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The Blush Brush to the Shovel

By: Kelly Kochanski

My mother told me I had a privileged life
That you would fill my reputation with holes.
She said that you would imbed me in trouble

That you would loosen my morals.

She said I would be on higher ground
Always watching you entrench yourself
It would be a descending romance

But she was fooling herself.

I know your sharp edged wit
I have seen you prod and wrench
I'm accustomed to a furnished life

And if loving you means hunkering down in a trench

I'll forget how the soot itches.

I will leave this vain art behind.

I'm used to quick morning fixes

But for you I'll labor all day.

In my dreams you overturn my fears

And I find my thoughts buried in you.

One day you might tire of constant excavation

And build a foundation, for two.

And in the mornings quiet hush,

Your cheeks will be the only ones I brush

THE EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD NOW

By: Rachel Varela

We humans never seem to have enough; we always need more money, more power, more vacation, but most importantly, more time, for it is a precious commodity far more valuable than gold. As my senior year draws to an end, more than ever I can relate to Andrew Marvell's quotation, "But at my back I always hear/ Time's winged chariot hurrying near." Yet time is not an ambrosial, winged chariot at my back; rather, time is a rocket torpedo barreling toward me! Because I am typically a proactive person, I frown upon idleness; however, this relentless rush to graduate has stripped away the beauty and significance of senior year. Now I find myself wishing I could slow things down so I can savor my final three months. But as we all know, nothing in the world can stop or slow the inevitable ticking of time.

Trivial things remind me of how much time has passed, like the towering evergreens that my parents planted ten years ago; Scrappy's dull, aged coat and gray muzzle; my

growth chart delicately penciled on the wall behind my bedroom door; and my little niece who has recently replaced her Barbies with makeup and jewelry. As a senior in high school, everything is "my last." My last prom. My last tennis season. My last Stage 2 production. Graduation seems like an ominous, looming date inching towards me because it will be the crossing point into the real world—a place that has so much uncertainty and so many possibilities. Next year, as I embark on the next great adventure of my life, I will genuinely miss the faces I have grown accustomed to. Lisa Malloy and I have been best friends since infancy, and I have severe separation anxiety when my boyfriend Casey Key misses a day of school. Above all, I'll miss my dad, who cries even at the thought of my leaving.

I was only twelve when I read *Dandelion Wine*, and I somehow overlooked the profound, wise words of Ray Bradbury, who effortlessly explains the mystery of time, writing: No matter how hard you try to be what you once were, you can only be what you are here and now. Time



hypnotizes. When you're nine, you think you've always been nine years old and will always be. When you're thirty, it seems you've always been balanced there on that bright rim of middle life. And then when you turn seventy, you are always and forever seventy. You're in the present, you're trapped in a young now or an old now, but there is no other now to be seen.

Today, I feel eighteen. Eighteen means I have experienced hardship in the past but have also lived a full, beautiful life. Sometimes I close my eyes and try to recollect memories of my childhood, wondering what it felt like to be six-year-old Rachel, vivacious with a wild imagination--what it felt like to touch and see and hear and dream as a credulous kid. Yet, try as I may, I have forgotten so much. How did an entire eighteen years manage to sneak up on me so quickly, and then rob me of my memory? When we are children, we think nothing of time nor future, and therefore we are free to enjoy ourselves as few adults can. Yet my idyllic childhood has been replaced with responsibilities, impending deadlines, and college applications; I can focus on nothing else but the present. I am "trapped in

the eighteen-year-old now."

I have often heard grandiose poets compare time to grains of sand slipping through one's fingers. Yet if you clench a handful of sand too tightly, the grains pour out faster through the cracks and crevices. Likewise, one cannot hold onto anything too tightly, because childhood, major life events, success, and friendships are all temporary. Senior year, for example, is a transient period of my life; by trying to desperately hold onto this moment, I am preventing myself from moving on to the next great chapter.

Adolescence is something people can only experience once, and when it's over, they are always left pining to feel young again. Yet, I don't want to waste the precious seconds of my life lamenting the amount of time that has passed. I'm only eighteen. I don't want to already feel like I am going through a midlife crisis, or that everything is slipping away from my grasp. I want to enjoy each day for what it is without the deafening tick of the clock ringing in my ear.

For Toledo

Brenda F. Copeland

Chapter 1

It was raining that Friday night when the car traveling on Highway 45 just South of Lauderdale, Mississippi, slammed into a yearling Hereford cow. That cow belonged to my family. My name is Brenda, and I was home with my sisters, Pam, and Linda, as well as my brother, Gary. Our parents were out for the evening, and we children were watching our favorite Friday night show, *The Twilight Zone*.

Pam sat next to the large picture window, keeping one eye out of our parent's eventual return, and was the first to notice something had happened outside. She had caught a glimpse of stationary car lights through the large window. It was unusual to see a car stopped on the highway because they usually sped by, their lights quickly blinking past. She turned to the rest of us and said, "Hey, come look, I think there may be a car accident!" Linda, Gary, and I ran to the window and looked out. We could just make out a car stopped on the highway. Linda immediately called our parents to let them know what happened; then, we all dashed outside and down the driveway towards the highway.

We reached the 4-door sedan and could see that the right front hood was smashed to the windshield. Considering the damage to the car, it was unbelievable that the driver was standing outside of the wrecked vehicle and appeared unhurt. Illuminated by the glare of one still-working headlight, was one of our cows, Betsy, a red and white Hereford. She lay on her side with her four feet sticking straight out, as though she were a porcelain figurine tipped over. Her big round eyes were ringed in white. We all ran to her. She was alive but completely unmoving except for the rolling of her eyes. Linda crouched by Betsy.

"This is really bad!" she said, standing up. Just then the driver said "I think, another car may have hit another cow up the road," and he pointed up the highway towards the bridge that went over the train track. We looked in horror towards where he pointed and saw that there was, indeed, another vehicle stopped on the bridge.

We ran in a panic to the vehicle on the bridge. It was a VW bus with a flat front, and I could see a wide but shallow indentation in the metal. Its driver, like the first one, also appeared to be unhurt. He said, "I hit a black cow and it flipped over the bridge railing." We knew that even if the cow survived being hit, it would probably not survive falling from the bridge to the railroad tracks far below. We peered over the railing, but couldn't see the Black Angus in the darkness.

Linda and I ran pell-mell down the side of the bridge into the darkness towards the tracks below. Thorny brambles scratched our legs as we half ran, half slid down the slope towards the tracks, all the while alert for the sound of an approaching train...

Chapter 2

The Black Angus that was thrown over the bridge onto the railroad tracks that night was my 4-H calf. When I say 4-H calf, you probably picture a shiny calf, bottle raised and tame as a dog. That was certainly the case of my sister Pam's 4-H calf Cutie Pie, (Cutie for short), which had been born and raised on our seven acres in Lauderdale, Mississippi. My sister Linda also had a 4-H calf, a white-faced Hereford named Meatball that was as cuddly as a large stuffed animal you win at the Fair. Pam and Linda regularly shampooed, cream rinsed, curry combed, and fluffed the hair on their docile calves.

I didn't have a calf to groom, but I let my parents know that I too wanted to show a 4-H calf. Soon Daddy bought a gorgeous black yearling for my 4-H project from a cattle auction. Funny thing was this black steer looked all the world like a bull straight out of a bullring in Spain. He had a well-developed neck and had been a bull up until just before he was sold. It was obvious from his wild dashing about that he had never been tamed.

I had never been a Matador, nor spoke any Spanish, although I could almost hear the word "Ole!" as he jumped out of the trailer into the corral, where he ran around with his head held high and his blue back body shining in the sun. Well, I had got-

ten my wish, my own 4-H calf. I couldn't turn back now.

I set out trying to tame this steer that I called Toledo, for the town in Spain. Toledo was so wild that no one, not even my father, could get close enough to pull off the yellow auction sticker that was still on his rump. He wouldn't allow me to put a rope around his neck, even if the noose was around a bucket of sweet feed. He would snort and pull away just as I thought success was mine. I had fancied myself as a brilliant animal tamer, and had even taken a mail-order course in how to train horses and dogs. I had taught our dog Melody how to crawl and how to halt on command. I looked at Toledo as if he were just a larger, *much* larger, version of Melody. My ability to train him would be another feather in this brilliant animal trainer's hat.

The massive Toledo, on the other hoof, looked at me, a 12-year-old 105-pound girl, as though he needed strong prescription eye "glasses to see me at all."

Chapter 3

My sister Linda and I are twins, which is a situation that engenders interest, especially then. Word had gotten around our small community that two girls, Linda and Brenda Smith, were going to show calves in the upcoming 4-H show. The local paper in Meridian asked my parents if they could send a photographer to snap a photo of us with our calves for the paper. Our parents agreed and they told Linda and me to catch and groom our calves.

Linda, of course, shampooed and coifed Meatball to within an inch of his life. In the meantime, I chased Toledo all over the 7 acres. Finally, a cowboy friend of my father's lassoed Toledo and managed to put a halter on him. The photographer quickly snapped a photo and left.

The photo appeared the next day in the local paper. In it, my sister Linda is looking directly at a camera, smiling brightly while holding her squarely standing and well-groomed Meatball. I am next to her with my hair, lank from sweat, hanging in my face. My head is turned away from the camera, and I am looking off into the distance. I'm sure I was thinking about how embarrassed I would soon be, especially after all of the hoopla, when I never showed this wild bull, I mean steer at the show. You can see Toledo's mood. He's foaming at the mouth.

Chapter 4

My eyes were straining in the dark to see the cow that had fallen onto the tracks and if it had survived or not. Slowly, I made out the shape of a black rectangular mass that was darker than the surrounding darkness. It was Toledo! He was standing on the railroad tracks, not even attempting to flee or move. I was so relieved to see he was alive, and approached him slowly asking, "Boy, are you OK?" He stood as still as a bronze statue in a park, so I quickly ran my hands over his body and legs. I could feel no breaks nor wounds, only very tense, grimy muscles. The pungent smell of sweat, fear, and manure emanating from his body was somehow intensified by the darkness around us. Someone brought a halter, which I quickly put on the steer's face, all the while fearing a train would come around the corner before I could get him off of the tracks.

Once the rope halter was on, I coaxed Toledo to step off of the tracks. I wasn't sure how he would react to the tug on his halter, but to my relief, he inched forward, taking one step. Then he stopped to rest. I continued to coax him further, and he took another step, then another. It was slow, tedious going, but he finally stepped off of the tracks and down the gravel hill on which the tracks set. The night air was cool, and by now Linda, Pam, and Gary were all gathered around Toledo, their hands on him, urging him to keep going. By the time we all made it back up the hill and across the street, Highway Patrol cars were on the scene. So were our parents. We heard the crack of a gunshot as a patrolman put Betsy out of her misery.

While Betsy was being taken away, we finally got Toledo into the pasture where he collapsed. As he fell, the night air was filled with the melancholy whistle of a train. No doubt its occupants were unaware of the drama, which had ended in time enough not to involve them.

Chapter 5

The next morning I ran out to pasture to check on Toledo. He was lying on the ground in the same spot where he had collapsed the previous night. I walked up to him and crouched down. He didn't flinch or make a move to get to his feet. I petted him and asked, "How are we feeling?" as I thought that was what nurses always asked. He wasn't doing well. Big liquid tears rolled down his

face as he moaned in pain. It's true, he cried.

I got a nylon halter and placed it loosely on his big head, careful not to pull his ears, or poke an eye. I pulled on him to make him get to his feet, but he refused and was too big for me to move. I brought him feed and water. He didn't have an appetite. I sat on the ground next to him and washed away dirt and dried blood from his many abrasions. Areas of his hide were bald, and I applied petroleum jelly to them. I did this every day. Toledo lost weight very rapidly during this time. His coat grew dull as the hair on a rabbit run over days before. He remained quite weak and listless. After four days, he managed to struggle to his feet, swaying like a newborn calf.

As the weeks passed, Toledo recovered from his ordeal, but, even though he was strong, he didn't move away or fight my efforts to halter, lead, or groom him. He even allowed me to teach him to stand with all four feet squared up. I did this by using a show stick, a leather wrapped metal stick about four-feet long with a point on the end and a small hook. If a foot was out of the square position, I could gently poke or pull it until Toledo got the idea and moved the hoof into the correct position. I felt a great sense of satisfaction as he willingly did what I asked.

The day before the 4-H Show, Cutie Pie, Meatball and Toledo were loaded into a trailer and trucked to the Fairgrounds. Pam, Linda, and I were waiting impatiently for them to arrive. We had a clean pile of straw in an area of the show barn where they could bed down for the night. There were water and storage areas for feed. When the calves were unloaded, I clipped my lead rope to the brass ring on Toledo's halter.

Once the calves were unloaded, the first stop for them was to go to a grooming area where the hair on their faces was to be clipped. Since the hair clippers made a high pitched buzzing sound,

calves were held snugly in a metal vise that opened to accept each calf and then closed on their neck. A man ran the clippers over each calf's face, and once finished, he opened the vise to release the calf, which would then be led away by its owner. Meatball and Cutie endured this clipping fairly well, but then it came time for Toledo. When the vise closed over his neck, pinning him, he fought with all of his might. He was unable to escape while the groomer ran the clippers over his face, producing a black velvet texture to his face. The groomer handed me the lead rope just before he freed Toledo. I knew I was doomed to be dragged to my death by a terrified Toledo who had just reverted to the wild.

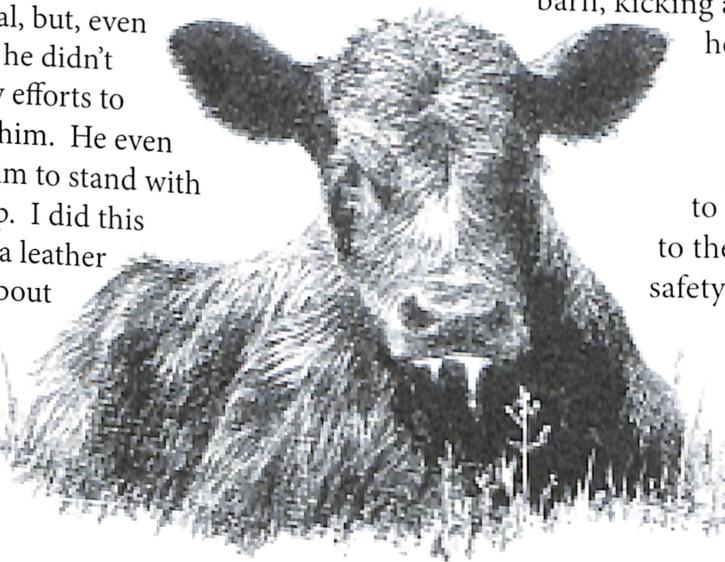
I was sure he would drag me across the show barn, kicking and bawling in his panic. What he did instead was cuddle up to me and do everything I asked of him. He was practically glued to my side. It was clear to me that in his fear, he turned to the only human he trusted for his safety.

I led him over to the bedding area where I picked up a bristle brush and his silky blue black coat. No one would ever guess that, only a few months before, he had barely survived a terrible ordeal.

That night, I lay on the straw next to his huge, shampooed body as comfortable with him as a puppy piled together with its litter mates.

Chapter 7

The morning of the show day dawned clear and cool. We girls got up at the first light, and although Meatball, Cutie and Toledo were spotless, we scrubbed every inch of them, studied them for any misplaced hair or whisker which would be eliminated with a quick flash of scissors or dab of hair gel. We agonized over if we shaped the tassel of hair at the end of their tails in the perfect ratted up ball. We trimmed hair around hooves and combed back the hair on their butts to make them look fuller and more square. We knew that a rectangular-shaped calf with short sturdy legs and a good depth to his ribs was desirable to the judges. We worked with



artistic zeal as well as shampoo, scissors, curry combs, and hair gel to make our calves look as much like the ideal as possible. Once the calves were living stuffed animals, it was our turn at grooming.

We all took turns showering and changed into our show outfits. I wore blue jeans and a printed shirt. Then each of us took our position with our respective calf and waited for our class to be announced. Suddenly my class was announced, and off I went with Toledo in tow. Leading him was easy as holding a helium balloon on a string. We walked into the ring like we knew what we were doing. Once in the show ring, I got Toledo to stand squarely. Once he was square, I rubbed the show stick on his belly, as I knew this had a calming affect on him. There were about a dozen other calves in my class, including Meatball. Pam's class would be later as she was in a different age group. An official called out instructions over the loudspeaker of each of us to turn our calves in one direction or another, or stop and have them stand for the judge to, well, judge. I held Toledo's lead up in the air to keep his head up. He squared up fairly easily, but I could see Linda was having trouble with Meatball who was showing interest in his surroundings rather than to Linda's instructions.

After looking at all of the entries, the judge walked over and handed his notes to the announcer. My co-exhibitors and I held our collective breaths for the verdict. Linda and Meatball won the 3rd place Ribbon. Brenda (me!) and Toledo won the 2nd place ribbon, a red one, and a tall freckle-faced boy with a white-faced Hereford won the first place Blue ribbon.

I couldn't believe my wild one had won such a high ribbon! I was so proud of him for behaving, even when the loudspeaker blasted.

Chapter 8

Pam showed Cutie in the next class, and they also won a 2nd place red ribbon. A short time after the showing was over, as I basked in the satisfaction of winning, reality hit. We all had to sell our calves! I mean, then and there, giving us no chance to hide them away somewhere safe. We were asked to lead our calves individually into the sales arena. Linda and Meatball went before Toledo and I. Then it was our turn. I found myself walking with Toledo glued to my side through two huge wooden doors that led into a small auc-

tion ring. The ring had sandy red dirt on its floor, strong metal fencing, and was encircled by bleacher-type seats on which men sat, staring down at us. It couldn't have felt more strange than if Toledo and I were Earthlings being stared at by Aliens on the floor of their circular spacecraft. I knew these men spelled bad news to Toledo and me –they were the Buyers.

The auctioneer let the Buyers know that I was the twin of the girl who just sold the Hereford, that I wasn't the some girl coming through for the second time. All of a sudden the auctioneer started asking for bids in his unbelievably fast talk. Toledo was nervous, as was I. I couldn't follow the rapid fire bidding until I heard the words "Sold! To Winn Dixie!" Winn Dixie, aka, the meat people. I was stricken with the harsh reality of it. I felt I had betrayed Toledo's trust. I remembered all the struggles he and I went through and how I was only able to halter him when he was down on the ground. Now, I unbuckled the halter and slipped it off his black velvet face. The handlers ran him into a room with a scale and his weight, 900 pounds, flashed on an overhead sign. Other handlers immediately funneled him into one of the many holding pens at the back. Suddenly it was over, and I left through a side door, with Toledo's empty halter in my hand.

Chapter 9

As Linda, Pam, and I sat silently in the back seat of our station wagon on the way home, I looked at the \$9.00 I held in my hand. It was my part for showing my calf. Exhibitors got a penny a pound over and above the buyer's price. It was not enough. What could be enough for me betraying Toledo, who trusted me? Me, the only human he trusted, who had named him, loved him, and helped him recover from his horrible ordeal?

But showing and letting calves go to their destiny was seen as part of a young person's learning about life and letting go, and there was nothing I could do except to accept the situation.

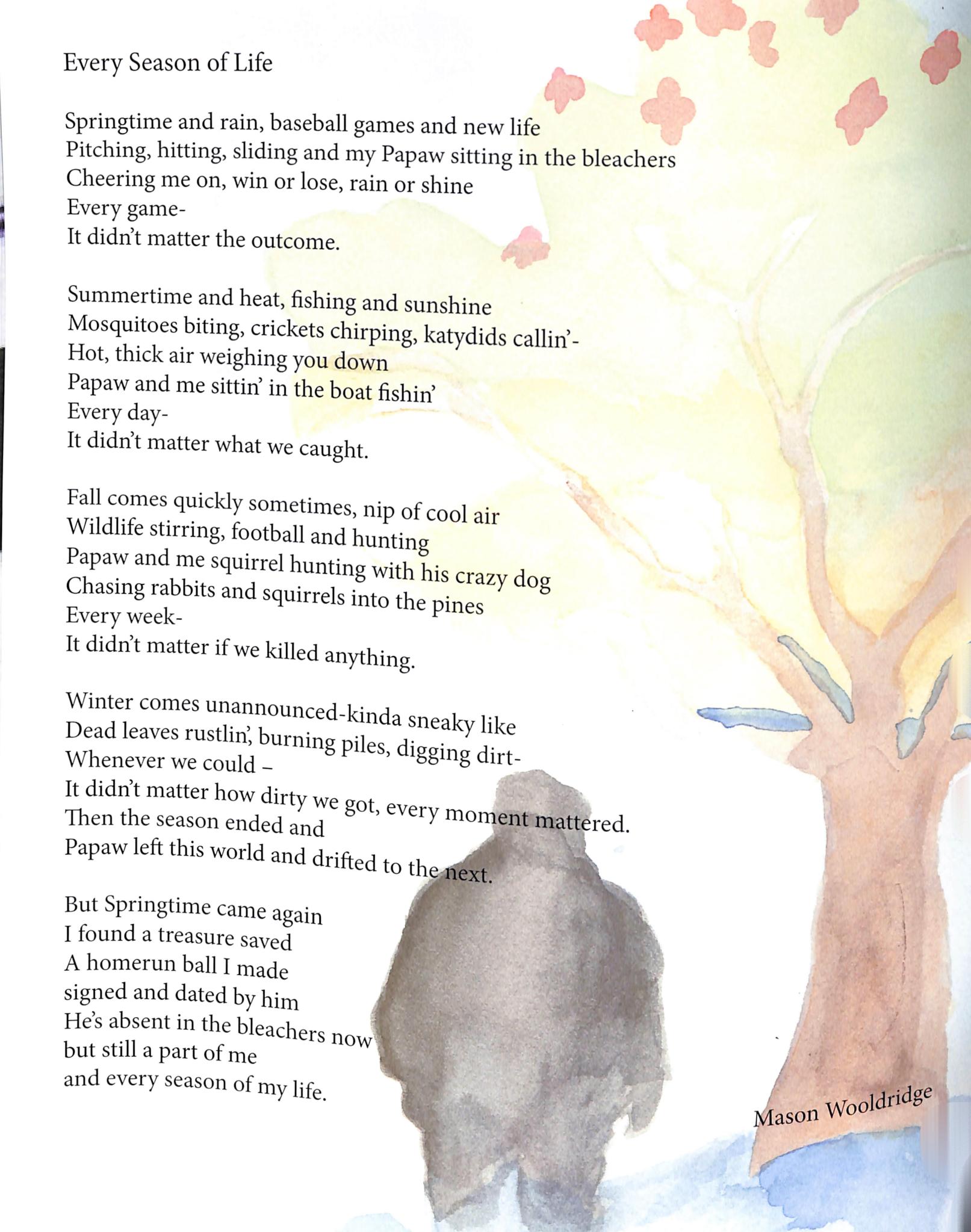
Chapter 10

I am now an adult, and I live on ten acres of land. Many times over the years, someone has suggested that I raise beef cow on the land, so I can have a freezer full of beef.

They never understand when I tell them that if I got a calf, I would end up aging Black Angus on my land...

The End

Every Season of Life



Springtime and rain, baseball games and new life
Pitching, hitting, sliding and my Papaw sitting in the bleachers
Cheering me on, win or lose, rain or shine
Every game-
It didn't matter the outcome.

Summertime and heat, fishing and sunshine
Mosquitoes biting, crickets chirping, katydids callin'-
Hot, thick air weighing you down
Papaw and me sittin' in the boat fishin'
Every day-
It didn't matter what we caught.

Fall comes quickly sometimes, nip of cool air
Wildlife stirring, football and hunting
Papaw and me squirrel hunting with his crazy dog
Chasing rabbits and squirrels into the pines
Every week-
It didn't matter if we killed anything.

Winter comes unannounced-kinda sneaky like
Dead leaves rustlin', burning piles, digging dirt-
Whenever we could -
It didn't matter how dirty we got, every moment mattered.
Then the season ended and
Papaw left this world and drifted to the next.

But Springtime came again
I found a treasure saved
A homerun ball I made
signed and dated by him
He's absent in the bleachers now
but still a part of me
and every season of my life.

Mason Wooldridge

Guest Of Honor

Ariel Elliot

Life hates me. My girlfriend is leaving me for my backstabbing best friend; I've been fired from a company that I've worked at for the past ten years; and I'm being kicked out of my apartment and have to move back in with my parents. I've undeniably managed to create the life of a depressed, thirty-two-year-old man who has no woman, job, home, or pride. I groan in frustration. To top it off, I've also managed to miss my turn when I'm nearly out of gas! What more can go wrong?

The more I drive, the more lost I get. I can't help but think

I'm probably driving straight to Hell as the road takes me to an old, nearly abandoned neighborhood where dark clouds consume the sky and night murders day. Luckily, the sharp ringing of my phone destroys the eerie silence. "Hello?" I answer thankfully.

"Robert, it's Dan. Dude, we're cool, right? You know what would do you good? Letting me buy you a beer!"

Seven billion people in the world. . . and Dan, my backstabbing best friend, is the person calling me. *I will* drive to Hell

before I let him buy me a beer. "Dan, we're cool," I lied, "but I've got plans tonight—a date."

I couldn't help smirking as he blurted, "Already? That's great!"

"Yes, I figured why should I keep the ladies waiting?"

"Robert, I *knew* you'd be cool with everything, and good luck with the hottie tonight! Promise not to steal your girl again!"

I gave a half-hearted laugh as the desire to beat him unconscious consumed me. That jerk had stolen the love of my life from me. "You're *real* funny, Dan."

"Catch ya later!" he laughed as the line clicked off. Angrily, I flung the phone aside and looked back to the road. I hated Dan so—
Holy mess! Where did that giant dog in the road come from?! Jerking the wheel, I crashed into a metal light pole, wrecked my car, and smashed my face into the steering wheel.

Shots of pain climbed up my back and attacked my neck as the grogginess from the collision died away. Did I taste blood? In a panic, I desperately pulled myself out of the car and toppled onto hard concrete.

"How much more must I suffer?" I whimpered to the cloudy sky ~~above~~ me. A strike of lightning followed by crashing thunder answered my question, and I screamed in rage as rain began to fall from the sky. "That wasn't a challenge!!!"

Anxiously, I spotted help far off in the distance. It was a single house glowing, and with no other hope, I heave myself to my feet and began the cruel, long, and aching walk, and somehow, I reached the house, but my relief soon turned to regret as I saw the environment I'd stumbled into. The walls were literally shaking from the volume of the music, and the door

was wide open. Inside, people were dancing like drunk animals.

Turning to leave, I was embraced in a hug. "Hola, señor!" he cried. I stared amazed at a five-foot Mexican man who was wearing a yellow suit and a giant sombrero. I pried him off me, but he began shaking maracas in my face. "¿estás listo para fiesta?"

"Uh... no español," I muttered back to him. "I'm leaving anyway. Sorry."

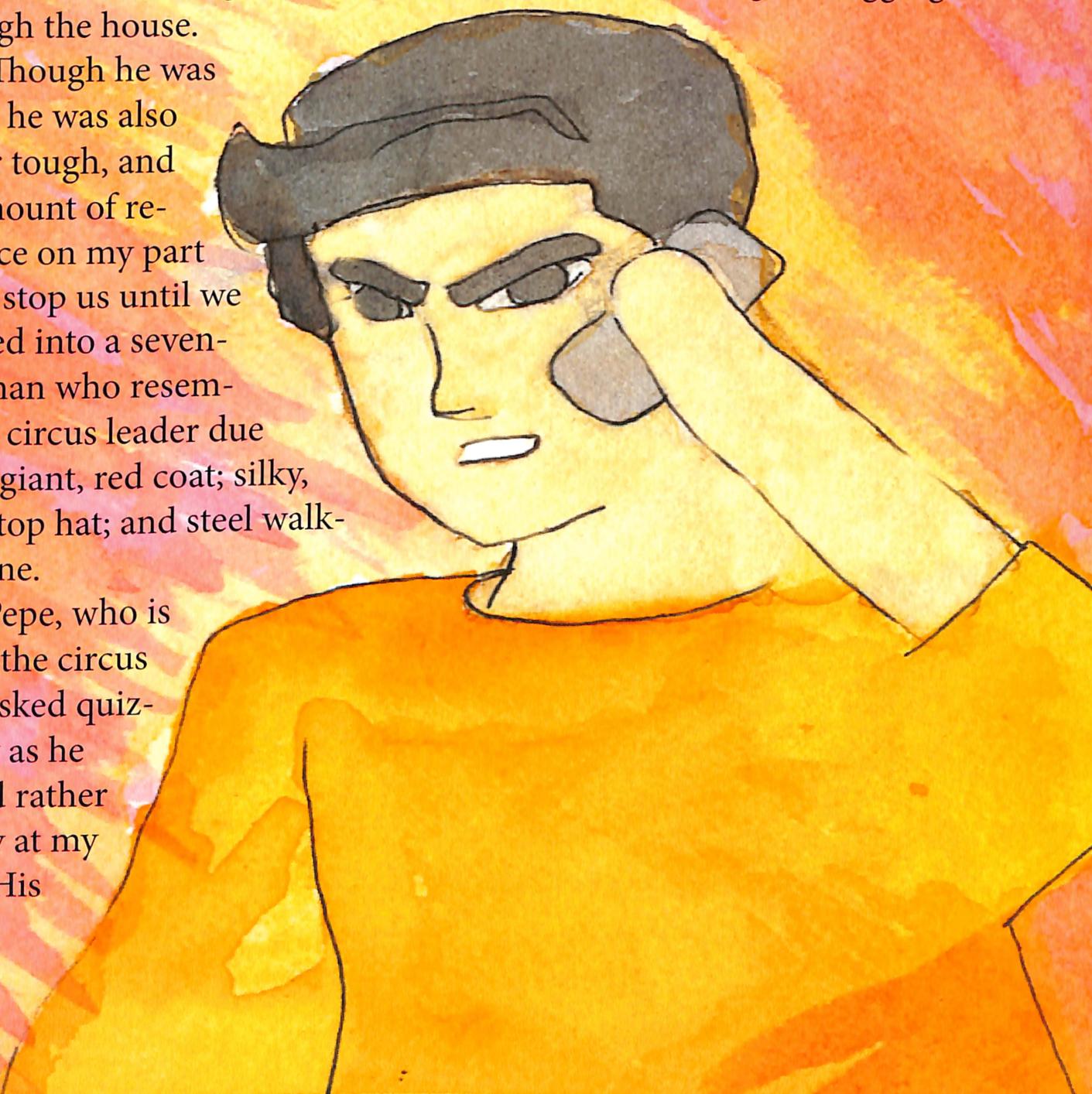
"Ah, hablas inglés pero no deje. ¡Me segues!"

"Look, I'm sorry, but I don't know what you're saying."

The man rolled his eyes and stopped shaking his maracas. "¡Me segues!" he exclaimed again as he grabbed my wrist and began dragging me through the house.

Though he was short, he was also rather tough, and no amount of resistance on my part could stop us until we crashed into a seven-foot man who resembled a circus leader due to his giant, red coat; silky, black top hat; and steel walking cane.

"Pepe, who is this?" the circus man asked quizzically as he peered rather closely at my face. His breath



smelled of peanut butter, and his voice was highly exaggerated.

"Could *he* be our guest of honor?"

Baffled, I explained, "Sorry, but I'm no one's guest of honor."

The circus man sighed. "I was for sure you were him, but apparently not, yet who are you then? What's your name?"

"Robert."

"Robert... Robert," he repeated slowly. "Sir, your name is so dreadfully bland! It lacks pizzazz. Try Rob. No, Robby! Wait... the Robster!"

"I'll keep it as Robert..."

thanks. I need your help though. My-," I began but stopped as the circus man spun his cane and jabbed my chest with it.

"You need help too! How strange because *we* are in need of *your* help also! How's about you help us, and *then* we'll help you!"

"Please, it's just my-"

"You help us; we help you," he stated firmly.

I wasn't getting any help unless I assisted this freak first. "Fine, what's wrong?"

"Excellent!" he cheered but then switched over to a soft whisper. "it's our guest of honor.

You see... we've arranged this whole party for him, but now he's missing! We need



you to ask the people arriving if they are or have seen our guest of honor.”

“Well, what’s the guest of honor wearing?” I asked. “Does he have a name?”

“Don’t be absurd! We don’t know anything about the guest of honor!” he exclaimed. “Only the host knows who the guest of honor is!”

“Then why doesn’t the host tell us, and how’s anyone to know who the guest of honor is if no one knows? Also, why is this person the guest of honor anyway?”

“Are you possessed by fools?” he asked as he jabbed my chest with his cane again. “The guest of honor will know who he is! Don’t you know anything?”

“I know I need your help!”
Why did I even walk inside
this house?

“You know how to get our help: find our missing guest of honor!”

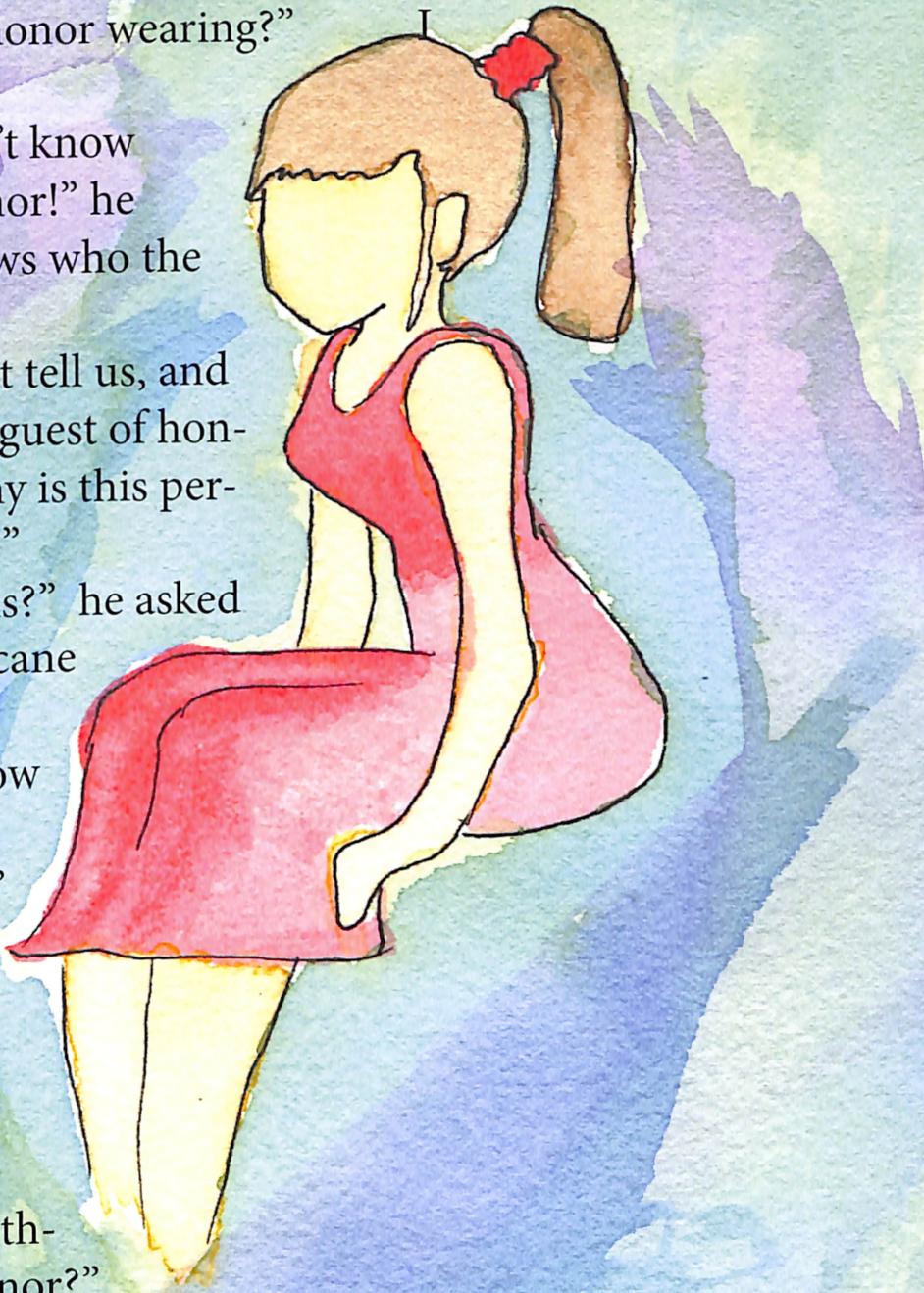
“Are you certain there’s nothing know about the guest of honor?”

The circus man looked around cautiously and began whispering softly again, “Rumor has it the guest of honor is a rather odd fellow, unable to fit in kind of guy.” Then rapidly turning away, the circus man disappeared into the crowd.

I stood there with confusion, anger, and grief boiling within me. His rumor didn’t help me at all! I sighed and noticed the Mexican guy was still here.

“So, your name is Pepe?” I asked.

“¡Sí!” he replied while shaking his maracas.



“Well, Pepe, it seems we need to find the guest of honor.”

“¿Nosotros?” he asked in a fit of laughter.

How this man understood what I was saying but could not reply back in the same language was beyond my understanding. “Well. . . any ideas of who to ask?”

Pepe quit laughing, and with a newfound excitement, he pointed to a woman walking through the door. “¡Vas a pedir esa mujer bonita!”

The woman was gorgeous. Her soft, honey hair was elegantly pinned up while her shimmery silver dress complimented her figure perfectly. I knew enough Spanish to tell Pepe goodbye as I walked over to the angel who had entered the room. “Excuse me,” I wooed, “but I’ll be awfully surprised if you’re not tonight’s guest of honor.”

The woman turned to face me, and I felt my throat close up as I looked at her. Her bright, blue eyes sparkled against her flawless white skin as her devilishly red lips greeted me with a warm smile. I was right. . . . she really

was an angel.

“Then be surprised because I’m not, though I do wish the guest would arrive soon. The party is to have begun already, and lateness is never an attractive quality.”

“Of course, yes. . . lateness is most rude, so very rude!” I muttered while gasping for breath. “I presume *you* were on time though. I was on time. You know me. . . well. . . you don’t know me, but if you did know me, then you’d know me for never being late. . . ever! My friends actually call me Never Late Robert because I’m never late. Ever.”

Her eyebrows were raised as she sarcastically mused, “Oh, really?”

“Sorry I thought you were the missing guest,” I chattered like a blundering idiot.

“No need for apologies,” she said with that warm smile. “It’s nice to meet you, Robert. I’m Marie.”

“How did you know my name?” I blurted in amazement. “Are you a psychic because that’d be so amazing? Here, I’ll think of something, and you tell me what it is!”

She stood there laughing as I began thinking of chicken wings.

“Are you reading my mind?” I asked excitedly.

"No," she giggled, "but that's because I'm not a psychic. Remember, you told me your name, Never Late Robert."

"Oh... of course! I was just... being funny! Always clowning around, that's me! My friends call me Clowning Around Robert because I'm so funny. They're always telling people to go see Clowning Around Robert for a laugh!"

Why was it so hard for me not to sound like an idiot?

"You seem to have many nicknames, but if you don't mind, I'll just call you Robert. It was nice meeting you though, and I hope you find the missing guest of honor."

"What... oh! Yes! The guest of honor, yes, I have to find that guest of honor. Laziness... such a bad quality," I stuttered as I turned away. "Nice meeting you too, Marie." That was utterly awful.... I have no game! I should just call it quits now! I-

"Oh, Robert?"

At the sound of her voice, I spun to answer her and tripped

over my own feet. She merely laughed as she pulled me to my feet again.

"Drink this champagne, won't you? You seem... awfully tense," she advised.

Smiling lightly, I took the glass and quickly fled. Stupid... I'm so stupid! I gulped the champagne and set the glass down. I just need to find this stupid guest and leave, but who could he be? There're so many people here! What if the guest isn't here yet? What if I missed the guest when I was embarrassing myself in front of Marie!?

My poor, aching head was pounding.... I needed a break. Grabbing another drink, I found an empty chair and sat down but was shortly interrupted.

"Hey, Squirt! Get up outta me's chair!"

Opening my eyes, I was harshly

snarled at by an elderly man. "You needs to borrow me's hearin' aid? Get you's rear outta me's chair!"

I jumped to my feet apologetically and let the man sit down. Why was he here? This party was no quiet round of bingo!

"Sir," I asked delicately, "Why are you here?"

"Well I ams here for 'da party. Why's you here?"

"By a strange string of events, I'm stuck here looking for the guest of honor."

He chuckled. "You's ain't ever gonna find him."

"I have a theory that I may be looking at him."

"You's a dumb fool! I ain't nobody's guest o' honor."

The man must have seen disappointment on my face because he asked, "Why's you's panties in all so'ts of knots 'cause this ain't me's party?"

"If I find the guest of honor, I was promised someone would help me."

"If they's lady probums, no idiot here wills be ables to help ya!" he snickered.

"Well... I do have lady problems along with house and job problems, but at the moment I'm referring

to my *car* problem."

"You's younger generation ain't got a clue how to fix nothing! Show me where you's car is at," he said pulling himself to his feet.

"You're going to fix my car?" I asked in surprise.

"Working wit' cars me's whole life! Show me 'da car unless you's mind changed."

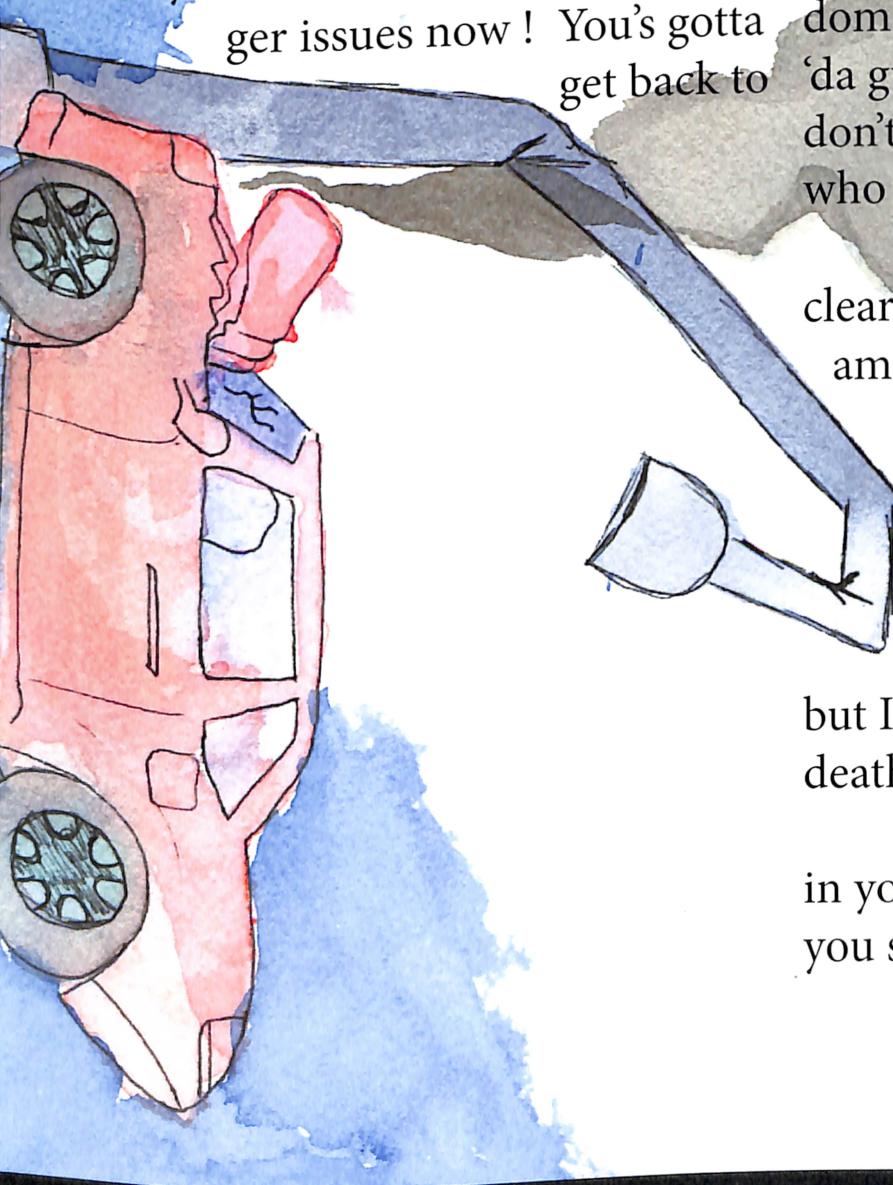
Okay, even though the old grump was crazy, illiterate, and a thousand years old, he was still the only person willing to help me, and I was more than willing to accept the help. "Sir, I'd be greatly appreciative."

The old man started pushing his way through the crowd while mumbling to himself. "Dumb youngsters of today's world, can't fixs no dad-gum cars. What they's gonna do when 'da old's generation dies completely?"

I followed behind him quietly until we reached the front door, and he blared, "Leads the way, Squirt! I can't reads you's mind!"

The rain had finally stopped falling as I began leading the man my wrecked car.

"Holy cheese and butter be! Why did you's go smashin' into a



“pole?” he hollered when he saw the car. “You talked like she broke down, not ‘dat you killed her!”

“Her?”

“Cars are always women, but ‘dat ain’ts me’s point,” he bellowed while pointing at the car rapidly, “and you dumber than I thoughts at first too! Bet you wrecked ‘cause of some dad-gum phone!”

“Oh, like you’ve never had a wreck!” I defended in shame.

“See! It *was* a dad-gum phone!” he griped and then randomly screamed, “But we’s got bigger issues now! You’s gotta get back to

‘dat party!”

“Why?”

“Cause I founds you’s guest o’ honor.”

“Where?” I asked. Finding the guest wasn’t a major priority anymore, but I’d still like to see the idiot who’s put everyone into such a distress.

“Go looks in a mirror, and you’lls find him.”

I groaned. “No, I’m not the guest of-”

“Yes, you’s is!” he backlashed. “Boy, don’t argues ith old person’s wisdom! How cans you deny that you’s ‘da guest o’ honor if you’s obviously don’t knows why the guest o’ honor is who he is?”

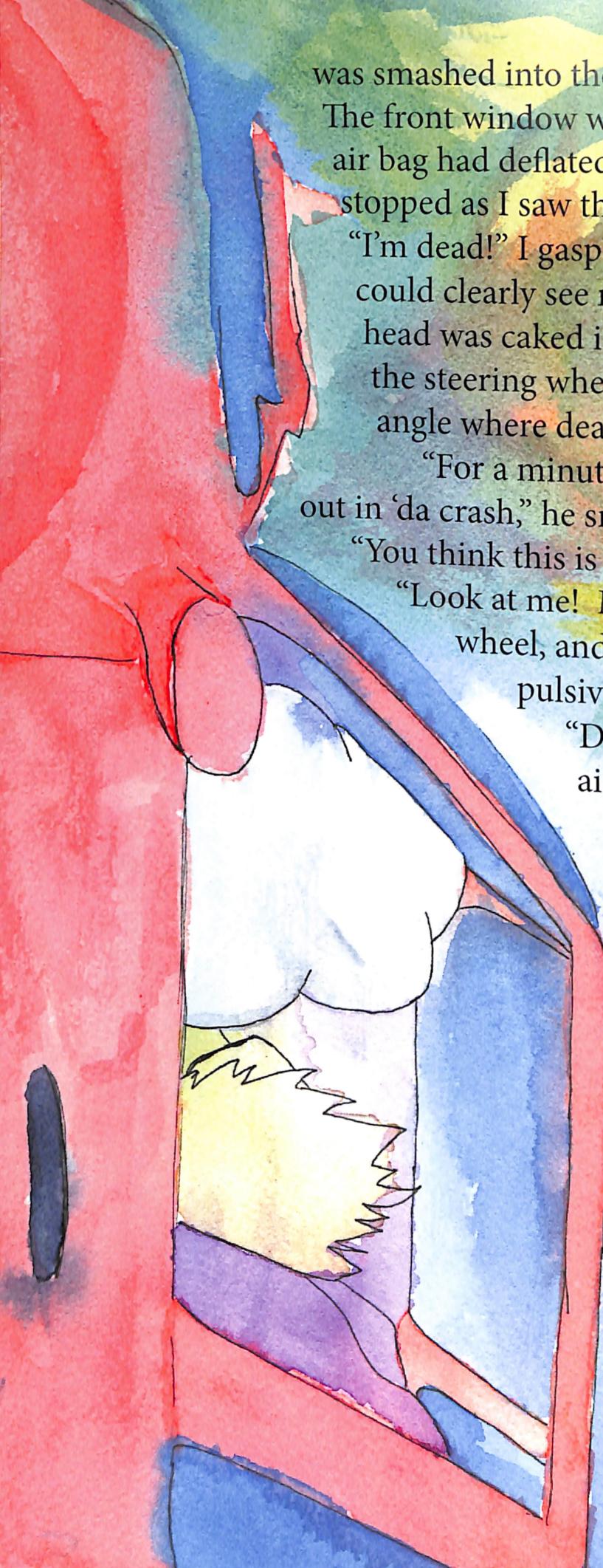
“Fine,” I sighed. This man was clearly missing a few marbles. “Why am I the guest of honor?”

“Cause you’s dead!” Okay, maybe he’s missing all of his marbles.

“I’m not dead!” I exclaimed. “And, sir, no offense, but I’m quite positive you’re closer to death than I am!”

“You’s denyin’ death, boy. Look in you’s car. Stare ‘til ‘dat truth hits you square in you’s dumb head!”

I looked at the car. The front



was smashed into the pole as if the car had been paper. The front window was completely shattered, and the air bag had deflated. "Sir, I don't see-" I started but stopped as I saw the truth.

"I'm dead!" I gasped in shock, fear, and horror. I could clearly see my limp body in the front seat! My head was caked in blood, and my face was glued to the steering wheel while my neck was twisted to an angle where death was indisputable.

"For a minute, I thought you's brains musta fell out in 'da crash," he snickered.

"You think this is funny?" I screamed hysterically.

"Look at me! My head is bashed into the steering wheel, and my neck is bent in all sorts of repulsive ways!"

"Death's a hard thing to accept, but it ain't all 'dat bad. You'l's gets used to it."

"I'll get used to it? I'll get used to being dead? What?"

That's when a hard smack hit my face, and I was stunned into silence.

"You's were goin' into shock," the ol grump explained. "Dead people cans get stuck 'dat way, and you's already stupid. Don't needs you a spaz also."

"I died..." I softly muttered. "Why'd you make me realize the truth?"

"I figured you's younger generation people are too stupid to fig-

ures it out on you's own. Consider it a gift of old's person wisdom 'dat you's never had 'da chance to get," he said but added quickly. "Though mostly, it was for the good booze. They won't come out 'til the party starts, and the guest o' honor has to show up for 'dat to happen."

"So for the booze?"

"For 'da booze," he assured.

We sat there in silence looking at my lifeless body until he interrupted the silence. "Well. . . sees you at you's party, Squirt." Then he walked back to the house, leaving me alone to stare at my corpse.

I'm dead. . . I didn't have a love life; I didn't have a work life; and now I don't have life. But. . . could I be wrong? I stood up and brushed my pants off. Tonight has been liveliest night I've had in a while. I smashed a car, made some friends, and met a girl. Also, there's a whole celebration in the memory of my death going on right now. A whole party. . . just for me! I smiled as I ran back to the house.

The door was shut now, but after a knock, the door flung open,

and Pepe embraced me. "¡Hola, invitado de honor!" he exclaimed.

"Robert," the circus man cheered as I walked inside the house. "I'm so proud you finally found the guest of honor!"

Then as if on cue, and angel's voice teased me from a distance. "And here I thought you were never late, Robert."

I faced the beautiful Marie and retorted, "I must not have told you that I'm also known as Bamboozling Robert, though I wouldn't call lateness rude if the person is fashionably late."

Farther off, the old grump could be seen in his chair happily drinking his booze.

I turned to get a refreshment from the table for myself but, instead, stared in awe at a hooded figure wearing a cloak as black as the night. It was the host. Silence filled the room as the host slowly lifted something from behind his back and raised it into the air. It was a glass of champagne. The host was toasting me, and I couldn't help but smile.

Yes, life had hated me, but amazingly, death already loved me.

I wanna know...

Lisa Brookins Mercer

I wanna know...
Is there a dog big enough to jump over the fence?
Tonight, right now
I wanna know
Is... there a dog...
Big enough to jump the fence?

I know you ain't gon' jump the fence
All you hear is snarlin' and growlin'
You don't hear the pain in her howls
The whimpers in between barkin'
You!
Ha! You're scared...
And that's all right 'cause it's gonna take a big dog
To jump the fence

Yeah you! The big dog back there declaring you ain't scared!
Ain't no bitch's bite big enough to shake you!
You'll take! Her! Down!
Mmmmm Hmmmmmm
See, you're the reason she's behind the fence now
You saw her when she was young and full of fire:
Yippin' and runnin'
Yeeeaaaah, the big dog!
Came sniffin' around
The Alpha male
You wooed her, and then you broke her!
You couldn't see benefits of letting her bring a bone in
You couldn't see that lending her howl and bark to fears of the night
Every now and then
and you whipped her into the surly cur she is today
would make you stronger
and that's why she's behind that fence!





But, I still wanna know
Is there a dog big enough to jump the fence?
Is there a dog
Big enough to peep through the cracks and look
I mean really watch her?

See
The dog big enough to jump the fence
Will be the one bold enough to wait until she's quiet and watch her
To listen...

See
The dog big enough to jump the fence
Will be the one bold enough to stand still when she charges
'cause she's gonna charge the fence

See
The dog big enough
To jump
The fence...
Will be the one strong enough to hold her gaze
Stand there... calm and strong
Stand there while she barks

That dog
Will see the scars
The wounds from the chains of life around her neck

That dog will know she snarls to scare away the hurt

That dog will know she growls to hide her fear
And that dog
Won't have to jump the fence

'cause she'll open the gate

The Magic of Books

By: Sara Creel

Since the day I learned how to read, or perhaps even before then, I have held a deep love for books. As a child, I would spend my nights huddled under the blankets, up way past my bedtime, with a book in one hand and a flashlight in the other. Wherever I went a worn-paged companion went with me. Books were amazing. Then one day I had a realization that only served to make me love them more. I realized that books are not just books--they hold an unbelievable power. I cannot remember exactly when this revelation came to me. Maybe it sprung into my mind as I devoured page after page of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first novel I ever read. Maybe it developed in a middle school English class as I learned of works that I had never even heard of before, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Where and when this epiphany occurred does not matter. What matters is that it occurred and changed my entire outlook on literature.

When I say that books are not just books, I simply mean that they are more than we perceive them to be. For example, if I were to hand my copy of Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, my favorite novel, to someone and ask that person what he or she sees, I would probably hear "worn cover," "dog-eared pages," "torn spine," and other physical characteristics. However, what I see when I look at that book is different. When I look at that tattered, well-loved novel I see an old friend. I see a companion who has never left my side. I see a teacher from whom I have learned there is always hope, even in the bleakest of worlds. I see an adventure waiting to happen.

My epiphany is what enables me to see these things. It allows me to see that books are not merely pages with words thrown upon them that exist only to entertain us. They are so much more. They are counselors, teachers, friends, and inspiration. They have the power to influence the lives of those who read them. I am no exception. The works of Henry David Thoreau showed me the importance of nature and taking time to get away from the busyness of life. From Kurt Vonnegut and Hunter S. Thompson's works I learned to question the status quo, to find my own truth and not just go with the flow. J.K. Rowling, J. R. R. Tolkien, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Shel Silverstein and so many others showed me the power and worth of a great imagination.

These books, these pages often viewed as simple entertainment, changed me.

As a writer myself--an amateur one but a writer nonetheless--this realization caused me great distress. How could the things I create ever compare to the literature that came before them? How could the meager poems and short stories that flowed from my pen hope to inspire or teach? What could my works do that would bring change to the world? So for a time, I relinquished my pen. I tucked away my notebooks. I chose to bury myself deeper and deeper within the pages of my books. I believed that if I could not create great literature then I might as well surround myself with it. I was nestled comfortably in the words of my books. Then one day I stumbled across a quotation, which caused a new revelation. Hunter S. Thompson said, "As things stand now, I am going to be a writer. I'm not sure that I'm going to be a good one or even a self-supporting one, but until the dark thumb of fate presses me to the dust and says, 'You are nothing,' I will be a writer." Those words struck something within me. I quickly scribbled the quote down on a sticky-note and placed it on the wall next to my bed. This way, each morning when I awoke, those words would be the first things I saw, and each night, before I drifted to sleep, they would be the last things running through my mind. I pulled my notebooks from their hiding place and jotted the quote down on the inside cover of each one. I began writing that quote on practically every available surface, hoping that it would serve as a reminder

"As things stand now, I am going to be a writer. I'm not sure that I'm going to be a good one or even a self-supporting one, but until the dark thumb of fate presses me to the dust and says, 'You are nothing,' I will be a writer."

-Hunter S. Thompson

that I am a writer, no matter what I or anyone else may say. You see, that quote helped me to realize that I am who I am. It does not matter whether I am the greatest writer to set foot on this planet or if I am the most wretched writer to ever pick up a pen. It only matters that I continue to write.

I do not write because I hope for recognition or wealth. I write because I enjoy the process. Writing allows me to express myself and gives me a voice in a world where it is often hard to find one. How could I ever give that up? And, who knows? Perhaps one day I will write a book, and it will possess amazing power. It could transport others to places they have only ever dreamed of and lead them on wild adventures. It could bring change. Most importantly, it could be someone's constant companion, his or her never faltering friend.

Little Boy Blue

By: Barry McMullan

"Miss Ouida," Dr. Riley said as he walked up to the young mother, "I don't believe in beating around the bush with my patients. Your son shows a failure to develop vigorously and his heart appears to be somewhat compromised. We are investigating a number of possibilities and will continue to search for a diagnosis."

The mother's stricken face showed her disbelief. Each day became an eternity for herself and her husband, Gene. Little Jimmy was their first child; it was all so unfamiliar. The diagnosis, when it came later, frightened the new parents even more. Little Jimmy had a serious heart malady, Tetralogy of Fallot, a hole in the septum of his heart, a condition commonly known as Blue Baby. This condition which is caused by a lack of oxygen gave babies' skin a bluish hue. At the time, this dire condition was mostly a death sentence for the children. There was no cure, no normalcy, and a short life-span of only ten or so years. Gene, Ouida, and Jimmy faced a possible terminal condition. Little did Mr. and Mrs. McMullan know at the time that their son would one day be an early candidate for a new surgical procedure.

Jimmy's condition became noticeable when he was old enough to stand, or at least try to stand. Much to his parent's dismay, Jimmy couldn't stand up without passing out; he squatted down all the time. The doctor told them that this is typical of Tetralogy of Fallot children. The family faced other challenges when Jimmy reached school age. For one thing, Jimmy needed help traveling from home to Highland and later Chalk Elementary Schools. Local children helped with that problem. The decision was made to pull Jimmy to school in a little red wagon. The children of Highland and Chalk considered it an honor to pull Jimmy to school. Even some of the tougher boys learned a great lesson in helping the less fortunate, possibly a lesson for some of today's bullies.

Dr. Billy Riley, who had gone to medical school at Johns Hopkins, contacted the McMullan family when Jimmy was about eight or nine. A new surgical procedure for Tetralogy of Fallot children was being developed. The cutting edge of heart surgery began in the 1940's at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. A doctor from Vanderbilt named Alfred Blalock

practiced at Johns Hopkins; he was not afraid to tackle the serious heart cases. Dr. Blalock brought with him a young man, Vivien Thomas, who had no advanced degrees but was both a perfectionist and a very talented Mister Fixit. Also in this pioneering group was a talented pediatrician named Helen Taussig. They worked together to treat the Blue Baby heart problem.

Many less courageous doctors thought that Dr. Blalock was throwing away a promising career to operate on the hearts of young children. If he was unsuccessful, the first child who died could ruin his career and reputation. But being a man of integrity and resoluteness, he went forward with his research and surgery on animals until he was prepared to operate on the first child. Dr. Riley went through the proper channels to arrange for Jimmy to be seen at Johns Hopkins. In 1946 Jimmy was seen by Dr. Taussig who referred Jimmy to Dr. Blalock as a potential case for surgery. At age ten, Jimmy became one of the first eighty surgeries on Blue Babies.

When Jimmy was at Johns Hopkins, Dr. Blalock asked him, "Jimmy, what can you do?" Jimmy replied, "I can do anything!" So the good doctor took him down to X-Ray and had him stand against the wall. Every time Dr. Blalock turned around Jimmy had slid down to the floor. This prompted Dr. Blalock to realize and exclaim, "Why, hell, he can't do anything!" Everyone else knew this, but it had escaped the famous doctor.

Another plus that helped with family finances was the location of Jimmy's aunt and uncle's home. Wiley and Josie Secrest, formerly of Meridian, had moved to Alexandria, Virginia. This gave the family a place to stay within commuting distance of Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. This blessing was appreciated by the entire family.

Jimmy passed away in 1986, just shy of his fiftieth birthday. Though short by today's standards, it was much longer than originally expected. I know this, because I was that fortunate little brother.

Dedicated to the kids who pulled Jimmy to Chalk School: Waddell Byrd, Jimmy Mills, Douglas Jones, and all those kids whose names are now forgotten.

A Letter of Letting Go

By Janis Overby

Wednesday, June 1, 2005

Mom has been at the hospital since Tuesday, May 24, 2005. She was diagnosed with AML or acute myelogenous leukemia (with a sub-type, M3, acute pro-myelocytic leukemia). These are just many long medical words known as cancer. She was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease three years earlier in 2002. This disease affects the neurological part of the body, slowly, day by day. It takes your loved one down a long deteriorating journey physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Am I ready for this? Mom lost one of her children, my sister Gina,

from ALL, acute lymphatic leukemia in April 1967. Gina was only four years old. How cruel to think that now Mom has to suffer from this disease having already seen how devastating it was to her child! At this point in time I feel numb; it all seems like a bad dream to me. But every morning I wake up to find it is not. Mom has always been my best friend, and I love her so much. We have a spiritual connection to one another through our heavenly Father, and He placed it within our hearts. I am trying to be "positive," but also aware of the facts: Mom could die from this! I want a miracle from God--total complete healing.

Thursday, June 2, 2005

Mom, I have been talking to God about you. He knows how special you are to me. I have been asking Him for a miraculous healing for you. I believe God can do anything; after all in Matthew 19:26 Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." But, Mom, do you know what? God has been speaking to me about healing you in another way, too. It is not easy for me to think about, but I feel He is asking me, "Janis, if I heal her by bringing her home to Heaven, can you let her go?" Oh Mom! It is so hard for me to say, "Yes, Lord," but it is beginning to feel more

peaceful in my spirit as I dwell on it day by day. I think I understand how God must have felt when He decided to give us Jesus. I know it is totally different, and yet for me somehow the same. You had to give up Gina, and I had to give up my unborn baby, but we have always had each other! How can I deny God or be angry with Him if He chooses to take you out of the physical pain and suffering you have to endure? I would keep you here on earth with me always if possible. Our spirits are so tightly braided together; I know that closeness will be there even if you are in Heaven. So, Mom, I am letting you know it

is ok if God takes you home because I will be there with you when I die. I am willing to let you go. Please be at peace in your spirit and know that God will hold me and love me when you cannot. You are forever in my heart!

Saturday, October 23, 2010

Father God, five years have passed now, and Mom has been in remission from leukemia for four, and You let her stay with me. Thank You will never be enough! Help me love and cherish her for the rest of her days here with no regrets. She has since been diagnosed with other problems because of the Parkinson's Disease, but she continues to trust You and love You with all of her

heart, mind, body, and soul. What a wonderful Godly Mother I have been blessed with! "Her children rise up and call her blessed," Proverbs 31:28. Mom, you are blessed, but I am blessed even more because God gave me to you and He chose you for me. I am so thankful!

January 29, 2013

Well, now it has been seven and a half years since Mom has been free from leukemia. The year before last we thought we might lose her again. Mom, you and God continue to amaze me! On Christmas Eve day 2011, you fell in your room and were completely knocked unconscious. An ambulance was called; we went to the emergency room again and waited. The doctor did not have an answer to give us as to why it happened, except that the Parkinson's Disease was probably the culprit. You had fallen many times during the previous months and seemed to be slipping away from us. For two weeks you did not really know who or where you were. I did what I had been taught by you, I prayed. By this same time last year we were able to get you into a physical rehabilitation facility where in only eight days we saw God perform another miracle in your life! The doctor released

you to go home, not a nursing home, but home! Yes, we still have some up and down days, and we deal with those as they come. However, Mom, you are alive, seventy-five and still believing that God can do the impossible! The greatest lesson I have learned from you is never, ever quit praying, believing, and thanking our Father God in heaven for all things. Please, Father, I ask that this heritage be passed on through me to my children, their children, and on and on. Your Word says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Matthew 6:33. Oh, yes, one has to read before verse thirty-three where Jesus tells us not to worry about our life!

What'll It Be

See you standing there,
dropping crumbs,
and must thank you for my share.
Run out,
hoping not in sight,
scampering away after hearing a shout.
Stomp, stomp, stomp!
“Get a shoe, a shoe!”
Clomp!
“Not *my* shoe!”



Anna Marie Bell

Parting Sonnet

By Lisa Malloy

Those who depart the nest with gleeful eyes
Are ignorant. For he who leaves alone
Is he who has been fed so many lies,
And thinks he is well known - but is unknown.
He leaves the breast from in his youth he drank,
And puts in absence of not only he,
But from she who should receive love and thanks.
That grace was left behind, she gave no plea.
He neglects the cries of his own father,
And only remembers to give notice
To his tearful relection. The bothers
Resting upon his shoulders are doubtless.
Into the crazy world he wanders. Some
Still wonder if he ever found freedom.

ABOUT THE MCC LITERARY Review 2014

The Language And Literature Division of Meridian Community College is pleased to sponsor The Literary Review Contest each year as a method of encouraging writers to submit poetry, short stories and essays. Our entries are always outstanding, and we revel in reading the creative writing talent in Meridian and surrounding areas. Therefore, through The Literary Review Contest and Magazine, we seek to showcase some of the best writers of our area.

The contest is open to any high school sophomore, junior, or senior from any school in our area. We are pleased each year to receive many outstanding entries from the local high schools. Furthermore, we welcome entries from anyone in our community. At MCC, we strive to meet the needs of our community, and this is just one more way we reach out to creative writers who write for the simple pleasure of putting their ideas on paper.

At the conclusion of our contest each year, the entries are divided into two categories, high school and community. The entries are then further divided by genre. MCC English instructors evaluate the works and award first, second and third places in both high school and community poetry, short story and essay. The Language And Literature Division is grateful for the support of The MCC Foundation in funding our monetary prizes.

Finally, Meridian Community College publishes The Literary Review Magazine. This magazine is a compilation of the best creative works we received that year, both high school and community. The magazine is developed by our Graphic Design Program students, and they are responsible for the layout and artwork found in each year's magazine. We then use the magazine as a showcase for the following year's competition.

If you would like information on our Literary Review Contest, please call Meridian Community College and ask for Joshua Maeda, Language and Literature Division coordinator of the contest. We would be pleased to talk with you about submitting your work and answer any questions you might have.

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