



2021

*New River Anthology*

# 2021 New River Anthology

*A Collection of Student Art & Writing*

**Volume 25**

## **CHAIRS**

Eric Vithalani  
Holly Adcock

## **EDITORS**

Ashley Ess  
Bethany Hunter  
Breanna Lowe  
Davonna Thomas

## **SPECIAL THANKS**

Emily Ellis, Ashley Ess, David Heatherly, London Parker, and Ginger Tuton

## **COVER ART**

"Flower Day"  
By Adel Abudayeh

**COASTAL CAROLINA**  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Jacksonville, North Carolina

The Right to Write Award is sponsored by George and Lora Cole of Jacksonville, given in memory and in honor of their daughter. George earned an Associate in Fine Arts from Coastal; he is an accomplished artist with awards received from many campuses and local art exhibitions. The Coles are passionate about recognizing the academic achievements of successful students, and we are pleased to present this award to three writers in particular:

**“Midna” by Espana Mack (Poetry)**

**“Why God?” by Chastity Mumper (Nonfiction)**

**“The Witch of Westerlan” by Michael Kiley (Fiction)**

# Table of Contents

- "Midna" by Espana Mack ..... 1
- "Morning Dew" by Miya Johnson ..... 2
- "Untitled" by Samantha Cook** ..... 3
- "Show Some Respect" by Donna Brown ..... 4
- "Grandpa" by Codi Mann..... 7
- "My Name" by Codi Mann ..... 8
- "Why God?" by Chastity Mumper ..... 9
- "I want someone..." by Chastity Mumper ..... 14
- "Untitled" by Samantha Cook** ..... 15
- "My Wish" by Miya Johnson ..... 16
- "Chained Heart: A Series" by Natisha Moore .....17
- "Beauty Doesn't Matter They Say" by Chastity Mumper ..... 18
- "The Weeping Woman" by Karla Ware ..... 20
- "Life After Breast Cancer" by Donna Brown..... 21
- "Feeling Blue" by Adel Abudayeh**..... 24
- "To You" by Miya Johnson ..... 25
- "To my boyfriend:" by Samantha Milan ..... 27
- "Changes" by Codi Mann..... 29
- "Black Enough" by Owen Hills ..... 30
- "Safe Keeping" by Natisha Moore ..... 33
- "Not the Same" by Codi Mann..... 34
- "Untitled" by Samantha Cook** ..... 35
- "What is Love?" by Chastity Mumper ..... 36
- "Promises" by Chastity Mumper..... 38
- "The Witch of Westerlan" by Michael Kiley ..... 39
- "A Concept" by Natisha Moore ..... 59
- Contributors ..... 60

*\*Artwork pieces are bolded.*



# *Midna*

*By Espana Mack*

She is wild, like a fire in the woods  
Destructive and carefree yet,  
Sweet and often misunderstood  
She is precious and loving, never a threat.

She sits in the window like a model  
Posing in the warm sunlight  
Hints of orange and blonde, this tortoiseshell  
That shades of black do nothing but highlight

Comforting me in my times of need  
And often every time in between.  
In a battle for my attention indeed  
She is mischievous and quick to cause a scene

I am grateful she brightens up the house  
Playful like a kitten never quiet like a mouse.

# *Morning Dew*

*By Miya Johnson*

Glistening Droplets  
That shines on a morning day  
Sleeps on blades of grass



*"Untitled"*

*By Samantha Cook*

# *Show Some Respect*

By Donna Brown

In July 2020, a wild colt in Corolla, NC, died after choking on an apple. According to a news report by WBTV, "Corolla Wild Horse Fund says the young horse, named Danny, was fed an apple by 'humans who had no regard for the safety of the horses' and 'no regard for the laws put in place to protect the horses.' The colt likely choked on the apple for days and caused further damage by trying to loosen the obstruction, according to the organization" (Miller). A baby bison at Yellowstone National Park had to be euthanized after two tourists scooped it up and placed it in their car to keep it warm. They feared it was freezing to death and took it to the ranger station. According to an interview with representatives from the park, "Although rangers attempted several times to reunite the calf with the herd, their efforts failed, and the baby bison had to be euthanized" (Free). Again, in another case, people picked up dolphins out of the water to take selfies with them. Sadly, a baby dolphin died as a result. A representative from Viva Silvestre, Argentina's partner with the World Wildlife Fund, said "At least one of these dolphins suffered a horrific, traumatic, and utterly unnecessary death, for the sake of a few photographs. Wild animals are not toys or photo props" (Gidman).

People are also injuring wild animals by carelessly throwing trash on the ground or in the water. Things like soda rings, fishing lines or hooks, or other items made from aluminum, plastic or glass

have been known to harm animals. Animals have gotten tangled in such items and, unable to free themselves, they become strangled or suffocated. In some cases, animals ingest the trash left behind, which then sickens them, causing infections, or blocking their digestive system, eventually killing them. Plastics are probably the worst culprit as "some estimates suggest that at least 100 million marine mammals are killed each year from plastic pollution" (Henn). Such irresponsible behavior is causing harm to many animals.

-----  
Wild animals are amazing to watch in their own natural habitat; I have experienced it myself. I have seen elk, moose, deer, rabbits, foxes, and turtles in the wild; it was quite an education just staying still and watching them. Baby animals are especially cute and adorable, so I have had to resist the urge to pet them. Mother animals can become upset and attack you if you try to handle or pet their babies. I have also resisted the urge to feed them as I know that they have their own food that they eat in the wild. The U.S. Department of Agriculture warns that "Human food is not healthy for wild animals, and they do not need food from humans to survive. Wild animals have specialized diets, and they can become malnourished or die if fed the wrong foods. Also, animals cannot distinguish food from wrappers or foil and can get sick eating

*"At least one of these dolphins suffered a horrific, traumatic, and utterly unnecessary death, for the sake of a few photographs" (Gidman).*

these items" ("USDA APHIS | Don't Feed the Wildlife"). Watching animals in the wild can be a great experience. We need to respect their space instead of trying to pet them, feed them, or take selfies with them.

There are ways to show respect for animals in the wild. One way is to properly dispose of trash whether on land or on water. All it takes is a few seconds of cleaning up, both animals and our planet will greatly benefit from this. Another way to be respectful of wild animals is to obey the many signs you see at a wildlife refuge or national park, signs which warn you not to feed or go near the animals. It is not only for the safety of humans, but also for the safety and well-being of the animals. Also, make sure to contact the proper authorities when you come upon a wild animal who is sick or in distress. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) advises the public that "If you have found a wild animal, the best thing you can do is leave it alone or put it back where it was found. If you are truly concerned that the animal is injured or orphaned, but not sure, then contact a wildlife rehabilitator" ("Injured and Orphaned Wildlife"). You can easily find a wildlife rehabilitator by calling the NC Wildlife Helpline at 866-318-2401 or call Wildlife Enforcement at 800-662-7137 for any injured deer or bear. You can also go to <https://www.ncwildlife.org/injured-wildlife#7110749-what-should-i-do-if-i-find-injured-wildlife> and search for a list of rehabilitators by the county. Furthermore, if you see a baby animal that is alone, don't just assume that it has been abandoned or its mother is dead. The NCWRC also advises that "Just because a young animal is alone, and the adult cannot be seen doesn't mean the animal is orphaned. Many juvenile animals are left alone by adults for long periods of time or merely have fallen out of their nest. Since it's always best to give the adults the opportunity to re-establish contact

and take care of their own offspring, a good rule of thumb is to leave it alone for 24 to 48 hours to determine if a parent will return" ("Injured and Orphaned Wildlife"). We don't always know what is best for wild animals and may mean well and have good intentions. But it's best to let the experts handle things.

-----  
Animals deserve to be respected in their natural habitat. Consider this. Would you like it if someone came into your home, petted your child, scooped them up, and then carried them away? Would you like it if someone came into your home and started feeding you or your child something that could make them sick or kill them? Would you like it if someone came into your home and started dropping their trash all over your house? The answer is obvious. Of course not, you wouldn't want any of that to be done in your home. So why are we doing this to wild animals? Why are we going into their habitats and causing them harm? Just as you deserve to live in your home in peace and safety, animals also deserve to live in peace and safety in their habitats. Show some respect!

## Works Cited

- Free, Cathy. "Bison Calf Euthanized After Tourists Put It in Their Car To 'Keep It Warm.'" *PEOPLE.com*, 2016, <https://people.com/parents/bison-calf-euthanized-after-tourists-put-it-in-their-car-to-keep-it-warm/>.
- Gidman, Jenn. "Baby Dolphin Dies After People Take Selfies with It." *Usatoday.com*, 2016, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/02/19/newser-dolphin-selfie/80604294/>. Accessed 26 Jan 2021.
- Henn, Corrine. "These 5 Marine Animals Are Dying Because Of Our Plastic Trash... Here's How We Can Help." *One Green Planet*, 2020, <https://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/marine-animals-are-dying-because-of-our-plastic-trash>.
- "Injured And Orphaned Wildlife." *NC Wildlife Resources Commission*, 2021, <https://www.ncwildlife.org/injured-wildlife#7110749-what-should-i-do-if-i-find-injured-wildlife>. Accessed 27 Jan 2021.
- Miller, Jennifer. "Wild Horse Dies After Choking on Apple In North Carolina: 'Danny Was Just a Baby.'" *Https://Www.Wbtv.Com*, 2020, <https://www.wbtv.com/2020/07/14/wild-horse-dies-after-choking-apple-north-carolina-danny-was-just-baby/#:~:text=C.%20%28WBTV%29%20%20A%20wild%20colt%20died%20afterto%20loosen%20the%20obstruction%2C%20according%20to%20the%20organization>.
- "USDA APHIS | Don't Feed the Wildlife." *Aphis.Usda.Gov*, 2021, [https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage/sa\\_program\\_overview/ct\\_dontfeedwildlife](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/wildlifedamage/sa_program_overview/ct_dontfeedwildlife).

# *Grandpa*

*By Codi Mann*

The smell of Old Spice and tobacco chew,  
Still has my tears shedding a few,  
Your memory is still with me,  
The way it will always be,

They all said you had a rough exterior,  
But with me you couldn't have been happier,  
Fighting two tours on foreign land,  
You had scars that no one could understand,

You loved to carve wooden ducks,  
And would sell them for a couple of bucks,  
With two broken down El Caminos,  
That you were never able to show,

Eleven years have passed,  
Since you were taken too fast,  
I still hold tight to what you taught me,  
Hoping you're up there able to see,  
Many changes have happened since that day,  
That you were taken away,  
Daddy got married so I gained a stepmother,  
And a couple of years later a little brother,

I wish he could have met you,  
He's a mini you through and through,  
My nickname for him is Guppy,  
He follows me around like a puppy.

Every day I carry you with me,  
Trying to be the person you wanted me to be,  
I miss you so much I hope you see,  
Grandpa Bull you still mean the world to me.

# *My Name*

*By Codi Mann*

My name is Codi.  
Spelled with an I,  
The love between two young Coast Guardsmen,  
A strong single mother at 21.  
My name is short and sweet.  
Deep as the bends in the Albemarle swamps,  
As fireflies dancing around a picked corn field.  
My name is a Venus Fly Trap, quick to the strike,  
The oldest of 7,  
A National FFA American Recipient.  
My name is the snorts in a laugh,  
The un-breakable family bond,  
The pink you find in the perfect sunset,  
An old Dodge pick-up over a new car.  
My name is a future educator.  
My name is a dream creator.  
My name is Codi.

**Content Warning:** the following piece of non-fiction explores the theme of sexual assault and rape, which some readers may find distressing.

## *Why God?*

*By Chastity Mumper*

It was a Sunday morning, and the pews were filled, sandalwood incense smothered the air, and the choir hummed quiet hymns as we were all gestured by the priest to stand from our humble placements. The walls surrounding me were ones that resembled an octagon shape with a grand cathedral ceiling with many wooden beams yawning from one side to another. Each wall was adorned with stained glass windows depicting some biblical reference. The only one I recognized was Eve with the Forbidden Fruit; all the others are lost to memory.

The priest led us into his first prayer, and I closed my eyes and bowed my head dutifully as I waited for him to finish speaking his piece. I peeped a look over at my grandmother clutching her rosary to her chest as she silently mouths what I am guessing to be the same prayer the priest recited. It suddenly gets noticeably quiet, and I rushed to shut my eyes again in hopes no one sees my disobedience. The entire congregation said "Amen," and we sat down. The priest went on about the reading for the week and I did my best to follow suit in the Bible, but between all the effort I put in to attempt to follow along, I honestly had no idea where I was supposed

to be, and I was too embarrassed to ask my grandmother for any help. So, my ears wandered with my eyes as I stared at the gruesome wooden statue of what I knew to be Jesus Christ on the Cross. Whoever was responsible for the piece took no shame in showing the damage to the body and the implied blood that seeped from his crown and body. I remember shivering in my seat and trying to look away from the looming figure, but I sat in that cold pew it felt as if the rest of that Catholic service; it only had eyes for me.

It was Christmas Eve. My sisters and I were dressed as matching elves, there was always a peppermint to be had, and it was bloody too cold to be dressed as an elf. My mother and her coworkers were toting their families around to different elderly people's houses. It was a ton of fun and full of joyous caroling and we were giving everyone we saw peppermints like they won the lottery. The purpose was to spread Christmas cheer; though, there were a few odd ones that did not seem to partake in our joyous mood, which struck me as weird. I remember offering them the green peppermints in hopes they would smile. To my dismay, it hardly worked.

*"I remember shivering in my seat and trying to look away from the looming figure, but I sat in that cold pew it felt as if the rest of that Catholic service; it only had eyes for me."*

Every time we finished singing our songs and handing out our candy, we were whisked away to another room or rushed back into the car as we waited an additional fifteen minutes for the adults to take us to the next house. This happened about ten times in total, and after it all, I was tuckered out. Amidst all the waiting we did in between carols, I learned how to spell the word "elephant." As if I learned one of the hardest words in existence, I proudly recited the letters numerous times for anyone who would lend me their ear. It was probably one of the happiest times of my life. Though being a kindergartener, there isn't much that is not considered fun. Little did I know all the elderly folk we visited were living the last few days of their life. And my mother was a Hospice Chaplain, reading them some of the last verses from the Bible that these patients would ever hear again.

The sun kissed my face, my voice was stretched from singing songs all morning, and I was only eager to continue my next two weeks of my third summer in a row of Vacation Bible School. Surrounded by kids of varying ages and led by what I could only assume to be local high school students, I was one of the other one hundred kids who were sent here by their parents. My favorite parts consisted of belting out the lyrics to the kid friendly church songs or the craft of the day. Unfortunately, though, there was one part of the school that my sixth-grade imagination was not fond of.

I normally dreaded having to read aloud biblical passages to "rank up" in whatever hierarchy the Baptist church had. My teachers would hand me a Bible and point out a text to read. I would fly through the passage as easily as a river under a bridge, but once I was asked to explain what I read, I could never recall. It did not matter if I

read the text another time or two; my mind just refused to maintain it. Luckily, I only had to do that about three times a week, but I still dreaded those sessions. I remember at the end of the week, these certain kids who excelled in those sessions would always get called up in front of the congregation and get special little awards. To this day, that still irks me; hand me a book on Greek mythology I will be happy to recite the stories of Helen of Troy or Perseus and Medusa, hand me a book on astrology and have me explain the theory of the Big Bang, or how gravity works, and I will take you to space, but these confusing passages in a book that seem to only serve to intimidate me. No, I just could not do it...

The leaves were becoming friendly with the ground, the colors of autumn were upon us, and the heavy load of textbooks flooded my arms as I walked with my best friend to our next class.

"C'mon Chas, just once, let me show you how amazing God is to me and my family!" I reluctantly said yes to what I felt like was not even an option in the first place. But I replaced my sense of uncertainty with a smile before my face gave me away. We made it to our next class and took our seats for algebra.

I always enjoyed numbers; there never was anything trying to hide their meaning. They were just straightforward, a matter of fact, and constant. I never had to tarry with anything confusing or multiply in their meanings. As I worked, I helped Shelly with her work. She might have excelled in English, but may the good Lord help her as she did struggle with mathematics.

I thought about her invitation to her church service. But truth be told, I was not eager to go. Knowing Shelly's parents and seeing how hard they were on her and knowing "God" was the reason behind such strictness was not appealing to me. She was fifteen years old, could not hang out or associate with the opposite gender, had to prioritize her religion over schoolwork, and because the family made so many contributions to the church, they never had money to pay for Shelly's lunch at school. And it was like that for the three years I was with her. I could not fathom how there was never food in the house, or money for her to even buy lunch when all she would reply to my inquiry was, "It goes to the Lord's residence."

Well into the night of a uniquely chilly evening in Hawaii, the wind howled across the shingles, the night sky began to show the first traces of stars upon its face. I should have been in bed hours ago, but I was not. I was instead lecturing myself in the mirror about the twenty-seven different books of the New Testament as my mother sat at her desk. I had lied about my whereabouts regarding my after-school activities that day because I wanted to spend more time with my not-so-secret boyfriend now. To my dismay, I got caught, and my mother was having me recite the key morals behind the books of Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John.

I honestly had to silently laugh at the hypocrisy of it as my mother, being legally married, would "entertain" other men as we were separated by an ocean from my father. But of course, my father did not know of my mother's actions, and neither was he aware of my late-night consequence. But I was sure my mother had no issue sharing my transgression over the nightly phone call that I knew had already happened. But when it was my turn to share my day, I would be thoroughly scrutinized to ensure that I never gave away the

sacred secrets my mother had to keep. I could and still cannot fathom how a hospice chaplain felt justified to do so after how much she stressed the faith to herself, her family, and strangers.

The birth of a new year was abloom with pollen stirring up everyone's allergies, green began to remind people that it existed, and rain flooded the sidewalks. With all these beautiful signs for renewal and purity, it would only serve to spite the ending of mine. I was in the ravine about a mile behind the high school, meeting up with people who were my friends. Three guys, one girl, middle of a forest? Should have been fine considering I trusted them. Let me just say it was not.

I walked to the usual meeting place where the creek made a bend over the most beautiful of water-washed stones, and I should have known by the heaviness of the air that something wasn't right. I saw the boys and jogged to meet up with them. We started talking but something was off about them all. We normally came up here to smoke a joint and call it a day, but there was no sign of marijuana in the air, and they all had a crazed look in their eyes. I tried to shake the feeling off and one of them offered me a needle. Realizing what they were all doing I hurriedly shook my head no and said that it was going too far. They did not agree with my statement. The objection turned into an argument, I tried to walk away and instead, I was roughly grabbed by my arms. This was not some force to just stop someone from leaving, but this was brute force to ensure that there was no escape. My mind started to race, I abruptly turned, and my fist contacted a neck, but another set of hands grabbed my other arm, and I was quickly subdued with kicks to my gut. I gasped in response and fell to my knees. The boys started laughing at me and commenced to even spit on me from my low position. These boys were not the ones I thought

they were. They had turned into something entirely different, and I was terrified. My brain panicked and I kept ardently struggling to no avail. There was not anything I could do to run away. I tried to force sound out of my throat, but my worst fear came to life; I could not make a sound. Seeing my panic only made the maniacs laugh harder and beat me more. I tasted blood on my lip, and I could hardly breathe. I fell to my side and squeezed my eyes shut wishing the nightmare to end. Before I knew it, my clothes were being torn from my body and I was left exposed to the open forest canopy above. I could already sense what was about to happen, and I was frozen, curled into a ball, barren, with nothing left to defend myself. I remember before the moment I was internally torn to pieces, that I begged God to help me and take me away from this moment. Pain entered my body from a different place I had never felt before and I did not need to open my eyes to stare upon the treachery that was happening. My mind raced and raced and raced endlessly, and like a light, my world went black.

Why? Just why God?

To this day I wonder if God helped me in this moment to escape. I also wonder if I had done something wrong to displease him so badly for something like this to happen. Or just maybe, I dared to question, he did not exist at all.

There are too many experiences in my young life that I have had where I just do not know if I can bring myself to believe in a God that allows such terrible things to happen to myself and others. I know there are people out there with worse stories, and I just wonder, why do we, his creations that He claims to love so much, must go through such struggle to be drawn closer to him? Why must I prove my faith to someone so much so where I am marked a whore and ridiculed for something I did not want to happen? Why is there a higher power out there that allows these horrendous crimes to be committed?

## Works Cited

Carr, David. "Love, Truth and Moral Judgement." *Philosophy (London)*, vol. 94, no. 4, 2019, pp. 529-545.

Hungerford, Amy. *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion Since 1960*, Princeton University Press, 2010. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/coastalcarolina-ebooks/detail.action?docID=537682>.

# *I want someone...*

By Chastity Mumper

I want someone to want me the way depression desires suicide-  
The best kept secret that us two would choose to hide.  
We'd be the only medicine for each other's condition  
With nothing more than the dirtiest of intention.

I want someone to want me the way an addict craves her vice  
Sharing with me all of the lustful desires that we can entice  
Whether it's alcohol, weed, or nicotine I wouldn't care.  
It would shift into a centrifuge of the time we could share.

I want someone to want me the way a cutter wishes for control  
To allow ourselves to bleed into one another's soul.  
We'd lovingly gaze at the scars that may one day fade  
And maybe living would stop feeling like such a charade.

I want someone to want me the way anxiety fears silence  
Maybe if I spoke on what I wanted I'd make more sense,  
But my brain becomes a cluttered mess  
And rational thinking becomes less and less

I want someone to want me the way an insomniac knows the stillness of sleepless nights  
We would untangle our way through the darkness and fall beyond the sense of sight,  
Teaching each other from the inside and out  
Dissipating the remnants of skeptical doubt

I want you to cut my heart, just like I would raze my wrist.  
I want to be all your strengths and weaknesses that I dare to risk-  
That I bravely admit this poem is about you,  
But I'm just a girl that craves darkness  
While you're this blinding light that you never truly knew.

*“ I want someone to want me the way an insomniac  
knows the stillness of sleepless nights”*



*"Untitled"*

*By Samantha Cook*

# *My Wish*

*By Miya Johnson*

To be like the sun  
Who can uplift and brighten  
To be like the moon  
Who is meaningful and wise  
Is my lifelong rooted wish

# *“Chained Heart: A Series”*

By Natisha Moore

Beginning:

She was a model child. When I say model, I mean the kind of little girl most parents longed to have. She said her prayers, read her books, and even studied the ever-popular children’s Bible from front to back on many occasions, not-withstanding the days spent running around the front yard as a normal child should.

She had reached the over-publicized status of a well-rounded student before ever stepping foot inside a classroom. When the summer months announced the coming of a new school year, Marni was her usual “all smiles” mood. Her first school year was a mixture of excitement and curiosity. She had never beheld a school as massive as the local elementary school.

The bus rides were a blur and only made for time to catch up on her reading. In increments, she would look out the window, but only long enough to read a sign or two. This would let her know whether to speed up her reading, or to slow down in order to fully understand the page speaking to her. While most of the other children horsed around, yelling and throwing papers at each other, she found the light whisper of words and the silent rustle of a page turn were all she needed to stay occupied.

The school bus parking lot was filled with children. To keep safety number one, every bus had to wait until the very last one arrived and circled around to a parking space. At that time, the children would be led off. To Marni, this was quite logical, so it was a loss to her why some of the children would yell at the bus driver whenever the safety officer kept their big spheres of energy waiting. “Poor bus driver,” Marni would say aloud, then return to her reading. One teacher would grip the blue and white megaphone in her hand, “Bus number 394!” She would lead on in this manner from a list of bus numbers.

Marni would slightly unzip the top portion of her book bag to make it easier to slip her book inside upon exiting. She never wanted any harm to come to the pages of her books. She and the local librarian had formed a wonderful bond.

*“While most of the other children horsed around, yelling and throwing papers at each other, she found the light whisper of words and the silent rustle of a page turn were all she needed to stay occupied.”*

# *Beauty Doesn't Matter They Say*

*By Chastity Mumper*

Such a smart girl they would say.  
She's so bright she will change the world one day!  
Look at how quick she learns!  
Her mind is a fire that never ceases to burn.  
Oh look at her strength!  
Nobody compares to the same wavelength.  
So studious and diligent in her work,  
Who would ever think there's space for a demon to lurk?

She's so ambitious they would say.  
For she conquered every obstacle in her way.  
She's musically, athletically, and academically inclined?  
Her talents can't possibly be bound by the sky!  
I wish my daughter was half as gifted as yours.  
But little did everyone know,  
This smart girl,  
Desired something more.  
The compliments for her spanned between just her height and face  
Hardly ever a word about anything between her neck, feet, and waist  
Her sisters were prettier, she would outright admit.  
As did the guys who she would manage to get.  
Her friends would be thin and fair,  
A thought she hid to herself.  
Because she couldn't bear,  
To even look at her own reflection,  
Without dejection.

Looking upon her herself she would see,  
Everything she didn't want to be

Between her wild brown hair that refused to be straight  
Or the broad shoulders most guys seemed to hate.  
She honestly believed she was built like a man  
And her Maker simply gave her a wrong gland.

So maybe you will ask why would this girl care about something so shallow?  
Because she was desperately tired of having to be so unhallow-  
In regards to her looks,  
When so many would judge her like the cover of a book

# *The Weeping Woman*

*By Karla Ware*

It's a summer night  
Dark like jet black  
About ten stars are out  
The kids are sitting  
In the stoop chilling  
Talking and laughing

Suddenly a silence  
Far away, a woman's cry  
The cries are sounding clearer

"It's La Llorona!" Frightened,  
They start to run, fast as lightning  
Looking back while running,  
They see her coming

Floating in the air, long black hair  
In a white filthy dress in distress  
Crying, mourning the loss of her children  
The kids get to hide in an alley close by  
Peeking, hoping they are safe  
They see her floating, yelling for her children

Suddenly a silence  
The woman disappears  
When they hear, "Don't be scared, dear."

# *Life After Breast Cancer*

By Donna Brown

“No Evidence of Disease.” The words slowly sunk in as I realized that I had beaten breast cancer. After a year of chemotherapy, a single mastectomy, and four weeks of radiation treatment, there seemed to be a sense of relief for me. It was all finally over—but was it?

I got the phone call on July 26, 2017, the day of my 31st wedding anniversary. I went into shock as the doctor rattled off the lengthy name of my diagnosis: Stage 2 Invasive Ductile Carcinoma, HER2 Positive. I was stunned. How could this happen to me? When the doctor said it was cancer, my mind swirled as he went on to tell me what kind of treatment I would be facing and how that treatment was going to give me an 85% survival rate. I was afraid as I thought about what the future possibly held for me.

Everything happened so fast as I found myself getting my first round of chemotherapy about two weeks later. Then came the side effects of chemotherapy: nausea, severe diarrhea, exhaustion, loss of appetite and fingernails/toenails nearly turning black. Oh yes and hair loss, great bunches of hair coming out of my head. Eventually I began to resemble Gollum from the Lord of the Rings movie, the shriveled up looking character with wisps of hair on his head. While I can look back on this now and joke about it, at the time, I cried many times at the sight of myself in

the mirror. I’m not going to lie, it was hard. After dealing with chemotherapy, surgery came next: a single mastectomy with reconstructive surgery, an implant, and seven lymph nodes removed from under my left arm where cancer had spread. After recovery came four weeks of radiation treatment, getting zapped with high doses of radiation that turned my skin red like a lobster. When I was finally done, the doctor pronounced me free of cancer and gave me medication, Tamoxifen, to take for the next five years to keep the cancer away. I was finished and only needed to see my doctor every six months to keep an eye on my health.

At first, I felt a sense of relief. As far as I was concerned it was done and I could get back to normal, and my hair could grow back. But it wasn’t long before reality set in for me; life was not normal; life was not the way it was before breast cancer. Even though I was done with treatment, I found myself constantly tired and low on energy. I began to experience what is commonly known as “chemo brain,” which causes “things like memory lapses, slower processing, difficulty multitasking and concentrating, and forgetting common words” (Smith). The removal of my cancerous lymph nodes resulted in swelling in my left arm and hand, otherwise known as lymphedema. Radiation treatment left me with shortness of breath and an annoying cough. Then I was hit with the side

*“I got the phone call on July 26, 2017, the day of my 31st wedding anniversary. I went into shock as the doctor rattled off the lengthy name of my diagnosis...”*

effects from the Tamoxifen: insomnia, bone pain, leg cramps, loss of sex drive, mood changes, and depression. Along with all of this was the constant worry that any ache or pain was cancer. The fear hung over me like a dark cloud. Yes, I was done with treatment and cancer-free. But I was truly not the same person I was before cancer; I was changed. While I did not realize it at the time, I was not alone in the aftereffects I was experiencing. According to studies done on women who have survived breast cancer, "Up to 10 years after diagnosis, breast cancer survivors experience intermittent claudication, appetite loss, concentration difficulties, forgetfulness, dizziness.... cardiovascular dysfunction, depression, and anxiety are significantly associated with a history of chemotherapy or radiotherapy" (D'Onofrio). Cancer treatment had changed me both physically and mentally, but I could not accept those changes.

Then there were my family and friends who rejoiced with me when I was declared cancer-free. As far as they were concerned, I had won the battle, and I was now back to normal, and could resume my life as it was before cancer. But they soon found that was not the case. They couldn't understand why I was moody, couldn't sleep, didn't have much energy, or why I was having cognitive issues. Sometimes they would get impatient with me if I were slow to answer their questions because my brain was slow to process things sometimes. They could not understand the changes that had taken place with me. It was frustrating as I found myself having to repeatedly explain what was going on with me and why it was happening. Yet I understood their frustration because I was not the same person they knew, and it frustrated me as well. It took some adjusting on our parts to deal with these changes. My doctor put me on some medication to help manage some of the side effects, along with some supplemental vitamins to boost my energy. It did

not make everything perfect, but it helped me function a little better. Eventually my family and friends became a little more understanding. Over time, I developed ways to manage things and have come to accept the "new me."

As I have found, life has a way of throwing you a few curve balls. It could be cancer, an accident, relationship problems, financial issues, or some other event that leaves you fearing the future. However, as with anything that happens in life, you find a way to get through the situation, whether it be through your family, friends, or doctor, etc. In the end, you find yourself a changed person, and hopefully a person who has changed for the better. I have now developed a new perspective that life is precious. I make the most of what I do, I make the most of the time spent with family and friends, and I strive to make a positive difference in the lives of others. What did not kill me just made me stronger.

## Works Cited

D'Onifro, Kaitlyn. "Breast Cancer Survivors May Experience Side Effects 10 Years Later." *Docwire News*, 2020, <https://www.docwirenews.com/docwire-pick/hem-oncpicks/breast-cancer-survivors-may-experience-side-effects-10-years-later/>. Accessed 25 Jan. 2021.

Smith, Lauren. "What Is "Chemo Brain" + How Long Does It Last?" *Healthination.Com*, 2019, <https://www.healthination.com/health/chemotherapy-brain-fog/>. Accessed 26 Jan 2021.



*"Feeling Blue"*

*By Adel Abudayeh*

# *To You*

By Miya Johnson

I remember that emptiness I felt inside  
Where an afternoon walk did no good, and a trip to the movies couldn't satiate my yearning for  
happiness.

Where once the credits rolled *it* would return in full  
*It* knew my name; *it* knew my story  
Yet I couldn't nor didn't understand *it*

In periods of great uncertainty and inner grief there would be *it*.  
Unwanted and unwelcomed, yet walls could not stop *it* from barging inside  
Dissipating the images of myself that were good  
And bright, like prancing around with bed hair don't care bright, oozing happiness  
Where despite obvious flaws, optimistically I looked toward my future in full  
By editing and re-envisioning my story

But when I'm there and I see *it* it's hard to listen to my story  
Entangled and flushed by it,  
Who is a mirror of myself; A locksmith to what I hold deep inside  
Threatening to reveal to everyone but more importantly myself that I am in fact not well. That I  
am in fact not good?  
Embracing the lie, I leap into the hollowing depths of happiness  
Where my passions and likes are put on the burner, although I crave for it to return like a starved,  
thirsty man to a glass half full.

Desperate, lonely, and full  
On pity, pain seemed like the answer to bring me back my lost story.  
But I was afraid, as my chest tightened and my face tingled scrambling for air, I knew I hated *it*  
All, I wanted to feel normal, go back to the flawed me inside  
Who laughed when funny things happened and still felt good afterwards. But time gave me the  
ability to process, to sit down and think, and during that period of time I learned something  
about happiness.

The state of being happy is the Google definition of happiness  
And my journey to return to that state involved me having to realize I could never completely get  
rid of you, *it*, who paints a full  
Picture on a story  
I wished to suppress, but *it*  
I learned that in ignoring and shunning you I only continue to hurt myself from the inside  
Out, and that in order to heal I needed to finally listen to what you had wanted to say from the  
beginning. Whether it's the bad I've always known or the hopeful good

In opening my ears, I could see that you were a cry for help that I was in fact not well nor good  
But where to start I wondered to return to that state of happiness  
To start I changed my habit, I ate until I was satiated instead of overwhelmingly full  
I then forced myself to practice self-care, rebuilding the image destroyed by *it*, piece by piece as  
meticulous as I would be with my own pen-to-paper story  
But know that I don't care for you *it*  
I'm ready to toss you aside anytime and that urge hasn't subsided, but what I had gained from  
confronting you remains ingrained inside

Deep inside my mind I know I will still continue to struggle with the good  
And bad images of myself, but I learned that happiness is obtainable, and that I'm making  
substantial progress, adorned with an armor full  
Of determination and love, because my story does not end with you, like the sun that shines after  
torrential hazardous weather. There lies another tomorrow. Where you are only an obstacle *it*.

# *To my boyfriend:*

*By Samantha Milan*

You grew up with a tough life  
Some dogs have the hardest bite  
You've done things that you aren't proud of  
Never had anyone who stayed around uh  
You've been around the block a few  
Way past curfew  
Just trying to make it out  
But you think no one can hear you shout  
Trying to survive  
Trying to hide  
All the pain you hold inside  
You grew up with a tough life  
Spent nights with tears  
Believing all of your fears  
Can't trust any of your peers  
Things got rough  
But little did you know  
That only made you tough  
Through all of the pain  
And struggles that you faced  
You ran that race  
Paced yourself around every corner  
Life's getting shorter  
You're tired  
And your mind is on fire  
You feel weak and burnt out  
"I can't do this anymore" you think to yourself  
Well, you aren't by yourself anymore  
Tag me in, I'll run the race for you  
Give me all of your pain  
I'll place for you  
The running will never stop  
But together we can run farther  
As if we haven't had it harder  
Give me a chance  
I'll take a stance

I'll show you that I'm not like the others  
I see your pain  
I hear your screams  
I know your past  
I've seen your dreams  
And the places that you're headed  
I feel your strength  
God only gives his hardest battles on the toughest soldiers  
The battle may not be won  
But we will fight as one.  
You grew up with a tough life  
And together, everything's gonna be alright.

From: Your girlfriend

# *Changes*

*By Codi Mann*

Having laughs and shedding tears,  
From riding bikes to shifting gears,  
We have changed through these past years.

Little kids swimming in the bay,  
Sharing smiles every day,  
Walking barefoot down gravel streets,  
Earning calluses on our feet,  
We have changed these past few years,

Early winter mornings with camo and a gun,  
Late summer nights with everlasting fun,  
Having the first childhood crush,  
Spent days on the water that were such a rush,  
We have changed these past years,

Many years have passed,  
Traditions faded away too fast,  
To be that young girl again,  
I relive those memories, so they'll never end.  
We have all changed these past years.

# *Black Enough*

*By Owen Hills*

No one gets to choose who, what, when, where or why they are born. Yet these factors all combine to create two categories with great influence on life experience and outcome: identity and place, which can cooperate to confer great privilege on some, or they can clash and create conflict and hardship for others.

I was born in 1993 to a white father and black mother in the Bay Area of California. I am the youngest of six. The younger three are between both of my parents and the older half are from previous relationships, but all of us are multi-racial. When I was six, my parents moved me and my two closest siblings to a predominantly black suburb of New York where my mother was born and raised. After my parents divorced, we moved to a rural, completely white neighborhood in Jacksonville, North Carolina, when I was twelve. Though we left that neighborhood after two years, Jacksonville has been my home ever since. Although I didn't fully understand at the time, being biracial in New York and North Carolina would be a confounding challenge for my identity involving rejection, racism, and the uncertainty of identity, that persists to this day.

In my youngest years in California, race was never an issue. I grew up in a house with two half-white, half black sisters and two half-white, half Puerto Rican sisters. My father was never very attentive or masculine in healthy ways. I remember Mikey, a friend of my mother's, often being the present male in those years. This time in my life was the safest and most normal feeling I would experience. I remember gardening with my father, fishing off the pier with Mikey, and being babysat by my eldest sisters. Perhaps the strongest example of how

different this time was from the rest of my life is how little I understood about the people involved. It wasn't until later that I found out that Mikey was homosexual, or that my eldest two sisters were half Puerto Rican. The female-dominated dynamic of my household along with the diverse and accepting culture of the Bay Area sowed the seeds of my feminine personality and the ambiguity of my racial self-conception, which would clash with the expectations generated by my skin-tone in later environments.

Things changed when we moved to New York. My much older half-Puerto Rican sisters stayed with their mother in California, my much older and more "black-presenting" brother lived in New York and became a more regular part of my life. On top of the changes at home, the neighborhood was predominantly black as well, a noticeable change from the melting pot of the San Francisco area where I was born. This wasn't a big problem at first. My brother often teased me for being small and somewhat shy. He would punch me sometimes when he came to visit; other times he and his friends would coach me on how to fight. I thought they were so cool, so masculine and confident and strong, but also so very far away from who I felt I was. I didn't like rap, I didn't wear baggy clothes, I was notoriously bad at basketball, and I didn't curse or even use slang really.

While I took my brother's behavior as sometimes annoying but ultimately loving the treatment I received from my peers and my new stepfather was immeasurably more hurtful. My parents' divorce was hard for all of us and added an extra layer of "other-ness" to my developing identity, and my mom's new boyfriend didn't help in the

least. There was no escape from the bullying around my masculinity occurring in school and at home which manifested in endless variations of how I wasn't "black enough" or "not really black" from my Black peers explicitly, and implicitly from my black stepfather. I struggled with anger management and fighting throughout this period of my childhood. I was angry at my father, angry at my stepfather, angry at my peers, and ultimately, I was beginning to be angry at myself. Before we left New York, my mother and stepfather began showing us movies like *Rosewood* and *Roots* which frightened me, but also, I think it helped me hold onto some amount of "black identity." I could not know how this would foreshadow the next chapter of my life.

Around 2005 we moved to Jacksonville, and the dynamic of my racial identity problems flipped in an ugly way. For the first two years we lived in a completely white and very racist neighborhood. It didn't seem that way at first; the other kids were nice enough. We rode bikes, played video games and they even introduced me to four-wheelers, which is something one doesn't see in suburban New York. Over time, though something changed; I think the older men began to coach their children because I began to experience outright hostile racism from these same kids. "Go home Nigger!" would be yelled at me if I rode my bike alone around the dirt roads at the back of the neighborhood as kids threw a mixture of gravel and pecans at me. This was incredibly frustrating and isolating as I realized even though I was often "not Black enough" in New York, no matter how light-skinned and well-spoken I was, I would never be anything but "Black" here in North Carolina. This was more than just a shocking exposure to the racism I had only seen in movies, it felt like a boxing in, like I could never be good enough for anyone due to racial contradictions in my blood that I never asked for. I can't remember

where or by who, but once, it was suggested to me that much like having divorced parents was supposed to mean two Christmases, being biracial was supposed to afford me the best of both sides of my background. However, much like the reality of my parents' divorce, being biracial introduced conflicts and confusion that I was not equipped to deal with healthily as a young child. This led to unhealthy social coping, negative self-image, and rejection of racial identity as I became a teenager.

We left that neighborhood when I was 14, but the damage done in those two years would follow me. As a young teenager I rejected all racial identity. If I couldn't be "black enough" to be black but I was certainly "too black to be white," I would just do without. Looking back, this was an unhealthy coping mechanism that led me to accept tokenization and racist humor from peers in exchange for some nominal friendship. By this time all my friends and role models were white, and I was beginning to experience something similar to body dysmorphia. My wide nose, full lips, big ears, and thick wavy hair all seemed distinctly out of place and irreparably ugly. I wanted so badly to be like the rock bands I idolized and my more popular friends too. I have been fortunate to avoid the worst possible outcomes of these scenarios; however, the internal conflict persists and gained new relevance over the summer of 2020.

My relationship to my identity has shifted alongside the physical and social contexts I've experienced. In California as a toddler, I gave no thought to my racial identity due to a racially diverse household and community. In New York after my parents divorced, I self-identified as black, partly to shun my father and partly as a reflection of my new environment. Although I can never identify as white, my early experiences in North Carolina caused me to reject racial identity entirely. In my

late teens and early twenties, I found healthier friends and became involved in more progressive spaces. These social factors encouraged me to re-embrace my black identity but not in any deep, meaningful way.

It wasn't until this past summer when racial tensions exploded across the country that I began to feel troubled over this trajectory. Since the early rejection of my time in New York, I've struggled to connect with my black peers. Now my entire social network is white, and I operate in predominantly white spaces. I've wrestled with what that means in this moment of racial tension and reckoning. Who can I talk to about being black? Am I once again "not black enough?" Do I deserve to raise my voice on the black experience in America? My conclusion is an emphatic affirmation of my black identity and experience. I have learned the power that internalized racism has to turn blacks against each other. If I was truly not black, I would have never experienced the racial aggression of my childhood. Grim though it may be, through the pain of my childhood and the spotlight on continued racism in America I have become certain that in the eyes of America's dominant systems of racist oppression I am very much "Black Enough."

*"...no matter how light-skinned and well-spoken I was, I would never be anything but "Black" here in North Carolina."*

# *Safe Keeping*

*By Natisha Moore*

Where is my ring  
Where is my opal  
Where is the soft metal shaped and weaved?  
Molded and conceived to shape only me  
Kept safely beside a heart that is mine  
And released to my adornment  
At the moment of I do

Lord bless this ring  
Upon receiving it stigmatized me  
Made me less of myself and more of another  
So I look back to his self  
The question of are you really a brother  
Your thoughts shape generations  
But you run  
From the possibility  
Do all that you can to re-write feMANinity

Shape pottery with hands  
However still, bear into me  
Chase problems with plans of a long-forgotten history  
A misuse  
Of the words I promise  
Of the time they  
Gathered in our honor  
To dispel the view of no love  
No hope, No reciprocity  
A myth  
Is all it has become to me  
Where is my successor?

# *Not the Same*

*By Codi Mann*

Looking in the mirror only to see,  
A shell of the girl I used to be,  
Red puffy eyes from fallen tears,  
A smile that has faded over the years,  
The hurtful words that were said to me,  
Have taken a toll on my sanity,  
It is all your fault they often would say,  
Still echoing in my head every day,  
Questioning myself if it is even true,  
Still hurting by what I have been through,  
The so-called sticks and stones would hurt I see,  
But the words they said hurt more to me,  
I am now singing my fight song,  
Saying that they were wrong,  
I'm stronger than they made me out to be,  
So, they can all just wait and see,  
I'm not letting them drag me down anymore,  
No more lying, crying on the floor,  
I am going to be better than before,  
Not going to be that same girl anymore.



*"Untitled"*

*By Samantha Cook*

# *What is Love?*

*By Chastity Mumper*

Love is the hail that hits you violently,  
Or perhaps it is the snow that will hit you silently.  
Either way,  
Once it has melted,  
You're still wet  
With the memory,  
Of who you have met.

Your mother will say,  
Love is when you smile every day.  
Because you have children  
Who grew up into fine young men.

Your father may claim,  
Love is when you know you will never be the same.  
Because you grew out of who you were  
All because you met her.

Your grandparents will believe,  
Love is when you grieve,  
For the other half of your heart  
When they leave and must begin a fresh start.

Your friends will think,  
Love is when a cute boy gives you a wink.  
Or perhaps they'll say it is getting butterflies.  
As they watch their crush walk on by.

A stranger will denote,  
It's when words get caught in your throat.  
Whenever you try to have a conversation  
Cursing your inability to speak to damnation.

Maybe love is all these things, but I believe it's so much more.  
It's like an invisible gateway, no, more like a door.  
That poses itself closed,  
Begging to be explored  
You will not know what lies beyond if you do not turn the handle.  
All you need is the hope inside for you to burn as dim as a candle.  
It is a chance where you will be vulnerable.  
But there is so much about you that is still discoverable.

Love is taking the chance after ever lover.  
Allowing yourself to say, you will recover.  
From every heartbreak and shed tear,  
And pursuing the next, albeit the fear.

*"A stranger will denote,  
It's when words get caught in your throat.  
Whenever you try to have a conversation  
Cursing your inability to speak to damnation."*

# *Promises*

*By Chastity Mumper*

Hollowed temples of wishful words  
Finding prey upon those who wish to be heard  
It starts with one, and followed with another closely after  
Saying them becomes as easy as it is for a child's laughter  
How many times did you give your word to me?  
It was more than one, more than two, and at least three.  
And each time, I hung upon your voice  
As I fell blindly victim to any other choice  
Because there was no other one besides you  
I knew better, yet still, you were in a different hue

I thought,  
I fought,  
I sought,  
And I caught,  
Air

Words that were lost to the wind  
And statements impossible to mend  
They were as cliché as always and forever  
Suffocating my heart with temporary and never  
While my mind rationalized your actions  
My chest beats only in fractions  
How does one catch breath in such a frozen air?  
As my eyes watch you turn away without a care.  
Your words echo in my mind  
As I replay each memory, looking for a sign.  
Where did I misstep? Was it something I did or said?  
But the reason doesn't matter, because you've pronounced this love now dead.

I thought,  
I fought,  
I sought,  
And I caught,  
Just words.

Just empty words that were caught on the wind

# *The Witch of Westerlan*

*By Michael Kiley*

A cool summer breeze flows through the forest, rustling the leaves as the sun shines from above. The breeze slows as it approaches a lone cabin, gently flowing around the building and almost caressing the flowers and plants in the garden.

"Ah, Araphon. I see you have come to visit my abode once again," says the young witch on her front porch.

"Oh Lori, must you be so formal with me?" responds Araphon as she hovers with her broom in front of Lori.

"You do not need my permission to land, High Wicken Araphon. The pleasure should be mine." Lori stands with a cup of tea cusped in her hands. The wind calms as Araphon stares at the cup with widened eyes. "You really can't help yourself, can you?"

"Nope," replies Lori in a bubbly tone. "Well, since you are staring, would you like to come inside?"

"Gladly," replies Araphon with a smile. She lands gently on the grass in front of the house. The house is surrounded by overgrown plants, two gardens on the sides growing multiple types of herbs and vegetables. "Already inside, as expected." She walks up to the porch, noticing the workmanship on the wood. She looks around at the porch seeing a lovely little table and three chairs. "So cozy, I wonder how long it took her to design this."

"Oh, not too long. A few days perhaps," replies Lori

while opening the front door and handing Araphon a cup of tea. She smiles, happy to see her closest companion once again.

"Thank you, Lori," says Araphon while trying to hide a small smile.

"Well, come on in, Ara. It has been way too long as you know." The two walk into the home as Lori guides Ara to the living room. She motions for Ara to sit down as she sits down.

"I'm sorry I haven't visited recently; work on the council has been very stressful. They are trying to build up a new class system in Gala. It is total bull; they should be trying to integrate those who want to join instead of shoving them to the bottom of the order for not agreeing to join earlier! The audacity! Luckily there are more council members who are opposed to such a thing than there are supporters," says Ara as she realizes that she just blurted out such things instead of trying to catch up first. "I'm so sorry."

"Ah, don't say another word."

"But..."

"Upupup, no more. You know how long it has been since we last saw each other?"

"I... I think it has been eight months."

"Seven and a half to be precise, and I can tell you haven't changed at all."

Ara looks down at her cup and sinks down a little. She thinks to herself, I've been so selfish.

Lori walks over and sits down next to Ara, putting her tea on the table in front of her. She closes her eyes and says in her mind, she is so wrapped up in her thoughts, she worries too much but at least her heart is in the right place and she can finally make the differences she always wanted to. Lori leans in and wraps her arms around Ara. Ara jolts a little in her seat as she does not see Lori sitting down next to her. She leans her head onto Lori's saying softly, "Thank you."

Lori replies, "Your best qualities are still shining, you know. That is what I had meant. Plus, you look the same as well. I'm going to guess the fashion of the Gala Elite hasn't hit you yet," says Lori softly.

"No, not yet at least. I was hoping to change up my hair at least before I came, but that didn't happen."

"I like it."

"You always have, even when it was a complete mess."

"It's because it's on you, so it always looks good."

"That's not how that works."

"Yes, it is, now stop ruining the moment."

Ara smiles and softly replies, "Fine."

Lori unwraps her arms, grabs her tea from the table, and takes a sip saying, "You know that is why I never joined? Hell, it's why I moved even further away. It was too much change, bickering. The life I live out here is calm, peaceful, and almost carefree. The potions I can make help with money. I've

actually been able to make two potions blindfolded now."

"I've always been jealous of it out here. Also, no way. What are they even?"

"You could always come and live out here, you know. I've got room for a second person in this house. You would have to learn to not kill my plants though."

"I wish I could take you up on that offer; however, the commute to Gala is long."

"Two days."

"Yeah, long. Now, tell me what potions you can make blindfolded!" Ara is rocking gently with excitement.

"Well, first is the Falden potion. It aids in the healing process of bodily tissue; however, it does not heal up internal organs for some reason. I make those for a small-town hospital about half a day's journey by broom from here. Pay is good for it and it gets them by, luckily. The second is Vega's Aroma."

"Wait, you make love potions on the regular?!"

"Uh... not exactly. Vega's Aroma is simply an aphrodisiac as well as a sensory enhancer."

"Ah, so who do you sell those too exactly?"

"Well, there are quite a few general stores in the surrounding area, so I asked if they wanted to start selling some. They agreed and it has been successful to say the least. I honestly think I make them stronger than they should be; however, I never tried any, so I wouldn't know."

"That sounds quite interesting. I kind of want to try it now, to see how sensitive it makes my senses well...sensitive."

Lori gives a side smile and glance at Ara saying, "Do you remember our academy days? Never allow a fellow Witch or Warlock to test a potion by themselves."

"Oh, so you would have to watch me the entire time?"

"To just make sure you'll be alright, so don't get any ideas."

Lori looks down into her tea, "So, have you gotten any new laws or reforms passed?"

"Ah, back to business. Sorry for making you uncomfortable..."

"You didn't, just caught off guard. Back to the question." Lori pours more tea into her cup and moves the pot towards Ara.

"Right, I have actually managed to get a law passed. It was one I wanted to get passed when I was younger. Businesses are not allowed to discriminate based on gender, familiar, or previous social class, if applicable."

"Wait, that wasn't a law already? I thought it would be, but it should be enforced even if it wasn't a law. That kind of discrimination is messed up. I'm glad you got it passed."

"Me too, that stuff happens so much in Gala." Ara looks down at her hands as she notices she is running her thumb up and down her other thumb.

"Have you met anyone? In Gala, there has got to be

plenty of 'eligible' bachelors."

"I tried; nothing has really felt like an actual connection yet, so nothing serious. How about you, or have you already decided to remain forever alone in this cabin?"

"Honestly, I haven't met anyone who really gets me. I have thought about staying alone, but where is the fun in that?" Lori smiles as she closes her eyes, remembering an old memory. "Oh, dumb question but how long do you plan on staying out here?"

"Well, the council is on recess for about two weeks. So, I want to say during that time until I need to travel back. Would that be okay?"

"Wow, that is quite the time to have off. You'll be able to stay here, but you will be learning some things if you do. Mainly how not to kill my plants."

"I killed one plant back at the academy."

"You killed my entire window garden, twice. Not to mention my UV garden, once."

"I remember when you locked me out of that room; you were so mad."

"Yeah, I was, so please listen this time, yeah?"

"Yeah." Ara pours more tea into her cup. The tea steams with heat as it is poured in. She places the teapot down back on the table. "So, may I have a tour of the abode?"

Lori looks up while sipping her tea, "Certainly." She stands and motions for Ara to stand. Ara places her tea down and follows.

"Well, first up is the living room. It has a nice fireplace in the corner, perfect for aiding in the cooking of some recipes. All the books here are just casual reading. The table is quite spectacular and quality, especially since I got it for free. The sofa and recliner are equally comfortable," says Lori as she points around the room. The two move through the opened-up wall. Lori begins to point and say, "This is the kitchen. Nothing as fancy as the stuff in Gala, but it all works most of the time. The cabinets on top are full of food, respectively labeled. Perfect for your height."

"Ah yeah, perfectly out of reach."

"Maybe. The pots and pans are next to the stove. The plates are on the left wall cabinets. The glassware is spread around the sink. Silverware is in the drawers under the sink."

Ara looks around and notices quite a few plants inside, herbaceous plants to be specific. She continues to look at the plants and says timidly, "Hey Lori, isn't it dangerous to keep that plant around your food?"

Lori turns around and notices what she is talking about. "Ah, *Conium maculatum*, or as you know it, Hemlock. I suppose it can be quite dangerous, but I have my uses."

"Lori, that could kill you."

"It could if it were actually Hemlock. It is a special genus of carrot. The carrot itself doesn't actually develop normally; it develops into a thin root system and due to that drastic change, the coloration is affected and makes it quite similar to Hemlock."

"So, it's not going to kill you?"

"No, well unless I put an animation spell on it, and it tries to strangle me. Surprisingly, that wouldn't be the first time. However, I do have Hemlock growing in a greenhouse along with a few other 'non-friendly' plants."

Ara looks at Lori with a worried expression as Lori responds with a look of calm and indifference saying, "I'm careful with them, and I need them for a few potions I make on special occasions. For instance, since I know what you'll ask, I use it to help local hunters catch and subdue large predators that are endangering the local towns."

"Huh, that is a pretty good cause. So, it doesn't kill them outright?"

"No, it is dosed right so it only makes them incapacitated. Though the animal in question will feel horrible for a bit no doubt. However, there were early times in which the hunters would keep reserve batches and use too much, killing the poor thing."

"Oh no, that is horrible!" says Ara in a somber tone.

"Yeah, but when I heard about it, I threatened them that if they did that again, I would no longer supply them. That made them listen."

"But wait, why don't they just buy it straight from Gala? I know many stores don't care about those who buy it."

"Ah, you see. I dabble in the barter system. I give them potent poison and, in exchange, they give me the bones that aren't used. I used those bones to give to the fishermen because they use them for easy hooks. I then get fish in exchange for hooks. Easy deals for food. Those same potions, or brews as they call them here, sell for way more than they

are worth in Gala. Add the travel time and it just isn't worth it."

"Wow, I never took you for the business type, Lori. I'm very impressed. But how do you earn money?"

"Ah, that would be from the hospital. Falden's Potion is priced decently here."

"They say that in Gala too, yet the price exceeds four hundred and thirty Lichten. How much does it cost here?"

Lori almost spits out her tea and says, "Four hundred and thirty! I sell it to them here for seventy-five Lichten when I'm low on material. Why is it so expensive in Gala? Are they insane?"

Ara stifles a cackle and replies, "Sadly, it has kept going up for no reason in Gala. Along with everything else. It really is getting hard to live there, but with a seat on the Council, I'm able to afford a nice small home and save up plenty for later. Not to mention help lower the costs for the common Witch and Warlock."

"You always had a good soul. When are you going to let me steal it?"

"One day, but not today, Lori," replies Ara in a mocking tone.

Lori turns around and says, "Darn, well come on. The rest of the tour awaits." She walks into the next room and spreads out her arms saying, "Welcome to the Lori Library!" Lori turns around smiling; a joyful energy radiates from her.

Ara responds by smiling and saying, "You're really happy about the name I see; it is quite clever you know."

Lori chuckles as she cups her hands and replies with a tilted head saying, "Yeah, very clever." She closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, and exhales. "This room holds many texts on how to properly be a Witch, the history of magic, the many theories on how magic formed, why magic only chooses certain people, the possibility of normal people learning magic without passing any preliminary tests for intrinsic magic, astrology, horticulture, herbology, cookbooks, sci-fi novels and novellas, astronomy, and a few high fantasy stories. You are free to browse, just put them back where you found them."

Ara scans the room for a minute and finds a book that stands out among the rest. She walks over to it and picks it out: *The Fires of Heart and Home: The Romantic adventure of A Witch and A Northman*. Ara has a slightly confused look on her face and turns to Lori who is scanning her bookshelves. "Hey, Lori. I didn't know you were one for romance books."

Lori turns around with wide eyes thinking, Oh no! Why did I leave that one out? I knew she was coming today! *Oh, she won't let this one down, I just know it!* Lori puts her hand behind her head, scratching the back of it, saying in a slightly panicked and nervous voice, "I'm not, as you know. I bought a mass of books; I guess I accidentally grabbed that then."

Ara looks down at it and replies, "Yeah, I get it. You do tend to start losing track of things when in large quantities. Do you mind if I read it then? It has been a while since I was able to read a good romance."

"Sure thing. Oh, I did forget to say this, but nice satchel! It looks like it was designed in Breach, but that place is closed off to non-Breach folk. A shame it is, as Breach is absolutely stunning!"

"I know you've always wanted to visit; it is almost

like a new planet with how diverse the ecosystem is. We had a representative from Breach visit Gala to discuss trade agreements, and I was assigned the deal. The deal was successful because it was truly just a formality to renew the previous trade agreement. He gifted me the satchel as was a custom of Breach, in hopes it would foster good will for the two nations."

"Can I hold it?" Lori asks timidly, admiring the unique designs.

"Sure," replies Ara with a soft smile. She thinks to herself, *For someone who lives in such a rare place and studied all about cultures and many other topics in University, she is still absolutely amazed by the small things. I'd say she'd marry it if she could, based on her look.* You always were a joyful spirit, I missed it. She unshoulders the bag from herself and hands it over.

Lori holds it in her hands and mumbles, "There is no way."

"What?" replies Ara

Lori's eyes light up and she gasps saying, "Ara, I want you to see this, but you are going to think this is crazy."

"Lori, we live in a society where magic is real."

"I know, this is something you may have only heard of once in school."

"Go on."

Lori closes her eyes and places one hand on top and bottom of the satchel and says, "I unbind the satchel by the rite of Alchala. Born from the sands of Herophenous. By this rite I unbind the seal hidden to the unknown. I break the oath of the master before you and bind you to a new master." She opens her eyes and says, "Araphon Petra, I bind this satchel to you. I also bind this satchel to Laura Fresea." The room begins to darken as the satchel glows. Unknown symbols flutter around the satchel and Lori. Ara attempts to move yet can't. She thinks *What is happening, this is unlike anything I've seen before. What is she doing, this could kill us?* The strange symbols float around Ara, and the room grows dark and trembles. The satchel glows a sinister red, and then subsides as the room stops trembling. The symbols disappear, and Ara can move again.

"Lori, what on terra was that! I couldn't move!"

Lori collapses into a chair behind her and drops the satchel onto the floor.

Ara rushes over to her side saying, "Oh no, can you hear me!? Are you okay!?"

*"The room begins to darken as the satchel glows. Unknown symbols flutter around the satchel and Lori. Ara attempts to move yet can't."*

Lori takes a deep breath and puts a hand on Ara's head saying, "No need to worry. That kind of magic has not been seen in millennia, at least in Gala. Also, yes, I'm okay. If you remember from our Second-year enchanting class, magic is like a muscle. I haven't worked on this one and did the equivalent of pulling a muscle. I probably should have explained what was going to happen before I started with the disenchantment and re-enchantment. Sorry."

"Do you need anything? You look drained."

"Yeah, a glass of water. That took a lot more energy than I thought it would."

"Okay, just stay here."

"Can't really move too well, so no worries."

Ara gets up and rushes into the kitchen, looking around the sink to find a large glass to fill with water. "Oh, come on, there's got to be a bigger one than this." She opens up the cabinet next to the sink and finds an old drinking stein. "Perfect," she remarks as she turns on the faucet. The cool water flows into the stein and Ara holds it with her second hand as it is heavy. She pulls the stein away and turns off the faucet with her elbow. Ara looks into the doorway and notices Lori leaning in the doorway looking drained still. "Lori, I told you to stay put. I was coming back."

"This is my house, you know. Despite my appearance, I am quite resilient," says Lori with a smirk.

"You know, if our roles were reversed, and I said that, you would have literally dragged me back into the chair or to bed so that I could rest. Mind you with the stein in hand."

"Well, next stop on the tour was going to be the

bedroom. So, if you would follow me, you could live out your fantasy of finally being stronger than me."

"Of course, only you would think the first thing I would do if I were stronger is put you on the bed," Ara chuckles.

Lori turns around and sticks up her index finger stating, "Your words, not mine."

"I hate you."

"I missed all of your personality too."

Lori walks up a small staircase and enters her bedroom. Ara is a few steps behind her and asks, "So, is this where the magic happens?"

"I swear you always made the worst puns, but... maybe. I'm going to lay down."

"No, you aren't, you need to have water first."

"Correction, I will lay down in my bed as you will have a futile attempt to give me water."

"Why are you somehow more stubborn when tired, or is this just a test?"

"Honestly, both."

Lori sits down on the bed as Ara pulls up a chair next to the bed. Ara hands Lori the stein and says, "I noticed there is a lack of reception out here. Do you think we can head into the nearest town? I need to make contact with the Council."

Lori tilts her head and replies, "Sure, it must be important seeing as you didn't want to talk about work earlier. Is everything okay there?"

Ara looks down and reassures Lori by saying, "Yeah, everything is okay there. I work with Belon, a High Wicken of the Council. He teaches at some of the Universities in his free time. An overall good guy, he wanted to make sure I arrived safely at my destination.

"Well, that is kind of him. Did you tell him where you were going?" Lori asks while looking slightly concerned.

Ara chuckles, "No, all I let him know is that I will be visiting family during our break as I needed a break from Gala. You do not have to worry; this place is still off the maps."

Lori cracks a smile and responds, "Good, I'd hate to see this place be raided by Galan Enforcers."

"The Bureau of Magical Compliance has been cracking down lately. There has even been new legislation giving them more freedom than ever before. It is getting scary how much power they hold. There has been rumor of magic suppression being researched."

"Did you know that's actually possible?"

Ara looks up with an expression of disbelief. "You cannot be serious, right? Please tell me you are pulling my leg."

Lori shakes her head and says, "I wish it weren't true. Ancient texts describe a potion that could nullify the innate properties of the ruling class. Back in those times the ruling class was thought to be magic users, though their magic was limited and arcane. From what I can gather, most historians believe this potion was a potent tranquilizer. I don't know why though; it seems obvious that it is

talking about magic."

"Did you say, limited and arcane? I thought magic had always existed in its current form?"

"Ah, I forget they didn't teach us that magic is like the seasons. It changes form, though it seems that magic used to not exist within our population. Instead, it seemingly blessed us early in written history and has only grown stronger since then."

"How does this relate to the seasons?"

Lori looks at Ara with a slightly annoyed expression. "I was getting there. Think of it like when humanity was first blessed by magic, it was weak and untamed, yet common as if it was just harvested, like Fall. The Winter saw a drastic decrease in the number of magic users, yet those blessed were powerful and cold in personality like Winter. We currently reside in Spring; magic is plentiful in the number of users with new abilities never seen before. The magic is blooming and has been for 1,100 years. I feel as if we are about to change seasons."

"To Summer, but what will that do to our magic? Do you think it will become more powerful than anything we have seen before?"

"I do, and I think that will cause problems in Gala especially. Since magic is random, a large influx in the number of magic users and the strength of those users could mean a complete social reform. For better or worse, it will be a trying time. If it happens like that of course." Lori takes a sip from the stein and puts it down. She looks to Ara and says, "Get some sleep. I'll take you to Penopt tomorrow. We can talk more after you contacted the Council, so get some sleep." Lori smiles and lays down under her sheets.

Ara replies "Sounds good, see you tomorrow." She walks downstairs and lays down on the couch with a blanket over her.

### Meanwhile in Gala

A group of three wizards walk into a meeting room inside the Bureau of Magical Compliance. The group kneel before a mysterious figure sitting down at the head of the table.

The mysterious voice beckons, "What do you have to report?"

The leader of the group responds, "My Lord, the research has stalled on Project Tide. The researchers say there is too little to go upon as we do not understand magic well enough."

The voice responds, "I see. Well, let them know that if they don't show results soon, then they will be terminated."

"Yes, my Lord."

"I have a new order for you. There is a new Council member, she seeks change that would upset my plans. I need you to find her and bring her back to me, alive if possible. If you cannot handle her, do not bother coming back. She was last seen heading towards the Territory of Westerlan. A small territory, nothing of note."

"Yes, my Lord. We will take care of her."

"Now leave, complete your mission. 'Til then, gentlemen."

The three wizards stand up and walk out of the room. The men dressed in tattered clothes and bearing a unique symbol upon their cloaks vanish from the building in a spark of green.

### Back at Lori's home

Lori puts on her backpack, which is packed with food and water along with some potions. Ara looks over as she puts her satchel over her shoulder and says, "That seems like a lot considering we are only going for a short trip to the town."

Lori agrees and says, "Yes, it is, but I have my reasons. The road to the town isn't the safest and occasionally travelers need assistance, so I pack extra just in case."

"Well, that is quite the reason. Always caring for others even if it puts your own safety in jeopardy. I still do not see why you want my soul so much. You have a solid one for yourself."

"Yeah, but what if I had two good souls? That would be mildly better. Plus, then I would have your political nature. Though your structured life is a tad annoying, so I guess you can keep it," replies Lori while smirking at Ara.

Ara rolls her eyes and walks towards the door, "I am waiting on you."

Lori replies, "Say that one more time and I'll take even longer. Anyways, I'm ready, so let's get going." The two witches walk out the door and grab their brooms, which were resting against the house. Lori immediately hops onto her broom and flips upside down as she floats off of her porch, "Come on Ara, let's see if you can keep up."

Ara runs off the porch, leaps into the air with her broom, and flies past Lori. "I think you need to catch up Lori. There is a first time for everything, including losing."

Lori flips right side up and rockets towards Ara saying, "The day I lose to you is the day I give

up flying, and we both know that isn't going to happen."

Lori and Ara fly in tandem for miles over the lush green forest. The canopy is low as is usual in the flat plains west of Gala, but the forest is unusually vibrant for the time of year. In Gala it is the very end of winter; the trees are still barren with the sole exception of the giant evergreen tree in the center of the kingdom. Songbirds flutter in and out of the canopy, singing their love melody. Two blackbirds fly next to the two witches before flying off into the expansive forest. Mountains flank the forest to the North and South, covered by snowcapped peaks. The sun slowly reaches its peak in the sky as the forest shimmers in shades of green, blue, red, and violet. Ara yells out, "What is happening to the forest? It looks like it is changing colors rapidly. Tell me you are seeing this, Lori."

Lori looks at the expansive canopy as it shimmers, "I see it. I don't have any answers, but it is beautiful. All I know is that this is no ordinary forest; there is something mystical about it. I wonder if it can channel magic in some way, subtle and without thought. Pure flow of magic."

"Do you think it can?"

"Well, it is a color-changing forest, so possibly, but I don't have any books describing this phenomenon. I bet you if there is any place that has them, it is Breach. That place has to be a trove of knowledge."

"Lori, you and I both know we cannot just waltz into Breach. It would be a miracle if they even heard our case for entering."

"I know Ara, I know. There has to be a way in, there always is. We need to hurry and get to the town." Lori and Ara lean forward on their brooms

as they increase in speed, soaring over the canopy as it fades back to green. The town appears on the horizon. A clocktower stands tall above the trees. The two reach the edge of the town when they decide to slow down.

"We need to go low, just below rooftop level. The locals have a weird law about that, and don't ask because I have no idea," says Lori as she begins to slowly descend towards the rooftops. Ara follows close behind her to not lose her.

Ara asks Lori, "Do you know where I can contact the Council here? Preferably someplace private."

Lori responds, "Yeah, the library has a long-range communications room. It is usually free. Just follow me." She snakes through streets with Ara close behind. A few minutes pass before they arrive at the library. The building is nearly overrun with vines and shrubbery, yet still fully functional. The two land and walk into the building. Lori looks around for the librarian, so she can check the status of the communication room.

"Oh, hello deary. You had me worried. It has been quite a while since you stopped by. Did you need something?" says an old woman's voice.

"Mary, my friend here needs to use the communication room. Is it available?" asks Lori.

"You are just in luck, as it is free. It is just down the hall, fifth door on the right. It should be easy to find."

Ara replies, "Thank you ma'am. I really appreciate it." She walks down the hall towards the room.

Mary walks to her book cart and begins sorting it when she asks, "So deary, who is the friend? I can

see that you two are close.”

“How can you tell?” replies Lori in a curious tone.

“Simple deary. You never keep company around. Whilst friendly to all those around these parts, you tend to be alone. Seeing you with company is a nice change of pace. So, answer the question, who is she?”

“She is one of the only close friends I’ve had. We met the summer before University in Gala. We had just moved into the dorm and kind of clicked. It felt right to be around her, so we got close. She actually kept me out of a few fights. We have been close ever since, but because of our lines of work, we rarely see each other.”

“Ah, she sounds like a wonderful girl. A warm soul, and one that is willing to stick with you through the worst of it. Those people are hard to find.”

“I have a question, Mary. Try as I might, it is hard to find information on why Breach is at odds with Gala. Do you by chance know why?”

Mary lets out a sigh and says, “It is an interesting story. The short version is that a few hundred years ago Gala and Breach were in the middle of a trade deal. The kingdoms were both open to each other, but travel was hard due to the sheer distance the journey required. During the trade deal, Gala soldiers, under orders from the King, executed the delegates, except one. This was a

show of power, hoping Breach would cave in and give a more favorable deal as to avoid war. Breach did the only thing they could and offered a better trade deal, heavily favoring Gala. This deal is still in effect today, but a lot less severe on Breach. Since then, Breach also closed its borders officially and recalled most of the books about the kingdom. A few books survived to this day, but no one knows where they are.”

Lori looks at Mary with an expression of shock and says, “No wonder they don’t teach us about that in school. That is so messed up. I don’t blame them for closing up shop honestly.”

“So much knowledge lost to the rest of the world,” Mary says in a somber tone.

Lori looks over her shoulder and says, “I’m going to see how it’s going with the communication room.”

“Lori, do be safe with that old magic by the way. I noticed the satchel she has, and your enchantment mark seemed to be on it. That is dangerous, even to skilled users.”

“I will, Mary. I will.” Lori walks down the hall to the communication room and sees Ara’s broom leaning against the door. She overhears a male voice saying, “Araphon, we can’t wait to see you back when the Council resumes. ‘Til then, Araphon.”

Lori thinks to herself, *That must be Belon, the guy she works with. Smooth voice, that must be*

*“The group kneel before a mysterious figure sitting down at the head of the table.*

*The mysterious voice beckons, ‘What do you have to report?’”*

*persuasive inside the Council meetings.*

Ara opens the door and walks out of the room muttering to herself, not noticing Lori to her side. She mutters, "That went well. Good to know everything is not collapsing behind me."

"You seem chipper. I'll assume it was good news?" Lori interjects whilst walking up behind Ara.

Ara jumps slightly and turns around saying, "Lori, for Terra's sake please do not do that. You know I scare easily." Ara has an expression of annoyance on her face.

Lori tries to hide a smile as she apologizes saying, "I know you scare easy. That wasn't my intent this time. Just hoping everything went well."

Ara replies, "Well, the senior members of the council are having a meeting in a few days, so it does not apply to me. I am good to stay as long as Gala doesn't burn down."

"Well, I certainly hope it doesn't burn. I've been waiting for time with you for a while. I mean it is... wait. You just used a contraction. You don't use those normally. Are you nervous?" Lori asks while tilting her head slightly.

Ara looks down and replies, "To be frank, yes. The senior members have the authority to declare an emergency vote at any time. This allows those in the chambers to vote on an issue. Though it can be abused, and I am worried that they will abuse the power to pass a set of 'Gala First' laws. It would cut off trade to and from Breach and close off the borders entirely. I know there are many on the council who are opposed to the idea as it is radical and will only serve to destabilize the kingdom."

Lori lets out a sigh and responds, "That would

destroy what Gala stood for originally. You can't let that happen Ara."

"I will not, for as long as I live and am a part of the Council." Ara reaches into her satchel and pulls out a notebook. She opens it and flips through the pages attempting to find something. "Ah, there it is. Senior Representative Justinian Maidlock. He was the one who gifted me the satchel in the first place. He said that if I ever wanted to talk, then his door was open. I had forgotten that until now."

Lori leans in and grabs Ara's shoulders saying, "You have a way into Breach! We need to go, for both of us."

"Why does this apply to both of us?"

"You don't see it, do you? This applies to you because you may be able to help secure Gala's future. Think of it this way, you want to make sure the Council doesn't pass those laws, right?"

"Right."

"If you can broker a substantial treaty with Breach, the citizens of Gala would see Breach as an ally. This would make the passing of those laws very hard to justify and could lead to those responsible for the laws! This could work for you big time."

"That makes sense, though it could also lead to worsened diplomatic relations between us if things go south somehow."

Lori looks at Ara with an exasperated look saying, "You know, I forgot you could be a real downer sometimes. But that's alright, if we are to meet with representatives from Breach, we need to go to Breach."

Ara places her hand atop Lori's and says, "We will

need supplies, as I think it is a three-day journey from here. We should start preparing."

Lori closes her eyes and leans her head down saying, "Let's go, I should have most of the necessary supplies at the house."

Ara gestures for Lori to lead the way out of the library. Lori and Ara walk back to the front desk where they meet Mary once again. Lori stops and says, "Hey Mary, I will see you here at the usual time. This time I won't forget the cookies."

Mary looks up and replies, "Forget? Haha! I know you ate them. Make double if you plan on doing it again. I will see you then and do be careful on your trip. It may be dangerous with the changing of the seasons."

Lori tilts her head and says, "The changing of the seasons?"

Mary chuckles and says, "From winter to spring. The equinox has not arrived yet, darling. I look forward to the plants around the town coming back to life."

"Oh, yeah that makes sense. I thought for a second that you meant something else," Lori sighs.

"We best be on our way; it was nice meeting you, Mary," says Ara as she grabs Lori's forearm and pulls her to the outside where their brooms are. "We should head on back. Plus, you get to look at the forest again. We can see if anything has changed."

"Agreed, I'm actually a little tired. Once I pack, I am going to sleep," Lori says as she sits on her broom.

"That sounds like a plan. We can make a list on the way there. Once we get back, I will put on

some tea." The two float down to the rooftops and begin flying towards Lori's home as the clocktower chimes. The chime sounds once and then the sound distorts heavily.

"That can't be good, Ara what do you think?"

"I have no idea; it would seem as if someone put a localized distortion spell in the clocktower. Though, I thought you were the only Witch here." Ara replies

"I thought so too. Times are certainly strange. Anyway, let's get back. It's getting dark soon." Lori pulls off in front of Ara and speeds up as they exit the town's limits. Ara follows close behind as they pull off above the tree line. The trees are now back to their natural green hue instead of shimmering violet and blue.

Ara rides up next to Lori and says, "The trees seem back to normal, hopefully we can find some answers in Breach."

Lori replies, "Hopefully, they should have some old texts relating to the subject." She looks down to the trees, contemplating if there actually are any answers to this topic.

"Lori, it is okay. Even if we do not find out all the answers we need, we can still study it on our own. It will be okay."

"Since when did you give the heartfelt talks?" Lori says with a chuckle.

"Ever since you started looking gloomy," Ara replies with a small smile.

The two head off through the forest, flying in tandem until they reach the house just as the sun sets over the horizon.

"Alright, now I want to know something. Just how much have your broom skills improved since University?"

"Brooms are not allowed in many sections of the inner city of Gala. Sadly, that means I have not had time to practice very much," replies Ara as she glides down to house.

"That is unbelievable, but why haven't you gone out to the outskirts and practiced there? I mean, how else would you be able to do this?" Lori replies as she flies down past Ara at high speed. She pulls up into a loop and kicks off her broom. The broom completes the loop as Lori flips and lands standing up on her broom. She glides down from there and bows as she approaches Ara who has a smirk on her face. "Ah, I see you still love to show off on that thing."

Lori sits cross saddle on her broom and floats next to the porch where Ara is sitting. "Someone has to because I know you never will."

"I am content with my skill," Ara responds

"You seem to be content with a lot of things, including rarely visiting."

"I wish I could visit more; I thought you knew that."

"I know Ara, I know. It is sad you can only come every once and a while. It does get lonely out here."

"That is the cost of living in isolation; though, it is stunning out here. The whole night sky is teeming with stars. It is amazing out here, not to mention the weather and sense of freedom. Low prices, since the only settlements are small towns nearby, and you help the locals with magic potions. It is amazing, especially the infrastructure behind no

magic cities."

"That hasn't changed, always talking about the behind-the-scenes of everything. Though, I don't mind it; it makes you see both sides. I just chose this place because it allowed me to get away from Gala."

"Yeah."

"It wasn't personal. Plus, you could also move out here, you know."

"I cannot, not yet at least. I still have a lot I want to change in Gala."

"That has always been your dream; I'm happy you're following it though." Lori looks down and then hops off her broom saying, "We better head on in. We still have to pack for tomorrow's journey." She walks past Ara and opens the door, heading inside and placing her broom above the doorway. Ara sighs and follows Lori in, leaning her broom against the wall next to the door.

"I am going to put on the tea. Make sure to write that list with everything we need," Ara says as she walks into the kitchen.

"Oh boy, you're leaving me to do the planning. This'll be fun, no doubt," Lori replies as she lays down on her couch, notebook in hand. She says to herself quietly, "All right, so we're going to need the basics: food, water, tent, sleeping bags or maybe two blankets. Finally, an extra change of clothes. That seems about it really." She places the notebook on the table beside her and leans her head back and closes her eyes, resting on a pillow.

Ara walks into the living room and over to the table. She picks up the notebook and sits down on

the couch next to Lori. She says quietly, "Ah yes, the bare minimum and nothing particular. What kind of food are we bringing? How big is the tent? You never know with her." She shakes her head and pulls out a map. "Let me see, Breach is west of Gala. It is about five days' worth of flying. We are located here, around the midway point, between the two. So, if we fly north-by-northwest, we should arrive at the border city of Hazen in approximately two days if we fly for around nine hours." The teapot begins to whistle from the kitchen as Ara draws a flight path to Hazen. "Oh drat." Ara stands up and rushes to the teapot, flipping the cap open on the spout to make the whistling stop. She slides it over to a cold burner and looks for cups. "Now, let me see. Where does she keep her tea?"

Ara opens drawer after drawer looking for the tea. "Ah, found it. What does she have?" She looks through the tea and grabs a small jar of loose-leaf tea. "Perfect." Ara pours out a small amount of tea into a kettle and walks away to let the tea steep. She sits back down at her map and contemplates where they could stop to rest on their first night. "This looks like a good area: a large glade just after the halfway point. From there, we should be able to make it to Hazen just before nightfall at the latest," Ara says to herself. She walks back to the kitchen saying, "Tea should be ready."

Lori opens her eyes and sits up seeing a map out on the table. "Ah, ever the planner. Let's see what she plotted out." She rotates the map to face her and looks at the flight path. Lori says, "Well, it's a good path, though I doubt we will make it to the glade in time. She seems confident in her ability, so I won't question it." She looks over at her notes, seeing that Ara commented on her original list. Lori smiles and shakes her head.

Ara comes in from the kitchen holding a teapot and

two cups. Lori reaches out her hand, ready to grab a cup. Ara says, "Could you at least wait for me to put down the teapot first?" as she walks around the couch.

"Nope, but I guess I'll make an exception this time." Lori sits back and sighs commenting, "You know, it can be quite annoying to plan out every little detail of a trip, especially when you try to plan out the food."

Ara hands Lori a cup of tea and says, "Hey, that is why I usually plan out the trips."

Lori grabs the cup replying, "Yeah, you used to, but I think your planning skills are bit rusty."

Ara scoffs as she sits down. "Like you can talk, you barely planned anything."

"Ah, you see my dear, Araphon, I go where the wind takes me. Plus, I already knew which way to go to reach Hazen," replies Lori as she sips her tea.

"Oho, two can play at that, Lori," Ara chuckles

"Wow, you are the worst," laughs Lori. She sips her tea again and says, "I'm glad you remembered my favorite tea."

Ara replies, "It was the only type you had."

Lori snaps her fingers saying, "Exactly."

Ara states, "We do need to pack for our journey though. It should not take long."

"Agreed, let's get packing," responds Lori.

### Meanwhile in Penopt

The three wizards enter the city, walking down the dimly lit streets. One of the wizards asks, "Grange, how do you think we're going to find her? Westerlan is a large territory, though it is sparsely populated. There is no promise we're going to find her before she goes back to Gala."

"Aster well will find her. We must; if not, Belon will have our heads. Go search the local inns. Trema, I want you with me. We are going to check out the library. It has the only communication room around so that could give us a lead."

Aster nods her head and walks off towards the nearest inn. She says to the group as she walks off, "Good luck. We will meet beneath the bell tower when we are done."

Grange and Trema nod their heads in agreement and head off to the library.

### The Next Morning

Lori places a pack full of supplies on her broom and straps on a tent and sleeping bag, acting as back support on the broom. "Come on, we should leave soon."

Ara does the same as Lori and lays her satchel across her shoulder. "You were the one who forgot to pack some extra supplies; I was ready to leave at sunrise."

Lori waves her off saying, "Yeah yeah, now let's go. It's a long trip to the glade." She hops on her broom and begins to take off.

"It is only a ten-hour journey," Ara replies as she hops on her broom and takes off.

"Nine if you can boost your broom's magic," remarks Lori

"I doubt even you could do that for very long," replies Ara as the two begin flying towards their destination.

"You're right, that takes a lot of magic tolerance to even attempt."

"I wonder why it is so hard to boost enchanted objects? It should, in theory, be easier than enchanting."

"In theory yes, but it seems that when once an object is enchanted, it has a certain level of magical tolerance."

"Meaning what, exactly?"

"The higher the tolerance, the more magical energy is needed to attain a higher magical power within the object for a time. Sadly, it isn't permanent."

"That makes sense actually."

"Yeah, tell me about it."

The two fly over the green forest for hours, the forest itself swaying with the wind and occasionally shimmering in brilliant colors like the Aurora. Birds gather in formation with the witches from time to time but fly off to their own home in the endless forest. Lori scans the area ahead and spots a group of people attempting to flag the witches down.

"Ara, we should go down and see what they need," Lori says as she looks to Ara.

Ara thinks for a second before saying, "Are you sure? We may not make it to the glade on time if

we do.”

“I’m sure, now come on.” Lori dives down into the clearing where the group is with Ara close behind. She hops off her broom and leaves it levitating off the ground as she walks to the group asking, “Is everything okay? Why did you flag us down?”

One of the men says, “Oh, thank the stars! Our friend was injured badly during a hunt. He lost a lot of blood, and he is still bleeding. Can you help him?”

Lori replies ecstatically, “Yes, I need my bag, but I should be able to help your friend.”

The man replies, “Thank you so much.” He jogs over to where the group is and tells them the news.

Lori tells Ara as she lands, “Ara, I need you to bring my healers’ bag. You know what it looks like, right?”

Ara hops off next to Lori’s broom, grabs the medium sized bag with a green plus symbol on it, and says, “Already bringing it. What is wrong with him?”

“I’m not sure yet. I assume it’s an artery that was cut. I can fix that with a Falden’s potion, but the blood loss might be too great for the potion to hold off death,” replies Lori as she takes the bag and heads over to the group.

Lori kneels next to the patient who is barely conscious, and she notices his leg is covered in a

blood-soaked bandage. “I’ll need to take this off to access the wound.”

“Do whatever you need to; we trust you,” replies the man.

“For the Witch of Westerlan is fair and just,” states the crowd.

Ara looks confused as she processes what the group just said. She moves closer to Lori as a gesture of protection.

Lori opens her bag and pulls out two small vials and a new cloth bandage. She looks at the patient and closes her eyes for a second before unwrapping the bloody bandage. She fully exposes the wound: a large gash on the interior of the man’s thigh. She looks at the man and says, “This is going to hurt, but it should help you stay alive.” She opens the first vial filled with a viscous purple liquid and slowly pours it into the open wound. A loud hissing sound is made, and the man grimaces in pain. The wound bubbles and forces the blood back into the wound. Lori opens the second vial, this one filled with a less viscous green liquid, and pours it evenly across the wound. She quickly wraps the thigh tightly and firmly. The man once again grimaces in pain and takes deep breaths.

“I need you to keep taking deep, even breaths. Your leg is going to heal up soon; it should be sealed up fully in two hours. For now, the bleeding has stopped.” Lori stands up, places the vials back

*“The broom completes the loop as Lori flips and lands standing up on her broom. She glides down from there and bows as she approaches Ara who has a smirk on her face.”*

into her bag, and looks over to the man she spoke to earlier. "He will be okay, but he must get to a hospital in the next eight hours or else he will die. The closest town should be a four-hour walk, so he should make it."

"Thank you, witch. We are forever grateful for this," says the man as he bows to Lori.

Lori bows back saying, "It is my duty to help those in need. Stay safe on your journey."

Ara stands next to Lori and bows at the man as a sign of respect. Lori and Ara walk away from the group and back to their brooms when Ara asks, "Was it just me who thought that they were a bit creepy?"

"It was a bit creepy to actually be called the Witch of Westerlan, but I guess that comes with the job. I also noticed that you moved closer after they said that," replies Lori as she hops on her broom.

Ara hops on her broom and looks away saying, "I don't know what you mean. I was just getting a better view of what you were doing."

Lori places her hand on Ara's shoulder and says, "Your contractions always give you away, you know. I don't mind you being protective; makes things feel normal again."

Ara looks to Lori and smiles saying, "You and I both know you do not need protecting, but it never hurts."

"Let's go. We still have a bit of travel to go until we make it to the glade," replies Lori as she takes off.

The two travel for a few hours before Ara looks behind her and realizes there are three more

wizards heading their way. She looks to Lori who nods her head, acknowledging that she knows they are being followed. Lori dives down into a small clearing along with Ara. Lori asks Ara, "Did the Council send guards to protect you over the break?"

Ara replies, "No, I have no idea who they are. I do not like this."

Lori grabs a wand from her bag, an ornately carved pattern is present throughout the wand. "I'm not taking any chances here. Unknown wizards following us as we head for Breach? I doubt they want to sell us cookies."

Ara grabs her wand from her side pocket, an elegant floral pattern is carved on the handle. "Cookies, is that the best you could come up with?"

"Oh hush."

The group of three land on the opposing side of the clearing, dismounting from their brooms. Grange, the tallest of the three, walks forward towards the Lori and Ara. He says as he bows, "High Wicken Araphon Petra, it is an honor to meet you."

Ara responds, "Who are you? Why were you following us?"

Grange replies, "Well, he never said you were harsh. Alas, my name is Grange Oresta. My associates are Aster Ysnel and Trema Hazel. We are here to bring you back to Gala."

Lori steps forward, past Ara and says, "Under who's wishes? For it is not her own."

Grange states bluntly, "We are not here for you, so

how about you run along before things get ugly.”

Lori laughs saying, “I’m not leaving without Ara.”

Ara says, “Who demands I return?”

Aster chimes up, “High Wicken Belon.”

Ara replies, “There has to be some mix up; he would not do this.”

Grange says, “There is no mix up. If we have to, we will take you by force.” He takes out a wand from his coat pocket.

Lori tightens her grip on her wand and stands in front of Ara saying, “If you want her, you’ll need to get through me.”

Grange chuckles and stares at Lori saying, “Good.” He points his wand towards Lori and conjures a firebolt, which hurls towards Lori. She redirects the attack towards Aster who barely manages to dodge the attack. Grange shoots a second firebolt, which Lori redirects into the sky.

“So, she can fight. This will be fun.” Grange charges at Lori swiping his wand through the air and conjuring a lightning bolt that curves around Lori as she attempts to block it. It strikes her in the back of the leg, bringing her down to the ground.

Ara conjures a creature of stone which charges at Grange. Aster and Trema run around the creature and attempt to hit Ara while she conjures another spell. She spins her wand in the air above her and points it towards the ground, which creates a bubble that prevents Aster and Trema from attacking. She grabs Lori and feels for a pulse, only feeling a faint beat. “Get up, please get up, Lori. Please!”

Ara stands up and with tears in her eyes, brings down the bubble protecting them, and strikes Aster with a lightning bolt in the stomach, taking her down. The rock creature falls apart as Grange hits it with a shockwave. Ara looks towards Trema and screams as she hits him with a directed shockwave, sending him flying towards the tree line. She turns towards Grange as he hits her with a shockwave, sending her flying. “You should have just given up, Araphon. It would have spared your friend.”

Ara gets back up and holds her side in pain yelling, “I will kill you if you try anything!”

Grange smiles and says, “If only you were fast.” He sends a rock flying from beside Ara. She turns to see it exploding. Grange walks towards her saying, “Good thing Belon does not care if you are dead or alive.” He pulls his wand back over his shoulder, charging up a lightning bolt, when he is hit in the back by a large firebolt that knocks him to the ground. He attempts to stand as Lori approaches, a fire in her eyes as she sets the ground beneath her ablaze. She says, “I will give you one chance to run, or else there’ll be nothing left of you.”

Grange gets up and runs towards his broom with a scared look. Aster and Trema both flee on their brooms.

Lori sinks to her knees as the flames around her extinguish. Ara gets up and holds Lori crying as she says, “I thought you were dead, oh I thought. We still need to get to Breach.”

Lori wraps her arms around Ara saying, “I know; we can seek an audience with their government. Tell them what happened and from there I don’t know, but we will figure it out.”

Ara asks, “How did you do that, the whole flames

thing?"

Lori replies, "I don't know. I felt a surge of magical power there. It was like the planet was exuding magic for a moment. I guess I was the only one affected."

Ara replies, "I guess so. That was amazing to see despite both of us almost dying."

Lori chuckles and says, "I told you they weren't here to sell cookies. Now come on, let's go."

Ara and Lori hop on their brooms and begin to fly towards their destination. They fly over the forest for a day and a half. The forest slowly transforms into a savannah before they reach a desert. On the horizon stands a great wall that covers it. A large town sits before the wall, seemingly an oasis in the desert. Lori sits side saddle on her broom and says to Ara, "There it is: the border town of Hazen. Our ticket into Breach."

Ara responds "Well, what are we waiting for?"

# *A Concept*

*By Natisha Moore*

There is a time  
When hope is set into motion  
Upward standing  
And  
Ability not  
Suppressed instilled at conception  
Explored  
When a student is tasked with pushing the outline  
Laid out before  
Then written  
Expression  
Application

When the question of  
May I learn here  
May I reside my intellect  
Within your hall of higher thinking  
Might I be given the given opportunity to apply my footing  
A time when those tasked with affording  
Lessons  
Once completed  
But again asked for  
Shall have to consider their role on the vast plane

That one of scholarship  
[Integral of continuing]

# *Contributors*

## **Adel Abudayeh**

Adel Abudayeh joined the United States Marine Corps in February of 2001 and was medically retired in March of 2015. During his last hospitalization in 2013, he was introduced to the world of art therapy, starting with clay sculpting, and soon progressed to painting. Since that day, he started healing, and more importantly, he started coping with old memories and working toward catharsis.

## **Donna Brown**

Donna Brown was born in Virginia and spent most of her life there, growing up in a conservative family. She was married in 1986 and went into the ministry with her husband. Along the way they were blessed with five children. She now spends her time pursuing her love of writing.

## **Samantha Cook**

Samantha Cook is a Coastal Carolina Community College student.

## **Owen Hills**

Owen Hills was born in 1993 and has lived in Jacksonville, North Carolina since 2005. His interests include music, cooking, and politics. After dropping out of high school, Owen pursued a musical career running a live music company until 2020. Since COVID-19, Owen has returned to school and shifted his focus to politics.

## **Miya Johnson**

Miya Johnson lives in Hubert, North Carolina, and is currently attending Coastal Carolina Community College in hopes of becoming a public librarian someday. Outside of working and going to school, she enjoys listening to lo-fi and the blues while taking plenty of naps.

## **Michael Kiley**

Michael Kiley is a sophomore at Coastal Carolina Community College and is a graduate of White Oak High School. He lives in Jacksonville, North Carolina with his family and holds interests in horticulture, writing, gaming, and caring for their three dogs.

## **Espana Mack**

Espana Mack was born and raised in Jacksonville, North Carolina. She is currently a student at

Coastal Carolina Community College. In her spare time, she walks the local trails with her son. She is a veteran as well.

### **Codi Mann**

Codi Mann has lived in Jacksonville for the past two years and is currently a student at both Coastal Carolina Community College and the University of North Carolina Wilmington. In her spare time, she likes to hunt and fish with her family, and as a result, she knows her way around the outdoors.

### **Samantha Milan**

Samantha Milan is a Coastal Carolina Community College student.

### **Natisha Moore**

Raised on literature and music, Natisha Moore spends her time not being creative with family and a few close friends. Rural upbringing makes frequent stays in the city a welcome force to the local and liberal arts trained writer, singer, dancer, and actress. Volunteering covers the bulk of her other time.

### **Chastity Mumper**

Chastity Mumper is a current student at Coastal Carolina Community College and is pursuing a degree in the Visual Fine Arts. In her free time during the day, she does art on all different kinds of mediums, and at night she is a competitive gamer who fills her notebook with random words that end up somehow making sense. Her biggest pride is taking joy in the fact that she has a beautiful daughter.

### **Karla Ware**

Karla Ware has lived in Jacksonville, North Carolina for three years and is currently a student at Coastal Carolina Community College. In her spare time, she enjoys crafting home decor and spending time with her English bulldog Bentley.

# *New River Anthology*

Coastal's Student Literary Magazine 2022

---



Submit poems, stories, essays, and artwork to be considered for inclusion in the 2022 magazine by February.

## **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

**Poetry** — up to 5 poems

**Fiction/Nonfiction** — up to 5 pieces of fiction or nonfiction, up to 15 pages per submission

**Artwork** — up to 5 scanned files of artwork or photographs at 300 dpi

[newriveranthology@coastalcarolina.edu](mailto:newriveranthology@coastalcarolina.edu)

If you have any questions or concerns about submissions, please contact:

**Eric Vithalani** (CA104, (910) 938-6195, [vithalanie@coastalcarolina.edu](mailto:vithalanie@coastalcarolina.edu))

**Holly Adcock** (CA119, (910) 938-6134, [adcockh@coastalcarolina.edu](mailto:adcockh@coastalcarolina.edu))



<https://www.coastalcarolina.edu/campus-life/student-showcase/>

All work to be judged by the New River Anthology Board and student editors.

Notification of acceptance — May 2022 Anthology Distribution — November 2022

---

The New River Anthology is a publication of the English Division of Coastal Carolina Community College. All works contained within are the sole copyright of the authors.

