The Origin

The ideas for this story came from a hodgepodge of places. First, there was the dead armadillo on the road beside my apartment. Then there were the stories my boyfriend told me about his cart pushing job. Then there was a character named Suzan who I’d been toying with in my head for a few weeks without much direction. Once I realized that all of these things were part of the same story, Reaching for the Sun was born.

Suzan Kilpatrick had never seen a live armadillo, just the dead one on the side of the highway.

The Process

When I began writing this story, I knew my character, and I knew the story’s frame. My main challenge was to put Suzan in situations that would create tension and move the plot forward. I used real-world experiences as inspiration for creating realistic details and happenings at Suzan’s workplace, and then I let the characters in my story react to them. My goal was to create a fictional world that felt believable, relatable, and artistically complete.

“You will experience things that must be spoken of.”
-B. H. Fairchild

Reaching for the Sun
By Elise Hopkins

In this short story, a decomposing armadillo on the side of the road awakens Suzan Kilpatrick to the fact that her own life is fleeting. Throughout the story, she grapples with her desire to leave a mark on the world and her fear that her job as a cart pusher won’t give her an opportunity to do so. To what lengths will she go to live the life she’s always wanted? To what lengths will she go to be remembered?

“There’s the knowledge you have from experience and the knowledge you have from knowing things.”
-Gerry LaFemina

Excerpts from Reaching for the Sun

This creature lived, she wanted to tell the world. See! It lived and it died and here it lies. But, of course, she had let the rain and the sun and the passing cars erase it from the Earth.

“I saw an armadillo on the way to work today,” Suzan said instead of hello.
“Dead?” said Rupert.
“Yeah, said Suzan.
Rupert nodded and took a puff on his pipe.
“It’ll start to stink soon.”
Suzan scrunched up her nose at her sandwich. “I wish I could afford a car. Then I wouldn’t have to walk beside the road kill.”
“Don’t you worry,” he said. “Get a good rain, a few weeks of sun, it’ll be gone. Nothing lasts around here.”
“Nothing?” said Suzan.
“Nothing lasts forever.”

Though she’d seen the TV commercials about identity theft, an identity was something she’d never considered stealing. Yet, here it was.