



# THE LAUREL

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*St. Bonaventure University*

# Meet the Team

*We would like to extend a special thank you to our faculty advisor, Dr. Joe Hall, the English Department, and each contributor for your creative work. The Laurel editing team could not have produced this edition without the dedicated support of each student, staff member, and alumni who contributes to and reads each edition.*

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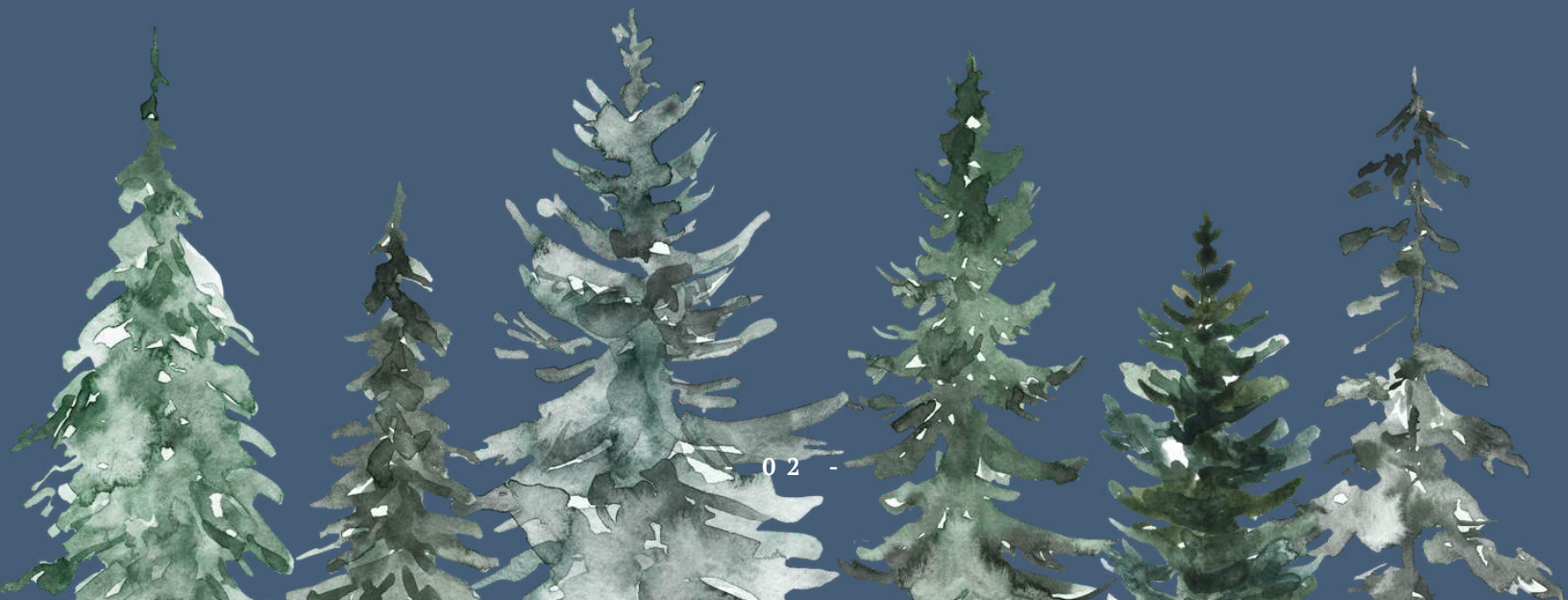
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# Table of Contents

- 04 - Sunset by Reilly by Isabel Marzullo
- 05 - Winter by Anonymous
- 06 - Frozen in Time by Rose Pfeiffer
- 08 - Brain Freeze by Rose Pfeiffer
- 09 - The Yeti by Rose Pfeiffer
- 10 - Writer's Block by AnnMarie Truesdell
- 11 - Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Joe Hall
- 12 - Ode to the Willow Place by Guinevere Brady
- 14 - Snowfall Anthem (Art) by Rose Pfeiffer
- 15 - Snowfall Anthem (Short Story) by Rose Pfeiffer
- 24 - Pavloved Myself Sonnet #1 by Abigail Taber
- 25 - Sonnet #117 by Anonymous
- 26 - May '26 by Mary Quinn McNaughton
- 27 - The Rug by Tanner Pasi
- 28 - Dominoes by Anonymous
- 30 - Hemoglobin Goblin by Mariam Baloch
- 34 - Walking Backwards by A. Fox
- 35 - Nothing Ever Happens by A. Fox
- 36 - "Hey Jon, what's next?" by Clay Peets
- 49 - Sorry, I never called you up. by Mary Quinn McNaughton
- 50 - The Left Side by Mary Quinn McNaughton
- 52 - Mt. Irenaeus by Isabel Marzullo
- 53 - Smoke Break by Eoghan Murphy
- 57 - Allegany River by Mary Quinn McNaughton
- 58 - God of Roadkill by Maximilian Haskell



# Table of Contents

- 60 - Space Ranger by Joesph McCormick
- 64 - The Snow Tiger by Anonymous
- 68 - اِزْيِك by Niamh Hanna
- 70 - The Molder by Tyler Green
- 71 - Making the Bed by Tyler Green
- 74 - Other Pastures by Thomas O'Neil
- 75 - University Ministries by Isabel Marzullo
- 75 - Dog Walk by Mary Quinn McNaughton
- 76 - Contributor Thanks and Editor's Note



Sunset by Reilly by Isabel Marzullo

# Winter

BY ANONYMOUS

The cold sweeps in and I am stagnant,  
Sitting, molding, rotting.  
My skin sloughs off,  
And my brittle bones crumble.  
Leaving nothing behind  
Except a mess no one wants to see.  
But as the sun gleams off the snow  
Melting it to grass once more,  
The mushrooms feast on the last of my corpse,  
Encouraging nature to renew.  
Sprouting from the filth  
Until from the earth I am born anew.  
Rising in the summer air  
To resume the life I destroyed.  
Until next year, when the cold breaks me down again.

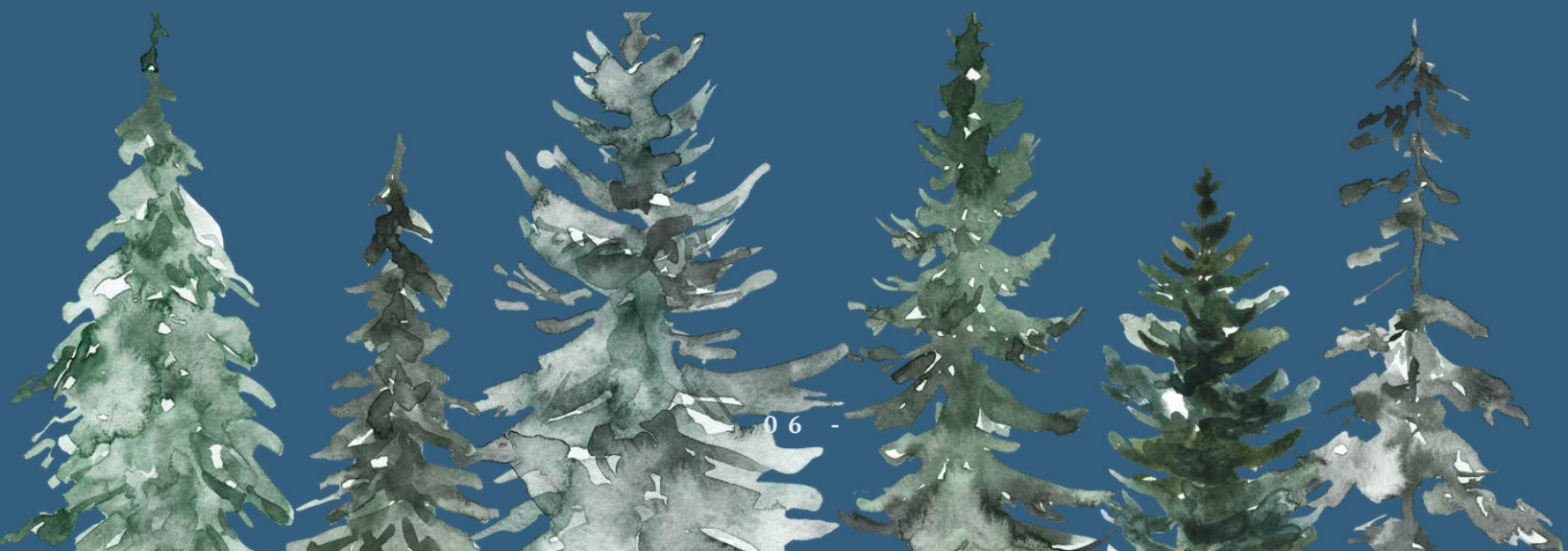




# Frozen in Time

BY ROSE PFEIFFER

I pause and notice stillness around me.  
Still river, still trees.  
Dead leaves cling to their branches, shivering softly ...  
This is the ugly time of year.  
Everything around you is brown,  
Surrounded by death and decay.  
Sitting, waiting to be wrapped by Lady Winter's mourning veil and laid to rest.  
Your runny nose is a funeral guest, tears like so.  
Trembling under a strange shadow of mountains.  
As the precession continues its delay,  
I can feel it in my throat,  
I can feel it in my head.  
This is the time the world becomes unrecognizable for a moment.  
Frozen and awaiting their revival.  
Still river, still trees.  
Carefully adorned with frost but as fragile as glass.  
Still river, still trees.  
Whispering now is the time to make your peace.



# Frozen in Time

CONTINUED

We will meet again after months of silence.

But for now, we rest.

Lady Winter murmurs, "Hush, my child of snow."

"Peace." Whispers the cardinals flashing red across the white.

"Peace." Whispers the snowflakes falling on your nose.

"Peace." Whispers the fire crackling in the hearth.

"Peace." Whispers the scent of pine filling the air.

"Peace." Whispers the creatures donning their winter cloaks.

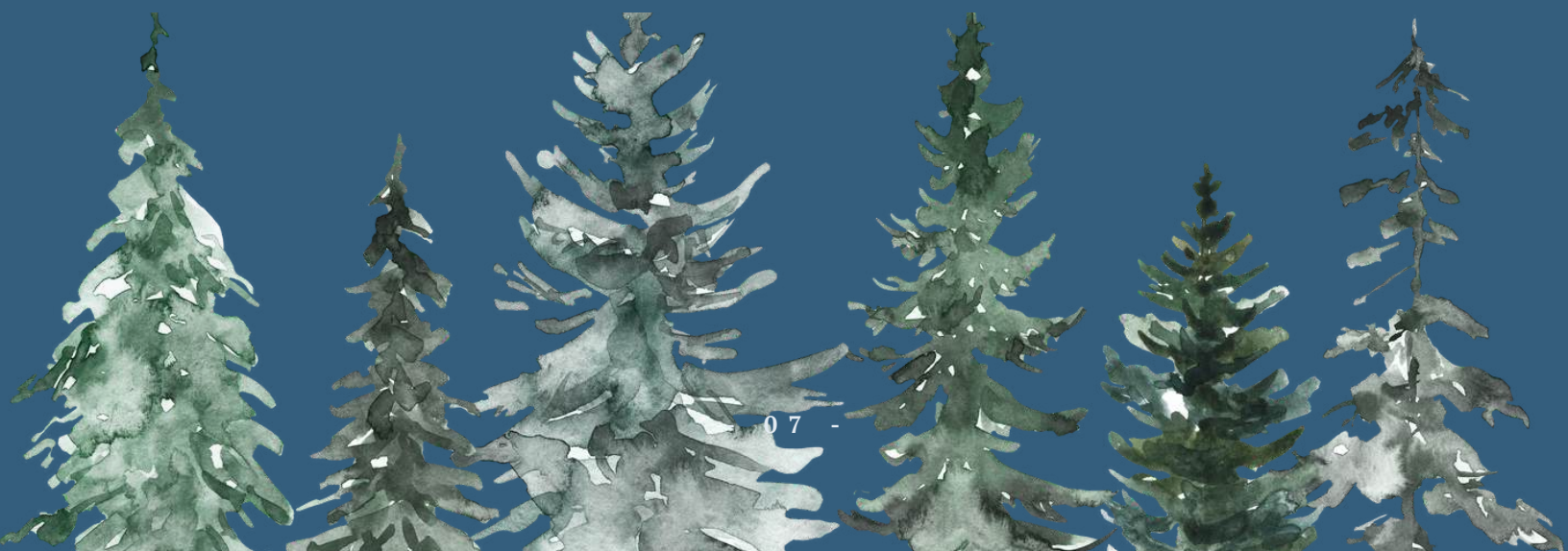
"Until we meet again." Murmurs the bears and squirrels.

"Farewell." From butterflies and geese.

"Farewell." From leaves and closing petals.

And for now, all is still.

For now, until born again to greet you in a year brand new.



# Brain Freeze

BY ROSE PFEIFFER

I miss writing beautiful things.  
The snow glistens in white,  
Enchanting the night with every streetlight...  
Yes, a line, a brief moment of clarity,  
Long been a rarity.  
But that's not enough  
My imagination fell silent  
My mind is only quiet  
I don't understand why it—  
Is it from months away from home?  
Day by day, grinding away?  
Schoolwork, wrist hurt?  
From typing day by day?  
The main thing I learned was  
That I am so tired.

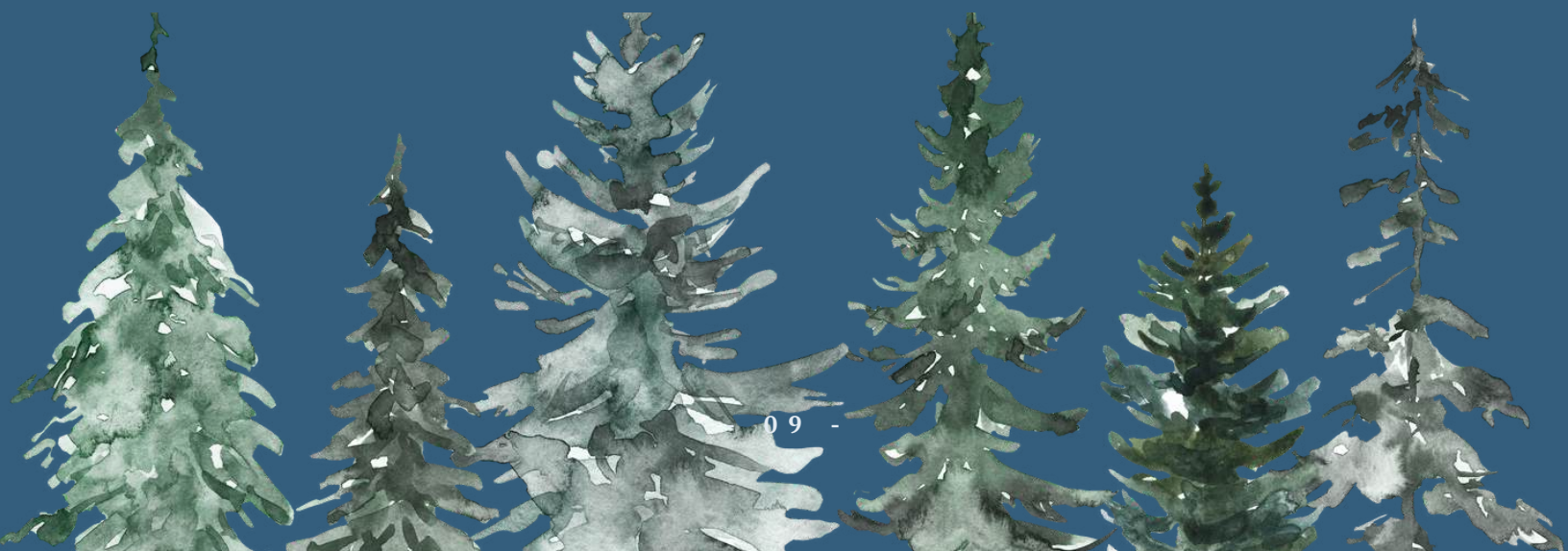




# The Yeti

BY ROSE PFEIFFER

Snow spiraling toward the window,  
Landing like little white flies;  
Changing, turning...  
Snuffing out the trees,  
Cloaking a building—  
Usually seen quite clear.  
Wind chill, winter veil,  
Yellow eyes stare from the snow cloak,  
That, otherwise, would be decoration  
Scattered along a lovely building.  
The farther you look, the less you see  
Mountains hidden in a freeze.  
The birds grow silent or flee.  
Demolished by pretty decay,  
Of leaves and trees and grass,  
Dressed in ice and dying things.



# Writer's Block

BY ANNMARIE TRUESDELL

The blank page calls  
Screams out my name  
My walls begin to fall  
But things are strangely tame.

There is no rush  
No overflow of words  
They were my crutch  
Now only broken swords.

The sharp steel dull  
No longer able to slice  
Everything is lull  
I've lost my paradise.



# Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Joe Hall

*Dr. Joe Hall, assistant professor at St. Bonaventure University, is a writer, poet, and educator. He has 6 published books, with his newest one, Buffalo Free Rapid Transit, set to release in 2026. At St. Bonaventure, he fosters a community of artists through his creative writing classes and as faculty advisor for The Laurel.*

& I find myself alone, who I thought my friends  
were just poems, & with just poems

just ache, lake winds' slap doesn't explain  
everything, this long freeze

pulls away; Le Sueur said she could only see her  
life in ruins & pain, forty years older

than Brodine, who she was writing to  
who had died & would hate this despair

the neighbor thumping away, Buffalo  
gridded by sirens & heavy men

dragging a baker into a van  
that the feeling tip of the climbing

bean finds & ascends the spire of foxglove  
twisting staircase of bells

a few days before the frost in  
the compost bin improvised from worn decking

what is the first step towards rage?





# Ode to the Willow Place

BY GUINEVERE BRADY

Her tears tickle my knees  
Soft and flowing  
Flush with the ripples of stagnant pools  
Tripping over small stones  
Tossed through stalky threads  
She stands tall and gentile  
My safety blanket  
Shoulders weighted from years of yearning  
Her plot of soft moss covering her toes  
The earth seeps through  
It cradles my crown and holds my tired body  
Simply holding what gives me life  
Sad eyes leering over those who speak not  
The pond beyond gazing back  
Swaying together in the waltz of the wind  
Conversing through droplets of rain  
Her outstretched hands frame the sky  
I put my thoughts there  
My grievances  
My joys  
My creative epiphanies  
She holds them tenderly  
Small creatures make it known  
She holds their whole lives



# Ode to the Willow Place

CONTINUED

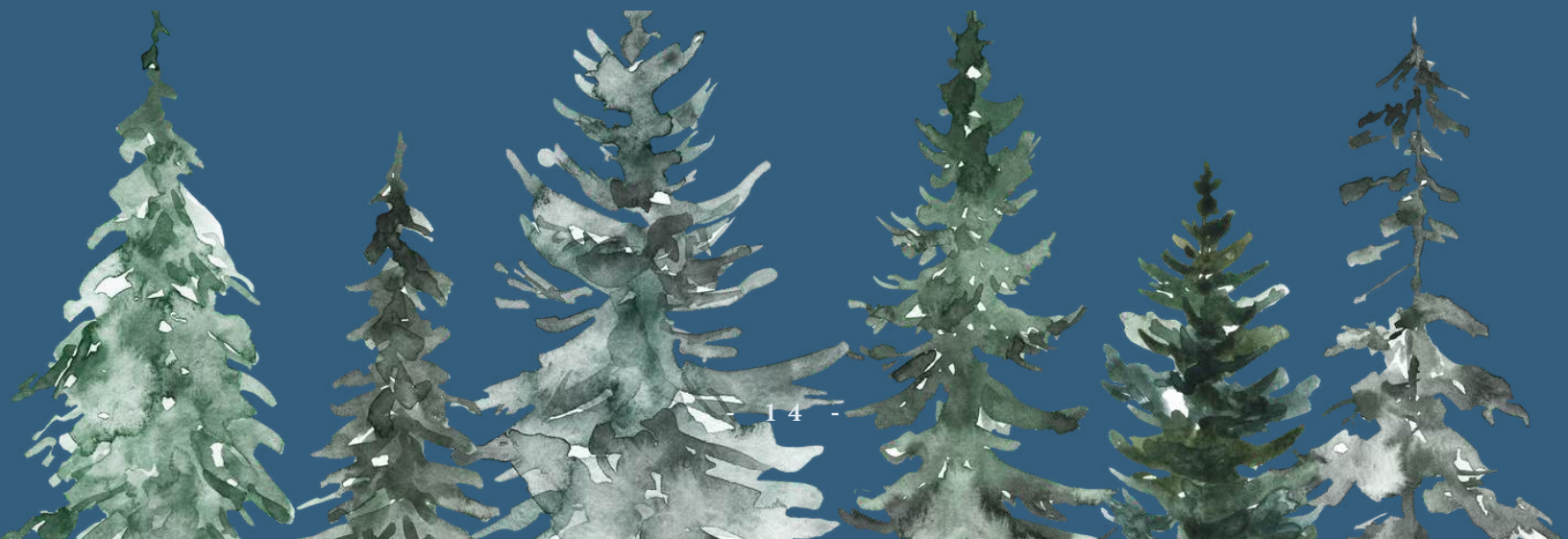
Feathers rest in her nooks and fill her tired arms  
Seeds and berries veiled in her rifts  
Powdered wings finding solitude on her ridged flesh  
Tall ears carving the space on which she stands  
To the rest of humanity  
Seen merely as an idol of beauty  
From eyes without aim for empathy  
A blaze too smokey for use  
So she stands  
Motherly and warm  
Caring for her children  
I worry for her  
I see the weight she bears  
Woman to woman



THE LAUREL AT SBU

# Snowfall Anthem

BY ROSE PFEIFFER





# Snowfall Anthem

BY ROSE PFEIFFER

CONTENT WARNING: BODY MODIFICATION

"A-are you sure this is safe-?" Faron blurts, grasping at the thin string. The access to it was growing more limited, as the others had also piled onto this plank of wood. Faron didn't remember exactly—it was carved, carved, and smooth, and it curled at the place where his feet rested.

It gave him that weird sense of *deja vu* again. He knows this is something he should know- but he can't remember. Traces of a past life, like Keenan, that old witch, had told me about a while ago, after he made me into what I am now. Faron reminded himself.

Skylar claps him on the shoulder. The board lurches forward a little across the snow. "Hey, we'll be fine!"

Faron fumbles for the string.

"Sky!" The others say in unison.

Jet offers a smile from the very back. "It's all good, man, we got you."

Faron nods a little. "W-what was this called again?" Faron glances back at the four faces behind him.

"A toboggan!" Kurt pipes in from behind Skylar.

"O-oh-" Faron goes back to facing forward. The toboggan jerks forward again.

"Easy," Says Jet, "We'll give you a countdown. Alright?"

"Consider it normal winter fun training," Shawn adds softly.

"Yeah—" Faron gives another nod.

"Here it goes, three. . . Two. . ." Kurt starts.

Faron gulps in a breath.

"One!" Skylar calls, pushing from the ground. Kurt, Shawn, and Jet pitch in too.

They were somewhere farther away from most people. Tracks from other sleds and toboggans sit fading in the sparkling snow.

He wondered why they were farther away—Faron guessed it was because of his stitches. The toboggan gradually slows to a stop.

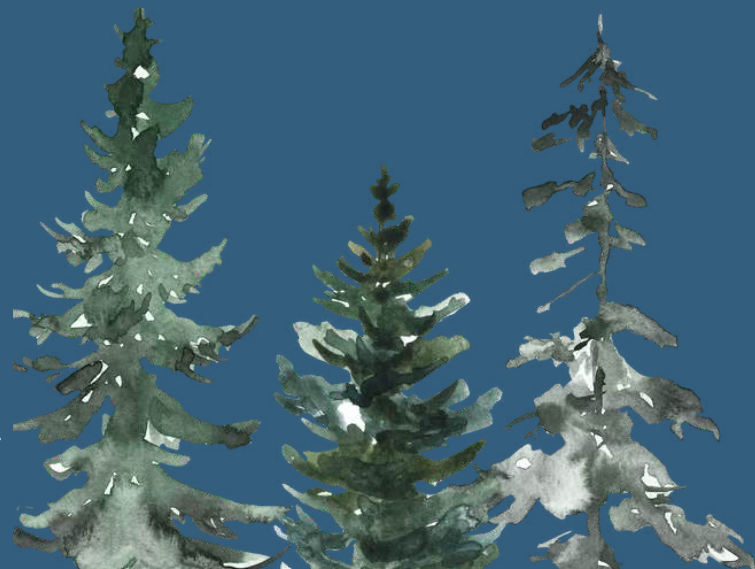
"Can we go again?" Faron looked over. Betsy was at the bottom of the hill, sitting on a bench. He grins.

Jet laughs. "Glad you're having fun!"

Faron smiles more. "Yeah, I am, I didn't know I would."

Jet and Shawn got off the toboggan. Jet nods toward it. "You guys have fun, you don't need us there anymore." He chuckles. Shawn nods. "Yeah," he smiles with his eyes, mouth still hidden by his mask. Skylar and Kurt nod.

"Come on!" Kurt grins. He and Skylar start going, taking off toward the top of the hill, towing the toboggan behind them. He smiles at Jet, Shawn, and Betsy.



# Snowfall Anthem

CONTINUED

"Thank you,"

"Yeah," Jet smiles.

Shawn gives a nod. "

Of course," Betsy waves him off. "Go have fun," she tips her chin toward the others.

"Yeah, okay-!" Faron smiles, then hurries off to join Skylar and Kurt.

Faron goes a few more rounds down the hill with Kurt and Skylar. They laugh and run around until Betsy calls them over.

"Hey, you three, could you wrap up soon? I have some big news for you!"

They pause their tobogganing shenanigans.

"What?" Faron's eyes widen as he jogs down with Kurt and Skylar. Kurt drags the toboggan behind them.

"Did we mess something up?" Kurt tilts his head. Skylar nudges him and whispers, "What could we possibly have done?"

Betsy chuckles. "It's nothing like that."

"Okay, cool," Kurt leads the charge as he, Faron, and Skylar join Betsy, Jet, and Shawn.

"Guess what?" Betsy flashes a smile.

"Yeaahhh???" Skylar draws out the phrase.

"Yeah, what's up?" Jet rubs his neck.

"So, you guys said you wanted to try and be a band, yeah?

Been practicing a bunch, and y'all are really good, so..."

The five boys exchange looks, anticipation flashes through the group like static.

Betsy chuckles and smiles at them.

"Well, I have an old friend who owns a local pub here," Faron glances at Skylar, then Kurt, then back at Betsy.

And?" Kurt pipes in.

"He's offered to let you boys perform!"

Grins spread across their faces, flushing against the frigid winter air.

"THAT'S AWESOME!"

They all cheer and high-five and whatnot. Faron reaches into his scarf to make sure the excitement bubbling up and making everything warm was going to burst a seam.

"... That is, if you can figure out something by the weekend," Betsy adds.

"Oh." The warmth fades, and Faron moves his hand away and covers the stitch around his neck with the scarf again.

"This isn't going to go well..." Muttered Skylar.

Faron hangs his head, but then an idea sparks to life in his mind as the hope starts to fade. "I mean—I've written songs before.

"Whoa, really?" Jet's eyes seemed to light up; the others grinned and talked. Kurt nudges him. "I didn't know that."



# Snowfall Anthem

CONTINUED

"Yeah, I have." Faron grins.

"So we're back in business, huh?" Skylar rubs his hands together, grinning.

"I bet you boys can manage," Betsy grins, it's nice and warm. "But for now, let's go home, it's pretty cold."

The boys all agree.

Home, right. Faron runs the words through his mind as they walk. Yeah... This is really starting to feel like home. Faron starts to grin as they walk along.

\*\*\*\*\*

Faron was taking a walk with Kurt and Shawn. He decided that would be a good way to start thinking of a song.

His breath curls into smoke as the sound of chatter and giggling fills the air. A main source of it seems to be from two teen girls nearby, about his age. Hearing this, Faron glances in that direction for an instant. They're smiling and giggling, and one's occasionally glancing in his direction. He uses his coat to hide his face, his cheeks are rosy from the cold, and a bit embarrassed.

Kurt nudges him. "You know, Faron, I think you're being checked out," Kurt whispers, chuckling a little.

Faron shakes his head and scoffs. "Yeah, right."

Faron sweeps some of his multicolored bangs away from his face. "They're probably looking at you or Shawn."

Shawn shakes his head, glancing. "Yeah, not me." He speaks low and deep. There's a bit of an amused glitter in his eyes.

"Maybe you should go and have yourselves a little chit chat, yeah?" Kurt whispers, smirking. Faron has to pause a second—this was one of the times he could hear the faint trace of an accent in Kurt's voice.

When he looks back at Kurt, his memory whispers: You were born somewhere far from here, weren't you..? Faron quickly snaps out of his little daze and keeps the thought to himself. Noting that would be a fairly strange thing to say.

Shawn quietly makes a suggestion.

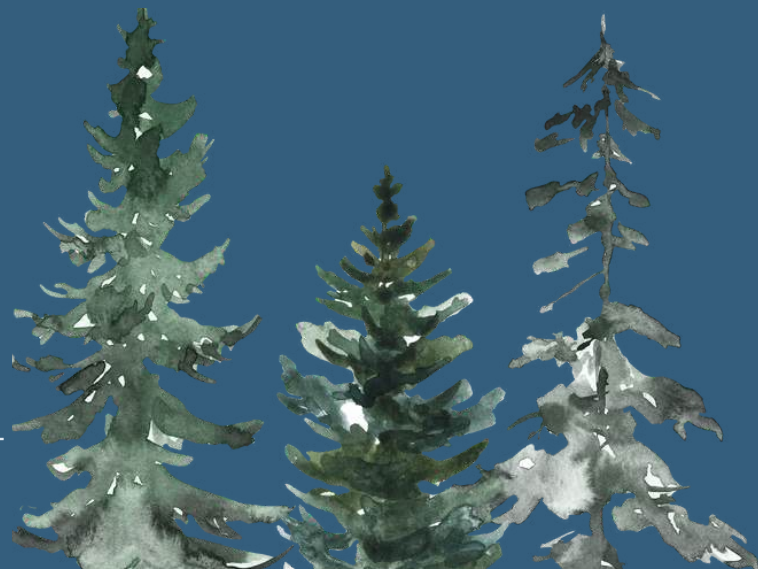
"Catch her gaze for a moment, smile," Shawn tells him.

A wave of familiarity washes over Faron.

"Yeah- I'm pretty sure I've done this before..."

"You could tell those guys have been leading me in circles, right? I'm gonna be honest," he drops his voice to a whisper. "I don't think they actually know what they're doing."

The girls sort of giggle. "Yeahhh, I could tell," The girl who had first been looking at him answered.





# Snowfall Anthem

CONTINUED

"You seem to come by this park often. Mind showing me around? The name's Faron, I'm still kind of new around town," he offers a mitten-clad handshake. His streaks peek out of his winter hat, among his coal colored hair.

The first accepts his handshake. "I'm Karina, nice to meet you, and this is my friend Sydney."

"Nice to meet you as well," Sydney chimes in.

"Yeah, you guys too." Faron smiles. "Well, lead the way," he says, waving his hand and motioning down the sidewalk.

"Sure," Karina smiles, nose and cheeks rosy from the cold. They both seemed about his age, and he walked with them. Faron steals a glance at Shawn and Kurt, flashing a little smirk.

Kurt's jaw dropped, and Shawn's eyes widened. He pats his pocket where a recently acquired phone is, to tell them: "You know how to contact me."

Then he sets off with the girls, conversing with them throughout the park. His stitches lay hidden by all his winter gear.

As they walk, Faron and the girls circle a pond. They'd all been making small talk as they went.

"So," Karina says, "You're new in town, right?" Faron nods. "Yeah, I'm working on settling in."

"Huh, what brought you to this little town?" she asks. They cross over a bridge trimmed with holiday lights and decor.

"Sheer coincidence, I didn't originally plan to stay here,"

"Now you are?" Sydney chimes in, and Karina bumps her with an elbow.

Faron just smiles a little, peeling off a second and gazing at the pond, shimmering and frozen.

The girls take notice and join him. "Why'd you stay?" Sydney adds.

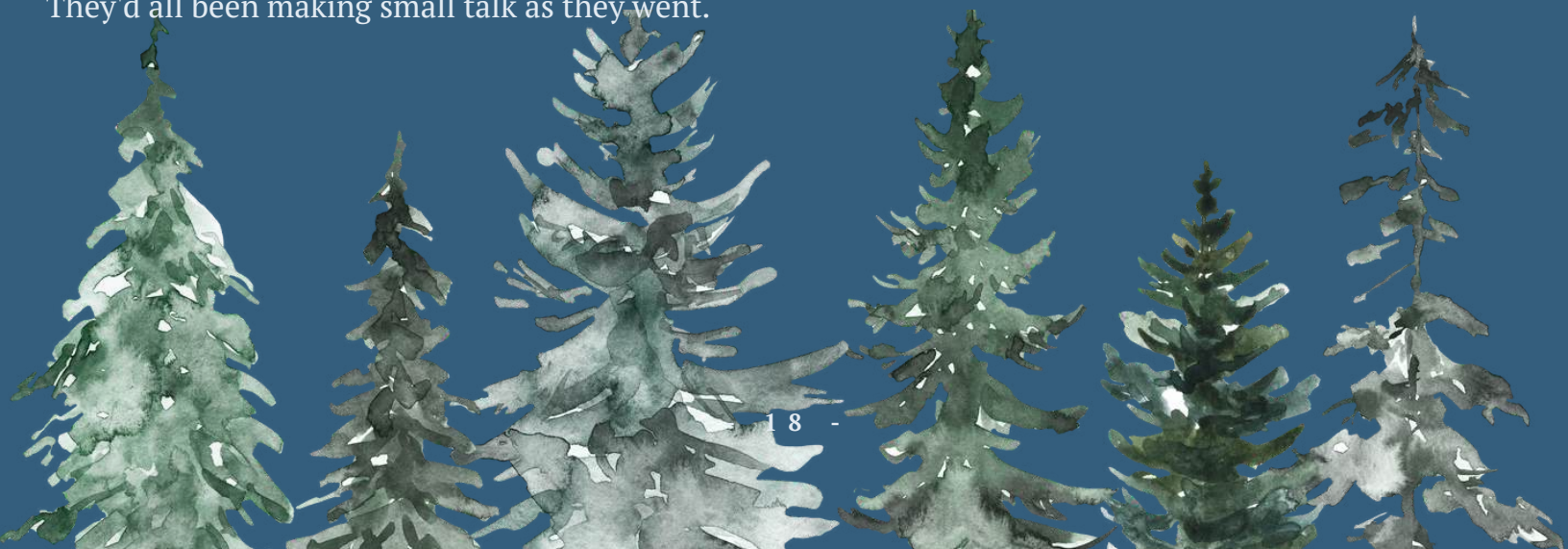
"Guess I found where I belong," Faron smiles at his clouded reflection. Karina giggles, cheeks rosy.

"Wow, that's kind of deep."

Faron smiles and shrugs. "You think so?"

"Yep," she laughs. "You going to be attending school here then?"

Faron adjusts his hat. "We've been working on it- me and my sort of family. There were some issues that popped up where I came from. So, I ended up here." He puts on a smile.



# Snowfall Anthem

CONTINUED

Faron wasn't about to say he'd needed to run from home- from the people who made him- because of an angry mob thought one of them murdered him for some reason- then hopped on a bus driven by two ancient witches- one of which was a skeleton- then was hit by a car and everything- that... That would definitely come off as weird.

"There's a shelter where they hand out hot cocoa nearby. How about we stop by there and warm up?" Karina suggests.

"Sounds good to me," Sydney agrees, and they then look to Faron.

He shrugs. "Sounds good to me." He smiles. They head to a little building, log walls like a mini cabin. People are inside, chatting, laughing, escaping from the cold. They walk in, it's warm and cozy, and some people gladly take off a layer of their winter gear. They find a table to themselves.

"Hey, how about I fix the hot chocolates for you guys too?" Faron offers, giving a smile.

"Sure, that very nice of you," Sydney says.

"Of course," Faron gives a nod. "How about you, Karina?" He adds.

She giggles. "Oh, absolutely, thank you,"

Faron gives another nod. "Anytime." He peels off to make them all cocoa. He can hear them talking and giggling some behind him. He can't help but be amused. He remembered they'd briefly interacted and passed by at the park before. Faron was glad they finally talked.

It was really warm there. A fire crackled in a fireplace there. So, Faron took off his hat, gloves, and scarf before he went. He stirs up the cocoa and starts walking back, carrying it in a holder.

"Hey," He smiles at the two of them.

Karina is smiling and twirling her hair. "Hey, thanks,"

"Yeah, sure." Faron dips his head in a nod, grinning. He goes to set the cocoa down... But then they catch sight of the stitches.

"Hey... Uh, Faron?" Karina glances him over.

He tilts his head and sets down the cocoa. "Yeah..?" He slides it over to them.

"You got a little- I don't know- on your-" She lifts a hand to her own neck.

"Oh—heh- it's- it's a choker-" he raises his own hand to mirror her.

"But it's on your wrist too-" Sydney adds. "Is there a projector in here or something-?" She looks around.

"Okay- bye then, Faron?" Karina stammers. "Didn't even get your number yet!"

Faron manages a smile. "Later-! I promise!" He cracks the smile and attempts to wave. But his other arm has gone limp at his side, helplessly. He grabs that one with his other arm and starts hustling out. He doesn't even notice when he hustles past Shawn and Kurt.



# Snowfall Anthem

CONTINUED

They'd been making their way in casually. He forgets about his cocoa and just goes. Shawn and Kurt exchange looks, growing concerned. Shawn bumped Kurt's arm and pointed.

Riiiiip.

His legs buckle, and he tries to get out his thread and needle. Faron keeps trying to run, and his mind starts racing without mercy. Images flood his mind.

No, this is too much- get far, far away- from everyone- step, step, step, step- get far away- Then his legs give out, a cry of shock escapes, and then he falls. The feeling leaves his body as he tumbles.

Faron tumbles down the hill, rolling and tangling with the threads. Trees, bushes, and branches latch onto any loose thread in their reach, further causing a tangle. He tries to catch himself, but the arms don't move. They just flail wildly and limp— he keeps falling.

My existence has got to be cursed or something.

He swears he sees one of his hands go flying off into a bush- the sight makes him nauseous, even if it's just stuffing poking out.

Going- going, he knows it's a pine tree that catches him- but he feels nothing as he thumps against the trunk.

He knows he should- but he doesn't- he just smells the sweet scent of pine, hears his breath growing quicker. Images flash through his mind. Faces- places he could've known in a different life. Familiar voices ring out from the top of the hill...

But Faron just closes his eyes and lets everything dissolve into black.

What do these images mean...? He wanted to find out, maybe he'd just stay there for a while...

He knew he had a heart. Even now, it beat in his chest like anyone else's.

Who... What was he? Maybe the shadows dancing across his eyelids would disclose the answers.

*A life nearly taken too soon.*

*A girl, unfamiliar to this life....she... She...*

*Red lights. Blades. Wheels. A different name.*

*She talks to him, she kisses him on the cheek- red lights, red flash like a photograph. She was the last thing he saw. She- killed him, or at least tried to- why-? He tries to dive deeper. She said his name- he can't hear it at first- again, no words come out, he can't see her face... Maybe if he tries to push deeper, he starts to hear a voice, but it morphs into..."Faron...? Faron-! Are you okay?"*

"Shawn! I found him!" He calls back.

Then Faron hears rushed footsteps in the snow, and Shawn comes into view after Kurt, following the strings sprawled across the bushes. His eyes go wide, and he follows Kurt, skidding down the hill too.

"What the hell happened...?"





# Snowfall Anthem

CONTINUED

Faron manages to turn his head away from him. Kurt crosses his arms. "Not gonna talk about it, eh? Alright." Kurt glances at Shawn.

"Uh..." Shawn lifts up one of Faron's ragdoll-esk hands.

"Whoa-- that's bad." Kurt's face goes pale. "Come on-- let's get you home."

"Or at least somewhere warm, indoors..." Shawn adds.

"It'll be easier to fix you up somewhere less cold..."

"I'll try to fix a few things for now," Kurt surveys his trajectory and follows it. Shawn nods and sits by Faron as Kurt searches.

Eventually, Kurt jogs back over, carrying Faron's bag and sewing kit. He fixes some minor rips for now, enough so Faron can move a little more. Some stuffing is missing, leaving Faron looking thinner and still a bit limp.

"Why...?" Faron speaks up in a whisper.

"Hey, don't feel too bad, we're all kinda freaks here." Kurt gives a small smile, stopping sewing for a moment. He waves a hand, and dark pink snowflakes appear around it.

When they make contact with the real snow, it seems to sizzle.

"Yeah..." Shawn agrees, he pulls down his mask and reveals his jagged teeth. A faint smile appears on Faron's face. "Let's get you out of here, ok?" He offers a small, jagged smile. Though, Faron's smile fades.

"I don't...want people to...see me like this," His voice is faint.

"Alright," Kurt says. "I know a more covered way out of here."

Faron tries to nod, heart still racing.

"Yeah, come on." Shawn makes his way closer. "Can I pick you up?"

"Yeah..." Faron whispers. Kurt puts away the sewing kit, and Shawn scoops up Faron's limp form. He starts carrying Faron. "Jeez, you're light."

Faron gives a weak chuckle. "Yep... I know."

Shawn tries making funny faces as they hurry back, displaying his fangs and trying to take Faron's mind off of things.

Faron rolls his eyes but ends up smiling and amused.

"Well, alright," Jet tilts his head. "Anything you wanna tell me now?"

"I wrote a song," Faron says with a smile.

Jet smiles back and puts a hand on his shoulder.

"Well, hey, that's cool, everyone's gonna be thrilled."



# Snowfall Anthem

CONTINUED

They manage to get Faron back home. He'd gotten his legs working better by then. But, the first thing he does after thanking Kurt and Shawn is hurry to his room. The boys exchange looks and shrug.

\*\*\*\*\*

After a while, Jet knocks on his door. "Hey, Faron? I heard something crazy happened—are you okay?"

"I'm better," He hears Faron call back, though it sounds muffled.

"Can I come in?" Jet touches the doorknob.

"Yeah, yeah," he hears Faron.

"Cool," Jet opens the door and comes in. Faron... Doesn't seem to be in immediate sight.

"We got a nice warm dinner, I made it today." He looks around.

"Alright," Faron replies, his voice seems to be coming from around a large chest in the room.

"Uh... Where are you?" Jet rubs his neck. Surely he couldn't be in the chest-- it doesn't look anywhere big enough for someone to fit in.

"Over here," Faron calls. The lid of the chest shifts, then opens. He--should not be able to fit in there- but nevertheless, Faron emerges from the chest, practically unfurling himself. He picks up his legs a little and flops out. He stands up slowly, although not fully in normal movements.

Jet mentally lags a moment.

"Uh... Why am I not surprised?" He finally says.

Faron shrugs. "I... Have to tell you guys some stuff later," Faron glances aside and turns a spool of thread in his hands.

"Well, alright," Jet tilts his head. "Anything you wanna tell me now?"

"I wrote a song," Faron says with a smile.

Jet smiles back and puts a hand on his shoulder.

"Well, hey, that's cool, everyone's gonna be thrilled."

"Yeah," Faron's smile fades a little. "The other thing is about my past," He seems uneasy about that one.

"Well... Alright. Come on, let's go get dinner."

"Yeah, of course," Faron smiles and walks with Jet down to the dining room. Jet makes sure he doesn't lose his balance.

\*\*\*\*\*

First, Faron announced he'd come up with a song to the whole group. All of them couldn't wait to find out about it.

But he kind of pulled Kurt and Shawn aside.

"I think I should mention this to you guys first,"

"What's up? Something freaky, I'm guessing," Kurt leans against a wall.

"Yeah- There's no way like- dance around it, so I'll just say it-" Faron takes a deep breath.

Shawn dips his head. "Take a moment if you need it."

"Right." Faron takes another breath. "So—there's a chance before I became the way I am- before I was here- that someone might've tried to uh—murder me- so- that's a thing...."



# Snowfall Anthem

CONTINUED

Shawn and Kurt are silent for a moment.

"I mean—you're not the only one with a weird situation- my voice at full value can kill someone. I'm practically whispering right now..." Shawn says, taking off his mask.

Faron pauses. "Really?"

"Yeah- I guess it's kinda like I'm half.. Ghost maybe? I don't know, it's weird. I've been told it looks like I hover off the ground sometimes. Maybe if I focus enough, I can walk through a wall, but I'm not about to test that theory." His voice, unaccompanied by the mask, seems to resonate through the room even when speaking softly.

"So... Not that bad," he twirls his mask around his finger by one of its ear loops.

"Yeah, and my powers came from a near-death experience..." Kurt adds. "I don't like to talk about it. Betsy could tell you... She was a good friend of my mom. Skylar probably could too, but I wouldn't trust his testimony," he gets a faint smile.

"Oh— wow- sorry about that," Faron blurts, unsure what to say.

"Sorry about you almost getting murdered, " Kurt replies with a shrug.

"Heh," Faron smiles a little. "At least you guys kinda get it—"

Shawn gives a smile, and Kurt nods.

"Since that's out of the way—how about we get everyone together to plan out the song?" Faron gives a half smile.

"Sounds good." Kurt chuckles a little.

\*\*\*\*\*

"So, what do we have?" Kurt brushes back his long hair and stands one foot on a box, leaning forward. He's got his guitar strapped across his back.

Skylar twirls his drumsticks and grins wildly. "Can't wait,"

Shawn pops up his keyboard and gives a thumbs up. Jet crosses his arms and leans against a wall. "What do you need me to do?"

"Right—okay, Jet, get your guitar for now," Faron says he's sitting on an ottoman, letting a leg dangle off. Jet nods and grabs his guitar.

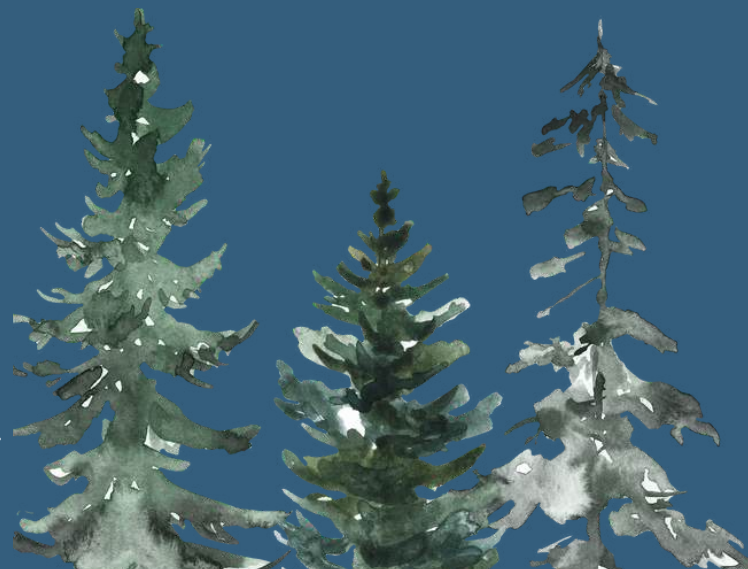
"Alright," Faron adjusts his black zippered sweatshirt, it hangs off his shoulders some, leaving some of his stitches visible. Then he opens a notebook. "Well, it— kinda starts edgy?"

The guys sort of nod. Jet offers a smile.

"We can do that, think it's one of the things we're better at,"

Faron smiles. "Good, okay-"

"I'm in, hit us, yeah?" Kurt leans in close with a grin. Faron scoffs at him and nudges Kurt away.





# Pavolved Myself Sonnet #1

BY ABIGAIL TABER

Bridgette's dad is coming in  
tell maggie to put the vape away

kkk  
kk  
not kkk

clubhouse can host formal on the 6th 👍

im not gonna go out. I'm sorry  
can you come to my room please

how are you feeling after being home  
for a couple hours?

not that bad... i  
went to whole foods and my mom bought me  
ton of weird foods and half a key lime pie!

thats honestly rude to tell me less than  
12 hours before we leave. but you need to  
understand that i'm pissed off to my core.  
i think i pavolved myself

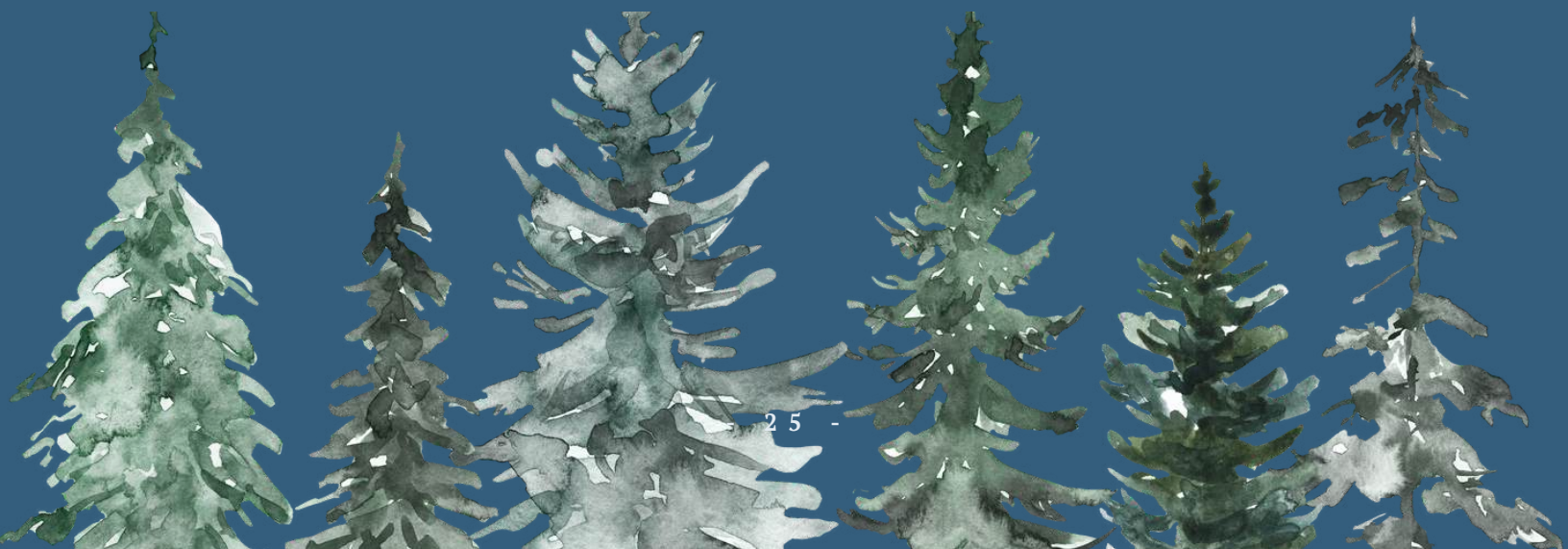


# Sonnet #117

BY ANONYMOUS

Catching and dragging my fingers along  
the newest infliction of my belief  
that tomorrow I'll be your precious grief.  
You were only meant to be a bad wrong.  
Instead, you taunt my room with your sweet song.  
Only superficial, I am told to stall.  
The deeper I go, the farther I fall.  
You feel so good, I don't want to be wrong.

Where in my life did it turn to cutting  
myself open to feel my love pouring  
out onto the empty apartment floor?  
I should have known my mind was out gutting  
sensibility for the sake of warring  
for something I've never wanted before.



# May '26

BY MARY QUINN MCNAUGHTON

I have lived knowing this will end in tears  
I'll forget the joy and accomplishment  
All it will boil down to is memories  
We met those girls that night- any advice?

*do not let go. savor, love everything*

We answered under strobe lights, the clock still  
counting down, projecting theft onto us  
We will curse the days we wished passed so quick  
And look helplessly at each other, stuck  
clinging to hours stolen by our restless,  
cruel Mother Time. We'll miss all of this:  
the shitty food, the dive bars, that one mean  
librarian. Legacies become posts.

*I hate this moment. I will die to have  
it back one day. My, our, time is near here.*





# The Rug

BY TANNER PASI

The doe scans the bronze forest with her eyes.  
She gracefully glides through the gentle breeze  
As the rising sun appears in our skies,  
Lured by the flowers underneath those trees.  
Three precious fawns cling to her watchful side  
To avoid becoming wise in the least,  
Longing to match their mother's wondrous stride,  
And to enjoy this blessed morning feast.  
The family now chases a distant call  
Sung by the crystalline river's calm flow.  
The weary fawns rest under trees so tall.  
But without need for sun-kissed sleep, the  
    Dad, Dad, I got him! Right below its jug'!  
    Nice shot, Son. Mom's been wanting a new rug!



# Dominoes

BY ANONYMOUS

I feel my anger more than you know

Simmering

It sits under my skin

Simmering

Popping in my veins

Boiling

I want to throw things, break it all

Boiling

Ruining my life is so easy

Boiling

A few words, a couple actions

Spilling Over

It all comes crumbling down

Spilling Over

Falling to pieces

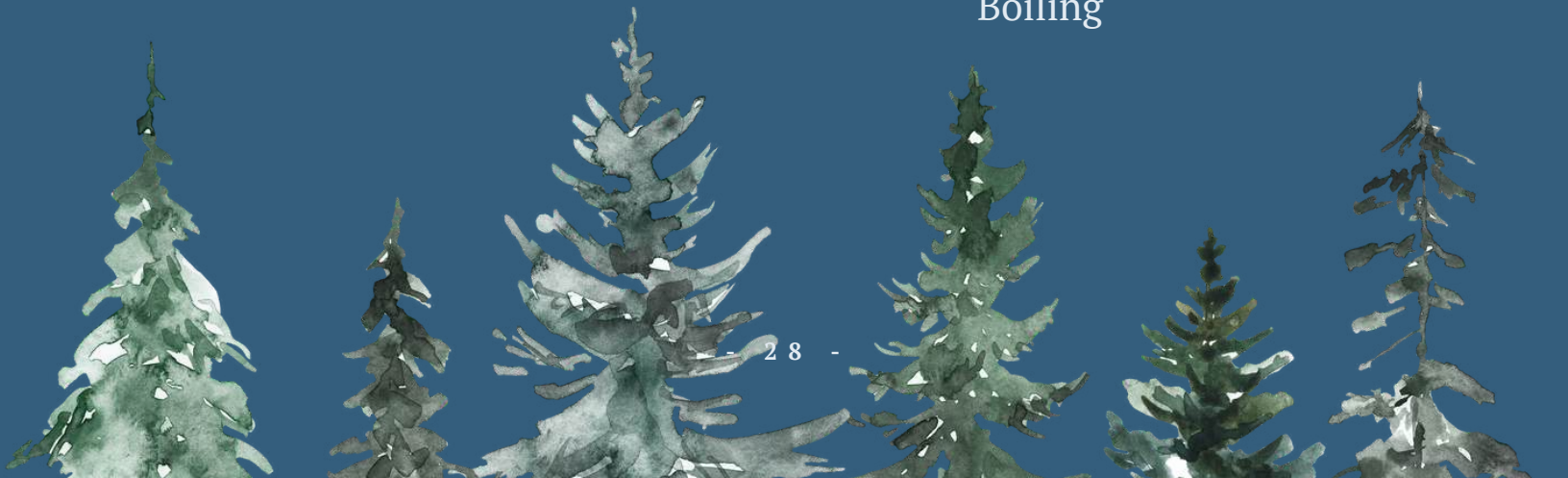
Spilling Over

Until there's nothing but rubble

Spilling Over

But then I'd have to pick up the pieces

Boiling



# Dominoes

CONTINUED

Fix the mess

Boiling

Soften the blows

Boiling

But that much clean up

Boiling

Isn't worth the fleeting satisfaction

Simmering

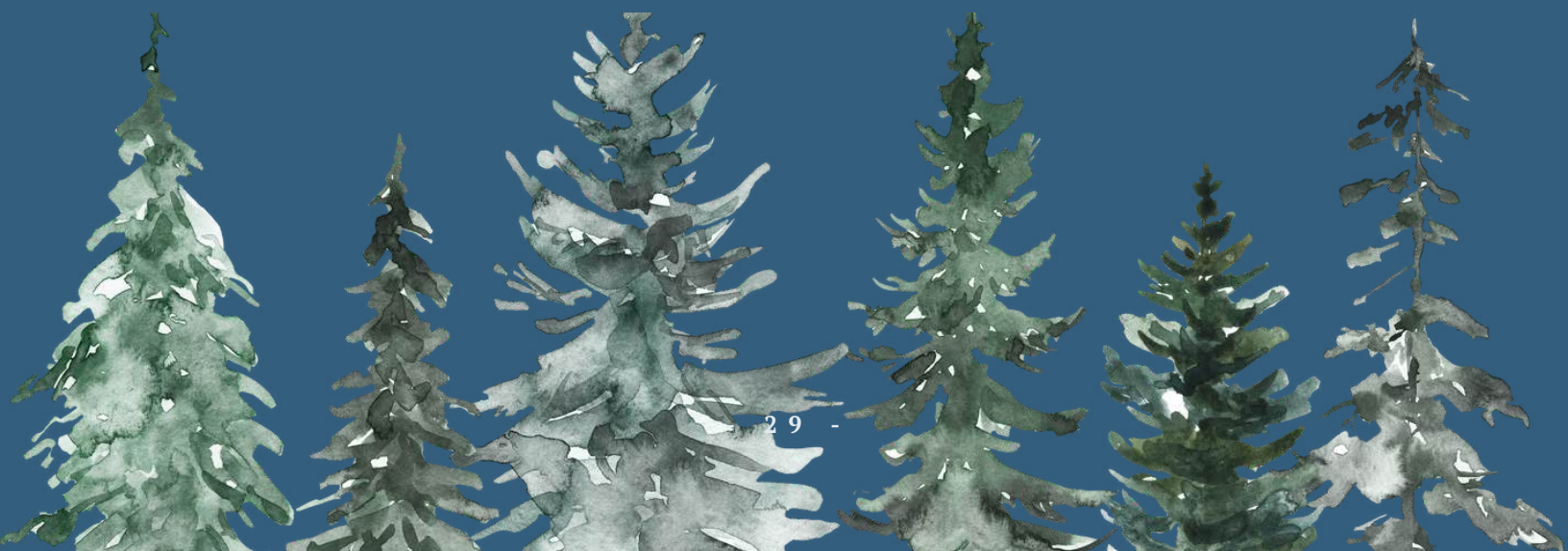
So, I swallow it down

Simmering

Pretend it's not there

Simmering

Because since when does my anger exist





# Hemoglobin Goblin

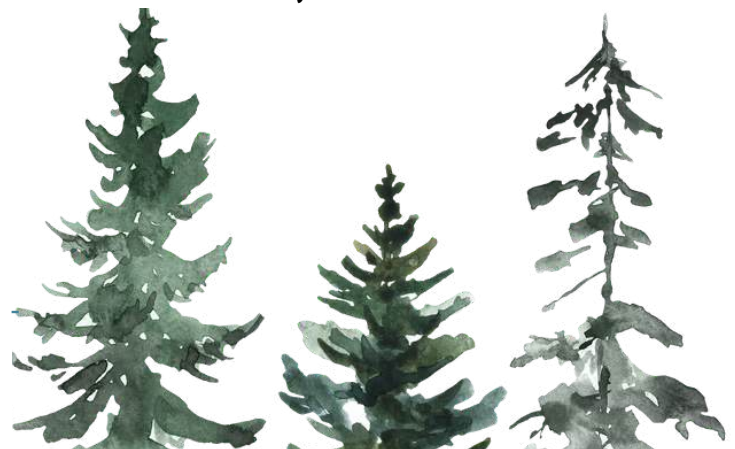
BY MARIAM BALOCH

Elanor woke up, staring at the Egyptian hieroglyphics on the ceiling. She looked around and noticed the paint on the walls surrounding her had lost its color and luminosity. The air was full of dust and reeked of mold and unfamiliarity. The mattress that lay beneath Elanor was torn and taped back together. “Where am I?” Elanor thought intensely. Elanor’s first move was to stay calm, something she learned in her premed student training: stay calm before reacting to disaster. As Elanor got up, a wave of memories hit her. From studying her pre-med brain away with random anatomy facts to her final moment of being bitten by a vampire. “Oh my god,” Elanor screamed in real time, pure fear rushing through her dark green eyes. Her scream echoed through the building and shook the vase sitting next to her mattress.

It was September of 1999 in Pennsylvania when she was last conscious. Elanor was furiously studying for her medical entrance exam, spending countless hours in Penn State’s Library. Elanor dreamed of becoming a doctor and curing her mother’s lupus. One night, her mother invited her over for dinner. On her way over to her mother’s house, who was making her favorite dish: garlic bread with spaghetti. As Elanor entered her house, she saw her mom on the floor and everything else was a blur until a figure rushed up to her and then, BOOM, she was bitten by a vampire.

“There’s no way... it...it can’t be,” Elanor cried in real time. Before Elanor could say any more, a tall, tremendously pale man wearing long overalls ran into the building. Elanor turned and froze. She was hungry. She could hear the man’s heart pump blood through his veins. There was this feeling inside her that she had never felt so strongly before. “Sorry, I don’t mean to disturb you. A bear was chasing me, and this was the closest area of retreat.” The man said. Elanor did not respond because all she could think about was how incredibly hungry she was. While she was a human premed student, her dream was to study the human body, finding ways to heal it. Now, all she can think about is tearing the human body apart once. She couldn’t focus or think about anything else. All her thoughts channeled to one specific thing: fresh blood.

“Are you okay, ma’am?” The man asked with concern stretching across his face. Elanor did not respond. Instead, she made her way towards the man. “I am....so...so hungry.” Elanor squealed and opened her mouth, revealing the sharp edges of her vampire teeth. The man had no time to run, no time to hide, no time to react. Elanor was too quick, like she had been doing this for ages. She bit the man, sucking the blood from his lean body.



# Hemoglobin Goblin

CONTINUED

Elanor blocked out all the noise. All the screams, all the fear, all the horror that came with the act: she blocked all of it out. All she focused on was catering to a new blood-only diet.

After she was done, she looked at the man and felt nothing. No remorse, no compassion, nothing. Elanor needed more. This first victim intensified Elanor's craving for fresh blood. Elanor let go of the man, and his body hit the marble floor, with the noise echoing throughout the building. Elanor looked at the man, unconscious with his back flat against the floor and his face towards the ceiling. Is he dead? Elanor thought. Elanor walked up to the man and looked straight down, making direct contact with where she bit him. The more she looked at the bite mark, the more numb she felt. Elanor left the man. The man wasn't her problem anymore.

Elanor opened the door to expose herself to the current version of the world. Elanor was in awe. She admired the smell of the fresh-cut grass, the harmonic sounds of the birds, and the baby blue color of the sky. However, all of that wonder faded when she saw a human far ahead. Elanor rushed towards the human. As she rushed towards the human, everything went black.

Elanor woke up and instead of staring at Egyptian calligraphy, she was looking at a plain white ceiling with a figure of a random person hovering over her. Elanor gasped and said, "Who are you?" Elanor felt targeted. She felt trapped. She felt as though something bad was going to happen if she said any more because the person gave her a disgusted look.

"The real question is, who and what are you? And...OH... don't try to fool me because I already know what you are. I just want to hear you acknowledge it yourself." the person said.

"My name is... my name is..." Elanor was confused. Her mind was blank. She couldn't remember her own name. She began to question who she was. She looked at her clammy and pale palms, her wrinkly fingers, and touched her rough skin.

"You're a vampire." the person said. Elanor gasped with horror traced over her face. "Don't worry. I am not here to hurt you. I am here to help you because I, too, am a vampire." The person said. Despite the kindness in their voice, it made Elanor have suspicions. Before Elanor could listen to another word, she juttled from the bed and ran to the door. She tried to shake the handle, but nothing budged. Elanor kicked and shoved her entire weight against the door, but nothing worked in favor of her escape.

"I am SO hungry." Elanor squealed. "I need food. I need blood. I need—" Elanor got cut off.

"No." the person interrupted aggressively.

"Why are you holding me hostage?" Elanor asked furiously.



# Hemoglobin Goblin

CONTINUED

“The second vervain storm in the history of vervain storms is predicted to hit the streets of Pennsylvania. We vampires, though immortal, are prone to the effects of vervain,” the person said.

Elanor mocked the person. “A vervain storm?! Ha, I remember reading about the myth of that in my folklore class. It looks like you’re keeping me in some prison. I don’t feel safe.” Elanor sharply stated.

“It is not a myth. The last one was in 1852; now, over a 100 years later, we see one coming again in 2001.” The person said.

“2001!?” Elanor said in shock. How did two years already go by since she was last conscious? With this realization, Elanor realized she missed her MCAT exam scheduled for March 2000.

“NOOO!” Elanor screamed with regret. Elanor vigorously hit the door using the hard wooden table in the room. Not to mention, she even utilized a chair and managed to break the handle of the door. Nothing worked. Elanor was stuck in this room.

Hours had passed. The person disappeared. Elanor could hear the silence. It got to her head. She began pacing back and forth, trying hard to remember what exactly happened before she landed here. The door creaked open, and the person entered the room holding a glass vial containing a neon green liquid. Elanor froze and her suspicions of this person grew even more. She looked around and there was no hope of escape. She was helpless. She stood there, frozen, as the person walked towards her.

“What is that?” Elanor said in a cracked voice.

The person came up to her and said, “Something good for your discipline.” The person then proceeded to open the vial and held it up to the ceiling.

“Stop this,” Elanor demanded.

“Ok.” The person said. The person then proceeded to throw the contents of the vial at Elanor. Elanor screamed in excruciating agony. Elanor shrieked, and the person cackled with pure joy in their red eyes.

“Vervain,” the person joyfully yelled with a wide smile. As the vervain touched Elanor’s body, not only did she feel physical pain, but also mental anguish. The vervain made her remember her human self. All the memories Elanor had buried came rushing back. She remembered the lifeless eyes of the man she had killed. Her emotions were all over the place.

“STOP!” Elanor’s yell echoed through the room.

“Never.” The person responded.

Seconds passed, and the person went from throwing vials of vervain at Elanor to throwing liters of vervain. The vervain was as poisonous as it was eye-opening. Elanor felt the pain of killing the man in the building earlier. Elanor felt the pain, the remorse, the lack of sympathy, she felt everything. Elanor realized that she had been manipulated.





# Hemoglobin Goblin

CONTINUED

She had been kidnapped, and there was nothing she could do about it. There was no one she could call for help. She, herself, was also a villain. Elanor cried, “LET ME OUT!”

“No. You are now under my control,” the person said.

The person continued to torture Elanor with the vervain. Endlessly throwing the bottles of vervain at the helpless Elanor. The person enjoyed the feeling of power. The feeling of pure superiority. Using vervain bottles as a way to dominate other vampires was this person’s way of making people do whatever they say.

Tears rolled down Elanor’s face as she continued to receive the plain torture from her kidnapper. Though she wasn’t crying because of the vervain. She was crying because she had become the very thing that she hates: a murderer. Elanor, therefore, did not deny the torture and opened her body up for it. Moments later, the vervain storm stopped. The person paused and brought out their human hostage from the closet.

“Now, Elanor. You said you wanted blood, right? Here is this human.” Elanor looked at the scared, fearful face of the human. She remembered the very reason why she wanted to become a doctor. She wanted to help those in need, not watch them suffer. She made eye contact with him, staring into his deep ocean blue eyes. Elanor thought back to her human desire to become a doctor. She asked the very question a doctor would ask their patient.

“What is your name?” Elanor asked.

“Ja..Ja..Jamison.” The human stuttered, breathing rapidly. Elanor looked at Jamison, a rush of compassion flooding through her mind with an urge to help him. She pushed down any burning craving for blood. Her overwhelming sense of compassion outweighed her crucial want for blood.

“Go on now...get your blood.” The person said.

“No.” Elanor responded confidently.

“I demand you listen to me and get your blood.” The person said.

“I said NO,” Elanor yelled, this yell scratched the back of her throat. Elanor walked towards the human, fighting all her unwanted desires. She walked toward Jamison as if she was a doctor preparing to treat him.

As she got closer, however, her craving became stronger. She closed her eyes and was reminded of her powerful desire to be a healer. She came into contact with Jamison and wrapped her arms around him. As she hugged Jamison gently, another tear rolled down Elanor’s face. This tear was not a sign of weakness. It was a sign of her reborn compassion.



In laceless shoes  
Walking backwards

I find myself collecting reasons to hate you

Sweeping up shards  
Digging through dustpans

discovering nothing new

hurting us both

Tripping down the stairs  
Refusing to look

Seeing me sideways  
your searing gaze

burning a hole in my chest

You never really loved me

If you could just leave  
cold cloth pressed against bloody knuckles

Ambling about the empty street  
Facing the fallout

Screaming your name  
Praying to be heard

by no one

Scraped, scuffed  
Clutching my chest

So far from here

5 miles from home

You found me

BY A. FOX

# Walking Backwards



# Nothing Ever Happens

Masked men batter down doors and tear children from their homes

Rats on the subway chased away by a more lovable pest

A spiked bench solution to a compassion problem

An image of an infant calls scared kids child killers

Holding hell to the temple of a confused kid, threatening  
eternal damnation for daring to love in the devil's direction

Blue-collar boys band behind billionaires clutching their last two cents

Crippling the other crabs in the blood-drenched bucket

So many lives snuffed out on live TV, even the audience looks lifeless

Keeping food behind lock and key and machine gun fire

You can lead a horse to water, but if you shatter it's fucking kneecaps  
it still can't drink.

Nothing's really real before it rolls across my television screen

Nothing ever happens if it never happens to me.

-A. FOX





# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

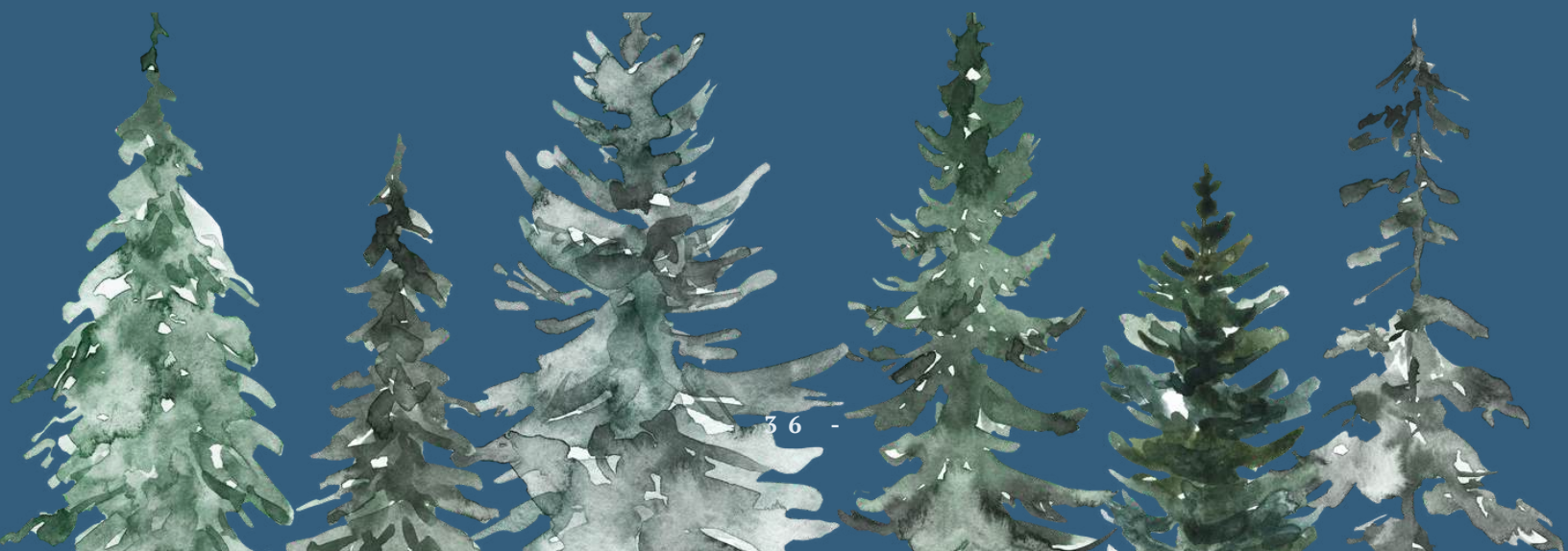
BY CLAY PEETS

I tell ya, I once knew this kid man.  
We worked together at Manny's,  
ya know on West Harold Street.  
His name was Jon... real real handsome guy.

Different jobs... but every Saturday  
once closed, we'd talk.

It would usually be about last night's game  
or coworkers and customers.  
But sometimes, Jon would pause and confide  
bigger things, like going back to school,  
girl trouble, all that stuff.  
He was a smart kid, strong too, broad-shouldered  
ya know.

...



# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

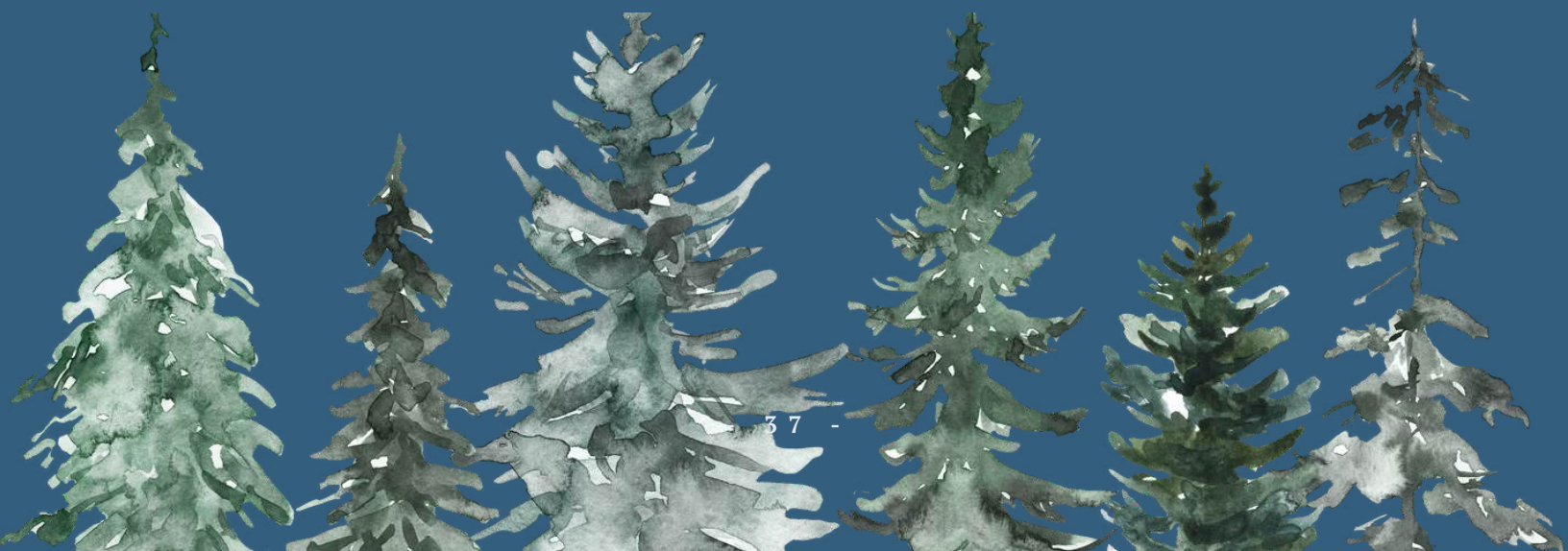
CONTINUED

I’d been working at Manny’s for years,  
probably eight or nine before we hired him.  
I loved working there, I mean most people do.  
But Jon, I always felt as if he didn’t.

I never understood why in the moment.  
There were some signs sure but  
in retrospect, it seems so obvious man.  
But I missed it. We all missed it.

I mean we’d be twice as full as De Lucca’s  
just because Jon was working man.  
He had a lot of charm, everyone swarming  
to him because of something.  
His looks. His demeanor. Anything.

...



# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

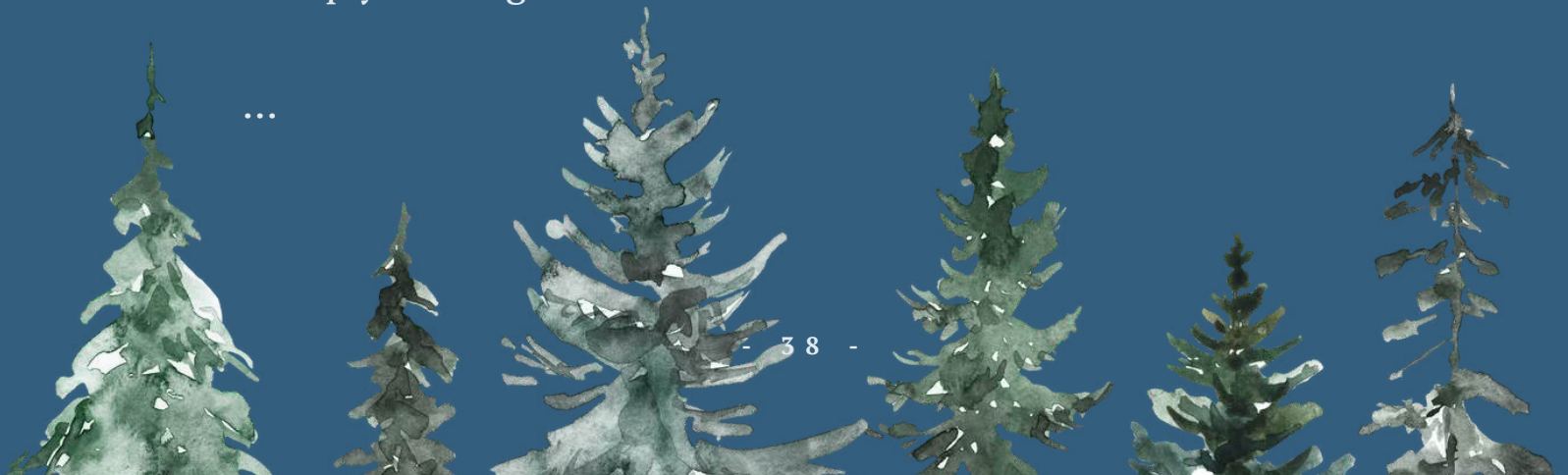
See, I was 62 at the time when Jon quit. Jon was 22. Man... such promise in that kid, but before he left that last night, I remember he sat down on the center-rail seat and began to talk.

...

I was sweeping under our roundtables when I heard his deep voice say, “Hey Charlie, I can’t be here much longer... you mind closing up for me.” Jon rarely asked this of me, but I graciously conceded.

Jon got up and ambled towards the backdoor. He turned, and looked at me quarterly. And said, “Thank you Charlie, for everything man, and you know what, give me a call when you fill up your lodge in Cadillac.”

...





# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

I think Jon saw me as some sort of father figure.  
Or maybe just some old wise man...  
I was divorced and my sons were all grown, ya know.  
I probably needed him just as much  
as he needed me.

...

I didn’t think much of Jon in leaving that night,  
but I probably should have.  
I didn’t say goodbye because I didn’t think,  
...think I needed to.

The next Saturday following Jon’s departure  
people were asking about him like crazy ya know.  
I told them he left, that he moved to New York City  
to take acting classes and finish school.  
The guys were bummed and the girls were  
heartbroken, I mean everyone loved Jon.  
But the way I see it now, very few knew Jon



# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

He would call me occasionally his first year in New York. Then, the phone never echoed and we lost touch.

Years passed and there were only whispers of Jon around the bar and town until his former teammate said he’d moved to Los Angeles. I told myself that Jon was well.

About 6 months later I was shuffling channels on my 15” Panasonic, kind of mindlessly ya know. Then I hear a familiar voice on CBS 4. I stall...

It’s that damn voice of Jon.

It was this mystery crime love show whatever. That’s beside the point – Regardless, it was Jon. Co-lead role. I didn’t believe it at first ya know.



# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

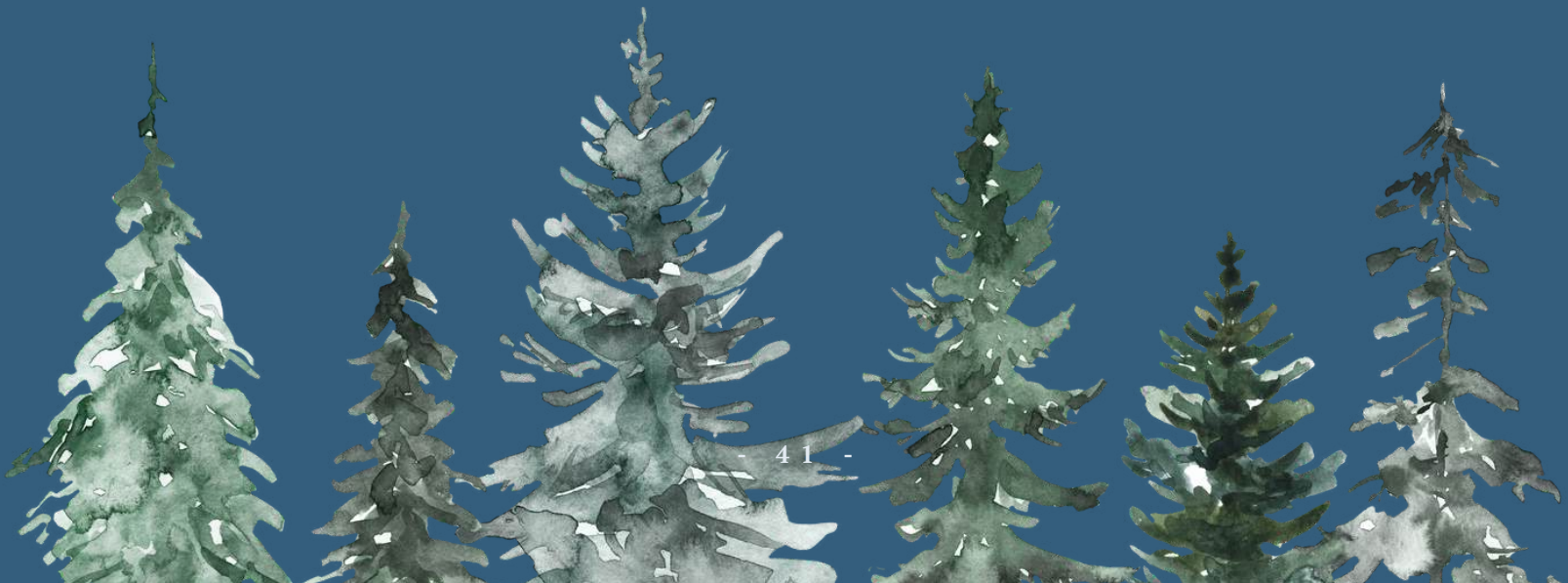
And again I told myself that Jon was well. I thought about giving him a call out of the blue but I figured let him live, he’s a young up-and-coming Hollywood star now right?

I’m telling myself he doesn’t need ole’ Chuck... he’s switched phone lines and is entering a whole different life now.

...

I would usually watch Jon’s show every Tuesday if I could. Then it stopped airing one random week, and it got replaced by another late-hour mystery crime love show whatever.

...





# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

Well anyway, about a week goes by and I get a letter in the mail. Return address says 695 Wilkins Lane, Englewood, NJ.

I don’t know anyone from New Jersey really. So I kind of apathetically open it. Inside it reads:

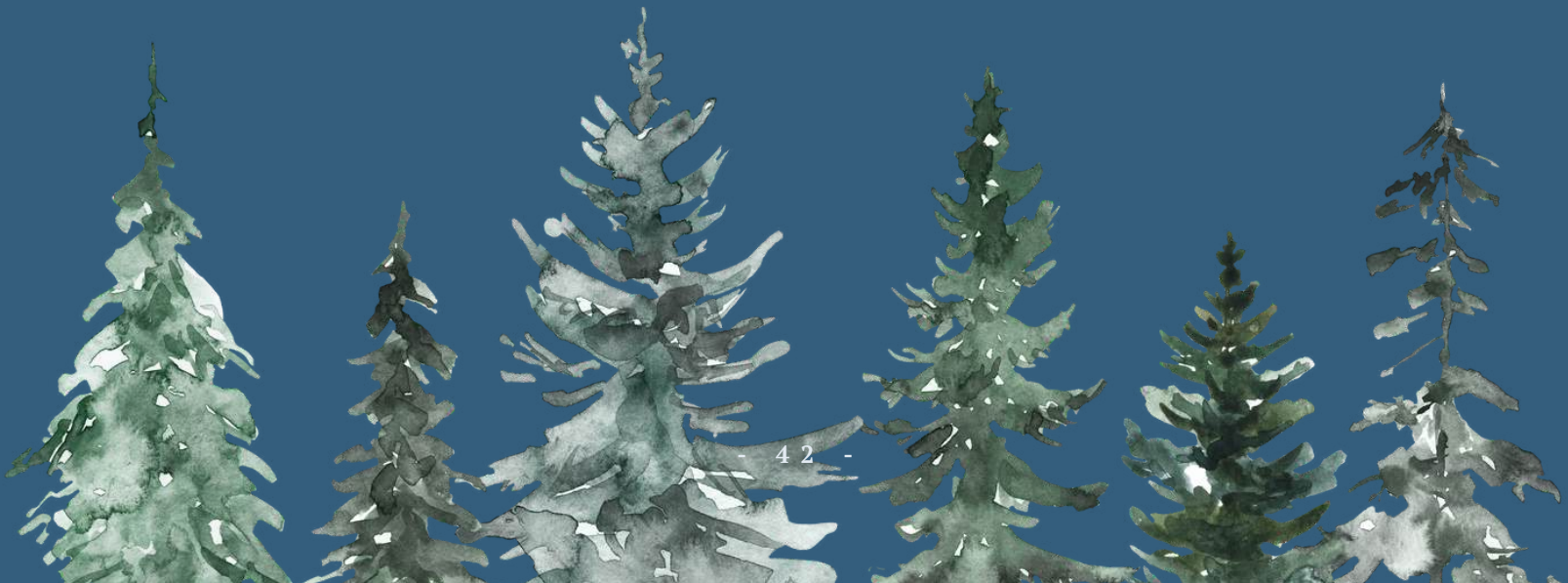
Dear Charlie,

There has been a great accident and loss. Jon passed away last Friday on set. I want you to know that Jon always looked up to you while working at Manny’s years ago.

His funeral is set to take place at Lyra’s Funeral Home in West Hollywood on Sunday, November 3rd at 10:00am PST.

From,

Jon’s older brother Michael



# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

I was in denial. Face in hands. I couldn’t sleep.  
And since the letter barely reached my hand in time,  
I had to leave the following day.

I pulled into Los Angeles late Saturday night  
after two layovers. Here I was 66 years old still  
scared of big crowds and large cities.

I mean the last thing of any sort of magnitude  
that I attended was a Bob Seager concert in Kalamazoo,  
and that was probably 1977 ya know.

I told myself this was going to a movie-star funeral, a large crowd no doubt.

Well, Sunday morning I arrive at Lyra’s about  
a half hour early. I expected more cars. More people.

I enter and I’m solemnly greeted by Jon’s brother  
Michael who kind of looked through me and  
seemed somewhat surprised that I made it.

“I’m glad you made it Charlie, Jon  
would’ve needed you here. I had to call  
Rockford City Hall just to find your address.  
I don’t even think Jon had it.”

...



# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

In the back of my mind, I’m asking, well, many things, but what happened?

What happened Jon?

I had been searching news outlets and LA papers posthaste since arriving, but I found not a damn clue. It was probably Monday news.

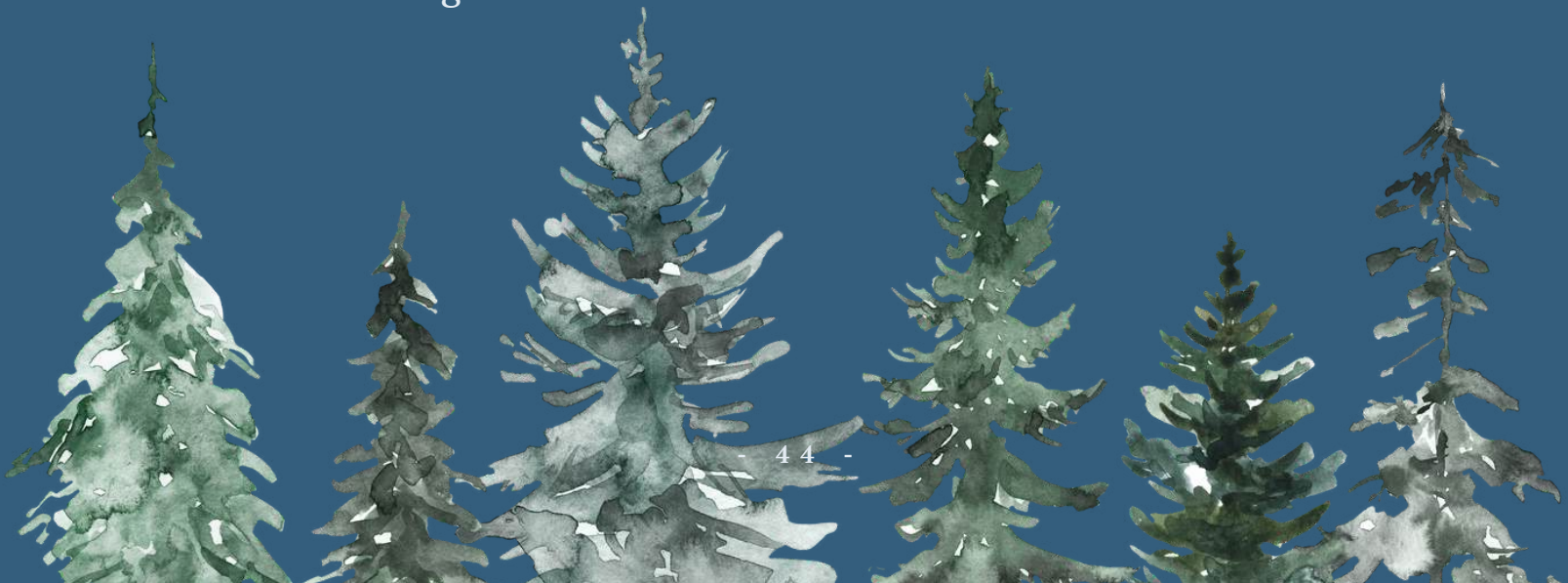
My retired investigator brain had to make some more sense of this big mystery.

So, I finally stomached the guts to ask Mike straightforwardly before he was about to greet other people. He respited and said,

“Well, in-between sets of his show ‘Off Duty’ Jon accidentally... accidentally shot himself in the head with a prop pistol...

Five days later Doc said he was brain dead.”

That’s all I got.





# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

I immediately spun trying to digest the news, and found myself subconsciously lumbering into the common room. Where they had him. He looked exactly the same as I remember him. But he looked cold, and he made me think that some people are seemingly blessed and cursed to a degree that others can’t even fathom.

...

I headed back to Michigan later that same day. On the plane ride my mind endlessly cycled the imagery of Mike’s story, what happened ya know. I couldn’t reason with it, I couldn’t come to terms knowing Jon had less than 30 people at his funeral.

And I was one of them.

Sometimes I think that Jon saw more in me than I saw in him. To some people that might mean something, I don’t know, maybe.

...



# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

Four months later and I had taken most of the bladed grief of Jon’s death. But I tell ya, those first few weekends at Manny’s were rough. I even told Bill I couldn’t work near Thanksgiving.

He understood, understood that I was trying to evade any questioning about Jon’s whereabouts. And Bill and I both knew the holiday crowd and their questions were coming. And they did.

But on a slow Thursday night in late-March of the following year, Bill asked me to take a look at some neglected fax prints in the back office. Work I used to do but haven’t done in awhile. He said, “let me know if I need to make any call-backs.”

I sit down in this dusty closet chair and get to work. A few minutes go back and I come across this stack of crumpled prints. I’m looking and some of these fax date Dec. 1982 and March. 1983. I mean these are months, some even years old. Some are from Jon.



# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

THURSDAY FEB. 3, 1983 [12:32:13]

Hey Charlie,

I must’ve lost your address and number, so I’m sending this fax to Manny’s, hope you still work there. Anyways, I am moving to Los Angeles to continue acting. My agent says he may have something lined up for me in an action movie called “Mismatch.” Let’s talk soon, I miss talking with you. - Jon

WEDNESDAY SEPT. 14, 1983 [19:52:56]

Hey Charlie,

The new movie got scratched but there’s a big-gig called “Off Duty” that my agent is saying I’m going to have a chance to audition for the lead role, or at least the co-lead. What was I going to say, oh yeah, I got my phone line set-up out here so give me a call when you see this. My new number is 310...233...9845 - Jon

MONDAY DEC. 5, 1983 [19:17:03]

Happy Holidays Ole’ Chuck,

Things are getting busy out here in Hollywood, but I tell you, sometimes I miss those modest Rockford nights at Manny’s. Just you and me man, Doug’s crew sometimes too. I don’t get any space out here, it can be suffocating. I also want to run something by you, I need your advice on something so give me a call back. You should have my number, I tried to fax the bar maybe two months ago, but if you don’t its

310...233...9845 - Jon

# “Hey Jon, what’s next?”

CONTINUED

Unbelievable man... I lean back in the chair and read all that I could find, only to be left in a cascade of tears. I searched every inch of that make-shift office. I read every fax as if Jon were there sitting on that dark green upholstered center-rail seat, making sense of his troubles, me giving him a better ear.

That was my last night at Manny’s, and I left believing...

Believing that Jon’s death may have been a suicide.

What I can’t believe is that it’s been nearly twenty years since he passed. It’s been probably been fifteen since I sat at Manny’s. But I tell ya...

And I’m certain... the picture above the main bar’s top bottles is still there. The picture of Jon and I playing pool together...





# Sorry, I never called you up.

BY MARY QUINN MCNAUGHTON

I'm an icon. U think I'm a weirdo.  
I'm just a man. Or a woman. And  
the pope is from Chicago. I'm a hair  
away from blocking your number. I just  
walked past u. Lol. did you get back  
safe? Disgusting fuck. I'm so sick of our  
shit ass fantasy team. You don't have any  
winter clothes. Shut up you dumb canadi-  
an. Not everyone is a hat person.  
I must call my grandma in the morning.  
But I think imma go bleed out on a  
mountain- where only we exist. disgus-  
ting fuck. Actually, I don't know what  
I want. The wind shall guide us. Be a man.



# The Left Side

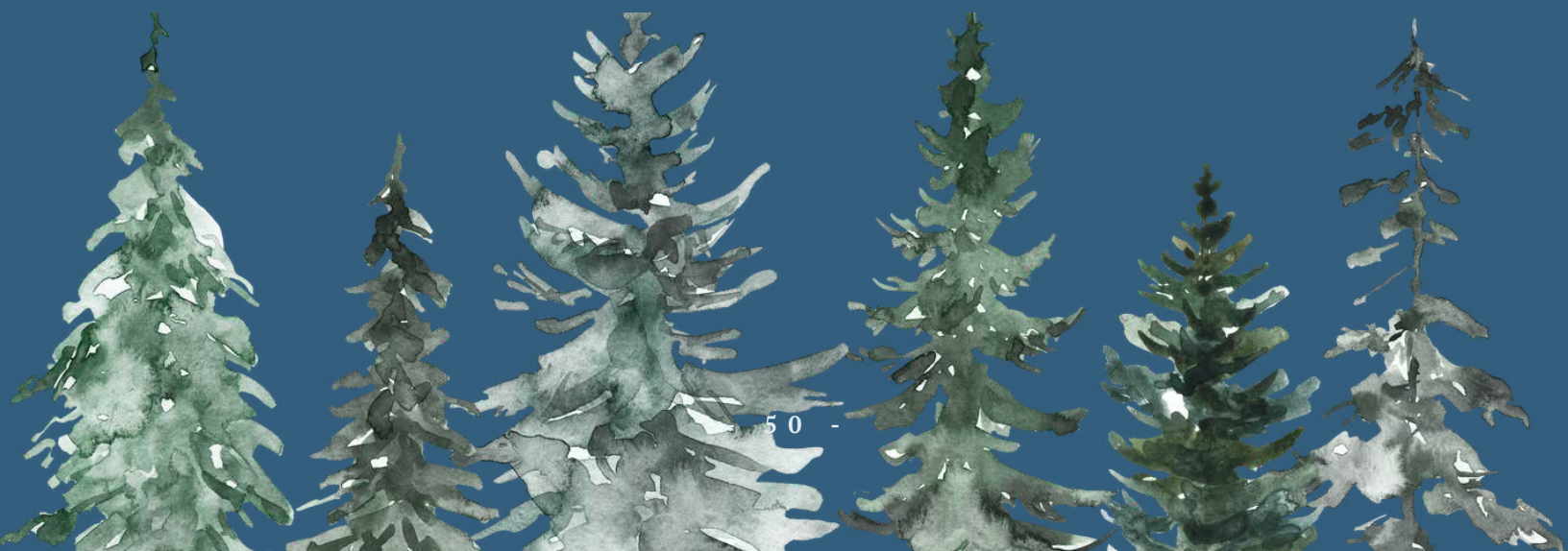
BY MARY QUINN MCNAUGHTON

It is light out  
but we will be gone soon.

They said that  
you'll have our  
place  
this time next year.

*You'll*  
pay the rent  
we once struggled to.

Your twenties are:  
strawberries expiring helplessly on the middle shelf  
spray tans that cling to high school acne scars  
crying in matching pajamas, peppermint tea in hand, *of course*  
your parents credit card you're only semi-ashamed to use  
forty-six leftover meal swipes you definitely won't use  
chronic drowning that you know that you'll miss once the clock strikes thirty  
flailing.

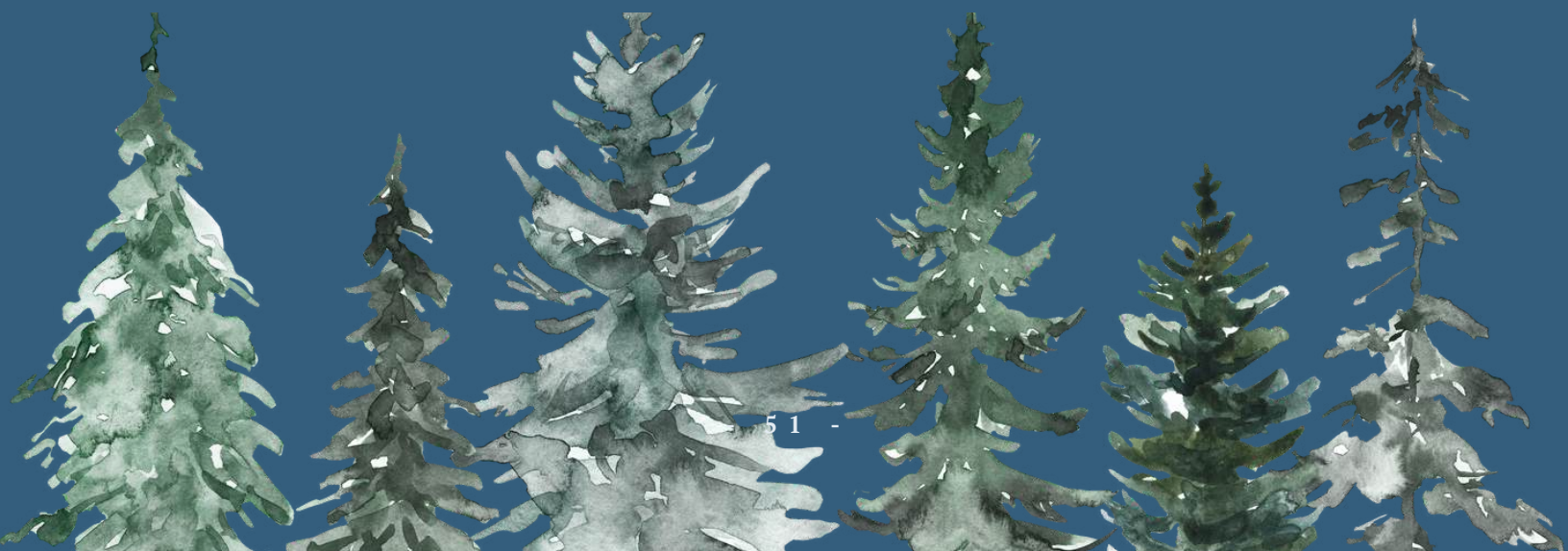


# The Left Side

CONTINUED

The hotels are all booked  
and your family will probably be proud  
or get too drunk  
or too loud  
and at some point,  
you'll wish you were hauling your clothes  
up those fucking stairs  
all over again.

The fridge will fill with champagne that last week.  
It won't last,  
even though it's real cheap and  
you've sipped better vodka.  
You and them  
You will all sit on  
cherry hardwood and drink  
out of plastic cups and probably  
cry.





# The Left Side

CONTINUED

But, now,  
all you have to focus on  
is standing  
forcing a lip glossed smile  
and moving to  
the left side.



Mt. Irenaus by Isabel Marzullo



# Smoke Break

BY EOGHAN MURPHY

Matty wasn't a "good" kid. This fact was drilled into him by everyone, from top to bottom. Teachers, classmates, classmates' parents, the guy who worked at the Dollar General the time he grabbed a gift card and ran (only to learn later that gift cards don't work that way). Matty didn't really care, though. Why should he? Sometimes you need something and don't have the money. The stores were right there, and he could run faster than any of the employees. It helped, too, that his face was entirely unremarkable. He was tall for a twelve-year-old, lanky, dressed in his dad's hand-me-downs, always a size or two too big. Today, it was two sizes.

Matty was excited, despite the dreary Pennsylvania weather. It was always like this: overcast, light drizzle falling on the leaves. He was sitting at a bus stop, shoulder bag in his lap, even though he had no intention of taking the bus anywhere. The bus stop was a nice place to wait for a while, because no one really paid him any attention. Whereas most people might ask "where're you going?" or "all alone, pal?", the people here were largely preoccupied with their own stresses, far too busy to pay him mind. Matty would take advantage of this and scour through their bags and pockets without their knowledge. Over time, he had gotten really good at it, growing an impressive collection of earbuds, watches, and wallets, really anything he could get his hands on. Matty felt a light tap on his left shoulder. Turning, he came eye to eye with Frasier.

Frasier was a weird kid. Just a little shorter than Matty, he was dressed in a black puffer jacket, hood up, hair matted to his forehead. He was always a bit odd, and he didn't really talk, which was one of the reasons that Matty liked hanging out with him. The other reason was his sister, Paige. She was twenty, and the only legitimate source of income for Matty and Frasier. Once a week, the two of them would trudge over to her house (that she shared with a revolving door of roommates, all of whom seemed a little off) and run whatever errands she needed. They'd each get ten bucks, which was more than enough for them both. Frasier stared blankly at Matty. Matty let out a sigh.

"Ready?" He asked. Frasier nodded, shoved his hands into his jacket pockets, and started walking away. Standing, Matty slung his bag over his shoulder, trudging after Frasier's silent figure.

The walk to Paige's house was quiet. There wasn't a whole lot to talk about. They had the same classes, and not much in the way of other friends. Matty couldn't remember the last real conversation he'd had with Frasier, though it didn't matter. Their friendship wasn't contingent on conversations or even any shared interests. They were bound together through friction, and that was enough.



# Smoke Break

CONTINUED

They walked side by side, heads down, hands clenched into fists in their pockets. The sidewalks on this side of town were cracked and warped, which, combined with the rain, made the trip an arduous one. Matty silently wondered what task they'd be given today. Paige's orders had ranged from boring (clean the dishes, clean the yard) to tedious (sorting through dozens of baby photos) to strange (crawl under the porch and see what you can find). Regardless of the task, Matty and Frasier were always eager to help. After all, ten bucks was ten bucks.

The boys kept walking, following the decrepit sidewalk through street after street, until they finally turned the corner and stood squarely in front of Paige's house. The rain had subsided, a thick mist taking its place instead. The mist, unfortunately, wasn't enough to obscure the peeling white paint of the house's exterior, nor was it enough to hide the piles of garbage on the porch. Walking up to the front door, Frasier gingerly knocked. Before he could even finish his second knock, the door swung back. In the peeling archway stood Paige, hair up in a bun, wearing sweatpants and a fluorescent green hoodie.

"Hey, freaks," she said, rubbing her eyes. "You two ready for a job?". Both boys nodded. "Alright," she said, "wait here for like, two seconds". She disappeared back into the house. Peeking through the doorway, Matty was able to make out piles of clothes on the floor. From somewhere deep inside, music could be heard playing faintly.

The whole place smelled like too many cats. Paige emerged from the darkness again, this time carrying a package tucked under her arm. Despite its small size, it was wrapped in layers and layers of transparent tape," she said, rubbing her eyes. "You two ready for a job?" Both boys nodded. "Alright," she said, "wait here for like, two seconds". She disappeared back into the house. Peeking through the doorway, Matty was able to make out piles of clothes on the floor. From somewhere deep inside, music could be heard playing faintly. The whole place smelled like too many cats. Paige emerged from the darkness again, this time carrying a package tucked under her arm. Despite its small size, it was wrapped in layers and layers of transparent tape to the point that the whole thing looked like a plastic ball.

"This one's fragile, so don't drop it," Paige said, handing the box over to Matty. Matty took the box, placing it firmly under his arm.

"What're we supposed to do with this?" he asked.

"Take it to my friend's house. He lives on Carpenter Street, just look for the one that's painted orange." She stopped and thought for a moment, "How's your dad?" Matty tensed. He wasn't really sure. His dad worked the night shift at a job that Matty didn't fully understand.



# Smoke Break

CONTINUED

When one was awake, the other would always be asleep or out. Matty often felt like he lived with a ghost; when he woke up, things would be moved around, ever so slightly changed from how they were when he went to sleep, like a spirit trying to leave messages. He tried not to let it get to him, but more and more recently, he'd begun to worry if he shared the house with anyone at all.

"He's fine," he said, breaking eye contact and looking towards the ground. Paige stared for a second before relaxing slightly.

"You two might want to start moving before it gets dark," she said, motioning out towards the fog-laden world. The boys nodded before turning away and heading back out into the street.

As soon as they were out of sight, Matty began toying with the box. It was heavier than it looked, and he couldn't make out what was inside, no matter how hard he shook it. "*Oh well,*" he thought, before tossing the box to Frasier. He caught it, almost dropping it in the water-permeated air.

"What do you think's in it?" Matty asked. Frasier held the box up and rotated it a couple times before shrugging.

"Gotcha," Matty said, motioning for Frasier to toss him the box back. They continued on down the winding streets, cracked sidewalks giving way to cracked pavement. The air was still heavy with mist, but the rain was back, heavier than before. The world had gotten a lot darker than when they had left, the sparse streetlights acting as a poor substitute for stars, making Matty feel uneasy.

Familiar landmarks began swirling into a watery blur. He was unsure of where he was, and the rain gave no indication of letting up any time soon. Frasier too seemed on edge, his walk becoming more stiff and rigid. Time continued to drag on, striking deep the fact that they were lost. Just as Matty began to open his mouth to announce that fact, hoping to at least be able to make it back to Paige's, he noticed something. A shape, a figure, trailing behind them. The figure was still a decent length behind them but seemed to be speeding up.

Now sharply alert, Matty coughed to draw Frasier's attention. Once he glanced over, Matty did his best to nonverbally explain the situation. Using sharp glances and a quick look over his shoulder, he was able to communicate his stress to Frasier. With a mutual acknowledgement, both boys quickened their steps. Glancing backwards, Matty saw the figure begin to speed up. Quicker and quicker the figure moved, until the boys were in full sprint, through the rain, water running down their faces, making it impossible to see. As they rounded a corner, Matty lost his footing and came crashing down on the asphalt, letting out a cry. Frasier stopped, skidding in the rain before running back.



# Smoke Break

CONTINUED

He knelt next to Matty, desperately trying to help him up. Before either boy could regain his composure, the figure was upon them, revealing himself to be a man, scrawny, somewhere in his early twenties. He was wearing a zipped-up hoodie and jeans, his long hair matted from the rain. “*Oh my gosh,*” thought Matty, heart racing, “*This guy’s gonna kill us.*”

Before he had a chance to scream, the man said, “Hey, hey, hey, don’t worry, I’m not gonna hurt you. I just need the box,” He motioned towards the package, now lying a couple of feet away from where Matty had fallen. The man walked over, picked it up, and began tearing the tape, ripping through layers and layers of clear plastic to get to the cardboard buried deep inside. Stunned, the boys watched as the man opened the box and pulled something out. It was hard to see through the rain, but the man seemed to produce a dense white brick wrapped in clear plastic from the box. Muttering under his breath, the man shoved the rectangle into the one of the front pockets of his hoodie.

“Say hi to Paige for me!” he shouted, before running off down the street.

It took Matty and Frasier an hour to make it back. This walk was even quieter, both boys in shock over what had just happened. Matty couldn’t even begin to order his thoughts, instead opting to push them to the back of his mind for the time being. As they were about to round the corner of Paige’s street, Frasier stopped. “Do you think she’ll be mad at us?” he asked.

Matty was taken aback. He hadn’t heard his voice in forever, let alone like this. He seemed scared, shaken up by what had happened. He thought for a moment.

“No,” he said, “I don’t think so. There’s not much we could do I guess”. He shrugged, and that seemed to be enough for Frasier. Coming back to the porch, they found Paige waiting.

“Oof, you guys look rough” she said, inviting them in.

After finding a place to sit in the dimly lit living room, Matty explained what had happened. Paige seemed upset, but much to the relief of the boys she didn’t take it out on them, opting instead to leave the room. From down the hall Matty could make out Paige leaving furious-sounding voicemails, and after a good five minutes of yelling, she came back into the living room, collapsed onto the couch, and said “Have you two smoked before?”

Paige took them outside to the back yard, and produced a beaten box of cigarettes and a lighter from her sweatpants pocket.

“You two had a rough one” she said, handing them each a cigarette. “Here, put it in your mouth and I’ll light it.”





# Smoke Break

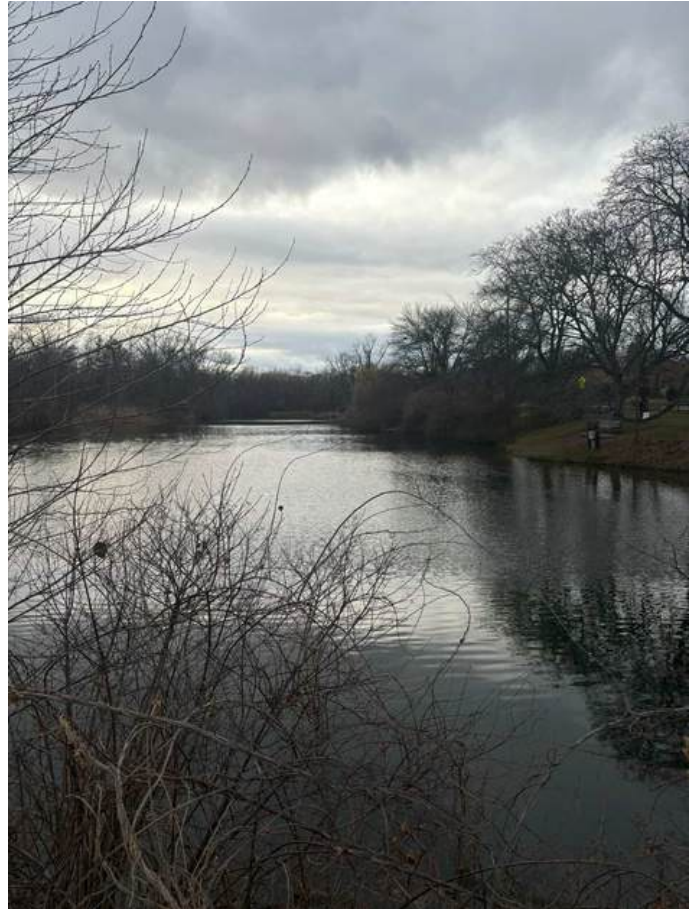
CONTINUED

Matty gingerly put the cigarette to his lips, glancing over at Frasier. Frasier already had the cigarette in his mouth, Paige’s hand cupped around the end to light it. Matty was next, nervous to try.

“Once I light it, all you have to do is breathe in, alright?” Paige said, holding her flame at the end of his cigarette. Matty took a deep inhale and immediately began coughing. Paige laughed to herself.

“Yeah, it’s kind of nasty at first,” she said, “but it helps”. Matty continued to cough, regained his composure, and inhaled again. This one didn’t hurt as much, and he was able to hold himself together.

“Don’t tell your dad,” Paige said, “He’d kill me”. Matty nodded. He would tell his dad, of course. Not about the cigarettes, not about him and Frasier running down the street in the rain, not about the pile of things he’d taken from people waiting for the bus. He wasn’t fully sure what he’d say to his dad. But he’d make a point to say anything. He’d stay up, wait for his dad to get back, and just talk. He’d find something to talk about, no matter how boring. He’d make peace with the ghost. Matty closed his eyes and took another drag. This one didn’t hurt at all.



Allegheny River by Mary Quinn  
McNaughton

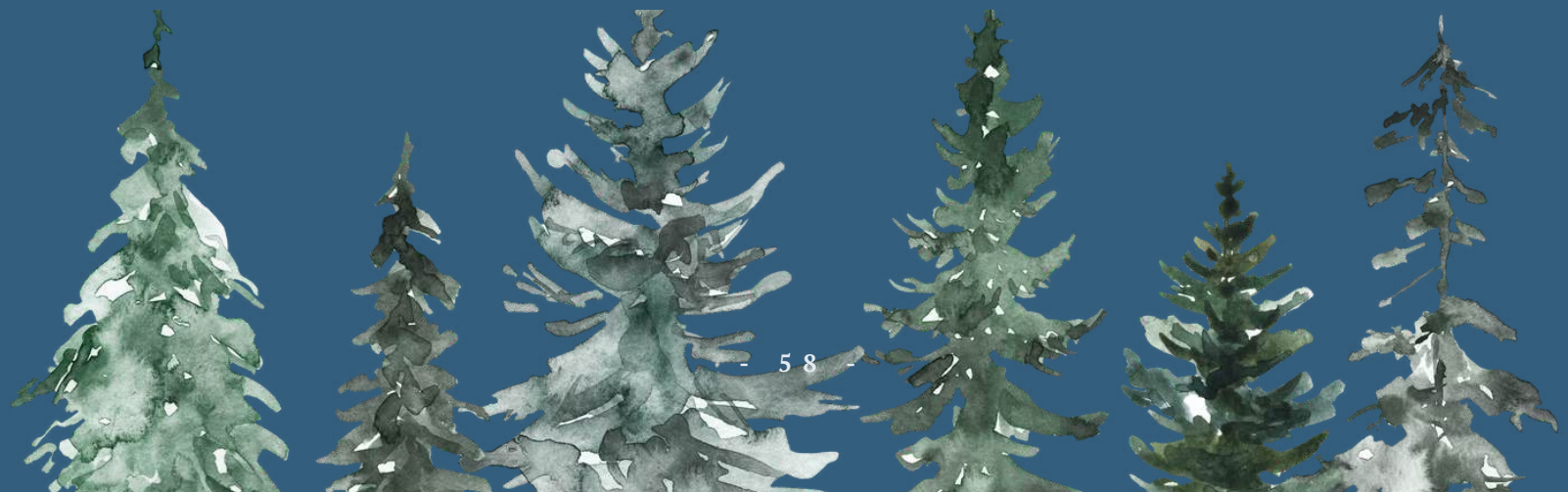


# God Of Roadkill

BY MAXIMILIAN HASKELL

Call me now,  
God of roadkill.  
Free me from  
My paved prison  
Red anatomy and  
Asphalt inextricable.  
Form forced into  
Inky openings.  
Is something that  
Fits always something  
That is that final?

I've had this tension  
In my head some time  
I envision the pressure  
Escaping under tires  
Scattering ideas  
Across a roasting route  
Among fetid fracture  
And broken bone



# God Of Roadkill

CONTINUED

My hair with rotting bows of rotting doughs of rotting does  
And  
The color of five o'clock shadow contrasting cheap concealer  
And  
Putting on a skirt and pretending I'll pace through the palpable peers  
And  
The feminine confined inside this wide ribcage  
And  
A black bearskin bra to hold both halves of my very soul together  
And  
Convincing them both that I'm happier this way; that I'm safer as a part of the road.

I scan frantically, like prey I am  
Hairy hands outstretched, shielding,  
Pleading to linger, to have time for this  
Like they'd be enough to stop  
The speeding beasts of steel and fire  
Speaking to jockeys enclosed  
Deafened by the distance the and noise  
"Is it too late now to change?"  
"Is it too late to get out of the road?"  
Call me now,  
God of roadkill.





# Space Ranger

BY JOSEPH MCCORMICK

The many rings of Saturn are beautiful  
The way the galaxy is ignited  
I can't let myself be swallowed by their elegance  
I have a duty to protect

I am a space ranger in the vast expanse  
Endlessly in pursuit of my use  
Gazing at the stars and how they scream to me  
“What have you done?”

Planets circle around me  
Each with their own ecosystems  
Wailing for my help  
As dark forces torch their homes

I am a space ranger  
Fighting in wars beyond my comprehension  
Shots of green and red light zoom past my face  
Fighting in wars with myself





# Space Ranger

CONTINUED

My earthly home  
Seized by the twisted overlords  
Eating away at my family  
Feeding on conflict

I am a space ranger  
I am my world's last hope  
As constellations blind me  
Orion docks his arrow

I prepare myself for the onslaught  
My eyes consume the cosmos  
Searching for a fight  
Disenchanted, disheveled

I am a space ranger  
I am destined for greatness  
I am readying my shield  
I am loading my cannons



# Space Ranger

CONTINUED

The void rips apart my heavenly body  
Chunks of my home ripped away  
I watch from 1000 lightyears away  
For just a second, I ponder

I am a space ranger  
But I am much more than that  
I am a brother  
And I am a son

My ship's shields power down  
Dying out with the stars  
A flash of light to begin  
And one to end

I am a space ranger  
And I am broken  
The wars I have fought damage my morale  
Beat me when I'm down



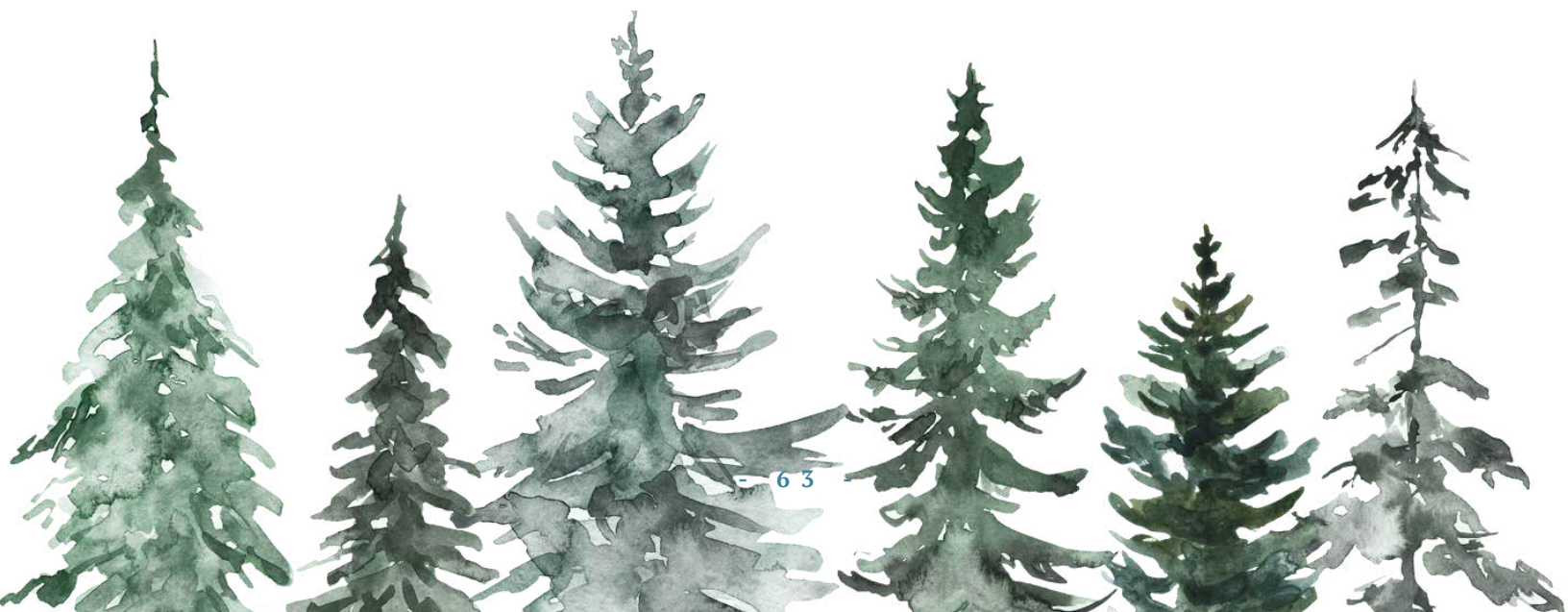
# Space Ranger

CONTINUED

I stand trembling, defenseless  
Against the looming black hole  
Swallowing space as it inches closer  
Matter warping around its darkness

I am a space ranger  
I am engulfed by space's deep blues  
I am not struggling anymore  
I am a warrior

The heavens ascend upon me  
Open their celestial hands  
Swirl of neon and darkness surround me  
Flashes of memories before the wars beam me up



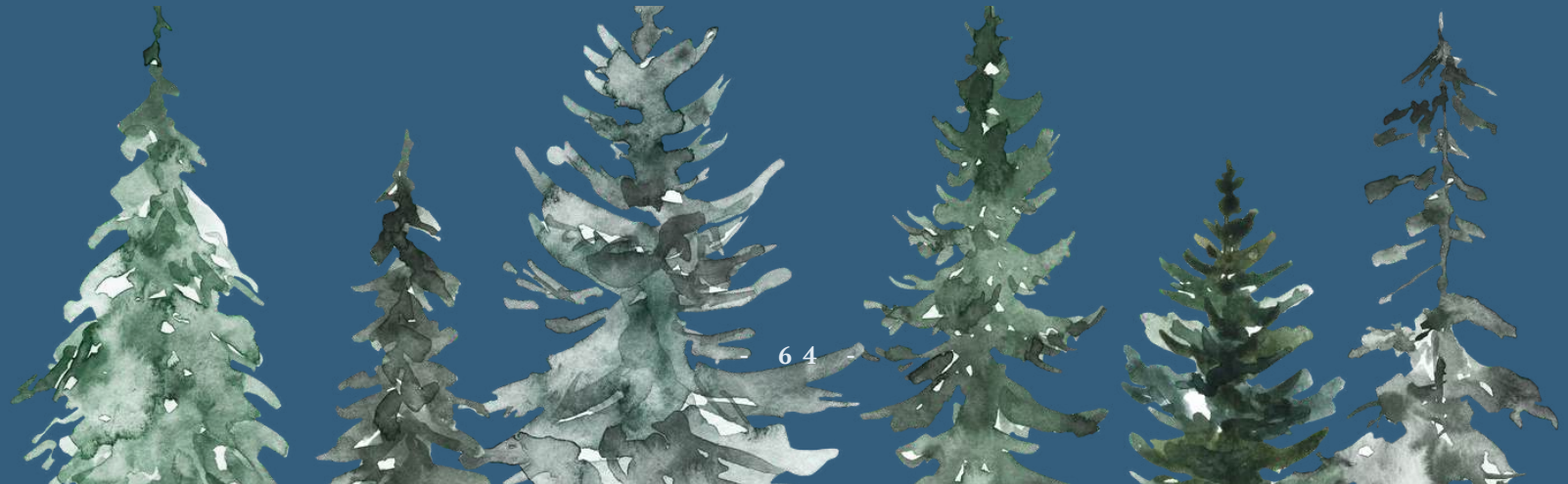
# The Snow Tiger

BY ANONYMOUS

Slanted bleary eyes befall  
A briefly sundrenched scene  
Approaching through parted clouds  
Heaven against  
Even the shimmering snowflakes  
Wearily drifting in the 5 o' clock twilight.

A gold-plated scene  
Of hot tears kissed away  
By soft, morning-breath lips  
Of tender fingertips tracing  
Ink-lined arms  
Beneath knotted bedsheets

Of mirrorball street lamps illuminating  
Hands held over center consoles  
In the night;  
Cheesy grins spread between deep-set dimples  
And eyes that crinkle and shine like tinfoil.



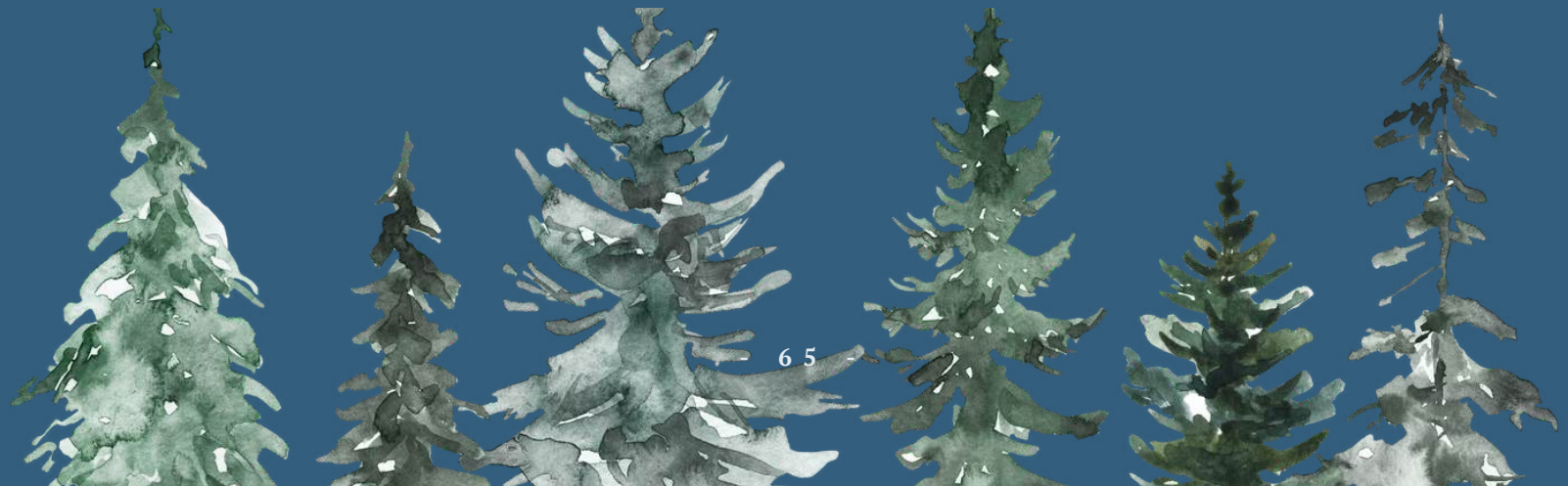


# The Snow Tiger

CONTINUED

Of shrieks and soaring soap suds and Stevie  
Wonder  
Of bare, calloused feet floating along cool  
kitchen tiles  
And toes painting the floor with rogue drops of  
dish water,  
To no one's mind.

Of secret shadows silhouetted on window  
curtains  
Whispering in the warm breath of the radiator  
On the right side of the frost-latticed window  
frames  
Worlds away from huffs of steamy breath  
Blooming on frigid air  
Condensing until the glass cries  
(Curiosity did not quite kill the cat,  
But it did make him skittish.)



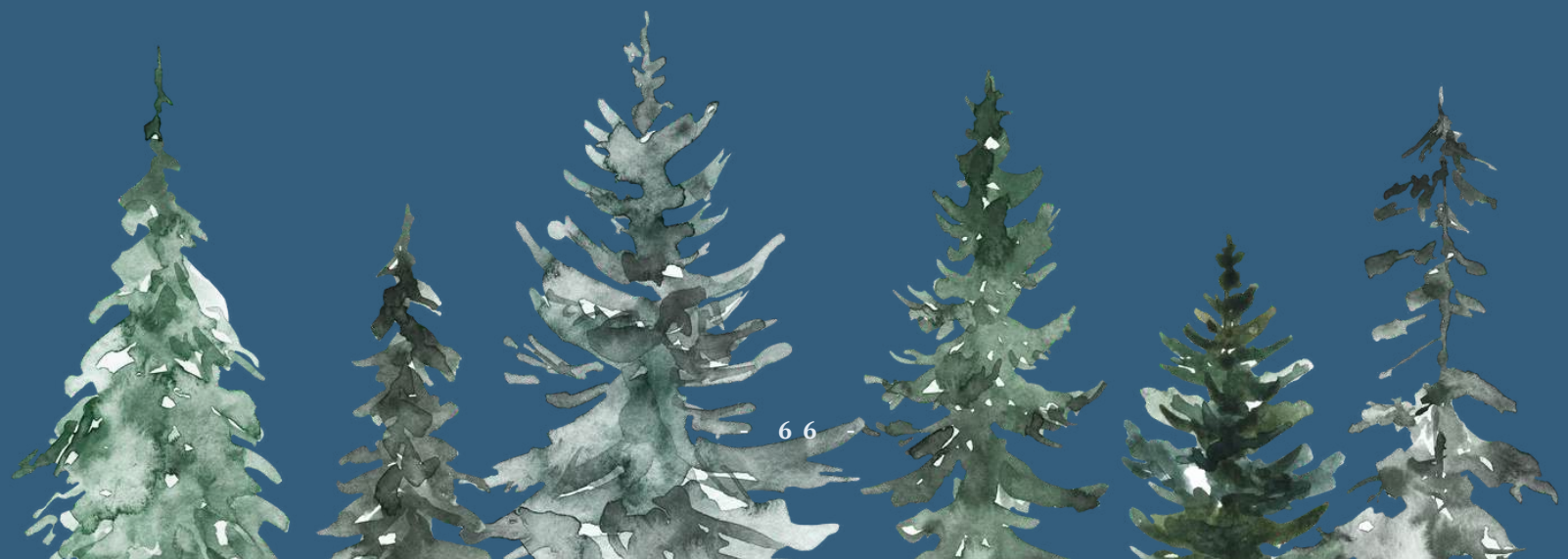
# The Snow Tiger

CONTINUED

Of simple pleasures.

Of bouquets behind backs  
And caught stares through  
Swirling plumes of cigarette smoke  
And memorized coffee orders  
On Sundays.

The wind howls and stirs the snowdrift sea from  
slumber  
Clouds converge once more  
Upon the beast's retreat  
Back to white-blanket woods  
To snapping branches and groaning boughs  
Hanging low in sorrowful submission,  
Splintering beneath savage crystals  
Twisted by cruel beauty



# The Snow Tiger

CONTINUED

The cold consoles  
And embraces the tiger like the warm arms  
Of any mate  
And he slumbers beneath burly evergreens,  
Under the awe-filled gaze  
Of those marveling at his stripes  
From the right side of the frost-latticed window  
frames  
Rather than the thorn in his hide,  
Spilling scarlet on the snow.

Slanted bleary eyes befall  
A briefly sundrenched scene  
Approaching through parted clouds  
Heaven against  
Even the shimmering snowflakes  
Wearily drifting in the 5 o' clock twilight.



# إزَيْكِ

BY NIAMH HANNA

Here, in exile I forget.  
until someone exaggerates  
and calls me “exotic.”  
At home I’m exhausted  
by the exasperation of my exhibition  
expected to exult and exhort,  
to exude and exhibit xenogeneics

I try to xerox my brothers,  
but add the xenial they never exercise.  
they expanded in their foxholes  
while I extrinsically existed as an exclave.  
Exempt from silence,  
I realize my paradox.  
I exhale as I extend into  
my family’s matrix.





إزَيْكِ  
CONTINUED

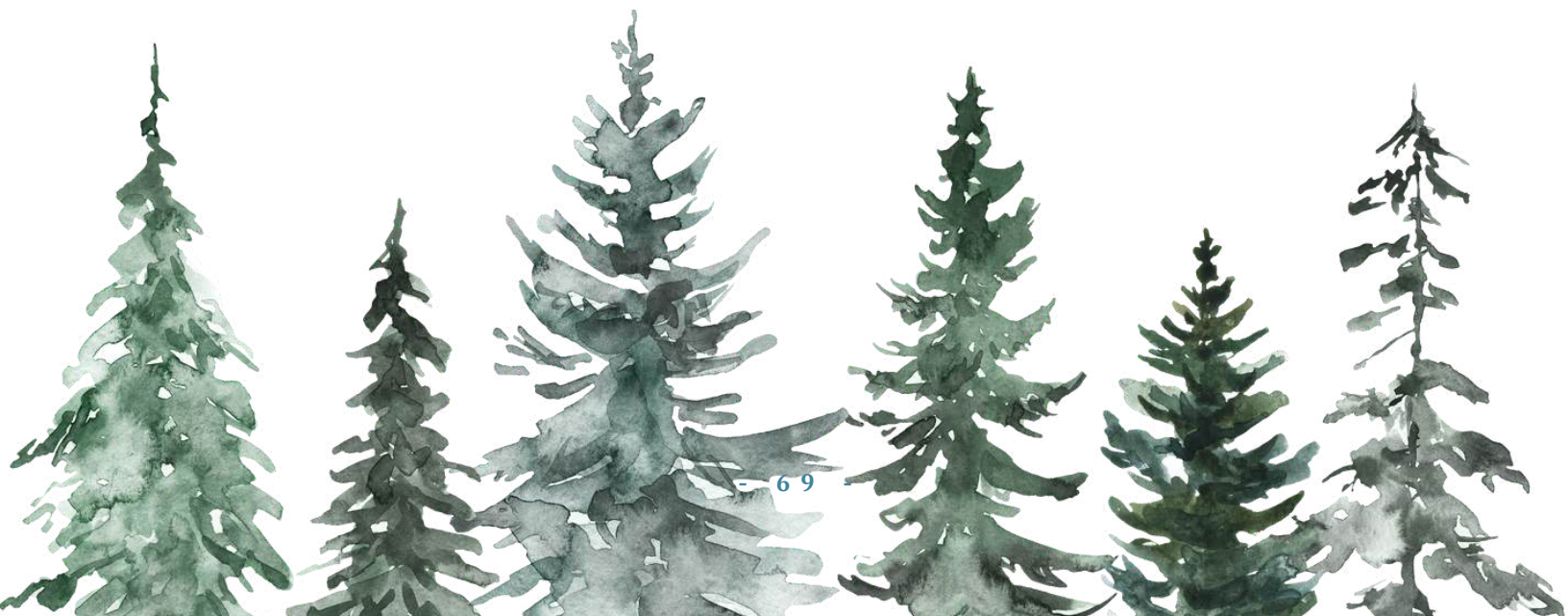
the tides that extend  
from Alexandria,  
to Wexford and  
back to our duplex.

My brother exclaims its proximity  
changes your context and expression.

The flux of accents,  
expectations I fail to express.

I .execute my own existence  
with my brothers and sisters perplexed

And yet, whoever I vex,  
I know I echo his example  
in the annex of my complex



# The Molder

BY TYLER GREEN

Why do you fear?

You have never been one to be nervous.

I'm sorry,

Your mind is just unclear.

I'm scared,

You're doing your mind a disservice.

I can see your ship in your dark blue eyes  
sinking with each wave of thought.

Why are you not here

With me like you have always been?

You act as if your life is paralyzed.

You ought—

Come back.

Without me, you can prosper, you'll—

I need you to come back,

You're a lighthouse for my vessel

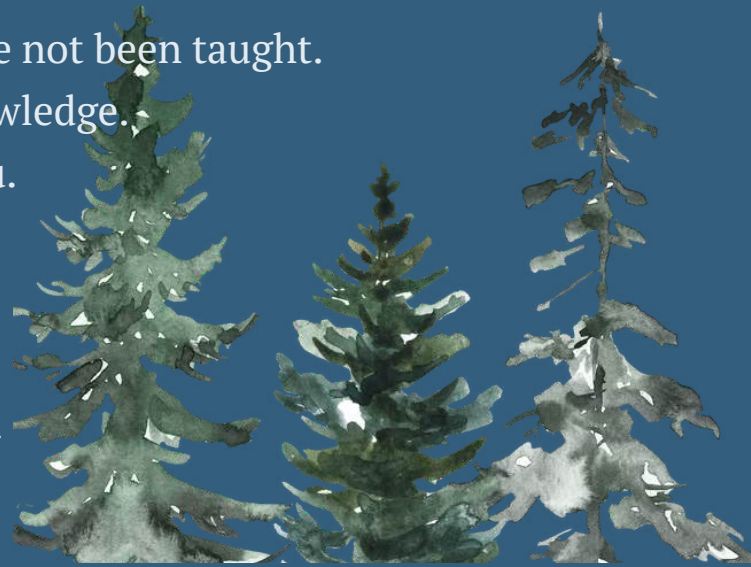
The anchor to—

Why not a seagull to an eagle?

Because my wings have not been taught.

The clay I used has all my knowledge.

But it doesn't have you.



# Making The Bed

BY TYLER GREEN

You fight and hate to feel fulfilled  
Each passing day, the same.  
You yell to have the pleasure  
Winning the argument, a game.

She has eyes where you can't see,  
But you blind them with your hate.  
Why? To win the battle,  
Or to cover up your fate?

You don't care, never have, never will.  
To you, it doesn't matter.  
Each night you go to your bed, fake angry, at your tucked-in sheets you've always hated.  
To one day just leave, and think of only YOU.  
This new life is full of fruits and freedom to feast.  
You take no time to adjust, immediately forgetting her.  
How does she cope?



# Making The Bed

CONTINUED

She cries and mourns and tries her best to be there for you.  
Her cries are met with a wall.  
You sleep drunken, drugged, and in a bed that hasn't been made in weeks,  
Awakening to a text sent hours ago. Reading,

Goodnight I love you bug.

You sit, staring at it,  
For some reason you have a feeling of being speechless.  
You don't know what to say.  
I Love You feels astray from your speech, as if not worthy.  
As your feet hang off the end of your bed, freezing, you respond,

Good morning

That's all you can muster?  
She pours her soul out for you day in, day out and all you have to say is...  
Never mind





# Making The Bed

CONTINUED

You get up, put on your socks, and today make your bed.  
Weeks pass and you visit home.  
The whole way home, you wish you would have stayed.  
You walk in the door and all your stress and fears are gone.  
You are confused, she's hugged you, and all is better. It doesn't make sense,  
All the animosity, hatred, and fights... they vanish.  
She lets you go and goes on, you wish she never did, but oh well.  
That night you realize, all the fears you had are false and getting into bed you say,

See you tomorrow Mum

She stares and smiles at you,  
While your feet are warm under your tucked-in sheets, you realize it is never a see you  
tomorrow.

She will always respond,

Goodnight



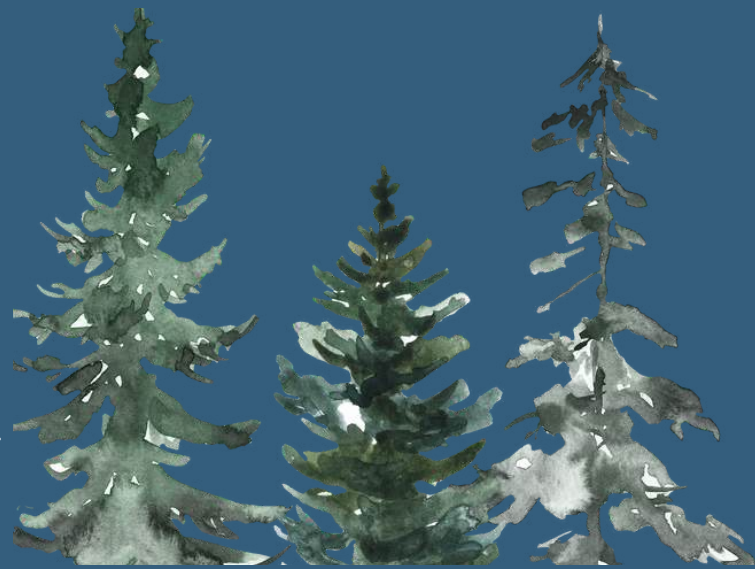
# Other Pastures

BY THOMAS O'NEIL

I have imagined many  
pastures greener than this.  
Ours is dry, baked hard  
like clay in a furnace,  
the moisture sucked out.

Too few have been the  
rains that water our pasture.  
I tried to till  
the ground, but  
the rocks have become  
too many.  
The blade catches them  
and bends and dulls  
continually.

I have tried to clear  
the rocks,  
but for some reason  
you keep throwing more  
into the dirt.  
The longer I stay  
in the field wrestling  
the rocks,  
the more everything  
else fades.



# Other Pastures

BY THOMAS O'NEIL

Now,  
I only see desolation.  
The earth is hard  
crusted like a scab.  
The memories are too  
few, and the  
good ones have disappeared.

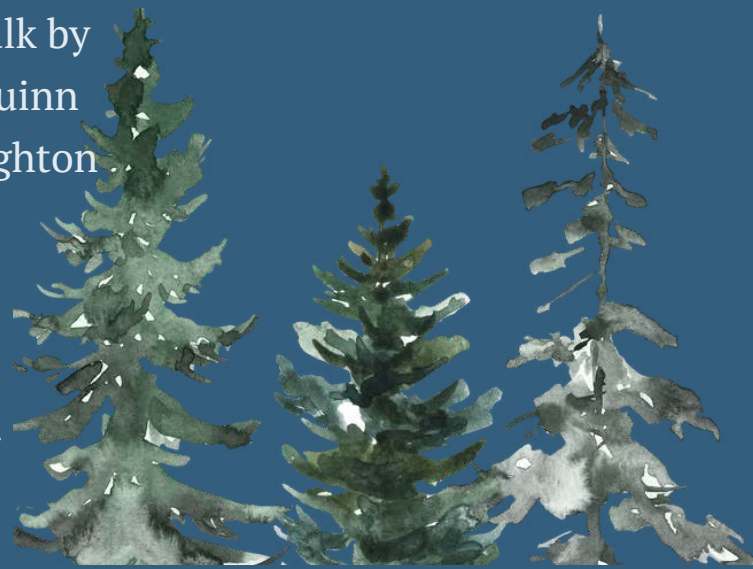
I am reaching the edge of the  
field and I've noticed  
there is a gap in the fence.



University Ministries by Isabel Marzullo



Dog Walk by  
Mary Quinn  
McNaughton





# Thank you to all contributors!

Isabel Marzullo

Rose Pfeiffer

AnnMarie Truesdell

Dr. Joe Hall

Guinevere Brady

Abigail Taber

Mary Quinn McNaughton

Tanner Pasi

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A. Fox

Clay Peets

Eoghan Murphy

Maximilian Haskell

Joesph McCormick

Niamh Hanna

Tyler Green

Thomas O'Neil



Untitled by Abigail Taber

*Editors Note:*

*I want to once again extend a thanks to each editor who made this edition possible. Thank you to Dr. Joe Hall for your guidance, AnnMarie for your help, and each person who submitted work this year. Thank you for a great semester! See you in 2026*

