

# Write RHODE ISLAND!

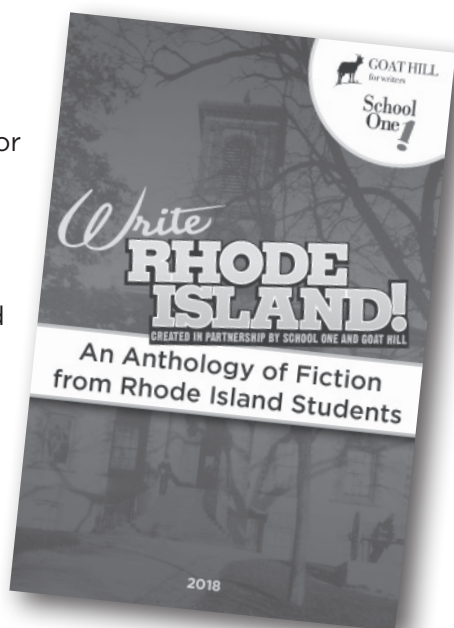
CREATED IN PARTNERSHIP BY SCHOOL ONE AND GOAT HILL

**Write Rhode Island!** is a short fiction competition for Rhode Island students in grades 7-12. The goal of **Write Rhode Island!** is to promote and celebrate student writing by incorporating Rhode Island as a theme in a creative piece of prose.

**Write Rhode Island!** offers creative writing workshops for students across Rhode Island, providing a place where students meet with published writers and their peers for guidance and support.

**Write Rhode Island!** publishes *The Write Rhode Island! Anthology*, a juried, high quality publication, and the only statewide print magazine dedicated to the fiction writing of RI students.

Write Rhode Island is created in partnership by School One and Goat Hill.



Cover image of Old State House, Rhode Island Photograph Collection. Image courtesy of Providence Public Library.



## School One

**School One** is an independent high school in Providence that provides an arts intensive, college preparatory education to diverse students from across Rhode Island and Massachusetts. A learning community that emphasizes a student-centered approach and a rigorous curriculum, **School One** is not a typical school. Our students come from a variety of backgrounds: they are racially, ethnically and economically diverse; they come from low-income city neighborhoods as well as suburban communities. Over 70% receive financial aid.

Founded in 1973, **School One** has held on to many of the core values of its founders, a group of parents who sought an alternative to the one-size-fits-all approach at most high schools. Our mission statement reads: "At **School One**, we teach students to think, write analyze and create. As a community, we treat each other with care and respect. We appreciate each other's differences as people and as learners."

**School One's** small classes are discussion-based, inviting all students to contribute in personal and meaningful ways. Our curriculum spurs a love of learning and self expression. Our accepting community and our advising system provide support, guidance and inspiration. Our tuition is affordable relative to local private schools and we offer generous financial aid.

**School One** is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.





# GOAT HILL

for writers

## Goat Hill

**Goat Hill** is the Providence meeting place of writers Ann Hood, Hester Kaplan and Taylor Polites. We invite you to join us at Goat Hill for workshops, seminars, literary events, and sociability.

Our events offer exciting opportunities to engage in conversations about writing and publishing, meet agents and editors, attend readings, and connect with other writers. We enjoy taking advantage of Rhode Island's many beautiful and interesting sites for our events.

**Goat Hill** was formed in 2015 by three Rhode Island writers and educators to cultivate and support the literary life of the state through innovative programming and community engagement. Over the course of three seasons, Goat Hill has invited writers, agents, publishers, and editors to talk about their work and share their insights with the public. Goat Hill's writing seminars, workshops, and one-on-one mentoring offer learning opportunities to writers at all experience levels.

For more information about our programs and workshops, visit **[www.goathillwriters.com](http://www.goathillwriters.com)**.

# Write Rhode Island! Advisory Committee and Judges

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## Write Rhode Island!

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**Director of Literary Programs and Outreach :** Diana Champa

**Goat Hill:** Ann Hood

Hester Kaplan

Taylor Polites

**Design:** Kim Luca

**School One Intern:** Colleen E. LeBeau



# Congratulations from School One

Welcome to our 2nd year of award-winning short stories written by teens from across Rhode Island. Just as our state contains amazing diversity within its dense boundaries, so our young writers and our schools reflect the differences that make Rhode Island such a wonderful and expressive place to live.

When School One and Goat Hill Writers hatched the idea of Write Rhode Island, we wanted to inspire young people to stretch their creative muscles and find their literary voices. We had no idea the project would catch on so quickly, and that's largely due to some amazing champions in the community, especially teachers and librarians, but also our great roster of judges and sponsors. We are deeply grateful to all those who believe in teens and their creative potential.

And when you start reading, you too will be wowed by the creativity, range, and complexity of these stories. If there is one thing I've learned about teenagers, it's that they hate to be patronized, and when you read these stories, you'll see that their quality and authenticity speak powerfully. There is no need to condescend to these writers on the basis of their age. Teens, like the rest of us, have a great deal to learn, but as artists, they are on their way.

You'll be wowed by the stories' descriptions of our gorgeous state. In one story, you can take an imaginative walk from Providence to Pawtucket; in another, you can feel the mystic stillness of the woods in winter. You'll spend a desolate moment in the Block Island lighthouse or you'll hear the humane reflections of a Pell bridge tollbooth worker. Perhaps you'll spend a day with a feisty teenage witch as she teleports between a Newport mansion and West Warwick High School. The stories are as varied as the teens who created them.

As Head of School One, I am used to the joy and electricity generated by creative teens. Write Rhode Island allows me to be inspired by all the creativity beyond our school's walls. I hope you enjoy your journey through these stories and hope that you find occasion to support the many young artists and writers in our midst.





# GOAT HILL

for writers

**Goat Hill** is proud to have once again partnered with School One on *Write Rhode Island!*, a program that goes right to the grassroots of our writing community.

We received more than 150 submissions from students in grades 7 through 12, from every corner of the state, and this year's stories show the amazing range and diversity of voices, interests, concerns, and imaginations of our young writers.

The stories moved us, made us think and made us smile, invited us into new experiences and offered us new perspectives, and from city streets to the coastline, revealed the many gems and rich heritage of Rhode Island. We hope you enjoy and are inspired by the stories in this anthology as much as we have been.

We are enormously grateful for the enthusiastic support of *Write Rhode Island!* from the student writers, their teachers, schools, librarians, and families, as well as the generosity of the volunteers and sponsors that make this state-wide program possible. Together, we have created a vibrant and exciting new community that celebrates the art of storytelling, and the ambition, potential, and creativity of our young writers.

We look forward to the stories they tell today—and the ones they will tell tomorrow.

  
Ann Hood

  
Hester Kaplan

  
Taylor Polites

# THANK YOU

We would like to extend a big thank you to all of our community sponsors who are supporting ***Write Rhode Island!***

A special thank you to Jennifer Borman, Paula Cioe, Susan Shepard, Sophia Reichert and Colleen E. LeBeau for their red pens and eagle eyes.

***Write Rhode Island!*** collaborates with many Rhode Island organizations to educate and publish RI students. We would like to acknowledge the support and help of these organizations.

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**IS PROUD  
TO PRESENT THE  
WINNING  
STORIES**

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# Secrets, Secrets Are No Fun

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by Sam Read

Everyone has something. A secret that is burning them on the inside. Maybe it is about them, maybe about someone else, or maybe they don't have anything at all. I don't like to think that, because everyone must have something, right?

Let me go back, to where the story begins. Junior year of high school. I don't mind school, I do pretty well and enjoy most of my classes. Physics can be a bore, listening to the teacher explain laws of motion and some elaborate equation I'm definitely never going to use later in life. I start drifting off, wondering why there can't be laws of life. Why can't some things have an answer? I hate not knowing the reason behind something.

Staring at the whiteboard, I watched the dry erase marker squeak across, forming some kind of equation. At least there was a reason to that, even if I didn't find it useful. The bell rang. I hopped out of my desk and couldn't get to the door quickly enough. "Thank you!" I hollered as I raced to lunch.

The lunchroom was full of conversation; other students were talking about homework, classes, sports and gossip. Over at my table the conversation was that of a typical boy: Girls. Although I was eager to get to lunch, I picked at it, suddenly not in the mood to ingest the school's "whole wheat pizza." I followed along with the conversation. Scanning the lunchroom, I wondered why this topic is always so important that it needs discussing. The other junior guys at the table were talking about which girls they'd been with this past weekend, as if it were some game. One of the guys, Mike,

was boasting about a senior girl that I personally knew. Every word that spewed out of his mouth angered me. If only she heard what he said about her, but I just hid my emotions, smiled and nodded as was accustomed. More conversation bounced around the lunch table until it turned to me .

“So Bry, any luck this weekend?”

“Nah, unfortunately not,” I replied, pretending like I was disappointed.

“Dude, what about that girl you’ve been hanging out with?” said Mike

“I dunno, we’ll see what happens,” I said, this time with less disappointment and more annoyance: Annoyed at the fact that I felt I was being interrogated. I wasn’t, but why couldn’t people just mind their own business? All I wanted to do was get up and leave that lunch table, leave all the conversation behind. But I couldn’t. I felt trapped and I hated that.

Now it’s time I tell the truth. Not that I’ve been lying, but some details are missing. My name

That night I couldn’t sleep. I was tearing myself apart thinking of all the possibilities of what could happen, what could go wrong.

is Bryson, “Bry” to most, and two weeks ago something happened, something that changed my life. No one knows. I hold the secret like the secret service guarding the President. But lately, it has been getting harder to keep things guarded. Things people do or say. Things that I do or say. At times I want to just blurt it out and other times I want to hack it away with an axe, but most of the time I just bury it deep down where no one can find it. Until a few days ago, when the dilemma occurred.

Again, the sound of conversation dominated the atmosphere. This time it was in conjunction with the music, and the conversation varied from table to table. Adults talking about their jobs, families scolding their children for making a mess, and the six of us just having a good time at the local Newport Creamery. Six of us finishing up our meals and just talking.

The waitress came by with the checks. We didn't plan on dessert because we were going back to a friend's house. We walked out into the cool night. A slight breeze made me get the chills. We piled into the SUV and drove back. Almost in an instant the music was blasting and the hum of the bass could be felt through the car. The lights of the highway and of other cars coming from the opposite direction blurred by us. In that moment things felt good, being with friends, feeling as if the world was whizzing by and we were immersed in the song.

Back at our friend's house, we sat around and watched a movie, something that I'd already seen. I tried to hide the fact that I was bored, but I think it showed through. My friend Claire who was sitting next to me looked at me and smiled. It was a sly smile, one that I was not used to. My phone buzzed and I looked down at the bright screen. It was from her! The message read, "Do u wanna get out of here? We can go to my house." I immediately knew where this was going and it wasn't good. I didn't want to leave, even though I was bored. And especially with Claire. Why was she thinking what she was thinking? My mind raced as I tried to come up with a solution. I saw no way out so I played along. I smiled at her and messaged back, "Yeah, sure." We left our friend's house and walked to her car. As soon as we got in, I blurted out that I wanted to go home.

The ride home was awkwardly silent, I stared out the window and watched the houses we passed by. The radio was on but was not blasting this time. Not a word was said until she arrived at my house and I opened the door and quickly muttered, "Thanks for the ride," and got out. Claire sped away. I watched the taillights fade down the road until they became one singular light. I went inside my house and flopped down on my bed. I ran through all the possible scenarios that could have happened. Maybe I shouldn't have looked at my phone, maybe I should have said that I wasn't feeling well. Either way, Claire was mad and I couldn't change that. I wasn't concerned about her being upset as much, because I knew she would get over it. I was more worried of what she would say. The rumors that would start flying around. The gossip that would spread. How my secret could suddenly become unearthed. I fell asleep from all the thinking I was doing.

I woke up to the sound of my phone buzzing. I read the screen. The brightness hurt my eyes in the dark room. It was early morning and I already had 10 unread messages. They were all from my friend whose house we were at last night. The texts said much of the same. Apparently, Claire was very upset and things didn't look good for me. I put my phone down and sat up. I sat there in the dark and started thinking again. This was exactly what I feared. The worst was about to happen and I had no way to back myself up.

I needed to figure this out. There had to be a solution; there always is. According to physics there is. There's always some reason. I resolved that I had to talk to Claire. I had to tell her the truth. It was daring and risky, but it had to be done. Later that Sunday night I messaged Claire. "Claire, I need to talk to you tomorrow. Meet me at our usual hangout spot in the junior hallway before school." I didn't get a response, but that was expected. I just hoped that she got the message and would meet me.

That night I couldn't sleep. I was tearing myself apart thinking of all the possibilities of what could happen, what could go wrong. I got up early and started getting ready for school. I got in my truck and drove to school. I listened to the radio. That five minutes of music was the only peace I feared that I would feel that day. I pulled into the school parking lot, which was already beginning to fill up. I walked into school and headed toward our meeting spot. I didn't see her. I scanned around at the other students that maybe she was with, but she wasn't. Was she late? No. I was already kind of late. I was about to keep walking when I heard my name.

"Bry," Claire gently called out from behind me. I turned around and was surprised to see her.

"Claire, I need to tell you something if you will let me please," I sort of begged.

"Fine." was all she let out, but it was good enough for me. I let everything out. I told her everything. The secret came to life before my eyes, but it wasn't as scary as I had imagined. This was partly due to Claire's reaction. She wasn't mad and she didn't seem like she was ready to tell the world. Instead she smiled a friendly smile and came closer, leaned in and asked details.

After I finished my whole explanation I said, "Do you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" she questioned, "Bry, you shouldn't be sorry! I wish you had told me sooner!"

A feeling of relief came over me and I finally felt as though the secret wasn't a huge weight on my shoulders. She hugged me and we walked to our classes. The rest of the day I felt relieved, knowing that I had a friend to back me up and support me. The rest of the

school year would continue. It would be interesting, but it would continue. It always does, just as the laws of motion state: an object in motion remains in motion unless altered by another object.

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# Dream Pool

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by Rebecca Smith

ne day last winter, my friend, Moon, and I fell asleep in the woods. That's right. Asleep. In the snowy, 28-degree woods. But I'll get to that in a moment.

That day my friend, Moon, had come over to my house to play in the snow with me. It was afternoon, but the normal golden light was blocked by a layer of sullen, gray clouds, the same clouds that always precede a snowstorm. We traipsed about the yard for a while building snowmen, throwing snowballs, and making snow angels. The snow blanketing Exeter muffled all sound, except for the monotone droning of the snow-making machines spewing snow onto the gleaming slopes of the nearby Yawgoo Valley Ski area. Our shouts and laughter seemed sharp and empty in the freezing air, rather like glass shattering in a quiet room. No birds chirped, and I recall the feeling of being the only people alive. I should have been suspicious, but it didn't seem to be of any importance at the time.

I remember making a snow cat in honor of my new kitten, Eclipse. I had made it out of five snowballs: a large oval for the body, a smaller sphere for the head, and three tiny snowballs, two for the ears and one for the tail. Then I took off my gloves and gave it pebble eyes and a red berry nose. I particularly remember the chill of the snow as I stuffed my hands back into my gloves, bringing with them clumps of slush, already partially melted from being on my hands. This, however, was not the main experience of the day.

As the afternoon progressed we became bored and tromped inside to get permission to go into the woods that bordered my backyard. Then we started our long journey down to the stream. The trip looked something like this: my friend and I both in purple snowsuits, trudging down a steep hill covered in trees, rocks, and six inches of snow. Before

long we were panting, sweating in our heavy winter coats, and collapsing onto rocks to take breaks. We did not talk, save for things like, “Watch out for that hole,” and “Careful, that rock’s shaky.” The silence of our surroundings seeped into us, making us vaguely uneasy, as though the world was holding its breath, waiting for something to happen.

Finally, we got to a place I call the Rock Garden as it looked like an Oriental Zen garden in winter. As you might have imagined, it was pitted with rocks making it rather hard to navigate. These rocks, abandoned by the ancient glaciers that used to cover the district, were all different sizes, ranging from stones the length of your arm to boulders big enough to pretend they were a small island on which you were stranded. Few trees grew in the Rock Garden, further accentuating it from the rest of the forest, and making it look slightly mystical, as a clearing in a dense wood. From there our trek led us up a smaller, but no less steep, hill almost identical to the one we had walked down to get there. Walking up was much harder than walking down, and many more stops were made on this hill.

From the top of the hill you could see the small tree-filled valley that was arrayed below it. We staggered down the hill, unease growing in our chests as the first snowflakes started to fall. It was silent. Too silent. We inadvertently walked closer together obeying the ancient instinct of group survival. At the bottom of the hill we started to hear the trickling of the stream. This area was extra unsafe; as in previous, stormier seasons the ground had been hollowed out when this distant relation of the Queen’s River overflowed its banks, creating a maze of cleverly disguised holes. Reaching the snow-covered rocks that bordered the stream, we proceeded to travel upstream, hoping to find a satisfactory spot to play. Parts of the small waterfalls that permeated the stream had frozen, creating sparkling icicles that glimmered in the gray light. We began to get tired, but we kept walking until we found the perfect place.

It was a small section of the stream that was so calm it looked like a mirror. The snow on either side was flat, smooth, and untouched. It was so perfect we sat down to gaze at it, enchanted by its beauty. The water was clear like glass, showing the smooth bottom of the pool. It sparkled too, but not the harsh sparkle of the sea on a sunny day.

It was a quiet sparkle, like moonlight or liquid diamonds. My favorite part, however, was how if you looked closely enough, it seemed to be a puddle of sky.

We named it Dream Pool for its supernatural perfectness that made us feel as though we were in some dream or illusion. It almost felt like it was waiting to be found, its only purpose to be found, and it seemed to rejoice that we special humans had found it. Soon, we were drowsy, and we lay down on opposite sides of the stream, our cheeks pressed against the cold snow, and watched the reflection of the sky.

For how long we fell asleep I do not know, but when we awoke the same pale sky that had lulled us to sleep was as hard and as grey as iron. Snow was swirling down on gusts of wind. The trees shook slightly and, to my bleary senses, sounded as though they were trying to warn me of something. I ignored this, dismissing it as background noise. I sat up rubbing my eyes and looked across the stream for Moon, not even awake enough to realize I was outside. She seemed to be just waking up too, stretching her legs and yawning.

“How long was I asleep for?” I asked groggily, my voice loud and strange amongst the whispering forest.

“I don’t know,” Moon yawned. “I think we both fell asleep.” She glanced around and said drowsily, “I don’t like the look of this sky though.”

Wait... sky? I jumped up as the full force of what had happened hit me. We had fallen asleep in the woods! A coyote could have eaten us! What would my parents think? Were they looking for us?

“Come on,” I said nervously, tensing at every sound. “We have to get back.”

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She got up, and we walked back down along the stream glancing around warily. I crossed back over the stream, and we started up the

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.....

hill. The unease in our chests grew as the snow came down harder and the wind started to quiet. We crossed the Rock Garden and started up the final hill. About halfway up the wind stopped. We stopped too. Fear blossomed in our chests. "Why has it stopped?" I thought fearfully. "What's happening?" We looked at each other and began to run. It felt as though a breathless fiend's frightful gaze was boring into our backs as it stalked us like a predatory cat, making us quiver and glance around like a pair of cornered rabbits. We ran as hard as we could, often collapsing into the snow, only to get back up again and continue to run, each spurred by our terror of being left behind by the other.

Finally, we reached the safety house and, with unease still lingering in our hearts, we sat and watched a movie while the snow swirled outside.

Looking back, the whole experience feels like I was in between a dream and wakefulness. I have returned to the stream many times, unable to find the Dream Pool again. What made us fall asleep in the cold, unfamiliar woods? Were we just tired, or were we ensnared by something some would deem "unexplainable"?



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# Unwelcomed Guests

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by Amanda Woodard



Annalise peered out the window, through the dusty, floral curtains of her upstairs bedroom. There was a girl in her driveway, carrying large cardboard boxes in her hands with labels like 'Kitchen' and 'High School Memories' written on them. Shining brightly from the glare of the hot September sun was a diamond on her ring finger. It wasn't all that impressive, Annalise thought to herself. And she seemed a bit young to be getting married.

She wondered if the girl would choose her bedroom to be her own. Of course she would; Annalise's bedroom was beautiful and feminine and by far the best out of the six.

It had a large oak wardrobe that resembled the one in a story her mother had read to her as a child where, behind the coats and nightgowns, was a whole other world. She had always loved that wardrobe and the imagination it sparked. It bothered her that the other people who had taken over her bedroom over the years just accepted that the wardrobe was there, not appreciating it the way she always did.

But she was happy that the last family who invaded her house left everything behind when they moved out. Every room was a mixture of old and new furniture abandoned by their previous owners. It was nice to live in a furnished house with just her and her family, the way they did many years ago.

It had been awhile since someone new moved in. The creaky hardwood floors were now blanketed with a layer of dust, and the light bulbs had given out since they were all left on when the last family left so abruptly.

"Anna." Matthew tugged on the hem of his big sister's long, cotton nightgown. "Who is it this time?"

Annalise finally removed her gaze from the girl in the driveway and averted it to her brother. “No one we can’t handle,” she said with her Mona Lisa smile before turning back to the window.

The girl with the boxes had long brown hair that reminded Annalise of her own. She repeatedly tucked it behind her ear as she transferred her things from the U-Haul to the front door step. Annalise had seen this girl once before, walking around with the woman with clicky heels who boasted about how lovely the house was.

“This house is almost a landmark for Jamestown, been here since 1806,” the woman with the heels had said. She said it was old. She said it was in need of love. How could she say that when Annalise

and her brothers and sisters loved it more than anything?

Annalise watched as a second car pulled into the driveway. She recognized this type of car, it was a Chevrolet, the same as the last owners’. In the front seat was a handsome boy about the same age as the girl with the boxes. He must’ve been the fiancé. He opened his door and hopped out, running a hand through his charming and disheveled dark-blond hair.

The girl with the boxes turned around and smiled as she placed the box in her hands

on the doorstep. The blond boy approached her, placing a short kiss on her lips. It was very casual, like they’d done it a million times before. A wave of jealousy washed through Annalise. She had only gotten to kiss Peter once, and she had made sure she treasured that moment. How could box girl and blond boy be so casual about it?

“Annalise?” a small voice asked. Anna impatiently turned to look at her sister. She wanted to continue watching the couple.

“What is it, Samantha?”

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"Is that girl and the boy moving in?" Samantha asked. She looked up at her sister with big, hazel doe-eyes. Anna sighed and knelt down so she was eye level with her, tucking one of her soft brown curls behind her ear.

"Don't worry, Sammie. I've got this under control, okay? Just like last time." It pained her to see Samantha; she was only nine. Annalise stood back up and patted down her nightgown, walking by her sister and into the hallway. She had to do something. She knew she owed it to her siblings.

Annalise silently made her way down the stairs just as the girl and the boy walked into the kitchen with some boxes.

The blond boy looked around the kitchen, narrowing his eyebrows at the crooked, chipping cabinets and the rusting appliances. He hadn't been there when the woman with clicky heels led the girl around.

The boy gave the girl a look and she simply laughed. "Come on, it's better than that stupid apartment and it's the same price."

"It's probably the same price because some family died here or something," the blonde boy said, but the girl ignored him. Annalise smiled at the comment as she watched the two from the archway of the kitchen.

"Well, I love it, and you love me, sooo," the girl smiled and slid her arms around the boy's waist.

"Yeah, yeah." The boy let out a laugh and kissed the girl yet again. Annalise wondered how long they'd been together. She envied the way they acted towards each other. The way she'd always longed to be with Peter. If only she'd gotten the chance.

Water suddenly started coming out of the faucet of the kitchen sink beside the couple, causing them to jump. Annalise smiled to herself at that reaction as she watched the girl quickly turn the sink off.

"Jesus Christ, Marcy," the boy muttered as he pulled away from the girl.

Marcy, a peculiar name, Annalise thought. Marcy simply took a calming breath and told the boy there was nothing to worry about.

Oh, Marcy, Annalise thought to herself, don't be so presumptuous

Annalise decided not to scare the couple any more as daylight remained. There were a lot of things she saw amongst Marcy's boxes

that she wouldn't mind adding to her collection. It was best not to scare her off too soon.

But it wasn't Annalise's fault that her siblings always made such a ruckus when they ran the halls at night. They didn't know any better.

"Anna?" Matthew asked late that night as he approached his sister in the basement. She was staring around the ashy room, memories flooding her mind.

"Yes, Matthew?"

"How come new people moved in again? That never happened when mommy and daddy lived with us."

Annalise took a deep breath and gently placed her brother's hand in hers. "That was a long time ago," she said carefully. "Things are different now."

"I don't want to share with Marcy and Alex," Matthew said, his bottom lip sticking out into a pout. Alex must've been the blond boy's name.

"We won't have to for much longer, Mattie. I promise."

Annalise told her siblings to stay in the basement for the rest of the night before she made her way to the second floor of the house. She carefully walked down the hallway towards the bedroom that was once hers and peered inside. Marcy and Alex were laying on the bed that was once hers, with a new mattress and a blue and white comforter set. Beside them, on her bedside table, was a lamp Annalise hadn't seen before. She decided she hoped the couple would leave the lamp behind.

Annalise stood by the doorway in the dark room, watching as the couple slept. Marcy pulled the blankets over her arms and snuggled into a fetal position. Annalise knew it was her presence making Marcy so cold. It only upset her yet again to be reminded that she couldn't even be near someone.

When Anna looked at Alex, she noticed he had woken up, and was staring straight in her direction with a squinted gaze as if he was trying to make out what he was seeing. He reached for the lamp beside him, quickly switching it on, only to see nothing standing where he could've sworn he saw the shadow of a girl.

Anna purposely stomped down the hallway, smiling to herself when she heard Alex fearfully waking up his fiancée. She couldn't help but

laugh when he tiptoed out of the room holding up a hair dryer.

"Stop it, Anna," Samantha said as she followed her sister down the hallway. "I like them! I don't want you to make them leave! You always scare them away!"

Anna turned and glared down at her sister. "This is our house, Samantha. No one else's. I will not let some couple invade mom and dad's home!"

"Mommy and daddy aren't coming back," Samantha said, taking her sister aback. "They would have by now."

"If you know that, then how could you let someone else take what's theirs?"

"They died," another voice said. The two girls turned to see Bethany, the next oldest after Annalise, standing at the end of the hallway. "Mom and Dad died twenty years ago. Forty years after we did," she said, causing Samantha to cover her ears with her hands.

"Stop it," Anna warned.

"It's true!" Bethany said. "How can you let them all believe that it's not? How can you think it's okay to scare every new person off? We're dead, Anna! This isn't our house anymore!"

Rage boiled within Anna, causing every newly installed light in the house to flicker. She watched Alex as he walked past them in the hallway, his blow dryer still readily in hand as he stared apprehensively at the lights. Anna reached out and pushed him on the shoulder, causing him to whip around with pure terror in his eyes.

"Stop!" Bethany shouted. "Stop scaring them!"

"This is our house!" Anna yelled. She ran into her bedroom and slammed the door. A gut-wrenching screech filled the house, and she turned to see it came from Marcy, who was staring at the slammed door. "Get out!" Annalise screamed. She'd never been so frustrated with the fact no one could really hear her. "Get out, get out, get out!"

.....  
Annalise peered  
out the window,  
through the dusty,  
floral curtains of her  
upstairs bedroom.  
.....

she screeched at the top of her lungs, but it was no use. The best her anger did was flicker the lamp.

“What happened?” Alex barged into the room and ran up to Marcy.

“Get out!” Annalise screamed, tears now streaming down her cheeks. “Get out,” she mumbled again, meekly this time, as she slid down the wall.

Bethany entered the room and walked up to her sister. “I think it’s time we go to the basement,” she said, reaching out her hand for her sister to take.

The couple looked around with anticipation as they waited for something to happen. Was it over? Alex reached for his pocket and slid out his phone.

“Who are you calling?” Marcy whispered, tears in her eyes because she knew this was partly her fault. She should’ve listened to the signs. But Alex wasn’t calling anyone.

“I knew it,” he said. He held his phone up for Marcy to see. An article titled ‘Addington Children Killed In Basement Fire,’ appeared across his screen, followed by the address of the house they had just moved in to. “Are you kidding me, Marce? I know you. There’s no way you didn’t research the hell out of this place before you leased it. I knew there was a reason you liked it so much.”

“I didn’t think it would be an issue!” Marcy admitted. “Even if this house is ‘haunted,’ they were just kids! The basement’s boarded up for God’s sake!” She grabbed the roots of her hair as she sat down on the bed.

“Christ,” Alex mumbled. “I didn’t even know there was a basement!” he shouted, shaking his head. “I’m not doing this. I’m not living here.”

“Look, Anna!” Bethany shouted. She motioned to the rest of the basement, at the charred furniture and the ashy floors. Annalise took a shaky breath as she looked around the basement she once loved. At the basement she destroyed. It was her fault. If only she hadn’t been so careless.

“We don’t blame you,” Bethany said, shaking her head. “It was just a candle. We don’t blame you for what happened to us.” The rest of the children came out from hiding and slowly approached their other siblings.

Samantha nodded her agreement. “You don’t have to keep trying to make it up to us. You don’t have to drive everyone out. It’s not our home anymore.”

Annalise shook her head. “It was my job to protect you. They were just going to see a film!” She sobbed as her sisters surrounded her with open arms. They reassured her that it was okay, but she couldn’t believe them. It was all her fault. She did this to them.

“They’re leaving.” The girls pulled away from their hug and turned to see Matthew standing at the bottom of the stairs.

“What?” Annalise croaked.

The siblings all ran to the small window of the basement that overlooked the front of the house. The only thing they could see was the taillights of a Chevrolet speeding away.

“Well,” Bethany said. “I guess it’s ours at least a little longer.”





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# Into the Light

by Andrew Ackroyd

He wanted to jump when he reached the top. The Block Island Southeast Lighthouse, standing on the edge of the beautiful, clay Mohegan Bluffs of Block Island provided the perfect location. Its tall towers of rust-colored clay rose above the sweeping landscape like a mountain before the sudden sheer ending. When the sun reflected off of the cliffs just right, they were beautiful. He had felt like the climber he had seen during his shift earlier in the day, climbing up and up, grappling to live before this clear and starry night when all the rising actions of his life met a climax and fell, tumbling down a metaphorical 'bluff' before hitting the bottom with no room to move forward.

Arthur Gasper had lived his past four years in solitary misery. His emotions were as turbulent as the rushing, ever-changing tides. He stood alone outside the bottom of the lighthouse with no fear in his heart and only the everlasting dread that had been there since he turned the keys in his car back at his house. The dread had only grown as the mileage between his house and his destination increased. He tried to rationalize his actions as if convincing himself that this was the right thing to do, *there's nothing to fear when Death grasped with his long, pale fingers. The things to fear existed solely in life*, he told himself. He looked up at the blinding beacon as it spun in its five-second rotation.

He walked up the stone stairs to the porch with a hammer in his left hand and with his right hand, tried to open the door with its flaking white paint. It was locked and he tried to pull on the dirty golden doorknob with its splotches of discoloration. The knob wouldn't budge, no matter how hard Arthur tried. He had thought of this and produced his worker's key from the right pocket of his

khaki-colored cargo shorts. The key was made of iron and the end came to a dull, point. The jagged underside had started to rust. Arthur moved the key into the lock and jiggled it around before it clicked. The door opened.

The room he walked into was black, a contrast from the navy blue of the outside. The only things he could see were the outlines of the slightly darker shadows signifying a table or desk where merchandise would go. Shards of white moonlight shone through the now open door and fingerprints covered windows. The moon was at its peak.

Arthur stumbled along in the darkness, drifting from room to room on unsteady feet before finding the iron steps leading to the top of the building. The backless stairs sometimes caused children to be wary of them. Arthur remembered one day with a pensive smile. A brown-haired boy who couldn't have been older than six or seven had given the stairs the best death glare he could manage, maybe trying to scare the stairs into submission, before grasping his mother's gentle hand and climbing them.

There was a small amount of light coming from the top of the winding stairs as Arthur started to climb. He grasped the railing on the third step with his right hand and with his left, held the hammer so it swung limply. When he reached the sixth iron step, his black dress shoes clacked softly, he recalled a memory and had to sit down on the step, cradling his head in the palm of his right hand.

. . . . .

He was young, seven. Arthur still had the treble voice of children that pierced the ears of everyone around him. He didn't speak much; he was too shy. Arthur remembered this moment and saw it tattooed on the insides of his eyelids almost every time he closed them.

He sat at the head of the bleached, four-person, wooden table of his childhood. His chair legs were splintered at the bottom but Arthur didn't care. His skinny legs were swinging in the joy that had left him that same day.

There was a corridor from the foyer to the kitchen and his seat had the perfect view of it. The door was polished with a black lacquer and its hinges were bronze. Arthur heard a rap on the door and his father's voice boisterously speaking a greeting towards the door and saying it was unlocked as his father ran down the stairs. The knob turned and the door swung opened quickly and the pounding footsteps of his father stopped.

A man in a police uniform stood on the porch, not coming in through the open door. Arthur hopped down from his chair and walked down the corridor towards the door, his bare feet slipping on the hardwood floor. The officer had a frown on his face and his eyes were rimmed with red as if he had been crying.

Arthur's father spoke once he reached the bottom of the stairs, stuttering slightly. "H-hello. Wh-what are you doing here?" His voice was quiet and slow, not wanting the answer but knowing he must hear it.

The officer paused before he spoke, "It's about your wife-"

"Arthur go upstairs to your room," his father told him. Arthur complied with confusion and felt a constriction in his stomach from nervousness. The knot only grew until later that day he learned that his mother had died in a car crash.

Arthur's last exchange with his mother was, "I love you," before hugging her and saying goodbye. He didn't know at the time it would be goodbye forever. No one did.

. . . . .

Arthur was able to stand on the step and started to climb again. His legs were unsteady in his khaki shorts. Though the night was warm, his knees were covered with goose bumps. Thoughts were racing through his mind, some trying to talk himself out of it but eventually, only one thought remained: it is what he must do. His mind was numb to reason as he climbed.

Eventually, he reached the twelfth step. As his foot landed on the metal, a thought pushed away his solitary promise to the grave. What would my mother say? He wondered as he continued up the stairs, contemplating the memories of what her personality might be

like. Arthur's father definitely wouldn't judge as he drank his liver to ruin when Arthur was eighteen. His father had never been the same since his mother died.

He ran up the final two steps and was in the glass enclosure containing the bright beacon. Arthur walked around the circular platform, facing outside as to not be blinded by the light. He continued to walk before the town came into view. Every five seconds the darkness brightened as the spotlight perpetually rotated. He could see the buildings that seemed so small from that height. The National Hotel loomed over all the buildings. It was large standing next to it, but it seemed minuscule from there.

Up there, with no one watching, no one to judge his actions, he thought of his wife. He longed for her, but she did not love him. After ten years of passion, the kindling had burnt to ashes and all that was left were the memories, haunting memories.

. . . . .

Arthur's wife stared at him, her stormy gray eyes leering into his brown ones. Her mouth was slightly open in the middle forming a small circle. Her nose whistled slightly as her body racked with silent sobs. Neither of them spoke for a long time. Their dog, Dell, wanted to know what was wrong and leaped up. Dell whined in a shallow, high-pitched manner. The dog hated when they fought, almost more than the couple did. Dell, a small, homely puppy of questionable origins, was adopted from the animal shelter. Nobody else had wanted him, but Arthur couldn't resist. Those big, sad, lonely eyes.

His wife, Sandy, was the first to speak, breaking the pregnant pause that enveloped them. Her voice was weak but did not falter; he had never heard her sound like that. "I want you out of this house by the time I wake up tomorrow. You can sleep on the couch, but after that, you are out."

Arthur replied, "Fine, but I take Dell." The dog had silenced its whimpering and stared at the two with his shiny brown eyes. His body shook like most small dogs, but he was shaking much more violently than ever before. Arthur didn't want to watch the woman



across from him so instead watched his dog.

“Fine,” he repeated, choking back tears.

. . . . .

His memories moved to one morning which was uncharacteristically cold for the early April day. Arthur stood on the dock of Point Judith with Dell in his arms. Dell didn’t usually mind the cold but nevertheless cuddled into Arthur.

The ocean in front of him rolled into waves and moved sluggishly, seemingly with no reason to rush. The ocean was a dark blue-green due to the cloudy weather and seemed void of the rage that would explode by midday. It had a calming effect on Arthur as he peered over it, but regardless of that, Arthur’s emotions were as stoic and numb as the water.

The disoriented man walked on the lonely dock towards the booth that sold tickets to get on the ferry. There was a woman behind the counter and some ship attendants who worked further down the dock. On the loudspeakers, their jingle played loudly and echoed over the ocean. The woman had tanned skin and her hair was jet black. Her voice was high and she held a large iced coffee from the local donut shop.

“Good morning sir, how many tickets would you like?” As he approached her, he could see the dark blue shirt she wore and her red name tag on a matching lanyard. The tag read Megan Moran. Arthur asked for a single ticket with a voice on the verge of cracking, but he held it together while he was in front of the stranger. He felt a sob choking its way up his throat, but swallowed it down with fervor. He and Dell were moving to a newly rented house on Block Island. The ticket printed and Arthur took it. He turned to face The Carol Jean, the boat that would lead him to his new life.

. . . . .

Arthur now knew with certainty how the night would end. He walked around the room that held the massive spotlight and faced the



endless ocean. The waves were now rough off the coast and salt lightly coated some of the glass of the windows. Arthur switched his hands holding the hammer and hoisted it to above his right shoulder. He swung it with all of the strength he could muster and the glass shattered, leaving a gaping hole where the glass used to be and Arthur stepped up to it. He breathed in and out.

In and out.

*In and out.*

Suddenly, a low male voice called out from behind Arthur, startling him almost out of the window. “Arthur, please,” were the only two words the voice said. Arthur turned and saw his boss, Henry Clark. The man in front of Arthur was old and his hair had whitened due to his age. “Don’t jump, Arthur, please.”

“Why shouldn’t I?” Arthur asked slowly, taking a step away and sitting down against the glass casing holding the beacon, his feet hanging off the side.

Henry sat down before gathering his thoughts. “Do you know the history of this lighthouse, Arthur?” Henry asked, starting the plea for his employee’s life.

“No, I never paid much attention to history, it was never really my strong suit,” Arthur answered.

“Well, this lighthouse wasn’t always here-”

“I guessed that much, it looks to be human-made. Humans weren’t always here.”

Henry chuckled nervously at the deadpan sarcasm. “I meant in this spot. When the lighthouse was opened in 1874, it used to be somewhere over there.” He pointed towards the edge of the bluff before continuing, “The Mohegan Bluffs have been eroded for years by the ocean. They have been reduced by almost 250 feet since the opening. The lighthouse was in danger of being swept into the ocean, this was in 1983 so it was before I started working here. A group called the Block Island Southeast Lighthouse Foundation tried to raise the two-million dollars for the lighthouse to be relocated. Eventually, in 1993, The Coast Guard was called in and moved this entire lighthouse three-hundred and sixty feet back from the ocean.” He felt like he was giving a tour and silently cursed himself for not being able to be more human.

“Why? What’s so special about this lighthouse?” Arthur interjected.

“Well, it’s expensive to build a brand new one and this lighthouse is just, special.”

“Isn’t it expensive to move one?”

“You’re missing the point of the story, its sentimental value. We, don’t let anything, lighthouse or person, fall into the sea here. Rhode Island is special, the people in Rhode Island are special. It saves everything it can with all the might and resources it can possibly manage. Let me do the same thing for you. Yes, you have problems, but we all have problems. I’ll help you if you let me, Arthur.” Henry stood up and gave out his hand to Arthur. Arthur took it slowly after hesitating for a moment, breathing slowly, wiping a tear from his eye. Henry helped Arthur up and walked down the winding steps to the ground floor and out the door.

“I-I d-don’t know why I-,” Arthur started, choking on his sobs as he stood alone on the lawn as Henry locked the door again. “I’m sorry that I-.” He tried again but failed.

“You don’t need to be sorry for anything,” Henry said with a sudden anger that he immediately felt bad for when he looked at Arthur’s young face. The anger was lost quickly.

Silence fell and Arthur spoke after a moment. “I-I’ll see you again in the morning?”

“Take the day off. Get better Arthur,” Henry said quietly. Arthur smiled sadly, wiping his wet eyes and escaped to his car, to *home*.

. . . . .

Dell welcomed Arthur at the door of the house with a cacophony of barks and whimpers. His tail wagged with the excitement and love only a dog can show. Arthur patted Dell on the side and picked the puppy up, cradling the small dog in his arms. The man, with his dog, went to the queen-sized bed upstairs and fell into the sheets, piling them upon himself so he was sufficiently covered. He fell asleep holding Dell, glad he at least had him as a friend, and that fact would never change throughout the highs and the lows. Regardless of what had and would happen, Dell would be there, and at least for that starry night, that was enough.



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# Give Me the Directions!

By Diego Cante

**D**o you want to know how to get to the place that I consider “home”? Well, today you will find out each and every step of the way with me. First of all, take a right to get out of the parking lot at St. Patrick’s and get onto the right side of the road. Now, just keep going straight down Smith Street and you will pass the State House. Soon enough you will be on North Main street. As you go through North Main Street, you will pass places like Benny’s, which has a big sentimental value to me. I still remember when I went to buy tires with my dad at Benny’s when I was little and thought it was the coolest thing ever. After you have passed L.A. Fitness, you are officially in Pawtucket.

As soon as you get into Pawtucket, you will have two lanes to pick from, the left or the right lane. Take the left lane to avoid “el trafico duro de la tarde” (like my mom says) and go straight down Main Street. My mom always talked about “el trafico duro de la tarde” as being rough traffic and she always says that little phrase when she is trying to get somewhere without much time and has to drop me off at home. Once you have gone straight down Main Street and passed businesses like the car wash and the Little Sisters of the Poor, you will have to take the right lane and go onto the other side of Main Street. Then, you will have to keep going straight again until you get to “La Funeraria” and take a left. She always made jokes about how “La Funeraria” was haunted and used to say that she would move into it if they ever sold it. Now that you have taken a left, go down the memories of getting together on Christmas and eating “pasteles with arroz con gandules” and the moment when I had my first surprise birthday party when I was two years old. During Christmas in our household, my family eats “pasteles with arroz con gandules”

and we have a great time stuffing ourselves with all the delicious food made by mom that year. Those green banana stuffed meat pastries with rice and pigeon peas is something that I always look forward to each Christmas.

Once you have passed these memories, keep going down the street of intense soccer games on Saturday and get to the red stop sign that has a sticker of a soccer ball on it. I placed that sticker there three years ago, but I remember someone ended up taking it down around a week later and never seeing it again. It was a humid and sunny day when I placed the soccer sticker on the stop sign. I passed by the stop sign after a long day at school; I carried a sticker of a soccer ball on my hand that my first-grade teacher, Ms. Megan, had given me. Then, I had the best idea ever. How cool would it be to stick the sticker on the sign and see how long it would last on it? Without hesitation, I began

to place the sticker on the stop sign and even tried to measure it so that it would not end up looking crooked. Every single day after school I would pass by the stop sign to see if the sticker was still there and I would smile, because for me, the sticker symbolized that I was growing up. Approximately one week later, I do my regular routine of coming back home and passing the stop sign, when I saw that the stop sign looked as empty as the desert. I looked everywhere around the block to see if the sticker was still around, but I was not able to find anything. At that moment, I began to cry because I had started to grow a connection to that sticker and it had just gotten ripped from me. To this day I still don't know who ended

.....  
She felt her soul pull  
wickedly from her  
eyes, ripping her in  
two, and then, there  
was only red and the  
shrieking laughter  
of insanity.  
.....

up taking it, but I know that the stop sign will always be there as a symbol of the week it had the sticker placed on it.

Now, pass by the house that is always silent like a ghost and go into “la entrada de reversar”. My mom calls it “la entrada de reversar” (which means “the driveway where you only back up” in English) because she always puts the car in reverse to get a parking spot. Shortly after that, walk up the three set of stairs that clank and make a loud screech and open the two doors that contain the wrath of lions in front of you. You will notice that there is a lot of noise upstairs, which is why I call this house the “the wrath of lions.” As soon as you start to go upstairs, you will be able to smell the scent of “arroz con habichuelas con carne” that my mom is making as well as my mom laughing or screaming in the background. Whenever she is making that much noise, just know that she is probably talking to my family. Finally, place your foot on the mat that feels like a piece of a cloud and knock on the door. Standing in front of you will be a lady smiling at you with her home phone on her ear. In general, it only takes about 15 minutes to get to this place, and it is the place where I can be myself. I hope you enjoyed coming to the place I call my “house” and visit it soon!



*Phyllis Moura treating some boys from Fox Point Recreation Center  
after winning 1st prize in drama play, 1953.*

Lou Costa Collection on Fox Point. Image courtesy of Providence Public Library.

# Dive in

by Qwin Cute

I am on the RIPTA bus, as I have been so many times, leaving Kennedy Plaza. This time, it feels different somehow. I feel my shoulders set back in a more confident way. I am not sulking in the shadows of the people around me anymore; I'm right at their level, tall and proud. It used to feel weird having to stand in front of someone, because I always just made it on, and there was no room left. This time, I felt proud to stand. I still know that this is far from done, but at least it's a good start.

I, Emily Hayes, walk into the East Side YMCA on Monday, November 6 to hopefully and finally achieve my goal.

I beep my card at the front desk and give a little wave to the kind lady while she is midconversation. She gives a pitiful wave back. Then I rush into the locker room, keeping my head down but peeking up once in awhile and giving an awkward smile to anyone who sees. Because I know I am just a shadow again, following the same routine, not breaking it. I know I need to break it. I quickly run into a changing stall and come out in no time, not even stopping to grab the rest of my things. I scurry into the shower room, get a quick rinse, and I go to open the pool room door. Something stops me. A lurching feeling in my stomach pulls me back from the door handle. I don't waste any time. I take a deep breath and put my hand on the wet, cool, and calming door. A strong sense comes over me: not to go in, not to take another step, not to face it another time. But I know I have to go through with it this time. But how could I? No, I am doing this no matter what. I push forward and step into the room. I see the pool... there it is... there... it ...is. It's like a huge whirlpool, dragging me in and forcing me out at the same time. And in the process, I'm getting banged up over and over for what



seems like an eternity. This was the place, this was the place it happened, right here in front of me. I start shaking thinking about her, thinking about how I lost her. My legs keep shaking and won't stop. Then, it's almost as if I can feel her, lifting me up and calming me down. I slowly set my towel down on the bench, making sure to have it perfectly folded like I used to. I feel an overwhelming feeling come over me again, and I can't push it back, not alone at least. Don't cry Emily, don't cry I tell myself. I can sense her telling me the same thing, don't cry. I know what I want is on the other end of that whirlpool, but I can't let my feelings take control. I know one thing: every time what I love ends up being the thing that breaks me down. This time, that isn't going to happen. I am not going to let the thing that was breaking me stop me from doing the thing I live for, swim. But how can I just let go of her, most of all here. No. It has been too long. I drop everything and run, the edge of the pool doesn't stop me. I keep going, right into the pool. I don't even notice the people chasing after me, or the lifeguards who felt like family. No. It is just me and the water. Then boom, it hits me like a ton of bricks. As I am completely surrounded by water, not moving, just still, I notice something that I hadn't realized before. I want everything to come back to me, even though I never admitted it. I just didn't want to seem like the person who wasn't as polite or as good as everyone else. I am human, and humans need and want greedily all the time. I am now wanting something. So there, I said it, I want everything back. By jumping in, I realized that what I had was close to everything. I still have my sister's happy spirit, and I still have swimming. Now I am facing the truth. My sister drowned a year ago, right on this day, right at this time. I was scared of that, but I'm not any more. I feel as if the whole world is lifting the weight that has been on my shoulders. In my head, it is finally clear and quiet. I break the surface, air surrounding me. I lift my arm and glide it through the water. Just like that, I'm swimming.

# Retrace of Steps

by Dominique DiSpirito

“Why now?”

He’s leaning against the doorway watching me pull my jacket on, tie my shoes, as if I’ve never been so sure of something in my life. But the truth is, I’m not. I wish I could answer his question, but the truth is I don’t know why myself. I know where I have to go, I know why I have to go, but I don’t know why it has to be now. It just does.

“I wish I could tell you.” I’m unusually quiet, even serious. “I really do. I’ve had this feeling in the back of my mind for the past few days, telling me to go. I’ve suddenly been bombarded with memories of that house, of her. I mean, it’s been ten years without her in my life. Ten. Years. I haven’t even told her — I’m getting married next month and my mother doesn’t know.”

“Rhode Island is more than three hours away and it’s already dark.” He’s using his analytical, matter-of-fact voice. “Are you sure it can’t wait until morning?”

“It can’t.” I stand up and brush the cat fur off of my jacket. “What if I’m getting this feeling because it may be my last chance to see her? She’s my mom and I haven’t even called her. Let alone, told her that I’m engaged.”

“You had your reasons.”

“And she had hers. But two valid points don’t make a conclusion.”

“Fair point.” He reaches for his jacket with a relaxed determination.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going with you.” Again, matter-of-fact.

“No. I need to do this one by myself.”

That doesn’t even slow him down. I’m watching him pull on his jacket like there’s no question as to whether or not he’s going.

"You can't come with me."

"And you can't go without me."

I stare at him, his face gently creased by that smirk that he wears when he's waiting for me to realize he's right. I know he is.

"You can't come in with me, though. She'll..."

"I don't have to go in with you." He opens the front door.

I go out the door and wait on the landing as he locks the door. I look up at the sky like I always do, close my eyes and take a deep breath of the crisp November air. Slowly, I release the air and open my eyes. The stars are beacons tonight, piercing through the fabric of night with their bright white light.

"Okay." He turns from the door and places a kiss on my cheek.

"Alright, let's go."

We get in the car and I pick up my phone to put in the GPS coordinates. My fingers fight against the numbers, doubting whether or not I remember it correctly. The synthetic voice urges me onward, back to Rhode Island, back to mom. I get the car on the road before I can think twice about what I'm doing.

This neighborhood is all I've known since I left the university. Yet even now, as I leave the little apartment I have made my home to go back to my hometown, it all seems foreign again. Like the first time I saw this town about ten years ago.

*My mother, brother and I drive up in our banged-up SUV packed full of trash bags of my clothes, books, and blankets. The three-hour trip has been utterly silent besides a few aggravated complaints from the backseat. Mom sits at the steering wheel without a word. Her eyes are lost in more than the road, leaking streams without a sound. When we finally get to the college campus, we heave the bags into the dorm room that would now be my home. My brother gives me a quick, over-and-done-with hug before wandering back to the car.*

*My mother hugs me as if she'll never see me again, her face red and puffy from the tears. "I love you." The words are distorted by the sorrow of goodbye, yet they feel sincere this time.*

*A bitterness settles in my heart as I repeat them back, hollow as an echo. "I'll be fine," I whisper as she pulls away. "I promise." Then they leave.*

His voice from the passenger seat brought me back to the present. “Hmm?”

“I asked you when you talked to her last.”

I have to think about this. My brain flicks through the weekly phone calls that slowly became monthly, then yearly.

“I think it was about three years ago.” My voice is low as my heart revolts against me. I can’t believe I haven’t heard my mother’s voice in three years.

“Hmm.”

There’s a long silence — I can sense a hesitancy about him.

Three years without a single phone call. I go back to my senior year of high school, the dozens of arguments that framed my life. Her voice is so vivid, the memory still so raw. For a moment, the car and freeway melt into a scene blurred with neglect.

*I can barely keep my eyes open as I read chapter after chapter. Laws of kinetics... polymerase... “I think to him they were all my sons.” Test tomorrow. Homework tonight. My brain hurts. I want to sleep. I stumble into the kitchen after a shift of putting books away, smiling synthetically, exhausted.*

*“I’m going to need you to wash the dishes, clean the bathroom upstairs, vacuum...” Every item in the list unravels another stitch of my composure. I break, hysterics. Too much, too much. “I think you can manage to help me with the chores and still get done your work before school.” Time? Less than twelve hours left until school. Test tomorrow. Homework tonight.*

Different time, different place.

*“What do you want from me!?” she screeches. “Everything I’m doing doesn’t work, so just tell me what you want me to do.”*

*“It doesn’t work like that, mom. I just want you to care about what I’m doing, what I’m achieving.”*

*“I do care. You know I care, you’re just blind to it.”*

*“But I don’t, mom.”*

*“Then you need to wake up.”*

I hear the movement as he adjusts himself to a more comfortable position in the passenger seat. He’s finally figured out how to phrase the question.

“How do you know something hasn’t — happened?”

“I don’t.”

Immediately, my tear ducts betray me. The street lights become fuzzier than usual. A gunshot I never heard goes off in my head, bringing me back to the cold that digs into my bones.

*“Tell me this is a joke.” My mother’s voice, borderline hysteric calls to me from her bedroom. I pull my shoes off with an eye roll and lung-emptying sigh. She’s standing in the doorway of her bedroom releasing short and unsure laughs. Entering the bedroom I see blood. I don’t want to believe it. It’s a joke. No, it’s not. It’s my father’s body on their bed, the handgun that glistens in the sheets confirms it. The screams, I’m not sure whose, pierce through my eardrums and straight into the cavity of my mind, reverberating off the walls. They subside and I’m calling 911. Then I’m sitting on the kitchen floor holding mom close as she screams for her husband, for my father.*

No more. Not now. I close my eyes briefly as more tears threaten my vision.

“Do you need me to drive?” He intertwines his fingers in mine as the first tear falls.

“No.” I breathe in. Five, four, three, two, one. I breathe out. Another tear falls and my vision clears. “I’m okay.”

“I don’t think you are.” He’s concerned now.

“I will be, I promise.” I kiss his hand before letting it go. I turn the heat on to chase away the lingering sensory memories. He skims through the radio as the exits fly past, changing the topic of discussion to something silly in an attempt to get me to laugh, to make me happy. My mind won’t give in to him this time. Once there’s a break in the conversation, it takes its chance.

*“Your family has been put in a very difficult situation.” The stranger speaks gently as if afraid to break my mother and me with their words. “Before you were a family of four. Where your husband talked to your daughter, then to you and vice versa. Now you two have to learn how to talk to each other.” They sit across from me and my mother, staring at me with pity. We sit in that office, listening, arguing, raising our voices.*

*In the car ride home the air is thick with tension. "You wanted this," she says quietly. "I didn't think there was anything wrong."*

*"Are you listening to me?"*

*His voice is a gentle whisper. He knows I'm not.*

*"I'm sorry."*

*"Don't be. I'm just wondering what's going on in that head of yours that is strong enough to defend against my stupidity."*

*"Memories."*

*"Ah. Well here's one right now." He gestures to the sign that reads: "Welcome to Beautiful Rhode Island."*

*I smile for a moment. Just a moment.*

*My brother and I are in the back of the banged-up Jeep Grand Cherokee with a giant cooler of snacks and soda between us. We are bouncing in our seats pretty much the whole time with sheer excitement. Mom and Dad are in the front seats blasting Queen's Greatest Hits. My mom surfs the freeway air with her free hand outside of the window. My dad sings to the track with extreme drama directed in the rearview mirror to ensure that we're laughing at his antics. When night comes, the air is crisp and rejuvenating against my skin. There is no music playing, but my heart is still flying.*

*My father talks to me about how he killed my uncle's character in their latest roleplaying campaign. "Oh, here comes the sign. Quickly, wake your brother or he'll be left in Massachusetts."*

*"I don't know if I want to now." I giggle as I jostle my brother awake.*

*"Here we go, kids. Three, two, one..."*

*"Thump-thump."*

*"Thump-thump?" His voice tells me he's making that slightly confused, slightly intrigued face.*

*"It's what you're supposed to do when you cross over the state lines or you're stuck in that state."*

*"Interesting."*

*The smile lingers on my lips.*

*"You're smiling." He's smiling, too. "What is it that finally got you out of your head?"*

*"Happy memories. Remember that picture I showed you of the water ride?"*

"The one where you had Pippy-Longstocking braids?"

"Oh, hush." I giggle mildly. "We don't talk about that."

"Yes, I remember."

"I was just remembering that day."

The freeway slowly narrows into a two-lane road. Trees line both sides of the road so thickly it seems that the forest never ends. The stars shine like LEDs against the uncontested darkness. A single green sign is nestled between two trees. Its white lettering regards me with familiar eyes.

"Welcome home, it's been a long time." The cobwebs in my brain are slowly clearing. My hometown has been preserved in images that had blurred over time. The images are being brought to life with every jolt of my car on the broken road. I shut my phone off as instinct promises safe travel to my destination.

"Do you think she's still at the house?"

"If she's alive, she's at the house."

"How can you be so sure?"

"My mother always dreamed of owning a house." I turn on to the street I know so well. "She had lived in an apartment for 15 years and the landlords refused to let her do anything with it. When we moved into the house in 2012, it was her dream come true. When my father died, she fought for the right to that house with all she had. It was one of her personal dreams that had come true and she wasn't going to lose two of her dreams." I pull the car over to the curb and put it in park.

"Is this it?"

"Mhmm."

The house gazes out at me as if it was seeing me for the first time again, hauling boxes and furniture into its doors. I was so thrilled that I could hang whatever I wanted on the walls that I drew dozens of pictures and even bought frames for them. The lights are on in the upstairs windows and in the kitchen. The blinds are shut so that I can't see anyone in the house.

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"I have to do this by myself."

"Alright. I'm here if you need me."

"I know." Simply touching the door handle sets my heart racing. I feel like I'm going to be sick.

"You can do this." He rests his hand on my shoulder for a moment.

All I can manage for now is a slight nod. I open the door in a swift motion, like pulling off a band-aid. I take a deep breath and stride to the front door. There's still no buzzer. From somewhere inside the house I hear someone singing. After a few minutes, I hear a bunch of people talking. She must be watching her singing competitions again. I guess some things never change.

Three knocks. Hard enough so that my knuckles are red. My heart feels like it's gnawing at my chest, vying for a chance to get out into the free air. The tv is silent. I want to run, but my hand knocks again. The door opens slightly.

"Who is it?" Her voice, my God, it has been so long.

"Your daughter." The words feel foreign on my tongue.

There's a deafening silence as she opens the door. She looks worn. Her hair is lighter, and lines have formed as markers of her expressions. There's a flicker of relief in her eyes before the film of grief, of hurt sets into them.

"Why now?"



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# Toast Crumbs

by Jane Freiman

It was still dark when she awoke, hours before the light would set a yellowish cast on the bed. A little table sat beside it, a stack of dusty books, a hairbrush with some dark brown strands, a chair by the opposite wall and a small closet with all her wearable items inside—except for some red socks (those were on the floor). She dressed quickly in the dark, slipping into black wide-leg pants and a white t-shirt and smoothing her hair into a low bun. Sneakers and coat on and grabbed the small backpack from the bedpost. Wallet, key, phone, a crisp chef coat emblazoned with “Gâteaux NEW YORK,” water bottle. A quick glance in the plastic-rimmed mirror and she left the room.

She pulled her coat collar up around her cheeks. When the wind blew she could smell her rose-scented face cream. Her face was white from the cold, but her cheeks were flushed pale pink, as if she was a woman in a Rococo painting. Her dark brown eyes were underlined by deep, purple creases that seemed to offset any remaining twinkle. The sidewalks were still empty, the shops closed. The shelves of fruit and pastry and cans of juice had been brought inside. The train tracks above shook and rattled. But it wasn't a rattle. It was a crashing, jarring tumble of steel colliding with steel. She didn't flinch. When she arrived at the station it smelled of char. Its heat was strangely pleasant, hitting her icy face like a wall. A brown rat almost blended in with the platform.

*Kachunk kachunk.* The train descended into darkness. Her arms were wrapped tightly around her bag, clutching it to her belly. Staring. A poster. Across the aisle there. It was an ad for an allergy medication. A woman beamed and pranced in a field of wildflowers.

*It was spring. May first and the annual village Victoria Sponge competition was today. She had been preparing for weeks—greasing*

*tins, mixing batter, making jam. Her cupboard was full of curved jars stacked upon each other—a deep deep pink, barely pink at all.*

The F lurched to a stop and she slid an inch on the orange plastic seat. An hour had passed, and it was her stop. She stepped into the largely empty station. A red and white sign, a warning about the third rail, was mounted on beautiful mosaic tiles. Emerging into the world again—oops taxi coming up fast—she crossed the street and made her way to work. The bakery windows were aglow like orange marmalade. And just look at the tea cakes today. All organized neatly in rows. Candied fruit like gems. But back to the industrial kitchen. She sighed. Dressed precisely and rolled up sleeves. Bag and coat into a little cubby with “P A L O M A” printed on a white sticker. Flour flour flour. Mixed and twisted and shaped. Her mind drifted as she kneaded the soft, cool dough.

*The layers of sponge were in the oven now. They were starting to rise into golden pillowy discs. She was creaming butter and sugar and a little bird sat on the windowsill offering songs of encouragement. The table was laid with gingham cloth, and a wooden spoon sat parallel to the lines. A shiny silver bowl was next to it, but she wasn't sure why. She didn't need that anymore. Okay, back in the cupboard.*

Hours later, she left the city and got off at Coney Island. Outside, women were selling mangoes in the shape of flowers. She felt in that moment that there had never been any greater artistry. How was it that Monet's house was its own museum—which, naturally, she had visited on her semester abroad three years ago—yet these women stood on the cold street, in relief against a backdrop of graffiti-covered cement? It was getting dark now. She passed an old woman walking her dog. Neither of them smiled. Now she smelled like sourdough and yeast and dead roses (she thought she had read that once). She bought some dinner things at Key Food and went home to her apartment in Brighton. She showered, microwaved her dinner, and crumpled onto the couch. In her dreams there was a funny creature dancing around the bakers as they presented their cakes for judging. Hmm, yes, it was a strawberry! All cartoonish and pure scarlet with little yellow seeds

and friendly eyes. Woah...strange, she thought, as she awoke to the aggressive clanging of her alarm clock.

*She lost the competition. Some old British lady won it again I guess. Paloma went to Waitrose and bought a "Waitrose Essentials Victoria Sandwich Cake." Mmmmmm, yes, she thought. This was better.*

The next day was much the same. And the one after that. She contemplated her future mostly. Another two years and she could begin to work with chocolate—fluid, enticing, but far messier than it seemed and truly a pain to scrub out of a white chef coat. In five, she could do pastry. Every day would begin with first choux, then puff, and layer upon layer of dough flanked with thin sheets of butter for the croissants, the palmiers, the Kouign-amanns. And repeat. If she was to go about things the right way—and, generally, she did—it would be another ten until she could open her own bakery (that's what all this was for, right?). Ten years! Ten years. Ten years ago, she was standing in a bright kitchen with her grandmother, peering on dutifully as she was lectured for hours about the proper rites of British baking. Her Gran had grown up in Yorkshire, and she held a deep respect for the history and tradition of classic bakes. At Christmas, there was the steamed "plum" pudding (really more currants nowadays) and golden, crumbly fruit cake with bits of peel, raisins, and an icing shell. This was how it was supposed to be: warm, inviting, personal. And sweet! Bread is wonderful, but it's just not the same. In culinary school, just a few blocks from *Gâteaux*, she had formed a deep appreciation for it, but she had never imagined spending every day bent over a sticky ball of empty dreams. Ah, what was she blabbering on about? The train had almost reached the station. The distinct rooftops of Brooklyn slid by in a gray-beige blur. She rearranged her coat and bag in preparation for another Saturday night of silence and microwaved mashed potatoes.

The next day was her day off. Once again, she awoke to darkness, even though the windows bore neither curtain nor shade. Sleeping habits are just that. Her room was small and cramped. It was nestled between the second bedroom and the little kitchen. She didn't see her roommate much at all, because of their opposite work schedules,

but she often spotted her small grey cat. It slinked into the kitchen where Paloma sat hunched over eating a yogurt. A white mug was on the table. It held within its porcelain walls some jasmine tea that told of places far away, of lives far dreamier. The tea was getting cold, but she carried it into her room anyway. It sat untouched on the wooden desk. There beside it was the beginning (and end) of a wax object collection and a spiral-bound notebook. The sparse room, with whitewashed walls and blue carpeted floors, held the remnants of another time. Slowly, piece by piece by piece, she removed the souvenirs of her former life.

On this Sunday, she un-stuck a picture from the wall: a postcard of a Thiebaud painting, thirteen cakes in pastel rows, the paint thick and frosty in appearance, like icing had been spread over it. She remembered going to the museum the day she bought it. It slipped into the trash can without a whisper. Then she lay down on the bed and curled up on her side. Her heart felt like a stone that pulled her forward towards the mattress. She could feel its quilted pattern on her ribs; despite being surrounded by treats all day, she was only getting thinner.

*The cakes! They were HUGE. She stood between two that had to be at least ten feet tall. She was in a purplish-white room, surrounded by the thirteen cylinders and truncated cones of sponge and cream elevated on round white discs. The best one was at the back right from where she stood; it was just half of a cake, with the opened side facing her. She imagined it like a cutaway diagram in a biology textbook (figure 3.14, "Cake"). The four layers were clearly defined, and they alternated with the very thinnest stripes of chocolate icing. The cake's half-cylinder shape was precise, comforting. The noise of a cash register dinging made Paloma turn around. She heard coins clinking and several people talking at once, their conversations intertwining. She realized that it was not a room at all she was standing in, but the display case at Gâteaux. The shop bustled with customers. It could only be a Sunday afternoon.*

And, thus, she whiled away the hours of the day. Soon it became dark again and the objects on the walls—the letters from Europe, the card from the Paris bakery where she spent her junior year, the

disposable photos with college friends—turned to mere outlines, like ghosts of the past.

The next morning came suddenly. The only signal of its arrival was the same alarm, the same three *briings* over and over. When she arrived at work, Paloma began right away. It was nearing Christmas time and the hordes of people at the front of the shop seemed to be multiplying daily. They were tourists, jostling for some superfluous decadence (or maybe just its photo), and locals, picking up their usual overpriced goods. She thought there might be some interesting comment about commercialism to be made here, but she was too tired to piece the words together. Instead, she dreamed of Christmas Eve.

*A scene of warmth and joy orbited around a twinkling tree. The ornaments that adorned it were antiques, carefully chosen and preserved by generations. She noticed her Favorite One; it twinkled like it was winking. All this was diminished next to the simple grandeur of the kitchen. Tray upon tray went into the oven dotted evenly with thin, precisely cut shapes of dough, each one a neat, squashed-down prism. When they emerged again they were slightly puffed, a bit organic. The gingerbread people got an outline of pure snowdrift-white icing. The sugars got a sprinkle of sugar (whose red and green dye stained your fingertips), and Rudolph always, always, had a Red-Hot perched imperfectly on the end of his nose. It had begun to melt a little in baking but—*

No, it was too much. No. This was unsustainable. She would quit. Maybe next week? Maybe.

The rest of the week passed by. Each day was a perfect reflection of the one before. When her next day off arrived, Paloma was dejected.

Then something peculiar happened. She did something she hadn't done for a long while. Something very scary. She made a friend. Her name was Olive and they met in a thrift store. It was one of the ones that Paloma was morally opposed to—so expensive, so full-of-itself, and frequented by wannabe artists who spent their summers in Newport—but her old coat was wearing at the elbows and she secretly loved all the falsified, conventional unconventionalism. Maybe she didn't "love" it, but she sure lapped it up like all the rest.

For, what was authenticity? One could pretend, with simple dress and sparse lives, but there is a commercialite within all of us. She thought all this as she approached the counter and took out her wallet.

Behind the counter was Olive. She was wearing clear, round glasses under a short fringe of red hair. They were very good glasses and Paloma told her so. They began talking and later that evening they met for dinner under the warm glow of a noodle shop window. Light sifted through murky depths of broth. Paloma praised the consistency and craftsmanship of the noodles and Olive sketched the whole scene in her notebook. It was all very simple, really. Olive had dreamed of being a designer, had gone to Parsons, established a brand, the whole bit. Now, she was selling clothes instead of making them.

It is true, that old overused adage: misery loves company. And in that commiseration, nestled deep deep within its leaves was a little oblong stone the color of melted butter: solace. Nothing changed but this. When Paloma prepared for work the next day, she was not content. It was dark in her small room, and the fatigue still weighed on her face. The skin on her hands was cracked and bleeding from being washed so much. But she thought maybe—socks on, hair tied back—she would work another week, at least.

*A simple scene. A table covered in brown cloth. A pale blue plate and a slice of whole wheat toast. Crumbs littering the surface, the last remains of what had been.*

# Deeper Water

by Eva Haan

Gravel crunching underneath the tires of the car was synonymous with listening to music as the sun beat down onto the shimmering sea, right across the gravelly parking lot and over the broken sea wall. The wall itself was a beauty in its own right: covered in growing seaweed vines and water-corroded stones, which shimmered with the sandy ocean spray. Everything was tall and smooth and painted like the finest watercolor on a stark white canvas. Beautiful, wide, and very heavy-looking waves crested into white crowns and then fell down into the sea, their peaks curling back over into their faces and sending frothy, salty spray into the air. People were everywhere along the water, their bodies rising and falling with the movements of the waves.

Jeordie stuck his hand out of the window and felt the cooling air press up against it, flying through his fingers and blowing his hair back from his face. The car then slowed to make the turn into the lot, the small bump from the ground bruising his arm as it bounced and hit the hot surface of the car outside the window. He recoiled his arm and examined the small red bump, before hearing again the crashing of the waves and forgetting. He watched as the signs flew past the window, their metallic fronts shining on the letters, reading *Narragansett Beach* in black. They pulled up into a small parking spot, their tires spinning slowly and spraying the rocks underneath the car. Jeordie clicked at the door lock impatiently until it finally popped open, allowing his small frame to leap the foot to the hot ground.

Without shoes, the asphalt was scorching and hurt the bottoms of his feet. Every small pebble between his toes made him ache even more for the sand. He squinted into the sunlight, tapping his hands against the window as it rolled back up. His mother reached around to close the door and then moved his hands out of the way for him.



"Jordan! Let's go!" She encouraged him, as he sat, intimidated by the rushing water. An especially large wave crested right next to the sea wall and spiked saltwater into the air. It rained lightly down on him, as his mother pulled him away from the car and down the sandy steps into the beachfront.

Once they had reached the softest part of the sand, she spread out the blanket and ushered him towards her. The glint of the sky and water on her sunglasses was blinding to Jeordie. He looked away, but shambled towards her. Jeordie's mother dug into the contents of her beach bag, and tapped on the hard plastic of something, and proceeded to pull it out. She opened up her palm and squeezed some sunscreen onto it. After, she carefully lathered everything onto Jerodie's bony shoulder blades. He winced and shivered.

"Mom. It's cold."

"I know, sweetie."

"Stop - Mom!"

"It's much better than a sunburn, Jordan."

Jeordie pulled away as she began to wipe her hands. "Be careful, Jordan! The waves are big today!" Jeordie nodded absentmindedly, not taking anything to heart, and charged towards the surf. He happily hopped into the water, splashing his arms through the seaweed and foam as he waded out further. He loved the cool feeling and the weightlessness that came with swimming; it almost realized his dream of flying. As soon as his feet left the ground, he began to paddle out.

Several times along his journey out to the sandbar, someone would wash into him and his small head of sandy-colored hair would be dunked under the water, taking the rest of him with it. He didn't need to hold his nose; he was a big kid. Opening his eyes under the water let him see only the murky, sand-swept ground and the legs of everyone else as they slid fluidly through the waves. He paddled out further still, staying under as the whites of a recently crashed wave rushed over his head. He was sucked back a little, and he pulled his head up, gasping. Out on the beach, his mom had stood up, and was jogging to the edge of the water. "Jordan, honey!" She called. "Are you alright?" Jeordie, still treading the water, raised his thumb and grinned. He saw her wave back and then return to her towel along the

water's edge. As soon as she was looking away, he rolled his eyes and submerged himself once again.

He found his way to the sandbar easily, avoiding some of the swimmers that were aggressively paddling past on their surfboards. His feet finally hit the silt-like raised platform and he stepped up onto the bar, watching the waves surge into the beach from his vantage point. There were a couple of other people there with him, but nobody paid him any attention. The waves rolled past him, crashing later. He was immune to their curling crests. He loved it out there. The person next to him let out a sharp cough, laughed, waved at his friends, and began to paddle towards the horizon. Looking out over the water, the glare was too sharp to see anything. His face was red with sunburn and salt rash. He glanced away as his eyes began to go red. When he looked back, however, he could barely see his mother, frantically waving him in. Jeordie tilted his head, raising his arms in confusion. When she remained making the same motion, he shrugged again and turned around. Once he was facing the horizon, he ducked his mouth and nose underwater serenely, letting the sun fall behind a cloud.

The glare was then gone from the ocean, and all at once, he saw what they were all looking at. He felt so alone all of a sudden, watching the people gathered in a clump, bobbing together. A huge, heavy-looking, deep blue wave slowly crawled towards them. As he watched, the whites of the wave crested slowly, allowing a few seconds where the people ahead of Jeordie rose over the wave, their heads bobbing like buoys during a storm.

Jeordie was stricken with the sudden realization that he hadn't thought far enough ahead. His nose whistled with every anxious breath, the clean salty air burning in his nostrils. He hadn't yet realized that he needed to be elsewhere to avoid the giant bearing down. He dove, but his hands hit the sand below him as he was too close to the sandbar. Then he felt the entire weight of the wave on his back, forcing him down into the sand and keeping him there.

There had never been stories on the news, or classes in school teaching him how to hold his breath. He just stayed put for a moment, darkness drifting lazily in front of him, a sharp contrast to the heavy, insanely strong mass of water collapsing straight onto the small of his

back. Not known to him, he had released the last of his air in a silent exhale under the surface. Realizing his mistake all too late, he took in a surprise gulp of salt water and began to feel his head pounding. He blindly groped at the murk for something material, but for all he knew, he was thirty feet deep and nowhere near the seafloor. Thirty agonizing seconds had to have passed as Jeordie sat under the racing foam, waiting for the pressure to lessen on his back. When he could bear it no longer, he kicked to the top to the best of his abilities. In a simple stroke of luck, his hand made contact with the whites above him. His face broke through the foam, which raged past his head and out behind him. His feet were no longer in contact with the sandbar, however. He had been rushed out past and into a small gully surrounded by rock walls. He coughed up the water, but failed to expel it all before it seeped into his lungs again and caused him to retch, his consciousness slipping away, his arms growing weak and letting him sink, again, down to the bottom.

Air rushed into his lungs like a balloon inflating. All of a sudden, there was no pressure at all. He was breathing so easily, he felt hyper-aware. His eyes were the thing that was lagging behind the rest of him. He slowly lifted his eyelids and blinked into the annoyingly bright lights that were shining right into his face. Air rushed down the back of his neck as he became aware of the sand that was caked all over him. The sky, despite the sun right above him, had dimmed quite a bit since he had gone swimming. Someone behind him said something muffled, and it became evident that his hearing was muted by quite a bit. Then his ears popped, and like a racing car speeding past him, everything swam into full comprehension. His mother was cradling his head, brushing his hair out of his face. Out over the greying ocean, huge waves twice the size of the one he had come into contact with battled for the highest peak. They knocked into each other, spraying mist over and booming when they fell, like boulders, back into the sea. But in short intervals, the water would come crashing down and stay that way, the foam dying into a white, lace-like pattern that blanketed the water. The blue sky was now white as well, small spots of water appearing all over the sand and out over the water. Jeordie was pelted by the rain and the wind, which tossed the salt and spray into his face. His mother picked him up, shouldered her bag, and started to make her way back to the car.

The wind whipped at Jeordie’s sand-coated face, causing his sunburn to sting. His lips felt nearly akin to numbness, his tongue bitter with the taste of salt. A towel was wrapped around his abdomen, his hands free to wipe his tearing eyes. No longer would he yearn for the ocean, not until he was much older. This he knew. He waved a tearful goodbye as the crashing surf grew further and further away from his car, his eyes growing fuzzy with water and the speed at which the car was moving. His mother glanced at him through her mirror, and gave him a grim smile. She, too, had a tear-streaked appearance, her face red.

“Are you cold, sweetie?”

Jeordie swallowed, and nodded. His mother obliged by pulling up on the window button, the quiet *whirrr* of the rolling glass and the *thunk* once it closed officially putting the ocean out of Jeordie’s mind. All he could see was his own face, staring back at him. He smiled sadly, and turned away.



*Picnic at Goddard Park, Lou Costa Collection on Fox Point.*  
Image courtesy of Providence Public Library.

# My Italian Grandmother

by Claire Hagerty

**M**y grandmother, Francine, has always been hardworking. She is smart, caring, kind, and passionate. She was an immigrant and came to America in 1920 from Italy. Now she lives in Cranston with me, her granddaughter. My name is Brooke. I am fourteen years old. I live with my grandmother and grandfather, Werner. My grandparents own a restaurant.

We live in a very big house on the “nice side” of Cranston. It was not always like this. My grandparents didn’t always own a restaurant. They didn’t always live in a nice house with me, and they weren’t always happy. The story of when my grandparents met, and how they came to this country all starts now.

“Brooke, I would like to show you something,” my grandma said, holding a large book.

“Okay, I’m coming,” I replied.

“You told me that you have a school project coming up that has to do with your family tree, so I brought this down from the old chest in the attic for you.”

“Wow, Grandma! Um...What is this?” I asked.

“It is the book with all our family history and records. It even has photographs,” she said.

She opened the book and we both looked inside. I saw black and white photographs of people, but I wasn’t sure who they were. They were beautiful photographs of brick streets, Italian foods, and New York City. I wasn’t sure why New York City was there, but I was curious, so I looked at some more pictures.

“Ah...,” Grandma sighed. “Those were the good days. Days when you didn’t have to worry about your granddaughter’s assignments,” she said with a chuckle as she wistfully turned the page.

“Grandma, how come you have a picture of the Colosseum?” I asked.  
“How come some pictures are of Italy and some are of New York?”

“Oh, looks like you’re going through the old Memory Book,” my grandpa said.

“That’s what it’s called? That’s pretty cool,” I said.

“Yes, we are. Werner, sit down and help me explain these pictures to Brooke.”

I got all comfy on the couch, because I knew this would take a while, and I wanted them to explain every picture to me.

“Ooh, pizza!” I pointed to a black and white picture of a pizza being taken out of an oven.

“Si, Brooke. Now hush, we will tell you a story.” Grandma started talking and her eyes lit up when she spoke. That’s how I know her stories are going to be good, when her eyes light up.

“So, when I was little, I lived in Italy. It was nice, but my family was very poor, so we could not afford much, even food to eat sometimes. Every day, I would say to my mother, ‘Mama, what will we have for dinner?’

“She would answer with a worried look on her face, ‘I don’t know, Francine. I will go to the garden and try to pick something. If we are lucky, the tomatoes will be ripe, and we could boil some for dinner,’ My brothers, Paulo and Fabrizio, and my sisters, Gabrielle, Andrea, and Agata were always hungry as well. We would each work a job to help pay for the family. Papa sure couldn’t do it because he usually came home late with a bottle in his hand from the liquor store down the street.

“Papa would work as a coppersmith, and he told us he had late hours and that was why he wasn’t coming home for supper. But we all knew it was because he was at the pub across the street called Mucca Ubriaco, which means the drunken cow. Papa was far from perfect. He would promise to try to do better raising us, so our poor Mama wasn’t so stressed out, but he never did. We all figured he didn’t want to be with us. He wanted to be with a drunken cow.

“One night, when my oldest brother, Fabrizio came home from his job, which was laying bricks on the streets, I walked outside to the well to get some water. I heard Papa yelling at Fabrizio.

“‘Why can’t you be there for the family? Why do you have to work all night on your drawings! You stupid boy!’ Papa said as he slapped Fabrizio’s head.

“‘No, Papa! Stop it!’ I said. ‘You! Get over here! You know you can’t be up this late!’ he yelled once again. Before I knew it, he was tossing me on his back and spanking me. I could feel his ashy hands touch my cold skin.

“‘That should teach you not to sneak off!’ he yelled to me.

“‘No! Papa! Stop! Don’t touch her! Don’t hurt Francine!’ Fabrizio looked like he was about to cry. He pulled me away from Papa’s hands. They both looked as furious as two taunted bulls.

“‘You have come home late for years now, Papa, and you have the nerve to continue to treat our family like this! I am the reason our family isn’t crumbling apart! Along with everyone else just trying to live off what small pay we have!’ Fabrizio cried, as a vein was bulging out of his neck.

“‘You think I do no work! I have come home late because I was working,’ my father said loud enough so the neighbors could hear.

“‘No, you haven’t. Stop lying. Stop doing whatever you’re doing. Just stop. You have only been a burden to this family,’ he told Papa.

“‘Francine, get inside,’ Fabrizio ordered.

“Fabrizio was the only person I completely trusted, so I listened to him. I would be horrified to witness anything else. The rest of that night, I didn’t sleep well at all. I could hear our pans crashing and glasses breaking in the kitchen. I could hear Papa screaming at Fabrizio and Fabrizio didn’t even speak, except to say that Papa would wake up the family.

“Through the years, Papa was abusive, mean, and selfish. One day, he said he would go to “work” and he didn’t come home for two days. Mama told me and my brothers and sisters not to worry about it, but when Mama checked Ubriaco Mucca, she found him in an alley right next to the pub, unconscious and with blood on his left eye.

“Mama brought him to Dulce, the woman who was the village nurse. Dulce said that he could not be saved. I lost my father when I was fifteen years old. Now, this was five years after his incident with Fabrizio, but that is one of my only memories of him. I remember he



was sometimes kind, but mostly when he was sober, which was only when I was very young.

“At the funeral, I saw a mysterious woman who looked to be younger than thirty. She was dressed in a black dress and wore high heels. She had bright red lipstick that looked like cherries on her skin. I asked Mama who she was. She didn’t know. At the part where you said things about the person who dies, the woman spoke, ‘Enzo was a loving husband to me. He had his flaws, but we all do I suppose.’

“Enzo was my father’s name. I tuned out the rest of the woman’s voice. I looked at my mother. She looked as if she had just seen a ghost. A single tear rolled down her face. ‘I’m sorry, Mama,’ I whispered to her.

“Andiamo! Let’s get out of here! I will not stand to pay my respects to a pig like him,’ Mama said, her voice trembling. Mama, Paulo, Gabrielle, Andrea, Agata, and I all left.

“Let’s spit on his coffin as we leave,’ Gabrielle said.

“Si! Si!’ everyone agreed.

So, we all spat on his coffin when nobody was looking. I heard Mama say under her breath, ‘Go to hell, Enzo.’

“Mama raised us all by herself for the rest of the years. It wasn’t that much harder than before, because Fabrizio had already left to go to art school in America, in Rhode Island. Mama was already used to being the only parent most of the time. Mama said that we all had to work extra jobs to support each other, on top of the work we already had. We could not go to school. She couldn’t feed us all by herself. I was thinking about working in the dressmaker’s shop, just to help the family pay the bills as well.

“At work and at home I was tired, but I had to keep going. I decided that I would save up my money to move to America and live with Fabrizio. I thought he would be making a lot of money. I could work too, so we could really afford to live somewhere fancy and not have to worry so much about food.

“I told Mama of my plans for America. She sobbed and said she would miss me, but it would be easier on her, knowing that I would be taking care of myself and I would do great things in a new country.

“I thought about what I was going to do in America, sometimes

for hours. One day, Mama and I were making pasta and soup and I thought, ‘That’s it! I will be a cook!’ It would be an excuse to eat really tasty things, and I would get paid money for it! I was so excited, but I needed to get a job first. I had to buy a boat ticket to go to America.

“Now, Brooke, we didn’t have airplanes back then, or at least ones that people could travel yet in big groups, so going anywhere far had to be by train, boat, or car. Cars were still pretty new, only a few years old. I had to save up so much and work so hard every single day, but I knew it would finally be worth it to go to America.

“So, before I knew it, I said ‘Ciao’ to my family and our neighbors, hugged them, and Mama even gave me a few things to bring from home. She gave me the memory book, photographs, and some American money she took from Papa when he was gambling with an American at the pub.

“The boat ride was brutal and crowded, but I looked at this memory book you are looking at, Brooke, to pass the time. It helped, but not enough. It took days to cross the ocean. Days!

“I had to wait around a long time, but on the boat ride, I met a kind and interesting man. He said his name was Werner. He talked with me throughout the rest of the ride. That man is your grandfather,” Grandma said to me, smiling and holding Grandpa’s hand.

“So anyway, back to the story. I was talking to him about how I wanted to cook to make a living, and he said he had a restaurant in Rhode Island. What were the odds of that happening? So, I talked to him more about my family, and he told me about his. Apparently, your grandfather was coming back from Rome from visiting his sister. He also said that he had a job opening at his restaurant, so I took it!

“We both arrived at Ellis Island. We almost separated. It was the most crowded place I had ever seen! People were speaking foreign languages, and everyone was rushing in there. I held Werner’s hand the whole time. Well, most of the time.

“There was one lady on the dock who was chasing after a bird that looked like a pigeon. She plowed right through us and I was separated from Werner. I couldn’t find him, and I felt like I was going to have a heart attack. My back started hurting and my whole

body was weak except for my brain that was racing and racing with worrisome thoughts and anxiety.

“Despite the pain, I kept searching for Werner. Now, I didn’t know that he would be my husband later on, but I was looking for him to keep going to Rhode Island, where I could work in his restaurant. I searched for him and searched. I was panicked with all the noise and the fear. I was thinking, what if he already left? I went to the balcony up the stairs that looked down below on everyone waiting to enter this country.

“Then, I saw Werner! He was also on the balcony, looking for me. I quickly met up with him.

“‘Francine!’ your grandpa called out to me as he rushed over. He looked relieved. ‘Never let go of my hand,’ I said.

“‘I won’t ever again, Francine. Now, let’s go talk to those officials so you can move to America.’

I smiled, and we went over to the New Arrivals area. The lines were extremely long, and I thought I would be there for days. I didn’t speak English very well, so Werner had to translate for me. I had to wait a very, very long time for the immigration officers to tell me that I could come to America.

“I rushed off with Werner and my small suitcase. We got in his brother’s car and it was a long drive from New York to Rhode Island. We talked the whole way there about his restaurant, and it took hours and hours to get there. His brother’s old rickety Ford was slow, but that allowed me to talk to Grandpa longer.

“We got to the restaurant in Cranston, and I didn’t have much experience cooking the foods they served, so I had to learn from Werner. He taught me so much like how to make gravy, how to look for the freshest seafood, how to cut meats, stuff like that. For the first time in my life, I wasn’t hungry.

“Shortly after my arrival, I visited Fabrizio in Providence, and I learned that he started a family of his own. I decided that I should too, so I married Werner. Fabrizio was the best man and Werner and I spent our honeymoon in Italy. We saved our money and bought this house, raised two wonderful children, and were blessed with you, Brooke, our special granddaughter. We lived happily ever after.”

# To Raise the Sea

by Violet Johnson

The late March wind swept past Charles and blew up his wispy grey hair. He pulled his coat tighter around himself as he looked over Galilee Harbor. The sun had yet to pull itself into the sky and, as far as Charles could tell from where he stood on the dock, there was no one out on the water. He lifted his old, battery-powered lantern outward as far as his arm could reach. The circle of artificial light did not glint off the fiberglass bodies and chrome finishing of speedboats, nor did any painted wooden hulls come into view that he had not already seen.

Charles checked his watch: 4:16. He grumbled and dropped his lantern to his feet. It landed on its side by the lure box and net that would surely go unused. Matteo was more of an idiot than he let on. Who went fishing at four in the morning when all the sensible men of the trade were still asleep in their beds? Charles had been a fisherman once, long ago, when he was a young man. He had been eager to make as much money as he could. On one particularly cold spring day, he had set out early to find fish, only to return with an empty net and a stuffed nose. Charles leaned down to gather his things. He was crazy for going out this early, especially at his age.

The familiar rumbling of Matteo's old truck shook Charles out of those thoughts. He pulled himself up and looked around, finding Matteo's one working tail light illuminating the left side of the uneven pavement. It stopped just short of the dock where Charles stood. With a high-pitched creaking sound the car door swung open to reveal Matteo, a dear friend. Charles couldn't make out Matteo's outfit in the dimness, yet he knew what it was: a blue baseball cap, his slightly bloodstained green shirt from when he worked in the back at "Big Belly Deli," a pair of paint-splattered jeans, and black

and yellow rain boots. The garish ensemble was Matteo's fishing outfit. It did more to show that he was not a fisherman than it did to keep him dry.

"You ready?" Charles called, not wanting to move from his spot.

Matteo gave a barely audible grumble and pulled his bait box and rod out of the back of the truck before responding, "Yeah, let's go catch ourselves some fish." Matteo closed the car door with another bang that would have startled nearby birds if any had been awake enough to hear it.

"I don't understand why we're out at this hour," Charles complained as he leaned down and gathered up his things,

Matteo answered as he made his way towards his friend. "We're going to catch all the best fish before those industrial scumbags do."

Charles sighed at that but he could not keep a small smile from working its way onto his face. Only Matteo would think of something like that—stealing fish from the big companies.

"I'm telling you, Charles. We're going to be eating like those corporate boys tonight. No more buying overpriced fish at the market." Matteo was by Charles' side now, bent a little in on himself from the chill but nothing else. "Christ! This cold does nothing for my knees," Matteo complained, bending over and rubbing the joint.

Charles frowned at that, just another reminder that Matteo was just as old as he was, and just as close to the end of his life. He shook his head. It was no good thinking like that. Jessica always warned him when she came for the holiday visits, her skin bright with the afterglow of California sun. As she always said, he was sixty, not eighty, and not dead yet.

"Here we go. Just dump your things in," Matteo instructed, pointing to the boat tied up by the side of the dock. It was named *The Lucky Lady*, though it was the most unlucky boat Charles had ever known. Of the four times Charles had sailed upon her she had crashed, run ashore, sprung a leak, and crashed again. Matteo had vouched for its safety before coercing Charles to come along on the early morning expedition. He had said something along the lines of, "Nothing went wrong last time so the curse must be broken." At the time it had been proof enough. Matteo, however, had the astounding

skill of making every defeat sound like a victory and every loss made him king of the world.

Perhaps if I was smarter, Charles thought to himself, I might stop trusting this fool. For a moment Charles was again sure that everything would go wrong, and both of them would drown in the black depths of Block Island Sound. When Matteo jumped in the boat and shot Charles his blinding smile, only visible by the lantern light, Charles was reminded of one universal fact: Matteo had been through Vietnam, liver cancer, and the death of his brother. Drowning would simply not be enough to keep him down. There was very little the world or Charles could do against Matteo—and that was just the way he liked it.

Charles boarded the boat slowly and carefully so he could avoid dropping into the icy water below. Matteo stirred the boat to life with a simple turn of his keys and they were off. *The Lucky Lady* was thirteen and a half feet of wood with an engine connected to the stern with as little effort as possible. The only reason she was allowed out on the water was that Matteo had saved the Marine Inspector’s daughter from a watery grave. Everyone in Galilee had sworn since the moment Matteo had first built her that someday she was going to maim someone. *The Lucky Lady* never had.

Matteo steered them around the docks and stationed boats until the pair found themselves on the open water. The area off Judith Point was a wonderful fishing spot for amateurs and a spot Matteo sailed right past. When Charles lifted his lantern he could make out the hulking mass of land to their right.

“Where are we going?” Charles sputtered as the boat drew further out into the black expanse of water. Matteo did not grace Charles with an answer. Instead he kicked up the speed of the boat to as high as it would go. Dread began to settle in the pit of Charles’ stomach, though he did his best to ignore it.

The boat finally came to a startling stop when the engine cut out. Charles was convinced that they were stranded without any power to get back. There was no land in sight, just ocean on all sides. Matteo quickly soothed over his friend’s fears.

“Alrighty! Here we are! Let’s try the net first?” Charles followed the suggestion and began untangling the net in the lantern’s glow. It was

twice as long as the boat, made of thin off-white fabric that would catch larger fishes in its clutches. Attached to the bottom of it were two weights that were countered by two buoys at the top corners of the net. Charles threw the net into the sea as Matteo baited both their hooks. After that, all there was to do was cast and wait.

For the next hour nothing bit, caught in the net, or rippled the water. There was only the soft lapping of waves on the hull of the boat. Charles felt himself starting to drift off. The boat rocked him like a mother's arms and the sound of the ocean was as peaceful as anything could be. Even Matteo's breath was a calming influence on Charles.

The only thing that kept him from falling into sleep was a factor he did not realize until it became impossible to ignore: the stench. Galilee always smelled of fish due to the processing plants. This smell, however, was not just dead fish—it was rot and blood. Charles' eyes shot open when his mind made the connection. He set down his rod and scrambled over to the other side of the boat where they had spread out the net. With aid of the white light, Charles could make out a substance in the water. Part of the dark ocean was now a glowing teal color that lapped up against the side of the boat.

Against his better judgment, Charles reached out to touch the spill. It was warm and stuck to his fingers like blood. When he raised his hand up to inspect the liquid it reminded him of the fatal accident at the Trident Seafoods plant. It was death, blood, and rotting fish. Charles did the only thing he could and pulled in the net.

Matteo had now noticed the smell and Charles' intentions. He moved to where Charles was and began pulling the net in with him. Something heavy was caught in it. Eventually, the two pulled in the twenty-eight-foot net which was coated with the same substance Charles had found.

"What do you... What do you think it is?" Matteo wondered aloud as they pulled up the end of the net and the something huge caught in it.

The thing rolled over and into the belly of the boat. There was barely enough room for the three of them. Charles and Matteo quickly skirted away from it and ended up crouched on opposite ends of the boat. From where Matteo sat by the engine he poked the

creature. It looked almost human, except for the scales and webbing that covered it. Its hands and feet were webbed as far as Charles could tell. It lay on its side, legs curled in and arms wrapped around its stomach. A dreadful thought came to the forefront of Charles' mind: they had just caught something toxic.

"I... I don't know," Charles replied after a long moment of staring at it. There seemed to be fins on the creature's forearms, just as blue-green as the creature's skin. There was a huge trio of gashes on its back that oozed out the odd liquid.

"Is it some kind of... Mermaid?" Matteo offered as he grabbed his fishing rod and poked the thing's legs. They were not connected in a tail but instead had fins similar to the ones on the creature's arms. They were half covered with dark blue scales. Only its stomach, upper legs, and face seemed to be free of them. On the back—where the gashes were—the scales seemed to have been twisted and ripped out.

"Whatever it is we need to dump it back where we found it," Charles warned and almost went to do so except for the fact that he dreaded to touch the creature. He shifted himself to get a full view of the thing's face. It had soft features, almost as if it was sleeping.

"No way! Do you know how much money we could make if we found proof of a real mermaid?"

No answer was needed. It would make them much more than a thousand early morning fishing trips ever could.

Charles sighed and kicked at the mermaid with his shoe. "We can't be sure that's what it is. No matter what it is we should take it to town and then inspect it in better light." Charles offered to which Matteo replied by nodding quickly.

Matteo turned the engine over. The loud noise cut through the icy air. It was that, and the sudden rushing of the boat, that prompted the crying.

For a moment, Charles was convinced the strange noise was the result of something clogging the engine—the strange liquid or the ends of the fishing poles. Upon closer inspection, the noise was coming from the creature. Charles quickly withdrew the fishing rods before going to the creature's body. Matteo did not hear the sound



from where he sat by the roaring engine. Charles leaned in close to the creature and pulled its arms to its sides. Something small was tucked away there which had been protected by the larger creature. Charles shifted the small creature onto its back with shaking hands, just barely touching the thing as he did so. The smaller creature looked like a miniature version of the dead one. However, this creature was wailing, its tiny mouth open and eyes screwed shut.

“A baby,” Charles whispered to himself and felt something overcome his fear of touching it. He reached out and pulled it into his arms, rocking the baby.

“Sh. Sh.” Charles attempted to soothe the creature, but calmed the screaming only slightly. He had done this once, a yellow stained memory in the back of his mind. Jessica had been a child crying in his arms once, her little pink face screwed up in pain. He could see the same face in the creature, the soft jaw of his daughter, the gentle puffs of her cheeks. Without realizing it, Charles’ heart made a decision over his head. This thing, this creature, would be another daughter. Without thinking, Charles did the only thing he knew to do, and sang what had been Jessica’s favorite song. “Hush little baby, don’t say a word. Papa’s gonna buy you a mockingbird.”

She settled into his arms and her crying subsided. All that was left was the engine, a rough voice singing, and the sounds of the sea.

# Ayita's Last Dance

by Orli Juarez

They say all men are equal. That we all bleed the same blood and cry the same tears. They say all men have the right to be free. All men should have an equal chance at opportunity, a chance at success and accomplishment. I once believed these things. I once had faith in humanity, but I've found that success often comes at the expense of others. Mankind's greed has led us to do unforgivable things. I remember the day so clearly, when I just gave up. On mankind. On my future. On everything. Tell me then, if everything you ever knew, your home, your freedom, your way of life, was just taken from you, would you not feel the same?

My name is Ayita, of the Narragansett tribe. My name means *dancer*. I loved dancing when I was younger. I found peace and happiness through dancing. When I danced, it was like nothing else in the world mattered. I once danced out of joy. But, there was a time where my world went dark, and I lost all hope. This is my story. This is why I will never dance again.

We were once a large, strong people who inhabited nearly all of Rhode Island. We were expert farmers and warriors. We even evaded most of the diseases brought to us by the Europeans in 1633. We were hesitant, at first, to welcome the white man to our land. It was Chief Canonicus who was friendly towards them, and even sold land to a man named Roger Williams. He is one man I would honor, if my judgement wasn't clouded by the actions of his fellow white men. Though he attempted to make peace, our two cultures simply did not work well together. It started with religion, when we were put into praying towns. They enforced upon us their beliefs, although we wanted to keep our own. Then came the Pequot War. Mankind is so very predictable. One man acts out of his own greed and a

whole nation suffers. One slight disagreement can lead to a path of destruction, bloodshed, and tears.

Whether we're fighting against the white man or another tribe, war is war. Lives are spent because of man's greed and anger. Instead of settling our arguments like human beings, we raise our fists and weapons, be it tomahawk, axe, bow and arrow, or gun. We kill thousands of innocent people without a second thought. Kill one person, you might feel guilty. Kill two people, you don't feel as bad. By the first hundred killed, those ended lives become statistics. Just another name on another list. When we reach that point, the human side of us just disappears. We treat other human beings like animals, free to pick off whenever we choose.

Metacomet (known as "King Phillip" by the English) led our tribe, among many others, in an uprising against the Englishmen. This was our last attempt to drive out the English settlers.

Although the war seemed sudden, our resentment of the English had been building since the 1660s. We had become so reliant on their food, goods, and weapons that in return they expected us to recognize English sovereignty. Instead of complying, some of us took up weapons. The Wampanoag, Nipmuck, Pocumtuck, and of course, the Narragansett, were a few tribes who chose to fight on Metacomet's side. Meanwhile, the Mohegan, Pequot, Nauset, and Massachusetts tribes fought alongside the English.

Metacomet was later killed by his own men. Just goes to show how inhumane humans really are. His supporters either escaped or surrendered and were taken as slaves. I was one of the lucky ones. I safely escaped captivity with my family. I was a teenager, maybe fifteen at the time. While we had our freedom, we did not live in peace for very long. Those who remained encountered diseases, cultural disruption, and the expropriation of our lands. Some of us were even enslaved, which is ironic in a sad way, for that was the one thing we had hoped to escape.

One would think that war among adults wouldn't affect the children. Then explain to me the boarding schools we were forced to attend. They changed everything: our clothes, our hair, our language, and even our names. They wanted to *civilize* us. We were immersed

into their culture, whether we liked it or not. We were forced to leave our families, leave our homes, and everything we had ever known.

People lie. People steal. People kill. Happy endings are rare. After a while, I stopped smiling. I stopped hoping. I stopped dancing. I had no reason to do any of those things. As I said before, I once danced out of joy and thankfulness. Now, if I danced, it was out of sadness and disappointment—disappointment in the whole human race and how we could ever treat each other in such a way. Dancing kept me stable, kept me sane, kept me alive. I look at the reservations we live in now, and realize I no longer have a reason to smile. I no longer have a reason to dance.



*Lima family at dinner. Lou Costa Collection on Fox Point.  
Image courtesy of Providence Public Library.*

# The Mighty American Dollar

by Martin Lapczyk

Expensive cars. Priceless art pieces. A multi-million dollar mansion. These were the things that Larry Tendly desired the most. He shared these dreams with his business partner Paul Lazenby. And now they were finally within reach. They were stockbrokers and they had found a wealthy client with an extremely ill wife. Unfortunately for him, Larry and Paul weren't planning on increasing his savings. Their plan was to use his desperation to save his wife to trick him into putting all of his money into an offshore bank account, and then simply take his money. The two con artists were discussing the plan in their office when a secretary walked in.

"Mr. Sanders is ready to see you."

Paul looked at Larry.

"Let me handle this one."

Larry watched as Paul greeted Mr. Sanders, and led him into a meeting room. Larry waited anxiously in the office, hoping for good results. Half an hour later, Paul walked in. Larry nervously asked "How did it go?"

Paul grinned.

"It went off without a hitch. We're rich, Larry."

## Newport, RI

Three weeks after their good fortune, Paul and Larry were living the dream. After receiving the money, they changed their names to not get caught. Even after splitting the money, they had each gained three million dollars. They both bought million dollar houses in the seaside paradise of Newport, and were finally happy. However, something was bothering Larry. They were at Paul's house, lounging

by the pool, when the need to talk to someone about the way he was feeling overwhelmed him.

"Hey Paul?"

"What?"

"Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Shoot."

"Do you feel bad about what we did to that rich guy?"

"Not at all. In fact, I recently heard his wife died, and I still don't care!"

"She's dead? That's awful!"

"Yeah, for him, not us! He made the mistake of trusting us, and now he's getting punished, and we live the dream."

The sound of barking interrupted their conversation. "Oh no. My dog must've got out of the house again. Come on, let's just get her quickly inside." The two strolled to the front lawn, where they could see a black lab running in the street. A van was coming from the end of the street.

"Come on, Jessie!" Paul yelled. "Come to Pauly!"

The dog simply sat down in the middle of the road, and looked towards the incoming van. "Come on, Jessie!" Paul called out more frantically. "Get out of the road!"

"Don't worry about it, Paul. The guy in the van can see your dog. He'll stop if we can't get Jessie out."

"Yeah, you're right. There's no reason to panic."

Jessie still sat, somehow transfixed by the van. Contrary to what Larry said, however, the van wasn't slowing down. In fact, it appeared to be speeding up.

"What's he doing?" Paul cried.

"I don't know!"

The lab couldn't move. It was locked in a state of terror, like a rabbit about to be devoured by a snake. The guys screamed desperately at the van, begging for the driver to stop. He didn't. The van plowed through the dog and continued driving, like nothing had happened. A hysterical Paul rushed over to his deceased pet and cradled her in his arms. He started to sob. Larry looked on in absolute horror. Thoughts were racing through his head. Who was the driver? And why didn't they stop? If he had known the answers to those questions, he would've fled the country.

A week after the incident, Larry was still shaken. He was thinking about possible answers to his questions when he heard something rustling outside. Turning around, he was stunned to see a hooded figure taking pictures through a window. Realizing he was caught, the figure darted off, and Larry ran out after him. The stranger jumped into a vehicle and drove off. Larry was terrified. Before he had been scared, but he had just noticed a detail that shook him to his core. The vehicle that the unknown person got into was the same one that had run over Paul's dog a week prior.

At this point, Larry was paranoid and on the brink of madness. He didn't trust anyone, and was killing himself trying to figure out who this mystery person was. Then one day, a package appeared on his porch. He was reluctant to open it, but he knew he had to. There was no return address and no stamps, so it had to have been hand delivered by the person who had created it. He slowly cut off the wrapping paper, revealing a cigar box. He flipped the latch, and opened it. Dozens of pictures were set in piles in the box. Flipping through them, Larry saw pictures of himself and Paul and their houses. An unease spread through Larry. These were undoubtedly from the hooded figure. But why was he doing this? Larry looked down into the box, and saw a folded piece of paper at the bottom. He unfolded it. It read:

411 Narrod Street, 7th Floor  
9:00 PM

An anxiety rushed through Larry. That was the address of his and Paul's office building in Providence. They had put it up for sale, and a possible buyer was coming for a look the next day. Larry had called Paul earlier that day to ask if he wanted to hang out, and Paul said he couldn't because he was going to the office to add some last minute details. Dread filled Paul. He grabbed his coat, ran to his car, and sped off to the building.

Once he reached the office, he abruptly stopped the car in front of it and rushed in. It was dark. He was the only one there. He frantically sprinted to the stairwell, and climbed to the seventh floor. He looked down the hallway. The door at the end was ajar. The same door that led to his and Paul's former office. He ran to it. Bracing himself for



anything, he opened it and walked in. A body was laying in the center of the otherwise barren room. It was Paul. Larry rushed to his side, and checked for a pulse. Nothing. He was gone. Blood stained his white-collared shirt. Larry started weeping. His best friend was dead. He noticed something on the wall. His hand trembling, he retrieved his phone, turned on its light, and shined it on the wall. Spray painted on it was the following:

*Was it worth it? Was it really worth it? It gave away any morality you possessed in exchange for the mighty American dollar. You're more evil than the cancer that killed my wife*

The wooden floorboards behind Larry creaked, and the office door clicked shut.

# My Life on Pell Bridge

by Jillian Lombardi

I have spent the last 20 summers on Pell Bridge working Lane 3 of the Newport toll. Hundreds of people pass by me everyday. I am a pitstop on the journey to a destination for many and am fortunate to see a snapshot of their lives. The diversity of the visitors to my 5' by 7' booth exemplifies the uniqueness of Rhode Island. Each person at any stage in their lives and of all walks of life come to see the treasures of Rhode Island. I will say there is a respect shared during a personal exchange in this predominantly detached and technology dependent world. You see, I work in a lane that requires cash; therefore, it excludes the E-Z passengers and discounted residents, and is often traveled by different types of people that I have recognized and grown to appreciate.

Jeeps usually barrel at high speeds up the bridge with their tops down and the latest pop song blasting through the speakers. I receive fearless smiles from teens in love with sparkling eyes and wild hair. Young lovers exhibit absolute contentment and refuse to unlink their hands despite the driver's difficulty to reach cash. The buzz of anticipation for summer's unfurling promise and relief from the escape of high school is palpable. They are often headed to find trouble and excitement in Newport and its beaches.

I envy these kids and their futures as I reflect on my own teen years. I lived in Barrington and would bike to all of my friends' houses or Barrington Beach. On the lucky occasions I had the family car, we would drive into Providence to raise hell. The best concert of my life was ELO at the Civic Center where we spent the whole night singing and stealing beers from the couple in front of us. My first kiss was at Purgatory Chasm at night under the stars. My summers of misbehavior and first loves have long expired, but are only beginning with these teenagers.

A young couple sits in the front seats of a minivan with exhaustion and joy radiating through their eyes as they tackle parenthood. Cries in the back seats from impatient children with sunscreened painted cheeks and loosely hanging, patterned bathing suits are triggered by the sudden delay from the thrills of the beach and the prolonged time in the heated car. The trunk is crammed with sandy boogie boards and buckets waiting to be used. The mother rushes to dig to the bottom of the cup holders, her fingers searching for sticky coins to pay their toll. Soon, this family will reach Gooseberry Beach and cherish the innocence of a lazy, sandy afternoon by the water.

I reminisce about the youth of my children, who have long left me and this state with its simple pleasures, and the countless summers they spent discovering the ocean. They would race each other out to the floating dock and I would relax without fears of large waves. We would dig huge holes in the sand hoping to find sand crabs or China. After being exhausted from the sun, we would leave and grab a Del's lemonade for the trip home. I can only wish the same happiness for these families.

Sometimes a Corolla will climb up the bridge driven by an elderly citizen. They look up at me with a heavy gaze of age and experience. Their hesitant smiles stretch the lines on their faces that reflect their stories through the myriad of wrinkles. The subtle sound of the classical radio plays as a sweet lullaby in the car. They may be alone, however they are not lonely, rather content with the life they've lived. Don't be mistaken, the trip they are taking is leading to a sunny day with loved ones. They may stop for oysters or see a flower show. I search for some reassurance or wisdom in their expression for my future. I am worried that I will lose myself without the constant stream of faces and the beautiful view.

The bridge overlooks miles of Rhode Island's ocean nipped at the sides by buildings, vegetation, and docked boats. The white lighthouse stands as a constant in the distance as boats pass under the old bridge in numbers that match the amount of cars I see. The abundance of tall, tilted sailboats in my view in the water projects the classic New England view. The deep, blue water sparkles under the

gleam of the sun as seagulls squawk and circle above. The bridge has aged, but its strength is evident. It has faced hurricanes, snow, and waves, yet always emerges victorious. Its brawn holds me up everyday.

The sky is my favorite. During the day, I stare up at the bright sky and try to find shapes in the clouds. Hues of orange, pink, and red are splattered across the sky as the sun sets. Even at night, the darkness is brightened by the bright, twinkling stars that I mistake with the lights that illuminate the bridge. The beauty of the water and people are constant and the sky is my only indication of time.

I am questioned often by my choice to sit here everyday, but I do not regret my decisions. My life has become a mosaic of people, skies, waves, and days. My experiences are illuminated through the people I encounter. My memories, loves, and future are reflected in the people that pass. I am only a moment in each person's life, even in their journey for that day, but together they are everything to me. These people are my days, my community, my state.



U.S.S. Arcadia Picnic, Newport, RI, 1961. Rhode Island General Photograph Collection.  
Image courtesy of Providence Public Library.

# The Wooden Elephant

by Marlaina MacDonald

Tears rolled down my cheeks. My eyes were wet, and my lip trembled. I sat on my bed, facing the window. I watched as the cars zoomed by, splattering water onto the sidewalks. The drab apartments with their boring dreary colors and flat roofs lay across the street. The sky was a lifeless gray. Cars honked at each other, and the deafening sirens of an ambulance wailed down the streets. Thinking to earlier this week, I let out a sniffle that soon developed into a sob. It had only been a couple days after the funeral, but it felt like only a second ago I was in my mother's arms when suddenly all of that was just washed away. I reached into my pocket and clutched a small wooden elephant carving. I traced my fingers down the grooves and smooth edges.

The scene faded into another flash of memory:

"Hey mama! Look what I found!" I squeaked excitedly.

"What did my little Ava find?" she crooned.

I proudly presented the small object with a smile. It was a wooden carving of an elephant.

A broad smile shone on my mother's face.

"Thank you, my little sunshine!" my gratified mother replied. This was in fact my mother's favorite possession. It had gone missing a couple weeks before, leading my mother to run around frantically looking for it. I had become familiar with the story of how she got it.

It all started back to a humorous old woman on her street, of whom became her best friend. It is a little strange, but in a way made sense. The old woman always had wood beside the fireplace. She taught my mother how to carve sculptures out of them. One day, she gave her the small wooden elephant. It was a sad memory to my mother. I didn't understand why back then, but now I do.

I flinched feeling a tap on my shoulder.

Someone cleared her throat behind me. I quickly wiped the tears from my face and turned around. It was one of the other orphan girls.

"Hey... Are you okay?" she asked worriedly.

My face felt tight from the dried tears. My eyes were unfocused, and I quivered from head to toe.

"I am fine," I quietly rasped, not looking up at the girl.

Unconvinced the girl replied, "Is it hard?"

"What?" I asked, giving the girl a confused look.

"Losing someone..." she gazed wistfully out the window, as I had done just before. I did not respond. She took my silence as an agreement.

"You're not the only one that has gone through this. Many of the other kids have also. If you need someone to go to, just come to me." She slowly got up and drifted back to a group of girls.

I observed the room. It was a long room with beds lined up along the walls. The smell was musty and old. Cobwebs filled every corner. Dust was on every window, and it was extremely cold. I glanced at the quiet group of girls once more. Their expressions were dull and sad.

The night drew closer. I had not eaten or interacted with many people today. I thought back to the girl. I regretted not thanking her, or at least asking for her name. When night arrived, I lay awake in the unfamiliar bed—the unfamiliar room—wishing my mom was still here. Soon someone would adopt me. I didn't want that. I wanted to be left alone. No one could ever replace my mom.

Suddenly, my ears picked up a noise, hushed voices in the hallway. I could just make out one word, "...adoption."

Why would I be worried about the word adoption? I mean, we're in an orphanage. I tried to reassure myself. The problem was that earlier I overheard some people talking about adoption regarding me.

My teeth chattered at the thought of it. My tired, overwhelmed body soon drifted into a deep sleep.

I woke up early the next morning. None of the other children were awake yet. I drowsily limped over to the large, open door at the end of the room. My bare feet quietly wandered down the hallway, numbing from the cold floor.

Passing the main office, I curiously peered inside. Stacks of paper were piled neatly along the shelves. One desk sat at the end of the small room. A woman stood near the telephone. She was a short plump woman wearing a bright purple suit. Her hair was gelled back into a tight bun. Her bright red lipstick messed up the whole outfit. I glanced back at the desk. It was pretty normal. A jar of pens sat next to a row of staplers and tape dispensers. Papers were spread out on the desk. Then I noticed something unsettling. The more I looked at it the more familiar it felt. There was a photo of me. I gasped.

Suddenly the woman spoke. I stiffened, alert. At first, I thought she was talking to me, but then I realized that she was on the phone. I pricked my ears, hoping to catch some of the conversation.

“Oh yes, she’ll be waiting...” the woman paused for a second, glancing at the clock. “Thank you so much. I’ll see you at 2:00.”

.....

It was now almost 2:00. I sat in my bed scrunched up, rocking back and forth. I had been dreading this moment for the last twelve hours. Earlier a man from one of the other offices told me to pack my belongings. This was not good news. I didn’t want anyone to adopt me.

Soon I was called to the main office and forced to bring my suitcase. There were three chairs set up in front of the small woman’s desk. Two of the chairs held old people. The third chair was left for me. I shuffled into the room without taking my eyes off the old couple.

“Now sit down my dear,” the office lady stated, as she flashed a fake smile. “Today, you lucky girl, you are getting adopted. All the papers and documents are signed. This is now your new family,” she announced, expecting my overjoyed expression.

Instead, a look of horror struck my face. New family... New family... New family. All I could hear were those same two words.

“But-but I don’t want a new-new family,” I stuttered.

The old couple glanced sadly at each other, but I didn’t care. I didn’t want a new family and these adults weren’t going to decide my fate without even talking to me first.



"Now dear, these people are kind enough to adopt a child in need of love. Like you." The plump woman's icy voice echoed in my ears.

"I don't want these people's love! I just want my mom!" I wailed. This was my life. They're acting as if my mom passing away wasn't important!

"Now hon', we know how you feel and we are..."

I cut her off. "No! You don't know how I feel! I'm not going to some stranger's home. Where they claim that they love me!" I stomped out of the room and slammed the door shut.

I overheard the last of the conversation. The plump woman was soothing her guests. "It's just a phase..." was all I heard, as I ran away from the scene faster than lightning.

. . . . .

It had been a couple hours since my outburst and I didn't regret any of it. The people who should be feeling bad are the old people for trying to force me into their home. Of course, nothing stopped them from taking me there. I had tried everything: screaming, pushing, shoving, crying, pleading, yelling, even running away. But somehow, I ended up in their car.

I quietly sat in the back. It was an old beat up van. It smelled like a nursing home and too much perfume. All I could see were the backs of the old people's heads. The woman had a short white bob with a little barrette sticking out. The old man had smooth gelled-back hair put into a small gray ponytail.

I stared out the window until one of them spoke.

"You said your name was Ava, right?" the old woman asked kindly.

"I didn't tell you anything," I grumbled.

"Well Ava, Roger and I are very happy to bring you into our household."

"Glad you're happy," I replied sarcastically.

After that, we said few words. I continued to stare out the window reading the signs. Route 146, Yield, Construction Up Ahead. Then I read, Discover Beautiful Rhode Island!

"Yeah right," I muttered.

. . . . .

Soon we arrived at their house. It was a small blue house with a small white porch. A small plant sat next to the door.

“Ugh! Why is everything in Rhode Island so small?” I blurted. The old couple glanced at me, amused. I was already in a bad mood. Why do you have to make it worse? I asked myself, putting all the blame on the old people.

We stepped up to the door. I watched as they unlocked it. With one hand, I carried my suitcase. With the other, I tightly held the elephant in my pocket. They soon brought me to my room. It wasn’t as bad as I expected it to be.

The walls were a pale blue color. My bed sat in the corner, accompanied with a small table. A large bookshelf covered half of a wall with a desk right next to it. I entered the room and set down my belongings.

“If you need anything, just tell us, okay?” the old woman stated. I had learned that her name was Judith.

“Okay,” I replied, not looking up at her.

As soon as she closed the door I ran over to the bed and lay on it. I didn’t want to admit it, but it was exactly like my bed at home, or what used to my home. The bed was soft and plushy. The blankets were warm and light. The pillows were comfortable and soft.

I suddenly heard a knock. I jumped up, smoothed the sheets and quickly opened my suitcase on the bed. The door opened. It was the old man, Roger.

“Hey, are you finding everything okay?” he asked, a look of worry plastered on his face.

“Sure,” I responded bluntly.

“Listen, all me and Judith want is to give you a warm home. Not an ice-cold orphanage,” he added. He left the room, closed the door, and left me to think.

. . . . .

The next morning, I explored the house. Judith’s and Roger’s room was across from mine. At the bottom of the stairs was the living room and to the right of that was a small kitchen.

I trudged over to the couch and watched the fireplace. I watched the wood crackle and burn as the fire consumed it. Lost in my thoughts, I hadn't noticed anyone enter the living room until they spoke.

"The fire, it's strange isn't it?" Judith asked.

I sharply turned towards her. "I guess."

"Fire is just like a child. If you don't feed it, it dies out. If you don't tend to it, it dies out," Judith mused.

"I never thought of it that way," I mumbled.

We both sat in front of the fire, thinking. I noticed a pile of wood at the side of the fire. It reminded me of my mom. I clutched the wooden elephant in my pocket. An idea then occurred to me.

"Judith?" I asked.

The women looked at me. She gave me a look of joy, for this was the first time I voluntarily started a conversation.

"Yes?" she asked with a smile now on her face.

"Do you have a knife I could use?" I asked.

She turned pale. All happiness washed away. "Good Heavens child, what do you need a knife for?" she exclaimed.

"To carve wood," I replied, showing her the small wooden elephant.

"Oh." Some of the color returned to the woman's face. "Did you carve that?" she asked.

"No, my mom's friend did," I replied sadly.

For the next four hours, I showed Judith how to carve wood. In the end, she presented me with another small elephant. It was a little misshapen, but it was alright. I stuffed the new small elephant into my other pocket.

. . . . .

It has been a week since I'd arrived. Roger and Judith were okay, but it wasn't like Mom. One morning, Roger announced that we were going to the beach.

"What's the use of going to the beach in November?" I grumbled.

"You'll see." he replied.

. . . . .

We soon arrived at the beach. It was deserted like I had guessed. The waves came crashing down and rolled back to the sea. I took off my shoes and walked down by the shore, as did Roger and Judith. The sand was stiff and cold. Occasionally, the water surprised my feet. Another surprise was that I sort of liked the beach like this: the salty air that left a tang on my tongue, the fact that no one was here, and the refreshing chilly breeze. Judith set down some chairs and a blanket that she pinned to the ground with some rocks. Roger pulled out a couple kites and handed me one.

The kites took flight into the air. Roger ran down the beach. He was in good shape for an old guy. I chased him and for the first time in a long time I smiled. The kites soared high into the sky. Judith watched us in amusement. She sat in a chair carving some wood. I gave her this new hobby. Once we felt tired we returned to Judith who had sandwiches ready. We ate hungrily.

I gazed down the expanse of the empty beach and asked if I could walk on my own for a bit. The couple looked to each other. Roger smiled and nodded at me.

I soon found a cluster of boulders. I ran towards them. I climbed on top of the tallest one. I took out my mom's wooden elephant and Judith's wooden elephant. I sat them beside each other. We all watched the sunset.

"Maybe Rhode Island is beautiful after all. Big and beautiful." I murmured happily.



*Looking Over Burr's Hill Park, Lauren MacDonald.*  
Image courtesy of the Warren Preservation Society.

# Rhode Island Smalls

by Emily Ornberg

**M**y name is Erza. No, not Ezra. It's Erza, Erza Miklo, just a 20-year-old girl who feels small. Every day I pass by the same buildings. There's the train station. There's the library. There's the less popular synagogue. There's my old high school right up the hill. I see them all the time. On first inspection, you might think of those buildings as big, but if you're like me, the more you see them, the smaller they seem. I am like those buildings.

Every day, the more I think about myself, I realize that I'm getting smaller. Not too many hybrid Jews in the town of Westerly, huh? Not too many freakishly tall girls in the town of Westerly who think of themselves as small but not in a height way, huh? I used to think of myself differently, thinking of myself as unique, different. That's what my parents told me. But as I get older, I realize I'm like everybody else: just a small girl on a small planet in a gigantic void called space. I could never stop seeing myself like this—until she showed me how.

Who is the she I'm talking about? You may not ask because you most likely know I will tell you either way or you don't care enough to ask. Her name was Aria Tamber. Great, my sexuality is another thing to feel small about. Sure, there are a few lesbians in Rhode Island, but Aria was the only other lesbian I had ever met. It was just me and Aria against the world. She was the sun to my dark void of space. I was happy. I realized how important she was, but you never truly know what you have until it's taken away from you.

Let's start from the beginning, shall we? Aria and I first met inside of Savoy, the bookstore that has the word "aesthetic" everywhere in your brain when you look around the place. I ordered my usual small French vanilla iced coffee from Tim, the owner, and sat down alone at a table for two. Tim looks a lot like Gunther from *Friends*. He is way too nice to me, always concerned about how I'm doing, asking me if everything's okay. He was the

closest thing to a friend I had since I would go in there at the same time every single day.

I'd seen Aria before this. She was a common customer, but I had never talked to her. I only kept to myself, until that day. She got her usual sugar cookie and put it in front of the empty seat before me.

She plopped down on the seat and said, "You know, I always see you in here. On the same seat at the same time drinking the same drink. Always alone. Why is that?"

I was completely amazed how someone could be so confident as to come up to a person and say that, but it also made me feel small. "I-I don't have any friends, except for Tim." I motioned my head to point at Tim who was working with a customer.

"I feel you. I'm exactly the same way. Do you want to make another friend?" she asked hopeful.

I almost spit out my iced coffee. My eyes became wide as hers and filled with confusion. Nobody wanted to be my friend before, except in my younger years, but people who wanted to be my friend usually drifted away from me. So, of course I said yes.

"Great! The name's Aria Tamber by the way."

I didn't even realize we didn't tell each other our names. "Erza Miklo." I didn't have to look to know that Tim was smiling at me from behind the counter. I felt his proud gaze on me.

We spent the entire day in Savoy, talking about ourselves and our lives. It was the first time in a while I laughed so much, talking about the embarrassing stuff of our past. When the store was closing, we parted ways. We didn't exchange numbers because we always know where we'll be, and I didn't have a phone.

After that faithful day, I didn't feel small when I was around Aria. She made me feel like my life was important. I think that's why her usual was a sugar cookie. She was too sweet to me.

Sometimes, after meeting at Savoy, we explored downtown, went for ice cream at Mel's Downtown Creamery, or to the library where we most likely made too much noise, but we didn't care. We had fun finally being with someone other than Tim.

After a year of us hanging out, she asked me if I wanted to sleepover her house and I agreed. We went to her bedroom. I felt kind of awkward, but I didn't know why. She jumped on her bed with a belly flop. She turned herself so that her feet touched the headboard and patted to the empty spot beside her. I obeyed her

request and lay down next to her, with my face being about five inches from hers.

“So, how do you feel?” she asked, wanting to break the silence between us.

“Hm?” I replied. I didn’t know what she meant by that.

“I want to know what you think about! Tell me everything. How you feel about yourself, me, society, anything!”

My eyes darted away from hers in embarrassment and my face got red. I was scared. Would she treat me differently if I told her how I felt?

She must have noticed that I was acting strange because she put her hand on my shoulder and said, “You don’t have to tell me anything if it makes you uncomfortable.”

For some reason, her words gave me enough confidence to tell her, but I had to make her promise me something. “Promise you won’t treat me differently after this?” I was still a little scared, but I had my mind set on telling her.

“Promise.”

And that’s when I told her how I felt. “I see myself as small. Just a small girl in a small town in a small state in a small world in the hugeness of space. I’m not like a lot of people in Rhode Island, making me feel even more small, you know? But you... you make me feel big, feel important, feel loved. Speaking of loved, society scares me because I’m a lesbian, and they might think that’s not correct... As if it’s wrong to love who you love.”

She replied, “I totally get where you’re coming from! You are probably the best person I have ever met! But, since this is technically a sleepover, I have to ask the good ole question...”

My mind ran wild with panic, repeating please don’t ask it. Please don’t ask it. Please don’t ask it.

“Do you have a crush on anybody?”

She asked it. What did I do? There was only one solution. I had to die in a hole. Say I died of death. But for an odd reason, my mouth didn’t like that plan. It replied with an honest answer to her question. “Y-yeah. I-I do.” Now I’m stuttering? She’s totally going to laugh at me now! She didn’t. She just smiled. She stared deep into my eyes as time stopped. She leaned in closer to my face and put her hand on my cheek. I leaned in closer to her until our lips made contact. Who would have thought a Rhode Island loser like me would kiss her crush? We pulled away and I was in shock.



"I told you, I get where you're coming from!" she said, making my face slowly go back to its natural color.

After a long period of just looking at each other and smiling, I said, "Cough, cough. Will you be my girlfriend? Cough, cough." It was probably one of the most awkward things I've done.

She nodded and said "Yeah, I'd like that."

After that, we were always together. I moved into her house. It was much better than my apartment in the downtown area. We still did the same things we would do as friends, but there was something more there. It was a spark that made everything ten times better.

We decided to tell our only friend. We went to Savoy, hand in hand. We opened the doors and saw Tim across the room, behind the counter as usual.

"Hey Tim!" I said.

"Hey Erza, Aria. Usual?" he replied.

"Yup. Also, by the way, we're dating," Aria said as if it was nothing.

"Bout time! You guys deserve to be happy!" Tim replied. He was like a dad to us. We giggled and were about to pay when he held up his hand. "This one's on the house."

We smiled at him. This was his way to have a celebration.

"Thanks, Tim," I said.

"You're welcome," he replied.

We sat in our usual seats and talked about feeling small. It's a good feeling to talk about it.

"I'm not like other people. I've never been out of Rhode Island. It's my home, and I'm too scared to leave. It makes me small," I said.

"You're not the only one who feels small, Erza. I have the exact same feeling," Aria replied.

"Then I guess we're the Rhode Island Smalls, huh?" I jokingly asked.

She gasped and said, "I love that! We are the Rhode Island Smalls! Cute!"

We finished our talk at Savoy and traveled downtown like always.

It happened one month after that. We were walking down a street in the downtown area when we saw train tracks. I walked on them and stood in the middle of the tracks, then looked back to Ari. "Am I daredevil yet?" I asked.

"Pfft, of course! Now seriously come back over here before I run off to find a new safe girlfriend!" she replied.

"Can't have you doing that, now can I?" I said. I moved my left

foot, but when I tried to move my right, it wouldn't budge. I tried again, again, and again. Nothing. "I'm stuck."

"Is that a new girlfriend calling me?" she asked, thinking that I was messing with her.

"No, seriously, I'm stuck. I think my pants are caught on the tracks!" I said.

"Then get them out!" Aria told me.

I tried, but I wasn't strong enough to remove them.

"A little help?" I asked, feeling defeated.

She rolled her eyes and walked over to me. "You're lucky I love you and won't leave you here to die."

"Yes, yes, I am," I replied.

As she was working on getting my pants unstuck, we both heard the sound nobody wants to hear when they're on train tracks. A train. Uh-oh. We both started panicking. "Go faster!" I said.

"I'm going as fast as I can!" she said while still working on my pants.

"I love you." I said. I thought I was done for. I was planning on pushing her out of the way of the train if my pants were still stuck.

"I love you, never forget that," Aria replied, as my pants got suddenly unstuck.

The train was in sight. It was the last minute. She pushed me out of the way of that train just in time, with no time to save herself. I couldn't live with myself. I was the cause of her death. I wanted to be the hero, to save her, but it seemed that life had a different plan. I sat there, at the side of the train tracks, just sobbing and sobbing. Eventually, I fell asleep there too. I wanted to willingly jump into those train tracks to be with her again, so why didn't I? I knew she wanted me to be alive, to live a good life, to be happy. She would be disappointed in me if I joined her. That doesn't mean I stopped grieving though. I still think about her every day, all the time.

Tim was a huge help. He always comforted me and came to sit with me whenever he had the chance. I would sleep in Savoy. I couldn't bare seeing the home we once lived in.

After a month had passed, Tim walked me to the house after his shift ended. He wanted to see me sleep in an actual chair instead of the bean bags downstairs. I opened the door and memories of us living happily there flooded in my mind. I stepped inside. Tim was behind me, making sure I don't break down. I traced the walls with the edge of my fingertips, like I could almost feel the love through the walls.

When I got to our room, I couldn't help but cry. I could feel and almost see her on the bed, relaxing and looking at me.

She disappeared when Tim came up behind me. "Are you okay?" he asked, seeing that I was crying.

I couldn't talk. Words were an unknown concept to me in that moment, so I just nodded.

"I'll be downstairs if you need me."

It was just me and the room now. I went under the covers to the spot I was familiar with. I felt her in my heart. That's where she resides. She's still there today.

Tim slept downstairs for the next week to confirm that I was going to be okay. He really is a dad to me.

After he left, I went out to the downtown area. I wanted to find someone new. Not for me, but for her. For her to rest in peace, I did it.

For the next few weeks, I did my usual Savoy stop in, and made sure to make close observations of the people there. I saw a girl who reminded me of myself before Aria. She sat alone, drinking a usual lemonade.

I went over to Tim when there were no customers. "Tim, you know that girl over there?" I asked, hoping he could tell me something about her.

"That's one of my usuals, that's all I'll tell you. If you want to know more, I guess you'll have to talk to her," Tim replied with an evil grin on his face.

I rolled my eyes at him and walked over to the girl. I put my iced coffee on the table and plopped myself on the empty chair across from her and asked, "What's your name?"

"Safiya," she responded quietly.

"Safiya, I like that. I'm Erza, Erza Miklo, it's nice to meet you," I said.

"Same," she responded as she started to drink her lemonade.

"Do you... feel small?" I asked.

She nodded her head.

"Great, then you're in the Rhode Island Smalls!"

Those words started a happy ending.

# Marie Nottingham

## by Caroline Sechio

Marie Nottingham always said *if you're a witch, might as well dress like it*. So, she always dressed in black, covered her blue doe eyes in heavy eyeliner, and let her bleached blond hair run freely down her back. She wanted to make everyone wait. She looked at the clock, fifteen minutes late, perfect. Marie put on her six-inch heels and descended the marble staircase. She made sure to make as much noise as she could with each step. The crowd of girls who sat in the common room fell silent, and the clicking of her heels were all that could be heard. Eyes followed her as she sat down in an empty seat. A lesser woman would have fallen, but she was not a lesser woman.

"Are we all set, Miss Nottingham?" Headmistress Camille asked.

Marie was laughing at something her friend Nicole said. When their headmistress mentioned her, she nodded, holding back laughter.

"Everyone of us is in danger," Camille started. This turned everyone serious, except Marie who still had a smirk on her face.

"Witch hunters have been searching all of Newport for us. We still have the protection hex on the mansion, but these are not ordinary hunters, Girls. I fear these men will find us."

"Then why are we still here?" Marie questioned, uncrossing her legs and sitting forward. "We don't live at Hogwarts. If the lives of your students are in danger, why wouldn't we, you know, leave?"

"Because, Miss Nottingham, they know where all of you live. Because if you go home, they will kill you, but if we stay here together, we will be able to figure out how to stop them." Camille was very firm with her, trying to get in her head that she was in danger.

"So, we just have to hide in fear? We have to be scared of men like women have been for hundreds of years. We're witches. They

should be afraid of us. All of us, together, we can kill them. Christ, I bet even me alone cou...”

“Miss Nottingham, I am just trying to protect everyone! If anyone leaves, the hex will break!” Camille screamed.

Marie shot up and went into her room. She slammed the door without having to touch it. To top it all off, her heels broke. She threw them into the mirror, cursing at them for breaking. Using her powers, Marie ripped posters, framed pictures, and even the bookshelf from the wall. Her anger started to cool, and she fell backward on her bed. A meow got her attention. Looking over, she saw a giant ball of black fur. It was her obese, fifteen-year-old, black cat who also had arthritis. She laughed and placed him on her lap using magic.

“Hi, Smokey. Sorry I woke you up,” she whispered to him.

Marie got Smokey for Christmas when she was two. At the time, no one even knew she was a witch. It skips a generation sometimes. The irony of her being a witch and having a black cat was never lost on her. Nicole always said that now all Marie needs is a vampire boyfriend and she’ll be a classic Halloween movie waiting to happen.

“Smoke-Smoke,” she said to the cat while giving him a belly rub. “we need to go. Camille is going to get us killed.”

Marie got up, snapped her fingers, and changed into something more travel ready. Instead of a dress, she now wore a black t-shirt, black jeans, and black boots. Picking Smokey up, she teleported outside of the Newport mansion. She didn’t know where to go, hardly ever leaving the school. Closing her eyes, Marie hoped her subconscious would take her somewhere good. Somewhere far away from here. Opening her eyes, she ended up in the back-parking lot of West Warwick High School. Smokey limped towards the grass, wanting a comfy spot to sleep. His witch followed, sitting crisscross on top of the steep hill.

It was the perfect early October weather. A light breeze blew in her face, moving her hair just slightly. But still, the sun beat on her back, splitting her body between warm and cold right down the middle. Even though she felt the butt of her jeans getting wet, she made no attempt to change this. Thinking quickly, she put an invisibility spell on herself.

Police and fire sirens rang from the other part of town. There were always sirens there. It was so quiet where she was now. Laughing a little, Nottingham looked off on to the field. They had a pretty good soccer field. The nets were in good shape and it was painted fine. What needed a little work was the tall rusty fence and the dead grass the gym teachers called the baseball field. She really missed this place. It wasn't her favorite place in the world, but it had some good memories.

Marie found out she was a witch halfway through her sophomore year. She changed from West Warwick to Mrs. Camille's School for Special Girls. What a stupid name. *Who does Camille think these witches are? The X-Men?* Marie thought. She would have been a senior with all her friends, except now she was a final year with a bunch of girls she couldn't stand. Well, except Nicole.

Suddenly, the senior gym class walked down. She knew almost everyone but did not see anyone she was close with. Then Nancy, one of her best friends since elementary school, walked by. She was walking with Greg. Marie was only school friends with Greg. They never hung out outside of school, but she still liked him. Getting a weird idea in her head, she hoped they were dating.

Sirens went off again.

They started playing some kind of frisbee game. Marie wondered if she would have been in this gym class. Suddenly she heard the unmistakable laugh of Vanessa. Even all the way down there it was all Marie could hear. How could she have missed Vanessa? Did Vanessa change so much over the years that she couldn't even recognize her? No, it wasn't that; she must have been behind someone. Vanessa was really short.

She looked over at Smokey, who was on his back, big fat belly facing the sun. Telling them she was a witch would have never worked. Nancy wouldn't know what to do. Greg probably wouldn't sit near her anymore, and Vanessa wouldn't feel comfortable laughing near her. The teachers blew the whistle and all the students wandered up to the school. Marie so badly wanted to join, but they couldn't accept her here. Only at her new school could she be herself.

"God, that's a fat cat," a male voice from behind Marie commented.

Marie turned around as fast as possible while pushing herself up from the ground. Two men with guns and knives on their backs and belts stood in front of her. They were both over six feet and somewhere around their early thirties. One of them was black. The other was white. Marie knew exactly who they were. Every witch did. Each of them had more kills than every other hunter combined. They were the Armstrong brothers, Mark and Chris.

"Little witch is far away from home," Mark teased her.

"Chris laughed and picked up Smokey with a grunt. "What do you feed this thing?"

"Cat food. He stress eats," Marie tried to think about the class she took on witch hunters. They learned how to fight them, what spells work, and what ones don't.

"Enough of the small talk." Mark pulled his gun out and shot at her.

Marie defended the shot with a spell, but since they also had a hex on the gun the force of the shot made both her and Mark go flying back. Mark went through a car windshield glass. Blood covered him from head to toe. Marie went into the baseball fence. The fence left a pattern of bloody square marks on her back. Chris took out his gun and shot at her. Seconds before the shot hit her, Marie teleported to the school flipping the men off before she left. She ran to the gate of the mansion and pounded on it screaming.

"Camille, let me in, please! Camille, it's Marie Nottingham! You need to let me in! Please! Please. I don't know how long we have! Please, for the love of God, let me in!" Marie started to cry.

She left Smokey with those psychopaths. How could she? That poor cat had been with her for years and those guys were probably skinning her alive.

"Camille!" Marie's voice cracked. "We're in danger. If you don't let me in, we'll all die!"

From beyond the gate, Marie saw the door open. Camille walked out with her emotionless face.

"Thank God. Oh-oh, thank God," Marie's tears kept pouring down her cheeks.

"Miss Nottingham, where have you been?"

"Jesus, Camille, it's been an hour. Just let me in; my powers aren't working. I can't open the gate."

"I have a hex on the gate. I'll ask again. Where. Have. You. Been?"

Camille was really getting on Marie's nerves now.

First off, don't you see all the blood I'm covered in? I look like Carrie after prom. And you want to know where I've been? You have to be by far the worst person to run a school ever. Camille, I was wandering around my old town. Witch hunters found me. Not just any witch hunters. It was the Armstrongs, Camille, I don't know if they can find me. They'll kill us all," Marie felt like she was going to start screaming again.

Camille did not look surprised. "I told you that this was serious, and you chose not to believe me. You probably led them here. They were not going to kill us all. Just you. Figure it out yourself." Camille started walking away.

But Marie was a better witch than her. She was a better witch than everyone in this school. Closing her eyes, she tried to remember a hex they learned about. You could control someone for one minute, but only with gestures. No words. Marie knew she could pull this off. She had done it a thousand times.

A lightning bolt of yellow hit Camille in the back. Marie twirled her finger in a circle. Camille did the same with her body. Her eyes were looking off into space as if she were not present. The hex worked. Marie had her under her control. Marie told her to come forward and moved her finger in said fashion. The headmistress walked to the gate. She opened the gate when Marie gestured for her to do so. Marie ran on to the campus and into the house. Nicole noticed her right away and threw her arms around her best friend.

"Marie, I thought the hunters got you!" She started crying and shoved her face in Marie's shoulder.

"They tried, but it takes a lot to kill me. They do, um...have Smokey though." Maire pulled away from the hug.

"Jeez, Marie. That's terrible."

"Yeah, I'm angry at myself and want to cry, but we need to get the place ready for when the Armstrongs come back."

"Oh my God, Marie. Your back. They did this to you?"



"What? Oh, yeah. Come on, Camille's going to yell at me for hexing her. Get all the girls together. We need to be quick."

Nicole nodded and started gathering all the students, but before she left, she put a spell on Marie to heal her back. Camille walked in ready to scream at Marie.

"Look, I know you're pissed. I know I should not have done that, but we need to protect everyone."

Camille nodded and walked to her office. Marie tried figuring out what her endgame was but decided it would be better to get the rest of the girls ready for the guys. In all honesty, she didn't think any of them could handle this. She barely could.

Nicole called her into the common room. Not knowing what she was going to say to them, she shrugged and walked in. How hard would it be to wing it? Everyone stopped talking when Marie walked in.

"When I was gone, I met the Armstrongs. You know, the witch hunters. They are the two best witch hunters in the world, so trust me, we're screwed. That is, if we try and fight them alone. We need to work together and maybe we can make it out of this alive. I know you guys want to run, but they'll get you. They'll get us all. We need to use killing curses, spells that do some horrible things, mind control hexes. This is serious. I don't know what else to say, Guys."

A clap echoed through the room. Marie turned around and saw Camille was the source.

"You heard her. Start practicing before they come," Camille smiled and walked out of the room.

All the girls practiced for twenty minutes before they heard a crash. A Final Year's body, Jasmin, tumbled down the stairs. Her eyes were lost and glossy. There was a giant gaping hole in her chest. The whole school ran to the scene. They all looked to Marie for what to do. She thought for a second. Before she had time to say something, Mark and Chris walked out to the top of the marble stairs.

"How cute. The little witches are trying to fight us," Mark laughed pointing his gun at one of the First Years.

"You heal fast," Marie said noticing the lack of glass and blood.

"I patched him up while we tracked you down," Chris smiled, but Marie could tell he wanted to blow her brains out for hurting his step-brother.

It made Marie happy to know she ticked them off so badly. She could not wait to get back at them for what they did.

“Oh, by the way, this is yours.” Chris held up Smokey. He was dead. The cat she had since she was two was killed by the people who wanted her entire kind dead. The sadness and self-pity turned to anger. She used a killing spell hoping it would hit one of them, but they were better than that. Chris and Mark both got out of the way and started shooting.

The girls started shooting spells and trying to put hexes on the hunters. Even Camille came out of her office to protect her students. Suddenly, Nicole showed up next to Marie.

“We’re losing,” Nicole sighed as she tried putting a hex on one of the Armstrongs.

“Obviously.” Marie managed to hit Chris with her killing curse, but his leather jacket deflected it. She always wondered how it was that they hated witches yet used magic to kill them. Marie found the whole witch hunter community very hypocritical.

From behind a wall, she saw broken glass and furniture thrown around. Girls ran in panic. Many fell to the ground. Colored lightning was being shot at the hunters who were hidden by the wall. Curses were yelled. Gunshots rang throughout the school. Mark and Chris were yelling stuff at each other that Marie could not make out. There were loud bangs of furniture being flipped over for protection. Screams of bloody murder were the main thing filling Marie’s ears, and Marie blamed herself for every girl who wasn’t making it. Her throat closed as her anxiety caused her to panic. Oddly enough, the school still smelled like it always did: lavender. Marie wondered if this lovely purple flower could distract from the death surrounding her.

Glass from the window above her and Nicole rained on them. The horrible shards caused terrible pain as they cut her face and hands. The lavender was washed away by the gut wrenching smell of blood. The blood from her face trickled down over her lips. The strange salty taste went across her tongue. Putting her head between her knees, Marie threw up. Burning stomach acid, blood, and a muffin from earlier poured out of her in a red and yellow goo.

“Marie, I don’t think we’re going to make it.” Nicole slid down the wall.

“You know what? We are going to get out of here alive because those hunters chose to go against us. We’ll kill ‘em both. We just need to focus,” Marie grabbed Nicole’s shoulders and smiled. Nicole, who had her head hanging down, lifted it up and smiled back at her friend. They hugged each other tightly.

“Okay,” Nicole said. “Let’s do this.”

Before Marie could even let her go, Mark appeared from behind Nicole. He shot her in the back of the head. Marie’s ears rang as her best friend fell to the ground. Marie let out the loudest scream Mark and Chris ever heard, or at least Marie hoped, since she couldn’t hear anything. She put the mind control hex on both of them. She didn’t think it would work, but it did. They were under her control.

As tears ran down her face, she put her fingers in the shape of a gun. Remembering the cat she had since she was two, she brought her finger gun to her temple. Replaying her best friend dying, she pulled her thumb down. With two synchronized gunshots, the Armstrongs fell to the ground.

Suddenly, she could hear again, but it was so quiet—there was nothing to hear. Marie slid down the wall and pulled her legs into her stomach. Putting her head back she cried.

“Miss Nottingham?” Headmistress Camille asked.

Marie brought her eyes to Nicole’s body lying on the ground. She did not even look at her headmistress, just nodded, holding back tears.

# Through the Flames

by Chloe Shilale

## **Tucker Hollow Road RI, 1705**

The trees reached for the sky, an unnatural shade of bright green. A slight breeze ruffled the branches and caused leaves to shift and sigh in the wind, a silent song that no one could hear. The wind lifted a dead leaf from the ground, giving it life once more. It twirled and spun, dancing in the wind, reaching for its brethren. It fell back to the ground, never to rise again.

A dark-haired woman walked hurriedly along the path, clutching a woven basket of herbs. The golden sunlight of summer sifted down through the bright green leaves, making patterns of shadow and light on the forest floor. She hurried along her way, desperate to make her way home to heal her sick daughter.

As she neared the edge of the woods, she could see part of her cottage through the thinning trees, where it resided on the outskirts of her community. She could also see tendrils of smoke curling up into the bright blue sky, weaving around the fluffy white clouds—a dark omen. Dropping her basket, she ran, running to her home, to her young child. For where there's smoke, there's fire.

Breaking out of the trees, she caught sight of her home. She stood still, in shock, as tears began to pour from her eyes. She sank to the ground and wept—there was almost nothing left. The cottage she had lived in for years was barely standing. Only the bare bones of the house were left. Parts of it were still aflame and it continued to smoke as the fire died. Through what had once been the back wall of her home, she could see her young daughter's corpse. The small form was blackened and charred from soot, smoke, and ash.

Standing up, she stumbled through her home's remains as her tears continued to fall, making her way to her dead daughter. She collapsed

at her side, keening and wailing, her heart broken. For even she could not bring back life when it had ended. Even for her, death had its rules.

Hours passed, evening fell, and eventually her sobs quieted. She stayed there, at her daughter's side, before standing up and wiping away her tears. She began to make her way out of the burnt house, looking up as stars appeared in the sky, as a roof no longer covered her home. She tripped, sprawling on the ashes and cinders that littered the floor. When she stood, the soot-covered woman saw what she had tripped over and had her breath stolen from her.

She now knew how her home had burned and how her daughter had died, for she saw a torch. The fire had not been the result of a knocked over candle or the wind carrying a stray spark. It had been intentional. In other words, someone had murdered her daughter. She knew why—they thought she was a witch due to her skill level in healing. Anger ignited in her as she thought over all she had done for them over the years: healing their children, their livestock, saving their lives from the deadliest of diseases. Even though she had done so much for them, they still saw her as a threat. Not only that, but they had killed her seven-year-old daughter, her light and joy, the one she loved above all else. With this thought in mind, Dorothy Ellen Cole vowed revenge on the townsfolk for murdering her daughter. She changed from the kind and loving woman she had been to a grieving, raging, avenging mother.

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“Witch! Witch! Witch!” the townspeople shouted as she was led to the pyre. A wooden stake stood tall in the center of their village, surrounded by sticks, logs, chairs, and various other wooden objects. Dorothy Ellen Cole was forced to the top of the pile and fell, sprawling against the wood. She was yanked to a standing position, then forced against the stake. A thick rope was produced and circled her waist, binding her to the tall wooden pole.

“I’m sorry, Miss,” one man said, tears in his eyes as he helped tie her to the stake, “You saved my Margaret from the fever back

in June. She wouldn't have survived without your help. I'm sorry to have to do this, Miss Cole. I wish it didn't have to be this way."

As the men stepped away and off of the pyre, a priest stepped before the crowd. Clearing his throat, he silenced the insults and condemnations of the crowd.

"This woman, Dorothy Ellen Cole, stands here accused of witchcraft. She has also been accused and found guilty of killing Mr. Smith and Mr. Porter. Both of whom were upstanding citizens in their own right. This—as vengeance for her daughter's death—which was caused by an accidental fire. For these crimes, she has been sentenced to death by burning."

Finishing his proclamation, the priest stepped back, took the waiting torch, and threw it at the stake. A cheer rose from the crowd as they watched the flames grow steadily higher, licking at the edge of the pyre. To Dorothy Ellen Cole, the flames seemed to dance, gold and red and orange calling to her, whispering in a secret language. She listened, listened to their foreign tongue, as the fire snapped and crackled, as it drew steadily closer, as the chants grew louder.

The crowd waited for the young woman to scream, to yell, to weep. But she did none of these things. She stood tall, regal, her head held high, looking out at the crowd. Her gaze drifted across the many faces she had come to know. Her eyes passed over many she had saved from illness and death. Their eyes either turned away or defiantly met hers. As the flames grew closer, indescribable heat washed over her. She looked up to the sky, eyes fixed on the full moon as it rose. Her dark hair tumbled over her shoulders. The crowd watched her lips move but could not make out her silent words. It was to the moon that she spoke, uttering one last plea to the deity that she now loved above all else.

As the fire reached her, it rose higher, the flames coming to claim her body and soul. She submitted to the fire, allowing herself to burn, barely feeling the excruciating pain. Her gaze never wavered from the moon. She never spoke another word.

Hours later, the fire died. The crowd dispersed to their homes to hold their loved ones tight, to cherish the time that they had been gifted. The moon was high in the sky, shedding her pale light upon the scorched ground where only ash remained. A cold wind swept through the town, gently lifting the cinders into the air and carrying them up to the stars.

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### **Tucker Hollow Road RI, 2015**

As her dad pulled up to the sportsmen's club, Cranston Fish and Game Association, Alexa wished that she could have stayed home. She was seven and she thought that hunting was cruel. To her, taking the life of another creature, no matter how small, was wrong. However, her older brother, Jason, didn't see it that way and was eager to be back once more. As they exited the car, Alexa lingered, not wanting to be there.

"Come *on*, Alexa," Jason called, "if you don't hurry up, we won't be able to get ice cream later."

Sighing, Alexa continued onward.

Later, Alexa trailed after her brother and father as they traveled deeper into the forest, eventually leaving her behind. Alexa looked up and realized that she couldn't see them. She spun around, desperately looking around her for some sign of where they were. Of course, when she couldn't see them anywhere at all, her fear grew and turned into full-fledged terror. Picking a direction, she decided that must have been the way they had gone, and started running, desperate to catch up with them.

She ran erratically through the trees as leaves of red and gold fell to the ground around her. She ran, pushed on by fear and terror and panic. Eventually, however, her adrenaline wore off and she was stuck, alone and lost, with no way of finding her brother or father.

Alexa dragged herself over to a fallen tree, its great branches stretched across the ground. Before sitting down, a bone-deep weariness filled her body. She sat on the log and wished for her brother, her father, for *anyone*, for some way out of here, to not be alone. But Alexa realized that it was possible that no one would find her, ever. The woods were so very big, and people had gotten lost in them before. It was possible that a bear or a wolf would come along before a human did, and then only her bones and blood would be left. Filled with despair, fear, and loneliness, a tear slipped down Alexa's cheek, followed by several more.

Alexa continued to cry as a blurry figure appeared between the trees. Wiping her eyes, the figure became more defined and Alexa

could make out that the person walking towards her was a woman. She had dark hair and bright blue eyes filled with worry. She was beautiful, wearing a dress so white it almost seemed to glow. She seemed to glide over to Alexa, walking with an unearthly grace. She sat down next to Alexa and rubbed circles on her back until her sobbing subsided.

“Are you lost, child?” the strange woman asked, her eyes and voice filled with motherly concern.

“Yes,” Alexa replied, before breaking down in tears once more. “I don’t know how to get out of here.”

“I know the way if you would like me to show it to you,” the woman said softly.

Alexa nodded furiously through her tears, and the woman stood, taking Alexa’s hand and pulling her up with her. The woman hugged Alexa, comforting her, before turning to lead the way out of the forest. They walked among the trees, seeming to follow a hidden path known only to woodland creatures. The woman glided across the ground, speaking words of comfort, home, and safety to Alexa as they walked.

The trees started to look more familiar to Alexa, and she brightened, at last believing that she really would be alright. A raven cawed in the treetops, releasing a piercing warning before the crack of a gunshot was heard. The noisy forest, filled with the quiet chatter of nature, seemed to fall silent as the bullet traveled along its path.

The woman stepped in front of Alexa as the bullet raced towards her, putting herself in the line of fire. Red bloomed on her pure white dress as she fell to the ground, a ringing in her ears. The woman could hear Alexa screaming as the world went out of focus and the hunters ran towards them.

As the world turned dark, her face lit with a gentle smile. She was happy to have saved the girl, someone so similar to her daughter, the way she hadn’t been able to save her own child. The sounds of the earth faded, her bright eyes closing for the last time. Her body shimmered, glowing as pale and white as the moon as it faded, leaving Alexa to stare at empty space as her form disappeared. The woman in white was gone. At last, the spirit of Dorothy Ellen Cole was laid to rest.





*Warren Reflections. Linda Megathlin.*  
Image courtesy of the Warren Preservation Society.

# The 10 That Saved Nella

by Marlin Severino

**N**ovember 13. There it was: all the memories were damaged with just a simple candle lit. It was 3:54 pm when we lost our home. I heard my mother cry as she knelt down on her knees on the sidewalk. I had never heard anything like it. On Tuesday, November 13, I didn't know what was going to happen the day of my birthday. I'm Julia. Thirteen, almost fourteen. I live in Woonsocket, in a small city, in a two-story house. Pretty modern. We have four bedrooms, and two and a half bathrooms. We came from the Dominican Republic when I was just six months old. We live in a beautiful neighborhood where I grew up. It was all well until November 13.

I had woken up to the sound of my alarm ringing to Justin Bieber's "Baby" at 10:00 am. I heard Willy stomping up and down the stairs, yelling, "I am the master!" I rolled my eyes, saying "yea okay" in my mind. I yawned while scuffling for my glasses on my bedside table. I heard Pops yell, "No, I am the master!" I stepped out of my room to see my father picking up Willy and taking him downstairs across his shoulder. They always had that type of relationship.

I closed my bedroom door, and started walking towards the bathroom when I tripped over one of Willy's toy cars that happened to be a police car. I went down the hall where I freshened up, staying in my giraffe shorts, with my Pink tank top. Since it was November, it snowed the night before, meaning we had no school. I went downstairs, and was welcomed by Mama saying, "A large pancake with blueberries on top for my precious diamond who is 14." Getting into fake tears, she put it down on the table as I kissed her on her cheek. Papa was reading the newspaper like a father always does in the movies. Willy was playing with his oatmeal and acting like his spoon was a rocket ship.

"Vroom, vroom. Why didn't I get any pancakes?" Willy asked. "I want pancakes, I want pancakes!"

"Well, sometimes we don't get what we want in life," I said as I drizzled syrup slowly on my pancakes in front of my annoying brother's face.

"I have amazing news!" said Mother as I stuffed a piece of blueberry pancake into my mouth. "Today my boss told me I got a raise, and we are being gifted to take a trip to.... Disneyworld in December!"

My jaw dropped. I couldn't believe it. The mess of mashed up blueberries and pancakes sounded gushy as it was slowly falling out of my mouth. OMG. "We are going to Disney World," I said in my head like Tom Brady after he won the Superbowl. My excitement got interrupted by Willy shouting across the table and running around the house. He went through the kitchen, down the hall into the guest bathroom, into the living room, then upstairs, where he tripped over his police car. He got back up and yelled, "WE'RE GOING TO DISNEY WORLD!"

Mama went running to him to pick him up. He started saying, "Thank you, Momma" but Momma told him, "Everything I do is for you guys."

Papa was still sitting at the table as he smirked over his coffee and newspaper. He got up, went to the kitchen, and opened the fridge. He was in the process of taking something out when all of a sudden he began to sing, "Happy birthday to you." Then Mama and Willy joined in, "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday, dear Julia. Happy birthday to you."

He walked over slowly and placed it on the table when he finished. It was a cookies and cream ice cream cake. Mama went to get the lighter to light the "14" candle on the cake. She slowly and carefully put the lighter against the candle. Dad dug his finger into the frosting and put it on my nose.

"Te esta poniendo vieja, con cara de conejo" sang Papa in Spanish.

Mama went to get something that looked like a box covered in different dog breeds with a big red bow at the top. I heard something shuffling around inside of the box. Momma placed it on the table as she said, "I know you've been wanting this so much, and I decided to get you it finally."

I slowly opened the box, as the sun came out from the window afar. My eyes reflected a small Shih Tzu in Oreo colors running around inside the box.

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!" I screamed. It started barking as I picked him/her up.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" I asked.

"Girl, honey," Momma replied.

I couldn't believe my eyes.

"I want a dog," Willy said.

"We can share it." I told Willy, making him believe I was going to share with him.

"Let's name her... Nella."

And that was the first time Willy had said anything intelligent. I kept on searching inside of the box, and there was a book that had my name carved in it with a small heart next to it. Mama told me that it was a small diary, so whenever I feel like the world is falling apart, I would write. Writing takes me away from all the problems in the world. It's as if the ink, staining the paper as I wrote took me to a whole other place. The pen was my plane, and the words were my trail.

I took Nella upstairs to my room, and put a pink three inch bow in her hair. As I put it on her, she licked my face and I felt her soft furry skin against my face telling me she'll love me.

"I love you too," I told her.

I went downstairs to see Willy eating the rest of my pancake. I didn't mind so I told Papa that I'd be walking Nella outside. I went to the table and got the leash that was in the box. I put it on her and she started shuffling, but I finally got it on her. I put my jacket on and we headed outside.

I started to walk Nella in the front yard. The snow that fell last night was still on the ground. She ran all over the place, rolling and barking over the snow. She looked like a ball rolling over the ground, never ending. The only time she stopped to settle was when she was tired and couldn't run any more. I decided she needed a break, so I picked Nella up, and we headed inside for a treat. I put her down on the couch, went to the box and saw treats inside. I opened it and gave her three treats. Mama, Papa, and Willy were all upstairs in their rooms. I went back to the box and found a letter. I saw an envelope

decorated with heart; it was a pretty teal color. It said, “Para mi nina” which meant for my daughter. I opened it up to see a card come out. My dad was never the writer’s type; he worked at a car repair shop.

“Mi nina. Ya tienes catorce, y no bebe. Quiero dejarte saber que eres muy especial, y si me pasa algo, sepa que te amo tanto, papa.”  
*You are fourteen now. No longer a baby. I just wanted to let you know you are very special and if anything ever happens to me, just know I love you so much.*

He was never the person to express himself through words, but I guessed he went out of his way just for my special day. I put the card back in the envelope, and went to pick up Nella so we could go upstairs. I went to my parents room to say thanks to Papa. He and Mom were getting ready because we were going to get ice cream at Friendly’s near our town. We were the type of family to always eat something cold on a cold day and something really hot on a hot day. I knocked and they said to come inside. I gave Papa a big hug, squeezing him in tight so I could hear his heartbeat. I gave Mama a big hug as well, kissing them both on the cheek. I sat on their bed, and took them in both by my side and said, “I have the best parents in the world. Thank you for all you’ve done.”

Mama and Papa chuckled. Willy came in and hugged us as the sun was setting outside. Our family moment was interrupted when we smelled something burning. We all went downstairs to witness our rug and curtains on fire. We all forgot that the candle was still lit. We all jumped when the smoke alarm went off.

Papa and Mama screamed, “Willy, Julia, get your coats, leave everything behind. Don’t get any toys or phones. Let’s go.”

Willy went running to his room for his coat. I went to my room to get something because I already had my coat on. I knew Papa and Mama told me not to get anything else but I saw our family picture on my night stand, so I took it and put it in my pocket. I put on my Uggs and left my room. I saw Willy pass by and pick up his police car. I picked him up and we went downstairs. Papa and Mama were trying to put out the fire with water but it just grew bigger and bigger. Cough, cough is all that I heard coming from Willy. Papa and Mama couldn’t put the fire out so we left out the

back door. I felt like I was missing something but it never really hit me what I needed.

We started to head down the street when Papa started calling the fire department. We couldn't really get much help because it was a snowy day and it would be way too long before the firefighters got there. Papa and Mama sat us down on the sidewalk as they started calling family. I looked around, and Willy started crying. He got closer to me and I hugged him. We were sitting there together when all of a sudden I remembered that Nella was in the living room. I heard a cry squealing from the inside.

"We have to get her, Mama. It's Nella. She's stuck in there, Mama! I can't lose her now!" I cried.

The fire grew bigger and bigger as it came out of the windows. I started to cry thinking we couldn't do anything to help her. I felt weak, irresponsible, and stupid as I sat there. I thought, "How could you, Julia?" I ran to the backyard in hopes there was a way inside. I stood there on top of my dead grass and looked at the door when all of a sudden I saw a black figure near the door. I heard Nella barking and squealing. There was nothing I could do at that point. My grey house in Woonsocket was being broken apart by just one candle. All of my childhood memories stood in an 8 x 12 picture frame on the wall. I stood there, crying, as if the trail of my tears down my face would put out the fire.

All of a sudden, I heard something coughing. I didn't think much of it, thought it was Willy. But it came from something real close. I heard footsteps trying to get by the back door. I looked up and it was Nella. She had been looking for safety. There were three steps leading to the back door, and she was behind the door. I reached for her as fast as *The Flash*. My hands started to get really hot as I tried to grab her. Finally, my ten tiny fourteen-year-old fingers grasped slowly around her body and her soft fur. My tears were all dried up due to how close I was to the fire. I quickly got her out of the fire, and held her against my body. She was covered in dark black ashes. I held her tight as she started to cough, and was thankful she was okay.

"Julia? JULIA? Julia sweetie?" I heard Mama calling me.

I walked towards my family while dusting Nella off. Momma was

hugging Willy, and Papa was still calling family. From the distance, I heard sirens. We were finally going to get some help, but we would no longer live in our small home in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. I laid Nella down on the ground and reached inside of my pocket. I found our small family portrait and held it tight. I sat next to Mama, and Papa sat next to me. I stretched out my hands to show them, as the fire trucks pulled up. In front of us five, our home was burning; the heat that kept us warm wasn't from the fire, it was from all of us sticking together, no matter what. November 13.

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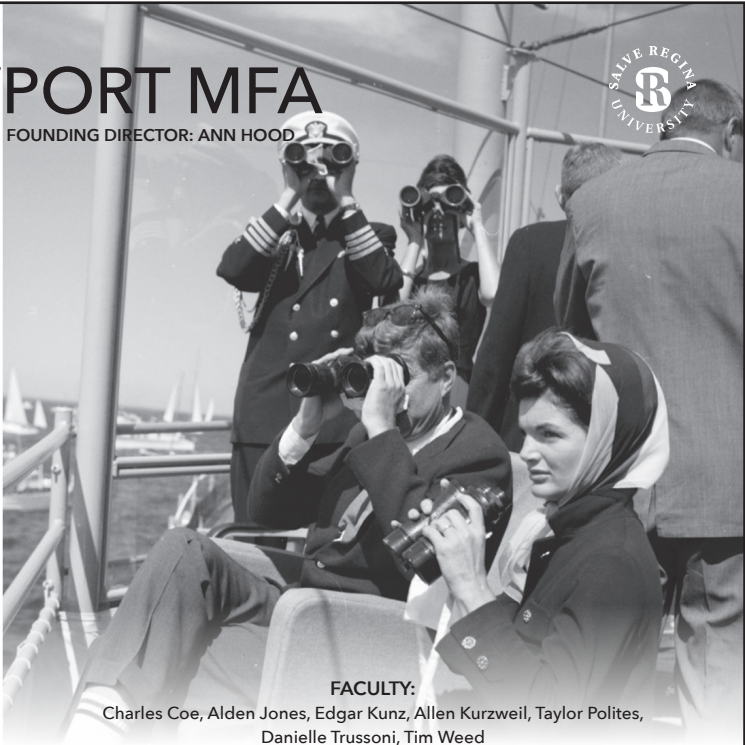
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# Galaxy of the Land

by Caroline Kramer

The ocean is quite possibly one of nature's most extravagant phenomena. Its vastness offers an entire spectrum of possibilities to the eye of the beholder. It contains so many unexplored depths and undiscovered treasures that an element of surprise is created—an aura that's retained within clear water and velvet sands. It holds a promising sense of hope. Its entity is so welcoming, making it so appealing to so many people. And maybe it was just because of the atmosphere she grew up in, but Nora felt the most at home in the Ocean State.

Her auburn hair danced in the wind as she walked across the sandy pavement toward the beach. Beside her was her dear cousin, Vivien, a precocious brunette with a knack for adventure. After living in the suburbs of New York City for all her life, Viv was far from accustomed to the life of the typical Rhode Island pedestrian. But now that she was moving to a new residence in Providence, Nora was more than ready to show her the ropes.

The tangy scent of sea salt wafted past them in a gentle gust of warm wind. The skyline was painted with a mellow yellow, melting into a fiery orange-red as it descended to the horizon line. She couldn't speak for Viv, but to Nora, it was astounding. The light receptors of her eyes longed to register every hue the setting sun had to offer. The colors were rich and vibrant, blending into each other and overlapping to produce colors unfathomable even to the human eye. Some things were just so marvelous that their beauty couldn't be captured. That's exactly how it was with sunsets.

As Nora scanned the horizon with big, inquisitive eyes, she found her mind wandering. She pictured her grandfather with his arms enclosed around the great, wide sea, welcoming any beholder of



curiosity through his makeshift gates. It was his way of proposing the idea that the sea was not something to be taken for granted. To Nora, he was a token of the ocean exclusively personal to her. He wanted the world to see things intuitively, openly—because an open mind is the key to an open heart.

“Well, here we are, Viv. This is the last stop of your tour.”

The two girls scaled the length of the boardwalk. Viv rested her hands on the smooth cedar railing overlooking a strip of crystal sand, and Nora stopped beside her. Propping her elbows up, she skimmed the area in front of her. She'd always considered the beach the galaxy of the land. With foaming, white waves crashing against the shore and cerulean waters gleaming under the reflection of the sun, the endlessness of it reminded her of a more accessible outer space.

The one thing that left Nora unsettled, though, was that someone legally owned the beach's land. *Why?* She understood that someone had to maintain its cleanliness, but the idea of an individual owning acres upon acres of something nature freely gifted the world was a concept she couldn't wrap her head around. The fact that she was on someone other than Mother Nature's property was simply inconceivable.

But it was no use dwelling on the structure of society when a world of overpowering grace and serenity was out there.

Nora's most cherished moments laid within the borders of Rhode Island. Something comforted her knowing that it was the smallest state; it further justified the fact that quality tops quantity. The tight-knit community in her part of the Ocean State made every waking moment worthwhile.

As far ago as it was, some snapshots of her life seemed as if they had taken place just yesterday. Notably enough, solving jigsaw puzzles on the hardwood floor with Vivien while listening to their grandfather's tales of simpler times was the most vivid. Even at the young age she was, Nora resonated with every single word her grandfather enunciated. His description and enthusiasm made his picture of the past even more real. As a Rhode Island native himself, Nora found even more fascination in the fact that the things he was saying occurred right below her feet.

“Honestly, this entire tour thing was a real eye-opener,” Viv said, turning to face Nora while slouching against the rail. “I honestly always had the impression that Rhode Island was this secluded little area where elves worked on boats sipping coffee milk with no wiggle room to breathe. But now I know that it’s more than just the underdog.”

“Well, my job here is done, then,” Nora said warmly in response. “But I regret to inform you that elves are a no-no.” Viv giggled.

From a distance, a lighthouse was shining a sharp, revolving beam of light as a misty fog settled over the water. The waves grew more treacherous as the tide dipped in and out. Viv took a steady sip from her green tea, immune to its purposeful bitterness.

“I truly can’t wait to move here.”

The words came out breathlessly. Nora observed her cousin’s amber eyes as they skimmed every particle of life she could scavenge with awe. The savory flavor of clam chowder lingered on the tip of both their tongues, and their palms were calloused from their simultaneous rides on the carousel. Adventures in the woods led to a tear in the knee of Nora’s jeans, and the storage space of Viv’s camera was reaching its capacity from the series of photographs she’d taken. The pleasant events of the day would be stored in the back of their minds for the rest of their lives.

Fine grains of sand clung to Nora’s hair as the wind started to howl with intense vigor. Stars dotted the sky as the ever-growing darkness of night enveloped the landscape. Both of them knew it was about time to retire for the day.

“Thanks for a great time, Vivien.” Nora turned to face her cousin, and they both started back down the boardwalk. “There are twelve-hundred square miles to explore here. The sky’s the limit, so as soon as you guys settle, knock yourself out. Have a clam cake or two, and maybe check out the historical landmarks we missed.” Nora paused to absorb every ounce of bliss that she could from the atmosphere. With flamboyant skies, soft sands, clear water, and her witty, loving cousin surrounding her, life couldn’t get much sweeter. “You’re in the Ocean State now.”



*Skipping Along Stingy Alley, Angela Pacino.*  
Image courtesy of the Warren Preservation Society.



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