



Watershed

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Table of Contents : *Literature*

6	Ear of Corn Rachel Walkowiak	26	Whimsy Teresa Morse	41	Four Quarters Tonia Karpowicz
7	Cranberry Sam Moon	26	Revenge Kate Colby	47	The Book Tyler Keal
8	Hunter-Choppers Katherine Hayes	27	This is Just to Say Parker Roth	49	Kiwano Katie Mercer
14	In Catherinstadt Blake Scott	28	The Flu Blake Scott	51	If Stars Could Speak Katie Adams
15	What Ginny Sees Parker Roth	31	Boabdil Katie Adams	52	Famine Tyler Keal
16	Five Miles Under the Speed Limit Kyrie Bair	32	Corn Allyson Sass	53	Death Tyler Keal
20	Home on the Kansas Range Katie Mercer	33	Grocery Store Woes Sam Moon	54	Woody Bear Katie Adams
22	In this Hour Bryce Lathrop	36	They Always Smiled Back Tyler Keal	64	Summer Fruit Haven Ashley
23	Fireflies Tyler Keal	38	Great Kyrie Bair		
25	Cat Tonia Karpowicz	40	IOWA: Where the Heart Is Rachel Walkowiak		

Table of Contents : *Art*

Cover	Reflection Brandi Dority	39	...	Brittni Sayers
13	...	45	New Adventure Brandi Dority	
19	Limenitis arthemis, Nymphalidae Ariel Williams	48	Doorknob Allyson Sass	
21	...	50	Cityscape Brandi Dority	
24	Mordecai Brandi Dority	53	Rainy Street Allyson Sass	
30	...	56	...	Brittni Sayers
34	Brave Aaron Hannon	62	Lilly on Water Ariel Williams	
35	Planets Aaron Hannon	63	...	Ryan Hodges
35	Sea Aaron Hannon	66	...	Rachel Walkowiak

Ear of Field Corn

Rachel Walkowiak

Oh you brittle typewriter, bitter and dried up over your missing keys.

Tart pebble of the winter world, I long for a cold cup of your fallen brothers.

Sam Moon

Cranberry

Hunter-Choppers

Katherine Hayes

Every family has traditions, especially around the holidays, and my family is no exception. Yet of all our rituals, large and small, our biggest and most anticipated tradition is Christmas tree shopping. Some people stand in line for hours at Kohls; we stand for hours amongst a field full of evergreen trees. No doubt, it started as a fun Christmas outing, but over 28 years my mother has turned it into a rigid and obligatory ritual. The search must occur on the same day every year, Black Friday. I used to resent my hunting duty; none of my friends were dragged from farm to farm as children as I was, not even the people in my extended family get a real tree. It's an obsession; a genetic mutation that my mother has passed down to all three of her children.

There used to be a trusty tree farm that we counted on every year for our quality ornament hanger of a tree. However, it shut down about five years ago and now every year is a fight for excellence. We have to spend quality time researching the farms in our area and try to avoid anything too far away because it's risky carrying a Christmas tree on top of a car for more than 50 miles. It's important to have more than one tree farm on the list of options. If we have the misfortune of visiting a place with all precut trees, we don't stick around to sip the hot chocolate – we load up in the car and head out. The past few years we've had to visit more than one farm in a day but we always manage to find a tree on Black Friday.

There are a few guidelines that our perfect tree must meet. The most important of these is height. My brother is our measuring stick: he is 6'3" and when he raises his arm straight above his head, it reaches the same height as the ceiling in my mother's house. Before we discovered John's purpose in life, several times we found that the trees too tall when we got home and had to cut the tops off. The second selection specification is that the tree mustn't have bag worms. If the tree has a worm, that means it probably won't last the whole Christmas season. The color of the tree is a given: green, not brown. There is one specification that we sometimes fudge on but only when the picking is slim. The general rule is no obvious holes in the tree- spots where branches are missing and one can see all the way to the trunk. Fortunately, my mother has accumulated 28 years' worth of Christmas ornaments so minor gaps can be covered with some of her collection. Some years have called for desperate measures; when we have to settle for a tree with a gap big enough to stick my entire head in, we put

that side up against the wall.

There are other qualifications that not everyone agrees upon. This ensures that no hunting trip goes without argument and a little bit of despair. My mother and I would prefer a tree that is as robust as possible: the rounder and fatter, the better. Both of my brothers prefer a skinnier tree with a smaller trunk, but that's only because they are the ones that do most of the cutting and carrying. It usually ends with someone making a reluctant sacrifice and maybe doing a little sulking.

The true test is when the tree gets back home. It's mysterious the way a tree can seem so perfect when it's in a field surrounded by other evergreens but, when it's in a tree stand all alone, it suddenly has many imperfections. The major problem is that it always seems to grow on the way home. Each year as we cut the mesh bundling off the tree, and the branches fluff out, my mom exclaims, "Wow that's a lot bigger than it looked in the field." We accommodate for the unexpected size and wrap it in garland and colored lights, then hang

I enjoy decorating the tree, but the real thrill for me is in the hunt. Once, I attempted to share the thrilling hunt with my roommates. I talked up the experience and got everyone really excited. One of my roommates, Darcey, said she already knew of a tree farm nearby, so I didn't bother to research farms in the area. The three of us piled into Darcey's 2-door Ford Escort, wearing tacky Christmas sweaters and flashing Christmas light earrings, and headed for Strawberry Hill Tree Farm.

As we drove up, I noticed a patch of ill-cared for trees, but the optimist in me knew that somewhere beyond my line of vision was a field of luscious, well-cared for, evergreen trees. We parked and headed for the big red barn with a tractor-trailer out front. I could see a lot with pre-cut trees, but already knew picking one of those was not acceptable. We were greeted by an elderly gentleman and his dog. The man told us if we wanted to cut down our own tree, the tractor would be taking customers out to the field in a few minutes and to grab a saw. Kristen, Darcey, and I obliged; we climbed onto the trailer and perched ourselves on top of hay bales among the other eager hunters.

The old man fired up the tractor and we were off. He circled around to where the pre-cut trees were – only a few yards from where the ride started- and asked, “Anyone wanna get off here?”

Everyone declined; we wanted more adventure than we could get from a tree someone else cut down. We bounced a few more hundred yards down the grassy path and stopped in front of the run down lot I had seen when we came in.

The driver made an announcement, “Alright! Everyone gets off here! Once you pick a tree wait here, and we'll come back around and pick ya up.”

I looked in his direction with desperation. I wanted to signal to him, somehow, that we wanted to go where the real trees were, the trimmed, spruced, and full branched trees. Oblivious to my anxiety, my friends joyfully hopped down and headed for the withered selection of trees. When I came to my senses and realized he wasn't taking us anywhere else, I flushed with another wave of fear. Suddenly, I felt compelled to run and find the best of the worst trees before someone else got to it. The naïve enthusiasm of Kristen and Darcey once again brought me back down to earth. I wandered around with them and silently disparaged each tree we contemplated chopping down. They settled for one that was only half dead. There was a big hole in the living side, but I figured we could put the dead side against the wall and cover the hole with ornaments.

Cutting down the tree was the easy part. I felt like an expert tree chopper because neither one of my friends had ever attempted it. The hard part came once it was chopped and purchased. Just as it's a bad idea to choose a tree farm too far away from home, it's also a bad idea to bring a car that is too small to carry a tree. When Darcey pulled her car up to the barn, the tree farm workers giggled a little but, their expressions quickly changed from silly to worry when they realized we weren't joking. They tried their best to secure the tree snugly on the top of the tiny car and then assured us it wouldn't budge. We made it less than a mile along the road before the tree was halfway down the back windshield and headed for the pavement. We pulled over twice to readjust and drove 35 mph all the way home. By the time we had the tree roped down tightly, two of the three of us were also roped so tightly we couldn't get out of the car.

The three of us look back on this trip with laughter now, but it isn't something we did again the next year. And even though my siblings and I still carry on this tradition in my mother's house, sometimes the end of the season leaves us asking why. By the time December 26th rolls around, the tree is dead and we are busy making plans for the New Year. My mom cries every year when she has to pack all the ornaments away and her sadness makes me wonder if it is worth making all the fuss. Then I look at my brother, and his height reminds me that our family was born to be Christmas tree hunters.





Sara Bell

13

In Catherinstadt

Blake Scott

In Catherinstadt shadows slump
down the alleyways.
All roads lead to corn stubble.

Christmas lights drip watercolors
on the boot-tracked snow.
(The tricky ton of feathers;
the weary press of softness.)

In front of the old elementary school
a snow angel has melted through to grass.

Refrozen, misshapen,
she lies unmoving,

afraid to believe she was never really there.

She walks in the room with the special teacher.
Hey, Ginny, nice shirt, Kyle chants, sarcasm oozing
from each syllable. *Thanks*, she smiles back.
Ginny stands proudly for the class to see
her oversized, deer-infested Christmas sweater. It's March.
Not even Mrs. Cole bothers to stifle a laugh.
Why should she? Ginny's laughing too.

Hallways are the worst, insults flying at her
like arrows. She hears taunts whizzing by,
but Ginny's ears hear hummingbirds instead.
Kyle hands her a dead dandelion in passing,
but Ginny sees a rose.

Parker Roth

What Ginny Sees

Five Miles Under the Speed Limit

Kyrie Bair

And Jesus ascended into Heaven...

That's right. They never play just the radio during road trips. It is Max Brooks, Tim McGraw, or nothing. This isn't business; there is no compromise. Not that going on road trips with my grandparents is boring. The trips are just... long.

"Don't miss the turn, Bud."

"I'm not going to miss the turn."

And took his just place at the right hand...

"Bud! Don't miss the – I told you."

"Well...I didn't know you meant..."

Then Grandpa Bud, never one for enunciation, mutters something I can't really understand. His wife, Lois, doubles as my grandma and his translator. Though only about one third the size of Grandpa, her sharp voice makes her hard to ignore.

"Do you need to go to the bathroom?" She's talking to me this time. "Bud, turn there. There's a rest stop. Turn there. Do you see it?"

"I'm fine, Gramma. I can wait till we get there."

She turns backwards in her seat. "Are you sure, honey? You haven't been all day."

I don't think this is a very polite subject to be discussing in front of Grandpa. "I'm okay." As she turns to the front again, I look at the sky, the movement of the clouds sluggish compared to the interstate traffic.

The thing that I really like about traveling with my grandparents is their van. The seats aren't very comfortable, but I get to control the vents over my head – both the speed and the temperature. I like to mess with the controls until Grandma tells me I have them on too high.

Turn tape over to side two...

However, the thing that I don't like about these trips is my grandparents' memories. Grandpa's memory is somewhat lacking, which is good for someone in my position. If I'm patient enough, it means I can get an extra can of Dr. Pepper. But Grandma's memory is too good: I think she stole all of Grandpa's memory cells when he was asleep one night. Kind of like the way cats supposedly steal breath from little babies. Grandma loves cats.

I can't get away with anything when Grandma is around. It's not like she's mean or anything, and I am most certainly not a bad kid. But I am stubborn. I don't like being monitored. My mom started leaving me at home by myself when I was in first grade when she needed to make quick runs to the grocery store or the cable company. My record is totally clean of burned down houses or holes in walls. I never even spilled my water during my tea parties. I think Grandma forgets this because she spends more time with my terrible-twos little cousin than with me.

"Gramma? Did I go through the terrible twos like Logan?"

She turns around to look at me. Her wraparound sunglasses dwarf her face even more than Grandpa's size already does. "No, you were a good baby. Loved your mamma, that's for sure. That's why I'm worried about you. Everyone has to be bad at some time in their life and if you don't get it out of the way when you're little, it's even worse. I feel sorry for your principal."

I don't know whether or not to be offended by this. "I'm not going to be bad. I'm going to be like Cinderella. She never did anything wrong."

"Cinderella? That means you're going to have to dance with a boy. Do you like boys?"

"No! I don't like boys and I won't have to dance with them." This isn't where I wanted this conversation to go at all.

"Uh huh." She keeps looking at me through her glasses.

And THAT, my friends, is true power...

I turn up my vent all the way and stare out the window until she turns away again. Now I know where my mom gets it.





Limenitis arthemis, Nymphalidae Ariel Williams 19

Home on the Kansas Range

Katie Mercer

I'm from the sunflower state, cow chip capital
where prairie chickens reign, where summer meets winter
in the same week, where the only military-paid exorcism
occurred. I'm from the home of the Jayhawks and Wildcats,
of the box turtle and barred tiger salamander. I'm from
the graham cracker with a bite out of the top right corner.

In my state it is illegal to wear a bee
in your hat, illegal to use mules to hunt ducks or
to shoot rabbits from motorboats.
Illegal to carry or use bean snappers,
to ride an animal down the road, to spit
on a sidewalk, to screech your tires,
to own musical car horns, to catch fish
with your bare hands. Illegal to hit
a vending machine when it
takes your money. Illegal

to serve ice cream on cherry pie.



Rachel Walkowiak 21

In This Hour

Bryce Lathrop

In this hour, music bares its soul,
rich, raw, and revealing
as consciousness loses control,
and senses blend, so that music
is touched, tasted, and taken in.

In this hour, as the dark of night descends,
music ghosts arise with whispers to send
to the daring young troubadour, whose heart is
atune
to the rhythm that Earth has given.

In this night hour, this twilight masquerade,
the fireflies dance as lyres of gold are played.
Each chord that is struck, each string that is
plucked
sings to souls and stars a sweet serenade.

In this mystical hour all is silent
while old arias of the muses ring
Terpsichore, Erato, and Euterpe sing:
“play on, play on and listen with delight,
sing on, sing on, deep into ancient night.”

But only until the light returns, for
Only now does the music have its power.
Only in this hour.
Only in this hour.

Fireflies

Tyler Keal

I remember those summer nights, waiting for the first sight of yellow lights. My sister and I, our cousins, and occasionally some of the neighborhood kids would perch on my grandparents' back steps and watch as the last of the day's light faded into darkness, feeling the afternoon's heat follow suit. We would gather empty plastic peanut butter jars—or glass canning jars, of which there was always a surplus in the cellar—and watch for the first yellow light to blink on. That initial flash was always our signal to begin; it broke the natural stillness of the night, and we broke the silence as our hurried footsteps crunched across the dry grass and our delighted cries filled the air. We were hunters. We called our prey *lightning bugs*. We were in competition to see who could collect the greatest number before we stopped seeing lights flash on.

At the end of the night, our prey became our reward. I poked holes in the lids of my peanut butter jars. Air holes. Despite what our original intention might have been, when all was done, I'm not sure we really cared who had the most. We were too busy watching our homemade lanterns, watching those magnificent bioluminescent insects do their thing: flashing their yellow lights off and on, off and on. To be humane, we released them in the morning, but, for the night, they were our trophies for a successful hunt. A job well done. A game well-played.





24 Brandi Dority

Mordecai

Tonia Karpowicz

I cannot pet you.

You reach out,
tiny paw testing
the air.

White and black fur
slick and soft under
my hands.

You purr
near my face;
I give in.

Five minutes pass,
nose and head
clog.

Still, you reach out
meowing for love.

I cannot pet you.

Whimsy

Teresa Morse

dances into the art studio
wearing a rainbow scarf and mismatched socks
then ignores the canvas and paints the floor

Revenge

Kate Colby

sneaks behind the bar,
dressed in fishnets and stilettos,
to sprinkle cyanide in his shot glass.

This is Just to Say

Parker Roth *-with apologies to William Carlos Williams*

I have eliminated
the fortissimo
that was in
the 87th measure

and which
you were probably
saving
for the climax

Forgive me
it was obnoxious
so loud
and so open to interpretation.

The Flu

Blake Scott

When Marilyn Monroe got the flu
no one noticed.

When she coughed and spat
a bit of green phlegm into the on-set trash can,
everyone was watching Clark Gable,
or maybe Dean Martin.

And when it was time for her lines,
no one saw the dark ones beneath her eyes,
or heard the way she wheezed over the boom mics.

All the rushes were followed by applause.

But the flu got worse.

The day she died her face was gaunt and sunken,
her hands had rotted to claws and her famous platinum locks
were green and falling out in clumps.

Heedless, the reporters gorged on snapshots.
Making a banquet of her beauty.

In her dressing room
she coughed so hard a lung came up
and hung grotesquely from her mouth.
Bravely she continued to shoot her last scenes,
unable to talk or breathe.

“She looks magnificent”
they whispered behind the cameras,
while the audio track recorded
only the thick, wet rattle
of her exposed flesh,
flapping.



Boabdil

Granada, Spain

Katie Adams

The last, evicted
inhabitant of
the Alhambra
slinks into my lap,
lines my black coat
with ginger hairs.

A schoolgirl
asks, *¿es tuyo?*
and inches forward
to stroke his
purring head.

Corn

Allyson Sass

You are *maize* in Mexico, *wheat* in England, Scotland's *oats*, or the Bible's *barley*.
You taste sweet in the scalding heat, devoured after we shucked the silk.
Whole and pure, you are summer.

Western Union. Broken register. Postage Stamps.
Spilled Milk. Spilled Juice. Spilled lunch.
Bent can. Bent lid. Bent door. Bent broom.
Quarters please. No change.
Wrong receipt.
UPS. CRS. EBT. WIC. USPS.
Phone Cards. Kansas Lottery. Money Orders.
No soap. No shampoo. No sense.
Customer complaints. Customer requests. Customer comments.
Rain in. Dust out. Carts froze. Sign down.
Red polo. Maroon polo. Blue polo. Black polo. Black vest.
Khakis. Corduroys. Cargos.
Clock in. Clock out.

Sam Moon

Grocery Store Woes

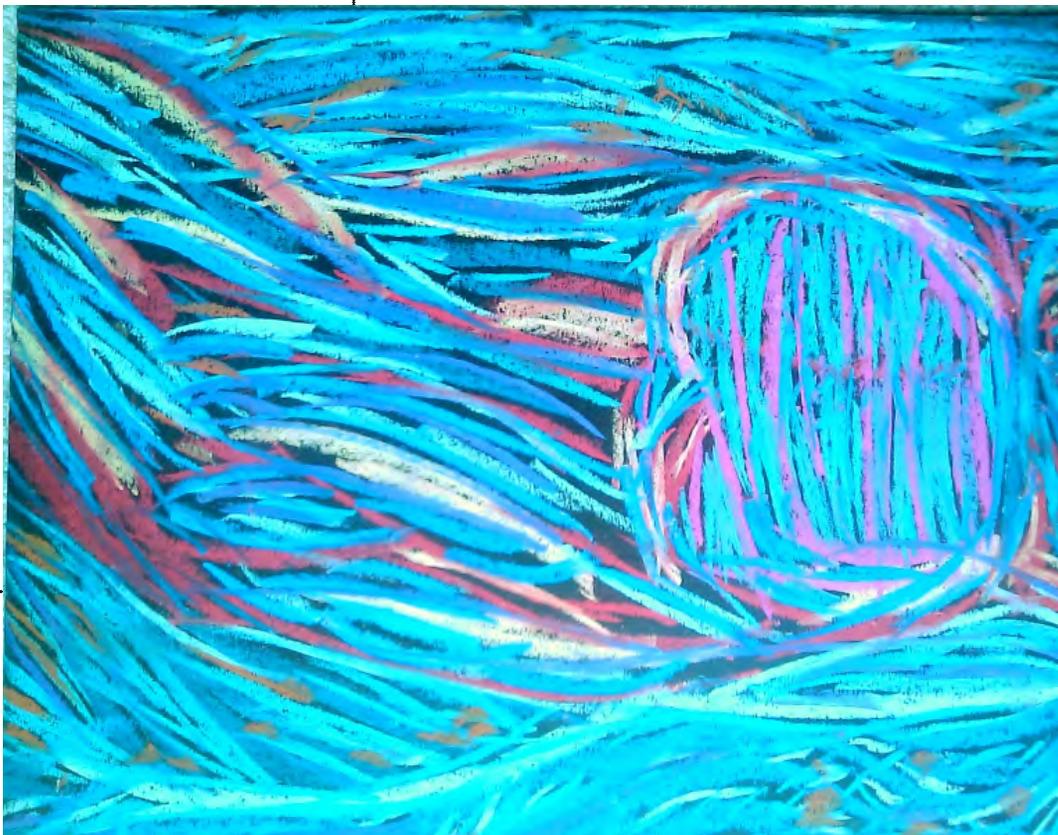


Aaron Hannon
Soft Pastels

Brave



Planets



Sea

They Always Smiled Back

for Frank and Doris Drummond

Tyler Keal

I sat in Grandma's sunlit kitchen after school
and told stories of my day while Grandma listened
with all the time in the world for me.
She made me snacks each afternoon: bagels
with cream cheese, burritos with
sour cream, salad, macaroni and cheese, ice cream.
Everything *she* made tasted better, even the orange juice
from the same frozen can my mother used,
so we joked *Grandma spit in the mix to improve the taste*.
Watching afternoon cartoons with plate in hand, I ate on the old
brown couch while in the blue chair she rocked, busy
sewing, quilting, embroidering-nimble fingers
moving across fabric with ease.

Later I entered Grandpa's dark garage, past white-washed doors, sunlight cutting through gaps, illuminating shafts of dust, smelled grease and dirt and gasoline, looked around at tools collected over a lifetime: hand saws, braces, bits, pliers, screwdrivers, rulers, wrenches, files. Grandpa helped build my boyhood dreams: wooden tigers, guns, and planes. Then we walked up to the house past *Grandpa's* garden where everything grew unmatched by store-bought produce: tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, spinach, okra, squash, zucchini, and sat in the yard with five gallon buckets full, stemming beans and husking corn, enough to last the year.

At their yellow house, we gathered for celebrations, holidays, birthdays, meals, and conversation-*visiting*. We ate turkey with homemade noodles and lemon-pretzel dessert, ripped gift wrap from presents, played in the back yard with the leaf cart and milk crates, watched fireworks over the trees while sitting on the patio, and caught fireflies in plastic peanut butter jars, trophies we showed Grandma and Grandpa, smiling proudly. And they smiled back.

Great

Kyrie Bair

-with apologies to Larry McMurtry

I cruised up and down the gentle roller coaster road back to Great Bend. I passed the spindly, skeletal windmills toward the last few miles, where the curves rotated from vertical to horizontal. It only remained to perform some kind of symbolic act to give the drive coherence, tie the present to the past.

I stopped at an unexceptional duplex that sat somewhere between the railroad tracks, a Dollar Tree, and the local hospital. Only a rank degenerate would avoid making an appearance at this address after making the long trip home. The pieces of the disheveled lawn mower that were as old, if not older than I, were still unsympathetically shoved under the porch that was almost artistic in its discoloration. A couple of newer bungee cords hopelessly tried to hold that rusted scrap together. The trees and grass were still just as sad. There were strangers next door.

A limping, cryptic man stepped out; he looked out of place, more like he belonged on the side of a mountain. With my trained eye, I could see the atrophy in his left arm and leg – the result of paralysis from years ago. His eyes were deep with cynicism and the wrinkles on his face were not made from laughter. Besides more grey hairs, he looked the same as always.

“Well,” he grunted with a voice that probably had not been exercised in a while, “the world has gone to hell.”

“I know, Dad, I know.”





Brittini Sayers

39

IOWA: Where the Heart Is

Rachel Walkowiak

I am the home of the American Gothic
where Native Americans decided, “This is the place.”
Where we dream of soybean fields, baseball diamonds,
and Maytags stocked with Eskimo pies.

I am the home of rustic bridges, hot air balloons,
and more twisters than anyone knows what to do with,
of Buffalo Bill, The Duke, and the cherished Cap’n
who leads his troops onward at dawn with a silver spoon salute.

I am the home of man’s best friend – a four-legged bovine –
of old fairgrounds, competing pastries, livestock, and song,
where in mere seconds anything can be skewered
and offered as a crispy treat to a delighted child.

I am the home of Glenn Miller’s swingin’ melodies,
where humid summer sunsets are serenaded by Bix Beiderbecke’s Jazz Festival.

And I am the home where ice cold lemonade is served on the front porch.

The gravel road crunches under the Sonata's tires. In ten more minutes, Mom and I will arrive at my grandparents' house for Thanksgiving dinner. With Brad Millison crooning the classic "Christmas in Kansas City" over STAR 102's airwaves, I can't help but grin, picturing all the little cousins running around the basement I decorated for Grandma last week. This year we are gathering in a new home, but the people and love we share remain the same. Almost all of our family will be at dinner tonight; we're driving in from Arkansas, Missouri, and Illinois, with only the Texans missing.

Grandma Bobbie and Grandpa Bill just moved off the family farm a year ago because, at seventy-five and eighty-three years old, they were simply too old to keep up with maintenance. They hung around the big farm as long as possible, gradually downsizing fields and crops for the final ten years as they realized their limits, but they couldn't deny the physical and mental strain a farming operation puts on a person, even a young one, and Grandma and Grandpa were on the wrong side of young. So, after much manipulation (and a heart attack), Grandpa agreed to sell the farm and move to town.

I certainly understand why Grandpa struggled with the idea of selling the farm: he grew up there, and the farm was all he knew. Grandpa is not a complicated man, and I'm not claiming I know everything about him—in fact, I don't know much about my grandfather at all. What I do know is that he was born

Tonia Karpowicz

Four Quarters

and raised on that farm, and that he loved the place. He never actually admitted this, but I can tell from small details that working on the farm consumed his life. That he knew all about farming, and it made him comfortable.

After his heart attack, Grandpa had to have a quadruple bypass. Both the attack and surgery proved to him that he couldn't handle all the work he once did without breaking a sweat, and he saw that even the gradual downsizing wasn't enough to keep the farm going.

Once we arrive, I realize this Thanksgiving, except the changed location, resembles all the ones before. Grandpa still manages to keep up his traditional holiday demeanor in the new, smaller living room. He sits in his faded blue recliner, props his feet up, crosses his arms at the elbow, and puts a smart-ass look on his face. Whenever a new group of family members arrives, other family members leap from their chairs, ready to spread hugs and kisses. Everyone, that is, except Grandpa, who stays firmly in his seat and greets each family member with a stoic "Hello, again."

Grandpa stays in his chair until Grandma serves dinner. He flinches in his seat, right foot tapping a silent SOS as the youngest children bounce around the living room, climbing on laps and proudly singing their ABCs for all to hear. Although Grandpa takes it all in stride, Grandma notices his foot flinching and springs into action. The mothers quickly begin ushering their children to the "kid-friendly" basement as Grandma chides, "Y'all know Grandpa gets fidgety with them babies up here. Send 'em downstairs now, ya hear me?"

Within minutes all four kids take haven in the basement, leaving Grandpa visibly at ease, but now he's got a grimace on his face. He's ready to battle Grandma.

"Bobbie, you leave them kids alone, I'm just fine."

"Bill, you're not foolin' no one in this family," Grandma tells him with a wave of her spatula, turning to the cousins. "Now, keep them babies downstairs like I said, Virginia." "Bobbie, get yourself back in the kitchen," Grandpa says, always trying to get the last

word. Grandma shakes her head while the rest of us grin.

Grandpa Bill hates it when Grandma makes a big show out of anything, even when it's for his own good. Everyone in the family knows little kids stress him out, but he doesn't like when Grandma rats him out in front of us. He would rather keep his nervous twitch up all day than let her show him up. He seems to think if she can stand the company, he can too.

Grandma and Grandpa's bickering is sure to last all day. In any other family, fighting between the two top dogs might cause concern, but not in ours: Grandma and Grandpa's disgruntled banter provides us with hours of holiday entertainment and material for countless comedy routines.

Conversation with Grandpa doesn't always flow, even with the babies tucked safely away downstairs. As he grows older, he's harder to understand, and possibly hard of hearing (though he'd never admit it). He mumbles constantly, but the family is used to the comforting sound, and although his deep, grumbling voice may be incomprehensible to most of us, he manages to keep a running play-by-play for all family gatherings.

This year Virginia, better known as Ginny, is the butt of Grandpa's playful joking because she recently lost thirty pounds on a new diet and workout regimen. We're all very proud of her, and ask her countless questions as the day goes on. She looks amazing, and Grandpa definitely notices. All through Thanksgiving he calls Ginny a twig, his way of letting her know she looks nice.

"Where'd ya go Ginny? There's nothin' left to hug!"

"Oh, Grandpa, I've still got quite a ways to go, at least ten more pounds," Ginny smiles back, blushing.

Grandma adds her two cents, "Virginia, you lose ten more pounds and there won't be any more of you left."

Listening to the Skinny Ginny conversation sparks memories of my high school graduation party when my entire family came out to celebrate with Mom and me. At the beginning of the party, while we exchanged the normal hugs and hellos, Grandpa appeared eager, as if hot on the scent of a new target. This time he found two of the family to tease, and felt simply gleeful with this two-for-one comedy routine. My cousins, Caroline and Heidi, were extremely thin growing up, but by the time my high school graduation party rolled around, they had both had children, filled out from their baby weight, and looked like a couple of red-carpet movie stars, a regular Thelma and Louise duo. He couldn't leave it alone. "Look at you two fatties, so healthy. I hardly recognized either of you!" The story's a family favorite, and the two cousins still find themselves perplexed by Grandpa's past-time. Grandpa Bill is ornery, and I love to watch him pick his targets.

Grandma announces that lunch is served. The kids rush up the stairs from the basement, ready to devour her turkey and ham, but really longing for her sweet potato pie. As Grandma asks cousin Bob to bless the meal, we stand and join hands in prayer. Grandpa, however, remains in his recliner, bowing his head only to appease his religious wife. I know he's like me; he can't wait to get to the food.

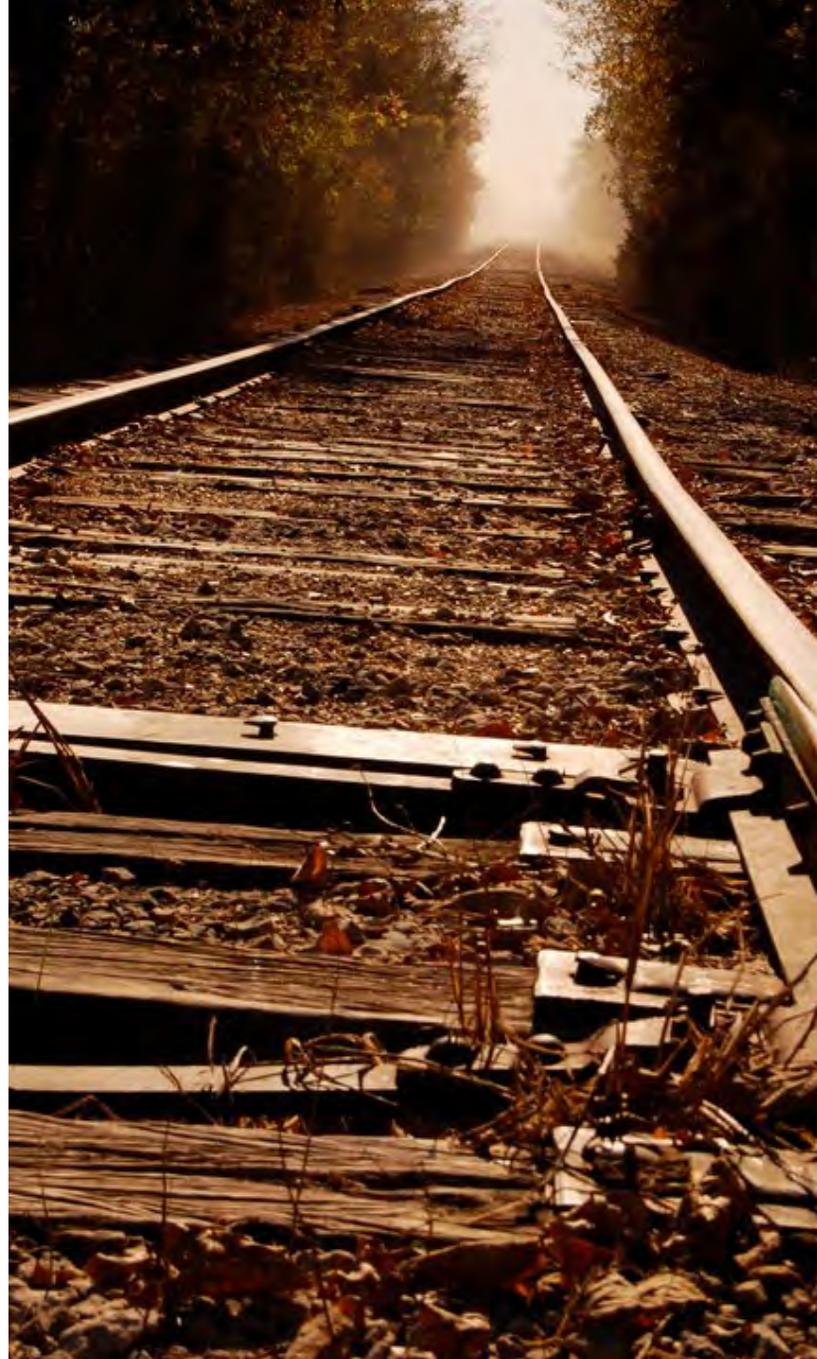
Grandpa Bill was always the first through the line when I was growing up. "Men and children first!" Grandma announced at the beginning of feasts, ushering Grandpa to the front of the buffet. Now, he rests in his recliner until all of the men and women fill their plates, too embarrassed to go first because his once eager quick step has slowed to the tune of a funeral march. After some prodding, he shuffles up to the line, places his silverware in his shirt pocket (for safe keeping) and picks through the food. As we chow down, I notice the change in Grandpa's appetite; it's not what it used to be. These days he might eat one slice of ham and two forkfuls of potatoes all day, but he still

enjoys every bit of his meal, and insists that other family members go up for seconds and thirds, claiming they “barely ate a thing.” Clearly, he likes to live through the eating habits of other family members, longing for his own third and fourth helpings.

Dessert marks the end of the day, so we always put it off until the last minute, and as the day winds to a close, we all make visits to the laundry room to attack the dessert bar. Pumpkin, cherry, sweet potato, and pecan pies sit atop the washer and dryer, four tubs of whipped cream to the side.

“Too full for dessert, Grandpa?” I ask, and he’s instantly offended by such a suggestion (how could he miss dessert?). After some debate, he and I decide to share a large slice of cherry pie. When I was younger, we often split bowls of vanilla pudding; now it’s cherry pie. Either way, I’m just glad for some alone time with him.

When I get up to leave, I’m surprised by a tender hug from Grandpa. Our family has always been big on hugging; it’s ritual to hug



New Adventure

Brandi Dority 45

each and every person present at a gathering before even putting on a jacket to leave, but Grandpa doesn't usually initiate a hug. In fact, it's unheard of, and the show of affection now brings me back to when I was a kid. Back to when Grandpa and Grandma used to always walk us to the car when we left the farm. After hugs and kisses goodbye, Grandpa would pull me aside. He would bend down to my level, look me in the eye, and strike up some small talk. Then he would take my hand in his, and place a "surprise" in my palm.

As I felt the weight of something cold and metallic slip into my hand, Grandpa would wink at me.

"Don't spend it all in one place."

When I got in the car, Mom would always ask what Grandpa had wanted. My responses varied, but in the end I would proudly show her four shining quarters. Until I reached high school, Grandpa never failed to give me this special parting gift.

Grandpa's surprise hug this Thanksgiving replaced the four shiny quarters I received as a little girl. He may never come right out and tell our family that he loves us, but he doesn't have to. Whether it's petty cash or a pat on the back, Grandpa's unexpected actions tell me everything I need to know. Everything.



The Book

Tyler Keal

I remember reading it as a kid, the silly, simple line drawings, rhyming words and rhythm. The thick white pages. My third grade classroom at Sunflower Elementary. Back then, it was the pleasure of senseless humor, of turning the page to each new surprise poem and sketch. Of a “Quick Trip” through the *quick-digesting Gink*, and a particular *tattooed message* left by the “Spelling Bee.”

Years later, cleaning my room, opening a forgotten cabinet, that book and I crossed paths again. The cover was torn and pages were falling out. As I flipped through, familiarity mixed with a new understanding, memory blended with a new perception. I saw the book differently, found new meaning and new joy in those words. Without realizing until I was done, I read its entirety in one sitting. I let the “Magic Carpet” take me *where I’d never been before*, past the *whatifs* and “Fear,” and saw a childhood favorite in a new light.

I taped the loose pages back in and marked my preferences with yellow sticky notes. When I introduced it to my bookshelf, an old friend met my newer ones. That striking white spine still draws my eye: Shel Silverstein’s *A Light in the Attic*.





48 Allyson Sass

Doorknob

English tomato, melano, jelly melon, horned melon, hedged gourd, African-horned
bright, spiked, short, stout, orange cucumber—
how dissatisfied you have left me.

Katie Mercer

Kiwano



50 Brandi Dority

Cityscape

They would tell of waltzes,
of two flames forever circling,
never embracing, never
curling together in bed.

They would tell of bright orbs
in the distant blackness with
which they longed to have a cup of tea.

They would tell of loneliness,
of rocky planets,
of gassy planets, and
the safe distance those objects maintain.

They would tell of a heat
that burns from within, a heat
that incinerates all who approach.

Katie Adams

If Stars Could Speak

Famine

Tyler Keal

slinks into the field
wearing a black cowl
and sets the wheat ablaze

Death

Tyler Keal

toils in the laboratory
wearing pale green gloves
and synthesizes a new virus



Rainy Street

Allyson Sass 53

Woody Bear

Katie Adams

My grandpa died on April 20, 1994, two months short of my sixth birthday. He was my mom's dad, and everyone called him Woody, but his real name was Leonard Woodson Peters. Yes, Woody Peters. He actually refused to tell my grandma his last name until after their first few dates. I don't know why he let everyone call him Woody his whole life, but I've come to think maybe it didn't bother him enough to correct anyone. Grandpa was always unnaturally laidback, cool as a cucumber. His unflappable nature was the stuff of family legend. One of the most-related tales is of the time my cousin Jesse fell in the pool at my grandparents' house, before he learned to swim. While my aunts were screeching, Grandpa simply reached down and fished him out of the water. I wish I'd inherited his unshakeable calm.

It would have taken something powerful to overcome Grandpa's innate ease, and in the end, that something was cancer. I don't know where the first tumor appeared, but after Grandpa fought for several years, the cancer somehow went to his brain. I can still see him climbing into a car with a white bandage wrapped around his shaved head after the biopsy. He was in the hospital for months and months, fighting and losing, and although I didn't know at the time, everyone was waiting for him to pass away. His disease was ugly and devastating, and we could only watch as he lost his hair, his memory, and his power of speech. I remember my mother explaining these things to me in short, simple terms: *Grandpa looks a little different, but he's still the same; Grandpa can't talk anymore, but he can still hear you; Grandpa is going away soon, and he won't be coming back.* We sat on the swing set in Grandma and Grandpa's backyard when Mom explained death to me, and though I didn't understand, I told her I did, just to make her feel better.

No one called me out of class the day Grandpa died. My Grandma Adams picked me

up from school and took me home, where my mom was with my Grandma Peters, and they were crying. The details of the funeral are only fragments in my memory. It was held in the same funeral parlor where all the family funerals have been, and I remember the place looking much bigger then than it does now. The pews swallowed up my five-year-old self. My dress made me itch, and I think I sat next to Great Aunt Susie (I remember holding a wrinkled hand). I went up the aisle to the casket several times, accompanied by various escorts who guided me through the sea of black-clad legs. I didn't cry, although I felt I was supposed to; everyone told me Grandpa had gone to heaven, and that didn't seem very sad.

Almost a year afterward, my grandma, using one of Grandpa's soft, old shirts, made teddy bears for all of her grandchildren. Grandpa used to wear a lot of flannel, generally plaid, always underneath bib overalls. He was never concerned about style – my mother still recalls with horror

Adams

the time he wore his moccasin slippers to a restaurant – but comfort was critical. That his shirt served to comfort his grandchildren after his passing was only fitting.

The bears were made out of red and black flannel – a pattern of red squares, black squares, and squares of diagonal black stripes over red. The fabric was slightly fuzzy, and I imagined the shirt had gone through the wash more than a few times. Woody Bear was less than a foot tall, a simple cut-out of straight arms and legs, with ears capping his head like a Mouseketeer’s hat. He was stuffed taut, filled with cotton fluff. His eyes and nose were black buttons, with crooked stitching for the mouth.



My bear has since lost the thread indenting the center of his left ear, giving him an even more lopsided appearance. He has a white ribbon around his neck, too, which is funny, because Grandpa would never have worn a tie, unless Grandma made him do it. On my bear’s back is a rectangle of white fabric, quickly yellowed by Grandma’s cigarette smoke, which reads: *Made from the shirt of ‘Woody’ Peters, Grandpa of Katie Adams, by her*

Brittni Sayers

grandma, Darlene Peters, February 11, 1995.

In that little bear is wrapped up all my knowledge of death, of *dying*. It's the date on that bear that draws my attention now. So many months after my grandpa's death, was it a part of Grandma's grieving process? Had she already fought her way through *denial, anger, bargaining, depression*? Was each bear a step toward *acceptance*? I wish I knew what those long years of doctors and pills and hospital visits had been like for my grandmother. When had she known she would be losing her husband? For how long had she clung to hope? I never asked my grandma these questions; I didn't even think of these questions until recently, nearly three years after *her* death.

Four of my cousins have bears identical to mine, made from the same shirt. The five of us had been born before Grandpa died, and somehow, Grandma cut five bears out of that one button-down. The older cousins – Jay, Emilia, and Jesse – struggled more with Grandpa's death, understanding his slow deterioration in a way I could not. I was treated as the baby of the original grandchildren, even though Bryan was younger than I was. He and his family lived far enough away that Grandpa couldn't spoil him like he did the rest of us. I was the littlest within reach, and Grandpa would come and collect me at random, whenever he was on errands for Grandma, picking up whole turkeys and cigarettes and who knows what else in his beat-up, pea-green Monte Carlo.

Everything about Grandpa was like that: broken-in, well-used, unbeautiful but functional. Grandpa didn't know much about Italian sports cars or conflicts in the Middle East, but he knew how to whistle and whittle. He could start a fire with the sun and a magnifying glass, and he knew how to build things at his cluttered work bench. And Grandpa delighted

in getting us dirty, especially Bryan, whose mother dressed him in tidy white shirts and shoes.; the pristine white outfit provoked Woody like a red flag draws a bull, and he wasted no time getting Bryan in the muddy front yard. Grandpa met my aunt's irritation with his laid-back grin, enjoying her ire almost as much as he enjoyed the dirt smeared across my cousin's backside.

In his quest to spoil the grandkids, Grandpa once took me and my three older cousins to Kiddie Land. Kiddie Land has since been demolished and replaced with a bowling alley, but as the name implies, the amusement park was a little paradise for children. A large green dinosaur, still standing outside the new bowling alley, marked the entrance (a thrill of residual excitement hits me even now when I see that ugly lizard). That day, Grandpa went on every ride with us, folding his legs into the car of a miniature train, climbing in next to me on a boat ride. With the boys, he hazarded the petting zoo, while Emilia and I watched, shy and squeamish. He bought the girls candy lipsticks, and the boys received candy cigarettes, a delicious commodity hunted to extinction by those convinced the candy sticks would encourage children to smoke. Laughable, those fears, when the firsthand knowledge of cancer we've acquired since then has guaranteed that not one of the grandchildren will ever smoke a single cigarette.

My youngest cousin, Brettney Woodson Peters, wasn't with us at Kiddie Land, and she has a different bear, made from green flannel. She wasn't born until July 20, 1995. After Grandpa died, and after the bears were made. When she realized the rest of us had bears, she wanted one. She used to say she missed Grandpa, which was impossible, of course, because she'd never met him. But it was the only way she could articulate what she really felt: that she'd been deprived of the memories the rest of us had, that the age gap made her feel

disconnected from our tight-knit family, that she wanted to know the man whose middle name she shared. Grandpa would have loved her and all her energy; she would have taken to mud pies and backyard campfires with gusto.

Woody Bear feels more significant to me now that Grandma is gone, too. Like Grandpa, she didn't go quickly or easily. Grandpa lost his mind to a brain tumor, and Grandma lost hers to undiagnosed kidney failure. Blocked arteries prevented blood flow to her legs, her stomach, and her kidneys, which released countless toxins into her body in their death throes. We watched her deteriorate for over a year as she lost her appetite, her clarity of mind, her ability to walk. Gut instinct told me she was dying a month before she was admitted to the hospital, and the epiphany is frozen in my memory, the simple moment when I cried on the couch with my mother.

The doctors didn't understand Grandma's illness until she'd already had a minor stroke and a heart attack, until she was

unconscious in the ICU with a machine doing her breathing for her. Before the heart attack, she completely lost touch with reality, calling my mother "The Slasher" and declaring, "V for Victory!" The onslaught was sudden, leaving no time to say goodbye — one day, my mother was ushering me out of the room, trying to protect me from seeing my grandmother so wrecked, and the next, Grandma was unconscious and hooked up to a respirator. A few days later, we took her off the machine and waited a long week for her to go.

Grandma's death was much different for me than Grandpa's, the blow sharpened with the clarity of understanding. The hospital called my mother that Thursday morning in July, warning her that Grandma would die soon. My mom and I had left the hospital late the night before, intending to get some sleep before returning the next day. This had been the pattern for a week. I had a job that summer, too, but I'd taken all those days

off, feeling an instinctual responsibility to be the emotional support for my family members, even though I was losing as much as, if not more than they were. Next to my mother in the air-conditioned car, I listened helplessly as she called her brothers, telling them to hurry to the hospital. We were ten minutes away when the nurse called again. Grandma was gone. I'll never forget the way my mother's face crumpled when she heard the news. I told her to pull over, that I would drive the rest of the way, but she ignored me.

As much as I would like to forget sight of my grandma in the hospital bed, pale and mottled in death, the details linger. The sound of my uncle Doug's choking sobs when he walked in. The stale smell on the air. I'd seen dead people before, but always carefully made-up with peaceful expressions and folded into caskets. Grandma didn't look anything like that. Her mouth and eyes remained open, and my chest hurt when I tried to breathe. I didn't cry then; the shock overwhelmed me. I couldn't cry at the funeral, either, could only laugh when someone's cell phone went off with a rooster ringtone in the middle of the service. In fact, the only time I really cried for my grandmother's death was months before – when I realized it was coming. Since, I've only cried when I miss her too much to bear, when I wish I could sit on the rug in her sewing room and listen to her tell the same stories she always told me when I went to her for advice.

I wish now that I'd thought to make some Grandma Bears to go with the

Woody Bears, though I have no idea what I could have used to make them. Grandma was even less fashionable than Grandpa: her wardrobe consisted of stained sweats and ratty pajamas. Grandma and Grandpa were a match made in heaven, in that sense. All of Grandma's comforting fabrics were the ones she put together herself, the quilts she made, then draped over various surfaces of the house, quilts I would never dream of touching with scissors. But perhaps it isn't too late to make another bear, to complete my own grieving process. Maybe there is no time limit on mourning or love. Maybe there are ways to understand people and lives even after they're gone. Even when the unasked questions haunt us as effectively as any restless spirit.



Mushroom

Rachel Walkowiak

You are a withered manuscript of one thousand pages recalling forgotten childhood fairytales.



Lilly on Water

Ariel Williams



Ryan Hodges

63

Summer Fruit

Haven Ashley

It was a hot afternoon in the middle of July. Summertime. We were sitting on her front walkway, Katie and I, enjoying the insistent heat that was pressing upon us.

We were nineteen, both home for the summer and thrilled to be together again. Katie and I sat outside a lot, in the shade of a large sycamore tree that cast dappled shadows on our summer skin. Katie got up, putting her hand on my shoulder for balance.

“I’ll be right back!” she promised. I heard the soft thwack of the screen door shutting behind her and turned just in time to see the curve of her heel retreat into the cool darkness of her home. Katie. To me she was perfection, the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen.

She emerged from the house, carrying with her two small oranges. Tossing me one she said, “You’ll love it. It’s a clementine. They’re so easy to peel.”

When she sat down beside me, her striped tee-shirt fell off her thin shoulder, revealing two small freckles and the strap of her bathing suit. I noticed her shoulders bore a light pink sunburn and I couldn’t help but be reminded of a faded old Marilyn centerfold. I watched her nimble fingers quickly tearing off the orange peel, her light brown hair falling in her face. I bit my lip. A drop of juice slid down her wrist, over a narrow L shaped scar. As I watched this, something inside me stirred. I desperately wanted to lick that drop right off her warm skin.

“Why aren’t you eating yours?”

I looked up and there were those eyes. Blue blue blue, with a thick black line of lashes. The kindest eyes anyone had ever seen.

“Oh, sorry.” I mumbled and began to remove its outer casing with clumsy fingers. I glanced up to watch her pop a slice in her mouth. Her eyes closed.

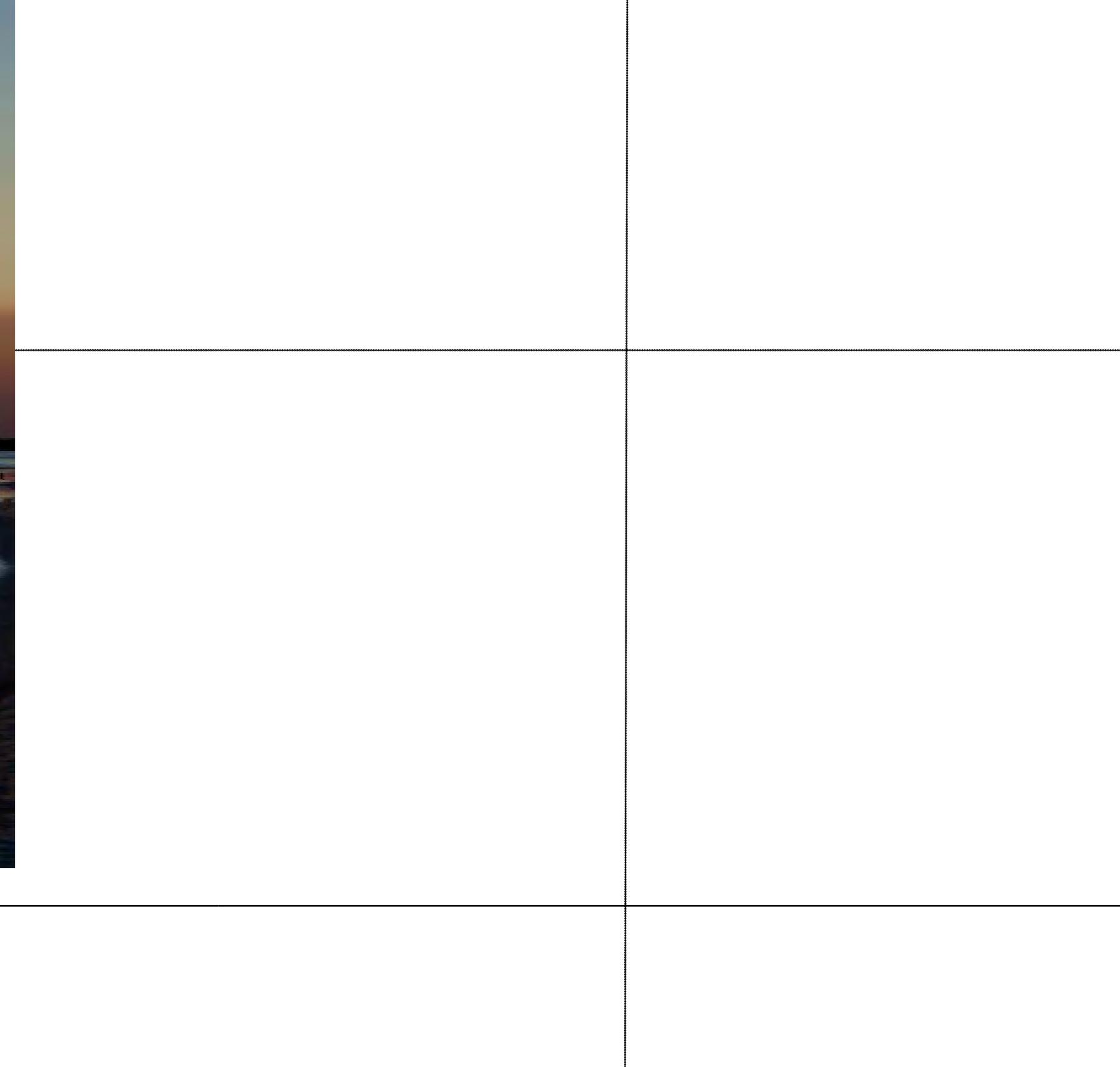
“Mmmmmm.” she murmured. The discarded rind of her clementine lay next to her foot, a little puckered corkscrew. A small cluster of gnats were beginning to hover over it, tempted by its aromatic scent.

Katie’s arms and legs were smooth and tan, but a thin band of white peeked out under the hem of her shorts. She leaned down to scratch her ankle and the white stripe disappeared. I ate a piece of the clementine and was surprised by its coolness and sweetness. She must have kept them in the refrigerator.

“Good, isn’t it?” Katie nudged my knee until I couldn’t help but grin at her, even though my mouth was full of the bright fruit.









On behalf of all of the featured writers and artists,
thank you.





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