



The Mercury  
The Student Art &  
Literary Magazine  
of Gettysburg  
College

---

Volume 2020

Article 13

---

2020

## Stones on a Hill

Kenzie Smith  
*Gettysburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

**Share feedback** about the accessibility of this item.

---

### Recommended Citation

Smith, Kenzie (2020) "Stones on a Hill," *The Mercury*: Year 2020, Article 13.  
Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2020/iss1/13>

This open access fiction is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

## **Stones on a Hill**

### **Author Bio**

Kenzie is a senior studying environmental science and public policy with a minor in writing. Kenzie serves as the managing editor for The Mercury and holds three part time jobs on campus. In her spare time, you can find Kenzie watching endless hours of “Diners, Drive-ins, and Dives,” falling out of trees she has tried to climb, or participating in various other forms of tomfoolery!

## Stones on a Hill

KENZIE SMITH

### **Wren**

August 4, 1996

I know most people say life is too short, but I think mine was long enough. I did everything I wanted to do; graduated highschool with my best friend Betsy, met a wonderful man in the first year of college, got married the very next spring, and had three beautiful babies shortly after. Dan found a great job in Massachusetts, the kids went to school each day, and I spent my afternoons cooking and cleaning and embroidering nice little sayings into pillows. What more could a woman want? Right?

Sure, it became a little monotonous sometimes. Dan was always working, so it was often just me and the kids. And when they grew up and moved away, I thought maybe Dan would retire. But he just kept working until he keeled over on his desk one day at the age of 66. I wonder if that's why they'll think I did it, to be with the old bastard again.

Oh, despite all his flaws, I loved him. When we first started dating, I honestly thought he might be magic. He would walk into a room and the air would start buzzing. I'd accidentally kill a houseplant and within a week of him watering the remains, he'd bring it back to life. He'd plan an outdoor date on a night it was supposed to rain, and I'd tell him that it was supposed to rain, but he'd tell me to trust him; and somehow, the sky would be clear and full of stars. I do miss him terribly. But he's not why I took the extra pills.

I guess I just figured it was time. The kids are doing great. Carol has a job as a school teacher and she met a great guy, who I suspect will pop the question in just a few months. Robert and his wife Isabell just moved into a brand new house in Rhode Island. They'll probably start thinking about kids soon and I'm disappointed I'll miss that, but at least I met one of my grandbabies. Georgia and Leonard really seem so happy, and little Margaret is sprouting up so fast, she'll reach the moon in no time. My family was really the only reason I was sticking around and they didn't need me anymore.

And I wanted to go. I had always been drawn to this place. Dan

thought it was odd for a grown woman to spend her time in a graveyard, but I always found it peaceful. The dead don't ask you how you are doing, they don't question why you didn't get out of bed the day before, they don't worry so much. It's silent here, with only the whispers of the wind through the birch trees that crown the hill above, like a greeting, welcoming me home.

## Georgia

June 18, 2010

I apologize for the crass language, but fuck this shit! I probably shouldn't be cursing considering I'm about to meet the guy who outlawed it, but he's also the one who got me into this mess, so I think a few choice words are appropriate.

I wasn't supposed to go out like this. I'm only 55, I had another 25 good years in me and maybe 10 more bad ones on top of that. I went to church, I paid my dues, I never stole anything, never did drugs (well, hard drugs. Hash doesn't count, right?). I was a good daughter (most of the time). And I was a good wife (until Leonard left me for that whore). Okay so maybe I wasn't perfect, but I really did my best as a mother. That's the part that kills me (no pun intended); that Margaret now has to do it all on her own.

She and Henry weren't even trying. They only just got married last year. She told me over coffee a few weeks ago that they wanted to travel the world, roam through Rome, eat in Hungary, check out the Czech Republic. And she's only 25, she has a few more years before she had to start thinking about that. But then last Sunday, she cancelled our weekly coffee date because she had a "stomach flu" that had been making her nauseous every morning for the past week.

I was going to let her figure it out herself. It's a special and heart wrenching thing for a woman to come to that conclusion. I didn't want to spoil it for her. And of course if she didn't grasp it within the week, then I'd drop hints next Sunday. I'd wear baby blue and pink, and order baby carrots, and show her a cute video of a mother dog with her pups or something else ridiculously adorable and maternal. And then I'd ask her if she was feeling better from the "sickness" she was feeling "in the morning." She hasn't always been the sharpest at picking up subtlety, so if she still didn't get it, I'd shove a test in her face and hold her hand while we waited to find out if I was right (and I'm always right).

But then I fucking died! Tuesday morning, I was driving to work at my ceramics shop the next town over. It's a forty minute drive,

but one jackass semi-truck driver crashing through the guardrail on I-91 and suddenly I'm at my final destination. Suddenly, my dreams of opening a second location for my ceramics shop, of growing old in a rocking chair on the lake, of being the grandmother that spoils her grandkids rotten, of dying of old age after a long full life surrounded by family and love, are all wiped away. Suddenly I'm being shoved in the back of a hearse and dropped into a worm filled, six foot hole surrounded by bare trees, rotting leaves, brown grass, and a bunch of dead people (including my bitch of a mother who chose a stomach of pills over her family!).

But Maggs will be okay without me. She's always been tough, that one. She never cried over scraped knees, just stuck a bandaid on it and got back on her bike. She was only 12 when my mom died, but she slept by my side every night for a month just to make sure *I* was okay. She was 14 when Leonard left; I was a mess, but she helped me put the pieces of our lives back together. She's always had a brave soul, made of something stronger than most. She'll get through this, no problem. And she'll be a great mother when the little one comes around. I just wish I could be here to see it.

**Paige**

May 21, 2019

It isn't much of a party. I thought that since there would be flowers and everyone was getting dressed up, it might feel a bit like a party. But there's nothing to celebrate.

My stockings itch the whole time. Dad made me wear them even though they're too tight and have a hole in one of the heels. Mom wanted to go out to the store and get a new pair for me. She said I have to look my best for our family. But Dad told her, "no one is going to see her feet anyways. She looks beautiful, one hole doesn't really matter."

I have to be completely silent during church. The priest's speech is so boring, I almost fall asleep. Mom can't sit still in her seat like I can. I wasn't allowed to sit near her because we each have special seats, but I can see her fidgeting from across the room. Her shoulders shudder every few minutes; maybe she is cold too.

When the mass finally ends, we all go back outside again. It really is a beautiful day. So beautiful, you might forget to be sad. The wind is singing, the sun is sparkling on the lake, and the sky is full of white cotton candy! Cumulus clouds. Mrs. Healy taught me that last year in school, even though they don't teach the other kids that until the fifth grade. I see one that looks like our old dog Bo and I try to

point it out to Mommy, but she doesn't hear me.

It isn't a very long walk to the graveyard; just across the street and up the hill a bit. Mom says this is where our whole family is buried: my great grandparents Daniel and Wren, my grandmother Georgia, and a bunch of other old people I've never met. They must have been dead for a while, because the tombstones look pretty old too. Moss is growing on some of their rounded tops and they have weird spots. But next to them is the new one. It's smaller and cleaner and much more detailed than the others. Mom chose one shaped like an angel spreading her wings toward the sky with a sad smile on her face. I think it's the most beautiful statue I've ever seen.

Everyone stands around the statue and the boring priest says some more stuff, but I'm not really paying attention. From this spot on the hill, there is a perfect view of our house down the road, town across the lake, and my favorite lily pad field along the bank below. The sun dances on the water like it's full of glitter. I'm getting tired and I'm thinking maybe I'll just rest my eyes for a minute. I catch snippets of the priest's final words: "Beloved daughter of Henry and Margaret... only nine years old...leukemia...God's plan." I drift off to sleep to mom's whispered "I love you, Paige," and they gently tuck me into my resting place. I hope I have good dreams.

### **Margaret**

May 21, 2020

It's been a year, now. A lot's happened in a year. A lot's happened in a lifetime.

Henry and I got divorced. The stress of Paige's death was just too much to handle. Plus the money was running out and the bills kept rolling in from the hospital. It's cruel that they still make me pay for the cures, even when they didn't work; that they still make me pay the doctors, even when they failed at the one thing I've hired them to do. And then I had the additional bills from my own treatment-- the endless hours of "how does that make you feel?" and my little blue pills that made the tears stop, my tongue numb, and my heart slow. But the memories always remained, vivid and inescapable.

We only started noticing something was wrong a few years before. Paige was 7. She didn't want to go to school one day, and I thought it was because she had a spelling quiz that I knew she hadn't studied for. But halfway through the day, I got a call from the school saying Paige got a nosebleed in class and when she went to the nurse's office, they found she was running a fever of 104 degrees. I thought

the nosebleed was a fluke and the fever just the flu. So I brought her home, put the humidifier next to her bed, pressed a cold washcloth on her head and kept her hydrated with water and her favorite chicken noodle soup. When the fever didn't break the next day, I brought her to the doctor for a check up, but she sent us straight to the hospital. I called Henry from the car in tears and told him to meet us there. I think that's when Paige started to get scared; she never saw me cry.

They kept her for two days without any idea what was wrong. They ran so many tests, I thought she would fall apart from the poking and prodding. I didn't sleep at all those two days, sitting by her side, fluffing her pillow, holding her tiny hand and painting her nails in her favorite pink to cheer her up. When they finally gave us a diagnosis, late-stage M7 Acute Myeloid Leukemia, I thought I was finally asleep and having a nightmare. But I never woke up from it.

It was almost two years of endless treatment, half the time living at the hospital and the other half bringing the hospital home. And through all the drugs and trials and tests, Paige just kept getting weaker. In the beginning, when we were still naively optimistic that Paige would pull through and one day walk a stage to receive her diploma, her bachelor's degree, maybe even a masters or doctorate, we hired a home-tutor, Mrs. Healy. Paige loved her and they would talk and giggle for hours about science and literature and cultures from far away places that Paige wanted to visit. I think Mrs. Healy was part of why Paige held on for so long; she still had more questions she needed answered.

"Mrs. Healy," she'd say. "Why don't we have a king and queen?"

"Mrs. Healy, how do planes fly?"

"Mrs. Healy, why do people from other countries have different skin colors?"

"Mrs. Healy, what happens when you die?"

I wonder if you just stay where you're put, here on this hill-top, watching the sun rise every morning on the left and set on the right, feeling the breeze as it sweeps up auburn leaves in the fall and cherry blossoms in the spring, listening to the loons on the lake and the whispers of the lapping shore. It's not such a bad home, especially surrounded by family. Mom and Grandma Wren would have loved her so much. I pray she got to meet them, wherever they all are.

I hope, now that I'm finally going, I get see them all again too.