



**Janus
Fall 2021**

PERSPECTIVE

Perspective

Janus Fall 2021

Dear reader,

Janus is a student-run narrative medicine journal at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Medicine. Our name was inspired by the Roman god of transitions, who has two faces, allowing him to look simultaneously at the past and the future. Our journal encourages student reflection on our journeys in medicine through writing and artwork to better understand our patients and ourselves. Through reflection, we are positioned to better serve and more compassionately care for our patients in the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented time with constant changes to our way of living, ranging from minor inconveniences to major life alterations. In this edition of Janus, we explore how the events of the past year have affected our perspective, both professionally and personally. It is an opportunity to reflect on challenges and triumphs as well as consider how our unique perspectives compare with others around us.

We are thankful to the authors who shared their experiences and insights. We also appreciate the continued support from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center community. We are excited to share the Fall 2021 edition of Janus with you.

Sincerely,

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dreamland

Hannah Sullivan

Sweet butter moon
hanging in ribbons over my shoulder
These minutes drip heavy
when you watch the world
unfurl during the dead of night
There's an assembly line of ghosts
who I pass in the empty hospital halls
Clasping tarnished jewelry and government ID cards
Life is but a dream

Apparition peering over my shoulder
just passing through
We walk in synchrony
until I realize it's me following you
dusty shadow of a memory
through the empty hospital halls
And when I feel as though I can reach his hand
I remember what it felt like for him to hold mine
And that night he hollowed out the moon

I play cats cradle with suture thread
The bruises under my eyes cast spells
on the reflection I see in the mirror
Is it the witching hour yet?
Tree bark limbs ache with too much time
and space from morning light
Forgotten love letters rotting into sinew
The moon outside blinks heavy while we soldier on
She sings us off to sleep

The Dawn Wall

Radha Patel

A few days into 2021, I watched a documentary on the first people to free climb El Capitan's Dawn Wall. Climbers rely on the natural curves and cracks in the stone face to get by, however, the Dawn Wall was thought to be so worn and smooth, it would be impossible to climb. A quote stuck with me during that film. A journalist had been observing the climbers make their day's attempts through a telescope in the valley. Shaking his head, he said "There's this 3,000 foot wall, and it's coming down to millimeters of skin contact on your fingertips."

2020 was a year of stable footholds crumbling away from cliff-face, sweaty palms slipping off the slightest of handholds. Some of us were lucky enough to have family, friends, technology, wealth to belay us, to slow our fall to the earth.

Others were not.

As the world outside - or at least the world inside the television - seemed further and further away, I've tried my best to find my footing in the space around me. In the colorful socks on my feet, a gift from the person I love. In the rose-scented candle on my desk, its flame creating sweet swirls of light around the room. In the cool rush of air entering my nostrils and the way it lifts my chest. In warm exhalation, a gentle release.

Millimeters of skin hold me to the cold, granite wall, not as securely as I planned and leaving the tips of my fingers torn and raw. But I am here, and I will move forward.

A Look at Legacy

Connor Lenihan

I'm grateful for my
Privilege

Glad to have been accepted
To medical school
In Memphis

To be a legacy student at a university
that still discriminates

Against women
Against people of color
Against the majority of our city
Sometimes I reflect on the irony

To be me and to be proud
Proud of my position
And proud to share it

I've seen how much better we are
With more

More perspectives

I'm surprised to find the justifications
Although not just

For this status
My heart is open
And so is my mind

I try every day to
Wake up

Indian Summer

Vidushi Sinha

I always wondered what they ate
The tobacco-colored streets offered no scraps of hope, faith, sustenance
Not even tears of victory, or comfort, Indras' thunderbolt cracked, my lips burst
open

I'll have some mithai, please

Footprints and dung to commemorate an existence, *an existence of sorts*
Scavengers have time for neither vengeance nor remorse
Regret, a luxury for the blessed

Mummy dirties my hair before I step outside
I'm told to keep silent, to blend in
But the glimmer in my eyes betrays
Through the flat's iron gate, my swing screeches loudly
And this is all I know of pain

Milk wrapped in plastic arrives every morning, *chai begins the day, of course*
In silence, we sip porcelain mugs, white light, *Fair & Lovely*
Opening the window, we call to our friends, *chidiya, chidiya*
Tossing our leftovers to the winged worthy
Who sing to the starving below

Visitors come, chanting holy cow, holy cow
Is that a holy cow?
But the seasoned would rather watch Zee TV, than our neighbors fighting for breath
Daddee says "c'est la vie"
Pass the mithai, please



Memphis VA Medical Center, Memphis, TN

Hard times lie ahead.
Ready or not, here I come.
I know not what waits.

Hospital. Repeat.
I am just a letter now.
Should try to enjoy it more.

Got the hang of it.
Just kidding, so far to go.
Used to it by now.

It felt just like home.
Solitude without a choice.
Think I like it here.

I saw the summit
And I made it to the top.
Where did the time go?

The fact you had a toy gun in your hands in the first place is fucked up
 But there you were, as soft and innocent as your age
 Your hands, equally soft, innocent, twelve, gripped the gun like you had seen on tv, but naively
 In a play so familiar, as if we couldn't teach our children better games to play; you were playing in a park
 You must not have been able to easily place the emotions you felt when the adults pulled up like that
 Or perhaps, since you live it, you knew, at twelve
 But for sure, they knew you'd have it; possibly why they did it like that, with impunity
 The deep, inward, exhaustive tightening of your being: fear, again
 Maybe that's what made you twitch, untowardly; the video certainly didn't show much motion from you before you were shot
 But there you were, twelve, and you think about the game they made you play your whole life
 After you were shot, I wonder if you realized in time what happened to you wasn't because you were bad
 What happened to you was because you were made to be the bad guy the whole time.

When you left to get snacks, your family's lifelong warnings must have barely crossed your mind
 After all, your family moved you here so you could be safer; be out ten minutes tops, you thought putting on your hoodie
 Picked up your favorites, already on your way back home when you crossed
 You saw him, but he was looking; the neighborhood watch security detail was looking for faces like yours
 Telephones, television, news, even neighborhood watches, the incessant, invasive dissemination of faces like yours—wanted
 In a better world, unimaginable that this man would follow you, I know, but he did, properly announcing himself in fact
 As usual, you started running away; as usual, you were chased down
 He had been waiting for this moment his whole life, the american dream: getting away with it under the lights
 You couldn't believe what was happening to you, at seventeen, scarred for your life having to fight off an attacking adult
 You had been waiting for it, but you weren't prepared for the feeling it gave you when you saw it; you knew
 When you saw the gun, you knew; the light reflecting off the metallic sheen searing your eyes
 It was the only thing you could process in that moment, your impending death
 It also gave you extra adrenaline to absolutely obliterate him; you know that's what happened
 Upsetting it ended up aiding his defense—you defending yourself when you knew you were about to be killed
 Every picture of you, always a child, portraying your favorite pop stars tricked into wanted posters; this is not a criminal
 As you painfully died, if only the last injustice you suffered was when his finger placed the trigger
 If there is solace, it is in you not having to suffer through the ones after your death as well.

When Hamlet spoke, “To be or not to be,” context signals to the audience that he is questioning whether he should kill himself. Within the play, this famous phrase is enriched by its respective soliloquy and conveys the immense emotional burden he faces as the play builds to a climax. However, the phrase has a question buried much deeper below its face: What does it mean, “to be”? Of course, as an English verb, it can be conjugated in many ways (am, are, is, was, were, been, being, etc.); the complications with such an irregular verb mirror the intricacies of its grammatical usage and, therefore, how it is understood. Commonly, “to be” is used in one of three ways: predicative, veridical, and existential. Yet, understanding “to be” and its implications on an object’s identity often require more than just one of these three usages. Thus, one can combine the already-well-defined essence behind each of the three usages into one “theory” to better define what it means “to be.” Furthermore, we can use this framework to illustrate why the Covid pandemic demands such a heavy toll.¹

As the name implies, the predicative form of “to be” requires that some descriptor follows.² Take the following examples: That pot **is** red; Granny Smith apples **are** all stolen from salamanders in Greenland; that last statement **is** foolish. In this form, “to be” allows direct attachment of ideas, connecting “red” to “the pot” and “directly sourced from salamanders in Greenland” to “apples.” And, as the “apples” example shows, predicative statements are not necessarily true. Based on the truth value of the predicative statement, they could fall under the categories of fact, fiction, belief, hypothesis, opinion, etc.

Now, consider the following exchange:

Ana: What do you think of Covid?

Elsa: Covid **is** *just such a pain*. I’m really tired of being stuck in my room.

Ana: What about the idea that Covid is a *hoax*?

Elsa: The conspiracy theories surrounding it greatly interest me, but Covid itself **is** a *virus*, so that idea **is** *true*. I’m not really sure how I feel about people spreading the idea that it’s a hoax.

The first few uses of “is” take the predicative state. But, when saying, “...that idea **is** *true*,” Elsa uses the veridical form, which necessarily equates “to be” with “true” and “not to be” with “false.” The veridical may seem like just a subset of the predicative, but one major difference is that the veridical “to be” is a complete thought on its own, whereas the predicative “to be” needs a descriptor to have meaning. In order to describe a pot as red, one needs to include the descriptor “red” in the sentence. But, to judge a statement as true, one could just say, “yes, it is,” and the listener understands that something is being verified. The same goes for when someone says, “Yes, that is the case.” It implies that some idea or hypothesis aligns with reality.

The third form of “to be” is the existential. While the veridical form implies truth, the existential form implies existence. If I say, “The wildfire is in Paradise, California,” then I am using the predicative form to describe the wildfire’s location, but if I say, “There is a wildfire in Paradise, California,” then I use the existential form to assert that a wildfire exists (and happens to also be in California).

1. I am not going to claim that I am teaching something that people do not yet know; rather, I am only offering a framework (or some mental organizational tool) for better understanding the nature of “being” that can be applied much more than Covid, such as personal identity or object/idea identity. Of course, the contents of that frame are specific to each individual.

2. Remember that a predicate is a verb followed by some descriptive clause (e.g., Robin Sparkles wants to go to the mall.)

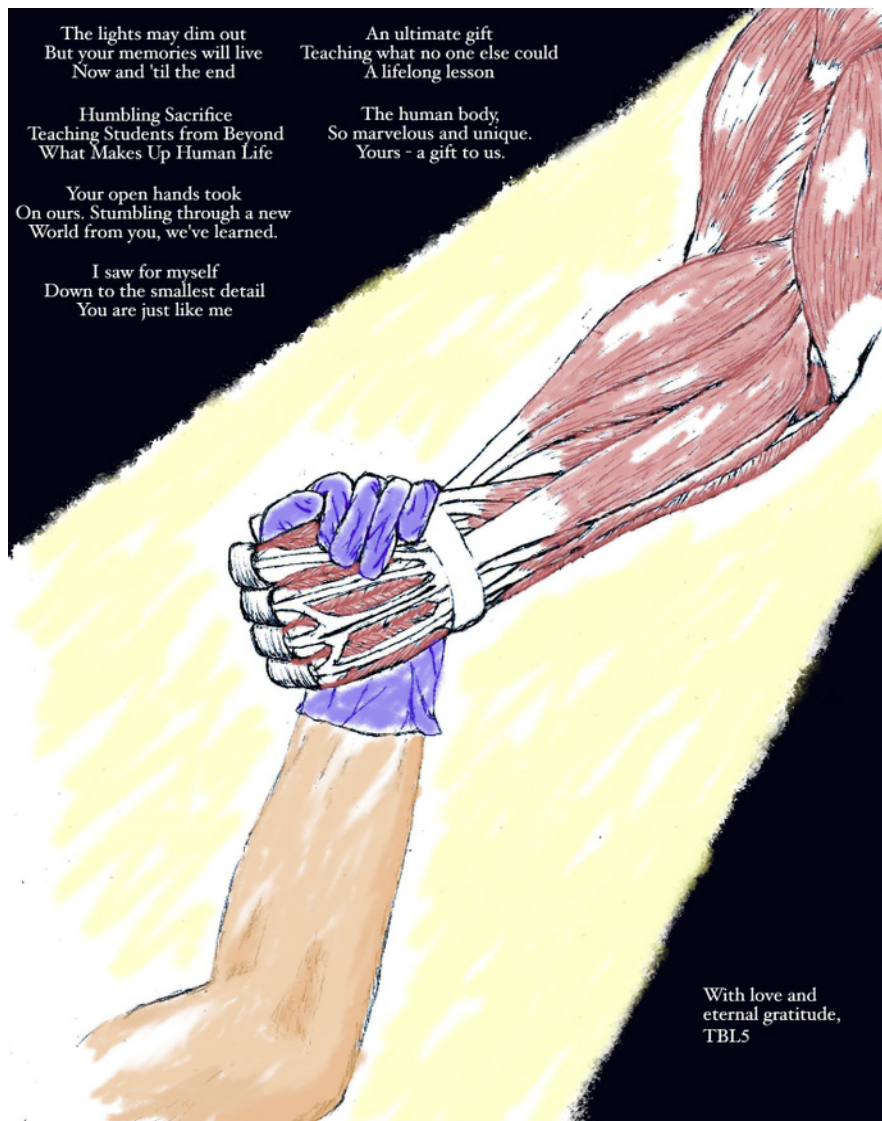
Why did I spend so long describing these forms of “to be”? So that we can combine them in order to paint a picture of what it means to exist. Imagine an atom; this atom will represent whatever object you choose. It could represent your own identity, the screen or paper in front of you, or that stupidly complex idea you heard in a podcast last week. At the nucleus of this mental atom are that object’s existence and core truths about it (the existential & veridical “to be’s”). And like physical atomic nuclei, objects do not exist in isolation; in our minds, an object’s relationships are inherent to its identity. So, radiating outwards as the electron cloud are descriptors and connotations that can be attached or detached to varying degrees (the predicative “to be’s”). To dip our toes into epistemology a little bit, no one really knows what the true form of a mental atom is, just like with the atoms of physics. Though experiments (analogous to our experiences) can help scientists ascertain properties of the physical atoms, we slowly construct mental atoms of everything we encounter. And as we accumulate them, mental atoms “react” with other atoms to form/break bonds and molecules.

Now, compile a mental atom for 2020. Or just compile one for Covid (since 2020 as a whole is a lot to process at once). It might look something like this: At its nucleus, Covid is a virus that started spreading through humans from Wuhan, China. It has *insert physical virus attributes here along with strain-specific information* and *insert other historical facts, timepoints, and developments here*.¹ In the electron cloud lie all the deaths, lasting effects, fear of contracting it, prejudice against Asians, worries about loved ones and the future, government policies, speeches, public outcry and division, financial instability, mental illness, lifestyle changes, etc. It filled us with the uncertainty of what-ifs. The mental atom of Covid is one of the largest I could imagine. And guess what big atoms tend to do... They fragment. They shoot off electrons and whole chunks of themselves; these shards go on to affect other atoms. The reaches of this pandemic intrude so far that every other mental atom has been rocked to the extent that it is practically impossible to catalogue every minute change. Now, for many people it does not even take infection to feel weary.

But at this point, that might just be what our mental atoms consist of. Obviously, I am in a privileged state to be able to write that. I am not deprived of health insurance from losing my job at the now-bankrupt local restaurant. I am not a sleep-deprived Filipino nurse in the ER of a small-town hospital managing the patients forced to reside in the hallways. My parents did not have to decide whether to turn off my ventilator after the physician told them I would pass peacefully. But isn’t that why we chose healthcare? The weight of Covid’s atom on the mind is overwhelming, but Atlas is not alone.

1. The point isn’t for me to “educate” everyone on a lot of stuff I don’t know.

TBL 5 includes Mark Betonio, Chris Habermann, Francesca Healy, Zara Parkinson, Andy Thai, Lucas Wilkins



It's often said that you never truly die until the last person on Earth forgets your name. Names are viewed as a legacy and a measure of worth that move forward in time even without us being physically here. This is perhaps a comforting thought if you're a famed celebrity whose name is immortalized in history books; but if you're like me, perhaps you have this subtle yet unsettling feeling that you haven't done enough with your time on this planet, and your name might never reach that level of notoriety. Best case scenario: our names might live on for a couple of generations, and they might someday show up on our great-great-great-great-great grandchild's middle school science homework about family trees.

Anatomy as a field of study is all about naming things—this nerve, that artery, this muscle, that vein—they all have names. Seemingly more often than not (and to the dismay of medical students the world over), they also can have more than one name for the same thing! There are also names to describe where things are in relation to other structures, which allow us to be as precise as possible in describing things—like where a bone is broken, or where a tumor might be located. It's through this anatomical naming scheme that we are able to describe, understand, and communicate about the body and its functions. Without this important nomenclature, we would not have modern medicine and science as we know it, and even the simplest of procedures wouldn't be possible or replicable.

If there's anything I learned this year in anatomy, it's that while there is beauty and power in naming things, there is also beauty and power in the unnamed. Many students gave names to these unnamed bodies as a way of providing dignity to their personhood even in death. Although we knew that there was no longer a heart beating or lungs inflating, their humanity was still ever-present on our mind, and viscerally confronted us with our own mortality and existential roles. This unnamed-named body—whose dreams I will never know; whose laugh I've never heard; whose family I might never meet; but who I also feel sure had a first step and a first kiss, a favorite song and flavor of ice cream— is all of us and none of us.

Even though we will never know the real name of our donors, their lives and deaths on this planet have already impacted us personally beyond their wildest imaginations. They not only were critical to furthering our knowledge of anatomy and medicine, but also indelibly emblazoned upon our consciousness a deeper understanding of what it means to be a human being. Nevertheless, their existence moving forward is not quantified or qualified through their names themselves—but rather, through the ways that their contributions will help us to save lives, to discover cures, to be better doctors, and, most importantly, to be more compassionate and benevolent people. And in that way, it is in death that they most certainly live on, name or no-name.

there used to be callouses on my left fingertips
from an instrument i no longer play
it took months and months for them to grow
even longer to disappear
but they were necessary for the craft
a cover
for the bruises
so art could flow

and among those of us who played
we must have forgotten
that there were times
when it hurt even to practice
because we'd done it for years
because the thickened skin was a part of us

years later i feel callouses forming
within my heart, weathered with indifference
they come again from practice
it takes months for them to grow
and i suppose they are necessary for the craft
a shield from pain
so that healing
can proceed

in every field of medicine
there are those who have forgotten
of those times
when suffering hurt like a bruise
because they've practiced apathy for years
they've forgotten the art
and the scars are a part of them

my calloused fingers
altered the way i touched the world around me
beyond the music
i couldn't feel
couldn't differentiate between thorn, wool or concrete
now I worry
what if the ones forming inside my heart
change how i relate to people around me?
what if outside
i can't feel anything?

if it had been any other year
i could've turned a blind eye to my own numbness
hard and jaded
like those before me
tedious technicians
more than meticulous artists
but the pain and the suffering still ache
what if distance
and apathy
become indistinguishable?

in time maybe i will be thankful for the callouses
instruments of our humanity
in a daily symphony
used to embrace the uncomfortable
weaving in and out of strangers' lives
through their sorrows and joys
that comes from the strain
i am learning
to seek out the discordant harmony
so that the callousness is not a part of me

Honestly

Nathan Brott

As for many of us, the pandemic set several plans back for me, such as my clerkships and my boards mid-way through studying. Despite these setbacks, it granted me time in May to reconnect with my family in Knoxville, and for a longtime friend and me to reflect on how our lives and priorities had developed.

Be outside, feel the rain, let it dry,
our lightning friend we brought to fly.
Rubber rolls, smooth and rock.
Just remember, those are my socks!

On the hood, we sat and soaked
and thought of ways in which we'd cloaked
who we are, not on this car.
Far away, far far.

Cloaked to some, some not others,
some of them may be our brothers.
Though time must tell, and tell it must:
I know a real fine fellow I trust.

The lightning cleared our paths to see
our thoughts, our wishes, our families.
And without pause, we let it out;
Full intention leaves this mouth.

Then in this car you showed to me
the dark and turmoiled history
your mind went through once before.
The raindrops danced and knew the score.

A break—more light,
and sweet Mochi delight!

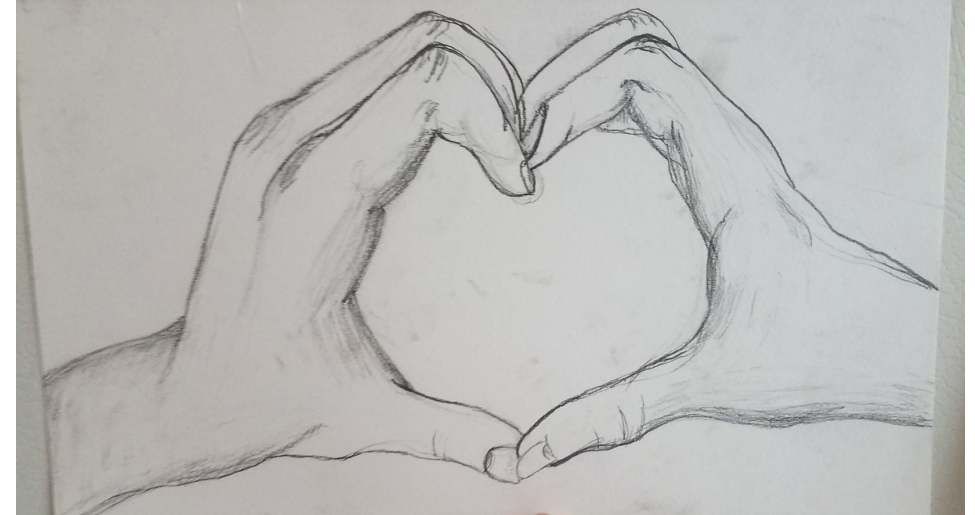
Then there we sat, and then you learned
about these folks you never heard.
The tea grew cold,
heads heavy, eyes old.

Enlightened by the hours before,
oh look, and now it's four.

We hope to use these things we've learned
for a fuller life, the one we've yearned.
Fuzzy glow and a buzz below.
Too many chuckles this way blow.

Hands

Dora Geving



This past year has been difficult for me, as I'm a pretty extroverted individual who thrives in a social environment. As we observed the COVID-19 pandemic progress, and as social distancing restrictions were implemented, I made several uncomfortable observations. One observation was how odd it seemed to me when watching a TV show or movie, with the actors not wearing masks. Seeing TV characters hug each other and eat in restaurants together began to appear very strange to me. With this in mind, I reflected on how valuable our social interactions are. The limitation of not shaking my patient's hand, and not providing an empathetic pat on the back- that truly began to bother me. The sketch above reflects on these issues. I did not know how to draw a hand when this pandemic began last year- but I taught myself how to sketch a hand, so that I could put my thoughts into an image.

Roxie thought about sneaking out of the house. All she had done for months was sit by the window and stare into the woods beyond her backyard. She was sick of doing nothing. Outside the grass looked lush and green, the tree limbs were stuffed full of leaves, and the air, she imagined, was ripe with summer heat. With a twinge of nostalgia she remembered last summer, before the virus, when every day she would spring out of bed, jump into a pair of pants — she had begged Mom to let her wear shorts, but Mom said there were too many ticks and too much poison ivy in the woods where she and Jonah played — then venture two houses down the street. As soon as she rang the doorbell, he was halfway out the door, ready to go. They nodded to each other, an unspoken code, then dashed to the woods. Last one there was a rotten egg!

But now, because of her condition, Mom would not allow her to see anyone, not even Jonah. She had been locked away for her own safety. As she sat alone in her climate-controlled playroom, she longed for the rush of wind through her hair, the morning dew which seeped into her socks, and the heat in her cheeks as she blushed from pure joy. Those were the days she did not hurt. She longed for the days she could run, the days without head pads, without pills alongside breakfast, without pills before bed, and the stretching routines Mom made her do. None of it helped her joints.

Every day before dawn, Roxie woke up to her mom, kneeling beside her bed. In one hand she had a glass of orange juice — Roxie's favorite — and in the other hand, the dreaded stretching band. Her mom helped her sit up then held the cup to Roxie's lips. She savored every sip of her juice because once she finished, she would have to endure those excruciating first movements of the day.

As soon as the last sugary drop was gone, Mom said: "Let's start with just the hand stretches."

"Do I have to?" Roxie groaned.

"Roxie, please," Mom sighed. "Why do you fight me every day?"

"It doesn't help!"

"Yes it does. Doctor's orders," Mom said, handing her the stretching band.

And that was that. Nothing changed, no matter how many times she told her Mom that her fingers still burned after the stretches, that the submarine shaped pills tasted like chalk, and that she had nightmares about choking on them. She tried to explain to Mom that the only thing which helped the hollow throbbing in her bones was play. Playing with friends — playing with her best friend.

"I'm sorry, honey," Mom said, placing a hand on Roxie's shoulder. "Not during a pandemic. With your immune system...it's just too dangerous."

Last summer, when Roxie and Jonah had built a fortress of tree limbs and caked mud, her limbs never ached. She shoveled mounds of dirt for the foundations, set heavy branches for the walls and roof, carved limbs to furnish the inside, padded pine straw for the carpet, and every day, as a reward, climbed the tallest tree in sight and took an afternoon nap in the lush canopy. Jonah preferred to take his break under their roof of crisscrossed twigs. He always asked why she chose to sleep up there, instead of inside the fort that she spent so much time building. "I don't know," Roxie would say, shrugging her shoulders. Then she would race up the tree and fall asleep within minutes. And above all, she loved when an unexpected rain shower soaked the ground as she slept twenty feet above the forest floor.

A deluge of melancholy flooded over Roxie as she sat by the window and reminisced about the damp afternoon air, the rising scent of earth, and the dappled sunlight shining on her face through the trees. She wondered if it was even right to consider herself the same person she was then. That all felt like memories of a different girl. That was twelve-year-old Roxie. Now she was someone completely new. In twelve months she had aged sixty years. The new Roxie could not climb a tree. The new Roxie had spent the entire morning trying to convince herself she liked cartoons because there was nothing else to do. New Roxie felt tired all the time, like she had a permanent case of the flu. New Roxie needed Mom to write her pre-Algebra homework for her because whenever she gripped a pencil, not only did her hands clasp in pain, but they trembled and shook in every direction, making everything she wrote completely illegible.

All these thoughts raced through her mind as she contemplated sneaking out. Mom was just downstairs, working in her office. If she caught Roxie, would she yell at her? Or would she break down and cry? Roxie could handle shouts but she could not handle tears. What scared her even more than Mom's reaction was that Jonah had never met the New Roxie. Jonah only knew fast, adventurous, fearless Roxie. That was the Roxie who, on the last day of summer, had taken a blood oath in the woods with Jonah and vowed to never let their castle succumb to the rain, wind, and storms of mother nature. But what would he say when he saw her limping up to his front door or staggering around the woods? How would she be able to shovel dirt and carve limbs if she could not even grip a pencil? Jonah would have to do most of the work, at least at first, until her joints healed.

She had no idea what Jonah would say; she had no idea if he could sneak out; and she had no idea how Mom would react if she were caught. All Roxie knew was that the best treatment for her burning joints was neither stretches nor chalky pills nor sitting alone, indoors all day. Her heart, her mind, and her aching joints told her the only way to feel normal again was to play with her best friend in the woods. So she gripped the window and, with all her strength, slid it halfway open. She stopped to catch her breath. When she thrust the window further ajar, a warm summer breeze slipped inside to greet her and beckon her away. She slipped through the opening and felt the ripe summer sun on her skin.

my heavy heart

Hannah Sullivan

a lesson in losing your way

my alarm rings at 4:00 am

medical students don't work hard enough anymore

Blue drapes, dainty waves, beckoning me forward.

Please, break me down until there's nothing left to offer

but pounding heart and rotten bruising flesh

and nothing but my own silly hope to show for the work of it.

Fingertips warm with the same crackle

that mocks me when I sleep:

you are safe, you are in danger.

My cup runneth over

I should be doing more

my alarm rings at 4:00 am

cheeks rubbed raw from the fibers of his mask

I want to trace the lines of his smile with my fingertips,

a foolish attempt at remembering the ephemeral hope

I felt when I saw him for the very first time.

only six feet to reach my arms to hold you

my insecurities are lost

and found in the rise and fall of his chest.

you can stay if you want to

text me when you get back

I fall asleep alone

my alarm rings at 4:00 am

days draped in overwhelming blue until I feel like I'm drowning in it

can I tread water for the next 5 hours?

three heads hunched over open abdomen

I don't think anyone remembers I'm here.

It's a work in progress, it's a bottomless downhill spiral

I let the sorrowing current

envelop me and wash me away from shore.

I'm easy come, easy go

I'm so cold

I was never here to begin with

my alarm rings

I don't hear from him anymore.

and the whole thing

the blue drapes and towels

the dark blood clots coating bedsheets and

spilling through the cracks between my fingers

and mask over mask over mask until

I don't know what I look like anymore

I don't remember who I am anymore

I love you, I love you, I loved you

my alarm



2021 has taught me to remember the footprints I leave behind and treasure the footprints that remain of those before me.

The End

Design by Elizabeth C. Conner

Layout by Courtney O'Connor

