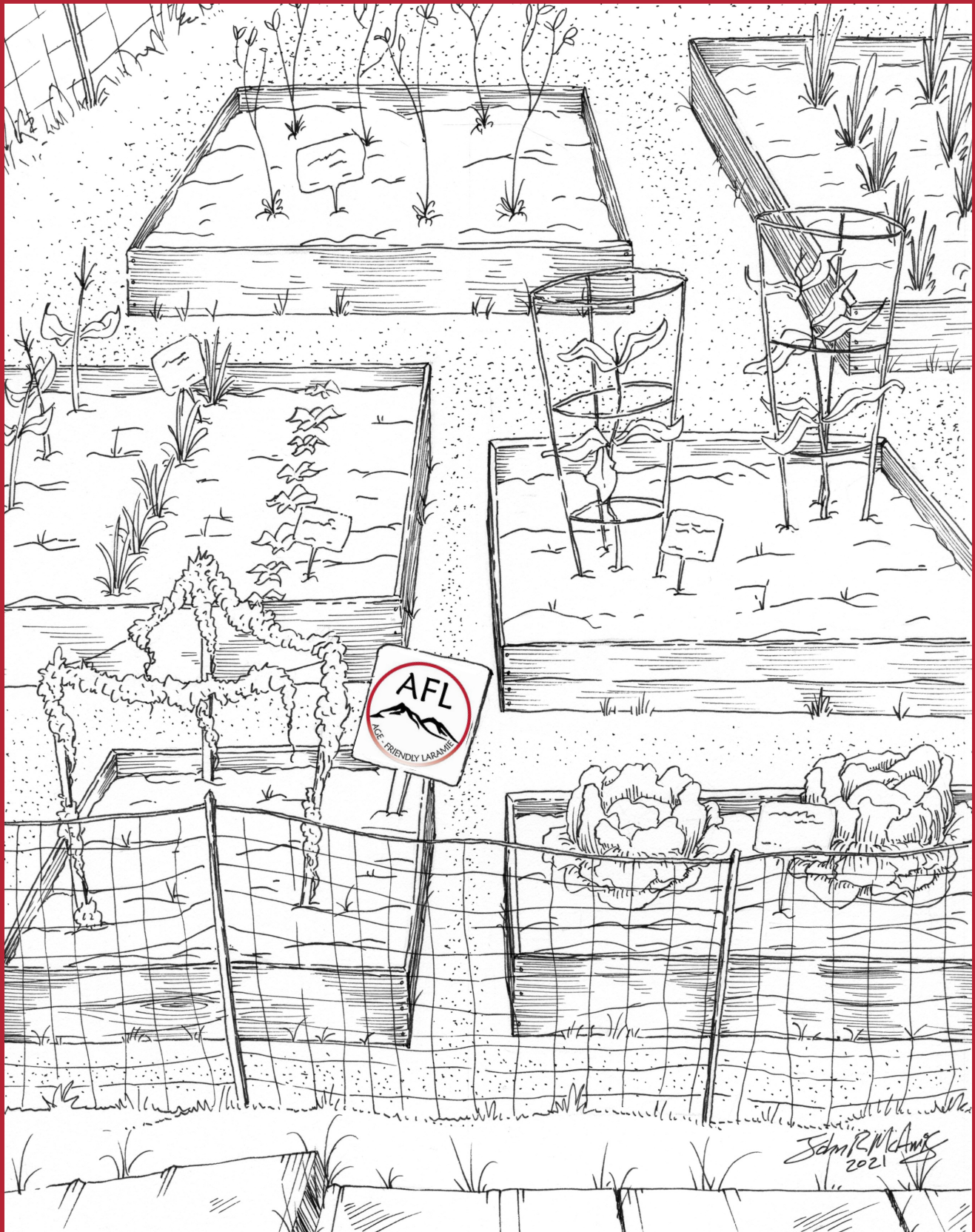


# THE AFL REVIEW

A HOME-GROWN LITERARY JOURNAL  
FALL 2021



AGE-FRIENDLY LARAMIE





# THE AFL REVIEW

A HOME-GROWN LITERARY JOURNAL

---

Lucille Norwood  
Samuel Stagner  
Hollie Sambrooks  
Kimberly Morin  
Bernard Steinman  
Janissa Martinez



***The AFL Review***  
**Volume 1**  
**Fall 2021**

**Cover Drawing Credit: John McAmis**  
**Editor-in-Chief: Janissa Martinez**

***The AFL Review***  
**Age-Friendly Laramie**  
**<https://age-friendlylaramie.org/>**  
**Laramie, WY**

# CONTENTS

5

**I WONDER:** Lucille Norwood  
Third Place Winner

7

**ALWAYS ANIMALS:** Samuel Stagner

13

**WHITE:** Hollie Sambrooks  
First Place Winner

16

**THE PATH TO AGING:** Kimberly Morin  
Second Place Winner

19

**GROWING SWEET BASIL IN THE YARD FOR THE FIRST TIME:** Bernard Steinman

21

**SECRETS:** Janissa Martinez

13

**First Place Winner: Hollie Sambrooks**

Read the work of our first place winner for the  
Literary Laramie Writing Contest





Lucille  
Norwood

I  
Wonder

**"I wonder if he has a mother" said the mother of her son,  
Or if he has a father, where does he go and where does he come from?  
He visits her each day, cooks her breakfast and serves her lunch,  
But when he leaves he's gone, her mind not holding much.  
They share a love that still runs deep,  
You can see it in their eyes, a thing they'll always keep.  
When she asks he tells her "I'm your oldest son."  
"How can that be your hair is grey", "my world has come undone!"  
They laugh together sharing jokes, they make each other smile,  
Though the joy that's theirs will last only a short while.  
Memories shared, stories told and then again rehashed  
When he leaves he's gone, her mind holds not the recent past.  
She doesn't trust too many, her nurse one of the few,  
She lets her check her vitals, and give a shot for flu.  
She shares her honest thoughts, no fear of being judged,  
She lets her help her with her bath with bubbles and with suds.  
She really doesn't want to bathe, "can we just skip this week?"  
But when she's done she feels so clean she claims she could just squeak!  
When she leaves the nurse must know she will also be forgotten,  
And when she gone she's gone, the mind holds not a thought in.  
I'm sure she knows us in her heart, the mind and heart connected  
In a way we'll never know nor would ever be expected.**







Samuel  
Stagner

Always  
Animals

The thing that stuck out about my thirteenth birthday, the birthday where one takes their first steps into adulthood, is that my mother turned into a crow and flew away. I wasn't sure what to do, or if this had anything to do with turning thirteen. At first, I looked at my friends to gauge their reaction. They seemed unsure which, now that I think about it, is probably how I looked. I initially thought it was part of some magic show-type birthday arrangement and stayed still. I was politely waiting there when my father walked out of the house holding a cake with thirteen candles on it. He continued gingerly until he realized that the party had stopped and my mother was nowhere to be seen. He sat the cake down on the cheap plastic sheet that was over our picnic table and asked why did the party die down, and why does everyone look so confused, and where did your mother go? There was an uncomfortable shuffling. It wasn't until later in my life I was able to put that uncomfortable beat to words. It was similar to the feeling you get when an inebriated person walks up and tries to have a discourse with you, but you're completely sober. You know the words aren't going to make sense to the intoxicated, so you stand there, mouth agape, not knowing how to proceed.

Dave Stockten, a boy in my grade who had barely turned twelve two months ago, was the first to say something. He told my dad exactly what we saw. His bravery is what I admired, because after he said it, I realized that it would've sounded ridiculous coming out of any one of our mouths. Too much time had passed since his inquiry to mistake what was said as a joke.

He stood for a beat, maybe two, just looking up at the sky. The other boys at the table were getting uncomfortable, unsure how to console an adult whose wife aviated without saying so much as a goodbye. He eventually looked back down, clenched his fists, and walked back inside. There was a raw moment where he had slipped on some wet grass and lost his balance, but he recovered. He slid the glass door closed and I didn't see him for the rest of the night.

Unlike my father, I couldn't just leave my own birthday party. I had social obligations, even if my mom crowified. My guests and I went through the motions, none of us truly feeling it. We pinned maybe... two tails on the donkey. My father forgot to bring out a knife so we just grabbed chunks of cake and ate it. At the end of the night, we went inside and I helped them into their coats and had small talk with their parents. I remember downplaying my mother situation to keep their minds at ease. I waved at them as they drove off, then returned to the backyard to pick up the wrapping paper, and the plastic sheet, and the barely pinned donkey. I ended up throwing the cake away. Not that I didn't want it; I figured that after today I should minimize the number of marital reminders around the house. I walked up the stairs and past my father's room. He was standing by the window looking out. When I saw him start to turn around, I quickly moved away from the door and hugged the wall. It wasn't until I was in my room, I realized that my action of running contributed to the loneliness he must have been feeling.

The rest of my adolescent school years continued how you would expect. My father would eventually come out of his lassitude and continue to raise me, or more like, be in my proximity as I grew older. The years wore hard on him. He seemed to age rapidly in the next five years. His black hair filling out to a complete gray.

I never heard any mention of my mother from my dad. There were counselors that pulled me out of class on a few occasions to talk to me about her disappearance, but they always referred to it as my mother's abandonment, which I felt was only half true. They would ask if I was angry or sad, or really any emotion that they could write down on their standardized sheet that verified if I was going through the appropriate levels of grief. Eventually they gave up on trying to get me to correlate any emotion to my mother turning into a bird and quit all together.

It's not that I was wholly unaffected by my mother leaving suddenly without a word or squawk, but of all the reference material I went through, I only found a brief article online about Raven Tales. Which didn't include a modicum of grief response, or even so much as a character interacting with the world post-maternal fledging. I couldn't ask my father about it either, not only because of his wife's extramarital flight from homemaking, but a general anhedonia that he refused to see anyone about. Of course, that's my own personal diagnosis. Unverified. But so I continued through my education with decent grades. Part of me felt that the teachers felt bad for me, or thought I was crazy, or both.

I got accepted at the state university on a full ride. I felt bad for leaving my emotionally distant father, and worried this would be seen as another familial abandoning. Ultimately, I chose the guilt. On graduation day, after the ceremony and hand shaking and promises to keep in touch, I returned home. The house was no different from when I

left. No streamers, no cake, no father. I wasn't surprised. We hadn't had a true celebratory party here since my thirteenth. What was odd though, was that my father was nowhere to be seen. I hadn't seen him leave the house for the past three months and he was gone. I walked up to his bedroom and looked around. Drawers still had clothes in them, luggage still in the closet. This was a relief because, and I'm not proud of it, but a dread came over me about the house and the bills. Who would drive me to university? Who would help me move in? The terror of my dad's disappearance was subdued by this train of thought.

I walked back into the living room and sat in my father's recliner thinking. As I was torturing myself with the logistics of moving in, making friends, keeping a respectable GPA, I heard a scratching. Then a boof. More scratching. I got up and tried to locate the source. It wasn't downstairs. I went back up the stairs and waited for another sign. Barking from my room this time.

I walked down the hall and gently opened my door. Nothing inside. After checking under my bed, I didn't hear anything for a while. Then the scratching again. This time from the closet. The anticipation overcame my fear. I swung the door open to find a dog stuck in an old NASA shirt I used to wear. It was some sort of terrier, I thought. It was having a real tough time getting out of the shirt and would periodically give up and lay there until he could muster up the strength to escape again. I remember thinking that I wasn't all that surprised. I sighed. "Alright dad, let's get you out of there." ". I took my dad out of my shirt and brought him out of the closet. The dissonant part of the whole ordeal was how happy this dog was. It seemed that the simple pleasure of freedom was all he needed. "Why don't we go get you some water?". He trailed me down the stairs and followed into the kitchen. I got a bowl from the cupboard and filled it up at the sink. The dog didn't look like my dad at all. The dog started lapping up the water. I watched him, and kept oscillating between grief and relief. To this day I still have guilt about not reacting with the appropriate emotion.

I resolved to call Dave Stockten. I was living in the dorms for my first year and they had a strict no dog policy. I hadn't talked to Dave since the beginning of high school, but his parents owned a farm and it seemed like my only option. I wasn't going to take my dad to the pound, so I hoped that he could live a comfortable dog-on-a-farm life while I finished college. Dave was receptive. I didn't mention the dog being my father. I felt like it would be needlessly complicated. His parents were willing to take the dog in, so I drove out to his farm and dropped my dad off. It would have been a bittersweet moment between us but as soon as we pulled up, he hopped out of the car and ran off to chase a rabbit he saw. I made small talk with Mr. and Mrs. Stockten, who made comments about my mother and bird-related jokes whose wit had long lost their edge. I waited to have a true and cathartic goodbye with my dad, but he never came back. They both assured me that he was just excited to have an open place to run around and he would be back

eventually when he got hungry. I shrugged and thanked them again. I pulled out and went on my way.

The first month of school took some getting used to. Not only was I in a new place with people from vastly different backgrounds, but I was still digesting the fact that not just one, but two, of my parents had turned into animals. It wasn't until I had got distance from my house and hometown that it started to, like, uncontextualize. Not only had they turned into animals, but they had abandoned me. It never set in because I was still functional from day to day, but the fact was there.

These revelations came late, but because of that I didn't have the tools for processing it. My mother was the inciting incident, but my father was somehow less equipped than I was. I ended up becoming the one keeping him together. The thoughts didn't arrest me but took up more room in my head than I would have liked. I continued through classes and resolved to lighten my load next semester and try to sort all of this out.

Making friends was a new endeavor for me. It was hard making friends back home. By the time I made it to high school I had already been given the cognomen "Bird Kid". Which makes sense, saying "the boy whose mother turned into a bird" was a little wordy and didn't have the same sting. I struck up conversation with some people in my electives, and fortunately enough, I made a few friends. We weren't like, go-out-on-the-town type friends. More like, "oh hey we have the same class together, and sit in close proximity, so why not say hello to each other". It wasn't much, but a step in the right direction. To be honest, I was looking for someone I could eventually get close enough with to bounce some of these parent transforming ideas off of. Not all of it necessarily, but maybe just dipping a big toe into the subject. I would bring it up casually, possibly as a joke, and they would laugh and take it half-heartedly, entertaining the idea for a bit. Then later in our friendship I would drop it again, and they might recognize and call me out on it, then I could admit to them that my parents actually did turn into animals and I didn't know how to bring it up and then they could give me some sort of advice on continuing through life with mother and father as bird and dog respectively. Or something like that. I had hoped.

Time passed slowly, but I made it to the end of my first semester. I was able to get a bus ticket back home to my house for winter break. It was a lonely ride. The only two on the bus were me and the bus driver. I remember trying to strike up a conversation with him twice. The first time I simply asked, "So where are you from?". I could tell he heard me, because his face contorted into disgust. He adjusted in his seat and didn't answer. I figured he didn't hear me, so I asked "How does someone get started in a business like this, driving buses that is?". This time he became angry. He reached into his pocket and pulled out some headphones and plugged them into the radio. We rode the rest of the way in silence.

When I got back home the first abnormality I noticed was our overflowing mail box. Even when my parents weren't animals we rarely received letters. It was really too much for one trip, so I went inside to drop off my bags, got a garbage bag, and brought in the mail. The majority were bills. I realized I couldn't see very well so I flipped the switch. No light. I realized that it was actually quite cold too. It felt like the house was dead. I gave up and went to my room, got the blankets and quilts I had there, and went back downstairs to my father's chair. I reclined it out and got comfortable. I only stayed for the night. I went back to the bus station the next morning and bought a ticket back to school.

I realized, in my second semester, that I was preoccupied with the why and not the how. Forget why they would abandon their son. How did they turn into animals? I was so mad at them for leaving me alone, but after some distance from it, I realized I was ignoring the biggest question.

I made my way to the school library and started some serious research. I poured over books on magic and mythology. Most of it was found in the fiction section, and also not very well-written. Book upon book of werewolf material that always had the character anthropomorphing into half-man half-wolf hybrids. Never full canines. I was beside myself. How could I unlock the barrier of understanding and eventual acceptance if I can't even comprehend what happened?

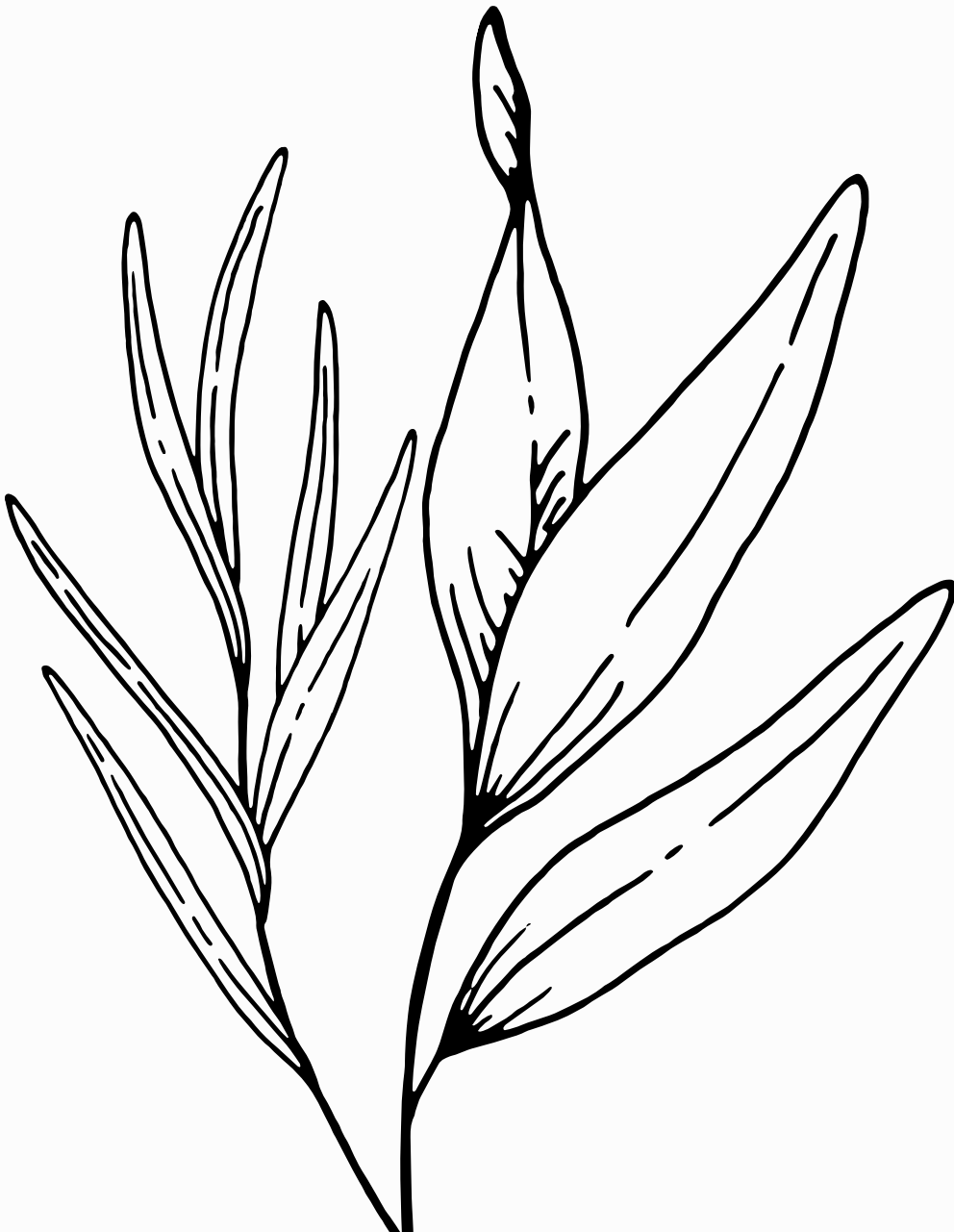
I conceded that I wasn't able to understand. Maybe the path I was supposed to be on started with accepting that it happened. That clicked. Why do I need to know? What would I gain from that? Why am I asking either question? Then the rest started to fall together. It's possible they don't know how it happened either. How would I even verify that? It's not like I could find my mom and talk bird with her. Same with my dad. The brief time I spent with the dog didn't indicate to me that he was even the same entity. He sure seemed happy as a dog. Then so, the questions kept blossoming. Why wouldn't I want my parents to be happy? Why was I mad at them for something that was either a desperate choice, or something completely out of their control? Sure, it's in my rights, especially as a minor, to be frustrated with them. Even resentment could be justified. I felt a surge in me. As if some hole left vacant was slowly being filled with these revelations. Who cares if my parents turned into animals? That doesn't mean I have to, and if I do, it would be from grim circumstances, never flight from consequence.

Having my thoughts in order I went to student health and asked if I could make an appointment with a therapist. During my first meeting I was open and forthcoming. Mostly. I still avoided my parents turning into beasts, and used the language that the counselors were using with me in high school. I said things like "My mother's abandonment" and "My father's negligence". This was the gasoline on the therapeutic fire. I started learning psycho-strategies for coping and understanding the situation I was in. Then I started making friends—Which was a lot easier when I didn't have ulterior motives. I continued with therapy.



Eventually the past five years were like a casual memory, one that could be looked at with un-squinted eyes. After my first year was finished, I returned to my home and got the piles of mail from the mailbox. The blankets from winter were still on my dad's recliner. I went to my room and started sorting my items into piles of things I want to keep and things I want to give away. I packed all the knick-knacks and random appliances into boxes. A few days later I put together a garage sale. People from the neighborhood came to our house for the first time in years and went through my parents' old stuff. When they would ask what had happened, I would shrug and tell them my parents left and said I should sell their things.

The garage sale was successful enough for me to make a down payment on a small truck. It wasn't much but it was mine. The paint was chipped and had over two hundred thousand miles. I didn't care. I felt for the first time in too long that I knew what I was doing. My first stop was going to be to the Stockton ranch to see my father. I swear, the freedom made me feel like I was flying.





Hollie  
Sambrooks

White

She died in October. She rests on golden leaves and others flutter above her, tiny brittle wings casting calico shade on her face. She is on her back, head turned to the left, studying the black-and-white trunk of an aspen. Her heart nestles limp in her chest, a dead bird in the gutter, peaceful, sad.

This is a heart that has run. It craved speed, the quickening, the pounding. She fed it by any means, leaping from the clouds and gliding on kites and piloting the shining wingspans of sailplanes through the sky. Her heart sang to the pace of galloping hooves, rejoiced in the second of silence when her mount flew untethered to the earth, soaring over fences and creeks. She sought out any beast or machine that could take her higher and faster, that could satiate her feverish heart. Fear tasted like honey.

Her body has fulfilled its purpose beautifully. The widening of the ribcage and hip bones is a telltale sign. She has been a mother to four children. Her first was a dark-haired boy, born when she was only sixteen. Another boy came soon after, this one fair, like her. Thirteen years passed for the family of four, until her firstborn was struck on a dark highway. Three years after, she gave birth to a bonny girl. The announcement in the newspaper called the infant the 'sunshine after rain'. A second daughter came anon, and so like the first that they would be mistaken for twins.

There have been insects since day one. Flies lay eggs upon her mouth and nose and around her eyes. By the time her sinking blood has congealed completely and marbles her skin with storm clouds, the eggs have given way to maggots that slide into her body and join the feast there. Her honeyed heart is consumed.

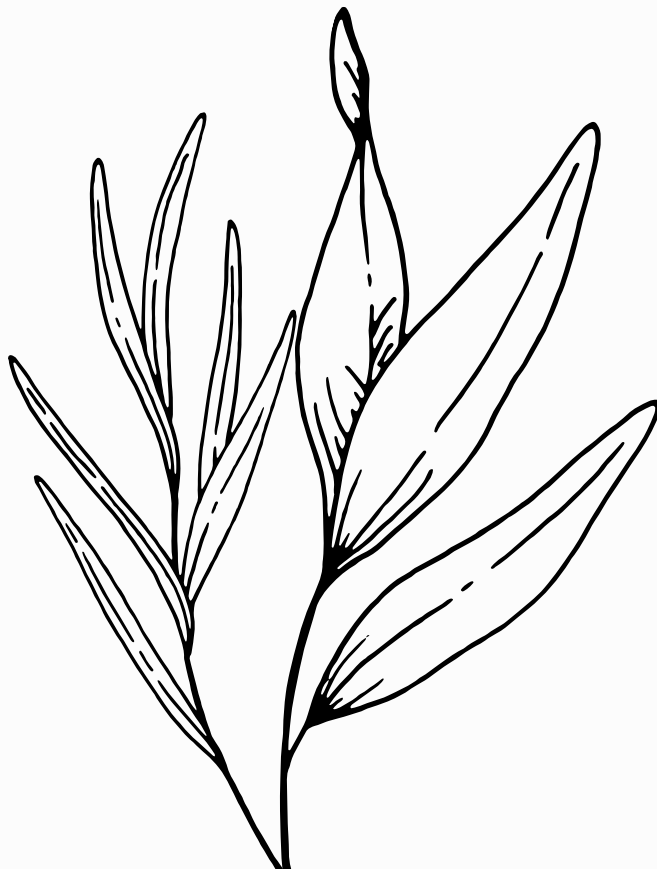
When enough cells have ruptured, putrefaction begins. Bacteria has broken down the soft tissue and produces gases that eventually rip open the abdominal wall and escape. She begins to decay. Several generations of maggots have lived solely on the corpse, which has blackened and collapsed into bones, skin, and what was once flesh.

Her skin has been a canvas. Lines on her face, small holes in her ear lobes. A massive serpentine scar wrapped her leg, a memento of a time when her insatiable heart got the better of her. Hands painted with bruises and varicose veins, bitten countless times by shears and shovels and thorns. Puckers where melanoma was taken out, dark spots where melanoma remained. A lifetime of sunshine and wind and snow and ineffable ethers: babies' breath and mirth and dawn and wood smoke, despair and dust devils and ocean spray and lightning storms.

Mold has started to grow underneath the fermenting body as a dark stain spreads outward. Tissue and skin that held no nutritional value survives decay becomes leathery, clinging to the bone in natural mummification. With little to offer to animals or bacteria, the once teeming corpse is left in silence to skeletonize.

All that remains of my mother lies in the prairie, nutrients seeped away into the earth and given rise to generations of insects. She has dissolved into the winter, another carcass on a hill, carried away by the world in slow waves of decomposition and in the mouths and bellies of beasts. She is only bones now, resting under a gentle behemoth sky. They began inside of her, inside of her mother. They grew whitely inside pounds of dark meat and gristle and blood and skin. They lived in the darkness of a churning body with the sounds of flesh wetly whispering against them.

Now, they lie in a glittering snowy dawn and drape themselves delicately in ice and in the thundering of the hoarfrost, they languish silently. Teeth and phalanges scattered in the sagebrush like lost baubles. Half of a twisted spine, two ribs, some peculiar, graceless piece. They smell the storm clouds and taste the blazing stars and slumber in gossamer moonlight. Set free, they watch the world.





Kimberly  
Morin

The Path  
to Aging

**I once heard that aging is not for sissies.**

**I came from a medical background. I have worked as a CNA, an LPN, a geriatric office receptionist, and in the billing office at more than one hospital. I knew many elderly people so I thought I understood what it meant to “age”. Boy was I wrong.**

**Now that I have had my thought process altered, I think of aging as a path. Like any good hike through Wyoming, there are breathtaking vistas, fields of wildflowers, and jaw-dropping sunsets, but there are also twisted ankles, rattlesnakes, and sometimes bears.**

**Like that hike through Wyoming, it isn’t unusual to leave your house with the sun shining and suddenly find it snowing. The path to aging throws similar obstacles in your way. There are so many wonderful things about aging like grandchildren, great-grandchildren, paying off a home, retiring and having time to go to a favorite fishing spot or find new hobbies or find time to spend with friends. Aging also has some rough spots along that hiking path that are not expected. While the path to aging might not include real bears, health issues and loss of family or friends can bring dark clouds to a journey.**

**The Eppson Center works to keep seniors active and healthy, to help keep their path to aging smooth and free of thorny bushes. Their mission is to provide lifelong support for independent living. This means finding ways to provide programs that are most needed by seniors, whether it is day-to-day help or just a map to stay on the clearest paths to aging.**

**During the pandemic, seniors’ needs were magnified. Seniors were told they were the most at-risk demographic and they needed to stay home until it was safe. Since not everyone has family available to help, the Eppson Center went into action. Weekly calls were made to make sure patrons had someone to talk to and so they knew someone was thinking of them and cared. Toilet paper was delivered to patrons in need. A shopping program was instituted for seniors who wanted to stay safely away from grocery stores. Home Delivered Meals went into overdrive**

picking up many new clients who now receive hot meals delivered daily by dedicated volunteers. Mechanical pets that respond to voice and touch were provided to seniors facing severe isolation. Seniors were given rides at no charge to vaccination clinics and doctor's offices. The Eppson Center provided an opportunity for seniors to have a free meal, listen to music and visit with friends while remaining socially distant. Employees would even jump onto the transportation vans and drive to patron's homes to sing and wish them a happy birthday.

The Eppson Center has always been there to help tackle uphill slopes for seniors on the path to aging. Support groups for health or emotional issues are offered like trail guides. New activities to keep minds sharp and prevent boredom are constantly being added. Socialization to fend off isolation is a guarantee at the Eppson Center, just like a whistle to bring others running. Exercise programs to keep bodies strong and moving forward are offered in many different classes, including an actual hiking group. Help with Medicare questions are a phone call away. A wonderful volunteer is always ready to help cut through the brambles of questions the Medicare path consistently brings. Home Delivered Meals are available when a patron is ill or just needs a little help. AARP offers Safe Driving Courses to help patrons be safe and get discounts on insurance. If patrons aren't able to drive anymore, Eppson Center drivers will pick them up at their door with a smile. Foot care appointments are available to keep patrons on their feet and hearing tests and hearing aids are an option when patrons can't hear the birds chirping anymore. Medical equipment is loaned out to make mobility and finances easier. Lunch and Learn programs help in a variety of ways, both finding out more about things going on in the community as well as learning about topics of interest to seniors. Volunteer opportunities are always available to help keep patrons feeling connected and see how valuable their help is. Seniors on The Go is a program where patrons go hiking with friends, see those breathtaking vistas, fields of wildflowers and jaw-dropping sunsets, and if they see a bear their friend can hand them a camera to make it a memorable experience rather than a challenge.

The Eppson Center is not the answer to every obstacle on the path to aging. There are no guarantees of sure footing or outings free from twisted ankles, but the goal of the Eppson Center is to be a resource for seniors. They work hard to make community connections and to be aware of organizations in Laramie that can assist with struggles faced on the path to aging.

I have learned many things while working at the Eppson Center and while they sound cliché, they are absolutely true. Never take seniors at face value and don't judge their book by their cover. There are so many life experiences our patrons have survived that until we walk in their shoes, we couldn't possibly imagine what they have been through. The patrons I have met have told me stories of living through wars, the Depression, horrific loss, and diseases, yet here they are today, standing strong, continuing proudly along the path to aging.

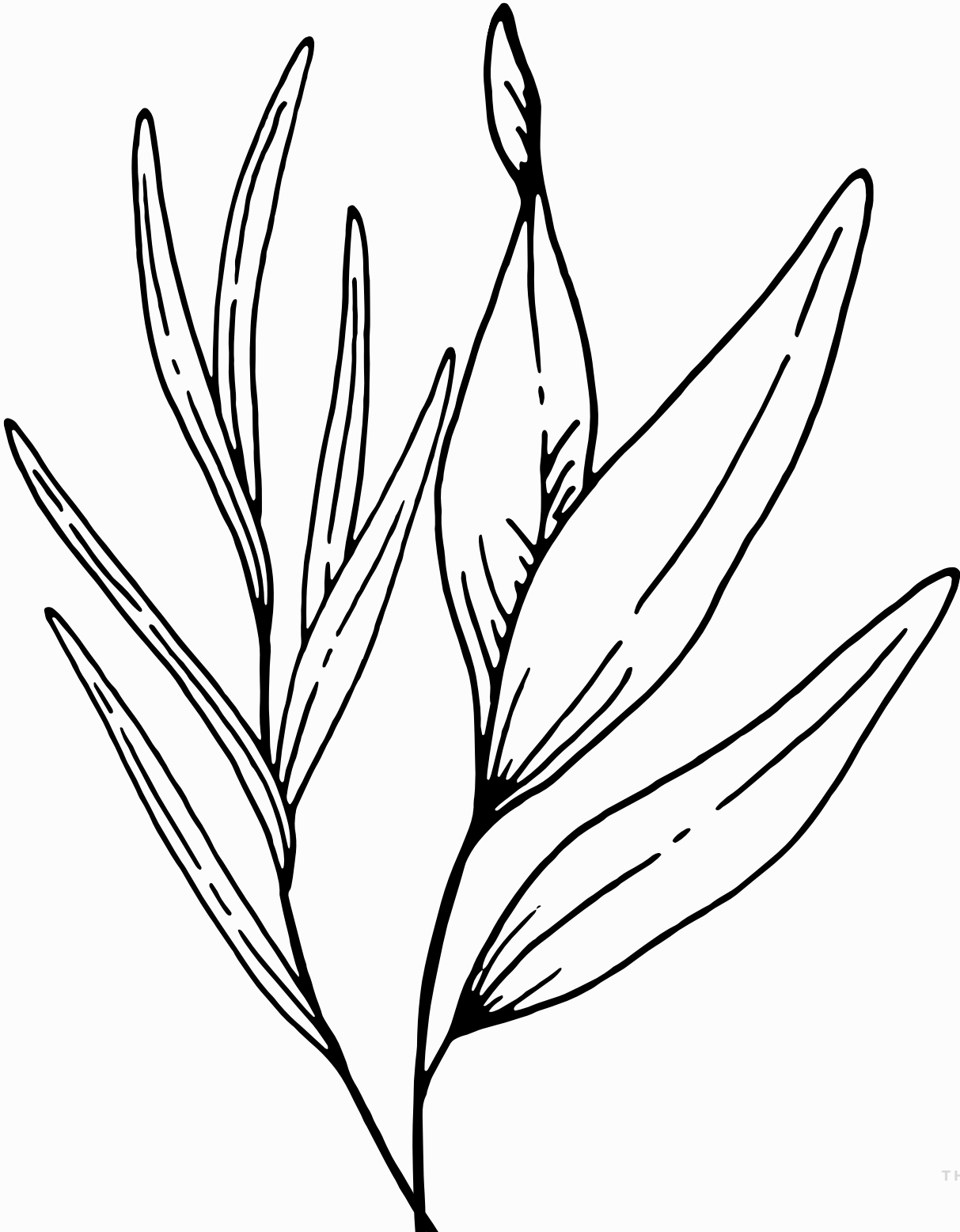


**Never assume. Every person has different abilities and knowledge and their stories would astound us. Seniors are fountains of information; they are truly walking encyclopedias and history books. Patrons have told me about the military and flying planes, train travel across the United States, stretching meals for a family when there was barely any food, and stories about presidents back to William McKinley. If you were lost in the woods during a hike, a senior is guaranteed to have a logical, thoughtful solution to help find your way.**

**Be patient and give them time to think and speak – it's worth the wait. Patrons have had full lives and interesting careers. Give seniors a chance – they have so much to offer. Just like on a hike through Wyoming, you may need to look past some lightning struck, fallen trees to see the beauty beyond.**

**We are all heading down the path to aging. We should work together to be helping hands on that path rather than adding obstacles. Come check out the Eppson Center even if you are not a senior or a "senior-in-training". Come see how you can make a difference in people's lives and how you can be the bright spot in someone's day. Come hear some of the amazing stories these patrons can share. Come help us develop new programs for seniors to make their lives easier on this often-rocky path. A smile and a little conversation can be a steadying hand on an uneven path for some seniors. It will mean so much.**

**I am glad that the Eppson Center is here for our seniors and for me too, someday. I hope my work has made someone's life a little easier and helped pave the way to a future where seniors can remain in their homes, supported by their community, for as long as they want, and where people who are devoted to caring and helping meet their needs with abundant resources. A place where we can help others along the way until it is our turn to take their hands for support along the path to aging.**





Bernard  
Steinman

# Growing Sweet Basil in the Yard for the First Time

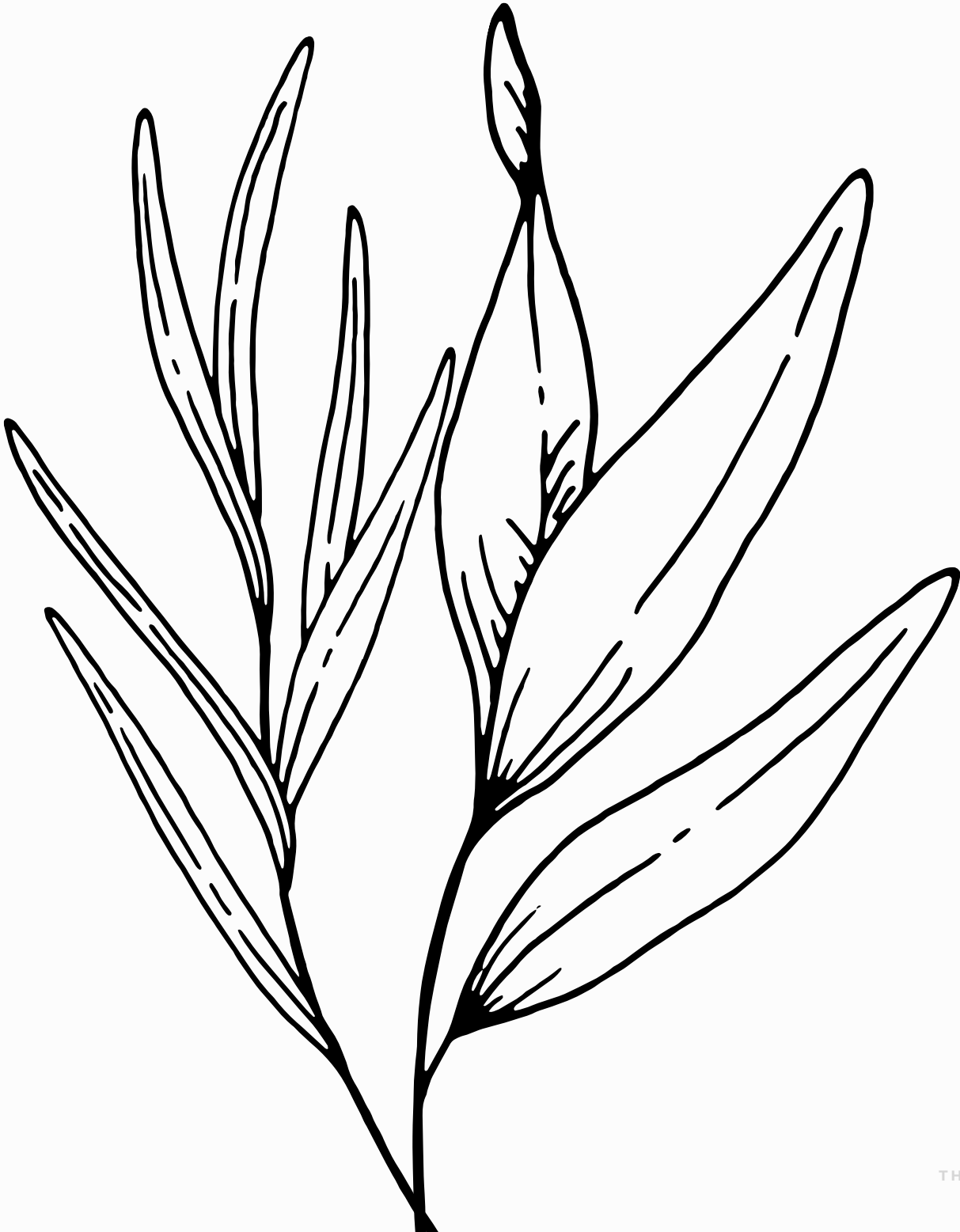
**"You pinch off mature leaves to harvest," the Internet says, "the plant must not flower".  
Late summer air's hot and I've prayed for cool showers. Then distracted,  
I noticed the flourishing mint, its purple blossom coming to head.  
I came to prune basil, but harvest mint instead,  
Hung on twine, tied between fence posts to dry, for winter tea.**

**And then back to the basil, it was tiny in April  
Sewn from seeds or bought started.**

**Learning by links, since I did not know how,  
That by fall, the risks, they were much greater now, in September,  
When the nights grow colder, the buds have all gone to seed.**

**"Pinch the buds off!!" the Internet said, "to preserve basil's use",  
Convince it it's young, though daily, its vibrance fades more in the sun,  
And my Wyoming plants, like me, may wish they'd retired in Sicily.**

**I've pinched the buds off, and ate them right there; you cannot let it flower,  
Or it withers, and tastes bitter in the autumn hours.**





Janissa  
Martinez

Secrets

It's my birthday today, and I'm alone. The only people who would remember are my mother, who's slaving over an open body some 800 miles

away, and my husband, Paul, who went to work this morning without so much as a mumbled recognition that I exist. I wonder if he'll remember while he's typing numbers into spreadsheets or making angry calls to suppliers, but somehow I doubt it. He's been pulling back from me for a while now, in his long slow way. I wish he'd just get it over with.

The doorbell rings, one long chime of a bell. I mutter as I open the hall closet, swear as I stub my toe pulling on another sweater, a coat, gloves, hat, and stuff my double-socked feet into knee-high boots.

I open the door, feeling the cool air swirl and coil into the pleasantly heated townhouse. A brown parcel shines mutely, resting on the iced steps leading up to our doorway. From across the street comes the screams of childhood laughter, and the soft thunking tshhh of snow hitting puffed up fabric. Making a point to not look, I kick the door shut and cut off the high cackles of the children outside. I set the package and myself on the floor by the coffee table and wait for my breath to come slower.

Taking a pen from the table, I slice open the delicate string of tape binding the edges together. I slide my hands underneath the edges and flip them out, the cardboard cool beneath my fingertips.

Inside, a card lays atop a crinkling of bright white tissue paper. Hope this keeps you warm darling. My mother's scrawl, almost illegible. I set the card aside and sweep back the paper.



A scarf lies within. Gorgeous red into grey into charcoal coloring, broken diagonal rib stitch pattern. I lean forward to touch it, my finger lightly grazing the fabric. And I realize that it's Qiviut. A little quiver goes through me at the realization.

I've yearned for something Qiviut for months now. I scoured the internet for different articles of clothing, a hat, a scarf, gloves, a sweater, anything. But every time I found something for my heart to sing over, Paul's answer was that we couldn't afford it or that I didn't need it.

"We're supposed to be saving," he'd say to me, exasperation leaking into his words.

I pull the scarf from its cradle, the supple waves of fabric falling softly over my hands. Two feet long and as tall as I am, thick enough to feel luxurious.

Wrapping the scarf around my shoulders, I nestle into it before walking towards the closet. It's full already, I know that. Stuffed to the brim with hats, gloves, scarves, sweaters, coats, jackets, all perfectly meshed into the wicker organizer Paul had made when things started to spill out of the hall closet and into other areas of the house. Jackets had been draped over chairs, scarves streaming from half open drawers, gloves mixed in with giant fuzzy socks in boxes all over the house, never a match to be found.

But he'd fixed it for me. He'd gotten a book, and organized the hell out of our house, not even minding that I couldn't get rid of any of my clothes. I'd held each layer in my hands, a memory on my lips, and cried at the thought of parting. I open the closet and touch each of them again now, stroking each texture, feeling each moment of the past.

The hat I'd worn the first time Paul and I had kissed in the snow on the way back from a movie, pink and soft. The gloves my mother had given me after we moved north away from my father; warm, brown, and durable, like her. The scarf I'd been wearing alone in the doctor's office that day, black and rough, worn for warmth more than comfort.

And Paul had said he was okay with it, with me keeping all of them. At the time he'd just wiped the tears from my eyes and held me until they stopped. I wonder if he would do the same today. Because this morning when he bent down to kiss me goodbye...





**This first issue of the AFL Review focuses primarily on themes related to aging in general and the gains and opportunistic losses that the aging experience affords us as maturing humans who live in our unique Wyoming community.**

