turning tides
the MMA literature & arts journal

Spring 2016
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— Art & Photo —
Anthony Coletti
The Milky Way
It has been said that athletics started as training for youths to practice important skills for life, turning children into strong and skilled young men and women. Today, the importance of athletics lies not only in the physical aspects; instead, the mental toughness and work ethic are the primary benefits. In athletics, it is important to be driven. The work put in will ultimately result in a feeling of self-pride. In life it is important to have a goal to strive for. One does not achieve success without drive and motivation to work for that goal, no matter the obstacles or potential failures that stand in the way. Cycling is a perfect example of this important fact.

On an early spring day, the bus careened down the twisty road on its way to Holderness, New Hampshire. The students within were bubbling over with excitement and nervousness. We were all on our way to the first cycling race of the season, a twenty-five mile ordeal that would be taking us on a winding, fast, and challenging course. For many of the students there, this was their first race. They were about to be initiated into the world of competitive cycling, and the Holderness race would be a baptism by fire. It was always fast, always dangerous, and always fun. For a few other seasoned riders, the goal was a spot on the podium at the end of the day. My brother, Sam, and I were two such people. Sam had been racing for two years and I had been racing for three, so we had both seen and raced this course several times, and we had worked our way up from being naive rookies to seasoned veterans, thoroughly capable of consistent top ten finishes. Today we wanted to both finish in the top five, and we were determined to make it happen.

Road bike racing is a lot like chess at thirty miles an hour. It is as much about positioning and strategy as it is about raw strength. Cycling is a sport of attacks and feints, gentlemen’s agreements and savage underhandedness, alliances without allegiance. That is always the aspect of racing the rookies do not understand; it is not enough to just be strong. You have to know when to draft off the rider in front of you, which entails riding so close, sometimes less than three inches behind that rider, so that you are in their airstream and can do less work to go the same speed. At speeds of twenty miles an hour or more, it requires ice in your veins and a bank of skill and confidence. You have to know when to work together in a paceline, where several
riders all change the person who is “pulling,” or the first person in line who cannot draft off anyone but whom everyone drafts. You have to know where to be in the peloton, or the main pack of riders, at any given time, or whether you should try an attack to get ahead of the peloton and try and beat these riders rather than ride with them. Combining all these thoughts, all this planning, while speeding along in the ever dangerous peloton, requires more than a little skill, a lot of luck, and a healthy dose of courage and determination.

At the starting line, Sam and I went straight to the front of the peloton, knowing that working our way up to the front of the peloton from the back or middle would be nearly impossible. When the starting gun went off, the riders on either side of us all launched off the line, going full speed straight from the start! Sam and I kept up, but allowed them to remain slightly ahead of us. We knew that we could draft off them while they tired themselves out. We could see that the riders would fall one by one, instead of rotating who was in front and working as a team to conserve energy and go faster. At twelve miles into the race, the front of the peloton was not working together; all the attacks that had taken place were by individuals and were quickly reeled in like a fish on a hook, and Sam and I were still in good positions. We decided to start a larger attack. We had made several “friends” in the pack as we rode, riders who thought like Sam and I did. They were good. They understood strategy, and they were ready and willing to up the ante of the race. We all went on the attack simultaneously as we crested the top of an abrupt hill and managed to drop the peloton by all working together. We rode in a paceline so we could ride faster than the peloton while still saving some energy for the finish. About fifteen riders made the breakaway group and were able to keep up with the pace. Our group was going nearly twice as fast as the peloton, which was riding almost lackadaisically at this point. The lead group was going too fast for any one person to successfully attack, and so we would work together to reel in any rider or small groups that went off the front. It was all textbook; everything was going perfectly. Then, as it does from time to time, disaster struck.

The number five rider in the paceline touched wheels with the rider in front of him, and they both crashed at about twenty-seven miles an hour. Their crash caused a chain reaction, wiping out all the riders behind them, including both Sam and me. There are few things as scary as a bike crash. Crashes occur almost instantaneously, but they seem to last forever. My world slowed down, and I saw the person in front of me fall to the pavement after hitting a bike already
on the ground. I watched my front wheel hit his ribs moments before I was wrenched forward and into the air. Before I knew it, the wind was slammed out of my lungs as I landed on my back and ground to a halt across the pavement. I had come unclipped from my pedals and my own bike skittered across the pavement. The five or so riders who were riding in front of the crash took off on an attack, trying to capitalize on the accident and secure their victories. I got up and looked for Sam, my little brother, to make sure he was all right. Fortunately, he had just been driven into some sand at the side of the road, and both he and his bike were fine. I, on the other hand, had had a slightly rougher go of things. When I had kissed the pavement, it had sanded a fair bit of skin off of my right knee, hip, elbow, and shoulder. I got to my feet with a groan of mild agony, found my bike as quickly as I could, looked over it to make sure it was not majorly damaged, and hopped back on the saddle. Still bleeding, I rode hard with my brother to catch up to the riders who had escaped the calamity. No one else who crashed even tried to continue the race.

Sam and I were determined to catch the group who had escaped the crash, determined to beat them, so we took turns drafting each other to go as fast as possible. I used my turns drafting to reach down and clean out my wounds with my water bottle and a rag I always carried in my jersey pocket for just such incidents, rinsing out the dirt and scrubbing the road rash to try and remove any imbedded pebbles. The cold air stung as it whipped over my legs, now damp with intermingled blood and water. The group we were pursuing had gone hard for two or three miles, but then, not seeing any pursuers, had eased up the pace. They seemed shocked when we caught and rejoined them two miles from the finish line. There were seven riders left in all now, meaning four would not be standing on the podium, and things got vicious. Riders would vary their speed during their pull at the front, alternating going slow and fast, because it took more work on our part to keep drafting efficiently. To punish this behavior, the rest of the group would refuse to allow the man pulling off the front. This meant that he could not draft off anyone, and so he was more tired than anyone else when the time came for the finish, reducing his chances at a good result.

As all this transpired, Sam and I conferred quietly whenever we were next to each other as to where the next attack would occur, and what our strategy would be. We decided that I would choose where he and I would attack, since I had had more experience racing. We knew that the finish was up the access road to a ski mountain, a brutal climb, about a mile in length, with a punishing average grade of
twelve percent. We could see riders preparing to attack on the turn onto the access road at the base of the hill. When their attack came, Sam and I were ready. We stuck right with them. Sam was immediately in front of me, the third rider back in the attack. As the group reached the bottom of the hill, the front of the group slowed down as they started to climb. Since Sam and I were slightly further back and were still in their draft, we were still going faster than they were without really trying. I decided that this was the time to strike, to counter-attack immediately.

I yelled at Sam, “THIS IS IT!” and hammered on my pedals. As I passed him he pulled onto my wheel, drafting off me as we soared up the hill. I rode in my drops, standing out of my saddle. I poured every ounce of energy into flying forward, and told Sam to keep drafting off of me. I had decided that Sam should win today; he had a better chance of winning if anyone caught up to us. Only two riders managed to come near Sam and me, but they could not get close enough to draft off of us. The hum of my tires pulsed in sync with my pedal strokes as we climbed and climbed and climbed. Hummocks of snow, the last vestiges of winter, soon started to appear at the roadside between tufts of brown and green grass. The air got colder and colder, searing our throats and lungs, but it was welcome because it cooled the sweat on our brows and kept our body temperatures tolerable.

I was exhausted, but I kept grinding my way up that mountain as fast as I could, hungry for victory for my brother and me. I lied to myself, telling myself that I had to get to the next sign, the next bend, the next tree as fast as I could and then I could quit. Then the race would be over. But every time I reached one of my markers, I set a new one. I kept tearing up the mountain, sign to sign, tree to tree, always convincing myself that the end was just around the corner. The gashes on my legs started to bleed again, my muscles working so vigorously, my heart pumping so hard, blood had pushed through what scabs had formed to drip down my leg as I strained onward and upward.

By the time the finish was in sight, we had dropped all but one of the group who had survived the crash. Only one rider was near us, ten or fifteen feet behind, just too far back to draft off of us but close enough to be a concern. I stomped on my pedals in the final hundred yards to the finish, a coppery taste rising in the back of my throat as I sucked in all of the cold mountain air I could, pouring everything I had into the final stretch. Sam still passed me, as we had known he would, and the lone rider who was near us started his sprint. Sam sailed across the finish line, arms raised in victory, but the remaining
Art & Photo

Kasey Carlson

Jellyfish
rider and I were neck and neck. At the finish line, he managed to just edge me out by a wheel’s length, but I did not care. I had come in third, my brother had won, and we had both raced a perfect race.

At the end of the day, Sam and I were elated. We had achieved what we had set out to do. Despite the difficulties, despite the discomfort, despite the amount of work involved, we had looked failure in the eyes, gritted our teeth, and beaten it back. We only made the podium because we had the ambition to do so. Without the motivation to keep going after the crash, without the motivation to put it all on the line and attack at the end, without the motivation to keep working harder, we would have never won. Instead, we continued to push forward, persevered in the face of disappointment and hardship, and emerged triumphant.

The qualities and mindsets that the sport of cycling instilled in me did not stop helping me when I had to leave my high school league. The summer after my senior year of high school, I went to work on a blueberry farm in Oregon as a “row boss,” operating a transfer station to get the fruit from the fields to the packing facility, which meant moving literal tons of fruit by hand from the fields onto special carts. I was up at 4 every morning, and in the fields by 4:30. We would work unit 4 in the afternoon in the fields, and then clean all the picking buckets for another two hours or so in preparation for the next day. All this was done under the blazing sun, which reached temperatures of over 100 degrees frequently.

I got through, and even enjoyed, the work through the mentality I gained through cycling. What you accomplish is limited by your mind not your body. If you just settle down to work all the way to the end, be it the end of the day, the end of the week, the end of the month, then there is nothing that you cannot do. This same way of thinking has gotten me through Mass Maritime’s orientation, college applications, and any number of projects. In fact, the mentality athletics gave me has allowed me to accomplish any number of things that I would otherwise not have been able to. Cycling has given me the determination and the drive to accomplish my goals.
Three children are playing on the beach, two boys and one girl, all under the age of ten. The boys wear matching red swim trunks, while the blond haired girl wears a pink polka dotted one piece. The three friends are running towards the shore line where the ocean’s water meets the glistening sand. In their hands they carry yellow sand pails and small matching shovels. The sun shines down on them enhancing the big, bright, white smiles on their faces. Their smiles seem as though nothing could ever be wrong in the world. In the background Sara hears the faint sounds of the song lyrics “ei ei o” coming from down the hall. She motions to her brother to grab her backpack off the floor while she repositions her pillow to her lap. Sara’s dad comes into the room with excitement and gives her the reassuring thumbs up that they’ve been waiting for. She rises slowly, but confidently from her bed, starting to make her way towards the doorway. Before taking her last steps out of the room, Sara turns and looks at the beach painting one more time. It is the painting that she has stared at for the last five days. The painting of children at the beach that hangs on the wall of her hospital room.

Three weeks earlier, towards the end of January that year, she came to the hospital to meet with a team of doctors to discuss her upcoming surgery. Over the last two years since Sara’s diagnosis, she had trialed all of the medications on the market and exhausted all types of therapeutic, holistic and natural methods to treat her chronic medical condition. Once very energetic and active, she now struggled to simply make it through each day. With her options slim she made the difficult decision to have surgery. A surgery that would potentially restore her health and give her the quality of life back that she had enjoyed prior to getting sick.

Sara was admitted to the surgical floor of the hospital the day before the surgery to undergo last minute, pre-surgical testing and to have her IV’s placed. As she settled into her room that evening, she noticed several framed paintings hanging throughout her room which really brightened up the dull yellow walls. One painting, much bigger than the rest, hung on the wall, near the foot of her bed.

The morning of her surgery, Sara was woken up by several doctors who had entered the room. They all stood in front of the bed, blocking her view of the beach painting that hung on the wall. They
Some Courses Are Beautiful
discussed all risks and potential complications they could have with the operation and gave Sara what seemed like a hundred papers to sign her life away. When they were finished they filed out in an orderly manner and took a left turn down the long hallway of the surgical floor. Sara turned her head from the doorway to face the wall in front of her bed where the beach painting hung. This was the first time she had really looked at it. There were three children on the beach, two boys and one girl. The boys were wearing matching swim trunks and the girl was wearing a one piece bathing suit. They were running towards the shoreline where the water met with the dark colored sand. The sky, tinted a pale gray, seemed to block the sun from shining through. The three children looked apprehensive about the water; maybe it was too cold. Sara’s focus was interrupted by her nurse, who told her it was time to go.

Constant and consistent high pitched beeping noises woke Sara from her unconscious state. Confused and unaware of her surroundings, she opened her eyes a crack. As she became more coherent, Sara opened her eyes a bit more and lifted her head ever so slightly from the pillow. In front of her was a painting hanging on the wall. The colors blurred together, mixing blues, yellows, even a little red. She laid her head back down. As the beeping of machines and the commotion of nurses talking became white noise, she began to fade out, closing her eyes wondering where the beach painting had gone. Three children stood on the beach. The two young boys were both wearing red bathing suits and the girl was wearing a polka dotted one piece. The three of them were walking towards the ocean, looking kind of lackadaisical; twenty-four hours after Sara’s surgery and the beach painting was back. She went for her first walk that morning. Accompanied by two nurses, they went from her bed to her hospital room door and back, each step equally difficult as the one before sending shooting pain all throughout the incision sites. Walking this seemingly short distance used up most of her body’s energy. She had not eaten in three days. For the rest of Sara’s day she was distracted by a steady influx of visitors. By the end of the evening, she was exhausted. As Sara got ready to retire herself for the night, she glanced forward at the painting and closed her eyes.

The next morning Sara woke up and began the process of sitting up on her own. She gripped the sides of the bed and pushed with the little energy she had while simultaneously trying to hold down the button that would recline her bed to a forty-five degree angle. After getting herself into the desired upright position, she took a few minutes to catch her breath and try to breathe through the pain that she
felt, despite being on a high dose of morphine. After a few minutes her tense body began to relax. The pain subsiding, Sara looked up towards the wall in front of her. The painting looked different when she sat in an upright position. The colors seemed brighter than they had before. The sky was bright blue without a single cloud in sight and the sun shined brightly onto the golden sand. The ocean water was calm with only a few ripples. The three children looked like they had more energy than they did the day before. They carried yellow sand pails and matching shovels as they ran toward the shore. Sara felt as if she had been staring at the painting for hours. Sara’s deep thought was broken when her nurse came in to check her vital signs.

As she checked Sara’s blood pressure and temperature, she asked the nurse what she thought of the beach painting that hung on the wall and Sara was almost offended when her only comment was that it was “nice.” How could it only be nice? This painting was pathetically the only thing providing Sara with some form of entertainment. This painting experienced everything with her. All the pain and emotions Sara felt were portrayed through it. Sara hoped to be discharged later that afternoon, but as the nurse undid the blood pressure cuff she informed Sara that she would be staying for an additional two days because her vitals were not stable enough to go home. She left the room and walked back to the nurse’s station. Sara had been sitting upright, but decided to lie down. She wasn’t tired but shut her eyes so that she wouldn’t have to look at the beach painting.

Playful screams echoed down the hallway followed by a tricycle flying by the door. Sara had only left her room twice over the course of the last four days and decided that it would be in her best interest to leave the room to get a change in scenery. She grabbed her pole and pulled it behind her. Sara walked past the beach painting and went into the hallway; walking, although still very painful, was much more bearable now. As she turned the corner, Sara was almost run over by the same little boy on a red and yellow plastic tricycle that had ridden past her door just a few minutes earlier. He pedaled excitedly, whipping around each corner. His mother walked towards Sara apologizing for her son’s behavior. Sara, however, did not mind. His playful attitude brightened her morning. She began talking to Ian’s mom and learned that her normally healthy four year old had had an emergency appendectomy three days earlier and was finally returning to his normal energetic self. When Ian came around the corner a second time, he stopped in front of Sara to catch his breath, his smile never leaving his face. Inspired by his energy, Sara asked him if he wanted to race to the end of the hallway. His face lit up showcasing
his bright blue marble eyes. He shook his head up and down exci-
tedly, accepting her challenge. Two nurses agreed to hold a paper
towel finish line at the end of the hallway. Sara and Ian took their po-
sitions at the start line; Sara with her IV pole in hand and Ian gripping
the handle bars of his tricycle. Three, two, one, go. They were off. Sara
didn’t stand a chance. Sara will never forget the smile that Ian had
on his face when he looked back at her after he had crossed the fin-
ish line. Looking at Ian made her realize that joy can be found in any
situation if you have the right perspective. Exhausted from the morn-
ing, Sara waved goodbye to Ian and his mom and returned back to
her room. Sara walked towards the foot of her bed and stared at the
beach painting. It made her smile.

Three children were running on the beach, two boys and one girl
all under the age of ten. The boys wore matching red swim trunks
and the blond haired girl wore a brightly colored, pink polka dotted
one-piece bathing suit. The three friends ran towards the shoreline
excitedly with yellow sand pails and shovels in hand. The sun shone
brightly, making the sand and calm ocean salt water glisten. The
blue sky was clear and bright. The three children smiled as though
nothing was wrong in the world. Sara’s friend helped her put on her
blue and orange running sneakers while she zipped up her hooded
sweatshirt. It was day five, and she was finally being discharged. She
sat on the foot of her bed, waiting for the nurse to bring back some
paperwork. Going home made her excited and nervous, excited be-
cause she was ready to leave the hospital, but nervous because the
surgery could have been done for nothing. There was a chance it
wouldn’t be successful. Knowing this was difficult to bear because
she really didn’t have many options left. Sara knew hard times were
ahead of her but was hopeful. If she kept a positive attitude, posi-
tive outcomes would come. Sara reflected about everything that had
happened over the course of the last five days as she stared for the
last time at the beach painting. It looked much different than it had
from the previous days. She thought about Ian and what he taught
her. As she walked by the painting for hopefully the last time and
took the left out of the room down the surgical floor hallway towards
the elevators, she knew that this journey in her life was not a nega-
tive one. She learned from it that a positive outlook creates a positive
perspective. After stepping outside for the first time in five days, she
closed her eyes, took a deep breath in of fresh air, and smiled like the
three children playing on the beach from the painting that hung on
the wall in her hospital room.
12 turning

— Art & Photo —
Anthony Coletti
A Misty Moon
Lying facedown on the mattresses, bellies bulging, we moan from the greasy pit of our stomachs. A happy pit of grease. McDonald’s is not my choice of food, and leaves everyone a little queasy, but this is a special occasion. Leaving for college soon, our squad had to have one last memorable night before we separated to different schools in different states. Our last summer together before college was the best: hikes followed by Friendly’s trips, hangouts extended with ice cream trips and soccer games finished off with a spicy Chipotle burrito. Tonight, though, we would take the grand trip of them all: a late night into early morning McDonald’s run. A 24/7 McDonald’s is pretty important for late night cravings especially when you need ice cream past 9. Yes, regular McDonald’s stops serving ice cream past 9! Sometimes a hot fudge vanilla soft serve sundae off the dollar menu is all a girl needs in her life. Therefore, the 24/7 McDonald’s could solve these problems and satiate a teenager’s boundless appetite.

The night began slowly, with us laying around in the summer haze, eventually succumbing to the powers of Netflix to watch The Office. Barely entertained, we all lay quietly as summer’s chaos bubbles away with the last few remaining weeks. Then, Emma gets a sly smile on her face like I have seen so many times before as she goes up the stairs. Zack, Meagan and I lazily stay in our sedentary positions until I see what Emma carries over. Sweet royal blue frosting wraps around a round cake decorated with a golden frosting anchor inscribed “WLY AP” I see as Emma brings the cake towards me. “It’s for you, AP,” they exclaim as my eyes almost well up with tears seeing the effort they put in for me.

“There’s a surprise, too,” Zack intimates with a gleam in his eyes.

Emma slices into the cake to reveal the best possible flavor on planet Earth: funfetti. Rainbow specks infiltrate the vanilla cake’s pores to create a sweet but satisfying cake. The cake tastes as good as it looks, with the perfect frosting to cake ratio. Next, Emma hands me over some gifts which include even more treats: Twizzlers and a frame around my favorite group picture of me, Zack, Emma and Meagan. I thank them and of course a group hug follows. However, the night is still young and our stomachs are ready for a high calorie intake.
For a few more hours, we lay out waiting in anticipation for the real event of the night: the late night trip to McDonald’s. After playing Heads Up for at least five rounds as a time consumer, we finally avoid staring at the clock and begin our mission. The charades nonsense ends and the game plan unfolds.

“I can drive,” Emma volunteers as we shuffle our shoes on, to escape through the back door. We move stealthily and silently out the sliding back doors, then run up the slight hill into Emma’s car. Without waking up Zack’s parents, we blast the music and start the trip to McDonald’s.

About halfway into Fetty Wap’s mixtape, we spy the golden arches of our destination. Pulling into the long line of the drive thru, we begin to contemplate our orders while noting the unhealthiness of our trip and then brushing away the thoughts of the trans fats and just enjoying the summer fun. Five minutes later, the golden nuggets we craved for hours are in the palms of our hands, easily devoured on our way back. Complemented with sweet and sour sauce, the nuggets’ taste improves, but the company of friends and laughter enhance their flavor from dry, fried chicken to crunchy, yummy nuggets.

By the time we get back to Zack’s house, the pitch-black night guards us as we sneak back in, and flop right down to sleep. Satisfied with our meal, we start to drift off. Emma knocks out in a matter of seconds. Although I’m tired and feel like crap from the food, the day was completely worth it and made a lasting memory.
— Art & Photo —
Michael Coute
Message in a Bottle
The hard words fell softly from my mouth. A cascade of emotions erupting from such a small and meek host. Their imaginations create the screen, my words screenplay. Dressed in soft pastels, I told of soldiers dressed in uniform, falling bodies, the mouth of hell. It was the first time I truly heard myself recite that poem. All the other times were just practice, but now was the time. I could feel the ground beneath me shaking, or was that just my knees? I am immersed, almost drowning, in the stanzas. “Forward the Light Brigade,” I shout. “Charge for the gun,” I cry. I know what comes next. I think that maybe I can prevent what is about to happen, but the lines keep emanating from my lips. The poor audience has no idea what tragedy is about to ensue.

The poem is six stanzas. Six pauses. Six moments to breathe. Six moments to feel every pang of sorrow. The silence was deafening and yet, I put forth the sound of war. Every battle cry was heard, every horse shrieking in terror, every cannons blast. The burden of the same knowledge the six hundred possessed, knowing they were plunging into certain death, was similar to the pit in my stomach I felt before stepping up onto that little stage in my pink jeans and floral blouse.

With sweaty palms and shaking as if I had single handedly consumed an entire pot of coffee, I patiently waited my turn as the contestants went up one by one. I was amazed and awed at the intensity of the others around me. For such young people, all of us in our mid- to late teens, we had an astute knowledge of the poems we had memorized. We did not simply spew out the words, in meaningless blurbs, unfeeling and ignorant. We understood these poems and their authors better than anyone else. We, who had studied them and learned their deeper meaning, and had cried and laughed with the poets, were so well versed in expressing the true nature of the words. I listened and was pulled into the lines that slowly became a reality around us. As nervous as I was, I allowed them to carry me away into the lives of others.
I never understood the meaning of poetry or even knew how to interpret it before this experience. As lost as anyone is at that age, I muddled through iambic pentameter and structure, never stopping to fully realize the poems potential to change me, my aspect on life, or touch me so deeply that I was moved to tears. After this experience, I became attached to this poem, never to lose it from my consciousness. Passionate as I had become about the reciting of poetry, I became hungry for more. I yearned for poems that would broaden my mind, speak to my soul, and sometimes would even scare me. The poems that are about being on the brink of self-destruction, poems from the labyrinth of the minds of the insane. From the sunshine filled meadows of Lewis Carrol to the dark stormy nights of Edgar Allan Poe.

The experience also made me strive to write some of my own poems. When I first started, I couldn’t think of anything to write about, except the corny little limericks and haikus. However, one day it hit me. I lost my grandfather to heart disease many years ago, and one night I was distraught and all the memories came flooding back. For some reason all I could think of was writing. I started writing and before I had even typed the first two lines, I was sobbing hysterically. Luckily, I’ve learned to type with my eyes shut. I wrote until I had nothing left to say. I was shaking and crying and was a complete mess, but what I was left with was a poem that was tangible. It was like I had a piece of him that I could physically hold on to forever. When I shared it with my family, they felt what I felt while writing it. I learned that for me, my poetry comes from the strongest emotions I have felt: extreme joy, sorrow, spite. Many poems reflect a colorful palate of who I am and the experiences that have made me who I am today. The result is a deeper connection with people because I have realized that inside every person is a poem like mine. It may not be the same one, but it is their own strong emotion, their own sadness, their own joy. To be able to read someone’s poetry is being able to read a piece of that person’s soul. Which is why I am beyond grateful to have been introduced to poetry.
— Art & Photo —
David Evans
I Should Be Studying
The sharp sting of her withered hands smart as I recoil my hand from the bowl that contains the blood, sweat, and tears of tradition. I smile sheepishly as I shove my stolen goods into my mouth. She looks at me and laughs. I grin again, unashamed of the goofy, yet greedy smile I know is plastered on my face. She doesn’t mind. She clucks her tongue and shakes her head. “Strega Nipote!” she says. Italian for granddaughter witch. An endearing term in our family and a nickname for me. “Strega Nona!” I chime right back. We have called each other this since I was a small child, having read the story Strega Nona by Tomie dePaola. Except in our story I am her little helper, and today, we make spanakopita.

The hands that have made this recipe countless times are well versed in each move. So well trained that they don’t even need measuring cups. Each movement is precise and accurate and yet she does it so effortlessly it would seem she is making mistakes. I watch her lovingly, waiting for my next instruction. “Go drain the spinach, please.” I run as fast as humanly possible to her enormous double sink. She places the step stool at the base so that all of my 4’5” will be able to reach the colander. I look down at the unappealing, green mass that is the bulk of our recipe. I cannot believe that the dish I love so dearly looks like this beforehand. I squish the spinach down with my hands, squeezing its juices out so that a green fountain of water pours down the never-ending darkness of the drain.

As she places each ingredient into the bowl, I am careful to note each amount. A bowl of spinach. A few handfuls of feta. Enough onions that you cry so profusely, you can’t count how many actually went in. The scent travels and immerses itself into every nook and cranny of the house, making it impossible to miss. We grind the spices together in our hands, releasing the flavors of the herbs, and fold them into the green mess in the bowl. Again I ponder how this squishy green concoction can become such a delicious meal. I can barely contain my excitement as she gently caresses the phyllo dough with butter, places layers upon layers of the delicate sheets over the base. We insert the pan into the oven and the timer is set. It can never go fast enough!
Finally, it is ready. The warm golden layers of phyllo dough and the perfect medley of spices create a dish that no one can quite replicate. Someday I hope to recreate her masterpiece, but I know it will never be the same. It is unique to her. I wait patiently, my eyes never losing sight of the pan, for it to cool down enough for me to eat. Filled with warmth and joy, the flavors excite my tongue. It doesn’t last long. With a large family, everyone gets a piece before it is gone. Everyone loves spanakopita. They can’t keep their hands off it. Their fingers shine with grease and butter as they stuff the flaky goodness into their mouths.

The meal is over and the dishes are handed one by one to the sink as the entire family helps in the clean-up. Someone starts singing and then the rest of us happily join in; it goes so much faster this way.

We retire to the living room, our stomachs full, smiles on our faces. We listen to the grandparents talk about old family traditions and funny stories. We start to nod off and we are herded off to bed. As I drift to sleep, I think about the day and how much fun it was. And then the wait begins, for the next sleepover.
— Art & Photo —
Patrick Fagan
*Over Connected*
The night the *T.S. Kennedy* departed from New Orleans, I was standing watch on the stern of the ship. Most people were asleep or in the mess deck except for the occasional cadet who would come out for a cigarette. That night I continuously stared out into the horizon as I listened to the waves crash off the ship. I couldn’t help but wonder on nights like this why I bothered to come to Maritime. If I had never gone to this school, I would be with my family right now when they needed me most.

“I missed my grandmother’s funeral today,” I kept thinking to myself.

I had a brief onset of depression as I began seeing the land off the horizon line fade thinner in the distance.

“The way you’re leaning over the stern get’s me worried that you might fall in, Mr. Savignano,” said a voice beginning to approach me from behind. I looked over to see Sellepack leaned over the edge of the stern, right beside me.

“At this point I’d probably welcome that,” I responded. “What the hell are you still doing up anyways, it’s like 2 a.m.”

“Who could sleep on such a beautiful night like this, Mr. Savignano?”

“Anyone ever tell you that you’re a bit of a freaking weirdo?” I asked.

“Yes, Mr. Savignano, you have on multiple occasions,” he replied. Not going to lie that made me feel like a total jackass.

“Hey, Sellepack, mind if I ask you something?”

“Sure thing, Mr. Savignano. What’s on your mind?”

“Why did you come to this school?”

“So I can graduate to serve the Maritime industry,” he replied.

“I wasn’t asking you to recite the mission of the Academy, buddy. I honestly wanna know why the heck you find this place so appealing,” I said as I began turning towards him.

Sellepack looked at me then turned back towards the ocean. “I’m not going to lie, Mr. Savignano, I often ask myself that same question,” he responded as I turned back to the ocean as well. “But whenever I ponder why I chose to come here, I just take one look out at the sea, and in that moment I truly know it’s worth it.”
I couldn’t believe it, but in that moment Sellepack left me speechless. For the first time, I didn’t have a witty comeback or a smart-ass follow up question. I was literally speechless. Sellepack took one last look out at the horizon, then stood back up and said, “Maybe you’re right, Mr. Savignano, maybe it’s time to get some sleep.”

As Sellepack began to head back to the entrance of the holds, I yelled. “Hey Sellepack!”

“Yes, Mr. Savignano?” he responded.

“You can just call me Ray,”

“Will do, Mr. Savignano,” he said as he smiled and continued to walk inside.

I’m not sure why, but my brief depression went away after talking to him. I couldn’t believe it. Sellepack put me in my place. “What was I thinking?” I thought to myself. I knew I had to stay here at Maritime. This is where I belonged. Plus, my family back home wasn’t my only family. We have a saying here at Mass. Maritime. “Shipmates before brothers, brothers before others.”

Sellepack and 6th Co. were proof of this.
Betty White,
silver bullet,
white missile,
white whale,
your were a boat of a car,
your baby blue cloth interior faded like an old pair of baby blue jeans.

Betty White,
car of luxury,
you belonged to some friends of the family,
than my great grandmother,
than my aunt and uncle,
than my parents,
and finally your last owners, my sister and me.

Cloth top a rich navy blue.
It’s such a shame you didn’t turn into a convertible.

My sister and I only washed and detailed you once, for prom.
Yes, Betty White,
you went to our junior prom.

You were priceless,
especially when your battery would die,
leaving my sister and me stranded in many parking lots.

You were the car of class,
a seasoned 1996 Buick Presidential Park Avenue.

You’re named Betty White
because you were old and white.

With your cancerous rust,
your heat and a/c diminishing,
your floor rotting out,
your had to retire
and went to live on a farm
with other old cars.

That was a sad day
at Robertson’s GMC.
Feel the warm rays of the sun
radiate around your skin
while you ambitiously walk on a dirt road
on your way to sweep in the cranberry bogs.

Let humidity dwell around your body,
condensing into a film of dirt and sweat.
The air is as heavy as the importance of this job.

Without sweeping, this year’s crop would be
devoured by silent armies of insects.
Do not give them the privilege to reap the
benefits of the cranberry grower’s crop and livelihood,
preserve those insects from devouring
our crop of crimson red orbs.

Sweep to ensure at Thanksgiving & Christmas
everyone can enjoy
cranberry sauce, craisins, cranberry pie,
cranberry bread, cranberry muffins, cranberry juice,
cape codders, cranberry chutney, cranberry vitamins,
and cranberry everything.

Sweep 25 steps per the acre
sweep to find insects,
the bugs best come out in the late morning through the afternoon.
Start by jumping,
from the bank of earth onto the bog,

and sweep as a humble steward of the land,
sweep to cater to farm and property.
Be methodical.
While moving your lightweight net,
walk and tread carefully,
in a light march,
walking and moving
your net at the same time.
Sweep in a semicircle arc-like motion,
like Tom Brady’s arm in any Patriots’ game,
crisp white fabric sewn onto the hoop of the net
 gliding across the surface of the
vines on the cranberry bog.

Twenty-five sweeps later,
it’s time to inspect your net to have a look,
lift your rod first with your right hand,
holding it 3-4 inches away from the hoop,
then peer inside.

Will your sweeping bring a pile of insects and plants
to a blooming booming crawling life?

Small copper weevils come to life and crawl around,
like deer descending from the forest;
they jump with a leap of faith
into the sky to fall home to the lush thick vines.

Sweep to control the
sprays needed to kill insects
that otherwise will kill your crop.

Sweep for the future of agriculture,
to be reminded to believe
in E.M. Tiffany’s future faith born not of words but of deed.

Sweep the bogs because
a fifth-generation cranberry grower,
you, like everyone in my family,
play a part in the successful growing season
and crimson harvest.
28 turning

— Art & Photo —

Patrick Fagan

*Birthday Cake*
— Art & Photo —
Chris Fanara
Railroad Bridge
— Poem —
Eric Leuze

Ode to My Computer

Oh, Computer
the one who can’t
let me down,
sitting on the desk
like the brain
of a genius
asking for my inquiries.

You’re there for me
without complaining
even after my asking thousands
of stupid questions.
Unlike everyone else
I know.

You’re smart, you
actually have the ability to help me

while I fill you with my useless
shit, leaving you full
yet you still don’t care and happily
assist me.

When we type away
your soft keys under my fingers
give me the artificial satisfaction
of intelligence as you show me
useless facts. You’re still the only
one that makes me want more.
Even after this, 
after all we’ve been through 
you aren’t enough. 
Your screen size, 
your processor, 
your memory, 
your ram, 
you’ll never be enough. 
I’ll always need more. 

A younger 
smarter 
better looking 
computer is all I’ll want.
Go to the butcher in the early morning, in the middle of July, awake with coffee when the lean meat is freshest, soon after slaughter, and pick a 16-ounce filet. Stay away from the cheap cuts as the next morning you will know the difference when you least expect it. Go home, pick a yellow squash from the summer garden. Clean up and fire the grill. A propane grill is best as the heat can be controlled, salt, pepper and red pepper is all you need, simple is better. Mix the spices, lightly sprinkle on each side, and as you wait for the steak to reach room temperature pour a glass of red wine. Place the steak on the grill delicately, as you hear the roar of the steak as it sizzles you hope the cow didn’t feel the same. But her pain is our gain. Two-and-a-half minutes later turn her, seeing the perfectly checkered grill marks, you’re halfway done. Another two minutes, you can almost taste the steak melting in your mouth. Sip the wine to calm the voracious void wrestling inside. Now touch your first finger to your thumb. Feel the tender muscle on the pad of your hand. That’s what the filet should feel to the touch. That’s rare. Take her off the grill but don’t cut. Wait for the blood to spread back like refugees returning after war to see what’s been done. If you cut too early, blood will spill, ruining the perfect piece.
You’re done.
The first bite will be one for the books.
A work of art. A flawless recipe.
Never-ending days along the dunes,
coming home smelling of fire and salt.
All to see you.
For you, sunset, are the reason we mortals brave the scorching sun,
the pounding waves, the shells like broken knives
cutting our feet.
We sit in silence,
awaiting your transformation and quick departure.
And then, a fireball in the sky, you appear.
You are a blazing inferno of orange,
spiked with slashes of reds.
We stare at you longingly,
as if attempting to possess you with our body and soul.
To bite into your sweet citrus-filled skin,
to cradle your warmth in our hands, an everlasting ember,
to swallow your fire.
If only we could reach you.
Reach your burning flesh,
reach your fiery spirit,
reach your heart ablaze with passion.
You slowly sink lower and lower,
but not with resignation.
You go with a finale suited for no other but you.
Slow, deliberate, ecstatic, you release an explosion of color, beauty.
My heart feels as if it’s being ripped from my core,
watching this song of a dying swan, this final sonata, this “Firebird Suite.”
The warm breeze caresses my cheek and tousles my hair,
a kiss goodbye as you sink beneath the dark blanket of the ocean.
The salt in the air coats my lips, matching the salty tears I shed,
amazed by the scene I’ve just witnessed.
The rustle of beach grass combines with the crashing
upon the shore, a magnificent symphony in the silence.
Seagulls cry their last
in the darkness of the sky.
The living settle down,
assuming the peace of the dead.
As you draw your final rays from the sky, and we are slowly submerged into the darkness, the sorrow I felt is replaced by a comforting joy. I will witness the sunrise, tomorrow.
— Art & Photo —
Kiernan Galbraith
*Great Egret*
— Poem —

Samantha Parker

The Salty Breeze

Upon the brink of the sandy dune
I look out to the sea.
The waves reflect the shining moon,
and I hear you speak to me.

Your voice is the trace
of the wind as it rustles by.
And as I remember your face,
I turn, trying not to cry.

For being here,
with the salt in my hair
makes our memories clear.
How life is unfair.

Your sharp blue eyes
and your rough worn hands
would guard me as we looked out
upon the vast open sea.

As the moon sinks down
and the sun rises up
over the never-ending horizon,
I feel the warmth of your embrace.

This we will always have.
For it is here I feel your presence most.
As I sail the seas I will know I am never alone.
And one day I will join you here so we may drift for eternity.
If we get there at the right time,
We see Bubba, Mattie, and Bruno;
The gods of dogdom.
They can run all day,
Don’t mind sharing the
Slimy tennis ball they’ve retrieved for hours,
Racing each other across the fields,
Plunging into the pond,
Swimming like muskrats, puffing out cheeks
With quick bursts of breath right at the waterline,
Pogo-sticking through the tall grass like gazelles,
Careening along the stone walls,
Sometimes hurdling over them to get the slimeball,
Staring up with lolling tongues and intense, expectant eyes
Jockeying for the quickest path to the slimeball
As it arches over the goldenrod and thistle
And splashes and bounces in the luxuriant green grass under the apple trees.
Running, running, running, running, running
Away and back again
Chasing, chasing, chasing
Being chased, chased, chased, chased, chasing!
Bog Dog

The rusted yellow iron gate
Fallen and dragged off the road
Just a chain with orange ribbons
To stop a night time passerby
Just behind the pumphouse
Used to get water to the cranberry bogs.
The road splits and goes up over the hill
Where the local kids have a rope swing
At the top of a forty foot drop to the pond.
The dog bounds along with his loping gait
Stopping here and there to sniff the wonders
Of grass hummock, tree stump, toadstool.
The morning sun blocked by a stand of taller trees
Makes a cool tunnel to the bogs farther along,
One beside a vocal brook weaving its way under the overhangs.
The dog, in heaven, prances along, every sense tingling.
I feel guilty for bringing the tennis ball and Chuck-it.
He can entertain himself.
I’m just the limo driver.
O, Change!
In a world where nothing remains the same,
Where life appears only to disappear,
You are hated deeply and darkly.
In a world constantly spinning,
Where the sun will dawn, even after the blackest night
You are lusted after with unfathomable desire.

What was a bird, if not first
An egg?
And the leaves fall every autumn;
Not the crisp green that they were born as,
They hit the ground bathed in the colors of fire.
The trees will stand naked and alone,
But just for a season.
For the leaves always return
In the spring.

The buildings of man
Pale before your might.
Nothing can stand in your way;
Even Rome fell to her knees before you,
Change!

Where friendships come and go,
Just as the tide rushes in to meet the sand,
And lap up against its edge for a few hours,
Only to turn its back and recede.
Where faith is as permanent
As the skin of a snake.
Where love binds people,
With pâper maché handcuffs.

You, Change!
In a world that evolves with every breath,
You are a permanent scar,
Shiny white tissue, where was once unblemished skin.
A constant.
Withstanding the trials of time,
War, religion, plague,
And even death.
You never change.

Change,
Try as we might
To resist your touch,
We will always be firmly within your calloused grip.
For when we are through changing,
We are through.

You can always be counted on;
For better or worse,
Wanted or unwanted,
You creep into my life like a shadow,
Or crash into it like a hurricane,
Knocking me flat and throwing chaos into my life.
 Burning everything away like a wildfire,
Leaving nothing but ashes in your wake,
Or creating more hope than clouds in a drought.

You are an immovable object, an unstoppable force.
You alone are unchanging.
I will always expect you, Change.
42 turning

— Art & Photo —

Nathaniel Higgins

Roots
— Poem —
William Taylor

What I Learned from the Man & His Shadow

I learned from the Man,
When his eyes closed,
Like a winch lowering
An oak coffin slowly into
Freshly torn
Earthy soil
With worms still wriggling,
Surrounded by
The solemn statues
Chiseled out of black obsidian,
Black obsidian that wept
Salty tears,
That you do not want to be the one to close his eyes.

I learned from his Shadow,
The shadow that lurked,
Day in, and day out
Every day
Of the man's life,
Like a grim,
The dark beast that wanders
Just outside your vision,
Slinking proudly in the hammering rain,
And cowering in the sunshine,
But never letting up its pace,
The shadow,
That waits for you to falter,
Slathering, chomping at the bit,
But infinitely patient,
And never raising a hand,
That it is man who does what the Shadow can't.
Knock, Knock, Kock,
I stagger in fear.
Fuwuyuan!
Bloodshot eyes, blinding fear,
Don’t look behind the curtains
For there is always one watching

Big Brother, are you there?

I careen to the door:

In hope,
In fear,
In desperation,

Interrogation ensues.

Mind fleeting,
Body fleeing
We escape to the midnight train.
Guards Guards!

Big Brother, are you there?

Uncertain of my fate
I await my penance.
— Poem —
Brant Wilkinson and Stephanie Granger
The 2501

10,000 in cash for the 25th floor corner.
Our new chapter begins:
Euphoric.

An oasis high
In the oppressive yellowed sky

An infallible strategy for our newfound independence.
Friggin’ foolproof,

So we thought.

The subsequent events a symphony of serendipity
That thread that will unravel our narrative.
46 turning

— Art & Photo —

McKenna Jarvis

Coastal Sunrise
I still had not found my sealegs after two days out of Fortaleza, Brazil, and that greasy dinner made me extra queasy, so I opted for some fresh air on the fantail. The R/V Newton was 279 feet, but she still moved with the swell, which we had on our beam as we steamed and rolled toward the next research mooring deployment site.

“Hey, they are playing Empire Strikes Back in the lounge at 7, are you coming?” asked Greg, my cabin-mate. He was in my same graduate program, but studying biological oceanography. My work was in physical oceanography, so it was always cool to chat with him and learn. We had had some crazy adventures together in port.

“Oh yeah, sure. I just need some fresh air first,” I replied. I always envied those people who just did not get seasick.

“OK, cool. It starts in about 10 minutes, so I am going to get a good seat on the comfy sofa. Want me to save you a spot next to Petra?” he asked with a slight wink.

“Ha, no thanks. You go for it,” I said. Greg had a thing for the Croatian engineering student, and this was his dorky way of expressing it.

I made my aft through the rolling ship. Most people were settling in for the five-hour trip to the next site. Closed circuit screens here and there showed our speed and heading and ETA at the site. I knew I’d better get some fresh air before I made a fool of myself and hurled in the lab. Reading anything, even for a second, made it worse.

The bulkhead door to the fantail was closed and latched due to the swell breaking over the deck. I opened it and found the bosun and third engineer just finishing their cigarettes. There was a small sheltered area just outside the door where the crew could smoke and not be out in the wind and weather. They saw me and pitched their butts overboard and came back inside. Why did they have to do that? There was a bucket right there. I found it strange how some of the people who are most intimate with the ocean can be the most callous, almost abusive, in their relationship. They read that thought on my face as they passed me.

I stood in the sheltered area trying to get some fresh air to calm my stomach, but all I could smell was stale smoke. To top it off, for some reason the engine noise was somehow amplified in this small space. I looked further aft through the dark onto the low fantail with
the A-frame at the stern. The research vessel's fantail had little freeboard to facilitate getting instruments in and out of the water. The downside was that any amount of swell on the beam or aft resulted in a very wet deck. The captain always pointed the ship into the swell for mooring ops.

A medium-sized swell broke over the handrails and water sloshed across at least ankle deep. CRAP, I am going to have to go out there or I am going to puke. I had cold beads of sweat across my forehead and a metallic taste in my mouth from the useless Scopalamine patch behind my ear. Screw it, the water is tropical warm. I just need a few breaths of some air that has not been in the ship for days. My sea boots were in the locker at the entryway so no problem. I slipped them on and was about to head out there when I remembered my promise to my advisor back in Massachusetts.

"If you go out on deck, wear a floatcoat or vest. I don’t care how calm it is. Promise?" Those were the words of my PhD advisor. I had promised, but knew he was just paranoid because his brother had been lost at sea when they were in their 20s. The brother had been sailing a 43-foot sloop from Marblehead to Norfolk and leaned over the side to pee while at night and the boat was on autohelm. He had lost his handheld and fallen overboard. His sailing partner turned the boat around but could never find him, even after searching for days.

I grabbed a floatcoat from the peg next to me that had R/V Newton written across the back in Sharpie and headed out. The fresh tropical night breeze immediately made me feel better. I decided to walk across the open expanse of the fantail to the back corner where it was easier to hold on. So in my blue seat boots, my khaki shorts and my floatcoat I wobbled across the pitching metal deck in the darkness.

Halfway there, I noticed something big and white out of the corner of my eye and above me. As I turned toward it, the outsized whitecap crashed across the deck and knocked me down. I spluttered and tried to figure out which way was up. The floatcoat kept me up on the surface as I flailed around in wet shock and heavy water-filled boots for what seemed like forever. When I got my bearings, I put my boots down to find the deck, but found nothing.

SHIT, SHIT, SHIT! I was floating. No noisy vibrating steel below my feet, just water and darkness around me. Then I was suddenly blinded by what seemed like a camera flash next to my head. What the!?! I turned to see the strobe on the coat was on. It must have turned on automatically when I was submerged. That seemed good, only that now I was practically blind from the light, without any night vision.
In My Heaven...

In my heaven all those I love are present or visible.
There is no pain, sickness or sorrow.
In my heaven beauty is the only thing to see,
Love is the only thing to feel.
In my heaven there is only explanation,
No questions, choices or decisions.
In my heaven there is no race, nationality or religion,
Only kindness, caring and generosity.
In my heaven time stands still,
Space is limitless.
In my heaven laughter and music are the only sounds,
Words are felt, not heard.
In my heaven there is peace.
50 turning

— Art & Photo —
Erin McNeil
Shiba Inu
The strobe blinked again and I shifted it around to the back of my neck on its strap on the coat. Then I finally had a look around.

I turned about 90 degrees and saw the lights of the *Newton* moving away from me. “HEY!!!” I screamed and waved my hands as I moved up and down in the swell. I remembered the whistle on the coat and blew it hard. Trust me, you can blow a whistle very loud in that situation. Still, the *Newton* pulled away.

The water was warm, but still below body temperature. I looked at my watch. 19:00. Great, the movie just started. The swells were rolling along and the *Newton* grew smaller and smaller. Now I could barely see the ship when I was in the trough. I tried to remember my physics class…the curvature of the earth. In 8 kilometers the earth drops away about 5 meters. How tall is that ship? 10m? How fast were we going? Eleven knots, so about half that in meters per second, so like 5 meters per second or about 20 kilometers per hour. So I should be able to see the top of her tower 16 kilometers away. So I have under an hour for someone to notice I am gone and still be able to see my strobe. If they have super powerful binoculars and are at the top of the tower in these rolling seas. That sounds probable, NOT. I curled my body into a ball to conserve heat.

I watched the ship for what seemed like forever. I looked at my watch again. 19:10. Probably still on the ice planet Hoth scene in the movie, and if Greg is sitting next to Petra he has completely forgotten me. While I thought I would be able to see the ship longer, it was already less and less visible as I bobbed in the dark night swell.

At 19:20 I could barely see the ship, and nothing below the bridge. I turned my body so the strobe on my back faced the ship and looked up at the clear starry tropical sky. Hey, at least I wasn’t seasick anymore. I chuckled to myself, closed my eyes, and settled back into my fetal position.
It would be a rather large understatement to say that life is peculiar. Life can be weird, uncomfortable, and outright challenging sometimes, a crucible in its own right; but that isn’t to say that it doesn’t have its moments of grandeur either. Particularly, life is however each individual interprets it, and what they bring to others makes it so unique. People’s family history, background, and upbringing all play an integral part, but it’s the perspectives of others coincided with our own which makes our experiences of existence relative. For some, life is a gift; one in which we wake up every morning, greeted by the tenderness of the loved ones around us, awaiting to see what adventure the approaching day has in store. For others it may seem like a curse, intermittently feeling like an outlandish nightmare from which we cannot wake, always asking “why me?” at each turn of events. It’s uncommon for these two outlooks to be exclusive from each other. Happiness, true, genuine happiness, not some simple and fleeting sentimentality you feel when two of your favorite on-screen cinema characters touch lips or the jubilation felt when winning a small sum of money on a scratch ticket, but the actual realization that your life and your loved ones are exactly where you want them to be. The comfort of thinking that no matter where your life may lead or take you, your fortitude can take it head on with negligible damage to your physical and emotional well-being in the long run. Obtaining this train of thought, this way of life, is anything but easy. Life has unique and varied approaches of testing us. It’s curious to think that’s all life feels like sometimes, just one big test waiting to see you fall. From that long plunge into darkness and disparity, however, it’s always possible to rise up from the ashes and try once more, even if it’s for no one’s sake other than your own.

Garret

In a dim green light the radio glowed 2:08 a.m. An acoustic version of “Everlong” by the Foo Fighters echoed through the car around us, one of our favorites. I watched cheek in palm as each illuminated yellow line in the road rushed underneath the Jeep Grand Cherokee. It was a chilly February night, or morning I suppose I should say. I went to push the button on the center console to acti-
tides 53

vate the heated seat and I think the sudden movement broke Declan out of the same abstracted trance of the lines I found myself in just moments ago. “I don’t know, man,” he started. “It just happened so fast. One day we were literally each other’s entire world and the next she avoids me like I’m the plague.” I thought about what I wanted to say for a moment. I never was any good in these sorts of situations and occasionally felt guilty for it.

“You said it best yourself. It might not have been her; it could have easily been the disorder talking,” I replied.

“Yeah, Garret, I realize that. It doesn’t make it any easier.” We both fell silent again for a moment. “It’s finished, I should just be worried about getting over it, but I’m worried about her, too. She isn’t well.” He sighed.

Declan had just gotten out of about a year-long relationship with a girl he thought he was destined with. He was twenty-one and she only a year shy of him. They met through a mutual friend and really began to hit it off. I was happy for him because, like me, confidence wasn’t his forte. He was the type of person that lay awake at night worrying whether or not people liked him and would mentally list off the reasons as to why they wouldn’t. Also similar to me, this was more than likely due to the occasional bouts of anxiety and depression he suffered from. Nothing too severe; he never would be the type of person to question if his life was worth living, but it was enough for him to often keep his head down while his mind would run amok with a thousand thoughts a second.

“Eating disorders can destroy not only your body but who you are as a person. Something about not getting enough fatty acids can affect the neurons in the brain and alter your behavior as a person or something of the sort. I read about it online from, like, six different sites. I say that’s why she was acting so odd, but who knows? It tears me apart, Garret. Whether it’s because they don’t know any better or they simply don’t care, none of her friends or family have ever bothered attempting to help her. She has gotten nothing. None! Zip! Zilch! She’s tried talking to them about it, it’s not like they don’t know! So naturally, the one time somebody in her life does take the time to care, the one time someone does put the effort in, she takes it as a threat and acts like I’m the bad guy for it!” Declan hit the steering wheel with his fist letting his emotions get the best of him. He caught his breath for a moment before continuing on. “Now there is nothing left and there is nothing I can do other than slowly watch her die.” Looking defeated, Declan slumped back in his seat with both
hands back on the wheel. He rolled his eyes at the thought of his situation, expressing to himself just how torn up he was about it.

“If it's any consolation, I think deep down the real Alice still loves you. Sometimes these things are out of our hands and we have no control over what others do,” I said. “It will take time to heal, and I know you’re anxious to see what is going to happen, but sometimes you can only do what you can do when the time comes to do it.”

“It doesn’t seem right just sitting and doing nothing,” Declan argued, looking fatigued.

“No, but there is nothing more you can do,” I responded, and he fell silent for a moment.

“Something about these night drives of ours bring up the most gloomy topics.”

“Maybe we’re just gloomy people,” I humored him.

“I didn’t use to be,” he replied, taking the joke in a more somber sense than I actually meant.

Every weekend was the same. Declan would drive home from college every Friday, and rather than go out to a bar or club, we ate pizza and just kicked it at his place. It wasn’t exhilarating but it was a good time nonetheless. As we drove around the back roads of town, every few seconds a wave of light would wash over the car from the looming street lights. His auburn hair looked jet black in the night. The darkness shielded the few freckles he had, and yet I could still make out the silhouette of his sharp nose and rounded chin. Every few minutes I quickly glimpsed at Declan’s expression. Stoic, but I knew he was holding back the anguish inside.

Declan

It was difficult to concentrate in class. I just kept thinking about the talk I had with Garret. He and I had been best friends for as long as I could remember. We graduated high school together, but I went on to study Biology, being the science nerd that I was. I was enrolled in the spring semester of my junior year, and in terms of my future, I wasn’t all too sure where I wanted to go yet. I just wanted to be happy, and that was one of my biggest fears, simply not being so.

Garret didn’t really go anywhere after high school. He had always worked with his father who was a carpenter and continued to do so after graduation. He never even bothered to take the SATs; anxiety had got the best of him. He often says he regrets not going on to school, not having the chance to meet new people, but at least it allowed us to stay in touch, because we certainly couldn’t say the same
— Art & Photo —
Laurie Norman
Setting Sun
about our other friends. Our friend Jacob went off a couple states away to University of Vermont to study in a field similar to my own, while Peter kind of disappeared completely, oblivious to the meaning of loyalty. I suppose that was a big fear that Garret and I both shared: loneliness. As an introvert, I learned I can become addicted to the solitude of being on my own but that solitude can quickly turn to seclusion and that isolation in turn becomes depression. We both found it a difficult balance, but it was what we were comfortable with.

It was difficult to concentrate in class that week and to make matters worse, the days crawled by. I shoved my duffle bag into my Jeep and sent Garret a quick text letting him know I was on my way home for our usual pizza and movie night. I pulled off the highway into the comfort of my familiar small town suburbs. This is the place I called my home since I was born. At times it often felt like it was all I ever really knew about the world; it was my world. It was nice, having something that would always stay the same in the chaos of our everchanging lives.

Traffic slowed to a stop, and I spotted a police officer directing traffic. As he waved me on to keep moving forward I looked out my driver's side window to see an accident, one car nearly lodged right into the passenger seat of the other. It was a hell of a crash. Ambulances were already on the scene and it looked bad. The officers were getting visibly frustrated with my absent minded gawking, so I continued to drive on. I could only hope both parties were okay. I pulled into my drive way, opened my door, and moved my feet onto the gravel beneath me—while still sitting in the car. I checked my phone and there was still no response from Garret. It was odd, considering he's known to get back to me right away.

I put my stuff away and got ready to order the pizza when I noticed the clock on my stove read 6:00. Nearly an hour had passed from the time that Garret was normally here. Then it happened. I saw the headline on the news while walking into my kitchen. “Local 22-year-old male killed in fatal collision.”

“Garret Colwell was killed on impact as another driver, who has yet to be identified, slammed into the front passenger side door. It's suspected the driver causing the accident may have been under the influence of alcohol at the time of the crash. He is thought to have some fractures and minor lacerations but is expected to make a full recovery in due time. However, on this tragic night Garret has left behind his mother, father, and loving sister. We are keeping them in our thoughts tonight as the story of this tragic accident continues to develop.”
I felt numb and disoriented. I was sick to my stomach. I mean there had to have been at least one other Garret Colwell in the world right, what are the chances that it was my friend in particular? We’ve always got pizza together every Friday since I went off to school. That just couldn’t suddenly stop happening; he would never have allowed it. I snatched my keys off of the kitchen table and hurriedly jumped down the front steps, nearly twisting my ankle in the process.

As I sped out of the driveway I could see my parents getting into their car to follow suit. I drove until I approached the same officer from before who now ordered me to an irritated halt. My tires screeched to an abrupt stop and I got out of my car, leaving it more of less on the side of the road. The officer started yelling and began after me. I couldn’t make out a thing he was saying. The blending of the sirens and the ringing white noise in my head created an agonizing sound that pierced my ears as well as my heart. My parents had pulled up next to my car and followed the officer in my pursuit. I saw Mr. and Mrs. Colwell right at the front of the scene. As I approached them, Garret’s mother looked at me with an expression of helpless despair. I’ll never forget it, a look that only a grieving mother of a lost child could actualize.

After that I don’t remember much other than Garret’s services. It’s like my mind went into shock for the next few months. My family and I attended the wake and funeral, and at the wake I specifically recall the moment where Garett’s uncle kneeled down to tell his daughter that her cousin was going to sleep for a very long time and it may be a while before she sees him again. She couldn’t have been more than five. It thoroughly crushed me to think how confused she must have been. How do you explain the concept of death to a child? I suppose in a sense we’re all still children inside when faced with it, those brief moments of delusion where we pretend we didn’t hear the horrific news or act like it’s not happening until reality tells us it’s time to grow up again.

At the actual funeral, a large number of people stood up to give a small speech, celebrating his life and telling funny anecdotes, giving brief moments of solace. At the end the pastor asked anyone else if they would like to stand and speak. My father gave me a nudge, startling me, nearly causing me to lose grip of the crumpled, ink-smereared letter I had written. Trembling hands and crippling anxiety is the only place my mind was focused. I went to stand, but I don’t know what gave out first, my legs or my heart. I slumped back into the pew and crumpled the paper back into my pocket. I looked across the room to see Jacob sitting in a pew opposite from me. He nodded and then
turning

— Art & Photo —
Leah Saunders
Gulf Stream Sunset
looked down as if to say, “Long time no see. You’re still brave as hell for trying.” Peter was nowhere in sight, but that wasn’t a surprise to either of us. He left us all high and dry.

From there the days just sort of blended together. Between Alice and Garret, my depression and anxiety about nearly everything grew to all-time highs. I’d been lonely before but I had always enjoyed it to an extent. The serene calmness of the lonesomeness brought ease to my mind but this was neither serene nor calm. Instead, it was some sort of hellish purgatory. I felt as though it was the most pain I had ever experienced, that no one else could see was happening. Often times it felt like I was devoid of any of my senses. It still does occasionally, I suppose. I was a prisoner in my own body, only being able to muster the strength for a smile when social circumstances demanded it. I felt the range of every possible negative human emotion grinding together until emptiness was synthesized, a realm of mental and emotional oblivion. I began to feel so lowly about myself the only thing I could do was just to turn myself off completely sometimes. Simply put, depression is like cancer of the soul, and that is exactly what it is; not some common cold that you get over in a matter of a couple days. It isn’t just sadness but unbelievably so much more. I felt as though Garret wasn’t the only person that had died that day.

Layla

The longer I traversed through the city, the further the feeling in my face began to wane. I could feel the redness of my cheeks due to the sharp bite of winter gusts. Born and raised in Vermont, one would figure I’d be used to the frigid New England weather, but that’s not the case. Boston has tough winters and I despise the cold despite my upbringing. I pulled my hood up and continued my trek down the few blocks to the tea shop. The city was in the midst of its usual bustle, people walking by with long coats, hands in pockets and shoulders hunched in attempts to protect themselves from the chilled air. I love Boston and all the history it carries, but city life had begun to feel mundane even though it had just only been under two years that I’d been living there. I was getting antsy I suppose. I was always told that I had my whole life ahead of me to do what I wanted and to see the world. I was only twenty-four after all, so why was it that it felt like I was bogged down with work already and a savings account that seemed to shrink every time I checked it? I felt like I hardly knew who I was or what I wanted. At times I couldn’t help but to wonder if this
was what a quarter life crisis was, the awkward stage of transitioning from college to the working world, not knowing if you made a right decision or if you will ever wind up being happy?

When I arrived I pulled the front door open to be greeted by the ringing of the bells tied to the entrance. I was never a big tea person, but I’d do just about anything at this rate to keep warm. It was a quaint little place. Bright colored walls and a couple of tall circular café tables by the front window gave it a welcoming atmosphere. I walked up to the counter and asked for a small Earl Grey with honey and handed the young woman a five. After a couple minutes, they handed me my cup over the counter. Before I even had the chance to know what was happening I was nearly knocked over by a man walking backwards causing me to drop my tea onto the floor, just nearly missing my pants.

“Oh, shit!” he cried. “I’m so sorry, I’m such an idiot. What did you have, I’ll buy you another.”

Dabbing the bottom of my jeans with a napkin, “Just Earl Grey with honey,” I replied, irritated. What kind of idiot walks backwards in a crowded store? As he went to counter to get my order, I observed that he wore a green vintage jacket with dark jeans and appeared to only be a few years younger than I.

“I’m really sorry again,” he said while handing me my new cup. “Really, I am,” and just like that he was out of the door in a hurry as though he was trying to run away from the embarrassment. I rolled my eyes and made my way to the nearest train station. The second walk wasn’t nearly as dreadful as the first was now that I had my warm tea. I walked down the steps to the station and put my headphones in. I crossed one foot over the other and leaned back against a nearby support beam waiting for the T to arrive. When the train came and the doors slid open, I took my seat and scrolled through a few different songs on my iPod until I found one that suited me at that moment.

These train rides bored me terribly. Boston was still a relatively new city for me, so how come it all felt so stale? I wouldn’t say I’m unhappy but content isn’t a correct term either. Back in school, I had really hoped to be a full time teacher, but at the moment I worked as a substitute and after school tutor. I wanted to express my passion for literature and inspire kids to feel the same and bring out their inner writers. I can’t help but to feel my passion was wasted. Rather than seeing me as a mentor bringing out their potential, many students saw me as the woman their parents made them stay after school with to lecture them about the proper usage of a comma. I suppose I just
expected more out of life by now. I don’t precisely know what, but what I did know was that I needed some sort of change, some sort of stability in the sense of happiness, something that made living where I did worthwhile. I needed something to hold on to whether it be a friend, relationship, new job opportunity. Anything to look forward to I suppose.

My train of thought was broken when I felt something tap my foot. An empty Dunkin Donuts styrofoam coffee cup, discarded irresponsibly by its owner was rolling around. I swiftly moved my foot towards it to gently kick it away. I looked around the train car and saw a gentleman slouched over in his seat across from me, nearly moments away from falling asleep. Next to him down a few seats was a young couple sharing a song, one head phone in each other their ears giggling. I don’t know what but I’d be lying if I said it didn’t make me somewhat envious. On the opposite end, my side of the car was a familiar ugly green jacket. How could I forget it? I stood up and walked over to this stranger and sat down beside him. I don’t know what compelled me to do it. If nothing else I figured it was just a curious circumstance. He must have been zoning out because I gave him quite the startle when he looked at me.

“Easy! You going throw that tea at me, too?” He replied with an uncomfortable silence, not all too sure how to react about the situation. I cracked a smile. “I’m kidding, you’re fine. I saw you over there and I figured it would be fun to push your buttons is all.” He looked a little more at ease after that.

“Is that what you do for fun? Pick on people you just meet?” He smiled back, not quite making eye contact with me.

I pointed to the sleeping man towards the middle of the train sarcastically. “Well I’d do it to that guy, but he doesn’t look nearly as fun.”

“No, no, I suppose he doesn’t,” he said followed by an awkward silence. “Once again, I’m really sorry about….”

“Just stop already!” I smiled. “You’re fine, I promise. If I really held a grudge I wouldn’t have come over to sit with you.” He gave me a reassured grin and didn’t say anything for yet another long while.

“Declan, by the way.”

“Hah, what?” I asked. It sounded as if he had a mouth full of marbles.

“My name’s Declan,” he repeated as he extended his hand. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“A pleasure, huh? Don’t go jumping to any conclusions now. Lay-la. Nice to meet you too. What brings you to the city?”
“Ah, nothing really I guess. I kind of do this weird thing where every now and then I come into the city on my own. Do my own thing, find my own adventures. I don’t find an excuse to get out often enough so here I am. What about you?”

“Well, I live in the city, actually. I work as a substitute teacher and writing tutor when I’m not filling in for the teachers.”

“Oh, nice!” replied Declan overenthusiastically.

I couldn’t help but to inquire, “So you just roam around the city on your own with no friends?”

“Well I mean it’s a big place.”

“It’s not that big of a city.”

“No, I suppose it’s not, but a lot of the friends I have are usually either busy or just aren’t around anymore. There is something to be said about walking the streets on your own. There is being on your own alone and being in a crowd of people that don’t know you alone. I feel invisible and the isolation is nice sometimes.”

I decided to probe once more. “Well, what are you planning to do now?”

“Go home, I suppose, it’s getting dark.”

“What?” I gave him a quick nudge. “It’s a Saturday night. After dark is the best time for the city. C’mon! I got an idea but we gotta’ get off at Park Street.”

Declan quite apprehensively agreed. He kept questioning me, asking what I had in mind, asking the same questions over and over again, but I didn’t want to spoil the surprise for him. We made small talk until the train arrived at our stop. We left the Park Street station and walked a bit into the Boston Commons. We walked the paved path guided by the lamp posts that illuminated our way. Declan seemed like a pretty reserved person, following a complete stranger clearly wasn’t something he was comfortable with, but I was determined to show him a good time. I couldn’t say why to be honest. We arrived at the frog pond where dozens of people were skating ever so gracefully.

“Oh, god no. I’ve never skated in my life,” Declan said, shaking his head.

“All the more reason to learn now. It’s not that bad,” I reassured him.

I purchased two tickets for us. It didn’t seem fair to make him pay for something he seemed to see as certain death. We put our skates on and waddled over to the ice. It took Declan a couple minutes and some serious convincing for him to muster the inner strength to let go of the wall. “Look! You’re standing like a pro!”
— Art & Photo —

Leah Saunders

Marion, Massachusetts
“It’s like I’m trying to learn to walk all over again. Putting all of my body weight on these two little blades? It’s practically asking for a twisted ankle, and it would be greatly appreciated if you stopped skating circles around me.”

“I learn by watching. I figured maybe you do, too! Here take my hand and we will go around the entire rink so you can get a feel for it.”

“I feel like that scene in Bambi on the frozen pond,” Declan explained, clearly attempting to use humor to cope with the anxiety.

I spent about two hours trying to teach him how to skate. He wasn’t pro by any means, but he definitely got the hang of it by the end. We walked back to the train station where we needed to part ways. I needed the Green line home, him the Red.

“Thanks for that, Layla. It was surprisingly fun and it’s not often I get to go out to meet new people.”

“I’m glad you had a good time. Like I told ya, I’ve been in Boston a couple years now and haven’t succeeded in making as many friends as I’d like. I’m glad I was able to make another. I’ll Facebook you; we can make plans to hang next weekend if I didn’t scare you off already.” Declan stuck his hand out with a dopey smile. I gently slapped his hand away and gave him a hug and we went our separate ways. It wasn’t by conventional means, but I was happy I was able to get someone new in my life. Perhaps he was the stability I was looking for, just a simple pal to talk to when needed. He carried himself as though he had the weight of the world on his shoulders though. It hadn’t been easy adjusting to my new life, perhaps he was trying to adjust to something in his as well.

Declan

After an incredibly short amount of time, I was finally in the second semester of my final year of college. I began to look into different job opportunities and different ideas with what I could do with my degree. It had also roughly been a year since Layla and I met and had really hit it off well. After only a few weeks meeting, it was safe to call each other best friends. She was great, we knew we could always contact each other anytime about anything. She was certainly more outgoing than I, but she helped me come out of my shell when I needed to, and I helped keep her level when she needed. I often described it to her like a sort of symbiotic relationship between two animals and she would just laugh and call me out for the nerd I was. We did our best to hang out at least one day a week. Most of the
time I’d come up to Boston to visit her there, but occasionally given enough time in the day, I would pick her up at the T station and drive back to my town to lounge at the beach or just drive around listening to music. We had a deep appreciation for each other and understood all of the difficult things each of us had endured in our lives as well as the good things of course. It was a level of comfort I had not felt for a rather long amount of time; I suppose since Garret, really.

Garret was always considered my other best friend, even after the accident. Hell, Layla even went with me to visit his grave on a few occasions. I think he would have liked her. Truth be told, Layla did wonders for my state of mind, although I’m still troubled. She talked me through my issues with Alice for the most part. I knew there was nothing I could do for her, but it was still difficult not being able to help with her disorder. There have been times when I’ve felt all right, but my depression and anxiety was an ocean, never really ending; flooding and ebbing at different intervals of time. The remnants of memories with Alice and what happened to Garret troubled me enough, but I’m not certain I have strength to go off into the real world and be on my own.

I was on my way to head over to Layla’s apartment. It was an unusually warm day for April. There was something to be said about the eager anticipation of getting off the T to see someone. Perhaps it’s because it was a foreign experience to me until I met Layla, but it was nice. When I approached the building I walked through the front door and pressed the button labeled “10” to let her buzz me in. She was on the very top floor. I grinned and then proceeded to press it several more times just to be a nuisance. She unlocked the door and I made my way upstairs. After buzzing me, she had left the door open so I stepped inside, closed it and headed up to the roof where I suspected she was; our usual hang out spot. We spent the entire summer and any other moderately warm day up there either talking or often spending hours pulling up songs on our phones to play to one another.

I climbed up the metal staircase and sure enough there Layla was, her legs dangling over the side of the building, hair blowing in the wind. She had always been much braver than I when it came to getting close to the ledge. I stood a safe distance behind her. “What took ya so long?” she asked while still gazing out at the skyline.

“There was a delay at one of the stops on the T.”

“Shocker,” she giggled. There was nothing said for a small period of time. That was unusual for us now. “Hey Dec, we need to talk,” she frowned looking back at me.
— Art & Photo —
Valeria Surkovaite
#Throwback Tuesday
“Oh? What about?” I questioned anxiously.

“I’m not going to beat around the bush. I’m leaving Boston.” She said it so quickly the words didn’t really register right away. They just rolled off her tongue so easily; it almost seemed cold, like she didn’t care. I immediately sat down beside her on the ledge, pushing aside my fear of the sheer altitude.

“What?” I asked, hoping I misheard her.

“I’m moving. To Europe.” I heard her crystal clear that time. I looked at her perplexed. She pushed her hair behind one of her ears and quickly licked her lips before saying, “I found this really unique teaching program in England. I saw it and figured what the hell? I didn’t plan to tell you unless I got in, but the unimaginable happened and...I’m going.” Another long pause. It was almost as if we were back to being strangers.

“When? When do you go?”

“At the end of the summer; we still have time together,” she said glumly.

“Hardly. I don’t even know what to say. How long will you be there for?”

“Declan, there are some great opportunities for me there. I’m hoping that being in that part of the world will have some answers for me, make me feel less trapped and let me be confident about what I’m doing with my life.”

“So, forever?” I snapped.

“Maybe,” she said looking down at the street below our dangling feet. She tried to reassure me with a forced smile “We’ll still be in contact with each other. We can email, and skype, and text,” I said nothing. “Look, let’s not think about this now. Let’s just enjoy the time we do have together here and now and until autumn rolls around.”

“Yeah. Yeah, sure,” I mumbled. I wasn’t too sure what to make of it, my thoughts were too scattered.

She put her arm around me and rested her head on my shoulder.

“I’m excited... but that doesn’t mean I don’t feel the same way that you do.”

I was hoping the next few months would crawl by slowly. I wanted to make every minute with Layla count. I still had no idea what I was going to do once out of school, and to make matters worse, everything was happening so fast. I couldn’t help but to question if I was even stable enough for the real world. I was still coping with Garret but now Layla too? It was bullshit. I was angry at her. I knew it was unfair to her, but I couldn’t help it. She literally came into my life out
of nowhere on her own accord when I happened to need it most and now she casually mentions just up and leaving like that.

I didn’t like it, but the day of my graduation finally came. I walked up on stage, shook several hands and reached for my diploma as my parents obnoxiously cheered for me. Layla was in the seat next to them, giggling at the commotion they were making while applauding me. She stood out with her dark chestnut hair contrasting against her cream colored dress. She looked great. When the ceremony was over we had people back at my place for a little celebratory get together. It wasn’t until the end of the night I really had time to talk to Layla as I had been too busy catching up with old relatives before. “Congrats,” she said. “Best of luck adulting! It’s not as glorious as it’s made out to be.”

“Yeah, I figured as much,” I said, exhaling heavily. She frowned.

“Lighten up, Dec. This is a good thing,” she reassured me, gently reaching out to touch my shoulder.

After that the summer flew by faster than I had hoped. Layla and I had beach days together. We went to the movies and watched meteor showers, and for every shooting star, I had wished for my friend to stay with me in the States. We even went to the county fair too, one of our favorite memories. We went on nearly all the rides and even got to watch a demolition derby. She won me a giant stuffed giraffe from a carny with a creepy eye patch, too. It was a grand old time, but just like everything, the good times had to come to an end. It was the night before I had to take Layla to the airport. Our legs dangled next to each other, hanging over the curiously quiet city. We watched silently as people passed by below us. “This doesn’t change anything between us,” she said while still watching the people below.

“What are you talking about?” I asked incensed. She looked at me shocked by the tone of my voice compared to her own which was so gentle. “This literally changes everything! You helped me get over my Alice. You helped me mourn Garret and after all that you’re just up and leaving! I spent the last four years earning a degree and have no possible career to show for it! The only thing I feel I have is you.”

“I think you’re being a little selfish about this, Declan. As my best friend, I figured you’d be happy for me. This isn’t just about you.”

“I don’t even know what it’s like to be happy for myself! You’re the best thing that has happened to me in a long time, and I don’t know if I could have kept it together without you,” I said, feeling the weight of the reality of the situations dangling over me. I felt myself begin to slip back into that dark place, the very place Layla lifted me out of.
“I’m glad I helped Dec, but I can’t always be your crutch. I’ll be there for you when I can be, we can always talk but you need to start to live your life. Get out there, get a job you love, find people you connect with.”

“You make it sound so easy! That doesn’t just come naturally to me as it does to you.”

“Is this how you really want to spend out last night together? Because I sure as hell don’t! In time you’ll learn but you need to understand I want this. I NEED this. I thought being friends with you gave me the stability I needed and it did, but I also turns out I needed something more. I want to be able to do something I can be proud of, and I really think this program could give me a fresh start. I’ve cherished every moment we’ve had together and if I could, I would take you with me but that’s not in the realm of possibilities.”

“I just feel so exhausted,” I sighed, visibly exasperated. “It’s a vicious circle I can’t seem to break. Any time anything good comes into my life it leaves or something tragic happens to screw it up. When Alice left me, I realized Garret was the only person that had always been there for me, the one person I could talk to. The one person who would never leave, but he did. Then I found you and I thought most of my worries were over, but like him, you’re gone now.”

She looked at me for a moment with empathy in her eyes, as if for the first time she single handedly experienced all the pain I’ve been describing over the past year in one swift moment. “Do you know what the word entropy means?”

“No,” I replied using my sleeve to wipe my face.

“Well, you’re a nerd, so let’s take a scientific approach on this. It’s a term that’s often used in physics that relates to order, disorder, and equilibrium; however, I think it can be used to describe life as well. It’s defined as a lack of predictability or gradual decline into disorder. Sounds like us, right? Essentially, no matter how good your life is or how much you strive to better yourself, there is always going to be some bad with it either right around the corner or at some point down the road. When these inevitable and terrible things occur such as break ups, deaths, illnesses...a friend moving away, it’s often out of our control and there is nothing we can do about it. Even if it was a mistake that we made leading up to the disorder in our lives, you need to accept you were wrong and try to move on from the consequences.”

“That’s your motivational speech? Just deal with it?” I asked, bewildered.
“Our character, our identity, it’s conceived from the scars we collect along the way, both physically and emotionally. Each one you collect is another that you can draw a different sort of wisdom from and the fact that they are even there shows just how possible the healing process is. By nature, we are imperfect beings destined to live imperfect and flawed lives, but that doesn’t mean they can’t be lives worth living. I know that doesn’t seem very comforting. I’m not going to get into any lame clichés such as ‘it’s always darkest before the dawn.’ Despite this, however, it’s an invaluable life lesson to learn how to roll with the punches because if we never had to take those hits, there is no way of ever knowing when we are truly happy. It’s how you choose to hit back. Are you going to cower and hope one day you’ll magically be happy, or are you going to fight for a life worth living? There was a point in time where I thought that if I waited around long enough, happiness would come and find me, but that’s rarely the case and it certainly wasn’t for me.” Layla paused to catch her breath and waited for some form of response or acknowledgment from me. I looked out to the skyline once more to collect my thoughts and get them to soften before I even attempted to formulate a sentence.

“I understand. I know what you’re saying and I’m sorry you felt like I wasn’t happy for you. That couldn’t be farther from the truth. I just don’t want to be alone again. You make being happy easy and you make it sound so easy to achieve on my own. The drunken bastard that killed my best friend walked out of that accident nearly unscathed, and I just learned that he may very well walk free. He’s a lawyer! Of all the professions he had to have been a lawyer, Layla!”

“I’m sorry about Garret, I really am, but hating a man for the rest of your life won’t make you better. I never said happiness was easy, but we are responsible for our own and that’s why I need to take this step. Maybe Europe won’t have all the answers for me, but I need to try. Occasionally we’re pushed, forced to take that foreboding plunge into chaos, but that allows so that we may one day dip our feet into the shores of the soothing order that we seek in our lives. It’s not always a pleasant transition and it can take quite a bit of time, potentially years depending on the circumstances, but they can’t exist without one another and it’s always worth it in the end.”

We both paused to watch the navy silhouettes of clouds move across the pale moon. The silence occasionally disrupted by a faint car horn or siren in the background. The moonlight was reflecting off her pale skin. I began to twiddle my thumbs.
— Art & Photo —
Brendan Thornton

_Eiffel Tower at Dusk_
“Thank you. Not just for this but for everything. I’m pretty sure Garret would have been in love with you. He ate up all this philosophical crap,” I laughed.

“I’m certain we would have gotten along great. He sounds like an amazing friend. We should head back inside though. It’s getting late,” she insisted.

“How about just a little longer? Who knows if you’ll have a view like this over there?” She smiled and scooted closer to me. We sat for nearly a couple more hours making small talk like normal and watching the city sleep. I know I was just being cheesy, but there were a few instances where I could have sworn I felt Garret next to us.

The next day I drove Layla to the airport and that was that. The final goodbye was difficult. It’s likely to be the only ten-minute-long hug I’ll ever receive in my life. I put more of my focus on finding a job and landed a gig as a lab technician aiding in research. It wasn’t anything too glorious, but it was a good job fresh out of college. Naturally, (and before meeting Layla I think I would have used the word surprisingly) I made a couple of good friends at work. Every weekend or so we headed into the city to do something fun. One of the times I even brought them ice skating and watching them was a spectacle in itself. As for Layla, well, she was excited to start her new life, learning to become a better writer, and teaching others what she already knew. She missed Boston every now and then, but we kept in touch with weekly video chats and kept each other up to date with what we were up to. It wasn’t always easy, but it was doable. I started a separate savings account in hopes of being able to go over and visit her one day.

Things were far from perfect and I suppose I could always be happier, but I was better than I was and I think that’s what Layla was talking about. It will take time and effort. My depression still loomed over me every now and then and I don’t look forward to the hurdles that may lie ahead, but that’s life. I have the good memories about the people I care about and the ones to look forward to that have yet to be made to keep me going. I think in a sense, we experience chaos to awaken our hearts to seek what we really want out of life. Sometimes it’s simply a matter of whether or not you reach for it.

Just the other day I woke up on a Sunday morning to hear birds chirping outside my bedroom window. It had me feeling so wonderful that I decided to organize my room a bit. I picked up my laundry and organized my bookcase. Taking some old clothes out of my closet, I had found my old suit and in the pocket of my pants I felt what I thought was a receipt. I fished it out to see what the expenditure
was only to find that it was a wrinkled up note. It was the very same one I wrote for Garret’s memorial. I held the crude ball of crumpled memories and emotions in my hand and as if it had some sort of unique power I felt all of the emotions come flooding back to me, hitting me like tidal wave of wide-ranging, enigmatic sentiments. It was as though an odd silence fell in my room, the birds had suddenly stopped singing. It was just me and my mess of thoughts. I walked to my desk and opened a drawer to put the note away but I stopped myself. I closed the drawer and with the delicate hands of a surgeon, I unfolded the note and opened it up so that I could read the words I had written about my friend so long ago. My eyes automatically ran through each line of text, half remembering what I wrote all those years ago. When I finished, I kept looking at the paper, transfixed on it standing motionless for five or so minutes.

“Huh,” I said to myself with a slight smirk.
Sometimes you think so much that you just get sick of thinking. You think and you think and you wonder why you are still caught up on this one thing. You have contemplated what did happen, what should have happened, and what would have happened and in the end you are the same as before you even started to think. Thinking changes nothing, but in a way it changes everything. It doesn’t change how you look and feel and it certainly can’t change your past, but it can make the past the present. So you begin to imagine and in your thoughts you are living another life, and in this other life the dead are alive again; they are there alive as day in your imagination.

Still nothing has changed, you are the same person you were and always will be.

That’s what happened that night on the river.

The sun dropped below the trees and mountains. It was dully shining through the brush, leaving Vietnam in the darkness as it always had. The platoon had humped all day. Finally off night patrol, they were ready to set down for the night. Henry Dobbins popped up the tents and we assembled them in a circle. The rations were given out and we prepared ourselves for the terrors of the night. We were travelling along the river for the past few days now, and each night two men stood guard on a makeshift kayak rowing up the river to ensure it was safe from the Vietcong. Tonight was my turn, along with Jimmy Cross. Through the muck and slop, we set the wooden raft in the water and hopped in.

“This place really comes alive at night, huh?”

“That’s the whole struggle,” I exhaled.

We moved along the river with a sort of undeclared silence; that’s all Vietnam really was. There was the occasional word here or there to assure our humanity, but other than that we were in our own heads.

Sitting at the bow, I stared back into the darkness watching Vietnam pass. I saw the moon like I had never seen it before. That’s the thing about ‘Nam. It was a whole other world over there. The moon was the only thing that stayed true on nights like that. When all the fighting was over, when nothing remained—your innocence, your sanity—you could look up and it was right there. Your innocence and sanity would be glowing in the darkness as you remember back to the person you were before you lost it all and the moon was still there.
The white glow swirled away in the soupy water behind us as we moved upstream.

That’s when I began thinking. My mind was playing games on me. Right there in the depth of the river in all its darkness I saw a brown boot. It was just floating down the river, waiting to be pulled out. I looked down into the water and it disappeared. When I looked up, Lieutenant Cross was searching for my eyes. He knew how the darkness could play games on you, have you seeing shit. A few minutes passed and I saw it again, only not quite just the boot, looking right past Cross I saw shit, actual shit, it was a field of shit, an abundance of shit like you have never seen, and right in the middle of the shit was the moon, drowning away, but this time it couldn’t be saved. I was shaking now, my heart beating out of my chest, my head bobbing in and out of consciousness with each heartbeat.

The guilt was too much.

I looked down at the water just as I had on the rainy river; it was an escape. I followed the water to the shoreline with my eyes where I heard a collection of noises. It was the Vietcong. They stood there looking at me, laughing, just laughing, the fuckers were laughing at me through the trees hidden in the brush, and they knew that they wouldn’t have to kill me. I was squirming for life myself. I was embarrassed.

I took my helmet off and grabbed a cigarette out of the elastic band. I needed something to cool me down. I took a puff and the white curls slowly whisked out of my mouth, but all I could see was the smoke coming off the hot flesh that was then laying twenty feet to my left, but now it was coming out of me, it had come from me before, my fault, it was all me, but now it was really coming out of me. Kiowa’s hot flesh simmered in the rain as he was buried beneath the mud and shit of the sewage field.

Nothing had changed, not after thinking, and not after going to Vietnam. I was still a coward. I was still embarrassed. Courage was not always a matter of yes or no. Like the day I chose not to evade the draft, the day I shipped off to Vietnam, when I chose not to go to Canada. That wasn’t courage. Courage comes in degrees. And that night in the shit field, I failed to act.

I replay that event over and over in my thoughts, but after all my thoughts, after all the thinking, I am still the man I was, and always will be.

This story was written in response to an assignment to write an additional chapter to Tim O’Brien's *The Things They Carried*.
The hotel room sat quiet and ready, not a sound to be heard. The sun outside was just moments away from dipping below the horizon, sending golden light shining in through the window and casting a bright beam radiance over the mattress and furniture that the maids had tidied up that morning.

Here it was: Room 215 perfect and neat as it waited patiently to greet its next guests with a warm welcome to the Perry Stream Hotel.

Suddenly, the sound of a key card unlocking the door broke the calm silence. The handle turned, the door swung open, and a young couple entered, looking relieved in a way that can only be the faces of people that have just reached the end of a long day traveling.

“Well, here we are,” said the man. He was well-proportioned and physically fit, with an Irish face and a jawline that was so robust it could’ve been chiseled from stone. His light brown hair added another two inches to his height, long enough to cover half his forehead. Carrying three bags of luggage in his hands, he moved his dark brown eyes over the room, studying it.

“Oh wow. This is nice. I love it!” the woman approved. She was shorter than him, but what she lacked in height she made up for with her stupendous beauty. Her simple green tee shirt and blue jeans strongly hinted at the exquisite figure that was hiding just beneath them. Her legs were long and muscular, the legs of someone that spent a lot of time moving. Black hair cascaded down to the center of her back, a few strands sticking up in a frizzed manner from what must’ve been a long car ride here.

The couple walked into the room’s main space to where a large king-sized bed lay in waiting, its headboard against the left wall. For the time being, the bed doubled as a much needed shelf for their luggage. There was a lot that had to be unpacked.

“How much more stuff is in the car, April?” the man asked.

“Just two more bags, I think,” April replied. “I can go down and get them if you want.”

“Nah, I’ll get it. Pretty sure it’s mine anyway.”

April nodded and started to unpack. Before he headed back down, the man took his first real look at their room, walking around to take in the details.
— Art & Photo —

Brendan Thornton

*Railroad Sunset*
The giant bed was professionally made. The blankets were all tucked and the pillows were neatly spaced. He sat down on it get a feel for its comfort. Not bad.

On either side of the bed was a nightstand, but the thing that was most intriguing about them was what sat on top: the most bizarre lamps he’d ever seen. They appeared to be constructed out of actual deer antlers; two fully grown pronged-horns fixed together into a makeshift tripod. Draping each one was a white lamp shade that had a pattern of silhouettes of stags running through a forest of pines.

The man felt them. Yup, they were real alright.

He got up and walked over to the kitchen area. It was generously large, with the setting being shaped like a U and composed of a sink, refrigerator, and a stove. A black granite countertop stretched around the enclosure. White ceiling cabinets lined the walls.

Through a narrow door across from the kitchen was the bathroom, complete with a cozy-sized bathtub and shower. The man took one look inside and was tempted to drop everything so he could jump right in and wash off the weariness of the day.

Then he took a brief moment to appreciate the main space itself. In the back right corner was a tiny reading area, where several chairs made a semi-circle around a bookshelf stacked with several magazines and novels. The walls were painted ivory-white, with several charming pictures mounted on them—mountainous landscapes at dawn and dusk and interesting photographs of old fashioned cabins and buildings. The last feature he noticed was that through the far wall was a sliding door with a walk-out balcony. Through the blinds, he could see a round table and two chairs, the perfect place to relax.

All in all, it was the perfect North Country hotel room; exactly what he had hoped for.

“Tom, do you need to use the bathroom?” April asked, rummaging through her things.

“No, you go ahead.” Tom replied. “I’m gonna go down to the car to get the last bags.”

“Okay. Be careful now, don’t get lost.”

“Very funny.”

April turned around and shot him a smirk, the kind she always gave him when joking around, the kind that Tom always thought was cute, the kind that melted Tom’s heart a little every time she used it. With that, he set off out the door and down the hall to retrieve the last bag.

Room 215 was located on the second floor of the Perry Stream Hotel, (the “top” floor, really, since the place only had two floors in to-
tides 79

tal), so it was a short walk to the end of the hall and down the stair-case that spilled into the hotel’s lobby.

As far as lobbies go, it was small. But nevertheless it was an attractive little room, the whole space embracing the theme of a wilderness lodge. The whole room was open to above, so the ceiling rested two full stories above Tom’s head. The furniture was constructed out of oaken logs that looked like they were freshly cut at the mill. Old style skis, fishing poles, and snowshoes hung on walls of white cedar planks. A large stone fire place rose up through the roof that, much to Tom’s delight, was topped off with the mounted head of a bull moose.

Such a delightful little hotel this was.

He strolled out the lobby, through the glass doors, and over the mat on the curb that read “Welcome to the wilderness!” to the parking lot outside. His car was just across the way.

The crisp northern air felt like a drug, pleasing every cell in his lungs. The sun had finally vanished underneath the horizon, but the sky was still a brilliant mixture of flaming orange and yellow. Clouds striped the heavens and reflected the light in an array of blood reds.

Tom looked around—at the colorful sky, the thick forest surrounding the hotel—and couldn’t resist smiling. Finally, after so much hassle, they were here. This, all this, was just what they needed. What he needed.

Throughout the twenty-nine years of his life, Tom had always loved to be outside. Ever since he was a boy, he would press his parents for the next time they would leave the crowded life of Quincy, Massachusetts, and travel to some remote location together as a family. As he grew older and more independent, he found himself making trips, either with friends or by himself, to the most scenic places in New England, just to get away from it all. To this day he pounced on every opportunity he could.

And that was just when his window was short. Over several long vacations and summer breaks, Tom had traveled far beyond his urban lifestyle to some of the most special places in the country. He’d walked along the edge of the Grand Canyon. He’d visited the wide open vistas of Yellowstone. And, his personal favorite, he’d climbed the peaks at Yosemite National Park. Man, he needed to go back there. That place was unreal; best trip of his life. When he first laid eyes on that incredible valley, he figured there wasn’t a sight in the world that possessed such natural beauty, that nothing he would ever see with his own eyes would ever compare.

That is...until he met April.
— Art & Photo —
Joshua Wallace
*Trail to Serenity*
Man, why couldn’t more girls be like April? It still baffled him that she had lived in Braintree all her life, a wonderful twenty-eight year old girl living in the next town over this whole time. Tom knew right away she was special when he discovered she loved adventure almost as much as he did—even their first date was a hike up the Blue Hills. Tom could count the number of times he’d seen her in a bad mood on one hand. She never stopped joking around and giving him a hard time, just as he did with her. And best of all, maybe the most important, there was no tension in Tom’s mind when he was with April, no uneasiness or insecurity. Of all the girls he’d met in his life, none compared to her. He got along with her so naturally and fluently it was as if they were made to be together.

Yup, she was the best all right, the best. And he could see it in her eyes that she felt the same about him. And now that it was their three-year anniversary—a strong motive why they’re here in the first place—he was sure she was counting down the days until he asked her the big question: Will you marry me?

True, she never actually said it, but lately she had showed many strong signs of wanting this. It was her idea to move in together after all.

Once, around Christmas time, Tom had told April several days prior that he had gotten something very special for her, telling her that it was waiting in her stocking and was not allowed to peek inside until the Christmas day. After two weeks of buildup, April finally got to plunge her hands into her stocking and found a jewelry box hiding inside. The look on her face was a blend of shock and awe. She’d even blushed.

“Oh, Tom I...” she uttered.

“Open it,” he told her. He could hardly wait to see how much she’d like it.

She did, ever so slowly, and discovered the present inside was... diamond earrings.

“Well, what do you think?”

“Oh...oh, Tom, they’re beautiful! I love them!”

That’s what she said, but when she opened the box Tom saw, for the shortest of moments, an emotion on her face that changed him forever: disappointment.

It got him thinking; it kept him up at nights. Maybe the time was right. He did love her, loved her more than anything, and he would like nothing more than to spend the rest of his life with a girl like April, but deep down he’d always been wary of the word “love.” He believed that love was a powerful thing, and not something to be
taken lightly. To him, to say you loved someone was serious. It needed to be real, and not just illusions of attraction or lust.

Maybe that’s why he hardly ever said it to her.

Either by chance or cruel twists of fate, Tom had experienced many broken hearts throughout his life. Maybe it was because he’d always been a little more sensitive than others. That pain was always worse for him, magnified and concentrated deep inside his core, at the mercy of his own racing emotions.

Of course he’d told April he loved her before, but mostly because he had to. And, yes, he did care for her—unlike anything he’d ever cared for in his life—but when it came to actual love, he was just too afraid to really mean it. Plus he was getting to that age when all his friends back home were either married or soon-to-be, which only made him more apprehensive. And why shouldn’t he be? A marriage, after all, is one of the strongest commitments a person can make. To Tom, he just had to be sure.

But one thing was for sure: when he was with April, he felt whole and complete—like he’d lived with one eye his whole life and one day woke up with two. Together they were a team, a match, and he was growing surer of himself every day that he was a blind fool for not showing how much he loved her. Every part of her was a joy to him—her complexity, her personality, her beauty, hair dark as night, full pink lips, dazzling green eyes that could take the form of the most beautiful spring day when happy, or the most threatening storm when angry. To Tom she was, without a doubt, the most inconceivable natural beauty, better than any national park across the globe.

Tom took another deep breath, exhaling for a full ten seconds. He needed to stop thinking about those conflicting thoughts. He was on vacation, after all. He didn’t want to spoil his own mood with thoughts about love and commitment. Right now, he thought, I’m just going to focus on enjoying myself.

He unlocked his car and pulled out the last bags—his laptop case and a plastic shopping bag stuffed with food from home. With the last of the luggage in hand, he locked his car up and strolled back across the parking lot. While he did so, however, he caught sight of the vast forest behind the hotel and stopped a moment to gaze into it. The sky was still very bright, but already the world within the trees had grown dark, quick to embrace the approaching night. It looked so peaceful in there, and he found himself being thankful (certainly not the first time) for how lucky they both were to be up here now. It was such a treat to get away.
This past month had been tough for both of them. He and April had been busy with their lives back home in Massachusetts, caught in a momentous cycle of working, sleeping, working, sleeping, over and over. Days they got to spend with their family, friends, and of course each other had been rare lately. Even though it always looks so easy on television, Tom discovered long ago that the reality of being an adult was that it was not easy. It was a lot of hard work.

So two weeks ago, he declared to April that the time was right for a break, and together they began making plans to get away. Miraculously, they managed to get the time off of work—four days during the second week of July, when summer was at its peak. The perfect window.

For days they discussed where they should go, both not being able to come to a location they could agree on. Places like Lake Winnipesaukee, Cape Cod, and Long Island were all mentioned at some point, all places that they had visited before.

Finally, with their tight window fast approaching (and the annoyingly prudent factor of money involved) they realized that it was time to try somewhere new; somewhere neither had been before. Adventures combined, Tom and April had explored the wilds of New England so vastly over the course of their life it was as if all six states were their own backyard. But had they been everywhere?

True, it would be pleasant to see all those places again—to see the pine-covered mountains of Baxter State Park, to swim the deep waters of Lake Champlain, to bask in the summer sun Martha’s Vineyard. But for their three-year anniversary, they wanted the occasion to be special. They wanted a place that was out of the ordinary, a place far away from New England’s touristy hotspots. A place where civilization...had a blind spot.

So there they were: April still unpacking in room 215 and Tom walking back through the lobby with the last of the bags in hand, both ready to explore the natural wonders of the peaceful town of Pittsburg, New Hampshire. It was time to see what the most remote, isolated part of the state had to offer.

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“Do you hear that?” April called from the bedroom. Tom was shaving in the bathroom.

“Hear what?” he asked.

“Tom, come here.”
He walked into the bedroom and found April with her back to him, standing in the sliding doorway leading out to the balcony.

“What? What is it?”

“Come here.”

He walked up right behind her, putting his hands around her waist like they were posing for prom pictures. He let his chin rest on her right shoulder, his ear snuggled warm against her dark hair, and looked out at the same view her eyes were locked on. The sun had long gone down, and the evening had fallen into a surreal—almost magical—state of twilight. The sky was a shade of the darkest blue and the ocean of trees running into the mountains was already pitch black. On the far horizon, the thinnest line of golden light still radiated from behind the rolling peaks. It was daylight...in its final moments.

“What?” he asked again.

“Listen, do you hear it?”

“I don’t hear anything.”

“Exactly,”—her lips broke into her signature smirk—“isn’t it great?”

Tom shook his head and chuckled. “Shut up you.”

“Hey!”

He turned away and headed back into the bathroom to shave the other half of his face. “Are you ready yet?” he called once he was back in front of the mirror.

“Yes, I’ve been ready. Waitin’ on you, hotshot.”

She was more than ready. To Tom she was a knockout. She wore an elegant cranberry red dress with a silver strap that worked wonders showing off her comely figure as it draped down her body in a sleek sheet of lyocell. She’d inserted the same earrings he’d gotten her for Christmas—two glistening silver hearts twirling carelessly from each lobe. She did nothing to her hair, letting it tumble down her shoulders to the small of her back.

Beautiful.

Five minutes later, Tom was ready too. The front of his hair had been curved up in a tiny wave of light brown, held in place by a touch of hair gel. With a green-and-white-checkered button down shirt and a pair of nice jeans on, he was good to go.

“We’re still going to the Tavern right?” April asked him. “I mean it is pretty late. You sure you don’t want to try somewhere else?”

The Perry Stream Hotel may have been small, but it did have its own pleasant little restaurant just through the lobby. Tom took notice of it when they first walked in and read the sign on the door that explained it stopped serving dinner at 8:30.
— Art & Photo —
Lufei Zheng
Provincetown
He looked down at his watch: 8:20. “We’ve got ten minutes ‘till they stop serving. We can make it.”

“Oh, but Tom they won’t want new guests walking in just before they close.”

“We’ll just try it. Look, I’m ready now. You’re ready too, right?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, let’s go.”

Out the door of 215 they went. Once in the lobby they walked through the open door branching off to the right with a grand sign over the entrance that read “The Pioneer Tavern” in gold letters.

The main space was a lovely little dining room with a teal carpeted floor. Frank Sinatra was singing about the best things in life being free on the ceiling speakers above their heads. The air smelled like a fresh garden thanks to all the trees and flowers growing in pots scattered about the room. There were ferns, vines, hibiscus, lilies, and so many others Tom would have to get a BA in botany to name them all. A long bar took up most of the left wall, and about a dozen round tables were spread around the room, each one following the same decorative standard: a white tablecloth, four-legged wooden chairs with dark green cushions, and a single hydrangea flower in a little vase next to an ignited oil lamp placed right in the middle of the tabletop. The night was clearly winding down, as there were only four other customers left—two at the bar, two at a table in the far corner.

Another posted sign said PLEASE SEAT YOURSELF, so the couple strolled over to a table next to an open window. As if on cue, a young waitress a little younger than April swung out of nowhere to greet them.

“Hi, guys. How are we this evening?”

“We’re great,” April cheered. “Sorry we’re so late. I hope this isn’t a problem.”

April?! Tom thought. He didn’t want to give the wait staff an option of kicking them out if he could help it.

“Oh, it’s no problem at all,” the waitress smiled. “People come in late all the time. Long day traveling?”

“Yes,” the couple answered in unison.

“Well, sit back and relax. You’ve earned it. Can I start you off with something to drink?”

Neither Tom nor April drank very often, but the occasion was special, so they asked for a bottle of red wine, which their waitress retrieved shortly. After some analyzing of the menu, they placed their orders: two salads for appetizers, a medium rare sirloin steak for Tom, and a grilled chicken breast with a soy sauce glaze for April.
The night passed on. The other customers in the Tavern left one by one until the two outdoor enthusiasts were the only ones left. Aside from the wait staff, they had the whole restaurant to themselves, and despite the hour growing late none of them seem to mind their prolonged stay. Their waitress even dimmed down the lights so they could dine by candlelight. Frank Sinatra started singing about making one for his baby and one more for the road.

The couple talked about their families, friends, work and, of course, what they wanted to do the next day—nothing short of the usual. But deep down, Tom was simply marveling at her presence. His eyes never left her. It was such a treat to be sitting down with her here without the normal weight of life back home on his shoulders. In the candlelight, April seemed to glow. Everything from her wonderful red dress to the simple way she’d brushed her hair behind her head was a perfect thing, flawless.

He almost asked her right then and there. It was on the tip of his tongue. April…I’ve been thinking a lot about this…I’ve been really nervous about it but…I’d like to spend the rest of my life with you. But the strength to force those words out was a challenge far greater than any mountain he’d ever scaled, so he held them back, kicking himself later for being such a coward.

He still loved her though. He really did. He hoped she knew that. Finally, when the time clicked past 9:35, the couple decided it was time to call it a night. Their waitress came back over with the check and they split the total evenly. (April had insisted they go Dutch, and Tom didn’t bother trying to change her mind. It would’ve been hopeless.) Just as they rose from their table, a man’s voice to Tom’s left asked, “Did you guys have a good evening?”

They both turned. It was the bartender, calling from across the room behind his counter. “Yes, it was delicious!” April assured. “Thank you so much.” “You’re welcome! Glad you got a satisfactory meal in you. Is there anything else you’d like? Bar don’t close ‘till ten.” Tom looked at April. He really didn’t want this brilliant evening to end. “What do you think? Do you want a drink? We can stay a little longer if you want?” “No, I’m fine,” she said. “You can stay for a little bit if you want.” “You sure?” “I don’t mind. We’re on vacation.” She leaned in until her lips were an inch from his ear. Her voice dropped to a whisper. “Besides, I’ve got a surprise for you upstairs. Give me ten minutes. You’ll see.”
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— Art & Photo —

Lufei Zheng

A Swamp in Eastham
Tom ran that over in his head for a second. The mischievous tone in that whisper of hers sent a wave of fervor undulating up his spine. Whatever she had in mind (though he had a pretty good idea of what it was) he’d give her all the time she needed. Plus, in the most non selfish way, a short moment by himself wasn’t a bad idea. After all, it wasn’t often that a woman, even one as good as April, would volunteer to give her man a moment alone when they were away together.

“All right,” he said, “I’ll meet you upstairs in ten minutes?”

“Ten minutes. You better be there.”

Tom smiled and turned back to the bartender. “I’ll stay for a quick drink if you don’t mind.”

“Sounds mighty fine, friend!” he approved.

April gave Tom a quick kiss and departed the restaurant. Tom watched her leave until she vanished around the corner of the lobby, and then he strolled over to the bar.

“How are ya tonight, friend?” the bartender cheered while he wiped his counter down with a wet rag. He was a middle-aged man, maybe in his sixties, but for someone who was obviously stacking on the years he looked to be in pretty good shape. Big muscular arms protruded from his outfit, with two massive bear paws for hands. He was about April’s height, which meant somewhere around five foot four, but his shoulders were wide and solid, built like a linebacker. His face was warm and friendly yet displayed hardness at the same time, like a baby face carved out of stone.

“Pretty good,” Tom replied, taking a seat on one of the barstools. “Yourself?”

“Oh, I’m doing alright. Business can get pretty slow up here, in case you haven’t noticed.”—He put down his bar rag—“What’ll you have?”

“Uh...not too sure. What would do you recommend?”

He pointed a big, sausage-shaped finger at him and cracked a grin. “I’ll tell you what. I’ll give you something special. You seem like a nice guy.”

“Well, I hope I am. Otherwise, my mother has been lying to be my whole life.”

He laughed and slapped his knee. “Funny guy, you are. Funny guy. Give me one sec.”

While the bartender set to work preparing his drink, Tom studied the bar. It was classic in style, with dozens of multicolored bottles on the far wall stacked neatly on fancy shelves. But despite its simple layout, it was touched up nicely. The barstools were made of what looked like cherry—a deep red wood as strong as oak—with com-
fortable brown cushions like the ones on the chairs. A black bear head hung mounted above the liquor shelves, frozen in a permanent snarl, and the bar counter was a green...

“Wait a minute. This is a canoe!” Tom exclaimed, hardly believing what he was seeing. He hadn't noticed it before, but the counter wasn’t a counter at all, but actually a fixed, over-turned canoe.

The bartender chuckled. “Sure is. A friend of mine was just gonna throw it away. Can you believe it? I just couldn’t stand for that, but the thing is I've already got enough canoes of my own. So I bought it anyway, had a spark of creativity, and here she is.”

Tom has to admire it. It was pretty cool. On its side, down by his knees, the canoe’s name written in yellow cursive: The Topsy-Turvy. If the canoe were to be detached from its position and placed right-side up again, the letters would be flipped around. Very clever.

The bartender placed a drink in front of him—a dark, amber-colored hard liquor with three ice cubes clinking against the glass. “So where you from, friend? Any plans while you’re up here?”

“I'm from Mass—we both are.” Tom answered. “We’re just up here for a little break. Need to get away, you know?”

“I gotchya. Nice time of year to be in the mountains.” He picked up his bar rag and resumed wiping the counter down. “My father always said: 'That mountain air is good for ya, champ. Breathe it in and it'll cure ya, good and proper.’”

Tom was starting liking this guy more and more. They shared similar outlooks.

“What's your name, friend?”
“Thomas. Thomas Owen. You?”
“Robert Paulson. Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Owen.”
“Just call me Tom. Everyone does.”
“You got it, Tom.”

They shook hands, and Tom’s disappeared inside that massive bear paw grip. When they let go he took a sip of the drink Robert had prepared and was instantly impressed.

“Ooo, that is good. What is this?” Tom wasn’t usually a hard liquor guy, but whatever this was had a soothingly tranquil punch to it. Fire covered in heavy flavor.

Robert grinned when he saw his customer’s satisfaction. “Like it, huh? That right there's a vintage whiskey from the thirties. Belonged to my old man, it did. Brought it all the way over from his homeland. You an Irish man, Tom?”

“A quarter Irish. So yeah, I guess so.”
“Well, my old man was born and raised. They don’t make that stuff you drinkin’ anymore.”

Tom frowned. “If it’s a vintage then why are you giving me some? You just met me.”

Robert chuckled again. “I like you Mr. Owen. You remind me of me when I was young. I remember, years ago, when I came here for the first time. Brought my girl along and sat down at that table you and yours were sitting at this very evening. It was like I was looking at myself.”

“No kidding.”

Nope. I tell ya, it’s a happy feeling to see you go through the same thing. Are you and her...?”

Robert trailed off and looked right at him. For a moment Tom was confused at what he was getting at...then it became clear.

“No,” he said, sinking a little in his seat, “we’re not married…or engaged.”

Robert looked flummoxed, like that was the most ridiculous thing he’d ever heard. “Well, aren’t you going to ask her, friend? I’m an old man, Mr. Owen—‘been around the block a few times—and I know what love looks like when I see it. She loves you. I can tell.”

Tom felt his face grow hot. This man he just met was speaking the exact words that were running amok in his head. It was discomforting, invading.

“I…I just want to be sure is all,” Tom mumbled.

Robert grinned in the same amused manner a father might give his son when discussing girl problems. “I saw you too, Thomas. You’re already sure. You just need to tell her.”

Tom was really sinking in his seat now. He wanted to be angry at this man for pressing him on such a personal matter, but he couldn’t escape the shock of knowing that every word Robert had spoken was true, even if he didn’t like it.

Thankfully, the bartender could see that he was making his guest uncomfortable, so he resorted back to friendly small talk. “So do you have any solid plans for the day tomorrow, Mr. Owen? Plenty of things to do around here.”

Tom perked back up. “We’re not really sure yet. I did a little research and made a few notes, but this is our first time in the area so we don’t really know any of the sweet spots yet.”

“Lake Francis is a good place to start if you’re looking for a relaxing day.”

“I think we we’re going to try First Connecticut Lake tomorrow.”
“Oh, that’s a good one, too. ‘Bout five miles up Route 3 from here.”

Tom started to get excited. “Is it a good place?”

“Wonderful place. Got that real un-touched beauty that’s hard to find nowadays.” He stopped wiping the counter and looked up. “It’s on the way to my favorite hike, actually. Do you like to hike, Tom?”

“Love to hike. I’ve only got a seven more peaks left and then I’ll be part of the four-thousand-footer club.”

Robert smiled. “Well, my taste for the extreme is long gone, friend. I’m not a young man anymore. For an old guy like me, the one I’m thinking about is a pleasant and easy one just up the road. Three miles round trip, I think—mile and a half to the lake and a mile and a half back.”

“I love a nice easy hike,” Tom assured. “Just because I like the big ones doesn’t mean I can’t enjoy the little ones.”

“Well, good to hear then. In that case I’d recommend Crawford Lake. I think you’ll like it.”

“Is it good?”

“Of course. The whole place has this feel to it, you know? Like... you’re traveling back in time. Very peaceful.”

Tom, intrigued by this, said, “So it’s got that old-time magic to it, huh? That sounds good to me.”

Robert nodded. “It is a pretty nice hike for such a short distance. Still...” His voice trailed off. His eyes became unfocused. “There really is something...different about that place.”

For a moment Tom was set back by the sudden change in Robert’s tone. What’s so “different” about a hike in the woods?

“A Hike to Crawford Lake” continues at: maritime.edu/turning-tides