



Brush  
&  
Ink

**Volume II**  
**2023**







Brush & Ink is a compilation of short stories, poetry, photography, and art by Sachem Public Library patrons ages 7 and up. Submissions for Vol. II were accepted from January to March of 2023.

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**Reader discretion is advised.**

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# Foresight and Hindsight

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## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

This year, Brush & Ink received over 100 submissions for Volume II. Previously published patrons as well as many new authors and artists submitted their work. Our contributors ranged from ages 7-84: they are students, parents, LGBTQ+, activists and immigrants. They are everything that makes Sachem the beautiful, diverse, talented and creative place that it is.

We would like to thank the Library's Board of Trustees and Administration for the opportunity to put this magazine together and showcase all of the different voices in our community. We thank our colleagues for helping us to celebrate our district with this project.

Lastly, we thank you, our patrons. We are proud to serve a community that is so dedicated to art and expression. Thank you for submitting your work, thank you for reading the magazine, and thank you for supporting the arts. Please enjoy *Brush & Ink Volume II: Foresight and Hindsight*.

Christine Latham  
Sara Neil  
Editors-In-Chief







FOR EYESIGHT<sub>1</sub>





my voice

my voice creates words

my heart speaks with its actions

i am capable







## The Trash Effect

Once upon a time near bustling New York City, there was a beach many people visited to relax and where many children liked to play in the water. The water was clean, clear and refreshing; the perfect environment for two best friends, pufferfish named Jack and Jill.

Jack and Jill spent their days learning new tricks with their schoolmates. They were such good friends that they created their own communication by blowing bubbles and doing tricks that created ripples in the water.

One day while Jill was flipping around and blowing bubbles she got caught in a plastic bag! Jill puffed up in surprise! She wriggled and wriggled to free herself however it was no use. She was stuck.

Jack saw Jill's ripples in the water so he followed it. He just knew Jill was in trouble. Jack swam for ages until he finally saw what happened. He froze in fear. He saw his best friend trapped in trash! Jack quickly wedged himself between the opening of the bag just wide enough for Jill to squeeze through. Jill was free again!

Jill threw her fins around Jack in a hug only a fish can understand. They tearfully talked about all of the garbage they have been seeing in the water. They decided to bring the bag to their friend Bob.

Bob is in charge of teaching the people about keeping our environment healthy. They call him the Nature Expert. Jack and Jill found him working near the shore. When they showed the bag to Bob, he immediately knew that the trash had become a big problem.

Bob called his student volunteers, Tim and Tom, to assist with a big project: cleaning the beach. Tim and Tom agreed that the garbage has become a big problem here at the beach and were eager to help Jack and Jill.

Tim and Tom quickly came up with a plan. They asked all of the people at the beach to help pick up trash. The people were angry to hear the story about Jack and Jill and were eager to help stop the pollution. They split up into groups and started picking up all of the trash. Bob made a "No littering: \$10,000 fine" sign to put up.

By the end of the day the beach was spotless. Jack and Jill were so happy they blew bubbles and flipped in excitement. They couldn't wait to swim in the clean water again.







# Winged Fairy

Winged fairy  
Dancing in song  
In the open  
In the open and the true  
In the open and in you

Winged fairy  
There are songs that you've never danced  
Winged fairy  
There is hate out there  
Pain and songs of sorrow  
In your magical way there is hope  
Hope for me and hope for you

Winged fairy  
There is so much we can do here  
See the way they love but feel the way they sing  
But in love oh winged fairy  
In love there is hate  
We can be in the way and help them find their trueness glow you know  
There is hope for all of them  
Hope for the evil ones  
Hope for the blessed ones

Winged fairy  
Say sorry to the ones we'll miss  
To the ones that will wash away  
And wasted dreams that should have stayed  
There is nothing we can do  
But winged fairy  
There is so much we can do  
There is so much we can do  
There is so much magic out there



*Winged fairy  
Be the one who helps them  
The evil and the lost  
The lost ones we'll lead home to our fairyland kingdom  
They'll be home  
But to those we'll miss  
There is only one thing you can do  
Love  
Love like the winged fairy*

*Love  
In oceans songs  
In the foggy haze guide others to heaven  
And in this love  
You are loved*

*Love  
Lost and broken souls  
Feel their pain and goals  
Love them  
Love them  
And always love yourself  
Your self*

*Love  
To the end of time  
Be the lighthouse to the ships that went astray  
See hope in your own heart's goals  
Feel hope  
See hope  
Never let go*

*Never letting go of you  
Letting go of you  
Love you to the end of time  
For you from the winged fairy  
Is this poem of truth and solidarity  
Goodbye my dear*



# Holly

She read the text twice but it didn't make any better sense the second time around. *Bch at 5*. Holly had barely even glanced at her I-Phone these past few months. In fact, ever since Matt died she hadn't had a single coherent conversation with anyone. She glanced around her room, the posters on her wall from concerts she'd seen this past winter mocked her now. Had she ever been so young? How could she have ever cared about such drivel? Was it really just a few months ago? It seemed like years. God, she was so tired...and felt so old.

"Holly, sweetheart," her mother called tentatively up the stairs. "Come on down now for dinner. I made garlic mashed potatoes, your favorite." Holly rolled back over in her bed, resting her hand on her dog Jingles' satiny ear and dropped her phone to the floor. The text must have been a misdial. What the heck was *Bch at 5* anyway?

Amy pushed the food around on her plate. "I don't know what to do with her." She looked out the window at the dogwood in the front yard. Matthew and Holly had bought it for her last year on Mother's Day. Spring had brought the delicate blossoms to life again but her daughter seemed to be withdrawing further from the world each day. "She won't even come down for meals now."

"It's really not been that long since Matt died, Amy. Give her more time." James replied with a mixture of empathy and exasperation.

"She failed two tests this week, math and physics, and she hasn't even opened her SAT review book. I wish she could see that throwing away her education and her future won't bring him back."

"Let's hang in there until next week when she sees Dr. Kramer again. He says he'll let us know if he thinks she's...declining...and then we can make better decisions about her care."

"I'm not putting my daughter in an institution, or mental health facility, or whatever, James. If I have to quit my job and stay home and force feed her, then that's what I'll do." She faltered. "It just seems so extreme, for her depression to go on this long. Matt was a wonderful boyfriend and I loved him too. And James, I know this is terrible to say, or even think, but I thank God every day that Holly wasn't in the car with him that night. I mean, he'd just dropped her off." Her voice trailed away. She gave herself a mental shake. "But still, don't you think she should be improving just a bit by now?"

"I'd hoped so, her sadness is killing me too. But what else can we do?"

Holly was dreaming of Matt. They were at school, down by the English wing. Matt was walking her to Creative Writing. She was excited about a poem she'd just finished and was in a hurry to get into the classroom.



Matt kept pulling her back for one more kiss but she was impatient and pulled away. Laughing and swinging her long dark hair out of her face, she spun back for a last look at his retreating back. But Matt hadn't moved. He was, in fact, frozen right where she'd left him. His hand was stretched out toward her, his eyes still closed from their recent kiss, but he had solidified into stone. She began to shake her head violently, "No, no, no, no, no." And came suddenly awake in a tangle of bedclothes in the darkest black of the night. The glowing green numbers on her nightstand alarm clock read 4:30. She sat up abruptly and said out loud, "BEACH AT 5!" She got it— the text -- it was Beach at 5!

Driving over the causeway, she felt her pulse quicken. It was an odd sensation. In fact, it might have even been excitement, but it had been so long since she'd felt anything like that and it was hard to identify her emotion. Sylvia Plath had likened depression to living inside of a bell jar and Holly understood the analogy. But she felt her life had just flatlined. There were no ebbs or peaks, no movement at all. Just – stagnation. So this weird curiosity was puzzling.

She parked at Field 3. How many times last summer had she and Matt done this? Parked just here? Walked right there? Lay down their blanket exactly in this spot? She sat carefully down in the sand and looked out at the horizon. There was nothing here, no one. Just miles and miles of water and miles and miles of sand. The only company she had was a single white seagull who boldly approached her for some leftover chips or a crust of sandwich, of which she had neither.

She sat for about ten more minutes, waiting, then headed home. She felt let down. For a minute there, she'd experienced something other than the vacuum in which she'd been existing.

This time she dreamed that she was once more back at school with Matt, but after their goodbye kiss, when she turned back for that one last look, he was encased in what looked like an hourglass – the grains of sand slowly filtering down, covering his lashes, his eyes, his beautiful mouth. When she awakened, she dressed silently, and hurried back to the beach. And again, only Mr. Seagull was waiting.

And so, when three days passed and lethargy had once more consumed her, she at first ignored the buzz of her phone indicating a text had been received. But when she heard it again and again and again, she grabbed it angrily from her bedstand intending to turn the damned thing off. There were four messages, one after the other, all exactly the same. *Whrru? Whrru? Whrru?*

That night, she set her alarm for 4:30. It was raining and cool, not an auspicious day for beach sitting. Yet she had been haunted by dreams of Matt calling, "Holly, where are you?" In the dawning mist, the beach was empty. She wasn't about to hang around in this weather. She noticed the gulls again, one quite brazen one waddled close. "You been texting me?" Holly smiled and the bird tilted its head towards her. "I got nothing for you, buddy."



Holly slipped her hands inside her windbreaker to show her empty pockets when she suddenly realized her keys were not there. Had she left them in the car? She hurried back to the little Civic sitting by itself in the parking lot, but the doors were locked and there were no car keys hanging from the ignition. Trying to remain calm, she began to retrace her steps back through the tunnel and onto the boardwalk. And what she saw next stopped her in stunned silence.

*Holly 's journal: April 2*

*My hands are still shaking as I write this. I've towel-dried my hair, changed into dry clothes and drank two cups of hot tea. This morning on the beach I saw the most amazing thing. Yet I know it will make everyone think I'm totally and really, for real, crazy. And Dr. Kramer has already suggested that I should think about going to Placid Woods for a few weeks, get started on some medication and have therapy every day. So I can 't tell anyone about this or I'll be carted off to the loony bin before you can say white bird.*

*I had gone back to my car to search for my keys and when I didn't find them there, I started back to the beach. Just as I came into view of the boardwalk, I saw it. It was frightening and beautiful all at the same time. At first, I only saw a mass, a white misshapen lump, that seemed to be, that was, expanding right before my eyes. And as it grew in size, it began to change in shape. It resembled a seagull but was so much larger, even bent over as it was. The wings unfolded and stretched out a good six feet or more. It drew its head up from its chest and rose to its full stature – it had to be over seven feet tall. The beak softened and became a magnificent mouth, the eyes widened and even from a distance I saw the long whisper of lashes. Short black claws elongated into a glistening sinew of thighs and calves. And covering every inch of this breath-taking sight, were thousands of tiny iridescent feathers. As sure as my name is Holly Cooper. I was looking at an angel.*

As she stood just behind the concession stand, this magnificent creature began taking longer and longer strides through the sand, then at once, bounded into the sky and within seconds was gone from sight. And there were her keys, glimmering in the luminescence of the rising sun. As she bent to retrieve them, her fingers closed around a silky, white feather which she picked up gingerly and tucked into her jeans pocket.

The next day, Holly woke up before her alarm, no dreams this time but Jingles was kissing her ear. She stroked the soft golden fur below his chin. He grinned back at her. Matt had given him to her last summer for her birthday. He was part golden retriever and part something else. Who knew? But his liquid brown eyes always seemed to see inside of her and his warm sturdy body always calmed her. Holly loved animals, that was how she'd met Matt, in fact. She and her mom had brought her first dog, Rags, to the animal hospital after finding the fifteen-year old's lifeless body curled next to the fireplace. Holly had been crying so hard that when Matt first spoke to her, she hadn't even heard him. She found out later that it had been his first day on the job.



He was working there as an apprentice, trying to learn as much as he could. He had been accepted to Ohio State University for the fall and hoped to get in to its prestigious veterinary school when he'd completed his undergrad work.

"Wanna come see something special?" Jingles cocked her head. "Let's get your leash, we're going for a ride."

And so, her morning ritual began. She would rush out in the dark, speed down to the beach and stand partially hidden behind the hot dog stand. And her beautiful angel never failed to unfold in front of her. She began to feel lighter; her step was quicker and her gait surer. On the seventh day of her beach meditation, she came running down the front stairs and slammed straight into her father's chest, knocking his coffee cup to the floor and splashing both her and him with the hot dark liquid.

"Whoa, slow down," he uttered in surprise. "What are you doing?"

"I'm sorry, Daddy. Did I burn you?" Her eyes darted to the dining room clock. "What are you doing up so early?"

"I'm fine, just a little coffee on the cuff of my pant leg." He smiled. "I'm catching an early plane to Boston. Actually, I think the car's here for me right now. The question is, though, where are you going at this hour of the morning?"

Holly felt she was going to explode with impatience. She had come to anticipate with something akin to pleasure her church on the beach. But she couldn't tell this to anyone, no one would believe her.

"I've got to take Jingles out. She was crying. Must be a stomach thing." She looked down, she wasn't in the habit of lying to her parents and she was afraid this would show on her face.

"Poor Jinggy," he patted the pup's head. "You should let Mom know though. If she wakes up and finds you gone, she'll panic." He kissed her forehead and stepped outside. Holly waited until the Uber's lights had faded then flew out the front door.

*Holly's journal: April 10th*

*I can't believe I'm grounded. Dad told Mom, of course, about my 'walking the dog' at 5 in the morning. So she decided that if the dog had to go out in the middle of the night, I had to wake her up and she would go with me. Ever since Matt died, she's been watching me like a prison guard. I NEED to go see my angel. I don't know what I'm going to do now. I thought about telling her the truth, but I know how that would go over- I feel even worse than before. Mom and Dad are meeting with Dr. Kramer next Friday. They thought I was making such great progress and now I'm going backwards. Sometimes, I want to shake them by their shoulders and shout in their faces, "Let me go back to my angel!"*

At first nothing happened, and then, Holly's phone began to vibrate. She ignored it. What was the point? But finally one day, curiosity overtook her and she jabbed at the little white balloon inside the green box marked 'Messages'. Ms u Ms u Ms u Ms u. She hit delete and then let her phone go dead, it might as well join the boneyard of all the other things she had ever loved.



On the Friday morning of her parents' visit to Holly's doctor, her brother Thomas called from Chicago to say the baby was coming that day. Amy made arrangements for Holly's grandmother to come and stay with her because Holly had already told them she wasn't up for the occasion and Amy didn't feel she could be left alone.

"Our flight's at ten and Grandma will be here by noon. Please be careful Holly, promise me you won't do anything stupid!" Her mother hugged her too tightly.

Holly pulled away. "I'm not allowed to do anything." She couldn't remember anymore what her mother looked like when she smiled or laughed. She softened, "I'll be fine. Tell Thomas and Maria I love them."

As soon as the car turned the corner at the end of the block, Holly grabbed Jingles' lead and flew out the door. She had three hours of freedom and she wasn't going to waste a minute.

The beach was silent. There were no people, no birds, no angels. She berated herself, it was too late in the day. She knew it had to be 5 o'clock a.m. She sat at the water's edge, Jingles on her lap, and cried violently -- an explosion of emotion that she just couldn't contain. She cried for Matt, she cried for her angel and mostly, she cried for herself. When the better part of an hour had passed, she began to wind down. Her stomach ached and her throat felt raw, but somehow, she felt kind of right. She stroked the feather in her pocket and finally stood up.

She got back to her house just ten minutes before her Grandma was due. As she walked in the door, she heard the house phone ringing, then her Mother's voice leaving a message on the answering machine. "And he's so beautiful, Holly and Mom, if you're there yet, he looks just like Tom. And the best part, his name. They're calling him Angelo! Isn't that lovely?" Holly broke into a run as she dashed across the kitchen to grab the phone before her mother hung up. She stabbed the speaker button and practically shouted, "That's a perfect name Mom. I wanna come and see him. Can I come there, Mom? I love you Mom."





## *Pants, Plants and a Pandemic*

*Since the Pandemic I have had many lazy days  
Staying in PJ's*

*I am excited today since I plan on putting on pants  
and growing some plants!*

*Some days the most exciting thing is getting some mail  
Filing your fingernails,  
but today I'm putting on pants  
and growing some plants!*

*Instead of baking some banana bread,  
and feeling like a sleepyhead  
I'm putting on pants  
and growing some plants!*





## CHIP AWAY

THE TIME HAS COME **BIG BRO** HAS SAID  
TO PUT INTO EFFECT AND MOVE AHEAD  
THE **FOLLOWING PROGRAM**

A RECORD OF WHAT WE DO AND WHAT WE SAY  
WHAT WE THINK – STRAIGHT, BI OR GAY

ALL THIS CAN BE DONE IN ONE EASY SIMPLE STEP  
DUE TO THE INVENTION OF A **MINI-MICRO CHIP**  
INSERTED INTO EACH ADULT'S ARM

WE ARE ASSURED IT WILL **CAUSE NO HARM**

FUNDED BY THE CIA  
APPROVED BY THE AMA  
REGULATED BY THE FDA

DATA PRESERVED IN A **SPECIAL PLACE**  
A SECRET SATELLITE OUT IN **SPACE**

LET US **CONSIDER** THE CHIP  
IMPORTED AND **DESIGNER** MADE  
FASHIONED IN MANY A COLORFUL SHADE  
FROM PEACH TO PERSIMMON  
TO LIME AND VERMILLION

AVAILABLE **NEW** OR **GENTLY USED**  
MAY BE SOLD ON E-BAY FOR THOSE WHO MAY **LOSE**  
THE CHIP  
CLICK ON "CHIP-ON-THE SHOULDER" OR BETTER YET  
"CHIP-OFF-THE-OLD-BLOCK" ALL **AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET**

ASSORTED **SCENTS** ARE A FUTURE PLAN  
LIKE – VERA VANILLA  
COACH CINNAMON  
LAUREN LEMON

IF DISPLEASED WITH ANY OF THE ABOVE  
PLEASE KEEP TRYING FOR YOU MUST LEARN  
**TO LOVE**  
**THE CHIP**



Moonlight  
The moonlight rules over the night  
The moonlight  
Rules over the night  
Awakens  
The creatures of deep  
It lights with helping hands the stars  
Kinda looks a lot like Mars  
But we all know your grateful power given by  
the God and his Son  
The moonlight  
Rules over the night  
It makes us  
Feel like we could fly  
It makes our way open to our heart that'll  
never, ever, set us apart









# On the Outside Looking In

## A Christmas Poem

Anisette and moments tender,  
Something more that I remember.  
Past the gifts and good things cooking,  
Beyond the tree where I was looking,  
There was always something more –  
Something watching at our door –  
On the outside looking in.

Carols sung in nebulous tune,  
Foretold of something coming soon.  
Paper held up to the light,  
Torn from objects of delight,  
Made me look beyond my shoulder.  
Something else was growing colder –  
On the outside looking in.

Closing eyes to dull the glitz  
Sensing something was amiss.  
Heartbeats pounding at the portal.  
Some are spirit. Some are mortal.  
Backs are turned. It's getting late.  
I reach to open up the gate.  
Hand on knob, my fingers clenching –  
Mind awl and stomach wrenching.  
Should I open up the door?  
Should I beckon something more –  
On the outside looking in?

From every side, promoted missions  
Preserving family traditions.  
From lands afar and times of old,  
Exotic dishes did unfold.  
Yet always felt the something other –  
Something hazy. Something smothered –  
On the outside looking in.

Watching starry nights for snow –  
Colored lights on homes aglow –  
Cloying stench of needles pine –  
Desperate shouts of truth divine.  
No one further seemed to notice  
Ghostly brethren out of focus –  
On the outside looking in.











## **New Life**

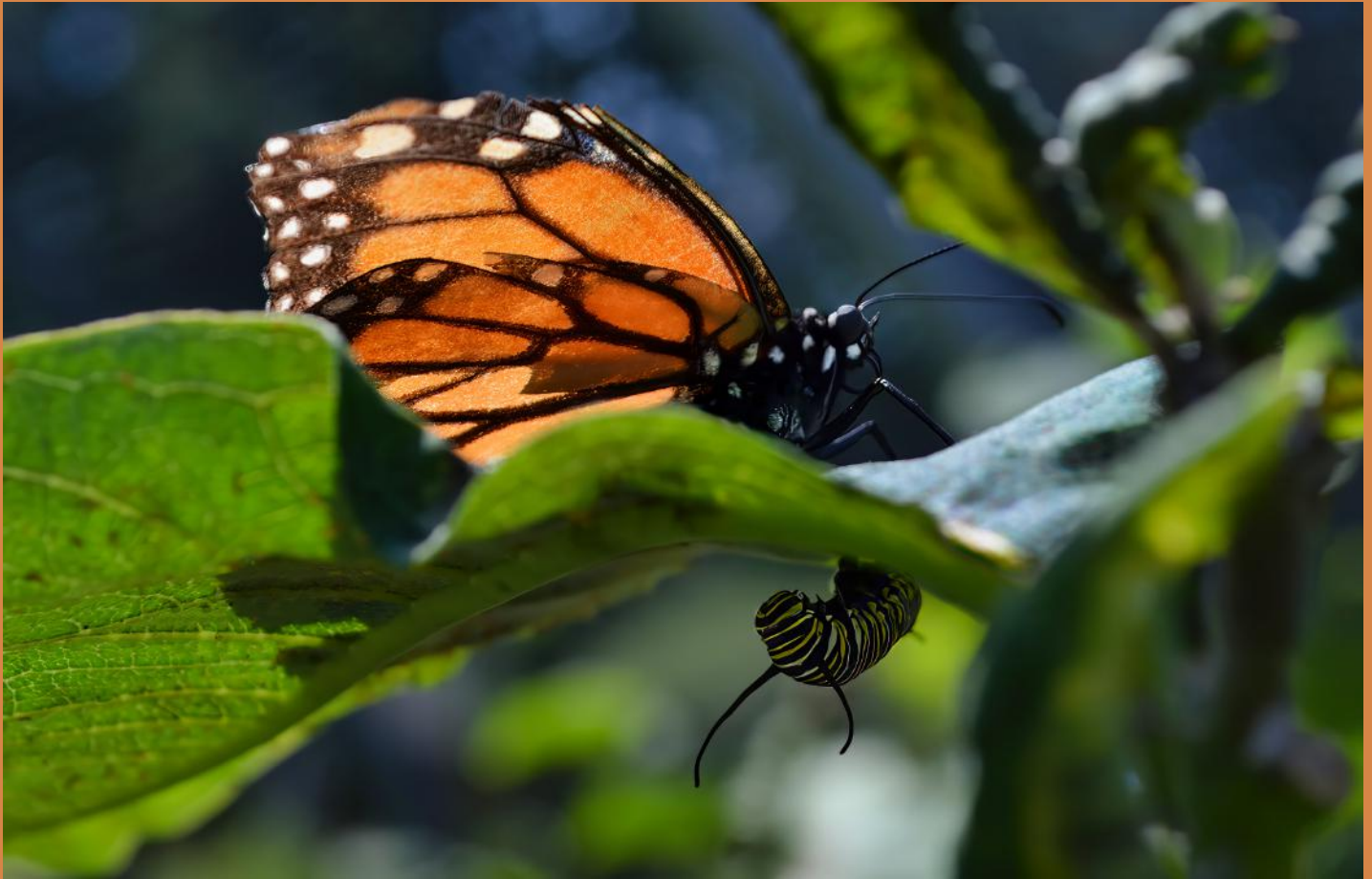
**As the snow melts, water begins to flow.  
Rivers fill and overflow, bringing nutrients to the land.**

**Spring arrives as new life begins to grow.  
Flowers and trees show signs of their rebirth.  
The sweet smell of new life blows across the land.**

**Morning songs fill the air as birds return to their abandoned nests.  
Animals both big and small wake up from their winter's rest.**

**Hearts reawaken from their winter slumber.  
Happiness and joy fill the air as children run and play again.  
Spring has arrived...**





## CHANGE

Forget about the status quo...  
Bad times come and good times go.  
Roses radiant with Summer's bloom  
Are dead and brown in Winter's tomb.  
Nothing that we know today  
Will ever again be that way.  
Whether change is great or small,  
This we know - it comes to all.

Life is but a moment long...  
Drop of rain - Bluebird's song.  
Here today and gone tomorrow...  
Both the same - joy and sorrow.  
Sun by day, stars by night -  
Each is in its own way bright.  
Embrace each change Life may impart,  
And greet each day with happy heart.

With this perspective, Life's well spent  
And all its changes, blessings meant.





## WORDS FROM A PENCIL

YOU CANNOT WRITE WITHOUT A WRITING UTENSIL

AND A UTENSIL CAN'T WRITE WITHOUT YOU

MY PEN IS AN EXTENSION OF ME

IMMORTALIZING LETTERING ON A CRUMPLED PAGE

A PEN RUNS OUT OF INK,

A PEN CAN BE REFILLED

I AM AN EXTENSION OF MY PENCIL,

WHICH WEARS FROM ENDLESS EXHAUSTED IDEAS

THE MORE IT'S SHARPENED, THE SMOOTHER IT WRITES

UNTIL ALL THAT'S LEFT IS THE END AND THE TIP

OFTEN MY THOUGHTS RUN DRY

BUT THE SMUDGED GRAPHITE LASTS JUST LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO COVER IT IN INK

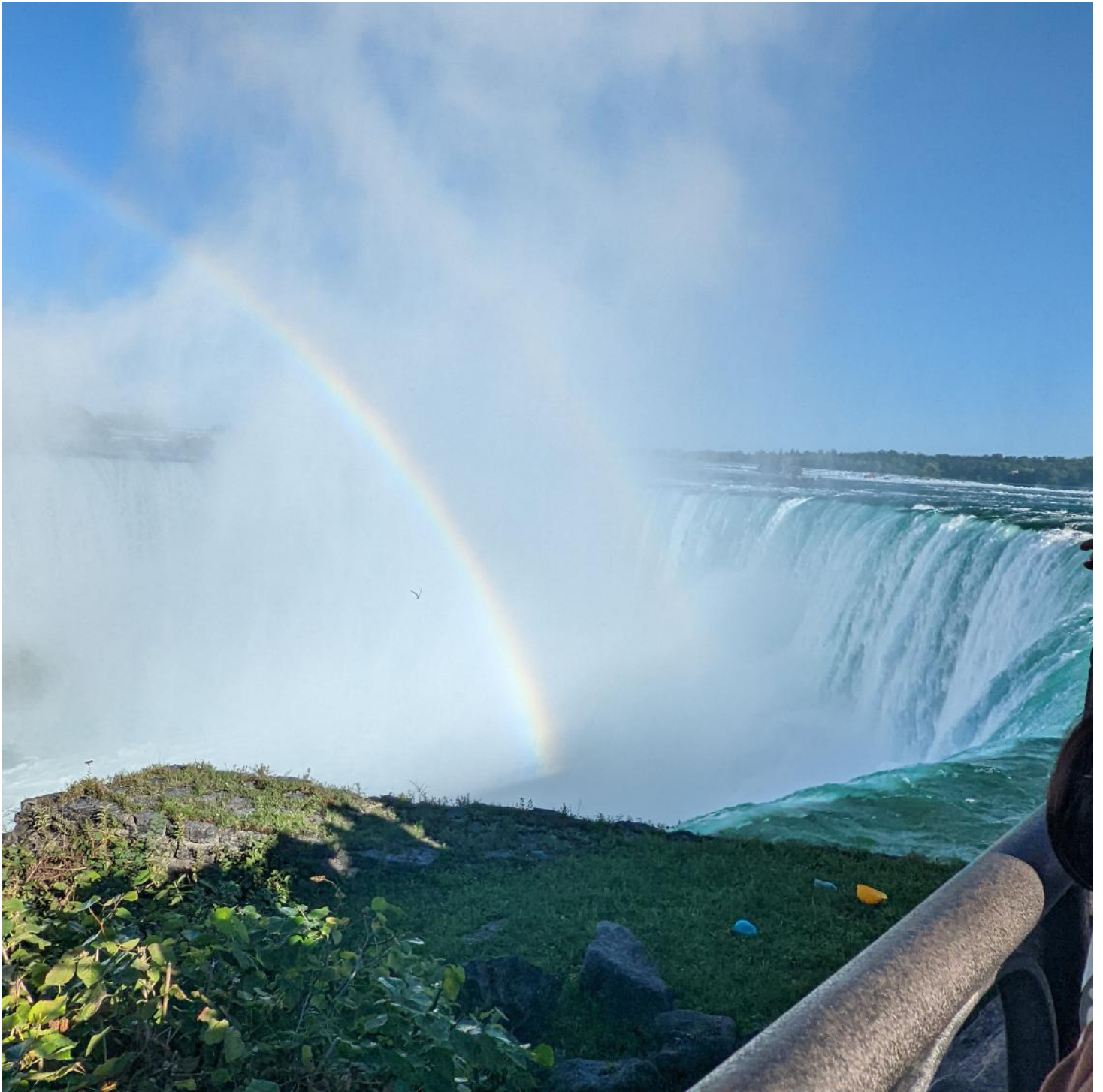
I WRITE WITH A PEN, BUT WRITE FROM MY PENCIL.











## WATERFALLS

WATERFALLS ARE BEAUTIFUL AND WATERFALLS  
HAVE DIFFERENT COLORS.

WATERFALLS HAVE GOOD LISTENING SOUNDS AND I  
**24** LOVE TO VISIT IT ANYTIME I AM OUT AND ABOUT.





## SEASONS OF LAKE RONKONKOMA

Summer at the lake means walking its sandy shores,  
A picnic on a grassy hill overlooking the lake,  
Dinner in a restaurant with a view of the swans taking off and landing,  
Fireworks in all their glory, exploding in the evening sky.

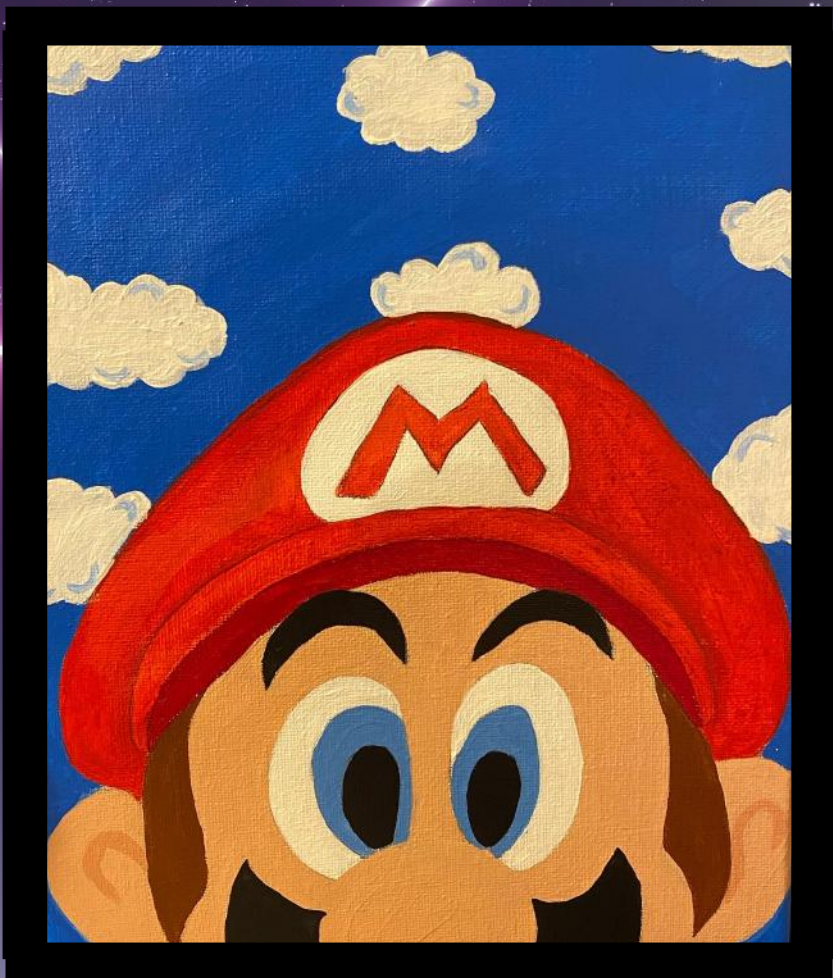
Autumn and the lake gets colder;  
Trees change color, squirrels gather food for the long winter ahead;  
The air is fresh and crisp, the leaves a panorama of gold and red.

Winter brings peace to the lake,  
Snowflakes cover the sandy shores,  
Ice-boaters and skaters skim across its frozen surface.  
Cold and icy, the trees are bare.

Spring brings a new beginning,  
Trees budding, birds singing,  
Wildflowers awaken from their long winter's nap,  
And once again the swans paddle across the sky-blue lake.



# STRANGER THINGS





# FUSION

FUSION

PURE

SIMPLE

MELDING!

REPELS DISCORD AND CREATES PATHS.

PURE

EMBRACES THE TACTICAL DIVERSION; AVERSION?

REMOVES SCENARIOS OF

INTENSE EXPECTATIONS,

PREDILECTIONS,

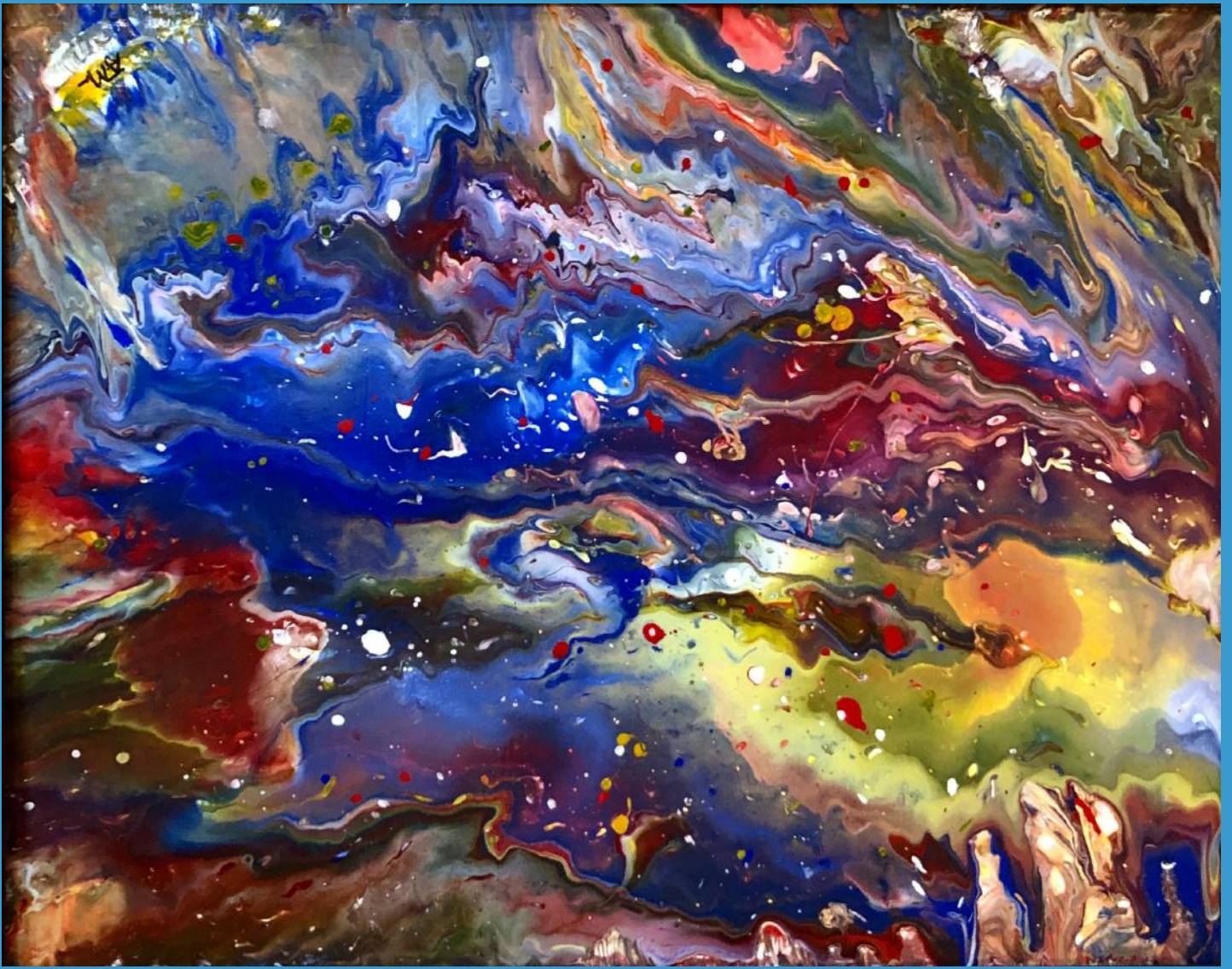
SUPPOSITION,

AND COMBINES PLATTERS OF CHARACTER!

FUSION.







## *Ocean*

*Crystal clear blue waves*

*Many very colorful fish*

*And black sea urchins*



# Music

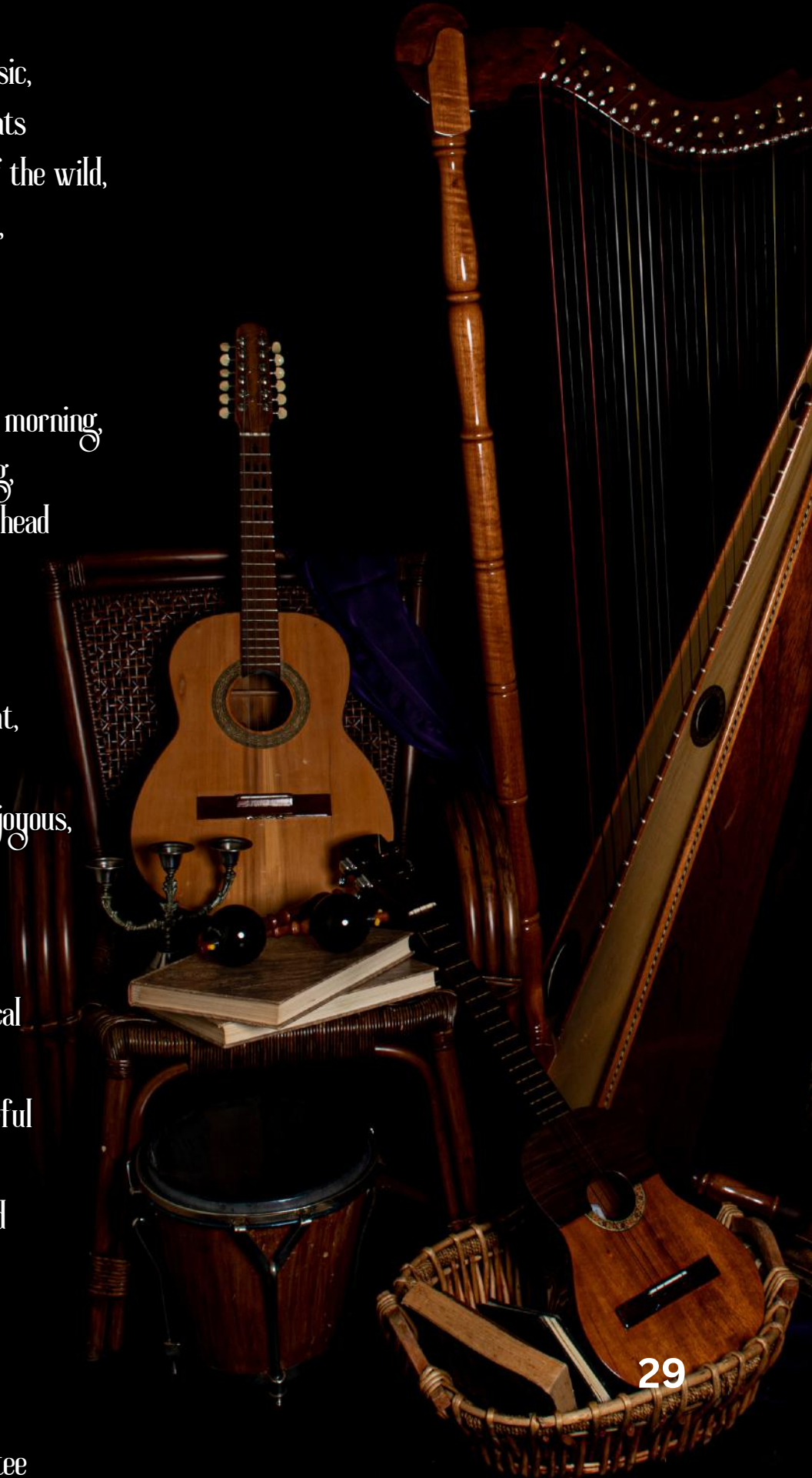
I heard the beautiful music,  
The unison of instruments  
Sounding a rhythmic melody of the wild,  
Fluttering in my mind,  
Helping me up

The music sounded  
Like soothing rain on a gloomy morning,  
Relaxing yet depressing,  
reverberates through my head  
calming my mind,  
Lulling me to sleep

The melody was up-beat,  
Fast and energetic  
The music was blissful and joyous,  
Making me happy,  
keeping me content

The rhythm was classical  
slow and depressing,  
yet refreshing and peaceful  
Making me feel like,  
My emotions conflicted

Many types of music,  
And such little songs,  
it's clear to me  
There's a musical absentee

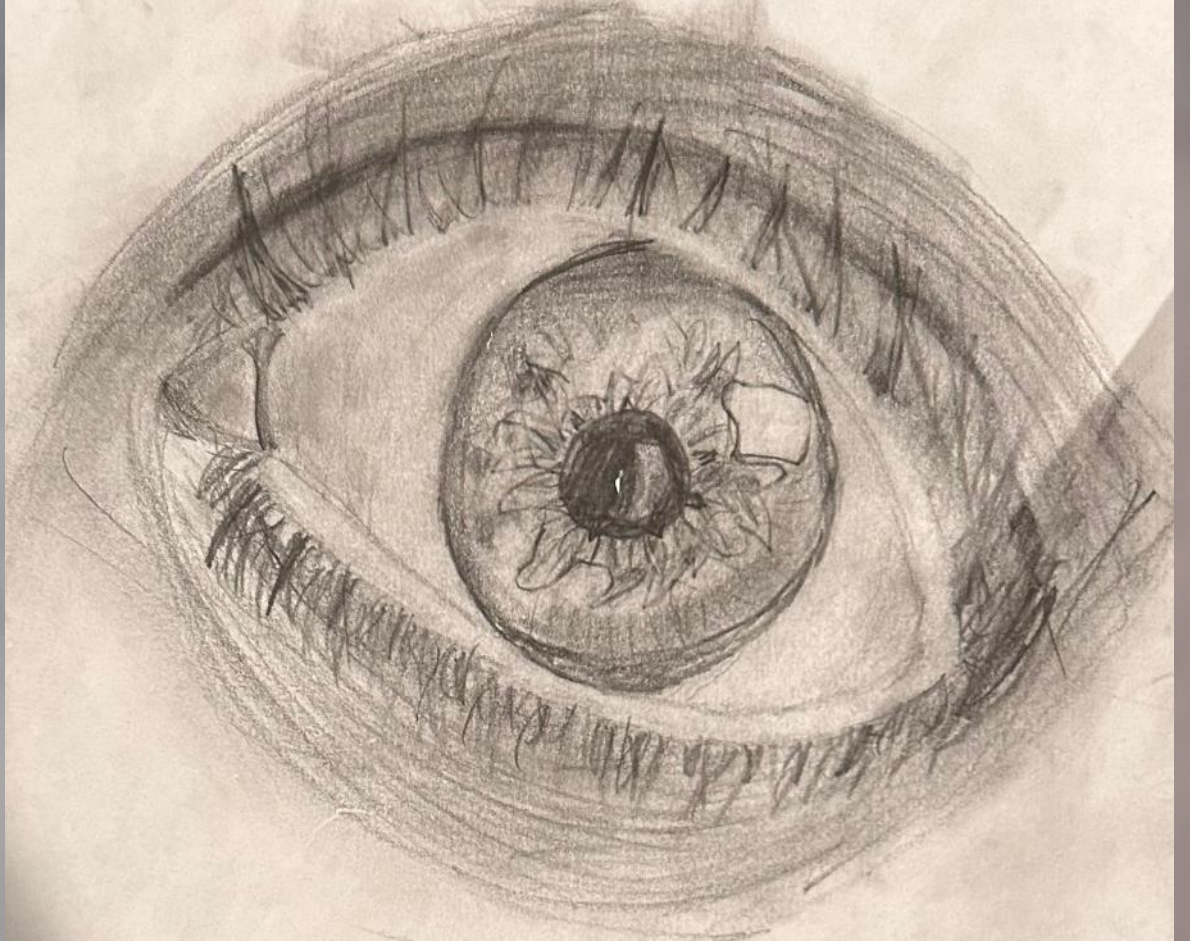








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## The bowl of brownie batter by the burner

will spill if you don't move it darling and don't lick the spoon either, not until after we've poured the bowl of brownie batter by the burner in a pan and placed it in the oven—only then will I sneak a lick myself and pass it to your tiny hand and bend down to kiss the top of your head as you spin in your socks on the kitchen tile, the taste of the bowl of brownie batter by the burner still on my tongue, and then we will wait while they bake and you'll tell me how you tiptoed over the fairy moss in the yard and ruled over roly polies and scoured the dirt for soft stones and wore a crown of dandelions and clovers woven by the robins and sparrows while I mixed the bowl of brownie batter by the burner.

One day you will forget about the daisies embroidered onto the pocket of your overalls and my fingers pulling your hair into pigtails with pink elastics and the oven mitts on the counter beside a sippy cup and what cartoon was on this morning and the bowl of brownie batter by the burner—but I will not. And you won't either when your daughter stomps into your kitchen like a sun in need of a planet's pull and hearts to warm and burn.





## Googling Grief

I ask my student if she knows what it means to grieve

She says no, what does it mean

So I decide googling grief will give a clear explanation

What it says is "deep sorrow, especially caused by someone's death"

My student says I get it now

Her father has died

And I want to tell her

Grief stays forever

It changes

It mutates

It grows inside your heart but stays against the back fence like

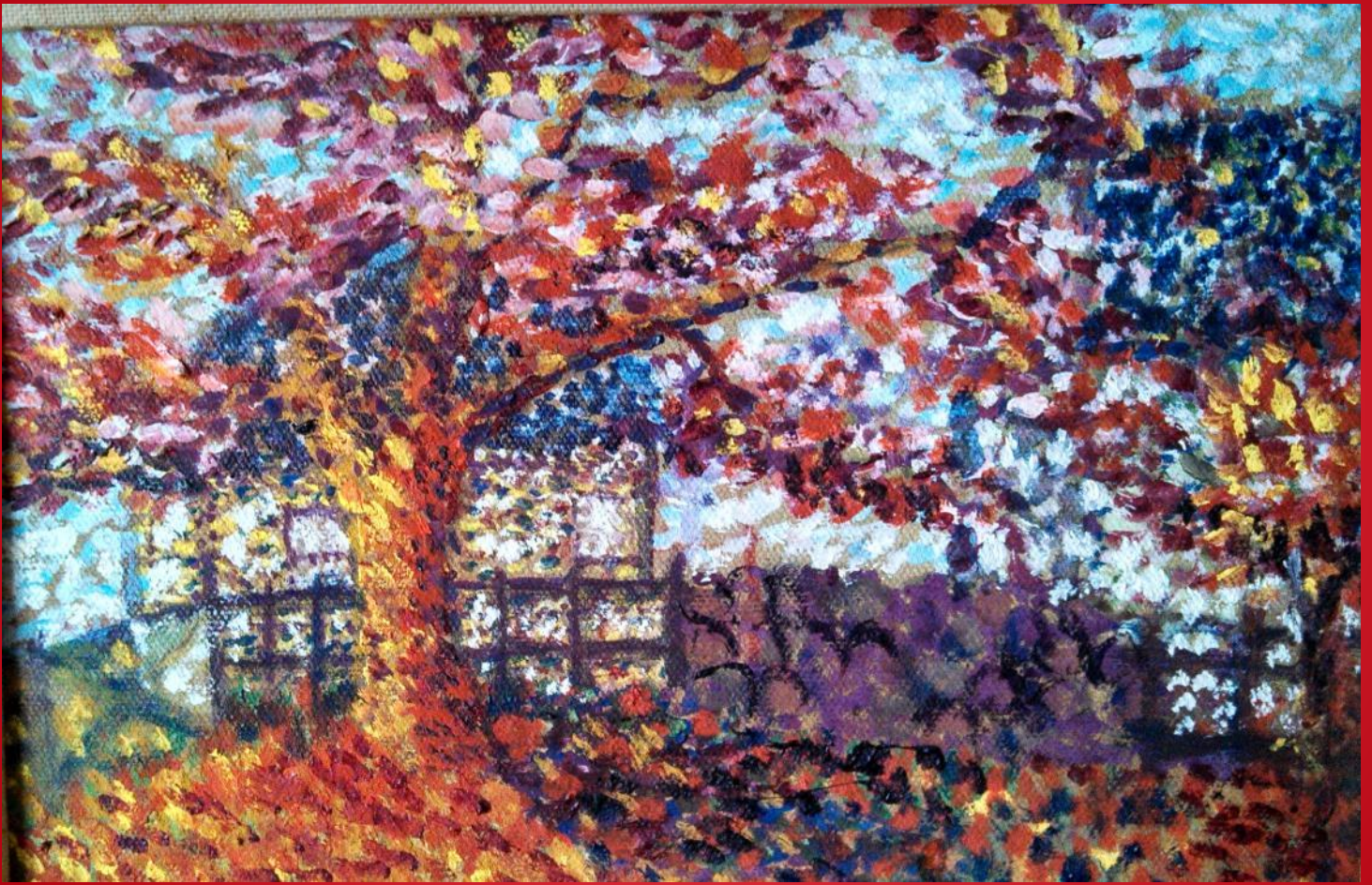
A plant that you often forget to tend to

Until one day there is ivy that has overgrown

And you're afraid to touch it







## Today is April the First

April the first came and went. It should have been a day that was filled with jokes, laughter, and silly phone calls but it was quite the opposite. None of our days are quite like we once knew them. Today is a day in which we cannot leave our homes, a day in which we can wave to our neighbors but not sit with them, a day where you can order takeout but not spend time in the restaurant, a day in which family members cannot visit their loved ones in the hospital. When will life return to the times when children attended school, when we kissed a friend hello, went to lunch with a co-worker? Will what we remember as “the norm” ever return?

As I ran down the supermarket aisles (not “isles” as some like to write) I was reminded that life is so very precious. Normally, I would have smiled at the lady holding her child or said “hello” to the store manager but not today. Things are different now. People all look like enemies and one can feel the stress as items are grabbed off the shelves from mask wearing scared individuals fighting over toilet tissue. What have we become? Gloves cover our fingers as we search for soap and cleaning supplies. We stand far away from the man loading up on “fun” foods so his kids are still able to be entertained.



I see elderly people shopping for themselves and want to help but this is one of the most helpless times of my life. Many of us feel helpless and speak to ourselves on a daily basis as we search for answers. Patients sit alone in hospitals with no outside contact as the doctors and nurses save lives, offer support, and serve as the only “friend” that these patients have. I use the “F word” a lot but it is not the one you think I am referring to. I point to frustration and all that comes along with it. I am disappointed in myself yet know it is not me. I hunt for answers yet they don’t come to me. People often say “ask Beth, she’ll know or figure it out” but I am kind of stuck this time. I have not yet figured it out.

As I receive another call from a relative (whom I have not spoken with in many years,) I am truly thankful for the love that I am presented with. There is something so touching about my childhood friends who reach out during the tough times. There is a lot of love in the world and now more than ever, we need to be together (figuratively speaking) and remind one another how precious each moment is. The things we used to fight about seem so silly now. I am seeing things in a different light and I know that you all do, too. You are thinking to yourself that your “big” problem really isn’t so big after all. I have never been a “foodie” but I have realized so much during this time; I am now not so quick to throw out that half eaten meal, I am now wrapping up even the littlest amount.

I am thankful to all who put themselves in danger to help his/her fellow man. From the doctors and nurses to the grocery store workers and all in between, I salute you. To the volunteers who are assisting those who cannot assist themselves, I thank you for your kindness.

Let’s remember to love each other from today on. There is nobody who expected the world to be this way but here we are so let us remember to care for and protect all who we can. Keep your body strong, your mind sharp, your arms outstretched, and your heart available.

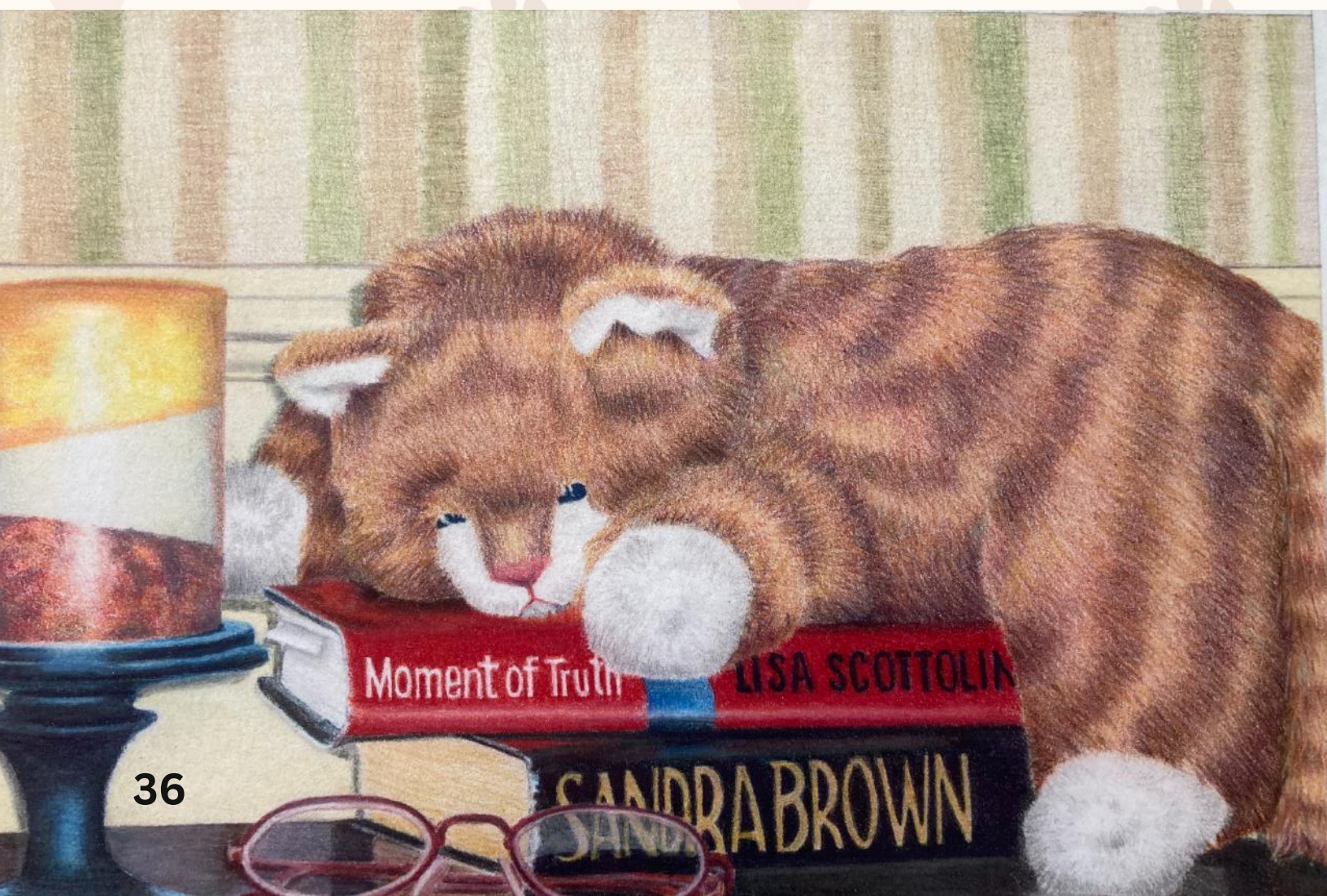
Now, go on and enjoy your third dinner.



## The Window

*Every morning we pass each other with just a window between us. Catching my eyes without even trying, causing me to hesitate. Her beautiful face occupies my day, taking up the spaces in my mind that should be filled with work. Contemplating the pros and cons... the responsibilities and risks of opening my heart to a potentially shorter lived loved. Am I ready for possible heart attack? Unconditional love? It seems scary but all I can think about. The day drags waiting for 5pm to come, yearning to stroll past The window once again to see those profound brown eyes filled with pure happiness. The end of the day finally arrives, I can feel my heart fill with warmth and love as I get closer.*

*A love that needs no words of communication other than a simple look. I pass The Window once more, but this time is different. I've made my decision; life is too short to be afraid of responsibility. I walk with confidence ready to open a new chapter in my life and say hello to the beautiful soul that has been keeping my mind at hold for the past week. I enter the shop and turn to the left window. As I lay my hand into her cage to finally introduce myself, she returns her hello with frantic licking. The pet shop employee smiles at me as she says, "I've seen you passing by each day... is she the one?" With that my only response is "yes." No need for introductions our hearts are already connected.*





## Orange

I like the way you pause and wait for me to laugh after you say something not-that-funny. I laugh anyway because I know it'll make you laugh, and I like your laugh. There was a time when I would count how many times I could make you laugh and each day I'd try and do better. I don't do that now. I sit and admire the way your dark bangs fall around your brow, the way your eyes glint like pools of copper in the afternoon sun. I offer you half my orange. You decline. You tell me that you hate the texture, that they make your tongue sting. You tell me about her. She seems nice. I pick the rinds out from under my fingernails. I place the peels in neat piles, organize them in shapes and stacks. I remember a time that I would pick apart the things you'd say and the things you'd do like dandelion seeds off the bud or splinters from an oozing wound. You say you should get going. I fuss with pulp between my teeth before saying the same and dumping the orange carcass in the trash.





## Lost in the Forest

Shawn just heard the bell. He exclaimed to himself, "Yes, finally!"

Shawn got out of the school to go home. It was June and it was the last day of school. As he didn't like school that much, he was happy to go home and hop on to his gaming chair and play all day.

He saw Justin, his friend, being dismissed.

Justin offered, "Want to come to the comic store to buy some trading cards tomorrow?"

Shawn replied, "Sure". After saying bye to Justin, Shawn took his usual walking route back to home. Then suddenly a car crash happened!

The police said, "Sorry kiddo, the car had explosives in it, you have to take another route today".

Since Shawn was a little kid, he was afraid of the woods and the only other way was to go through the woods. People would never go there. There is a rumor that long time ago, a girl named Sara went there and never came back. People also say that a witch lives there who turns dead people into slaves.

As there was no other way, Shawn didn't bother all the rumors and decided to go through the woods after all. Shawn kept walking and walking until he got hungry and tired. The forest was only an acre long, but his watch was saying otherwise. Apparently, he had walked for 5 miles. As the sun set and darkness was falling, he started panicking and looking for signs of life. Then he saw an old house. In hope of finding help, he slowly walked in and found very old furniture and cobwebs. Wandering around the rooms, he soon realized that it was just an abandoned old house. Nobody had come here for ages.

Getting disappointed, he decided to go out of the house and search for his way back home. But when he started walking out, the door stopped working. He tried his best to pull the knob, but the door just didn't open.

Suddenly, he heard an eerie voice saying, "You don't have to leave. You can just become one of us." Looking back at the source of the voice, he found a little girl climbing out from the old torn couch. She was about his age and had long black hair. But her face was so pale that it seemed like there was no blood in her body. Shawn stood there petrified for a while. When he saw the girl crawling to him, he gathered some courage and started pushing the door as hard as he could. The door was so old that it finally opened with a harsh noise. Then, he ran for his life without looking back. He couldn't even remember how long he was running. Finally, he saw his parents and two policemen walking towards the woods. Shawn instantly ran to his parents and hugged them.

To this day, Shawn is a teacher. Whenever he gets his lunch break, he stares at the woods from his office window and wonders what actually happened that night.









## The Only Ones In Walt Disney World

It was around 9:30 pm and the Magic Kingdom park was about to close so me and my sister, Rachel, were going to go on one more ride. When we got off the ride there was something wrong. There was no one there.

Then we looked at the clock. It was 10:30 pm and the park closed at 10. We looked around and saw nobody; we didn't even see cast members. We looked straight at each other and then we ran. She went straight for the candy shop and I went for the ice cream parlor. I got a huge bowl and started digging in. Cookie dough! Cookies and cream! Moose tracks! So much more! Then Rachel met me at the castle. She had cotton candy, gummy worms, marshmallows, and so much more. Next, we went on Big Thunder Mountain... afterwards, we regretted eating all that candy.

Afterwards, I went to the candy store and Rachel went to the ice cream parlor. I was in heaven! Cotton candy! Caramel apples! Chocolate Rice Krispies!

We were worn out, so we went back to the hotel to get some rest.







My love is a spark  
She is warmth and fire and cataclysm  
As turbulent and still as the open ocean  
Steady as a stream, gently pooling  
Rushing like a rapid, thoughts sprinting in white water  
I hold her all the same  
I am dust  
Or at least, I am learning not to be  
My love sees in me what I cannot  
I am dread and tension, sickness and sorrow  
Lying unmoving in an unflattering form  
She holds me all the same





## THE LAST EMOJI

To all my Facebook Friends

All 12,938 of you

I spend way too much time with you

Fear of missing out has consumed my life

And so I must say good-bye

No more clicking and scrolling

Every post, every video and every link

So in this final post...

Here's a thumbs up for the pictures of your meals

Here's a heart for your children and your pets

Here's a sad face for your losses and disappointments

Here's an angry face for your discontent

Here's a laughing face for all of your jokes

I wish you all a Happy Birthday and a Merry Holiday

Have a wonderful vacation and get well soon

Hang in there and keep up the good work

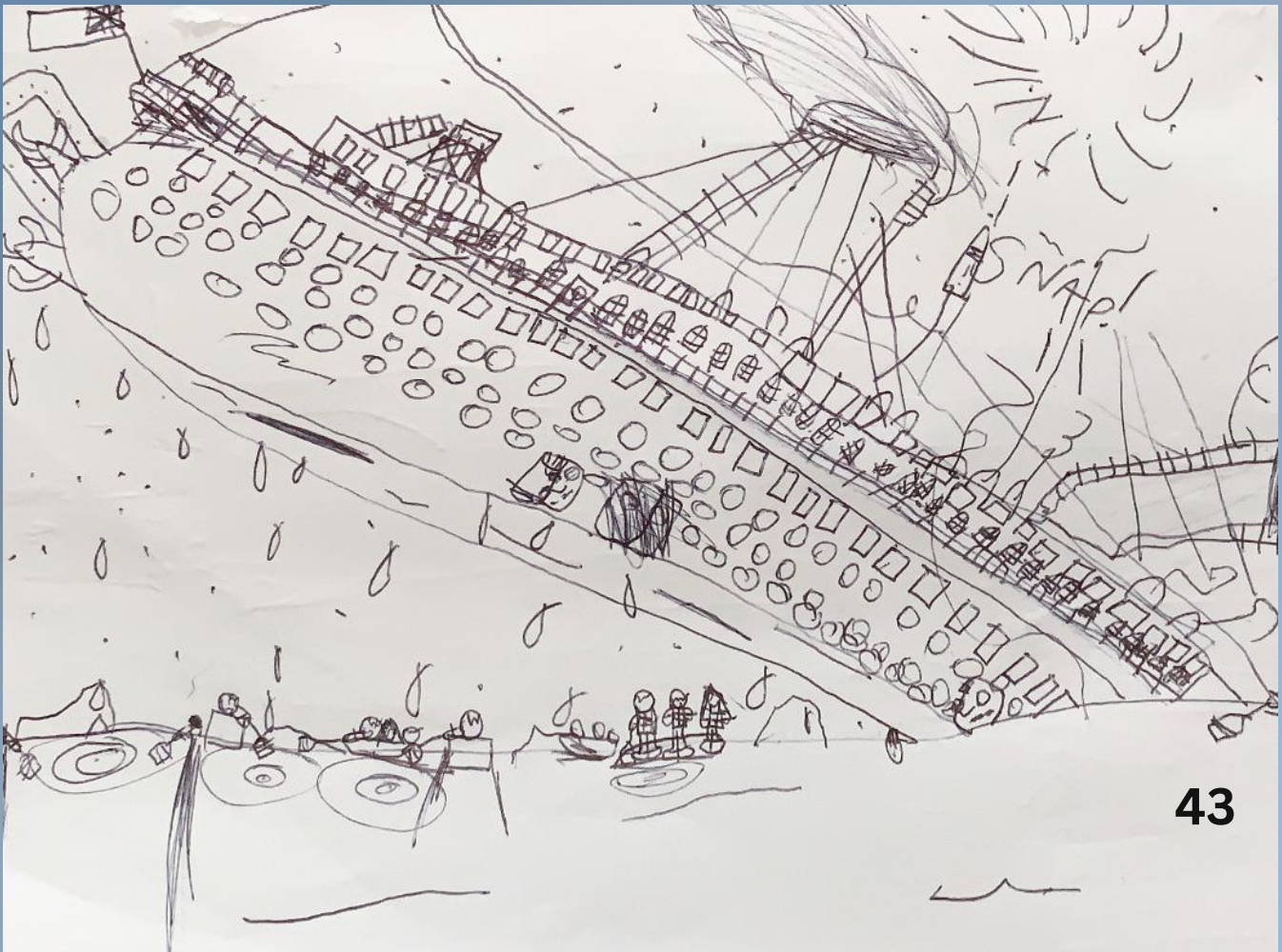
Congratulations and good luck

So as you all send out your shares and your posts

Please know that I'm thinking of you with a big smiley face

And this...

is my last emoji





SAVE AS

THERE IS NOBODY TO BLAME FOR THIS  
CURSE

EXCEPT MYSELF, ASHAMED WHEN I  
FUMBLE.

MY LIFE IS ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE,  
AS I CAN FEEL IT RAPIDLY CRUMBLE.

INSIDE A HOSPITAL I AM CONSTRICTED,  
AND I'VE LOST EVERYBODY WHO WAS NIGH.

SLOW AND PAINFUL FOR MYSELF  
AFFLICTED,

AND NOBODY THAT WILL MOURN WHEN I DIE.

I WISH MY PARENTS COULD BE BESIDE ME  
AS ALL OF MY MEMORIES FADE AWAY.

I PRAY THAT MY SPIRIT WILL BE SET FREE  
AT THE TERMINATION OF MY DECAY.

MY SOUL SHAN'T BE SEEN DRINKING FROM  
LETHE,

FOR I'LL HAVE FORGOTTEN ALL BEFORE  
DEATH.





## Four Seasons

### Spring

Crocus blossoms pop  
Yellow, white, purple landscape  
Herald joyous spring



### Summer

Like giant pompoms  
Basking in the summer sun  
Hydrangeas delight



### Autumn

Vivid earthy tones  
Brilliant displays gone too soon  
Branch parts with last leaf



### Winter

Nature's best mimic  
Moth, slipper, spider orchids  
Winter blooms indoors







## Shadows of the Mind

A crescent moon hung just above the horizon casting off enough light to accent the top edges of the clouds being swept beneath it. I had dropped off the last clients of the night, or should I say early morning. The last wisps of cigarette smoke still drifted lazily in the empty passenger's cabin as I glanced in the rearview mirror.

Driving for a small, privately run family limousine service helped pay the bills. The hours weren't the greatest but every once and awhile the tips made it all worthwhile. Now it was a long drive back to the office after a long night. It was the drive that kept you going and it was the drive that tired you out. You don't want to stop, even when you have to and when you have to, you can't, you're so wired. So, I stepped on the pedal and began cruising the outside temperature. It was very hot.

The stretch floated along the highway in its own dream like motion. The road was deserted, slick and winding through the rolling hills like the back of a snake as it moved on its way. My eyes had a constant tendency to stray to the mirror but the dimmed lighting only revealed the haze of the stagnate cigarette smoke that still lingered. My mind began to wander as my eyes fixated on the road.

Scenery flashed past the window like the images that were racing through my mind. I was caught in the current. Looking for a sign post of recognition. The blur of time and speed distorted any clear image. Waiting for a bump in the road, something that would bring it back into focus. Then the reality hit me.

The place where it happened. Their last ride. So silent was the emptiness now. The serious moonlight was gone. Like it was that night. Blackness filled the space outside the headlights as if nothing else existed.



The bottles in the cooler shifted as the ice melted away breaking the dead silence of the night. The first drop splattered against the windshield, then the second and third. Within a second you could no longer keep count as the deluge descended from a tear in the heavens. In what seemed to be an endless battle the wipers slapped away against the inundation. Then as quickly as it began it was over with a flash of lightning in the distance.

Steam rose from the hot road bed as the car cut its way through leaving spindles of vapor to fill the empty spaces. Darkness filled the rest.

The memory rushed back like it was yesterday. Shadows in my mind saw their reflections in the mirror, as they were that night. She still wore her wedding gown and him the tuxedo. Their names I never knew, only their faces, intent on each other. The image was etched into my brain. I would never forget. They sipped champagne looking in each other's eyes and laughed. Their whole life ahead of them.

Suddenly there was the glare of headlights in the side mirror about to pass. Then the flash from the gun barrel, the sound of glass simultaneously shattering. The bullet tore through the gown and the tuxedo as they embraced each other. Instantaneously their love became eternal.

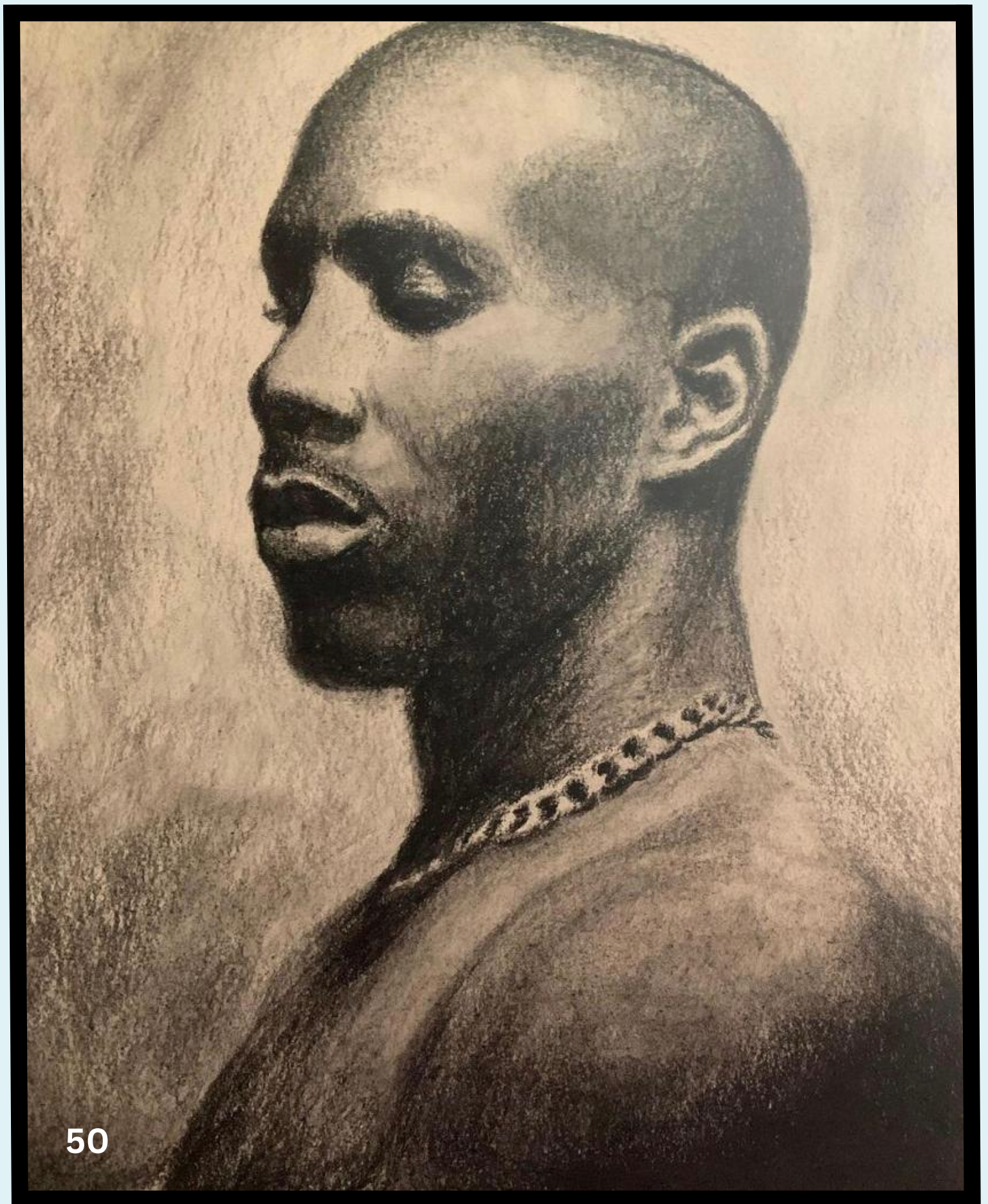
The police found the car from the limited description I was able to give them abandoned. It had been wiped clean. They had only stolen it a few hours earlier. No arrests were ever made. A random act of violence that in a short time no one would even remember.

Now in the lonely darkness of a starless night, amidst the speed and fatigue of an endless road, they live again, untouched by time. They'll live with me the rest of my life.











## The Final Case

Many people have wondered why I, the great detective Monroe, have decided to retire after having spent my career successfully solving four hundred and thirteen cases of various crimes but mostly notably, murder. For my latest has thrust upon me something that I fear has racked me with guilt and rendered me inept at my duty. I have retired to try to understand what occurred outside the house behind the Krall family funeral parlor the evening of my final case.

A small town had reported numerous missing persons. What I found most suspect about the missing persons is that they were all already deceased, having been lifted from the Krall family funeral parlor. The police were less than enthusiastic about their investigation, until the disappearance of a six year old boy named Oscar. He had been playing outside the funeral parlor. When his parents had sought to retrieve him, he was no where to be found.

This is where I was called in. The parents of the child, Brantley and Clarissa Cartwright, were a family of considerable wealth having been bankers for generations. I began my search, and sat with the owner of the Krall funeral parlor, Jeffery Krall himself. He was soft-spoken and dressed affordably, but I did detect a clear dislike of the Cartwrights. Jeffery seemed more concerned over the missing bodies than the boy.

I had a similar conversation with his wife who shared her husbands disdain. Their son Matt seemed very sympathetic over the occurrence. Their secretary was very kind, and revealed that Jeffery Krall had an important business deal fall through with Brantley Cartwright.

It was shortly after this that I joined the procession of the Cartwright family, who invited me to ride with them in their limousine. Their son had gone missing during the wake of his grandmother, and I had arrived to speak with them at an inconvenient time. Brantley Cartwright, the father, and his wife Clarissa, both expressed great concern over their son in our conversations. When I mentioned the missing bodies they thought it was negligence on the Kralls' part. Their daughter, Teresa, seemed to resent this. She defended the Kralls saying they have been serving the local community for generations. Her father had disagreed and urged me to focus more on his son than the missing bodies.

I did speak to the driver of the hearse, named Leonard, a polite and soft spoken young man, sharply dressed for his duty. He confirmed the secretary's story regarding the fallen out deal, and was even more forthcoming in placing the failings of that deal on Brantley Cartwright. I questioned him further, riding with him at the head of the motorcade returning to the parlor. Then I headed to my hotel where I reviewed my research.



I returned later in the evening after reaching my final conclusions. I arrived shortly before the police, in time to see the hearse drive off down a path behind the funeral parlor and head north. I spoke to Jeffery and asked if it was normal for Leonard to take the vehicle down the path behind the parlor, but Jeffery's expression told me everything. I asked to see a map and he produced one off of the office wall. Upon examination I noticed an old building that was located north from the parlor. I asked the significance of the place and Jeffery told me it was once Leonard's family's estate, until they foreclosed and the bank acquired it.

Now my suspicions had truly solidified. I held Leonard responsible for many reasons, but it was this information that confirmed his guilt. During my interview he spoke with such disgust for the Cartwright family that it was beyond what the Krall family felt, and I knew he must have his own reasons for disliking the family. Using the map, I took my own vehicle and followed the path as well. It was there, tucked away in the brush, I saw it all occur.

Leonard stood before a bonfire, a large raging inferno in front of the run down house of his ancestors. He was chanting something in an ancient language that filled me with a primal dread. I could see six bodies splayed out around the fire, posed in various positions. Next to Leonard bound in rope was the young boy Oscar. The chanting ended right as I stood to make my move.

The fire suddenly crackled and sputtered with an unnatural intensity and from within the flames a series of vehicles emerged. They were hearses, six of them, glowing red hot and moving like a motorcade in a spiral in front of the house. They parked and in perfect synchronized movement six creatures emerged. They stood like men but were much too tall and thin. They acquired the bodies and placed them in the back of their vehicles. I could smell the burning of flesh as the bodies began to burn as if placed in incinerators. Once complete all drivers returned to their vehicles except for the frontmost, who approached the boy and waved his unnaturally long fingers in an unholy blessing before the child. The creature then returned to his vehicle and the procession proceeded in reverse back into the fire from whence they came.

It only took a moment more for the police to arrive and the arrest to be made. I kept what I had seen secret until seven days after the incident had passed. I was reading the paper when I discovered the Cartwright family had all been killed in the night by their son Oscar, who was discovered by the servants at home the next day carving an unnaturally tall and thin figure out of wood.

This news shook me to my core. Had I spoken up earlier about what I saw, could I have prevented this tragedy? I could no longer do my work as my mind that always found an answer suddenly had none. Perhaps my final case was better left unsolved.



## At Dusk

At dusk, it's cold and breezy  
The stars shining bright above you  
That feeling of being loose and easy  
And you are right in the moment

At dusk, you hear your soft feet,  
Tapping at the ground  
Like a little beat  
Each step you take

At dusk, the lights are turning off  
The kids head inside  
And the parents cleaning up  
While they tuck in their babies

At dusk, you see fireflies  
They light up,  
And give off flashes of happiness  
Something you longed for

At dusk, you wind down,  
Taking deep breaths,  
And focusing on yourself  
You take some time to think about you

At dusk, you look back  
at the happy moments,  
But also the sad ones  
And even the embarrassing ones

At dusk, say a prayer  
For those in need,  
For your family,  
And friends

At dusk, you look back  
At your mistakes,  
What you did wrong  
And how you can learn from them

At dusk, you feel the cool breeze brush against your lips  
Your eyes, slowly closing and opening  
You're yawning and decide to head home  
To your nice, warm bed



At dusk, you walk home  
Feeling relaxed  
Feeling like you can do anything  
If you put your mind to it

At dusk, you tuck yourself into bed  
A big, warm bed  
Calm and watching every breath  
Slowly, closing your eyes

At dusk, the stars glare down at you  
Moon saying good night  
Breeze calming  
The world turning off

At dusk, you fall asleep,  
Dreaming of a perfect life





THE LITTLE GIRL  
SAT ON THE STOOP

The little girl sat  
slumped on the sun  
setting stoop,  
Grateful for the day's  
anguishing pain  
To be over.

The fervently wished  
for deliverance  
Would come with the  
morrow's sunrise  
promise  
of smiles.  
and laughter,  
and love.

The little girl sat on the  
stoop.

Decades would expire  
till that now-woman,

Having wrenched the  
searing grief

Of the sunrise betrayal  
from her soul;

abandons the stoop—

to set forth into her own

DAWN.









## Would You Have It Any Other Way?

The keeper of the Heavenly Gate asks,  
Before you enter, do you want to go back  
to change your life so you'll have a different story to tell?

I consider her question, turn, see, alongside many joys,  
an awkward trail of disappointment, shattered illusions  
heartbreak and wounds

But the landscape behind me is not desolate.  
From each scar of despair, fertile growth had sprouted  
abundant in strength, newfound courage, challenges met.

I see blooms of creative expression, expansion in new directions  
spiritual discovery and depth, a fruitful flowering seeded and  
nourished  
by the compost of what was uprooted.

Though the path of my life is crooked  
it is rich in color, variety, organic twists and turns  
a beautiful Divine design.

I turn towards the Keeper, my story left intact.  
Her smile mirrors mine. The Gate is already open.





## Book Travel

If you want to travel,  
And make it really cheap,  
Grab a book, grab my hand,  
And let's go take a peek.  
Travel through the misted jungles,  
Ride the stormy seas,  
Climb up on the snowy mountains,  
Feel the dry hot desert breeze.  
Walk on through enchanted forests,  
Hike on down to caverns deep,  
Take a boat through swampy marshlands,  
Trot along cliff faces steep.  
So if you want to stay in place,  
But also travel far,  
Know a book can take you anywhere,  
No matter where you are.









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