

Stars and Scars



Painted on Procreate by Marilynne Ellis during chemotherapy

*There aren't many stars in the sky, because I gave them all
to her.*

Front Matter

In the first collection, I wrote about falling and slipping on the ice. It's spring and the snow has lifted. The sun shows off oranges and threads of red.

While there are thousands of words here, there are no words for this level of devastation. The world lost a fierce advocate for women's rights, a kindergarten teacher that inspired so many young generations, a plant-based advocate for animals and fur-Mom, and the most caring, kind, authentic human being on the planet. I want to add a million more words to describe her, but I think you get the point.

I lost the Love of my Life. My soulmate. My everything. My entire universe.

Nestled in these words is a grief so unimaginable and messy. It was a life of opportunity, blackened by a malignancy more aggressive than anything else I've ever seen.

In the tomorrow to which I don't know the answer.

I know that our love was stronger than any cancer.

This is why I write. To keep our story and her voice alive.

In dealing with grief and feelings, help others thrive.

Voicemail to the House

The morning light peels away the last few layers of night.

It's today I go to our house. Recently, I've lived the strongest emotions a human can feel.

I just don't understand how I am still real.

With grief that peels me to pieces.

All I want to do is hide in the bushes.

No!

I'll write. And I am going to have to fight.

I am afraid. I wonder how I'll feel... again, when I walk through those doors. Our life of opportunity will stare right at me.

I have to face it. Because we battled everything that came our way.

It is to write the letters to the word *Hope* in the blue and pink clay.

Gordie + Pepper helping get through the day.

I am going to sleep in the house. Is it to torture myself? I don't know.

But I need to do this. To sleep on our pillow.

It is somehow to a new life that I have to sew.

It is her platform, From Star to Sun

That will pencil the letters to the word *Hope* in yellow

The Paintbrush with Missing Bristles

We all have a canvas. What colour is your paintbrush?



Jordy with Marilyne, 2018

Standing at Yonge-Dundas, I notice a streetlight flickers red. On the sidewalk, someone was painting a river with two people in love. After Mom died, Toronto felt different, and every corner of

the city grieved. From the Beaches with its Halloween houses to the bungalows of Etobicoke in the west, I couldn't hide. I wanted to go back to Québec City, where I came of age in a new language a few years earlier.

In Dundas Square, the voice from the machine mumbles *Walk sign is on for all crossing... walk sign is on for all crossing*. When the pedestrian signal turned green, I travelled East again, and back to Québec City.

Frosty films of cold air slipped through the door as I walked into the school building and mingled with the hum of activity.

We will consider your admission if you finish the math that you currently lack. This is not something I believe you can do in one month, so I suggest you apply again next year. Good luck.

The Admission's Office email was a reminder to fight. It was early December and school was starting, without me. Holiday lights hung over the school building, making the snow sparkle. All I wanted for Christmas was to go back to school.

Winter stung my spine with its chill. The next morning, I registered for the math courses. I walked on the frosty sidewalks to buy the four books and started studying. Something was telling me I needed to start school right away. I spent every awake minute immersed in math and the corresponding numbers.

"I have your test results", the teacher's voice radiating with confidence. I waited for the bus, using the glass panel as a shield for the harsh Québec City winter.

“Ninety-four percent”, he said, surprised. Even he couldn’t believe it.

“Oh my fucking god”, I blurted out, interrupting only to apologize for my language.

I can do this, I thought. It was the first happy moment since Mom died.

A few more exams later, I received my letter of acceptance.

It was early 2011. Icy streets battled it out with the slush in what was a cold and dark January, but a promise of longer days and a school schedule made it more bearable.

I met Marilyne in February when I played *The Knave of Hearts* in the school musical, *Alice in Wonderland*. She sang *Dare to be Different*. All of us sang, but it was only her voice I heard. She wore a beautiful dress with colours of lavender cake to school with hair that weaved graciously through the hallways. Her strength radiated through every classroom and touched every part of me. She was graduating that year, off to university for teaching and would be leaving in May. Ms. Ableson wanted me to start in September, and Marilyne would’ve been in university by then.

If I hadn’t dared to be different, I would’ve never met Marilyne — my soulmate and the Love of my Life.

I was studying at Starbucks one night for a Spanish exam — well, more like cramming because the exam was at 8 am the next morning. After studying, I waited for the bus. Wind whipped up swirls of snow on the streets. In the distance, I saw a couple privileged with age. They walked slow, their wrinkles wrote words like pur-

pose, affection, and elegance. I couldn't tell her yet, but I saw Marilyne and I.

I feel you need to talk. You seem so stressed at school, she texted. When I got home, we fell asleep together on the phone, talking until the first rays of light peeked through the windows and it was almost time for class. We danced around how deeply we were in love with each other for months before finally kissing by the river in Lévis. In the summer of 2011, we started our painting.

We'd kiss on Les Plains d'Abraham until the moon got tired and you could sense the sun waking up. Her hair danced in the breeze, like the rolling hills we sat on. We'd lie together, underneath us the grass tickling our legs. Above us, all the stars that I wanted to give her. We wouldn't leave until everyone was gone. And even then, we'd stay.

Marilyne grew up in Saint-Émile — a small village in the suburbs of Québec City. It was a stark contrast from my big-city and unstable Toronto adolescence. The highlight of the village was a sushi restaurant and an ice cream parlour, only open in the summer. In winter, the ice cream parlour transformed into a hideout for high school kids wanting to make out. After school, I took the 387 — a bus full of students who lived in the village. It took an hour to get to her house, but we would take the bus together. I'd stay, almost always missing the last bus into the city. On Wednesday's, we'd stay at my small apartment together. Marilyne's Dad, Alain, and her Mom, Lyne, both loved me and I felt warm at their house. I would drink all their instant coffee, and Marilyne and I would go paint in the basement together, or do homework. But, mostly paint or other crafts.

Imagine played in the background, Lyne's favourite. The song should be a lesson of today, for people are not living in peace.

On the canvas, we paint strokes of love more magnificent than the most marvellous of rivers.

We draw lines to connect our stars together beneath a blue night sky.

We paint blue and yellow butterflies to hang on the wall of the hospital where her grandma was.

We make gold angels out of cardboard so Lyne could bring one to chemotherapy.

We mix red and white to paint wildly long kissing sessions under the summer night sky by the St. Lawrence River.

We paint using green a trip to Guelph to visit my Oma that was supposed to last 3 days but stretched for 2 weeks. We felt safe together.

We paint footprints of all our walks — from the busy downtown streets to the quiet parks where our toes cut through the summer grass.

We use pink to paint study sessions together at Cinecure, our coffee shop in Québec City.

We use watercolours to tint the sky blue with a big yellow sun when life was hard.

We paint two bikes travelling up the trail with fresh, leafy trees on either side.

We use red to paint our long sleepy mornings, waking up next to each other.

We paint the little notes we'd leave for each other.

We paint the time when we walked through Trinity-Bellwoods Park, sharing sweet potato fries and kisses all day — the kisses much sweeter than the fries.

We paint a sapphire rock — one you couldn't break, that signified our strength.

Malignancy was the ultimate thief, aggressively picking out the bristles of our paintbrush. Today, that brush is all worn down, and so are the souls of my shoes from walking so much. Our river still flows because life goes on, but I don't want it to. In fact, the icy March water hurts less than my pain. I tried for 6 months to paint over the malignancy with strokes of pink and blue, but the cancer was too black and potent. Any painter knows, it's hard to brush strokes of colour over black.

Like in *Alice in Wonderland*, danger lurked. I sit by another river in Guelph. Nobody can hear me scream because the river flows so viscously and loud, just like my emotions. I use that brush to paint sadness into the river — the kind of tears that bleed in agonizing pain. But it's a different shade of red than the one from years earlier.

The canvas had a lot of space still to fill. Our painting was incomplete.

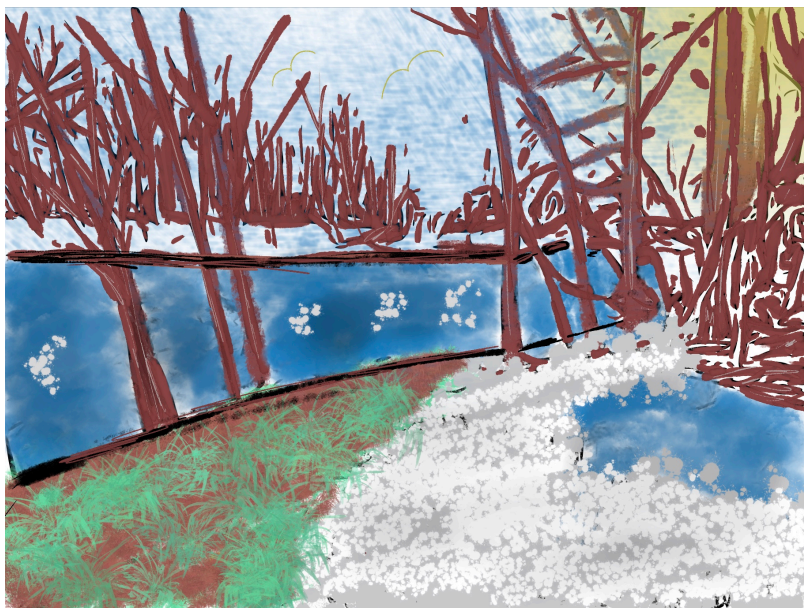
I just went through another emotional disintegration. Before I try walking, birds skim across the water and land gently on a rock.

Their tiny feet etching themselves into what's left of the snow. They remind me of Jordy, a little bird with a crooked beak we saved. Jordy was a chicken we rescued from sure death. Her yellow head a light in our lives, and a symbol of hope today. If I dip the paintbrush in the river now, I realize the colours of the past might wash away, so I can't ever do that. I decide to paint our story with what's left of the brush. I hope this painting colours the world in kindness, and helps others remember that we all have our own canvas.

Don't worry if your paintbrush is missing bristles. It can still paint Hope.

What colour is your paintbrush?

The Small School with Two Birds



Our River, 2022

I feel privileged to have gone to Cegep Champlain St. Lawrence, and the connections I've made through it. It is a school with more than mustard-coloured walls.

This story is dedicated to Cegep Champlain St. Lawrence. I recently returned for a visit, and am grateful to the school for welcoming me back.

*To current and future students everywhere, make sure to
colour in those mustard-coloured walls.*

I sit in the car, watching the rain. Each drop hits like a bolt of pain. Paralyzed and unable to move with sadness more intense than the world itself, I asked myself again, *How am I still here?*

This is the small school where big love happened. Now, when I come back, nobody knew really knew it's been dampened. I am terrified someone would ask me how things were going.

In the background, *I Will Follow You Into The Dark* talks about worn down shoes and seeing everything there is to see.

I can relate.

Love of mine, I think. I am where we met — our small school with big dreams. All I want is to bike behind you, like always, as you take on the world.

My heart screams.

This is the school where life happens. Unlike our house, where the dust settles on the dead plants.

The one thing we said would absolutely never happen — not now. Not at 30. Not at the start of our lives.

Fuck no.

We both knew we'd die. Just not yet. The cancer was to be the hardest thing we've ever gone through — the biggest fight of our lives. Writing these words is impossibly necessary.

I made it to the door and the sound of thousands of birds faded as it closed. I walk in and hear the distant hum of lecturing professors talking about the MLA format. I look around. I see a painting on the mustard-coloured wall, transporting me back to a hot spring day in 2011.

It was exam time and we were studying like nutcases, but we always made time for each other.

That part was easy.

The day was sizzling in summer heat, and Marilyne wore a light blue tank top and short shorts. I told her I was taking her to a restaurant downtown, but I had other plans because I had no money for a restaurant.

“You know what, let’s get off here!”, I said enthusiastically.

“I am so down!”, her energy bursting like always.

We were going to have a picnic in the grass. And talk about all the things that would make us last.

Holding hands, we brushed through the sprouting field with footprints of love. Her eyes lit up and sparkled, just like how the sun made the grass glow colours of a morning glory muffin. We found a spot nestled away where we could be us.

Québec City — c’est l’amour.

She took me away in love more powerful than the sun that spring afternoon.

We lifted each other so high, we could feel the blue sky.

Today, it brings me to my knees, thinking how close we were to touching our ultimate project — our family.



Our actual chocolate salad, 2011

I hear her laugh. The same one from that spring afternoon in the grass. We drank juice and had sandwiches and a salad with little bits of chocolate in it because... why not?

We sat close. Our kisses melting us like the chocolate from our salad.

Less talking and more kissing.

The day boiled like a tea kettle at its highest whistle.

Being together was everything. As the day went on, the sun cuddled the river the same way we put our arms around each other every morning. The moon shining bright in the sky, pointing us in the direction of a firefly.

This was not one day. This was Summer 2011 in every way.

Just then, students jam the hallways. Paralyzed in pain, everyone moved around so freely.

How could that be, I thought.

Classes were over and reality replaced the sun cuddling the river. The moon vanished behind the trees, still dead from winter. The mustard wall was just that... a mustard-coloured wall that had posters on it of school events. One of the posters read: Join the School Play, 2022 Edition.

It's 2022?, I thought. Mingling with the sound of students marching around the hallways was rain striking the windows, falling harsher than earlier.

I walk around. I feel like falling to the ground. My slow demeanour contrasting against the hustle of students and teachers.

I think, *I hope everyone here is making every moment count.*

I hope everyone here is painting on the mustard-coloured wall something they will remember for life.

This is a small school with big dreams, with love that beams, screams and steams.

After that visit, I take Gordie for a walk and sat with Alain, my father-in-law. My eyes filled to the brim, like the hot tub we sat in, with tears I was holding back to be strong in a grief so wrong. A cool wind washed over my chest. I sunk deeper into the water, holding back the emotions. I know for Alain, I don't have to be an actor.

Marilyne — the love of my life, and a daughter. We help each other.

“Regarde, il y a un oiseau qui s'accroche au ciel. Elle nous regarde”, Alain said in his calm voice.

Looking over at the pointy roof, the bird glanced down at us.

With a voice dripping in tears, I told him about the painting on the mustard wall and the time he came to see the school play, where Marilyne took photos. I thought about the time we fell off the sailboat, our bodies sliding gently into the water. We both smiled and held each other. The droplets on her lips fused with mine in a moment that lasted forever. The small fibreglass sailboat chopped off the crests of the waves, sending spray into our eyes, but we could see clearly. I started telling him about the Christmas story, but that's for another time too.

Because our story will never stop being told.

In a life now so blurry, I thank the bird for looking down at us, resting on the roof, standing ever so tall. With its beak, it might even paint letters to the word *Hope*.

Au ciel l'oiseau se trouve, pour aller au fleuve.

Je me dis, afin de raconter notre histoire, il faut vivre cette épreuve.

After Rain

This short story talks about the importance of respecting others. It talks a bit about us walking in the rain.

The city after rain.

At night, streetlights spread colour onto the concrete softly, shining blurry greens, yellows and threads of red. Rubber tires hiss down the soaking street — usually that sound lingers even after the storm.

Unlike the rain, my grief continues its downpour. Getting ready to head back to Québec City for school, we'd go for late night coffee walks in Guelph. It was late and we were coming back from Starbucks at Gordon and Clair.

Tea for Marilyne. Coffee for me.

The scents of her green tea fused with my coffee through our lips. The rain stopped just enough to powder dust. Marilyne wore her yellow shirt and black skirt. It was one of my favourite looks. The most beautiful women in the entire world. We'd be deliberate about trying to get sprayed by passing cars. The warm rain cooling us off in the heat of the night.

"Oh my, I am so sorry", said one man in fear of getting in trouble.

A neighbour was watering the grass and not realizing we were standing so close, sprayed us from head to toe.

Her laugh echoed through the neighbourhood and washed down the streets of the entire city. I will remember that laugh forever.

Her voice. I still call her voicemail sometimes, just to hear it. Because it's as close as I can get. Just like a candle shifting in a rainy wind, my emotions dance along the border between turbulence and order. I have a drop of calm when I hear it followed by a waterfall of devastation that it is only a recording. I still wear a mask in public. It helps to hide the tears so people can't see.

I see her bike down Gordon Street. It's dark, yet her smile makes every corner blink. Her beautiful body locking my eyes onto every peddle forward. I miss every aspect of her.

I walk carefully to avoid stepping on worms. They come out after the rain. As we know, it's their space first. At the corner of Gordon and Kortright is a field. Fortunately, they haven't built condos yet so animals still have their space. I stop and stare. The trees are silhouettes on a pacific blue sky with streaks of soft whiteness from the clouds.

There aren't many stars in the sky because I gave them all to her.

I cry into the midnight air, looking down at the puddles. I see a reflection of sadness. I'm not quite sure where to go. My family and life destroyed like the fields replaced by concrete jungles.

Why destroy nature?

From my Oma's house, we walked down these Guelph streets, holding hands and kissing at more-than-regular intervals and getting sprayed by random people watering their grass. She used to talk about how one day we'd be walking down the street with a

stroller, then teaching them how to properly cross the street, and more. Sometimes, I think about writing about that life of opportunity as if it happened, but I can't.

Not yet.

Marilyne wanted kids. She told me how she'd talk about that as a child. We wanted a family.

This grief peels me to pieces.

I realize that nothing matters. All external expectations, all fear of embarrassment or failure — everything is washed away with that rain in the face of death.

The other day, I was at a local grocery store giving them copies of my stories. They had a table where you could put books and magazines. A person barked orders at a cashier, telling her how the almonds weren't good anymore and that she wanted a manager, *immediately*. I curled up, thinking about how that cashier shouldn't have to deal with that crap.

I decided to wait before giving them a copy of my collection. Once the almond-hating lady left, I went back in, giving them a copy, and telling them that kindness will always win.

It's hard for the thins slats of kindness to find their way through the floorboards of ferocity in this world.

We destroy our environment.

We destroy nature.

We destroy animals and even each other. I'm not sure if the world will ever get the point, but I hope you do.

I hope we can all walk in that city after a rain storm and appreciate the beauty that is the green, yellow and threads of red lights shining softly onto the street. I hope we can all speak up for those that are being hurt.

The next morning, before taking Gordie for his checkup, everyone went outside. Pepper, our tiny chihuahua, wants nothing to do with winter. The blades of grass dusted in white. Winter somehow is back. It's been 2 months since the hospital had to wrap me in a warm blanket to keep from shaking in agony. I still can't go back to downtown Hamilton, or anywhere near St. Joseph's Health Centre. And everything is still surreal. Despite the warmer days, it is still snowing in my life.

In the evening, with the snow stopped and the cold clinging to the branches, I walk. It's too cold to take Sam for a walk and Gordie is recovering from his surgery, so it's just me, and my thoughts.

In my thoughts, I think of Hope.

I hope when that snow gets replaced by sunflowers, we can appreciate getting sprayed by a passing car.

I hope Gordie makes a full recovery from his surgery so we can go on hikes again together.

I hope we can appreciate that cashiers and everyone else is just trying to do their very best, sometimes in impossible situations.

Like me, right now.

Letter to my tears



How do you keep flowing?

I can feel you on my face. I look in the mirror and see your reflections.

A darker shade of red layers the area surrounding my eyes.

I don't see me — I see the tears in front of me that make me look like a broken reflection. Maybe the mirror is broken? No, it's me.

This is just a speck of what grief is. I am writing this after crying myself to sleep, curled up and unable to move. My entire world crushed and drowned deep in the waters of tears so strong and harsh, I don't know how anyone overcomes something like this.

How does one swim the waters of tears so strong after losing their soulmate?

I live that paralyzed pain now, with an isolation that humans aren't meant to live. We did everything together. We grew together — two trees with branches stretching high into the sky — her's taller than mine. And then leaves blooming in the summer sun — as green as can be.

Now, the leaves are all gone. Fallen to the ground, also drowning in the tears that keep on somehow flowing. The leaves lie sitting in the puddles beneath the dead tree. The branches are frozen, stuck in the cold February wind. The wind howls, yet the branches don't move.

I take a picture of a drop on a blade of grass. You need to live these tears droplets at a time.

Living at all at once will kill you, trust me.

The stillness scares me. I wrote once about the raging river in Québec City — the beautiful place we met and had our first kiss. I hear the rain from outside — even it isn't falling as strong as these tears. It reminds me of the sounds of our river.

I can feel myself slowly slipping away.

The tears pulling me down the waterfall of withering despair.

I take our dogs outside to sniff the grass — and sniff Hope. I force myself up. I force myself to think of Hope. To think of what Gordie and Pepper will look like as senior dogs.

To think of all the fosters that need me. To think that maybe my words can help just one other person struggling to understand their own tears. To think of what would happen if I were to make her foundation the biggest platform in the world for advocacy in healthcare. To think of how it is a privilege to grow old. Because that is my purpose.

Hope is a four letter word with a million meanings.

Tears, I understand why you're here. It's okay to cry. Because the tears that flow can create a river — similar to our raging river.

Flowing into the roots and watering the tree of hope.

Listen to Yourself

It's possible to find the light when you listen to yourself.

I arrive late afternoon. The birds are extra loud. The sun shines comets of orange dust that lingers when the day will be nice tomorrow.

The sky flies high with colours of a swallowtail butterfly. Because of how the sun touches the grass, the bristles stretch into the warmth, writing out the letters to the word *Hope*.

Gordie settles into his spot. Pepper burrows under the bed, still there from last time. Sam joins Pepper. They all go back to their spots.

Except me.

I open our garage, check to make sure all is in order. In a life such a blur, I notice our bikes are still in their corner.

Perfect, I think.

No.

How so imperfect that we'll never ride again. I pause to feel her bike. Every cell in my body still scorching in pain. In our garage is some of our life. It was in this garage I had most of my calls with doctor's because I didn't want to scare Marilyne. It was here I spoke to doctor's who told me there was not much that could be done — that it was likely terminal. It was here I tried everything.

Driving to the house, the rain pours out of the clouds — like how my emotions pour out of me. I walk slowly. Emotional disintegrations hit hard, again.

I place my index finger on the counter. Smudging the tiny particles — the dust has been settling too long. I hope to see a family grow here.

This house deserves its kitchen to be messy of dinner.

It deserves for the coffee to crawl back upstairs, percolating to the beat of the sun bending high in the sky, waking everyone up.

It deserves for the whistle of tea to stir the evening tree.

It deserves for old wooden toys to cover the deck. It doesn't deserve for this life that turned into a shipwreck.

It deserves for mealtimes and stories at bedtimes.

It deserves music over the Holidays. We had this, one last time. Christmas 2021 together, with the Love of my Life, Alain, me and the dogs. And lots of vegan eggnog.

It deserves music and games. And for the walls to be covered with so many frames.

It deserves to be a Home — *a good place to grow*, like the sign in the town.

The sky is dense. I feel the clouds weighing over me, and threatening to crack the roof. But love stronger than sapphire glass lived here.

I took most of your clothes because I wanted them with me.
There's still lots of you here. I'm here to make us proud.

I feel layers of sadness blanket the house, like the deep clouds that fill the sky above the roof.

This is a depth of loss deeper than Challenger Deep in the west Pacific.

"Hey, my Love, wanna bring our blanket with us?", I asked Marilyn before we rushed to Toronto for the clinical trial.

It's our wolf blanket. We wrapped ourselves in it on long bus rides together. We became one in this blanket. We wrote essays together in this blanket. We drew lines in the sky to connect our stars on this blanket. All the stars that are today — Yours.

Always and forever.

It is our blanket. There are pieces of it missing, and it's falling apart.

Like me.

But it still smells like her art.

You can easily pull pieces of the fibres out. They're all lines into who we became.

"No, let's leave it. I love it. It'll be here, waiting for us when we come back.", Marilyn responded in her soft, beautiful voice that cured anything I ever had.

We never came back to our house together.

I hold the blanket close to me. Shivering in pain, it's warm in the worlds biggest storm. I can cry into it instead of the carpet.

Our next chapter didn't quite work out, did it, my Love?

As I dry the wetness on my face, again.

I take Gordie to the dog park after the last few pieces of light break off the deep blue sky.

He can find the light, even at night.

In Hawkesbury, the lights are out everywhere because of the storm. I look around and see candles dancing. It is to the neighbours door that I ring.

"Can I please borrow a few candles?", I ask.

Everyone comes together in situations like this. Outdoors, people mingle on their patios and life looks to be electric, without power. Footsteps and flashlights blink in the darkness. I talk for a bit. People sending more of their condolences for a situation that doesn't have any words. Most people on our street know.

Gordie and Pepper cuddle tightly on the chair, lit up only slightly by a few tea lights. The faint sound of a hydro truck creeps through the darkness. Gratitude electrifies my mind as I think of how hard they're all working.

I am in our house, which has gone completely dark.

I think, *life already went dark months ago.*

I shift between hope and sadness like the candle flame.

Is it possible to find the light? I think. I realize that hope and sadness can and do coexist.

One must question, *What is light?*

Light is seeing furKids like Sam find fur-ever homes.

Light is watching Gordie at the dog park. It's through the grass he roams.

Light is seeing Pepper bounce around in grass taller than her. This is beautiful to see in a life such a blur.

Light is watching these words normalize grief and feelings.

Light is recognizing the little things.

Like right now, I have an iPad full of power, on which I can write down my banter. Even more importantly, I have two beautiful dogs that I love to bits. Even though sometimes, they're somewhat of misfits.

Light is our ten years, flying high in the sky like a kite.

It was a love stronger than sapphire glass that took flight.

Light is being able to see in the dark. Something I've been trying to do for months now.

Light is listening to yourself and others.

Just listening, even if we don't have all the answers.

Believe it or not, light is crying. It's living a pain that has the world's biggest sting.

Light is not dancing around and acting.

In the darkness, there are always fireflies.

It's to the little things we already have that we can never minimize.

Gordie, when I talk, you listen. You hear. You understand. Your eyes — I can tell you see how sad I truly am.

Sleeping in this house is the hardest thing I've ever done. I need to do it. I need to listen to myself.

It was here in a part of French Canada where life was to happen. Where our kids were supposed to grow up learning to say *Oui, Yes, Hello, Bonjour, Merci, Thank you.*

The stillness is unsettling and the quietness makes me scream on the inside. I've never been somewhere more quiet and loud at the same time.

You are so beautiful, my Love. Popping in colour from every angle and every corner. It breaks me apart that together we didn't get to go further.

Be strong.

I need to tell myself this every few minutes because these emotions get me deeper than the very foundation of this house.

The trees are in bloom now. I'd love for you to see them. I kiss you. One of our long kisses that is way longer than all the summers combined of our 10 years.

I carry Gordie's leash tight, and notice some stars blink in the darkness. I give what's left in the sky to you.

I wake up and each morning, the day starts in the wrong way. More tears that cut me apart. But now Friday is a harder day. I don't know why. The things she would say, how she looked, felt, and glistened in the morning sun.

Marilyne — my Love, you did not lose the cancer battle. You stood tall every day — stronger than a sapphire castle. We both knew the sarcoma might be fatal.

No cancer can destroy a love stronger than sapphire glass.

Nestled deep under the blanket is a grief so painful and unimaginable. Yet within the fibres are strands of a life lived to the absolute fullest and love more powerful than the biggest gust.

To live these emotions are impossibly necessary.

I find it hard to close my eyes. I am afraid to fall asleep here, without you. To say I miss you is an understatement of epic proportions. People need to know what happened. It is a life dampened, and I am frightened.

The next morning, the heavy clouds lift. With the sky shining bright in the colours of blueberry water, it is to these letters I author that I hope others can learn to appreciate all of life's colour.

Our blanket might be missing some strands, but it can still keep me warm. You can even write the letters to the word *Hope* with the fibres.

In it, I can shake. And live that unpresentable grief that nobody wants to see. And cry.

As I look up at our bonsai, it's a Love stronger than sapphire glass to which I shall never say goodbye.

I realize today one reason why I am here is because words help me steer.

Thank you for being an ear.

Don't keep your emotions on a bookshelf.

Listen to yourself.

Letter to Heal

Dancing between gratitude and grief. The question is, *which floor am I dancing more on?*

The other night, I was walking in Guelph and came across a place called *Heal*. I took a picture with an arrow from the pedestrian signal pointing to it. To heal. I don't quite understand it. People talk about it and mention it in their discourse to me.



What is it to heal?

How does one heal after losing their soulmate? How does one continue living after losing the love of their life? How is *to heal* even a thought in a grief so unimaginable, loud, and messy?

I often end up paralyzed in pain. I am now able to recognize this and sit in it — like sitting in a ring of fire that stabs you every few seconds.

Minutes pass. Hours go by.

You don't even recognize you've been sitting there just paralyzed all that time. Crying with both knees on the ground. My head in the pillow. Putting the blankets over my head because I am so

unpresentable. Living every single fucking second of this intense pain. That's grief.

When it comes to healing, I think there's a better *H* word.

Hope.

I do believe in hope. I write about it often. For our big cycling project we did for our Mom's, Pink Future, our slogan was:

Hope doesn't end when someone dies.



Pink Future, 2015

This is more powerful today than it ever was.

The point isn't to heal. It's to have hope.

I hope our house we bought to start our family one day has a family in it.

I hope my writing inspires others to live in the moment, and understand my grieving process.

I hope I can continue telling our story.

I hope Gordie and Pepper continue to grow into senior dogs. They pick me up off the floor more than you can imagine.

I hope that one day we find a cure for neurofibromatosis, and MPNST.

I hope more people recognize animals as beings, just like us, that speak a different language.

I am also grateful.

Grateful for Gordie, Pepper, my fosters and all the people in my life.

I am grateful to be able to set up her foundation, **From Star to Sun.**

It isn't because I am healing, but it's because hope is all there is left. But it create ripples that last. It's possible to have immense grief and gratitude, both at the same time.

Gordie & Pepper

A love letter to Gordie + Pepper, for being there and picking me up when I fall.

Somehow in the impossible, helping me to stand tall.



Gordie + Pepper

When the tears come
Streaming down my face
I feel your fur
I look into your eyes
This grief is a new world I cannot displace

You bring the moment
It is in my life that you are always a constant
It's us three — taking on the world
You pick me up when it's under a rock I curled
I kiss your noses — ever so gently
In this world so blurry
It's through your lens I see beauty
We don't speak the same language
But somehow you understand all my damage
And it's together we'll cross this bridge
It's to the top of my lungs you hear me cry
A grief way too much for others
I am way too shy
It's that unconditional love that you magnify
I know you both miss Marilyne
She was my Everything
Her smile, beauty, strength, and authenticity lit up our world
I am trying my best, my furKids

In all this turmoil

We're going to keep on cuddling

Because having you by my side is a blessing

Lavender Fields



my Love, always and forever.

In Lavender Fields we grow

It's all because of your gorgeous flow

It's together we always run
Through the Lavender Fields of life
The entire way having fun
The only thing cutting our flower
Was the leg lesion
For which we had no power
Now it's up to me to somehow run
To tell our story, I am far from done
As I write this, I can hear the birds whisper a morning song
I don't know if they hear me crying this strong
In this grief, I often don't know where to belong
It's for you my Love I have to remain strong
The Lavender Field glows light shades of purple
Lighting up your candle
Dancing along the border between dreams and despair
We always told each other
We can get through any nightmare
It's our story that I will share

The one of you biking on the trail

Or us on Baby Blue, our boat that we would sail

The one where you changed lives as a teacher

To help them become what they wished; from a doctor to a
painter

Keeping the roots of our flower alive

Watching Gordie, Pepper and all the animals in our life thrive

To keep Lavender Fields growing far and wide

Because you were my only bride



My Love — the most beautiful lavender around

Back Matter

It is a blessing to me you took the time to read my words.

Thank you.

The mustard-coloured walls in school can be more. They can paint memories of life by the seashore.

It's without her that it's impossible to watch the sun go down.

Hope is the most powerful word around.

All the stars in the sky are hers.

I have lots of scars.

We all do.

Please go through life gently, with compassion towards yourself, animals and others.



Girl and Friends. Painted by Marilynne Ellis on Procreate.