

m e n d



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# Mend

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## The Year my Heart was a Lead Crystal Vase

Valued for its refractive index, its ability to disperse light and split it into prisms the colors of joy, a pale yellow, hope, a bright blue, or faith, a cadmium red, it was sought after, and when held, cherished. Filled with roses from the garden, pink ruffled petals nibbled by caterpillars, or daisies pulled from fields, it made a pretty table. Displayed in a cherry wood cabinet under halogen light, it showed almost silver, some precious metal. The weight of it impressed, the lead obvious in its heaviness, sturdiness. It was made to stay upright, to not break easily. Sea coal and a glassblower's skill were enhanced by the chemical, making it easier to mold and cut the pattern of stars and thistles, strawberry diamonds and a trellis at the base for love to grasp onto and grow.



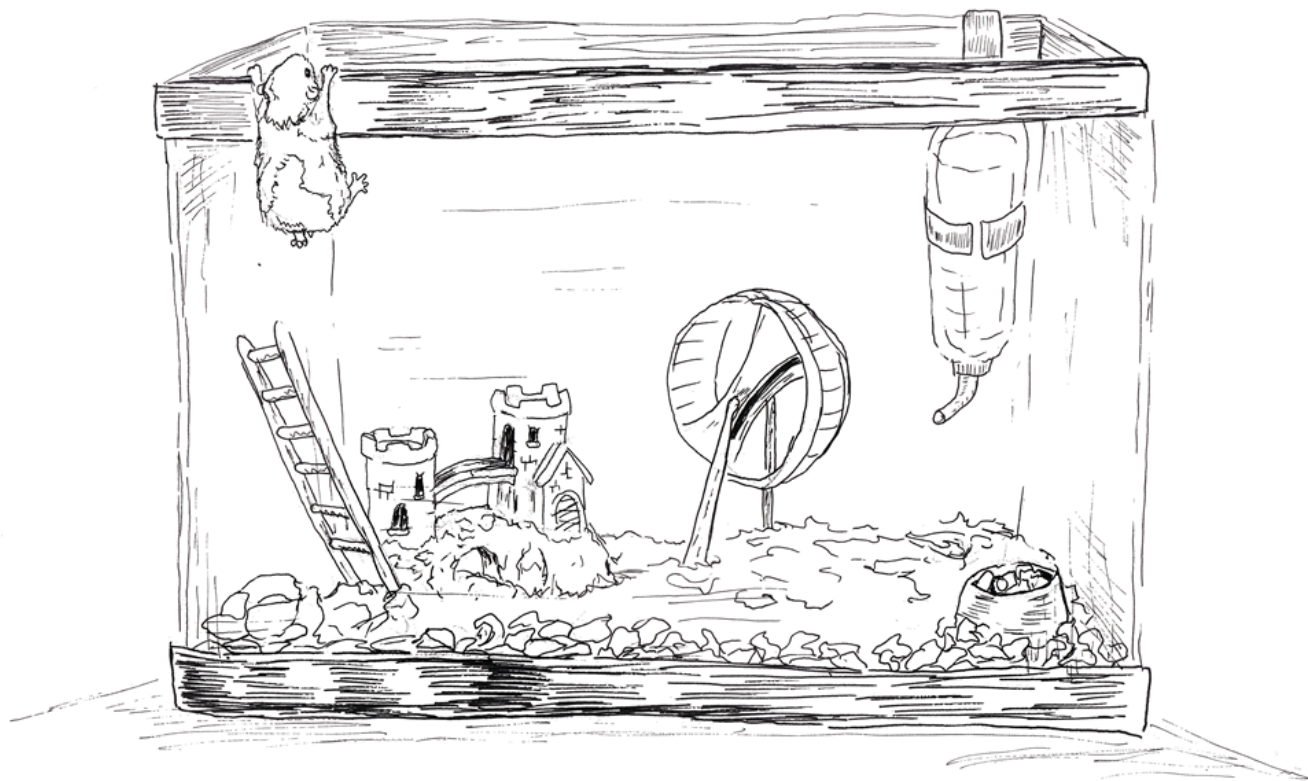
## The Years my Heart was an Aquarium

Say, sixty gallons, glass-edged with silicone,  
a pump, some gravel colored like confetti.  
We fill it first with fresh water, test the pH,  
get silver tip tetras and red cap orandas,  
lyretail guppies and gold gouramis.  
Buy a neon blue castle, lace java ferns  
and a treasure chest that can't stay shut  
but bubbles open. Read books on algae,  
but forget to find a sucker fish. Overfeed  
the guppies and let the tetras overproduce,  
eat their own young. Forget to change  
the filter, forget the cover, hire a friend  
to dump it all out, bleach it, start over.

We fill it with salt water, read the hydrometer  
and adjust the temperature to a balmy  
eighty degrees. Plant mermaid's hair  
and mermaid's fan and add a feather duster  
with an orange crown to keep everything clean.

Find a red finger gorgonian and a fake ship  
wrecked on coral. Stick to the fish who sport  
the funniest names: bicolor dottybacks and  
the midas blenny, the scissortail dartfish  
and the sleeper banded goby. They will  
swim and be tickled by the plants we offer,  
hide in the wreck and eat the brine shrimp  
we drop into the water. All will be well until  
the goby leaps from the tank and is swallowed  
by the dog, the dottybacks bully the blennies  
to death, and the dartfish get lodged in the clear  
tube that pumps water, poisoning the duster.

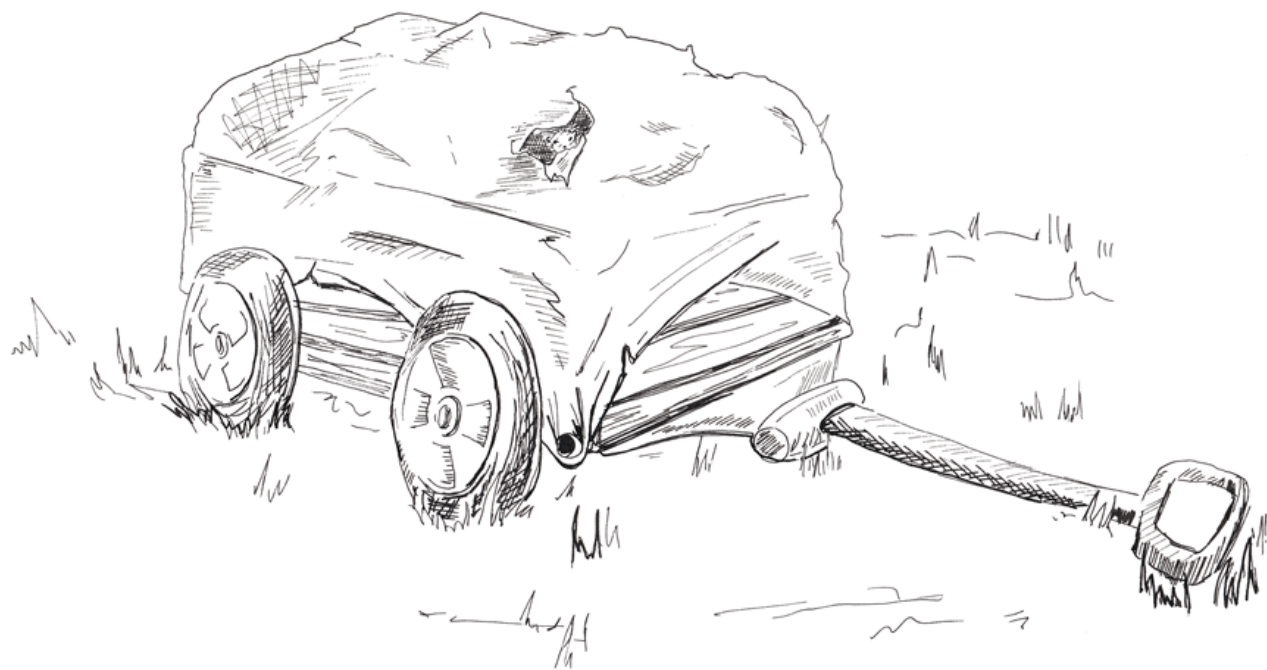
Empty and clean the tank again. Line the bottom  
with woodchips and add a water bottle and pink  
igloo. Buy a guinea pig. Name it Eel. Hope  
that this plan works better than the others. Know  
that at least this time, it's dry and pellets are cheap.



## The Years my Heart was a Tarp

Manufactured to be nearly impervious to water sharp objects, to cover or support, its uses seem never-ending. Practical, green, a perfect square with grommets at the corners, it may not be pretty all the time, although no one can argue over the lovely shade cast by a tarp tied to the oak trees and staked in the grass at a 45-degree angle against the sun, a picnic of cheese and grapes and good home-baked bread spread in the shade, the river nearby and children playing happily in a clearing far enough away that their laughter echoes instead of pierces. When it rains, it keeps those underneath dry, at least their heads and shoulders if not their feet. When possessions are packed in a cart, it will keep

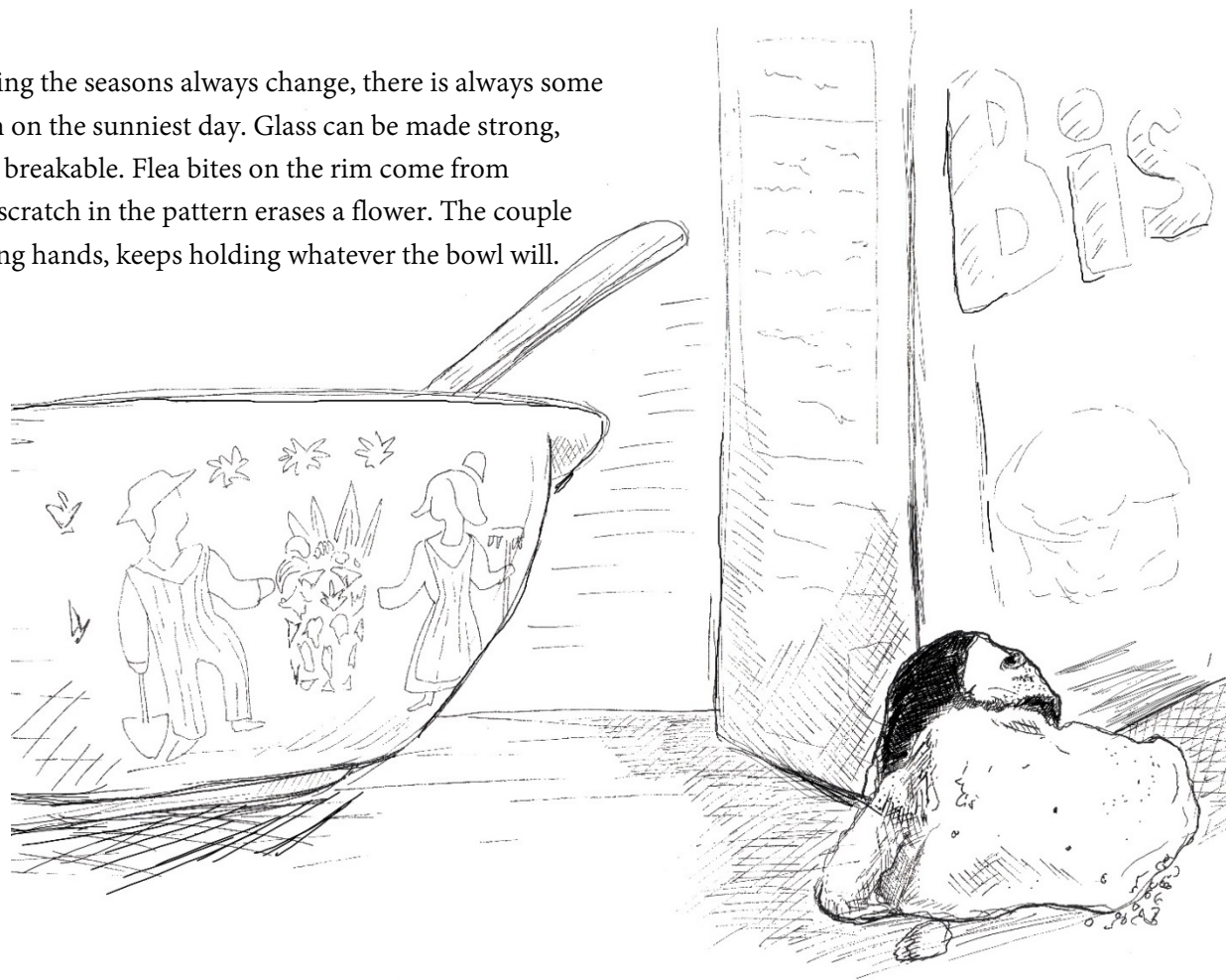
them together, tied down and safe. In storms, it may billow, even blow away, but collect it, hose it off, and it's good as new. It doesn't complain, doesn't say the tent is too small, understands when it is pierced accidentally by a box cutter. Fold it up and put it in the garage, in the trunk, in the basement or the shed, and years later it will be ready to be of service, the same green, only just with a few more cracks, a little rust on the grommets, but strong and useful.



## The Years my Heart was a Pyrex Mixing Bowl

Butterprint shows a couple, Dutch, holding hands  
and always puts me in mind of housekeeping, the kind  
children practice at play, a table set with pink dishes  
and cups of water for tea, plastic bananas and Oreo  
cookies on cocktail napkins. The princess bowl  
is practical, with handles that double as pour spouts  
making it good for an electric mixer or a wooden spoon,  
the left hand making sure the bowl stays steady as  
butter creams into sugar and eggs or powdered sugar  
becomes less and less mass in the presence of a little  
milk. Cakes, cookies and brownies, of course, baking sweets  
for the sweet is always appreciated, but it doubles  
upside-down as a stand for a tray of bars hot from the oven  
or a tub to hold bleach water to clean stained coffee cups.  
In a pinch, it'll serve mashed potatoes, hold soup as it cools,  
a round belly of bread dough set to rise in a sunny window  
the trees bending a little in the breeze, the squirrels scurrying  
as if in play, maybe tag, the birds singing and swooping

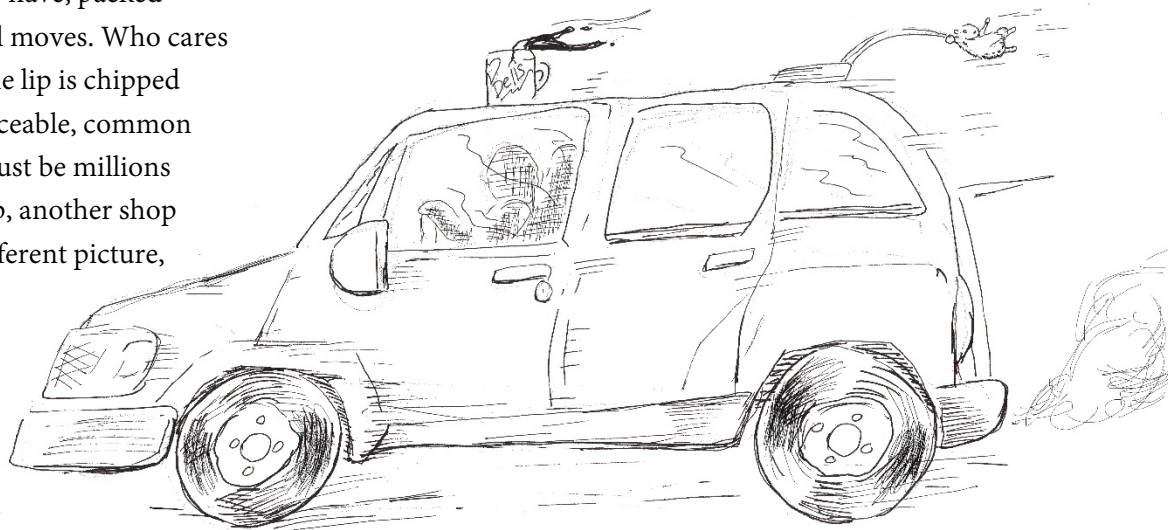
understanding the seasons always change, there is always some danger even on the sunniest day. Glass can be made strong, but it is still breakable. Flea bites on the rim come from nowhere, a scratch in the pattern erases a flower. The couple keeps holding hands, keeps holding whatever the bowl will.



## The Years my Heart was a Stoneware Coffee Mug with Your Name Printed on It

It's a souvenir from the Dells, some hokey reminder of waterparks and nieces of family arguments and bad taste in gifts. It's fine to use for common company, the kind that stops by out of the blue to chat, the kind that asks for tea when everyone else is having beer. You leave it in the cabinet during thrift store purges, knowing it's handy to have, packed over and over through several moves. Who cares if the handle is damaged or the lip is chipped while it's in transit? It's replaceable, common for a common name, there must be millions of people with it. Another trip, another shop and it can be found with a different picture,

one that's funnier or more natural, Snoopy or a scene from South Dakota. The good mugs all match, are the same turquoise blue, but are barely ever used. This one is yours. No one else has the same memories of summer spent driving the two-lane highway through Wisconsin, the music blaring, the windows down.



## The Years My Heart was a Terracotta Rabbit Lawn Ornament

We abandoned the life-sized, rust-colored bunny, standing on her hind feet, ears back, beside the rhubarb for three winters.

The first summer, she was alert, nose in the air, enjoying the full sun and the rain, birds bathing nearby, splashing.

The winter was wet, left the yard spongy and brown. The moss stayed green in the corners, the sky a slate of gray.

The second summer, untended, brought Creeping William and spreading irises shading out the rhubarb and rabbit alike.



That winter was arctic as if a glacier  
had advanced and retreated while we  
warmed ourselves under white comforters.

The third summer, the garden went wild.  
The rabbit was buried under thistles and ivy  
and we decided to call all the weeds perennials.

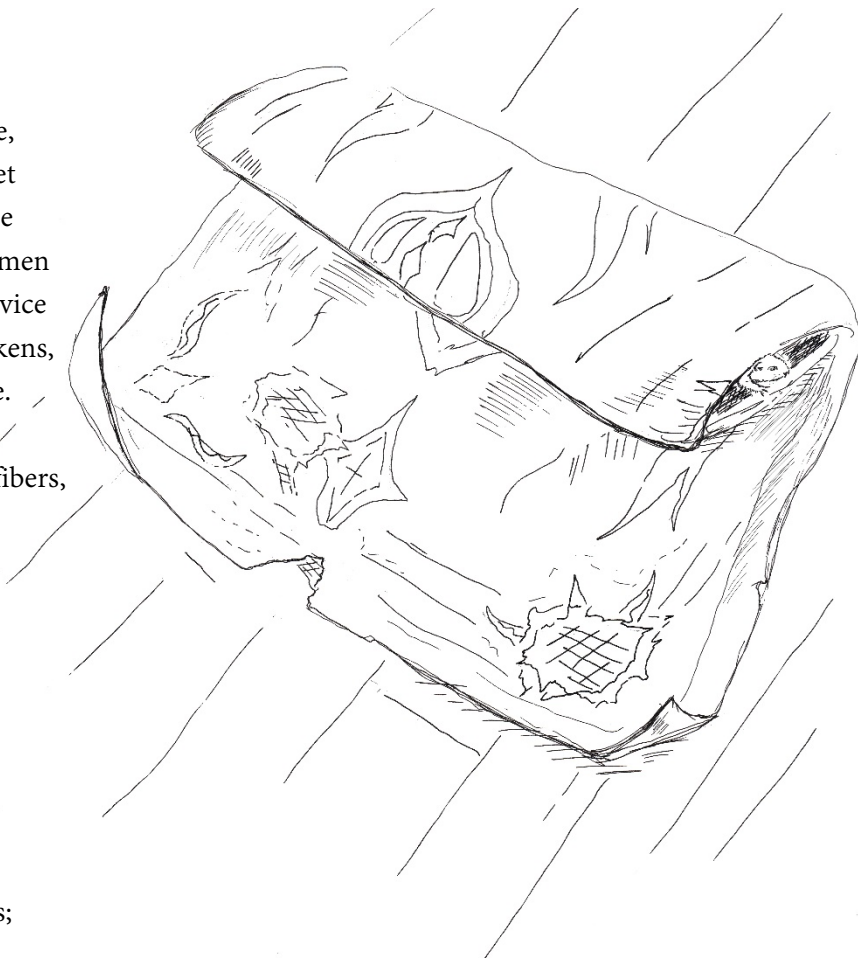
The last winter was cold and dry. Ice  
formed from the fog that blew in off the rivers  
and pushed at the sidewalks no one walked.

Now, I dig out the beds, reseed the lawn.  
I find the rabbit, one ear missing, her back  
scaly and flaking. I mend her, make promises.

## The Years My Heart Was a Persian Rug

Knotted in red, black and brown the color of sandstone, the women made it to last years, to accept the men's feet that would tread upon it, the children who would dance with their arms waving, jumping and laughing, the women who would sit quietly on it, sipping tea and offering advice in such subjects as the marriage bed, how to cook chickens, what is best for washing hair to make it shine and wave.

With each knot turned around the warp of the woven fibers, a prayer was given for the home the rug would find, that it would be warm, clean, quiet; that it would be without anger and loud piercing words; that it would be filled with the quietest sleep and brightest sunshine. All rugs begin new, the patterns bold and easy to read: diamonds together for a couple holding hands; ewers for a full store of oil to light lamps, massage the body, cook spring lamb; combs for purity, the freshly washed and combed hair of the woman, how it falls across her husband's body, a shield against other lovers;



stars for the night sky, the peace of sleep, God's eyes  
looking down on them, always keeping watch.

The women's prayers, their fingers making knots,  
their hearts beating as they tell long stories for the hours  
and days and weeks it takes to make the patterns,  
their breath entering every fiber of the wool,  
were never enough to guard against the worst damage,  
time and the slow work of sand and water on the rug.  
Each foot adds a grain of dirt, a drop of moisture.  
An animal's nails may tear it, fur and smell sink into it.  
Each year, the rug is taken out and beaten, the dust  
rising in clouds. It is never as new as it once was.  
It is moved from room to room, set aside, brought back

to the center, rolled up and put to the side, maybe carried away,  
stored for a time.

When it is rediscovered, the stories are told  
of when it was new, how bright the red dye was that year,  
how it has never been as bright as it was then. A child  
may trace the diamonds, humming. A mother may gather  
her into the folds of her dress, tell a story about two  
lovers who met, were lost, and years later, found  
each other, as if they were never parted.

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