



# Concinnity issue one • fall 2024 A Journal of Art and Literature



Prayer flags for communities affected by Hurricane Helene • Kim Lutz

issue one • fall 2024

I began this issue with a broad theme. I was looking for pieces on community, shared spaces, collective human experience with one another and with our environment. It has turned into a beautiful reflection of friends that have passed through my life in one way or another. As I write this on Thanksgiving Day 2024, I am thankful for all of you.

Dedicated to my friends and family in the mountains of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee as they continue to recover from Hurricane Helene and to new and old friends at Ohio University.



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### Today I Hit the Wall Zen Sutherland

I can't take it I can't breathe I can't stop crying for my Asheville I know everybody's pushed beyond limits But I'm at breaking point not one more dark thought to stunt my sleep not one more bucket of tears to fill the toilet not one more insult to my body my hair is dirty my shoes are muddy I'm numb I've sliced my heart I ache my good nature I feel slipping away into a night of endless days I want to help when I can barely help myself I'm desperate I'm crying I'm cranky I can't sleep

I can't think
I can't get away from myself
why aren't I stronger?
why do I shuffle and stumble
Like a thoughtless zombie?
I'm anxious
I'm tired of bending
I'm breaking
I'm breaking
I'm broken
there's nothing wrong and
everything's wrong
I'm so sorry
so very sorry

Helen and I whispered soft encouragements as we lay in our bed in the couple's Pompeii pose stitched my rendered heart back together

## **Becoming** Kim Lutz

and it becomes the first drop of rain a part of something rain and topsoil and it becomes

needed for life in the midst of destruction two feet of rain and six inches of topsoil and it becomes

a part of something clouds part neighbors gather between the end and a beginning part of something and it becomes



Found in West Asheville River Arts District after the flood • Zen Sutherland



Digital Art • Kira Bursky

### Not IT Manda Mustaine

IT
IT happened
IT cannot be undone
IT wrote a chapter in my story that cannot be erased
IT cHAnged me...but will not define me
I write the next chapter - Not IT
I am the plot of my story - Not IT
I happen
I

#### Dear Ms. God Tipton Gentry

"Dear Ms. God: Please don't give us anything we can't handle today."

Sometimes there's an amen, mostly it's just rinsing. Body wash, shampoo, shave. A ritual in its own right. Both are repeated every morning in the shower, scrubbing up before donning the gear that will hopefully keep me safe from the broken, sick, and downtrodden that are the inevitability of the day to come.

With my quiet attempt at prayer comes a modicum of guilt. With one simple, heartfelt mantra I am at risk of disappointing a Southern Baptist mother, a Presbyterian father, and an Irish Catholic wife. But Mom has dementia, Dad lives in Florida, and the missus self-excommunicated from the faith long before she died. Fuck 'em anyway, it's my prayer. For me, for my partner, for all the Lost Boys in turnout gear. For the docs in the ED that think they've got a handle on things, and for the nurses that do. Tell me I'm wrong.

I get to work and my partner already smells like that load of laundry you ran three days ago and somehow forgot to shift over to the dryer. Just our luck, we have a brand-hammer-new student riding along on his first ever clinical. He is so green he doesn't even know what he doesn't know yet. He's never ridden on an

ambulance before. I show him where the puke bags are.

The day begins. We get an MVC with ejection at a high rate of speed; the patient is thankfully unresponsive, his legs shredded from the knees down.

Our frequent flyer has an actual STEMI. We run it in Code and try to convince HUC and the docs on the way in that this time it is for serious real.

Then there's a twenty year old who, and I shit you not, hurt her back performing a jujitsu move a week ago and now can't move from the waist down.

Later we drive emergency, lights and sirens through rush hour traffic on the interstate for another MVC, only to be cancelled before arrival. We sit awkwardly at the stoplight off the exit with everyone we just ran off the road giving us the stink eye.

Just our luck, the POS combative drunk who knows all the right phrases to skip jail and get his bed for the night at the ED decides on a parking lot in our district to leave a 25 foot piss trail to be seen by the tourists.

That shitshow leads into the 3am, three hour call with the Ukranian ladies who have lost dad/husband to COVID and don't know

how to navigate funeral arrangements. We stay, sort it out, and eventually haul him away to the morgue.

After that and then some, I arbitrate a beef between the incoming EMS crew and the outgoing Fire crew at 07:15 in the a.m. To keep the peace. To restore order in the house. To get the fuck off shift and leave it with someone else.

I reckon the prayer was answered. We handled it.

Best part of the whole damn shift was the new kid shaking my hand on his way out and saying quietly with a bit of awe, "Man. You sure can drive!" I nod and smile, knowing he's never gonna make it in this business.

ED: Emergency Department. Once ER or Emergency Room, now changed to department to denote the importance of multiple rooms where several doctors can move about with said importance. For you Brits, think A&E.

MVC: Motor Vehicle Collision. Once MVA or Motor Vehicle Accident but changed because accident inferred that no one was at fault.

STEMI: S-T segment Elevation Myocardial Infarction. In layman's terms, a heart attack.

POS: Piece Of Shit. Reserved for repeat offenders that foul their linen and speak disrespectfully to female nurses in the ED.

#### Social Media Post (as written) Nic Coker

Hey friends, I hope everyone is hanging in there. I know sometimes it's hard to stay positive with so much changing and much suffering and loss in our midst. The storm, or rather the "geological event" as they are calling it, has really been a huge lesson in the impermanence of all things . . . even mountains. They say these Appalachian mountains were once as high as the Himalaya which exceed 28,000 feet. Mt. Mitchell aka Black Dome, our tallest, now stands at ~6,680 ft . . . All things must pass in time, us too! I've had a hard time processing the loss of trees from Helene, and we still don't know the specific degree of exactly how many, and which ones have been destroyed by the winds and flood waters . . . as most roads are closed as well as all access to most of the Grandfather Ranger district of Pisgah and Blue Ridge Pkwy between Asheville and Marion, which includes all my most beloved and frequently visited forests and ridges. I'm hoping to visit these areas as soon as I can to lay eyes on it and see it for myself. Seeing areas like Elk Mtn rd and the top of Ox Creek with my own eyes, seeing drone footage and hearing rumors and seeing maps, some areas of the forest are utterly devastated. I long to visit Curtis and

Newberry Creek, Graybeard, Pinnacle, the Great Craggies, etc so I can see the condition for myself . . .

Where was I going with this? I guess to say impermanence is real . . . not in order to be depressing, but just to realize this and not to cling. To cultivate mindfulness and dispel ignorance when possible, perhaps holds the key to being at peace and enjoying what is here and being present, grateful and all that jazz. I'm writing this, not trying to sound wise, but maybe to share how I've been coping with the aftermath and I guess to life in general. We do our best to make the world better, to save what's good and help others, and that is important and great . . . But as one teacher recently told me, we have a lot more control about how we respond in our minds than we do over the "outside world" and its changes, and change it will, inevitably. Looking on the bright side, the contra dance started back up this week at Warren Wilson and it was a beautiful thing to be amongst friends and fiddles! I'm looking forward to playing there with Art, Garrett, and Anna in a few weeks Nov 21st. Also, I went hiking for the first time in a month last week in Tennessee with Jan and Maggie Dog and it was quite lovely and inspiring to be on the ridge

and see that much beauty is still out there.

... I'm not sure if this post is conveying things clearly but I hope so a little at least. Thanks to all for reading and anyone who has hired me for pet sitting or gigs. Community is wonderful. I continue to look forward to seeing friends and fam, playing music and spending time in the woods . . . just as before.

"Whatever has the nature of arising, has the nature of ceasing." - the Buddha 📣



Relief Cut Ceramic Tile • Ari Gaub



Shells at Hunting Island, South Carolina • Kim Lutz

# Airport Ode David Wanczyk

Ode to the dad at John Glenn

with the carseat on his head—

diaper-bag backed—

kid in his right arm and

left foot aloft that whole

escalator ride: his shoe untied.

#### An Interview with Writer Rose Skelton Conducted by Kim Lutz

Kim: Hi Rose, thank you for talking with me today.

Rose: Hi! It's a pleasure to be asked.

Kim: The first time I met you we were at an Old Time Fiddler's Gathering that my friends and I have been organizing for over 12 years. It rained the entire four days and at least half the group left. The rest of us spent the days at picnic tables covered by a convoluted tarp system that mostly kept us dry.

Rose: The tarp system was epic. So much rope. I remember swimming in a creek deep in the night, and playing along as best I could (total beginner) to banjo tunes. It was a whole new world to me, and an experience that actually began my move to Southern Appalachia and my decision to take creative writing seriously (I started an MFA in Fiction at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa). I was looking for a home, a community, and in particular I was looking for a writing home. It all came together for me after that, in a convoluted way. I'm grateful for that time.

Kim: I listened, mesmorized, to your life story.

It sounded like you were living a romantic adventurous life that I had only dreamt of. You had traveled around the world, were working as a professional writer, and at that time were living in Scotland working on an ocean rescue boat. Where has your writing taken you?

Rose: I was doing a lot of travel at that time. And it did feel exciting, but it was also desperately lonely. I think that I found it hard to connect with people in an honest way, because my life seemed to people on the outside to be so adventurous, but inside I was just looking for some stability. But of course you can't easily get across to people who are maybe dreaming of travel that it's not all it seems. I lived like that for a long time. When I started doing an MFA in Fiction, and ran into US visa problems, I ended up going back to the island in Scotland where I had spent a lot of my childhood. I had no other choice because I had blown my life up elsewhere, and I had had a pretty serious breakdown at that time, developing an inability to be around any kind of noise. Even someone breathing was painful in my brain. My grandmother had just died and I moved into her small cottage on a loch on the Isle of Mull, miles from anywhere, and

spent the next year trying to build something out of what had happened. I began to write in a way that was a lot more honest than anything I had done before, and I was lucky enough to have a writing mentor, Megan Staffel, who didn't let me escape from the truth of my life, in my writing. She pushed me to be honest. I started writing characters who were looking for community, and I started writing about the community I saw around me on that island. Then I started being in that community. The Isle of Mull became my home in a way that saved me, and continues to save me. I have had to move away for my marriage but I know that the island will take us back when it's time.

Kim: When did you realize you were a writer?

Rose: I had always told stories, as a child, and I read a lot, like many children. Stories filled my interior life. At boarding school, I had an English teacher—Bill—and he pushed me to write. He gave me confidence where I had none. When it came to the school careers talk when I was 17, I told them I was going to be a writer. They told me that wasn't a job, and that if I liked reading and writing then I could be a librarian. I went to Glasgow university to study

English, but my depression was so severe by that time that I didn't last more than a month. I quit, got a job in a bar, and started writing whenever I wasn't working. I never told anyone except Bill that I was writing, and having quit uni to work in a bar, no one much thought I was going to get my life back together. Writing held me together. It was a long time before I showed anyone anything I had written.

Kim: How did you end up in Scotland?

Rose: My grandparents had moved to the island around the time I was born, and they had bought a farm and some properties that they turned into holiday cottages and eventually a hotel. I spent every school holiday there, and I felt sick whenever it was time to leave. My whole life I have been leaving that island, and then returning again. There are people who still remember my grandparents, and the house is still there. There was a "campsite" on the property, a piece of grass kept short by the sheep, sitting at the head of a loch, looking out onto mountains and some smaller uninhabited islands, and I used to go down with my grandfather early in the morning to collect the money from the campers. I was

around the age of six, and at that time it cost £3 to spend the night. He would get me to call out, "good morning, good morning," until a hand would reach out from the zip with the money. The campsite is still there, and I pass it often. The price has gone up to £5 now, so I guess it's going up £1 every 15 years. I see the number painted over the sign where the price has changed, and the cattle grid where he and I would check every morning for hedgehogs that had fallen in, and rescue them to the bushes if they had. My childhood sounds idyllic, I know. There were hard things about it. But Mull was always my refuge, and still is. I don't think that will ever change.

Kim: The images online of your Scottish island are beautiful. It looks like it is made up of small communities. To what extent and how has the local community accepted you into their world?

Rose: It's something I have worked at, and something that I have questioned so many times—do I really belong here? But that is much more about my internal struggle of feeling like an outsider to everyone and everything than anything that has been shown to me externally by folks on the island.

In the end, the island doesn't work without its community. The island has a small hospital,

with a couple of beds, but you can't get much more than a broken arm fixed up there, so if you go into early labour, or you're having a stroke, and it's nightime or it's stormy and the ferries are off, then it's the Lifeboat that will take you across to the mainland. The Lifeboat is an ocean search and rescue vessel and I was part of its crew for five years before I left for the US when I got married. It's run by volunteers from the community who do years of training to be able to manage the boat in all weathers. Ditto the Christmas lights, and the Hogmonay fireworks display, and the foodbank, and the kids' sailing club, and the walled garden, and the community forest, and the community swimming pool, and the beach cleanups. Everything is run by volunteers. Wages are low, the council is broke. There's no money to pay for events and services, even life-saving ones. So the community chips in, and it works.

Paying in and drawing out of the community has been so much a part of my life in the ten years since I moved there. While I've been living overseas, and renting out my flat there, I have had to draw out of the goodwill fund more than I have been able to pay in, and that's been an uncomfortable position for me. The water tank starts to leak and you need a plumber but there's only a couple on the island—the Lifeboat crew were the ones to go

around and try to stop the leak. When I moved from the flat into a house, the Lifeboat crew showed up to move me, piling everything into a horsebox leant to me by a friend (there's no moving services on the island), all in a winter snowstorm. Friends check my post, send me electricity meter readings, take care of my car. People show up, and you have to show up too. I love being asked for help. It feels so good to be able to make someone's life a little easier, and it's a way you can connect with people that you might not otherwise even have met.

I suppose each person builds a community around themselves, and I have too. It's a system of concentric circles. I have two or three very close friends, who have visited me in the US, gave speeches at my wedding, took me to the hospital when I was pregnant and not doing so well. Then I have a handful of friends whose company I enjoy, who would help me out if needed, who I might take shopping to when their car is broken down, and stop in for dinner or a cup of tea. Outside of that are a group of people I would stop on the street to chat to, say hello at the fireworks event in the next village, and probably connect with on social media too. They're people I haven't got to know that well yet, but would like to. Perhaps they're people I've met through our son. Then there's folks I might say hi to in the street, who I know from the doctor's surgery, or because I bought

something off them from Facebook, or perhaps I was friends with a family member. Then there's people I know but we've never done more than nod or wave when our cars pass on one of the narrow hilly roads of the island. The man who works at the swimming pool, and who leant me a pound coin for the locker, or the guy who drives the bus and also plays the accordion. Then there's the people I know about but don't know, and I am that person to some people too, though not necessarily the same people. Then there's people who have pissed me off, or did something I found offensive, and I suppose I might be that for some people too. There's people who I might connect with over something who, it turns out, knew my grandparents, and that's always a pleasure. Occasionally I come across someone I've never heard of, and then I realise that the island is bigger than it sometimes feels. In the end, I know a lot of people, and I think everyone on the island does. We each have our own version of the island, but no one is alone, even if they want to be.

There's always the possibility to know the island in a new way. When I met my now-wife, the writer Nomi Stone, the island took her in, readily and without question, in a way that helped me to feel more accepted too. She's pretty amazing, but they accepted her before they could even know that. Not everyone is

taken in that way—some people don't want to be part of this web and I don't think they last that long. But Nomi knew what the place meant to me, and she made it hers too. She has her own version of the concentric circles, and it keeps getting wider. I love watching that happen for her.

Kim: It sounds like an amazing world. How have these community connections and the location helped to transform your writing? Rose: When I write, it's because I am trying to work something out. I am trying to see something that's been on my mind from multiple different angles. I write about community because I am stunned at how it works, why it works, why it's hard, and why it saves. Living in a big city in Texas for 7 years has shown me what it's like to live in a place where individualism and capitalism are the things that keep you together. But it hasn't kept me together, in fact it has rattled me apart, so I still write about the island and what it's like to be away from it, what the un-Mull looks like worn on a person (me). Mull is the thing I measure every other place by, but it just happens to be the place that I found a home. Writing about home for me is about writing about oneself, what one needs, what one can't live without. The landscape of the island is part of that—how it transforms, forms, and unites

people. How the sea heals. How the forests give. How the hills and the moors have the ability to lose or find you. I have found myself in that landscape, in the whistling silence of those hills, and in the cup of tea waiting for me with a friend at the bottom. All those years of running around the world, wishing for a home—it was there all along. And I am still trying to work out how and why. So that's why I write what I write.

Kim: What advice can you give to new writers on writing and living the life that was meant for each of us?

Rose: Writing, for me, is a way of processing the art of living. As someone who finds living quite hard, writing is essential to my survival. I couldn't live without writing. At the same time, writing isn't really a way for most of us to make a living and I do think that can be something both hard and a blessing. I was a journalist for 15 years because I wanted to make money as a writer. I did a lot of living in that time, but it wasn't a rewarding career, or the one I wanted to have. It turned out to be a big distraction from what i wanted to be doing, which was more creative, or personal, writing. I spent most of my time as a journalist chasing jobs, chasing payment, and occasionally writing. I don't regret it, because it got me to a lot of

fascinating people and places, but I do wish I could have had the courage to go into the kind of writing I wanted to be doing a lot earlier than 35, which was when I started writing creatively rather than as a journalist. When I did start to write creatively, I discovered that I am a slow writer, because I am a slow processor, and I also have a very short attention span. I am not someone who (like my wife, who is both prolific and extraordinarily talented) can sit and write for hours or days and finds it pleasurable and rewarding. Writing is slow and painful for me. It just wouldn't be a way for me to make a living. I don't want to make a living this way—the pressure to create would mean I would have to find a way to be a completely different kind of writer. A different kind of a person. So I make money elsewhere and that suits me perfectly.

I like my different jobs and I want to be good at them, but I don't really care all that much what the jobs are. I've done a little bit of everything. I want to earn the money I need in order to survive, and then I want to live, and then I want to write about living. Now I get up at 5:45 every morning except weekends, and I write until 7am, and then I get my son up for breakfast. Then I go to work. In the evening I watch TV or read with my wife. I have spent decades trying out other formulas, but in the end, if I can write for one good hour in the morning,

then I am content. That is enough. My advice to new writers? You need to live and you need to have discipline. Find out what kind of writer you are, what kind of thinker and feeler you are, and then tailor your life around that. Everyone is going to have their own way that works, and you need to find what that is. I worked as a journalist for 15 years and I have taught writing for the last 10, but if I could have my time again I would have trained in a trade—joinery, carpentry, pattern-cutting, something I could do with my hands. I would have got really good at it, and then I would have gone freelance, started my own business, trained an employee. I would have freed myself up financially in order to put writing at the centre. So that's my advice for people who want to write—don't make earning a living through

writing your end goal. Make living your goal.

**N** 



Old Marshall High Studios, Marshall, NC Before the Storm • Kim Lutz

# Pair of Haiku Brook Longstaff

sense the morning light fog rises from a warm earth awaken cows moo

> there upon the hill the one adored from below will the love descend?



Digital Representation: Ginkgo from Union Street, Athens, Ohio • Kim Lutz

#### Gifting Garden Tom Dingledein

Throughout my upbringing, suburban gardening always played a small part. I grew up with my parents always having at least a few tomato and zucchini plants and my grandmother having a more extensive home garden. I have very fond memories of those childhood gardens. However, over the past decade, I have found solace in the garden and I'm fortunate to be able to share it with others. This is a brief summary of my unique journey and how a radish seed set me on the path to recover from trauma and ultimately provide well over 7,000 dahlia blooms for others' enjoyment.

At the age of 32, I found my life to be at an unpredicted low. My marriage of eight years had come to an end. My ex-wife struggled with her rehab and therefore was unable to be reliable. I was the sole responsible parent to my three year old daughter and my daughter and I had moved in with my parents. Topping it all off, I was working a part-time job without benefits or a livable wage. I was simply trying to cope with all that was happening in my life and all of the transitions that were taking place.

As I was learning to cope, I attended a "Divorce Care" group-therapy course offered by a local church and therapists. During one

of the sessions, they recommended starting a small garden or at least planting a few seeds. There were many philosophical clichés that went with this suggestion like "nature will teach you patience", "there is a plan even if you can't see it", and "there is potential in that tiny seed". Fundamentally I understood what they were trying to teach us, but I could not fully comprehend the impact that this suggestion would eventually have on my life.

My first garden success was so much fun! It was a few simple Cherry Belle radishes grown in a small planter on the deck. I do not know if it was the amazement of eating something I grew, sharing a few with my dad or learning about the varieties of radishes available to grow that you can't buy in the grocery store, but it brought awe into my life and the distraction I needed. From this start, my parents were happy to encourage my gardening and allowed me to dig a couple of garden beds. My evenings quickly turned into a garden decompression zone. Once I put my daughter to bed, I was able to turn on the backyard flood-lights and remove sod for another bed or sit on a bucket and try to figure out the new pruning method I had read about. This time and attention to the garden led to the stress relief and bit of exercise I longed for. It also brought on new and welcomed problems, like, what do you do with 73 cucumbers? You quickly learn how to make pickles and have your toddler help!!! Then what do you do with 20 jars of pickles that are only cold-pickled and not properly canned for storage??? You find the friends in life that would happily help you eat 20 jars of pickles before they expire! Most importantly though, that little seed got me off of the couch, it got me to stop thinking about my situation in life (at least for a moment) and it got me to reconnect with the friends that love and support me.

Then life's struggles struck again. Later in the year of my divorce, my ex-wife was found unresponsive and ultimately passed away due to diabetic complications. Needless to say, the next gardening season, more garden beds were added as I continued to use this as a method of coping. I very much could not recognize at the time what gardening was doing in my life or how it kept me connected to my people and simply kept me occupied when I needed to fight slipping into my own depression, but it did.

A few years later, I met a gardening friend that made the statement that Dahlias were

her favorite flower. In a foolish attempt to get her attention, I decided to grow dahlias at my new house. That initial plan quickly became a distant memory, but dahlias had been planted in mass and had become another fun aspect of gardening for my daughter and I. That summer, we used the blooms to decorate for my parents' 45th wedding anniversary and gifted multiple bouquets to friends and family. The following summer we entered our blooms in the local county fair and my daughter, now 9 years old, beat me in three different flower categories! Those skills that were started, developed and nurtured by the lessons of a radish gave me the inclination, or just enough false confidence, to want to keep the dahlias going.

What came next was learning about the dahlias' water and nutrient needs, their need for support and the need for the dahlia's tubers to be lifted in order to survive the winter. Our gardening zone is 6B, in NE Ohio, which is quite a distance from the dahlias' native habitat of Mexico. However, my success with lifting and dividing (propagating) the dahlia's tubers only grew the garden more and allowed me to gift tubers to friends who wanted to try growing them too. The dahlias continued the best

aspects of what the vegetable garden started for me. It continually connects us to other people. My gardening friends happily trade tomatoes and veggie starts for dahlia tubers. My mother is thrilled when my daughter and I plant tubers for her birthday every spring. I also loved it when my daughter and her friends wanted to pose with the dahlias for their homecoming pictures this year. Then most importantly to us, we are able to gift the blooms as a simple way to bring a little bit of joy and beauty into the world. This year we maintained the dahlia garden with 120 plants and 38 varieties. The varieties that I select are primarily because they do well as cut flowers. Over the past few years, we've also been able to supply acquaintances with the bouquets for their wedding, bouquets to lift the spirits of those feeling overwhelmed working in a public school setting, bouquets for church altars, bouquets for family gatherings, and recently, we were able to provide dahlia bouquets for a friend's in-law's Celebration of Life service.

The dahlia garden and all of my hobby farm adventures have allowed me to take my difficulty with life transitions, stresses from being a public school music teacher and a single parent of an amazing child with disabilities and put them into the soil. It has also kept me connected to many important people in my life.

My gardening continues to branch off and I love learning more about soil science, different types of propagation, how to save seeds, how to increase yields, and so much more. This also includes my love for English gardening shows and my favorite gardening show host, Monty Don. In a recent speech he gave, he stated, "... but much more important, is that relationship that you have with the garden. You should garden as you live, take risks. Don't march - Dance! And if you're like me you'll dance really badly and embarrassingly. Doesn't Matter! That's how you should garden. And if you can share your garden, so much the better! I'm lucky, the last 43 years, I've shared it with Sarah, every aspect of the garden and that's been wonderful. But it doesn't have to be a person. We all know with our pets, we share the garden. It's with love and affection. And I do feel that if you can garden as you live; with kindness, with honesty, with bravery, with joy, you'll be a good gardener. That's what you need to know and if you garden like that, I bet you have a good life too!"

I simply couldn't agree more with his sentiments. Who cares if you make a "mistake" in the garden but get out there and try. Then, if you can be in community with it too, it will help you find your people, be seen, see others, and have fellowship that heals the heart from what stresses it.

Gardening is only one glorious aspect of my journey and coping strategies. I encourage anyone in crisis to seek professional counseling and a therapy program that is correct for themselves and for their situation.



From the Garden • Tom Dingledein

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#### **Heartwood** (Published in *Four Way Review*, August 2018) Rose Skelton

On the day after Hazel died – it was a Tuesday afternoon in early March – George stood at his woodworking bench, whittling a bowl. He pressed the piece of yew down, and used a bowl gouge to scoop a smooth sliver of the pinkish-white wood so that it curled upwards and away, falling to the bench. He did this repeatedly – he tried not to think of anything else, not Hazel, not the empty house – and then, tired of that singular motion, he reached for sandpaper and ran it over the burrs and birds-eyes until the wood was warm and smooth to the touch.

George looked through the window, out on to the loch, where the water was as flat and as grey as slate. On the loch's far shore, lying low across the hills Beinn Bheàrnach, Beinn a' Bhainne, and Beinn Taladh, was a bank of cloud that made the hills seem like stubs that ended only a few hundred feet up. These were the hills that George and Hazel had looked at every day of the 43 years that they had been married. Peat and granite and died-back bracken were George and Hazel's winter-time palate; these were the hues that stayed with them through the darkest months of the year, until April when the first of the dog violets reared their purple nodding heads.

Hazel hadn't been well, but despite the pains that tore at her bones, and then the operation just before Christmas, she had been out in her garden every day. A few weeks after the operation, even, she had pulled on her wellies, got her gardening gloves down from the hall shelf and wrapped her purple rain jacket about her. Concerned, George had watched her through the long window at the back of the house climb carefully up the steps, clutching at the wooden rail, and enter her labyrinthine vegetable garden. He had watched as she had become smaller and smaller, eventually disappearing behind the poly-tunnel, just a purple speck on the hillside, a trowel in her hand.

Now white wood shavings curled on George's fleece jacket, and flecks of wood dust sprinkled his arms and shoulders. He didn't bother to brush himself off. When the light grew dim, he switched on the overhead strips, which flickered and growled to life. He would stay out here until he saw his tools in double; only then would he go inside the empty house.

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The next afternoon, the minister called

in to visit. George watched him drive up the road in his faded Ford Cortina, and then they sat in the living room where the stove glowed with coals. George served him tea and some Ginger Nut biscuits which Hazel had bought at the Spar Shop just Saturday. The minister had mild Parkinson's disease, and his hands shook, the tea cup rattling on the saucer. He spilled a little of the milky tea on the beige carpet, both of them pretending not to notice. George didn't mind; he just wanted the minister to leave. He wasn't ready to talk about Hazel.

The minister offered his condolences. "Thank you," George said, and then looked at the spot on the carpet where the tea stained brown. He asked if Hazel had left any wishes for her funeral, any specific requests – cremation, burial, that kind of thing. "We hadn't expected her to die," George said, thinking how cruel to be taken, after everything they had been through, by a stroke. He got up to stand at the window.

From there he looked out onto the edge of Hazel's vegetable garden, which staggered in wild, overgrown terraces up the hillside behind the house. Neither George nor Hazel knew exactly how many acres the garden covered, because as demand for Hazel's produce across

the island had increased, so the garden had stretched out into their land at the back of the house. From the outside, the garden looked nothing more than untamed gorse bushes and rowan trees, trees that Hazel had planted when they had first moved to the house because in local lore they were thought to ward off witches. But on entering, and following the muddy path up the hill, the garden stretched out into large areas planted with every kind of vegetable that could grow in the island's short season.

Raised beds were planted with leeks, spinach, kale, squash and kohlrabi, beds that sat alongside fruit cages, potting sheds, and a poly-tunnel which in late spring brimmed with sweet peas and, in summer, with strawberries, runner beans, trailing tomatoes. Up higher were whole sections reserved for root vegetables — crops that in summer burst their green tops through the rich loamy earth, and in autumn delivered creamy white offerings of parsnip, potato, turnip, Jerusalem artichoke, roots that kept them going through the cold dark months of winter.

From up here, Hazel had often told George at the end of a long day of work, she could look out across the house, the fields that

surrounded them, and beyond to the loch, the hills, and the islands beyond theirs. From here she could be reminded that they lived on an island, because it was so easy to forget, an island that they had chosen randomly off the map all those years ago, its very virtue being that it was disconnected from the rest of Britain. She said that she felt reassured, when she was looking out on the sea that kept them apart from the mainland, that this would stop the rest of the world from encroaching upon theirs.

George now stared out at the rowan trees that bordered the garden, clasping his hands behind his back, his fingers picking at an old woodworking cut on his thumb. Behind him, the minister fidgeted and shook. George wondered what he was going to do about the garden. Keeping it up had been Hazel's job, not his.

"You've been standing there for five minutes," the minister said kindly, and George turned to find him still sitting there.

"The garden," George said, then trailed off. The settee springs creaked as the minister prepared to get up. "If it's cremation you choose, it will have to be a mainland service," the minister said. "Or there's burial in the village, of course. It's a lot to think about, and so soon. Perhaps you will call me when you've had time to consider?"

George nodded heavily, his mind darting

to when he had seen Hazel in the hospital, just two days ago, after the doctors had said she was gone. He blinked the image away, and right then, through the window, he thought he saw a movement through the trees. He looked closer, squinting his eyes, straining to see through the silvery branches if what he thought he had seen was real. A pair of eyes looked back at him, white and wide, and then another pair, and then another. He saw a flash of tawny hide, a glimpse of cream, the sharp points of antlers. Deer, George started, and the Minister looked at him quizzically.

"Never mind," George said, and then rushed the Minister to the door, hoping he hadn't been rude.

"You'll be in touch about things?" the minister said, "and of course, if there's anything."

George nodded.

When the minister had set off in his car, down the steep driveway towards the sea, George went upwards, towards the garden. There, he saw how the deer had got in: a fallen strut had left a gaping entrance to Hazel's garden, and the fence had been trampled. The deer might come out on their own, but it was unlikely. He would need to fix the fence, and he would need help to get the deer out. He couldn't do it alone.

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Early the next morning, frost glinted on the tufts of shoreline grass, and herons stood still and long-legged at the water's edge. George looked out from the window in the living room, and then picked up the phone to call his neighbour, Karl the farmer, and ask if he had time to come over.

The deer were still in the garden. George had watched them from the living room window as they destroyed an elderflower bush, the bush shaking in great waves as it succumbed to the violent nibbling of teeth. Now George felt a kind of weariness that two cups of coffee hadn't shaken, a deep tiredness that had lain with him all throughout the sleepless, cold night and had risen with him at the blue hued dawn. It was a tiredness that loomed over him so that he felt if he didn't keep working, it would crush him.

He was finishing up a slice of Hazel's sourdough bread when Karl's truck pulled up outside the house, his two sheepdogs, Ailsa and Aidan, turning circles in the truck bed.

"Hello, mate," said Karl, eyeing him cautiously. He held out his hand, across the pile of condolence letters that littered the doorstep.

"Karl," said George, shaking his hand, looking down at the letters. "I'm okay."

"Whatever you need," said Karl, and George nodded.

Karl was younger and taller than George, broad-backed, big-boned, carrying a head of bright blond hair. His face glowed red above the neck of the Guernsey sweater he always wore. George and Karl had been neighbors for going on 25 years, when Karl had taken over managing the farm on the Ashworth estate, and had moved to the cottage four miles along the road. The Ashworth estate stretched as far as George and Hazel's house, and continued on the other side, so George had seen Karl come down on his quad bike, or in the truck if it was blowing a hoolie, twice a day, every day for the last two and a half decades.

George stepped outside and pulled the door closed behind him. The cold air stung his nostrils. Hazel loved this kind of weather, the ground still hard but spring somewhere nearby. She loved the white stillness of frost and the long evenings when a stew simmered on the stove, when she and George would play Scrabble together, which Hazel usually won. Hazel had always been good with words, ever since school where she had won the spelling competition. That was when George had first noticed her; they had both been thirteen.

George led Karl around the side of the house to the garden.

"Part of the fence fell," said George, pointing to the gap. "This was her department. I haven't been round here since," he paused, "the operation. Before Christmas."

"I see," said Karl. "Can you get a new section of fence up?"

"I can get some posts," he said. "And some new wire fencing."

"When do you think you'll have it ready?"
"Tomorrow, maybe. By the weekend for sure. I'll have to go to the town for supplies."

"Okay," said Karl.

"But the deer," said George. "There must be five of them at least. They've been watching me."

Karl nodded. Over the years, Karl had become a feature in George's life, if not quite a friend then someone George could count on. Hazel had sold her produce every week at the market, sixteen miles away in town, so she knew nearly everyone. But George rarely went away from the house, unless to fit a door he had made or sell his turned wooden objects. He was fine without friends; he had Hazel, and he had his work.

But when Hazel had got sick at the start of the winter, Karl had begun dropping in every now and again after he'd fed the sheep, offering Hazel and George lifts to the ferry for hospital appointments in Glasgow, picking up medicine for them from the town. Karl's wife, Mandy, might send along a cake or some bread, and recently Karl had shown up on his quad bike with a fallen branch of rowan wood from the estate. He had asked Mr Ashworth's permission to take it to George to turn bowls with, and Mr Ashworth had said, given the circumstances, that this would be fine.

These were little things, but where they lived, they made all the difference. During Hazel's sickness, George realized, he had come to rely on Karl and Mandy in a way that made him feel uncomfortable. He didn't want to be a burden on anyone.

Karl and George stood now, looking into the garden, until they saw movement, a swaying of branches, the snap of twigs and the flash of red between the shades of greens and greys.

"I see them," said Karl. "Little pests."

"I don't know how long they've been in there," said George. "Hazel, she hasn't been out here since, well – " His shoulders hunched and his chest caved, as if he were folding in on himself.

"It's okay, mate," said Karl, reaching out a hand and placing it gingerly on George's shoulder. George raised his forehead, pulled back his neck, sucked in a little air.

"Since Saturday. She was fine on Saturday."

She was out here on Saturday."

"Well, it sounds like they've had enough of a feed," said Karl. "What say we get these rascals out of there? I'll get Ailsa and Aidan from the truck and see what we can do. How does that sound?"

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While George and Karl were out in the

garden trying to get the deer out, the minister left a message on George's answering machine.

"It's Reverend Paul," said the message, which George listened to later on that night. "From the church." He asked if George might call him, or if he might come round again, to discuss the arrangements. George had listened to the beeps that followed the message and then had pressed the delete button.

George and Karl were unsuccessful with the deer. The sheepdogs did their best to round them up but every time one of the dogs cornered one, the deer leapt away into some further reach of the garden. Karl and George stayed with it until around lunch time, when Karl said he had to go and see about the cows.

"Of course," George said. "You be getting along." He tried to say it in a way that didn't make Karl feel bad. Even so, Karl shifted awkwardly from one rubber-booted foot to the other and offered to come back another day if the deer still hadn't left.

"If it's no bother," George replied, trying not to sound relieved.

"It's nae bother to me at all, I want to help," Karl said. "You'd do the same for me, right, mate?" George dipped his head, a heavy nod of agreement.

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As darkness fell that Thursday afternoon, George went out to his workshop. He pressed the light switch on the wall, and the caged strips flickered to life. The bowl he was working on lay on the bench, its corners cut, its insides gouged, its surface rough with the scoops and turns of his tools.

George had been woodturning for as long as he had been married to Hazel, 43 happy years as a husband and a woodturner. You couldn't rush either one if you wanted to do them right. George had learned about wood from his father, growing up in the New Forest, where his father had taken George on his wood-seeking trips around their house. By the time George had left school, at fifteen, he had learned to love wood with the same passion that his own father had.

George earned his money from making doors and gates for people, kitchen cabinets, those sorts of useful things. But what he rose for every day, was to turn discarded, forgotten pieces of wood into beautiful bowls, platters, vases, objects that would live in people's houses for years, maybe even be passed on to the next generation. He wasn't good with books, or words, or spelling, like Hazel had been, but he was good with his hands and he had the love of wood buried deep within him.

George looked out of the dark window at his own reflection staring back, and then at the row of tools clipped in hooks along the wall. There was the red handled chisel his uncle had bought him when he had turned his first bowl, the saw, 40 years old, a new blade bought on Amazon just one month ago. A bradawl, the rubber grip long since turned sticky but the blade still up to the job, which he had bought in an old man's yard sale on their first holiday together in 1976. A jack plane that Hazel had bought him for his twenty-second birthday, the same year she briefly went to work at the Clydesdale before deciding an office life wasn't for her and took to gardening full-time. A sliding bevel square, one of many tools left to him by Jack, who used to farm next door. The froe that George had bought himself, the gimlet he had found. The rasp, the spokeshave, the twybil; a brace, a broadaxe, a bucksaw.

George ran his hand over the blades and handles now, ending with the set of Sheffield steel bowl gouges his father had left him when he'd died. George had spent nearly his whole life with these tools, each one so precise, existing for one single purpose only. He looked once again up at the window out of which he could see nothing, only his own ghostly reflection. What would his purpose be, now that she was gone? What would he be?

Lying on one end of the bench was the piece of rowan that Karl had brought to him from the estate. It had been sitting there, gnarled and knobbled, waiting for him to do something with it, but with everything that had happened – the operation, the slow recovery, and then, this, Hazel's death – George hadn't

got around to even splitting it open. He had no idea, and could not tell from looking at it, what was inside, what colours and patterns he would find when he eventually laid it out and cut it through with the saw.

But he had the urge to touch it now, to rub his fingers over the bark, and then he wanted to take the branch in his hands, and he did, feeling the weight of it pull on his arms. Then, it were as if his body were acting on its own, and the deer, Karl, the minister's visits, even the fact that Hazel wasn't inside cooking dinner, all of that became a kind of haze to which George was now numb. He took the branch over to the saw table and laid it down in front of the circular blade. He pulled on his safety glasses, stretched his fingers into some gloves, and flicked the switch on the side of the saw. The jagged mouth of the blade roared, a blast of sawdust-speckled air gushed upwards onto his face. The teeth began to pierce the rough skin of the wood and the noise drowned out the darkness that had permeated George's mind. Just the rowan, the blade, and the devastating cut of metal on wood.

George shut off the saw and laid the two pieces of wood down on the workbench, blinking the dust from his eyes and taking in the colours before him. Cream and copper, tan and taupe, specks of auburn and swirls of russet, freckles of chestnut and honey and peach. He swept off the dust, and then licked

the tip of one of his fingers and rubbed a little saliva into the wood. Along with the growth rings that he expected, the wood also contained patterns that snaked in one direction and then in the other, the lighter-colored sapwood on the outside spiralling inwards towards the deep treacle-tinged heartwood at its core.

George ran his hand over the wood once more, taking in the brightness of the colors, and then he watched as they began to fade, as the air in the workshop oxidized the wood. It was as if their lights were going out. The colors lost their brightness, the wood lost its shine. It would never be the same piece of wood again.

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The week lumbered on, bringing with it an entourage of lady-callers, women who lived on the island, many of whom people George had never even met. He had made the mistake of letting one of them through the door, early on in the week, and then they had talked on Facebook, probably, or at the post-office, and before he knew it, they all wanted to come in.

They brought cakes, mostly, but also soups, stews, trays of flapjacks, an apple strudel, a multi-coloured chilli plant from the village shop, all of which lay abandoned on the shelf inside the porch where in April, Hazel would have been laying out trays planted with seeds, ready for outside sowing in June. When the

women knocked at the house, he didn't answer, and so they cupped their hands to the window and then pressed their faces into the aperture their hands created. Then they would decide he wasn't there and back away, leaving their offerings inside the porch.

Eventually, someone brought George a bottle of Famous Grouse whisky, even though he hadn't had a drink in God knows how many years. The bearer was new to the island – a blow-in, locals called these people – and had no idea that George had promised Hazel a long time ago that he would never touch another drop. George snaffled the whisky into the pocket of his woodworking jacket and took it out to the workshop. He didn't bother with a glass.

There was an old leather armchair in his workshop, and he sank back into it, rested the bottle on his knee, and looked up at the rafters. He let out a sigh. Then George twisted the top off the bottle, put it to his lips, and glugged at the amber liquid, wincing and enjoying the pain as it slipped down his throat. The whisky burned the back of his tongue, and gouged tears of surprise from his eyes because he had not tasted whisky in so many years and now he remembered how disgusting and how delicious it was.

He thought of Hazel, and of her garden, and of her windowsill which should be covered in trays of seeds but instead was covered in

trays of brownies and other things he would never eat. He tugged at the neck of that bottle and forced himself to swallow the whisky, and after a few minutes of drinking his arms felt light, as if they might lift of their own accord, and his head was woozy, and then he couldn't remember why he was sitting in his workshop at all. With the confusion came a momentary, welcome relief.

But the feeling that had been plaguing him since Hazel had died, the weight that hung around his shoulders, that dogged him in the house and followed him when he went to bed and when he got up in the night to go to the toilet and when he finally rose to deal with the day, the immense and stupefying weight of her absence still clung to him, and even though he was drunk and he felt like throwing up everything that was inside him, still it was there. And the thought that it would never leave, that Hazel's absence might for ever hang around his neck, was, even in his drunken discomfort, also a strange kind of relief, because at least that meant that he would always feel her close by.

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When George woke up to a hand on his shoulder nudging him awake and Karl looming over him, he didn't know where he was. But by the light coming through the windows, he could see that it was morning. His head was raging.

"You okay, George?" said Karl.

"Just give me a second," said George, who felt sick and mortified by what Karl had seen. "I was just..."

"Yes," said Karl, who ran his finger along a knotted branch of ash that lay drying on the racks, looking away so that George could gather himself, straighten his jacket and kick the bottle underneath the chair. "I came about the deer," said Karl.

George had forgotten about not getting the deer out yesterday, and felt immense gratitude for Karl having come round. They went outside to Karl's truck, where the sheep dogs snapped and twisted in the back.

"You okay, mate?" Karl said, eyeing him closely.

"I'm getting there," said George, who had now been without Hazel for four whole days, the longest they had been apart for twenty or more years. "I'm not really sleeping," he ventured. His head felt as if it were bursting.

"Is there anything we can do?" asked Karl "Mandy says do you want to come over for tea?"

"Aye, maybe one of these days," said George, who would have loved to eat a meal at a table with someone else. He had been surviving off sourdough bread and cheese, which he nibbled at while standing up at the kitchen counter, too afraid to sit down alone. "Maybe later," he said, worried that too much warmth would crack him. "I'll let you know," he said, knowing he probably wouldn't.

The sheep dogs, Ailsa and Aidan, pressed their muzzles against the grill at the back of Karl's truck.

"How about them deer?" said Karl, "are they still up there in your garden?"

"They've taken out the rowans," said George.

"Oh dear," said Karl, knowing Hazel had planted them. He twisted the handle on the tail gate and the dogs piled out of the truck, panting and dangling their long pink tongues around the rims of George's boots. "Come," Karl snapped at the dogs. To George he said, "let's see what we can do, shall we?"

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The deer took fright when the dogs appeared, and scattered to every corner of the garden. "You stay by the gate," Karl shouted, following the dogs with his whistles and clicks up through the paths that wound from each part of the garden to the other. "They might come out," he shouted, his voice fading as he went further away. Then Karl was gone, only his red jacket visible in flashes.

In actual fact, Hazel had told George when she had gone for her operation before Christmas that, should anything happen to her, she wished to be cremated. She wanted her ashes to be scattered in the garden, Hazel had said, underneath the rowan trees. George hadn't wanted to talk about it but Hazel had insisted. "Just in case," she had said, holding his hand in bed the night before she was due at the hospital. "I just want to know that we talked about it."

George's head was still thick with the whisky that he wished to God he hadn't touched. The feeling of having broken his promise to Hazel was enough to make him realize that it was the last time he would ever drink again. He heard a shout from the top part of the garden, somewhere up near the brassicas, then he heard the dogs barking, and then a scuffle of hooves around the perimeter fence as two white-faced stags came trampling down the hill towards him.

"Look out!" shouted Karl, whose head was just visible above a clump of gorse bushes. George was momentarily fixated by the way the animals leapt towards him. One of the stags had just a small pair of antlers but the other was an eight-pointer, maybe a ten. Its haunches undulated as it ran. A fine drizzle had begun to fall on George's face and it seemed as if the drops were falling on someone else's skin entirely. The two stags were nearly upon him, undeterred by his presence.

"Let them through, George," Karl shouted, "stand back." The stags made directly for the

opening in the fence. All George had to do was to let them pass. They streaked by in a flurry of fur and bone and hoof.

"Well done, mate," said Karl, who had come down the hill towards him. "I'm afraid we've got trouble with that young fallow, though," he said. "She's tried to get through the deer fence, and I think her leg may be broken." A fine layer of mist had settled on Karl's face too, and the two of them, bedraggled and damp, look out at one another beneath rain-soaked hair.

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Karl came back that afternoon after milking and shot the injured deer. It had been a young one, its leg mangled by trying to jump over the fence, its antlers small but perfectly formed. They laid the deer on plastic sheeting in the garage, split it open from end to end and removed the gralloch which Karl plopped into a bucket, the kidneys and intestines trying their best to slip through his fingers. He left the head on a tarpaulin, and took the feet for his sheep dogs to chew on. Together they hoisted the body up onto a hook in the roof beam, put there for such a purpose. George would skin it for its meat once it had bled dry.

Afterwards, they sat in the house and George lit the wood-burning stove, resisting the urge to ask Karl if he wanted to play Scrabble. George produced the apple strudel, and together they ate it and drank a pot of tea. "Have you decided what you're going to do about the –" Karl paused, "about Hazel. About the funeral?"

George sipped at his tea, and said, finally, "Yes." He knew what had to be done, and tomorrow he would call the minister. "Hazel wanted to be cremated," said George. "She wanted her ashes scattered underneath the rowans. They'll grow back, won't they?" he asked.

When they had gone up to free the deer from the fence, and found its leg broken and the deer weak having wrangled all night, they had found the garden in a state of destruction. The beech trees' lower branches had been bitten to the core, the purple sprouting, kale and other winter greens were flattened and snapped, stems bleeding white, open to the sky. The potato patch was churned with clovenhoofed prints, and the rowans were naked, stripped of their bark, the sapwood within shredded and torn as if an angry clawed animal had been trying to get its guts out.

George had run his hand along the trunk of one of the trees, once smooth and silvery, now rough against his palm, like strands of old rope. George didn't know if the rowans would survive another year, but Karl had suggested he call James the farrier, who was good with trees, to see if he had any advice. When Karl finished

his tea, George didn't offer him any more. They said goodnight at the door, and George heard the truck bounce down the lane to the road, the dogs whining from their cage in the back.

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In the garage, the deer hung from the hook. In the stark glow of the strip lights, the deer's hide shone bright, tawny with patches of cream, specks of brown, hazy spots of auburn faintly visible. The head lay on the tarp still, and the deer's eyes were closed now, its lids pressed shut against its face. But when Karl had taken a rifle and nuzzled it up against its struggling head, its eyes had been wide open, bright with fear and pain, the eyeballs engorged, straining through its own scull. George had hardly been able to bear it, though he knew that this was the kindest thing to do.

"Best to put it out of its misery," Karl had said, and then he had pulled the trigger. The fawn was killed immediately, its body slumping against the fence where its leg had been caught, but for a few seconds, its muscles had twitched and its eyes had gone on blinking, the nervous system firing impulses even though its heart had stopped. George wasn't religious, or even spiritual, but he thought, for a moment, that he might have been able to see something pass from its eyes, something fade, before the eyes

stopped blinking and the muscles ceased to shiver.

George closed the door to the garage, turning his back on the deer. It would still be there in the morning, and a few days later when George would skin it and carve up the meat for the freezer, taking a parcel along to Karl and Mandy. George went back inside the house, past the trays of cakes, to the table where the phone lived. Holding the receiver, he dialed the minister's number, and waited for him to pick up on the other end.



#### Redbone Hound Kim Lutz

We spent the summer
hiking by moonlight
swimming in the lake
on hot afternoons
mountain biking and climbing waterfalls
weekends kayaking creeks and rivers
By fireside, I listened to your poetry
and drunken ideas
embers burning down to ashes
as the summer ended

months later I visited your side of the mountain

we went on a hike and took the redbone hound which turned into a scramble down the side of a mountain through brambles and thickets of rhododendron Old Red following faithfully we made it off the mountain the three of us sweaty and tired found the road and started the walk home it's maybe five miles you said even Red was tired you apologized again and again

a pickup truck stopped the October sun setting warm air whipping my hair into tangles as miles of mountains passed Redbone sprawled out exhausted you with eyes half closed in the wind

it was the last time I saw you and Old Red and as I said goodbye you apologized again but to me it was a perfect day and the perfect ending



#### **Rooted** Scarlett Fried

EXT. OUTSIDE FARM - DAY

A charter bus SCREECHES to a halt, and the brakes let out a SIGH of air. The dirt kicked up by the wheels slowly settles back down.

INT. BUS - DAY

STEVIE (23) sits on the bus and looks out of the window. Through the window is a sign that reads "Lena's Orchards and Vineyards".

EXT. OUTSIDE FARM - DAY

Stevie steps off of the bus and, aside from a backpack and carry-on sized suitcase, she is alone. The bus pulls off, a cloud of dust in its wake.

Stevie drags her suitcase and walks towards the sign. A Colonial-style farmhouse looms in the distance. Stevie walks up a lush green lane to the house.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

At the house, there is a large, wraparound front porch. People of all ages and ethnicities sit at mismatched tables and chairs. Every person has a plate piled high with fresh vegetables and warm bread.

Out of breath from the trek to the house, Stevie hauls her suitcase up the steps, PANTING.

Stevie stops to catch her breath, hands on her knees, and looks up to see a tall older WOMAN (50s) with a slight Eastern European accent, healthy farmer's tan and wearing overalls staring down at her.

WOMAN

Stevie! I'm Lena. Glad to see you made it.

Lena pulls Stevie into a crushing bear hug.

LENA

How was the bus ride? Hope you didn't get too beaten up on our dirt road

Lena lets out a loud HA, and claps Stevie on the back, nearly sending the young woman flying across the porch.

STEVIE

Yeah, um yes, I did. Thank you for having me. Is there somewhere good for me to put my stuff down?

LENA

Yes. And then we'll get some food in you. Beau can show you to your room. Beau?

BEAU (Late 20s) stands up from one of the nearby tables. He also has a strong farmer's tan, but his skin is still young,

not as weathered as Lena's.

His work pants and shirt are covered in a healthy layer of dirt, and Stevie can't help but notice that some of the dirt in his hair as well.

LENA (CONT'D)

Beau, this is our new farmhand, Stevie. Stevie, this is Beau, my nephew. He spends every summer with me. Since he was seven. He's not too sure about bringing on the WOOFers. He plans to run it himself because no one knows this farm better than he does.

Beau LAUGHS, embarrassed, and he blushes.

BEAU

(to Lena)

Aunt Lena, please, no one knows this farm better than you.

(to Stevie)

Come with me.

Beau gives Stevie an awkward smile, and pushes the front door of the house open.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

BEAU

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BEAU

Sorry about my aunt. She's always excited to introduce new people to the family.

Stevie shrugs and gives him an awkward smile, not knowing what to say.

Beau leads Stevie up a tall flight of stairs to a second floor that has been converted to hold twice the amount of rooms it originally had.

Beau stops at a door mid-way down the hall. The door has a small nametag that reads "Stevie" and is decorated with hand-pressed flowers.

With a sweeping motion, Beau opens the door.

BEAU (CONT'D)

Here's your room. You can unpack now if you like, but I think Aunt Lena wants to do a tour for the new folks, and you won't hear the end of it if she doesn't get to feed you something first.

STEVIE

(chuckling)

Oh, I know allll about folks who won't stop until you've eaten at least two plates of food. I have two Jewish grandmothers.

BEAU

Only two? Pffft, that's nothing. I have three, and another four Jewish aunts between them.

The ice broken, Stevie and Beau break into GIGGLES, and head back out to the porch, and delicious, homemade food.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Lena and Beau stand in front of Stevie and three other new farmhands. Behind them is a huge, bright red classic barn.

LENA

Welcome to Lena's Orchards and Vineyards. Today we'll be giving the official tour so you can get an idea of the kind of work we do here.

Beau leads the group to a section of garden beds next to the barn.

BEAU

To start, this is our Kitchen Garden. We use this space to experiment with the best growing practices to make the most out of a smaller space.

Everything we grow here we use in our meals.

LENA

On the farm, we all live, eat, and work collectively. So, one day you might be asked to cook all of the meals while others clean up, and then you'll switch the next day.

Beau takes the group around to the back of the barn. There, goats graze in one pen, while pigs snuffle around in another. A third pen hosts a couple of cows.

EXT. MONTAGE: SEVERAL LOCATIONS - DAY

Scenes around the farm. Rolling hills. Goats. Rows of vineyards. Workers picking grapes. Orchards. Beau notices Stevie. Smiling faces. Getting stuck in some mud. Stevie notices Beau. A worker climbing down and loading up apples, then climbing back up to do more. Stevie's eyes grow wide as she realizes the amount of work she's gotten herself into.

INT. FLASHBACK: STEVIE'S CITY APT - DAY

Flashback: Stevie's college apartment in a noisy city.

Boxes are everywhere, kitchen gadgets and clothing mixed together, piles of unpacked books. The bed is half-made, and a huge stack of pictures threatens to topple off of the coffee table. Stevie bustles around, Gracie Abrams blasting in the background as she packs up her college apartment.

It's chaos, but an organized one. Post-It notes hang off of boxes and furniture. Neatly hand-printed lists on lined paper are taped to the wall.

Stevie's phone BUZZES from the bed, and Stevie jumps, having been so hyperfocused on packing. She picks up the phone and pauses the music. The screen reads "Mama \*heart emoji\*".

#### STEVIE

Look, mom, I did like working at the newspaper but. . . ok, I know. . . I'm just not sure if it's what I want to do right now. . . I know I know. . . but I just. . . I haven't even had a chance to see anything except my hometown and this college. . . YES. I swear I did a good job and I was always on time. I need a chance to experience the world. . . Okay, love you. Bye.

INT. STEVIE'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

RING RING RING. The sound of the loud dinner bell jolts Stevie out of her dream. She rolls over and looks at the clock. It reads 05:30am.

Stevie GROANS and rolls over, pulling the covers over her head.

Someone KNOCKS on her door.

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Someone KNOCKS on her door.

STEVIE

(muffled)

Go away!

BEAU

Time to get up!

STEVIE

No!

BEAU

I'm coming in!

Stevie GROANS again as Beau marches into her room and flings the curtains open. He flicks on the light switch as he heads back out the door. BEAU (CONT'D)

Breakfast is in 30 minutes. If you don't hurry you're going to have to wait in a very long line for the bathroom.

Stevie throws her pillow at Beau's receding figure, but it just hits the door as he shuts it.

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Stevie walks into the dining room with the other WWOOFers.

Everyone lines up at a side table and piles their plates high with fresh fruits and omelette fixings before sitting down at a huge rustic dining room table.

When Stevie sits down, she can't help but glance in Beau's direction. He glances back at her, but Stevie quickly looks away.

Lena notices Stevie noticing Beau. She nudges Beau.

LENA

Come. Get some more strawberries with  $\operatorname{me}$ .

Lena and Beau get in line at the buffet. Lena leans close to Beau.

LENA (CONT'D)

Be careful with her.

Beau looks at his aunt.

LENA (CONT'D)

You should take her seriously, or you'll regret letting her go.

BEAU

Ah, these American students. They're tourists to the farm life. I'm part of the tourism. Trust me. Nothing is going to happen.

Lena shakes her head, smiling.

LENA

Oh, to be young.

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

A group of WWOOFers stand in the orchard in front of Lena and Beau. Beau picks up a fruit picker from the pile on the ground next to him.

LENA

. . . Beau is going to demonstrate how to use the fruit picker to pick the apples.

Beau deftly situates the fruit picker under an apple and plucks it from the tree.

Everyone stoops to grab a picker. Stevie takes one and heads over to a full-looking tree down the path.

Stevie's fruit picker wobbles in the air as she tries to get under an apple. She takes a step back to get a better angle and trips on her own feet.

Just before Stevie hits the ground, a pair of strong arms catches her. Stevie looks up at Beau's face as he gently hoists her back up.

STEVIE

Thank you.

Beau grabs the fruit picker off the ground and hands it back to Stevie, shrugging like it was no big deal.

BEAU

Here. Let me help you.

Beau wraps his arms around Stevie's and guides her fruit picker up into the tree. Together, they carefully pluck the fruit out of the tree.

STEVIE

I-I think I've got it from here. Thanks for your help.

Beau's hands linger softly on Stevie's shoulders. Almost reluctantly, he lets go, his hands brushing gently down her arms.

BEAU

If you need anything, just holler.

Stevie nods, trying to force her face not to turn the color of the apple in her fruit picker.

EXT/INT. MONTAGE: SEVERAL LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

Stevie works on the farm. Everywhere she goes, Beau is there. He is able to to everything. He's tasting wine out of the barrels. He's sitting with a group crocheting. He's making coffee in the morning when she comes down. He's serving dinner. He's picking grapes. He's meeting with guests and doing tours.

Slowly, Stevie joins these activities. Beau helps her cork her first bottle of wine. They sit close together and Beau helps Stevie with her crochet, their arms as tangled as the yarn. Beau stumbles down one morning to find Stevie already dressed and fully awake making a big pot of coffee. Stevie joins Beau in the fields and on the tours. A calendar showing the summer months passing.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

Beau and Stevie sit in two of the antique rocking chairs scattered across the porch, rocking back and forth.

Beau turns to look at Stevie.

**BEAU** 

Have you ever been hiking before?

STEVIE

At the MetroParks back home, yeah.

Beau stands up abruptly. He holds out his hand.

BEAU

Come with me.

Stevie grabs Beau's outstretched hand.

STEVIE

Where are we going?

Beau doesn't answer. Instead, he pulls Stevie out of the rocking chair and points in the direction of a mud-splattered Jeep.

BEAU

Wait over there. I'll be back in a minute.

Beau returns with a sturdy backpack and a pair of hiking boots dangling from his fingertips.

He hoists the backpack into the back of the Jeep and nods his head to indicate Stevie should get in the car.

INT./EXT. JEEP - DAY

Once Stevie and Beau are settled in the car, Beau hands Stevie the boots.

BEAU (CONT'D)

These are Aunt Lena's but I think you two should be about the same size.

STEVIE

Now will you tell me where we're going?

Beau just winks and starts the car.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE DRIVE AND HIKE - DAY

Beau and Stevie drive in the car. Rolling hills dotted with sheep fly by. The windows are down. Her hair blowing. He

turns on the radio. It's Gracie Abrams. He looks over at her. Takes her hand. Falling in love. They arrive at the hike.

EXT. TRAILHEAD - DAY

Beau parks the Jeep next to a trailhead sign. Stevie stares at the lush greenery around them in wonder.

STEVIE

Wow. Just stunning. The hills really are alive with the sound of music.

Beau looks at her, confused.

STEVIE (CONT'D)

You know, with songs they've sung for a thousand year...

Stevie spins around with her arms wide open

Beau shakes his head laughing.

BEAU

What are you doing.

STEVIE

I can't believe you've never seen "The Sound of Music." Shot in the Austrian mountains. Well. I know what we're doing tonight.

EXT./INT. MONTAGE: SEVERAL LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

Hiking together. The mountains in the background. He puts his arm around her as they walk. She leans into him. Back at the Jeep. He leans in. She lean in. Their lips touch. Kissing scene. They break apart, sparks flying. Back at the farmhouse. They burrow under blankets even though it's the middle of July, a bowl of popcorn between them, The Sound of Music movie playing in the background.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE: SEVERAL LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

Time passing. Holding hands. Signs of affection. More hikes. more movie nights. Falling in love. It's August. Stevie gets email offers from journalism places. She ignores them. Lena and Beau argue. Stevie overhears. Beau shakes his head and throws up his hands. He notices Stevie watching. He deflates.

#### INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Stevie comes up behind Beau and he's on the computer. He's seated at the desk scrolling through the World wide Organic Farm website

#### STEVIE

What are you looking at.

Beau slams the laptop shut, grabs her hand, and pulls her outside. On the porch, close up of their foreheads pressed together. Camera pulls away as he's explaining something to her and she looks shocked and sad. He's explaining that their affair is going to come to an end, she's going to go back home, he's moving on. She pulls away

#### EXT. VINEYARD - DAY

They are out picking grapes together. He comes over and dumps his grape collection into her larger basket. She picks it up and moves away from him.

BEAU

Why are you moving away from me?

STEVIE

I'm not. I'm just rearranging the basket.

STEVIE

I'm not. I'm just rearranging the basket.

BEAU

You are moving away. Are you gonna talk to me? Look. You gotta know. The summer is going to end. I am going to find other seasonal farm job. This is my life, and it's super fucking awesome.

STEVIE

I like your life, I never said I didn't like your life. I just didn't expect you to move on so quickly

BEAU

This is the life. This is what we do. I spend the year moving around. I wanted to settle down on a farm but it's too hard to be a small farmer in America, so this is what I do.

STEVIE (GETTING UPSET)

I don't understand why we can't plan something together. Is this what you do every summer? Lena tried to warn me... STEVIE (GETTING UPSET)

I don't understand why we can't plan something together. Is this what you do every summer? Lena tried to warn me...

BEAU

Oh, that's just great. Look. You never wanted this life. You didn't work for this life in college. Summer is great. Lena's farm is special but I just don't think you want to live this life and I'm committed to it. I can't ask you to leave behind your city, American, journalism life. You gotta go back.

STEVIE

What if I come back next summer?

BEAU

I can't do long distance...I can't promise anything about next summer...I would if I could but we both know better. Come here...

They hug. She looks over his shoulder at the vineyard, tears streaming down her face.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE: SEVERAL LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

Stevie and Beau make the most of the time they have left before they go their separate ways. Both of them try to be in denial that the summer is drawing to a close. He helps her search a job back in NYC. She helps him pick his fall WWOOF site. Lena tries to convince him to go to New York. Love scenes. Making out. In bed. Doing the crossword puzzle. Holding each other. The vineyard. Grape processing. Bottling. Celebration.

Summer comes to a close. On the porch again, pressing foreheads, he's shaking his head no. She pulls back, realizing this is goodbye. Stevie packs up her room. Lena hands her the doorplate from the room. Beau tries to hug her but she pulls away. Lena walks her down the lane with her arm draped on her shoulder. Lena gives Stevie one last hug and kisses the top of her head. The charter bus is back. Stevie climbs on, back in the same seat, and watches as the farm and everyone waving goodbye disappears in a cloud of dust. Beau is noticeably missing.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE: STEVIE'S APT + BEAU'S FARM - DAY/NIGHT

Stevie is in a new NYC apartment. On the couch, sobbing. Devastated. Pajamas. In bed all day. Beau arrives at his next WWOOF location, same types of people. Beau at the rustic dinner table looking around at the new people, a few young women try to catch his eye. eau looks away. He has a memory of Stevie at the table. Beau out working on his own. Beau hiking alone. Remembering Stevie. Remembering Beau. Scenes of them milking a goat, falling off stools laughing.

INT./EXT. MONTAGE: SEVERAL LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

Stevie in a busy news channel studio. Alone. Working. A few years pass. Stevie appearance changing over time. More mature, professional clothes. Older. Rising up to more responsibility. Goes home alone. Successful but not happy. Occasionally scrolling through the WWOOFing website, reminiscing about That Summer. She learns of a piece of land available in up state New York. A vinyard. The owner wants to retire. Stevie makes the leap.

Stevie builds a farming/vineyard life in America. Beau goes back to Aunt Lena's vineyard. Lena and Beau sit alone at night on her porch, and drink wine. Beau always thinking about Stevie. Lena opens her laptop to Stevie's farm website. Beau leans in, the light of the screen illuminates his understanding that Stevie was always meant for the farm life.

Stevie selling at a farmer's market. Stevie laughing. Happy. Loving life but looking around, still alone. Her farm. She falls off a stool milking a goat, but no one is around to laugh about it with. She loves her animals. She loves her new home. She opens her laptop, again to the WWOOF website, and this time she clicks on "host." WWOOFers arrive on her farm.

A charter bus pulls up at the end of the lane leading to her house. A man hops off the bus and its Beau with a knapsack. He takes a deep breath and starts walking towards her.

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#### **Contributers' Notes**

Kira is a filmmaker, artist, adventurer, lover of magic and the owner Bursky of allaroundartsyfashion.com.

Nic is a professional musician and hands down the best house sitter out there. Coker Living in Asheville, NC, he is active in the music and contra dance communities.

Tom Currently serves as the elementary music teacher for Kirtland Local Schools. He finds true joy in spending time with his daughter, family and friends.

Scarlett Scarlett is a junior Media Arts Production major at Ohio University. She aspires to be a film producer in LA once she graduates from college.

Ari Ari is an undergraduate student in the College of Fine Arts at Ohio University, Gaub a triathlete, backpacker and poet.

Tipton Tipton is an EMT - Paramedic working in Asheville, North Carolina with Gentry a degree in English Literature from Wake Forest University.

Kim is a graphic designer, artist, academic advisor and all around adventurer, Lutz currently living in Athens, OH with hopes of returning to western NC.

Manda is a mother, wife and a mechanical engineer, working at Ford Motors. Mustaine She graduated from OU and attended graduate school at Virginia Tech.

Rose Rose is a professional writer, new mom, adventurer, traveler, and active Skelton in politics, living in Texas with her wife and their son.

Zen Zen is an artist, musician & writer living in Asheville, NC. Sutherland

Dave Dave is the author of Beep: Inside the Unseen World of Baseball for the Blind (2018) and he has published essays and poems in Salon, Boston Globe Magazine, Texas Monthly, The Laurel Review, UCity Review, and others. An assistant professor of instruction, he also coordinates the department's creative writing events and serves as the editor of New Ohio Review.

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