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Dartmouth Hurricane

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Cover Page Footnote

These pieces were written in the timespan of a single workshop and presented to you in its original form

Dartmouth Hall Hurricane

The prompt for this exercise: to write a short form piece inspired by the image which also graces the cover of this issue

Elizabeth Barrett

The tree fell after my grandpa died.

That tree meant everything to my Grandpa Frank and Grandma June. It was symbolic—a landmark in their love story, the beginning of our family. Grandma June died twelve years ago—I was only four years old then, I don't have many memories of her—but Grandpa Frank still visited the tree whenever he missed her.

I started asking to go with him when I was just a little girl, and it gradually became a frequent occasion. We'd get ice cream in the summers and hot cocoa when it got cold. He told me so many stories: about the war, about school, about Grandma June. He was my best friend and I was his.

The tree stood tall next to the college they attended together. That was where he met June, in fact. June would escape to the clearing to read under the shade of the big oak and Frank strode around the area to clear his head. I must have heard the story a hundred times.

"She was beautiful, Brooks," Frank would tell me, eyes sparkling. "She wore these dresses with puffy sleeves, and her hair was a mess, but it still sat just right."

I always listened eagerly. I hardly knew my grandma and every tiny detail added to this fantasy image I'd molded. She was everything I wanted to be: smart, stunning, and so eminently kind. Grandpa Frank would stare up at the branches of the tree from the old, cracked bench where we sat.

"I didn't know what to say to her," he would laugh. "She always looked so mad at anyone who bothered her, you know?"

I did know. He'd tell me almost every time, but I didn't mind. "Then what?" I would urge.

He'd smile with a faraway look on his face. "Well, Brooks, then we fell in love. We carved our initials into that tree, too. Right after we got married."

Thinking back to this memory now made my heart ache, but I smiled anyway.

Grandpa Frank's services were beautiful, even though the grief pulling a hole in my chest was not. It was a military funeral. I don't remember all of it, but I remember the trumpet and the gunshots and the lump that felt thick in my throat. I remember my mom's bloodshot eyes and the flag they laid over his coffin. The sun was out, and it almost felt like a betrayal—how could it be such a beautiful day when I was so engulfed in grief? That night, I sat outside for a long time. The tears had stopped coming, as though I had somehow used them all up, but my heart still felt extraordinarily heavy in my chest.

Three days later, as if Grandpa Frank had come to take it with him, the tree was uprooted by heavy winds and it, too, perished.

I visited its wooden corpse one more time before they took it away. I imagined the raspy sound of Grandpa Frank's voice as I dragged my palm over the tree's rough surface. I thought of the old, black and white picture of Grandma June that he kept in his wallet. I found the place where they'd crudely carved their initials and—what do you know—it seemed that I did have more tears to spare. Just then, the grief felt a little unbearable.

It would be okay, though. I knew that in some place, somehow, they were together. I knew we would all be together again. My heart felt full again at the thought.

I gave the tree one last look and climbed back onto my feet.

Kevin Donohue

OFFER

To all who sat under,
those in the summer
down with your lemonade
while idling there in the shade,

to those once before now
admiring its snow-laden boughs
when winter had covered
summer grasses of lovers,

to those who had ever
in any sort of climate or weather
had seen how it conquered the sky
had seen and not understood why,

offer your condolences.
For the ground here is redolent of
whatever before its death here
whatever you have left here,

you had lived and loved in the sun.

James King

She falls heavily in the mid-morning
Mourning the loss of a summer-autumn come and gone and dead.
Sunlight once lit up her eyes and warmed every inch of her sweet soft skin but
The sun is gone and she is
Hardened. Bark.
She feels as cold as the earth,
Pretty as a gravel pit.
Her hair,
Once luscious, shining silver-green with the light of the sun,
Now bedraggled and brittle.
The Sun! Oh, but where is the Sun!
Life and light, HER life and light, forever disappearing over the horizon as green turns to grey,
Cruelly held captive by the changing of the seasons and the
Relentless
Ever-tilting planet.
Every passing day becomes colder and darker,
The land she stands upon bleak and unchanging.
She shampoos in a rain shower that even now turns to snow,
Cold wash on her scalp, rinse and repeat day in and day out.
The wind dries her but she is never warm.

The clouds wrap her in a robe of ice that raises bumps on her bare skin.
She shivers. A darkness falls.
And with nothing left and cold wind against gruff skin
She tears her toes from the ground,
Rudely, self-uprooting and falling.
It seems to happen in slow motion,
Her surrender, her giving-in to gravity,
Until, crash, it is done. She has fallen.
A small crowd assembles silently at the base, the place where she came down
Struck down, almost,
Like a tree in a hurricane.

Madeleine Waters

Things fall down sometimes. Things like bowling pins and protagonists of nursery rhymes are rather meant to. Sometimes things like your grandmother's tea cozy or a glass of milk fall, and it's not what you expected, but it doesn't really change the course of your life much. Then again, there are some things that fall and seem to stop everything in a moment, frozen, so that everyone sits up and takes notice that the literal tipping point of a major historical movement has just occurred. Things like the Roman Empire or the Third Reich.

Trees are somewhere in the middle. Sometimes they are intended to fall, other times they aren't, but either way, it causes a bit of a stir to have a bloody great piece of wood go in a matter of minutes from being vertical to being horizontal.

In light of that, I think we can forgive the men for taking a moment to notice the secret passage. These were stuffy academics, dressed in their Sunday hats, and feeling rather martyred about being out in the cold mud to deal with something as down to earth as a fallen tree. You know what they say about academics—quite good at noticing and nitpicking at minutiae no one else can see, but apt to miss the cavernous tunnel looming right in front of them.

Immediately they began to theorize and argue about the reason behind the tunnel's existence (a thing that could hardly be resolved or expected to have real effects on the world around them) instead of working to clear the tree, as was the practical and original intent of their mission. Some claimed vehemently that the tunnel had to date back to at least the school's founding—that the tree was planted to provide it cover. Others said there was no way of dating it, but that the other camp *must* be wrong because of course one would build a secret passage in a location that already offered concealment, such as the root system of an already-grown tree.