

Harbinger

2021



Harbinger

2021

n. har•bin•ger [här•bin•jær]

a person or thing that comes before to announce
or to give indication of what will follow

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Foreword

Brevity: Long Story Short

Edgar Allan Poe is often credited with inventing the short story, or, at the very least, he was one of its strongest advocates during a time when it was criticized for its brevity. One of his first short stories, “MS. Found in a Bottle,” was only a few pages long, yet it was enough to land him an award. He worked hard to establish the genre’s key elements: mood, tone, unity of effect, and, of course, narrative compression. He believed a short story should be read in a single sitting for the reader to experience its full impact. Ernest Hemingway built on this concept when he used the metaphor of the iceberg to characterize the demands of a story: the deeper meaning of the piece should remain submerged below the surface. This technique requires more engagement from readers as they work toward meaning. Also, it meant that the story has fewer chances to make its points so every word must count.

Kate Chopin used the short form to question patriarchy subtly through metaphor and tone in order to avoid censorship. After receiving backlash for her oblique feminist novel *The Awakening*, she decided to stick with the short story form and with great success. In a few brief pages Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s iconic story “The Yellow Wallpaper” captures the mental distress of a woman whose ailments have been misdiagnosed by male doctors. And today we have Joyce Carol Oates’ advice: “If you can tell a story as briefly as possible, it’s more dramatic.”

In this year’s issue, many of our featured writers of fiction, nonfiction, drama, and poetry create a great impact in just a few pages, capturing the quality of brevity Poe so much admired. In her ten-minute play “Out and About,” Amber Lehmann dramatizes in a minimalist style the humor of a daughter coming out to her father. Arabela Rowland’s creative nonfiction piece “Smog Colored Glasses” traces in a few paragraphs a young woman’s first relationship that began in high school and lasted until her college years. But the disturbing

detail she discovers will be with her for a lifetime. In Jessamin McSwain's science fiction piece "Logs of Captain Faris of the *Elysian*, August 2099", we read the daily accounts of a spaceship captain who is under siege. But is our narrator reliable or not? Madison Crist's art feature *a sense of the streets* pays homage to street art and the diverse people who create it. Lauren Granich's poems with their short, direct lines capture interesting moments of alienation and isolation. The twelve brief interviews with former *Harbinger* editors sprinkled throughout this issue answer the question, "Where are they now," and also give advice to their fellow writers and editors.

When reading Poe, Hemingway, Chopin, Gilman, and Oates—a group of our most noted short story writers—we experience the artistry of compressing stories to their essential elements. Today we are used to reading brief stories and are quite familiar with the short format. We get our entertainment and news fast; either in an abbreviated text or email message, a tweet, or a short video. Contemporary consumers of media know that not everything needs to be spelled out in order for meaning to be conveyed. Yet, of course, one questions what is lost. Does all this hyper-compressed product rob the reader of a fully immersive and intellectual experience? It might be too early to tell, but the short story survives as does short-shorts and micro nonfiction and ten-minute plays. Brevity seems to be the condition of the day.

We invite you to embrace the short form of storytelling as much as we do. Read slowly, or quickly, and read it again, and use what you see on the surface to understand the deeper meaning beneath.

N.C. & J.F.

Perilous Safety

Jessamin McSwain

Since the *SS Belgravia* left Saint John several days ago, the rain has been unending. The chill Canadian air reminded me of Copenhagen, which reminded me of Anna and Leif. I had left them behind to cross the Atlantic for a chance to see my photographs hang in the Fotografiska, albeit under my son's name. The rain continued to fall and a heavy fog swallowed the world around the ocean liner. From the porthole in my room, I could see the downpour and climbing waves. Perhaps the ocean had expanded due to the rain, which would explain why the trip was taking longer than I had hoped. I had been told that May was a better time to travel than June. Chances for tropical storms were low. That had been a lie.

I recalled this observation in the ship's lounge with the wives of the gentlemen onboard. Danish was my native language, so my English was below average. But my Danish accent and difficulty with certain English words made me interesting to talk to. And it made the trip easier.

The women wore pearls, grand hats, corsets, and large shawls over their shoulders. I had a single fur coat and a simple dress I had bought in Copenhagen. The women were all beautiful, their necks jeweled and faces pale. I paid their husbands little mind, preferring to admire their wives while thinking of my own love.

Anna was a widow. Her husband, Hans, had died of a coughing disease that a doctor called tuberculosis. We had become close friends during the beginning of her arranged marriage and shared a secret. I had adopted Leif as my own son before Hans became ill. Still too young to recognize the relationship his mother and I have, Leif called me Auntie Marja. It was in the midst of the conversations with these wives that the liner shuddered. Echoes of scraping metal rose from the depths of the vessel, causing a wave of panic. The wives rushed to their husbands, like scared damsels. I stood alone, my hands shaking, searching for the nearest cook staff and waiters. But

they had no answers.

“Go find out. I demand to know what’s going on! Are we sinking? I must speak with Captain Laird. I paid good money for a safe trip.” Their voices rose, arguing or sobbing as the noises continued to emanate from the bowels of the *Belgravia*, and our voyage came to a halt. Standing outside the circle of Americans, I wondered about the other foreigners like myself. Immigrants were stuck in the tiny cabins above the engines, too poor to afford sunlight. My heart sank as I thought of them terrified, holding their children close, unable to get any information.

A gut feeling led me to my cabin. I began packing my belongings into a trunk, my confidence is staggering. I would not stay on this ship any longer. I would catch a carriage to take me south. It would add days to my travel, but I would feel safer on solid land than the churning ocean.

Echoes of scraping metal rose from the depths of the vessel, causing a wave of panic.

As I returned to the lounge, I caught a staff member.

“Why have we stopped?” English had been difficult to learn, but Anna was a good teacher.

“*Belgravia* has run aground. Captain Laird has called for tugs and a replacement vessel to transport the passengers.” He spoke swiftly, and it made my head hurt. Some of the words I lost, but I nodded as he continued. The men began shouting in anger, some cursing the captain. Their wives followed them like lost dogs. I couldn’t envy them anymore.

The couples began drifting from the lounge to their cabins to prepare their items for departure. The staff would load their trunks onto the new ship when it arrived. My gaze traveled upwards to the skylight. The rain had stopped. Pulling my coat close to my chest, I made the climb to the deck.

Standing at the railing, I strained to see through the thick fog. A chill wind cut through my coat. Soon it would be warmer, but I was used to a late summer. The crew moved across the aft of the *Belgravia*, shouts and orders being passed from the deck to the holds below. I watched them dash to-and-from. Most were absorbed in their tasks, while a few still had the mind to acknowledge my presence with a light nod.

A word I didn't know came from the crew. The other couples who had found their way to the deck began moving toward the center and downwards, I couldn't figure out why. A young sailor rushed toward me speaking too swiftly in English. When he realized I couldn't understand him, he switched to French. I shook my head in confusion.

As he reached out to grab my arm, the *Belgravia* lurched forward, and I lost my balance. The sailor crashed into the railing as I toppled overboard, too stunned to scream. So, this is how my life would end?

The cold water engulfed my coat and dress, the weight pulling me down. My eyes burned in the salt water; I was too shocked to close them. I struggled out of my coat as I sank deeper than my lungs had air for. Waterlogged, I couldn't make headway, and the current pulled me down. The *Belgravia* had run aground, but there seemed to be no end to the depths.

When arms wrapped around my waist, I was moments from giving in. My lungs burned and my eyes stung. Despite my deranged struggle to swim, my rescuer delivered me to the surface. As the wind caught my cheeks, I took a deep breath of air, letting my eyes readjust.

"Madame! Madame!" the sailor shouted. If he hadn't come in to save me, who had?

A strange voice spoke to me. It was comforting despite my inability to understand the angelic woman who held me in her arms, frost white hair pooling in the water around us. Her eyes held the secrets of the ocean, and I realized her legs were

a long tail. She had fins for arms and gills at her throat. She had saved me.

“Here! I’m here!” I called up, never letting her leave my sight.

Her skin was pale like Anna’s but semi-translucent with a shimmer underneath. She was hauntingly beautiful. Her warm smile exposed serrated teeth.

A round of relieved voices echoed from the women above as a cresting wave crashed against the hull of the *Belgravia*. The cold water didn’t bother me the longer she held me, and I was thankful for her presence.

A life preserver connected to thick rope landed on the next wave, moving toward us. I grabbed hold as she released her grip. A voice above me asked if I had the preserver, but I did not answer. I could not leave yet. I leaned forward, resting my forehead against the woman who reminded me of Anna, so kind and selfless. Except this woman wasn’t truly human. She was something different.

“Tak,” I said, before kissing her forehead. She blessed me, and I returned the favor as best I could. She smiled and then made sure I was secure in the preserver before disappearing into the cool depths.

“Ready!” I called and suddenly I was pulled from the Atlantic. The fog obscured my vision of the ocean below, but I was certain she was still there. The sailors pulled me onto the deck, a crowd of crew gathered to help with blankets and hot coffee.

“You okay?” Captain Laird asked. I glanced back toward the fog and sea, hoping to catch a final glimpse of the woman.

“Yes,” I said and nodded.

I would get on the next ship to New York City, but I now knew if something went wrong, there would always be someone out there to protect me.

The Monsters on Indiana Avenue

Christina Scott

Mama told me and Little Annie from up the street not to hang around Indiana Avenue because there were monsters down there with big bellies and crooked teeth waiting to gobble us up. I didn't believe Mama, assuming she didn't want me rolling around in the grass at the Indiana Avenue park and speckling my legs like chicken skin from the bug bites. Little Annie was struck with the fear shivers though, and swore she wouldn't go down there even for a crisp five-dollar bill. I told her I'd sneak her two from my daddy's wallet if she went with me since he said wouldn't nothing snatch her up because she smelled like mustard greens and never shut up in the car.

When me and Little Annie from up the street passed Martin Luther King Boulevard two blocks from Indiana Avenue, she said she was starting to feel a rumbling in the bottom of her gut like her granny got before folks busted in her apartment windows one night. I told her there were tablets she could drop in water for that. She needed to come on because the streetlights would be lit up soon, and we'd have to be back home. She stepped a little quicker then, clutching her stomach like a mother holds her baby.

When we got to Indiana Avenue, she started hearing a crying sound. At first, I thought she was trying to spook me into going home, but then I started hearing it too, coming from the back of a Section-8 house. Little Annie told me to go see about it, and I told her to go instead. Like my daddy said, nothing was going to want her. She started puffing and pouting and went around the house to get away from me.

When Little Annie had been gone long enough for me to arrange all the bottle caps I found in the front parking lot by

At first, I thought she was trying to spook me into going home, but then I started hearing it too, coming from the back of a Section-8 house.

color, I started feeling what seemed like frogs jumping around in my belly. I knew Mama was just trying to get at me with all that monster talk, but Jeffrey from the street next to mine said he'd heard about a little girl that got swallowed whole on Indiana Avenue. I'd told him I knew he was telling a lie because there wasn't no place for the monsters to hide if they were big enough to eat folks whole. He shut up after that but thinking about the story didn't make my stomach feel any better.

Little Annie had been dragging her feet loud at first to let me know she wasn't too happy about going, but I'd stopped hearing it when she got too far away. I called out to her, telling her not to play around because it was starting to get dark. I thought I saw a street lamp turn on, and it was getting cold. The wind was pummeling my head something fierce, so I had a hard time hearing her when she yelled back at me that she'd found a kitten.

After that, I didn't hear from Little Annie anymore, and I didn't see her again either. I sat there and waited for her to come back. I even screamed that she better not bring that cat back because I was allergic. She didn't answer. Something rumbled and rustled and crunched like tires on a torn-up parking lot. Then I went home, shuffling my feet and holding onto myself in a familiar sort of way. How was I going to tell Mama that the monsters got Little Annie? She was going to tear into my butt with the belt for being disobedient.

But Mama didn't whoop me. She didn't even scream at me. She told me there wasn't no monsters on Indiana Avenue, only more little girls disappearin'.

Olivia Aguilar

In Brief: A short interview with 2012 editor of *Harbinger: Full Disclosure*



Q: You currently work in publishing. Was your experience as the editor of *Harbinger* useful in your current career?

A: During my time as editor of *Harbinger*, I learned how to work with a team to produce an award-winning publication. *Harbinger* is a launchpad for many young writers, but my experience as editor guided me toward a career in book publishing.

Q: We would love to hear about your current job.

A: I'm a publicist for Northwestern University Press. NUP publishes scholarly works as well as quality works of fiction, drama, nonfiction, and poetry. I love being a publicist because every day is different, and I get to work with authors and reviewers directly. In that same vein, the challenges are always different, but the rewards are worth it.

Q: Graduating with a degree in either English or creative writing can be daunting. Any advice?

A: I would encourage all graduates to keep their options open! I started out in editorial, but I made the decision to switch to marketing and publicity six years ago, and I've found my niche. I would also encourage them to attend readings and literary events in their communities. Whether you're a writer or a professional working in publishing, or both, it's important to have an idea of the literary landscape.

Dear Seashore

Quinn Doll

Dear Seashore,

Sometimes I forget my words—I forget my keys in my car. I forget my car. Sometimes you forget my name, but you have never forgotten me. Have you forgotten all the things you wish you never knew? How does it feel? Are you lighter? Are your bones hollow? When the wind blows, do you feel as if you are being lifted? I do. Sometimes. But then, I have forgotten the time, the days, the land and then someone has to call me back. I'm sorry I keep missing your calls. I had saved the voicemail of you singing “Happy Birthday”. I still remember the sound of your voice on the phone. You said you were thinking about how we connect with each other: how we smile and sing, dance and laugh. (It's an old thing you took the time to think about.) How we hug hello and goodbye. But you said it so well, and I'd already forgotten. I still remember the blue shine in your eyes as I left last. I don't remember tears. My memory changes it or it was never remembered at all. Joy is so much more worthwhile than happiness because it happens after you have been scared for a long time. I'll call to let you know when I get there.

A Memory Bird's Song

Quinn Doll

I am the bird in the little house your granddaughter painted for you.

Who is free? I've forgotten but I can still remember the tune.

My beak is a little broken but I will soon fly.

A child's toy—a music box (some assembly required).

*I'm a robin, a sparrow, a finch made of old driftwood,
a little wooden bird for a little wooden house.*

*I'm found in what was lost,
thrown in a drawer; then inherited.*

I'm repainted, softened cobalt, then worn again.

My beak is a little broken but I will soon fly.

Deny its burden it's a bad habit;

but is a habit really bad or do we search for things to
grow out of?

(Tony, Tony turn around; something's lost and can't be found.)

Try to remember;

I'm a robin, a sparrow, a finch

Think, where did you see it last?

I'm repainted, softened cobalt, then worn again.

My beak is a little broken but I will soon fly.

Are we happy slipping off solid ground?

I've forgotten, but I can still remember the tune.

I am the little house painted pretty and worn again.

Give birth to what gives you more life. But there is no refrain
anymore.

Why call it a weakness? It's so much greater.

Time to Go Home, Kiddo

Quinn Doll

Sometimes life lives you, and I think that's okay.
Should we always be doing well?
She had another dream about you.
You wouldn't get on the school bus.
And for the first time, she was your mother and you her child.
And me, I was nowhere.
I never knew you. And then I was afraid to.
Are we fading or is this just more growing pains?
And you say:
I don't want to leave you behind.
I promise I'm trying not to. I'm holding on with all my might.
But these lights are so loud, and the roads are so bright,
I want to go home because it has lost me so many times before.

Desert Women

Mikaila Baker

The thing about women from the Sonoran Desert, land of saguaro forests and distant mountains, is that their colorful spirits can't be bleached by the sun. They stand out like gems in shades of brown and green. They are prepared for whatever nature throws at them.

The desert has four seasons of heat and light, each with its own intensity and unique interruption. Summer brings strong winds and monsoon rains that flood the streets and chase power out of homes. The sound of the last drops of rain on the gravel draws people outside to enjoy the cooler air until their WiFi and air conditioning returns. Neighbors greet one another under dark blue clouds, and children stomp in streams of water by the curbs.

There's a common friendliness there I haven't noticed elsewhere. Strangers greet like relatives, making small talk as they pass you. The smiles of the desert women stay warm in the winter. They carry sunlight in their hearts and in the bright smiles they share with friends and strangers alike. Sometimes they burn with the intensity of that heat. You can see it in their dancing, music and art. You can taste it in the food they serve.

I've met so many resilient women there. They overcome hardship and continue on with their lives. They stand tall and strong like the saguaros, rooted in experience. I wasn't born in the desert, but when I'm out of view of the mountains and fields of brown I feel homesick. I miss the warmth and light of the desert people. I miss the lizards and roadrunners and quails. I miss the sunsets; a gift offered each day.

Maya Alpert

In Brief: A short interview with 2016 Editor of *Harbinger: Girls Like Us*



Maya Alpert graduated from Stephens College in 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts in English. She attended the New York University Summer Publishing Institute to pursue a career in book publishing. Maya is now an associate editor at Insight Editions in the San Francisco Bay Area, editing cookbooks and cocktail books based on licensed entertainment brands such as DC Comics, *World of Warcraft*, and *The Office*.

Q: Please discuss your experience as the editor of *Harbinger*.

A: *Harbinger* was a wonderfully challenging and rewarding experience. As an editor, I gained insight into the creative and technical processes involved in producing a literary magazine and honed my editorial skills. As editor-in-chief, I learned skills that are vital to a professional in the book publishing industry: effective communication with team members, persistence in meeting tight deadlines, and, of course, line editing.

Q: Your job as an associate editor at Insight Editions sounds exciting. What do you love about it? What are the challenges?

A: As an associate editor, I focus on titles within the food and lifestyle space that are also tied to official pop culture brands. As a junior-level editor, I not only edit my own projects but support three senior-level editors on their projects as well. My favorite part of my job is getting to pitch new ideas for books! I love the opportunity to brainstorm with coworkers and con-

duct research. I also enjoy digging into manuscripts and working on developmental and line edits. The biggest challenge on a day-to-day basis is working with the brand licensors. When creating a product tied to a licensed brand, my job as the editor is to work within the brand guidelines while also producing a compelling book.

Q: Please share some advice for those graduating with either an English or creative writing degree.

A: Apply to internships if this is a financially feasible option, continue your editorial education by writing book/media reviews, etc. on a personal blog, and work on creating excellent cover letters that are tailored to each job you apply for. I would also say that with time and hard work, you will eventually move up from your first entry-level position.

Q: Do you have a favorite book?

A: My favorite book is Jane Austen's *Persuasion*.

Q: Please share an inspirational quote from one of your most admired people.

A: "If you don't see a clear path for what you want, sometimes you have to make it yourself."~Mindy Kaling

Lavender's

Ana Green

If you were to ask Sage, Lavender's is perfect for studying. Cori, the cute barista who works there in the afternoons, is definitely a plus. While he is a distraction, Sage does most of her homework between classes, and besides, her course load has led to a caffeine addiction. Fortunately, Lavender's uses locally sourced ingredients from their community garden. This eases her spending guilt. She pays a couple of bucks for her cup, and then gets refills in her reusable mug.

"Hey, Sage," she hears when she opens the door. The smell of coffee hits her full force, and beneath it the fragrance of dried flora that hangs from the walls. The coffee grinder hums, and Sage watches another regular pay for her drink. Cori is behind the counter, and he stops his back-and-forth with the customer to greet her when he sees her in the doorway. Sage blushes as she watches a smile spread across Cori's face.

Cori is not Sage's type. He's built like a ballerina or a gymnast, with

long graceful limbs. Sage's last boyfriend had been a football player. Her girlfriend before that had been a cheerleader. And before that, she dated the class president.

Sage sets her things in her usual corner booth and arranges her study materials on the table: laptop, notebook, pencils. She picks up her cup, walks to the counter, and, before she opens her mouth to order, it floats over to the tea station.

"Chai with strawberry and vanilla cream on top, super light ice, with honey instead of sugar." It isn't a question, just a statement. Cori knows Sage's order.

"What if I wanted to switch it up?"

He laughs.

"What! I could drink something else. Maybe I wanted coffee today."

He opens his palm
up flat and it floats
over to the counter.
The machines whir
back to life.

Cori falls into another fit of laughter.

“Even the magic knows better than that, Sage. Lavender worked really hard to make the enchantments perfect.”

Sage does know. She helped Lavender work on the enchantments after a customer ordered an Americano and ended up with something that was mostly herbal. “Okay, fine. Thank you.” Sage takes the cup from his hand, and feels Cori’s hesitation to let go.

“Thank you. I’ll be over in a little bit to pick up your cup for your refill.” He winks at her as she turns away.

She loves Lavender’s with its bottles of dried herbs and flowers. Machines turn on their own, the handles twisting and turning without being touched. An empty cup floats from a table over at the other end of the store, and when it lands on the counter, it is filled halfway with light roast coffee.

“I’d better take this over to Madge. I’ll see you in a few?” Cori says.

Sage feels lightheaded as she slowly walks back to her table. As she reads from her laptop, her lips move and her pen follows the words, taking notes in her handwriting. She’d perfected this spell freshman year.

Lost in her reading, she doesn’t hear the machines turning off. She doesn’t notice that nobody else walks through the door. And she doesn’t hear Cori walk over to her table and grab her empty cup. He opens his palm up flat and it floats over to the counter. The machines whir back to life.

“You know, botany sounds like the perfect major for you.”

His observation is simple. It could mean two things. Either he actually cares about her career goals, or he’s pretending to for the sake of conversation.

“And how did you know that’s my major?”

“You’re working on healing herbs, aren’t you?” He nods toward her illustration of deep green and golden yellow ginkgo leaves.

“Yeah, I am. Good eye, Licorice.”

“Please don’t call me that. You know my name. You can use it.”

Sage’s cup floats back to her table and settles next to her laptop.

“It’s so much more fun to make fun of you for being a brat. You shouldn’t have picked such a stupid name,” Sage says jokingly.

“Listen, it’s Lavender’s fault for making us pick cutesy names for our work personas.” He rolls his eyes and settles against the faux-leather booth.

“Of course, it is, Cor. I’m sure it has nothing to do with your sweet tooth or your addiction to shitty candy.”

Cori scoffs and puts his hands on his chest in mock hurt.

“Excuse me, I’ll have you know that I eat some of the world’s best candy. Licorice is exquisite. Anyway, everyone still calls me Cori, and it’s my real name.”

“Yeah, but Cor is cooler?”

“Come on, you know I hate that. Reminds me of family reunions. Makes my cheeks hurt.”

Before she thinks about what she’s doing, Sage places her palms over his cheeks. She tries to remember the chapter she’d read years ago about acupuncture and how to alleviate pain quickly. There are certain spots in the face that you can stimulate to force blood flow to relax the muscles.

“Let me see if I can fix that.” She knows he was joking, but she wants to show off her magic a little. She closes her eyes and concentrates on the feeling of Cori’s face beneath her fingertips. Blood moves beneath his skin, little rivers of tension hiding below the surface. The muscles in his face are tense: under his eyes, at his temples, where his jaw meets the bottom of his ear. The same spots she has to tackle when she has headaches.

Sage whispers a spell, and then she can feel the magic

come to life. Little bolts of electricity shock her, starting in her chest and spreading down her arms, following her veins down and into her fingertips. When she opens her eyes, Cori is shivering.

“Where’d you learn that? I didn’t think they taught plant lovers medical techniques.”

“Something I picked up a couple of years ago in an intro to magical medical practices class. Learned a lot of cool stuff. I can fix my own headaches now, things like that.” She looks at her notebook and realizes the pen is floating, waiting patiently for her to turn the page.

“Did you learn that in a class too?”

“No, I figured that one out on my own. I’m sure if my professors knew they would call it cheating.” Sage notices Cori’s face is flushed. “Do your cheeks hurt?”

“No! My face feels really relaxed. Can I call you next time I’ve got a headache?”

Sage has to make a decision here. Should she give him her phone number, or should she laugh it off and say something sarcastic? She decides to be brave, if you can call flirting brave.

She closes her eyes
and lets herself feel
the magic.

“Sure. You can call me whenever you want, really.” She picks up her phone and offers it to him. He puts in his number, but then he starts swiping. “What are you doing?”

“I knew you were a sucker for plants, but I didn’t expect it to be this bad. Plant dictionaries? Herbology apps? You’re precious, Sage” He hands back her phone.

“Thanks, I guess? It’s not like you’re not obsessed with something, come on. There’s got to be something.”

“It’s cute, seriously. I don’t know anyone who is so dedicated to their passions.” He reaches for his phone in his pocket. “Fair is fair though. Give me the number, set up your contact,

look through my home screens.”

The first thing she notices about his phone is the wallpaper. Behind all of his apps, which are neatly organized by color, is a picture of a shoreline: a jagged rock coast with Cori standing with a bundle in his hands. Behind him, a fire of driftwood glows brilliantly against the blue sky.

His apps seem pretty normal: social media, a library lending app, some puzzle games. There’s a folder dedicated to photography and music.

“Ah, there it is. You’re a photography guy.”

“Oh shit, you caught me!”

This back-and-forth has become easy, natural. Sage would normally have been scared by now that she might ruin the conversation.

“Now you know how I felt! Oh no, a cute barista found out I love plants! He’ll think I’m so weird.”

“Can you show me some magic?” Cori rubs his thumbs over her palms and looks up at her. His hands are cold. “I want to know what it feels like.”

“Sure.”

“Don’t think about it. I just want to see what you can do.” His voice is quiet, like they’re sharing a secret.

Don’t think. Sage can do that, shut down and let magic guide her. It glides through her, turning white hot, and burning from the inside out. When she opens her eyes, she looks down at her palm and notices that her veins are green. A String of Pearls grows, sprouting the stems first, then the leaves with heart-shaped beads. The stem is mossy and green. It grows so long it drapes over her palm, over Cori’s thumbs, and down past her elbow.

“Holy shit. That’s amazing. How do you do that?”

“I’m not sure. It just happens, I’m obsessed with plants.” She looks down at her hand. The stems have separated from the lines of her palm and turned into roots.

“You’re amazing. Seriously.”

Something crackles in the air between them. Not magic, just something raw and emotional.

“Maybe we could team up one day. I could photograph some of your magic. We’ll have to talk about it when you call me,” Cori says as a woman with long red hair walks over to their table.

“You do work here, right?” She narrows her eyes, taking in Cori’s nametag. “I have somewhere to be and not enough patience to stand here and watch the plant major put the moves on you.”

As Cori goes off to help her, time seems to stretch on forever. Sage can’t just leave, that would be too obvious. It would also be embarrassing. And there was something real between them. There was no way she’d made it all up.

When she looks up again, the woman is standing with her cup in her hand. Lily. Of course, her name is Lily. Her fingers are adorned with rings that sparkle more than they should. Sage sees through her seeming perfectness. To her she looks disheveled. Her braided hair hangs in uneven strands down her back. Her blazer and jeans are frayed. She must be using some kind of magic to make herself look more presentable, but Sage isn’t sure what it is.

If Sage is going to leave, now would be a good time. She packs up her laptop, notebook, and pens. On her way out the door, she begins to feel as if she’s suffocating from the smell of coffee and dried herbs. Just a few more steps and she’ll be outside where she can take a deep breath, but before she can run away, she feels a hand on her elbow and shoulder.

Cori has come after her. “Where are you going?” he asks, “I forgot that I’ve got somewhere to be soon.” Sage knows the lie is flimsy, but she can’t come up with anything else.

“Can you sit down, please?”

He leads her back inside to her booth. They sit together as

they had been before Lily interrupted them.

“We were having a good conversation. I love talking to you. I don’t know what Lily thought she was doing. You’re so amazing, and we were having such a great conversation. No one existed but us.”

Sage smiles and says, “I thought so, too.”

“Does that mean you’ll let me ask you out? Or will I have to continue to pine after the cute witch who sits in the corner where she knows I can see her?” Sage sucks in a breath as Cori continues. “I know I’m just a mere human, but I think you’d like it if you gave me a chance.”

Sage shakes her head. God, there’s nothing about him that she has to take a chance on. She knows this will work.

“If you’d have shut up after asking me, I would’ve said yes. Now I want to spell your lips closed.”

Sage smooths a stray tuft of Cori’s hair behind his ear and then lets her hand rest against his cheek.

“Are you going to kiss me, or keep looking at my lips like I don’t know what that means?”

Cori leans in close, stops, looks at her and then waits for her to meet him halfway. “I should’ve been asking for permission, so I’ll just wait here until you’re ready.”

Sage leans in and brushes her lips against his, enjoying the sparks she feels between them. There are little bolts of energy that jump from her lips to his. Magic is telling her to take a leap.

“Just because you don’t have magic doesn’t mean you have to be a smartass.”

“Just because you do have magic doesn’t mean you’ll be a good kisser. I hope I’m wrong.” Cori pauses for a second before they knock their foreheads together. He lets out a little laugh, and Sage feels it against her lips. “Prove me wrong?”

She does just that. She hopes.

An Interview with Amber McCrary

Madison Crist



Amber McCrary is a Diné poet, zinester, feminist and artist. Originally from Shonto, Arizona, and raised in a small town near Flagstaff, she discovered her love for punk rock and the DIY culture.

She earned her BA from Arizona State University in political science with a minor in American Indian Studies. She received her MFA in creative writing with an emphasis in poetry at Mills College. She is the creator of *DANG! Zine*. Her chapbook *Electric Deserts* was published by Tolsun Books.

Madison Crist: I would love to start off by talking about your poetry. What drew you to the genre and what does it mean to you?

Amber McCrary: I am not really sure what drew me to poetry. It felt pretty organic. When I was younger, I was already writing what you might consider poetry without even realizing it at the time. I had a natural gravitation toward poetry and zines.

MC: What other artists or other writers influence your work?

AM: Growing up I would say Rebecca Walker, M.I.A., Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chinua Achebe, Pixies, Animal Collective, and the Clash, to name a few. In my teens and throughout my twenties, I gravitated toward African literature and punk rock music. They all talked in a way that pushed back against the normative white gaze or a conventional narrative.

MC: This is a question I love to ask all poets. If you had to

describe poetry in three words what would they be?

AM: Dreamy, angsty, and experiences.

MC: Let us get into your body of creative works. You have created numerous zines and also published a chapbook in 2020. What is the writing or crafting process like for you?

AM: I probably sound like a broken record and will iterate other writers when I say no piece is ever finished. I could probably go back to all the zines and the chapbook and add or correct them, but I think it is more of a letting-go process. You have to let it be its own piece of art regardless of whether it is done or not.

MC: Regarding zines, I know you also hold workshops on the creative process. If you could create any workshop in the world what would it be about?

AM: Oh! That is a good one! So, I am super into this show right now called *Superstore*. I would probably make a fanzine workshop dedicated to the show or a fanzine workshop dedicated to the band and singer Sade.

MC: How would you define the zine aesthetic and how you create one?

AM: The classic zine aesthetic usually lies in simple cut-and-paste and layering of pieces of paper. I love making homemade zines with paper, glue, tape, scissors, and a typewriter. However, recently I have been doing some pieces through apps such as Flipsnack and Canva, and I am teaching myself how to do Photoshop.

MC: I know zines can serve as a powerful outlet for creativity. They are the perfect medium for the expression of niche content, and they give you a glimpse into worlds outside mainstream culture. Why do you think zines matter?

AM: It is the exact opposite of the publishing world. The publishing world can be daunting, and there are many editing factors involved. The process to publish a book can take one to two years. With zines, they are entirely self-published, and there is no censorship like in the publishing. What I also love about zines are Zine Fests. You can find your people: comic artists, feminists, works about cats or burritos or tea. There are so many different niches, but what I mainly love is how open-minded a lot of the creators are to content that might not relate to what they create.

MC: You recently published your chapbook *Electric Deserts*. In a review, it said that this chapbook is a quest to know yourself, your history, and your future. What inspired you to create it and what impact did you intend for it to have?

AM: It was not really a concept chapbook; it just turned out to be about deserts! When I was in graduate school, all of my poems just happened to be about love, the Sonoran deserts, Indigenous bodies, my muse, and me. I mainly wrote about what was happening in my life at that moment. It celebrates Indigenous love; when two Indigenous people from two different deserts meet and find beauty in one another's land and body.

MC: I feel a strong connection to the land in your poems, especially your poem "A Letter to the Land." Why is it important to intertwine land and language in your work?

AM: For most Diné, land and language are the same. They

are not separate. For Diné folks, most things interact in a way where everything is connected. It is like you cannot have one without the other. As an Indigenous womxn from Northern Arizona, I write for the land.

MC: You are creating the first Diné womxn-owned publishing press, Abalone Mountain Press. What are your goals for starting the press? Who are your dream writers that you would like to publish or interview on its accompanying podcast?

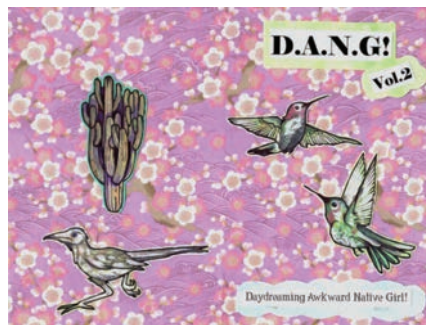
AM: My goals are to start with one book at a time. I already have two in mind. My dream writers to publish would be Ofelia Zepeda, Layli Long Soldier, or Danielle Geller. The beginning of the press will entail researching, reaching out to publishing mentors, and doing interviews with native writers. Only a handful of presses in the United States publish only Indigenous writers. There are less than a handful of Indigenous-owned presses in the United States. I discovered this when I was trying to look for an Indigenous-owned press to submit my first collection of poetry. The mission is to create a space for Indigenous voices. Abalone Mountain Press will be a Diné womxn owned press working on occupied Akimel O'odham land. It is named Abalone Mountain Press after the Abalone Mountain, which comes from the Diné name for the San Francisco peaks in Flagstaff, Arizona. Abalone Shell Mountain is one of the four sacred mountains for Diné. I grew up in Flagstaff, Arizona, therefore this sacred mountain is near and dear to my heart.

MC: In these crazy times of COVID-19 and social distancing, how do you find time to work? Do you feel like your mind is constantly creating or is it a good time to reflect on future and past projects?

AM: My mind has not been in the mood to create at all, which is a bummer. It has been more of a time to reflect on future projects like the press and collaborating with other folks on their events or projects.

MC: What are your other passions outside of poetry?

AM: I love to read. I want to improve my water coloring. I love music, which influences everything I do. I also love tea and learning about medicinal plants and herbs.



Harvest Moon

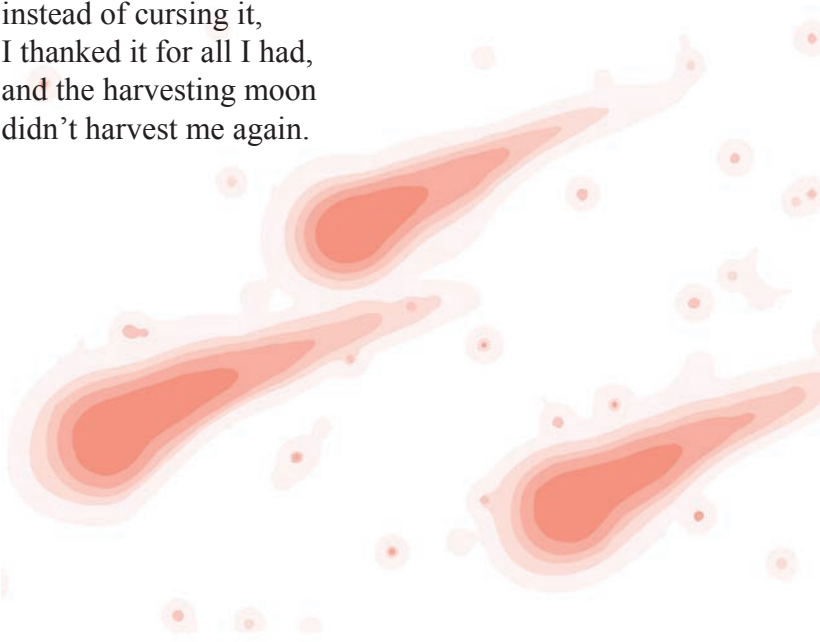
Lauren Granich

The Harvest Moon glared at me
as I crossed the cobblestone street.
My ankle twisted, toppling me to the ground, making me
one with the street.

I was used to people walking all over me.
Harvesting my efforts for their own,
harvesting me for their pleasure,
and harvesting me to keep them alive.

I wanted to harvest myself.
I wanted to pat myself on the back
for all my hard work
instead of my work feeling like someone else's.
I stood on my twisted ankle,
limped across the street,
and glanced at the Harvest Moon again.

For once,
instead of cursing it,
I thanked it for all I had,
and the harvesting moon
didn't harvest me again.



Ten Girls

Lauren Granich

Was all that was left of us.
The boys were long gone,
scared off by the structure
and consequences at a Catholic grade school,
but the girls remained.

Just ten girls.

We suddenly were thrown into a spotlight,
as big of a spotlight a small-town Catholic School can have,
and became everyone's favorite class.

We were well-behaved,
groomed to behave as they wanted.

We didn't have the strength to fight back
as polite young ladies.

Ten girls eventually split up into groups of two,
friend groups of two,

and I was left with the girl
who had stolen, broken in,
and shared her psychiatric diagnosis
on our third day of meeting her.

How could it have come to this?

Ten girls,

once so equal,
had now become separated,
and I was left alone.

Ten young, polite girls in skirts.

Ten girls.

One me.

Renée Reed-Miller

In Brief: A short interview with 2000 and 2001 Editor of *Harbinger*



Renée Reed-Miller is the concept pioneer of an integrative, trauma-informed community engagement process called Thanks in Advance (TIA). She uses expressive arts to promote trauma-sensitive, healing-centered practices in families, organizations and communities. As founder of Reed-Miller Group, she collaborates with public and private entities to design trauma-informed policies and procedures critical to co-managing human and so-

cial services in varied contexts. Reed-Miller is also the founder of a small, local-to-global non-profit organization called Vessels International, with past projects in Haiti, India, Jordan, Missouri, Nepal and Uganda

Q: You were editor of *Harbinger* for two years. What did you learn from the experience?

A: I developed professional skills to last a lifetime and honed core values that guide me on a daily basis; such as mutual respect, active listening, inclusivity, humble inquiry, equity, and agency. While serving in this capacity, I gained an appreciation for those who produce a themed literary publication. Although I initially had an acute eye for revision and an expectation of perfection, the work itself birthed in me a deeper understanding of the processes and challenges faced by reviewers in this arena. The feedback of editors carries added weight with me

now, because I served in the role of a constructive critic nurturing other writers. I am grateful for the valuable lessons I gained through this authentic and co-creative exercise at Stephens College.

Q: Tell us about your current job. It sounds fascinating.

A: My work now focuses on frontline community-level intervention for collective healing and mental well-being. Growing the socio-emotional health of individuals, families, teams and communities is rewarding yet emotionally laborious work. Through the use of non-clinical, therapeutic and contemplative practices, including therapeutic creative writing, I am devoted to the growing the field of healing-centered arts in all of my occupational endeavors. I mentor artists, writers and community-builders.

Q: What advice would you give graduating English and creative writing majors?

A: Exercise compassion. Collaborate rather than compete. Remember that your skill-sets translate into just about any occupation.

Q: Will you share a short list of your favorite books?

A: *Portrait of a Turkish Family* by Irfan Orga, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, and *Fuel* by Naomi Shihab Nye

Skinless

Jasmine Flores

“Name?”

“Jennifer Griffin.”

“Date of birth?”

“May 6th, 1992.”

The moaning and groaning of the ER was drowned out by the obnoxious sound of the nurse’s nails typing on the keyboard. Jennifer stood awkwardly as the nurse continued to type, not bothering to make eye contact with her. The nurse put together a small stack of papers and a clipboard and handed them to Jennifer without looking at her.

“Fill this out, bring it back to me, and then a doctor will see you shortly,”

Jennifer took the clipboard, said a quiet “thank you,” and scanned the seating area. The emergency room was full. A few patients had IVs in their arms, some were on their phones, but most of them were having coughing fits every couple of minutes. Jennifer sat between a kid who was holding his arm and leaning against his mother’s shoulder and a man reading a newspaper.

When Jennifer began to have a coughing fit of her own, she covered her mouth with her arm. The man reading the newspaper side-eyed her while the mother with the boy attempted to move away from her. The arms of the chairs prevented them from being able to move too far.

Jennifer kept her head down, embarrassed despite other people in the ER having similar coughing fits.

“Anderson, David,” a male nurse called.

A man stood up, shaking and terrified. His eyes, wide and bright red, darted around the room. He scratched a rash that covered his right arm as the nurse led him behind the double doors.

Jennifer returned to her paperwork. As she scribbled in information, a man sitting in a seat in front of her groaned loudly. He bent forward, his arms holding onto his stomach and his eyes shut tight.

“I’m so hungry,” he cried.

Now that he mentioned it, Jennifer thought, I'm pretty hungry, too.

As the man continued to groan, the mother with the boy sitting next to her snapped, "There's a vending machine around the corner. Go get a snack from there and stop complaining. You're scaring my son."

The man groaned even louder and buried his face in his hands. "That's not what I want," he said.

Crashing and screaming echoed through the ER. People got up from their seats to get a view from the windows above the double doors. Nurses assured them that everything was fine. "Please sit down," they said.

"Code gray. We have a code gray," a voice announced over the loud-speaker.

"What's a code gray?" someone asked.

"I don't know" another answered.

"Google it or something," someone else said.

A few patients had IVs in their arms, some were on their phones, but most of them were having coughing fits every couple of minutes.

Armed security guards appeared on the scene and rushed through the double doors, giving Jennifer a glimpse of the incident before the doors snapped shut. The man named David, who had been called back moments before, had his teeth firmly attached to the arm of a nurse. Several nurses and doctors were trying to pull David off her bloody arm.

As the doors closed, multiple hollow pops were heard. People screamed and ducked under their chairs. Everything went silent except for the boy next to her who cried in his mother's arms.

"Excuse me!" the mother yelled. "We deserve to know what's going on. Are we in danger?"

The nurses looked at one another, unsure of how to answer.

“Hello? Aren’t you supposed to be evacuating us? You’re just standing there.”

The man who had been groaning about his hunger pounced on the mother. He growled and then let out an alien cry. The other man who had been reading the newspaper jumped into action and shoved the guy, causing him to fall on his back. He was on his hands and knees in an instant and lunged toward the man. As they struggled, the mother and her son ran out of the building.

Everyone in the ER watched as the nurses tried to separate the men, but the one who was clearly deranged sunk his teeth into the cheek of the other man. Jennifer stared in amazement as the deranged man tore at the skin, which stretched like bubblegum until it popped loose.

Jennifer sat frozen in a state of shock while others started to run for the door. Someone finally called for security, but they were still fighting with David in another room.

Overwhelmed, Jennifer brought her knees to her chest, put her head down, and covered her ears. Her hyperventilating turned into a fit of coughing. When the spasms subsided, she slowly opened her eyes. Strangely mesmerized, she stared at her hand, moving it around, examining it as if it were something unknown to her. The chaos around her was drowned out by her fascination with her hand, which she brought to her mouth and licked tentatively, taking in the taste of herself.

Without warning, Jennifer bit into her hand, causing blood to spew. Her skin also stretched out and then snapped loose. She slurped it up and chewed it loudly. Jennifer looked down at her blood covered hand. Her muscles were beginning to show, but she gave it no mind and attacked herself again, going in for a second round.

Amy Sand

In Brief: A short interview with 2010 Editor of *Harbinger: Unhinged*



Q: Tell us about your experience as the editor of *Harbinger*.

A: I remember having strong feelings about poems that conflicted with some of the other editors' opinions. I was grateful that they spoke up and expressed their support because after a while I wised up and realized they were right. I remember the main challenge was finding the theme throughout all these submitted works and then trying to wrap them up nicely into

a foreword. That's the fun and the struggle! There's something magical about being part of a team and making an issue like this happen. The meetings, the readings, the designing it's a large undertaking and a labor of love.

Q: What do you love about your current job? What are the challenges?

A: I switched from nonprofit writing to software development a little over a year ago. I love having solvable problems to fix every day. The challenge is the opportunity to always learn something new—it's both a gift and a curse.

Q: What advice would you give graduating English and creative writing majors?

A: The world is new every day. Follow traditional publishing practices or don't. If you believe in what you've written, just get it out there. The world needs your voice.

Q: If you had to come up with an inspirational quote from someone you admire, what would it be?

A: "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing."~Helen Keller

Dating Apps for Virgin Authors

Christina Scott

You're a virgin, and you don't want to be one anymore. Losing your virginity should be an easy endeavor, really. There's nothing offensive about your appearance. You shower regularly. Your physical appeal lands you right at average on a sliding scale, and lucky for you, there are plenty of average people looking to shimmy some sheets with other average-looking people.

You sign up for a dating app where you signify by sliding your thumb in either direction whether or not you'd be willing to sleep with someone. As you're providing the app with your information (name, age, how far you'd drive to be touched), the app tells you that millions of people find love online everyday.

All you have to do is type a message and hit send. You know it's that easy because your best friend is with you, and she's been doing this for years. You ask her for help setting up your profile, adding pictures and music and a biography. She knows what kind of pictures make you look hottest and what kind of music makes you seem coolest and how to make your bio short enough that it's not overwhelming but quippy enough that people might actually want to talk before you bone. Like she said, she's done this a billion times, and she knows what she's talking about. So, get swiping!

Soon you get your first message.

So, you're a writer? Anywhere I might be able to read some of your work?

He's referring to a list of one-word descriptors about yourself that your friend has put in your bio. On his profile, he has five pictures. In one he is standing at the top of a cliff with a tree-littered quarry behind him. In another he's gesturing toward the scenery like he's Vanna White. Two of them look to be at a conference. He wears a beige button down and trousers with dark suede loafers and a lanyard around his neck. The last picture is of him as Kermit the Frog for Halloween. His name is Eric.

Up until this point you've almost forgotten that you

were a writer. You're sure that will make it even easier to accomplish your goal; you know people. Not only do you know them, you know them well enough to create them. You know what people are drawn to, you know how they speak,

You know what people are drawn to, you know how they speak, you know what they find enticing.

you know what they find enticing. You can read a room like a Bukowski poem, and it's time to crack the spine on this collection.

You look back at your inbox. Eric has sent you a second message.

I've always been jealous of people who can write. Not very good with words myself.

Now you have two new anxieties.

1. He's messaged you twice with time in between. This means that he either sent the first message and you took too long to respond so he's trying to get your attention or he sent the first message and then continued to think about your existence as a writer long enough to warrant a second message. Either way, now you have a problem. If you take too long to respond, it's likely that he'll think you are stuck-up before he assumes that you're busy. If, instead, he sat around and thought about what to say to a writer then you have an even bigger issue.

2. Now that you've realized that you're a writer, you have to act like one. Eric has clearly voiced his envy over the way writers are able to express themselves with words, so it would be an awful let down if you weren't expressive. All of a sudden, losing your virginity seems like a daunting task.

Though you feel silly, you defer to your friend.

"So, what do I say to that?"

"I don't know, man. Anything."

Frustrated that she doesn't grasp the severity of the situation or pick up on your growing tension, you get more specif-

ic.

“Yeah, I mean, I know, but . . .” You hesitate. “I guess what I’m asking is how do I say it. I’m just worried I’m going to sound like a dick, you know.”

Your friend huffs. “You’re really overthinking this. It’s not that hard. Just, like, be yourself.”

Your friend doesn’t know it, but she’s just flung you into state of ego death stronger than any psychedelic. How can you “be yourself” when you have six different possible responses lined up and each of them would make Eric think you were a completely different person? If you play it cool, he’ll think you’re faking modesty. He’s into academics so he knows what that looks like. If you go into details, he’ll think you’re chatty and self-absorbed. He’s a hiker; he appreciates ambience not rapid conversation. If you change the subject, he’ll think you’re dismissive and just looking for sex (a truth but an impolite one).

Your friend might be the expert in online hookups, but you’re a writer. You know people. You know that there is no statement that isn’t weighted if not in what you say than how you say it. The thing you’ve learned when writing people is that no matter how much you think you understand your characters, you never know what they’re going to do until they do it. You never know what they’re thinking until they say it. You never know them until you do.

You’re a writer, and you know people. You know that if you’re dealing with them, nothing is ever simple. You never respond to Eric. You don’t say anything about it to your friend. You let her think you played out the encounter until you got bored and abandoned your mission.

You stay a virgin for two more years.

Rachel Clair

In Brief: A short interview with 2009 editor of *Harbinger: Restoration*



Rachel Clair lives in Chicago with her husband, Dan. She spent six years writing curriculum and creating content for a kid's summer camp in Chicago before accepting a job as a content writer at World Relief. She loves pizza and riding her bike, and sometimes blogs about faith, politics and creativity at rachelclair.com

Q: What did you learn from your experience as the editor of *Harbinger*?

A: I gained a lot of confidence in my ability to edit and draw out the best in someone else's work. I also learned the value of clear communication and really enjoyed working with everyone on the team.

Q: We would love to hear about what you are doing now?

A: I am a content writer for a global humanitarian relief organization called World Relief. I love the people I work with and the things I learn from them daily. As a marketing professional, I consider it a privilege to tell the story of the work my colleagues and our community partners are doing on the ground. At the same time, it is often challenging to hold someone else's story, telling it in a way that is both honest and dignifying. My biggest hope is that the work I do would challenge the stereotypes that often come with humanitarian work rather than perpetuate them.

Q: Do you have any advice for a new college graduate?

A: Hold things loosely. Chase the dreams and goals you have, but don't be afraid to let those goals change as you grow. Try new things—whether that's new ways of writing or new creative endeavors. One of my favorite things about Stephens is that we had to take classes in every genre, which gave me experience writing a bunch of different things. Keep doing that. Say yes to opportunities that interest you even if it's outside your most natural genre of writing or creating.

Q: Please share a quote from someone you admire.

A: “When you cannot see the future, just do the next right thing.”~*Frozen II* (not an inspirational person, but it's the quote that's gotten me through this last year!)

A Ten-Minute Play: Out and About

Amber Lehmann

CHARACTERS

ALLIE: An eighteen-year-old girl. Dressed in flannel and blue jeans.

DAD: A man in his late 30s. Looks like a lumberjack.

TRISHA: An eighteen-year-old girl. Not afraid to say anything.

SETTING

A campsite. Midday.

AT RISE

DAD sits in a camp chair looking through a backpack. He finds what he is looking for and sets the pack aside. ALLIE and TRISHA walk into the campsite.

ALLIE: (laughing) Dad! We just saw the most perfect thing.

TRISHA: I've literally seen nothing better.

ALLIE: I spotted it and immediately thought of you.

DAD: Whatcha girls talking about?

ALLIE: There was this tree with moss on it.

DAD: And?

TRISHA: It looked like your face.

ALLIE: With the beard and bushy eyebrows and everything.

TRISHA: Nature does some amazing things.

ALLIE: It was uncanny.

DAD: My eyebrows aren't that bushy.

ALLIE & TRISHA: Of course not.
(The two girls look at each other and giggle.)

DAD: (sarcastic) Ah yes. Allie, I'm so glad you invited your girlfriend along so you all can gang up on a poor old man.

(DAD goes to the tent to put away his backpack.)

ALLIE: Girlfriend!

TRISHA: (to ALLIE) Did you already tell him?

ALLIE: (to TRISHA) No! I was going to tell him on this trip.

TRISHA: And you brought me along?

ALLIE: I needed the moral support.

DAD: What're you guys "whispering" about? Wait. If it's girly stuff, don't tell me.

ALLIE: Girly stuff? What are we, 12?

DAD: (bear hugs ALLIE) Yes! Because you're still my little girl and definitely not 18 yet.

ALLIE: (pats his back) Dad, my birthday was last month. Have you still not gotten over it?

DAD: No, and I never will.

TRISHA: I'm not 18 yet, sir.

DAD: (pulls TRISHA into the hug) Then you're my new daughter!

TRISHA: Cool. You hear that, Al? I'm his new daughter.

ALLIE: Gah! Shuddup.

(ALLIE pulls herself away from the hug and

straightens her clothes.)

TRISHA: Aw man, Dad. She's already pulling away from us.

DAD: (wipes away stray tears) I know. I don't know when she entered this rebellious stage of hers.

ALLIE: Rebelli-? Wha-?! I have been a model child my whole life!

DAD: I know you have, honey.

TRISHA: I don't know. She can be feisty if she wants. (growls)
Like a little cat.

DAD: Or like those possums I sometimes have to drag outta gutters.

ALLIE: Stop picking on me!

TRISHA: Aw, sweetie. We have to. That's our job.

DAD: It's a dad's job to compare his daughter to cute animals.

TRISHA: And a gir-. . .grrrreat friend's job to tease.

DAD: Trisha, you're back in my good graces.

TRISHA: Was I out of them?

ALLIE: He's just kidding. And you are totally a great . . .

(ALLIE and TRISHA look at each other. ALLIE takes a deep breath.)

ALLIE: Dad, I think I have something to say.

DAD: Huh? What's up pumpkin?

ALLIE: Just sit down, okay?

DAD: (skeptic) Okay...

(DAD sits in a chair while the girls pull the other two closer. ALLIE and TRISHA sit holding hands.)

ALLIE: I've had something I've needed to tell you for a while, but I really haven't known how.

DAD: Oh God. I know what this is.

ALLIE: You do?

TRISHA: I told you it's noticeable.

ALLIE: It is not!

TRISHA: Oh, it isn't? Look at you.

ALLIE: I don't see anything wrong with the way I look.

TRISHA: There's nothing wrong about it. It's just noticeable. The flannel isn't helping.

DAD: How long have you known?!

ALLIE: Um, since I was like 15?

TRISHA: It's been three years. Of course. he's noticed.

DAD: (breathing heavily) 15? Three years? How is that possible?

ALLIE: I was really hoping he wouldn't freak out.

DAD: How could I not freak out?

ALLIE: Because you love me anyway?

DAD: Of course, I love you!

TRISHA: See? It's all good.

DAD: No! It's not all good!

ALLIE: But I thought you said you love me?

DAD: I do, Allie! But how can you be pregnant for three years?

ALLIE & TRISHA: Pregnant?

(TRISHA doubles over in her seat laughing maniacally while ALLIE contemplates throw-

ing herself off a cliff.)

DAD: It's been a while since I've taken sex ed, but I was there when you were conceived and born.

ALLIE: Dad!

DAD: It's physically impossible, Allie!

TRISHA: (howling with laughter) Pregnant!

ALLIE: (to TRISHA) You're not helping. (TRISHA gasps for breath while reaching for ALLIE'S hand.) Dad, I'm not pregnant. I'm gay.

DAD: (clutching his chest) Oh, thank God. That's all it is.

ALLIE: What? That's all it is?

DAD: And here I thought I was going to be a grandpa at the ripe age of 37.

ALLIE: Wha-?

DAD: That and I don't think Nana is ready to be called great-grandma yet.

TRISHA: My great-granny goes by Nonna. She thought grandma just sounded old.

DAD: That's a good one.

ALLIE: How are you so calm about this?

DAD: Well, I've had my suspicions for a while. I figured you would tell me at some point.

ALLIE: Suspicions?

DAD: Honey, when we watched Titanic, you talked more about Kate Winslet than Leo.

TRISHA: (to ALLIE) You watched Titanic with your dad?

DAD: I'm actually the one who showed it to her.

TRISHA: Best Dad ever.

ALLIE: Can we go back to me being gay?

DAD: Oh yeah, sure.

ALLIE: Thank you. I mean you're okay with it?

DAD: I don't care about the gender of the people you love. As long as they treat you with respect.

ALLIE: (shocked) I mean yeah.

TRISHA: So, I guess that means I can re-introduce myself. (holds her hand out to DAD) Hi. I'm your daughter's girlfriend, Trisha. All one word, no space.

DAD: (shakes her hand) Oh. Nice to meet you, Girlfriend Trisha.

TRISHA: You can still give me "The Talk". The one where you threaten to end me if I ever treat your daughter wrong. Which I don't plan on doing.

DAD: Oh good. I've been practicing for years. Just was waiting for the moment I could finally use it.

TRISHA: I've never gotten one, so it's a first for both of us.

DAD: I think I can say you're the best girlfriend my daughter has ever had.

TRISHA: But I'm her one and only girlfriend.

DAD: Exactly! The best!

ALLIE: (groans) I should have never let you guys meet.

DAD: Just wait until you introduce her to Nana.

ALLIE: Noooooo.

END

Shelly Romero

In Brief: A short interview with 2017 editor of *Harbinger: Face the Strange*



Shelly Romero is an assistant editor at Scholastic. She graduated from Stephens College with a bachelor's degree in English and attended the 2017 NYU Summer Publishing Institute. A proud first-gen Honduran-American, she is a member of Latinx in Publishing, People of Color in Publishing, and a junior mentor for Representation Matters Mentorship Program.

Q: Describe your experience as the editor of *Harbinger*?

A: Thanks to my time on *Harbinger*, I was able to solidify my decision to pursue a career in publishing. I'm very extroverted, which is to no one's surprise, so getting to work with others to create each year's issue of the lit mag is something that I wanted out of a career. I wanted that teamwork and collaboration. I wanted the tangible end result. Reviewing submissions for the *Harbinger* issues was another invaluable experience. It allowed me to start building an editorial eye and was perfect prep for reviewing my bosses' submissions. Working on *Harbinger* fueled my love for editing. I absolutely loved working on *Harbinger*, and it's a love that I've thankfully translated over into my work now.

Q: Are you working in publishing today?

A: Yes, I'm an assistant editor at Scholastic, acquiring middle grade and young adult novels while assisting my two

bosses, an executive editor and a senior editor, with their lists. What I really love about my job is the authors I get to work with. When an author trusts you as their editor to help shape their book, it's something so special. I've gotten to work with so many incredible people thanks to this job. I also love my colleagues and friends. When things aren't as great or they're stressful, my friends are my anchors.

Q: Any advice for those interested in a career in publishing ?

A: The piece of advice I always give aspiring publishing professionals is to read books that have been recently published. Definitely talk about your childhood favorites, those novels that really sparked your love of reading, but also know books that have been published in the last couple of years. If you want to be an editor, part of your job is to know comparative titles, know what the market is excited about, what books are being acquired and so on.

Q: We love inspirational quotes. Do you have one that you would like to share?

A: "No one succeeds alone. Never walk alone in your future paths."~Sonia Sotomayor, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States

Art Feature: a sense of the streets

Madison Crist

Art is about the senses, and street art provides a unique platform to inspire change, challenge perception, and make the curation and production of art more accessible. From graffiti to commissioned murals, each artwork serves as a metaphorical canvas. Jas Charanjiva, a brilliant street artist, believes that when street art is imbued with a message it becomes “amplified communication.” She said, “It’s powerful because it can reach hundreds of people every day. And often the message is raw, untouched by a corporation or agency. Street art is also a mood enhancer: it adds energy to the streets that wouldn’t exist without it.” With the same intentions and genuine passion for street art, I decided to create a sense of the streets. Each composition is composed of several layers of street art photographs from numerous states. In this series, each digital collage embodies a sense of hope, life, and loss. Like all street art, it also reflects and highlights diversity.

Each digital collage mimics the style of graffiti art and its landscape with brushes and filters that add back texture and the aesthetics of walls and buildings. When cutting and pasting different elements together, I strove to maintain the relationship that mural art has with its environment. I also want to give thanks and recognition to the original artists of each piece. The fusion of their works pays homage to other aspects of street art such as anonymity and impermanence. Each piece is what it is presently and may be again; thus, I will always have a deep appreciation for the resilience of street art and the chance it allows strangers to share in the same moments.



Madison Crist, *a sense of life*, digital collage, 2021

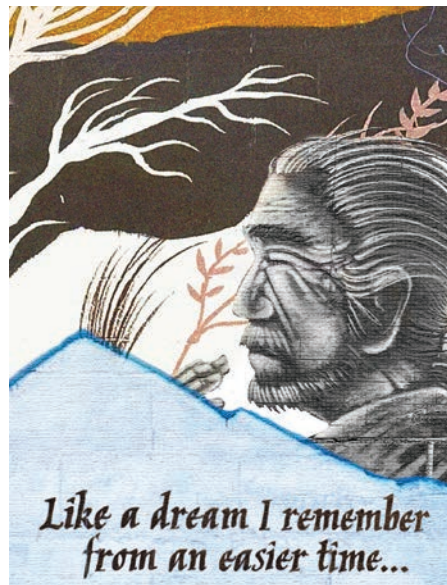
Madison Crist, *a sense of loss*, digital collage, 2021





Madison Crist, *a sense of truth*, digital collage, 2021

Madison Crist, *a sense of tomorrow*, digital collage, 2021





Madison Crist, *a sense of hope*, digital collage, 2021

Madison Crist, *a sense of magic*, digital collage, 2021



RJ Johnson

In Brief: A short interview with 2019 co-Editor of *Harbinger: More Than Myth*



RJ Johnson graduated with their BFA in creative writing spring 2019. They have two large dogs and since graduating received their Masters in Business Administration in one year in Denver, Colorado. Now, they spend their time hiking, performing as a drag king named George Not-Strait, working on their novel, and running their own marketing consulting company.

Q: What did you learn from your experience as an editor of *Harbinger*?

A: You may start out with a bunch of pieces that seem to be unrelated, but once you've selected the best and assembled it all, coming up with the theme is easier than you might think. Creating a literary magazine is no small feat and each year's *Harbinger* is nothing short of a work of art.

Q: What is your job now? What do you love about it? What are the challenges?

A: I just finished my MBA in one year and am currently looking for work as a content writer in marketing. I also started my own marketing consulting company called Fable Consulting, LLC. My philosophy with this company is to focus on the stories people and companies have to tell through a marketing lens. I have worked in this field previously and loved being

able to marry my love of writing and business/marketing.

Q: What advice would you give to graduating English and creative writing majors?

A: Keep writing. I know it can be hard to get caught up in other things without someone literally forcing you to attend workshop and literature classes, but you choose this major for a reason. Don't lose that love.

Q: Please list your favorite books.

A: *American Hippo: River of Teeth, Taste of Marrow* and *New Stories* all by Sarah Gailey

Q: Please share a quote from one of your most admired people.

A: "I am deliberate and afraid of nothing."~Audre Lorde

Under the Moonlight and Snowfall

Amber Lehmann

The house across the street had always been a sore subject in my family. It was rotting and overgrown with weeds and vines snaking across the brick and mortar. My mother always complained about the state of it, yet my father never said a word about its condition. Whenever he glanced in the house's direction, he turned as white as a sheet. Once when I stepped onto the sidewalk in front of the house, nearly tripping over a deep crack in the stone, my father jumped out of his car, grabbed me around the waist, and hauled me home. He beat my butt red until I couldn't stop crying. My mother had to stop him.

"Yuri! *Nanishiteruno!*" It was a shock when he slipped into his native language. He only did it when he was very angry. "Never ever go over there! Do you understand me?" He shook me, his fingers digging into my tiny shoulders. I was only six.

So, it wasn't until my eighteenth birthday, a year after my father passed, that I finally stepped foot into that house.

"What's your problem with this place? You won't even walk on this side of the street when you go home." Lily took a long drag of her cigarette before dropping it on the concrete and smashing it with the heel of her UGG boot. She never took more than one hit off of anything. Said she liked the burn of the first inhale but not the queasiness of the ones after.

I stared at the looming structure in front of me. The paint was peeling off the sides in black clumps, revealing deteriorated wood beneath.

"My father basically threatened to kill me on a regular basis if I got too close to it."

"Heavy." Lily picked up the crushed butt, threw it onto the front porch, and then turned back to me and said, "Well,

nothing happened. Guess it's fine to go in."

"What? No way!" I looked around, expecting my father to run toward me with belt in hand.

"Yuri." Lily drew out my name. "You need to live a little. Get your hands dirty. Maybe we'll find something valuable." She pulled me toward the house, but I refused to budge.

"Seriously? Are you a kid? Grow a pair."

"One step into that house, and it'll likely come down on your head," I joked. I wanted to stop her from going in.

The door opened with ease and then slammed shut behind me. I was finally in the place my father had forbidden me from entering.

Lily raised her manicured eyebrow. I knew that look. She gave it to me freshman year before Matt Jenkins became our personal slave for a month. It was the one she gave me before we

bleached my pitch-black hair. It was one she gave me before we got matching tattoos. It was a look that said, "You can't say no."

"No. Don't you dare. You are trouble. I'm not dying today, or any day for that matter."

"You won't die." She paused. "I mean, we won't die." She set her hands on my shoulders.

"Let's play a game."

"Listen Jigsaw, I'm not going to go into that house. You can't make me." Flashes of cobwebs, broken floorboards, and decayed animals flitted through my mind. It was a death trap. I was sure that's why my father never wanted me to go inside.

"Yuri, we're going in." Lily grabbed me around the waist and hauled me up under her arm like a football player running to the endzone, my feet dangling in empty air.

“Lily! I said no! Stop it!” My stomach twisted to the point that I felt like puking.

“We’re almost there. Stop squirming you big baby.”

“Please, I don’t feel well.” Bile seared the back of my throat. Something inside me screamed, *Run. Run!*

She didn’t listen to me. She never listened to me. The first step creaked under our combined weight, then the next, and the next until she stood on the porch. I was nearly foaming at the mouth when we reached the top step. Something primal in me did not want to be here.

“See? It’s not a monster house. It isn’t going to eat us.”

Something inside will eat us. Will eat me. Will eat and eat and eat and. . .

Her grip loosened. My feet touched the rotted boards that squealed like a pig to the slaughter. For a moment, I couldn’t hear anything. Then a soft, sad song played in my ear.

“Yuri?” Lily stepped in front of me, catching my gaze.

“I was just kidding. We don’t have to go in.”

“Can you hear that?” I stepped past her shivering body.

A violin played within the house. I wanted to find its source and dance along.

“Yuri,” she said. She grabbed my wrist tight, but I slapped her away.

“Leave if you want. You’re right. I was just being a brat with daddy issues. Nothing is going to eat me in there.” I gave her a light smile, but her face turned pale.

“You wouldn’t even step onto the lawn. What happened to that fear?”

“It was irrational.”

“Yuri, we need to leave!”

I stared at her as a burning agitation rolled through my body.

“No. I am tired of being pushed and pulled around by

you. I didn't want to come here, but you forced me to anyway! Now you're pussyying out, and I'm the only one with some balls to go through with it!" My voice barely raised above a hissing whisper, but the anger was evident. She stumbled back, her heel catching a broken board. She fell onto her butt on the porch.

"You're acting weird! What's wrong with you?" Tears filled her eyes, but her crying made my anger worse.

"You are." I felt a sick satisfaction at the look of shock on her face.

The door opened with ease and then slammed shut behind me. I was finally in the place my father had forbidden me from entering. A thick layer of grit and dust covered everything in sight.

While my father kept me from going near the house, it never stopped me from investigating it. I had read articles that said the place had been abandoned in the 70s. The owner had been a rich debutante with money to throw around. Everyone in the town assumed a rich man had whisked her away. The house was still in her name, property bills were still paid, but no one lived there.

For fifty years, the house sat empty in the dark, rotting, waiting. White blankets covered the furniture: a long couch, a coffee table, and settees that ladies in paintings drape themselves over. It was easy to imagine it all cleaned up with people attending a dinner party, sipping brandy or wine and talking about the stock market.

As I passed through the archway to the next room, the music grew to a crescendo and then screeched to a halt. In this room there wasn't any furniture. Light crept through the boards on the window and gauzy, decaying curtains swayed in a non-existent breeze. Something caught my eye from the corner of the room. I pulled a dingy sheet off of a rectangular shape that

lay underneath. A portrait.

She was beautiful. Ethereal. Otherworldly.

The artist had captured her perfectly. She appeared ready to walk out of the building. Except that didn't seem right. The woman in the painting seemed like she would crawl out on her hands and knees, a predator hunting her prey. Her lips formed a pout as if to say, *I would never hurt you*, right before she gnawed you down to the bone.

Goosebumps appeared on my skin while a feeling of warmth spread through my body. I had never felt a heat like this; it made me squirm. The parka I wore stuck to my skin. I ripped it off to get some relief.

My hand moved to touch the painting, which felt smooth and cold. When I pressed my face against it to cool my burning cheeks, I could smell the perfume on the woman's skin. "You're beautiful."

My heart pounded. I wanted to kiss the red pout of her mouth until I could feel our lips split. I would lick away the blood. I felt hungry.

I pressed a hand to my heart. It seemed to want to escape its wet and dark confine. My eyes couldn't stop drinking in pale skin and long, ebony hair. I licked my dry lips as I looked at her face with soft bowed lips under a petite nose. But her eyes were missing. It looked as if someone had stabbed out her eyes.

Her lips formed a pout as if to say, *I would never hurt you*, right before she gnawed you down to the bone.

I wanted to piece the painting back together, but the bits of canvas were gone. All that was left was two yawning holes.

I searched around my feet as if her missing eyes had fallen to the dusty floor. Finding nothing, I looked at her face

again. Red eyes stared back at me. I screamed and stumbled backwards. I hadn't seen the hole in the floor.

And that's how I ended up down in this damp, dark abyss that threatens to swallow me whole. My body aches and my head swims as I sit up. I try to assess the damage that the fall caused.

I probably have a concussion and a few bruises. In the weak light, I can barely make out a jagged opening in the floor above me that I had fallen through.

"Damn." It looks like I fell fifteen feet only to land on cold, hard stone. My heart thuds as I remember my phone in my pocket. *Please don't let it be shattered.* I pull it out, tapping on the screen. A picture of Lily and I flashes into view, the light briefly blinding me. The flashlight on my phone barely cuts through the inky blackness, revealing the crude shapes that surround me.

Cold seeps into my skin. I miss the parka that I abandoned upstairs. My teeth chatter, sending a sharp pain through my jaw.

"Need to get out of here," I say to myself. It would be my luck to freeze to death in this death trap, the one my father forbade from going near. He didn't want me to die here, alone. No way to escape. No way back to my family.

The light from my phone lands on a box across the room. It reminds me of a piece of cargo perhaps for a museum exhibit.

The box calls to me much like the house and portrait had, and I can almost hear the sound of the orchestra again. As I draw closer, the pain of my wounds ebbs, and I feel a deep pull inside my gut. It's calling to me.

“Wow,” I gasp. The box is shiny and black with gold filigree sweeping across its smooth surface. I trace the design with my finger; it feels warm to the touch. *Strange.*

I search for an opening, my curiosity pushing me to look inside. A rusted latch crumbles to the touch. The lid weighs next to nothing. The scent of roses and dark earth after a hard rain fills my nose. The contents look like nothing more than a trunk full of clothes until I notice someone is wearing them—a beautiful someone. A beautiful woman clothed in brown velvet and blue satin. Of course, it can’t be real. She’s just a mannequin, and a realistic one at that.

The flowery smell wafts up from her, so she must be well preserved. Tightly sealed away from the death and decay surrounding her. It’s intoxicating. It makes me want to crawl into the box and curl-up beside her, but I resist. Instead, I run a hand over her face, feeling her smooth skin like plastic under my palm.

“Crap.” My hand stings, so I pull it back. My blood drips onto the mannequin’s mouth from a cut I hadn’t noticed before. I hiss as the wound throbs and then a puff of air hits my palm.

“Well, hello there.”

My eyes snap back down to the box. The mannequin is a living woman. She blinks back at me, a pink tongue swiping across her lips like a snake tasting the air. All the breath leaves my lungs in a silent scream. *I’m going to be eaten.*

Rush Pittman

In Brief: A short interview with 2013 editor of *Harbinger: Bombshell*



Q: Tell us about your experience as the editor of *Harbinger*?

A: Before working on *Harbinger*, I had not submitted my work to many magazines, and when I had submitted my work, I did not have a clear idea of how to put it together

in a way that would appeal to editors. When working as an editor, I read through many submissions and realized a couple of things. One, the importance of revision and proofreading. Secondly, the importance of a strong beginning.

Q: We would love to hear about your current job.

A: I work as a secretary at a small law firm. What I love about it is that I do not have to take my work home with me. This leaves more time to focus on my writing. Also, if it is a slow day and I have little to do, I read at my desk. In terms of challenges, there are few. I used to work as an emergency medical technician, and with that job it was difficult for me to write after work due to the stressors I would take home with me. With my current job, I am rarely stressed and have more space mentally to focus on my creativity.

Q: Many of us are getting ready to graduate. Any advice, particularly for writers?

A: If you want to become a writer, remember that 90% of the

time writing is about hard work. The majority of what you write will most likely be trash material, but it is about putting in the hours so that you are there when something good comes along. Don't be hard on yourself. Allow yourself to have fun, otherwise what's the point in it all? Also always remember the importance of reading. Reading will open your eyes to all the possibilities of what you can do with your work. It will teach you new moves and help you see your work in a broader context. And remember, getting work published is an entirely different ball game than writing. Be patient. Submit your work when it is ready. Be prepared for many rejections, but also know that eventually someone will like what they read, and you'll find a home for your piece.

Q: Do you have a quote from a person you admire that inspires you?

A: “You are so young, so before all beginning, and I want to beg you, as much as I can, to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves—like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. The point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”~Rianer Maria Rilke, *Diaries of a Young Poet*

Keeping Your Head About You While Writing a Novel by Someone Who's Never Written One

Ana Green

Step One: Find a subject you're passionate about. (Eva is passionate about writing and knitting, and she loves 2D world building games. None of that is exciting enough for a full-length novel. She spends weeks trying to think up a good topic and decides she'll write about a ghost stuck in purgatory.)

Step Two: Start planning your story. (There's a big whiteboard hanging on the wall across from Eva's bed. She stares at it every night before sleep, and when she wakes up in the morning, she still doesn't know what to put on it. One night, while drinking and crying about her favorite animated show, she has a breakthrough. With a pink marker, she plots the whole story in ten minutes, and, when she wakes in the morning, she can barely read it. It's smudged from her tears.)

Step Two B: (Eva cries again.)

Step Three: Watch your favorite movie. Then watch just the first episode of your favorite show, and then the second episode while making lunch. Watch the entire thing, and put off writing for three weeks. Clean your house, do your laundry, fold it, and watch your favorite movie again.

Step Four: Begin creating character charts. Create a main character. (Eva creates Evan. He is like Eva but has a dick. She notes this in his chart. She also makes sure he's physically different from her. He is buff and has freckles and green eyes. He also has pink hair. Why not? This is Eva's novel, and she wants pink hair.) Make sure your character is living an amazing life before he dies because he deserves it. (Eva is careful not to take out any of her life's difficulties on poor Evan.) Make sure there is a love interest who is his foil. People like that, right?

Step Five: Write the damn thing. Goddamn, this is hard. You're going to throw things and procrastinate and throw things again. You'll read and you'll spend hours on the Internet. You'll do everything you can to avoid writing, because

even though you desperately want to write the damn thing, it's not that easy. (Eva learns this after about fifteen coffee-fueled chapters. She rediscovers her playlists from 2015. She screams and cries and writes after months of being stuck in one spot, wishing she had the words to get past it.)

Step Six: Print out the first twenty chapters. Put them in a bowl in the sink and light them on fire. Watch as the flames consume your hard work. (Eva learns that her smoke alarm is sensitive. She explains what happened to an attractive firefighter with long dreads.)

Step Seven: Make tea. (Eva hates tea. She's hoping it will cure her writer's block. She thinks maybe it's a magic fix-it-all. Writers in her blog group drink tea. They all prefer it to coffee. Eva takes two sips, pours it down the drain, and brews a cup of coffee.)

Step Eight: Erase the whole document and then panic and hit undo. Click ctrl and z and hope that everything isn't gone. Hold your breath for four seconds while your Internet tries to retrieve the words. When they appear on the page, let out the breath and suck

Print out the first twenty chapters. Put them in a bowl in the sink and light them on fire. Watch as the flames consume your hard work. It will create a sick sense of satisfaction deep within you.

in another one. (Eva sounds like a fish. She runs for her inhaler and a glass of water. The words reappear on the screen. She will *never* do that again.)

Step Nine: Complete the last chapter. Email it to every publisher you can think of. There are only four, so research other publishers. Look up who published all of your favorite

books. Laugh because you know you'll be turned down; there's no way you can write like your favorite authors. Have a panic attack and remember that imposter syndrome is a real thing. (Eva calls her therapist, Zhara. She spends a week avoiding the book altogether while she waits to see Zhara in her office.)

Step Ten: Print out the manuscript and hold it to your chest while you sob. Call your best friend and beg her to buy booze. (Eva loves hard lemonade. She drinks the three that are in her fridge before her friend gets there. She spills one all over the printed copy of her book, but it's okay. Nothing can hurt the digital copy because she's saved it in several places. When she wakes up the next morning and realizes how much money she wasted on that copy, she groans and prints another. She puts it in a binder and sticks it in the middle of her bookshelf. It belongs there among her favorite authors.)

The Village

Eli Tirrel

Once upon a time a village burned down. The main character vows revenge and goes on a journey to find those who hurt his loved ones. Along the way he finds a mentor who dies early and a love interest who ignores him until he becomes stronger. He stumbles once or twice, but ultimately faces down his foe and fulfills his vengeance. He lives happily ever after.

Once upon a time a village burned down. There are few casualties because villages are usually built near sources of water, and these villagers know how to stop the spread of fires. The village helps rebuild the damaged buildings and take time to mourn their dead. They aren't guaranteed a happily ever after, but they stick together through the good times and the bad.

Once upon a time a village burned down. There are no survivors. Travelers avoid the area, believing it to be cursed.

Once upon a time a village burned down. There is one survivor. He has severe burns that take years to heal. He never recovers. He never goes on a quest for vengeance, happy to have escaped with his life.

Once upon a time a village burned down. It is attacked by a dragon. The survivors move away, hoping their next home will not be in a dragon's hunting territory. No one vows revenge. It is foolish to try to attack a dragon.

Alternatively, a group of young men leave to track down the dragon. The elders warn against it, but the young men cannot be discouraged. They never return. Their families hold funeral rites, and the elders curse their folly.

Once upon a time a village burned down. It is war season and the opposing kingdom has finally made it deep into their home country. Their crops are stolen to feed the army, their men slaughtered, and their women and children sold into slavery. No one escapes unscarred by the realities of war.

Once upon a time a village burned down. The would-be hero sets out on his quest on a horse he barely knows how

to ride. The horse gets a stone stuck in its shoe and throws the rider. The would-be hero cracks his head on a rock, and there is no one around to save him.

Once upon a time, the story went the way we thought it should, but only once because stories are unique. More often than not characters are only trying to stay alive. There are other stories to be told that don't require the village to burn.

Once upon a time a village was built. It sees its people come and go. New villagers are born and old ones die. A barn burns down every few years from human folly: a man smoking his pipe too close to the hay, a knocked-over lantern, an ember from a fire stoked too high. The village watches people fall in love, invent new things, create new art. The village sees good times and bad. It sees harvests and famine, great shows of strength and horrible acts of cowardice. It sees bonds made, kept, and broken.

Once upon a time there was no village. The first settlers chose a spot upstream, closer to the mountains, where they can mine instead of farm. The land where the village might have been hears different stories, those of roads, travelers, and marching soldiers. It hears the story of a great oak, the fast life of a mouse, and the adventure of an owl. It sees campfires and hears the tales of wanderers, of heroes, of burnt villages, and of dragons.

Once upon a time stories were created. They begin with the first breath of the universe and though some have been lost to time, stories will never die.

Mary Arnold

In Brief: A short interview with 2018 Editor of *Harbinger: Negative Space*



Mary Arnold is a Stephens College alumna who graduated December 2019 with a BFA in creative writing and a minor in music. She was born and raised in South Carolina and moved to Missouri in 2009. Before attending Stephens, she worked for a manufacturing company to earn money to attend college. She enjoys reading mysteries and romances, writing short stories,

binging crime shows, playing video games, and being at home her family.

Q: As a *Harbinger* editor, what did you learn?

A: That being an editor is a lot of work! But that's what I really liked, too. From composing the giving letter, to writing the foreword, to overseeing everyone's participation in reading and rating the submissions, to leading the launch party, it was fun to take charge and collaborate with some amazing team members!

Q: Tell us about your current job and what you love about it.

A: I am the marketing and communications coordinator for Alternative Community Training. ACT is a 45-year-old non-profit organization that has been supporting people with developmental disabilities in Columbia and Mid-Missouri. I love what our agency is all about. The mission they stand behind: "an inclusive community where everyone belongs, participates, and is valued." I'm a positive, happy person who enjoys socializing

(when possible) and getting to know people, and in my current position I get to do both, a lot! Also, I am able to utilize creative writing, event planning, social media, and tech skills, all of which I acquired during my time at Stephens College.

Q: Do you have advice for current English and creative writing majors?

A: Don't discredit your writing abilities before you get started! Turn off the editor in your mind and write without restraint. Absorb all the writing advice you can from the professors. They are very knowledgeable and there to help you succeed. Enjoy your time as an English/creative writing major because it'll be over before you know it.

Q: Please share an inspirational quote from someone you admire.

A: Kate Kogut liked to say, "Don't get it right, get it written." I can't tell you how many times this helped me get through writing assignments for classes!

Smog Colored Glasses

Arabela Rowland

It's 4:00 p.m. on a Tuesday in mid-September. The year is 2013. I just got a role in my high school play; comedic-relief yet again. What a surprise. But I thought that maybe if I do a great job in this one, I can get a starring role in the next.

I walk through the door for our first day of line reading. Not a lot of people are there yet; only a small group of upper-classmen in the corner. One of them catches my eye. He's short. I can hardly believe he's a senior. He has shiny brown hair, thick stubble, thin wire glasses, and brown eyes the color of caramel brownies.

I am a typical shy freshman with low self-esteem, but I want to make a good impression on my castmates, so I introduce myself. I jump from person-to-person, trying to make conversation about homework, comic books, and television shows—typical stuff. At last, I start talking to the cute, nerdy guy.

"Hi. My name is Arabela, but most people call me Bela. What's your name?" I ask blandly enough, my palms sweating.

He immediately picks up the conversation. "My name is C. How are you? I don't think I've seen you before. Are you as excited as I am for this year's play? It looks like it'll be a lot of fun, right?"

I smile back at him and make a few short replies. I am already crushing really hard, and I don't know why. Maybe it's his smooth voice or how adorable, yet mature he is. Little do I know my brain is already turning him into my "archetypical crush".

We form a tight friendship after that, sharing our many fandoms and common interests that fall. Yet, despite the obvious chemistry, there is a major roadblock, his girlfriend. I hate being jealous of his girlfriend because we are friends, but I can't help my feelings. So alas, my first major crush is off-limits until he graduates and moves away.

Years later, we reconnect and try, off and on, online dating. No one tells you how underwhelming online dating is compared to the real thing, but I can tell something about C. is different. I am 19 and he is 23. He seems more hopeless than he was in high school and aggressive too. He drops out of his university and loses his full-time job. He is forced to live with his mom. He is hard to reach sometimes. He goes days without talking to me.

One day I am at his house, which smells of garbage, cigarettes, and dog piss. I struggle to make myself comfortable. He makes pasta, and, after a while, we kiss, but a huge storm sets in. His mom comes home early, and I become anxious and uncomfortable. She is nice enough, but I feel as if I am not wanted there.

After that, he doesn't talk to me for a month. Of course, by that time, I have a new boyfriend. C. is upset with me, but I am tired of being ignored. No one gets into a relationship because they want to be ignored.

After a night of poor decisions, I Google him, and I find his name, several pictures, and his address on the sex offender registry website. He is serving parole for trading mature pictures with and attempting to coerce ten minors. Some of the girls are as young as thirteen. I am left feeling disgusted and block him on social media.

He was my first crush. He was the reason I mistakenly dated J. and then another J. They reminded me of him. Now I no longer miss any of my exes. This revelation leaves a sour taste in my mouth. I disregard all men who fit my previous type. And now, this is no longer a secret of mine. Gone are the rose-colored glasses and on went the smog-colored ones. Sorry to all you short, cute nerds out there. I have a new type.

Gabrielle Dooley

In Brief: A short interview with 2020 editor of *Harbinger: Outside the Lines*



Gabrielle Dooley is a Stephens College 2020 alumna with a degree in English. She has had three publications in *Harbinger* and was the co-Editor-in-Chief of the spring 2020 issue *Outside the Lines*. She enjoys reading psychological thrillers, drinking way too much coffee, and spending time with her dogs Ludo and Rikki.

Q: What did you learn during your years on *Harbinger*, particularly as an editor?

A: I learned a lot during my time on *Harbinger*. The biggest thing I learned is that being an editor is time consuming and at times difficult but rewarding in the end. I put hours of work into editing the designed version with our designer, and it made the final product well worth it. I also learned how important communication is, especially toward the end when deadlines are fast approaching. We had some great communication between Kris Somerville, my co-editor and the designer that really allowed the magazine to be a success. It is true what they say: communication is key.

Q: We know you just graduated and during a pandemic. What are you doing now?

A: I work for Prairie Band Casino as a marketing representative. I am a part of a guest service team that has all the answers

to everyone's questions. We are informed about promotions and the inner workings of the casino. I really like my job. I love meeting the different guests who visit the casino; you would not believe the stories I've heard, things. There are many challenges that come with my job, but I'd say the most difficult challenge, aside from COVID, is not sharing all of the insane, funny, and strange occurrences at the casino. Most people don't want to bring their work home with them, but I wish I could bring home some of the crazy stories.

Q: Do you have advice for those graduating in 2021 while the pandemic still rages?

A: Don't worry about getting a job in your field right away. I struggled for months looking for a job, any job, that fit with my degree. I was looking for a job as a content writer, copy writer, editor, English teacher, tutor. Really anything I could find that would put my degree to use. But the truth is your degree will help you with any job you get— that's why they are called transferable skills.

Q: Tell us your favorite book.

A: Yikes. A favorite book? Sorry, that's just not possible. So, I'll tell you my current read. I am currently reading *All the Missing Girls* by Megan Miranda, which I found at a thrift store the other day.

The Anthem of Buffy Sainte-Marie

Madison Crist

You wrote the anthem
No more war
You are the anthem
No more piercing command

Your words mixed with the cries of injustice

A cultural soundbite riding on the spirit of the wind
There was a certain pride: “power in the blood and justice in
the soul”
You rendered the people dying
You spoke of their forbidden tongue

Their words mixed with their cries of injustice

You spoke of censorship and greedy annihilation
You rebuilt from behind walls
The powerless few chanted, “ah what can I do?”
You chanted back

Dance, stand, sing, run, dance, stand, sing, run
A broken record repeats
Run back the tides to the moon
With the fusion of styles, beats and vibrations

You are the anthem of a new nation

To: Kai Cheng Thom, From: A Land on the Moon

Madison Crist

there was a poem stuck in your mouth
but it wasn't just there
it lingered in the air, underneath me
underneath the moon
love and violence
gravity pulled the family ties together
working to be whole
"i am with you"
in the river where people are remembered
no longer forgotten
you used the pen in your head
to wash them down your thighs and riversides
forgotten names were born
born inside the boy
born inside the girl
we have to stop fetishizing survival
and find the difference between being alive and living
"you have to come to the wounded for healing"
as the lady in the moon, I saw your mother's scars
one, two, three
i saw you too, both parts
and you must know that you cannot be
me when I am gone
because my sister witch
you are leading home the girls in waiting

Going the Distance with Susan Goyette

Madison Crist

You hold up the last lamp light, and the dark confines of relationship begin to absorb in the fog. We feel so close to the children as we stretch our necks like Giraffes, attempting to watch their world change or maybe our world is the one changing. At the kitchen party, we watch our memories dance and begin to sing, hoping that we continue to “misinterpret the looks of surprise as silent praise.” Beyond the talk of politics, food and the bad dinner guests there is a kind of silence that stops the chewing, and you cannot hear the clink of fork on plate.

We realize that we are not a part of this party. We are outside the window and across the yard. We are somewhere else entirely. Far behind the fog or in front of the fog? My perception is distorted and what comes next is something unknown. This is what it feels to be on the outside looking in. “What did we want? Life but not with a mind of its own.”

The fear of being forgotten and our minds spiraling down the family tree. We sit on the outskirts of our own lives. Did it mean that we were not living? This loss of nature paralleled with the lost art of conversation and stories. Perhaps you were creating a place from which we could reflect, but through this fog, the grass does not look greener. “Distance is the greatest con.”

We will experience everything from a distance with the illusion of close up

We will feel your push and pull

We will misplace our names and our faces

We will lose our trees, planet and sun

The fog will preserve what is not our own

Nevertheless, we lose our greed that burns the fences of trees

The erosion of cliff's and beaches will cement in our photographs

I think you are telling us that our forgotten names must begin the journey home if we are to go the distance.

Emily Sorce

In Brief: A short interview with 2011 co-Editor of *Harbinger: Shadow Box*



Formerly Emily Marchant, Emily Sorce lives in Salem, Oregon, where she met her husband and works as a legislative staffer. Writing has remained an important part of her life. She has had short pieces published in online literary magazines and had the opportunity to pitch a pilot to two production companies. She is looking forward to a career change that will give her time to write and read.

Q: What did you learn from your experience as the editor of *Harbinger*?

A: As an editor, I learned the importance of compromise in teamwork and seeing things from other perspectives.

Q: We are always interested in what former *Harbinger* editors are doing now.

A: I just wrapped up my fifth year working in local politics, and I'm ready to move on to something new. I'm currently taking a real estate course to prepare for my state's real estate broker exam.

Q: Career advice is always welcome.

A: The skills and lessons you learn working as a team you'll take with you to the workplace. Since graduating, I've found it so important to find a community to be part of. Find your people.

Logs of Captain Armani Faris of the *Elysian*, August 2099

Jessamin McSwain

Ship's Log - 2035 - 14:31 - Captain Faris recording. . .

On this momentous day, September 23, 2035, the Paradise Class Starship *Elysian* has launched from Arcadia Station orbiting Earth enroute to Barnard's Star b. Captain Armani Faris and Science Officer Dr. Lawrence Rourke are joined by alternate pilot Nicholai Kastellanos and Chief Engineer Moira Boyce. The crew is prepped for their six-month trip to the edge of the Sol System and the Oort Cloud. We look forward to your response, Houston. Faris signing off.

Captain's Log - 2035 - 10:48

Happy Halloween, or at least that's what the calendar says. It's been over a month since we set off across the system, and things are still working themselves out. Rourke and I trained with Freeman and Lowrey for a majority of our time at the Institute, so we're having to adjust to Kastellanos and Boyce. If Star Reach had actually done competent testing before shipping off the *Eden* in April, maybe Freeman and Lowrey would still be here.

Shit, man, I can't imagine it. They were the first ship to reach the Oort Cloud, the first to make it beyond the system, but for what? To get blown to smithereens for breaking the space speed limit. We got the news four days before we were supposed to depart. The *Valhalla* is three months ahead of us. I can't imagine what they were thinking. I don't blame Freeman and Lowrey for backing out. Hell, I thought about it too.

I should've seen it coming, though. I've been writing for years alongside school and training. Nothing is perfect, and a dramatic explosion makes things suspenseful. Will our titular crew make it through the Oort Cloud safely, or will they suffer the same fate as those on the *Eden*? How will they fare with a sudden change of crew? Can they trust their new companions in space?

Maybe I should've been a shitty scriptwriter not an

astronaut. But, if I was, I wouldn't have the bragging rights of the first black female interstellar captain. Can't say I'm selfish for wanting the credit despite the danger.

Plus, the view is amazing up here.

Although I'd like to think that the CEO of Star Reach would've learned something from the past, I know there's a space race right now, what with Musk putting boots on Mars, but that doesn't give anyone, not even Jonathan Hughes, the right to waste billions and multiple lives. When the *Challenger* exploded in 1986, NASA immediately started using better procedures to avoid another disaster. Meanwhile, Star Reach seems way too relaxed about the loss of the *Eden*. I wonder if they've even told the public about the catastrophe.

Captain's Log - 2036 - 15:03

It's March 21st and the last day before we reach the Oort Cloud. The road is going to be rough moving forward, but the *Valhalla* made it so we can too. If I develop claustrophobia after hyper sleep, I won't be surprised. The ceilings are too low, even for me. I can't imagine what it's like for Kastellanos, although he's never complained.

Regarding Kastellanos, I've grown fond of the old man. He's the perfect amount of gruff and relatable, minus the smoking. He makes the routine less boring with his dad jokes, although he says they can't be dad jokes because he's not a practiced father. From the photos he's shown me, his daughter is a beautiful young woman, but he never had a hand in raising her. Despite all that shit, he sure acts like a father. He is constantly making sure all of us are healthy, or at least look it. The

She might also be jealous of our intimate relationship, but I wouldn't know. She doesn't talk to me unless she has to.

nutrition pills are disgusting, but we have to take them, and he's always dragging me into the gym with him to "keep my bones strong." He's a regular Mr. Safety.

Boyce is difficult. She keeps to herself and only speaks with Kastellanos. It was understandable since they trained together, while Rourke and I are a little much at first. She might also be jealous of our intimate relationship, but I wouldn't know. She doesn't talk to me unless she has to.

Thankfully, I still receive constant emails and videos from Earth. Momma, Naomi, and Sara have been contacting me as often as they can. Most science fiction writers gloss over the reality of space and travel to make things easier for themselves. I used to write short fiction with the same explanation, but I'm living the truth now.

Alien was a starting point for my writing. It wasn't a great idea to let an eight-year-old watch a horror movie, but older siblings never care. The suspense was intense, the revelation of Ash's synthetic form came out of left field, and the xenomorph was killer. I wrote a few stories with terrible space monsters, but they always lacked a real sense of urgency.

Ship's Log - 2036 - 13:00 - Captain Faris recording. . .

The *Elysian* suffered minimal damage traveling through the Oort Cloud. The technique discovered by the crew of the *Eden* to flip the ship and use the burn from the engines to clear the density of the cloud worked perfectly. Of course, we lost a lot of momentum, but we're thankful to be alive. The crew really pulled together during that little team building exercise

In any event, repairs have been made and the crew is preparing for our first hyper sleep. See you on the flipside Houston. Faris signing off.

Captain's Log - 2037 - 02:59

I'm pretty sure it's Christmas, but what does it matter?

When we awoke from hyper sleep something in my pod seriously fucked up. I've been vomiting for hours. I haven't eaten anything substantial since before we went to sleep after the Oort Cloud. After dealing with the usual maintenance and contacting Star Reach, Kastellanos and Boyce have been working on my pod. Apparently one of the cells was off? I don't know jack shit about the inner components of the ship, but I do know my stomach is empty.

Rourke sat with me for most of the time, warming me up. If only we had met before deciding to ship out into deep space. Maybe the life I never thought I'd have could've happened.

Ship and Captain's Logs from the years of 2038-2074 have little out of the ordinary except for the following report that is of note.

Ship's Log - 2075 - 19:45 - Captain Faris recording . . .

A micrometeoroid storm has damaged the fusion engine. Boyce made repairs, but the errors continue within the

When I left Earth, I
crossed the threshold,
and ventured into the
unknown of space filled
with nebulae, debris, and
the hopes and dreams of
generations.

programming. The *Elysian* has not begun the slowing process. I repeat, the *Elysian* is not slowing down! Plans to orbit Barnard's Star b may now be impossible as the velocity of the ship is likely to supersede that of the

planet. Some advice would be nice, Houston.

Public access to the works is available at the New York Institute of Technology and New York Times electronically.

Ship's Log - 2075 - 19:45 - Captain Faris recording . . .

We have reached a turning point in our journey. Communications with Earth and Houston may not return in a timely manner. Let it be put on record Captain Faris is now taking highest authority and will not defer to Houston except to make shift reports. I hope you are all doing all right. Faris signing off.

Captain's Log - 2079 - 10:54

It's June 8th, and I just received a message from Naomi. Momma had a heart attack and passed away suddenly, but it was sent 2076. My mother has been dead for three years, and I didn't know until now.

I haven't told the crew. Knowing our families could be dying won't help anyone. Naomi remains the only one who has attempted to make contact with me. My other siblings faded out of contact long ago, and even Sara disappeared. I wish I knew how she was. They're probably thriving, having families and kids and getting promotions and seeing the sights in Venice. I never left the U.S. before I decided to go skyward.

Morale is low. Isolation has set in, and Rourke has started scheduling meetings with us each individually to discuss our mental and emotional health. The *Elysian* is making sure we're healthy physically, but she's not programmed to care about our thoughts. Most of us agree: Star Reach and Earth has moved on. There's something new they're working on, and we've been forgotten. Fuck, we haven't even received an update about the *Valhalla* in three or four shifts.

While Rourke is a wonderful therapist, he still needs his own support. Thankfully, our relationship hasn't faltered one bit. His therapy has become time in my arms, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I have him. I love him. We promised to take vows when we reach Barnard's Star. We'll be married by the laws of a new planet, a new colony. We just have to get there first.

Ship and Captain's Logs from the years of 2080-2097 are few and far between. It is assumed isolation and space fatigue resulted in less communication. Once again, access to the works is available at NYIT and The Times.

Ship's Log - 2098 - 20:15 - Captain Faris recording . . .

Doctor Lawrence Rourke died today. He suffered massive head trauma when returning from the bridge for routine checks, and the spin gravity of the outer ring caused his body to collide with the floor of the airlock. If he wasn't dead when he was injured, his fall killed him. I dealt with the situation, and his body has been ejected into the vacuum.

We were all supposed to make it to Barnard's Star. Rourke was supposed to make it. How could this happen? I don't understand. Did you plan this? Fuck! Fuck all of the formalities. Why won't you respond to us Houston? Where did you go? Rourke has died, and you don't even care! You won't even get this before we're set to land.

Captain's Log - 2098 - 23:57

He died on the 13th. I knew something was off. There was something else in the air, something malicious and troubled. Rourke's death wasn't an accident. Kastellanos had the strength to kill him. Boyce was supposed to be with Rourke on the routine checks, but she said she stayed behind. Maybe she's lying. Maybe it's Kastellanos. I'm being paranoid. I'm grieving.

Rourke, no Lawrence, he took something with him when he died. My heart, my love, I can't imagine life without him. His hope, his optimism, his excitement for our future, it's all gone. I considered staying with him in the airlock. I considered dying along with him. But, I can't. I know someone is plotting against me and killed him. I have to figure it out. I have to avenge him. I have to make it to our final destination,

for Lawrence. I know this is why I shouldn't have become involved with a crew member. Fuck!

Captain's Log - 2098 - 09:23

It's been less than six months since our last shift. Six months since we lost Rourke, and I've noticed increasing repairs are needed. Repairs Boyce said she's handling. Obviously, she's not.

I've had plenty of time to think, and I've determined my life is in itself the Hero's Journey. Star Reach's invitation to join their Paradise Initiative was my call to adventure. When I left Earth, I crossed the threshold, and ventured into the unknown of space filled with nebulae, debris, and the hopes and dreams of generations. I've fought isolation, moody crew, and the loss of Momma. I stuck through it all until I lost you.

When I lost you Lawrence, I died, and I haven't been the same since. But your death showed me that I had been neglecting my duties and the priority of our mission. During this shift, I awoke nauseous, but I kept quiet and checked my pod. Someone has been tampering with it. I think it's Boyce. She's the only one of us who would know. Although, Kastellanos was there when they first fixed it, so maybe. No, he wouldn't, but Boyce would. I'm going to keep an eye out. I won't let her ruin what we've worked so hard for. I won't let her end my journey before it's over.

I miss you Rourke. I love you. I still do. I always will.

Ship's Log, *Elysian*, 23:00. Captain Faris recording . . .

This is the final recording of the Paradise Class Exploration Vessel the *Elysian*. I'll cut to the chase. Boyce completely lost it. She went mad when we discovered the engines had malfunctioned, and killed Rourke when he realized she was unstable. That bitch killed Lawrence! She gutted Kastellanos and was hunting me down. She had no plans of any of us reaching

the surface of Barnard's b.

I've sent Kastellanos down in the med lab shuttle after sewing up his wounds. Despite his pleas to help me, I couldn't risk him. Currently, I am preparing the habitat shuttle for launch and have Boyce locked in the joint airlock. When I detach, she'll be thrown into space. She'll either suffocate or burn up in the atmosphere or maybe die because of the burn from the engines.

However, she goes, she deserves it.

If you receive this message send aid immediately. If this reaches Star Reach CEO Jonathan Hughes, I have only one thing to say: fuck you. If someone other than the corporation finds this, receives it on an errant radio signal, please tell the world. Don't let them get away with this shit. This is my last report. Goodbye.

Captain Armani Faris, signing off.

If you have any information regarding the Paradise Initiative, the Star Reach Corporation, or fugitive Jonathan Hughes, please contact Jessamin McSwain at the New York Times or NYTI.

Paige Burton-Argo

In Brief: A short interview with 2011 Editor of *Harbinger: Fight or Flight*



After graduating from Stephens in 2011, Paige Burton-Argo worked for New Boston Creative Group, LLC, an integrated marketing and communications agency in Manhattan, Kansas. She started as a copywriter and eventually worked as director of content development and director of operations. After her first son was born, she worked remotely for NBCG for a year and a half before leaving to stay home full time. She now

has two boys and helps in their family-owned businesses, Argo Farms and Argo Land Services.

Q: What was your experience like as the editor of *Harbinger*?

A: Working on *Harbinger* was the most useful and fulfilling experience of my college years. I gained so much practical experience in editing, writing, marketing, and collaborating with the staff and contributing writers. Of course, a large part of what made the experience so valuable was learning the ins and outs of creating a literary magazine from Kris Somerville. She simultaneously trusts the creativity of her students while pushing them to achieve a higher standard, which is why the magazine has been so successful.

Q: Tell us about the loves and challenges of your current job.

A: Keeping two tiny humans alive. I love the tiny humans. Keeping them alive—and maintaining my sanity—is the challenge!

Q: What advice do you have for your fellow English and creative writing majors?

A: Take any opportunity to hone your skills, even if it seems small or insignificant at the time. You'll be amazed at how in-demand good communicators are in the "real world," so do everything you can to keep your writing skills sharp.

Q: Please share with us a favorite book, film, and song?

A: There are too many books and films to name! Same with songs, but I will say that my top two favorite albums are Carole King's *Tapestry* and Adele's *21*.

The Millet Dogs

Christina Scott

Only the Millet family could breed the Millet dogs. Hell, only the Millet family could touch the Millet dogs. It wasn't as if you got up too close to one of them it would bite off your finger. The Millet dogs never barked, never growled, and wouldn't dare bite; they were brought up better than that. For being cattle dogs, they were calm, perched usually in pairs in front of the Millet's farm gates as stoic and menacing as gargoyles. If you didn't know any better, you might've thought they were well-kept statues. And when they drove the cows back to the barn in the evening, the dogs didn't dart or skid around in the mud. No, they pranced over the top of the animals, weightless. Strange as it was to us, it scared the cows shitless. The blue heelers were more robust than big, but those cows minded without so much as a "moo" in rebuttal.

The Millets never helped dispel rumors about the dogs. They kept all information in the family. The Millets were kind enough folks and, in every other way apart from their canine companions, completely unassuming, but everybody just decided not to bring up the dogs. We didn't know what would happen, but figured it was better not to find out. There was, however, a list of things we did and did not know about the dogs.

First, we knew that the Millets had always bred their heelers. Tracing through every family tree in town were stories about those hounds, some true and some made up; some believable and some not so much.

Second, nobody ever knew how many dogs there were. We knew there were at least two since they sat on patrol in front of the property, but other than that the exact number was unknown. Due to the purebred nature of the pups, they were all completely indistinguishable from each other, and nobody ever got close enough to them to be able to figure out their sex. Those generations of in-breeding made for some pretty icky food for thought but some genetically superior AKC contenders.

Third, we knew the Millet dogs were not show dogs;

they were working dogs. The Millets owned their farmland for generations, and the livestock never fluctuated in number. Even during tough economic years when selling the cows looked like the easiest route to stability, they refused. This sparked rumors of its own; that they kept the cows around for the dogs. But there was no way to confirm this theory.

Fourth, nobody had any idea how old any of the dogs were. Nobody knew when they were born or when they died. They were raised in the house until they were old enough to start herding, and then they were seamlessly assimilated into the rotation. You couldn't tell when they got old either since the blue-gray of their coats hid their age. When we were little a lot of us imagined that the dogs were never born and never got old. They simply existed forever.

The fifth thing we all knew about the dogs was that they were cursed. Despite being so well behaved and harmless, they

We didn't know what would happen, but figured it was better not to find out.

had a body count of a successful serial killer. When folks said nobody could touch the hounds but the Millets, it was a warning. This fifth bit of information included a growing list of "mishaps" all suffered by those outside the Millet blood-

line who came in contact with the dogs.

1. Jared Breier, one of the Millets first farmhands, was a sweet blonde boy in his early twenties. They kept him around to fence-mend and house-paint. This was during a good year for the Millets, and they could afford the expense of extra help for menial tasks. He did good work for the family, and most importantly he regarded the dogs from a respectable distance. As a handsome small town farm boy, Jared was known to invite local girls on stargazing dates at the top of the hill behind the Millet's property. Perhaps becoming too comfortable with his situation, one night he accepted a dare from a date to sneak up to one of the sleeping dogs guarding the farm's gates and

pet it. Jared did pet the dog without consequence; it didn't even seem to notice him. About a week later he was decapitated while working on the underside of a plow.

2. Ferdinand Mapleton was the Millet's first personal in-house veterinarian. He was just out of school when they hired him, and we'd heard Mrs. Millet cried with relief after learning Mapleton was eager to work with the dogs despite their reputation. The conversation had been a quick and simple interview:

Mrs. Millet had said, "I know you've been trained. I know you're qualified."

"Yes." He'd shifted in his seat.

"Do you know about the dogs?"

"I'm very familiar with the breed. My family kept them around when I was growing up, and I've worked with many during my time in school." He'd sat still then, straightening his back to appear confident.

Mrs. Millet stiffened her jaw before speaking again, and a new vein appeared on the surface of her throat. "I'm not asking if you know about the breed, I'm asking if you know about our dogs. Have you heard about them?"

Mapleton found it hard to hold eye contact. He studied a portrait on the wall across the room that showed two of the Millet's dogs posed in a burgundy armchair.

He swallowed hesitantly and spoke in a lower tone.

"I mean, of course I've heard, you know, stories and rumors. Can't truly avoid that kind of thing around here."

"I'd imagine not."

"You don't have to worry about that kind of business with me." He'd straightened his jacket and found Mrs. Millet's gaze again.

"No?"

"Not at all. As a man of science, I don't buy into the nonsense."

This time it was Mrs. Millet who found herself drawn to the portrait. "Well not even all men of science have enough

pluck to want to be around our heelers. She excused herself from the room, and the veterinarian was hired the next day.

It was generally believed that Mapleton's lack of belief in the curse caused his demise. See it's not often that folks think of curses as being sentient. It's more usually thought of as a rule, a simple cause and effect. The dog's curse was different. It preyed on what made people weak, found out what sort of trickery they would be most susceptible to and treated them to an experience accordingly. The young doctor was around just long enough for people to stop worrying. Just long enough for the youngest Millets to start talking about him at elementary school. Just long enough for Mrs. Millet to take to wearing expensive perfume when he came up to the property. Just long enough for him to tell the whole town that the curse was an old wives' tale and he had proved it by petting one of the dogs without incident.

Mapleton was rounding out his second year with the family when there was an incident. According to reports, he was seen leaving the Millet residence by car at around 4:30

The dog's curse was different. It preyed on what made people weak, found out what sort of trickery they would be most susceptible to and treated them to an experience accordingly.

a.m. during a snowy November. Another vehicle was seen exiting the gates fifteen minutes later, but could not be identified through the snow flurries. A resident of the apartment building where Mapleton lived called in a noise complaint to the landlord the next day for "roughhousing at an ungodly hour."

The building owners tried for three days to contact Mapleton, but after no response they performed a "wellness" check. All was not well. The landlord and police found the vet's home in disarray: small

pieces of furniture overturned; objects broken on the floor. In the doorway leading from his living room to his bedroom, Mapleton was found face down on a blood-soaked carpet. He was covered in bruises, his throat was slit, and his tongue was removed. Since the second vehicle was never identified, few suspects were questioned and none offered promising leads. No charges were made.

3. Lisa Beaumont was regarded as the town's most tragic loss from the curse. She began seeing the oldest Millet boy before he graduated high school. Millets typically never went to college; they finished their primary education and then worked on the farm until they had kids old enough to take over their jobs. Then the cycle started again. Those who married into the family were enigmas. All of them were normal people who'd grown up believing the same things as the rest of us. Then there'd be a private wedding reception, and, all of a sudden, they wouldn't answer questions. The hush order went into effect as soon as the wedding rings were exchanged. Once somebody took the last name Millet, talking about the dogs was a dead end.

Everyone liked Lisa because she was an informant. Since she never officially tied the knot with anyone in the family, she wasn't subject to the lip-sealing forces on the farm. Many suitors of Millet adolescents never got to hang around the property enough to gather any information, but Lisa was special. People said she resembled young Mrs. Millet, and Mr. Millet had developed a soft spot for her. He'd come up with reasons why she needed to be at the farm. The oldest son brushed the occasions off as an old man trying to feel a spark again, but it gained Lisa access to the dogs.

Specifically, she wanted to see how the family interacted with the animals. At first, she would come back from her visits with information about the layout of the dogs' living arrangements. Each room in the house contained one large, metal water bowl placed next to a matching bowl of kibble. Neither supply ever diminished. Also, in each room, there was one medium-sized dog bed and one leash hanging next to the door.

Lisa found all this odd because she never saw a dog inside the house, only the two sitting at the gate.

The Millets also never talked about their dogs around Lisa. If Mr. Millet or any of the children needed them for work on the farm, the heelers just knew. Without gesture or whistle, they set out on their tasks.

A little under a year after the oldest son graduated high school, it got back to Lisa that he would be proposing soon. Knowing that once there was a wedding, there would be no more espionage, she wanted to collect and distribute as much information about the dogs as possible. Nobody knew whether the Millet spouses were threatened into silence, seduced, or assimilated, but Lisa didn't want to take chances. She would not be coerced into secrecy before revealing what she knew. To do this, she had to touch the dogs. Her only intention had been to simply pet one while it was sleeping like Jack had done. She'd informed friends of this and jokingly told them to look out for a news report the next day. As it turned out, the news report gave more information than Lisa could have imagined.

At ten o'clock on a Sunday night in April, Lisa called her mother. The call went through to voicemail before Mrs. Beaumont could answer it. She picked up anyway, getting the conversation on record. The local news must have run the audio a hundred times while the story was still fresh.

"Mom? Are you there?" Lisa was crying.

"Yes, I'm here. Lisa, baby, what's wrong?"

"Mom . . ." She broke into a sob.

"Sweetheart what's going on? Why are you crying?"

"I did something, Mom. Oh my, God. I'm going to die."

There was shuffling on Mrs. Beaumont's end and a waver in her voice when she answered, "Hey, hey now. c'mon don't scare me like that. Tell me where you are and what you did."

"I'm in the car. I don't know what's—"

"Driving where?" You could hear the jingling of Mrs. Beaumont's keys on the line.

“I took the dog, Mom. I have it with me.”

“The dog?”

“I shouldn’t have taken it, but I couldn’t stop myself. I shouldn’t have, I shouldn’t have, I shouldn’t have.” Lisa’s voice cracked as her crying became more hysterical.

“Listen, baby. I don’t know what you’re talking about, but you need to calm down. It’s not safe for you to be driving like this. I’m sure whatever you did, you’ll be fine.”

“It’s already happening. They’re here.”

“Who’s there?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know. But it’s the dogs, Mom. It’s all true.” Lisa’s volume trailed in and out as if she kept moving away from the phone. It was assumed by most that she was looking behind her because at the same moment the sound of revving tires became clear in the audio. There was no conclusion as to whether they belonged to her car or to another vehicle.

“Lisa, is there someone following you?”

That recording of the voicemail ended after that. Lisa’s car was found the next morning off the side a road leading to an interstate out of town. The doors were flung open and the front windshield was shattered. Lisa was nowhere to be found. When asked whether or not she had stolen one of their dogs, the Millets were standoffish but revealed that they had seen one of their heelers plodding back to the gate at a strange hour. They’d questioned it, but no harm seemed to have been done so they dismissed the occurrence. The missing person’s case on Lisa was never closed, and no one ever found a body.

The last thing everyone in town knows about the blue heelers is that we need them. Not only do we need them, we need them as they are: gray, sturdy, and cryptic. We need them perched up like the Queen’s Guard in front of the farm not licking our toes at the dinner table. As the number of victims climbed, we’ve needed the curse concealed like fleas in the blotches of their thick fur. When a thing like that rumbles the underbelly of a place, it’s best to let sleeping dogs lie.

Contributors' Notes



Mikaila Baker graduated from Stephens College in December of 2020 as a Strategic Communication: Integrated Marketing major. Her writing is influenced by her emotions and love of nature. She enjoys creative writing, poetry, and wordplay. This is her first publication in *Harbinger*.



Natia Compton is a senior creative writing major and digital filmmaking minor from Monett, Missouri. Her short fiction was published in the 2020 issue of *Harbinger*. After graduation she will start her MFA in TV + Screenwriting at Stephens College and work on her novel.



Madison Crist is a 2020 graduate of Stephens College with a degree in digital filmmaking and minors in creative writing and music. Her poetry and academic essays have been accepted and presented at Sigma Tau Delta's International Convention. She has been a member of *Harbinger's* staff for two previous editions, the latter as co-editor. She is thankful to have her work featured in *Harbinger* for the third time.



Quinn Doll is a senior BFA student at Stephens College. This is the second time her poetry has been featured in *Harbinger*. Her story "Of a Mother" has been published in *Montana Mouthful*. She enjoys wandering around the woods with her dog, Wylie. She plans to continue writing poetry after graduation even though it won't pay the bills. Quinn is a member of Sigma Tau Delta.



Jasmine Flores is a senior creative writing student whose work has been published in *Harbinger* for the second time. She is co-editor for this year's issue and hopes to use her newfound knowledge to continue to publish work in the future. She is vice president of Sigma Tau Delta and the historian for Mortar Board.



Ana Green is from rural Missouri. Her stories are inspired by fond memories and fueled by magic. She is a graduating creative writing major and a member of Sigma Tau Delta. Ana's work appeared in the 2020 issue of *Harbinger*.



Lauren Granich is an avid reader, writer, and lover of romance. Her online novels have gained over two million reads, and she hopes to one day work in the publishing industry. Lauren spends her free time brainstorming new writing ideas and reading as many books as she can.



Amber Lehmann's second publication in *Harbinger* is her last hurrah before graduation. She has a passion for writing fantasy and LGBTQ stories and plans to become an author. As president of Astro Girls, Stephen's resident animation club, she enjoys planning events and hanging out with friends.



Em Louraine is an English major at Stephens College, with plans to go into publishing and writing their own works. This is their first contribution to *Harbinger*, and they are honored to be a part of such an established literary magazine.



Jessamin McSwain is a sophomore majoring in creative writing at Stephens College with a minor in art history. Her piece “Homeward Bound” won 1st place in the Owl Purdue Short Story Contest in 2016. She was one of four Stephens students accepted to attend the Unbound Book Festival Writing Workshop with Idra Novey in April 2020. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta.



Zoe Miner is a writer and an avid reader of horror/thrillers. She hopes to one day be a published novelist and work in the publishing industry. Much of her free time is spent writing down ideas in her numerous journals and reading novels.



Danielle Rodriguez is a creative writing major from Chicago, Illinois. She is a playwright, photographer and graphic designer. This is her second year as *Harbinger's* graphic designer. Her one-act play “Case File: (T)ango (I)ndia (M)Ike” won the 2020 *Harbinger* Pittman Prize for drama.



Arabela Rowland is an English major and a psychology minor at Stephens College. She published an article in *Stephens Life* entitled “Self-Esteem vs. Egomania: A Study in Self”. She has worked for *Harbinger* as an assistant editor. This is her first publication in the journal.



Christina Scott is a senior at Stephens College, pursuing a major in creative writing and a minor in digital filmmaking. She has been published in *Stephens Life* and worked in art direction and makeup for a number of short films, including the web show pilot “Tampsen Air.” Her work is inspired by the mysticism of the Midwest, and this is her first publication in *Harbinger*.



Eli Tirrel is a creative writing major who in her spare time cares for her foster dogs. “The Village” is her first published piece and is a tribute to Margaret Atwood’s “Happy Endings”.



Emerson Van Roekel is a senior in the digital filmmaking department. She was a team leader in the Citizen Jane film festival, and this is her first year in Creative Ink. Emerson is passionate about art of all kinds, from music to writing to sculpture and film. This is her first time being a part of *Harbinger*.

Brevity: A Designer's Cover Notes

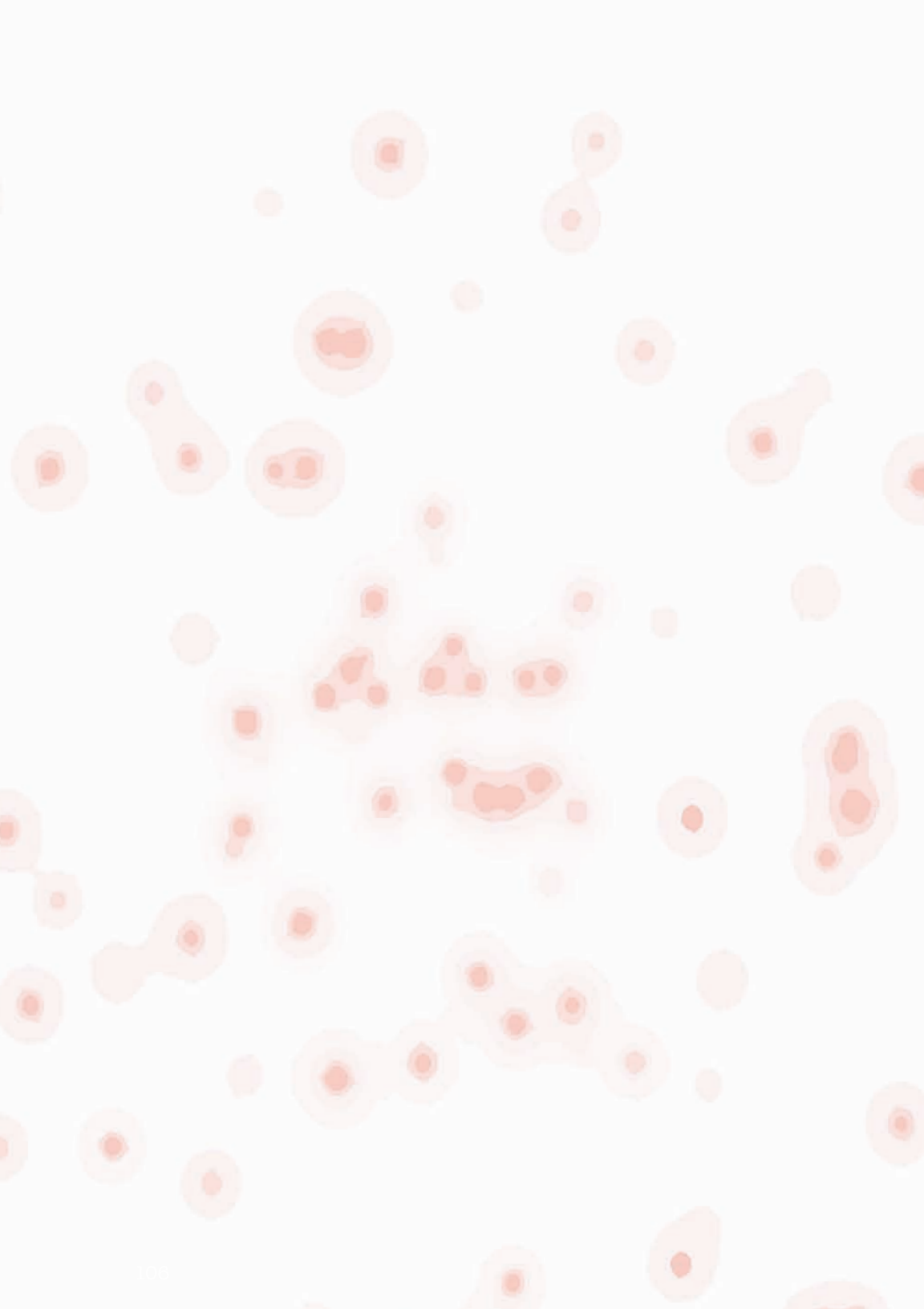
Emerson Van Roekel

**I do believe in the power of story. I believe that stories have an important role to play in the formation of human beings, that they can stimulate, amaze, and inspire their listeners”
– Hayao Miyazaki**

Like shooting stars, “brevity” is a form of fleeting beauty. The mostly short pieces in *Harbinger 2021: Brevity* prove that brief stories are no less wonderful than longer forms. Inspired by the beautiful and unusual stories in this issue, I created a cover image that blends my design, music, and emotional inspirations.

When exploring the idea of brevity, I first thought of shooting stars and then of my personal love for the fantasy-adventure film *Howl's Moving Castle*. I noticed that the stories as well as the poems and nonfiction in this year's *Harbinger* possess a magical and dreamlike quality that reminded me of *Studio Ghibli*. I wanted to draw inspiration from Hayao Miyazaki since he has been such an influential artist in my life, and in the lives of countless others. I also wanted to incorporate a music trend that resonates with many young creatives. Using the maximalist clutter style of the lo-fi beats, I was able to incorporate secrets and references from the stories themselves and even past *Harbingers*.

Finally, the cover is an appreciation of the indoor spaces that have cradled us and kept us safe in this last year. Sometimes to survive we have to romanticize our lives and our surroundings, and I appreciate every space that has fostered story and creativity during this international crisis. Short form stories keep us from dwelling on loss and heartbreak, and for that, I am particularly grateful.



First place winner in the 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2020 Literary Arts Journal Category and second place winner in 2015.

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Laura McHugh
Author, *The Weight of Blood*, *Arrowood*, and *The Wolf Wants In*

“*Harbinger* provides readers with a balance of insight and entertainment, provocation and pleasure, audit and reward. Perhaps most powerful of all, the incisive social dialogue created by these young writers reinvigorates my hope in art’s ability to bring about change.”

Jill Orr
Author, *The Good Byline*, *The Bad Break* and *The Ugly Truth*