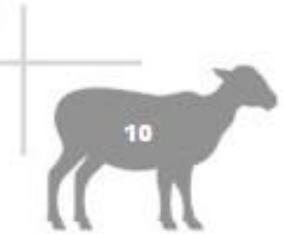


THE GARDAN



Anger Sister

by Rob Rogers ('25)
Winter Garden, FL

Your voice quivered the first day you arrived at our therapy group, hands shaking as you struggled to describe the explosions detonating inside your mind. I knew the moment I looked into your eyes that I saw myself.

You sat across the room that day, a nondescript collection of plastic tables and metal chairs fashioned into a daytime hospital for the spiritually suffering. All of us fled there from lives that had become too hard to bear. We had stopped going to work every morning and instead were spending workdays trying to exorcise the diseases that haunted us, before returning at night to families who couldn't understand us. Most of us were coping with at least one strain of depression; almost all suffered from anxiety and insomnia. Until the morning you arrived, I had not met anyone else who struggled to control anger.

You clutched your purse with icy knuckles as you poured out your soul to people you'd never met, struggling to find the words to confess sins you couldn't understand. Plates of spaghetti thrown at walls during family dinners, drivers pursued after they cut you off on the way home from work. Staring at the table while quaking in your seat, you were a Doberman caught in a bear trap, desperately in need of help but afraid of what you might do to anyone who came close enough to try, resigned instead to chewing through another limb, to continue staggering through the darkness alone.

"My husband always tells me to just relax and calm down," you sobbed that morning.

"As if it that were so easy," I couldn't help interrupting you mid-sentence.

You and I were from totally different worlds. I grew up in relative luxury in a waspy conservative suburb, with dismissive parents who never abused me. You had known violence and



abandonment all your life and survived only by harnessing rage. Both of us were stumbling through lives where our fury was unwelcome, struggling to appease wary spouses, disappointing unforgiving bosses, and trying our best to ignore provocative drivers on overcrowded highways. Intensity polluted our minds and ferocity distorted every emotion we felt. Even with those we loved the most, we fought in vain each day to express ourselves with civility. We had been losing that war for decades, our pasts littered with friendships and romances left behind as casualties.

Scarred by my own impulses, I confessed how I can often only calm down by blasting rock music during long drives to unnecessary destinations, lowering my face while stopped at



"Storm" by Beth Reitmeyer ('24). Mixed Media. Bowling Green, KY

intersections to prevent passing drivers from seeing me arguing with the voices screaming inside my head. How I buckle under the weight of people who can just calm down whenever they want, and how much it hurts to see their rolled eyes when I can't contain an outburst.

As our eyes met that first time, tears burst through their levees and cascaded down your cheeks. For once, finally, someone understood.

The next day you sat beside me, and you remained there for the next four weeks. We spent breaks pacing outside, showing each other our wounds, sharing notes on box breathing and journaling and other tactics for taming the beasts within. We intuitively knew when the other entered the room if a crisis had erupted. We vented, empathized, coped, and encouraged, first with each other, then with others as we began loving ourselves for the first time. As the weeks wore on, we reveled in each other's milestones. Landmines with loved ones dismantled through pleas for understanding, provocations from clients and supervisors ignored.

And then several weeks later, we returned to our lives, strangers once again. Initial intentions to stay in touch have been thwarted by busy careers and families who need us more. Perhaps it just hurts too much to return to the memory of those processing groups and the agony we had to endure to get better. But you remain in my thoughts. I know you are out there somewhere, and I know you will survive.

I dream of seeing you years from now, sunshine beaming from your eyes, the years of pain having been sealed in photo albums now buried in dust in the attic. Grandchildren cling to your side and bask in your glow. They've never heard your voice raised in anger. Your children now treasure the mother they've never thought they'd know. You are no longer alone.

Few thoughts give me more joy.