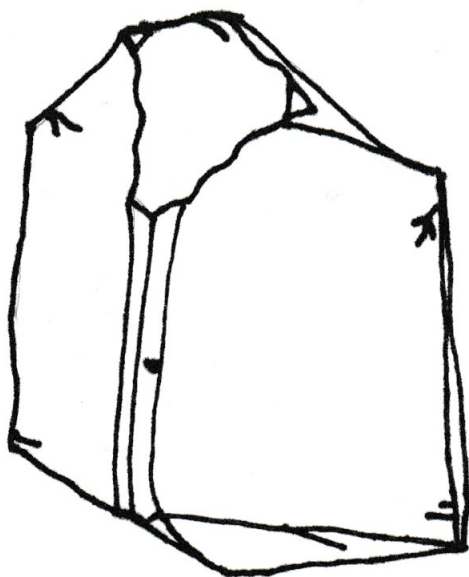


The Secret Wisdom of Saco



A Collection of Place-Based Stories

Compiled by Sebago Seven

Edited by Gianna Palleschi, Chelsea Steinauer-Scudder,
and Andrew L Fersch

*For young people everywhere who need some proof that
they have the power to change the world.*

The Secret Wisdom of Saco

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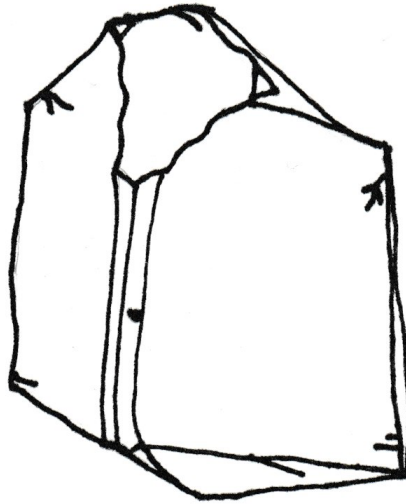
Acknowledgements

William Penn may have made the most important contribution to education without intending to by saying, “I expect to pass through this life but once, if, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do for any fellow being, let me do it now, for I shall not pass this way again.”

Our lives and the lives of those we love are precious things, so is our time, as is the natural world. As a young person, our lives can seem overwhelming – how do we actually help the world we love filled with people we love when we’re so busy being marketed to, distracted by, and convinced away from that which we know matters? We do it by realizing that we are given this beautiful opportunity in our lives to try to understand the world. We do it by putting our energy into endeavors which show kindness, which help our fellow being (be it plant, animal, or mineral), by realizing that the time to act is right now, and that waiting is no better than inaction. The students of Sebago Seven are not going to wait and this collection of stories is part of their action.

The cyclical nature of the world is expressed through a series of creative stories, first inspired by *The Secret Wisdom of Nature* by Peter Wohlleben, and then brought to life by the creativity of these students for our local ecosystem. So take the time to give these stories a read, and then figure out what kindness, what good thing you’re going to do, and go do it now, for we shall not pass this way again.

Andrew Lapham Fersch // November 2019



Tourmaline // Calvin Richard

I float carelessly through the lava, my once rocky body dissolved. The convection currents pull me up and down and around, through my fellow magma. My life is perfect. Over the course of years I will cool down, harden, warm up, and melt back into magma, and so on and so forth. This endless cycle is my life.

I float freely along, but in my carelessness I don't see what's in front of me. Suddenly, a rogue current drags me upwards, toward a small, cold, miserable chamber. I reach the magma, and that's when the real terror sets in.

Help! No No No! I can't do much now, I just have to hope. The cooling magma surrounds me, slowing me down. I've seen this happen before, so I know what happens next. I'm going to solidify. I feel the magma slow to a sluggish pace, and cool down even more. *No! Why?! I just escaped this prison! This isn't fa-* the magma stops. I feel everything around me start to harden. *NONONONO!* I feel the rock creep across me, slowly disabling my movement. It travels farther and

farther, inevitably trapping me here forever. I feel pain all across my body as spikes of crystal form across me, their rosy and lime color shining in the last moments of light. And then, everything goes black.

Nothing. This is my existence. I see nothing, I hear nothing, but the pain I feel inside is there. I had it all, freedom, comfort, the whole world to move around, and it was all yanked away from me. The hundreds of pounds of granite slowly crush me, threatening to turn me into a metamorphic rock.

Although, what am I? I must be an igneous rock, I was magma just a few years ago after all. But what *exactly* am I? The last thing I saw before getting condemned to this void was those shiny crystals. They had green edges, like an emerald, but the middle was a vibrant pink. There is only one rock that I know of that has those formations; tourmaline. *Yes!* Before I was melted down, a few million years ago to be exact, I was a large chunk of metamorphic rock. It was drab, but I was located next to a particularly chatty piece of tourmaline. Over the years it drifted upwards toward the surface, leaving me to be melted into magma. Well, at least I know I'll be free eventually. Eventually...

The rocks around me are cold, and uncomfortable, and crush me like a vice. *Only a few million more years!*

Sigh A few million years is a lot longer than I thought. I have no sense of time, considering that it is always dark down here. It could have been only a few years, or a few million years. I can't even do anything. *I'm a rock.* My crystals ache as the millions of pounds of granite press down on them. This is the only thing I feel. Everything else is a void. The onyx black is endless, and I haven't heard a sound. After a while the pain becomes comforting. Feeling pain is better than feeling nothing. Maybe I'm just going insane. I miss having the company of the tourmaline, even if it was a chatterbox. I remember it as if it was only 10,000 years ago. She lived in a little granite pegmatite, and her crystals were of the black variety, which she was always a bit self-conscious about. Black is the most common type of crystal after all. *Where did those days go? Where? Where where where where? Where?! Why?! Why am I here?! HELP ME! Help... Please... Please...* My internal screams turn into internal whimpering as I yet again start to wait.

Something strange has been happening. For the last 20,000 years I've been hearing strange noises. Scraping and pitter-pattering fill these dark depths. I must be nearing the surface, where the elements will slowly free me from this tomb of stone. Every couple hundred years the sound grows louder, as the rocks slowly get worn down by whatever awaits me. This sound is so faint yet so powerful, as it slowly grinds away rock, turning the granite into sediment. Suddenly, a horrifying thought fills me. *Will I be ground away?* No! That can't be!

I've waited so long, I couldn't just have my journey ended that quickly! The reassuring sounds of freedom suddenly change to those of pain, and horror. It's almost as if I can hear the granite shrieking as their rocky surface is ground away. Cold fills my crystals as a heavy feeling of dread sets in. The stone around me has never seemed so dark. The inky void envelopes me, and a disheartening thought enters my mind. *I'm never going to get back home, am I?* Depression washes over me like a tidal wave, and the only thing crushing me more than the billions of pounds of granite is sadness.

The pitter-patter of the above ground suddenly grows louder. The scraping is deafening, and I accept my fate. *I will soon die. And it won't even matter.* The noises stop, but the silence isn't any better. But then, I feel something, not something physical, but mental. I feel hope. I know there is a chance. I could survive! But, I just need to wait a while longer. And with hope flowing through my crystals, I wait.

The sounds of scraping are so close now, and excitement fills every hour of my day. I can hear each individual drop of water hitting the my granite cage. I can almost feel the sediment being ripped away. *I'm so close!* The thin layer of ground above me is the only thing keeping me from freedom. I can now feel the vibrations of the surface, the rain, it's inhabitants, and most everything else. I know I'm almost there. But, I don't know what awaits me at the surface. *I guess I'll find out soon.*

As soon as the thought leaves my head I feel something. One of my crystals had freed itself! The substance is grainy and mushy, and much softer than what I am used to. But I know exactly what it is. *Soil! Yes! Finally! Free! Freee! Yes!* This soil gets brushed away by the water, like dust on a windy day. I feel more of me get freed, the water pounding down on me. Then, I see light. After millions of years, I'm free. The light burns into my vision, and my crystals glimmer. Then, the clouds part, and the last bits of earth holding me in place are washed away, leaving me free. For once I'm happy that *I'm a rock*.

After a few weeks, my vision recovers, and I am able to take in my surroundings. The rain dots the plains, making the large green blades shine like diamonds. The soft sound of water babbling nearby calms me. The sun is warm on my granite body and my crystals glimmer. The soft breeze blows through the trees, knocking off leaves, and freeing them into the wind. The grass brushes across me, leaving refreshing dewdrops on several of my crystals.

For the first time I finally have a clear view of them. They have a rich sage green color, transitioning to a peacock green. Then, between the two shades of green comes a vibrant magenta. The light shines through them, covering me with beautiful pink, purple, and green light. Peace.

Then, something moves. It has long hair, the color of flames. It moves like a flow of magma, seemingly gliding. A long ivory white tail flows behind it, flicking every few seconds. It has a long snout, and is

smelling the tall grass, pushing it aside. Suddenly, it goes rigid. It leaps forward, its lips pulled back as it dives forward. The spot where it lands gives a quiet squeak, and is silenced after a crunch. The creature brings its head back up from the tall grass, its muzzle stained with a crimson liquid, it carries a small umber colored animal. Then, as soon as it came, it disappears.

The sky starts to get dark, the colors a brilliant display of auburn and rose. The bright colors soon fade to a gloomy Tyrian Purple, and soon enough, the sky is black. *The-the dark-darkness. N-n-no. No p-please.* Images of the dark void where I dwelled for millions of years fill my head. *Stop! I'm safe! Please! No! This isn't real! HELP!* The stream of images keeps coming, filling me with panic. Suddenly the visions fade and I'm still sitting in the field. The night is silent.

The sun, stretches across the horizon bringing warm shades of orange. As the rays of light hit me, I feel the warmth and life return. I hear quiet chirps and tweets. My gaze falls upon a flit of color soaring across my vision, its voice just a whistle. The bird whips around and perches on a cedar. It looks down at me, and a chill goes through my spine. It looks like it's smiling, but not one of kindness. It looks defiant, malicious even, as it perches high above me, free in its maneuverable body. Its whistle turns into a screech as it lifts off the tree. The canopy seems to shift as a horde of large black birds ascends

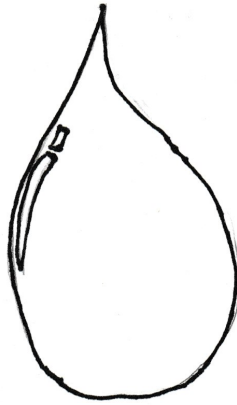
from the tree tops, their screams not unlike the ones I heard in the depths. Charcoal colored feathers rain down across the fields.

The sky grows gray, and the air around me gets cold. *What's happening?* Suddenly my question is answered. A crack echoes through the sky, shaking my crystals. The sky manages to get even darker, as loud booms shake the ground. Suddenly I see a streak of pure white, lighting up my surroundings. The birds shriek louder, and with the added cracking and thundering of the storm I can almost feel my hearing start to dissipate. Then, without warning, the sky opens up, buckets of rain pouring down on me, scraping me away. *HEEELP! GAAAAAH! THE AGONY! NOO!* All I can do is sit as I'm ground away, particle by particle. *Noooo... Nooooooooo. Heeeeelp. Please...* The pain is unbearable and my vision is going black at the edges. The rain shows no sign of stopping, and the pain is becoming worse each second. I can feel mud flowing past me, like the magma I once was. Even the ground below me is starting to give. I hear a muffled roar and manage to open my eyes to see what awaits me. I wish I hadn't. The river must be going hundreds of miles per hour, and with each passing second I draw closer to it. *NO NO NO! MOVE! MOVE! HEEELP! NOT WHEN I JUST GOT FREE! NOOOOO!* I need to move, but I can't. I'm a rock. Then, one of my corners frees itself from the mud, and sends me tumbling down the hill, the water roaring like some insane beast. Intense pain fills my body as it hits another rock, shattering one of my crystals. *AAAAAH!* I ricochet off of the rock and land on the shore. I open my eyes, and I see that I'm resting right on the edge of the river. The water churns right in front of me, the foam splashing on the shores. *Whew. That was clo-* The land underneath me collapses.

Everything around me seems to slow down. I hear the birds' resentful screeches, and the rain hitting the tree tops. Even louder are my internal screams. I tumble through the air, watching as all the colors of the world spin around me. I see the sky one final time, the clouds a slate gray. I feel my body come in contact with the river, the freezing temperature sending chills through my crystals. Then I realize I won't have them for much longer. I take one final look at them, their vivid pinks and greens, the last beautiful thing I will ever see.

Then, darkness. I am plunged into the grasp of the angry water, its currents ripping sediment off my body. I hit the river bed, the slimy mud splattering across me. The sand particles are as fast as the bolts of lightning racing through the sky, and rip through me. I soar across the bottom, the ground grinding me away. *Huh, this is it. I never thought the cycle would end here.* I look back to see a giant craggy boulder standing in the middle of the river bed. My speed is picking up and my time is almost over. I might have been taken from my home, had to suffer for millions of years, and was tortured by rain, but hey, *I made it.*

And with that, I hit the giant boulder, my crystals shattering, and my rocky body getting pulverized. Now, my body is sediment, and my crystals will become a gem gravel. And with that, *I'm not a rock.*



Freshwater // Rylie Prejean

I look afar and see many tiny pebbles waiting to be taken away by my luscious waves. The wind throws the wave up to shore and I slowly reel the pebbles into my small wave, they try to grasp onto the wet sand as I pull them in. But they fail. They float motionlessly, by themselves, and slowly make their way down, and soon hit the lake bed, as I flow there in peace.

After a while, the rocks that once laid upon me break down into the sand in the lake bed. The bare minimum of light that brims through rains on the pebbles, enhancing the colors of the rare tourmaline. The java fern colored accents blend into the strong rose, filling the rock.

A group of guppies abruptly swim over and look for rocks. Their small gray bodies with rainbow accents, squirm to find the best rocks possible. As they are all looking around, one guppie sees something... A great wind gust suddenly springs upon me. My wave rises and travels thirty feet up to shore as the small pebbles wait to be taken away by my luscious waves. All of the guppies fly up with my wave. The fish follow the wave up to shore and they somehow succeed.

I *swoop* the small rocks along with the fish, and one large rock piece stands out to me. It is a beautiful rose color with a gloomy green tone. It slowly sinks down, until it hits the lake bed. *Plop*. The small guppies swim by and they gather the tourmaline for their small home. The tourmaline quickly disappears in a span of minutes. I look around and all the small fish are making homes for their ‘spouses’ and the little ones. They snatch the small tourmaline pieces in their mouths and made a tiny house to spend the rest of their short lives in.

A massive pack of mosquitoes comes flying over and rests at the shoreline. They all sit there very quietly for many hours until they pick their tiny bodies back up and head out.

I look around and it looks like everybody is doing the same. I think about the place I call ‘home.’ It’s a man-made lake (reservoir) surrounded by land and trees that gets used daily: by fish, plants, and even dirty little humans!

There is always a human that comes to me every day; she’s been coming for many years. She always brings others with her, but today she doesn’t. She brings this white blanket and lays it down on the ground, and sits on it. She sits there for a while. Thirty minutes pass. Then an hour. Then three hours. The lady finally gets up and walks around the miniature beach. She has these small tears running down her face. She repeatedly wipes them, but they keep rolling down. She silently walks down to the shoreline and starts saying some words...

“You didn’t come into the world for nothing, baby. You came to float with the water, dance with the waves, spend time with me. Your mom. I never got the chance to tell you this, but fourteen years ago, your father and I were at this very lake. This is where I found out I was

pregnant with you. Little did I know today was the day, the day every parent fears. We'll miss you, Oliver."

She walks back over to the sand and grabs that white blanket. She looks at it and quietly says, "This was your baby blanket. This here blanket was also your father's. I'm sure you both are playing up in heaven, as I speak. I miss you both tremendously... I can't wait to see you again, in the very near future."

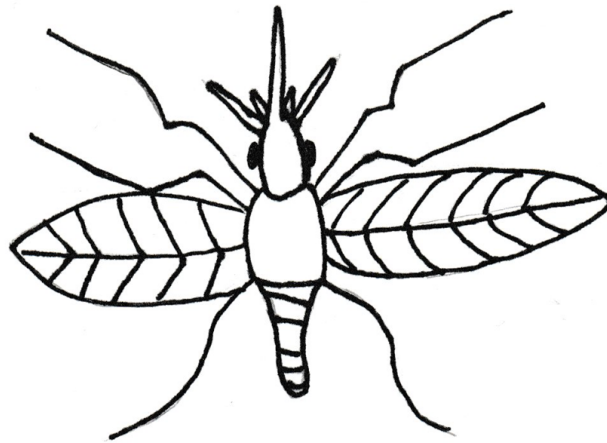
She heavily sighs and slowly steps away. Tears slowly rolling down her face. She looks at the sky and walks away.

I hear a light sounding buzz coming across my waves. The buzzing gets slightly louder, then even louder. It's a mosquito. The minuscule, brown-tinted bug comes whizzing over me, and dashes to the small beach, right out in front of me. As my wave flows up to shore, I see the small insect land on a broad tree.

"Tweet, tweet," I slightly hear. A large red bird glides above the large tree and swoops down to a branch. The mosquito is standing there, all alone, when the bird comes and scoops it into its petite mouth. As I'm flowing around, the bird takes-off and zips over the water. The bird flies away and I sit there for a while, thinking about when the next colony of mosquitoes are going come over.

"Buzz! Buzz!" The pesky mosquitoes sing. I look afar and see that there is another tremendously large colony of mosquitos coming my way. They zoom right past me, and I see their reflection in me as they move along. The mosquitos fly around in large circles, and then zoom past me once again, as fast as they can. They zoom by, going a mere one and a half miles-per-hour, and beat my small wave to shore.

They slow themselves down and settle into their new small home, right near me.



Mosquitos // Ryan Causey

I fly as fast as I can to the shallow part of the river with my swarm. I finally have enough blood to lay my eggs, and I found the perfect place to do so. I use the blood as protein to lay my eggs, and for food as well. I lay ripe green banana looking eggs into tiny little rafts that will float on the stream. I had 100 that I laid and four rafts of 25 eggs that will be staying on the stream. The rafts of eggs look like a speck of dirt to humans, but to me, they are not. Female mosquitoes can lay up to 300 eggs every time and these eggs take two to three days to hatch.

My eggs will hatch three days from now. Marvin is going to be so happy. We are so excited to have kids. Even though we mated a couple days after he emerged from the cocoon, he is the best partner I've had. Though right now he is gone, sucking up nectar from a honeysuckle plant. Male mosquitoes are not carnivores and only drink/eat nectar from plants. They get their food from flowers and plant sap. I, and all females, are carnivores and only like blood. Wait, do I smell...humans? I do! I see the male and female cross the bridge to get to the other side of the trail. I will fly up there and get a nice little snack

from one of them, then I'll come back to my eggs. I decide to go to the male and pierce my thin, needle-like proboscis into his arm, and start to suck up his blood. As I land on him, my six legs touch his hairy arms and he notices that I'm there. I quickly bite him and fly off right before he tries to whack me. I was so fortunate to survive.

After I bite the man and suck his Type O blood from his arm, I go back to the stream and watch my eggs float around. Mosquitos only like certain types of blood. Mosquitos are most attracted to Type O blood and are least attracted to Type A blood. Then I hear something. Something scary. I hear the call of a chickadee. I also see it coming right at me! I fly as fast as I can get away from the bird so it does not eat me. I was flying as fast as I can! But I managed to outrun the bird. But then I realized...the eggs!!! Meh, I only knew them for 10 minutes. The bird got away but only ate two of the rafts. That means I still had 50 eggs left. Birds aren't the only predators to mosquitoes. Some other predators of mosquitoes are frogs and tadpoles, fish (goldfish, guppies, bass, bluegill, catfish), turtles, dragonflies, damselflies, bats, and even other mosquitoes!

I fly through the tall grass as a shortcut back to my eggs. I then stay there all night and all day for three days straight until my eggs hatch. After they hatch I stay there again all day and all night until my larvae have fully developed into adults. Now they can go get blood and produce more of us. My life is almost over and I know it. Female mosquitoes live up from six to eight weeks but when hibernating they can live up to six months. Male mosquitoes, however, have the shortest lifespan and live up to ten days. Marvin is eight days old so he has two more days to live his life and breed with more mosquitos. Yes, male

mosquitoes do not just mate with one female but with multiple females all throughout their life. Even though Marvin's a player I still love him. It's raining out but that means that it's nice and humid and a perfect day to go out to get some blood for some more eggs. Females produce eggs more than once in their lifetimes. I fly out of the forest for a better vision where I can find blood. I then see a house which is across the highway. I can definitely get there and I even see that they have a screen door with a small hole in it that I can fit through. I detect the house with my two eyes that are made up of hundreds of lenses, just as a human flicks on a light inside the house.

I start to cross the highway but then...a raindrop drops right on top of me. To mosquitos, a raindrop weighs three tons and travels 20 mph. So you would think it would hurt really bad, but mosquitoes can survive them. The raindrop pushes me down a little but I continue to fly to the human's house. Once I arrive at the screen door, I fly through it into the house. The humans are watching TV but they hear me buzzing around. The little one screams as they throw their little plastic humans at me. It is not even close to hitting me. The little one then proceeds to run to the bigger human who is making apple crisp in the kitchen and cries for help. The little one is starting to annoy me so I went for it. I land on its arm as it is still screaming and then start to suck the blood out of her. Yummy blood. She has O-type blood, my absolute favorite. Time to head back to the forest- SMACK! The big human smacks right when I was going to fly off the little one's arm. They then use a paper towel to wipe me off the little one's arm and throw me into the garbage where there is an empty juice box. Right then and there I think *Marvin*

would've liked some of that before I see a huge light and fade off into mosquito heaven.

I emerge out of the cramped egg and plop inside the running stream and see all of my brothers and sisters swimming around in the stream. I have five days until I become pupae, and eight days until I become an adult. While I wait to become an adult I stay in the water and eat tiny microorganisms that are in the water as food.

Eight days later I am a full-grown male. Mating is next on my schedule. Male mosquitoes have to wait one day for their reproductive body parts to fully develop and when it is time to mate they listen for females wings which flap from 250 to 500 beats per second.

But right now I am hungry for nectar. I fly over to a pine tree that had some sap running down the bark. I suck all of it up and drink some water as well.

It's then the next day and I am ready to mate. During the day I mated with ten female mosquitos. While I am flying over the river I see big animals munching on grass. I don't usually bite but I'm feeling hungry for some blood. I fly over to the deer and land on its back. I suck blood out of it and it does a sharp movement to show that I stung it. It isn't anything so I kept sucking out blood. It begins running but I am still hanging on. This is very good and yummy blood. I am having a great time just getting food to help reproduce and getting a free ride as well. But then I see the deer going towards the river and the doe then jumps inside the river. I try to fly off as fast as I can but my smart self

keeps on sticking onto the deer and enjoying its nice warm blood as it goes into me, and I get washed away by the water. My wings get soaked and ruined so I cannot fly.

I then see the deer walk away and a big, green, bulky, gross bullfrog comes my way.

No, no, please not like this. I would rather drown than get consumed by a slimy frog. The frog gets closer and jumps onto a rock that is right next to me. The current of the river brings me closer to the rocks and the frog opens his mouth and shoots out his long tongue that wraps around me and pulls me into the mouth of the frog. It's dark and wet inside the stomach and I can't see a thing.

I think of all that I have done in my life which was 13 days long which doesn't seem like much and it isn't. I realize I haven't done much in my life. When I was born in the water I knew what had to be done and what my life was about. I will miss the sweet taste of pine sap and nectar from honeysuckle and will miss eating all day and night. I will miss flying in swarms and biting humans for no reason. This frog is about to fully end my life because I am running out of air. I have done my job though which was to reproduce and make more and more of us.



White Tailed Deer // Gabriella Montecalvo

Sprinting to the closest pond, I vigorously shake the blood-sucking insect off of me. Ahhhhhh. The cold water soothes my bitten skin caused by my roaming in the woods, attempting to find food and shelter in this new home. I find myself weary and tired from my journey from Ontario, Canada to Saco, Maine. Compared to Canada, it's much warmer and has far more plants and trees for me to harvest on. The sun rays warm my fur as I venture deep into the woods to find more deer. Eager to find some friends, I ignore the bugs eating me away. I left my old home just before mating season because it was too cold there to find another deer.

After what seems like hours of searching, I give up for the day. I munch on a few cinnamon ferns, some american wintergreen berries, and then I lay down behind a large bush, reminding me of how my mother would hide me while searching for food. A loud noise wakes me. I pick myself up slowly and I sigh with relief. A herd of deer, three

female and two male. I jump up and join them. Then I realise what they were running from. A small pack of two or three grey, rugged, wolves chase at our tails, hoping to get an early morning breakfast...and we're the main course. We finally lose the wolves and all lay down; worn out and exhausted. Then the other deer notice me. They shrug it off and start munching on young plants. As a ruminant species, we have four chambers to digest food, making it possible for us to eat things like twigs. The male deer that seems to be the leader of the group grunts, informing us that mating season has started.

Six months after mating with one of the male deer, I give birth to my offspring. My two fawns seem happy and healthy in the first couple days. I come home from a nice walk to find my smaller fawn lying on the ground motionless. Slowly, the small deer passes away. With my one living fawn, I have less to take care of and less to worry about while I'm out having lunch of my own. I lay my fawn down behind the closest bush and join the rest of the deer for a meal. We venture out and find the perfect eating spot; lots of newly sprouted leaves from trees in the low canopy, long green grass, and other delicious snacks to munch on. I worry about my fawn being the meal of a hungry predator, so I head back to the bush. My fawn still lies there, jumping up when it sees me with a fresh meal in my mouth. My fawn feeds and slowly drifts off to sleep. The rest of the herd arrives back shortly after and I noticed one of them missing. They're stomping a few meters away with loud grunts, which only means one thing...danger. I start to panic as I rush my fawn awake. I lift my tail, revealing a white patch that makes it easier for my young to follow. We slowly back away from the opening until we are out of site, and start to run.

We run until we know we're safe and lay down for a rest, hoping for safety in the night. When we wake up, each of the mothering does feeds their young ones before we all take a long trot to a nice grazing ground. The fawns play in the field as the parents harvest on twigs and buds. There aren't as many greens here, so we eat young trees to keep us energized. BOOM! A large noise startles the young ones as a large beech tree tumbles down in the crowded woods. Strange voices follow along with multiple trees lunging at us. The fawns freak out and run away from the destruction. We quickly run after them as a tree falls on one of the bucks. We try to free him, but two more humongous trees come down, revealing a stream of blood seeping out into the ground. We sprint so fast we start to trip over our hooves. Once we have run a good 10 miles away from heaven's grasp, we reach the fawns hiding in a small swampy area, shaking in fear. We embrace them, trying to calm them down. One doe sits behind a bush, still upset over the lost leader. We all take a rest, lying down eating small greens as a snack. The fawns are still hyper as ever, jumping around, until one of them falls down a hill into the lake. The mother runs down and picks him up. The fawn shakes it off and we all take a nap.

Once we wake up, it's time for dinner. The fawns feed and then are laid behind bushes so the parents can go out to find large greens and nutritious twigs and buds to feast on. Once we travel a little ways, we start hearing those strange voices again, but no loud noises. Then we see it. The dead male deer, stuffed and stood up next to a strange shiny metal object, far larger than any of us. Surrounding the object are many large people. And surrounding them...a large clearing of fallen trees. We slowly back away, trying not to be seen by any of the humans. We

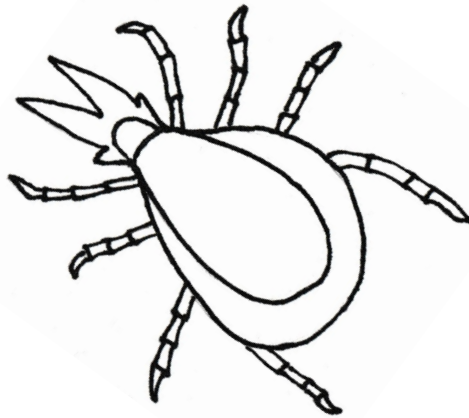
start running back, stopping a few times to munch on trees. Our deerlings jump up when they see us arriving, but can see the sadness in our eyes. We start to migrate once again. I feel an itch on my leg, but I can't reach it. Wow, it's hard finding a safe place to live in this new home.

A strange smell catches my nose as we rest in an open field. Then strange noises. I look beyond the trees to see this large black thing in the ground that those metal objects are moving on. The other adult deer join me and we marvel over the sight. Large flat metal objects stand up in the ground. They have something on them, but I don't know what it is. The new leader of the herd leads us across the hard substance. We all make it past safely, or so I thought. The doe that was still upset over the stuffed male deer ran halfway, but one of the lights on the large objects catches her eye. Before she knew it, the large object rammed into her, killing her on the spot. A human steps out of the object, glaring at our friend. A huge dent is revealed on the metal object. The human holds her finger up angrily to our dead friend, whatever that means. She pulls out a small thing that I can't really see. She taps it and holds it up to her ear. She talks to it and another large metal thing with a strange symbol pulls up shortly after. They scoop up the doe and throw it in the back of the thing. We wander back down into the woods in pain. Not physically, but mentally. Three of the six of us have been killed in the last two days. What's gonna happen next, the world is going to end? We will be eaten by wolves?

A few days later, we are munching on twigs and buds and the remaining greens in the harsh wind. My fawn stays near my leg, trying to keep warm. The woods seem to close in around us as a huge banging

noise interrupts the voice of silence. A small shiny thing lies near the foot of a tree. Then voices join in along with several ear splitting popping noises. One final large bang goes off and one of the deer suddenly falls to the ground, a small shiny pellet stuck in their skin. A puddle of blood stains their fur and the voices start to get louder. We hide behind a nearby bush and watch as strange people in dark colored coverings come into sight. Their weirdly shaped mouths are curved at the ends as they pull out a small piece of wood. I don't know what they're using it for, but it can't be good. The itch on my leg comes back again, so I dig my hoof into my leg. That should help.

A few short weeks later, we are all lying down, mourning the four dead deer. When I migrated here, I thought it would be a better living experience, a better place to raise my deerlings. I start to feel weak and numb. No. This can't be happening, not now. I start to feel dizzy and I want to run to my fawn but I can't move. I fall to the ground and everything in the world is gone...and then I black out.



The Dog Tick // Ben Thurlow

Mmmmm mmmm. This is some good food but this little speed machine of an animal won't stop moving, I think, trying to keep my energy for holding on. Bounce, bounce, bounce is all I can really think about though, this ride is just so fun and a good snack but oh I'm just so...WOAH.

“Where am I?” It is a small darkly lit stream and at first the only thing I can hear is rushing water. Then I hear a baby deer crying for help. She sits on me. The baby deer tears trickle down its little scar below its eyes. Almost like it is crying. I see the reason I was almost crushed: the hurt momma deer. The scar stuck out gleaming with tears. The little one is broken. As they try to comfort the beloved mother, I realize what I have done and I run...I just...run. I don't know what happened, it was just so good. I still want more but as I hear the last breath I run off of the hill I was on and I scream in my head. I feel something happen in my mind my emotions fade and I feel nothing.

I'm not sad, I'm not happy, I'm just moving. I see a mole near me and I pounce. The nectar is just so good. As I go back towards the

cave, I see the milkweed I was in when I woke up and all I can think is...I am back? I just want more and the undying need for more keeps me going for hours and hours until I find them...the dogs. The little dogs of the forest, too. I loved dogs. As I start to chase, they run. I figure I have at least two months till I die and I can lay larvae in a while, after all it's only June. As I run more and more I see that it is...autumn. The red leaves glisten in my only line of sight. I figure out that I spent two months on that mom's leg. With all that I am feeling, I hate myself. I try to fight it, but my legs keep moving. I don't want to be bloodthirsty but I am and I am so scared that I will give these poor dogs anemia. I didn't want to take that much blood. I feel my body stand in the tall grass and I feel my legs getting weaker. The green, tall, dying out grass is just a huge green cage. Like steel bars painted green with nature's paintbrush. Though really I have no emotion and as that thought crosses my mind, I feel myself falling and falling, though still standing on the ground. My two years are going to run out here soon. I thought I had time, but now I don't. Slowly I feel my vision coming back and my life starting. Still, I feel as if I had more to do though I am really an autonomous machine, meant only to kill and reproduce. I know I need to get my children but I have to find the right spot.

Wait no, I don't, I could just reproduce in a clearing or somewhere else. I just don't want a lot of trees. But how do I get out of this grass? I only hear small things like birds chirping, and deer running. Hey, that's my way out. The *deer*. Wait, where is it? I...I can only see vague shapes and these shapes...I know what they mean, but they're moving too fast. What is it? Is it that grey thing or the black animal over there? Why is this so unfamiliar to me?

Why...can't...I...find...it? I feel my mind shutting down and my head...spinning. And I feel myself slip...away. The only sounds that ensue are deer running. So quiet you can't hear them.

Chapter 5.5

Deer. It's my favorite. I love it. My name is deer tick. And I love deer more than my own larvae. It's my only passion. I love, need, want, and desire it. The constant herds of deer are my only desire. I have so many preferences but I LOVE DEER. I don't care if it makes them mad. I want more. Once I see a tan square come across my vision, I jump with excitement. I chase and chase until I see them. Today I see a little baby deer next to a mom at a stream. She has little scar below her eye. I love it, the sweet smell of her leads me on. I just want that deer. *That deer is mine.* I want the deer for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. All I need is one second. *One precious second.* As I run forward I keep clamping my jaw and unclamping it over and over again. So I can get a bite as soon as possible for that sweet juice. *I want it so bad.* As that thought crosses my miniature mind I feel my teeth clamp onto her leg as she screamed with sadness watching her mother's lifeless body float away. As the stream flows by the more I take. So...*sweet.* My thirst for this kind of sustenance grows. I need it. *More. More. More.* The food flies into my soft insides like a river of honey. So thick but yet juicy. It's like an iron flavored milkshake. I love it all. There isn't much left so after a couple of weeks... I remember the way it ended. But no one and I mean *no one* comes. She died. I don't even feel bad. It's nature's way. No, better yet, it's MY way. The bloodmeal of her corpse is my favorite I have ever

had. It is rancid the next morning so I sadly know I have to stop. I am sad for a while...but. I am full and it's time to lay some larvae. I know I'll die but I need to. I have to leave the forest. The trees are too chaotic. I need open space. But it can't be here. I can't have my children seeing their first blurry shapes and only see brown. They will go crazy like...I did. *Wait, no I don't, I just need more food.* More food. That's all I need. I am perfectly normal. I...*never...hurt...anyone.* I keep hearing these...voices saying Saco. Hey, that's what I'll do. I will *conquer* this Saco with an iron grip and rule there so my larvae can survive there. I want to be such a force that I live forever somehow. I keep seeing shapes of different sizes and color zooming past on the long gray path of smooth-ish black. The yellow line in the center blaring like the orb in the sky. I feel the ultimate need for more and more nectar. All I feel is a craving I can't get to satisfaction...*yet.*

I know what needs to be done. *I need more prey.* All I can think about is the pain and suffering I cause. The painful screeches ringing out in my ears. Though this awful potent smell is killing my insides with every breath I keep going and going. I realized long ago that I am a machine and neglected it. But now I know it and I will stop it. I start to feel the wind kicking up. I...am...losing...my...grip. When I awoke the ground wasn't white so...I still have time. I don't understand where I am but can sort of hear the cars rushing by. I think of how long I spent on that baby deer and how I killed it in cold blood. I remember it all. But...I...cannot think about that now. I must fend for my babies. They need nourishment. All I can think about is the red juice flowing through my veins.

I don't like this. It hurts and I love it. How can I survive this? I have no idea. But there is no time for that. Larvae has to be...my focus. I feel my little legs getting weak. My jaws snap once or twice and the world goes quiet for a moment. But the silence lasts. And lasts. And...l...a...s...t...s. As though it will never end. As a light begins to shine I realize I am going to die. Then I hear a crunch behind me and the silence goes away. The world comes back to life like a Christmas tree after a power outage. It is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me. I feel my body wake up. Then my spirit. I know I have not much, but a little time left.

All I want to think about now is not my pain or suffering but my babies' future. They need to grow. I don't know how long it will take but I know I will make it through. Just for you. My...b...a...b...i...e...s. Those are the last things I think before my eyes go black. And I die. I truly die, here in this milkweed.

But in that moment, then and there, is when my larvae decide to escape. My babies fly out into the world with force and dignity.



The Milkweed // Abigail Lizotte

What in tarnation is tickling me? I happen to not appreciate being tickled! Augg another pesky tick, how do they always manage to ruin me? Look at me: a tall stalky plant, the most beautiful in all of the fields. Yet, I have to deal with tiny little squirming ticks! Why me, why not the inferior dandelion? I cannot take this anymore! What is this tick doing? Ahh, drowning in my leaf how dare you, how dare you. You, pesky tick have no right to drown on my most precious leaf. I am not a graveyard, what is this madness!

I am almost full-grown, a full four and three quarters of a foot tall! I can grow to be five feet tall, or two and a half meters if you don't like feet. I am probably the most beautiful plant ever to exist, I'm tall, colorful, and useful. My stem has long leaves poking out of it all the way up until it reaches my flowers. That's right I have a perfectly shaped afro of flowers. They shine brightly in the sun with their purply

pink color! My flowers are my crowning achievement, they used to be more practical but on me they are purely for decoration. So why is this ugly butterfly taking all of my nectar!

I don't deserve to be eaten, especially not by something as dumb as a butterfly! I'm enraged they couldn't have eaten my less superior cousin, he isn't even three feet tall yet. I am the tallest in my cluster. How does this thing always manage to fly all the way up here! I'm trying to sway peacefully in the breeze and enjoy my greatness while you, the dumb butterfly are trying to rob me of my greatness and keep it for yourself. You know what, if I looked like you, I might want to change the way I looked too. I don't blame you, you're just jealous, aren't you? Hey! Get back here! You can't just take all my nectar and leave. You know what, now at least I can just sway in peace.

Augg my sap is leaking again, my one flaw is this sticky goo that will one day be the death of me. My milky liquid is sticky and disgusting, nothing I do will make it leave. All I want is to get rid of my sap. And allow myself to be clean and beautiful. The liquid is toxic and disgusting. I'm not toxic and disgusting, I'm trustworthy and majestic. After all, I am the most beautiful creature. The most beautiful creature with this thing, this parasite! Maybe not a parasite, but it certainly feels like this is what a parasite does, destroy. Please, my milky latex liquid, go away, you are ruining my life!

Nooooooooo! The bugs, the flies, the mosquitos. You did this, sap. They all want to lay their eggs on you, especially the flies. Go! My liquid is toxic, it will kill your children! Please, now they will get suck and I will have dead fly bodies all over me! This is gross why, oh why is my life so terrible. I'm the most beautiful plant with the most ugly life. Dead flies are scattered throughout my milky sap. I'm such a wreck. No matter how perfect I am, my sap is heart-set on destroying me. But why, oh why is it me? How dare, yes, how dare the flies choose me?

I'm hurting as a milkweed, my blood and my bones are injured. I shall not fret though, I will just need to take some good energy from the sun. I can feel it, its warmth on my westside leaves and petals. I will use the energy to eat and heal myself. Huh, that's just one more thing that makes milkweed superior, especially me, the most important milkweed. I truly am the most important milkweed to exist, so it only makes sense that I can heal myself.

“CHIRP! CHIRP! CHIRP!”

Goodness gracious, would you shut up, I'm trying to rest my blossoms. Give me some beauty sleep for once. You, you, you, inferior cricket. Nobody likes you; you're noisy, creepy, and repulsive. I just can't stand you chirping so put a sock in it. Graaa, crickets always jumping on my leaves making a ruckus and leaving! So creepy, yes you creepy little crickets, so strange.

It's quite cold, too cold for me to withstand, I feel like I...I, I might faint, no I won't, I can't give up now! I just need more energy. Where is the sun? I can't feel its warmth and I can't see its brightness which means, it's gone? I can't use its energy any longer, not till sunrise. How dare the sun, how dare. The sun knows I need a lot of energy and it just leaves? Well then, the sun didn't ever even deserve to have me use its dumb energy anyways. I will just rest and use the water instead.

Ohh finally! The sun is bright and exuberant, only second to me in amazingness. I'm so sorry if I could ever repay you, just please forgive me! I love you so so much, but obviously not more than I love my flowers and my stem and my leaves, but I do love you more than my toxic liquid. So give me energy! Ahh I love the feeling of becoming even stronger than my fellow milkweed. My scars will soon be healed and I will return to my beautiful state, not that I was ever not beautiful of course.

Oh my goodness gracious, I'm not okay with whatever is ruining my photosynthesising. Aug, a caterpillar? No! Its billions of little legs are trying to creep up my stem. So, so, disgusting! Why, in all of the plant universe, does this thing even exist. Wait, what are you doing, caterpillar, trying to make a cocoon on me, *me*? How dare you,

how dare you! You, caterpillar, have no right to make a cocoon on my most precious leaf. Oh how dare you, I shall not stand for this! Off, get off you little creepy crawler. Ahhh why can't I move? My pure greatness should be enough to let me move. Alas, it is no use, I will just have to ignore the little creepy thing.

“Prrrrrrr.....Prrrrrrrrr”

What in tarnation, AHHHHHH! A hummingbird!? This has never ever happened before! A hummingbird, hmmmm they're quite noisy. Ahhhhh! That beak is extremely sharp and freakishly long, thank you very much and, Ahhhh! What the heck I don't have anything left for you to take beside my beauty! No, no, you cannot have my beauty, go, shoo fly shoo. Oh sorry *hummingbird* you might as well be a fly. You're noisy, gross, and annoying just like them! Back off you winged weirdo! I'm not happy and how dare you even look at me. Get out of my sight you flying freak! Oh yeah, that's right, fly away, huh.

Well at least now I can breathe easy. Wait, what you're still here!? I thought I told you to go away. The audacity in you, augg! Just go away and never show your demented face around my leaves again! What even is that white stuff around you? I know it must be a cocoon. Also, how long is this going to take? I need my beauty rest so whatever this is can't keep me up. I am, after all, the most important plant in the patch.

Why are you still there? Doesn't it make you tired to hang upside down all day? I mean, I would never get tired but a lot of other organisms would. I'm not super happy you're there but at least I have someone to share with. So since I was a young milkweed I've always had the prettiest flower crown. The flowers line the top of my stem, since you can't see me I'll describe them. How to describe something so incredibly perfect. Well, they are a purply pink and they shine when the sun hits them with an afternoon glow. The small buds are long and thin, they creep around my stem in an afro shape. Was that good enough? I am a rare milkweed, do you know why? It's because I only have one cluster of flowers, everyone else has at least two. Personally, I like being unique, it makes me feel pretty and gorgeous and I guess just great. Do you like being unique?

You don't have to ignore me, you know, we both seem pretty lonely. Not that I'm alone, everyone loves me, I'm a unique milkweed. You do seem like you're alone though, don't caterpillars stay together? Maybe it's just my milkweed family. My family is pretty great, I'm obviously the favorite, though they never told me, I can read between the sways. Huh, what's that?

“HAHAHAHA!”

Are those, KIDS! Oh no please don't come near me please oh please. I know the story, no I can't go through the same thing. Hey little caterpillar do you want to know the story? You know what, I'll just tell you it anyways.

It was a bright sunny day in a peaceful field, much like this field. The milkweed named Jessie was happy for the sun after a cold night. What Jessie didn't know was that kids were roaming the field near the patch. Jessie was a unique milkweed, just like me, except Jessie was unique the other way. That's right Jessie had six clusters of flowers (that's cool, but still not as cool as one cluster). Anyway, those six clusters are what caused the accident that followed. The kids trampled the grass and made a path straight toward Jessie-Six-Cluster. Then, they proceeded to pick his flowers off, one by one. Jessie never grew his flowers back. How dare those kids though, just how dare them. Jessie was weak and died at a lower age than normal milkweed does. I'm unique so I'll probably live for longer, but it's still scary.

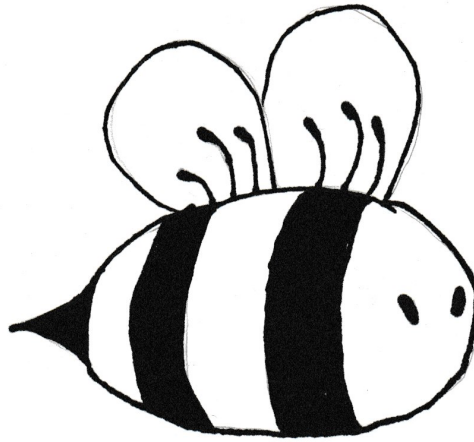
Yeah you might think I'm lying but I'm not and if those kids take one even one of my clusters, I might just die! Besides the kids, I hate their bigger versions especially the ones that take the leaves off of us and steal our milky latex like liquid. I might have said I hate the liquid but, they still can't just take it away from me! You know what, another reason I hate it is that it's toxic but has healing abilities to humans so they take it. Apparently it helps with their breathing thing and, hmm, what was it, yes their warts! I haven't the faintest idea what a wart is but I think that I would like one. So I'm mostly perfect, my one flaw is my white gloomy goop.

Do you hate any-, NOOOOO! Where did you go? I mean, pfft I never even liked you anyways. Who cares about some stupid catipillar. I certainly don't care a single bit, not a part of me misses you, well maybe my liquid does but I hate my liquid so I hate you, too! You know what, how dare you, how dare you! I am the prettiest milkweed and you have the nerve to just leave me. I don't even care, I don't miss you, I never loved you, I only love ME.

It is kind of boring here alone, but I have me so it doesn't matter.
So me what do you think about-

“Buzz...Buzz.”

Caterpillar! I mean, the nerve of you to come back. I can't even believe you would, wait no that's a BEE! Well, me, do you like bees? No, me, I don't believe I do like bees. Well, I don't either so go away bee. Nobody likes bees, they buzz and, and, steal my pollen, yep my pollen, pollen I use for me so, bee, how dare you, how dare you. I am the most precious milkweed so buzzing bee, go away! I'm astonished you even exist in the same field as me. How dare you be born, how dare you buzz, how dare you take my pollen and just leave. Everyone always just leaves, I, I, I just don't want to be alone!



Western Honeybee // Julia Kruger

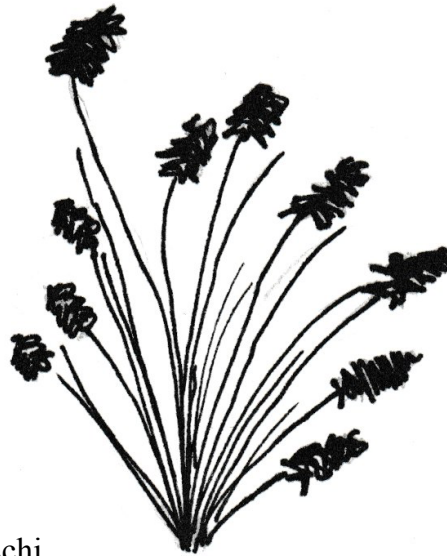
At last, I find a source of nectar. I know the journey hasn't been long, but it felt like forever. I land on the beautiful pink flowers and take a sample of the creamy nectar from the plant. When I have a decent-sized sample, I lift myself off of the flowers and turn back to the hive. On my way to the hive, I pass many humans. Some of the smaller humans try to capture me in their two hands, and others threaten me with whatever they're wearing on their feet. Some of my sisters have lost their lives to footwear. Most of the humans try to avoid me at all costs, though. They really shouldn't be afraid of me. I'm sure I'm more afraid than they are.

I focus on nothing but getting back to the hive to share my nectar sample. I'm avoiding humans, birds, and anything else that can hurt me. I'm almost past the crowd of humans, but I hear a painful screech. Two large hands come toward me. I see the silhouette of a human towering above me. The hands cup on either side of me. I try to fly upwards to avoid the hands, but they come closer and closer, nearly crushing me.

Everything is dark. I try to fly, but barely have any room before I hit a soft wall. I bounce back onto a similar surface and sit for a

moment. *"It's too early for this,"* I say to myself. I've been captured by the human. I don't want to give my life and sting the human. I want to live a long, fulfilling, 152-day life. I bump my head against the human's hand. I wait a moment and the hands fly open. I look back and the human appears startled. *Why did it try to capture me? I thought the humans were afraid of me.* I try not to focus on the human too much and head back to the hive. There, I will share the nectar sample with my sisters so that they can collect more nectar as well.

I finally reach the hive, ready to perform my waggle dance. I step into the hive and begin to move around the hive in little circles, spreading the nectar throughout honeycombs. My sisters gather around to watch my performance, paying close attention. Every once in a while, I pause to distribute more nectar. My sisters pay close attention and pick up some of the nectar sample. The others are constantly checking up on the queen, making sure she is always in good health. When I finish my dance, my sisters go to search for more nectar. I watch as my sisters leave the hive to find more sources of nectar. They tell me that they're going out to the meadow. I wonder what they'll find there.



Meadow Interlude // Gianna Palleschi

I watch as a small honey bee lands delicately on one of my flowers. Sipping nectar from the millions of tulips that cover my surface. A calm breeze flows through my tall dry grass. Making me wave this way and then that way. As the breeze dies down my grasses slow to a stop.

I gaze at the far ends of the woods leading into me. A whitetailed deer tromps in, grazing on my grasses, and stomping on my seeds. It grazes at one side of the calm grasses and then tromps over to a different area, grazing there as well.

Surrounding me, life lives on. Butterflies fly above me, deer graze my grasses, bees take my nectar, and birds call out to me. The ecosystem that they live in, perfectly balanced with life.

A loud noise calls out to me, scraping and scratching. It almost sounds like metal and wood. At my far end, humans finally reach out and touch my grasses. I think to myself, *humans aren't that bad now are they*. But then the scratching noise is louder and louder when they drop wood and metal into my grass. They build and build for forever. Taking up the ends of me with wood and metal.

A while later, they stop, as if they are done. They have built some sort of structure. It has a rectangular body and a triangular top. And oh, what's happening now? I watch as they drag animal by animal into the musty structure. I expect them to leave but they seem to not want to.

Soon I learn to accept the weird structure at the end of my grass. In fact I feel it is part of my ecosystem now. And if it were gone it would be a unearthly quiet sound that leaves me in solitude. So I am rather fond of the humans at the end of me, they are doing quite well.

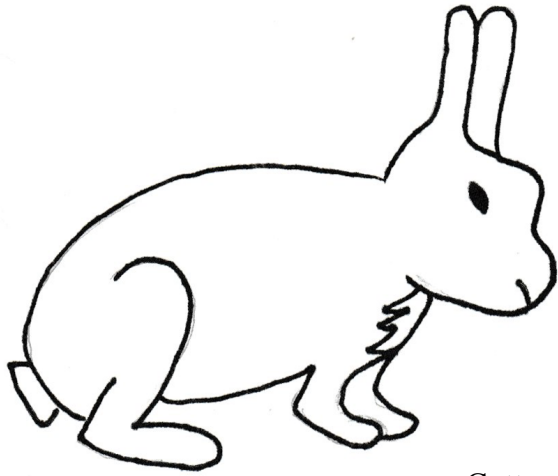
A gentle rain falls down to me, leaving droplets on the blades of my grass. No humans come out today, they all stay inside. A breeze picks up swaying my grasses to and fro. The settled water drops spray off the grass in a rush to get out of the cool wind. No deer or butterflies or birds come out today. Just the swaying breeze and falling rain.

The weather engulfs me in a swirl of rain and wind. Tulip buds fly off onto the ground Acorns from close by trees fly off into the depths of my grass. Sunflower seeds falling to the ground, defeated by the rushing breeze.

After the storm, the moon shines bright. The edge of the woods are active once again. I hear the singsong of birds, and the pitter-patter of deer, and the buzzing of the bees. Tonight I hear a new noise. A small thumping on the ground from a small force. I stay tall, and still as I await the thumping force.

As it draws nearer and nearer to the edge of the forest I make out the shape. A small rabbit hops to the edge of the woods and rushes into the edge of my grass. I wonder what it will choose to eat tonight, maybe some tulip buds, or oh some sunflower seeds, or maybe even some small acorns.

As the rabbit hops farther into me I know that yes, my ecosystem is expanding, and for the better.



Cottontail Rabbit by Gianna Palleschi

I run through the tall bushes. My grayish brown coat keeping me from being seen. The moon brightens up the sky as I chew my way through some grasses and herbs. My favorite meal in the summer. I slowly fill up my belly and start to hop back home. I grab some grasses in my mouth and hop through the bushes once more.

I find myself back in the burrow where my wife lays. It's only June, she should be giving birth soon. I lay down the grass in front of her and purr. She purrs back gratefully and slowly chomps up the grass. We have already had one litter this year, after the second we hope for another litter. There are barely any cottontail rabbits left in Maine.

I curl up next to my wife and start to fall asleep. The grassy burrow that we live in is under a couple big green bushes with little red berries on top. Big, juicy, red. All of them have little tiny seeds in the side of them, that's my favorite part. I think when some humans were

walking by they called them, what was it? Strawbuffet? No, Strawbetty? Oh right Strawberry! Yes, those are my favorite!

I wake up right before dusk. My wife lies quietly as I start my journey through the strawberry bushes. I hop along trying my best to stay in the bush as always. As the rows of bushes bring me to the best food grounds, the woodlands. I hop over to a fallen twig. And I munch and chomp. Oh it's so good. I hop to the next meal, a freshly dropped bud of a tulip. I nibble on it and tuck it away for my wife later. As I listen to my own thoughts, a blood curdling scream appears. I know that scream. It's my wife's. I hop back to the burrow as fast as I can, it's hard enough in the dark. Until I stop: about halfway between me and the burrow there's an owl. Poking and prying at the entrance of the den. All the way through I see my wife and our first litter pushed up against the farthest side of the den.

So scared, I haven't had to use my scream in a long time, I let it loose. I produce a similar blood curdling scream, almost the same as my wife's. As the owl turns its head. I run. I hear the distant swooping of the owl's wings, coming for me. I just hope that my wife and the kids fled to the emergency burrow. I scurry, zigzagging. I weave in and out. In and out. Until it seems that the owl has lost interest and has flown away. I make my way to the bushes and I hop along to the emergency burrow. Scared, as dawn begins to enclose me, I run back as fast as I can so that I don't have to be seen by a stalking coyote or a looming hawk.

As I scurry along I see a hawk peering from a nearby tree branch. It doesn't see me. Yet. Quietly, I hop through the bushes. I grab a few blades of grass from the bush lanes. And avoid the hawk all the way to the burrow. There in the corner my wife and kids are huddled together. I purr softly to them all to be careful because there is a hawk looming near.

I take the soft bristly blades of grass, and slowly lay them in front of everyone. I nudge it towards each and every one of them. My wet nose grazing the top of each blade. Gratefully, every other wet nose pulls in the grass close to their warm bodies and slowly chomps on the delightful meal. Slowly each and every baby cottontail, each a mere one pound, come out of the corner. So does my wife as she curls up next to me.

The next morning my wife seems almost ready to have the next litter. I thump my hind legs on the ground telling her that I will get some food for her and the newborn babies.

Be careful, she purrs to me. The softness in her purr, telling me to be quiet and not get caught by the hawk. I stumble out of the burrow, the short grass pricking my hind legs. I shift deep into the brush and hop to the field.

As I make it to the field I make sure to stock up on supplies. We could be having eight in a litter! And we also have five other babies to feed. And my wife and myself. And yet, we could only have three newborns on the way.

I stumble into the long grass. As I hop to the first find, I look down to see what goodies I can bring to the babies. As I stare down at the surprise in the dry dirt, my face falls. An acorn. The tiniest acorn ever. Sure on any other day this would be a treasure, magnificent at most. But this isn't what I want to give the newborns as a first meal. I nibble on the tender shell for myself and continue on my way.

I stumble upon old tulip buds, acorns, and sunflower seeds. But it isn't good enough. As time disappears and I am the only thing alive, I make it farther, and farther into the dizzying grasses. It brushes against my body and I whisk myself away to a different treasure. Oh well this looks quite interesting indeed. Yes, a big hardy tomato. Well I've never seen that before. I grab the juicy tomato in my mouth as I stare up into the beautiful open sky. And then I turn to the left. A huge farm is built, towering above all of the grasses in the world. I stare, amazed. And I realize something, I stare back to the sky. The open sky. As in, it is way into the morning by now. I jump to a big wooden crate, discarded from the farm, and I stare over the grass. I've probably hopped a mile away from the forest. All I can see is millions of grasses. Oh no! The babies! This has absolutely never happened before.

As I jump off the crate to go home, something touches me. A hawk? No, an owl? Maybe a coyote? I let it rip, "EEKKKKKKKKKKKK!" I close my eyes.

"Aren't you a cute little bunny! Yes you are, yes you are!"

I open one eye to a squint. Then the next eye. My eyes open fully to see a tall figure standing in front of me. His eyes glint as he stares at me. He reaches out to grab me.

“Yes you are a cute bunny!”

“EEEEEEK!” I bolt through the grass, not letting him touch me.

I run as far as I can without a single break. I grab sunflower seeds, tulip buds, and acorns. Anything that is food! And I gaze at the far-off forest, looking heavenly as ever.

Hours later I make it to the brim of the forest, almost home. I rush through the brush. The vines tickling my ears, the strawberry smell wafting through my nose. Just keep going. I urge myself on. The pain in my leg begging me to stop, take a break, eat something. But I continue on ignoring everything my body tells me. I make it to the burrow.

The balls of fuzz. It seems that there are more of them. I missed it. Oh no! I rush in, laying all of the food on the ground. I nudge it forward slowly as three pairs of eyes peer out from the darkness of the burrow. I lay on the ground as I nibble some sunflower seeds. My wife purrs softly urging the babies forward. One by one they stumble out from the depths of the burrow. The first nibbles on the tomato with glee. A girl. The second reaches out for some of the grasses I have collected nibbling on one then chewing on the other. A girl. The third and final baby rabbit stumbles from the corner. And... falls on **his** face. **He** pulls himself up and reaches out for a ripe tulip bud. A boy! Our first boy of the season! The other five pull themselves out of the back to eat their portion after the newborns.

My, it's been a long day. A long day indeed. I close my eyes as the fluffy babies come and curl up around me. I'm enclosed by the dark and I fall asleep once more.

My eyes flicker open. Awaked by someone's soft purring. My wife's. Yes, it is her. My vision focuses more. Clearer and clearer within each second. She stands rock solid at the entrance to the burrow. Purring continuously out to the forest. I stumble over to her and look out. There, across the strawberry lanes, one of the newborn girls wallows across. Looking under rocks, nibbling grass, and falling on her face. My wife looks to me, then looks up to the trees beyond. On the longest branch the hawk looms. Its dark beady eyes staring directly at her. I continue to purr louder and louder to her. Get out! Come back! Hawk! Run!

But it's no use, the hawk leaps off the branch and swoops down to the poor baby. Less than 300 cottontails in Maine, you know. And now there's one less than before. Silence. Eerie silence. Cottontails are very endangered. And I have to say that the one that just risked its life to eat some grass, is a darn stupid one because we talked about the hawk the other day. I sigh as I circle around to everybody else. I purr: nobody, and I mean nobody is allowed to leave this burrow. Unless me or your mother says so. You got it? Seven pairs of sparkling eyes look up at me and purr back.

The next week we move to a different burrow, closer to the woodsy area of Maine. I wake up at the crack of dusk. I rush through the soft and wet grass. Each blade tickling my paws. The only sound in the world is my hindlegs echoing through the dry dirt. In the distance I hear the buzz of a fly and the croak of a nearby frog.

Trying my best to be covert, I hop to a big cluster of different grasses. Taking my choice of the biggest finest grasses. Tall, green, and delicious. I take a quick glance over to the burrow about ten yards away. Everything is as still as before, perfectly still. Good. I snap off a good group of grasses, and nudge a medium sized golden acorn with my crinkly nose.

I turn around and look behind me to start heading back. With a shock I drop all my grass from my mouth. My son, the only one in the litter, is staring right at me.

I grunt to him, annoyed, what the heck are you doing out here!?

He stares up at me with his sparkling eyes, and purrs, *I want to help.*

I sigh, of course he wants to help. I nod at the acorn showing him to pick it up. His eyes become bigger and brighter as he giddily grabs the acorn and starts to hop back home. I grab the grass and hop after him. Of course he wants to help.

The next day I rise up, the dawning darkness projects into the burrow. I turn to leave, into the misty night, when all of a sudden I feel

a force push me over. I fall to the ground and look up, bracing for the idea that it might be an owl. I open my shut eyes and look. My son. Again? He stares at me, waiting for me to leave.

I purr to him, *not today, you're not ready*. He stares at me with the look of, excuuuuuse me? I stare at him blankly and turn to leave. I hear his poorly attempted tiptoes and turn around. No, I grunt this time. He sighs and turns to curl up next to the other puffs of gray and brown fur.

Trees surround me: beeches, pines, and hemlocks. Everywhere. The burrow lays a length of about 25 yards away. I grab the twigs of a nearby pine tree. I hop with glee back to the burrow, what great finds today. I found beech nuts, rare grasses, and wonderfully delicious twigs. Everyone should be glad when I get home.

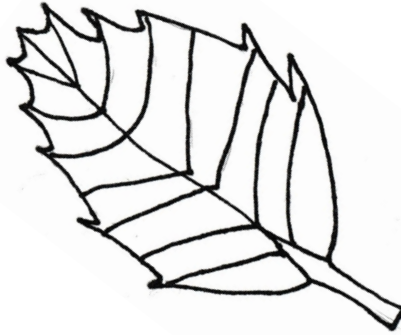
As I run through the rocky woods my feet kick up the dust behind me. I slow down when I am about two feet from the burrow. The tall grass, tickling my nose. I make it to the burrow entrance and wiggle my tail as I lay down the various items.

My wife purrs with gratitude. Everyone takes a nibble of this, then a chomp on that.

Two weeks later, I wake up at the crack of dusk, as it urges me awake. I hop over to my son and nuzzle him awake. It's time for him to

provide for the family. He wakes up expecting that it's time to eat, he turns to chomp on thin air and falls to the musty ground of the warm burrow. He shakes his fuzzy head as he looks up at me. I look at him back. And then his face shows me that he realizes what I woke him up for. His happiness pushes me out the burrow.

We hop into the tree-filled woods, I nudge him over to a close bunch of beech trees. There in the middle is an old dying one. We hop over to the edge of the tree. I show him which grasses are perfect. I watch him grab the few grasses he can carry, as he stumbles around the short grass he picks up all sorts of treasure. Yes, now he's ready.



Beech Tree // Gabrielle Price

That little cottontail is so young. My thoughts interlude with the world around me, seeing the baby cottontail reach for the evergreen blades of grass by the base of my trunk. All I can do is watch, seeing that the elder, endangered rabbit watches as well, as the little cottontail scurries with the blades of grass in his jaws, and right back to the elder one. Even if they were injured or sick, they could still continue their adventure. I have to stay here, knowing what's to come for me. At least I still can watch as life continues around me, brimming with energy and excitement. I watch as the small cottontail, his light brown coat fluffed, and the small ball of snow that's located in the back twitch as the two return back to where they came from. *Farewell, little one. I hope life treats you well.*

The smell of the rabbits lingers in the air, fresh as can be. Who knows what kinds of animals will turn up here, mouth-watering for the flavor of the endangered cottontail. I'm pleased that they escaped, scurrying home with food for their family to eat. I don't know how to explain this disease I'm going through, but I know exactly how I was given the title "diseased tree." I'm never going to forget that day that I

noticed what was now on my appearance, where it previously wasn't there before.

An April morning, nine and a half years ago.

What a morning it is today. Birds are alive and well, animals are hunting, the circle of life continues. I know that the world around me will calm and cease, due to the knowledge that the stratus clouds above me mean that rain is bound to fall at any moment. The air lingers with a warm feeling, as well. I haven't sensed a good vibe off the air around me-it seems sickening, but I can't tell. I'm a beech tree, I produce shade, food, and oxygen to those in need. My purpose isn't anything more than a producer for my home. A bluejay starts nonsense chatter towards another of its kind, the pitch ranging between a highly annoying chirping, or a low, lovely melody. Possibly a conversation about this air, but-

Drip. Drop. Drip. Drop.

The pitter-patter of water droplets against my leaves echoes a previous claim, brightening the already beautiful color. The color of the water, though, is very unappealing to me. The color is clear, but darker, who knows what kinds of chemicals could be in here due to those humans controlling the world. I see them every once in a while, taking a stroll through the forest. They won't be here today, though. They hate rainwater, but I personally love rainwater- it gives me so many nutrients that I consume, which helps me produce nutrients to the other

factors that live in this ecosystem. I soak up the rainwater, watching as more falls from above.

Three weeks later.

Perhaps there's been a misunderstanding in my book. The rainwater wasn't very appetizing when I had consumed it. It looked fine, except that it was darker, but what could it have been?

A bird flies past me, landing on one of my limbs close to my base, and pecks at something. All my fears became a reality as I see that a few particles of the only disease that's threatening my kind is now attached to the bird's beak- the beech bark disease.

Present-day.

Sadness fills me as I remember that moment. The moment that I found out I was now diseased, cursed with the probability of death. Cherishing these moments that I can feel true strength through my roots and up to the tip as all the trees loom over my head, but the growth in me is slowing; tearing away everything that I built, cherish, and all I have left is the promised fate of death.

Chirp! Chirp, chirp! The bird coos, flying quickly to the nearest water source. This drought has been taking away the energy that I've stored up in my lifetime as a tree, and being diseased, it's going quicker. Water, water, water, water, water- I need water! Pain

starts to fill up every inch of me as I let my roots search for the moist water in the soil.

Nothing.

Not a single, little drop of water that I can use to survive the drought. If only I could speak, sending off my pleads and requests for survival to the only organisms that care about my survival. My pleads, though, are only to be heard by me, in my vast, enclosed mind.

A vibration is sent through the soil and to my roots, and with that, it feels like a warning. I've never known what a warning feels like, I've only known my endless, lonely thoughts. Is this mother nature herself warning me of my demise? Or is this just the earth changing, taking course here, near my roots. Is this a sign for what I have to do, send a vibration out to the others here, in my response to this summer's drought? Perhaps time will tell my fate, and also give the same warning to the other beech trees.

My limbs lift as the beech nuts that I've been carrying fall, fresh produce to the animals all around, or even for the soil to grow new life in my place once I've perished. The flowers growing on the limbs of mine are in pairs with short hairy stems looking toward the area away from me. That fact clarifies that I'm a female- males and females have different types of flowers that grow on them. I have the flowers that grow in pairs, joined together in a bristly mess. Males, though, have small yellow flowers, clustered together in a ball-like structure. The beech trees around me, though, are all healthy and different. I don't know how long they've been alive- I've lost all care since I became sick.

I've had enough of this. The chance of me surviving in this drought, with no water, and sick, is less than 10%. I'll send my only warning, but is it a warning? *I'll try my hardest.*

I send a warning, at least, just a statement. *I'll release my nutrients to the forest if I don't think I am going to survive with the way the world is working around me. Take them when I let them go- I want you all to survive when I can't. Nature is taking my place here, and returning the wonderful experience of life to another creature.*

Signals are returned, fairly quicker than I thought they would be. They acknowledge my warning for the future, and I am very pleased that my nutrients and care will go to good use. For now, I will produce the rest of my beech nuts to the animals and creatures here, waiting for the moment to come. As long as I continue to fulfill my role here, and let life continue growing- in spite of how mine is shaping out.

Thinking back about my journey in nature, I realize many things. First of all, I watched many different organisms grow around me, taking in the sun's strength, and absorbing the water that was in the soil, or that rained from above. Not many get to experience this view, watching as life shapes around them, brimming with hope towards a new future for many, many more to come.

Second, I helped support new life. I gave food to the animals in the forest, nutrients to come. Squirrels, chipmunks, and birds all are commonly dependent on my kind's food. I'd see a bear and raccoon from time to time, but they were never as common as the squirrels, chipmunks, and birds. This feeling that always happens as I help support life is amazing, supporting everything for honorable reasons. I

depend on them to eat my produce, even decompose it. Planting it in the soil for them to grow and produce for this ecosystem as well.

Finally, I wouldn't rethink life. We all come and go, sharing the same experience as we watch these actions take place, but from a different view. This life I've experienced has been a happy, yet difficult one. I wouldn't rethink it. Perhaps I'd have wanted to be diseased when I was taller than the other beech trees, but nature decides what to do, so I can't complain about its actions. I am diseased, destined to pass on one day. This life I've experienced, though, has been fun and exciting. I believe that the other beech trees who are experiencing this somewhere else agree.

Feeling the hot sun on my leaves, I soak it in, and let the drought continue running like it's been recently.

The drought is almost over, I can feel it in the air. Sadly, though, I hardly have any nutrients left from the long drought. I'm shocked that I've lived this long, though. I need water to survive, as well. Seeing the area around me, and sensing it through my roots, I can feel that others are depending on my nutrients to survive now. I send out a calling: *It's time for me to end my journey now.*

Taking in all this beauty around me, I send my last bunch of nutrients from the tip of my form, down through my roots, into the soil that needs it so dearly. I can sense that many other organisms are doing their best to grab ahold of it all, but the larger organisms don't need it that much- I want the ones who've given up something important to

grab this, those who need it to survive. *Be gentle to those who are smaller and need it more.*



The Balsam Fir //

Matthew Dormanen and Tess Frager

She had sent out her last warning signal to the forest, telling us of the drought that had dropped her reserves down to the bottom of her roots. She had sent out a hefty chunk of her resources about two nights ago, telling the forest she would distribute her remaining resources to surrounding trees if she felt she would not survive. But I had gotten none of her before she went. I was relying on her to give me her energy, for I had dropped most of my short, dense, moss-green needles to lighten the load of the water I consumed trying to keep my needles healthy.

At the time I had no choice but to drop them with the little water we had been getting. Yet now I need my needles back to regenerate my energy and grow my trunk to an unsurpassed level of the forest. But right now my roots are grounded. I can feel my needles dropping by the bucket load. I do not know what I will do, but whatever it is, it must happen fast.

Out of the blue, my roots are overloaded from the nutrients and liquid from other trees, miles away. Their gifts are welcomed into my trunk and go straight to my leaves, but they all carry a message. Rain. The one thing that is important, the only thing that I need. I am waiting for the rain to come and fill up the ground around me, as if my roots go straight to the ocean. The rain is what I need to start my journey towards the sun. If it's headed my way, of course.

I have been slowly dying of thirst, as each day goes by. I feel more and more of my needles dropping. It is a natural counter to thirst because of how much water they consume, and I have no control over it. If it were my choice, I would not drop them, because I know I will need them later, but sadly it is not my choice. It is a part of me that has no idea what happens when I don't have them. Luckily, I have heard through the clear messages of the trees on the outskirts of the forest that there will be rain soon. If that is true I will not need anything else to begin my ascent and grow new needles. But if their messages are not true, than I will most likely die.

The sun, and its rays of warmth and energy, will go wasted, bouncing off my dead needles and into the stars. However far away this rain is, I am hoping I can stop dreaming about it and have it become a reality.

I can feel my long, conical shape shake in the wind. The wind is more than just a breeze. It is more violent, inconsistent. Is this what the others were talking about? Possibly this is the brutality before the settling of my thirst that begs to be quenched. My strobili, both genders of my long, strongly scented pine cones, are falling off in the wind, tumbling far away from my roots, where they could become my children. The wind is a destructive force that supposedly brings rain along for the ride. The wind is the most violent wind I have ever felt, destroying little ferns and baby trees wherever it goes. My roots are struggling to keep up with the force of the wind, pushing against my long, blistered trunk. My roots feel like an elephant is pulling each hair apart one by one. I have never felt like this, so helpless, so alone.

I can feel the air get incredibly dense and moist, like it is filled with heavy honey. This does not mean anything good, it could mean a thunderstorm or worse. The ground around me...it is like there is nothing underneath, sinking into nothing below. Groundwater rushes through my roots, little making it past them without being pulled through the soil and into my trunk, to end up in my needles. But that does not matter when most of them are being blown off in the wind. I am weak, normally I could hold my own in a storm like this, but not with the recent drought. My dream of water has backfired on me, it is like I am on an island in the middle of the ocean, drowning in the water I once held sacred.

My branches and needles, wrapped all the way around the twig, finally stop wading through the honey. My branches are battered, my needles soaked in water. My entire being has shifted in the wind, most of my roots left behind. All of the resin from my blisters has hardened, leaving bubbles of amber all over my trunk. As the humans say, a “Nor’Easter “was responsible for this pain wrenching through me to the stubbs of where my fallen branches recently were.

Two peaceful years have passed, and all around me, beech trees have given me their last resources and words of vision before they give out. The disease has carried on, making their trucks—which were as smooth as the light feathers of a bird—as rough as the disposed rubber tires on monster metals. Although the storms have passed over the last two restful years, I still have that huge blistering, resin-filled bruise on my slightly rough and umber brown trunk. It makes an odor that I know all wandering animals pick up.

Wait. I’m getting a signal from the moss that dwells on my tangled roots. They say there’s a... what? I feel a huge brown and furry moose with antlers three feet long stoop down and mangle the soaking moss from my thick roots. The jaw of the great moose has a rhythm in his obnoxious chewing. I decided to ignore the beast of the Maine woo-
Ouch!!!

The bubbling blister that has swelled inside of my grained trunk has bites of only one creature that could have a bite that big. The big, dumb-minded moose, standing there with a mouthful of my blistering

resin. I send my reinforcement resources to the ruined sight on my trunk, praying to Mother Nature for the stubborn moose to go away before more damage could be done.

Gradually, the moose realizes the taste of the resin, using his long tongue to spit the chewed up gunk from my painful body.

Dumbfounded, the moose lugs his 1,500 pound body away to the reservoir that the trees and I can not access. I am now left in slightly painful peace, but I can feel my resources dwindling as I rush to regain strength in my wound. I will have to find nutrients and have sun and water for a few days...

But when that thought comes to mind, a warning of darkness from my surrounding community comes. There is no rain coming, but the moss of the forest will be stocked with it, and I will be able to get some from them, as they are surrounding my snarling-looking roots. Though I am still confused... My friends, the other Balsam Firs had messaged “darkness.” If I had a face, my growing terror and recognition would be showing. They meant no sun was to come. And no sun for days will leave me with little to survive off of with this kind of wound. This is going to be one of the longest days of my rooted life, in this place where I am supposed to live for years and years to come.

Going into dreadful day one, I can tell from the sky—which is a thick fluffy but grumpy white blanket—that this is not going to go over well. I take water sources from the moss which are kind, but my glucose progress is extremely low. I am feeling tired with the sun being

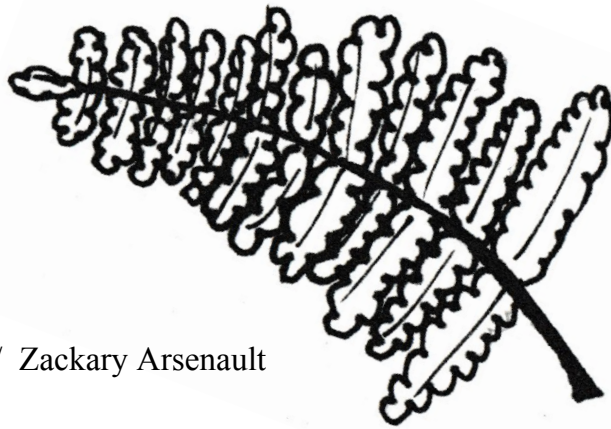
hidden behind the gloomy clouds, which have increased in number and color to a solid light gray. Creatures of the deep Maine forest that I dwell in scurry along the slightly spongy ground from the previous rain that the lush moss had absorbed. Squirrels hurry with fluttering woodpeckers and finches to rush into their drilled or carved homes in the oaks and maples, which are very stubborn. This is a sign, one that has torn one of my great branches off in the angry storm of a Nor'Easter. High winds are coming to strike, with no rain to follow, instead a thick, tiring humidity.

By dusk, the rugged weather has come to strike. Extreme heat comes, wave after wave, flowing along with the wind that torments me and the tall, billowing forest. My needles, having their own control and decisions, start to slowly peel off, even though no winter is nearby. My trunk feels as heavy as ever, small licking water coming off in the heat that has come to play, nothing getting in its way. Bugs start swarming all over, many clinging for nutrients and ways to bother me. They start climbing and scavenging through my body, my waving branches frantic for them to go away.

The night has been terrible, but on the second day, the winds die down. No massive currents of thrashing wind come or stay, but the day is hot with no sun. I can't believe no rain has come through the wall that moves slowly, but only condensation that warmed within minutes. If the rest of this terrible trend lasts, I may not make it through the next day with my thirst becoming urgent.

Finally, the third day has come, and the temperature cools by the hours through the long day. My needles decide to stick to my branches. The pests in Mother Nature's frustration calm down, though some, with their beady eyes, stay to hang out. I eventually tone down my frustration too, although I need sugar to energize my veins and work for the needles and life. Rain will come soon, I coax myself, surely after this dreadful weather that has beaten down on me. All I have to do is hold onto what I have for resources, the other trees like me needing theirs as well.

Rain comes on, and it is gentle and cooling. Sun shows through the beaten clouds that have cleared themselves for the beautiful blue sky, making a sunshower for the forests of Maine. Even the pouting Hay-Scented Ferns have made room for delight in their oval leaves and veins. I wonder how they survive and have enough resources to pull through days and weeks very much like this one...



Hay-Scented Fern // Zackary Arsenault

When I was a younger fern, it felt good being in the sun. Being in the sun's invisible yet noticeable heat and light felt good. It made me grow bigger and bigger. The others around me felt good as well. As I grew older, I was still in the light and it felt good. It still made me bigger like it did since I was created. But now, I don't notice it anymore, like it's not there, it's gone. Its warm hug around my blade that had been there for all my life has been taken away from me like a tree being cut down by people, taking the things for their own growth. The Balsam fir that has been growing along beside me for a while has risen so high that it blocks the sun from reaching me. I don't feel as good as I did when I was younger. I mean, it's not like I'm gonna die, it just isn't as great of a feeling as I had years prior. When I realized this, it was weird.

Because it was unfamiliar to me not having the sun looking down on me, it was crazy. After a while, I've grown more and more used to the dark feeling of shade. I realized that it's not as bad as I thought.

At the beginning of this shady phase, I surely thought that this could have the potential to kill me since I'd been growing in sunlight

ever since I had grown, maybe decades ago. I was very small in the moist soil, and I was still in the sun's grasp of heat and light. I mean, I didn't know better than to think that it would bring my demise. But I was wrong, I am still living my silent life in the forest. With its animals and trees growing beside me, also dealing with the problems that they face with no sunlight that they're so used to being hugged by, like me.

I am glad to be living here. It is so peaceful out in the forest of tall trees and moist earth. Though I am living next to someone's home, they never bother me. They never even come close to me. And that's all I want. A peaceful and well-lived life, that is my dream. Anyway, back to the Balsam fir.

I remember when it was young. I never knew it would grow so big, I didn't even know it could. I never knew the potential of the height of trees. I didn't know anything about them to begin with. I never even knew anything about trees. They were always so foreign to me. A tree, tens or even hundreds of feet in the air, taller than even the tallest hay-scented fern, was weird to me. It seemed so normal and nice or peaceful to just be a little small plant rather than a tall tree. As a tall tree, you have more resources, which means the trees have more of a chance to be cut down by people, who use a lot of resources. But when I'm on the ground, I never really come into the risk of being killed.

I never know why they even kill plants. They are thriving in the forest and then they just take their life away from them. It seems pointless. But I don't know why they do it, I don't even know about their kind. Maybe it's for the better and it's not for nothing. The person I live next to rarely disturbs us. He once chopped down a tree but then never did again. Although, there have been other people that did disturb

me. The owner had some young people in the backyard one time. They were playing in the grass, leaving me and my kind alone. Then they just started walking in our patch of land. They stepped on me and the other ferns. They even ripped out some of them, it was really scary. Luckily, they stopped after only a bit. They went back onto the grass and played around like they were doing prior and nothing like that happened again.

I was young like those young people once. Well, not free to move, even now I'm still unable to move and that goes for every other plant but that's beside the point. I was just a young sporophyte. Much smaller than I am now. I grew and grew until I was taller, much taller. But, as I said earlier, not as tall as the Balsam fir blocking my view of the sun in the blue sky. There were trees as tall as the Balsam fir when I was still in the sun, but they didn't bother me.

I wonder what it would be like as that Balsam fir. Being tall, many feet in the air, on the top of the forest. I imagine it would be scary, having the chance at any time of a person cutting you down and killing you in the process and taking you for personal growth. I don't think I'd like it. Then again, I'm a fern and not a tree, maybe there are benefits. But I still like being down on the floor of the forest. It's more peaceful than up there with the high gusts of wind, pushing the branches powerfully. I'm sure if I was up there, I'd snap my rachis in half, like a person's strong grip. Down here, the forest shields its inhabitants from the pulling winds up high and it's peaceful that way. It would be crazy being up there, as invisible forces pull at your branches, waiting for them to break. Like I said earlier, it wouldn't be fun for me, it would disturb me like a person pulling at the pinnae of a fellow fern. I'm happy that the person I live next to never does that. He never even

comes back to my area of land and disturbs me, and I like it that way. It makes me feel at ease knowing that I am safe from being killed by living next to this person. I know there are people not like this person though. There are trees and other plants that tell me about the bad people taking them. They tell me where they are. They warn me in case they come my way. But I know that won't happen, I know that this person will not let that happen. Well, I don't entirely know that, we're two very different things so I don't really think I could understand him, even if I tried. Neither do I care to. I'm fine with doing my thing by myself and I bet the person is fine doing his thing without the help of a hay-scented fern. I don't even know what a person does nor how they survive so I don't think I could know even if I tried, but there are more reasons for that. I don't know a whole lot about a lot of things. After all, I'm just a plant and the people have pretty much taken over the entire planet so I feel pretty confident when I say I know less than people. It's pretty impressive how they took over the planet. And it's funny how they're destroying it. They cut down trees, they pump dangerous gasses in the air, they even burn down forests of trees. Why would anyone do that?

It just seems ironic that the people who have relied on the world and its resources for so long now are the reason for its destruction. But, it's always possible to stop it. It could be possible if, in a century, the world would be safe from killing itself and they wouldn't have to worry about ending themselves as a species, as well as every other living thing. That would be good. I hope that people in the future will be able to save the earth from its early demise. But, I guess only time will tell. Anyway, let's focus on some other, smaller things.

I remember one day, maybe years ago. I was just chilling in the soft breeze, enjoying the peace of the forest of tall trees. Like all of my days and years in that ecosystem, it was calming and peaceful. And then, these people came. They had all of these tools that I'd never seen before. They had spikes and looked intimidating. And then, they just started cutting down trees. Loud sounds were followed by the deaths of trees. It went on for maybe an hour and was scary, to say the least. When it ended, all that was left in the patch of land was the stumps of trees. I wonder what it would be like to be one of those trees. To be living lively and then a few minutes later, you're dead. Anyways, over the next days, they removed the stumps and any trace of the trees was gone. Then, they started building something. I had no idea what it was, I didn't really care, to be honest. It went on for a few months and then, there was a building there. Then, these people showed up. They weren't like the ones months before these events, they were infinitely more peaceful. Those people I'm speaking about here include the person I was talking about earlier. The person I live behind who never disturbs me. One day, the person just showed up with a load of stuff and moved into the building. The process of building the house didn't really bother me that much. Of course, except for the destroying of trees, but in the whole grand scheme of this event, it was short-lived.

I've wondered ever since that day, what would it be like if those people never came and chopped the trees. I have no idea, but I imagine it would be very different. Maybe I would never know the tension of being next to plants being killed. I don't know if it would be for better or for worse. On the one hand, I'd have experience with that type of situation. And on the other, you've never felt the stress of that situation.

So I guess, either way, it has its pros and cons. It would be cool to find out that question. But that's pretty much impossible, so I guess I'll have to leave that up to my thoughts.

I also wonder what it would feel like in the situation of one of those unlucky trees that happened to be chopped down. I imagine looking at some person, hacking away at its own body and killing it in the process. I imagine it would feel pretty scary. Or maybe terrifying is the right word. Anyway, summing it up, it would pretty much be a polar opposite feeling to happiness. The polar opposite of the feeling of being at peace in the forest in soft winds and sunlight.

Though it isn't there anymore, I still imagine the feeling of the sunlight hitting all of my pinnas and making me grow bigger. It still feels great even though in real life, it's not there for me. I remember when that Balsam fir was pretty small. It was taller than me. It seemed so small compared to the other trees surrounding me. Now, it's pretty much as tall as the trees that it was dwarfed by in its early years. It seems unbelievable that that's even possible. A small tree that can grow and eventually reach the heights of the tall trees it was once dwarfed by years ago seems extremely impossible to me; it seems absolutely ridiculous and absurd. But that goes for many things. That is sort of a thing of mine. I don't know a lot about a lot of things that aren't about hay-scented ferns. I'm guessing that isn't the best thing in the world but I've been doing fine for my life. Well, until something happens.

So, on one nice day, I realize something. There is something new in my area. The day before, I didn't see anything next to me. But now, there is. I don't know how, there just is. And the next day, it is even bigger. And in the next week, it surpasses my height. To say I am

speechless would be an understatement. I don't know if I can even put it into words. Over the next few months, it grows and grows, and I feel worse. I feels painful, like my demise will be soon. I know that sounds dark but that's the truth, sadly. And then one day, I die. To put it in nicer words, I kick the same bucket that all of those trees that were cut down for that person's house years ago did.



Japanese Knotweed // Gabrielle Price

The Hay-Scented Fern was fun to watch, but everything comes to an end if they're not like me. Sure, the Hay-Scented Fern is a beautiful plant, with the scent, and also with the prickly ridges at the edges of its form. Of course, it's nothing compared to my outstanding white flowers. It does get lonely and boring, though. Killing everything that tries to oppose me- small or big. Sometimes winning all the time sucks.

Anyways, the people nearby really like what I've done to the place. Who wouldn't want this beautiful plant everywhere? Even if they didn't want me to continue growing and expanding, I'd come back. They can't do too much, since my roots are so thin and small, I'm practically invincible! Especially with the way I grow, with a short amount of time, I could be taller than an average one of those two-legged mammals. Being 2.1 meters tall—or seven feet—is just the best, I can see where else I could expand my reach to continue growing. Ah, it's just the best view, even if I kill it all.

These people nearby, though, are holding their creation. I don't know what they use it for, but whatever it is, they're probably using it to get rid of these minor plants that aren't even an eighth as appealing

as I am. Even so, why are they walking towards me? They aren't trying to get rid of ME, are they? How preposterous!

One of them is kneeling down beside one of my strongest bamboo poles, and they yank it out of the ground! How dare they! Ruining my precious appearance, making a mockery of me- I'll just grow it back as quickly as they stole that bamboo from me. Maybe not as fast, but still, pretty fast. Just as long as they don't continue robbing me of bamboo...

Sure enough, they do *just* that. Rob me of my bamboo, stomp on them and throw it all into this... chipper? Why, what have I done to oppose you all? I simply am growing here, maybe killing a few plants. The Hay-Scented Fern and countless other herbs and plants were here at a previous age, so it's time for *me* to take control of this new age! Humans have had their time to shine, don't rain on my parade! Stripping me bare of my bamboo isn't the best welcoming gift to me, neither is stomping on my flowers! You know the animals you've affected? Bees, butterflies—some heartless creatures you humans are! You'll go after my roots, trying to do your best to strip me of those, too. Hopefully my plan will succeed, and one of your gardens will be my next meal. Perhaps a day later, I'll have become a tiny little root. Sure, all my other bits and pieces of roots will be in the clutches of humans, but perhaps this small, little stand of a root I will be at that moment... I think I'll be the one with the human in my clutches.

My scheme is forming exactly as I wanted it to, attached to the bottom of one of those human's shoes. They'll never figure it out until I start growing, eating anything they've planted or are tending to at their houses. They never should have messed with me, one of the most invasive species. At least I'll make their place become a total upgrade of an environment, with my absolute beauty. It is tiring, though, countlessly being stepped on, rocks jaggging into my thin roots every once in a while.

They completely destroyed every other chance of me growing back again. Those humans sure wanted to get rid of me, and replace the area I improved with a lower quality plant. That's so rude—all I wanted to do was shine above the rest. Maybe kill a few plants in the process...

A small portion of the root has slipped from the hold of the shoe, waving as the human continued to walk. Yes! Here's my opportunity, as long as another rock doesn't impale me—

A sharp edge of a stone impaled the root, exactly as I didn't wish, and is now farther into the edges of their shoe. Great, just so great. I am farther into the pit that I was in a matter of seconds ago—and that means I won't fall off. An idea sparks, a previous one. My plan, how had I forgotten it so quickly? The longer that I'm attached to this human, means that it's even closer than I ever imagined. I'll be able to flourish so fast that they won't be able to contain the growth. I don't care about the pace of time to get there—slow or fast, I'm going to get my revenge. These humans have been trying their best to extract me from these places. I was brought overseas from Japan, where they loved the beauty that I gave to the ecosystem. Then, someone decided

to share my beauty, which I appreciated very much. But why haven't these humans appreciated my beauty as much as my original home did?

When I flourished in this completely different ecosystem, killing off any plant that opposed me, humans decided to intervene. They made paths of plastic, each a different color, and since I was in their way, they removed me, but they didn't do a good enough job. I stayed, and then found a different place to thrive. A more secluded area, where life peacefully continued, not interrupted by anything, or anyone.

Well, humans decided to march their way back into an ecosystem, effectively removing me from that area, too. The Hay-Scented Fern grew peacefully, a sight to see as the human walked out of the forest, planting me near the fern, and in the long run, effectively killing it.

Now, I'm attached to this person's shoe, waiting to finally settle down into a spot where I can get true, sweet revenge.

I've buried myself deep into the soil, and I've sprouted a little bundle of bamboo. Their garden is a little dry, and it seems they're not paying much attention to the garden itself. This will be an easy place to grow and take advantage of these plants. Something I always repeat to myself, since first being taken from my home is two simple words: *Don't quit*. I've never quite understood why humans invest so much of their time to steal away the accomplishments of countless other organisms, not just myself. Perhaps my motivation to stop the humans

in their tracks is fed by anger, but I'm not quite sure. Killing things gets lonely.

I do think that I've been noticed, but that human thinks nothing of it. I'm pleased with her train of thought, thinking that I'm a regular plant, growing like any plant would. In reality, I kill whatever I come across, which is the downfall of the human's thoughts. Most see a plant like me, and all they do is take in the beauty, possibly left breathless. Would they feel the same if they found out I was a killer plant? I won't ever know, but some know my ambitions, and others are ordered to get rid of me, never having any idea what could be the problem. Being a plant sure is awesome, in many ways, but being a killer goes onto a whole different level. No plants can choke me out, but I, for sure, can choke out other plants.

I bathe in the sunlight, taking in the warmth of the abiotic form, using it to fuel my own energy. Though all the plants that are sitting miserably in this garden struggle to grow, I'll overtake them, shredding every strand of life that they have, and make it my own. These plants don't need to rely on the sun and energy from the water and soil as I do, I'll outshine them anyways.

The human has taken notice that her crops are dying. Of course, for some reason, she isn't suspecting me of anything, all she's doing is taking in the beauty that I possess. I've grown a few feet within these few weeks. Why hasn't she noticed—is it that hard to see that I'm killing these plants?

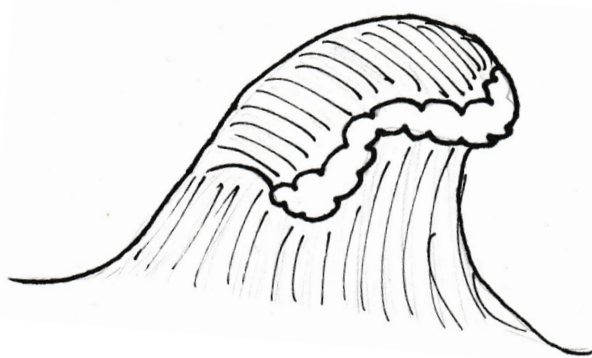
Why have I been so unsuccessful until now? Now, I am killing these crops, and the human is just blind-sided by the truth. It's been so difficult to settle down and grow properly, but now, she returns when the stratus clouds above signal a light drizzle, or light rain shower. The human is cleaning out the garden, and ignoring me at this point. I mean, it's her loss—no matter how much she cleans and cleans out the garden to make the crops have more of a “fresh” ecosystem, I'll just slaughter them all.

The human's attention turns toward me, getting to her feet as she seems to be finished with her work. Realization seemed to set into the human as she gazes at me in recognition, but I'm not quite sure. She reaches into her pocket, pulling out a device, pressing onto the surface of it. Then, placing it against her ear, she walks away as she starts a conversation with someone. Humans are weird sometimes, at the very least.

I can sense my roots choking out another plant, stealing away their life and nutrients. The human is gone, now recognizing what I am. She seemed nervous, and now has a clear understanding of why her plants are dying out.

Rain starts sprinkling down overhead, sparkling in the slightly sunny day. Water is water, but each has a different smell. I know what freshwater smells like, but the water that's coming in contact with me now is saltwater.

Salt Water. The water has traveled a long way to reach here—a storm must be blowing in salt-spray from the nearby ocean. In reality, it seems that salt water is everywhere, just like me.



Salt Water // Tess Frager

Tonight, the moon is at its fullest and causes me to be as big as I can be. My dark, green blue water is calm as no human-made transportation zooms across me, tickling my large quantity of water in different areas. My favorite part of my five major areas is the Atlantic, where the U.S. is positioned. There, I am loved by humans, though their boat activity is outrageous at times...

The coast of Maine, which is my favorite part of Earth, where I can watch year-round, is the place I monitor the most. Although, I have been getting frustrated by the animals I see suffering, impossible for me not to look away. Even though that's happening all the way in the Pacific part of me, I've been taking my anger out—on accident—on the shore of Camp Ellis, Maine.

Through my frustration, I eroded the beach of Camp Ellis. The humans tried to make it better by foolishly building a rock wall to stop my chomping at the beach, and I also tried to retract myself. But it was too late. The damage had been done, water flooding the houses on the land only feet above sea level. I saw the chilling scene play out before me, the thick beach houses slowly becoming filled by the abiotic water of my freezing body. Low sloped streams carved the land around the

crying dunes, birds chirping their last note before flying away from their devastated homes.

One reason that I can't stop myself is that I can never sleep. With my body being too vast for anyone to see all at once, the sun keeps me awake, along with humans, at all times. Also, species of all kinds that live inside me never stop moving, due to annoying animals being diurnal and nocturnal. Sorry for my curious self, but why can't everybody be one thing, either diurnal or nocturnal, and not the other?

My problems vary, many of them occurring every day, and growing bigger. First of all, going to the other side of the U.S, humans have taken up a big part of my deep and vast space, dropping millions of tons of trash into me. I hear and feel scientists' boats flying across me, taking bits of the displeasing waste, along with taking small quantities of me along with them. I feel myself being put in tubes, but I eventually forget about the tickling or harming sensation.

Another big problem of mine that hurts me is my enemy: global warming. You see, I suspect its devilish self, because temperature keeps going haywire in the surface and depth parts of me. Also, a lack of oxygen is destroying parts of me, along with species of fish, and humans call those ghostly parts of me "dead zones" or "death towns." I guess if I really get down to the science, global warming (ugh) changes my temperatures too fast, and also takes away my oxygen. I just look around and see that there are about 400 different spots inside me that exist with life teetering on the edge of death.

Many other tragic events occur, like extinction of species. For instance, seeing (many years ago) the great Steller's Sea Cow go dead within a few years, due to over-hunting the poor things. You know, it was difficult for them, because they had so much fatty blubber, that they would float near the top of my salty thrashing waters. The wooden boats would come, spears in hand, and they never saw it coming.

But, I finally know that the humans have figured out that the Steller's Sea Cows closest relative was the Manatee, which is still well alive today. It's funny to watch them snort the ocean floor, eating vegetation that dwells there. The family of these marine mammals (*marine* refers to the ocean, which is me) is the family *Sirenia*. The members of this family are and were the Steller's Sea Cow, the Amazonian, West African, and West Indian Manatees, and last but not least, my personal favorite that swims in my waters, the Dugongs. The cool thing about this family inside of me (I know, a little weird) is that they can also float and swim in the inhabitants of my very best friend, fresh water.

The profiles that I myself and the humans have tracked about the life that is contained inside of me is enormously abundant. We have both classified it (well, I did use a little part of their methods) into a well-organized system from being broad, to becoming specified. The order of the organization goes from very broad to very specific like this: Domain, Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, and Species. As an example, take one of my smartest marine animals, the

octopus. In the order that I listed, the way to classify the octopus is like this: Eukarya, Animalia, Mollusca, Cephalopoda, Octopoda, Octopodidae, Enteroctopus, E. megalocylas. It's quite a mouthful, especially when it's Latin that you're speaking.

This confusing-but-totally-worth-it system of organization is used for every species in the world. Though I don't know many, I know that inside of me, there are exactly 228,450 species that the human's and I have discovered, but I know there are multiple in my depths that I have seen, but not named. I guess the humans or scientists are the masters of this...

Going back to the facts about the Earth that cradles my dense body, the density of me is around 1027kg/m^3 . The level of my saltiness changes sometimes if my water is frigid and cold. Only 3.5% of my immense body is salt. Within my saltiness, there is an ecosystem that makes me sick to watch die. The coral reef.

The coral reef, with its beautiful colors that show up against my dullish ones, is indeed amazing. The babies—which I like to call mine—are the bright fish darting around the whole network of delicate corals, sponges, and homes. A whole food chain of its own is established here, with sharks, my vicious ones, taking the main role of keeping it sustained. Though again, not surprisingly, humans are ruining my beautiful underwater spectacles! They kill my violent but cautious tens-of-teeth-filled sharks, throwing the reefs into death zones!

Uhh. I wish my rippling waters could repel this nasty waste. If humans were to put that horrible stuff into one place on my surface, it would cover 139.7 million square meters of my watery body. It risks the lives of my children, probably harming me too. Oil is another one of the human's faults, clouding my body and the bodies of marine species with the "black death." Many other forms of damage occur, but I could go on for days non-stop about it.

The Atlantic part of me is the warmest part. If a human is reading this, as I suspect, it may seem illogical that the north part of the eastern coast of the U.S. is the warmest. But, again, you can't forget that my vast waters bear much temperature variety, making me feel weird at times.

When I eroded Camp Ellis, Maine, a damage I could not stop, I mentioned that the humans and community of the humans built a rock wall to keep me off their property. (Although it's my buddies, the Biosphere and Geosphere's property.) To explain, when they put the rock wall there, I was interested in what they thought it would do, until I realized their purpose, and how it turned into a huge mistake. Without noticing, I had dragged at the millions of grains of sand, the boasting rocks, and the visible level of land with me.

When the wall had gone with my waves, the land stuck, swirling to the bottom of my "feet." My water stretched out like arms from my anger burning in the waves. Camp Ellis was doomed. My salty water

pouring from my body circled the dunes, drilling higher and higher into the houses of the frightened residents.

I had just destroyed the human's homes.

That night, when my friend, Moon, was at her new moon phase, I became as small as I was allowed to be. Humans swarmed their ruined land and homes, the beaches eroded to an eight to nine foot drop, stretching all the way to the Old Orchard Beach's new 'coaster, the "Sea Viper."

What had I done?

To be honest, humans have done just about the same damage to me, probably more than I have to them. And, if they haven't heard, the science behind putting a rock wall between myself and wooden/plastic homes super close to the coast line is a bad mix. These sea walls, (which really should be called *ocean* walls) don't protect man made houses or shorelines. The shorelines that hold my broad body of saltiness are broken down and taken away from the solid ground faster with a sea wall in the way.

When I push against the wall with my heavy, dense, salty water, the space that is left between the previous beach and the dunes disappears with my anger and flawless tides, a new space which I can take advantage of. It creates a completely new beach or coast line, like in Camp Ellis, Maine, lighting a dark path for me to take.

Though I am my own species, and there is only one of me, it can get lonely. So, when anger or desperation gets to me from recently

destroying another's home accidentally, I feel really bad. Even though humans can and are torturing me and my life's goal, I would never wish upon another to be through what I, the vast, salty, dense, and dangerous ocean, has been through. I don't want anyone to lose their entire home or life, just because of what many, but not all humans have done.

Right now, I am at a subtle low tide, but the Nor'Easter has racked up my thoughtless waters. Fish scurry to the bottom, where the muddy sediment, where either the choice of warmth or cold is chosen. They hear the beating of the slanted rain, but that doesn't stop other species.

The whales, for instance, are warm blooded mammals that need lots of air. They need about 90% of the oxygen that they take from their huge gasps, when the humans are so tiny that they are only able to take in 15% of the oxygen they suck in. (Especially when coming up from my swirling body of salty water for oxygen). Compared to the humans, whales take exactly six times the amount of which the scrawny humans can take.

As I whirl my next wave onto the beach of Old Orchard Beach, a massive white body of a Minke Whale shows up, a three to four foot wide chomp taken out of it. I could smell the problem miles away. Although I see many feastings, ones like this are not so simple. It means the human's smartest people will get involved, and wonder what has happened.

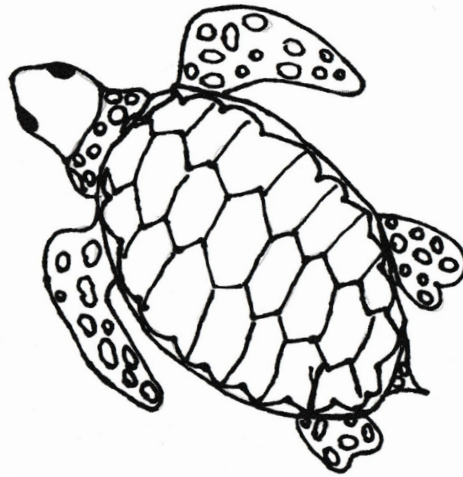
As I search myself, looking for the gnat that started this, I see what I haven't seen in my Maine waters in forever. A Great White Shark, shining his tens of hundreds of teeth at a mature salmon heading back to my best friend, Fresh Water, to lay her eggs. I look away as bubbles fizzle up from the thrashing of the gray shark, the salmon and her caged babies all gone.

I feel two boats coming off shore, gliding across my slightly disturbed body. I can understand repetitive letters seen from the surface of my body, even though I am not a human, and from what I can see from my glinting white caps off my surface from the sun, I see three distinct letters. *UNE*. The smart people are coming with viles, cameras, and chemicals to take a super small portion of my salty waters to see where the blood has come from, and who caused this mess.

Well, since I'm used to this small daily part of my immortal life, I guess I can wade away into the depths of my dark, lonely, scary Atlantic waters...

Swimming through my blurry waters, a four flippered creature approaches my sight. A bright and dark brown shell glistens from the sun rays through the thin layer of salty water on my surface. A small, light green head with huge black eyes stares into me, many others behind it, scurrying into many diverse directions.

The Loggerhead Turtle baby glides blankly into my body, excitement striking its fearful felt eyes.



Loggerhead Turtle // Kendall Sulikowski

I feel my flippers hitting the cool salt water. The never-ending waves line up with the horizon. Seagulls fly overhead, I hear their loud chirps in the wind. Horse flies surround the seagulls from head to toe. The never-ending sand feels warm to the touch.

I turn back and look at the beautiful waves in front of me. Hearing the waves hitting the dried sand then disappearing back into the water, like a magnet. I look left and right and see my brothers and sisters disappearing into the waves that are hitting them. I see a big wave coming towards me, I know that this is my chance to get away from the gigantic green crabs. The wave isn't even a foot away. I get ready to run into the wave. I say in my head, 'Ready, set, GO,' but wait...

I am stuck, I'm not moving. I start to slowly move off of the ground and into the air, I am shocked, I am shaking, I feel like I want to cry. I feel a cold salty tear go down my face. I don't know what is

going to happen. I look over my shoulder and see gigantic green crabs shuffling across the gritty sand coming full speed at me. They are digging their legs into the sand every step they take. Then all of a sudden, everything starts to get really tight, really fast.

I slowly turn my head and see a big green crabs with it's gigantic green claws gripping my tiny body. I start to move but nothing budges. My whole body starts to hurt. But then, I am free. I am free!! I glance over my shoulder and then I see it, it is a two big green crabs fighting with their gigantic claws. It reminds me of two knights fighting with sharp metal swords. I scramble to the ocean. A big wave hits me hard but then I realize that I am free and in the ocean far away from those evil green crabs.

I try to swim but it is harder than I expected. When I soon get the hang of it, I start to get hungry really really fast. I am still a little wobbly swimming but I know I can do it! I start to really get the hang of swimming and I decide to swim to the bottom of the ocean floor, to see what is down there. It feels like ages swimming all the way to the ocean floor, I start to get even more hungry. My stomach starts to make really loud grumble noises. When I finally make it to the ocean floor, I hear something behind me.

I feel it getting closer and closer every second. I start to get really scared and look for something to hide behind or hide in. I am starting to get really, really tired from swimming so much, that I take a one second break. But it is too long. I feel something sharp around my hard small shell. I turn my head around as slow as I can. I see a silvery white seal with its jaw locked on my shell. I hear a crack from my back. Right after I feel the seals grip get looser and looser until the seal lets

go and has its mouth open looking like it's screaming but the seal doesn't make a sound. And then I see it. There is a big Great white shark with its big sharp teeth dug into the seal's back. I start to move away as fast as I can swim, but I can barely move. My shell feels like it is ripping off like a wax strip. I look over my shoulder and see that my shell has a big crack in it. Man my back is hurting really really badly. While I am trying to find cover, I spot a big grey rock, so I won't be supper for someone. I glance back and see the seal trying to get out of the shark's jaws. Everything starts to turn blackish red. The seal's head slowly falls down to the sand. The shark munches the seal down in seconds. I quickly swim over to the big grey rock. I am very scared. Fear rises up from my chilled body as I ease around the rock to take a quick peek. I see the shark with blood swirling from its blood stained teeth.

I feel my heart coming out of my delicate underbelly as I see the enormous shark look over at me with a growing grin, swimming towards me. I quickly begin to panic and look for a better place to seek shelter. I look left and right, but there isn't a small enough hideout that the shark couldn't fit in. I can hear the swish from the shark's pointy tail. I start to get really scared and panicked. I decide to start to swim as fast as I can. I can feel the shark grinning at me from behind. I am looking everywhere for a hiding spot. The longer I swim for, the faster I get tired. I am starting to stop moving and look behind me. The shark isn't there? I look everywhere. Left and right but there is nothing. The only thing left is me, standing there like a turtle with no one, lonely, wishing they had someone or something that protected them.

3 years later...

While I am swimming through the well-known ocean, I get a good glance of another loggerhead sea turtle. I quickly stop in my tracks and turn around and follow. I soon see more than 10 loggerhead sea turtles all together like there is a party. I soon begin to find out that some of them are my long lost brothers and sisters! I am so happy, I've only seen one sea turtle, but then he or she got eaten by a seal (surprisingly I didn't get eaten).

A few months later I am officially a part of the group. One male loggerhead sea turtle keeps coming close to me and, and because it is summer and the water was warmer than usual, I can tell that he wanted to mate.

One warm morning, I wake up early and am really hungry. I swim through the ocean trying to find food. While I swim down to the bottom of the ocean floor, there are many many carbs crawling around. I quickly scramble to them before they crawl and disappear into the sand, and munch the crabs down into my empty stomach. Man were those some good crabs. I also see a lot of sargassum, I munch the sargassum down before anyone notices. Sargassum is a type of algae that I love to eat.

After I eat enough sargassum, I get really full. But I don't want to go back to the group, I want to explore. While I am swimming through the ocean, the light from the sun makes the ocean brighter and much easier to see my surroundings. While I am looking at boring rocks that I've seen in the past, I pass one rock, it is very different from the others. But why? Why is this rock so familiar? Than it all clicks

and I remember. That rock is from when the seal was eaten by the shark. I remember that I also hid behind that same rock! I can't even believe it! I swim over, as fast as my flippers will take me. The rock is a dark solid shade of grey.

Seven weeks later...

My stomach is extremely big, It is hard for me to swim and I know it's time for me to lay my eggs. I know that I have to find the same beach that I was born on. I have to say goodbye to the group of turtles to find the long lost beach. There are a few other pregnant loggerhead sea turtles with me. Two of the pregnant turtles are my sisters! Me and my two sisters start to become really close. We are talking about how big our bellies are getting and how tired we are. The whole group has 10 pregnant turtles in all. All of use will have to stop a lot because it is hard for all of us to hold 100 turtle eggs. Everyday I feel more and more weak and tired. Now everyday, all of us have to stop at least once or twice an hour.

Almost three weeks later we all finally make it to the beach I was born on. I finally feel my stomach pain go away into pure happy sadness. It is so weird being back on the same beach I was born on. When the gigantic green crabs tried to eat my tiny body. Not anymore. Those green crabs weren't just terrifying when I was younger, but they are so small now, but there are thousands of them, crawling from left and right ready to eat all of the eggs we are gonna lay. I start to walk slowly over to a sandy spot not too far away from the beautiful ocean. I start to dig with my back flippers. I trade off from the right flipper to

the left one taking 30 second breaks sometimes. While I am taking a 30 second break, I look over my shell and already see my sister laying her eggs in a hole. I know I have to start to catch up. I start to dig my hole really fast. But the faster I go, the more tired I get. I decide to try and not take such long breaks.

Five minutes later..

I finally finish digging my hole to lay my eggs in. I look over and still see my sister laying her eggs. I turn around and start to lay my eggs in the hole. It hurts really badly. It feels like fire or lava. I know the faster I get this done, the faster it will stop hurting.

Seventeen days later...

My sister finally got done with laying her eggs and then started to bury them with the sand that she dug up. There were two other turtles that were still laying their eggs, including me. Hours and hours, day and night, I pushed and pushed until there was nothing left to push. I was so surprised. I threw myself onto the warm sand and took a long break. I slowly moved to my resting place and closed my eyes slowly.

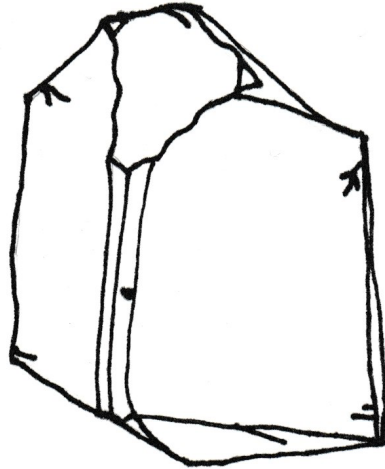
I'm going to go rest now...

Animals started to eat all of my flesh until my body was just bones.

Sand started to blow over my non moving body. Everyday one millimeter of sand would go on top of me, making my go deeper and deeper into the sand.

10,000 years later...

The turtles bones have turned into a fossil which then was covered with sediment from being so deep in the sand. With the weather and the force of the waves the sediment is carried along the current. Over time it starts to decompose and compact itself where the sediment is crushed and compressed together to form a rock like structure. As more and more sediment collects on top of the rock like structure, the layer with the organism keeps compacting together. Sedimentary rocks are formed from pre-existing rocks or pieces of once living organisms. Sediment moves from one place to another through the process of erosion. Erosion can move sediment through water, ice or wind. Sometimes, plants and animals become buried in this sediment, which protects them from weathering. If the water current and waves are strong enough, it can lift the sediment out of its buried underground sand location and carry it to another location. Each time a sediment is moved by its natural habitation surroundings, it can be re-buried or new plants and animals can become buried in the sediment. Water and waves and change a sediment and its location, but wind can also remove and and other sediment from the ground by the process of deflation. When the sediment is re-buried it loses water and becomes cemented to form a rock. These rocks can be pushed deeper underground. Then, the sediment is solidified and turned into schorl. Schorl is the most common type of tourmaline.



Tourmaline // Calvin Richard

I float carelessly through the lava, my once rocky body, dissolved. The convection currents pull me up and down and around, through my fellow magma. My life is perfect. Over the course of years I will cool down, harden, warm up, and melt back into magma, and so on and so forth. This endless cycle is my life, and I love every second of it...

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