

Potluck!

The magazine that eats!

November 2025

The Fear Issue

Issue 011

Much Ado's own...

Kevin Bogan!

by Charlee Shewmaker

Potluck!



The magazine that eats!
November 2025
The Fear Issue
Issue 011

and the winner of *Potluck's*
photography contest is...

Ellie
Lease!



The magazine that eats!
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"I don't mind having
fear in what
people think of me."

Ms.
Pratt!

by Emilee Stark

Potluck Magazine!

“Is there something amiss? Yes.”
- Aidan Worsham, *Potluck*

Our Cooks

Founder <i>and</i> Editor in-Chief	Nicholas Ziegler
Art Director	Arden Almy
Writing Director	Adam Stark
Marketing Director	Aidan Worsham
Photography Director	Justine Zylla
Advisor	Dr. Darryl Ellison

AAHHHHHH!!!

Our Other Wonderful Cooks Are...

Lara Aranda, Sam Barnes, Kam Brodnax, Ella Follmer,
Isabel Harris, Jackson Hedberg, James Merkle,
Sophia Reisdorph, Noah Rittenhouse,
Adam Stark, Evan Wilson, *and* Parker Wolters

Nutritional Facts

Potluck is the student magazine of Colorado Early Colleges Douglas County North, covering news, fiction, poetry, interviews, and more. *Potluck* accepts submissions from all(!!!) students and staff in the school, and would currently prefer to have submissions directed to Nicholas Ziegler, Adam Stark, or Dr. Darryl Ellison.

The views expressed in *Potluck* are those of their respective authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of Colorado Early Colleges.

The team at *Potluck* is very grateful to be doing this work, and hopes that you, reader, enjoy this issue. Eat up!

Chef's Special!

or, a Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the Fear Issue of *Potluck*!

This is our first-ever themed issue, an exciting new step. I had many reasons for choosing this specific theme. One was that Fear is deeply negative—no student magazine would center a whole issue around it, which, of course, is why I wanted to. If Fear is both universal and unpleasant, I wanted to see how we could confront it, celebrate it, approach it with a sense of curiosity and experimentation.

Consider this issue one big experiment.

**Respectfully yours,
Nicholas Ziegler,**



First Course!

News, Essays, and Nonfiction

Our Menu

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A GEC Emergency Evacuation

Outer space, uncanny valleys,
and mild trespassing:
Aidan Worsham takes us
to another planet

Writing by AIDAN WORSHAM.
Photography by AIDAN WORSHAM and NICHOLAS ZIEGLER.

In the last issue of *Potluck*, I jokingly made a story called “Secrets of the School Building” and even bluntly labeled it as propaganda. What I didn’t know at the time was that our school hides a deep, dark secret that hasn’t been uncovered until now. On the surface-level, our school is as normal and light-hearted as it can get—well, other than the odd fact it is technically an office building that has some things a normal Class-A office building wouldn’t have, like the placement and shape of some rooms like the cafeteria space, the oddly shaped rooms (the robotics classroom for example) and the maze-like floor complexion. In case you were wondering: yes, the school simply could have renovated some of those extensions. Perhaps that explains the cafeteria, but that doesn’t explain the base architecture.

So I looked deeper, and found nothing. The school was normal. So I ask around, and Mr. Wilson claims I am not insane and that the place is uncanny. He says it is odd that a school is in an office building, almost like we are getting pushed into the cold world of work too fast, too soon.

Uncanny, like the building is pretending to be completely normal. Just like the uncanny valley. If something looks human but just slightly twisted, we find it disturbing. We most likely evolved this trait to avoid sickness from dying people or to avoid decaying corpses, and of course, there is always the possibility that there was an extinct predator that had a face resembling a human that we never found. Office buildings are exceedingly common, and the fact that this one is slightly different may be the reason why it could be found “creepy” to some people, claims Mr. Wilson from our quick chat, and the fact that the building is al-

ways cold, even in atrocious heat, doesn’t help this feeling either.

I was at a dead end. Until I got the suggestion from my mom, to figure out who owned the building before it became a school. So I looked even deeper into the building records, and I found something a little disturbing...

IHS, an aerospace data company, was the original owner of our school. They were involved with the military and owned the building from 2000 to 2016 when it merged with Markit, then sold it hurriedly in 2018, leaving the building vacant until 2019, when it became CECDN. IHS was working with microfilm a lot during their residency in the 20th century and “other” unknown projects—perhaps even classified—relating to aerospace and data.

The weird part is how hurried they were to vacate, almost like something was pushing them to do so. This is where the trail went cold again, like I was getting close to something I just couldn’t fully grasp before vanishing, and sending me down an even deeper hole. I was frustrated to say the least, but I was also begrudgingly committed to discovering whatever lies at the end of this ever-shifting trail.

Trails. I used to walk with my friend Amelia to the park and back after I discovered it on my 3rd day at school. I thought I had stumbled upon a secret garden and something quite special and rare. So I wanted more, I almost could sense there was more to be discovered around the Inverness area. I convinced Amelia to follow me, and we took off. A pond, a couple backroads, and a few other uninteresting discoveries later, we decided to head back to the school in defeat, and on our way back, we found something... out of place, in plain sight.

In my search of the school building, I almost forgot to look around it for context clues, and wow, I am sure glad that I did. Just across from our school lies an even more ambiguous building, an abandoned building which I could find nothing about except that it was owned by a private owner and has been up for sale for years. Another incident where the owner left hurriedly without any regard for selling immediately. This is getting a tad bit disturbing.

IHS may have a dark secret. IHS may have a very dark secret. Even though IHS has merged with Markit, then later S&P Global, I believe back when they were a sovereign entity and owned our school, they were up to something. Something that eventually drove them and another owner out of their developments. But the question is what? What could do this? Or on an even more terrifying note, could this happen to us?

The only question is: what is the big secret? I have a sinking suspicion it has something to do with the night sky. IHS was in cahoots with the military, and in their time owning the school building, they focused on aerospace and data. But what data specifically?

Radio emissions from pulsar PSR B1919+21 in the Vulpecula constellation terrified Jocelyn Bell Burnell on the 28th of November in 1967. This data from the cosmos shocked leading scientists because of the orderly sequence of the signals. Jocelyn named the sound LGM-1 (Little Green Men 1) after the 1.33 second interval sounds emitted from the object, she believed it was an extraterrestrial beacon of some sort. Upon further inspection from the scientific community, another signal was found in a completely different part of the sky, and that was how we discovered pulsars. When dealing with unknowns, all possibilities are real until one is

singled out. You never know when alien activity is actually a pulsar or when pulsar flashes are actually an alien spacecraft, until you open Pandora’s box.

LOG 10/25/2025 8:31 PM

Just finished a call with Nicholas, he said he will get a photographer to go with me come nightfall on Monday. I don’t really need one—I just need someone to watch my back—but a few high-resolution pictures will be nice. I talked to my dad, and I only have a 10-minute window. I hate that. I need more time. He also said I can’t bring my most powerful telescope because of setup time; I don’t understand. I will have to modify my refractor telescope to pack some extra power into it. I hope I can see it in time.

LOG 10/25/2025 9:54 PM

Good news, Nicholas and his dad are going to come with me. Now I need to scope out the route of abnormalities.

People are crazy and like to spread misinformation; I believe that can explain a third of UFO sightings. People want clout; I believe that can explain another third of sightings. People see normal objects through an odd perspective that can explain another third. I just knocked off 99% of abnormalities in the sky and on the ground. There is always that 1% that can’t be shrugged off so easily. The one percent that can’t be explained. In a universe of literally infinite space, there has got to be a developed civilization who has unlocked deep space travel. Right?

Extraterrestrials

LOG 10/26/2025 12:54 AM

More people are probably coming, I am glad. I will bring my monoscope so the search will go faster. Hopefully.

LOG 10/27/2025 4:45 PM

Just finished calibrating the spotter scope on my refractor. Weather isn't looking too good.

I set up my telescope at the school. All the lights were on. I could see nothing through the heavy rainfall. Nicholas was a tad bit late. I found a cluster of stars through the clouds on the spotter scope. I searched in the main optical piece and nothing. A few more tries later, I find out the supposed stars were an optical illusion from the school's lights.

Nicholas pulled up and we took a couple pictures of the oddly lit school. There was nothing out of the normal, other than the excessive lights. The weather was not on our side this night, but I had one other location I needed to check out before calling it quits. I asked Nick to follow me into the night, and he did, with his camera in hand. A device was ringing near the sidewalk as lightning lit our path, to the abandoned architecture across the street. It had one light on inside the building. We took a few pictures, and walked nearer towards this abnormally to be met by even heavier rainfall and more flashes of lightning, as if even the weather was telling us to stay away.

We got closer and closer to the lit room. Taking pictures as we went, my phone's storage was suddenly full. This had never happened to me before. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw faint movement in the foliage, I turned my head sharply to find nothing. Something in the depths of my being was telling me I should leave, immediately. I resist-

ed. I told Nicholas to point his camera in my stead. An odd sensation came over me, perhaps dread, perhaps my better knowledge, but I knew we shouldn't stay. We couldn't stay. So we left with our pictures and left the building with its secrets, for now at least.

LOG 10/27/2025 8:02 PM

I was reviewing the pictures at home and I found a light visible in one picture and in the previous not. I mapped out the beam; it looks almost like a flashlight. I need to see Nicholas's pictures.

LOG 10/28/2025 9:43 AM

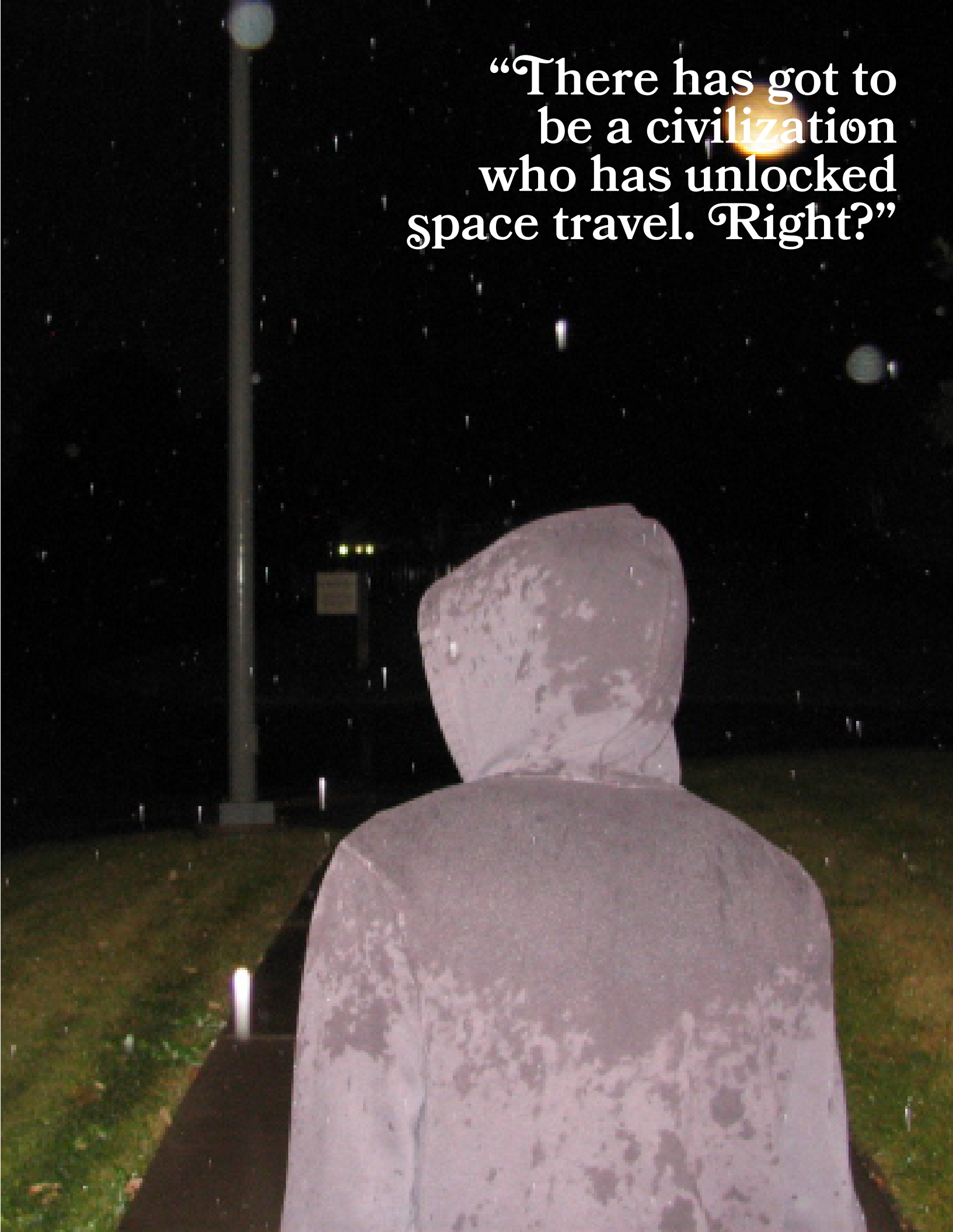
I showed my friend Kyle the photos, and he found a figure in one of the windows. I told Nicholas, and we both agreed to watch the place from a distance. I don't believe I will ever come back at nightfall. I don't want to ever come back at nightfall. Weird stuff is happening around this place, and I don't want to get directly involved.

Will we be kicked out of the building? I don't know. Will the administration randomly say we need to relocate? Maybe. Is there something amiss? Yes. Yes there is. Many horrors have happened in the past, unspeakable horrors. Who is to say that nothing bad will happen to us only because of our modern infrastructure? However, because of our modern infrastructure, it is more unlikely that true horror will emerge. There is a part of me that doubts that anything really bad is or will happen, and another part of me wonders about the horrors that the unknown veils.

A king, a fool, a star, a flight, or a knock at nothing.

Bliss. 🍌

“There has got to be a civilization who has unlocked space travel. Right?”





Another Way To Feel Alive

Isabel Harris on the psychology behind fear

The Psychology of Fear

What is it called when your heart starts pounding, your breath shortens, and your body suddenly freezes? Oh yea - that is called fear. It is one of humanity's oldest survival instincts. Fear is the body's natural response to something dangerous or out of our control. Some people describe it as an emotion, but it's much more than that.

According to psychologists at Harvard, fear activates the amygdala – the brain's alarm system. When a person feels fear, their body reacts in different ways. These reactions are often called fight, flight, or freeze. Depending on the situation or person, you might try to run away, confront the threat verbally or psychically, or you might just become completely still and be frozen in place.

Researchers at the University of Utah say that rational fear is normal and part of human functioning. Feeling afraid when you or a loved one is in harm's way is natural and is the body's way of saying you need to protect yourself. However, when fear happens too often or feels more intense than what the situation calls for, it may become irritational and lead to anxiety or paranoia.

Irrational fear is not healthy and can lead to severely bad experiences and habits. A sign that fear might be irrational is if it isn't based on reality and doesn't come from anywhere. For example, someone who is deathly afraid of clowns, but has never even seen one before, might be considered to have an irrational fear.

Whether you're afraid of tornadoes, the ocean, pickles, or bugs, fear is something we all have in common.

When Fear Feels Fun

There are some people on this earth who crave adrenaline. These are the type of people who skydive on the weekends, go cave-diving with sharks, ride every roller coaster imaginable and never miss a chance to go see a horror movie. These people are known as thrill-seekers.

But why do some people enjoy fear? The answer lies in the brain. Research suggests that when we experience fear in a safe environment, our body still releases adrenaline, but the brain releases dopamine.

Controlled fear gives a rush of excitement and liveliness, without being in any real danger. That explains why some people pay to go see scary movies or walk through a haunted house. It's the reason you might try an extreme sport or go live on the edge and do something risky.

However, not everyone enjoys fear the same way. Scientists say that people who are born with a thrill seeking brain often find the rush of adrenaline and dopamine to be addictive, which leads them to take part in more dangerous activities. Others might want to just watch *Hocus Pocus*, not *The Conjuring*.

It might be a haunted house in October, a fast roller coaster with lots of loops or maybe a scary movie, but either way, fear can actually feel fun. We don't have to avoid fear all the time because sometimes it's just another way to feel alive. 🍋

Ava Rodriguez

by Mackenzie White

The girls get together to discuss anxiety and arachnids.

*Interview by MACKENZIE WHITE.
Photography by ELLA FOLLMER.*

MACKENZIE WHITE: Hi Ava, I'm gonna ask you some questions [*laughs*] about your biggest fear. So, what is your biggest fear?

AVA RODRIGUEZ: I don't really have like a normal biggest fear. Like, genuinely my biggest, irrational fear is bugs and moths and like...ew.

WHITE: You know what, that is relatable, especially when I found a spider in my car.

RODRIGUEZ: [*Laughs*] No, I was gonna send you—there was a spider right here in my car—

WHITE: [*Laughs*]

RODRIGUEZ: —the biggest spider ever, and I was like, “I need to send this to Mackenzie,” and then I rolled down my window and it flew away, so it was okay.

WHITE: Mine was living in my car for a couple days, but that is a very—

RODRIGUEZ: What's your biggest fear?

WHITE: Probably seeing another spider in my car, like I did the one time, that was horrible. Do you enjoy fear-inducing activities such as movies, haunted houses, or I don't know, even public speaking?

RODRIGUEZ: I'm not the biggest fan of horror movies or haunted houses. I don't understand what people would willingly choose to—

WHITE: No, I agree.

RODRIGUEZ: —to put themselves in those situations. Public speaking, I wouldn't say I enjoy public speaking that much, but I am good at it. And not like good-good, but I can do it. And if someone needs me to, I'm willing to.

WHITE: I think public speaking is very scary, so you're very brave for that. I also hate horror movies. It's a horror(!) to watch them.

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah.

WHITE: [*Laughs*] In what ways have you felt or seen your fears in a school environment, and what have you done to face them?

RODRIGUEZ: Great question. [*Laughs*] Okay, in school, probably in anxiety with tests or presentations or, I don't know, just other school activities. And I've usually just either

Spiders

done my best to prepare for them, whether that's like studying for an exam or prepping for a presentation, or I've just gone head-on and just go for it with zero expectations.

WHITE: And would you say that being in Sources of Strength helps you with this, battling this fear?

RODRIGUEZ: I think what I've like learned from Sources of Strength and just, like, knowing I have these resources in my school has always been helpful. And learning about the Sources of Strength Wheel of Resources, seeing that I can rely on my friends or my peers or healthy activities to go relax for a little bit is really nice.

WHITE: Yeah, how long have you been in Sources of Strength and what has—you kind of touched on this a little, but what has your overall experience been like?

RODRIGUEZ: It's been really good. I've been in Sources of Strength since freshman year and it's been really good. The first time that we ever did anything was, a teacher had to request you to be in this day-long thing; it was actually really exciting as a freshman because we got to skip class the whole day.

WHITE: That's always fun.

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, and just learn about all the things that Sources of Strength does and start to delegate things and decide if we wanted to actually be in the club officially. That was really fun when we got to start actually doing things for the school, and started making, like, newsletters and posters and... yeah, I don't remember the rest of the question.

WHITE: [*Laughs*] What have you taken away from Sources of Strength, and how has it helped you in your school, but also just your life overall?

RODRIGUEZ: I think I've taken away just, like, well-being and knowing that I have—again, I talked about this already a little bit, but knowing I have like resources and availability if I ever need help—

WHITE: Great.

RODRIGUEZ: —but also learning ways to deal with things like anxiety or school stuff by myself and just learning all these regulation things, I guess.

WHITE: Yeah, you always have that outlet of Sources of Strength. One last question to bring in the fall spirit: what is your favorite fall or Halloween activity?

RODRIGUEZ: Definitely going to a pumpkin patch or an apple orchard, and just wearing cute clothes and taking pictures and getting good food.

WHITE: Ugh, so cute.

RODRIGUEZ: I'm very much, again, not into fear.

WHITE: The horror movies?

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, not into like haunted houses or horror movies, or even as a kid, dressing up wasn't my favorite thing ever, but I do enjoy autumn and fall itself.

WHITE: Yes, and all the leaves changing. It's just so pretty!

RODRIGUEZ: So perfect.

WHITE: [*Laughs*] All right, well, thanks for answering those questions about fear and Sources of Strength.

RODRIGUEZ: Thanks! 🍎

“I need to send this to Mackenzie.”



I'm Not All That Scary!

Ms. Michelle Pratt and
Emilee Stark talk small
towns, spaghetti straps,
and getting into trouble

“I’m gonna have a lot of
shake-my-head moments.”



*Interview by EMILEE STARK.
Photography by JUSTINE ZYLLA.*

EMILEE STARK: How are you doing so far?

MS. MICHELLE PRATT: So far, so good! I'm happy it's Friday.

STARK: I know, me too. How was your fall break?

PRATT: My fall break was good. I got some doctor's appointments in, I got my eyes checked. Yeah, I got the oil changed in my car.

STARK: I need to get that done. *[Laughs]*

PRATT: All those things that you need to get done that you really can't just do while you're here.

STARK: Yeah, yeah, I get that. Well, again, thank you so much for letting us do this, for interviewing you for the *Potluck*. I know that Nick [Ziegler, *Potluck's* Editor] has said that this issue is going to be more like fear-themed since Halloween's next week. What's your favorite thing about Halloween?

PRATT: I think one of my favorite things about Halloween is seeing the joy on people's faces as they're going around and trick-or-treating. You know, everybody's in a good mood. Y'know, the kids are having a great time, and they actually get to spend time with people that they care about, parents make time for their kids for trick-or-treating, so it's a fun thing to watch. I love the fact that we're starting to decorate more outside for Halloween, too.

STARK: Oh, nice.

PRATT: Because I love to decorate outside for Christmas, and now we're starting to go a little crazy on Halloween.

STARK: That's fun! Have you ever done, like, a trunk-or-treat kind of thing with a church or whatever?

PRATT: No, no.

STARK: Oh, really? Those are fun.

PRATT: So, I originally, I grew up in a very small town in Nebraska.

STARK: Oh, okay.

PRATT: The town, the whole population was 1,200 people.

STARK: Wow, that is tiny.

PRATT: Okay. So trick-or-treating in a small town like that, you go to every single house. And because you know every single person's house that you're going to, you know who's living there, and you know all of that. And so it's very personal.

STARK: Oh, fun.

PRATT: It's always been a fun thing growing up that was—you know, we would spend hours trick-or-treating, and we trick-or-treated much later in life than many other people in a larger city do because there's really nothing else to do besides get in trouble.

STARK: *[Laughs]*

PRATT: And if you get in trouble in a small town like that everybody knows who it is, so there's no anonymity in that, and so it's—

STARK: Kind of a community thing, community building kind of thing. That's fun.

PRATT: So sometimes they would do a community haunted house or things like that. So it's always a community, and so trunk-or-treat

to me is just really impersonal.

STARK: Okay. So, Nick had sent me some questions, and a couple of them were like, again, with it being Halloween and whatnot, why do people think you're scarier than most staff? Which, I really don't see you being scary; you're authoritative, and there's a big difference, at least to me, because that's how I've grown up as well. Why do you think people think that?

PRATT: I think for a couple reasons. First of all, my position is inherently built on the negative parts of things. You know, I don't get to go out and find students as they're doing good, necessarily, because I'm dealing with some missteps of students. It's not that students are being bad. I don't feel that any one of our students is a bad student, but I do feel that, you know, we all make mistakes. But I think that people's experience with administrators in similar positions in their previous schools, like in middle school and elementary school, could have something to do with me being scary. You know, the job itself is disciplinarian and, you know, I have to deal with the not-so-fun parts of being a teenager. But I also think that it's because they don't know me, but even I would hope that as students are coming to see me when they have a bad moment in high school, that they learn that I'm not all that scary.

But I don't mind having a little bit of fear in what people think of me, because teachers do use me as, you know, "If you don't stop, I'm going to call Mrs. Pratt." They use me as a threat because they know that, you know, I'm going to sometimes communicate with parents, and sometimes there's consequences involved and things like that. My presence is not inherently a positive thing. Dean of Students, on the other side, can actually be a very positive thing, and I try to be that person more so. I think that there are people that might

just consider me as scary.

STARK: Yeah.

PRATT: And the people who think of me as scary really don't think of me as scary, they just think of me as mean. *[Laughs]*

STARK: Like I said, I've never thought of you as scary or mean, I just thought of you as authoritative, because again, that's what I've grown up with. And so that's how it clicks in my head. I'm like, "Oh hey, she's not trying to be mean, she's not trying to be scary or whatever, she's just being like, 'Hey, you can't do this kind of thing.'"

PRATT: Yeah. And so, I mean, it's my job to enforce the rules. It's my job to make sure that everybody's being safe. It's my job that everybody is where they're supposed to be. And so, sometimes that's dealing with the negative parts of things. So that's where I think I get maybe a negative reputation.

STARK: Yeah.

PRATT: But if there are students who really feel that I am mean and scary, I think, y'know, they've probably had a not-positive experience with me. And that could be something I could improve upon, too, because I don't always want to be scary, but I do want to be heard and very firm on what my expectations are. And some people struggle with firm expectations.

STARK: Well, it could be also that people who think you're mean and scary, they may not have that authoritative person in their life as well. So this is their first experience of it and they're like, "Wait, what's going on?" At least that's the way I see it.

PRATT: I don't ever want a student to walk away from my office and feel like I was com-

**“Are people spraying
that fart spray around here?”**

plete and total terror to them. I want them to know that, “Hey, you know, she means business, but she’s not that mean necessarily.” But I do, you know, shoot straight from the hip, and I don’t sugarcoat things and I tell students as things are, you know, and if I need to sugarcoat, that just isn’t my style. Because I think sometimes when you sugarcoat and try to make it not as scary, then they’re not hearing the true message of what it is. So I need that true message to be there.

STARK: Just kind of being blunt, kind of being obvious with it.

PRATT: Yes, yes.

STARK: Yeah, I get that. Would you change anything about the dress code? Specifically, more on the girls’ end?

PRATT: *[Laughs]*

STARK: Because I have gotten so much crud about that. I’ve gotten so much crap about that, whether it be with a shirt or whatever. And I’m just thinking, that’s not fair to me when half the girls dress the way they do and nothing seems to happen to them.

PRATT: So that’s a personal question!

STARK: Yes.

PRATT: All right. That’s a good question, though, because I think that my job is to make sure that I’m following the network policy. So the network policy is very, is a little different than what I’m enforcing here. I recognize that. The network policy, when it comes to like straps and sleeves, they want something like four inches. And, you know, I do recognize the fact that it’s hard to find something with a sleeve of that long, you know, but I would prefer that dress code not be the spaghetti straps, more of a, you know—some of the tops

I struggle with accepting. When it comes to specifically girls’ clothes, I’m not real comfortable with how low things are cut or how high they are cut.

STARK: I know, it’s stupid.

PRATT: I mean, it makes me uncomfortable, but again, I am of a different generation.

STARK: Right.

PRATT: If I followed the network policy to a tee, none of those things would be allowed. But I have to pick and choose what rules I’m going to enforce, because it’s a hard thing to do. And especially in the middle of the year, if I start changing things. In the next fall or even next January, things might change a little bit. But I am also of the point that if I’m going to enforce a rule, you’re going to know about it beforehand. Since we don’t have Teams anymore, that would have been the way that I would have communicated.

STARK: Oh, that’s frustrating.

PRATT: But I would have to send an e-mail out, we need to put it in the newsletter, or I might put posters up, but I am never going to enforce a new rule without letting you guys know. Does that answer your question a little bit?

STARK: Yeah, no, yeah, absolutely. But I mean, that’s why you see me in jeans and t-shirts all the time, ‘cause everything’s just so...

PRATT: And really, there are some things I’m like, I’m uncomfortable with them. With some people, and it’s not just girls! I mean, there are some things that some boys are wearing as well.

STARK: And you’re just like, why?

PRATT: But I also want to appreciate individuality. And you know, again, I want people to make the right choices for them. And just because it isn't something that I would wear, doesn't mean that it isn't something that that person shouldn't wear.

STARK: Right. It's whatever they feel comfortable in, what they feel like showing in a way.

PRATT: But I would like to enforce it more firmly, if it was my choice, yes. *[Laughs]*

STARK: Okay. Graduating class of 2026, what would you have to say for them?

PRATT: What would I tell them?

STARK: Say, me included. *[Laughs]* Me and Nick included.

PRATT: Use your resources. Life is not going to be easy, and learn where to go when it's not easy. Learn who you can count on and truly trust when it gets difficult, because it's going to get difficult. And it's okay that it gets difficult because it's not meant to be easy; otherwise, they wouldn't call it life. Expect the difficult, but know that you can get through it. I mean, everything that you've gotten through right now and all of the hard times, you're mastering 100%. You've gotten through every single one.

STARK: In one way or another.

PRATT: In one way or another, you've gotten through it. So there's always going to be an opportunity for you to get through it. It just may not be that comfortable, but choose the people that help you along with that ride. Because it's going to be rocky, so wouldn't you want to be in a car with somebody that you trusted rather than somebody who just turns up the music and *laughs* at you? *[Laughs]*

STARK: Yeah! *[Laughs]* That's a good analogy, honestly!

PRATT: I want to be in a car [where] my friend would say, "Hey, put your seatbelt on; it's about ready to get rocky." Laugh still, yes—

STARK: Oh, absolutely.

PRATT: —but look out for me, rather than just look for you to hit your head on the top of the car and laugh at the fact that they set you up for that. Find those people.

STARK: Right, like you're saying, find those people that you can surround yourself with that make you a better person.

PRATT: Yeah.

STARK: Yeah, absolutely. All right, well, thank you. That is all the things I have.

PRATT: Wow, that's it? Okay, if you think of anything else, you know, e-mail me, whatever. You can come by. Hopefully, I won't get too crazy around here, but you're welcome to come on back. The week before Halloween, it might be a little crazy.

STARK: *[Laughs]* Just a little bit.

PRATT: I'm gonna have a lot of shake-my-head moments. *[Laughs]*

STARK: Oh, I have no doubt, I have no doubt! *[Laughs]*

PRATT: We had a really bad smell in the school earlier this week.

STARK: The lunch boxes? Yes.

PRATT: But there were some of us who were like, "Okay, is it just early Halloween? Are people spraying that fart spray around here?"



STARK: *[Laughs]*

PRATT: "We have to decide, is this real or is this something else?"

STARK: I was wondering what was going to happen with those lunch boxes. I've noticed in the last month.

PRATT: Feel free to ask me any questions in the future.

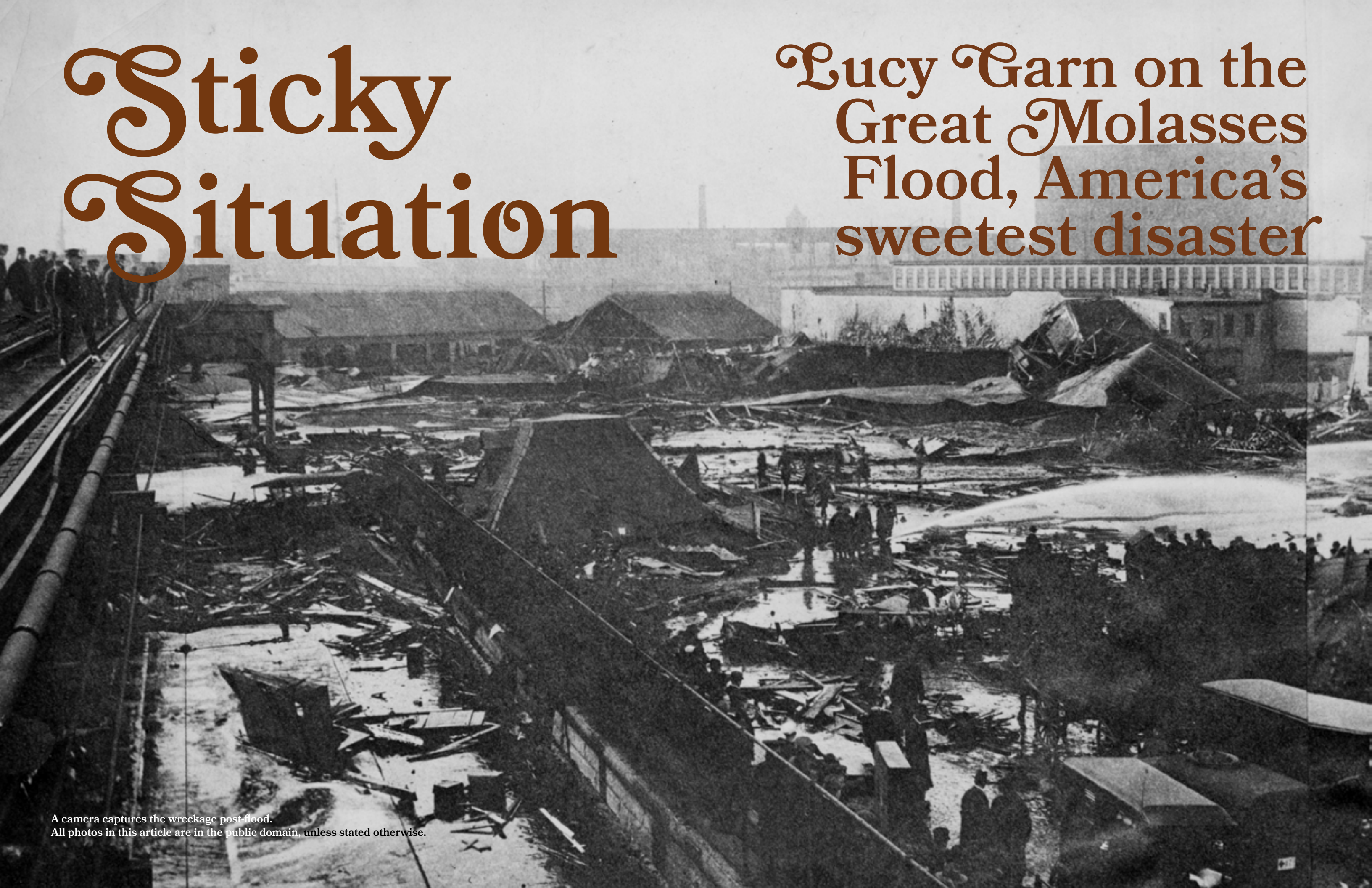
STARK: Well, thank you so much for this.

PRATT: You're welcome. 🥒

Sticky Situation

Lucy Garn on the
Great Molasses
Flood, America's
sweetest disaster

A camera captures the wreckage post-flood.
All photos in this article are in the public domain, unless stated otherwise.



Introduction

At 12:30 p.m. on January 15, 1919 in the North End residential area of Boston, a tank holding 2.3 million gallons of molasses burst, sending a wave of thick, heavy molasses crashing over the neighborhood and killing twenty-one people, along with injuring many others and destroying homes, buildings, and even a set of elevated railroad tracks. United States Industrial Alcohol (USIA), the company that built the tank, was found liable for cutting corners on safety, a landmark moment that paved the way for stricter construction regulations and increased corporate liability. Though there were multiple factors contributing to the flood, the most prominent was the tank’s cheap construction.

Background

Molasses can be fermented to produce ethanol, a critical ingredient in munitions. In the mid-1910s, demand was quickly rising for ethanol due to its uses in World War I, and USIA needed somewhere to store all the molasses they were using to supply this demand. The tank was constructed in 1915, supervised by Arthur Jell, and situated in Boston’s North End neighborhood.

During its time there, it received periodic shipments of molasses and was almost never completely full, only being filled to capacity a few times. However, a few days before the disaster, the tank was refilled to the top, putting extreme stress on the tank’s walls and likely contributing to the flood.

Construction

To understand why the tank burst, a variety of factors must be analyzed, starting with the construction. From the very beginning, the tank was not structurally sound: it was cheaply constructed, poorly supervised, and did not comply with even the lenient regulations of the time. Moreover, thorough testing was not conducted and warning signs were largely ignored.

Steel

Many know steel as being an iron alloy, but not many know what other elements compose this alloy: carbon, manganese, and small amounts of other elements. Manganese is a crucial part of steel, imparting strength and stability and decreasing brittleness¹. The steel used to build the tank had a low manganese content, which raised its transition point (the point at which a metal becomes brittle rather than malleable) to a temperature that could have been as high as 59 degrees Fahrenheit. When the tank burst, the steel was below the transition temperature, making it brittle and potentially contributing to the disaster². The lack of manganese can likely be attributed to cost: “[Manganese steel plates] are more expensive than regular steel plates”.³ (Note: This quote was taken from an article on steel plates that are 12-14% manganese, as opposed to the ~2% manganese that would be ideal for the tank. However, the point still stands that high-manganese steel is more expensive than low-manganese steel.) Because of this deficiency, the tank was too brittle to contain large amounts of molasses in Boston weather for long periods of time.

1 William F. Cannon, “Manganese: It Turns Iron into Steel (and Does so Much More),” *Fact Sheet*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.3133/fs20143087>.
2 Mark Rossow, “The Molasses Flood of 1919 and Other Ethical Failures in Engineering,” accessed February 26, 2025, <https://www.cedengineering.ca/userfiles/LE2-010%20-%20The%20Molasses%20Flood%20of%201919%20and%20Other%20Ethical%20Failures%20in%20Engineering%20-%20CA.pdf>.
3 Conquest Steel and Alloys, “Everything You Need to Know about Manganese Steel Plates,” *Conquest Steel and Alloys*, December 8, 2023, <https://www.csteelindia.com/blog/everything-you-need-to-know-about-manganese-steel-plates/>.

Testing

The tank’s testing was inadequate: to test for leaks, the 2.3 million gallon tank was filled with six inches of water, which is a far less dense substance than molasses. No leaks were reported to be found after this was conducted, but when the tank was filled with molasses, it demonstrated otherwise, with the sticky brown liquid dripping out of the seams of the tank to the point where children would come up to the tank with spoons and eat the molasses straight off the steel walls. After receiving complaints about the leaking tank, USIA painted the tank brown to match the molasses color and hide the leaks.

Warning Signs

Multiple warning signs were observed, such as groaning noises when the tank was filled with molasses. These red flags were largely ignored. When a laborer brought shards of steel from the tank walls, his concerns were dismissed, being told that the tank was still standing and there was nothing that could be done about it.⁷

Regulations

At the time of the tank’s construction, regulations were concerningly lax. The tank did not need a permit to be constructed, and questions were not raised about placing the tank in a residential area.⁸ However, despite such relaxed regulations, USIA still found a way to be noncompliant: the steel used to

The steel’s composition was not the only weakness of the tank. The rivets holding it together were not reinforced, making them weak points of the tank, and evidence suggests that “the rivet hole at the 12 o’clock position above the manhole was very highly stressed”.⁴ These stressed rivets, along with a crack forming in the tank, is considered to be the origin of the tank’s failure.

Additionally, the steel was not thick enough to contain the molasses. The thickness of the steel walls ranged from 0.31-0.67 inches, which was “at least 50 percent too thin” to contain the weight of the dense molasses, even by the relaxed standards of the day.⁵ This may have contributed to the aforementioned crack, and illustrates USIA’s negligence and disregard for standards.

Supervision

Arthur Jell, USIA’s treasurer, was placed in charge of supervising the building of the tank, which was a bad decision, because he was highly unqualified for the job. He had no experience with engineering or architecture, and he rushed the tank’s construction, as a failure on the project would be a significant setback on a promotion he was hoping for.⁶ Jell’s rush to complete the tank combined with poor weather led to him cutting corners and conducting insufficient testing.

4 Ronald Mayville, “The Great Boston Molasses Tank Failure of 1919,” Civil + Structural Engineer, September 1, 2014, <https://csengineermag.com/the-great-boston-molasses-tank-failure-of-1919/>.
5 Peter Schworm, “Nearly a Century Later, Structural Flaw in Molasses Tank Revealed,” Boston Globe, January 14, 2015, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/01/14/nearly-century-later-new-insight-into-cause-great-molasses-flood/CNqLYc0T58kNo3MxP872iM/story.html>.
6 Samantha Geib, “Research Strategies Award Essay: The Boston Molasses Disaster,” 2012, https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=ames_award.
7 Stephen Puleo, *Dark Tide* (Beacon Press, 2003), page 3.
8 Ben Kessler, “The Great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919 Killed 21 after 2 Million Gallon Tank Erupted,” NBC News (NBC News, January 14, 2019), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/great-boston-molasses-flood-1919-killed-21-after-2-million-n958326>.

The molasses tank is cut open with an acetylene torch, to search for bodies post-flood.

“The most long-lasting effect of the flood was the smell, which some say was still noticeable on a hot summer day for decades.”

- Lucy Garn

build the tank was too thin.⁹ Later, it was calculated that the stress on the tank was alarmingly high (see table 1).

Stress Type	Calculated Stress (ksi)	Allowable Stress (ksi)
Tension	26.7	16
Rivet Shear	15.4	10
Rivet bearing	32.4	18

Table 1¹⁰. Calculated stress compared to allowable stress on the molasses tank.

Temperature Changes

The flood happened on an unusually warm January day. Boston winters are not generally known for being particularly warm; snowstorms and cold temperatures are common, so a 40 degree day was likely welcomed by residents. Preceding the flood, temperatures had rapidly climbed from 2 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit, a change that likely impacted the outcome of the disaster in multiple ways, increasing the fatality rate and potentially even being a direct contributor to the flood.

Nice Day for a Walk

Because the weather was pleasantly warm, it is likely that those living in the North End neighborhood were inclined to eat lunch outside, go for a walk, or simply enjoy the sunshine. It is known that when the flood struck, six city workers were killed on their lunch

9 Tony Fishwick, “A Sticky Problem - New Light Shone on Boston’s Great Molasses Spillage.,” *Loss Prevention Bulletin* (Institution of Chemical Engineers, December 2018), https://www.icheme.org/media/7207/lpb264_pg24.pdf, pages 1-2.

10 Ronald Mayville, “The Great Boston Molasses Tank Failure of 1919,” *Civil + Structural Engineer*, September 1, 2014, <https://csengineermag.com/the-great-boston-molasses-tank-failure-of-1919/>.

11 Tony Fishwick, “A Sticky Problem - New Light Shone on Boston’s Great Molasses Spillage.,” *Loss Prevention Bulletin* (Institution of Chemical Engineers, December 2018), https://www.icheme.org/media/7207/lpb264_pg24.pdf, page 3.

12 Nevena Misljenovic et al., “Rheological Characterization of Liquid Raw Materials for Solid Biofuel Production,” January 1, 2013, 7, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258158394_Rheological_characterization_of_liquid_raw_materials_for_solid_biofuel_production.

13 Ibid.

break. Unfortunately, being outside may have decreased chances of survival, even if not all of those killed were outdoors. Some were indoors and crushed by falling buildings or asphyxiated on molasses, but the extra layer of a building may have helped to protect against the sticky current.

Viscosity Dangers

The tank had recently been refilled with a new shipment of molasses, which had been warmed to make transport easier. At the time of the flood, the molasses was probably around five degrees warmer than the surrounding air, making it approximately 45 degrees Fahrenheit (7.2 degrees Celsius).¹¹ As it rushed through the streets and as the day grew colder, the molasses grew colder, too, which increased its viscosity (see figure 1).¹²

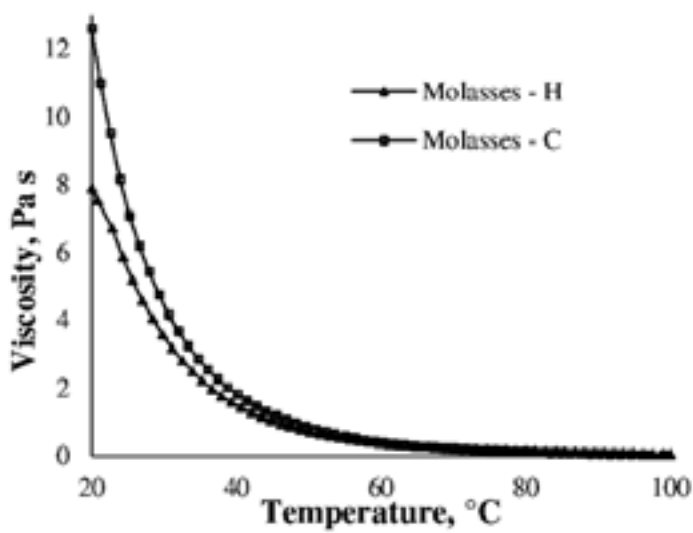


Figure 1¹³. Graph demonstrating molasses’ viscosity increasing as temperature decreases

es, approximating an e-x graph shape.

Because the molasses started out warmer, it was able to spread further through the streets, and as it rapidly cooled, it became almost impossible to escape. If the flood had happened in the summer with higher temperatures, the molasses would be thinner and easier to escape from, further demonstrating how the weather impacted the outcome of the flood.

Additionally, molasses is a non-Newtonian fluid: when more pressure is applied to it, its viscosity decreases, and vice versa. The amount of pressure that gravity exerted on the molasses when the tank burst allowed the molasses to have a far lower viscosity than is often observed: its viscosity would have been far thinner, allowing the molasses to spread through the streets almost like water. However, victims of the flood were not able to apply the same pressure to the molasses, causing the fluid to behave more like the thick, sticky molasses most often observed.

Temperature Expansion

Another effect of the warm temperatures was expansion. When fluids increase in temperature, they expand, and since the tank full of cold molasses had just been refilled with warm molasses, the increased temperature may have caused the molasses to expand and strain the walls of the tank. It is unknown how much of an effect this potential factor had on the flood, as the main factors are determined to be the poor construction and safety factors of the tank itself.

14 Tony Fishwick, “A Sticky Problem - New Light Shone on Boston’s Great Molasses Spillage,” *Loss Prevention Bulletin* (Institution of Chemical Engineers, December 2018), https://www.icheme.org/media/7207/lpb264_pg24.pdf, page 3.

15 Benjamin Simonds, Discussion on Molasses Fermentation, interview by Lucy Garn, May 8, 2024.

16 Stephen Puleo, *Dark Tide* (Beacon Press, 2003), page 97.

Fermentation

When stored, microorganisms can ferment the sugars in molasses, creating carbon dioxide and heat as byproducts. If significant fermentation had occurred in the tank, it is possible that the pressure from the carbon dioxide buildup could have contributed to the tank’s collapse. However, others argue that the low temperatures, probably about 45 degrees Fahrenheit in the tank¹⁴, would have made the effects of fermentation negligible.¹⁵

Though fermentation almost certainly occurred in the tank, it likely played little to no role in the tank’s collapse, and the tank would have eventually failed even without its effects. Additionally, since the tank had recently been opened to be refilled, any preexisting pressure would have been relieved.

Flood

The pressure eventually became too much for the poorly-designed tank, and around 12:30 pm on January 15, 1919, the tank burst open, the rivets flying out of the tank with a sound reminiscent of a machine gun; witnesses described the sound of the wave like “roaring surf” or “a runaway two-horse team smashing through a fence” and the force of the wave could be felt as a rumbling in the ground.¹⁶ Property damage totaled over \$100 million in today’s money, including flattened office buildings, homes, and an elevated railway (see figure 2).

Molasses was waist-deep, and the 35 mph wave swept people and horses off their feet. Some even reported being picked up by a rush of air and thrown several feet. Debris was everywhere, carried along by the flood.



Figure 2. Wreckage of Boston's elevated railway after the flood.

This debris was responsible for many of the injuries sustained.

Deaths

Twenty-one people, ranging from 10 to 78 years old, died in the flood. Three of these deaths were children: Maria Di Stasio (age 10), Pasquale Iantosca (age 10), and Eric Laird (age 17). Many victims were covered in molasses to the point of being unrecognizable, and the chilly weather only made recovery efforts more difficult. The last victim to be recognized, Cesar Nicolo, was identified four

months after the initial flood when he was found in Boston Harbor. Additionally, animals died from the flood, including twelve horses and an unknown number of household pets such as dogs and cats.

Cleanup

When fresh water did not work, salt water from a fireboat was used to scrub the town of molasses, and sand was used to absorb any remaining molasses. The cleanup effort took weeks, and the water in Boston Harbor remained brown until summer. The most

long-lasting effect of the flood, though, was the smell, which some say was still noticeable on a hot summer day for decades after the initial flood.

Dorr v. United States Industrial Alcohol

After the flood, a class-action lawsuit was filed against USIA, entitled *Dorr, Trustee v. United States Industrial Alcohol Company*. It is estimated that around 110-125 separate lawsuits were filed against USIA and later condensed into the *Dorr* case, which included the testimonies of 3,000 witnesses. USIA argued that Italian anarchists had bombed the tank, potentially protesting capitalism, war, or weapons production.

However, no evidence was found for a bomb and, after six years of the case, the Suffolk County Superior Court ruled in favor of the prosecution, declaring that USIA was at fault for the tank's failure.¹⁷ The families of those who had died in the flood received varying amounts of money, averaging around \$7,000 (\$350,000 in 2025 dollars).¹⁸

This outcome is significant because the plaintiffs were expected to lose the case; courts of the early 20th century were often biased toward corporations. Commonly, businesses were negligent and did not suffer repercussions for it. Therefore, when *Dorr* managed to secure a payout for victims' families, it set precedence and opened possibilities for similar cases.

This also paved the way for stricter construction regulations and accountability in engineering, and codes such as zoning laws, requiring city inspection before a structure's use, and proper supervision over blueprints and engineering plans. Additionally, the

¹⁷ "Boston Legal History: The Great Molasses Disaster," Chambers Associate, accessed March 9, 2025, <https://www.chambers-associate.com/where-to-start/commercial-awareness/regional-insights/boston-legal-history-the-great-molasses-disaster>.
¹⁸ Ibid.

outcome set a new standard of liability for companies, helping to make sure that similar disasters do not occur and imposing consequences for negligence or other offenses.

Legacy

Today, the site where the tank stood is a baseball field, and a small plaque commemorates the disaster. The flood's 100th anniversary was in January of 2019, when several Boston newspapers published articles commemorating the disaster. Additionally, Stephen Puleo published his book *Dark Tide* in 2003, which is one of the only books written for adults on the topic.

Conclusion

The Boston Molasses Flood had multiple factors contributing to the tank's failure, but its primary shortcoming was the poor construction of the tank, having been built with subpar steel and unreinforced rivets, in addition to being poorly tested due to the rushed schedule and tight budget set for the project. Environmental factors, such as temperature and potentially fermentation also may have played a role, but had the tank been better constructed, this disaster, taking twenty-one lives and injuring hundreds more, would not have happened. Though this event happened over 100 years ago, its influence on construction regulations and liability still has an effect today. 🧐



A pot of sop merah.

Sop Merah!

Felicity Lim on Chinese Indonesians, immigrant pride, and delicious soup

**Writing and photography by
FELICITY LIM.**

The recipes in this section typically come from cooking blogs, forum posts, or family and friends. To account for allergies and dietary restrictions or to make recipes more cost effective when cooking for Pan-Asian, common ingredients such as meat and nuts are usually excluded or substituted.

Both the modified and original versions are accounted for here. The *Ingredient* and *Instruction* paragraphs represent the original recipe, occasionally reformatted for clarity. Any deviations from the original and our own notes on the process are included under *How We Modified It*. All references are combined into a single bibliography at the very end.

If you decide to follow along, we advise reading through both sections before cooking. Have fun!

Sop merah from Indonesia

This recipe is my oma's. I grew up eating sop merah, and distinctly remember warm cauliflower and the slightly sweet taste of tomato broth. It ranks high among my favorite soups, and is surprisingly specific to my family's origins.

Ingredients

- Vegetable oil
- 2 tbsp salt
- 3 tsp white pepper
- 3 tsp ground nutmeg
- 3 tsp ground coriander

- 3 tsp garlic powder
- 2 tsp Chicken powder (optional)
- 2 tbsp White/granulated sugar
- 4 tbsp tomato ketchup
- 3 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tbsp or 4-5 cloves minced garlic
- 1 quarter red onion, cut into medium-sized chunks
- 1lb carrots, peeled
- ½ - 1lb green beans, ends cut off
- 1 head of cauliflower, cut into florets
- 1 can of unsalted peas
- 1-2 chicken breasts, or about 1lb (or as much as you have on hand)
- 2 cans of Vienna sausage (save the liquid!)
- 1 box chicken broth and 2 quarts water

Instructions

- Wash your hands.
- Wash all vegetables, and drain and rinse the peas. Set the peas aside.
- Peel and quarter the carrots through the middle, and cut into chunks about ½ an inch long. Trim both ends of the green beans (feel free to peel the strings if using both hands to do so), and cut sections about ½ inch long. Cut the cauliflower into florets.
- Reserving the liquid, slice the Vienna

sausages about ¼ of an inch thick. Cube the chicken slightly larger than your carrots. Feel free to toss the chicken in coriander, garlic powder, white pepper, and salt to marinate while you carry out step 5.

Cut the quarter of red onion in half, and then in thirds, and peel garlic cloves. If using a mortar and pestle, crush/flatten both with pestle and grind until combined into a mostly smooth paste. If using a blender or food processor, blend the onion and garlic until mostly smooth. Add a small amount of vegetable oil to get things going if the onions get stuck. Set aside.

In a medium or large stockpot and on medium-high heat, add a bit of vegetable oil (around 2 tsp). Once hot, sautee the chicken until white on all sides, but not cooked all the way through. Set aside.

In the same pot, add a small amount of oil. Once hot, add the red onion and garlic paste, and stir for about 2 minutes until aromatic. Add the carrots and stir continuously for about 3 minutes, until the carrots are partially cooked (less than halfway).

Add in your chicken stock and as much water as you'd like. Now would be the time to determine how much soup you'd like relative to your veggies. I end up using approximately 2 quarts. Leave soup alone on medium-high heat until carrots are halfway cooked.

Once carrots are half cooked (slightly firm but pokeable with a fork), add green beans to pot. Leave alone until green beans are likewise halfway cooked.

Once green beans are halfway cooked, add in cauliflower, Vienna sausage liquid, and all of the seasonings above *except for sugar*. The measurements are starting points—the exact amount used in our own soup is un-

known.

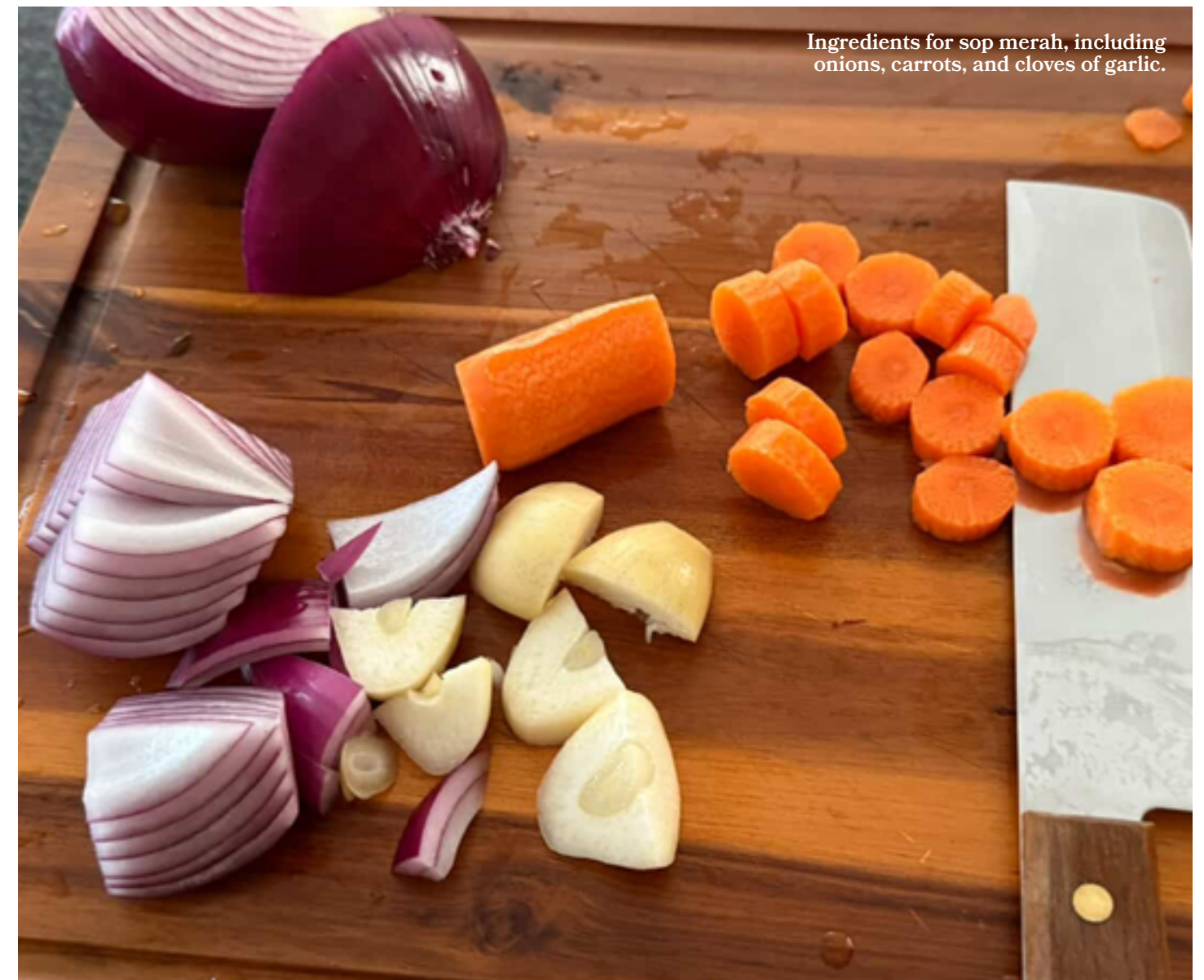
When soup is brought to a boil and the veggies are slightly softer, add the chicken breast and Vienna sausage. Let the pot come to a boil once more, add the peas, and check on the firmness of each vegetable. Add sugar and continue simmering until they reach your desired texture.

Adjust the seasoning if necessary. The final soup should retain its flavor of nutmeg, garlic, and tomato, and should be savory and sweet as opposed to salty. Serve atop warm white rice, or alongside bread.

What is sop merah?

Sop merah, which translates literally to red soup, is an Indonesian tomato soup which typically features onion, carrots, peas, cauliflower, and a type of meat. Evidently, in my household sop merah is made with the addition of green beans, chicken Vienna sausage, and diced chicken. Though green beans are slightly pricey, Vienna sausage is cheap and a small amount of chicken breast or thigh can appear plentiful among the other ingredients. Diced canned button mushrooms can also be added.

Though we initially believed that it was a recipe my grandmother made up, sop merah originated from Surabaya, capital of East Java. Many bloggers designate it as specifically Chinese-Indonesian. Sop merah is not part of the typical Indonesian diet—that is, if a national Indonesian diet exists beyond celebratory staple foods like nasi kuning—and may not be recognized by Indonesians from other islands. Accordingly, it doesn't have a precise origin and is unlikely to have been noted in the historical record, in contrast with tom yum and pakoras from the April 2025 edition of *Potluck*.



Ingredients for sop merah, including onions, carrots, and cloves of garlic.

What is certain is that colonization and interracial marriage largely influenced its flavor profile. Tomato paste or puree in the soup is a step of Dutch invention which mirrors a Dutch tomato soup (which would contain meatballs), and Dutch contact with Indonesia is extensive. Dutch soon-to-be merchant and explorer Cornelis de Houtman, along with a fleet of four ships under the Verre Company, reached and established trade relations with rulers in Java, Sumatra, and Bali in 1596. The Dutch East India Company or VOC was consequently founded in 1602 to protect trade interests in the Dutch East Indies (or much of modern-day Indonesia), and Dutch presence would remain a constant and grow in strength

as Indonesia became a source of profit. The common cause of Dutch oppression, political and colonial, would give rise to Indonesian nationalist movements in the 1920s and a united Indonesian identity which still exists today. The Japanese took over Indonesia in 1942, and after their surrender at the close of WWII, Indonesia declared independence on August 17, 1945.

Indonesia is inherently a mixed country, not dissimilar in its diversity and divisions to neighboring Southeast Asian countries. Chinese communities in Indonesia have existed since the 13th century, and immigration increased under Dutch rule as work opportuni-

ties in mines and trading emerged. There are concentrated Chinese communities in West Sumatra, West Kalimantan, and East Java, where my family is from. While discriminatory violence has existed since the deportations of Chinese people from Indo since the 1740s, sinophobic laws and riots have persisted until almost the year 2000.

In 1966, during the tenure of former president Suharto, decrees from various Indonesian leaders began encouraging Chinese people to leave specific provinces. These declarations were soon followed with presidential directives to replace Chinese surnames with Indonesian ones, and in 1967 a ban on all Chinese languages in literature, schools, signage, and for general public use was passed. Chinese religious expression had to take place within one's home.

Since the 70s, anti-Chinese riots resulting in the looting and burning of businesses have occurred frequently. The most recent wave of violence, on May 4 of 1998, was sparked by student protests against Suharto calling him to resign. Clashes between protesters and the police spilled over into the looting of local businesses. Tensions were reignited by the murder of four anti-Suharto student protesters by the police less than two weeks after. Violence spread throughout Jakarta, Solo, and Medan over the next three days, with most fatalities belonging to rioters who had burned to death. In addition to the burning of businesses, some Indos who merely resembled Chinese people were likewise attacked. Suharto consequentially resigned on May 21st of the same year. The violence and sinophobic rhetoric has scaled back and prohibitive laws have been repealed under the new administration, but as expected, suspicion has not disappeared.

All of this is to say that it has taken more hardiness and grace than I know for my

parents and relatives to constantly witness their community be resented. Growing up I was told to stand my ground, and retrospectively it's both the experience of being an immigrant in America and a foreigner in the eyes of your own country that has shaped the resilience I was raised in. These circumstances are not unique to Chinese Indonesians, and are experienced very similarly by minorities throughout the world. Through them it is clear that there is fearlessness in having unmistakable pride in who and what you are—in keeping your story alive through something as simple as soup.

What's that ingredient?
Chicken powder

Lee Kum Kee's chicken bouillon powder, or what my parents and I (and thousands of other Southeast Asians) colloquially call "chicken powder," is a quintessential ingredient in our home cooking. We use it on eggs, stir-fried veggies, chicken marinade, and soup. In its huge, dense tins, the flavor of chicken powder is noticeably different from bouillon cubes or refrigerated paste. While non-Asian chicken seasonings (as far as I'm aware) lean on celery, onion, and herbs as aromatics, chicken powder tastes most strongly of chicken and almost has a peppery taste to it. I feel that its side ingredients are much more subtle, leaving room to adjust the seasoning of your dish or use it on a variety of things without clashing. I have a very clear bias. Try as many bouillon brands as your heart desires.

The love for soup is almost ubiquitous among all societies and eras, and is the use of dried or preserved stock. Methods of making soup convenient stretch back to the Magyar warriors of Hungary in the 14th century, who boiled, sun dried, and ground salted beef into powder to be carried in small bags. Later on, and likely without influence from the Mag-

yars, British sailors and during the 18th and 19th centuries carried portable soup made by slow cooking broth repeatedly and reducing until gelatinized, then drying into cakes, and in the late 18th century, British loyalist Benjamin Thompson created solid dehydrated cubes of meat and bone stock to feed to the Bavarian army. In the late 1800s, companies Maggi, OXO, and Knorr would develop unique processes and formulas for deriving and preserving flavors, and release bouillon cubes to the European market in the decades following. Contemporarily, bouillon powder is a polarizing preference among different generations of cooks—while convenient, many worry about sodium content and the loss of traditional methods of rendering bone broths and fermented paste. In my household it's used sparingly, and sometimes left out of sop merah.

How we modified it

The chicken breast, Vienna sausage, and chicken powder were omitted to make this recipe club-friendly. The steps still apply in the same order and with the same timing, just excluding the chicken and sausage. While I accidentally used chicken broth instead of vegetable, thereby defeating the purpose of excluding chicken, any unseasoned boxed broth should work fine. If boxed broth isn't available, chicken bouillon cubes (with some adjustments to seasoning) could be a good substitute.

There are a few things I strongly advise against. Never listen to anyone who suggests adding cornstarch— a mix of jasmine and basmati rice soak up the soup much better and adding cornstarch at the wrong time may throw off the consistency. Adding pasta rather than rice and referring to sop merah as Indonesian minestrone is, in my opinion, of the devil. 🍲

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Kevin Bogan

The *Much Ado* lead calls up his co-star Charlee Shewmaker to talk worms, moths, and why he's *not* watching *The Exorcist*

“The amount of times I've had grasshopper guts slung over me is impressive.”



- Kevin Bogan

Interview by CHARLEE SHEWMAKER. Photography by NICHOLAS ZIEGLER. Makeup by MAX BRODJE and CHARLEE SHEWMAKER. Special thanks to JOSH SCHUTTE.

CHARLEE SHEWMAKER: Okay, so, I guess—I really only have three questions as I’ve mentioned. The first of which is: what is one of your greatest fears?

KEVIN BOGAN: I really have, like, two main answers to this. One of them is definitely more serious than the other. I’ll start with the more serious one. I’m really afraid of losing my friends and family and not being able to do anything about it.

SHEWMAKER: Yeah.

BOGAN: The second one is crickets. I’m absolutely terrified of crickets. Crickets, grasshoppers, and moths. Can’t do them.

SHEWMAKER: And—I know the answer to this obviously—is there a specific reason that you have this fear?

BOGAN: Friends and family, yes. I just don’t think anyone wants to lose their friends and family.

SHEWMAKER: That one, I feel, is rather self-explanatory.

BOGAN: Crickets, yes. There is a specific reason, as well as moths and grasshoppers. Grasshoppers is the simplest, because I mow lawns. That’s one of my businesses I run, and the amount of times I’ve had grasshopper guts slung over me is kind of impressive. As well as the fact that I’ve had grasshoppers jump under my shirt before, and so I’ll be walking, and then I’ll just feel these feet along my stomach or back, and I just lose my mind.

SHEWMAKER: You know what? I feel as though that’s valid.

BOGAN: Yeah, crickets is because of my mother. She’s also terrified of crickets and passed that fear on to me.

SHEWMAKER: Okay.

BOGAN: Finally, moths is because I went to a summer camp, I was leading. We also had a tornado and a hailstorm that year, but the worst thing was the fact that there were hundreds—close to thousands, probably—of moths in our camp every night. And you would climb into your sleeping bag and then just feel the flutter of wings around your body. It was horrendous.

SHEWMAKER: Ew. Yeah, no, see, I was going to poke some fun, but I feel as though both of those, considering your experiences, are kind of valid, actually. I’m also not really in a place to judge, considering one of my greatest fears is worms.

BOGAN: Yeah. I mean, God forbid they decompose you.

SHEWMAKER: I—they’re unnatural! They don’t have arms, they don’t have a head, and when you cut them in half, they’re not dead. Like, that’s just not how—

BOGAN: Okay, hear me out. Snakes don’t have arms, they don’t have legs, they do have a head, though, I’ll give you that. There’s some species of newts where you can cut them into a couple hundred pieces, and they will grow into a couple hundred newts. Why are we not afraid of those? Okay.

SHEWMAKER: Because they check at least one other box. Like snakes, they have heads, newts, they have arms *and* heads. Worms just have *none of it*.

BOGAN: I also really enjoyed *A Quiet Place*. It is well done. I’ve watched all three of the movies and most of the way through the video game.

SHEWMAKER: Yeah, I personally have seen neither of those movies, but I have heard pretty good things from people who have watched them. So definitely on my list for some of the next horror movies I watch.

BOGAN: Highly recommend it. I will say, the other major horror thing that I’ve watched is *Stranger Things*.

SHEWMAKER: Oh, I guess that does fall into the category of horror.

BOGAN: I believe it does, especially with season four, all of Vecna’s stuff.

SHEWMAKER: Yeah.

BOGAN: I’m afraid of grandfather clocks now. Like, I hear a grandfather clock and I’m out.

SHEWMAKER: Really?

BOGAN: It was, it was when all the spiders came crawling out at the grandfather clock in the fourth season for me that I was out. People’s eyes just pop back into their heads; your eyes should not go into your head or really out of your head. Your eyes should just stay in your eye sockets and be happy.

SHEWMAKER: Well, the last question I had prepared, you kind of already started going into. Just [what are] types of horror movies you don’t like or don’t recommend?

BOGAN: It’s not even that I don’t recommend them. I just don’t want to get into that. I’m okay if I go my whole life and never watch *The Exorcist*.

BOGAN: Okay, I’mma strongly disagree with you, but...

SHEWMAKER: I feel like in order for me to not be scared of it, it has to check at least one of the boxes. I will say snakes freak me out, but not to the same degree worms do.

BOGAN: I love snakes. Snakes are so cool. I remember I was in second grade and I found a bullsnake at the playground near my house, and I’d been watching too much of the Kentucky Wildman [*Call of the Wildman*, the reality TV show] recently, and I got a giant stick and went and I picked up the snake with the stick and then just took him over to the grass and let him run. I love snakes. They’re danger noodles.

SHEWMAKER: I think they’re cool in concept. I just don’t want to be within, like, a 12-foot radius of them.

BOGAN: You know what? Fair.

SHEWMAKER: Well, now that we kind of talked about that a little bit, one of the other parameters or ideas I was given to talk about was horror movies. Now, I know you don’t necessarily watch too many horror movies, but I wanted to ask if you had a favorite.

BOGAN: I watch quite a chunk of monster movies and zombie movies, but evil horror, *The Exorcist*, *Longlegs*, stuff like that, is just not up my alley.

SHEWMAKER: Yeah.

BOGAN: So, if we’re talking monster horror, one that I watched relatively recently that I thought was just really well done was *28 Days Later*.

SHEWMAKER: Oh! Okay.

Vermin

SHEWMAKER: Yeah, and I wasn't necessarily saying you don't recommend *The Exorcist*. I was just saying if there are other movies that you don't recommend or have seen and admit that it isn't worth people's time, yada yada, et cetera.

BOGAN: I don't know; I'm a big movie fan. It does not take much for a movie to make me happy. So I'm probably not the best person to ask that question.

SHEWMAKER: Okay.

BOGAN: One of the movies I've seen that I actually really enjoyed is a movie called *Beast*. It stars Idris Elba and it's about this family who gets stranded on an African game drive and gets hunted by this lion. And that was well done, pretty freaky. I enjoyed that.

SHEWMAKER: That's cool. The only horror movie I genuinely have disliked, I suppose there's two of them, but for very different reasons. I don't know if you've ever watched a movie called *Good Boy* [the 2022 Norwegian film directed by Viljar Bøe]? It's more of a psychological thriller than anything.

BOGAN: I've heard of that. That's the dog one, where it's a dog watching his owner get possessed?

SHEWMAKER: No, that's a new movie coming out [directed by Ben Leonberg]. It might have the same name, actually, but the one I'm talking about, it's not even in English. I'm trying to remember what language it is. It's a movie about this guy who essentially forces people to be his dog. And it gets really creepy, really fast, especially if you're paying attention to the subtitles. That one just kind of messed me up a little bit. It was really well done for what it was, but it was quite a strange movie. And then a simply bad horror movie, which I'm going to rope you into watching at some

point, it's called *The Cult of Humpty Dumpty*.

BOGAN: Oh?

SHEWMAKER: I'm pretty sure it's some sort of college film, and oh my gosh, it...is an experience. Not a good one, but an experience, nonetheless.

BOGAN: ...Interesting. A movie that I really want to watch that I just haven't gotten around to yet is this one called *Dangerous Animals*, and it's about this serial killer who takes people out to look at sharks and then kills them and feeds them to the sharks.

SHEWMAKER: That is a really interesting concept, I don't know if I've ever heard that before.

BOGAN: It came out this year, and from what I've seen of it and heard of it, it was pretty good. So I want to watch it, I just haven't gotten around to it yet.

SHEWMAKER: Well, I definitely have a few more things to add to my list after tonight.

BOGAN: I think that might be enough time, we've been doing this for 15 minutes.

SHEWMAKER: Okay, hopefully that should be enough.

BOGAN: I mean, it surely has to be. [*Potluck's* Editor] Nick [Ziegler]'s a pretty talented guy; he can get what he wants out of this. Also, hi Nick!

SHEWMAKER: Hi, Nick!

BOGAN: You're listening to all of this back, and I honestly don't want to know how bad it is. 🧀





“I’m afraid of
grandfather
clocks now.”

Second Course!

Fiction, Poetry, and Art

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“Jumpscare”

A flash
horror fiction
anthology:
read if you
dare!

Angel Alvarez
“The Caller”

Every night at exactly 3:12 a.m., Jamie’s phone rang once — just one buzz — and stopped. No number. No missed call. Just the vibration that woke him every time. He thought it was a glitch until he noticed something strange: each night, the ring came one minute later than the night before. 3:13. 3:14. 3:15.

He joked about it online, even recorded it one night. When he played the recording back, the faint sound of breathing filled the silence right before the ring.

Then a whisper:

“Almost there.”

Last night, it rang at 3:59.

Tonight, it should be 4:00.

That’s the time he usually leaves for work.

Anonymous Theater Kid

In the true crime stories that I watch on TV, like on 48 Hours or something similar, people have trusted the wrong person and ended up dead. Recently, one story I saw where a young woman owed a drug gang some money and went door-to-door asking for money. She got to an old woman’s house and got some money from her, but noticed she had more money in her purse, so she grabbed a knife and stabbed her, hit her on the head with the phone, and ran past the old woman’s brother and sister-in-law, who were coming to get her to go shopping. This made me fear giving people money or telling them how much money I have. On the Crime Junkie podcast, there was a story about two women shot to death in their apartment in Hobart, Indiana on November 4, 2022. Investigators determined that the killer likely got in the apartment through an unlocked sliding glass door. That scared me because where can I be

“Now you see
5,000 Labubus
dancing to ‘Baby’
by Justin Bieber.”

from a story
by Leah Garrison

safe if not even in the building that I live in? And that’s why I don’t give people my address, and only meet in public spaces where there are multiple security cameras. There are some crime stories where the victim gets horribly mutilated, and their mutilated parts are dumped near interstate highways. This absolutely terrified me and made me not want to drive on the interstate or anywhere near it because I thought I might see a dead body there one day. Lastly, there were true crime stories that made to be afraid to go to college. One young woman was found stabbed to death in her apartment in North Dakota on June 3rd, 2007. Her former roommate was charged for her murder. However, the jury recently reached a verdict of not guilty. That made me wonder: if you can't trust someone who lives with you, then can you really trust anyone?

Nathan Bern
“*Minecraft: Lost Villagers*”

I.

I have been building a village in a mesa biome in my single-player *Minecraft* survival world next to my base for the past 2 months. Just recently, I shipped over some villagers from a nearby desert village and got them situated. They started breeding immediately, and soon I had 15 villagers with houses for all of them. Several *Minecraft* days later, I noticed that my shepherd villager and fisherman villager had disappeared. I looked all over the surrounding landscape and even used Spectator Mode to try to locate them, but couldn't find them anywhere. You might say, "Oh, it was probably just a zombie who got loose." But the village is well lit and surrounded with cobblestone walls measuring 2 blocks thick and 5 blocks tall, with access only by ladders which villagers can't climb. To make it more mysterious, the Shepherd villager was in an enclosed trading stall when he disappeared, with no way to get in or out without the stall

being destroyed. The stall was intact and had a roof, so even if he was infected, he would have still been in the stall, which is also out of reach of the 2 iron golems patrolling the village. With no reasonable explanation, I can only assume that there is something much deeper going on.

II.

As soon as I finished the first report, I logged back into my *Minecraft* world, and within less than a minute of logging back in, my fletcher villager disappeared. Like the Shepherd, he was in an enclosed trading stall. Like the Shepard, I still don't have a logical explanation as to how it happened.

Cash Determan

As a kid, I lived on a golf course and always realized weird things in my house. I'd walk around with all the doors closed, then all of the sudden the doors would be opened when I walked back. I never thought much about it because I was so young. One day, I was home alone while my parents went to the store, and I swore I saw a guy walking around my house. But when I followed him, he was never there. One day, I was walking and I felt something behind me, and when I turned around, I saw my grandpa. I was so happy and started to play with him, and when my parents heard the commotion, they came over to me, and I was playing alone. That day, I saw something that wasn't there, yet it looked so real. Nothing weird ever happened after that.

Curtis Fehr

I was studying last night when I heard my mom call my name from downstairs, but she should have been at work. I yelled, but she didn’t respond. And then I heard her voice right outside of my door. My phone buzzed; it was a text from my mom, “Don’t open the

door. I’m still at work.” The knob began to turn, then all went quiet. Later, when I returned and glanced at the back door, there were muddy footprints leading away from it, then stopping midway across the yard. I ended up moving, but even after my move, strange things kept happening twice in the first month. I heard knocks with the same message from my mom. Finally, I had enough and confronted my mom. I wanted to know what was really going on. She looked scared and pale when I asked. She was confused, and she said, “You have been texting me when you’re not at home.” Now we were both confused when I got another text: “Don’t trust her; I’m outside”. I really started to get scared at this point. I looked at my mom and told her what I had read. Then my phone began to ring, i answered on the other end of the phone was a random voice saying “open the door and let me in” at this point i was frustrated and told the voice to leave me and my mom alone or i will call the cops, my mom was one step ahead of me already on the phone with the police, when the police showed up they didn’t see anything outside that showed someone was there they even searched our phones but the messages were just gone. No matter what the cops said, me and my mom knew it was real. We still haven’t seen or heard anything, but we will never forget those nights that we can’t explain.

Leah Garrison

Most of the time when you hear scary stories, you think about creepy stuff and ghosts. But have you ever feared losing something or things that are not going the way you expect? Well, imagine this.

You wake up. It’s a normal day, and you’re dreading getting out of bed. It’s a Tuesday, and you despise this day because it’s the very beginning of the week, and you are already worn out, and you still have 3 days left.

You show up at school. You’re looking for your friends, but they aren’t anywhere to be found. You think this is normal because your friends are terrible with time management, so they are probably just late, right? So, you keep going about your day and head into your first period. And look at the teacher’s desk, and there is a substitute teacher there. But wait a minute; Mr. Stalto is never gone. Even if he got arrested, he would break out of jail and come to school. So, you are sitting in this class, and the teacher is calling attendance. But one by one, everyone starts leaving. Until you are the only person left. “What the heck is going on?” Now you are confused and start getting a little suspicious. So, you leave class and go look for everyone. You’re walking around, and it’s been around 20 minutes. But wait... the lights go off. You are alone, at school, in the dark. What could be worse? You sit there for a while to see if the lights will come back on. They don’t. But there is this tiny little light, so you try and go toward it. And then it gets bigger. You are outside your chemistry classroom. The lights come on, and you see one of your classmates. So, you walk into the classroom. But it’s not normal. Now you see 5,000 Labubus dancing to “Baby” by Justin Bieber. Then, suddenly, the president is there, and apparently, this was a meeting for the government. They banned coffee, tacos, and Crocs. WHO DOES THAT! Your head is spinning, and you’re so confused. Then you black out. Was it a dream? ...I guess you will never know.

Alexander Hart

I was walking in the halls of Legend High School, throwing fries at my friend as a sacred ritual to ward off spirits, but then a scary spirit pushed me and told me to stop and started saying very mean things about me behind my back, trying to antagonize me to give the evil ghost power because it feeds off anger. But then the scary ghost got horrified when I brought salt next time, and his scary

ghost friends started practically begging me not to pour salt on the evil spirit. And then the evil spirit was never seen again and stopped saying things to try and antagonize me after I threatened to pour salt on it. The scary ghost has since not learned his lesson and continues to try and antagonize people, even through his fear of salt.

Sydney Lambet
“The Thing in the Locker Room”

It started after practice on a Wednesday. Everyone else had gone home, but I stayed behind because I couldn’t find my hoodie. The locker room lights flickered like they were about to give up, and the air smelled like wet socks and chlorine.

When I opened my locker, my hoodie was there—but it was wet. Like, dripping. I didn’t even shower that day. Then I heard the sound of metal slamming from the far end of the room, like another locker opening and closing by itself.

I said, “Ha ha, very funny,” because that’s what people say in horror movies right before they die. Nobody answered. Then the floor squelched. Footsteps. Bare ones. I could see wet prints appearing on the tiles, but there was no one making them.

I ran out without my hoodie. The next day, the janitor told us they found a puddle under my locker—and a handprint on the inside of the door.

I didn’t go back to practice. The team still uses that locker room, though. Sometimes, when it’s quiet, they say they hear the lockers slam on their own. Like someone’s still looking for their hoodie.

¹ For those of us reading this in print, this link leads to a video by astryuuna entitled "Mom found the yaoi". Quote frightening, indeed!

Ethan Pattison

I.

You are a crab. You are happy, fulfilled, and beautiful. Each and every day, you rejoice in your lack of vertebrae, in the superiority of your form, in the glory of you. You are the apex of all creation- the ultimate lifeform. Everything wants to be a crab, and imposter crabs are all around. They wish they could be like you. But your blood is pure, everyone likes you, and you are amazing. Then, you wake up. It was all a dream. You weep, knowing the limitations of your soft, fleshy form, and what can never be.

We live surrounded by fear. The fear of not being enough. The fear of inadequacy. The fear of not being a crab.

If that’s not enough to scare you, I have a proposition even scarier. https://youtu.be/9f-95CwLVbck?si=hn9h4DT_q7Qkz44Q1

II.

Picture a cow. Not an adult one, but a cute, newborn little calf. Let’s call him Jeremy. Life is pretty great for him—not a care in the world, drinking milk, eventually figuring out the entire floor is food. That’s pretty cool. He is an American beef cow, but for now, only a cute little guy. Jeremy quickly starts to grow, eat, fart so much it impacts the environment, and enjoy life, even getting introduced to an even better type of grass—corn. And, take it from me, corn is pretty great. As time passes, he starts to pack on the pounds, becoming an adult cow. Jeremy is uniquely lucky for a cow, given he gets a nice, open place to roam, and doesn’t have the bovine equivalent of depression. Eventually, he’s taken to a facility to await processing. We all knew it was going

Aaahh!

to happen sometime, but he's still blissfully unaware. And, why shouldn't he be? Jeremy's whole life up until now had been pretty great, so why should he expect it to change? Eventually, the time comes, and, about 20 minutes after the processing began, Jeremy is just meat. You got to know him, get familiar with his story, and though it's sad to see him go, you're happy for him in the end. Only, that's not the end of this story. Humans are deplorable sometimes, committing unspeakable acts where they are least expected. And, through sheer misfortune — in what seems like some divine form of torture, some unthinkably evil monster cooks a part of Jeremy... well done.

Brennan Rathke

It was a dark, stormy night deep in the oil rigs. There was a man by the name of Dr. Flink. He is the height of 3 grown men, and he can see all and has the strength of a gorilla. With the great power he controls. He still has one weakness...

One night, he was extracting oil with his bare hands until he started to hear the scariest sound of all time. He jumped up and was ready to fight. He went to the noise he turned the corner, and saw where it was coming from, and was terrified. It was the GRADEBOOK! Once he realized he had to grade his students' work, he ran the other way and was never seen again.

Sierra Rodarte

When I was a child, I once choked on a piece of cucumber, and since then, I've had an unnatural fear of them. What should be an ordinary vegetable instantly brings back that terrifying memory whenever I see or smell one. The experience left such a strong impression that even the crunching sound of someone eating cucumbers can make me tense up. I know it's irrational, but my mind automatical-

ly connects cucumbers with danger and panic. Over the years, I've tried to get over it, but the fear still lingers deep down. Sometimes, I even avoid salads or dishes that might have cucumbers just to feel comfortable. Friends usually laugh when they first find out, but it's a real fear. Cucumbers are, and always will be, the bane of my existence.

Lilah Rettinhouse

Across the room was a silhouette with eyes that almost glowed with its gaze locked on me. I felt my whole body tensing up, urging me to move, but I found myself stuck in place as it came closer. It didn't have features, but it felt familiar, and I realized it was me. No, not a replica, but something twisted... created from the shadows in the room. It grew as darkness engulfed the room, twisting and new limbs breaking through its torso. Breathing became difficult. It reached out to me before suddenly the light turned on. Movement came back, and the silhouette was gone, almost like it hadn't existed at all. I looked to the door to see my mother there, staring at me with worry, and I knew she had asked something, but I couldn't hear. I brought myself to speak, saying the words "I'm fine." I don't know if she believed it, but she left, turning off the light on the way, and I found myself regretting not telling the truth. My eyes raced around the room, making sure it hadn't come back, before laying down and taking a deep breath. Then, my eyes glanced towards the window, seeing it again. It wasn't in the room, having no way in, but I knew that wouldn't stop it as it went out of sight again. It wouldn't give up, and I could hear it everywhere, and looking down and hearing its breathing told me all I needed to know. It found a way in and only I could see it. It rose from under the bed, staring at me with no remorse, and I finally understood what this twisted thing was. This was a replacement, wanting to crawl into my skin and take my place, and I wasn't able to do

Aaahh!

“It reached for me, one pair of arms cradling my face, while the other pair pierced my skin.”

from a story
by Lilah Rettinhouse

anything but watch.

Then it moved, new limbs breaking through where they shouldn't be. It looked wrong. It reached for me, latching on where it could, one pair of arms cradling my face, while the other pair pierced my skin. It started to shift, no longer becoming a shadow with a pair of eyes, but an unsettling version of me. It was like it couldn't get every detail quite right, eyes a different shape, its mouth inhuman, and as it opened its mouth, the sound it made was unnatural, almost trying to mimic me, but unable to do so. Then it did something I didn't expect. It started merging with me, taking up any space possible. I thought it was going to kill me, but this was worse. I had to watch it take over, trapped in a cage in the back of its mind, being forgotten. I could only witness as it stood up and looked at a mirror, seeing itself in my skin, but it still looked different. Its smile was wobbly, unsure if it should make its mouth larger or just small, eyes lifeless, lacking the shine most have, but I knew it would learn because it was looking at me, learning how to replace my every move with its own. As it kept staring, its smile widened, now unnaturally large, and I got the message, there wasn't hope for me to be found.

Jack Schroeder

Liam read a warning: "Spilling grape juice on a dog could create an evil clone."

Max ignored it and poured juice on his dog, Barkley, who instantly split into a dark, snarling double. The clone shook itself, sending juice flying everywhere, and more shadowy evil clone dogs appeared with each drop. Growls filled the night as the pack crept closer, eyes glowing in the firelight. So, the kids made their only escape, which was into an abandoned grape juice factory. The floor inside was slick with purple liquid and even more coming from the pipes above. Every

turn they took, dozens of eyes followed them. Eventually, their luck ran out, and they were surrounded and cornered. They realized escape was impossible. The fire flickered once more, and then silence fell, broken only by the low, hungry growls of the relentless pack.

David Schwarz

Imagine you wake up, you open your eyes, the sun coming in through the window is illuminating the dust in the air, your back is killing you from all the work, and the crappy, dirty makeshift mattress on the floor that you are sleeping on, the next thing that strikes you is the intense smell of burning tires, smoke, and dust. You live in Gaza City. You realize this smell is the result of the bombs that were dropped on your city last night. You are thankful you survived, but scared for the future. You know you could be next, and it is not in your control; they could drop a bomb on the building you live in, and you would have no idea it was coming. You sit up in your "bed" and look around you see your two little sisters, your older brother, your mom, and your dad all sleeping in the same room. This is pretty normal to you, unfortunately. As you sit up, you notice that you can see your little sister's ribs showing; you and your family have basically been starving to death, and the side effects are clear. As you notice this, it sets in your stomach and you feel lightheaded and sick. Again, you have no food. What are you going to do? You can walk to one of the four aid sites distributing food, but no water, but the aid sites are more than an 8-hour walk away. So you would have to walk with no water to maybe get some dried food with no water. The food is not guaranteed; the people swarm the boxes, fighting for food. Also, if you go to the aid station, you risk getting shot by the IDF. They don't have signs to tell people where to go, they guide people with gunfire, and people have died. This is War, War is Hell.

Peace Traore

While ghosts may shake your spirit, monsters may give you a fright, and spiders may bite. There is something scarier than all of the Halloween nightmares. It is not a physical being, nor is it a spirit, but it will haunt you, keep you up at night, and activate your fight or flight. The thing, so terrifying that it will leave you crying, goes by the name of Procrastination. Picture this familiar memory that you know so well; it is a tale of how procrastination can feel like Hell. As the bell rings, you are released from your captors; they teach, they grade, and tire your soul, but the only thing on your mind is the bed you wish to see again. You reach the chambers where that bed is kept, but there is an invisible force that's making you sweat. The homework you were assigned this morning! There are two ways to approach this tool: do the work, or lay in bed and drool. The second option seems way more cool but, in the end, if you pick it, you're a fool. The consequence consists: You leave that bed in the chamber you'll miss, only to find out that your homework was amidst one of my many things you forgot to do. You stress and wish to be blessed with some magic powers to erase the things you didn't do. So in your moment of sorrow, you choose to do less than trying your best. And when you see your final grade, you realize the Haunt of Procrastination has won again.

Sophelia Wright

The old grandfather clock in the hallway struck midnight, its chimes echoing through the empty house. Emily lay awake, staring at the ceiling, her heart pounding with an unshakable sense of dread. She had moved into the inherited Victorian mansion only a week ago, dismissing the townsfolk's warnings as superstitious tales. But tonight, the whispers began-soft, unintelligible mur-

murs seeping through the cracks in the walls. Gathering her courage, she crept toward the faint voice, following it down the creaking staircase. The whispers grew louder, forming a chilling phrase: "You're not alone." As she reached the bottom step, a cold hand gripped her ankle from the darkness below, pulling her into the shadows with a silent, final gasp.



Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled*, 1991



“Late at Night”

by Blackbird

It was cold in his bedroom, blankets kicked almost completely off of him, arms pricking with goosebumps. It was late at night, dark and quiet in the sort of way that made his vision shake with static, in the sort of way that made the ventilation one of the loudest sounds in his ears.

A muzzle rested on his shoulder, a furred arm rested on his stomach.

Like this, perhaps he could pretend that they enjoyed each other’s company. (They never had. He didn’t know why he lingered on it.)

He was the only one breathing, of course, but he wondered if the moment would feel any different if he could feel the rise and fall of its stomach. Less still, maybe.

He didn’t need to look to know it was staring.

“Chris.”

He tensed, involuntarily. “Yes?”

It huffed. Moved closer.

Nights like this always felt more like it testing what it could get away with than anything else.

It had always liked pressing his buttons.

(Back then, he’d stand his ground. Do something to tick him off, perhaps. An offhand remark or something to that effect.

But he couldn’t really afford to do that now, could he?)

“You can’t get rid of me.” It sounded smug, but it was probably feeling something

more like *bitter*.

He held back a sigh. “I don’t want to.”

It hissed, digging claws into his side. “Liar,” it snapped, so familiar he couldn’t stand it.

He did his best not to wince from the pain, jaws so, so close to his neck.

“You *really* piss me off,” it hissed. “You think I want to be here?”

He didn’t dare move. It could kill him. It could kill him.

Would it?

He didn’t know. He didn’t even know. (Had he ever known? Back then, back before, had To—)

“Answer me,” it snapped, dragging its claws up a little, tearing his skin like paper.

He breathed in, sharp. “No,” he managed, hating the way his voice shook.

“You think I want to go back to Connor, Chris?” He could feel its teeth, grazing right where his jugular was.

And still, the words made his skin crawl. “Of course I don’t.”

“But you wouldn’t have to deal with me anymore,” it drawled, faking an unbothered tone. “No more claws, no more argu—”

“Toby,” he snapped, frustrat—

He froze, cutting himself off, realizing what he’d done as soon as the word had slipped off his tongue.

It was cold in his bedroom, blankets kicked almost completely off of him, arms pricking with goosebumps. It was late at night, dark and quiet in the sort of way that made his vision shake with static, in the sort of way that made the ventilation one of the loudest sounds in his ears.

A muzzle rested on his shoulder, a furred arm rested on his stomach.

Like this, perhaps he could pretend that they enjoyed each other’s company. (They never had. He didn’t know why he lingered on it.)

He was the only one breathing, of course, but he wondered if the moment would feel any different if he could feel the rise and fall of its stomach. Less still, maybe.

He didn’t need to look to know it was staring.

“Chris.”

He tensed, involuntarily. “Yes?”

It huffed. Moved closer.

Nights like this always felt more like it testing what it could get away with than anything else.

It had always liked pressing his buttons.

(Back then, he’d stand his ground. Do something to tick him off, perhaps. An offhand remark or something to that effect.

But he couldn’t really afford to do that now, could he?)

“You can’t get rid of me.” It sounded smug, but it was probably feeling something

more like bitter.

He held back a sigh. “I don’t want to.”

It hissed, digging claws into his side. “Liar,” it snapped, so familiar he couldn’t stand it.

He did his best not to wince from the pain, jaws so, so close to his neck.

“You really piss me off,” it hissed. “You think I want to be here?”

He didn’t dare move. It could kill him. It could kill him.

Would it?

He didn’t know. He didn’t even know. (Had he ever known? Back then, back before, had To—)

“Answer me,” it snapped, dragging its claws up a little, tearing his skin like paper.

He breathed in, sharp. “No,” he managed, hating the way his voice shook.

“You think I want to go back to Connor, Chris?” He could feel its teeth, grazing right where his jugular was.

And still, the words made his skin crawl. “Of course I don’t.”

“But you wouldn’t have to deal with me anymore,” it drawled, faking an unbothered tone. “No more claws, no more argu—”

“Toby,” he snapped, frustrat—

He froze, cutting himself off, realizing what he’d done as soon as the word had slipped off his tongue.

It was quiet, for a moment. He could barely hear anything at all.

He could die tonight. He *would* die tonight.

It was suffocating, the certainty, just for a moment he could barely breathe-

A drop of something cold hit his collar-bone. Then another. And another.

It pulled its claws out of the scratches, cursing as it scrubbed at its eyes.

...Oh.

The emotion that crashed into him wasn’t relief or pity, but some vague guilt. How long had it been since he’d been called his own name?

He wrapped an arm around him cautiously, feeling him tense.

“St-stop, quit—”

“Toby.”

“No, *no*,” he hissed, hitting his chest hard.

He just patted his back, frowning as some dull realization hit him. “...You haven’t changed at all, have you?”

“I’m a goddamn *rabbit*,” he snapped in response, shaking.

“You know that’s not what I meant.”

He groaned, hitting him again. “I hate you. I’m going to *skin* you.”

The threat felt incredibly hollow now, somehow, as if he hadn’t been so sure Toby

would kill him even moments before.

Was he an idiot?

...Perhaps.

He sighed. “Toby, do you have any idea how tedious skinning me would be?”

He just huffed.

He sighed, again, and reached over to grab the covers. “You’re cold.”

He didn’t have to ask. The only reason Toby even got close to him in the first place was (almost certainly) to leech some of his warmth.

“Stop it. Stop, I don’t-”

He pulled the covers over both of them, ignoring his complaints.

He groaned, hitting him again.

He ignored the pain, just shut his eyes and kept patting his back.

It was still for a long time, just Toby quivering against him. He rubbed his back, waiting for him to calm down.

They’d done this before. Toby had always seemed to hate it. Being exposed.

He shifted, suddenly, taking the covers off of himself.

He frowned. “Toby-”

“It’s still bleeding.”

What?

He tried to catch a glimpse of his face,

but it was so dark he couldn’t tell him apart from the pitch black. “What are y—”

A paw grabbed one of his hands, pressing his palm against something wet.

Oh.

He froze, didn’t dare move. “You...”

“Impressed?” His tone was flat, faintly bitter. He pressed his hand harder against it, and the heel of his palm slipped in. He hissed quietly.

He felt lightheaded, suddenly. The heel of his palm was—god, there was just this gaping *hole* in his stomach, cold and wet and—

He tried to pull his hand away, but he tightened his grip, wincing.

“Toby,” he started, trying not to think about his hand, about what it *looked* like, “this is hurting you. Let go of my hand.”

“It’s fine. Feels better than just sitting here.” He pressed *hard*, some horrible squelch reaching his ears as he whimpered in pain.

He took a sharp breath in, trying to choke down the nausea. “Let go.”

“...Please?” (He couldn’t remember the last name Toby had ever asked him politely for something. Never, probably.)

He hesitated, trying to calm down.

...Maybe he was a little curious. *Maybe* he was going to pass out.

He screwed his eyes shut, sighing. “No.”

Toby dug his claws into his hand, send-

ing sparks of pain through him. “Why not?”

His voice was harsh.

He tried to focus on the pain and not the feeling of—

“It’s gross, okay?”

“God, you are such a *pussy*,” he hissed, letting go of his hand and turning his back to him.

For *what*? Not wanting to stick his hand into a massive puncture wound?

He held his tongue, feeling the light throbbing of a tiny cut Toby’s claws had given him, just below one of his knuckles. It wasn’t worth arguing over.

He really needed to wash his hand. His palm felt like it was completely coated in blood.

He sighed, sitting up and putting his feet on the cold floor.


“Can you quit moving?”

He glared at the vague shadow. God, was he always this annoying? (He was. He *remembered* him being this annoying. So why did it still sting?)

“I’m leaving to wash *your* blood off my hand.”

Toby just scoffed dismissively.

He took a deep breath and carefully walked towards the door, grabbing it with his clean hand.

(God, was the blood starting to dry? He hoped not.) 

“It could kill him.
It could kill him.
Would it?”

from “Late at Night”
by Blackbird

John Brosio, *The Night Hunt*, 2013



“Marble Cracks and Pale White Blurs”

by Sala Addink

Chapter 1: Polar Bear *Point of View: Lilly Graham*

The South Dakota prairie could swallow you whole if you looked at it long enough. Miles of golden grass rolled toward the horizon, each blade bending beneath the sun’s relentless heat. The air shimmered, heavy with dust and the faint hum of insects, and somewhere far off, a hawk circled so slowly it looked like time itself had paused to watch.

The Addink Regional Airport sat at the edge of all that nothing—a squat little building that looked more like a post office than a place where planes actually landed. Two short runways crossed like scars in the dry earth, and a handful of cars baked in a parking lot split by cracks big enough to swallow pebbles. It wasn’t a place for grand adventures. It was a place you passed through.

I was seven years old and restless, walking with my aunt and uncle and their kids. My aunt was pushing a stroller that carried the twins—red-faced and sticky with melted popsicles—and my uncle trailed behind, balancing luggage like it was his life’s work. I walked next to my cousin Callie, who was a year older and liked to remind me of that every few minutes. The hot wind tangled our hair and carried the faint smell of jet fuel mixed with dry grass. Then I saw it.

At the far edge of the parking lot, half-hidden behind a faded sign for “Welcome to Addink Airport,” stood a polar bear. Not a real one—at least, that’s what I thought. It was a statue, carved from what looked like white marble, towering over us. Its mouth was open in a snarl, teeth gleaming in the sunlight. The bear’s pose was strange—half-crouched, as if frozen mid-lunge—but there was something about its eyes. They didn’t look carved. They looked aware.

At its base, a metal plaque read:

“YOU MAY CLIMB ONLY IF YOU ARE A KID.”

Naturally, that was all the permission we needed.

Callie was the first to scramble up, her sneakers scraping the stone. I followed, my palms burning as I reached for handholds in the marble fur. The twins giggled from the stroller, and my aunt raised her phone, the screen flashing in the glare of the sun.

“Say cheese!” she called.

“Cheese!” we chorused, all teeth and sweat and laughter.

And then—everything changed. The air thickened, heavy like the sky before a storm. The wind stopped. The hum of insects cut out. Even the sunlight seemed to dim, as if something vast had stepped between us and the sun.

A sound rose from deep inside the statue—a groaning, grinding roar that didn’t belong to stone. I stared down as tiny cracks split across the bear’s surface, flakes of marble tumbling away to reveal something dark and wet beneath. Fur.

The statue shuddered. The snarl twisted into motion. The bear blinked—once, slowly—and exhaled. Its breath was real and hot and smelled of salt and earth.

I screamed. My aunt dropped her phone. My uncle shouted something I couldn’t hear. I leapt off the bear and grabbed the stroller handles, running blindly toward the terminal. But the world was already changing around us—melting, folding, rewriting itself. The paved lot crumbled into dirt. The glass

walls of the airport rippled, then dissolved into tall prairie grass that whipped against my legs. The sky deepened, turning the color of old bruises.

When I finally stopped, gasping for breath, the stroller was empty. The road was gone. My aunt, my uncle, and my cousins were gone.

All that remained was the sound of the wind returning, soft and lonely, and somewhere in the distance, the faint echo of a roar.

Chapter 2: Missing Footage
Point of View:
Third Person / Investigative Narrative

Two months after the Addink Airport disappearance, a thirty-seven-second clip surfaced. It wasn't supposed to.

According to the official report, the airport's surveillance drives had been corrupted during a "severe electrical malfunction" that same afternoon. But someone in the maintenance wing—later identified as technician Paul Denton—had managed to recover one short segment before the system wiped itself clean. The clip was quietly passed to law enforcement, who reviewed it in a windowless conference room in Rapid City, faces pale in the blue glow of the monitor.

The footage began innocuously, time-stamped 14:23:08. The camera angle was fixed high above the parking lot, the lens slightly warped at the edges from years of prairie wind and dust. Children climbed the marble statue of the polar bear, their laughter silent but visible in bursts of motion. Adults lingered nearby, shading their eyes against the sun. A stroller rocked gently in the breeze. Everything appeared utterly ordinary—mundane, even comforting.

Then, at exactly twelve seconds in, the light changed. The sun's glare dimmed, but no clouds passed overhead. Instead, the shadows of the children stretched across the pavement, long and sharp-edged, bending toward the statue like reaching hands. The air in the footage seemed to vibrate, a faint shimmer rippling over the lens as though heat itself had gone wrong.

At sixteen seconds, something flashed across the frame—a streak of pale motion, too fast to identify. Some analysts called it a reflection; others said it looked organic, like muscle under translucent skin. The frame juddered once, refocused.

At nineteen seconds, the bear moved. Its eyes, previously dull marble gray, flickered open—dark, wet, and alive. The surface of its chest rose and fell as though it were breathing. A fine mist, impossible to explain, formed around its paws.

Then came the twenty-second mark. The family was gone. Every single one of them. No sign of retreat, no motion blur—just absence. The stroller remained, tipped on its side, one wheel still spinning. Something dark pooled beneath it, glossy under the sunlight.

The background shifted. The prairie behind the terminal—visible through the chain-link fence—began to ripple. Not from wind, but from movement beneath it. The earth undulated like the surface of water, wave after wave rolling outward from the direction of the statue. For a brief instant, a shape—massive, white, indistinct—seemed to move just below the ground.

At thirty seconds, the image fractured. Lines of static tore through the frame, then consumed it completely. The sound feed (which should have been silent) emitted a low, guttural noise that technicians later described

as "a combination of a heartbeat and a growl." Then the screen went black.

When investigators attempted to recover more footage, the hard drive had "auto-erased." No command input, no error logs, just a sudden factory reset at 03:14 AM—the system clock frozen ever since.

Paul Denton, the technician who'd made the backup, vanished one week later. His car was discovered still running on the side of County Road 6, facing west toward the prairie. Both doors were open. His laptop sat on the passenger seat, logged into an email draft that ended mid-sentence:

"They're not gone. They're—"

Outside the vehicle, investigators found four impressions pressed deep into the dirt—paw-shaped, but enormous. Each print measured nearly two feet across. Forensic teams ruled out bears, machinery, and hoaxes. The soil showed compression consistent with a creature weighing several tons.

No official explanation was ever released, and unofficially, the locals stopped calling it Addink Airport.

They called it The Place Where the Ground Breathes.

Chapter 3: Field Notes
Point of View: Detective R. Keller
(Recovered Journal, 2021)

June 14, 2021

The airport is a ghost.

The fences sag inward as if the land itself has been exhaling for years. Weeds split the asphalt, thin green fingers prying apart what little order humanity once forced onto

this place. The wind moves strangely here—sometimes too still, sometimes sharp enough to sting the eyes. The silence isn't peaceful; it's pressing, heavy, almost deliberate.

The terminal stands hollow, windows clouded with dust, the roof beginning to cave. A single departures board hangs by one screw, still flickering faintly when the power grid hiccups. It lists no flights—just static and half-formed letters, like the building is trying to remember something it shouldn't.

I drive past the gravel road to the shallow depression where the polar bear statue once stood. The grass refuses to grow there. Even after two summers of rain, the earth remains gray, slick with clay, and faintly concave—as if something once pushed its way up from beneath.

Interview: Ellis Grant
(retired maintenance worker, age 72)

He meets me by the hangar, cap pulled low, cigarette trembling in his hand. His voice carries the weight of someone who's seen too much and was believed too little. When I ask about the statue, he doesn't answer immediately. He just looks at the pit, his mouth tightening.

"You ever seen marble that bleeds?" he finally says. "When we came out here with the county boys, the eyes were gone. Hollowed out clean, from the inside. Like something had been chewing its way out. We hauled it off that same week, though no one could agree on when. The paperwork's a mess—some say July 25, others August 1. I stopped asking."

He hands me a folded paper—yellowed, grease-stained, the corner stamped PROPERTY RECEIPT.

“The locals
stopped calling it
Addink Airport.

They called it the
Place Where
the Ground
Breathes.”

from “Marble Cracks
and Pale White Blurs”
by Sala Addink

*Return of Property —
White Marble Figure, Height: 10’2”

Condition: ACTIVE.*

Active. Not a word meant for stone.

I ask where they sent it. He shakes his head. “Back to the quarry, I think. But that place was already shut down. Fences torn up, buildings collapsed. Nothing’s been cut from there since the nineties.”

That night, I find the quarry. It sits at the end of an unmarked service road that disappears into the prairie. The buildings are hollow shells, the machinery half-buried in dust. I search the main lot and find only a single fragment of metal embedded in the dirt—a broken tag, scorched around the edges.

ADDINK EXHIBIT

No sign of the statue. No records, no storage logs, no witnesses.

June 15, 2021

At 11:47 p.m., my phone vibrates. A blocked number. One message:

Don’t follow the tracks.

There are no tracks. Not yet.

June 16, 2021 — 2:13 a.m.

My car alarm goes off. Later, as I check the dash camera footage, I see, for two seconds, the headlights flare, and something moves past—pale, elongated, impossibly fast. The light bends around it. The motion sensor records nothing else, but the audio picks up a single low frequency hum, almost a growl, that rattles the speakers.

I haven’t slept since. Every night, I dream of breathing marble and shifting soil. Tomorrow, I’m going back to the quarry. If I vanish, this journal will remain.

Chapter 4: Final Report
Point of View:
Official Investigation / Case Summary

Case ID: SD-DPS-4412
Subject: Disappearance of
Detective Raymond Keller
Date of Report: August 9, 2021
Prepared by: Division of Public Safety,
Special Investigations Unit

SUMMARY:

Detective R. Keller was reported missing on June 16, 2021, following an unauthorized solo visit to the decommissioned Addink Quarry. His last known communication occurred at 2:13 a.m., when motion was detected near his residence. Keller’s unmarked state cruiser was discovered three days later, approximately six miles west of the quarry’s perimeter fence. Both doors were open. The engine was cold. The vehicle’s headlights were still in the on position, the battery fully drained. Inside the vehicle, investigators located Keller’s field recorder and his partially filled journal. The recorder was intact and contained one final voice entry.

TRANSCRIPT —
FINAL ENTRY (Excerpt):

“Sunrise. Following the tracks along the north ridge. Soil feels loose—like something’s breathing underneath it. There’s a smell—saltwater, brine, metallic... it’s moving again, I can—”

(Audio distortion. Sudden high-frequency interference.)

“—ground’s splitting, I see—”

(Roar. Deep scraping noise, metal against stone. Static.)

(End of recording.)

The tape ends abruptly at 04:47:19 a.m.

ON-SITE FINDINGS:

Four depressions were identified near the quarry lip, each approximately twenty-seven inches across and spaced in a pattern consistent with quadrupedal movement. Depth measurements ranged from nine to eleven inches, indicating significant mass. Residual white particulate matter was collected from each depression; laboratory analysis confirmed it as calcite dust, matching samples from the original Addink statue base.

No human remains were recovered. The soil around the impressions displayed unnatural compaction, as though compressed from beneath rather than above.

Subsurface scans performed two weeks later detected hollow cavities extending nearly forty feet below the surface, some of which emitted measurable heat signatures. Geological consultants cited “unstable limestone” and “thermal seepage” as possible explanations.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

Following the recovery, several nearby residents reported mild tremors during nighttime hours. Others described hearing “a low hum” resonating from beneath the quarry site, most noticeable just before dawn.

On June 25, 2021, state engineers ordered the quarry sealed for “structural instability.” Heavy concrete barriers and reinforced

fencing were installed around the perimeter. A notice from the Department of Natural Resources prohibits further excavation or surveying within a five-mile radius. Officially, the site remains active—though no personnel are assigned there. Locals claim the hum has grown louder. Some say it follows the wind. Others insist it’s breathing.

But no one knows for sure.

Chapter 5: Pictures and Prairies
Point of View: Third Person
/ Unconfirmed Sources

Five years after the Addink Quarry was sealed, a plain brown envelope appeared on the front desk of the Rapid City Police Department. No return address. No postage. No fingerprints.

Inside: a single tarnished badge—Detective Raymond Keller’s—and an old Polaroid photograph.

The photo showed the South Dakota prairie at dusk, the horizon washed in gray-blue light. In the distance, a tall white figure stood half-obscured by grass and shadow. Around it, smaller dark shapes crouched low, their outlines indistinct but undeniably alive. Across the back of the photograph, in faint blue ink, were four words:

“The Addinks are home.”

No one could identify the handwriting. The film stock had expired decades earlier. Forensic tests confirmed the badge was genuine, though it bore faint etch marks that hadn’t been there before—fine, curved lines resembling claw marks, or cracks spreading beneath a surface under pressure.

That same week, residents in the outer counties began reporting strange vibrations

at night. Some described it as a low rumble, others as a deep, rolling pulse—like distant thunder that never ended. Pets refused to go outdoors after sundown. Windows rattled without wind.

Highway travelers spoke of seeing pale forms moving through the prairie—white and luminous, gliding low to the ground. Dash cameras caught only flashes, the images smeared with motion blur and static. When recovery teams searched the stretches of road afterward, they found nothing but flattened grass and shallow impressions in the soil, too large for livestock, too irregular for vehicles.

In the mornings, the earth sometimes bore new marks: four prints pressed deep into the clay, perfectly spaced, facing north. By noon, they were gone, as if the land had drawn them back in. Locals now avoid the area entirely. Truckers detour miles out of their way rather than drive the old highway past the quarry. They say the air there hums—not loud, but low and constant, like the throat of something massive just beneath the surface. On windless nights, that hum becomes a roar, rolling across the plains for miles, echoing off the hills like the sound of the world shifting in its sleep.

No official explanation exists. The reports remain “unverified.” But in Rapid City, the officers who handled the envelope still swear the photograph changes. Every few months, when they open the evidence drawer, the horizon in the picture seems darker—closer—and the white figure stands a little nearer to the camera.

Some nights, the prairie itself even seems alive.

And watching.

Chapter 6: The Pack
Point of View: Lilly Graham (Adult, 2026)

Ten years have passed since the Addink disappearance. Ten years since the world decided to forget.

But I haven’t forgotten. And neither has the prairie. The land here remembers everything—the voices, the footfalls, the tremors that move like slow breath beneath the surface. It’s dusk when I arrive, and the horizon glows the color of old embers. The air smells of dust and rain that never comes. Where the airport once stood, there’s nothing but open grassland, rolling and endless. No fence, no runway, no road. Just prairie.

And yet, the ground feels familiar under my feet. It knows me. The depression remains—the place where the marble bear once stood. Only now, it’s wider, deeper, its edges crumbling inward like an open mouth. Wind whistles through it with a low, hollow tone, almost like a voice calling from far below. I stand at its rim, and the earth quivers faintly, enough that the pebbles around me shift and roll toward the pit.

Then I hear them. At first, only whispers in the tall grass—soft padding, faint breathing, the brush of fur against stems. Then they emerge: wolves, foxes, coyotes, moving with impossible grace. Their eyes glint amber and gold in the fading light. Each step is synchronized, deliberate. They move as one body, yet each creature has its own purpose, its own intelligence.

And behind them—towering, still, and white as bone—the polar bear rises. Its fur catches the twilight, pale and rippling, its eyes dark and fathomless. But it does not command the others. It is not a master. It is kin.

The pack circles me slowly. I don’t

flinch. I can feel the ground vibrating beneath their paws, the pulse of something ancient humming through the soil. They close in, close enough that I can see the condensation of their breath. None of them bare their teeth. They're studying me—waiting.

The wind changes direction. It carries the smell of grass, salt, and something older—stone dust and storm air. It's the same scent I remember from that day, when marble cracked and the world folded away.

Something inside me stirs. My heart-beat slows to match theirs. My skin tingles, nerves sharpening, muscles stretching. I exhale, and the sound that leaves me isn't human—it's low, steady, and wild. The fear that's haunted me for ten years dissolves into something vast and wordless.

I step forward, into the circle. None of them move to stop me. The bear's massive head lowers, and for the briefest instant, our eyes meet—mine reflected back, golden and shifting. The air ripples. My hands become claws. My senses bloom open—every scent, every vibration, every heartbeat in the grass around me. The world sharpens until it feels almost unbearable in its clarity. The prairie hums. The pack howls. And I howl with them. The sound rolls across the plains, rising like thunder, echoing in every hollow of the earth. The depression glows faintly white, and the wind carries the taste of salt and stone.

For the first time since that day, I am not running away. I am running to. I am finally home. I am part of them—no longer human, no longer afraid.

Only alive.

Epilogue 1: Freedom

Point of View: Lilly Graham (Wolf Form)

Years have passed. The world beyond the prairie has forgotten us, sealed our names inside dusty reports and fading headlines. But memory is not a human thing alone. The earth remembers. The wind remembers. And so do we. I have become what I was meant to be.

The change that began in terror is now a rhythm, a pulse that runs beneath my skin and through the soil. My body moves with the ease of the wild—muscle and instinct, fur and breath. My senses reach farther than thought ever could: I can taste the rain before it falls, feel the tremor of a rabbit's heartbeat a mile away, hear the grass bending under starlight.

The pack is all around me—wolves, foxes, and coyotes. We are fast, we are strong, and we are whole. The polar bear still stands as our sentinel, vast and silent on the horizon, white against the endless dusk. It watches, but it does not command. It guards. It remembers.

My family runs beside me. My cousins, my aunt, my uncle—all changed, all alive. Their scents are familiar now, woven into the wind and grass. Sometimes I can still glimpse the faces they once had when the moonlight strikes just right, but it doesn't matter anymore. What we were is gone. What we are is eternal. We roam the open prairie, our paws thudding softly against the breathing ground. When we run, the air itself seems to bend around us, carrying the echoes of our movement for miles. When we hunt, the world sharpens into focus—pure purpose, pure presence.

I do not miss being human. Humanity is a small, brittle thing, bound by fear and forgetting. Out here, there is no forgetting—only

“I do not miss being human. Humanity is a small, brittle thing, bound by fear and forgetting.”

*from “Marble Cracks
and Pale White Blurs”
by Sala Addink*

living. Only the hum of the land and the blood of the wind.

Sometimes, on still nights, our howls roll across the plains—low and haunting, threading through the grass like ghosts of a storm. Travelers hear them and quicken their pace, eyes wide, whispering old names they don’t realize they still remember. They are right to hurry. This is no longer their place.

We are no longer victims. We are no longer lost. We are the prairie. We are the hunt. We are the wind that never stops moving.

And I am one of them.

Forever.

Epilogue 2: Legend of Stargold
Point of View: Third Person
/ Mythic Chronicle

Seasons turned, and the prairie grew wilder. Grass reclaimed every trace of road and runway. The wind whispered names no human remembered, carrying them like seeds across the endless fields.

And then, under a silver moon, something new was born.

From the den beneath the old Addink ridge came a single cry—soft, shimmering, not quite wolf and not quite mortal. Her fur gleamed pale gold, each hair catching starlight as though woven from the night itself. Her eyes opened wide and bright, not amber like her parents’, but deep violet, flecked with silver. They called her Stargold.

The pack gathered in a wide circle around her. Even the sentinel bear bowed its massive head, rumbling a sound like distant thunder. The prairie seemed to hold its

breath.

Starchaser—once Lilly—watched her daughter take her first steps on trembling paws, guided by Silverslip, her mate, his coat bright as moonlit frost. Together they nuzzled the small cub forward, into the tall grass that moved like waves beneath the wind.

But this wolf pup was different. When she ran, the stars above seemed to follow. When she howled, faint lights rippled through the sky, as if the heavens answered her call. Her footprints glowed briefly in the soil before fading, leaving no mark.

The others whispered—if wolves could whisper—that she carried the echo of the power that changed them all. That she was born not of the old curse, but of something gentler, older, watching over the land.

As she grew, Stargold would vanish for days, chasing fireflies or the horizon itself. Sometimes she was seen running with shadows, her form flickering between fur and light. Other times, she’d return with her muzzle dusted in white marble flakes and her eyes full of stories the others could not comprehend.

Under her, the prairie began to bloom again. Wildflowers returned where only dry grass had stood for decades. The hum in the ground softened—less a warning now, more a song. And when the pack gathered at night to howl beneath the stars, her voice rose higher than the rest—clear, strong, bright. It reached beyond the plains, into the dark, into the sky itself. The world no longer feared the wind. It listened.

And somewhere in that endless sound, a new legend began. Of Stargold, the wolf born from stone and starlight, wolf of the wild and the wind, the first to be truly free.

Travelers along the old prairie roads sometimes swear they see a pale, golden wolf moving beneath the starlight, her violet eyes shimmering like distant planets. She appears for only a moment, then vanishes into the tall grass, leaving behind footprints that fade before morning. Locals whisper of the “starlight wolf,” a guardian of the wind and the wild, and though no one can touch her, every howl that echoes across the plains carries her story—a story of freedom, of the pack, and of a legend that will never die. ☕

Giuseppe Veneziano, *Pogo the Clown*, 2011

On a breezy fall afternoon, a young family, the Stimpsons went to a local garage sale. This older couple was selling a lot of furniture and things they had collected over the years. They looked very distraught and saddened, as if the weather mirrored their mood. Daryll, the youngest child, found a painting with a clown holding a peace sign. He was ecstatic about finding such a perfect painting for the season. Daryll went over to his parents to ask if they could buy it for him. They said it was too expensive, but the older couple quickly lowered the price so they would buy it.

Later that evening, the Stimpsons put the painting up in their house. Daryll wanted it to be between all the three children's rooms so that they could share the "awesomeness" of the painting. That night, the parents of the children went out to dinner for their 20-year anniversary. When they came back, they noticed that the house was unusually quiet. There were lights on but no sound came from inside the house, which was unusual for their family.

The parents opened the door and went upstairs to the children's rooms. There they saw a trail of blood leading from each of the kids doors. They went into each room and found each child dead in their bed, all with frightened looks on their faces. They followed the trail of blood in and out of each room until it lead out of the last room. It led to the painting of the clown, but something was different. The clown was holding up five fingers. 🤖

“Clown Story”

by Jireh Jordano



Ansel Adams, *White Tombstone*,
Laurel Hill, San Francisco, 1977

“The Forgotten Souls”

by Cadhla McLean

Morana felt a shiver race through her. Fear. But for what? She had nothing to fear. She was simply visiting her grandmother’s grave. Maybe it was just the air around the cemetery, or the fact that it was a cloudy day with only a little light passing through the clouds.

Morana blew out a shaky breath, quickening her footsteps. She located her grandmother’s grave and set the bundle of forget-me-nots in front of the tomb. She paused, she still felt agitated, but it wouldn’t be right to just set the flowers down and leave, right?

“Um,” Morana’s voice filled the empty air, “I...really miss you, Grandma, and...” Fog gathered around Morana. She startled, backing away, “I’m...just going to leave now.”

Morana turned, racing through the graveyard. She lunged over stones and tripped on sticks.

The entrance appeared in the fog and Morana ran as fast as she could. Her breaths came in gasps and her legs burned, but she

kept on running, her gaze pinned on the entrance.

She fell.

Morana let out a shriek, holding out her hands to catch her fall. She hit the ground. Hard. She shook slightly as she pushed herself up onto her knees, glancing around.

Behind her sat a large stone which she must’ve tripped on. She forced herself back to her feet. She felt cold and began rubbing her arms, wishing she’d brought a jacket. The fall seemed to have knocked some sense into her, she didn’t feel nearly as scared as before, just some anxiety.

Morana slowly walked toward the entrance, her hands stung from her fall and her legs hurt from the run. She reached the entrance and glanced back, then forward to the entrance.

It had vanished.

The fog in front of her blocked her view,

she spun around, but empty grayness greeted her on all sides.

Morana’s petrifying fear returned and she tried running again, but no matter how far she ran she couldn’t escape the fog, or her dread.

Then the voices started. Whispers, hardly there, they were so quiet and haunting. Then they grew louder.

“Help...”

“Tell them it was my fault...”

“Help me return...”

Every voice made her freeze, they all seemed to echo, come from all sides.

“H...help?” Morana asked.

A figure appeared before her, “Yes, help.”

The figure was a young girl, dressed in a white dress. Her wide, gray eyes stared up at Morana. Her skin was so pale it was almost translucent. What made Morana pause the most, though, was that the girl was hovering at least five inches off of the ground.

Morana stumbled backwards, “Y..you’re a ghost.”

“I was more once,” The girl's voice was filled with sorrow and pain, “But I suppose none of our stories are remembered now.”

“Our?”

“Yes,” The girl waved her arms and the fog cleared, transforming into about thirty spirits surrounding Morana. Some of the ghosts looked sad, others angry, and a few

looked lost, like they didn’t really know what they were doing there, “We are the forgotten ghosts, merely erased memories. Our families chose to leave this town, leave us behind, and then didn’t share our story. Few knew that some of us even existed, and when those few passed, our lives were lost in the past.”

“I’m sorry,” Morana realized that she wasn’t scared of the small ghost girl. The girl didn’t feel like she had negative energy, although Morana sensed that some of the spirits surrounding her did.

“Yes, I’m sure you are,” The ghost girl sighed, then glanced around, “But no one will do what it takes for us to be remembered again.”

“What does it take?”

“It takes a willing person who wants to help,” the ghost girl said, “Someone who is willing to hear each of our tales play in their head and share them with others, but of course, that also means that if the person fails to share each and every story, we will not fail to drag them down with us,” The girl’s eyes flashed with the first hint of anger, “Plenty have promised, but none have gone through with their promise.”

“What is your tale, then?” Morana asked, “I am willing to hear.”

“Are you sure?” The ghost girl asked, “Once you make this choice, you cannot back out. It is either share and hear every story, or join our ranks. You must know, there are thirty-seven of us forgotten souls, that is thirty-seven stories, and some of them are terrible. One of us has been murdered, another was simply lost. Each story ends with the same terrible fate, us ending up here.”

Morana paused, there was a hint of

fear, but she pushed through it. The spirits needed her help, “I want to help.”

The ghost girl nodded, “Alright. Listen, then.”

The Ghost Girl’s Tale

I was called Letha Wraithe and I lived not far from this cemetery. I had always loved coming to the cemetery because it was so quiet and it seemed peaceful.

Little did I know that the place I loved so much would be the place I died in.

One night, around the age of eleven, I got mad at my parents and ran out of the house, insisting I would never return.

I wish I had been wrong.

I ran to my refuge, which was, as you can guess, the graveyard. It was nearing dark, and I began to grow afraid. The wind in the trees sounded like the shrieks of hungry animals and I felt like something was watching me.

When I arrived at the graveyard, I heard my parents calling my name, searching for me, so I ran further and further into the graveyard. I was going so fast, and I tripped. When I tripped I tumbled down a hill and hit my head against a tombstone. My neck cracked, and by the time my parents found me, I was already gone.

Morana paused, a feeling of empathy and sadness filling her. “I’m so sorry,” Morana whispered.

Letha shrugged, “It’s okay, but fulfill your end of the promise, listen, and share.”

Morana nodded, “I will, and when

I’m done listening, I will share each of your stories, you will never be the forgotten souls again.” 🍪

“Tick”

by Kayla Ruby



My family has always known me as hardworking. I was never a stranger to hard-ship and juggling multiple tasks and jobs at once—it was just who I was.

“A busy bee that is far too independent for your own good” my parents used to tease, “One day you’ll get yourself into trouble with all that work.”

My first job was at a less-than-known bakery an hour away from my neighborhood, but I never heard any of my neighbors talk about it, maybe it just wasn’t that popular. My family wasn’t close to neighboring houses, so it’s not like we talked to them much anyway. The long drive was my only complaint, especially since the job paid well. I knew better than complaining about the perfect opportunity.

Every afternoon after I got home from school, I’d head straight for the bakery for my night shift. The drive there was silent and oddly soothing. The backroads stretched endlessly, surrounded by nothing but fields. The only sound that countered the peaceful silence was small murmurs coming from the radio. I wasn’t one to listen to music, but complete silence was far more distracting, in my opinion.

The bakery, on the other hand, was far from silent. It was an orchestra of overwhelming smells and sounds: the sharp and sickly sweetness from frosting mixed with the bitter aroma of too much baking soda, the old clock ticking far too loud, and the endless beeps and creaks from the stoves working overtime. But, despite all of that, I had the place to myself. No one there to micromanage rushed me through closing duties. Just me and the bakery’s unnerving Maneki-neko.

My employer, Brennan Miller, said that no one else volunteered for the night shift,

which was mainly why I was able to secure such a paycheck; it never seemed out of the ordinary to me. Most of my coworkers were adults with families. I figured that’s all it was.

The night shift wasn’t for everyone.

—

I often caught myself glancing at the clock to keep track of time during my shifts, but either the clock was broken, or I’ve lost sense of it. The hour hands never moved the way they should—jumping ahead in one moment and seemingly skipping backwards the next.. My shifts began to feel longer, stretching thin, as if time had stopped. The bakery would fall in eerie silence during these moments—no ticking or running ovens. Just silence. Still, I ignored it. I knew better than to trust a broken clock.

“Just a little longer,” I’d whisper to myself, “Just a little longer, then I can go home.”

—

I arrived at the bakery a little earlier than usual, and the first thing I noticed was the new arrangement of the tables. They’ve completely moved. Where they used to line the windows and walls, leaving space for customers to walk through, they were now arranged in perfect, neat rows.

The change in arrangements shouldn’t have bothered me, but it did. The layout felt unnatural for the bakery’s setting. Day shift must’ve rearranged them which meant Mr. Miller approved. Still, that didn’t sit right with what I know about Mr. Miller. He was never one for changes.

“Drastically changing something that works is unnecessary.” He’d always tell us whenever someone even slightly suggested a

change.

—

I wasn’t able to make it to work one evening due to a disruption in my schedule, so I figured I’d go in. Mr. Miller never answered emails, so I searched up the bakery’s number. But, for some odd reason, the website wouldn’t show up.

I’ve visited it plenty of times before to check schedules, review inventory but now, it is gone. No search results, not even a cached page. Nothing. It was as if it had never existed.

I brushed it off at first and decided to check my call history instead. I’d called in sick before, so I should’ve had the number saved but after fifteen minutes of scrolling, there was nothing. There was no record of Mr. Miller’s phone number and no trace of the bakery at all.

A cold shiver snaked down my spine, raising the hairs on the back of my neck.

“What is going on?” I whispered.

—

I’ve rerouted my GPS a million times over, yet, somehow, my drive still hasn’t added up. By the twentieth reroute, I gave up and relied on memory to get to the bakery. By now, I should’ve been there already, but instead, all I found was never ending backroads that led to nowhere. Not even a single car or house in sight— just open fields and empty roads stretching for miles. It was frustrating to say the least.

I huffed, “What else can go wrong this month?”

—

When I finally arrived, I let out a sigh of relief and checked my phone to see how late I was. To my surprise, I was right on time. How was that possible? I’d been driving for far too long.

I stepped out of my car and looked toward the bakery, freezing mid-step. Something wasn’t right. The address was correct, but the building wasn’t. This wasn’t the bakery. It was a run down warehouse by the looks of it, weeds and vines breaking through the cracks in the pavement. I was two seconds away from getting back in my car and leaving when something caught my eye.

Miller’s Bakery

The sign – faded, withering, half-eaten by mites and overgrown with vines, still clung to the wall. My stomach dropped. I checked my phone, clinging for an answer. I confirmed it once more, this was Miller’s Bakery. The air around me grew heavy.

Against my better judgement, I moved toward the front entrance. The door creaked as I pushed it open, revealing shattered windows, crumbling wallpaper, and years of dust and grime layering on every surface. Then I heard it, an all-too-familiar sound.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

My eyes snapped towards the sound. This wasn’t just a sick dream. That “broken” clock was still ticking– just like it did every single shift. Everything else had fallen apart

and yet, there it was, untouched and pristine, the jagged second hand gliding across the numbers. Beside it, the Maneki-neko’s paw seemed to rise and fall in perfect rhythm with the ticking, the unblemished white paint stark against the grime, and for a moment, it felt like it was watching me.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Then it hit me, cold dread washing over me.

The bakery never existed. 🍞

“Halloween”

by Elizabeth Bench

The spooky season has arrived
 And with it comes a fun surprise
 Tricks and treats in the air
 Eating candied apples at a fair
 Carving out pumpkins
 And making little munchkins
 There is nothing here to despair
 So dress up spooky
 And act all goofy
 As the night comes out to scare. 🍂

“Useless, Toothless”

by Amelia J. Rogers

Useless. Toothless.
 The world has done it. It has come to an end.
 Family no more, no more friends.
 The dead will fight sick,
 The weak will fall quick.
 The strong may just survive,
 But I am sure to thrive.
 Useless.
 Toothless.
 Dreadful men, dreadful women, old and WW.
 Next to leftovers they were not fed.
 Spitting to spread their ill.
 Bites are how they kill.
 But with their sticky, rotting eyes,
 They cannot achieve their emprise.
 Of find their false teeth,
 So I can live with death!
 Useless.
 Toothless.
 My fear is who gave them this plague,
 Hints of whom are quite vague.
 Slimy gums try to bite me,
 While I eat steamed broccoli.
 I ponder up ways to rule,

Make a throne out of a stool!
 What's a king without a throne?
 A shock hit me like a stone.
 The dead will fight sick,
 The weak will fall quick.
 The strong may just survive,
 But I am sure to thrive.
 Useless.
 Toothless.
 Is not he,
 Who bit me.
 I shriek with fear and desperation.
 No longer trapped in isolation.
 All my grand plans interrupted.
 How could this get me corrupted?
 I fret the disease I thought I was safe from,
 But I will not let myself succumb!
 Useless.
 Toothless.
 The dead will fight sick,
 The weak will fall quick.
 The strong may just survive,
 But I am sure to thrive.
 I had all there was to fly,
 Yet I still managed to die. 🍿



“Edge of the City”
 by Sota Reinfeld



“Playground
Memory”
by Lucy Garn



“Da Tree”
by Ellie Lease

What Are You Afraid Of?

Write your answers below!