



Brush
&
Ink

Volume I
2022



The Editorial Board of Brush & Ink are both librarians at the Sachem Library. The editors seek short fiction, poetry, art and photography for publication. Previously published work and simultaneous submissions are accepted.

Submissions are free.

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Sara Neil

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**Sachem Library
Literary Magazine**

**Volume I: New Beginnings
2022**

Brush & Ink

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FROM THE EDITORS

The journey to bring this magazine from an idea to a reality has been a long, exhausting, and extremely satisfying one. It is never easy to do anything first, and while there are quite a few literary magazines published in our country, there are not as many that are published by libraries. But we did what librarians do best – we researched how it was done, collaborated, trusted each other, and turned it into a labor of love that makes us both incredibly proud.

Our submissions, while initially slow, eventually built to an astonishing number. Those that submitted represent what makes Sachem so special. Our contributors range from ages 9 to 75. Our magazine includes parents and their children, librarians, veterans, graphic artists, a postal worker and a forensic scientist. Some of the work you will see in the following pages are by professional artists, authors, and photographers who have already been published. Many others are having their work published for the first time.

We would like to thank our Board of Trustees and our Administration for their encouragement and support in this project. Their dedication to serving the Sachem district has no parallel, and their belief in us was unwavering.

It has long been a dream to bring the incredible talent that we know is right here in our community to the page. So many people have so much to share. It is our honor to bring it to you. Please enjoy the first volume of the Sachem Library's literary magazine, *Brush & Ink*.

Christine Latham
Sara Neil
Editors-In-Chief



Borax Sunset

Abandoned borax
Approaching scenic sunset
Twenty mule teams strong



The Library

Library

When you hear that word
what do you think?

Maybe seven-foot tall shelves
lined with dusty old books.

Not my library.

Words that come to mind are

Colorful

Not necessarily quiet

Interesting books

A place where people come to read, but also

Connect.

That is what I think of when I hear

Library.



Slow and Steady Wins the Sane Race

1.

Life compresses my days (Deflated mornings, afternoons folded with the evenings, tomorrow stuffed back) in a storage bag. Hours are cast to forgetful darkness. I desire devoting daylight to an ambition, but my dawning of mental usage waits for time to learn Einsteinian freedom of relativity, when flexibility of the hour contorts to a glob in a lava lamp, melding with the oblong of the next hour.

Psychedelic floaters of minutes would drift the night.
Instead, I'm stacking rigid minutes to the ceiling of the day's end until I'm sleepy, so tonight...

I bed-cocoon myself in an old promise—challenging myself to a race with myself.

The next morning, I hatch out as my own self-monitoring butterfly,
Metacognition-winged, fluttering over a thought:

“I need to outrun my anxieties.”

On the thought's winds, the butterfly glides and flaps its wings, generating the afterthought:

“Yes...but outrun them with graceful confidence.
Or else I shall suffer mania,” Masking mania,
As if nothing's amiss. And thus, we have our racers:

The tortoise of my heart, my internal self, that is I.
Then there's the mental hare, seen as an extension of myself, yet not I.

The tortoise creeps along, blinded to absolutes, yet rational
Like looseness of water. Its waves slosh too variably for concrete measurement,
But fits into the moment's cup.

The hare dashes along, sighted with exactitude but irrational,
Like an equating needle on overdrive to dominate existence with measurements,
But skips over subtleties and nuances in the moment's picture.

2.

“What's the point of this self-challenging race when the world is burning?”
The hare asks the tortoise, already jogging to find the answer.

Meanwhile, the tortoise replies, “We can delay Armageddon for a vacation.”

Years ago, we befriended someone in Amsterdam and kept in touch.
He happened to live in Denver, Colorado.

“We can visit him!” The mental hare sprints to the idea.

The tortoise stops to consider the consequences. “What about Covid?”
“We’re vaccinated!” replies the hare, leaping over my worries and hurtling to JFK airport.

We schedule a 10:38 AM-flight, New York to Denver,
Covid saturation to vaccination-ephemera.

In our Uber ride to the Airbnb, the hare assesses the state:
“Between every block, the future is under construction, building atop quicksand of poverty.
Rise or sink? I rather rock out while the ship’s going down!”

The tortoise replies, “The city climbs above sea level to nutritious bustling,
Despite dystopian shadows. I choose ascension by steadiness.”

The Uber Driver drops us off at our Airbnb on a fraction address: a purgatorial alleyway.

On a hellish wasteland, a garage’s gate leads to a vacant heaven with a water fountain,
cobblestone bordered by clean cut grass, and a table with an umbrella—a paradise reservation
for mortals. Heaven has boarded windows, yet here I’m parasailing time that glides me over the
calendar’s gravity, to untracked skies of wandering hours. On the apartment’s door, I enter the
code to permanentize timelessness, and the door is opened to a narrow stairway. Atop it, white
walled-silence is accented by humming ceiling-fans.

Brightness of the wood floor reflects the least accurate resemblance of my image:

A squiggly yellow line of my recognizability,
free from Covid anxieties and free to relearn myself.

I ease down into newness of my image, interrupted by the hare speeding around the Airbnb.

“Fate shored us upon poor amenities,” he quickly judges after glancing around.

I, the tortoise, unpack my baggage with all the trip’s past hassles, spinning me around
now.

The metacognitive butterfly fluttering by my eye, I’m reminded to slow down,
And I find coffee grounds and a pot, dishes, glasses, and plates neatly arranged in the cabinets,
toiletries in the bathroom, cleaned and pristine, sheets and linens, folded nicely, and most
importantly, temperature control thermostats.

3.

Before I can situate myself in the Airbnb, the hare’s verbalized labyrinth spawns a whirlwind,
vacuuming me down suggestions of activities to fill the trip. I’m soon lost in this mazelike force of
nature. My attempts to change plans spins me through his talking’s twists and turns, to my
agreeance.

Hopping Uber rides to and fro through town sweeps us in and out coffee houses, cafes,
restaurants, bookstores, and then to the main event:

Red Rocks' Amphitheater, megalithic and naturally formed, resembles the hare's mania,
Yet also reconditioned for entertainment like the hare's mania,
Massing as a populace is massing among stone-skyscrapers of crimson.

I, the tortoise, dodge his manic explosions until the show begins.

The sparking livewire of the spectacle plugs itself into our antique toaster brains. Overcharged excitement burns them to the brink of insanity. It's testing if we'll last the night's show, or whether madness will win. I hold my own—mentally, but the hare jumps to the shocking sound of that

Psychotic POP!

4.

Our assigned Uber Driver cancels on us while we search for the pick-up-area.

“Damn endeavors when things are against us! Forfeit ourselves to madness! Embrace the beast of man! My mourning rage howls at the dying world!” The hare screams,
While we wander in the darkened wilderness of stone and earth.

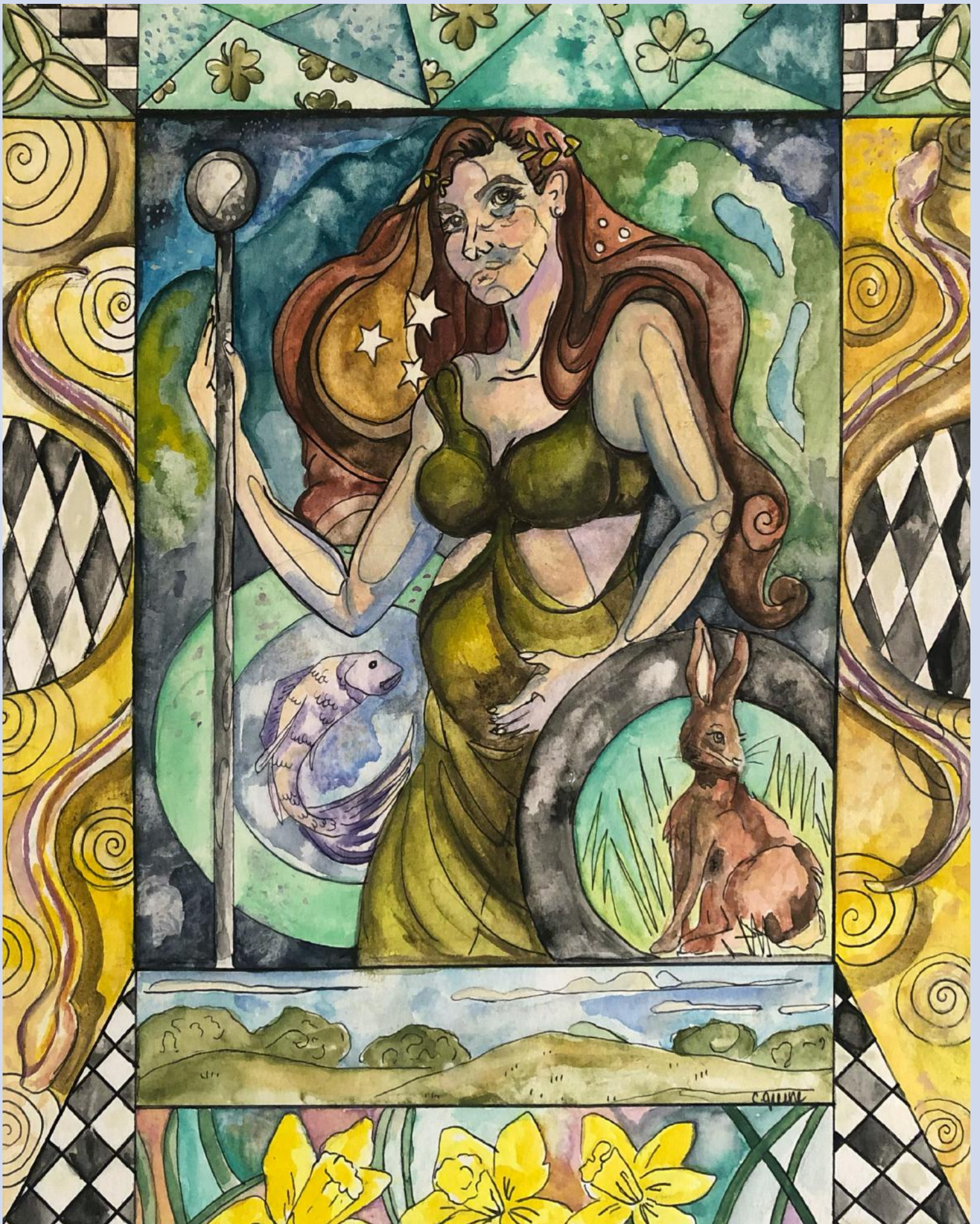
The tortoise buffers his behavioral loudness with slight course-corrections to our way home, saying, “On the contrary, my dear hare. Don't succumb to nihilistic meaninglessness when so many artists, scientists, athletes, practitioners of every kind have worked towards finding and contributing to the human narrative of truth.”

I request another Uber Ride. A new driver is quickly assigned to us, and I continue, “It's an age-old narrative, not made of history, although historical events play a part. It's not made of fiction, although fictional monuments play a part. The human narrative of truth mythizes facts and factualizes myths to create a living cultural collage where truth-contributors, like so many fish, leap from the river of the world's timeline and become birds.”

Via text I coordinate with the Driver so he can find us, typing while speaking, “This human narrative is filled with scientific discoveries, artistic experimentations, epic masterpieces, little gem-poems, athletic feats, and social justice wins. These are puzzle pieces of a picture bigger than we can imagine, although we wish it's never completed, only further explored. “The Uber Driver pulls up to our location and we shuffle inside. “If ever the picture of human truth is completed, humanity would pass into extinction, and in our final hour, let's not spoil the picture with obnoxiousity, lunacy, and desperation. This is human truth's ultimate disservice!”
And thus, the tortoise finds the answer at the finish line.

On the last day of vacation, our Amsterdam friend drives us around the mountains,
And I understand why I challenge myself to races:

The view of the mountains' majestic soul, purpled ghosts sleeping on the horizon, precedes the experience of the mountains like feeling the love of a daughter without having a daughter:
an endearing absence colored by magnitude.



Acorn Released

Hear the acorn as it hits the ground
Did you see it fall?
Did you see its release from the branch?
What is in the unseen?
The anguish, the despair, the release

Oh mighty oak

So tall and proud

How strong your roots
How stable you stand

Your nut so small
You gave it strength
You nurtured; it grew
Your boughs bent
Heavy, oh so heavy
Too heavy

You clutched
Don't let go; you can't let go
Your fibers stretched; you clung
It grew; it took your strength
The weight unbearable

You released
You said goodbye; you mourned
Healing. Light. Life.
Fibers rebuilt; you grew stronger
Branches renewed; they reached farther

Tall, beautiful, strong
Glorious new discovery
Of that which was always there

Where is your acorn?
What holds it?
What is the burden of its weight?
What beauty might be discovered,
If you found the strength to release it



Life

Time is a peculiar measurement.
It passes slowly or at an accelerated pace.
Moments of contentment, joy and pure happiness slip by all too fast,
Like sand through an outstretched hand.
Times filled with sadness, hopelessness or despair seem to lag on forever,
in a position of cementation.

Time can be compared to a river.
It can flow like a gentle brook or stream,
rolling along carefully, navigating through the obstacles.
As events and experiences increase, the direction and speed can change;
obstacles may be more difficult to avoid, creating a new path.
Eventually rivers decrease their speed as time goes on,
returning to a gentle flow as they spill into their final place.

As with rivers and time,
life has an ebb and flow.

Each of us have the power and strength within us to navigate down the slopes,
through the obstacles and return to a place of peace and happiness.
Our journey to this place requires love and guidance from within,
and begins with the decision to change one's path.

Slay My Heart

The howling wind rattled the only window of the one room schoolhouse, tearing my attention away from the stack of papers I was grading. Branches from the gnarled oak that grew outside scraped against the thick glass pane like talons. Snow began to fall from the dark, cloudy sky.

A storm was brewing. I should've been on my way home, except I was stuck waiting for my last pupil, six-year-old Isaac, to get picked up. The inquisitive boy was curled up on our meeting rug reading a book quietly with my own six-year-old daughter Alyce. My heart swelled with pride to see the pair of new readers so deeply immersed in their book. I shook my head with a chuckle. It was hard to believe that a few years ago I was the most fearsome werewolf slayer in the land, and now I'm a school teacher.

As soon as my daughters were born I knew it was time to hang up my trademark red cape and lay down my weapons. Fighting dangerous rogue werewolves was no life for a parent. Besides, we now live in peace with the packs, although many humans are still wary of werewolves. I should know because my late husband was a werewolf who had been slain by a vagabond werewolf.

The door to the school house swung open and the man I had been waiting for strode inside; Isaac's father Damon Darkclaw. Damon closed the door and leaned against the wall, crossing his muscular arms across his chest. He inclined his head to me politely, golden eyes shining. "Scarlett, my apologies. The pack had a meeting with the village elders."

I nodded. The village elders, including my granny, frequently met with Damon's pack. It was all part of keeping the peace that had made our village a safe place to raise a family for humans and werewolves alike.

The children were so absorbed in their reading we had to pry the book from their fingers, so we could bundle them up for the storm. "Papa, can we stay a bit longer?" Isaac pleaded.

"We were just getting to the best part," Alyce moaned, while I pulled a knitted cap over her raven curls.

"You can finish the book tomorrow," I promised, ignoring their pleas. While it made my heart glow to see them so passionate about reading, I was more than a little worried about making it home before the storm grew worse.

"I'll escort you home," Damon offered gallantly. Damon was our neighbor and our twelve-year-old daughters Imogen and Skyla were best friends. As far as neighbors go, I couldn't complain. The sweet little things Damon did for our family never failed to make me smile; from chopping wood for our fireplace to helping shovel us out when it snowed, or bringing over a crockpot full of his famous chili so our families could have dinner together.

Always the gentleman, Damon held up my crimson fur-trimmed cloak. Even though I left that life behind, red is still my signature color. Our fingertips brushed lightly as I took my cloak, and a spark shot through them at the brief contact.

"Let's head out," I said, cheeks flushed. I ushered the kids and Damon out the door so I could lock up.

Snow was swirling and the gravel road leading out of the village was already coated with white fluff. I gestured to the wooden sled I made for Alyce last Christmas. "Why don't you two kids hop on?" With wide smiles the kids climbed on the sled.

Damon held out his gloved hand to take the reins. "Allow me, Scarlett."

I followed, my boots crunching through the snow as Damon jogged down the path with the sleigh. The kids excited shrieks filled my ears as I took in the quiet beauty of the snowy evening. My earlier anxiety was melting away surrounded by such innocent joy.

Damon slowed down, panting slightly. "I guess you're getting your exercise?" I teased.

You could say that." Damon chuckled, offering me his arm. I slid my arm through his, and we continued towards the woods. Despite the chill, I felt warm with Damon pressed against me. I huffed out a sigh. I couldn't let myself enjoy his company too much. He was just my neighbor and that is how it had to remain.

"Mom, can Isaac and I shift? Please?" Alyce begged hopefully. My youngest had inherited her father's abilities, but rarely had a chance to explore her other form. I glanced around us. We were far enough away from the village that no superstitious eyes would spot her. Why not let her have a little fun?

"Ok, just don't go far," I said warily.

Soon two gray wolf pups were streaking past us, yapping playfully. Damon grinned, as thrilled with their youthful antics as I was.

Our log cabins were coming into view through the thinning cluster of pines, when a frightened yowl snapped my attention to the woods behind us. I tore myself from Damon and trudged through the thick snow. Two burley men in hunting gear stood on the outskirts of the forest, each holding a squirming wolf pup in their massive hands. The older hunter laughed mirthlessly.

“Let them go!” I snarled.

“I’ll think about it, if you call off your dog,” the younger hunter drawled. A threatening growl filled my ears. Damon had shifted and was ready to fight.

Before either hunter could blink, I unsheathed the dagger I kept hidden in a secret pocket sewn into my cloak. I flew at the men causing them to stumble backwards in shock and drop our pups. “Run!” I screamed, my blade arching down to connect with the vulnerable flesh between the younger hunter’s neck and shoulder. Blood spurted from the wound. He clamped his hand down to staunch the flow as he crumbled to the ground. These fools may have been afraid of werewolves, but I would make them regret the day they decided to mess with a mother.

Damon launched himself at the older hunter, pushing him into the freezing ground. His razor-sharp fangs lay bared against the trembling man’s throat, ready to rip it out. “Please, let me go so I can tend to my son’s wounds,” he croaked. These vile men were the reason the peace between humans and werewolves was so precarious.

“If you dare set foot in my village again, you won’t be so lucky.” I wiped my bloody dagger clean on the hunter’s chest, hoping to drive my point home. He groaned and clutched his shoulder.

Damon backed off, snapping his jaws in warning. We headed off to find our children. They were waiting with the sled several yards away, back in human form.

Alyce’s eyes were brimming with tears as I gathered her to me. Damon transformed back just in time for Isaac to fling himself into his arms.

“You’re safe now,” I soothed, settling Alyce back on the sled beside Isaac.

“They were no match for you, Scarlett.” Damon flashed me a grim smile.

Silently, we slogged the rest of the way home through the snow. After a day of work and that unexpected skirmish, I was exhausted. All I wanted was to curl up by the fire with a mug of tea and rest. I knew that wasn’t going to happen as soon as our giggling twelve-year-olds thrust open my log cabin door to greet us. Despite my weariness, I plastered on a smile for them.

“Surprise, Happy Valentine's Day!” Imogen cried.

“Everything is ready, just as we planned.” Skyla giggled, quickly tugging us all inside.

Hand on my hips, I arched a dark brow at Damon. “Were you in on this?” Damon shrugged, flashing me a crooked grin. I couldn't believe I had forgotten it was Valentine's Day.

We followed the kids into the den. A fire was crackling merrily in the fireplace, and a large woven blanket was spread out before the hearth. A picnic basket filled to the brim with food and a bottle of champagne sat on the blanket.

Tears pricked my eyes and I took a deep breath. “This is beautiful,” I gushed.

After our holiday feast, the girls took the younger kids to the kitchen to play a board game. I stretched out next to Damon before the fire and he poured me another glass of bubbly.

“Happy Valentine's Day, Damon.” I clinked my glass with his. “I'm sorry that horrid hunter called you my dog.” I hated the way some humans still treated werewolves like they were animals.

Far from being offended, Damon smirked. “I wouldn't mind being yours.”

My heart fluttered and I shifted closer. “May I kiss you?” Damon murmured, raising my chin gently with his fingers. I nodded as his lips brushed against mine like warm velvet. Our kiss deepened and his woody scent engulfed my senses. Once I had dedicated my life to slaying rogue werewolves; now one had yet again slayed my heart.

Flies to a Corpse

She sang and he listened
he danced and she watched.

Melodies of an angel swimming through his ears with
the movements of a god making her soul shimmy.

She cooked and he ate
he poured the wine and she drank.

The steak tender as her heart and
wine as sweet as his endearments.

He worked and she took
she birthed and he slept.

Checks and numbers bounced in his mind
like her bosom in the mouth of their son.

He talked and she ignored
she cried and he screamed.

Work work work-
Feed burp- she hadn't slept this week.

He drank at night and she drank with him
she sobbed and he slapped.

A mad man drunk and
beer in the baby's breast milk.

He stopped coming home and she slept alone
she filled the void with her son as he filled another woman.

She moved across the country and he moved in his new wife
He beat her too and when the cops came she said-

The fly on the wall had seen the whole thing
ask him yourself and I bet he'll sing.



Cabin in the Woods

Mark's legs sunk into the earth as he kneeled on the forest floor. His legs were two noodles that could no longer support his one-hundred-pound body. Dirt smeared tears dried on his cheeks. His mouth was sandpaper, his tongue swollen. Having no clue how he ended up here or how long he's been running through the woods, Mark was too tired to comb over it. He spread his body on the moist, cold ground, and listened to the wind ruffle through the trees. The smell of fresh pine and his body odor filled his nostrils. The sky was a navy blue, and he knew that he would be swallowed in a sea of darkness soon. Forcing his crusty eyes shut, he drifted into a restless sleep.

Mark's eyes flew open at the sound of howling. Not wanting to cross paths with a wolf pack, he jumped up and started running without a destination. Hundreds of trees flew past him as he ran, hopping over tree limbs, ducking under low branches, squeezing through clusters of poison ivy. He stopped, leaned against an oak tree as tall as Mount Rushmore, breathing heavy. His lungs were burning, and his clothes were soaked with sweat. The air smelled like firewood. Was it a fireplace? His heart leaped at the thought that he may find someone to help him. Like a bloodhound, Mark tracked the musty smell of the fire, praying it would lead him to another person.

A cabin right in the middle of the forest was glowing with life. Warm yellow light was spilling out of the windows, drawing Mark closer. The smell of the fireplace growing stronger with each step. Mark approached the brown door and it swung open just as he was about to knock.

"Mark, my boy! Where have you been? We were just sitting down for pie."

"Dad? What are you doing here?"

"What do you mean, son? We live here."

"We live in the middle of a forest? Since when?"

"Since always, kid. I told you to quit smoking that funny business. Now get in here. I have a pumpkin pie with your name on it."

Too tired and hungry to give it a second thought, Mark strolled into the cabin. The heat of the fireplace sent a warming chill through him as the sweat on his clothes started drying. There were moose and deer heads decorating the walls, and a stuffed bear in the corner. The bear's eyes followed Mark as he walked into the kitchen. His mom and little brother Johnny were seated at the small round table in the middle of the dimly lit kitchen. Cinnamon and pumpkin scents danced in the air making Mark's mouth water.

"Hun, where have you been? We were getting worried."

"You smell," said Johnny as he pinched his nose.

"Now, now. Be nice to your big brother."

"Sorry, mom."

Mark sat at the table and cut two slices of pumpkin pie. The warm, sweet flavor melted in his mouth and his stomach ached for more. His family sat around him, watching as he inhaled both slices. He sat back, feeling his body relax. Wondering what came over him in the woods, he shrugged and headed off to bed.

Sunlight marched in through the windows, waking Mark at six in the morning. His dad was standing in the doorway holding a rifle.

“Good morning, son. Mom made breakfast. After you eat, go get yourself washed up and meet me outside. We will go out and find some dinner.”

Mark walked into the kitchen. There were blueberry pancakes on a plate sitting at the table. He sat and shoveled the pancakes into his face as fast as humanly possible, nearly choking as he swallowed the massive bolus. He took a swig of the orange juice, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and headed to the bathroom to wash up.

“Dad?” yelled Mark as he walked outside. The air was still, quiet. Too quiet. Mark tried to listen for his dad’s gunshot going off, or the sound of birds but only heard the blood flowing in his ears. He walked aimlessly for hours, feeling the leaves crumple beneath his feet. He heard voices traveling through the woods. The sounds of kids shrieking. Someone was cursing. Was there a fight in the woods? Mark scratched his head and jogged towards the disembodied voices.

The woods were behind him, and he approached what appeared to be a camp site. Teenage boys were playing basketball and volleyball. Laughing, and throwing around the F-Bomb like it was a frisbee.

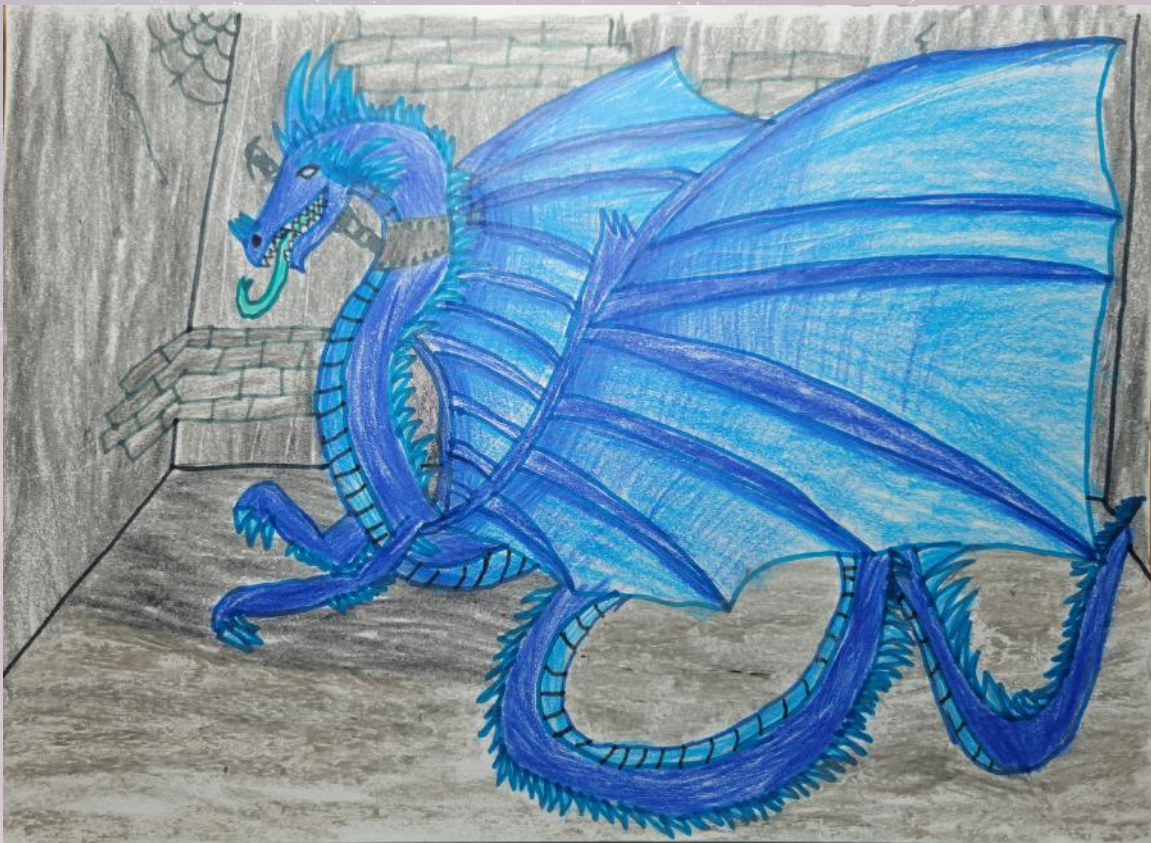
“Look guys, it’s Mark,” yelled a guy playing basketball.

People surrounded him like he was a science experiment. He heard his mom’s voice screaming his name. His parents pushed through the crowd of people surrounding him. His mom wrapped him in a bone crushing hug, tears smearing her mascara.

“Oh my God, Mark, where the hell have you been?”

“Where have I been? I was with you and dad in the cabin.”

“Honey, we’ve been here at the camp since you vanished. We searched the woods endlessly for 4 days. There is no cabin.”



The Captain's Eyes

Behind the door
is a portrait of a captain I adore.

I know he isn't real,
his hands have yet to feel.
His eyes tell an interesting tale,
about when fishermen set sail,
to catch as many fish
as they wish.

Their ears were freezing.
Their cheeks were red.
Their hands were so dry that they bled.
The captain was stern,
and he couldn't get to bed.

So what did he do?
He made Irish stew.
One spoonful was hot,
the other was not.
The nets went in the water
down, down below.
The fishermen were tired.
But their skin had a glow.
When the nets were finally lifted,
the fisherman's minds had shifted,
from the task at hand,
to the sweet sounds of the band,
the band they heard in their sleep,
a dream they kept having on
their voyage to the deep.







Laugh with the Frogs

The turtles all agreed, the frogs would have to go. They had shared this pond for generations, but enough was enough. The frogs kept the turtles and their babies awake all spring long with their endless peeping, splattered the groggy turtles with their careless muddy hops and worst of all they made better jokes. Once the frogs started with their comedy, the ducks couldn't help but crack up quacking up a storm.

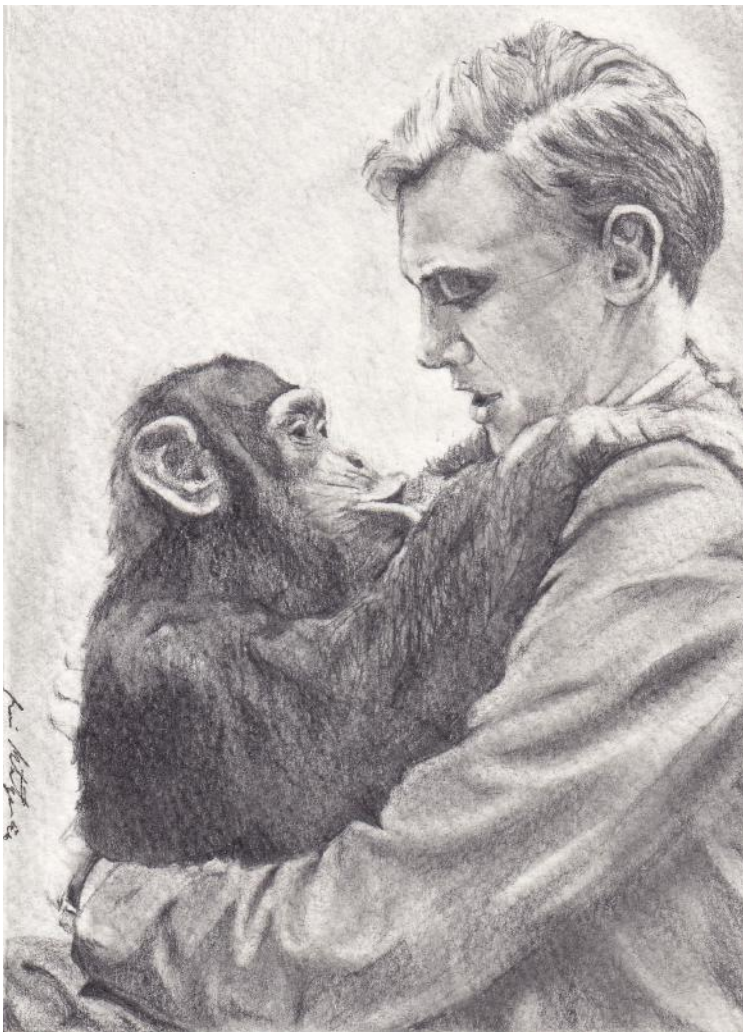
Enough was enough. It was time for a plan. The turtles had friends in high places and enlisted the help of their local pelicans. The turtles would get all the frogs into one spot just when a team of bucket billed pelicans would descend and scoop all the frogs up and out of the pond for good.

The turtles convinced the frogs to put on an epic comedy show complete with acrobats and friendly competition. The frogs agreed and drummed up wild enthusiasm from tadpoles to toads all preparing for the big day. The ducks spread word to the swans who decided they would attend. The turtles and the pelicans traded conspiratorial winks and nods as they met among the grasses, their plan a total secret from all the others.

The big day finally arrived. The frogs drew a huge crowd; even the foxes and deer had heard. One after another the frogs took five minutes and each was funnier than the last. The noise of all the laughing animals made the turtles' shells crawl but it would all be over soon.

As a grand finale, the frogs all came together in a perfect amphibian pyramid. This was the moment the pelicans had been waiting for. Ten full grown pelicans swooped down from nearby shrubs and gobbled up each and every frog. The great birds even dipped into the water to capture the tadpoles in the shallows. After a frenzied moment, they soared up into formation and flew away. Their beak pouches bulged with squirming frogs. They did not go far. The big pond was only a stone's throw away, across the street, and that is where the pelicans switched to a landing on a float of logs near shore. One by one the giant beaks bent low to the water and let the disoriented performers emerge. What greeted them was like frog heaven, lily pads as far as the eye could see teeming with flying insects and blooming flowers. The frogs hopped merrily away from the birds and began to set up home among the lilies and logs. Before long, all the animals who had gone to the comedy show made their way from the pond to the big pond.

The turtles found themselves alone as last with only the dumb koi for company. The nights didn't get any quieter though. The frogs had teamed up with the stage building beavers and were performing night after night to ever wilder crowds. The turtles had to admit their folly when they found their babies sneaking slowly (and sometimes fatally) across the street to join the big pond parties. Don't be a grumpy turtle, Laugh with the Frogs.





Venom

Careless goodbye, he left.

No sweet kisses or bliss.

No loving words or feelings left to
scrutinize.

He vanished like a bird in the night,
leaving his venom inside my every cell.
Melting. Feels like I'm vanishing into
lifelessness.

Scary to be here alone.

Midnight, I turn to a werewolf,
sucking on blood just to feel alive
Emptiness, what have I become?

Always giving, never receiving- sickens me
now.

You sicken me now
Don't dare to return,
Or the venom you seeped through my soul
Will haunt you.

What If

Part 1: What If!

I learned to love myself unconditionally.

There were many stories of the dilapidated house on the hill and the old lady who lived there, whom everybody simply called “the Witch.” Ten-year-old Terry and his twin sister Mary decided one day to find out for themselves. She never left the house except for once a month, and today was that day, so the twins grabbed the chance. Once inside the house, they saw all kinds of spooky things, but what wasn’t in the house was most intriguing. No mirrors, not one. After rummaging through an old trunk, they came across a picture of a young girl, about twelve years old, homely in appearance. She had a letter attached that stated, “to God. I hate you; I hate myself and everyone else.” It went on to say that she hated herself because she was ugly, her schoolmates because they always made fun of her, and God because he made her that way. It ended by saying, “I’m going to become a witch and make sure everyone else feels the pain I feel.” It was signed “Lilian the witch.” The twins sat in stunned silence, then Mary began to weep. Her tender heart broke for Lilian the witch.

“Johnies is my best friend, and some kids say she’s ugly,” Mary blurted out. “But she’s fun and smart and always helps me with my homework.”

“I know,” Terry said sadly. Just then, Lilian the witch walked in on them glaring with those black hollow eyes. She screamed.

To be continued.

You know, people are the way they are because they learned to be that way. No one is born with a good or bad self-esteem. Their particular environments mold and shape them as they listen and watch others. In a perfect world, everyone would love one another no strings attached. But in this life, that’s simply not the case and children pick up on it early in life. Oh yes, Lilian the witch has some lessons yet to be learned.

Part 2: What if!

I learned to love myself unconditionally.

“You little bitches, how dare you break into my house?” yelled the witch, waving her broom at them.

The twins ran into the corner of the room amidst the cobwebs, cowering in fear. Lilian continued her tirade. “Now you’re mine! You’ll never get to leave. I’ll put curses on you and make you drink my special cat eyes and lizard potion!”

Wide eyed and trembling, they begged to be able to go but Lilian just laughed with glee. “You’re never going to be able to leave! I’ve always wanted two little witches of my own and now I have them.” Then, she walked out and slammed the door. She locked it from the outside and ran up the creaking staircase into her bedroom. But soon her laughter turned to anger. She looked up, clenching her fist, screaming, “I hate you God! You sent those little wretches just to taunt me. Haven’t I suffered enough all these years?”

Exhausted from yelling, she fell onto her bed, sobbing, drenching it with tears. She laid there for hours, thinking of all the terrible things that happened to her and what she made of herself: a witch indeed. She tried to think of one good thing that happened in her life but couldn’t. Then, all of a sudden, her eyes glanced at her dresses and she notices the small keep sake box her mother had given her just days before she died. She walked slowly in its direction and stared at it, finally grabbing it.

To be continued.

Life has many twists and turns. Some are for the good and some are for the bad, and usually when they happen we don't understand it all the time. However, if we are patient with ourselves and give life enough time, I believe even in the worst-case scenarios, we can find redemption in it all. As the saying goes, "you never know what's around the corner," and Lilian was about to find out.

Part 3: What if!

I learned to love myself unconditionally.

As she picked up the box and opened it, there was a letter written by her mother. "Dearest Lilian, I know it's been very hard on you ever since your father ran out on us, and I know school has also been very difficult for you as well. My heart breaks as I must tell you that shortly I'll be leaving you as well. The doctor tells me I only have weeks to live and there's so much I wanted to say to you, but I barely have enough strength to write this short letter. You can't imagine how much I love and how proud I am of you. You mean more to me than anything in this world. But please remember, God made each one of us very special, just like those butterflies you love chasing after. Everyone is different and beautiful in their own way and that's the way it is with every human being. Remember, every time you pick up this box and look into its mirror, you're looking at someone beautiful- someone very special. I'll always be looking down from heaven waiting for you to come back to me. I'll ask God to send angels to you in you ever lose your way. Your loving mother, Clara."

Trembling, Lilian placed the letter gently back in the box and pressed it to her chest. Weeping, she could no longer hold back her emotions. "Mommy, mommy, I love you. I miss you so much. I'm so lonely and made such a mess of my life." By now, she was on her knees and the words would barely come out. "God, please forgive me for all the things I've ever done." She ended her prayer by asking God to send those angels her mother talked about in her letter.

To be continued.

You know, mirrors and intended to view one's self, but it's how we perceive ourselves in the mirror's reflection which would ultimately determine who and what we think we are. A mirror can only show you who you are physically, and that even becomes distorted when we have a low view of ourselves. Self-esteem isn't about how good looking you are, but the inner qualities of your soul. Lilian saw herself as ugly and so she became exactly who she thought she was, an ugly witch. But isn't it nice that it's never too late to change?

Part 4: What If!

I learned to love myself unconditionally.

All of a sudden, the door behind her creaked open. Startled, she turned around quickly and in walked Mary and Terry cautiously. For a moment, they stared at each other, not knowing what to say.

Mary broke the silence, speaking with tears still in her eyes. "We're so sorry for coming into your house. We didn't mean to hurt you."

"Yeah," Terry said. "I was able to open up the door and we came here to say we're really sorry."

Mary interrupted. "We read the letter in your trunk and heard you outside your door. We don't think you're ugly. I don't care what anybody says. Anyway, who cares about looks or what other people say. There are kids in school who think I'm weird just because I have red hair. They're the weird ones."

Finally, Lilian spoke, her lips quivering. "I'm so sorry for what I did to you. Will you ever forgive me?"

The twins walked over to her, speaking all at once. "We'd like to be your friends." Lilian smiled, brushing away tears.

Terry chirped up, "hey, you've got a really cool house." Then he asked, "did God ever send some angels?"

Lilian put her arm around Mary and Terry, hugging them tightly. She said, "yes, I do believe he did."

Lilian spent the next couple of weeks cleaning and redecorating her house. Next to one of the many mirrors throughout the rooms was her mother's letter, framed and hanging prominently on the wall. The funny thing is she never did see the twins after that. However, Lilian did learn one of the most important truths a person can discover: you are worth loving yourself no matter what your past or present is, or what anybody else may think of you. Your future isn't written down yet; you decide what it will be. Also remember this: God loves you just the way you are, no strings attached. I suggest you go and do likewise. If you do, you'll be a far happier and healthier person than you ever thought possible. I have a great idea: let's go shopping. I saw a nice big mirror that would look great in your living room. Always, your friend.



Why I Write

I don't write for you

I write for the pain that can't be healed by medication

I write to release the tension in my shoulders that hands can't rub away

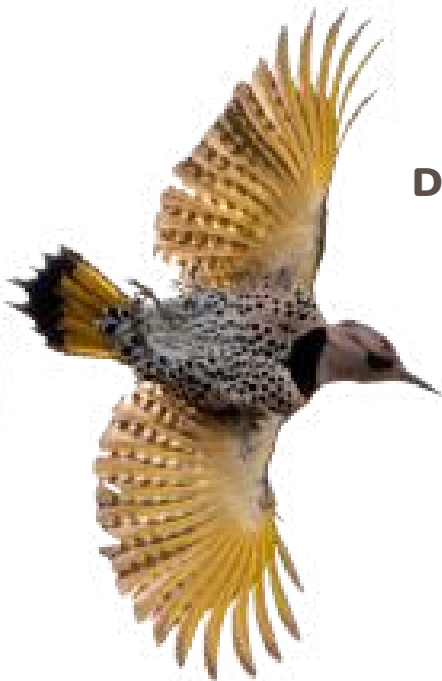


I write for the breath I forget to take when the stress becomes unbearable

I write to be the hero of my sanity and save it from taking that step off the ledge

I write to remember that I am not broken

Disabled
People with disabilities
People like you, myself, even thousands of others
Painful? Sometimes
But I treat my disability as a gift
Why you ask?
Simple, because even though I am handicapped, always
exhausted
-yes always, isn't a brain injury great!
But, no matter,
The only thing that is just between me and the world?
Nothing
Disabled doesn't mean unable, or useless, or unintelligent
It means there is always a challenge
I'm always up for the fight
Even if I fall, I rise
Disabled doesn't mean unable,
Disabled means unique, one of a kind
Legendary
I am proud to BE
I am proud to be disabled



I Am All Around

**I am the wind that blows through your hair and dances on your cheek,
I am the warmth from the sun holding you close to me,
I am the gentle raindrops reminding you how much I miss being with you,
I am the sweet smell of flowers reminding you of your beauty,**



**I am the birds singing, telling you how much I love you,
I am the twinkling stars keeping you company so you are not alone,
I am the moon at night watching over you, listening to you talk to me
about your hopes and dreams,
I am all around you in sight, smell, touch and sound, forever.**

Paper Planes and Mended Hearts

When my best friend Allie said she was having a destination wedding, I imagined palm trees and sparkling blue water, not mountains of white and blizzard warnings.

With Ollie, my four-year-old son against my hip, we race through Islip Airport. I've never in my life been on time for anything, not even my own birth. My son, he's the same way. This morning we played a game of - find the missing shoe and I hate wearing pants, which ultimately led to our late arrival.

Cancellations and delays appear on the screens all around us. Winter on Long Island is mostly mild, but not today. I pray that our flight to New Hampshire isn't in the line of fire – or maybe ice. My pulse is already racing from the idea of being thousands of feet above the ground, the delay is not helping.

"Zoom." Ollie crashes his toy plane into the back of my head.

"Ouch. Ollie, please be careful." I rub the sore spot on my head.

Setting him down beside me, I check the flights. Thankfully ours is still on time. Glancing down at the small blonde hair brown eyed boy, I'm able to let go of a calming breath. You've got this, Eliza. It's a short flight. I would have left Ollie with my parents for my own sanity, and for him not to see me panic on the plane, but he's Allie and Tim's ring bearer and I didn't want to disappoint her.

Moving forward my foot kicks someone's luggage. Warm steady arms grab ahold of me, and I tighten my grip on Ollie. My eyes scan the tight jeans and roam upward towards a black Ramones tee, followed by a chiseled jaw and... I do a double take. How is it possible to remember someone just by their jawline?

"Eliza Mae is that you?"

All the air deflates from my lungs. Eyes wide I stare up at him. Trevor Mullins, Allie's brother, the one who ran away with half my heart. The same guy who slipped a promise ring on my finger when we were nineteen and then bolted.

I clear my throat. "Hello, Trevor."

"Oh." He glances down at Ollie. "And who do we have here?" Trevor kneels in front of him. For a brief moment I check the gate and most of the passengers have already boarded.

I shift from side to side, as the woman at the gate checks her watch then gazes out at the dwindling crowd.

"Captain Ollie." Ollie says, straightening his posture and holding out his hand to Trevor.

Trevor's chuckle sends a shiver down my spine. It's hard not to miss someone you spent your whole life loving. After shaking Ollie's hand, he stands. I've spent many hours trying to forget the way his captivating deep set steel blue eyes put my heart into a choke hold.

"So that's Ollie."

My face tightens and I nod. I had Ollie two years after Trevor vanished to find himself. Things didn't work out with Ollie's father, and I've raised him on my own.

"We should go before we have to walk to New Hampshire," I say, my voice crackling from the building knot in my throat.

I throw up a wall. If I lay my heart out on my sleeve, Trevor would be sure to take it as he had when we were teens.

Trevor picks up the bag off the floor, the ones I nearly tripped over, and allows Ollie and I to step forward first.

I straighten my shoulders and attempt to keep my shaking hands at bay. The woman standing at the door holds out her hand for my ticket. I pull out mine and the paper slips from my hand fluttering to the floor. Before I can grab it myself, Trevor's arm reaches out, my ticket in his hand.

Our eyes meet. I have to bite my bottom lip to hold back the tears. I'd blame my nerves over flying, but I can't even fool myself. We head forward and Ollie stops. He turns to Trevor like he's waiting. Ollie reaches into his jacket and pulls out a second miniature plane, handing it to him.

"Come on Captain Trevor, we have planes to fly."

Part of me wants to snatch the plane, but I can't. Ollie rarely addresses anyone he doesn't know or isn't comfortable with. My heart lurches inside my chest, for some reason or another he trusts Trevor. I don't allow myself to question it.

Entering the small, enclosed space with tight aisles, I keep having to take deep breaths. A hand on my back startles me. Pushing him away would be the right response, but the heat rising through me keeps me from pulling away.

Trevor finds his seat, releasing his hand from my back, and attempts to give Ollie his plane. Ollie shakes his head and pushes it back towards him.

"Trevor's plane," he says.

He politely nods, and smiles. His eyes linger on Ollie for a second longer before his gaze finds mine again.

Trevor swallows hard. "Hey." His hand reaches out but drops at the last second.

"See you when we get there," I say.

"Yeah. See you when we get there." He echoes.

We are a few rows back and because Ollie has requested the window seat I am stuck in the aisle. After everyone is settled the plane begins to back up. My hands wrap around the seat clenching the soft fabric in my hands. Ollie's plane noises aren't calming, and I find myself closing my eyes. You're going to be okay, just relax.

Something soft hits my leg. I ignore it only to feel it again. My eyes open to find two paper airplanes nestled on my foot. I reach down, eyeing Trevor a few rows up. Ollie's eyes light up when he sees them.

"Woah, cool!" he chides.

I reach down and grab the one that says, CAPTAIN OLLIE. He swipes it and holds it up to the window with his other plane and continues to make jet engine noises.

Lifting my gaze, I'm caught up in his again. Trevor's brows knit together. I lean forward and with trembling hands pick up the second plane. I unfold the wings and inside it says: talk to me Goose.

The plane gaining speed pushes me back into my seat. Holding on tight to the edge helps a little, but what helps even more is the paper plane with our favorite movie quote crumbled between the seat and my hand.

Ollie cheers beside me as we race into the air. He tugs on my shirt and points out the window.

"Mommy look, it's beautiful," he yells.

For a moment I glance out the window. My stomach drops, but Ollie is right, the view is amazing. I settle my attention back on Trevor, his eyes never leaving mine. I take a deep breath and swallow up my pride and mouth, thank you. Trevor's smile fills my heart with something I didn't realize was missing. I check back over with Ollie, who hasn't stopped smiling. Maybe this weekend won't be so bad after all.





DOES HEAVEN HAVE ROOM

**Does heaven have room
for all the souls that are coming?
The hearts that are broken;
the cities that are smoking.**

**Will the children that flinch
as the bombs surround them,
find peace in this world
from the horrors that pound them.**

**And the evil that stalks and kills
With its might:
Can it be vanquished and starved
Of its terrible plight?**

**For the brave that fight on with the
odds against them;
For the righteous, the good, too many
to mention;
For those who fall under the darkness
so cunning:**

**Heaven Does Have Room,
For All The Souls That Are Coming.**



Bahar ki Barashain: Spring's Rain

In time of spring

The Earth puts down her palm

Verdant grass raises its roots toward North and
South

Flowers bloom their ravishing , radiant petals

Lifting their buds to the Heavens up above

Trees create new bows of Life

Butterflies arise out their cocoons

The wind blows creases of clouds out their
cotton

Growth and Greenery bombard vast plain views

Soft scent of mischief and renew create a
certain dew

Oh but,

Stems last once or twice

While the dew of scents turns to mist

Deluge and downfall of seasons rain

Drawn to engulf the tiniest birds and ants

Flooded till dawn, cold till night stars

Downpour ponders on trees new
blessings

Cold water spits down on a deer's snout

Saen of the shrine, calls me by wish

Seek he says, before the bucket of faith
intertwines

Bitter and brisk at sight, Sun's warmth
can't heal Bahar ki Barashain

The Vase

Is it really in the heart or in
the mind
Or some other site?
On what shelf do we
cluster
The fragile bouquet of
recollected emotion
As a petal falls away -
Do its crisp edges scream
Crinkled, curled, and
brown
As paper near a flame?
How do we measure the
richness of our soil?
By those petals that have
fallen away,
Or by those frail buds
tenuously emerging to
greet the sun?



The River

It flows like a river
Wiping out all life within
The butter water crawls along the banks
Changing the color of the landscape
Brown and thick with poison

Its power is unstoppable
Unrelenting in its purpose
Killing all... good and bad
No mercy, no change in direction
Through every valley and canyon
All is barren, empty, dead

It will be over soon... they say
It will grow back
But how can life be restored after such
devastation
The air is filled with disease
There is no regrowth
There is no return to normal

Then the river stops... it is dry... the poison is
gone
It took everything and left nothing behind
The earth struggles to rebuild
To bring back what was lost

The soil is not as fertile, but there is renewal
and life
Everything grows more slowly, but it is stronger
It's more resistant to wind and rain
The landscape has come back

The flowers may not be as bright and the grass
my not be as tall
But what makes them beautiful is that they are
grown from love



Being with Gaia

Up the hill, the pebbles and
Sand spill
Down to
Where you started.
The mountain air mist
You caught on your lashes,
Honey-sweet nectar
Rises to your nose.
You rest mid-ascent, unwind and relax
The midday sun
Welcomes you to the fun.
When the decline comes
You dip your toes-
The lake's late winter runoff
Refreshes your mind;

The dauntless moon
Soon comes up to welcome,
Her children in the night: owl that
hoots to the
Dark of the forest,
The coyotes call and
The stars search
For those wandering eyes.
There are so many you can't recall
The recognizable are disguised under
The blinding illusion of starlight.
The dipper and her cub,
Those constant points in the sky,
Your compass to rely on barely helps
you by.



The Day the Hamster Died

I expected nothing out of the ordinary when I walked into my younger son Andrew's room that morning. It was a school day; he was in 4th grade. As I always did, I wakened him and went to feed his pet dwarf hamster, Hammie. (Yes, I agree, not the most imaginative name, but this was not a particularly imaginative hamster.) Hammie resided on top of Andrew's dresser in one of those plastic enclosed "habitats" with various plastic tubes for him to run in (not that Hammie ever seemed to run or do much of anything other than sleep, eat, drink and poop), a wheel, and other hamster accoutrements. I should note here that Hammie was merely one member of a rotating menagerie that resided in our home during our sons' childhood: parakeets, zebra finches, guppies, crayfish, miniature lobsters (almost indistinguishable from crayfish except they cost more), a dwarf rabbit, and a cockatiel named Pete. There also had been several previous hamsters. Our boys (Andy and his older brother Jeremy) wanted a dog, and as much as I love dogs, they are a whole other level of responsibility and care, and I felt I already had plenty of both. So, I pretty much let them have anything else, and they pretty much did. I drew the line at reptiles, though.

But back to Hammie—the most boring hamster I've ever come across, and I have plenty of hamster experience, going back to my own childhood. I know they're nocturnal creatures, but Hammie took this to a new level. We barely ever saw him. It was like having a virtual hamster, except for the poop. He spent his days, and most of the night, sleeping under a pile of shredded bedding. You might see the pile move now and then, and I assumed he did roam around his home at some point, but I also assumed any activity occurred between, say, 1:00 and 4:00 a.m. Andy seemed to have pretty much lost interest, and as usual, Hammie's care fell to me. Never, ever believe your kids when they swear by all that is holy that if you just let them have a (fill in the blank with type of pet), they will take care of it, 100%, all the time, forever. Even the most honest child is lying through his teeth.

This particular morning, I noticed that Hammie's food dish seemed untouched. Hmmm. I shook the "cage" slightly. A small lump under the bedding slid back and forth, like a padded rock. Uh-oh. Now, here is where I made my first mistake: I said aloud, "I think Hammie's dead." "Oh, no!" Andrew immediately began wailing. "Hammie! No, no!" along with various other dramatic expressions of grief. This from a child who had barely acknowledged this creature's existence and who wouldn't have noticed his passing until the smell of decomposition set in, and probably not even then. Had I replaced Hammie's body at that moment with a small potato and covered it with bedding, I probably could have gotten away with it until Andrew went off to college.

Of course, Andrew saw this as an opportunity to stay home from school. He was too upset. He was in mourning for his beloved pet. He couldn't possibly concentrate in school. I, the most heartless mother in the world, was having none of it, and off to school he went. I then headed to my part-time job at another school in the district. I should have known this was not over. In fact, it hadn't even begun yet.

I got home at about 1:00. My plan was to eat lunch and then, to avoid dealing with Hammie's corpse, toss his entire habitat, with him in it, into a large trash bag and be done with it.

We wouldn't be getting any more hamsters—I would see to that--so there was no further need for a hamster home. It was then that the phone rang. It was Andrew's teacher, Dr. Olsen, a patient, soft-spoken woman who had been Jeremy's 4th-grade teacher three years before. Andrew had told her about Hammie, she said. He was so upset that they had allowed him to skip Phys Ed that day and had instead let him go to the computer lab and write a story about his hamster. (Oh, well played, Andy!) I was desperately trying not to laugh. I knew just how much that hamster had really meant to him. Dr. Olsen then told me Andrew had informed her that we would be burying Hammie in my father's beautiful garden, and that she thought this was a lovely idea. (It was a good thing I hadn't used the Hefty bag yet.) Oh, yes, I said, pretending I knew all about this plan. Of course. She assured me that she and the entire class were being very sensitive to Andrew's heartbreak. The last thing she said to me was, "My condolences." I thanked her and hung up. It took me a good five minutes to stop laughing. I then called my parents, who lived close by, to inform them of the upcoming funeral to be held at their home.

I next got a call from Andrew's principal. He, too, wanted me to know how sorry they all were for this terrible loss, how Andrew had spent some time in his office (and been given one of the principal's special pencils), how he, as a principal and a father himself, ached when any of his students was in pain. You can see why it was no surprise to me when, years later, Andy joined the college theater group. I can only imagine his performance at school that day.

Andy came home, and once Jeremy arrived from middle school, we put the entire hamster contraption in the back seat of the car and headed to my parents' house. Jeremy dryly suggested we turn on the headlights. (His bereaved brother did not find this at all funny; on the other hand, this still makes me laugh.) He further suggested that the school flag should fly at half-mast the next day. Jeremy was not totally heartless, though; he donated, for a casket, a nice little cardboard box that had held his favorite geode.

We arrived at my parents' home. After much sympathy and many hugs, my mother removed the corpse from its chamber. To understand what happened next, you need to know that at one point when I was a child, one of our hamsters was discovered in his cage, cold and seemingly dead. My mother thought perhaps he just needed to be warmed up. She placed him on a heating pad set on low, and, I am not making this up, after a little while, he started moving. Ever since then, my mother had never fully believed any small pet was really dead at first, and she'd let them lie in state for a while, just to be sure. It was kind of like those bells they put in coffins in Victorian times, in case the loved one awoke in the grave. When she took Hammie out, she said, "He feels warm." Of course he felt warm. He'd been lying under his bedding material, in an enclosed plastic box, in a heated house, all day. Plus, he had, you know, fur. Andrew, through his tears, shouted, "Hammie's alive?!!!" and started joyfully jumping around the kitchen. My father glanced at the body and said to my mother, "Honey, that animal is dead. He's stiff."

Cushioned on cotton balls in his little Nature Company box, Hammie was buried with appropriate pomp and dignity in my father's rock garden. He haunted me for a few more days, though, first when the school nurse called me, saying she knew of a student who had a hamster but was allergic and would have to find it another home. Would Andrew want it?

All that mattered to me at that moment was that I didn't want it. I politely declined. And then, days after that, in the supermarket I ran into a mother I knew from the PTA. She'd heard about Hammie—of course she had; seemingly the entire town had heard about Hammie--wanted to say how sorry she was and asked how Andrew was doing. To this day, I don't remember how I answered her or if I managed not to burst into laughter, but that was, finally, the last of Hammie.

And, of course, we did end up getting a dog.





Live for Those Who Can't

We lost everyone. Everyone was gone. They were gone.

Gone.

Gone.

Gone.

And as I screamed at the pouring sky, as I clawed at the earth beneath me, the mud, the blood, Calix tried to pull me back from the danger that still lurked, whispering something to me. But I couldn't hear, not over the rumble of the world around me and my heart breaking.

"Selene, we still have each other."

"But Kara... and Ahza... and Morg—"

"I know, I know but we have to go!"

He pulled me up, and suddenly we were running as fast as we could through the woods. Branches whipped at us, but we still kept running. We needed to get away, or their sacrifices would be in vain.

Something howled behind us, spurring me to go even faster. Calix stumbled on a tree root, falling down onto the hard ground, hard. I spun around and dove for his hand, finally seeing the large beast following us. A scale covered brute with scars all over it, probably from people who have tried to kill it... and failed; its bright green eyes were focused on us. "Calix, get up!" I hissed, pulling him to his feet and running again.

We just had to make it out of the forest and we would be ok. There was a small town just over a mile away, and they had large walls. They had to give us refuge. Another branch hit me, and I cursed violently, failing to see the drop in the path ahead. Calix let out a cry to warn me but it was too late, and I tumbled down the hill.

The earth twisted and turned around me as the ground got closer and closer. I hit a rock and let out a yelp as a large tree got into my path. There was no stopping me as I flung into it. Hot flashes of pain coursed through me, and I couldn't do anything but lay on the ground, trying to regain my breath again.

Calix's steps down the hill echoed for a moment before he appeared above me, panting wildly, "Selene! Are you ok?!"

I nodded, forcing myself to my feet despite the sharp pain in my ankle, "I'm fine. Let's go!"

Again, we were running, and I saw the edge of the forest. My ankle throbbed and it was an effort not to give up right there, but I pushed. I had to, had to for the people who had given up their lives for us to get out. We broke through the trees, and I was finally able to see the lights of the town. We would make it! If I screamed for help, would they hear me?

A beast growled behind me and I whipped my head to see. But before I had a chance to react, to do anything, it jumped at me. Calix let out a roar as he slammed into me from the side... and the beast flew into him.

"Calix!" I screamed, scrambling to my feet and flinging myself on top of it, digging my nails in to its eyes.

It roared and tried to buck me off, but I held on. Calix groaned from his spot on the floor, and again I looked at the lights before it bucked again. I screamed as loud as I could, yelling for help, hoping someone would hear me.

Another buck and I finally went flying off of it. I slammed onto the ground, trying to regain my breath and get up before the beast could finish me off; I couldn't. Calix let out heavy breaths to the left of me. "Calix?" I whispered, my throat sore.

He groaned softly. Good, hurt but alive.

The beast circled me, deciding how it should kill me---It was toying with me. Bastard. Everyone's deaths meant nothing, not when we would die too. How were we supposed to win against that brute? After everything we've gone through this would be it... Maybe dying wouldn't be so bad, maybe I would finally be able to rest--- but Calix, he didn't deserve to die. He still had so much left in him.

That was the only thing that had me struggling to my feet again. The beast cocked its head. I narrowed my eyes at it, "You will not hurt him anymore," I growled softly, "You will not get through me."

It let out a puff of air, almost as if it were laughing, but all I did was reposition my footing. If I were going to die I would do it making sure Calix was ok. I've lost too many friends today.

It leaped at me, just as a flaming arrow flew past me and into its back. A bellow of pain surrounded me as guards came from the bushes. I gasped softly as another arrow flew at it... Arrow after arrow flew past me, and after a moment I knew we would not fall today. I dared a glance at Calix, at the medic already helping him, and knew that we would get out of this, even if so many didn't.





Mattituck, Long Island

In late August, we picked blackberries and sucked sweet tart off our fingers. It was safer to label myself lovesick than insane. His tenderness, how he would hum along to the car radio, how his nose would scrunch up around lavender; I remember so much. I must have been manic to him, a wild girl with knots in her hair and lips stained purple yelling

***Look at me, pay attention to me, I will
dissolve into nothing if you stop loving me.***





My First Garden: Grew a Lifetime of Passion and Joy

I have always adored flowers and gardening. I clearly remember as quite a young child, about four years old, sitting next to my mother at the breakfast table.

She'd given me a slice of cantaloupe which was new to me.

It was spring time. Our big kitchen door was open. A gentle, sweet breeze wafted through the screen door my dad had installed.

As I dug my spoon in to take a bite, my mother gently restrained my hand pointing to the mass of seeds beneath which lay the succulent cantaloupe.

"These are the seeds, Diane. You don't eat them."

My mom showed me how to remove the seeds first, which we did together, spooning them into a small bowl. Her hand on top of mine guiding the dripping, gelatinous cantaloupe seeds.

"When you are finished eating, we'll plant the seeds," she said to me. "We'll dig a small hole in the dirt and place the seeds there, then cover them over with more dirt. Then, we'll water them and you will have your first garden. You know Grandpa always had a garden at our house in Brooklyn. It wasn't a big backyard, but Grandpa always grew the most beautiful roses, red ones. So full you couldn't see through the petals to the center. And they smelled beautiful, like something from Heaven. He also grew cucumbers."

A picture began to take shape in my mind's eye of huge, beautiful red roses as I sat next to my mother at our kitchen table, becoming entranced listening to the sweet story of her youth.

“Whenever we heard the clip-clop of the milk wagon’s horse, Grandpa would run like the wind, grabbing his bucket and shovel to scoop up the precious, smelly horse manure. Grandpa said it was the best fertilizer for your plants. I always love the scent of horse manure,” my mother continued, “it reminds me of when I was a girl and my father, your Grandpa, would make his garden in our small backyard. The scent of horse manure always makes me remember Grandpa and the beautifully, deep red colored roses with their special perfume that he grew in our small back yard.”

I listened, completely absorbed, as my mother continued telling me the story of her youth. I listened about her father, my grandfather, whom I knew well and how Grandpa always made a garden.

“After breakfast, I’ll show you like Grandpa showed me, how to make a garden at our house.” It sounded magical to my 4-year-old ears. I ate quickly and hurried out the kitchen door, clutching my bowl of drenched and dripping cantaloupe seeds. I went right along side the cement stoop, excited to plant my seeds and make a garden like Grandpa.

My mother followed me saying, “no Diane, there’s no sun here. Let’s go over here on the other side. See? There is good dirt here and plenty of sun. You need plenty of sun for your garden to grow.”

I started “gardening” at the tender age of four years old, and I know well that sunflowers swivel following the sun. I never knew that on a cloudy day, sunflowers turn to face each other as if they were faces kissing.





The Nature of Risk

What courage each year has the tree
to once again birth her leaves
her pink cherry blossoms
her delicate dogwood petals
knowing in days, weeks, or months,
they will wither and fall to the ground.

So, too, the crocus or tulip
who struggles through frozen ground
regardless the chance of Spring snowfall.

Even if warmed, her flower's glory
will be short-lived.

What freedom to show up
generously share
sure of one's value to Earth
Oh, to be like that
to bloom without fear
not cling to longevity
nor demand guarantee
but offer our best without expectation.





Spaces

Spaces lend finite moments
and settle prospective voids.
Openings collapse when that which matters
emotes vacuous loss
FLOOD creativity within which the holes regale,
and escape to pitch the dome to triumph spaces all.



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