

*Emily Graham*

It was during the end of a merciless summer heat wave in 2008 when Heather and her family had to pick up and move from Heather's childhood home, the home they'd lived in for ten years and expected to live for many more than that, to a new home across the street. That was just the way it worked out – financially. The apartment was available for rent and affordable, which is hard to come by in a beach town during the summer, so they did what they had to do. The heat had been hanging stubbornly in the air all day, but Heather felt a cool breeze from the ocean move across her face and through her hair as she stood there on the porch that stuck out the side of the second story of their new home. They only had the second floor, anyway, the landlords lived on the bottom level.

The view from the new porch allowed her to survey the street easily in the washed out August afternoon sun. She looked over the half wall to see beach visitors from the city passing by and moving south, unsure of how to hold their rented boogie-boards and excessive amount of summer accessories – tents, water shoes, plastic shovels larger than the children that were holding them. Kids that didn't yet know that they could just lie in the sand with their eyes closed or float with the highs and the lows of the waves to be fulfilled.

Aside from the tourists, Heather saw her own family and a few dedicated friends, lined up and traipsing across the street like a tired, brokenhearted parade. They held the last pieces of the old home in boxes stuffed to the brim with books, dishes, heirlooms dredged from the basement that no one thought they would see again until someone died. They'd been doing it all day, flowing out of the old red-bricked beauty's opened doors like tears.

As she stood on the porch she considered her new perspective of the street she'd lived on for as long as she could remember, and felt for the key to her old house that still lingered in the pocket of her dress. It was a single key loosely strung on a white ribbon and tied in a bow. From this view she could see the small, green hill of a lawn that her childhood home sat on so comfortably. She could see their old porch, lower down than this new one, and without any walls. Just iron bars where the green and white awning should have been, but which had been taken down and stored away. The flowerless branches of her mother's prized forsythia plant rose to meet the bare bars, having shed their decoration months before, too.

She tapped on the beige stucco wall with her long, carefully shaped teenaged nails, and was shocked at how hollow the new house sounded. Her huge galoot of a dog came bounding through the screen door at the sound, with a low growl and healthy portion of drool ready to attack the imagined intruder. He agilely approached her, dodging the random debris scattered about from the move, and propped himself up against the porch, paws resting on the edge of the half wall, panting from the heavy August heat with his dark eyes focused to assess the situation.

His short tail began to wag as he saw his people approaching with their boxes, his face wrinkled with concern softening into a relaxed, open-mouth dog-smile. They looked up to Heather and the dog and waved. Heather smiled back down at them before turning around to help with the last of the boxes. She walked toward her family and let the key on its string fall from her hand before shutting the screen door behind her.

◇

*Kristi DiPerna*

The lake had never been this covered in fog, with the sun barely rising above the horizon to shine. It was early in the morning, too early for some, but for Sarah it was the perfect opportunity to be alone and think. The lake had always been her favorite part about going on vacation with her family. It had been their tradition to visit the lake every summer, far from the city. However, it had been years since Sarah had visited and this would most likely be the last time. Too many memories saturated the area and it was too much for her to deal with.

Sarah sat by the lakes edge, looking over the water and listening to the subtle sounds of life going on around her. She didn't hear him approach, but she knew that he was there.

"I knew you would be here," she whispered, without turning around.

"You always knew me better than myself," was the response.

He quietly sat down beside Sarah, not forcing a conversation. Sarah refused to look at him, it was too hard to bare. She needed to escape, yet here he was, once again closer than she wanted him to be. Without hesitation, she stood up and walked away. She refused to look back, after all it could shatter all of her thoughts and she needed peace. It was her last visit to the lake and she would end it on her terms, no one else's.

◇