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Dreams and Reality: A Storyteller's Look at Life

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ABSTRACT

These pages tour the wanderings of a storyteller's mind and snippets of life in the forms of non-fiction, fiction, and poetry, though not always in that particular order. The topically arranged pieces first delve into the meaning of being a storyteller. This involves having half of one's mind in another place and putting on the mantles of different characters. After finishing with the theme, the collection turns to fiction with a selection of stories and poems. Turning from fiction, the collection touches upon real life pain, struggles, grief, and growing. Each provides snippets of life adding a backdrop to the storyteller's daydreams. The last part records aspects of childhood through poetic and observational non-fiction about home and hobbies before concluding with a dream.

DREAMS AND REALITY: A STORYTELLER'S LOOK AT LIFE

by

Sara Kathleen Bennett

A Collection of Creative Writing Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of English,
Literature, and Modern Languages at Cedarville University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Creative Writing Minor

Cedarville, Ohio

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Approved by

To my parents, who taught me to be a lover of stories.

INTRODUCTION

I started considering myself a writer freshman year in high school with my great masterpiece of a novella. I cannot read it without thinking how fast, flat, and unrealistic the story is. That personal writing project is the reason I decided to earn a degree in English with a Creative Writing minor. This collection of pieces represents the continued growth as a writer that occurred from sophomore to senior years in college. Being a daydreamer and a reader for my whole life laid the foundations for writing. I never gave up on my novella which has grown into a novel. The first four pieces were spawned by the project. "Part of Me is in Another World" explores the experiences of a "world builder" and how much of my mind has been absorbed by my first novel set in another world. The piece is purposefully disjointed with sentences from my novel conveying how much time I spend in dreams and the quick change from dreams into reality and back again. "Homesick" and "Dreaming" continue revealing the attachment to Arcia and my character friends. I almost feel more at home in Arcia, than in the real world. "Ava's Brothers" is a poetic exploration of emotions and early thoughts for a planned project.

Shifting away from Arcia, "Explorer Week Storyteller" and "Becoming Shadow: Mystery Week Opening Ceremony" portray the mental processes behind orally telling redemption stories for Camp Susque's Explorer Week and Mystery Week opening bonfires. Each piece shows how I become different characters to fit each theme week as I embrace the themes of testimonies.

These pieces display how close the lines of fiction and reality are for me.

Like many pieces, "The Hideout" began with an image. This time, the opening scene. A major theme is a character from my daydreams intersecting with a version of me. It toys with the idea of knowing about different people because of daydreaming and exploring other worlds and

lives through those daydreams. Reading accomplishes a similar principle through a book's pages allowing "armchair" travel to new places and interaction with new people.

The next two pieces, both fictional, convey different times in a family's life. "The Photograph" began from a class prompt and was not intended to be continued. But the glimpse compelled me to see where the family was many years down the road in "Tennessee." Parts of "Tennessee," come from my own life. The books mentioned are ones from my home schooled days. *Misty of Chincoteague* is still one of my favorite "horse books" from childhood. I wanted the family to encounter a realistic obstacle but also keep the family united.

The poems "The Cottage" and "Farther Down and Deeper In" fall under poetry. "Farther Down and Deeper In" came from a surrealist exercise of compiling a list of made up words that were changed into real words with similar sounds and used in that sequence to create a poem. The main influence was "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll.

In the second part of the collection, I turn to non-fiction. The next four pieces are characterized by physical and emotional pain or struggles. "Living Life Running Away: A Week of Pain" attempts to describe college life with chronic migraines. It draws out questions and doubts I have about my future because of the pain. I also explore how environmental aspects of certain lights and layers of voices can cause pain, yet the piece was not meant to be a personal pity party but my struggles put onto the page in a desire to find answers as I search for peace and healing.

The following pieces, "The First Time" and "The Second Time" were written in honor of Sharon, a co-worker at Water Wheel produce stand and my grandma Sara. "The First Time" dwells in memory and was written in farewell to one of the best women I knew. "The Second Time" discusses the expected death of Grandma Sara while exploring loves passed from mother

to daughter as, like Grandma and Mom, I love flowers, butterflies, and hummingbirds. The two pieces contrast the sudden death of a woman in her sixties with the slow death from congested heart failure at age ninety-six.

The next piece, "May 13, 2015," also comes from processing a sudden medical emergency. The form uses hour markers to capture the familiar feelings of the long waiting and not knowing what was happening while Dad had quadruple bypass heart surgery. Any details of the surgery, I researched months later, having been too afraid to research them before the surgery. It was a day where escape into daydreams to process events did not work. The pieces about pain reveal parts of real life to balance the daydreams and fiction.

"Pendants for Confidence" describes the different necklaces I wore until senior year in college. Each pendant connects to stages in life as I grew from an insecure middle and high schooler to a more confident adult. The last necklace, the tree, reminded me the most of my writing. During the time I wore that one, I completely embraced being a writer and stopped caring what others thought about how half of my mind was in another world at any given time. It was also a time of re-evaluating why I had chosen English. Writing reminded me how much I love stories and I went to college to learn how to hone my craft.

The next cluster of pieces thematically belongs to observing the world. They mostly describe my home and family pets. "Observations of Tamarack Farm" describes different aspects of home I learned through interacting with the natural world, looking up in wildlife books, or taught by someone close to me when I was young. I absorbed many seemingly random facts or information through searching through the numerous field guide books when I had a wildflower to identify, or looking through those books enjoying the pretty pictures. The lessons from swampy areas were discovered through mistakes, though I never lost a pair of boots.

"Foundations" and "1840s Pennsylvania German Farmhouse" are written about the house I grew up in. "Foundations" describes the basement and some stories from previous owners, but most the stories only go three families back to Prohibition days. My mom has wondered what stories the house could tell. "1840s Pennsylvania German Farmhouse" describes the exterior of the house, though it is nothing special because of the numerous stone houses like it in Pennsylvania.

The next two poems, "Jumping Jacqueline Also Known as Fluffy" and "Horseback Riding," are a tribute to my first horse. "Jumping Jacqueline Also Known as Fluffy" tells a typical winter evening scene where I tried to feed Jackie before my brother fed the cats, since her old age particularity insisted of being cared for first. She would talk to me if I did not feed her on time. Because her winter coat was nearly three inches long and thick, I nicknamed her "Fluffy." "Horseback Riding" describes what it felt like to canter on her.

"Embroidered Stars" mixes two interests, embroidery and astronomy. It is my attempt at describing a clear night at Camp Susque where every visible star shown down in a bright pinpoint of silver light. "Stitches" describes the movement and sounds of embroidery and how one simple stitch can make something come to life.

The collection closes with "Ocean Voice" drawing together dreams and memories of the beach. The memory comes from concrete details about what is on the sand and moving in the poem. The dreams enter with the voice. This brings the collection full circle, from starting in a reality mixed with daydreams, into fictional worlds, into the painful real struggles of life and growing to, observations of the natural world beneficial for a writer, and then ending with a mixing of observation and dreams.

FOREWORD

Writers have two duties, to their craft and to their readers. Knowing how to fulfill the duality becomes a struggle for writers. A Christian writer's obligation to their craft involves writing artistically crafted stories for God's glory. The purpose is not to churn out shoddy stories proclaiming the Christian message. The writer's task is to weave compelling stories emerging readers into a realistic, united world no matter the setting.

A Christian writer must construct a realistic whole world for the story to unfold. In "The Superiority of Realism to Fantasy," Larry Woiwode writes,

but that the reader is able to enter a fictional world so fully he takes the metaphor constructed of words to be a reality as substantial as the one in which he just dropped that book to the floor....Accuracy occurs when proper weight is given through the metaphor of words to an act or process or object within that reality.
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Christian or not, writers must create a vivid world – whether a slice of our own in present or past times or a fictional world with its own set of natural rules. The writer records events and movement happening in the unified world and sensory details even though physically it all takes place in the pages of a book. Both the duty and obligation to the craft of writing and to the reader hinges on creating a real place for the action of the story to take place in.

A way to fill out the world is by using sensory detail. In creating the realistic world, a writer has to use concrete details and images to paint the background of the action for the reader to see and be immersed in the world. According to Flannery O'Connor, "The beginning of human knowledge is through the senses, and the fiction writer begins where human perception begins. He appeals through the senses, and you cannot appeal to the senses with abstractions" (para 9). O'Connor teaches that fiction writers must use specific details in their stories appealing to the reader's senses. Later in her essay, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," O'Connor claims including

three senses makes an object real (para 13). Using three of the five senses – sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste – fleshes out the scene enveloping the reader in the events enabling them to see, hear, feel, and taste what the characters do.

The story "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," by Ambrose Bierce places the reader into the world of the Civil War South with the sensory detail bringing the setting to life. The first two sentences set the scene and start immersing the reader into the world of the story. "A man stood upon a railroad bridge in Northern Alabama, looking down into the swift waters twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord" (Bierce 149). From the beginning, we have the image of the events, a man on a railroad bridge with water churning beneath him then comes the feeling of the scratchy cord around his wrists. The senses of sight and touch are enough to start drawing the reader into the story and setting of Northern Alabama during the Civil War.

The story continues with breakneck speed as the main character attempts a daring escape because the cord used for the noose snaps. A scene during his escape, lands him on the bank of the creek. "[The sand] looked like gold, like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms" (Bierce 155). In this passage, Bierce uses the senses sight and smell. In the following sentences, Bierce writes about the branches musicality and the whizz of cannon grapeshot in the trees sound completes the three concrete sensory details in a scene. Ambrose Bierce follows the obligation to craft by writing a story set in a realistic world with concrete sensory details capturing the reader and holding them in the well-written and artistically crafted story.

While adding the sensory detail, concise descriptions should be used to tighten and strengthen writing. In my prose work, my mother has continually reminded me to be brief with descriptions woven into the narration and dialogue. Descriptions should never be added for the sole purpose of adding details to the physical world of the piece because a description has not been added for the past two pages or stanzas. Details should fit the place and should be short and clear. Robert Frost nails this with the opening line, "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood" ("The Road not Taken"). Right from the start, Frost sets the scene with how many roads and where they are. The yellow wood denotes fall with the leaves ablaze with autumn colors. Each word contributes to the presentation.

Outside the realm of description, but important for a writer's craft is the ability to weave words together forming sentences. Musicality in words, especially in poetry, is important as the rhythm lends itself to being read aloud and enjoyed because of musicality of words and rhythm. The way Rosemary Sutcliff forms her sentences and the music they create enralls me. In the second paragraph of her book *Eagle of the Ninth*, Sutcliff writes,

It was a busy road and saw many travellers: traders with bronze weapons and raw yellow amber in their ponies' packs; country folk driving shaggy cattle or lean pigs from village to village; sometimes a band of tawny-haired tribesmen from farther west; strolling harpers and quack-oculists too, or a light-stepping hunter with huge wolf-hounds at his heel. 1

The lilt in her descriptions creates music. She also has a slightly different way of looking at the world. The descriptions "tawny-haired, quack-oculists, light-stepping" are a few of the phrases Sutcliff uses. One of my favorites from the book is "mossy-faced ponies" to describe the tribesmen's furry mounts. To me, an American reader, the descriptions are vivid yet different. I would probably describe a pony like that as "shaggy, fuzzy" or "fluffy." Her way of looking at

the world makes an image feel new. No matter how many times I go back to her writing, I am enamored by the syntactical music.

A story has to be woven together artistically and work within itself. Flannery O'Connor writes, "But all I mean by art is writing something that is valuable in itself and that works in itself. The basis of art is truth, both in mater and in mode. The person who aims after art in his work aims after truth, in an imaginative sense, no more and no less" (para 5). The duty of the Christian writer is to write a story that rings true and captures the world it takes place in to stay true to their craft or to their readers. Anything short would dishonor the craft of a writer and discredit the reader.

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PART OF ME IS IN ANOTHER WORLD

I know the dreams are fake. Even though I walk between buildings my mind weaving stories or figuring out how to fix problems in my novel creating alternates. *Matt is right, the attack on the castle that takes Daria's life is not logistical. What is a good way to keep that plot point and make it real for the world?* Some dreams stick with me others fade with time. My elf princess world jumper battling alongside Peter against the White Witch, fighting in Helm's Deep, helping the Varden fight against King Galbatorix, and traveling through the wild reaches of Nolthanin with Aljeron and company. I know there were others before her but they are gone, fragments, images, nothing more. Gone like nighttime dreams, phantom images left behind fading like morning mist.

That night Rena dreamed she and Oak were on the plains. She saw Owen. When she was close enough she dismounted and ran to Owen.

I used to not know what the plains felt like. Then we stopped at a rest stop on the high Wyoming plains. The dry wind blew across the sagebrush and grass-covered expanse. The wind was stronger than at home. Now when I want to go to the plains I just have to think and remember.

The banner of Nasis streamed out rippling and snapping with the full force of wind from where it flew at the top of the keep.

Maladaptive Daydreaming – a non-official condition described as constant daydreaming, losing days or hours by replacing human interaction with fantasies of their own mind. The psychologist Eli Sömer coined the term. He sees it as a way to escape from an individual's circumstances such as abuse. I call it Excessive Daydreaming Disorder or EDD since I only found out about the clinical term around Christmas. I am a dreamer and always will be, though sometimes I cannot pause the dreams and am trapped until they run their course.

Rena could see, through the bars of the cell door a young man sitting with his back to the door.

Mom still believes I would have been diagnosed with ADD if I had gone to public school. Now, the embroidered quilt and penciled world map on my walls and the medieval dress in the closet have become products of the dreams – eight years of world building. One concern about Maladaptive Daydreaming is the dreams create a false sense of hope, which becomes ripped away every time the dreamer comes back to reality. I don't find it to be that the case on most days. Though there are times where the allure of exploring the Black Ice Mountains through Panther feels better. I sat in US History II struggling to focus on the lecture. My mind weaving how Panther will succeed in an almost unwinnable fight saving himself and his clan.

Owen thinks, I said I would do what I thought best for my people and now I will die because I believe the plains need a peace treaty.

A clear image remains from eight years ago remains – a knight meeting a girl who didn't know she was a princess in a wood. I know them now as Ryan and Rena, two characters I

considered my best friends during high school along with Owen, Ryan's best friend and Rena's older brother. Writing every morning before classes can lead to not wanting to pay attention to class due to my mind, still embroiled in the current events in the story. But the next day, it is easy to pick the threads up again with my pencil.

Rena, at Cara's direction, sat down at the spinning wheel which Curran pulled so it sat near the hearth. Rena set the spinning wheel in motion carefully guiding the carded wool into a thread.

But daydreamers know the difference between the dreams and reality. We have too. Though sometimes, I wish I could live in my dream world or joke about if I had a set of C.S. Lewis' yellow and green rings, I would take up world jumping. Sometimes I confuse people by referring to events in my book and dreams as real. The characters *are* real to me, and grow realer by the day. I can picture Rena meeting Ryan for the first time and being suspicious of who he is.

Rena looked at Ryan wondering Who are you at the castle that can bring a castle warrior with you? Why are you really here? Rena tried to examine Ryan on their walk to the barn without being obvious about it.

One of my main rules for daydreaming is to NEVER daydream my life with real people. I have done a few where I have world jumped, but they are never as satisfying. The dreams become elaborate compared to a movie or novel and can be composed through repetitive motions. I know repetitive motions work the best for letting my mind wander. Relaxing for me is to turn on a good soundtrack and pull up Spider Solitaire. Then my mind can wander through Arcia delving into alternate timelines for my novel using characters to explore the world. That is how I discovered the Great Eastern Forest. Mom thinks the alternates create confusion. I will

jump when startled out of writing or daydreaming, my mind is wholly there. When editing the first version of my book, Mom made me put myself in the scene not just to see but to feel. We spent so many hours editing after the first year. Each with a cup of tea and a writing utensil the old origami cranes flying above our heads attached to the hanging light by old dusty threads. I would close my eyes. *What does the room look like? Who else is there?*

Rena explored her rooms examining the details of the garden scene based tapestries and wall hangings. The soft hooked rug's pattern led her gaze in circles from the intricate design.

It does not have to be like ripping the mind apart, stepping out of a dream can be like pausing a favorite TV show or movie or forcing yourself to put the bookmark back at a chapter break. The images can be returned to easily and quickly though lines may be whispered over and over a few times to regain the scene and get it just right. The dreams change quickly sometimes streaming back over time. Some dreams, like the Arcian assassin, Panther, have so many alternates of how he freed himself and his clan from the dictator forcing them to kill. Sometimes Panther makes it out alive, other times he dies, and still other times he dies and falls into another world. But, even after dying his work is not done and he is brought back. Half forgotten haziness of never recorded images or some written in old composition books that I wince every time I go back to read them. In a way, the dreams are helpful, though I never use them to explore a scene before I write it. I have tried that, and the scene has never turned out like I want it. I tried once for an argument between Owen and Rena and Owen and Ryan.

“You are speaking of Ryan. I have seen the way he looks at you, the way you behave around him. You are shy around Ryan, Rena. You love him. I knew it was a mistake to send him to get you,” Owen said almost accusingly.

I don't regret my EDD. Some days it is frustrating to not get enough schoolwork done because Panther's adventures are too enticing or the morning's writing keeps my mind in Arcia. I call my dreams a blessing and a curse. I don't like calling them a curse, that would be turning my back on a gift. The world Arcia has become part of my world, part of who I am. Without Arcia, I wouldn't be a writer or English Major. So much has come from Ryan meeting Rena in Ezmeralda. Sadly, the original meeting didn't fit the story anymore. So the knight in traveling clothes and a white horse will never meet the peasant girl, who doesn't know she is a princess, out hunting in Ezmeralda. It had to be changed to make the story more realistic, as realistic as a romanticized Medieval world can become.

Before the sunset, the watchman called from his perch on a gate tower that Bryn and Ross' party was returning and King Owen and Princess Rena were with them.

Writing has harnessed my mind, sometimes keeping the dreams at bay. It is the reason I wake two hours before morning classes to snatch an hour of writing. It usually finds me in a hallway or empty classroom waiting, thin black binder open with printed pages, words highlighted for the expected final edit, rewriting how the war ends. But, in spite of the eight years on my novel, I have always had trouble getting the middle right. I can always find something wrong with the execution scene. Poor Owen.

Owen heard the twang and zip of the arrow. He gasped as it tore into his left shoulder under the collarbone...Working with an assistant, the healer cut along the embedded shaft on either side so the arrow could be removed cleanly without leaving the arrowhead behind.

HOMESICK

My affections for a world I have never visited in reality fill my heart. Part of me lives there already, the dreamer. I have watched Owen grow up without his father. I have seen Owen crowned king. I felt Rena's confusion when she was told her parents were royalty. I felt Owen's emotions when he thought he was to be executed. I want to meet them, to really be there, on the plains and not in my mind.

I have been in woods, a cheap imitation of the Black Ice Mountains, hemlock trees, dark streams, pine trees, moss so soft I sank up to the ankle. I could pretend I was there, but only a daydream. I was really in the woods by the Branaca Cabin.

The question of building vs. creating a world tugs at me. Sometimes I feel like I built the world one block at a time. Then days where the world breathes life on its own and I record what I have found. I map the world fill it with cartography symbols the Forest Ezmeralda, Black Ice Mountains, Faërie Flow River, plains, Crystal Lake, Marsh Island, desert, and Ice Islands. Each one no more than carbon lines on drawing paper taped together on the folds.

I will never go there, to feel the wind across the plain, hear the birds sing in The Forest Ezmeralda, or feel the waves on the shore by Ara.

DREAMING

I stand on the plain with warm air pushing my
back. The flag at the top of the castle
keep snaps from the power.

I stand on the castle wall. Children's laughter,
voices from the orchard below. The girls
sit on a patched, blue blanket while
the boys play games of tag.

I stand outside the potter's workshop. He
gently guides Rena's hands over
the wad of clay on the wheel. Slowly the lump
rises into a cylinder. Each movement ripples
through the clay as the wheel spins.
A mug emerges.

AVA'S BROTHERS

There is something wrong about her.

The woman you brought home, I have heard her singing in her rooms. She speaks a language so different than our own. I do not believe it is a human language. Is she human? Her songs have power, magic.

Father, you promised never to remarry. You told us that after Mother died, when Cador was born. Don't you see what she is doing to our people? Or did her song enchant you? We didn't need a mother. I wish you never went hunting last year!

My brothers turned into swans today! I know they were the six swans who flew by my window. I know their eyes. It must have been that woman. I am afraid what she wants with us. Locryn and Briac would have fought against her if they had known.

The window was open in their room and swan feathers covered the rug. Everything else looked normal. Cador's book on the table, Keir and Arlin's swords on their clothing trunks, and Piran's crow still in the cage. The dishes from breakfast were still on the table. Father, are you not going to find them? Your sons are gone!

EXPLORER WEEK STORYTELLER

The beating of my
heart, echoes my
footsteps. I have
to reach the gazebo
unseen.

I am the storyteller.
Mystery surrounds me
but I know some campers
will figure it out. I did leave
opening ceremonies early.

Silly songs echo from
the pavilion. Excitement
and joy is evident. For a
second, I regret being the
storyteller.

It is a foolish regret. I
have wanted and
feared this for months,
dreaming of telling
my stories.

I am a storyteller.
My whole being responds
to stories. One of the most
precious gifts I have
ever received.

The dark form of the
gazebo is before me.
Inside is my lantern. I
know I can leave my
backpack there.

My mind reviews my
story. I know I will have
to *live* it for the campers.
My limited acting skills a
life saver.

The pond is still, water
I will soon be crossing.
During that crossing
I have to become
Maria.

Maria, an explorer,
a mask for me to put on.
She is afraid to die. Searching,
Seeking the fountain
Of youth.

On Maria's journey to
the legendary fountain,
which is in North America,
Maria hears mixed
confusing directions.

Some say the fountain
is north. Others believe
the fountain is south. More
swear it is east while few
say west.

Maria is lost. She
doesn't know where
she is. But she is
saved. The son of the
King comes.

He brings her into
his kingdom. She becomes
his sister, a part of the
King's country and
family.

My attention returns to
Pennsylvania mountains
towering above me. A
comforting enclosure, the feeling
of home.

Constellations turn in
their ever-moving dance
above me. Draco and
Scorpius gaze downwards,
ever watching.

My steersman and paddler,
Miss Jen, a long time
Susque friend, and I
push off. I kneel on
the front seat.

The plastic canoe seat is
hard under my knees.
the wooden candle lantern's
wire handle bites into
my hand.

On the far shore of
the pond lights flicker.
A large fire and those old
heavy coffee cans on poles
torches.

I am shaking. Terrified,
terrified of speaking, telling
stories to large groups of
people. "Lord, let your light shine
through me."

Ripples flow over
the surface of the
pond. The lily pads
bob on the waves. My
mind settles.

Calm descends on me.
I am no longer a
second year counselor.
I am no longer –
Miss Sara

I am an explorer,
looking at the gathered people.
there to hear my
story, my adventure. The
canoe beaches.

I step out, taking
off my life preserver.
I pick up my lantern
holding it high. I look
up and smile.

I, Maria, have landed.

BECOMING SHADOW: MYSTERY WEEK OPENING CEREMONY

Miss Sara stood in Navajo Cabin. The only light came from the candle in the fireplace. She pulled wisps of hair around her face to give the appearance of a different person. Miss Sara pulled on black fingerless gloves. She felt the familiar feel of a knife strapped via dog collar to her right leg and the K-Bar on her left hip. She was ready, ready to tell Shadow's story.

Navajo's door creaked as Miss Sara exited. A little while later, she entered the Hawk Area. The fire had been laid but was not lit. Miss Sara took her place leaning against a tree off to the side. She drew her K-Bar, the leather-wrapped handle comforting to pre-storytelling jitters. She flipped it around in her hand. The single action along with prayers of shining Christ's light through the story and reviewing Shadow's story put Miss Sara into character.

The fire was lit by a support staff member with the aid of "Susque Juice" and matches. The campers were coming. They filed in around the fire and sat down on the ground or log benches.

Miss Sara stepped out from the shadows. As she walked, she sheaved her knife and snapped the leather strap holding it in place. Only Shadow's story existed in Miss Sara's mind.

"Good evening. My name is Shadow. I am a professional spy. I am what we call in my profession a ghost. I can become anyone and vanish without a trace. If I told you some of the things I've done, I would have to kill you."

The Campers gasped.

Miss Sara continued telling about Shadow's time in the Eastern National Military Forces and leaving to follow a life of self-serving as a private eye. The narrative shifted to Shadow's last

job as a private eye, which went south. She had been hired to locate a dangerous highly addictive drug spread in kitchen spice packaging. Shadow located the drug, but landed in a gunfight with the men guarding it.

Shadow destroyed the drug by blowing the explosives the guards planted. She was shot several times escaping the warehouse. She sprinted down a deserted alley changing direction at every intersection to avoid being tracked. Her fear and desperation to escape won through the normal iron resolve containing her emotions as she ran. A light appeared. Shadow dove for a dark doorway. A man exited a house walking towards Shadow. Shadow waited not wanting a shot to reveal her location.

The man spoke, "I know you are hiding in a doorway, Shadow."

Shadow stepped out aiming at him.

"Come with me, I can tend your wounds and hide you from the mercenaries tracking you."

"How do you know?" Shadow asked she sensed something different about him.

"I have known you for a long time, come," He offered.

Hesitantly but believing she could take him in a fight, Shadow followed. The man, a carpenter, indeed tended her wounds. "The carpenter did more than heal my wounds he gave me a purpose and showed me how to use my skill set. More importantly I became part of his family. His sister," Miss Sara said as Shadow. She had been slowly pacing back and forth keeping the fire between her and most of the campers. "And now, I would like to introduce Camp Susque's director, Chief Mike," Miss Sara said, as her story was over. As Chief Mike came forward, Miss Sara backed into the trees.

Miss Sara slipped away through the trees the firelight flickering behind her. A clear sky brilliant with the summer constellations arched over head. Miss Sara made her way across Susque back to Navajo Cabin to become Miss Sara once more. She felt the joys of storytelling uplifting her spirits showing her she was meant to be camp storyteller.

HIDEOUT

I darted through the woods, my combat boots crunching dead leaves. My leather quiver, filled with three dozen arrows, was strapped to the side of my olive green Vaude backpack. Practice made drawing arrows from my quiver feel natural. I had to reach the hideout, where Mark waited, unseen. We had enough supplies in the hideout to last three months. Mountain House dehydrated food and canned food filled most of our pantry. I had had success on my scavenging trip. Honey Crisp apples and Bartlett pears filled my backpack. Once dried, the fruit would be welcome in the winter months and would help our supplies last. Hopefully, we would be able to get more dehydrated and canned food before our supplies ran out. The same went for arrows. Mark and I knew how to outfit carbon-fiber shafts, our favorite, with our preferred synthetic vanes, jam in the plastic knocks, and screw in the sharp metal tips. Field tips for small game hunting and broadheads for killing anything large. Our problem was we could only shoot a broadhead two or three times, if we were lucky, before it destroyed itself. Broadheads ripped through flesh and bone. I always carried a few broad head arrows in case I ran into something big, like a black bear, or mountain lion, or something worse: one of *them*.

My carbon compound bow, a ladies hunting bow called a Sidekick, felt natural in my hand. I never left the hideout without it. Same as the old ten-inch Marine K-Bar on my hip and my Gerber Guardian Backup in my boot, long ago presents from Dad. I could throw the Guardian Backup if I needed to. The cool of late October cut through my brown leather jacket. The beautiful Pennsylvania Mountains enclosed me. I remember Dad telling me a long time ago in a different life the mountains were like strings, long ridges with some very skinny valleys.

Very different from the pictures I had seen in grade school of the Rocky Mountains. That was all before *they* arrived and my husband Mark and I hid to avoid capture. After the initial fighting, when *they* wiped out the military. I don't know what happened to Dad or the rest of Mark's family. I want to try to find them, but Mark thinks it's too risky. He knows we'll need to find survivors eventually but doesn't want to leave yet. I bent down and opened the trap door to the hideout the water swishing in my Nalgene water bottle.

“Honey, I'm home!” I called, after dropping into the hideout and closing the door.

Mark's voice echoed from our “living room,” “Good, because we have company.”

I walked into the living room and froze. A young man stood there. He looked nervous and fidgety. He held a hunting knife back-hand, parallel to his arm. Mark sat in a chair. I could see that Mark was trying to stay calm. He saw what I did: the elegant throwing knives our strange guest had sheaved in a leather case hanging from his belt and there was the hunting knife in his hand. I could tell they were not the type of knives I could have bought at Cabela's or Gander Mountain years ago.

“Are you Irene Rose?” he asked, moving towards Mark when he saw my bow.

“Yes, I am,” I replied, taking off my backpack. I didn't put my bow down or let my quiver out of arm's reach.

“I found this, in a funny little stone building on a rundown farm southeast of here. I think the farm had a sign with a llama on it by the driveway.” In the stranger's hand was a flash drive. My old flash drive, a gift from Dad in my Christmas stocking, for my writing projects.

“I thought I lost that.”

“I read the stories on this device and I need your help. I need to find my brother and I believe you could help me.”

“You read my stories,” I said, my mind quickly reviewing the files. I was formulating guesses who the stranger was. *Black eyes, a yellow ring around the iris, almost like a bird of prey. This is going to be interesting.* I think as I realized who he was.

“Yes, your piece on my people was very...intriguing although you did not record the events that actually happened.”

“You know who he is?” Mark asked. He saw the stranger as an enemy.

“His name is Aren. He can help us,” I said, trying to convince Mark.

“How can you help us?” Mark demanded, standing up and moving away from Aren.

“I can help you survive and remain hidden from my people.”

THE PHOTOGRAPH

Izzy sat curled up on the loveseat in the library of her house. The merrily whistling tea kettle drew her out of her book. She was just starting *Sword at Sunset* by Rosemary Sutcliff, one of her favorite authors. Izzy immediately disappeared into the vivid world of post-Roman Briton when she delved into the pages of the novel. She walked into the kitchen and took the kettle off the back burner of the electric, flat-top stove. Her favorite mug, twice as large as a normal mug, sat on the tan countertop. The mug was painted with a deciduous forest scene. A stream flowed into the foreground of the image. Izzy didn't remember where or when she acquired the mug. It probably came from a nature preserve or camping store. With practiced movements, Izzy poured the boiling water into the mug over the Taylor's of Harrogate's Scottish Breakfast tea bag. Scottish Breakfast was one of her favorites and perfect if she needed a little energy for the rest of the day.

Her mind still in Briton with Artos, wanting big horses for his mounted companions, Izzy spooned in three heaping teaspoons of Domino sugar into her tea and put the sugar bowl back in the oaken kitchen cabinet. Picking up her mug and a walnut wood coaster, Izzy returned to her nest in the library. Almost all the library's walls were lined with cherry wood Stickley Furniture book cases almost reaching from the floor to the ceiling. The bookcases had been Christmas and birthday presents from her husband over the past four years. Books ranging from *The Chronicles of Narnia* to the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* had places on the shelves. There also was an old, worn Calculus textbook belonging to her husband's college days. An odd collection of items Izzy and her husband acquired over the years at Renaissance Fairs was displayed on top

of the bookcases: a gold hilted sword, a white buckler emblazoned with a red cross, a leather quiver filled with medieval arrows, and a black and white hunting horn to name a few.

Constellations were stenciled with glow-in-the-dark paint on the light blue ceiling same as the boys' play room. Izzy had carefully crafted the play room, nursery, and library when she and her husband bought and moved into the house four years before. Izzy's two-year-old twin boys were asleep. After lunch naps, granted Izzy time alone, a chance to relax and settle her mind through reading and creative writing though the waking moments with her boys were some of the dearest moments in her life.

After finishing her chapter and tea, Izzy stood by the library's window gazing out at the Adirondack Mountains. The trees were ablaze with autumn colors though muted by the gray drizzle of rain.

The doorbell rang. Izzy hurried to answer it.

"A package for you ma'am," the UPS delivery man said. The rumble of the truck's engine provided background music for his words.

"Thank you," Izzy replied, taking the small box.

She didn't remember ordering anything or her husband ordering anything. There was no return address only her own address written with black Sharpie in engineer script. She did not recognize the handwriting. She took it back to the library, pulled out her black Gerber Evo Junior pocket knife and opened the box. The box only contained a photograph. The picture was a design for a time machine with a list of materials penciled on the back in the same all caps engineer script.

Who could have sent this? Izzy thought, the picture in her hand. She glanced over to her book where it lay on the Stickley Furniture cherry side table. *I did wish I could go back in time to see and know what things were like back then.*

She held the photograph in her hands as she slowly climbed the stairs to the twin's room passing picture frames with an embroidered phoenix and owl behind the glass. She gazed at her sons from the doorway. Their innocent looking faces, she knew the mischief the two could accomplish together. She looked back down at the photograph. She knew where she belonged and it wasn't back in time. In the end it didn't matter.

TENNESSEE

Izzy stood framed against the woodstove the firelight darkening her red hair. "You look beautiful, sweetheart," Colton said, embracing her from behind.

"Hi, honey, I didn't hear you come home," Izzy replied, her head falling back as she looked up at him.

"I wanted to startle you."

"Well, you didn't. You know I can smell the cologne you wear. How was work?"

"I am going to Tennessee again."

"For how long? Is it settled that your position is being moved?"

Colton slumped into the plaid easy chair by the woodstove. "About two weeks. It's starting to look like it. I'll find out for sure while down there." Sighing and running his hands through his brown hair he shook his head. Then pulling himself together, he stood and looked over Izzy's shoulder. "What's for dinner?" he noticed Izzy was frying garlic and butter in the cast iron frying pan. The mixture sizzled as she stirred it.

"Garlic butter shrimp. I wanted to cook them before the freezer thawed. If the power doesn't come back soon we are going to lose a lot." Izzy turned her attention back to the stove.

"I really should've bought that generator on sale back in August."

"But your car broke down. We will be fine even if we lose everything in the freezers."

"Where are the kids?"

"Liz is up in her room. Probably curled in the window. When she went up, she had about half of *Black Horses for the King* to read."

"Lizzie and horse books. Something she got from her mother."

Izzy looked up at Colton and smiled "The boys are out in the woods. I told them to bring back logs to be split while they were out there. No, they didn't take the hatchet."

"How long until dinner?"

"Ten minutes from when I put the shrimp in. Probably slightly longer because of the woodstove. We'll see. The noodles are almost done."

"I'll call the boys. Then make the salads for you."

"Thanks. The salad stuff is still on the back porch."

Colton walked through the kitchen and picked up the train whistle from the counter by the unusable electric stove. Once on the back porch, he blew it long and loud, producing a high-pitched tooting honk. Colton blocked different holes around the neck of the whistle to produce several more blasts for the boys to hear before rummaging in the large plastic tub on the back porch. The cold autumn air made it the temporary fridge.

After grabbing the plastic package of greens and the bag of romaine lettuce along with the broccoli, carrots, and red pepper that usually made it into salads, Colton stood by the card table in the family room while he shredded lettuce and attempted to put together a decent salad in each paper bowl laid out on the table. Laughter from the back yard cued the boys were back and Liz's voice from upstairs, "Mom, the boys got Sadie all muddy!"

"Can you please take care of it?" Izzy's patience starting to wear thin. She had sent the boys outside to burn energy and so she could have some quiet before starting dinner.

Colton wiped his hands on the dishcloth on the card table. "We'll be back soon." After hearing the screen door slam, Izzy looked out the window and saw Colton walk across the yard to meet the boys. Sadie happily trotting along, a tree branch in her mouth dragging on the ground

behind her. Sure enough, her stomach was splattered with the grayish creek mud nearly blending with her black fur.

"Liz, will you come and help me finish supper?"

A pause, the sound of sock feet on the stairs, "Coming, Mom." With the softness of smaller feet Liz entered the room, a shimmer of tears in her brown eyes. "I finished the book. Mom, why didn't you tell me that Spadix died? It was so cruel for Iswy to do that!"

Izzy took the frying pan off the stove and placed it on the brick hearth before standing and hugging her daughter. "I cried too, when I read that book for the first time. I still don't like the part in *The Last Battle* where the dwarfs shoot the talking horses. But that little one was a faithful friend to Lord Artos' horse Cornix. You will probably like *The Black Stallion*. After you finish your school books you should try it."

"What do the salads need?"

"What your father didn't put in there yet."

"Is *The Black Stallion* like *Misty of Chincoteague*?"

"Not exactly. It has more action in it. *King of the Wind* is another good horse book. We are reading that sometime. That's enough broccoli and peppers."

"Grandma knows how to pick good books."

"What makes you say that?"

"The note in the front of *Black Horses for the King*. Was that one that started your King Arthur obsession?"

"No, my love of the Arthurian foundation myth started in high school when I wanted to read the different variations of the story chronologically. When I was your, age Grandma bought

me horse books at used book sales. But *Misty* has always been a favorite. The salads look great, sweetheart."

"Is that why you are giving me horse books to read?"

"We share the love of horses. I love talking about books with you."

"Why do you have to read Dickens to us? He is so boring. I liked it when you read *The Hobbit* this summer."

"Why do you think I am reading *A Tale of Two Cities*?"

"Because we are studying the French Revolution and it takes place at that time."

"Precisely. It will pick up and have more action."

"When are we reading more Shakespeare?"

"Not this year. We are out of that time period now. The boys will be reading some for Brit. Lit. next year. The two of us will be working through the Sunlight Readers," Izzy referenced the homeschooling curriculum she used.

"Are you having us read any more old favorites?"

"There a lot of good books when we hit World War II. I think *The Good Master* and *The Singing Tree* fit in around World War I. *Angel on the Square* is good. Some old favorites are *Snow Treasure*, *Number the Stars*, and *I am David*. I remember collecting books to loan to another homeschooling family, the Bethunes, one summer I was in college. Mom and I filled two whole boxes with World War II books."

"I love finding books to read at Grandma's house!" Liz exclaimed looking up from laying out a pile of paper plates and plastic silverware.

"Your Uncle David had to double stack his shelves at one time to hold all the books. I hear the boys and Dad."

While the two boys and their father trooped through the house, leaving a clean enough black lab in the kitchen, Izzy added another few logs to the fire. The dark walnut logs, from a fallen tree out back, would burn slowly. Colton asked the blessing – prayer for the food to nourish their bodies and thanksgiving for the day. The family chimed in for the traditional Tubbs family blessing, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let this food to us be blessed. Amen." They ate quickly before Colton pulled out the worn box with a haughty contessa dressed in red. The battered box read the game's name "Coup." While Colton shuffled the cards, Izzy dumped out the hexagon cardboard coins. They formed a misshapen pile of silver and black on the card table.

Colton dealt out the cards so each player had two and the remaining five were in the court deck. The game had lots of laughter as the twins each had a duke and captain and Izzy had double assassins. Liz won the game, a first in a while. They played four games before bed.

Izzy and Colton lay in bed after turning off their flashlights. "About moving, Phil wants me down there. After his promotion, there is an open position under him. He wants me to take it. I don't want to tell the kids until we know for sure if we are moving."

"Won't that spring the move on them?"

"It will." After a long pause, Colton said, "I don't want to move. Especially with Mom's health failing. I like taking the boys over for a day to help Dad with the property. We can get a lot done and they can get a lot of time with their Grandpa. Something I never had."

"I love Montoursville too. Church friends, the co-op," Izzy said. The moonlight through the window illuminated Colton's silhouette.

"But would staying here be best in the long run?"

"Well, let's wait and see what happens during your trip."

"I hope the power comes back before I leave."

"You're leaving in four days. It should be," muffling a yawn, Izzy hit the light button on her watch before rolling over and sleepily saying, "Goodnight, Colton."

"Goodnight, Sweetheart," he replied tenderly, settling into the soft mattress.

Two weeks later Colton returned from a business trip to Knoxville, Tennessee. He and Izzy had had a long conversation over the phone after the kids were in bed one night where Colton told Izzy they wanted him to move. Over dinner, the first night he was home, Colton broke the news. "We're moving. They want me working at headquarters in Knoxville."

Liz dropped her fork.

"What?" Jonathan, the younger of the twins, asked.

"When?" David asked, at the same time.

"They want me down there in two months."

"But this is home. What about going to Gran and Grandpa's every month? Baseball in the spring?" Jonathan asked, barely able to stay in his seat.

"Our woods, the waterhole we just finished," David chimed in.

"You said we could try out for the high school team!"

"There will be teams down south," Izzy replied. Liz hadn't picked up her fork.

"Teams without Tommy, Mike, Glenn, and Zach," David remarked bitterly.

"It is a very good promotion. If we don't move, I might not have a job for much longer since I am not needed here. I was able to look at some houses while I was away. None of them were quite right and I want your mom to take a look. It is eastern Tennessee. It is very pretty.

You boys may be able to play baseball nearly year round," Colton said highlighting pros for moving.

"We really are moving? But what about camp?" Liz asked, suddenly no longer hungry.

"Yes, we are. I will miss Montoursville," Colton replied, glancing at Izzy.

"Camp is months away. We will figure something out," Izzy assured Liz.

"What about Sadie? Are we going to have woods?" David asked, flipping his flatware knife in his hand.

"We will find a house that has a big backyard," Izzy assured her son, gently touching his arm to let him know to stop flipping the knife.

"I don't get it, we are happy here," Jonathan asked his chair grinding against the linoleum as he pushed it back and stood up.

"Sit down, young man," Colton firmly said.

Jonathan obeyed, though the glare in his eyes showed he didn't want to.

"Jon, the company is a good one to work for. I am not happy about moving away from my parents. I do love it here. But your mom and I talked it over and decided to move."

"We will look for a team for you to join. If the local high school can't work then a tournament team or community league. I know we promised you could try out for the high school team this year and you still can, just not for Montoursville."

"Would there be space for us to have a horse?" Liz voiced her dream of having a horse.

"I haven't been looking at houses with that much land. We will have to see what we can find. What can be home."

That night before falling asleep, Izzy and Colton spoke about what they wanted in the new house. "I should start going through things to see what we want to keep."

"I think Lizzie took the news well. It would be nice to find a horse farm near the new house so she can learn how to ride. We should have looked around here more."

"Yes, we should've. But I wanted a safe place for her so I wouldn't worry in the future when she could go by herself. I wanted a farm like the one Mom and Dad found for me when I was a kid."

"You worry too much."

"I wonder what Tennessee's homeschooling laws are like. I should start researching that. I might need to keep more examples of the kids' work. Piffle, I have to see what I want to keep of all the old projects. Three sets of portfolios."

Later in the week, Izzy cleaned out the now unused toy boxes in the forest stenciled playroom – a paint job before the twins were born. She came across two stuffed bears the twins had been given on their first birthday. The fur had mostly worn away and patches on the plush bodies showed where Izzy had mended and re-mended the bears. She sank to the floor holding the bears tight. Her eyes filled with tears – the twins, barely two years old, sat on the floor in that room hitting each other with the bears.

"Mom, are you okay?" David asked, seeing her on the floor.

"Do you remember Teddy and Big Bear?"

"Of course."

"I remember when Grandma gave them to you and Jonathan."

David's face lit with memories as he took Teddy from Izzy's hands. "He was the general of the bear army. They conquered the whole house."

"Take him for your boxes. I can't throw him and Big Bear out."

"I'll take them to our room. Did you correct yesterday's math lesson?"

"It is in the corrected work pile in the library."

"Thanks," David said, leaving with the bears tucked under an arm.

Early the next week after the kids had gone to bed, Colton and Izzy sat looking through old portfolios picking favorite projects to fill a two-inch binder of memories for each child.

"Lizzie's Sinbad story," Colton said, holding the handwritten page from the previous school year.

"Do you remember when I had them write the ending to 'The Lady, or the Tiger'?"

"You had the boys steamed for a week."

The two managed to work through half of the portfolios before 11:30. They planned on finishing the next day.

Two weeks later, the twins and Liz were staying with Colton's parents as Colton and Izzy went to Knoxville to look at the dozen houses they saw online and wanted to view in person. They were also open to see any other houses the realtors had with a big yard, three or four bedrooms, and rooms for family space and books.

The week passed. Some mornings, Izzy looked at the write-ups for houses while Colton put some hours in at work figuring out the transition. Izzy grew quiet as the days ticked by with house after house failing to find "home." They needed to make a decision soon as they had roughly three weeks to move the family. Fortunately, Colton's boss understood the move the family had to make and the logistics of finding a new home.

Near the end of the week, a realtor took Izzy and Colton to a house that had just been put on the market. "This is my favorite house," the realtor gushed as she led the couple up the walk,

her fuchsia heels clicking on the stone tiles. "There is lots for space for your children and a big backyard like you wanted," she added unlocking the door.

Izzy stiffened as the door swung open revealing the rectangular modern style of the interior and the dark, bold paint choices for the walls.

As they walked through the house, Colton felt Izzy squeezing his hand harder, "This isn't what we had in mind. Are there any other houses that are good for a family of five with a sizable chunk of land? Woods would be preferable."

"Why didn't you say you wanted woods! There is a quaint house in a wooded suburb. All the plots are large and there is a park nearby which would be great for your kids."

"May we see that one?" Izzy asked, not sure what the realtor meant by "quaint."

On the way to the "quaint" house, they drove by the park. An old black locomotive and the large jungle gym looked interesting, though some of the oldest children there looked to be around Liz's age. The neighborhood seemed quiet. Trees stretched over the street. The realtor pulled into a driveway leading to a two-story brick and stone house. A Japanese maple grew in the front yard.

Izzy grew quiet as they walked through the house. Colton recognized her "thinking face," the one she often wore in college while reading for literature classes. The house had a nice area to be turned into a play room or library, a well laid out kitchen and eating area, a dining room, a comfortably sized master bedroom. Two of the upstairs bedrooms could be used for the kids, while the third would make a good guest, room and, to Izzy's delight, the washer and dryer were upstairs as well. The view from the upstairs back windows looked over a lake and most of the six-acre wooded lot. The neighborhood didn't feel too much like a suburb though in a good location. As Izzy and Colton walked through the house she said, "This is it."

After being shown around, Izzy and Colton walked through the house slowly with the realtor speaking more about buying the house and the problems it could have rather than the rosy first impression. "It is enough of a home so it won't be such a dramatic change, yet it's new and different," Colton commented.

"We don't need a playroom anymore, but we still need a room for books and a place for the kids to do their schoolwork."

"Yes, this room would make a nice after school study."

"We homeschool. I try to let the kids have a space that is encouraging for completing their assignments. Having a spot for them to do their work, a place where I won't be distracting them while doing housework, is nice."

"How old are your children?"

"The twins are almost fifteen and Lizzie is eleven," Colton answered.

"I have been told this neighborhood is great for children. Are you sure you want woods?"

"We have woods back home. The boys love being out there after they finish their schoolwork for the day. The woods here would be no different." Izzy added to herself, *I hope. It wouldn't be their woods.*

"So, you are interested in buying the house?"

"Yes. This is the first house here that has felt like it could be home."

"Do you want to come back to the office to talk the details of buying?"

"That would be nice," Colton replied.

On the way to the office, the realtor took Izzy and Colton through more of the neighborhood. Passing by some sports fields Colton asked, "What type of baseball teams are down here?"

"I don't follow sports. I think a few years ago the Little League team was in the paper. I don't remember why." Once back at the office, Colton and Izzy formalized the paperwork to put money down on the house and start the process of buying.

The next day, their last day, Colton and Izzy spent driving around the area. After pulling into a parking spot for a sandwich shop, Izzy took Colton's hand, "Well, it isn't home but it won't be that bad here."

"No, it won't be that bad, I hope. It won't be our woods, mountains, and hiking trails, but it can be home."

"The boys will miss the snow."

"I won't miss shoveling, but I will miss the snowball fights, ice skating, and sledding at my parents' house."

"There are new museums to explore and field trip opportunities here," Izzy said, as she opened the passenger door of Colton's truck and hopped down.

"That's true."

During the long drive back, they planned how to tell the kids and the logistics of moving and starting to pack. They had had to keep the house clean after they had put it on the market two weeks earlier. "This is really happening. It is hard to believe we are moving. I thought we would stay in PA like your parents."

"I thought so too. But this new house looks great. I was thinking: maybe we should put desks or a desk in the boys' room so they can do their schoolwork there. And having a study instead of a playroom."

"Yes, that might be best since they are growing up. But I don't like a TV in the main living area. It makes having company over difficult."

"We'll put that in the study. We can put the library loveseat in there and the table and chairs from the playroom."

"That could work. I do like the floors and carpet, though the paint color in the third upstairs bedroom needs to be changed. Ugh, that strange pastel orange like an Easter egg. The green and blue of the other two rooms look nice. We'll have to see what the kids want. Repainting that one room is the only change that I want to do. Although, I suspect we will find more things we want to change once we move in."

"I'm glad I took lots of pictures for my parents and the kids. It is a relief to have a house so we don't have to worry about where home will be. I'm glad we talked to the bank about taking out a mortgage and the phone conversation this morning with them went well. I set up an appointment for Tuesday afternoon, during my lunch hour to meet and talk about mortgages."

"Good. I will be glad to have that settled. The new neighborhood looked pet friendly."

"Yes, oh, did you notice the horse farms while driving around?"

"We need to look into finding a place for Liz to take riding lessons," Izzy said.

"I wonder if the boys' are good enough to make the high school team. If they aren't we need to ask around about community or tournament teams."

"Tennessee does allow homeschoolers to try out for the high school teams just like PA. Colton, I am actually excited about the prospects of the move. This is going to be good for us, though an adventure and a growing experience."

"We can find new places for vacation. I still want to go to one of our parents' for Thanksgiving."

"I do too. I have so many fond memories of Thanksgiving at Grandma Ida's in Charlotte."

"I remember. Back in those college days."

"Can it really be nineteen years ago?"

"I still can't believe the twins are almost fifteen," Colton replied.

The next week Izzy took a break going through the books in the library packing the ones she wanted to keep and making a stack for the ones she wasn't sure about. Peeking into Liz's room showed Liz standing in the midst of her room with some toys around her. The little brown horse, Prince, in her arms. His head lulled to one side as the bean bag stuffing had shifted. Izzy flashed back to three-year-old Liz, with Prince draped over her arm, looking up with shining brown eyes and an innocent, hopeful smile while they stood amongst the shelves of a bookstore.

"Momma, I don't know what to pack in my boxes. Do I have to pack books too?"

"I want you to go through your books for ones you want to keep, but no, they are not part of your boxes. What do you want to keep? What are your treasures?"

"Kaya and her clothes. We can always make more Model Magic play food um." Liz put down Prince and started finding things to put in her two boxes.

Izzy moved on to check on the boys. All their baseball cards, posters, game balls, and trophies from when their team, two years ago, had placed second in the community league. Big Bear and Teddy sat on top of the baseball stuff and the small knife collection. The boys' bat bags lay near the packed box.

"...like playing Oregon Trail. Admit it."

"It is so big! It takes up practically the whole box! We have already filled one and most of it is yours!"

"Hi, Mom," David said, noticing Izzy at the doorway.

"We were just debating if we should take Gran's old Macintosh."

"Do our bat bags count as our boxes because we have one box filled and the other three mostly packed," David asked.

"Talk to your father about it. It might be time for the computer to go."

"Fine," David spat out, though both boys seemed to sulk.

That year, because of the move, the family celebrated Thanksgiving with Colton's parents' even though they previously planned to go see Izzy's parents in Virginia. They spent the last weekend in November driving down to the new house. The van loaded with the kid's treasure boxes and what the family needed right away. Colton had hitched the largest U-Haul trailer he could to the back of his pickup truck for their belongings. He had also purchased a cover for the bed of his truck so what they packed there wouldn't get wet in bad weather. The largest pieces of furniture had been taken down by professional movers. The twins fought over who rode shotgun since they had the choice of riding with either parent. Liz rode behind the driver seat in the Sienna. The other part of the bench seat had been folded down for the dog crate. Liz had the crate's door open for most of the ride so Sadie could have her paws dangling over the edge of the plastic.

Finally, at the end of the long drive that had been planned for two days so they would have most of Sunday to move in, Colton and Izzy pulled into the driveway of the new house. Izzy turned the keys quieting the minivan's engine. Colton got out of his truck. As the kids piled out of the vehicles, Colton said, "We're here. Welcome home." He pulled out the keys to the new house and unlocked the door.

THE COTTAGE

The wind encircles a stone
cottage. The type fitting
Kinkade paintings – fire
burns in the open fireplace – rising
with sapphire and amethyst
and emerald flames the
plastic bags – scattered,
fallen between logs.
She turns away from the fire –
meets my eyes
a packet of mineral salts
still grasped – "I've been waiting –
for a long time."

FARTHER DOWN AND DEEPER IN

Hesed, Hebrew for love.

Frustrated and confused as images of
snort tomes, (books make sounds?) stare
at me in dim wrath.

This might be because I am an ex-sleepy or
I am head fried. That must be true, as I
am having visions of Obi Wan Kenobi
visiting my department. But I don't work
in an arena, I hold prison for
a living.

LIVING LIFE RUNNING AWAY: A WEEK OF PAIN

I sit between the main doors of the Dixon Ministry Center looking at the high steeple from the inside. Triangles, rectangles, and curves filled with light from the roof windows. My back is against the radiator. Kirby talks about the renovations her dad has done to their house since they moved in and the planned work on the porch over Spring Break. On the other side of the doors into the DMC, the bass from chapel worship music thuds. I can still feel it on the safer side of the doors. Nearly like clockwork now, we go back in ten or fifteen minutes after chapel officially begins, but for us, it begins after the second song ends. Once the chapel band finishes it is "safe" again. Safe – where the thudding of the music will not continue morphing into throbbing pain behind my temples, making me feel like my head is in one of Dad's orange and black clamps, causing me to beg God to end the pain or why me, causing a desire for my head to split open so it will stop hurting.

For now, I avoid the pain, avoid the triggers, and try to find a way to end it. The past two doctor's appointments have ruled out classical migraines – a relief not to have that burden. *But what causes the pain? Is it because of the tension headaches? Did the tension headaches worsen? Do I really have migraines and ones not treated by that medication? Or was it just a bad reaction? Would another migraine medication work?*

Sunday mornings, after the service ends, Redeemer's congregation gathers in the Lower Fellowship hall for coffee and snacks. Small children run between the talking adults. *Will the*

pain or fear of pain turn a happy dream of three or four kids to a reality of one or two? Or none?

Once, Eyown danced in her squeaky shoes becoming scared when she looked up at Matt towering above her. She only came up to his knees. *Will a daughter's footsteps be on the stairs in the future?* The pleasant sound of conversation becomes unbearable after a time. My beau looks at me and asks if it is time to go upstairs. We duck out the back door and up the staircase that reflects the outside temperature. In the library, Carroll sits at her normal place at the table, her husband Bruce is in one of the circled chairs waiting for Sunday School. Matt and I settle into the couch. I pull out my embroidery, relieved to be away from the conversations stacked on each other.

Chuck's Sunday night crowds, possibly lured by chicken patties and curly fries, make it hard to hear. Voices, weaving together form a type of music, constant with individual voices breaking out above the others. The crying laugh of Wagner echoes in my ear starting the throb in my temple. The existing headache – the one that will always remain, a dull ache in the back of my head, noticeable at times but otherwise ignorable, a learned and accepted pain – spikes with the closeness and volume of the sound, headaches crash together compounding pain. I have had to learn how to deal with pain. The tension headaches have gripped my occipital bone for over seven years. However, the tension pain feels different from other head pain the spikes in my temples or behind my eyes. The question of why I have the headache in my temples nags the back of my mind. *Did I drink enough water today? Is the Excedrin not working? Do I need to take another? But it is nearly 18:00. It is getting to late. Is it the wrong type of headache? Should I drink coffee instead? What is wrong with me?*

God, please, make it stop. Please, make the pain stop. How long? Why? Why do I have to go through this? I'm not strong enough. I can't do this anymore! I lie down for a nap trying to sleep off a splitting headache that has been around for two days. Is it correct to call the pain a refining fire or my "thorn in the flesh"? Is it a sin to call my struggles that? I resist isolation by spending time with people before retreating to solitude because people make noise and noise hurts. I carry Excedrin in my purse because I don't know when or what could push me over the edge, even something as simple as the air system's almost unnoticeable bass rumble.

Limitations spread out in front of me, no summer hours teaching archery to middle and high schoolers. The long dining hall filled with fifteen tables of chattering campers, all wanting to be heard, would be too much. Instead, I anticipate doctor's waiting rooms, with Channel 16 playing on the TV in the corner, throughout the summer. *How long will I be shackled by the pain? How long will I cry for healing with no answer? Is it a sin to question God's plans? How long will this last? Where will I work? Where can I work?* Water Wheel, a roadside produce stand, is no longer a job option. The whoosh of a car, the rumble of an eighteen wheeler, the deep gurgly engine noise of a Harley, and the high whine of a Japanese sport motorcycle would be too much.

The daily routine of flight becomes survival. A way to cope and keep going. I have been labeled with a disability because no one listened to pleas of turning down the chapel music for health concerns.

The chapel band gets up to play and moves across the stage. I get up, say a quick "see you later" to Matt, and head down the stairs to the balcony walkway, then down the stairs dodging people as they come in. I sometimes wonder what they think of my quick flight down

the stairs. Rabbitting away from worship, a forced retreat. The cost of worship is too high. I am not willing to spend the rest of the day in agony for fifteen minutes of concert-volume music led by performers. The headaches negate motivation and productivity – so I leave. I don't want a headache forcing me to wear sunglasses indoors; I already wear a baseball cap to shield my eyes from artificial lighting because the lights stab my eyes. I don't want a headache forcing me to turn down my music, lower than the four or six volume level, because passing by crickets echoes in my ears, or wanting to scream because the shower throbs in my temples and reverberates through my whole head. I don't want to beg God why or for the pain to stop. I don't want to cry in Matt's arms because I feel broken.

So I run, darting down the stairs into the gap between the doors into the DMC.

THE FIRST TIME

I left a bouquet of fake flowers taped to Water Wheel Stand's door in memory of Sharon and those long fall afternoons where I lugged pumpkins from the refrigerator truck to the trailer for customers, the afternoon when I was hyper and jabbering about the current rewrite of my book and how she turned to me and said, "Sara, you need a boyfriend," the summer Saturdays of handing boxes of plums, pears, tomatoes, and green beans out of the truck to open for the morning, the fall evenings my brother would pick me up from work and help us close.

Melanie left a message on the answering machine on a Tuesday in January. Mom played it after we returned home. Melanie's message said Sharon had gone to the hospital last night from a heart attack but did not make it. I ran up the stairs grabbing the sunset yarn half-afghan in the corner of my bed – a gift from Sharon on a fall day when I did not work. She had asked my brother and I to come to the stand. She had something for us. She gave me her crocheted work saying, "I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but you are a plain Jane and I wanted you to have something bright to catch the eye of your knight in shining armor." A few months later, it was not a sunset for her, but a candle going out sudden and quick.

At her memorial service, there were flowers in the front of the funeral home. Her ashes were in a metallic purple urn. There was a poster board covered in pictures. I heard about Sharon in the context of her family, her bell collection, and care for others. I sat with the others who worked at the stand. Jackie was next to me. In October, during the Open Gate Farm Tour, we had run the stand. The familiar faces did not ease the emptiness.

"Hi, Sara, it's Sharon. Mike said no work today. We're not going to open up today because of the rain. If you have any questions, just give me a call. If not, thanks for working this summer. Bye." The voicemail left on my turned off cell. I did not hear her message until after she died. Her final goodbye played again and again just to hear her voice.

Sharon – with her hummingbird tattoos sitting in her chair looking out the large front opening holding a diet iced tea and a cigarette. She kept a book on the end of the cash register table – a popular romance with the gorgeous girl and the shirtless guy. She sassed the regular customers, crocheted every kid who worked with her a half afghan. She teased me relentlessly but taught me to smile when helping every customer, how to run the cash register, and who told me, "You have this one" when two teens pulled up and the boy was covered in light blue paint.

THE SECOND TIME

Mom drove down to Charlotte, again, to see Grandma because my uncles didn't know what to do. I don't remember what happened, there were too many times Mom went down because of Grandma's failing health, too many moments Mom missed because she had gone to see her mother. Sometimes it was to visit. We would joke how Mom was always in Charlotte, especially when we would talk about events that happened while Mom was gone. One softball game Emily's team used one of the best pitchers in the league for batting practice. The pitcher couldn't keep calm because it threw off her whole rhythm. Emily's team beat their undefeated opponents who thought the game was won before it started. Grandma was in her mid-nineties shouldn't it be expected for her to have deteriorating health? Her aids weighed her every day. If she gained weight, then there was fluid around her failing heart. So many times she went in and out of the hospital. So many times, it was caught early so Grandma didn't have to go to the hospital. I didn't pay attention to what was happening or why. Grandma's heart was weakening because she was old and had lived a full life, but still, she never heard about me graduating from high school or about what I was doing in college.

March 3rd, Mom calls from Charlotte after rushing down to see her mother. This time Grandma had held on long enough to see Mom, the last of her children to make it to her bedside. Mom's three brothers were there, but they live in North Carolina, unlike the ten-hour drive Mom had. The memorial service was planned for Easter Saturday so family could gather. It was five days after my birthday. I didn't really celebrate when I turned eighteen. The day happened and we had cake to celebrate but the cake sat half eaten on the kitchen counter when we left for

Charlotte. The timing wasn't just for the logistics of having a longer weekend Mom wanted it then because of the idea of resurrection and rebirth. The hope of The Resurrection. A butterfly was on the cream program. I don't remember if the wings were filled with color. I think it was after the service when we were back home that Mom filled the wings with purple, blue, and yellow spots. The butterfly – dying and rebirth – a symbol connecting to Easter.

Grandma didn't have many butterfly decorations in her house she loved birds more. She had a plastic balancing bird with extended wings and a weight in its beak so it would perpetually look like it was flying – a cardinal. We used to see how quickly it would balance on our fingers or the wooden cardinal cutting board we used to hold like falconers. We don't own a traditional bird feeder like the two in Grandma's backyard. If we did, there would be feathers all over the yard from the cats nabbing a snack. We do have a hummingbird feeder just off the porch, easily seen through the kitchen window. The bright red base draws the single male and three or four females every year. Mom loves hummingbirds. Grandma had hummingbird decorations, ones Uncle Marvin gave her, the glass ones hanging from the lintel like little jewels by the front door next to the sitting room.

Grandma's memorial service was held on March 30th, Easter Saturday. Avondale Presbyterian Church filled with Easter flowers – at least two of those large floral stands. Some of the flowers must have been Easter lilies. There must have been some pink. I know there was white in the bouquets. I remember the gardenias on the bushes outside. I had a fake one in my hair, in the way Mom liked. I normally notice the flowers. When we have people over, I am the one Mom tells to pick and arrange a bouquet. Mom gardens like her mother used to. Some of Grandma's houseplants, or ones like them, live in the windowsills at the farm. I have a plant sitting on top of the microwave in my dorm – a philodendron.

Those hummingbird glass jewels are gone, just a memory, like the picture I carry in my wallet – Grandma, white-haired and smiling, a silver hummingbird pin on her blue blazer and her necklace filled with head silhouettes each one representing a grandchild. The picture was for her ninetieth birthday, six and a half years before she died.

MAY 13, 2015

Around the 8:00 hour

The ringing house phone jolts me awake. My first thought is *Dad!* At that moment Dad's heart could have been stilled and replaced by the pump, the heart and lung machine used in the operating room for cardiac patients. The call is only a notification about some test at Lake Wallenpaupack, the small hydro power plant Dad manages. Emily answers the phone so I don't know what it is exactly about.

Around the 9:00 hour

I try not to think about what he is enduring: a six to eight inch long incision in his chest. An artery is harvested from his tanned left arm. That arm no longer has a pulse at the wrist because the blood vessel taken creates the wrist pulse. The incision would make a scar to go along with the watch-tan Dad gets in the summer from his nice gold work watch and cheap sport watch with the rubbery plastic band. A vein is removed from his left leg, the leg that has had problems with cellulites and bad circulation ever since Dad fell off that ladder and smashed his heel. An incision by his knee and ankle guide the camera in to remove it. The vein was taken by camera because it is piping, not muscle. If the artery had spasmed it would have been useless.

Around the 10:00 hour

I have been playing spider solitaire, listening to music, and trying to daydream for a while now. I am too scatter brained. I don't try to write. I am too unfocused. My LG Chocolate is

shoved into the right cargo pocket of my shorts. It remains still and silent. Emily, fielding calls to the house phone and her cell phone, becomes the family secretary. Every time the house phone rings my heart stops. *Did something go wrong?*

11:00 hour

Around the 12:00 hour

I have started sewing. I am sitting on the cold tile floor – not the white and gray marble I grew up with, but the new brown-toned tile that replaced the old cracked marble – pinning the pattern to brown cotton fabric for a peasant dress. The phone rings yet again. It is from Camp Susque about the summer and had nothing to do with Dad. Dad's surgeon grafts the harvested artery and vein around the blockages. The very things that made Dad's chest feel tight when he tilled the strips in the garden field to plant tomatoes, beans, and onions, what made Dad burp and unable to exercise for months because his heart was working overtime and taking blood from the digestive system. The new piping and muscles create a detour for the blood. An observing intern is enthralled by Dr. Phillip's tiny stitches that are made to last.

PENDANTS FOR CONFIDENCE

Solid silver, the figure of a galloping horse, tail streaming back in the wind, mane whipped with speed of running – a Christmas present from Uncle Dave and Aunt Scotty. It never came off except for weekly dance lessons. Next came the square, knotted, dark-brown hemp cord necklace. White, carved fake ivory or stone beads breaking up the dark knots – a small dragonfly the main charm. A conscious choice to wear a symbol from the name welcoming me in the Camp Susque family at age eight.

August 2010, family vacation in Yellowstone. In one of the gift shops we found a teal-winged dragonfly necklace. The silver plating wore away to copper over the many times I fingered it – worried, nervous, thinking, bored.

Christmas, I don't remember what year, Emily gave me a dragonfly with a straight body and marbled labradorite wings.

Another Christmas, another dragonfly necklace, this one's silver body curves in a gentle "J" shape. The wings are gemstones – aquamarine or light blue topaz upper wings with peridot lower wings. It matched my dragonfly ring.

A single crystal purchased long ago from Lauray Cavern's gift store matches the uncertainty of college freshman year. The flawed side and choker chain I thought matched my

new identity. Changed personality as flawed as the crystal. A step away from the young horse lover and dancer, away from the numerous dragonflies and the different representations of me.

A circle of silver surrounds a tree – delicate branches spreading inside the disk about the size of my thumb’s top joint – a present from Kelsey. It reminded her of my stories and the tree I stitched on royal blue linen – the lazy daisy loops for interlocking leaves out of three shades of green thread, split stitch for edging out of the base green and brown and the decorative gold and silver, and satin stitch for bark, roots, arrow shafts, and fletching. Stories dating back to the knotted and hempen cord dragonfly necklace of fourteen. But what it represents changes yet silver remains the same.

OBSERVATIONS OF TAMMARACK FARM

Canada Geese lay three to six eggs in a nest. Nests can be found in April through June. The eggs are a dirty white. I found a nest once, when the eggs were hatching. When I drew near to the swamp in the middle of the woods, the mother flew away. The eggs were safe in a circle of reeds and down nestled between some skunk cabbages. A faint cheeping made me look closer, then leave the nest alone. I went back the next morning to find the hatched, yellowish lime-green goslings. Little miracles even though I dislike geese.

Wild onions are good when pulled up, washed, cut into bits, and sautéed in butter and herbs. The big ones in the bunch have thicker stems. The roots are poisonous. After the stem turns green, it gains the cinnamony taste of onion grass. The onions are only good in the early spring, March through early May. After May, they are too tough. Aunt Dorothy first taught me wild onions were edible, but not the roots. Many springs found my sister and me in the woods pulling and washing the onions in a cold brook. We dug a pool deeper so we could have more water to wash them in, stopping to let the water flow through and become clear again.

Queen Anne's Lace roots smell like carrots.

Some pears on wild trees look like wild apples.

Black raspberry brambles have three leaves and the branches have a white tint to the thorny vine-like branches. The brambles can grow near strawberry patches which means Poison

Ivy may also be twisting among the three-leaved strawberry plants. It is strange: I know I have touched the oily plant before but have never gotten the Poison Ivy rash.

Yellow perch swallow the hook – a three-pronged spinner. They are worse than large-mouth bass. Bass typically only bite the hook; I did catch one by the gills once. I felt terrible for the fish. Sunnies have a nasty spine that hurts if you hold them wrong. Dad taught me to slide my hand over them front to back. I wonder if his father or grandfather taught him or did he learn it for himself? He used to use his father's fishing pole, but I use that one now. If my grandfather were alive, I think we would have gone fishing together.

Man-made ponds break creating swampy areas.

Those swampy areas are not safe to play in unless moving quickly over dried grass covered areas. The sinking, sad clay traps shoes and feet and legs if not careful or if the ground isn't frozen. Even in winter, the safest places to step are the rocky streambeds leading into the broken pond.

Swallows follow the lawn mower in the summer, devouring the bugs kicked into the air by mowing. The fledgling swallows wobble on the power lines as they learn to find their balance. I watch them dip and weave around the lawnmower, their numbers swelling over the course of every summer. A few turn into many. They are musical flying bug catchers with the sharp tweet-tweet every time a cat walks through the paddock area. Each cat would have a different reaction. The swallows have never liked Princess. I guess that is because if they get too

close to her, or pick enough fur off her back when dive-bombing her, she catches them. Her brother could be lying down then jump and catch them mid-flight.

FOUNDATIONS

Old whitewash flakes off the old stones, laid in the 1840s. A bar from the wild prohibition days and Italian owners lingers as a relic from a different time. The airstrip somewhere out back has vanished. A legend and story about previous owners like the lady who drowned herself in the pond. The bar is now a shelf – bottles of hand soap, unfinished pottery projects, boxes of clay, lemon-scented furniture wax with an old fabric diaper for cleaning the air hockey table. Two fireplaces on each end, now filled with old kitchen chairs and forgotten toys. A red cement floor makes the basement a fun place to roller blade – until Emily fell and cracked her elbow.

1840S PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN FARMHOUSE

The old stonewalls baked and frozen as
months turn. Situated from north to south
along the hill, so the large windows and seven
doors ensnare both the first and last
sunlight. Stones speckled and crossed
with warmth. Stone gives way
to brick after sixty years.
Thinner walls but the same rectangles
as the rest of the house.

JUMPING JACQUELINE ALSO KNOWN AS FLUFFY

By the white barn, stands a blood-bay
horse. She noses the red, cracked bucket.
Sighing, she turns to stand by the
paddock gate. Winter, lit from barn
lights, reflects on the snow but not on her
Wales plaid blanket or bright fur. Two
figures on the driveway. The boy yells
for the cats, which already follow him to
the hen house. The girl goes to the
paddock. "Hi, Fluffy! Ya want supper?"

HORSEBACK RIDING

Smooth, like a glider rocker
is a horse's canter.

The wind blowing
makes my face hurt
with the speed of the
air, the creaking of the
leather, western saddle
gives an ancient and
raw feel to riding.

I control the
beautiful, powerful animal
with the reins in my hands.

The speed and power
of a horse's canter has
no parallel. I can be
a knight or lady from
Camelot astride a great
steed and I can be myself.

A girl who has loved horses
since the age of three,
because of that pony ride
on Prince.

DAVY CROCKET

Soft, a bundle of fur, with
four paws, and a tail
long and never still.

Two ears, two
yellow eyes.

Always watching
always alert,
always on the hunt.

Paws dipped in white
paint. Fur the grey tabby
of a tortoise shell
comb.

Little kitty, Davy Crocket.

APPLACHIAN TRAIL

The rocky trail weaves across
the mountain ridge dips
and dodges around leafed
obstacles. Sometimes, You meet
a through-hiker walking
sticks in each hand. Tread down the path,
their pack buckled on their back.
Day hikers navigate the trail. A couple has
a light-footed dog. Sniff
around the rocks he trots alongside
his masters. Clear skies marks
the time of hawk migration as the birds
glide along the mountain on their way south.
Ospreys have far to reach Chile,
their winter habitat. The fish-eagles will
return as the trail has hikers in the spring.

EMBROIDERED STARS

Light stitched into knit cloth,
the bolt has been unwound across the
sky, behind the deciduous-covered
mountain. Each bright point
of light, French knots of silver.
Draco, Cygnus, Scorpio, Aquila.
Points of a pattern on one side
of the fabric. Other stitches so
small nearly knit into the
fabric provides texture to the
dark, navy-purple knit.

STITCHES

Hands busy, up and down, gentle pull and tug, a soft pop and swish of the needle and strands of embroidery floss through the linen fabric – a bright crayon red, dull ember orange, fall leaf decoration orange, marigold orangey-yellow, pale water color yellow, sunshine yellow. The colors swirl together burning in a phoenix flying out of coals of black linen. Satin stitch feathers blaze together spreading, covering the fabric, filling the colored pencil yellow fabric paint outline. The fire spreads to keep the mind focused.

OCEAN VOICE

I heard a voice by the sea, different
from any. The voice not a human tone
or any seagull or sanderling small.
I watch the birds rush amongst the shells
digging for coquina clams while each wave
recedes. "V" shapes in the sand show where
the mole crabs hide from sandpipers.
I heard the voice again. This time the cry
came across the water. I thought
I saw a shadow near the horizon. The cry,
the voice came again,
before fading away.