CREATIVE NONFICTION

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

VOLUME ONE • ISSUE ONE

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JOURNAL 2020 fosters an interdisciplinary community of students with a mutual interest in creative nonfiction—encompassing and connecting seemingly disparate disciplines, fields, and genres.

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

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Special thanks to Dave Underwood for invaluable guidance in layout and design.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY will publish in print each Fall and Spring. Expansion online is planned for later issues, but we are a print journal. We only publish creative nonfiction (with accompanying art), only by students who were undergraduates at time of composition. We especially welcome work that includes research (including journalism), and work with attention to issues of community and sustainability; we publish all sub-genres within creative nonfiction. We acquire First North American Serial Rights; rights revert to authors and artists on publication. Send queries and submissions to the Program for Writing and Rhetoric, UCB 317, University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0359; or journal2020@colorado.edu. We are a green journal and prefer electronic submissions and correspondence. Printed on recycled stock and fully recyclable (including the cover). Single copy costs are $12.00 per issue U.S. and Canada, $14.00 outside North America.

Cover Art: MARIAH HERMSMEYER

ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

While taking the course that inspired this journal, I was struck by the power of creative nonfiction—of being able to take something true from life and turning it into a new experience for others. It was therapeutic, finding the words for moments I thought I could never explain. As I read my classmates' stories—stories of heartaches, of triumphs, of oddities and fears—two-dimensional strangers became wells of hidden depths. I learned we write because we have something to say, but we don't always know how to say it out loud. Whether we want to explain ourselves and tell the stories that have shaped who we are or we want to reveal a world overlooked, writing creative nonfiction brings past experiences back to life one more time.

At the end of the class, our instructor Jay Ellis mentioned creating a journal of our work, nothing fancy, and asked for volunteers. I was an editor for my high school yearbook, so I raised my hand. I had no idea what I was getting into. It became clear as Jay and I started working on this it couldn't be a one-time project. The amazing quality of work from sixteen students in one semester proved that there is talent at the University of Colorado Boulder and a desire to further this genre of writing, and so months later of never-ending proofreading and arguing over page margins and typefaces, JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY was born.

Our first issue highlights the work of my classmates and the many subgenres of creative nonfiction we explored. Cassie Beck's memory of volunteering in Nicaragua questions how materialism infects every culture it reaches. Kathleen Childs reports on how the NAMES Quilt Project memorializes AIDS victims, while Hannah Beckler's new journalism finds the mixed effects of Islamic law on the rights of women in Morrocco. Her portrait of a matador's heroism beyond a horrible accident combines travel and sports writing while opening a window on a cultural heritage as deep as it is controversial. More exotic rituals are observed by Allison Matney at a baby shower. Joel Perez and Valerie Erwin recall the different dangers of boxing and dance, and Kelly Givens commemorates a lost friend. Sadly, we have more than one story of women assaulted, including Bryn Newman's brave testimony, and Kathleen Childs using her experience of fencing as a metaphor for the dangerous games we play around gender. Aj Gustern memorializes the mother he lost at age ten and I watch my family say goodbye to a loved one. Dominic Haury's sober account of a father with mental illness contrasts Abigail Nelson's darkly humorous portrait of a drunken uncle. Our humor grows lighter as gender steretypes hit the road with Matt Anderson, only to get poked at by Sam Klomhaus. Jessica Epstein pokes the insides of a piglet. Humor, travel, confession, memoir, portraiture, and new journalism—within these pages are incredible true stories of and by students at CU.

MARIAH HERMSMEYER, EDITOR

Editing this first issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY has been both a joy and a privilege. It is always a pleasure to read writers with enough strength of voice, skill, and courage to translate their experiences into words; it was an even greater pleasure to get to work with an entire class of such writers. The essays in this journal are brave, often personal, sometimes funny, and always true. I want to thank each author for their strong contributions to this journal.

Yet, even with the high quality of these essays, JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY would never have reached completion as you see it without the wonderful contributions of CU Boulder undergraduate artists. JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY is a creative nonfiction journal, a difficult enough genre to define when applied to writing, let alone art. In selecting the art to publish, I struggled with the question of what makes artwork creative nonfiction. If art is a reflection of the artist's own experience, is it similar to personal essay? Is a photograph new journalism? Can abstraction be related to memoir?

Our inclusion of each piece of artwork in this issue is a result of struggling with these questions. What has been chosen is not only meant to reflect the tone of the essay it accompanies (or in some cases contrast it), but must also be imbued with a certain quality of nonfiction—subjective, objective, or otherwise. The nonfictional aspects of artwork might be in a photograph that reflects reality, in the emotive color used in abstraction, or a personal truth communicated in a drawing. I think that it is this undercurrent of nonfiction that allows the art to hold a dialogue with each essay, one that teases out greater meaning and nuance from the text itself. I am very excited to have helped share these great works from writers and artists alike. Enjoy.

HANNAH BECKLER, EDITOR

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY began in the classroom, but what began there had to find you here. Teaching my fall 2012 section of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric's course, Introduction to Creative Nonfiction (WRTG 2020), I had the undeserved fortune of a classroom full of talent beyond what I had seen in over twenty years of teaching. Individual brilliance shows up now and then in any class, but how could so many students bring this much talent to one classroom? As this journal is devoted only to Nonfiction, I can't begin to take credit for the sentences you will read here. These students took to my method of student-centered classrooms relying on small groups with impressive energy; that means I never exactly edited their work. The writing of these students is not the rewriting of this teacher. Instead, improvements in their inclusion of detail, structural management, incorporation of evidence, avoidance of sentimentality—and especially their daring in subject matter and wide-ranging curiosity in subjects—came from their honest hard work. They worked collaboratively then, and a core of them continued working together beyond semester's end to produce the issue you hold in your hands.

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC had already become the home of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. Meanwhile, CU clearly had enough strong talent and deep interest in this genre that we needed much more than a single course on it. The 2020 course could only generate the idea of publishing that coursework; any teacher realizes the problem of asking for volunteer work beyond semester's end. After the grades were in, with no course credit hours to earn or any other remuneration—and I was already bound to write the best recommendation letters I can manage—fifteen of 2020's sixteen students took up the equally hard work of building a journal that will live beyond their time at CU. They created what is now the publishing home of creative nonfiction for this campus. Future issues may include work from undergraduates nationally, but as unlikely as it may seem to have a single issue with as much good writing as this come out of a single class, readers can judge for themselves the results; my bet is that Issue 1 will hold up as a strong start for a journal with an impressive future.

Without the support of PWR DIRECTOR JOHN-MICHAEL RIVERA, and SUSAN AND DICK KIRK, our first print run would have amounted to a vanity endeavor. And instead of merely dumping this strong writing online or into unimaginative slices of dead trees, we had the further good fortune of CU's Digital Media Consultant DAVE UNDERWOOD's expertise in layout and design. Students played a part in every step of the editing process—including the layout you see here. But Dave's energetic teaching of multi-modal graphic design, and his keen eye for design that starts conversations, helped immeasurably.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY will remain uniquely committed to our founding characteristics, even as we broaden our base of contributors. At press time, no other journal in the country fits all four of these criteria:

- We only publish creative nonfiction.
- We are a print journal.
- Undergraduates create all content.
- Undergraduates edit all content and manage layout, design, and production.

Creative nonfiction remains a key part of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric's mission. As we grow, so does the integration of CNF throughout our curriculum. This is also true of multi-modality, but the sensory experience and aesthetics of print best serve our content—and reward the hard work of students. We will expand online, including video interviews with writers, multi-modal pieces, etc., but we promise to continue print issues twice a year. Finally, what you read here was created by undergraduate students in one class, but we already reached across the campus for our artwork, and students edited this issue.

Our next issue will draw from undergraduates across campus at the University of Colorado Boulder. But watch these students grow this journal. After another semester in WRTG 2020, we will have our own course—and probably with a different number. But this journal will retain its title in all its iterations: hindsight, reflection, 2020 but also TWENTY TWENTY (because we like the look of it). Read on.

JAY ELLIS, FACULTY ADVISOR

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MOROCCAN BLUE

By Hannah Beckler

My memories of Morocco smell of turmeric and cinnamon, saffron and paprika—the heady spices sold in high stacked pyramids of copper and rust red. They are steeped in the rich ocher of sweet apricot tajine. Bathed in argon oil and fragrant attar. My memories of Morocco are awash in blue.

All the streets and walls of Chefchaouen, a city in northern Morocco, are painted blue. A deep bold blue that sinks into the dimpled surface of ancient stone. There are no cars in the inner medina of the city. Instead, the streets—some barely wide enough to walk two abreast—wind in the absurd twists of medieval engineering. Tangles of white flowers spill across the buildings and branches laden with oranges or figs sweep low from behind cloistered walls of private garden courtyards. To the west, the sun sets behind the mountains and wreaths of quiet pink and gold bloom across the horizon. The air thickens with evening scents—ginger and rose oil. In the fading light, the blue streets deepen to twilight.

Photo by Hannah Beckler

In the central square next to the mosque is a quiet tea house where I sit drinking mint tea with my guide and friend, Sabri. Sabri and I are a part of a cultural exchange program in which American students studying Spanish in Sevilla, Spain were matched with Moroccan Spanish language students who acted as our guides during our stay in Morocco. Sabri lives in Tetuán, but we have taken a day trip to Chefchaouen along with the other American students in my group. We chat together in our broken Spanish—my second language, his third. Our language barrier hangs between us in a semi-translucent veil. I want to ask him about the Arab Spring, but I don't know the words. Instead, I tell him about the flowers in my mother's garden. I wrap my fingers around the warm tea, served in tall glasses still aflush with mint sprigs. It tastes sweet and strong. Sabri begins to tell me the history of the blue painted city.

Nearly every street, wall, and doorway of Chefchaouen has been painted blue once a year for the last 500 years—an ancient Jewish tradition continued by the predominantly Muslim population. Originally, the color symbolized the sky and heaven. It imbues the city with exotic beauty and a certain nostalgia. Today, this ancient practice is contrasted against the silhouettes of satellite dishes and antennas that are mounted chaotically on the rooftops. A bizarre juxtaposition of the twenty-first and fifteenth centuries. This is modern Morocco. A country embroiled in an often contentious debate between the desire to adhere to a deeply rooted traditional identity and the increasingly incessant call of modernity. As Morocco moves towards a more modern, globalized structure, opponents say that it runs the risk of succumbing to cultural homogenization and unwanted governmental secularization. However, neither can Morocco remain entrenched in the past to such an extent that beneficial progress is sacrificed. It is a precarious balance.

In 2004, the Islamic parliament of Morocco enacted a sweeping reform of the Moudawana, the country's family code. This governmental code oversees issues related to the family including the regulation of marriage, polygamy, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Propelled by both the king and Muslim feminist

Never before have Moroccan women enjoyed such a powerful affirmation of their natural rights.

groups, the reforms gave women the right of divorce, raised the legal age of marriage to eighteen, granted more custody rights to mothers, and guaranteed protection from the traditional practice of repudiation, whereby husbands could dissolve marriages nearly at will.[1] These rights are unprecedented in the Muslim world and have been lauded by international human rights organizations for the measures taken to address women's rights and gender equality within an Islamic legal framework.

First proposed in the late 1990's, the Moudawana was finally passed unanimously by the Moroccan parliament in February of 2004. This victory was in part due to careful compromises sacrificed on both sides of the liberal-conservative spectrum. In an attempt to assuage the religious conservative pressure against the passage of the reform, proponents of the Moudawana took great efforts to verify that all proposed measures would be in concordance with Muslim law. The result was a uniquely Moroccan re-interpretation or "re-reading" of the basic tenants of sharia law. However, the most persuasive catalyst to the process stemmed from the suicide bombings in Casablanca on May 16, 2003. The attack was committed by the Islamic terrorist organization, Salafia Jihadia, and killed at least forty-five people and injured more than a hundred. For a country traditionally devoid of violence instigated by religious extremism, the attacks came as a brutal shock. In the aftermath of this tragedy, Morocco experienced a surge in anti-extremist ideology accompanied by a broad sweep of liberal leanings that helped propel the Moudawana to its implementation less than a year later.

In 2012, the Moudawana had effected great changes in the lives of many Moroccan women. Previously prohibited, a woman can now marry at eighteen without the consent of her appointed proxy, usually her father. She has the right to divorce her husband in cases of "incompatibility" or abuse, with the increased security of fairer financial settlements and custody rights. She also enjoys unprecedented rights and gender equality within an Islamic judiciary framework primarily based upon the tenants of Sharia law.[2] Never before have Moroccan women

1 Hursh, John, "Advancing Women's Rights Through Islamic Law: The Example of Morocco," *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice,* (2012): 252-305.

2 Guessous, Nouzha, "Women's rights in muslim societies: Lessons from the Moroccan experience," *Philosophy & Social Criticism,*

enjoyed such a powerful affirmation of their natural rights. To many women, the Moudawana is palpable victory.

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"I feel free, really free." Salma tells me as we walk through the dizzying labyrinth of the inner market medina. Salma is a good friend of Sabri's who would often accompany us in the afternoons to shop and later for tea. Salma and Sabri help me to barter for fresh cooking spices, perfumes bottled in delicate glass, and traditional leather slippers richly embroidered in patterns of intricate geometry. We dodge through congested streets interwoven with scent and overwhelming color. The market is stacked upon itself in suffocating proximity and pulsates with living sound.

The three of us eventually arrive at a teahouse at the edge of the market overlooking the central square of Tetuán. The minaret of the mosque spirals upwards behind us—capped with gold and stuccoed in white against the light blue of a Mediterranean sky. Salma orders sweet honey tea and a platter of sfenj—warm doughnut pastries dusted with light sugar. Salma is a student at the local university studying law and also a member of a local feminist campaign in Tetuán.

"Young Moroccan women are beginning to know their rights—to know that to have their natural rights is not to go against their faith, their Muslim faith," she says, "but we must be vigilant. We must always be aware of our rights, so they do not take them from us."

Sabri agrees. As my guide, he has been desperate to impart upon me that Islam should not be something to be feared. His desire to correct Western stereotypes of his religion permeate nearly all of our conversations. We speak openly about his faith and he goes to great lengths to demonstrate his own tolerance of my beliefs. I have grown used to his absences at each call to prayer—an exquisitely exotic melody that resonates deep below my diaphragm, sending shivered ripples to my scalp.

Yet, when I recently spoke with Sabri, he acknowledges that religious extremism within Morocco often contributes to the continued oppression faced by women within his country.

"I believe that in Moroccan society there is a large percentage of people who do not apply Islam the way that I think

This penal code was used to justify the traditional practice of marrying a rape victim to her attacker.

God intended," Sabri said. In fact, many young Moroccans agree that the Moudawana does not go far enough to fully protect the rights of women, particularly within rural and conservative populations.

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As recently as March, 2012, article 475 of the Moudawana allowed for a "kidnapper" to escape legal prosecution by marrying his victim should she be less than eighteen years old. This penal code was used to justify the traditional practice of marrying a rape victim to her attacker. In a country where rape victims carry a debilitating stigma of shame and dishonor, conservative judges would recommend this option as a method of preserving the honor of the victim's family. The law received international attention after sixteen-year-old Amina Filali committed suicide in the northern city of Larache by swallowing rat poison after a six-month forced marriage to her rapist. Filali's death spurred outrage among Morocco's internet activists and increased pressure to further reform the family code. Activist Abadila Maaelaynine tweeted, "Amina, 16, was triply violated, by her rapist, by tradition and by Article 475 of the Moudawana." Fortunately, the law was amended to eliminate this judicial option. However, despite this improvement, the Moudawana continues to suffer from a lack of universally standard enforcement.

Due to the ambiguity of certain passages of the code, conservative judges are able to exercise their own discretion regarding the new regulations. Consequently, while the Moudawana initially had a dissuasive effect on polygamy and marriage involving minors, it was quickly realized that it was not difficult to receive dispensations from judges. Between 2006 and 2007, a fifty percent increase in the number of marriages of underage girls raised the number of all marriages involving minors in Morocco to ten percent.[3] Furthermore, polygamy under the Moudawana remains legal. However, in order to obtain a second marriage, a man must prove to a court of law not only that his first wife is in complete agreement, but also that he will

3 Eisenberg, Ann M., "Law on the Books vs. Law in Action: Under-Enforcement of Morocco's Reformed 2004 Family Law, the Moudawana," *Cornell International Law Journal,* (2011): 693-728.

be able to treat both wives with complete equality. The problem manifests itself in the subjectivity of the judge's personal decisions. Different judges, influenced by various combinations of socioeconomic or religious factors, are susceptible to differing interpretations of the law, ultimately resulting in an inconsistent enforcement of Moudawana law that undermines the general effectiveness of the code itself.

Yet another detriment to the success of the Moudawana is the continued prevalence of illiteracy and lack of education within Morocco. As of 2009, illiteracy for Moroccan women was at a high sixty percent.[4] With access to education limited by social or economic pressure, many women become socially marginalized, with little understanding of their protected rights and newly granted freedoms. Many important measures of the Moudawana are dependent on the active participation of women. Should women remain ignorant of details concerning the Moudawana reforms, rights such as divorce, child custody, and equal inheritance are undermined due to a lack of invocation by women themselves. The single greatest challenge for the continued progress of the Moudawana law within Morocco is basic—some people simply do not know how it works.

"The future of Morocco is in education, education and literacy," Sabri tells me. He and I are standing together on the rooftop terrace of his university building along with the other American and Moroccan students. Before us stretches the silhouetted panorama of Tetuán wreathed in sleepy twilight. The air is imbued with cinnamon and roasted chicken basted in coriander and lemon. It is my last night in Tetuán. Tonight, we celebrate together with food and music. For now, Sabri and I chat easily with several Americans by the balcony.

Below us, many of the ancient buildings in the center of Tetuán have been painted blue—echoing the tradition in the streets of Chefchaouen. The color glows, reflected against the white tile and limestone stucco. I imagine the depth of the color—the paint layers built upon themselves with each yearly wash

I imagine the color changing, evolving, reflecting different timbres and lights through its centuries-old history to today.

4 CIA- the World Factbook. "Morocco." Accessed December 4, 2012.

of slightly new hue. And I imagine the color changing, evolving, reflecting different timbres and lights through its centuries-old history to today. A Moroccan blue, a color in motion.

So too will Morocco change. Perhaps hesitatingly, slowly, with uncertain leaps and reluctant compromises, but ultimately the people of Morocco will continue to seek progress for their country. The Moudawana represents an important step forward for Moroccan women—an affirmation of their natural rights regardless of religion, yet still inherently bound to a deeply rooted Muslim faith. In the coming years, the Moudawana will keep evolving as Moroccans continue to find ways to acquaint ancient tradition with the inevitable advance of twenty-first century change.

Dusk settles over Tetuán. The shadows cast by the lanterns strung over the terrace lengthen and the band begins to play loud and fast, lead by a young man with a high tenor voice. We all sit in a circle surrounding the music, Americans and Moroccans alike. We smile and clap to the beat of the music so beautiful and strange. Sabri and Salma know the words and sing them aloud on either side of me. Soon, we are all dancing—we laugh and spin circles around each other to the beat of Chaabi melodies.

My memories of Morocco are flooded by that last night. By the music. By the dance shared together with women and men, Moroccans and Americans. They are wrapped in heavy spice and perfume. Painted in the rose tints and copper of the sunset over the mountains to the west. And they are blue, the moving color, that beautiful Moroccan blue.

Artwork by Cassidy Robison

MY VERY OWN PIG

By Jessica Epstein

He rifled through the plastic bag of fetal pigs and handed it over to me after finding the perfect specimen. I squinted at the plastic bag that didn't have a zipper, wondering how they got those pigs in there. Did they have a plastic soldering machine in whatever lab smothered those babies in chemicals? I stuck my gloved hand into the heavy liquid-filled bag and pulled out the first pig that caught my attention. It looked slightly less discolored than the rest. The chemical smell of formaldehyde quickly seeped into my nose, and after about a minute, my brain stopped signaling. I plopped the pig on a tray next to a scalpel, scissors, and whatever tool is used to poke organs.

I carried the tray to the desk that I shared with my lab partner, Emily, and dropped it on the surface between the two of us. I sat at the desk with the scalpel in my hand, staring at this fetus that hadn't opened its eyes yet. Its umbilical cord was still attached, and while checking its sex, I couldn't help but make a dirty joke. I didn't know where to begin. Each time I touched its belly, my fingers sunk in a little because of the puffy organs, and it tipped onto its side, as if trying to cover its shame.

My professor suggested that I tie each of its limbs to the four corners of the metal tray so that the pig remained still. It lay on its back with its extremities spread apart; the way my dog, Shelly, sleeps at night, or rolls around in the leaves with her tennis ball in her mouth, and I felt the sudden urge to blow a raspberry on its belly.

I took the knife and sliced down the center of the swine, starting at the bottom of the neck and working my way to the opposite end, stopping just below the intestines that immediately became visible. My lab partner used her gloved fingers to pry open the chest cavity, revealing the rest of the organs. The first thing I noticed was the heart. Of course, it didn't look exactly like those dazzling red candies that you get on Valentine's Day, but it was pretty close. It reminded me of one of those stress balls you can squeeze and the plastic squishes out between your fingers. But you can't squeeze too hard or else it will burst, and the innards will ooze out all over your hands. Well anyway, I wanted to poke the heart, but I thought that would be unprofessional.

The first thing I noticed was the heart. Of course, it didn't look exactly like those dazzling red candies that you get on Valentine's Day, but it was pretty close.

The liver looked the way I would expect my liver to appear, from all of my excess drinking in college. It was blotchy and gray, and looked kind of like the mushrooms you find on a pizza. And then I scolded myself for thinking about food while this baby pig lay split open on the tray in front of me.

And then I couldn't get food out of my mind. It reminded me of the quail I ate a while back, and at that moment I knew I would not be able to eat poultry again for a very long time. I knew that every time I ripped the leg off of a steaming chicken, I would think of the legs that I tied helplessly to the metal tray.

The intestines could be fun to poke too. I couldn't help myself. I giggled squeamishly, like a kid on Halloween who closes his eyes and sticks his hands into a bowl of spaghetti. They had the same texture as those slimy noodles that I eat for dinner, but were way smaller in size. They could maybe pass as an appetizer if they came with a handful of shrimp.

We labeled all of the organs and it was now time to clean up and go home. The fetus would be thrown in the trash can, along with the other unwanted pieces of matter in the classroom. But I had other plans for it. I had to see the brain. Get as much use out of it as I could before it was thrown out, or incinerated, or whatever they do with this carcass that is too spoiled to be made into bacon.

My lab partner agreed to watch, while I got to be the one with the scalpel. I brought the scalpel down onto the top of its head, but couldn't find the right angle to cut with these utensils. I decided it might be a better idea to use the scissors instead.

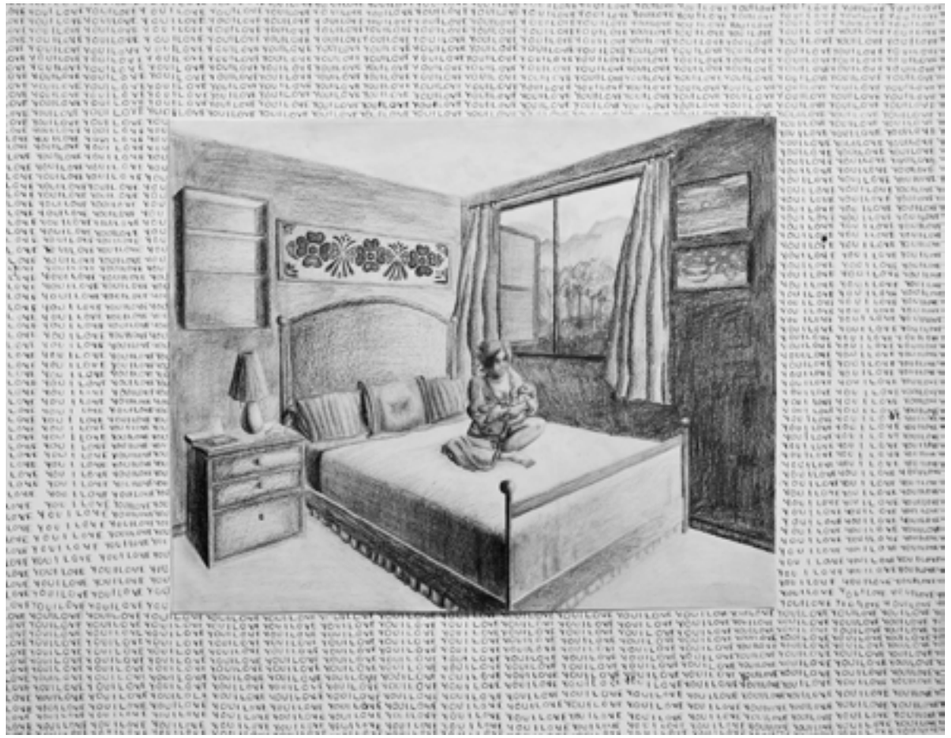
Almost the entire class had cleaned up and left as Emily watched my postmortem examination of the fetus. She leaned in closely as I fixed the blades of the scissors on the upper jaw bone and squeezed the handles together. One of the last remaining students jumped at the cracking sound that resonated through the room as the jaw and skull spit, and I looked up at him and laughed. "Gross, huh?" I smiled the way a small child might as he pokes a dead bird with a stick.

"That's disgusting," the student said, as if about to vomit. I kind of hoped he would.

I used two of my gloved fingers to tear open the skull. It crackled with each jerk of my fingers, and finally ripped into two barely connected slices. It wasn't quite as exciting as I had expected. I guess I have seen too many special effects on crime scene television shows, but it looked kind of plain. It was still a brain, and that was pretty cool, but it was smoother than I had expected. The ridges were a lot less defined. I guess it's like that restaurant dish you have played up in your head for so long, and have waited a week to eat. You go around telling everybody about how great it is, and then you finally get there and it's just not what you expected.

"Goodbye, little fella," I said in my head as we tossed it into the trash can along with our plastic gloves.

We cleaned our tools, left them to dry, and walked home. I greeted Shelly and walked to the kitchen and opened the fridge. I reached for a double bottle of red wine that sat comfortably next to a half rack of baby back ribs.



Artwork by Haley White-Ballowe

THE JACKET

By Aj Gustern

There are some days I get awfully down on myself. It's probably on one of those lazy, rainy Sundays where you spend the whole day inside doing practically nothing. It's days like these that I sit under a tree and drag on my cigarette. I love the rain—don't get me wrong. It's just that rain has a tendency to erode my thoughts and expose buried memories. When the barriers in my head fall, others erect themselves and take their place. It could be a closed door or a just a look I have in my eyes. People don't knock on a house with shutters on the windows. They wouldn't hear me over the rain and thunder anyway. I'd speak and try to tell them what is going on in my head, but what pours out of my mouth they wouldn't understand. There is only one person I knew who could speak in raindrops, but she joined the clouds a long time ago. The drops would pour and pour, and we'd sit in the car and just pour into one another. We'd laugh or we'd cry. She'd smoke and I'd cough. It didn't matter. Nobody could see us through the rain anyway.

After the day drags on, and the moon has settled in the sky, night is when my memories are bare and have had time to breathe.

This is the time when I begin to chain smoke. The soft glow of the cigarette burning floats in the night like a specter. The smoke climbs the air up through my nose and I try to suffocate the reanimated memories. But the memories thrive in the smog. I know this. I always have. I always will.

A flick and a fall.

The little flame drifts down onto my jacket. It burns for a moment, then fizzles and dies. The jacket is unscathed. The jacket is tough!

After what this jacket has been through, a little cigarette cherry isn't going to do any harm. It just smells like cigarette smoke now. But that's okay because it always has. The smoke has stained this jacket, has lingered a long many years. Even when I found it buried away in my mother's old clothing, smelling like mildew and another era, the smell of smoke still stuck.

This jacket was hers, after all.

It's military green with four pockets, two on each side. It has thick bold buttons and no zipper on it. There are straps on the wrists and shoulders that you can button (though you'd look fairly silly if you walked around without them buttoned). It's very long and extends past my waistline. There are four pins on the upper pockets on each side. On one pin sits The Walrus himself, accompanied by a smaller button next to it, which reads simply "love rocks." I found it fitting because not only did The Egg Man love, but he also rocked—hard—both things she would have approved of. I know this because this was her button. When I found this jacket, Mr. Lennon's grinning face sat there alone over the left breast pocket.

"Come on kid. Pick me up. I'm bored of sitting here under these old clothes and rubbish."

So I humored the old Brit, and I did.

The jacket emanates a foreign aura. Maybe pulled from a time machine or off of some murdered foreigner. Clue to the jacket's origin can be found on the patches sewn onto it. On the right sleeve, the bright red star of the Soviets sits with the hammer and sickle engraved onto its guts. On the back sits the insignia of a corporal from a former enemy's army. I still don't know what the writing on the back says, which means I still don't know anybody who speaks Russian. That's not important, though. The jacket as a whole is what really sends the message. You can tell it has a soul.

Her soul.

The true origin of the jacket is somewhere in Russia. I never got the chance to ask my mother about it. From what my family has told me, in 1986 she decided to get away from the land of the free and really see how the other half lives. So she went to Russia. It was nearly the end of the cold war and she decided to visit the Communists to see if they really were as bad as her country had said. She was eighteen when she decided to make this journey. Like her, I made my own foreign pilgrimage at the same age. I didn't go to the Middle East to see where our "enemies" come from. No, no. I decided I wanted to see where I come from, so, sonotravatonel Italia (that means I traveled in Italy). They were our "enemies" before the Soviets; I thought it would be an ideal place to live for a while. I traveled all across Europe, from Munich to Dublin. Like her I learned that people are people, no matter where you go. However, unlike her, I didn't bring back a relic from a lost era. On the flight back, my mother had to remove the Communist insignias and re-stitch them back on or they would have been confiscated.

This jacket represents the both of us. The both of us suffered from clinical depression, as I still do today. Both of us were wounded by our parents. Both of us have brown eyes and black hair, and I feel like both of us were born at the wrong time. Both of us were infatuated with the sixties. The history, the political tension, the style, the people, the movements, the pure free energy that existed then that doesn't today just simply fascinates me. I feel like I should have been with the flower children in this jacket, fighting for something, even if it did fade to nothing in the end. The counter-culture's revolution is over, and my dream of a bohemian lifestyle died before I even drew breath in this world. I look at myself now, and can't figure out how the hell I got here. My dad certainly isn't the type to wear tie-dye. He's a suit. It's what he's good at. He also is the one who raised me for just about as long as I can coherently remember.

Most people are scared of spiders, but it's TV screens and magazines that scare me. I can't talk to anyone about it.

Which is why this freaks me out.

When I'm walking around in the rain and I see my reflection in a puddle, I wonder why I see her instead of him. I look at myself and see a monument to the flower children. I see a person who doesn't like what's put in front of him. Most people are scared of spiders, but it's TV screens and magazines that scare me. I can't talk to anyone about it. I try to send her messages in balloons on Christmas and her birthday. I listen for

her in my dreams, but I rarely dream at night and I've only seen her once. I can't ever sleep. So I try to keep the dream alive, this dream of escaping the veil of raindrops. I just don't know if it is even a dream she shared with me. She went through college. She got her degree and worked as a social worker. She was a mender of young souls, a broken heart sewing together the pieces of broken children. The ones she couldn't help bore heavy on her heart. Case after case the weight grew stronger. She had her own demons she hadn't killed yet, and her career was helping people too young to understand their own monsters.

Most of all
I just wonder
what my life would be like
if I would have been able
to say goodbye.

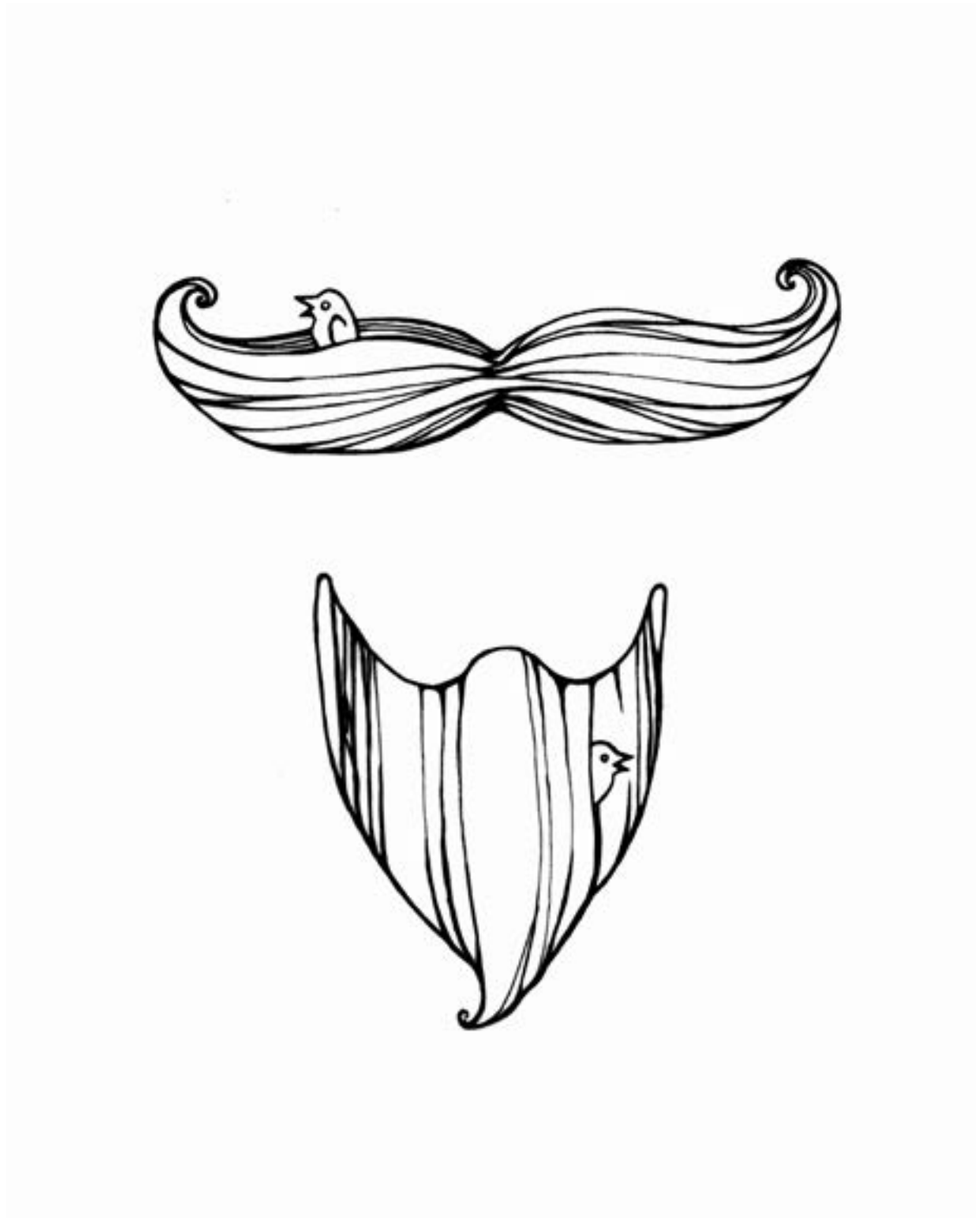
Everybody has their limits. The only ones who truly know where the edge is are the ones who have gone over it. She was one of those people. I remember only bits and pieces of the morning. I remember waking up and getting ready for school that day. I remember not being able to wake her up. I remember her boyfriend giving her CPR, then the paramedics when they arrived. I remember a prayer I sent to god in exchange for her life, my first and my last. I remember curling up into a ball in a blanket on my bathroom floor. I remember waiting to hear her voice from her room below in the basement, and I remember how I felt when I saw them wheel her out of my house covered in a tattered bloody cloth. The depths of the endless darkness I felt are indescribable. I became a thunderstorm, raindrops falling from my eyeballs and thunder from my mouth.

I remember the night before. How we had fought over a dog. I remember lying in bed pretending to be asleep. She comes over and kisses me on the head and tells me she loves me. I said nothing.

No goodbyes, no closure. That's what hurts the most. When you're ten years old it's already hard to make sense of the world. To this day when I think of her all I remember is thunderstorms and cigarettes. I wonder what my mom and I would be like together if she hadn't died. Every time I sit in the dark of night or in a storm smoking alone, I think of all the times she probably did the same thing. I wonder if she used to smoke alone in the rain like I do before she had me.

Most of all I just wonder what my life would be like if I would have been able to say goodbye, because now closure with people who leave me is an absolute necessity. If somebody drops out of my life and doesn't say a proper goodbye I panic. The pain of that day comes back to me. I feel alone. I feel sick, like I have a swarm of locusts in my belly. My mind hums and buzzes about these things in my past. But compared to some people, I like to think I've gotten off fairly easy. Not without scars, that's for sure. At the end of the day, I know I can always cleanse my mind's wounds with a cigarette and a thunderstorm, and this jacket will always be at my back to protect me from the lightning and rain.

Artwork by Dylan Begneaud



Artwork by Cassidy Robison

FACIAL HAIR CLUB FOR MEN

By Sam Klomhaus

The first primitive man trudges out of his cave to greet the new day. Sunlight pours forth from the heavens like the most glorious pitcher of orange juice. His wife's nagging voice rings in his head as he surveys his kingdom. The area around his loincloth itches. He tugs on it. He needs to convince his wife to do laundry. Perhaps later. She's in one of those moods. He picks up his club and walks into the wilderness. A fly lands on his chin. He smacks himself in the face in a futile attempt to kill the damned thing. A new sensation on his face startles him. His face feels scratchy like sandpaper, only sandpaper hasn't been invented yet. He runs down to the creek to examine the new development on his face. He sees in his reflection a myriad of black dots surrounding his mouth. What witchcraft is this? He has been cursed! What foul abomination has he become?

Beards have been around for quite a long time, and we men have always been fascinated with them. Peach-fuzzed high school students and grizzled lumberjacks and all varieties of man in between constantly experiment with facial hair. There are many theories concerning this fascination, none of which is being explored by the scientific community. The majority of scientists don't

have beards. The fascination could be due to a survival property beards once held, like warmth. Vanity is another possible explanation. There are few greater feelings than being mistaken for a twenty four year-old, then explaining that you are in fact nineteen. Also, it's great fun to walk by baby-faced fools on the street and imagine the envy for your beard that consumes them at that moment. I imagine it's a similar feeling to the one girls get when they pass a less attractive girl on the street. That's just speculation, for I confess my knowledge of how girls think is limited. In all honesty, the cause of this fixation is probably the fact that beards make us feel like men, and there are fewer opportunities for that every day.

I myself sport a goatee. While not as rugged as a full beard, my goatee is a perfectly serviceable alternative. It started out as a full beard. I was on vacation, and as a rule, I never shave while on vacation. If I wanted to do things that bothered me, I would stay home and not go on vacation. All good things must come to an end though, and I returned home from my vacation knowing that I would have to shave. I shaved everything but the goatee because I wanted to see how it looked. Lo and behold, it looked pretty good. So I kept it. My goatee and I have been together since July, and we could not be happier together.

Not everyone is as happy about facial hair as I am. The burgeoning "metrosexual" movement and things like "waxing" are decimating the beard ranks across the nation. With the exception of Brad Pitt's recent growth and Zach Galifianakis's majestic chin-blanket there aren't many beards to be found among celebrities. Also, many men feel that it is more difficult to get a job when sporting a bit of facial hair. They imagine employers will find it "unprofessional." What these men fail to realize is that a beard projects confidence. Legions of great men, including Sean Connery, Ernest Hemingway, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln, and Chuck Norris all have, or had when they were alive, beards. The tide has begun to turn against that stigma, and the group responsible is as unlikely a group to be involved in meaningful social change as you can find: hipsters. When hipsters aren't skulking around dirty little coffee shops or whining about "mainstream" things, they have been busy growing beards. I hate hipsters, but one thing that those tight-pants-wearing little cretins have been good for is bringing the beard back, and that's fine by me.

Legions of great men, including Sean Connery, Ernest Hemingway, Confucius, Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln, and Chuck Norris all have, or had when they were alive, beards.

Another group busy bringing the beard back to its rightful place at the forefront of our consciousness (and our faces) is the brave men who compete in the World Beard and Moustache Championships. The World Beard and Moustache Championships are held every two years in a different city. They compete in a variety of categories, including but not limited to Natural Full Beard, Natural Moustache, Natural Goatee, Musketeer, Sideburns, Amish Beard, and "Freestyle."

The first World Beard and Moustache Championships were held in Germany in 1990. The Championships didn't start garnering real attention until the 2007 competition, held in England. Since then, there has been a steady rise in popularity though the 2009 competition in Alaska and the 2011 competition in Norway. The next competition is scheduled to take place in Germany in 2013. With the upcoming competition, half of the competitions will have taken place in Germany, and the vast majority have taken place in Northern Europe. The United States has hosted only twice, in 2003 and 2009.

The World Beard and Moustache Championships are governed by a set of rules as unique as the competition itself. A panel of seven beard experts judges the beards. They score the beards on a scale of 5-10 with half-points possible. The judges can only use the numbers 10, 9.5, and 9 once per category, effectively ranking their first, second and third choices in the competition. The highest and lowest scores of each beard are not included in their overall scores. The positions must be clear to the judges, and if a tie occurs there is a second vote. Any arguing with the judges results in a disqualification, though it seems to me if you argue with the judges you aren't in a position to win anyway.

Most of these rules seem logical, but some of them have me so confused the room just started spinning. You get five free points just for entering the competition and showing your beard to the world. Why they didn't just make a 1-5 scale with ½ increments or a 1-10 scale is beyond me. I can't decide if this rule is fantastic and hilarious or wimpy like those participation trophies kids get in tee-ball that make the uncoordinated ones feel like winners. The rule that ranks each judge's first, second, and third choices eliminates indecisiveness, which might sometimes be a good thing. The aim of the rule that eliminates the highest and lowest scores for every contestant was probably to eliminate

outliers and get a clearer picture of what the judging panel as a whole thought of the beard, but that doesn't make it any less stupid. This rule renders the opinions of two judges moot, so why not just have five judges and not seven? Just like every beard should have a fair chance before the judges, every judge should have a fair chance to judge the beards. If it's an issue of fairness, they should institute a more thorough vetting process for the judges. This rule isn't fair to anybody.

Every contestant gets a participation certificate. I would usually be mad about this because I am against telling everyone that they are a winner even though some are and some aren't. It gives them false hope. If your talent isn't bearding (the word used in the competition for beard growing) then you should be told that so you can go find your real talent. I'm not opposed in this circumstance because having one of those certificates would be the greatest conversation starter of all time. The first thought that went through my mind when I found out about the certificates was "I have to have one." I don't know if this reflects more on me or the World Beard and Moustache Championships.

The first thought that went through my mind when I found out about the certificates was, "I have to have one."

The event that is most associated with the World Beard and Moustache Championships is the Natural Full Beard competition. The description for the Natural Full Beard competition on the website for the World Beard and Moustache Championships (worldbeardchampionships.com/full-beard-natural-2011/) is as follows:

"This is it! The Marathon, the main event, the real McCoy, the Superbowl. No 'tips pointed upward,' nothing narrow and pointed, just who has the best beard! Length is important, but isn't everything. Mass, density, shape, color, and overall impression all count. This category always draws the largest number of contestants and the most heated competition."

I was so fired up after reading that paragraph that I went out and didn't shave for like two days. The Full Beard Natural is taken very seriously at the World Beard and Moustache Championships.

The reigning Full Beard Natural champion of the world is a man named Rooty Lundvall. Rooty competes for an American team (yes there are bearding teams) called The Whisker Club. An air of controversy surrounded Rooty's victory. One of the judges on the Full Beard Natural panel, Dan Sederowski, belongs to the very same Whisker Club as Rooty Lundvall. This

ruffled the feathers of (former) two-time defending world Full Beard Natural champion Jack Passion. Jack competes for a team called Beard Team USA and is known to be a bit of a prima donna. All negative personality traits aside, Jack Passion is the best chance the World Beard and Moustache Championships have of gaining some real notoriety.

A recent documentary called "Mansome" prominently featured Passion in its segment about beards. Also, the Independent Film Channel is producing a reality show about Passion and the rest of Beard Team USA called *Whisker Wars*. The first season of *Whisker Wars* received moderate to negative reviews (mostly from clean-shaven reviewers). A second season has been announced. The show focuses on the personal lives of Beard Team USA, where the drama is more outrageous than the lengths of the featured beards. One storyline involves Jack Passion and his quest to defend his world Full Beard Natural title (The show was filmed before he was dethroned by Rooty Lundvall). Another revolves around Beard Team USA "Captain" Phil Olsen and all manner of power struggles surrounding him. Phil very much enjoys being the boss of everyone (much like all of us enjoy being the boss of everyone).

Perhaps these men in the beard-growing competitions are a little exuberant, but at least they don't have cucumbers over their eyes.

Those portrayed in *Whisker Wars* and their fellow competitors in the World Beard and Moustache championships would have us believe that there is a beard renaissance of sorts sweeping the nation, but that simply doesn't ring true. The beard does not hold as much sway in American culture as it once did. The metrosexual movement has been killing the masculinity of American males from coast to coast. I don't have the time or the attention span to spend fifty pages defending this thesis, so you're just going to have to take my word for it. The reason for the derision and frowning-upon competitions like the World Beard and Moustache Championships is these movements. Someone should inform the poor misguided souls who frown upon beards that you don't have to go to the same spa as your girlfriend and get the same treatments as her. Perhaps these men in the beard-growing competitions are a little exuberant but at least they don't have cucumbers over their eyes. A man's dignity is a hefty price to pay for the removal of a few aging lines.

The competitors might be a little vain but so is nearly every celebrity and we practically worship celebrities as gods. The

World Beard and Moustache Championships are a place where men can be men, and it seems the number of those places is shrinking nowadays. There certainly are folks out there who will look down upon this competition and these competitors. These people are haters with nothing to do but deride others as a coping mechanism for their own failed dreams. They will continue to hate. And these men will continue to grow their facial hair to massive lengths and volumes. I, for one, sleep better at night knowing that all these proud bearded men are out there keeping the baby-faced fools in their places.

Photo by Ryan Matthew Long

Artwork by Meigan Canfield

STEEL

By Kathleen Childs

No one's ever asked what it's like to remember, but if they did, I'd probably tell them that it doesn't hurt anymore—all I'm left with is residual terror. Every action is suspect, and each word echoes extra meanings in my head until I'm deafened to intent. I blink and shift my weight into my hips. I swallow my voice. When it comes up, I can stay here for days. No one knows I've left.

I can't do this. At 11:59 a lethargic ache sits behind my forehead as I pace small circles in my apartment. The lights are all on. The nice girl across the complex probably hates me for it. I can't fucking do this. The tangerine in my hand numbs my thumbs and index fingers as I separate each of the twelve sections. They're too cold to taste. The back of my throat feels sour and the membranes are rubbery between my teeth and I'm not getting any more words on the page. Just writing that introduction was a transgression, and I've not even explained what's going on yet. I don't know if I'm even going to get that far. Catharsis through confession seems a long way away. I can't

keep running though. Tonight, I'm not hiding in the overloaded academic words I normally use to keep the measure comfortably distant. Foils ready I guess.

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It's not that words are stronger than swords—they're steel themselves. They flex and whip through the air searching for their marks. I'll never be a master fencer, but self-defense is paramount. We follow old rules so the scratches don't go too deep. We practice and study. We make it a game. Sometimes we forget we're playing. Me? I keep score.

Each discussion is a secret phrase d'armes. I know that you know. Everyone knows. Wait, you don't, do you? A passé. I'm on the offensive now. How far is it safe for me to go? I can't overextend. You have to have guessed. The bout ends without me being touched. I admonish myself for worrying, but I still play by the rules. If I didn't, you'd be free to run me through, and the right of way wouldn't matter. You might anyway. The names they read on Sunday attest that it might happen just that literally. I didn't go to pay my respects. Those ceremonies are depressing as hell anyway.

"There's nothing I want to write less than a coming out story." It's an invitation. I'm probing, waiting for his counter. He plays cautious though. He tells me artistry can compensate for the cliché. It looks like a direct, but I'm smarter than that. The coffee I'm drinking makes me jittery, and as I bring it to my lips I glise. "Silence being death is one thing, but culture demands those kind of narratives. As soon as we tell them though, they overwhelm the rest of our identities. There's nothing left but the story." The ploy doesn't give me any leverage. He nods in agreement. He smiles gently and tells me exactly what I need to hear. "There's no one right road here. Just like gender." Shit. I left myself exposed. Gender's too big of a word though. I don't know how badly I'm bleeding. He's probably talking more Simone de Beauvoir than Judith Butler, but it doesn't matter. The word pricks. I tell myself these mal-parries are rare. He's giving me an opportunity to learn. Instead of saluting, I step out the door into the bright gray light and am instantly anonymous.

Pommeling like this strains my wrists and makes my actions imprecise. Going corps-à-corps isn't a foil technique, but sometimes it's necessary.

Keeping my guard up like this is exhausting, but I'm still in control. I'm still in control, and people are judging me on the things I'm presenting them alone. Walking north, I notice myself slouching as a group of men's eyes pass my way. I straighten my back and feel my hips pivot as I walk a little faster. Nothing to see here. I'm just playing the game. I can feel the one in the middle's gaze trail down my back as I walk by. The afternoon sun is hot, and I shiver under my jacket. I have to stay in control. I need to be ready the next time I step onto the piste.

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I step onto the ancient linoleum of our kitchen at 12:15. The chill's spread up from my fingers into my spine. The sliding glass doors in the living room let all the heat out. I cup my hand to the faucet and take a sip of water. The winter melt-off is steel in my mouth. Swallowing, I shuffle into my room and collapse into the chair in front of my keyboard. I'm still keeping too distant. Pommeling like this strains my wrists and makes my action imprecise. Going corps-à-corps isn't a foil technique, but sometimes it's necessary.

No fucking way. That ends with me pressed against a steel railing and an arm on either side of my head, or a hand on my chin, pinning it to my shoulder before I can even draw. He doesn't have time for ritualized mock-combat. He's direct, with martial confidence. His eyes trace up and down my neck, looking for something, and I don't know what. As I look over my shoulder to the sea of gyrating bodies on the dance floor below us, I can tell I've been chased into a corner. He lets me go, and I hold my breath to not smell his, which is somehow hotter and stickier than the club's neon air. The railing comes halfway up my back. If I lean back anymore I'd fall. My hands are behind my back, and his legs keep mine pinned. As he forces a kiss, I push his nose aside with mine. Rebuffed, he moves in again and I whisper, sweet enough to curdle milk, that I can't. I'm designated driver. I have to take my roommate home. I'm so sorry. I give him a fake number and all but run to where she and her girlfriend are dancing a few feet away. Of course they're going home together, but a few minutes later they walk me out the door and I'm shivering with the heat at full blast, seventy miles an hour on Highway 36.

I pour over snippets of banter for the moment he broke the rules. "So are you a boy or a girl?" Identity is loose and personal spaces come at a premium at the club. Shirtless bartenders serve fluorescent drinks with strawberries skewered on the straws and disaffected butch girls sip both whiskey and cigarettes outside. Everyone has a good time. It's safe. He seemed playful, so I responded in kind. "I'm a girl, why, what are you? I should have known – no. You're better than that Leena. "Me too." I smirked. "Yeah, I'll bet." He moved closer. They're gonna ask me why I didn't get their attention. What I was fucking wearing. "Hah, just kidding." "Are you sure? You could be if you wanted." A few measures of music later, before I could decide whether or not it was okay his right hand was on my left hip he made his move.

"So are you a boy or a girl?"

On the highway, my left ear rings loud enough to drown out the grooves in the road. I knew this was the way the men and women work but I still wasn't prepared. I wasn't prepared, and this wasn't the place I was supposed to worry. The road stretches on and on as disembodied cream headlights pass around me. The rules were probably already broken the moment he approached you. At home I pour vodka down my throat to disinfect my wounds. At least it didn't go any further. I nod at the copy of *From Margins to Center* lying under the old laptop speakers in my closet. I guessed he proved me right.

"Hey baby." My head spins instinctually over my right shoulder to a call across the street. Bad move. You're not supposed to look at them. He knows you heard him now. I press on. "What? You don't speak?" I cross my arms and clutch my waist. Keep moving. His buddy chides him. My chucks and military jacket don't mean anything. "Nah," he laughs "I seen them titties."

My desires don't matter, and when it comes to my body, they never have. I learned the footwork first, navigating the constantly shifting landscape of expectation and identity before I worried about stance or grip. Stand up straight. Stay balanced. It's about going with the flow at first. I advanced evenly, lightly. Mastered disengages before worrying about attacks. Better to deny dialogue than open new lines of attack. You win if they hurt you less. Move forward with stutter steps, light on the toes

so you can retreat if you need. Moving the foil is about momentum and direction more than force.

It makes me run hot and cold. It makes me shrink from conflict. When I'm comfortable, when I have the right opponent, it's almost beautiful. The bouts are playful, with the kind of flashy engagement, balestras, flèches, that make me seem like a swashbuckling hero. It's energizing, exhilarating, addictive even. If I get cut a little, I can still walk home feeling good about myself. That ends as soon as the safety ends. Dueling dry, or worse without a referee, risks ugly, dirty play. This is everyday combat though. I can't presume to afford those luxuries.

It could happen at any time, and anyone could be my opponent. I toss a quick glance around the room, as superstitiously as I can muster. I probably stiffen a little as I do it, but it's a relatively safe right now. We're between matches – no one looks threatening right now. Even so, I can find myself en garde at a moment's notice. Someone else makes eye contact and I force a reflexive smile. Tonight I don't risk genuine contact, and my lips relax as they look away. I just want to stay safe. All I can muster is to follow the rules.

I constantly analyze my play, looking for where my defense leaves me vulnerable, seizing on the weakness of my advances, choosing engagements carefully. I have to tear down every fault. I tell myself that is what keeps me safe, what keeps me in control. I lose myself in constant replays, dissecting frame by frame what I should do better next time, and each inopportune gesture cuts through the air with a steel whip. I glare in cold satisfaction as I reprimand myself. I was lucky this time, they let me get away with it. Next time I could fuck up worse. Next time they'll seize on my faults, or bring a sharpened tip. Next time I might find it's my turn to lose when the stakes are at their highest.

My toes announce their continued presence by biting a little. Sitting on my heels keeps the rest of the foot warm. The chair's not meant to do this, and the way I've folded myself in the seat pulls on my knees. It's not really a great way forward. Even when I'm giving up my secrets, I do it at a distance, substituting

air for steel. Emotion over substance. When the truth trickles out, it comes out in little low line flicks. That's the way it goes. It's mostly anticipation. The actual swordplay is over in moments, and as loath as I am to admit it, relatively painless.

It's not easy though, to put the sword down, to take the mask off. I can't escape my suspicion any more than I can escape the ringing in my ears. I haven't made a friend of terror, and I probably never will, but maybe, someday I might understand it. When I find myself visiting, the best I can do is draw my foil, extend my forearm, touch my left hand above my ear for luck, and shift my weight across my feet. Who knows how long I'll be staying.

Prêt?

Allez.

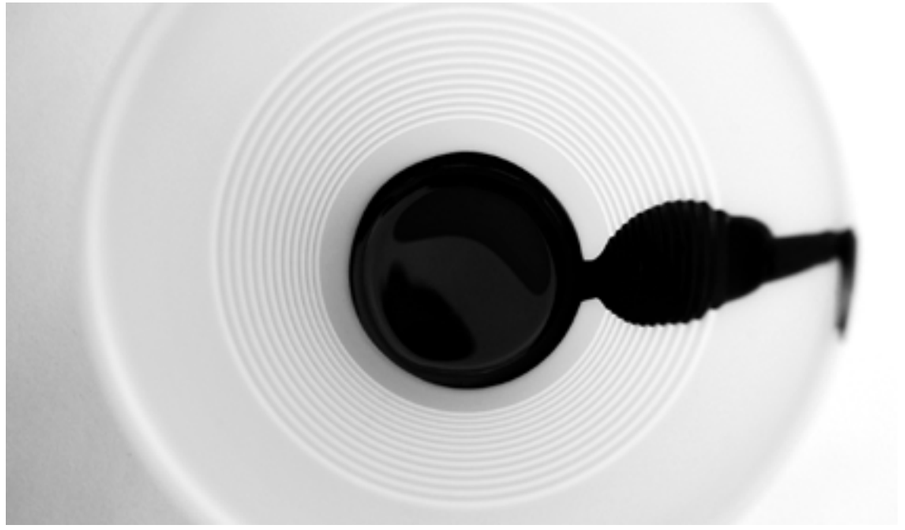


Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

CURTAINS

By Mariah Hermsmeyer

I can still feel his hand. I can still trace my gaze from outside that moving train down to his arm, to my chest, to his face. Dark, mud-colored skin greasy with sweat, small beady black eyes glossed over with a yellow glaze, plump fat lips so large that the bottom one folds over itself, exposing the slimy pale pink inside drenched with saliva. And then those cheeks—those bulbous cheeks. Of all the body parts to be so distorted and hideous, they had to be his cheeks.

He came up behind me and smiled. I thought he was only admiring the view like I was, so I politely smiled back and looked away. He began to speak, but I couldn't understand his language. He came closer—closer than he needed to. He wanted to show me something and pointed his arm out the door, trying to get me to look for it. His arm rested against my body, but I excused it because of the close quarters. I looked out in the direction he was pointing, but there were only the monotonous flashes of crumpled stone buildings and swarms of people flying by—nothing that stood out. He kept pointing, eagerly flapping

his arm. I could make out some broken English, the word "lake," so I looked harder—maybe there was something in the fields approaching. Then he retracted his arm, slowly grazing his hand across my chest, and I suddenly knew there was no lake.

I sat down in a seat at the back of the bus. There had only been one other person on the lower deck until he got on. He was headed to the stairs when I accidentally made eye contact and smiled. Stupid small town girl. He stopped to smile back and changed his course towards me. His bleached white teeth shot out in contrast to his dark brown skin and dark leather jacket.

I shouldn't have smiled. I shouldn't have looked up. He wasn't alone.

He took the seat next to mine, beaming and fixing his gaze upon me. Then the six or seven men that came in behind him—large glum-faced giants—took the seats in front and behind the both of us. I found myself surrounded. Alone. Without a map. Without a phone.

"Where you headed, blondie?"

I found myself surrounded. Alone. Without a map. Without a phone. "Where you headed, blondie?"

I didn't believe what was happening at first. I thought it was an accident—the train was unsteady. But when he did it the second time, I understood. I froze, unsure how to react. I wanted to turn and run, but only the blur of tracks and rice fields remained behind me. If I screamed, he could push. If I tried to get away, he could use both hands. So I just stood there, waiting. Waiting for him to reposition himself in a turn for me to rush by.

When it finally came, I turned to run, smiling innocently like I hadn't caught on, when he used both hands. They cupped my breasts, and as I continued to force my way from under his body that had been squeezed up against mine, his index finger made one last trace from the peak of my chest to the pit of my stomach, like a surgeon slicing into my innards. I took one final glace at his face, that disgusting face, but he glued his gaze to my body, his chest rising and falling. The only sounds I could hear

aside from the sirens in my head and the rumbling of the tracks were the nauseating cracks of phlegm through his heavy breaths. I quickly opened the door to my car and staggered like a drunkard into the dark narrow corridor back to my seat.

I had to answer—they might get aggressive if I didn't. "I'm meeting my brothers at a coffee shop." A lie—I'd just left them to go shopping. I noticed a man sitting next to me was handsome and well-dressed, a sculpted face with piercing eyes that petrified me in place, while the rest of the men were fat and ugly. Their swelling cheeks weighed down the corners of their mouths into grimaces, their heavy brows drooped over into permanent scowls casting a dark shadow over their dull black eyes.

I could tell there was nothing normal about this set up. The giants never spoke, never moved, never looked away from the two of us. They were no doubt his goons, and I his target. He kept asking questions—what was my name, where was I from. "Jane Lively—I'm from California." Both lies.

He wanted to find me on the internet, find me in California and come stay with me. He leaned in closer, his eyes surveying my body. He asked if I had a boyfriend, what kind of guys I liked. I just smiled and avoided the question while he listed off potentials. Then he said, "We like white girls."

My family sprawled out among the risers, the curtains to our dirty, dimly lit chamber still open. I silently melted into the corner of the lower bunk, wrapping my arms around my knees to hide my face in the darkness. I strongly wanted to cover myself—every inch of my body—so no one could see me. Could see that I was white, that my hair was fair, that I was a girl. I wanted to be like those women in distant lands that Americans pitied for having to cover themselves. I finally understood the appeal.

I couldn't say anything. There were still six hours on that train and it would only cause my parents to panic. Even if I did

confess, what could we do? Who could we tell? There's no such thing as justice for women here.

So I stayed silent, except to ask that the curtains be closed.

I responded as passively as I could. I tried to appear uninterested without being rude, and that I was expected somewhere and didn't have any money. We reached my stop but I knew not to get off. They would for sure follow me, and I didn't want to find out what they were like under the cover of night. He eventually became quiet and his friendly façade faded away. I saw him look at his goons and nod as the bus slowed to a stop. I held my breath, praying they'd just leave and not try to take me with them. As they all stood up in unison, the giants exiting first, he lingered in front of me and winked.

"See you later, blondie."

I sunk into my seat as the doors closed, relieved it was over, when I heard a tapping at my window. That sculpted, dark-skinned face with glowing white teeth grinned at me again as he ran alongside the bus, shouting and waving for nearly two blocks. His farewell felt like a threat and the street we were on was no longer safe. I couldn't go back the same way—I couldn't risk seeing them again. I finally got off the bus into the chaos of the unfamiliar city and got myself lost as I left the only road I knew. I wanted to buy a map, but every store I passed was manned by a greasy, bulbous-cheeked giant. I became faint and nauseous just at the sight of them now.

After hours of staggering through the streets, hiding in coffee shops and clothing stores when drunken men started to follow me, I finally found my way back to my hotel. As I climbed under the sheets of my bed, still shaking and disoriented, my brothers asked how my shopping trip was. I felt embarrassed for going out alone and barely being able to make it back, for being terrified when nothing actually happened, for thinking it would be safe. So once again, I lied.

"It was fine."

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

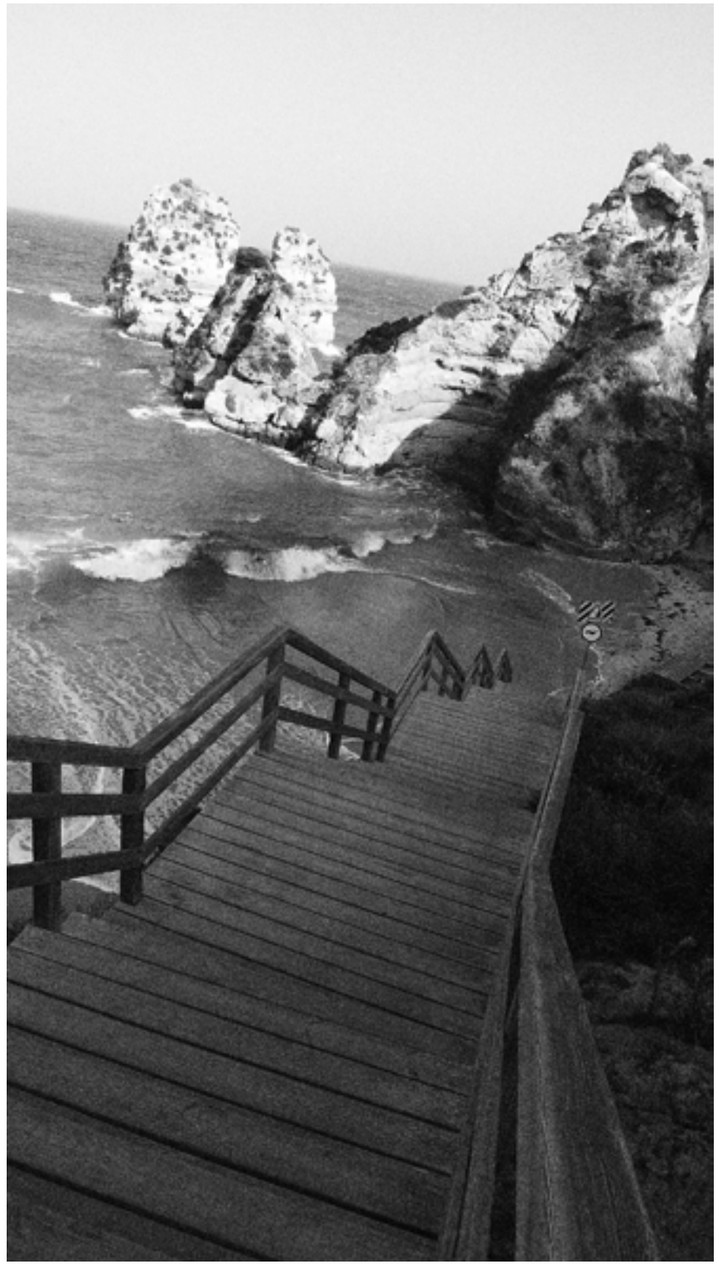


Photo by Bessie Stanisz

DRUNK WITH SUCCESS

By Abigail Nelson

It is a fairly small family, this family of in-your-face overachievers. They are doctors, lawyers, and chiefs of industry and commerce. They are writers, and inventors, and entrepreneurs. They are patent holders, and architects, and professors. They are big talkers with even larger opinions.

Seriously, what other family spends the better part of a holiday meal debating the relative merits of having been a Renaissance era painter versus a Victorian era poet in a surreal, often repeated but never duplicated version of the parlor game "Would You Rather?"
This family engages in that kind of thing.

As a child, one is lucky to ever get a word in edgewise. You sit and listen and learn. Not about football scores, or cooking, or fashion, the likes of which as a young kid I probably could have used on the playground, but about Joan of Arc, the Romans and the Greeks, Mesopotamia, and small gauge railroads and steam trains. You know—the kind of information that helps you get picked first for kickball teams.

Thank God, too, for the invention of the DVR and TiVo. Relatives run to the television at precisely 6:00 PM to sit in a crowded huddle as they watch Jeopardy with Alex Trebek, like a real-life scene pulled directly from the movie Rain Man. Amongst themselves, they create their own games within this game. Who got the most correct answers in a row, who swept the category, who answered first, who bet the most aggressively, who on the show was the bigger nerd, who on the show had the larger rear end, and did large rear ends affect the overall outcomes. Personal family statistics are kept and counted and frequently lorded over others.

Our family members expect only one tangible thing from those who share our blood. Find something you love or are passionate about and don't just be good at it–be great at it. It has never been a question of money or title or fame. It's a question of greatness, no matter what it is. Be great. Do not half-heartedly attempt anything. Follow through to completion. Stay the course.

So what, then, if you are the one member of the family who does not feel like you can measure up to the expectations? What if your passions aren't quite clear to you? What if you don't know, or simply don't know how?

He isn't just a garden variety good alcoholic–he is a great alcoholic.

This is my Uncle Tom. He is smart enough, but chose early on to excel only in alcoholism. He isn't just a garden variety good alcoholic–he is a great alcoholic. And in our family's typical fashion, he knows he is great at it and takes a twisted sort of pride at all he has managed to accomplish under the veil of booze. Luckily, my entire family loves to talk and always tells the truth no matter what, so I contacted him.

I asked him if we could discuss his struggles throughout the years.

"I know some of the legendary family stories, but I'd like to understand your perspective and hear them directly from you," the conversation began.

"Sure, Abigail, what do you want to know exactly?"

"When did you start drinking? What prompted you the first time, and what was it like for you?"

"That's easy. I was 11 or 12, which would make this the mid 1970's. It was your Aunt Barbara's First Holy Communion party at Granny and Pop's house in Connecticut. Brian Gorman, who lived next door, was there too, and we were always getting into some sort of trouble together. It used to drive your

Grandmother absolutely nuts, us running off all the time, sneaking down to the railroad tracks with stolen cigarettes, sneaking down to the beach to go clamming, never turning up for meals…you get the idea."

"At this party, Brian and I were hiding from all the parents down in the basement and found a stash of old Virginia Gentleman Bourbon and thought we had hit the lottery. The two of us got smashing drunk and it was only your Aunt Barbara who knew what we had done for a long time. I don't think anyone noticed we were gone or what we had done in all the party confusion."

"You didn't feel guilty or sick or hung-over?"

"No. In a weird way, I felt great."

"What do you mean by great?"

"I mean it was great, the feeling of not being yourself, of flying high. I enjoyed the feeling of not having a care in the world, of being in charge of your mood. It was just plain awesome. I thought it gave me power and self-awareness."

And so began Uncle Tom's slide down the slippery slope to alcoholism and perdition. He is currently 48. He lives by himself in the "man cave" basement of a crazy older woman who rents rooms to other half-crazed or damaged folks. He is divorced and is the father of three children. He hasn't worked in over two years and has spent countless years in and out of rehabilitation hospitals and clinics. He is dying from advanced liver disease and he is only saved from living on the streets out of the kindness of my grandfather, who is loath to let it "come to that."

We spoke again.

"What happens next, Uncle Tom?"

"Oh, it just evolves."

"Evolves how?"

"I drank through grade school, I drank through high school, and I drank through college. I drank enough to dull my emotions and pain. I drank enough sometimes to give me emotions. But, at least at that point I was still getting great grades, keeping my head above water, pulling the wool over everyone's eyes. Or that's how it felt to me, at least."

"Then what happened?"

"I got your Aunt Lara pregnant."

Lara is Tom's ex-wife.

"Then what?"

"I kept drinking. I wasn't the one pregnant, after all. I now had responsibilities I didn't really want in the first place. Marrying a woman I liked, sure, but loved? I don't think it was ever the case. Not sure to this day why she talked me into it. But your Aunt Lara embraced motherhood like a duck to water. She envisioned herself the grand dame of Greenwich [Connecticut], a PTA super hero, a volunteer at church, a matriarch, and the blessed mother. And she was told she was a martyr and a saint for putting up with me."

"Secretly, I think she ate it up. It was a joke, a sham, and we couldn't afford any part of it. She got pregnant two more times in quick succession. I now had three kids I couldn't afford and I drank because I had to. Our car was repossessed, our home was foreclosed on, and I ran away whenever I could to either rehab or work."

"Speaking of running away, what is the story about you and Canada? I never did get the complete version of that."

"Oh, those were good times." He laughs.

"Your grandfather gave us some money to rent an apartment, pay off some debts, buy into a hardware store in Maine, and put clothes and shoes on the kids, and food on the table."

"So what happened?"

"I wanted no part of that, either. I knew your Aunt Lara would use the money for sensible stuff and keep some hidden from me, so I drained the bank accounts and took the one car we had left and drove to Newfoundland in Canada to buy a boat and sail into the future with no strings attached. I almost made it, but I foolishly used a credit card instead of cash and they tracked me down and dragged me back."

He laughs again.

"They kept muttering about responsibilities and needing the car for school pick up. Spare me. I drank some more."

"Then what?"

"Well, they sent me off to another stint in rehab. Fat lot of good those places do. They detox you, dope you up with other drugs, and turn you into a walking, talking zombie. It's a tradeoff on so many levels. They make you take Acamprosate, Naltrexone, or Disulfiram to deter you from drinking once you are dried out. Then they load you up with Xanax, Klonopin or Ativan."

"Anything to mute the anxiety from not drinking. And then for good measure they top you off with Seroquel, in case you

"Sobriety is seriously overrated, Abigail. Think of some of the best alcoholics– Mickey Mantle, Winston Churchill, Edgar Allen Poe, Ulysses S. Grant, Ernest Hemingway . . . on and on. It's a fine club."

have mood disorders too. All this does is trade one set of effects for others. It's a big waste of time. I feel better with vodka, not Seroquel. I feel better with Bourbon, not Xanax. How about I have anxiety because I want to drink? How about I feel better when I do drink? I do not feel better taking that boat load of meds. It's everyone else who has a problem with my drinking. Not me."

"Was Seroquel the drug you were taking when you came to visit us in Denver and you almost burned our house down?"

"Yup, boy was your mom pissed!"

Not just my mom, really.

"You passed out making roast ducks and left her convection oven on 550 degrees for hours while you slept it off, and the fire department arrived because there was duck fat smoke pouring out of her house, and the central alarms were going off, right?"

"Got to tell ya, Abigail, I never did that with booze and that was a waste of some gorgeous ducks. I only ever did that kind of stuff on the damn drugs they make you take so you don't drink. What a joke. I'm safer to be around drunk, not drugged, trust me."

I asked, because I never really knew the answers and I knew they would come easily enough from this glib family of talkers, "Do you have any regrets about anything? Would you do anything differently? Did you ever really want to get sober and stay that way? Are you afraid of your liver disease?"

"Well, yes and no. I got three kids out of a marriage. That's good, I guess. They don't speak to me anymore, not as their father anyway, but they are each successful, do well in school and seem happy. I don't regret having them and no, I don't regret not being part of their lives. People tell me that they are better off when I am away from them. I suppose that is true. After all, I am a tad unpredictable."

Seriously? Unpredictable? Good one.

"What about the rest, Uncle Tom?"

"Sobriety is seriously overrated, Abigail. Think of some of the best alcoholics–Mickey Mantle, Winston Churchill, Edgar Allen Poe, Ulysses S. Grant, Ernest Hemingway…on and on. It's a fine club."

"But you have advanced liver failure. You will not live much longer. That doesn't leave you with regrets?"

"Are you kidding me? Not in the least. "It is what it is," as they say, and it was a fine trip to this point. I met great people, had an absolute blast. Frankly, I'm still having fun. They will have to drag me kicking and screaming to the pearly gates."

"Did your mom tell you about the Cuban girlfriend I now have whose husband left her with a yacht when he took off with the younger woman? She's a little old for me but we've been sailing…it's been grand."

I listened to his words carefully. "It's been grand." By my family's standards, Uncle Tom should be considered successful. He found a niche and made his mark. He is a legend in his own happy hour and absolutely the greatest alcoholic he can be. He is not unkind. A bit self-absorbed and singularly focused, but not unkind, and his family should be proud of his determination to be the best at something…anything. He chose something that he loved, followed his passion and saw it through to the end. The end may be perdition and ruin, but he pursued his alcoholism like any other career or ambition. Can't be more successful than that, right?

Photo by Dylan Begneaud

Artwork by Meigan Canfield

REQUIEM FOR A BABY SHOWER

By Allison Matney

"There it is, 14209," I say, pointing towards a cozy suburban home adorned with pastel pink balloons and streamers. As our SUV stumbles up the driveway, I lift a covered tin of carefully crafted cupcakes from my lap, hoping to avoid a domino effect inside. What worth would an authentic American baby shower have, after all, without its pristine mini cupcakes?

My sister sighs resignedly and gives me a lazy eye roll as she pulls her key from the ignition. "Two hours max," she warns, "and I'm out of here." I reply with an approving nod and we make for the open front door, dragging our feet all the while like stubborn five-year-olds at a grocery store.

Early birth rituals served as a forum for a transition of wisdom from old mothers to new, and as a celebration of welcoming new life into the family. The Greek ritual of Amphidromia included a sizable feast provided by familial guests, as well as a dance around the hearth as a symbol of an infant's integration to the brood.[1] Years of pregnant siblings and cousins

1 Rousselle, Robert, "Father Avoidant, Mother Dependent: the First Seven Yars in a Child's life in Classical Greece," *Journal of Psychohistory,* 33 (2205): n. page

and a healthy dose of cynicism, however, reminds my sister and I that wisdom and amusement don't hang around modern baby showers—unless you really enjoy guessing the girth of Mom's belly or find the latest acronym for your infant's optimal bowel movement insightful. Still, a loving sister-in-law would show the utmost enthusiasm at the prospect of a baby niece, so here we find ourselves, trekking into uneasy territory on a random October weekend.

The toasty air of the foyer compliments a rosy shade cast by the myriad decorations hanging on the walls and suspended from the ceiling. Pink tissue paper roses, pink flower centerpieces, wreaths made of rolled pink baby socks—all surrounding an immaculately dressed table with an endless array of pink mints, cookies, and other gourmet-looking treats. I quickly arrange my cupcakes on a flimsy plastic platter and clear an open space at the table's back corner. The turquoise frosting so mindfully swirled on each chocolate cake now looks like nothing more than an irritating interruption to the otherwise dainty display of traditional femininity.

A light tap on the shoulder prompts me to pivot and find my older brother's smirking face, his forest green T-shirt and stiff Army baseball cap clashing with surrounding soft pastels. Noticing the set of keys in his hand, I ask, "Where are you off to, proud dad-to-be?"

"The guys and I are going bowling for a few hours." He zips up a worn-in windbreaker and slides his hands into its pockets, digging for loose change at the bottom.

"Why do you men get to have all the fun?" I hear my sister scoff. My brother grins in her direction and shrugs his shoulders casually.

"Don't forget to sign the guestbook thing by the front door," he tells us with feigned enthusiasm, retreating a few paces. "It's really important, I guess."

I watch his figure disappear in the garage doorway and find my way through wisps of sweet perfume and pungent hairspray to the magenta book lying open on a folding table. An extensive guest list shows round signatures succeeding one another in perfectly straight lines, each name accompanied by a description of gifts purchased for the shower. Among the many, I see the versatile Bumbleride Flyer stroller, a posh crib sheet set from Pottery Barn, and the lifesaving (or so I hear) Diaper

The turquoise frosting so mindfully swirled on each chocolate cake now looks like nothing more than an irritating interruption to the otherwise dainty display of traditional femininity.

Genie Elite. I scrawl my name underneath a glamorous autograph and, in slightly smaller print, indicate my gift to the right. "Book—The Giving Tree," I write, and gratefully give the pen to the woman standing behind me.

Not until the 1950s did the tradition of "showering" a mother-to-be with gifts become a social standard. The baby shower as most know it, in all its gendered glory, arose in partnership with the surge of consumerism following the Second World War as a way to help alleviate financial burdens on the family.[2] While undoubtedly well intended, this emphasis on gifting all the items necessary for childcare, and then some, has paved the way for items to become essential to a modern woman's transition to motherhood.

I pop a square of cheese into my mouth just as the shower's host approaches me, arms open for a hug, her pink diamond cross necklace twinkling in the bath of autumn sunlight that drains in through wide windows.

"Thanks so much for being here today," she bubbles, handing me a sheet of paper and a pen. A shiny charm bracelet tinkles as she opens a manicured hand towards me. "We're starting our first game, so write down your best advice for our mom-to-be on here and we'll share it as a group in a few minutes." She scurries in the direction of another guest before I can respond, her strappy pink heels clacking against the floor as she restarts her welcome speech.

I find a spot on a worn leather couch beside my sister, both of us racking our minds for advice we have no authority to give. "How about this?" she whispers finally with a grin on her face. "If your baby starts crying, put it outside."

"Yes, write that," I laugh, and scrawl instead the one useful piece of information I retained from a half-hearted 6th grade babysitting class—"Never shake your baby."

The beaming expectant mother sits enthroned in a La-Z-Boy recliner surrounded by a moat of meticulously wrapped gifts, awaiting her sage advice and sacrifices of swaddles and pacifiers. "First and foremost, you'll need to pray," says a cozily plump woman from a folding chair next to the fireplace. A round of complacent "mm-hmms" fans through the room like a

2 Yalong, Bobby T, "Baby Shower: Its origin and worldwide practices," *Asian Journal* (2012): n. page.

score of devoted bystanders insisting on the wave at a basketball game.

"Make sure you follow the 5 S's when the baby is upset," says a younger lady sitting just beside. "I would have literally died without them."

"At the end of the day," says an assured voice to my right, "God has you in his hands. Let his light guide you through the hard times."

"What does that even mean?" my sister's voice faintly whispers in my left ear. I press my spine through the sofa, hoping not to be cold-called like in a ninth-grade science class.

"Presents!" yells a messy-haired little girl to my relief. She points impatiently to the catalog-ready bags at the foot of the recliner and polite laughter trickles from one rouged mouth to the next. My ebullient sister-in-law picks up the nearest bag, illustrated with an ark full of exotic animals, its handles tied together with a satin pink bow.

"This is so cute!" She lifts the bag up for the party to see, displaying it like a work of modern art. A chorus of melismatic "awws" cues the flash of anonymous cameras as thirty-some women's gazes lock for the moment on a mass-produced plastic bag. The synchronized rhythm of female voices continues through each onesie, teething ring, and children's book to follow.

The synchronized rhythm of female voices continues through each onesie, teething ring, and children's book to follow.

The traditional baby shower strives to maintain a sense of community amongst women, to create a realm in which, even if only for a few hours, females can relate and connect on a personal level[3]. Perhaps a noble concept for past eras in which women found little refuge under the laws of their male counterparts, the occasion has inevitably become a modern day masquerade of materialism and empty compliments, one which often demands the willing suppression of one's individuality as a human being in the name of an obsolete Stepford-like disposition.

By the time the gift session approaches its end, party guests with painted smiles start funneling out of the house. I study the remaining women around me, their legs crossed and hands in their laps, lacking nothing but a hot cup of tea and extended pinky fingers. Their docile temperaments seem too polished to be real, and I imagine they will drive home later, drop

3 Fischer, Eileen, and Brenda Gainer, "Baby Showers: A Rite of Passage in Transition," *Advances in Consumer Research* 20 (1993): 320-324

their shoes by the door, stash trendy coats in stuffed closets, and peel off their masks of vacuous enthusiasm and "aww" struck eyes in exchange for pajamas and a level head. I smile at the thought as my sister comes into focus, bundled in a navy blue scarf and jingling her keys impatiently in front of my view.

"Two hours," she mouths, nodding her head to the left towards our dozing car outside. I stand up and grab my own jacket from a hook on the wall, then pick out two mini turquoise cupcakes for the ride.

Artwork by Meigan Canfield

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

ALGO ES ALGO, MENOS ES NADA

By Cassie Beck

¡No hay más! There's nothing left! Hands reach into the truck in attempts to find more. More toys, more clothes, more anything. ¡No Hay Más! We're screaming now, as if the reason people keep looking is because they can't hear us. My feet dig deeper into the base of the truck, allowing me to stand my ground. Countless glares of Panamanian mothers penetrate my skin while babies cry in their arms. They don't want toys, I want to scream, they want you. Even my thoughts are drowned out by the chaos.

When we arrived here, our truck was overflowing with things: Plastic cars, Polly Pockets, Beanie Babies, Barbies; there was enough to supply a small town. Somehow we are now standing in the absence of it all. Empty white plastic bags escape the back of the pick-up truck and float to the ground, creating a contrast to the dull dirt. Without toys weighing them down, they flutter freely in the wind, passing by anguished parents tugging at the heads of dolls as if they're the five-year-olds fighting for them.

I try to discern what people are saying amidst the disorder. One man violently waves his hands towards a toy car hiding in a young boy's palm. I can only tell he's talking because his mouth is moving. I wanted that car, he must be saying. Then his eyes direct me downward to the toy in his own hands. It resembles the young boy's toy except for the missing back wheel, which takes me several seconds to notice. The look of desperation he gives me next says everything I couldn't understand. He is looking up at me as if I have the solution, but I have nothing. The toys are gone. I can't give this man a better car for his son; the only thing he can do is be happy with what he has. But how do I tell him this? Looking down from the truck, I shrug my shoulders and shake my head slightly. "No hay más."

Dos Semanas Antes

Nutre Hogar. Two weeks before—the sign stares me in the face as I exit the taxi. This must be it. It's been six months since I signed up for this service trip to Santiago, Panama and ever since all I have heard about from my Spanish teacher, Mrs. Morse, is Nutre Hogar.

"You'll just fall in love with the children. It's the experience of a lifetime. It really is."

Nutre Hogar is an institution that cares for malnourished children until they are healthy enough to return to their parents. The children come from remote areas of Panama and have grown up with virtually nothing. For some of them, once they are a part of the Nutre Hogar community, they never see their parents again.

"You have to understand that you'll become the mother that some of these children never had." Mrs. Morse's words ring in my ears as I brace myself for my first volunteer experience. Nutre Hogar volunteers feed, change, and play with the children for at least four hours every day. They are there to take care of the kids, making sure that they are living a healthy lifestyle and, most importantly, that they are happy.

"The only thing these kids want is to forget any pain that they have, literally or figuratively." Feeling immense pressure now, I try to shake Mrs. Morse's voice out of my head.

I step through the main door of the building to be greeted by the pungent stench of baby poop wafting from a nursery room and the overpowering scent of spices seeping through the kitchen doors. I wrinkle my nose in disgust.

"¡Bienvenida!" Mrs. Morse prances towards me, her short blond hair bouncing with every step. She leans in with a smile still on her face. *"Don't worry, you'll get used to the smell."*

We walk through two more sets of doors, nerves building up in my body with every step. Finally, Mrs. Morse pushes through the last door revealing a room full of people. My eyes scan the familiar faces of the other volunteers I met during the flight to Panama. I haven't seen them since we all moved in with our host families, a process added to the service trip a few years back to force volunteers to speak Spanish for the entirety of the program. I can't wait to talk to them in English.

My eyes continue to search the room, taking in the scratched, light brown, wooden floors and the small iron rods encaging the windows. Two ceiling fans slowly spin above my head helpless to the unbearable heat creeping in through the prison-style bars. The aged brick walls below the bars contrast against the children's colorful toys scattered over the spongy blue mats in the back corner. Next to the abundance of toys is a large Little Tikes playhouse with plastic yellow walls, a plastic baby blue roof, and a plastic bright red slide. It reminds me of something I would find in the backyard of one of my friends' homes when I was a child.

A creak to my right suddenly catches my attention as I turn to find multiple Panamanian children running through the door to the playroom. The boys go straight to the mats waiting for one of the American strangers to join them. My focus stays on the door, watching the last of the children saunter hesitantly through. A small girl with a pink dress and short dark hair is being carried in by one of the Nutre Hogar employees. She looks as though she must be six years old but she cannot yet walk. Following my gaze, the employee sets the girl down by my feet.

I realize that I am the only one playing while Mariah stares blankly at me. Please just smile, laugh, something.

"Se llama Mariah. Tiene cinco años." I gently pick up the small five-year-old girl to keep her from crying, but she does not seem amused. I grab the Barbie doll to my right and begin to play with it, showing her what to do. However, after about five minutes, I realize that I am the only one playing while Mariah stares blankly at me. *Please just smile, laugh, something.* I find another toy, a tiny Beanie Baby, and crawl it up her arm. Her eyes stay locked on mine until finally she begins to cry. Panicked, I drop the toy and begin bouncing the girl on my leg.

Eyes staring directly into hers, I try to keep a composed manner and a smile on my face.

"It's okay . . . It's alright." *Like she can even understand me.* She calms down though, recognizing that she has my full attention. I continue bouncing her, hoping she'll remain calm. Lifting her higher towards the ceiling then lower towards the floor, I keep her locked in my hands. Finally a smile grows across her face. I set her back down on my leg and tickle her bloated stomach. She lets out a giggle. *Unbelievable.* Despite the plethora of toys that have been donated to these children, all this girl wants is someone's attention. Mrs. Morse's advice creeps back into my head, sounding more like a melody now. *"You'll become the mother that some of these kids never had."*

"You'll become the mother that some of these kids never had."

Dos Semanas Después

Two weeks later—after volunteering daily at Nutre Hogar, and constantly finding ways to make Mariah smile, it is time for the volunteers to return healthy children to their families. We have been driving in a small, white, van for three hours now and are just approaching the village where parents come to collect their children. As we get closer to the village, large brick buildings emerge out of a dirt abyss. These buildings are used as medical centers for children of Nutre Hogar in order to assure that they are healthy enough to return home. Not only are they the only buildings for miles but they are also the only things that expose impoverished Panamanian parents to the lifestyle of Nutre Hogar volunteers, the ones who paid the money for the buildings to be built.

The dark green pickup truck ahead of us is filled with white, plastic bags overflowing with American toys for the new families. I can't imagine that parents will be too concerned with getting toys when they are seeing their children for the first time in months, maybe even years, but it is a gesture to remind the children of us volunteers from their previous home. As the truck comes to a stop, our van pulls up next to it allowing me a view of the sea of Panamanian parents. I close my eyes and picture their faces as I hand their children back into their arms. I can't wait.

Tres Horas Mas Tarde

Three hours later—stressed, scared, and confused beyond belief, I use the slow car ride in the back of the green pick-up

truck as my therapy. I try to forget my thoughts as we proceed to the next village. I just can't seem to shake the image of parents returning home with their new, healthy children, cursing at the toys that they could have had. The entire time I volunteered with these kids, I was working towards returning them to their loving parents. Suddenly I feel as though my work was for nothing.

I think back to my time with Mariah. When she was without a family all she wanted was attention and love. She never wanted toys, she wanted to be bounced on my legs and tickled on her stomach. Meanwhile, these parents believe that the only thing that will replace their months of absence is dolls and toy cars. They want their kids to feel as though they are giving them something meaningful when they aren't giving them anything more than a lifeless toy.

A bump in the dirt road shakes me to reality. We are approaching the next village and it is much less developed. Trekking through heavy piles of mud, the truck pulls into the neighborhood of destitute Panamanians. Intricately woven, light-green grass roots compose the huts surrounding us. Despite the humid heat, children are running between each hut, their laughter creating a soothing sound. The truck slowly comes to a stop. I look down to avoid the mud before jumping off the back of the truck and suddenly lock eyes with a pink and white polka-dotted pig that is half my size. He runs away in a frenzy of snorts when I plant my feet straight into a puddle. The last thing I want right now is to be covered in mud, but I am influenced by the boys laughing next to me to simply smile and shake off the dirt.

We are done returning children to their families so now we are merely observing the culture of these Panamanians. After the last group, I half expect hell as I walk towards a mud-floored hut. Gingerly, I step inside.

There is nothing in their home except for a bed that is made of the same green, grass roots as the other huts.

To my surprise, two young boys are sitting angelically on the ground next to an older woman. The woman's hair is knotted, her skin is rough, and some of her teeth are missing, but her smile radiates throughout the room, causing her eyes to glow in elation.

There is nothing in their home except for a bed that is made of the same green, grass roots as the other huts. I assumed that the woman would be waiting for a gift of sorts, but her

hands stay at her side. As she excitedly shows us her home, I realize that the reason she doesn't ask us for anything is because she has everything she needs. Her family is happy here. They don't think about what they can have but rather what they do have. They do not have the option to compare themselves to others since they are living in such a remote town and have no way of viewing others' lives. All they know is that they have a family, water, food, and shelter. They don't ask for anything more.

Since what seems to be the beginning of time, our world has been built around the idea that wealth, power, and virtue are positively correlated to ownership. Ownership of money, ownership of land, ownership of anything materialistic: that's what causes success. That's what causes happiness. In sociologist Juliet Schor's article "Keeping Up With the Trumps," she discusses the progression of overconsumption. According to Schor, when people see that others around them have more things than they do, they feel the need to obtain more things themselves. For instance, television shows in America have caused numerous U.S. citizens to feel the need to live like the celebrities they see, such as Donald Trump. Schor wonders if, "the likely explanation for the link between television and spending is that what we see on TV inflates our sense of what's normal" (35). Through viewing the lives of people who have so much more than us, we feel as though we need to obtain more things to keep up with others.

Parents who send their children to Nutre Hogar are under the impression that their children will be exposed to a rich, American lifestyle by constantly being surrounded by American volunteers. Their kids are leaving their small homes to enter a world of constant care, food, and toys, all things that they, as parents, could not give to them. Unable to see how these children will be happy returning to a life without materials, they often do not know what to do when their kids are back in their arms. The hands that should be holding their children are instead grasping for toys from the back of a truck. These parents are attempting to obtain the lifestyle that they think the privileged Nutre Hogar volunteers have revealed to their children. Suddenly they believe that happiness will be obtained through pieces of plastic.

As they say in Spanish, algo es algo; menos es nada. Something is something; less is nothing.

Parents who do not even have the means to send their children to a recovery center surprisingly do not need much to be happy. They care for the family at their side, bless the Earth under their feet, and are grateful for a roof over their heads. There is no competition in their lives. Through cancelling out the idea of having materialistic things, these families are forced to appreciate the things that they do have. They aren't the hands desperately reaching for more; they are the bags floating freely without anything to weigh them down.

The idea that happiness must be attained through materials is a concept that destroys our ability to appreciate the things we have. When we can't even be grateful for our own children because we feel as though we are not getting enough materialistic entities for them, we are at a loss of life. My life in America has been replete with money, shelter, and opportunity for success for as long as I can remember. I constantly view my existence in terms of what I can obtain next, whether it is a job that will secure my future or merely items, such as accessories, that I do not need. My anger towards the first Panamanian group we met that day was a hypocritical reaction because I am just as guilty as them for not always appreciating the things I am given in my life.

When I first entered Nutre Hogar, I thought the only thing the children wanted to do was play with toys. That's what will make them happy, material objects. Mariah quickly shook this idea from my mind through showing me that sometimes all people need is affection. Standing on the mud floor of the Panamanian hut later that month further enforced this idea in me that happiness must come from within, not from materials. Happiness is the ability to recognize that having something in life is better than having nothing. As they say in Spanish, algo es algo; menos es nada. Something is something; less is nothing. Happiness is not achieved through ownership or consumerism. It is found in the people we are within, the family that surrounds us, and the home that is the mud under our feet.

Artwork by Joni Hayward

THE DANCER IN THE DANCE

By Valerie Erwin

The first time someone noticed was on a Wednesday. It was competition season, and I was in my fourth hour of practice. Nationals were the upcoming weekend in Atlanta, and we were attempting to correct any imperfections in our routine that might keep us from securing a national title. My body was weak, working overtime without enough energy to sustain its demands. During a short water break, I found a spot to lie down by the ever-coveted fan at the front of the dance floor.

While hoping to catch my breath if even for a minute or two, one of my coaches walked over to me. Towering over me and trying to speak over the loud, constant humming of the fan, she asked, "How do you feel?"

Her question reminded me of when a police officer pulls you over and asks, "Do you know what I'm stopping you for?" They know the answer, but require a response from you that meets their expectation. Knowing her well-crafted motive, I didn't respond.

"You look kind of pale," she persisted.

"PJ, I am pale. I don't tan."

Bearing no tolerance for my sarcastic reply, she continued. "Have you eaten today?"

"Yes." That was true, at least.

"What did you have?"

I've never been good at lying to people. I can dance around the truth for days, but my coach knew me well enough that if she asked directly, she would get a truthful answer. Not to mention, I lacked sufficient energy to even forge a story that would avoid the truth that daily I fought so desperately to keep hidden.

"Crackers," I said.

"When?"

"At lunch."

"Did you eat breakfast?"

"No."

"Is that all you've eaten today?"

I hesitated, anxious of what her response would be if I continued with my honesty. My mind raced with what seemed like hundreds of what-ifs in a matter of seconds.

Would I still be able to compete that weekend?

Would the team find out?

Would I be able to keep dancing altogether?

Would she tell my parents?

What would they do if they found out?

Abandoning the thoughts that held me captive, I finally answered her, giving her only one word. The one word that confirmed everything she had originally been searching for. One word that affirmed what I knew both of us didn't want to be true.

"Yes."

Her facial expression quickly changed from her stern demeanor of interrogation. Part of me still can't find words for it. She was concerned, that should go without saying. It was something much more than that. Whatever it was, she immediately reached for her purse and grabbed a dollar out of her wallet.

"Here, go buy food from the vending machine; I don't care what it is, but you have to get something. Once you get it, you're going to sit out the rest of practice to eat. If you don't, I'll feed you myself."

The whole thing was a game, a game of perfection. And I wasn't the only player.

Dance was always my greatest escape or my worst enemy. Sometimes it was both at the same time. Once I started competitive dancing it became my religion, my worth, my life. I would go to the gym to practice for hours on end to perfect my technique—to make my leaps a little bit higher, my turns a little bit stronger, to be better than the next best girl on the team. I skipped meals weekly, and in desperate times, daily, in hopes of being smaller for costume fittings and competitions, or sometimes just for the sake of being smaller. Once I achieved one goal, I would move on to the next one. The whole thing was a game, a game of perfection. And I wasn't the only player.

Perfection tends to be a distinct mark of the culture in professional and competitive dance with varying degrees of intensity depending on the company, team, or individual dancer. In its defense, perfection is a necessary element of performance-based dance, which inherently requires that movement in routines and performances look neat, polished, and presentable for audiences and in some cases, judges. The desire for that perfection reaches a new extreme when it is demanded of not only the dancing, but of the dancer. And today, teams and companies are setting expectations for multiple aspects of the images of their dancers from a certain weight, body mass index, height, skin tone, hair style, to even a certain hair color or nail color. Much research even shows that this desire for perfection (whether it be towards image or performance) is a risk factor in dancers developing eating disorders. For many dancers, this culture creates a struggle for perfection that all too often, can never be complete; a struggle that causes countless dancers to inflict harm upon their bodies in order to meet the expectation of possessing the perfect body.

"My freshman year of high school I thought I was tiny (in terms of weight), I still do think that, but I was also short, so because of my shape they wouldn't put me in certain parts of shows. Then, my sophomore year, I had put on some weight and they told me, 'If you can't fit in the costume, you can't dance

the part.' It didn't have anything to do with technique or talent. Our instructor was a professional ballerina from Russia who had a specific idea of what dancers should look like . . . but only a few dancers really looked like that. Ultimately, that's why I ended up leaving the company. I didn't feel like I was going to move up any further there, and simply because of my body type. I remember one time a girl that had been dancing two years and was probably 5'9 and 120 pounds got a part over me, and at the time I had been dancing for seven years . . . I cried myself to sleep over that. That was kind of the straw that broke the camel's back."

The topic and discussion of the expectations and physical demands placed on dancers and their bodies is a double-edged sword: the demands are motivating for some but crippling pressure for others. Many dancers fall victim to harmful habits like eating disorders in order to keep up with the pressure to be perfect, however developing such habits can often lead to taking the dream of dancing away from them when disorders put their bodies and lives in danger. In the reverse, many other dancers are capable of developing a healthy lifestyle that helps them to continue pursuing a career in dance and also offers them new opportunities for success. The culture of different dance organizations, companies, and teams often shape this dynamic.

Many dancers fall victim to harmful habits like eating disorders in order to keep up with the pressure to be perfect . . .

Collin Sarvis has been a dancer for 19 years; almost 10 of those years were as a part of competitive teams. After dancing competitively at studios, for her high school, and with an all-star program, Collin auditioned for and secured a spot as a sideline dancer for Clemson University, a spot she would hold for her four-year college career. In high school and in college, Collin drew her attention to and looked up to America's sweethearts, the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders. "I had posters of them on my wall," Collin admits with a giggle. But the adoration she had for the team didn't stop at being a spectator. "My senior year at Clemson I looked up their audition dates and started training. I had dreamed of being a part of that organization, I wanted to give it a shot. I thought, 'if nothing else, I'll be honored just to have participated in the process of the selection of their squad.'" After travelling to Dallas for the auditions though, to Collin's surprise, she was selected for the team.

Over the phone, Collin tells me with almost childlike excitement every detail of being a DCC. There's a satisfaction in her voice in the telling, she knows that as a result of her hard work she has made her dreams a reality. She and I talk about everything from their halftime performances to moving her life to Dallas, and eventually we get to what's expected of the team in order to maintain the near perfect bodies that women across America strive for and that men dream of. In my conversation with Collin, there is refreshing perspective for the reasoning behind demands for images of professional dancers, perspective that doesn't get anywhere close to as much attention as the arguments for the negative effects of the intensive expectations.

"The expectations that our coaches have for us as far as physical appearance and shape go are justified by our performances, our last halftime routine was seven and a half minutes long and then of course you're dancing on the sidelines for the rest of the game. You honestly have to work out outside of team practices to have the stamina enough to dance through the duration a game, which is a few hours. And usually in a team setting, you don't want to be the rookie that can't finish a workout like the veterans are able to—the older members of the team are role models and positive examples as far as their exercise habits go, in that sense."

The pressure to keep pace with team veterans and the necessity to be physically capable of finishing routines strong are not the only driving factors in the expectations for the physical shape for a Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader. As Collin explains to me, there are no team workouts outside of practices. While the team members are provided with the necessary resources if needed to maintain healthy dieting and exercise habits such as dieticians and personal trainers, each individual member is responsible for making sure that their weight and shape is in line with what is expected of them. Weekly weigh-ins are conducted, and if a dancer is not within the healthy weight designated to her, there is a chance that she will be "benched" or prohibited to dance at the next game, or until she can get back within her target weight range.

Collin explains that these expectations both positively and negatively impact her. "I feel better when I eat better and care for my body, I just feel better about myself. And I love to run, it's very therapeutic. I don't know anyone on my team that achieves their weight and physical shape in an unhealthy way. I think that what they expect of us in that regard is admirable. My teammates are great role models for having beautiful bodies from living a healthy lifestyle."

Where Collin finds her difficulty are the physical expectations for her appearance that lie outside of weight and physical shape. "Not only do we have to have our hair and make-up done for performances and appearances but even practices, too. I mean technically, if we're anywhere in public we have to look that presentable, nails done too. I think that's the hardest part for me, there's always this pressure to look perfect."

Artwork by Heather Clark

"It's like this vicious cycle . . . to get addicted to the 'success' that losing the weight brings . . ."

Amanda, a lifelong dancer and fourth-year dancer for an NBA team, offers a different perspective with respect to weight expectations.

"We diet like crazy, I know girls that weren't healthy in it either . . . it definitely causes eating disorders. We usually prepare our bodies for the auditions and then it's a huge sigh of relief once you make it, but then you realize you have a photo shoot or opening night or something else and it doesn't actually stop, there's always something. Every food or drink that I pick up, I think about. I know a girl that's bulimic and it's very apparent but we don't know how to address it because we don't know her very well, she commutes from out-of-town for practices. And we think . . . 'Do we tell our coach? Do we try and approach the girl?' It's hard to get anyone to change that has been doing it (developing unhealthy habits) for a long time, especially if they were doing it while they made the team because they associate the success with that."

The grace, synchronicity and sheer perfection from groups of elite dancers showcase aspects of the art that never cease to leave a crowd with jaws dropped, appreciating their beauty and also the physical and technical challenges of the performance. This difficulty can be seen across multiple styles of dancing, and not just from acclaimed ballets. Watching a performance by Alvin Ailey or the University of Minnesota dance team, Denver Nuggets dancers, or even high-school aged performing groups from schools and teams like Westmoore High School Poms or PACE All-Stars likely elicit a similar appreciation for the difficulty required of and mastered by the group that executes the routine. Performances and companies like these inspire dancers and non-dancers alike. For many dancers, it fuels their existing passion for the art form and gives them something to aspire to.

"Also during my freshman year of high school, but prior to my departure from the company—one of our dancers who was aspiring to go professional with the ballet . . . she was . . . gosh, she was a really bad case. She was bulimic. But it was . . . so much worse than anything I had ever come into contact with. It got to the point that one day she left [ballet] class because she had eaten breakfast and went to throw it up, and someone finally heard her. They went to go check on her, and she was throwing up blood. She told our instructor, and they called for an ambulance to come pick her up. Then her parents took her out of the company and she went home for the remainder of the season."

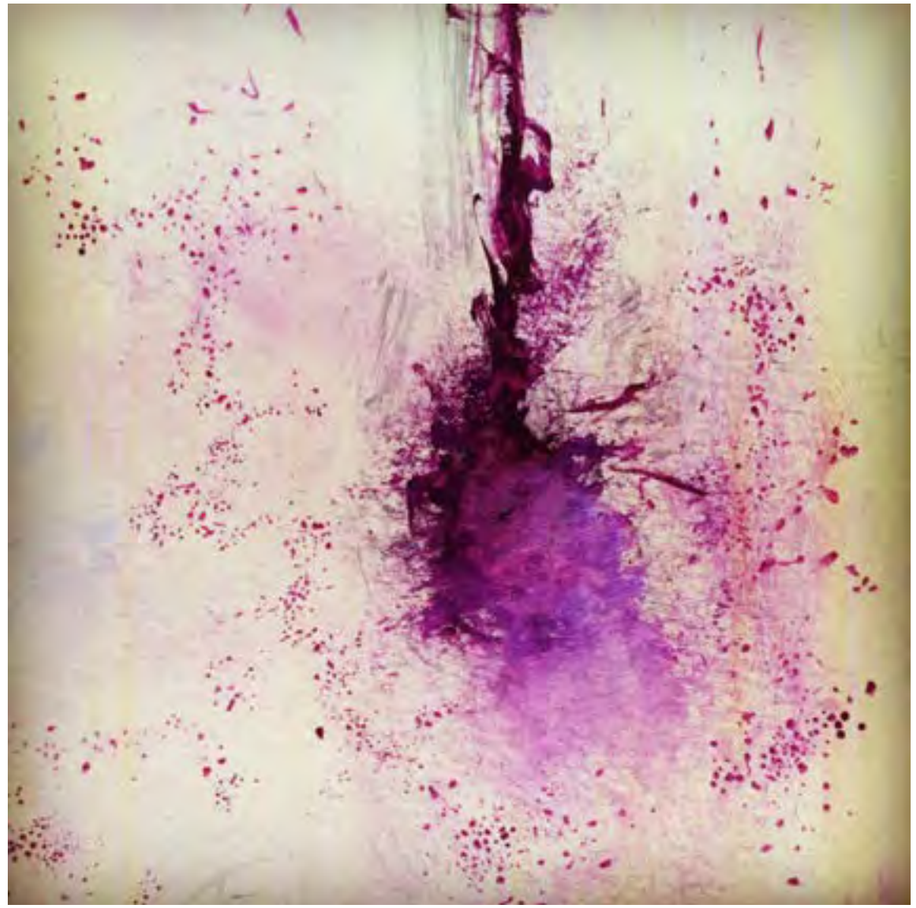
"The craziest part was we all thought she might quit after something like that . . . but pretty soon after the fact, she ended up attending a different school for the arts in North Carolina and then went on to dance for several different companies. There's no way she was better before she started dancing again . . . it was too short of a time for her to recover, to break a habit of that extent. It's like this vicious cycle . . . to get addicted to the 'success' that losing the weight brings . . . getting parts in productions and associating that with the size you bring yourself to, that you're somehow getting the parts because you're making yourself vomit . . . or whatever. I don't know. It's tragic."

I was allowed to compete at nationals in Atlanta that weekend.

My coach never told my parents.

I never told my parents. I wonder if there is a part of my mother that always knew, though, and out of fear, never asked. I got better, but it took a long time. Sometimes I feel like that part of me never fully left. That it's always there, lurking under the surface, waiting for a spark that will make it come alive and manifest itself in me again.

It will say to me, "You can be more perfect, let me show you how."



Artwork by Joni Hayward

Artwork by George Perez

EIGHT HOURS

By Bryn Newman

It doesn't matter where the eight hours were spent. I was trapped in an in between, lost in vast blackness. Because that's all that night was, blackness. And until not long ago, that's all it remained. The memories never come back to me, and they never will. Parts of me still aren't back. Parts of myself lost forever.

When I woke up I didn't know where I was. The room was bright. It wasn't Adam's[1] room. It wasn't my room.

Who the fuck is that on the couch?

What happened?

Is that throw-up on the bed?

Where are my pants?

The stranger stirred. He got up and poured a cup of water. He asked if I knew the boys from San

1 All names have been changed.

Clemente and I said they were my good friends. I noticed my phone, shoes, and chapstick in a neat pile by the foot of the bed.

That's strange.

I found my acid wash jeans behind me, immediately got up and wiggled into them, put on my shoes, and the stranger walked me out. I knew I was in a fraternity house, but I was so disoriented I couldn't tell which one I was in. I was let out a side door and I walked across the street to my apartment.

I got into the shower and tried to wash the throw-up out of my hair. Instead of cascading refreshment I felt a wave of panic wash over me. My stomach dropped as an image filled my head of me laying down looking at a dark figure above me, I couldn't move. Then the image was gone, just like that. Back into the blackness.

It was just a dream.

I crawled into bed and I stayed there for hours. If I tried to eat it came right back up. Tears streamed down my faced as I hugged the toilet bowl begging for it to stop. This was the hangover from somewhere worse then hell.

Two days later my roommate was told by a friend in another fraternity that I had had sex with his friend Mark. I was on my period. Sex didn't seem plausible. I remember my roommate telling me the news. She seemed calm, her face concerned. She waited for a reaction. I stuttered rape, and looked at her for reassurance. I burst into tears. I exploded.

I put my forehead against the wall, my face was contorted with anger, shame, confusion, and regret. I was in shock—convulsing and sobbing. My roommate and I had no idea what to do. I picked up my phone, hands shaking, and called Planned Parenthood. It was the only place I could think of calling. I told them what happened and naively asked if I could get tested for rape. The woman told me if I had already showered it wasn't possible, but she wanted me to come in and get tested for STD's. I was stunned.

How could this have happened to me?

I wasn't convinced that I just had to live with this. So, I looked up sexual abuse hotlines and called the first one, Moving

I put my forehead against the wall, my face was contorted with anger, shame, confusion, and regret.

to End Sexual Assault (MESA). A representative told me that evidence could be collected up to 72 hours after the fact and she would meet me at the closest hospital to walk me through the process.

The next four hours were torture. The first forty-five minutes of that, even worse.

The women from MESA made me feel awkward, the so-called soothing tones and comforting words drove me more insane than the thoughts running through my mind. I didn't want to be comforted. My way of coping involved immediate sarcasm and distancing myself from the emotions I was feeling. I wanted to pretend none of this was happening.

What will everyone say?

What will I do?

Will any of the guys still be my friend?

Should I tell my parents?

How do I even begin to explain that I got too drunk and woke up in a stranger's bed?

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. After we waited four hours in a secluded waiting room, a nurse popped her head in and called another young woman. In Colorado, 1 in 4 women will experience a completed or attempted sexual assault during her lifetime. According to the advocacy group 'One in Four', 42% will not report the crime. I shouldn't have been surprised when the nurse wasn't expecting me.

Finally, at one in the morning, there was a knock on the door. The second late night SANE nurse had arrived. It was time for my exam. Together the strangers and I headed down the florescent-lit hall. I was raw, cut open and completely drained. They kept saying this exam would be the hardest part.

I was sent to the bathroom to pee in a cup and remove my tampon. When I returned the SANE nurse examined my skin for any marks, bruises, or tenderness and photographed any of these injuries she found. She then collected samples. She swabbed my mouth, made me cut my nails off and place them in a folded piece of paper, pulled strands of hair from my scalp, and did a pelvic exam. She also collected all of my clothes from that night. I was then given two treatments for Chlamydia and Gonorrhea. One of which was pills and the other was a painful shot that was injected into my right arm. They kept telling

me I was being so strong. I was at the point where I didn't feel a damned thing.

I was told the police officer had shown up. If I filed a report the tests and treatments were free. After I put fresh clothes on, I followed the officer back to the private family waiting room. The MESA rep kept telling me I didn't have to give them any information I didn't want to, but I wanted the truth, I was frightened, and I didn't know what else to do.

I told him what I knew and it wasn't much. I explained that I went to a party at a good friend's house and by 11:30 pm, I blacked out. Not one glimpse could be recalled. I then woke up in a bed covered in my own vomit and was told two days later a frat guy "fucked" me. I told the cop that we found out who he was and what fraternity he was in. But when I called the boys prior to going to the hospital they didn't know a kid who matched the description I gave them. I also told the cop that the fraternity was located across the street from my apartment building and I had no idea why I hadn't gone home or stayed at Adam's house.

That night, I was driven home for the first time by a police officer.

When I finally crawled into my bed eight hours later, the sockets of my eyes were aching to the point where I felt like my eyeballs were going to fall out, right into the hands I was crying into.

I always said that would never be me, I read the articles, I heard the stories. I was always safe at that house, why was this time different? Where were my friends? Why didn't anyone notice that I disappeared? Why didn't anyone call looking for me? I never meant for this to happen.

Everything I should know, blackness. Everything I want to know, nothing.

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September 11th, 2012 3:09 am

My hospital band rests on my wrist as a label symbolizing today, my trauma, my gut feelings, my truth. Yet, what is the truth? Everything I should know, blackness. Everything I want to know, nothing. Everything that I wished would have happened, impossible.

I am told its okay to feel sad, or angry, or fine. I am told it is all right to feel anything. I don't really know how I feel. I am also told that it is not my fault. But maybe it is? I really don't know and I feel as if no one will help me. I am so afraid. So

afraid. Eight hours of shame, eight hours of fear, eight hours of numbness, eight hours of emptiness, eight hours in foreign halls, eight hours of excruciating torture. Now, as I lay in the safety of my own bed, even a slight shadow causes my heart to drop, I can't sleep when that's all anyone said I needed.

I will never feel whole, ever again. I am afraid I lost someone who I thought I was. I don't understand what happened. I can't bear to show my face. I can't run away. All I want is to escape.

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I slept through my alarm the next morning. I wanted to sleep forever. I didn't want to write my papers, study for my tests, or even attend class. I dreaded walking out of my apartment or anywhere near the fraternity. Even in class, I wasn't there, my body was sitting in those desks, but my mind was somewhere else, lost into yet another sea of blackness.

I told my brother what happened, or at least what I knew. He hugged me. For the first time, I felt someone actually cared about me. He told me he wanted to hurt the kid, he wanted to make it look like he was mugged, he wanted to protect me like he would have that night if he had stayed another hour—he could barely stand being in the room he was so angry about the whole situation. He said there was no way a blacked-out guy would have remembered to put on a condom. So we found Mark's phone number and decided to ask some questions.

I couldn't manage to speak to him.

I asked one of my roommates to do the talking.

She began the conversation as follows, "Hey Mark, this is Bryn's roommate and we have some questions about what happened the other night."

He nervously told us the same story we had already heard. But added, "Well Sean introduced us on the stairs and we were all dancing, I barely remember the walk home."

I gasped, trying to refrain from making any noise, tears silently fell down my cheeks. I didn't remember meeting him on the stairs, let alone any part of walking home. He knew more than me and I wanted to know all of it.

My roommate continued, "We just want to know what happened because in the state of Colorado, when a girl is not mentally or physically able to consent it is considered rape."

He knew more than me and I wanted to know all of it.

"Are you going to the cops? Please, this isn't like me, I don't even do this sort of thing, please don't go to the cops," Mark pleaded on the phone.

I heard the stammer in his words. My empathy is often my worst enemy.

Why did I have to drink that much?

Why did I let this happen to myself?

My roommate ended the conversation saying, "Please answer any other phone calls from this number, we might have more questions."

I wanted to curl up into a ball and disappear.

I had already told the cops this boy's name and what fraternity he was in, there was no way my brother could settle my score. But all I wanted was for Mark's ribs to break and for his nose to bleed.

Going to the cops was the right thing to do, right?

September 11th, 2012 10:17 pm

For the first time in my entire life I wish I was invisible. And for a few moments here and there I feel like I'm not truly here. I am finally that kid that has to avoid a certain path to school, afraid that I might see something I do not want to be confronted by. Him. I am afraid to interact with my friends because I fear they will mention it. I take responsibility, I made a mistake, but that doesn't mean this should have happened. This doesn't mean I have to feel guilty, and sad, and angry, and bad. I barely even have had a moment to grieve.

And him. He is a ghost of my regret, my shame, my terror, but he says he did not mean to harm me. Yet, in every sense he did. He harmed everything. I ruined everything. I've been told kick turns are good—touch the rock bottom and kick back up to the surface, to the light. I never wanted to reach this point.

On Wednesday, September 12th, 2012, I met with a detective from Boulder Police Department. He asked me to tell him what

"I don't want to press charges, I just want the truth."

happened. I repeated the story and I still cried. He went over my options. He told me that I had complete control. I could close the case or I could keep digging. I was afraid I might lose friends if I pressed charges. He asked if these friends would still be there for me ten years from now. He was right, but a part of me didn't want to follow through with pressing charges.

I just wanted this to be over.

He gave me a tape recorder and told me to call anyone who might have more information than me about the night. I wanted answers and for some reason I thought the police would help me get them.

I made the calls later that evening. I just wanted this kid to admit that he remembered something. I wanted him to come to the realization that fucking a drunk incapacitated girl was disgusting. I couldn't fathom that he didn't remember anything, there had to be bits and pieces—he had put on a condom for Christ's sake.

Mark had tried calling me multiple times. I ignored the calls, and listened to his voicemails begging me to meet with him in person. I had refused to respond, but now I finally had to call, I had to hear his voice.

He repeated that what happened was unusual for him. He told me that wasn't like him, "If you got to know me you would know this isn't me."

"Can I take you to coffee?"

"Can we talk in person?"

"No," I said. I couldn't bear to see his face.

I told him I was in the middle of my period, there was no way I would have willingly had sex with him. I told him my tampon was missing. I asked if he remembered me going to the bathroom. He said he doesn't remember a thing—not even the walk home. He asked if I was going to the cops. I told him I already have and I had to do it, it's protocol when you go to the hospital and go through the medical examination I went through.

"I don't want to press charges, I just want the truth." I hang up.

I muster up the strength to call Sean, my friend who allegedly introduced us. He explained that we were on the stairs dancing with his friend. He introduced me to Mark and then I fell into the middle of the dance floor, off the stairs, straight onto my face. He picked me up and brought me upstairs to

make sure I was okay. Apparently I wanted to keep partying. He said he was going to leave and asked Mark if he would make sure I was okay. Then, when he walked outside he saw me walking with Mark and he asked if I was good and where I was going. Sean said I then told him, "I'm fine. I'm going home."

Sean tells me his friend seemed really blacked out too, and he tried to make sure that I was okay before we parted ways. He ended the conversation with, "Whatever happened shouldn't be turned into a big deal."

I said, "Thanks," and hung up.

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September 15th, 2012 2:17am

I was told that I fell flat on my face that night and it feels like I haven't gotten up since. Dead weight. Heavy with regret.

All I want is the truth.

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Over the next few weeks, I continued trying to live a normal life—go to class, go to work, meet with a counselor, listen to the same bullshit.

Sean called me a few times and asked questions on Mark's behalf about the investigation and told me I should drop it. I told him that I wish I hadn't and I swore I wasn't pressing charges.

I told Sean, "I wish my brother could have just beat him up and this would have been over."

Sean agreed, "Mark deserves to learn a lesson and getting his ribs kicked in probably would have been better then going to the cops."

I am crushed because I agree. For my situation the cops only made things worse—they drove Adam away from me.

"You took it too far, fuck frat stars but you shouldn't have gone to the fucking cops," Adam drunkenly screamed at me, "The kid's frat is getting shut down, all of his brothers hate him, and he's moving back home."

"You took it too fucking far."

I never found the answers I was looking for, and I never received the apology I wanted.

I never meant for this to happen.

But I just stared, mouth gaped open. My world was in pieces.

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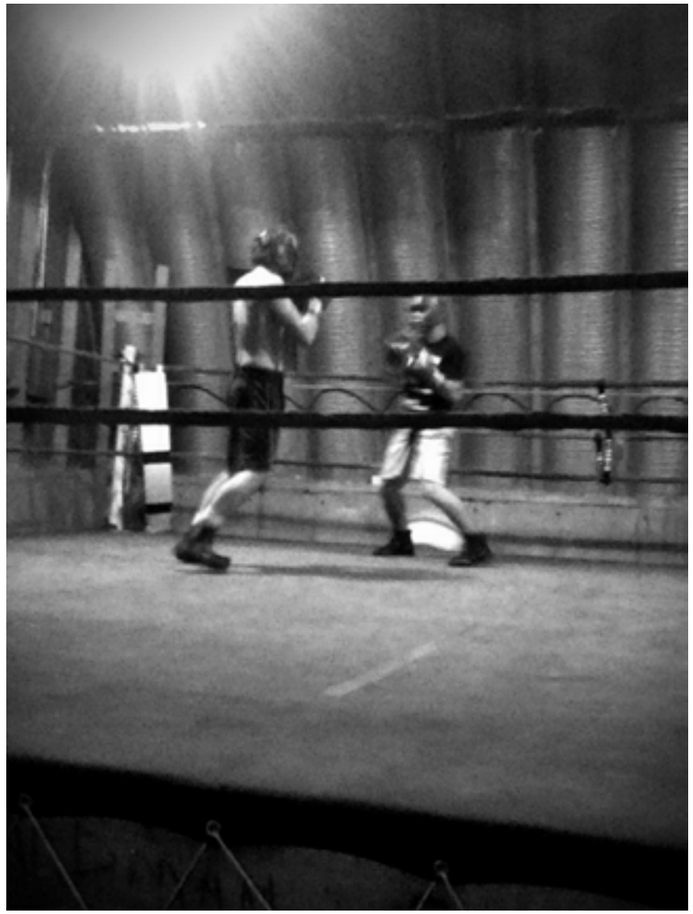
Eventually it was all over. The days slowly passed and I started walking in front of the fraternity house again. I told the detective that I didn't want to take it any further. I never found the answers I was looking for, and I never received the apology I wanted. But as time went on I grew. I realized my true friends were the ones that pulled me aside and said they were so sorry that this had to happen to me. I took a drastic step back from drinking and I learned my limits.

In the end I was not happy with my choice to go to the cops, but I am happy I did something. I live on a college campus that sees what happened to me as a normal incident. Blacking out and hooking up is casual to them. These boys live in fraternity houses where girls are slipping out every morning of the weekend. These boys don't see it as disgusting, they high five and encourage the other guys to do the same. They are so determined to keep up, the line is sometimes crossed. And the girls stay quiet, because if they speak up, "They took it too far."

This subject is atrociously taboo, and it pains me to see girls live in a culture where they are made to feel dumb for drinking too much and getting taken advantage of. I am shocked that as a society we don't prepare young girls with people to call to seek advice from if something like this happens to them. I am appalled that men live in a world where they are not taught the manners to bring an incapacitated girl home to her roommates. I am not encouraging girls to not contact the authorities. I am encouraging girls to stand up for themselves. I am encouraging girls to find the strength to do something about their situation. I am encouraging girls to walk away from the shame and find the courage in their hearts to stand up. ꕥ



THE AUTHOR AT RIGHT IN A BOULDER COUNTY GYM

I LIVE TO FIGHT

By Joel Perez

Thud goes the sound of the glove as it rushes towards my face and finds its mark right on my jaw. An eerie ring lingers within my ears and the pain of the punch instantly stabs at the mark. My eyes, hit by a flash, squint as they brace for the coming onslaught of punches. The blows glance off my head, yet another hook sneaks its way past my arms, landing once more on my jaw. It reminds me of the time my brother caught me with the same hook, only I fell to the floor wrenching at the dry pain that followed.

There was no doubt in my mind my jaw was broken—I could barely open it. The act of breathing alone became work. Yet I withheld my composure and continued to fight, or rather, defend. Bobbing, throwing anything I had, weaving, dancing about the ring, forcing a breath from within my exasperated lungs. I knew I should have run more.

The beeper rings to signal the end of the round. My arms weigh a ton and instantly drop to my sides. I stagger my way back to the corner. My trainer, a withered ex-amateur

Photo by Joel Perez

champion, walks over to me, gives me some water and instructs me for the next round. My body yearns for me to throw in the towel. It's been only a couple rounds and I can barely work in half a breath.

After watching my first Rocky movie as a small boy, I have been a fan of the sport, punching the fluff out of my pillow, using my little brother as my punching bag, and pleading with my parents for a pair of gloves. My parents, also fans of the sport, knew well enough the damage a single punch to the head could have on me. And because of that, fighting competitively was not one of my options. After a while of pleading I finally settled with watching it on TV. I tentatively watched the fighters' footwork, mocked their every move, wondered about the feeling of walking into an arena packed with cheering fans just to see me. When no one wanted to fight me, I fought with my shadow and did as many pushups as I could, though working my body then was just an empty dream.

"BEE BEE BEE!"

Lungs still filled with fire, I can see my opponent charge me, starting right where he left off the last round. A barrage of uppercuts and hooks come my way, aimed at my face.

"Move your head, Joel!" my trainer yells.

I duck, step to the side and throw a solid jab to the body following with a jab landing right on his nose. There's nothing like the feeling you get when a punch lands cleanly on the mark. The power surges through my body seeing my opponent wince and stagger from my might. He stumbles back to the ropes and covers up. Adrenaline surges within my body. I rush him, his back against the ropes, and work his body with hooks and uppercuts, chopping away at his base. Occasional crosses to the face land clean as well.

I'm weary of unleashing all I have for the opportunity to knock him out—I'm running out of fuel and I still have a round left. I back up, letting both of us recover before I again jab up and down. My jaw aches with every pulse, and now I am terrified. I can already feel the pain that's waiting for me while I anticipate his next hit, aware of the suffering that will follow. Surrounding the ring, other fighters pause their workouts and stare. I can hear their comments.

"Oh, he's tired."

"See how fast he is?"

There's nothing like the feeling you get when a punch lands cleanly on the mark.

"Damn . . ."

I begin to think about how my family would react watching me fight. I yearn for the day when I walk into the ring, crowded with people surrounding it, and I can see my parents, brothers, sisters, and friends. I want to fight for them. I want them to be able to come to me after the bout and congratulate me with shouts of joy and excitement.

4:30 in the morning and my alarm awakes me to a chilling sunrise. Sleep drags me back to my bed but I know that if I let it overtake me I'll regret it. I trudge my way over to my drawer and slip on a pair of shorts, put on my sweater, grab my shoes and head out the door. Instantly the sharp air fills the walls of my lungs and I begin my jog.

A lot of times I think about my future when I run. School, work, relationships, and sometimes even the sliver of consideration for going professional finds its way in. It's what keeps me motivated, makes me sympathetic to the pain. I return to my house and get ready for the rest of my day, while most of my enemies still sleep soundly.

In the heat of the skirmish, he sneaks a blow once more into my jaw. This time the pain is unbearable.

What seems like 10 minutes ends up being just 2 and a half as the 30 second warning initiates. I gather up the little energy I can scavenge and swing. By this time fatigue has overwhelmed my muscles and technique no longer restrains my movements. It is in these last seconds of the fight that full out brawls ensue in an attempt to score the last winning round. This fight was no exception. Devoid of the possibility of a fatal blow, my will rallies me forward to finish the round. In the heat of the skirmish, he sneaks a blow once more into my jaw. This time the pain is unbearable. My knees buckle and my hands can no longer muster the strength to defend

myself. Blow after blow, my opponent lands clean shots to my head. For a moment a numbing pain resides within my skull, where each contact no longer affects the already stinging dullness.

Yet technique and timing will beat speed and power nine times out of ten. Anyone can throw a punch– very few can box.

It always fascinated me that people think of boxing as a "sweet science". It's easy to assume it is a primitive sport. Two people within an enclosed ring hammering their fists into each other's faces and bodies, with the sole purpose of "knocking out" the opponent, rendering them unconscious. Yet technique and timing will beat speed and power nine times out of ten. Anyone can throw a punch—very few can box.

When the final bell rings I stagger my way to the nearest ropes and lay my whole body against them. I desperately force as much air as I can through my nose. I struggle to pull my mouth piece from my mouth. I slowly try to take it out, but as soon as I expand, a sharp stab inflicts my jaw. At that moment I feel as if it's broken. Saliva strings down to the floor from my opened mouth. I slowly gather myself and take my gear off. The pain in my head won't subside. I put on my street clothes and give my farewells to my trainer and the fighters. I pick up my gym bag and head out into the night.

The pain in my head gives rise to skeptical thoughts. Am I committed to this sport? Is this really what I like to do? Train hard only to go home to an irritating headache and aching jaw? Are my parents right? Many times my parents have warned me about the dangers of the sport and how I could end up. I watched a documentary once about the effects of boxing on the brain, and it definitely opened my eyes even more to the possibility of how I could end up.

To this day my memory lacks at moments, but I live only once, and to live in security without any risk is hardly a life worth living to me. I'm in it for the glory, the proud feeling to say, "Yeah, I'm a fighter." In life, I'm no more than a spoke on a wheel, another student, another number, passing unknowingly through life and its hardships. In boxing, I'm someone to watch. All eyes are on me and the opponent. All eyes waiting for one of us to knock the other down, cheering at every punch.

I want that.

Photo by George Perez

Line Art by Hannah Beckler

CLOUDS

By Kelly Givens

Walking into the tattoo shop was nerve wracking and exciting all at the same time. I couldn't believe this day had finally arrived and I was ecstatic. I sank into the leather couch as I waited for the tattooist to call me to the back. I flipped through his portfolio and thought for the millionth time if this was exactly what I wanted. A tattoo is forever. My stomach started to knot with anticipation. Impatiently, I began bobbing my foot to the music playing over the speakers. The electric guitar riffs combined with the drums and bass line created a rock and roll atmosphere. I was having a hard time relaxing without singing along. Twisting my hair between my fingers while humming softly to myself, he finally called me back. I took my T-shirt off and sat with my back to the tattoo artist as the needle started up; it sounded like a swarm of angry wasps. The potent smell of A+D ointment and rubbing alcohol filled my nostrils. The moment the needle touched my skin, I started to remember why I was getting this tattoo, and I realized there were both tragic and joyous memories that led me here.

Sara was a beautiful girl, a strong athlete, and an amazing straight-A student. It took us a long time to realize she was sick. It started off slowly; she skipped meals and just insisted she wasn't hungry. Since it wasn't every day we didn't notice right away. She stopped bringing food to school and she was gradually getting thinner and frailer. I don't know how her parents found out. Maybe they also realized she wasn't eating. Maybe they caught her throwing up after the rare meal she did happen to eat, but as soon as they recognized that she was anorexic they took her to the best doctors they could find. It didn't matter who they took her to see; she wasn't getting any better. If anything she was getting worse, she was 5'9 and around 100 pounds. The final hospital they brought her to was her last hope.

I remember the last time I saw her. She was lying in her hospital bed, propped up by fluffy, cloud-like pillows. Her black curly hair limply hung in ringlets around her gaunt face. I sat next to her and we gossiped about our friends and the boys we had crushes on. All I wanted to do was cry and tell her that she's beautiful; I didn't understand why she couldn't see that. But I needed to be brave for her. I delicately touched her skeletal hand and asked her how she was feeling. She told me, "I feel strong for the first time in a long time. I'm okay." We must have talked for an hour or so after that comment before I left. I told her I loved her and I'd be back later that week. She smiled sadly at me and told me she loved me too. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up and I hesitated, just for a moment, before I walked down the hall. A strange feeling washed over me, I felt like bugs had crawled under my skin. I thought something was wrong, but I couldn't put my finger on it. So I ignored it and walked out of the hospital.

Two days later, her parents called my house and talked to my mom. I was at school at the time. When I got home, my mom's face looked red and puffy, like she'd been crying. She asked me to come sit next to her on the couch; cautiously I sat down. She stroked my face and played with my hair for a moment, her brown eyes looking at me like she was trying to keep my image in her mind forever. "Mom, what's wrong? What's

I knew her songs by heart; I couldn't stop singing.

going on?" She couldn't speak for a few more seconds, but it felt like an eternity. "Sara's parents called today . . . Somehow she snuck out of her room and went to the roof of the hospital . . . Honey, she jumped; she committed suicide." She choked on her words and started to cry. I sat in stunned silence for a moment before I stood up; I immediately fell to the ground as painful sobs escaped from my throat. Suicide? How could she do this? Why did she stop fighting? I couldn't believe this had happened, especially to someone who used to be so strong.

One of my best friends died and I was exposed to my own mortality. Death consumed my thoughts; my mind was sucked into a tunnel of pain and fear. I didn't understand, she said she was getting better; she said she was feeling better. Was she just trying to give me hope so I wouldn't suspect what she planned on doing? Was she feeling better because she decided this was what she really wanted?

Singing was my coping mechanism so I didn't drown in my sorrow. Day and night, I listened to music and sang until my throat was raw, until I could no longer make a sound. Evanescence music would play in my room, some songs on repeat. The haunting lyrics and melodies echoed around the room and in my head. I knew her songs by heart; I couldn't stop singing. It was the only way I could think of to simultaneously ease my pain and honor Sara's memory.

Photo by Bessie Stanisz

Singing had always been a way for me to relieve tension, heal, and cope with difficult situations. Everyday eventually got a little bit easier. I never would have gotten through her death without my music. It allowed me to grieve without my misery swallowing me whole.

Backstage is chaotic. The blinding make-up lights and calamity of noise drowns out my own thoughts. Girls on both sides of me, chatting away and doing their hair with smoking curling irons. Guys and girls alike searching for lost shoes and miscellaneous accessories before heading to the stage. Closing my eyes, I try to quiet the cacophony blaring inside my skull. I picture my sister and me laughing together and Sara's smiling face; once my headache subsides I carefully finish applying the last of my mascara with a bittersweet smile on my face. I grab my bright red heels and run up the stairs in my black and silver dress to the stage door. Opening it as quietly as possible, I slip inside as I hear the lyrics to "Prime Time Blues." The mixed a capella jazz choir enthralls me and I get lost in the music, the glamour, and the lights. The other girls file in behind me one at a time while the other choir finishes their last song. The curtain closes to roaring applause from the audience as the light focuses on a filler act in front of the red curtain.

We grab our microphones and tiptoe on stage as quietly as church mice. Anxiety hits me right as the applause goes up for the filler act. Will they like us? God I hope I don't screw up. Don't forget about that key change after our scatting break. There's one moment of utter silence—that second before the curtain opens. My hands are shaking, my smile in place, and my adrenaline screaming in my ears. Once the lights begin to come on we begin our a capella rendition of "I Got Rhythm." Jitters gradually disappear while the opening notes tumble from my lips. I can't even see the audience but I know there are hundreds of eyes staring at me, and the rest of the girls. If I were watching the performance instead, I would be tapping my feet and bobbing my head along with the beat. The two and a half minute song comes to an end; the audience explodes into applause and rises to their feet. Satisfaction, pride, and joy radiate off of us like heat from the sun. I feel like I could float on cloud nine, I'm completely euphoric.

This magnificent piece of art was now a part of me.

The tattooist finished and I realized how much this would mean to me for the rest of my life. My flesh was tender and I could feel the blood pounding into freshly inked skin. I stood looking over my shoulder at the treble clef and bass clef that will forever be a part of my life and permanently on my body. The ebony stood out against my pale skin in a graceful heart with filigree delicately twisting and turning within the center. It was beautiful and I could not put into words how happy I was with it. This magnificent piece of art was now a part of me. It was something that I wanted, and needed, to get for myself; it will always be mine. Singing is something beautiful that I will always treasure and rely on to get me through the rough patches that will undoubtedly come up throughout my life. It's for Sara, for every time I perform on stage; this tattoo is an exquisite reminder that I will always be able to overcome whatever the world throws at me.

MEMORY WORK

By Kathleen Childs

"Nancy's Favorite Things: Sunsets, Sunbathing, Antiquing, Santa Claus, Ladybugs, Cats, Gargoyles, Maine, Florida, Steven King Novels." I knew I'd get emotional, but I didn't think the tears would actually sting my eyes shut. I start reading again. Short poems. Promises of peace. Bible verses. A slowly bleeding message painted onto felt by his partner in blue ink. "I'll always love & remember you—you could always make us smile. Always my love—Chris." An old photograph's protective plastic covering glints in the mid-afternoon sun. Each one of these grave-sized rectangles is a person. I might not have really internalized that yet.

Photographs by Kathleen Childs

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt is the largest piece of folk art in the world. More than 48,000 hand-sewn three foot by six foot quilts form thousands of twelve foot by twelve foot collages that tour across the country. Started in San Francisco in 1987, the project quickly spread nationally, as family members and loved ones sought to pay tribute to the lost. The combined panels now cover 1.3 million square feet.[1] Nearly thirty acres. Despite the staggering size, the quilt only represents 13% of the 641,976 estimated AIDS deaths in the United States.[2] The last time the whole project was displayed as a unit was in 1996. Now, it's far too big. All 48,000 panels were displayed in Washington DC this summer in conjunction with World AIDS Day, but it took 60 displays over 31 days to show it , with sites including the Washington Monument, National Mall, the Smithsonian Institute, and many smaller venues ranging from churches, museums and libraries.

Our quilts arrived Friday evening. UPS said they'd be there Monday, and Leanne Haug thanks God for small favors. She'd have gotten them out, but she really didn't want to be working all night. Leanne's been entrusted with the memories of 200 human beings, and after the months of paperwork and university bureaucracy, she takes the task with the lighthearted morbidity of a combat veteran. Leanne talks about the project with excitement, but there are tones of resignation when she tells me she's not going to be sleeping much this week. On Saturday, ex-board officer Matt is there to help, and it's appreciated. The previous crop of graduating seniors left Queer Initiative's current administration (which is to say Leanne) without a real road map. The nondescript three foot by eighteen inch cardboard boxes we load into my truck don't seem too heavy—but definitely not a suitable task for one person.

"Can you get one of us with Tim in it?" Kay McBride's gotten all her siblings together one last time. They're not all in great health themselves, and this might be her last time to visit the ashes sewn under a photograph of a kind-eyed man in his late thirties. If the scene weren't so somber, I'd feel self-conscious standing on this black fold-out chair handing cameras back and forth to try get the three sisters and their brother all in frame.

1 "About the AIDS Memorial Quilt," *Fact Sheet-- The Names Project*, web.

2 "Basic Statistics and Surveillance," *CDC HIV/AIDS Statistics*, web.

A 1984 Van Halen world Tour shirt and torn, acid wash jeans. A slow-motion photo of a hummingbird. A bright mustard backdrop for a scene of Americana: a Lakers basketball, a pie, a Christmas tree, a record, wish you were here. "Music brought Time & I together—Brett." Denim patches on a cotton bed sheet with a locket cradling an orange tabby's picture. A pair of fingerless bicycle gloves. Messages from his children and wife in thin black sharpie on canvas sewed around a photo collage of the family. The gold filigree on orange cloth shines brighter than the fading note:

March 17, 1989

Timmy,

From the time you were born a beautiful tiny baby, I have loved you, an obedient and caring boy. You didn't carry your responsibilities lightly. You gave love and happiness to me in big and little things you've shown me you enriched your own life and the lives of those around you.

Now you rest, gently in God's hands.

I will always miss you as I know that you are ordered and sure, every thing is ordered with wisdom and the unbounded love of our Heavenly Father.

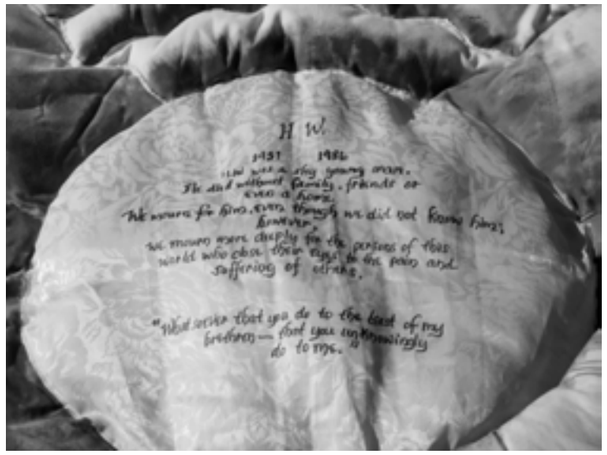
Grant us in all things to see his hand.

The Lord watch between you and I, when we are absent one from the other.

With love,
Mommie

"I'm sure it'll all come back to me when we actually do it, but there's a specific way you have to fold the quilts." Leanne lifts up the corner of a quilt, and points to the five digit number on the underside. "This will end up face-up, so they know which quilt is which when we send them back. If Matt shows up, he can teach you how to do it, hopefully you'll tell everyone else." She was here to begin setup at eight, and rushed over from her brand new software engineering internship to make sure the five o'clock take down goes according to plan. She's fading wearing black jeans and checkered vans under a herringbone blazer, dirty blonde hair pulled into a tight ponytail. Overall, the first day has been a success. Six quilt blocks rest on the Norlin quad, and someone managed to requisition a tent for the volunteers minding the memories. Curious students stopped to examine the quilts, and a few locals came to pay their respects, but not many people took fliers about AIDS prevention or the free condoms. "I'm just happy to have gotten things out. As long as we have people to take down, we can set more out tomorrow. For today, I'm just glad it all seems to have gone okay."

As I'm taking pictures, a middle-aged woman approaches me. "Have you lost someone yourself?"



Anyone is welcome to enter a panel, and several celebrities have been memorialized several times. Freddie Mercury, singer and frontman of rock group Queen has twenty-five, actor Rock Hudson sixteen, top-ranked tennis professional Arthur Ashe nineteen, artist and activist Keith Haring, nineteen. The vast majority, though, are made by and for family, or in some cases the community that's all one has left. Men who have sex with men still account for 61% of all new HIV infections[3], and Black and Latino people are overrepresented in all HIV-Positive populations. As such, the AIDS Quilt becomes a powerful statement of defiance and a rallying point for the gay community. According to the project's founder, Cleve Jones, the quilt "worked on so many levels for people. It was therapy. It was something to do with your hands. It was a way to encourage people to talk and share memories. It was a tool to use with the media to get the media to focus on it. It was a weapon to shame the politicians for their inaction. [4]"

A quarter mystery pattern, each white triangle with a different signature.

Wednesday afternoon, a small CU Gay Literature class stops by the quad. The professor's never taught this course before, but encourages his students to share thoughts or stories. Most stand around quietly, and I can't tell if they're feeling reverent or bored. As I'm taking pictures, a middle-aged woman approaches me. "Have you lost someone yourself?" I answer that thankfully I haven't, no, I'm just helping out and taking pictures, but she suffers from a chronic illness herself, and her online discussion group let her know the quilt would be here. Watching and reading seems to fire her up, she volunteers to help if we host the AIDS Quilt next year.

That's an idea that excites Leanne when I talk to her on Thursday evening. This week she's been hurting pretty bad for volunteers. Today, she left her job early to help put away the quilts, only two people had signed up to help. "You know, what I'd really like to do is start doing the quilt in the spring—it's just too busy at the beginning of the school year. Everyone's busy, and no one knows what's going on." I assume Leanne means herself. She mentioned last night that she was feeling overwhelmed organizing the quilt's volunteers. She continues: "I called BCAP [The Boulder County AIDS Project] to ask if they had anyone who wanted to volunteer, or any educational material, but they never got back to me." An older man approaches as several of us collapse the tent. "You don't have many quilts out." I start to explain that the nine that are out today are only part of the 25 we have,

3 "HIV in the United States," *CDC HIV/AIDS*, web.
4 "The Age of Aids," *Frontline PBS*, web.

we're rotating through the collection, but he cuts me off. "I like it this way. I was there at DC this summer and it was too much. You couldn't stop and really read."

"Please take care of my Dog." Newspaper clippings and Louisiana State University Diploma. A quarter mystery pattern, each white triangle with a different signature. Terry Caoette's name in plaid on plaid with a single yellow wax rose. J. Timothy Atkinson: Sweet Sensitive, and Ever Sincere. Steaks in a lavender's paint sparkle like nebulae. I take off my shoes, hoping I can stay grounded. An e. e. cummings poem: "if a cheerfulest Elephantangelchild should sit" nestled under butterfly wings. Dozens of rainbow handprints. Jerry Payne's first second and third prizes at the Denver Rose show. The cool grass cushions me as I recite names like liturgy. "Looking back through the tears; I still smile Remembering with all the Love in my heart . . . It hurts good—Love, Jerry."

According to the Names Project, it would take thirty-three days to look at the entire quilt, taking in one panel a minute. I've certainly spent twelve hours transporting or reading our twenty-five, and I've barely kept it together. I'm breaking down watching these traveling graves. The other regulars seem equally exhausted. Leanne and consummate volunteer Kae wax nostalgic about showering. I swear the week's never going to end. Can I even imagine the task of fighting the disease itself? Even here, there are so few of us helping. Under-publicized, underfunded, understaffed.

Fall announces itself with a mortal chill and the threat of snow on Friday, the last day of display. The quilts stay inside, displayed in an obscure corner of the University Memorial Center's basement. Traffic's much lower, and the sentiment feels a little blunted, even closeted. Some quilts hang like gallery-pieces, but several others are spread out on the linoleum, as though the bones lie underneath the building's—our community's—foundation.

Photo by Dylan Begneaud

THE ROAD GOES ON FOREVER

By Matt Anderson

GUN IT. My life flashes before my eyes as we charge past an eighteen-wheeler, bracing myself for a collision that would certainly kill us all. A dusty car with dimmed headlights heads down our throats—the machine emerging out of the ghostly cloud of snow hovering above the two-lane highway. The wheel of my truck, and my life, are in the hands of my buddy Belush. OH SHIT. He frantically swerves back into the right lane as we skid across the icy road with no more than thirty yards between the oncoming car and the massive eighteen-wheeler behind us. The glaring eyes of the monster hunting us down illuminate the rearview mirror as the back tires at last catch traction somewhere within the deep powder. We drive onward through the wild blustery night. ROMPING. My brothers and I are all alive. The Lord wanted us to live that night, for we were on the road to New Orleans to celebrate the beginning of the Christian season of Lent, dammit. MARDI GRAS 2010.

Take it easy,
Take it easy
Don't let the sound of your own wheels
Drive you crazy
Lighten up while you still can,
Don't even try to understand
Just go ahead and make your stand
And take it easy

VACATION. Windows down, we slow our roll through the Baton Rouge-NOLA traffic, taking a load off to *The Band* and crack'n cold Shiners. Warm welcoming rays beam down upon my scarred right forearm that casually controls the wheel while my other arm hangs out the window. I'm cool as shit. Despite having been driving for over twenty-four hours and through the worst snowstorm to ever hit North Texas, the traffic does not bother me. I leisurely breathe in the thick gulf air and observe the diverse peoples on Highway 10, taking note of license plates and bumper stickers. Alabama. Arkansas. Texas. Mississippi. Georgia. LOUISIANA. The Saints had just won the super bowl and countless golden fleur-de-lis were stuck on the back of cars, distinguishing locals from the elated invaders flowing into the city. Although I am a die-hard Cowboys fan, I was glad to see the Saints win for the city of New Orleans after the devastating blow of Hurricane Katrina. WHO DAT. Proudly displayed on the back of my black FJ Cruiser is a Colorado Buffs tire cover. Having driven all the way from Boulder and trucked through a record blizzard makes us bad ass. More badass than any other Mardi Gras travelers on the road to NOLA that weekend. This makes us "very dangerous people." RUN RALPHIE RUN.

Down south in New Orleans, the prettiest girls I've ever seen
Sparkling eyes, lips so sweet, we make love to the Rumba beat
Ship's at anchor, my suitcase packed, got a one way ticket, ain't comin' back
Life's a pleasure, love's no dream, down south in New Orleans

I am in a great deal of pain when I wake up in my truck the next morning.

TAKE A PULL. No time to waste and no place to stay, we park our asses on top of the tallest parking garage near Bourbon Street and pass around a handle of Evan Williams Black. Rae pops the cap off of the handle saying, "Thank y'all for letting me take part in this trip with y'all, this is gonna be a good time now, oh yeah." The three of us had picked my buddy Rae's black ass up in Dallas after we dropped my dog off at my parents' house along the way. Rae is the man. In a town like New Orleans, it doesn't hurt to have a "brotha" at your wing either. He takes a pull of the whiskey and then passes it to Belush, who grunts out some primal rebel yell before throwing the handle back into the New Orleans skyline. Nobody knows the little bearded man by his actual first name, Ryan (I think), but rather by Belushi, the name of the lovable Animal House character. Not only does he have an extraordinary resemblance to the John Belushi, our Belush is a terrible drunk as well.

I grab the handle from his hands saying, "Leave some for the rest of us, Cowboy."

"Yeah, Belush, take it easy there. You're already down'n it like wuter," Mac chimes in with his Baltimore accent. Wuter? Really? Such a stupid ass accent. Mac, who was the ringleader behind this spontaneous idea, defines what it means to be a Balti-Bro, rocking long hair that just yearns for a lacrosse helmet to flawlessly flow out the back of. "Boys," he says before taking one last pull, "Let's get after it." LE GO.

Well you get down the fiddle and you get down the bow
Kick off your shoes and you throw them on the floor
Dance in the kitchen 'til the morning light
Louisiana Saturday Night

THROBBING. I am in a great deal of pain when I wake up in my truck the next morning. Looks like we're parked outside a Holiday Inn. Rae is passed out in shotgun and little man Belush is curled up in the back. Where's Mac? I open my door and gracefully roll out. Where the fuck is my phone? Rae and

Belush wake up as I drop the biggest F-bomb of my life. FUCK. My iPhone's gone. It was cracked to shit anyways, but I figured it would be more loyal to me than this. Get over it. A loss is a loss.

"Yo Rae, where the fuck is Mac?"

"He's in the hotel with some girl, remember?"

"Oh, right. She good look'n?"

"I'm sure she looked great last night," Belush chimes in from the back. Rae gives Mac a call but his phone is off.

"Let's go inside and look for him, maybe they'll let us shower." Fat chance, considering we didn't know the room number or the name of the girl he was with.

"Well, there is a pool."

"Good call, Belush. That's exactly what I need right now. I feel like ass." We take a dip into the pool, followed by a detox in the hot tub. Life is good. Or better than it was earlier this morning, at least. Two hugely obese black men jump in to our bath tub with us.

"How y'all doin' this fine morn'n?" We reply that we're feel'n good, feel'n alright.

"What's that you're sipping on?" asks Belush.

"Some daiquiris der, start the day off right," the less obese of the two replies. "There's a drive through daiquiri stand just a block down." I love New Orleans.

Finally Mac shows up–I guess he spotted us from the lobby. "Enjoying the pool of my 5-star hotel, I see." Belush MAD.

"Shut the fuck up, Mac. We slept in the truck, you asshole."

"Calm down Belush, I didn't get a bed either. Slept on the floor with some chick bigger than you. Let's get the fuck out of here, though, before she finds me."

"Drive-through daiquiris, anyone?"

NEXT QUESTION.

Good morning America, how are you?
Don't you know me? I'm your native son
I'm the train they call The City of New Orleans
I'll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done

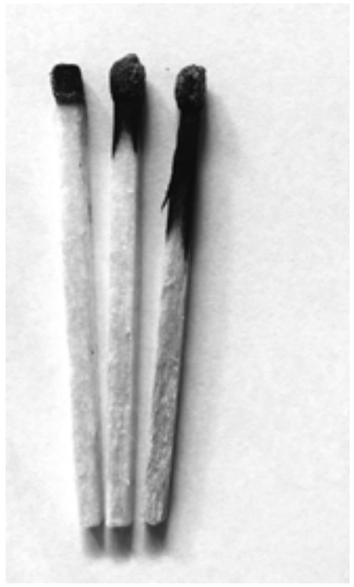


Photo by Joni Hayward

CELEBRATE. The four of us drink our tropical beverages as we stroll down the Endymion parade route. Everybody loves a parade. This place has more life than anywhere I have ever been. Just a bunch of colorful people having a good time together in the streets of uptown New Orleans. Green, gold, and purple beads paint the brilliant sky. Sounds of jazz ignite the crowd, people are dancing, laughing. I wished I had as much rhythm as Rae. On that glorious day, I was reborn. Some beads hit Belush in the back of the head when he was turned away from the floats. Belush MAD. The little man's drunk already. STANDARD.

Born on the Bayou
Born on the Bayou
Born on the Bayou

BRO. Rae was by far the most skilled at peeling crawfish. He has to be part Cajun – last name's Toussaint. The four of us shove the free crawfish down as quickly as we can, surrounded by strangers, most of whom were guys from southern fraternities. Lot 'a dudes. Mac brought us here. He is friends with some guy who works for Brobible, which is a really douchey website for bros, and got us invited to a sponsored crawfish boil.

Luckily, the party was also sponsored by PBR, my favorite shitty beer. They had free PBR hats, free PBR shirts, free PBR koozies, and most importantly, free PBR. Those PBR hats would not leave our heads for the rest of the trip. Belush would not take his off for the next few months. SPONSORED. At this point everyone at the crawfish boil was good and drunk. And a PBR drunk is a happy drunk. We share our story and naturally, everyone loves us. The bros of the crawfish boil had become our fellow journeymen as we joined together in drunken anthem. SING IT.

So rock me mama like a wagon wheel
Rock me mama anyway you feel
Hey mama rock me
Rock me mama like the wind and the rain

Rock me mama like a south-bound train
Hey mama rock me

TITS. We are on a balcony overlooking the sea of people on Bourbon street. Mac and Belush toss out beads to select women down below. Belush HAPPY. On top of the balcony with us are a bunch of fellow college-aged ragers, including some beautiful Austin ladies. It was the place to be. It was by chance that I had run into some buddies of mine who go to the University of Texas that were nice enough to invite us up to their balcony. We are the Kings of Mardi Gras. O RAGE.

I see you, heh, on down on the scene
Foxy
You make me wanna get up and scream
Foxy lady

THE BOOT. I have no idea how long we have been at this bar. It could have been days because time seems stagnant. Still without a phone, I feel the need to find my brothers. I look over and see Rae occupied in the corner. He's got a big smile on his face, grinding with some thick white girl like it's a high school dance.

"Yo Rae, where are the other two drunks?" I spoke too soon, as we watch Belush shove a bouncer outside the woman's restroom. The little man is covered in flour and drenched in water. He had been antiqued. We later found out that he had been getting nice with some girl in the women's restroom when the bouncers tossed flour and water over the stall door. GOT'M. Rae and I quickly run over to save his dumb ass, grabbing him and pushing him out the door. The bouncers had been beating the shit out of anyone who was fucking around at the bar that night. Rae calms down a D-lineman sized bouncer standing outside the door—they're brothas. I tell Rae we should head to the truck.

"But where's Mac? It's 6 AM and he's not picking up."

The little man is covered in flour and drenched in water. He had been antiqued.

"Let's just get the fuck out of here, we'll find him later." The three of us walk down the street as the wise sun rises before us, telling us our ridiculous night must come to an end.

"There she is—my baby." We walk up to my truck and find Mac passed out with a fat chew in his lip. We were all home. The four of us sleep it off for a few hours, wake up, and drive.

THE ROAD.

I was a highwayman, along the coach roads I did ride
With sword and pistol by my side
A place called Boulder on the wild Colorado
I slipped and fell into the wet concrete below
They buried me in that great tomb that knows no sound
But I am still around
I'll always be around

NEVER ENDS. It is Monday, February 20, 2012. I am on the road again, headed back to Boulder from New Orleans for the third consecutive year. The pilgrimage must be made every year now, for it has become a part of who I am. Each Mardi Gras experience is unique from one another, and I have made the journey with different people every year, Rae being the only other one of my friends to be at my wing for all three. I would die for Rae. My friends who have never been along for the ride do not understand. They see no sense in spending the same amount of time on the road as in New Orleans. PUSSIES. Mardi Gras needs no plan, you see. You lose your freedom when you have one. Last night was the first night I managed to find a bed to sleep in while in New Orleans. DON'T CARE. The Road is nothing without impulse. Sameness is suicide. You must be open to meeting new people on the Road and build upon the friendships you already have. BROTHERHOOD. A true traveler is flexible and above all open to growth. I am a highwayman. The Road I'm on goes on forever and the party never ends.

HAPPY MARDI GRAS Y'ALL.

Photo by Hannah Beckler

DEVOTION OF A ONE-EYED MATADOR

By Hannah Beckler

In Zaragoza, Spain a 1,200 pound Miura fighting bull lowers its horns. The massive muscles in its neck quiver and the nostrils flare. It charges—blood clotting like beaded sweat on its ashy black hide—towards the awaiting shadow of the *torero*, the bullfighter. Assuming the traditional languid stalk, the matador, Juan Jose Padilla, is scaled resplendent in gold and fuchsia. The bull thunders towards him with head lowered and horns ripe with the anticipation of gory penetration. Each hoof drives the animal forward. Padilla grips both of his *banderillas*, the wicked harpoon-like instruments designed to coax the bull's confusion into terrifying rage by stabbing them into the flesh of its neck. It is a moment of Hemingway-esque timbre. The bull surges within inches of Padilla. He arches upwards with the tension of a striking viper. Just before the bull's horns reach him, Padilla jumps and brings both *banderillas* down at once. He spins around to face the bull, stumbling backward, toe to heel. Caught up in the momentum of the animal, he falls.

The blue sky wheels above him in a kaleidoscope of his final binocular vision. He lands heavily on his side. The bull is on top of him, churning the dust under heavy hooves. It dips

its mammoth head in a deceptively gentle arc to drive its left horn through the bullfighter's jaw. With a savage upward tug, the horn crushes through Padilla's bone and exits through his left eye-socket, leaving his eyeball to dangle glistening on his blood soaked cheek. Panicked, the bull presses on, dragging Padilla several feet through the arena sand. The skin of his cheek stretches away from his skull and tears with delicate elasticity.

With a final shake, the bull dislodges its horn from Padilla's head, leaving the matador's body lying prone in the dust. He springs up and staggers towards the other toreros. The golden embroidery of his jacket is soaked through with blood to a now a nauseous violet. Pressing his dislodged eye against his cheek with his finger, Padilla begins to scream.

"My eye! I can't see! I can't see!"

Other bullfighters spill into the sand and rush to Padilla's aid. They lift him, bearing him towards the infirmary. Meanwhile, the bull lingers at the edge of the arena. Another matador, Miguel Abellan, steps in. Abellan kills the bull with his eyes glazed in a trance-like state which months later he will swear he can't remember. Tears run down his cheeks. He himself has survived twenty-seven *coranadas*, gorings, yet what he has seen tonight has shaken his very understanding of the *Fiesta Brava*—the wild feast.

The modern *Fiesta Brava* or the *corrida de toros* traces its roots back through thousands of years of human cultural evolution to a prehistoric reverence of the sacred bull. Painted with large horns and the broad sweep of a powerful neck, ancient aurochs are depicted in cave artwork as distantly as thirty-five thousand years ago. In Mesopotamia, the bull was a lunar symbol, and in ancient Egypt, the mortal embodiment of Osiris to be embalmed and entombed within monolithic sarcophagi. From ancient murals on the walls of the palace of Knossos to references in the old testament, the bull has become one of the most important bestial symbols of the western cannon.

It is no great surprise then, that the mythology surrounding bulls was adopted by the Romans and brought to the Iberian peninsula during the conquest in 17 BCE. The Romans fought the animals in gladiatorial arenas as well as sacrificed them in ritual tauroctony—the killing of a sacred bull. In 711 CE, the Moors advanced from North Africa to conquer "Al-Andalus" (Spain) and in the process irrevocably impacted the evolution of modern bullfighting.[1] Now, nearly a millennium and a half since the beginning of it's cultivation, bullfighting remains an important—if hotly contested—aspect of Spanish identity.

The Romans fought the animals in gladiatorial arenas as well as sacrificed them in ritual tauroctony—the killing of a sacred bull.

Groups such as PACMA or PETA openly condemn bullfighting as a spectacle of cruelty and suffering, an atavistic ritual that cannot hope to survive this new enlightened era of Spain.

Is bullfighting a dance, a sport, a torture? A relevant homage to a rich artistic legacy, or an obsolete relic of medieval cruelty? In this complicated debate, evidence leads in every direction. In 2010, Catalonia outlawed *las corridas de toros*, in a move both lauded as a progressive move towards animal rights and criticized as yet another blatant act of Catalonian separatism.[2] In Madrid, however, bullfights are protected and subsidized as "cultural heritage." In many Spanish newspapers, bullfighting reviews are printed in the cultural section alongside theatre critiques and art exhibition announcements. Meanwhile, vocal *anti-taurinos* groups such as PACMA or PETA openly condemn bullfighting as a spectacle of cruelty and suffering, an atavistic ritual that cannot hope to survive this new enlightened era of Spain.

1 Shubert, Adrien, "Death and money in the afternoon: a history of the Spanish bullfight," *Oxford University Press* (1999)

2 Noguer, Miguel, "Cataluña prohíbe los toros." *El Pais,* Accessed June 28, 2010.

To most aficionados, this is not a "fight." It is a dance. It is the Fiesta Brava— a complex art form complete with flourish and a certain vicious beauty.

Yet, despite the controversy, bullfighting remains entrenched in the cultural symbolism of the collective Spanish ethos. The misleading English translation of "bullfighting" implies something altogether brunt and unsophisticated. To most aficionados, this is not a "fight." It is a dance. It is the *Fiesta Brava*—a complex art form complete with flourish and a certain vicious beauty.

The ceremony begins with the *pasello*. The three matadors, six *picadores* (lancers) mounted on blindfolded armored horses, six *banderilleros* (flagmen), and three *mozos de espada* (sword servants) parading in dignified procession around the arena. Once the pasello has finished, the six fighting bulls are run through the arena, mammoth and snorting saliva foam. These animals are all over one thousand pounds with an overdeveloped complex of muscles over the shoulder and neck which gives the animal its distinctive profile and monstrous strength. The breed has been specifically selected to exhibit extreme aggression, energy, strength, and stamina. The only sacrifice made for the safety of the toreros in the bulls' breeding is their separation from their mothers. The cows are more intelligent and will teach their offspring to fight, and for a ceremony dependent on novice bulls, an animal taught to aim would have an entirely unfair advantage.

Traditionally, each of the three matadors and their respective teams have two fights divided into three parts. In the first third, called the "act of lances," the bull enters the ring and

is tested by the matador and the *banderilleros*. Using spinning capes of yellow and fuchsia, the *toreros* antagonize the charge. Inches before impact, the *toreros* step away from the rage of the animal and simultaneously sweep the cloth over the body of the bull. The purpose of each dance-like pass is to identify which horn the bull leads with. Once the matador is satisfied, the *picadores* enter the ring on horseback. Their role is to stab the bull just behind the corded neck muscles. The *bandarilleros* then return to the ring during the second act to each sink a decorated barbed pole deep into the bull's neck between the shoulder blades. If successful, the resulting combination of blood loss and muscular injury will force the bull to hold its head lower during the last stage of the fight.

Finally, the matador steps alone into the arena. This is the final stage, the *tercio de muerte*, the act of death. The matador, using the traditional red cape, will initiate the passes, *la faena*, in which he will coax the bull into charging the cape a hair's breath from his own unarmored chest. The *faena* will end once the bull is sufficiently exhausted and the matador is prepared to perform the final act, *la estocada*. In these last few seconds the matador will face the charge of the bull and flourish his sword above his head, thrusting it through the animal's shoulder blades to stab deep into the aorta.

Juan Jose Padilla does not finish his fight nor perform *la estocada.* His fellow *toreros* bear him to the infirmary, his head lolling on their shoulders and drenching their uniforms in blood. Gorings are so common that every arena is legally required to have a surgeon on site. Padilla is tracheally intubated and loaded into an ambulance.

The eye is back in its proper place, but sightless—

"Pronóstico muy grave," the staff surgeon tells reporters.

Padilla arrives at the hospital at 7:52 p.m. with multiple fractures to the left side of his face, a protruding eyeball, a detached ear, and a hemorrhage at the base of his skull. An operation lasting five hours is performed to save his life. Surgeons try to rebuild his cheekbone, eyelid, and nose with mesh and titanium plates. The irreparable damage, however, leaves him with a split facial nerve and total paralysis of the left side of his

face. The eye is back in its proper place, but sightless—the optic nerve has been elongated and lesioned by the horn. He is now also deaf in his left ear.

On October 19th, less than two weeks after his goring, Padilla speaks to the press with his face uncovered. The entire left side is amass with bulbous swellings and blooms of mauve and purple bruises. His mouth curls downward in a permanent grimace. His voice is slurred and slow.

"I have no rancor toward this bull or toward my profession," he says, "I will return to dress as a torero."

Why? Why return to the sands of the arena so recently bloodied? Before the goring in Zaragoza, Padilla himself had been severely wounded by bulls thirty-seven times, including a goring through the neck that almost killed him. Yet, whether for courage or insanity, Padilla and most *toreros* remain inexplicably drawn to the *Fiesta Brava*. To them, *la corrida* represents an ancient ceremony, an art form that grasps at the very fibers of human mortality. It is not simply man against beast. It is a celebration of death in which man stands before a creature of his own manifested mortality. When done well, it also becomes a celebration of life. The matador charged with honorably killing such a powerful creature will dance with it to its death, risking his own life in turn. It is for the love of bulls, they say, and for the pure love of the art itself.

Supporters of bullfighting argue that this death is less cruel than those suffered by cattle raised en mass to slaughter in distant mechanized factories.

He appears gaunt, skeletal, in his white "suit of lights," the traditional matador's garb, decadently embroidered with real gold.

Yet, there are those to whom bullfighting is not an art but a public torture executed in three parts. Silvia Barquero, the spokeswoman for the Spanish animal-rights party (PACMA) claims, "We should not cause suffering to an animal that has the same right to life as our own species."[3] Bullfighting is cruel. Those who say that the animal suffers are, of course, correct. During the fight, the bull experiences brief but horrendous trials of brutal pain and terror. It is stabbed and speared, it vomits blood, bellows in pain, and is finally impaled by the matador's sword. It is difficult, if not impossible, to refute the claims put forth by animal rights activists. Every year, approximately 250,000 bulls are killed in bullfights throughout the world.

Supporters of bullfighting, however, argue that this death is less cruel than those suffered by cattle raised en mass to slaughter in distant mechanized factories. The attack on bullfighting, they insist, is a product of the recently developed preference for death wrapped in cellophane, one that is invisible and easily ignored. They believe that to ban bullfighting would not only be an egregious affront to Spanish heritage, but also a final capstone on a bloodless, neutered culture too concerned about correctness and accepted taste in an increasingly homogenized world.[4]

It is *Feria* in Jerez de la Frontera, Andalucía. Juan Jose Padilla strides into the arena to the adulation of the crowd. He has endured a fourteen-hour facial reconstructive surgery, daily electroshock treatments to catalyze nerve regeneration, and has lost nearly forty pounds, but now, five months later, he stands again in the center of the ring. He appears gaunt, skeletal, in his white "suit of lights," the traditional matador's garb, decadently embroidered with real gold. Yet, his eye-patch looks menacing and his permanently grimaced face is a portrait of fearsome pride. He lifts his arms wide. His grizzled bellow of "Jerez!"

3 Brandes, Stanley, "Torophies and Torophobes: The politics of Bulls and Bullfights in Contemporary Spain," *Anthropological Quarterly* 82 (2009): 779-794.

4 Minder, Raphael, "Animal Welfare Activists to Protest Bullfighting in Spain." *The New York Times*, August 20, 2010, Web.

sends ripples through the crowd. This is his home turf, his *tierra*.

The bull is enormous. It charges the *banderilleros* who each cape it in turn, sweeping the heavy pink fabric of their *capotes* just inches from the horns. The *picadores* then stab their lances deep into the flesh of the bull's neck. The potent smell of blood is nauseating to the unaccustomed. The second act begins and the bull, wild with pain and rage, barrels forward. This time, Padilla dismisses his assistants and signals that he will place his own banderas. *¡Ay Padilla, qué fuerza!* This is the same way Padilla lost his eye five months prior. He sprints towards the bull with his barbed weapons held aloft. He leaps and sinks the banderas into the animal, his back arching with the force of the recoil. The bull bellows in pain.

The third act begins. Padilla stands alone before the bull. He circles it, slinking forward. With his red cape he goads the bull until it thunders towards him, punctuating the beat of its assault with a tossing thrust of its foot-long horns. The crowd seizes in anxiety as the bull bears down on Padilla's blind left side. He spins. He has no trouble guiding the bull away from his body.

¿Vale la pena?
Is it worth it?

Over the next seven minutes, Padilla and the bull continue to make their passes. The bull shudders with the force of each ragged breath. Blood runs from its nostrils and mixes with the dribbles of saliva at its muzzle. Padilla holds his body high, yet before this creature he appears more frail than ever, the twisted scars on his face more vivid. Together they look startlingly mortal. The passes continue and the two spiral deeper into intimacy. Padilla carves his cape around his hips, leading the fatigued bull ever closer to him. He draws his sword.

Next comes the moment that swallows description. Appalling, sublime, insane, enraging, and alive. Padilla levels his sword at eye height. The bull is only four feet away. He jumps, hovering his torso over the bull's horns and plunges his sword into its heart. The bull collapses mid-stride, blood spews from its mouth, and with a final ripple of taught muscle, it dies.

The crowd erupts. Padilla drops to his knees, from relief and exhaustion, and kisses the sand. He has achieved his goal and returned to his art. For such an honorable and brave fight, Padilla is left with both ears from his bull as trophies. Clenching the ears in his upheld fists, Padilla is lifted upon the shoulders of his brother. He is held aloft like a torch, awash in the exaltation of his triumph. In his face there are no shadows of hesitancy, doubt, or fear. His return in itself is a testament to his blind devotion to the continued future of an art steeped in tradition. A faith that has been left unchecked by the growing opinion that bullfighting should be sedimented in the past as an obsolete relic of bloodier times. Padilla remains staunchly resolute. The *Fiesta Brava* continues.

¿Vale la pena? Is it worth it?

"Yes," Padilla says, "I now have a chance to prove that I can dance better with the bull with one eye than with two."

WHAT HE LEFT BEHIND

By Mariah Hermsmeyer

By Mariah Hermsmeyer

The sound of the curtains scraping across the pole vibrated in my skin. The muscles in my back clenched as I felt compelled to step further inside. I watched my family and relatives disperse around the bed, taking positions in clumps, bracing themselves. I held my breath and strained to exhale. My eyes wasted no time to gaze upon the body, his distorted face—loose at the jaw but petrified in the eyes. There was something familiar about his eyes—the rotten yellow flesh, the faint grey irises, the stagnant pupils staring blankly behind me—but they didn't look like his own. They looked fake—replaced by something inhuman, something I'd dissected in school. I followed his empty gaze to the ceiling. Rows of cheap speckled plaster squares held up by metal frames and cold fluorescent lights shed a pale blue hue over the room. I thought about the wires and pipes hiding behind those squares, powering the machines that tried to keep him alive. As frantically as that energy flowed to awaken the fading vessel where all wires met, it wasn't enough. I wondered if that was that the last thing he saw before it all went dark—if

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

the loud echoes of the screaming machines were the last things he heard. Or had he disconnected already, his body just making it official? What were his last thoughts, his last pleas? Was he scared?

His body was stiffly arranged on the bed—legs straight, feet erect, arms limp at his sides. I could tell a nurse had prepared him for us—his sheets were nicely tucked in and aside from his horrific face, his body looked at peace. I wondered what tangled unnatural position he was in before as a doctor sat on top of him shoving his palms to his chest, breaking ribs to try and awaken his heart while alarms and nurses panicked around him. Did they panic? Or was this just another arrest, another loss, another night at work?

I looked at my grandmother standing at the head of the bed. Her eyes were red and wet and her head bobbed with small whimpers, but she seemed more composed than before. Only a few minutes ago she was frantic when his fate was uncertain, but now that it was over, she looked relieved. She wiped a tissue under her eyes to clear the smearing mascara while her shoulders relaxed and her breathing settled. The last time I visited them she was scrambling around the kitchen cooking and cleaning, rushing from room to room to care for him when he grunted in agony. She would reenact in great detail all the restless nights, the grim doctors' visits, the helplessness she felt. She always looked tired and on edge, inches away from a total meltdown. It was painful to watch. She was so much younger than him, I wondered if she regretted giving up so much of herself in those last years. Did she really love him that much, or did she feel obligated to care for him? Was it to keep us, the family she loved but had only married into? The man she fell in love with was long gone, replaced by a grumpy sick patient with no energy left to give compassion—I wondered where she found the motivation to stand by that. But it doesn't matter anymore—she upheld her vows and can finally move on.

I thought I should touch his hand at some point as we all stood there. It looked the same—thin leathery skin patched with different shades of reds and purples, blue veins now motionless protruding from underneath, his nails untreated, yellow, and chipped—but his fingers looked different—longer and empty. The rings he had always worn were gone; the thick turquoise wristwatch he loved so much had been replaced by a thin plastic

The man she fell in love with was long gone, replaced by a grumpy sick patient with no energy left to give compassion—I wondered where she found the motivation to stand by that.

strip with his name on it. I reached out my left hand and dipped my fingers behind his thumb. His palms were still coarse, provoking memories of him holding my hand and lifting it to his lips, but the cold chill was unsettling. In my head I imagined him springing back to life, gasping for air and clenching my hand in terror. I drew my hand away quickly, now apprehensive, and resumed my position at the foot of the bed.

My aunt was clutching onto her two daughters, the three of them forming a tripod of support. They sobbed together, truly mourning and grappling for intimacy. The daughters never looked away from the body. Their confused innocent eyes surveyed it like they were looking for something—for someone. I could tell they saw something was missing, that they felt the emptiness, but maybe they were struggling to find the words to ease their minds. I wondered if this would rob them of their innocence, or if they'd fight to keep it.

The loudest wails in the room came from my uncle and his two children. I expected him to cry—he'd always been sentimental—but I was surprised by the painful weeping of my cousins. The boy was the hard type, rebellious and aggressive as the result of a traumatic childhood, but I guess I understood his tears. The man on the bed had been one of the few people that believed in him. He'd watched over him and his sister as children when their single father was struggling to make a living and their intoxicated mother abandoned them. He'd treated my cousin as an equal when most of us looked down at his addictive and destructive behavior. The girl was no better, but her charm blinded it to those around her. She was manipulative and co-dependent, destroying herself whenever left alone. When she looked at me, her eyes communicated that this was too much, too soon since her last attempt. I knew she shed tears for the loss of a mentor and fear for herself, but I could also see the selfish glow of an excuse welling up in her eyes, eager for the attention this night would bring.

My brother stood properly a few paces away from me, his head bent, shoulders hunched, hands folded—like an altar boy waiting for communion. To someone else he may have looked strong and composed, but I know his eyes—they were withdrawn, unsure, maybe even frustrated. When I looked at him he looked back sincerely, the corners of his mouth flexed—a signal we've adapted but I can't explain. It's always been said

that he was the most similar to the man in front of us—handsome and charming, always prepared with new stories of his adventures, always the center of attention. Maybe he was finding the words for this moment to ease the tension later. I wondered if this is what his final night would be like. If he'd carve a similar path, or if he would be like our father, a figure that seems more like shadow on the wall than a physical man. My father was next to him, standing the same way, staring at the floor. I saw his hand twitch in a gesture as if he were speaking, a habit of his when deep in thought. I wondered who he was talking to in there and about what. Was he thinking about his own father? Was he thinking about work? His face was cold, but I knew his chest fluttered with a warm heart. I wondered if he would speak at all tonight, or if he'd remain a shadow until morning. The drooping of his cheeks suddenly struck me—how drastic his wrinkles have become—how little hair was left. A knot jutted into my throat, a wave of nausea overwhelmed me as a flash of him lying on that bed gripped my stomach and blurred my vision.

I braced myself by finally looking at my mother across the room. Her head was slightly tilted down, her hands clasped together resting on her stomach, her body gently swaying from side to side. Her soft eyes floated between his face and her hands. She was praying. I tried to picture the heaven she believed he was heading to: a place of peace, free of darkness, full of light and filled with love. She'd be envisioning his welcome at the gates, a handshake with Peter, the reunion with lost loved ones. Her mother would be there. I could see the smile on her face when she lifted her head and closed her eyes. The beauty she saw in these moments. She'd made a life of sitting at the bedside of the suffering, feeding them the hope and comfort of God's grace, easing them from pain and panic, replacing the fear of the unknown with the certainty of relief. The ordained minister was at work—the stable believer bringing peace to those around her with her presence—but I worried about the orphan underneath it all. The unstable woman I knew at home. I worried she'd need comfort that her distant family would struggle to give. But I knew she had God. It had been years since I broke the habit of praying, but in case anyone was listening, I thanked Him for being there for her when I could not.

I looked back at his face, trying to undo the sagging and discoloration of sickness and age to get back to the man I knew as a child. I'd watched him transform from an old man to an elder—watched the life in his eyes vanish to the very end. An old man is still present, still engaged, just aloof. An elder seems isolated with no energy left to interact. Their bodies are still, but their eyes still move. They can hardly feel, hardly hear, hardly speak, but they watch, as if everything they see is beautiful. They often look on the verge of tears—tears of joy or sadness, I don't know. As a child I just thought they were empty with no thought, disappearing into nothing when they fell silent, but now I wonder if there's something they're hiding from us, like adults hide the stress and cruelty of the real world from their children. Is there something darker—more frightening—waiting for us at the end? Hallucinations, crippling regret, paranoia? Or do we just fall into a state of ignorant bliss? Did he feel his body decaying from the inside? I wonder if that's why we lose our senses as we age. It would be too painful, too terrifying, to feel what's really happening to us.

Is there something darker—more frightening—waiting for us at the end?

As I walked out of the room I took one final glance behind me. Everyone was saying their goodbyes—his children leaning over to kiss his cheek goodnight one last time. Their eyes fought to look into his, their heads turning to meet a gaze that couldn't be returned. Farewells were spoken, but the words felt empty in the silence of no response. It was their heavy sighs of resignation that lingered the longest. One final breath, one final moment, and then we looked away forever.

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

Photo by Ryan Matthew Long

STILL ON THE FENCE

By Dominic Haury

The first time he fell off the fence he was twenty-eight. Charles Haury III is a father of four, an accomplished entrepreneur, a former husband, and the oldest of eight siblings, but I just call him Dad. He wasn't different from many other southern Indiana natives, besides the fact that a sickness dwelled in him. A sickness that would come to torment him for the rest of his life, and it only needed a trigger, something to let it loose. That trigger was the birth of his youngest daughter, my little sister.

Charlie truly wakes up a different soul every day. When you hear therapists trying to explain certain mental illnesses, it sounds and reads like it came out of a DIY guide. A therapist takes an inventory of symptoms, develops a diagnosis, and comes up with a treatment plan. The sad truth of it all is that after years of treatment some eventually find out there's no curing, only coping.

Charlie grew up in the mid-sized town of Evansville, Indiana, in a lower to middle income household with the traditional nuclear family of eight kids, a mother, and a father. As the oldest, and presumably most responsible, Charlie bought his

first house as a project to flip at the age of seventeen. Selling the house a year later, he made a $20,000 profit. Most eighteen-year-olds would squander that profit in one way or another, but Charlie was a different type. He put it in stocks—all of it. Buying houses for most people is a huge undertaking; a long drawn out process that often ends in some form of cognitive dissonance. Extreme personalities like Charlie, though, when in their manic states—that is, one of radical and swift decision making—buy them like a five cent bottle of Cho-Cola at the nearest fueling station. Cognitive dissonance and a state of depression eventually ensued, but not until the papers were signed and the house was his.

As an eighteen-year-old college student, he started a painting business—Collegiate Painting. As the owner and operator, it makes sense he had a high turnover of employees because of his unpredictable daily mood swings. Nobody could really understand that he was always on the fence.

While in his early thirties, during the days immediately following the birth of his youngest daughter, he lost it. The demons inside had escaped, and the situation came to fruition like a rabid animal with foam dripping from its mouth. He fell into a deep depression. His wife, Berny, took on full responsibility of the house and all four of us. She was tossed into the life of a single mom overnight as Charlie occupied the bedroom as a permanent residence.

I couldn't recall what type of meds he took, so I called my dad the other day to ask a quick question—should've known there is no such thing with him.

"Hey dad, what type of medicine are you taking right now for borderline?" I can tell right away, I'm lucky to have caught him on a good day.

"Oh, nothing works, therapists misdiagnose borderline everyday. They've always just given me depression meds, like Prozac and Klonopin. I'm hooked on that shit right now."

He continued with his usual rant about the trigger and abandonment, a loss of self worth, inability to be alone, black and white thinking, and the fact that he was never validated by his father. They are all common themes within the world of Borderline Personality Disorder, being played over and over in his mind.

He isn't capable of seeing things from anybody else's point of view. Inconsistent moods as a symptom are, in his case,

When a doctor diagnoses an illness, patients can accept it, move on and try to help themselves, or they can use that diagnosis as a crutch; a vessel to which they attach themselves, in any harm they might smash through, and blame it on the sickness.

an understatement. The "black and white thinking" that's come to define BPD was and is his defining attribute. As the popular book on BPD by Jerold Kreisman and Hal Straus says in the title "I Hate You, Don't Leave Me." That suggests a constant push and pull of everyone closest to Charlie, and it was and remains the story of his life. The authors pinpoint Charlie's problem, but don't offer any solution. "Ask an experienced mental health clinician about the disorder, on the other hand, and you will get a much different response. She will sigh deeply and exclaim that of all the psychiatric patients, borderlines are the most difficult, the most dreaded, and the most to be avoided—more than schizophrenics, more than alcoholics, more than any other patient." Imagine telling your friends and family everything you can't stand about them, and routinely having to call them and ask forgiveness. This is routine for Charlie. When a psychologist attempts to explain the symptoms of BPD, it often comes with an "in some cases" clause. For Charlie, it's almost always present in some way or another, fear of abandonment at your lowest lows.

"If you don't have a sense of self, you don't know who you are so what's the point of living anymore? It's a terrible thing to have. I'm terrified to go home anymore. All it takes is a trigger. For me it was divorce, when BARNY [he has mispronounced her name since I was seven in an attempt, I'm guessing, to devalue her as a person] divorced me and took all my money, that was it, I died eighteen years ago."

I could hear him making himself angry, so I changed the subject back to medication.

When a doctor diagnoses an illness, patients can accept it, move on and try to help themselves, or they can use that diagnosis as a crutch, a vessel to which they attach themselves, in any harm they might smash through, and blame it on the sickness.

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He's a proud man of humble beginnings but when it comes to losing money, there is no greater fear to Charlie. He views every cent he has ever saved as his. No exceptions, it's his. He speaks to all of his kids about things that happened over eighteen years ago when they were no more than seven or eight years old like

they had just happened yesterday—

"Do you remember when you were standing in that football end zone on that fucking nerd's shoulders? BARNY wouldn't let me even come near you."

"No dad," his kids often need to reply. "I was only six years old you said."

He often changes subjects mid-sentence. If you mention certain trigger words such as "dollar, mom, my car, Lauren" (my sister), it ignites something and he is off. A conscious effort has to be made to stand on neutral ground.

The extremes of BPD can create an alternate world where the victims of the disorder have completely skewed views of past events in their lives. It has been said that BPD is much like a tall skinny picket fence. Like fence walkers, patients are ready to topple over onto either side at any moment, suffering either deep dark sadness or unreasonable happiness to the point of insanity. Charlie has terrible balance. On top of that fence he is the best guy to be around, unpredictability being one of his best qualities. You never know what's coming. But that balancing act can only last so long and when it stops, he comes crashing down. It must be a tall fence, I've always thought. Within the Academia of Psychology, the fall from the metaphorical fence isn't a gradual one.

What the specialists call BPD is actually more often a combination of disorders. According to Presniak, Olson, and McGregor in their article on "The Role of Defense Mechanisms in Borderline and Antisocial Personalities," "BPD has one of the highest comorbidity rates with other personality disorders, especially with APD." That basically means, in most cases, one mental illness comes with the other. APD stands for Antisocial Personality Disorder. Charlie has a smorgasbord of illnesses, and you have to wonder sometimes whether they're in his brain, or just in his head. The brain is a complicated thing and it is said by some that we as humans know more about the vast universe surrounding us than the human brain. I say that's a dangerous assumption, and allows many to "blame it on the sickness", if you will. Charlie is now fifty-six years old, and on a good day is able to make it to the Starbucks on the corner and

A psychologist can't and doesn't know the extent to which a person can create his or her own reality.

read the paper. Antisocial Disorder can have many facets. In his case, he'll talk to anyone willing to listen as long as he doesn't know them.

Now Charlie calls his kids anywhere from once a week to twenty-six times a day. A quick reference to an obscure memory from eighteen years ago, and a self deprecating threat to end it all right here right now usually follows the "Hello" from anyone willing to answer the phone.

"Hey Dad, how's it going?"

(Sobs)

"Come on, what's wrong?"

"I can't get outta bed, I'm alone, I think I took too many pills. That's it, this is the end."

His kids know what that means, a half eaten block of moldy cheese, a can of refried beans, and a forest of empty pill bottles are sitting next to his bed. His makeshift curtains, made of the sheets that used to be on his bed, have been drawn for days, and he has just gotten enough energy to call and pour some of the burden of his terribly heavy life onto one of his kids. These days are recovery days—he has walked on the fence recently, happily frolicking, not even bothering to look down, and after a misstep and an argument with one of his sisters or brothers, has tumbled all the way to the ground. It hurts—I'm positive of it. For God's sake, I've got the same genes as him.

What will my life come to resemble? This pitiful man curled up on a beautiful summer day in his bedroom? Is any of this illness a choice? I choose to believe Charlie's unfortunate life is a product of his own doing. It may seem I'm too hard on him, but as someone who knows about the illness, because I was forced to learn about it, and who has dealt with it for so long, I refuse to believe all parts of it are a human condition. A psychologist can't and doesn't know the extent to which a person can create his or her own reality. Thanks, Dr. Luzio. You've given Charlie a crutch for life, but I won't go near it. The view from that fence may be grand, but I'll stand on the ground and look on if that's quite all right.

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

KNIGHTS IN SHINING KNEE BRACES

By Sam Klomhaus

Every year, washed-up former high school athletes at college campuses across the nation flock to courts, fields, and rinks to try and prove to their contemporaries that the line, "I would have played college ball if coach had played me in the fourth quarter of the big game" and its many variations aren't complete and total bullshit. I speak of course about the brave souls who compete in intramural athletics. These long-suffering modern-day gladiators finally have their chance to be kings like they remember themselves being in high school. Also, they can get that idiot down the hall to shut up about his pre-collegiate exploits. They battle to decide once and for all who would have been all-state if they hadn't blown out their knee. They will do anything in their power to recapture the glory. I am one of these people.

In my youth, I considered myself a strapping young basketball standout. People would tell tales of my conquests on the court to this day if I hadn't been the victim of a grave injustice. My coach had an idea in his head about how basketball should be played. I too had an idea about how basketball should be

played. They were not the same idea. Why Coach didn't tailor my team's playing style (which involved a lot of running, something a finely-tuned athletic machine like me had no patience for) to my considerable talents is beyond me. Thus, I rode the bench and missed my window of opportunity. Who knows, if it hadn't been for his foolish miscalculation you might be able to watch me perform amazing feats of basketball magic across campus at Coors Event Center. Alas, it was not to be.

I am on a quest to restore my honor and prove to my friends that I am much better than them at basketball. This is not a serious quest like Frodo bringing the ring of power to Mordor, or the Blues Brothers raising money to save the orphanage. My quest is more along the lines of Kenny Powers trying to get back to the big leagues, and my reward will be an intramural championship T-shirt. I will not rest until I have acquired one. I'll go to grad school if I have to. I may end up a very educated man indeed.

Every King Arthur needs a round table and every future intramural champion needs a team that will accompany him in his rise to the top. When I first embarked on my quest for greatness, I decided that only the best possible basketball players would be allowed on my team. A test was administered to make sure only the most talented would join my team. It consisted of one question, which was, "Do you want to be on my intramural basketball team?" Those who said yes were deemed worthy.

Besides me there was Bryant, a buddy of mine from high school whose Division I football dreams had ended when Jon Embree told him that a 5'11" 200 pound stature was too small to be a college linebacker (Who's laughing now?). There was Nick, who was my RA, and the captain of our team, Dan, who is from New York and therefore must be good at basketball. Kohl, who smokes a lot of weed and has a giant head, and Thor, whose name is Thor, and two kids whose names I don't remember and who didn't actually show up to any of the games.

Fully assembled, we struck out to make the opposition tremble at our might. The Harlem Globetrotters would have wet their pants if they ever found themselves on the opposite side of the opening tip-off as us. We came together with a singular goal: win an intramural championship. As it turns out, winning an intramural championship T-shirt is about as easy as giving a male hippopotamus a prostate exam. This was especially true in

Fully assembled, we struck out to make the opposition tremble at our might.

the division in which my team found itself in: the intermediate division, which was made up of thirty eight different teams. For those of you who cannot comprehend the magnitude of that statement, let me put it this way: there are more teams in the intermediate men's basketball division at CU than there are in the NBA. Therefore, we can infer that it is harder to win an intramural basketball championship at CU than it is to win the NBA championship. Good thing we had a few tricks up our sleeves.

I will be honest—
we looked like middle-schoolers.
In our defense, the other team had what appeared to be an NBA player on their team.

We prepared for the season by using proven basketball training techniques like sometimes taking the stairs up to our dorm rooms (Only sometimes though. Need to save some energy for the games) and going to the gym and staring intently at the weights in hopes that they would lift themselves. A healthy, championship-winning body starts with a healthy, championship-winning diet, so eating as much shitty dorm food and drinking as much beer as possible were also very important pieces of our training regimen. After much training, eating, and drinking the start of the intramural season came upon us. We realized that our team was missing something very important: a name. So we put our heads together and after much deliberation decided on a moniker. We were the "Pure Ringers." The name resulted from a hilarious encounter between one of our players whose name I will not reveal, just know that it wasn't me, and a girl with a purity ring. Everything was in place. Then the season started.

Dan, Nick, Kohl, Thor and I piled into Nick's 2007 two-door Honda Civic and made the perilous drive from Williams Village to the parking lot nearest the rec center that didn't re-

quire a parking pass. Bryant took the bus for this journey of over a mile. The other two kids went somewhere other than the rec center. We felt optimistic about the game, but uncertain. None of us had played basketball together before. This showed in the game. I will be honest—we looked like middle-schoolers. In our defense, the other team had what appeared to be an NBA player on their team. I think after he was finished demolishing us he drove to Denver to play for the Nuggets. We regrouped after the game, and agreed that the next time a team had a player that good, one of us should try and fight him. I suggested Kohl because while athletic he is useless in a real basketball game. He said that was fine.

The next week, we again piled into Nick's tiny Honda Civic. Bryant joined us this time, which meant one of us had to lie across the other three people sitting in the back seat. My teammates decided that person should be me. It was not an enjoyable car ride. My back went numb, a consequence of having six knees plus both of Kohl's elbows jammed into it. While we were warming up a kid none of us had seen before came up to us and asked us if we were the Pure Ringers. We said we were. He said his name was Sam and he was friends with the other two kids who hadn't shown up to the last game. He said he wanted to be on our team. We said okay. We asked Sam if those kids were ever going to show up. He said no.

The game was no better than the first. The other team didn't have any NBA ballers on their team, but somehow managed to win by a considerable margin. Again we regrouped after the game. We decided to switch from a man defense to a zone defense so we wouldn't have to run as much. Despite our best training efforts, we were still out of shape. Many of our players worked on expanding their lung capacities by smoking lots of weed, and we hadn't been eating enough shitty dorm food. The lone bright spot was other Sam. It turned out that he was actually pretty good at basketball. On the way back from the game Kohl (who was now lying across me, Dan, and Bryant) said he thought Sam was good enough to play college ball. Trying to be modest, I told him that I wasn't quite that good. Kohl told me that he was referring to the other Sam. Then he called me a pussy.

Before the next game we decided that we were tired of losing. We were going to win the next one. We all got out of

According to Nick, Dan is our most consistent player. Nick is wrong. I am our most consistent player.

Nick's clown car focused on winning. We got blown out by forty. The "highlight" came with thirty seconds left in the first half. I had the ball and was dribbling it up the court. One of their players started counting down like it was the final seconds in an attempt to bait me into heaving a long shot with very little chance of it going in. This is what we in the sports world call "bush league." Especially when you are killing the other team. What the counters didn't account for was my NBA three point range. I got mad and pulled up from twenty-seven feet and drained a three pointer. I turned around and got in the face of the dude who had been counting. If it hadn't been for the gallons of adrenaline surging through my veins I never would have done this. The guy looked like Tiki Barber. I had to be restrained by Nick. It was a good decision. Tiki would have killed me. Also, we lost our most consistent player when Dan went down with an ankle injury in the second half (According to Nick, Dan is our most consistent player. Nick is wrong. I am our most consistent player). It was later agreed upon by the entire team that Dan was faking and just didn't want to get his ass kicked any more. I don't blame him, but that doesn't make him any less of a sissy.

We spent the seasons rigorously training, using the same methods as before, only with less taking the stairs and more beer.

After that debacle there was only one more game left in the season before playoffs, and we resolved to win it. We arrived at the rec center brimming with confidence (Except for Dan, whose turn it was to lay across Nick's backseat). I saw, warming up on the court I was going to play on, wearing the same color jersey as the team we were supposed to be playing against, a kid that I had played against in high school. His name was Omar, and back in the day he attended a school with the worst piece of shit basketball team you will ever see in your life. I once outscored his team eleven to zero in three minutes.

I was giddy. Then Kohl informed us that he had forgotten his tennis shoes. He thought he could borrow the pair of basketball shoes I normally wore around campus, but I had worn my cross trainers that day. This meant Kohl would have to play an entire basketball game in the shoes he had on, which were some kind of moccasin-slipper hybrid. We lost again. Omar destroyed us.

Playoffs rolled around and our mood turned pessimistic. Then the strangest thing happened: we won a playoff game. It was a forfeit because the other team didn't show up, but we weren't in a position to be picky. Some players were unhappy about this. I thought they were idiots. The free win took us one step closer to our ultimate goal of the T-shirt.

Our next playoff game was against the second best team in the division, but we weren't concerned. Our "win" had filled us with confidence. Or we just didn't care anymore. Either way, we weren't scared. We only lost by twelve. It was the highlight of our season. After the end of the season we decided that the league needed a break from us. Someone else needed a chance for glory. So we took the next two intramural seasons off. We spent the seasons rigorously training, using the same methods as before, only with less taking the stairs and more beer.

Our first game defined the term "failure."

We regrouped for the fall 2012 season with a roster overhaul. Other Sam now avoids the rest of us like the plague, so he was out. Kohl transferred to Iowa. Thor walked on to the football team, where his winning experience on the Pure Ringers appears to be very influential on the other players, especially Jordan Webb. And of course the two kids who never showed up didn't show up for the next season. We brought in Kelvin, who is almost as good a three point shooter as I am, Reed, who is also from New York and (he claims) good at basketball, Trent, who has a beard, and Alex, who does not. Our new captain, Dan, accidentally put us in the competitive division, which is the division with the best players. In other words, a more difficult division than the first season. I will never forgive him for this.

Tom was a little lacking in basketball fundamentals, such as the rules and where the basket is located.

Our first game defined the term "failure." Bryant wasn't able to make it to that game and we were left with Alex as our only player taller than six feet. The other team had many players over six feet. You can probably see where it went from there. After the game Bryant told me he had found a job at Target that forced him to work on our game days and because of that he couldn't be on the team anymore. With Bryant gone we needed another post player to help Alex. Reed, who is from Brooklyn and therefore a superior judge of basketball talent, told us his roommate Tom would be a good fit because Tom is 6'4". Tom also plays hockey, which (according to Reed) makes him coordinated, which makes him good at basketball.

The next game did not go well. Contrary to Reed's opinion, there isn't a correlation between hockey talent and basketball talent. Tom was a little lacking in basketball fundamentals, such as the rules and where the basket is located. Also, he pouted whenever anyone subbed in for him. Tom made a bad game even more miserable.

I had a Biology test the next week, so I didn't get to play in the game. Nick had to work, so he was out too. I showed up midway through the second half, just in time to watch the other team put the finishing touches on a blowout. Tom was bitching as usual. This season was turning out to be even more miserable than the last one. For the final game we only had five players, me, Reed, Dan, Trent, and Kelvin. Nick had to work again, Alex had a test, and Reed conveniently forgot to tell Tom about the game. I again saw a player who I had demolished in high school on the opposing team. Strangely, he played for the same high school as Omar from the first season. Also strange was the fact that he too appeared to have gotten much better since high school. We were killed again.

None of us showed up for our playoff game. Not a single person. It was against the team that we had played the week before, and we just didn't have the heart to compete anymore. Currently, the Pure Ringers are on hiatus. We might give it one more try next semester. With football season over Thor can rejoin the team, and he can bring along some of his tall athletic football friends. Until then, all I can do is hope Tad Boyle comes to his senses and lets me onto CU's NCAA team.

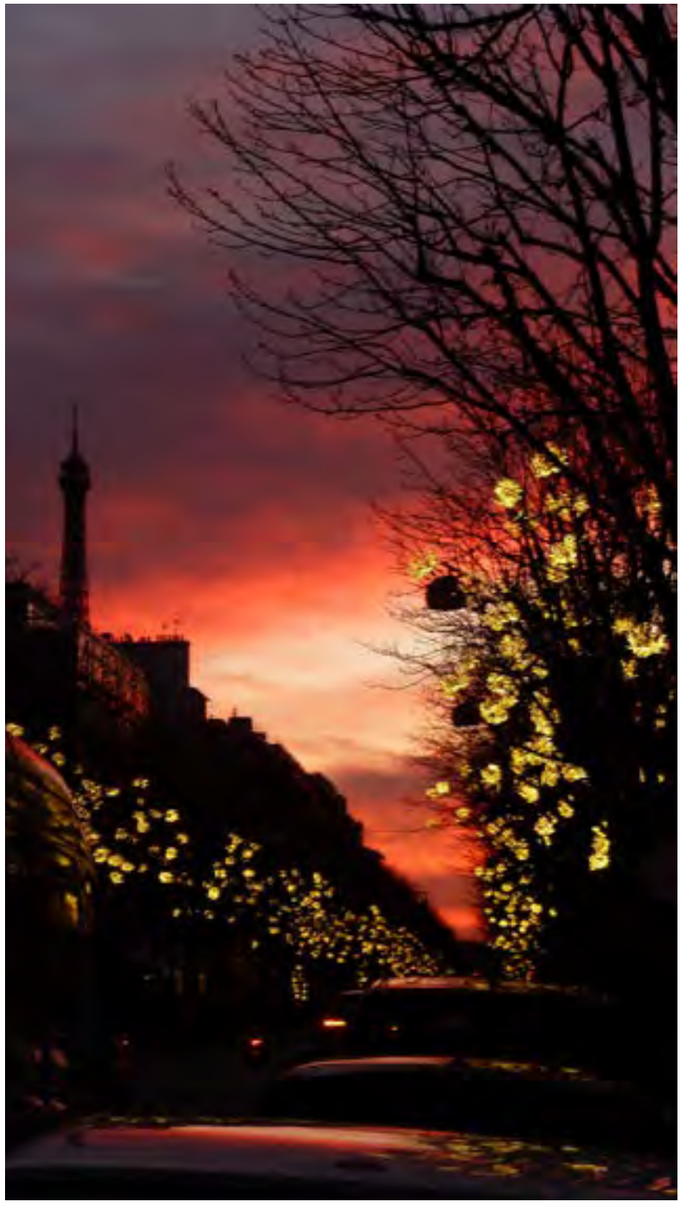

Photo by Bessie Stanisz

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JESSICA EPSTEIN grew up in Avon, Colorado, before her parents moved to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. A Spanish language and literature major, she studied for 5 weeks in Rosario, Argentina, and has visited Barcelona and other Spanish cities. Jessica studies Spanish and English literatures and plans on moving to Puerto Vallarta after graduation this year. She came to CU, "because my brother and sister live nearby. I like how environmentally friendly this city is, and I like how much people here are concerned about their health." The author of "MY VERY OWN PIG" adds, however, that she is "NOT a vegetarian!" She writes fiction more often than non-fiction, and considers Douglas Adams and James Patterson her main influences. "I can write whatever I want," she says, without being considered "rude or impulsive."

AJ MAIER GUSTERN was born in Denver Colorado in 1993. A freshman in Biology, Aj found his major after three life-changing weeks studying primates in Costa Rica. After finishing his bachelor's degree, the author of "THE JACKET" plans on learning Spanish and joining the Peace Corps, then going to graduate school to specialize in predatory animal behavior. His favorite thing about writing is how words and their meanings can be manipulated. His least favorite thing about writing is the feeling of beginning to hate a piece he's working on after reading it so many times. Favorite authors include Jack Kerouac, George Orwell, and Jack London.

SAM KLOMHAUS hails from the great metropolis of Silt, Colorado. He is majoring in Journalism and Psychology. He has a goatee (which you should know from reading "FACIAL HAIR CLUB FOR MEN") and wears his hats forward. His favorite authors are (in no particular order) Dave Barry, Hunter S. Thompson, Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, and Douglas Adams. Hobbies include playing basketball (if you have read "KNIGHTS IN SHINING KNEE BRACES," you already know that), skiing, reading, pretending he knows how to fix things, and writing third-person biographies about himself. When he isn't doing any of these things, he usually spends his time wandering aimlessly around the grocery store.

KATHLEEN CHILDS is a Boulder based writer and composer, who enjoys long walks outdoors, live performances, and commas. Author of "STEEL" and "MEMORY WORK," Kathleen is currently a senior in the University of Colorado French Department. Much of her attention is spent considering her local and global responsibilities and minor personal tribulations in a post-colonial landscape. She also considers herself a modernist, but fears that this description of her academic and political sympathies might ultimately be overstating things. Kathleen is thrilled that you are reading this.

MARIAH HERMSMEYER helped create JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY as a founding editor and contributor to its design, layout, and artwork. A Boulder native in her second year at CU, the author of "CURTAINS" and "WHAT HE LEFT BEHIND" double majors in Environmental Design and Studio Arts. She is also involved in the Biophilic Design Club learning about and designing environments that combine both nature and technology through biomimicry, and is employed at Norlin Library as a Programming and Communications Student Assistant organizing and setting up the art displays and exhibits. Mariah pursues other interests like photography, writing, film, philosophy, psychology, history, gardening, music, theater, and travel in her "free time." Before graduation from CU, she wants to help form and be a part of the creative community on campus and to study abroad in Europe and Africa.

ABIGAIL NELSON is currently a sophomore majoring in English with a Business Minor at CU. Born and raised in Philadelphia, she has always had a strong passion for the arts. She enjoys reading anything: books, magazines, blogs, even cereal boxes; she admires great writing and aspires to be better at it herself. The author of "DRUNK WITH SUCCESS" is a chief editor for the journal, working on all of the pieces in this issue (and learning that editing writers can be like "herding cats"). She loves creating art, expressing herself through drawing, painting, and sculpting. After graduation from CU, she looks forward to graduate school and a literary career in publishing, editing, or journalism.

ALLISON MATNEY grew up in Thornton, Colorado, the youngest of five kids. A French major with a love for language, the author of "REQUIEM FOR A BABY SHOWER" discovered during her undergraduate career that writing helped to strengthen her skills in her other studies, while providing an excellent forum to express her ideas and creativity. Although she graduated at the end of the course that spawned this first issue, Allison stepped in to help manage the editing process at a critical moment, and she edited many of the pieces here. She currently lives in Boulder, Colorado with too many roommates and spends her writing time trying to be George R. R. Martin.

CASSANDRA BECK also helped edit several of the pieces in this issue. The author of "ALGO ES ALGO, MENOS ES NADA," is a sophomore at the University of Colorado Boulder. Born and raised in San Diego, California, she has lived in three different states and two different

countries since. She attended middle school in Surrey, England; high school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and now studies Communication at CU. Her interest in literature and writing includes favorite authors Kurt Vonnegut, for his imaginative style, and Cormac McCarthy, for his story lines. Along with her focus in Communication and public relations, she plans to continue writing in the future.

VALERIE ERWIN is a graduating senior majoring in Advertising with a concentration in Anthropology. Author of "THE DANCER IN THE DANCE," a few of Valerie's passions outside of dancing include being active outdoors, attending concerts, doing ministry for Young Life, exploring new places, and being ridiculously curious. "I came to Colorado curious, wanting desperately to grow and explore," says the South Carolina native, who lives by a quote from one of her favorite authors, Donald Miller, that says: "I want to keep walking away from the person I was a moment ago, because a mind was made to figure things out, not read the same page recurrently." Following graduation, Valerie will finish out a season as a dance instructor and choreographer at a local dance studio before pursuing a career in advertising.

BRYN NEWMAN, born in the mountains of Colorado but raised in Florida, finds herself yearning for all things earth and all things sea. Writing remains her most expressive outlet; the author of "EIGHT HOURS" sees the arts as her therapy. "All of my stories are a part of me. They are all, in that sense, nonfiction, which is why creative nonfiction is my method of guidance when I feel lost. I find inspiration in writers like Alan Watts and Chuck Palahniuk, who, whether in style or thought provoke me artistically and intellectually. I don't like to label myself as a writer, because I would not like to lessen myself to that of a one-word description, which is ironic for someone who enjoys words as much as I do. But we are more than just that; as humans we are not just painters or photographers, we are creators. Striving to find the beauty in the chaos."

JOEL PEREZ is a sophomore at the University of Colorado Boulder and is currently studying for a degree in Economics. The author of "I LIVE TO FIGHT" was born in Lancaster, California to Mexican immigrants. "As far as Mexican athleticism is concerned, two major sports dominate: soccer and boxing. Starting from a young age, I loved to watch boxing. It was exiting, suspenseful, and glorious." As soon as he was old enough to join the nearest gym, he began training and fighting, and has been boxing ever since.

KELLY GIVENS majors in Creative Writing at CU Boulder; "CLOUDS" is her first published piece of creative nonfiction. She was born in Denver—premature—in 1991, and graduated from Boulder's Fairview High School in 2010. Beginning in high school, she has worked on her craft in workshops on fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. In her free time, she enjoys singing, playing tennis, and writing stories in her journal. Her favorite forms of writing are flash fiction and short story pieces.

MATT ANDERSON graduated from the University of Colorado in December of 2012 with a bachelor's degree in History. Since writing "THE ROAD GOES ON FOREVER," the avid snowboarder moved to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, "to shred pow and enjoy all the mountains have to offer." Matt's love for the outdoors and regular road trips inspire his writing, which qualify his current movements in the grand Tetons as research. The native Texan plans to spend another season in Jackson before enrolling in law school in the fall of 2014 back in his home state. As any good Texan would recognize, his title comes from songwriter Robert Earl Keen Jr.'s "The Road Goes on Forever and the Party Never Ends"—though in Matt's piece no one is shot.

DOMINIC HAURY also graduated just after taking WRTG 2020, Introduction to Creative Nonfiction, and he says it already helps him as he pursues a career in advertising. Born and raised in Indiana, the author of "STILL ON THE FENCE" loves being outdoors, riding bikes, and breathing heavily.

JOURNAL 2020 is a collection of the finest undergraduate artwork and creative nonfiction writing at CU Boulder—the work of young writers with enough strength of voice, vision, and courage to tell their true stories and the true stories of others.

FALL 2013
VOLUME ONE • ISSUE TWO

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

FALL 2013 • VOLUME 1 • ISSUE 2

CREATIVE NONFICTION

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

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Special thanks to Rebekah Hartman and Ozo Coffee for hosting our Launch of Issue Two, and to Dave Underwood for ongoing guidance in layout and design.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes print issues each fall and spring, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder Undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our back page for submission guidelines.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

Editing this second issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY has posed rewarding new challenges. Last spring, our first issue proved that the creative nonfiction from just one writing class could showcase an extraordinary collection of young voices. This fall, we fulfilled our plan to expand our vision. Issue 2 grew from our roots in one classroom to encompass undergraduate writing and art from across the University of Colorado Boulder campus. Our call for submissions was answered by ninety-five writers and dozens of artists. We received so many submissions from talented undergraduates that we have begun work on our online complement to showcase a wider breadth of student creative nonfiction work in writing, film, art, podcasts, and more.

Yet the heart of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY remains in print. The pieces in this issue represent the finest in creative nonfiction writing at CU Boulder. Once again, I feel extraordinarily lucky to have had the opportunity to work with writers with such strength of voice and vision. I want to thank the authors for allowing us one lens to view an intimate interior, or another that deepens our focus out in the world. Those views are sometimes personal, tragic, or funny, but always true.

Our second issue opens as Lexi Evans recognizes ignorance and intolerance both in others and herself. Moving to the U.S. proves bittersweet for Stela Knezevic. Benjamin Ross struggles with questions left by his service in Iraq, while Megan Sakas finds her grandfather's war wounds still unhealed. Samuel Carrothers's memories of his East Texan childhood are simpler than his present life. More childhoods are turned over in Lexi Evans's and Sayoni Nyakoon's portraits of lost loved ones. After the loss of his mother, Brendan Craine hardens his body and mind only to find himself still vulnerable. More vulnerability is explored in Amy MacNair's brave memoir. Michael Harris tries to equate faith and young love, and Kimberly Preston embraces her culture and traditions. Traditional social expectations are challenged by Sayoni Nyakoon, while Kathleen Childs's new journalism confronts homelessness in LGBT youth to reveal tragedy both personal and national. We switch gears and get lighter with Kathleen's recipe for behaving maturely around an ex, and Ben Song laments the trials of a cursed dating life. First Dates are awkward for Andrew Hecocks. Finally, Erin Greenhalgh paints us an epitaph to close.

New journalism, portrait, memoir, humor, and more—I am very excited to have helped share these powerful stories with you. Enjoy.

HANNAH BECKLER, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I chose to take on heading Art Direction in Issue 2, after helping start the journal last year. My main task was cementing our image for the journal and spreading awareness through posters, handouts, and our new website. It's been exciting for me, as an Architecture and Studio Arts student, to put my visual computer skills to good use, creating fun graphics that kept our iconic red bar while also trying to educate others about who we are and what we're here to do. My other main task was finding the color to bring life to our pages. I am a strong believer in giving artists as many opportunities as possible to share their work, so it was important to me for student artwork to be highlighted within our journal, not only to complement the writing around it for nice transitions between pieces, but to also stand alone as an exhibit of the great artistic work of our student body. I'm thrilled with the artwork we have this issue and had a lot of fun creating new ways to display each piece on the page.

I'm excited to see how the journal progresses and look forward to seeing what the future staff creates and what new stories come our way.

MARIAH HERMSMEYER, ART DIRECTOR

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY's second issue might merely have hoped to reach the quality of writing that occasioned its creation, a high enough goal. An astonishing collection of writing from just one course (WRTG 2020 in fall, 2012) led several students to create Issue 1 last spring. Even with growth in staff for Issue 2, everyone had enough to do simply establishing a journal with ongoing support, representing talent from across the University of Colorado Boulder, and reaching an audience beyond campus. Impressed readers of Issue 1 might naturally ask: *can something this good be sustainable?* The strong support of Director JOHN-MICHAEL RIVERA and THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC, as well as a generous UROP GRANT from MAY PENUELA AND JOAN GABRIELE, helped us answer that question.

Photo by Meigan Canfield

We fulfilled our promise to continue publishing one issue a semester satisfying our founding criteria:

- Creative nonfiction only—in all its sub-genres.
- All content created by undergraduates.
- All editorial, layout, and production work by undergraduates.
- All in the beautiful print you hold in your hands.

Volume I, Issue 2, however, already raises the bar for us.

Issue 2 publishes impressive writing from students across campus, and our nearly one hundred submissions underwent a blind review process worthy of any scholarly journal. The writing here exemplifies sensibilities, depth of feeling, and curiosity that some older readers (if not so lucky as I am to work with these young people year after year) might easily think impossible in undergraduates. This journal continues not only as a home for creative nonfiction's possibilities, but as a testament to the quality of work that for some reason we thought possible from late teens and twenty-somethings in the 1920s, but not now. Not so. To read these young writers is to realize young talent flourishes in any age; one must simply look to see it.

Undergraduate energy that created JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY has proven contagious, inspiring not only me, but more importantly, students new to the journal. Hannah Beckler, this issue's Editor-in-Chief, managed our staff through the acquisitions, developmental editing, copy editing, and publishing processes resulting in this issue. Somehow, she also taught fundraising and marketing strategies to other students, and led our new business staff through successful application for that UROP grant. She then began our growth online, creating our first website (journal2020.wordpress.com) with last issue's EIC, Mariah Hermsmeyer.

After helping to found the journal, Mariah turned to Art Direction, acquiring the stunning artwork you see in these pages. Her work with design advisor DAVE UNDERWOOD last spring accomplished the look you see here, with a bold layout that avoids what Dave calls "non-nutritious text." We continue to honor the strong writing we publish by presenting each piece with a fresh turn of the page to en face art that does more than mimic the coming story. Mariah's innovative introduction of four-edged bleeds in this issue stretches art across a page spread, lifting the first words of a piece over colors subtle or stark, or contrasting black, raising the aesthetic bar for future issues. And as many new submissions as we received, we simply could not find the ideal cover for this issue until we went to "the Hermsmeyer folder" again.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY grows precisely because these and the other students working so hard on this issue taught each other along the way. Next issue, look for multi-modal and media-rich complementary material online while we keep our print journal to put in the hands of parents and the rest of us who want it all in terms of how we read and react to creative nonfiction. If you are reading this beyond our campus walls, drop us a line, stay in touch. If you're an undergraduate here, join our staff, send us your artwork—*tell us your stories.*

JAY ELLIS, FACULTY ADVISOR

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Artwork by George Perez

MAKESHIFT PATRIOT

By Lexi Evans

It was going to be impossible. There were three buildings in Research Complex I, and two of the buildings had twelve floors each. The third building had nine floors. This amounted to thirty-three floors, which meant there were roughly 660 stairs for me to scale to find the missing person, who, I might add, had just arrived in the United States for the first time. From Saudi Arabia. This was a dangerous proposition in itself: an unaccompanied Saudi who spoke broken-to-severed English lost in the biggest academic research complex west of Chicago on his first day of studies in the U.S. (Homeland Security would not like the sound of this). So with the conviction of an army of TSA personnel responding to an airport security breach, I began my pursuit, dashing through heavily carpeted hallways and racing up dark stairwells. Our boss had told us that we would need to accommodate Hasan's[1] prayer needs; I was worried we hadn't accommodated fast enough. So I had to ask myself: if I were an Arab in an American research complex, where would I go to pray to Mecca? The answer was obvious: the floor with the bioterrorism chemicals.

1. Names were changed for this piece after fact checkers verified the story.

This was my job. I worked in a Proteomics lab in the Endocrinology, Diabetes, Metabolism Department at Anschutz Medical Campus at the University of Colorado at Denver as a professional research assistant. Before I started, I had to Wikipedia "endocrinology" to make sure it was the study of glands and not the visual examination of organs by means of an endoscope. I couldn't pronounce the word "proteomics" (and still can't), but I was sure fooling someone, because they were paying me $12 an hour while I bolstered my resume for med school. I had previous experience as a laboratory assistant, but tragically, Friday mornings rendered me too hung-over to function, so I quit before they could fire me. I lasted three months. But if writing lab reports were a qualification, then I was hundreds of pages deep in experience.

I had gotten the job because two divorces and an eHarmony account later, my mom had met a professor. Jim worked at CU and was collaborating with a researcher who needed an assistant. Surprisingly, the eHarmony romance ended shortly thereafter because (a) Jim wanted to have a "plant-potting party" (my mother struggled to keep cacti alive), and (b) he showed up at our front door a few months after they met, got down on one knee, and told my mom he wanted to wake up next to her every morning for the rest of his life. They had never even held hands. At least I got a job out of the ordeal. According to our boss, Mike, we were working on an "important project" for King Saud University in Saudi Arabia. They paid for a number of their students to earn their PhDs at our university while working in Mike's lab (among them was Hasan, whom we lost on the first day). I didn't know what we were doing half the time, I just knew it was "important."

Among the Saudis chosen to "assist with research" was Aabid. What I knew about him before I knew anything else was that the day before his first day of work, he asked Mike to ask my supervisor Linda and me to "cover up," and not wear anything revealing; which, by his definition, meant anything that exposed skin not on our hands or face. He didn't want to get distracted, he said. He wasn't used to it. The next day, I silently crept into the lab and slid in between a row of lab benches so I could get a glimpse of Aabid before he could get a glimpse of me. From a small opening I could make out a massive curtain of black, thick, wiry hair. His beard turned, and an olive-colored neck appeared. My flip-flops slapped against my heels as I moved toward him. I emerged from between the lab benches, and his eyes followed the sound of my flip-flops up to the bare skin shooting out of my shorts, up to the place where my necklace dove down beneath my tank top. I stuck out my hand. Aabid blinked at it, then began waving his hands wildly in front of his chest. "No, no, no! I do not, I cannot!" The curtain shook violently. I retracted my hand. "I'm Lexi, nice to meet you." He was still waving fiercely. Rage flooded my body. My flip-flops began slapping my heels harder and faster all the way out of the lab. My eyes burned with anger. I was nothing to him because I wasn't a "him." I was a thing not worth shaking hands with because I didn't have the anatomy to match the image of worth. The feeling was familiar, but the first time I had felt it was eight years earlier, before I even had the chance to understand what it meant to be female—

My mother's ex-boyfriend had just been murdered, so she was buying pillows.

His name was Eddie. But of course that wasn't his real name. His real name was Ahmed Orabi, and "Eddie" represented his attempt to seamlessly assimilate into American culture. Easily pronounceable and generic names were a trend amongst Eddie and his clan. His friend Khalid became "Ted." His brother, Omar, went by just "O." I never knew Andy's real name, I just knew it wasn't "Andy." To enhance the theme of changing the most important part of one's identity, Eddie also carried around with him an excessive amount of accessories proudly donning the American flag, I guess as a peace offering of sorts. In all actuality, Eddie hated the United States. He hated it almost as much as he hated Jews.

My mom met Eddie at T.J. Maxx. She was buying pillows. My mom went through this phase (and in all likelihood is still in it), where anytime she needed consolation, she would buy pillows. On a bi-weekly basis, I would come home to find my living room entirely re-decorated with a new set of pillows. She would keep them for a trial period, then exchange them for a new set. Sometimes she wouldn't exchange them, but would continue hoarding them until we had a closet in each room stuffed with pillows, which would later become an endless supply of chew toys for my dog, who, like my mother, developed a strange affinity for the damn things. My mother's ex-boyfriend had just been murdered, so she was buying pillows.

My mom was vulnerable, and Eddie was in the pillow aisle, so a year and a half later, Eddie began living in our house and my mother started wearing a ring. Apparently, they had gotten married, but my mother didn't think it was incredibly important to tell me, so she didn't. I was thirteen years old.

Living with Eddie was like living with someone who had emigrated illegally from Jordan to the U.S. in 1987 and had yet to realize that two continents and fifteen years had passed him by. Under Eddie's reign, I was never smart enough, never fast enough, not tough enough, reserved enough, or domestic enough. He may as well have told me that because I wasn't born with a penis, I would never be enough. He complained to my mother about what I wore, he threw a fit when I began wearing eyeliner and mascara at age sixteen, and he went berserk when a boy tried to take me out on a date at age seventeen. Once, when he was mad at my mom, he barked, "In my countrrrry, we keep women on short leash!" (Thank God we have retractable leashes here in the United States.) He thought it beneficial to tell me on a weekly basis what I would never be able to do, or else he wouldn't talk to me at all. He would see a female celebrity on TV and, regardless of who she was, would point at the screen with a thick, greasy finger, and howl, "Dis woman whorrrrre!" To Eddie, women were either sexual objects or domestic slaves, and to Eddie, I was just a naïve girl who still believed in the innocence of the world. Our futile debates about race, religion, and sexual orientation only affirmed this. He condemned everything about me from each thread of clothing down to every pulsating thought I breathed into existence. I was nothing.

After that turbulent first day, Aabid gradually came around: he would nod politely at me when I walked into the lab, and would occasionally ask me about experimental procedures. One summer day a few months after he arrived, I walked into the lab in an uncharacteristically upbeat mood, only to lose it entirely several feet before reaching my desk. Aabid's eyes were glued to a soccer ball flying across my computer screen. He didn't break contact with the monitor, even as his hands struggled to find their way into one of the three bags of "Flamin' Hot" Cheetos, Lays, and Funyuns that were strewn across my desk. I pulled Linda out in the hall.

"What the hell is going on here?"

Aabid's eyes were glued to a soccer ball flying across my computer screen.

Linda just shrugged her shoulders. "The speakers on his computer don't work, and he wants to watch the soccer games."

I slapped my palm to my forehead. "Jesus. But that's my desk. I've been here for over a year. He just got here!"

She shrugged her shoulders again. "I know. I know. I'm sorry."

I never got my desk back.

Eddie loved garage sales. He loved them so much that every Sunday, at precisely 11 a.m., Eddie would pick up his daughter from his ex-wife's house, and would eagerly begin his Tour de Sale through the greater Denver metro area. Eddie had an irresistible attraction for things that were already broken, or would break very soon. This ritual continued when he moved in with us, and within months of his arrival, our garage began to resemble a "Hoarders" freak show on TLC. It overflowed with dismembered hard drives, crippled bicycles, defective TVs, horrid shoes that would never belong to a pair of feet, trinkets disguised as patriotism, and my personal favorite: a mangled, sputtering Otis Spunkmeyer cookie oven. One summer, Eddie decided it was time to pawn off his wretched junk to some other poor soul. So we had a garage sale—my first ever. Eddie had a natural talent for hustling, and I marveled at his ability to get rid of years of worthless treasures within hours. I briefly went inside our house to use the bathroom, and when I returned, a stranger was walking away with my bike—the same bike I had bought with money my deceased grandpa had given me for my birthday. I skidded over to Eddie.

"Eddie! That's my bike! What are you doing? You can't sell it!"

"Honey, it's okkkayyy."

I ran over to my mom. She shrugged her shoulders. "Sorry, Lex, but he already sold it. We can't just take it back."

So I watched my childhood roll away with a stranger's hands gripping the handlebars.

For the first few months Aabid worked in the lab, he refused to eat lunch with Linda and me because we were women. Eventu-

ally we persuaded him to have lunch with us on East Colfax, but only because other men would be there. On the way back, stunned by the number of liquor stores lining the street, he asked us what one could find in a liquor store. I had forgotten they forbid ethanol ingestion in Saudi Arabia. He was 30 years old and had never indulged in even a sip of alcohol.

"Ya know, beer, wine, hard liquor."

"What is de difference?"

"Well, hard liquor has the highest percentage of alcohol; then wine usually, which is made out of grapes. Then beer, which is made out of yeast."

"So you are more likely to become alcoholic if you drink hard liquor?"

"No. Not really. Alcohol doesn't discriminate."

"So children should not drink beer?" He asked in a Borat-esque voice.

"No, Aabid, they shouldn't." He was innocent.

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I remember Eddie telling us that Islam did not allow him to drink—it was a sin. He would say this while swigging from a bottle of Tuaca and laughing viciously. He condemned my mother's sporadic consumption of wine because drinking was especially sinful if you were a woman. Eddie sat on his pedestal—a beer in one hand and the Qur'an in the other. The Qur'an was his reason for not ingesting drugs or pork, but it was also his reason for discriminating against homosexuals, Jews, Christians, women, and countless others. He ripped what he wanted from Islam and abandoned the rest with self-righteousness and indignation.

Because of Eddie, my soul grew bitter. I hated him in a way that I've never despised anyone before or since. I hated him for being so prejudiced, for believing the world was an ugly, disgusting place. I hated him for everything he stood for. And I especially hated him after 9/11. He began to represent the oppression of all women, and in a single man, he embodied the entire Middle East for me. Being a patriot began to mean hating another race. I could see few differences between him and the men who killed some 3,000 people, some burning as they leapt to their deaths from the frame of a crumbling building. Eddie chose to live in his world, and I, in mine.

Because of Eddie, my soul grew bitter. I hated him in a way that I've never despised anyone before or since.

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After failing a biochemistry exam four weeks into the fall semester, I was feeling particularly defeated about my chosen career path and life in general, and thought double-checking the average GPA of prospective medical school students would be a good idea. It wasn't. Salt water stung my eyes as a knot began tightening around my throat. I could hear Aabid's timid footsteps approaching, and I knew he was going to ask me a question about an experimental procedure I wouldn't be able to answer, which would only magnify my feeling of inadequacy. I hid my face in my hands to indicate to him to go back to his soccer games and potato chips.

"Um—Lexi?"

"Hmm?" I peered at him from behind my fingers.

"Um—Are you—okay?"

I shook my head.

"What is wrong?"

"I-I did terrible on my biochemistry exam. There's no way I'll be able to get into med school."

He shook his head. "No, no. Medicine is difficult, but if you want to become a doctor, you will. You are smart. And if you want, I can help you with this biochemistry."

I pulled my hands away from my face and looked up at him. "Thank you, Aabid." He held up an index finger to signal me to wait just a moment, and disappeared behind the lab bench. I could hear him rummaging in his desk drawer for something, and he returned seconds later with a shiny, red-orange bag. He nodded at the bag, then stretched his arm toward me. I stuck my hand into the "Flamin' Hot" Cheetos and smiled gratefully.

Aabid pulled up a chair beside me. He tapped the cover of my textbook with his finger. "So, what are you having trouble with?"

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Some months after the biochemistry catastrophe, Aabid asked Linda and me to accompany him to the lounge. A miniature white tablecloth covered one of the tables. On the tablecloth rested a ceramic teapot engraved with elegant Arabic script, surrounded by three tiny teacups. Candied dates and baklava were arranged

beautifully on saucers. He poured the tea into our cups with such care and precision, and eagerly watched our faces as we brought the steaming liquid to our lips. He smiled with his eyes. It was the end of Ramadan, and Aabid wanted to share the celebration with us. Aabid explained that Ramadan was the Islamic month of fasting, where Muslims refrain from drinking, eating, sex, and smoking during daylight. He told us that this practice was important because it was about resisting temptation, finding humility, exercising patience, and being submissive to God. He told us that by cleansing his soul, he found freedom. So Aabid sat and shared his tea with two American women on the holiest of Muslim holidays.

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I remember when Eddie would celebrate Ramadan; in the early fall dawn, he would grab a freshly prepared pumpkin pie from the fridge (a product of my mother's insomnia), snatch a fork from the silverware drawer, slam it down on the table with the pie, and proceed to savagely shove forkfuls of pie into his mouth until whole turned to half. I never saw him pray, and I never even heard him explain what Ramadan was, so when it rolled around every year, all it meant to me was half-eaten pumpkin pies punctured with metal prongs and deserted on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator.

During the month of Ramadan one year, Eddie had a peculiar guest over for dinner. He was a man of few words, saying little to nothing during the three-course meal, save for a few phrases exchanged in harsh Arabic with Eddie. He sat with his arms crossed over his chest, his downturned lips displaying his obvious dissatisfaction with the world—or my mother's pumpkin pie, I couldn't decide which. He would let a chunk of beef or lamb roll over his tongue and then begin working his jaw against the meat, viciously tearing it into little pieces as he let out small grunts. He chewed and grunted, chewed and grunted. He had black, piercing eyes, and a grim silence that clouded his entire face. A few times when the chatter was buzzing and the forks were scraping desperately against plates, this man's piercing eyes found their way to mine, his eyes turning even blacker and his face falling into deep shadows.

This man was an ex-Al Qaeda member. Of course, I didn't find that out until a year later—my mom made sure of that. When I learned the truth, my sixteen-year-old self extracted two disgusting facts, plain and simple: I had eaten dinner with the enemy. I had

He told us that by cleansing his soul, he found freedom.

betrayed my country. All I could think about were those menacing eyes, the way they burned through me with a hatred that spread to Ground Zero and back. When I thought about the way he stared at me that night, at my own dinner table, I was resolutely sure that he had desired one of three things: (a) to blow me up, (b) to stone me to death, or (c) to turn me into a sex slave. There were no other options.

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After sharing his post-Ramadan feast, Aabid inexplicably sent me an email with pictures of war in the Middle East. There was no text in the body of the email, no captions, just the truth of a plain picture. I couldn't respond; I didn't know how. I never heard Aabid speak badly of another race or faith. Aabid's Qur'an was sacred, and Islam was part of an intrinsic force that stitched together the fabric of his existence. It helped him make sense of the world when everything else seemed lost. Eddie poured Islam on his smoldering contempt like gasoline. The Qur'an was his scapegoat for hatred—the same hatred that had burned thousands of Americans to the ground. He used something holy to condone his prejudices, and for that, I could never forgive him.

Eddie was a nationalist, blind with pride and rage founded in revenge. And so was I. But Eddie would live and die in his hatred. He had murdered his own soul; and I thought he had permanently tainted mine. But mine had been salvaged because I could still find humanity in a race that I blamed for the destruction of my nation. It was the humanity in the mutual understanding of war, the humanity in Aabid's kind, innocent eyes that rescued me.

It was the humanity in the mutual understanding of war . . . in Aabid's kind, innocent eyes that rescued me.

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We ended up finding Hasan the day we lost him. After searching for an hour, I was called back to the lab. Hasan had never even left. We couldn't see him because he was a few lab benches away, kneeling on an delicate rug, his bottom resting on his heels with his arms locked out in front of him, his head slung low between his shoulders. His palms were pressed into the tiles and his lips were barely brushing the rug. He was facing east. Praying. ꕥ

Photo by Ryan Long

EXTRACTION

By Benjamin Ross

Moving steadily through the early darkness, after the sun had slipped far beneath the horizon, my Marines and I eased along the bank of the Euphrates River. We approached the rally point and waited for the order to proceed. The rancid, humid air engulfed my nostrils. I crouched, felt my right knee sink into the wet muck of the earth, the wretched stench absorbing into my fatigues. The squad was concealed by high grass and foliage, but each movement we made was slow and deliberate. Poised and disciplined, each man scanned his designated sector with minimal rotation of his head—eyes wide open, darting from one potential threat to the next. There was a seemingly endless anxiety over dangers surrounding us. My own eyes trained on something close, just through the stalks of tall grass. A sheep, drenched and rotting, its tongue flopping out of its gaping mouth, rolled calmly in the shallows of the foul river. Its eyes seemed to focus on me. I could imagine how it had died—how it had slipped on the banks and splashed into the muddy water. It had probably gasped for breath, bleating in fear, but could only suck in silt and slime. Death would have slipped over its eyes as its fellow sheep looked on.

One week into Iraq, my disdain for the people had begun to grow. Everyone felt like the enemy, and my distrust of the civil-

ian population only burned stronger with time. It started with the friendly kebab vendor three blocks down the littered road from our exposed patrol base. He seemed to be sincere and helpful. Through chapped lips and plaque-ridden teeth he would divulge information about improvised explosives in the area and give us intelligence on weapon caches and insurgents living close by. We all felt he was an incredible asset—but when his kebab stand exploded, killing an Iraqi police officer and sending Corporal Evens to the hospital in Germany, our trust was shaken. Ten days later, while performing surveillance, our designated marksman Lance Corporal Ortiz shot the vendor in the sternum after observing him plant two 155 artillery shells in a road called "Wagon." After Explosive Ordinance Disposal had cleared the area, they called me to check the body. Even with his two front teeth missing, I recognized the kebab vendor's dusty, lifeless face without question. My confidence in the population fell to an all-time low, and hatred began to look like the safer choice when dealing with the locals.

I recognized the kebab vendor's dusty, lifeless face without question.

Emerging from our concealment by the river, I caught my stocky platoon commander, LTJG Marvin, making a smiley face with his gloved forefingers from the edges of his mouth up to his ears. "Joy," he was saying, a hand signal of his own invention. Our reconnaissance must have radioed in, telling him that it was clear to move. The silhouette of the town loomed fifty yards from our rally point and we entered the outskirts via a five-foot-wide space between buildings, our weapons at the ready. I stepped over puddles that might have been either water or sewage, but kept my sights on the rooftops until we reached the entry point to the dusty town. The insurgent's residence, made of cinderblocks and plaster, sat two stories high across the street and was guarded only by its inconspicuousness.

In the war zone silence I could hear our extraction vehicles start up about a mile away. We made quick work travelling across the rubble in the road and stacked ourselves against the front door, one Marine behind the other, me in the fourth position. Sergeant Roberts and Corporal Jimenez threw two stun grenades—smashing through the pane of the front window. The burst made my ears ring. LCPL Duncan forced his way through the front door with a well-placed front kick a few inches from the handle. The entire door came off its hinges and crashed into the living room. Dust drifted down as I entered the house. My stomach churned as I observed a room full of children too dazed to cry. The lights switched on and Duncan made his way up the stairs to the second story with two more squad mates. A child wailed, and I noticed a small boy bleeding from the right side of his forehead where the door had slammed down on him. Another one of the boys, perhaps fifteen years of age, made a stumbling run for the stairs before Lance Corporal Courage snagged his collar like a misbehaving puppy and threw him to the ground. His skull bounced as it hit the cement floor covered only by a thin rug. Duncan's voice called down from upstairs that he had the man we were after. I responded that the living room was clear of danger. As Duncan's heavy stomps came down, Courage's urgent tone caught my attention over the rumble of the extraction vehicles now idling outside.

I had to help these people I had learned to hate.

He stood over a scrawny little girl on her knees unable to breathe from the force of her sobbing. Her tiny hands pushed frantically on another body lying inert on the cold floor. I told Courage to contain the girl and got my first look at the victim. A tear-soaked face, wrinkled with age, half-open eyelids, stared unresponsively at the crumbling ceiling. The elderly man's fragile chest heaved and abruptly stopped. Sure sign of a heart attack, I knew. I looked at the girl, whose legs had given out from beneath her in her anguish, as the old man gasped again. Duncan strode by with the target insurgent, who was struggling against his zip tie handcuffs. When he caught a glimpse of the old man lying prostrate and gasping for life, his resistance against Duncan's heavy grip quickly turned to helplessness. "Help!" he yelled at me in accented English, gesturing at the old man before Duncan yanked him out the door. At that moment, I could only think of helping the old man, and I began to perform CPR. LTJG Marvin stood over me. He was screaming, but I hadn't noticed, his face crimson red with anger. He ordered me to load up and leave, that we were done here. I responded with more CPR. I had to help these people I had learned to hate.

"I'll stay with you, Doc," Courage's voice rang in my ear, but a moment later a sharp tug on my flak jacket lifted me off the floor, and I was dragged by my obedient Marines out the door toward the vehicles.

"*Muschtefa*!" I called to the girl. "Hospital" in Arabic.

LTJG Marvin glared at me and spat, "Think about who you're trying to help, Doc!" He turned and spoke on the radio as I climbed into the vehicle. The girl attempting to drag the old man's limp body out the door turned, and her swollen, red eyes locked onto me.

"Mission success," I heard someone say as my eyes welled and we rumbled away down the hard, war-torn road.

A CICADA SHELL IT SANG ITSELF UTTERLY AWAY

By Brendan Craine

My feet are hideous.

At least when compared to the smooth, pink extremities that most people have within their shoes, the contrast is striking. Mine are rough, callused, and oddly colored, with bulging tendons and misshapen toes. The pinkies stick out at odd angles from being broken and re-broken, and my insteps are covered in minor cuts and rug burns. Where most people have skin on their soles, mine are like elephant hide. The balls of my feet are dark and hard, like scorched earth, like the site of some mighty volcanic force. Further up, my shinbones roll like sand dunes, a geography of lumps of scar tissue and calcified bone. My knee-

Photo by Chad Henderson

caps are scraped raw, discolored and hard. All over, I am worn and weathered. The beauty has long been battered out of me.

Yagyu Renya, famous swordsman of Japan's middle ages, wrote in his *Seven Principles of Swordsmanship* that "It is not good to be overly conscious of one's physical condition, especially aches and pains."[1] Last week I woke up and found that it hurt to straighten my fingers. A lump of bone had been pulled loose, had re-fused inside my knuckle, and I could feel it sticking out sideways when I tested it with my finger. The toe on my right foot had swelled and turned a sickly purple during the night, broken the prior evening when it caught against someone's *dō-gi*[2]. I flexed my fingers to warm up the joints, and taped my broken toe to the ones beside it. These are the weekly wounds. Only by chipping away at a rock did Michelangelo create his *David*.

It is autumn in Boulder, Colorado, and the sidewalks and streets are littered with dead leaves and seedpods like the beaches clogged with samurai corpses at Ichi-no-Tani[3]. Slowly, the trees are becoming more withered and barren. Everywhere the world dies around you and it sheds itself, decomposing in the grass and on the rooftops. Off in Colorado's prairies, old forgotten houses mold and dilapidate with time. Over centuries, rivers carve deep paths into the mountains.

Doing pushups on your bare knuckles hurts at first, but then the skin toughens over and you stop feeling it. After that, you roll your wrists in and balance on the calluses, and the pain comes back as you rip them off and re-grow them over and over until they come back so thick that you can't tear them on carpet or gravel or ice. When that's done, you do pushups on the sides of your hands so that your wrists seize up and it hurts to type. Eventually, the tendons strengthen, and you can start clapping between each repetition, slamming the blades of your hands against the ground like guillotines. When that stops hurting, you do pushups on your fingertips, digits stretched far apart, so that your finger joints strain and shake, threatening to give and splinter. When they've strengthened, you move to four fingers, and

1. John Stevens, *Budo Secrets*, (Boston and London: Shambhala 2001), 22.
2. dō-gi or keikogi is a type of white three-piece uniform worn by Martial Arts practitioners.
3. One of the most famous and decisive battles of the Genpei war, fought in the late 12th century. The Minamoto pinned the opposing Taira against the cliffs, and claimed a stunning victory.

Batter away at the ribs for long enough, and eventually you will reach the heart.

when that stops hurting you move to three. Ancient masters used to shove their hands into bowls of rice a thousand times a day, until their digits were like railroad spikes.

It is written in the *Kokoro no Maki* that "When the heart is full of things, the body feels constrained; when it is empty, the body feels expansive."[4] I've always liked walking on snow-covered leaves, brushing away a layer of winter, like uncovering the past—like traveling back in time. If you walk everywhere barefoot, it hurts for the first day. You form blisters the size of half-dollars, and leave bloody footprints on the sidewalks. The second day is worse. On the eighth day, you feel nothing but the pressure of pavement, gravel, pine needles. The world's hardness becomes softer.

When I was eight, I buried my mother, and then when I was thirteen I buried my best friend. My cats, my grandmother, my grandfather—after a while I became good at burying things. It was only after three funerals that I realized they weren't like pushups. I liked to watch heartbreaking movies, *Titanic* or *Pay It Forward*, trying to build up a resistance. When you can watch Jack sink below the waves and feel nothing, you rent a copy of *Old Yeller*. When you can do pushups on your fingertips, you do them on the backs of your wrists, hands cupped like crane's beaks solemnly bowed.

If you take beer bottles and roll them along your shins and ulnae a hundred times a day, it makes the bone calcify and strengthen. If you don't have beer bottles, you can roll up the Sunday edition of the newspaper and use that. This week I woke up and noticed that my nose was slightly crooked from being punched the night before. I spent that day blowing blood into a tissue and groaning whenever I breathed in too rapidly, aggravating the bruises on my ribcage. Batter away at the ribs for long enough, and eventually you'll reach the heart. What was in Minamoto Yorimasa's mind when he sliced through his chest at the battle of Uji?[5] What words did Benkei[6] whisper when he died on his feet at Koromogawa castle?

4. Ibid., 36.
5. The first battle of the Genpei War, beginning in 1180. Yorimasa commanded the Minamoto side, and after losing the battle, subsequently committed seppuku (ritual suicide).
6. Bodyguard to Minamoto Yoshitsune during the Genpei War, Benkei expired from his wounds while still standing.

You don't feel your injuries when they happen. They are buried under adrenaline until they can resurface. When samurai were preparing to ride into a battle they couldn't possibly win, they used to burn their houses and kill their families so that they could fight with complete abandon. Their honor compromised, women of class would tie their knees together with cloth before they committed suicide, so that their bodies would be found in a modest position. After a forest fire, the soil is rich and fertile, and flowers spring up and bud with tenacity. At the pond outside my window, I like to watch the ducks vanish underwater for seven, eight seconds, before appearing once more, shaking the water in droplets from their feathers.

Venerated sword-saint Miyamoto Musashi wrote, "Do not grieve when you have to separate yourself from someone or something."[7] I remember raising monarch butterflies with my mother, watching them form hard chrysalises and burst forth to flutter around in the summer sunlight, alighting on cabinets and bookshelves and our bodies, until they found the windows and escaped. We have a picture of her lying on her back on a Mexican beach, arms and legs spread, her bald head pressed against the sand. A wave might have come in and carried her far out to sea forever, like emperor Antoku[8]. She looked so peaceful. The first time I went camping, I found cicada exoskeletons in piles underneath the pine trees, like tiny suits of antique armor. I crushed them to dust in my hands and scattered them to the wind.

While she was going through chemotherapy, my mother started losing her toenails and fingernails. Her body abandoned the excess as it tore itself apart. I remember her sitting barefoot on the bed, her raw pink toes curled and grotesque, as she cradled me in her lap and whispered to me in hushed tones about nothing in particular, as if she were sharing all her most important secrets with me. After a while, she started wearing an eye patch to account for double vision, and she used to make pirate jokes while she wore it, arrghing at me from where she sat, exhausted, in the living room. I would stare with my two eyes into her one eye, loving her bald head and her bare toes. She was falling apart until only the persistent parts of her were left.

7. Ibid., 74.
8. During the final battle of the Genpei War, (the battle of Dan-no-Ura), the child emperor's nurse took him in her arms and plunged into the sea, letting him die rather than be captured by the enemy.

After you've been hit enough, you learn to anticipate and tighten, so that it just feels like dull impact.

Ancient masters used to shove their hands into bowls of rice a thousand times a day, until their digits were like railroad spikes. When they turned sixty, their hands were withered tree branches that shook and trembled. After you've been hit enough, your body loses that initial shock reflex, and you stop being ticklish. After you've been hit enough, you learn to anticipate and tighten, so that it just feels like dull impact. Harry Houdini died when a stranger sucker-punched him and ruptured his appendix. This summer, the girl I love lost her father to a senseless, sudden act of violence, and for two days I cried and shook with emotion. I remember her looking at me with hollow, empty moon-eyes, enduring it. That look drove straight through my chest, and when I woke up the next morning, I felt it resounding like church bells.

If you walk everywhere barefoot, you learn about decay. You learn about snow-covered leaves and rotting piles of pine needles. You learn how things go in soft and come out hard, how they go in hard and come out beautiful. Old trees are struck by lightning and burned to ash and the great masters could still hold their grandchildren in their brittle hands. When you are done pounding your fists into the floorboards, when you are done wearing your knees and elbows into battering rams and your shins into cudgels, beneath it all, your heart will not have hardened. Musashi killed men and created beautiful calligraphy. The warrior Tesshomaru shed his armor for rags, his sword for a walking stick, and traveled the world. If you scrape away at yourself, eventually you uncover something that exists more deeply. If you walk barefoot everywhere, you get worn down and exposed and your feet become ugly. My mother painted pictures of her cancer in bright pastels and hung them in the room where she would eventually die. During his final days in Osaka, as he lay sick among his disciples, the poet Matsuo Bashō wrote,

falling sick on a journey
my dream goes wandering
over a field of dried grass.[9]

9. Haruo Shirane, *Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Bashō,* (Stanford University Press 1998), 279.

Photo by Ryan Long

THE EAGLE

By Samantha Webster

In the fall, she memorized a poem. A short poem, only six lines, but it took her awhile. She wrote it out on a note card carefully, stashed it in her pocket so it became wrinkled and dirty. She muttered it under her breath on her way to and from class, stood in front of the mirror in the communal bathroom, trying out a different facial expression for every word. When she finally had it memorized, she would whisper it to herself in the dark, atop her lofted bed, while her roommate snored below. *He clasps the crag with crooked hands*.

She spent a lot of time looking at her hands. She'd stretch them as flat as she could, then try to make a fist, listening to them creak. I'm like the tin man, she thought, perversely amused. An oil can to grease her joints. If only.

She lived a reduced existence, she decided. It was simple—class, homework, food, sleep. She was adrift in time, anchored only to her schedule and to the silence that settled around her like snow. In it, she found neutrality, and it was a relief. There were no good days or bad days anymore, just days. This must be what being a monk is like—so in the present that real life became its own form

of escapism. *Close to the sun in lonely lands.* She would mutter the poem to herself like a mantra.

It was possible to get used to pain. Memories are insubstantial things, and whether by necessity or by happenstance, hers seemed to be more ephemeral than most. What had it been like to be able to run? To stand without help? To bound down stairs? She could remember, but it was like remembering a photograph; she couldn't quite project the feeling of power down to her ruined extremities, couldn't quite forget the constant ache that demanded her attention. And so she adjusted, recalibrated. Overcame by giving in. If it was here and here to stay, might as well let it do some good. At least this pain was tangible.

She hit milestones. *Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.* She'd quote it to her first boyfriend, on a weekend trip to the mountains, while they waited in line to see the President. She mentally catalogued her firsts, stored them away for later perusal, the remember-whens to be pulled out, presumably, once she grew old. It was always with a sense that these moments would mean more to her as memories, and she lived them as one takes an Instagram picture, the present in ready-tinged sepia.

. . . she lived them as one takes an Instagram picture, the present in ready-tinged sepia.

She voted for the first time at her old elementary school, and she felt acutely her own lack of displacement. What had really changed since then, besides the fact that she now hobbled like an old woman to her voting booth? She should have left—and yet she had stayed, retained her juvenile characteristics, delayed adulthood. Only now, she was a disparate mix of too young and too old, and she hurried back to campus to where, she thought wryly, the uncomfortable in-betweens were institutionalized for their own good.

There were bad days, despite what she wanted to believe about neutrality and perpetuity and whatever else. There were days that doors were impossible, and the campus enormous, and her lofted bed a cruel joke. These were the days that her knees buzzed and her fingers were so swollen that she couldn't hold a pen, and the short walk to the dining hall was so prohibitive that she ate cereal for dinner. *The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls* she would remind herself, and, with no cast and no crutches, take the handicap-only elevator.

She noticed different things than most—the shape of door handles and the slight incline to walkways. Her bike was some comfort; she could feel almost normal on her bike, those terrible distances reduced to mere fractions. But inevitably she'd have to get off, and her hips would protest as she swung her leg over the seat. Stairs were unavoidable. She'd grip the railing with a talon-like hand, trying desperately to take pressure off knees unwilling to bend. People liked to think she was drunk when she did this, and it wasn't worth correcting them, even when they yelled horrible things. She felt like Hamlet, a bit crazy—or pretending to be crazy, who's really to say—and she always ended up feeling like she could observe herself from afar, limping past slurs with little more than casual indifference.

She had trouble with words. She, I, you—some sentences sounded better with one than the others; a single scene could be described from a million points of view before she acknowledged any one was really her own. *He watches from his mountain walls*—or had he watched, or will he watch? Was this story a comedy, a tragedy, a cautionary tale? Was it an existentialist's diatribe or young adult trash? How much sex could she reasonably include? There were too many ways to write her life, and too few ways to live it.

They called it prednisone, and it was magical. She went to stand from her seat after a lecture, used her forearm to heave herself up and she realized she didn't have to: her knees supported her weight. She opened doors. She went for a hike. On a break between classes, she sat on the lawn. She was endlessly fascinated by her hands, opening them, closing them, making fists. Once she even gave someone a high-five. She tried to do yoga, but maybe that was something that had always been outside of her range of abilities.

There was a future, and there was a past, and once again she was balanced on the knife's edge between them.

It was temporary, but it was now. Now, now, now; she felt it in every step that didn't hurt, every morning she wasn't stiff, every moment she could devote to other thoughts. And she was grateful. What was life, but the pursuit of order in the face of inevitable chaos? This present ought to count as much as any other. She thought about summer, submitted one application, then another. There was a future, and there was a past, and once again she was balanced on the knife's edge between them.

She composed her Academy Awards speech as she rode to class one day. To my mother, who never gave up on me. To my chemistry professor, who somehow got me a free textbook. To Shakespeare and Tennyson. To the baked sweet potatoes at the grab-n-go. To my bike, which gave me agency when I had none. She smiled to herself and powered up a hill. *And like a thunderbolt he falls.*

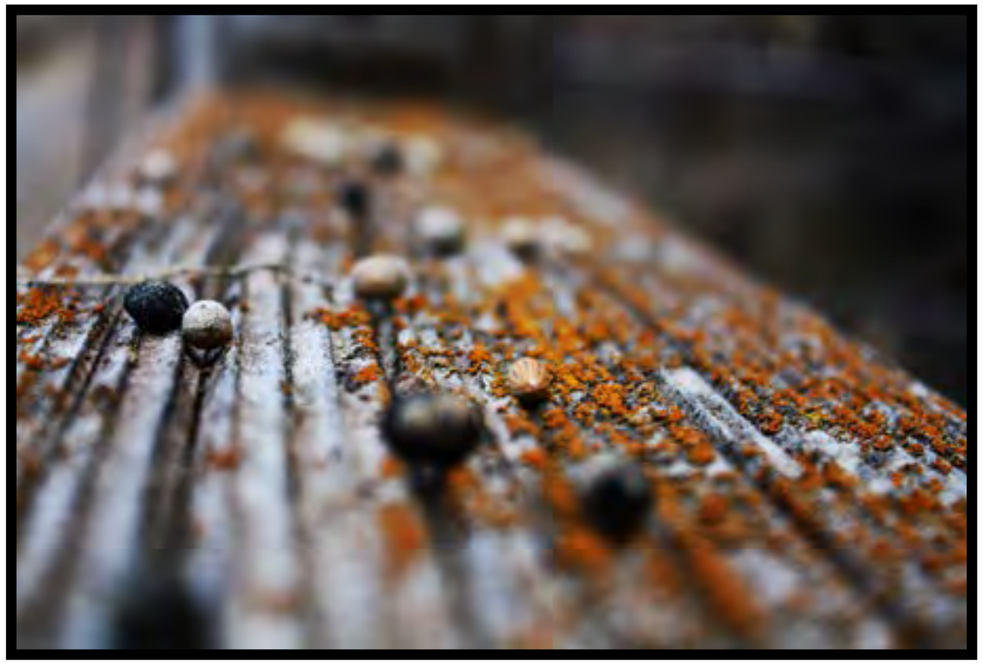

Photo by Meredith Soychak

THE NATURAL HAIR DILEMMA: WHY BLACK WOMEN NEED TO FOCUS A LITTLE LESS ON THEIR HAIR

By Sayoni Nyakoon

When I was in my junior year of high school, I discovered I had natural hair.

The term "natural hair" belongs solely to the black community. So do the words, "kinky-curly," "Afro," and "nappy." Having natural hair is similar to, but could be different from, having "good hair." In the black community, "good hair" is genetic, and considered a by-product of having white ancestors, while any woman could choose to wear her hair "naturally." If you wear your hair naturally, you refuse perms to chemically straighten it. For some, it is refusing to straighten their hair—by any means—and preferring to wear Afros, dreadlocks, and other styles to showcase pride in their African roots.

As a black person, when you wear your hair naturally you are thought to be more cultured, more in touch with your African heritage. It's assumed you refuse to conform to the majority's idea of what is professional, acceptable, and beautiful. It could also mean disregarding other lines of ancestry (Native American, Hispanic, and White) in favor of learning more about, and embracing "mother Africa." As a black person without "good hair," the decision to "go natural" is met with praise for your presumed courage. If you happen to have "good hair"—that is, easily manageable, loosely curly, rarely frizzy, and usually light brown hair—and you make the decision to "go natural," the response you get from the black community is not likely to be so positive.

Outside the black community, fewer people notice when a black woman with "good hair" decides to "go natural." This is because her straight hair or loose curls were already regarded by the dominant culture as acceptable, if not beautiful. Though she may feel pressure to straighten her hair to look more like her white friends, she would not be looked at with confusion or disapproval if she does not "go natural." Her hair curls nicely, naturally (or so it would seem). But some natural hair enthusiasts might claim—from a place of resentment, jealously, or ignorance—that her hair is not truly "natural."

By the end of eighth grade I decided appointments with the hot comb and the perm weren't necessary for me either.

Until my junior year of high school I never thought of my hair as a political statement.

When I was seven, my mother, in a bout of frustrated depression, decided to cut my and my twin sister's hair. I was happy with my new short "do," until we both went to our father's house for a visit that turned into an extended stay. My sister had "good hair," so she escaped most of our father's complaints. She had "good hair," so she escaped appointments with the perm and the hot comb. By the end of eighth grade I too decided to escape the perm and the hot comb. But my hair was uneven and heat damaged by this point. It was "nappy;" my father would not stand for it. For the second time in my life, I got a major haircut.

When I was fourteen I went to a public high school in the inner city of West Philadelphia. Attending school with a "low cut" and later a TWA (teeny weeny Afro) was not easy. My hair wasn't cool, it wasn't in fashion, and as a friend would tell me—toward the end of my sophomore year—"I'm sorry, but men don't look at natural girls anymore."

When I was in my junior year, I thought about how Blacks are portrayed in the media.

Movies like, *Coffy*, *Foxy Brown*, and *Superfly* were low budget, high action movies with black characters. Some call these movies blaxploitation, because of their appeal to black audiences. The characters talked tough and they always overcame their obstacles; they beat the White Man. The characters looked like the people in the audience who watched them: they had Afros and braids and dark skin. These movies made it seem cool to be black and struggling. These African American movies were popular with non-American blacks and non-whites from many cultures—eventually this popularity spread to the dominant, white, audience.

TV executives saw how much money could be made, simply by having a black character on television. But wary of ostracizing their main audience, the blacks shown on TV were not struggling too much. The blacks on *Good Times* generally only got into comic trouble, and Dr. Heathcliff from *The Cosby Show* was an OB-GYN. His wife, Claire, was lovely—and she straightened her hair.

Somewhere between the 1970s and 1980s, becoming a successful and professional African American meant giving up a part of your culture—becoming "white." The kids who used to dream of becoming Black Panthers went to the movies and decided they wanted to be like Superfly instead. But their parents would say, "No. Look at Bill Cosby. You don't want to be a pimp, you want to be a doctor. Cut your hair or straighten it—I don't want them to think your tryin' to be like that fool (or slut) in the movies." And it did seem that those African Americans who were most successful did have a perm, or had such "good hair" they didn't need one.

Of course, there was backlash. The micro-braids and love yourself culture of the 1990s seemed to fight the idea that you had to assimilate to become successful. There was one Moesha

in a sea of Martins, Parkers, and *Cosby Show* kids. But then even Moesha went away with Brandy's braids, and it was no longer cool to wear your hair "natural."

I grew up when it was not cool to wear your hair naturally. And as the Gabby Douglas spectacle shows, in the black community, how you wear your hair is everybody's business. I couldn't walk in the hallways without hearing a black man yell, "Yo, Afro," and I couldn't walk down the streets of Philly without getting a dirty look from a black woman. I could almost hear them say, "Ah, she's so pretty. Why won't she just do her hair?"

Even my twin sister, with all her "good hair," could not escape natural hair scrutiny. An English teacher pulled her aside to ask, "Honey, do you have a mom at home?" When my sister answered "yes," the teacher grew tight-lipped and sighed. Then she adjusted her wig and walked away with all the good intentions and self-righteousness the world has to offer.

I honestly could not fathom why an Indian boy or a white boy would ever find me attractive. I turned down a prom invitation, thinking it was a joke. After high school, I moved to Denver and I noticed the pick-up lines and invitations increased. I would walk across the street and hear, "I love your natural" from black women I had never met. My white friends raved about my hair and my black friends asked me how I did this style or that. When I was chatted up for the fifth time in one day, I realized the social current had shifted.

Are you still with me? Let me try to explain it like this: natural hair is a trend. A trend like bell-bottom pants, bra burning, foodism, and any fashion. The thing about trends is there's no way of knowing whether they'll stick around, for better or for worse. Certain trends, like black power, fuel drastic social movements that have shaped our world for the better. Other trends, like those in fashion, exercise, or education, do absolute nothing—at best.

Only history can determine whether something was a trend or a movement—there are some people who only agree or endorse something because it is popular. There is no denying the fashion of the black power movement or how cool you were if you said you were a feminist in the 1990s. My own mother was an advocate for women and education and she loved me, but she had no idea how to care for my hair. Before I moved to Denver she suggested a perm, to improve my curl definition.

Let me try to explain it like this: natural hair is a trend.

I do feel it is important for people, especially women, to be comfortable in their own skin (or hair). And I do think women of color who choose to wear their hair natural are strong, for refusing to conform to society's beauty norms. But when you let the superficial become who you are, who are you when your exterior changes? Who are you when society changes its opinion about how you look?

I let myself be defined by my weight and my ability to run in high school. And when I went from "super skinny" to "thin" after high school ended I was scared. Being "thin" scared me more than walking home alone, late at night. If I were no longer skinny, what would I have to offer the world, or more specifically, a mate? It took me years to realize I am more than how much I weigh—that I have more to offer the world besides my looks. To be clear, I love my hair, but it is not a vital part of my identity.

I realize people are judged on their looks and this won't bring about the downfall of humankind. While it's wrong to judge someone's character based solely on how my much she weighs, how much make-up she wears, or how she chooses to wear her hair, many judgments we make based on another's appearance are perfectly accurate. The secret is to let the superficial shape who you are without allowing it to engulf your total identity. I plan to cut my hair in the near future. Not because I do not want it to be a part of my identity any longer, but because I am not afraid to cut it. I am more than how I choose to wear my hair.

I'm tired of my hair. I'm tired of washing it every week. I'm tired of the occasional bad hair day. Of course I'll miss the compliments, but perhaps people will start to notice me instead of my hair when I walk into a room. I want to be remembered by the books I've written and the lives I've affected—not by how amazing my hair looked.

Photo by Andrew Schlechten

OUR OWN GHOSTS

By Kathleen Childs

"Are you okay?" my friend Avery asks on Saturday night. It's the 29th of June, we're down in Denver, and all around us are women and a few men celebrating our newly acquired potential for someday acquiring federal marriage benefits. Sitting at a table facing the spectacle, I feel as though I'm being unfair by not enjoying myself more. I sigh, pick up her glass, and roll the whiskey around before taking a small sip. She knows I'm avoiding answering the question. Instead of pressing me, she asks me what I think of the spirit. I tell her it's pretty good, but it's trying too hard to be sweet. It's very well made, but it doesn't work for me. The sherried vanilla highlights mask a long smoky bitterness underneath. My thoughts are hundreds of miles away with a distant friend of mine—Mary. Last I heard she was in the Northern part of the Midwest, living with a pair of women she has a "semi-serious" relationship with, and to her annoyance when her supervisors harp on it, the lone white person working the sewing machines at a performance clothing company. She's not particularly interested in the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act's overturning. I doubt she'll ever get married, settle down, or even have interest in that sort of relationship.

Mary is in her mid-twenties. She left home at age twelve after coming out, which she told me was the worst mistake she's made in her life. The mistake wasn't leaving—she needed to escape the enormous emotional and physical abuse her religious mother put her through. She did sex work. She ran drugs. She bartended. She was raped multiple times. Earlier this year when she thought she was going to kill herself, she donated what money she had left to RAINN (the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, an anti-sexual assault organization), who earlier had picked her off the street and taught her about feminism. Her humor is sharp, fast, and as black as the tar in her lungs. For now, Mary escapes into books, video games, White Russians, and the vastness of the internet. The last time I talked to her over Skype, she opened the conversation like this:

> [3:20:08 PM] Mary: hi i havent spoken to you in a long while but my life has been all over the place and im gonna die and i have to wake up at like 4:30 every morning forever now so bye

A growing consensus of research suggests that between 20% and 40% of the homeless youth population identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender.[1] This figure becomes even more staggering when one takes into account that LGBT people account for only 3%-5% of the population of the United States. (Surveys may even under-report the extent of the problem—some respondents may fear reprisal if they out themselves to the surveyor.) When asked of the most pressing concerns of the LGBT community, LGBT respondents to one survey explicitly mention employment equality and legally sanctioned same-sex marriages, while fewer list support of LGBT youth organizations. News articles in the popular press on LGBT issues focus almost exclusively on same-sex marriage.[2]

1. Whitbeck, and others, ed. "Mental Disorder, Subsistence Strategies, and Victimization Among Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Homeless and Runaway Adolescents," 41, no. 4 of *The Journal of Sex Research*, (2004), 330.
2. Pew Research Center, "A Survey of LGBT Americans: Attitudes, Experiences and Values in Changing Times," (Washington: Pew Research Center, June 13, 2013) http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/06/SDT_LGBT-Americans_06-2013.pdf.

Those who are chronically homeless are often so heavily damaged by their ordeals that they never quite recover.

The marriage equality advocacy group The Human Rights Campaign received $25,479,071 in contributions and grants according to its 2011 IRS form 990.[3] It claims 350,000 volunteers. This is over six times the same year's revenue, and 1,100 times the manpower, of the only explicitly youth-focused homeless shelter registered in the Denver Metro area, Urban Peak, at $4,029,748.[4] In the HRC's 2012 study entitled "Growing up LGBT in America," homelessness among LGBT youth is mentioned only at the end of the report in vague allusions to programs the campaign supports.[5] Upon visiting the HRC's website, the viewer is immediately solicited for a donation. A message on the popup says that the fight for equality isn't over. They couldn't be more true. The struggles of the most vulnerable members of the queer population—the young and homeless—are all but invisible.

Youth who run away or are forced from home are extraordinarily vulnerable to drugs, violence, disease, HIV/AIDS, and a host of other difficulties. A 2004 longitudinal study found that young, homeless, lesbians and gays report markedly higher physical and sexual victimization than their straight peers, are more likely to engage in survival sex work, and are more likely to be the victims of sexual abuse.[6] 40% of LGBT youth in the study were identified as suffering from symptoms of major depression, 47.6% of post-traumatic stress, and 57.1% had attempted suicide.[7] Those who are chronically homeless are often so heavily damaged by their ordeals that they never quite recover.

While reports vary, 1,000,000 youths are estimated to run away or become homeless in the United States each year.[8] The total comes to an unconscionable number of people whose needs

3. United States Department of Treasury, Internal Revenue Service. 2011 *Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax (Form 990): Human Rights Campaign*, (2011), 1.
4. United States. Department of Treasury, Internal Revenue Service. *2010 e-file Signature Authorization for an Exempt Organization (Form 990)*. (Urban Peak Denver, 2011), 1.
5. Human Rights Campaign, Growing up LGBT in America, (2012), 22.
6. Whitbeck and others, "Mental Disorder," 334.
7. Ibid., 335.
8. Ray, N. National Coalition for the Homeless, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness*, (2006), 12.

are not being addressed while our money and attention is fixated on marriage equality: a 2013 Pew poll reports that 58% of LGBT people view same sex-marriage as the top priority,[9] even though only 52% of the same population ever imagines themselves being married if the right is extended to them.[10] With DOMA overturned, recent court cases filed challenging state gay marriage bans,[11] and general, but not overwhelming, straight favor towards gay marriage;[12] the fight for marriage equality is being won. Even as the struggle goes favorably, the LGBT community cannot afford to lose its fighting edge. It has the resources, the strength, and the willpower to fight against youth homelessness. It is high time for a paradigm shift in activism.

I pick up the glass again and honestly, I'm not sure how Avery is so good humored about it all. She lived with me for a while, and later bounced around between romantic interests to escape her parents' own hostility toward her queerness. Just minutes ago we were joking about how her mom is perfectly reasonable about the whole thing when it's not personal—her favorite nephew is a trans man. The famous quote though, is, "It's okay for other people's children to be gay." Avery's been living with them again for a while now, not counting the month last semester she slept in her car. Her car. She's going by she again. I stumble over asking about it, and it's maybe the first time the facade cracks this evening. Of course she's not thrilled about it, but she's got to make do with what she's got. The family didn't even get to the point of having a real conversation about identity, about normality, about happiness before the hammer dropped. As Avery tells me, right now she's doing what she needs to do to survive. "Other people's children can be gay—but not mine."

9. Pew Research Foundation, "A Survey," 67.
10. Ibid., 71.
11. M. Kendall Wright vs. State of Arkansas. Pulaski Circuit Court, AK. 2 (2013): 1.
12. Pew Research Foundation, "A Survey," 65.

"Other people's children can be gay—but not mine."

LGBT youth have not come to be seven times over-represented in the homeless population by accident. Unfortunately, LGBT kids are frequently thrown out of their homes. An oft-cited study conducted in 1989 finds that 26% of boys are told to leave their households when they announce they're gay.[13] A 2011 study suggests that 40% of transgender people's relationships with their parents and family end entirely.[14] Abusive parents who know that their children identify as LGBT are likely to focus their abuse on their child's identity,[15] adding additional stress to a situation that already drives many youths, queer or not, to the streets. While some who end up homeless are not exactly thrown out, between neglect, threats, hostility, attempts at control, it can become untenable for youth whose parents react badly to their sexual orientation or gender identity to remain at home. Many of the subjects interviewed in the National Gay and Lesbian task force's study reported that they ran away to escape abuse, or that they feared being subject to abuse if they had stayed at home.[16]

At their core, the reasons LGBT youth leave home stem from an inability to meet the expectations placed on them. A heterosexist society expects straightness and gender conformity from its members. Parents expect good grades, happiness, religious observance, any number of things that the endemic stresses of growing up having one's sexuality suppressed can make difficult. LGBT youth across all income levels and races report high levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, which can be worsened by hostile familial reactions to their perceived failure. 40%-60% of all homeless youth come from physically abusive homes.[17] When the strain of playing along becomes too great, something naturally has to give. Most teenagers are completely financially reliant on their family. If they can no longer stay, they've nowhere to go but couches or the streets.

A heterosexist society expects straightness and gender conformity from its members.

13. Ray, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth*, 16.
14. Grant, Jaime M. and others. "Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey," *Washington National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*, (2011), 100.
15. D'Augelli and others. "Parents' Awareness of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youths' Sexual Orientation," in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, No. 2, (2005), 479.
16. Ray, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth*, 21-23.
17. Ibid., 18.

For this reason, researchers point to parental acceptance and a supportive schooling environment as essential for positive outcomes for LGBT youth. Research of at-risk behavior in several New England high schools suggests that gay, lesbian, and bisexual students are more likely to feel unsafe than their straight classmates in several schools.[18] Harassment and stress cause 15% of transgender students to drop out of school.[19] Recent interest in anti-bullying campaigns, school safe space policies, and peer education all help to keep LGBT students in school and at home. Similarly, campaigns like the Family Acceptance Project and the advocacy organization PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) provide educational resources to families and LGBT youth who are struggling for or fearing acceptance. Such advocacy directly attacks the causes of LGBT youth homelessness, and represents a sound general health policy. Family rejection is highly associated with negative health outcomes. Recent findings published in *Pediatrics* magazine claim that health disparities between straight and non-straight adults can be correlated with the stress of parental rejection.[20] The opposite is true as well. There are numerous supportive families, and they are essential for positive outcomes and success.

[4:04:24 PM] Kathleen: how was the phone
[4:04:34 PM] Mary: okay i guess
[4:04:36 PM] Mary: as far as phones go
[4:04:43 PM] Mary: my phone is literally a tracfone from like 2004
[4:04:50 PM] Mary: every time i use it i think its gonna snap in two
[4:05:15 PM] Kathleen: that's exciting
[4:05:27 PM] Kathleen: it makes every call an adventure or maybe a disaster waiting to happen

18. Kann, Laura and others. *Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Risk Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9–12—Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, Selected Sites, United States, 2001–2009*, (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011), 12.
19. Grant and others. "Injustice at Every Turn," 33.
20. Ryan, Caitlin and others. "Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults," *Pediatrics,* 123, No. 1 (2009).

The addictions run deep, and the scars run deeper...

[4:06:22 PM] Mary: how has your life been
[4:06:28 PM] Kathleen: My life has been good!
[4:06:34 PM] Mary: well good!!!
[4:06:57 PM] Mary: im already v jealous

Sometimes I choke on my words when Mary talks with me. It feels almost shameful to confront how lucky I am in the scheme of things. While coming out for me was a rocky, long process, I've managed to survive. I was sixteen when I came out to my family by letter on New Year's Eve, and even as I trembled in my girlfriend's arms at a party miles away, I didn't once fear losing them. Years and years passed before my being queer really clicked in my parents' minds, but they supported me through the depression that consumed me during college, and even if they didn't understand my identity, they kept me afloat. I'm not strong enough to make it on my own—I've never been that strong. Mary, though, reprimands me for being self-indulgent. It's no good to despair for her past, and she feels awkward enough bringing it up to begin with. The addictions run deep, and the scars run deeper, but she directs her anger outwards. There are millions of people who don't understand, she tells me, or worse, people who do understand, but don't care what we do to our outsiders.

The outsiders are exactly the ones who need attention right this very moment, and with a focused effort, the LGBT community can make substantial inroads towards lessening the hardships of LGBT homeless and runaways. The movement's greatest political strength lies in its indefatigable spirit. It has never backed down from a fight. It never fails to educate, to force a dialogue, even beneath the historical indifference of a society that once refused even to conceptualize the movement's existence. Improving conditions at home and school, in foster homes and hostile juvenile courts, all starts with humanizing the damage, and making its victims visible. Teenagers and young adults who are homeless are twice as likely to die as their peers, and the risk climbs rapidly the longer one has been

homeless.[21] Chronically homeless adults die as much as thirty years sooner on average than the general population.[22] The LGBT community has already struggled against, and forced an understanding of, a killer at least as endemic and deadly in the population: HIV/AIDS. As in the early 1980s, however, the conversation isn't yet loud enough. The banner's not yet being raised. The LGBT community is not yet shouting for help and running to remove the blanket smothering so many of its youth.

Voices are getting louder. In 2012, The Forty to None project, the first organization with an explicit mission to end LGBT youth homelessness, was formed. In a Huffington Post article, director Jama Shelton lays out the organization's tactical vision. As she describes it, the way forward is best accomplished by skills that the LGBT community already has.[23] Promoting general acceptance and understanding at home and school lessens stress on at-risk LGBT youth. Programs that aim to reconcile runaways or children forced from home have the capability to strengthen ties and support. In some cases though, familial reunification may remain impossible or dangerous. Shelters that work with the homeless need to understand the specific needs of the LGBT population, and be willing to work with them. In 2004, at least 4,200 youth were turned away from Basic Center Programs.[24] It is critical that the mental health and addictions of the population are addressed. It is imperative that the presentations and identities of transgender youth are respected. These are all reachable goals. These are all areas where there is already an activist presence. With focus, with dedication, the community can ease the suffering of our homeless.

In 2004, at least 4,200 youth were turned away from Basic Center Programs

LGBT people have made great strides in integrating to society since the fiery birth of gay liberation on June 28th, 1969 at The Stonewall Inn.[25] Gay sex has been decriminalized nationally. Many states have non-discrimination laws in housing and employment. LGBT couples in states with gay marriage can now access federal benefits. Gay people can sponsor their partners for immigration. There is certainly plenty of work to be done on every front of the struggle for equal rights and a stable place in society, but the singular focus of LGBT activism on marriage equality in the recent past is not the way forward for the movement. There is room for LGBT voices, time, and effort to help families, to help support students, to provide services and education for those who are struggling and often without outside support. The queer community cannot sit around while so many of our young are literally dying in the streets.

21. Thomas, Benthan. "Homelessness Kills: An Analysis of the Morta ity of Homeless People in Early Twenty-first Century England," [Summary] (Crisis UK: 2012), 4.
22. Ibid., 4.
23. Jama Shelton, "Ending LGBT Youth Homelessness: Forty to None Project's Multi-pronged Approach," *Huffington Post*, 22 May 2013.
24. Ray, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth*, 31.
25. Often seen as history's first major protest for LGBT equal rights; on June 28th, 1969, police raided a gay club in New York City for selling liquor without a license, and other violations.

This is the state of things: lives are ending before they even begin. This is what happens to those of us we forget and leave to survive on the margins. As I sit—comfortable that I'm scratching out a living with my supportive family, my network of friends—there are as many as one million peers of mine who have been on their own for what may as well have been their entire lives. I've since talked to her again, but this is the way, sitting at the bar on that Saturday, wondering why I wasn't sufficiently happy to see DOMA overturned, my last conversation with Mary ended:

[5:15:01 PM] Mary: im p strong willed
[5:20:13 PM] Kathleen: yeah
[5:27:34 PM] Mary: dont make fun of me!!!!
[5:28:42 PM] Kathleen: I'm not
[5:29:31 PM] Kathleen: but drugs are not really things that care about will I guess
[5:36:54 PM] Kathleen: IDK, sorry if that was a weird thing to say :/
[5:37:05 PM] Mary: it wasnt
[5:37:11 PM] Mary: im just in a slump i guess
[5:37:12 PM] Mary: idk
[5:37:15 PM] Mary: life!!!!!!!!!
[5:37:22 PM] Kathleen: indeed
[5:39:40 PM] Mary: a lifelong slump lol
[5:40:22 PM] Mary: idk i was hoping id get more stable from being in shittier situations again but nope!!!!! that didnt work out

Photo by Bessie Stanisz

BECOMING CHANGING WOMAN

By Kimberly Preston

As I took off running to the east, the first beams of sunlight peeked above the horizon, transforming the sky into a million shades of pink. Although I had been awake all night, I felt alert and energized as I ran in a thick woven wool dress and turquoise jewelry. My heavy necklace bounced against my chest as the chill air whipped my face and my newly washed hair flew behind me. My moccasins felt light on my feet despite being bound in huge layers of buckskin around my calves. As the sun rose higher, I could hear the sound of my family and friends running behind me in support. As I came to a stop on top of a tall rock ledge and looked out over the vast desert landscape, I felt different. I knew that when I returned to everyone, I would be seen as an adult instead of the small middle schooler I was.

Growing up, I visited my family on the reservation often, sitting quietly in small hogans and trailers, listening as my family babbled away in Navajo. "*Yá'át'ééh,*[1] child," they would say as they shook my small little hands. They would sit and talk for

1. Yá'át'ééh (*ya-at-eh*): A Navajo greeting used for "Hello." Literally translates to, "It is good."

hours, intermixing English and Navajo words in each sentence. When I was lucky, I would escape out into the dry, red dirt and play with my cousins until the stray dogs came looking for food. We would wander down dusty dirt roads until we could look out across the edge of the mesa, or ride in the back of a pickup out to my parents' hogan with its view of *Doko'oosliid*,[2] one of the four sacred mountains.

I was always the "cousin from California," the one kid that didn't look native, the one kid with colored eyes and lighter hair. My skin wasn't as dark, and neither was I as tall or as round as the other kids. I hadn't lived in a trailer on the reservation my whole life, wasn't learning Navajo in school, hadn't grown up in the harsh desert climate. I was somewhat of an outsider—although everyone knew it, I was still family and had grown up with an understanding of the traditional beliefs.

Once I got older, everyone started asking my parents, "When will you have her *kinaaldá*[3]? Where will it be? Better start preparing now." Much like in the Jewish tradition, the Navajo perform a coming-of-age ceremony for girls when they reach puberty, but instead of one large service, the *kinaaldá* spans the course of a few days.

I had been looking forward to mine for years with nervousness and anticipation. The ceremony would transition me into adulthood and demonstrate my strength in front of an entire community. In some ways, I was surprised at how many people wanted to help me into this new stage of my life. From the cooking to the nightlong prayers, every member of the family was involved. Family friends from around the country, who had watched me grow up, came to see me. Even people I had never met were there to support me and celebrate the traditional and ancient ceremony that would bring another *Diné*[4] woman into the community. All these people stayed up with me throughout the nights of prayer, and spent the days keeping me awake and giving me advice. The medicine man and his wife sat with me for

I was always the "cousin from California," the one kid that didn't look native.

2. Doko'oosliid (*doh-koh-ooh-sleed*): The San Francisco Peaks, regarded as one mountain.
3. Kinaaldá (*kee-nahl-DAH*): The traditional coming-of-age ceremony for Navajo girls.
4. Diné (*dee-NEH*): Navajo word meaning "The People," which Navajos use to describe themselves.

hours during the day, talking to me about my new responsibilities as a woman, how to respect myself, others, and how to continue to work hard in everything I do to make an impact on the world.

For an entire day, I sat in the sweltering hogan, grinding corn with a grinding stone for the *alkaad*, a large cake baked during the last part of the ceremony. The circular cake, which spanned a few feet in diameter, was placed in the ground, lined with cornhusks and buried. A large fire was built on top and tended to throughout the night by my uncle Roy, my brother Bob, and my other male family members. While I ground corn, a sheep was slaughtered and skinned by the women to prepare the next day's large meal. I took a break, and watched in astonishment as my grandma dug through a large bowl of sheep intestines, preparing a traditional dish of intestines coiled around strips of fat and grilled. In addition to the cake preparation, I was required to run in the four directions at dawn, noon, and dusk, to show my endurance and strength. The ceremony was grueling, and when I wasn't working on grinding corn or running, I was struggling to stay awake from being up all night in prayer.

The warmth and support that surrounded me was amazing. "You're doing great," everyone said. "If only your father were here; he would be so proud to see you doing this," my tiny, frail grandmother said to me one morning. I knew that although he wasn't there to support me physically, he was thinking about me and staying up all night in prayer as well.

Just like Changing Woman, I ran for the last time, starting before the sun rose on the last day.

Coming into the ceremony, I was still a girl. A girl who loved her culture and was eager to be brought into the world as a young woman in a special and spiritual way. I recall being told as a child the story of Changing Woman, the daughter of First Man and First Woman, that depicts the first *kinaaldá*. Changing Woman created the plan for the Earth and from her

skin she created the initial four clans, one of which, *Tó dích'íinii*, "Bitter Water Clan," is mine. Just like Changing Woman, I ran for the last time, starting before the sun rose on the last day. My hair had been freshly washed with yucca root and tied back in a *Tsii'yeel*[5] by my mother as the fire above the corn cake outside died down. A lot relied on that cake. A good cake, cooked all the way through without any burns, meant a good future. When I returned from the run, the sun had risen all the way, and even more people had arrived for the end of the ceremony. Seeing all the people standing around waiting—waiting for me—was intimidating, but I knew I now possessed the strength to push past my shyness and be introduced to my community.

My closest female family members began to touch my arms and legs, symbolically molding me into a woman.

They had all come to be blessed, not by the medicine man, but by me. In the Navajo culture, women are the leaders and are sacred for their ability to bear children and to nurture. When people hear about a *kinaaldá* taking place, they come from all around to be blessed by the new woman. As over a hundred people formed a line, I lay down on a rug outside, and my closest female family members began to touch my arms and legs, symbolically molding me into a woman. Afterward, each person approached and asked me to bless and mold them. Many asked me to touch their back to heal pain or their head to clear their minds of any bad thoughts. Although it felt strange to be seen as a healer, I was beginning to feel the maturity the ceremony had symbolized. I was now the center of attention, the focus of the prayers of every member of a community that I had only been able to visit a couple times a year—a community I had often felt separated from. I had often felt like I couldn't

5. Tsii'yeel *(SEET-yeel)*: Traditional hair bun of a Navajo woman. It is tied at the back of her head with white buckskin or white yarn, signifying that she is a woman.

relate to my cousins or the other women in my family because I had not grown up the same way they had and hadn't lived in a community of Native peoples my whole life. I had always been proud of my heritage and was grateful I was able to experience traditional ceremonies throughout my life, but I had never felt so accepted by my community until then. As the ceremony ended, and the women in my family greeted me, I realized I had been accepted and initiated into a group of strong and spiritual women who understood the significance of the traditional ways and teachings: a group of women who would continue the legacy of our people.

Photo by Meigan Canfield

Photo by Dylan Begneaud

THE FINE ART OF AWKWARD FIRST DATES

By Andrew Hecocks

The combined trembling of everyone involved will cause roofs to cave in. The sweat will flow like a biblical flood or Boulder circa 2013. The speech stammering will create a cacophony of rattling voices, all desperately poured from the mouths of people who are just trying again.

They will run through the litany of coffee shops and sit across from one another at rickety wooden tables that aren't level, tables so small that when they sit down, their knees will knock and both of them will stammer hurried apologies. One of them will fold a napkin into a small square and put it under the uneven leg of the table to make it stop shaking. This is their first mistake, as it gives them one less thing to talk about. Instead of cracking a joke like, "I guess these tables must cost an arm and a leg," they are left with the slow clinking of ice melting in a glass.

It is more like an interrogation than a first date. The pair will quiz each other about favorites and music and cinema and something funny they found at the thrift store. Other times the collective silence will be as suffocating and stale as graveyard air,

a mortuary of exhausted conversation topics. This is not so much a fine art as it is a crash course, a trial by fire, trying to get into the deep end when you really don't know how to swim. Sadly, most of these people will drown. Calls will go unanswered and peoples' thoughts will change from what could've been to, "Oh, I remember him. No, we never really hit it off." One person will hopefully text the other every once in a while, but will be disappointed by one-word replies, if they're replied to at all. People will doubt themselves and wonder why, in the end, they were so forgettable or undesirable. They may run through the first date over and over again in their mind, replaying the finer moments and lamenting their awkward silences, making a list of everything they could've done better—maybe I should've told the table joke.

Laundromats will have a heyday with people wiping anxious, sweaty palms on shirt hems and jean thighs. The post-date mental state of immediately harping on the night's failures is not for the faint of heart, and yet we've all been put through its paces. A person can stand in the middle of a winter street or another area of such poignancy, and think about their collection of first dates, like looking into a vault or thumbing through a photo album. Awkward first dates become an infinite number of faces and names that are slowly forgetten. As needless as this backdrop of blank faces seems to be, it couldn't be more important in getting over the hill into finding somebody who will matter more than a first date. A first date will turn into a second date, which will turn into a third date, which will turn into any number of dates that leave the number line and eventually become the aggregate mass of a "relationship."

But that is the fine art of awkward first dates. Not everyone is an artist, and now and again I will walk by a coffee shop and consider it the ground zero of an infinite number of first dates to come. It is where dignity goes to die. It is the fine art of social suicide commited in the hopes of finding somebody perhaps a little bit better than you.

Artwork by Kevin Kane

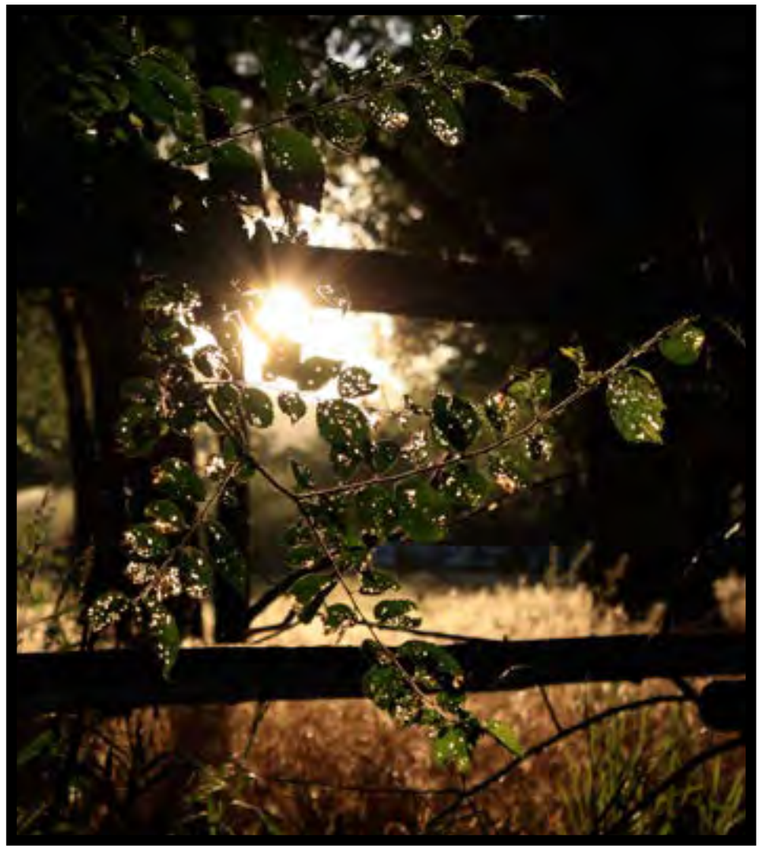

Photo by Meredith Soychak

CROOKED LETTER

By Samuel Joseph Carrothers

I wish there was a word for the way that cottonmouth snakes move across the top of the water in Copper Sage Pond. I used to watch them with fascination, fixated by fear. The biggest one we ever saw was about six feet long, but the babies terrified me most of all. In the spring they would gather, sometimes nearly twenty of them, in the stagnant pools of water on the edges of the pond, and slither madly in figure eights, frantically moving over each other, swiftly twisting, going nowhere. We fished that pond often—perhaps daily in the summertime. Four of us total, each with the Southern sensibility ingrained in a boy who spent every summer day, dusk to dawn, in the thick woods of East Texas. We knew how many crawdads to bring Ms. Jerry before she'd do us a boil, and where to find them. We knew to stay clear of stray dogs, and that timber hogs were the meanest animal in the 100 or so acres of our own little world.

I don't know if I'll ever go back there again. I revisit Copper Sage Pond so frequently in my memory that even today, 10 years after my last summer there, it projects with vivid realism in my mind. Even the screen in front of me lacks that visual depth, that richness of image that paints every detail of the old pond of my memory. Every detail of that special place seems so perfectly contained in my mind. Nothing feels that way now—every aspect of my day or week or year seems mixed up. A wash of fluorescent light drapes itself over my daily reality. I perceive the world through a barrage of LCD; everything about my life seems to be reflected back at me only through a series of screens. I live my life in 16:9, and it makes me yearn for the warm blanket of green light that pulses through the Texas timber of my youth.

Neither of my parents being born and raised Southerners, I never took to any of the delicious variances of the Southern accent the same way that the other three did, so I was always the one that talked a little funny—which means I made use of every syllable in a word and didn't talk exceptionally quickly or slowly. Brandon's voice was a perfect copy of his dad's and rang with that beer can twang distinct to North Florida. David spoke with a quick, Creole excitement. Tyler's words, on the other hand, were caked in that muddy, Mississippi drawl that mimics the way "Mississippi" itself is spelled. For a few weeks every summer, he'd go visit his dad back in Starksville, and return with a new Mississippi colloquialism. For an entire summer, everything he described was "—as the day is long." I fell in love with listening to the drawn-out way he would say something as simple as, "My cousin Ross is lazy as the day is long." I never thought once about the grammatical implications of "they is" or "fixin' to" or my personal favorite, "where y'at?" I just devoured the sweet sound of our conversations. One summer, I spent a week with some distant relatives (my extended family alone may very well be responsible for stereotypes about Catholic family size) in Maryville, Texas. Even at age nine, I relished in the trading of phrases as if they were baseball cards with the wiry, white boys of North Missouri that I now only see at funerals.

To us,
"S" was always
"the crooked letter."

I don't talk the way I used to.

We never spoke the letter "S." To us, "S" was always "the crooked letter." I'd even spell my name out loud that way: "Crooked letter-A-M." We associated this letter with snakes on several levels. The "S" itself linked the idea of the snake in our minds to the serpent of Genesis (we were all good Christian boys at the time). Then there was the shape itself. The same shape that allowed the water moccasins of Copper Sage Pond to move from one end to the other. These connections were easy to make because our world was so small. Letters and language and movement and light and sound and gods and evil and right all made sense because the logic of a ten-year-old in the woods allows for those sort of slithering associations that allows imagination to glide over reason and logic. It was only when I really started to try and make sense of things that it all stopped making sense.

Everything used to have meaning. The simplicity of it all, the interconnectivity of these thoughts, shimmered like fresh rain on the surface of the entire world. It was like running barefoot, or that inexplicable appreciation for a brief shiver on a chilly day—aliveness? I feel closed-in now. My shoulders are taut. My senses interweave and overlap and mute each other out. Sight-sound-taste-touch-feel; squinting at the incessant, overexposed reality of reality. It is ceaseless and I am finite.

The water moccasins often coiled themselves on the banks of the pond. Their eyes were all shiny and black, flickering to a matte shade of the same black. When I first read the Book of

Genesis, Eden was the timber surrounding Copper Sage Pond. The Tree of Knowledge was a sagging, solitary willow, wrapped in cypress and wreathed in cattail flowers, and Satan an old black cottonmouth that we all knew. In our minds, she was eternal. She was there the very first time we went to the pond, carefully woven in between the cattail stalks and water lilies. We were certain of her gender because for about a week each spring, she would be blanketed by babies about the size of our fingers. Eventually, we would find ourselves more afraid when we did not see her than when we did. We thought she was evil. I had looked into her mouth, white and wide. There was something comforting knowing where the snake was. She exuded a terrible calm, as if she wasn't worried about our presence in the slightest. It seemed that she knew something we didn't, and she—more than any other snake we'd encounter—frightened us to no end. I liked knowing what could hurt me. I liked knowing what to be afraid of. I liked being able to look my biggest fear dead in the eyes, and I liked the feeling I experienced when I pondered the physicality of my fear.

What does it mean to face your fears? If you're afraid of heights, do you overcome that fear by going mountain climbing? If you're afraid of drowning, do you take swim lessons? The water moccasins terrified me growing up. How I wish that my present fears possessed a similar weight and mass to them. How do I face my mom's illness? How do I face the deteriorating mental health of a close friend? It's like trying grab all the air in a room and arrange it a specific way.

I remember vividly the day that we killed the old snake underneath that willow tree. I don't know why we did it, or who decided to bring the shovel from Tyler's garage with us that day. More so than a decision, it was a feeling. We knew we could do it, and so we did. It was slow. Gruesome. Exhilarating. Electric. The experience wasn't divine. It wasn't particularly life changing at the time. That evening, I wasn't overcome by a wave of guilt or a surge of power. We hardly spoke of it in the

I find my present self envious of the boy that helped take the diamond head off the snake with an old spade.

days, weeks, even years to come. Something about it, though, has prevented me from shaking it away completely. The more I distance myself from it, the more I try to think about it in romantic terms—like it was some symbolic turning point in our lives where we finally had to confront the consequences of our childish ways. But we didn't. When we went back the next day, something had eaten most of the snake's body and we threw the rest of it into the pond for the fish to finish off, and that was the end of it. Time, though, has slowly adjusted my perspective on it all, and I find my present self envious of the boy that helped hack the diamond head off of that snake with an old spade. We were scared of something (demonic association aside) for a very rational reason, and we were able to resolve that fear with nothing more than a shovel. If only I could cure my mom so easily. If only my fears of today were half as comfortable.

I haven't seen a cottonmouth in years now, but I take comfort in knowing that they are almost certainly still there at Copper Sage Pond, moving from end to end in billowing S-curves. That pond was ours for a few years, or at least the snakes and the gar and the sunfish shared it with us, but the place is eternal. The very movement of all of the snakes emits power. The way they wrap themselves around themselves with crooked ease on the bayou banks of the East Texas woodland is a very real thing in my mind. I wish there was a word for the way that cottonmouth snakes move across the top of the water in Copper Sage Pond, because it is something that is both beautiful and horrifying, but even more so, admirable. As I move through the world that I inhabit, I often stumble, often act foolish, sometimes cowardly, and frequently without confidence in myself or trust in others. I envy the sureness and might of animals in movement—the kinetic display of confidence in both purpose and ability, and to me, this will forever be most true of the coffee-colored S's ebbing their way across the pond near my childhood home.

Photo by Ryan Long

REYNOSA

By Paul Henning

We always approached the border by automobile. This was the same South Texas/Mexico border that had been there since the Treaty of 1853. Long lines of cars and the comfortable transition of business signs going from mostly to entirely Spanish invariably marked our proximity. I would open the door of the car and step onto the parking lot's cracked asphalt, which seemed to emit more heat than our home stove, and anticipate the meal that awaited me. Then we would walk towards the looming bridge, nod politely at the somber Mexican Border Patrol agents guarding the gate, slide a few coins into one of the rusted turnstiles, and slip easily into another world.

The fence along the river was tall, and because of the beggars, the bridge we had to cross seemed longer than it really was. Looking down through the loose wire fence that protected the sides of the bridge, we could see dozens of topless children from four to twelve years old standing on the southern banks of the Rio Grande River, some fifteen feet below us. They had cut the top halves off of milk jugs and crudely attached them to long sticks and poles they struggled to hold with their small

hands as they banged them aggressively against the sides of the fence, demanding in Spanish with their tiny, faraway voices that we give them spare change.

My hardworking, ever-present mother took my brothers and me to have a cheap, delicious lunch, practice our lazy Spanish, and do some light shopping, making sure we never got too far away from her.

"They steal little blond boys here sometimes. You have to stay close," she would say.

"*Una Coca Cola, por favor*," we recited to the waiter after my mother reminded us not to drink the water.

My even harder-working, scarcely present father would sometimes take us out for lunch too, but that was mainly because we were with him when he needed to make a stop at the local *pharmacia*, where they knew his name and required no prescription. We would walk through the same dirty streets we had with my mother, except my father did not hold our hands or tell us to stay close. We struggled to keep up with his long strides, and when we entered the refreshing cool of the drug store, Spanish was not used—the names of pharmaceuticals need no translation. Our father felt more calm and comfortable here, and so did we.

To my mother, anyone could look too smooth, and dangerously suspicious. My father would transfer pills into a bottle with a different label before we left the *pharmacia*. When we passed the U.S. border agents with these, I worried that we looked too smooth, and dangerously suspicious ourselves.

The first time I crossed that border unaccompanied by my family, I was sixteen. My friends and I parked in the same lot my parents used, and when I gave the familiar nod to the Mexican agent at the turnstile, I hoped he did not notice the anxiety on my face. On the other side of that river we felt a newfound freedom, and we reveled in it. People may like to call the United States "the land of the free," but it wasn't to us. The U.S. had rules, regulations, curfews, and identification

Photo by Gauri Adettiwar

checks. Mexico had whatever we could think of, no questions asked. This was how Pinocchio felt on Pleasure Island. I sat at a table at the first bar I would ever get a drink in, lit a cigarette, and ordered the most appropriate thing I could think of: a Corona.

Sometimes, it was a late night event with a big group. Other times, just two of us would go for a short visit to enjoy a cocktail with our lunch. All you needed was a simple driver's license or state I.D. to re-enter the U.S. I received my driver's license at sixteen years old, only six months after 9/11. Unbeknownst to us, a law was being drafted that would end our escapades, but might well have saved our lives.

You could eat two tacos,
drink seven beers,
and return to your homeland
feeling ecstatic,
especially because you were
far from the legal drinking age.

The Spanish word "peso" translates into English as "weight." Ironically, the peso did not seem to weigh much compared to the dollar. The dollar was flexible, and you learned quickly where you wanted to spend it. At first, all you needed was ten-dollars to have a blast. You could eat two tacos, drink seven beers, and return to your homeland feeling ecstatic, especially because you were far from the legal drinking age.

I was one of the few who owned a cell phone at the time, and from calling my father I knew that when one was in Mexico the phone did not ring. Instead, it played a long recorded message in Spanish explaining how international service could be obtained for a fee. I could not have my parents, or girlfriend, knowing where I was, so the phone always stayed in the car on the U.S. side where it could ring and ring contentedly, disclosing nothing.

One afternoon, as I was buying a souvenir for myself from a street vendor in between bars, I was amused to realize that I had become a combination of my parents. My friends and I bought cigarettes and beers, sat and laughed with each other, feeling as free and unrestrained as anyone could. We had fun, and we were definitely breaking someone's rules, but the whole routine was mostly harmless.

We got old enough to purchase tobacco in the United States and graduated to another level of accessing Mexico's stimulating commodities. Now, we never left the country without at least thirty dollars for our border crossings, and our interests began to vary in their specificity. As soon as we crossed the bridge, ignoring the pleas for food and money below and around us, we bought marijuana for cheaper than the already low prices we were used to. The group would split, some headed straight for the bar to order beers and cocaine from the encouraging bartender, while others would meet there after going to the *pharmacia* to get Xanax and other prescription medications. Everyone seemed connected to the drug trade somehow. The bartender would ask how much pase (the slang term for cocaine) we wanted and then upsell the deal by offering twice as much for just a little bit more money. We always said yes. While we sipped our drinks he would run down the stairs, then up the street and back in less than five minutes with our purchase. It was customer service at its finest.

This led to more and more insobriety. It was sublime.

Having an abundance of illegal drugs on us created a new, welcomed challenge. Since most of us wouldn't dare to try transporting cocaine or marijuana into the U.S., whatever we purchased had to be devoured then and there. It became a group effort at the end of each visit to use up everything to keep from feeling like we wasted money. This led to more and more insobriety. It was sublime.

Someone might ask cheerfully across the noisy room, "Hey man, do you know where I'm supposed to be right now? Seventh period math." We would all collapse with laughter.

We drank more alcohol and smoked more pot to compensate for the cocaine's shaky high, chain-smoked Marlboro Reds, and blurred our vision as the night grew more clouded—laughing, shouting, vomiting, and dancing, sometimes all at once.

Miguel was stabbed by a local Mexican youth for being too friendly and loud at a small, dirt-floored bar . . .

In the midst of all the excitement, I developed some disconcerting feelings about these trips. Visits to the doorless toilet stall to retch my guts out, after having dug the key to my parents' house too ambitiously into the powdery bowels of some small plastic bag, became so normal that I would simply wipe my sweaty face with the bottom of my t-shirt and head directly to the bar to refill my newly emptied stomach.

One night, Daniel pulled out of the border parking lot to head home with a swerve as wide as the grin I'm sure he had on his face, and was immediately pulled over and arrested for drunk driving. Not long after, during a night that I had fortunately been absent from, Miguel was stabbed by a local Mexican youth for being too friendly and loud at a small, dirt-floored bar, where the bartender, who could not have been more than twelve, served beers out of a broken ice chest. Looking back, I'm sure our careless, arrogant attitude and our ability to cross back and forth over the border—a privilege that many can only dream of having—boiled their blood.

At nineteen years old, Christina and Desiree were speeding home after a night of the usual blackout drinking and pill-popping when Desiree ran her car off the road and died on the spot. Christina was in heartbreaking disarray for a long time after that. The usually animated guys that were closest to

the feisty duo fell eerily silent as they smoked a blunt in the funeral home parking lot, before going inside to embrace each other in grievous crying, bent low over Desiree's appropriately closed casket.

We were no longer free. The lifestyle we had created in Mexico carried over into our lives stateside, and it became a cage.

By age twenty,
I knew I needed a major change.

We now found ourselves in Texas inside messy, dark, smoke-filled homes of drug dealers, nervously watching infants crawl around the floor in dirty diapers, while we waited an eternity for our irritable, unpredictable business associate to return from some back room with, hopefully, what we had paid for. By age twenty, I knew I needed a major change. I was trapped in the same ups and downs of substance abuse, but it was no longer fun and exciting.

In a strange twist of circumstance, I soon found my new definition of autonomy within the strict confines of U.S. Navy boot camp. With my head freshly shaved and my mind clear as spring water for the first time in a while, I sighed deeply with relief and tried not to smile thankfully at the men howling at me to stand up straighter. There was an unexpected freedom through restriction, and it was exactly what I needed.

I was twenty-three when, on June 1, 2009, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative went into effect, requiring U.S. citizens to present a passport or special driver's license when re-entering their home country. Some of the poorest areas of our nation are located along the Texas/Mexico border, and most young adults do not have a passport lying around at their leisure to allow them to walk impulsively across that bridge. We certainly did not. This initiative was prompted by events leading to the attacks on 9/11, and was put in place to strengthen border security and prevent false documents. Unfortunately, the crime and violence along the borders of Texas have not been reduced

since then. In fact, they've gotten worse. Tighter security along the river was met with stronger opposition from Mexican cartels and drug dealers. Many people think that the act has done nothing but make these problems worse, and they may be right. I, however, was grateful for it in a more personal way. Having two younger brothers that lived in the same place I did at their age, I understand that because of this new law, there will be parents having dinner with their children, who otherwise might not have made it home safely from a night in Reynosa.

Artwork by Steffen Myers

INSTRUCTIONS

By Stela Knezevic

Start.

I'm crouched in the darkest corner. The coats, heavy with a shallow spring's rain, engulf my shrinking frame. I can hear it all outside: whispered curses, hushed conversations, my name cooed repeatedly, gently. I crouch lower. The commotion comes and goes in waves as bodies move like liquid, getting closer and farther away from the door. I have enlisted my cousins as body-guards. I can see their shadows through the cracks in the wood as they stack Legos in the shape of sticky technicolor castles, ones to ward off my enemies.

I left my letter of resignation on the coffee table this morning:
I am not going to America.
It is simple.
I even spelled all of the words right.

Go somewhere new (maybe New York).

The wallpaper is the kind of yellow no one would say is their favorite color. Walking back from the motel bathroom, the

lights fluorescent and the air thick, I hear voices through every door—not a single one shaped in a tongue I understand.

I told you I didn't want to come.

We are only here temporarily. They need to look at our papers before they can let us enter.

They only ever look at papers.

My mother smooths my bangs with her spit-soaked index finger; she smiles gingerly. If they looked at you to decide, with all of those little teeth missing, they would never let us cross the border.

I laugh as I stick my tongue through the gap in my mouth, formed by the absence of my two front teeth. Do I feel better? Hopping over her, I squeeze into the space between her and my dad.

Right there, the air is soft. Their stoic sobs mingle with my dreams.

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Go back to Start. Make sure it's July.

As she takes a sip of her coffee, my aunt looks at me—the eyelashes decorating her lazy eye lethargically brush the broken rim of the mug.

It's been a while.

I know. I'm sorry. The time and money always run out before I can make it back here.

Nine years in a row.

Sometimes it seems like that's the best I can do.

Her pained smile is a reflection of all eight siblings'. How's America? Last fall your parents visited. They told us you're going to university.

It's all the same. Some places are just louder than others.

Don't be modest. We are proud of you.

You can only be so proud before you become bitter. When I'm sitting alone, sometimes, I imagine getting all of you out of here.

All of us?

I see it in the creamy brown constellations of her pupil: a father-in-law, a husband, two kids, a son-in-law, grandchildren. She sways her head lightly.

It's all the same. Some places are just louder than others.

We got out while we could, but it has only been thunderstorms. It's so spectacularly heavy to be seen as the winners of a game we all lost together. Do you know that? Do you know how badly I wish you had gone instead? Any of you. I can stay here, make wine and cheese, and pick the figs in late August. You can go see the lights, the dishwashers. Did you know that they don't even use wood to heat their homes? They use switches, attached to wires, attached to magic.

She pulls the earthy wool sweater, draped over her petite shoulders, closer to her heart. You can't blame yourself for the world's problems.

But I should.

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Go somewhere new (again). Pretend you recognize it.

As I watch the sun set behind the rusty apartment buildings, I hear you come home; it is the subtle difference in the echo that resonates when you set down the car keys that marks you. From the balcony, I predict where your foot is going to fall next, how many seconds it will take you to get to the fridge, the number of drawers you will unsettle in your quest to find the bottle opener. I never hear you coming, but the years have introduced me to the moment when I can count on the glass door's whispery squeal. I pull my legs in for you to pass and, catching the first wisps of cigarette smoke from the corner of my eye, I turn.

How was work?

Spectacular. The syllables drip warmly through your eroded teeth.

You do look especially brilliant this evening. Reaching over, I giggle to disperse the minute shards of light illuminating your hair.

I thought of something today. Can I tell you? I've been waiting.

This one isn't like the others. We've never talked about this.

I don't believe you.

The dried paint on your forehead floats away in shy flakes of white, migrating to the rosy cliff of your nose. I'm being as serious with my words as any other night.

I know. I fell asleep in class this morning because we were up so late. We need to start pretending our thoughts are shorter.

It's short.

Tell me.

Will you believe me? My words are as serious as any other night. Today, I remembered that you are my only friend. And then I remembered that you are my greatest friend. And then I remembered that nothing has made me happier in the last 47 years.

Dad, you don't have to—

I know.

Save the world.

Wars happen: one land becomes seven, homes become dust, disrobed hearts become hollowed suns. The survivors leave and the dead stay. That's the deal.

But I'm breaking it.

Photo by Maura Towey

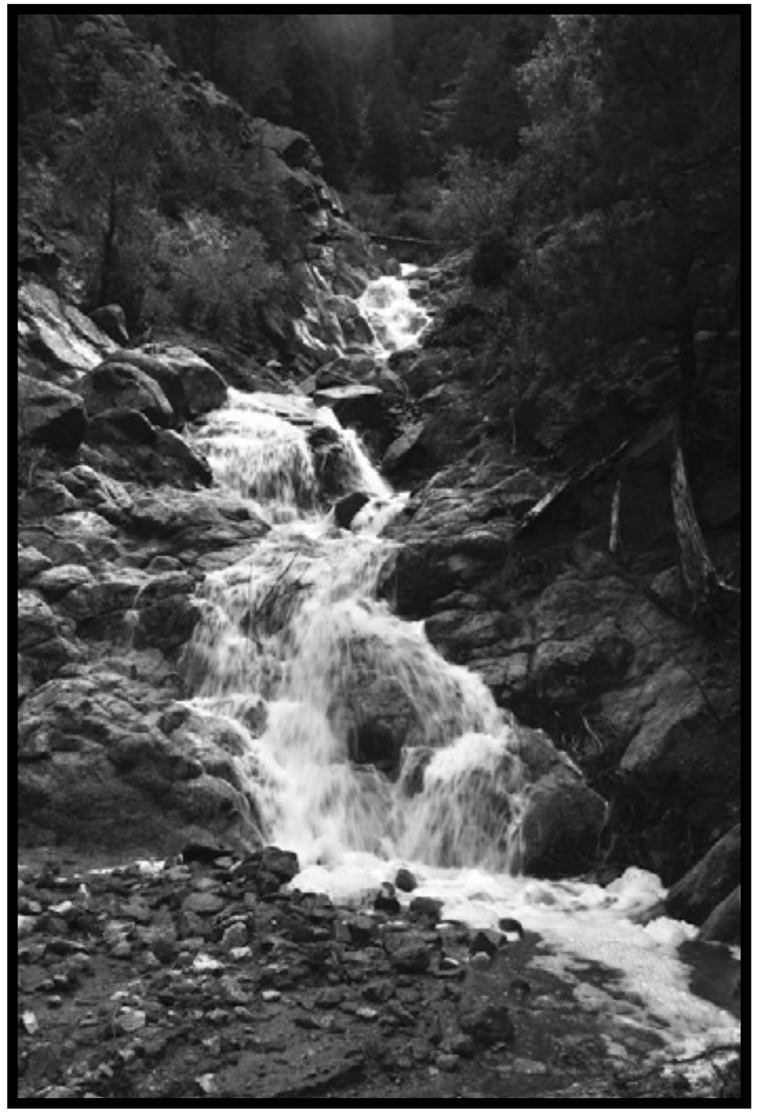

Photo by Puttichai Kupadakvinij

OPEN HOUSE

By Sayoni Nyakoon

Park Swing

I am not exactly sure how old I was, but I know many years ago I was stuck in a park swing.

My sister asked, “Sayoni. Remember when you were stuck in that park swing? How old were you? Do you remember?”

My mother answered, “She was old enough to know better.”

I know it was before I entered seventh grade, because it was the subject of a personal narrative I had to write. It was before I moved to Philadelphia with my twin sister, my father and the rest of his family—it was before I entered the eighth grade.

When I still thought love was a deity that never faded, when I still believed beauty had nothing to do with a person’s character, when I could force myself to believe my mother would take care of my sister and when I could close my eyes and fall into a world of my own creation—I found myself stuck in a park swing.

I thought the sky was a beautiful color. It was beautiful and it warned of

Rain.

My mother looked at the sky. Then she looked at my twin sister and me. She told us it was time to go home.

Before we left, we had to do one more thing. We had to swing one more time. Just for a little while.

There was a swing in that park
It was meant for toddlers
And babies.

My sister said, "What if you could fit in that swing?"

I hesitated.

My mother said, "Sayoni, you're so skinny you could probably fit right in there." And she was no longer irritated by the weather and its tendency to cut our time outside short and remind her she no longer had a car.

My sister and my mother held back laughs as one of my legs squeezed out of the openings of the swing. For the first time, I learned what it was like to wear clothes that are too tight and heavy.

To complete their show I pushed my feet off the ground and pretended to enjoy being the only kid my age who could squeeze into a swing for "little guys." After awhile the show was no longer entertaining.

"All right Sayoni! Get out now! We need to get home!" My mother had the voice of an educated, African American, southern woman. Sometimes she yelled when she was angry and sometimes she yelled when she was only pretending to be. Either way I tried to get out of that swing.

I tried to get out of that swing. I tried and I was tired because headaches run on my mother's side of the family.

I tried
and
I tried, but
I was stuck.

The fire department was called.
And it never rained.

And she was no longer irritated by the weather and its tendency to cut our time outside short and remind her she no longer had a car.

Car Baby

For awhile my mother's favorite way to categorize my twin sister and me was to say we were "car babies."

You are a car baby when:

- You are used to having someone drive you around in a car.
- You complain every time you have to walk to the grocery store, or buy clothes at the Goodwill for the first day of school.
- You aren't used to riding bikes, and getting exercise, to get where you have to go.
- You are pampered and spoiled and not used to working hard. When you believe the lies your father tells you,

"Because there is nothing wrong with shopping at the Goodwill or Aldi's or getting a little exercise."

- You suffer because your mother has made "childish," "silly," and "foolish" mistakes.
- You let a hillbilly hick turn his nose at you and smirk and call you a nigger.

We were car babies when we didn't want to walk up the street to get milk, and when we were tired after going across town for bread.

The summer before my gap year, I took a car ride with my mother and twin sister. I don't remember where we were going or why, but I remember how my mother felt as she drove.

She took a detour.

"I want to show you guys the house I grew up in." So we drove and the road whined as the sun beat it down.

We passed
Sturdy Strong
Old houses
With vines
Overgrown.

And I get sick trying to describe those houses and that road.

We reached an old house with brown bricks and green ivy climbing up its sides. The door was a red brown and beautiful—like dark brown skin after a long day in the sun. The cement porch might have had cracks; the cement steps did. The hand rail was a worn metal pipe and the lawn was yellow-green, a badge of the Kentucky Summer. There may have been a car in the driveway but I was certain no one lived there. At least, no one was home. "This is where I grew up," she said, and her sunglasses hid her expression.

But she had grown up in the projects?

"Conrad bought this house, for my mother, after he got out of the army."

What happened?

"Shahida was supposed to take care of it, but she let the bills get out of hand and she lost it. Isn't that a shame? It would've been nice to keep this in the family."

We took our time returning the car she borrowed. I'm pretty sure I gave her gas money.

"Isn't that a shame? It would've been nice to keep this in the family."

City Park

There are no park swings in City Park. There are only statues and wide lush fields that are excellent to play soccer on.

On the 11th of November I woke up to a text message.

"Soccer @ City Park today—be there"

I didn't plan on going to the park. I planned on sending my mother a steroid cream for her eczema (the cream was also supposed to treat my acne but I never used it), but the post office opened at noon and the clock said 9 am. I put on my dance shorts and left around 10:10.

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

I was late arriving to the park, my shorts were way too tight and short; I felt self conscious. Every time I got on my bike I'd stop after riding a few blocks and tug at them.

After playing an awful game, I paused, tugged at my shorts, and checked my text messages. I had three: all from my boss.

"Nuni, call me immediately."

"Nuni, call your aunt."

"Nuni, there is an urgent personal matter. I need to speak with you."

I called my boss, silently praying I was still going to get paid. His tone alarmed me more than his words.

"Hey Nuni, have you spoken to your aunt?"

I had not.

"Okay, well you need to talk to her soon."

Her number was not saved in my phone.

"I can text you her home phone . . . I just want you to know that we're here for you, Nuni."

On red alert, I hid behind a statue and called my aunt. I was choking before she said a word.

"Your mother had a heart attack."

That was all right. Yes, it sucked but I still had time to see her—I had trouble breathing. TJ and Samantha were behind me though I never saw them approach. There was no space between us when my aunt asked,

"Who is there with you now?"

I told her. I told her I wanted to see my mom, soon. Then she told me,

"I didn't know how to say it before sweetie, but
She's
Already
Dead."

THE EGG-IN-A-HOLE LENS OF MY BROKEN HEART

By Michael Harris

8 and hungry.

I sit on my bed. The stereo downstairs hums Kenny G; it's seeping through the walls. My dad loves Kenny G. It's the only stuff he plays in the house that isn't Christian worship music.

I have a plate in my lap. My breakfast is what my mom calls an egg-in-a-hole. Lots of people call it an egg-in-a-hole; I just don't know this. I think my mom invented it. I'm eight, so I don't know a lot of things.

Like how to eat.

I mean, I know how to eat. I just don't know there are rules, like, you shouldn't lie on your back on your bed and hold the egg-in-a-hole up and see how long it takes for the egg to fall out of the hole.

This ability to not know things is one of the reasons I can peel off layers and not even know I'm doing it. It's what fancy people call inner work. It's what pretentious people call enlightenment.

Because of this, I have an unforced slowness not common in children. This will go away in a few years when I dis-

Photo by Chad Henderson

cover candy and especially (especially) Mountain Dew, but for now, I am reflective without trying.

And this is why I notice light, maybe for the first time. I honestly don't think we've met before, which sounds strange, because it doesn't make sense. Regardless, light, it is wonderful to finally meet you. Or maybe I've met you every day of my life, but I forget every night, and wake up with a blank slate like Drew Barrymore in *Fifty First Dates*. Or maybe that was a series of dreams I had, and not a movie?

That makes more sense, actually, because that movie came out years after this happened.

I am so distracted by the light that I forget I'm dangling the egg-in-a-hole above my head. The splat of the egg on my face gently reminds me of this fact. My vision is immediately yellow and white and dark and runny and sort-of scary. I don't want this stuff to kill my eyes or something.

But I don't scrape it off, because I like the way the light has changed, or, how it appears to have changed. Now, I'm viewing it through a syrupy filter. The hues are different, the shapes barely defined, and I laugh. Of course, I don't have the words to talk about any of this. I just feel it.

And at this moment I feel something I'll never un-feel.

I am a lens.

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22 and flying.

I slam my head against the steering wheel. The feeling I hate penetrates my chest. I gasp for air but sputter and cough instead. I glimpse the speedometer through watery eyes. 75 mph. 85 mph. 95 mph.

I pull my head up, wipe the tears from my eyes, and regain enough focus to keep my little Saturn from barreling off the side of the thin road. But I don't slow down. The trees whiz by, like the cinematic montage I've engineered my life to be.

But this is real. I realize again that it's real.

"How the fuck could you let this happen?" I scream.

At myself.

At God.

And still, for the audience to hear.

"How the fuck could you let this happen?" I scream. At myself. At God.

I grit my teeth. Is there actually a difference between physical and emotional pain? This agony is more than I imagined. I grip the steering wheel tighter and slam my head into it again.

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16 and suave.

I'm perched on a sandstone rock, clad in my latest Goodwill suit. It's a warm September night, but I'm glad to have the blazer on as a light breeze rolls in. The moonlight bounces off the guitar resting on my lap, my brown tie playfully hovers in the wind, and I can't contain the smile stretching across my face.

Just a foot from me is Maria, the girl of my dreams and, miraculously, soon the girl of my reality. Her silky brown hair drapes over her shoulders, and she sits on a rock a few feet from me with a blindfold over her eyes. It's all part of the show in which she's the star, and I think—well, I hope—she's loving it. Her dazzling smile seems to say so. And it is dazzling.

"You can take the blindfold off, beautiful," I say. She slowly pulls it down, revealing her shimmering eyes, and her smile widens as she takes in our surroundings.

On one side of us is a gentle slope dotted with trees. The other side is a steep cliff overlooking a meadow, which sits in the shadow of the monstrous Rocky Mountains, ominous but beautiful at night like this. We are perched where the land ends. All around us, sandstone rocks jut from the ground like castle towers. It's a breathtaking sight, but not as breathtaking as her. This all feels like a dream.

But it's real. I realize again that it's real.

I breathe in deeply as the anticipation hits me. I'm shaky and nervous but more elated. The butterflies in my stomach flap their wings with alacrity, like the crack-addicts they are. Is there actually a difference between physical and emotional excitement? Her wondrous gaze subsides and her eyes turn to meet mine. I grip the guitar tighter, and slide my hand into place.

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We are perched where the land ends.

I'm 22.

The sound of my heavy breathing and pacing footsteps on the hardwood floor fills the living room. I'm clutching the letter in my sweaty hands. My gaze darts between it and the street outside the window. Every new second pulses in my temples. I interrogate myself again.

Is this the right decision? The pressure intensifies in my chest and I swallow. She'll be here any minute. I have to be strong for her.

My eyes catch a flash of reflected light and I turn to see her Honda pull up in its usual spot, the spot she's pulled into hundreds, if not thousands, of times. My heart races as I rush out to meet her.

The car door opens. Maria is already sobbing. She's figured it out.

"Please don't do this, Michael." Her voice is muffled as she buries her face in my chest and whimpers, "I love you. You're my best friend."

This slices into me. It takes every fraction of willpower I can muster not to give in and admit I'm being ridiculous and stupid for my lack of faith. "I love you too, beautiful," I say.

We hold each other in the middle of the street for a while. Then I put her hand in mine while my other hand clutches the letter and we walk to the house.

I'm about to do something I know I'll regret.

I'm 16.

The sound of my guitar and voice echoes across the meadow. There's a neighborhood a mile or so down the hill that I'm sure I'm disturbing at this hour, but I don't care. My gaze darts between my left hand, making sure I've got the right chords, and the girl I've thought about non-stop for six months, who happens to be sitting right in front of me as I serenade her.

The light-hearted, slightly jazzy sounding verses tell of the first time I saw her at our high school youth group. I bounce from word to word.

"Every time I look at you, you shine our savior's light."

It takes every fraction of willpower I can muster not to give in and admit I'm being ridiculous and stupid for my lack of faith.

"And I'll never forget the first time I saw it in your dazzling smile when we met that Wednesday night."

I arrive at the bridge in the song, and the chords get emotional. I pick at the strings gently.

"And I feel like it's Sunday night, and I'm flying down Powers."

We smile at each other knowingly. A few days ago I floored the accelerator of my Sebring Convertible on Powers Boulevard until the speedometer read 110.

"'Cause whenever I'm around you, baby, my heart's going at a hundred and ten—"

I mute the strings and click the small button beneath my foot. The trees around us suddenly illuminate with white Christmas lights. Maria jumps. She had no idea. My voice rings through the night.

"Miles an hour!"

The guitar erupts back into the night. I strum passionately, smiling inwardly and outwardly at the perfection of the moment.

But my thoughts start racing.

Artwork by Dakota Nanton

EXPOSÉ

By Amy D. MacNair

"They'll never believe me. Not inside of here, nor outside of here, despite the story I have to tell. In the one form of my existence, I'm defending the other version of myself, and vice-versa. This is the torture I've known—a living shell of who half of them want me to be, but never whole."

Whiplash. Denver. October, 2009.

Balance the cost of the soul you lost,
with the dreams you likely sought.
Are you under the power of gold?
—Dan Fogelberg

It's been sixteen years and I'm still going strong. They always said I'd make a brilliant salesperson. Hell, they all said I'm brilliant. But, is it just a relative term? Brilliant compared to what? Was it a lame attempt at flattery that would get them nowhere? I'll give them credit. I think they were actually being genuine in

their estimation of who I presented myself to be. I could work it as well as the best of them. I always chose to take the path less traveled, in my pursuits, my education, and within the confines of my job. You could call it a sort of rage against the machine. It became a pride thing for me. Somewhat fabricated, somewhat innate.

People are people, and everyone has something to offer. I would be enlightened to this truth over the years in a surprising manner during my extended stay in this rather non-conventional career. Although the money would prove to be my largest gain, it was the conversations with the customers that I found to be the most satisfactory part of the job.

"So, where are you from and what is it that you do?" This was the typical, one-line icebreaker that I used to gauge my potential "sale."

"I'm a freelance writer and a professor of advanced writing at Villanova University. I got my undergrad at Brown University in Rhode Island and my Ph.D. at Arizona State University."

It was like a welcome mat and a punch to the gut all at the same time. Unbeknownst to him, I was a college graduate with a dream to now further pursue some sort of advanced degree. A master's degree, perhaps? A juris doctoris? Yeah, that's more like it. But he would never believe me, and with good reason. Sitting across the table from this man in a three piece suit I was wearing nothing but a two-piece outfit: a swimsuit with rhinestones and six-inch heels.

"So, tell me something interesting about yourself," he said.

My normal, scripted response included where I grew up and something about my horses, but in cases like this, I was compelled to unleash the truth about who I *really was* and nine times out of ten I was brilliant in my assumption. I captivated him with stories of putting myself through my undergrad as an exotic dancer and my refusal to be phagocytosed by the lifestyle after all these years.

"I'm thirty-six years old, never married, no kids." I said proudly.

"Um, are you gay?" he asked as it was almost expected that most dancers two-thirds my age and already been divorced twice and had accumulated several children.

"No, just independent and *free*." I always considered this my vehicle for financing an education that my successful, womanizing father fell short in providing for me and my brother. In respect to the rest, however, I was one of the lucky ones. There were so many young women over the years whose dreams and goals faded behind the quick, easy money of the job. Education was last on their list. This was the end of the road for them. They actualized themselves from high school dropout to 50,000 dollars a year, part-time.

"So, tell me something interesting about yourself," he said.

I witnessed so many of my coworkers die from the inside out. The flame of life slowly receded to embers as they sold themselves short to this place. To some, it was manageable, and in the best case an opportunity—if she was wise enough to use the job as a means to something bigger. But usually it turned out a dead end. The biggest stumbling block was the drugs. The Fast White Lady. Black Beauties. Smack. Spotting the ones hooked on drugs was easy. Under the dark, purple lights of the club they appeared as calendar girls. Under the bright, white lights of the dressing room they transformed into the walking dead. Their addictions slowly reduced them to chasing their next high in primal desperation to simply survive, let alone function. Dark circles enveloped their eyes as they dragged themselves into the dressing room at the start of the shift, temporarily sober and in need of their next fix.

I never judged addicts as much as I felt sorry for them. I grew up in an addictive household, mainly alcoholism, and loved my family regardless. I bonded with them and respected them. I sensed my dad's loneliness behind the bottle despite his padded life and world travels from his high paying, white collar employment. The collision of the ice with his favorite blue glass indicated his first drink after work. It was a familiar sound in our household. It was one-half rum, one-half Coke, all night long. We would sit out on the deck and talk past dark as his mistress in the glass slowly seduced him into oblivion. By ten o'clock my father's face was flat on the table, bearing the weight of his torso rounded over from the chair. Years later it would become three-quarters gin and one-quarter tonic drowning his extremely forgiving liver in a toxic bath. Despite decades of uncanny, residual health, the bottle had the final word. His successful career as a nuclear engineer was abbreviated due to his relationship with booze, and the once-strong, sub-professional cyclist was reduced to a prematurely-unemployable old man who walked with a cane.

I got to know the faces behind the veils from a very tender age and learned that compassion is one of the greatest gifts bestowed upon us—compassion for deep suffering. I was always the big sister at work, the one who lent an ear. And I wanted to hear. But this often put me in a precarious situation. Despite my eagerness to lend compassion, I dreaded this vulnerability I often signed up for. I felt it was my duty to listen to the girls . . . just let them vent without the risk of penalty that they were so used to in their normal lives. But I also internalized so much of their grief and frustration as I sought to make sure they knew I truly understood them. I ruminated over their problems and responded in the best way I could to their need for advice. I carried their stories with me and struggled with my inability to solve their problems. My shoulder absorbed countless tears of grief wept freely. I wept with them over those losses. Lost loves, lost children, lives stolen by addiction. It gave me a purpose to be strong for them, my younger sisters in this strange life we all lived. But from this I learned that you cannot be open to others without being vulnerable. It was a gamble. A gamble I chose to take because I loved these lost souls. I, too, even in my relative sobriety was a lost soul. What was I doing here? How did I get here?

Of course, I know how I got here. I was a sophomore in college looking to make some extra cash when my dorm roommate introduced us both to the world of stripping. That was sixteen years ago. So, why was I still here? The rationalization was always a legitimate one. The money. I could still keep my horses and compete with them at local shows. My horses provided me with a refuge from the very place that allowed me to afford them. The same animals had given me refuge while growing up in a household falling apart—and that household had financed them. Was this the same setup? Something compelled this conservative woman to continue to remove her clothes for complete strangers. I was massaging the egos of men who would stuff my pockets at night, and was hanging out with drug addicts from the ghetto. Then, during the day I changed masks and disguised myself as normal on campus and at the grocery store. I was constantly reinventing myself from one to the other on a twenty-four hour basis, working at Z and living at A. I was drained to the point of exhaustion. Normal daily routines came to be too much work as I attempted to rebalance my core for the next task at hand. Whiplash. Which identity was I? Or could I be both?

I was massaging the egos of men who would stuff my pockets at night, and was hanging out with drug addicts from the ghetto.

"It is through your relationships with others that you better understand yourself," my grandfather told me when I was just five years old.

A few of the dancers I had the pleasure of meeting were without a doubt the most brilliant people I'd ever met in my life. They knew how to avoid the whiplash. They tucked that organic part of themselves away while at work and put on a desirable armor for six hours. They exemplified stoicism as they traded one face for another, blanketing away their core and presenting simply what was to be desired. Despite their obvious genius, their refusal to open up to anyone under that roof left me hungry for more of their secret. They were satisfied doing just enough to make the money and run, only dancing for a few years before they moved on to medical school, law school, business, etc. So why was I still here? And why was I still so good at what I did?

I enjoyed listening to people and learning about them, and they enjoyed having someone listen to them. I will always believe it was not my scantily-clad presence that drew them in, but rather the lending of my ears that kept them coming back to see me. Many of these men became my regulars. I went on a trip around the world each night, living vicariously through their stories of travel and experiences, and in return I got paid handsomely for it. It wasn't the removal of my clothes or the vertical gyrations that did it. It was my interest in who they were, off stage. This was a secret—no, a gift—that few other dancers ever understood.

"It is through your relationships with others that you better understand yourself," my grandfather told me when I was just five years old. But it's an insatiable pleasure, as the more you learn about yourself, the more you realize you don't know. I'm sure he never expected me to level with his words of wisdom in this way.

"Well, I'm so glad you asked!" I told the professor from Villanova. "I recently decided to go back to school, pursue a different degree, then graduate work. I am at the University of Colorado studying . . ."

We sat there and talked. None of my clothes were removed, and I was bought off the list. I accrued two hundred dollars an hour to be removed from the DJ's dancer list (no stage dances required during that time) and after four hours found myself eight-hundred dollars richer on my drive back home. It was easy money.

Ten Feet Tall and Bullet Proof. Denver. September, 2011.

You'd think I've learned my lesson,
but I'm still payin' dues
each time I drink and start to think
I'm ten feet tall and bulletproof.
—Travis Tritt

"Come talk to me in the office as soon as you get dressed, Kaylee." These were the Olympic level buzz-kill words I'd heard Matt tell me at least a dozen times after losing my cool, thanks to mismanaged consumption of the only protection I thought I had. He was the club's long-term, iconic manager. The club owners, a married couple, had adopted him at a mature age for some mysterious reason and secured for him one of Denver's most powerful positions in the entertainment industry. He ran the place in Nazi fashion and when he called you into the office during your shift you always began to sweat.

Matt was a force to contend with at the club. Whatever he said *went*. Tidy and timely as a Swiss watch, yet as crazy as a wild stallion, he successfully played the roles of both the man in charge and the eccentric loose cannon that kept us all on our feet, and customers craving for more. Everyone wanted to be Matt's friend. He gained celebrity status and was not easily crossed. I tested this fact on many an occasion in my inebriated glory.

"I just had three customers complain to me. They said you told them to leave your stage because you felt they weren't tipping you appropriately."

"Not true. I was going to let *all* of that go until one of them pulled out a cell phone and started snapping shots. That was the straw for me and I asked them to leave my stage. Really! Please believe me!" I exclaimed in the most sober voice I could command.

"Kaylee . . . they were three people in sweater vests. Please. Let's face it, you and I are college-educated. How long have we worked together? We both know that when you do this shit, it gives all of them a glorious excuse to make us look like the pieces of shit they think we are. Come on. I need you to get dressed, go home and call me before your next shift."

I loved the numbing effect alcohol had on my emotions. It was my armor.

"*Damnit*!" I'd just been slammed again. I'm such an idiot! Shit.

Five hours earlier, I relished the taste of the sweet candied liquor finished with a floral accent bathing my tongue. My loyal friend in the bottle was once again offering me the wonderful, mind-altering effect of numbing all of my defenses, awakening the inner seductress, light on inhibitions. This fantastic relationship with the bottle offered me the confidence required to swim with the sharks I was soon to face. Each sip of booze would transform those sharks into dolphins, and eventually those dolphins into passive bottom-dwellers, at least as I saw it. Each level down in this ritual made me the shark inside those windowless, four walls that would attempt to contain me for the following six hours.

The first sips were actually sucked from the nipple of a pre-filled water bottle. It was the pre-buzz opening act that started at Colorado and 23rd and lasted through twenty-two intersections of stoplights. To me it was glorious rebellion and self-satisfaction. To passive observers, it was Gatorade. By the time I pulled my car left onto Virginia Drive, my sensible self reaching for the brake was hogtied as a greater sense of my inflating ego took over. It was this ritual suppression of my true self that paved my entrance into this place for which I carried a natural aversion, felt more clearly on a sober scale. It was the same place that paid my bills and kept my horses in oats, right up there with the Joneses.

Booze was introduced to me at a very tender age. I hated it. I felt superior to it. My own infatuation with my wonderful father was challenged as I watched these spirits slowly steal his dignity. I never understood how someone as smart and strong as he was could fall victim to this seduction. I privately judged him with harshness for his desperate infatuation.

"What a waste," I thought. It drew him away from all of us. His authenticity was lost through this weakness.

Now, twenty five years later I was becoming a mirror image of this disparity and I could care less. I *loved* the numbing effect alcohol had on my emotions. It was my armor. Each sip taken between the flip of mascara, brush of blush, and consecutive set on stage lent me a growing fortress of seeming protection from the nasty crowd of perverts.

Still in a relative state of sobriety, I approached the front of the club carefully, reaching for the brass handles of the heavy,

wooden doors. I heard the music and the DJ announcements as I walked through the bar in my everyday wardrobe, making a point to avoid eye contact with of any of the customers sitting in the shadows. I still needed to create more space. I entered the back room and headed down the fifteen stairs to the dressing room.

"3:40. I've got twenty minutes to the start of my shift," I thought to myself with slight trepidation. I needed all of those twelve hundred seconds to carefully dispense makeup to my aging face and pick out an appropriate outfit. I preferred working the four to ten shifts. I felt as if I still worked relatively normal hours aligned with much of the outside working world and appreciated the wallets that tended to walk through the doors in the earlier hours. It was a buffet of older generations with decent manners and expendable incomes opposed to the later crowds chock full of young testosterone and shithead, cheap attitudes. While putting on my makeup the effects of the alcohol slowly slid over me like a cool, soft cotton sheet draped lightly over my body in the middle of a summer night's sleep. My sense of confidence bloomed from somewhere inside, inspiring my devil self to rise once again.

I was often tempted to engage in safer addictions that would not perhaps cost me a driver's license or felony driving record. One such option was the Fast White Lady, which strangled many of my coworkers with her dangerous seduction. They flew around the club, impervious to others with their dizzying and swirling energy. I was scared of the white powder, though. Call it my conventional, snobbish New England upbringing, or just sensibility, I was "above" that. Additionally, I witnessed too many drug dogs randomly entering the club and sniffing up the locker room to think twice about carrying any on me. Granted, I'd done my fair share when offered, only to wake the next day preferring to die rather than get out of bed. So my addiction remained enclosed in the bottle, despite regular payment of morning headaches and lost memories of the previous night.

I had flesh of steel tying
my body together.
Where one rounded muscle stopped,
another one began.

After putting on my face, my nail polish, heels, and cocktail dress, my boobs and I walked upstairs. We were ready to face this crowd of jerks. For at least a moment, I could present myself as bulletproof. Despite my ability to mix in with the crowd and present myself with confidence upon initial greetings, I always felt extreme discomfort with the shallowness of the industry. My value was only threads deep to them. A large part of me hungered for that greater sense of appreciation of who I really was. I needed to stand out in the crowd in a positive way, yet so often I felt neglected. Concerning physical appearance, I was often the last finisher in the claiming race. I was far from the anorexic body type that graced six of the seven stages while I danced invisibly on the seventh. The other dancers had noticeable knees, hip bones, and wrists. I had flesh of steel tying my body together. Where one rounded muscle stopped, another one began. Often times, I would walk my strong physique up the stairs to the stage only moments later to watch men flee in fright. At times there were even dust trails left behind. They wanted to see little miss pretties with their helpless youth, naïve presence, and tiny waistline. I was the walking contradiction to all of these qualities. Therefore, my income was forcibly dependent on a unique selling style. I would have to reach deep into the psyche of these men and challenge them, to awaken their mental drive that fell asleep upon entering the front doors. This was my clutch and it required tremendous energy on my part—energy to be used wisely and selectively, and it required a solid buzz with which to erase any doubt that I was still qualified enough to play this game.

The shoes he wore
told me stories
of his past and present.

When not on stage, I would search the crowd for my kill. Ideally, he would be sitting alone at a table, drinking a martini or wine suggestive of expensive taste and an inquiring mind. The shoes he wore told me stories of his past and present. Tennis sneakers spoke of limited income and education. A nice pair of Italian leather loafers or Asolo's from REI lent a much better appeal. Chances were good that he was most likely in for a little fun to be

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

had with his residual play money from an income adding over six figures. And if his posture spoke of desire for company, this was my guy. While most of the girls walked around and planted their butts in an empty chair with no thought as to how to cater the conversation but only whether "he would like a table dance" or not, I was the silent wolf. It would be a challenge of my intelligence against his to determine who would be the smarter, more stealthy predator.

"So, where are you from and what is it that you do?" I said with an unassuming approach.

"I'm here on business from Chicago."

"Fantastic! My mother grew up in Chicago, in the southern suburb of Lemont. And I'm sure you've heard of Lake Geneva?"

"Oh, absolutely! We have a vacation home up there."

"Well, wouldn't you know it, my grandmother lives on Lake Shore Drive and she's been there for over fifty years now. She'll be ninety-seven in January. She and I frequented Popeye's during my last visit.

"Oh, for sure! I love going to Popeye's. I'm usually there at least once a month."

This was my wise attempt at forcing common ground. My words would fly out at a much more forceful tempo than normal, as if I'd known him for years while my eyes scanned his for a glimmer of interest, or better yet a feeling of comfort and connection. My goal was to keep tugging at who he was until I got him to feel important and desirable in my eyes. Suddenly, he was the one trying to impress me, intoxicated by my appearance of hanging on his every word. Enter two more glasses of wine and thirty minutes of intensive conversation and I was hopefully on my way to five private dances. It was another one hundred dollars in my purse for the effort. If I could repeat this performance four times a night, in between sets, I would leave the club with a feeling of success. Nights like these proved I didn't have to feel as if I'd sold my flesh for an underbid price. Rather, my wits alone opened his wallet. My dignity was still intact.

On a nightly basis, I set the rules to this game. I was everyone's friend, secretly appraising their individual value and doing my Sunday best to humor them all with my natural grace and appeal. I was smarter than them. I was the silent predator of predators. They were mine, not the other way around. My over-inflated ego sustained my pseudo-strength and removed my sensitivities that would normally render me vulnerable. I bravely

It was another one hundred dollars in my purse for the effort.

entertained NBA stars, Hollywood actors, and corporate millionaires. I was the main attraction and quite attracted to myself, likewise. My buzz increased my comedian's sense along with my peace and love attitude. I was an unmistakable genius . . . up until about my fifth glass of wine. Then it would all change.

My intoxication would eventually come spilling out the other side, catching the stern attention of my boss, Matt, many times over. It was clearly evidenced by my outrageous gestures, often decorated with my middle finger in its solitary glory followed by vulgar statements aimed at desiccating any remaining morality of the customer who took liberties at mocking me or shorting me on cash. My badass would come flying out. I never escaped this brutal twist. It was as if something else took over my better judgment and often cost me dearly. I got to a point where I realized I was in the *wrong* place.

"I *wasn't* raised this way, and how *dare* these guys look at me like that?"

My relationship with the bottle turned against me with more frequency as I advanced in my career while I continued to abuse it for emotional protection. This codependency would turn out to be my greatest failure.

Leaving the office following Matt's familiar lecture and not knowing if I still had a job, I collected my belongings. I was now the loser among losers. It would be another sleepless night.

Uncertainty. Denver. November, 2011.

I could've done so many things baby,
if I could only stop my mind from wondering what
I've left behind and for worrying about this wasted time
. . .
maybe someday we will find
that it wasn't really wasted time
—Don Henley, Glenn Frey

I can't imagine what I am going to do now with my life. What once was my freedom has now become my sentencing. My résumé is anemic at best, hopelessly pathetic at worst. Every night here I

attempt to exhume the past in some way to deny the reality that I am truly in the twilight of my eighteen-year career. I am holding on with a death grip. I look around at the other employees and see shades of myself in each of them. I see a young girl in the corner of the room with a customer. She is wearing a tiny, blue, sequined dress that clings to her one hundred-pound body and her hair is in an up do accentuating her baby round face. Her twenty-two-year-old energy radiates glee at the attention she receives from this man in the form of compliments and Ben Franklins placed neatly into her cleavage. She is a hard reminder of my age. I think back to the days when I was her. I wonder what would've happened if I'd channeled my income into better investments and money markets affording me the opportunity to walk away, comfortably. Now, I scramble for leftovers from this place to stock up for what could be a very long winter season in my life. I am reminded of a recent discussion I had with my best friend who has been an alumna of this job following her own fifteen-year career in the business.

"Don't let this job fool you. It has a dark side of its own. The hands of opportunity this job promised to us early on in our career are now threatening to strangle you and suck the life out of you, just as they did me. I had a home on the coast of Florida, a home on Lake Michigan, drove Ferrari's, and had a quarter million in the bank at age thirty. Now look at me. I am 40 years old, living in a small apartment in Boulder, attending CU on loans I cannot repay, and living on a prayer."

We both sat on the edge of her second-hand futon couch that doubled as her bed. We drank coffee from mugs she got for ninety-seven cents each at the dollar store as a gentle, mountain breeze blowing from the mountains into her studio apartment, tossing sleeves back and forth on her hanging shirts and jackets she got at the thrift store. I believed her words as I'd witnessed this disintegration as well, but they were painful to digest.

"What do you think it is that leads to the disappointing end?"

"It's the energy," she said. "We spent so much time gaining possessions and money, but all the while falling further and further into spiritual bankruptcy. We sold our flesh for shallow gains. It's Karma. It is a debt that cannot escape repayment. And there is no aging gracefully in that joint. The customers will remind you of that with brutal honesty," she said with intensity in her eyes, backed up with resurrected anger.

"What do you think it is that leads to the disappointing end?"

"Do you want another cup of coffee?" she asked after a brief pause.

Refilling our mugs, she turned to the window and collected her thoughts.

"It really is better now. I have lost all of my material gains but have regained a priceless peace. I wouldn't trade it for the world," she said with a relieving sigh and convincing nod. "Trust me. I think your time is coming. You will know it, just as I did. You will look around the club one night and finally decide you are done. It won't occur with anger, but with peaceful surrender. Then you will collect your things and simply walk out without ever looking back. Just be grateful that it will be a voluntary decision. The greatest success you will achieve in that job is the ability to tell it goodbye, not the other way around. Remember all those girls who fell into the cracks of addictions, demise, and occasionally death at the hands of an abusive partner, drugs, or the end of a rope? They were the real victims."

"... and the beautiful Kaylee will be joining us on stage five," sounded over the loudspeaker in a voice only an overly-enthusiastic DJ could expel.

As I arose from my bar stool and trance of recollection, my eyes were drawn back to the girl in the corner of the bar. She was sixteen years behind me in experience. Her cliff was still far off in the distance. I couldn't judge her, though. I was once her and she would eventually be me, looking back.

Artwork by Dakota Nanton

BLUE AGAINST BLUE

By Lexi Evans

Sunday, March 4, 2001:

I'm standing in front of a bloated corpse. His arms form a cross on his chest. His skin is gray and stiff. His eyes are swollen shut. I stare at the black fabric of his tuxedo and try to imagine where the bullet hollowed out the flesh of his abdomen.

Tuesday, February 27, 2001:

I've relived the moment a thousand times over:

I'm pulling back the overstuffed, pink-flowered comforter on my canopy bed. The frigid February air whistles against my windowpane before crystallizing to frost. A pair of yellow lights flash across my room. A red car is positioned haphazardly in the driveway. I'm home alone. My eleven-year-old heart flaps in my chest. I'm not sure whether to run, hide, or embrace him, but it's been months since I've seen him, and as I trudge across the thick carpet I know he won't hurt me; my bare feet find the courage to meet the frozen pavement.

David rolls down the passenger window. His face is all shadows and bones. Before I can even open my mouth, he urges me

to go back inside where the furnace is humming, where I won't catch a cold with my shoeless feet. Then his tone softens and he asks for my mom. He's white-knuckling the steering wheel. His hands are the hands of skeletons. He asks me to tell her he stopped by. Thin black hair covers patches of his scalp. A faded Rockies jacket swallows him whole. "See you later," I shout as he backs away from the house. "Good night," he says. His car chases two spotlights into the pitch-black night. I'm left standing alone in my driveway.

The next day when my mom picked me up from school, she told me. Her face was perfectly poised, expressionless like stone. Her speech was clear and unwavering. "David was killed today. He was shot, while trying to rob a bank. He's dead."

David and my mom had met seven years earlier in Georgia, shortly after my parents separated. David had accidentally received my mom's developed film from the drugstore because they had the same last name. Instead of returning the pictures to the drugstore, he found out where she lived and hand-delivered the photographs because she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. They quickly discovered they were both from Puerto Rico. So two Puerto Ricans with the same last name found each other somewhere in redneck Georgia in the middle of a blistering summer. David never picked up his pictures.
He didn't need them.

When my mom, my brother, and I moved to Colorado after the divorce, David followed. My dad did not. I was five years old, and being that my dad occupied physical space in my world about two times a year, David began to feel more and more like a father. By the time I turned eight, David had moved in with us. My mother was a flight attendant, and while she lived in the sky for days at a time, David made sure my brother and I were safe.

Every Saturday morning while David lived with us, the smell of fresh pancakes would waft through the crack under my

door, creep up to my bed, and gently pull me from a dream. I'd slip out from underneath my covers and tiptoe downstairs as the soft morning light flooded the kitchen, hoping to catch him mid-flip. With that spatula he could flip the whole world upside down and make it right side up again before I could even reach the next step. Sometimes David would catch me out of the corner of his eye. When he did, he'd turn away from the stove, give me a bright smile and whistle a little tune as the pancake somersaulted in mid-air—then turn back around to catch it centimeters before it met the skillet. An artist's precision. He would meet me at the bottom of the stairs, pull me into his chest with one arm, and plant a kiss on the crown of my head. After breakfast, we would eagerly pull the bikes out of the garage and race for hours in the shadows of trees. And on the way back, when I was too tired to pedal, David would take one hand off his own handlebars and grab mine, pulling my bicycle alongside his like a superhero until we reached home.

His eyes were wet and his entire body trembled as though thunder cracked through it.

If I thought then that David represented some semblance of stability in our chaotic and semi-nomadic lifestyle, I was wrong. Inexplicably, we moved out of the townhouse we shared with David, and he moved into an apartment. My mom was a reason short of an explanation, and thought that David's "strange behavior" and "extended disappearances" would be sufficient to justify why yet another person had been severed from our lives. It wasn't. We still saw him on occasion, but the visits became less familiar and less frequent until he disappeared altogether.

Six months later, David's silhouette was framed in our doorway. His eyes were wet and his entire body trembled as though thunder cracked through it. He muttered something to my mom that I couldn't hear, something that prompted her to let him into our home. In an instant, David's life was reduced to the mattress in our loft, which he slept on for days at a time and would abandon for just as long. One day I snuck upstairs, hoping to catch him singing in Spanish or dancing salsa like

he used to when he thought no one was looking, only to find him thrashing violently in the sheets, writhing in pain, a hand cradling his belly while he twisted and folded in on himself like a contortionist, too empty even to prop himself up on his elbows. Droplets of sweat gathered on his skin, which was stretched so tightly across his cheeks it looked as if the bones might snap through at any moment. Blackened bags sagged beneath his vacant eyes. Horrified and unnoticed, I retreated to my room.

He tore it down
and I built it back up again,
with fragments
of drugs and sex
and tiny pieces
of hell.

I recognized David's debilitated state from a scene in "Basketball Diaries," a movie based on the true story of Jim Carroll's teen heroin addiction. In a vignette eerily similar to the one I had witnessed with David, the main character was in the throes of a heroin withdrawal, strung out in an alley with a needle still poised in his sickly green veins as he clutched his stomach with an emaciated hand and shrieked for more drugs. My father had made me watch the film three years earlier, and though it served as his best attempt at protecting his children, he was ripping apart my innocence. He tore it down and I built it back up again, with fragments of drugs and sex and tiny pieces of hell.

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David was born in Fajardo, Puerto Rico on January 20, 1965 to divorced parents, two sisters, and three brothers. David's two sisters lived with their mother. David and two of his brothers lived with their father. The fourth brother lived with their grandmother. When David turned twelve, his father forced him and

his two brothers to push drugs in the projects. They sold marijuana, cocaine, and heroin. Those three boys became drug addicts. The fourth boy did not. David left Puerto Rico in 1988. He wanted to escape.

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On Christmas Day, my brother and I took some shiny red and green wrapped presents—all snowmen and Santas and bows—up to the loft where David had been deteriorating for days, fading into a ghost. He said he didn't have anything for us, so he couldn't open our gifts to him. I told him, "It's okay." I knew he had stolen my leather jacket, my rollerblades, my favorite childhood movie (*Free Willy*) and countless others, my brother's remote-controlled cars, and my great-grandmother's wedding ring, and pawned it all off for heroin. I wanted to tell him that that was okay, too. That it didn't matter. That I just wanted him back. We left his presents on the floor, beside the mattress. He never opened them.

Then David vanished entirely, this time at my mother's request. A few months later when he reappeared in our driveway, I was the only one there to answer his unspoken plea. As I would later find out, faced with the grim ultimatum of paying back his drug dealer or having his son murdered, David chose the former. With the desperation only a parent can have, he decided to rob a bank. Save for a tainted armor of cocaine and heroin, David stepped into the bank unarmed. He was met by a cascade of bullets. On the other side of the gun was an off-duty police officer who murdered him on the spot, targeting his vital organs first. That night would be the last night I would ever see David, just sixteen hours before he took his last breath. This would make me the last person of David's family and friends to see him alive.

Save for a tainted armor of cocaine and heroin, David stepped into the bank unarmed.

Guilt slowly began to gnaw at my insides until it became a part of me as intrinsic as my heartbeat. With the heroic delusion characteristic of children, I was convinced that I could have done something or said something that would have stopped him. I thought that I could have saved him, but I didn't say anything. So I dreamt about guns pressed against temples and woke up in a perpetual scream.

Clumps of Puerto Rican soil bury the soft, velvety red petals.

As David was balancing on a fine line between life and death, the line I was tiptoeing between childhood and adulthood was thinning at a dangerous rate. David's addiction sank its teeth into him like a beast that wouldn't let go—he lost his balance and plunged into the blackest void. I, too, was free falling, unsure whether I wanted to land in a reality constructed of needles and bullets, or to retreat into the safety of nights in my mother's arms—nights that began with "once upon a time" and ended with "happily ever after." But I sensed that it was too late, that I had already seen too much. I didn't want to watch my childhood crumble around me yet again; I wanted to leave it in a pile of rubble at my feet because rebuilding it hurt more than watching it collapse. I knew deep down that no number of fairy tales could restore my innocence, and that my mother's arms could no longer keep me safe.

Sunday, March 4, 2001:

A single red rose falls from my fingers onto his casket. Clumps of Puerto Rican soil bury the soft, velvety red petals. I can see where the ocean meets the sky from the top of this hill—blue against blue. And in that place where the two converge—where you're unsure whether you're sinking or flying, that's where I imagine David. My knees slam into the earth. An arm on each side of me lifts me up. One is my brother's. The other is my mom's. Hot, salty tears sink into the dirt. Part of me will die down there with him. I wish I'd hugged him that night in the driveway. I never would have let go.

I've recreated the moment a thousand times over, always the same way:

I slip into my shoes so I can greet David in the driveway, but instead of stopping at the passenger's side, I circle around to the driver's side. I open the red door, and have him step out onto the pavement. I wrap both arms around his body as tight as I can. I don't let go. I whisper, "I love you" into his ear.

When I fast-forward it, though, it always ends the same way, because even the purest of loves wasn't strong enough to stop him. I wish I could've pulled his handlebars like he did for me countless times, but when he rode through his battlefield, he was steering, and I couldn't be his superhero. He never made it home.

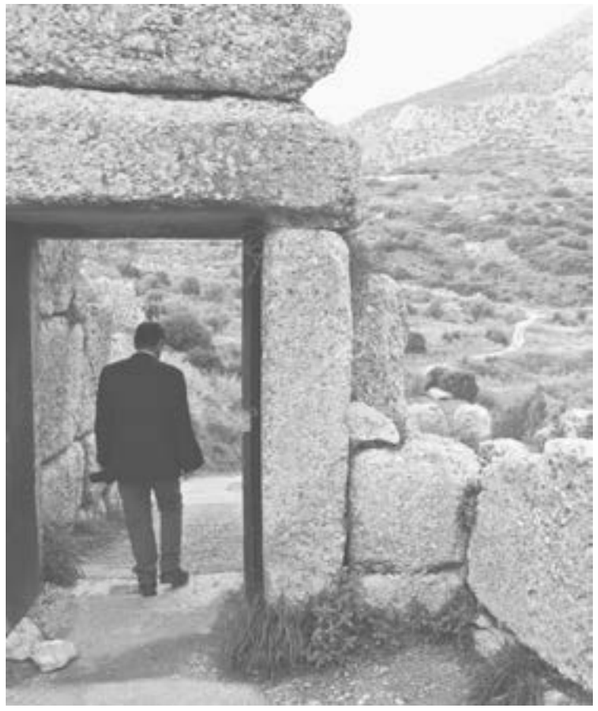

Photo by Fiona Doxas

Artwork by Erin Hauer

KERING TEMPE KACANG

By Kathleen Childs

Kering Tempe Kacang
Indonesian fried tempeh and peanuts. Perfect for a party!
Serves 5 and your ex.
Cooking time: 25 minutes (6 years prep)

Ingredients:

4 ea. cloves garlic
2 ea. shallots
4 ea. Thai chilies
2 ea. blocks tempeh
1 c. peanuts
2 tbs. tamarind paste
1 tbs. palm sugar
1 tbs. soy sauce
1½ in. galangal
2 ea. bay leaves (pref. Indonesian)

2c rice, uncooked
Sambal olek to taste

Method:

Mince garlic, shallot, and chilies. Wonder if it's still too soon. Start rice. Slice tempeh into thin, short slices and fry with peanuts until your mind is golden brown and earthy with the smell of the pine needles outside your ex's house in Evergreen. Drain and season. You dated in fucking high school and it's absurd to be either reminiscent or nervous now. In a separate bowl, whisk tamarind, sugar, soy sauce. Heat wok or large pan over your continued embarrassment at your meager accomplishments and calm down. Breathe. Slice galangal. Add 2 tbs oil to wok, heat to simmering like her—no, you're not going down this path again. Add galangal, lose yourself in stir-fry. When you're cooking, the world vanishes. Anything else that comes in is an interruption, and will probably screw something up—you know that oil's hot. Add vegetables and bay leaves. It was cold those nights in her car. You splatter oil on your left forearm. Wince. Remind yourself of your actual skills and accomplishments. Add tempeh, peanuts, and sauce. Cook until coated, shiny, and dry.

Heat wok or large pan over your continued embarrassment at your meager accomplishments and calm down.

Remove from heat and pick out galangal and bay leaves. Remember hostess said not to bring food, but it's normally meditative to create things and it would be the ideal dish. Inoffensively vegan, a little showy, but relatable. Hesitate. Decide not to bring tempeh. You could use easy breakfasts next week. Eat tempeh for lunch with rice and sambal olek. During lunch, decompress some—you have a closet full of anxiety, but you're a damn good cook. Realize your ex never learned that. You hadn't yet become one. Accept that you've developed into a substantially more reliable person than the one she broke up with. Imagine she's grown into herself as well. Resolve to interact with your ex like a mature adult. Tempeh in refrigerator, feel duty-bound to bring something to party regardless.

Go out and buy beer. Think yourself clever for buying IPA called "Stranger." Place yourself and beer in vehicle. Drive to Westminster for party. Wonder what it is about Colorado that's made so many old friends come back. Turn question on yourself, and feel too much like a salmon swimming upstream.

Arrive. Set beer on table and scope out where she's sitting. Greet hostess, greet other friend, introduce self to strangers. Avoid eye contact with ex. Berate self, make move to reintroduce self to ex, but she beats you to the punch. Fail not to notice her engagement ring. Wonder if that's really as significant as it feels. She asserts that you look like you're doing well.

Yeah. You are. You really are.

Serve and enjoy.

Photo by Kevin Mayer

YOU FIND WIFE

By Ben Song

Saying you've had a perfect dating life is like saying the Titanic never sank, Oprah never retired, and VCR's are still trending. I am part of the 99.9% that proudly admits the failures of their dating career. At the ripe age of 21, my dating experiences can be summed up in one word: disaster.

Being a Korean American, you get the best of both worlds. I grew up watching American sports, listening to American music (boy bands are still my guilty pleasure), and admiring beautiful American women. Drowning in all this American pride, I would still get spoiled with extravagant Korean meals at home and all of the fun-but-unnecessary Asian holidays that started my childhood bank account. I'd thought of myself as an ambassador between the two nations, American by day and Korean by night. My rebellion played out in a timetable opposite that of a rebellious teenage girl—my "sneaking out" happened during the daytime in the carefree air of American society, but at night it was back to those strict Korean family rules where curfew was 9 p.m. and homework was first priority, closely followed by practicing the cello.

Have you ever signed a contract without reading any of it, and then later, the actual terms of the contract come into effect and change everything? That's a little how it was being brought up by Asian parents. From birth, I signed a contract to succeed in school, to be #1 in the class, to practice the cello at least one hour a day, to get nothing other than straight A's, and to choose only extracurricular activities that look good to Ivy League colleges. Don't get me wrong, I love my parents. If it weren't for them, I can guarantee I would be the laziest man on the planet. That being said, there was one fine line of print that I managed to miss—a small specification that will haunt me until my wedding day: *You are the only successor of the Song lineage. To carry on the Song name, you must marry a Korean woman.*

"If you don't marry a Korean girl, I will move to Alaska."

"I've never been any prouder, knowing the Song name will continue with such a handsome, fine gentleman," my mom said. "If you don't marry a Korean girl I will move to Alaska."

No pressure, right? One slight problem: I'm not attracted to Asian women. There's nothing wrong with Korean girls; I've just grown up obsessing over the Spice Girls, Brittney Spears, and G.I. Jane. Over the years, I've never dated a single Korean girl. I desperately hope that if I bring home an amazing girl, even though she might not be Korean, my parents will forget my destined path. However, bringing any girl home to *Meet the Parents* has been an obstacle in itself. Throughout my dating career, I've never brought a girl home. It's not because I'm afraid of what my parents would think, or that my game is so terrible no one wants to come home with me (well, hopefully this isn't the case)—it's because I've never had the chance to end a date on a high note.

The universe is wired to follow the laws, and the laws for me are, apparently, to date Korean girls until I find a Korean wife. If anything disrupts the natural course of the universe, the universe will find a way to fix it. Therefore, I blame all my failed dates on the universe. I feel as if there is some master hand purposely forcing the most awkward and uncomfortable dating situations onto me until I fulfill my mother-given quest. It's like a game of Monopoly. You put so much effort and strategy into making your way around the board, and just as you're about to pass "Go," you get a chance card that sends you straight to jail.

We all have that one girl we can't help but chase, even though she's way out of our league and failure is inevitable. Mine was Carly. The first time I laid eyes on her she was in a bikini on our school fun day at Water World. A bikini. I had no chance. She was the captain of the dance team; I played cello for the orchestra. She had a part-time job modeling; I built toy models of cars. She was the junior class president; I was an awkward sophomore. How did she know I existed? Because I tutored her little brother, Sam. How did I ask her on a date? I used that 10-year-old little brother as my wingman.

Advice #1: Little kids possess great powers of persuasion—they're like puppies that can speak. There I was, frozen at the doorway of her house. Flashes of all the "what ifs" started playing in my mind—she's clearly older, cooler, and more experienced than I am, but here I stand, in straight midnight jeans with a shirt I had to iron a thousand times. Is my hair okay? Do I smell good? I basically had to take out a loan to buy this seventy dollar cologne, but did I spray enough?

Stumbling.

Sixth grade: I was paired up with dream girl Hayley as my lab partner. Before we got together, I ran into the bathroom and basically took a shower in Axe Deodorant Spray. As I walked back into the classroom, every head turned toward me, noses in the air. Beaming with confidence, I sat down next her, only to be greeted with a face of disgust.

"What is that awful smell?!" She looked at me, gave me one sniff, and ran away.

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Snacks.

Carly was the closest to an Asian girl that I have ever dated. She was half Korean, half Caucasian. The perfect loophole for the contract. There's a common belief that every Asian knows every other Asian in existence. With my luck, of course, Carly's mom actually knew my mom. I was on a double date, needing to impress both Carly and her mom. One slip-up and she would report to the warden.

The night led up to Carly and me alone in her basement, "watching" a movie. The entire night had been a success, with my rehearsed jokes, talking about how Sam and I were best friends, and how much I admired her. Now here we were, undressing each other. I won't lie—my thoughts during this time were not about the situation and the task at hand. All I could think about was how I had finally conquered that stupid contract.

But the universe doesn't believe in loopholes.

Carly wasn't fully Korean, so of course things had to be set right. As we made out, her mother decided it was a good idea to come downstairs to give us snacks. Everything was a blur—snacks soaring in the air, me dashing for the bathroom, stumbling, pants at my ankles. I slammed the door and waited an eternity, listening to them argue.

Double-checking my zipper, I stepped out of the bathroom only to be greeted by Carly, covered by a blanket.

"My mom says we can't date. You need to leave."

Advice #2: Don't start getting frisky at 10 p.m. Parents are still awake.

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She said yes.

Her name was Alexandria. We played the "eye staring" game in my U.S. history class, trading glances and never listening to the teacher. After a lot of pressuring and teasing from my friends, I finally got the courage to ask Alex on a date. It was a

Tuesday, and the date was planned for the upcoming weekend. But even before we had the date, it felt as if we'd been dating for months. Throughout the week preceding the date, every morning I had a "Good morning handsome, have a nice day :)" text (RED FLAG). I only thought of it as a nice gesture and couldn't wait to take this sweet girl on a date.

In high school, I lacked the creativity to break the "dinner and a movie" format. I was on my way to pick her up when she texted me that her parents were going to join us for dinner (RED FLAG). Free dinner, though. I couldn't pass that up.

"Hey son, it's nice to meet ya. My daughter here is full of only high praise whenever she mentions you," he said, shaking my hand vigorously.

"Uh, thanks. It's nice to meet you too, Mr. Douglas."

"You're right, Alex, he is tall and in shape. Great genes, probably," smiled Mrs. Douglas, as we took our seats.

The majority of the dinner consisted of highly personal questions directed towards my life and future (RED FLAG). The single light fixture above our table only added to the interrogation ambience. Nothing else existed besides the two cops in front of me, asking about my life decisions.

"We understand you're going to CU, but what happens when Alex goes to Penn State? Will you move out there with her?" asked Cop #1.

"How do you see yourself supporting my daughter?" questioned Cop #2.

"Do you love my daughter enough to be her loyal husband?"

We never made it to the movie.

Advice #3: Pay attention to your red flags. They're waving for a reason.

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Squeaky shoes.

College: the time in our lives where possibilities are limitless, regrets don't exist, and two dates are too much of a commitment. As a hopeful eighteen-year-old, I envisioned college to be a fantasy world crowded with beautiful women parading around campus.

In this world, you can't walk anywhere without turning your head to view these majestic creatures. It's even easier to catch glimpses of these women in class. Let me explain. While you're walking on campus and see a pretty girl, your stare-down can't be obvious lest it interrupt your stride. You have two options: (1) be obvious, stop and stare, and creep the girl out entirely, or (2) accept the three seconds you have to look at her, and move on, spending the day kicking yourself for not saying hello. Not all hope is lost, however. The fifty minutes in each class should be seen as nothing but a gift for undisturbed staring.

It was through this gift that I met Ashley. A four hundred-person lecture hall, and I immediately saw this girl. There were many lectures where I froze and couldn't muster the words to start a conversation with her. It wasn't until she offered me food that a path through the maze I couldn't maneuver revealed itself.

"Do you want a date?" she said.

"Of course. Let's go bowling," I said immediately.

"Excuse me?" she laughed. "No, I meant the food date, not an actual date," handing me a crumpled raisin-like object. "But since you suggested, yes, I'll go on a date with you."

It was my first date in college and I knew I had to raise the bar. What better way to say you're sophisticated than to take the girl out for sushi? She looked gorgeous in her white summer dress, while I'd pulled out the white slim-cut jeans, influenced by *GQ*, a magazine for desperate men wanting to impress women. We were seated at a half booth, and I took the chair, even though the booth side was obviously more comfortable.

Did I spill some tea?
Wait, we never had tea.

Ashley warmed up to my sense of humor quickly, her leg touching mine beneath the table as I joked about the sexual names of the sushi rolls. I was enjoying the confidence booster that her laughter gave me. Until I felt a warm sensation on my leg. Did I spill some tea?

Wait, we never had tea. My eyes grew wide and I stopped talking. Ashley stopped laughing. She just stared at me.

"I need to go to the bathroom. My contacts hurt." I got up and made my way towards the restroom. *Squeak. Squeak. Squeak.* My shoes seemed to be making the only sound in the restaurant. Afraid to confirm the truth, I looked down—the pants that were supposed to be white were now an unpleasant yellow from the knee down.

I headed back to the table (*Squeak. Squeak. Squeak*). Ashley hadn't moved since I left.

"I need to tell you something," whispered Ashley. "I have a bladder problem where if I laugh a lot, I pee. I kind of—sort of peed under the table. Can you take me home please?"

To this day, Ashley believes I bought my white pants with a funky yellow pattern on them.

Advice #4: If ever a girl pees on you, don't talk about it. Some things are better left undiscussed.

The universe is unfair and my curse is unbreakable. The only cure that exists is a Korean woman. My mother might as well start packing warm clothes for her move up north.

Photo by Meredith Soychak

WINTER

By Megan Sakas

The winters in Struthers, Ohio are the kind that make you question why you ever decided to live in that miserable place. The industrial smoke from what remains of the steel mills blackens the snow and the smog, and the thick ice covers everything it can dig its fingers into. The trees bend downward in solemn defeat. These silent, frozen winters don't depart thoughtlessly; they have the capacity to instill a certain immovable sadness within a person. They carry this sadness down from the weighty storm clouds and pour it upon a defenseless town.

When I turned seven and my parents decided I could take an airplane alone, I began visiting my grandparents every winter in Struthers. I still don't know what drew me there, especially during those brutal winters, but I continued to ask my parents for a plane ticket each year. There was something magnetic about the snow and the hush of its placidity.

During these trips, my grandpa and I would walk through Yellow Creek Park down a forgotten trail next to the water. It was very still there. The only sounds were the crunch of his cane upon the frozen ground and my clumsy footsteps dancing in front of him. He'd hum everything that my quick

young heart could handle about his time serving in World War II as a Marine in the Asian Pacific. He flew in the bombers as a machine-gunner: Squadron VMD-154. He never told me battle stories—no matter how much I prodded him—and instead told me stories about games with makeshift footballs, his best friend Thomas who had a laugh you could hear from the opposite end of camp, and how much prettier Grandma was than the women in the towns he was stationed in. These stories never gave me an indication that war was a struggle. Growing up, I believed that the draft was a glorified summer camp. His descriptions of the life-long friendships, the traveling, the letters he wrote to my grandma as a lovesick twenty-two-year-old, all left me completely spellbound. My grandpa's past was a shining space in my mind, made up of valiant, worldly things that I dreamt of experiencing one day.

When I was fourteen, though, something shifted. I still don't understand what changed—maybe it was just a break in spirit, or a heart too heavy, but my grandpa stopped telling me stories. My grandma would say, "Maybe he's just run out of stories to tell, Megs," which I reluctantly accepted. That winter, I watched from across the room as my grandpa sat in his new wheelchair, staring at the television screen, his hand deep in a bag of butterscotch to keep him from lighting another cigarette. His skin had become grayer. His eyes had sunk deeper. Our conversations became perfunctory, having to do more with school, my friends and my part-time job—trivial things I'd recite details about while I silently begged him to tell me another story about Guam, or Guadalcanal, or Thomas.

One year, a snowstorm hit worse than any of the others I'd seen. Grandma stocked up on water and groceries. Grandpa complained about his aching, tired bones. We sat in the living room playing Scrabble, the television murmuring quietly in the background, surrounded by an unrelenting, heavy stillness. The TV started playing Ravel's Boléro, a solemn medley of flutes and strings, and my grandpa's gaze became distant. The Scrabble tiles dropped from his hand as he sat motionless—

"Archie? Archie, what's wrong?" My grandma kneeled at his wheelchair. We sat in silence until the percussion and the flutes died away. In a low, unsteady voice, my grandpa told us about how he and Thomas had been in a bomber together, machine guns in hand, when a stream of bullets whizzed by the

I silently begged him to tell me another story about Guam, or Guadalcanal, or Thomas.

right side of his face. They hit Thomas, who died there in that plane, right next to my grandpa. He recounted how Thomas's blood covered his face and his hands, how it soaked through the small photograph of his high school sweetheart Thomas kept in his breast pocket. I'm not sure why that song brought my grandpa back to that place, but his skin turned pale and his body slumped as if he could not help but sink into the frozen ground. Some darkness in that song had carried him back to the bomber.

It was then that I realized how perfectly deceptive my grandfather had been. He had me convinced that his skin was nothing but thick, that his heart was unscathed and perfectly whole. Now I wonder what happens to him when he's alone in his thoughts, lying in bed at night. I wonder what defenses he employs to fight off those images, the phantoms of blood, panic, and fear, and I wonder what other dark memories he has been conquering by himself for forty-some-odd years. That day, his despair was nearly tangible. I wished with my entire being that I could lift the permanent weight that had been placed on my grandpa's heart.

As a young girl, I had been too enthralled by his fairy tale life of bravery and homecoming to understand the truth within my grandpa's stories. His valor lies in his heavy, broken heart—in the destructive memory of what was.

The winters in Struthers paralleled something within my grandfather. They both understood grayness. They both understood solemnness—a perennial return to frigid silence.

COLUMBIA CEMETERY

By Erin Greenhalgh

The couple lay among the headstones as if at a banquet, sprawled, tangled, tanned. The more animate family of Ernest Severne, baby, FATHER under the tree. Such inspired progeny of stone (some chiseled grey, some white and chipped like teeth), languid under the sun. April, the month providing a warm hollow between Amelia Prescott, mother and wife, and Julia, died at nine years, four months, six days. They stretch out their bones as if they recognize the pattern: they still have tendons, stomachs, eardrums, and breath, but it is quite comfortable to lie outstretched and still, a name, a date hovering above each head.

Photo by Bessie Stanisz

Artwork by George Perez

CONTRIBUTORS

SAMUEL JOSEPH CARROTHERS grew up just outside of Houston, Texas, the oldest of three. Currently studying English and Film at the University of Colorado, Sam has always been interested in writing and more recently has become interested in writing for the screen. His first short, "Blink," is set to screen at a festival in spring, 2014. Sam currently works as a freelance cinematographer and editor and most recently had the opportunity to travel to Kona, Hawaii to film the IRONMAN World Championships for Newton Running Company.

KATHLEEN CHILDS is thrilled to be a returning contributor to JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. Author of "KERING TEMPE KACANG" and "OUR OWN GHOSTS," Kathleen seems increasingly to write about LGBT interests and concerns. Kathleen is a senior in the French Department, expecting to graduate in spring, 2014. Outside of school, she makes her living as a freelance composer and entertains an inordinate interest in the culinary arts. Kathleen is unsure whether or not the author is dead, but likes to pretend she truly appreciates post-structuralism.

BRENDAN CRAINE entered the world in Denver, Colorado, where he majored in Creative Writing at the Denver School of the Arts from 7th grade on through high school. Beginning his martial arts training in the same year he started studying as a writer, he continues to pursue both passions, though his attention to martial study has possibly begun to border on the obsessive. He is currently majoring in Japanese at the University of Colorado Boulder, and is spending his junior year studying abroad at Sophia University in Tōkyō, Japan. His essay, "A CICADA SHELL / IT SANG ITSELF / UTTERLY AWAY," is a departure from his usual preference for short fiction, though it very much reflects his unabashed geekery for Japanese martial culture and history. When he isn't overseas, he teaches Shorin-ken karate at CU and reads books by people like Haruki Murakami, Roald Dahl, and Douglas Adams. He recently got really excited when he noticed that his name could be written in Japanese with the characters for "martial," "training," and "man," which is just way too perfect to be coincidence.

LEXI EVANS, the author of "MAKESHIFT PATRIOT" and "BLUE AGAINST BLUE," is an Integrative Physiology and Neuroscience major who grew up in Aurora, CO. A self-diagnosed adrenaline junkie, Evans has been bungee jumping & skydiving, and feels most alive when she is snowboarding, mountain biking, backpacking, scaling 14,000-foot peaks, falling, and writing. "I write because to me, writing is a process of inner exploration. To write is to create. Creation, at its core, is the essence and beauty of being human." Evans thinks her life would make an interesting memoir, in some ways resembling "Running with Scissors." Until then,

she hopes to join the Peace Corps and later attend graduate school, meanwhile balancing her passion for writing and the mountains. "Mountains are my soul food. I hope they never cease to inspire me to create."

ERIN GREENHALGH is relishing her last year at CU Boulder. She has been involved with CU's *Honors Journal* and *Walkabout Creative Arts Journal* since she started college, and she is thrilled to be involved with JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY as the author of "COLUMBIA CEMETERY." She does have a propensity to wander Boulder's local graveyard, but more often you can find her working in the CU Student Government office, sweating in spin class at the Rec, engaging in a discussion about modernist literature, or eating dark chocolate. Erin will graduate in May with a double major in English and Linguistics, and looks forward to chronicling more beautiful moments wherever life takes her.

MICHAEL HARRIS grew up in beautiful Colorado Springs, Colorado. He is now a CU Boulder film student—minoring in Philosophy—whose brain is always throbbing with the joy of constantly acquiring inspiration. He tries to write with words and with light. He aspires to PhD-dom and to help pioneer a church-ish/not-at-all-church-ish community one day. And no, he is not sure what that means, either. He's finishing his first book, currently untitled. It's his story of growing up as a radical Evangelical, leading people to Jesus, falling in love with God, then the girl, attending Oral Roberts University to become the next Billy Graham, and more. It's a whirlwind of theology, philosophy, heartbreak, and hilarity. Also, Michael Harris feels strange when he is writing about himself in the third person. He blogs inconsistently (in time, topic, and tone) at themichaelharris.com.

ANDREW HECOCKS grew up in an area roughly ten square miles large in Westminster, Colorado. Such an upbringing developed his love for the poetics of suburban space and piqued his interest in writing about them. Currently in his third year as an English major, he has spent most of his time as an undergraduate looking for an opportunity to spread his work. Podiums like JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY have provided him with the motivation he needs to pursue his dream career of being a published writer. He still lives in Westminster, and kills time by waiting tables and reading books by John Green and Chuck Palahniuk. Included on the long list of things that fascinate him the most are airports, parking garages, and the human condition.

PAUL HENNING is a senior in the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department, who grew up on the south Texas border. It wasn't until his freshman year in college at Texas A&M that he realized his thick Mexican slang and accent did not match his long blonde hair. Paul writes sometimes because he feels he has a story to tell, and other times because he wants to be able to look back on the details of his life—details he might otherwise forget.

STELA KNEZEVIC hails from a tangle of refugee programs and foreign tongues. A first generation immigrant to the American Dream, she only recently started writing words down on paper she pretends is stone. She counts her days in letters received from parents who scrub staircases in the suburbs of Munich, and enveloped action figures from a brother discovering the first grade. Her nights live in cups of coffee and completed sentences. Stela's hobbies include traveling for cheap, sitting under trees, and eating books. The author of "INSTRUCTIONS," this International Affairs major is looking forward to being an ambassador—playing tag with the winds of Moscow, and writing small words in big books on glittering iron benches. She hopes to one day shake your hand.

AMY D. MACNAIR grew up in small-town New England, with a standing population of two thousand. For her first three years of school (K-2), she attended a three-room schoolhouse on the end of a dirt road deep in the wooded hills of Western Massachusetts. After graduating from high school, she moved out to Colorado to attend college, following in the footsteps of her brother, who found his escape out West. Her dad passed just recently after fighting a long battle with a disease that has inspired much of her writing. Although her academic focus is Integrative Physiology and Molecular Biology, her newest focus has been writing her first novel, "EXPOSÉ." It was the blooming out of the original creative nonfiction narrative strongly encouraged by the wonderful faculty in CU Boulder's Program for Writing and Rhetoric. She is eternally grateful to the university and to all of her peers for accepting this rather painful and dicey piece. It has been very healing for her to explore this memoir through writing and she is very excited to see where the final product will end up.

SAYONI NYAKOON plans to publish a book and teach underprivileged kids how to use writing as a constructive outlet. She loves writing because she enjoys knowing that her writing may evoke a positive change, and what she creates will last. Writing has been one of the best parts of her CU Boulder experience.

KIMBERLY PRESTON grew up in San Carlos, California, and graduated from Sequoia High School in Redwood City, California. Her Native American heritage has always had a large influence in her life, and she often uses her cultural experiences to inspire her writing. Both writing and music have always been creative outlets for her, and one of her true passions is playing the violin. Kimberly is currently an International Studies major at CU Boulder, who spends her time focusing on school, the gym, and hanging out with friends.

BENJAMIN ROSS was born and raised in Missoula, Montana, where he learned the joy of the outdoors, adventure, and patriotism. After high school, Benjamin enlisted in the United States Navy to become a Fleet Marine Force Corpsman in the 2nd Marine Division. During his two deployments to Iraq and his six years of service, Benjamin was fortunate to learn how much emergency medicine meant to him. He now resides in Boulder, where he rock climbs, fly fishes, and is continuing his medical experience through the University of Colorado in hopes of becoming a physician assistant.

MEGAN SAKAS is a Spanish for the Professions major with a minor in Business Administration and finds writing to be a key element of her major, especially with respect to translation. She believes writing is important because the basis of success is good communication. She recently visited Spain and found the stylistic differences between American and Spanish writing to be of great interest—something that further informs her own writing process.

BEN SONG graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder in May 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in Advertising, after writing "YOU FIND WIFE" for an upper-division course in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric. The past four years attending CU Boulder have built the attachment he has to this beautiful city, causing him to continue to live there today. Ben is an avid fan of football and basketball. He loves the outdoors and cannot stand staying indoors while the sun is shining, which happens only three hundred days a year here. Ben draws his creative inspiration from musical artists, like the Postal Service and The Killers. He currently works for the college ministry, The Annex, and plans to pursue a career in advertising after his time there. He has a traveling heart and wants to fall in love with another city as much as he has with Boulder, Colorado.

SAMANTHA WEBSTER is a sophomore major in both Biochemistry and Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology at CU Boulder, and she likes to write in third person, so this really should be a piece of cake. She spends a fair amount of time on East Campus messing around with RNA molecules, and she considers the hours spent in Gen Chem recitations as an undergraduate Learning Assistant some of the best of her week. She wrote "THE EAGLE" specifically for JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY and promptly fell in love with the genre of creative nonfiction, since she realizes she's best at writing nonsense and that's all real life is anyway. She hails from Louisville, Colorado and has two large dogs she likes to take on hikes because they would probably protect her from bears. Probably.

Call for Submissions

CREATIVE NONFICTION WRITERS

All University of Colorado Undergraduate students are eligible to send us your writing for consideration by JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. Submissions go through our blind review process before possible consideration by our full Editorial staff. We retain FNASR—First North American Serial Rights—which means you agree not to publish submitted work in any way (including by yourself online) until accepted work appears in our print journal or debuts online. After that, rights revert to you and you may republish wherever you wish.

We seek only creative nonfiction, but in any of its genres:

- New Journalism
- Creative Scholarship
- Humor
- Lyric Essay
- Graphic Creative Nonfiction
- Travel, Food, and Sports Writing
- Portraiture
- And yes, Memoir

Send a brief message to our email at journal2020@colorado.edu, and follow the guidelines from our auto-reply. You may also see our web page at journal2020.wordpress.com. We do seek media-rich content for online publication, and growth online will include scholarly work about creative nonfiction, composition, and other aspects of the undergraduate writing life.

ARTISTS

Send us your picture stories—artwork of any type—for consideration by our Art Direction staff, for inclusion in either our print publication, or online complement. We especially seek multi-modal work for our website, including video, animation, music for podcasts, etc.

WE NEED YOU

The creative hands and eyes that helped us launch Issue 1 and grow in Issue 2 will teach new Editors and Art Directors to carry forward our third issue next spring; then Volume II, Issue 2 next fall; and so on. We will have a home course each semester to generate each issue while growing online: WRTG *2090* (begging spring 2014). We also welcome Independent Study students and volunteers, all to work together, increasing our depth in every aspect of creative nonfiction publishing. We need Business and Marketing majors as well as students in Art Direction and Editorial, and to reach an audience across the country we must grow online. No matter your existing skill set, join our staff and learn how to do things you don't already know how to do. Ask our current staff, and they'll admit it's hard work—but fun.

JOURNAL2020 is a collection of undergraduate artwork and creative nonfiction writing at CU Boulder—the work of young writers with enough strength of voice, vision, and courage to tell their true stories and the true stories of others.

CREATIVE NONFICTION
VOLUME TWO ISSUE ONE

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

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CREATIVE NONFICTION

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

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JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes print issues each Fall and Spring, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder Undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our back page for submission guidelines.

Queries: JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, Program for Writing and Rhetoric, UCB 317, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0359; or journal2020@colorado.edu. We are a green journal and prefer electronic submissions and correspondence. Printed on recycled stock and fully recyclable (including the cover). Single copy costs are $12.00 per issue in the U.S. and Canada, and $14.00 outside North America.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

We, as the Editor-in-Chief team, have had the immense pleasure of helping to oversee the third installment of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. What has sprouted from a classroom has since blossomed into an evolving expression of undergraduate experiences. This semester has been challenging, but also extraordinary. The success of the previous two issues has allowed us to expand our small staff to include twenty-eight students, some who are enrolled in the new course—WRTG 2090, independent study students, and of course our dedicated volunteers.

The transference of the our journal's workplace to a classroom brought with it a staff of bright-eyed learners with their own personal skills, and a desire to hone them while learning new ones. The breadth of experience and dedication of our staff has blown us away, and we would like to thank each and everyone of them for spending long nights editing our submissions, digital production work, and compiling the third issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. This publication would could not have happened without their help.

We have been struck by the enormity and depth of the stories our fellow peers have had the courage to share. Creative nonfiction is a broad genre, but one that allows the expression of truth in a way that helps make sense of this confusing and passionate world we live in.

This issue begins with a creative work by Andrew Hecocks about the small things in life we often overlook. Claire Zai and Amy Burnett recall the challenges of overcoming suicide, whether a friend's, or ones own attempt. Kim Campbell and Ben O'Leary describe aspects of class differences, and Alynn Evans expresses the challenging nature of finding the correct order of words to express meaning for something intangible. The social changes brought about by the introduction of the e-book are cleverly discussed by Madison Hosack. Emma Gardner shares the difficulties of telling her loved ones she does not share the same beliefs while Paul Henning struggles with prayer. Parker Griggs explores the use of metaphor in creative nonfiction. Heather Clark gives a profile of an Alaskan town, and Talia Halfon witnesses the remains of the Rwandan genocide, while Conor Kucza shares

his experience in Iraq. Colin Barry beautifully writes on his experience of drowning. Jeleighna Killet describes the feelings of anger of defeat. Peter Hassinger humorously describes the moral dilemma of using "study aids" and Parker Griggs tells us how satisfying sharing a good beer with a few good friends can be. Ariel Herman explores the wonders of meditation, and the issue concludes with a gorgeous piece about Tanzania by Kathrine Hurley.

EMILY PATTERSON, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
FIONA DOXAS & PENELOPE BAGGS, ASSISTANT EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

I was fortunate enough to able to take the course that originally inspired this student-run journal in the fall semester of 2012. Our class was gifted in many different ways and we learned to love the power and art of creative nonfiction. As a class and as individuals, we were able to learn how to take something from real life and turn it into a creative, new experience with words to share with others. It was ultimately therapeutic finding the words for moments I thought I could never explain. I learned we write because we have something to say, but we don't always know how to say it out loud. Writing creative nonfiction brings past experiences back to life one more time. With the first issue, it was clear to the staff and our instructor Jay Ellis that this would not be a one-time project. The amazing talent at the Univeristy of Colorado Boulder needed to be shared in the future. Months after never-ending proofreading and countless arguments over small and silly details, JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY was born.

Having the privilege of being a part of the editing process for our third issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY has been a great experience. It has been a joy to receive so many submitted pieces with such strong skill, voice, and ability to translate true stories into beautiful works of writing. Not only were we able to work with great stories, we were also able to work alongside these talented writers throughout the process. The pieces in this journal encompass many different points of view and are all entirely true. I, and the rest of the JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY staff, want to thank each author for their strong contributions. It has been a pleasure to watch the growth of this project throughout the semesters, and I look forward to the amazing work to come in the future.

ABIGAIL NELSON, MANAGING EDITOR

Both of us were very excited to become involved in Art Direction for Volume II, Issue 1, of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. We both are involved in photography and other forms of art. We looked forward to all of the art related business and duties in the journal. We do many things as the art directors; this includes making posters, picking pieces, creating the covers, and much more. While the primary focus of the journal is of course written work, a great deal of undergraduate artwork also circulates throughout the journal. None of this would have been possible without the help of such talented artists and a hard working Art Direction staff. We grew from a staff of one student, to six students in the last year, which has only helped improve the journal as a whole. As JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY begins to move into a new era of its production, we hope everything about it continues to thrive.

MARK HASELMAIER & AUSTIN ZUKERMAN, ART DIRECTORS

Three is the magic number. This Spring 2014 issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY wears our scholarly badge of Volume II, Issue One. The numbers proliferate. As we reach our second year of publishing creative nonfiction from across the CU Boulder campus, the scope of our journal has grown considerably. From a staff of eight students—mostly all-volunteer—working absurd hours to produce our second issue, we go to the printers now carrying the hard work of twenty-eight undergraduate staff. Our course home in THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC (WRTG 2090-001) anchored efforts this semester with seventeen dedicated students learning the Editing, Art Direction, Digital Production, Business, and Marketing skills to produce this issue led by fabulous Independent Study Assistants and our all-volunteer Editor-in-Chief. We also made forays into Video Production for an upcoming promotional piece for the journal, and we will be updating and expanding our online presence—which already includes social media. But the print issue remains our gold standard for now. Look for us to keep growing again next Fall. Meantime, read on.

JAY ELLIS, FACULTY ADVISOR

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Photo by Austin Zukerman

DISCARDED THINGS

By Andrew Hecocks

Socks with holes worn in the heels and toes, crumpled and torn pages on notebooks—these are the things we discard and forget. A toy car lost a long time ago to the grass and dandelions of the backyard, when you spent hours looking for it until the fireflies came out. When your mother calls you back inside, you tearfully stumble over the threshold because that little green car was your favorite, and unfortunately suited for perfect camouflage in the lawn.

A penny flips end over end into the koi pond that's really too deep to be a pond and is more of a lake, choked with dead leaves and plastic on the tense broken mirror of its surface. The penny is lost and forgotten under the sediment and fish crap.

An empty soda can under a bench that gets blown over by the wind and rolls down the road to rest in the highway-side ditch. Old clothes with unraveled hems or holes in the seams and the collars, buttons missing from their shirts and hiding in cement basement corners. Near-empty bags of popcorn left under theater seats. Apology letters written to somebody you reeled in and then forgot about, penned in red ink and folded into a neat square because this happened a long time ago, before

electronic messaging eclipsed everything. Broken rubber bands vacuumed off an office cubicle floor; an antiquated cell phone gone uncharged for a while so it chirps its catchy little battery-low jingle in the closet for a day until the screen goes quiet and cold.

A used tea bag, good for about three and a half mugs of chamomile, flushed away down the sink and snaking drainpipes. A once painstakingly-made cup gets a chip in it and sits sadly on a foldaway card table at a garage sale, resting on a paper that reads "50 cents" in hand-scrawled Sharpie to keep it from blowing away. Factories responsible for making discard-able things like Mylar potato chip bags and aluminum foil.

Sometimes it's nice to put on some old socks with holes in the heels and the toes, and go walking in the backyard and step on a green toy car and swear loudly, but in the end pick it up and run it up and down a splintery handrail on the back porch, while around you the birds sing harbingers of autumn and many, many grey velvet curtains of sky roll down your immediate dome of a world, and the dead, yellow kudzu hangs weakly onto the tired, slumping chain-link fence that kept your childhood in an isolated square when you were little. You let go of the car and it speeds down the steep banister and crashes back into the grass next to a quivering leaf, coming to rest with its spinning wheels to the sky.

Past the fences are the satellites and rabbit ears and peaks of tar and shingles of the rest of the neighborhood. The leafless tree clutches an old tree house in its bony knuckles, the once-bright curtains of hobby-store fabric now faded by decades. The best days of your life are spent in a green box full of discarded things—they are crumpled up and stored in a plastic Wal-Mart bag hanging in the front-hallway closet just in case you ever need them again; and while sometimes you open the doorway to let in some light, in the end you just kneel to pull on your shoes and close the door again, leaving behind a lot of things that you look at every day but do not use, an anachronistic museum without any glass because nobody wants to take the exhibits—a closet full of rubber and canvas and moth-eaten fabric that doesn't mean much to you anymore. And when you get home that evening and step in through the yellow rectangle of an arguably welcoming front door, you'll take off your shoes and find that you've worn a hole in the heel of one of your socks; you'll peel it off and drop it in the garbage can, and go upstairs to have an existential crisis in the shower with your head against the tiles on the wall.

The best days of your life are spent in a green box full of discarded things . . .

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

Photo by Alynn Evans

AN UNDERSTANDING EAR

By Alynn Evans

Blue Band, Clocktower, bucket showers—all things that had no existence in my life two months ago and now are normal. *Pole*, *karibu*, *asante*—words I now speak because they have meaning and purpose, while two months ago they were just noise to me. There is no escape from what I am learning, feeling, and trying to make sense of, because it is a part of my every moment. It is infused in my thoughts, manifested in my actions and reactions—seeping into my interior like the tea bag diffusing through the water of my morning cup of chai. This is me, here in Tanzania, constantly trying to make sense of what is going on around and within me.

Stepping onto Tanzanian soil, I was ready for an adventure and a change from university living. I had signed up to spend four and a half months abroad, traveling throughout northern Tanzania learning the language, meeting the people, and staying with local families.

I quickly realized the differences of living in Tanzania. My family and friends in the States can describe my home life, and I can get an understanding of it. I can ask questions about

how my brother, aunts, and grandparents are doing, and feel connected to the answers because they are familiar. I have my understanding of home, and it makes sense to me—but this insight does not always go both ways.

I can tell my American family that every night I helped make dinner with my Tanzanian sisters and mama. I can tell them that we started picking the un-edibles out of the rice at four in the afternoon and how I tried to keep up with my twelve year old sister as we cut tomatoes. I can tell them I sat over a hot, smoky fire for the next hour, stirring vegetables. I can tell them that I eat until I can't move, and then my Mama will feed me more. I attempt to excitedly describe how incredible it is: we get our milk directly from the cow, we kill a chicken for dinner to feed the family, and we pick avocados from the tree in our yard. I feel as if I am screaming out all the dense realizations I have that make me feel warm, or uncertain, or whatever. It's then I expect someone to scream back in a way that shows they understand what I'm feeling. And then they respond:

"Wow, that sounds incredible, but are you getting enough to eat?"

Camping in the national parks was another endeavor. Though I always slept soundly, there was one night I did wake up, at 12:41 exactly. It was the night a group of hyenas stopped by our campsite in the Serengeti and trotted off with our trash-can. I woke up instantly to their cackle, followed by a mental monologue where I realized that the only thing separating me from these animals, which could easily crack a giraffe's femur with it's jaw, was the thin layer of my tent. Of course it struck some fear through my body—as it should have. By withholding this story from my worrisome mother in our brief conversations, I attempted to shield her from the farfetched possibility that an African predator would snatch away her daughter.

These experiences have all functioned as incredibly personal reminders of how a young, white woman like me fits in the world. While I may not be thought of as a rich individual in the States, I am a representation of that here in Tanzania—whether I like it or not. My allowance to buy one lunch in Arusha is twice

I want to be understood for who I am.

as much as most people have to live off of in one day. I reek of privilege. It seeps out of my pores and reveals itself through my camera, headlamp and quite simply, my sweaty, pinkish skin.

Of course I am turned off by the fact that this is what most Tanzanians see in me. It is unpleasant to be bombarded with merchandise while walking down the street, asked to pay for a bottle of water by a stranger at a restaurant, and constantly hounded for gifts. Whether it's a stranger selling hats at the Clocktower roundabout, or my Masai homestay mom, they smell my privilege from a distance. I want to represent more than a white Westerner to the locals. I want to be understood for who I am. But with a language barrier, only four months living here, and no hiding my light skin, this seems impossible.

And all this makes the translating harder. My friends and family want to hear about my personal experiences. They want to laugh about weird things I have eaten, and absurd things I have done. But what I tell them also largely shapes how they view Tanzania.

Take my Masai mama for example. This is the woman who took me by the hand on day-one, and bought me a soda and sucker for the walk home. The woman who kissed me on the cheek in the most endearing and tender way when I returned from the long trek to Lake Natron in the hot sun. The same woman who snatched my camera away from some children, because she could tell by the look on my face that I did not want to take any more pictures. But this is also the same woman who on the last day of my visit herded me to her jewelry, instructing me to buy it with prices clearly higher than anyone should be willing to pay. Of course I want to think of her as this sweet lady who took me in and cared for my every need for three days, and that is how I would want to portray her to people back home. But she is also a business woman, who heckles and hassles me because she too smells my privilege. This is the reality, and I am learning to accept that. But to people back home, it sounds wrong.

There is a romanticized, preconceived notion that maybe different cultures and backgrounds can harmonize, that people can be loved, or at the least understood, by complete strangers. I spent over an hour one night filing through pictures with a fel-

low student and friend determining which ones to post on Facebook. We put pictures up of children in seemingly dirty clothes, intense gazes, and mouths with downturned corners. They are portrayed as the poor, sad poster-children of Africa—not the tough, sometimes annoying, resourceful kids of Engare Sero that I held hands with and slept next to every night.

After my Masai homestay, I returned to camp exhausted, dirty and hungry. I had to be ready that afternoon to witness a goat being killed for our food. No one made me, but I told myself I had to watch it. It was about time I saw my food transition from a living breathing animal, into a few cubes of meat on a plate. I love animals deeply, and I knew it would be hard for me to watch, but I also knew it was necessary.

As the goat's nose was covered, he began gasping for air. There was little struggle beyond the gasping. The group remained quiet and the air was thick. I held tightly to two friends' hands, and we cried, sniffled, and cried more. Our hands were sweaty, but we didn't notice, we were fixated on the goat. It was very uncomfortable to watch, but once again, it was necessary. Something happened that I didn't quite anticipate. While I was surely crying for the goat in that moment, other feelings came up too. Feelings that I couldn't possibly recognize at that time. I had so much inside me—thoughts, emotions, realizations from the recent Masai homestay to experiences in Tanzania as a whole. They came out in soft, quiet tears and comfort from the simple gesture of holding hands with others who were also having an intense moment. It felt so good. I was refreshed and alive.

I had struggled so much with putting my experiences into words, but I've since realized maybe that's not always the point. Surely, I desire an understanding ear to reciprocate these wild things. I appreciate the people on this trip with me that do understand what I am experiencing because they are part of it too. I am also thankful for my loved ones back home that do their best to comprehend what I am telling them. But maybe it's not always practical to attempt to manifest my experiences into words. Because these experiences are so multifaceted, words can't always be the outlet. Sometimes it needs to come out in tears, a scream, shared laughter, or an embrace of some sort. The message may not get across in these ways, but words aren't all too successful in relaying the message either. Though I feel plagued with the responsibility of crafting many people's perception of Tanzania, I've learned it is an impossible task for one person. Sometimes making sense of my reality here can be expressed, but not always spoken.

They came out in soft, quiet tears and comfort from the simple gesture of just holding hands . . .

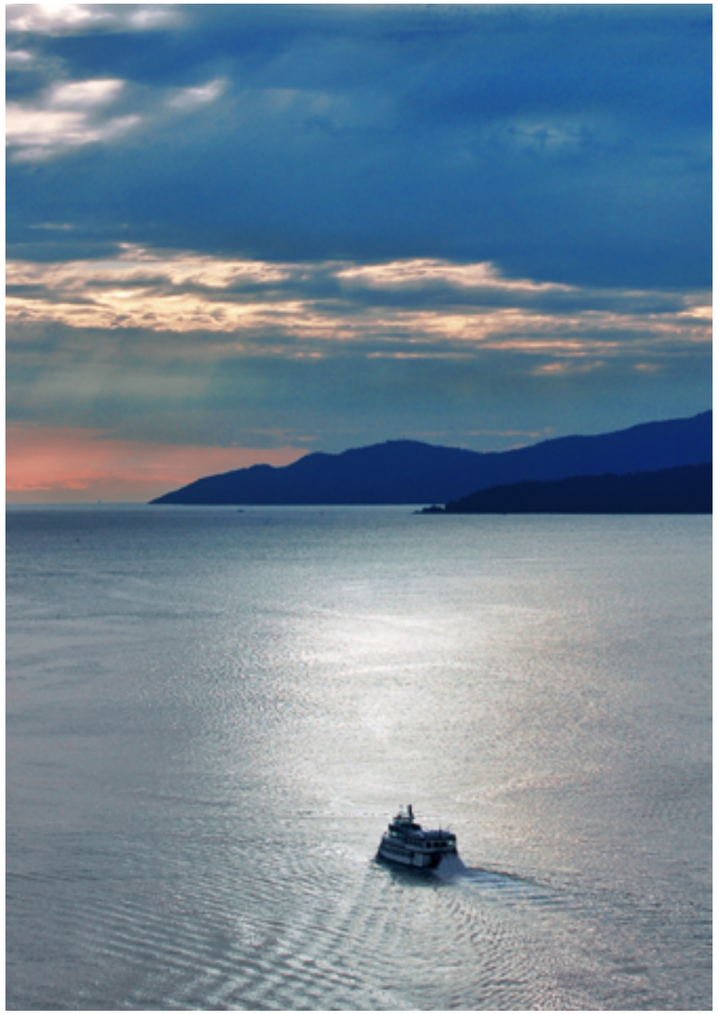
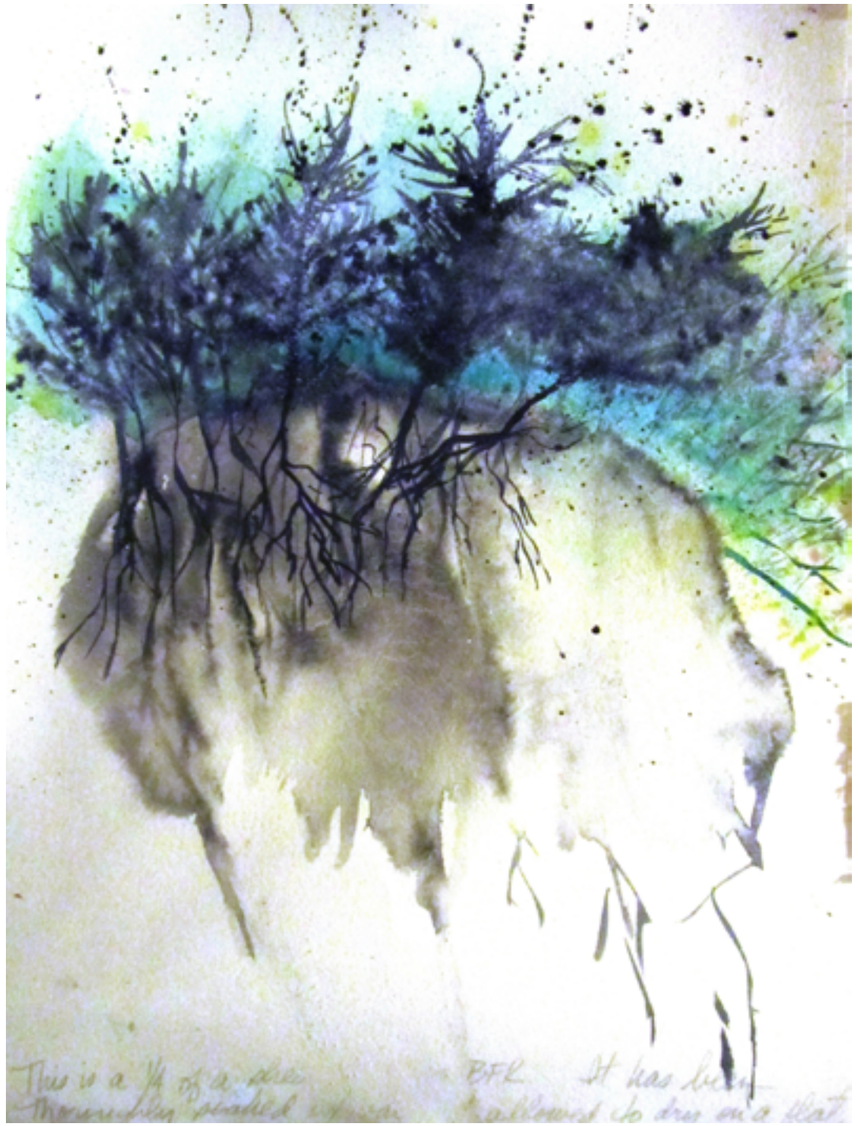


Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer



Artwork by Chelsea Sturgill

SITKA

By Heather Clark

The water in Sitka, Alaska is dark grey. We plow through it as we head into deeper waters, hoping for a successful day of fishing. The farther we get from land, the greater my anxiety grows. My mother pales at the mere sight of a boat, yet here I stand, faking the existence of sea legs. As I sit inside the cabin of the fishing boat, memories of past family travels flood to mind. We visited postcard worthy tropical paradises with white sandy beaches and itineraries, our days jam-packed with activities in order to achieve the most efficient use of our time. Alaska was a different world.

Before I left for Alaska, a variety of people offered wisdom and advice, and warned me of what it would be like. My mother, in her infinite worries, shared only the worst stories. I heard tales of serial killers, bears, and what Alaskan natives were "truly" like. I was told that to live in Alaska, you must be running from something—something was preventing these people from living in a civilized society, where you weren't paid for your residency. The people are uneducated and wild, killing the food necessary to survive the year. These familiar

stories create a surprising contrast to the former commercial fisherman and his son with freshly cut hair and shaven faces standing before me.

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As we navigate the rough waters, I can feel myself being swallowed up by their darkness. The collection of islands with sparse wooden cabins are almost too small to see. The boat rocks fifteen feet up and then back down as we throw our longest line into the ocean. I hold onto the fisherman's dog as we slide across the deck of the boat, simply trying to remain upright. The more we rock, the more I see how small I am compared to the boat, the ocean, to Alaska. The world seems impregnated with space. Hours pass and we pull out the line we left behind in those deep waters. Fish after fish flail for mercy, as they are ruthlessly yanked from the depths of the grey. They squirm until the fisherman clubs them hard enough that blood spatters the white walls of the boat and they slide lifelessly along the deck with the motion of the waves.

. . . I can feel myself being swallowed up by their darkness.

We return to the simple rustic cabin on the island, the sun still high above us. I wander the coastline, finding the abalone[1] shells left empty and abandoned by mink. I imagine the fisherman's son, in his younger years, finding secret passageways through the forest, catching young fish off the shore with a homemade fishing rod, and collecting the spiky starfish off the rocks when the tide rolls out across the shore. These images leapt from childhood fantasies, and instead of drifting off to sleep to dream of small town Alaska, I wake to meet it.

The fisherman, who grew up here, will grow old here. He will spend his days on the water with his wife until he dies. The hours he spends working to build and fill the perfect woodshed next to their home will be a trademark of his own. Meanwhile, his wife will shell crab they catch themselves and hand knit hats to send to their children, now off in college, never forgetting to text them both every morning when she wakes. Generations of memories fill their picture frames and I, now sitting alongside them at the dinner table, am becoming a part of them. I slowly surrender to the inevitable fact that I will be caught in this net of thoughts, memories and connections—ones beautifully different from those I had known.

Days later I find myself on a plane heading back home. As we lift into the thick clouds permanently suffocating the small island town, I gaze down into the grey water speckled with white fishing boats. Maybe all of my mother's stories were true. There could have been serial killers; there truly are bears, and maybe all the people were running from something—or maybe, they went there, looked down into the darkness of the water and felt a force pull them, bringing them to the rawness of the earth and exposing them to the clarity of a simpler lifestyle. They find themselves not minding the cold, the rain, the snow, the wildlife, and the groggy pace of life in Sitka. They find themselves on a plane two months later, that dark ocean beckoning them back north. ꕥ

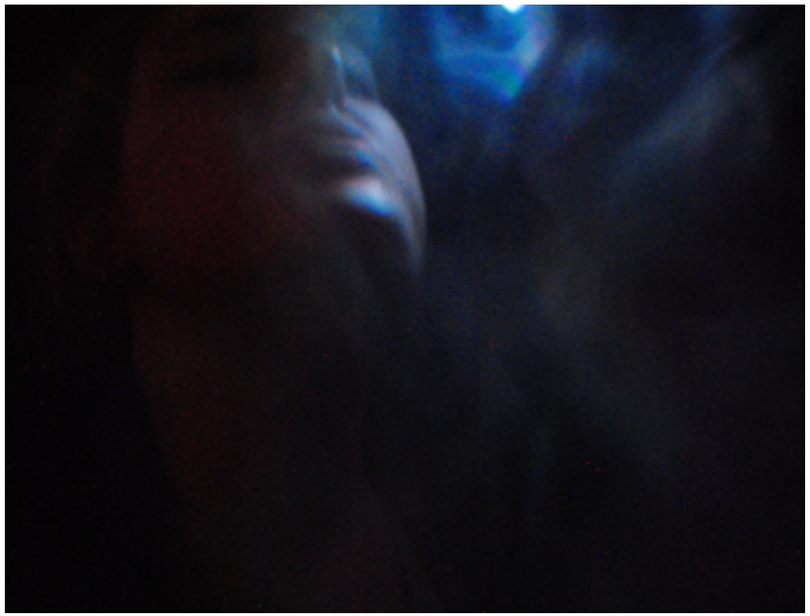

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

1. Any of various large edible marine gastropods that have ear-shaped shells. They're often used as ornaments due to their colorful, pearly interior.

Photo by Ryan Long

I JUST NEED TO FALL ASLEEP

By Paul Henning

That desperate feeling always comes on at the same time, while I am lying in bed waiting to fall asleep. As I recap the concerns of the day in my head, a part of me wants to travel to that place that made me feel better when I was younger. I started to do it, but I stopped myself. I know that it is not going to make anything better. I have known for a while that it is wrong, but for just a few minutes, it helps. It eases my anxious belly and comforts my worried mind, just enough to shut my eyes, and drift off for the night. If I can make it to the encouraging light of the morning, I will be all right. I just need to fall asleep. I. Just. Need. To. Fall. Asleep.

Having to unlearn something can be so much harder than learning it. It helped calm my concerns for well over a decade. Now it fought with me. It yanked vigorously on my sensibilities. In the back of my mind it started to speak, quietly, trying to make its way to the front. Come on, it will all be all right. Just one more time.

It might not be so hard to resist if I had not watched my entire family do it day after day growing up. Worried about your relationship? Do it. Concerned about someone's health? Do it.

Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, parents and brothers, all of them did it, especially when they felt helpless. Maybe it is in our blood. Maybe it is because I am from Texas. I know that when I moved away to college it took me only a few months to realize that I was not going to go down that path any longer. From that point on, most of my friends would not do it, it would not be a part of my relationships, and someday, my children would not do it, at least not because had I lead them that way.

On the grand scale, it has caused substantial issues in many cultures and contributed to confusion about what is right and wrong. It is true that many people can handle doing it without impacting others negatively, but that seems to be the minority. Commonly generating guilt, it often causes violence, misunderstanding, hate and entitlement. It regularly reinforces the oppression of women, and frequently aids in the defamation of those that are not part of a "normal" family.

I twist in my sweat-drenched bed sheets, my thoughts consumed with my worries. My girlfriend was having a rough week dealing with her father's health, and I am powerless to help. My brother might be heading down a dangerous direction in life, and I am incapable of changing it myself. These feelings of helplessness over these long years developed into a trigger for this behavior. I am divided in a moral dispute.

I tear off the sheets and sit up, already disappointed in myself. If I give in today it will be that much harder to resist tomorrow, but it is too late. I step onto the floor, turn and face the bed, kneel down to that familiar position, bow my head, and pray.

. . . it has caused substantial issues in many cultures and contributed to confusion about what is right and wrong.

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

Artwork by Dylan Gebbia-Richards

DAMN LIP RING

By Claire Zai

I knew at the top of my one and a half full that I wasn't going to make it. My rotation was glacial and my twist was sloppy, all over the place. I pulled my dive in tight waiting for my call. "Hup." I shot my feet straight down as soon as I heard his voice echo across the water, praying that I didn't kick out too early. I broke the top of the water and rocketed toward the base of the pool at the wrong angle. I had under rotated my dive and I knew it. I let out all of my air as I rose up to the top. I could see my assistant coach from the depths, his form sitting over the water on the deck. I looked up at him as I rose above the water. He smiled at me, shaking his head while he played with his smelly green gauges. We both knew what was wrong.

"You're twisting too early and not wrapping hard enough. Try one more time." I nodded and hauled myself back out of the pool to try it again. He stood and wrapped his arms around his head, demonstrating the motion he wanted me to do. "Remember, it's like you're throwing a huge trucking wheel."

While waiting for me to dive, Fish played with his lip ring. It glinted in the dim light of the pool. He would always mess with it, moving it around with his tongue. I started again, slowly measur-

ing my steps down the board trying to find the zone. I lifted off and threw my arms around my head, but my hips went the other direction. I popped up from the water again, Fisher's boisterous laughter filling the pool. He calmed down, breathing hard and chugged a couple sips of his mountain dew before he looked back down at me.

"I don't know how you did that but you twisted to your right, and then back to your left." He stood and walked away. Fisher grabbed his swimsuit off the chair, returned from the locker rooms and replaced me on the board.

He stood at the foot towering over the team as we looked up at him from the water. His face was focused, his blue eyes set on the goal ahead of him. He inhaled deeply, his chest rising. Sunlight from the only door in the pool shone onto his face, illuminating it. He was waiting, waiting to feel the connection with the board, for that perfect moment. He released his air as we watched him slowly approach the other end of the board. His powerful body gently moved, coaxing the board to bend to his will as he sunk deep into his hurdle and hit his last jump.

Fish shimmied his hips underwater, pushing up from the bottom of the pool with strong, powerful kicks.

Pressing the board down with his power, he let it lift him halfway to heaven. In the air he was rigid—like any good diver should be. He fought for control over every muscle in his body. He spread his arms like wings letting his body begin to flip. He shot himself into a spiral and wrapped his arms around his head with all his might. He spun like a top, and as he entered the water, there was no splash. His arms were long and straight above his head, breaking the water and creating a perfect pocket of air around him. He was straight all the way to his perfectly pointed toes.

I dropped below the water line and could hear the board bounce as I waited for him to enter. Bubbles surrounded him, gently caressing him and congratulating him on his success. Fish shimmied his hips underwater, pushing up from the bottom of the pool with strong, powerful kicks. He rotated underwater as he rose all fourteen feet from the bottom, his head leaning back

searching for the light at the surface. His hair flowed underwater, a curly mess streaming back from behind his head.

He faced me, his eyes sparkling, and smiled. His lip ring glistened next to his teeth. Underwater he was weightless and free. Here in the deathly silence nothing could touch him, nothing could break him. As he broke the surface he flipped his hair out of his face spraying water everywhere and making all of the team burst out in laughter.

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I remember the warm June night clinging to my skin as I drove home in the dark. I had my radio blaring country music and my windows wide open. The stars glittered from above and smiled down on me. I was elated with my life as I sung along to the music. My diving was going well and I was getting back from a lively night with friends. My phone buzzed jarring me in my seat. I picked it up to read it.

All the message said was "Fisher Gould has taken his life."

I screamed. I struggled to control my car. I had no words for what I had just seen. With my eyes wide I just stared at the empty road. I shrieked hysterically until I had no air left, pounding my fists on the steering wheel. I had to pull over to the shoulder. I shuddered and wept, barely able to comprehend what had just happened. I just sat in the empty darkness, waiting for the horror to end.

I had to remind myself almost constantly that he was happier elsewhere; he had made the conclusion that this was not his place. I knew that if Fish had made the choice to take his life there had to be significant reasons, and that he had thought through his decision. I wanted to respect that and I hoped that it had been the right one. But instead, I cursed him in anger. I cursed fate. I cursed the board. I cursed all of it. Nothing mattered if we couldn't take care of those who were close to us.

Why were we here if we couldn't save each other?

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Every day at work I avoided the board as much as possible, trying to ignore it, trying to forget the memories that it held for me. I ached and strained to forget the man who shared those memories with me. I missed his smile and that damn lip ring. It had always been there smiling at me, and now that it was gone, I didn't

realize how much of a comfort it had been, glinting there at the corner of his lip. I looked down at the board from the overlook of the rec center. A piece of glass safely placed between the board and me. Didn't he know that we had been here for him?

Eventually I felt that I needed to spend some time on the board, but I didn't feel like flying with it. I just collapsed on the board after the rec center closed. I lay there shaking violently; the whole board shook with me, my tears soaking its blue aluminum. I hadn't touched the thing since before that warm June night. The board pulled me into itself, protecting and comforting me, and for a while I was able to disappear in my sorrow.

The board reminded me of Fisher and all of the memories that I shared with him. "You're twisting too early and not wrapping hard enough. Try one more time. Remember it's like throwing a huge trucking wheel." The board was an important part of our friendship. Now a part of the board was missing like a piece of it had just been torn away. It was a wound that we could not fix because we didn't know how to replace what had been taken from us. We couldn't bring back our friend.

My first day back at practice was the hardest. I stood at the foot of the board trying to find my focus, trying to find the zone. I couldn't move from that spot. I was stuck just staring at the wall with an image of his face eternally fixed in my vision. I had to back down off the board. For the time being, I was thankful to have my feet back on solid ground. Some of the new divers snickered and looked at each other. I turned back around and climbed back onto the board. I forced myself to walk down the board with my eyes closed and it wasn't until my last step that I opened my eyes and looked for the end. I took off like a scrambled mess. My arms and legs flew everywhere and my jump was too far out. Underwater I screamed in frustration. Why did he leave us here all alone? Why didn't he ever say something? I let myself rise to the surface and didn't even look at my coach. Fish wasn't up there, I knew that, but couldn't bear to visibly see the wound.

I let my body slide back below the surface, just listening to the silence—to the whir of the jets pumping out fresh hot water. I could hear him down here. Why wasn't he here with us? I could hear his voice and his laughter, bellowing and echoing. It hurt to

not have him at practice. I looked around under the water waiting to see him swim toward me, waiting for him to appear out of the blue depths. I looked up at the light that shone down. What did he think of every time he looked up at that light, and now what did he think as he looked down at me in the depths of the water? This was a place we could both call home. Why hadn't it been enough?

As practice wore on I grew angry, stomping and pounding the board. I fell off on almost every dive. I kept losing my balance. I couldn't find my zone. I couldn't even find the board for god's sake. Bubbles ripped from my lips, and water filled my gaping mouth as I cried out underwater. If only Fish was here, with his crooked smile and his damn lip ring, he would know what to say. Everything would be fine if he were here.

I kept diving through the end of practice, never accomplishing a single thing. I pulled out a couple crumpled dollars from my wallet and purchased a mountain dew from the vending machine. Sitting there on the side of the pool, I watched him dive. Over and over again I watched his image leaving the board and arching gently through the air, a smile always plastered on his face.

Bubbles ripped from my lips, and water filled my gaping mouth as I cried out underwater.

Every time I practice now, a piece of my mind settles on him. I find my focus on that wall, the same wall he found his focus on. That lip ring cheers me on every time I leave the board. I breathe, look down at my toes and settle into the board, becoming one with the board and one with Fisher. I give him just a thought and then let my mind go blank as I raise my head to look at that one spot on the wall. I slowly approach down the board pressing my weight into it every time I step and let Fish lift me up into the air, flinging me halfway to heaven.

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

CHEMISTRY OF CONSCIENCE

By Peter Hassinger

"The final exam will count for twenty percent of your course grade." Shit. "Expect to see material from chapters three through eight covering hybridization, kinetics, VESPR theory, chemical equilibrium, REDOX reactions, thermochemistry, types of chemical bonds, acid/base chemistry, Gibb's free energy—" My weight shifts in the chair. "The exam will consist of multiple choice questions, short answer problems, and two essay questions in which you will have to use equipment from the lab to conduct titrations. We've reviewed everything covered in the exam, so nothing should look foreign tomorrow." I need to start studying, now.

As I slowly gather my books and my thoughts, the flickering fluorescent lights of the classroom mock my persistent procrastination. The vast vacant board at the front of the room mirrors both the barren white landscape outside and the emptiness inside my head. Prepared smiles from fellow classmates single me out as "the one that's not ready." As I flee out the door to escape the onlooking students, the stale sign by the handle throws one last jeer my way: "Start studying early!"

The previous memory of this morning's review still echoes through my head. If I'm going to pass this class, I know

I must make a choice. Obviously, starting to review weeks ago, instead of binging on Netflix shows, would have been the best option, but I can't change that now. The missed homework assignments and gaping zeroes in attendance have taken a heavy toll. I've never resorted to using 'study drugs' before, but a friend had mentioned this last minute option for cramming.

Half the notes from the semester, the vast expanse of the internet, and a four pound lame excuse for a tree are on my side. With these hefty study materials and one minuscule bead-filled pill, I am ready to begin. Looks like the sheep will have to jump over the new moon uncounted tonight.

My large hand cradles the microscopic capsule in my slightly sweaty palm. I look closely and begin to wonder how the smallest of words are printed on these unfamiliar tablets: Adderall XR 25mg. I've never seen a pill like this, filled with tiny balls of chemicals I can't identify. The trustworthy Wikipedia tells me it's salts of dextroamphetamine and racemic amphetamine: should last 8-12 hours. Is this cheating? The question rings in my head like a penetrating gong, as the response from my conscience falls into a grey area. Sure, there are students with ADD who require prescriptions like these to study—but this ethical dilemma wasn't covered in our honor code. My conscience tells me this is wrong, but the increased potential to study is too tempting at this point. A sinking feeling strikes, as I realize that this is my only option. Here I go again, wasting more time. I quickly swallow my pride and my principles with the capsule. Hopefully the ends will justify the means.

I quickly swallow my pride and my principles with the capsule.

My weight shifts in the chair. As I steal one quick look out the window behind me, the thick evergreen trees are lit with a soft, tangerine glow. The clouds in the sky resemble scoops of orange sherbet spread thin among contrails, and the snow-topped mountain peaks at the edge of the horizon glisten with a light pink hue. I direct my increased focus back to the dark desk in front of me. Let's get to work.

The old dark wood that composes the desk is sprinkled with paint streaks. Chips and dents bring depth to the flat landscape. Across the wooden plain, a computer screen soars towards the ceiling. The towering monitor emits a powerful synthetic moonlight that reflects my anxious face on the surface of what used to be a mighty tree. My weight shifts in the chair. Chapter three. I begin to page through the book, seeing what subjects I

I feel a slight confidence growing before reality slaps me hard.

recognize. It's like I'm thrown into the high school reunion of a close friend—there are a few familiar faces here and there, but I'm mainly learning from scratch.

Scratch scratch. Blink blink. I am glued to my work, as I scream through the chapters. Two down, four to go. Topics congregate in my head like parents slowly trickling into a PTA meeting. I feel a slight confidence growing before reality slaps me hard. Thump thump. In one short glance at the clock, the bold red numbers dissolve my hesitant hope and scold me for the nights I should have studied. I race to the window that confirms my fears: the thick evergreen trees have vanished with the sunlight. The clouds in the moonless sky are hidden by a layer of low fog. The snow-topped mountain peaks at the edge of the horizon loom in the distance. Shit. I direct my dwindling focus back to the desk in front of me. Persevere.

Four chapters down; two remain. Scratch scratch. I nervously fidget in my chair. My aching brain pleads for me to go to sleep. As I power through the pages, the fatigue building in my bones is put on the back burner. My gaze returns to the taunting clock. Blink blink. It can't be true. I rub my eyes hoping I'll wake up in bed with a fading nightmare retreating from my mind. Yawn. As I slowly raise my heavy head, my heart simultaneously sinks. The glass paned window to the world reveals the unnerving truth: billowing clouds now consume the sky as beams of yellow creep through the cracks. I stare emptily beyond the glass, and the sound of mockingbirds outside begins to overwhelm the soft music playing within my artificial landscape. The hourglass of the evening has run out of sand. My weight shifts in the chair. Scratch scratch, thump thump.

The test looms closely in the front of my mind as I numbly drive towards my final exam. The lines of the road rhythmically whiz by, as I struggle to organize the chaotic chapters in my head. I've used all the time in the short evening to prepare, but I know the past fourteen hours is still not enough. Those wasted nights filled with *The Office* episodes and *Friends* reruns eat away at my consciousness like strong acid on a precipitate. I vow to never repeat this experiment again. Next time, I'll actually heed the advice of Mrs. Archer's note: "start studying early!" The cold snow covering the landscape blankets my hopes of success, as I sit down with my graphite companion. My weight shifts in the chair.

You may start your exam, now.

THAT SWEET SMELL OF FALL

By Parker Steven Griggs

We lay where the two lane road turns to dirt, looking at the stars on the eastern plains. We lay there as I smiled, soaking up the valor and sweet victory that was your company. I had fought with honor and had musterd up more courage than I thought I was capable of, just to rest by your side. The stars were so bright out there. On the horizon, the clouds sat perfectly between the stars to fill in new constellations of ducks and rocket ships. We lay there pointing at each one, musing that the creator was playing an elaborate game of connect the dots between each bright and flickering star, painting the marriage of land and sky with cave drawings of horses. A production tailored uniquely for the two of us. A production fit for royalty. To the south, the stars had formed a team of horses marching into battle, jousting with the army painted on the northern hills. The wheat whistled soft melodies in the fields next to us. The pines played a ballad of whispers in the distance. When the notes reached us, they smelled like campfires, waterfalls, dust and raindrops.

The wind brushed by each one of my shoulders, knighting me with the sacred duty to defend you. I sported a coat of chainmail, wielding a sword the length of my gangly legs. The

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

weight of the armor was exhausting. You had a pointed pink cone for a hat, with a ribbon draped from the tip, twice the length of your perfect body. You were my majesty, my princess. Beside you was a bouquet of wildflowers, picked when I was a serf, for adornment to your radiance. The bed of the truck where we lay made the castle walls. I wanted to toss my armor to the side and toss your hat there, too. I wanted to explore the castle instead. I wanted to learn every corner and chamber. I wanted to light each new torch along our way.

A pack of coyotes howled at the drawbridge. I sat up, startled. I tried not to let you know that I was scared. Your arms squeezed around my waist. You pulled me close. You whispered into my ear, "Don't worry about them, we're safe. We don't have anything they want."

"I don't." I thought to myself, "I don't have anything they want." You had everything a sensible coyote would want. You smelled sweet, like newly cut pomegranates and sunscreen and a rocky mountain brook. I closed my eyes. Your warmth sang lullabies to my sleeping heart.

I was your knight,
yet I couldn't even
pick up a sword.

I should have never closed my eyes. I woke up. You were gone. I yelled your name. You didn't answer back. I called your phone. It went to voice mail. I called your mother. She said you had left. I had failed. I had sworn to protect you. I was your knight, yet I couldn't even pickup a sword. Maybe the coyotes had breached our walls. Maybe you found a safer castle. Maybe you went to sing with the wheat and maybe, you got lost.

I chased the symphony of the wheat and the trees, but my armor was slowing me down. I fell too far behind and there I was, left with only my calloused hands, the bouquet of flowers, and the ribbon of your majesty's hat.

Photo by Chad Henderson

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

HOLEY DEVOTION

By Emma Gardner

I sat down at the table, as I had a thousand times before. They'll love you no matter what and that is all that matters. Truly, I had no idea what the outcome of this conversation would mean for my future. My heart was pounding and I knew that if I didn't get this conversation off my chest, it would haunt me as it had for years, but worse. Unconditional love is what family is for. We were raised to have our own educated opinions. My sisters and my mom took their places just before my dad and I. I felt my face turning red as I set my fork down. Without warning, my lips betrayed me:

"I don't believe in God."

It wasn't that I wanted to taunt my mother, but I had already made the assumption that her reaction would be worse than my father's. At this point, my face felt hot and my heart raced. I had never experienced shame presenting itself in a physical form. The heat in my cheeks matched that of the fire you weren't suppose to touch, while the beat of my heart matched that of my

swift race to hell. My mom—my idol—looked at me as if I was speaking in a foreign tongue. Without reason I repeated myself:

"I don't believe in God."

Immediately, her hazel eyes began to swell with tiny droplets.

This is what you expected, just relax.
This is okay.
You don't have to agree with everything.

Although I kept repeating nearly the same things to myself, when the tears began to consume napkins and my dad's stare seemed to penetrate what soul I still believed I had, the shame washed over me.

My mom became unfamiliar and my dad became angry. Once she was able to regain herself, the truly difficult part began. "What did I do wrong?" This question, she repeated a few times before she even looked at me.

You didn't do anything wrong.
You've loved me unconditionally,
but I refuse to submit anymore.

She rhetorically asked me why I had no faith and then listed all the things she believed she could have done to avoid this. It would not have mattered if we went to church more—I stopped going before the family did. It would not have mattered if we prayed before meals more—I stopped before I had the chance to start. It would not have mattered if we were involved with the church more—I lacked the ability to enjoy the company.

My dad politely hushed my mom who was still blotting tears before he spoke. "What would your grandparents think if you told them that?" I knew full well what he meant. My grandparents had become the only reason I went to church at all. My grandparents meant more to me than almost anything and my dad knew that. For my grandparents to think less of me would crush me and he knew that too.

Maybe I should have told them first.
At least they wouldn't cry.
Grandma would be upset a little, maybe,
but she would understand.

. . . when the tears began to consume napkins and my dad's stare seemed to penetrate what soul I still believed I had . . .

Grandpa would ask me why,
but he would ask out of curiosity,
not disappointment.
Maybe I should have asked them how to approach you two.

This was my shame—my reason to be silent.

The shame I felt was unlike anything I had previously experienced. This was not the shame you felt for being caught stealing from the cookie jar at age five and being placed in time-out. This was not the shame you felt when caught lying about where you really were with your best friend at sixteen and being grounded. This was not the shame you felt bringing home that less than impressive calculus exam score at eighteen and having to watch your GPA take a dive. This shame felt like it would never quite leave. This was my shame—my reason to be silent. I didn't even take a bite of my meal. Instead, I excused myself and spent the remainder of the evening in my room. I pushed what had transpired to the back of mind and did homework, knowing that my parents would be in my room in due time to confront the issue.

I read *Salvation* by Langston Hughes just weeks before I found myself in my room that night. This poem, another assignment for my AP Language and Composition class, was the first time I had connected with a reading in a way I never had through the comprehension questions. Langston Hughes describes a boy surrounded by his congregation, trying to see God in order to be saved. The predatory scenario, taking place in a room full of adults pressing young children to understand God is what causes the little boy anguish and anxiety. The anxiety coming from his inability to feel connected to God and the anguish that brings him to lie just to escape the church walls and cry himself to sleep was something I did not think anyone understood but me.

Recollecting the joys that church brought me when I was much younger comes with ease. At an age where pleasing my parents was the best way to end the day, I took pride in getting my Sunday best together prior to bedtime. I took pride in get-

ting up early the next morning to comb my untamed curls, to pull my dress on—and always smooth out the wrinkles—to pull my frilled socks up—and always fold them over evenly—and to buckle my Mary Jane shoes—and always use the third hole.

Why did it matter what I wore?
Which bird of prey was staring down on my choice of attire?

I would put in the barely visible earrings because too much jewelry gives the wrong idea and never wear lip-gloss because that's inappropriate for church.

What wrong idea does a six year old portray with an extra bracelet and shiny lips?

You should be ashamed.

I would dutifully help my mom get my sisters ready, and then we would be off.

Weren't we all in this place of worship to do just that?
Worship.
Why were we worshiping this figure anyway?

The pastor was reading from the big book and interpreting it for us, telling us how we should live our lives week by week. The elders surrounding me didn't ask questions.

Who is he to tell me what I can and cannot do?
Each of these worshippers surely lived beyond the walls of this entrapment,
yet they all sat and nodded.
Amen.
Does he even know my name?
In school, we are expected to interpret on our own,
so why do I have to accept this man's,
this complete stranger's interpretation?

. . . our subservient shepherds would lead us to school—The Kingdom.

My parents didn't come to my room. I sat in solitude and felt numb. I thought it would feel great to remove this weight, but it had come to be anything but a relief. The shame subsided, but just barely, and I was able to think back to why I had come to this point in my life.

As if a broken record, I was six again, walking into that Littleton church giggling with my best friend. Although we did enjoy church, our devious smiles were solely the result of the doughnuts sitting just outside the church kitchen. All we would have to do was behave for the twenty minutes before they would call the smaller children up to ask them questions. After the adults got a few laughs and felt that the children had expressed some understanding, our subservient shepherds would lead us to school—The Kingdom. The Kingdom was where we would either compete or reluctantly participate in any number of activities that occupied the two hours that service lasted. Participation equated to doughnuts, and I was not about to be the six year old to turn them down.

Why was that okay?
Why was it acceptable to have six year olds trained to behave through a two-hour service by means of bribery with a sugary delight?

I understand now that doughnuts and coffee after church were meant for the adults to discuss the sermon, the past week and the personal faucets of life. I went to church because I got to hangout with my best friend, see my grandparents and eat a doughnut after two hours of games.

How could I have known at an age where Mommy and Daddy know best that The Kingdom was a way to reel us in?
How could I have understood that even as they were feeding us doughnuts they were truly plumping us up with ideologies they did not want us to question?
I thought I believed in God because everyone else around me did,
but what does a six year old know?
It's got to mean something more than showing up to church and saying "amen" to truly accept the almighty in your life,
right?

However enticing doughnuts were to my six-year-old self, they simply no longer held the same power. I stopped going to The Kingdom when I realized its children knew nothing beyond force-fed interpretations of the bible.

Were my parents really the only ones who raised their kids to have
their own opinions,
unless it meant a disbelief in God?

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Church resurrected as a math equation: two hours of fanciful daydreaming equated to one doughnut. But that no longer equated to fulfillment, and it surely never occurred by choice. About as soon as I lost interest in sitting in the pews with the elderly for two hours, we were going to a new church. This church didn't have my grandparents or doughnuts. This church had—what my best friend and I called—baby care. Our mischievous escapes from The Kingdom were over. At this church, our mothers had to be physically present in the doorway before we were emancipated.

A new church clearly meant that my mother had finally gotten fed up with all the drama that encapsulated the elderly in the Littleton church choir.

That's not what I would consider a Godly lifestyle.
If it truly were "do unto others as you would have them do unto you,"
critically judging others would not be acceptable.
Besides, judgment on the final day is left to the big man upstairs,
so why waste the time?
Your paraphrases of this book are an abstraction:
my clothes, my sexual activity, my beliefs,
my language were not predetermined.

By the time we stopped going to the Littleton church, I knew that my mom was sick of them, though she didn't confirm that until I was older. I had watched these people of God get one choir director fired, one pastor replaced, and several people removed from the choir. I should not have been expected to see these people as models for right and wrong. After all, when I think of all the people I know, the ones who aren't fully fledged

Photo by Chad Henderson

Sunday worshipers, tend to be the kindest and most accepting. They are not the ones telling me I have to be something, do something and say something. They are not the ones disappointed in me for making a personal decision either.

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My parents never came upstairs. My parents never said a word. My parents still haven't said a word. For the first time in my life my opinion was not up for further discussion. Whether or not they disregarded the conversation as mere words from their stubborn teenager, reaching out about the subject will not happen unless I'm the instigater. I haven't stepped in a church since and I haven't prayed. I never told my grandparents because the shame brought on by my dad's words burned brighter than my desire to discuss it.

This is me.

I didn't have to be placed in a church basement to feel as though there was something closing in on me, like I was alone. I didn't have to sit amongst the congregation to try to see God and fail.

Was I failing God for not looking in the right places for Him?
Was He failing me?
Was the search as simple as closing your eyes?
But why was there nothing there?
Closing my eyes to say "amen" was just like closing my eyes to go to
sleep—it was just like blinking.
I've had an imagination my whole life,
so if God appears in different forms to different believers,
why was there absolutely nothing?
I'd shut my eyes tighter if that's what it took.
I'd try different places if that were what it took.
But it didn't seem to matter how often I tried,
how often I went to church,
how often I prayed.
I saw nothing.

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Oh my God.

My very first thought after answering the phone just before ten on what I thought was just another summer morning. July 27, 2013 was a horrifying reality check. My grandma had a stroke. I was terrified, but being the oldest and having neither of my parents home meant that I had to explain what was going on to one younger sister and then withhold the information from the other.

My mom came home to take my sisters and I to the hospital and shortly thereafter, my reality became a nightmare. Grandma had a grade four tumor on her temporal lobe. Grandma had cancer. The real tears began that evening.

"This hospital is a great hospital. I was real sick when I got here, and Imma tell you that they do good things here. Ya'll be in my prayers. God is good." My whole family had been sitting with my grandpa as my grandma went in for another MRI four floors above us.

Why was that necessary?

This older man had stopped by and said those few words, and to my immediate family it may have been a kind gesture, and part of me wanted to be thankful for people like this man too.

If God didn't prevent this science,
he surely is going to fix it.
Your faith claims everything happens for a reason.
I would love to be enlightened as to why my grandparents must suffer through this experience.
This is a matter of science—of genetics.
I'd rather not lay blame,
but if we're going to praise Him now,
I just have to ask one question:
Why a grade four tumor?
If there is a God out there that helps his angels—which I believe my grandma is—why was she the one to get cancer?
It should have been me:
punishment for the nonbeliever.

. . . my reality became a nightmare.

If I were to ever believe in God, it would be for my grandma. Of all the people that have told me how to hold myself, how to act, how to pray, how to live, none of them would have allowed me to breathe on my own if they could have managed it. My grandma, the only person I've ever seen as a true person of God, is the only one who has never given me lessons in "how to." Instead, she offers the advice I have needed over the years.

So why is she being tested by God?

My grandma has accepted her tumor in a way that I have not—in a way I do not understand. She is not afraid of passing on because God has given her more than she could have asked for.

"If it's my time to go, I'm ready."

When my grandma said that, any shame that still chaunted me faded. I've conquered the predator. My grandma can be at peace with a fatal diagnosis and still be the rock in our family because she has God on her side. My grandma was enough for me to understand that my peace didn't have to be dependent on my family's support of my beliefs. My peace came from standing up for myself, from questioning the one thing I wasn't supposed to. God is good for some, but not for me. My grandma's words broke my heart because I don't want to let her go, but those same words enabled me to see that it was okay for me to not believe in God because I'm happy without Him. This is me. I do not believe in God. I am not ashamed. I am at peace. I am happy.

I've conquered the predator.

Artwork by Dylan Gebbia-Richards

RWANDA

By Talia Halfon

I crossed the border from Uganda into Rwanda with quick ease. It took all of ten minutes to get off of my little blue bus, exchange my passport with a clerk in a cramped shack-like building, sign a few documents and wait for my bus to follow me over the border. I was headed to Nyamata, a small rural town in Southeastern Rwanda.

My bus continued through Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda and I took in the hustle of the major city. The buildings towered over a sea of suits bustling about in day-to-day business affairs. I continued on past the city, making the transition into more rural communities where the task of going to work meant going into a field and having access to running water was a novelty. Outside Kigali, beautiful jade hills, countless in number, rolled on for miles until they melded into a mosaic of shades of green. I had previously researched the communities I now traveled through, and discovered these were most heavily affected by the Rwandan genocide that took place twenty years prior. As I gazed out the left window, a hill of tall grass came slowly into focus. The grass easily exceeded my height, and stretched across several acres. The field I was

looking at was the very same one I read about, the same field hundreds of Tutsis fled to every night in an effort to hide from the nightly raids over rural villages.

We drove on past the massive field, continuing on to a dirt road. The dirt road bumped along for at least a mile, before we stopped in a lot surrounded by four red brick buildings. Stepping off of the bus, utter silence of an entire town engulfed me and I shuddered. I ambled around the eerily quiet lot, kicking up red dirt under my feet as I went. After a few minutes, it finally occurred to me the lot was completely empty—no children jumping rope or playing soccer and no adults conversing—an anomaly in similar rural communities I had worked in. I found myself wandering aimlessly, looking for someone who could direct me as to where to go. Walking along those vacant streets, I suddenly became aware of an outburst of choir music slowly building, increasing in volume as I progressed towards a church.

. . . hundreds of bullet holes tattering its once-smooth bark.

The sound differed greatly from the choir music I had listened to in the past. The language it projected remained unfamiliar and foreign to me, but I didn't need to know the language to understand its beauty and power. I followed the music into the church, and stood silently listening in the back, admiring the simplicity of the structure. The outside of the church was under construction, but the inside stood beautifully—the ceilings high, the walls bare and holes in the walls taking the place of windows. The church differed drastically from the grandeur of some I had seen in the United States. After several minutes a tall, thin, middle-aged man appeared next to me. Once the choir took a pause, he extended his hand for me to shake, and motioned me to follow him out of the church. Quietly and without question, I obliged.

I walked with him across the lot to the base of an enormous sausage tree and he stopped at its roots in silence. I looked closely at the tinted grey tree trunk to see hundreds of bullet holes tattering its once-smooth bark. The tree offered a sense of comfort—an icon of hope in its survival through the atrocities that had taken place around it. After a few moments of shared admiration, he turned to me and asked abruptly, "Shall we go into the church?"

I looked at him with slight confusion, and replied "Were we not just inside the church?"

He smiled politely and informed me, that the community decided to leave the remains of the old church after the genocide as a memorial and reconstructed a new church for the community just across the lot. He took out a key chain from his pocket and singled out one small silver key. He unlocked the rust stained, white gate next to the tree and ushered me into a white flower lined yard of a smaller brick structure. I followed him through the front doors, welcomed by the musty odor of old cloth. Thousands of articles of clothing lay stacked in mounded piles on top of the pews in an otherwise empty room. I walked through the middle aisle to the front of the room where a statue of the Virgin Mary stood tall on a table draped with white linen, stained with splashes of old dried blood, overlooking the ruinous cache of abandoned belongings. At her feet lay jewelry, identification booklets and other personal possessions of people who did not have the chance to flee the church. I slowly tried to absorb the scene, gazing upon the wreckage. Casually, the man grabbed an identification booklet and pointed out the information of a young woman who it had belonged to.

. . . a sick horror began to bubble hotly inside me as I gazed upon thousands of human skulls, stacked neatly on dusty shelves . . .

He took me downstairs into the basement of the church, where the casket of a 28 year-old woman remained. She had been raped repeatedly by upwards of ten men and was then brutally beaten to death with a metal rod. Beside her casket, the weapons used to destroy these people lay chillingly beside her casket: metal rods, guns, clubs, machetes.

I followed him up the stairs and out the back door to a mass grave. Unlocking a door that lay on the ground, he motioned for me to go down. Hesitantly, I obliged, and crept down the narrow wooden stairway. Reaching the ground floor, a sick horror began to bubble hotly inside me as I gazed upon thousands of human skulls, stacked neatly on dusty shelves stretch-

ing down a long hallway in either direction. A wave of repulsion, rage, and terror rushed over me, and I felt a desperate need to get out. I rushed out of the underground grave, breathing heavily. I walked around the church, out through the front gate, back out to the sausage tree, and paused with both hands on my knees as I tried to catch my breath.

After a few minutes, the man emerged again and sat down on the ground beside me to tell his story.

He grew up in the Nyamata community, he attended that church, and it was there he lost his family. At twelve years old, during the initial civil war between the Hutus and the Tutsis, he and his family sought refuge in the church during an attack and survived. Years later, they fled to the same church when their village was attacked in the spring of 1994. After three days inside their sanctuary, he awoke one morning to hundreds of men throwing grenades into the church and he was knocked unconscious by one of the blasts. When he regained consciousness, he found himself beneath his dead, eight-year-old brother. He heard men walking through the church, but they weren't there as rescue. A mass amount of Hutu men returned to kill those who survived the attack. They shot at the helpless crowd, ruthlessly crushed children's skulls into the walls, and raped the women. He quietly tucked himself further under his dead brother and the surrounding corpses, pretending to be dead. He stayed there in that massacre three more days, until he felt it safe to leave the church and go into hiding in the nearby forests. He remained in the forests for another two weeks before the genocide was finally over and he was safe.

He retold his chilling story not with anger, but with compassion. He was the only one of his family who survived the Nyamata massacre, but he managed to move past the slaughter—somehow able to forgive the people who had taken his family. I admired him. He was the strongest person that I have yet to meet, but with his story and that experience, I realized I myself was not strong enough to live in Rwanda.

. . . he managed to move past the slaughter—somehow able to forgive the people who had taken his family.

Everything I saw in Rwanda thereafter seemed entwined with the genocide. I became nervous and on edge everywhere I went and it became clear I was not fit to teach in Rwanda.

I didn't sleep that night and instead of continuing on, I cancelled my stay in Rwanda for the next three weeks. I returned back to Uganda on the first bus the next morning.

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

SEPARATE WORLDS

By Kim Campbell

The man looked dirty. His ashen jacket had clearly seen better days and only partially covered up the remains of the black shirt beneath it. His stained jeans barely extended beyond his knees, and the materials covering his feet couldn't even be called shoes. His greyish hair, which may have been brown at one point, now hung limply down the sides of his face. The bramble that grew on his chin was flecked with dirt and remnants of an old meal. He meandered out of a dark alley, pushing a shopping cart filled with water bottles and blankets.

I began to speculate how this man's life reached this point. I wondered if he had ever known a warm place to call home. I questioned if he had ever experienced having money or power, or if he had always drifted between places, never truly belonging. Just as pity and sadness began to set in, I noticed a small black shape following him. As the two forms emerged into the streetlight, I realized the shape was a stray dog, happily trotting along behind this man. The man seemed to

notice the sound of the dog's footsteps, turned around, picked up the dog, placed him tenderly in the shopping cart, and continued on his way with a new smile on his face.

I noticed this event while at a stoplight, sitting in the comfort of the leather seats in my warm car. The light turned green, and just as quickly as the man appeared, he vanished into an adjacent alley.

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

Photo by Austin Zukerman

BACK FROM THE BLUE

By Colin Barry

Drowning is like meditation. Like freeing your mind. Like forgetting the world around you and focusing on what little breath you may still have left within your lungs. Drowning is like a dark prison cell, where the only thought that enters your mind is begging for forgiveness from your loved ones. Drowning reminds you that whatever compassion, love, patience and generosity you once were capable of, it was never enough. Drowning is like stepping into a washing machine, curling up in a ball, and letting the rolling and turning sensation take you over. The ocean does not care about the friends and family you will leave behind or the future experiences you will never have. The ocean only moves on, rising and retreating like it has done and always will. Drowning is desperation.

I remember a poster on my basement wall of a man on a robin's-egg blue surfboard, riding a giant purple wave in Hawaii. The man, smiling ear to ear, seemed to be in a uniquely wondrous state of mind. A state of mind that elevated him to touch

the sky, forever remembered in one snap shot. The poster was a souvenir purchased by my parents from a previous romantic getaway to the beaches of Hawaii. "Life is a Rush—Hawaii" was the phrase imprinted in my mind whenever I looked up at the poster on the wall. This man, in his tight yellow board shorts, is who I dreamt to be. Gliding atop a rushing blue monster, a lei of flowers around my neck in my very own banana yellow speedo, waving to all of my friends as I touched the sky.

Surfing is an addiction. It is a habit that is impossible to break once you have been emerged in your first wave. It is an addiction in the non-traditional sense of the word. It is not to be taken as simply as a deep inhale of a long awaited Marlboro. It is not just a way to escape the dull monotony of white-collar city living. It is a lifestyle. One, where at the end of the day, there is always someone holding a cold beer, waiting to hear your stories and share their own. Surfing engages with the beautiful world around you and with those sharing the same passion. Surfing is about the inhalation of the Earth into your lungs. The gulp of realization that the world is more than the people and places you know. Surfing is not the past, nor the future—it is the present. It is a whisper of salvation, filling your body and releasing through your pores. Surfing is privilege. Surfing is a moment of liberation where the only context is the blue water around you.

Surfing is about the inhalation of the Earth into your lungs . . . Surfing is not the past, nor the future— it is the present.

My first taste of surfing culture came in 2011 and it was a taste I quickly became addicted to. Moving to California was predicated on the assurance that I would be living "three blocks from the water and even closer to the women." Both of these assertions proved to be more than accurate when I spent the next ten months as a grizzled beach bum looking to score a big wave and a little action. While the women proved to be a challenge—California girls do not, to my surprise, dig the homeless man look—ultimately my only goal was to surf. California was like an appetizer. A little sniff of the sizzling top shelf New York strip that was waiting on the grill. The initial lick of that popsicle on a hot summer day. California was the antipasto before the anticipated bathtub sized bowl of spaghetti at an all you can eat buffet. It was the kiss on your wedding night, reminding you to consummate the thing. After my time in California, I was in desperate need of some consummation.

The following winter I picked up a bright yellow pair of board shorts and booked a flight to Chile. The trip, of course, was about more than just surfing. It was about indulgence, and the ability to visit one of the few places I had forever dreamed of seeing. Chile is an outdoorsman's paradise. A 4,300 km noodle that travels north to south along South America's western border with the Pacific. In correlation with its uniquely elongated shape, Chile has a wealth of geographic and biological diversity. A territory that stretches from the Martian deserts of Atacama, to the frigid desolation of Antarctica. Throughout this stretch, there are several different climates and mile after mile of pristine beaches. While the country offers up the adrenaline and high-tempo lifestyle of a formula one racer, I was looking to tap into my inner Keanu Reeves and find a paradise where I could relax, catch my breath and surf my days away.

"Don't forget to buy some bananas while you are here, I feed them to my dog!" Nico, my new counterpart and the young owner of the Surf Farm hostel in Pichilemu, yelled through the window of his rusted Geo Metro. As I scoured the small grocery store, looking for the bananas I was instructed to find, I thought of only one thing. I could smell it. I could hear it. I may have been able to taste it, had I not had a full bag of potato chips dangling from my lips. The feeling I had so desperately been pining for since the day I left San Diego. My old friend the Pacific Ocean was inviting me back for a swim and a cup of tea. Like a clown at the carnival I carefully balanced and juggled my grocery necessities as I reached for the bananas. Green bananas were all that I could find and I figured the dog, named Pomello—or grapefruit—would not mind the color. The small crowd of old ladies gathered at the deli nearly dropped their canes when my careful balancing act suddenly became a cleanup zone after I lost my grip on three bottles of beer, two bags of potato chips, and the generic Spaghetti-O's I was hopelessly clinging to. "God damn Grapefruit" was my only thought when the one thing I managed to hold on to were the un-ripe bananas. "*Maldito* gringo," the ladies yelled at me as they shoved me out the door with their canes.

The small, sprawling, village of Pichilemu is not the type of place that a gringo like me would expect to be a world-class surfing destination. In December—the beginning of the Chilean summer—the place feels like a semi-tropical Detroit. Mechanics, rather than beach bums, roam the beaches near the town toting their rusty tools in place of a shimmering surfboard. Pichilemu is not Southern California—it's a working class town through and through. The beautiful beaches and rocky coasts serve mostly as footpaths, from one machine shop to the next. Pichilemu is stunning. There is a certain beauty in the contrast of the ocean and the landscape of the town. The rolling hills of sunflowers and dandelions contrast the dark blue of the sea with stark yellows and greens. Nico's surf farm was situated at the crux of where the yellow meets the blue, a hundered yards from the rising tide of the Pacific.

On Monday we drank Carmenere. We passed the bottles between us and gave the dog an occasional sip. This was the day for reflection. For relaxation. It was a simple moment to unwind our rushing minds and to ease the death grip from our planned adventures. On Monday we talked. We told stories of past waves. We told stories of past women and compared them all. We remembered the rush that we wake to on any given day when the breaks are clean and the wind is low. We tasted the currant, the raspberry, the dark chocolate palate of the glasses in our hands. We talked about submission to the water. The immunity to pain. The release of any problems dwelling inside us, too head strong to come out. We talked about the feeling of feeling significant because we knew come tomorrow morning significance would be meaningless. We could feel the water approaching. Each rise and retreat of the tide moved with the breaths we took, as if knowing eventually we would breath together. For tomorrow we knew we would ride the Point of The Wolves. The swell of Punta De Lobos was beckoning.

We remembered the rush that we wake to on any given day when the breaks are clean and the wind is low.

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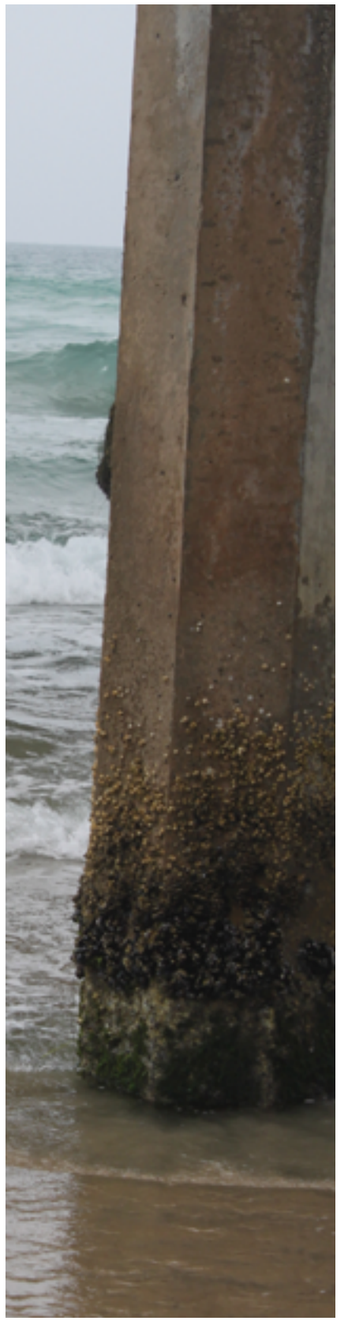
They told me to drop. "Take this one, we will wait out the next," they said. Paddle hard and don't lose focus. Follow the barrel and push yourself into it. Force your feet up and let them slide underneath you. Find your wax, and plant yourself into your board. "Your feet are your roots, bury them deep and they will keep you upright." Be careful of the rocks. Watch out for the current. "Do it. Drop," they said.

So I paddled. And I dropped.



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Two and a half minutes can be a very long time. I started to count my breaths, then realized there was nothing to count. I tried to center my focus on my body. On my survival. To let any thoughts of panic that entered my mind be quickly forgotten. I puzzled over the situation I had found myself in and tried to devise a plan to pull myself out—to stand up straight and fight back against the monster that held me down. With each attempt I was thwarted like a fly does a fly swatter. Two and a half minutes in a cave of darkness and doom. Rolling and tumbling like an avalanche from a mountain, only to realize that there is no end. My mortality was creeping up on me and reminding me to repent. To apologize to my loved ones and to myself for the future I would be leaving unfulfilled. I knew this was impossible. I knew that my story would end here. There was nothing I could do. There was no way out. This barren hollow of blue would be my final resting place.

Two and a half minutes was far too much time to withstand. The carbon dioxide was pulsating through my blood, begging me like the devil on my shoulder to take a breath. This would be the easy way out. Short and sweet. I fell into my thoughts and allowed myself the acceptance of my watery grave. Two and a half minutes was all I could bear.

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I simply sat. At the edge of the beach where the sand turns grey and the tide barely reaches. The ocean continued to breathe. It continued to force its smell and taste into my body. Salt was in my brain. Salt was in my lungs. Salt was all that I could taste, smell, hear and feel. The edge of the ocean rose and fell, reaching for my toes as if trying to return me to its grasp. Reaching its long blue tongue out as far as it could, only to pull it back when it touches my feet as if to say "I barely had a taste, let me finish my meal." Food was the last thing I thought of. My stomach was full of kelp and minnows, garnished by the zest

Photo by Jacqueline Las

of the Pacific. The only thing I wanted to swallow was the wind around me. I reached with my mouth as the ocean reached for me, for any taste I could manage to capture of the fresh air. I coughed. I coughed again and spit up what saline discharge was left in my lungs. I engulfed the breeze. I frantically puffed and panted with all of my might to take in whatever amount of life I could manage. The sweet air of the Pacific was the doctor that saved my life. It had ripped the lid off of my coffin and demanded I breathe. It reached inside of me and ran throughout my blood stream. It searched for the places invaded with fluid and forced it to retreat—to leave my body and to return to the ocean from whence it came. That zephyr, that gale force current, forced me to breathe. I had ridden the wolves. I had been on giants. And I had been eaten alive. Drowning is like desperation. Drowning is despair.

With the sharp end of a stick I started to draw. I left that beach with a pat on the back and a cold beer supplied by Nico. As we drove away I stared across the great blue of the Pacific, as the tide finally washed up to shore. The ocean had obliterated my drawing, but it had left me alive. It swept away the sand as it had swept away my dreams—as it had swept away the life I had known before. The life I had taken for granted. The life that five minutes earlier had been accepted and forgotten. My life that I had already mourned as I twisted and tumbled, begging for freedom from the water. The ocean had let me go. It had unlocked my shackles and released me from my certain condemnation. At that moment, tattered and torn, I could breathe again. Drowning is like living.

I had ridden the wolves. I had been on giants. And I had been eaten alive.

Photo by Jacqueline Las

Photo by Fiona Doxas

DESCENT

By Ben O'Leary

"These ladies are selling dynamite," Basilio told us as we hopped off the steps of the bus. "Anywhere else in Bolivia the police would think you're a terrorist, but in Potosí you can buy dynamite in the street."

My friends and I collectively blushed with nervous smiles as we took turns holding one of the sticks and fiddling with the fuse. We were led down a narrow alley and into an unmarked building where we were given our equipment. The weight of the yellow jumpsuit reminded me of the gear I wore going skydiving, but the black rubber rain boots ensured that this would be a different kind of adventure. Basilio and the other employees helped us as we hooked up the headlamps to our hard hats. We returned to the cramped bus and slowly started making our way up the winding road towards the round copper-colored mountain.

The tour guides passed around a few large bags of dry coca leaves to those who were interested. I took two massive handfuls and stuck the leaves between my gums and lower teeth.

We finally reached the entry point. I stepped over two metal tracks in the ground and followed their path with my eyes. They disappeared into a dark tunnel carved into the side of the

mountain. As I gazed blankly into the opening, a mysterious clatter echoed from within at an increasing volume. Hunched over with their arms extended, three men emerged into the sunlight pushing a cart full of grey rock. Their faces were darkened by dust and sweat. Another team of men started shoveling the material into disorganized piles. The first group grabbed an empty cart and returned into the darkness without hesitation.

We were split into three groups of six. My group's guide, Carlos, was short, stocky and spoke through a massive cheekfull of coca leaves—which I could not compete with. Carlos chuckled at our amazement as he watched us, with our professional looking Nikons and iPhones, eagerly taking photos of the strange-looking mountain and city sitting in its shadow.

"About fifty die every year from collapses," he told us. And even if they avoid these, no one escapes silicosis.

He briefed us on the journey we were about to embark on, telling us how many mines there were in this mountain, their colonial history and the danger the miners face on a daily basis. The mountain is called the 'Cerro Rico' where the Spanish started sending slaves in about 500 years ago. "About fifty die every year from collapses," he told us. And even if they avoid these, no one escapes silicosis. The miners chew coca because it is a mild stimulant and it represses appetite, giving them the ability to work sixteen-hour shifts without much food.

"I was born in Potosí, and I will die in Potosí," Carlos said with a casual certainty.

I think he went on to talk about his past, but I don't remember what he said because that sentence was still echoing in my head. I had never heard someone express such a clearly defined sense of self in so few words.

Carlos organized us into a single file line. The same jitters I felt minutes before jumping out of the plane began to conquer my body. "My group always goes the deepest," he laughed.

With nothing but our headlamps guiding the path, we took our first steps into the murky tunnel. Our boots struggled through the grey puddles between the metal cart tracks. I glanced back at the entrance and watched the daylight slowly disappear. Carlos ordered us to move aside as the loud reverberations of a cart approached.

Our descent continued. We had walked less than one hundred meters, but the tunnel had already become a disorienting maze of bends, curves and diverging lanes. At a fork in the path Carlos led us to the right. Our surroundings started to change; a large gap in the grey earth lay ahead, bridged by a six-foot-long wooden plank. Below the wet piece of wood was a considerable drop-off where a lone miner was crouched in the crevice, hacking away at the walls with a pickaxe. Carlos called down to the man and told us to ask him any questions we may have.

"How many hours do you work every day?" The man remained crouched down and mumbled his responses without looking up. "Fourteen hours."

"How old were you when you started working in the mines?"

"Twelve-years-old."

The ceiling of grey dirt was coated with a sparkling silver dust. I reached up and scooped some into my hand. "That's silica," Carlos said. "That's what we're breathing."

Symptoms include shortness of breath, chronic cough, loss of appetite, and chest pains.

Silicosis is a respiratory disease caused by inhaling silica. While there is no danger of infection from entering the silver mines just once, the dust slowly tears away at the lungs of those who descend every day. Symptoms include shortness of breath, chronic cough, loss of appetite and chest pains. In severe cases, the miner's skin will turn blue and his fingernails will fall off. It takes about twenty-five or thirty years of mining before silicosis kills its victim, giving the average worker a life expectancy of just under forty-five years.

We crossed the plank and landed on somewhat firm ground. A distant rumbling filled the tunnel. Carlos tried to explain what the noise was, but his rapid voice and our incomplete knowledge of Spanish left us uncertain. "Want to go down and see them?" he asked.

"¡*Sí*!" we exclaimed in unison.

"It's about one hundred meters down on the ladders."

We walked on the flat path a while longer until we saw a ladder poking out of a hole in the ground. It was no more than a foot wide and the rungs were blackened and soaked by the soles of countless boots. Carlos calmly made his way down first and then spotted the next person. Step-by-step I slid in descent, blindly trusting each successive rung and hoping my boots could get some traction. John, our anchor, finished climbing down and we all breathed a sigh of relief. "*Tres mas*," Carlos said.

A dry, dusty cough began, leaving an irritating tickle in my throat. We turned another corner and saw the next ladder jutting out crookedly. The machinery shouted louder as if it sensed intruders, aggressively warning us to turn back. Only by yelling could we communicate over the blasting metalwork. As the noise got louder, the air got hotter.

I stepped into the daytime and left the night behind.

The rattling of the walls overwhelms my memory of the two remaining ladders. I was nearly overwhelmed by claustrophobia and chaos as faceless men drilled into a crumbling wall packed with silver. They acknowledged our presence and then returned their focus to the drill. Dust flew violently in my eyes. I made a futile attempt to wipe away the dirt and sweat from my face. Carlos herded us back up the ladders as I waved goodbye to the men who stayed below. One of them gave me a thumbs-up and may have been smiling under his mask. Carlos told us that even with masks on, their lungs aren't sufficiently protected from the dust.

We dragged ourselves back through the tunnels. I finally saw light ahead and remembered that the sun was still shining. I stepped into the daytime and left the night behind. A stray puppy and a child selling precious stones were the first to welcome me back. I took off my hardhat, bought some rocks and felt the wind on my face.

The rest of my friends emerged from the tunnel and piled back onto the bus. The academic director greeted us with rosy cheeks and told us what was next on our schedule. Before the bus departed to take us back to the hotel, I briefly made eye contact with an idle miner. Aged by the mines, his wrinkled face surveyed the tourists who had come to Potosí. He turned his back and joined two of his coworkers. They pushed an empty cart down the tracks until they disappeared, descending into the darkness of the mine.

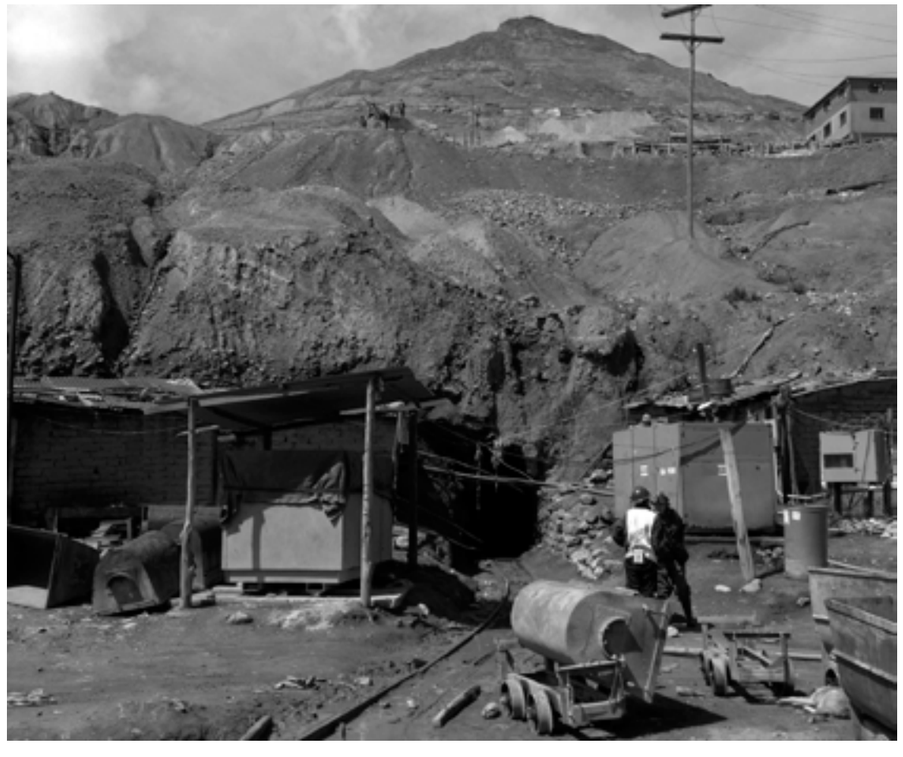


Photo by Ben O'Leary

Photo by Austin Zukerman

REDEMPTION ON THE LAKE

By Amy Burnett

I probably don't deserve to be here. I'm lucky that anyone loves the shell of who I once was.

I wondered if John Wesley Powell—namesake of Lake Powell—could identify with these thoughts when he first arrived in the Glen Canyon 144[1] years prior to my 2013 arrival. He had lost an arm in the American Civil War before charting the portions of the American Southwest that would one day become Lake Powell. I had both my arms, but only 90% of my brain. Two years earlier tragedy and abuse had barely left me with my life. Of course, I didn't traverse an uncharted lake in a canoe, but rather in an air conditioned houseboat, equipped with two bedrooms and a water slide. The entire Cross family, ten adult humans and two Vizsla puppies, fit on the boat.

Powell and I both arrived in that place broken. Neither of us could heal our physical maladies in that sacred place, yet we each left a bit more whole in another way. But since he's already got the namesake, I'll have to settle by telling my tale here.

1. Shelly James, Canyon Country Online LLC, 2013.

I couldn't imagine anyone being bored on this particular vacation full of jet skiing, shallow water snorkeling, swimming and campfires. On day three of family fun, we all packed into a speedboat and skipped across miles of the man-made lake. We were headed toward the Cathedral in the Desert—a natural landmark made of one of the offshoots of the main channel of the lake.

I had never been to Lake Powell, so I didn't immediately understand the sense of collective dismay upon arrival. The water level was several feet lower than it had been the last time anyone visited, so one could not simply step off the boat onto high ground like before. A loose salmon-colored sandstone wall stood several feet above the water level. A trickling waterfall crevasse carved the only passable route to the Cathedral's entrance.

This wall was only scalable using the eighteen-inch crag carved by the tiny waterfall. My knowledge came from years as a rock climber—wedging my body into impossible positions, maneuvering myself into contortions in order to inch closer to the top. The tragedy of this whole situation was that I was the only person on the boat with any sizable climbing experience.

The tragedy of this whole situation was that I was the only person on the boat with any sizable climbing experience.

Oh, god. If mercy exists, let them believe this is impassible.

In the climbing world, we call tricky spots "problems." The Cathedral in the Desert "problem" was solved after a ten second survey of the rock—at least in my mind.

While I was waiting for everyone else to discuss their particular solution to our problem, my body filled with a nervous energy. My skin tingled, painful to the touch. I wrung out my hands as tears filled my eyes and dense dry cotton filled my throat. We decided that two young men could go up first and then pull everyone else up. By the time this consensus was reached I was sobbing, uncontrollably.

Not more than two years earlier, I would have fearlessly led the charge up the rock. Climbing rocks was and still is the cheapest and best therapy I've ever known—and heaven knows I could use some good, cheap therapy. Ironically, it was an almost successful suicide attempt that had left me with a traumatic brain injury. I was forbidden to climb for the following two years.

Now what, girlie girl? You can solve it, but you can't do it. Is that all you have? You're only a shadow of your former self and you know it.

I was bullying myself, quite effectively.

Oh look, the entire Cross family now thinks you're a wimp. You know you can't do this and there's no way you can hide.

The tears streamed hotly down my face, stinging my dry skin. I managed to remove the cotton from my throat long enough to offer to stay in the boat with the puppies so everyone else could enjoy this fine afternoon of their vacation. Seared into my mortal memory was the genuine offer that my partner's dad made to keep me company. His kindness in that moment, while not uncharacteristic, gave me the confidence to circumvent self-judgment enough to reassure the clan that being alone would suit me best.

I had an excellent cry. Even now, I feel a bit bad for sobbing into the fur of five-week-old Bridger. A cathartic cleansing of the soul, a forgiveness of self for the years I lost to mental health crisis, abuse and great loss.

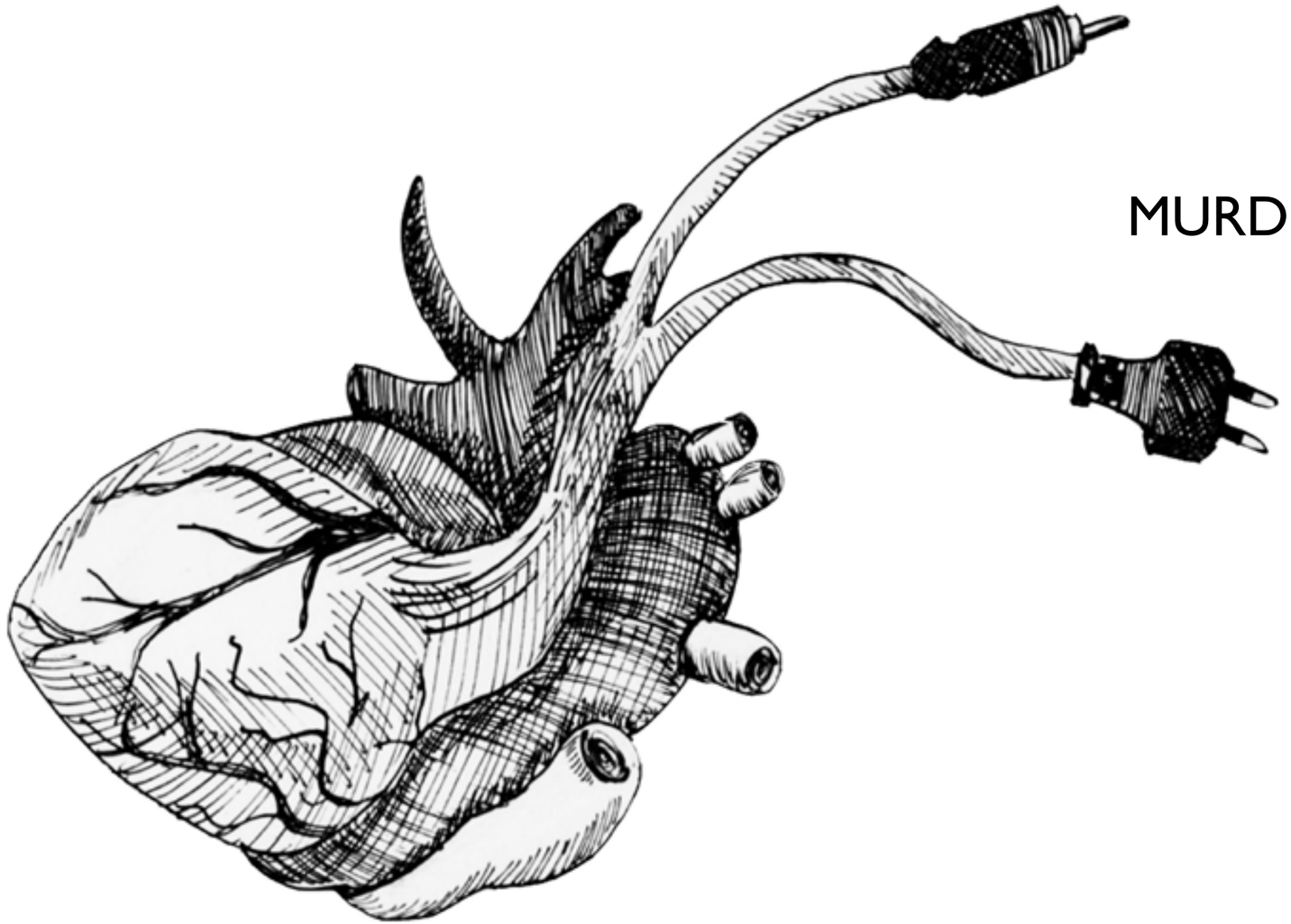
Even shadows can climb with a little external effort.

My failures and loss have carved a deep channel in my heart, just like the water has carved deep crevasses into this rock—but my success and skills haven't left me either.

I can scale this pain. I can scale this rock.
Scratch that, I must scale this rock.

I made it past that crevasse to the Cathedral in the Desert with the help of a family who loves me. It was a sincerely magnificent combination of waterfall, canyon and compassion. But the true magnificence was in the battle against Fear. He had won too many battles already.

It's my turn.



MURDER BY E-BOOK

By Madison Hosack

Andrew Carnegie donated $60 million dollars of his fortune to fund 1,689 public libraries in the U.S. In 1903, Carnegie built what would become Washington, D.C.'s oldest library. It was open to all races and genders, acting as an "intellectual breadline." Those affected by the Depression went there to feed their brains.[1]

Besides my birth certificate, my library card was my first form of identification. It never expires.

Johannes Gutenberg invented mechanical movable type printing in the 1450s. It is often regarded as the most important invention in the modern world. It created equal opportunity learning and made knowledge available to the masses.

Michel Hart is attributed with inventing the e-book. The first digitized text he created was the *Declaration of Independence*. He

1. Susan Stamberg, "How Andrew Carnegie Turned His Fortune Into A Library Legacy," NPR, last modified August 1, 2013.

Artwork by Kelsey Ruggaard

once said that, "E-books are the very first thing that we're all able to have as much as we want other than air."[2]

Every Christmas my family and I eagerly clamor down the stairs to retrieve Barnes & Noble gift cards from our stockings. We proceed to spend the entire next day at the bookstore, making careful selections so as to use our gift cards to their utmost potential.

E-books "typically have prices that are 50-60% lower than their print counterparts."[3]

I add all the books I buy for school to my personal library in hopes that, one day, my delusion of generating a "Beauty and the Beast" Library will come true. I don't have shelves for them so they are stacked horizontally along the floor of my room. I arranged them so my favorites sit on top of the stack.

. . . in the hopes that, one day, my delusion of generating a "Beauty and the Beast" Library will come true.

In 1605, Father Henry Garnet took part in the gunpowder plot to blow up the House of Parliament. His punishment was death by hanging. His offenses were recorded in 1606 and made into a book entitled *A True and Perfect Relation of the Whole Proceedings Against the Late Most Barbarous Traitors, Garnet a Jesuit and His Confederates*. It was bound using the skin of his face.[4]

The Kindle Fire HDX has a feature that allows you see what your friends are reading, share highlights, and rate books you read. This "real-time highlighting" is supposed to create a more immersive reading experience.[5]

CU Special Collections has a copy of *Mein Kampf* with Hitler's signature in it.

In one year, over two billion books are produced in the U.S. The paper needed for these books comes at the cost of around thirty-two million trees.[6]

On February 16, 2011, Borders applied for bankruptcy. On July 22, they closed their last remaining stores.[7]

With the dispersion of Borders, Barnes & Noble became the last remaining major bookstore chain.

The e-book industry grew by fourty-four percent from 2011 to 2012.[8]

When I graduated high school, one of my teachers "gifted" me a copy of *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran. His note inside the front cover says this book was the best advice he could give.

Andrew Carnegie's Library in Washington, D.C is dedicated to the "diffusion of knowledge."[9]

MIT Technology Review did a study on the effects of e-books on the democratizing effects of reading:

> Except under limited circumstances, eBooks cannot be loaned or resold. They cannot be gifted, nor discovered on a trip through the shelves of a friend or the local library. They cannot be rebound and, unlike all the rediscovered works that literally gave birth to the Renaissance, they will not last for centuries. Indeed, publishers are already limiting the number of times a library can loan out an eBook to 26.[10]

Michel Hart, the inventor of the e-book, died in 2011 at age 64. His death was announced on International Literacy Day.[11]

2. Andrew Losowsky, "Michael Hart, Inventor Of The eBook And Pioneer Of Electronic Literacy, Has Died," The Huffington Post, September 8, 2011.
3. Roxanne Weber, "The Pros and Cons of eBook Downloads," TopTenREVIEWS.
4. Keith Veronese, "Anthropodermic Bibliopegy, or The Truth About Books Bound In Human Skin," io9, February 22, 2012.
5. "All-New Kindle Fire HDX 7" Tablet." Kindle Fire HDX Tablet. Amazon, n.d. Web.
6. Zorba, "Ebooks Save Millions of Trees: 10 Ideas For Sustainable Publishing," Epublishers Weekly (blog).
7. Julie Bosman, "The Bookstore's Last Stand," The New York Times.
8. 100 million ebooks downloaded from Kindle Owners' Lending Library, Public Libraries RSS, August 28 2012.
9. Stamberg, "Carnegie Library Legacy."
10. Christopher Mims, "The 2014 List of 50 Smartest Companies," MIT Technology Review.
11. Losowsky, "Michael Hart Has Died," The Huffington Post.

The New York Times named Barnes & Noble one of the "only things standing between traditional book publishers and oblivion."[12]

On August 28, 2012, Amazon announced that over 100 million e-books had been borrowed or purchased from their Kindle Library.[13]

My best friend trades her Kindle Fire for Denver Beer Festival tickets on Craigslist. She purchases an iPad the same week.

My parents used to make my siblings and I read *Harry Potter* aloud to them before we went to sleep. We would all crowd onto my parents' bed and take turns reading chapters. When us kids beg to postpone our bedtime to find out what happens to the boy wizard and his friends, my parents always comply, secretly wanting to continue as well. My mother was the best reader—she had voices for all the characters that were subtle enough to seem real. Turns out we all had been pronouncing Hermione's name wrong for years, we didn't realize it until the movie came out.

The Kindle Fire HDX has a "read-to-me" feature that can read any English-language content aloud to you.[14]

On May 10, 1933, the German Student Association burned upwards of 25,000 volumes of "un-German" books under the Nazi Regime as a form of censorship.

China's entire Internet is censored.

There is a second hand bookstore on Pearl called Red Letter Books. There are three employees. The shelves are completely overgrown with books of all different shapes, sizes and smells. It's always quiet in there, even when it's crowded. No one ever goes to Red Letter to simply buy a book; they go to be entirely surrounded by them—to loose themselves in them.

The shelves are completely overgrown with books of all different shapes, sizes, and smells.

Nearly four billion trees or thirty-five percent of the total trees cut around the world are used in paper industries on every continent.[15]

I have always loved the smell of books. The first thing I do when I pick up a book is run the pages through my fingers. They make the sound of shuffling cards and smell like damp ink.

Andrew Carnegie saw public libraries as "instruments of change—not luxuries, but rather necessities, important institutions—as vital to the community as police and fire stations and public schools."[16]

Public libraries remain one of the only places besides shelters where the homeless can take refuge. They accept the hungry, the ragged, the smelly and the people who have nowhere else to go. A clean, safe place to read a book is a simple luxury.

Bemis Library is five minutes from my house. We went there every Sunday. There is a wooden castle in the kid's section. Its narrow passage, perfect for keeping adults out, leads to a second landing piled with pillows.

In my memory, I begin with strolling the isles, carefully selecting the day's top picks and retrieving a whole stack of books. I then proceed to barricade myself at the top of the castle for the remainder of the day. My sister meanders around the pre-teen section while my brother plays games on the old, bulky macs. My parents branch off to look at books without pictures.

It is the only place I remember going where they would leave us to our own devices.

12. Julie Bosman, "The Bookstore's Last Stand," The New York Times.
13. 100 million ebooks downloaded, Public Libraries RSS.
14. "All-New Kindle Fire," Kindle Fire HDX Tablet.
15. Sam Marton, "Paper Chase," Ecology Global Network, September 10, 2011.
16. Stamberg, "Carnegie Library Legacy."

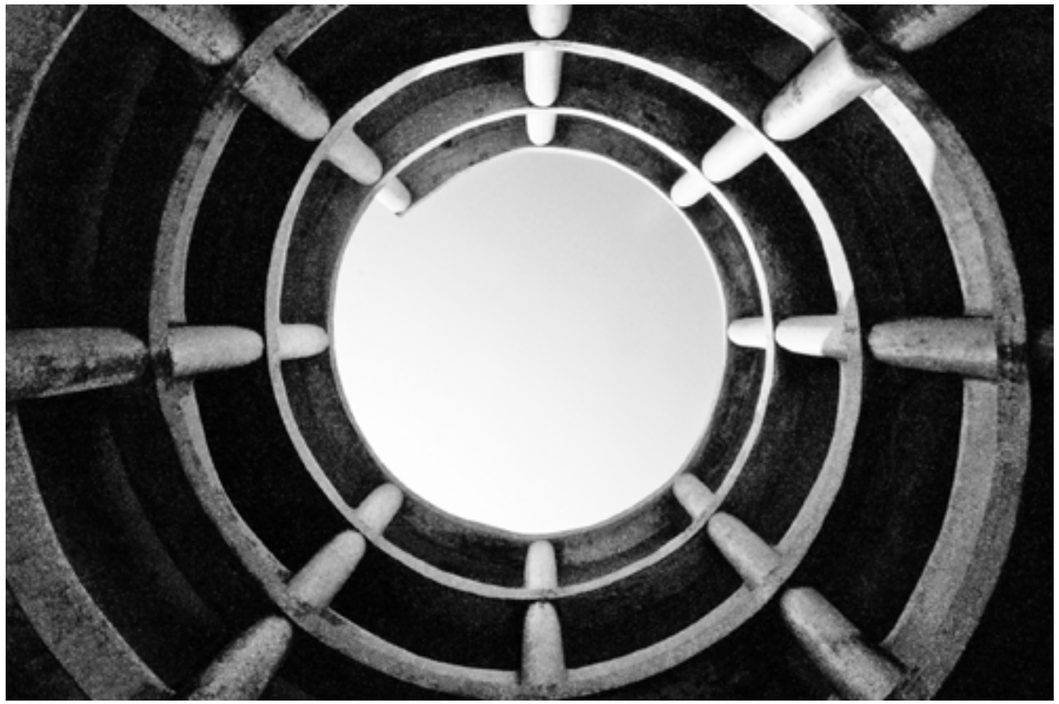


Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

VICTORY LAP

By Je'Leighna Killet

I am bouncing back and forth, staring at the starting line. My gut, heart and lunch are threatening to spill out of my mouth. Not to mention, I need to tinkle. I break focus with the vibrant, rust-colored track and gaze out onto the stadium. Although this event is outside, there is no space to breath fresh air. I pity the sticky bodies clustered together at the fence near the start. On any other day, I'd complain about the dry heat scorching my shoulders and proceed to whine for water. Instead, I'm daring the stadium to break out in flames. I switch my attention to the thick, grassy football field and see all of my relay girls in their designated spots, wearing neon-yellow socks. We plan on making a statement today when we run the Sprint Medley Relay (100m-100m-200m-400m). I always bust out the 400 meter run, which is an entire lap around the track. The man who shoots the start gun slowly climbs up the ladder and stands tall, signaling he's ready to begin. The murmur of the crowd lowers and all attention is focused on us, the sole event on the track. I recognize the man on the ladder from previous races. Every time he starts our race we dominate the track—

just as everyone expects. It is a promising start to my last State Championship. He takes a glance at each girl in her lane and proceeds to raise the gun.

"Sweats off," his voice echoes in the megaphone. All of the girls in lanes one through nine strip down to their spandex speed suits. The feline-like athletes pounce up and down to preserve the tedious warm up we all did to chase the prize of first place. The claws in our spiked shoes grip the track with our final stretches.

"On your mark!" Everyone who starts the race settles onto their blocks. I stop jumping and look at Bridget who will ignite our race.

"Set!" I take a deep breath in. And wait.

The gun explodes. Bridget propels out from the blocks—like she's expected to—at top speed and controlled power. She reaches Hayley after a short 100 meters. She's one of the first to get the baton and I'm confident she'll close the distance between herself and the one other girl ahead.

Her time's up and she passes the baton to Crystal. I grin at the sight of them. My girls are flawless. I shiver and bounce ferociously as I await my turn. As she turns the back corner—in the lead of course—I stop my bouncing to get a better look. Are those wings on her feet? My heart beats in anticipation as if I were already in the middle of my own run. She comes in closer and I confidently swag into my stance. As soon as I see her hit the mark, I press three powerful strides, pop my right hand behind me, and wait for—

Are those wings on her feet?

"Stick!" Perfect.

My hand is like a magnet that pulls the hollow baton in towards me. The empty "clank" against my hand signals my turn. I blitz out the first fifty meters and then relax my run, focusing hard to remember the perfect pace. I'll die on the home stretch if I fully sprint the whole race. At the 200-meter mark, I'm impeccable at keeping my breath. Breathe in, *one, two, three*, then breathe out, *one, two, three*. Repeat. I refuse to do anything too strenuous—it must be perfect. Then this girl passes me. That's alright, I'll get her at the end like I usually do because I'm supposed to wait to run my hardest—right? It's not unusual for me to be passed in the middle of the race. I always catch her. But then, number two passes me. I'm starting to get nervous. My butt hurts. It feels like someone has lit a torch in the depths of muscles

and forced it down to my thighs and up to my lower back. The flame constricts my once solid stride and makes it shorter and shorter. My lungs are shrinking, there isn't enough oxygen to give to my legs and I still have 100 meters to go. This is the last curve of the lap where I normally slingshot straight to the finish line. Instead, I'm moving in slow-motion. My once beloved track betrays me and burns my feet at every step. As I attempt to pick up speed for the last stretch, number three passes me—why can't I move faster? I begin to plead with the lower half of my body. My legs are rejecting me and the best I can do is beg them to at least keep the same pace. I'm pathetic. I look down and try not to focus on the metallic taste in the back of my throat. Before I cross the finish line, I feel this unfamiliar tingle in my eyes. I have nothing else left in me. I have no breath, no drive and no heart. They've all been replaced with fresh disappointment.

I double over with my elbows on my knees, begging for air.

I stomp heavily across the finish line, no longer graceful and soaked in my sour sweat of defeat. I double over with my elbows on my knees, begging for air. I stand up straight, trying to maintain the little bit of pride I have left. My legs shriek at me to breath, but they don't deserve the air they desperately crave—they can starve for all I care. The prickling sensation in my legs tells me that they truly are bereft of oxygen and it gives me a morbid satisfaction. It takes all I have left not to throw the baton at the track and scream. I have to stay in control. The sharp resentment racing in my mind helps me drag my pathetic limbs over to the grassy field. The moment my three girls look at me, my rage turns into guilt and shame and my tears spill out. They nurture me, as I did for them so many times.

"We still have another race," each of them promises me. I know that they feel just as disgraced as I do. Each of us has had our own hideous moments when running—dropping the baton, false starting and even missing a race. I wish my time to wreck a race would not have come when my team needed me the most. We reluctantly lag our way to have our pictures taken

on the podium. The megaphone directs the crowd's attention to the podium and announces the "winners." They all clap, but I know it's not for us. I stare into the depths of the black lens and shamelessly glare at the photographer when he says, "Smile."

There was absolutely nothing to smile about. Years of hard work and I blew it. Every day for the past four years, my life has been oriented around track. I've been consumed with hours of difficult drills and endless running. During the season, Saturdays are completely dedicated to the track, which is an all-day event. When track season was over, I worked out and watch my diet. I even did cross country to lengthen my endurance. As soon as that terrible sport was over, I did off-season track during the winter to sharpen my skills. I've missed countless opportunities to be close with my family for this same rusty track. I've been captain for three long years—wasn't I supposed to be a successful role model for the entire team? I had high expectations and unlimited internal fire. Any hopes or plans for the future were bitterly drenched—what did I do to deserve this failure? So no, I refuse to plaster the perfect smile on my face for anything, not even for this moment that will be captured forever.
The camera flashes and the agony is over.

Photo by Mariah Hermsmeyer

WARFARE'S LIFELINE

By Conor Kuczka

Our lives can be drawn simply as line segments, beginning in one place and ending in another. And it was the life and death of a man that I have never met that drastically altered the course of my very own line.

It was March 2003: I remember watching the news from the comfort of my red leather armchair. Trucks roared through the streets with merciless intention, fire and smoke engulfing the once tan and sandy buildings. Tank engines rumbled as they crawled into the ancient cities accompanied by the steady chatter of gunfire. The screams of soldiers and civilians intertwined to create a sorrowful melody of warfare. News anchors interviewed generals and politicians, discussing battle plans and immediate actions. The war was on—and I had a front row seat.

War was gritty, dirty and terrifying, but I thought there had to be a purpose—why else would generations of people continue to go to war for their country, their homes, and honor? Maybe because war is a necessary evil, preventing those who endanger

our freedoms and way of life. But what freedoms of mine had been taken away by the people of Iraq? Who lost their right to freedom in my country because of the actions of the Iraqis? I had so many questions, but it didn't matter. We were at war now, fighting the bad guys—good versus bad: that's all they needed to legitimize this dirty conflict.

The logic that controlled the attention span of my ten year old self wasn't terribly refined. I was at an age where certain events did not have the proper meaning since I could not comprehend them. I began to lose a vested interest in the war, only quickly glancing at the news and wondering if those who said we had lost our freedoms had found them in that ancient desert. I wondered if we had stopped the bad guys yet. I didn't think about the war in detail, or the soldiers who were fighting. They weren't like me—it was their job to fight.

One such glance at the news introduced me to the soldier who would alter my life's line. I never met him in person. I never knew his name, his hometown, or even what he looked like. I only knew that he was inside a casket, and draped over it was the American flag.

The same American flag that, to me, represented a symbol of the righteous. If we fought under the American flag, we were automatically justified—we were invincible. It represented life and liberty, but it hugged his metal casket in solemn comfort. In this moment, the flag was not met by a smile from me. Its tattered and broken edges waved at the frame of the crypt, its bulk held down by the time worn hands of Death. I imagined a cloaked figure standing at the back of the crowd at the soldier's funeral, placing his thin, pale hand softly on the mother's shoulder while cooing softly, "Another war, another body."

Death sighed.

The soldier wore the flag on his shoulder while he walked the dusty streets of Iraq. It was sewn on inversely, representing the soldier as "always moving forward." He enlisted under this flag, fought under this flag, and died under this flag. And it failed to uphold the intangible ideas that I believed it had. The American flag was not bulletproof.

It became all too real. It was the heart break of his family, crying on the woven red, white and blue fabric. It was the loss of a young man who held so much light in his eyes—a man looking toward his future. That light was faded in the fifty eggshell stars.

The American flag was not bulletproof.

Seeing the casket and the flag—seeing war for what it was and not for what it was supposed to be—stopped my life's line in its progression and quickly and resoundingly smashed it into a new trajectory. The force and the shock of the collision knocked me from my blissful ignorance. I cried at this realization, my parents were unable to console me.

"Conor, you are not going to die! You are perfectly safe here. You don't need to worry about death," my parents said. But I didn't cry for myself. War leaves permanent scars that come at a high price.

If war embodies such sorrow, why then do men and women volunteer their lives to serve? Why do they merge with the predestined warfare line if it causes them to suffer through blood, sweat and tears? The same line bathed in the blood and tragedy of past wars. Since the war started, I had many questions that I could not answer. I did not understand why someone would willingly put themselves into harm's way, knowing what war was like and the risks that came with it. But, slowly, I finally began to understand—seeing that family cry over the flag draped casket defined war's meaning for me.

War isn't about the medals, ribbons, or glory—wars aren't fought just for honor, or out of duty to one's country. Those elements all have a place in war, but are not the driving force behind why a person would put themselves in harm's way.

They joined and fought because of a love for each other. They found themselves miles from home in a foreign land already scarred by centuries of warfare, the only familiarity being one another. They fought for each other. And at ten years old, I understood—I wanted to merge my line with theirs.

The war was no longer a distant conflict seen through the screen of a television, but an internal struggle within myself.

I couldn't help but wonder if I would have the courage to leave the comfortable life I had been lucky enough to enjoy, and risk it all in an unforgiving desert. If I was not able to serve, if I

did not have the desire to serve, who would go in my place? This question haunted me for weeks. The war was no longer a distant conflict seen through the screen of a television, but an internal struggle within myself.

It infected me.

It kept me up at night, distracted me at school and redirected my attention away from my family and friends. If I did not serve, whose family would be crying over an American flag? I decided then, at a young age, that military service was mandatory. I was not willing to let another human have their lifeline erased prematurely because I hesitated.

It was this thought that flashed through my head as I walked into the ceremony room at the Denver Military Entrance Processing Station on October 10, 2013. I stood in the front row, with a group of people I had just met that morning. We were all strangers who had our own reasons for standing there that day, but I knew at one point the only thing that would keep us alive in war would be each other. As I saw that family from ten years ago in the corner of the room crying for their son, I raised my right hand, and swore the oath to serve.

Photo by Alynn Evans

Artwork by Kelsey Ruggaard

GOOD BEER

By Parker Steven Griggs

I remember the first time I invited a girl to join my friends and me at the brewery. She didn't live far away, so we had little time to converse on the way. I spent most of that precious time apologizing for whatever my friends could possibly say through out the evening. "These are military people." I said, "They can get a little carried away with their war stories."
"It's fine, my dad was a Marine."

Inviting someone to our Thursday night brewery gathering was like inviting a friend to church: everyone attending was very accepting, warm, open, and friendly, but you still couldn't shake the fear that your guest might not like it. They might think you are in a weird cult, or be so bored they keel over in front of you. This was beer though, tangible, flavorful—this was art.

I opened the door to allow my canoness to proceed me. I couldn't see how she reacted, but my hope was that it was something like a Texan's first experience with snow. My hope was that she would be as excited as I was. The building was very basic: jet-black metal ceiling, painted concrete floor, orderly alignment of chairs behind the giant, solid oak tables that stretched from

one side of the building to the other. The interior of the building was surrounded by massive wooden barrels stacked three high. The podium stretched from the left wall, twenty-five feet to my right. Behind it were ten tap handles standing at immediate attention prepared for duty and service. When someone was in need, the tap would bow forward, ceremoniously relinquishing the prized beer that was being guarded so vigilantly by these ten soldiers. Not just anyone had a relationship with these soldiers though; it took training, trust, commitment, and extraordinary knowledge to become a brewer.

Taylor was in charge of ordering food since he had established an ever growing friendship with the waitress at the wing place. The brewery didn't have a kitchen of their own so we would have the wings delivered. "Just look for the four good looking dudes in the barrel room," he would always say—but this time he added, "oh, and the pretty girl with us." Taylor was my best friend and usually I would carpool with him to our event, although, given the circumstances, he had shuttled himself that night. He didn't like beer. He said it was too bitter, but he enjoyed our company and was in attendance every week, which was great for me because he could be my designated driver—though that was rarely necessary.

. . . it took training, trust, commitment, and extraordinary knowledge to become a brewer.

Jeff, an ex airman tended to favor the amber beers, and it wasn't unusual for him to perform a particular "happy dance" when he noticed the red was on hand-pull—an homage to the traditions of craft brewing. He and his wife had just come back from a three year displacement in Europe, bringing back stories of pubs, cities, and general chaos from his time overseas—his job was to start our tab.

Jason was a wild card, he had a tendency to pledge his allegiance to the pale ale. Bitter and sweet, typically with a higher alcohol percentage, pale ales have a unique characteristic of getting rowdy. His job was to get two boats of the free popcorn they offered to patrons. I had only met Jason the month prior. During our introduction he tried to convince me that he was once a helicopter, from then on I just referred to him as "The Helicopter." He too, was an ex airman. He had recently returned from a two year stint in Korea and Afghanistan.

Neil told me a story of his first time in Las Vegas, where he would order his drinks by the color, not the technical name. Neil favored the Apricot Blonde. It was a dark orange color and sculpted with great care. The apricot was imbued with sweet notes from the special apricot purée. It was light and easy to drink. Savoring the robust flavor was the best part of this beer. It was consumed with reverence and honor. Slowly swishing the beer to either side of the glass, little bubbles would form, but the carbonation wasn't overbearing. When you took a sip, the beer would rest on the palate and soak into each taste bud.

Walt was the brewmaster who worked with Neil. They were both in the military. He would come over and talk with us, bringing us new beers and explaining the science behind brewing. "Lagers like Corona are awful to keep on tap; they skunk out within 20 seconds of being exposed to light. That's why they're always in cans or green bottles. Some brown bottles also offer protection from the light—for example Bud Light and Coors light which are American Lagers." He always had some interesting beer fact to share with us.

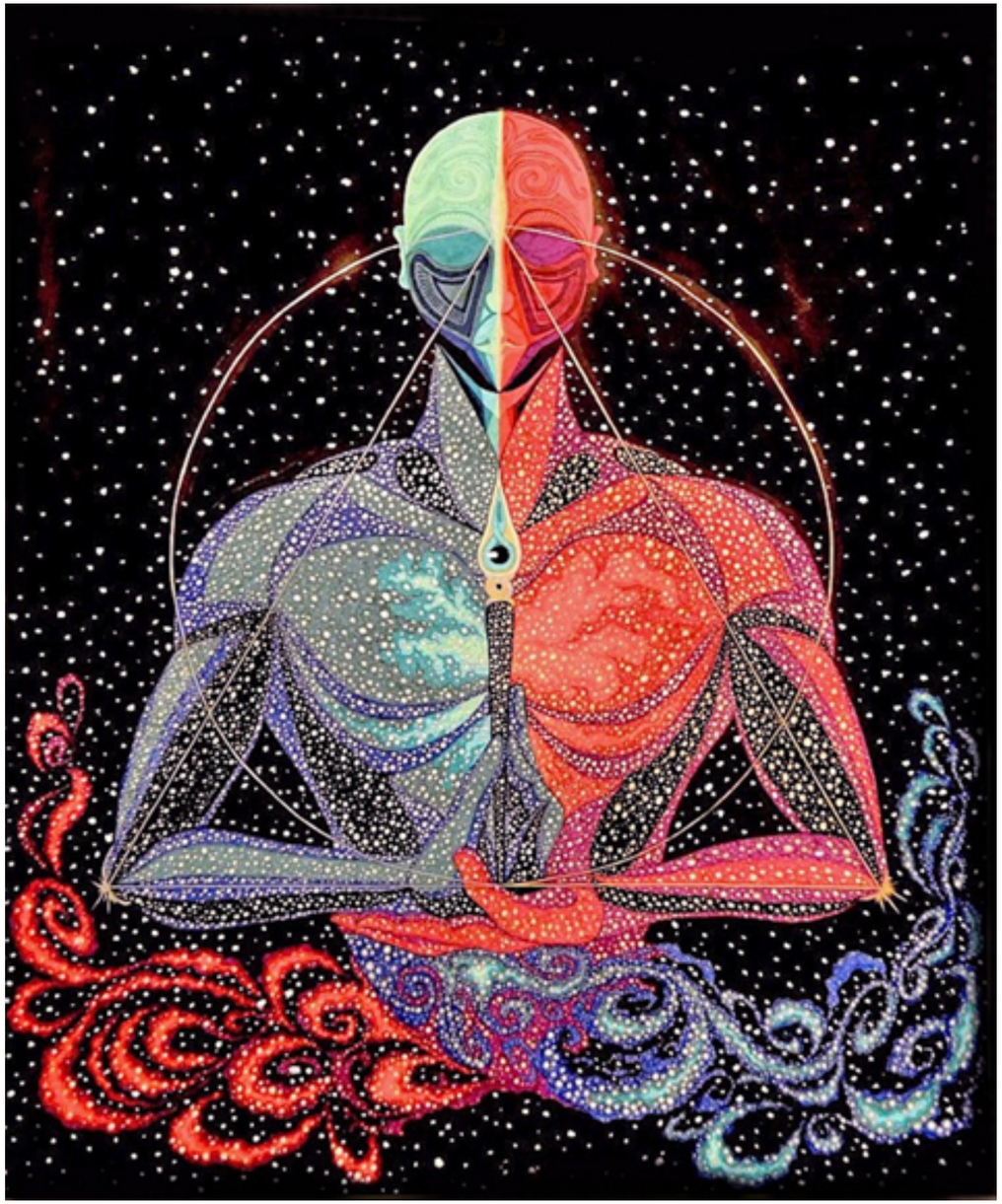
Inside the glass was a caramel colored liquid, bubbling with anticipation to be consumed.

The girl I had brought sat very quietly, her eyes drilling away at the screen of her phone. She would only look up to acknowledge the questions we asked her, but never really took the initiative to join the conversation. That didn't spoil it for us though—we were a community.

The glass would always make a small noise when being delivered to the table. It never sounded angry or harsh—it was as if it were just announcing "I'm here." The light would sparkle off its crystalline sides and draw your attention to the brew within and the little Dry Dock Brewery logo. Inside the glass was a caramel colored liquid, bubbling with anticipation to be consumed. The aroma it let off was so sweet you would think it was candy—the taste, now that was the real joy. It was slightly bitter—not in a sour or spoiled way, though. It was just a little bite on your taste buds in order to wake them up, that then apologizes by getting sweet. It was an ale.

Sometimes, when it was available, I would get the stout: pitch black with a milk chocolate colored head. It was not a drink for the faint-hearted. It was a workout to drink, but afterwards you would realize just how special it truly was.

I was amazed at how many variants there were for something so generically called "beer." The canvas of the glass was always painted a different shade with each handpicked color. This gallery of handcrafted beer was what brought all of us together. It was the artful community of beer that united us.



Artwork by Patrick Schappe

DOING NOT-DOING

By Ariel Herman

Welcome to Vipassana.
Bring your attention to the breath.
Then, focus on bodily sensation.
Try to avoid thinking, or focusing on thoughts.
Focus between thoughts, between molecules,
behind the movie screen.
Do not personalize this.
See you in ten days.

Meditating for any period of time brings to mind interrogation scenes from chintzy action dramas, where two cops beat a powerless, bound man, firmly reassuring him that this can go easy, or we can do it the other way.

A static, unstimulated expanse of time is completely subjective. For me, it was oddly similar to the time I went skydiving. Chester "The Molester"—a squat, Greco-featured tandem diver, who shared a spooky resemblance to my first college professor—

grabbed my shoulders from behind as the rear hatch opened. "This is going to be a bit like prison sex—if you relax, it will be better for the both of us," he said before triple-flipping both of us from the back of a perfectly functional aircraft. As I fell, Chester was on my back as my liaison to the sky. In this ninety second relationship, trust was mandatory—but I wouldn't meet Chester for five more years.

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I was driving north with an old friend to do something for myself that I'd wanted to for a very long time. It was autumn of 2005 up in Kelseyville, California. I parked my '85 Volvo with the other cars at a sandy volleyball court. At the edge of the parking lot were two women seated at a resin table with clipboards. The trail beyond led across a small creek ford. Highway 101 was a few miles behind us, and equally as surrounded by the evergreen and deciduous forests, capped with incoming cloud cover. My friend's name and mine were checked off of the list by a brunette in a bandana with wide-gaged earlobes. Her comrade, a bundled up blonde in a black hoodie, gave me a small guidebook and reiterated the precepts of Right Action: "You must abstain from killing of any kind. No stealing. Suspend all sexual activity. Do not tell lies or take any intoxicants. You must maintain Noble Silence beginning after orientation until the course concludes." Her eye contact was warm but curt. Tomorrow would begin the ten day introduction to Vipassana meditation, by N.S. Goenkaji. I was nineteen years old.

We forded the creek toward the campsite and parted ways from there. After setting up the tent, I discovered it had a gaping hole in it from years of childhood trips—maybe it wouldn't be a problem? We were given orientation in the main dining area before being released to shower, and turn in. Eye contact was also forbidden—much like a crowded New York City subway, except we were alone together, maybe sixty people, in the middle of Northern California at a summer camp for kids. As a child I'd thrived in places like this.

When I was in school I was described as a procrastinator. I like to think of meditation as a scrupulous form of procrastination. In school, I resented being told to face my tasks and—to

You must abstain from killing of any kind. No stealing. Suspend all sexual activity.

I breathed in, and out, with the pace of a child about to go into a tantrum.

my recollection—no one was prodding me to see the value in trying. The experience was alienating. It felt like an apt moment to make an investment, having finished high school a year prior. Going to meditate was the first time in my life that I made a concerted effort to get to know myself without a mirror, a report card, or the scene at home.

In the meditation hall men and women were divided. At the front were a couple of twenty-somethings, an old man, a large tapestry and a television screen on a rollaway. Every day we received a message from N.S. Goenkaji, instructing us in Vipassana. We would sit for hours on stools that turned the ass into a mixture of rubber cement and corn starch. I breathed in, and out, with the pace of a child about to go into a tantrum. My right shoulder would rise defensively as if to support a single-strap backpack loaded with textbooks. I would actively lower it, only to have it automatically elevate once more.

The sessions were between two and three hours each between 4am and 9pm, accumulating from ten to twelve hours a day, but the average for me was nine. The lost hour was usually spent awkwardly investigating reality, trying to see if I could see things differently. I'd find myself standing by the side of the trail that led between the meditation hall and my tent, staring piercingly across the ford towards the parking lot masked by willow trees.

After the rains came, I was moved from my tent to a camper's hut with two other men. The three of us shared the lodging, sleeping in three of the twelve parallel stacked wooden bunks. One of the men bore an unsettling similarity to the anglicized Jesus Christ. I would later learn he was known professionally as "DJ Jesus Christ", or "DJ J.C." for short. Our second roommate was an exceedingly orderly man in his early thirties with a tightly packed, internal frame backpack designed for long expeditions. Every morning at 4 a.m. when the wake-up call of the brass chime came floating out of the night tapped by a course volunteer, his wristwatch would simultaneously emit a screeching second reminder to wake up. He would jerk up, fully alert, and begin making his bed with precision and haste. Me and Jesus got up about the same speed and with the same groggy enthusiasm.

People would walk in quiet refrain along damp trails underneath the misty oaks, cozy in their camping clothes. The moisture breached my sweats and gave me a shudder as I saw

my friend from the drive up to camp, stacking rocks by the trail. I watched him create a jagged tower of smaller and smaller stones—like a pile of baby turtles. Later on, I added a pile of my own up the trail.

People would periodically fart loudly in the meditation hall. This would set off a cascade of inner confabulation, "Don't laugh," I would inwardly say. "Don't speak inwardly!" I would then retort. And then I would compliment myself on not doing these things, and then I would reprimand myself for complimenting myself. And eventually, I would let it go. On and on, I tangled in the Chopin etudes of my thoughts. The clamor of heightened sensitivities brought on by the ability to focus and detach—or "depersonalize"—my thoughts as mine gave me an understanding not unlike Charles Manson—he said prison bars were an intervention around his reality, and that they did not imprison him. In his mind, he was free. I began to wonder if I was going through withdrawal from the past nineteen years of steadily injected social programming. I feared I would be as amoral as Manson if I couldn't find an original source of goodness in my character beyond the software of identity—if the exorcism was a success, the reboot achieved, would I still be myself? The prospect both terrified and tempted me.

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On day six, I contacted management—so to speak. His name was Joel[1], a mathematics major in his mid twenties who I recognized from Santa Rosa's Junior College where we both studied. He had curly dark hair, and wore a puffy down jacket. I met him by the kitchen and asked to speak to the assistant instructor. Only in select situations were we allowed to speak. Joel seemed taken aback. His disposition was warm and respectfully servile, with the sadness of a shy man or a recovering introvert. He led me along the fire road at the edge of the camp in shared silence. His dark brown eyes were fixated, hawk like to the proverbial horizon obscured by the deep forest green. Our feet squished the damp foliage while mist condensed onto leaves and dripped to the forest floor. He led me to the assistant teacher—the man responsible for sitting motionlessly while a volunteer pressed play on the

1. This name has been changed by discretion of the author.

He then broke eye contact, gazing downward into a pool of jackknifed memory.

VHS recordings of Goenkaji. I met him in his private cottage. For the first time since I'd arrived, I didn't feel alone. The relief was jaded, knowing I was surely going to finish the ten days.

The man's eyes were blue as the sky beyond the afternoon raincloudsHis beard was pure white like his hair. From a cross-legged stillness, he smiled with several concealed facial twitches. "What seems to be the problem?" he asked. He did not come across as the New Age type—more like a grandfather. A few sentences escaped my lips, but they felt unimportant, and I trailed off. Then, reestablishing eye contact, I blurted out, "—I hate myself—so much." He gazed at me with pitiless solemnity. After a beat, he responded, "You have no idea how lucky you are to be doing this at your age." He then broke eye contact, gazing downward into a pool of jackknifed memory. He smiled more easily, and lifted his attention towards me. "You'll be fine—just stick with it." And there's something vastly impressive about someone who can say that to your face without a shred of doubt in their delivery, even if you don't believe it—which I didn't—it made you want to.

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I squeezed the rock in my fist. I had more awareness of my will power than I'd ever known. I wondered if I could see it, measure it. I threw the rock as far as I could across the creek towards the forest. I did this repeatedly one afternoon as other hunched men sifted by, some stopping to join the rebellion. It felt incorrect to hurl rocks as a social activity. I left for the dining hall. There were more stacks of stones. Was my friend sending me a message? I stacked a pile—for him, and to occupy the misery of my idle hands.

For the last three days of silence I had a trio of Aerosmith, Elton John, and Big Band Jazz ensembles playing endlessly in my head. While leaving the meditation hall, I heard heavy drumming as I imagined dashing to the car, turning on the engine, and running back to the littler problems of the world. It was vividly cinematic—I tried to ignore this. It reminded me of Nikola Tesla reading peacefully next to an active tesla coil, appearing to barely notice the blaring electrical storm he'd invented—I also tried to ignore this. The silence was overwhelming, not unlike visiting New York City for the first time, but eventually it became normal.

I burned for familiar contexts. Every person who had made me feel like myself came to mind, and there was nothing to do about it. To reject the thoughts was wrong. To personalize the emotions they brought up was wrong. To hate that they came up was wrong. To berate yourself for reacting to them was wrong. Yet the idea of meditation had always struck me as problem free. They almost insisted that nothing is ever wrong—but don't be proud of seeing it: that's wrong too. It all started falling away. An endlessly peaceful, primordial silence began to appear beyond the static.

The imagination that had bunkered me from compulsory education fired flaming pianos from trebuchets of self-amusement. I became a freelance self distractor—inhaling, actively lowering my shoulder, exhaling, and closing my eyes again—breathing for freedom. The density of my consciousness went from a cotton wad on the surface, to a lead ball descending miles into the ocean.

The blank expanse in my vision heightened the other senses on my body. The sound of my own heartbeat puffed like a goldfish going in circles around a little plastic castle and a strip of fake kelp from a neon pit of rubble. My mind was a pile of glass shards, as silver as the sparks on the surface of the sea. Every word I thought was a form of escapism—an act of defiance. To say I missed my friends was to witness Ariel Herman, an idea, admitting he was lonely. Slowly, my life of sensations began to seem like they belonged to a character who only existed in some other narrative. Like an unobserved particle, I had no absolute location in reality. It was kind of like being fifteen years old in a mosh pit as a great homunculus in a spiked, leather jacket hurls you at a nineties, gutter-grunge, lesbian in a boy's undershirt. I stopped being angry with anger, curling my middle fingers down and placing them against my thumbs. My rebellion was useless to me now.

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Nobel Silence ended, and as we left the meditation hall, the silence was instantly hilarious. All the men—still separated from the women—began gasping like the hissing of so many pressure cookers.

It was ecstatic.

"What the—What the hell! Who are you people?" I exclaimed. At dinner that night we all spoke about our experiences. We'd been advised not to speak to members of the opposite sex, but I sought the few I'd distracted myself with for the past ten days. It was pure ecstasy to experience true reciprocity again. I was giddy inside, and yet as sturdy as the iron ball left over from a supernova. If any insecurity was there, it absolutely didn't matter. "Who are you?" was all I wanted to get from everyone.

When the prohibition of silence fell on the tenth day, DJ J.C. would be the first human on the planet that made me miss our vows of Noble Silence. I really liked the idea of Jesus, then at length, he told me of his truth—and it hurt. As I drifted to sleep that final evening, Jesus spoke to me from the darkness, waiting intermittently for me to respond with "hmm" and "uh huh" before continuing his lament of social injustice and depictions of a not-far-off utopia. He pontificated in New Age musings: the foundations of which would save our humanity. The impartialness I had been fostering during those ten days began to backslide into narcissistic judgmental thoughts before I could fall asleep. The platitudes Jesus offered were full sheets in a doldrum, but I didn't have the character to contradict him—nor did I have an ulterior plan to save the world. Where his convictions were total, I was unimpeachably cynical. The historical Jesus was considered a master of the heart, and not the mind—that was the Buddha. To me, DJ J.C. had drunk the Kool-Aid, punched the ticket, doubled the dose, and opened his mind so broadly that it had fallen out. Although his ideas were truncated and grating, I liked him—but I couldn't tell why. As I finally drifted to bed, I became worried for the man with the digital watch. Even after we were allowed to speak he offered no conversation nor did he reach to join one. That evening he had reorganized his belongings with his back to us, itemizing the tightly rolled cloths into new neat rows on the bed.

The platitudes Jesus offered were full sheets in a doldrum, but I didn't have the character to contradict him.

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I am in a mom and pop general store somewhere in Mendocino County just off the 101. I'm very slowly chewing single pieces of popcorn, and doing a slow investigation of a building inhabited by strongly colored products. The butter and salt are

strangely acrid, yet satisfying. The walls of the red and white wax paper bag makes a soft cutting noise against my fingers. My carpool and I left the volleyball court less than an hour ago. The old woman behind the counter asks if I'd like anything besides the popcorn. It takes me a moment to remember myself, "No, this will be all. Thank you." She takes my money. "I can't believe how little this woman gets it—" I don't even know why I thought that. Did it occur to me, or did I realize it? I don't think I thought it—it was just there—was it me? Or mine? "Alright, that'll be—$1.08." I take my change and leave, bare feet swiping absently on the worn wooden floor.

I step onto the porch into the afternoon sunlight, gazing with scrutiny at the world returning. The highway is drying out and the tips of the redwoods steam in the sun's rays. The colors out here are superior—sacred, I think. The physical world and the non-physical within feel like divorced parents sharing custody of my mind, each tugging on a different ear, and talking shit about the other one. But as the doubt of it all comes crashing in, I get this feeling of reassurance that this Americana roadside store is as true as the void I was just brined in. I sit in the passenger seat as my friend drives southward home. The view unfolds like a serene unending painting.

The physical world and the non-physical within feel like divorced parents sharing custody of my mind . . .

"How was it for you, man?" asks my friend.
It was great. "It was great—"
"—Do you think you'll keep the practice?"
Yes, I should try to. "Yeah, I wanna try." Will you? "How about you?"
"Eh. Maybe. Kind of intense, if ya know what I mean."
—yeah. "Either way, I'm happy we did this."

Photo by Claire Scanlon

Artwork by Dylan Gebbia-Richards

IT WILL RAIN

By Katherine Hurley

I was bare foot in Tanzania on a dirt and dust path, with some golden cracking grass here and there. The African moon was yawning in the thick, blue sky—lying on his back, ready for dusk, but not worrying too much about it.

The birds bellowed, giggled, and whispered calls that crept into my brain and created rhythm. The long-tailed cuckoo had mastered a way of always finding a silent gap in the cacophony of voices in order to sing out:

It Will Rain It Will Rain It Will Rain

My naked feet ran to the tent where I hoped there was still water. I had plans to pour it over my head, and feel each drop turn from cold, to warm, to steam.

With large, presumptuous steps, I hopped along that dust path until I saw something lying beneath my descending heel. It was a snake.

I jumped back, stood still, and watched him. He lifted the front half of his body to watch me.

We stared at each other for about ten "It-Will-Rains." His yellow eyes were hot with the thought of attack. The snake's strong, beige body held itself up with a disturbing thickness, and his slimy eyelids slid back into his smooth head—I saw hate and emptiness in his gaze.

It was when he showed me his wings that I knew he was a cobra. Listening to my brain rhythm, and the rhythm of the birds, I backed away slowly and whispered to him, "We don't have to do this."

He scoffed the way a snake might scoff and wiggled away.

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Jacob[1] had been slithering in and around madness for months. Always on his hands he wore maroon mittens, but he had cut the fingertips off with garden scissors. The wool unraveled around his fingers, and created loops for things to get caught in. Along with his mittens, his mind unraveled—and I was one of the things that got caught in the loops.

He was so dark except for the moments he tried to hide his smile. He would bring his mittened hand to his mouth, attempting to cover his crooked teeth. But the creases around his eyes told me he was happy. It was a look of disarming, and alarming tenderness that you had to trust. He was shy, but he could thaw out a whole room.

His eyelashes were heavy and black—they made you search for his eyes, and stop breathing when you found them. His hair was thick, dark and wild, like concentrated smoke, and I was:

Coughing Coughing Coughing

For months we tunneled through burnt-out craziness and snuggled up to darkness to hold its hand. I was taking my skin off, and breaking my bones down in order to descend with him into the cold and into love.

It only took one snowy Seattle night for him to really attack, and I wasn't sure if I had the venom in me or not.

He walked into my room with a cheap bottle of red wine, a copy of *Frankenstein,* and a pocketknife. His lips and teeth were stained red as though he had been ripping apart flesh.

He walked into my room with a cheap bottle of red wine, a copy of Frankenstein, and a pocketknife.

1. This name has been changed by discretion of the author.

I breath again, but never really sleep.

From the way he paced in the room—feeling every pocket of air, surveying every shadow with his eyes—I knew something had gone too far.

I cooed soft words that I hoped would calm him. I made no sudden movements and used slow gestures. We stared. "Jacob? Will you sit down? We don't have to do this."

He didn't hear me. Instead he brings out the knife—but not in a dramatic way that catches the light. Suddenly, it's just there, and I'm dialing 9-1-1 for the first time ever, panting and tripping, watching him jump out the window.

I look down and watch his silhouette creep away through the snowy streets. I breathe again, but never really sleep.

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This one is a dream, but here I am again, in Africa.

I am in a Masai village, holding a little girl's hand and studying fruit. The sky is that fleeting dream-blue that makes the red garments on the women pop and smile.

Things are peaceful and bright until my brother turns to me and says:

Civil Unrest Civil Unrest Civil Unrest

ꕥ

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

CONTRIBUTORS

COLIN BARRY was born and raised in Greeley, Colorado. He is a senior studying Sociology with interests in Environmental Studies and Creative Writing. His favorite thing about writing is that it grounds him. It takes him away from the stresses of the world around him and allows him to focus on the details of the here and now. To him, writing is focusing and meditative. For the past three years he has been spending his summers in Denali National Park and wintering in Europe, South America, and Southern California. He recently returned to Boulder to finish his undergraduate degree and make a few bucks bartending on the weekends. His real passion is travel and he hopes that he will soon be able to return to the road and further his interests in creative travel writing.

AMY BURNETT comes from Lakewood Colorado, although she did attend high school all the way in Mbabane, Swaziland. She has spent and plans to spend more time traveling throughout Africa. Rock climbing is a serious hobby and skill of Amy's. As an Economics major, she plans to defy the norm with her writing—which is a skill she believes most economists do not possess. She strongly feels that her writing can be used to expose the reality around her, as well as recreate special moments for herself and others.

KIM CAMPBELL is a junior studying both Math and Anthropology because she decided she didn't want any sort of social life. She's from San Diego and came to Boulder for school because having actual seasons sounded cool. Her favorite authors are J.K. Rowling and Julie Kagawa. She enjoys reading and binge watching TV shows right before finals. She wrote "SEPARATE WORLDS" for her upper division writing class.

HEATHER CLARK is a Business major at CU, hailing from nearby Niwot Colorado. She enjoys writing as a form of self-expression as well as a means to push her to have new experiences and try new things. She hopes writing will help her in her future endeavors, whether it is writing a blog or writing emails. She is an avid tandem biker, roller blader, and swing dancer—she insists that all are best done with friends.

ALYNN EVANS was born and raised in Fort Collins, Colorado. She is currently attending CU where she is studying Neuroscience and Art History. Animals are a real passion of Alynns', who admits that she has developed a habit of visiting the lonely

puppies at the local humane society. She is an admittedly picky eater, which was something she must have needed to cope with while traveling to Tanzania and India. Alynn claims that her inspiration for writing comes from the need to express things that only seem to make sense in her own head. To Alynn, our whole life is encompassed by our experiences with people and our surroundings, and it's important that we "never underestimate an experience."

EMMA GARDNER is from Centennial, Colorado. Since high school, art has been an essential part of her life, and now writing is a secondary outlet to express herself. Writing has been a great source of relaxation. The accumulation of day-to-day stress can be wiped away by the ten minutes it takes to fill up a few pages. When asked about her future she refered to the quote, "Every man must decide whether to walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness." - MLK

PARKER STEVEN GRIGGS is a junior from Aurora, Colorado studying Political Science at CU. He writes because it is the only way he can figure out what the hell he is trying to say. He plans on being a writer and loves revising his works and receiving critiques to improve his writing. Parker doesn't really know where he's headed, but as long as he continues to make progress he knows he'll be okay. Revising allows him to get technical and particular with his word choices and metaphors. He says the most difficult part of the creative process is actually taking the time to sit down and write. "This world moves so fast and often we overlook our basic ability to just sit, write, think, reflect, and create," he says.

TALIA HALFON is an ambitious CU student from Denver. She strives to utilize everything CU has to offer outside of the classroom, and often finds inspiration from these experiences. She writes to remember these experiences and finds great satisfaction in the finished products of her writing. Primarily though, Talia seeks to captivate the different cultures she is exposed to and hopes to work abroad in the future.

PETER HASSINGER is a junior at CU Boulder studying Environmental Engineering. Raised in Evergreen, Colorado, Peter is working to develop clean drinking water solutions in developing countries around the world. He has always enjoyed using writing as a tool to propel ideas through space and time, and strives to continue creative writing despite his scientific background.

ANDREW HECOCKS grew up in an area roughly ten square miles large in Westminster, Colorado. Such an upbringing developed his love for the poetics of suburban space and piqued his interest in writing about them. Currently in his third year as an English major, he has spent most of his time as an undergraduate looking for an opportunity to spread his work. Podiums like JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY have provided him with the motivation he needs to pursue his dream career of being a published writer. He still lives in Westminster, and kills time by waiting tables and reading books by John Green and Chuck Palahniuk. Included on the long list of things that fascinate him the most are airports, parking garages, and the human condition.

PAUL HENNING is from Mission, Texas. Inspired by the support and wanderlust of his family, Paul worked in the Navy as a helicopter mechanic after leaving his home state, and traveled the world before coming to CU to study Evolutionary Biology. In his professional career, Paul will be writing scientific articles and the precise technical studies of the academic realm. But as an artist, Paul explores writing as a tool for expression and reflection. When he is not producing environmental films, Paul is probably having fun manipulating the language and syntax of his written pieces like a puzzle. Like a literary mechanic, Paul is diligent in developing and exploring his pieces to find the best fit for himself, and his audience. He decides he is finished with a piece when he is ready to let it go, and walk on its own. Paul intends to continue writing and committing himself to new experiences and expectations so that he can realize the limits of his potential.

ARIEL HERMAN is from a small town in Northern California. Ariel came to CU to study astronomy, but was drawn towards the English degree because it better suited his desire to become a better writer. His interests are broad, and have included theater, philosophy, politics, ontology, astronomy, music, and cooking. He wrote "DOING NOT-DOING" for a personal essay assignment. It was an attempt to illustrate an experience that defined him that he did not entirely understand. Themes of self-reliance, self-knowledge, and the nature of happiness appear in "DOING NOT-DOING." His favorite authors include Neal Stephenson, Orson Scott Card, Art Spiegelman, David Foster Wallace, Hunter S. Thompson, Hermann Hesse, Alan Watts, and Shel Silverstein—to name a few. Writing for Ariel reminds him of being seven years old and trying to catch blue-belly lizards from underneath old plywood and rotting fence posts tacked with barbed wire. The process requires patience, being sneaky, poor odds, and the anticipation that you might find a snake—that would be way cooler—provided it isn't a rattler. He plans on attending grad school to pursue creative nonfiction and travel writing.

MADISON HOSACK was born, or more likely hatched, near Littleton, Colorado. She is currently double majoring in English and Humanities at the University of Colorado, enjoying all the finer things such as art, literature and, more pointedly, pizza. She spends too much of her time reading in the bath, which with her natural clumsiness has resulted in many a water damaged book by authors such as David Foster Wallace, Franz Kafka, and Michael Ondaatje. Although she understands the benefits of electronic books, she loathes them just the same. This is why she wrote "MURDER BY E-BOOK;" or it could have been to get an A in Topics in Writing: Best American Essays—either way.

KATHERINE HURLEY is a senior from Chicago studying English and Film studies at CU. She writes because the only way to give existence to beauty, purpose, and structure is to translate the mundane into an artistic medium. She says, without art—love, life, and death are hard to digest. Her favorite thing about writing is finding an unusual combination of words that create a specific sensation that is so unique, it could not be described in any other way. She says writing is a skill that establishes a strong foundation for critical thinking.

JE'LEIGHNA KILLET was born in North Carolina. Jeleighna said she once despised writing, so much so that she got in trouble at work for her e-mails because they weren't written well enough. She wrote "VICTORY LAP" simply because it was a requirement for a writing class. She chose to write about something that meant a lot to her—losing. She and the girls earned first place in the 4x100 meter relay after the race. She does not have any particular favorite authors and is a Psychology major at CU and is currently working on a minor in French. She would love to be a nurse and if she had the patience or funding for more school, she would choose to be an OBGYN.

CONOR KUCZKA is senior from Longmont, Colorado studying Psychology at CU. He enjoys exercise, hiking, writing, and drinking—a future writer, indeed—in his free time. "WARFARE'S LIFELINE," originally written for a class assignment, was submitted to JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY at the suggestion of his professor. This piece was inspired by Conor's experiences growing up during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and how these experiences influenced his decision to enlist in the U.S. Army following his graduation.

BEN O'LEARY is a Spanish major at CU. When asked if he thought how his writing would benefit his major or career, he explained that he only writes for enjoyment. He enjoys recollecting and writing about his experiences and hopes that he can entertain others with his stories. His favorite part about writing is scribbling out the first draft, because in his opinion, after that he has a tendency to second-guess himself too much. While writing my not be his major, Ben has found his writing and rhetoric classes here at CU to be some of his favorite. He wanted to thank his writing professor, Eric Burger, for encouraging him to participate in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY.

CLAIRE ZAI is from a tiny, one stoplight town called Franktown, Colorado. She enjoys playing almost all sports and her favorite team to follow is the Colorado Avalanche. While she enjoys the creative process associated with writing, she has found that much of the editing work can be tedious. Claire thoroughly enjoys any outdoor activity.

Call for Submissions

CREATIVE NONFICTION WRITERS

All University of Colorado Undergraduate students are eligible to send us your writing for consideration by JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. Submissions go through our blind review process before possible consideration by our full Editorial staff. We retain FNASR—First North American Serial Rights—which means you agree not to publish submitted work in any way, including on personal online outlets, until accepted work appears in our print journal or debuts online. After that, rights revert to you and you may republish wherever you wish.

We only seek creative nonfiction, but in any of its genres:

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- Humor
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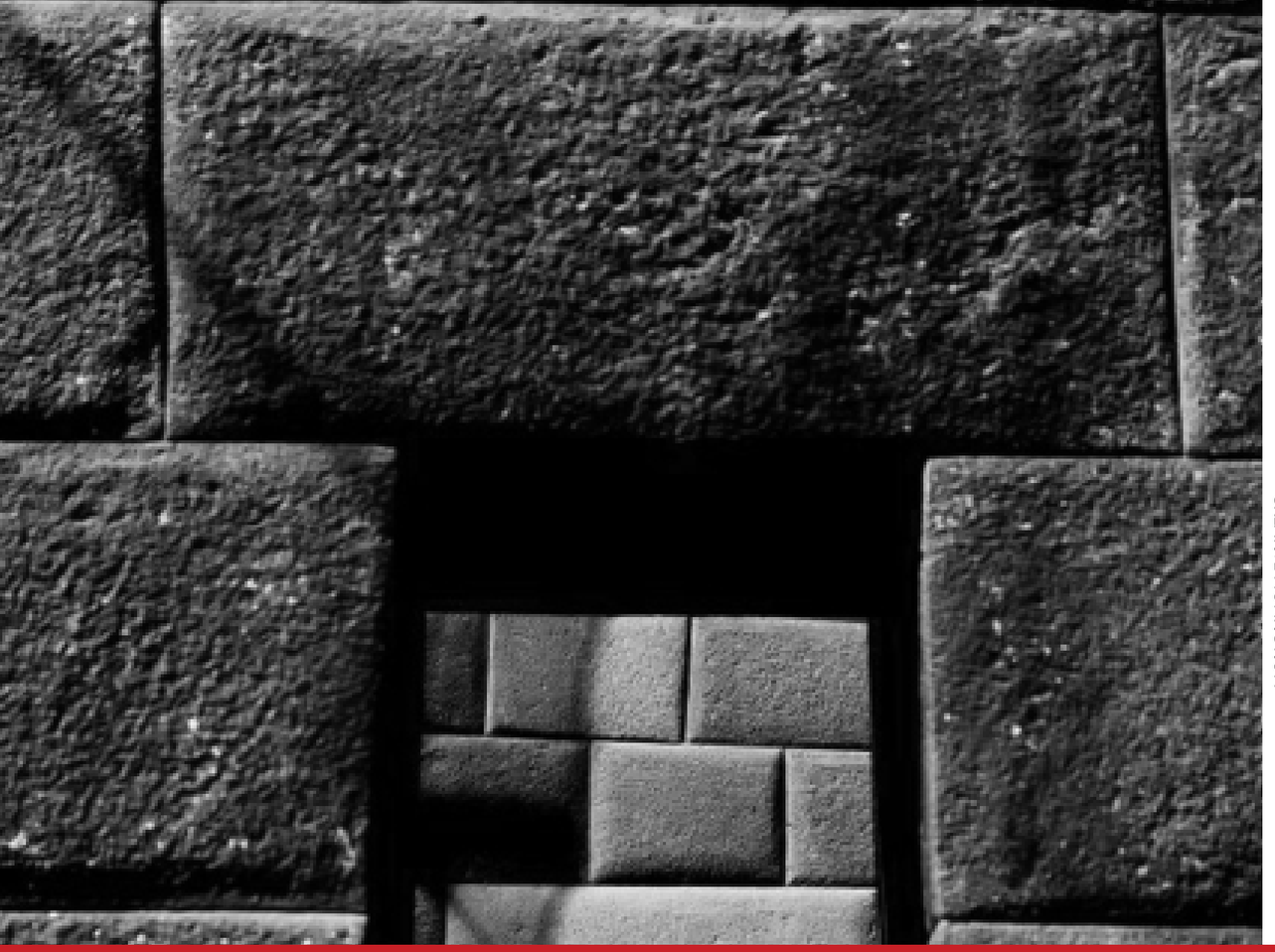
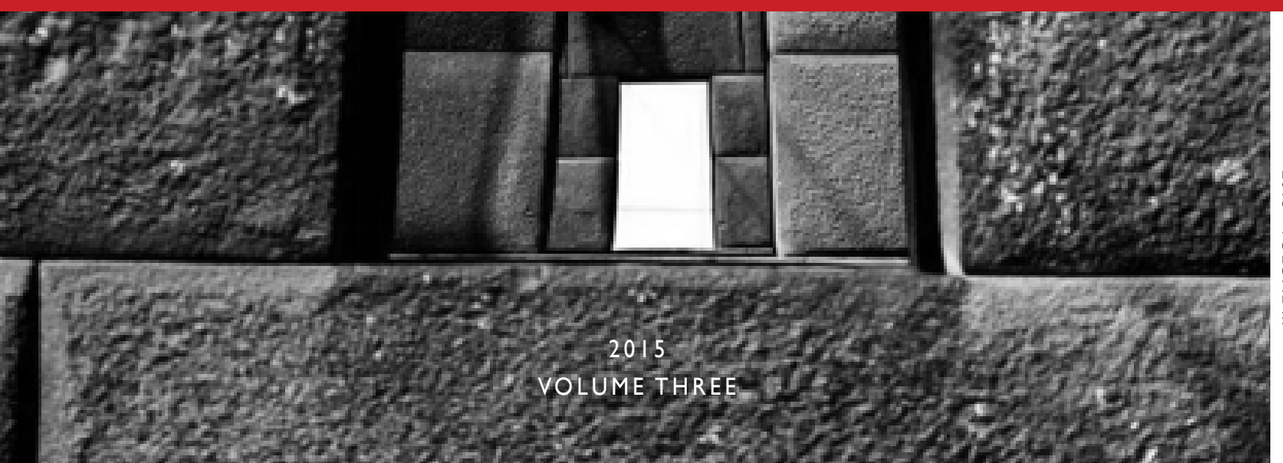
Send us your picture stories—artwork of any type—for consideration by our Art Direction staff, for inclusion in either our print publication, or online complement. We especially seek multi-modal work for our website, including video, animation, music for podcasts, etc.

WE NEED YOU

The creativity that helped us grow issues 1 and 2, and now this issue, will teach new students to carry forward next fall. THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC offers a course each semester—WRTG 2090-001—to generate each issue while growing online. We welcome independent study students and volunteers, working together to make the vision of the journal a reality. We need anyone interested in Editorial, Business, Marketing, Art Direction, and Digital Production; and we seek to grow online, so bring us your interest in Web Design, including Audio and Video Production. No matter your existing skills, take our class or join our staff as a volunteer to learn new ones. Ask our current staff and they will tell you the hard work is rewarding in the end.



JOURNAL 2020 is a collection of the finest creative nonfiction writing and undergraduate artwork at CU Boulder—the work of young writers with enough strength of voice, vision, and courage to tell their true stories and the true stories of others.



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JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes a print issue each year, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder Undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our back page for submission guidelines.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY regrets failing to credit Penelope Baggs correctly for her photo on page 83 in our first and second print runs. Penelope is not only a fine photographer but also a former editor for the journal. See our previous issues for more of her work.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

When I came to THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC at CU, I was close to earning my undergraduate degree in Environmental Design. I needed only to fulfill six credit hours in my field, and three more in an elective to walk down that aisle. The problem was it took all the effort I had to even show up for class, because my husband had just died. I still don't know what possessed me to choose "Ways of Telling the Story" for my elective, or what exactly happened during my twelve weeks in that class, but I know that I wrote—a lot. The confusion and, at times, utter helplessness that accompanied the loss of someone so close to me were emotions I couldn't begin to articulate, but what a gift it was to learn how to talk them out on paper. Paper never talked back, it never asked questions, and never once did it give me advice. It simply listened.

While I wrote often during those weeks, I know what I first wrote probably wasn't very interesting, or even worth reading. However, my instructor Kerry Reilly's encouragement kept me writing. To my astonishment, I had one of my stories published that year. I cannot help but thank her again and again. Not only did I have a story worth reading, I discovered how much I loved the art.

After that experience, I decided I wanted to earn a Master's degree in Creative Writing at Farleigh Dickinson University. I still wrote about loss, but new stories emerged as well. I began to write about my family, and their history during World War II. I arrived at a dreaded question—what's at stake? A question asked so often, it still haunts me. Even now, when I write, I worry—did I give the reader what's-at-stake? Or did I miss the mark altogether? I now understand that once I've written my story to its end, what's-at-stake seems to miraculously appear anyway. So, as I read the many wonderful ways the stories contained in this journal were told, I had to wonder about the writers: How many of them also discovered the miracle of what's-at-stake?

"LIFE AS A TWINKIE" invited me to peer at life as a Chinese girl adopted by a Caucasian family. In "AN ISLAND OF SOLITUDE" I pondered the difference between solitude and loneliness, and came to understand how a memory could become an addiction like cigarettes in "HER BEAUTIFUL CURSE." "MERIDIAN" took me on a solo camping trip in the snow, while "WHEN YOU'RE A STRANGER" sent me down lonely highways in Utah. I listened in on randy behind-the-scenes dialogue between restaurant workers in "CHICKEN WINGS AND NICETIES." I read of loss: death, suicide, and the ways people deal with both. I was moved by the miraculous evolution of story.

An axiom of THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC is, "We write because we have something to say, but we don't always know how to say it out loud." Perhaps this is the stake, then—that we have a story, and when we write it all out, sometimes things get said that we had never thought of before we wrote them. I believe that's what happened for me in that first writing course I took at CU, because as I look back, I realize my pain did dissolve. I believe writing had much to do with that. I believe you too will find such miracles in the pages that follow. I believe you will be moved as I was by the lyricism and the honesty, the humor and, in some cases, the tremendous courage it took to write. In a world as confusing and strange and too often sad as ours, saying it on paper when we can't always articulate it out loud, we find what's-at-stake—the miraculous evolution of story. It is the reason we write.

KERSTIN LIEFF

Having the opportunity to work on the editing team for JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY is always amazing. We get the privilege to read and delve into the experiences of other undergraduate writers, to see through unique lenses their perspectives on their world, their events and the people they know. Running on our fourth issue so far, it's heartening to know that each group of new submissions proves that interest in creative nonfiction genres is very much alive and well. We received dozens of submissions—both in art and writing—and being able to sift through them all, and review and discuss them in our makeshift round table of editors, was and will continue to be truly a pleasure and an honor. We want to thank each and every one of our writers, photographers, and artists for helping us make this journal a reality, to continue the proud legacy of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY and its dedication to our students, and to provide a platform for the young voices of our undergraduate campus. It's been a blast working with all of the writers and faculty to make this journal happen.

ANDREW HECOCKS AND AMGD ABDELGADIR, EDITORIAL STAFF

For years, Hannah and I have toted around cameras, amassing a range of styles and subjects. Becoming Art Directors was just personal evolution. We were delighted to receive a variety of mediums from film to watercolors, covering a plethora of styles, from students across campus. Our search for JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY's artists to work with the written pieces in this issue proved successful as we received dozens of powerful and beautiful works of art and photography. We know how empowering it is to be published and we're excited for the opportunity to publish the best undergraduate works of art on a public platform. We hope you enjoy them.

CHAD HENDERSON AND HANNAH VINE, ART DIRECTORS

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY continues as a print publication annually (no longer every semester). Why write "Volume Three" for our fourth "Issue?" Because we started that way, flying against the digital wind by publishing print twice a year. Because we like memoir but also pieces with footnotes; scholarly journals don't put leaves on their covers (neither do we; like leaves, but not on our covers). Mostly, we'll keep "Volume" because the student staff decided on it in last Fall's course for journal production (WRTG 2090—another confusion, I know). Volume Three as a fourth issue remembers that the quantity of strong writing produced by University of Colorado at Boulder undergraduates filled an issue every semester for our first year and a half (and, with enough funding, still could). VI-I1 started us out, then VI-I2, then VII-I1—and now we're annual, with VIII. Printing once a year allows us to get copies of this beautiful print journal into more hands. And with Independent Study students on staff between Fall offerings of our JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY course, we can develop more online. After you've read Volume Three, look for more on the web in months to come.

Send us your writing (if you were a CU Boulder undergraduate when you wrote it) for next year's print Volume. Look for us to add multi-modal creative nonfiction online—and send us yours. THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC continues to teach strong sentences and graduate-level research techniques, but some of us also teach digital storytelling—essays, arguments, scholarship, and creative nonfiction in all its sub-genres, pairing words spoken with words read—with images and sound in all digital forms.

KERSTIN LIEFF came to us for a writing class with Senior Instructor and Journal Faculty Advisor Kerry Reilly, finishing a degree started years earlier. She had just lost her husband to metastatic melanoma; with Kerry's encouragement, she wrote powerfully from that devastation, publishing in *FragLit*, "when all has gone. white." That encouragement urged Lieff to graduate work in creative nonfiction. There, a cache of her mother's letters to a lover during the Russian occupation of Berlin, along with hundreds of hours of interviews before her mother died, gave Lieff the material for *Letters from Berlin*, the 2013 winner of the Colorado Book Award for Biography. Whether or not the survival of those letters says anything about the surprising persistence of writing on paper (we think so), we are honored to have Kerstin Lieff delivering our first guest forward, and the keynote for our Launch of this issue.

JAY ELLIS, FACULTY ADVISOR

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Photo by David Coons

THE DOVE

By Maja Solbakken

Looking into my jewelry box, I see way too many necklaces, rings, bracelets and other sorts of accessories. I often run late for school because I can't decide which one to wear. Today, however, I know exactly which one I am going to wear. I pull out the bottom drawer, and there it is: the dove. I hold it up gently and let the white golden necklace slowly run through my fingers.

"That's a great piece of history you're holding right there."

I didn't notice my mother enter the room.

"I guess you can say that," I reply without taking my eyes off of the dove.

"Do you want me to help you put it on?" She says with a faint smile. I nod gently and give her my dove.

I received it from my grandmother for Christmas two years ago. She got it from my grandfather after the war ended in 1945. She was only 17 years old back then, and he was 19. Doves had always fascinated my grandfather. He used to bring me to the park to feed them when I was a child. As I sat on his lap, he would tell me stories about how they tricked the Nazis and saved a lot of lives. He was originally a lumberjack, but dur-

ing the war he worked for the Norwegian resistance opposition as a soldier helping Jews to cross the border to Sweden. They were transported to our village hidden in crates, and then guided through hidden paths over the mountain pass into Sweden.

"Of course the Nazis knew what we were doing, but they never found any proof: no one knew the mountains better than us, or how to handle the cold winters." I would listen to him talk in awe.

"They would threaten and interrogate us, and rummage our houses in the middle of the night, but they never found anything and no one ever spoke of it." I was too little to understand back then, but I will never forget his stories.

My favorite part, however, was when the war ended, and they celebrated it by releasing hundreds of doves in the park. I don´t know whether he gave the dove necklace to my grandmother as a symbol of peace and love, or just because he liked it. I never asked.

"Are you ready?" My mother's voice takes me back to reality.

"Yes, I just have to grab my notes." I answer absently.

"Good, I'll be waiting in the car with the others."

I stare into the mirror. My usually long, free-hanging hair is tied up in a tight knot. I look older with my hair this way, but I do not feel any more mature. My grandfather was only two years older than me when he joined the army and risked his life fighting for our country. I could never do that. My grandfather is the strongest person I will ever know.

Silence invaded the car ride. I am seated between my two older brothers, staring at the road ahead of me. As we leave the car my oldest brother lays his arm around my shoulder.

"Are you nervous, little sis?"

I try my best to collect my emotions and give him a smile, but all I can muster is a weird grimace. Half an hour later, as I take slow steps towards the guitar, my heart is palpitating, working faster and faster—even faster than a rabbit on ecstasy. My legs are shivering beneath me like dying leaves. I do not even need to look down, I can feel it: all eyes on me, staring with no smiles, just expectations.

In my mind, all that I'm thinking is, "Why the hell did I sign up for this?" But there is no more time to think. I take a deep breath, trying to clear my head. All my senses sharpen: the lady in the third row clearing her throat, Uncle Thor opening the program sheet, a baby crying, someone chewing gum like it is an Olympic sport. My skin pushes through a fog of lilies and roses. As I take all of that in, I notice my fingers are moving across the strings, filling the room with sounds that most would find beautiful. The music flows into people's ears. They are enjoying this moment, but I find it horrible. It's like a hole is being drilled through my heart, and my happiness is dripping out of it. Each chord sends the drill further into my heart, and my sadness seeps from the wound. After the intro my voice chimes in. My own version of Sissel Kyrkjebøes "Innerst I Sjelen" ("Innermost in My Soul") starts to surge through the room.

I cannot look at the audience. My eyes are closed and I am back in the park with my grandfather. We are feeding the doves. I drop the breadcrumbs and, in one second, what feels like hundreds of doves are attacking my feet. I scream. My grandfather reaches out his hands and pulls me into his lap.

"Doves are like boys, Maja. They only bully you because they like you!" He says, as I can feel his heavy heartbeats against his chest, and the strong smell of aftershave.

I could not be in a safer place.

Sound waves from the last note resonate around the room. I am back. I raise my head, open my eyes and stare at the crowd. No applause or smiles. I do not bow. Some people nod gently at me, telling me "good job" without actually using words. I put my hand in my purse and pull out a small paper dove. My grandfather taught me how to fold them. I walk purposefully to the middle of the room. My feet can barely carry me. I have never felt so weak. I place the dove on the top of the casket and lean down. Wanting to say something, a last word, but my voice cracks—instead warm tears stream down my cheeks. As I walk down the aisle back to my seat, I see a dove on the windowsill. From the corner of my eye, I think I see it spread its wings and fly away.

My legs are shivering beneath me like dying leaves. I do not even need to look down, I can feel it: all eyes on me, staring with no smiles, just expectations.

Photo by Hannah Vine

HER BEAUTIFUL CURSE

By Pauline Zenker

Then I woke up.

He deliberately held a cigarette up to meet his lips like an old friend. A blue flame wrapped comforting arms around his smoky treat. He inhaled a deep breath of velvet smoke, slowly releasing a cloud of tension that lingered between us outside a greasy New York City diner. Watching him brought me back to her, my beautiful curse. He stood smoking his Marlboro Red with an artistic manner in an elegancy that you can only pick up from her. The exhaled fumes made the clear a little hazy. I was falling into a silky dream, one where I found myself miles overseas surrounded by her.

This dream started black and white like a broadcast show on an outdated television set. Before I realized, she was painted over with the oils from an impressionist time, coloring the black and white. She was arresting and always remained graceful. She pulled me into her world like she had planned, like a street gambler would on the avenues and boulevards. My eyes explored and followed the lines of her rich baroque architecture, lengthy

men in black tailored suits, an endless amount of picture frames, and the river boats that circulated through her veins, pumped by a nostalgic heart.

My reverie was disrupted by an unpleasant bitterness lingering on my tongue from the New York coffee. I looked back at him, the stranger, to see colorfully detailed flames slowly burning crisp paper and the fragrance of tobacco in this cement city that we tolerate.

A familiar shrieking noise quickly lured me back into my daunting dream. My ears had become fine-tuned to the similar sound of reckless New York City drivers. This shouting silence was the token symbol that brought me from one to the next. It was the music of metal yelling as the wheels ran deeply into the tracks. As I sat down for a transient ride on the metro, the occasional performer would harmoniously charm all the travelers with the familiar Portuguese tune, "*Ai Se Eu Te Pego*," on a dull accordion. Distracted, sometimes I would miss my stop and go further than I had anticipated. This didn't bother me. I was gifted with the luxury to get deeply lost under her skies that Van Gogh's mesmerizing hand once painted.

Uproarious honking from aggressive yellow taxis forced my eyes to open. Glancing over, I saw he had inhaled almost half of his cigarette. The biting perfume, permeated his clothes, absorbed me back into this dream.

I stood on her newly born street, Rue Oberkampf, where all the young were scattered. I sat on the rooftop of seven floors, the tallest you'll ever grow in a skyline so modest. I sunk into these white cushions with the starry night shining ever so gently on my dark clothes. This is where I went to find music, while the tall church's bells would play along, as the spotlight from Gustave's tower would find me through the crowds.

"But Paris was a very old city and we were young and nothing was simple there, not even poverty, nor sudden money, nor the moonlight, nor right and wrong nor the breathing of someone who lay beside you in the moonlight."[1]

1. Hemingway, Ernest. *A Moveable Feast*. NY: Scribner's, 1964; 58.

Then I woke up from this dream I once lived.

He nearly finished his smoky outing before I noticed. I watched him pinch the butt of the cigarette and extinguish it on the lifeless cement that stood below us. I knew it wasn't his last because it never was. That was okay. I understand the desire of addiction: The desire to return to her, my addiction, the best place I have come to know. Until I return to Paris I can't help but dream of her. I am stuck with this beautiful curse.

Photo by Hannah Vine

Photo by Jessica Williams

ANSWERS

By Laura Ridyr

The west is a promise. It is the promise that beyond the next sharp bend in an endless stretch of road, there is a something. A something worth having that one cannot touch and which one cannot view—whether through camera lens or oil paints or prose—anywhere else. A something, intangible but somehow visceral. It is also a promise of things: the concrete but unquantifiable. Riches, resources, or homes for a vagrant kind of soul.

Things and somethings. These are the promises that once drew wanderers and treasure hunters, gold miners and desperados driven by greed as much as need; that enticed outlaws and optimists alike. The somethings seduced ranchers motivated by the necessity of space, as well as the persecuted seeking some semblance of freedom that never existed for their forefathers. The west promised a place where the ability to survive was qualification enough to be considered human and where justice was queen, until she wasn't. Where, at times, blood and squalor and trails paved with tears over-

powered her. A place for the independent-minded fleeing the masses and the corrupt seeking exemption, a place where the athlete goes for a challenge, and the moneyed now seek the best views. The west is the promise of contradiction: of life and death, of wealth and destitution. The desert is now home to the likes of Las Vegas, and somewhere behind a jagged fence line, a mansion looks out on the Dallas Divide. Oprah lives outside of Telluride on a patch of land worth millions. A patch of land just over the mountains from the tiny semblance of a town where my great grandfather worked himself to death to make a living, sucking in silica and candle smoke as he hammered along quartz veins by hand in the dark damp of silver mines.

The west is the promise of every dream that wanderlust can endeavor to imagine, but it is also a hard reality. It is heat and storms and snow, rattlesnakes and falling rock, earthquakes and—so they say along the Cosmic Highway that winds down from the Sawatch—aliens. The west is where the weird come to retire, in the gated community of Area 51, near the tourist-town charm of Roswell. Where the strange go to be apart from the rest of the world, to seek solitude under broad swatches of sky. A place where people and fortunes disappear on treacherous byways and inside darkened casinos, and where fortune seekers of old paid in blood and black lung for the hope of coal and gold. Gold, a promise in its own right, which has since been replaced by other resources infinitely more valuable: oil. Farming subsidies. Water.

The shouting over that precious thing begins at ten thousand feet where tributaries turn to creeks, tumbling off rock and pine to the grassland below, while elsewhere down the line people bite their nails in an incongruent desert paradise of recycled liquid and neon cowboys. But the water does not come easily. Like the mountainside that has—over time—crushed and frozen and buried and starved miners and road builders and explorers and commuters as payment for daring its slopes, so too the rivers exact their tolls. Water tempts the definition of finite in great and sudden swells, sweeping away the roads that lead to headwaters and tearing out the foundations of the houses that perch on riverbanks. You asked for water, say the skies and say the mountains, as every hundred years or so they offer it ten-fold. They surrender it in such excess that the ground can't absorb it and the dams burst and the people, standing knee deep in mud when the flood passes, are looking at no simpler a solution than they'd been looking at the day before.

A place where people and fortunes disappear on treacherous by-ways and inside darkened casinos, and where fortune seekers of old paid in blood and black lung for the hope of coal and gold.

The west is the promise of well-intentioned retribution. It calls in debts with little warning, long after the dealers have forgotten that they're bound to laws of even exchange. Deserts run dry till they flood. The prairie is endless until it comes to a careening halt against the mountains' feet. Snow sits quietly before the avalanche. From the foothills' shrub-shrouded sides to the rain slickened cliffs where the coast meets the sea, the question is never if there will be a price to pay, but when, and how high.

That is not to say that the west knows no forgiveness; that it is any more evil than it is good in its state of reckless nature. To say that the west is wicked would be to say that God is comparable to man or that the rivers don't know their own courses. It would be to say the mountains don't know where they stand, would be to assume that their indifference to the fall of trees and the passing of time stems from meanness and not from nature. From the understanding that, as time decays, their iron innards will inevitably corrode. And despite this, they will outlive us.

Men may dig out their cores while fire and blight strip them of their outer dressings, but they themselves will go on long after the trees and the men are gone, standing—if a bit worn—until the world hangs naked in the solar system under an exploding sun. The mountains know this. Perhaps we know this. Perhaps the promise of knowing this is a part of the something drawing us westward; one of the answers we seek. Perhaps their endlessness is enticing to the flighty, briefly present human heart.

The west is a promise of a something. Of an eternity. It is a promise of adventure, of hope, of beginnings; of sanctuary and wildness. It is the promise of things. It drives a hard bargain and offers, in exchange, a raw and uninhibited world where the same elements that grant life also grant destruction, but where, nevertheless, life persists. It is a promise humanity runs towards in multicolored droves, for it is a promise not of winning nor losing, or of failure, or success; but a promise of movement. Of being moved. Of contradiction. The West is a promise of questions, because it is the promise of answers.

WIND

By Keiran Pirie

Photo by Alexandra Upadhyaya

The wind is mysterious. It leaves me with such wonder and fascination that it's hard to decide if I find it treacherous or exquisite. Is the wind a he or she? Is it the Katrina who blew out the candles before going to bed? Or is it Joplin; who found himself lost in southern Missouri? I like to believe the wind is the beauty I hear when I don't want to hear anything.

Peter, Paul, and Mary told me "the answer is blowin' in the wind," but what does that mean? Nothing I've come to learn in the city is ever that easy. The only thing I know to do, is let its quietness fill me up, ignore the rest. Pretend the screech and screams do not exist. When I hear the rustle of orange leaves scatter gracefully, I zone out and find a different place inside of me. This place is the closest thing I can relate to feeling truly free.

Wind is such a simple word it should have a simple meaning, but it doesn't. Shouldn't I know the answer to wind, being from the "Windy City" of Chicago. A doctor is a cooling sea breeze in the Tropics, and I'm never going to become a doctor. So in theory I can't understand the language. The language that originates in one place but really never stays. A girl you thought you knew just became a runaway.

I have this feeling deep in my gut. It seems to die, then rise again. The wind may travel far from home, but I sure know where I belong. Does the wind ever feel homesick? Happening all over the world, where did it begin? Some people say wind comes from the unequal heating of the Earth's surface, but if that were true, then where's its mom? It needs a home to keep it warm, the wind has lots of thoughts to store.

Invisible to the naked eye, escaping millions one day at a time, that's the power I need to find, much more useful than any wind turbine. Wind power doesn't rule over man. It produces four percent of the world's energy, not having to kill anything.

Not having to deal with the pressure of making someone proud. The wind does as it pleases, and usually with a howl. If a human faces a problem, a struggle is to come. The wind will blow right through it, as if it never were. Life has an ending point much like a book. A summer breeze always seems to find a nook. The expectation of wind is to be kind and friendly. To allow young creatures to herd in flocks, warm and pure, without a harsh breeze to disdain their allure. Often unpredictable the wind will see what's fit. Having no eyes or no shape it might just be a myth. A human, however, shall do their job. Whether it's being a student or fighting a war. The schedule is premeditated and really quite a bore. The only thing unpredictable is time itself. How will the years impact your soul before your ashes are on a shelf?

"Thought is the wind, knowledge the sail, and mankind the vessel," said Augustus Hare, a man with great wisdom. This phrase confuses me much like a prism. Looking closer I realize the truth it speaks. Build your ship with a brain and find what you seek. To whom do we listen when given a direction? The voice in our ear? Our own reflection? There's a silent killer in the air. The fever is rampant and really not fair. Don't look around now, you'll see it instantly. Found within ourselves is a deadly mystery.

Why is a classic romance titled *Gone with the Wind*? Is it because wind has become a phrase to take something forever? To carry a love that should have been never. A straw in the wind is a sign for tomorrow. Wipe away your past and forget the sorrow. Mankind doesn't know the meaning of love. We would rather put money far above. The wind loves to ring the chimes. Bring a smile to my face a mile wide. Compassion is a sought after trait. Human feelings are mostly hate.

I love the sound of nothing. Nothing to me feels a lot like something. A something nobody else can feel because it's unique to me.

Being lost should be expected today. Can't lift off the stone that seems to weigh. Looking for a place to thrive. Follow the breeze and get left behind. The wind won't wait. It moves with great speed. Much like a lecture, slow down, I plead. The wind is great friend's with reality. Not caring about anybody's vitality. You work all day in hopes of a better tomorrow, to find around the corner a new Sleepy Hollow. Why must our aspirations be cut so short? The wind doesn't stop, it only soars. A wind symphony plays off in the distance, but trapped you are by your own existence. Not having time to enjoy the beauty of wind, you must return home to your own kin.

I love the sound of nothing. Nothing to me feels a lot like something. A something nobody else can feel because it's unique to me. Day dreaming on a cloud holds the key. The wind knows all, it's been to Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Wind is air, it keeps us alive. We welcome it with diesel, methane, in hopes it will survive. Nothing turns into something when everyone realizes its importance. The wind has no name tag, should we give it our fortunes?

Acts of random kindness are very rare. But the wind never fails to blow through my hair. It's as easy as a hello in an unfamiliar place. Just like a mountain wind blowing in your face. Happiness can be caused by the weirdest of things. If you are lucky, something will cling. Hopefully this happiness is produced naturally. Addiction to synthetic love is only fantasy.

Photo by Hannah Vine

THE EXISTENTIAL LADYBUG CRISIS

By Alyssa Chacon

I've always been a bit of a nihilist. I believe the world is meaningless and that there's no point to anything in it. The problem is I wish I didn't see the world this way, so I try to find inspiration in anything I can. Eventually, everything disappoints me by being underwhelming or void of meaning. My favorite question to ask people is, "What do you live for?" A lot of people can't answer the question at all. Some try to argue that in the end they want to be able to look back on their lives and say they were good people. I comment that in the end they won't look back on their lives at all. They'll be dead. They'll be nothing. That ends the conversation because it's impossible to argue with nothing. Undeniably, everything comes to an end. Everybody will die, the world will end, and there will be nothing to show for it. So, of course there's no point. We're all working towards nothing. It's a radical idea, but it's all I can ever think about.

I don't know why I started feeling this way. I've gone through a lot in my life, but I don't blame anybody for my problems. I could blame it on seeing my grandma's dead body when

I was eight. I could blame it on the times when we didn't have water, electricity, or food. I could blame it on my mom for being a drug addict. I could blame it on my mom for begging me to let her kill herself one too many nights, convincing me I was the one who should feel guilty. I could blame it on my mom for slitting her wrists in the backseat of the Cadillac leaving me covered in blood. I could blame it on my mom every time, but I don't. It's not her fault that the world is cruel. Everybody experiences hardship; that's just the way it is. It sounds like I'm bitter and sad about the bad memories from my past, but really my experiences have opened my mind to accept things for what they are. I expect things to disappoint me, so when they do—and they always do—I accept it and move on. Life follows an inescapable pattern, and even the smallest moments fall victim.

One day, I was sitting in front of a hallway window, waiting for my biology class to start. I was completely lost in my phone, scrolling through other people's lives, when suddenly I was pulled back into reality. Something landed on my head and started crawling around in my hair. I shook it out as quickly as I could. My heart started beating so fast I could hear it in my head. I panicked because even the sight of a bug will make my skin crawl all day. Bugs may be harmless, but I can't help but to be repulsed by them. Looking around for the culprit, I was pleasantly surprised to find a ladybug crawling around on the floor. All my fears faded away.

Ladybugs are constantly appearing in my life at important moments. They're like a sign from the world that everything will always be okay. Once after a bad day at school, I got on the bus and there was a ladybug crawling on the window. There was a ladybug on the ground at my grandma's funeral. When my mom had another episode and ended up in the hospital, I woke up to a ladybug sitting on my nightstand. That's why I feel so strongly about such an arbitrary thing. It's amazing that a ladybug could be in the right place at the perfect time.

I put my finger in front of it and let it climb onto my hand. I watched as it crawled to the edges of my fingers, trying to find solid ground. As the ladybug was exploring the landscape of my hand, the class was let out and I put it back on the ground. Hundreds of kids started flooding out of the lecture hall. The hallway filled with the noise of conversation and shuffling feet. Through the chaos, I looked down and saw the ladybug caught in

Ladybugs are constantly appearing in my life at important moments. They're like a sign from the world that everything will always be okay.

the middle of the rush. The poor thing was facing his imminent death. People walked right over him and came so close they would just nearly miss crushing him. Every second that went by was painful. Everybody just kept walking along completely unaware of the miracle under their feet. He was frozen in the middle of the crowd waiting for his fate to be determined. One wrong step and he'd be dead. It was one of those horrifying scenes that you don't want to watch, but just can't look away from.

After the crowd had dissipated, he was still standing there in all his glory. It was a miracle that my little symbol of hope had been faced with inevitable death, yet survived. It didn't even make sense that he was alive. Feeling relieved, I was prepared to go to class satisfied with my life. Then some brute in combat boots came down with one swift step, unknowingly destroying his innocent life. She walked right out the door with his guts stuck to the bottom of her boots. I just stood there in shock, staring at the remaining pieces of his tiny body scattered across the carpet.

The world had yet again made a cosmic joke at my expense. In a moment that tiny creature was crushed, along with all my hope, affirming my belief that the world is ultimately meaningless. After all was said and done, it was pretty funny. At least I can laugh at how absurd it all is. It's hard coming to terms with the fact that the world has no meaning and you have no purpose. People are so afraid of mortality. It's close to impossible to imagine what it would be like not to exist. It's terrifying to think that one day you'll be gone. If you really think about it, death is so natural and pure that it's almost beautiful. We all struggle and work so hard to reach goals that will have no value. We try and try, but it's useless. I'm still enchanted by ladybugs, regardless of their fragility. They're going to die one day, but that doesn't mean I can't enjoy them while they're alive. The paradox is that even though I see life as worthless, I still choose to continue to live it.

LOVE IS IN THE EARTH

By Matthew Thomas

Photo by David Coons

Emily, first things first, I'd like you to say hi to Ryan for me. Tell him his friends are safe with me, and that he needs to take it easy with all the wine Jesus keeps pouring him- so he doesn't forget to help you shine the moon. I went in to your room yesterday (sorry I know you hate it when I do that) and found the earrings I bought you for your last birthday. You never got around to putting them on . I'm just gonna assume that they were so beautiful, you were afraid you'd lose them.

You were my greatest fan, and my biggest critic. I'm going to miss having you around to keep me honest. And yet, I have the strange feeling that you will still keep me truthful even if you are not physically present.

I exhale and watch the room around me disintegrate. I'm tossed through the rings of Saturn into the realm of my mind, which lies well beyond physical incarnation. It is the most unfamiliar, beautiful, insightful, and terrifying thing my eyes have ever seen. The waking world around me has become a dream.

It's clear now that one can travel very far through the universe not by spacecraft, but by simply looking within one-

self. The self, unlike the ego, is not a singular entity that exists separate from the universe around it, but is the universe, which surrounds all of us. What we see and feel here and now is what the entire universe is doing.

"All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force which brings the particle of an atom to vibration and holds this most minute solar system of the atom together. We must assume- behind this force- the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind. This mind is the matrix of all matter."[1]

My sister was always the sober one at the party because my sister never wanted to miss a second of consciousness. She knew that what you do with your time here matters. She knew that no possession was to be taken for granted and that no thing was to be taken seriously. When she was mad at me, it felt as if a tidal wave had hit me. When I could get her to grin, it made me feel like I was the funniest person in the world. When I could get her to laugh, the world didn't exist at all.

"For truly I believe that Ill Fortune is of more use to men than Good Fortune. For Good Fortune, when she wears the guise of happiness, and most seems to caress, is always lying; Ill Fortune is always truthful, since, in changing, she shows her inconstancy. The one deceives, the other teaches; the one enchains the minds of those who enjoy her favour by the semblance of delusive good, the other delivers them by the knowledge of the frail nature of happiness. Accordingly, thou mayst see the one fickle, shifting as the breeze, and ever self-deceived; the other sober-minded, alert, and wary, by reason of the very discipline of adversity."[2]

The doctors called it a "brain tumor." But if you'd ask me, I'd say that my sister's giant soul was simply too large for the small, slender, and beautiful figure which the Earth had provided her spirit. A spirit so beautiful and pure, that it was able to uplift everything and everyone that came near her.

We come into these bodies and we are given a simple task from our Earth mother. This task is to assist everything and everyone within our environment. And although we are all given this task, it seems that very few of us actually take it seriously. It seems that a lot of us have forgotten the instructions for how to live on this planet.

1. Max Planck. "Das Wesen der Materie." [The Nature of Matter], speech at Florence, Italy (1944) (from Archiv zur Geschichte der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, Abt. Va, Rep. 11 Planck, Nr. 1797).
2. Boethius. "Philosophy" The Consolation Philosophy. W.V. Cooper, trans. London: Dent, 1902.

It seems that a lot of us have forgotten the instructions for how to live on this planet.

My sister had not forgotten these instructions. For the eighteen years that she lived, my sister was able to make everyone she talked to feel like her best friend.

"But death is not easily escaped from by anyone:
All of us with souls, earth-dwellers and children of men,
Must make our way to a destination
already ordained where the body,
After the banqueting,
Sleeps on its deathbed."[3]

In the seventh year of my life, right as the sun began to shine just a little more than the moon, my dog Isis got sick. Isis was a Siberian husky, and she was beautiful. Her coat sleek and well groomed; her senses keen. She was strong, and she was much smarter than the average pup. Undoubtedly though, her most beautiful feature was her eyes. Her right eye was as brown as the bark of a sturdy evergreen tree. But her left eye was a piercing turquoise as blue as the sky itself. So blue that it was almost white.

I once asked my mother exactly why my dogs eyes were different colors and other dogs weren't.

"It's because your dog is magic."

Isis died of lung cancer on the first day of that summer. Everyone in my family cried, even my father. It was the first and last time he would ever let me see him cry for the next fourteen years. And it wasn't even really a cry. He didn't sob like I did. Rather, he sort of reluctantly released two or three tears onto the aged quilt, which had become his face.

My father buried Isis. He carried her to the top of a steep hill which over looked everything and everywhere I'd ever known. He took a hard, blunt stone and used it to carve her name into a piece of sandstone.

It's been a very long time since I've gone to see her.

3. Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.

I had an amazing friend once tell me: "You think you're alive? No— you're just asleep on the couch in life's waiting room. Once you die, that's when you wake up and start living."
Death is an act of creation. You knew this better than anyone. Right now, in your death, you are living more than all of us. This thought brings me much comfort.

Cause you definitely got the right idea Em. No more homework, and no more class. Now, you get to play in the snow forever with Isis, Gracie, and Grandpa Bill. Bailey can come too, but I'm pretty sure she hated the snow.

I gotta say though, I'm quite jealous—I would like to join you as soon as possible. But apparently God's got this whole "master plan" thing—so I got to stay here and do a few things first.

Wherever you are though, that is where the moon is, where my heart is, and where my home is. From you, I have learned that home is not a particular place. Rather home is state of mind, which one must constantly master throughout life. If you are "going home", well then you are never going to get there.

Wherever you are though, that is where the moon is . . .

"High on a stag the Goddess held her seat,
And there were little hounds about her feet;
Below her feet there was a sickle moon,
Waxing it seemed, but would be waning soon.
Her statue bore a mantle of bright green,
Her hand a bow with arrows cased and keen;
Her eyes were lowered, gazing as she rode;
Down to where Pluto has his dark abode." [4]

Me and my sister stand next to a pile of dirt which sits adjacent to my apartment complex.
"Do I have to?"
"Yes," I say, "now take your boots off."
I slide my shoes and socks off quickly and watch my sister do the same. Once I'm sure she has fully removed her footwear, I allow myself to sit in the dirt and bury my feet.

4. Chaucer, Geoffrey. Neville Coghill, trans. "The Knight's Tale," *The Canterbury Tales.* London: Penguin Books, 1951.

"No way. This isn't going to do anything."
"Oh come on. What have you got to lose?"
Through her piercing aquamarine eyes, my sister shoots me a look so skeptical that it would even make a Nobel quantum physicist doubt the words coming out of his mouth. After a long, well-placed pause, she finally sighs and decides to play my game for just a minute or two. She slowly lowers her fragile young body into the Earth.
I start to cover her feet with the dirt.
"Ew . . . Matt this is weird as hell."
"No, no—just simmer down."
Her feet are fully submerged; I hand her a of cup chamomile tea. She raises the mug to her mouth and cautiously lets the smallest amount of liquid to slide in. As she sips the tea, we start to talk about nothing in particular. Her life has been far too serious lately; all I really want right now is for her to smile. I can tell she has been somewhat lonely lately; she thinks sitting in the mud for healing purposes is "weird as all hell", but I can see she is happy to be with me either way.
One of my weird, fanatical comments that I make only around people I'm comfortable with finally get's through—she starts to laugh. And for this instant everything is okay. As long as she can still smile, as long as she can still shamelessly show me, her perfect grin that could light up the moon itself, everything is going to be alright for me.
"Hey, this feels kinda good actually." As she says this-her smile lifts my heart upward, past my fiery, toxic need for power—into the loving air, which controls no thing.

I'll see you with the full moon. Every 28 days you will pull the tide upward and release that water onto all of us. You can be seen in the tears which fall from the eyes of the countless human beings you effected positively. And I can feel you in the tears that fall from my own eyes. People have told me that 18 is too young, but I know without a doubt that your soul is already as old as the moon itself.

Our debt is to the world my sister. I will stay here until our job is done and every lost soul has been lead into the light, which you shine.
I'll see you the next time around.
Forever yours . . . ☙

Photo by Natasha Collins

AN ISLAND OF SOLITUDE

By Jonathan Fedyschyn

Loneliness. It creeps into your soul. It finds every bright corner of your life and fills it with shadows. It starves the body of hope, of desire. It rots away happiness, joy, humor, all of the so-called good emotions. Like the most stubborn tick, once loneliness has lodged itself inside you it is extremely difficult to root out. Once you think you've taken it out, that tick's head still lives beneath the surface of your skin.

In the cold, northern Atlantic, off the coast of Maine lies a small island. On one end waves roll in from the ocean, breaking against the rocks with rhythmic crashes. Each crash is an avalanche upon the ears. Crossing the island brings you across two trails, both cutting a path through a dense green wood that is only occasionally peppered with a dead brown tree.

Close to the opposite side there is a large field, dotted with houses. The field leads down to a small tan strip along the coast, a beach. Here the waves gently lap against the sand and the shells. Only the massive wake of the lobster boats break the rhythmic peacefulness. Off the beach lies a small sandbar that

only pops out at low tide. The north end of the island points to the town of Friendship. It opens into a bay, across which you can see the town harbor. Throughout the day, the harbor slowly fills back up as the colorful lobster boats make their way back home. Except for the mornings the bay always quiet and peaceful.

In Maine, there is no rooster crow, no morning songbird. The wakeup call of Maine is the lobster boat. It sets out with a diesel roar well before the crack of dawn. Alone, this roar is almost charming, a reminder of where you are and the business that drives the economy. But Friendship is a lobstering town. At 4:00AM a hundred lobster boats, sized from little skiffs to monsters that take twenty people to crew, set out from Friendship Harbor. On many days a thick fog blankets the bay. The stillness only accentuates the noise; the grumble of the diesel engines echoes off the islands.

It is here, in a small cottage perching over a cove, that I call my home. Over the years I have lived in many houses; houses in Japan, Texas, Virginia, Florida. But this is my home. I have a connection to this place. An attachment that I do not feel for any other place in the world. The small twin bed on the second floor, dressed in a sailboat comforter, is mine. Wherever I might go to school at the moment, whichever part of the world I currently inhabit, I know that bed will be waiting for me. It is perhaps the only constant thing in my life.

There are many laws in Maine governing when a lobster is large enough to be caught. Unfortunately, there is no way to keep the smaller lobsters from entering the trap when it is on the ocean floor. When they get pulled up by the lobstermen, the younger lobsters inevitably get tossed back over the side. This can be horribly disorienting, as the lobster boat may have moved a significant distance before they can throw the little lobsters back.

My life is that of the small lobster that is constantly being caught and thrown back far away from my home. My dad was a naval aviator. The most time I ever spent in a house was two years. By the time I was old enough to comprehend what was going on, I no longer cried each time I was ripped away from the people I knew. Except for when we moved to Japan. My mind could not comprehend the concept of going to another country, so far from where we were. More than six thousand five hundred miles lie between Friendship and Japan. There was a delay over the phone when talking to family back in the United States.

But my home, my real home, will always be that cottage in Maine. It is a wonderfully confusing place. Each year I desperately want to be there. When I get there, I desperately dread leaving, yet I desperately want to leave. I often find myself sitting on the dock that protrudes out into the cove. I listen to the cawing of the seagulls fighting over the small red shells that are last night's lobster dinner. It is blissful, and yet, also agonizing. From my vantage point, I can see families out on the water, tubing and skiing across the bay. Where, I wonder, are the people I can do that with?

Wanting to escape from the torture, I hike down my family's secret trail. It is marked with everlasting red dots on trees, always there to guide me home. These days going down the trail has become an expedition only I am willing to undertake. Long past are the days when my grandfather was strong enough to keep the trail clear. Now, the meandering path is cluttered with fallen trees, some small enough to step over, others standing so high you can't see past. Pine trees batter your face with their needles and completely obscure your vision. It's claustrophobic. The trail passes close to the coast, so every now and then you get a glimpse of the shining water from between the trees. Here in the coastal forest the smell of pine mingles with that of the salt water, and it is almost overwhelming.

The once green trees we used to wall the shelter have all died, and it is now brown and barren.

Eventually I reach my destination, a place that is now solely my own. In a rare moment of cooperation and boredom, my brother, my cousin, and I came together to build a small shack up a little rocky cliff. It overlooks the trail, but is impossible to spot. It was our hideaway, our personal playground. This was years ago though, and now it is in shambles. The once green trees we used to wall the shelter have all died, and it is now brown and barren. The roof is broken, collapsed from the heavy winter snow. Littered around it are dead pine needles, remnants of the roof and walls. This dead, broken down shack is punctuated by the sounds that echo through the woods. The swishing of the leaves and the slow creak of the trees in the wind. I sit, and relax, and think.

Even sitting here though, I cannot escape the melancholy. The woods are silent, but for the creepy noises nature makes. This is not a good place to reflect on loneliness. It is a reminder that here I am, home, yet once again alone. I ponder the happiness I would feel to break the silence with ululations of

joy; what it would be like to chase and scream and run through the woods with other people. But I will never know that feeling.

Around the time I was born, my grandpa and my dad (with only token help from the uncles) built Fort Friendship. Something of a tree house, Fort Friendship looked more like it had been plucked out of the old west and plopped on an island in Maine. The blond, two story structure even had wooden spikes sticking out of the top its walls. I loved and hated it. When I was alone, Fort Friendship was the best companion to an over-active imagination. In it, I fought aliens, rescued princesses, and conducted the defenses of a siege.

However, when my brother was there, I often found myself locked in the lower floor, where there is no light. It is a small, damp, smelly cube infested with bugs. There is no room to stand up, I had to sit in the dirt. Since my brother has always been significantly larger than I, all I could do was wait and hope he eventually let me out. The lower floor was a lobster trap. The lonely lobster sits and waits to be freed.

Evening falls, and I return to the cottage. My grandparents relax with a steaming cup of tea, but there is no one my age here. I curl up on the couch with a book, my only escape from the oppressive loneliness. It is only by living through these stories that I may, for moments, find companionship. My only friends were the characters in the stories. I knew them almost better than I knew myself.

It is only by living through these stories that I may, for moments, find companionship.

These books were my passion. In those days of course, you couldn't just download a book to your Nook that you picked off the internet. Even if that technology had existed, even now there is no cell reception on the island. Each book I had was a special treasure; it was carried from wherever I lived at the time, sometimes from ten thousand miles away, just so I could read it over the summer. Here, I developed the habit to reread books. Nearly every book I own I've read four to five times completely, that doesn't even count the times I've read my favorite parts. The page corners of those parts are permanently creased. I would wander the island and pretend I was living with my favorite characters.

At night, I go up to my bed. There are four beds in my room. Three of them are empty. They only serve to remind me, again, that I am alone. This room was not meant for one person, it was meant for siblings and friends. But my only siblings are

not my friends; I have no friends. When I go to sleep, I convince myself that I am not sad because I am home. But this home is also my lobster trap. I always wind up back here. Inevitably I will be plucked from the island, and thrown back out into a place I do not know. I will stumble around until I inevitably am lured back into the trap, a place that is at least familiar to me.

In the morning, the massive roar of a hundred boats wakes me up, and reminds me that I must survive yet another day in this lonely paradise. The morning sun burns away the blanket of fog, I hear the gentle lap of waves in the cove, and I breathe in the salty air. These are my pillars of strength, and there is no place in the world I would rather be.

Photo by Natasha Collins

Photo by David Coons

CHICKEN WINGS AND NICETIES

By Danielle Hawley

Chicken wings in a plastic basket clattered down on the line in front of me. The kitchen reeked of grease as the cooks dunked cut potatoes in oil and poured cheese sauce onto steaming noodles. In the dining room, a kid cried about the color of her crayons, and two men in suits shoved onion rings into their mouths. I watched from the kitchen entryway, chewing on my pink, curly straw—we were required to have a lid and a straw with our drinks. I had been a server for a month. The motorcycles hanging from the ceiling no longer impressed me and I had stopped noticing the smell of fried food weaved into my clothing. It was the slow hour between lunch and dinner. The wait staff chattered as they walked in and out of the kitchen, trying to kill time. A waitress named Jazmine skipped over and leaned against the wall next to me.

"Guess what?" She asked.

"What?"

She scooted a little closer, "I bleached my ass last night."

I choked on my drink. Adam, a waiter with thinning hair and a mohawk standing nearby, let loose a manic laugh before tucking his smile between tight lips. The kitchen hand, Gilly, snorted as he passed.

"Well, I mean, not my ass. The hole, you know? It's so pretty now! My boo is going to love it when he gets back in town," she said while I finished coughing up iced tea.

Jazmine was my age, nineteen. While I was playing flip cup at college parties, she was taking care of her three year old daughter with the help of her mom. She brought her daughter to work occasionally, and the little girl stared at everyone as though she had just swallowed cough syrup, never saying a word. I'm not sure if the time restraints of parenthood made Jazmine cut the small talk, or if she had always been this way, but everyday something she said yanked my eyes open. Actually, most of what the staff said threw me for a loop. No one in the restaurant business has a filter during conversations, except when they are talking to customers.

"I want to get a wax too. Go big or go home and all that. Do you wax? You recommend anywhere?" Jazmine asked.

"Um, I don't really know. Sorta? I mean . . . uh . . ." I faltered.

She prodded me with eyes of false lashes fanning her face, and sharply curving liner at the end of her creaseless lids.

"Hey, Danielle, I have that book you wanted to borrow," Adam said, waving a paperback while he peered around Jazmine. I hurried over and took the book. More food slid onto the line. Jazmine grabbed the tray and walked into the main room after shooting us an annoyed look.

I mouthed 'thank you' to Adam. He winked at me.

A tattooed tail hung out from the sleeve of his T-shirt. When we first met, I thought it was the tail of a tiger, but later he showed me the full tattoo—a fading demon that he had gotten done years before. He had drunkenly stumbled into a tattoo parlor and pointed to a drawing on the wall. It was his first break from the suburbia of his youth.

As a teenager, Adam traded his parents' expectation of a college degree for job hopping and moving around the U.S., and in the process learned the blunt language of restaurant culture. My family has two kids, a dog, and a white picket fence. I grew up knowing how to navigate potlucks, not conversations on literal assholes. Adam remembered going through the same shock, and would throw me a lifeline every once in a while.

I grew up knowing how to navigate potlucks, not conversations on literal assholes.

The fluorescent lights of the kitchen created shadows on his face where his skin pinched into pockmarks. Those marks always reminded me of elementary school, when I would run outside the double doors everyday to smattering of moms in workout clothes. One mom had pockmarks as well, but filled the indents with thick foundation. She would yak with the other moms about interior design and the best family photographers.

There was a day that the pockmarked mother wasn't there. The other moms whispered news about her husband's accident through painted lips. He had been hit by a mail truck while on his bike, and was pronounced dead at the scene.

The dress I wore to the memorial service was too short, and I wiggled throughout the speeches trying to pull it down. It seemed my entire school community was there: students, parents, teachers, administration, as if it was some fashionable event to attend. My classmates sniffled around me and nodded along with the heartfelt memories, though we had only known the man from the occasional sleepover.

When the pockmarked mother walked up to the podium, her hair was straightened into a perfect bob that stayed stiff with each step. She read the lyrics from the song of her wedding dance, her voice steady and hollow. Curtains were tied off with golden rope to the sides. I half expected them to unravel for an intermission.

She read the lyrics from the song of her wedding dance, her voice steady and hollow.

Afterwards, I shook her hand. Her mask of heavy makeup shifted into a smile, and she thanked me. She blinked rapidly, forcing tears back behind her lids. It had been less than a week since her husband died, and here she was, still slipped into her role. I wish I had told her it was alright to cry, but instead I moved aside so the next person could give their condolences.

I once dreamed about that funeral before a shift, but I was the one at the podium. I was reading from a script to a room full of mannequins. I woke up with a glass panel between me and the rest of the world. That day, I worked as a runner—the person who takes the food to the tables on busy evenings—so I observed my co-workers between plates.

Two of the wait staff, Ted and Harmony, flirted in the dish room. Teddy's bright orange shirt dampened from the stray of the washer. Their intertwined hands slowly swung in and out of sight. Harmony knew he was married with children, but that didn't stop the affair or the bluntness of their relationship.

Ashley, the new girl, leaned against the wall with her shoulders hunched around her neck. Hair was caught in her premature wrinkles, but she didn't pull the strands away, and the bloodshot whites of her eyes surrounded her green irises. She was hung over, probably from her usual mix of alcohol and acid. But rent had to be paid.

From the back entrance, the bartenders walked in from their break, laughing and smelling like smoke. Mike loomed over me in his six-foot-four frame, and he patted Ashley's head as he went by. His dark jeans were too short and showed his green and white socks.

This wasn't a performance like the afterschool huddles, or the packed funeral. This was real, and raw, and open for all to see. The honesty of the moment whirled around me, the outsider looking in. I checked my makeup in my reflection in a tin of ranch dressing, lifted a tray of food, and walked into the main room.

Nine hours into my double shift, one wrong order, two non-tipping tables, a children's basketball team, a hair in a quesadilla, and unlimited wing night.

A few weeks passed, and I sat on the floor of the cooler with my eyes closed. I twisted my ring. The ice, collected on a bucket of celery, melted through my shirt and goose bumps rose across my back while the uncovered bulb flickered. Outside, my manager bickered with the head cook over the consistency of BBQ sauce, pots clashed against each other, grease splattered and sizzled as it hit water, non-slip shoes squeaked. The noise seemed to condense the air around me, squeezing the space surrounding my lungs so I could only take short gulps. Nine hours into my double shift, one wrong order, two non-tipping tables, a children's basketball team, a hair in a quesadilla, and unlimited wing night. My eyebrows felt permanently sewn into a furrow.

Photo by David Coons

The door swung open and banged into the metal shelves. I scrambled to my feet and grabbed a tub of single-serve sauces. Gilly's face appeared from behind the door, and his wide cheeks folded into a smile when he saw me.

"Heya, galla! What you doing back here?" He asked.

"Just, you know, restocking."

I dragged the side of my mouth up and nodded to the bin.

"Always on top of it! You're making me look bad!"

The teasing crinkled his eyes. He reached beside me for a package of frozen fries and heaved it over his shoulder. The wet air from his nostrils condensed in the frigid temperature, creating two puffs.

"Best get back out there, galla. I swear, the kitchen's about to catch on fire, everyone's running around so much," he said, grabbing the door handle.

My hands shook slightly and made the metal bin in my hands sing. My lungs felt tight. I could see smudged mascara on my fingers from rubbing my eyes. I tossed the bin back onto the shelf.

"Wait, Gilly? I—I'm freaking out a bit. Could you stay for now?"

I wiped the rest of my makeup off with the heels of my palms.

He turned around and looked back at me. He held up one finger before disappearing back into the buzz of the restaurant. I slumped to the floor. Minutes passed, and no one came. As I surrendered and began to drag myself to my feet, the door popped open again, and the smell of french fries filled the space. Gilly sat down beside me and offered me a plate of fries, pretzels, and onion rings. I took a handful of fries and stuffed them into my mouth. Gilly cracked a grin at the ends sticking out of my mouth.

"You're going to get into trouble for this, you know. It's technically stealing," I said, still chewing.

Gilly shrugged.

"People got to stick together. Be real with one another," he replied.

We sat in silence for a moment.

"Gilly?"

"Yea?"

"Remind me to tell Jazmine that Beauty Plus gives miracle waxes."

Photo by Chad Henderson

MEANING IN MEMORY

By David Griffith

There are two places in this world I have been to that have brought me true solace: the beach and McDonald's. Now I don't differentiate, it could be Newport Beach or Clearwater Beach; as well as it could be the McDonald's off Baseline and US-287 or the one off Zuni and 128th. Granted, everyone has their own opinions about solace, but for me there are really only two kinds. There is the exotic and surreal solace of an aesthetic and rarely visited place and there is the solace of comfort, safety, and company. Each unique and separate form of solace holds stories that stick to our memories like mnemonic devices. From a rebellious and gangly kid to a slightly less gangly adult I have been molded by solace.

We were all gangly. Typically there would be three to eight of us. We would make the quarter mile trek down the hill for some McDoubles or Hot n' Spicy McChickens. At least three of us had the menu memorized, and with our soaring metabolisms and lack of anything to do on hot summer days, we were there often.

Our time spent there dwindled as summers went by. As we grew older, everything got bigger. We moved from bikes and scooters to cars, from kick the can to climbing onto rooftops at night. The younger days were better. With cars we broadened everything and McDonald's suddenly had competition for our solace. Sonic had a happy hour with half-priced drinks and because of the limitless flavor combinations the horrible service was completely worth it.

Our group changed as we did. What was once a large mixture of football and basketball-playing kids slowly became as divided as East and West Germany. The neighborhood park served as our Berlin Wall. It became the upper half, and the lower half. The upper half kids learned of the world without filters before the lower half kids could. Spurred on by a lack of sheltering and older siblings, they grew up fast. Like most lower half kids, I was from a conservative family with strict rules and preconceptions about things. These differences drove us all apart.

Growing up, I felt pretty close to Evan, who lived in the upper half. We weren't best friends, and I never admitted it, but I looked up to him. I was incredibly cocky, still am, and Evan was flat out better than me. He was faster, stronger, and better at sports, which was all that mattered to us. I was always second. Evan represented what I wanted to be. I lost a part of myself as he faltered. He began to hang out with other kids, upper half kids, while I stayed with the lower half kids because I was more like them. As high school wore on, the gap widened. Evan's parents got divorced and his dad moved to California without saying goodbye. His older brother sold drugs and there was no one Evan looked up to more. I heard stories of how his mom would bring other men home and I would want to talk to Evan about it but I knew there was no possible way to relate. So I turned my head. Evan stuck with the upper half kids and I with the lower half.

His older brother sold drugs and there was no one Evan looked up to more.

The younger days were better. I moved on to a different McDonald's with friends from school that didn't live in my neighborhood. I found solace there in the absence of the solace I had been missing at home. Once a week, the day following a Broncos' game, we would go during lunch at school. We had a card that got us Big Macs for a dollar apiece the day after the Broncos won, and they basically always did. After football season, we went every Friday during Lent because the fish sandwiches were cheap and we were sick of vegetarian food. McDonald's became a safety net for our outside troubles.

But it wasn't until recently I realized we never really went there for the food or the deals. When we were young, we went there because we could. Because our parents would tell us to be careful and some of us had to call them once we got there, but we were actually able to leave the borders of the neighborhood and venture into the unknown.

We went there for food at night, after we had gone bowling or after sundown during Ramadan for my friend Yazen. At school we went there for tradition. Our unit strengthened through our McDonald's outings and became more than friends. We were brothers. My friends from the lower half and I were always brothers. I barely distinguished them from my actual brothers and that holds true to this day.

We all talk about our ability to change our futures, and I never believed it.

I've heard that the only thing that changes in this world is the clock. I wonder if that belief is actually true. I always thought our lives were merely paradigms, set out in patterns that are predictable and arranged. Looking at my friends and family, I can tell you what will likely happen to them in the future. We all talk about our ability to change our futures, and I never believed it. I told myself that I knew things all along, and that there was no avoiding what was ultimately bound to happen to him.

I think Evan changed. I think I could have changed him too. A lot of people are predictable, but not all people. There are some rare people, like Evan, who are malleable and ever changing until they reach the impeding point of no return in adulthood. It took me too long to realize this. I let Evan go his way, when I could have changed him. I used to think about actually trying to understand him, but I never brought myself to do so. The only things that move are clocks and these special youths. So we wait for them.

But what if all youths are like this? And what if we didn't wait for them, but met them halfway? Or what if through Evan's eyes I was the one who was changing? Depending on the perspective taken, it seems like everything is adaptable, freely weaving in and out of definitive resolution up until adulthood. Men and women don't change often. Once we've chosen a path, it's very hard to go back and very easy to fall into meaningless routine.

It's natural for humans to choose what's easiest, so that's what happens. If this newfound possibility is indeed true, I am now teetering on the edge of concrete formation. Evan and I aren't friends anymore. There is no right or wrong to the story. We both have changed and time has moved us away from each other like the separation of sticky-notes from the ever-shortening stack. There is no way of telling how people change, however marginally or catastrophically, it just happens. It could be an intrinsic motivation or external factors, but it cannot be measured, only remembered.

There is no way of telling how people change, however marginally or catastrophically, it just happens.

We can reflect on time and change through our memories and experiences. I can remember hundreds of visits to McDonald's, but time blends them together. My memory holds stronger the notion of solace than of experience. It's important to distinguish the two. Experience is temporary, fleeting, and true serenity or definition of emotion is permanent. I can't recall every individual time I have been to McDonald's, but I can hold in my heart the power of the solace it has given me. The permanence in those memories is held in the setting and the smiles I can recall.

It still makes me happy, going to McDonald's. It's a different feeling than when entering other rivaling establishments. In McDonald's I feel home, incredibly comfortable to be in a calorie capital building covered in grease. The food is somatic, as if it belongs in my body regardless of whether or not I want it. Each bite I took signaled the organs in my body to function correctly, and triggered my brain to converse in human tongue with my friends. I ate through the happy and sad times. I ate in the rain, the snow, the sunshine, and those freezing days when the sun is still out just to give false hope. McDonald's was my safe haven, and when I was inside the stresses of life were left at its doors.

I could talk about the special moments. I could bring up the times I've cried laughing, or confessed my love to a girl. I could talk of the differences in my friends, and how each of them has changed so much and how I have changed so much but there is no point in that. Our true purpose in anything is what we make it. Some of us meditate on the past, working with the specifics, and we hold onto those for as long as we can. I grapple with the motif of each story. Every joke made, every story told, every laugh produced. All of these comprise meaning.

Our lives are like the bottom of a fish tank. Each rock is a memory, and all of them together make up the floor of the tank. Each rock is important, but the ultimate goal is to build up the floor. When reflecting, or when looking at a fish tank, we don't look at each rock or memory, but instead we focus on the composition that each rock or memory creates. The total sum of memories I have make up the person I am now. The solace, the joy, and the sorrow: these are what make us who we are.

The specifics don't matter. In memory, the specifics never matter. Look at a piece of non-fiction literature and it's plain to see. Memories are imperfect, so non-fiction writers fill in the blanks with perceived experiences and occurrences that didn't actually happen. The emotions of the memories are true, raw feelings that changed the writer's outlook or perspective. However, the dialogues, the characters' appearances, what they were wearing, are all fictional. We can call the author a liar but we don't. We believe it because we all know the clock moves too fast and our brains process too slowly so we try to take from memory the absolute necessities. Out of everything I've experienced at McDonald's, solace is the most important. So I won't recall those specific stories, even the ones I remember the strongest. The only thing worth noting is the solace and the time, but only how time moves, not the specifics of it. I have been walking to McDonald's since I was in fifth grade. I don't know how many times I have been, and I don't remember what I wore or the elemental properties of the earth on each day I walked, but I do remember that it made me happy.

Photo by Sofie Davis-Kos

PRAXIS

By B. James Dougherty

There's a screaming in your mind
that rips apart the synapses
leaves them flipping around like a garden hose left by your first son
and you love him but soon you will realize he is missing
the hose splashes in its own puddles on the lawn you taught him to mow
when you felt he was too young but he was eager
because he wanted to be like you
It stops the electricity
stops the pulses

melts his brain into a beautiful melted sherbet the dog would love to lick up
barking hysterically and is hungry now
No one is home
He becomes a zombie
an abomination that craves completely and lacks totally and
reminds you of the times in college when you skipped class and
sat next to your window letting the radio drown out the sound
of the sirens outside
Your breath becomes mustard seed
blooming on the bottom of your tongue
a garden planted in the manure of the broken bottles from your
youth

The same garden you would hide away in when your wife cried in
agony and convinced herself of stillbirth
the garden you slept beside when your son smiled at you for the first
time as you pressed the last of your underwear into a dirty suitcase
the garden that needs never be watered
because it grows during the lulls of the mind
and it grows in him now

GOTTA LOVE THAT DIRT

In Memory of Tino Cuellar

By Amy Helen Chu

Dirt is an ever-moving surface upon which I have physically struggled to keep my balance. My life has become emotionally intertwined with the phenomena of earthquakes, fires and floods.

When I was five years old, the earth struck from below quite sharply. In my hometown of Boulder, Colorado on Easter, 1967, my young cousin was visiting. We were sitting in our high chairs, crunching colored eggshells in our teeth and marveling over the revelation that it was harmless to do so. Mom was standing right behind us, and remembers how much it hurt when the earth slapped her feet - it stung. I was happy to have experienced this 'natural' wonder. Registering 5.4 on the Richter scale, it was not from a natural cause.

Photo by Hannah Vine

Colorado is normally considered an earthquake-neutral area. Apparently, workers at the Department of Defense's Rocky Mountain Arsenal north of Stapleton Airport had been pumping liquid waste from their weapons storage activities into a 12,000 ft. deep well. There was actually a swarm of quakes, according to the United States Geological Survey. The association of the D. O. D. injections and the ground movement was theorized, and the pumping was stopped, but not before the whole Denver suburban area felt some. Such quakes soon subsided, bolstering the theory that these were man-made.

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A wave of emotion welled over me when I met my future husband at a dance. He said he studied earthquakes, and I joked, "Does that have anything to do with the number of Quakers in the area?" It turned out he was a Quaker, like me! He liked the fact that I loved to live in the country, wanted to stay home with the children, and was not afraid of snakes.

He didn't have close friends. It was apparently because he didn't want to over-exercise his rescuer gene and have them asking him to help fix their cars. He didn't mind helping strangers because they couldn't come back for more of him. He became a workaholic, rescuing everybody at work and feeling important there. He never did understand my needs, such as my desire for time together with him, or evenings talking with my friends. A project on the "honey do" list he would largely ignore. However, if I started in, failed to make it just right and needed rescuing, why, then he'd be right home to fix it.

Soon after our wedding, we moved to earthquake country—north of Los Angeles, where the San Andreas Fault marches its way across California in a straight line except for a jag around the meeting point of the San Gabriel Mountains and the Los Padres Mountains. The jag loads it with more stress than ever. At this exact location it traverses the gigantic Interstate 5 Freeway and canal, one of the few pinch-points that moves people, food, and water into the Los Angeles City Basin.

We did not want to live in "the city that shouldn't be" as we called the whole L. A. metropolis, due to its lack of ability to provide for itself from its own natural resources. So we moved as far away and into the mountains as we could, (65 miles) anchored

He didn't mind helping strangers because they couldn't come back for more of him.

by his early Global Positioning System work at the Jet Propulsion Labs in Pasadena. We lived in Frazier Park, one of the small towns strung like pearls on a string stretched alongside a narrow arroyo that wanders away from the I-5 freeway going west along the San Andreas. Living along the fault was an exercise in my faith.

Despite the preconceptions about California being a surfer's paradise, there are actually mountains, pine trees, and snowstorms there. Right next to Frazier Park, the mountain town of Lake of the Woods recently made the news by nearly running out of water. That is yet another hazard of living in the arid mountains at the corner of the Mojave Desert. Rainfall takes a precipitous drop every year along around March and doesn't recover until December. Lately, three years of marked drought have made for dangerous situations in the forests for fires, and in the little towns for dry wells.

My family experienced some huge fires while we were in Frazier Park such as the Day Fire, named thusly because it started around Memorial Day. My farm animals were trapped on the ranch in box canyons with no other exit but through the fire zone. As the fires spread, they left hot, blackened hillsides below mushrooming ash-cloud formations. The smoke's grey and white cloud-canyons were lit orange from the miles of hellfire coals and flames spreading below. We didn't have to evacuate that time. Our ranch survived those disasters without a scratch. The red and white hens still ran in their chicken yard and the goats gamboled next to them. Our steep hills made of squared-off rocks still had pokey-leafed scrub oak trees, sage-colored stringy rabbit brush and fuzzy-seeded mountain mahogany bushes that made up the chaparral. The live oak trees still held their lofty heights and hollow ant-filled trunks. In later years, however, after the ranch was sold, those hills were burned thoroughly, right up to the foundations of the house and garage buildings.

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My neighbors were going through divorces, un-pairing one by one. The destruction was marching up the canyon towards us. I still believed the rampage would not touch us. My

faith in God seemed to grow ever stronger as each day passed, as I felt that whole neighborhoods may fall under this mayhem, but that it would not even approach me.

The San Andreas Fault line itself was quiet while we lived there. However, in 1994 the sudden release of the previously undiscovered Northridge fault threw me into the wall as I tried to climb under our bed to hide. Then it shook back, slamming me into the bed's frame. When would I make it to the floor, I wondered? The seismologist had planned for us by building a queen bed raised on stilts so we could take refuge below it in just such a case. The dog was delighted to have us join him in his little under-bed fort. Our house wasn't hurt and we had only a few items thrown off the mantel onto the peppered white carpeting below. We moved outside for the day, in case of larger aftershocks. The tremors turned out to be minor.

This was symbolic of conditions in my marriage. Differences between us had begun to rattle our lives. The seismologist was merely a Quaker by culture, and not by faith. He was an atheist, not a seeker, as I once thought. He wanted the children to be raised atheist. Being left alone a great deal loaded my life with tremendous stress. We grew apart. I did my church activities alone, or with the boys. There were days and nights I thought I would crack from loneliness. Somehow I muddled through, believing the main rift in our lives would never slip enough to separate us completely because it was held by a promise.

There were days and nights I thought I would crack from loneliness.

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The hills along the fault line completely hide the sandy creek bed and its arroyo inhabitants from the passing trucks below until the creek reaches its highest point: Apache Saddle, with 1,000-foot drop-offs. The maroon sand cliffs fall from such heights, and so suddenly, that people don't often see them until they're tipping near the dizzying edge. The locals there still collect piñon pine nuts every year despite the hazard. The grass and stubby trees give no clue as to what's ahead. During an end-of-high-school party, a graduate wandered away from his group of his friends and fell off that cliff and died.

After fifteen years of marriage, my life was recklessly and suddenly pushed over just such a cliff when the seismologist jumped off the high bed one day, admitted he "couldn't do

it anymore" and walked out. The shock, the splitting and tearing of the children in court, the stress and wrenching of shared goals, the ruination of a whole family became all I could see. My hopes, future, dreams, ranch, farm animals and all my belongings were crushed, dropped and let to tumble over one another precipitously to their own demise.

Sometimes in my mind I wander through the lonely, dusty heap of memories, looking for a hope here, a dream there—something that could be rebuilt from the refuse. There are possibilities in the items others consider wasteful. An upside down piece of a chicken hutch just needs to be righted and shoveled out. A new hinge on its egg-door could help considerably. A broken dish could still serve as pieces in a colorful mosaic tabletop. My hoarding gene goes into full swing, and I am assembling a hill of projects that need work—lots of work. Wandering through the scraps lends me hope. Collecting bits helps me feel that my life is no longer lost to me. Friends wonder how long I'm going to hang on.

A medium-sized three-bedroom trailer home in Lake of the Woods became available for cash on the day my ranch divorce sale was final. It was affordable, although it was going to be nearly impossible to sell that old house-on-wheels someday because banks wouldn't finance older mobile homes. It was right next to the arroyo, and had four bright-green poplars in the backyard that reached heights of up to seven stories. The front door was in a little alcove off a turquoise porch. My boys could have their own rooms for once, on the every-other weeks I was allowed to have them back with me. The swamp cooler kept the desert summer heat at bay, the heater seemed to warm the winter and life was going to be possible.

So we lived on the "island side," as it is still called, . . .

My boys and I began to explore the pearl-on-a-string where we landed. The San Andreas grinds the land so far along its length that the gorgeous white marble stones on one side of the fault are not found on the other side until some 300 miles to the south. So we lived on the "island side," as it is still called, which comes from the tall tale that a big quake could be great enough to shake the entire state apart and leave the coastal chunk floating somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. The fault doesn't spread apart like that. It scrapes along like someone keying a car—with another car.

As we wandered downstream, we found our side had no marble, except what had tumbled into the stream, rounded and sculpted by erosion over the years. We were living instead on the lava cones, whose hills were made of dark yellow and maroon crumbles, and brown and black pumices. The right and left banks competed for a place on the bottom of the arroyo; chalky whites here mixing with darks there.

The soils affected which trees grew there as well. Our volcanic side had short piñon trees, but the marble side had Jeffrey Pines. They looked like the Ponderosas from my childhood, but the cones were larger than my hand. I hoarded some, thinking of many projects that could be beautified by such patterned objects. All I got was pinesap spots on my hands and shirt. My sons and I marveled at how the lava cones on our side could be found a great distance to the north on the other side of the fault.

The arroyo fills with sand in quiet times, yet can get stripped of its contents quickly in a sudden desert downpour. Closer to the trailer, the larger rocks were replaced by sand embankments eroded into rough cliffs. It became clear these were not just any heaps of streambed sand. There were screen doors, chunks from wooden porches, cream-colored bricks, and metal pipes of all kinds poking out of the steep banks. We asked around and found out there was a tragic flood in the arroyo in 1971 and that's why our trailer was placed there the next year—because new sandy fields were made available for development after the recovery. The water had ripped roads and houses from Lake of the Woods and piled them up so high that they had actually dammed up the stream. The grinding had taken out the road above us in the process.

There were screen doors, chunks from wooden porches, cream-colored bricks, and metal pipes of all kinds poking out of the steep banks.

We took to searching and collecting bits of history. The thought of running across bones from people who were never found kind of creeped us out, but we gathered treasures from the stream nonetheless. Car door parts! A crystal-glass doorknob! A 7-UP can from the 70's! Blacktop! Tiles! The hoarder gene was delighted, fully functioning.

As the years passed, and the boys looked toward college, I could find no reason to continue to go into debt living in California. It was difficult to sell the trailer due to a lack of financing options and because I was storing stuff high up against the walls. The realtor couldn't imagine showing it with a hoarder living there, and I had to move out for an entire year in order to get it empty enough to suit her. I got rid of the stuff.

A friend who lived higher up the stream in Cuddy Valley needed someone at his house at seven in the morning to make sure his teenage son got to class, so I went there to live and help out. The three boys were best friends, so that was a win, and then they all scattered to different colleges.

"When are you going to move on?" My friends worried. Once the trailer was readied for sale, I did leave earthquake country and returned to live with my mom in Boulder. Back in the gorgeous, hillside house where I grew up, I often think about the quakes I have experienced in my life.

According to The National Geographic, there have been more tremors in Colorado as of late, likely caused by fracking. The policy developed in the days of activity at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal was to stop pumping if injection-induced quakes were occurring. None of these vibrations have been felt in Boulder yet.

The Colorado Front Range did, however, have its own tragic flood. This September falling rain overwhelmed the ability of the land to soak it up. I defended the house successfully by digging a small trench to allow the runoff to reach through the yard to a lower area on the hill. My mom was quite traumatized by the previously lush mountainous canyons stripped down to exposed rock piles, log-jammed streams, and people's broken lives shoveled out on the curbs in huge piles for everyone to see. The hoarding gene flexed its muscles in me, seeing opportunities in the white porcelain surfaces of toilets and tank lids for painting with ceramic layers. Collecting cabinets and bookshelves also would have been natural for me, but I resisted. I did pick up a strip of new peppered white carpeting to cover my garden walkway.

"Don't fear the floods, Mom," I told her. There are treasures to be found when the ground moves, and after all, disasters are nothing like a divorce.

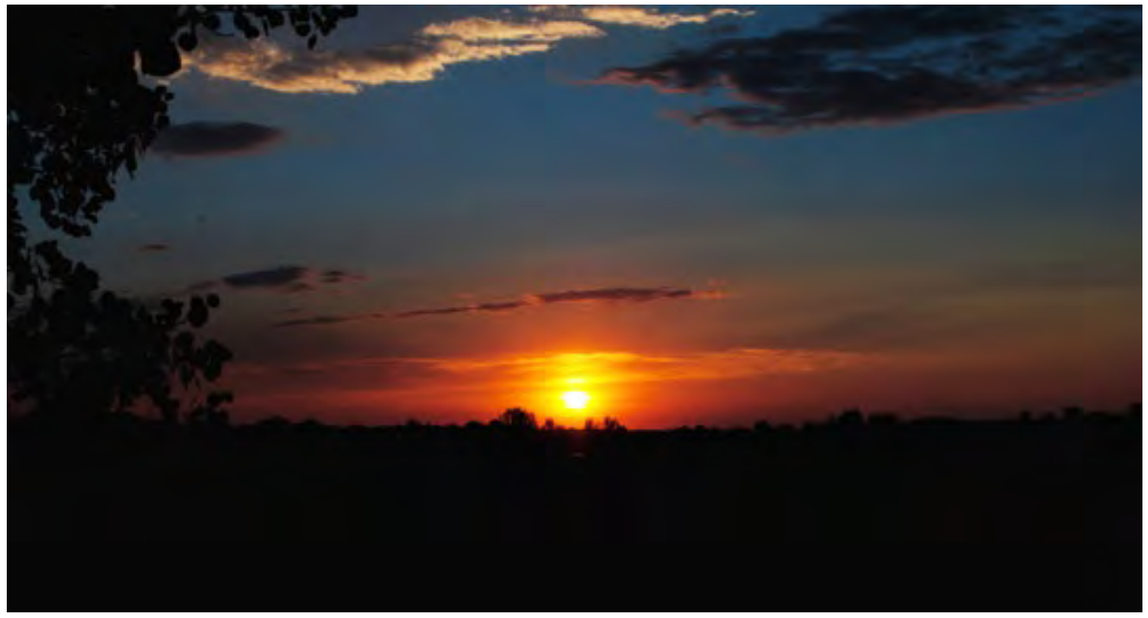

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

HIGHWAY 2

By Brian Streeter

Windows down, hair glued straight back by the cool California air hitting me right in the face. The sound of the engine's revs being drowned out by the heightened volume of the perfect cliché rock ballad now blaring from the speakers. Every turn we make putting us deeper into the mountain forest whilst the L.A. skyline became smaller. As we rounded the last hairpin, putting the city out of view, smoke from our hand rolled cigar filled the Beemer as prominently as Bob Seger's heartfelt voice. My friend Tom and I were heading up on a routine "Crest Run," our name for our recreational excursions up Angeles Crest highway.

People went up "the Crest" for many reasons, among them to hike, ski, stargaze, or to just simply drive. The Crest was to me the sixty six mile highway road that managed, impressively, to shoot through a labyrinth of chaparral wooded mountainside. Angeles Crest Highway (or Highway 2) has become a popular destination for thrill seekers of all sorts, from outdoorsmen and campers, to bikers and drug enthralled teens. Its windy upslope has captivated many with its thinly populated mountainside and

endless number of lefts and rights. At a certain time of day you could drive up and see the blood red from dusk's reflection shining in between the beach and the mountain islands far in the distance. It was that time of day as Tommy and I sped up the highway with no set destination in mind.

Tommy's coupe seemed to maneuver organically around the tight corners and bends, its leather seats always very comfortable. At this time I had been thoroughly enjoying my shotgun seat, my mood ecstatic as I coughed with puffy eyes over my swisher sweet. After clearing my lungs of the sticky smoke it always felt nice to breath in the mountain air long enough that you forgot about the ominous cloud of off-colored air that settled over the city every evening.

I would need to avoid looking at the ground in front of and beneath me, as it seemingly went on forever, an infinite number of turns. We whizzed through rolling hills, curved flat pavement, and the occasional dynamite-blasted hole in the face of the mountain. Slabs of decomposing, brittle granite jagged out of the mountain and zipped past my head, just closing in by a half a yard stick. We occupied a one-ton German-built needle, threading through the San Gabriel Mountains with near-expert precision. The oak trees and cliff sides, although visible for a split second alone, seemed to melt together as one slideshow of natural beauty. All I can remember as a nauseated child riding up Highway 2 was the looping twists and turns, like one of those circus rides designed to make you lose your lunch. Today though, I just felt the majesty of the woods, the accomplishment of conquering the mountains, and the thrill of the machine. I felt high on the bliss of the drive—my imagined opposite to carsickness. There still were things I could see on the road that could make me sick to my stomach, as I soon realized.

We occupied a one-ton German-built needle, threading through the San Gabriel Mountains with near-expert precision.

"Oh, I think those skid marks are just around this turn." Tommy said in a surprisingly flat and dull tone.

"What, was somebody trying to drift or something?" I threw out only half-jokingly.

"These marks have been there for a few weeks. It always gives me goosebumps when I drive by them."

Surely enough the sight we drove up to made me pause inside: black smears leading from the center lines, through our lane and then off the very edge of the road. No guard rail to the right of us, only a several hundred foot drop-off lined that Caltrans-maintained stretch of California highway. The two burnt rubber outlines pointed to what had to be a fatal trajectory. As our car passed safely over the spot, my heart sank and goosebumps immediately went up my arms then down my spine.

With that sight etched squarely in my mind now, hope of this trip being anything close to a leisurely drive went out the window, as surely as the roach that we had just flicked out. I immediately wondered, how fast were they going? Had the driver washed down a couple of beers with his dinner? How hard did they slam on the brakes? What song had been playing on their radio? How long did they just fly through the air intact, before becoming aggressively acquainted with the valley hundreds of feet below. I could only think of one way to survive a fall like that, and it involved a parachute. Those skid marks were a harsh reminder of the fragile nature of mortality to the thousands of motorists speeding up and down Highway 2.

While Tommy's and my ride that day ended without incident, it became increasingly more difficult to bury the sensation of uneasy apprehension that would randomly accompany me at the wheel. Although after several weeks I completely forgot about the skids on the road and the mangled cars below. Dozens of Crest Runs later and I was back on the horse, straddling the mountains with all of L.A. to my one side and Palmdale, with the endless expanse of "nothingness California" that stretched as far as the eye could see, to the other. Behind the wheel I was back to where I wanted to be and it wasn't until I was reminded that the uneasy sensations resurfaced.

"So here is the example for everybody to solve." My quirky physics teacher Dr. E. proposed to the class my senior year. "Five teens are driving back on Angeles Crest highway from a rave one night." I had a feeling like I knew where he was going with it. He chuckled slightly and slowly looked around the room as if for dramatic effect. "Their car over-corrects on a turn and the teenagers find themselves flying off the cliff which is 500 feet high. So if we convert that into meters, and we know that acceleration due to gravity acts at 9.8 meters per second squared, then find how long were the kids falling before they . . ." And then he clapped his hands loudly as if we couldn't imagine the ending of the story on our own. As I plugged the values into my calculator I got an answer of 5.6 seconds. *5.6 seconds*?

I tried to imagine as I sat in class what those last few moments might have been like. Sure they were going fast, and likely

slammed on the brakes. It must have taken a few moments to realize what was happening. That first second or two their electric music must have been drowned out by the loud, telling noise of tires losing their grip and screeching all over the pavement. As they took off over the hill, maybe it was two or three seconds before they felt the sensation of falling. Accelerating now straight downward, it must have been in seconds three to four when they realized this was it. And then that last second and a half. I could only imagine that feeling you get on a plane when it suddenly drops, and you feel your heart and lungs shoot up through you in a disconcerting way. Except I could only imagine that those teenagers felt suspended in time and air with their hearts and lungs permanently now settled to the bottom of their throats.

Stories began to come forward from distant memory about the dangerous nature of this morbid highway road. A van filled with ten rocket scientists flying off the road on their way to work (Jet Propulsion Laboratory), a famous kidnapped Raiders cheerleader found in a shallow grave, and stolen cars thieves had grown bored with. These were all things found along the route of Highway 2. The steep incline of the route straight into suburbia was a recipe for injury. Just ask my good friend Shane "Staplehead" Martin, whose less-than-stellar longboard performance landed him in a hospital bed with a coma for the better part of a week. A couple of semi-trucks had even lost their breaks on the steep last portion of the highway, becoming three-axeled bowling balls smashing through my quiet suburban neighborhood. Something about the way the highway went from the hustle and noise of the city, to the untouched, unoccupied and already dangerous mountains must have made it perfect for those who needed a hiding place. I could also see why it might become the perfect burial ground for "accidental suicides".

When I thought about Angels Crest I couldn't just think about accidents though, because I began to see how it was among the most mysterious places to kill oneself. Besides the fact that you could easily find a contour on the sixty-six mile line where you most likely would not be found for several weeks if you flew off, nobody would know what happened. Maybe he drove too fast. Maybe he drank too much. Maybe he didn't care how much he drank or how fast he could go because he had, in a way, already accepted that fate. The most alluring and disturbing fact about

I could only imagine that feeling you get on a plane when it suddenly drops, and you feel your heart and lungs shoot up through you . . .

the highway is that we will never truly know the intent. Accident or not, it was the most mysterious and terrifying suicide I could imagine.

Angeles Crest never lost its allure to me. Even when I slept in my warm bed (in my new cold home) in Colorado, I dreamt about the quick, decisive turns and the cultivating view that got more picturesque every mile up the highway. My confidence at hand behind the wheel of my Honda grew stronger, with the clouds of smoke that wouldn't be quite thick enough to obstruct my view of the endless road in the distance. Bob Seger's words being sung from my speakers directly at me:

> "*He spent all night staring down at the lights of L.A.*
> *Wondering if he could ever go home*"[1]

Waking up, feeling the nostalgia of driving that car of mine up the New-Deal aged pavement into somewhere I would be deathly afraid to spend the night alone, made me miss home. I missed L.A., and I missed the Crest.

I knew what I had to do when I first returned home from Boulder. After flying into Burbank and making my favorite freeway drive in the city (up Freeway 2 towards the mountains) I know what the first thing I had to do was. After greeting my family, I got into my Honda and gave the Crest a visit. I had driven up only about ten minutes when I got to the famous look-out point that sat just out of the city limits. It just happened to be that time of day again too, you know, when the sun looks like it's bleeding through the notoriously dirty rag that is the L.A. atmosphere. Let the doctors and scientists tell you what they will about that layer of thickly colored air and what it might do for your health, but at that moment it was beautiful. The sun was coming down in a way that all the trees and hills around started to dim, but the city below me was illuminated.

I could see without turning my head the sphere, in its entirety, in which I had spent my whole life. The vastness of the less traveled road laid behind me in the dark. I was straddling the edge between what I have always known, loved, and seen my whole life with what is unfamiliar, exciting, and dangerous. I think I realized that evening that it is only human to appreciate the realities of getting close to the edge, but Goddammit that is the place you will always find the best view.

1. Seger, Bob. "Hollywood Nights." *Stranger in Town*. Capitol: 1978.

Photo by Jessica Williams

THE ESCAPE

By Renee Blevins

A warm beam of Minnesota sunlight streamed through an open window, naturally bringing the light and sounds of summer into a cluttered room. The room was round and open. Months previously, a father had carefully painted it pale blue. A white wooden bed was placed under the window with a green comforter lain haphazardly on top. A matching nightstand, chest of drawers, lamp, and bookshelf inhabited the remainder. And, of course, toys were everywhere: Barbies, tea sets, blocks, and balls. In short, all that was expected of a girl around the age of six. And so she was. Rebecca sat in the middle of this eruption of toys on an oasis of thin off-white carpet. Her long blonde hair floated from the crown of her head to the middle of her back in a thin, disheveled braid. It sparkled and shimmered in the sunlight as she happily played with her plastic friends, sending them on countless adventures over hills, through mountains, and into magic kingdoms under the sea.

Her mother's voice floated up from downstairs, announcing the arrival of Laura from down the street. The girl

stood up from her toys and leaped over her river of clutter, jumping onto the sparse stones of clear space leading to the door. She ran down two flights of stairs to eagerly press her nose against the front door's window, her breath making spots of white appear on the clear glass as she watched the car in her driveway. The back of a curly brown ponytail emerged as Laura got out of her mother's van. Rebecca opened the door and, keeping her feet on the cool wooden floor, leaned her thin body over the threshold to wave. Then, she saw her: a second girl, Laura's older sister, stepping out of the front seat.

Rebecca's little feet made scarcely any noise as she marched towards her mother. When she entered the kitchen, she let out a long, drawn-out groan. She turned to see her stick of a daughter silhouetted with little hands planted on hips and an accusatory glint in her eyes, "Elle's here, too." The little girl's voice echoed through the spotless kitchen. Her mom sighed.

"Now Rebecca, I'm sure Mrs. Johnson has some good reason for dropping Elle off."

Rebecca gave her mom a look, reminding her of all the times she had come home from Laura's house shaken by some awful encounter with Elle.

"I know she's a bit harsh," she said, "but it's just for an hour. Then Mrs. Johnson will come back and pick them up. They both have to get haircuts."

Rebecca threw her head back and groaned, inches away from a temper tantrum.

"And that reminds me that a haircut, missy, is something we have been putting off for far too long with you."

"I don't want Laura to leave in an hour. I don't want Elle to be here."

Her mother turned back to her dinner preparations.

"And I most definitely don't want a haircut!" Rebecca huffed at her mother's back and pounded towards the door.

As the gold van backed out of the driveway, Laura and Elle waved goodbye. The little blonde's bright blue eyes watched as Elle pushed her younger sister out of the way the moment their mother was out of sight. Elle turned and walked straight into the house, not even bothering to knock. Laura, shorter and chubbier, followed sheepishly. The sisters shared the same thick, curly brown hair but little else. Laura shot her friend an apologetic look and shut the door behind

They went on many adventures through forests, over valleys, and even underground.

her. Rebecca defiantly stared at Elle. Today, she was not going to let Elle be mean to her. This was her house and her toys. They were going to play her way. She turned and skipped lightly up the stairs, her braid flying out behind her as she lead her friends to her room.

They played Barbies, mostly. The taller brown headed ponytail fought with the shorter skinny blonde braid. They bickered in the way little kids do, neither girl able to truly one up the other. Laura meekly accepted the roles handed to her and played quietly, trying to appease both her older sister and her best friend. They went on many adventures through forests, over valleys, and even underground. They attended balls, concerts, and circuses. The hour passed all too quickly for the three, and soon, Rebecca's mother summoned her daughter to the stairs. The girl stuck her skinny face through the railings to look down, her long blonde braid hanging limply by her ear. A voice called up from below for Rebecca to come down, now.

"But Mom," she whined, "why do they have to go get their haircut? Can't I go with them?"

"I thought you didn't want to spend time with the two of them," her mother replied, "and anyway, were having family dinner tonight and you, young lady, still haven't cleaned your room."

"But-"

"Come down, now."

The pale face withdrew from the bars in an angry thrust of blonde hair. Rebecca marched back into her room. Elle looked up from playing with her dolls and said, "Well, why don't you do it anyway?"

The blonde blinked, bewildered, "Do what?"

"Come with us."

Rebecca took in a deep breath, ready to shoot down Elle's suggestion. But then, Elle's eyebrow cocked. Her brown eyes looked straight into Elle's blue ones, and she sneered, "Oh, I forgot. You and Laura are babies. I bet you couldn't even do it if you tried."

Rebecca stared out her window.

"All you have to do is get in the car when Mom pulls up. Hide in the back and she won't even know you're there. Or are you too scared?"

Silence fell. The air became heavy with as much tension and suspense that could be contained in a room of three young girls. Laura looked back and forth between her big sister and her best friend, her eyes wide and unbelieving.

"Well?" The mocking sneer was back. "Are you going to do it?"

After a few impossibly long seconds, Rebecca gathered up her pride and looked back from the window. She looked at Elle.

"Rebecca, yes or no?"

"Yes."

The look on Elle's face made everything that was about to happen completely worth it to Rebecca. This was her chance to show Elle she couldn't be the boss anymore, she couldn't walk all over her little sister and her friends just because she was bigger.

A car door slammed in the front driveway and all three of them jumped slightly. Elle looked at her challenger and smirked, "Here we go."

The two sisters ran down the stairs before Rebecca. She stood, shaky, on the top of the steps that led down into the trial ahead. Slowly walking down, she could hear her heart pumping in her ears, and she wondered how she would get out of the house without being seen.

She reached the bottom of the staircase and there it was. The perfect opportunity just waiting to be taken advantage of. Mrs. Johnson had already entered the kitchen and the mothers were whispering in hushed tones with their hands over their mouths. Elle glared down the pathway to the idling vain, free and clear. Rebecca hesitated briefly. Elle cleared her throat and smirked at the timid blonde with a mocking look of I knew you wouldn't do it in her eyes. Shoulders squared and little heart determined, Rebecca took a small step over the threshold, briefly glanced back at her unsuspecting mother, flew down the hot sidewalk, and threw herself into the car. She slowly pulled the sliding door shut behind her. It closed with a subtle click and she ducked around, half-walking, half-crawling through two rows of plush individual seats. She squeezed her body out of sight, still being small enough to fit between the last two rows. She tucked her head against her smooth knees and waited, allowing herself to be momentarily distracted by the crisp smell of a new car and half-finished apple juice.

Shoulders squared and little heart determined, Rebecca took a small step over the threshold . . .

Laura fumbled down the sidewalk, giddy with the excitement while Elle followed mechanically.

Scarcely before Rebecca had time to catch her breath, Mrs. Johnson's heels marched down the sidewalk toward the car. Even over the hammering of her own heart, the unfortunate rebel could hear Elle and Laura calling fake goodbyes up to her empty bedroom. Laura fumbled down the sidewalk, giddy with the excitement while Elle followed mechanically. Their brown curls swung as they buckled their seat belts. Laura sneaked her friend a sideways smile. Rebecca could see Elle's face in from the front seat in the reflection of a mirror. It was blank. When the girl saw this expression, her chest swelled. She had done it; she had shown Elle that even though she was younger, she had more guts. Then, she felt the car shift into reverse, heard the blow of the air conditioning, and felt it slowly back out of the driveway. As her bright blue eyes peeked over the seat and out the window, she caught a glimpse of her house disappearing down the street. The car rolled to a stop and then merged out onto a main road towards Kidz Kutz. Rebecca's neighborhood disappeared behind her all too quickly. When the sign that marked her neighborhood was no longer in sight, Rebecca realized she had really done it. The pride that filled her was instantly gone. The thick black lashes that lined her cheeks became wet; the street blurred. She didn't want to leave. It was scary out here. She liked being in her room. It was safe. It was home.

As the van stopped at a red light, an overwhelming urge to pop up and tell Mrs. Johnson to turn this car around came over Rebecca. But she stayed frozen in place, fearful of Elle's menacing gaze and listening to that small part of her that wanted to be rebellious. The car moved forward. The ride seemed never ending; with each passing second the little girl's throat began to close up as the sobs of terror and homesickness silently catapulted up her chest. All the while, the mother and her two daughters were chatting away blindly, never realizing the terror of their unseen stowaway. After the eternity of the six-minute car ride, the van pulled off the road into a parking lot. Two speed bumps jostled Rebecca and she squeezed her eyes tight, praying that when she opened them she would be back in her bright, round room. When the van finally came to rest between two white lines, the sisters and their mother disembarked, slamming the doors behind them. Silence fell. Suddenly, Rebecca realized she had no idea what to do next.

On shaky legs, Rebecca unfolded herself from the back and inched forward to the middle of the van. Already she was starting to sweat. Water now both oozed out of her eyes and marked her underarms; the van was heating up. Moving to the window, the girl stared at the backs of the family. The sobs she had silently barricaded inside came out in a torrent of the raw fear of being left behind. None of the girls were looking back, not one of them even thinking for a moment about the child sitting inside the locked van resting on hot July pavement. Just before entering the door, the shortest hesitated and turned to look back at the van in which her best friend was confined. She paused, then grabbed her mother's hand and whispered something in her ear. As the mother turned back toward the car with an exasperated look on her face, Rebecca saw her own terrified expression mingled with the accusatory gaze.

She watched as Mrs. Johnson walked towards her and pulled her keys out of her purse. The sliding door rolled open and the girl stepped out into the suffocating, sweltering sun. The bright light burned her eyes and she squinted, trying to see not only through the bright light, but also the tears that were now coming fast and thick down her face. Rebecca sobbed quietly, following her friend's mother toward the store. They entered. She sat down in a chair against the back wall, watching as Elle and Laura silently climbed into tall swirly chairs and Mrs. Johnson punched a number into the phone. Her mother was coming to get her.

As she waited, Rebecca stared at herself in the mirrors that lined the walls—a small, frail girl curled up in a chair made for a much bigger person. Her smooth arms wrapped around her legs as she pulled them towards her chest and hid her chin behind them. Her long blonde hair spilled over her shoulder, having come completely out of the braid. Her eyes were bright amidst her splotchy, tear-stained face. As she stared, Elle's voice cut across the room, full of self-pride at her opponent's downfall, "Hey! Why don't you come get your hair cut with us? You can look like me!"

And to this the girl said, "No."

Photo by Eva Weinberg

Photo by David Coons

INTEGRATIVE PHYSIOLOGY

BY NEVIN WHITTEMORE

We, as modern people, take the human body for granted. We jump out of airplanes, do harmful drugs, ski down mountains with active avalanches, and endless more activities that risk our lives and health. But what is life without adventure and excitement? This is the sole thing that makes us human in the first place. We are imperfect like the very networks that dominate our lives in the form of growing technology. We stare at flashing screens, hoping to. . . what? Escape from the real world? Look into someone else's life? While in the process, we miss our own lives that are gifted to us since conception. We constantly wait for an update for our phones in order to make them work quicker, with a reduced amount of flaws. And then we eventually need an upgrade for a faster processing speed and a bigger screen. And meanwhile the human body needs no update. It needs no upgrade. It is a perfect system working for an imperfect being.

Perfect is of course an overstatement. The mere idea of perfect is unimaginable in itself. Yet we strive to find this so

called "perfection" and miss life as it goes by. Not the life that we make, but the life that was set for us by none other than… The universe? Evolution? God? The brain composes what is thought to be the most complex system in the known universe including the known universe itself. The human brain is said to have about 100 billion neurons. It is a mystery. Most of the brain is undiscovered territory. We have yet to even come close to spotting the new world. It is there though, waiting deep within the cloudy webs of neurons within the squishy pink mass of an organ.

Not the fake, double lobed, ooey-gooey, Valentine's Day crap, but the real deal with ventricles and atriums and a big juicy aorta.

By far my favorite organ is the heart! Not the fake, double lobed, ooey-gooey, Valentine's Day crap, but the real deal with ventricles and atriums and a big juicy aorta. On average the heart beats 100,000 times per day pushing 2,000 gallons of blood through the body. Upon each pump of the heart, the 1.25 gallons of blood incased in the human body is pushed throughout the 60,000 miles of blood vessels within. It is a magnificent muscle, the heart. It is the go-to organ for the feeling of love (so I'll give the "ooey-gooey" one a little credit), when in fact it's all the brain. But we feel it in our hearts with a change in heart rate, an increase in respiration, a rush of blood flow delivering oxygen through every limb to compensate for the nerves involved in the feeling itself. It brings new meaning to the organ responsible for pumping blood, serving the rest of the body and connecting it with the outside world. It acts like its own body. It is the glue. It is the base. It is the source. When in doubt it is the silver lining. The heart is the provenance of hope where courage is born and bursts out with adrenaline as a sidekick. It is.

Consider the drum. It is known by musicians as a rhythmic instrument of precision and foundation. It leads the rest of the band to hit the climax together. It is also

known as an instrument of free will. Improvisation cakes the walls of the drummer's mind. Where society sees the drum as the background, it is constantly evolving and yearns to solo, bringing everything to a halt, except the music itself. The beat of the drum is the beat of the music, which is the internal flow of the rhythm of the body. Sitting in complete silence, put your fingers to your carotid and feel the funky swing of your body in motion. Feel your popliteal in your leg and undergo the sensation of the beat moving your legs. Place your hand on your chest and seek the origin of your pulse that is directing the eternal, internal dance that defines nature. Like a highway your blood moves to and from the music of your heart.

When I was younger, I was afraid of horror films like any normal kid. My older brother took me to a movie, Cloverfield, involving a giant alien, little tiny aliens that came off the bigger alien. There were dark and twisty subway stations where people would cry blood and explode after getting bitten by the tiny aliens. It is easy to imagine my fear as a pre-pubescent boy witnessing the apocalypse when I would have much rather been watching Scooby-Doo (now I am a post-pubescent guy who would still rather be watching Scooby-Doo). Lame excuses for entertainment such as this lead to a misconception about blood. Upon sight, some people will gag, throw up, become nauseated, and have to avert their eyes from the bad associations that come to mind when people see blood. Blood is the big, tall, bald guy with a scar across his eye and an angry look on his face who works at a bakery, professionally designing cakes. Blood is the creepy, old, witch-looking lady from next-door who invites you over for tea and sugar with a kind smile. Blood is the mean looking Rottweiler chained to a rickety fence who pants and rolls on its back and licks your face when you get the courage to say hello. Blood is a healer with the face of a killer. Blood is a miracle. It is a messenger delivering oxygen to everywhere in your body. It carries immunity and fights infection. And it is everywhere, ready to seal exposure to the outside world. It clots and protects the wound while the damage is repaired. And when it is done, it will fall away having done its work, and perfect, new skin either as a scar or not will be left in its place.

Blood is the big, tall, bald guy with a scar across his eye and an angry look on his face who works at a bakery, . . .

"A picture is worth a thousand words." Arthur Brisbane said it. A photograph can recall an event. A painting can tell a story. A stain can direct a play. A group of freckles can write a book. But a scar, a scar is an epic poem. It is Dante's Inferno rewritten to the individual's personal experience. Scars hold the memories of the good and the bad. Within the layers of scar tissue is the emotion that weaves through the history of the event. It is a constant reminder that follows you everywhere you go until the scar has finally faded and the memory is gone. Beneath every scar is the personality of the wearer. What bones make up their body? They are the same by core but different by shape. They are physically grown the same but are shaped anew by adventure. They exist to give us purpose, enough shape to walk, to dance, to point and laugh, to hug with passion, to throw a punch, to . . . live. Without them we would be bags of Jell-O.

We take the human body for granted. It is a system of perfection. It is perfect in its own way. It works together for every part of the system. For the most part it can sustain itself. It has a flow, like a flawless factory. Look at your hands and marvel at the fact that your eyes, connected to your optic nerve, connected to your diencephalon, allow you to see with such clarity. Acknowledge the sensation of smell. What is it? What does it feel like? Consider the human body as you take on life and give it credit for its remarkable system that brings you everything you experience. It is integrative physiology. It is integrative life.

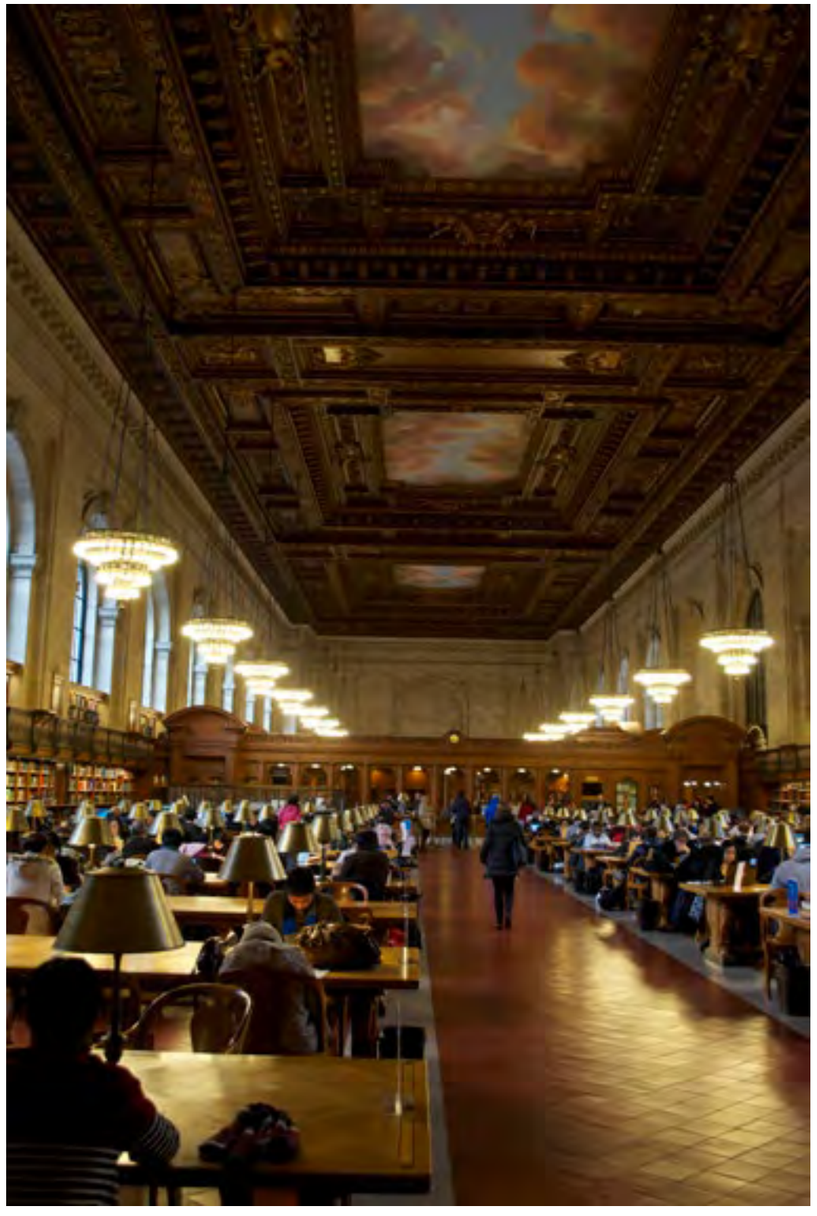

Photo by Penelope Baggs

Photo by Sofie Davis-Kos

ON BEING ALIVE

By Luke Lemons

I have often wondered if somewhere there is an infamous and mad architect who travels the world and designs only hospitals; instituting the same film of teal light in white hallways, the same rooms paired side by side like cells, the same furnishings that try to dupe the patients and visitors into believing that they've entered somewhere else, where life goes on like home. Over the span of a few months, when I was younger, I used to visit numerous hospitals following my grandma's radiation treatment and surgeries. Of course, I was too young to be the leader of these expeditions, but my parents dragged me through bustling hallways of fake white light, fake flowers, and fake scents of lilac, all used in order to cover up the smell of latex. Looking back, I can still remember how sick I felt when I entered a ward.

As my family and I charted our way through each hallway, I frequently managed to pass by someone alive in their fancy hospital bed, eyes glued to the television as they sat back breathing in their canned oxygen and eating their pre-blended food.

Some of these souls had windows to look out and watch the world below tread on like worker ants. From the ground, looking up, it seemed as if the rooms remained hollow and empty; they never appeared to have residency. My grandma had one of these windows no matter what room she recovered in, and my siblings and I had decorated it beautifully with colored wax paper, giving her room the feel of a sanctuary in a church with stained glass. We brought the wax paper with her to every new room she had. So while the framed thrift shop paintings and mundane wallpapers changed, she at the least had the constant glow of blues and reds falling on her white linen sheets to comfort her.

I was not old enough to understand completely why these visits became more and more frequent, and not until years after her passing had I realized that she personally battled her own type of struggle in that labyrinth of doctors and nurses. I imagined the pain she must have felt, not from the surgery to rip out her cancer, but from the repetitive clacking of doctors' business shoes on the tile floors (pulsing rhythmically with the occasional roar of sorrow coming from someone who's loved one had finally died). I imagined that she questioned when we would come in one day and let out the same shriek of sadness and loss from the doorway of her opened room. I imagined the nights, when all her wax paper lost its color and the only way to spark thought resorted to listening to the musically coordinated coughs. I imagined while she slept she dreamed of square dancing with my grandpa or long walks with him through the mountains. It must have been thoughts like those that caused her to finally snap and decide to leave.

While the hospital staff advised against her idea of recovery, she chose to get well at home on the luxury of her back porch where she could watch my grandpa's garden flourish with Indian paintbrushes, wild roses, and the rest of his flowers. My grandpa had, in fact, built a whole new porch for her made of wine-red bricks and positioned it so perfectly that my grandma could watch the sun rise and set. He got burnt and bronzed from the sun due to the long hours outside laying down brick after brick. He would not mind though; he grew up on a farm far off in Nebraska and was used to the labor. Even after moving to Colorado in the sixties to work on computers night and day, he was used to the labor. Even after finding a cute, catholic secretary, my grandma, and working overtime to pay for a wedding

He got burnt and bronzed from the sun due to the long hours outside laying down brick after brick.

His newly built patio would be my grandma's hospital room, . . .

ring, he was used to the labor. And now, when my grandma had grown sick and depended on him to carry her up and down the stairs when she grew too tired, he did not mind, he was used to the labor. His newly built patio would be my grandma's hospital room, except that she breathed effortlessly on that back porch surrounded by blooming flowers. No longer would the claustrophobic walls of the hospital swallow and constrict her humanity and life.

Though she looked frail and weak from the hospital, she still went out with my grandpa, shopped at stores, and drank beers at restaurants. I preferred the ten-minute drive to her and my grandpa's house over the long walk through echoing corridors. I found her refreshing new recovery more pleasing than the hospital because my family no longer had to stand over her bed to talk to her--gazing down upon her like at a wake right before we lowered her into the ground. What an agony it must have been for my grandma to feel pronounced dead, but still fully awake and conscious in that damned hospital.

However, at home in her house my grandma was alive. The freedom that she chose made her skin glow more than the fluorescent lights ever could. Our entire family headed over to her house frequently for barbeques and family dinners, and again my naive younger self never saw the red flag. I never took note of all the self-healing books that surrounded her bed. A flashlight and a pocket knife were found neatly on my grandpa's side of the bed while her side juxtaposed; riddled with crosses, prayers, and holy water for rubbing on her scars. I know today that my parents, grandpa, and even my grandma knew that her choice to live at home was going to kill her quicker than the hospital. Yet, when death seemed so close, she wanted to live her final days in the sun with her family versus deteriorating in a stale hospital bedroom. My mother told me years later that on the phone, in between her sobs, my grandma had told her that she never wanted to go to another hospital again, no matter the situation.

One summer day in her quiet neighborhood, my grandma began to have problems breathing. Not willing to risk losing the person for which he had sacrificed a life of leisure for, my grandpa went into an instant panic. She told him that she did not want to go back to the hospital, back to the facemasks, back

to the coughs, back to the oxygen tanks, back to her slowly creeping grave. After my grandpa threw her into the car and began to drive, she slumped over, gently resting her head against the car window with the midday summer sun shining through. My grandpa pulled over, picked up his dead wife and ran with her to a neighbor's front lawn, and used all the energy left in him to attempt to revive her. She had more than enough life in her during her final days, she was humored and free; tanned and smiling; talkative and witty.

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My mother had yelled from our living room that she wanted to talk to my siblings and me. Quickly we headed to the couches, the seats that no one wanted to sit on; the couches used only for talks of serious, horrible, or important issues. These couches were not the kind that one simply rested on after a hard day; one came to these couches and returned with something shattering. Without any warning after we sat down, without any time to catch our breath from the sprint to the living room, my mother let it fly.

"Noni died today."

Even though we all knew she was sick, even though each time I went to her house I could feel the presence of death suffocating me, we all cried. Everyone. The funeral would be in a week; her body, cremated.

I began to break down; how is it that someone living a full life yesterday is suddenly gone for eternity today? I still remembered her voice, and her warm skin. The funeral and its environment made my deep quarrel for explanation worse. The countless speeches all starting with, "I knew Kathy when—", or "I'm sorry to be here today—", and my favorite, "I remember—"

While the adults humored themselves with stories that proved that her life was not in jest, I focused on the tiny wooden box in front of a giant picture of my grandma. That box contained her laughs, her voice, her smile, her hair. It contained her glass figurines as well as her marinara sauce. Everything that was my grandma found itself contained in that small oak box no dimension bigger than a foot. As the light broke through the stained glass murals all around me

That box contained her laughs, her voice, her smile, her hair. It contained her glass figurines as well as her marinara sauce.

in the church, I became reminded of the wax paper. But I know that if my grandma knew that, she would hit me. I could hear her saying, "Why would you think of such an awful place? The place where I barely managed to escape?"

It scares me, that wooden box surrounded by patches of color. It scares me that there is no use in escaping the box, or avoiding it. We all end up a memory of someone in one way or another, but it is until we make that memory one to remember. It had been six months since my grandma had died and her house grew much darker. Spending his days in silence, my grandpa lived alone. After his wife's death, he woke up each morning on the right side of his bed and manage to get up and pass a dresser full of jewelry and perfume. He showered and got his clothes from half of his closet while trying not to eye the dresses and blouses so close to him. After eating breakfast alone, my grandpa went to the basement and watched TV from an unbalanced love couch.

After my grandma's death, entering the house became challenging; right when I stepped foot on the carpet, I began the search for my grandpa. I never wanted to find myself alone in a room staring at dog-eared pages of healing books and notes shoved in drawers. Until I found my grandpa, I treaded lost in the void of past life caused by the vacuum of death, the same void my grandpa mucked through each day alone.

More months passed and my grandpa— began to chart the void, and my family began to realize that he acted differently. He no longer remembered when we last came over to his house or how to tell time. His eyes went from a sky blue to a storm gray, locked in the constant position of confusion. His garden had died and he lost his pocket knife. He no longer labored around the house. He just sat and watched TV, trying to dilute his confusion and mistakes.

"Kathy, can you come here?" He shouted to my mother, Karri.

"Dad, my name's Karri, you know that," she replied with an undertone of understanding.

"Oh yeah!" He laughed, looked to me with a grin and rolled his eyes as if it made up part of a big joke to irritate my mom. I laughed like it was the joke he wanted me to laugh at. Yet, after more time passed, the errors he committed became harder to redirect as jokes.

It has been over a few years now and my mother still receives constant phone calls from him. I recall one going like:

"What do you mean?"

"No, look at the button . . ."

"The button."

"Dad—"

"Dad, I ca—"

"I can't just drop everything here and leave . . ."

"I know."

These types of conversations came up frequently in my household. My grandpa calls, forgetting how to do something, in this case use the microwave. My mother gets annoyed. He becomes embarrassed, and thus annoyed. She will yell then storm out to drive to his house to help him. It has gotten to the point where he is unable to live on his own. He cannot cook, drive, or dance. My grandpa only sits and confuses himself with ideas that he cannot grasp. His memory and mental health had died in the void that my grandma had created. He is now a walking shell full of ricocheting thoughts that will never come together.

I do not consider myself an evil or demented person, but each day that passes that I see him lost in a pursuit of pointlessness, I see one of those people in the hospital beds, looking out their window towards the world around, wanting to live there, but now too far to reach it. Sometimes I question why he isn't a memory in the back of my head yet, because each day good memories are replaced with sad and pitiful ones. I love him still, but I catch myself thinking back to my grandma and her choice to leave the hospital, her choice to live. I will enter his house and find myself lost, flipping pages of the self-healing books and looking through old jewelry. While my grandfather sits at the dining room table trying his hardest to read the newspaper, I think of my grandparents both and wonder: who really outlived whom?

Photo by Sofie Davis-Kos

Photo by Kelsey Ruggard

TOOTH FAIRY VS. JESUS CHRIST

By Sarah Hershman

As a young girl it was easy for me to believe in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy[1] (especially the Tooth Fairy), so in theory believing in God—who arguably has more believers than the aforementioned childhood superstars—should not have been difficult for me at all. To counter my naiveté and willingness to believe, I had to actively refuse to learn how to be a Christian. Right now you might be asking, "Why did you—in your infinite wisdom—decide to reject our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Don't you know He died on the cross for your sins?" Well, yes, I am aware, and to be honest, I was uneasy about my decision at the time, but I chose to reject Christianity to support my mother. I realize that it may seem strange that my parents tried to raise me to be a Christian and I returned the favor by rejecting that same religion to support

1. Whenever I lost a tooth, the Tooth Fairy would give me $100.00 bills. No, my teeth were not made of gold, but this made me really keen on the Tooth Fairy. I didn't stop believing until all my baby teeth had fallen out, and Dad sat me down and came clean about the pile of lies he fed me about the Tooth Fairy's existence and such. That was a hard day.

them. So allow me to explain the interesting situations that led me to the decision to not-learn Christianity.[2]

My maternal grandfather is a born-again Christian preacher. (Un)Naturally, his relationship with God is more important to him than anything else in life—including his family. It's important to note that before he became the Magnificent Being who has been washed clean of his sins in the blood of Jesus Christ, he was actually kind of an asshole.[3] When my mother was growing up, my grandfather was an abusive alcoholic—meanwhile, her mother was suffering from multiple sclerosis, which resulted in a long stretch of her mother being in a medically induced coma. One story I vividly remember hearing about is the time my grandfather pinned my mom to the ground and shoved his dirty gym socks in her mouth in front of one of his drinking buddies just to prove that he could. Needless to say, no one was there to support my mom through the traumas of her teenage years. So for her sweet sixteen, legally emancipated and finally free, she moved out of her parents' house, away from the abuse. All of these stories were passed down to me from my mother, and at first they were hard to believe. I had only known my grandfather as an overly self-righteous Christian who actively would not harm anyone because "hurting others is sin." The worst he did was insist that my brother, sister and I attend Sunday school, and sometimes when he would visit, he would read us stories from the Bible. I couldn't see how my good, God-fearing grandfather once was a drunk who beat his daughter for fun, but as time went on and I grew older his sour streak became more and more pronounced.

During one of my grandfather's visits, he read us the story of Abraham, who was asked to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, to prove his loyalty to God. At the time, I was seven, and when you're at the ripe old age of seven your parents are your world—the thought that God might ask one of my parents to kill me to prove their

2. Not-learning is a theory developed by Herbert Kohl in his essay "I Won't Learn from You: The Role of Assent in Learning." Not-learning is an active refusal to learn from somebody. It should not be confused with an inability to learn, despite the fact that both types of not learning are characterized by an extremely flat learning curve.

3. For lack of a better word. And to be honest, this is probably one of the kinder words that could be used to describe him, but we won't go into that. Although this sentence suggests that he might somehow have become less of an asshole he has not.

devotion terrified me. How could God love me and ask my parents to kill me? This was all too much for me then, and frankly I began to prefer the all-benevolent Tooth Fairy, who would leave me money for all my lost teeth (even that one tooth I swallowed when I ate a hotdog), as opposed to this God who might make the people I loved most in the whole world cut my heart out to prove a point. So as any curious child would do at that moment, I looked up at my grandfather and asked, "If God told you to kill us, would you?" He looked me dead in the eye, and without a moment's hesitation, his voice boomed a big "YES." It absolutely crushed me and it was at this moment in my life that I first began to doubt my grandfather's sanity and, subsequently, Christianity.

Later, in my early teens, after hearing one too many horror stories about who Grandpa used to be, I asked Mom if he ever apologized for everything he did to her after he found God. To my surprise, she answered, "No," and continued on with whatever task she was doing at that time. I was appalled that instead of apologizing to my mother for all of the pain he caused her growing up, my grandpa wielded his religion as a tool to break others down—not unlike a hammer emblazoned with Jesus Christ's name hitting you in the clavicle until it shatters. On multiple occasions my grandpa would scornfully judge my mom and make her feel like a bad person, as well as an inadequate parent. My grandpa's comments varied, but "you are living a life of sin! What do you think will become of your children if you live like this?" was always at the core of his arguments. Every time they had one of those conversations I could see the pain that erupted in my mother's eyes that then slowly cooled into anger and hollowness. I realized my grandfather never stopped being abusive; he simply switched out the belt for the Bible. For me, knowing that Christianity was routinely used to hurt others, particularly people I loved, made me promise myself to never learn how to be Christian.

I realized my grandfather never stopped being abusive; he simply switched out the belt for the Bible.

Not-learning to be a Christian was really rather easy for me—I didn't have to develop any techniques or procedures to inhibit my learning; I simply didn't try. I found that a lack of effort is actually a very effective tool to use when not-learning Christianity. One reason that lack of effort was so poisonous to learning Christianity is that the biblical language is difficult to understand. If you do not put forth adequate effort to learn what the scriptures mean, you won't understand the message. Simple. As. That.

Just to be safe and sure that I would not-learn the Bible, I also employed the simple tactic of not reading it.[4] In Sunday school, when the instructor read the Bible to us and asked us questions about God, I preoccupied myself with creating a mental masterpiece-of-a-list that contained all the reasons why the existence of God and Jesus Christ are implausible. If and when I was finished with my magnificent list, I would busy my mind by contemplating the sanity of all the members of the congregation.[5] The more challenging aspect of my not-learning mission was convincing my family, particularly my grandfather, that I was indeed becoming a faithful Christian. To do this I simply avoided him altogether. If he called, I would not answer. If he wanted to come for a visit, I would be busy. Unfortunately this could not go on forever. When he and I finally did end up talking, I tried to avoid the topic of religion at all costs. Sometimes he would force the subject on me and I would smile, nod and pretend as though we were on the same biblical page. And thank God, it worked! I, the awkward prepubescent teen with a gap tooth and a high propensity to get sunburned, prevailed.

Some of you may be wondering if I kept my promise… Well, sort of. In my late teens (maybe 17 or 18 years old), I had a little fling with the New Testament after my best friend, Lo, introduced us. Lo was one of the really cool girls in high school—the kind of girl who got drunk with Malcolm and the Oi Oi Boys[6] after cheering at the football game. Lo went through her punk rock phase and then transitioned into more a psychedelic period, and then made the transition to raver/molly-fanatic,

4. Not understanding the words in the Bible + Not reading the Bible = Double whammy against the word of G-O-D!

5. Most of whom I concluded were f***ing mental. This helped fuel my passion and determination to not-learn. I convinced myself that the believers were insane, which meant I had to protect myself from the onslaught of psychiatric issues that were being forced into my brain by not-learning their faithful ways.

6. Malcolm and the Oi Oi Boys were Elizabeth, Colorado's own personal version of The Sex Pistols. They played punk rock shows at this little shack/building at Casey Jones Park once a month, and if you were an immature high-schooler who drank a little too much of that cheap Keystone, that one of the meth heads (let me be honest, it was most likely one of the Komar Brothers) bought for you in exchange for drug money, it was the place to be. Lo and her boyfriend, Tyler, the lead singer, were like Elizabeth's rendition of Sid and Nancy.

Photo by Natasha Collins

which was pretty brief.[7] My memory of this period is a little foggy, but I am pretty sure it was a bad trip that led to a suicide attempt that ended up sparking Lo's Christian phase.[8] I didn't partake in all the drugs that Lo did, but when she found God I thought, "This might be something I could actually do with her, without destroying my brain."

As Lo dove deeper into her newfound Christianity she kept inviting me to church, and I kept going. She bought me my very own copy of the Bible, and I read it. Hell, I even prayed! I really gave the whole Jesus thing a shot, but no matter how hard I tried it just felt wrong. I felt like a kid who knew their imaginary friend wasn't real, but still kept talking to them because they weren't ready to let go and grow up yet. After a few months of this I stopped lying to myself and acknowledged that even if I wanted to, I couldn't learn to be a Christian.[9]

Oh, how Lo cried! "Sarah, it breaks my heart that when I die and go to heaven, you won't be accepted into God's eternal kingdom with me, but instead you'll be burning in Hell." Sometimes I worry that I might rot in the fiery pits of Hell forever with the rest of my family, but I easily brush the feeling away, unaffected by the thought. Occasionally I fear that the Bible could be true, which would mean that I am a horrible sinner whose soul is damned for eternity (which isn't the most optimal end to life, but hey, someone's gotta burn, right?). With all the horror, insanity and nonsense religion has brought to the world—even if it means my soul ends up as nothing more than a fiery ember in the depth of underworlds—I just can't be a Christian. I refuse to allow any sort of semblance of the man that is my grandfather to exist in me, and this includes his religion.

7. I had a conversation with Lo one time that went a li'l something like this: "Sarah, come over, the ceiling is melting and the spiders are crawling all over me." My response: "… Um? What?"

8. This "phase" has yet to end. She met a boy and married him at 19 years old. She is now a mother of a beautiful baby girl and she is still deeply involved with the church. Despite my qualms with Christianity, it has been good for Lo.

9. I think trying to be a Christian just felt wrong to me because of the magnitude of anger that I had for my grandfather. Despite my attempts to find God and believe in a higher power I couldn't because my hate-fire that burned for my grandfather was (and still is) more powerful than my will to be "saved".

Artwork by Chelsea Sturgil

RETURNING FROM DARKNESS

By Clare Fairchild Baker

I have suffered from ten concussions. None of them were from one sport, but rather from multiple sports and activities. Of the ten, only three have been truly "diagnosed" by a doctor.

Researchers have discovered that once you have suffered one concussion, you are one to two times more likely to receive a second one. If you have had two concussions, then a third is two to four times more likely, and if you have had three concussions, then you are three to nine times more likely to receive a fourth concussion. It does not take much for me to get a concussion. If someone accidentally elbows me hard enough, I could receive a concussion. It is hard to always be on guard as to avoid situations that could cause one, but sometimes, accidents happen. Confusion is a character that makes increasingly more appearances throughout my life. After each concussion, I can feel the absence of something. This "something" is not always easy to discern, but I know that it has left me. Sometimes it is something small that I will not miss, but other times it is something I will miss terribly.

Spelling was never a difficult task for me. I always laughed at my friends' inability to spell, but now I am the one at whom they should laugh. My math skills have also crumbled away. It is hardest to know that I was once great at math, and had the ability to spell very well, but now, no matter how hard I will myself, cannot seem to do either without great effort.

I loved math because my mental sharpness was incredible. Every math problem would enhance my intellectual capabilities. Logarithms and derivatives were simple aspects of calculus that I could do with great ease. My great mathematical abilities also aided me in other elements of my life. I was able to remember dates for history more effectively, read more analytically for English, and focus without becoming too distracted. I did not always like math, but as the years passed, I began enjoying it. This enjoyment led me to become passionate about math, and eventually excel in it.

That is not the case anymore. My skills were stripped from me after my last concussion. Now, simple multiplication and division problems are difficult. It is arduous, and grueling to try and fail miserably over and over again. My frustration grows each time that I must solve a mathematical problem. The prior ease has now shifted to tiresome difficulty. I long for a day when I will return to that exceptional skill level at which I once existed.

My dad always tells me that if I work hard enough, and do enough math problems, I will be able to return to that expertise. And I will endeavor, but something seems to be missing. I hope that time will heal this invisible festering wound.

There are stories of people who were hit in the head just right and developed savant-like abilities. Some become math geniuses, while others become musical prodigies. With each concussion, I hope that the concussion will give, rather than take. Wishful thinking.

I used to be able to run for hours on end. Running was my bliss: an environment where the world melted away for a while. I could get away from my fears, apprehensions, worries, and simply be free. I loved to feel the earth under my feet, and smell the forest around me. It could transcend me into another realm where everything was beautifully cheerful. But it was soon shattered like glass breaking into countless razor-sharp pieces. The concussion I suffered from wakeboarding changed all of that. Running jostled my brain. I could feel it bounce as I took each

Each concussion steals something from me: its greedy hands snatch parts of me without my knowledge.

step. The headaches induced from running became unbearable. My former escape from the world grew into another aspect of pain and eventual sorrow.

Lists, I am always writing lists. All of my friends joke that I go through more Sticky Notes than all of them combined. But I can no longer retain information as I once could. It slips from my mind when I am not paying attention. Writing lists allows me to visually see what must be accomplished, as well as to relieve my mind from the stress of remembering tasks. Each day, I write anywhere from five to twenty lists. And yes, the tediousness is dreadful, but it is something I must do.

Each concussion steals something from me: its greedy hands snatch parts of me without my knowledge. Some take a part of my intellect, and some a part of my life. I have always been a very adventurous, daring girl; however, each head injury lends itself to more people saying, "I don't think you should bike or run." Every time a person says that, a part of me dies inside. I want to scream out, you don't understand how much these activities mean to me! It is easy for them to make such suggestions, but most things are easier said than done.

I am going to die, was my only fleeting thought. The green of the leaves below me was all I saw as I fell headfirst towards the ground. The branches and leaves were hitting my face, and there was no pain as they slapped me, but rather numbness. I surrendered to the tree, hopelessly plunging. I bounced off bigger branches that did not budge as I toppled to the ground. As was my instinct from being a gymnast, I put my arms out in front of me to protect my head…

The water was scorching hot. The intense heat that almost felt cold was rushing down my body. What had happened? How did I end up in the shower? Why was I showering in the first place? After drying off, I went to bombard my dad with the millions of questions filling my head. I crinkled my forehead and asked, "Dad, did I fall today?" His eyes widened in disbelief and he said: "Yeah, you took quite the tumble out on the Reservoir today. You fell so hard that your feet came out of the wakeboard."

One of the most important people in my life is my dad. He has been my greatest teacher and friend. I love him more than words can express. If I were to suddenly lose him, depression would overcome me so that it would seem a part of me has

died with him. His knowledge seems infinite, like the stars that fill the night sky. There has never been a doubt in my mind that he is the most intelligent person I know. Every day, he enlightens me with knowledge. I am a product of his love and nurture. Most people are blown away to learn that he is a ski instructor: they are dumbfounded as to how he is not a lawyer, or a doctor. Yes, he could have been either, but his heart knew neither were his true calling. The mountains have been his home for thirty years, and he always says that the mountains have been his greatest teacher. The knowledge he gained from living amongst them is superior to that of any medical school or law school. And just as an active lifestyle has led to my concussions, the same can be said for him.

My dad has a lot of experience with concussions. Playing rugby for twenty-five years, avid mountain biking, and extreme skiing all lend themselves to inevitable head injuries. He jokes that his brain still functions properly, as far as he can tell. But there is an underlying fear in his voice. Over time, his brain may turn to mush, much like Muhammad Ali's. Researchers have found a link between dementia and multiple concussions. Will my dad end up brain dead like the many boxers, football players, and rugby players before him?

I have a terrible fear of losing control over my brain, and an even greater fear that my dad's mental capacity will dwindle to nothing. I dread that one day he will no longer be the infinite source of knowledge from which I have learned so much. He is an apple tree; each apple contains information about the universe. I can go and pluck one off, and that apple will fill me with knowledge until I am hungry for more. He willingly hands out his apples to those who wish to learn.

My dad and I love to mountain bike. That is something that we could do forever. We never feel a desire to go fast, but rather enjoy the day and its beauty. He taught me how to mountain bike when I six. I started on a small inclined dirt road, and progressed from there. Each ride would get more difficult. By sixth grade, I could ride almost anything, but there was one problem. I did not have pedals in which my feet could clip. I was much too afraid to ride a bike with my feet clipped in.

The frustration and fear mixed together all too well. I couldn't do it because I was afraid, but I wanted to do it. My mind was torn; is the reward worth the risk? Biking downhill on such a steep incline that my butt was behind my seat, thinking to myself, what the hell have you gotten yourself into? My dad was waiting for me down below, yelling encouragements that sounded like mumbling from my distance far above. I had only just started to use clipless pedals. The key is to keep moving just enough so you don't lose your balance, and try not to get going too fast. I knew that with normal pedals, I was perfectly capable of riding this downhill. I kept saying under my breath, these fucking pedals. They're going to be the end of me. That mindset was not the best that I could have had. And sure enough, as I was attempting to navigate my way down to my dad, my foot slipped from its place on the pedal. My body went flying over the handlebars. I landed on my head then tumbled down the hill. Instantly, I grabbed my head, unaware of my shattered shoulder blade and broken ribs. God damn it, Clare. You can't fucking fall on your head. Before you're twenty, you will be brain dead.

These thoughts seem to have made more and more appearances as I have grown up. How can thoughts influence someone's life? Each time I get hurt, or hit my head, I always detest myself for it. And in truth, a part of me wants to die when I get hurt. Everything I love to do involves being active. It is hard for me to sit idly and heal while all of my friends are out doing what I love. I oftentimes begin to hate my body for constantly being injured. But one day, I came to the realization that healing begins in the mind. Positive, healing thoughts are a great panacea for injuries on the inside and the outside.

Although each concussion has taken a lot from me, I now know the best way to heal my mind and soul. Each negative thought that escapes must be replaced by positive, encouraging notions. I only have one brain, and if I do not do my best to restore it to its former level of function, I will slowly slip into oblivion. But this oblivion is not like the darkness I have gone to before: I have always returned from the darkness. This oblivion, however, is permanent.

He is an apple tree; each apple contains information about the universe.

MERIDIAN

By Max Owens

At last I was comfortable. A camp stove, happily purring, sat in the snow in front of me. The water in the pot was nearly boiling, and I had a package of oatmeal ready for when it did. I munched on a bagel, scooping out globs of peanut butter as I went along. The snow had stopped falling and I was hungry.

It was still cloudy and I could not see the rocky ridge in front of me, nor the one behind. The map told me they were there, but I only half-believed it, like one half-believes the varied recreations of an image seen in a dream. The forest was quiet. Each tree limb carried a heavy load of snow, but this snow did not have that branch-crippling density that can make a forest look stressed or weary or sad. These trees carried a golden load. They were not over-exerting themselves, but they were proud of their efforts. A dead skeleton of a tree next to me in this proud forest carried a lively burden. A gray jay—fat and round like he had just swallowed a softball—peered at me from his needleless, weathered perch ten feet away. I froze because I did not want to scare him away, but I don't think I need to have worried. The

way that he stared without stirring or blinking even during my startled double-take suggested he had been there watching me for a while and was interested in how long it would take for me to notice him. He was a patient host and I was very happy for his hospitality. He had the right sort of eyes for spectacles and he sat and watched me while I made hot chocolate. If he was confused or curious, he did not betray it and only showed me friendliness and what was probably mild amusement.

In those moments it was amusing to me, too. Funny, even. Earlier it had been stupid. Unsatisfying. The whole business was unsatisfying and I should not have expected less snow, bluebird skies or contentment. I wanted adventure. Solitude was foreign, exotic. That's a nice, romantic way to say it. Actually it was loneliness that was foreign and exotic, but solitude is what I called it when I described it to other people. I expected solitude and got loneliness. I was lonely some of the time, but there were times that, even in the thick of the snow and the low clouds, I found sunshine.

The first rays of light appeared that morning. The map showed a hairpin turn that I was sure I would miss because of all the snow covering the trail. Every coincidental gap in the pines looked like the trail, but finally I found a gap that was too coincidental and bent in just the right way. I followed it and was relieved when the gap did not shrink. My dreary mood began to clear even as the clouds thickened.

I expected solitude and got loneliness.

The second shower of sunshine came when deer tracks appeared in the snow that covered the trail. They made nice company as I slogged along and it was funny to look back at my snowshoe tracks beside the deer's. My tracks looked like a big-footed robot's, and I imagined my friend, the deer, leading such a stranger through the woods. I smiled because this was not far from the truth. The deer did not wander and several times I trusted her when I couldn't tell which way the trail went. She was right all of the time until her tracks diverged purposefully through some thicker underbrush off to the left. I was sad to see her go.

Up and up I climbed through the woods. For a while the spruce gave way to aspen. On some of the aspen trees couples had written their initials. The letters were very low on the trees and I guessed that the couples had carved them during a snowless, sunny time. As I trudged through the snow alone, I

imagined they were probably watching the wood in a fireplace crackle and spit from under a blanket that they were sharing. Every once in a while one of them got up to add a log to the fire or brew a little more coffee but always returned to the blanket where together they watched the fire and the slow, large snowflakes falling outside.

In the aspen forest the snow fell differently than in the pine and spruce forest. The spindly bare aspen branches did not collect snow like boughs of needles and so it fell heavy and unhindered. It amplified the loneliness if you let it. After the deer went her way and the sun stopped its momentary bright burns, I let it, and I was lonely.

With all relationships set aside, I was confronted with my own bare bones. This true aloneness is uncommon, but it's a common fear. We often go to great lengths to avoid it. Why? Perhaps we're afraid of what we'll see when we look at our very cores. When everyone else is gone, will our skeletons be enough?

Early in the afternoon I arrived at the notch in the ridge. Heavy snow concealed much of the green of the trees, and thick flakes in the air dulled the remaining color. It was the snowy forest of a black and white film: a silent, slow-moving picture. I would camp on the flat of the notch but I knew I could not complete the rest of my planned route, which would have carried me 1,500 feet higher out of the trees and into even deeper snow. I did not have the gear or the time. I was disappointed at my failure to set reasonable expectations. I did not make the decision so much as I sensed what was right. Factors like current conditions, forecast, pace, and equipment had been algorithmically churning somewhere beneath the level of conscious thought all day long. At intervals they had surfaced and I had acknowledged them, but at the notch the equation spat out a solution: I would not be going any higher. It was entirely practical but it still tasted sour. I didn't want to dwell on it, so I focused my attention on making camp.

It felt good to pant and sweat as I turned a patch of snow between two sturdy spruces into home. I laughed in surprise when I stomped through the snow to the ground for

the first time. Buried to the hip, I had to squirm awkwardly to get out. I shoveled out a rectangular pit a couple of feet deep and stomped it solid. My design was good and the open ends of my A-frame tarp fit snugly against the edges of the pit. To keep the wind out, I built up walls of snow around the tent and then turned to the feature that made this site so inviting in the first place: a large spruce 30 feet away that had fallen earlier that season. It was held off the ground at an angle by another tree and I could reach many of the branches. These I tore off and carried to my shelter. I stuffed the inside of the tarp with boughs full of needles and piled up branches at either end. I left a large enough hole to wiggle through and I knew I would sleep well that night.

Production had made me happy and hungry so I built myself a kitchen and that's when I had my encounter with the softball-shaped jay. The snow started falling again and it felt like the right time for a nap. I crawled through the hole and into my sleeping bag but at that moment the snow began to fall heavier and wetter. It rapidly accumulated on the walls of the tarp. The nylon crept closer to my face with the weight and I used my arm to shake it off, but always the snow built back up.

The wet nylon pressed in and I felt suffocated. I banged the walls every four or five minutes to prevent a collapse, but the snow would not give up. A few times I went outside to shovel away the banged-off snow that was inching up the walls from the ground. Finally the snow defeated me and I convinced myself that it was letting up so that I could sleep and just forget about it all.

It was not letting up. There I lay, and the walls were much too close and getting closer all the time. The forest was inches away but I could not see trees or birds or tracks and so I forgot about it. I stared at nothing for a while, then fell asleep.

I awoke to light. It was not light that burned feebly behind a layer of clouds but the genuine light of a clear sky. It had a softness and subtle warmth that comes only from a sun sitting low in the sky. I moved quickly to put on my boots and did not shiver or care when my bare neck rubbed against the

cold, damp tarp walls. I crawled out of my hole and stood on my doorstep for several minutes, transfixed by the beauty of the evening landscape. I strapped on snowshoes and explored.

Over the reaching spires of spruce and fir the sky extended . . .

For the first time the low clouds and fog had lifted and I could see my surroundings. Above me to the east and west the rocky outcrops towered, taller and rougher than I had imagined. To the south stretched the mountains beyond mountains of the eastern flank of the Rockies. Over the reaching spires of spruce and fir the sky extended, a sea of blue interspersed with wisps of white clouds. It lightened towards the horizon to match snowy mountaintops. A lenticular cloud, lit from behind by the sinking sun, sat like a stationary zeppelin above Mt. Evans. The fresh snow billowed in the glades like a sail in a shifting wind, unbroken except for hare tracks that bounded from tree to tree. I stood for a long time, watching the clouds move without hurry across the sky. As the light faded I knew I was alone, but still I had the woods and I had myself, and I felt fuller than ever.

FOOD FOR DEATH

By Matthew Thomas

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

"The ancient Egyptians believe everyone has two deaths. The first death happens when you take your last breath. The second one happens when a person says your name the very last time."

Sean ate the yellow sweet tart without hesitating. After about two minutes, Smiley was smiling uncontrollably. That was the only way Smiley knew how to smile, from the soul. The kid had a lot of names, but my favorite was Smiley. Once he started, everyone in the room couldn't help but join in. Most people smile, but they're not really smiling. They think a smile is just a motion one makes with the facial muscles. But only those who are divine, those who have been kissed by the spirit of the Moon, know that a true smile comes not from the face, but from the bottom of the stomach. A true smile comes from a place in one's body where the spirit is taken from the spring air into the warm summer waters.

"Smiley, what the hell's so funny?"

"I can't believe you did that."

"Did what?" Sean was finally starting to suspect something was amiss.

"Dude, you just ate acid."

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Part V. Additional Studies

"The crab is symbolic of possessions and retention; it carries its house on its back. Although it has land travel faculties, the crab is a creature born of water. The Egyptians represented this sign with a Scarabus. They made much out of this emblem, not because of its beauty, but because it was a figure of the zodiac, a star-sign of perfected being; symbolical of progress from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom, from death to resurrection, from the vicissitudes of time to secure possession of the treasures of eternity."[1]

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Smiley was found in his room with a nitrous tank and a balloon over his head. The paramedics said it was a suicide, but anyone who actually knew him was well aware that Smiley wasn't trying to die. In fact, I'd say it was the exact opposite situation. He wasn't trying to die. He was just like the rest of us—another lost soul searching for belonging.

But belonging on his terms.

And if I'm being honest, that's all anyone ever really wants—the ability to belong to a family who loves you no matter how bad it gets; the ability to wander freely in the world, but to always know where home is. Wherever Smiley was, wherever Smiley is, that is home. Home is where the heart lies, and that kid's heart was a vast ocean. Every 28 days the full moon would pull the tide upward, and release that water onto all of us.

Towards the end of his life, it seemed like everyone was trying to save him from himself. It's pretty clear to me now that we were really just trying to save ourselves.

Home is where the heart lies, and that kid's heart was a vast ocean.

1. Llewellyn George. *Llewellyn George's New A to Z Horoscope Maker and Interpreter.* Llewellyn Publications. 2004.

A week after Smiley died, it started to rain. Within about three hours, the small creek outside my house had turned into a river. The flood was coming.

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"Cancer is the exaltation of Jupiter, the detriment of Saturn (Satan), and the home of the moon. Moon is mot, Maya, mother, mutter, mater, ma, Monday, and relates to pure, undefiled water, virgin mere, holy water used in the ceremonies of Isis and those of the Catholic Church."[2]

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Out of my anguish, I reach into the shower stream and try to grab on. The harder I squeeze the faster it slips through my hands. I have nothing left to hold onto. Everything is collapsing. The water is rising. It's time to either float atop the flood or to be swept away with it.

The linoleum surface of the bathtub presses against my cheek. As the icy water runs over my back, I cry out from the frozen tundra of hell, begging for this pain to stop.

But one does not stop pain.

One must learn to feel that which hurts.

The flood is here.

It's time to build a boat.

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There were twenty hits of acid last night, now there were four. All and all, twelve of us had participated in the madness. The full zodiac. I fell asleep at about five in the morning; Smiley woke me up at nine.

"Matty, we're going skiing."

"No way, dude. I feel fucked right now."

"Nah, it's cool. We're going skiing. Go take a shower; I'm gonna get Willy's car keys."

2. Llewellyn George. *Llewellyn George's New A to Z Horoscope Maker and Interpreter.* Llewellyn Publications. 2004.

I get out of the shower and meet Smiley outside the dorms. The air is so cold it makes the hair inside my nostrils freeze. He hands me a lit cigarette and then lights his own. We stand there, comfortably silent, and watch ourselves release the warm air within us into the frigid ice we've been thrown into.

"Well, I got to hand it to you. You got our whole dorm high on acid last night."

His watery blue eyes catch hold of me. He chooses not to respond right away but instead to smile. Then, at the last possible instant, he pulls the cigarette away from his mouth.

"Matty, life's really beautiful sometimes."

"Yeah man. Thanks for waking me up." I watch as my warm cloud of smoke mixes with his beneath the backdrop of frozen, reflective crystals glimmering in the rising sun. "I needed this."

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In Vedic tradition, water is ubiquitously referred to as "food for death." Out of the four basic plutonic elements, water is feminine, and it is symbolic of emotions. Throughout history, there have been countless tales told of a flood, which God sends to cleanse the Earth of its sins. A few examples of such tales are the Epic of Gilgamesh, Noah's flood in the Old Testament, and Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston. One who understands water is aware that we all must one day face a "flood of emotions." One who is born into water is able to fill whatever environment he or she has been placed into. The three water signs of the zodiac are Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces. All of these signs are heavily influenced by the Moon. All of these signs are able to adapt to great change. All of these signs involve great secrecy.

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Jack the dog is looking for something which cannot be found. He has lost his boy. All of his other puppies are here, but the most important one is gone. My tears flow like the raging creek that runs parallel to me. It's too sad not to cry when a dog outlives his boy. I put my cigarette down and reach out to the wandering pup; Jack collapses into my chest.

Home isn't just the place you put all your stuff.

"It's okay, buddy. We did all we could." The wet nose of the dog gently brushes the side of my cheek, "We'll see him the next time around."

As I look throughout the room, I realize this was the party Smiley had always wanted. Unfortunately, the only way he could attend was omnisciently. Everyone was here; it was the family Smiley had created.

It's three in the morning on a Thursday. The whiskey bottle makes it around the circle of infinitely unique children who have come to pay their respects. All of us have class tomorrow morning, but none of us could care less.

Home isn't just the place you put all your stuff. No, home is much deeper than that; home is a mindset one must constantly master. If you're trying to go home, you're never going to get there. Smiley was a crab; he carried his home on his back. But the home he carried all on his own was big enough to hold all of us.

Now that he was gone, it felt like we were homeless.

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Pleasant Street is pleasantly flowing. There are various news trucks lining the road that have come to document "The Flood of The Century," but from where I'm standing, it looks exactly how it was supposed to. There is a 3-inch thick layer of soot on the steps of Smiley and Willy's apartment. Me and Wes have come here to go make sure Willy's guitar has made it through the storm that destroyed the apartment where Smiley was found dead just a week earlier. Or at least that's the lie we told ourselves.

We really came here on a whim; we came here because we had lost our home; we came here because the water had swept the earth away and we needed something to hold onto. I had been swimming blindly in the dark for a week; the current was becoming too strong. I needed a raft—something that could make sense out of these dark, unfamiliar waters.

But I've lately found that it is senseless to make sense out of senselessness.

His room has been stripped of all of its previous possessions—even though I'm sure that if I looked hard enough,

I would undoubtedly find a small bag, probably covered in little blue dolphins, filled with some form of upper, downer or in-betweener that would make me feel different. It might even make me feel okay.

But it wouldn't make me feel better.

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"Those graced by Water love to take their sense of the world and translate it into the artistic. They desire aesthetic beauty—and for everyone to be happy as a result of that beauty. Much like still water can become stagnant, however, an inactive Water Sign person is not a Water Sign person at their best. Water Signs feel most fulfilled when they are helping others, and they do so in an enchanting, considerate and even romantic way."[3]

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Every single one of us has an addiction; every single one of us is an addict. We have all, at one point or another, relied on something outside of ourselves. Television, when consumed in mass quantities, can be just as sedative as Heroin. People take Adderall to study, but I call that speed. We are all afraid of death, yet most of us continually choose to involve ourselves in activities which will probably kill us. But there is such a twisted irony in that fear of death. 'Cause it's something we all share.

Because despite the infinite differences between people, everyone is still going to die. It doesn't matter if you were a famous person or a homeless person, a black person or a white person; it doesn't matter what car you drove or if you couldn't afford a car to drive; it doesn't matter who you slept with or who slept with you. "We all go the same." When we are born, everyone comes out of their mother's womb crying. When we die, everyone cries for us. At birth, we are thrown into a very fast river. One day, the river will pull us under. But until we get pulled down, the only choice we really have is whether or not we want to swim upstream or with the current.

3. Dr. S.P. Bhagat. *Love Astrology: Compatibility of Signs.*

Most of us swim upstream.

But those who have learned to swim with the current understand that by swimming with the river, we become the river. When we stop clinging on to the side of the shore and let go, the water will take all of us to exactly where we are supposed to be.

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Me and Smiley get on the bus going to Denver. It's the first Friday of freshman year, and the world is changing faster than it ever has. I've only known Smiley for four days, but I get the strange sensation that we've known each other much longer.

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"It is told that when two Zen masters meet, they do not need to be introduced. For two thieves need no introduction. Those who are Zen do not steal for personal gain; rather, they will steal your watch and sell it back to you, simply to remind you that you had the watch in the first place."[4]

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We sit in the same row of seats, and begin to talk about nothing in particular. But the conversation is far from boring. Blissfully, we flow from topic to topic like the creek bouncing between rocks. Suddenly, he turns towards me and speaks from the bottom of his stomach:

"We're going to be friends forever." ꕥ

4. Alan Watts. *Zen Bones and Tales.* Lecture. Web. 1960.

Photo by Hannah Vine

MONARCH

By Marie Martin

Just like her thoughts, the monarch fluttered aimlessly over the dewy, wet grass. I sit here, alone in a meadow, watching the yellow monarch make its way, dodging flowers and long grass strands. This beautiful animal is a symbol of hope, but to me, it is a symbol of finding who you are.

I was born hotheaded, driven, and exuberant about life. She danced into this world gracefully with a golden aura beaming in every direction of the room. We shared laughs, threatened lies, and forced tears in the dirtiest of ways, but most of all, she was my other half. A sister is someone you love unconditionally, but a common misconception in sisterhood is "why" we love them. Do we love so deeply because we are sisters by blood or sisters by bond? It took me eighteen years to find the answer to this question that seemed to be fluttering in front of me every time I looked at her aimlessly wandering, hazel eyes.

Growing up, we were inseparable. The longest we had ever gone without seeing the other was two weeks, due to my mandatory fifth grade camping trip to the Redwood Forest.

Like most relationships, we went through phases of being distant, but because we were so close, that distance would quickly diminish into an enthusiastic conversation over our love of food. Which would then lead to our love of the arts, the ocean, and then inevitably, it would come back to food once we got hungry from talking. Maybe it's the twinkle in her eye, or the dimple on her cheek, or the way she walks like she has fifty things going on in her head at once, but somehow, she can always make me smile on my worst day. They say everyone has that one person in your life who makes everything bad worthwhile. Sarah was my person.

They say everyone has that one person in your life who makes everything bad worthwhile.

Every morning I would wake up to the sound of my mother's chirping grow closer and closer. The sound of her steps growing louder as she approached my room, knocked, and continued her morning ritual. Once she finished with me, she pranced out of my room, still humming the same tune as she cautiously approached my sister. The humming would stop, followed by, "OKAY I'LL GET UP," and a loud exaggerated sigh from my mother's end.

Waking up, washing her face, brushing her teeth, putting on the right outfit, eating breakfast, getting in the car, driving to school, and picking a parking space were all extremely difficult tasks that took Sarah triple the amount of time it normally would for an average teenager. Washing her face was a lengthy process that went like so: she would turn on the sink, then wrack her brain to remember where she washed her face last. She would go to that room, grab her face wash, rush back to her room with the water still running, splash her face and half of the counter with water and proceed to wash her face whilst getting distracted by what she wanted to eat for breakfast.

She would walk into her closet to pick out her outfit, forgetting about the face wash still on her face, and then get the scrub on a shirt she accidentally touched. She would then rush back to the bathroom to wash it all off her face while simultaneously getting more water on the counter and on her shirt. It was a task that would take an average person two minutes, it took her fifteen.

"It's not that hard to just get in the car and go to school, Sarah," our mother said. Sarah's perfect ballerina posture turned insecure as her shoulders sunk into her body and her eyes fluttered down resting on her hyperactive twiddling thumbs. Then she would roll her eyes and shake off every dagger directed at the fluttering monarchs that were her thoughts.

I used to take my mother's side, completely baffled at why these simple tasks were so difficult. It would take me thirty minutes, at most, to get ready, eat, and get out the door. So naturally, I never understood the apparent difficulty of these tasks. Instead of trying to understand why she was this way, I would support her attempts to mask her hyperactive thoughts. But who she is was inescapable.

I refer to my adolescence as inconvenient. My sister and I would call ourselves "custodial kids" since our parents constantly bicker over having joint custody over us as if we were items, not their children. Each Christmas, Thanksgiving, spring break, and summer we would move from the picture perfect suburbs of San Francisco with our mother, to the small island of Oahu, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, with our father. Just like going to school, traveling was always a huge ordeal for her. Our trip usually began with me waiting in the car, ready to go, while Sarah struggled to get everything together last minute. Once we left, it was almost a ritual having to turn back around at least once because she forgot something important—usually her ID. My mother would disguise her rage and instead show her disgust for the organization Sarah lacked.

Trying to describe your parents in a few phrases is nearly impossible, so I'm just going to tell you that while we are blessed, every family has its problems. Our problems just seemed to have happened earlier in our lives than we would have liked. But life has its way of not letting you chose your fate—life is funny that way. My mother moved to California when she wanted nothing more to do with the conflicting values in their marriage (him not wanting to move from the small, social bubble of Hawaii, political and financial differences, etc.). This would usually end in my father drinking until he fell asleep. This pattern continued most summer nights: waking up happy in the morning, then proceeding to accentuate our flaws loud enough for the neighbors to undoubtedly hear, finally passing out while murmuring sad-nothings to himself. These flaws usually consisted of attributes we could never change, like the fact that he saw Sarah

as a spitting image of our mother and because of this, he could never love Sarah like a real daughter because in his eyes, all he saw was how much he hated our mother.

As a young teenager, I was insecure, ignorant, and did not realize how these direct attacks on who we were made such an impact on my relationship with my sister and who she became to me. At the time, her fluttering mind seemed like such a distant concept, completely out of grasp to what seemed like everyone, especially me.

Denial kept me from thinking it possible that I could not see who my own sister was. Blinded by the manipulative fighting words from my mother: Why can't you be more like Marie? Where did I go wrong with you?

It wasn't my sister, but me. I masked the person she really was.

Growing up, you look up to your parents and think that everything they do, say, and believe is right. So naturally, hearing those words from my mother only convinced me more that what I hesitantly thought at first was right.

After living on opposite sides of the world for over six months, we were finally back in the same house and in our favorite room where we shared our fondest memories: the kitchen. It seemed surreal for us to finally be back in the same state, or even the same country. When we first set foot on our respective paths in life, I didn't know how to live without her. Life as a single child was as much a foreign concept to me as the language she was about to be immersed in. I didn't know what life without her was like. However, I had no choice but to find out. Naturally, we grew apart.

We sat at the counter telling stories about our past semester and her many adventures traveling abroad in Italy. She became frazzled—cleaning the dishes, making tea, running to her room to grab a sweatshirt, running back to the kitchen, then back to her room again to get sweatpants, then back to the kitchen just in time to turn off the whistling kettle pot. She grabbed a cup from the cupboard and rustled her hand around in the tea drawer to grab her favorite black tea with five pods of cardamom, her favorite spice. She poured hot water from the kettle into her mug, spilling some on the counter. She yelled out as some of it splashed on her leg and raced to grab a paper towel to clean it up and soon after, hustled to the

refrigerator to grab the milk and then to the cupboard to grab the sugar. "Sarah," I addressed her, "what's wrong?" I could sense she was trying to mask something by distracting herself.

Silently, we walked into her room and out the French doors that led to a small grass lawn. We sat on the edge of her door with our feet in the grass, looking up at the clear starry night sky, soon filled with the smoke and scent of the spiritual herb. There in silence, comfortable in each other's presence, we absorbed the time we shared now, and making up for the time we had lost.

Repositioning, we faced each other cross-legged. She began to vent about the problem that really bothered her: living in a foreign country for a semester, away from the pressure and conflicts with our parents, had allowed her to accept herself unconditionally. Being home brought back repressed emotions of when our mother had once made her feel incapable of anything and of our father's relentless rejection.

It is easy to feel inferior stuck in a bubble where reality is at the tip of your fingers, just out of reach. Being back home reminded her of that feeling of inferiority. It was in that moment, gazing into her hazel eyes, and her into the deep blue of mine, endorphins flowing, and mind wide open, that she let me see her—in every sense of the word.

A beautifully magnificent mind appeared behind the fog . . .

A hole in my stomach formed. Something in my gut that made me feel empty: guilt. It flushed over me—a feeling I had never before felt for her. I felt remorseful for believing the unintelligence and incompetence our mother saw. A beautifully magnificent mind appeared behind the fog that I could never see past. She had waited eighteen years for me to come full circle and see her for the glorious fluttering monarchs that were her thoughts.

We sat there in silence for what felt like an eternity. She had so many thoughts hovering in the hazy abyss before her—some easy to grasp, and others just out of reach. She could catch a few thoughts at a time, and to her, this was simply how she worked. But she tried to conform to outside pressures of our

small bubble of reality, where she was not the norm. She smiled just barely, letting me know that she knew I understood—she let me in. I smiled back and we hugged. In that moment, we both knew that we are the way we are, and no one could change us or change what we meant to one another. All the conflict that had clouded her mind diminished and the thin string that had tied us together at the hip, that had cocooned during our time together that night, transformed into a thick rope that couldn't be worn down.

Her mind works like a swarm of these monarchs, hovering in front of her, just out of reach, but just close enough to grasp only one or two at a time and hold onto it. That is, until it slips out of the cracks of your hands. Not to be confused with foolishness, as she is one of the most intelligent women you will ever come across. It is more like a practice, or a game rather, of how long she can hold onto this small unit of her mind before it flutters away and she is on to the next one. Even still, it is a mystery how long these thoughts stay in her mind, if they stay at all, or if they never really leave.

Our past experiences make up who we are, but she showed me it is how you take those experiences into your own hands and whether or not you let them affect the person you want to be. The pain I felt realizing my lack of appreciation for her unique mind ultimately led me to a greater understanding of people and for that, I will be forever grateful. Some, like my mother, will never understand people like Sarah, but that is another funny thing about life—some people will just never understand you no matter how hard they try. So here I sit, in spirit, alone in a meadow, toes in the dewy grass, watching a fluttering monarch hover aimlessly above a flower. To some, this monarch is a beautiful symbol of hope. I chuckle to myself and remember that it is who she is.

Photo by Kelsey Ruggard

Photo by Chad Henderson

LIFE OF A TWINKIE

BY SERENA L'DARA

"Why don't you date someone your own age?" Those words take a moment to register as I am caught unaware by the accusation. The hostility was palatable as it dripped from the waiter's tone. He is addressing me. I feel caught, as if I have done something terribly, horribly wrong. Emotions cloud my mind as I think frantically of how to respond. A hush descends on the table as I silently struggle.

I was at a nice restaurant with my father. It was not for any big occasion or for something special, just a simple catch-up session. Since my parents had divorced and high school had started it was increasingly harder to keep in touch. Therefore, it was a rare and kind gesture for my dad to take me to a restaurant. However, I underestimated the effect of the "Asian timeless look." At the wholesome age of fourteen I never would have suspected that someone who saw us together would assume anything other than that I was my father's daughter. This reality had never been challenged up until now and that sent super-charged thoughts through my mind like flashes of lightning. Each flash lit up a new thought crackling with confusion, anger, and mystification.

I am adopted and, for as long as I remember, I was aware of that fact but it had never impacted me directly. I was simply happy with living in the moment and getting in and out of various childhood scrapes. It was not until my teenage years that my biological heritage started to affect my self-identity. My hometown of Boulder, Colorado has a very strong Asian population, and as such it was during high school that I learned of the term "Twinkie."

Many of my friends at the time were Chinese-American and this metaphor hit home for all of us who were raised here in the United States and thus upheld American ideals but were encased by a Chinese exterior. It was easy for my friends with Asian parents to identify themselves as Chinese (or not), but because of my Caucasian family and upbringing, I have always identified myself with White American culture. Although I connected with Asian people on several levels, I still felt distanced from them; I had none of their cultural background. Where did I belong if not with Chinese Americans? If I look at a family photo I feel instinctively that I belong, all the smiling faces identical in expression, but my appearance contradicts that. This has led to many awkward situations where I was the inadvertent target of some unintentional snap judgments.

It was not until my teenage years that my biological heritage started to affect my self-identity.

I was with my mom and my best friend at the bank. We went up to the teller and said, "My daughter would like to open a bank account." On autopilot, the woman turned to my Caucasian friend and asked, "May I see your driver's license?" Time screeched to a stop. I did not want to make the poor lady feel bad for a simple mistake. At face value, anyone could make the assumption that I was in fact, the friend and not the daughter. There was a complete lack of ill intent and I did not want to make a scene for something that had not actually hurt me. Time resumed as I slowly and calmly opened my wallet and discreetly placed my license on the counter. I gave a small nod and pretended to ignore the teller's panic-stricken face.

At family reunions on my father's side, I am never recognized as part of the family. I am always referred to as "oh, the adopted one" by my aunt. At my cousin's wedding, my grandfather thought I was my father's new girlfriend. Cousins have asked me if I really am part of the family because I'm "just adopted, not really my parents' daughter." To this day, those words evoke tears that prick through eyes.

Emotionally I was in turmoil. For me, family is composed of those who you love and care for and who love you back, regardless of relation. If my parents were able to open up their home to someone not of their blood, was it just that big of a stretch for others to at least acknowledge that I was part of the family? The lack of recognition of who I was evoked a self-criticism of how I viewed myself. I lacked the background to fit my physique. As far as I was concerned, I came from a perfectly normal family, went to school, did my homework, and played sports. There was nothing to differentiate me, nor any real reason to treat me with disdain. From the "white" side, I had the pity of those who looked on my life as unfortunate. From the Asian side, I had the criticisms of not fitting in, not understanding my heritage, or having bad blood because I came from a dishonorable family that abandoned me. Yet some of these doubts about my character were true. I had no comprehension of Chinese tradition or any notion of my heritage. However, it was not my intention to commit this heinous crime. I simply was not born into it. But I felt guilty for this fact, why did I not care more about where I came from? Why did I not recognize it in proportion to how I appeared?

Throughout the years I had been in contact with other girls from my adoption group. We met several times over the years and attended some heritage camps founded by our adoption agency. At these camps, I felt like I belonged. We all shared the same backgrounds, the same persistent, gnawing feelings of inadequacy and a desire to belong somewhere. It was during one of the camp talks that it hit me; we had carved out our own niche. We were a different group altogether. We were our own distinctive fusion with Chinese biological roots but with an American upbringing. This epiphany made me realize that everyone could, or even should understand me on that level if that was the way in which they viewed the world. The only acceptance of my true identity I needed was my own. If I could be true to my own ideals and beliefs of what made me, well, me, others would eventually follow that lead.

My mind snaps back to the restaurant and I pause to make sure what I say to the waiter is accurate to what I wish to convey. It is not enough to take everything in only at face value. Even though the waiter had several years on me, at the solemn age of fourteen, it was apparent I knew more about identity than he could ever begin to comprehend. I let the question trail off into silence.

THOMAS

By Stephen Patterson

Yesterday, a homeless man told me he was an angel. He said the streets were already paved in gold, the kingdom was come. His name was Thomas. He was smoking a cigarette and asked if I had any whiskey. He'd been hit by a car and didn't want to sue the woman behind the wheel. It wasn't her fault, he said. I wanted to believe him. I wanted to believe all of it.

I asked him to pray over my body. He took my hands, held them tight over my kitchen table, I bowed my head, closed my eyes, and tried to remember faith. On Sundays, I pass on my regards to the big man through a roommate. I'm afraid of priests. I used to have a wooden cross necklace, long since lost.

I feel sick all the time. Sometimes, I imagine a snake, long and scaled, and it slides through my body, scraping, slithering, rough angles catching on my insides, begging to be coughed up and choked up and vomited down a drain. I imagine a couple of my teeth will come out with it. The blood from my gums; the afterbirth.

A couple teens stole his tablet while he was rolling a cigarette on a bench. He didn't mean to chase them, but it was instinct. Natural. He got up, they ran, they made it across the street, he didn't. The car hit him right in the middle and he saw the Kingdom opened. It broke his body. He lost his job, then his home. He calls himself Iron Man, says he's indestructible. He looked so tired.

He was holding my hands, kept shifting them, maintaining contact. I didn't want to let go, even when it seemed he was done praying. He could sense it. He would stop for a moment, then start again, more fervently each time. He asked if I knew what "amen" meant. I said "I agree". He said no. So be it, or Truth.

He said there was something living inside of me, that I'd picked it up when I was abroad and that it had been there ever since then. He guessed South America.

He said he'd died before, five times. Someone kept sending him back. I thought he was high. He told me a story. He stayed up all night locked in the art building on campus, painting with a woman half his age. He said it was weird, but not like that. He scared me, a little. I locked the door after he left.

I wanted him to be an angel. I wanted to believe in angels that smoked and drank and cursed like a woman giving birth. I wanted an angel who would bum a cigarette, who would shoot whiskey with me at two in the afternoon.

I wanted an angel to give it to me straight. I wanted an angel with dirt on his knuckles and under his nails.

My hands smelled of dirt and smoke and booze for the rest of the day. I washed them, but it didn't go away. He prayed for my stomach. He said there was something living inside of me, that I'd picked it up when I was abroad and that it had been there ever since then. He guessed South America. I've never been south of the border. But South Africa, three or four years before. He told me to have faith,

that he could take it away. It's been there three years now, if he's right. I feel sick all the time. So maybe not a snake, maybe a worm pulsing in time with my blood. The streets are already paved in gold.

It was November, warm. I was on the phone with my dad (financial trouble, as always) and halfway through a Pall Mall. He stood over me, asked for a light, then waited while I talked. I asked dad if I could call him right back. I think I was rude, I didn't know what else to say so I asked if he wanted a cigarette. He was already smoking one. I wanted to get back to my phone, but he said, "Let's talk for a while." He told me he was an angel. He said I was one, too. His name was Thomas, he prayed over my body and I feel sick all the time. But I feel better today.

Photo by Eva Weinberg

WHEN YOU'RE A STRANGER

By Semayah Post

I've been driving for about an hour. I have four more to go. A few minutes earlier, I noticed the 100-miles-from-Colorado marker. When an endless sprawl of naked land points off in every direction, the imagination does an interesting thing. All proof of mammalian life goes extinct. I wonder if UFOs visited Earth during the Jurassic-AKA dinosaur-Period. What if dinosaurs still existed somewhere in the galaxy, kidnapped as proof of earthly dominance? I look over at my friend Emily who drifts in and out of sleep on the passenger side next to me. My thought of extraterrestrial life is interrupted by her catatonic nod into the headrest, which is usually followed by baby elephant-like snorts that make me giggle. Zack and Megan are asleep in the back seat. The upper half of their bodies take up the entire seat and their legs and feet dangle over the head rests or poke out the window like an octopus's tentacles. I have my music, my thoughts, and a six o'clock setting sun that makes me consider, for the first time in 300 miles of ambivalence, that Utah is a beautiful state after all.

Photo by Hannah Vine

Only a few minutes later the back of Roxy (Emily's mother had given their Subaru Outback a rather stripper-esque name) is shaking like an earthquake snuck up on her. You'd think the rapture was happening at this very moment and every Mormon in all of Utah had made it in this round of saints. I slow to a solemn forty miles per hour and Roxy still fishtails drunkenly across the right lane of I-70. I pull over with the hope that I'll witness thousands of white clad Mormons being snatched up into the sky. I discover instead that the right back wheel is as loose as the first tooth I lost. Had I tried to grind out two more minutes of this Martian-like desolated landscape, we would be in a far more dismal place.

Let's make a few things clear: ignorance about cars runs rampant within our crew of gals; Zack knows a smidge more, but even he awkwardly confesses to having never been forced to change a tire. We pool together our sparse car sensibilities and agree that some unidentifiable sharp object didn't poke the tire. Its guts are intact. The rubber isn't shredded into spaghetti, and we aren't shrouded in plumes of smoke. But that right rear tire is definitely loose. For the sake of knowledge, I will discuss a sparsely informed Wikipedia understanding of tire science. The rubber tire—what we call the black covering—fits snugly around the wheel. The wheel then mounts to the hub by the studs. Now before you write this off as a Dr. Seuss rhyme about cars, just know that the lug nuts tighten and hold the wheel onto the studs. Ta-da! There lies our problem. Each tire is held to the wheel by five lug nuts. Within the last hour, that one problematic tire had lost four of its nuts! If you aren't already convinced that cars and their associated language were created by men, and for men, just consider this simple formula: nuts come from studs that mount hubs. Roxy lost four of her twenty nuts. Enough to make the girl go crazy.

One thing about the desert terrain of southwest Utah is the coldness that seeps into your bones after the sun waves goodbye. Hard to feel anything but the permeating darkness. Eighteen-wheelers come bombing past us at high speeds, rattling the only cocoon we have, an injured Roxy. A series of phone calls tell us the AAA tow truck is one hundred and twenty miles away. We spend the time reenacting techniques we perfected as children, the ones we learned when our mothers sent us into the backyard to entertain ourselves. We play cards, and humbly

We play cards and humbly consider our possibilities as packs of coyotes whip, yip, yap, and hoot across a blanketed echo.

consider our possibilities as packs of coyotes whip, yip, yap and hoot across a blanketed echo.

Emily, who is wearing three sweaters at once, begins, "You know, when we stopped to get gas at that last place . . ."

We all nod. I remember sprinting for the ladies room. Handing the cashier forty dollars for pump number three. Telling Emily she was all set to fill Roxy up. Zack, Megan, and I, feeling the pangs of "doing absolutely nothing but sitting for five hours" hunger, decided our only option was the fast food joint across from the gas station.

She continues, ". . . there was a guy who came up to me while I was filling up gas. He told me I needed air in the tires, and said he would do it for free."

I look at Megan, she looks at Zack, and our eyes grow big with this new information. Megan offers, "I knew I was meditating over that veggie burger, but I didn't know I had entered a trance."

Emily is no frills. "He starts talking about how tire pressure increases as you get higher in elevation and I admitted we were heading back to Colorado. I mean, he sounded like he knew what he was talking about."

The burger is souring in my stomach. Emily ended up pulling Roxy into the mechanic's shop that was attached to the gas station. He tried to convince her she needed a whole new set of tires. But before she waved an entire summer's worth of grocery money goodbye in Utah, she called her mom. The tires were fine. They'd been inspected, along with the car, two weeks earlier. She argued with the shifty-eyed mechanic for three minutes before peeling out of there. That's when the three amigos waddled out of Burger King.

Our faces turn red with anger. Foul play; we can smell it like a rotten rat. Thinking our unfortunate luck is owed to some wheeling and dealing stranger at a gas station makes us all cranky. Just then the tow truck pulls up. A big-hearted, small town mechanic who talks in a rusty southwestern twang greets us. With Roxy in tow, we cram our four bodies into the passenger side of his truck.

Green River, Utah boasts a population of 973 people. Back in 1876, a man named Blake set up a ferry and a way station on the east side of the Green River (an actual river) to support the U.S. mail station. Seven years later, a train station was opened.

The population boomed by eighty-four percent that year, owing mostly to workers who came to lay the tracks for the railway. For many years, Green River was where the train stopped to fill up on fuel and where passengers went to fuel their stomachs. Up to the 2000's, the townspeople supported themselves by mining uranium, growing cantaloupes, and launching missiles with the U.S. Air Force. The Green River of 2013 has one double lane road dividing it in half. The first street we see juts to the right, home to most, if not all, of the municipal buildings. The post office is a white, Lincoln-log-style house. Ray's Tavern sits in a sunken brick building. A little farther down lies the Melon Vine Grocery store, which happens to be the largest building on Main Street. I catch sight of Cathy's Pizza & Deli and momentarily feel comforted. Our sweet, hillbilly tow truck driver drops us four Despairing Dorothy's and a beat up Roxy at the only mechanic garage in town. We're not surprised to see the "closed" sign on the door. Stashing whatever sense of hope we have left far away, we haul our bags and exhausted bodies to the Book Cliff Motel. My disclaimer is that it is conveniently right next to the mechanic's shop.

Due in part to an abnormality I call excessive curiosity, I visit the Travelocity reviews during the pecking away of this piece. In my defense, I was seeking out visual cues to magically stir the cauldrons of a year and a half old memory. I don't mind calling that a mistake. Maybe we were experiencing a heavily drugged bout of sleep deprivation and stress hypnosis, but walking down those forbidding and ghostly hallways didn't as much raise the hairs on our backs or heads. We spent several minutes haggling with a rust encrypted keyhole, entering our room four minutes later. Each wall is painted a different color—red, yellow, orange, green—hinting perhaps to an insanity-induced period of painting psychedelic vomit on the walls. Minimal sixties kitsch furniture consisting of two beds, two nightstands, and one table from when the motel first opened still exist there today. And the carpet looked like a dish sink that had marinated in food scraps for years.

But a bed is a bed and sleep is sleep. I dress myself as if I'm a resident of the North Pole. My hope is that the thicker the layer is between my skin and the sheets, the more resistant I am to the cooties, that without question live deep within this bed. Morning returns with the sun and a diagnosis of Roxy's health. She is going to survive, but it will be a day before the part she needs arrives from several hundred miles away.

Morning returns with the sun and a diagnosis of Roxy's health.

I'm on the phone with my mother, who every year has grown more paranoid and fearful of my whereabouts and do-abouts.

"Isn't Green River where the Green River Killings took place?" She quizzes, as if this statement alone warrants a long scream followed by a frantic sprint to the hotel to grab my bag, fumbling over my words as I tell Emily, Megan, and Zack that we HAVE to leave this very second. We're damned. This place is full of killers and people stuck in 1950.

"No, Mom, that was in Washington or California . . . I think. And isn't he in prison anyways?" I demand dryly.

"Well you be careful, just stay in your hotel room," she replies.

"Let's go get food and check out what this town is all about!" I humor the gang after my mom hangs up.

We walk in the direction we had come the night before. Four lost ants shuffling alongside a road the width of a football field, in search of coffee and bagels. Humans do this weird thing where they just stare at other humans who look like they don't belong. And stare they did. Ignoring our obvious displacement, we all look at each other in thankful disbelief when we come upon the Green River Coffee House, as it doesn't resemble anything else in this town. Sure, things are fairly cluttered—the whole coffee shop is filled with books, jewelry and local craft things for sale. But it is also dressed up with wooden tables, pastries, bagels, breakfast sandwiches, and coffee roasted-in house.

Emily is curious about why the town is named Green River. No one in the coffee shop knows, which is odd, seeing as they all live in Green River. It probably shouldn't have taken me a year and a half to find out that the town was named after the river that ran alongside of it. If we had driven that half mile more, we would have inevitably crossed over the bridge and found the answers to our own questions. I'll give them the benefit of the doubt that they thought it was some existential question like this: "Was there a river before there was the color green, or vice versa, and was it man, beast, God, cosmic force, or a bang that created it?"

We guzzle our coffee and remain curious about this answerless place. Zack is a jack of all things weird and collected. He looks like an earthy oddity himself. He wears bones, wood, and other miscellanea that he's found off the ground as jewelry.

His clothes resemble rags; strips of fabric held together by silver safety pins. Obviously his interest is piqued by the thrift store next door to our breakfast oasis. We enter and find this town's compost of displaced "things" interesting enough to help an hour pass by. Then Megan convinces us a trip to the Melon Vine Grocery store should be next on our agenda.

Megan has wavy strawberry cream hair that hangs down to her waist, deep moon-brown eyes, and tightly pursed rose lips. She looks like an otherworldly goddess. She is horribly addicted to sleeping and third generation feminism, and nothing goes unnoticed, and uncommented, at least in the realm of gender relations. Being a vegetarian with limited options, Megan paces the grocery store grabbing every processed food in sight. Bagel Bites, Cream Cheese, Skittles, Doritos . . . I wonder how all that junk could possibly be better for her than a few strips of bacon. We head back along the road to the motel and make curious notes of everything: the man with waist-length dreads who is humming along to Bob Marley as he cleans the shop windows, the women with Mickey Mouse eyes who waves at us from inside the barber shop, and then the man at the front desk of Book Cliff Motel who lets us stay an extra night at no extra cost.

Time passes. We blow bubbles into an empty crumbling pool and soak up the sun as it moves overhead in the middle of the day. We wander down the streets that seem to disappear into nothing. Emily sees a swing set and leads us all to it. These are long swings, the ones that let you go as high as you can pump. For a whole hour we swing back and forth, brushing the tips of our feet against the branches of a willow tree. All the trees and the miniature single-story houses and the lonesome, run-down, abandoned buildings that speak of an exuberance long gone—all shimmer with dusk-ridden opulence. In this park, we give a middle finger to the crummy nature of humanity, the woes of being dealt a dose of reality, the grown up B.S. of this spinning life. Today we returned to the simpleness we knew as children, when time was endless and our imaginations grew fast and fanciful. The small town singing its sad country tune seemed to subdue our adultness long enough for us to notice the strange, untimely, and beautiful wholeness—when the curious rhythm beat of the world lets you break down just long enough to be still.

By nine AM the next morning, Roxy is ready to take us home. Our bags are huddled together near the door of our grungy hotel room. Emily does a once-over of the room to make sure she hasn't left anything. She opens the drawer of one of the nightstands. You know how some hotel rooms come with Bibles? There was no Bible sitting there, just a Bhagavad-Gita, the ancient scripture on Hindu mysticism and theology. Smiles pass over our faces. Things we didn't know about this place surprise us. As Green River became a speck of buildings and then nothing, I think of the strangeness of entering and leaving a place. We pass through, expectedly, and unexpectedly, and hope we're changed in the meantime.

Photo by Jessica Williams

Photo by Natasha Collins

CONTRIBUTORS

RENÉE BLEVINS is a freshman who just recently made the move from the humidity of Germantown, Tennessee out to this wonderful city in the shade of the Flatirons. She is currently studying Spanish, Psychology, and the mountains. Writing has always been one of her passions and she is honored to have her work selected to be in this journal. In her next years at CU, she hopes to further develop her writing skills and become more involved in the creative community.

AMY HELEN CHU grew up in Boulder in the old days when she was allowed to cross the fence, lock up her bicycle, and wander all over the Open Space lands. She remembers returning from hikes to find grasshoppers chewing the Styrofoam inside her helmet to get the minerals and salts left from her sweaty forehead. She loves color and painting. She has a BS in Biology from Colorado State (1984) and is pursuing her BFA in Ceramics at CU. She worked at the MCDB in Recombinant DNA of Cystic Fibrosis when DNA had to be processed by hand. Catching butterflies at the age of 12 for a lepidopterist author who lectured with his live specimens and then released them back into the wild was the pinnacle of her love of the outdoors. She still counts butterflies as a volunteer for the Open Spaces every summer. Painting is still great therapy—as long as she doesn't get too much of it on her mother's curtains. Her story, "**GOTTA LOVE THAT DIRT**," is written in memory of Tino Cuellar, who put her and her family up in his house for more than a year.

B. JAMES DOUGHERTY is a writer and malcontent who grew up in Chicago, Illinois where he began writing poetry and short fiction at an early age. His work often features themes of existentialism and minimalism. James also sometimes performs music under the pseudonym White Bells.

CLARE FAIRCHILD-BAKER hails from Vail, Colorado. She is a freshman majoring in Integrative Physiology at CU Boulder. She has two older brothers; one of them attends CU Boulder as well and is in Air Force ROTC. He intimidates and scares away any boys who try to talk to her. She loves trail running, mountain biking, and baking.

JONATHAN FEDYSCHYN was born and raised in several U.S. states, as well as Japan. He is a junior at the University of Colorado-Boulder studying Political Science. His travels

across the world serve as the inspiration for this piece. This piece was submitted at the behest of a professor to JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. It his dream to continue traveling throughout his life, eventually winding up back in Japan.

DAVID GRIFFITH, author of "MEANING IN MEMORY," was born in Colorado. He enjoys playing sports and spending time on the ocean. He majors in Finance and hopes to one day find a beautiful wife. He has four siblings and a few close friends. An optimist, David wants for everyone to be happy.

DANIELLE HAWLEY majors in English as a Junior at CU. She grew up in Golden, Colorado with her parents and younger brother. She now resides in Boulder with four roommates, but would much prefer to live with a puppy. She enjoys reading, writing, rock climbing, traveling, and other soul-feeding—but financially worthless—activities. Around campus she can often be seen staring off into space while lost inside her head and walking into things.

SARAH HERSHMAN grew up in a small Colorado town before graduating from University of Colorado at Boulder with a degree in Integrative Physiology in May of 2014, after writing TOOTH FAIRY VS. JESUS CHRIST. She plans to start medical school in the Fall of 2016 with hopes of pursuing a career in medicine. She spends her spare time adventuring outside with friends and her scruffy rescue dog.

SERENA L'DARA, author of "LIFE OF A TWINKIE", is a Freshman at CU majoring in Integrative Physiology. She is an avid watcher of *Bones* and enjoys writing in her free time. She hopes sharing her experiences will inspire other internationally adopted children.

LUKE LEMONS is a freshman at the University of Colorado Boulder with no plans for the future besides just being there. Born and raised in Colorado, Luke enjoys hiking and exploring the outdoors with friends and family. Aside from all things social, he also enjoys playing guitar and occasionally writing. Currently, he is working on creating an amateur album and writing a new short story. Luke wrote "ON BEING ALIVE" for his First-Year course in THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC.

MARIE MARTIN was born in Hawaii and raised on both that tropical island and in the golden state of California. At the University of Colorado at Boulder she studies Accounting and Mathematics. She submitted "MONARCH" on a whim after the suggestion of her writing professor and continues to write in her free time, when she is not consumed with numbers. Along with creative nonfiction, Marie is passionate about writing music and traveling around the world and hopes to travel around Europe and South America after graduating from CU.

MAX OWENS is a Senior in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. Originally from dreary, flat Ohio, he is a lover of the sun and the mountains. He spends his weekends either climbing rocks or thinking about climbing rocks. His appreciation for the communication of his ideas and experiences—through writing, photography, and film—grows every day. If he could, he would like to spend every night of his life dancing with friends around a campfire in his fleece leopard onesie (or, if the fire's warm enough, nothing at all).

STEPHEN PATTERSON, author of "THOMAS", is a Creative Writing major at CU Boulder, originally from Colorado Springs. He usually focuses on fiction, mainly, but he's also pretty down for real life. Sometimes. Currently, Patterson is working on a sci-fi comic series with a buddy and is 2,794 words into his first novel. He likes the X-Files (a lot) and really wants to believe the reboot will go well.

KEIREN PIRIE studies Computer Science student here at CU. He enjoys swimming, meeting new people, and flying kites. Born in Morristown, Tennessee, Keiran has lived in Georgia, Illinois, and now resides in Colorado. He plans to study abroad in Scotland at some point during his college career. His dream for the future is to become as beautiful as his mother and as strong as his father. He listens to all kinds of music including country, classic rock, and EDM. He claims to be a shy guy, but his friends will tell you otherwise. He has always loved to write because he feels there is nothing better than being moved by a good book. He aspires to one day move others with his own stories.

SEMAYA POST is many things. An aficionado of biographical writing is not one of them. The version of her life that induces the least amount of fatigue and still leaves the reader capable of operating machinery goes like this: she comes from a family of seven (and she's not even Catholic), will have Psychology and Creative Writing degrees come May (knock on wood), and is in the beginning stages of planning her own post-graduation Hobbit adventure in New Zealand (or learning to talk like a Kiwi).

LAURA RIDYR writes mainly novels and short stories, but occasionally strays from her usual topics—androids and aliens—into the realm of nonfiction, driven by her adoration for her home state of Colorado. When she's not up to her neck in editing the manuscript for her first novel, she spends her time working towards her Political Science and International Affairs degrees and graduation in May of 2015. She can be reached through her website, *lbridyr.com*, or via a brief search in her natural habitat—Starbucks—where she can be identified by her tendency to mutter at her computer.

MAJA SOLBAKKEN is an international transfer student from Norway. She was recruited to the CU Ski Team by the head coach in 2013, and is currently a sophomore majoring in

Integrated Physiology. Her dream is to become a doctor, and to use her education to travel and experience the world. Besides her interests in cross-country skiing and medicine, she also likes to climb, back country ski, travel, and write. Her writing professor encouraged her to submit this personal narrative, which is dedicated to her grandfather, Harry Solbakken (1924-2012), to JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY.

BRIAN STREETER is a Junior in Anthropology from Southern California. Born and raised in the little suburb of La Cañada Flintridge, Brian was drawn to the Rocky Mountains by the clean air, big mountains, and smell of adventure. Rafting on the American River, and sleeping outside along millennia-old Giant Sequoias in Yosemite National Park, are two places Brian would rather be. Orangutans and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* are among two of his favorite things. Along with his personal favorite, Disc Golf, Brian has also been known to enjoy wrestling, fishing, foosball, and the occasional round of regular golf. Highly competitive—having grown up with three overly-athletic sisters—he has always tried to be the best he can be at the things he works at, whether it be wrestling or writing. He enjoys writing because it can express thoughts in a way that speech cannot, and communicate thoughts and memories in a meaningful way.

MATTHEW THOMAS, author of "LOVE IS IN THE EARTH" and "FOOD FOR DEATH," is twenty-two years old, and grew up in the area surrounding Aspen, Colorado. His hobbies include: skiing, slacklining, hacky sack, designing new Kool Aid recipes, and praising Jah. He currently works as a burger chef for CU Boulder's Farrand Hall Grab-and-Go, and has a long history of careers which involve the serving of "rich and helpless" people. After college, Matty plans on growing a beard and becoming a ski bum. He would like to dedicate his work in this journal to the memory of his sister Emily, and his beloved friend Rocci.

NEVIN WHITTEMORE began racing road, mountain, and cyclocross bikes at age thirteen and has ridden for Boulder Cycle Sport, Tokyo Joe's Mountain Bike Team, and Clif Bar Development Racing. In 2014, he finished top fifteen at the Cyclocross National Championship in Boulder. A freshman in Engineering and Applied Science, his passion for medicine was sparked by family members who worked in search and rescue and the fire service. He loves slacklining and snowboarding; playing guitar, ukulele, and drums; and everything about coffee culture.

PAULINE ZENKER was raised in both New York City and Seattle, Washington. She is a graduate of The Brooks School in North Andover, Massachusetts. Her interest in creative nonfiction developed during her gap year traveling around Europe. Other artists, musicians, and expressive works found in her surroundings also influence her.

GET INTO PRINT

Send a brief message to our email at journal2020@colorado.edu, and follow the guidelines from our auto-reply. You can find our web page at journal2020.wordpress.com.

CREATIVE NONFICTION SUBMISSIONS

All University of Colorado Undergraduate students are eligible to send us writing for consideration by JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. Submissions go through our blind review process before possible consideration by our full Editorial staff. We retain FNASR—First North American Serial Rights—which means you agree not to publish submitted work in any way, including on personal online outlets, until accepted work appears in our print journal or debuts online. After that, rights revert to you and you may republish wherever you wish.

We only seek creative nonfiction, but in any of its genres:

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Send us your picture stories—artwork of any type—for consideration by our Art Direction staff, for publication in either our print or website editions. We especially seek multimodal work for our website, including video, animation, music for podcasts, etc.

JOIN THE STAFF

Take the Fall JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY section of WRTG 2090 (yup, for the journal production course, that's twenty-*ninety*) or sign up for Independent Study any semester with one of our Faculty Advisors. We need anyone wanting to learn Editorial, Art Direction, Digital Production, or the Business and Marketing of a print and online journal of creative nonfiction—no previous experience required. We exist to serve and further a community of creative nonfiction writers (and artists) across campus. Develop strong job skills while learning about the exciting genres of creative nonfiction, publishing the premier print and online journal of *only* creative nonfiction in the region.

JOURNAL 2020 is a collection of the finest undergraduate artwork and creative nonfiction writing at CU Boulder—the work of young writers with enough strength of voice, vision, and courage to tell their true stories and the true stories of others.

SPRING 2016
VOLUME FOUR

CREATIVE NONFICTION

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

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JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

CREATIVE NONFICTION
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JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

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JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes a print issue each year, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder Undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our back page for submission guidelines.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

This journal that you hold in your hands—is the result of months of labor. If you'd seen much of this labor taking place, it wouldn't have looked like much: you'd have seen a kid sitting in front of his laptop typing—or maybe this kid wouldn't have even been typing, maybe you'd have just seen the thrumming of fingers on the tabletop, a clenching and unclenching jaw, a blank stare. This is what the labor of writing looks like most of the time. Like nothing—from the outside. Only when the thoughts manifest and translate to paper can we truly understand the experiences of others. Putting honest words down on paper, with the knowledge that at least one person will read them, is a valuable act. And nonfiction is a special case. The writer of nonfiction has to get things right in every way. The experiences described in these pages are as varied as human experience, but they have one thing in common: they happened.

And yet we know, because we have this issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY in our hands, that the product of all this apparent nothingness is something—and not just something but something big, special, important. Something that resides in the most internal of landscapes.

In this issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, a sense of place is often palpable, though not all tangible. For Juan Mateo Menendez, meaning comes from a work of art; for David Gordon, it derives from the words of other writers who came before him. Michael Kussin documents a friendship with lovingness and care, while Thomas Van de Pas does the same with a particular point in time—the fourth grade. Madsen McComsey finds a hospital trip laughable. Others bravely and thoughtfully render difficult—and, in some cases, tragic—experiences. Sara Seidel evokes the uncertainty of being a college student; Rachel Hultquist exposes a secret trauma to overcome it; Andrew Hecock describes what it feels like to be inside his complex mind; Bailey Ferrari recalls her father's death; and Veronica Sachtjen's remembrance of her grandfather becomes a meditation on mourning itself.

Still other pieces in this issue focus on how external settings have helped to shape the internal landscape. We visit some faraway locales. Stephanie Quon takes us to an island in Ireland; Robbie Gershon travels to Northern Ghana; Sarah Ellsworth tells us about the Sachsenhausen concentration camp; and Dakota Brummel revisits Afghanistan, where he served in the Marines. Kelton Collins catalogues the places he's lived in Oklahoma, none for more than four years at a stretch. Others focus on places with which we Coloradans are more intimate—but their pieces are no less evocative. Ben Crawford takes us to a canyon in Southern Colorado; Heather Clark brings us to Devil's Causeway. Jack Herrick fondly recalls a river in rural Delta, Colorado, while for McKenna Russen, a river is remembered with horror as the scene of a terrible accident. We feel the uncertainty surrounding Molly Henze's arrival in Colorado from California, and the disappointment of Kelly Walker's arrival from the Seychelles. Others find

richness and depth in experiences that might be dismissed as mundane: Donna Das takes us to a coffee shop in Boulder, while Rebecca Hall recalls visiting a Rite-Aid.

In writing my short stories for *Tin House*, *Glimmer Train*, *Zyzzyva*, and elsewhere and my journalistic nonfiction, which regularly appears in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *Businessweek*, and the website of *The New Yorker*, among other places, I have felt my work turn from nothing into something. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to read the pieces in this issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, and I believe you will be, too.

VAUHINI VARA

We would like to extend our thanks to the contributors and extended staff for making JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY possible. Everyone's hard work and dedication truly made a positive difference. This year, the Journal is larger than ever, with more pieces and art than any of the previous issues. There were just too many good submissions, so we chose more. As part of such a large and diverse campus, we don't often know the people whom we walk with every morning. JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY's goal is to bridge the divide, to be the catalyst for a CU Boulder connected through stories of the true. This is reflected not only in the diversity of the pieces, but in our staff as well. We all came from different majors. We've gained insight by collaborating with each other, and the journal serves the same purpose for readers. From everyone on Editorial, we hope you enjoy the stories of our community. So we'll leave you with a question, what's orange, only has one hair, and jumps?

EDITORIAL

Sitting in an ATLAS editing bay one evening, putting the finishing touches on this issue, we realize we need one more broken crossover—where the art reaches across two pages—earlier in the issue. One of us finds the photo, the other the piece closer to the front, we place it, and only then realize the match. (You'll find this in the answer to the riddle above.) Serendipity is like the muse: she's down the street at a bar unless you're putting in the regular hours of hard work. We could not have found that good luck in art for that piece without the incredible contributions of our artists, and the equally strong writing we had to illustrate and complement.

ART DIRECTION

The response to our submissions drives this fall was so tremendous that not only is this issue more expansive than previous ones, but our online presence is growing as well—you will find this and earlier issues on the site, and also find pieces which are only available there—be sure to check it out! The site is located at Journal2020.wordpress.com. And check out our Facebook page as well. Even better—submit something! We would love to get video and other multimedia content, which is best presented online.

DIGITAL PRODUCTION

This year's JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY in print reveals an established student publication moving forward. The Fall 2015 WRTG 2090 JOURNAL PRODUCTION COURSE (yup, twenty-*ninety*) tabled, postered, and talked up plenty of writing and more art than previous issues. Our diverse staff includes a non-traditional student whose blog you can find linked on journal2020.wordpress.com. Mistaken for a professor by a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, his conversation with Dakota Brummel led to publishing "Birds." Of course the piece had to make it through blind submission, as does all our writing, but read it, and you'll see why that happened. As long as this country sends young men and women to war, we will publish the truth of that.

We also continue publishing true stories of undergraduates enduring the seemingly unendurable: rape and abuse appear again in these pages, because these crimes continue to be a fact of life for too many students. I'm amazed by the toughness of writers and editors following Chekhov's advice to "be somewhat colder," letting the reader do some of the work of feeling, especially when feeling runs strong. This issue again disproves the suspicion that undergraduates (of traditional age) haven't experienced enough to have anything to write about. We also see them asking questions about their education, their majors and how they're being taught, and financial pressures making college harder for many. But you'll again see pieces exploring reading and art, as well as honest confrontations with their relationships across divides of generation, culture, class, and country.

Spring Independent Study Staff not only took the final editing and digital production of this issue to the printers; they also grew our online presence, publishing our first online-only stories. Undergraduates at CU Boulder can check our guidelines for submitting to next year's print issue at the end of this one. THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC continues to develop coursework in creative nonfiction video production. Our website also seeks graphic true stories, animation, and other work most suitable for computer screens. But enjoy this print issue as one can only enjoy printed words and images, and spread the word: creative nonfiction's home in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY issues, online, and the PWR-sponsored student Club keeps growing.

JAY ELLIS, FACULTY ADVISOR

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Photo by David Coons

BUCHANAN'S STATE OF MIND

by Donna Das

You can have your Starbucks or your Caribou, your Folgers or Nescafe, but the best coffee in the world is served in Boulder, Colorado, on the corner of Pennsylvania and Broadway. But it's not just the taste that makes it so great, it's the feeling. Cultivated after nearly four years of habit, each sense is signaled upon by just walking through the doorand that's not the caffeine addiction talking. In fact, jittery is the opposite reaction. Instead, it's like catching a familiar scent that summons a memory forgotten in the wake of life; the sensation of comfort embodied in a physical space; a home away from home. Sitting across the University of Colorado in a neighborhood called The Hill, surrounded by sticky-floored bars infamous for cringe-worthy birthday shots and small rundown homes with overpriced rent is Buchanan's Coffee Pub.

To some, Buchanan's is a hub for free Wi-Fi or a pit stop before class, but to me those green awnings incite so much more than study space and drip coffee. I have a special spot tucked in the corner to the right of the door. Part of me will anticipate it before I'm even in, looking through the glass while I cross the

street. It is a small rectangular table and one of the few window seats devoid of direct sunlight in late afternoon. It allows for people watching both outside and in. One can look out towards the east and see the Broadway intersection, and towards the west, a slab of a Flatiron pokes out from behind the Fox Theater. Local originality radiates simultaneously in the atmosphere with toasty aromas of coffee beans.

The first incentive is always to claim a spot—the spot if it's available—I learned that around my second semester of freshman year. You walk in, you set down your things, then you buy coffee—otherwise the flush of people that come in at the top of the hour will steal any available space. The beverage of choice varies day to day, and their options are as wide as my mood. I'll catch up with the baristas. They are pleasant, enjoyable people, each as diverse as the beverage selection. We've become friends through circumstance; we know a lot about each other's lives for not knowing one another's names. I'll put in my order whether by their recommendation or my craving and go sit down with a full cup. That moment—after the hustle of spot-claiming and coffee-ordering, when I have my drink, I have out my work to do, and I finally sit down—is the most calm I feel in an otherwise hectic life.

I was introduced to this café half a month into college by my Farsi class. My professor held his office hours on Buchanan's ront porch. He was an elderly Persian man who read Rumi while drinking black coffee and smoking cigarettes. You could normally find him under the green awnings happily doing all these things. He assigned recited presentations that second week of classes and our group collaborated the meeting space to be in close proximity to his pseudo-office. "You know Buchanan's on The Hill? Let's do the project there." I barely understand what "The Hill" is, let alone where Buchanan's could be. The upperclassmen that surrounded me seemed to have no qualms about any of this; they didn't have to verify where Buchanan's was, they seemed competent in this language I barely grasped the alphabet of, they probably already had the assignment done. I, on the other hand, had all sorts of anxieties: the pace of school demanded more than I was prepared for, the pressure of not having held myself to that higher standard created unnecessary stress, and now, I have to get to this coffee shop on time without getting terribly disoriented on the way?

They are pleasant, enjoyable people, each as diverse as the beverage selection.

I was on my own, and that evoked a combination of exhilaration and confusion.

There was this wonderfully terrifying feeling felt in full force that first month of school. I was on my own, and that evoked a combination of exhilaration and confusion: trying to get into a new groove of life all the while making sense of what my new norm was. Not to mention, I got lost fairly often. But this first month was also the beginning of my comfort zone's expansion. I learned the world keeps turning and I could keep stride. So I gave myself 30 extra minutes that day to equate for getting lost, and in my spare 25 minutes, I had my first moment of calm in my corner with a cup of black coffee.

Buchanan's in 2012 was different than the Buchanan's that I sit at today. It was reminiscent of a thrift shop but in a most humble way. The tables and chairs had no uniformity: some were circles, some were square, some were big or small. Certain tables had five chairs around them others had one, and all the seating seemed to be put wherever there was space, leaving not much room to move around. It was the type of clutter that promotes coziness, like a well-worn home. Sharing in that sentiment, the mugs you were served with seemed to be pulled from a coffee cup collector's cabinet. I grew to be partial to a red mug with a black and white cat on it. Mind you, you have no say in your coffee vessel but when I got Cat Cup it was a self-prophesized good luck.

Inconvenient off-hours were spent tucked in the side of Buchanan's, trying to organize my fake-adult life. I used coffee to fuel last-minute paper writing and nurse weekend hangovers, some days both at the same time. It became a space all my own: it was my study zone, my meet-me-here place, my favorite setting for me-time. I began noticing the "regulars;" I became a regular myself.

In the past three and a half years I've made hundreds of flashcards for dozens of classes. Typed millions of words for at least fifty papers. Watched thousands of people cross Broadway to get to school. I've seen three cars turn into traffic on a one-way road. Multiple bike collisions and sometimes human ones, with that awkward side step. I saw even more awkward first dates. There were stunning sorority girls with bows in their hair and frat guys dressed in pastels like walking Easter eggs. I devoured the words in my text books with a side of coffee cake only to become more passionate about International Affairs. Enough to take on a certificate for Middle Eastern and

Islamic Studies after completing the advance level of Farsi. I briefly took a look at graduate programs in different states and started applying for jobs across the globe. I began daydreaming about my future and started turning with the world. Something about those funky mugs and non-navigable floor space made me appreciate organized chaos.

College was the first time I was truly accountable for the person I was becoming. Being eighteen somehow legally qualifies one as an adult but what experience of the world did I have that gave that number any legitimacy? But of course I didn't think that at eighteen. No one thinks they're naive at eighteen. I remember thinking how awful it would be if I were to become one of those adults I watched rush away with a coffee in hand, living day after day on some monotonous schedule. That kind of routine mortified me. That was because I equated routine with being broken. The system got 'em, they're just a cog in it now. This is why the world doesn't change; they gave up on it. They stopped being dreamers and started molding to society, living their mundane lives. Where was the passion?

I realized how wrong I was in that on an early Saturday morning right before finals week my junior year. "Realized" may be the wrong word; there was no shock and awe. It was just one of those revelations you are contented with when you spend enough time with yourself.

Everything that morning was tinted a yellowish-gray while the sun and frost competed against each other for the landscape; the slab of Flatiron being a particularly gorgeous piece of contention. It had been one of those days where getting to a destination is done purely through groggy, human autopilot. I walked into Buchanan's around 7 a.m. exhaustion embedded in my bones. Sluggishly threw my backpack onto my empty seat and even more pathetically ordered coffee. The quiet harshness of winter assisted by caffeine trickling warmly in my body brought me back to life. I spent the first few sips looking outside before misty rings would fog up my view. Huffs of air from underneath the coats of passers-by made me appreciate the steam I felt coming off my cup.

The cup was white; they all were now. It was a chic bowl with a small handle on it. I remember watching the renovations in Buchanan's happen gradually, but all of a sudden it was something new. The tables were all the same shape and color, rectangular and gray. Seating arrangement had also been transformed; there were booths now along a wall and the chairs were all standardized. The bar and coffee counter were accented light blue. The floor was redone and the walls had new pictures on it. This all happened right before my eyes but until I took the time to look around, I'd forgotten all about the mismatched furniture and my lucky Cat Cup.

Something about those funky mugs and non-navigable floor space made me appreciate organized chaos.

My fatigue was not just toward finals approaching; it wasn't a tired apathy towards school though, more of a frustrated longing to do more. The giddy inspiration that came with textbooks started to dwindle after I finally decided I would become a U.S. diplomat. Tired of taking tests and writing essays, I craved a routine that would contribute to the world. I wanted to see the world. Was I a cog now? Did I give up? No, my dreams aren't dead. But do they matter? Does it matter? Accepting my insignificance was so wonderfully terrifying. All the while, it induced such a strange feeling of relief and comfort that in another day and time would have crippled me. Maybe the system got me, like those adult-cogs. Maybe I was broken. But perhaps you're supposed to break in order to fit better into this grander organized chaos. Your pieces are the same, they're still who you are, just different. And in that moment I felt calm.

I didn't really change—I grew up. Buchanan's grew up too. I don't hate the difference though. I don't necessarily miss how it used to be either. My memories are fond but there is no desire to go back. I do feel an ache thinking about how we won't be able to watch each other grow in the next four years but it comforts me to think there will always be a coffee shop to cater to my Buchanan's-state-of-mind. Donna at twenty-five will be different than Donna at twenty-one, let alone Freshman Donna. But I'd like to think we'd all buy each other a cup of coffee. This time next year my days will be spent in another corner of another coffee shop in a place I don't know yet. It's a wonderfully, terrifying feeling.

Photo By Logan Guerry

ON THREE, JUMP

by Stephanie Quon

On the island of Inis Mor, I can feel the cold rock under my bare feet as I stand on the edge of island cliffs. Forty-two feet below, the dark ocean froths and sprays to create a spiraling portal in an unnaturally natural rectangle cut from the hard earth, The Wormhole. The coastal winds push and pull at me, but I stand fast. As I stare down into the dark waters, I'm filled with fear. I can only see forty-two feet down and everything else is lost in the unknown depths.

My grip tightens on the rocks to keep me from jumping. The more I look, the more fear settles into me; regret hasn't. I have never jumped off a cliff before, and frankly I didn't think I would have the courage to do this. But the appeal of trying new things is too sweet to turn down. The possibility of a new adventure is something my body naturally craves, and this hunger is my own demise.

Count to three and take a step out.

One.

I teeter on my heels. Look down. Look out at the horizon. And wait.

I have come too far to back out now. But my limbs remain frozen.

Two.

The reality that I'm actually going to jump off a cliff sets in.

I'm not ready to commit.

Breathe.

I'm not ready to go only one direction. I'm not ready.

Breathe.

I lower my eyes toward the water and release my iron grip on the rocks. I begin to bend and unbend my knees in a slow rhythm, gently rocking onto the balls of my feet.

Three.

The rocks shackle my fears and uncertainties as my scream pierces the air and the water engulfs my body.

Thank God. I did it.

The end is only a concept.

The end is only a concept. The true jump between the cliff and the water takes place internally. On the outside, I am composed. But the internal struggle is what shortens the distance between me and the water.

One. The prep stage. The fact that I am about to make the jump. It's too soon to tell what I'm capable of, but I'll find out soon enough. I don't know how I will feel on the count of three, but it's worth the risk to find out. The chance to prove to myself that the feeling of accomplishment will outweigh the overwhelming fear in the moment.

So, what do you want to do with your Psychology and Communication degrees after you graduate?

Two. Am I out of my mind? I can't believe I'm doing this. Why the hell did I want to do this? No, stop. Don't think about it, just go.The more I think about it, the longer I'll hesitate. I will be fine. I can do this.

Three. Okay, this is it. No turning back now. Oh my God. I'm out of my mind.

The scariest plunge can be the most exhilarating adventure.

Two months later, I am sitting at a booth with my friend Allison for brunch. The diner is congested with people, yet the space still feels pleasantly comfortable and cozy. Servers are running back and forth bringing food from the kitchen to the table and making sure your coffee cup never ran dry. Meanwhile the conversations around us grow louder with the flux and flow of pauses and times to speak. I can't contain my excitement as I recount my adventures abroad in London to Allison, making sure not to leave out any important details. The excitement of exploring new countries, the people I met during my internship, and all the adventures I had throughout my experience. All seems to be fine as I sip my cup of chai, but as we begin to talk about the academic year and how I feel about my senior year so far, the conversation takes a turn.

So, what do you want to do with your Psychology and Communication degrees after you graduate? She doesn't mean to say it in any way other than pure curiosity, but I feel my body tense and the plastic cushion in the booth seat squeak and tense underneath me. She is another voice and another face among the millions of other people who have asked this relentless question I dread. I feel my stomach drop and my adrenaline rush. I am back on the cliff looking down into The Wormhole, unsure about my answer about the end of this experience. Unsure about taking this leap.

One.
I am reluctant to tell her that I am in the process of trying to figure out my career path, again. This is the third time I have changed my major since my freshman year as I have had a difficult time trying to decide what I wanted to pursue. And although I am finally content with my current majors, being a

senior doesn't mean I have everything figured out, including a career. My body is too familiar with the tightening pressure in my chest as I jump through hoops trying to meet the criteria of my ever-changing interest. I also do not want to explain that I am hesitant to commit and jump full force in one particular direction because I still haven't figured out my future. Which, given the timing of my senior year, is not an ideal place to be mentally. My closest friends have decided their plans in advance as far as a year out from the day after they throw their graduation caps in the air. I avoid the conversation as often as I can. But I realize I have come a long way since my freshman year and am confident that I'm where I'm supposed to be. I might as well be honest.

Two.
It is frustrating to come to terms with the lingering ambiguity of my future. A majority of my college career was spent struggling through many semesters of course material I could not retain nor fully understand. During the summers I would use my free time to subject myself to more classes or for internships to try and gain experience. But in the end all the stress and heartache was for a major I didn't even enjoy in the first place. I had a stubborn mentality that thought the only way to be successful was to pursue a major that would lead me to an impressive career, such as being a doctor. It was only until I was at my wit's end that I realized that instead of trying to pursue what I think others would find impressive, I would pursue what genuinely excites me and I'm actually passionate to learn more about. I was worried about the possibility of disapproving looks and potential references to the stereotypes that are associated with being Communication major and then later on adding a Psychology major as well. Now, I could not care less about anyone's negative opinion on the matter. But with all the changes I have made, sometimes I wonder if I am out of my mind. I still don't feel comfortable to take the jump and make the commitment to pursue what I am passionate about, whatever I narrow the choice down to be. I still don't have an answer to what I want to do as a career, but I'm okay with taking some big leaps to test out the waters. I can do this. I will find my own way. I finish sipping my chai and place the cup down on the table.

Now, I could not care less about anyone's negative opinion on the matter.

Three.
I can't hesitate any longer, I'm not doing myself any good by trying to avoid the question with a well rehearsed response. I look up from my cup, across the booth past our breakfast plates to Allison and exhale.
Jump.

Honestly, I'm still trying to figure that out.
She smiles. That's okay, that's how my journey was too.

My whole body relaxes, laughing in disbelief and relief as my mind emerges from my clouded thoughts and insecurities. I do not know what will happen when I finally reach the end of my journey. I guess I'll find out in my next jump.

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

Art by Lucy Gale

A SMILE SEEN BETWEEN FLAGS

by Ben Crawford

I watched her approach, dazed and tired, eyes swollen. I didn't know what to do so I gave her my presence, to show her that I was there with her. We embraced, our breaths contracting and slowly melding together into one. The sharp red stone and vibrancy of the blue sky supported us. We breathed together. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. I held her tightly as if the pressure would dissolve the reality that we had experienced a few days previously.

Penitente Canyon is a place that I hold dear to myself. It is a place that when reflected upon, many specific moments shine bright as memories and burn through the folds of my mind as perfect images. Penitente Canyon is a small outcropping of volcanic rock tucked away in a small valley near the San Juan Mountains in southern Colorado. It is secluded and homey by nature. This canyon seems to lie outside the rules and notions

defined by the world and humanity itself. If even briefly, time seems to slow to a halt while in the bounds of the canyon, softly suggesting a natural existence encompassed only by what you find around you and those you find it with.

Tyler Gordon grew up climbing in Penitente Canyon. It is where his mother's boyfriend would take him on weekend trips to get out of Durango and explore the high elevation deserts of Colorado. Tyler always spoke very fondly of Penitente, often reflecting pleasantly on the 'bullet hard stone' and dreamlike environment. He would tell me that it is the best rock in Colorado.

For several of the years I had known Tyler, he had been someone that was difficult to get to know. He had always been the quiet, shy type, offering his opinions when asked but never pressing them upon people. He was an incredibly gifted mathematician and had plans to attend a graduate program in Vancouver for applied mathematics. Once he graduated from CU, we all saw a change in Tyler. He was beginning to blossom. Brightness emerged, his face constantly embedded with that smile that lit up the environment. He spent the better part of the year after graduating traveling Europe, exploring some of the best climbing areas on the planet with some of his closest friends. When they returned I could see a fire burning within Tyler. He had learned to share himself with the world and the world loved him.

After everything, it felt right that we would all be here together in Penitente. There was a sort of comfort that came with being surrounded by everyone close to Tyler. Seeing the amount of love and compassion that everyone held for each other was immense. It is what he would have wanted. He would have wanted us all to be together, doing what we all loved the most, climbing. His spirit embodies simplicity in that way. Everything was always so simple to him: if you want to do something, just do it.

Tyler's death struck us all hard. When I heard what had happened I was bouldering up in the Flatirons with my friend Pandora. I received a call from my roommate, Curtis. At first, his words seemed empty to me. Incomprehensible. I could not understand what he was saying even though I heard his words

Incomprehensible.

clearly. Tyler had died rappelling off of the infamous "Nose" of El Capitan in Yosemite Valley. After climbing most of the route in what was described as a flawless manner, Tyler fell trying to retrieve some lost gear that was dropped onto the ledge below. Once I understood, I fell back into my crashpad in a fit of tears and gasping breath, reaching for something in the air to ground my lungs and muscles into a stabilized state. The presence of everything around me melted away as I could hear Curtis sobbing with me on the other end of the telephone.

None of us knew what to do. The incessant presence of inaction was the most difficult part. Knowing that no matter what, there was absolutely nothing that could be done. We were stuck in this mental state of insanity, flashes and images of the beautiful life that Tyler lived screening through our minds, only to eventually be masked by the ultimate truth—Tyler is dead.

That night we all gathered at my house to bake together and share in the intense flavors of all of Tyler's favorite goods. Tyler had an immaculate gift in the art of creating baked goods. His craft was flawless. It felt good to be together. On this night, we all painted prayer flags for Tyler. We each took a cloth square and painted a memory, imprinting it into reality. When we had each finished painting our personal square, we strung them all together in a line, creating a long strand of prayer flags, each one resonating with a memory. The flags express the simple beauty found within Tyler's life and represent, however brief, a life well lived.

We each took a cloth square and painted a memory, imprinting it into reality.

We all drove into Penitente late Friday night. We gathered in the perfect silence of night. We sat with each other around a small camp fire, telling great stories of the laughter and happiness that Tyler had brought everyone over the years. About the huge grin he would have at the end of every climb shared.

We chose to drive to Penitente this weekend because more that anything else, Tyler loved to rock climb. We knew that if he were aware of us just sitting around in sadness, he would say in a simple tone "well, that's dumb, go climb!!" Penitente was an obvious choice for us all to meet because it was also a place that held special value to Tyler, where he learned to climb. And thus, in a way, what brought him to us was we met in this place through climbing.

On Saturday, we went to the crags, exploring some of the best climbing in Colorado. People persevered and sent projects, completed goals, and everyone did it together. It was a

great day of rock climbing. That afternoon the rest of our close friends joined us. Once they heard what our plans were for the weekend, they found it a necessity to venture to Penitente to be with us. Among them, Cat stood out in my eyes. A piece of her had been broken. I saw her and did nothing but hold her in embrace, letting here know that my presence was with her. Cat was one of Tyler's closest friends. Someone that had been able to really get to know Tyler from the inside out. She was able to give herself and take from Tyler in perfect equilibrium, creating the perfect recipe for a beautiful friendship.

Sunday morning I awoke with the soft touch of the sun. I looked around me and found myself amidst a line of perhaps thirty sleeping bags, all cuddled in as close to each other as possible. What I had realized over the past few days was that the only thing that could really bring any warmth was being close to people that all share the same love for Tyler.

At the heart of Penitente canyon there is a striking wall that hosts some of the best and most aesthetic climbing in the canyon. The wall forms a large L shape and has an adjacent flat rock in which you can perfect view all of the climbs on the wall as if spectating an arena. There is a climb on the wall called "Bullet the Blue Sky" that climbs a sharp arête jutting straight the edge of the L. In his youth this had been a climb Tyler had always aspired to do, a climb that stood out, providing inspiration and a future goal in climbing. Once Tyler had arrived at CU he returned to Penitente with a group of his new friends and completed the climb.

Once everyone had gathered in the heart of the canyon, it was here that we hung Tyler's prayer flags. We strung them from the anchors of "Bullet the Blue Sky" and stretched them across to the other edge of the L, framing the wall with Tyler's memories. Once we had the flags hung, every one of us sat on the arena rock and watched. We watched the breeze touch and flicker each memory, gracefully, as if life were being breathed into them. The sun would move in and out of clouds rapidly, casting a movement of light over the wall, blue sky penetrating through the spaces between clouds. We sat together in silence. We let Tyler fill our minds and remind us of what it means to live a beautiful life. A simple life. A life in which his smile is one that will be carried with us, always.

Photo by Logan Guerry

Photo by Alexander Drury

CRACK THE SKY YELLOW

by Molly Henze

I was 15 when my parents decided we would move out of the state. We moved four times before this decision, but always throughout California, so I only half-heartedly believed them when they stated it would be in Colorado. They had played this kind of game about five times every year. Their weekend past times involved driving to a town they'd never been to and look at open houses. My parents would talk to the real-estate agents, ask about the foundational structure of the property and its listed value. Then they would pack us into the car, give an opinion on the house, and never bring it up again. I think these ventures let them escape their lives for a moment; they could become someone new. However, the move to Colorado was different. My dad spent about a week alone in Colorado before the move, looking at different towns where he could buy property. He said this was the kind of thing he needed to "feel out."

When they stood by their decision, I looked forward to the move. For months prior to moving day I would spend time searching for properties online in Colorado, mostly ranches and farms. I'd print out the property details and present them to my

dad. I pretended we would live on the mountainside in a small town where everybody knew everyone's name. I would make a new name for myself. I could be anybody. I had created an entire fantasy future of what my new life would be like. It's not that I was afraid of leaving everything behind. I wasn't fleeing the crutches of an old life I held in California. I relished the idea of the future, of the unknown. Curiosity is woven into the fibers of my being. This was simply an opportunity to feed the urge to escape every day monotony. Perhaps this was even a genetic trait, as I had grown accustomed to the wayward lifestyle my parents had raised me in. If anything, I was fearful that this move was just another one of their attempts to temporarily flee their reality. My imagination of a life in Colorado could be trampled down to a mere dream in the wake of their decision.

I think even my parents were surprised by their own actions when we embarked on the move. They had made their decision final, signed in black ink at the Colorado State Bank and Trust, guaranteeing the title of the house. My father had decided on a dilapidated farm house with four acres in Parker. When we arrived to the house, sight unseen, my mother began wailing and screeching, "I can't do this anymore!" After two full days of driving, with three cats in a makeshift carrier in the backseat, with no air conditioning, she had had it. She got in the car and drove off in a panic, leaving me, my brother, and my dad behind momentarily.

My brother Christopher called it a shit hole. It was. All the windows in the house were inside out. There was an old, unattached pot belly stove sitting in the middle of the living room. The basement was nothing but concrete pavement holding up two pillars. The kitchen floor modeled peeling yellow linoleum, only to reveal splintered wood underneath. I picked up a rusted broom stationed next to a window and started to sweep the inch of dust that had accumulated in the living room. It was as if the previous owner had left the broom there as a condolence for the sorry house he had left behind. My dad stared off at the road my mother had sped off down. I told him that it would be okay. We would stay.

We tried to sell our house in California before we left, but the market was so bad we were left to rent it to a group of rowdy college boys for a year. The house tied us back to the state. After experiencing the harsh winter season, part of me hoped we would never be able to sell it. I hoped the market would keep our stake

We were vagrants stationing ourselves in the depths of our memories.

I twisted and ripped each lemon off its branch, tossing it in the bucket with a satisfying thud.

there, so we would have a home to run back to if Colorado proved to be too much for our family. But the following year after the move, my dad decided he would go back and fix the house up one last time and sell it. Christopher, and I tagged along in the hopes of seeing old friends and everything we had left behind. To travel cheap, we towed our trailer that we used for dirt-biking trips as a mobile motel, sleeping at rest stops and camp sites while my dad fixed on the house. The longer we stayed in the trailer, the more California felt like the past. We were vagrants stationing ourselves in the depths of our memories.

My father had finally finished all the repairs on the house. A final "sold" sign was staked into the ground we once gardened in. The day that it came to pack up and leave I stole a white dump bucket splattered with dried paint from the back of my father's truck and began filling it up with lemons from a tree in our old front yard. I did so stealthily and rapidly so nobody would know I was plundering a tree that was no longer mine. I twisted and ripped each lemon off its branch, tossing it in the bucket with a satisfying thud. When the bucket was overflowing, I still kept picking these lemons, piling them into a makeshift bag I had made by lifting up part of my dress. When my father came to the front yard, he saw me fumbling around, attempting to carry all these lemons. He smiled and went into the garage, only to come out with another bucket. We stuffed each crevice of the buckets with as many as we could, threw them into the bed of the truck and slowly drove away.

About eight hours into the trip returning back to Colorado, we had reached the town of Barstow, California. It was 117 degrees. The only buildings in town were a gas station and a restaurant claiming they offered the "world's best gyros." As we pulled up to the gas station, we soon discovered the sheer heat had shut down the power. There would be no gasoline. The blue and white restaurant seemed to draw travelers inside. We followed suit, and entered the building in the hopes of seeking refuge in an unforgiving desert. Everyone just sat there, waiting for the circumstances to change as they fanned themselves with paper plates. Nobody could purchase anything, but nobody wanted to remain outside either. I kept looking at the menu, wishing the machine would work to make an ice-cold strawberry milkshake. Dad claimed they were the best he's had in his entire life. The next stop was just outside of Las Vegas, but we

knew the truck would run out of gas before we ever reached it.

There was nothing left to do but move forward. As the truck kept moving, I kept waiting for the tires on the truck to melt into the pavement and peg us to the desert forever. We were carrying with us the remnants of furniture packed in our trailer, which dragged along behind us. We had left our house in California for the last time, it was no longer ours. Along with the lemons, I insisted we bring back an old rusting metal cabinet that used to hold my dad's construction tools. The white paint was peeling off to reveal a burnt, corrosive rust. "I'll fix it, I swear," I whined, which was enough to convince my dad to throw the metal junk into the bed of the truck. I stared at it now, with a placid smile spread across my face knowing that I succeeded in keeping it, keeping the memories. Next to it sat the two buckets of lemons, so yellow they seemed unnatural against the desert landscape. As waves of heat swirled around my face, I thought of all the things I would make with these lemons: Ice cold lemonade, lemon custard, lemon bars, lemon sorbet, lemon poppy seed muffins, lemon marmalade. My hands would carefully roll the lemon out before slicing it and grate the soft, fine zest into tiny little piles of yellow. I would squeeze the juice out to add a zing to almost anything. I would use every last bit of these lemons.

. . . so yellow they seemed unnatural against the desert landscape.

I was sitting in the back of the truck with my head crouching out of the tiny window in the middle. I had my back to the road, instead of looking forward. I saw everything in a kind of vacuum. The road behind us was swallowed by the wrath of the heat and the surroundings blurred into a strange mesh of colors, streaking my peripherals with shades of brown. The wind was in a bind, disrupted by the gap between the truck and the trailer. It was stuck, but kept hitting me in the face from time to time, whipping my hair into my eyes. I felt an undeniable sense of peace as if the heat had filled every cell in my body, warming me into a state of comfort despite the fact that my white dress was permanently plastered to my skin. My mind was fixed on the lemons when the truck began to crawl along the asphalt.

With one last cough, it rolled to a stop. The truck crooned and lurched as it was put in park and then, suddenly, everything stood still. Nobody said a word. The truck filled with silence. Heat continued to blister the inside of the truck. Even though we were no longer moving, my eyes were fixed on the trailer and

the road behind us. I refused to turn my body around and face forward. A minute crept by as we sat there in silence. The heat was suffocating us. My eyes remained glued to the buckets of lemons until the sound of the door opening ripped my train of thought back into reality as the truck beeped, warning us that the keys were still in the ignition, ding, ding, ding, ding, slam. My dad circled around the truck before reaching into his front left pocket to pull a Sherman cigarette up to his lips and strike a match. The flame engulfed the tip of the cigarette and, as it caught on fire, it slowly smoldered into a red, hot ember. With one long inhale, he sucked the tobacco into his lungs and exhaled with a sigh as smoke lingered around his face, trapped by the heat.

My brother then hopped out of the truck and began to kick the dirt beneath him. He picked up rocks on the side of the road and chucked them as hard as he could, mumbling curse words under his breath. He complained about the heat and the stupidity of being stuck in the middle of the desert and the fact that my dad could only go a few hours without lighting up another cigarette. But I knew with every rock he threw that the anger within him was not about the heat, but instead about the fact that California was no longer our home, no longer our life. I looked back down at the bucket of lemons. Maybe there were 40 lemons. Think of all the things I could do with 40 lemons. I didn't want to leave the truck but the heat continued to slap me in the face. I peeled myself from the seat and slid out of the truck. The dirt was like a fine powder beneath my feet. It puffed up and swirled around my toes, sticking to the sweat that had accumulated between them and my sandal. I knew the truck would stop eventually—it was inevitable. We were without gas, the fuel that would keep our truck moving along mile by mile. And I also knew that waiting in Barstow would do nothing for us. It was 117 degrees. There would be no strawberry milkshakes and I would not eat the best gyro in the world. There was nothing left for us there. In this moment, I didn't want anything. I didn't feel anything. I would sit there with my bucket of lemons for the next four hours, waiting for whatever was to come next. ☙

There was nothing left for us there. In this moment, I didn't want anything.

COLD SHOWERS

by Kelly Walker

It was ironic at times, being on a tropical island. I was completely surrounded by water. It was easy enough to believe I was in paradise when I was sitting on the beach, feet buried in the sand. The sort of soft, white sand you always see in the calendars and blame Photoshop for making it look so unrealistic compared to the ice cold, murky coasts bordering most of the United States. But when you left the beach, exhausted by the waves and sticky with sand, turning the taps of cheap porcelain, nothing would come out. Even in paradise it seems that you can have a drought.

The water would eventually turn on at three or four in the morning. We left buckets under the taps, cheap bulky things that you could curl up inside if you really wanted to. It was a tiny studio apartment, and three people took up a lot of room. Sometimes when the water would finally turn on at an ungodly time of the night, it would stay on, when too often enough, someone in their sleep-drunken state mistakenly would turn on the faucet, forgetting about the wretched water restrictions. Jolting ice water flooding over plastic sheeting patterned in the shape of fancy bathroom

tiles. This would usually result in a great surprise in the morning. It was a surprisingly hard habit to uphold—to remember to turn off the tap when expecting a nice generous flow of water to come from the sink, and not receiving a single drop. After the first ten times, a soaked mattress, and a water-ridden laptop, we finally managed to learn heavily from our mistakes, coached by the shrieks from our loving mother. It was the worst kind of day when the showers consisted of the water remnants left in the plumbing. Mid-shower, soap still in your eyes, only for the spray to trickle out. I would think fondly of my days with clean, running water in the United States, and my adaption to my new life was slow.

I was originally born in the United States but while I was in the first grade my mum decided to pack her things and move my sister and me halfway across the world. Before then, I had vacationed in the Seychelles before, visiting family. A crowd of cousins gravitated around my forceful grandmother. But these had been the best times of my childhood: the steady sun beating down on waves, and the clean white sheets of the hotels that we stayed in. But living someplace, even paradise, is completely different from a vacation.

I eventually made the decision to move back to the United States about four years ago. I realized that I was finishing up with secondary school and I decided I wanted to go to college to pursue my dream of becoming a pediatrician. Since I had the privilege to possibly move to America, I figured I should take that offer, and make good use of it. So, leaving everything that I knew, I set off on a two-day plane ride at what seemed to be the scariest time of my life.

I had such high expectations due to the propaganda of the 'American Dream'. In my head I imagined America to be a place of no wrong. From my happy childhood memories and books that I had read, I conjured this false an illusion of the United States as a place of friendly people, unparalleled shopping, and delicious food. To my disbelief, this ideology quickly began to dissipate before I even set foot in the country. I unhappily sat on the plane, very far from ready for the two-day plane journey that was ahead of me.

"Umm, excuse me, little girl, you are in our seat."

I thought nothing of it, escaped in my own thoughts. Like the shot of a gun I heard it again—this time I was able to make out what was being said:

"Hello? Are you deaf? Get out of our seat."

"Hello? Are you deaf? Get out of our seat."

I looked up alarmed, eyes red and swollen from crying. An older American couple stood towering over me, ushering me to move. Still crying, I stumbled over words of apology, grabbed my stuffed animal giraffe, and clumsily shifted out of the seat. Not a good start to my long journey to the 'Land of the Free.' Trying to meet new people and make new friends, all the while experiencing such a foreign culture was definitely far from what I expected; I guess you could say I watch too many movies. I quickly found myself missing my once simplistic lifestyle of being able to walk down the street barefoot to go buy some fresh red snapper for dinner, or to pick a ripe mango off a tree for a snack. I missed the hot, humid weather, and the warm rain that would fall almost every afternoon. I was so used to having my mother around; I continue to imagine her disapproval when I know I am doing something that I shouldn't, unintentionally still keeping me in check. Her constant nagging and worrying I had always taken for granted, and always misunderstood that they were just her show of love and caring. My newfound freedom in the United States was somehow lacking . . .

So homesick, I found myself taking cold showers, even if they would just last for a few seconds, just to give me that feeling of being back home in that tiny studio apartment.

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

MEMORIES OF A HOME

by Kelton Collins

I have never lived in the same house for more than a four-year stretch. It came with the territory of my father being an architect and the ever present need to create something bigger and better. Looking back through all the homes I have inhabited, there are distinct memories, like separate chapters, all having their roots in a different place. Like the changing of seasons, the homes of my past were stepping stones, each serving a purpose and holding a place in my memory.

(11704 E 80th St North, Owasso, OK) 1993-1995

My first recollections are around the age of three, memories of a small house in the then modest town of Owasso, Oklahoma. It was a home not unlike all the homes that surrounded it, but this one was special. It was a place we called our own. Days of summer and little league baseball are all that fill my mind from this time. Days of laughter and fun without a single care in the world, times of spontaneous adventures and limitless imagination. These were days of blissful ignorance without any knowledge of all the hardships life has to offer.

(14506 East 102nd St North, Owasso, OK) 1995-1998

This was the first home my dad built for us as a family, with a long straight driveway and endless front yard this home was where my sister and I had room to run free and let our imagination be the narrator of our days. A hectic, stormy day stands clear in my mind from this home. A tornado passed close by on a humid, spring afternoon. My mother gathered my sister and me, sheltering us like ducklings under her arms as we darted across our yard to the neighbor's house, who had a storm shelter. The storm settled as quickly as it had come and all was fine that day, although the neighbor's trampoline did not fare as well and was found residing on the roof of our home. The wailing noise of tornado sirens still bringing back memories and reminded me of home.

A tornado passed close by on a humid, spring afternoon.

(10122 North Dover Place, Owasso, OK) 1999-2003

A home surrounded by woods. An imposing stone turret stretching from the ground to the second story and beyond, coming to a conical point covered with copper. This turret that enclosed the spiral stairs inside was reminiscent of what I thought a real castle would have been like. The rest of the home continued in this fashion, large and covered in a beautiful grey stone. There was a small brook at the back of this home. It was not overly impressive, nor majestic, simply fulfilling the definition of what a brook should be. Babbling with water day and night and never running dry. Memories of holidays and family, adventures with my dog, exploring the woods, and endless seasons are all that fill my head from this home.

(1336 E 26th Place, Tulsa, OK) 2003-2005

As time progressed, our life in the neighboring city of Tulsa began to develop, and my parents felt the need to move us into Tulsa in order to save us from the daily forty minute commute that our lives began to require. With this newfound desire to uproot ourselves and find another home to call our own, the process began. My parents spent a lot of time considering all of our options, and for the first time since I was three my family had decided to move into a home that was already standing, designed many years ago for a family that had long since abandoned it as their permanent residence, leaving it to shuffle between hands until landing in our own. The intention was to again make this

. . . we debated about who would have rights to the radio . . .

a permanent residence, to have a place that we as a family could lay claim to and actually stay in for the foreseeable future. The home was a historic Tulsa home, originally commissioned and owned by Cecil B. DeMille, the famous filmmaker of the Ten Commandments movie. We found out he never actually lived in the home, and it seemed as if he only procured it to say he had a home on the bible belt. This home had a feeling of pride, a home that had stood the test of time and was still desirable. I miss this house. It was a beautiful home with stunning landscaping and every detail carefully scrutinized.

(2521 South Columbia Ave, Tulsa, OK) 2005-2006

A new home, one we had already labeled as temporary before even sleeping in it the first night. We secured a rental house for a time while our next permanent home was being dreamed up. This home was at the end of a cul-de-sac, the first time I had ever lived in one of these circular creations, with each home looking into the face of one another. It was perched on a mound of dirt higher than all the rest. This house had a steep driveway and a small, welcoming presence with a single tree in its yard. It was here where I first learned to drive. Turning sixteen, I qualified for a small plastic card allowing me to roam in a far larger radius than my bike had ever previously permitted. Memories of driving to and from school with my sister in the passenger seat, as we debated about who would have rights to the radio and the songs played on our commute to and from school.

(4532 South Atlanta Ave, Tulsa, OK) 2006-2010

The last home I lived in under my parent's roof was one that could be seen on the front of a magazine. Its giant stone face with hundred-year old trees shading the ground it stood on, acting as a frame to highlight every thoughtful detail put in the design of this home. It was the culmination of my mother and father's aspirations. This new home stated that we had made it in life, that we were somebody. This assumption, as I came to discover, was only a disguise. This house holds many memories, all being far more vivid than any previous home. I tend to think that the events that transpired in this home contribute to the reason that the memories from this house are so engrained in my mind. We moved into this house when I was transitioning

from a sophomore to a junior in high school. It was a labor of love; my entire family had worked in some way to help complete this home. It was perfect; every room, every hallway, every single detail was the picture of perfection in my mind. It housed, in so many ways at least, what I thought at the time to be the materialization of a successful life and family. This home, with its rich hardwood floors sprawling in and out of every space, a warm gold glow of the Venetian plaster coaxing you along, had a feeling of comfort and belonging. Every painting and rug perfectly placed to complement the structure as the inhabitant moved through. I loved this house, it incited visions of the future, and it was the home I truly believed would finally be the home that stood the test of time for my family. A place we could call our own, that would finally expanded past just a temporary residence.

This was not to be though. Life has a way of pulling things apart while allowing others to come together. This home that I cherished soon turned into a battlefield of human emotion and family conflict. The change was sudden, it all seemed a blur, and I was blissfully unaware of the problems building beneath the surface. It seemed like I just woke up one day and my parents had decided to no longer get along. The next thing I knew they were spending more time away from one another. This home that once held the picture of peace in my mind now seemed to be a prison. My mother and father simply resided next to one another, trying to just hang on, but this would not last. The bond between my parents continued to spiral with no restoration in sight, I was lost. I had always held my parents and family as the perfect picture of what a family should be. With that now falling to pieces I was baffled; what was to become of my family? Ultimately it proceeded on this destructive path until the only thing left was what every child fears most. Divorce. The day a child has to come to a realization that mom and dad no longer want to be around one another. The day mom and dad no longer say "I Love You" to one another. That day hurts, and the days that follow are no better.

My life has happened in so many places, all of my past homes are different now. All inhabited by new owners, by new families, making new memories. I still think of these homes as

my own, these structures that hold that familiar presence, a feeling of peace, a sense of belonging and shared history. I continue to search for that feeling in the places I reside in now, Living in apartments one year at a time does not recreate the same feeling of belonging. My apartment feels miles away from what my past homes once embodied.

Photo by Logan Guerry

CHESS CLUB DIARIES

by Thomas Van de Pas

The Highlands Ranch chess club always met at the library. Fourth grade Thomas liked it because he could play a game, then hide out in the kid's section with books about making money. Double whammy, heck yeah.

A ranking system ruled the chess club: it dictated your skill level, owned the room, who you could play, and when. This was a problem for dear Thomas and his lack of focus. He'd let out his nervous energy by messing with his beige zip offs, then get so wrapped up in capturing a stray bishop that his king would be left exposed. Thomas lived near the bottom of the rankings.

There was only one chess player younger than Thomas, a kid named Nathan who was honestly a doo-doo head and resided in the top third of the rankings. During a match he'd get all serious, enforce the time limits, scratch his head and squint his eyes as if that made him smarter and less of a butthole. If he made a dumb mistake he'd get really mad and throw a tantrum, even against thirty-year-old men.

After losing to a man with a math joke on his t-shirt, Thomas took a break. Out in the hallway was a pay phone with cold metal buttons and a big coin slot:

5 • 10 • 25
U.S.
COINS
ONLY

This phone needed money, none of which was in Thomas' many cargo pants pockets. It didn't work then, but it still felt funny, and he could pretend to use the cumbersome metal box like an old person. Thomas began pushing the buttons and feeling their inscribed numbers against his fingers. There was a little thrill in pretending to call his Dad's work, (303) 559-0600—his friends Megan and Jeremy, (303) 471-2671—the police, 911. None of it worked, as he hadn't put in any money, so Thomas went back to playing chess.

Ten minutes had passed when the room was taken over.

"Evening."

The police officer was nothing special, just a balding man with serious eyebrows. However, the way the officer projected authority used every square inch of his body and dominated the room, making his middle-aged pudge suddenly intimidating. He could probably eat Thomas.

"Who here called 911?"

If Thomas didn't speak, no one would know, right? BUT WHAT IF THEY LOOKED FOR PRINTS ON THE PHONE?! He would be screwed. Thomas disappeared into his chair, nervously fiddling with his zip offs so they constantly oscillated between pants and shorts.

BUT WHAT IF THEY LOOKED FOR PRINTS ON THE PHONE?!

The police officer, with his shiny badge, stood firm and looked around the room. Over in the corner, Thomas noticed Nathan, ready to toss a chair over such a distraction. There might still have been some guilt somewhere in Thomas' small frame, but at least he wasn't an assface like Nathan. This made Thomas secure in his secret.

Ten years later, Thomas still hasn't told anyone. He had to leak the story in writing.

Thomas' frail heart—the kid was somehow more skeletal than he is now—fluttered in recognition like a Pavlovian dog. Why would the phone actually call 911? He hadn't put any money into it? It didn't make any sense.

"Using the pay phone, perhaps? Anyone?"

Yeah. It was definitely Thomas.

"We need to know why we're here. Our job is busy, I had to jump a B&E for this."

The officer paused.

"No time for jokes. Please let us know so we can talk to you. We are not angry," said the voice, obviously ready to yell at a small child.

Photos by Logan Guerry

Photo by Jack Herrick

THE RIVER

by Jack Herrick

Think about a stonefly for just a second. A stonefly, for anyone that doesn't know, is a bug about an inch long with big, luminous orange wings stretching down its body. Stoneflies are clumsy, they cannot fly straight, and live only two weeks, three if they're lucky. Stoneflies exist solely to fuel the circle of life as they provide food for fish who in turn feed life around the river so that humans continue to come back. Stoneflies only goal in the short existence they are given is to mate, and then lay eggs for the next years hatch. Stoneflies are strange, and normally you wouldn't give them a second thought. But with a second thought, you'd see how something so small, so stupid, and maybe a little disgusting looking can have a bigger impact on the world if they screw up their future than if you do. The river is an ecosystem, and without the stoneflies, there would be less fish, and once the fish were gone, the birds would start to leave too. The river would become less healthy, life around the river would slowly start to look more dead, and anything that knew how to leave, would. It would then become a lot less popular, and even-

tually forgotten. And that would really stress me out. But thankfully, the stress isn't here yet. It's just me, my dad, and the stoneflies.

I grew up in a small Colorado ski town, and for two years my education was a mixture of home school and travel. I returned to traditional public school for a year and then finished my secondary education at Holderness, a boarding school in New Hampshire. I've jumped around a lot. But throughout all of my travels and experiences, there is one place I always return: The Gunnison River on my family's farm in rural Delta, Colorado.

Rural is good, and so is seclusion. It's a time when you are away from your phone, cars, planes, and—most importantly—strangers. It's times like these, and places like the river, where you stop focusing on everyone else, stop worrying about everything else, and just look around. All too often, I wish someone could tell me that everything was going to be okay, that I don't need to worry about the future, about what I'll do, or about who I'll become because, some way or another, I will figure it out. I know people have to have their own experiences and learn from the bad ones, but the times I feel most stressed is on the weekends, when I'm not busy with homework, and when I have time to think about why I'm doing homework in the first place. It's not that I don't like school, because I do; it's just when I think further into the future than just tomorrow, and think about what I want in terms of a family, and how I'm going to make all of that work, it's stressful. However, at the river, all of that dissipates. It's a place where I'm not terrified of the future, or about what I'm going to do with it. The river, that wanders as it does, takes me with it and the continuous; zen motion teaches me how to be calm.

I was seven years old. Early one July morning, my dad and I hiked down into the Black Canyon of the Gunnison and found our raft that had been packed in the night before. Soon after, we set out to carelessly let the river take us as the canyon swallowed us. I sat in the raft and my dad passed me a fly rod. I held it and looked blankly at him, but he had already turned his back to prepare his own. I clumsily put my line in the water and whipped it back and forth; it didn't work. The art of casting the line showed that patience through calmness, not force, was the essence of succeeding.

The art of casting the line showed that patience through calmness, not force, was the essence of succeeding.

We floated and fished for a while, then my dad stopped rowing. He handed me the oars and told me to row. I had never rowed our rafts, but as soon as I sat up and grabbed the oars, I knew I was in control. The oars, although much bigger than myself, felt like extensions of my arms. While I was grasping them, I began to notice things I hadn't noticed before. I now saw the sun reflecting off the river's newly hatched stoneflies, casting an orange glow throughout the canyon.

There were thousands in the air and hundreds in the water. Instinctively, I replaced my oars with my fly rod and casted with ease, letting the slack in the line calmly follow the rings of the rod up and out, only to glide through the air and land lightly onto the water. Almost immediately, a fish took my fly from the surface, but not just any fish, one the most gorgeous fish in the world: a rainbow trout. If you don't like fish, I understand; they are slimy, they are wet, and have different agendas than we do. But in their own way, they are beautiful creatures. I didn't understand death as an ugly thing until I saw the difference between a dead rainbow trout, and a living one. When holding one, you can feel every part of it. You can feel it move, you can feel its purpose, and when it swims out of your loose grip, you can see why people from all over the world keep coming back for that five second experience. Seeing a living rainbow trout from the side is like seeing a landscape. It is a landscape. There are small green sections, hills on the belly. Then, some black dots, black birds take flight in the middle between the dorsal fin and the stomach. The birds are flying over the hills, and under the rainbow which goes straight across from the head to the tail fin. It's eye catching, it's like nothing else in the world. It's just plain and simple, a rainbow trout.

. . . plain and simple, a rainbow trout.

It's sad though, to look at a dead one. You can't even tell it's a rainbow trout. When it feels cold, colder than the river itself, it doesn't look much better. It's still a rainbow trout, except now. It looks like the time right before the rain comes, the gray, dull, dark time. Once dead though, I like to believe any stress it held is gone. The future is clear to only it, and life goes on.

Trout, unlike humans though, never get to see what they become. To my knowledge, there is no money involved

in the fish world. There are no richer fish, no prettier female fish, and no bigger fish mansions. There are just fish. Although, the females are generally attracted to the better fed male, that's about the only form of currency, the only form of being better, and one of the only stressful aspects of a trouts life. However, trout stress only about the bare necessities of the condition that distinguishes bugs and fish from inorganic matter. In order for the cycle of life on the river to keep flowing, trout stress about giving life, and staying alive at the same time. So simple, yet so important. Humans, on the other hand, are stressing about what shorts go with what shirt, or about what may or may not happen in the future. While on the river, the thing that keeps me from stressing myself out is the realization that while the river may seem to wander, it always has a destination. I wonder if fish think about that too.

Life is strangely similar to a river. They both have the capacity for growth, exist with some form of reproduction, obtain functional activity, and change continuously preceding death. Now, death isn't usually the term used to describe the terrible time that a river dries up, but that's what happens: it dies, however, not until it has given everything it can to the organisms around it. The bugs, the fish, the animals, and the humans—everything invests some form of itself into the river, and through different means, the river gives back. It gives life. At this moment, the world has a truly unique and prosperous river. So when it comes time for that river to die, and at some point that time will come, it should be apparent that each living thing that relied on that river gave what it could, so that it could then distribute life elsewhere.

Similarly, what quality of life do you have if you don't give everything that you can to living? Life is a cycle, and no matter the stress felt by each individual, life is going to go on, and things everywhere are going to change with time. So when one life ends, it should be clear that you adapted to change, flowed over the obstacles put in front of you, and, directed those oars with courage and confidence. Furthermore, you should know that you gave everything you could to living, so that maybe, like a river, your life could influence others.

I like to say that I have mastered rowing the river, seen all the stoneflies, or caught all the fish although I never truly will do any of those things. But that cycle of new life and the

changes every year, cause the stonefly eggs to stay happy, the fish to stay around, the river to keep flowing, and the people to keep coming back. However, I am no longer that young child contained inside the raft, awed by its size, the power of the oars and the calm art of casting a fly rod. Instead, I sit above the raft on its frame, casting with ease, and directing the two oars that without me are dull, plastic poles.

As fall approaches, the stoneflies and I leave the river once more, but along with the lessons that the river has to offer, the rainbow trout stay and wander with ease. I sit back and revel, knowing that when I return, the stoneflies will too, the fish will be there to greet me, the river will be different, and so will I.

The bugs, the fish, the animals, and the humans—everything invests some form of itself into the river, and through different means, the river gives back.

Artwork by Lionnel Zikwata Bumbakini

JUST SWIM RIGHT

by McKenna Russen

Even on this cloudy day, the boy's face was pale with sunscreen and appeared almost ghostly. I thought to myself that he must have one caring and loving mother to mask her son's face with sunscreen. She must have been trying to protect him from something. His life jacket went up to his chin as he sat down and it pushed his pudgy cheeks up to his eyes. He had a waterproof disposable camera clipped to one of the straps on his life jacket. His helmet was tight around his forehead and rubbed off some of the layers of sunscreen. His wetsuit was fitted snuggly across his round abdomen. He sat in the aisle seat next to his older brother. They kept to themselves and stared ahead during the drive. The raft guides stood up at the front of the bus and told us about the conditions we were going to face.

"We've received record-breaking rain and snow melt this year."

"Raft guides live for days like today!"

"I've been doing this for 20 years and I've never seen the river this high."

"It's going to make for an exciting yet challenging

day! We really need everyone to be focused and listen to your guides."

My boyfriend had invited me to go on a rafting trip along with five of our other friends. Our guide was all about us having fun, but said that rafting is not something to mess around about. We had the heaviest raft on the river that day which meant we had the most people on our raft. There were three other rafts on our trip, and one in particular was extremely light, the lightest raft in our group. That raft had a guide, and three generations of boys: two sons, a father, and a grandfather. Our guide explicitly told us that we were going to stick close to that raft because he thought they were going to be an issue. I will never forget him saying that.

The smoky clouds above teased us with spotty showers of rain. It was a little foggy, but the clouds brought out the rich greens of the pine trees and the rusty colors of the rocks that lined the canyon. The end of my paddle disappeared into the murky water. The river was so high that it covered the rocky beaches of the banks.

The first rapid was a practice rapid for everyone, and all the rafts made it through flawlessly. As soon as that rapid passed, our guide explained how we were going to get through the next one.

"We need to stay to the right of the drop. The drop is a giant hydraulic and we don't want to pass over it. If you go into the water here, don't think. Just swim right. Just swim right."

Jagged rocks guarded the left side of the riverbank. My stomach dropped and my arms shook at the sight of the rapids curling and rushing back towards our raft. If a raft were even slightly sideways it would surely flip. I played intense music in my head as I extended my paddle into the ready position. It was a rush getting through it. Our guide kept yelling "ONE MORE, ONE MORE" to keep us stroking. I was drenched from head to toe with the frigid river water, but it felt energizing. We pulled off to the right bank to wait and watched the other rafts come down the rapid.

The lightest raft was almost completely sideways heading into the drop. Every muscle in my body tensed up as I watched it happen in slow motion. The raft dipped down into the drop so much that the floor of the raft was vertical to the river. All the rafters had dropped their paddles except for the

The raft dipped down into the drop so much that the floor . . . was vertical to the river.

All of the guides went over to the rocks where I thought the boy was.

guide who was still trying to steer them out, but the raft was flung again where the rapid reversed. I sat and watched as two people were heaved from the inside of the boat. I was close enough to see that one of them was smaller than the other. Guides were blowing their whistles and shouting, "WE'VE GOT SWIMMERS!" Everyone kept their eyes on the older man floating down the river backwards and watched as his guide yanked him out of the water. The boats were all pulled over onto the bank of the river now, but I heard random shouts as people looked around still with worry in their eyes. There was still one person missing.

I saw the little boy get flung into the water. I assumed he swam right. I assumed he was picked up by another raft. I assumed he was fine and that this wasn't a big deal, but I lost sight of him. I wish my assumptions were right. I told my guide that I saw him.

"I thought he swam over to that bank. He's just right behind those rocks," I stated to my guide.

All of the guides went over to the rocks where I had said I thought the boy was. Five minutes passed, then ten, and then twenty, and they still hadn't come back. I felt sicker as each second went by. I hoped the boy would come up for air. I tried holding my breath for a couple seconds so maybe he wouldn't feel alone if he were under the water. It was uncomfortable how quiet we all were just waiting for someone to come out from behind those rocks. After about 30 minutes, the guides came back with no one else by their side. I watched, frozen where I stood, as my guide walked down the bank of the river. With a rope tied around his waist, my guide attempted to swim into the rapid to see if the boy was stuck underneath it, but the current was ridiculously strong. There was no way anyone could swim into that rapid; it was just too powerful. My guide came back to shore, and then abruptly shot back into the water. He pulled out a bright red object that had been floating downstream. In his hands was the little boy's life jacket, the straps still clipped tight, hollowed out around a body its only job was to protect.

My heart sank into my chest and my legs became weak at the sight of the jacket without the little boy wearing it. My knees gave in and I sunk down into the raft. I wearily looked over to the raft next to us where the boy's older brother was

hugging his father. None of us wanted to believe what we all feared was happening.

All of the rafts decided to go down the river about a mile to tie up to a safer spot along the bank. I did not want to get back into the boat. It felt like my chest was being twisted and I couldn't stop myself from crying.

"It's alright, McKenna. Just take a couple deep breaths and I promise I will get you down this river safe. I would never let anything bad happen to you kids," said my guide attempting to calm us all down. My friend Hunter came over and rubbed my back saying, "We're going to be okay." I trusted my friends and our guide and knew we were going to be safe.

We all sat on the bank while the guides scanned the river for a sign. I repeated to myself, "That little boy is fine, he's just downstream, he's just downstream, and he is fine." About an hour later, his father, older brother, and their guide came to where we were all sitting. His older brother sat down with us and crumbled into a surge of tears. None of us had any idea what to say to him. There is nothing we could have said to make it better. The sun came out from behind the clouds and it warmed everyone up. Everyone except for his older brother stopped shivering. I overheard his father talking to his guide.

There is nothing we could have said

"You shouldn't have pulled me back into the raft. You should have gone for my son. Why didn't you go for my son?" the father yelled fiercely while holding back his tears.

"I know, I'm sorry, I should have let you go. The whole situation keeps playing over and over in my mind. I can't even imagine what you are feeling," said his raft guide.

After four hours of waiting on the bank for any sign of hope, everyone got back into the rafts except for his father and brother. They had decided to walk along the bank back to the bus. We rowed down the river in complete silence and in respect for their brother and son. My friends came together to get us all to the end of the trip. I had no strength to paddle any longer.

The rest of the day was a blur of emergency crews, police officers, and investigators swarming us for what information we could provide. I tried to picture what we looked like as we brought our raft up to the bus. We had puffy faces from our tears, dry eyes from being awake for so long, and broken hearts that went out to the family of the little boy.

Her eyes were sky blue, but all around them was light red.

I barely took one step off the bus when a woman walked straight up to me. She looked me directly in the eye and said,

"Are you the girl who pulled my husband out of the river?"

"No, that wasn't me."

"Did you see my little boy go into the water?" I paused. Her eyes were sky blue, but all around them was light red. Tears formed under her eyelids. The skin around her eyes was red from rubbing all her makeup away. I could tell she had been pacing, as she couldn't stand still for a moment. Her hair was matted and thrown back messily behind her ears.

"Yes, I saw him fall into the water. I am so sorry."

I saw her shoulders slouch forward as her hand went to her chest, as if she were trying to protect her heart from falling out. She became smaller right before me. I knew what I had said, but I didn't want to believe the words. I wish I could have said that I didn't see anyone fall out of the raft. But I wish most that I could have said that her son was on the bus and he was okay.

The rescue teams found the boy four days after he fell out of the raft. Drake was only 11 years old when he was found in the exact spot that my guide had tried to swim to.

The part of that day that continues to haunt me is the fact that he was just gone in a matter of seconds, he completely disappeared. I ask myself how could someone so young, so weak, so fragile, just vanish faster than a blink of an eye? Every person involved on that terrible day was so vulnerable to nature and how powerful it can be. It happened so fast that it's hard to believe, to this day, how abruptly a person can just disappear. I always think of his mother and how she had been trying to protect her son from something that she had no control over. I like to think that, in a way, I'm keeping him alive by telling the story of his last few moments of life. My whole heart and compassion will forever go out to Drake and his loving family. A couple weeks after the accident, I thought I saw Drake at the airport. I wanted to run to him, to grab his hand. This is the only way my mind feels it can save him.

FOLDED FLAG

by Veronica Sachtjen

Sunlight shot into the interior of the truck and doused everything with a bright white glow. The tinted windows had kept the blinding sun at bay for the entirety of the eight-hour journey. Here we were, in the end of July, walking to the door of the starch white farmhouse my great uncle Cecil had lived in for as long as I can remember. Normally, he would greet us at the door, and I would try not to feel uncomfortable as I hugged Cecil's wife, followed by my grandfather's sister, my great-grandmother, and finally, my great-grandfather. It's nothing against them. I don't really like to hug anyone. I've never understood the etiquette of a hug. How long do you hold on for? How tight? The hugs during this trip may have been the same, but the trip itself was so unlike the rest. This time, there would be one less uncomfortable hug to suffer through. Five days prior, my great-grandfather had died, and today we gathered for his funeral.

I had only ever been to one funeral before. When I was six or seven, my mother's father died. Or maybe it was her mother, I don't remember. Anyway, there was a funeral and Mom thought that it would be best if we went. The only memory I have from that day is of my brother, my cousin Caela, and I doing cartwheels in the damp grass at the cemetery. I'm not sure if this is real, or a make-believe truth.

Ralph Wesley Sachtjen was born on August 16, 1922 just south of Winner, South Dakota. With the exception of a year in the war, he would live his entire life within 40 miles of this farm. Ralph served in the United States Armed Forces from March 1945 until December 1946. During his time in the military, he was a mail clerk for General Douglas MacArthur and spent time in Tokyo, Japan as well as the Philippines. He married Lois in 1945. They had four children: Jane, Gail, Cecil, and Donna. All of these children went on to have families of their own, and when Ralph died he was survived by thirteen grandchildren, twenty-seven great-grandchildren, and one great-great granddaughter, a one-year old girl named Elliana. Ralph Wesley Sachtjen wasn't only a family man; he was also a farmer, a hunter, a veteran, a one-time school board member, a mechanic, and a neighbor.

He was probably in Tokyo the day the war ended. He never went to college, in fact he never even graduated from high school, yet he went on to be a member of the local school board for nine years. He was married to my great-grandmother for sixty-nine years, almost seven decades. And I didn't know any of this. Nothing. I learned about Ralph Sachtjen's life by reading the flimsy paper program they handed out at the funeral. I can tell you where Steve Jobs went to college, what type of diet he was on when he died, and every detail of his professional career, but I could not tell you where my great-grandfather was during World War II. I know more about the war than I do about the family member who fought in it.

I can tell you where Steve Jobs went to college . . . but I could not tell you where my great-grandfather was during World War II.

I avoid the elderly because I am arrogant.

I saw him every year; it would have been so easy to ask him just one question, any, instead of hiding in a corner, avoiding everyone. But I never did. Were you drafted? What was Tokyo like? How well did you know General MacArthur? How did you marry Great-Grandma if you were still serving in the army? Did you come home for the week to do it? Why did you stay in South Dakota? Who taught you to hunt? Did you teach Grandpa? Is this why Grandpa taught Dad and Dad taught me? How did you and Great-Grandma stay married for seventy years? What was it like when you were nineteen, in 1941? The war was just starting then. Did you always know you would join the army? Why did you join the army?

I avoid the elderly. When they can no longer take care of themselves and they go to live in a nursing home, I don't feel bad because I think that the nurses are enough company. After all, they're in a home with all of their peers so they can't possibly want me to visit them. I avoid the elderly because I am selfish. Seeing them so ancient, so fragile, so dependent on another makes me think of myself. How one day, I will be this ancient, this fragile, this dependent – it paralyzes me with fear. I avoid the elderly because I am arrogant. This man, who is mostly deaf and blind and can't remember his son's birthday or yesterday's lunch, is nowhere near as intelligent as I am. I don't care if he has been on this Earth for so much longer than I have, he needs me to speak slowly so he must not have anything substantial to share with me. He doesn't understand technology, so there is no way he can give me relationship advice, never mind that he has been married for seventy years. I avoid the elderly for no good reason at all. One day they will die, and all I will have left is their photograph staring up at me from the memorial card handed out at their funeral.

The evening before the funeral, the church hosted a memorial service and viewing exclusively for us. My family was some of the first people there, except for my grandpa and grandma who had been there to open the church. I stared down the narrow aisle, ignoring the oak wood benches and instead focusing on the mahogany casket that was halfway open. I knew my great-grandpa was lying in there. It's okay, my grandma said, he still looks like Grandpa. But you don't have to look if you don't want to. I told her that I would go. I have no clue why I said this. I think I just wanted them to think I was mature enough to look at the lifeless corpse of a man I hadn't seen in a year.

I walked up to the casket along with my mom and dad. My brother stayed in the back of the church. My grandma was right. He did look the same, he was even wearing one of those blue and white checkerboard shirts he loved. It was almost like he was sleeping. Almost. His lips were stretched grotesquely tight across his mouth, completely devoid of color. They stuck together the way lips do when they are dehydrated and beg to stay close to each other. It was enough to make him look dead. I wish I had just stayed in the back of church with my brother.

It was almost like he was sleeping. Almost.

When the family was sharing memories about Ralph during the memorial service, my dad stood up to talk about his grandfather's legacy. He mentioned the rural safaris my great-grandfather had led and asked anyone who had been on them to raise their hand. I didn't raise mine. Nor did my brother; in fact, a few of the younger cousins were the only ones who did. I was beginning to cry and trying to avoid drawing attention to the fact. That is why I didn't raise my hand. My dad didn't know that. He got upset and sat down before really finishing his story. I blame myself for his anger. He thinks I just don't care.

My great-grandpa used to round up four of his grandkids, usher us into his tiny blue pickup truck, and drive around for hours looking for the wildlife that he loved in that special way only a hunter can. We would sit in the decades old truck, shoulder to shoulder and listen to him weave elaborate tales about the animals he had encountered. He loved to tell us about all of the mountain lions he had seen last week. The way he told it, you would almost believe that all of the mountain lions in the west lived exclusively on his property.

It was on one of these journeys that he came to an abrupt stop in the middle of the dirt road to point out a flock of wild turkeys that had taken up residence in an abandoned one-room school. I didn't see anything special about them; they just looked like big brown ugly birds to me. However, great-grandpa said that they could be mean old bastards. They didn't look it, but if you got to close to one and pissed it off, the turkey would come after you and you wouldn't even expect it to happen.

Everything I knew about funerals came from what I had seen on television, where the prevalent image involves weepy-eyed family members gathered around the raised casket made of a dark wood. A priest (always a priest, never a Protestant) reads from a bite-sized Bible and tells the family that the deceased is with the Lord now. They are almost always standing beneath a tree as a soft breeze brushes against the hair of the women, women who are all wearing flattering black dresses. The men stand stoically, clenching their hands in front of their abdomens, looking like GQ models in their immaculately fitting black suits. Even the children, in their tiny black suits and tiny black shoes and tiny black dresses, understand that something terrible has happened. They refrain from begging for attention. Sometimes it is raining, because even the sky cries at funerals, and a ceiling of black nylon umbrellas protect the black-coated attendees. Right before the casket is lowered into the ground, someone walks up to the beautiful wooden box and sets an object of sentimental value on top, to be buried with the dead. Everyone then silently turns to leave. Maybe a muffled sob breaks through the near impenetrable barrier of quiet. A parade of black cars slowly exits the cemetery.

Television lied to me about funerals. It made me believe that the beauty of the funeral was the only thing that made it matter, that the more beautiful the funeral, the more beautiful the person. This is a terrible thing to show people. Ralph Sachtjen did not get a vogue funeral. Instead, he had a church bursting at the seams with neighbors, clients, family members, friends, and acquaintances ready to celebrate his life.

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It turns out that despite what television implies, people do not actually have to wear black to a funeral. In fact, funerals aren't very black at all. Of course, I didn't know this, so I wore a simple black dress. Everyone else looked like they were merely going to church, as if it were any other Sunday. The variety of pastel blouses was astronomical; I was the black sheep in a sea of Easter Eggs. There was no homely priest to read from Corinthians. We got a Methodist pastor who read the obituary and talked about himself and his nuggets of forgiveness, whatever that means. There was an overenthusiastic sign-language interpreter in the front. The funeral procession wasn't graceful, it was just like any other stressful drive. And since cemeteries don't have parking lots, cars stacked bumper to bumper along the edges of the dirt path that was trying hard to be a real road. A bright blue canopy covered the burial site, whipping around in the wind, barely anchored to the ground by four fragile aluminum rods. The same wind slapped at faces and devoured the funeral director's voice before it could leave the confines of the—

The first shot of the three volley salute went off without any warning, and I jolted. I should have been more prepared. My great-grandpa was military, of course he would get the salute. I tried, in vain, to keep myself grounded for the next two sets of shots, but even the last one made me jerk. Two young Marines removed the American flag elegantly draped over the casket that held Ralph Wesley Sachtjen. With a precision I had never seen in my life, they folded the stars and stripes into a perfect triangle, holding eye contact with each other the entire time. The handsome one presented the flag to my great-grandmother, whispering something that even I, standing right behind her, could not decipher.

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R.W.S.
August 16, 1922 – July 20, 2014

YIN

by Heather Clark

I begin with my legs crossed and my palms touching at my chest. I take a few breaths to get comfortable. I pause here to think of an intention for my practice: I am breathing in. I am breathing out.

Child's Pose.

From where I was lying I could see up through the back window of the Forester. It was so dark outside. I could see the stars through the dirt from the drive, thousands of them. A safe stillness came with camping in a car. All the creaking and rustling of the woods at night were held back by the thin piece of metal suspending me above the ground. In less than five hours I had to wake up to hike Devil's Causeway. Ten miles didn't seem so far. Up on the flat tops there were three feet of snow heavy and sagging into the earth. I lay there feeling the weight of sadness on my chest. Spring had become early summer. He had left for two months off into remote Alaska.

Photo by Logan Guerry

He hadn't called in a week.

My chest sinks to the floor. The muscles rooted alongside my ribcage and through my upper back are being pulled by the weight of my heart.

I had made it my intention to focus on work and succeed. Now my newly opened store was slipping into bankruptcy and none of my efforts were bringing people in. I could feel it on the edge of this cliff ready to tumble to a place where it couldn't be controlled and couldn't be saved. They had taken a chance on me. What if I wasted their investment? What if I was never worth it in the first place? What if I failed? Truly failed? Would they have the nerve to fire me? Did it matter?

The weight of my hips and thighs cuts off circulation to my calves and feet. My toes begin to tingle and lose feeling.

Two and a half miles in, there was a stretch that gives the hike its name, the Devil's Causeway. The trodden path disappeared, becoming a fifty-foot strip of odd rocks three feet wide that can only be crawled across. I feared the vertigo, nausea, and fainting that the 800 foot cliffs were known to cause. Past that, it was seven miles down Bear Creek Trail over the snowy and barren flattops back to the car. The loneliness from before shifted to excitement and anxiety over the thrill of the adventure I had been planning for weeks. My mind was racing. Four hours until I had to wake up. I exhaled. I felt energy building up inside and rising to where the two sides of my ribcage meet, right above my stomach. At last I felt alive.

Pidgeon.

About a year after we broke up, we talked again. He told me about his new girlfriend. He said she was kind and loving. He told me I had taught him a lot, but he hadn't changed. He had done the same to her that he had done to me. I thanked him for making our relationship something I could learn from.

My stomach lowers down, reaching the heel of my folded leg. I do my best to relax into the pose, resting the side of my face on the earth and opening up my outer hip. The stretch is so deep my core tenses and shivers in resistance.

I had always hoped I was secretly strong.

I told my mom after I left him for the final time. It was how I could be sure never to turn back. She looked at me, both proud and ashamed.

The stretch is too deep, I switch legs. As I lower down again, I can feel my jaw tighten and my cheek sticks to the mat as a force just stronger than gravity pushes my hips toward the ground.

He always made the best breakfast burritos. He would take those frozen potatoes, dump them into a big pan and cook the scrambled eggs alongside them. There really wasn't anything special about them, but everything mixed with the salt and pepper won me over. I was sitting on the couch watching TV when he came from the kitchen to ask me a question. I answered wrong and he left the room. On the screen, Tom chased Jerry around trying to beat him with a broom and I sunk into the tattered hand-me-down couch, my cheek hot and swollen.

Staff Pose.

It snowed two feet that day. Boulder had shut down due to the unexpected weather. I sent a text to my brother to brag about how I didn't have to work but he did. He didn't text me back for a long time. When he did, he asked me if I had heard from Mom and Dad. I hadn't.

I lower down. I can feel my legs become long from my ankles to my lower back. I lower my head toward my knees and am met with resistance from my overworked muscles. My only desire is to push away from it and end all of the struggle and waiting.

My dad ran marathons his whole life. He had been an incredible athlete when he was younger and now was a skinny man with a greying beard holding on to whatever athleticism he had left. When we were younger he would take us all around for his marathons. My dad quit running when I was young because my mom always had a hard time caring for three chil-

dren while traveling to watch the races. Now that we were older, he had been doing marathons all over the state and qualified for the Boston Marathon. For old time's sake, my mom went with him.

The room felt lonely, so I switched on the TV. There were bombings at the end of the Boston Marathon. Every channel had the same clip on replay. Runners, exhausted and determined, trudged their way to the finish line only to be swept up, feet away from the end, in smoke, fire, and fear. The ground came up to meet me as I sat there on the floor of my apartment, stunned. I watched the reporters, as people were carried off in stretchers, saying all the same things in different words, "We don't know what's going on."

I couldn't stand to hear it all said again, so I got in my car and drove to my childhood home a few miles outside of Boulder. I had heard on the TV that all cell phone service in Boston and the surrounding area was cut off to catch the bomber. A bustling city, full of energy and urgency, cut off and silenced. As I pulled into the snow-covered driveway of my childhood home I could feel that silence echoing over the house. It was lonely and still as I stepped through the back door into the dark and cold. I took off my snow boots and let the light and sound of the TV fill the space where my family wasn't. All public transportation had been stopped, phones cut off, and a second round of bombs had gone off. The city had slowed to a halt.

Runners, exhausted and determined, trudged their way to the finish line only to be swept up, feet away from the end, in smoke, fire, and fear.

Sharp intense sensations shoot from my sciatica to my Achilles. I flow between relaxing into the pose and recoiling from the pain. Only a few more moments.

I felt my phone buzz. As my body shivered sitting on the floor hot tears steamed down my face. They were alive.

I spread my legs out shaking them a little, relaxing into my final posture, Chivasana. I spread my feet and arms out off the mat. I allow myself just to sink into the floor. I breathe normally and return to my intention.

I can feel tingling in my toes as they lose feeling and completely let go into relaxation. I release any resistance I had to the ground. Calming sensations crawl up my tired legs through my calves and shins, knees and thighs. I feel my legs stretch out long and

then be still. For a second, the muscles in my hips tense from the shock of no longer being tugged in odd directions and then relax. Calm takes over my belly and ribs, soothing my core until it is still. Peace soaks through my shoulders, arms, and down to my fingertips. I can feel it traveling up into my neck and up over the front of my face just kissing my jaw. My tongue, cheeks, and forehead seem to let out a sigh of relief. The ground caresses my body as they slowly become one. I can feel my breath traveling from the depths of my gut up to my heart, bringing it energy. As I let air out, it moves up to the nape of my neck, bringing me peace.

I am breathing in. I am breathing out.

Photo by Katelyn Leigh Sector

THE ATIVAN DECEMBER (LORAZEPAM)

by Andrew Hecocks

My doctor tells me the pills will make my brain work the way it's supposed to. And maybe after a long enough time, they'll bring some of that light back into my eyes. Some people call them happy pills, he says with a pen cap clenched in his teeth and his bespectacled eyes fixed on a paper-clipped stack of documents, but that would be misleading. They don't make you happy, they make you function. Of course, you know that by now, he continues, tearing off a slip of paper informing me that I've been greenlit to have all of my prescriptions refilled.

I came into this world with defective parts, and I learned how to deal with them: a bilious stomach, a violently weak digestive system—it didn't matter as long as I found a workaround. But when a panel of experts declared that one of these defective parts was my brain, and they gave me explanations I didn't understand about how some neurons didn't light up when they should, I thought holy shit, my entire brain is broken. Don't I need that to, you know, survive? This was something slightly harder to learn how to deal with, because the solutions weren't so clear-cut.

The vaguely threatening names resonate in some cavern in my head: clinical depression, personality disorder, anxiety, and I know them better than a lot of things that occupy the same space. Standing in the parking lot with my coat pulled tight against the December sleet, I clasp all three of my prescribed bottles in my hands and try my hardest to think this over in rational terms. Two are translucent orange, and the other is an opaque ivory white. Shaking them makes a cacophony of plastic rattles. I arrange them in alternating colors and roll them back and forth in the cupped halfpipe of my palms and fingers, wondering how something so infinitesimally small can fix a problem that is much larger. They are the David, my brain is the Goliath, and my body is the vivisected warzone of a shower of capsules and pills.

My doctors and physicians and nurse practitioners tell me, take this blue pill with a meal in the morning, and then wait five hours before you down a couple of these white ones with a full glass of water. Oh, and by the way, make sure to set an alarm at 7:00 in the evening so you can take this purple one and don't have a meal afterwards so you don't exacerbate the heartburn. Besides, you can't even take your 11:30 capsule on a full stomach anyway, so no matter what you're doing, just don't eat anything and you should be all right. Did we mention that alcohol is off the table? Because it is.

The 11:30 pill is my favorite because it's red on one half and blue on the other. It projects the illusion of something enjoyable. In school, I learned that when brightly colored things are found in nature they are usually incredibly venomous, and when found in food they are usually delicious to the same degree. The 11:30 pill is neither of these things, despite its cheerful colors. It does, however, control my mind so it turns into less of a whirlpool, and this way I'm not stuck with a spinning funnel of sea-green foam roaring in my head in the place where thoughts should be.

I learn to start carrying the pill bottles with me, because if I bring the pills alone and naked in my pocket, I forget about them and they get run through the wash and are stripped of their colors and shapes and potency. With the price of my prescriptions, this equates roughly to a dollar and some-odd cents per pill and I'll be damned if that money goes to waste in a washing machine instead of dissolving in my organs. Initially I wanted to resist the bottles because when I carry them, everyone can hear the clack and the rattle and the sound of the things that do their best to fix me. At

The 11:30 pill is my favorite because it's red on one half and blue on the other.

Reason turned into the handfuls of snow that melted and dripped away . . .

that point everyone knows I'm made of broken parts and their gazes are composed of either pity or of curiosity, neither of which I want to indulge for them. Despite some faulty pieces, for the most part everything still works together to do what it's supposed to. In the back of my consciousness, though, it's hard to forget the bottles in my pocket when they remind me and everyone else of their presence with every step I take, monotone requiem bells that click click click click and shout HEY, LOOK AT THIS GUY. LOOK AT HIM AND ALL OF HIS PILLS!

I shove the bottle of painkillers in the side pouch of my backpack, or I put the smaller bottle of Ativan in my back pocket so I can keep sitting on it by mistake, or I keep esomeprazole and antacid in my work apron so I don't have to spend another twenty minutes leaning on the side of a bathroom stall clutching my chest and wondering if I'm going to die here on the wet tile floor of a chain restaurant bathroom. It's a tradeoff between being silent as I walk and feeling like I can actually live, a tradeoff between appearing well and actually being well. Sometimes I'm stuck in parabolas between the two and my mind and body can't decide together on where to land. I just lie in bed without sleeping or showering or doing very much of anything, counting shadows on the ceiling and tracing their movements like constellations painted between the spiderwebs on the crown molding. I don't have to turn my head away from the pillow to watch the colon between the hours and the minutes on my digital clock blink with a comforting rhythm that doesn't sync up to my breathing or my heartbeat. The bottles are always there on the nightstand, standing in a staggered line that retreats into blurriness that farther they are from my face.

Ativan came first, when my mind was a stormy sea that swallowed the ship of my sanity and self. It hit out of nowhere in December, much like the snowstorms that year, sending me reeling to find something to pin down as the source. Reason turned into the handfuls of snow that melted and dripped away and I struggled to think of what could've caused it, considering that my job and a stunningly ruthless semester of classes were pounding away at me with their balled-up fists. This had happened before, but never to this degree: I felt like a dark well had broken open inside my head, deep and profound and endless with some kind of horrific Lovecraftian beast lurking at the bottom. Eventually, I caved to the advice of friends and went to the doctor's office

before this monster punched a hole right through my forehead. I was bounced around to three or four different professionals, cycling through offices that all looked the same—tan paint on the walls, a wilting plant in the corner, and wildly uncomfortable chairs in which I read issues of TIME that were a few months out of date. Eventually I sat tightly curled in a chair, in one of these offices that felt more like an interrogation chamber with a single light dangling over each of our heads. Dr. Burton explained to me, in a lot of medical jargon, all about mood disorders and clinical depression, and that this thing called Ativan might be able to help me. He only prescribed me enough doses for a month, warning me of drug dependence, and that I should come in for a recap in thirty days' time and that we could go from there. I started throwing these little white pills at the monster at the bottom of the well, two per day, both in the morning when the beast was rising and ready to hunt, unfurling its limbs and long fingers to touch my mind in the places that were weakest. I hoped to placate it before it found the soft, bright spots in my brain.

"How are the stress levels in your life?"

About a year later, when I am doing my usual tour of the different hospitals, I find myself seated in another office with complaints of stomach pain. "How are the stress levels in your life?" the nurse practitioner asks, glaring at her clipboard through winged glasses. "They're definitely there," I reply simply, trying to free a wry laugh from my throat. I don't tell her that I'm manic with sleeplessness as I wake up at any hour of the night to take a pill. I don't tell her that my job might literally be killing me faster than the malfunctions in my body but that I am, astoundingly, still employed. She explains that I have inherited severe acid reflux from my father's side of the family and that stress is likely the catalyst that brought it to life within me. She faxes a prescription for Nexium to my Walgreens pharmacy, so I can add another bottle to the growing collection on my nightstand.

Sometimes it's hard to consider the fact that I'm supposed to be in the prime age of my life and I need medication to get me through the day. Where other people thrive, I find myself leaning on the front desk of a pharmacy. The success sought and discovered by my peers is outside of my grasp: when I reach for it, I'm limited by a body that resists most of the things I do. My fingers will move through the intangible wave of the future, my palm will come up clean and free of meaning and life, and instead I'll be clutching a fistful of capsules that dribble through the cracks in my fingers and fall to the floor. Despite how fascinating it is that we've reduced the complexity of the human body and mind down these colored tablets, it doesn't change the reality that the hours of my day are demarcated by the pills required between, and the months of my life are measured by the number of pills left in a bottle, rattling around the silica gel packet at the bottom. It's not simply a crutch that makes everything better for the day, it's a sudden flurry of chemicals that make my synapses pop and fire the way they're supposed to. It's a burst of sensation and cognizance deep in the neurons of my brain. It's a cold drop of ice that stops the burning sensation from creeping from my stomach to my chest, mushrooming slowly upwards like the leftovers of an atomic bomb to rest behind my throat. It reminds me to feel happy at the appropriate times, it reminds me that jumping off of this stairwell would actually be a terrible idea and that doing so would leave a bigger impression than just the literal impact on the tiles below. Much like jumping into a pool, my body hitting a horizontal surface would cause ripples to burst outwards: not through water, but through people and news headlines and an outdated file photo of me that the newspapers had permission to use. Festoon my body with yellow police tape and throw me bouquets of camera flashes.

Festoon my body with yellow police tape and throw me bouquets of camera flashes.

As simple as we want life to be, most of the solutions we find don't come through positivity alone, but through the physical manipulation of biology. Weakness is not defined by the number of pills that somebody has to swallow each day. It isn't until another early winter morning, one in which the world is crusted over with a completely out-of-nowhere blizzard that reminds me of The Ativan December, when I try to pin this thought to my brain. I desperately want to focus on this, as much as I want my brain to feel bright, like all of the neurons have started working again. I am not weak. I try to make the schedule of the day, color-coded by pills and annotated with the timed schedule of when to take what, fall away from my mind. I want this to be the first morning I feel like I won't need to take my medication and that I won't, like each day before this moment, have to pray for evening.

But it doesn't quite work like that. So I swallow my pills, pull my coat on around my shoulders, and lock the door behind me.

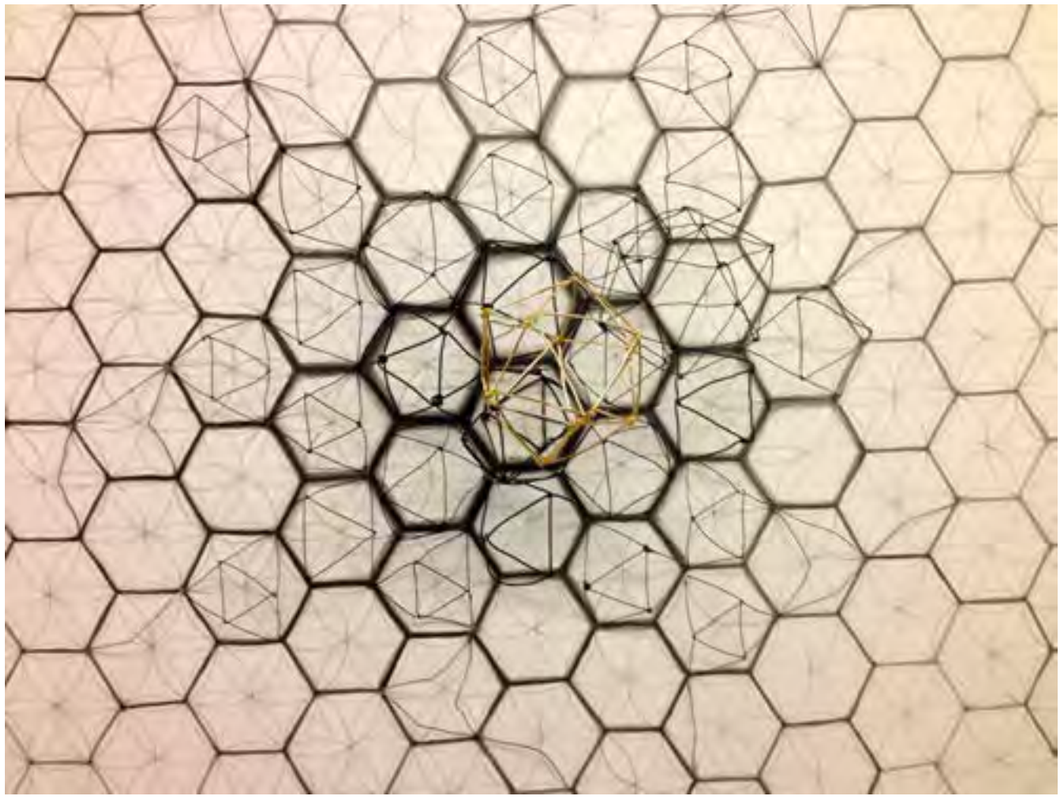

Photo by Lucy Gale

BEAUTIFUL SCIENCE

Why a PhD in biochemistry is necessary to shop at Rite Aid

"Science grows and Beauty dwindles."
—Lord Alfred Tennyson

by Rebecca Hall

The hot sun glares down on my face as I scurry from my dull gray Honda Civic to the automatic doors of the corner Rite Aid. I can feel my ancestry burning clear back to my great, great Irish grandmother. As I lunge inside I narrowly miss nailing the hesitating sliding glass with my face. A pudgy blonde clerk looks over at me with disinterested annoyance and just a smidge of judgment. Clearly, the door and clerk have made the decision that just because they are at work doesn't mean that they have to work. Undeterred by my near-death experience, I continue walking as if nothing has happened. I am on a mission. I even made a list. And it is . . . somewhere . . . I search the pockets of my jeans. Nothing. I'm about to turn around and face another attempt on my life to retrieve the list from my car when I remember… I reach into my bra and pull out a carefully written list of various odds and ends that would no doubt secure me a spot on the NSA's watchlist. I started using my bra as a part-time storage compartment back in high school when I came to the realization that the structural integrity of my bras were never going to be tested.

I unfold the list and orient myself to the first item: face lotion. I turn and make my way through a brightly lit maze of glamorous shelves stocked with every unnecessary product a person could ever want. In sheer awe, I approach a wall—nay—a shrine of moisture . . . a basilica of beauty . . . a tabernacle of cosmetic wonder. I look back down at my list—"face lotion." I look back up at the glowing bethel of products: skin clearing, pore refining, anti-acne, anti-aging, lightly moisturizing, extra moisturizing . . . I don't even know where to look first when suddenly hovering above me as if a magic godmother from the sky I see Jennifer Garner. Her perfect porcelain skin radiates outward, lightly kissing the words "rapid wrinkle repair" gently suggested beneath her heavenly face. It has never occurred to me, but "oh shit—I am getting older!" I guess it's never too early to be a time-fighter and I did see some laugh lines when I was checking my smile in the mirror the other day. Note to self: must brood more, laugh less. Okay . . . so I need an anti-aging face lotion. How hard can that be to choose?

My eyes wonder over to the Neutrogena section. Do I go with their Naturals line that is "fortified with Wintergreen leaf" and has "NO harsh chemical sulfates, parabens, petrolatum, dyes or phthalates?" I have no idea what any of those things are or what "Wintergreen leaf" is, but I feel like it would make a refreshing flavor of gum. What about their Pore Refining line with "Alpha and Beta Hydroxy formula?" Or their Hydro Boost line with "water gel?" It has "Hyaluronic acid" and is dermatologist recommended. Oh, but then there is their Rapid Tone Repair with "accelerated Retinol, vitamin C and SPF 30." Or should I just go with their Triple Age Repair line that has "Hexinol and SPF 25?" But wait—quick question…why don't all of their products say they have "NO harsh chemical sulfates, parabens, petrolatum, dyes or phthalates?" Does that mean they do have those harsh chemicals? Why would Neutrogena include any harsh chemicals in any of their products? And what the heck are hyaluronic acid, retinol, hexinol and alpha and beta hydroxy? You know what? It doesn't matter—there are plenty of other options here—moving on.

A flash of classic red captures my eye. Olay. Now we're talking. I pick up a box of their "Micro-sculpting cream." It feels cool and dense in my hands. The box says "visible wrinkle

What about their Pore Refining line with "Alpha and Beta Hydroxy formula?"

In sheer awe, I approach a wall—nay—a shrine of moisture . . . a basilica of beauty . . . a tabernacle of cosmetic wonder.

results start in one day" with their "amino-peptide complex and hydra-firming complex." That's a lot of complexes. I turn the box over and in a bold, white, ballsy font I see the words "a cream that defies gravity." Now that's just crazy. NASA can barely do that. Moving on.

L'oreal. Oui. A slight sigh of relief escapes my lips. No one does beauty like the French. Immediately, I see all the right words: "expertise . . . age perfect . . . ultra-nourishing . . . anti-sagging . . . " Actually, "sagging" is a bit harsh but they mean business. And aging is a serious business. Just because we all do it doesn't mean that we want people to know that. So to keep my face from "sagging" they have lovingly provided me with a cream that "nourishes skin with calcium" and a "nutrient complex." Hmmm. To be honest, that doesn't sound that impressive, does it? What about Roc? They're French and their Deep Wrinkle Repair line is "patented with Copper-Zinc technology." Impressionnant. Or Garnier? That sounds French. Their BB Cream has "pro-xylane, mineral pigments and SPF 15." But why BB? Why not AA? Well, okay, that one is taken . . . but why not CC or DD? Suddenly my mind hits overload. I start to feel nauseous as buzz words swirl around me like a vanity vortex. Aveeno advocates "calming feverfew, nourishing oat and soy complex." Burt and his Bees buzz with "daisy extract, cotton extract and clary sage." Clean and Clear claims "sea minerals, sea kelp extracts" that will "wind me down." Some brand called SebaMed sports "pentavin, vitamins and allantoin." Cetaphil . . . doesn't really have much going on except that it's recommended by Good Housekeeping. Not sure why that should convince me to use it on my face rather than my stove. Round and round the store spins as I grapple to gain my bearings. I close my eyes and take some deep breaths. In through the nose . . . out through the mouth . . . in through the nose . . . out through the mouth. My heart rate slows back to a moderate thump-de-thump in my chest. I open my eyes. The floor is down and the ceiling up. I look down at my list. I will think on the face lotion and move on to the next item: shampoo.

I start making my way back through the maze of glamorous shelves until I see a picture of a woman with longer, shinier hair than a Disney princess. I've arrived. I step into the aisle to start browsing. As my eyes scan the shelves I start to feel

an uncomfortable, yet oddly familiar sense of overwhelming pressure. Suddenly I am surrounded: “silicone free . . . peppermint complex and tea tree essence . . . oxyfusion technology . . . triple nutrition . . . moisture-silk complex . . . sulfate free . . . infused with keratin . . .” Son-of-a-bitch. ☙

“I believe natural beauty has a necessary place in the spiritual development of any individual or any society. I believe that whenever we substitute something man-made and artificial for a natural feature of the earth, we have retarded some part of man’s spiritual growth.” —Rachel Carson

Photo by Logan Guerry

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

DONE GOOFED

by Madsen Lozuaway-McComsey

My right foot swings alongside my board, propelling me further, faster. My head hurts—everything is too bright. Music plays in my earbuds as the world spins by me. Thoughts are escaping my grasp like a freshly caught fish, but essentially I know where I am heading.

My destination is empty. Damn, I think, they don't open until 3. I was sure there would be brunch; everyone has brunch on Sunday. I begin my journey back towards home, my items still lost. I contemplate sustenance. Nothing quite calls to me, other than my stomach, which is loud and persistent. My eyes peruse several locations but they all leave a bad taste in my mouth.

It's been several months that I have been longboarding, and I finally feel comfortable on the sandpaper like surface. Hills are still out of the question though.

The thought of breakfast is still heavy on my mind, but my stomach keeps recalling the Mexican silver of the previous night, making it difficult to want to eat. I decide upon some Colorado medicine to settle my churning belly and set my course for home.

"Sunshine" by Atmosphere comes on. This is my jam. It's so happy, positive, and motivational. All is well. Though one lyric in particular sticks out to me.

"My bad sight makes me trip on my ass, right into that patch of grass like, 'That's life!'"

My bad sight focusing on a pretty girl near makes me fall on the pavement.

Fuck.

She rushes over and asks if I'm okay. I'm not. "Pretty sure I just broke my elbow . . ." I can see the cap about an inch up my tricep. I look around, bewildered, trying to figure out what happened. My blurry vision picks out a hole about a foot deep. My wheel had caught it and my board stopped, but I didn't.

My blurry vision picks out a hole about a foot deep.

Fuck.

She asks if I live near. Only four blocks away and I think I can make it. I start limping in that direction, hoping she will offer assistance. My board is in my hand and my headphones are mocking me as they dangle from one ear, still playing happy tunes. She starts off in the same direction, but picks up her pace with an awkward pep in her step as she tries to avoid feeling like she needs to help me.

Bitch.

The sun is beating down in the way the Colorado sunshine does. My head is swimming, my vision fading, my whole body is so warm. Pants were not a good choice, even in March. A block down the road and I can't take it. The thought of an ambulance enters my head, but leaves even faster as I recall my

lack of insurance. Before I pass out and damage myself even further, I take a seat on my board, lift my head, and scream. It helps a lot.

I arrive home after a few more sit-downs, a couple more screams, and an abundance of profanity. My bed rushes up to meet me, but the pain is hot on its heels.

I silently thank the Fates that I have my friend's car temporarily. With excruciating effort, I pull the VW out onto the road and head for the hospital. Normally, I love driving, especially stick-shifts—though this is not one of those times.

Siri, being as helpful as always, directs me to the nearest veterinary hospital. I'm pretty sure I know where Boulder Community Hospital is.

Broadway, that's where I need to go.

As I'm waiting to turn into the parking lot an ambulance flies by as if mocking my financial state. I stall.

Shit.

In time, I'm standing in front of a big sign that says, "No Emergency Services."

Fuck.

"Arapahoe," the sign informs me. My stomach reminds me I have yet to eat. My water bottle keeps me as sane as I am hydrated, barely.

The drive east is filled with laughing, crying, self-scolding, and an odd combination of all three that must have looked very strange to other drivers. "Why so serious," I ask myself with a chuckle. My arm throbs with each pothole, crack, and bump I hit, reminding me to avoid them for the rest of my life. Pay more attention, idiot, my inner monologue screams.

As I sit in the left-hand turn lane, waiting for the longest light of my life, I contemplate the consequences of my obliviousness. I need to call my manager; definitely can't work tonight. I need to call my parents. I can already hear my mom fussing over me, telling me I "done goofed," but also reassuring me, comforting me, being motherly.

After all of time has passed, I turn left and pull into a patient parking spot. That's me, I think, a patient. I casually saunter through the parking lot towards the large EMERGENCY sign, my arm silently reminding me of how stupid I can be. Before entering I triple-check to make sure I have my Medicaid card. Thank you, Colorado taxpayers.

Siri, being as helpful as always, directs me to the nearest veterinary hospital.

The face behind the counter is friendly and welcoming. I state very matter-of-factly what happened, my hip still bleeding slightly, my pants and shirt still very dirty and streaked. He takes down my information, gives me a custom printed wristband, and ushers me through a door to the emergency room.

Once I settle into a room, change into a robe, and get poked a prodded a few times by several different individuals, I can feel my spirits lifting. I realize the humor of the situation. I just had to let my eyes rest upon that not-even-that-beautiful woman for those extra few seconds, didn't I? I just had to not notice that perfect cylinder of air a foot deep in the pavement. Such is life.

My mom reacts well. I think the fact that I lead with a lie of being arrested helps to soften the blow. She is very worried that I'm alone but I reassure her it's fine. My dad, of course, is also very sympathetic. We all have a chuckle to try and lighten the situation. My dad offers to fly out, to fly me out to him, or to help with the bills however he can. I inform him that this should all fall under the Medicaid coverage. How wrong I was.

Twelve hours, one surgery, five doctors, seven nurses, and no food later, I am walking out with my aunt, and a bottle of Percocet in my hand. I can't help but smirk as I reflect upon the day. I think of how it started, sickly but optimistic; how it progressed, painful and sad; how it ended, humorous and comforted. Fuck, I think, what an experience.

Artwork by Lionnel Zikwata Bumbakini

"BUILDING" IN BOLGATANGA

by Robbie Gershon

Lugging the 25-pound gritty cinder block across the uneven, muddy earth of the Bolgatanga schoolyard in Northern Ghana, my knees began to buckle, my shoulders quivered with fatigue, and my fingers felt raw beneath the heavy weight of the cement brick. Side-stepping carefully to avoid the foul-smelling urine puddle, I audibly chuckled thinking about the carefree summer days when my friends and I would chant, "Step on a crack and you break your mother's back!" But here, my own back was breaking, and I felt slightly nauseous as the fetid, musty fumes permeated my nostrils. Beads of hot sweat rolled lazily from my underarms down the sides of my trunk, and I desperately longed for an ice-cold bottle of refreshing water. I licked my lips attempting to alleviate my cottonmouth, and frustration flooded through my veins. "Damn it, Robbie! Of course you forgot your Chapstick!" I felt irritated, and I damned the day when I proudly announced to my parents that I decided to spend the summer between junior and senior year of high school traveling in Africa. Cursing the cinder block, I wondered why I ever imagined myself cut out as a builder.

Shaking my head, I thought, "This is nothing like Kenya!" My family had taken a fantastic safari to photograph the Big Five and deliver gifts to the children in a Maasai village. Feeling the pus-filled, oozing blisters burn my feet, I wished I were back in Kenya riding comfortably in the open-top jeep excitedly pointing to the elephant herd as it trampled the long grass in the game park. The weight of the cinder block was unbearable, and sighing loudly I thought, "Just quit. You can leave. Why do you need this?" But when I glimpsed Ebo, a thin and wiry six-year-old boy pull down his pants and unsuccessfully attempt to urinate on the wooden planks posing as a urinal on the dusty playground floor while actually peeing on the foot of his friend next to him, I thought, "Come on Robbie, you can do this!" But could I really endure the pure exhaustion, the offensive odor, and the aches and pains attacking my entire body?

Careful not to drop the cinderblock, I briefly paused to catch my breath. My chest heaved up and down, and, with each exhale, whew, whew, whew escaped my parched lips. My fatigue was impossible to mask, and my friend Patrick mouthed, "Are you okay?" Wearily I shook my head up and down, pushed my right leg forward, and trudged onward careful not to trip on the large rubber tires posing as fancy playground equipment. Finally, after the longest forty-five seconds of my life, I carefully lowered the cinderblock squarely on top of the already heightening pile. The muscles in my low back were throbbing, and, with my hands firmly planted in the small of my back, I wearily performed an arch hoping to alleviate the achiness. "Just stop...no one will get mad," but the truth was, I would get so mad at myself if I ever quit. Angrily, I kicked the large thirty-pound bag of cement lying silently at my feet, and then I ripped it open and haphazardly poured the sandy dusty contents on to the ground. Instantly I felt the grit clog my nostrils. Struggling to breathe, I heard a hoarse, raspy voice in my head urge, "Quit!" I really did want to take a hot shower, plop on my pillow-top mattress and sleep for two days straight. But just then a firm, forceful, ferocious voice roared, "You will not give up!"

Hastily I grabbed the first of the ten large water-filled tin saucers that I had previously carried above my head and placed around my work area. Pouring the water on the pile of dust, I began the methodical task of turning the dust into workable

"You will not give up!"

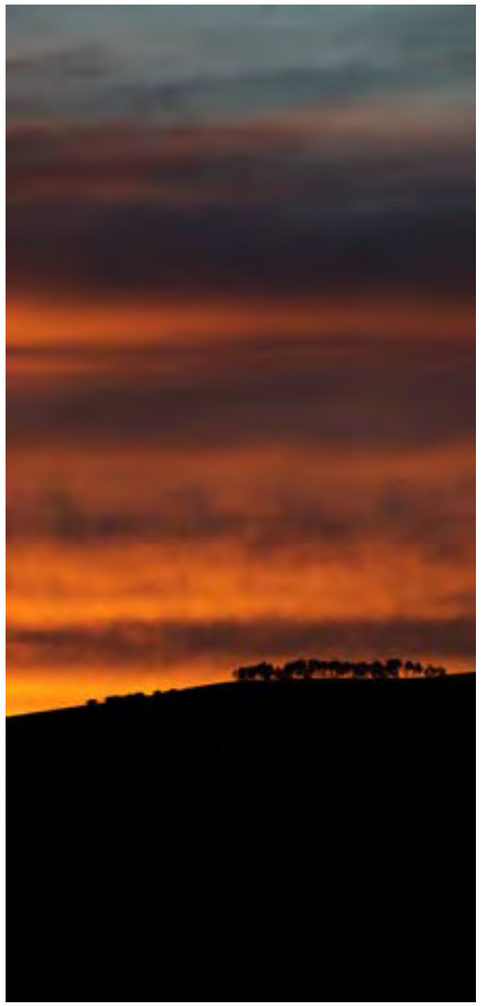

Photo by Alexander Drury

cement. Once again I felt the trembling in my thighs as I attempted to maintain a squat in order to complete this necessary but grueling task. The skin on my fingers split as I squeezed the wooden stirring stick, and red hot blisters erupted through the skin of my sweaty palms. Like a slithering snake, my tongue slid across my upper lip drinking up the sweat along the curved path. A sense of overwhelming thirst and exhaustion plagued my thoughts, and again the desire to quit exceeded the desire to help others, but glancing sideways at Dia and Georgine, the two six-year-old giggly Ghanaian girls kicking a soccer ball, I knew I would continue to mix and mix. Suddenly, I caught a glimpse of Ema, the adorable five-year-old innocent Ghanaian boy, out of the corner of my eye. Watching him pull his blue tattered shorts down to his ankles, I let out a heavy sigh. Ema peed on the playground dirt, and, without hesitation, his buddy, Junior, joined in on the action. Of course, none of the other laughing, carefree school children even skipped a beat as they continued to chase the rolling soccer ball. Urinating in the middle of the playground was no biggie!

Urinating in the middle of the playground was no biggie!

Urinating wherever and whenever was common and acceptable behavior for these young Ghanaian children, and, without a designated bathroom area, these children exposed themselves and each other to potential health risks. Additionally, many of the older girls stopped attending school when they reached puberty because they were embarrassed to urinate in front of the boys. I heard Georgine and Dia screeching with excitement as they chased each other on the playground, and the forceful voice in my head repeated, "Robbie, you will not quit!" Completing my stirring and mixing, I plopped a huge mound of cement on top of the large cinder block pile. I spread out the cement with a metal trowel, lifted my sore body out of the squat, and returned to the pile of cinder blocks, only to restart the process all over again. I repeated the routine of carrying block, placing block, mixing cement, and spreading cement for a total of six to eight hours for two full days. Finally, by the end of day two, my job was done. I, Robbie Gershon of Suffern, New York with my own two hands built a "bathroom foundation" for the young Bolgatanga students.

The sun was beginning to set, and dusk was setting in, but never in my life have I felt more brightness than at that very moment. My sense of accomplishment was overwhelming, and, as Dia playfully jumped into my arms, my eyes filled with tears. Just maybe, my hard work, fatigue, and soreness would keep Dia in school until the age of 15 since now she had a location to urinate in private. Smiling from ear to ear, I thought, "Wow, Robbie, you did it! You are a builder!" I squeezed Dia tightly and realized that Dia, Georgine, Ebo, Ema, and all the Bolgatanga kids were builders too. They helped me build my courage to tackle a physically challenging job. They helped me build my own strength and fortitude despite my exhaustion, and their claps and excitement at my success of layering one brick upon another built my knowledge that quitting was not an option. I am grateful for the opportunity to spend time with these loving, adorable, and innocent children, and I am grateful that these children built me a foundation for understanding that hard work is not just about the financial reward but more importantly about the emotional reward.

Photo by Jonathan Nelson

LUNCHING ATOP A MASS GRAVE

"Property damage is so much easier to live with than murder."
—Peter Watts

by Sarah Ellsworth

I smelled nothing. There was no scent at all on the perfectly still air. And it was quiet. The sounds of Berlin had faded a few kilometers ago. There was the muffled overturning of gravel under the footfalls of my fellow tourists, but they granted the place some measure of respect by remaining otherwise silent. It was as if all sensory feeling had disappeared a long time ago. Or maybe I was just refusing the senses that the place offered, unwilling to allow my nose to pick up the aroma of the dead. The sun was bright, but the temperature of the March air was almost unnoticeable, so close was it to room temperature.

We had entered Sachsenhausen in a line of tourists, whose purses stuffed down pants and whose cameras held ready declared they were foreigners, like my band mates and I who had come to Berlin my senior year of high school to play a few jazz shows in the smoky old music clubs. I was curious when we came in what it would look like, and at the same time, it felt wrong, even in the beginning, to even find myself there.

Photo by Alexander Drury

"The German government has preserved the concentration camps as historical sites," our guide informed us, walking backwards through the entrance so as to face us. "It's one of the ways Germany is trying to atone for its mistakes, by reminding everyone of their own crimes."

We were paraded through empty barracks, with cots strewn about the room messily, and then through the infamous 'oven room,' the gas showers, the medical experimentation centers. Everything was white and bright, but simultaneously dirty and out of order, as if someone had cleaned it meticulously, then went back through to make it look like the prisoners and Nazi guards had just been there and left quickly, leaving chairs overturned and plates on tables. It was groomed to look as real as possible, and it frightened some of the passerby, especially the younger ones.

The small, autistic Jewish boy, who played the trumpet and who the xylophonist sometimes picked on, trembled as we walked. He was the youngest among us, and the most shy, and the one with the fewest friends.

We were made to look at the mandatory pile of old shoes, which almost every place dedicated to the memory and mourning of the Holocaust has. We lunched under the quiet shade on the soft grass atop a mass grave, where small toddlers laughed and played. We all lay on our backs with our hands over our eyes, alone in our heads. Why had we come here? The voice in my head was playing on repeat. We should not be here. No one should be here. No one should ever have been here.

I felt uncomfortable, as if my mere presence in the concentration camp was a disrespect to those who had suffered there. We were touring a mass killing site like it was something people did on vacation for entertainment.

The guides treated it as a sort of museum, full of history and facts to be learned. To me it felt as much like a museum as a prison or a cemetery, of which it had been one, and was now the other. On our way out, we were marched through what appeared to be the Sachsenhausen gift shop, full of solemn history books and memorabilia for sale.

We waited for the bus, sitting on the curb outside. It was a beautiful little street, lined with white cottage style houses where the Nazi officers once lived. Some of the other

"It's one of the ways Germany is trying to atone for its mistakes, by reminding everyone of their own crimes."

tourists snapped some pictures. It was a beautiful spring day. A few of my band mates were slumped with their heads in their hands. I sat next to Nina, our dark haired clarinetist, who showed all the symptoms of solemnity.

"I think it's good they let people see it," she declared. "So no one forgets."

"I think it should have been burned to the ground," I answered her, almost tasting the bitterness in my voice as it came out of my mouth. "No one would forget the Holocaust if this place were destroyed. If I had been stuck here, I would have wanted to burn it down myself."

She tilted her head to the side, considering.

"We should try to change and destroy the horrible things in history, not preserve them," I said.

"I disagree," Nina said. "The German government has this on their conscious and they should be reminded of that."

"Nina, this is a tourist destination," I said. "How often do you think neo-Nazi's come here to repent? The only people that come here are tourists. Look around."

Indeed, not a single voice in the crowd was speaking German.

"But this holds them accountable," she replied, "with the world as their audience.

"These people didn't come here to put the Germans on trial," I told her. "They came to take pictures and feel like they gained some perspective on life. I think it's disrespectful to walk around here and pretend we know anything about how it was."

"That's the point though, right? To learn how it was?"

"Did you? Do you know how it felt now to be stuck here?"

She hesitated a moment, then answered, "No."

"We shouldn't have come," I decided out loud. "We shouldn't have been made to come, certainly," I said, thinking of our conductor, who had decided we were coming as a group, like it or not.

I looked at the little trumpet player sitting a few paces away on the curb, who looked distraught. He was the smallest thirteen-year-old I'd ever seen.

"Hey," I called down to him. "Come sit over here if you want."

"How often do you think neo-Nazi's come here to repent?"

He picked up his body slowly and slumped towards us and sat down. Nina put an arm around his shoulders. I felt the need to protect him, to shield him from what he had seen, but I couldn't. It was too real for him, real enough that he was feeling afraid.

Down the road a little, a saxophonist wrapped her arms around her young boyfriend's thin shoulders. He too was Jewish. His head was buried in her shoulder, and try as she might, she could not stop him from feeling sorrow like a barrage against him personally.

There are some things you cannot protect people from. You cannot protect people from feeling loss or grief or despair or anger. You cannot protect people from feeling personally threatened or afraid. You can stop people from feeling happy or hopeful—that's what the camps were all about on one level, but you cannot stop them from feeling afraid when they are paraded around a place that bred fear for their families. The best way to try though, is to destroy the threat, and to let those most threatened by it do the destroying.

We cannot protect innocent people from reality. But we can allow them to regain dignity after reality has torn them down.

We must ask ourselves what is important to us as a society when it comes to the camps. Certainly the camps are evidence of an evil that really happened, and without that evidence, denial of the crime would grow. But must we keep them looking the way they were- historically accurate? Or can we not stomp on them and tear them down a bit before we parade the children of those who survived them through? Can we not remove the gift shops? Can we not stop trying to pretend to understand what it is at all to be treated like an animal, just because we ate lunch on the dirt above the dead?

He too was Jewish.

Photo by David Coons

BIRDS

by Dakota Brummel

The month of August in 2010 our unit received word that we were going to Afghanistan.

Good, this is what I signed up to do.

I was nineteen years old and a year into the Marine Corps. I thought that I knew everything about anything; I thought I was invincible; I thought that nothing would ever happen to me because, hey, I wasn't in the infantry, I was just a helicopter mechanic.

In April of 2011 our whole unit was sent home for mandatory pre-deployment leave. This time is usually spent with family and friends, getting really drunk, and trying to find one of your old high school flings to bang, because who knows if that's the last time you'll be able to do any of that again. Handing Mom and Dad a copy of your will is not something a normal teenager expects to do, so you just let loose and try to relax during those couple weeks. A few days into the month of May, our unit was back together, packed up, and on our way to the battlefield.

Once we arrived in the hot and sandy country we were not jumping from helicopters into incoming rifle fire every day like the movies made it seem; in fact, it was fairly uneventful.

Photo by Dakota Brummel

Every day we would take a bus to the hangar where we turned wrenches on our helicopters, or "birds," as we called them. There were a few mortar attacks directed at us, close enough to see the explosion, but not close enough to injure anybody. The few times that mortars went off with nothing happening just reinforced the idea that I'm invincible.

The following days were long, hot, and repetitive. I started having these demoralizing thoughts that although I was a Marine in Afghanistan, the only thing I'm good for is fixing helicopters. I wanted to do something more than that; it seemed like my job was not important. Our Officer in Charge talked to us one evening and kept our drive going with a simple, solemn remark that I will never forget: "Five Marines died this past week in the area that we operate. It really fucking sucks to hear about, but it's because of you guys that keep the birds functioning and flying in the air that it's not twenty-five deaths."

One morning, after a few months of dealing with 130 degree heat, I was called in the back to talk to the captain. "Brummel, you're going to help on FOB Eddy. It's a small base with few people, you'll probably see some shit, but you'll be fine," he told me one on one in a brief exchange. Of course I'll be fine.

Honestly, I was excited. I wasn't sure what he meant, but I was excited to "see some shit," whatever that entailed. I mean, that's what happens when people go to war, right? Not fixing leaky hydraulic lines, or fiberglass panels with bullet holes in them; no, that didn't seem very war-like, especially to a Marine.

The next week I climbed aboard the helicopter with my large pack stuffed with clothes and books for my three-week camping trip in the desert. Once we landed and met the crew, I found out what we were actually doing. Our attack helicopters were there to provide security for the Army Medevac Blackhawk helicopters, because they kept getting shot at by the Taliban. A big red cross on the side of vehicles or buildings apparently doesn't mean anything in Afghanistan.

That first day was busy, with about four calls back to back. Each time there was a call we had to sprint towards the birds and prepare them to make sure they were up and running in a timely manner. Each time they came back with wounded Afghani civilians: men, women, oftentimes children.

This is what the captain meant when he said I would see some shit.

This is what the captain meant when he said I would see some shit.

We did this for the next three weeks and every single day was different, yet, the same: constantly seeing wounded people being flown in by helicopter, who were quickly pulled into the operation tent; watching the Navy nurse washing the blood off from the inside of the Blackhawk with a big yellow bucket full of water and bleach mix; constantly rushing to get the helicopter ready to go for the next time they would bring back a bloody human.

The clearest memory I have was a call over the radio that I heard faintly about a bomb that had exploded: "IED, IED, four wounded, four wounded."

We dashed out to the birds and prepped them for takeoff then went back to playing cards, reading books, or discussing

Photo by Kelsey Ruggaard

women. When the crew came back from that call I had the worst case of tunnel vision that I have ever experienced in my life.

This was the first time that the Blackhawk brought back fellow Americans, Marines like me, rather than one of the local nationals. There were four Marines loaded onto that helicopter: one screaming so loud I could hear him over the thumping of the blades still spinning; one breathing rapidly with his chest filling up and emptying with air like a brown paper bag used for panic attacks; one not moving at all; one with bloody strings of meat hanging off of his knees in place of his shins. I ran over there to offer help with two other Marines, but our training compared to the corpsman working at the hospital wouldn't have been beneficial, so instead I stared. I stared and took it all in wishing I could do something.

Our small crew continued to work through the rest of the day and through the next week before we went back to the main base. Everything seemed fine. I am fine; I am invincible.

The images of those wounded and bloodied Marines would flash through my head a couple times a week throughout the rest of deployment, but it was nothing. It was nothing, and I pushed them deep into the depths of my mind, locked behind a steel door.

We returned from our deployment a few days after Thanksgiving of that same year, seven months after we arrived. Everybody in our unit came home safe and in one piece.

Throughout the following years I would randomly experience flashbacks of that three week period where I was at FOB Eddy. Some of these flashbacks were different this time though. It wasn't just the Marines I reflected on, but also the Afghan men, women, and children wearing their single-colored, pure tunics juxtaposed against a splattering of bright blood that seeped through from the holes or gashes in their skin, from gunshots or hidden bombs. When they did resurface, I still didn't let those thoughts get to me. I took those memories, took those images and shoved them back in the shadows where they came from. I can't let them get to me; I'm a Marine. I'm strong; I'm invincible.

Fast-forward to September, 2015. Twenty countries later, I'm out of the military, and just starting at CU as a twenty-four-year-old freshman, feeling like Billy Madison. Those images of the wounded, bloodied people still pass through my mind often. Usually just a flash in the middle of the day, and, for only a couple

I'm a Marine.
I'm strong;
I'm invincible.

seconds, it brings me back to those weeks in the sun and sand where I stared and took in the images of people dying right in front of me.

My time in the desert made me realize two things: I know very little about anything; I am most definitely not invincible. The difference between the past few years and today is that this is the first time I have ever shared these thoughts with anybody, by writing this article; the first time I have actually sat down and reflected on them for a longer period than five seconds without pushing them away. I can genuinely say that right now I feel like this heavy, obscure weight, that I didn't know was there, has been lifted from my shoulders.

I am most definitely
not invincible.

Photo by Jonathan Nelson

Artwork by Lionnel Zikwata Bumbakini

PIET AND ME

by Juan Mateo Menendez

All across the surface of the canvas, golden yellow lines intersect each other like the streets of Times Square. Squares, each a different primary color, zip along the lines like cars speeding down Seventh Avenue. In the Museum of Modern Art, my mom commented on how she could do that herself, showing her lack of appreciation for the geometric simplicity displayed. Years after being introduced to Piet Mondrian 's Broadway Boogie-Woogie though, I was still curious about the painting's minimalism. Much like how Hunter S. Thompson allegedly typed out all of *The Great Gatsby* to experience the writing of a great novel, I wanted to paint this masterpiece to see what it felt like to paint a great painting.

When I attempted to reproduce the painting, I deduced that he must have used a lot of tape to get the lines as straight as he did and started by painting the yellow lines that carve out the canvas. I used blue artist's tape, which did the job, but sometimes a little paint slipped outside the lines, frustrating the perfectionist in me while I apologized to Piet for desecrating his masterpiece. Once I set out the lines, I started to define the in-

dividual squares. In a previous project, I had filled in 200 shapes, the shades gradually lightening from shape to shape, by adding the smallest dabs of white. Now, with roughly 300 small squares to paint in one by one, I knew that that project had been practice for the real thing.

. . . I saw the sliver as a beautiful person who goes tragically unnoticed.

I got as close as I could to Piet painting his small squares and recreating what he felt in his studio in 1943. Dancing madly to Jazz tracks, he must have reveled in the small details of his paintings. The details I noticed while making Broadway Boogie-Woogie fascinated me, like the sliver of white so close to the edge it was easy to confuse with the background of the canvas. When I first discovered it, I saw the sliver as a beautiful person who goes tragically unnoticed. To Piet it might have been the small joke that no one hears, but that is the funniest once understood. Although his paintings appear simplistic to some, there is unbelievable complexity in all of them. Like a poem, you can completely unpack these paintings to find mass quantities of meaning. Most significantly, however, each one will mean something different to each person who views it. The possibilities are endless.

When Piet moved away from his native Holland to settle in Paris in 1911, he dropped an "a" from his birth name of Mondriaan in order to make the transition more tangible, more real. The painting I made was one of the few things that I took with me when I decided to transfer from Savannah to the University of Colorado in Boulder, a change that, like Piet's, was not only physical but spiritual. It forced me to reassess the person who I truly am, just as he reassessed the world around him. After he moved, he came to realize that he wanted to "come as close as possible to the truth and abstract everything from that, until I reach the foundation (still just an external foundation!) of things.

As I look at the painting I made, with so much care and dedication four years ago, there is a certain sadness in me about the fact that it has undergone so much damage from the moving and years gone by. I had the painting with me when I lived in a house in which, after two years, the amount of things that had accrued, from pants, shoes, lighters, sunglasses, books, and movies to even a complete toddler's outfit, was simply staggering. Before moving out, we had to deal with all of that stuff plus everything that we had in our individual rooms. Before that moment, I had never realized just how much stuff could accrue over a period as short as two years. Between all of us, we took eight bags of stuff to Goodwill.

Once I saw how much stuff people keep, I had a deep desire to do away with all of it and live a simpler and more minimal life. This is what Piet was trying to get to by abstracting everything to its simplest possible form. He wanted to do away with all the clutter of regular experiential life so that he could get to the simplest possible point and find the beauty in that. Through his paintings he distills only the most basic of forms and in doing so has arrived at the very essence of life.

While I was doing research for this project, I came across a painting by Piet that I had never seen before, Lozenge Composition with Two Lines, and was stricken by its simplicity. The painting consists of a diamond-shaped white canvas with two black lines crossing each other near the bottom left edge, nothing more. What I find so striking is how much presence the white has on account that it is outlined by the stark black lines. Since the lines end abruptly at the edge of the canvas, it feels as if they extend out into infinity. What brings Piet and me together is that we realize emptiness does not necessarily mean the absence of something significant, but instead represents a field of infinite possibility. Whether it be painting, moving to a new place, or filmmaking, life will always present us with new white canvasses filled with possibility.

HEADLIGHTS

by Rachel Hultquist

I'm crazy. Sometimes I think I'm actually broken inside. Like that one day dictated the rest of my life. Or maybe I've always been like this; maybe I was born in this state: liminal, estranged, always skimming over the surface of what's going on. I am constantly struggling to live instead of existing just in my head. I am constantly wondering if these things I feel are real or if I just made them up. I desperately try to hold on to some sort of solidarity, some sort of routine. So I throw myself into my work, my education, but at the end of the day, the only person here is me. And my thoughts, as their own entity. Reflecting in upon themselves and onto ghosts around me, like headlights in the rain.

I'm haunted. By feelings, by people, by these pictures in my head. Most people think in words, I think in images. And that makes not remembering a lot of work. Flashes appear on a daily basis, always reminding me. And I can sense other people too, as if they're somehow talking to me, silently screaming out their pain as they smile and take notes in class.

Sometimes being alone is unbearable, but then sometimes I remember good things. Like I'll be remembering the

whisper: "Shhhh, it's okay. Nobody has to know. Don't tell anyone. It'll be our secret." And I'll feel my skin crawl, it'll seem like I'm drowning, calling out in the darkness and confusion of my own memories. And then I'll hear His voice.

"I'm sorry."

That's all He said. That's all He had to say. And everything was ok; the panic receded.

Like that time we were wrestling and He pinned me too long and I blacked out and threw Him off of me.

"I'm sorry."

Like that time He grabbed my right wrist while we were playing and pulled down at a slightly too-specific angle.

"I'm sorry."

Like that time I had a panic attack in His bed, the first time anyone had ever seen me like that, the only person to know that I could be that helpless.

"I'm sorry."

Like that time I had a dream about so long ago, so young, words jumbled around in my head, crying, screaming, begging for him not to do it. I didn't want it, I didn't want any of it. I had a dream about so long ago, so young, sitting in the lawyer's office watching him cry. I had a dream about standing in the courtroom watching the face of the judge as she looked at me.

"I'm sorry."

"You're safe."

"I'm here."

I have built up so many layers of walls around myself, making sure that no one can get in, no one can see how weak I was. I have made myself strong, created a fortress of honesty and transparency, ensuring that no one could get past that defense. I have promised myself that no one can make me do anything ever again.

"I'm sorry."

I have embraced the power of words, understanding that they can destroy and they can illuminate and that there is nothing and everything that we can do about that. I have made them my weapon, luxuriating in the feel of them on my skin, bending them to my will, compelling them to be my aid and not my torturer.

"You're safe."

I have carved my body out of a block of flesh, pushing past

. . . the power of words, . . . they can destroy and they can illuminate . . .

pain and exhaustion and convincing myself that I am strong. I have crushed my will so that it can be manifested in movement, my blood and sweat cohesively creating that which is ethereal, effervescent, evanescent. If you blink, I'll be gone.

"I'm here."

That night in the dark, awaking in a pool of sweat and tears, shaking convulsively as I remembered all over again, unable to shake off the dream, weak, helpless as I was back then, He grabbed me and wrapped Himself around me.

"I'm sorry."

"You're safe."

"I'm here."

And for the first time, being contained was not a cage, being consoled was not a challenge, being seen was not a terror.

And for the first time, sleep was not a descent into darkness. Because He was sorry, I was safe, He was there.

Photo by Logan Guerry

FINDING STRENGTH FROM SORROW

by Bailey Ferrari

Christmas of 2008 was the first time I had ever spent the holidays away from home. My father had been very sick for many months, so I can't say I was surprised when we got the call telling us to come to the hospital. On an average night a few days before Christmas Eve my mother told me to pack my things. She hurried around the house and explained nervously that my dad needed us. I loaded my clothes into a small suitcase quietly; I knew it would add to her stress if she had to take time to explain things to a nine-year-old. We packed small bags, loaded the car, and drove to St. Luke's Medical Center.

We spent December twenty-third by my father's bedside. Busy nurses hurried in and out of the room and spoke in hushed tones to my mother. You could tell that my mother was exhausted. The entire hospital was hustling and bustling; the array of beeping machines and the constant flurry of blue scrubs left me feeling uneasy and nervous. We were ushered in and out of my father's hospital room sporadically. Nobody really spoke to me, but when they did, they would talk about my hair or my clothes or my smile. I didn't understand what

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

exactly was going on, but my mom seemed okay and everyone seemed chipper so I wasn't sad.

We spent Christmas Eve in a hotel. The only meal we ate was in the small restaurant inside the hotel lobby; I ordered Mac and Cheese and my mom just drank vodka. The waiters asked why we weren't home for the holidays. My mother stated that her husband was "terminally ill" and they didn't ask any other questions. By the time I finished eating, my mom had downed three or four cocktails. The manager told us that the meal was free and I thought it was a kind gesture but my mom insisted on paying. I'll never forget the way she looked at me, her eyes red and tired. "Even if you can't empathize, don't pity," she told me as we abruptly went back to our room.

When Christmas Day arrived, the mood in the hospital shifted. Everyone seemed conspicuously sad as they said "Merry Christmas!" which seemed ironic to me. Nothing about this day seemed merry. I stared out the windows for hours watching snow swirl down and white twinkling lights shimmer in the distance. For a moment I felt like I was out in the snow, dancing and laughing, then the faint beeping of machines in the background reminded me of where I was. My mother just held my hand, not saying a word.

Eventually a Chaplain came to visit my dad's room. My mother and I waited in the lobby as he went in and read my father his last rites. The plastic-covered couch felt foreign beneath me and the air reeked of rubbing alcohol and lemon disinfecting wipes. The meager holiday decorations in the hospital looked phony and insincere. It didn't feel like Christmas.

When we entered the room again, I felt particularly dismal. Although it had been months since I had last seen my father speak or move around, this was the first time I realized that my dad would never again be able to push me on the tire swing or play house. The only gift I received that day was a blue Slushie from my mother; she thought it would cheer me up. It didn't, the sugary syrup felt thick in my throat.

My father passed away on January ninth. My mother and aunt took me out into the hospital lobby and kneeled around me. "You get to go back home now," my aunt whispered, mocking excitement. My mother said "Daddy won't be coming back home with us" and that "he is in a better place." I nodded and didn't cry. Friends and relatives hugged me, took me back to the

For a moment I felt like I was out in the snow, dancing and laughing, then the faint beeping of machines in the background reminded me where I was.

hotel, asked if I wanted to swim and kept me away from my mom for a while. I don't think I fully understood what had happened, partly because I was young and partly because nobody was really telling me.

The two weeks that followed remain a blur in my mind to this day. I remember the funeral, the faint smell of daises and old wooden church pews. Everyone was wearing dark colors. Many people from our small town attended the service; they made their way into the church without saying a word. Everyone around me was crying. The funeral itself was very brief, members of our church sent a quick prayer and the choir sang a few mournful songs. A few days later, I cried for the first time.

The days following the funeral, many of my mother's friends brought meals to our home. We would eat the food and they would watch in silence, their eyes wide with sadness and sympathy. When I finally returned to school, children my age simply avoided me as if I had a terrible, contagious disease. They didn't include me in their snowball fights, didn't invite me to play tag, and didn't want to sit by me in class. Maybe they didn't know what to say, or understand what I was going through, and I can't blame them for that, but I was left feeling confused, ostracized, and different.

I didn't feel like a regular nine-year-old girl anymore. It was as if the loss I suffered directly affected my entire essence, changing me into "that nine-year-old girl whose dad died. " For a long time, my mother was the only one I talked to because she was the only one who truly understood my loss. I would come home from school and sit in her lap and her sweet perfume would linger in the air around me. She would hold me close and I would cry.

After a while, my mother stopped tiptoeing around the truth and starting sharing the somber details about my father's battle with leukemia. My mom spent hours telling me about his unrelenting positivity, strength, and courage throughout the entire process. As we talked, it got progressively easier to no longer picture my father as the immobile, malnourished man in the hospital bed and instead see him as strong, loving, supportive dad that would push me on the tire-swing and make me laugh so hard that my stomach ached. That's how the recovery process began.

WRITING A REALITY

by Sara Seidel

Photo by Logan Guerry

"So I finally switched my major."

I anxiously played with the handmade bracelet tied around my wrist. The pieces were starting to fray.

"A degree in the journalism school would get you a lot further than a creative writing one, plus you have to pay off those student loans somehow," my dad said. He looked up from the grocery list he was currently making.

"I know, but I can't get into the journalism school," I said sternly. This is my major and I'm sticking to it. "And besides, if I do get in next semester I'd graduate a year late. Can you imagine me sucking at college for five years instead of four?"

"Ricky's graduating a year late you know."

He turned to my mom who was walking towards us with their grandchild in her arms. The baby was goo-gooing and gaa-gaaing as he was passed to my dad. He dropped his rattle and I handed him my phone to suck on before he started crying.

"He's graduating a year late because he had this guy."

I wiggled my fingers on the baby's round, squishy stomach. I got really close to his rosy cheeks and said, "College is for

weenies, you pay so much money so you can someday get a piece of paper that says you're qualified enough to earn all your money back." I kissed his soft nose and tried to pry my phone out of his tight grasp. With no luck, I exhaled and leaned back into my chair. "I'm not changing my major, Dad."

"How was the test?" I yelled from under the mess of blanket on my bed. I listened to my roommate Julia walk into the hallway, her heavy Doc Martens striking the wood floor.
"That bad?"

"The multiple choice was fine, I knew that part, but I only knew one of the four essay questions." Her voice was anxious. "Fuck the business school."

"Don't they curve the tests a lot though? You'll be fine." I remember my neighbor had told me a week earlier that the class average before the curve on the tests in the business school is somewhere around a 65.

"Yeah, but I don't like that I don't know the information. Fuck being a business major." She retreated into her room. I heard her talk to her cat in a baby voice and then the springs on her bed retracted. I assumed she face planted onto her mattress, a common sign of defeat among college students. She let out a loud sigh.

"Yeah, fuck being in any major," I muttered.

"Fuck the business school."

"Of course you don't know when pay day is, you're a privileged white girl," my coworker yelled over the water beating against the metal sink. I'm a privileged white girl?

"I'm not a privileged white girl!" I yelled back. I could feel my cheeks growing hot.

"You went to Australia for winter break and you go to college. You're telling me you aren't privileged? You college kids have no bills to pay, you don't even need a paycheck." He turned the sink off and threw dishes into the water. I worked three jobs over the summer with the intention of draining half of my savings buying a plane ticket. My parents had made college funds for my brothers and me, each containing enough money to send us to school for two years. The other two years have to be paid with loans. Does it make me privileged that I'll be somewhere around $50,000 in debt when I graduate? I work after class, sometimes between classes, and on the weekends to take a small fraction of the financial burden off my parents, even if it is only a couple hundred dollars.

Does it make me privileged that I'll be somewhere around $50,000 in debt when I graduate?

"Okay, point taken, I'm a privileged white girl. When's payday?" My voice fell flat. I could feel my jaw tighten. My knuckles were white from gripping the edge of the sink. I wouldn't have a job if I didn't need one.

I woke up to the sound of my dad yelling my name from the kitchen. The tone in his voice suggested I was in trouble. What could I be in trouble for? I haven't even been home for twenty-four hours.

"What is this?" my dad said, as he motioned towards spreadsheets laid out neatly on the kitchen table. His face was stern, as per usual. He jabbed his index finger at a number resting at the bottom of the spreadsheet titled "Grades." The one next to it was titled, "Loans." Somewhere in the pile was another that consisted of my monthly bills. Ever since I can remember my dad has always been obsessively organized, making lists to organize his other lists.

"I don't know?" I answered, rubbing sleep from my eyes as the sunlight from the afternoon attacked them. I shuffled onto the stool next to him and rested my head in my hands, peeking at him from the corner of my eyes.

"Do you know what your current grade point average is?" My dad stared at me, and then pointed to the Excel spreadsheets.

"Yep. It's okay, I'm taking care of it." I answered hastily. I was far too tired to be having this conversation. I knew my GPA was a 2.4, much lower than my high school one that, unbeknownst to me, had set a high bar for my parent's future expectations. I should've done what my older brother did in high school: be a C student so it wasn't as big a deal when I got my first F.

"Do you even care? Do you have any idea what kind of money it costs to send you and your brothers to college?" My dad looked at me accusingly.

"Did you seriously make spreadsheets, Dad?" I muttered, trying to play off the seriousness in his voice. I picked up the one nearest me. It had all my classes I'd ever taken in college listed in order by semester with the grade in that course in a separate column next to it. As I read down the list my throat tightened. I'm not naïve; of course I know how expensive college is.

"Maybe you shouldn't go to CU anymore." He stood up and walked to the kitchen, leaving me with the spreadsheets. I crumpled them up and tossed them across the table. Teen angst can last well into your twenties if you don't nip it in the bud.

"Do you have any idea how hard college is, Dad? Really fucking hard." I whispered under my breath. My mom looked up at me from the other end of the table. I hadn't even noticed her perched there behind her laptop.

"Sweetie, you're better than that number," she said, looking at me over her reading glasses.

"You guys don't get it. College is so hard." My voice cracked, accidentally putting emphasis on the word "hard."

"I do, honey, I went to college too."

"No, Mom, you don't. It's more about grades now than it is education; it's not the same as it was when you went."

"That's not necessarily true, your brother—"

"I'm not Ricky. And don't even have that argument with me. He dropped out and had a baby."

"Sara, that's not fair." I knew she was right. He took some time off school to sort his life out but he was back trying to pursue an accounting degree at Metro Denver. I was struggling with college too but from a different angle. I surely didn't have to drop out because I was going to have a baby, but I couldn't figure out how to balance typical college distractions with a passion for integrative physiology—that isn't actually my passion. The good and the bad that college has to offer had consumed me.

"Yeah? I'm going from being an above-average high school student to a subpar adult but at least I don't have a baby." I got off the stool and turned to go back to my bedroom where I knew my childhood toys wouldn't mock my grade point average.

"He dropped out and had a baby."

"I think I'm gonna do really well on this one," I said into the phone wedged between my shoulder and face. "Yeah, it's the anatomy one. Tomorrow night. I've been studying for a few days now." I repeated the same answers I had a day or two before when I had the exact same conversation with my mom. "My flight is Friday afternoon. I'll be home Wednesday night. Okay, Mom, I gotta go study. Love you too." The phone dropped from my shoulder and onto the couch, bouncing off onto the floor. I glanced at it momentarily, and then moved my attention back to my closed laptop, specifically the white pill I was crushing with my driver's license.

My roommate told me that if I snorted Adderall it would work faster than taking the pill orally, as it's intended to be taken, for someone with a prescription that is. I'd already had half a pill a few hours earlier, along with a massive cup of coffee. I don't drink coffee. I hadn't eaten a substantial meal in days.

With Adderall and caffeine coursing through my veins I sat in the brightly lit corner of my living room. The front window next to me is lined with blue Sky Vodka bottles, my roommate Leah's drink of choice, and I consistently tell my parents I didn't help drink any of the bottles. I turn on 8tracks and listen to a playlist titled "study vibes" that plays Beethoven into my headphones. The music notes reverberate, bouncing off the walls of my hollow skull, dancing with anatomical definitions. I still don't understand anatomy.

"I don't want to be a science major anymore," I looked over my academic advisor's desk, meeting her eyes.

"What are you looking at switching your major to?" She looked at me confused.

"Can I switch my major to undecided?" I knew I couldn't because of my class standing but it was worth a try.

"You said you like writing, correct? How about looking at the journalism school." She clicked keys quickly and precisely on her keyboard, pulling up a tab with the journalism school's requirements and another with my transcript. "It looks like . . . oh . . . your GPA is way too low to get in currently. You can try

getting your GPA up next semester then apply your junior year?" She looked at me with eyebrows raised, as if she were waiting for approval.

"Yeah, I'll try that." I cast my eyes downward, knowing I wasn't going to.

"It looks like you're stuck in science for now. Have you thought about the business minor?"

I left her office with a handful of brochures for majors and minors I wasn't interested in. My face grew warm and my jaw clenched. I thought back to my first academic advising appointment ever. It was at freshman orientation and my first-year advisor was asking me questions about what I wanted my college career to look like. I mentioned I liked writing but I wouldn't want to do it as a major—I only saw it as a hobby. She asked what classes I enjoyed in high school and I said anatomy. Five seconds later I was declared an Integrative Physiology major.

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The first time I ever took Adderall it was blue and I was drunk. Really drunk. My roommate smuggled a bottle of alcohol into our dorm room under her shirt. The first thing I noticed about it was the caution and warning labels. It was 190 proof. Everclear. I had one shot right off the bat. It burned like a regular shot but the taste ignited a fire in my mouth that spread down my throat, and settled into my chest. Liquid heartburn. Four shots later I was seeing in cursive. I was by no means a straight edge in high school; I just wasn't someone who drank something that took the nail polish off my fingers.

In a box disguised as a book, I hid the little blue pill. I had mentioned a few days earlier to a girl on my floor that I had an important essay due in a week. She disappeared for a moment and returned with a pill. I didn't even ask for it.

I leaned against the edge of my desk for support and accidentally knocked the box over, the contents didn't spill but I remembered the pill resting inside. Out of curiosity I took it out and eyed it. It was blurry in my vision and seemed harmless. I put it on my tongue and closed my mouth. What am I doing? I took a swig of water and swallowed the pill. My mind narrowed and my tongue dried. I didn't sleep at all that night. This isn't me.

We were parked in the Safeway . . . waiting for the rest of our brigade of girlfriends to arrive.

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"I can't believe we're going to college," Jessica said from the passenger seat in my car. We were parked in the Safeway parking lot, a meeting place in the middle of most of the neighborhoods, waiting for the rest of our brigade of girlfriends to arrive. The windows were rolled down and the sun was just slipping behind the foothills. I had one knee bent and pulled to my chest while my other leg rested on the edge of my rolled down window.

"I know, I can't believe you're going to college either," I said. She always made herself so easy to pick on.

"Shut up!" She squealed. Her high pitch laughed interrupted the calm sunset rays kissing our skin.

"Okay, okay, all jokes aside. I can't believe we're going to college either. Are you scared?" I asked, as I turned my head to face her. I'm scared.

"Nah, college will be so much fun. It's not even a new chapter of our lives, it's like a whole new book!" Her eyes lit up. What if I like this book though?

I pulled my leg into my car and placed both of my feet on the floor as the rest of our friends pulled up. Their smiling faces, tanned by the summer sun, spilled from cars. We exited my car and joined the growing group in the parking lot. "Yeah, it'll be so much fun."

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"I can't believe you're all graduating high school this year! Have you thought about what you want to do in college?" Lisa Sherman, my sixth-grade teacher asked. I looked around at the people walking past us, glancing at their scribbled lists and turning down random aisles.

"I'm thinking about majoring in biology, or something useful like that," my voice came out higher pitched than intended, a bad habit when I talk to adults formally. I gripped the metal lattice on the edge of the cart.

"I remember you always had your nose in a book. You would write stories and have me proofread them. I've always pictured you as a writer, but who knows, biology could be your

thing!" a high-pitched cell phone ringtone interrupted us and Lisa dismissed herself to talk to her husband.

"I've always pictured you as a writer too," my mom said as she pushed the cart through aisles. I nodded in agreement, but my mind was still set on biology.

Thinking back to elementary school, I remember my mom was always complaining that I read new books too quickly, as if the ten dollars spent on them was wasted. She would buy me notebook after notebook that I would fill with stories and drawings. I remember scribbling in them during church, the only thing that would keep me from complaining about the itchiness of my dress or the length of the service. I don't remember how I made the decision growing up that I had to major in something useful.

Ray Bradbury said, "You must stay drunk on writing so reality cannot destroy you."[1] As hard as I pushed my appetite for writing away, the reality of everything that college has to offer has graciously brought it back. The more writing classes I took the higher my GPA climbed. The more I threw myself into assignments I actually cared about, the less I took Adderall. The more I just wrote in general, the happier I was. Of course writing has always been useful, but to me as an individual it's essential to my happiness. I've decided that it's inevitable. I was never meant to be a doctor; I'm going to be a writer.

1. Ray Bradbury, *Zen in the Art of Writing*

Photo by Logan Guerry

THOSE BOOKS

By David Gordon

"For what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: It also depends a great deal on what sort of person you are."[1] "Sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."[2] My father's books are scattered around the house. "When I was your age, television was called books."[3] "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view [. . .]. Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it."[4] "I promise to love you forever - every single day of forever."[5] The books in the basket in his closet have shifted since last time I saw them.

1. C.S. Lewis, *Magician's Nephew*
2. Lewis Carroll, *Through the looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*
3. William Goldman, *The Princess Bride*
4. Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*
5. Stephanie Meyer, *Eclipse*

"Tick, tock."[6] "People say that eyes are windows to the soul."[7] "To explore the inner country of his own soul."[8] "The good writers touch life often."[9] The books change location from day to day, year to year; the covers stay the same. I am nine. "For, observe that open loves are held to be more honorable than secret ones, and that the love of the noblest and highest."[10] Mom and Dad read them together on the couch. A dim lamp, yellow shadows. Their affection for each other fills the silent room. A page turns. "Often we don't realize that our attitude toward something has been influenced by the number of times we have been exposed to it in the past."[11]

"Daddy is sick," Mom said. "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler."[12] Leukemia. "I now walk into the wild."[13] "He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance."[14] "Sometimes human places create inhuman monsters."[15] I hated the hospital. "You can look at a picture for a week and never think of it again. You can also look at a picture for a second and think of it all your life."[16] "They looked at each other, baffled, in love and hate."[17]

6. Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire*
7. Khaled Hosseini, *Kite Runner*
8. Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*
9. Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*
10. Plato, *The Symposium*
11. Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*
12. Ibid
13. Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*
14. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
15. Stephen King, *The Shining*
16. Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*
17. William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*

"Daddy died." "We will use the actions of others to decide on proper behavior for ourselves."[18] "It's dangerous not to listen! You miss important information and you don't see problems coming."[19] "His descent was like nightfall."[20]

"Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to a mind when it has once seized on it like a lichen on a rock."[21] "To understand the world at all, sometimes you could only focus on a tiny bit of it, look very hard at what was close to hand and make it stand in for the whole."[22] Ten years have passed. I am twenty. The books in the basket in his closet have not shifted. I pick up the familiar cover and open to the first page. "To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time."[23] "Not a word passes between us, not because we have nothing to say, but because we don't have to say anything."[24]

18. Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*
19. Martha Davis, Patric Fanning, Kim Paleg, *The Message Workbook: Powerful Strategies for Ef fective Communication at Work and Home*
20. Homer, *The Illiad*
21. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
22. Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*
23. Elie Wiesel, *Night*
24. Khaled Hosseini, *Kite Runner*

Artwork by Lucy Gale 2020

BYE BYE BYE

by Michael Kussin

I look out and see shadowed audience members out of their seats, applauding, screaming for us. I look over to see Sean and Jackson, our faces are litwith huge smiles, we just pulled that shit off. Three months of "prep" we never once taken seriously. We just capped off our senior year in the best way any of us could think of.

We had taken music theory for a few years but eventually we took the AP test and needed an excuse to keep Brindawg as our teacher, so for our senior year we took her vocals class. She was getting married earlier that year and we were determined to crash it. We would bug her about the details every day until finally she cracked,

"It's at the Queen Mary. I guess I won't kick you out if you show up."

Unanimously, the three of us wore that maniacal look on our faces and let her know "You won't regret this!"

Her wedding was in March, we suited up and head down in the Coug, a car with too much personality. She's a Mercury Cougar who loves to not work, we couldn't help but love her. We rolled up to the Queen Mary, a famous ship now docked in the Long Beach

Harbor. We searched every sign and room we can find, and finally found the ballroom her reception was in. We made it. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the three of us sneak in through the service entrance of the kitchen and she knew it was a mistake to tell us we could show up. We spent the rest of the night dancing and singing, we read Rick Astley lyrics as a wedding toast.

Brindawg loved the idea of a semi-dysfunctional boyband, and Sean, Jackson and I were the triple threat of uncoordinated performances. We divided the parts, Sean got Justin Timberlake, Jackson was JC Chasez, and myself as Chris Kirkpatrick.

Over the next few months, Jackson learned the first verse, I got the second down, and Sean mastered the bridge. We all went with a collaboration approach to the chorus and other parts so that we could figure out the best harmonies between our voices. This was the funniest part to me since we sang like pizza. We were really bad, but reveled in our cheesiness

This was the funniest part to me since we sang like pizza.

"Guys, we can't be a boyband without dance moves." Jackson would throw out.

"Yeah, cuz three off rhythm white guys can pull that off well. I'm in!"

"We can pull them from the music video and no one will even notice!"

May arrived, the month of the show, we were as ready as we'd ever be. We were also singing a few songs with our class, so we had a full night ahead of us come the 9th. We convinced as many of our friends as we could to come watch the show. We knew this would either be epic good or epic bad. Whatever the outcome, the three of us formed a special bond that many cannot say they have. We will have been boyband in front of 450 people. We were given the opportunity to water the seeds of our friendship and watch them bloom to the tune of our own ridiculousness.

The day of, we went to school as usual and hung out after to "prepare" for the show. We decided it would be a great idea to devour some food and raid Goodwill to find clothes. We needed to be at the theater by 4:30.

Come 5:03 we are leaving Goodwill, our phones blowing up asking where we were, but we didn't care. We aren't very crucial in any of the group pieces and everyone has come to expect this out of us. We just wanted to have fun. 5:15 we roll into the auditorium with hairspray frosted tips, white shirts, and white pants. We rehearse the logistics so that everyone knows where to go.

The show starts and we get through our other songs so the three of us disappear to prepare ourselves. We walk onto the dark stage, backs to the crowd, mics in hand. The light shines on us, everything else falls quiet, no one knows what to expect out of the loose cannons of Sierra Canyon. The music drops and people already begin screaming. We hype the crowd as the intro plays, "Best thing to do on a Thursday night!" Jackson famously yells out, we drop into the lyrics. Jackson's on. Nails it. A little chorus, they were actually liking us. I go for my verse and have to remember all the dance moves. In the music video my verse has a nice hand drag from your face to your crotch punctuated with a little thrust. I hit the move and people begin screaming so loud I can't hear the music in the monitors. Now, to my ear, I am finishing my verse acapella. Sean is up and he slays the lines he is assigned to. The song finishes as we are dancing around the stage and spitting out the last lines. That was when we look up and know we just finished high school in the best way anyone could; everyone screaming for you after you willingly made a fool out of yourself and pulled it off better than expected.

We pull out this piece every time we trek down to Korea Town for karaoke.

To this day we all still hang out together whenever we are in the same city. We pull out this piece every time we trek down to Korea Town for karaoke. Sean is in China, Jackson is in Italy, and I am sitting in Colorado. No matter how many times we are forced to say, "Bye Bye Bye" to each other, we will always reunite somewhere, somehow.

CONTRIBUTORS

LARISSA BREWSTER is a college senior who loves dogs, dogs, and also puppies. She is currently studying Linguistics and intends to study abroad again in South Korea in the future. After graduation she plans to attend medical school and will probably spend the rest of her life as a perpetual student due to her inability to accept she is now an actual adult. Born and raised in Colorado, she loves the outdoors, rock climbing, and gardening.

DAKOTA BRUMMEL is a freshman who grew up in Northwest Indiana and then joined the Marine Corps straight out of high school. He was stationed with his unit in Southern California as a Huey and Cobra helicopter mechanic and deployed with them to Afghanistan. After returning from deployment, he passed embassy security guard training and was posted in Cambodia and then in Venezuela where he finished out his sixth year military enlistment. Dakota is currently studying Psychology and chose to move to Boulder for his love of nature and because Indiana is boring. After graduation he hopes to return to the government sector by working in federal law enforcement.

HEATHER CLARK studies Human Resources Management and Leadership. She was born and raised in Boulder, Colorado. She has been passionate about visual arts for years, however is now fulfilling her creative impulses through writing. She is an avid yogi, tandem biker, baker, and adventurer. She has traveled all over the western United States and throughout Europe. Her moment of bliss is hiking with a dog in the chilly air under the pine trees covered in snow. She hopes to one day live in a cabin in the woods.

KELTON COLLINS is a former professional wake boarder and recent transfer student to the University of Colorado. He is currently pursuing a degree in the College of Engineering and Applied Science. He enjoys writing creative nonfiction and draws much of his inspiration from where he grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In his writing, he shares experiences from his many travels across the United States and Europe. He is a free thinker and enjoys getting from point A to point B in a more unique way than others. His passion to experience life's journey to the fullest continues to this day.

BEN CRAWFORD is a fourth year Evolutionary Biology student at CU Boulder. Outside of school, he expresses his passions though rock climbing and music. He is a co-president of the Alpine Club at CU and spends many of his weekends traveling and climbing around the western United States.

MICHAEL KUSSIN is not like most people. On the surface it may seem he is just run of the mill, but everyone seems to tell him different. Whenever you see him, no matter what he's doing, he is enjoying himself. He has been able to have fun in almost every situation life has put him in simply by enjoying where he's at. He has been lucky enough to surround himself with people he loves and takes him to a state that is absolutely incredible. Even as he writes this on a plane to California with the passenger behind him kicking his chair, he can block it out and love the fact that he has the opportunity to travel so often and just zone out into some Earth, Wind, and Fire. His story was written about experiences with two of his closest friends. They had more fun through the few encounters he introduces you to than most have in a year. He hopes you enjoy reading and create some memories of your own!

Born in Calcutta, India, DONNA DAS is a first generation college student studying International Affairs. A lover of travel and speaker of four languages, her dream is to become a local all across the globe, though she would like to end up in the Netherlands one day—the Dutch share her propensity for bicycles and flowers. Part of her has always wanted to become a trapeze artist, even though she can't touch her toes. If the acidity weren't so bad for her teeth, lemons would be her favorite fruit. She will always find time for breakfast foods and prefers waffles to pancakes. She has a dog names Bacon and both of them love French fries. J.R.R. Tolkien said, "Not all who wander are lost," but with her sense of direction, she is lost constantly. She doesn't mind it though; she embraces it even, as it leads her to indescribably beautiful places that she would never have gotten to otherwise.

SARAH ELLSWORTH was born and raised in Boulder, Colorado. She is an Integrative Physiology major and Pre-Medical student who enjoys snuggling puppies, walking everywhere, cutting up dead things, and that incredible sensation of finally sneezing after you've been struggling to do so for a while. Her writing can also be found in CU Boulder Today on the weekly list of Ten Things to Do In and Around Boulder.

BAILEY FERRARI is double majoring in Business and Psychology at CU. She is a Colorado native who loves to read, spend time with her family, and explore the beautiful Rocky Mountains. Although she can be a little shy, she loves to connect with people through her writing. In her spare time you can find her hanging out with her friends, cuddling with her cats, or trying to be funny on Twitter.

ROBBIE GERSHON is a freshman Environmental Design major and loves to travel the world. Through her travels to Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, the Middle East, Europe, and many of the National Parks in the United States, Robbie has met so many cool people. Interacting with people in their homes and watching people endure difficult circumstances inspires Robbie to share her experiences. Robbie hopes to work in an underdeveloped country and help the people learn to use their natural resources to live healthy, safe, and happy.

DAVID GORDON is a true gentleman and scholar. Literary archeologists have been searching the world for years in hopes of uncovering his ten hidden manuscripts. David studies Economics, International Affairs, and Portuguese with the hopes of one day becoming an international investment tycoon. He enjoys mountain biking, having his papers published, and meeting potential mates. This year (2015) he has been disappointed with the absence of creative depth being added to his personal music library. He is hungry to graduate in May of 2017, advising that the world take precautionary measures in anticipation of his release from the Norlin Stacks.

REBECCA HALL is a senior at CU and is currently putting the finishing touches on a degree in Integrative Physiology. Though Rebecca finds the human body and its many complexities an epic topic of study, it is the written word (and Daniel Day Lewis) that has her heart. Her habitat is coated with words; quotes of inspiration and sonnets about love (though it has been mentioned that if she added a few candles she could be mistaken for a serial killer). In her spare time Rebecca enjoys searching for the perfect word, though sometimes she shakes it up by looking for the best word instead. She is honored to have her writing included in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY and hopes to do a great deal of writing in the future.

ANDREW JOEL HECOCKS likes to think he's funny sometimes. He is majoring in English here at CU, and is glad to have met so many talented individuals through the program. When he's not working on a term paper or waiting tables, he can probably be found engrossed in novels by Chuck Palahniuk or Kazuo Ishiguro. His interests fall into four singular categories: the written word, craft beer, cats, and the human condition. Andrew would like to formally extend his thanks to the staff and editors of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY for providing a platform for his writing, and for working with him to make The Ativan December the best it can be.

JACK HERRICK is a freshman from Telluride, Colorado. He enjoys skiing, hiking, adventuring, photography and river rafting. He is currently undeclared as far as majors go, but is enjoying all of his new classes. Jack loves to write about all things, especially things that have to do with his past. His love for the outdoors inspired him to write this piece and then submit it to the Journal. He is excited for what the future holds.

MOLLY HENZE was a Political Science student at CU. However, her real passion was for literary journalism. She loves to write pieces about her experiences, most of which are memoirs. She is a mixed blend of California and Colorado, two states she tends to find herself in most of the time when she isn't trying to set foot across the globe. In her free time she is spending time outdoors, drawing, writing, or whipping up some baked goods. She maintains a strong passion for helping others and one day wishes to incorporate her passions about writing and the world together.

RACHEL HULTQUIST is a senior double majoring in English Literature and Russian. She uses writing as a form of exploration and expression in order to communicate things that are otherwise inexplicable. In her spare time she reads way too many books, daydreams about returning to Russia, and - quite strangely - finds ballet a fun way to torture herself. All of the above can be further explored at rachelhultquist.com, where her love of tea, cats, and sweaters also becomes apparent.

MADSEN LOZUAWAY-MCCOMSEY grew up in historical Portsmouth, New Hampshire. After high school, a cross-country road trip introduced him to scenic Boulder, Colorado. He has now lived here for two years, and is a first year Physics major at UCB. In his free time he loves to hike and run, play piano and guitar, work in fine dining, and study personal interests. Madsen hopes to take his acquired knowledge and apply it in the field of Astrophysics to help advance humanity.

JUAN MATEO MENENDEZ is a senior who transferred from Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia and fell in love with the mountains as soon as he got here. Originally from Mexico City, he is a getting a BFA in Film Studies even though his secret dream has always been to be a writer. He had always aspired to be published on the Fiction section of The New Yorker until they stopped taking submissions, so now he'll have to write a book. As a filmmaker, he loves seeing people's dreams on the screen and hopes one day to be able to plaster his own on it.

STEPHANIE QUON is a senior who studies Psychology and Communication here at CU. She is originally from Southern California, and considers Boulder to be her home as well. She has always loved to write and connect with others through her experiences and stories. More often than not, you will find her on campus with her yellow backpack covered in quotes, wearing yellow headphones, and holding a sunflower mug filled to the brim with some type of tea. If you see her on campus, say hello.

MCKENNA RUSSEN is a freshman at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She is currently majoring in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology. McKenna was born and raised in the beautiful state of Colorado where she had the opportunity to enjoy a diverse outdoor lifestyle. Whether it's skiing, competitive sailing, horseback riding, camping, or whitewater rafting, she always finds a way to utilize all this state has to offer. Her experiences have provided her with a deep appreciation and keen respect for the risks and rewards associated with outdoor adventures. She is looking forward to continuing her education at CU and possibly focusing more of her studies on writing.

VERONICA SACHTJEN is a sophomore studying English with minors in Computer Science and Leadership Studies. She is from a small town called Akron, Colorado, which is in the northeastern part of Colorado that is practically Nebraska. She is deathly afraid of geese and her greatest accomplishment is that she once watched all of the Harry Potter movies in one sitting. In addition to creative nonfiction, she also writes angsty poetry even though she is too old to have teen angst. She writes because it allows her to speak clearly in a way that talking does not.

SARA SEIDEL is a junior studying creative writing and business at CU. She's from Littleton, CO and can basically see her parent's house from the top of Flagstaff. She's a Leo and likes long walks on the beach, but there aren't any beaches in Colorado so she settles for long walks in the mountains. Her oldest pet is a cat named Snuggles who recently celebrated her 16th birthday. Sara hopes to someday start a blog that isn't terrible, and travel the world much like many other twenty-something-year olds. She hopes to make a career out of writing . . . and business . . . maybe advertising . . . something like that.

THOMAS VAN DE PAS hasn't slept for thirty hours, so he's listening to Limp Bizkit and using the self-hatred it creates to stay awake. Thomas was born in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, raised in the Denver exurbs, and spent two years at Wesleyan University in Connecticut before coming to Boulder to major in ????. This cocktail of Midwestern repressed-but-relentless self-criticism and suburban angst inspired Thomas to write Chess Club Diaries. Fred Durst references aside, Thomas is honored for his work to be selected in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY with so many talented students. You can reach him on Twitter @sensitivepapi.

KELLY WALKER is a sophomore studying Integrative Physiology with a minor in leadership studies. She has been living in the United States for about three years after moving from the Seychelles Islands. She is trilingual in three languages: English, Creole, and French. She loves meeting and hanging out with new people, cooking whenever she has the chance, and surfing every time she is near an ocean. Once she graduates from CU, she plans to go to medical school to eventually become a surgical pediatrician. She wrote her piece "COLD SHOWERS" to give insight to others that countries in Africa are not just the stereotypes that Africa has been labeled to be and that every place has its flaws.

JOIN THE CLUB

Connect with other students over creative nonfiction narratives, whether words, art, or photography—join the **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** Club. The club bridges academic majors, providing the chance to publish on a variety of platforms in the digital age.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY fills a niche in the campus community by publishing high-quality works of undergraduate creative nonfiction in a student-edited journal. By publishing creative nonfiction, **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** provides student editorial staff the unique opportunity to combine intellectual interest with professional experience, simultaneously fostering an interdisciplinary community of students with a mutual interest in creative nonfiction—an expansive genre that encompasses and connects many seemingly disparate fields and disciplines. The club creates a multicultural and inclusive opportunity for any CU student to share their experiences in print and online with the university community and beyond.

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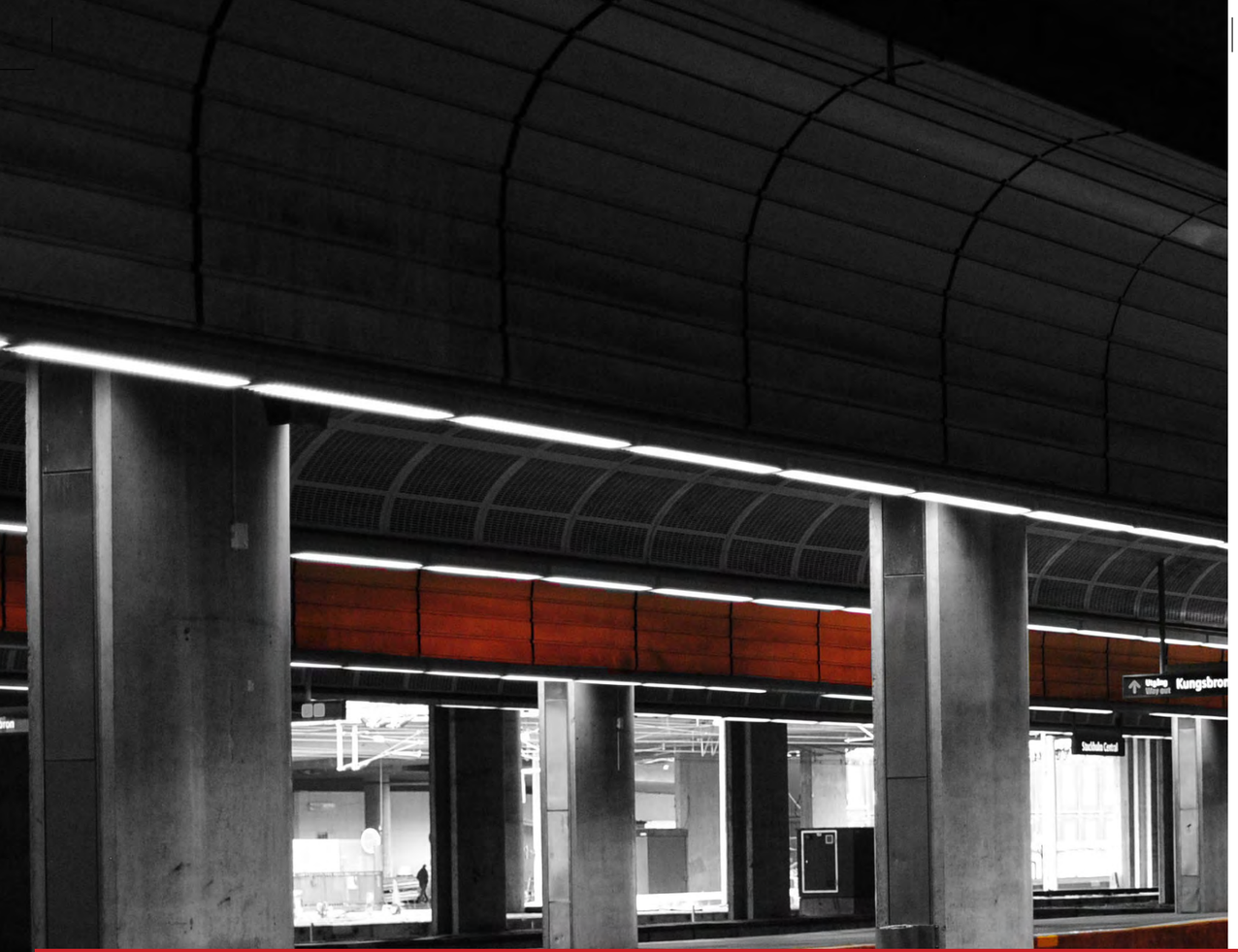

JOURNAL 2020 is a collection of the finest undergraduate artwork and creative nonfiction writing at CU Boulder—the work of young writers with enough strength of voice, vision, and courage to tell their true stories and the true stories of others.

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Emeritus teacher Dave Underwood helped students with our original layout and design.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes a print issue each year, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder Undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our Call for Submissions page for submission guidelines.

Queries: JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY , Program for Writing and Rhetoric, UCB 317, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0359; or journal2020@colorado.edu. We are a green journal and prefer electronic submissions and correspondence. Printed on recycled stock and fully recyclable (including the cover). Single copy costs are $12.00 per issue in the U.S. and Canada, and $14.00 outside North America.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

Once, on a reporting trip to India for WIRED magazine, a cab driver offered me this advice: "If you want to be a human, you must go to the burning ghats, and watch the bodies burn."

The cabbie's words haunted me. I finished my reporting and flew north to the ancient city of Varanasi, took a cab to the city center, and descended a staircase drowning with humanity. At river's edge, I hired the first boatman I saw, a thin teenager named Aryan. "Take me, please, to see the bodies burn," I said.

Thirty minutes later, squinting through thick smoke, I stepped onto an ash-covered shore, impossibly close to the hot fire—a remote corner of Hell, I thought. Two men carried an ornately decorated litter over and set it on a metal rack. As flames ripped through its white sheet, I was shocked by what I saw: a thick mane of long black hair and the gentle curves of a woman's face. Too young to die, I thought.

We stared. That was my job: to witness. Hours later, all that remained was a charred section of sacrum and a single vertebra. Both bones were removed from the ashes, set next to a flower and a flickering candle on a tiny boat, and let go into the Mother Ganges, an offering from the dead. I said a prayer to nobody and climbed back into Aryan's boat. Three days later, back in the States, I knew I'd been changed, though exactly how I hadn't a clue.

Transformation. Many stories in this issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY explore this—not the type in Hollywood movies, but the hard-won variety, burning away the past. Talicia Montoya give us a healthy dose of truth in her poignant piece, "NO, NOT LIKE THAT." Her writing is both gritty and soft, as she walks us through her realization that she is asexual, arrived at like scratching an itch till it bleeds. But the story is also beautiful. By the end, we experience what she experienced: new hope that she's not alone. Indeed, maybe there's a tribe of her. Nozomi Kido's "EPIDURAL HEMATOMA" tells the story of both painful injury and growth, a transformation by transcendence, permanently inked on her body, "Mom, I'm not scared." "TO GUATEMALA AND BACK" by Makena Lambert plays with arrival and transcendence as well, born not of pain or physical trauma but of a very particular type of love: the temporary love experienced during a study abroad in a foreign country. Her story, both graceful and bittersweet, depicts the arrival at a new, more honest place. Love is temporary.

We are all temporary. Stories are eternal.

BRAD WETZLER

Brad Wetzler is the author of REAL MOSQUITOS DON'T EAT MEAT *(Norton), and has published in* THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE and BOOK REVIEW, GQ, TRAVEL + LEISURE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ADVENTURE, WIRED, and was an original contributing editor to JFK Jr.'s GEORGE Magazine.

Art and writing speak to the ideas we cannot express purely with our voices. Whether its highlighting becoming fascinated with our own death as in "COLOR ME OBVIOUS," the written word is powerful. I have often heard that twenty-somethings can't write about anything important, that they haven't experienced enough to create meaning. JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY proves this wrong with "FREQUENT FLYER OR WHY ISN'T DAD DEAD YET?" and through the wonderful staff who spent countless hours working in inDesign. Each voice is important and valuable. In 2016, an election would change the course of history as we knew it. Artists took this as a rallying cry to go forth and create, whether it was in happiness or in despair. JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY highlighted this in our extended call for submissions which included bipartisian pieces like "THE DAY AFTER." "THE POLITICS OF WINGS AND BEER" also addresses how sometimes the thing that is supposed to divide us the most can bring us together. Art is a unifying voice bringing between generations, religions, and genders.

TAYLOR SHORT, MANAGING EDITOR

We at JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY are enormously proud of the artistic and aesthetic outcome of this year's issue. The decision to pair a piece of art with a piece of writing is something we do not take lightly. We strive to find art that connects with the very core of a piece writing. Sometimes that even goes as far as to include images that seem disconnected from the piece, but represent feelings of angst or desire. The art we have chosen fully embodies the spirit of creative nonfiction, and gives us the opportunity to make an author's piece come to life with beautiful art. We have featured the finest art CU has to offer, and every artist included is enormously talented, but we would like to make specific commendations to Mark Haselmaier and Noah Dreeban for their outstanding photography that is displayed several times throughout.

MATHEW FEUER, ART DIRECTOR

The issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY you are holding in your hand is the product of unified efforts across academic disciplines and is entirely student produced — getting involved in the production is easy, just stop by our office at UMC 440 , visit us online at journal2020.com, or email us at journal2020@colorado.edu. Students who join the JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY Creative Nonfiction Club have access to desktop publishing, video, and audio recording equipment. Take advantage of this opportunity to meet other like-minded individuals and gain a wealth of knowledge and experience around the creation, publication, and distribution of this unique and expansive genre!

FRANK KOGEN, SENIOR EDITOR AND CREATIVE NONFICTION CLUB CHAIR

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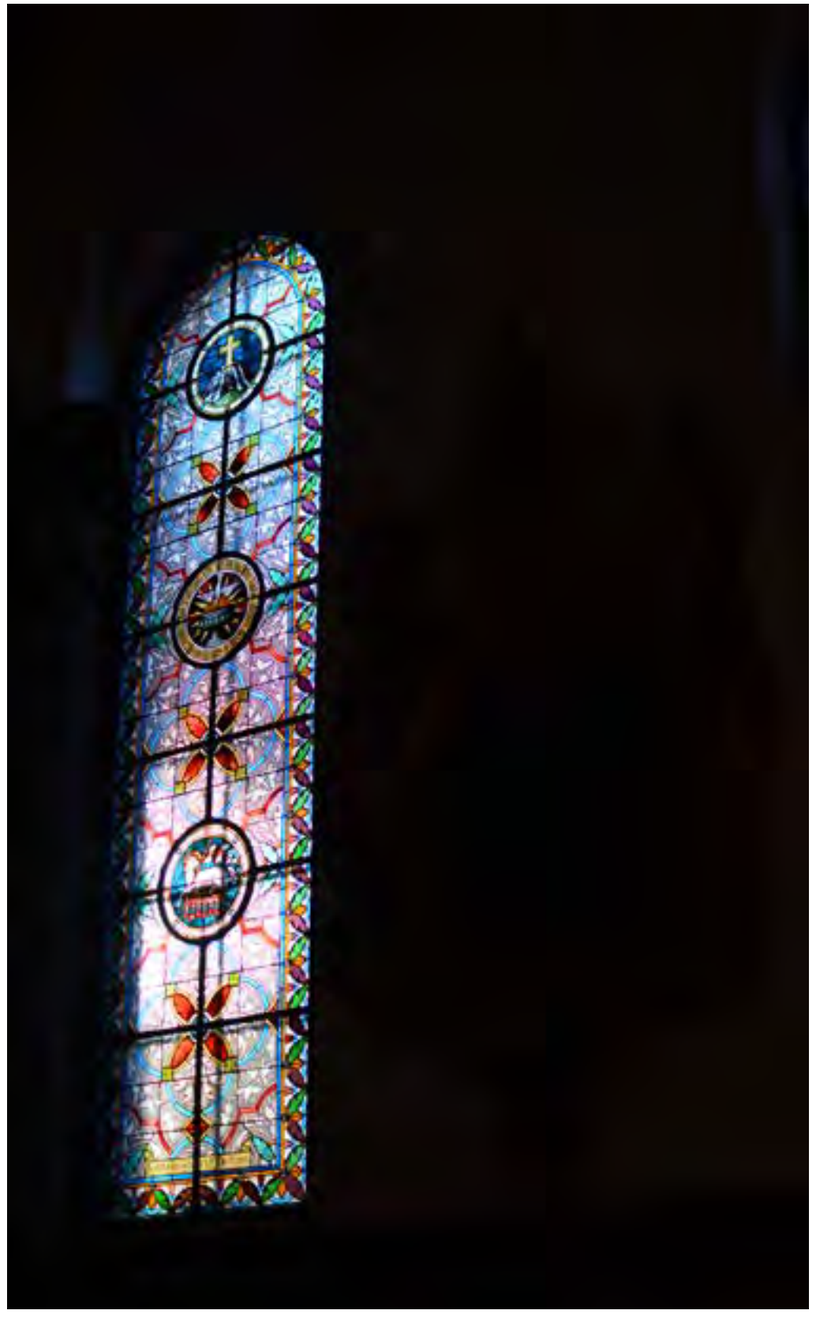

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

ALL ATHEISTS GO TO HELL

by Ellie Marcotte

A "*t*" hung on the wall.

It was a lowercase faded driftwood "*t*" nailed to the wall of my classroom, right in front, so no matter where you sat you always saw it.

The elegant, water-wrought lowercase "*t*."

I knew what it meant. But I always savored the reactions of my classmates when I deliberately stated, "What does the '*t*' stand for?" Their reactions were always instantaneous – they never skipped a beat. There were baffled looks, fiery glares, and offended splutters of "Th—That's not a '*t*' Ellie, that's a crucifix!"

I'd look confused for a second, nod slowly, and walk off, as if four years of strictly Catholic education had not taught me what, exactly, the profound symbolic meaning of our Lord and Savior's Holy Cross was. It was my main source of entertainment.

Drawing my attention away from the cross on the wall, I listened to what the teacher was saying. I hadn't known Ms. Cole for long, but from what I gathered she was a genuinely nice woman. She stood at the front of the classroom, lecturing my freshman theological studies

class about the fundamental idea of theology. More specifically: Catholicism.

The topic struck a chord. I narrowed my eyes, eying the big letters on the whiteboard: "CATHOLICISM—THE TRUTH." I wanted to scoff. As if that one word was the end-all answer to life on this planet. As if it could answer questions humankind has never figured out. As if it were our salvation.

My question was about half-thought out before I felt it leave my mouth.

"Do atheists go to Hell?"

Ms. Cole paused her lecture to look at me. "Come again?"

"Do atheists really go to Hell?" I asked again, adding a forceful element to my tone. I thought for a moment before re-wording my question. "If you're an atheist and a good person, would you still get into Heaven, even if you don't believe in God?"

Ms. Cole adjusted her cat-eye glasses in thought, brushing her stringy brown hair out of her eyes. Her lower lip puffed out; she looked baffled, almost offended at the prospect of the question. After a moment of silence, she laughed. "Of course not. If you don't have faith in God, you don't go to Heaven. Why would you go somewhere you don't believe?"

It was as if this conformity to a heirarchal social construct was the secret to a life of prosperity . . .

The atmosphere of the class seemed to err on the side of agreement with her. I felt them staring at me, their glares like daggers slashing into my spine. I felt the heat of embarrassment rush through me and suddenly it felt hard to breathe.

To this day, four years later, that statement sticks with me. If you don't believe in God, why would you go to Heaven? And of course that brings about the question, if you don't believe in Hell, what then? Where do you go? Why would you go somewhere you don't believe?

It was as if no matter who you were, what you've done, or how you've lived, as long as you could put on your résumé that you believed in this one rendition of a higher power, you were given access to the finest vacation spot the universe had to offer: Heaven. It was as if this conformity to a hierarchal social construct was the secret to a life of prosperity and a solid

after-life. It was as if living by a thousands-year-old and heavily misinterpreted rulebook was the key to the living the complete human experience.

And if you didn't follow the rules, if you questioned "THE TRUTH," if you didn't find some kind of deeper symbolic meaning behind the pale, washed-out "*t*" on the wall, you didn't go to heaven. You went somewhere else—and where that was remains unanswered.

There was something about that idea, that close-minded exclusiveness and narrow vision of what the "human experience" really was, that continually leaves me baffled after years of developing and growing in my own unique spirituality. It reached a daily point when my mother turned on the news and I listened to a man in a crisp, clean suit tell me just how many people died from the day's bombings, famines, diseases, and shootings, I felt a little piece of my faith in this merciful higher power tear off and drift away. It seemed as though the further my education developed and the more I saw of the world, the further I drew away from this idea of an all-forgiving, all-loving God. Ultimately, all that remained of my spirituality was an undirected sense of intellectually curious agnosticism — or rather, a genuine "I don't know" paired with an open mind.

But to give this transition a timeline, my theological journey, or rather anti-theological journey, began when I was seven years old.

My dad took me into a room after a long phone call with my mom. I heard the yelling, but I didn't think much of it. He got to his knees, grasped my shoulders, looked me dead in the eye, and stated in a tone so serious I had no idea what to make of it: "Ellie, I need you to remember something. You hear me?"

I nodded. I heard him just fine.

"When you're married, it's forever. Okay?"

"Your mother Laurie and I— What we had, it was special. We were married. When you're married, it's forever. Okay? Forever. When you grow up and get married, remember that God views it as forever. Okay?"

"Okay, Dad."

It wasn't until years later did I truly understood the irony of his words. Her name was Jessica, my dad's first wife. Then her name was Laurie, and then Michelle. I half expected him to get cursed if some holy being really valued marriage as much as he claimed. But after years of prosperity and financial success on my father's part, I started to question whether it meant anything at all. Whether the relationships I grew up with—

Hermione and Ron, Cinderella and Prince Charming, Ariel and Eric—were expectations that I should have for both the people around me and myself. Was love something real to be sought after, or just a half-thought, idealized and fundamentally artificial dream? Where was God in these relationships? If he had as much value in them as my father seemed to believe, why did so many of them fall apart? What did that say about God?

I wasn't "believing" the right way— silent, obedient, and unyielding . . .

I didn't really know what I thought about this idea of a higher power growing up. I never gave it much of a second thought, preferring to deal with conflicts at hand rather than talking to forces I couldn't see. Granted, I wasn't against the idea of Catholicism; I just didn't fully understand it until I was ten years old and forced to transfer to private school. I wasn't opposed to the change – the year and a half I spent at my public school consisted of teasing, name-calling, and your average fourth-grade bullying. My mom insisted that the kids and teachers at Ave Maria would be much nicer. They had God in their lives, after all. Didn't that make people nicer? More welcoming? More ethical?

And I believed her. At least until I received a detention slip for standing at Mass when we were supposed to kneel, sitting when we were supposed to stand, and for questioning why on earth it mattered in the first place. I believed her until my friend yelled at me for chewing the bland flatbread cracker I was given at Communion, as that was "disrespectful". I believed her until I took home a C in Theology, because I wasn't "believing" the right way—silent, obedient, and unyielding. I had an attitude, they said. I asked too many questions. They couldn't understand why I refused to believe.

I couldn't understand why, either. As I search through the furthest and deepest corners of my memory, I cannot think of a single time where I didn't question why the "Our Father" wasn't

"Our Mother" or why the "Eucharist" sat in a box of solid gold on the altar while there were people in the world starving. I cannot think of a single time where I felt as though I were actually speaking to some higher "great, almighty Father" as I got to my knees and thrust my hands together in prayer. Eventually I came to the realization that I wasn't outright refusing to follow this one way of life that I was raised around. Rather, it was my fundamental disagreement with the uniformity of organized religion and the corruption and lack of individuality it entailed that had me drawing away from it.

When I was fifteen years old, my father, brother and I visited our friends in Mazatlan, Mexico over spring break. Familial conflict had our small stepfamily spread across the continent—my stepmother and stepsister were somewhere in Florida visiting family of their own. The timing of this trip happened to fall right over my birthday, and although I was dejected over the fact that not everyone was there to celebrate, I also understood that with relationships came conflict. In the grand scheme of things, I really had nothing to complain about.

The sun was just beginning to set over the ocean, turning the water into a gigantic chasm of fiery reds and yellows. It shot beams of light across the sky and silhouetted the islands in a way that looked so picturesque it was as if God had taken his inspiration straight from an oversaturated postcard.

We had just come back to the hotel after an evening of exploring and cake-eating. My father had been going on about a gift he had for me—he was excited to give it to me, and as anyone else would be, I was excited to receive it. His enthusiasm was contagious.

"Ellie," he said, after practically sprinting into his separated bedroom and returning with his hands behind his back and a smile on his face. "It's your sixteenth birthday. And I think the most important thing to do is make sure that we're celebrating it with God."

Already, my borrowed enthusiasm began to drain out of me, leaving behind a sour sense of dread and a bitter taste in my mouth. My father and I had differing views—he claimed himself to be a preacher while deep down I knew I was a heathen.

But I played along. It was better not to argue—not now, not in a way to spoil the mood. I nodded, plastering a smile onto my face.

Suddenly, the jewelry in my hands seemed slighly less attractive.

He brought his hands out from behind his back and presented me with a small box. It fit perfectly into the palm of my hand, pure white as if to allude to what was inside.

I opened it.

It was a ring. A dainty, silver ring, encrusted with diamonds, reflecting the dim, artificial light of the hotel room and glittering attractively. It was beautiful.

"It's white gold," my dad said, carefully assessing my reaction with a certain air of elation. "Do you know what this means?"

I paused for a moment and shook my head slowly. "—No, I don't."

"It's a purity ring." He said. "You wear it on your left hand as a symbol—a promise between you and God, saying you'll stay pure until you get married. Only your future husband can take this ring off. You can replace it with your wedding ring."

Suddenly, the jewelry in my hands seemed slightly less attractive. I felt as though the thin, beautiful ring weighed more than it should have. My dad's words didn't sit right with me; they left something rancorous and unpleasant in my mouth, stinging like a barb in an odd place right behind my eyes. I wasn't bothered by the fact that he didn't want me having sex—that was expected—but I felt as though some inherent freedom I had to do as I pleased with my own body had been taken away from me. I felt as though this ring was a symbol of being controlled by someone who wasn't myself—watched continually by some Big Brother figure, only to be condemned when intimacy inevitably presented itself. I felt uncomfortable in my own skin, as if my privacy had been violated, as if my virginity somehow increased my value as a person in the eyes of God.

I realize now that there is a sense of peace in knowing without a shadow of a doubt . . .

I smiled anyway and thanked my father for the gift, doing my best to ignore the nagging, grating feeling of forced submission under some invisible force that I suddenly felt. I slipped the ring onto my right ring finger, as if that could somehow negate the meaning behind it. As if somehow, wearing it "wrong" could turn a symbol into an object, a proclaimed hard-standing yet fundamentally theoretical fact back into a mystical idea, a question—or a series of questions—nobody really knew the answers to. I realize now that there is a sense of peace in knowing without a shadow of a doubt where I stand—in a state of comfortable uncertainty and acknowledgement that everyone can and will believe in what they feel most negates their fear of the unknown. Whether those answers present themselves uniquely to an individual in the form of a holy cross or a lowercase t, is, in the purest and most fundamental sense of the word, theology.

Art by Braeden Sloan

NUMBER

By Alex Nguyen

These are the things I carry.

No matter how hot the weather is or how cumbersome the rest of my clothes are, I'm always wearing the same outer layers. Sometimes, it's the thin flannel shirt that, like most of my clothes, is a hand-me-down, one of many from my mother that she used to wear in the nineties. Sometimes, it's an enormous black hoodie that looks more like an odd dress than a jacket on me; every time I wear it someone asks me if it belongs to "my boyfriend" — which aggravates Number. Other times, it's the hoodie that's supposed to be burgundy, but also tends to be the shade of whatever meals and snacks I've eaten in the past several weeks, considering I rarely wash it. Occasionally, it's my green winter coat, the one I bought that matches most of my clothes and somehow never smells bad no matter how many times I wear it, which comes in handy considering it's supposed to be dry-clean-only and I can't afford to keep it clean that way. Most of the time, it's my black athletic jacket that absorbs endless warmth even in below freezing weather. This one I love for its endless pockets, each of them big enough to cram earbuds,

two phones, an ID card, and one small dinner roll—this makes it best for handling Number.

Not that I'd ever admit the "dinner roll" part to my sister Rebeka—she found week-old tater tots in my pockets when I was eight, and if she knew that I'm still aware of exactly how much food I can fit in my pockets, she would never let me live it down. Number wouldn't like that.

Even when I don't need to, I stuff my backpack full with at least two notebooks, a divider, the latest novel assigned for Language and Comp, my graphing calculator, my pencil box with the lenticular design that entrances everyone who looks at it, and three folders, all of which fit into the biggest pocket. This may seem like a lot to be dragging around, but trust me—it's not even half my locker size, and considering my high school is two floors, four hallways, and three buildings (two of which are gyms), its weight isn't much of an issue, not when Number is so much heavier.

Though I'd never admit it to most people, least of all Rebeka, I tend to squirrel food away in my backpack or jacket, often fruit snacks, an apple, or two clementines. It's for good reason—if I don't keep my blood sugar high enough, I can collapse and go into seizure-like episodes—but Number's arms get tighter when others notice that I have food in my pockets, and I don't enjoy blacking out in front of others, so the food doesn't stick around for long.

The smallest, most real things fill the pockets of my jackets and weigh down my hands, yet bear no metaphysical weight; instead, they are a counterbalance, lessening the pressure that clings to my back. It loosens the thread-like arms that threaten to stop my heart and tear my stomach to pieces, leaving me quivering in a ball on the floor, tears streaking my cheeks.

I don't like crying on the floor. It's cold.

It's this that I'm considering one grey-sky morning, standing at the edge of a damp-darkened street edged with leaves that press themselves in piles, all a bright golden yellow that fades to dull brown. I take this in, inhaling one last unhindered breath; I won't get another one until evening in the solitude of my room if Number gets its way, and Number *always* does.

Even before my feet carry me up the steps of the bus and onto a leather-plastic brown seat, I feel eyes on me, watching, and Number trembles, swells, and constricts its arms around my neck.

This is normal.

. . . Number trembles, swells, and constricts its arms around my neck.

Number is a dark, swollen, inky mass clinging to my back with its countless thin, spindly arms wrapping around me, slipping through flesh and tightening around my spine, sternum, and each rib, winding against my throat and gut and heart. It has no gender, no face, and no voice, unidentifiable by any method except for the way its slimy body shoots pain through my nerves and leaks rotting sludge into my bloodstream, its wire-tendrils amplifying everything from feather-light touches to pinprick points.

I keep myself pressed to the window, cold metal biting through my jacket, head down and hood up, tongue heavy with the silence that Number stacks on it to weigh it down. There are permanent, faint shadows under my eyes, borne from countless nights of Number reaching into my brain and stealing away what little melatonin I have; this is what it means for me to survive, and so the tired ache in my bones is no more unfamiliar a burden to carry than Number is.

I rub my eyes, wincing as the sleep-crust drags against the soft skin above my cheekbones. The back of my seat jolts forward as a body crashes into the seat behind me, and I can feel Talyn laughing as Michael grins, muttering insults. Number releases a tiny, skittering bug from one of its fingers, letting it fall onto my arm, and I brush it away absently, reciting trigonometric identities in my head despite my growing concern that I won't memorize them in time for the quiz this afternoon. I still have to print out my essay for Rupp before lunch and finish that last question on my Spanish homework, and I reach into my backpack, wiping away a glob of Number's sludge from my neck and scribbling in my planner. I'll just tell Garcia I'm going to the bathroom and then print the essay out in the library.

When I stand, I can feel the staggering weight of Number with acuity; it's grown not in size but in density, bloating and quivering, counting each dark endeavor it slips into my head, every thought of carbon-stolen breath or swallowed toxicity. Still, piling off the bus is worse, if only for a moment—I'm never quite fast enough to get off first, and so, with a habitual weariness, I end up trapped between others. As it always does, Number reaches into my lungs and tugs away the air, pressing tight to my temples so that loneliness seeps into my skull like stagnant water. I smile and thank the bus driver, who gives me an indulgent smile before her eyes drift to Talyn and Michael, the twinkle in her eye flickering a little, and I duck my head, letting my hair fall into my face to hide a tiny smirk.

I have carried Number's weight for so long, I do not remember what it is to stand straight and tall without Number's suffocating arms tugging my shoulders down and forcing my head to bow, to sit in my room without seeing mice and rats skittering at the corners of my vision, to fall asleep without scratching, scratching, scratching at flies and spiders and parasites that aren't there. Still, I harbor no anger nor hatred towards Number—it's been with me so long, eating away at everything I could have been, nibbling at potential and wistful dreams, leaving hard-crumb feelings, ones that leave urges to slice open my own skin with razors, leave a slit in my femoral and watch red flow out. I cannot tell where Number ends and where I begin and everything that hurts Number hurts me, too; all I know is that if I stop fighting, if I submit even a little to these urges, if I let myself fall, if I trip for one moment and don't get back up, Number will consume me, and I don't know if there will be anything left.

Sometimes, I wonder if there's even anything left for Number to take, and I try to catalogue the snippets of what Number hasn't claimed: poking a fellow soprano in the side and teasing her until her face turns red; burying my fingers in Devonte's hair and reveling in how soft his curls are; visiting my mother at work and pressing kisses to her cheek; throwing my arms around Adam, a smile so big on my face it feels like it's about to burst free. These thoughts taste like sunlight and rainwater, and I hold them close, carrying them with me; it's not easier to breathe, but they make it so easy to pretend that Number doesn't exist, even with all its weight.

These thoughts taste like sunlight and rainwater, and I hold them close . . .

Alex, RaKaye, Megan, and Devonte stand sheltered by the bathroom doors in the school lobby, packed together in a circle, standing in the same spots with the same backpacks and faded-dye hairstyles. Number pricks the back of my neck, radiating bitter irritation and longing at the sight of them huddled together, and I nudge each of them, unable to manage even a quiet hello with the way Number wraps a tendril around my tongue and pins it to the floor of my mouth. I mumble in greeting, letting my face plant into Devonte's chest, and he wavers for a moment before he gives me a half-hearted squeeze, leaning away.

It's little more than a moment, but it's enough, and Number expands with sudden ferocity, sharp thorns digging into my skin as I back away unnoticed, unable to remain there any longer. Number is extravasating, radiating a sickly ooze that tastes of fury and despair, sliding down my throat, and I drown in it. I can feel my heart struggling, the ventricles and atriums fighting against Number's grip, and so I slip my earbuds in with shaking hands and let sound filter in. The music pushes back at Number's sludge, tugging at its thread-thin arms to loosen them just enough to let me breathe without my breakfast coming back up my throat.

There are things I always carry to lessen Number's weight.

There are things I always carry to lessen Number's weight.

First is an old cell phone, secured in a browning jelly case and a weathered, scratched screen protector; next, a pair of earbuds, wrapped and knotted, seconds away from breaking and leaving me stranded with no music to create a barrier between Number and I. The phone and earbuds never leave my pocket, always there for me to plug myself in and keep the needles at bay, a wall of bricks built from pulses of harmonies and melodies to keep me safe.

Second is my school laptop, carried at my side, forcing my arm into a stick-straight line that leaves my elbow creaking and sore. The versatility is worth the ache—internet, writing, reading, homework—all are unquestionable excuses and easy distractions in themselves, and they keep Number at bay as long as they hold my attention, giving me precious moments of air and lightness.

Third is a necklace, sometimes of rhinestones, sometimes fake gold and false pearls, sometimes crystal, but mostly jade, wrapped in silver and tied around my neck in a leather cord I already know I will wear until, quite literally, it rots off my body. It stays there, bounces when I run, always present for me to roll in my fingers while I gnaw at my lips, twiddle my fingers, bounce my thigh, rub my eyes—anything to keep my hands from shaking, to keep Number at bay until I can handle its weight again.

I carry these things with me now, letting them drag down my hands, distend my pockets, and press bruises into the space between my breasts, and even as Number trembles, still hissing and leaking rot into my bloodstream, I remind myself that today is still better than the worst days. Most of the time, the things I carry lessen Number's weight, a replacement for a small orange bottle filled with colorful, clattering chemicals, but on the bad days, I'm lucky enough to gather enough willpower to drag myself out of bed for a single drink of water. This is not one of the worst days—I refuse to let it be so, and besides, I need to get to U.S. History, and I can't worry about silly things like not being able to breathe properly or being unable to hold a pencil and write without my hands quivering.

This is normal.

Art by Kristen Nadolski 2020

PAREIDOLIA

By Kai Kresek

My memories of myself before the thousand-mile flight that carried me from the low hanging clouds drifting above the Chinese province of Anhui, to the dry and dusty state of Colorado, are as grainy and disjointed as the home videos and photographs that embody the only physical evidence of this journey I endured eighteen years ago. Sometimes I sit alone, flipping through the pages of photo albums and watching film after film, with a vague sense of urgency. I'm convinced that perhaps, if I remember who I was as that two-year-old child, I could somehow figure out why I've become who I am today. My Chinese name means "the opening of new doors," but I have always felt like a shuttered house, within a locked gate, within a walled city.

In one shaky frame, I'm a stumbling sprout of a child in a little yellow sweater and squeaky shoes running through the whitewashed halls of a Chinese orphanage. I watch the video and I invent the sounds of other children, the amalgam of sweet and sour smells, and the feeling of thin carpeting giving way under my soft slippers. I stare into the eyes of the first picture ever taken of me—the one they sent my parents

in America months before they would arrive to adopt me. I have a perplexed look about me, as if I've forgotten something.

I misspoke before—there are more than just videos and pictures. There are stories I've been told time and time again. The first is the story of my birth. In my mind, it's an immaculate birth—one without parents. Of course this isn't true, but to imagine my birth parents is too abstract, and too painful, to attempt. Pareidolia causes their images to emerge from my mind's fog before shifting and slipping away. In reality, I'm told my birth parents loved me but couldn't care for me, so I was left on the stairs of a police station without even a name to keep me company. Is this why, throughout my life, I've always maintained a distance between myself and others, and why I've filled a moat of ice water around myself in the hopes that I could protect myself from being abandoned again? I desperately want someone to wade across it and find me because right now, I'm not strong enough to emerge on my own. I wonder that if someone did, would they find a little girl in a yellow sweater huddled in the corner, trying to remember how she'd ended up there?

Another story is about food. I've heard that there wasn't a lot of it at the orphanage, and so I would store as much of it as I could in my cheeks to save for later, and to protect it from being taken away too soon. When I arrived in America I was ravenous. There was more than enough but I couldn't stop eating. My parents did their best to control me, but I would scream for more—I would sit in my high chair and unleash terrible wails and cries that they told me broke their heart. There's a photograph of myself as a child in the darkened kitchen looking longingly into an empty bowl. There's a video of myself sobbing and throwing my dishes across the room in frustration. My hunger, this angry and impulsive monster, was buried eventually and I learned to eat like someone who knows that there's always enough. I forgot about it until years later and the monster's jaws re-emerged. Is it childish to imagine my hunger as a monster? It certainly seemed that way to me. I felt it before I saw it and when I saw it, it was never in the form I expected.

When I was a teenager, there was stress, sadness and insecurity. I hungered for control. Though I felt as if I were always hungry, I wouldn't eat for days. In this way, I mastered

When I arrived in America I was ravenous. There was more than enough but I couldn't stop eating.

myself and derived pride from the strength it took to become so fragile. This phase was short and volatile. When I could starve no longer, I ate uncontrollably and spent hours bent over a toilet vomiting up myself. Hours stretched into years and there was a time when I became a monster; a pale, hollowed out girl who redirected the hate she felt for herself towards those who tried to love her. In the end, it was these people who, despite my anger and resistance, helped me to bury my monster once more. These memories are a chronic ache, moments that I know have left scars on more than the fingers of my right hand. I recall them in blurry, washed out colors and muddled pixels. I've never had a crystal-clear image of myself.

I'm afraid that it means that I am made up of something immaterial and inauthentic . . .

I think that in attempting to understand, I'm also trying to absolve myself of responsibility. I want to believe that through these experiences, this sadness I've carried with me throughout my life was loaded onto my shoulders against my control. That somehow the events that have dissolved into time and space are what have closed me off and made the monster inside of me grow so big, not my own nature. Memories have the capacity to both comfort and nourish, as well as to shatter and suffocate. The more I pour over them and attempt to deconstruct and rearrange them in a way that makes sense, the more confounding they become. I see the twisted pines and the Huangshan peaks appearing in real life like the dreamy brushstrokes with which they're so often depicted in art. I see seven puzzled little girls arranged on the couch of a Chinese hotel looking lost and unsteady. I see a video of myself laughing for the first time and then another of myself tripping over a plastic train and bursting into tears.

In what picture have I become who I am, in what fleeting frame was another aspect of myself formed, and what

does it mean that I can't truly recall any of them in my mind? I'm afraid that it means that I am made up of something immaterial and inauthentic, like a story that was once true but has been chewed up, tasted, and regurgitated until nothing remains but the flavor of bile and the faint impression that there had once been something significant on the tip of my tongue.

I want you to know that in almost every way, I am fine. These are all thoughts that I try not to indulge in too often because they place a fine filter over my ability to recognize that I am almost obscenely fortunate. There's a feeling of immense guilt that accompanies sharing all of this because everything is so vastly and completely okay. I am warm, I am full, I am free. It's possible to live without an identity. It's one of those things a person could spend their life attempting to construct and never get farther then a step towards realizing. In the early hours of the morning, in the hollow moments between one task and another, and when I'm alone with my thoughts, I take the pieces of my past that I'm left with—scraps of images, the smell of a room, the glimpse of a familiar face—and use them to explain to myself why I am.

Two girls in brightly patterned night clothes stare up at the camera from the crib that they share. The sound of an orphanage nanny as she sings me a lullaby I can no longer understand. An image of her holding me tightly against her chest, the soft white fabric of her blouse cushioning my cheek. A hazy face, emerging from a dense mist, smiles down at me before fading away into the sounds of shoes against pavement and tri-tonal sirens from the nearby station. Then there's nothing, and I imagine it to have a milky color and to be cool to the touch.

Art by Jared Myers

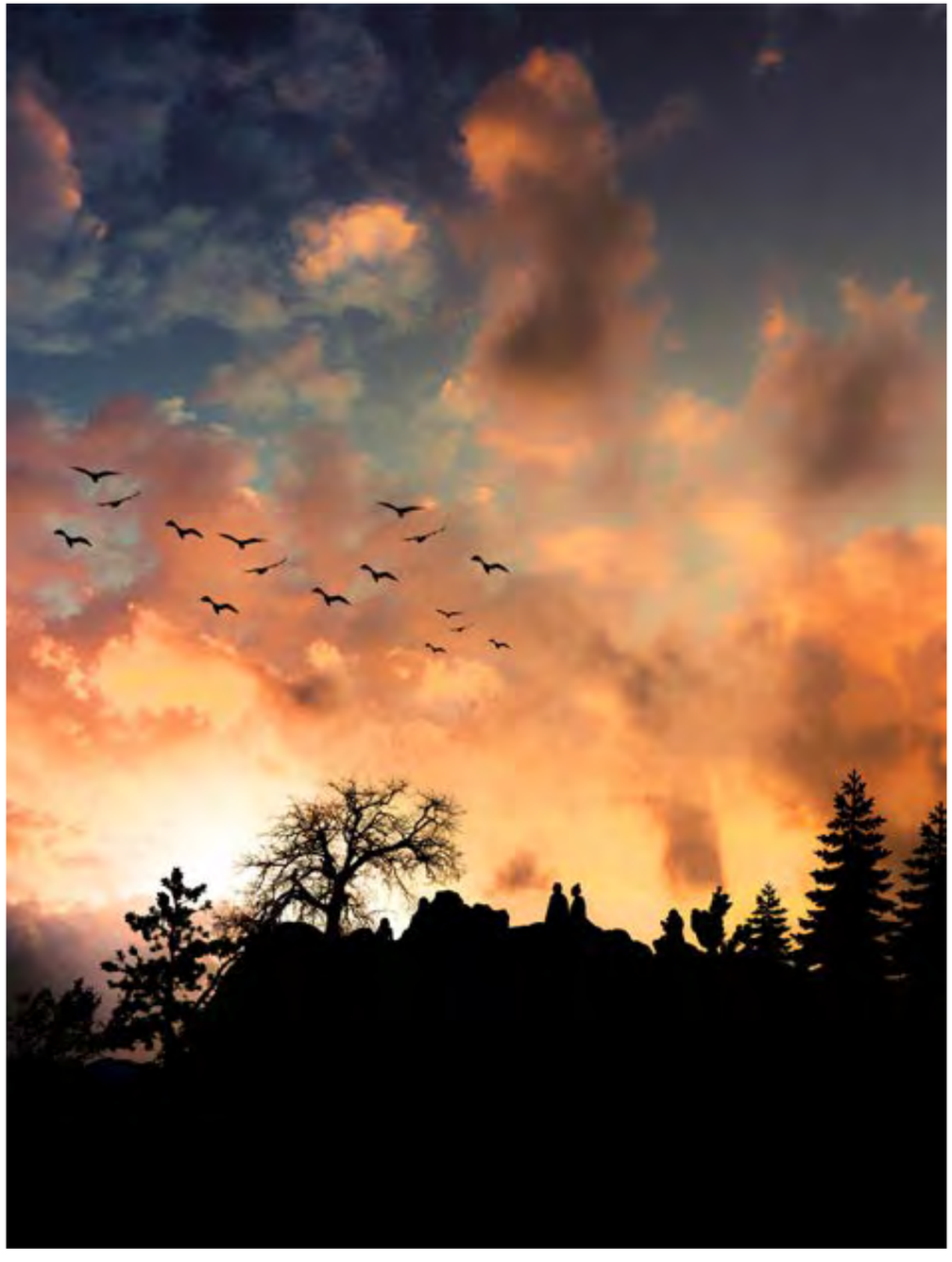

Photo by Bailey Miclette

FREQUENT FLYER: WHY ISN'T DAD DEAD YET?

"I don't feel frightened by not knowing things. I think it's much more interesting."
—Richard Feynman
"Innocence tinctures all things with brightest hues."
—Edward Counsel

By Bruce Kirkpatrick

It's my birthday, February, 2002. I'm turning seven. My best friends have congregated at my house for a Spy Kids-themed extravaganza, complete with plastic briefcases filled with mirrored sunglasses and disguise mustaches for every child in attendance.

I have a good life. My brother, Greg, is six years older than me, a too-cool high schooler craving the freedom of college. My parents are overbearing with him; we call it "first-child syndrome[1]." He always needs to be home by midnight and can't have his door closed. Ever. They're less concerned with me—second-child syndrome[2]—I can close my door, disappear to my

1. First-child syndrome: A powerful evolutionary force driving parents to feel obligated to confirm the living and lucid presence of their first-born child, likely a consequence of desire for genetic legacy.
2. Second-child syndrome: A reprieve from first-child syndrome, in which

friends' houses for hours at a time, and existing rules are rarely enforced.

The party is over. My parents have been acting weird. They hardly seem to be enjoying our post-party viewing of Spy Kids. Black bags hang heavily, like storm clouds, under both of their eyes. They're probably just tired.

Mom doesn't work. She stays at home, taking care of my brother and me while Dad runs his practice. He's a doctor, so he doesn't have much free time. When he's home, he and I practice violin together (we're on a book of Bach partitas right now). Sometimes, we'll go golfing with Greg, although I'm not very good and Dad and Greg are both excellent.

Recently, Dad has been flying to St. Louis a lot. Mom told me why, but I wasn't really listening—something about one of his old classmates working there. Dad joked that he's going to have a million frequent flyer miles soon, if this keeps up.

Sometime after my birthday, Dad shows me that his neck is swollen while we're practicing violin—I reach out and feel it; it feels normal, but the tone of his voice and his expression inform me that it is not. He tells me that he's sick, which is why he has to go to St. Louis so often to see his classmate—she's an oncologist now, a cancer doctor. He says he was sick, kind of like this, when he was in medical school. He says he's going to get sicker before he gets better. I ask if he's sick like Mom, since I know she has something called "M.S." that makes her tired and achy. He says no, that this is a different kind of sick; he tells me that it's called Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. I have no idea what he's talking about. I've been sick before, and didn't need to go all the way to St. Louis.

Oh, well. Grown-ups are weird. Dad will get better.

Weeks later, Dad picks me up from a tennis lesson with a new haircut—he's bald now.

Grown-ups are weird.

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It's my birthday, February, 2006. I'm turning eleven. Dad and I have flown to St. Louis. He has cancer. I understand this to

parents feel no need to intervene in any potential mischief their second-born child might be involved in, likely a consequence of exhaustion from raising their first child (and hell, they've got one to spare now).

be a bad thing, something that makes you very sick and requires unpleasant intervention. This trip to St. Louis (Dad goes almost once every two weeks), I've come along to meet Dad's old friends that he stays with and to visit the "City Museum[3]," a birthday adventure I've looked forward to since seeing pictures of the building months ago.

Dad's friends (an older couple, Mike and Cathy) are nice in a strained sort of way—they know something bad that I don't, but they're trying their best to be happy for my birthday. Mike is a giant of a man with a crest of grey hair, like the feathers of some enormous bird of prey. Cathy is small and frail and her hands tremble when she talks. Dad says that he met them while he was a student here, in St. Louis, and that Mike was working at Washington University at the same time. Mike says that they played basketball together and have been friends ever since. Dad was my basketball coach, but he stopped last year when he got too sick to go to all the games.

One morning during our trip, Mike takes Dad and me to a huge building where Dad says he trained—Barnes-Jewish Hospital—to see Dad's old classmate. We take an elevator and walk down many hallways to arrive at a huge waiting room, filled with the sickest people I have ever seen. Everyone in the room seems like they could die at any moment; some hack into handkerchiefs and scarves, others slip in and out of consciousness, many are wired into tall machines next to their chairs: some kind of vampire robot, pulling the life out of its host.

We wait a while in this room—I try to do a few of the cardboard puzzles sitting on the waiting tables—before a lady behind a desk calls my dad's name. She guides us through some heavy doors in the room to a back hallway lined with offices and examination rooms. One of the examination rooms is open, and the woman leads us to the door. Waiting inside is a woman reading a file on the computer with her back to us.

My dad is excited to see her: "Nancy," he exclaims. "I brought my youngest!"

3. St. Louis' "City Museum" is a local treasure; a city-block sized former bank, now inhabited by miles of slides and scaffolding for children and adults to climb, slide, and get stuck on.

The woman turns around and seems equally excited to see him: "Don! Good to see you."

He says he's really starting to rack up those frequent flyer miles.

Dad introduces me to the woman and we talk a little. She is Nancy Bartlett, Koman Chair of Medical Oncology at Washington University School of Medicine, a Very Important Person with Lots of Titles. She and my dad went to medical school together, and now she's his doctor.

After the introductions and pleasantries, my dad lays down on the examination table and Nancy probes around his body with her gloved hands. She pushes on his neck, under his arms, along his waist—I haven't seen my dad like this before. He's weak and requires someone else's help. During the exam, he and Nancy throw a lot of big, technical, words—words like "prognosis" and "serum LDH" and "metastases," at each other.

She hooks Dad up to one of the machines I saw in the waiting room for what seems like an eternity. Dad's skin tone pales and he sweats while he's plugged in; the vampire machine is sucking the life out of my dad, and the doctor is doing this on purpose. Dad is sicker than I thought.

The next day, Mike and Cathy take me to the City Museum. Dad's not feeling well and needs to stay in bed. They're fun, but not as fun as Dad.

After another day, Dad and I go to the St. Louis airport to fly back to Washington. Dad says he's feeling better. When we say goodbye to Mike and Cathy, Dad tells them that he'll see them in a few weeks. He says he's really starting to rack up those frequent flyer miles.

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It's my birthday, February, 2011. I'm turning sixteen. Dad and I are practicing driving in my high school's parking lot.

He takes more time off now—in the last two years, we've started doing a lot of things as a family: a tour of Europe, week-long stays at golf resorts like Bandon Dunes and Pebble Beach, weekend trips to the beach with our dogs.

Growing up was a cruel and unusual process. Middle school was filled with unspeakable awkwardness, most of which I've since blocked from my memory[4].

I remember a few things: my 8th grade encounter with alcohol[5], the ever-present regret associated with reading the entirety of Stephenie Meyer's Twilight saga[6], and that Dad had ongoing cancer treatments until I was in 7th grade. Mom told me he was in remission now, which meant he had an "acceptable" amount of cancer in his body for someone who wanted to continue living for the foreseeable future, and didn't need any more treatments for the time being.

Greg has been in college since 2007. He's going to school in Tacoma, an hour and a half drive north of our house in Longview. Dad and I visit him when we drive to Tacoma for violin lessons—one of Dad's favorite pastimes.

High school has been a breeze. Homework is mindless and brief, obligations are few and far between, and a reckless sense of freedom guides my actions.

Death is largely absent from a young person's mind. Until tragedy strikes, the concept of deletion from the physical world seems abstract and alien. My friend Jake's dad drowned last year. The death of a father is the death of an internal God; I had not seriously considered that my dad would die at some point. He had been sick, very sick, and was treated successfully. Jake's dad's funeral was one of the saddest things I've ever attended; so many people weeping in one place is an overwhelming experience. I felt so fortunate to have not been in Jake's position, and cried a little bit after the service at the thought of losing my father.

The death of a father is the death of an internal God . . .

Until 2008, my career goals were in the financial sector. After the stock crisis, I put off considering life after high school

4. Unfortunately, the internet does not reflect my internal censorship of these years as I had the tremendous misfortune of discovering YouTube before graduating from the adolescent nuisance phase of maturation.
5. This was the first of several terrible experiences with Smirnoff green apple flavored vodka.
6. I will actively deny this in conversation.

for a few years. Now, I decide to further entrench my family history in the medical field. I ask Greg about different types of doctors—he's studying to be one—and he tells me about cardiologists (like our dad's old friend Big Greg), gastroenterologists (like our dad), and oncologists (like Nancy). Greg tells me that he'd like to be an oncologist, like Nancy, since she saved our Dad.

I'm not sure what Greg means when he says that Nancy saved Dad. Greg says I'll have to talk to Dad about it. It's not a pressing concern, and it leaves my mind as easily as it entered.

It's my birthday, February, 2016. I'm turning twenty-one. My family has gathered in Evergreen, Colorado, at our new house. Dad took a job here two years ago and Greg has lived in Denver since 2012 after accepting a position in the MD/PhD program at CU's medical school. I'm in my senior year of a Chemical and Biological Engineering major at CU Boulder. I'm planning on being a doctor, like my brother, like our dad.

I have no illusions now regarding what happened to my dad. He should have died.

In 2002, my father was diagnosed with late-stage Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, with metastases originating from his lymph nodes on many of his major organs, including his lungs. His prognosis was five or fewer years, or, with an experimental treatment, ten or fewer years.

This was not his first bout with cancer. When he was in medical school (before my brother or I were born), he was diagnosed with testicular cancer: he went through several weeks of radiation therapy and an orchiectomy.

The discovery of his lymphoma in 2002 marked a spiritual rebirth for my father. He became deeply interested in religion and the notion of life after death—maybe mortality became more concerning with the extant threat of cancer. Elaine Pagels, Christopher Hitchens, and C.S. Lewis[7] books littered the shelves of his office, he attended church services of varying religions, and he drew deeply within himself. If you

Nowadays, if you ask him if he believes in the afterlife, he'll tell you that he's "not sure, although people should be nice to each other."

7. *On Christianity,* not the *Martian Chronicles of Narnia*.

ask him if he believes in the afterlife, he'll tell you that he's "not sure, although people should be nice to each other."

According to his initial prognosis, he should have been dead three years ago. Since 2011, he's had two small sets of radiation to remove a tumor behind his eye (2012) and to re-irradiate some lymph nodes in his neck (2014). His newfound passion for hiking with our dogs has him in the best shape of his life.

The medical care my father received was, fortunately for my family, some of the best in the world. Barnes-Jewish Hospital was recently ranked sixth in the country and Dr. Bartlett is a leading expert in the field of Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The experimental treatment he received was unusually effective, and his current life expectancy is nearly that of someone without cancer.

Dr. Bartlett and her family are visiting us in a few months. They love to see our family in good health and spirits after seeing my father so often during his illness. Nancy especially loves to interrogate my brother on his research: he's doing his PhD in cancer biology.

I'm applying to MD/PhD graduate programs—the same kind Greg is in—to pursue a career in medicine. Witnessing my father's salvation through clinical research and later understanding what I had seen has imbued in me a sense of obligation to medical progress.

Although much of our family time is spent discussing the future—Greg's and my upcoming research plans, our Dad's ongoing Master's degree work at Harvard (a new project he's taken on in the last year)—we still find ourselves reflecting on our lives in Washington. We sold our house there a few years ago, and Dad sees Nancy for a checkup once every six months nowadays. We're glad to be somewhere new[8], especially somewhere as close to the mountains as Evergreen. Plus, if we want to take a trip back to the Pacific Northwest, the plane tickets are free; we've accumulated a number of frequent flyer miles in the last fifteen years.

8. Where it rains less.

STARS

by Bradley Frese

When I look up on a cloudless and clear night, I see deep into the past. This is my moment to travel through time. I look up and try to imagine what the world was like when the that particular star first emitted this wave of light and what happened during the 1500+ years it took to travel to my eye. I have always been fascinated by the night sky. Our Milky Way Galaxy has around 400 billion stars and the universe has more than a trillion galaxies. The total number of stars in the universe is unfathomable! Just knowing how small and insignificant we are in the grand scheme of things is enough to make your head spin. The stars in the sky are much, much larger than our own sun, yet they are tiny specks of glitter amongst our night sky. And what it is even more extraordinary is in the time the light took to reach my eyeball, that star could've died. All that survives is the remnants of the light it produced. Because as people do, stars are born, live their life, and meet the inevitable fate of death. We have a sky full of ghosts.

Photo by Noah Dreeban

Birth

The birth of a star is no small feat. It takes place in parts of the universe where there is a concentration of clouds of gas and dust. These areas of conception are called nebulas. You can actually see the Orion nebula with a pair of binoculars (look right below his belt). These are beautiful and vast areas of space that act a bit like a nursery. Once the conditions are favorable, physics takes its course. The gases condense and collapse under their own gravity. Chains of nuclear reactions begin and they ignite. How incredible is it that something life depends upon starts from something as small and insignificant as some molecules and cosmic dust? The birth of a star gives hope and opportunity. It is possible the newly formed star might foster the right conditions to create life on one of its planets. The birth of a star is not that different from the birth of a human. It's miraculous and beautiful. How can something so complex like a star and a human be so easily conceived? Certain conditions must be met and it requires bits and pieces from different things, but the process is relatively easy. Bringing a new child into the world is a wonder of science as much as the birth of a star. It is a representation of new life and with that, it brings a new hope. Who knows what this new baby will grow up to accomplish? It could have the secrets to the universe's deepest and darkest mysteries, or the cure to the world's worst diseases. This new child could possibly be the missing puzzle piece to unlock the secrets of the universe. There is so much potential in the future of the child and so much potential in the future of a new star.

Just knowing how small and insignificant we are in the grand scheme of things is enough to make your head spin.

Life

The life span of a star with a similar mass to that of our sun is about 10 billion years. Think about that number: 10 billion. So much can happen in the life of a star. Look at Earth, for example. In less than half of the predicted lifetime of our sun, Earth has created complex life from the simplest of ingredients, and through evolution, I am now sitting here ruminating on the beauty of stars. Who knows what the world will be like in the second half of the sun's life? Did you know we are all made of stardust? Everything we are and everything in the universe originated from stardust. It is regularly floating through us even today. It directly connects us to the universe. What a concept! Our sun is middle-aged, and going through a midlife transformation similar to that of a man or woman. It might not be able to buy a new red convertible or trade-in its planets for new younger and hotter ones, but it's going through changes nonetheless. It has temper flares and solar outbursts. It's a seasoned veteran at this point, gradually getting older and hotter. In a way, it is a bit like a proud grandparent with eight orbiting children of its own and several billion grandchildren. It is there for the best of times and it is there for the worst of times. Right now, it is witnessing life on one of its planets like a proud parent seeing their child graduate or getting married. It's a stoic and unemotional being, but sometimes you can't help but think the sun knows how much it is relied upon. It is steady and dependable. Our sun has been viewed as a God for much of its life. So many cultures have worshipped our mighty sun and have been at the mercy of a giant fiery ball of gas. The life of a star may seem largely uninteresting, but it is there to provide stability and support. It keeps you warm and happy. I see my parents as strong and supportive as a star. They're always there even if I can't see them or feel their love.

Nothing is immortal and that includes something as poweful and massive as stars.

Death

Everything must end. It's just how the universe works. Nothing is immortal and that includes something as powerful and massive as stars. Some stars are destined to collapse under their own gravity and blow out all their gas. This is a spectacular sight to see. In about 5 or so billion years, our sun will begin to expand like the gas bubble it is. No one will be around to witness the death of our star. Life will be long gone. Our sun will expand, and through that expansion get so hot that it will kill anything left on our planet. Earth will be a fried crispy rock. It's a bit of a frightening concept. Just all of a sudden ceasing to exist. No more thoughts. No more movements. No more sights or smells.

Just nothing. It all just stops. I don't like to get hung up on the idea of death, but death is inevitable. Sometimes you have to think about it. Death is reason I want to do something that will have an impact long after I burn out. There is no telling if I will have a lasting impression, but just like stars, certain lucky beings do something special. Stars can have a lasting impression after they die. If a star is massive enough (something around 10 times the mass of our sun), they collapse into something so dense it creates a gravity field strong enough to pull everything near it inside without the possibility of an escape. This is the creation of a black hole. There is possibly nothing more mysterious and incomprehensible and just flat out weird than a black hole. It does things that baffled the greatest minds in physics, like Newton, Einstein, and Hawking. My favorite concept of astronomy is the black hole. I think it is because I want to be a black hole. I want to do something so great in my life that after I die, I will have a lasting effect. I want my memory to burn on. It's a comforting feeling to have when thinking about death; knowing that I might be physically and mentally gone, but still impacting someone, somewhere, much like the effect of a black hole. I want people will talk about me long after I'm gone. I want to be remembered, but doesn't everyone want that? Just like stars, not everyone gets to be a black hole. However, unlike stars we get to choose to do something that will have a lasting impression. Stars are either massive enough or not, but humans have the ability to choose to do great things so memories can be everlasting. Einstein, Newton, Hubble, Sagan, Copernicus, all these men are black holes. But, thanks to recent discoveries by their colleague, Dr. Hawking, it turns out black holes aren't even immortal. Even they will eventually evaporate—so I guess death will always win.

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

Photo by Bailey Miclette

COLOR ME OBVIOUS

By Kate Petrik

I've always been intrigued by the concept of my own death. I'm not suicidal, by any means. No part of me wishes to die, but I romanticize it. To close my eyes and drift the Lake of Shining Waters to Camelot by way of a flowery grave—Like Anne Shirley? An Unfortunate Lilly Maid? No? Irrelevant. That was an attempt to restore some sort of tangible normalcy to my childhood, hoping that someone else may have also spent their Saturday mornings fantasizing over the exploits of Anne of Green Gables, rather than drooling over the Teletubbies. My parents were marked intellectuals. Anyway, Anne—she had no deliberate intention of killing herself either; turns out she was only plagued with a case of vapid narcissism and an affinity for Medieval literature. But to each their own I guess. My thoughts of death come and go quickly, like this split-second day dream I have about making out with my high school soccer coach, harmlessly intertwining themselves amongst other monotonous thoughts, like what I want for lunch, or how I haven't flossed in a few days.

I've never told my parents, and it's not that I don't feel comfortable sharing this information with them. It's just that

I've told very few people. Mainly because it would be an inconvenience. Once I admit—out loud—that I regularly think about death, they will want to rationalize the fact that it could be indicative of some deeply-rooted emotional issue. My mom would definitely take it as a blow to her motherhood, and my dad would readily seize the moment as an opportunity for one of his psychoanalytic lectures. And just like that, there goes, yet again, another two hours of my life that I could've invested elsewhere. A nap. A run. Anything. I love my parents, but I'm fine.

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I make lists. A fair amount of them. An abnormal and slightly concerning amount of them, at least that's how my mom put it. She tells this story about the way I used to throw fits over my socks when I was four. Unless the seam was perfectly aligned across all ten tips of my tiny toes, I'd promptly place the matched pair on the floor, and refuse to wear them entirely. She called it early onset OCD. I called it simply being unable to understand how someone would settle for anything less than perfection when it came to the positioning of their socks OCD.

The notes app in my phone looks like that of someone newly diagnosed with amnesia—page after page of seemingly useless information to anyone other than myself, or maybe someone trying to steal my identity. Whether it's song lyrics that I want to remember, a to-do list from 2015, or the names of people I want in my wedding, I can't seem to delete them. It's like I think that I'll forget, but I won't. I'm positive actually—aside from my social security number, which I legitimately could not retain even if stapled into the palm of my hand—if any of these lists were to ever disappear, I could recite them from memory. Like this:

Lies I've Told Today:
Initially, I wanted this to be a poem, but I got lazy and gave up. It's aimless, but has evolved into more of an inside joke with myself. I have a lot of those. So now every time I tell a lie, I'll type it out and chuckle. These are my latest and greatest.
Yes, I'm registered to vote at my current address.
I'm just super tired.
Wow, that's so cool.

I wish I had some profound explanation for why, exactly, I would die to meet any of these individuals . . .

Songs I Want Played At My Funeral:
In high school, I told my two best friends that if I were to ever die prematurely, they were to be in charge of my posthumous mixtape. I instructed them to play the following, only the following, and to not feel bad if they laughed at the service.
Con te Partiro by Andrea Bocelli
Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen
Send Me On My Way by Rusted Root
Sweet Avenue by Jets to Brazil

Songs That I Know Every Word To And Will Never Get Old Until The Day I Die:
(See above list)
Surprise. It's the same list. Coincidence? I'm not really sure.

Halloween Costume Ideas:
Last year, I planned my costume for about six months. I wasn't dressed as Avril Lavigne. I was Avril Lavigne. Naturally, it took a few days to transition back to reality. I'm not a Canadian punk idol. It was tough, but I made it back okay. This list is by far the most extensive, so I'll spare you an extra two minutes, and cut it to my top four.
The Hash Slinging Slasher
Buttercup from The Princess Bride
Rex Kwando
A dad

Famous People I'd Want To Get Dinner With:
I wish I had some profound explanation for why, exactly, I would die to meet any of these individuals. I guess they exude extremely endearing energy that I'd hope to pick up on. I also would really just love to know exactly what Julie Andrews smells like. Probably cookies. Yeah, Kevin Spacey smells tastefully of aged Bourbon, and Steve Martin definitely smells like aftershave and freshly cut grass. If I'm wrong, I'll be sorely disappointed. But I'm pretty positive I'm right.
Lucille Ball
Kevin Spacey
Julie Andrews
Jimmy Fallon

Ellen DeGeneres
Steve Martin

Things That Genuinely Make Me Happy:
These all sound like they came straight from those text posts on social media that normally make me want to scratch my eyes out and question the individuality of our nation's youth. But then again, I am 20 years old and still cruise Tumblr on a fairly regular basis. I guess happy things are sometimes universally cliché.
Running without feeling tired
The weightlessness you feel while skiing through powder
The warmth of a fireplace against your back
Coffee
When babies smile at you
Being the first person awake in the mornings

People I Can Hangout With Indefinitely And Not Feel Depressed:
I pride myself in being good at people. Absolutely nothing is worse than chatting up the weather with an acquaintance, but it's unavoidable, and exercising one's proficiency in small talk is just part of being a decent human being. I go through bouts of "depression". But I don't want any pity. That's not my motive here. Depression is common, and I don't dwell on it. Sometimes I give away my own happiness trying to make other people happy, so I'm working on becoming more conscious of when it's happening, and appreciating those who don't drain it from me.
Mom/Dad
Any of my siblings
Grandma
Haley
Scott
Amos… dogs are people too
Annie

Names I Like:
A good number of names on this list (4…) were taken from persons I've had, let's say, friendly relations with. Given that information, I'm fairly convinced that at least half of my physical attraction to a person is in direct correlation to how much I like their name. I'm not crazy. It's unfortunate really that

It's unfortunate really that such a cool name can belong to such an uncool person.

such a cool name can belong to such an uncool person. Anyway. I digress.
Macaulay
Dakota
Porter
Lennon
Hunter
Keaton
Asher
Luke
Callan

Lyrics That Get Me Every Time:
I view hipsters as people who actively diverge to belong. I'd like to think that I'm too multifaceted to be defined by such a mindless term. Then again, that kind of sounds like something a pretentious hipster would say. My acid reflux is triggered every time the word is casually thrown my direction—Which, ironically, is often—I'm actually starting to worry about the structure of my esophagus at this point, but there's just something about the masses that has always turned me off. In the third grade, all the girls in my class bought these new pleated skirts, so, naturally, I went and bought camo cargo shorts. The visual is sickening, yes, but no one else had them, and frankly, I thought the pocket storage was economical.
Your fear of normalcy is hardly strange
Let's be freaks, plain clothes police
Let's be deliberate, because it's obvious to me
Deliberately weird is pretty obvious.
So color me obvious
I just want to be happy half the time
And blue only when I have the time.

I attend all social gatherings in the same fashion that one would attend a friend of a friend's party—one where there's top 40 music, but no booze to keep you drunk enough to enjoy it—I show up, dance the hardest, laugh the loudest, and find excuses to leave early. So much so, that my friends call me the Lil Dipper …

They don't. I just came up with that actually, but I wish they did. That'd be kind of cool. College is a weird place.

It's exciting. It's confusing. It's depressing.

The sadness comes in waves. It's when I'm alone that it becomes most intense. Being around people helps, but I really enjoy being alone.
I mull over death because I can't control it. I can't shove it into the pockets of my cargo shorts. I can't throw it on the floor, and refuse to acknowledge it entirely. I can't just jot it down, or confine it to a list.

I can't be truly full of life without experiencing all emotion deeply. So why am I waiting for you to see that I'm alive?

Art by Jared Myers

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

NO, NOT LIKE THAT

by Talicia Montoya

Steam rose from the surface of the water, curling around our flushed faces, and glow sticks shimmered below at our feet. My friends and I were playing a game of truth or dare at Tia's birthday party at the end of my senior year of high school, which became more like truth or truth since none of us wanted to leave the warmth of the hot tub. As with any game of truth or dare, the questions focused mostly on a single topic—sex.

In the beginning we asked each other questions like "Which teacher do you think is hottest?" and "Which of the Avengers would you like to be in a threesome with?" and "Who in our class would you most like to bang?" Around the circle we went, only giving pause when it came to me. My question: "What was the weirdest sex dream you had?" I was stumped, unable to think of even one sex dream, weird or not. It took me a moment to think of anything that might qualify. Finally, it came to me. "I had a dream that my boyfriend came to my house with his hands behind his back and asked if he could mash something against my face. I thought it was going to be pie, but he wound up kissing me. All I wanted was pie." My answer brought

a round of laugher, and they couldn't believe that was the closest thing I'd ever had to a sex dream, but they accepted it and continued on with the game.

Eventually, they stopped asking me questions; I didn't have the answers they wanted because none of the questions applied to me. I'd never given much thought to sex or looking at people and thinking "I want them inside me." It was a foreign concept, one I never identified with nor wanted to identify with.

Before the game ended, Tia turned to me after I apologized for not being able to answer any of the questions and said, "It's okay that you're asexual."

Her words stuck with me because it was the first time I'd ever considered the possibility that "asexual" could apply to me. Not the first time I heard the word, but the first time I thought of it in conjunction with myself.

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In middle school, the pages in my journal were dog-eared and scribbled on, trying to emulate what I had seen in the movies of girls doodling hearts and flowers around boys' names. None of my doodles came close to the Valentine-esque aesthetic of the diaries in the movies; they always fell flat because I was only trying to do what I thought people were supposed to do when they had an infatuation with someone else.

I used to be notorious for having a new crush almost every week. It was an exaggeration, obviously. There was Josh, Anthony, Taylor, Benjamin, Patrick, Rory, Roland, and Austin. My mom had poked fun at me, asking, "Who's the flavor of the week?"

My infatuations, however, stemmed only from the idea I had to have a crush on someone. All my friends had their crushes; they'd tell me how they'd kiss the posters of celebrities they liked. I started putting up posters of my own—posters of Taylor Lautner and Orlando Bloom—but I never felt nor understood the compulsion to put my lips to paper and imagine they were their actual lips. I only ever liked to look at them.

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It's okay that you're asexual.

It was a week or two after National Coming Out Day when I began to suspect I was something other than straight.

They tried several times to have the "sex talk" with me before I went off to college. My mom called me into her room to discuss the importance of condoms, my grandma visited me in my room to remind me how, "if I let too many people spit into my cup, no one would want to drink from it," and my dad, I'm still not sure what he wanted to say.

It was two in the morning; the only ones awake were my parents and me. All my other siblings were sleeping except for my brother, who was sixteen at the time. He was the reason they were still up; me, I was too focused on Skyrim to sleep.

The phone rang only once because Mom was quick to answer. "Where are you?" A beat of silence, broken by the dying scream of an enemy character on the television screen. "Stay there, I'm coming to get you." She hung up and grabbed her keys, leaving with a "Catalina's mom drank, he needs a ride back."

And then there were two.

My dad joined me on the couch, watching me let loose another arrow and kill another enemy. "So," he began, "about sex—" He left the statement open for me to pick up and continue the conversation.

Pausing the game, I turned to face him. "Not interested."

"At all?"

"Nope."

He seemed confused but relieved. "Well, good talk."

I returned to my game. They were confused by my utter lack of interest in sex, confused but didn't question it. I insisted I had other things I was more interested in at the time—my stories, drawings, and video games. Not much time for thoughts of sex when you spend most of your mental efforts thinking of new idea to torture your characters or how to draw a properly proportioned human body.

Enter college—a time for change, for newfound freedom and self-sufficiency, for realizing how sex-obsessed everyone is. Maybe obsessed isn't the right word, but it's hard to escape the subject of sex when you find yourself living in the LGBTQIA friendly hall. I made friends easily enough, but it was strange to be considered the one straight friend in a myriad of gay, pansexual, and bisexual individuals. We joked

about it often; how innocent I was and how they'd teach me all about the different kinds of sex. And for a couple months, I did think I was the only straight one in my group of friends.

It was a week or two after National Coming Out Day when I began to suspect I was something other than straight. In the middle of a round of BS, Ev, one of my new friends, announced, "I'm so sexually frustrated. It's fucking ridiculous!"

"What does sexual frustration even feel like?" I'd never experience sexual frustration; I was never really a sexual being. Sure, I found people aesthetically attractive, but the feeling never went further than enjoying their presence and looks.

Ev gave pause before speaking, probably because she'd never given serious thought to describing sexual frustration. Her final answer: "It's like I want to have sex with so many people, but I can't."

Not much of a helpful description, especially for me, but I didn't press for more.

Later, my roommate, Ashley, mentioned how sexually frustrated she was, but she described it more as a desire to cuddle with people and be physically affectionate. The sheer coincidence of having two people lament their sexual frustrations called into attention what I was feeling, or more, not feeling, wasn't what the typical college student felt. While many people may not be as vocal about it, I figured a lot of people wanted and thought about sex, even in passing, more than I was.

It made me wonder if being straight meant feeling sexual frustration, whether I could be something other than straight. But I knew I wasn't gay or pansexual or bisexual. It made me wonder what I was.

For the next couple weeks, I spent my time walking around campus, searching for fellow students who I found to be the most visually pleasing. It was a test, trying to see if I could imagine myself in physically intimate situations with these perfect strangers. I thought if I could, it meant I wasn't actually asexual. Girls in well-fitting jeans and knee-high boots, boys in leather jackets and sunglasses—none of them I imagined myself being with sexually. All I ever wanted was to look at them.

Wait, so you reproduce by binary fission?

According to a study regarding human sexuality, only 1% of the population is asexual. My roommate, mostly joking, partially not, said that's probably overestimating the amount of asexual people there are.

Of all the people I knew, other than myself, my friend Johnny was the only other asexual I'd ever met, so it was only natural I felt closer to him in a way I didn't with all my other friends.

On more than one occasion, Ashley brought her boyfriend over, I had texted Johnny telling him she brought Simon over and asked if I could swing by. Every time, he said, "Of course," because he understood exactly how much I couldn't stand seeing them cuddle together in her bed, kissing and giggling and leaving hickies on each other's necks.

It got to the point where as soon as the two of them walked in, I gathered my laptop and walked down the hall to join Johnny in watching reruns of Forensic Files or the animated series of Batman. Because he disliked seeing public displays of affection just as much as I did, he had his door open to me should I need an escape from the sexual tension of two college students in love.

Coming out to my friends was easy. It made sense to them because they knew I had never been into the concept of sex. It wasn't a huge deal because they saw it coming. I'd been vocal about how often I'd found sex scenes in movies and television series to be superfluous and how I didn't understand sex jokes or why people do unfathomable things they do during sex.

The only hitch was when Tia's boyfriend at the time, Josh, said, "Wait, so you reproduce by binary fission?"

I literally face palmed. "No, not like that," I said.

"But that's what asexual means."

"That's the scientific definition, not the sexual orientation."

"Whatever," he said, "You do you, or not do you, in your case."

"T, can you come back here?" My mother called to me from the bedroom in the back as I read in the living room. "Close the door," she instructed when I entered her room.

It was never a good sign when my mom wanted to talk to me with the door closed, but I did as told and sat on the edge of her bed, waiting for an earful of whatever it was I might've done wrong

"So, Dad tells me you're asexual," she began. I had told him first. I nodded. "What does that mean?"

I took a deep breath, knowing this conversation had to happen sooner or later. "It means I don't feel sexual attraction."

"How do you know?"

"Know what?"

"That you don't feel sexual attraction?"

Resisting the urge to expel and exasperated sigh, I said, "Because I've never wanted to have sex with anyone."

"But you've had boyfriends."

"I only went out with them because I figured why not."

"This isn't something you've read in a book and self-diagnosed, is it?"

"No." My voice was sharper than it should have been, but the question itself was offensive. It implied there was something inherently wrong with it, implied it was a sickness in need of curing. It isn't something you diagnose; it's not a disease or disorder.

She didn't seem to register the shortness of my response, only continued interrogating me. "Your dad and I didn't make you think sex is bad or gross, did we?" She was worried they had ruined sex forever for me because of how badly they reacted when they found out my brother was watching porn.

"No. It's just not something that interests me."

"How long have you been it?"

As if I could suddenly become it. "Umm, since ever." I didn't know how else to answer and was sure the tone of my voice was less than kind.

"When did you start thinking you were asexual?"

"Just before the summer, I guess." And I relayed the details of Tia's party to her, hopefully stemming the flow of her questions. She listened, mouth pursed, to the progression of my discovery from early June to late November. I saw it in her eyes—she didn't get it, couldn't fathom how I had a lack of sexual interest—but I had no clue how I could make her understand.

Cameron, the Australian grad student with an oboe, whispered compliments in the dark while we watched a movie.

I had tried dating. I say tried because each conversation over coffee, each discussion over dinner felt forced, as if I were an actor in the role of someone who had the potential to be sexually interested in the other.

Richard, the twenty-three-year-old third grade teacher, said how he was admiring me from across the awkwardly small table at a Starbucks. His mostly forgotten cup of coffee sat beside his hand as he filled every second of silence between us with small talk. Mine was almost gone because what else was there to do other than drink when you couldn't find words to offer.

Cameron, the Australian grad student with an oboe, whispered compliments in the dark while we watched a movie. I had to resist the urge to shush him because, while he seemed to have a fixation on stroking my arm and inching ever closer to me, I was genuinely interested in the movie's plot.

None of them lasted longer than the second date. I couldn't keep playing the role they thought I was because I felt I was deceiving them. They thought they were dating a pretty girl who was straight, if not, bisexual, a pretty girl who would find them physically attractive and might even get into bed with them somewhere down the line, when all I wanted was an engaging conversation and good company.

With Tim, I thought I should try telling him outright in the hopes of alleviating the uncomfortable feel I'd be lying to him if I didn't.

"What does that mean? What's it like?" he'd asked.

My go-to answer for such questions had become part of a script. "It means I don't experience sexual attraction. And it's just like I have little to no interest in sex."

"That's bizarre and awesome."

I wasn't sure how to take his response, both the bizarre bit and the awesome bit. To me it wasn't bizarre because it had always been how I felt, even when I didn't have a word for it. But I'd never had anyone give a somewhat positive response. Everyone had always questioned whether I actually was what I said, either that, or they were neutral to it, took it at face value and moved on.

"Do you feel like it gives you any advantages or disadvantages?" he asked.

A moment of silence passed as I considered. "I don't really think it gives me an advantage," I admitted. "Other than never knowing what it's like to be sexually frustrated." This brought a little laugh from his end. "But the hard part, I guess, is finding people who would still be interested in a possible relationship without sex."

Without sex, it seemed any relationship would become less, no more than an abnormally close friendship. This was the case, especially with me, since I couldn't even do kissing.

One day, I had asked my friend Emma why people get pleasure out of kissing. I told her how it was basically smashing the meat of your mouth against the meat of another person's mouth. She laughed, saying, "Well, when you put it like that. It's hard to see how anyone would get pleasure out of it."

It wasn't the first time I wondered what made a relationship between lovers who don't have sex different than a relationship between close friends.

"So what are you looking for?" The question was always the same though the faces behind it always changed. What are you looking for in regard to dating and relationships?

I used to tell them, "I'm just hoping to meet someone cool and get to know them better and maybe see what happens from there."

Too many times I had sat across from someone and looked at them, thinking about whether I'd be willing to spend hours with them just passing the time, whether I'd want to talk with them late into the night about whatever might strike our fancy, whether I'd be comfortable sitting next to them in silence while doing our schoolwork. And too many times I'd had the realization they might not be thinking about anything other than whether they were going to get laid at the end of the night.

But my script, since then, had changed. I became more honest with potential suitors. "I'm just looking for someone to have an interesting conversation with and maybe get to know them better. That's all," I had told them.

The chatter of conversations among friends and classmates filled the hall in the basement of the physics building as classes let out.

Students pulled backpacks over their shoulders and zipped up winter coats as they spoke.

On my way to Spanish, which was tucked away in a small room with too many desks, I had caught a flash of bright red-orange hair—Tia. I had called to her in the frantic moments between classes.

"Talicia!" Her attention had turned from her other friend to me. "Oh! I have to tell you something!" she said quickly as she pushed open the door to the stairwell. "Text me later or else I'll forget!" And she had gone, rushing to catch the next bus to Will Vill.

I had almost forgotten our brief exchange until I was lying in bed, nearly asleep. Stifling a yawn, I rolled over and picked up my phone, screen blinding in the dark of my room. "What was that thing you needed to tell me?" I asked her.

Her response, despite how it was past midnight, came in less than a minute. "Oh so my thing was a friend came out to me as ace [asexual] the other day and she'd never met another ace and so she said she'd like to meet you sometime if that's cool with you." I laughed because only a week before, she texted me saying how she needed more asexual friends because she had gotten tired of hearing all about her other friends' sex lives.

It was like hitting the jackpot to find out another asexual person went to the same school as me. No longer would it be just me and Johnny, even the two of us meeting was a feat in itself considering how rare asexuality is. Now there was this person who would understand completely what not feeling sexual attraction meant, a third person out of a campus of well over thirty thousand.

Smiling, I typed out my reply back to her. "Ooh yeah, of course I'd be down for that!" As if there were any doubt about me jumping at the opportunity to meet another asexual, one who had just started the process of coming out as I had only the year before.

Art by Julia Smith

VOLCANIC BLEEDING

By Leah Alette Reed

Ovarian Cycle

Follicular Phase

The flowers begin to grow and open as the sun shines through the ashy gray sky. Huckleberry invade the subalpine meadows, intertwining with sage to invade my senses.

I sit on a bench, waiting for the touch of a human I have never before felt. Hoping something would grow in the grass my feet sit on. Waiting for the beauty that had been described.

The man scrutinizes the fruit which I laid out in front of him, just within reach, tempting him to care for my being. He responds by laying me out at market, a dollar sign next to my name. Cherries pulled too soon and bagged for the mouths of those who ignore as they pass.

Flowers that have lived within my body may be burned by the fire that grows inside of me. The air I breath becomes too vile to sustain the life I grew for so long. The thick white

duvet that lingers above us grants the perfect environment: cool water, sun, air thin enough to promote life.

Ovulation

Although the man I try to know is a stranger in truth, I hold on to the possibility that his touch will melt the snow that has piled up year after year without enough sun to melt its chill. I prepare to hold a life greater than that which lives around me as the man selling me at market craves another bite. Longing for penetrative disruption, my chamber swells double in size.

Luteal Phase

My sheets contain my fear as I hide my swollen eyes below them. Hundreds of years pass around me as I await sweet release. From the pain caused by the man picking my fruits, hiking, unwelcome on my land. The pressure his feet create shallow my breathing, until it is barely detectible.

Sheets of white begin to slide down my walls, giving fair warning for the release of life around me. Air thickens and sinks, filling the lungs of those drinking my coffee, chewing my berries, my cherries.

Be it life, be it eruption. I quiver.

Uterine Cycle

Menstruation

Not only magma flows as the ash melts snow into water. Destruction is worsened as thick red heat and the earth's skin mix in to one. A mix that could foster life so long as the heat doesn't grow too close.

I scream out in the darkening sky and call for the creatures who have loved my body, my mind, my soul to run as I begin to boil. These warnings remain unintelligible to the men that lingered too long at my base.

He grew too sure. Moved too close. Refused to respect my power. He had mistakenly seen someone like himself. Planting seeds to help life grow but not a home to produce it. He thought that he could take my power but now he runs.

I produce smoke and lava too thick to breathe through. Breaking the life that had commodified my own.

Proliferative Phase

Photographing my power, he wonders when it will end. When I will seduce him once again with my fruits. The air darkens until the lights in his camera are too full of dust to flash. Clog the veins that I once found attractive, until his last cough echoes through my valley. My ashy laugh responds, reminding him of my body's capability to rid my land of life unexpected, unworthy, broken.

Secretory Phase

Waiting for the next chance to produce life, my ash floats down and coats home with potential. The nutrients the soil needs begin to seep in as I hope to make the heather, the trees, the fruits grow once more.

I will wait for the next life to come. A chance to find someone who will better care for my maternal wishes. Centuries will go by before I feel another breath graze my neck. One that eases the concoction growing in my belly.

Art by Lionnel-Bravo Bumbakini

THE DAY AFTER

"Progressions can't be made
if we're separate forever."
—Q-Tip

by Noah Stein

November 9th 2016:
Anger so thick you can slice it like butter for your toast
The Day After
Morning in America comes with hesitation, trepidation, the smell of rotten fish
Anger on the news Anger on the internet Anger in the hearts of Citizens, Students, Democrats, Republicans, Whites, Blacks, Muslims, Jews, Women, Men
One nation huffing cans of intolerance, inhaling the smog of hate but never Marijuana
Makes me wanna
vomit

The educated blame the non-educated
The men blame the women
Whites blame Blacks and so on and we don't know how to talk about it
We're ballerinas on issues of race, gender, sexuality and religion

Drowning in putrid swamps of inequality, covered in our own disease-ridden blood

We must not continue to allow our lives to be dictated by demagogues standing above us on platforms of blame and violence and negativity
We, the youth of America cannot and will not accept the Steve Bannon scumbags of the world as the leaders of this country, who think "gay" is a disease and "Muslim" an invasive species
Who behave as invasive species, dividing and conquering our protected environments into oil fields
The Zebra Mussels of humanity
We will not allow Chris Christie's belly of bullshit and scandal to crush us
Old white folks more twisted than a Rudy Giuliani face
Aloof like Secretary Clinton on a good day
Enough of the hateful rhetoric, enough of white nationalism and government that does not represent the plurality of our country
Their hate is the heroin of political ideology, numbing the truth, replacing it with something
far
more
heinous

The Day After in America
Fear
Frustration
We cannot be hypnotized by this nonsense
Our generation must wake up, we must change our countenance from tear-filled terror to ear-to-ear smiles, our hearts from gloomy, pre-thunderstorm humidity lathering our veins with toxic sweat to napping under a tree on one of those perfect days when rays of sunshine shoot through branches rejuvenating a tired soul, a tired nation
The Day After
Our cognitions from hate to love rather than fighting anger with anger
We must rise above
Our generation must support each other
Listen to each other
Our differences? Simply complicated constructs erected by intolerance, enforced by the manipulation of the Few

The Day After
We the people say no We are all human We all deserve a chance to live lives of peace
Us white folks must descend our fools-gold false-mountains to engage in dialogue
Our lack of communication enforces the division between our generational peers allowing the status quo of divisive rhetoric to locally anesthetize our collective consciousness
These are my thoughts on The Day After
These are surely the thoughts of others in my generational cohort on The Day After and on The Day After, we must not become pillars of salt
On The Day After we will never forget yesterday's mistakes; yet instead of reminiscing, we will look forward to tomorrow with hope and with our voices rather than our eyes, our love will beat their hate, our bridges will traverse their walls, our generatively will conquer their stagnation
On The Day After, we must make sure that tomorrow the sun shines brighter
The Day After.

We are all human
We all deserve a
chance to live
lives of peace

Photo by Nicole B. Ryan

THE NEW YORK STORIES

By Nicole B. Ryan

Not All of New York Shouts // 6.29.16

Not all of New York shouts.
Sometimes it whispers, like the rustling of the wind through the trees in Central Park, The gentle crash of the waves on the docks of Battery Park.

Sometimes New York sings, like the street performers who play for tips, ducking inside the subways when it's cold, or raining.
Ah, the peaceful bliss that is New York in the rain. Most profoundly late at night, when it gets so quiet you can hear each drop as it graces your window.

Sometimes New York prays. Like the hundreds of flowers and mementos left on the doorstep of the Stonewall Inn, after the Orlando shooting.

Sometimes New York cries, as I imagine it did the day its skyline was changed forever.

And often New York laughs, like in the tucked away comedy clubs of the Upper West Side, or the little kids playing in the fountain in Washington Square.
It dances, rejoices in the beauty that is, and only can be, New York.

And always, New York is proud. As Lady Liberty stands in the harbor, like she's done for over 100 years, welcoming those to what is, and always will be, the greatest city in the world.

And yes, occasionally, New York shouts.

Top of the Rock // 6.15.16

I found my love for New York in many places. In the majesty of Liberty Island, in the tranquility of Greenwich Village, in the excitement of Times Square; all the hidden haunts and faces of people you see once on the train, knowing you will most likely never see them again. So many times I fell in love with New York, over and over again. Yet, I never truly knew my love for New York until I saw it from the top. 8 million people condensed on this island. I looked down as sirens wailed, tiny cars and ant-like people hurried by, a city moving, yet still. I imagined their stories. Up here, time was suspended, as I watched life keep moving down below. I am reminded… shown truly, my love for this city. The city that slows down for no one, fights, blossoms and grows, even after you're gone.

The city beats on…

Something More // 6.1.16

He brushes the hair out of her face as the train slowly sways them. Drawing into each other, she curls into his chest; her protection from the turbulent world around them. In a packed train car, they act as though they are the only two people there. Quiet tranquility, not speaking, just being. They don't need words as they hold on to each other. Frozen in time, he looks at her in wonder. If there is something more than love, these two knew what it was; holding it secret in the entanglement of their bodies together.

Beautiful. Together. One.

Just Because // 5.30.16

Walking down the streets of Chelsea, I passed a little shop on the corner selling flowers. I thought to myself, they're all so beautiful, I wish I had a reason to buy some. After grazing through the flowers for a few minutes, I decided to buy some for myself… just because.

It's good to do things just because sometimes…

Humanity // 6.14.16

A Muslim man was there advocating for peace and unity.

I saw humanity come together at the Stonewall Inn.

During my time in New York City, the Orlando shooting happened. It was near impossible to grapple with the painful heartbreak the shooting caused our nation, and the LGBTQ community. I was left shocked and devastated, as this served as another reminder of how far we are from peace. I admit my hope was lost. Seeing how one person could take so many innocent lives over things like race and sexuality shook me to my core, leaving me with little faith in my fellow man.

The Stonewall Inn is a historical monument, which serves a great importance to the LGBTQ community for its history of the 1969 riots that started the gay rights movement. In the wake of the Orlando shooting, people flocked to The Stonewall Inn to leave flowers and candles as a vigil for the lives lost. I was moved by what I saw when I got there.

Couples holding hands, holding each other. People crying. Strangers taking the time to talk to one another. People standing in silence looking upon the faces and names of those who had died. A Muslim man was there advocating for peace and unity. People stopped to talk to him and thank him for his message. In the half hour I was there I encountered dozens of people; gay, straight, from all races and walks of life, came to show solidarity, to acknowledge, pay respect, and remember the innocent people killed.

My faith in humanity, my faith in the world around me, was restored that day. I know there is hope for a brighter future.

Even the Clouds // 6.19.16

Lying on my back, feeling the warm grass beneath me A relaxing moment captured on Roosevelt Island
As I look up, I notice the clouds surging through the sky Even the clouds move quickly over Manhattan

Where are they going?
Surely clouds hold no responsibilities
No important meetings they're running late to
No last minute lunch dates or kids to pick up at school
They exist above us, beholden to nothing but their gliding across the sky

The astounding energy of the city rises, forcing even the clouds to race to keep up Movement, always pushing forward, always taking another step
The clouds too keep in time with their city
Endlessly trudging forward through the New York City sky

Going Unseen // 7.01.16

I couldn't tell you where I was, because I don't remember
Maybe somewhere on the Upper East Side, searching aimlessly for a subway station
The sun was finishing its decent into the horizon,
The warmth from the scorching day that had just ended still rising from the ground below me
The city had fallen into a quiet hum

My attention was caught by the soft, distant sound of a guitar
As I turned my head, I noticed the doorman of the building directly to my right He was sitting behind a large desk, alone, quietly playing
I stood there for a moment, watching him through the glass
He smiled as he played his guitar, seemingly enjoying these precious moments he had to himself

These are the small moments that go unseen
The moments we take for ourselves, to do something we love
The moments that aren't shared

In this city so full
With millions of people living millions of different days, all at once Imagine how many of these small, magical moments are happening
How many guitars are being played, poems being written, and prayers being said Simultaneously all going unseen

I walked away, a smile on my face
The doorman's soft guitar becoming continually more distant Its sound eventually going unheard

Continued online at journal2020.com.

Photo by Nicole B. Ryan

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

WHAT DYING YOUNG TEACHES YOU

By Jacqueline Farrell

"Martin's funeral is on Friday."

He spoke the words to a silent and anticipating congregation. Silence hung in the air. Yet I knew he had enjoyed saying those words, enjoyed how much like a pastor he sounded.

On the previous Friday I stayed late at Goddard Middle School's talent show rehearsal. I was operating the spotlight and hadn't told my mother. Apparently because of this she called the school and the police, a problem which could have been fixed with the cell phone I was denied until nearly seventeen. When I got home on the activity bus on that day of middle school, she raged at me. But it was not out loud and obvious rage; it was the kind that expressed itself in pressed lips and stunted words. The cooler her demeanor, the angrier I knew she was.

When I stepped through my front door, I looked down the long hallway and saw my mother and father sitting at the kitchen table around an orange plastic Blockbuster bowl of pasta salad. Rather than approach them, I decided to slink through

the door to the laundry room. I took the etched mirror I had made in Mrs. Bates' art class out of my backpack. I had X-Acto knifed the edges of the template for weeks. The template my father had spent hours cropping on the computer from photos of 'American Beauty' by 'The Grateful Dead'. I put the mirror on the laundry room counter and busied myself with 'Windex' and a cloth, resentful of my mother's aggression and the surely noxious pasta salad.

My hands slowed when I realized what they were discussing.

As I listened, I realized I had to finish that task up, right now. If I didn't, the mirror would sit there, in dust and unused cleaning cloths.

Hesitantly and uneasily, I moved toward the kitchen. I stood before my parents with my chest open and my hands plainly to my sides. I stared at them accusingly for something I knew even then that they couldn't possibly fix.

"Do you know that Martin Walworth boy from youth group?" my mom asked. "Who was in the hospital last week?"

"Yes," I said, nailed to the floor by the years-long crush I was hiding from them.

"He died yesterday," my mom said, her face like wax.

I looked at them in blank silence. I turned and walked slowly to my room, sat on my bed staring at the wall, feeling for the first time that my eyes were like corks and my throat like a lidded mason jar, and that all that was in me could not pour out through futile tears.

We tried to go to the funeral the following Sunday. The family banded up into our late-model SUV in our Sunday finest. I wailed the whole way, which brought my parents' ridicule. We arrived to an empty church—turns out we got the date wrong. My parents drove home in a silence full of shame. The real funeral was a week out.

That week before the real funeral, one friend, who never thought deeply about much but had a big heart, invited me over for a sleepover to watch 'Spider Man' and eat ice cream. But when a song by 'My Chemical Romance' about dying young came on, she knew to ask me if I was okay.

"It's fine," I said, turning over and looking at the popcorn ceiling from my sleeping bag on the living room floor. I thought bitterly to myself—what do these boys know about dying young?

We arrived to an empty church—turns out we got the date wrong.

I remember that I went with her to Target the week before the funeral and we both bought cheap, showy espadrilles. I pretended that I would wear them to the funeral. My mom made me return them. I still hate espadrilles.

. . . I most deeply regret saying: "I don't love you enough for that."

Later that week, my mom and I were on the way to an oral surgeon in the foothills. I had been going there for years over a receding gum line, and every time my mother took me in for a surgery, we were fighting. I think this was not an anomaly, but a statistical measure of the state of things between us. "You need to stop crying about Martin," she told me. "Strong people have to pull themselves together. It's getting irritating to me."

My heart felt like a well, a sticky well with a clotted-over surface. I thought of its invisibility to my parents, and yet their intricate capacity to needle and pierce the clotted skin. I responded with one of the things I most deeply regret saying: "I don't love you enough for that."

After that there was the kind of silence in which she used to punish me without words and instead with a hot, terrifying anger. I suspect this moment has found a recessed cavity in her heart.

I remember very little of the eulogy. A song of the Christian worship genre which I was not to hear again for nearly a decade cried out softly in the rafters, 'Almighty God'. As though it were begging, as though it were crying out in helpless darkness in the only terms it knew. The chapel was full of sound. It was a groaning sound that was like the wooden belly of an old ship, straining against a storm outside and leaving the dark, interior space under a spell of quiet moaning, the sound of many people grieving together. It amounted to a slow, deep lake. I knew the sound in this room even though I had never heard it before because the sound of grieving, like the smell of burnt hair, is written on the inside of human skin.

There was a projector and a screen above the pulpit. The youth group had turned Martin's Facebook wall into a memorial, the screen displaying messages from it.

"I thought we needed you here on earth but I guess God decided to take one of his angels back." And, "One time you were in the emergency room with me on the other side of the curtain, and you didn't know I was there. You had broken your arm at football practice because you didn't know how to play, but you just kept on bragging about how you'd done it. The doctor just let you. I couldn't stop giggling."

It was humid and small flies navigated above the lawn, white in the sprinklers

After the funeral, there was a booklet open on a table. People were writing their memories of Martin. I went up to it and silently used my pen, the thing which has become my quiet mode of protest against the world. Martin was the first time I used it, but there were others later. When I became crushed by high-school depression, I used the pen against literally thousands of handwritten journal pages, in some cases even carving them up. I used it the first time I failed out of college to express to my parents that I was unfit for engineering school. When I starved for my work in a bug-filled apartment three years later, I even used my pen against God. Martin, I wrote, "When the youth group went biking up Platte Canyon, we got way ahead of everyone, and chased each other back down the whole way. And then for a while we sat under trees beside the river, just the two of us." Martin at his time of death was two years older than me. It may not seem like much, but to a pair of middle-school kids, two years might as well have been ten. The year before he died, peach fuzz had appeared above his lip.

I signed my name and walked out of the church into a bright day of spring. It was humid and small flies navigated above the lawn, white in the sprinklers. Easter was coming.

My father, the laugh lines on his face now pressed into grief, put an arm around my back and took me to the car.

I went to high school with some other people who went through this with me. One of them became one of my best friends. I think we even dated over it, until we fizzled out over recognition that the times and places of real, complex love were elsewhere, and because sixteen is just as stupid as fourteen when it comes to these things. After we had broken up, I sat with him many Friday nights on the porch of his parents' house after our friends had left the coffee shop, and he would look out into the distance, eyes darkened with something other than age. He would say, "Martin taught me to live. You never know when you're going to go. That's why I like Zorba so much," referring to the classic Greek tale of life well-lived that we had both read that year. He thought he believed this. But I could see that, deep down, he knew he didn't. What he did know was that he hadn't learned how to live. Doug would come up with other life mottos from time to time, but there would always be that dark, confused look in his eyes as he tried to convince himself he had found the right one.

I heard rumors after that of other youth group members who had gone on to major in theater or business. Most of them seemed normal. There was one boy, Travis Bentley, of whom the only thing I heard was a "he's— well— struggling" from my parents. He was the one who didn't eat for a week afterwards. I don't think he graduated. There was another girl who wound up in Hollywood, as my parents said "on the child-actress route." I never saw her in a movie, and I hope that she met a better fate than Travis.

A few years later I was cleaning out the hoarder's accumulation from under my bed. It was the end of my last summer of high school, and my belongings were packed for the move to engineering school. A small leaflet of paper had been pushed to the center and was lying on the dusty carpet. I retrieved it and flipped it over—it was a picture of him, cut from a church bulletin, horribly faded and bleached, the acid-paper eating and blackening the image. He was wearing 'Converse All-Stars' and holding a guitar. He was four years younger than I was. I stuffed the picture to the bottom of my trash.

I discovered a dusty shoebox. The cardboard had become brittle and the corners of the lid separated when I took it

off. Inside, neatly packed, were paraphernalia from that church. I unburied them, useless to me now: an elementary-sized Bible t-shirt, a rolled-up little booklet of Sunday school lessons. In a wadded handkerchief, I discovered something I thought I lost. A present my grandma ordered from a catalogue when I was five and smashed my face through a table. We called it the bluebird of happiness. When she gave it to me, I was in so much pain that I could barely see or hold it.

I hadn't packed away too many happy things into that church box: gaudy adolescence, familial apathy, an experience of death. But apparently, I had packed away that bird I loved—waiting to be discovered on that last hot night of summer when my girlhood was about to end.

If you asked me what young death taught me, I couldn't tell you.

If you asked me what young death taught me, I couldn't tell you. People will say a lot of things about it, but I think that might be because they haven't experienced it. It tells you nothing. It screams nothing louder than a freight train loaded down with coal, skidding toward you on steel rails, blaring but unable to stop. You are that penny the kids put out on the track for it to run over—you squirt out flattened, and they laugh.

Some people use God to make sense out of young death, as I think his parents probably did. Even though God has made sense of nearly every tragedy in my life, he never made sense of Martin. I don't know if he ever will. Eventually, I'll get there and we can have a chat. Me and Martin and God. But I don't think it will be about how he died—I think it will be about how good God was to us, in my long time on earth, and in his short time. That was one thing he saw at fifteen that I didn't.

The year before I came back to God, I went to a drumline competition. The drumline from the high school Martin would have attended was there performing, and in the audience, I saw Martin's parents. He was their only son. Doug and I went up to talk to them, but he did most of the talking. I just stared in awe. They looked like gods, there on the grass. His dad in a Hawaiian

shirt, his mom in a sunhat. You can't touch some things. You can't explain them. All you can do is see what they are, feel the weight of them.

It took me a long time to discover God again. The churchiness of my middle school experience gave way when that church dismantled under a greedy pastor. The congregation moved out when they sold the building to something else. They painted over the walls of the youth room. If you went there now you could scrape up the paint and discover the way we painted it when we were still there, with clashing colors and bad drawings, and with our paint-covered handprints. His handprint is on the wall beside the door. I have no evidence to confirm it, but I think that if I went there and scraped up the paint and put my hand on the wall, his print would be slightly smaller than mine.

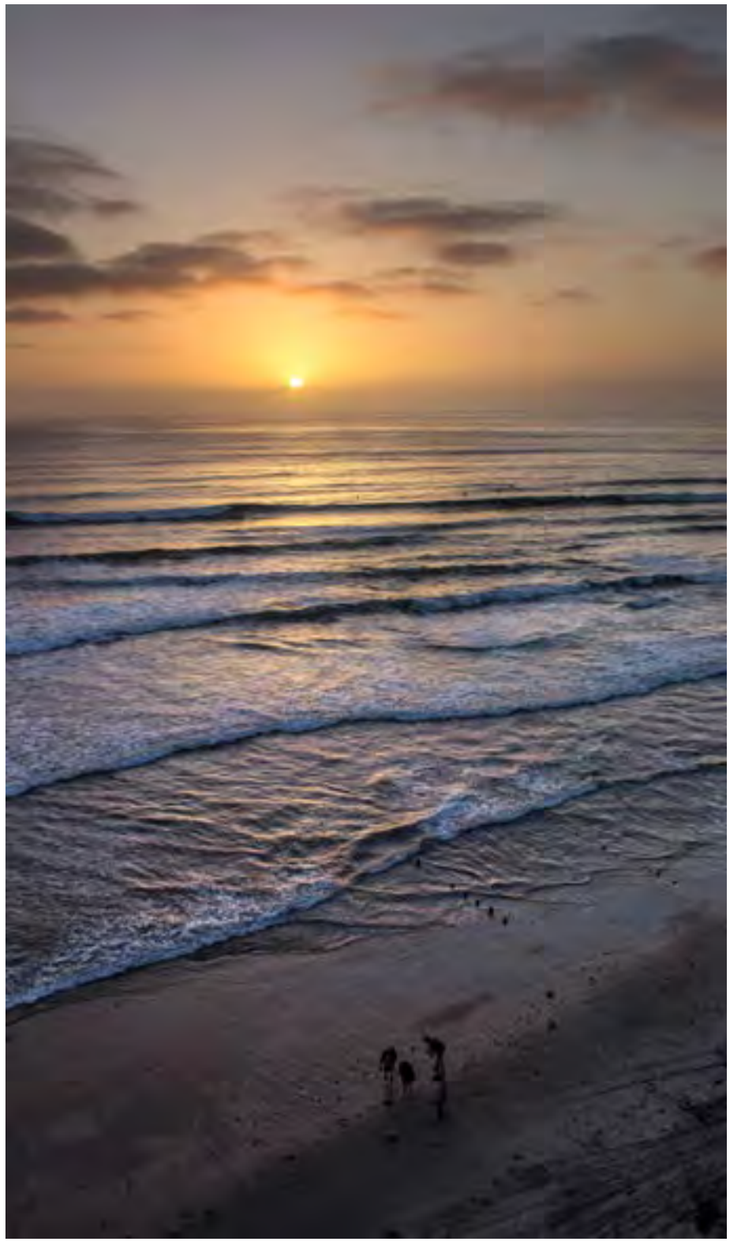


Photo by Jared Myers

MONARCH

by Taylor Pattison

I.

An old acquaintance once referred to my only friend as the porcelain pal. The manufacturer carved my pal's name above his stainless steel handle that seemed to always need an extra jiggle. The name read Sloan. I interacted more with this toilet than anything else. Sloan really knew me, he knew every me. As a fellow prisoner, my dear friend Sloan witnessed every flavor of my self-destruction, manifested in color. The beige walls of my space systematically repainted by the reds of blood, yellows of urine, various browns, blues, and, of course, black. The space within these walls provided me solace, where a codependent love affair between my sadness and me flourished. Like my father, Sloan observed from a distance in silence as my struggles with my liquid lover worsened.

Daily visits to Sloan always followed quality time with the most important 'her' in my life, the bottle. I identified alcohol as a female simply because she nurtured my sadness and I loved her for it. Yet, that night I hurt her, again.

She deserved it. After all, I loved her and she did not reciprocate, she just wanted more from me. In a fit of rage I broke her bones on that shit-brown mini-fridge she slept in. Sloan watched in silence as I picked the glass out of my trembling fingertips. She nevertheless nurtured me as an antiseptic, disinfecting the wound she had herself created. Alcohol as an innate trickster appealed to my senses and seemingly healed the outsides. Little did I know that this cunning little bitch played the long con, to quench her insatiable lust for my insides.

II.

Winters here consisted of an ever-persistent black. Unlike neighboring Chicago, everything slowed in my suburb of Aurora, Illinois. Outside, howling winds whistled through brittle leafless tree branches. Faint scratching on the window sill moaned through the cracks, this sound secreted the taste of blood on my tongue. Fond memories from winter's past got me thinking this cycle might finally end. Never mind how I acquired papa's handgun. Never mind everything in that state. At last, I achieved enough courage. That numbing pain inside would soon end. My lack of identity would no longer matter.

Teardrops dribbled down my rosy acne ridden face as I inserted my father's Nine-millimeter handgun into my mouth. I shut my eyes, engaged single action, and flipped the safety off. One deep breath plus one squeeze would equal freedom.

Somehow, five pounds of trigger pull became 500. As I opened my eyes, the rear right on the gun gave me perspective. Clarity proceeded. Only emptiness separated my father's Beretta and me. I pulled it out, wiped off the drool, and tossed it across the yellow-brown carpet. I recognized that moment as the eye of the storm.

I pardoned Miss Smirnoff from her box, and forgave her once again for biting my hand. I figured all love hurts and I rationalized in a mutter to myself, "all high school freshmen must go through this at some point." School started in 5 hours so I put my bandages on and drank to blackout. My tears dried, and my long sleeves would again cover the season's battle wounds.

Alcohol as an innate trcikster appealed to my senses and seemingly healed the outsides.

III.

My teammates screamed, "Pull, pull, pull, GO!!!" as I flip-turned the 3rd wall at our senior year sectional swim meet. As team captain and one of the fastest back-strokers in the greater southwestern Chicago suburbs, I had to win that race. I needed to qualify for the state championship. I had always swum well under this "state cut" during other races throughout the year. Olympic trials seemed inevitable at the rate I was progressing.

I was not bipolar.
I was an alcoholic and a drug addict.

As my teammates screamed for me, so did my rotator cuffs. I partially tore the tendons in both of them the year prior and swum with damaged shoulders my entire senior year. They once again flared up and failed me as I swam too slowly to qualify for the championship. I struggled to pull myself out of the pool and hobbled the twenty feet to the adjacent warm-down pool. Tears filled my goggles, but not from the physical pain.

For whatever reason, I finally accepted what I feared all season. No more swimming. I knew that from then on I was going to ride the drug and alcohol train until the wheels fell off.

IV.

I graduated high school in May of 2009. By September of 2011, I had destroyed my relationships with my parents, my brother, all of my extended family, my girlfriend, and every last one of my friends. I nearly totaled my car twice, beat two misdemeanors in court, dodged one felony altogether, and medically withdrew from two colleges. I had seen half a dozen psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers and was prescribed nearly twice as many psychotropic medicines. Like the good drug addict I was, I manipulated my doctors, my family, and my friends. I somehow had everyone convinced that I was merely a victim of bipolar disorder. I was not bipolar. I was an alcoholic and a drug addict.

My first exposure to Alcoholics Anonymous and the 12 steps followed a brief stint in a psych ward in October of 2011. After my intake at the psych ward to 'stabilize my meds', I tried to dance around how much drugs and alcohol I used weekly. I copped to half of what I really swallowed and they put me in a drug and alcohol "concerns" group. "Concerns" grew enough to send me to a more intensive outpatient program for substance abuse, requiring AA meetings. I played the game, continued to use, got kicked out of the program, and was medically advised to go to treatment. Naturally, I manipulated my parents into not making me go to an inpatient treatment center by making more empty promises to go to AA meetings, and get my life together on my own.

November 2nd 2011 was the first time I was entirely honest with anyone about my life. This man went by Officer Summers, a member of the Naperville, IL Police department. My using cycle finally stopped in Naperville, the neighboring township to my Aurora. I was returning from a routine trip to Chicago to get my favorite designer hallucinogenic drug. As per usual, I finished my drugs in the parking lot to avoid a possible possession charge if pulled over. Driving under the influence was second nature to me, but this time was different.

I was sucked into a full psychosis as I pulled my father's 300 horsepower Oxford Green Jaguar XJ8 out of the parking lot and proceeded towards the highway. I had never driven under the influence in my dad's car. My psychoses entailed a manifestation of voices in my head. Half of these voices were calm and positive, the other half were horrific. Whatever music was playing always fueled these oddly spiritual psychoses, but this time the positive voices could not be heard.

I attempted to engage the cruise control and coast home, but I zoned out. The cruise control did not engage. Horns from other cars helped me zone back in. I realized I was weaving in my lane and traveling a mere 45 mph, so I floored the pedal in a vain attempt to control this green beast of a car. The 300 horsepower engine had me traveling at a near 100 mph in no time. I took a deep breath and slapped myself

out of the psychotic trip that gripped me. Luckily I was able to slow down to the speed of traffic. Of course I tried the old cruise control ritual again and the same cycle continued for the next 15 miles on the highway.

. . . I was terrified these guys were aliens planning on abducting me.

Somehow I avoided crashing on the highway and made it to my exit in Naperville. I came to a stoplight, stopped too late, and rear-ended the car in front of me. The guys in the car were reasonable and we agreed to just exchange insurance information. I somehow kept the fact that I was on drugs contained, even though I was terrified these guys were aliens planning on abducting me.

Two cop cars pulled up. The lead officer asked, "What's going on here?"

I tried to play it off like a simple traffic accident, just exchanging insurance. "Oh yeah, just a car accident I see," stated Officer Summers as he looked deep into my eyes and smirked. They sat me down on the curb but did not handcuff me. His partner chimed in with, "Come-on man, where's the dope at? Your eyes are all pinned out, just tell us where the heroin is so we don't have to bring dogs and cut daddy's car up." They clearly thought I was running heroin from Chicago to the suburbs, which was a fair assumption in the Chicago area. Officer Summers pointed straight up in the air and said; "you see that helicopter up there?" I looked up and nodded a yes. "That has been tracking you. We have gotten multiple reports in the last half hour of a green jaguar driving recklessly all over the highway. You know how fucking expensive it is to dispatch a helicopter?" Tears of relief started to well in my eyes.

Teardrops again ran down my acne-ridden cheeks. Before he started to call bullshit on my tears I came unzipped. I spat out, "Listen, you get lied to all day. For once! I am not trying to manipulate. I can't stop using this shit and have been on the fringes of getting kicked out of my parent's house for months now. I am relieved and know I am going to jail. Any

change is better than this shit." Finally admitting defeat caused a strange sensation of calm deep in my diaphragm and my fingertips tingled as if they were falling asleep. My tears and hyperventilating began to subside. I looked off at the nearly setting sun, and waited for my handcuffing. Officer Summers broke eye contact with me and walked away to talk with his partner.

Everyone knew there were no measures my parents could take to prevent me from using . . .

As I sat on the curb with my thousand-yard stare, a yellow monarch butterfly fluttered into my line of sight. It danced over the brittle branches of a nearby shrub. As the butterfly landed on one of these branches, Officer Summers spoke at me, "Where's your mom at?"

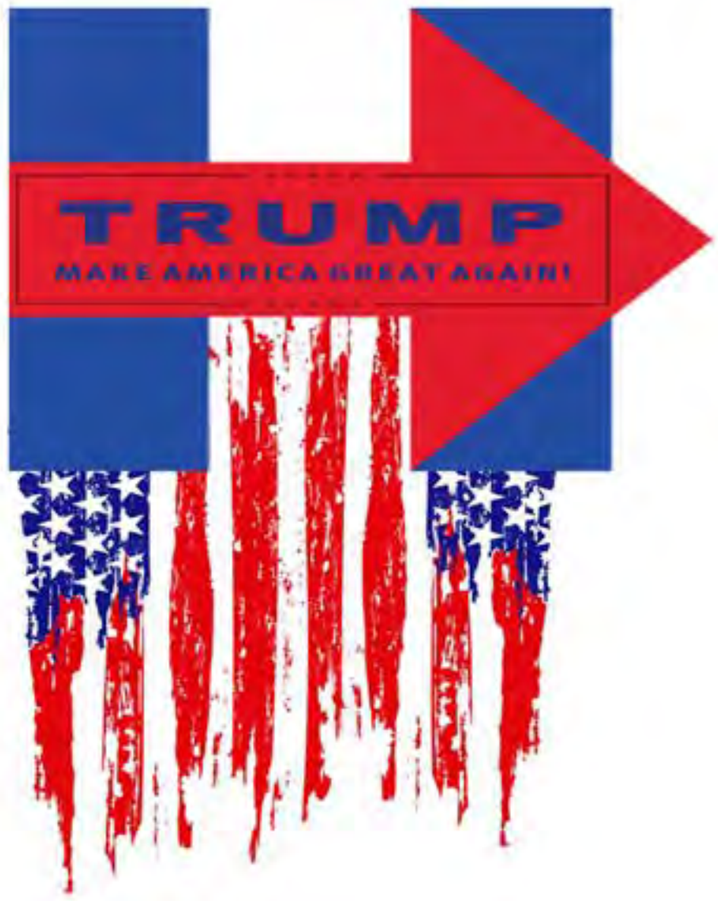
I looked at him, "Home—I think." He stared me down, "Listen, we can hit you with reckless endangerment, erratic driving, driving while intoxicated, driving under the influence, and a litany of other traffic violations. Jail is clearly not what you need. Get some help." I gazed over at him and his partner sincerely dumbfounded. He continued, "Call your mom. If she can get here in 20 minutes, we will release you to her, and she will follow up with us that you're going to get some help." I paused for a good ten seconds, and blurted at them, "are you fucking serious right now?" The partner followed with, "you want us to change our minds? We really shouldn't be doing this, so believe me, if you get caught for anything in between now and going to treatment, we will get involved and throw all of today's shit at you." I hurried to call my mom. Minutes later, she arrived more livid than I had ever seen. Slapping me around and swearing me up and down, she herded me into the car and took me home.

A couple hours later my mother got off of the phone with a lockdown 28-day dual-diagnosis addiction treatment center in Minnesota. I was set to travel on November 14th 2011, which

meant two weeks of drug addict limbo. Everyone knew there were no measures my parents could take to prevent me from using in the two weeks between. During those two weeks I lied about going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings to get out of the house and got high on whatever possible instead. Often I would go to the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings; I'd just get high before and after. My parents had a close eye on me and assumed I was still figuring out how to get high. It did not matter to me. Nothing mattered in that state anymore except getting on that airplane on November 14th.

Ultimately, I managed to evade the law for the two weeks and made it on the airplane to Minnesota. My journey to recovery began that day. November 14,th 2011 was my original recovery date. I wish I could say I stayed sober since then, but I did not. After staying inpatient in Minnesota for thirty-eight days I went to Delray Beach, Florida for another four months of treatment. I stayed sober for thirteen months and relapsed in December of 2012. I was using drugs in Florida for one month and my addiction continued like it never stopped. Within the first week of using again, I started using a drug that I had not done yet: crack cocaine. Attempts to stop on my own by going to AA meetings brought the same result. I could not stop on my own; I needed a new world.

In mid January of 2013, I called my father in a drunken stupor and begged him to send me to treatment again. The next day my father called me up and told me had arranged for my AA sponsor to take me to a treatment center in neighboring Boca Raton, Florida. I was ready, willing, and grateful for the physical change of environment. Sloan could tell you how many objects I had flushed down a toilet. That day nearly four years ago, for the first time ever, I flushed away the last drugs I've ever done.



Art by Jackson Barnett

THE POLITICS OF WINGS & BEER

by Sean Anderson

Two people sitting at a bar. Conservative. Liberal. Wings. Beer. America. Friends.

I had put off completing my ballot for weeks. It was not something I was looking forward to, but something I knew I should do. This would be my second time voting for a president, though this time I had no respect for my party's candidate. In a rebellious period of my life I had declared myself a republican, much to the dislike of my liberal parents. This election would test that decision and my beliefs. Out of nearly 20 candidates, no one expected Trump to win. I doubt that that even Trump thought that he would win. I recall a car ride down to Denver in January with several other GOP interns. We had all collectively agreed that we would quit if Trump received the nomination. Slowly, the other candidates began dropping like flies. The once promising contenders had been vanquished by the terrific Donald J. Trump. It was surreal to watch the party unravel and friendships become strained. The rise of "Trumpism" pushed me more toward the center than any "I'm with Her" advertising campaign ever could. I was disgusted to hear Trump apologists

try to explain offensive rhetoric, lewd actions, and failed businesses. It seemed like the more he put his foot in his mouth, the more powerful he became. America was at a crossroads and no one could have predicted the result.

Saying no one expected Trump's victory isn't exactly accurate. All my life I have lived in liberal bubbles. Living in Boulder or San Francisco, it is easy to forget about the rest of the country. As Trump's victory became imminent, even many anchors and pundits would fall victim to the same metropolitan mindset. An eccentric billionaire was about to become the most powerful man in the world and everyone was wondering if America would still be standing come morning.

"Another IPA?" asked the bartender at The Sink. I said that I might as well have one, I still had a few wings to polish off and needed something to wash them down. After dropping off my ballot at the UMC and collecting my "I Voted" sticker, I met up with an old friend from high school to get some lunch on the Hill. We decided to go to the Sink and were pleasantly surprised to find that they were offering a free beer to anyone who voted. Here we sat on a Tuesday afternoon drinking beer and eating chicken wings. Two friends from different sides of the aisle partaking in a great American pastime. Our talk of the election was minimal and light, mainly consisting of jokes about the candidates. The time for fighting and disagreement was past, and now we just sat at the bar shooting the breeze. A testament to friendship in spite of differences and the future of our nation.

Two friends sitting at a bar.

The rise of 'Trumpism' pushed me more towards the center than any 'I'm with Her' campaign ever could.

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

SWEET JENNY I'M SINKING DOWN

by Meredith Sherock

The road to Youngstown is always the same. Take the highway east of the airport, down a stretch of densely forested acres. After half an hour or so of Springsteen humming on the rental car radio you notice the immediate shift from green to grey, as woodland canopies are replaced by the cement blocks of postindustrial ruin. The country air always seems to be vacuumed out of your lungs as the nearing city smog suddenly circulates through them. I never understood how a forest and a city could coexist so close to one another, but in Youngstown it somehow made sense. History had proven that the land was fertile for both trees and industries, but not for humankind itself. At least not today.

For centuries Youngstown thrived as a manufacturing capital. The town led steel production for the nation, and waves of European immigrants flooded the area seeking employment. These workers brought nothing with them but their children, a

Photo by Noah Dreeban

pair of steel-toed boots, and the fierce spirit of Eastern Europe that pulsed through their blood. Over time, union strikes became a common occurrence among this crowd. In 1952, the most widespread strike took place, focused primarily on workers of Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company. The union strikers eventually attracted the attention of President Truman, who issued an order to seize control of the company and force the rebels back to work. The issue was taken to the Supreme Court, in which justices ruled against Truman and demanded that the steel companies be turned back to their rightful management. Youngstown workers rejoiced, but their victory didn't last long. Demand for steel plummeted to then ground in the 1970s, as did the factories. Bulldozers tumbled the historic smoke towers that bordered the city like a grey picket fence. Trains deported the few lucky workers to new factories, while the rest were left in the relics of their history. The population dropped nearly fifty percent in twenty years and by the time the new century rolled around, Youngstown was left in ashes.

I never knew my grandfather. His life and death were never spoken of, despite the size and sociability of our family. The only fragments I've come to understand are about as generic as one can get: his job, his family, his appearance. In every picture I've seen, he looks well-aware that he's become the handsome legacy of my surname. Dark skin, green eyes, stoic expression - he looks like a rough Italian mobster who's seen one too many wrongs in his life. He looks just like my dad and my dad looks just like me, so at least I can say that I've come to know my grandfather through heritable physicality. He's been described as a quiet man, and I suppose his absence of words followed him into death. I don't know when my grandfather died, but I know it was too soon. A life in the factory does that, or so I've been told.

A couple years ago my grandmother moved in with her daughter. It seemed like the rational thing to do. Having been a widow

Today they're silently fighting for resurrection of a once-stable town and for a return to prosperity. In fighting, they refuse to move on.

for nearly twenty-five years, and with retirement funds slowly dwindling due to a passion for handbags and Olive Garden luncheons, she decided to give up the family Victorian house in an act of conservation. Within a year, things were packed up and her home of half a century was left behind. It was certainly cheaper splitting rent with her daughter's family, but already I began to realize that things were off to a sickening start. The price she was paying for a new place was immediately questioned, merely based off the billing situation. How could an 84-year-old, four-foot eight-inch tall retired woman pay for half a house, especially when the other half is split between four able-bodied people? I was irritated with the idea before I ever visited their new place. If only I knew that it could all get worse.

After nearly fifty years of a fallen economy, Youngstown has yet to rebound. It's a city forever trapped in its once-thriving past, which is evident on every street corner and in the eyes of every olive-skinned resident. Broken windows decorate any given building, mirroring the broken souls pacing the adjacent sidewalks. Youngstown is part of America's Rust Belt, a modern ghost town where its people pass the decaying Sheet & Tube plant silently, pretending the economic collapse never happened. I have a theory that there's still an underlying sense of rage and rebellion in the Youngstown blood, a product of Italian heritage and laborious shifts working at the mills. Years of hard labor and strikes bred a city of proud, hardheaded citizens. These people are still unwilling to let the fight go, although the union strikes and steel work are a thing of the past. Today they're silently fighting for resurrection of a once-stable town and for a return to prosperity. In fighting, they refuse to move on. As a result they're trapped somewhere in the past, existing in an eternal state of denial. The wave of change and rejection that overtook the area is still visible today, and I get a glimpse of ancient memory with every trip I take.

My two cousins are vile human beings. Family is family, I'm aware, but certain personalities develop in a family tree that simply taint the bloodline, bringing into question if these people are in fact your own. Never have I witnessed anyone disrespect my grandmother the way they do, let alone disrespect anyone of her age and fragility. Last winter I was horrified to hear that my grandmother was hospitalized for a broken hip. Too lazy to shovel the driveway and pick up the paper, my cousins allowed my grandmother to trek through the ice and snow to fetch it for them. Any sensible individual would know that one fall can be fatal to an old woman, but in this particular act of self-entitlement my cousins nearly offed the matron of the household.

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Once my father drove me through his memories of Youngstown. He drove me by a weed-infested plot of land, the former site of the steel mill where he used to work. "As a number cruncher I never worked in the factory itself" he said, implying the existence of a steel-constructed hierarchy. We passed by the mill where my grandfather worked, and his father, and his father's brothers, and his father's brother's sons. Somewhere there was the crumbling carcass of Jenny, the furnace of Youngstown Sheet & Tube, left to decay forty years ago. I saw the small Catholic school where my father attended K-12. "It was a diverse school," my dad commented. "We had one Irish kid and one German kid to balance out the Italians." Down the street there was a Sparklemart, the only grocery store in sight. Even as a child I grimaced at the irony of such a title, disturbed by the often vacant shelves, selection of outdated children's toys, and the bleak inauthenticity felt in each employee's "have a nice day." Nearby a motel's sign flickered, "Free H O." A week later and the "B" was still just as vacant from the "HBO" as customers were from the business. People were scarce, and when you did see one it felt like you've seen them all: olive skin, dark hair, green eyes. Looking through the town's phonebook, there's rarely a last name that doesn't end in a vowel. The sameness is overwhelming, and inescapably eerie.

The drive through Youngstown is something I can never forget. From end to end it's less than an hour, but everything

seems to happen in slow motion. Red lights stop you just a few seconds too long, allowing downtrodden people to cross in such a way that makes you question if their shoes are full of lead, or stacks of heavy steel. Smoke-like clouds linger overhead, blocking the sun and freezing the earth in its rotation. The world stands still in Youngstown, and it's chilling to witness. It's as though time has stopped for all of its inhabitants, industries, and infrastructures. No matter where you are in Youngstown, it feels like ghosts are following in your shadow.

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During my first visit to my grandmother's new place, I witnessed the family's incomprehensible behavior firsthand. Her daughter scrolled through Facebook in a total trance, pausing only to verbally assault some townsperson's actions through the anonymity of cyberspace. My cousins, two young men emerging into adulthood beyond all odds, flanked their mother on either side, all their weight leaning against the kitchen counter. The first of many demands broke the silence. "Grandma," my twenty-something-year-old, partially-college-educated, entitled-piece-of-shit cousin said, "make me a sandwich." His younger brother, in well-practiced synchronization, chimed in, "Grandma, me too. I need a sandwich."

My grandmother, either too exhausted to fight or too accustomed to these demands, obeyed. "Just a moment," she told them, "I'm still working on your laundry." To this, my young butterball of a cousin scowled, accentuating the perspiration accumulating below his chins. Their mother, rather than offering help or pointing out that her children are fully capable of feeding themselves, did not raise a finger, other than to vigorously craft some Facebook post on her keyboard.

I was, and still am, appalled to say the least. Never have I encountered anyone treating my grandmother that way, let alone any individual of age and status. This behavior was quite typical of how the household ran, and I continued witnessing this abuse throughout my stay. There was an aura of privilege walking through the halls of this house like a tormented ghost. It seeped through the walls and creaked into the floorboards and twirled into a whirlwind on the icy driveway where my

grandmother fell. It's interlaced in my cousins' words and caresses the outward curves of their bodies pulling tighter, tighter until they obey its commands. These individuals are vessels to their own selfishness, greed, and self-entitlement, and follow these qualities willingly, without remorse.

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Like most immigrants, the Illias family came to Youngstown with nothing. They stepped off the boat, hand in hand, clutching the last memories of Italy their family would know. They settled into a garage attached to their tenant's house, for it was all they could afford. He found work in the mills, toiling away every day as his wife tended to their growing family. Soon they had six beautiful babies, all of whom were raised in the confinement of that cold garage. She stayed at home while he commuted to work, returning at night to pull off his grease-stained boots and collapse on a lone mattress. Every day and every night was the same routine, as this once-temporary living space became a home where memories were made.

This family's modest lifestyle eventually paid off, despite the years of poverty and struggle. Two of their children advanced to medical school, one became a lawyer, and most have families of their own. These are now my great aunts and uncles, a second generation that inherited the hard work of their parents. The Illiases were the epitome of immigrant determination and labor. First generation immigrants have an undeniably honorable work ethic, laboring day after day for minimum wage. Not only was there no other choice, but these individuals were simply thankful for what they could receive. Just having escaped a country of political turmoil and poverty, the immigrants saw America as the land of high hopes, of promise and prosperity. Having traveled here on a boat ride through the clouds to heaven, these families believed America could never let them down. The Illiases, like most families that sailed to here with high aspirations, worked to their death with the vision that their descendants would benefit from their labor. They came here to establish security for us all.

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I was part of the mistreatment that I loathed.

Looking back to my last trip to Youngstown, I begin to experience utmost unease as I am transported into that tight kitchen, leaning against the counter, noticing the loud steps of my cousin while tracing the weathered lines of my grandmother's face. It's all too vivid to forget. I remember there being a swelling in my stomach, bursting with rage, horror, and something else I could not yet identify, something burning at my insides with the intensity of a million smoke towers. Suddenly I no longer felt like an observer, but a contributor to my cousins' attitudes. All I could think of was my personal responsibility, my role in neither encouraging nor halting this immoral scene. Quite simply I didn't know if I wanted to hide from the abuse, mend this gap between generations, or apologize to my grandmother on behalf of her inconsiderate grandchildren. My silence spoke for itself. I was no savior, I wasn't going to mend this scene despite how strongly my heart ached for me to. I was there as an outsider who escaped Youngstown and Ohio and seemed permanently transplanted as far away as possible. Not quite part of this house, of this city, of this slave-driving relationship between people I'm supposed to love.

Whether it was my place or not to speak out is irrelevant now. All I can accept is that I was there, and I was quiet. I was part of the mistreatment that I loathed.

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The only concrete piece of my grandfather's life that I've come to understand is his occupation. He worked in the Youngstown steel mills, as did everyone else in his generation. The only break he had from work was during the war, when he registered as a medic. He spent years touring Europe, tending to the injured but never facing combat himself. My father remembers an old helmet in his attic with a swastika hastily taped to the side, surrounded by signatures of forgotten comrades. My grandfather had discovered it in a battlefield in Germany, and kept it as a memorial to his time overseas. Years later my grandmother threw the helmet away. She got rid of his bayonet and rifle. She discarded pictures of concentration camps, firsthand witness to those twisted and tormented corpses. This history, she argued,

would have no tangible value in the future. This history was not Youngstown history and it was not hers, therefore it must go. My grandmother, a woman so trapped in and in love with the past, sent history to the graveyard where her husband rested.

My cousins have never seen a day of work in their lives; they've never felt the blisters of labor on their hands and feet after a long day at the mill. They've never considered the priorities of others; they haven't chosen to sleep on a cold floor so that the ones they love could rest well. They've never protested for anything but a thicker sandwich and faster service; they haven't had to fight for a higher wage, a safer workplace or a place to live. They've never lost anything but their phone chargers or the bills in their wallets. They will never lose their steady jobs in the face of reconstruction, or lose friends in a war, or lose the love of their life too young, or lose the heart of their hometown in the forgotten pages of history. If these children could live the Youngstown dream and death, maybe then they'd have some perspective.

This is the disparity between my family's generations. This is how the beautiful ideals and values that my family sailed to America for came crumbling down, over a mere century. Not so long ago, families came to this country with nothing but their hands and their hope. It took years to build up Youngstown to the industrial capital it was, all of which was destroyed before I was even born. They gave all their labor to this city and all their love to their descendants, hoping it would all pay off in the end. But now this labor is gone as the industry is no longer considered valuable, and the love is gone as the individuals no longer value it.

Maybe this is why Youngstown is as desolate and troubled as it is today. There's a tension between what is now and what once was. People today are afraid to admit that they've let their relatives down, that they're not living the American dream. Perhaps we could call this laziness, or perhaps it's mere defeat. The vision of Youngstown, of prosperity and serenity, has been lost in the debris of demolished steel mills, along with the restless memories of those who built them.

Leaving Youngstown doesn't seem possible. There's always that pang of discomfort within me when I think about it, despite the distance of separation I've made geographically. And for those who live there, there really is no way out. A steel cage encompasses Youngstown, covered in years of ivy and rust. It's open for escape, but few choose to leave. There's a comfort in living in confinement, in seeking the shelter of familiarity. That's why so few ever drive down the exiting highway, despite the obvious tension in the city air.

With the gentle motor of the car buzzing in sync with the summer grasshoppers, I say goodbye to Youngstown, but farewells are never infinite here. Behind me, broken grey towers begin to take cover under forest branches. The city shrinks behind the trees, and the trees fall dark under the moon. Youngstown's ghosts are roaming, knowing that in this fading history, they'll never find rest.

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

COMMONEST, CHEAPEST, NEAREST, EASIEST

Reading Walt Whitman and Trying to Write in Los Angeles

by Katie Armstrong

Walt Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is still rather new to me, but I feel like I've read it before—like I'm remembering old lines instead of grappling with new ones. I'm beginning to think that if you've read any Whitman before, all Whitman will begin to feel familiar to you, especially if you find yourself preoccupied with the same fear and yearning that preoccupy me.

In "Crossing," Whitman performs as the poem's speaker. He bears encyclopedic witness to his crossing of the East River, designating himself as the pivot point upon which the whole scene turns. We feel Whitman dissolving spatial, temporal, and national boundaries as he crosses, aiming to unite his subjects—past, present, future, animate and inanimate—in a single "well-join'd scheme" (2.1.2). His objective: an all-inclusive communion, an intense spiritual intimacy. I applaud this purpose and the method by which Whitman hopes to achieve it because his

objective has also been mine. But in the process he ought to beware self-aggrandizement; he ought to beware crafting his communion from a place of fear, as a bulwark against loneliness, as I have been wont to do in my own brief stints as a poet.

I read Whitman's poetry most rigorously in the two years that I lived on my own in Los Angeles, during which time my teen years ended rather dimly and my twenties began more dimly still. It is true that I was working to "improve myself" at that time—I studied in a fever, working towards an undergraduate degree in engineering—but my profoundly cold, mechanistic, and uncomplicated education served only to set me in motion down a long, narrow rut, an extended personal nadir. If we use Taco Bell consumption as a barometer for my social and internal situation, things weren't going so well. Taco Bell was less than a block from my apartment. Eating there minimized my daily energy expenditures, which was essential given that I was depressed and didn't have a tremendous energy reservoir on which to draw. And, needless to say, living in Los Angeles and still deigning to eat at Taco Bell on a regular basis was itself a tragedy in miniature.

Reading Whitman poems beside various lavish campus fountains, though, I liked how easy it felt for me to intellectualize his representation of the material world. I liked that Whitman and I could collaborate, elevating the banal into the divine. And most of all, I liked that we, having gained access to the divine, could claim a piece of it for ourselves. (Divinity was a hot commodity for me at the time, and so it remains.) The exercise made me feel less alone—socially useful, even, as if I were a participant in some nebulous community.

How might this community be made, and who could make it? Whitman has some idea, and his vision begins auspiciously enough in "Crossing." He speaks of the condensation of identities which is hastened by the poet's own work. He commands, for instance, that the "flags of all nations […] be duly lower'd at sunset" (11.2.12). We can imagine another flag taking their place, one that represents a single spiritual identity, not disparate national identities. It is Whitman as poet who prefigures this new spiritual union: "fine centrifugal spokes of light," after all, lie reflected "around the shape of [his] head," like Moses descending from Mount Sinai, the commandments of the covenant in hand.

. . . living in Los Angeles and still deigning to eat at Taco Bell on a regular basis was itself a tragedy . . .

Whitman will even compress space and time in order to create his spiritual community. In one instance, he describes the flight of seagulls to us as he looks on from the ferry: he "saw the slow-wheeling circles" that the birds' movement suggested in the sky (3.3.6). The use of metonymy here—naming the seagulls' flight pattern as a way of naming the birds themselves—speaks to the way that the poetic imagination can transport material beings out of their physical arena. In a literal sense, a bird can only occupy a single point in space at any given time, but Whitman transcribes the bird's flight as a continuous shape, much like using a sparkler on a summer night to "write" in midair. In this way, he rearticulates his subject's context—from static corporeal moments to a dynamic temporal scale—in a powerful poetic gesture. Compressing a thing's past, present, and future into a single node means that he can incorporate it in the grand union in which "every one [is] disintegrated, yet [is] part of the scheme" (2.1.3).

As the speaker, Whitman situates himself at the center of a narrowing gyre. Multiple static frames of reference collapse into a single dynamic frame: the poet's personal vantage. His survey of the river crossing yields almost too many aesthetic riches to count, but Whitman gathers them conveniently with his own "sights and hearings." Material beauties are collected handsomely, like "glories strung like beads," as if upon a necklace (2.1.5). And the various beauties Whitman sees and hears reflect rather well on him, it would seem. They adorn his person, elevating him to a higher status. As a poet, Whitman fashions an alluring vision of unity among his subjects, but this vision cannot be divorced from his personal ambition, as the speaker, to achieve an exalted art. Whitman goads us to consider his power to refine mundane verse: "What the push of reading could not start, is started by me personally, is it not?" (10.2.5).

When Moses, clutching the tablets, descended from the mountain to speak to the Israelites, he put on a veil, diffusing the intensity of the holy light emanating from his face. Whitman obscures himself, too, though hardly in the spirit of Moses's self-effacing gesture. By concealing his own eyes, Whitman effects a panoptical power dynamic: "Who knows but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot / see me?" (9.2.3-4). This dynamic grants him a critical distance, almost a physical separation, from the poem's subjects. We can imagine Jeremy

Bentham's architecture as having a temporal element, as well, an opportunity that Whitman keenly exploits. "I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born," he writes, crowing about this intergenerational surveillance. At another moment, Whitman's boasts approach taunts: "Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be / looking upon you" (11.2.1-2).

Whitman carries his own engraved tablets, but he actually composed the words there, not just delivered them. The river water, the sun, the crowds of men and women—he has inscribed them all, articulated them in writing. But the poet has also inscribed them in a geometric sense, drawing their shapes enveloped perfectly by his own figure. Whitman goes on to address "you faithful solids and fluids" directly: "we plant you permanently / within us," he reminds them (12.1-2; 12.2-4-5). Ominously, the poem's subjects will have no meaningful return from this consumption. They "furnish [their] parts towards eternity," and in doing so are forever undone (12.2.8). Meanwhile, Whitman celebrates the "impalpable sustenance" he receives "from all things" in his field of view (2.1.1). But the incorporation of all the world's contents into Whitman's self-rests on two dangerous (and dubious) notions: first, that the contents are his to know; second, that the contents are his to name.

I'm haunted on Whitman's behalf by the consequences of this inscription. I fear that he'll bankrupt his own poetic exercise and that the bankruptcy will break him. Whitman clearly doesn't mean to disfigure his subject, to annihilate its context, to ingest its spiritual filling. The reason I know so comes straight from the poet himself, only in a different poem ("Song of Myself") in my favorite Whitman stanza:

> What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is Me,
> Me going in for my chances, spending for vast returns,
> Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me,
> Not asking the sky to come down to my good will,
> Scattering it freely forever.

Here, Whitman offers his neck to us, sticking it out for the possibility of inclusion in the "well-join'd scheme." Humbled, laid low, he supplicates at an altar. He "adorn[s]" himself, to be

sure, but more than enriching Whitman's decadent self, this adornment benefits others. Lest we worry that old Walt has debased himself, we need only notice his consciousness of risk in the last line. By "asking the sky to come down to [his] good will," he realizes he would despoil it, "scattering it" for all eternity—a far cry from the communion he imagines during his river crossing.

For his part, like mine, Whitman knows what it means to struggle with the problem of loneliness. "Saw many I loved in the street, or ferry-boat, or public assembly," he recalls, "yet never / told them a word"; even as his friends "call'd [him] by [his] nighest name," he makes no reply (8.1.2-7). In Foucault's conception of the panopticon, the observed figure provides information but never participates in communication—so it is with Whitman's subjects, with whom he struggles to engage in a genuine and reciprocal way.[1]

Whitman's anxieties about what it means to inhabit a body undercut even the intimacy of "their flesh / against [him] as he sat" (8.1.4-5). "I too had receiv'd identity by my Body," he begins. "That I was, I knew was of my body—and what I should be, / I knew I should be of my body" (6.2.2-4; emphasis added). "That [he] was"—the basic fact of his existence—rests upon inhabiting a physical body. But Whitman presses up against the limits of his corporeal form as he frets over spiritual fulfillment. On some level Whitman knows he "should be of [his] body," but his embrace of that notion is hamstrung by his struggle toward an ethereal dimension. The panoptical observer's actual presence in the central tower of Bentham's architecture is ultimately irrelevant, of course: the mere possibility of his gaze effects the panopticon's purpose. With his panoptical gaze, then, Whitman denies his own body. But ought he risk denying the body even as he yearns so strongly for genuine human connection?

They adorn his person, elevating him to a higher status.

As much time as I spent reading and re-reading Whitman in my first two years of college, I likely devoted even more to writing and re-writing my own attempts at poetry. I spoke so little around this time—sometimes not for whole days—that I more or less lost acquaintance with my own voice. Still, I convinced myself to enroll in an undergraduate poetry workshop in my fourth semester. The workshop involved, needless to say,

1 Foucault "Panopticism" in *Discipline and Punishment*

some speaking. But the exercise of talking ended up troubling me much less than the exercise of writing. I fell into cataloguing habits, like Whitman; I couldn't stop writing in the first person, engaging in invented arguments or negotiations with some unnamable "you." Writing poems ultimately became strategic, a method of claiming a social space for myself.

But in fixating on this notion, I had a lot of trouble believing that my writing could ever constitute an act of giving to anyone else. "Going in for my chances" and "spending for vast returns" required vulnerability, a willingness to share myself. Like Whitman, I often found it easier to gobble up swaths of the universe, even if they weren't mine to take. And while I can't entirely pin my want of intimacy and community on my reckless writing habits, they are insidious contributors to some degree or another. I didn't manage to keep in touch with anyone from that poetry workshop, by the way.

Both Whitman and I have to be wary of forgetting to "bestow" ourselves—or, more dangerous, forgetting how to bestow ourselves altogether. If we insist on looking, then we have to allow ourselves to be seen. If we insist on divinity, then we have to accept the laying on of hands, locked as we are in these physical bodies. If we insist on writing, finally, let us "go in for our chances," and let the poem be a gift to somebody else.

Art by Lucy Gale

Photo by Zach Damberger

EPIDURAL HEMATOMA

by Nozomi Kido

Everything moves slow; my eyes gently bat. I find myself caught between darkness and blurred chaos. The men and women draped and layered in white and baby blue prepare me meticulously. This one touching me, her hands feel stressed, used and broken in. I am accustomed to similar hands. Maybe it's her? My head slowly pivots around my neck, and our eyes meet, but no. Strangers eyes stare back at me, yet heartache overcomes the face of the fragile woman still, as she stands to my left with her hips pressed against my bed. She reminds me of my Ma, the way her eyes sing to me saying, "You don't realize how precious you are". My eyes shift slowly to the right, but my attention is redirected toward the caring woman once again, as she pinches me gently. Wait, what is she putting in my arm? Stay calm. I suppose she's trying to help, since ma told me they would make me all better. Ma's always right. *Where is ma, anyway?*

A muffled ringing travels and echoes through my four year old eardrums, obscuring any words spoken by my audience. I am being subdued, I can tell, but at this moment I am not exactly sure why. My heart inevitably begins to race, fighting to escape the cage of my body. A heaviness presses down on the

bottom right of my fractured skull, as it refuses to inflict discomfort on my person. I discover pain is indistinguishable at the moment, and sound is irrelevant; my eyes process as much as possible to assemble somewhat of a memory. Sleepiness and a wave of warmth drown the lids of my eyes as they now grow heavier. I am failing to keep awake. *What got me here?* I keep asking myself. *Where is ma? Did I do something bad? Am I being hurt? No, I was already hurt.* Now I remember. Machines begin to scream as the adults grow still. I slip into a deep, two month rest.

"No, my camp counselor dropped me down a flight of concrete stairs, and my skull fractured into my brain."

The room is dry, with occasional beeps and conversations between machines, my only company really, as they fill the stale spaces between the air. My eyes attempt to slowly open. I think I'm in my bedroom at first, but as I take my first conscious breath, an eerie feeling clouds my head as my unfamiliar environment is registered. I begin to panic at first. I am not where I am fond of, a place I can call home. *Where am I then?* I try to move, but my body is still and unresponsive. I am vulnerable.

I hear familiar heels now, as they quietly tiptoe past my bed while I lay. I can smell her hair, fresh and still damp from a shower with the Pantene she and Christina always used, sautéed with her three year old Chanel she so cleverly rations. Ma's always been amazing at all that, along with many things. It wasn't until many years later that I came to that realization.

I try to explain it to many friends, or even my science teachers and professors these days.

"Yes, it's called Epidural Hematoma (as I sigh and prepare for the usual explanation), a traumatic accumulation of blood between the skull and the ripped off dural membrane. It basically involves a focused blow to the head, like one from a hammer or baseball bat.

"You were hit by a baseball bat in the head when you were four?!" If only it were that simple, but no.

"No, my camp counselor dropped me down a flight of concrete stairs, and my skull fractured into my brain." That's where the questions usually end, or cease to.

She used to say, "you don't ever need to explain anything to anyone. You owe nothing to the world. Your story is yours and it's made you who you are, be proud of your scars!"

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At only five-foot-one, Ma is still a hell to be reckoned with. Stocky at best but never underestimated. She carries a sort of demeanor which forces you to step out of her way while walking past you, almost out of respect. I never understood why I did this naturally throughout my childhood. I understand she is my mother and I should respect her indefinitely, but she was much more than that to me and the rest of the world. She always kept her hair nice and short as well, even though I wanted her to grow it long. "Short hair shows professionalism. Long hair is too casual. I'm at work to do business, not play around," she would say. She considers every detail towards the outcome, as if it's her against the world. But is she right?

There is no room for others, I have begun to realize, as I look into her hardworking eyes . . .

As if she were her own president, her own boss, her own parent even, I soon notice Ma's methods of success. Despite her endurance, years of dedication supporting a struggling family has paid its toll. The look in her eye harbors pools of mistrust, strategy and sacrifice with good reason. Life has molded her into a cold woman. Can I blame myself for this, as I reflect similar behavior towards her? We feel a sense of detachment from each other, as I convince myself I was a disgrace to my own mother. During my

quiet and distanced childhood, unlike my sister I, avoided and blamed my harsh situation on a single mother. *But why?* Her deep brown eyes carry windows to her untouched heart, preserving its few ounces of love only for her two children, my sister and I. I've discovered each decision I've ever loathed her for as a young, ignorant child has inevitably benefited my existence, thanks to her fierce self-sacrificing nature and never-ending love. There is no room for others, I have begun to realize, as I look into her hardworking eyes, and see my own. I am her and she is me.

Love is an odd concept for the Japanese, as my family contrasted greatly from others in our crowded suburban town of Bellmore. I'd visit the houses of the few friend's I had, awed at the mother's behavior towards their gold prized possession of a child. Anger collected inside of me as I noticed children my age blessed and showered with gifts, but with no reason behind the reward. I questioned my mother over and over again about this, until the scorching summer day of August 18th, when I finally moved out. Anger from years of my childhood still festered in my mind and cold heart as I boarded my flight, watching the passengers frantically running and pushing into the plane.

Separation causes appreciation, I believe. As a college student now, I have a new perspective on the importance of everything and anything. My mother, through years of hardship and unorthodox methods of raising a child has shown me the importance of self-sustaining survival; Forget the irrelevant materials and individuals in life if they refuse to contribute positivity towards you.

I like to see every day as a restart button now, as we are the creators and engineers of who we are to become, adapting to an ever changing and dangerous environment proving only successful for those who refuse defeat. We are the hunted, as our day -to-day existence involves survival only, no matter the measures and costs. Escape is not our only option. In my case, death was not an option for me and my mother.

This one touching me, her hands feel stressed, used and broken in.

"Non-chan kuakunai-o" my tattoo reads in Japanese. "Mom, I'm not scared."; the last words slipping my pale lips as I clasp my mother's desperate hands. They attempt to roll me away as we hold on, refusing to let go. A smile runs across my innocent face, as I tell myself no, this is not the end of my story. Our entwined fingers begin to slip, and I am viciously wheeled into the room of work.

Everything moves slow as my eyes gently bat. I find myself caught between darkness and blurred chaos. The men and women draped and layered with white and baby blue prepare me meticulously. This one touching me, her hands feel stressed, used and broken in. I am accustomed to similar hands. Maybe it's her?

Photo by Jared Myers

TO GUATEMALA AND BACK

By Makena Lambert

It was 9:45 pm and too dark to walk home by myself, so you walked beside me. You walked me home every night after I told you about the time when a group of five boys harassed me. Their motorcycles skidded to a stop right in front of me, purposefully blocking my path, sending dust flying up into the air between us. They were being rowdy, laughing and yelling things that I couldn't understand. What to say when you're being harassed wasn't part of my school's Spanish curriculum, although now that I think about it, it should be. I walked on the edge of the road, trying to make my way around them.

"Stop. Parar," I mumbled under my breath as they turned to follow me.

They didn't stop, so I ran off the road into the rows of milpa[1], zigzagging around until they weren't behind me anymore.

The next night, as we headed down the same road, you pulled your hands out from your pockets to show me you had

1 milpa: corn stalks.

your fingers crossed. I looked up at you confused and you told me you hoped they'd show up again. You wanted to make them wish they'd never messed with me.

It took fifteen minutes, maybe less, to walk from the house we all convened at during the day, back to the small, concrete home that I lived in for those ten days with all ten members of my host family. But with you walking next to me, I remember wishing it took longer. I hated saying goodbye to you at the end of the day. I enjoyed being in your company more than anyone else I had ever met. Positivity seeped out of every pore in your body and I swear it rubbed off on everyone around you. Including me. Between the reforestation project and two hour Spanish lessons, our days were long — physically and mentally exhausting, but your simple motto, "It's all good," always put my mind at ease. You liked my company too, I think. It wasn't long before the other people in our group noticed just how much we liked each other's company. Maybe it was because we sat together at every meal, or because when we were set loose to explore the town, we always stuck together. In a rare moment when we weren't together, Ellie pulled me aside to ask me if I "liked" you. I remember telling her that I was hesitant to, or at least hesitant to admit that I did, because I didn't know what you wanted. I couldn't help but wonder if you and I would turn into something more someday. After these three weeks were up and you weren't just stuck with me in Guatemala.

I hated saying goodbye to you at the end of the day.

I tried not to spend too much time with my mind in the future. It wasn't hard, as I was enjoying every moment we were living together right then, like you walking me back to my host family's house. It was a cold night, so I wrapped my arms around your left bicep and you took that as your cue to take your jacket off and sling it over my shoulders. Sure, the jacket was warm, but just looking at you in your basketball shorts and blue tank top made me cold. You were notorious for not wearing enough layers. The week before I would have tried to give the jacket back to you, but by then I knew better. You're too stubborn.

Fuego, who had once been trotting along next to us, was now far ahead, but I could still hear his collar jingling. And then I couldn't hear it anymore – the quiet was stolen by a motorcycle engine. You pushed me to the other side of you, out of the street. You always did that, but it made me smile every time. There weren't any street lights, just milpa on either side of the dusty road, but I could still see your face. The sky was bright. You told me that when you were a kid, your dad would always say, "Have you looked up yet?" to remind you to look at the stars. That stuck with me.

We were almost to my house and you still hadn't said much, but you told me that you couldn't stop looking at me earlier when we were all sitting around the fire pit. You said the fire lit up my face nicely. I wanted to tell you that during the Mayan ceremony, when it was my turn to close my eyes and hold the candle to my chest to make a wish, I wished for you before tossing the candle into the flames. But I didn't. Wishes don't come true if you say them out loud. And I didn't know what was going to happen when our summer abroad trip was over and we got back to the states. Would you still like me in the U.S.? Or were you just a summer fling? I never had a relationship last longer than three months, so I wouldn't say I was optimistic, but I was certainly hopeful. And yes, there is a difference. The way you tell it, you weren't looking for a relationship, in fact you didn't want one, but when we got back to California you decided to give me a chance.

We loved each other all the way to Guatemala and back. Past each milestone — three months, six months, and then a year. But I moved to Colorado and took my heart with me, while you kept yours with you in California. Still, I know that if I could sit down right now at that same Mayan ceremony, I'd do it all over again — wish for you before tossing the candle into the flames. Knowing this time that eventually, it would have to burn out.

We loved each other all the way to Guatemala and back.

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

TO THE MOON: ABILITY DESPITE HAVING A DISABILITY

By Inna Kathreen Chang

"We finally made it!" I whispered, as I dramatically wiped the non-existent perspiration off my forehead with the back of my hand. "Now, where did we just land?"

"Moon!"

"Let's try saying it as a sentence. We're on the moon!" The twelve-year-old boy repeated those words and I praised him for verbally communicating in a complete sentence.

"People say 'Shoot for the moon, and if you miss, you'll land among the stars.' That means if you try your absolute hardest, you will achieve great things no matter what," I explained to him. "And look what happened, we made it to the moon!"

He began clapping and laughing at our incredible accomplishment, eliciting an identical response from me. Once I caught my breath, I attempted to further engage him in the activity by asking him what else he saw.

"We're on the moon!" he replied with a lingering giggle.

"That's right! But if you look a little bit closer, you can also see some stars—and some rocks—and an astronaut!" I exclaimed, pausing after every object to point with my finger toward the concave screen.

Hearing the sound of the fire raging under our feet, I let my co-pilot know we were taking off to our next destination in space. He responded by excitedly jolting forward in his seat and placing his hands on top of the exposed head sitting in front of us. Its owner froze, her shoulders hunched up, almost grazing her ears. With suspense, my coworker slowly turned her head back—her crinkled nose and slanted eyebrows creating a burst of laughter that echoed throughout the Fiske Planetarium at the University of Colorado Boulder. His attention was then quickly redirected to the astronaut waving goodbye.

"Bye! See you next time!" He let go of my coworker to wave into the abyss, pausing for merely a moment to watch his dwindling friend with endearment. He looked at me with his dusty, azure eyes that somehow were still illuminated in the darkened dome and proceeded to wrap his arms around my head as we continued our adventure.

"We're still in space, silly! We can't get off yet!"

After knowing him for over a year, I was well acquainted with the successful but exhaustive methods that encourage him to participate in these community-based activities. When he shifted his hands from my head, my coworker's head, or his lap onto the armrest, it signaled it was time for excessive enthusiasm. Verbal phrases like "We're still in space, silly! We can't get off yet!" or "Are you holding on tight? I think we're taking off soon!" while simultaneously patting him to provide physical stimulation was sometimes enough to keep him interested. Other times, he was already up, maneuvering through dangling feet and a sea of backpacks to tap his peers on the shoulder and wave closely to their face as we traveled through space.

He is one out of 12.6% of the United States population that has a disability[1]. Some well-known disabilities include autism, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy, but not all disabilities fit neatly under a specific diagnosis. For my first day of work, I was assigned as his therapeutic instructor. When I read about his personal information in efforts to prepare myself for the upcoming

1 2014 Disability Status Report

shift, his plan stated he only had a developmental disability; there was no precise diagnosis to explain his infallible positivity, desire tactile stimulation, or why he is always on the go. Instructors have clocked in as many as 12,000 excruciating steps with sweaty Fitbits after working with him.

That afternoon, when I told his mother he was in the planetarium for the entire show, her jaw dropped.

"The whole time?!"

"The whole time," I grinned. She fixed her attention to the boy, who was stimulating his senses by finger-painting the car door with invisible dye.

"I am so proud of you for watching the show. What did you see in space?"

"We're on the moon, Mom!" he emphatically repeated. She beamed at him and then me. The dimples on her cheeks and the twinkle in her cerulean eyes confirmed that she understood; she understood how difficult it must have been to keep her son in a room for half an hour instead of exploring every inch of the building. I reassured her that he made up for it by incessantly walking around the park during our lunch break.

Reflecting on our day, having to spend ten hours with him just gave me a glimpse of his life at home. When a child is diagnosed with a disability, parents must face many obstacles to ensure their child's protection, among the most important include keeping their child integrated with peers, identifying a suitable education, and increasing family support for the child[2]. Most of the time, however, parents do not have the necessary assistance. As community members, it is our duty to understand the perspective of individuals with disabilities so we can better support them.

Children with disabilities are not easily included because of stigma and assumptions. Parents explain that kids without disabilities feel like a disability is contagious—distance is essential if they don't want to catch it. People also assume those with disabilities prefer to be alone due to their non-sociable personalities or their tendencies to run away, but it is not the case. This is explained by Naoki Higashida, a thirteen-year-old boy with autism. He wrote his book, The Reason I Jump, using a computer and alphabet grid to express his inner trapped thoughts:

2 Resch, J. Aaron, et al. "Giving Parents a Voice: A Qualitative Study of the Challenges Experienced by Parents of Children with Disabilities."

> I can't believe that anyone born as a human being really wants to be left all on their own, not really. No, for people with autism, what we're anxious about is that we're causing trouble for the rest of you, or even getting on your nerves. This is why it's hard for us to stay around other people. This is why we often end up being left on our own. (question 13)

In reality, children with disabilities want to be included. Researchers from Olso and Akershus University College found that children with disabilities would rather exert more effort to feel like a "normal kid" than risk the stigma of having a disability[3].

Many things barricade possible inclusion and extensive research has been done on whether or not kids with disabilities should be involved in regular classroom settings. Some parents argue their child with disabilities isn't being challenged enough in special education, while others value the teaching of daily living skills over learning how to read[4]. In addition, the American education system is very inflexible and intractable. A mother explains this with a story about her child with autism; a teacher asked her child what color she was holding and her son answered maize, when the "correct" answer was yellow[5]. A child with cerebral palsy states "Teachers just don't know my learning style… There are a lot of things I can do; it is just not in the same sense"[6]. The limitations of common core education make it difficult to include children with disabilities into a regular classroom setting.

The limitations of common core education make it difficult to include children with disabilities into a regular classroom setting.

However, a recent study by Nowicki and Brown shows that kids are more than happy to include children with disabilities into their classroom. Some ideas brainstormed by classmates included teachers initiating group interactions, educating other classmates that peers with disabilities may need extra time, and creating a supportive environment. Another mother from Ryndak's research stated that "inclusion is philosophically the right way for people to live and grow up". By being included in the community, children

3 Asbjornslett, Mona, et al. "'Being an ordinary kid' – demands of everyday life when labelled with a disability."
4 Palmer, David S., et al. "Taking Sides: Parent Views on Inclusion for Their Children with Severe Disabilities."
5 Ryndak, Diane L., et al. "Parents' Perceptions of Educational Settings and Services for Children with Moderate or Severe Disabilities."
6 Higashida, Naoki. The Reason I Jump.

with disabilities will be given far more opportunities to increase social skills and self-confidence.

The most vital thing a child with a disability needs is a supportive microsystem, such as parents, caregivers, and teachers. I was blessed to meet someone who has managed to juggle being a parent and a superhero. I met Leslie through my job, as I have been her daughter's therapeutic instructor countless times. Her daughter and son, Jordyn and Kolten, are both diagnosed with pontocerebellar hypoplasia type 2, which makes it difficult for them to produce voluntary movements or communicate verbally, and they often experience seizures. This results in the two of them needing support for daily living skills, such as eating, changing their depends, and transitioning between their wheelchairs and the floor.

The most beautiful characteristic of Leslie is that she genuinely believes in the potential of her children. Research states that no patient with this disability has independently performed movements such as sitting, crawling, or standing[7]. However, Jordyn could sit on her own.

The first time I saw it was at Jump Street, which is supposedly Jordyn's second favorite place on this planet (her first being Disney World). I assisted her onto a secluded trampoline, safely distanced from kids doing dangerous flips and tricks. While sitting with Jordyn's head on my lap, I was slamming my hands on the trampoline, causing her to bounce and laugh. A coworker came up to us and asked for some assistance helping a teenager who uses a wheelchair onto a trampoline.

"Okay, Jordyn, I'm going to help Rachel," I said, as I gently took her off my lap and laid her onto the trampoline. "I'll be right back, so don't have too much fun without me." I made sure to spring off the trampoline with enough force to hear her contagious laugh. Looking back, I saw her beautiful smile with her arms outstretched up toward the sky.

Looking back, I saw her beautiful smile with her arms outstreched up toward the sky

"What did I just say?" I yelled, and then giggled as I went down the four steps to help carry the participant onto the trampoline.

When I started walking back up the stairs toward Jordyn, I stopped.

7 "Pontocerebellar Hypoplasia - NORD (National Organization for Rare Disorders)."

Jordyn was sitting up.

Her legs were tucked under her bottom and her long arms supported her.

I stood there frozen, both stunned and joyous.

Throughout the activity, she would lose her balance and fall onto her back, but I repeatedly witnessed the steps she used to get to this outstanding achievement. She would roll onto her belly, tuck her knees under her belly one by one, and then push herself up with her hands. Each time Jordyn repeated the process, it took her at least five minutes to sit upright. And each time, I encouraged her to keep fighting with my heart fluttering in my chest.

I practically screamed the great news to Leslie the second she came out of her car to pick Jordyn up at the end of the day.

She shrugged. "Oh yeah, she does that all the time."

My jaw dropped to the floor. She laughed at my dumbfounded face as she went over to greet her daughter, who she tends to call another name. "Hi Momma, how are you today?" Leslie asked Jordyn, as she leaned down to give her daughter a kiss on the cheek. "I missed you."

As I continued to stare at her, I felt my shock transition into admiration. I can't even imagine how difficult it must be for her to witness her children struggle but Leslie has believed and continues to believe in their potential. In an interview, she said:

"I have learned to push myself more and not give up as easily. If they can go through their daily lives with the smiles and laughter that they have, what do I have to complain about? They are in pain and unable to explain to us what it is like to be them but still wake up, laugh, smile, hug, and show compassion to others; they are my inspiration and way of life. I strive to be more like them, complain less, smile more and enjoy what is around me instead of what isn't."

She has consistently told me that her children have taught her more than she has taught them. She cherishes every single moment with her family, which is such a different lifestyle from what most parents experience. Despite the challenges, she would never change it for the world; she truly is a super mom.

After giving Jordyn a kiss, Leslie put on the brakes of Jordyn's wheelchair. She opened a backdoor of her tan Toyota Sequoia and nestled a baseball mitt in the crook to ensure the car door would stay open. She then helped Jordyn unbuckle her chest and leg straps.

"Oh yeah, she does that all the time."

"Okay Momma, give me a big hug!" She wrapped her arms under Jordyn's arms with her feet shoulder-width apart and her knees slightly bent. After counting to three, she swung her almost-as-tall-as-her daughter over her shoulder and carried her to the propped open door.

"Duck, Momma, duck."

I could see Jordyn taking time to process the verbal prompt as her eyebrows furrowed, and then try with all her might to tuck her chin toward her mother's back. I wondered how it must be like to fight against your own body to perform a voluntary movement as Leslie carefully placed Jordyn into the car seat. Once Leslie began strapping Jordyn in, I put Jordyn's things into the back of the car: her tie-dye school backpack with her lunch box and extra clothes, her black backpack with her communication device, her communication device's arm, and her other black backpack with her necessities that include emergency seizure medication, bibs, wipes, and depends. Some days, Jordyn had a few extra things, including things like a swim floaty, her blue striped tote bag with her swim clothing, her winter jacket, her spray bottle, or the canopy for her wheelchair. The wide, unique assortment prepared every day by her parents is both astonishing and inspirational.

After Leslie had Jordyn safely buckled, she met me at the back of the Sequoia so we could load the wheelchair together. She gave me a warm hug, thanked me for hanging out with her "little turd", and wished me a wonderful night, signs of gratitude she always expresses before taking Jordyn home.

Although Leslie is overflowing with love, I have experienced numerous times when people with disabilities were not treated appropriately. I have seen middle schoolers run away snickering from a kid who uses a wheelchair. I have heard my coworkers talk as if the child isn't there to hear it. One of the most devastating experiences was a time when Jordyn came home with a barely touched lunchbox. For eight or more hours, the person responsible for Jordyn did not give her any nourishment at all. It may have been because Jordyn often has wounds in and on her mouth from people roughly shoving a straw in her mouth to drink. It may have been because Jordyn prefers to have a sip of juice before eating. It may have been because Jordyn was having a bit of trouble keeping her arms still and she accidentally hit the provider in the face. It may have been because the caretaker was

unwilling to ask for help when they couldn't figure out how to feed her. It may have been because of an endless list of reasons but it should have never happened. It is never okay to consider that Jordyn, or any child with a disability, does not have the same basic needs as any other child.

On the other hand, I have experienced numerous times when people with disabilities were treated appropriately. A fellow student asked a kid who uses a wheelchair how his day was and if he brought a jacket because it was chilly outside. Many of my coworkers spend entire shifts talking to their participant, even if their participant cannot verbally reply.

And that day with Leslie and Jordyn was a prime example.

While I was walking away from the car, I overheard Leslie through her slightly rolled-down windows as she backed out of the parking spot. It was like a private exchange of words I shouldn't have heard, but I won't ever forget how personal and beautiful it was.

"So Momma, I bet you have some great stories to tell me."

Jordyn groaned.

"Mm-hmm, what else happened, Momma?" she sweetly replied, "I want to hear all about your crazy day."

Jordyn then replied with that same contagious laugh I heard at Jump Street.

I smiled as I continued walking away, my chest feeling tight and warm.

Jordyn's yearbook quote this year was "I may not be the same, but I am equally different." Despite our differences, whether or not we have a disability, we all have the ability to shoot for the moon.

In this case, the kids I've met always seem to be laughing at the fact that they have already made it there.

Jordyn Grochocki was granted her wings on February 9th, 2017.

Photo by Inna Chang

Photo by Mark Haselmaier

CONTRIBUTORS

SEAN ANDERSON is currently a senior studying Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. A Bay Area native, he will return to San Francisco after graduation to attend the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. Dissatisfied with the current state of partisan politics, he was prompted him to write a response to the presidential election for his Writing 3020 class. A lifelong love of literature led to him joining the staff of Journal Twenty Twenty this spring. His piece, THE POLITICS OF WINGS & BEER, was selected through blind review prior to his involvement.

KATIE ARMSTRONG is a senior studying environmental engineering. She is a lifelong Westerner (Denver to Los Angeles to Boulder to—someday—San Junipero), an oil and gas researcher, a leftist, and a reader, but not in that order. COMMONEST, CHEAPEST, NEAREST, EASIEST was written for Dr. Jay Ellis's section of WRTG 3020 ("Don't Fence Me In"). Katie's work has also appeared online at Hobart and Heavy Feather Review. She is on Twitter at @ArmstrongKatie. Her piece was selected through blind review.

INNA KATHREEN CHANG is a graduating senior double majoring in Biochemistry and Psychology with a minor in Chemistry. She has a passion for assisting and advocating for kids with disabilities and currently works in providing therapeutic recreation for them to expand their independence. She aspires to attend graduate school to become an occupational therapist for kids with disabilities. Her piece is dedicated to Jordyn Grochocki, one of the sassiest and happiest girls Inna has ever met. You are loved so very much and missed every day.

JACKIE FARRELL is a Junior from Littleton, Colorado studying Creative Writing at CU Boulder. She writes fiction and creative nonfiction centering around depictions of the complex inward life of ordinary individuals, focusing on life in the modern American West. In her free time she enjoys skiing, hiking and working out, as well as gaming with her boyfriend.

BRADLEY FRESE is a senior majoring economics. After graduation, he will be moving to New York City to pursue a some sort of career in the entertainment industry. He loves stand-up & sketch comedy. Bradley grew up in the mountains of North Carolina in the small town of Waynesville. His interest in astronomy and the interconnectedness of the universe are what inspired the subject matter of Stars. His favorite author is David Foster Wallace and draws inspiration from the way he observed the world.

BRUCE KIRKPATRICK is a senior in the Chemical and Biological Engineering department. His piece, FREQUENT FLYER: WHY ISN'T DAD DEAD YET?, was written for WRTG 3030. Despite his background in hard sciences, Bruce's passions include playing several instruments, watching art-house movies, and creative writing. He hopes to matriculate into an MD/PhD program within the next several years but is looking forward to taking a break from academics in the near future. Bruce would especially like to thank Dr. Naomi Rachel for her wonderful editorial skills, constructive feedback, and constant encouragement.

KAI KRESEK was born in China and moved to Denver, Colorado as a child. She is currently in her third year of pursuing a double major in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology and Geography. She hopes to one day be involved in environmental science research and is currently obsessed with remote sensing and GIS. Kai enjoys writing as a way to make sense of herself. She spends her free time taking long walks in dry river beds, trying in vain to remember what that one song is, and deciding whether to spend the last of her book money on Bukowski or Keats.

MAKENA LAMBERT is a freshman at CU Boulder majoring in Ethnic Studies with a minor in Spanish. While Makena grew up just south of San Francisco, CA, she has always deemed Colorado her happy place because growing up, her family spent many summers at a Colorado ranch. She is thrilled to finally be able to call Colorado home. As the daughter of two journalists, Makena has always loved to write, but feels like she finally found "her voice" in this past year and would like to thank the editors of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY for giving her the opportunity to share that voice. These days, her passions include slam poetry, rock climbing, traveling and social justice work.

ELLIE MARCOTTE has a mind for all things visual. Having spent most of her life living on the Front Range, she couldn't imagine going to school anywhere other than the famously scenic University of Colorado at Boulder. As a starting freshman at CU, she hopes to pursue a double major in studio art and advertising, as well as a minor in business. Although it's a full plate, she will always find time to do the things she loves: hiking, camping, skiing, writing, and cuddling with her pets. Ellie has a broad range of interests, but her real passion is in art. She hopes to someday visit the Louvre in Paris, and with any luck speak the language of the people. But a nice trip to Burano, Italy doesn't sound too bad either.

TALICIA MONTOYA is currently a senior majoring in Psychology with a double minor in Creative Writing and Spanish. Born and raised in Colorado, they lived briefly in Las Vegas, Nevada before moving back. When they aren't writing, they're rereading their favorite novels (often by Stephen King), watching movies, or hanging out with their fellow writer friends. After graduation, they hope to join law enforcement, entertain the notion of becoming part of the FBI, and publish at least a few of their still unfinished novels. Their piece NO, NOT LIKE THAT was originally written for their WRTG 1250 class and won first place in the 2015 First Year Creative Nonfiction Writing Award and third place in the 2015 Diversity Writing Award.

ALEX NGUYEN is a freshman studying International Relations, and hails from Platteville, CO. NUMBER was written for an assignment in First-Year Writing and Rhetoric. As a child, Alex performed nihon buyo and bon odori, or traditional Japanese dancing, with the Denver Buddhist Temple. Alex has a penchant for writing, reading, acting, dancing, and singing, especially when any of the aforementioned interests include being loud or overdramatic. In their free time, Alex holds Studio Ghibli marathons and screams about Steven Universe to anyone who will listen. Alex intends to become an international journalist and bring attention to important issues around the globe, especially where it concerns privilege, race, gender, sexuality, class, and religion.

TAYLOR PATTISON grew up in Aurora, Illinois and attended Michigan State University for two semesters prior to seeking treatment for his substance use disorder. Over a two-year period, he spent time in treatment centers in Minnesota, Florida, and California. Ultimately, he was able to get sober in January of 2013 and has been in active recovery ever since. Taylor earned an associates degree at a community college in Florida and transferred to the University of Colorado-Boulder in 2015. Currently a senior at CU-Boulder, Taylor majors in Psychology and minors in Sociology. Optimistic about the future, Taylor plans to attend a graduate program in Clinical Social Work or pursue a Psy.D in Clinical/Counseling Psychology. Taylor believes his past experiences along with formal clinical education and training will hybridize, and consequently enable him to become an even more effective clinician.

KATE PETRIK grew up here and there, from the mountains of Vail, Colorado to the music and art scene of Austin, Texas. As an outdoor enthusiast with a passion for aesthetics, denim, and debatably mediocre humor, she loves nothing more than black coffee and a good reference to Spongebob Square Pants. She thanks you for taking the time to read this generic statement about herself, and hopes that you maybe smiled or exhaled forcefully out of your nose.

LEAH REED was born and raised in the suburbs of Denver, CO. She is a graduating senior, finishing two BAs: English with a focus on Creative Writing and Communications. "VOLCANIC BLEEDING" is her first published work and came out of an assignment in Dr. Eric Burger's Advanced Creative Nonfiction class in the Fall of 2016. She hopes her creative work will raise awareness to the struggles young women face in America. She would also like to give Dr. Burger a shout-out for giving her the confidence to submit this piece in the first place.

NICOLE RYAN is a senior studying English Literature and being licensed in Secondary English Education. She has a multitude of passions, but finds writing and photography the most rewarding. She originally believed, without a doubt, she wanted to teach. However, junior year of college brought an abundance of experiences and opportunities that lead her to believe that a career in writing wasn't such a far fetched idea. After all, pursuing your dreams and doing what you love is more important than any type of stability. THE NEW YORK STORIES was a large part of this realization, as it was written after spending the summer of 2016 in NYC interning; an experience she believes helped her uncover who she truly is. She is also a writer

for and Music Director of Cliché Magazine, which has given her the tremendous opportunity to gain professional writing experience. She believes that you get what you give, and if you're fearless enough to put what you want out into the universe, the universe is benevolent enough to give it to you.

MEREDITH SHEROCK was born and raised in the highly cultural and incredibly dynamic suburbia of Centennial, Colorado. A disenchanted senior majoring in geology, she has mastered the technique of identifying rock samples while cheerfully disguising how dead inside her coursework makes her feel. Having neglected her passion for writing in favor of more conventionally practical subjects, she has finally returned to the pen and hopes to keep it that way. She is planning to pursue a masters degree in scientific writing in the UK upon graduation, as she fell irreversibly in love with northern England when studying abroad last year. Outside of school, she enjoys wearing bell-sleeved tops, collecting mushroom-shaped decor, sporadically running a travel blog, and rummaging through garbage at any given thrift store.

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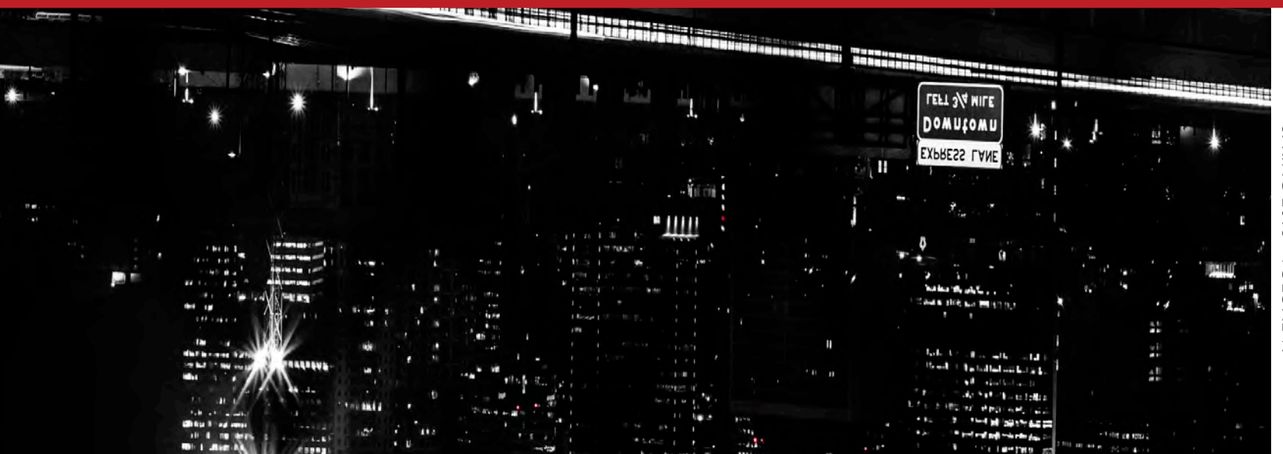

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JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes a print issue each year, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder Undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our Call for Submissions page for submission guidelines.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

by WILL BARDENWERPER

While researching THE PRISONER IN HIS PALACE, my book about the last days of Saddam Hussein and the soldiers guarding him, I was struck by how both the prisoner and his guards, despite being enemies, journeyed into their pasts to escape the circumstances of their present. Saddam, who had once had the power of life and death over 25 million people, and whose dozens of palaces dotted the countryside, had been reduced to a small concrete cell with a shabby outdoor "rec area" where he tended a few weeds he affectionately called his "garden." The soldiers, far from loved ones at home, had the psychologically challenging mission of keeping the infamous man alive and healthy long enough to see him executed. Despite the odd circumstances bringing them together, they often huddled in the "rec area" on chilly Baghdad nights near an old space heater Saddam dubbed his "fire," sharing memories that couldn't be more different. But, in finding a measure of serenity through remembering, they found common ground even amidst the drastically violent conflict of their separate, inimical pasts.

Memory can be overpowering, indiscrimate between an infamous tyrant and young American soldiers guarding him. Many stories in this issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY explore memories, ranging from the melancholic to bittersweet moments of transcendent beauty. The memories evoked are sometimes blurred and resist easy compartmentalization.

Helen Stritzel's "SEASON'S GREETINGS AND FAREWELL" recalls her childhood, poetically evoking changes of seasons: "Autumn has its own smell—it's strange, how rot smells sweet in the autumn"—and lives: "Fragments of family still gather every year, but it tastes like another ending." Andi Dulsky begins "IF YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT STEREOTYPES" by taking our hand from the opening line, guiding us through her sensations as she grapples with an overpowering and mysterious love. Her ability to "remember everything" conjures a dreamscape, but one shrouded in "a familiar haze . . . covering the edges and seams of everything that happened." At once tormented and enchanted by memories both real and imagined, she observes, "I can't say I see a future with you, but I can see a present." Sometimes that is the most we can hope for. Finally, Maggie Ramseur, in her beguiling "TO EAT A WHOLE RAM AND STILL BE HUNGRY FOR BREAKFAST," navigates some of the more sublime contours of memory, reimagining moments of transcendence on a summer trip to Alaska. She explains, in evocative, lyrical prose, how "thinking of it now, I can feel a tingle in my own thumb. An inclination to break. A desire to remain there, captivated by the potential of the land."

These stories all wrestle with the way memories occupy consciousness, sometimes in harmony, and sometimes jostling for supremacy. Sometimes liberating and enlightening, there are other times when we risk drowning in these mental cross-currents. At times like these, there is value in recalling Maggie Ramseur's "desire to clear my head of theories, and fill it instead with practice." After all, as I conclude my book: "Time keeps ticking, until it doesn't—for self-professed reincarnations of King Nebuchadnezzar, his innumerable victims, or those who stood watch over his final days."

Will Bardenwerper has contributed to THE NEW YORK TIMES, THE WASHINGTON POST, THE DENVER POST, and NEWSWEEK. His latest book is THE PRISONER IN HIS PALACE: SADDAM HUSSEIN, HIS AMERICAN GUARDS, AND WHAT HISTORY LEAVES UNSAID (Scribner).

FROM THE EDITORS

We at JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY are immensely proud of the work not only of our contributors, who have provided art and writing ranging from the whimsical to the profound, but of the combined efforts of all our staff to make the edition of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY you hold in your hands a reality. Additionally, we have been honored over the 2017-2018 season to be able to give this work the attention and celebration it deserves, from the extraordinary photography of Daniel S. Workman to the lovely, incisive poetry of of Dyllan Moran in "OBAASAN." We Spring staff would like to thank the Fall Acquisitions Team for their judicious selection of strong and beautiful work. An immense thank-you goes out to the Spring Digital Production and Art Direction teams for the hard but rewarding efforts made towards production time, as well as to the Business Team for relentless dedication to the success of this year's print issue. To our contributors—you were worth every minute, and more.

JACKIE FARRELL, MANAGING EDITOR

There's a reason why storytelling has held such a prevalence in each of the world's cultures from their beginning. Sharing your own experiences or the experiences of others can be cathartic, and it can teach us a countless number of lessons. Working with JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY this semester was for me another reminder of the fact that everyone around me is immersed in a rich, unique life experience. Having the ability to help in sharing the true stories of other undergraduate college students has been an awesome experience, and the team looks forward to publishing more work in our next ONLINE ISSUE at JOURNAL2020.COM. Keep submitting pieces, keep telling your stories, and please don't ever stop hearing what others have to share. Thank you to our readers and contributors for making this issue so fascinating!

MICHELLE KUBICKI, EDITORIAL STAFF

The written word is one of the most powerful and sincere forms of art. It is inspired by the material of one's interactions, experiences, and internal dialogue. The pieces we have compiled in this year's issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY each tell a uniquely compelling story about their authors and their lives. They have all been crafted through the rewarding and sometimes agonizing process of reaching back into the recesses of their memories, and shaping them into works of art. I hope that you will keep this in mind as you are reading these pieces and I hope that in your reading JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, you are greeted with the same sense of pride in the amazing creativity of our student body, as I was.

LIAM SONKE, EDITORIAL STAFF

Art by Daniel S. Workman

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Take the fall section of WRTG 2090 (yup, for the journal production course, that's twenty-ninety) or sign up for a one, two, or three-credit INDEPENDENT STUDY in any semester with one of our Faculty Advisors. Independent Study is offered at both the upper and lower division level. We seek anyone wanting to learn Editorial, Art Direction, Digital Production, Podcasting and Video Production, or the Business and Marketing of a print and online journal of creative nonfiction—no previous experience required. A position on the JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY staff will foster the development of strong job skills while learning about the exciting genres of creative nonfiction, and publishing the region's premier print and online journal of only creative nonfiction. We exist to serve and further a community of creative nonfiction writers (and artists) across campus.

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Art by Fiona Reynolds

TO EAT A WHOLE RAM AND STILL BE HUNGRY FOR BREAKFAST

by MAGGIE RAMSEUR

The best crepes I ever had were made by a Belgian hitchhiker on a farm near the adventure capital of Alaska. We had spent the better part of the day buried in the brush on Chilkat Pass with buckets, picking blueberries off the bushes, talking loudly to each other to make our presence known to any bears or moose that may be grazing around us. With the season just beginning, we needed only to tickle the branches to make the plump, sweet berries plop into our buckets. But the real treasures were the salmonberries, bulbous like raspberries but bigger, glossier, and sweeter, hidden on the underside of low rising scrub oak near the stream.

Foraging for salmonberries appealed to us especially because the flies were not quite as bad near the road, which ran alongside the stream. Hardly deterred by swatting, these ruthless flies danced around our eyes, dive-bombed straight into our ears, and explored our hair and our knees and our shoelaces. As if making their own presence known to bears and moose, they buzzed incessantly and incredibly loudly. These flies gnawed away at our peaceful perception of the morning, making

our shoulders roll up to our ears like nervous ticks, twitching the day away. But down near the road where the salmonberries grew and ripened quietly in the twenty hour days of the Alaskan summer, the flies were not so bad, and we could enjoy the view with pleasure and ease.

The Chilkat Mountains loomed in every direction, rising out of the river beds and slicing into the sky, their steep faces basking in the sunlight. Their snowcapped summits ominously called out to brave and reckless wanderers. Over the years, many Warren Miller films cast this threateningly beautiful landscape as their backdrop, a paradise to heli-skiers. Growing up in a suburb of Denver, I never thought I could love mountains more passionately than the Rockies until I came here. The Rockies are a boorish and barren comparison.

Once we had collected a dozen or so gallons of blueberries and devoured all the salmonberries we could scavenge, we loaded back into the pickup truck, parked haphazardly in the shoulder of the old logging road. Gretchen, the midsized white herding dog, stomped around on my lap, settling herself with her nose in the corner of the window. I looked over to my best friend, seated beside me in the backseat, both of us relieved to be resting after a long morning of fly swatting. As we rode back to the farm, we asked how a Belgian man ended up in Haines, Alaska. He said with a sincere smile through his charismatic accent, "I was hitchhiking through Canada, and when I got to Haines, I broke my thumb." We chuckled at the literal interpretation of his words, recalling our own hitchhiking experience from a few days prior; we knew that a hitchhiker couldn't very well flag down a ride with a broken thumb. Sally, the owner of the farm where we were staying, looked fondly over at her friend while adjusting her grip on the steering wheel. She knew full well that he had broken no bones in his hand, and that he had simply been captivated by the potential of the land. The urge to hitch a ride out just never came to him.

Back at the farm, he was like a twelve-year-old boy opening a new Lego set on Christmas morning. He needed towels from over there. Two planks of wood from the workshop outside. At least three big bowls. No, bigger than that. He assembled with fervor and precision. "This is the best way to destem berries. This way is the best way. I promise you," he said as he jerry-rigged the produce conveyor belt. We moved into position. He poured the blueberries out of the bucket onto the plank, which was covered in a towel, and leaned against a

chair so that it sloped gently to the floor. The berries rolled down the plank and landed in the big bowl on the floor. As they rolled, the leaves and twigs appeared on the towel, and we picked these things out of the way like chimps grooming each other. It worked as effectively as he said it would, and much more effectively than picking through the berries one by one to clean them. Soon we had several bowls full of pure, distilled blueberries.

He went to work in the kitchen, breaking eggs and whisking air into them. He leaned in to tell us the secret to better crepes, jutting out his chin and whispering it so as not to let the squash or the kale in the garden hear him. "The secret," he enticed, "is a fermenting agent." We furrowed our brows as he searched for beer in the refrigerator. Sally pointed him in the direction of some Kombucha. Shaking the jar in his eager fist, he exclaimed with a very European growl of satisfaction. "First rule of crepes," he said as he bent over the cast iron pan warming on the gas stove, "the first one is always a pitch. It's no good. Never eat the first crepe." He flipped the contents of the pan.

"Never eat the first crepe."

Sitting around the wooden dining table, just feet from the stove, we ate crepes as fast as he could flip them for what felt like lifetimes. We stuffed them with zucchini from the garden and tomatoes from the greenhouse and cheese from the market. We blended the blueberries with sugar, pureeing them into a sweet, violently purple glaze. We also ate them plain, trying to identify the flavor of the Kombucha, which had miraculously disappeared in the alchemy of their formation.

Every moment of the trip was deliciously memorable like this. On our hike through the pouring rain to the summit of Mt. Riley, we ate smoked salmon caught by Sally's husband on their commercial fishing boat and smoked by Sally herself. On the rocky beach where the cruise ships docked, we ate pizza from the Fireweed, a restaurant Sally supplied with farm-fresh ingredients. On the salt flats of the Chilkat River estuary, where the salt water mixed with the fresh water, we tasted last season's currant jam with fresh eggs and fire-baked bread. And on the dock at mosquito lake, where leeches attached themselves to my best friend's leg, we devoured two whoopee pies that we purchased from a young girl at the farmers market, who said they were her Amish great grandmother's recipe.

Alaska is home to a wild breed of people. A tough breed of builders and farmers, broken-thumbed hitchhikers,

truck drivers, and dog owners. Wearers of worn hats and rubber boots, wildflowers soaking up the long summer sunshine, and sailors traversing on the winter's unyielding moonbeams. Fishermen and waitresses and gin bottlers and chefs and bakers. Mountain climbers and market goers. Adventurers. This land welcomed each of these characters, and each person who called Haines, Alaska home embodied not one or a few but all of these characters.

When I departed for Haines, I felt to be very much "just me". Although, surely I felt a bit of something more, too, or else I doubt that I would have made the journey. One afternoon, walking down the road back to the farm from Mosquito Lake (leeches removed by this time), I could not stop pondering the value of calculus. A year into my college education, I was well-versed in theory. A lifetime of American education drilled arithmetic and language into my head. But less than that, I think it bestowed unto me the skills of test-passing, note-taking, sitting still for eight hours a day, and turning in homework on time. On the side of the road in Haines, I walked with an empty resume. Despite my knowledge of things like calculus, I knew so little about the world. I hardly knew when blueberry season began, let alone how to sail a boat or construct a house or safely can currant jam without cursing myself to death by botulism.

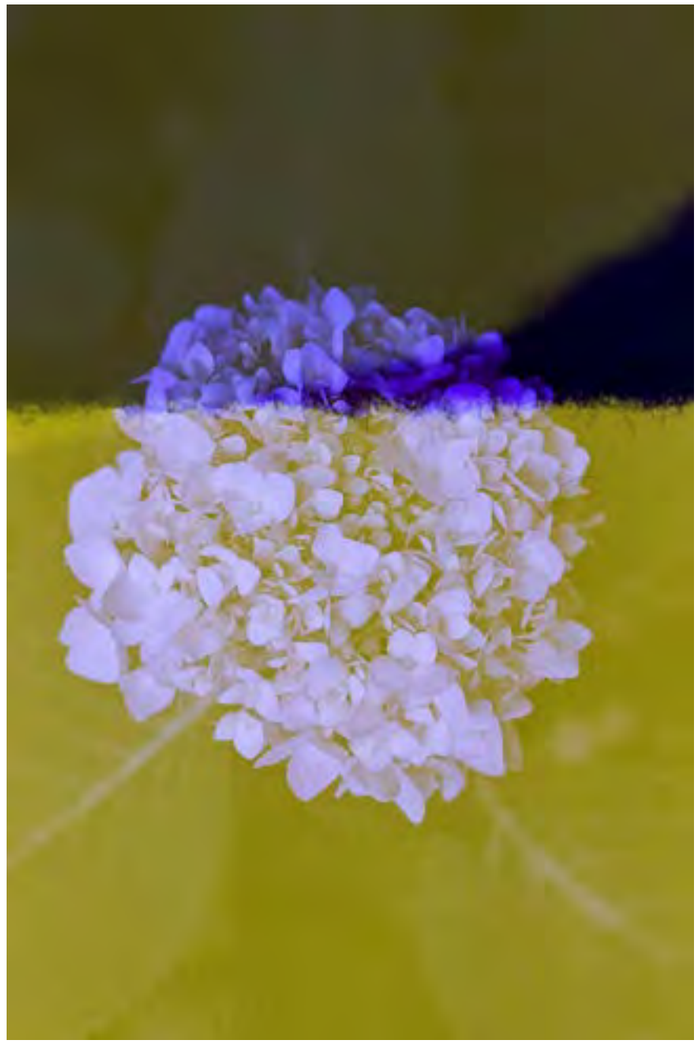
Kneeling in the fertile dirt on the farm, I held new life in my hands. I laid it in the earth, firmly pressing the bed around it, securing it in this place of growth. The carrot plant, which I held as a sprout in my naïve hands, would grow in the dirt where I laid it. In the bed that I tilled. On this piece of land on this farm in this wilderness. In our gypsy wagon at night, we sipped chamomile tea by the light of the sun, fading glacially beyond the firs, as I wrote in my notebook these reflections.

I have been to the land of the midnight sun. I have felt with dirty hands, new life. A blank page. A tambourine. A collection of raindrops. A tin cup of tea. A red floral duvet. An uncomfortable mosquito bite. A forest of giant pine. A green window sill. A few citronella candles. A fried egg on a sandwich. A white blue sky at 9:30 p.m.

My friend who traveled with me to Alaska has since completed his culinary arts degree. We often recall a Russian inscription we noticed, carved above the door to the gypsy wagon. When we asked Sally what it meant, she said, "You can eat a whole ram and still be hungry for breakfast." That was all she said. With our undying love for food, we accepted its literal meaning. With time, we accepted something more.

Thinking of it now, I can feel a tingle in my own thumb. An inclination to break. A desire to remain there, captivated by the potential of the land. Deeper, though, captivated by a potential of my own. A desire to clear my head of theories, and fill it instead with practice. To learn, by passing seasons, when the blueberries ought to ripen.

With our undying love for food, we accepted its literal meaning. With time, we accepted something more.



Art by Craig Lief 2020

Tapioca Pudding

by Taylor Lucio

Grandma could barely talk and move. It was difficult to watch her grow weaker and weaker, especially when I was only eleven years old. The entire family loved her, and over a hundred people would gather in her tiny apartment. They all wanted to be there for her as she was dying, but their presence was hard for me.

During her last days, Grandma's small apartment was always filled with the smell of fried chicken. That's all we had for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We couldn't afford anything more. The adults had been at Grandma's house all day, so by the time I got there from school, there would be nothing left. My cousins used to eat tostada shells because they didn't have anything else. They would break the shells so we could share.

I learned how to take advantage of food whenever I saw it. At school, I took everything in the lunch line. It was a feast that tasted horrible. I always overate in case I didn't get to eat at home. I remember the lunch ladies handing out two hot dogs to each student, and how the preppy girls would make a face and put their second hot dog back. I would get those, too. My favorites were the strawberry ice cream and the PB&J sandwiches because they were the only real food.

By the time I was eleven, I weighed one hundred and twenty pounds, when most of my class were seventy-five to eighty pounds. I got bullied. Bullied for my weight, depression, and constant crying. "Hey, Taylor! If I put a cookie on your shoulder, would you struggle to get it?" "Oh, look! There's the fat Mexican girl who can't stop eating!" "You're chubby." "Look at how big that Mexican girl's ears are… They're huge."

Even my friend Ayesha wasn't the same. "Oh my gosh, Tay. Are you pregnant?" she would ask. I didn't answer her. I couldn't tell if she was trying to be funny or if she was serious.

I never told Mom about the bullying. She was already tired and stressed out. Dad was always working, so I couldn't tell him. I stayed quiet. I never told my older cousin Darrell, even when he said, "Tay! If anybody picks on you at school, you let me know and I'll beat them up!" I knew he would actually do it and I didn't want him to go to jail.

My family members never knew about my incomplete homework and dwindling grades, or how my teachers were always yelling at me. Instead, I daydreamed in class, wondering what my life would be like if I lost Grandma. I was aware of the huge upcoming history project on Canada, but there was no way I was going to get to buy a poster board. I would have to take the bad grade. On nights when I would have to stay at Grandma Helen's house really late, I brought my homework with me. But I could never concentrate because there were always so many people and I didn't have room to write. The wall was too bumpy and the table was always filthy. I wrote my papers over the carpet and became frustrated when they were filled with holes from where the pencil would poke through. Grandma had only one pencil without an eraser. When her little green sharpener went missing, I would use pens, even when I knew my teachers wouldn't grade any homework written with a pen. When I finally brought my own writing board, my little cousins destroyed it, thinking it was a toy. I gave up on homework.

One day, Drew was making fun of me in the cafeteria again. He and his friends were trying to get me to go out with a fat boy. To make matters worse, I slipped on chocolate milk and landing on my back in front of everyone. My lunch went flying and sent everybody watching into hysterics. I was still soaked in milk when I got to Grandma's house that day. I found myself in the kitchen, looking for dinner, but food was scarce.

They would break the shells so we could share.

"Mom, what is there to eat?" I asked.

"Chicken," she said, pointing without looking up. I followed her finger to find two giant boxes from Albertson's on the counter. Both of them stank of grease. I opened the first one, only to find it empty. The second one was filled with bones. There was a single piece of chicken, but it had close to no meat and it was completely black. There was even a shriveled feather stuck to the top of it.

I sighed. "Mom, there's no more."

She turned around. "Well, I don't know what to tell you."

"Can't we go get Chinese food, or something?" I asked.

"No! Don't you understand that we have to feed all of these people?" she snapped. "Do you know how expensive that is? These people have to pay for Auntie Emma's funeral and now your grandma's, probably! Do you know how long it's been since I've eaten? It's been *days!* You're just going to have to miss a few meals, too!"

I felt the tears coming. I muttered an okay. I decided to leave Mom alone. I sat under Grandma's sink, behind the yellow curtain. I cried a little. I prayed and asked God to help our family. For Grandma and Auntie Keka and Auntie Vi. For supplies to finish my homework. For the bullying to stop at the school. For people to see me for who I really was, a silly girl who loved to collect pandas. Most of all, I prayed for food. Food not only for myself, but for my whole family. "Jesus, I'm hungry," I whispered. "The kids at school are so mean at lunch, but I can't help it that I'm starving. Please make them stop. I'm sorry for calling Megan a bad word. Please forgive me. And please give me something to eat. I know that you fed thousands of people with two fishes and five loaves of bread… or was it five… fishes and two thousand people? Or did two people get five thousand… no… I don't know. But if you could do that, you can feed us. God, please give me something to eat. I'm so hungry."

I crawled out from under the sink and opened the fridge. It was completely empty except for a container with three green beans in it, but they were months old. There was also a giant pitcher of tea labeled DO NOT DRINK. It was Auntie Martha's tea that she was using to lose weight and we weren't allowed to touch it. I opened the freezer. There was a tray of ice and a box of fudgesicles, but when I stuck my hand inside, it was empty. I wiped another tear from my eye. "Please, Jesus. I'm so hungry."

I opened the fridge again, to find something I didn't see the first time. On the inside of the door, was a little container of tapioca pudding. It was the only pudding left, and there was no box from where it had originated. I snatched it out of the fridge and pulled the lid off. It jiggled as I did so. I had never had tapioca pudding before, and the texture seemed awful. But I didn't care. I licked the lid clean and grabbed a spoon. The first bite tasted heavenly—like vanilla but better. I ate the pudding as slowly as I could, devouring one sweet tapioca pearl at a time. They popped in my mouth. I didn't like the way they felt, but they brought joy to me. I giggled. I imagined God saying, "There you go, my panda girl! How does that taste? I bet you were hungry. I love you, my princess."

I ate the pudding for half an hour. When it was finally gone, I licked the inside of the container clean. I said a silent prayer of thanks to God. Then I curled up in a ball on the hard carpet and slept. The floor wasn't comfortable but that was okay.

I woke up in the middle of the night. Everyone was gone except for Mom, Dad, the aunties, and my cousins. My cousin Alex and I decided to go to Grandma's room by ourselves. He happened to be the cousin I was closest to, and we practically lived with Grandma because we were always at her house. Inside, we talked to her, not being able to tell if she was awake or asleep.

"Thank you for taking good care of us," Alex said with a serious face. He looked like he was about to cry.

"Thanks for being there for us," I said.

"Thanks for being nice to us even when we were bad," said Alex.

"Thanks for loving us," I added.

"We love you," said Alex.

Grandma looked like a skeleton, lying in bed with her eyes half shut and her mouth open. She weighed less than the kids in my class. Her ribcage went up and down as she breathed. She couldn't move or talk. Suddenly, her blanket went flying and whacked me in the face. I panicked. So did Alex. We looked at Grandma. Her face hadn't changed, but her whole body was exposed. She was wearing an oversized blue shirt and a pullup. Her legs looked like sticks. We assumed she had gotten too hot and threw her blanket off. We laughed in relief.

"I… I…" Grandma's mouth moved, and Alex and I stopped laughing. We stared at her with anticipation. "I… l-l-

They popped in my mouth.

It was our home, where God hides delicious tapioca pudding.

l-luhhhh…" Her tongue was on the roof of her mouth as she struggled to get the words out. "I… l-l-love y-you, t-too," she said. Then she started choking.

Alex and I panicked. We gently patted her ribs. "You're okay, Grandma! You're okay!" we said.

"O-o-okay," said Grandma.

"Okay," we repeated.

"Okay," said Grandma.

"Is she okay?!" Mom burst through the door.

"Okay," said Grandma.

"Yeah, she just choked," said Alex.

"D- D- D-Doctors," said Grandma.

We looked at her, confused. But then she smiled. She was talking about me and Alex. We were her doctors.

Mom had Pastor Brendan and Brianna over to pray for Grandma. When they walked into Grandma's tiny apartment, they looked around in disgust. They gazed upon the faces of my relatives then looked at the size of the house.

"She lives *here?*" Pastor Brianna asked me.

"*Here?*" she repeated when I didn't answer her.

I could only nod. I didn't have enough strength to tell her anything.

"Wow. I didn't know it was going to be *this* bad."

I ignored her. Our neighbor Joe came inside. He wore the expression of—and may have been—an exhausted drug dealer, but he was our friend who used to buy us ice cream. Mom gestured for Joe to come in closer to see Grandma. When he did, he burst into tears and screamed, "Oh my god!" over and over as he bent down to cry next to Grandma. "Oh my God, Ms. Helen! My sweet Ms. Helen! Oh my God!"

I caught Pastor Brianna staring at Joe's tattoos. She looked back at me as if I had to explain his life choices. I didn't give her the time of day. She shared looks of shock and disgust with Pastor Brendan. When they finally started to pray for Grandma, I didn't listen. Their prayer meant nothing to me after their stares and comments. I wondered if God would even listen to their prayer after the way they acted. I left the room in tears. I didn't want to see them ever again. My young mind couldn't comprehend the fact that adults could be so rude and judgmental. I thought only kids at school were mean. Grandma was dying right in front of them and all they cared

about was *where* she lived when I just wanted her *to* live. It broke my heart.

That night, I sat next to Darrell, who was like my older brother. He was fifteen years older than me and he was as comforting as a teddy bear.

"Did she die?" Darrell asked me when he saw that I was crying. Worried sick, I had never heard him speak with such a weak voice.

I shook my head no. I didn't tell him the real reason I was crying. I was worried that the pastors would hear me. I didn't have to tell him. He knew. He hugged me.

Grandma's house was small, but it was clean. I practically lived there, and so did the rest of my family. It was our home, where God hides delicious tapioca pudding. A home, where Grandma could be surrounded with doctors who loved her from our hearts. It was where my cousins Darrell, Leah, Maiya, Alex, and I would spend time talking about Grandma. About the time she accidentally set the kitchen on fire and put it out before anybody found out. How she used to yell at the little cousins and spank them with flyswatters when they bugged her. How much we knew she loved us. We listened quietly to cousin Bob singing *How Great Thou Art* to Grandma. Darrell let me use the bottom of his T-shirt to wipe my tears.

In Loving Memory of Helen J. Martinez
November 7th, 2009

English-Japanese-English: Life in Nikkei

by DYLLAN MORAN

"Debitive indicates an obligation to do something. In a culture such as Japan, with an emphasis on duties, obligations, and responsibilities, it is not at all surprising that there are a variety of means to express obligation. What is surprising, however, is that despite the cultural emphasis on fulfilling obligations, expressions of obligation are infrequent."[1]

「祖先の言の葉を学んだらいいと思う。祖先の言の葉を学んだ方がいいと思う。祖先の言の葉を学ぶ必要がある。祖先の言の葉を学べない？祖先の言の葉を学べよ。祖先の言の葉を学んでくれない？」

My grandmother grew up on an island in the middle of an endless sea.

Art by Daniel S. Workman

Art by Daniel S. Workman

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING WOMAN

by ANDIE DULSKY

Shards of glass were everywhere in the garage, hiding behind brooms, plastic boxes of Christmas ornaments, and her brother's bicycle. They nearly sliced the wheels of the Volkswagen bug and found new homes behind her mother's old gardening tools. She was sure that she had missed these. It was seven in the morning, and my mother was cleaning up the mess that her parents had made the night before.

Before the first shatter, she'd heard them fighting for hours. Then the next, and the next. She'd gotten up early to see what had happened, only to find her grandmother's china set smashed into millions of tiny pieces on the floor. She had cleaned the garage all by herself, and her parents hadn't seemed to notice. Or if they did, they didn't care to say anything. My mother lived in a world where silence was the necessary, and only, option.

When my older sister was born, my mother screamed so loudly that my parents thought something might be wrong. They had asked the nurses about this, and they said that they, too, had never heard one scream like that. The rejection of silence, I suppose, might have made my mother proud.

I have always been the more quiet of the two sisters, although I have always been encouraged to use my voice, to never shrink for any other person's sake. I'd like to think that when I care about something, I'm not so quiet.

When my mother was old enough, she moved to San Diego. She lived with her best friend, Elisa. Elisa was only 18, but looked much older, due to a difficult upbringing. She had a thing for older men, and dated one named Peter, who lived out of a van. My mother adored these two. With them, her day to day life became a haze filled with omelettes eaten on La Jolla beach, cigarette smoke so thick it was opaque, and spandex workout gear. It was the 1980s. She was entranced.

There is a sort of longing in her voice when my mother tells these stories, perhaps a yearning for the euphoric people and places. She loved the beach. She loved Peter and Elisa. When I asked about them, she wondered about their whereabouts, if Elisa married the last man she had met in her time with my mother, if Peter still lives in his van. I figure I get this from her— this longing for lost places and people.

My mother and father met at a gym in San Diego. She was studying to become a lawyer, sitting on a stationary bike and reviewing flashcards. He ran circles around the track until he collected enough courage to talk to her. I've never seen a purer expression of love than the two of them. But before my father was Chip, who has become nothing more than a ghost of the past. He was a man infatuated with the rush of poisons in his veins more than his own life. He promised my mother forever. He couldn't follow through. She was silent until the end— I can only imagine how she had stayed up at night waiting for him, in the same way that I did for a boy I dated when I was sixteen. Mine was never too far gone, but I was silent through it all, with bruised wrists and shattered hearts.

I often see this pattern of shrinking women, repressing their needs for the sake of men. I wonder if I get this from my mother, even though she has grown from her years of silence. She went on to become a lawyer, a teacher, and a mother. She went on to become an incredible role model for many. Yet the question of the incredible shrinking woman lingers in the darkness.

The shrinking woman hides behind bicycles and boxes of Christmas ornaments in dirty garages. She hides in the closets of sixteen-year-old girls who allow their boyfriends their bodies.

The shrinking woman will be there, unseen. I've known her for years.

My mother is happy. The days of sweeping garage floors for her parents are over. She has built a nest in Colorado with my father, where I spend weekends gardening and taking drives around the city with her. She and I are so much alike that sometimes it breaks my heart, for I know the pain that holds her. I know the gripping feeling of the ghosts that return in the night. I know that somewhere under her baby blue eyes and red hair is a young girl, still looking for pieces of china under boxes and car tires.

. . . her day to day life became a haze filled with omlettes eaten on La Jolla beach, cigarette smoke so thick it was opaque, and spandex workout gear. It was the 1980s. She was entranced.

[040-BQJ]

by KATHRYN HERBERT

Zero

"Decades of increasing drug arrests has had no effect on reducing drug use and, in fact, illicit drug use has increased in Virginia in recent years."

5

You wouldn't know it by looking at me, but I was charged with a class 5 felony.

Art by Daniel S. Workman

Virginia refers the most school aged children to law enforcement officials than another of state. 16 in 1,000. 25% of these students are black, and 33% have learning or physical disabilities. How can we build a nation when we are putting shackles upon free minds before they can even drive a car?

16.5

Oh sweet, sweet release. I had never been so proud to call something my own. Amidst angsty teenage years repudiating the materialistic wasteland in which I lived, burying myself in volumes of Thoreau's thoughts and Whitman's prosaic ramblings, I found my escape. I'd journal into the early hours of the morning in an attempt to construct figurative "freedom." Now, freedom was tangible. It was real. As I settled into the driver's seat, cushioned by the fading fabric, there was only space for happiness. I did not notice the missing headrests. I did not notice the two-foot-long key scratches along the back door, accentuated by the mismatched paint job, a half ass attempt to cover a story never to be told. I did not notice the bright, "Milano Red" doors shrieking from years of rust with each open and close. I did not notice, yet, the broken A.C. compressor that I could not afford to replace. I did not notice the old stereo system, outfitted with a cassette deck and nothing else. I did notice, however, the long, yellow pinky fingernail of the shining, bald salesman as he talked about his jet skis with my father.

I was 16 and a half years old and I finally had my own car.

18.2

…§ 18.2-248.1 Except as authorized in the Drug Control Act, Chapter 34 of Title 54.1, it shall be unlawful for any person to sell, give, distribute or possess with intent to sell, give or distribute marijuana.

(a) Any person who violates this section with respect to:

(1) Not more than one-half ounce of marijuana is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor;

(2) More than one-half ounce but not more than five pounds of marijuana is guilty of a Class 5 felony

(3) More than five pounds of marijuana is guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment of not less than five nor more than 30 years…

Ok, I get it. I messed up.

25

She's seen more than I have, but together we've seen a lot. I cannot stand driving with the windows up. Even in the depths of Colorado's unforgiving winter, the windows are cracked as soon as those four tires get rolling. She took me places I cannot explain. Where freedom became more than a word on a page.

Seven days on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, sunburned and thirsty from scrambling along the trails, climbing down sedimentary cross bedding spanning literal eras in geologic time. I stumbled upon off trail petroglyphs with my three friends. Words lost meaning. We were humbled by those who had walked before us, lost in the stories the simple paintings told. There is a vastness that cannot be described, only felt, as you sit on the edge of what looks like the universe. The burning, orange sun slipping behind the horizon as you exhale the last sweet, smoky breath into the night.

Alone, and alive, in the Medicine Bow National Forest. Yellow Pine has become my escape, a small campground nestled among whispering trees, where hardly another soul can be found. Ponderosa pines and aspens older than me, I would bet. I perfected the subtle art of skipping town after the monotony of my customer service job ("Thank you, come again!") each weekend to return just in time for Monday's shift ("And how are you today, ma'am?"). Cruise control for a hundred miles north to reunite that big sky with my heart, yearning for the wide open, the freedom. Out there, there is no time. Just lazy days reclined in the makeshift bed that has formed in the trunk of my car. Nights of stargazing and prophesying on her cold, metal roof. Together we chased down Laramie Peak, the Tetons, Vedauwoo, and more. I do not need a map. These steps are ingrained in my being. Her front, left tire hugs the yellow line out of instinct, and nothing else.

26

Honestly, I almost feel sorry for the thief who stole my radio. Shattered glass and a dented dashboard proved the struggle that had endured, but in the end some lucky fool made off with a barely working, 15-year-old stock Honda radio. No auxiliary cord hook up. No CD player. Just a radio and a cassette deck. The midnight breeze mingled with the irony of it all. I should have known better than to park on 26th and Welton. Denver has seen crime rates skyrocket, and so I became another number in the data.

27

[Certain moments live on forever and change your path, change who you are. This is one of those.]

This still hurts to tell, and the words continuously elude me when I try to articulate what I gained and lost on the 27th of June. Nine unmarked police cars surrounding my dusty, little CR-V in a Lowe's parking lot. A simple handoff gone wrong. A cacophony of mistakes. Every ounce of trust draining from my body. Me, barefoot and high, with my best friend in the passenger seat, nothing but a pack of popcorn in his pocket. I realized my life was about to change. A lot.

I am a good person. But that day, the Commonwealth of Virginia labelled me otherwise. The cops laughed because my hands were so sweaty, the fingerprints would not take. I dumped the small inheritance my grandmother had left me, for school, into court fees and bail. I smiled my pearly, white girl smile. My lawyer happened to be good friends with the DA, and talked the detective down to a misdemeanor. I learned how easy it was to hate myself, hate everything I was.

I had nightmares about the black and white video replays from the cop's dashboard camera:

Swarmed, guns out, hands up, cheek on the hood, pat down, hands cuffed.

Questions, no answers, accusations, lines that did not connect,

The metal was so cold it burned, the walls smelled of

Something that cannot be named

Denying humanity, subjugation

Into words, into data, into

That which cannot feel

Pain, mercy, anything.

[Arbitrary power in the hands of//ego deprived vessels//red, white, blue.

but they only see white and black.]

79

"The legislature enacted Virginia's current marijuana laws in 1979."

We are afraid of what we do not know.

"While marijuana use among black people was 24% greater than among white people, this does not explain why arrest rates in 2013 were 233% higher for black Virginians compared to white Virginians."

The numbers do not add up. I begin to doubt who I am.

"Black Virginians were arrested in 2013 at 3.3 times the rate of white Virginians and accounted for nearly half (47%) of all marijuana possession arrests."

Identity is undefined. Remove the shroud behind which you hide. These words are real. Your privilege grins knowingly back at your tear-stained eyes in the mirror. Now this face has a name.

[Black is black, white is white. Those are words, but we are people.]

80

The asphalt sinew that holds together the American Midwest—

Who else could take me to midnight railroad tracks in Nebraska,

through mechanical breakdowns and the sweet corn fields of Iowa.

To the vinyl and plywood lined dive bars of Southern Illinois,

as I roll right along through my heritage: Ohio, Pennsylvania, Maryland.

I-80 blends into the smaller fibers of the American muscle,

into the Old Dominion, the place they tell me to call home.

There is a heavily read collection of beatnik books in the back-seat—

There is a girl, barefoot, looking out the window—

There is a way to rewrite your destiny—

Take the wheel and drive.

686

Virginia Senator Adam Ebbin introduced Senate Bill 686 in January 2015. He advocated for the elimination of a criminal penalty for marijuana possession. He advocated for change. Progress for a state still making decisions based on laws over three decades old. He was hoping to reduce racial disparity in the state's prison systems. But SB 686 was not passed.

The last available data shows that 77% of individuals incarcerated in Virginia are black.

Sic semper tyrannis. Thus always to tyrants.

173,056

What do you see? As you wipe aside the thin layer of dust that has settled on the review mirror. Your finger brushes against the tiny mantra taped in the corner [open yourself and let the universe fill you] as you rustle the strings of beads and dangling paper cranes. Things look smaller, less defined in the smudged reflection. You question what has been done, the unknown that gradually unfolds.

You, you alone have the power to take what the universe has given and reform, repurpose the shame into brilliance. Take small steps. Release your doubt and absorb the life emanating around you.

The mileage reads 173,056; the 6 paused halfway into the spin to 7.

Turn the key, and go.

infinity

"What is that feeling when you're driving away from people and they recede on the plain till you see their specks dispersing—? It's the too-huge world vaulting us, and it's good-by. But we lean forward to the next crazy venture beneath the skies…"

Art by Maggie Ramseur

A FLAILING IDENTITY

"A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents' culture. The third culture kid builds relationships to all the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the third culture kids life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of the same background, other third culture kids." —Ruth Van Reken

by ALIA CULBERTSON

When asked "Where are you from? No, like, where are you *really* from?" I can't help but wonder a different question. What truly makes a person who they are? Many of us have heard the microaggressive comments from people who don't understand the difference between home and ethnicity and why those aren't mutually exclusive. You know the ones, those who ask questions about our identity, as if we are confused. I think it's the phrasing of the question that really gets me the most, the "*really* from," because if you want to know my ethnicity, just ask, and if you want to know the town I grew up in, just ask. While it's almost laughable to be interrogated in this way, using questions you've never and most likely will never be asked, it's also minimizing and invalidating of my identity.

Take me, for example, I'm Lebanese, Ghanian and German, both of my parents were immigrants. I was raised in a separated home, where almost all of my culture of what makes me who I am, came from my mom's side. She was born in Ghana, where her mother, my *teta*, is from. She spent eleven years of her childhood there before moving to Lebanon, where her father, my *jidou,* calls home. After that, they moved to Lebanon, and why they moved *towards* the bombs during the civil war is beyond me. My mother spent some of her teenage years in Lebanon, before the bombs of the Civil War destroyed their homes along with their sense of security, causing her family to flee to Europe. I like to call this the Nader-Tabica Diaspora of February 1989. First they journeyed to Cyrus, by boat and then to Switzerland. After that, they did a stint in Germany by train and finally, in 1990 flew to London, giving 'trains planes and automobiles,' new meaning. It is in London and other parts of Europe that most of my family has stayed. An exception being my mother, who, thanks to her independent spirit, the same spirit the war almost stripped her of, went to America with the man who would later be my father.

"One thing to note about the civil war is that it wasn't constant conflict, rather a mixed experience of surreal times of 'calmness' mixed with period of bloody calamity." My mother shares that during the times where she and her younger siblings would sit in corners of buildings, surrounded by sounds and vibrations of bombs exploding, it created a pain that will never leave. A fear that causes you to hope and wish that God will hear you now. My mother writes poetry, she has repurposed and reclaimed this pain and puts into words what her mouth cannot always express. After teaching for years, something I saw to be so powerful that I followed suit, she has gone back to school yet again, this time for an MFA. She's been able to share her story in multiple literary journals, giving hope to those who've been in a similar position as her.

That I can tell firecrackers from gunfire. That I can only distinguish bombs from thunder when a whistle precedes the thunder. But that I think every thunder is a bomb falling and That I drop and look for shelter. That I am embarrassed that I jump at a loud noise. That I know I will not die as long as I can relive memories where I lived through death. That I know to open windows to avoid glass shrapneling the house. That the building in Lebanon did not have a basement. That I know how to fill sandbags. That I know what they are for. That the buildings on the street with sandbags are the ones with sons called to fight. That I know when school will be canceled. That I remember we forget to protect ourselves from a bomb landing in the elevator shaft. That we assume if it happens we are meant to die. That men can cry. That I remember filling the sandbags that block the lobby entrance. That the tenants of the building crawl on the ground on mattresses wait for bombardment. That I want to live. That I remember the warning on the radio the day before. That we are warned.

I was a strong willed tyrant of a child so I saw an opportunity and I seized it.

The journey that I've taken with my identity since I was a child has been a long one. From comments to my sister, Yasmine, and I about 9/11 and how we're terrorists. From being labeled as Mexican without ever even taking the time to ask if we're something other than an assumption. A father telling his own daughter that she has a "big-arab nose," and calling every middle-easterner in a movie a "terrorist"or "towel-head." Desperate to visit the countries of the culture of my family, to strengthen my identity, to not feel like some hitch hiking traveler stuck between *almost* and *not enough*, my sister and I had to fight against the voices telling us that part of us wasn't valid, important or beautiful. The beauty in this pain though, is that I am a more sympathetic, gentle, compassionate person for it. And now, I hear stories from my youngest brother who is in 1st grade, of children criticizing his cold lunch, (as if hot lunch is really that amazing. You can keep your square cut fake cheese pizza, thank you very much) because it's something they've never seen. When they said *ew*, my brother told them *you're missing out, you should try it before saying ew, it's really good.* Why he isn't ashamed like I was can be explained with a variety of factors. The strongest one being that he isn't being raised in a broken home. My mother can instill the confidence, pride and culture to the fullest extent. There is no tension, no confusion. My carefully well thought out childhood approach to children teasing me had always been to cover vegetables in ranch and to throw it across lunchroom tables. This would result in a suspension, which I would argue was worth it, but his casualty-free way worked better.

Groundnut Soup, Kinkeh and Fried Fish with Shitoh, Waakye, Fattoush, Maamoul, Kibbeh, Bamyeh, Loubieh b'zeit, Fasolia and Falefel. Such sweet aromas constantly filled the house, citing my ancestors of whom sometimes I feel detached from, as if I don't have a connection to them. Roasted plantain and roasted peanuts are treats for me; when the mixing of oils and flavors creates a scent that wafts to me, I am reminded of my culture, the same one, but experienced in a different way. In Ghana, you're greeted with those scents of peanuts and plantains. Growing up my mother and

her sisters would enjoy plantains which were sold to them on the side of the street from vendors. They tell me stories of everyone always having, selling or eating food, food being carried on heads, food being carried in bags, food even being sold through car windows. Food, food, food, all the time.

My teta—my mother's, mother, my namesake—she passed away last year. My mom hasn't gotten over it and grieves every day, that she wasn't there to say goodbye. That she can't call her up when she forgets a recipe and ask for the missing step anymore. She takes her grief out on us and complains that we don't know how to cook our favorite meals. And because she's right—which she, contrary to her popular belief, isn't always—I ask her to teach me. To teach me how to cook, but I procrastinate that more often than not. But also to teach me how to love unconditionally, how to think critically, how to write poetry. And although I'd be lucky to have half the eloquence and power she pours into her writing, I give it my best shot.

A melting pot, mixed with spices, I watch my mother cook. My tongue has been watered down, and the spices disrupt my taste buds. I am the one asking to change the meal, who feels uncomfortable. A table still set, napkins in my lap. My ancestors whose name I do not know, take up the empty seats. They watch me in anguish and despair, while I stay farther back, I sit on the stop shelf with the rest of the spices my mother doesn't use when she cooks for me. Unused and closeted for society's sake, a decision perpetuated by me.

My mother used to smoke before she had me as a child, she quit, cold turkey, but in no way was it easy for her to do. And when I was born, before my sister Yasmine was even a thought, she smoked again before giving it up forever. I have this memory, I'm in our home and my mom had just went outside for a smoke and to talk to a friend. I was a strong willed tyrant of a child so I saw an opportunity and I seized it. With those five minutes of freedom I decided to dial 911 and then to quickly hang up. I thought that was the end of my *awesome* prank, but I was not aware cops will still come knocking at your door if you call them, and she was not too pleased with me once the red and blue lights started flashing outside. To this day, she says that when she smells a cigarette she can tell which brand it is. When I ask her if she misses it, she says no but if she were to try it today she would probably become immediately addicted to the fullest extent. Dirt, soil, chickens and their coop; if my mother or her sisters smells chicken or sees pigeons they are reminded of Ghana. I try to do the math on how often they must think of their home, as they live in

Art by Daniel S. Workman 2020

big cities, like London, where Pigeons basically call all the shots. The difference between the home smells and the cigarette smells are that the latter does not incite me to dial 911 and the smells of home don't exactly inspire my mother to immediately get on a plane to visit Ghana.

In 7th grade we were assigned a project on a country that we would want to visit. We planned our itinerary, schedule, places we would visit, and follow up with general research about the country. I did mine on Lebanon. I asked to visit Lebanon pretty regularly after that presentation but I would continuously be greeted with one of a few of her staple mom-responses. *"It's too dangerous still"* or, *"You're not missing much"* or the ever simple, always popular, *"No."* It's not that I can't go now, I know I'm an adult and have a passport of my own. Though the one time I joked about going on my own, my mother didn't hesitate to remind me how clumsy, forgetful, absent minded and overly-trusting I am, so I would surely die, something straight out of 'Taken'. However, part of the experience of traveling to Lebanon or Ghana would be to go with my family. Seeing it through their eyes, living for a second in their home, on the streets that have been bombed time and time and time again, eat from the streets they'd eat on, go to their favorite corner shops, visit relatives I haven't met but surely will connect with. I don't just want to go, to *go.*

Lebanon has existed for at least 7,000 years. For my jidou it's been 66 years, my mother for 44, and myself for 20. All three of us have experienced, or know *Lebanon* as something else. It means something to each of us in ways we can't put into words, and then there are similarities that bond us in ways we can't explain.

When they think of Lebanon, the memories are met with the scents of cinnamon and fried garlic. Lots of it. Growing up, my mother and her siblings would hang out with their teta Abla. In fact, they learned to cook the meals they taught me how to make, from her and their mom. My auntie leans over and tells me that she liked spending time with teta Abla because she would feed her, and she likes free food. In Lebanon, when they were kids, they would go on picnics and since they'd be surrounded by Pine trees, they would pick up the nuts had been shed, scoop out the seed and eat it whilst on their picnic. They would put it in their rice and cook it so it would soften and expand. In another way they'd also put these pine nuts in an oven for about 10 minutes to roast them to perfection. I've never had such luxury of eating food literally off the trees. The closest I can think of is when my home at in a small cul-de-sac named Curtis

Place, where we had berries growing on a bush outside. However, I'm pretty sure they were poisonous, or maybe they were just extremely sour; same difference. I guess we also had a ginormous Pine tree which shed needles horribly during the fall. Except in my case of these only thing I was able to do with them was to rake them off the lawn as punishment for throwing attitude at my mother. Which was often. So often that, honestly, they should probably thank me for keeping our yard so well kept.

My home is deeply connected with my culture and my ethnicity. Despite having not traveled to Lebanon or Ghana, it does not make my *home* any less intertwined with them. They were my mother's, cousins, aunties uncles' home. They've made what I know home to be, what it is. With them, they brought their cultures of Ghana and Lebanon with them, they integrated it into my life without me even noticing. In a way, I've never been without them and truly never will.

They've made what I know home to be, what it is.

Growing up I was plagued with thoughts and voices, both external and internal, which were compounded by my dad's constant criticism and excessive punishments. In turn, I became filled with questions and doubts, rage and sadness. I was convinced that self-destruction was the only way to cope. I couldn't talk to my mother during this point in my life because I had developed a complex that my mother was the anti-Christ and because during every negative situation, my father would say I was "just like her," I resented the idea of ever being anything like her. Nothing brings me more shame than to admit that during my most impressionable age, I took this anger, this feeling of helplessness and anger towards my mother and put it into action. I scrubbed the sink drain with her toothbrush and then cleaned any visibly remaining *treats* from the sink so she'd never notice she was ingesting literal scum from the sink. She still found out years later. Mothers seem to find things out one way or another.

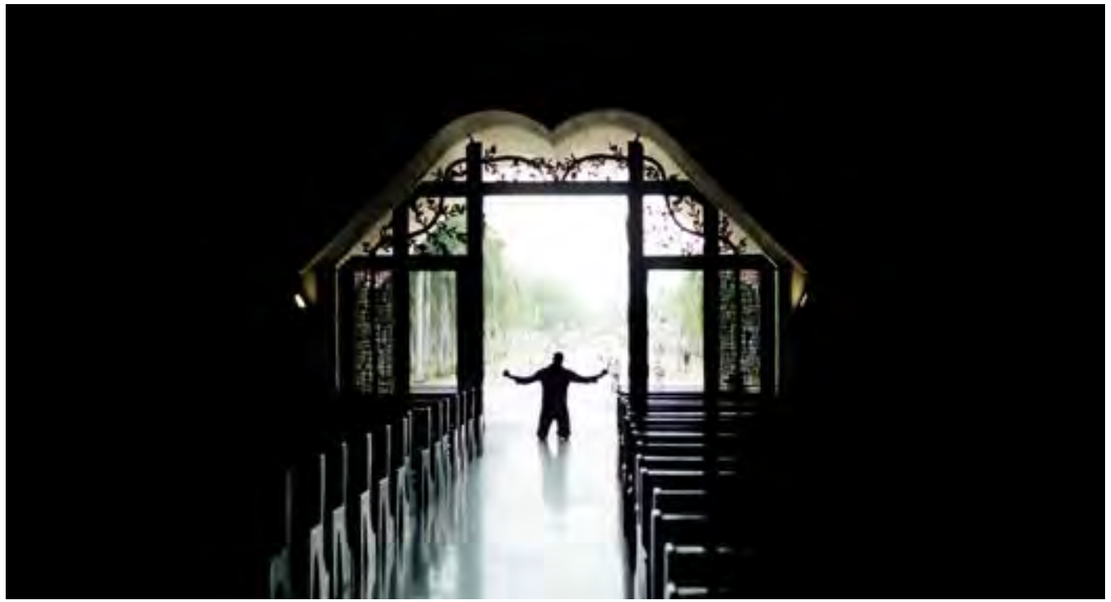
My mother's forgiveness for the hurt I felt towards her came from a place of pure love, a love I hope to share with my children someday. I was not deserving of it, I will never make right those moments of my childhood but I will continue to try. She even apologized for not noticing the pain the divorce had caused me, for the pain my father had been causing me and for not trusting her gut when she felt like things were off with me. They say secrets make you sick and it wasn't until my secrets of self-destruction made me sick enough that I had no choice but to ask for help. It was then I realized my mother would always be the first person I would go to, my shoulder to cry on, the person who has and will always have my best interest at heart. That moment and every moment moving forward shifted our relationship completely.

Every day I am thankful my first home was my mother.

Every day I am thankful my first home was my mother. That my source of strength is more than just my source. Family is an incredible gift that literally keeps on giving because you'll always feel a certain undeniable connection between you and this person, despite perhaps having never met them. In the way they move, in the way they talk, in their face, you will see your family and relatives and years of an unbreakable bond. It can only be described as a sense of familiarity that always stays with you. You'll smell your home in places you least expect it, so do you really need to physically travel to your place of origin to recognize it? Do you need a boarding pass to travel to your country? I don't think so. Because despite my many attempts to reject her at times growing up, my motherland has always claimed you, gently waiting for me to take a different trip; a journey towards acceptance.

"Maybe it's like family" my aunt tells me, "you love it, but you hate it." Perhaps it's the same way we feel about our hometown. We hate it growing up, then when you get older, probably in your last semester of highschool, you love it and begin to miss it. Or perhaps, it's the way you feel towards your own mother whilst growing up, saying horrible things you only wish you could take back, until you realize she's the only person who has always seen you as a whole person. Similarly, when you're a child or teenager sometimes you are ashamed of your culture, you want to blend in, you want to be friends with the girls who organize their friend groups together for Halloween costume plannings. Until you realize, trying to scrub away your identity, lighten your skin, bleaching your hair, in order to please others never works. (I never did any of those things, thank God my mother never allowed me to). At the end of the day, those girls still won't like you and you'll end up not liking yourself either. As you become older, the world becomes smaller and your differences become an exciting way to instill a sense of pride in yourself, regardless of having to answer questions like, "where are *really* from?"

So when you finally it again; that nostalgia of comfort, contentedness, satisfying your longing to be home—whether you find it in a person, in a food, in a face, in a smell—when you find it again, everything clicks, and you feel as if you've traveled home again.



Art by Daniel S. Workman

HAIR

by STEPHANIE A. WOOD

Falling out first her dad's then my mom's then his dad's & all of their hair was falling out & it'll make them better it said don't worry it'll all grow back they said & it was all falling out

Her dad never got the chance for his hair to grow back & they said it would still grow after they put him in the ground & I told them he was cremated & after all that I took her to a movie & we talked about what her wedding would be like without him there to walk her down the aisle & I pretended there was a heaven so I could tell her he would still be there watching it all & we ate popcorn & we made short videos & took silly pictures & she cried

Because of that I felt bad when they said that my mom was better & that we didn't need to worry anymore & I felt bad when my mom's hair grew back & I felt bad that I was happy & my dad stopped looking so tired & we got so many flowers we ran out of places to put them so we all had them in our bedrooms & it made my brother sneeze all night so I didn't sleep at all & I started to feel less guilty

Now his dad's hair is falling out & I worry about what it'll be like when he can't grow hair anymore & maybe they'll put *him* in the ground or cremate him or donate him to science or whatever else people do with their bodies now days & he still coaches soccer & hangs up their lights for the holidays & makes poorly timed jokes about dictators at dinner & it's only a matter of time until it's all over because the timer ran out a few years back

& all their hair is always falling out.

BRIGHT SPOTS IN DARK PUDDLES

by JOE CONSTANCIA

Art by Jennifer Wang

In a driveway in San Angelo, Texas. My cousin Deryl and I are psyching ourselves up to do what we have been doing every day for the last four years. Some houses we visit are amazing, mansions on hilltops, castles owned by oilmen and politicians, many worthy of *Better Homes and Gardens*, but this was not one of them. Deryl and I have been in our work truck for the last fifteen minutes, smoking a joint and hoping through some divine process this house would spontaneously combust. Or maybe we could go to jail? Ohhh, jail would be the Taj Majal compared to this place, but no. Back on earth, our cosmic punishment was to go back under this house for the second day in a row to finish re-plumbing the drain lines underneath. With our heads hung low, we move at a snail's pace towards the door. For good publicity our company did pro-bono work for underserved parts of the community. A great idea on paper, a horrible ordeal if you are the one fixing the issue, to get to this

point, several other companies would have refused to, leaving Deryl and I, the only plumbers in town dumb and dirty enough to put ourselves in this shit-uation.

This job started out like the rest. Our perfected greeting was filled with southern pleasantries, and tastefully crass plumbing puns. It wasn't until we pried open the hatch that let us under the house that we had our sense of smell assaulted by that all too familiar smell of sewer water. Eight inches in fact, eight inches of bath, sink, and toilet water, plus everything that goes down the drain with it. All co-mingled together in a black sludge that made swamp water look palatable. Although this was not our first time in this predicament, one can never fully prepare themselves for this type of work. The quicker you start, the quicker you finish. We dive in. On our stomachs, face down, we army crawl through our version of Texas tea. It wasn't as easy as just getting under the house. We had to crawl to the very end, fifty feet, in a bog of various floating solids. The devil's sangria, as I later dubbed it. I try and escape to my happy place. That wonderful place in my mind I escape to in times like these. Only to find it in flames, shelled, nuked, de-atomized, just non-existent. I often hear people say, "Oh my gawd, I literally died inside." But those who really have never say it with that kind of jubilation. Personally, dying inside has always had an almost paralyzing effect. In this instance, I close my eyes and try and develop some kind mutant power that will transport me anywhere but here, but no. I open my eyes to find Deryl beating the hell out of an old, half broken sewer line, saying every curse word in the book, splashing the poo stew we are swimming in, everywhere.

The quicker you start, the quicker you finish.

After five minutes or so it was my turn. Deryl passes me the hammer and climbs out for fresh air. As I start beating the decades-old pipe, all I can do is mentally check out. I internally scold myself for not going to college, and for partying instead of being a more productive person. Thinking about every bad decision that has lead me here, followed by utter depression, was the usual sign I was near rock bottom.

"Kershhhhh."

Never believe things can't get any worse, because sometimes they do, instantly. The inconsiderate prick who lived in the house decided to take his morning constitution at the same time I started dismantling the plumbing under his house. What happened next is what we in the plumbing biz refer to as a *baptism*.

I took a full-on load of toilet water to the face, and worse yet, stabbed in the forehead by the dookie dagger this son of a bitch flushed.

"I need a vacation." I thought as we drove home seven hours later, but that was never going to happen. In four years I had worked my way up to twelve bucks an hour, so we settled for the next best thing, dollar rum and cokes. We had several places we frequented, but we practically paid the rent at Bailey's. Deryl fell asleep while pooping one night, woke up locked in the bar and enjoyed unlimited drinks and the jukebox for a couple of hours until he let himself out. While most people would never speak a word of it, Deryl came to work on time and was still drunk as all hell; his bragging came out as slurred mumblings. Stories like this were what we loved to hear, especially our boss, Quentin. He sent everyone to work except Deryl. Quentin thought the best place for Deryl was with him, and he took him to breakfast.

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The first day I met Quentin Bannister, he was asleep in his chair at eight fifteen A.M. I thought he had been hard at work, but turns out he was selectively narcoleptic. He was five-foot-four and well over three hundred pounds. He had fallen asleep with a lit cigarette in his mouth and had not moved since lighting it. This was evident by the asharette hanging onto his lip by some sticky lip crud he produced naturally. His chair was a bit big for him, because his feet weren't touching the ground; his belly, it seemed, was the only thing keeping him up. His secretary, Mary Ann, was, and this is putting it nicely, a mean bitch. She shot up and out of her chair when I walked in and was giving me the stink face from the start. Mary Ann didn't have resting bitch face, no, no, no. Mary Ann had full on active bitch face, the kind of bitch face that said everything coming out of your mouth right now is bothering me. When I inquired about filling out an application; she replied with an over the top eye roll and a deep sigh, she then began poking and prodding Quentin, nagging at him.

As if they were his dying words, he slipped back to sleep.

"Quentin… Q, wake the fuck up. This boy wants to work for you." Nothing makes my blood boil more than being called

boy. Not that I was a man at that time like I thought. But this was also no time for self-respect; I mean where else was I going to make ten dollars an hour? Quentin grumbled to the tune of a teenager asking for five more minutes of sleep. I blew off Mary Ann's dickish attitude and introduced myself as a relative of Deryl's. He answered in nods and half-mumbles, never fully waking up or looking at me. That is, until he uncocked his head, lit another cigarette, and through the seven or so teeth he had left, he told me to come back the next day, and as if they were his dying words, he slipped back to sleep.

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Deryl had long been a favorite son of Quentin. Q was famous for picking out strays he could bring into the fold. After a couple of years Deryl got his plumbing license, and Q like a mother bear shunning her cubs at a certain age, stopped taking Deryl everywhere with him. Deryl, who sounded relieved by this, was quick to brag how he was happy to stop hanging out with the boss.

One morning, the office computer was running slow. I found out that they were paying a guy seventy five dollars to come and fix it, and asked if I could look it over. All I did was defrag the damn thing, but you would think I had hacked the Pentagon by their reactions. Q, being overjoyed to save some money, took me to breakfast for the first time. I had never been so happy to skip work. I was the main "shovel hand" as the other guys called it. I called it being the shop slave. The anger and jealousy were visible from the other workers. With two middle fingers going in a piston motion, I wished everyone a shitty morning and that I would be thinking of them as I ate.

Q liked people with spunk, and it was alive and well in many forms around the office. Eating with Quentin soon became an almost everyday occurrence. For a time, I ate two meals a day with Q, five sometimes six days a week. Every now and then, we would bring along other people, and after watching their lack of manners and conversation topics, I can see why I was the regular. Tony, was one the regulars. He was Quentin's son-in-law, although not by choice. He knocked up Quentin's daughter, who by the way looked just like Q, while she and her then-girlfriend were trying to have a baby. Not being one to turn down a three

Imagine someone watching their child being eaten alive.

way, not even a gross one, he was now stuck raising a baby and doing Quentin's bidding to make ends meet.

Tony would go in the back and talk to the cooks. He never washed his hands, and could be seen from time to time grabbing handfuls of grated cheese, or bacon straight off the flat top as he talked to the guys in the back. I don't think they cared for this much, but never said anything about it.

After breakfast, if there were no pressing matters, Tony and I would be "cleaning the barn." This was code for fucking off in the back. Smoking joints, tossing the football, and the occasional bomb making, were great ways of relieving stress and making the time go by. Not that we were free from plumbing, oh no. We just had better starts than the others.

One place Tony and I ended up on a weekly basis was Johnson's Funeral Home. The building was over a hundred years old, and creepy as hell, especially the basement. Tony was one of those traditional Mexican dudes that was afraid of ghosts and spirits. I would wig him out by speaking in tongues and once locked him in the embalming room. He let out the loudest, saddest bawl I had ever heard, and when I opened the door tears had ran past his cheek as he called me every name in the book, but after a cigarette, I would give him an awkward tummy rub. I would tell him "If we can't have fun in a funeral home then where? He would say very disparaging things about my mother, and after agreeing with him, he would laugh and call me stupid, then we would be off on our next adventure.

Little ways to break the monotony, (and sometimes tension) were as essential to life as water. Other plumbers in town were some serious kiss asses, and we would rather sit on sandpaper dildos, than be that serious about life. At least once a week the phrase "Thank God it's lunch, now I can sober up." would be uttered. The aforementioned plumbers would eat at the same place at the same time everyday looking

dead inside. Sometimes walking into the supply house could be just downright hostile at times. Dirty glares from dirty people did nothing but egg us on. A douche bag whose name I can't remember once bumped into Deryl, looked him over and laughed in his face.

Unfortunately for this guy, we had gotten into fights for far less, and within the space of a breath, Deryl had this poor guy on the ground beating him like he was nothing, and to us he was. A good thing about our part of Texas was that this was not a police worthy event. Unless someone was shot, not shot at, our own vigilante justice was allowed. When I had started working for Q, I took crap from everyone. A crown of shame I wore for too long in those days, but it didn't take long to learn from these guys, that a night or month in jail was well worth proving a point.

When Quentin's mother died, he and I went to the bank to collect her final will and testament from her safety deposit box. After being told he would need a signed paper from an attorney, he went off. Quentin was not about to take this for an answer. After a swear riddled critique of the banker's managerial style, poor choice of clothing, and overall life choices; he still was told no. Quentin reached deep inside himself, not for internal strength, but for a loogie that could only be measured in quarts. He held aggressive eye contact with the poor sap who dared stand in his way, and unleashed the biggest vat of lung butter I had ever seen.

Q never broke eye contact, and the look on the banker's face is something I will never forget. Imagine someone watching their child being eaten alive. I had the same look, but only on the inside. Grotesque by all standards but ours. I kept my cool and gave the same stone face look I had somehow maintained. By the time his gaze made its way to me, you could see in his eyes, he didn't sign up for this shit. He stood up walked out, and in under two minutes had the safety deposit box in hand. He also brought in a young intern who was there to clean up Quentin's mess. The person I am now would really have felt for this girl, but in that moment I felt nothing for her.

In fact there was probably a great lesson to be learned in that moment. I don't know what that lesson was, but like that puddle of phlegm on the desk. That was her cross to bear. What I got out of it was that there are certain procedures that must be taken when dealing with documents involving others, and respectfully following those rules makes for smooth, consistent,

service. But, if you're in a jam, and no is pretty much your only answer you are going to get, why not get creative? Shame and pride go hand in hand, and sometimes it can be to your benefit if you don't bother with either. We kept our serious business faces on until we got back to the truck. Once inside we simultaneously cracked up. I called Q a genius, and he shrugged as if it happened all the time, and who knows, maybe it did.

The naive version of myself who walked through those doors died a while back. There wasn't an exact moment; like evolution as we know it, it happened over time. Looking back, those bad experiences were good experiences in disguise. If you can take a step back be honest with yourself, and your situation, then you've gotten a lot farther than some people get. These days, I push a cart for a living. By Bannister standards I've made it.

A few hundred offices a day, I stop and talk to enough people that most folks see me as not productive. Every now and again I run into that stereotypical professional. Well dressed, educated, sitting in an air conditioned room. They are stressed and unhappy. The spreadsheet in front of them isn't adding up. They have to go to a meeting being catered by Half Fast Subs, again. Some don't have time to avert their eyes to show their full annoyance with me. I guess sometimes seeing a person seven seconds a week is just too much. Everyone has their trials and tribulations, but first world problems like these merit no sympathy from me.

Everyone goes through phases when they are cast in the proverbial muck. Some choose to wallow and become stagnant, staying in the muck longer than necessary if not forever. But if you can get your ass in gear, realize that the moment is going to suck, bite your lip, and get yourself out of that situation, the rewards are life changing. At the end of the day, the misery from crawling under those houses was always overshadowed by the feeling of ecstasy that that came from crawling my way out.

SEASON'S GREETINGS AND FAREWELL

by HELEN STRITZEL

September

> *As a reliable indicator of a season, many organisms use day length (photoperiod), which seems to be physiologically encoded in their circadian clock.* [1]

It arrives—no one sees but everyone knows from the streaks it leaves. It's a shift in the universe—quite literally, a rearranging of the planet's position.

When I was younger, my mind used to go numb with lack of stimulation during the last dregs of summer. Those were the days after my siblings and I had successfully staged our rebellion against summer workbooks to "keep our minds fresh," but before I was old enough to get a summer job. My classmates were predictably and dramatically devastated by the end of their lesson-less days, but I was ready for the smell of pencil erasers and chalk dust. The

1. Hitoshi Okamura, "Physiology: Brain Comes to Light," *Nature* 452, no. 7185 (March 20, 2008): 294–95, https://doi.org/10.1038/452294a.

familiar stirrings in my mind thrilled me. I usually got a cramp in my hand during the first week from using those previously dormant writing muscles. I usually got drunk on possibility. Who would be my friends? Would I like my teachers? What would I learn in my classes? Even the first equations of precalculus fueled this inquisitive fire. Robert Frost and the English Civil War stoked it to a roar.

The pinnacle of the autumn was my birthday. September 12th. Not technically autumn. Autumn starts on the 22nd of September. But then again, who could call September 12th summer? I came into the world eight days too late to have a pool party for my birthday and 10 days too early to claim fall with any legitimacy. And I was *bitter* that I couldn't have a pool party. I dreamed of the perfect party, fueled by *Barbie* media and *American Girl* party planning publications. I wanted to freeze berries into the ice cubes for the party, even though we had a fridge with an icemaker. I wanted to have balloon curtains and clever games like spin the bottle (I did not know how to play this game). But most of all, I wanted myself and all of my friends to enjoy every second of it. As we were prepubescent (human) girls, obviously that was not going to happen.

I went around the grave business of party planning.

So every August, I went about the grave business of party planning. My saintly mother patiently tried to help me recreate the party I anticipated, often with an impressive amount of success (the sushi making party stands out—thanks, Mom!). Still, they never quite lived up to that sparkling image of a *Barbie* birthday. Also, preteen girls can be very mean. An unfortunately high percentage of my birthday parties ended in tears. Even now, I always feel a twinge of disappointment on the passing of another year. The glow of the buildup always gives way to the dull reality of just another day.

October

it was the light
that you will see at evening on the side of a hill
in yellow October [1]

In Colorado, true fall comes in October. The trees are raucous, turning shocking shades of red and yellow. This absurd carnival of color makes me want to twirl and sing like a crazed Julie Andrews

every time I step outside. And the sky—the *sky*. Something is telling me to look towards the heavens until that precious blue withers to wintry grey. The sun is sweetly gentle at noon, then abandons the earth to the sharp snap of cold at dusk. Summer nights are no more.

> *"This is the first perfect day of autumn," Dr. David H. Thompson of the survey, who directed the symposium, declared. "The sky is never so blue as in autumn."* [2]

76 years ago, it also entranced Chicagoans. On October 6th, 1941, the Chicago Tribune dedicated an entire article to the coming of autumn. While war raged across the Atlantic, American hikers and naturalists wondered at the changing of the leaves. Two months later, winter came, and the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Autumn has its own smell—it's strange, how rot smells sweet in the autumn.

> *Two thousand years ago in the area that is now Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, natives called Celts observed the end of the farming season and the beginning of a new year on November 1. The night before, they also celebrated Samhain (pronounced sow-in) or "Hallow E'en." During this eerie time, people believed the boundary between the deceased and the living dissolved. And the ghosts of the dead haunted the Earth.* [3]

In middle school, I had glorious Halloweens for two consecutive years. Dressing up in elaborate costumes from our favorite young adult novels, my friends and I would skip down the street, bellowing a made-up Halloween song at each house: *(To the tune of "Happy Birthday")*

> *Please give us some candy!*
> *Please give us some candy!*
> *If you would, that'd be dandy!*
> *As long as it's not sandy!*

2. Rita Fitzpartick, "Birds, Animals, Sky and Trees Tell of Autumn," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, October 6, 1941.
3. Alexis Burling, "Halloween History," *Storyworks; New York*, October 2008.

Our musical efforts earned us cooing and chocolate—we were just on the upper edge of cute. Finally returning inside after a solid two hours of dashing door to door in the (usually) frigid weather, we would sprawl on the floor of William Brown's parents' living room, sipping hot cider. Then the bargaining would begin…

One (1) package of Reese's cups = seven (7) lollipops OR three (3) fun-sized Snickers bars

One (1) package of Swedish Fish = two (2) fun-sized Milky Way bars OR one (1) fun-sized pack of skittles

One (1) soda = two (2) packages of Reese's cups OR eight (8) Snicker's bars

In eighth grade, William Brown decided he didn't want to trick-or-treat with us anymore. He had cooler friends to spend Halloween with. We were getting too old anyway.

All things end.

November

The shortening days prompt our wildlife too to store food and to fatten up on Autumn's abundant fruit, nuts and seeds to see them through the winter months.[4]

The days are now getting shorter in earnest. In the beginning, this feels like a new beginning—perhaps, a dark beginning. A kind of hope for fireplaces and snowflakes and toasted marshmallows. The kinds of dishes that include mashed potatoes and pie crust and heavy, warm meats. It's potluck weather and casserole weather. It's getting ready to settle into a comfortable spot in your blankets while storms rage outside.

Thanksgiving Day can be traced back to the 1621 celebration at the Plymouth Plantation, where the religious refugees from England known popularly as the Pilgrims invited the local Native Americans to a harvest feast after a particularly successful growing season. The previous year's harvests had failed and in the winter of 1620 half of the pilgrims had starved to death.[5]

4. "How Does Autumn Affect Animals | Gardening with Children," accessed October 11, 2017.

My father's family always has a dazzling Thanksgiving celebration. Cousins and second cousins and aunts and uncles and *I don't know how we're related*'s tumble into their old Iowa farmhouse. In between games of Bananagrams and Catchphrase and Liverpool Rummy, the Stritzel aunts bark at the teenagers to peel potatoes and stir gravy and dig pomegranate seeds from their shells for the classic orange pomegranate Jell-O. When the chaos settles, my grandfather (great-grandfather to some) says the prayer. After loading his plate, he settles himself at the head of the table: a great patriarch, in his festive plaid vest. And I am glad to store up food before the winter.

Now the cousins are grown and have children, and the aunts and uncles are getting older. Fragments of family still gather every year, but it tastes like another ending. Autumn is a brief gasp of something strange and supernatural and beautiful.

During this eerie time, people believed the boundary between the deceased and the living dissolved.[6]

I had glorious Halloweens for two consecutive years.

When leaves face disintegration and animals prepare for new birth in spring, the boundary between beginnings and endings dissolves too.

Now the long freight of autumn goes smoking out of the land.
My possibles are all packed up, but still I do not leave.
I am happy enough here, where Dakota drifts wild in the universe,
Where the prairie is starting to shake in the surf of the winter dark. [7]

5. "Thanksgiving: What's the History of the Holiday and Why Does the United States Celebrate with a Turkey Dinner?," *Telegraph.co.uk; London*, November 22, 2016.
6. Burling, "Halloween History."
7. Thomas McGrath, "Beyond the Red River," Poetry Foundation. October 11, 2017.

GIRL PROBLEMS

by BERKELEY McCARTHY

She sits on the armrest of her wine-stained couch, only to fall backward with a cushioned thud. Her thick, kinky hair lays splayed under her. Her veiny hands are large enough to cover her whole tear-soaked face. She sighs aloud, summoning her roommates' attention.

"Accusations are thrown at me every day. For being a liar, a fake, a man. I wear dresses, I put on makeup, I act like a good girl. I soften my voice. I recede into myself. I put in the effort to prove that I'm female. I take time out of my day to make sure everyone I walk past believes me." She tries to retain her voice through her sobbing. "I have to present myself as feminine as possible so that I don't have to answer to strangers."

Why do you hate your body?'
You're a pervert.
Do your parents hate you?
You're lying to yourself. You want to be part of our community

so that you can feel special.

So . . . do you still have a dick?

Every day that I exist, the more my identity is up for debate. Even taking a piss is a statement. I didn't ask for people like me to be the face of a political campaign. The media portrays me as a grotesque monster. Or as the hero: a brave soul willing to wear her favorite lipstick." Her tears subside.

She rolls on her side to see her friends, folding her arms in front of her chest. "Then there's the constant violence. Every month someone like me is killed in cold blood. An average of twenty-five reported every year, more that go unreported[1]. This violence tells other people that they have a right to attack me. That we *must* die. The forgotten names of these women remind me that I am not meant to exist. I know I do. I love myself. But it's hard. It's hard to get the voices out of my head when everyone yells in my face that I'm an abomination of nature. Ridicule from family, from peers, from my country."

Closing her eyes, she takes a deep breath. "I'm so exhausted. I'm worn out from proving myself, that I am happy with who I am. All I want is to like myself when I look in the mirror. People tell me how wrong I am, how I'm unnatural. I do not fight or rage. I compose myself and ignore everyone else." She laughs through her nose. "I feel like punching them would send a stronger message." She looks down toward the couch. "I try to listen to the people who love me and tell me I'm real."

Finally, she sits up, shrugging. She places her tired hands next to her thighs.

"I know I exist. I'm not sure if I deserve to."

1. Crary, David. "2017 Killings of Transgender People Hit Record High: HRC." *Time*, Time, 17 Nov. 2017.

Art by Daniel S. Workman

Art by Daniel S. Workman

MZUNGU

by MARY BETH BLALOCK

In the landlocked African country of Zambia, I ask a six-year-old, Nyanja speaking, HIV positive girl named Natasha, "Muli Bwanji?" How are you?

"Bwino…" Fine… she replies. We continue our conversation, and I eventually ask her what she wants to be when she grows up. Her answer startles me, "Mzungu." This six-letter word is what Zambians use to describe a white person. Unsure how to respond, I shake my head, hold back tears, and continue with my questions.

An interest in international development and global public health brought me to Lusaka, Zambia as an intern with an organization that provides schooling for orphans who live in the compounds. Through the safety of a bus window, my eyes are exposed to the most severe poverty I've ever seen. I

try to shake the terrifying resemblance this feeling carries to being at the zoo and staring through glass at a world vastly different than my own, a world I understand little about. I fight the urge to stare at the drunk and naked man sprawled out on the ground next to a pile of trash. I fight the anger I feel at the other passengers on the bus, gawking, taking pictures on their iPhone 7s. I fight tears when I see a potbellied five-year-old holding an infant on her hip. The bus bounces up and down as we wind through alleyways narrow enough to make me hold my breath. A group of shoeless children chase behind our bus, some following the bus, some following the others. It's a game to them, a new exciting event in an otherwise monotonous world. Americans in the bus, including myself, cry at the sight. Neither tears of joy or sorrow, simply an overflow of emotion. I have trouble believing the emotional response has nothing to do with the color of the children's skin.

When I exit the bus, a small swarm of black skinned, black haired children are reaching out for a high five. Many of the children are dressed in tattered souvenir shirts from Disney World, "The Happiest Place on Earth!" and shirts that say something like, "My aunt went to Cancun and all she got me was this stupid tee shirt!". Their shoes, if they have them, are pointlessly small or entirely too big. I make my way through the crowd, smiling and high fiving the children but uncomfortable with my immediate fame. Following the instructions of my trip leader, I try to hurry to the school across the street, the reason for our drive into this compound. Large gates topped by barbed wire and shards of glass separate the school from the drunk man and the children I was just high fiving. The children and teachers in the school are all uniformed, it is an entirely different world inside the gates. The group places themselves in the middle of the school's courtyard, most taking pictures of the brand-new building. I hang in the back, staring at the gate instead of the building. It's too tall to see over, but there is a space at the bottom where the gate doesn't touch the ground. In this tiny space, there are at least twenty faces smooshed together, straining to see a piece of the world inside the fence.

Other than having a sponsor to pay for the tuition fees, there is only one requirement for admittance into this school -- be an orphan. This includes children who are only cared for by one parent. Largely because of the high prevalence of AIDS, Zambia

I see a potbellied five-year-old holding an infant on her hip.

A school is better than a brothel.

has the highest per capita orphan rate in the world, which means most of the children in the compounds surrounding Lusaka are "eligible." At the end of the day, all the students and teachers shuffle out of the gates, dressed in crisp, western style uniforms, meeting the kids who have been waiting outside the fence all day. They are all a part of the same world again until morning.

As I make my way through the classroom, meeting these students, I worry about the way I am disrupting their classroom for the day. I wonder about all the other mzungus who have walked through these rooms, taking pictures of the school kids. Or all the mzungus who sponsor these orphans and paid for this building with a small percentage of their yearly salary. The trip leader tells us that this building used to be a brothel. He tells stories of a student whose mother was a prostitute at this brothel before she died of AIDS. "This building is a sign of redemption." I can't argue with that; certainly, a school is better than a brothel.

Walking through a shopping mall in Lusaka is where one will experience the most Western influence; Pizza Hut is in between a craft beer bar and a gelato stand. As an American living in Zambia for the summer, I was thankful for these pieces of home in a foreign land. On the walk from a food mart to a toy store I pass multiple billboards for companies I've never heard of. All the models on these are either white, or extremely light skinned. I look back and forth from the advertisements to the Zambians surrounding me, none of whom look anything like the posters, or me. I walk into the toy store and make my way to the doll section. There is one row of black dolls: black hair, black skin. The rest of the aisle is covered in white dolls: blonde hair, blue eyes.

Stepping into the compounds on the outskirts of Lusaka, the signs of the Western world are less obvious. Beyonce's Hair Salon sits on the corner across from a store with a salvaged 7-Eleven sign on the front. A small hut made of recycled water bottles sells pirated American movies, refurbished cell phones, and hairbrushes all in one place. Natasha is from the Garden compound in Lusaka, Zambia. To any outsider, Garden's name would be a mystery. The compound cannot boast of any vegetation, much less a garden; the ground is composed of dust, trash, and broken glass. Talking to

the locals reveals that Garden is named after a farming area just on the edge of the compound. Once accustomed to the smell of sewage, the field is a pleasant place to be. The grass grows a thick green, even in the dead of winter, contrasting with the grey bleakness of the compound like Central Park in the middle of New York City. Most of the kids who live here go to this field, the closest thing to "nature" left in their small world, when they need time alone, a place to process or pray.

Natasha has no trouble jumping over piles of trash and making a game out of it. She picks up a piece of glass from a broken beer bottle and begins to draw with it. It amazes me how similar her drawings are to anything I would expect to see in an American kindergarten classroom. She scratches out a sun, completely colorless, but still bringing light. When she grows bored with drawing, she skips away and limbos under a clothesline. An old lady steps out from behind a curtain covering a small door frame, I can't understand the Nyanja, but she sounds upset. Nevertheless, Natasha giggles and runs away, motioning for me to follow. I have more trouble navigating this world; I'm much more careful of the holes filled with sewage and the piles of trash. A group of men stumble past us, yelling, slurring their words, getting closer and closer. Natasha laughs at the scene but gets in between me and the group. She's protecting me while I'm in her world.

Natasha and I pass by one house where a young girl is holding a baby. When the baby sees me, she starts wailing, screaming, clenching the girl holding her. All the adults begin laughing hysterically. Natasha can tell I'm confused; she laughs, "Mzungu" and points at me. I suddenly realize that I am the first white person, or mzungu, this baby has seen. In her world, I'm just different. In her world, putting me on a billboard would seem at best, foolish, and most severely, terrifying. I think I agree with her, I find the idea of my face on a Zambian billboard terrifying.

We eat our lunch sitting on some concrete stumps with no clue as to their history or origin. I eat a PB&J, Natasha eats a slice of bread and a nutritional drink I brought her. I know I can't give her more food because her stomach isn't used to it, but I still worry about my having more than her. Other kids from the compound come up to join us, staring at me, whispering questions to Natasha. I smile and ask them questions in the limited Nyanja I know. Some answer, the rest laugh at what I'm assuming is my pronunciation. We sit, content with each other's presence. I become less aware of my whiteness sitting in this calm circle of elementary aged children until a young girl starts stroking my arm hair. She giggles and shows her friend. Another boy looks at me concerned, and points to a freckle on my arm. "Fine, fine," I say smiling. I show him another freckle on my other arm but this doesn't comfort him. He tries to scratch off the freckle like it's dirt.

She's protecting me while I'm in her world.

When it's time for me to leave, I find Natasha in the crowd of children that has formed between us. I stoop down and hug her tiny body. "Nikukanda," I love you, I say. We walk to the bus hand in hand. I squeeze her hand before letting go, "Tionana," see you later. I find my seat and look out the window, Natasha is still there, looking for me on the bus. I stick my hand out of the dusty old window. She's blowing me kisses and runs up to the window. I lean my head out as far as I can to kiss her forehead before I leave her world and return to my own.

As a white, upper middle class citizen of the United States, there have been very few times I have been the racial minority. In Zambia I am white skin in a sea of black, but still I'm not the minority. I can't travel to another country in the opposite hemisphere of the world and expect to escape my white privilege. It was this privilege that allowed me to go to Zambia, but more importantly, it allowed me to return to America. This privilege has also given me the resources to sponsor Natasha to go to school.

So, what do I say when a six-year-old, orphaned, HIV positive girl from Lusaka, Zambia tells me that she wants to be a mzungu when she grows up, that she wants to have this privilege? How do I respond when a child innocently notices a privilege many of my peers deny having? When I went back to Zambia the following year, Natasha had been in school for one year. This time when I asked her what she wanted to be when she grows up she answered, "A teacher." A teacher like her teacher, who was an orphan herself, who grew up and still lives in the Garden compound of Lusaka, Zambia. A teacher who has given back to her community what she was given. A black, Zambian teacher.

Art by Daniel S. Workman

THE SHORES

by MADELINE SELTZER

Mom reached for the aluminum foil, pulled the smooth silver out, and tore off a long sheet using the teeth on the box. "Let me just wrap up the mashed potatoes before you go" she said as she covered the stuffing and green beans.

"I'll be home tomorrow mom" I snapped back. I just wanted to leave before she changed her mind and didn't allow me to sleep over at my older sisters' house.

"Well, maybe your sisters want it for the week," Mom said, directing the statement to them even though they weren't in the room. "Kristy! Lisa!" she called.

I knew where they went. I saw them sneak off after dinner to have a cigarette. I couldn't wait to jump in the backseat of Kristy's dirty white Honda Accord so I could have one too. Something I did only with them. I liked when they called me mature, how they treated me like a friend despite our age difference.

"Coming!" one of them yelled. Their voices sounded so similar I couldn't tell which sister spoke.

"You want the stuffing and green beans, right Kristy?"

Mom said with a look, as if Kristy had a choice to refuse them. "I mean, I wasn't even going to make them until you told your father how Thanksgiving wouldn't be the same without them." She waved the Tupperware in my sister's face.

"Yeah, I'll take them. I can eat them for lunch at work," Kristy said. "Thanks Julie"

Sometimes I wished she would just call her Mom.

"Alright Maddie, if you still want to sleep over then grab your stuff and let's go" Lisa, my oldest sister, said as she yanked at her black skirt.

Before anyone could object I pivoted on my socks and slid across the hardwood floor to my room. I grabbed an oversized, tattered T-shirt and some flannel pants to sleep in, a toothbrush, my journal, and three different books from my shelf that I knew I wouldn't read but liked having near, just in case I ended up alone like last time.

I held my backpack to my chest so it wouldn't knock anything over as I held my breath, walking by my dad, who lay passed out and snoring as loud as a log cutter on the couch in the den.

"Ready," I announced.

"Hold on," Mom said. "Wait a minute." She turned off the faucet at the sink where she leaned over a pile of dishes. "What time are you bringing her back in the morning?"

"I'll call you when we wake up," I said and gave her a quick hug. "Thanks for dinner, Mom."

"Yeah, thanks," both sisters said in unison.

I followed Kristy who followed Lisa to the Honda Accord. The redwoods in front shielded the house from the concrete street. Lisa swung open the passenger door and I reached for the lever to spring the seat forward so I could climb in. The car always felt warm and the smell of thick smoke stained the fabric seats, also sweetly scented with perfume. The windows didn't roll down in the backseat. As Kristy reversed down the driveway, she turned her head back to see. She had a cigarette bobbling up and down from her lips and the smoke drifted toward me.

She had a cigarette bobbling up and down from her lips and the smoke drifted towards me.

"Sorry dude," Kristy said, without parting her lips too far so that the cigarette wouldn't fall out. "Did you want one?"

Lisa plucked one from the pack and lit it for herself. "I don't know," she said, "I feel bad giving you cigarettes, Maddie." She had begun stepping into her role as the eldest. "Do you smoke with anyone else? I just don't want it to be a thing that you do *only* with us."

"Yeah, a lot of my friends smoke," I lied. She handed me the cigarette and the lighter. My thumb kept slipping off the lighter. "Can you do it for me?" I said to Lisa, handing her both the lighter and cigarette.

"Hold this" Lisa said, handing me her cigarette.

Lisa and Kristy lived together in a two-bedroom apartment in a complex with pink cursive writing on it called *The Shores*. Shortly after we arrived, they both disappeared into one of the rooms. I pulled out *Flowers in the Attic* by V.C. Andrews and flipped the pages, not looking at the words but rather listening to any kind of sound that would indicate what occupied them.

"You have to call him," Lisa said. "I told you before we left for Julie and Dad's that this wasn't gonna be easy with Maddie around. I'll stay here and you go."

"I already owe him, and he might not spot me this time, plus he likes you better," Kristy said. "Can't we all go? I'll just stay in the car with her."

"It's a type of weed." Lisa said.

"Yeah, it's called hash," Kristy said, "it's way stronger."

We crawled back into the Honda and now I had lit my own cigarette with ease. I couldn't wait to share with my middle school friends on Monday morning that I had smoked weed with my sisters. I had done it a couple times before, but I never got high.

I couldn't wait to share with my middle school friends on Monday morning that I had smoked weed with my sisters.

We parked in a spot towards the back of a Rite-Aid as Lisa aggressively punched texts into her phone, swinging her head from side to side. A light blue mini-van and stopped by our car. "That's him," Kristy said and Lisa jumped out.

Last month Kristy had signed me out of school to take me to get a Halloween costume. We went to a warehouse rented out only to sell costumes for the month of October. She told me she quit her job but not to tell Mom or Dad.

I couldn't decide what to go as so I copied Kristy and dressed as what she called a "slutty nurse." She let me borrow her emergency-red thigh high pleather boots on the night of my

friend's costume party.

After a few minutes, Lisa stomped back. She kept checking for anyone behind her but she looked happier than I'd seen her all night.

Back at *The Shores* we all sat in the living room. Lisa unwrapped the cellophane covering the tiny black ball, the size of a chocolate chip.

"Dude, he totally ripped us off," Lisa said examining the piece between her thumb and pointer finger. "I can see where he pinched the sack."

Kristy came around the kitchen island with a roll of aluminum foil and the end of a hollowed-out pen. "Let me see," she said.

"Yeah right, I'll hit it first," Lisa demanded.

Just like Mom had done earlier, Kristy pulled a rectangular piece of smooth silver and tore it off with the box's teeth. She folded the piece again, tore it, and repeated, making it a perfect square. She handed it to Lisa. Lisa pinched off a piece from the black ball and rolled it until it became the size of a big booger before sticking it onto the foil. She put the hollowed-out pen in her mouth and lit the underside of the foil, expelling a stream of smoke. I never saw anyone smoke weed like this before.

Next, Kristy took a hit and held it in until a tiny cough escaped. "I didn't get a good hit," she said. "Let me do it again."

Lisa rolled her eyes like she had heard that before, and gestured for the aluminum back.

"What about me?" I said. I didn't really care about smoking, I just hated how they kept forgetting me.

"Are you sure you want to?" Lisa said. "It's really strong."

"Yeah," I said. "I wanna try."

"Okay, but let me light it for you," Lisa said as she handed me the hollowed out pen. I placed it between my lips like they had done, like I had done with the cigarettes. She lit the underside of the foil and I froze and forgot to suck.

"Maddie!" The flame went out and Lisa grabbed the pen from my mouth and tried gulping down the drifting smoke. "You have to suck really hard. You just wasted a lot."

"Okay, but let me light it for you."

Kristy went into the kitchen and came back with a cup. "Here try this," she said. "It's a lot easier if you cover the foil with the cup, and let it fill up, then put the cup on your face and inhale. That way you *will* feel it."

I sat with my sweaty hands soaking into my jeans as they conducted the cup experiment. When the time came for me to inhale, Kristy put the cup against my face like an oxygen mask on a crashing plane.

"Hold it in," Lisa said. "Keep holding it."

I exhaled and felt my body drop down. My earlobes tugged at my head like weights, my eyes started closing, and my whole body tingled as if someone had been lightly tickling me.

Each sister got on either side of me and lifted my arms above my head. Lisa stripped my shirt off as Kristy dropped my night shirt on. I felt the cold clean T-shirt collapse on my stomach like a curtain. Kristy sat at my feet and untied my shoelace. She peeled my mint green *Converse* off and rubbed my toes until they were warm. I unbuttoned my pants and yanked them off my ankles and tossed them in the corner. My face was burning and all of the blood in my body seemed to have rushed there. The cool sheets soothed me. My eyes didn't have a chance of staying open. My head sank but my ear drifted to the hallway where I heard, "We can never tell her what that was."

OBAASAN

by DYLLAN MORAN

my grandmother / standing on the powder / sugar beach. / black sea, / the moon shining / down /
born on an island / never to learn to swim

my grandmother, / how much of you / is lost? do / you know? /
obaasan / mitsukerarenai

my grandmother's / name might mean / water; /
you never taught me how to write it. /

that means it's all still a mystery to me

Art by Daniel S. Workman

CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE

by BAILEY KNAUB

Nine lives, eight lives, seven lives…

The first time it happened, I was seven-years-old, and struggling for breath like a newly born kitten, like the kittens imprinted on my red and pink Valentine's Day PJs that say, "You're Purrfect!" PJs that flapped in the breeze, bed abandoned along with the safety of youth. Un-socked, juvenile feet pattering against the hardwood as I rushed to my parents in the middle of the night, and they lie to me for the first time.

"You can breathe, Bailey. If you're talking to us, then you're breathing," my mom said, always the rational one with sound logic and wicked mama-bear instincts. A trained nurse trying to calm me through what we all assumed was an asthma attack. Although, asthma attacks shouldn't paint your fingernails and lips Atlantic blue. Skin straining over childish collarbones like they would tear as easily as scissors gliding through wrapping paper on Christmas Eve. Mouth moving, but only pained silence passing through cobalt lips. Every gasp leaving me more breathless than the last. Suffocating on dry land in the way only a mermaid could.

I died minutes later in Mom's arms, asphyxiating within my own traitorous body. The chilly February air caressing my clammy skin; that's the first sensation to seep into my memory. Next, the hard, unyielding floors of our dining room I lay on, Mom hovering above me and the deep, baritone pitch of the Fire Chief, the only medic that could find our isolated house up in the mountains. This during the time before every phone had a GPS programed into it. Back when dial-up internet screeched its invasion, our landline phoned 911, and Disney channel was still a gem.

Consciousness came in waves after I stopped breathing for the first time, after my first death. It stroked my mind, surging and receding like the crashing surf on a white sand beach. I don't remember the ride to the hospital in the ambulance, only the red and blue splashes of sirens painting the pine forest in a massacre of fluorescents. The monochromatic X-ray that—at the time—showed nothing wrong with my respiratory system. Everyone trying to express the gravity of the situation in childlike terms, telling me the ER was like 7/11.

"You can come get a slurpee any time you want."

My eleven-year-old sister passed out in a chair too large for her, child psyche intact, but fracturing under the strain this moment placed on my family. Earth shifting, gravity dragging us all down. Dad hiding the crushing pressure behind a clenched jaw in the fleeting highway lights on the drive home, and Mom's white-knuckle grip around the emergency EpiPen, our last strand of hope dying within her optimistic blue eyes. My brother falling with us when he returned from college a week later. Not allowed to sleep until I repeated back how to use the EpiPen over and over and over again at age seven on a frigid February night at two in the morning. When I finally passed their unknown test I didn't even know I was taking, I curled up in their bed—not my own—and fell asleep. But you never forget the first time your parents lie to you. It's Purrfect.

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Nine lives, eight lives, seven lives…

I was ten-years-old when it happened again, and we now know what's wrong with me. What apparently was always wrong with me. My body had just lived in denial for the first seven years of my life. Now, tumors wreaked havoc in my lungs, succumbing to

It stroked my mind, surging and receding like the crashing surf on a white sand beach.

Death isn't heard, he is felt, and that day, Death tasted of sticky peanut butter and coarse hospital sheets.

my own body—my own blood—turning against itself due to a rare disease. No one expected me to live past eight. But at ten, Death greeted me again as if we were childhood best friends. Knocking on my hospital door, inviting himself in, and taking a seat beside me on the lumpy hospital bed.

None of us noticed at first, too distracted by one of my parents' friend's that decided to visit us in the hospital, the first new person we'd seen outside of the doctors and nurses in weeks. We gave her the best, least uncomfortable chair in the room. My parents crowded around her, eager for news of the outside world, where time didn't stand still like it did in that hospital with an odd number of corners. You get desperate in the hospital, tired of beeping machines, the painted-on smiles of doctors, and off-colored-white walls. So bored that you start to count all the weird angles in the room just so you don't hear the worries plastering themselves to the inside of your skull.

I didn't know her name, the lady that came to visit us. She might have been from our church or my parents' jobs. But I didn't care. Not when I had a soggy hospital PB&J the cafeteria brought up for me, nothing more than bread smothered in peanut butter. Not like the kind your mother makes with love in the summer after hours in the baking sun. Visitors came and went all the time in my hospital rooms, I stopped counting, but the silent visitor that followed the woman in wouldn't be ignored.

Heated fingers closed off my throat, blocking the airway no bigger than a straw that doctors struggled to properly open. A soft pitch whistle escaping my mouth, not even able to choke out a warning. Death isn't heard, he is felt, and that day, Death tasted of sticky peanut butter and coarse hospital sheets. Screams bounced off all the odd angles of the room, and machines blared along with the pinging of the nurse call button no one answered. The foreign blue eyes of the woman froze in terror, face as ashen as my paling lips. I died for the second time to that woman's face, never learned her name, never saw her again after that day. I couldn't blame her for not coming back.

I've never seen the face of Death, but the face of that woman was the closest I've come to putting one on him. I didn't eat a PB&J again until I was fourteen.

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Nine lives, eight lives, seven lives…

I'm fifteen, even older than anyone expected, but younger than I should be. About to start my freshman year of high school. It's summer, where the refreshing night air harbored our deepest scandals and the stars were our gods. But instead, I'm counting corners in the ICU unit, not chilling at the pool with tan lines and basking in the invincibility of adolescence. Something I had long ago lost along with my mortality. I'm baffling doctors about what's killing me, a fret that had lost its terrifying yet awed appeal after the fifth time. You know you're fucked when doctors start calling your already rare disease that's acting different than the few cases throughout history after your own name. *Bailey's* became the popular excuse doctors used when they had no clue how to treat me, how to stop me from dying.

"IDK, it's just Bailey's." I grew tired of my own name at fifteen.

Death was swifter this time. Going straight for the jugular without any foreplay. Suffocating, drowning in your own body takes longer than you think, longer than you would like. But this death happened faster with stars zooming through my vision like the heavy snowflakes rocketing past you in the headlights of your father's dinged up truck in the dead of night. Then I'm falling, submerging into comforting darkness. No light at the end of the tunnel to guide me, only soothing blackness like the kind under your favorite blanket when you're nine and you're convinced a flimsy sheet can keep the monsters at bay.

"Can I not get my driver's license now?" That's my last thought before I'm in oblivion. Or maybe it's Elysium, perhaps it's Valhalla, possibly good old heaven, but hell was better with my track record.

This death isn't memorable. It's not like the first time. But it's the first time coming back was traumatic. The green line of my heartbeat went from stable to spiking like the Colorado peaks. Suffocating in a new way at the six faces above me. Their breaths painting a watercolor portrait of panic. I'm there, but not really. Lucid, but floating in lightheadedness. Chest not moving, but air passing through the non-collapsed lung. Not registering life, reality, this moment until a nurse's fingers slip into my limp hand. Then reality snapped back in like a strained rubber band over a rolled-up newspaper your mom brandished like a whip at Thanksgiving dinner when your cousins get a little too handsy around the turkey.

The green line of my heartbeat went from stable to spiking like the Colorado peaks.

Jarring at the edges, blurring as adrenaline resets my heart, edges blacking out while color saturated.

"She's back! She's squeezing my hand. Her heart restarted," the nurse screamed. Relief colors the air in pleased huffs. Then the doctors dwindled away, the kindling in the pyre extinguishing. Except for the nurse whose hand I wouldn't let go of, and the doctor that wasn't mine that I forced to stay when she tried to pull the oxygen mask away. You never knew how much you loved the taste of metal-tainted oxygen from tanks until you went minutes without it. The doctors stayed with me. Forced to sit through me comforting my father, not the other way around. His hair as chaotic as the look in his eyes after he thought he lost his youngest. Calming Mom over the phone, promises oozing from my tone in careful fibs and false bravado. Holding back tears as I texted my two siblings that realized our family of five almost just became four, fingers shaking on the keys and trying to muster the will to keep going. The imaginary pale, tear-stained faces of my family at my funeral floated behind my eyes every time I blinked. I plastered on a fake smile everyone believed after eight years of putting on the same act daily just to get by. I'm fifteen when I learn to lie as good as my parents on that first night. Fifteen when I figured out how much my family depended on me being okay, even if I truly wasn't. I'm fifteen when I became the Bailey my family needed and started doing everything to ensure that Bailey's dies within my body.

Nine lives, eight lives, seven lives…

Twenty-two now, a fifth-year college student who sacrificed a lung to live, and living without giving two fucks. Driving way too fast with many speeding tickets to show for it. Drinking boys under the pool table I just conned them on and currently, writing this high. Don't fret, it's an edible. Living on the edge is easy when you've already crossed that line. Tightroping between life and death now that I'm cursed with the nine lives of a cat. All because of those stupid Valentine's Day PJs with kittens on them, and whenever anyone asks how I'm doing, I lie with an easy—I'm Purrfect.

One death, two deaths, three deaths… downloading the fourth.

Art by Daniel S. Workman

THE BEAR

by HEATHER CLAYPOOLE

When I was six, I received a stuffed toy bear that was huge, bigger than me. I was slightly terrified of this bear at first, because I was six and hadn't often encountered inanimate objects with large glass eyes and some semblance of an expression; it still escapes me why people think overly large stuffed animals are okay for small children, but perhaps my view is singularly mine. He (and I don't know why he was assigned a gender—thanks, patriarchal system) was an unsightly shade of beige; he could've blended in with our carpet that had become a murky shade after many food and liquid spills. He had no name, which I'm hoping is attributed more to me forgetting rather than lacking creativity. After a few weeks, he grew on me; I could drag him to and fro around the house, use him as cover during hide and seek, and utilize him as a backrest, but more importantly I could hump the shit out of him.

Without even having any concept of sex, this bear had somehow become my sexual awakening. It started innocently enough; after watching *Titanic*—no idea why I was watching this at six or, even more curiously, why I was so transfixed by it—I decided to experiment with kissing the bear. This did nothing

for me as he was an inanimate object; he lacked the warmth and sentience of a young Leo DiCaprio. So, I had to resort to the boys in my kindergarten class. I would indiscriminately choose a boy sitting at my drawing table, and whisper in his ear to meet me behind the play kitchen or, if I was feeling particularly brazen, the opaque, floral curtains.

Let me preface my few kissing tales with the fact that, at six years old, I was very gross and very rude and very weird. I would openly pick my nose and eat my boogers; I would flat-tire anyone who walked in front of me; I had a weirdly deep and raspy voice (my mother would later say I sounded like what she imagines an alien sounds like); I would push people down if they "took too long" on the monkey bars and derisively tell them that their mothers' heads were shaped like eggs; I often stared directly at the sun; and to top it all off, I never brushed my teeth. Some of these things have since changed, but my point is that these poor boys did not want to kiss me, which is why I did not make them privy to my plans until they met me at my choice locale.

Let me preface my few kissing tales with the fact that, at six years old, I was very gross and very rude and very weird.

Because I was the tallest kid in the class, I would tower over my selected boy and plainly tell him to kiss me. They would tell me that they didn't know how, and then I would give a demonstration using my hand and tell them to "just do it." I would lean down and we would share a quick and meaningless peck, but I was always left wanting more. At six, I craved some movement of the lips, some passion that would mimic the kisses between Jack and Rose. I started to become more demanding. "Move your lips like this," I would say before using my hand again to dramatically tilt my head from side to side, but no one ever got it right.

Perhaps no one satisfying my kissing cravings was what pushed me to the edge—the edge of my humping my bear. I'm not actually entirely sure what did it or how it came to be. Since I was at first in fear of the bear, maybe I thought I could overcome my fears by literally mounting them and going to town. I don't know, but what I did know was that it felt good. It was a sensation I had never experienced before and I couldn't explain it. After a while, my mom noticed that the bear was looking very ragged, so she suggested that we throw it away. I would not stand for it; at the mere mention of dumping the bear, I threw a fit, which she quickly and simply conceded to. I'm sure she thought he was just another bear, but to me he was so much more.

I was deathly afraid of being found out. I somehow knew what I was doing was considered wrong, and I felt shame around it, but not enough to stop me. I would only pursue our trysts when my parents weren't home, but I still had to work around my older sister. I have a very vivid memory of dragging the bear around the house in search of my sister so I could know where she was and take my bear where she wasn't. I couldn't find her anywhere and assumed she was playing outside with the neighbors, so I went to my favorite "secret" spot, which was the closet in the computer room. As I was opening the door to the closet, my sister swiftly appeared behind me and asked with a furrowed brow what I was doing. I panicked, and in my deep voice quickly said, "Nothing!" and ran into the closet with the bear in tow and shut the door. I sat there for a bit with the light off contemplating what I should do and whether I should lie to my sister about what I was doing with the bear, even though she had no idea. In the end, my primal instincts kicked in and, if nothing else, I have always been someone who does what they want, so I ended up humping the bear.

Not too long after that, I started feeling not just shame but paranoia. Not only was "God"—whom I was told bore a strong resemblance to Dave Thomas, the founder of the renowned fast food chain Wendy's—watching me, but I started to think my parents were watching as well. I got it in my head that there were cameras in the walls and that they had been watching me with disdain the whole time. I began overanalyzing their actions and words, and it ate me alive. When my mom would simply tell me to eat my broccoli at dinner, she meant, "Eat your broccoli because you've been doing something very bad with your bear and we all know about it and we're going to drop you off and leave you at the place you hate the most—the dentist's office." One day I couldn't stand it anymore, and as soon as I started hankering for the bear, I ran to the landing of the stairs and yelled, "Mom, are there any cameras in the walls?" To which she confusedly replied, "No," and inquired as to why I was asking. This was when I was seven and did not yet have the confidence to be terse with my mother, so I figured that saying "no reason" or "just curious" wouldn't suffice. I had to devise an elaborate lie, so I told her that I had just watched a show on Nickelodeon where parents put cameras in the walls of their children's' rooms to watch and either condone or condemn their activity. My

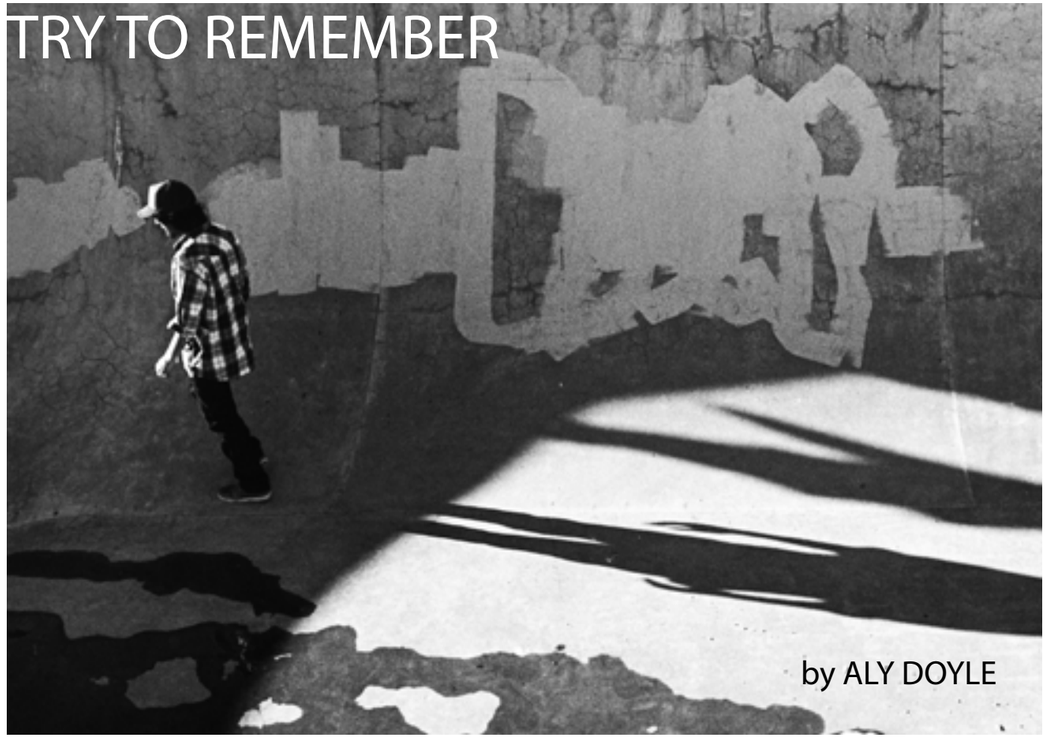
mother noted that it was a good idea for a show and maybe she should do that for us. Believing her, my heart sank and I ran to my bear thinking it may be one of our last times together.

Over the years, I would preach the act of humping to my friends. I would instruct them on how one humps and attempt to articulate the feeling. It never got through to any of them, though one friend tried but said she felt bad doing it. I was the only one, or so I thought. In middle school, I told a few of my closest friends and, much to my surprise, they had also humped objects into the ground when they were very young. None of them knew how it happened either, but they knew what it felt like. My best friend said she would hump the arm of her couch, but one day her mom walked in and berated her for it and after that she stopped.

I don't know what became of that bear. I had it for years, but once I moved onto actual human beings, I no longer needed him and lost track of his whereabouts. I like to imagine he is in a comfortable home now serving another child, the way he fulfilled his duties for me. Actually, I do not wish that—that would be weird. But I do hope that he is on a tropical island, perhaps Bora Bora, or on a northeastern retreat in the Poconos, and I hope that kids everywhere are having their sexual awakenings (something I never thought I would say) and not feeling too bad about it. And, if nothing else, it just goes to show that the best way to overcome a fear is to mount it and ride like the wind.

Art by Daniel S. Workman

TRY TO REMEMBER



by ALY DOYLE

I was fifteen, merely a freshman in high school. Between being nervous and excited, I was out of control, like most teenage girls. The gossip, boys, heavy eyeliner, and constant bickering with my mom made me a living stereotype. I held my head a little too confidently but I luckily had two brothers that kept a watchful eye on me.

My brothers were protective of me—the baby of the family and their only sister. Dominick, my oldest brother, made sure to keep me in my place. Over six feet tall and only a junior, everyone knew not to mess with him. In reality, though, he was a giant teddy bear. I still remember his kind face as he gave me advice, threatening to kill any boy that tried to play me. The older I got, the closer I grew to my brothers, especially Dominick.

I had a fairly regular after-school routine. I would go to cross country practice, then wait for my two brothers to finish football practice. One day, my twin brother stayed home because he was "sick" but probably just faking it. Dominick was with me

Art by Daniel S. Workman 2020

at school though, and despite being sixteen, he still didn't have his license yet so we had to wait for our mom. She was never late.

We piled into the car and prepared ourselves for the interrogation questions. She would start off easy, asking us how our days were. Gradually, she would start pestering us about our homework. *"Do you guys have a lot to do tonight? How much have you started?"* Quietly, we sat and rolled our eyes. Since I was only a freshman, I was always ahead of the game. While all my assignments were done in advance, Dominick was the king of procrastination. This aggravated my poor mother, leaving us no choice but to get our homework done.

When we got home, we all separated to our rooms and closed the doors behind us. I quickly ran off to finish all my homework. Dominick took his time; I was too preoccupied to notice. When I finished, I could finally sit on my phone and gawk mindlessly at all my social media outlets, making sure not to miss any new posts.

In the middle of my social media mania, I heard noises coming from outside my room. Confused, I walked outside to check out the commotion. My twin brother, definitely not sick, ran down the hallway, yelling at me to call 911. I walked forward and pushed Dominick's door open. I tried to remember his kind face, but it was gone. His face was different now. In that moment, I wondered to myself, *why is there so much blood?*

Now all I wonder is, *why did he kill himself?*

I never walked to the football stadium to wait for Dominick after that.

Photo by Daniel S. Workman

IF YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT STEREOTYPES

by ANDIE DULSKY

The first time I can remember falling in love, I was sitting on the floor of my father's office, pounding furiously on the keys of an old typewriter my mother had pulled from the basement. There was something so beautiful about the clicking and the fresh ink on the page. There was something so authentic about not being able to fix your mistakes. It was inexplicably human. I was only six years old at the time, but I can still remember the satisfaction I got from rambling on and on about whatever nonsense was in my head that day.

The funny thing is, I can remember being six and meeting a typewriter for the first time as if it was yesterday, but I cannot remember writing my first love letter. This is something I've always done – sometimes I send them, but most of the time I don't. This first letter was addressed to my middle school best friend, after she stopped talking to me. I had moved across the country, and she seemed to have thrown in the towel on our friendship. I wrote about my grief, the things that happened when she left, and the person that I was because she had been in my life. I could still see the love in the situation. I have the letter, locked in a box in my parent's house that I hardly open, but I

cannot remember writing it.

In this box are dozens of unsent letters addressed to various people. Some of the people are still in my life, and others have left. I've had to lock so many feelings inside this box, some never to be seen by the eyes of another. I'd like to think of them all as love letters – regardless of the contents, each one is addressed to someone I have loved in some form. I've always had a tender soul, but this world is not accepting of this trait.

The first time I wrote her a love letter, I hadn't gotten any sleep. She has a way of keeping me up long after she has left, even in the early hours of the morning.

October 16th, 5:39AM

It's 5:39. I've slept for an hour tonight. I'm lying in a new friend's bed, waiting for the sun to rise so I can walk home. I remember everything, but a familiar haze is covering the edges and seams of everything that happened. I don't remember how it started, but I remember regretting leaving you behind.

I walked home at 6:55. I remember the exact time – it was September and the sun was rising later than I would've liked it to. I left the building, feeling the judgmental stare from the man guarding the front desk. I would've liked to say, "it's not what you think," or "fuck off," but I was too tired to do anything and instead, I walked right past the man, out the front door, and into the morning air.

Maybe I shouldn't take this town for granted. The world looked so beautiful, hazy. I took pictures of everything that morning – the creek as I walked past it, the flowers blooming, and the leaves that were just beginning to turn from green to a shade of pale yellow.

When I finally reached my apartment, I fell straight into bed and fell asleep until two in the afternoon, when my sister came into my room to ask where I had been last night, who I had been with, where I had stayed. I told her I was at a party with friends, and had stayed with them. I didn't mention her.

November 30th, 2:35AM

I can't say I see a future with you, but I can see a present. I can see you waking up next to me, rubbing your seafoam-green eyes in the morning. I can imagine how it would feel to kiss the sides of your neck and run my fingers along the small of your back. I already know how it feels to kiss you, but I want to know how it feels to kiss you when the rest of the world is silent and I want to know what you're thinking. I want to understand the way your beautiful mind works.

I've locked so many feelings inside this box . . .

My mental state died right along with the yellow leaves in September, and I fell into a bout of seasonal depression unlike any before. I spent days in bed, unable to cope with the outside world, and nights etching black charcoal across pristine white paper. I distanced myself from everyone around me, creating a wall between myself and anything that could hurt me. I wrote letters to the people I had met, but mostly I wrote them to myself. I told myself to remember to breathe, to go to my classes, and to try to keep people close. I kept my sister and friends, but I dared not keep her. The monsters had already taken my joy; I dared not let them take her too.

My mental state died right along with the yellow leaves in September . . .

In the following months, I slowly emerged again. I took up dancing again. I started using color in my art after the longest time of seeing things only in black and white. I started talking to her. We became close friends as soon as I could allow her into my life. Despite all of our differences, we got along as well as any two people could. Sometimes she would send me poetry in the late hours of the night. We talked about her friends, her ex, her difficult relationship with being in college.

I'd forgotten how to fall in love, tried over and over again to no avail. There was the girl with the stony blue eyes who spoke in riddles, the girl with mold growing in her lungs, the girl who could never fall in love with me and me alone. In the time that I was dressed up as nicely as I could be, stood up by a date, she was there, late, with her blonde hair and green eyes, looking as nervous as anyone could in a room of strangers. She picked me up in her mother's old car, moving a canteen and a softball mitt off the front seat. I told her that there wasn't anything more stereotypical that she could've done. She just laughed.

That night, I brought her to my friend's apartment, frequented by so many people. I can't tell you exactly how it

happened, but it was in the brush of my hand against hers, in the way that she danced with me. It was in her crooked smile and the way her eyes glinted as she spoke. We stayed up together until four, talking about everything that we could, until she fell asleep. I didn't sleep at all.

The morning was filled with our unwillingness to leave the comfort of the bed. "Thank you for letting me stay," she said, wrapping her arm around my waist and kissing my neck.

"Thank you for staying."

It was the first time she had kissed me in the daylight, the first time we had touched since that first night. It was the first time that I had felt so at peace with another person in the better part of a year.

April 30th, 1:37AM

I think I fell a little in love with you last night. I know it's too soon to be thinking like that, and I have no idea how you're feeling of if you'll ever feel the same way. I already know your kind heart, and the weight that you carry. I know that you talk in your sleep, and that you hadn't ever had hot tea until you met me. Everything that you do seems beautiful to me, even the little things. The way that you hook your thumbs through your belt loops, the way that you brush your hair behind your ear. I've spent so long thinking that I could never connect with anyone. It's like there's a jar over my head like in "The Bell Jar," and how's that for stereotypes. But it disappears when I'm with you, so I know that because of this we can understand each other.

Remember the night that we met when we sat on the edge of that bathtub and talked? I remember you talking about engineering and math and thinking that we couldn't be more different. I was wrong. We have so much in common that I don't really know how to function when I'm around you, let alone tell you exactly how you make me feel, so I'm left to tell you all of the things you do that make me feel this way.

It was the first time she had kissed me in the daylight . . .

Art by Clayton Montgomery

FALL IN ASPEN

by KRISTIN HOPKINS

Occasionally thumping along a rough patch of weather-trodden asphalt, I glide down Main Street in a beaten town car. On my right is an aspen tree grove, sunlight seeping through their tawny leaves, scattering blotched shadows on everything beneath. I find it difficult to believe that a dying thing could appear so fiery and relentless at the inevitable turn of the season. To the left side are a continuation of tourist traps and medical practitioner offices, offering overpriced shot glasses for upper shelf bourbon and straightened spines. The recreational yet gluttonous town is a haven for both the wounded and the intoxicated.

Aspen is a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Denver. Or an hour journey from DIA, considering the forty-five minutes in the air, and the ten-minute rugged landing between two mountains and a deadly tailwind. An oxygen bar at baggage claim is perfectly placed to balance a tourist's equilibrium as they enter the paper-thin air. The oxygen spooling from the tube was flavored with lavender the one time I tried it, but those who grow up here experiment with expensive air for fun rather than

out of necessity. I am home after fifteen years for my high school reunion, unable to recognize anyone in coach on the way over. Maybe they have all found their way to first class. My driver to the hotel relays his story of transporting John Mayer from the airport just last week. His Italian leather shoes were hung over the backseat like rotting bananas, and he apparently served himself a line where my jeans now brush up against the upholstery. "He tipped me alright, but I wouldn't mind watching those earphones he was so fond of jammed in a different cavity".

I am left to my own devices on the corner of Main and Mill at the Hotel Jerome. Not exactly the heart of downtown, but still the beginning of it. Jerome Wheeler was one of the first socialites in Aspen when it was still a mining town. He built both a hotel and an opera house, which still stand today in their golden brick layering. Even his home has been preserved in the West End neighborhood, and I wonder if the Aspen Historical Society kept the same furniture he sat upon at his magnificent soirées. The Hotel Jerome is known for its J-Bar for having served liquor to the buffoon writer Hunter S. Thompson, who shot a bullet through his head only miles from here, and Bill Murray, who played Thompson in a film.

The lobby is scattered with elk heads attached to the walls and framed photographs of high society folks in their lace-up boots bound to the mud. The sidewalks of this town, lined with Gucci, Prada, and Burberry, were built on the dirt and bones of the hundreds who used to live here, searching for their fortune out west when mining for silver was still relevant. Smuggler Mountain, the fortress opposite Aspen Mountain, is a particularly fascinating mine. The largest silver nugget ever found was dragged from its caves right after the Panic of 1893, rendering it useless. There is a photograph in the lobby of the sofa-sized nugget, with a chain tightened around its neck like a noose. With all the extensive tunnels underneath the town of Aspen, an earthquake in these parts would cause the entire four square miles to implode.

After leaving my suitcase behind in the room, I depart the hotel and traipse down to the Rio Grande River just on the outskirts of downtown. This area was a lover's lane when I was a high school student: the skate park nearby with a deep and shadowed hole, a bench by the recycling center to fit a large blanket and two sets of shivering feet. Years ago, around this

time, when the animals were still feasting before their long stay in underground caskets, I woke up alone on that wooden bench to the scraping of a bear's claws against the recycling bins. Its nose was sniffing the air for a hint of last night's rotten and maggoted meat. I laced up my shoes and sprinted a mile back home. What was once my family's two story block is by now a four story mansion. My parents finally sold the place and moved to Idaho after a brutal fight between average paychecks and skyrocketing Aspen taxes.

I enter the John Denver Sanctuary, a park nestled into the side of the river and spotted with granite boulders. It was built not long after the singer's infamous death, and each of the polished boulders is inscribed with lyrics from his memorable songs. "Leaving on a Jet Plane" is the first boulder I find, and ironic that he did leave on a jet plane, and did not come back again. Country music is popular in these parts, but the live music bar "Belly Up" at the base of Aspen Mountain tends to cater to a younger generation's vices, electronic and hip hop reverberating off the cobblestone streets most weekend nights. College kids come back home for wild nights in the underground bar where many established musicians have performed in the nearly impeccable acoustic arena. In the bathrooms, cocaine residue accumulates on baby changing tables and lipstick stains the mirrors with phone numbers and personal anecdotes.

A teenager sprawls herself out on a rock in the middle of the river with a novel in hand, much like I used to do on weekend afternoons. A dog laps around the lagoon with a mossy log in between its barred teeth. The water is no longer riddled with rapids like it is after the snow melt. Now it drools on, and will eventually connect to the Colorado River. Every time an Aspen native takes a step into its frosted surface, the oil from the bottom of their foot can make it all the way to California. When the sky begins to turn, like too much milk whirling in a cup of earl grey, I part with the natural scene and return to the buzzing streets.

When the sky begins to turn, like too much milk whirling in a cup of earl grey, I part with the natural scene and return to the buzzing streets.

The outdoor mall is a congregation of the town's most bustling restaurants and proactive parents with their children attached to their arms like rubber gloves. A fountain sprays at the foot of the cobblestone path, water plumes dancing in unison and surprising the distracted passerby as a foot of water climbs up their pants. A clown blows balloons in the shapes of dogs and

pirate swords, and a kettle corn machine pops and sizzles, leaving greasy trails in paper satchels. The aspen trees lining the street will be covered in lights within the next couple of months for the holidays, and one can witness the glistening from a party at the top of the mountain. There is something about the gold, purple, and blue lanterns that dress the trees in an even more lively manner than their own fallen leaves, strewn about the sewers. I take a turn past the bus station to the gondola plaza at the foot of the mountain.

At my feet is a large compass carved into the granite. My elementary school class once took a field trip here to show us how to find our way to civilization if lost in the woods, in our quite different curriculum. I direct my feet north, and watch where the fading sun has left an orange glow on the mansions of Red Mountain. The way north is the way out of this town, out of this world within itself, which has promised me beauty and given it promptly. Nothing can truly be so wrong in one's life if they can gaze at those successively dying aspen groves far from where the streets have a name. I stand alone and erect in the middle of a compass and take off my hat, nearly bowing to the majesty of the primitive time that still exists, only hidden between the alleyways and river bends. This plaza will be drowning in tourists come November, clutching ski passes and tossing around gloves as though they were confetti, and I will still be standing here gazing at a scene, which I am both separate from and a part of.

I appreciate where I come from. It took a long time to come to terms with that fact, but I am an Aspen native and I should be proud. The policemen mostly do drug arrests and the children are at risk for severe entitlement, but if one can look past these underlying factors, they can see that thousands of people flock here for a noble reason. The sun is nearly gone now and I have found myself squatting on the frigid pavement. I hoist myself onto achy knees, and shuffle back to the hotel to change into my finest clothes for the reunion.

Art by Daniel S. Workman

Art by Daniel S. Workman

CONTRIBUTORS

MARY BETH BLALOCK is a car-dancing, to-do-list-checking, puppy connoisseur who finds a passion for social justice to be the fuel and steering system of nearly all of her life's endeavors. She has spent two summers working in Lusaka, Zambia studying sustainable development work, and uses her free time to mentor teen moms and their children in the Boulder area. Mary Beth recently joined Teach for America's 2018 corps and will begin teaching early childhood education in Denver this fall. When she needs to unwind, Mary Beth finds that playing the piano, watching puppy videos, dancing to Beyoncé's **"LOVE ON TOP"** and camping seem to do the trick. In May she will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, minors in both Leadership and Business, and a certificate in Public Health from the University of Colorado Boulder.

HEATHER CLAYPOOLE grew up in Tallahassee, Florida. She spent four and a half years at CU, including **KERRY REILLY**'s Introduction to Creative Nonfiction class to write **"THE BEAR"**—and graduated with a degree in Film Studies and Creative Writing, resulting in a career as a full-fledged barista. In her off time she enjoys restoring famous fresco paintings, nursing jumbo isotonic sports drinks while indulging in teen dramas or google images of Dave Grohl, and having one-sided conversations regarding the beloved animated character of **CAILLOU**. Having recently returned from a jaunt to Australia with no semblance of a plan for post-graduate life, Heather will do—whatever. She can be found on a street corner waving at people or poring over the children's magazine, **HIGHLIGHTS**, in the waiting room at the dentist's office. Heather is still waiting on **"MAMBO NO. 6."**

JOE CONSTANCIA was born and raised in the middle of nowhere, Texas. He was never disciplined as a child and that is most likely what's wrong with him. He is an undeclared sophomore who, a wee freshman in fall 2016, took the **PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC's** Intro to Creative Nonfiction class with **TOBIN VON DER NUELL**. Joe's passions include activities drawing his attention away from shiny objects. making people talk to him on airplanes, daydreaming, and putting his imagination to good use, mostly for food. He hopes to earn a living making people laugh, between sleeping on a pile of cash. Experience in manual labor and years of procrastinating have given him a renewed appreciation for how valuable an education is, and he is honored to have stories of his old nine to five job included in **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY**.

ALIA CULBERTSON is drawn to all things creative. She's spent her life growing up in Colorado but is eager to see where her creativity takes her after graduating. Alia is in her third year at

the University of Colorado at Boulder pursuing a double major in English and Elementary Education as well as a minor in Political Science. While most her time is occupied studying, being a part of Camp Kesem, and serving in the Arts and Sciences Student Government, she finds time to do what she enjoys most: photography, writing music, reading, and spending time with her siblings. Alia hopes one day to be a part of bringing major change to the Education system in America, but for now is content getting involved with her local community.

The author of "TRY TO REMEMBER," ALY DOYLE is an International Affairs major with a deep passion for traveling. After spending most her childhood in Colorado, Hawaii, and Michigan, she has always had a deep appreciation for new cultures and settings. Although happily finding her new home in Boulder, she realized her passion for traveling would only grow as she met peers from all over the world. Hoping to pursue a career learning more about other cultures, especially Asian civilizations, she strives to broaden her experiences and passions. Aly is a Junior and as her time at CU slowly comes to an end, she is eager to see more, learn more, and pursue her goals and aspirations.

ANDIE DULSKY, author of "THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING WOMAN," is a writer, musician, and activist from Denver, Colorado. Her other work often centers around identity, particularly her identity as a queer, Jewish person. She often writes of trauma, family, and queer relationships, all from a place of tenderness. She currently resides in Boulder, where she studies poetry, dance, and business. She comes home every night to a full bookshelf and a Cairn Terrier named Eve.

KATHRYN HERBERT has always had a passion for self-expression. While not pursuing a degree in writing, she took ERIC BURGER's Advanced Creative Nonfiction class last fall and still enjoys creating poetry and other experimental genres of literature, along with reading any book that comes her way. Kathryn is a double major in French and Political Science and is currently pursuing her Colorado Teaching Licensure as well. She loves to travel and explore new places around Colorado and the world, always looking for new inspiration and ideas. A lover of animals (including her pet snake), gardening, cooking, fresh vegetables, live music, and a strong community, Kathryn is grateful to be a part of this publication with her fellow student artists.

KRISTIN HOPKINS is an English major and Film minor at CU Boulder. This is her third year in college, and she doesn't know where the time has gone. She was born in California and raised in Colorado, so the mountains are very close to her heart. She enjoys skiing, writing, watching films, and hanging out with friends. Kristin is very excited that she has been published in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY after her modest debut in TeenInk. The author of "FALL IN ASPEN" hopes to write novels or screenplays. One of her goals is to watch every film on the Top 250 Movies list on IMdB.

BAILEY KNAUB has always had a passion for writing. She's spent most of her life reading whatever she could get her hands on and writing whenever she had time. When she started her freshman year at CU, she couldn't wait to pursue a major in creative writing, as well as a minor in history. Now as a fifth-year student, Bailey has had a broad range of interests and adventures, but her love for writing has never left. "CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE" was inspired by her tough battle with her rare disease and the true events she hasn't shared with many, and was written in JAY ELLIS's Intro to Creative Nonfiction course. Bailey hopes to pursue a career in the publishing world after graduation and dreams of one day making THE NEW YORK TIMES Best Seller list.

TAYLOR A. LUCIO comes from the suburbs of Denver, Colorado. She is currently a sophomore at the University of Colorado Boulder, in Creative Writing and Chinese. She plans to teach Secondary English. Taylor published her first story in kindergarten under the READING RAINBOW YOUNG WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATORS Contest. She is currently working on a sitcom about CU Boulder called THE DARLEY DARLINGS. She plans to write novels and travel since publishing "TAPIOCA PUDDING" in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY.

BERKELEY MCCARTHY is a junior in sociology with a passion for activism in multiple fields. They are also working towards minors in business and film. Growing up in Long Beach, California, they felt that Boulder would have the same appreciation for laid back and progressive attitudes. Berkeley hopes to uplift and empower their own community and other marginalized people through writing and art. They're part of peer education at the gender and sexuality center on campus and helps coordinate for T9 HACKS: the women's hackathon. They enjoy films, arguing, urban exploring, memes, and having a good time. They hope to finish two short films by the end of 2018, maybe even submit a film to a festival.

DYLLAN MORAN is from Aurora, Colorado and is Creative Writing and Japanese major at CU Boulder. Before publishing work has appeared in journals such as ENTROPY MAGAZINE and WALKABOUT Creative Arts Journal, and also as staged readings with Curious Theatre Company's CURIOUS NEW VOICES program and the University of Colorado New Play Festival. Outside his academic interests, Dyllan also enjoys gardening, watching old movies, and discussing politics.

MAGGIE RAMSEUR is a neuroscience major at CU Boulder. Beyond her coursework, she enjoys traveling and practicing photography. What brings her the most joy in life is her role as a teacher and mentor at the dance studio where she grew up. She loves choreographing entertaining pieces and getting to work with younger dancers. Her family has always inspired an appreciation of good food and good company to share it with. Maggie hopes to continue to refine her writing skills and improve her understanding of the world even after graduation.

MADELEINE RUTH SELTZER is a student of English literature and Women and Gender studies at CU Boulder. The author of "THE SHORES," was born and raised in Los Angeles, California.

HELEN STRITZEL is a Colorado native who will graduate from the University of Colorado at Boulder in May of 2018 with a major in International Affairs and a double minor in Economics and French—and took Eric Burger's 3020 Creative Nonfiction class in the **PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC** last fall. She grew up reading everything she could get her hands on and started writing short stories as the age of 12. An avid traveler, Helen has lived and studied in both Japan and Senegal, and possesses a working French proficiency. In her free time, Helen loves to spend time outdoors and try new recipes.

STEPHANIE A. WOOD has been writing since she was young—her first story was about a purple hippo. She is a senior, graduating this May with a B.S. in Business Administration with an emphasis in Marketing, a minor in Creative Writing, and three certificates. She gives credit to her great experiences with the courses and the professors in CU's Creative Writing program and is inspired by the university's visiting writer, **KHADIJAH QUEEN**. Even though school keeps her busy, Stephanie finds time to play board games, read, write, and volunteer at the local animal shelter. When she has saved up, Stephanie likes to travel. Her most recent trip was to Spain and Italy, and her most interesting trips were to Egypt and Vietnam.

Art by Daniel S. Workman

SPRING 2019 VOLUME SEVEN

JOURNAL 2020 is a collection of the finest undergraduate artwork and creative nonfiction writing at CU Boulder—the work of young writers with enough strength of voice, vision, and courage to tell their true stories and the true stories of others.

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JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes a print issue each year, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our Call for Submissions page for submission guidelines.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

by JENNY SHANK

When I was a 22-year-old graduate student at the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER, I interviewed Andy Schneidkraut, owner of Albums on the Hill, for the Colorado Daily. My article aimed to uncover which CDs people most frequently tried to sell back to local music stores. I can't remember the result, but I think it was Hootie and the Blowfish. I can't look it up, because most of my articles never appeared on the internet back then. In Boulder around the year 2000, music stores dotted the town and CDs abounded.

My editor advised me to talk to Andy, and to make sure to spell his name right. Andy is the kind of man a young person new to town looks to for help understanding the place—someone who has stayed rooted while the world shifted around him. As MySpace gave way to Facebook, which gave way to Snapchat, only Schneidkraut remains the same, in his music-filled lair on the Hill, which he rules with a world-weary grace. Schneidkraut has frequently served as the voice of experience to new generations of college students, who regard him through their relative innocence, with wonder.

In "DRUG OF CHOICE," CU freshman MAGGIE RZEPIENNIK interviews Andy. He's now selling more vinyl than CDs, but he's still the same Andy. Andy speaks to Rzepiennik about his lifelong love of music, but when he expresses regret for opening Albums on the Hill, Rzepiennik tries to get at why. A young person doesn't want to hear that an older person followed his passion and in the end, it kind of sucked. So Rzepiennik probes Andy. "I was straining for some positivity, some sort of pride to shine through," she writes. But keenly intelligent Andy gives her no easy answers. Instead he provides her, and her readers, some insights to ponder about life and the road not taken.

Many essays in this issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY explore the contrast between innocence and experience. In "HARRISON, ID," MICHAEL GREEN writes vividly of Lake Coeur d'Alene, which he and his family visit every summer to ride boats and enjoy the "same huckleberry shakes we have been craving since we finished the ones we had last year." Green could remain an oblivious, innocent tourist, but instead he delves into the town's history of environmental degradation due to local mines' illegal dumping.

In "A DANCE IN THE DUST," SAM JACOBSEN writes lyrically about watching a cross-country teammate die during a race. In the essay, Jacobsen revisits his teammate's collapse several times, from different angles, as if to see it both through the lens of innocence—when he didn't think anything so horrific could happen—and through that of experience, when he's trying to comprehend grave reality. In "SIDEWALKS WE DON'T WALK ON ANYMORE," CLARA SWANSON also grapples with death, in this case the suicide of the father of a friend who was as close as a sister. In "FOR THIS TIME," ANDIE DULSKY chronicles the end of a relationship with a magnetic musician she captures with precision, particularly in a scene in which she describes his meticulous ritual for gelling his dyed black hair. After their innocence is shattered, these writers must reconstruct their knowledge of the world in the light of new experience—sometimes with a sage like Andy to guide the way.

JENNY SHANK'S novel THE RINGER won The High Plains Book Award. Her stories, essays, articles and satire have appeared in THE ATLANTIC, WASHINGTON POST, LOS ANGELES TIMES, THE GUARDIAN and MCSWEENEY'S. One of her stories was listed among the "Notable Essays of the Year" in the BEST AMERICAN ESSAYS, and one received Special Mention in the 2018 PUSHCART PRIZE anthology.

FROM THE EDITORS

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY's editors are excited about the issue you hold in your hands, representing undergraduates from the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER through creative nonfiction. The journal is a year-long process of love, so we would like to thank all our staff, particularly our fall EIC MAGGIE RAMSEUR managing our submissions drive and blind review. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance we get from the PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC, the CENTER OF THE AMERICAN WEST, and our budding partnership with CU's RADIO 1190, offering our contributors the chance to share their work with on-air listeners. To all our amazing authors and artists—thank you.

JERETT CHERRY AND ISABEL PHELPS, EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

The art direction team at JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY is enormously proud of the aesthetic outcome of this year's issue. Pairing art with writing is something we do not take lightly. We strive to find art that connects with the core of each essay or poem. We woould like to thank CU's vibrant art community for its contribution to the journal. We would like to thank the digital production team who spend hours turning strong witing and beautiful art into a single issue.

KATE KELLY AND SEAIRA LEE, ART DIRECTION

It is humbling and inspiring to attend a university that produces such great work that we have the honor to synthesisze into this journal. I would encourage anyone that happens upon this publication by good fortune or is introduced to it by die-hard fans to consider sharing some of your work with us. Thanks to the entire staff who have not only excelled in their own roles but also helped emensely as the publishing date approached. Also, thank you to SARA COOLEY for being the best second set of eyes anyone could imagine.

LAUREN HALQUIST, DIGITAL PRODUCTION MANAGER

The club satff wants to thank all our club members for making this year fun. We want to extend an invitation to everyone at CU interested in what we do. Throughout the year we host readings, write-in sessions, film screenings, and other community events. Check our website and social media to get caught up on our events. Come join the conversation at WWW.JOURNAL2020.COM and on Instagram @CU_JOURNAL2020 and on Facebook. We would love to see new students at our events and look forward to growing our journal in print, online, and beyond the campus of CU Boulder.

MOLLY MANION AND PAYTON VALLEE, CLUB MANAGERS

Art by Carson Cord

GET INTO PRINT—OR ONLINE

All University of Colorado Undergraduate students are eligible to send in writing for consideration by JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. Submissions go through blind review by our Editorial staff.

We seek only creative nonfiction, in any of its genres:

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- Narrative Journalism
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- Travel, Food, and Sports Writing
- Portraiture and Memoir
- Graphic Creative Nonfiction
- Digital Compositions and Videos for Web Publication

ARTISTS

Send us your stories through artwork of any type for consideration by our Art Direction staff, for publication in either our print or online editions. We especially seek multi-media work for our website, including but not limited to: video, animation, music for podcasts, etc.

JOIN OUR STAFF

Take the spring section of WRTG 3090 or sign up for a one, two, or three-credit INDEPENDENT STUDY in any semester with one of our Faculty Advisors. Independent Study is offered at both the upper and lower division level. We seek anyone wanting to learn Editorial, Art Direction, Digital Production, Podcasting and Video Production, or the Business and Marketing of a print and online journal of creative nonfiction—no previous experience required. A position on the JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY staff will foster the development of marketable skills while learning about the exciting genres of creative nonfiction and publishing the region's premier print and online journal of only creative nonfiction. We exist to serve and further a community of creative nonfiction writers (and artists) across campus.

Find us online at Journal2020.com

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SWEET CORN

by WILLIAM BISHOP

I pull my cap down low over my eyes. The sun is at its high point so all I can do is look down, lest it blind me.
I ask myself if I am looking for snakes, but I'm not. Let them bite at my boots. The earth gives under my weight, sinking slightly, it is dry and crumbling, it cannot hold me like in my childhood.
The canopies of shade that acres of corn provided, where I could hide and read my books, are gone now. I was small enough then to believe it went on forever. Though I never asked if it did.

My family has had this land since our release from the camps. But no one speaks about this.

I walk for what felt like forever and remove my headphones for the first time.
I hear the buzzing, electrical static from old telephone poles which loom and lean in the heat, their rotting wooden poles offering no shade.
I hear the buzzing, vibrating of insects; crickets, grasshoppers, blue dragonflies that flit in and out of my vision.
These sounds could never be confused for the other.

This place used to be beautiful to me. But it has aged as I have.

Generations ago we pounded mochi for thin broth in the hollowed-out tree stump of my ancestors with wooden mallets.
We use a machine now. It hums to life, pushing out steaming ropes of pressed rice; it burns my hands as I form the sticky balls between my palms.
I look to my right, my cousins throw the white globs at each other, screaming in glee; there will be rice in our hair for weeks. None of us know how to pinch the ends off properly.
I look to my left. My elders, in-front of them, rows of pristine white rounds. Their heads down, deft fingers, practiced motions.

The older members of my family are all dying off. So few people call my grandmother Kimiko any more, it is Jane now, her American name. And I wonder what her headstone will say.
Though I already know. She will die with a name her own mother's lips never spoke.

There is only one boy I have ever wanted to bring here.
I wanted to marry him, to make him a part of this family, I still wear his ring.
We would sit on the roof of the barn, look out into the night air and I would tell him about when the fields were filled with sweet corn.
How after the sun had set and the air had gone cool, my eldest cousin Chris would wake us children. His finger to his lips, smiling. We didn't need to speak.
We would pull on our quilts that grandma had made for us, like kimonos, like cloaks, like secrets, held tightly to our chests. Pile them in with our tiny bodies into the truck bed. And we would drive down the dirt roads to pick up Alejandro, one of the worker's children who was our same age, he would be there, waiting on his steps, with candy we couldn't pronounce the names of, but we didn't need to, to taste its sweetness.
We drove down into the night to sleep under the stars.

I can still hear Chris quietly humming along to the radio in the cab of the truck, from years ago. My other cousins and Alejandro speaking in their own hushed tones.
The buzzing then, the same as now. But then there was still running water of the irrigation ditches trickling through to the rows of corn, the rustling of the tall stalk leaves.
We used to run in them, the clunking sound of our rain boots, and it was magical, the fields were always shrouded in shadows, but it wasn't dark and the life in the fields held no danger, and time only meant something when grandma called us in for dinner.
Sometimes, she would call us to the house. We would come running to the porch where she stood, to hand us packages, tied in silks, filled with rice balls and cookies, sour pickled Japanese vegetables, canteens filled with tea.
In the long summer days we would run into men like Alejandro's father in the fields, who would smile down at us with their big sun hats, their kind eyes, and say, "tell your grandparents thank you for the bread," for the beans, for the advice, for the soup, the help fixing the roof, the tomatoes, the blankets.
I would bow my head to them like I was taught, looking down at the sun warmed earth.
This is respect.

I sit on the worker's dirt road now and write, looking out over the terrain, it is overgrown with weeds.
My grandparents have grown older, and their land smaller; their bodies could do less and less and so outsiders bought more and more, soon the corn that shaded my childhood was replaced, by huge oil rigs and empty fields of weeds. Soon Alejandro and his family were gone.
But no one speaks about this.
About the miles of empty land, taken back by those only interested in what is so far below the surface that I'm not sure how they can claim it as their own.

A pickup truck rumbles up behind me as I write. It is green like the sea, though I doubt it has ever seen more water than that pumped from a hose.
A man with tired eyes speaks to me softly in Spanish.
He asks if I need a lift back to my grandparent's farm.

I have forgotten how far I wandered and that this land is no longer theirs, that it, in fact, does not go on forever, that it is shrinking, being taken.
I have forgotten what it means to trespass.
He says to me, in broken English, that the people who own it now are mean and might shoot me if they see me wandering.
I have forgotten about the violence here that was never in the corn fields of my youth.
I shake my head. I will take my chances. Most of the workers are gone now that season has passed. And the landowners don't tend to it themselves, they will never see me.
They have probably never taken the time to learn the difference in the buzz of telephone poles and dragonflies.

The man in the truck nods. "*Tu Abuelo*—" and he trails off. Not wanting to ask,
I shake my head, not wanting to answer.
Lately, my Grandfather has been calling me Chris, he looked my father in the eyes and asked who he was.
But no one speaks about this.
The man in the truck bows his head, and drives away, slowly so as not to kick up the dust around me.
As if already paying his respects.

I stand in the depression of what was once the irrigation ditches that my cousins and I would race paper boats down, that grew the green leaves and the sweet corn, it is dry now, filled in with dirt, barren.
I start walking back.
I see a snake hole and I wonder, if I were to thrust my hand inside the earth there, would I find the cool damp soil of my childhood?
It is so ugly here, no life. Not really, no running water, no more children, no youth.

There is only one boy I have ever wanted to bring here.
If he were here with me now, on the roof of the barn, the sun setting, watching the warmth leave the land. The boy I loved.
If I had gotten to share my life with him he would tell me that it is all still beautiful.

Art by Bailey Miclette

A DANCE IN THE DUST

by SAM JACOBSEN

When I close my eyes I see him. There he is. Dancing in the gentle dust. Dear lord, there he is. Just a few running steps away, he stands, dancin' in the light of that ever-present evening. The broom straw field is his stage, the grapefruit sunset his backdrop.

I can remember each of his body's uncouth contortions, each senseless seizure pirouette. I can remember the momentary, unnoticing feel, as he fell like any runner would fall, from lack of breath or wounded heel, swirling fast in a dust thick with the surreal, as the warbler warbled and the mountains watched with complacent grins. I can remember.

We had come to watch the race—that's me and three others. Our race had been run, so spirits were high with life's simplistic elation. We talked and laughed and joked for our souls' joyous inflation. All seemed calm, and perfect, and simple; distant cheering rode upon the soft September breeze. We watched the gently blowing cattails as the last runners passed—it was the somber part of the race: the part where faces are frozen into anguished positions, and form has begun to slack. They marched, the runners, up the final

half-mile hill, towards the finish line—salvation from a field as dry as hell. Cheering when our conversation permitted, we stood there watching. And then we saw him fall—just a gentle cottonwood leaf, nestling into the grass.

Time was still smooth then and flowed like melted gold. Runners still moved by mothers still cheered in the distance. Everything seemed alright with the world; it was simply ritualistic for a runner to fall from fatigue.

But the fallen boy rose too quick, and we saw within him something more than the runner's sick. And in that deep-fried instant, time itself froze, as up to the sky the runner's chin rose and rose. Speckles of splatterous spit spilled upward from his mouth, and that spittle, like late May rain, caught the light of the fading sun. He stood there suspended and bent, as if a puppet string had been tied around his heart and God had suddenly pulled up. Long droughtful sips of time drifted away on the tails of the cotton. His golden hair was a shining halo in the last light of day, and I felt burning cold chains slither down my nightmare-parched throat. Milliseconds were all. Milliseconds, but those droplets never ended.

But that first endless deathmare reflection was shattered in an instant, and his initial breach for air came down hard with a crash, as his head bowed down, and his arms flung out. His dance was not ungraceful; it was unbalanced, yet complex. In the bitter-sweet light of dawning evening he was a jester unstuck from time. The melt from the frozen instant was still slow and methodical, and I stood with slow worms bubbling in my stomach, unsure in my own legs. Not a word was spoken then between my companions and I, not a sound heard. Not the squeaking of the ground dogs, nor the warbling of a prairie bird; the only music to the boy's fever dance was the pounding of my heart. Finally, the seizure came to a close, and the runner fell back to the sharp golden grass.

Who spoke first after I cannot quite say, but it doesn't much matter. The boy was frightened, but there was strength locked deep in his acorn eyes. His nodding was slow and methodical, showing that he knew too well that something perfect had taken a misstep—a place once filled with peaceful complacency, had become blithe.

Choke

And then a cough

That was the pattern of his breaths. Soon the struggled, strangled breaths stopped coming. All at once came a wild-eyed terror, to both the fallen boy and I. The childhood cartoon had come true, and his

They marched, the runners, up the half-mile hill, towards the finish line—salvation from a field as dry as hell.

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sweat-bleached white face started to turn an impossible blue. Eyes rolled back, and the soul's windows closed, as more and more froth began to flow. A sickly science fair volcano of milky froth—one of the final acts of the show. Then, that body that once had danced became limp with a pulseless trance. Low to the ground, where the grass and curly dock stood high above, the boy stopped struggling; I watched this through seven layers of transparent eyes, stolen from six mourning doves. Three children did appear, from where I cannot say, and they cried for the boy, into ears that could no longer hear. I tried to hide the unfamiliar wriggling in my own heart as best I could, but knew that they'd see it—they all surely would. They ran off for help, but things happen slow. Besides, how fast must feet run, to catch up with a fleeting soul?

By the time the ambulances arrived, it was too late.

Blue and distant, the boy lay, and the the mother's cries came now with tears. There came the officers with pens, and papers, and questions, and there were the children, weeping. There were the EMTs with life masks and breathers, and they pushed and shoved for a reaping. They tried to pump life into a body, but the puppeteer had already pulled the soul far, far away.

The field had been almost perfect—the kind of fabled prairie found in picture books about cowboys and Indians. The grass had been tough and the clay dry. The field had been almost immaculate, and the wind there had been sweet and kind. Only a few things in that field showed signs of disturbance: the trashcan at the corner of the path, the people farther down, who cheered and were unaware, and the houses that bordered it. That field had been almost perfect, and I had found it beautiful. It was an interesting place then, for a soul to call a tomb; neither unpleasant nor cold, stony nor foreign. And when the fallen boy was wheeled away, had the field lost its beauty?

There, in those last succulent fish-line rays, came the field's wispy Coloradan voice: a deep forbidden mountain enclave and a lifelong snow flurry.

"All I have and am is from you." It called at soft peace to some form I still cannot see. Perhaps it was there, perhaps not and never. But whether or not, the birds still called, and the ground hogs still chirped as the sun set like a bruised heart over the angelic flatirons.

Art by Gabriella Miller

STATE OF MIND

by MEDHANE KIFLOM

December 3rd, 2009. 9:28 PM.

Darkness swallowed the sky quickly and effortlessly. A vehicle scuttled towards the curb. A shadow emerged from under the street light and flung the door closed. It moved toward the dilapidated house very methodically as sirens wailed in the distance. Keys rustled in the door as the shadow finally shoved its way through. From street lights now to a kitchen light, the shadow's posture relaxed. Penny loafers scraped along the dull white tiles, searching for sustenance from a colorless box. It removed a Heineken in a single, smooth motion, and now a tall suited figure was seated in the living room. Lengthy legs extended upon the couch as the television came to life with the words, "Ab amata alo—" Soon after, an empty bottle appeared on the table, and the figure ceased to move. Tranquility fell over the house. But the night was still young.

Three hours.

The figure slowly awoke to the sound of the door creaking open. Alarmed, the figure stood to greet the unknown visitor. The knob turned endlessly, yet nobody stepped through. Seemingly

ages passed by, and finally the door creaked open enough to identify the stranger. A familiar person stepped into the doorway, the figures supposed successor. Slightly relieved, but still confused, the figure took notice of the calm demeanor his son displayed. "Came ze wooday? Cab abe metseha?" The son answered slowly, "I'm fine, I was at a friend's house." The two continued to stand and awkwardly co-exist in the tension. "Entei deliha?" the figure questioned. "Let's go out Pops, get some alcohol and relax?" responded the son. The figure agreed, nodding his hollowed out tired face.

A shadow emerged from under the street light and flung the door closed.

Three minutes.

The man awoke abruptly. Pebbles scraping his back, back alley garbage waft dwelling in his nose, a nightlight piercing the veil of darkness from a distance. Pain shooting down to right below his knees. Thoughts rose and descended until his head spun. Extremely disoriented, he arose from the asphalt only to come crashing back down. Unable to move, red and blue lights painted his suit. In place of his son, police cars swerved to his destination. Confusion and agony were written all over his face. It seemed as if asking what had happened would throw him into multiple dimensions of pain. Men clad in blue ran over to his side, worried for his condition. Question after question swamped over him as he worried only for the whereabouts of his son.

Three days.

Metronomic beeping echoed within Gebrem's ear. He slowly arose from a white clad bed, only to view a curtain on all sides. A wire looped from his nose to a tall, looming machine. Curiosity fell over his face and soon pain swept it away. Torment throbbed from his legs, almost as if he held in Satan's torture chamber. A door creaked open in the distance, and in stepped a small, white woman. "Hello sir, how are you this morning?" The woman spoke quietly, yet firmly. A slight smile and a shy look communicated just enough of how Gebrem felt.

She slowly explained to Gebrem the procedure he needed. Surgery to remove bullets lodged firmly in the legs that worked tirelessly, day in and day out. Before Gebrem could fathom the reasons why, she got up quickly to leave the curtained room. As the door was about to close, she whispered to a nurse, "Poor father, he seems so innocent." She ceased to acknowledge that innocence did not plan an active role in this story. Innocence does not save people, but only humanizes them.

Three months.

The doorbell rang. In entered an Eritrean couple to a confined living room space where Gebrem was. The husband spoke alone with him, checking up on his old friend. A greeting transitioned seamlessly to old jokes. "Well you never liked to dance anyways," the husband mentioned jokingly. "Melik, you talk too much, that's why your teeth can never be straight!" Gebrem grinned as his old friend chuckled along with him. The rebuttal seemed to lighten his mood, even if he knew it was temporary. Unlike the permanent terrors of that night. His smile stayed plastered on his face, even as the couple left. It had been a long time since he could laugh so freely. It was a pleasure reserved for those who had few worries.

Three years.

Thoughts rose and descended until his head spun.

I had never seen him like this. Papa approached me in a very sheepish manner. It wasn't like the strong, confident man that I had known growing up. Almost as if he had a question he could not form. Simply put, he wanted me to accompany him to a marriage. Knowing Papa, he really desired my presence if he went out of his way to ask. I could never tell him no. He was my best friend; I'd do anything to share time with him. On our way to the church, a familiar name came up in our conversation. Gebrem. Before I could even ponder where I had heard that name, we approached the gargantuan church. Papa told me one thing, and one thing only as we lunged up the stairs to the main chamber. "Gebrem is here, pay your respects."

Three seconds.

There I viewed him. A man of the richest dark chocolate I could imagine. Hair glistening a sharp silver and legs that stretched past humanly belief. As I entered the ballroom, I immediately recognized the presence before me. I knew this man, his story, and most disturbingly, whose father he was. As my father sat down next to him, he introduced me. "Gebrem, meet

my son." I almost was too ashamed to shake his hand. I had done nothing to this man, yet I feel like I carried the weight of the greatest crime committed to him. One that tore his life apart from the seams.

No earnest father deserved what happened to Gebrem that day. He was betrayed by his family; His wife and his son in collusion. His son had committed a sin so great, no one in the community could brush it aside. He had aimed an instrument of death and destruction towards a loved one. With intent to kill, he disabled his father and left him to die in the street. But. Gebrem is a very unlucky, yet lucky man. Alive, but shattered, he now was only a shell of himself. He no longer had a family, or more importantly, a successor. And being a successor to my own father, I know how much that hurt Gebrem. Not the physical pain that burdened him. But the emotional pain of being betrayed. Growing along side his vengeance seeking son made me realize that we lived for different reasons.

We were of similar background. Hard working fathers who physically couldn't see their families. Eritrean boys who grew up attached to the hip of their mothers. First sons that felt the pressure of over achieving to create something from nothing. Gebrem's son and I were two peas of the same pod. Yet we lived two very different experiences. We went down two distinct ways at the fork in the road. And it all stemmed from our Papas. Honesty, work-ethic, and sacrifice was the foundation of our childhood. But it was applied differently. It became spite vs. gratitude. I grew up with my dad as my hero, while he grew up seeing his dad as a villain. I would realize how unique my situation was, while he would compare it to others. That's when I had become enlightened. I'd do anything for this man, because I realize that he had done it all for me. Even if I grew up not knowing who he is, it was to ensure I could become somebody. To ensure nothing stood in my path. And I swore to repay it to him. I realized I am one of few. A single Eritrean boy, standing at the gate of a life of freedom. And it won't stand much longer.

Alive, but shattered, he was now only a shell of himself.

Art by Zola French Bzdek

Art by Madeline Joy Camilli

HARRISON, ID

by MICHAEL GREEN

As hundreds of weekenders back their ski boats into the water and begin filling their tanks at the Chevron station tucked inside the marina, my family and I prepare for our departure from our dock in Rockford Bay on the west side of Lake Coeur d'Alene. The water that was once placid and mirror-like earlier that week is now agitated by the wake of amateur captains and their families buzzing our dock as quickly as their boats would carry them. My father—irritated by the chaotic bustle of water-sportsmen—sends us down to the boat for our escape from the madness.

The 15-minute boat ride stretches into an hour-long journey as we trudge through the rugged chop in the middle of the lake. All of this is very familiar to me. Even with the hurdles, I know that I would be able to navigate the boat to our destination at the other side of the lake blindfolded. Soon enough, the water begins to settle. On the horizon, a crisp silhouette of an old grain elevator marks our arrival into Harrison, Idaho. The small, quaint town sits on the eastern side of the lake. Its population fluctuates

around 200 residents during the summer and I imagine most pack up their RVs and leave during the colder seasons.

As we approach the cluster of old brick buildings, we raise the trim of our wake boat to avoid catching the propeller on the mangled weeds suspended from the bottom of the lake. We park our boat in the public docking area and struggle to tie our lines unprofessionally around the waterlogged and rotting wood. My brother and I lightheartedly joke about returning to find our boat in the middle of the lake as my father anxiously studies the dock for better places to tie off. The marina perfectly captures the essence of the rest of the town: completely unkempt and disheveled, yet peaceful and charismatic.

I step barefoot onto the hot dock, dreading the walk across an even hotter gravel lot once I reached dry land. I run swiftly to avoid splinters as the pungent smell of gasoline penetrates my nostrils, ignoring the multitude of fish floating belly up beside the dock, waiting for my family in the safety of the shade. Together we climb the small hill and walk into my dad's favorite bar: One Shot Charlie's. Locals the bartenders know by name fill the bar. We are outsiders to the regulars that make us feel unwelcome. The walls, lined with taxidermized animal heads and maps of the lake, confine a faint aroma of stale beer.

My dad, an avid collector of bar T-shirts with the unstated lifetime dream of owning a place like Charlie's, wonders if we have come too early this year for the new selection of merchandise. The waitress, remembering us from previous years, leads us upstairs to the manager's office where she unveils the new designs. My father seizes the unique opportunity to make an offer to buy Charlie's before he could be reprimanded by my mother. The manager chuckles and explains to him why the restaurant, as well as the rest of the town, does not have a promising future. Many of the locals moved away to the growing city of Coeur d'Alene where they could evade the primary waterfront property tax in favor of a bargain on secondary waterfront property with access to a public beach. Harrison evolved into a lousy retirement town, where people move to escape city excitement. However, residents struggle to justify spending their tight budgets to support local shops.

My brother, now bored of the local hangout, becomes restless. He pesters our mother for the change in her wallet and drags me along to the local creamery. While we walk, we discuss the bizarre atmosphere exhibited by the town. We notice that Harrison auctions off hunting rifles and camouflage pants as a philanthropy,

The exploitation of common resources generates for a few at the cost of others' well-being.

which seems abnormal to a couple of California boys. Most of the local businesses, including the market and coffee shop, are closed for the weekend because customers are scarce. The hours posted in the windows of the more professional offices indicate a short work week. Inside the ice-cream parlor, we order the same huckleberry shakes we have been craving since we finished the ones we had last year and unfold the local paper that features a recognition of the town's anniversary on the front page. Historic pictures and their captions culture our admittedly limited knowledge of Harrison.

The marina perfectly captures the essense of the rest of the town: completely unkempt and disheveled, yet peaceful and charismatic.

Unfortunately, Harrison has a much more troublesome ecological past than we previously understood. We discover that our refuge at the mouth of the Coeur d'Alene river was once a legal dumping ground for harmful waste from the Silver Valley upstream. Mines intended to yield gold instead produced mostly silver, zinc, and lead. Activity flourished for almost a century, until environmentalists stopped the tragedy in the 1980s. Miners made over $5.8 billion digging up metals, making the Silver Valley one of the most prosperous mining regions in the United States.

The Spokesman Review[1], estimates that about 30,000 tons of lead were dumped into the river. To make things worse, in the early 1900's, miners employed a chemical they called flotation material that was mixed into the water with finely ground rock. Minerals bonded to the flotation material and rose to the surface where the miners extracted more metals. The Coeur d'Alene River then carried chemicals, lead, and finer bits of material that could travel further downstream, resulting in a frothy yellow substance floating atop the water that flowed into Lake Coeur d'Alene. Eventually, pollutants migrated across the lake to the entrance of

1. Steele, Karen D. 2002. "Mining Enriched Region, Left a Big Mess." Spokesman Review .

the Spokane River. Seventy miles away in Spokane, the nearest hub of civilization, residents began to notice that their water source was contaminated with mine slime.

We read about the local farmers who pressed law suits against the mining companies because leaded water killed their livestock and crops. Executives denounced farmers' claims and escaped allegations by blaming fungus. Many local youth also became sick with lead poisoning; however, perpetrators decided to pay off the families of the sick children and defend themselves in trial rather than shut down their prospering mines. Thirty-eight families went against the mines in court resulting in a $32 million settlement that would be divided among each of the families. In 1986, the state of Idaho filed a lawsuit for $50 million dollars. When the attorney general lost the funding needed for research, the case failed. It settled for $4.5 million in damages, contributing to only a small fraction of the cleanup costs.

The Spokesman Review estimates that about 30,000 tons of lead were dumped into the river.

Today, about 60 miles east of Harrison, lies the town of Wallace. Citizens there proudly flaunt their mining heritage. Mines for tourists to explore and outdoor museums dedicated to the underpinnings of the area dominate the town. Under no circumstances would I agree that the residents of Wallace are transgressors for embracing their history. Like any other town, Wallace has a right to be proud of its heritage. But my brother and I realize that this problem ingrains itself in a much larger economic issue where tiny municipalities, like Wallace, can legally send their problems downstream to a much more populated city like Spokane only to drive their nominal city economy. The exploitation of common resources generates wealth for a few at the cost of others' wellbeing. Several areas in the northwest less fortunate than Harrison would still be polluted for years to come because of the empire created by large mining companies.

I begin to fold up the paper as we are summoned to the lake by our mother. Children who are swimming around rusted signs cautioning swimmers about lead contamination tread mindlessly. Parents watching carefully from the shore show little concern for the warnings Instead they worry about siblings instigating chicken fights and stone skipping contests towards the expensive boats in the marina.

My blistered and burned soles familiarized themselves with the temperature of the dock where our boat waits patiently for our return. Relieved, soaked in sweat, and eager to jump into the cool lake water, our discretion guides us back to the whitecapped wasteland trafficked by weekenders before we dare enter the water. The exploitation that occurred there is still apparent decades later. The charming little safe-haven was not ours. No, it belonged to the Harrisonites just as it did during the Silver Valley boom.

Art by Ellie Marcotte

PROZAC KINGDOM

by ANDIE DULSKY

Someday I'll die.[1] Everyone I've ever loved[2] will die. Our bodies[3] will turn to oak trees, to chrysanthemums and roses.[4] Or even just worm food. Soil and stench. Compost.[5]

Why not today[6]?

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1. *Do you recognize your past self?*

Nadia takes a hit off the pipe. I watch smoke billow from their nostrils, imagining a wise old dragon instead of the vacant being sitting across from me at the worn dining room table. The pipe is long, nearly worthy of Gandalf, made of transparent blue glass and narrowed to a point. The mouthpiece disappears between Nadia's lips.

I'm not sure.

Are you the same person you were last week?

Nadia takes another hit. I feel my consciousness leave my body. This is the closest I'll ever feel to being high. No, I don't recognize my past self. No, I'm not the same person as I was last week. I look the same, sure. Same dark hair and dark eyes as I've always had, same porcelain skin. But I'm hollower now. Cavernous, but still so, so heavy. Weighted down by meaningless rocks, perhaps. Maybe even vacant tumors. I can feel them in my stomach, growing into my arms and legs, rapidly making their way into my fingertips. Sometimes they're so heavy that I can't pull myself upright. I can't stop the swelling. I've never been able to. I can only hope to someday drown enough of my demons in cheap gin and chamomile tea to stop the influx.

I haven't yet. And I'm not afraid of demons or hell or ghosts like I used to be. I've come to realize that they're merely things you carry with you, the way I carry a bottle of fluoxetine in my back pocket when I can't make it home in time.

I've long since learned to let go of the things that bind me. Demons with slippery hands, hellhounds with hearts of gold. Ghosts with Italian Catholic grandmothers. The vacant tumors remain, steady and lifeless as the rock formation-backdrop I walk through every morning.

2. I remember what my body felt like when I was with her. Seventeen, young, and tender. Touching her was thaumaturgical, like conjuring an ancient spirit that has been packed away for centuries, begging to be freed. How loving could be sinful is shocking. The real sin lies in the hate just below the surface, in the eyes of elderly couples and bus drivers.

I'd never felt understood. Always been the weird kid, not many friends. Quiet. I used to build paper cities under the laminate top of my classroom desk, pretend I was somewhere else. *Anywhere* else. I was told that I was nothing but a space cadet with my head in the clouds. A mystery with blunt, dark bangs and dark eyes.

The truth is that I was afraid. My second therapist once told me that I carry a lot of fear. He was right.

Lily was the first person to tell me this. Lying beneath a fort of blue sheets, I told her of the reverse periscope that I see the world through. I've never felt particularly connected to my body. It's as if, at any given moment, my consciousness could take a walk around the block without telling me. *Dissociative disorder*, they call it.

I told her of my relationship with a man I've now come to call Harry. An oppressive 1950's husband who tends to take long vacations, but always returns in the winter to reclaim his territory. I told her of how he capitalizes my home, leaving dirty dishes everywhere but the kitchen sink and using up the pages of my journals. Allowing me only to wear a single white t-shirt for two weeks and only wash my hair when he leaves home once more.

Harry has a formal name, though I don't like to think of it. Major depressive disorder doesn't have the same otherworldly charm as Harrison. At least naming him gets a laugh out of those who have had it, though theirs might be Sharon, or Samantha, or Jennifer.

I stopped fighting him when I was with her.

No, breathing isn't easy, but it's easier when the hands around your throat aren't your own.

3. I scratch like I'm trying to claw my way out of my body. The depth doesn't matter. Nothing changes. There isn't anything under the surface

I'm hollower now.
Cavernous, but still
so, so heavy.

waiting to be freed. There's no sudden realization. No guardian angels. Just flesh and bone.

It isn't pretty. I'm not one of those tragically beautiful girls you read about in books and see on TV. I don't have scars on my wrists that I'll eventually cover with watercolor flowers. I don't listen to Nirvana and sneak out at 2am to drown my feelings in whatever I can get my hands on. I'm stale. Stinking of cigarettes and gin every Friday night, shame and flesh under my fingernails.

I try not to talk about it.

It's not the kind of self-harm anyone can recognize. Scabs heal. The scars they leave heal, even if in need of sweet oils. It's not obvious. Neither was the rubber band I used to zap my wrist during early high school.

It's a little-known fact that most people who self-harm aren't necessarily suicidal. Much to the delight of my family, I fall into that group. I'm not sure why it happens. I'd like to blame it on Harry or stress or on the weather, but I can't. I can't breathe. So I scratch. And nobody seems to notice. *I'm fine. Don't worry.*

4. She doesn't ask if I'm fine, and I could never thank her enough for that. I've spent too long lying to people that don't care to hear the answer. Instead, she takes my hands in hers and asks, in a voice that drips with honey, *what can I do?*

I don't know how to tell her that she doesn't need to do anything, that she's already done more for me than I could ever ask. She's given me a reason to try. And to fail. And to know that all my fucking up is finally worth something, because it led me here and it'll keep leading me, us, wherever we're supposed to be.

On our first date, I take my shot of fluid Fluoxetine before meeting her. I miss my uvula this time. Thank god. The last thing I need is to be more red in the face than I already am. I'm wearing my favorite dress, the only thing I feel truly myself in. I look in the mirror and remember my name.

My parents named me Andie Griffith before they realized what a mistake that had been. Luckily, no one from my generation knows who that is, lest I be beaten to death in a schoolyard. My legal name isn't Andie. My given name has never felt quite right. Or maybe, I've never felt quite right.

She wants to be called by her middle name, and although she has five names in total, four letters are sufficient. Rose.

Rose.

I never knew love didn't have to hurt. I never knew love could be shower kisses and spoonfuls of honey, chai lattes and gentle rain. Tender and soft and quiet, stable as the mountains. Maybe it's just her.

Maybe it's just her, but she makes me believe that I can get there someday, too.

I don't know how to say I love you in languages I do not yet speak, but I've always been a fast learner. I'll get there. I'm just taking my time.

On our first date,
I take my shot of fluid
Fluoxetine before
meeting her.

5. Compost is just something on its way to becoming what it's meant to be. At least, that's what my roommate tells me.

We can see the garbage from our balcony and watch the neighborhood raccoons for as long as they let us. They steal trash, dig through the compost bins. Maddie and I contribute the swollen carcass of a large watermelon, and the raccoons feast. I think that when I die, I might like to come back as a raccoon.

I see Maddie every day, and Avery just as much. We spend hours talking about the validity of modern drag culture, the politics behind slam poetry. We mooch cigarettes off our friends even though we know we shouldn't.

Each time I go to take my daily fluoxetine, Avery and Maddie are there, blasting LMFAO's "Shots" and filling glasses to the brim with whatever they can find, from almond milk to salad dressing. I've never met anyone more ridiculous, and I've never been more grateful.

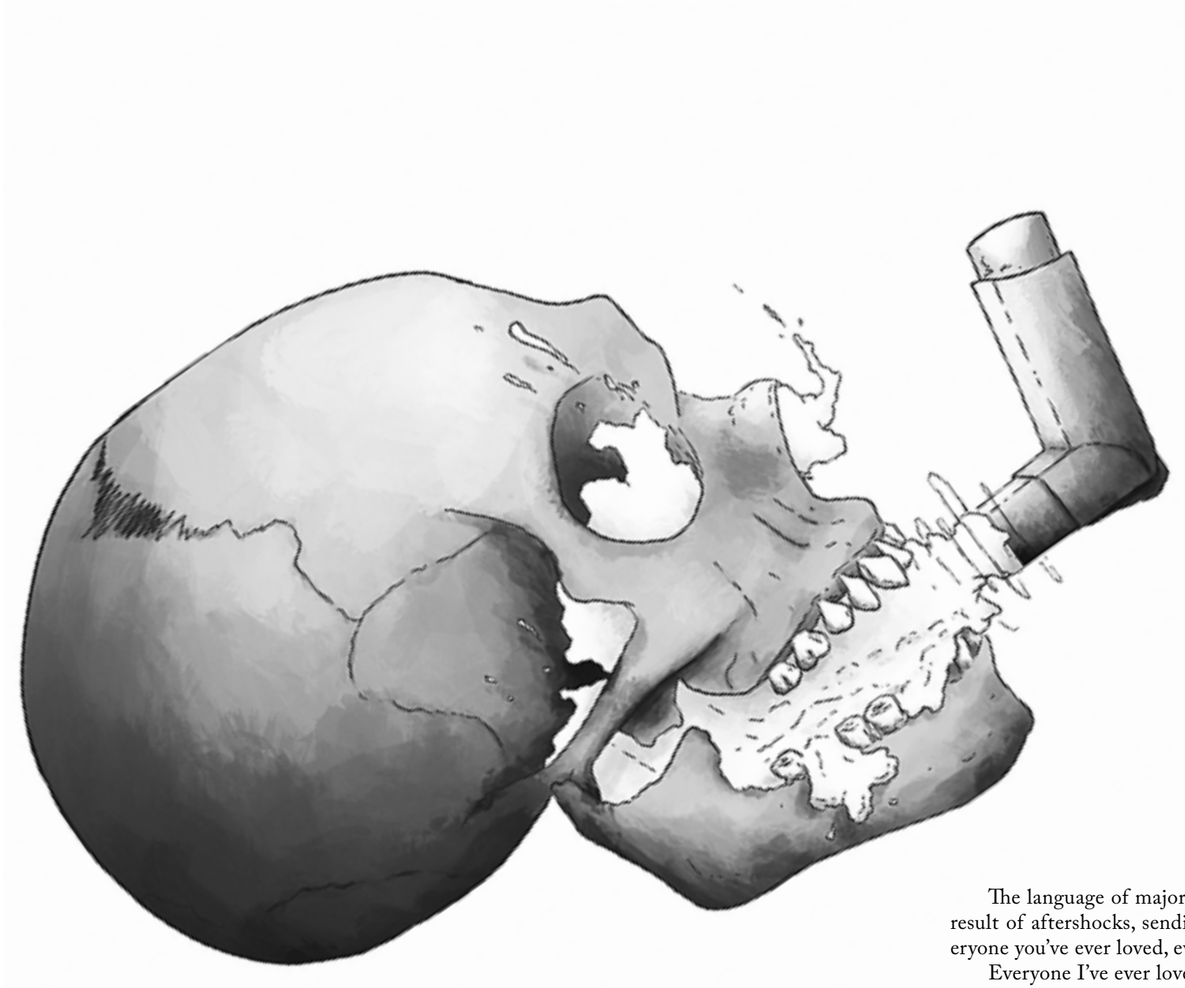
Vinegar is definitely harder on the throat than Prozac.

6. I didn't need to get rid of my demons, I just needed to find a way to talk to them. I'm not yet fluent in their languages, but I'm learning to find comfort in the gray area.

The language of dissociative disorder comes in waves, soft and serene. Like having a bell jar over your head, seeing everything from fifteen feet away.

The language of anxiety disorder can be the thing that keeps you, like the feeling of nearly toppling backward in your seat. A knife's edge of an existence.

The language of post-traumatic stress disorder hangs like a crystal chandelier, its chain ready to snap at any given moment. Fragile. Not like a flower, more like a bomb.



The language of major depressive disorder comes like a tsunami, the result of aftershocks, sending bookshelves into disrepair, along with everyone you've ever loved, ever could have loved.

Everyone I've ever loved will die. Someday, I'll die. Why not today?

There are hundreds of dogs I have yet to pet.

There are thousands of poems I have yet to write.

I've cried in front of too many paintings to give up on the Louvre.

I need to try the tamales that Rose raves about from her hometown.

I haven't seen Lily's band play in years.

I have to bring a balloon to Avery's hospital room someday after they more fully become themself, one that states, "it's (sorta) a boy!"

I can't give up on the safe space that Maddie and I have created in our tiny two-bedroom apartment, the hole in the wall that we've filled with pride paraphernalia.

I have politicians to fight, bricks to throw.

Someday, I'll name my children after my grandparents and tell them how I got through year twenty, the hardest of my life.

Until then, I return to my heart, over and over again.

Art by Thomas Young

Art by Tara Talebi-Talghian

DRUG OF CHOICE

by MAGGIE RZEPIENNIK

The store was filled with music, not that I was surprised. The sweet sound of Stevie Nicks' earthy toned voice filled the store with the strong essence of home. There seemed to be records and CDs covering every wall and crevice of the room. Even the rickety old stairs were lined with the lifelong collection of classic records and the classic faces we all know today.

Andy sighed as my interview began to come to a close and I asked my last question, "Do you have anything to add about music and the passion that compelled you to open this shop?"

Suddenly the song that once filled the room concluded and the silence swallowed me up. Andy looked around for a second, first down at the floor and then back up at me, "If you allow it to—music can alter your life—and it can alter your life for the better," he uttered quietly to me. "And ultimately it's about the music. It's not about me, the store, the format you're listening to it on, it's not about that. It's about people writing songs—that can say something to

you—" His eyes never seemed to leave mine. His hands were placed firmly on the counter, his thumbs no longer twiddling. "There are songs that can elevate you when you're down—level you off when you're manic, maybe—help you get through difficult things. Enhance—the good days—the good things too. You know, music can do a lot of things for you and that's why it has always been my drug of choice."

I pulled open the seemingly exhausted brown door to Vinyl on the Hill and walked right into what seemed to be a wonderland of records. My eyes traced the rainbow assortment of Michael Jackson, the Eagles, James Taylor, and millions of others. I felt like a kid in a candy store, whether this was my type of candy or not. I grasped the rail of the rickety old stairs and tiptoed my way down into the basement.

Andy appeared from behind the assortment of shelves that coated the back walls behind the worn down counter. His plaid button-up shirt gave him a clean look and his grey hair was nicely combed to one side. He pulled up a stool to the counter and sat down with a sigh. He seemed stressed, obviously overwhelmed with the shop and I'm sure a freshman interviewing him was the last thing he needed. I began, hesitantly at first. "So, what compelled you to open your store?"

He was quiet for a second, pondering all the time that had gone by since 1987, "Compulsion I guess would be the right word. I'm a music addict. It is my drug of choice," he chuckled to himself at this remark. "I have been a music buff since I was born." This was no surprise to me. His life was dedicated to a store filled to the brim with every type of music you could ever imagine and his personality seemed to bounce off the walls.

"So what made you want to open your store in Boulder?"

He smirked and looked down at the stack of CDs beside him. "People don't necessarily choose Boulder—" he paused for a second, eyes still glued to the CDs."Boulder chooses them. I came to boulder in the mid 70s. After living in Estes Park and in the mountains for about eleven years, I was ready to go and at that time my family was young and Boulder seemed like a great place to raise my children." His strained eyes drooped as he spoke of his return to Boulder. I searched for some sort of excitement from him, but if there happened to be any, it never showed. His disinterest shocked me as Bouder has been my home for only two weeks and it seems to be the best place in the world. I guess thirty years in one place could wear anyone out.

I felt like a kid in a candy store, whether this was my type of candy or not.

I'm in the regret time of my life.

I was straining for some positivity, some sort of pride to shine through. "What opportunities has this store opened up for you?" I hoped the idea of past memories and earlier joys of the store would brighten his mood a bit.

He looked at the ground with a squint in his eye, "Most recently the store has been closing off opportunities rather than giving them. I feel that thirty years is long enough or probably too long—" He tightened his lips into a slant, "I have always been a person who wanted to help people achieve what they wanted to achieve in music and I don't think I pursued my own things as much as I could have." He stopped for a second and the only thing that broke the silence was the background music that filled the store. "I'm in the regret time of my life. It used to be a genuinely viable business that used to support my family—it never made a lot of money, but it produced a nice living," he finally lifted his head and looked me, somewhat teary-eyed, "and it doesn't do that anymore."

My once flamboyant "interviewer smile" had faded. Never had I thought this man who owned a record store, a room full of his passion, would regret what he had done. The interview had flipped a 180 from what I had ever expected it to be. I was unsure what to ask. The conversation had gained so much depth that I felt as if my already prepared questions had become childish. "Did you always plan on opening a vinyl store or did you have other plans earlier in life?

He was quick to answer, "Loads of other plans! "I don't know why people say life works out when you make plans, but that's not what happened for me," he said solemnly." I have 2 degrees, one in Religion and one in Philosophy. I went to law school, but only for a year during Vietnam. I then moved on to school for filmmaking and I had every intention of being a filmmaker, but things didn't quite workout that way." Once again sorrow filled his eyes." I then owned a restaurant for awhile and I was also a prior Executive Director of Commerce at Rocky Mountain National Park. I then moved on and opened this store instead."

His sadness and regret toward opening the store still seemed to shock me, even after his remarks. He tried so many different ideas, careers, and majors throughout his time yet music seemed to be what was truly calling him. I felt as if he had finally gotten down to the marrow of his true passion, yet never was given the chance to fulfill him. I could feel his pain. His eyes looked as if they had lived many years, which they had, but they have endured

many years of stress and dissatisfaction. I continually ran ideas throught my mind that could be slipped into the conversation and find the bright side of what had become of his life. "What is one of the most interesting things that has occurred in your store?"

He looked down at his hands that were folded on the counter and looked back up at me with a much needed smile, "Many interesting things—" He looked away for a quick second, fiddling with the buttons that lined the middle of his shirt. "It may not be interesting to everyone, but I used to do a great many of instore performances." Finally I caught the glow in his eye that I had hoped to see.

"Ben Harper played in front of my store—George Clinton of Parliament Funkadelic, who is a friend of mine, was in my store signing autographs. John Doe from X sang his song "See How We Are" in my store. Dave Matthew and the Dave Matthews band played in front of my store when they were very early on. Jack Johnson and his percussionist Adam Toppel played in front of the store as well. Spin Doctors played for their first time in Boulder in front of the store. Recently Elephant Revival played magical show in the store. Before the first Coldplay record, Chris Martin came in and personally thanked me for a display we had put up. Sheryl Crow—."

His eyes sparkled at the thought of meeting all of these wondrous people and how his store had brought him so many opportunities. I was finally reaching the depth to him that had some sort of happiness embedded within it. I felt as if he could go on forever about the many people that had visited his store and the things he had seen. I finally saw some sort of youth in his eyes. A sense of wonder appeared from behind the casting shadow of sorrow that had taken over his life. It puzzled me to see a man sitting in front of me, with dark blue eyes, regretting the love of his life. Regretting a store that was filled with the things that truly meant something to him. He only longed for things that he couldn't have and it broke my heart.

The interview had finally come to a close and once again I observed the heaviness in Andy's eyes. His sorrow consumed him and I was unsure of what else to say after this point. I thanked him for his time and gave him a firm handshake, hoping to make a lasting impression. He looked around the room for a second, observing his collection and everything he had done. He smirked at me and proudly proclaimed "But ya know, Vinyl is back."

Before the first Coldplay record, Chris Martin came in and personally thanked me

Art by Adler Shannon

FOR THIS TIME[1]

by ANDIE DULSKY[2]

1.

Chapter 1/1[2]

I've always found musicians really attractive.

Uh, me too?

He shoots me a sideways glance from the bathroom mirror. I'm trying out an acoustic cover of "I Want to Hold Your Hand," not because I like it, but because he does. Every time he has a little too much to drink he puts his face too close to mine and recites the entire discography of The Beatles. His favorites are the covers in "Across the Universe." It's another teen drama, but there's this longing lesbian couple on the cheerleading squad. Of course, they're not the main characters. I'm not sure if they ended up together. I fell asleep before the end of the movie.

1. *You're too tender for me, you know. I hope that you know that I can see you at the end of this road, streetlights illuminating your face. Your headlights are too bright for me, but I don't care. I don't need eyes for this.*
2. *I never want to write our breakup poem.*

He opens the window. Takes his pink toothbrush from next to my blue one in the medicine cabinet. I've never seen someone brush their teeth for so long, but here he is. Three minutes later he spits into the sink and wipes his mouth on the inside of his t-shirt. He's looking at me more than he's looking at himself now. He runs some water through his newly-dyed black hair and reaches for the tin canister he's been carrying around for months. A gel made of a translucent shade of blue.

He runs it through his hair.

The perfect amount. He's meticulous. Whenever a strand sticks out the wrong way he just cuts it off.

Can I borrow your hairdryer?

Back. Upside down. More unnaturally blue gel. One more blast of hot air. He cuts off a strand on the back of his head and lets it fall into the trash. He says that he feels like this is the only thing in his life that he can really control.

After we break up, he shaves his head.

He says that he feels like this is the only thing in his life that he can really control.

2.

Meet me at the fjords.[3]

a. His toothbrush rests next to mine for the third week in a row.

We've been dating for exactly a month today, and we've all but moved in together. He leaves behind his copy of "The Shining" that we watched together on our first real date, as well as his favorite sweater. When he leaves town for four days, I take it off only to shower. *Tell me something sweet before I go to bed, he asks me one night. I wear your sweater so often because it feels like you're always with me even when we're miles apart.*

He likes to make fun of how sappy and cliché I can be, and I can't say that I don't deserve it—I absolutely do. I suppose that's what you get for willingly dating a poet, and this is what love is supposed to be like, right? This softness—the midnight kisses, Sunday morning almond milk lattes. Drunken cigarettes

3. *Tell me about every kiss. Every lover. I'll bless every one. We are lucky to dance upon your skin. Lucky to know you before you backwards become yourself.*

and shared secrets. Rolling over in bed and hearing your lover whisper; *Sweetheart, are you okay?*

These could be the last words I would ever hear and I'd thank everything that led me to them. When he says this, he doesn't lower his voice like he does around our friends, the bus drivers, the bus boys. In this moment, the demons have been banished, but I know they'll return by morning. They always do.

He stops to pick up ladybugs from the sidewalk and move them into the closest flowerbed. From the flowerbed he picks two flowers, a dandelion and a violet. He places the violet in my hand and secures the dandelion behind his ear. *I identify as a flowerboy,* he tells me one Sunday afternoon.

b. A week before he meets my parents, I tell them that if we're going to break up, it's not going to be because he's trans.

My parents met at a gym in San Diego. My mother was studying to become a lawyer, my father working on his career as a musician—a French hornist and conductor. She had a rattail, he a mullet. She was riding a stationary bike while he ran laps around the track in front of her, each one noticing the other until they had built up the courage to speak.

A classic boy meets girl.

No, their relationship isn't perfect, but it is indeed the closest anyone can get. They take drives around the city together, rescue stray dogs whenever they happen upon them, and cook salmon from the fish market down the street. They forget their anniversary every year—it'll be 27 in a few months, and I'll have to remind them on the day.

c. My grandmother used to say, *divorce isn't an option. Murder, however—*

Each time I fall in love, I think about my parents, lounging on the beach on a calm day in June. I wish I could see the ocean again. Sometimes it's hard to live in a landlocked city, despite the beauty that comes with it. I want to see the fish swimming around my ankles, feel the cool breeze on my warm skin. I like to be reminded of how small I am. I think that if you listen closely, you can hear the ocean whispering, *hush, you don't matter.*

In this moment, the demons have been banished, but I know they'll return by morning.

I settle for the aquarium. He lowers his voice when greeting the bus driver, takes up as much of our bench as possible, capitalizing upon the space around him. He doesn't under-

stand why I can't stop crying when I look at the seahorses (they deserve so much better than this).

The glass between us and the sharks is eleven inches deep. I draw a misshapen tiger shark in my journal. I used to be so much better at this.

The tigers are his favorite—not the sharks—the real tigers that they have locked up there. I remember there being a few more when I was younger. Now I can see only two. We spend 45 minutes watching them sleep.

Why don't I fit into your life?

He stops speaking to me. I cry on the bus ride home, and he can't understand why. I'm not sure I can tell him in a way that will quite make sense. He leaves me there, lights a cigarette as he walks out the door.

In another life, maybe I'm an Icelandic sheep farmer. I live alone with a dog and a lot of wool sweaters. Sunlight always filters through my windows and nothing hurts. Sure, it's a little lonely, but if nothing is given, nothing can be lost. I name the sheep after every person I've ever admired. There's one named Gibson, after Andrea Gibson. Sylvia, after Sylvia Plath. Harvey. Bowie. Nelson. Frida. Somewhere along the way, I learn to shear the sheep. Spin yarn. Knit. I can fix the mistakes in my knitting, something my mother could never do.

It's as if my heart is being pulled in every direction. I can feel the strings moving, every time I breathe, every time the wind blows. I am too broken, and too whole, all at the same time. I am trapped behind eleven inches of glass.

3.

Voyeurism, or field research?[4]

I call him immediately after I smoke my first cigarette. It's a Newport from a shiny teal box, and I'm not picky. I catch the last bus and we smoke my second together. It's the kind all of my friends from high school smoked. Maybe 17-year-old me would've been proud. Or shocked. Disappointed, even. Maybe all at once. These things have never been simple for me.

4. *You're so beautiful that it hurts, because I know how much pain you carry. Did you know that the stretch marks on my inner thighs look just like your scars? I hope you know that I love those, too. You, with them. All of you.*

Voyeurism, or field research?

Smell that.

Smell what?

Smell my hand. The smell of smoke on someone's fingers has always turned me on.

He looks me dead in the eyes, takes my hand in his, and raises it to his face.

I don't get it.

That night he pays extra attention to where he places his left hand. Always near my face. He dismantles me with every touch, every glance. We're back in our routine. The front door. Tripping over the coffee table. Be careful of the doorknob, that never feels great against your back. Don't put all of your weight on that side of the bed, the bedframe is broken there. Wait for me to turn on the music—would you plug in the lights?

We only have sex in the dark once, and it's the only time that he takes off his shirt. I get into the habit of never asking, of never wanting more than I can have. He gets goosebumps whenever I run my fingers along his back—this unfamiliar territory.

The next morning, I ask to photograph him. He is standing with his back facing the camera, blonde roots beginning to show. His familiar black cord hangs around his neck, a constant reminder of his troubled pride. I draw constellations on his exposed back. His body echoes something so much bigger than us, living out of my shoebox apartment. He posts the photograph online later that day. It appears on my screen within minutes. I cry in the coffee shop.

On his Tumblr blog is a photograph of Cole Sprouse, lounging on a chair and wearing a plain white t-shirt. He's commented "goals."

Somewhere in his archived posts is a screenshot of an online BDSM test our friends make us take. He scores 56% voyeur, though I'm not sure it's purely sexual. He tells me that his sexuality is somewhere in the messy grey that mine is, and I'm grateful for that. He watches the way the white t-shirt hangs on Cole Sprouse's broad shoulders, the way his blonde hair falls. Cole Sprouse dyed his hair black recently.

The next time he has too much to drink, he shows me the picture he took of his thigh after the second injection. He knows this kind of thing makes me queasy.

a. I now use his Tumblr as field research.

b. I've done too much field research.

4.

I didn't know what to say, so I asked her if she wanted to kill me.

a. I garnish our drinks with lime wedges.

She smells different. My body doesn't fit hers quite right. She uses her tongue a bit too sharply. The back of her neck is a bit softer than his. Maybe it's nice. Maybe it's weird. I don't quite know. Her hair keeps getting caught in my mouth. She won't tell me what she's thinking, even though I've asked her upwards of fifteen times in the past three hours. I've left my books of queer and trans literature out, so we'll have something to talk about. (Everyone has annotated copies of Adrienne Rich strewn across their bed, right?) I still resort to self-deprecating humor. She doesn't know me well enough to know that I'm kidding.

I pour two more drinks, and the door slams. I assure her that it's just the wind, but she's not convinced. I forget the lime wedges.

Do you have a ghost?

Maybe I'm a ghost. I think I'd like to be a ghost.

You want to be stuck here, searching for something you can't find?

Aren't I already doing that?

b. She leaves in the early hours of the morning, and I don't kiss her goodbye.

She marked her territory without my knowing, leaving marks upon my neck. I've always bruised like a peach. Unfortunate. She wasn't soft. She wasn't tender. I thought it would be better than nothing, but I was wrong. We didn't sleep together that night. I couldn't bear the thought of her lying in the places where he had once been.

c. I think about the back of his neck.

His blonde roots were beginning to show before he shaved his head. I think about breathing him in during the first touch. I think about the photos he must have taken at the concert two days ago that he bought tickets for weeks prior. I think about every cigarette he must have smoked after leaving. He never leaves the cigarette butts behind.

I think that I only like smoking because it makes me feel closer to him. The same reason it took me five days to take his towel out of the bathroom, and another three to wash it. I'll admit that I cried over the toothbrush. That was the first to go.

d. I think about the last time I saw him.[5]

We're lying on the grass now. The sun is going down and it's starting to get colder. We find a secluded spot behind some trees and lay down my old gray blanket. He rests the last pack of cigarettes he can afford for a while next to my navy-blue thermos. A homeless man wanders past at some point, but we don't mind. I'm just looking at him. He's not looking at me. He's looking at the last cigarette he might have for a while. He takes too-big sips from the thermos.

He leaves me sweaty and shaking, smokes his last cigarette. I pull my knees into my chest and look out across the creek. I can feel myself becoming whole again. Maybe. Maybe it's that I can already feel myself shattering and I'm desperately trying to hold myself together. Band-aid fix. I can already feel him leaving. He doesn't touch me again.

On his Tumblr blog is a photograph of Close Sprouse, lounging on a chair and wearing a plain white t-shirt.

5. *You're so beautiful that it hurts, because I know how much pain you carry. Did you know that the stretch marks on my inner thighs look just like your scars? I hope you know that I love those, too. You, with them. All of you.*

Art by Kenna Reyner

A NEW PIECE OF MIND

by JADE McGEE

Step 1. Admit Something is Wrong:

I was flung into reality on March 7th, the night of His roast, thrown on His birthday for a stroke of His ego and to raise money for a friend who had recently been through chemotherapy. Every other joke was about His immense obsession with younger girls. These jokes made both Him and the audience laugh. His friends were publicly making jokes that He was a pedophile, and they were statements that only caused righteous laughter amongst the crowd. I sat in silence as I watched adults laugh at my reality. Each joke spewed chipped away at the wall in my mind that was restricting clarity and self-awareness. Once the wall had been breached, the tsunami of thoughts rushed over me and I was suddenly the only person in the room.

Step 2. Distance Yourself:

After His roast I cut off all communication with Him. No matter the intensity of the assault, the amount of laborious effort exhausted to get yourself back on your feet is severe. It is not easy to save yourself. Fighting back is not an elementary subject in any capacity or on any level. Ignoring Him was relatively difficult considering I still saw Him every day at work. Because my disappearance in His life was so abrupt, He went to extreme lengths to stay in touch with me through many unopened texts, unanswered calls, and unnecessary badgering at work. This worked in terms of removing myself from the situation but ignoring Him went hand in hand with ignoring what happened. Disregarding your problems or issues only works for so long; keeping it to yourself and telling no one starts to eat away at you. Opening up to myself about what had been done to me did not present itself as an option. Every time I closed my eyes I was back in His room, or His office, or His couch. The assault and abuse that He brought me became my only world and I saw no way out of it. I attempted to commit suicide at this time but some force in the universe kept me here. When suicide failed I found that my only option left was to—

Opening up to myself about what had been done to me did not present itself as an option.

Step 3. Tell Someone:

After the whirlwind month of not speaking to Him, I told Her. I sat in my car as She sat in Her bed, crying into the phone. I felt nothing, completely numb to what He did to me. She saw that I was beyond shattered and took the wheel. She gave me a list of therapists, crisis centers, and hot-lines to contact and went against Her gut to ask me more about It. Not just because She wanted to know, but because She didn't want me to be alone in my thoughts about It. I very slowly started to tell more friends about It; I started to get feedback from other women who said, "The same happened to me, with the same Him."

Step 4. Be Angry, be Scared, Feel Empty:

Knowing that It had happened to multiple Women infuriated me. With this newfound knowledge that the others did

not have the confidence to take action or foresight regarding his next victim, came fury that led to action. It was time to take the energy I was putting into my emotions and start putting it to use. No matter what happened to me, at the end of the day I knew I couldn't let this happen to any other Women on behalf of His doing.

Step 5. Tell Someone of Importance:

After seven months of not speaking to Him, I told our boss, who was obligated by law to suspended Him and dive into a month-long investigation. This meant twice a week I was to meet with lawyers, social workers, detectives, and judges. All Men. Men asking a sixteen-year-old girl to describe what a thirty-seven-year-old Man did to her. This was the worst, most dehumanizing part of it all. I remember driving all over the city, bouncing from one meeting to another. I'd stick my hand out of the window and let it dance in the cool, crisp, fall air. Letting the wind push against my hand was the only feeling I had left. I'd close my eyes, take a deep breath, and try to keep my heart from beating so loud I could hear it echo in the room I was about to enter. Each meeting took place in the type of investigation room you see on crime shows when they interrogate the bad guy. Was I the bad guy? For the sake of their jobs, these Men had to grind at my story and approach it as if they didn't believe me. During each interview I was instructed to tell my story with the same details as the previous interview, because if I slipped up, I would be done for. If I was too emotional or not emotional enough, everything that I had built the courage to do would be for nothing. It was astonishing that after all that I had been through and how long it took me to speak out about It, these Men had to consider me a liar. They didn't understand that I kept quiet for so long out of pure fear. Fear of the residue it would leave on my newcomer's reputation. Fear of what others would think of me and how I would be treated. I believed I would spend the rest of my life with a sign on my forehead reading Victim. In the end, however, my will to help others trumped my own fears and concerns.

Letting the wind push against my hand was the only feeling I had left.

Step 6. Allow Yourself Time to Heal:

After the month from hell he was officially fired and I could finally begin to heal. Mine was a long process with numerous highs and lows. I kept pushing because I knew that I did the right thing. You need to take a step back and begin to put you as your primary focus. There is no winning or losing, what happens after It happens is up to you. Rebuild yourself from the ground up. Become the person you've always aspired to be. Learn from the mistakes of others. All of us have lived through our hardest days, never let anyone belittle the experiences you have faced head on.

Step 7. Never Forget Where You Came From: Rape.

A word that has created such a negative connotation in our current realm of society. A four letter, single syllable, word that has the capability to ignite such powerful emotions. Some people simply hear the word Rape and feel it expel fear and shame. It floods others with prickling discomfort and silence. With a disgusting number of recent stories being released about sexual assault, harassment, or rape, some would think the subject would become more comfortable to discuss, and yet every time a new story is released it's just as shocking and revolting as the last. Regardless, our darkest personal tragedies have the biggest influence on who we are today.

Step 8. Be Open With Yourself:

It's been two years since I was raped. I was sixteen and Dan was thirty-seven years old—our relationship lasted for four months. Our relationship is still the last thing I think about before drifting to sleep and the first thought I have when I wake up. Rape haunts my every day, affects my every decision, has changed me into a completely different person. Growing up, I heard of and saw horrible occurrences like rape or murder being described on the news. I naively assumed that something so horrific could never happen to me—but no one anticipates that such tragedies could happen to them

I believed I would spend the rest of my life with a sign on my forehead reading Victim.

before they do. Assault of any kind is everywhere and it can happen to anyone.

Step 9. Be Open With Others:

I never used to refer to what happened to me as rape. Admitting it to others, no matter their priority in my life, was embarrassing and made me feel tense in every ligament, isolated in shame about an act I had no control over. Growing up I was conditioned to picture rape as something violent, an act done by an aggressive stranger, an incident that happens once, something that would immediately wave red flags letting you know something was seriously wrong. Dan was a friend that I'd known since I was twelve, and I worked next to him every day. I used to say that I loved him but I've realized that love and hate are simply interchangeable.

Step 10. Help Others:

The commonality of rape does not make it okay. But my hope is that this helps make rape easier to talk about. Ask questions, don't be afraid to step in the mud. Never stop talking about it. You are braver than you know. You are never alone. Speak up and speak out, it might not save you, but it will save others.

Art by Ellie Marcotte

JUST US NOW

by PIPER BOYD

"But it will get better. I promise."

Her voice bounces off my consciousness like a rubber ball off the concrete. Mum's words of consolation aren't anything new, they are just a song that's on repeat and you grow unaware of the noise after a while.

The sniffling coming from the back seat snaps me back into reality, reminding me that my five-year-old sister is also in the car. Unlike her, I don't see a need to cry.

The sound of speeding tires against a wet and slushy road is deafening, like white noise. It breaks its way into my mind, driving me mad. Apparently, our weaving in and out of traffic irks other drivers as well, for the noise of car horns being pressed by impatient people fills the silence between the three of us.

Mum's hands sporadically tighten and untighten around the steering wheel. She moves her mouth around like there is a large wad of glue in there before she says anything. Her squinted eyes flutter to the rearview mirror.

"Joanna, your arm, baby? How's it feeling?"

More sniffling and a couple of wet gulps come from Joanna's direction.

"It's black and blue, and a little sore, but I think I'm alright. He grabbed me pretty tight. B-But it doesn't hurt that badly."

"And you? You haven't said much for a while. How's your—?" Mum's eyes just scan me from head to toe and she trails off. I know her words are directed at me.

But I suppose it's obvious that I don't care to listen.

I focus on counting the luminous street lights rather than the pain in my chest and on my eye. Perhaps we'll go to Nan's house. It's always warm there and she always gives me extra portions during meals because she says I look too worn down for someone my age. Of course, I don't know how long we would stay there; we have only spent the night a few times if Dad happened to be away. Whenever Mum dropped Joanna and me off, Nan would always seem anxious, and Dad would come soon after we got there and just take us home. He always said it was because he missed us too much.

"It's throbbing." I say flatly. I don't tell her exactly what hurts; it's hard to tell anymore. Guess I have grown numb to it, no matter how wrong it seems to outsiders. We are blood, after all.

This is, however, the first time we have run like this. There couldn't have been more than two seconds from the last swing to when we got into the car and sped off into the thick and misty fog. We stopped for petrol a few miles back and I checked the boot of the car, and sure enough, there was a large dent where he had slammed his foot. There was a smaller one next to it, but I guess the car screeched away before he could kick it full-force.

I don't see the point of leaving. I have always been told that nobody is perfect and that people make mistakes; that we should forgive and forget. Why should this change suddenly when people get angry? But I, however, have no say in the matter, and with my adaptability, I will get used to this now, too. Just us. Maybe Mum's right. Maybe it will get better, whatever her definition of better is.

For now, I just want to reach into our freezer, as usual, and put a bag of frozen vegetables on my face. It's soothing and feels like home to me, because ever since I can remember it has always seemed to quickly ease the pain. I asked Mum at the petrol station if I could run in to get something frozen, but she wouldn't let

Mum's hands sporadically tighten and untighten around the steering wheel.

me go inside in case someone saw me; she was already anxious enough about people seeing her. Why would anyone recognize us this far away from home?

I, instead, press my forehead onto the cold and squeaky window that is being pelted with hail. This'll do.

"Are we ever going back? How will he find us?" Joanna blubbers suddenly, sounding as if she'll be sick. Unfortunately, she looks up to him as much as I do. I roll my eyes and turn to look at her. Her bruised face matches mine.

"The point is that he won't find us. I guess family means abandoning each other." I direct this last part towards my mother. She bursts into a loud sob, and I reposition myself back to leaning on the window.

Just us girls now.

BLOOD SONG

Winner of the 2018 Thompson Award
for Western American Writing for Poetry

by CATY JANSURY

I think of you first in pieces,
the ones that I can see:

The red dirt caked on the soles of your shoes,
sweat seeping up through the cracked latticework
of your veins, sticky with residual drama.

Your jagged jaw,
cracked from chewing bits of limestone,
from your climb (tooth and nail) out of some deep tomb.

Your hair, shaggy and oddly-colored,
dark underneath like pine boughs
and light on top, like snow coating needles.

Limbs, hardened into slick rock
from years of jumping
over porch swings and gaping canyons.

What would you tell me, if you could?

Maybe secrets about your earliest memories,
ones that haunted you at night
in the farm of petrified grins where you lived:
those of fat, threatening coyote prints in the snow.

Or that first crucial moment of deep pain you felt,
when a bit of sun swept up over the hills,
and a sweet tobacco taste lingered stubbornly
on your lips and fingernails.

Of course, these are things I don't know,
things I've invented in the years
since that first time
I felt the roughness of your palm
and saw the trace of wet handprint on your jeans:
love.

I piece together my own invention of who you are,
have been and might be, from what I can see, because
blood songs
can't be shared.

Art by Braeden Sloan

HUMMINGBIRD

by HANNAH HURLEY

I remember the taste of warm sake resting on my tongue while eyes rested on my cheek. The smell of soy sauce and tempura mixed with what was once a massive appetite, replaced by a hollowness in my stomach that felt negligent to disobey. Remember the feeling when you're young and someone takes interest in you when you feel like you are privileged to even occupy a space? That's how I felt with that pair of eyes on me. I didn't know what I had done to deserve that gaze. I sipped more. My throat opened up welcoming the warm wine, like a single car driving through a mountain tunnel, warm summer breeze floating in the windows, dancing in the driver's hair. Moments often felt like this when I was awarded that gaze.

While I once occupied a quaint room in Florida filled with people, chairs and tables, clinking glasses and bartenders shaking fancy cocktails, I now found myself floating. I drifted off, occupying a different galaxy accompanied only by distant galaxies and stars. Gravity itself had chosen to abandon me, leaving me buoyant within my thoughts, grasping for something in reality

to bring me back. I reached for chairs and the table and my glass, but it was as if I were chasing a hat that had been taken by the wind. Useless and tiresome. In a random instant I was shaken back yet felt even more distant than I previously had. You seemed to have momentarily drifted as well. I wondered as to where you go when you find yourself among the stars and galaxies and distant planets. I listened to the noises around the room.

Faintly in the distance a woman sang, but she was drowned out by the Friday-night euphoria bubbling around the room, like Prosecco aromatically bursting in a glass. Girls walked in with fresh curls and phones held close, nervously searching for comradery. Boys in jerseys peered around the room as though it were the first day of school, deciding who they wanted to be friends with this year. An older couple was on a date, hyperaware yet simultaneously oblivious to their surroundings. Gentle and thoughtful of one another's actions. She slowly sipped red wine while he admiringly observed her, like a loving dog curious of his master's foreign doings. Back then I wanted you to look at me this way.

The scents changed over time. It was no longer soy sauce and tempura and booze. The sky became clear and crisp as we parted ways with the restaurant and those uncanny friends. As I looked up, I noticed smoky spirits danced around. A bright shade of indigo sprinkled with pale iridescent freckles. Warm gray ghosts begged their life to caress the stars, but saddened by their failure, faded dismally away; their sobs the scent they left behind. I trailed behind you as you towed your bible. Its large black case lined with red velvet, the secrets to your admiration between its teeth, sewn into its hair. I had grown my hair out hoping you'd be reminded of it, whitened my teeth and spoke softly in a futile attempt to protect my voice. That was my only way to reach you. Everything seemed to move a little bit slower with you. It was so minute that I was unable to pinpoint it for a while. It was as if the hands of my inner clock had been sticky. I thought maybe a bee with legs gooey from honey had landed on them. Each syllable rolled off my tongue and my feet suddenly felt like two lead blocks. I remember picking up my pace by a fraction each step, but each step I took you would gain on me. "A little bit faster," I'd say to myself. "One more and you're there," until I felt as if I were running. We had finally reached impromptu stools

I wondered as to where you go when you find yourself among the stars and galaxies and distant planets.

surrounding the warm glow of fire, whose billowing ghosts' tears were soon seeped into my clothing. I remember I smelt their tears for days, soon mixing with my own. But in the meantime, I felt comforted by the warmth and lost myself in the enjoyment of it… I sat down on a massive log whose width was so great I wondered how long it had been resting here. It made me feel insignificant. Leaning back, I looked up at the glinting pale freckles. I noticed Venus in the distance. Her swirling, blinking colors like a psychic's orb being manipulated by wrinkly hands and long fingers. Eventually I snapped back. You asked me a question while standing above me, a worn and tattered strap draping your shoulder. "What?" I asked, wondering how long you had been staring at me. "Do you want to sing?" You responded. Before I could answer, two friends walked up. Instantly, I was washed with a sense of relief. Dan was holding a case of beers, one of which he tossed to me.

Art by Zola French Bzdek

Looking back, Dan treated me the way I wanted you to. He was engaging and easy-going, yet just as mysterious and wise and imaginative. But it didn't matter how inherently he possessed these qualities. I had already decided whose affection I wanted. You started playing your guitar. Holding her neck and brushing her hair. At first you strummed lightly, gradually speeding up and up, until we were all talking louder and louder, eventually shouting. Lastly, we gave up conversation altogether. You strummed madly, violently, so aggressively that I thought the strings were going to pop right off with a cartoon-like noise, and you'd be left panting, grasping for breaths, arms hung by your side the way the ends of a towel hang around a neck. Veins throbbing and fingers bleeding, crying because they didn't know they were able to create something so beautiful. But they don't. I sat mesmerized, in awe, pondering how a god had been placed among mere mortals. I tilted my head back and sipped. With my head towards the heavens, Venus winked at me almost as if she knew he were one of her own.

I felt a bony nudge as Dan brought me back down and asked for a song. "Breathe Me" I blurted out, followed by Dan humphing "Huh, what?" "By Sia" I say. Chase started playing it. Almost perfectly. I realized I'd never actually heard it on the guitar, but it was almost even more beautiful. The smoke started to dance, at one point it even melted on my lap, hanging like a warm and dazed cat who had found solace on a window sill. The smoke seemed to warm my throat as well. I felt the first vibration. A hummingbird had been lodged in my throat. Directly where you'd see an Adam's apple on a man. At first it was doing its dance. Nearing a flower, but backing away right at the last moment, as if to tease the candied nectars. But the dance had been swung too many times. It's as if the nectars themselves leapt at the bird but missed, coating my throat in the sweetest salve nature had concocted. The words floated out of me and joined the smoke who had resumed her dance. They were sweet and smoky, as if the two had been searching for one another all along. Billowing, the ghosts wondered how they ever felt such sadness to begin with. Pain now a distant memory; they were dancing, waltzing, embracing and caressing as we all sat back in bewilderment, curious as to why God harbored this secret so selfishly

A hummingbird had been lodged in my throat.

for so long, instantly regretting thinking the thought as the beautiful marriage floated up, seeking the heavens. Venus became bright as ever, like a lighthouse in the velvet black of night welcoming the two whose beauty is beyond even what she knows in heaven; our mortality became our biggest regret as the sweetness drifted away, farther and farther. She seemed to wink at us when they reached her, mocking our inability to keep beautiful things within our grasp.

The four of us were still. The sobs of the ghosts could not be smelled anymore. The crickets had silenced themselves and sat down. The sleepy moss of the oak trees had awoken, but pretended not to, as to not disturb the ceremony. Lights had been shut off, doors locked. Embers had remained still and logs refused to pop. The strings of his guitar were frozen in a moment of reverence, and the pounding of my heart had decided on its opportunity for a solo. I looked at Chase and Dan, whose eyes greeted me with questions and answers all at the same time. My eyes responded knowingly, the hummingbird in my throat ready to make it happen again.

Art by Kenna Reyner

LEAVE IT TO THE KIDS

by HENRY SHORNEY

Tuesday afternoon I grabbed the paddles, fishing nets, buckets, and life vests—although I would never wear one—and headed for the channel with my sister. We walked across tiny rocks with slow, deliberate steps, occasionally experiencing a bolt of pain that came with stepping on one at the wrong angle. It took us a moment to find our canoes amongst the other boats and watercrafts. They were on their bellies well up the bank. With great effort, I flipped them over and drug them to the water. I gripped the sides of the canoe as it rocked back and forth with my weight.

The sun beat down on my back as I paddled—never sure how far to dip the oar into the water. Lily trailed behind my canoe, drifting in the wake. I came to a large branch where I spotted one. I stopped paddling and told my sister to do the same. It was perched on a log by the bank. I coasted up to it and reached out with my net.

Splash.

It was gone. We moved further down the channel and into a lake. The water was nearly transparent, and I was thinking about the catfish I had caught the day before.

"Henry," Lily said, pointing at a branch jutting up in the middle of the lake.

I coasted over. Its huge, glassy shell reflected the sunlight. This time I was more careful; I inched up from behind and brought the net down. It squirmed and hissed. I emptied the net in the bucket between my legs.

An hour before the race, I held its squirming body as Lily painted a purple 13 on its shell. We carried it in a bucket along the beach. Dozens of people had their own animals and were gathered around the green concrete circle where the race would take place.

"All frogs," Nelson said.

Around ten people emerged from the crowd with their slimy frogs cupped between their hands. Nelson directed them to place their critters in a bucket with the bottom removed—this would serve as the starting circle.

Frogs of all different sizes and numbers were in a panic to escape. They tried to leap out of the bucket, some even tried to use others as steps, none succeeded.

Nelson gathered everyone around, said the rules and hollered.

"souuuuuuuuuuue"

The bucket was lifted up and a frenzy ensued; frogs hopped over frogs, collided in midair, and went in every possible direction. The race was over in seconds: a tiny number 5 had taken three large leaps and passed the finish line. Second and third place were noted, but quickly forgotten as children ran a race of their own attempting to retrieve their animals.

a frenzy ensued; frogs hopped over frogs, collided midair

Squish.

One little boy had bolted across the racing circle making a beeline to his speedy number 3 and in the process managed to splatter number 12's guts all over the concrete. Tears started to well up in a little girls eyes, her face contracted, then released with a scream that could make your hearing assisted grandfather wince; her tiny body collapsed under the weight of her wail. Mom stood over her and attempted to cork the bottle, but this post-graduation champagne had been well shook and was spraying everywhere. Parents exchanged empathetic glances and waited for the debacle to cease. Her body flailed in a fit of clashing emotions. Mom scooped her up and carried her away as she tried to squirm out of her arms.

With the spray of a hose the deceased competitor was cleared off the circle.

"Alright moving on, toads, any toads?"

The toads were brought to the starting circle, being much less excitable than frogs, the race took a tad longer. However, the podium was still filled within the first thirty seconds.

Then, it was time for the turtles. With 13 pinched between my middle finger and thumb, I made my way to the starting circle; when I was almost there something caught my eye. I walked over to a group of kids gathered around a bucket.

"What is that?" A little boy said.

"It looks possessed,"said another.

"It's a snapper, out of the way," said Riley's dad, walking alongside Riley as he brought the bucket to the starting circle.

Riley barged passed me, picked up the snapper, and placed it down in the starting circle.

"I'm gonna crush you," he said.

I placed 13 in the corner farthest away from the snapper.

The slow crawl began. These races could go on forever. 13 had not moved an inch, in fact, he had retreated into his shell. The snapper was almost halfway to the finish, when all of a sudden it stopped, turned around and starting going in the opposite direction.

"Turn around," Riley and his father—who undoubtedly caught the turtle—yelled.

The race dragged on. Nelson had to keep the audience entertained, so he grabbed hold of the hose and sprayed. 13 emerged from his shell with a jolt and broke for the finish line.

"That's not fair," said Riley's father.

Parents exchanged disapproving glances. Nelson sprayed the snapper, who turned around and passed the finish line just before 13. I picked up 13, who had crossed the finish line right in front of me.

"Shit!"

I looked over and saw Riley's father recoiling in pain. The snapper had picked up speed and was zooming around. Little kids leaped out of the way, even parents wanted nothing to do with the thing. It was almost to the nearby trees when Nelson trapped it with the bucket.

"Let's leave it to the kids next time."

EL PASEO

by ANGELINA CARRANZA

At some point during that first trip, I learned about the Camino de Santiago. People from around the world make the trek, beginning in Spain, Portugal, or France and sometimes walking more than five hundred miles to see the St. James Cathedral. Knowing this made my family's tiny town seem special—part of someone's life-changing journey—even though to me it smelled like cows.

The houses, glued together in long ribbons, line the dirt roads. Many of them consisted of adobe; my dad once took too long of a shower in my aunt Casi's house and washed away enough of the wall to see the hay mixed into the clay bricks. Though often quiet, the streets echoed as people exited Sunday morning Mass, or when the town held a farmers' market. Tia Casi attended both events religiously. After Mass and shopping, she came home and cooked, bustling around the kitchen and murmuring in Spanish that we looked too skinny.

In the evenings, during what my dad calls "rush hour," the herds came back home from the pastures outside of town. The animals automatically took the appropriate side streets, jostling each other and the doors of the houses along their path. People put up corrugated sheets of metal at dusk to prevent the cows' hooves from denting their doors. My grandmother, my abuela, kept towels near the windows to tuck into the cracks, keeping the dust out.

Visiting Tábara as one of the youngest and tallest people (my dad is 5'8" and ducks to avoid door frames) felt like culture shock. My grandmother sailed on the Queen Mary and passed through Ellis Island, making us the only branch of our family tree to leave Spain. Relatives and friends treated my dad's arrival like the return of a prodigal son. We, on the other hand, got teased for our American-ness, lovingly of course. Once, my family burst out in laughter at my horrified face when my uncle Bernardo swung a dead, skinned rabbit in my face—the one that I spent yesterday morning petting—and proudly said in Spanish, "Look! It's your bunny friend!". I skipped lunch.

My brother and I spent our time playing Game Boy games while avoiding the heat and our family, counting down the days until we left for Madrid or Barcelona. Time seems to move slowly during the summer. The heat melted the buildings until the surroundings reminded me of a Dalí painting. We had nothing else to do with the day besides find one of the eight bars in the city and have a Coca-Cola with ice, poured in a glass. This is the time of day that makes Spain famous.

During his childhood trips, my dad remembers the men of Tábara gathering at bars during siestas to drink coffee, or maybe a brandy, and play cards. Women, including my grandmother and tía Casí, did laundry in the fountain in the Plaza Mayor, where my dad described their conversations as "People, the Washington Post, and the National Enquirer all rolled into one." They gossiped and told stories while scrubbing. Every day the men drank and the women washed.

During the Spanish Civil War, some of the women's husbands were executed by firing squad. Early in the morning, the town militia collected the men from their houses, taking them on un paseo, a walk, to the outskirts of town. All these men, both the "soldiers" and the "traitors," were neighbors. They lived next to each other and shared their lives in the same small area. They are all buried in the graveyard together. Their gravestones are indistinguishable from newer ones, save for the carved dates and the weather-darkened stone.

The heat melted the buildings until the surroundings reminded me of a Dali painting.

That story surprised me when I first heard it, since I thought nothing interesting ever happened in Tábara, but it surprised me even more to learn that the town ultimately supported the fascists—a curse word in the United States. Now, almost ten years later, I learned that my uncle's toast "Viva Franco" at my parent's anniversary party, wasn't a joke.

After graduation, my dad and I visit Spain, but chose not to go to Tábara. We had trouble justifying going back to somewhere old, when we had the chance to explore someplace new. At first, I pushed my dad to reconsider, certain he would regret not taking the opportunity. But he was sure. It was me who felt the need to relive the past, not him. To smell the scent of animals. To walk a little bit of the Camino. To see my grandma's house again, and judge it with fresh, mature eyes.

Instead, we stayed at my Tia Casi's apartment in Madrid, exploring during the day and sitting together in the living room at night. She tells us she rarely visits Tábara: too many changes. The town's priest was revealed to be a pedophile, so she refuses to attend that church anymore. She had no idea, but my cousin had his suspicions.

She turns up the volume on the television, the right-leaning news channel, even though she's deaf. A headline about Catalan politicians appears—they've been jailed for orchestrating a vote to separate from Spain. Tía Casi tells us about her granddaughter in Barcelona; Ella es Catalana, she says, venom in her voice.

As I tune her out her complaints, I focus on an old photo she has of Bernardo, proudly showing off something he grew in his garden. A pepper? A squash? The image is too blurry to make it out. I see pictures my parents sent her of my brother and me, and I think of the pictures we have at home of my aunt, my grandmother, my uncle and my cousins, some in faded colors and some in black and white. My dad was right about not visiting Tábara. It would be hard to go back.

DISMISSED

by JULIA REDLINGER

Before:

In Longmont United Hospital, Longmont Colorado on July 30th, 1999 at 5:36 p.m., a mother slaved for over thirty hours to give birth to a wide-eyed, drooling baby. Her mother held her too much for too long, for this would be her only child. She overfed her in fear that she might starve. She put her diapers on wrong, but then right and then wrong just a couple more times, but she overcame the demanding tasks of single motherhood.

At seven years old, the young girl fell in love with a doctor's kit. Plastic scissors and bandages and scalpels. The young girl dreamed of conquering the metal blade and her shaking hands. Her hands lacked the subtlety and precision that a proper surgeon possessed, but she refused to give in.

She enjoyed eating raw noodles out of the pasta box and always made sure to lick the bowl clean of any brownie mix.

She ran, but not often and tried yoga once, but her body refused to bend in such ways.

She cried over a few boys, threw things at a wall a couple of times.

Her love for space, science and medicine went on and on as her bookshelf grew heavy with the art of quantum physics, Einstein's life, medical books, anatomy guidelines, Carl Sagan, Neil DeGrasse Tyson…it continues. She has two bookshelves now.

She loved hiking and biking and laughing and screaming and rolling in the grass. She loved painting the mountains and the flowers and pressing leaves from the trees (though she always apologized to the trees when she pulled a leaf from them because her mother told her once, "how would you like if some stranger came up to you and pulled your hair out?"). She picked the leaves anyways so she could paint their lines and curves in her little black notebook. A vile monster in the mornings, but quite lovely after a cup of coffee. She gave a lot of hugs, and paid lots of attention to everyone. In times, she found her heart to be shallow, but she knew that.

A young woman in the prime of her youth, happy as she ever could be.

The First Day in Court

People hesitantly walked into the courtroom, the air drenched in the sweat and horror of the two hundred people that gathered in anticipation as the questioning process dragged on for three days. On the final day of questioning, Judge LaBuda's voice trickled over the crowd in a booming, yet feminine tone. The names of those called were free of the burden a jury has to take on. I soon began to realize that my name would not be.

Well, fuck.

Adam

Adam Densmore's memory will not fade in the recesses of my mind. I could pick out the tone of his eyes, the slopes, valleys and curves of his lips, the peak of his brow and the slumping of his posture.

He displayed a greasy sweep of hair around his head, with widening eyes as the days trailed on. His razor neglected some of the stray hairs peppered around this face. He never looked

Well, fuck.

I watched her speak with words that stood frozen in the courtroom

like he got more than a couple hours of sleep. Sunken into his sockets were eyes that carried a blank stare, painted a deep charcoal that pierced the room. The energy of his eyes nearly collapsed the stiffness of the air. We made eye contact often, each time a deep stare that mocked all other intense glares. With each hour, as the case dragged on and the evidence became more convincing, the energy harnessed in his eyes emptied into a puddle of pure exhaustion. In the end, he stopped looking over at me completely.

Julia, Who are You?

As my nights turned into periods of grieving rather than sleeping, I watched the decline of my brain and body. My chestnut eyes that once held such a beaming amount of laughter and light would crack and sizzle and burn out a little more each day. The sparkle that once glittered within them dimmed into a disgusting yellow speck of anger and frustration. I watched the tight, bright skin under my eyes melt into dark, sagging sacs of despair that hung from underneath my bottom lashes. I watched my weight fluctuate as I ate too much, too little, but never the right amount. I watched my skin dry and crinkle from neglect. And so I faced myself in the mirror each day, either too skinny or too fat, too bitter or too melancholy. Depressed and scared of the world, scared of what I might see next in court, I routinely avoided my reflection.

The Discovery

A young woman was the first witness that seemed to be around my age. I watched her speak with words that stood frozen in the courtroom as they passed by her lips, covered in a goopy pink lip gloss.

I am unable to forget the words she spoke to us that day.

I listened to her closely, fear creeping down my back. She presented her story with an appalling, almost eerie, composed voice.

She said she worked at a gas station. The Oklahoma air produced a cool, calm breeze, with a bright blue sky that domed

over her head. She saw a man, tall and mysterious, lug something over the grease-stained dumpster that stood behind the gas station. She watched as he drove away in his car that had only one working headlight. Her curiosity piqued at what he might have thrown away and she snuck away from her cash register, slowly wandering over to the green giant.

She peered over the top and noticed a dark lavender suitcase. It looked brand new with fresh fabric that lined it. *Too beautiful of a bag to be thrown away.* She inched her body over the edge to try to reach the bag, alarmed at the weight of the suitcase that wouldn't budge when she pulled up. She asked her co-worker for assistance to heave the bag over the dumpster.

When the team effort finally mustered the suitcase over the dumpster, they hesitantly stared at it. She traced the zipper along its teeth and popped open the flap. Inside, a black trash bag. She used a pocket knife to ease through the plastic, only to find another black bag underneath. With a final cut, they revealed a cold, white patch of flesh.

A dead pig? She thought.

She pulled back the plastic a little more. Breasts poked through the bag. A naked torso cleaned to a fault, empty of its organs and stripped away from its other appendages lay inside. Ashley. Now cut and carved, stuffed into a purple suitcase.

A blood-curdling scream shook Oklahoma that day.

I'm Okay. It's Okay…Maybe Not

Fairly calm throughout the trial, I didn't pay much mind to what I observed. It wasn't until they brought out the evidence that everything went numb.

A black power saw, freckled with bits of flesh and blood between the teeth, preserved in a glass case, just as they had found it. It chipped away at Ashley's limbs. Each cut slicing through the leather of her skin. Gnawing, cracking and fracturing her bones. Pieces of her would always remain clutched in the jagged teeth of the power saw.

Next, the dark lavender suitcase which once held the torso of Ashley Mead. Its purple vividly danced around the room, calling attention to its unearthly shade. I looked over

She used a pocket knife to ease through the plastic

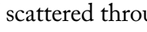
at Adam's mother as her eyes fell over a familiar suitcase. She used to pack her clothes in it for her wild vacations.

The suitcase is the exact size of Ashley's torso if Adam cut her body just right. Flashes of her body packed tightly inside and her mangled, ghost-like skin, cleaned so well it looked plastic popped into my head as I stared at the purple suitcase. I stared and stared and stared.

It all went black.

The Meltdown

My ears began ringing and the cool leather of the chair began to burn, sizzling and melting beneath me. Voices dissipated into echoes far off into the distance and a panic clutched my heart, benumbed under the anxiety now drowning my body in its fathomless watery depths. I watched the Judge, Adam, the lawyers, the evidence, the sobbing families, the nosy reporters all get further and further away from me. The room became larger, then smaller, then larger…no smaller; it then withered away into absolutely nothing. I found myself completely alone. My mind nowhere and no recollection of what they were saying in the courtroom. I sat in the emptiness, in a room completely and utterly detached from me. I floated in the profound, desolate universe as a faint murmur of voices from Courtroom "S" echoed in the black background. I saw nothing but a flesh-covered veil that draped over the room, stained patches of blood scattered throughout it. I listened to the low murmur of voices that once in a while demanded my attention, but I could not come back to reality.



Dismissal

Exhausted and traumatized, I became more and more aware that I could not handle the deliberations. To look at Ashley's cold, desolate body lying on an observation table at the hands of a Pathologist during her autopsy and to look at Adam one more time was far too much for me.

"Please, Tessa, may I speak with the judge?"

Tessa, the judge's intern, with slicked-back blonde hair into a tight bun, sporting square glasses that complemented her face,

said "Come. Let's go into a different room." She lead me into an empty deliberation room. I explained to Tessa that I experienced severe attacks of anxiety; things changed for me. I didn't *feel* like myself. Something was off.

"Please can I just talk to Judge LaBuda?"

"Sure. Wait here."

She finally came back and lead me into the courtroom.

"All Rise."

I watched the attorneys, the Judge, Adam, a couple reporters and the police stand for me.

"You may be seated," Judge LaBuda roared, "What's the problem Ms. Redlinger?"

"Ma'am I've been having trouble concentrating. I just went into a severe panic attack. I—" My voice broke. I wasn't able to finish my sentence.

"I see. Ms. Redlinger, please give the attorneys and I a minute to discuss. You may approach, council."

Her white noise machine went on, filling the room with a mind numbing static. Their sentences went unheard. She and the attorneys discussed my plea for removal. I waited—watching their mouths move without noise. The static stopped.

"Ms. Redlinger, after discussing your issues with the attorneys, we have come to the conclusion that your service will no longer be needed. You are hereby dismissed and we thank you for your time."

"Thank you." Tessa and I turned around. I heard a faint "all rise" seep out of Tessa's lips.

I knew I would never see the other jurors again and although I had no desire to, I knew they would be the only ones who would ever understand.

Tessa said goodbye to me as I walked away from the room.

My heavy heart felt defeated. I felt as though I had let the other jurors down, the judge, Ashley's and Adam's families. However, I never returned to courtroom "S."

The Decision

What happened to me after the trial was summed up with this*: I almost lost my fucking mind.* PTSD, panic disorder, anxiety attacks, flashbacks, tv static in my vision, blackouts, a loss of hope,

watching the life slowly fade from a man's eyes

fear of my death, a welcoming of my death. An effervescent soul lost to the words: April 26th, 2018, "... Densmore, 33, guilty of first-degree murder, guilty of tampering with a deceased human body, tampering with physical evidence and abuse of a corpse."

The trial was over.

After

In Longmont United Hospital, Longmont Colorado on July 30th, 1999 at 5:36 p.m, a mother slaved for over thirty hours to give birth to a wide-eyed, drooling baby. Her mother held her too much for far too long, for this would be her only child. She overfed her in fear that she might starve. She put her diapers on wrong, but then right and then wrong just a couple more times, but she overcame the demanding tasks of single motherhood.

At eighteen years old, the young girl examined photos of a torso that belonged to Ashley Mead and sat in court for eight hours a day, watching the life slowly fade from a man's eyes.

The image of a cut up, slashed up torso crept its way into her dreams, along with it, a non-stop questioning of her sanity and mortality. Whatever happened to the happy, bouncy baby girl?

Art by Madeline Joy Camilli

PURSUING VERTICAL

by GRANT WHITMAN PERDUE

Pitch: No, I'm not talking about singing "Kumbaya" in perfect harmony. The leader of a rock climb ascends approximately one rope length of a cliff, clipping the rope to gear placed in cracks in the rock. While the leader climbs, the follower belays, managing the rope in order to ensure the climber does not die a brutal death if he falls. Then, the leader belays the follower up the same stretch of climbing, allowing the pair to then push further up the wall. This rope length of climbing is called a "pitch."

Ground and Center

An extensive series of road and logistic escapades led me to this moment of anticipation—here I sit, at the base of the gargantuan rock face that I plan to ascend, then descend. Stephan, my climbing partner, and I are about to climb the Northeast Buttress of Higher Cathedral Rock. A climb storied for its sustain and intensity, we are eager to challenge our minds and

bodies. We rose before the sun's rays could shine upon Yosemite Valley in order to increase our chances of getting back to the ground before those same rays retreat into night. Now, my palms sweat as I approach exodus from the ground. They always do. Maybe it's the thought of, once again, entrusting my life to a bunch of tiny pieces of metal that separate me from the ground's sweet, rugged nurture—what kind of sane person would do such a thing, just to return to the same grounded place hours later? Maybe I am just excited? I am excited.

My feet leave the ground and I slip into a vertical meditation.

Pitch 1

My feet leave the ground and I slip into a vertical meditation. My palms no longer sweat, my mind no longer anticipates, only executes. I break above the tree line, and I am reminded of the beauty that this vertical perspective provides. The lush, once separable pines begin to mesh into one as I scale above their fortitude. It's here that my mind transitions from logically skeptical to above ground and centered: present; my brain now at resolve with the position to which I have pushed my body.

Pitch 2

Settling in to the vertical world in which we have inserted ourselves, Stephan and I share words of excitement and peace. We fix our gaze on El Capitan across the valley floor, whose gaze is already fixed upon us. I wonder what stories the behemoth wall has to tell—its wrinkled striations of granite emit vibrations of wisdom and grandeur. El Capitan sits at the center of the climbing universe—it's never-ending innerworkings of snake-like cracks and awe-inspiring features acting as an ultimate proving ground for historys most prolific climbers. I hope to one day be a part of its story.

Pitch 3

I delve deeper into a vertical meditation. I sense everything possible about myself and my surroundings. The way my fingers react to the rock's most miniscule of features. The way my hand perfectly fills the void of a crack in the rock, expanding with a few slight gestures in order to create the perfect hold. I strike awe at the fact that my body can turn this empty void into a usable method of upward mobility. I recognize the rock's slightest features and subtleties—for if it were a blank face, I would not be able to ascend it. However, it formed so perfectly in such a way that I am able to use its imperfections as a means to explore higher.

Pitch 4

Stephan—my relationship with him extends much further than the system of intertwined cordage that tethers us. For the past few weeks, we have been living as traveling vagabonds—moving through the country in search of experiential purpose. I've known Stephan for just over a year now—each encounter fulfilling and provoking. Stephan is a fantastic climber, emotionally driven; a romantic, a genius. I tend to separate logic and emotion, keeping romance on the backburner. Stephan excels in technical crack climbs, whereas I do so on cryptic overhanging rock. However, the different aspects of us—mental and physical—intertwine in a way that we are able to make decisions efficiently and ascend variable faces. Now, as we hang above the trees, this is ever-crucial, as we consciously entrust our lives to each other. Connected by a long strand of twine at the hip, decision making becomes double-stranded. Our bond grows stronger.

Pitch 5

Exposure. I traverse left, and the magnitude of trust I am enlisting in the singing pieces of metal clipped to my harness becomes clear. The wind dances around my body, intensifying and calming, causing my button-down shirt to flow freely. Below me re 400 feet of air, and I revel at the fact of the position I have put myself in. I feel wild, vulnerable. I love it.

Pitch 6

My eyes follow a thin flaring crack, leading to daunting territory. I had been envisioning this pitch for days, as I decided before that I would take it on the sharp end. Why not? If there's a time to push myself, it's now. And if it doesn't go well, the gear will hold. Right? As I exit the belay station, my mind clears of foresight and I begin the dance. Right foot, right hand, left foot, left hand. As I jam my way up the crack, I get into something of a musical groove. I need to in order to remain composed as my pieces of protection slip farther and farther away while I progress upwards. Mind on the mantra, mantra on my mind—good climbers place gear because they can, not because they need to.

Pitch 7, 8

"Vertical swimming," they call it. For the longest time, I did not understand why. However, as I forcibly wedge myself into a chimney-like formation in the rock, I get it. Inhale, get stuck, exhale, move, inhale, get stuck again. Rhythmic, yet intricate, my exhaustion builds in this heinous form of ascension. The walls seemingly close in tighter as I claustrophobically attempt upward progress—the unforgiving slither of rock whose void I have entered does not seem to allow grace; only grovel. My first time attempting the technique, I yell and growl as I struggle up the wall. My battlecries turn into what I believe to be the longest strand of expletives of my entire life. "Fuck! Fuck me! Jesus, fuck!" I yell as the climbing becomes increasingly more frustrating. I know it shouldn't be this difficult—I just don't have the technique figured out. But why the hell can't I just figure it out? I'm like a fish caught on a line, fighting while the wall tuckers me out. I place a piece of protection in a crack within the chimney, recognizing that it being there does not protect against a less than ideal fall. My helmet wedges and sticks in to the increasingly thinning chimney, so I decide I must remove it. I unclip my neck strap, and like clockwork, I fumble and watch my helmet as it plummets six hundred feet to the ground, bouncing off of rock and sky, landing eerily close to the point at which we started the climb. "Fuck!" Then silence. For El Capitan, this must be like dinner and a movie. I regain composure and push onward, reaching the final move in the chimney. My fingertips graze the small edge that would allow me to exit the chimney,

Black velvet, fly.

and I fall. Back into the chimney. Time does not slow nor cease to exist in this moment—in fact, it moves quickly, considering I have given myself to the air. However, my mind has enough time to process and evaluate. No, it does not fill with fright of my little gold camalot failing to hold my weight as I whip onto it. Rather than fear, my mind fills with frustration—damnit, I could have tried harder. An ironic occasion on many levels, I reflect on the fact that I lost my helmet prior to falling into a thin gape of unforgiving rock on what I expected to be an easy portion of climbing. I am humbled as tears fill my eyes—"I'm okay!" I yell down to a worried Stephan, fighting the yard sale of emotions that attempt to excrete out of my moistening eyes. I regain composure and finish the pitch.

Pitch 9, 10

Black velvet, fly. High into the vertical realm, I look down to appreciate the process of the vertical dance. Before my eyes, a bird who shines of black velvet floats below me with grace and precision. It is rare that one is in this position of observation, so I soak in every detail. The black velvet aviator flies with beauty and grace, effortlessly floating about the vertical realm. I wonder how its dark, glistening feathers sleek so smoothly against the grain of the wind. I aspire to one day move with such elegance. I admire its beauty.

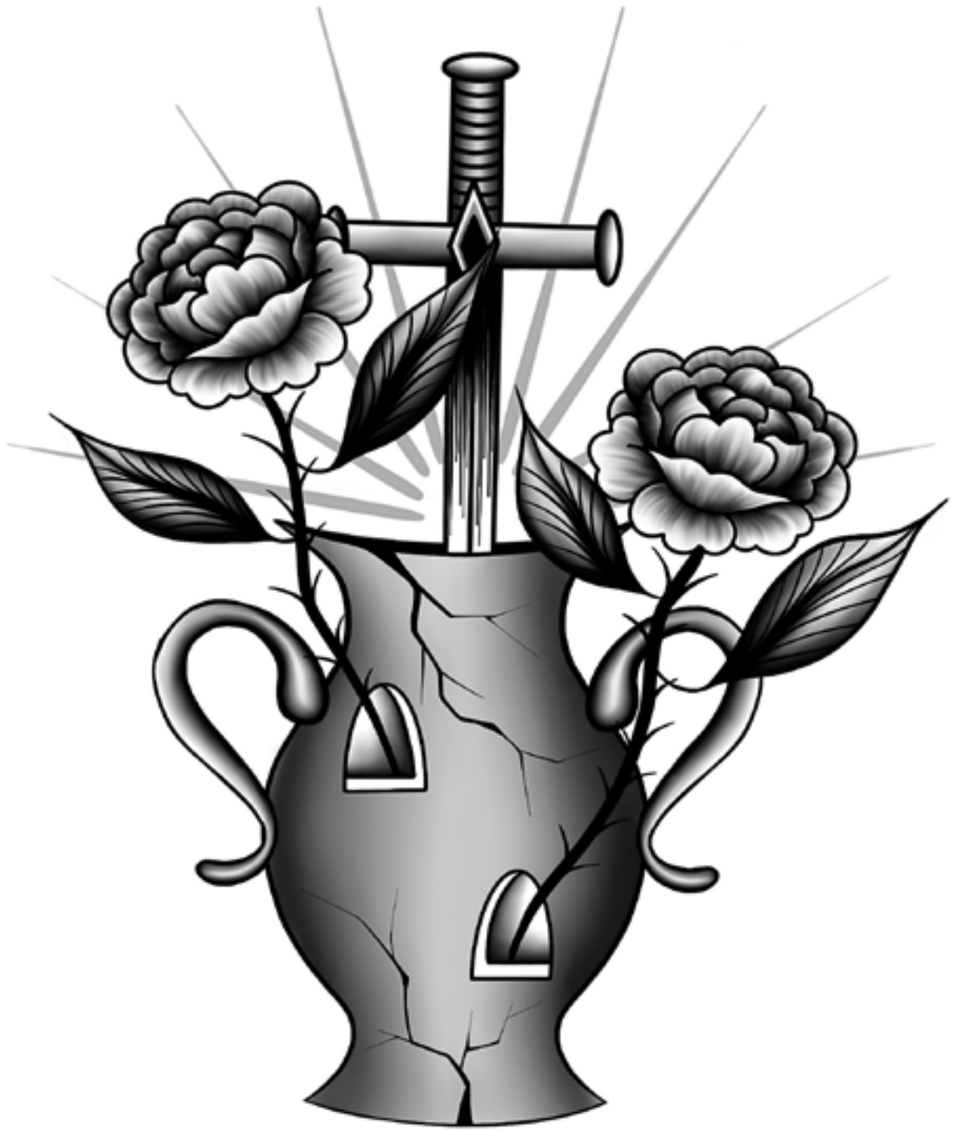
Pitch 11

"We're almost there, though. Last pitch to go, wish us luck!" I relay in a video recording before we reach the pinnacle, the halfway point of our vertical voyage. Stephan takes off on the last pitch, ascending a section of rock that is seldom, if ever, climbed—a bold completion to the dance, one thousand feet off the deck. We reach the summit of Higher Cathedral and gasp at the way El Capital meets our stare. Our smiles gape as we realize the fruition of today's ascension.

Ground and Center

We take the easy way down—a steep trail contrived of mystically neon mosses and rocks seeping with moisture. Passing by the section of rock where we began our climb, I notice the irony of casually strolling past the origin of such an intense experience. For we just ascended a cliff face and risked our lives in order to simply come back down. However, the effervescent present-ness of connecting mind and matter extricate any thoughts of "why am I doing this?" Maybe for the experiential comradery of going against what the brain deems logical and necessary. Maybe we're just lunatics. Back to our car, my glance is pulled from our ravaged water bottles and Clif Bar wrappers up to the sky. Spreading its wings like canvas through the sunsetting air, I appreciate its majesty and wonder when I may again meet the gaze of the black velvet bird. I anticipate when I will again join the bird in my own form of flight.

Art by Jan Mishaal



Art by Page Blackburn

SIDEWALKS WE DON'T WALK ON ANYMORE

by CLARA SWANSON

Dizzyingly hot, dripping with sweat, smelling of browned grass and gasoline and pot and coffee, it was the summer to end all summers. I could sing about the discoveries I made during those months, or of the people I loved. But the dancing and restless eyes of that season are now wilted and blanketed by a fog of halt and disdain.

We were seventeen then, and it felt like the dawn of adulthood—we camped in places that were lone-standing and free. We sang anthems and soliloquies, we drove searchingly, we wore ripped jeans. She was my best friend. Her name was Camille, like the 1969 hurricane, and aptly so—she raged in swift and deadly ways against mankind and everyday life, tearing apart those in her path and pulling respect from the throats of many. We spent the days of that summer smoking Camels in her decade-old Honda, sporting thrift store tank tops and thin canvas sneakers. Her breaking family was mine; I was the sibling she didn't have in her brother and the daughter her mother didn't have in her. I watched the worst chapter of the Andrews' family

story unfold sitting in a passenger seat I couldn't (or wouldn't) unbuckle myself from.

The end of the summer was the hottest part. Kansas City was reaching record highs that year and the humidity was dizzying. What I can remember of most days, through the haze of weed, heat, and exhaustion, was that our world had adopted a dream-like quality. Everyone was dehydrated and turning delirious. It was the final month of summer, too, when Camille's father began to deteriorate, both mentally and physically.

A large and muscular man, he was a retired college football coach now working construction. His hands were rugged and giant, and he had dark, tanned skin that looked like leather. He exclusively wore faded band t-shirts and blue jeans. He had an intellectual sense of humor but was no intellectual. During the

fever dream that was July and August, I watched each day as he began to cave in to the pressures of the family's issues.

Every week a new drama arose. One week it was drugs in the house, another it was not enough money for new milk. One, a panic attack, and the next, a drunken slip of the tongue. In the back of my mind I had taken on my role as mediator and therapist proudly, naively, with thoughts to fix a family that was obviously beyond repair. Around early July, Mr. Andrews began withdrawing occasionally from breakfast or dinner. Within a couple more weeks, he was withdrawing from entire days. He had, in a short time, grown skinnier and greasier. By the end of July, his face was chapped, and his eyes were red and sunken into the grayness of his face.

One hazy morning in early August I awoke to a frenzy that seemed only normal. Camille was speaking to me, her voice gravely and searching, looking for her cigarettes, the cat was stretching on the blanket over my feet, I heard a distant argument between her brother and mother from the kitchen, typical. I was still half-asleep and felt I had been born into a new, loud world. It was 8 o'clock. I sat up on the air mattress and looked out the window to the street. Camille's car sat in the morning sun, the driver's door hanging open. I asked her what was the matter. She yelled, practically, "he's gone!" and I sighed, because this was not unusual. For half a day or two days, sometimes, he disappeared, but he always came back. I told her this.

"No, it's different. He didn't bring anything with him, not even his credit cards. And he won't answer my calls." She was right. It was different—usually, he'd pack himself a small bag and would pick up the phone when called, even if only for a moment.

"His phone goes straight to voicemail," she told me, her bold, worried eyes creating dark trenches in the center of her head. Today, I can appreciate the gravity of these details, the foreboding nature of his robotic voicemail message ringing in my ears. But on that August day I did not. I told Camille, "It'll be alright." I laid back down and covered myself with the blanket. "He'll be back."

Camille spent all day driving around looking for him in nearby towns

Camille spent all day driving around looking for him in nearby towns and in parks and the houses of friends and in familiar places. I slept a while longer, thinking nothing of this, and went home in the afternoon to pack my bag for a small trip I was to take the next day, to St. Louis.

I left very early the next morning for St. Louis, around 5 o'clock, and arrived, after a leisurely drive, for breakfast around 8. I spent the day wandering and sightseeing with a friend of mine, and twice we mentioned the Andrews and their entire situation, but without much discussion. It was the last hazy day, I will add. After that day I can remember the past more clearly and credulously. It was the end of the summer and Camille called me early that afternoon.

Unhesitatingly, I picked up, and she didn't say anything at first. Gradually, I heard silent, hushed sobs and I knew what had happened. I sat down on the side of the street, a gray curbside, warm and rough, I remember. I couldn't breathe for a moment, and it was unsettling as getting the wind knocked out of you is—helplessly painful. I told her, "I'm sorry," and I didn't really know what else to say other than that. We cried on opposite ends of the telephone line for a minute or so. Looking back now, those tears were born not of sympathy but of dread. I think I understood in that moment that the times that were coming would be very difficult, sober times. I wiped my tears, sat up straight, and asked her what had happened.

I don't like to go much into detail about it, even today, but they'd found the corpse all the way in central Iowa on some farmland. Some poor kid walking past found it. The tattered body was seated in the red Ford pickup I drove to homecoming. In the passenger seat lay an old Remington pump shotgun with one shell in it. The truck was unsalvageable, ruined… as was the body. They had what was left of Mr. Andrews in a funeral home all cremated in a little town near Mason City, Iowa, and the truck was sitting in an auto shop.

I mulled this information over in my head for several minutes before telling Camille that I'd be over in the morning. I only came to regret this decision months later, after I was gone. I can't explain why I didn't make the two hour drive back home right away although I should've, but I speculate often. Perhaps I wanted to continue living, even for one more day, in this faraway world of summer innocence and warm, soft asphalt where I could walk barefoot and death wasn't real… in Kansas City, it would be real. Perhaps this is why I left our small, ghostly Kansas City suburb so shortly thereafter. I haven't been back. I think the sidewalks would burn my feet.

THE FADING OF GREATNESS

by DUAA AL-JAROUDI

A beautiful night under the sky back in KSA.

On the top of a mountain, somewhere in Saudi, at 9:45 p.m. under the dark sky, I wore my Abaya with my hijab stripped from my head resting on my shoulders. We were cuddling and kissing slowly and lustfully. It was our first time discovering the beauty and greatness of the kiss and the touch of a human body, along with the unphysical worlds we were traveling into at that moment. I never thought of my breasts, as a teen Muslim girl, to be something kissable or beautiful, until he grabbed my back and snuck his hand under my bra starting to touch them and sensing them carefully and worshipfully, as if they were conscious, sacred creatures that needed to be worshipped in a non-stoppable way.

With him, time flew so fast—five, six hours felt like one. I don't remember a time when we had enough from each other's presence and went back to the College Prepatory Program dorms without wanting more, although we would spend the next hours chatting on the phone till morning. I knew that even when we had all the time in this universe, it wouldn't be enough. That same night on the mountain top, we weren't so cautious with the slow down or even stop whenever we're together.

Opportunity matters.

While holding his face with my hand, staring at his dreamy eyes, and sensing his skin, I never knew life could hide such fascinating moments until the right time comes. A moment akin to a symphony.

"How could life have such a beauty that was hidden all the time?"

I was lost in my thoughts, trying to analyze and understand. How could geographical factors, i.e. living in this part of the world, make these beautiful moments even more beautiful and precious? I started to sense all the differences that lie within me and within this universe, and most importantly, the essentiality of the opportunity and my experience to me.

Art by Elijah Pettet

The night that was my worst fear.

We didn't feel that we needed to stop until a light from a car approached us and went its way through the dark on that mountain. I prayed endlessly in my heart that it would not be an officer, and if so, God wouldn't let me down, and would save me from all the mess I would be stuck in. For I was a devout and honest Shia Muslim. When a man who was, unfortunately, an officer, stepped out of the car and saw Hussain, my lover, holding me and kissing my neck at night in a prohibited area, I knew at that moment my life had ended.

Not only my reputation, but my very religious family and especially my short-tempered father's reputation would be destroyed. I could also lose my sponsorship and academic life, and maybe my life too, just because this officer has caught us. That night was the hardest of my life before coming to USA.

Luckiness, maybe?

The officer seemed so scary in that moment; I thought he would take us both to the police station right away without any kind of negotiation. I worried that, although I was shaking and crying in front of him, he wouldn't be less stern. But when he asked me what time I was expected back at the dorm, and I answered him "by 10:00 pm," he stopped playing the role of the mad scary cop and told me, in a hurry, to run before they notice my lateness and give me a serious probation. After a long time of investigating Husain and asking about his ID, he let him go. Maybe the officer was familiar with such a situation and understood everything that happened after all. So, he let us go.

The separation of boys and girls

Back home, in Saudi Arabia, boys and girls never go to the same school; it's illegal to have a mixed school, since laws and religion are connected. For me, this unnatural separation fights everything that's spontaneous and innate and creates many disasters for families as a result. It also destroys reputations. At the same time, this separation brings a lot of excitement, passion, and beauty to experiencing new things and new feelings. Maybe that's the case for all first timers, not just those back home. What makes it special is that it's a forbidden, both traditionally and religiously. Thus, you're always passionate and excited that you're having and living your own fantasy with your own rules, or at least that was the case with me. Breaking the rules has its own pleasure. That passion that I had was enough to surround me for the coming five years, at least, if that existential current didn't hit me off course and change me forever.

For me, this unnatural separation fights everything that's spontandous and innate

The strong girl

Coming from a religious Islamic environment probably made it impossible to experience such a beauty like our night on that mountain, or even to have a perspective that this kind of a relationship and love is so pure, sacred, moral, and natural. Without having a higher awareness than the one we were taught distinguishing right from wrong, acceptable from unacceptable, moral from immoral, and "halal" from "haram," we wouldn't come near these opportunities. That's why I was so in love with myself, so strong and capable, and most importantly, passionate. I could choose what I want to choose, neither religion nor law would stop me from doing what's natural, desirable and beautiful.

Cosmology and philosophy

My College Preparatory Program year was the most critical juncture in my life; it made the great person inside me blossom marvelously; I discovered how limitless she could be. I was 18 during that year, and everything was so colorful; both before and after I met Hussain, I had a purpose that would make me live forever. I worked so hard to get into this program, to study abroad and achieve one of my biggest dreams. I was called the great, smart, and special girl back in my high school days, because of my unique philosophical perspective and passion towards existence, my critical creative mind that questioned everything and came up with outstanding thoughts and scientific ideas. The research and innovations I worked through, and because of the writings I wrote and published in twitter, path, and other websites and magazines.

I was obsessed with everything related to parapsychology, brain electromagnetic waves and quantum physics, everything that's

beyond our natural world and beyond its natural laws. I believed in consciousness and in human limitless capabilities more than I ever believed in Islam. This world, as I call it the cosmic/cosmology world, made me, and others believe in my own uniqueness, without knowing that this passion may be out of sever grandiose narcissism.

My strength and my weakness

This world was my main source for strength and at the same time, the main source for my weakness and loss. That was my biggest mistake; I sensed my identity and existence only out of this world and by relying on it. It literally gave me everything; I valued myself because of how it changed me and gave me a unique vision and perspective for this entire existence. So, without this inspiration that made me an inspirational person, I am nothing. Because of that world, I had a lot of fans. Hussain was passionate and obsessed with me because of my passion toward this world. He loved me so much. The more he loved me the more I appreciated and valued myself, and the more I fell in love with myself. I didn't know I was feeding on his appreciation and worship.

The double-edged sword

If I could just tell you how your magnificent vision for this cosmos and your limitless passion towards this existence has the ability to destroy you and kill you as much as it creates you every day and gives you satisfaction and happiness, I would have mastered the art of speech. My excessive emotions made me feel happiness and love in the best way possible. It was like soaring in the vast space and galaxies of romanticism and beauty. In other words, I was "high" most of my life because of this ability. However, my hyper-excessive emotions weren't limited only by love and happiness, they also could, and did go the other way. I could have emotions and irritability with anger, pain, and sorrow. I first experienced this when I came to USA and had the best opportunities and circumstances to initiate that side and to create that person inside me. I never realized, not once, not for a moment, that life could ever have the chance to break me, or to trigger my weakness. For I've always been so strong and wise. This could be the breakdown of a narcissist, or narcissistic injury.

I'm a weak person, after all

The power of time.

Time has been always powerful. It could destroy you in seconds. These seconds prove how powerful time can be. After my first six months in the USA, I started to change and lose myself day by day. I realized that the endless appreciation and love you receive from someone can take everything that's valuable and precious away, even yourself. Yes, relationships do this to people, after the help of time, of course. I began to have suicidal thoughts just to end it all. It was the worst pain I could ever imagine having or going through. The pain that killed me just because I realized I'm different from the old Duaa; I'm a weak person, after all. The pain that's full of regret because I allowed myself to think of suicide, to seek salvation. The salvation that this world, in my eyes, didn't need or deserve. Instead, it deserved only all my ambition and commitment to be the greatest happiest most satisfied person I could ever be. When this regret approaches a person, it's nearly impossible to get rid of it, or to move on.

For me, it was always about self-development and being the best version of me. Hussain made sure I never became that person/version, although he was behind me supporting me in every step I took, he didn't know he was taking most of my energy and power, if not all of it. I became the weakest version of me. His love was that kind of love, so true, honest and limitless that's also so destructive, exhaustive, dominating, and oppressive.

Death is not my biggest fear

I don't fear death as much as I fear what's after it. Maybe there's no after, maybe there exists nothing after. The fear of after what suffocated me all my life.

Necessity to deal with craziness

It's not the hopelessness, nor depression, nor losing myself and the meaning of this world is what makes me suffer. I'm used to all that. But what makes me suffer every day and kills me is the necessity to find a solution for this instability, and that I must deal with it.

What kills me is that I'm obligated as a human to be calm, determinant, and stable, obligated to be everything that's the opposite of losing my mind and the opposite of craziness. All I know is that I didn't choose this, I didn't choose to see hell even before maturing. I wish my irritability and higher consciousness only gave me happiness and creativity, I wish the other edge of this condition didn't exist.

My endless existential crisis

That's how it's been in the United States: the darkest times, and I never sensed them coming. Losing my dreams and ambitions was the first stage for this new phase I'm going through, that led me to lose myself after I surrendered for the pain. I don't believe in praying or beauty anymore. I lost my faith in the only two things that made me alive for the past 16 years. And you might ask, what forced this huge change and conflict to happen at this age? I'll tell you. It's only one person, and one relationship that's created all the events and chances to make me reach my nadir. A relationship so powerful it can destroy you completely, just because it was the wrong one, and was maybe never meant to be. Or maybe, it was the only and first experience that could make you realize your truth including the "real" you with all the mental disorders that you've had all the time.

If time goes back

If that night on the mountain lasted, if that kiss and cuddling just froze forever, and prevented me from knowing the truth, the truth of me, of him, and the truth of this life, would it be different? Would I be saved from this sorrow? I hoped for the last three years that I could stay that innocent, passionate person, that I would never change to the ugliest evil version of me. The thing about this shift and conflict is that it's not clear what really caused it. It's all been added up, accumulated. Losing yourself in a toxic relationship, knowing yourself more because of it, losing all my dreams after coming to the USA only after a short time, and losing my faith in God forever, all made me like this. I just wish that I knew one thing, one thing that would change the path I'm on forever. That love, and the person or people who give you that works like a mirror for you. Their love will be

Losing yourself in a toxic relationship, knowing yourself more because of it

reflected on you no matter what. And the more massive love gets, the more massive the pain you'll go through becomes. Especially if the person who gives you that massive love is weak. Their weakness will impact and be reflected on you in a way you haven't imagined it would. I only wish I knew that a long time ago and wish if my lover would ask for my permission before all of this.

"Hey beautiful, I want to fall in love with your beauty and greatness, see life in your eyes, and worship you for all my coming days. But I will destroy you and suffocate your soul and kill your spirit for ever, would that be ok with you?"

Imagine how pain and sorrow in this world could be avoided if people just asked before jumping in the name of true love that would supposedly excuse every pain and suffering a human could go through. Love isn't your right nor your freedom. As spontaneous and innocent love must be, it should be cautious and secure too. You shouldn't cross your lines with your unlimited and massive feelings just because you love someone. For me, if love does that, then it's not different from a crime assaulting you and your rights. Even the abstract feelings by themselves, I consider them a crime. I hope people just believe that love doesn't need necessarily to be painful just because it's love. You don't have to tolerate any pain at all. Whatsoever.

Like a child walking into the unknown

I'm not a psychopath nor bipolar as they used to call me, I'm just a normal person who's been through a lot, faced emotional abuse for the last year continuously, and been dead alive. Besides all the suicidal thoughts I think of, I still didn't choose the last choice a person in my place would choose. I'm still fighting, as I always have, but the difference now is that I don't know what I'm fighting for. There's nothing that deserves to be fought for, I could end this in seconds, but I don't have the courage yet. I'm still hoping every day that I wake up one day and realize that all what I went through was a nightmare, and that life is still my ambitious world, and I'm still the happiest creative person that sees greatness in everything.

Art by Jack Elder

G IS FOR GIRAFFE

by KAITLYNN DYER

Abbey- my younger sister was born in 1998, officially making me the ever-cursed middle child. I have a few wisps of memories before she came, as I was only four, but even then, I knew there was a shift in the dynamics. I was no longer the youngest, I had become the middle child- the child my mother was taught to treat unfairly, taught that this child was worth less than the others, an undesirable by nature. When I was 15 she told me this is why she had behaved the way she did toward me.

Breast Cancer- a cancer that forms in the cells of the breast, with 1-4 stages of severity; stage 3 is split into a, b, and, c types of varying degree. Women diagnosed at stage 3 have a 72% chance of living five years or more dependent upon treatment. In 2009 my mother was diagnosed with stage 3b.

Chemotherapy- One of the most effective and commonly used treatments for curing breast cancer. It is also like fighting fire with fire. It is odd watching the person you hate and yet in their weakened state are supposed to love go through chemo. I felt guilty most of the time my mother was sick. Guilty for not

feeling more scared of losing her. Guilty for not feeling more sympathetic, but how could I be?

Diabetic- "a serious disease in which the body cannot properly control the amount of sugar in your blood because it does not have enough insulin"- merriam webster "Being diabetic means I can be irrational"- my mother

Eye Rolling- is truly an art. It's about timing. I have mastered the perfect dart left, half circle down and around to meet back to your prey with a slightly widened eye. For some it comes naturally, an instinct for calling bullshit or showing displeasure. My mother said I started rolling my eyes when I was born. I'd guess it was actually around age 6, about the same time I learned I hated her.

Father- my hero, my pal, my escape from her. When he passed, I felt robbed of the wrong parent.

Giraffes- My son once wanted a stuffed giraffe, I did not allow it. Later after my husband had grilled me on why he couldn't have the harmless giraffe I realized I didn't want to say because it was my mother's favorite animal, instead I said I didn't want to spoil him at a young age. We ended up getting the giraffe.

Hysterectomy- After getting a full hysterectomy a woman is supposed to take estrogen pills to replace the bodies natural hormones, otherwise hormones will become imbalanced. An imbalance of hormones can cause mood swings, bloating, fatigue, irritability, hair loss, palpitations, and cancer in certain cases. My mother had a hysterectomy at a fairly young age though I'm not exactly sure what that age was. She refused to take the replacement hormones because she swore they would give her cancer.

Iodine- Some people believe that if you are allergic to iodine that you are also allergic to seafood and shellfish. This however is not true, it is entirely possible to be allergic to one while not being allergic to the other. My mother refused to believe this though.

Jekyll- the better half of the fictional character Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. A doctor trying to escape his dark side, a monster free of morality. Dr. Jekyll was always notoriously apologetic and ashamed of whatever Hyde had done. This never stopped Mr. Hyde. It never stopped my mother either.

Katie- Since before I can remember I have had the nickname Kaite, it was my father who initiated this name and this spelling. I've always felt this makes me special in a world crowded with Katies. I have a stocking from a Christmas long ago that my mother made, it reads k, a, t, i, e. Likeness- I use to deny any likeness I had to my mother, but I've learned I cannot fight DNA; all you can do is acknowledge, understand, and try to shape the materials you've been given better than your predecessors. However, I will forever hate our shared nose.

My hero, my pal, my escape from her.

This never stopped Mr. Hyde. It never stopped my mother either.

Manic depressive/bipolar- my mother was never technically diagnosed with these things, but over the years she has been given medications that treat the symptoms of both. At 14 I thought my mother's behavior towards me was completely out of hate and craziness, so I hated back in response. My hate blossomed into a deadly vine of nightshade, winding its way through each piece of myself. As I got older this nightshade protected me from her manic outbursts and accusations of drug use. It slowly blossomed into patience and a healthy understanding of why to take care of your mental health. This behavior from my mother helped me discover my own needs that were not met and how to be independent at a young age. Now I am a loving listening mother myself, who through years of observation learned the hard way what not to do.

Neglect- verb (used with object) 1. To pay no attention or too little attention to; disregard or slight.

Opossum- The opossum if presented with stress or confrontation will "play dead"- this still comatose state is caused by shock and inability to handle stress. If backed into a corner it can be pushed too far, in which case it will hiss, growl, and bite.

Pneumonia- When I was 7 years old I was hospitalized with pneumonia for a week. At that age I thought it was one of the greatest weeks of my life. I was cared for hand and foot, and everyone had to be nice to me. For one week I was safe from my mother's Mr. Hyde, in public she was always Dr. Jekyll; in my weakened state she was even sorry for her Hyde behavior.

Quiz- What are two treatment options for breast cancer?
What are the symptoms of hormone imbalance?
How is my nickname spelled?

Radiation- is the poison that kills the cancerous cells. It also kills the healthy cells. The doctors tell the patient and their family to not think of it as poison. Watching someone get "warriors" pumped into their veins feels an awful lot like watching someone get poison pushed through their body.

Stairs- I remember hiding at the bottom of the stairs a lot even though I was scared of the basement I was scared of being upstairs with her. Once my mother pushed me down the stairs,

she claimed it was an accident- she pushed me because I had pushed my little sister away and she just wanted to show me what it felt like, I just happened to be standing near the stairs.

Teachers- Our first teachers are supposed to be our parents. I like to think my father taught me everything, logically though that couldn't be possible because he worked. The truth is I don't know who taught me how to walk, or say my first words because that's not what I remember. I remember my father taught me how to love and how to be strong and how to not cry. I remember my mother taught me to hide and how to fight and how to forgive. And I know my mother was taught to mistreat the middle child.

Umbilical cord- Adele Allen wrote a blog about how she did not cut the umbilical cord for six days. The placenta was placed it a sanitary pouch and carried alongside the baby. Allen writes about how this created a special bonding and natural separation from her and her baby. Allen also mentions that chimpanzees practice this, though I'd guess probably out of the lack of medical tools.

Violin- When I was in fourth grade I played the violin. It didn't last long, but for a short time I remember noticing that my mother liked that I played violin, at the time I thought maybe this was something we could bond over not knowing that there was never a chance at a special bond for us, my umbilical cord had been cut from her the moment I arrived.

Weed- is given to cancer patients to ease the symptoms of chemotherapy. My mothers accusations that I was on drugs became particularly hilarious to me once she started using marijuana. She had always accused me of this since I was around 12 or 13. I didn't even try it until after she did.

X-rays- I remember the first time my mother was sent to the hospital to be fully checked for cancerous growths. The x-rays took the longest, they always do for some reason. I've learned this is just a rule of the hospital. Maybe they take long to develop, maybe they want to kill you with worry, or perhaps give you time to apologize to one another for all the years of disdain.

Yelling- I remember hiding under the table at six, my mother's yelling terrified me. This was her defining character to me for a long time as a child- the yeller. I promised myself I would never raise my voice like this to anyone; instead I learned how to calmly cut someone down with wit and a glare. This made the yelling worse when I was a teen with black rimmed eyes and a sharp understanding of sarcasm.

Zoo- My mother took my sisters and I to the Amarillo zoo when we had enough money and no school. There was something about being there that allowed for us all to get along and enjoy each other. We would watch the giraffes and eat ice cream or glazed nuts and laugh and play and smile; begging to stay a little longer before returning to reality.

Art by Adler Shannon

MURDER IS ALWAYS AN ACT OF TWO

by EVARISTO GOMEZ

Many people don't know what it is like to live in the closet. Around a half a year before coming out, I had a mental breakdown. The night was muddied. My thoughts weren't clear. My memories were fragmented, except one. My dad had always kept a tidy garage. The wrenches went here. The screwdrivers there. The torches over here, and the razors sat dusty in the back corner of the toolbox. The skin was tougher on my scratch-pad, but that made the experience more enjoyable because instead of feeling guilt from the burning pains on my virgin skin, you only felt a light pinch of pressure before the blood oozed onto the blade. With every cut, I could feel myself falling into a cloud of an irreversible thought. I kept chanting, "I'm gonna do it. I can't believe I'm really gonna do it." I was curled up on the floor, gripping my bloody legs, wishing someone would just walk through the door. I was deranged.

Art by Lindsey Lewis

My head rolled across my back from one shoulder to the other. Just back and forth. Time was slowed and almost irrelevant as my mind wandered into the memories of my past. Most often, I would begin to think of the time spent on my boat. The vinyl seats were cream colored with strips of blue and grey. The water made the air musty but familiar. Just back and forth. My head mimicked the motion of the waves. Their familiar splash mixed with the warm rays of the sun made my eyes heavy as I fell into a deep sleep. It was pure ecstasy.

The pills were bitter, but after a while, it was as inviting as Grandmother's cooking on Christmas. One after another, I would chew my way back onto the boat where my inability to function would sendme into a state of bliss.

Percocet. Oxy. Adderall. Weed. LSD. Alcohol. Codeine. Xanax. Morphine. Coke. My days would usually consist of a special concoction of these substances. They weren't demons that were out to get me. They were like great warriors fighting battles in my mind; I couldn't fight alone. They smothered the flames of my homosexuality until the delusion of a female's touch was just as satisfying as a man's. They were so loud, they would drown out the voices of my anxiety and depression that would usually scream "Kill yourself, you fucking dirty fag!! You won't feel anything anyway. Your family won't even miss you." Most importantly, they brought the idea that under their triumphant victories, I might be able to be "me" again. A straight kid with the opportunity of the world in front of him.

Percocet. Oxy. Adderall. Weed. LSD. Alcohol. Codeine. Xanax. Morphine. Coke.

"The Body of Christ."

The priest towered over me much like the crucifix hanging on the wall. I couldn't tell what was worse, the preacher's scaly skin nearly touching my tongue or the bulging eyes of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as I opened my mouth to murmur the word "Amen."

"And all were judged according to their deeds…And anyone who was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the Lake of Fire." The words of Revelations-Chapter twenty-verses eleven through fifteen used to haunt me. Many times, these words would cycle in my head, but they would flow in subtly and would go unnoticed until a later time, but there was a reoccurring dream. It consisted of my grandfather, a man of merit, pinning me down and spitting in my face while muttering the words "All fags go to

Hell." Some nights when I couldn't force myself out of sleep, I would begin to feel the heat of Hell as my skin began to melt off my bones and the smoke would suffocate me. I could hear the voice of God, booming in the background because it didn't have to be judgement day to know where I was going.

It used to disgust me watching people go seamlessly into a line every Sunday to take the body and blood of Christ. Their cold bodies, only matched by the dry charisma of the priest, were mindlessly obedient to the scripture they never took upon themselves to read. Lazy and unapologetic for it. It used to remind me of my competitive soccer team when the worst kid on the team would complain about not getting enough playing time, but wouldn't put in any effort to change it. As I looked around the large chamber full of families and individuals praying, I'd just see that indolent kid, wasting his breath to get himself in a better spot. These people blindly prayed hoping their problems would magically vanish out of the grace of God, but I always kept my thoughts to myself because chances were that they were judging the little faggot boy just as much as the faggot boy was judging them.

"Hey! Can I go with some friends to dinner?"

"Who's all going?"

"Umm…I don't know. I think Geo and Aaron, but besides them, I really don't know. Probably just us three again."

"Yeah, you can go."

"I'll probably be out late, but I'll call you if I end up staying at one of their houses."

"Okay—be safe." She had no idea of where I would be the entire night. The lies just kind of rolled off my tongue with an ease that had a certain beauty to it. It wasn't the lies that were beautiful, but my adventures with the guys I would sneak around with. My first love was one of these guys.

Okay—be safe.

There was a time when he would take me on dates. Can you imagine it? The sweet, melancholic voice of Lana del Rey and the lyrics to Salvatore echoed off the walls of the mountain. Everything was perfect in that moment: the cool, mountain air, the city lights, and most importantly, his eyes. He had pushed my body against his car, and brushed his calloused hands against my face, but all I could remember was the touch of his lips. He would gently bite my ear,

and whisper "Eli, my love—" in an accent that would make the hair stand up on the back of your neck. It was something I believed to only happen in movies, but he made me feel like a star. He made me feel like this could be the start of our own movie: our own story, but they were always so short-lived. These men would fill my memories because after a while that was all they were. Relationships never worked in secrecy, but I would have rather kept my life a secret than be the screw-up. It was lonely.

My parents were strict, and often I was not allowed to go out with my friends during the early years of high school. In reality, I never found sanctuary at home unless it was in my room. My curtains have Jupiter, satellites, and astronauts on them. The bedroom, being space themed, was painted a darker royal blue color, and during the day, between the curtains and the wall color, there was barely enough light to see anyone. I would lay there facing the wall and stare at the curtains; a combination that would mesmerize me. The color made them deep and comforting.

It was like I didn't know how to grow as a person. The childish aspects of my life were trapped in my room: timeless. I tried to keep it as if they would never change. I would find myself staring at the pattern on the curtains for hours upon many days upon the week reminiscing. I still wanted to have dinners at my grandparent's house on Fridays and spend hours with my cousins as the adults played poker. I still wanted to hear the music of Sunday mornings indicating the call for family breakfasts. I still wanted to be able to run into my parent's arms knowing I could still be someone they would be proud of. I would spend hours sorting through the memories of my childhood and try to think where I went wrong. When did I change? Maybe, by holding on to this last bit of my childhood, the theme in my room, I could be something different than what I had become.

It was like I didn't know how to grow as a person.

Midway through my sophomore year, it had been a week since I had contact with the outside world. The forest around me was calm and focused. It was mid-autumn; the trees above Glenwood Springs were beautiful. The aspen's leaves were as gold as the gates of Heaven and as red as the fires of Hell. I had sat on a particularly flat rock.

The mosses and lichens padded it making it rather comfortable in the rugged environment. My dad, trying to scope out the rest of the area to see if there were any fresh tracks or beds nearby, ended up disappearing over the ridge about a mile away. His fluorescent orange vest disappeared in a thicket of oak brush.

I sat on the rock quiet for hours, listening to the animals crashing through the forest as they sought a lower elevation before the storm. Two does and a buck found their way in the safety of my crosshairs, but it wasn't long before the footsteps of something much larger caught my ear. They were coming from the dark timber behind me, eerily making their way to the edge of the shadows.

Being alone for so long, I had time to think. I didn't want to be here anymore. I had put my rifle's slender, black barrel in my mouth and shut my eyes. One slow breath at a time. You would expect your mind to be racing. You would expect your stomach to be unsettled. You would expect to try and talk yourself out of it, but I sat their calm and collected. The week had been one of the best of my life, and I figured if I wanted to die, it would be better to do it when I wasn't feeling the hatred of day-to-day life. Snap. The breaking of a branch caused me to pull the gun out of my mouth. The edge of the dark timber was occupied with the mass of a bear. Putting my rifle to my shoulder, I took off the safety off and fired a round near the bear's foot. It had stopped in its tracks and got up on its hind legs. Loading another shell, I took aim at the tree next to the bear's head, and fired another round. I could feel my whole body pulsating as the bear turned and rambled off into the woods.

I had no control. My knees buckled as my limp body fell into a bed of fallen oak and aspen leaves below. The slender black barrel of the rifle landed on my chest knocking what little air I had left out of me. On my back, the beautiful baby-blue sky gave way to the warming rays of the sun in the bitter cold air. A part of me wished the bear would come crashing through the woods again and maul my incapacitated corpse.

I waited there for some time listening to the branches of the trees as they cracked and moaned in the breeze that tore across the landscape. With every breath my exhaustion grew until the tears streaming down my face dried into remnants of my bitter past. It was the god-like spirit of the bear that commanded me to live as if it knew how much I did not want to die. At that point, there was nothing left for me but get up, put my rifle over my shoulder, and somehow try to make it home.

CONTRIBUTORS

DUAA AI-JAROUDI transferred from the Colorado School of Mines to University of Colorado Boulder in spring 2018. A junior majoring in Geology, she spends her time contemplating the earth. When not doing this, she obsesses over psychology, existential philosophy, and movies. She wants to thank her family and Twitter friends for all their support, especially the person who believed in her most: her dearest Ali.

WILLIAM F. BISHOP is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder studying Psychology and Literary Analysis in the Humanities. Despite moving often and spending most of his years in Colorado, his heart will always be at home in Chicago with his loved ones who live there. His poems are centered around the queer experience of love, and his own identity as a half-Japanese gay man, a hopeless romantic/music enthusiast/Quaker and a total pansy. All of his poems are love poems, even the ones that don't seem like they should be. When he isn't studying, Will can be found reading, making playlists, crying, playing air guitar, or writing poetry. You can find him on Instagram @the_neato_dad.

ANGELINA CARRANZA is originally from Colorado Springs. She is currently a senior at CU Boulder studying Marketing, Information Management, and Operation Management. After working hard during her four years in college, she is excited to begin a full-time position working at Visa, Inc. in Highlands Ranch. With graduation in sight, she's taking classes that let her pursue a lifelong passion of hers: writing. This semester has let her work on her writing skills, and she hopes to develop a portfolio so that she might be able to pursue writing as a side job.

ANDIE DULSKY is a writer, musician, and activist from Denver, Colorado. We only publish after blind review, and Andie has made that cut twice before, in our previous Print and Online Issues for 2018. Although she is published in three genres, creative nonfiction is where she truly found her voice as a writer. Her work often centers around identity, trauma, family, and queer relationships. Andie seeks to approach all of her work from a place of tenderness and empathy. She currently resides in Boulder, Colorado, where she studies creative writing. She hopes to someday meet a blue whale.

KAITLYNN DYER is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder. She's a Texas native who relocated to Wyoming at seven then settled in Colorado at the age of twenty. When not busy writing and studying for her Bachelor's in Political Science, she spends her time raising her three-year-old son and trying to find time to attend kickboxing. She would like to thank PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC Instructor KERRY REILLY, her creative nonfiction professor, for suggesting to submit her writing.

EVARISTO GOMEZ is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder studying Political Science. He is a Colorado native, born and raised in Denver. In this piece, he wanted to demonstrate the realities he felt as a member of the LGBT+ community struggling with the implications of what it meant to be gay. He hopes those who read it find it insightful regardless of their backgrounds. He attempted to portray his feelings in the most raw and unfiltered way possible while providing a narrative for any person who may feel lost.

MICHAEL GREEN is a junior at University of Colorado Boulder studying Political Science. When he graduates, he would like to attend law school and maybe one day become a politician. He likes to spend his time (and money) exploring new restaurants with friends. Michael grew up in Southern California and loves to surf and relax at local beaches.

HANNAH HURLEY grew up in a small town in central Florida that neighbors a charming beach town. She grew up with her two sisters, surrounded by the outdoors, spending most of her time listening to the cicadas and running around with her dog. Her love for reading and writing came early, encouraged by her mother who would take her to Barnes & Noble for hours and regularly gift her books on any special occasion. She's thankful for the passion and emotion this catalyzed in her at such a young age. Hannah hopes to bridge the gap between her love for writing and her admiration for the arts, particularly for fashion and design. She is currently still living in Boulder, but is considering a big move to somewhere where she can chase her dreams of working for a major publication.

SAM JACOBSEN is a Boulder-born Film and English student that grew up in Lafayette, Colorado. In elementary school she decided she wanted to grow up to be a writer. Practicing since then, she's worked to build up her voice and her own personal style. While she prefers to write fictitious works, she believes it is important to occasionally delve into more personal works to write stories of and about oneself. For this work, she wanted to make a strange, almost dream-like feeling, and to convey an emotion—not necessarily tell a story.

CATY JANSURY is a third-year BA candidate majoring in Dance. She spends her free time playing with her tuxedo cat Belvedere and taking car of way too many plants. Her poem BLOOD SONG won the 2018 Thompson Award for Poetry from CU Boulder's CENTER OF THE AMERICAN WEST.

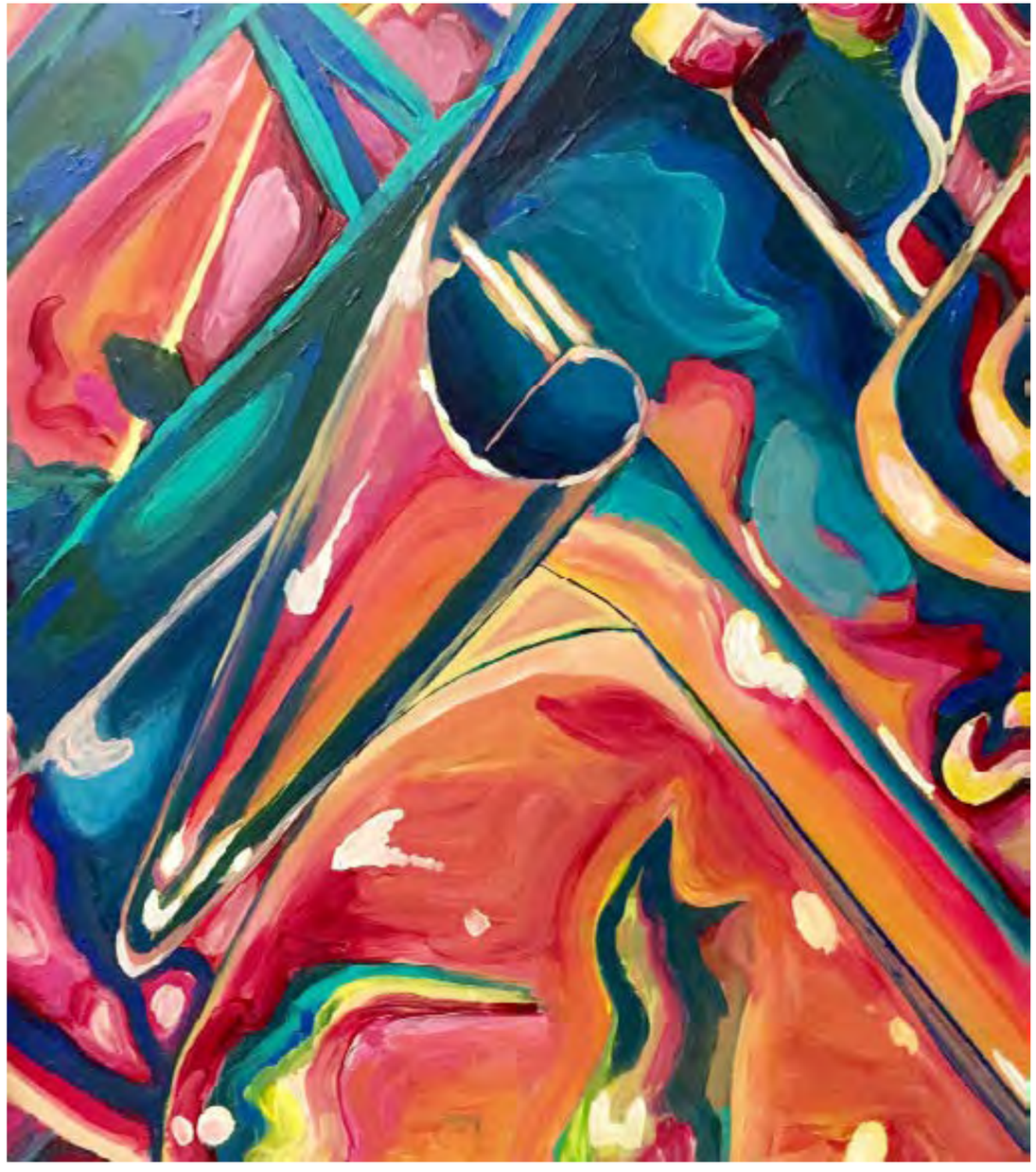
MEDHANE KIFLOM is an undergraduate at the University of Colorado Boulder studying Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology and Mathematics. He is Eritrean, and was born in Denver, Colorado. He's always loved to write poetry and teach mathematics, but he never explored his passion for writing short pieces. He decided to step more into what defines him as a person and create this short piece. There are many ways to interpret what he wrote, but it is meant to be read by a native Tigrinya speaker. It touches a lot on immigrant children from East Africa and their contrasting stories on living the American life.

JADE McGEE is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder currently studying Psychology. She is an actor, singer, and dancer born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. This piece is a step by step manual of how she personally got through a traumatic experience. She hopes to show that this subject is okay to talk about and that we can help one another through it. Silence is complicity; she hopes that sharing her experience in a published manner comforts and/or educates readers.

GRANT WHITMAN PERDUE is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder studying Geography and Journalism. This is his first time being published as an author, and he is stoked to see his piece come to life in Journal Twenty Twenty. A Nashville, Tennessee native, Grant started climbing as a sophomore in high school, and began writing about his endeavors shortly thereafter. Now a resident of Boulder, his current work centers around passion, psych, people, and the pursuit of the great outdoors. He plans to continue pursuing outdoor objectives, living enthusiastically, and sharing stories along the way.

JULIA REDLINGER is a pre-med student with a double major in Integrative Physiology and Creative Writing. She published her first book in middle school through a program called NaNoWriMo. This piece is her second publication, and hopefully not her last. She is currently working on a children's book series that she hopes to release before her graduation in 2021. She is a paid editing intern at a company called Verblio, where she edits blog posts before they are published on a company's websites. Her goal is to become a creative non-fiction author, and have a career as a surgeon. She would like to combine these two passions and follow in the footsteps of her idol, Oliver Sacks, a published author and MD.

HENRY SHORNEY is a recent graduate from CU. He was a Film Studies major and is now living in Los Angeles pursuing his dream of working in the film industry. This is the first piece of writing he has had published and he would like to thank his teacher ALEX FORBES for encouraging him to submit it.



Art by Ellie Marcotte

SPRING 2020 VOLUME EIGHT

JOURNAL 2020 is a collection of the finest undergraduate artwork and creative nonfiction writing at CU Boulder—the work of young writers with enough strength of voice, vision, and courage to tell their true stories.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

SPRING 2020 • VOLUME VIII

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

CREATIVE NONFICTION
2020 VOLUME VIII

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

2020
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JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY published a print issue every semester since its debut in Spring of 2013, and an annual print issue since Spring of 2014. As HINDSIGHT (our new name after this issue), we will continue publishing annual print issues, while providing an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in HINDSIGHT may refer to our Call for Submissions page for submission guidelines.

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How it should happen this way
I am not sure, but you
Are sitting next to me,
Minding your own business
When all of a sudden I see
A fire out the window.
I nudge you and say,
"That's a fire. And what's more,
We can't do anything about it,
Because we're on this train, see?"
You give me an odd look
As though I had said too much.

Art by Noah Thacker

ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

by HANNAH NORDHAUS

So begins Mark Strand's 1968 poem, "THE WHOLE STORY." When I was in college, a Chinese history professor read this poem at the end of the semester. He explained that he, too, was pointing to a fire—his passion for China and its history—and that the passengers riding alongside him were us, his students. He dearly hoped that he had found a way to share that fire with us.

He had. I had taken the class only because the professor was well-regarded, but I left with an enduring interest in China and the history of places unfamiliar. In the years since, I have returned to that poem often. It reminds of why we write, and why we choose to share our words with others. We write to learn, to illuminate unseen corners of the world, and to move others to care about the subjects that engage us. In my own work, those subjects have ranged from restless beekeepers to mail-order brides; from fire ecologists to pioneer nuns to rotten-chicken-bearing carrion beetle-enthusiasts. To write, it strikes me, is to sit beside your reader and nudge them—to say, "that's a fire."

It's fitting, then, that this year's Journal 2020 shares some conflagrations of its own. In "RAPID OXIDATION," a wildfire tears through Clayton Montgomery's hometown: "It pulsed and snarled every time it reached a new source of fuel," he writes. It "inhaled and exhaled," while helicopters swarmed "like angry bees." His family evacuates, returning to an intact home but a transformed notion of the threat posed by climate change. "It wasn't until I stared into the face of a changing climate, as those towering flames climbed the ridgeline towards my house, that I really began to understand the consequences."

In "WHAT THEN," Reina Watanabe Krumvieda tells of growing up half Japanese and half American, belonging to neither culture and often resenting both. "You're angry and ashamed, but you're not quite sure who or what it's directed at," she writes. Her parents argue; her mother struggles far from her home; schoolchildren in both countries stare, whisper, mock. Visiting Japan, she himself haunted, at the memorial to the victims of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, by the firestorm her father's country unleashed on her mother's.

In "PLASTIC STARS," Daniel Workman travels to the desert to find stillness under starlight "that is millions of years old." He recalls an older brother who once built a bed of blankets on the floor so he could "study the plastic glow-in-the-dark constellations" on the ceiling. His brother is dead now, but "in the darkest hours that the desert has to offer," Workman writes, "those familiar assemblages of light" help him both remember and forget. These essays nudge us and point to worlds beyond our view: "It may be that trains," Strand wrote, "Can kindle a love of fire." And that is why we write: to kindle our connection to the world—inhaling and exhaling, seeking new fuel.

Hannah Nordhaus is a NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STORYTELLING FELLOW and author of THE BEEKEEPER'S LAMENT and AMERICAN GHOST.

FROM THE STAFF

In reflection of the near-decade of artistry in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY pages, we are especially grateful for the creativity shared by our contributors, as well as the tireless efforts of this year's staff to produce this collection. We'd also like to thank the staff involved in the journal throughout the years for their great efforts in elevating the work of the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER'S undergraduate students. We're excited to announce our transition to HINDSIGHT, a new beginning for JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY coming Fall semester of this year. With this evolution, we still promise to deliver the quality and passion put into this journal over the years by contributors and staff alike.

The value of this journal has always existed in the great multitude of voices captured in its pages, but this year especially our editors have been humbled by the quality of our submissions. Without the support of our creators, the PROGRAM OF WRITING AND RHETORIC, and the UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM, this accomplishment would never have been possible. Our editors fully believe this year's issue to be a perfect ending for JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, as well as a fantastic point of growth for our Journal's future.

EDITORIAL STAFF

In a generation that increasingly seeks connection with each other online, it is refreshing to still see dozens of artists submitting their work to be published in print with JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. I was ecstatic to have the opportunity to dive into Art Direction and work on something unlike anything I have ever done in my college career. The artwork seen in this issue would not have been possible without our dedicated staff working together, and the talented artists who are so brave to share their work with the world. This journal is full of narratives not only told by the written word, but also through the visual components woven throughout. Enjoy!

ART DIRECTION

Here on the marketing staff at JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, we have been building our marketing campaigns from the ground up from the past two years. With the help of our talented team, we are able to bring you this journal. But even with the hardworking staff, talented artists, and visionary university departments that all come together to weave the fabric of this journal, the glue that holds these pages together is you. We thank you for supporting us and our beloved artists along every step of the way from collecting submissions to dispatching it out into the world. We hope you love what we've created for you.

MARKETING

Art by Jacob Newman

GET INTO PRINT—OR ONLINE

All University of Colorado Undergraduate students are eligible to send in writing for consideration by JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. Submissions go through blind review by our Editorial staff.

We seek only creative nonfiction, in any of its genres:

- Creative Scholarship
- Narrative Journalism
- Humor
- Lyric Essay—the truth told with a poetic slant
- Travel, Food, and Sports Writing
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LA TORTILLERIA

by VAYLE LAFEHR

Art by Jennifer Wang

From her motherly brown hands sweat slips off in teardrops, falling silently into the dough she rolls. She works indefatigably in a blazing August heat; one almost as repressive as her government. Her mental faculties succumb to a choking heat—intense enough to humiliate a human body and to shamelessly devour all remnants of cool air. The sheer temperature swallows the now impoverished part of her mind that once allowed her to recognize the meaning of the word 'discomfort.'

The warehouse around her rests in a gloom; it becomes her Sky and her Earth. It embodies her childhood, her current home, and her future. Her ribcage heaves slowly, her eyes are deep brown, almost black in the dim light, and they fix upon her brown hands. Her hips are pulled gently by the air, swaying to the hum of gears that churn out fresh dough.

This woman's hands, which knead and roll and knead again, are shackled by the white flour flowing sumptuously from its sac and onto her fingers. It flows so freely that it drowns those flimsy pieces of paper affording her the only living she can foresee—a

paycheck-to-paycheck tomorrow. That next piece of paper contains a prescient whisper of broken children's shoes and perhaps, for once, extra tortillas for dinner. And so, she kneads and rolls and her eyes do not wander any further than the next sac of flour to be used.

Bleached flour rapes her nostrils. Fractured white patterns tattoo her skin. The chalky scent of oppression and monotony stains her hair.

These are not the thoughts that swim through her mind as her shift continues; though they will begin when she sees the desperate eyes of her children that evening at dinner.

Instead, this woman wonders if her son will be scorned at school for nail polish chipping on his worn nails. She worries for her daughter who might return home from the library with more bruises than books.

But every roll and every knead, she intuits, will pull her closer to those children…and so she rolls on.

Art by Tori Gognat

SLEEPING, SKINNY BEAUTY

by REILLY GABEL

더운 텅 빈 무대에 섰을 때
괜한 공허함에 난 겁을 내 [1]

News reporters are terrifying if you think about it. They are trained to speak in "General American English" accent in order to sound more trustworthy and regionally unbiased. They announce disheartening headlines like, "Hong Kong protests continue ahead of China's 70th anniversary" and "Instagram is cracking down on questionable weight loss ads… next on All Things Considered…" Wait, what?

I stopped using Instagram after I quit a grueling, seven-year career on a competitive swimming club, after freshman year of high school. The boring repetitive diets of hyper athletic models, thin and pretty, pretty if thin, overwhelming consumed scroll time in bed, feeling like a lazy sack of shit.

1 Suga's first verse to "Epilogue, Forever Young" from BTS: "I stand on the middle of the hot, empty stage / And suddenly I feel so afraid of the void."

The split began. The other voice was learning the alphabet of my head.

As I stand on the middle of the hot, empty stage of this life, I know the pain I've endured, and suddenly I feel so afraid of the void.

ꕥ ꕥ

아무것도 없던 열다섯의 나
세상은 참 컸어 너무 작은 나 [2]

Chemistry class, the basic stuff, the easy stuff that my friends couldn't understand. I did all the homework problems for the next assignment in class while we reviewed the previous assignment. Boring because it was easy. I never paid attention and always got 95 on exams. The sound of my hand shooting up filled the room when a question was answered with silence. Sometimes I walked the class through problems. My classmates would snicker and giggle at my teacher yet complain about their toilet grades. My answers were the ones being copied. Out of boredom, more times than I liked to admit, I was counting calories, tracking weight, measuring fat, calculating exercise time to burn off breakfast, lunch, and dinner that I never ate anyways. I engaged in a different type of math.

This memory, this time you and I are both in right now, is distinct and I don't know why. In that moment, as I scribbled numbers on a notepad, my brain said, "I will remember this." Funny how memory works.

The fifteen-year-old me, who was something, but had nothing.

ꕥ ꕥ

순결했던 날 찾아줘
이 거짓 속에 헤어날 수 없어 [3]

"Yes, eating disorders are more common in women. No, that doesn't inherently make femininity a predictive factor. Instead,

2 Opening line to "Begin" by Jungkook from BTS: "The fifteen-year-old me who didn't have anything."
3 Chorus to "Lie" Jimin from BTS: "Find the me that was innocent / I can't free myself from this lie."

His princess is called Sleeping Beauty for a reason.

it's been found that when these scales allow for more fluidity in gender roles, nuances around femininity and masculinity in eating disorder development are no longer evident." [4]

The bulky, dominant presence of a man seeks the complimentary ideal of submissive femininity. My wandering eye in the gym locker room sought to replicate the bodies that, I thought, were the bodies "men wanted." Without realizing the blooming queer lilies in the garden of my chest. I wanted to be them. I wanted to be beautiful. But I didn't know what that meant.

A stylized repetition of acts is the theoretical substance of socially constructed gender identities. Wake up, wear a dress, put on makeup, smell like Victoria's Secret, talk small, eat small, be small, be passively feminine. Once menstruation begins, societal femininity wins. And then, wait for a Prince Charming. His princess is called Sleeping Beauty for a reason.

Since birth, I lived and breathed my discontent with femininity. Not wearing bras, avoiding skirts and exposed legs, leaving heels to gather dust, never carrying a purse even though I lost things a lot, eating with my elbows on the table, rolling around in the dirt, playing soccer with the boys instead of building flower crowns with the girls. As I lost weight, my breasts shrank, and my periods lightened. Gender is a compressive lie, and suddenly I tasted the freeing truth, sweet like Braeburn apples.

Find the me that was innocent, a naked body liberated from titles and labels, but, I can't, free myself of this lie.

ꕥ ꕥ

숨겨도 감춰도 지워지지 않어 [5]

After I returned from South Korea, my mom placed several bin-boxes of childhood memories in front of me to "sort through." Most of the memorabilia I wanted was in Boulder, along with my collection of books, some school related and

4 Fabello, Melissa A. "4 Stereotypes About Eating Disorders and Gender That Need to Go." Edited by Timothy J Legg, *Healthline*, Healthline Media, 21 Mar. 2019, www.healthline.com/health/eating-disorder-gender-stereotypes#1.
5 Verse 5 of "Stigma" by V from BTS: "Even if (I try to) hide it / or conceal it / it can't be erased."

others recreational. Among the drawings of potato-like people and portraits with smiles that had way too many teeth, journals from 2005 to early 2017 were encased in the artistic mess.

I glanced through them, not spending too much time on one page, one sentence, one syllable. I know my past. I lived my past. Surely, there is nothing here I don't already know… right?

I threw them in a moving box with family photo albums, snow globes, Beanie Babies, and belated birthday gifts that I couldn't take to South Korea. I stripped the pages of those that had one or two entries, with the intention to use them for school assignments. I threw the rest, untouched and unread for years, in the moving box with the intention to use them for a project or something. The reality is: I couldn't convince myself to recycle them, to burn them to ashes and bury them in the backyard with the skeletons of family cats. (Rest in Peace, Doyle.)

Even if I tried to hide it, or conceal the worst version of my past self, one who hated her presence in the void of reality, it can't be erased.

나는 나의 모든 기쁨이자 시름
매일 반복돼 날 향한 좋고 싫음 [6]

Where is the ceiling?
Where is the floor?
Never seen this place before
Darkness here and there
Not a single frame in sight
I can't help but say "I'm scared"

Where is this place?
How did I get here?
Can't remember anything but a chair
A chair and rope
In a dull, dank room
Not anything happy, I hope

Where am I?
What's my name?
In some sort of game
A noose above a tilted chair
There I hang and swing
Ahh, I'm in excellent care

—Undated poem I wrote in Theology class, circa 2014.

It repeats every day, the love and hate directed at myself.

오늘따라 문득, 더 안고 싶은 품 [7]

Author and feminist Emma White wants to change the way society sees female bodies, through a theological approach she calls, "goddess feminism." Through the image of the goddess, she writes, women learn to subvert the patriarchal agenda that has ruled over their lives for centuries. She highlights the female body as divine, working towards breaking down male supremacy as a tool to disassemble the

6 Verse 2 of "Reflection" by RM from BTS: "I am all of my joy and anxiety / it repeats every day / the love and hate directed to me."
7 Verse 8 of "Mama" by Jhope from BTS: "I want to hold you more today / Higher than anything above ground."

"anorexic expression." [8] I feel a sense of comfort when reading those lines over and over and over again. White puts the female body on a pedestal next to the statues of David, Discobolus, and Kritios Boy. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit I prayed to sophomore year never helped me because He is at the heart of strong patriarchal tradition. If only I had known White's Goddess when I was fourteen, if then, my therapy would've looked a lot different.

My mom took great measures to ensure that I stopped my self-deleterious actions,

"What man wants a woman that is skin and bones, dresses like a boy, and can't keep her room clean?"

But the problem was: I didn't want a man. Moreover, I convinced myself, they didn't want me either.

I want to hold you more today, the fourteen-year-old Goddess I was and still am, higher than anything above ground.

그때 기억해, 이제는 추억으로 [9]

I remember people turning a blind eye to my small portions one year, the large portions the next year, and frequent trips to the bathroom. I also remember people poking fun at my vegetarian diet, criticizing my "bird seed" lunches. Southern school events don't accommodate for "helpless Indians" who live on nuts and berries. Your choices are: dry salad, mac 'n' cheese, baked potatoes with (only) green onions, or death. Bon Appetit.

Why? A question (or just a word) I got often.
The easy answer: I'm not a big fan of meat, what can I say?
The complex answer: Meat and dairy scares me because of the caloric and fatty intake.

Recipe for making a vegan (from scratch)

Ingredients:
—Fear of weight gain
—Obsession with counting calories
—Southern, Catholic education
—Sense of security amongst plants

Directions:

Mix these ingredients together in a big, red bowl, fully incorporating each into a smooth paste. Plop the paste onto a non-stick baking sheet and bake for 45 minutes at 375 degrees. Place on a cooling rack, carefully not the break the edges. If you do, there's no egg wash to mend it. If you do, a piece of somebody (me) falls on to the floor and swept into the trash.

8 White, Emma. *The Spirituality of Anorexia: A Goddess Feminist Thealogy*. "Conclusion: The spirituality of anorexia." Routledge, 2019. EBSCOhost.
9 Verse 6 of "First Love" by Suga from BTS: "I remember back then / those moments are now in memory."

Now, my vegan choice is forged in the fires of animal rights, climate change protests, and simply, the unwillingness to form a new lifestyle. Why would I change something I'm happy with?

I still laugh at the fact that eating bananas terrified me. For over two years I have eaten them every day for breakfast, along with oatmeal, a high carb food that I avoided like the plague in high school.

I remember finding a book about Zen Buddhism in the Nashville Metropolitan Library. I was searching for a new religion, anything that wasn't Catholicism, a connection with resistance, not spirituality. I ended up finding my own "Zen" in a way. Listening to tennis balls bang around a dryer while volunteering at the Humane Society. Driving during sunsets, of any season. Porch moths fluttering around a single lightbulb. Watching kittens learn how to walk, meow, see, how to be alive. An empty, dark practice room at the gym, my only space for dancing in ease.

I remember back then, around December, that my mom once told me to kill myself, "to save everyone else the pain of watching you die slowly," after finding me purge the Christmas cookies we made together. Those moments are now in memory.

그래도 말야, 떠날 때가 됐는걸 [10]

My poetry from high school, although undated, was written during class, usually theology. All my best ideas seem to come during lectures and seminars. Seventy-five percent of this essay was written in various classes, taking shape in the background noise of class discussion. A type of jovial excitement that a child feels when receiving a present at Christmas. I must play with it. Move the joints and gears of the fresh plastic. See how it changes when I break off a piece by accident. Again, it is new. I get lost in it like the sun gets lost in the clouds before a snowstorm. Still on track to travel east to west but shaped by the chaotic mosaic of scholastic power. Like the Clif bar of creative energy, that I keep down in my stomach.

Alison Kafer coins a term called "queer crip time," to denote the reorientation of time experienced by disabled bodies and minds, and how it contributes to the "future of no future" of queer timelines.[11] Going further, she articulates that queer futurity must account for the notion that everybody does not follow the same timeline. That everyone experiences "bumps."

My mom once said to me, after I graduated high school and received an All-American Swimming Award, "I never understood why you didn't tell your teachers you had an eating disorder. You could've been given accommodations, or just an understanding of your problems."

I never considered my eating disorder to be a disability because my pursuit of thinness was a pursuit to perfectly fit within hegemonic time. Asking for more time on chemistry exams meant a delay in achieving perfectness. I was extremely impatient back then.

Even so, what I'm saying is, the past is sticking like quicksand, a tornado sucking people in with its strong gusts of nostalgia, but it's time to leave.

10 Verse 2 of "Awake" by Jin from BTS: "Even so, what I'm saying is / it's time to leave."

11 Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. "Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips." Indiana University Press, 2013.

Art by Susanna Andrews

STEP ONE

by EVE BELL

Vaguely returning to consciousness, I open my eyes. I can see the tiled ceiling and the green curtain to the left of the bed. Slowly taking account of my body, I notice I feel utterly weak and ache all over. The crook of my left arm hurts. Instinctively, I check my watch to learn the time—11:00. I still have my watch and rings on, but on the other wrist there is something different: a laminated bracelet. It has my name and date of birth on it along with a barcode. It's a hospital bracelet. This realization sends a wave of panic through my body. My heart is pounding, and my hands are shaking; I take a deep breath. The harsh, sterilized smell of hospital fills my nose. I don't try to sit up, but from my reclined position, I start to look around me. There are more empty beds to my right, and on the wall another clock showing 11:00. Then I notice a police officer standing by the wall opposite me. He does not appear to be doing anything; he just stands there stoically, looking over the room. The thought enters my mind that I might be in trouble, and a fresh wave of fear overcomes me. I move to draw my hands to my chest but am

met by a sharp pain in my arm. I look down and notice the IV needle taped to my skin. I poke at it, and the movement causes a strange sensation. Then, I notice I am not wearing the clothes I remember. In their place is a colorless hospital gown tied in the back. This disconcerting realization triggers a flood of questions: Where are my clothes? Where is my phone? Where are my friends? How did I get here? Is it 11:00 a.m. or p.m.? What the fuck happened?

A nurse comes over to me and asks something about how I am feeling. I ask if it is 11:00 a.m. or p.m. She says it is eleven at night. The knowledge of the time of day gives me some sense of bearing and allows me to relax enough to ask her what happened.

I do not remember exactly what she said, but I do remember one thing. A number. My BAC was 0.44. She said that was twice that of anyone else in the hospital that day—Dillo Day, Northwestern's notorious end of spring quarter music festival and party day. At that moment, that number did not mean much to me, and the nurse's apparent concern for me struck me as patronizing and annoying. How could she suggest I had a problem when she didn't know me?

A mind in active addiction is terrifying.

A mind in active addiction is terrifying. It is capable of acts of deception executed with astounding efficacy, and for me, the primary victim of that deception was myself. While for two years I was able to appear normally functional to those around me, I am still astounded by the extent to which I was able to delude myself into thinking that I was fine. After I decided to take time off school, I lived in Aspen for a few months. I worked two jobs, skied on my days off, and maintained an active social life. I was going out, meeting new friends, and drinking and dancing a few nights a week. Sure, I was doing a lot and sleeping very little, but that was because I was young and full of energy. It was definitely not because I was incapable of facing myself and examining my behavior.

Everything I did was rational and "normal." Yes, I drank a lot, but that was because I was at a bar or a club and that's what people do there. Yes, I would have a couple drinks alone, but that was because that way I would not have to arrive at the bar sober and could spend less money while I was there. But I did not drink in the morning. Then, I did have a drink in the morning. But that was because I had a crippling hangover and had to be on the gondola to work at 8:00 and that drink enabled me to

Anger was my defense mechanism and allowed me to ignore my fear.

do that. But I did not drink at work. But a beer with my lunch over my break was definitely fine, and I would be able to work perfectly well afterwards. But I never drank for no reason at all. Then it was a Saturday and I had not had a Saturday off in weeks, and having a Saturday off is a great reason to put whiskey in my coffee. And then I was already drinking, so I might as well drink all day. My line of reasoning was sound in my head, and I had myself so well convinced that I was fine that when my mom suggested to me the possibility that I might have a problem, I responded with anger. Anger was my defense mechanism and allowed me to ignore my fear.

My mom's concern particularly annoyed me when she would check up on me the morning after I had been out drinking. On the mornings that I worked at the Sundeck on Aspen Mountain, I would awake around 6:45 to get to the gondola when it started running for employees at 8:00. I would shower to wash the previous night away and the lingering fatigue and hangover with it. Then I would do my makeup to make myself feel put-together for work. As I brushed, patted, and drew on the face I would present to the world, my mom would come down the stairs and look at me with concern. She would bring with her a breakfast smoothie to make sure I ate. At that point, drinking the smoothie was the only way in which I would comply with my mom's wishes to appease her worry. As she asked me how I felt and if I was okay, I would respond with "I'm fine," dripping with irritation and denying further questioning. Her concern made me want to prove to her that I was an adult and did not need or want her worry, so I did the same thing again and again. I would go out and drink and return home at an ungodly late hour or not at all, and I lashed out at my mom every time she asked if I was okay because I could not admit to myself that I was very much not okay.

Each time that I went out and awoke the next morning with either a hazy recollection or no memory at all of what had happened the night before, I was afraid. I was afraid for my immediate safety and well-being. I was afraid about what may have happened the night before. I was afraid of the people I had met and what I may have done with them. I was afraid of my inability to keep the same thing from happening again and again. So alcohol became more than a pastime, a catalyst for fun, or an excuse to go out. It became my shield from myself and

my past experiences. While it may have been subconscious, my rationalization for drinking became "If I drink again tonight, I will not have to think about what happened last night." Alcohol was simultaneously my captor and my only escape.

March 18, 2016: I awoke in my bed with no recollection of coming home the night before. I felt sick to my stomach and just wanted to go back to sleep before my mind started to replay what I remembered from the day before. But the dehydration was making my heart beat so quickly and loudly that sleep was impossible. Rays of light poured in through the window, indicating I did not have the presence of mind to close the blinds before falling asleep the night before. As I got up, I noticed an unfamiliar jacket on the bed. Afraid of the answers to the questions that the green jacket provoked, I put it under the covers to hide it from myself. If only memories could go away by shoving them under the covers.

Alcohol was simultaneously my captor and my only escape.

I walked to the bathroom, the movement making my stomach churn. I raised the toilet lid and knelt in front of it. My legs were shaking too much to stand. A few hollow breaths later, I pulled myself up with the assistance of the bathroom counter and leaned over to turn on the shower. As I waited for the water to warm, I avoided looking in the mirror, afraid of the disgust, pain, and fear I knew I would see in my eyes. When I stepped into the shower, the hot water cascaded over my head. I willed the water to wash my mind clear as well as my body. I did not want to think about what happened the day before. I could not think about it, lest my last essence of myself would wash away down the drain. If ever there were a recipe for disaster, it included a twenty-one-year-old alcoholic in a party town like Aspen on a day on which it is socially acceptable to drink too much, like St. Patrick's Day. And it was a disaster. While I knew part of the

story, I would not know the full extent of it until a few days later; and memories and regret would still haunt me for months and years to come.

How many times would I have to let alcohol hurt me before I realized that it was the problem? I knew something was wrong and yet I could not fix it. The only thing I could do to avoid my feelings was to drink, but then when I did, bad things happened. So I tried to hide my feelings from myself by dousing them with alcohol. Just like I hid the jacket from myself by putting it under the covers. But before long, there were so many jackets hidden there that there was no room left for me. And I was afraid to look at them and face them on my own. I needed help. So, though it took me almost a year and dozens more terrifying experiences, I finally realized that the nurse at Northwestern was right: I had a problem with which I needed help. All I had left to do was accept that help. So this time when my mom came downstairs to check on me and ask if I was okay, I let the tears flow from my eyes as I moved to hug her, finally answering her question honestly.

THE WISDOM IN WALNUTS

SUSTAINABILITY AWARD WINNER

by KELA FETTERS

In the courtyard of the three-hundred-year-old former customs office, I found an easy peace under the walnut trees. Days were short due to the valley's depth; sun didn't strike the corrugated tin roof of la Casona el Resguardo until 9 a.m. and vanished as early as 5 p.m. Residents of this shallow crevasse worshipped the fleeting light. Nyctinastic desert plants opened their leaves and drank sunbeams. Mobs of cows willed themselves up the steep embankments to stand blinking in a patch of warmth. After the sun erased the morning chill in the courtyard of la Casona, I parked a worn cushion on red patio tiles that had withstood centuries of earthquakes. Seven bulging sacks of autumn's walnuts awaited my hammer. It was rhythmic labor: a learned tap was more effective than a forceful smote. The cracked nuts fell one after another into an awaiting bucket. Then the work was intricate and meditative. My fingers found the punctured ends of shell and worked them off, bit by bit, to expose the naked nut inside. Chileans know the halves as mariposas (butterflies), but to me they more closely resembled the headless, plucked, prone and golden-brown carcass of a rotisserie chicken.

More than anything, though, walnut hulling is tedious. Over the course of a month, I filled a large Styrofoam tank with halves. A small child could swim through my payload, but I barely put a dent in the total harvest. Señora Esolina told me not to worry: the leftovers would feed the birds and insects that frequent the garden. All foodstuff at la Casona was precious. No resource went underutilized. Eighteen miles from the nearest city, the complex was squat and self-reliant, the only access road a crumbling causeway that zigzagged up five thousand feet over a mountain pass and eventually into Argentina.

An ethos of sustainability is hewn into the very fibers of the building. Constructed as a customs office over 300 years ago, la Casona has weathered centuries of earthquakes and blizzards. Throughout the 18th century, commerce flowed through the ledger of the former customs office as merchants transferred goats, cattle, leather and yerba mate to and from Chile, Argentina, and Peru.[1] In 1822, Chilean liberator Bernardo O'Higgins declared this mountain passage the only legal one between Chile and Argentina, elevating la Casona's importance to national significance.[2] An 1860 description of the compound survives:

> The rooms [of the customs office ...]. They are new, comfortable and I think enough for the commander and 3 or 4 more guards who accompany him. In the front and north of these there are some browns and in the same direction some paddocks, but, to the west are some vegetables, preceded by a large courtyard where some fruit trees grow, and I think that to the south it also has cultivated land […][3]

The building remained the Customs of northern Chile until the Trans-Andean Railroad superseded trade by foot in the early

An ethos of sustainability is hewn into the very fibers of the building.

1 Abel Cortez and Marcelo Mardones, "History of St. Stephen, 1740-1936," Territory, Society and Rural Life in a Local Area of Aconcagua, Los Andes, (2009).

2 Agustín Ross. "Historical Review of Commerce in Chile During the Colonial Era," Imprenta Cervantes, Santiago, (1984).

3 Manuel De La Cruz Villarroel, "Diary of a trip from the province of Mendoza to Aconcagua," Printing of the Post Office of Santiago, (1870): 106-107.

1900s.[4] By the dawn of the 21st century, the customs office had been converted into a bed and breakfast for the traveler desiring solitude. There are no solar panels, composting toilets, low-flow faucets, or LEDs. El Resguardo is most distinctive for what it lacks. The small stone swimming pool is filled by mountain run-off. Clothes are hung on the line to dry in the up-valley breeze, in view of the occasional condor on high riding the same current.

La Casona sources much of its foodstuff from within miles of its gates, a feat all the more impressive to a veteran of United States supermarkets. In el campo (the countryside), localization is necessary; the grocery store is a long bus ride away. For breakfast, we sliced a loaf of bread baked up the road by a neighbor. We clothed our toast in avocado slices or jam—both sourced steps away from la Casona's courtyard fruit trees. Eggs, served scrambled or soft-boiled, were purchased from another neighbor by the dozen. Oranges were a special gift from the garden, their fresh-squeezed juice a complement to the smoky taste of walnut butter and the acidity of the coffee. Even the beans of that coffee, admittedly far from their harvest in Colombia, traveled significantly less to arrive in the north of Chile than the center of the United States. Wine, however, was vine-to-table. The semiarid region of San Esteban boasts some of the nation's most esteemed vineyards. Crushed, pulped, seeded, and fermented, the grapes become vino—internationally acclaimed and perhaps second only to the Pisco sour as a Chileno's drink of choice.

Even the kitchen scraps possessed a noble destiny.

Even the kitchen scraps possessed a noble destiny. Potato peels, celery heads, spinach stems and the like ended up in a bin for the chickens—four friendly hens with an appetite for lettuce. In several months, weaned on the kitchen's waste, they will grow large enough to produce fresh eggs. Cèsar the donkey also received his fair share of produce scraps, to the chagrin of the horses. Walnut shells are saved and used to feed a different beast: the stove fires inside the house. Central heating is forgone for heavy wool blankets. To tame the immensity of the walnut trees themselves, branches are frequently hacked off, gathered, and chopped for firewood.

In this way, we internalize the near environment by eating and drinking the edible parts of the orchard's plants and using their inedible parts to warm our bodies.

4 J. Valerie Fifer, "Andes Crossing: Old Tracks and New Opportunities at the Upsallata Pass," Yearbook 20 (Conference of Latin American Geographers), (1994): 35-48.

Once, around midnight, Pato saddled his horse for a journey several miles up the mountain road; a neighbor's cow needed rescuing after falling into a ditch. Reciprocity is a tenet of life in the Cordillera. Neighbors help neighbors. In the more remote reaches of the sector, people graze cattle. The animals are free-range to the wildest extent of the word; I followed cattle trails up to the highest peaks in the vicinity, startling when a large brown body brayed from behind a cactus at my approach. After trekking for several hours up a ragged peak, I stumbled across the outpost of a cattle herder under a slab of granite, replete with campfire and cooking pots. He must perform his labor exposed to the elements for days or weeks. His herd's beef must be world-class.

Too often we forget to look backwards in our quest for ecological harmony.

Despite the chill of early winter, we held a traditional asado (outdoor barbecue). We adorned the table with the bounty of the garden and orchard as the dogs circled, drooling. Too often we forget to look backwards in our quest for ecological harmony. The idea of sustainability is forward leaning: balance and endurance in perpetuity. But continuum stretches in the opposite direction. What sustained life in this valley hundreds of years ago—simplicity, reciprocity, and thriftiness—sustains it today. Some "green buildings" exchange human touch for gadgetry. La Casona el Resguardo quietly makes the case that homegrown meals shared with guests might be the most enduring thing we have.

There are many other regions in Chile more well-known and dramatic than this one. The same modesty of El Resguardo is embodied in the scattered cacti and thickets of thorns of these sandy hillsides. It's beauty that doesn't self-advertise. We shared wine and meat and turned our eyes to the mountains. In the immaculate stillness, a condor circled its cliffside home, a black ghost in the dying light. By imperceptible degrees, the Cordillera caught the residues of the setting sun. The sunrays expired and an alien luminosity struck the mountain flanks. Alpenglow bleached the peaks for a handful of heartbeats and then the technicolor display was spent. Suddenly the landscape transformed: the white thorns swayed like gnashing teeth, eacha pebble cast the shadow of a boulder, and the dusk bled moans and howls.

Art by Emily Diaz

Art by Madison Melton

THERE HAS TO BE A DEEPER MEANING

by BRISA ELLIOTT

My younger sisters and I sit curled up next to our mom, a dresser barricading our bedroom door. The lights are off and she's trying to lull them to sleep while I kneel, ear pressed to the vent, waiting to see if he'll move from the basement. Then I hear something. His voice travels through the vent, a whisper at first. My mom looks over at me, concern in her eyes. "What's he saying?"

I shrug. "It sounds like he's…singing?" My mom gets up and I take her spot. She tells us to stay put and moves the dresser, sneaking out of the room. Some moments pass. Maybe she calmed him down? The silence begins to worry me, so I move to the door and peer through the crack. My dad's drunken song drifts through the house, slowly getting louder. My sisters giggle at his slurred words and I find myself smiling as well. The situation seems so absurd. Why were we even afraid?

Then my mom comes running up the stairs and into the bedroom, slamming the door behind her. My dad's song follows her: "You won't take them away from me! You won't leave me!"

Frantically, my mom dials a number on her phone. After what seems like an eternity of sitting in the dark, terrified, my mom tells us that my grandparents are waiting for us outside, but we must sneak past dad. What happens after is blurred by my tears, but this night is ingrained in my brain forever.

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I was fifteen when my mom and I were finally able to escape. While we were no longer physically trapped, my dad refused to set us completely free. His icy claws clung tight, leaving wounds nobody else could see. I suffered through months of pure torture before I was able to see my sisters again, and it was years before they were able to forgive us for leaving them behind. One night, shortly after our solemn reunion, my sister asked me to sit outside with her. While we sat in complete darkness, she told me that she often wondered what would happen if she were to just disappear. Would dad's life be easier if he had one less kid to take care of? I held her close as she sobbed, remembering how those same demons haunted me when I was her age. I held her close as my pure white freedom became stained red with guilt. I was Icarus, reaching for a dream I was not yet able to attain.

I was fifteen when my mom and I were finally able to escape.

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I walk up to my father's apartment and push the door open. Just inside is a cheap couch where my father sits watching TV. He glances over his shoulder, notices it's me and jumps to his feet. He offers to give me a tour, though, looking around, I can already see everything the apartment has to offer. The small closet on my left is overflowing, making the narrow walkway even harder to navigate through. There's no dining room, just a coffee table in front of the couch. A multi-purpose room, you could call it. My three sisters share a bedroom across from the bathroom and my father claims the master bedroom at the end of the hall. His room is filled with bookcases lined with books he believes everyone should read. Small statues are placed haphazardly, artifacts from places he's never been before.

Back in the living room, he shows me the pictures he's hung to give the place a homely feel. A small family portrait in a cheap Walmart frame hangs on the wall, the centerpiece.

It's one of my father's favorite possessions because it shows off his beautiful girls. Everything in the portrait shouts that we're a happy family—our matching outfits, the smiles we pasted on as the photographer counted to three. If you look closer, maybe you can notice my father's tight grip on my sister's shoulder, the tightness of his jaw, the smiles that don't light up our eyes. My father reaches out and wipes a smudge off the glass and everything looks fine again.

I'm only there for the weekend, which means there's no time for me to even breathe. We have to make up for months of separation in less than 48 hours. My sisters claim me as their own and every move I make is mirrored by them. They grip my hand tight, as if they're afraid I might disappear at any moment and they'll never see me again. We sit together on the couch, no concern for personal space, and pray for time to slow. We want to play games, sing and dance, be sisters for the short time we have.

My father puts on a movie instead.

It's a movie I haven't seen yet and I'm excited to find out what happens. Ten minutes in, my father pauses the movie.

"I won't spoil it," he says, then proceeds to explain the whole plot. I look at my sisters and roll my eyes. They giggle. He presses play then asks my sister to grab him a soda. She goes to the kitchen and asks if any of us want anything. "Shh, the movie's on," my father says. When she sits back down, he pauses the movie again and proceeds to tell me how the movie ends.

As we watch the movie, I feel his eyes on me, so I make sure to react to the twists and turns, even though he's already told me about every single one. When the movie ends, he asks me a million questions.

I tear the whole thing apart looking for deep secrets. I analyze every camera angle, every bit of voice inflection. I replay scenes that stood out, scenes that might harbor a truth I had missed. There has to be a deeper meaning. You just have to look for it. ꕥ

I tear the whole thing apart looking for deep secrets.

WHAT THEN?

by REINA KRUMVIEDA

You are 7 years old. Your class is reading a story about Korean-Americans aloud, and your heart's racing because you love to read. The teacher reaches a Korean word and she abruptly stops to look at you, eyebrows raised. The rest of the class turns to you as well, and a classmate nudges you in the side and whispers, "Aren't you Korean?" You can feel your face heating up as you look down at the foreign word on the page, and stumble through it as the teacher looks on with disappointment. You aren't Korean. But that doesn't seem to matter does it? The teacher forces you to say every Korean word in the story. By the end of the story you've grown resentful against your Asian heritage. You don't want to be Japanese anymore.

You're 9 years old. Your mom walks you to the bus stop every day and attends all of your school events. When other kids see you together, they always ask who she is. When you tell them she's

your mom, they look at you in confusion and say, "but you don't look Asian." Everyone seems to discredit your ability to know who you are, only because you're "not Asian enough." It makes you feel confused and hopeless, but there is just one resounding thought in your mind—you don't want to be Japanese anymore.

You're 11 years old. You absolutely love Japanese food and decide to have it for lunch at school one day. When you take it out all your friends become hysterical—"EW what is that? That looks disgusting." You feel your eyes begin to water as you meekly attempt to defend your food, and make a mental note to never bring Japanese food to school ever again. You're angry and ashamed, but you're not quite sure who or what it's directed at.

You're angry and ashamed, but you're not quite sure who or what it's directed at.

You're 13 years old. In history class your teacher wraps up a unit on World War II by concluding that "it's only because of the generosity of the United States that Japan has progressed to where it is today. The atomic bombings were a small price to pay after what they did in Pearl Harbor." You clamp your fists tightly, and you feel a sharp pain as your nails dig into your skin. Last summer you visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and witnessed the carnage of the atomic bombs on civilians firsthand. It haunts you to this day; dioramas with black skies, burned and bloody manikin in grotesque poses, skin hanging off their naked bodies like shredded pieces of fabric. Radiation poisoning slowly killed children even 10 years after the bombing, propelling Japan into a new era of growth, hopeful peace, and nuclear deterrence. You are defensive of your Japanese heritage, and yet too weak to defend it.

You're 14 years old. In an effort to embrace your Japanese heritage you've started taking Aikido, a Japanese martial art. You don't tell anyone at school about it for the same reason you don't tell anyone your middle name. You're tired of people grossly mispronouncing it, and even worse, of them telling others that

you do Tai Chi—which isn't even Japanese—or that your middle name is "wasabi." When it does inevitably come up you can't get angry; they'll say you're just being sensitive, your struggles aren't real, you're white, and discrimination doesn't apply to you.

You're 16 years old. On the airplane to Japan, the flight attendants ask your mom—in Japanese—which meal option she would like. Moving on to you, she sees your round eyes and white skin and switches to English to ask you the same question. It's not a big deal, but it's like a slap to the face. You know Japanese, but how you look changes how people perceive you. On Japanese public transport little kids whisper in hushed voices as they stare and point at you. At your Japanese school professors openly discriminate against you in front of the class for being bi-racial, and give you zeros on assignments nearly identical to the full Japanese students. Who are you? You don't fit in anywhere.

Who are you? You don't fit in anywhere.

You're 19 years old. Part of the Japanese Student Alliance, you're friends with numerous bi-racial Japanese-American kids, and they distinctly understand your struggles because they've faced them too. Finally, you see a path to embracing your Japanese heritage. But at what cost?

Your mom stopped attending your events altogether by high school, missing concerts, volleyball games, even high school graduation. You never really understood why, but remember nights where your parents would argue, your mother frustrated at how this country treated minorities despite calling itself a "melting pot." You remember all your mom's friends gradually moving back to Japan, and of more recent dinner conversations, involving lingering stares and red baseball caps. While your mom listened to your struggles at school, she tried to do everything she could to help. She tried to shield you from a pain she understood all too well, but what if in the process of protecting you she identified herself as the problem? What if she sacrificed her happiness for you?

What then?

FISH BOWL

by EMILY SHORTER

For as long as I can remember, my mom has loved flowers. We had orchids on every table, lilies sprouting out of pots on the front porch, and gardenias blooming in the backyard. I think that gardening, for her, offered a sense of control. It was a way to make something more beautiful, to change something by altering the earth between your hands.

I think that's where my love of flowers has come from. I love the way they connect people and how much they can symbolize. For me, flowers were the way I connected to nature as a kid. I would spend hours in the background building fairy houses out of sticks and petals and making up stories of the fairies that would live there one day. In elementary school, we took flowers from the garden and sat beneath the bushes counting petals. He loves me, he loves me not. Though we did not know what love meant. The only love we saw was in Disney movies and between our parents, but at that age I thought happy endings were inevitable.

Art by Aisha Ozaslan

After we moved, my parents set to work fixing the house. One day while my mom was still at work, my dad was in the backyard planting flowers. I remember watching him from the window, back hunched over the small row of holes he had just dug in the ground. It was hot. One of those South Carolina days where the heat seems to follow you wherever you go, clinging to you like a second skin, suffocating you even in the shade. He was planting blue hydrangeas, the small flowers reflecting the sky back down. By the time he came inside, drenched in sweat with the sky growing dark behind him. My mother had come home and sat at the kitchen table with her computer open, her mind already absorbed in thoughts of tomorrow.

"I think I lost my wedding ring," he said. My mom looked up from the computer.

"How did you lose it?"

"It must have slipped off when I was planting outside," he said, rubbing his ring finger with the other hand. "I'll see if I can find it tomorrow."

The next day, he went back outside to the garden and dug up all of the hydrangeas he had planted the day before, sighing as he carefully untangled their roots from where they had settled the night before. He spent all day searching for the ring beneath the dirt, soil staining his hands until he came back inside, unable to find the ring.

When I was young, every Sunday my dad would cook us breakfast in the kitchen. My sister and I would take turns picking what we would eat—french toast one week, pancakes the next. We woke up to the smell of syrup and the sound of oil spitting in the pan. My mother would turn on Nora Jones while we sat at the kitchen table in our pajamas while the sound of church bells rang in the distance.

This was one of the only times we were all together during the week. My dad worked an hour away and most of his days were spent driving back in forth. My mother opened an elementary school when my sister and I were in the third grade and even though Olivia and I attended the same school, we hardly ever saw my mother, who was always busy. When we got home each day, she would work through dinner, going to bed by eight so she could be up at three to start working again. Our countertops were covered with books and computer cords

"I think I lost my wedding ring," he said.

We were the reason they stayed together for so long, why they never dared to jump out the top of the bowl.

and all the paperwork it takes to start a new school. Except for those Sundays, when we would clear them off and sit down together.

The second half of my parents' marriage was silent. Around the age of ten, the music stopped playing on Sunday mornings. I miss the way the music would start, rousing me from sleep as we stumbled out of bed listening to Bill Withers and Jack Johnson on full blast. I loved the way it used to fill the whole house, the sound seeping into the wood becoming a part of the house. They stopped fighting around this time, too. Before then, it was a constant back and forth argument about one thing or another. But it was as if they turned it off—flipped a switch and everything stopped except for silent conversations late at night in the kitchen when they thought my sister and I were asleep. Soon after, my dad moved into the downstairs guest bedroom. They told us it was because he snored too much and didn't want to wake my mom. At this time, they became more roommates than partners, each one allowing the other to have their space.

I still listen to those songs from my childhood and reminisce about Sundays. I often think about what it would be like if we were all still together in that house, how it would feel to sit down at the table together, hearing the same sounds that permeated throughout my childhood—the sounds that made us into a family for that one time a week.

If my parents were fish, my sister and I would be the Fishbowl. We were the reason they stayed together for so long, why they never dared to jump out the top of the bowl. We were what brought them together; we were the reason they continued to coexist in the same space for as long as they did. I often wondered if they thought it was easier for us to pretend we had the perfect set of parents to look past the silence. To look past all that had changed since we were younger. When our friends came over, we bypassed the front room where my dad's things sat neatly on the bedside table and told them our parent's friend was in town. They told us not to tell anyone. Maybe our parents weren't trying to hide their imperfections from us. Rather, they tried to hide it from themselves. To package everything in a neat box, to tape the top and bury it in the closet along with the pictures from before we were born.

As I've grown older, it is easier to see the signs of crumbling in my parents' marriage that I didn't see as a kid. My parents, too, have talked about what went on behind closed doors and in those late-night talks. I often wish it could be kept hidden, shut away in the doors of that house we no longer live in. I want to be blind to it all, to shut my eyes and squeeze them tight the way I did as a child when they would come into my room at night after fighting, pretending I was asleep and that I did not hear anything coming up the stairs.

When my parents finally told us they were getting a divorce, we weren't surprised. My sister and I walked down the stairs to the "family meeting" they had called. It was ironic that they called it a family meeting. By that time, we weren't really a family anymore. Though she hadn't told me, my sister had heard my dad talking to someone about an apartment a couple of months earlier. They told us that they had been thinking about this for a long time, that it just seemed right now.

"We tried to work it out for a long time, to be happy with each other," my mother said, "That's one of the things I love about your father."

Other times,
the plant lasts a season, slowly wilting
towards the ground until it
decomposes into the earth.

I never heard her say she loved my dad. I never thought my parents loved each other before. I still saw them as the fish mindlessly swimming by each other, stuck in the same place. They loved each other in different ways, not as obvious. There was love in the way they cared for my sister and I all those years, in the way my dad cooked dinner every night, and in the way my mom would buy Diet Coke for my dad on the way home from work. I think the love we have for someone can evolve, and take different forms. I hope that the love my parents did have for each other has taken a different shape in their lives, that they have found a way to be happier apart than when they were together.

My thoughts on love have grown since I was younger. Love no longer just means pancakes or happy endings. It's not easy the way it is in books. I wish it could be as easy as finding your prince in the woods or running into them at a ball. Now I think it is much more like gardening. You can plant it, watch it grow, take care of it. Sometimes, it takes root, growing deep in the ground, reaching up towards the sun. Other times, the plant lasts a season, slowly wilting towards the ground until it decomposes into the earth. That's the thing though. Even though you cannot see the plant, it still lays underground, fertilizing whatever comes next. I like to think that that's what my parents' love is like—still there beneath the surface. It gives me hope for the small girl who once believed in fairy tales.

Sometimes, I think about my dad's ring that is still stuck in the garden of our old house. Buried deep underground, washed by years of rain and dirt and worms, the words once engraved there now gone, held between the roots of plants. I went by that house a couple years ago, only to find the whole front yard redone, the hydrangeas long gone. I wonder if the ring is still there, buried beneath the earth, a symbol of what my parents had together, in a place where we were all together.

Art by Sarah Klingensmith

BUGS THE BUNNY

by KAYLIE STENBURG

All afternoon, we had been lying on the chicken coop in Lena's backyard, letting the sun soak into our skin, watching the bees that bumbled about the garden, and talking about this and that. Her dog, Rosie, ran around the yard, chasing after rabbits and barking at the other neighborhood dogs. I felt my thoughts drifting toward the same things that they always drifted towards—the story I had been struggling to write, college, and having to say goodbye to my friends at the summer's end—including Lena, who was lying next to me, holding up her hand to block out the sun. I knew that I would miss these kinds of days, these unassuming moments.

Suddenly Lena bolted off the coop and ran across the yard, yelling "drop it! Rosie, drop that!" When she caught up to Rosie, Lena put her hand up to the dog's mouth. I jumped off the coop to catch up to Lena, and when I did, I saw that there was a baby cottontail caught between the jagged peaks of Rosie's teeth. Powerless, I looked on as Lena wrestled the bunny out of the dog's mouth. When she did, she ran inside the house, and I followed.

Down in the basement, Lena set the bunny down in the bathtub. Free of her grasp, it darted around the clean white basin for a few seconds, leaving behind trails of blood. Eventually it stopped to huddle by the drain. It was hurt, though it was impossible to tell how badly from a distance. We stared at each other for a moment, silently asking "what now?" No one else was home. If anyone was going to help the poor bunny, it would have to be us.

I started looking for a solution out loud. "I guess we'll need gloves… and maybe some bedding for it… and—"

"What should we call him?" Lena interrupted.

"Is there a particular reason that we're naming him? Can't we just stick with 'the rabbit?'"

"How about Bugs?"

Bugs was perhaps the least original name for a rabbit that I had ever heard, but given the circumstances, I wasn't going to complain.

Poking out through a tuft of red-soaked fur, we could see the tips of bone.

Lena bent over the rim of the blood-smeared bathtub and cupped her hands around the little bunny. It was just a tiny thing, small enough to fit in a coffee mug. For the moment it was still in shock. She turned him around, examining his belly and sides. As she did so, one of Bugs' back legs moved with gravity, twisting at unnatural angles. Poking out through a tuft of red-soaked fur, we could see the tips of bone. She grimaced and drew in a tight breath. "We can make a tourniquet. If we tie it tightly enough then his leg should just…" she shrugged.

"Should just... what?" I asked.

Lena gestured toward the ground and made a plop sound with her tongue. "It'll fall off."

"Oh."

So, we proceeded to the bathroom where we collected the most professional medical supplies we could muster; Q-tips, gauze pads, a bit of sewing string and nail clipping scissors to

cut it with. Before we started operating, I had been the one that pushed for us to call the vet. We had to call twice—because the first time the receptionist hung up on us. On the second call, she told us that there was nothing that their veterinarians could do. She said that it was illegal for them to interfere with the lives of wild animals. With our hope for outside help properly smothered, Lena passed Bugs to me and so I held him close, fearing that at any second he would awaken from his shock and wriggle out of my grasp. But he didn't. He just stayed still, staring back at me when I stared at him.

His eyes were distant, and I was hoping that he was as far away from reality as he seemed.

Lena took the string and wrapped it around his leg, above the compound fracture. When it came time to tighten it, she winced and closed her eyes, but nevertheless she went through with it, pulling at the string until it was as tight as she could make it. Then she wrapped the string around the Q-tip and used it as a knob to make the tourniquet even tighter. Every moment I watched Bugs anxiously, waiting for him to cry out in pain, or suddenly jolt up and run away. He never did. He only watched me—or rather, watched through me. His eyes were distant, and I was hoping that he was as far away from reality as he seemed.

"Oh my God," Lena said without much breath.

I looked down at Bug's belly and saw a mess of glossy organs spilling from just above his leg—the result of a puncture wound buried in the fluff that we had failed to see. "Let's use the gauze," I suggested grimly, but I almost had to laugh, out of stress or worry, out of anything but humor. "After this we could basically call ourselves veterinarians."

Lena nodded, then we set to work bandaging Bugs' fluffy skin over the organs that were spilling out of him. This time Lena held him while I did the best job I could of wrapping

gauze around his midsection. It was hard because the gauze was so wide, and Bugs was just so small. Each time I tried to cover up the wound, his legs ended up getting wrapped up too. Finally, I managed to wrap him up and tape the gauze in place.

We took him back down to the basement and set him in the bathtub for a moment so that Lena and I could run to the refrigerator and grab a few handfuls of lettuce. We used the lettuce to line the bottom of her old hamster cage. It was bedding and food all in one. Out of cardboard and duct tape, we made a water bowl for him, and then a little dome to serve as a house. Once the cage was set up, we stuck Bugs inside and set the dome over him, hoping that he would feel safer tucked away rather than out in the open.

It was the best that we could do, or at least the best that we knew how to do. Eventually I had to go home for the night. Over the next several hours, Lena and I sent videos back and forth. She kept me updated on Bugs. He had nibbled at the food in his cage, and he seemed to have come out of shock.

"He survived the night," Lena told me the next morning over video. "It seems like he's doing a lot better." She showed me Bugs, who was nibbling on a piece of lettuce. His eyes were clear and lucid. I set down my phone just to take a moment to smile. It warmed my heart to see that he was recovering.

It was the best we could do, or at least the best that we knew how to do.

But it was that very same night that I got another video from Lena. There was blood all over Bugs' cage. There had been another puncture wound that we had missed. It was too much. The poor bunny was falling apart at the seams. The gauze wouldn't be enough. The tourniquet wouldn't be enough. There was only one thing left for us to do, and ultimately it would have been better if we had done it at the start.

Lena stuck Bugs in her freezer. Not much later, he died. I set down my phone again, only this time it wasn't so that I could have a moment to smile. This time I cried, the kind of tears that fall without prompting or urging. Light tears.

Dimly, I wondered what I was supposed to feel. Young girls cry over dead bunnies. What about older girls? The truth of what I felt couldn't be altered by age; I was sad, and I felt that I had failed.

We had made a series of decisions the day before. At each step we had acted in the way that we thought was best, but good intentions weren't enough. In the end, I had to wonder if they had been too much.

THE DAY MY MOTHER DIED

by CAMERON MARKUSON

Often, I am overwhelmed by the stench of remembering.
The hours after she left are so vivid and crowded.
A silver sedan doing sixty, speeding away from the scene.

Mounting the steps only to sit around in disbelief.
Surrounded by dogs and relatives, shivering to think.
How indifferent the world was; how the couch was still there.

Perhaps it should have died with her.

We will have no use for it anymore
as we spend the next year in bed, under sheets, under fans
under dim lights, sharing the same house.

Us four men unprepared for open windows and no breeze
waiting, impatiently, for rain to fall upwards
or the sky to descend
and bring her back to us.

SILVER SOULS

by HANNAH LAUGHLIN

At 4 am, my phone rang. My mother's broken voice told me that my brother had passed away. I fell to the ground. This could not be true. I wanted it to be a nightmare.

I met my parents at home and then headed over to the rehab center to see my brother's body. Pale and motionless. My eyes took a picture. A picture that cannot be erased.

The room was full of people, but I felt like I was in a parallel universe all alone. I stared at my feet, avoiding all eye contact. Sobbing sniffles echoed through the room but my tears would not come.

The coroner came to take his body. Walking out of the room, I turned to get one last glance, but it was too late. He was gone.

I got home and began searching for it - the most important thing I have ever owned. My silver Tiffany's bracelet that my brother gave to me for my eighteenth birthday.

For three years it sat in the same spot. It magically shimmered and glowed in the darkest of places, but now I couldn't find it.

I frantically searched through my jewelry box. I looked under my bed, in my pillowcases, in the kitchen pantry, under the couch and even the back seats of my car. But it was nowhere.

For the first time that day I broke down.

Engraved on the backside, the letters read "I love you lil sis." ☙

Art by Adler Shannon

RAPID OXIDATION

SUSTAINABILITY AWARD RUNNER-UP

by CLAYTON MONTGOMERY

The fire started at the gun range. It was a humble gun range just outside Basalt, Colorado. It had areas for rifles, pistols, and shotguns alike. It didn't have any fancy facilities—hardly any structures to speak of. Situated in the middle of a field surrounded by brush and low trees, the range had a rural charm to it. The tall grass had been drying in the scorching mid-summer sun for weeks. The place was dusty. Dry. It only took a young couple in their twenties with a few tracer rounds and a rifle to accidentally ignite the grass. The infant flames grew quickly, aided by a steady breeze under a bright blue sky. It spread. From grass, to shrubs, and then to trees, the flames eventually passed the threshold of control. From those 'fire bullets,' the nickname by which so many people know tracer rounds, grew a fire so large that it cast a crimson glow that could be seen for miles. It pulsed and snarled every time it reached a new source of fuel. It tickled power lines. And it wanted to grow.

I drove past the fire that day, the third of July in the summer of 2018, before things got serious. It hadn't spread to any surrounding trees and appeared to be only a brush fire that would be extinguished

quickly. As I drove past, I noticed that wildland fire trucks had already made their way up the hillside, and I trusted that they would get things under control. But due to unruly winds and a bone-dry hillside that practically begged to go up in flames, the crews couldn't gain control. I awoke the next day, July 4th, to hazy skies. The fire had started about 5 miles from my house, but as I looked out the window, I was surprised to see the sky filled with smoke. The fire had indeed grown overnight, but still not to the point of panic, at least for my family and me.

"You got work today?" asked my dad, as I started to make some breakfast.

"Yeah," I replied. I scowled at the food in front of me. As a 19-year-old, the last place I wanted to be on the Fourth of July was serving food and drink at a country club in Aspen.

"What time do you get off?" my dad asked, continuing his questioning.

"Six," I replied.

He raised an eyebrow and said, "that's pretty late. Why do you have to stay so long?"

"My shift always ends at six. Literally every time," I said in an unfriendly tone. I ate my breakfast as fast as I could.

"Okay, well, have a good day, and happy Fourth."

"Thanks, you too." I felt bad for being so curt, but the eight hours of mind-numbing restaurant work ahead weighed on me. I finished eating, hopped in my car, and began my forty-minute drive up to Aspen.

Halfway through my shift, I felt on edge and needed a break. I walked out back by the dumpsters where I found the entire kitchen staff standing on the loading dock, staring. I walked behind them to catch a glimpse of whatever they were looking at. It stood before us, miles away and towering in the sky, a massive column of smoke, rising and unfurling itself above cloudless blue horizon. It twisted and squirmed in slow motion. It was from the same fire as the night before, only much, much bigger. Even still, the tone amongst the kitchen staff wasn't of much worry. I sent a quick text to my Dad to make sure everything was alright, and he said it was, so I went back to work.

I managed to escape from my shift a little early, around five. I sped down the highway towards my friend's house—eager to begin the Fourth of July festivities. As I passed the town of Basalt, the flames came into full view. It was a hellscape. Flames consumed

It twisted and squirmed in slow motion.

entire trees and exploded into the sky. Helicopters swarmed like angry bees, drawing water from the river and dumping it on the fire. The air pounded with their spinning blades and gave the whole scene a soundtrack reminiscent of war drums. I decided to take the exit and drive into town. After parking my car nearby, I stood on a bridge above the river and watched the chaos unfold before me. The scene was deafening. Smoke continued to pour from the flaming hillside, where the fire threatened to consume the power lines and their wooden poles. I wasn't alone on the bridge. Men, women, and children all stood alike in stunned silence as the fire threatened to consume their town whole. I watched with them, teary-eyed, as the helicopters continued their desperate attempts to put the blaze out. The flames were close to town—really close, and getting closer.

Nonetheless, I didn't want the fire—which now had a name, the Lake Christine Fire—to ruin my Independence Day. My friends must've thought the same, because when I arrived at my friend's house I saw everyone enjoying themselves, eating and laughing.

We relaxed outside playing lawn games and doing our best to enjoy the holiday. Once the sun dipped below the horizon, we began to settle down a bit, and headed downstairs to play some pool. Halfway through the first game, someone yelled from upstairs, "you guys have to come see this, out on the street."

The glow was spectacular. Apocalyptic.

We marched upstairs and on to the street. The glow was spectacular. Apocalyptic. The fire had made its way down the valley and was now practically at our doorstep. The flames hid just out of view, behind a ridge, but we could see the violent pulsating glow they produced. As the fire inhaled and exhaled, it sent out billows of smoke cast in a deep, dark red. And in the glow of the streetlights I began to notice small flecks in the air. Ash. The tiny bits of debris from the fire rained from the sky like a soft winter snow. A random car pulled up next to us and told us that the adjacent trailer park just got an evacuation notice. That was less than a mile away. Just as the car pulled away, my phone rang. It was my dad. I answered, and he said in a hushed voice, "hey, I think it's time to come home."

Without hesitating, I got in my car and sped up the hill to my neighborhood. I watched the ominous flicker of the fire in my rearview mirror while I navigated hairpin turns. Before I arrived at my house, I saw my father and my sister standing on the street,

watching. I pulled over and joined them. The rapturous sight ahead of me lay beyond comprehension. The flames had crested a nearby hill and moved towards us. The wind whipped in our faces, stoking the flames. The fire moved up the adjacent ridgeline at an almost unbelievable rate. The sheer size of the blaze meant that the flames practically consumed trees whole and spat them out in the form of smoke, ash, and more flame. I could see my sister's eyes watering in the fire's radiant light. My father talked with the neighbors in hushed voices. We heard sirens in the distance quickly approaching. A state patrol officer flew past us at top speed with sirens and lights blazing. Through their intercom they screamed, "everyone off the street, you're next to evacuate. Go!" My sister and I, nearly frantic, went home to pack, while my dad opted to stay and watch for a little while longer.

The scene at home was hectic. My sister and I sprinted throughout the house gathering photo albums, passports, social security cards, and all the other essentials. We packed clothes, valuables, and anything else we couldn't live without. In the middle of the chaos, my mom called and frantically told us that she couldn't make it home; they had closed the road up to our house. Over the phone, she told us what items of hers she wanted us to pack while she drove to a family friend's house. My dad came home just a couple minutes later, hopeful that we wouldn't have to evacuate, but he packed just in case. Once we had everything packed and staged in case we got the call to evacuate, I stepped out to the front porch and called my mom again.

She answered the phone on the first ring. "Do you have everything? I heard the trailer park is evacuating right now," she said with panic in her voice.

"Yeah we grabbed everything. I can see the fire and I think we'll be alright," I said. I looked to the hillside about a mile away and watched the flames climb upwards. Since I could see the actual flames, that meant the wind was blowing the fire away from my house. It provided a slight feeling of safety. As I tilted my head up further, I noticed the faint stars in the black night sky. In that moment, it was surprisingly peaceful. The tall grass surrounding our house swayed ever so slightly in the breeze. Crickets chirped in unison. The half-moon cast a soft silver glow on everything, and the streets were quiet. Once I was done listening to the crickets, gazing at the moon and stars, and enjoying the relative peace, I realized I could no longer see the flames.

The wind had shifted. It blew directly in my face, which meant the fire would be heading straight towards my house. I interrupted my mom, who was talking about the hellish landscape she drove by on her way home from Aspen. I told her that I had to go, and that we would probably be evacuated. Moments later, the skies opened up and began raining ash onto our house. My eyes watered from the thick smoke and every breath I took stung a little. The wind grew stronger and stronger until we made the decision to leave. We wouldn't wait for an official notice to evacuate. I fashioned a makeshift paper sign that said, "WE ALREADY LEFT," which I taped to our front door in case police or firefighters came to evacuate us. We locked the doors and I said goodbye to my childhood home. I thought I would never see it again. We loaded all that we had packed into our three cars. Our fifteen-year-old Anatolian Shepard got loaded into my old 4Runner. As I put my car in reverse, and as the poor old dog stumbled around blindly in the backseat, my eyes welled with tears watching ash rain on my childhood home. The unthinkable was upon us, and we couldn't do a thing about it. We pulled out of the driveway and joined the line of cars leaving the neighborhood.

Minutes after we left, we got the official evacuation notice. We made it to the house of our family friend and did our best to settle in. We slept on couches and in spare beds and had nightmares filled with flames. I awoke the next morning, July 5th, startled at first by my unfamiliar surroundings. I logged onto Facebook and saw a post from a classmate whose house was a couple streets from mine. It had burned down overnight.

In my mind, that settled it—my house was gone. I walked out of the spare bedroom to get some breakfast. I saw my mom, my sister, but not my dad. "Where's Dad?" I asked.

"He's at home," my mom replied casually.

"Wait. What? How? It's fine?" I was in total disbelief. Our house survived the night. Due to the incredible actions by firefighters and by a few instances of pure luck, the fire stopped short of our neighborhood. Even some of the neighbors played their part by flooding their fields, which helped stopped the fire in its tracks. However, not everyone was so lucky. In total, three homes were destroyed in the blaze, and by the time the Lake Christine Fire

finally died out months later, it had torched well over 12,000 acres. The flames, and the trauma that came with them, will be etched into the memories of Basalt's residents for years and decades to come.

After the fire, everyone had one big question on their minds: was the Lake Christine Fire caused by climate change? Basalt, which sits only thirty minutes away from Aspen, hears a lot about climate change. Nearly all of the town's revenue comes from the ski industry, fly fishing, and various other forms of ecotourism—all of which are enormously susceptible to climate change. Due to that economic fragility, Basalt's residents are incredibly aware of climate change, and very eager to do their part to stop it. So, was the Lake Christine Fire caused by climate change? The short answer: yes, probably.

The Aspen area which includes Basalt normally features very low wintertime temperatures and mild summers. A line graph of the average temperature over the course of the year shows a fairly tidy bell curve with the peak in July . Precipitation is pretty even throughout the year, with the rainiest month being April. When comparing the precipitation and temperature data of the first half of 2018 to the averages (collected from 1981-2010), it becomes very clear that it was not a normal year. 2018 started off on a strange note temperature-wise. The average temperature in January is a mere 19.8 degrees Fahrenheit. January of 2018, however, featured an average of 26.4 – almost 7 degrees higher. The warmest recorded day in January 2018 was a blistering 56 degrees. And in June, when temperatures normally go no higher than 75 degrees, June of 2018 saw at least one 90-degree day . July, too, saw 90-degree temperatures which is also quite rare. On the whole, when comparing the temperatures of January through July in 2018 to the averages, 2018 was almost a whole five degrees warmer overall.

The first half of 2018 was also quite strange in the precipitation department. Between January and July, 2018 only saw 72% of the precipitation that it would normally see in that time span. 72% doesn't sound too bad, but problems arose with how sporadic and uneven that precipitation was. March saw only 49% of normal precipitation, while April saw 139%. April was followed by an abysmal early summer with totals coming in at 33%, 54%, and 34% for May, June, and July. That intense rain and snowfall in April likely created a sort of 'growth spurt' for the local flora and fauna. Grasses and shrubbery were allowed a short period of quick, above-average growth. And then, the below average rain for the following

However, not everyone was so lucky.

The goal, though, is to be more than reactionary.

three months, combined with the brutally-hot temperatures left vegetation in the area overgrown and extremely dry. By the time July came around, a fire was practically bound to happen. And Basalt wasn't alone that summer; Colorado had one of its worst fire seasons to date. By mid-August in 2018, over 1,500 unique wildfires had scorched over 430,000 acres. Those too, were due primarily to the severe lack of moisture over the course of the year and abnormally high temperatures. It was a year that defied all expectations, models, and norms. As if to top it off the weirdness, just months later, Basalt had one of its snowiest winters on record. The neighboring Aspen ski resorts collected 396 inches of snow, where they normally only get 300.

By all measures, volatile and unpredictable weather patterns are a symptom of global climate change. It's well-documented that extreme weather becomes more common as climate change worsens. The implications of extreme weather are many. Prolonged droughts, floods, stronger hurricanes, and of course wildfires, are all consequences of changing weather and climate patterns. Now, more than ever, climate change poses a serious threat to human safety. Climate change used to be a vague and far-away concern, but with wildfire and other natural disasters worsening across the country, people are more willing to pay attention. They have to be. The goal, though, is to be more than reactionary. Why should we wait for a wildfire to come knocking to start having those serious conversations about climate change? Does it really take a natural disaster for people to make a change? At least in my case, yes. It wasn't until I stared into the face of a changing climate, as those towering flames climbed the ridgeline towards my house, that I really began to understand the consequences. And only then did begin to make lifestyle changes to minimize my carbon footprint. These climate-driven natural disasters will hopefully act as cautionary tales to others. If people want to be more than just reactionaries, they'll have to start making serious changes in their lives. These changes can include anything from reducing needless waste, to riding a bike to work instead of driving, all the way up to buying an electric car. The possibilities are endless. If people start making lifestyle changes now, they will hopefully never have to deal with a wildfire or any other force of nature bearing down on them, threatening all that they hold dear. As a changing climate strengthens its hold on all of us, action will be our only way to safety.

THE HYPHEN

by MARITHZA FLORES

Home is the hyphen between Mexican and American.
A place that is overlooked for the thought of belonging to nothing,
Having no meaning, but so much power to connect two different things.
Home is the hyphen between McDonald's and frijoles, the distance between English and Spanish.
Home is the hyphen between being white and American or brown and Mexican, where confusion lays when you lack belonging to either or neither.
Home is the hyphen where cultural boundaries remain hidden, under-represented.
I am the hyphen and home is where I make it.

Art by Lauren Halquist

Art by Carina Bandoni

QUIET BISEXUAL

by TRICIA MENZEL

I've always thought of myself as quietly bisexual. Well, more accurately, I've only ever allowed myself to exist as quietly bisexual, and for the first twenty or so years of my life I didn't allow myself to exist as bisexual at all.

For a majority of my life I was fiercely and dedicatedly heterosexual. Throughout all of high school I spent a total of three months without a boyfriend, and even in the times when I was single I continued to entertain a perpetual queue of boys. I spent most of these relationships feeling like sex was something that happened to me rather than something I participated in, and whether or not that was reflective of me versus my boyfriend of the time is something I'm still not particularly sure of.

I don't remember exactly when I started to realize that there was something different about how girls made me feel. I was always tantalized by the beauty of actresses who I felt most actors paled in comparison to, but I thought that everyone had elaborate fantasies about what it would be like to make

out with Miley Cyrus. I never felt especially attracted to any girls I personally knew, so my musings for famous women just seemed to me like heteronormative business as usual.

When I came to college, I continued faithfully in my performance of compulsory heterosexuality. I went to frat parties with my friends, flirted innocently with cute boys, and even shared my bed with a man-child or two. But above all else, I continued to ignore any tinge of attraction I felt towards girls in both theory and practice.

After one particularly shameful night with a man I would have never spoken to sober, I was left feeling like a small piece of me was missing. I spent the whole next day reflecting and ultimately decided this pattern of behavior was becoming far too detrimental to my mental health than it was worth. Most of the men I slept with made me feel like a means to an end; a mere pawn to their pleasure. Isn't it shocking how in compulsively trying to prove I was heterosexual there was little time left to weed out the douchebags?

After retiring this routine, I was left longing to explore a different avenue. Not wanting to commit to coming out but still wanting to actively explore my attraction to women, I secretly downloaded Tinder and switched my preferences from men to women.

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The first time I met Ella was after a month or so of texting her constantly, keeping my phone close to my chest to preemptively prevent a friend from getting even an accidental glimpse of who I was talking to. Ella offered to pick me up at my dorm, and as soon as I got in her car, our collective nervous energy was electric.

"Can I take you to the most basic spot in Boulder?" she asks, her confident tone mediated by the slight shake of her voice. I smile, knowing exactly the place she has in mind.

"Look, I don't usually tell my deepest darkest secrets on the first date," I say, lowering my voice to a whisper before divulging, "but I've never actually been to Lost Gulch before."

Ella fakes a gasp and grips her steering wheel dramatically. "You mean to tell me you've lived here for eight months and have never been to Lost Gulch?! God you must be such a loser," she jokes.

I shake my head and laugh in response, turning my face out to the car window to enjoy the view as we climb up the mountain. She turns on her car speaker, and her taste in music bleeds into mine. I can tell this is by design as my favorite artists begin to crop up on shuffle. When my favorite song comes on, I snap my head away from the window as if someone had just shouted my name. Ella is stifling a smile, trying to avoid making it obvious that she's done this on purpose. "This band sounds so familiar," I observed aloud. Ella senses my facetious tone immediately and breaks her poker face. "Just shut up and let me be smooth," she says through a laugh.

It's an exceptionally beautiful day at Lost Gulch. The sun is shining per usual and from time to time the still warm air is broken by winter's last remaining breezes. Ella's legs shake beneath her as we walk across the boulders, and I laugh to myself thinking how neither of us have on the proper footwear for this.

She picks a spot on the edge of a rock and I sit down beside her, keeping a comfortable distance. I am consciously aware of the space between us, somehow convinced that there's a possibility that the way she feels about me is entirely platonic. Our hands brush together only slightly when I show her something on my phone and I want her both closer and further away.

I want her both closer and further away.

"Have you ever kissed a girl before?" she asks, mere inches away from my face. I've never felt so comfortable having someone in my physical space before.

"Yeah, but not like this," I reply, hoping she can't hear my voice wavering.

Ella is pretty enough, her hair reaches just to her collar bones and her eyes are piercingly blue. There is a small gap between her two front teeth that I can't help but look to when she's talking, thinking about how it is somehow so fitting to her character.

"Well, not to brag, but I've been told I'm a pretty good kisser," she jokes, her lips curling up into a smirk.

Ella is funny enough, her sense of humor almost entirely based on feigned confidence. The veil that cloaks her insecurity is thin, but I pretend like I can't see through it.

"Is that so?" I playfully scoff, leaning forward to close the gap between us.

To most people in my life, the idea that I would ever feel attraction to girls is quite abstract. It's not something plainly obvious about me, which I've come to realize is likely by my own design. My ability to pass as heterosexual is one of the most vital tools in maintaining my quiet bisexuality, but it is certainly not the most positive.

Because I'm straight passing, I don't have to come out of the closet just once. There is no scenario where I could easily be seen as a bisexual person: if I am dating a man I'm heterosexual and if it's a woman I'm a lesbian. So I must come out of the closet to each and every person I currently know and every person I will ever know, which is part of what caused me to put off coming out for so long. I feared I wasn't strong enough to begin the endless process that coming out would be, and I still don't know that I am. I've stood with the door vacantly open for months now, stepping halfway out for only a select few.

There are limited occasions when I am able to openly refer to myself as bisexual, and even when I do, it doesn't come with ease. The first few times I spoke of this side of myself was not through spoken word at all, but rather from behind a screen where I felt protected from the threat of unacceptance. For a long time, I imagined telling my best friends about my sexuality in person, and every time that the scene formed in my head I would feel my chest tighten even at the thought of it. In the back of my mind, I knew it would be out of character for any of my friends to reply in a way that diverged even slightly from love and acceptance, but I still feared the worst. With my girl friends specifically, I worried it would change the way I was able to show them love; that it would shift the perception of my intentions from platonic to sexual and my most special and intimate relationships would be tainted.

Even after the words finally escaped me, there was no giant burden lifted from my chest. Rather, I felt dirtier than before, like the secret was much cleaner being kept inside. By bringing this secret out into the open, I was exposing it to a world I didn't think would be accepting of it, or worse, that it would somehow be distorted. And in some ways, it was. Friends asked me if I was sure I wasn't "just gay". They wondered if I was sure I wasn't just exploring or experimenting or bi-curious, which hurt more than they intended. My sexuality

wasn't decided on a whim, but rather something that took years of wrestling to warrant any sort of clarity. I grappled with it for so long that any beginning point is muddled, and to be met with the idea that someone else thought they could possibly have more lucidity on the matter was unsettling.

Ella drops me off at the dining hall on campus, kissing me goodbye before I leave her car. When we kiss, I'm unnerved by the complete absence of that magic feeling that I feel like every lesbian storyteller gushes about when they kiss a woman for the first time. I enjoy kissing her, she is soft and new, but it's not like it inspires this great epiphany in me or ignites some life-altering fire. It feels different than kissing a man, sure, but not necessarily better. Turns out, I found kissing a cute girl was just as pleasant as kissing a cute guy.

"Where did you disappear to today?" I'm snapped out of my introspection by Maya, who's much earlier to meet me at the dining hall than I was expecting.

My first instinct is to lie. "Oh, I was just studying with someone from my Bio class," I garble, knowing that there will be no way for Maya to verify my lie if I say I was with someone from class. The words feel slimy and I know they've come out too quickly to be convincing. I'm usually so much more poised in my lies, making sure I've got a solid story rehearsed in my head beforehand, but my thoughts are still jumbled from kissing Ella.

Maya's eyes narrow and it's clear to me that she's unconvinced. My stomach is knotting rapidly and I'm nervously running my thumb across the pads of my fingertips. She can see the lie on my face; I know she can see how dirty I am.

"Where did you guys study?" she pries, not wanting to let me off the hook that easily.

"Actually, that was a lie. Can we just drop it?" I push the words out more forcefully than I intend to, desperately wanting this conversation to be over. Maya reluctantly complies, and I can feel her curiosity breeding.

Ella is not the first girl I've loosely dated, but she is the first girl I am so close to being caught with. I live with the very people I'm so terrified to tell, and by extension I've come to be living constantly in the fear of being found out. My friends are well-intentioned in their curiosity of where I've

been lately; it's not like me to disappear without a word of where I'm going. When I leave to see Ella, my friends call me incessantly, but I feel like I'm in a separate world with her.

Ella is the only person who knows this side of me, she is the only person for which I allow myself the space to explore my identity in this way. What draws me back to her is not the person she is, but the person she allows me to be. Before meeting Ella, I had packed my sexual thoughts and feelings and fantasies about girls neatly into a box and tucked them away in a dusty corner of my mind, hoping that if I left it untouched for long enough, it would simply dissolve away. Not only did it not dissolve, it festered. I was haunted by its presence each time I saw a girl whose face I couldn't help but think of cradling between my palms.

But Ella gives me a safe space to rip back the packing tape and start to look inside. Even if by mere coincidence, she makes me feel like this part of myself isn't something to be ashamed of, and it is only when I am with her that I let my guard down. It feels like a sigh of relief; it feels like finally slipping off a pair of shoes two sizes too small after years of pinching into them.

I was haunted by its presence each time I saw a girl whose face I couldn't help but think of cradling between my palms.

Yet it's not all blissful freedom with Ella. When she touches me I want to pull her in and push her away. She tells me I am beautiful and I simultaneously feel butterflies and knots in my stomach. She has given me the ability to explore my sexuality, but in moments of internalized disgust for being this way I find myself overwhelmingly angry at her. Being with Ella makes my realization of my sexuality more concrete; it becomes something I can no longer actively deny. In retrospect, I am grateful for that, but as I was living it I was nothing shy of furious. I really believed it was herthat made

me into something so repugnant, so revolting. She was helping me to be more me, and I was absolutely fucking disgusted by it. I felt like I'd opened a can of worms and in moments of solitary weakness I sobbed and screamed and begged not to be like this.

I wake up to her arms wrapped around me. The light washes into her room, and I'm immediately aware of how hungover I am. I begin to piece together my blurry memories from the party the night before, trying to stitch together how I ended up back at Ella's apartment. I remember how magnetic she was in her all gold sequin dress and how badly I wanted to kiss her the moment I saw her. I remember sneaking away from our dates, stumbling into a bathroom stall together to make out and take shots from the flask I smuggled into the venue. I had never been so unafraid of being caught, which doesn't settle well with me now that I'm sober.

Ella notices me stirring and she blinks awake. "Good morning," she whispers, running her thumb across my cheek. I half smile back at her and sit up, my legs hanging off the side of her bed.

"I have to get going," I say, kneeling down to gather my dress and earrings from her bedroom floor. Ella sits up slowly as she runs her fingers through her knotted bed head.

"Oh, okay, I can drive you home," she replies, her voice heavy. I can tell she's upset by my urgency to go, but that doesn't quell my anxiety to leave.

I move closer to her and half-heartedly offer up an excuse, "I'm sorry, I would stay, I just have so much homework to do." She smiles and grabs my free hand, "That's okay, I understand. Let me drive you home."

I let her drive right up to my dorm when she drops me off, mostly just because a hungover crawl back from the dining hall doesn't sound ideal. As I pull back from her kissing me goodbye, she pulls me back in to kiss her again. When I disconnect from her only slightly, she gets closer and kisses me a third time. I can't help but break my somber mood with a flustered giggle.

"I'm sorry, I just really like kissing you," she says, her face so close to mine that I can feel her breath. I know it's wrong that I am the only one of us covered in shame.

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In the weeks to come, I sat by idly as my relationship with Ella tapered out, like when you put a lid on a candle and watch as the flame slowly dies. However complacent I may have been in letting our relationship go, I can't help but look back on our time together with a sweet fondness. She did not owe me the guidance she inevitably gave me. She opened up a part of me I could have spent so much longer keeping shut. Although I still find myself with only one foot out of the closet, Ella gave me the opportunity to crack open the door and let in some of the light from the other side.

It is still painful to feel like I am being pulled in two directions, tearing in the middle of my chest. It is baffling that I can simultaneously feel not straight enough and not gay enough, outcast to the biting cold between two worlds. I've spent far too long wishing I was not this way, wishing that I could commit to a side of the spectrum. How much easier that would be, how much time I would have saved not suppressing one half of myself in the hopes that it would fade away. More than anything else, I could have avoided the cloud of confusion from how murky my own sexuality felt.

Calling myself a quiet bisexual is not half as poetic as I make it to sound. It is not a delicate struggle, it is a painful silencing. I realize that my quiet bisexuality is born more of fear than it is from an inclination to keep my sex life personal. My self-erasure continues to be nourished by the belief that I can run from my sexuality until it grows tired and is left faraway from me. As that race drags on, it's becoming more evident that it is I who will soon tire of the constant running.

I know that I am living with only one foot out the door. But I refuse to discredit the years it took to pick the lock; I will not diminish how monumental it was to turn the knob and let in some of the light.

May each day open the door a little wider; may each day make my voice a little louder.

PLASTIC STARS

by DANIEL WORKMAN

Art by Iona Bruce

Resentment is a muddle of anger and love wrapped in confusion; it is heroin for the hurt.

For someone who loves the desert as much as I do, my relationship with her is relatively new—but with all the she has to offer, I am most captivated by her stars.

When the unknowns in life feel like too much to handle, I hold out for the idea of lying on the slick rock on a moonless night. With the heat of the sun still trapped in the rocks below, nurturing me like a warm embrace, I am able to take in light that is millions of years old.

It might be the stillness that gets me. Everything is so busy all of the time. A hike around Boulder often ends up in a shoulder-to-shoulder bottleneck at the trailhead. Constant chatter humiliates my capacity to reason. The front range is full of tourists.

In the desert, anyone who wishes to find their solitude can find it. There are some nights when the mesas are so still that it would be a crime to convolute the sweetness of their silence with a troublesome thought. I have no burdens in the desert. I don't recall a time that I've wronged someone or wished something was different. I see the lights winking playfully, as if they know how beautiful and coy they really are. They know that I seek answers, but they only ask me, "why?"

Stillness seems to be the most fleeting commodity I require. All of the people I love in my life want to help. They want to talk. They ask questions that I don't have answers for. They give me advice and tell me that God works in mysterious ways. "Everything happens for a reason", they say. They ask if I have tried to eat better, sleep more, or sleep less. There is an obsessive need to fix or help. They don't understand me like she does. I don't blame them. The desert is as sweet as she is indifferent. Her icy hugs will freeze the tears off your cheeks. She doesn't want anything from me, but I need her.

When I would get scared of the dark as a child, my big brother would make me a bed of blankets on his floor. Lying still on my back, I would study the plastic glow-in-the-dark constellations that occupied his ceiling, waiting for him to fall asleep. When the soft green glow from the stars eventually faded to darkness, I would stealthily slither into his bed. I was embarrassed, but he never complained.

Resentment is a muddle of anger and love wrapped in confusion; it is heroin for the hurt. My lust for it strengthens from prolonged exposure to the violence of busyness. Only time can heal the wounded and only stillness brings clarity. The sermons I hear fall on tired ears these days. Resolution is a goal for the resentful and only the resentful would seek resolve from the desert.

In the darkest hours that the desert has to offer, I seek out those familiar assemblages of light. I don't remember how I got there. I forget the resentment and the busyness. I don't remember that my brother is buried in the cold dirt I stumble upon. I pursue no solutions. I am still in the deserts arms as I watch the hum of the nights glitter refuse to fade into the darkness.

Art by Graciela Robertson

POOLING

by MELIA INGHAM

I feel the rain.

It trickles down my neck, my spine, it sticks to the hairs on my skin.

Each drop burns through, flows into my body, and pools in my feet, weighing me down.

Who am I?

"Honey."

"Baby cheetah."

The water fills the space under my kneecaps and pushes me forward. My shins hit the red carpet of a white room.

A young woman on her knees? Looking up to the sky? To the gods? To the man holding my hair back in his fist? A woman fresh out of the shower? A deflowered virgin? Still "Honey"?

It's at my collar bones now. Water strokes down my arms and fills my fingertips. An idea? A fantasy? A guest at The Hotel Boulderado? A lingerie owner, experimenting with a new concept: my body is mine?

The water is in my skull and I topple onto my back. The last bits of me fill with rain. It flows out of my mouth, eyes, and nose and pools around my body.

Who am I now?

A woman, skin and bone, under a white sheet. No place on her body yet to be touched. He gathers his socks.

Art by Aisha Ozaslan

NECROSIS

by LINDSAY KILLIPS

books cascade down shelving units, form mini-mountains on the floor. neurotransmitter molecular structures taped to the deep moss colored walls, pulse to the beat of the fan. frames that don't quite line up scatter the walls, display the doctor's years of education. the tiles in the ceiling are interrupted by sleeping light bulbs; my skin softens to the yellow hue whispering from the two floor lamps. here, i wait. left leg over right, right leg over left, then both soles quivering against the dark, melting-pot-of-indistinguishable-colors-carpet. his five-month waitlist seemed endless, yet it seems minuscule compared to the length of this day until two in the afternoon: drive to campus, nine a.m. class, ten a.m. class, lunch, homework, drive to his office. minutes morph to caterpillars, inching forward, reminding me how slow time can move. he is behind schedule. i wait with my heart mimicking the sound of the ocean; waves of blood ebb and flow, gush through my aorta, a symphony my ears will only break from when

my doctor slides the door open so gently that the hinges can't even scream; they remain asleep. the wood itself seems to usher him in, slowly revealing himself: shoes first—gym shoes, reebok maybe, jeans—faded blue, his fingers—dangling next to his thighs, and a shirt—haphazardly tucked in. booming like a volcano, he erupts his name—"dr. herman"—into the air with a smile.

his energy is invigorating. the way he spills his hands, like gushing lava, in front of mine, draws my spine from seeping into the back of the shadowy, floral print chair. when i extend my hand towards his, my palms seep sweat as if his waiting hand is magma. radiating heat hot enough to melt my skin. the sweat meets his cool, plump, sanitized hand, and i can no longer deny the truth of the matter—that i am sitting in a psychiatrist's office, and something is very, very wrong. he can hear it in my voice. the way my vocal cords tremble, try to turn my lips into upside down "n's" as i tell him my name. "lindsay" enters the air, unable to leave behind the tears rasping against the folds in my throat.

when he asks why i am here, my aunt's voice bubbles from somewhere in my head, reminds me, "don't tell him about the accident." but it slips out after he questions when i first noticed my add medication changing my mood. after the accident. once those words touched his ears, reality changed and i—i wasn't ready. without even a minute pause, he gives me a psychiatric disorder screening and a post-concussion screening, which ends in a phone call to a neurologist. he demands an immediate referral. honesty and uncertainty strewn across his eyes and bubbling softly from his lips made me, for the first time, want to pause time. to place reality on hold, let me catch up.

he asks me if i know what a bruise is; "broken blood vessels," i answer. "when your ex's truck hit the minivan, blood vessels broke," he continues. the way a tide builds far in the distance, barely past the horizon, he chooses his words carefully. he delicately summates each sentence, draws closer and closer to revealing a truth i have been denying. as if i am the shore and his words are waves that will inevitably crash atop me, ebb back with pieces of me i didn't know were fragile enough to break, get lost in his words, drawn into an abyss. he confirms i was covered in bruises for weeks after the accident. my skin looked

he delicately summate each sentence, draws closer and closer to revealing a truth i have been denying.

he tells me i may never; and that that is okay.

like the fourth of july's night sky, saturated in fireworks: black, blue, green, purple, and red. he softens his voice to match the light trickling from the floor lap, "your brain hit your skull at sixty miles per hour," and that was enough to hear, but he pauses while he types. he has a second monitor mirroring his screen so i can see, he is finding peer-reviewed articles about ehlers-danlos syndrome, the genetic disorder i wrote on my medical history form, and concussions. his voice interrupts his quick fingers, "your connective tissue wasn't structurally sound enough to cushion your brain." i look to the carpet, visualizing what he explains—my brain colliding into bone, breaking, bruising. i pick my chin up, to hear what i hope is his conclusion, that i have broken neurons; i am injured.

i meet his words with silence. once my muscles un-paralyze themselves, i blink. try to reabsorb the water pooling in my eyes. try to feign a strength i do not have. try to pretend i don't know the reality of what he just said. so, i ask dr. herman if i will ever be the same again, and as i hear each syllable, each sound, i drift into the silence in each pause. the last word of my question lingers in the air. leaves both our voices hidden in the back of our throats. the same way a dog cowers, scrunches back, teeth barred, hoping to fade into the horizon, but with tension surging through her body, waiting to defend herself.

he begins philosophically reaffirming the answer i know is coming, that after an accident no one is ever really the same. we let our words drift; i divulge that i haven't been able to put my feet on a dashboard since. he tells me i may never; and that that is okay. he tells me the accident will blend into my blood, circulate through my being, that as time goes, i will carry it on my red blood cells like hemoglobin, undetectable. expect for when it is not, the times when it will burst past my aorta, straight to my retina: like when i am forty-five and my daughter puts her legs on the dash while i drive her home; i will see myself in her skin; i will see brake lights; i will feel as hot at the coffee that drenched my skin after the collision, and i will throw her feet to the ground with such force she will instinctually plant her feet like aspen roots into the floor.

a nurse comes in. his next patient is here. the sorrow in the room pierces her, she begins to draw the door shut, saying she will hold him fifteen to thirty minutes. fifteen it turns out to be, to tell a nineteen-year-old she may have permanent brain

damage. his words feel like ice picks shoved into my ears, pierced down to my heart where they leave it in saturated in polka dots of punctures. his statement, like a branding, "i won't tell you something i don't know, but i can tell you, we will do our best to get you back to who you were before this. but you see…," is like cooling lava. it dries to my skin, crusts as i walk to my car, hardens as the front of my car eats the white lines all the way home. like a child afraid she hasn't been heard, my mind replays his words: "…the neurons ruptured, spilled out everything. we need to clean the debris."

debris. fragmented cells, shards of death bath my bruised brain. white knuckles strangle my steering wheel as the wind pouring through my open windows rush tears across my cheeks. i am entirely unprepared for this: a brain bruised the color of my july fourth skin—the fireworks refusing to diffuse and leave the sky blank once again.

the world has a saying it whispers to the broken, "time heals everything." i choke on the realization that time is simply a clock, each 360-degree rotation marking the permanence of the damage. time is not a savior. more troubling, is the fact that i will live pending, alongside the perpetual ticking of the clock, to find out if the damage is permanent. it will be like a volcano: a violent eruption will leave blood like melted rock rivers inside of me, scatter what i stored within my cells, my core, across my cerebral spinal fluid as if it is an ocean. glial cells will swoon like ash, try to repair the injury. still alive neurons will fire signals, perpetually activated, as if they are snakes racing their death from surging magma. the ruby rivers will turn black as the air swallows its heat; an island will be left. life will grow, turn tar into forests, beaches will blossom as rock disintegrates into shore, leave the trauma that formed it nearly forgotten.

two years later, the clock continues to make its rounds. i wake up early enough to see the sun turn the sky blue each morning, and i stay awake until her eyes are too heavy, and she gathers her rays, falling asleep behind the horizon. i go through the motions of life with something just slightly off, like a countercurrent patiently drawing me away from where i left my towel on the shore and entered the water. each morning as i get ready with the sky leaving behind its darkness, i find the damage whispering good morning to me. its voice is the pain stretching across my head, behind my eyes, encompassing my skull; is the way i reach out and miss the refrigerator handle, forget where i put my cup, forget that it always wasn't like this. its voice is the swallowing sound made as the pill dr. herman tells me i will likely take for the rest of my life sails down my trachea every morning and night.

"i don't want to put you on mood stabilizers. you don't have bipolar; you are injured," he reaffirms my sanity assuring me all of this is just post-concussion syndrome. it's an amino acid precursor, nac; it washes the waste from my brain, scavenges for rubble still swimming inside of me as if it is a catfish. fireworks explode and leave a haze in the sky, but the next afternoon, it is gone, dissipated throughout the atmosphere. my body struggles to do the same, and now i have a haze of fragmented cells and neurotransmitters swimming in my head like an oil spill far too immense to clean myself.

but the nac cannot repair everything. two years later, i sit on black leather at an eye doctor, waiting, because the headaches have clung to me with the same strength, i used to clench my steering wheel with. a ninety-minute appointment wraps me in loose hugs; the neuro-optometry tests force me to see that my eyes cannot do just that, see. the deficit list leaves me on the phone with my mom, swallowing tears as i tell her each problem they found—neglect syndrome, muscle spasms, misaligned eyes, improper tracking, cracks in my visual pathways. it took two years to gather the courage to face the eye doctor, to face the broken axons from my optic nerve to my occipital, partial, temporal lobes, to face the mirror with glasses. seven-hundred-and-thirty days to absolve myself of the guilt i carried buried in my muscles like lead, because i remember waking up in the accident, slumped over my own body, asking whatever god there is to take me with the sleeping sun into the horizon. because i would rather float with the stars than be different, look different. and here i am, looking the same, but with eyes that cannot see the world the same. at nineteen, i was not ready to learn that the body can shatter from the inside out and still manage to carry on. in an anatomy and physiology course, i learn the body excels at adapting to stress; it wants to survive. it will find a way to regain homeostasis. the body is resilient.

at twenty-one, i put my glasses on, i drive to visual rehabilitation, i go to school, i go to work, i realize that healing does not mean the absence of cracks. healing is letting my wounds have frayed threads and still bleed at times, but to rinse the slowly sealing scars in alcohol, let it burn until it is sanitized. wrap the injury in honey and gauze, take a break. scar tissue anchors at the wound, no longer injured, but not the same as it once was. it is more than it has ever been; i am more than i have ever been. the weight of trauma and the weight of repair unite; the body heals.

Art by Aisha Ozaslan

KILLING COMPASSION

by WILL BLEVINS

I sat at the table studying my half empty bowl of mac and cheese: small, tubular noodles mixed with bright yellow liquid cheese. Kraft. The clock on the wall ticked, ticked, ticked; I heard my food returning to room temperature. I wasn't that hungry anymore, but I didn't want to leave the table. Mom, now on her way home from work, just finished calling to let us know that she left Richmond. The sounds of a Wednesday night dominated the house; the sounds of my dad cleaning the kitchen competed with the PBS News Hour's coverage of something far away. At the sound of footsteps coming up the front stairs, I sprang to my feet in order to play my almost daily game: opening the door before my mom had a chance to unlock it. The door swung open, revealing my mom's exhausted looking face. I gave her a big hug and she kissed me on the forehead. My superhero mom returned from the hospital, surely having saved lives that very day. She went to the kitchen to see my dad while I returned to my seat. Unbeknownst to them, my ears had become adept at detecting adult conversation; I usually knew how my mom's day went before she even told me. I listened

to the uncharacteristically hushed conversation in the other room. “Everything ok?” my dad asked her. Silence. The pause in conversation dominated even Jim Lehrer’s booming voice coming from the TV. “I lost a patient on the table today.”

Surgery, one of the most difficult jobs in the world, requires years of study and practice simply to hold the scalpel over a real patient. Behind the scenes, however, surgeons have an even tougher job; one that they can’t escape just by driving home. In “The Knife,” Richard Selzer writes: “The carapace of the turtle is his fortress and retreat, yet keeps him writhing on his back in the sand. So is the surgeon rendered impotent by his own empathy and compassion. The surgeon cannot weep. When he cuts the flesh, his own must not bleed (Selzer 53).” Surgeons must remain in control of their emotions at all times due to the of the intensity of their job. A surgeon who grows a connection with a patient before surgery will feel every incision they make during the procedure. Excessive emotional attachment to a patient can render a surgeon helpless, like a turtle on its back. Every surgeon must have the ability to suppress their own compassion before compassion kills their patient.

Only the best can fully put aside their fears of harming the person lying in front of them.

A surgeon meets their patient, often multiple times, before a surgery in order to discuss the procedure. Often times, they must reassure and comfort the patient. Yet despite their words of comfort, a surgeon always knows that something could go wrong. Only the best can fully put aside their fears of harming the person lying in front of them. A surgeon must do their best to smother the compassion they feel for their patient, ideally seeing them not as a person who needs help, but as a

procedure to execute, for one cannot feel loss if one does not feel an attachment. Some find it impossible to engage in one of the most intimate acts, the invasion and manual manipulation of someone’s body, and not feel compassion for the person whose life lies on a table before them. My mom and Selzer, both world-class in technical skill and knowledge, lack the cold emotionlessness of the perfect surgeon.

Growing up as the son of a surgeon, I saw the burden that these physicians carry firsthand. My mom often described surgery as fun, like solving a human puzzle. Sometimes, though, her job seemed like it required more than just solving puzzles. My mom told me of a nightmare she had a couple times where she had to operate on me or my sister. I never understood what horrified her so much about that dream; if I needed an operation, I would have surely wanted my mom holding the knife. Why would someone have such a problem solving a puzzle that they already know?

To operate on a loved one is to perform the impossible operation.

I pondered this question for some time until I realized what Selzer articulates in his writing. In “An Absence of Windows,” Selzer has to perform surgery on a friend, but inadvertently speaks his name out loud while offering words of comfort. He writes: “I should not have spoken his name aloud! No good will come of it. The syllable has peeled from me something, a skin that I need.” By stating his friend’s name, Selzer admits his attachment to him, exposing himself to the emotional burden of operating on a friend and endangering his own performance. Surgery requires objective thinking, without irrational fears and thoughts present to dull the surgeon’s scalpel. Seeing a loved one on the operating table would strip a vulnerable surgeon of

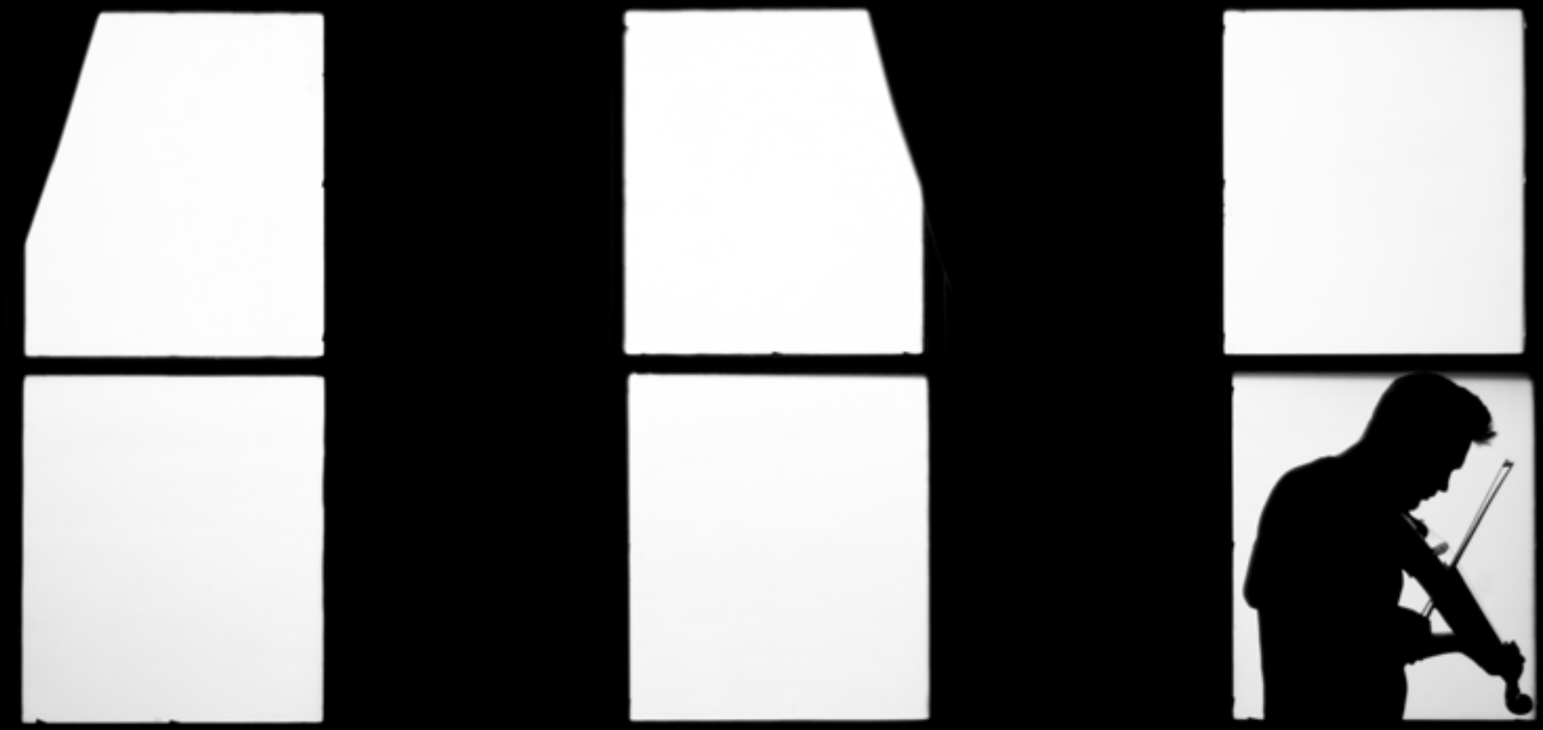
their protective skin, exposing them to emotions and feelings that would ultimately overwhelm any rational thought. To operate on a loved one is to perform the impossible operation.

My mom often showed me and my sister pictures of the results of some of her operations. Often times, a blob of red tissue sat, lifeless, neatly positioned next to a ruler for scale. The most memorable photo featured my mom cradling a massive red, bulbous tumor as one holds a baby, her blood-stained scrubs juxtaposed with her warm, familiar smile. My mom's knowledge and passion for the human body blew my mind as a kid. I never knew anyone who loved their job more and seemed more fulfilled. My mom, a superhero in my young mind, always came home excited to tell me about her day.

But, that one day, the illusion of her invincibility collapsed. She lost a patient that day, something I thought impossible. Nobody dies at my mom's hands. She clearly thought the same. She looked tired: her eyes betrayed the exhaustion that follows hours of stressful surgery, her posture revealing just how long her day had gone. No doubt she had just finished the longest ride home she'd ever had when I ran to open the door. She didn't tell me what happened at work that day, though I figured it out anyway.

a light that
I could have
never imagined
at the time.

Realizing my mom's imperfection made me uncomfortable, my young brain grappling with my discovery of my parents' vulnerability. I still don't know the full story behind the surgery. Maybe my mom undertook an impossible procedure, setting herself up for failure in an ill-fated attempt to save the man's life. Maybe she just made a mistake. Whatever happened, it shook my mom up more than I had ever before seen. I saw her in a light that I could have never imagined at the time. She no doubt had a long night that night, thinking about what she could have done, thinking about the person that she had spoken to moments before they closed their eyes for the last time. That would disturb anyone. But, thinking back upon reading Selzer's work, I realized that this instance, though seemingly a moment of weakness, demonstrates my mom's prowess as a surgeon. The next day, as the PBS News Hour played on the TV, I opened the door to her usual smile, her confidence restored.



Art by Daniel Workman

PORTRAIT OF A HOUSE IN THE WOODS

by CAMERON MARKUSON

I am in the musty house, with my two brothers,
Mold grows up through the carpet,
My Grandmother is here.
She stays locked away in the bedroom unless we call her.
Light pours in through the windows,
Throws itself onto our pale faces.

We walk around the lawn incessantly
Circling the house over and over.
Grandma only sees us as we pass by her window,
Cast her a glance,
She looks up from her book
With a blank stare
And curlers in her thin grey hair.

The driveway is overgrown.
Trucks barrel down the two-lane highway
But Grandma can't hear them from her room,
The birches and the barren maples are in the way.
Blanketed in damp air,
We sweat with the trees.

The shade covers her portion of the house
So that the only sun she sees has been distorted,
Bent into reflections by the greenery.
But she loves the shadows.
She cannot stand the heat of an open field
And neither can we.
Conjoined to our lowly patch of woods,
Our blood is thick with its rust colored dirt
And its rising water line
And the decaying white bench
Which has been swallowed by the lake.

Art by Daniel Workman

THE YOKE

by AMANDA LEJEUNE

My mother was a roamer. My father never roamed. His ethnicity, his Acadian-French accent and his poorly funded schooling funneled his path directly into the only living wage he could provide for his growing family in the 1980's and 90's: trade-work. It enslaved him to a merciless cycle of grind and paucity for most of his life—an enslavement that I have seen leave many disgruntled men in its wake for what it took from them. For when Eve was condemned to the bearing of children, that bull shaped organ called her womb that would bare her pain evermore, Adam was in turn condemned to toil in labor, his existence reduced to that of an oxen; the fate of the bull.

Jimmy was a welder for an oil piping company who worked "six on and two off" or some other cruel combination that involved a sizable weld shop cloistered in the southeast Texas countryside. The field he found himself in for so many years had its share of stubborn hands that slowly and dreadfully exhausted the fuel from their barrels. These were steers captured in a field that deprived them of the use of their own numinous will and sense of direction. The shop had no air-conditioning. The large

fans the company did place on the perimeters only blew the hot air through the workspace where the men could be found toiling: meat-hands slugging away on doglegs. The afterthought was more offensive than the heat. It would have been better if they had pretended to forget about the temperature. In the summers the heat became so exasperating it was inhumane. The money itself was always "a dime wide and a nickel high." For over twenty-five years this is where he labored from either 3am to 3pm or 3pm to 3am. His home hours were diminished to much needed sleep and food so that he could restore himself for yet another round of work. How he did it I will never know, but the effects of this sacrifice rippled through the lives of those whose sustenance depended on the misery of this caged and burdened body. The ripples reverberated like the polluted river streams coursing under the old iron bridge at the edge of town. A current that twisted tides of both internal pain and external poise through all of us—and that had to keep moving or die.

From the time I was a small child until I left home for good, I saw these ripples in colors. In fact, I always saw life in color. The rays of sorrow would solder through the windowpanes of our timeworn house and somehow bathe our lives in blue. One image scorched into my memory is my father's jet-black hair, slate blue eyes, and strong but slumped shoulders at the head of our table while the sun danced into twilight on the evening of his fortieth birthday. The fixed look of sorrow on his face as he stared through the bluest of windows during my baby's breath teenage life smelted me from ore to core. The desperate search for something innocent lost. The internal rage of something precious taken. The anger was borne like the densest of sandbags that caused him to stomp when he walked—the kind of anger that could only lift in tragic displays within the walls of our small wood-framed house. I cannot forget the iron he both mustered up into will and smashed into day after day. I cannot forget the heat on his clothes that nearly burned my skin when my brother and I would run up to hug him. I still remember the smell of dirt and metal and combined sweat. That was his signature smell. Over the years I would see him pace throughout the house, walking himself to the front door which had a small opening placed at the top of it. He would sometimes spend hours staring out the tiny window—a man and a fixed gait. You could feel the quiet desperation as he looked out from his prison cell. It was as if he was immovable; a bull permanently stuck in his thoughts, mouthing frustrations to himself—fighting through the delirious exhaustion. He was distant most of the time, unable to connect because of the ever-brewing anger and resentment. Yet after the red muleta had passed we could catch spare moments of his humor and softness which we would readily savor as children. Jimmy was a man under the full weight of the yoke with his mind as his only refuge. The most vital decades of his adult life were tragically confined and yet as catholic as the church he rigorously prayed to for deliverance.

…a "golden arm" with a "poor fit-up,"

…a "fish-eye" of steel blue that never cried.

Saint Joseph the worker was his favorite. The soil where we lived was so dark and fertile. Dark like the lives we were given and fertile like the ones we hoped to live. It rained so often that year after year, our summers were immersed in thunderstorms and tropical depressions. Over time it wore through us as we learned to love the heavy pounding of rain on our shoulders and the rumble of thunder coursing through our bodies. The pounding of the storms was the pounding of our hearts. The smell of salt in the air before the sky broke was the fragility of our hope and the anticipation that relief might come to us. We will have some alleviation: we can smell it. The weight of the fat drops of rain was the pestle in the

It was people that made life entertaining.

mortar of the world that pummeled us into the soil…until we became the soil we toiled in. And yet levity did come to us. It came to us in the most fertile and peaceful of ways…a way that evoked the primeval egalitarian way of life that depended only on nature for its sustenance. Like all good Acadians we drifted out onto our porches with family when the sky finally fell and the rain came down. We drew together to watch it, muttering the same phrases over freshly made coffee and while sitting quietly or gently rocking in our chairs.

"We need da rain…"

"It's comin' down now, yeah…"

Stories about weather, floods, hurricanes and such were always exchanged first, as they were always the most memorable of shared experiences. There were stories about which families evacuated to where, who lost what job and how high the water came up that year. This was our creative way of harvesting family time. It was the time to tell stories, to talk about important matters, to make clever jokes and to sarcastically goad each other on. These spontaneous little gatherings were where I also learned that you're not really Acadian-French until you've learned that your truest inherited pastime was to hone your skills and wit – and become a fully-fledged professional bullshitter. With flair. It was people that made life entertaining. If you could convey a story well, you were listened to with quiet adherence. However, if you could tell it while being a smart-ass, this made you a cherished member of the family. So, the discussions and the thunderstorms carried on. As children we always hoped it would last a little longer since we thirsted for more time listening to the adults tell us about serious matters. We knew somehow that we grew from them. We absorbed their tone. We matured from the way they reasoned and recounted their experiences. We developed ourselves by witnessing with attentive quietude how the conversations were tilled and seasoned carefully by the adults as if they knew they were nourishing soil. The rumbles and mumbles carried on, weaving that pattern in the family tapestry that only families know. It drenched and enriched it from the deepest roots, those fundamental needs we all share; which the entire idea of family is there to serve, to the shoots of the tree, which are the little idiosyncrasies that make your family genus personally yours. My mother's distinctive laugh and unfailing mention that she had "gypsy blood". My older brother, John, and

his personal stories that made our sides hurt at what would have been the most mundane life events to anyone else. My younger brother Theodore playing his guitar and budding in a joke every so often; perfectly timed. My oldest sister Jean's unapologetic incursion on the world…our ability to laugh at our sorrow…our ability to offer each other compassion rather than pity…and how we skillfully learned how to put the "fun" in the dys-function of our family circumstances. The secret we carried with us was that all of this proficiently honed bullshitting wasn't just our way of coping or enriching ourselves with what we were given—but a way of shitting back on the bull. In the small huddle of slowed time, a reaffirmation of values came into being that was beyond the yoke and its gruesome demands on us and on our lives. A herd that relied on each other for survival had gathered in its congregation and declared communal defeat of the beast. When the rain eventually let up, we would retreat back into the house for more coffee or whatever small leisure we had access to. We were revived somehow and grounded; ready to plow on. Yet some of us could never hold the cruel weight of the yoke for too long.

We matured from the way they reasoned and recounted their experiences.

My mother was a wanderer in every sense of the word. Despite the threats to her survival, she never allowed the beast to chain her. She simply could not bear its breath. If she were cornered in a windowless room, she would somehow squeeze through the peephole to escape its rude demands on her unconquered yet fragile spirit. She wandered in mind, in creative impulse, and eventually, from street to street. I suppose when a poet cannot defeat the beast by sheer will as my father tried to do, then the only other option is to resort to the wildest forms of creative abandon. Perhaps this was her way of attaining her freedom. You cannot pin a moving bullseye. Life cannot emit suffering unto something that suffers itself unto life. I read that the bull has been with us since ancient times. I read that it has been both an object of worship, and a symbol of material power, along with its symbolic manifestations of servitude. The ancient Romans after slaying their enemies in battle for example, would make conquered peoples walk under beams as a symbolic representation that they must now pay tithes and submit to Rome's authority. They called it "walking under the yoke." John of Patmos had a lot to say about the bull in all of its material power as the root of all evil. Given what I have seen and felt throughout my life I can't say I disagree with him. I think of my father and his willful consternation in the face of his grueling life-long bondage. I think of my own life experiences of working two or three jobs since the age of fifteen for very little gain and few moments that edified or nourished me the way I needed to be nourished. Scrubbing floors and toilets, exhaustive late nights, hours of awful Clear Channel music that should be classified as a mild form of insanity, soulless corporate environments that bound and stretched my personality into a caricature lest I be deemed "not a fit" and therefore "fired" (as if I had the option to go somewhere else that would be different than their special set of dehumanizing corporate demands). I think of the environments that pull on all of us and provoke us when our sustenance could just as easily be gained in plentitude working alongside family and loved ones, tilling and enriching our own soil and educating ourselves in our leisure. Creatures cultivating goods, waged by their own hands, transforming them into profits. In fact, I say with all the satisfaction I can muster in my soul that I resent the bull with the most brazen of contempt. I relish in the molten ball of fire it has ignited in my soul that cannot be extinguished. For it has taken more from me and those I love than death ever could. I have seen it drag my authentic core through its mud. I have felt it stomp out the essence from me. I have smelt its shit. And so like my mother, the roamer, I will creatively craft another path—one the illustrious beast cannot track or follow. And like my father, the welder, I will craft my metal carefully in this molten core. I will eye my oxygen levels, keeping my hands still and steady. I will muster my iron will to withstand the brutality of the heat on my burdened body, and you may watch me craft my swords with the utmost care. I will slay the beast in my father's honor. I will celebrate with my mother's creative flair. I will not set myself fixed lest the beast catch me. I will learn and therefore adapt; lest the beast tempt me with its degrading conveniences and expediencies. I will enrich my life in ways the world has not yet thought of. I will nourish myself beyond the yoke with wit and poetry, so making it my servant. I will roam. ☙

Art by Casey Messke

WHEN MINDS BECOME LAND MINES

by ASHLEY MALLET

I sit with my hands in my lap playing with the remnants of what were my nail beds at one point, gnawed off earlier in the day as I sat through my astronomy lecture. I glance at the walls. Degrees and certificates of psychology adorned in gold frames litter the eggshell paint, and I hear the faint trickling of the small fountain that sits on the desk.

"Did school go better today?" I'm asked. My therapist is a short woman. Her hair is cropped short as well, paired with a small nose and contrasting oversized glasses. Her glass of chamomile is perched on the stool next to her, the tea bag string still draped over the edge. "I guess. It's pretty much the same thing every day," I respond, "it's just this numb feeling and I get that lump in my throat and I can't think." I can't think. My words trail off and become quieter as I near the end of my answer. No one likes hearing themselves talk aloud of how they went from a promising and confident human being to barely feeling human at all. My fingers grip into the fabric of the couch I'm sitting on. My knuckles go white. I feel myself sinking and the tight grasp on the chair is the only thing that's keeping me above ground. It feels

like gravity is crushing me into the floor and squeezing my lungs and chest until breathing turns into tears welling up in my eyes.

There's this vivid memory that haunts me every time I find myself in her office - the one that convinced me that I needed to seek this place out at all. It's constricting and monstrous and wraps its deathly grip around my throat every time it crosses my mind. A few weeks ago, when A Series of Unfortunate Events had begun to feel more like the past three months instead of the series of novels, I had gotten a phone call from my mother as I was driving home one night.

The evening sky was washed out by a flood of street lights lining the highway and I could make out the faint line that separated the trees from the horizon. I had been playing an emotionally depleting game of hide and seek with my anxiety and I was losing. Badly. No matter how fast I drove, how long I hid under the covers, or how much I talked with friends, it was racing to catch up with me.

The twenty-five minute drive back to the hotel I had been living in was spent reflecting on a wonderful day with my boyfriend at the time. Hours of laughing as we made hot chocolate, curled up in a puddle of blankets, and watched movies sat at the forefront of my mind. As I said, though, anxiety's good at its game. As I sped towards the not-so-safehouse that was the hotel, it trailed after me, stopping for nothing. Through red lights and traffic, it assaulted the driver's seat of my car. It gripped my throat. It wrapped itself around my spinal cord and slithered up into my brain. My eyes glazed and I was unable to see the road and the tree line that almost blended seamlessly into the dark sky. I saw an opportunity. I saw I was driving on a bridge. I saw the only control I had left resided in the two hands shaking on the wheel.

My mom had been on the phone this whole time listening to me talk through my day. Now hearing my voice become unsteady and quiet, she jumped, realizing I hadn't yet conquered the devilish thing that haunted my past four months.

"Ash? Are you having another attack? Say something back please, okay? Let's breathe. Ready? Inhale…"

That afternoon, the hot chocolate, the movies, the smiling, the unexpectedly warm weather and sunshine that poured through the windows - it was gone. Absent from my thoughts. I heard my mother's voice on the other end of the phone but the anxiety strangled mine. Unable to talk, I sobbed into the phone, only pausing to desperately try to catch my breath which only resulted in hyperventilating.

I had been playing an emotionally depleting game of hide and seek with my anxiety and I was losing.

"Yes… I can't…breathe… I can't stop crying. It hurts. I just wanna go," I uttered in a series of breaths and tears.

"Go where honey? Where do you need to go?"

I didn't have the heart to tell her where my consciousness had in mind.

Just one jerk of the wheel.

"Let's get your mind off of it, okay? Let's think about the future. Let's think about all the good times when you make it through this..."

She started down the topic of futures and she had asked me, "Well, where do you see yourself in five years?" As I thought through my response, I began to feel this sensation that could only be described as a rock tied to my foot as I was left for dead in open water. I finally spoke up:

"Mom… I can't see… I don't even see myself existing in five years."

That was the day my mind collapsed for the last time and I couldn't pull it back up. I let it defeat me. I hit my rock bottom.

The concepts of anxiety and depression are so familiar to those who have experienced it, yet so unworldly to those who haven't. Sixteen million Americans suffer from a major depressive episode during a year. That's an awfully large community, and though I'm surrounded by a country full of people that are being crippled by the same corrosive pain, I find it so ironic that I feel so… alone. I myself struggled with the idea that someone wouldn't want to experience this life. I was happy then. I was bubbly and enthusiastic and wrapped warmly in the security blanket of high school, complete with guidelines and structure and youthful aspirations that kept me safe from a bigger world.

My therapist had developed a routine for most of our sessions: ask about the week, add a bullet to my exponentially growing list of self-care acts, sketch some wild drawing on the whiteboard about how my anxiety was infringing upon my life, and telling me to meditate. I tug at my baseball cap, shading my eyes more from her view.

My hat has become a signature of my typical ensemble I've been sporting lately, including an oversized hoodie, leggings, and a bare face without a trace of makeup. It's important to note that depression takes its heinous form not only within the confines of the mind, but on the physical shell as well. It's difficult to tell what goes first, the brain or the appearance; it's a classic chicken or the egg scenario. Regardless, as this disease sinks its claws deeper

into my skin, its coaxed out of my body, like a hard coating, that stiffens around my frame and constricts me, to the extent of not being able to even take a breath without feeling pain and restraint. I become a body of stone, reflected in clothing that is big and bulky and concealing. It shields me from the world around me in such a way that I can't connect with it.

"Breathe in. Breathe out." My therapist begins the process of trying to get me to meditate. Her voice fluctuates as she repeats the mantra. A higher pitch as she instructs me to inhale and lowering as she asks to exhale. I've always been an insomniac. Going to sleep is a sport: hard work, focus, and dedication. The lights shut off, the phone gets plugged in, and I hit the pillow, holding my eyes shut tightly, and desperately fighting to turn my brain off. The endeavor lasts several hours while I'm at war with the inner workings of my anxiety-ridden mind. It's a similar experience during meditation. Slowly, I begin to slip off into the grey unconscious of a relaxed state.

"You are in a calm space. You feel safe. Take your worries and your problems and pull them outside of your body. What do they look like?" I hate this exercise. It's too cliché.

"Abstract… red?"

She asks me to imagine a container to place them in.

"A crate…"

"Place the abstract red in the crate. Does it need anything else?"

"Chains and a lock."

"The crate is locked in chains. Does it need anything else?"

"Bury it."

This office feels like the only place I can abandon my day-to-day dread, so if I'm only able to escape them in the imaginations of my half-asleep brain, I want my problems as far away from me as metaphorically possible. Despite my hesitation to play along with my therapist's game, I walk away from my anxieties, now shoveled ten feet under the bedrock of my subconscious, feeling temporarily at ease. The next step in her exercise has always been more well-received by me.

She asks me to leave the grave at my back and to walk away. On the horizon, she instructs me to imagine a scenario where I was truly at peace. I take myself home, to my old stomping grounds, reimagined to get a front row seat to view the best qualities of my favorite subconscious escape. I set my sights on the North Carolina skyline, now transforming into a watercolor

Going to sleep is a sport: hard work, focus, and dedication.

Their canopies merge with one another above us, allowing just enough sunlight to bleed through to create haloes of light that dot the drive.

masterpiece of greens on canvas. Hunter, sage, olive, kelly green, they mingle in the clear blue of the skies, molding themselves into the leaves of tall and strong oak, maple, and poplar trees. Dark brown trunks stretch down from the leaves, their roots hugging the ground, which is sprouting into meadows, and fields of tobacco and cotton as far as the eye can see. I close my eyes, allowing myself to feel the humidity seep into my skin. To most, it's a dreaded concept. Walking outside into a sauna, dripping in sweat. I treasure the southern air though. It's part of home. My eyes remain shut as I take a deep breath of the warm air. Sweetened by the morning rain, it brings the dogwood flowers to life, filling my nose with the smell of summer. The cardinals sing their tune across the fields and are answered by their counterparts in the trees nearby. The warblers and limpkins chime in, inspired by the chirps, creating a symphony of birdsong melodies.

I open my eyes and the trees on the horizon begin to slide closer into view. The grass under my feet brushes past my legs faster and faster and folds down morphing into black asphalt. The yellow dashes on the pavement slip under me at an increasing rate and metallic panels rise from the ground, surrounding me, and meet in the middle to form a large window framing my view of the road, now clearly visible. Grey fabric climbs up my back and lifts me up. I'm sitting in a car. The passenger seat to be specific, of my childhood best friend's Hyundai Sante Fe. The trees race by the open windows and the cardinal song is muted by the radio. Lauren's hands rest loosely on the wheel and she encourages me to jokingly sing along to the only station that Garner has to offer on Sunday afternoons besides eighties throwbacks: bluegrass. We continue to drive down the familiar backroads towards town. A thick string of trees creates a green border outlining the winding road. Their canopies merge with one another above us, allowing just enough sunlight to bleed through to create haloes of light that dot the drive.

We reach town and wrap around a small building into a drive-thru. Complete with a parking spot for the mayor and rocking chairs out front, Lorraine's Coffee House is the perfect local hangout. Hearing the accent through the speaker as we order is refreshing and taking the first sip of our mochas we religiously pick up every time I come into town sets me at ease, that is, besides the caffeine kicking in. There's something about mom-and-pop, hole-in-the-wall restaurants that makes me smile. The small but prideful success of a small business that greets everyone with their

first names and regular orders is nothing short of sublime. We pull away from the window, straws to our lips, waving goodbye to the workers. Back through the tree-lined streets, wind tangling my hair as I lay back in my seat, playfully whipping it in loops, we head towards Benson.

Benson houses the building blocks of my childhood, manifested in the form of a lake and a park. The car slows as it rolls over the stones into a dirt lot. The car doors are swung open and we make our way down the sidewalk towards the picnic tables. We pass the landmarks of my youth: the curb I scraped my knee on after falling off my bike, the view from the perfect break in the trees where you can see the fireworks on the fourth of July ripple across the lake, the hours spent running around the swings and playing mindless games on the playground. Water droplets well up on the side of our cups and drip onto our hands as we stroll through the heat to the tables. We prop ourselves up on the tabletop and rest our feet on the bench, nearing the end of our coffees. I share a "remember when" story and she chuckles, adding in her perspective of the tale. We look off into the brush on the other side of the clearing. The sun stands alone in a cloudless sky and the last of the children at the park abandon the slide and run back to the car as their mother calls for them to go home for lunch.

Lauren's coffee cup hits the table as her arm shoots back up in front of her, and her fingers point out to the edge of the forest. I squint and lift my hand up to block the glare from the sun, and direct my eyes towards trees.

"He's back!"

Benson is best known for a purely white deer that makes its rare appearances from time to time. He's beautiful. I fix my eyes on the deer as he moves through the tree line. How familiar it feels to see a creature that is so confident in its surroundings, yet living in a life filled by paranoia. It is a widely known fact that deer are wary of humans, cars, and loud sounds. They hide from their predators and conceal themselves within the brush at the first sign of danger, but he can't mask himself in the trees. He is the definition of sticking out like a sore thumb. It's honestly a miracle he's even lasted this long. He turns his head sharply in our direction. He freezes. It's strange the similarities I feel between him and I. Both sitting at the bottom of the food chain, waiting for life to take its toll, bracing for impact. The deer begins to walk

again, slowly lifting his feet, and strategically placing them on the ground before him. Every movement he makes, my muscles tense with his. I feel my anxiety trickling up my spine. How does he live a life of insecurity with such courage? He doesn't fight to find his purpose. It doesn't matter if he knows it or not. He lives a life of simplicity and peace in the forests of Benson. He doesn't concern himself with entertaining the stress that the future holds. He neglects trying to grasp the concept of death, the concept of love, or of his place in the world. Despite his short life, and without the dreams of big cities, and passing classes, and other humanly aspirations that deer obviously seem to lack, he lives in an existence of freedom and bliss. He flaunts his white coat with the assurance of a king, and takes the fear of the unknown with stride and ease. I envy that.

I envy his happiness.

I envy his strength.

I envy his persistence.

I envy his inability to overthink. Overthink. Overthink. Overthink. Overthink. Overthink.

He'll get shot. His fate will be sealed by an untimely death caused by a man with a shotgun. I bet the man already has the perfect place picked out on his wall to display his trophy. A forest fire could engulf his home before the hunter even gets to him. His family would be ripped away. He could be all alone. All alone. Like me. Sixteen million people, I mean deer, and… and he's still all alone.

Like me.

"Breathe in. Breathe out."

The colors of my subconscious contort back into their previously watered down state, and I am brought back into my painful reality confined by the walls of the office, trapped in my oversized hoodie and hat shielding my confused and teary eyes. I look down at my hands. My nail beds are torn and bleeding.

Art by Yvonne Krumrey

by MADELYN SALVUCCI

I park my car a 21-minute walk from my apartment.
She sits uneasily on a frontage road
and on each side loom aging houses, born with my grandparents.
In the darkness, their windows feel like eyes watching.
Waiting.
Hungry.

Most nights, I arrive after safe people sleep.
I work late, then I drive back, and I park 21 minutes from where I need to go
because I'd trade my life for free parking.
I shoulder my backpack and its exhausting weight.
Luckily, textbooks can't be stabbed through.
I trudge down a dark path
only the ghost of a streetlight
21 feet away
to light my feet.

I cross through a tunnel under the highway
with car keys gripped in my fist, a makeshift shank.
My self-defense teacher told me to go for the eyes if anything happens,
you can stab anything into someone's eyes.
I bought myself pepper spray, but keys
Keys feel like the strongest weapon.

My mom and dad came up to check for danger
before they let me walk it at night.
They came up from Denver.
They needed to make sure no men hid
in dark corners where they lie in wait
for some innocent young college girl to walk past for them
to take away and take and harm and murder and steal and rape.

And it didn't stand up to their scrutiny.
A tunnel,
whose lights flicker like those in a horror movie,
of course, I'm not safe.
They armed me with a combat flashlight,
told me never to walk with headphones,
I need to hear if some creep comes up behind me,
I need to protect myself.
And to appease their desire to know I'm not dead every night
I text my brother at home, watching Grand Theft Auto livestreams,
and try to joke that
"I'm headed to the tunnel of doom"
"If you don't hear from me in 20 minutes, send help".

As I walk through the damp tunnel,
footsteps echoing
a cold chill seeping through my clothing
Keys in one hand
flashlight in the other
checking around every corner
as though all that could protect me.
I think,
at least I don't live near the frats
where danger hands you drugged drinks with a smile,
where women protest on Baseline, signs aloft that say
"In the month of Oct @ CU…
6 women threatened by men with guns
5 reported druggings of women
21 women allegedly drugged at Sig Pi this weekend"
and safety comes from worshipping potential danger
when
research shows:
fraternity members think that "no" means "yes"
and believe women offer "token resistance" before sex
more than men free from this culture of turning women
into little more than objects that never mean "no[1]".

1Canan, Sasha N., et al. "Sexual Assault Supportive Attitudes: Rape Myth Acceptance and Token Resistance in Greek and Non-Greek College Students From Two University Samples in the United States." Journal of Interpersonal Violence, vol. 33, no. 22, 2016, pp. 3502–3530., doi:10.1177/0886260516636064.

As I shudder in thinking of seizing lights
soundwaves punching
bodies undulating primordially
and an all-consuming smile.
My darkness and silence
and the warming metal in my hand
a soft and heavy blanket.
At least I don't have to walk past the frats.

I glimpse a shadow sulking through the brushes
and my heart leaps
because the world warned me
they might kill me
they will kill me or worse, touch me.

I stand tall to not look like a victim.
They say when faced with bears you should make yourself bigger;
in my youth, my music teacher told me it works on rapists too,
but this shadow has no gothic teeth or fur matted with blood.
I could deal with that.
But this. True horror. Blood pumps. Eyes sharpen.
I stare.
A pack of white men
laughing like hyenas before the kill.
Adrenaline pounds through my system
and I know
from all my training,
everything people have told me
if they wanted to
they could do anything
and I could do nothing to stop them
but scream.

I hear my blood in my ears,
sweat crosses my body like armor,
my hand numb from gripping my keys
And nothing happens.
They walk past.

I unlock my apartment and drop my guard with my keys by the door.
In my relief I forgot to text my brother,
"I'm safe."

THE RATIO OF CONNECTION

by JORDAN WILSON

Astronomers have long been able to predict the likelihood of an Andromeda/Milky Way collision. Countless formulas built up around the trajectory of stars and the influence of gravitational pull on passing masses. The mechanisms of gravity between two human beings, on the other hand, has never been quantified.

Today we'll be looking at The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. Can I get a volunteer to read?

Too many factors affect the probability. Population. Location. Circumstance. Time. Choice.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes

We are able to calculate the odds of winning the lottery (1 in 292,000,000), being struck by lightning (1 in 280,000), or being injured by a toilet (1 in 10,000)… But personal connection defies the parameters of statistics.

Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys

The odds that I would be sent to a newly formed charter school in northern Colorado that admitted only 12 students to each grade were probably relatively high, considering I have never lived anywhere else. The odds that a young man from Spokane, Washington would find his way to that same school and, without a teaching degree, be hired as the English and math instructor were substantially lower.

And indeed there will be time

For the yellow smoke that glides along the street

The odds that he and I would collide in that place, at that time, are incalculable.

There will be time, there will be time

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet

Mr. M's passion for math and the written word spread through his students like a contagion.

Time for you and time for me,

And time yet for a hundred indecisions

He had a habit of bouncing around the room in fits of enthusiasm, slapping desks and chalkboards with a wooden yardstick. I was lucky enough to witness the breakage of one of those sticks, rigid fibers finally worn down by his outpouring of passion.

And for a hundred visions and revisions

He rarely awarded me anything higher than a B on a writing assignment. In elementary school, this would have resulted from a lack of trying on my part, a strange manifestation of quasi-boredom and hubris. With Mr. M, it was a push to be better. Do more. Reach further.

And indeed there will be time

To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"

I often wonder where I would be if his passion for writing had not taken hold in me—

Do I dare to eat a peach?

—and I marvel at the way things occur with no conscious effort on our part, perhaps not against all odds, but certainly in the absence of them.

Do I dare

Disturb the universe?

and where is my place
amidst the dusky stars
that atom-quenched in-between
where voices echo
and souls burst out
calling
shall we meet
and shall we meet?

Art by Craig Lief

CONTRIBUTORS

EVE BELL is a Colorado native currently in her final year at UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER. She previously studied for three years at Northwestern University before taking three years off while she lived in Aspen and the Boulder area living the Colorado lifestyle. She is studying psychology and will pursue an MBA after graduation.

WILL BLEVINS comes from Berkeley, California and is currently a first-year integrative physiology major at CU BOULDER.

BRISA ELLIOTT is a senior who is majoring in English. When she's not interning with Dzanc Books or teaching Shakespeare, she spends her time writing. While she's been writing since she was little, she only recently developed an interest in non-fiction and "THERE HAS TO BE A DEEPER MEANING" is her first published story.

KELA FETTERS is an aspiring scientist with a heart for people. Last summer, she traveled to Chile in search of deep powder, but did more walnut hulling than skiing. She is better for it.

MARITHZA FLORES, originally from Southern California, was raised in the beautiful state of Colorado. A Mexican-American first generation college student, Marithza majors in Biochemistry. Optimistic about the future, Marithza plans to pursue a career in dentistry. Beyond her responsibilities of school and her job as a surgical assistant, she enjoys nothing more than spending her time exploring the outdoors with her husband. Her poem "THE HYPHEN" is an illustration of how Chicanos and Chicanas have felt overlooked despite the powers they possess to connect two different cultures.

REILLY GABEL is a senior in Creative Writing and Asian Studies (Korean) at CU BOULDER. According to Reilly, this piece incorporates both her majors through a timeline of her life where she was suffering from bulimia. The essay includes several references to queer or feminist writing because she identifies as pansexual. Since her family looks down on the pursuit of an "LGBTQ Studies" certificate, she has gravitated towards electives with a queer focus. When she's not doing school work, Reilly enjoys dancing and volunteering at the HUMANE SOCIETY! *Reilly Gabel wrote this piece for* ERIC BURGER, *a professor of the* PROGRAM FOR WRITTING AND RHETORIC.

MELIA INGHAM is a junior at CU BOULDER. She is studying English. She writes short stories and poems. She also paints acrylic and oil paintings. Melia is from Boulder and wishes to go to graduate school and become an author and professor of English. She loves plants of all kinds and hopes to one day have a greenhouse!

LINDSAY KILLIPS is an undergraduate student at CU BOULDER studying psychology. She has several poetry publications in Harper College's Point of View Literary Magazine, as well as forthcoming publications in Minerva Rising Journal and the CU HONORS JOURNAL. Lindsay was born and raised in the Chicago suburbs. In addition to her studies, she works as a lifeguard and swim instructor.

REINA WATANABE KRUMVIEDA is a Japanese-American citizen striving to find ways to embrace her culture while staying true to herself. She is studying aerospace engineering and music performance on piano, and hopes to one day serve as a cultural liaison between space agencies like NASA and JAXA, to build international relations and push humanity towards space progress together in unity.

VAYLE LAFEHR is double majoring in Neuroscience and Philosophy, with an emphasis in law. She grew up in Colorado where she fell in love with the outdoors. Vayle enjoys rock climbing, skiing, writing, and traveling.

HANNAH MICHAEL LAUGHLIN is a junior pursuing a degree in Evolutionary and Ecology Biology. Despite her main focus being on science, she truly loves writing and the outlet it provides. She wrote this piece for an advanced writing class called Storytelling New Media and was encouraged by her professor, LAURIE GRIES, to submit it to the journal. Hannah's piece was accepted to the journal through blind review before she was on staff.

AMANDA LEJEUNE was raised in southeast Texas and developed a love for writing in childhood. Her mother was an aspiring poet who loved romantic and classic poetry. The exposure to her mother's poetry and the works of John Donne, and William Blake inspired her creatively as a child. After overcoming two major hurricanes and the recession, she was brought here to beautiful CU BOULDER to study Religion and Psychology. Amanda plans to continue answering her calling for writing by delving into her muses with wild creative abandon as well as all of the preternatural ideas that continue to inspire her.

ASHLEY MALLET is currently a junior at CU studying Communications. Originally from North Carolina, she spent sixteen years of her life in a dance studio and has a huge passion for choreography and performance. Ashley has always had a love for writing as well, however, this is her first piece she has ever submitted in hopes of publishing. In the future, she would love to take her interpersonal communication skills into a wedding planning career or event coordinating.

CAMERON MARKUSON is a senior studying Spanish and Biology who also happens to write things in English. In addition to writing creatively, he enjoys writing about music for the CU INDEPENDENT. After graduating, he hopes to live abroad in Latin America where he will teach English and continue writing. He also likes to watch movies, read books, and then talk about them afterwards.

TRICIA MENZEL is a sophomore from a suburb of Chicago pursuing a degree in Psychology with a certificate in LGBTQ Studies. She enjoys yoga, hiking, and getting overly excited when being in the relative vicinity of any animal (cat, dog, or otherwise). Tricia widely credits her mother for her passion for reading and writing due to the nightly cuddle and reading time the two enjoyed regularly in her childhood. The first book she ever read was "BLACK BEAUTY" by Anna Sewell, and the first memorable piece she ever wrote was a blurb about how she doesn't want to go to college because she will miss her family and pets (a strikingly accurate prediction). This is Tricia's first time being published in print and she's totally cool about it and not at all ecstatic, overjoyed and/or wholly honored.

CLAYTON MONTGOMERY is a junior at CU studying creative writing. He grew up in Basalt, CO, which has given him a love for all things 'west.' He loved the rodeo as a kid, grew up skiing and snowboarding, and has always considered himself a "mountain kid." His favorite topic for writing is anything concerning the American West, whether that be in the form of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. He hopes to one day be a working writer for an outdoor or environmental publication.

MADELYN SALVUCCI is used to writing her anxiety out of her body. As a Theatre Stage Management Major with a minor in TAM used to taking too many credits a semester, stress accumulates in her body like a stage accumulates wear, and writing polishes the stress away. Graduating this spring, Madelyn will spend her extra time writing more uncomfortable works.

EMILY SHORTER is a Psychology major and English minor. Born in South Carolina, she went to an arts high school where she studied Creative Writing. In the past, she has published a collection of short stories entitled WHAT WAS LOST as well as written for her high school paper and the CU INDEPENDENT. Now, she enjoys hiking, reading, and enjoying the sites Boulder has to offer. She is pursuing her degree in hopes of getting her PhD and becoming an adolescent therapist in the future.

KAYLIE STENBERG is a student of the arts and sciences college who is currently studying the most fascinating subject, 'undeclared.' For most of her life, she has written fantasy and fiction stories although she does dabble in other genres. A few of her pieces have appeared in small publications over the years. She would like to dedicate all her writing to her two beautiful children: Tao and Genya, who are bamboo plants. Kaylie's dream for the coming years is to, by some miracle, find a way to make money through creative writing. And also, to tame a dragon.

JORDAN WILSON, after bouncing around a dozen different (and more "practical") degrees, finally landed in CU BOULDER majoring in Creative Writing and minoring in EBIO. Science, history, art, and writing are her big passions. Jordan always feels that she is learning something. If she could make money by going to school, as opposed to digging a deeper pit of debt, she would probably be a student for the rest of her life. But school or no school, Jordan is looking forward to cobbling together a life for herself that makes at least a little sense after graduation--hopefully one that involves a lot of travel.

DANIEL WORKMAN is a non-traditional student from West Virginia currently seeking degrees in Anthropology and Film. He obtained his AAS from the Isaacson School for Professional Photography and has decided to continue his education at CU BOULDER. Although he is attracted to all forms of art, he focuses his energy into mediums such as writing, photography, filmmaking, and songwriting. His interests in culture and anthropology strongly influence the work that he creates. His accomplishments include work with Pulitzer Prize winning photographers at the Eddie Adams Workshop in New York, being the cinematographer for the PBS documentary "THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PHOTOGRAPH," and an ongoing documentary film project that follows bear hunters in Appalachia which he hopes to finish sometime in 2020.

WHAT'S IN THE NAME

JAY ELLIS

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY began in a single undergraduate class on creative nonfiction, and WRTG 2020-001 was simply its course number in the University of Colorado Boulder's PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC. One morning in the Fall of 2012, sixteen students worked away in small groups, unbothered by an instructor reading their latest drafts. Those pages were too good: too much insight, sentences swerving fish-like, space breaks across emotional crevasses, and—as comes with memoir—too much brave emotional surgery and hard realization not to share beyond that classroom. Unable to add the work of publishing a journal to a course heading into the holidays, I only asked those interested to contact me after final grades.

Five volunteered. Publishing themselves, of course they had energy, but they kept on. Our Volume I-1 signaled our ambition to publish every semester and reach readers beyond most lit journals, and V-I-2 published students across campus through blind review. Staffers created CU's Creative Nonfiction Club, and added support from the UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM to that from the CENTER FOR THE AMERICAN WEST and our home in the PWR. Many lit mags gave up print; we merely scaled back to annual issues. We debuted as the only all-undergraduate creative nonfiction-only print journal in the country.

Beyond memoir, we published narrative journalism on everything from the AIDS quilt project to women's rights under Moroccan Moudawana laws. Our writers have come out as trans, described homeless LGBT students' bittersweet celebration of the first same-sex marriages, and decried racist pressure to straighten their hair. They've pulled us into their absorption in science, in classrooms and deserts and up fourteeners, and cracked up readers with dating confessions and facial hair clubs (before normative beards). They've confessed and accused, tearing into scars and new wounds to write about sexual assault and other abuse, drug use and recovery, too many losses—to suicide, disease, and a stepfather shot dead by an off-duty cop. But also made discoveries: of Navajo coming-of-age through cooking and running; of dance, art, and music; ways of seeing beyond preconceptions; and of great writing from the past.

In the nearly eight years of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, we've published 149 undergraduate writers in nine Print Issues, 121 artists, and 34 writers in online-only features. 139 students have served on staff, some for years. They've taken their writing lives through MFA's in creative nonfiction, law degrees, advertising jobs, and to careers in science and medicine. Most recently, the staff for this issue finished an online version under particular duress, adding this to that edition's final page:

> *This issue of* Journal 2020 *was made possible by the efforts of staff members working remotely under the conditions of an ongoing pandemic, COVID-19. We've all felt the effects of this global tragedy and believe in the power of this journal as a way of connecting us during our shared isolation. By sharing our stories, now and in the future, we will continue to find a way forward.*

In that way forward we can't be JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, however, in 2021. So, get ready for our next print issue of what to us is simply "the journal," but will next Spring transition to—

HINDSIGHT

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC · UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

HINDSIGHT

CREATIVE NONFICTION

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

2021 • VOLUME I

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

FOREWORD BY:
JERICHO PARMS

HINDSIGHT

CREATIVE NONFICTION 2021 VOLUME I

HINDSIGHT

creative nonfiction

2021
VOLUME ONE

Volume One, First Edition, March 2021.
University of Colorado Boulder Imaging Services.

The first volume of HINDSIGHT (formerly known as JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY) is made possible thanks to the support of the PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC, John-Michael Rivera, Director; and grants from the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, Director Joan Gabriele and Assistant Director Tim O'Neil. HINDSIGHT is also part of the Collective to Advance Multimodal Participatory Publishing, Amanda McAndrew, Project Manager; part of Arts and Sciences Support of Education Through Technology, Blair Young, Innovation Catalyst. Special thanks to the University Memorial Center Reception Desk Staff, and Brad Lenhart, CU Imaging Services Manager. The University of Colorado Boulder's Student Organization Allocation Committee generously provides print marketing funds and production facilities.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY (our former name) debuted with print issues in both semesters of 2013. Since 2014 we published annual print volumes. As HINDSIGHT (our new name), we will continue publishing annual print issues, while providing an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. We welcome CU Boulder undergraduates, graduate students, and recent alumni to our literary journal. Artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in HINDSIGHT may refer to our Call for Submissions page for submission guidelines on our website.

Queries: HINDSIGHT, Program for Writing and Rhetoric, UCB 317, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0359; or journal2020@colorado.edu. We are a green journal and prefer electronic submissions and correspondence. Printed on recycled stock and fully recyclable. Single copy costs are $12.00 per issue in the U.S. and Canada, and $14.00 outside North America.

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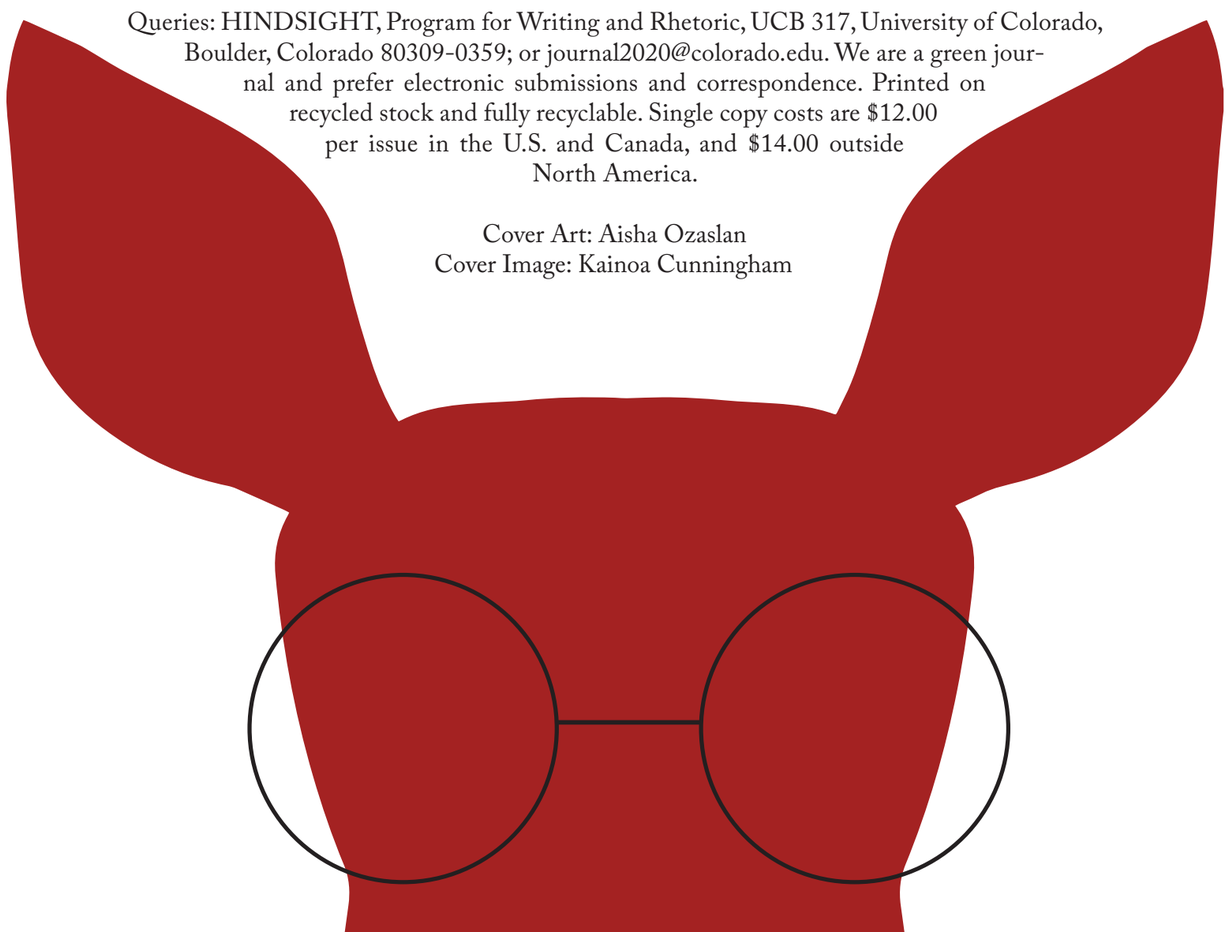

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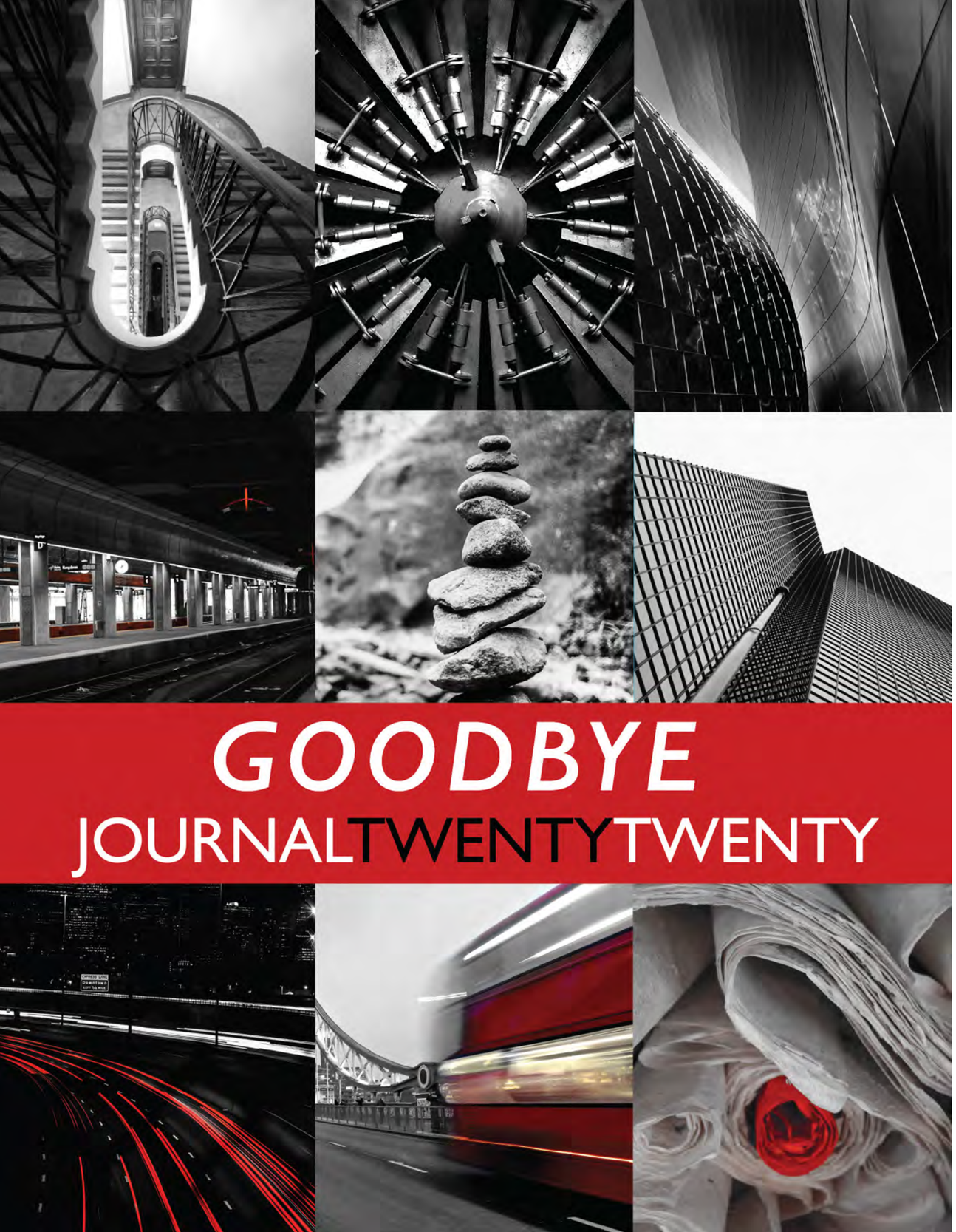

HINDSIGHT IS JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

Our debut issue actually extends the legacy of a journal begun over eight years ago. The UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO's Program for Writing and Rhetoric already offered Introduction to Creative Nonfiction (WRTG 2020) for its Writing Certificate. I'd taught it before and seen plenty of good undergraduate writing, but never what one class created in the Fall of 2012. After grades were in, a few students and I created JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, playing on the serendipity of that course number. Our first issue, still on our website, featured memoir but also strong narrative journalism, dark humor in portraiture, and three of the funnier pieces of a now nine-issue run. Within three months we launched a full-color print issue in Spring 2013. At that point, Journal Twenty Twenty was the sole journal in the country publishing only creative nonfiction, only by undergraduates, with all editorial and production work done by undergraduates. Since then, we've published over 150 pieces of creative nonfiction across the many subgenres of that "fourth genre," and taught more than 125 students the creative business of publishing in print and online. Well before the year 2020 darkened we'd planned our new name, and now, in another inventive Spring, amidst hopeful vaccinations but clouded by the stubborn human resistance to reason, we debut our new title still looking back—as all writing must—but also ahead.

by JAY ELLIS

Our hind began with the red design by A/V Director Zenghiog Ng. A hind is a female red deer, *Cervus elaphus*; for this journal, she is drawn looking backward, as writers do. HINDSIGHT's Art Director, Aisha Ozaslan, took this idea and ran with it. Aisha showed up to a staff meeting with a full page of sketches, and everyone was awestruck. Her original design featured the tip of a dip pen integrated into the hind, then she later decided to tweak the white space within the logo to show a quill. This points to HINDSIGHT as a literary journal above all else.

In creating the colophon—the smaller emblem seen on the spine and at the bottom of each page—Aisha went with a simplified version of her hind logo, creating a stamp-like recognizable design. Then for the cover, she went the opposite direction, expanding the hind to be the centerpiece. HINDSIGHT's logo glances backwards at its previous brand but moves forward regardless. In saying goodbye to JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, we are moving forward, too. We invite you to turn the page with us as we introduce HINDSIGHT Volume I.

FROM THE STAFF

This academic year presented many challenges that the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER students and staff faced with both innovation and humility. Our staff is proud to present this edition as the first transition from JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY to HINDSIGHT. We are grateful to our contributors, who, during a time of fearful uncertainty, chose to connect through art. We are thankful for our staff, who powered through the limitations of a digital world and still managed to compose this moving edition. We'd like to thank the CU BOULDER staff involved in the promotion of the journal for their great efforts in elevating the work of the CU BOULDER'S undergraduate students through creative writing submissions. Finally, we are grateful and indebted to the PROGRAM OF WRITING AND RHETORIC, and the UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM, as this would not have been made possible without them. We sincerely hope you enjoy the intriguing and diverse perspectives presented throughout these pages. Our editors believe this evolution of the journal offers some of the best writing and artwork we've seen yet and, as the CU BOULDER students continue to evolve, we are proud to provide a landing for their publication.

HINDSIGHT STAFF

Amidst all the tumultuous challenges of the past year, we would be remiss to ignore the people who keep us grounded and thriving. Much has changed since the journal's first issue in 2013, but one thing that will never fade is the brilliance of the artists who continue to share their work year after year. For their excellence and creativity, we are deeply thankful. This year, we especially want to acknowledge the inspiring ways in which many artists responded to the pandemic by channeling their complex emotions into their creations, producing striking and personal pieces. As we move into a bright future with a new name, we have confidence that our dedicated staff at HINDSIGHT will continue striving towards our vision of sharing the student body's outstanding writing and artwork in the best light imaginable.

ART DIRECTION

The HINDSIGHT Marketing Department would not exist without our dedicated staff. Every member takes on a different role to spread awareness of our journal, challenging each other to produce great work and keep the creative nonfiction genre alive at CU BOULDER. Each semester we run campaigns on our website, social media accounts, Radio 1190 and in print. In spite of COVID forcing us off campus, we continued to spread our journal's message. But this semester brought us a new challenge--a rebrand to HINDSIGHT from JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY Please enjoy the first volume of HINDSIGHT. We thank you for providing our team with valuable artwork and writing, making the process of spreading our message that much easier.

MARKETING

GET PUBLISHED

IN PRINT OR ONLINE

All University of Colorado students (undergraduates or graduates) are eligible to send in writing for consideration by HINDSIGHT. All writing submissions go through blind review. We seek only creative nonfiction, in any of its genres:

- Creative Scholarship
- Narrative Journalism
- Humor
- Lyric Essay—the truth told with a poetic slant
- Travel, Food, and Sports Writing
- Portraiture and Memoir
- Graphic Creative Nonfiction
- Digital Compositions and Videos for Web Publication

Artists, send us your work to accompany writing in HINDSIGHT print, online, or marketing. We accept work including but not limited to photography, video, or music.

JOIN OUR STAFF

Take the spring section of the Journal Practicum (WRTG 3090) or sign up for a one, two, or three-credit INTERNSHIP in any semester with one of our Faculty Advisors. Internships are offered at both the upper and lower division level. We seek anyone wanting to learn Editorial, Art Direction, Digital Production, Podcasting and Video Production, or the Business and Marketing of a print and online journal of creative nonfiction—no previous experience required. A position on the HINDSIGHT staff fosters professional skills while learning about the exciting genres of creative nonfiction. As a member of staff working on the region's premier print and online journal of only creative nonfiction, students learn with other students, gaining an unparalleled experience on campus. We exist to serve and further a community of creative nonfiction writers (and artists) across campus.

FIND US ONLINE AT

JOURNAL2020.COM

ON HINDSIGHT
by JERICHO PARMS

In her book *Intimations*, written during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic, Zadie Smith writes:

> Experience—mystifying, overwhelming, conscious, subconscious—rolls over everybody. We try to adapt, to learn, to accommodate, sometimes resisting, other times submitting to, whatever confronts us. But writers go further: they take this largely shapeless bewilderment and pour it into a mold of their own devising.

To "go further," to move into new spaces and new territories of meaning, to reexamine our understanding of the world, to reinvent and reforge the connections we've always shared – this is our work now. It is fitting that this issue marks the transition from JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY to HINDSIGHT—celebrating the same richness and depth of writing experience through a slightly different mold. The work included in this issue reminds me of why I write: to seek connection, to be in community with others, to give shape to all of the bewilderment around us.

When Chloe Andrews in the essay "June 27, 2020—Aurora, CO" writes about Black Lives Matter protests in response to the killing of Elijah McClain: Experience rolls over us. We are confronted. We grow. "They are filled with rage but are filled with hope too." Andrews writes, describing young activists. "Not the tired, exhausted hope that's frayed at the edges, but the kind of stubborn hope that refuses to yield because they will change the world themselves, even if it means they have to pull it apart with their teeth."

When Kela Fetters in the essay "For Better, For Worse, in Sickness and in Health" writes about how the coronavirus pandemic has forced a reckoning with love and loss: Experience rolls over us. We grow bewildered. We learn. "It is here," Fetters writes, "pressed up against a window into the past and looking out into the grey haze of an uncertain future, that we find on the glass the fingerprints of the inconsequential millions of our history textbooks and see that their fingerprints match our own."

This is an issue full of work that reminds us to feel, reminds us to look closer, that allows us to wonder. To be mystified. To resist. To heal. And the timing couldn't feel more appropriate.

During a period marked by physical distance, when loss and isolation took root just as long-standing injustices in our society surfaced in new ways, protests budding, then branching across the country, writing that speaks directly to our shared human experiences has never felt more vital to our ability to connect.

HINDSIGHT is, as they say, 20/20. And I do believe we'll look back on this time with clarity one day, just as we strive to move forward with a clarity of purpose, with a commitment to our common humanity, with the knowledge of the strength and resilience that binds us and will carry us forward together.

Jericho Parms is the author of *Lost Wax* (University of Georgia Press). Her essays have appeared in *Fourth Genre*, *The Normal School*, *Hotel Amerika*, and *American Literary Review*.

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FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE, IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

by KELA FETTERS

In 1348, as the Black Death claimed the lives of his friends and family, Francesco Petrarch, a prominent figure of the Italian Renaissance wrote, "Where are our sweet friends now? We are—why pretend?—truly alone. . . And behold, even as we speak, we too are drifting apart, and we vanish like shadows."[1]

Seven hundred years later, in the middle of the strangest March of the modern era, (most) world leaders scrambled to inspire global cooperation. I was attempting to maintain social cohesion on a smaller scale—in one small condo, shared by me and my boyfriend. Businesses were shuttered, grocery stores were barren, and a shelter-in-place order was forthcoming. Faced with an incalculable length of time in isolation, I opted to "shack up" during lockdown and weather the pandemic with my partner.

We lived hours apart and saw each other on weekends only, so we were giddy with the idea of spending an indefinite amount

1. Petrarch, Francesco. "Letters on Family Matters." 1349. Accessed from https://artofwriting.berkeley.edu/friends-lost-in-1349-petrarch.

of time together under the same roof. Plus, the end-of-the-world atmosphere lent the endeavor a lacquer of intensity. I pulled into my beau's driveway, tooted my horn, and waved a bottle of wine and water-color painting supplies out the window. Our world was shrinking, fear and uncertainty blurring the periphery, but we were going to make the most of it, dammit.

We cohabitated for a grand total of seven days before it became painfully obvious that our lifestyles were not compatible (you play Call of Duty every night for how long?!). There are only so many arts and crafts you can make with a person before you find yourself sneaking off to the basement, desperate for a moment alone. After one short week of experimenting with love in lockdown, I found myself packing up my Honda outside of his apartment, sobbing.

I'm not alone in pandemic-related relationship woes: cut off from external activities and trapped together, many couples have called it quits. Ultimately, I'm one of the pandemic's lucky casualties—I walked away with a broken heart, not permanent lung damage or a deceased relative.

One thousand miles across the country, another partnership quietly imploded. Early on a spring morning, the phone buzzed: Grampa Bill was in the hospital with pneumonia, COVID-19 being the suspected agent.

It's a bit of an odd thing for a grandchild to write about her grandparents. There's space between us—cultural, generational, physical—that thwarts easy understanding. I got to know my mother's parents in two-week increments via road trips across the Corn Belt over holidays. Gramma and Grampa's house was boilerplate Midwest working-class: split-level, red brick, wide lawn, ringed with mulberry trees and adjacent to a cornfield. Three daughters were raised here, and countless grandkids. Constant traffic from IL-53 was the soundtrack to my childhood summer nights, tucked into bed in the guest room—the same bed in which my mother slumbered in her own youth.

As a kid, I simply absorbed my Gramma and Grampa the way I synthesized everyone in my world. Only later did I learn elements of their story that escaped me as a child. They'd met in a bowling league. Grampa was in the reserves during Vietnam. My ever-industrious Gramma had to be forced into retirement from the spirits bottling plant where she worked for decades.

My Grampa was a quiet man and a smoker fifty years strong. He chose detachment over small talk, which he couldn't stand. Some days, he smoked more cigarettes than he spoke words. When grandkids gathered in the kitchen to bake cookies or watch cartoons, Grampa remained in the family room La-Z-Boy, the television invariably on and tuned to NASCAR or CNN.

After a stroke the previous autumn, his doctor told him to kick the habit or die within the year. He was issued a portable oxygen concentrator, which hunkered under the kitchen table, purring mechanically, and whooshing intermittently. The machine fed him oxygen, cool and distilled, though clear tubing run under his nostrils. This tubing snaked through the old house, up the stairs and under dressers. Relatives were constantly tripping over it; young cousins used it as a jump rope when the adults weren't looking. Everyone watched their feet—no one wanted to be the one to unplug Grampa. Severed from his cigarettes, Grampa disappeared into the

easy chair, only extracting himself to mount the stairs for lunch. His ruined lungs protested as he ascended, clutching the railing. At the top, he rested for ten minutes to stabilize his plummeting oxygen levels.

Old habits die hard. Several months after the stroke, Gramma caught him in the garage, tubing pulled from his nostrils, cigarette in hand, inhaling blissfully.

For a virus of the respiratory system, Grampa was the dream host. My mom knew it, the doctors knew it, and in her own complicated way, Gramma knew it too.

The nucleus of Gramma Nancy's world was her kids and grandkids. She had a way of lingering on a subject a minute too long, be it potato salad or politics. She spun novels around a single photograph in a dusty frame. As a teenager, Gramma worked for a seamstress to save money to pay her brother Frankie's college tuition. Higher education was an aspiration she was never permitted. Through her life, she carried the hurt. Her mind craved patterns and order. She hand-washed dishes with sluggish precision, despite the new dishwasher they'd had installed. She was rarely without camera in hand, documenting every movement of the grandkids. She loved nothing more than indulging the babblings of a young grandson.

At noon every day, Grampa made a sandwich for Gramma and himself: white bread, Kraft cheese, deli ham, and mayonnaise. They sat together silently at the dining room table, Grampa's eyes cast downward at the crossword puzzle and Gramma's wandering around the room. The clock on the mantle ticked away the seconds with good, old-fashioned clamor. Sporadically, Gramma would bother her husband with a remark: "So, I says to Deborah down at the river that you'd be there Sunday to mow the grass." Grampa would grunt dismissively and return to his crossword. As a kid, I collected Grampa's newspapers after he'd finished with them. Without fail, the crossword puzzle was solved, neat pencil-strokes betraying a vast vocabulary concealed behind the silence.

As she aged, Gramma's spine bowed over. She mistook my mother—her daughter—for my teenage cousin. She put her jeans on backwards and struggled with the holes in her shirts. When someone mentioned the presidential election, she voiced her support of Jimmy Carter. She washed the same dish over and over, wearing her fingers raw. One morning, she fell asleep at the wheel and crashed her car into a ditch. By degrees, my Gramma was fading from herself, less the warm, maternal presence of my childhood memories and more a question mark drifting around an old house.

Gramma fought the winnowing of her independence with all of the awareness she still possessed, refusing caretakers and protesting her daughters' revocation of her driver's license. At the same time, Grampa recessed still farther behind the high-definition walls of the television, his damaged lungs confining his movement to the kitchen and back. In some ways, my grandparents' illnesses of mind and body are complementary, and I'd like to imagine them a unit of mutual support. But I know that their love—if once animated by some bowling league courtship—has been ossified by habit.

Then the pandemic struck. As the virus spread through Chicago and its suburbs, the family stopped visiting. My Aunt Joanie and her children dropped groceries at the doorstep and waved from outside the window. But hugging, touching, and visiting could be deadly. So Gramma and

Grampa were alone together in the house they'd occupied since 1971, that they owned in full and that Gramma covered in picture frames and white lace tablecloths. And shortly thereafter, Grampa was in the hospital, his ravaged lungs being drained of fluid. My mom hunkered on the other end of the telephone, one thousand miles away, fearing the worst. Then his COVID test came back negative. He was moved from the COVID floor of the hospital, stabilized, and discharged a week later. In the same amount of time I'd lasted with my boyfriend in his condo, Grampa had dodged the virus and returned to his roost in the La-Z-Boy.

Our elders are the overwhelming victims of the pandemic. Modern research and ancient wisdom both suggest that social engagement boosts longevity in life's twilight years, but one of the greatest risk factors for severe complications from COVID-19 infection is advanced age. To protect our vulnerable seniors, we've isolated them in retirement homes and replaced reunions with Zoom calls. In virus hotspots, nursing homes resemble prisons, with residents quarantined in their rooms, sans outsider contact. Our grandparents and great-grandparents, already marginalized in the public sphere, have been farther displaced. They face the elevated risk of acquiring an illness from which they may not recover. They endure this anxiety mostly alone. Ultimately, many of them will contract the virus, and some will not recover.

Bereft of even digital connection, my grandparents have each other and little else.

Last summer, my mother teamed up with her sisters to install a Wi-Fi router for Grampa and Gramma's home. It didn't take; Grampa was impervious to a screen he couldn't navigate with a remote, and Gramma couldn't make sense of it. The Internet arrived too late in their lifetimes to ensnare their minds the way it did my parents' generation.

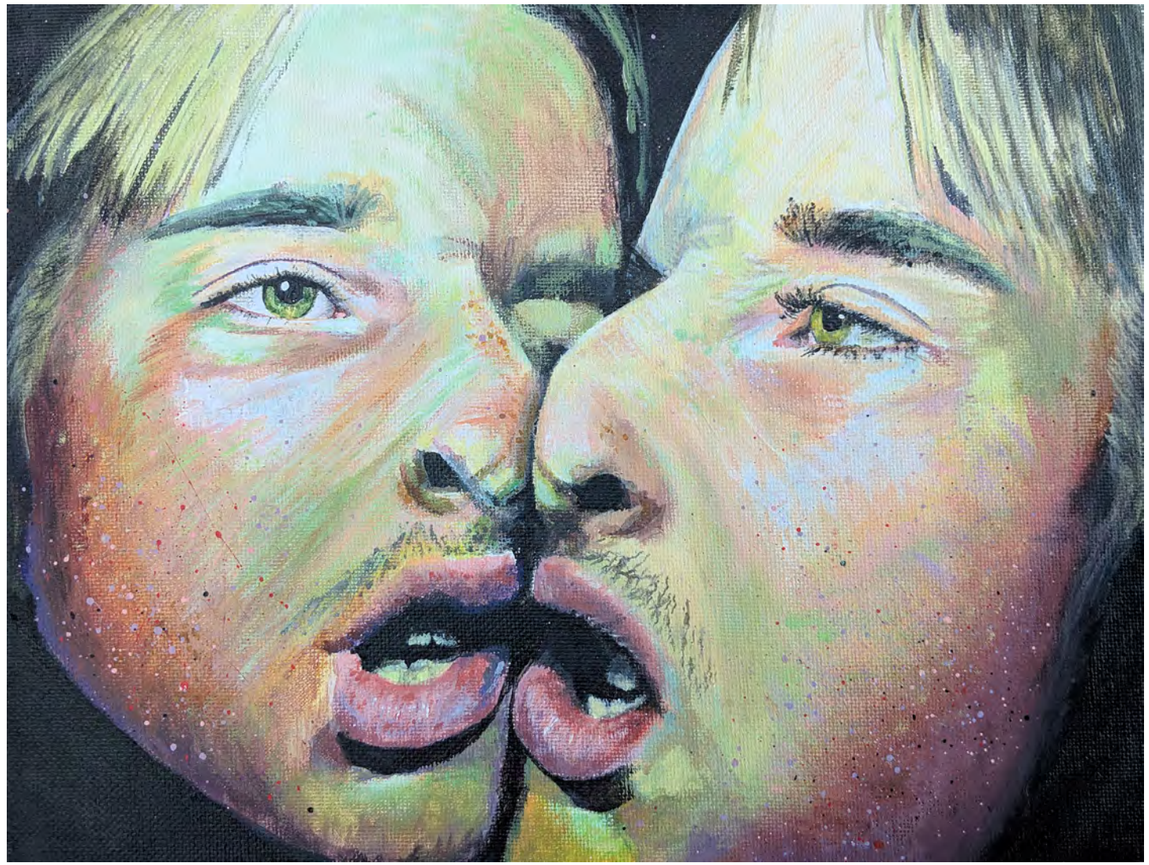
Bereft of even digital connection, my grandparents have each other and little else. I slipped away to the basement to escape my partner—Grampa has his garage and his smokes. While my relationship snapped with the frenetic drama of youth, my grandparents' will tolerate it all: the dedicated silence, the plastic tubing tangled under chairs, the daily crosswords, and dust gathering in the places Gramma won't remember to clean.

When I returned to my own empty apartment, public radio became my surrogate companion. Gradually, my loss was tempered by the electricity of living this historical moment. Cable news, I believe, serves the same purpose for my Grampa. Ceaselessly spirited away to the epicenter of global goings-on, Grampa leaves the bottom floor of the tri-level and exists somewhere else. The television is a conduit to his most lucid reality; Gramma pulls him back with her constitutive need. I long for the day when grandchildren can once again fill Gramma and Grampa's home, their presence easing the loneliness that the other cannot assuage. After all, the Black Death of the 1300s birthed the Renaissance. From the darkness crept much beauty.

My grandparents are Catholic, and when they married, they took each other in sickness, in health, for better, and for worse. The carapace of this vow may be the only thing holding them together. When I considered the endless identical days of an interminable shelter-in-place order, I bolted from my partner. My fear was that the monotony would calcify and define our eternity.

To parallel Petrarch, who described the loneliness of antiquity's plague, the coronavirus pandemic has forced a reckoning with love and loss. The human spirit is shuttered away, directed inward at self, companion, and immediate family. We have chosen this course to protect the elderly and vulnerable, who themselves suffer greatest from isolation. It is here, pressed up against a window into the past and looking out into the grey haze of an uncertain future, that we find on the glass the fingerprints of the inconsequential millions of our history textbooks, and see that their fingerprints match our own.

Art by DANIEL WORKMAN



Art by ROB BALSEWICH

LINER NOTES FROM A TRANS KID

by JAQ BRODY

Hello.

You're reading this undergrad art journal. You're reading a college journal, and it's been a long day—a long year, even, already—and you're sort of bored, sort of dozing off, and then—the word "You" makes you snap up and pay attention.

You. Wait. Me?

You're less bored now. This text is weird, and you don't know if you like it, but you're definitely not bored. You've read a lot—you don't make it to Journal Twenty Twenty without reading until your eyes swell like water balloons that have grown ripe with summer heat—but you haven't read this before. Okay. That's something.

Hello.

It's the context that matters. A trash bag floating in the wind is only art if someone takes a picture of it. An upside-down urinal signed "R.Mutt" only becomes important when Marcel Duchamp resigns from the Society of Independent Artists because they won't put his toilet in a museum. The context is this:

a coworker, who you want to like, says his favorite author is Hemingway.

That's not the point, you say, frustrated. You like fragile masculinity within the context of trench warfare just as much as the next man. But you like Yann Martel, too. Rupi Kaur. You mentioned liking Rupi Kaur in a poetry workshop once and your head-up-his-ass graduate-student teacher rolled his eyes.

Who's your favorite author? Asks your co-worker. You tell him and he snickers.

Your favorite author is Brandon Sanderson. You've never read *Alcatraz vs the Evil Librarians*, though, which is apparently his best book. Though you've never read his best book, you used to stand in the mirror and quote Alcatraz' fiery love interest, Bastille, until your tongue sparked like a rocket.

Your favorite author is Kurt Vonnegut, right? Let's get unstuck in time.

You don't go for that small talk nonsense on dating apps. You prefer to meet people the old-fashioned way, but when you're bored (are you bored?) or lonely, you'll start swiping. An ex took your profile pic. But you chose your opening line, something to start a conversation, something designed to show your intellect and to test others'.

Hey sexy. What's your favorite word?

Shitwad, he says, the boy you later fall in love with. It's a pedestrian response. Plebian. This won't go beyond a hook-up, you think.

Who's your favorite author? He asks.

David Foster Wallace. You're surprised at the question, but you don't have to think about the answer. *Infinite Jest* is the best book ever written.

Not bad, he says. Have you seen *This Is Water*?

This is water, you think, reading along in *Journal Twenty Twenty* about events that never happened to you. This is water. It's the context that matters.

He submerges his head, somehow still shouting.

You type until your fingers blister. Your favorite author, Stephen King, writes six pages a day and so will you, which is why the homework is boring—you have so many other things to do. You have blisters to pop. At least when you have to read Hemingway you're learning how to write. What are you learning from this shit?

This is water, and it's the context that matters. Ernest Hemingway is taught at every university and he earned that. They all earned that—Steinbeck, Melville, London. They're all great authors. That's not the context. The context is that you're in a graduate-level writer's workshop where everyone has read until their eyes swell like water balloons and every man who names his favorite author names another man. A white man. A straight, cis, white man.

Your name is Balyena, and you live in the sea. The old man—not Hemingway's man, but Hemingway—tells you about his rival. His prissy, unsatisfied, unsatisfying rival. Who's a homosexual. But he has a wife, you might argue. Nonsense, says Ernest.

But does he like men? You ask. Your tail thuds through the tide like a landmine.

Ernest reaches up to touch the brittle hide of your massive belly. Well he certainly doesn't fuck his wife.

Ernest, you want to say, there is more to sexuality than fucking one's wife. And there should certainly be more to one's wife than fucking. Ernest doesn't listen, because you are half out of the water. This is water. He submerges his head, somehow still shouting.

But let's say that, in this context, we're being very generous and count F. Scott Fitzgerald as not entirely a straight cis white man. You didn't learn about his sexuality when you read *The Great Gatsby* in high school, and if anyone brought up Nick and Jay's inherent homoeroticism, you treated it with a passing interest, or worse, a dismissal. They didn't tell you Shakespeare was bisexual, either, and though they couldn't hide Oscar Wilde's absurd flamboyance and literal sodomy trial, they did focus more on the woman Dorian killed than on Basil's hopeless infatuation.

You are on your first date with the boy you later fall in love with and you're wondering why no one else ever told you that Shakespeare wrote *Sonnet XX* about the Earl of Pembroke. You're thinking that you don't mind gay men, just men who act

gay—this is why you so deeply identify with Hemingway's heteronormative sense of masculinity. But then the boy you've just started to fall in love with moves on to a different Ernest, and his importance, the importance of being earnest, and for the first time your favorite author is not a straight cis white man, but the man in front of you.

At this point you're angry. At this point you're a gay cis white man and you're angry that, except for in the single diversity class you had to take to graduate, four out of five of the authors you were told to read were exactly like you but straight and the other one was Jane Austen. And you didn't even like Jane Austen.

You're going to flip your shit when I tell you about Alice Walker.

At first, you don't believe the boy you're barely in love with when he says his favorite author is Angie Sage. She writes middle-grade books. She writes about the seventh son of a seventh son and his princess sister.

They're good books, he says. You should read them.

They're for children.

So? So was *Huck Finn*. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. *The Little Prince*.

If you're angry, especially if you're straight or white or cis or rich or worship the same god as everyone you know, go read Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* and maybe you'll calm down.

Or maybe you'll get angrier. Good. Be angry. Tell someone why you're angry. As the not-male, not-white Zora Neale Hurston once said, "If you're silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it."

Tell someone why you're angry. Then tell someone about your favorite author who is not a straight cis white man. Write down your favorite Rumi quote and pin it to your mirror. Add a reminder on your phone to read a lesbian romance novel. Pledge to study Baldwin.

You're proud to disrupt the water.

You're at dinner with the woman you're so desperately in love with, and you're trying to learn, and you ask if she'll recommend you a book to read about women like her.

Trans women, she asks. Or chicana?

Both. Either.

She shakes her head. I can't recommend you a book. There aren't any.

It doesn't have to be classic literature, you say.

She shakes her head again. There aren't any. I mean, there are some YA books with trans kids. But they're mostly white. And even those are about being trans. Would you like it if every book with a cis man was about a man being cis?

You think she's wrong, don't you? You think there must be a book, one book, that talks about a trans woman whose trans-ness is not the point.

Look it up. Your phone is right here. Google books with trans women and tell me what you find.

There could be something, someday.

Your name is Balyena and you're proud of your name. You're proud to disrupt the water. When you beach yourself, you do it on purpose. Ernest and David and Jack all stabbed their carotid with a ballpoint and bled out on the page, but they died to end their world and you die to save it.

Your name is Balyena and you're proud to disrupt the water. You write until your fingers blister. You write about a trans man and a gay woman and a brown trans gay woman so that the next trans kid doesn't have to beach themself beneath Hemingway's bleeding fingers. You write, and it saves the world.

RED

by CAROLINE SITTER

Red:

You first saw it laid on top of you.
It began with pink tulle and tutus.
Then giblets and laces and rocks that were pets.

The candle lit on the bedside.
You stared into yellow and orange until your eyes ached,
so you quickly closed them shut.

You sat there,
eyes tracing each vein and the vague sense of maroon meaning
stained on the backs of your eyelids.

You loved dancing on the way to Granny's,
falling off of the prescribed path,
exposing your neck to the wolves.

Art by LINDSEY LEWIS

You wrapped yourself in a cloak of secrets,
grinning as deep down you knew that
no one would ever know the real you.

Your fingers traced the edge of the perfect blade.
You always preferred your mirror to be a butcher's knife.

You felt

Red:

You jut your fingers into it.
You said you wanted to feel something.

Fingers were always a funny thing:

The slabs of meaty hands,
cooing and coaxing for the lotus to open
before gutting out their insides.

In dimly lit hotel rooms,
pictures of poppies and cherries lay
and the ladybugs hibernate for the winter.

Inside, though,
you felt the colors of the sunset,
fleeting and fixated for only a moment's notice.
The little death.

Once again, you wanted to feel something.
You then remembered the sensation of your fingers in the flame.
How each little piggie throbbed at the sight of their caramelized skin being darkened,

turning

Red:

You remember the smell.
The foul and wretched stench of what left your body,
of what was misplaced and ill managed.

You count the days until you lose it again,
or until someone has to remove it for you.

It's natural they say,
an it is an it is an it.

The tips of your fingers painted
with varnish and spermicide
as the moon pulls your blood the way it wishes.
The rise and fall of an iron laced tide.

You grin,
at the crusted metal smell of the slaughtered cock's comb.

You smile,
at where smoke meets fire.
A floral minefield:
The smell of the perfect barbecue.

Red:

Taste it,
chicken.

Cherries, chilis and smiles soaked in grenadine

Watermelons taste sweet until the seeds sprout in your stomach
and the doctor keeps the medicine away.

Licking Satan's lips as
satin snakes slither through the gnarled roots of Eden,
attempting to find a home within you.

Their venom dancing on the tip of your tongue
each taste bud dazzled and dizzied
as you sway catatonically,
giggling at the hallucinogenic nature of such things.

It is only then, that the truth is laid on top of you.

Art by JORDAN ECKES

THE COSMOS UNDERFOOT

by SHANNON ROSS

Purple onions are the most regal of vegetables. I call them purple onions and not their barcode nomenclature of "red onion" because of the dye that rinses off the cutting board after you've halved and quartered and sliced them—purple. The halved purple onion is a bit of a marvel. In the Classical period, Greeks consumed barrels of onions before an athletic event; they drank quarts of onion juice and rubbed the acidic halves on their skin. Now we wince and leave the room.

I had time, during long summer afternoons, to contemplate the purple onion. I spent the summer seeding onions, watering onions, weeding around onions, harvesting onions, and then scouring my hands in their juices. My fingers spent hours removing the film behind the papery skin, carefully at first, and then with a gentle rehearsed sliding of my index finger, as if I were pulling a seam. I found them to hold a resilient seed tucked away under the film, known only to the observant few that feel the delicate fabric before it rips.

Never one for the prep involved in enjoying vegetables, I nonetheless found myself living on Turner Farm off the coast of Maine contemplating the onion, and its many cousins: garlic, scallions, leeks and chives, for an entire summer. I was about three crates' worth of onion-slicing in one afternoon, teary and hypnotized by the waving lines of the onion's interior. I imagined the bulb in its original home under the earth, starved of sunlight, bleached. I thought of farmers who turned asparagus white by covering the shoots up in soil, never letting the base of the plant see the sun. Magic, by way of tampering with photosynthesis.

The fan of green shoots, growing above the surface of the soil, is the onion's only chance at sunlight. Below the surface, its layers grew oblong at the base and reached for the surface of the earth until the lines met in a delicate neck. Again and again these lines formed, one around the next. They never weaved or intersected but rather cordially shrunk their width until they seemed to disappear at the top. Or so I thought.

It wasn't until I met the fourth crate of onions on the concrete floor of the barn kitchen that these beautiful arcing lines suddenly did meet. In a hurry to meet that week's Barn Supper demand, the farm crew left the tails of the onions intact. These tails served their purpose during the uprooting effort of the harvest, and were removed with a sharp knife before sending off to market. Customers enjoyed the fronds of carrots, as they could be used for garnish or proof of organic purchase, but there was no need for onion tails.

What a loss for the world. The tails are quiet proof of the natural world's artistry. Where I had observed, in the method of a pedantic scientist, the layers of the onion never meeting, the fronds had changed the narrative. Instead of closing to nothingness, the layers began to weave together. They left their home of bursting water layers and opted for a more resilient material, similar to a corn husk. After the onion felt the breach from soil to open air, the husks began to weave and braid as if to add strength to their system when the moment of tension from harvest came.

I placed my knife down on the table, now dull from hundreds of strokes. I was struck by the beauty of it all. The purple onion was a jewel hanging from a braided necklace. Only a few, mostly farmers, knew the grace of a common vegetable.

In that converted barn kitchen, I fell in love with vegetables. Not because they are good for you to eat or trendy to roast, but because they are marvelous. The growth of any plant is a wonder to think about. Any human or critter with functioning color sight is biologically inclined to delight in the juxtaposition of a vibrant carrot folded into a rich soil's darkness.

It took years, and similar countless hours of exposure, that I fell in love with soil. In a way, I also fell for minerals, water, pockets of air, and a matter of all living things; all of which comprised an entire ecosystem quietly forming the earth.

The original term for ecosystem was "microcosm," or small world. A scientist in the 19th century gave this name to a lake he observed. While studying near Geneva, François-Alphonse Forel realized that in order to understand an organism, he needed to understand the surrounding small world: the external life, nutrients, abiotic material, and environment. Soil is considered an integral part of our larger ecosystem as humans; forests, food, and baseball fields all grow from it, any person could tell you that. Some may testify that soil is more than its tangible gifts. It is one of our planet's greatest stores of carbon. But few try to compare soil to the cosmos.

The cosmos are indefinite, a well ordered universe. We humans are mystified by the grandness and mind-blowing size of the mysteries of the beyond. The accumulation of material below our feet is also a well-ordered universe. A complex system of millions upon millions of bacteria, invertebrates, fungi, and other microorganisms form soil. Together they work to break down the debris left behind from thousands of years of life so that new life may breathe on our planet. Soil too is made of star stuff. The same elements that are in precarious balance in an exploding star, found in similarly vital ratios below our feet.

When we think of the absence of light at a black hole's horizon, it makes our trivial efforts seem small and the universe so wonderful. When we consider the soil, we can see that our efforts to maximize her, our tangible cosmos, and manipulate her into something that only serves us, proves that our trivial efforts have the potential to wreak havoc.

Our needs have poisoned the land. Rather than allowing the productive and willing workers of the soil do their diligence, we have created a masterplan to pull the rug from underneath ourselves. It started with the clearcutting of forests and depleting the deep time humus formation of soil to take place. Then we plowed the fine fur remaining from the forests, ripping the fungal threads from the perennial plants. When we found the short-stubbed roots we planted could not thrive in the soil, instead of returning to perennial growth and their long searching roots, we invented chemicals as a proxy holder of life. So it has been for generations now. But our soil's microbial community has grown weary, its planets and moons and stars destroyed by an abundance of fertilizer. Soil cries the chemicals from her system, leaching once-precious water into wetlands as poison. She loses her stability. With nothing to grab onto but the wind, her topsoil, which took thousands of years and cycles of life to develop, blows back into space.

Still, there in the earth's belly grows a purple onion. Not to be outdone by the cosmos, soil is a bit of a romantic herself. It turns out that if managed properly with regenerative, patient, and lifegiving practices, the soil could be our greatest chance of earning our planet back. If the tilling were to stop and nitrogen-fixing cover crops were to be planted in communion with perennial crops, soil could gain her strength back. In time, our soil has the potential to sequester 294 million tons of carbon

Soil cries the chemicals from her system, leaching once-precious water into wetlands as poison.

from the atmosphere a year according to a Congressional testimony by the American Farmland Trust. In this give and take between the atmosphere and soil, we humans could be the actors of healing and restoring the natural order.

When I cut purple onions, even now, thousands of miles away from Turner Farm, I feel a peace wash over me. I caramelize them in sweet sugar and butter and put them on toast with ricotta. A few years ago, a friend I farmed with in Maine called me about a new package of hybrid seeds she received in early February,

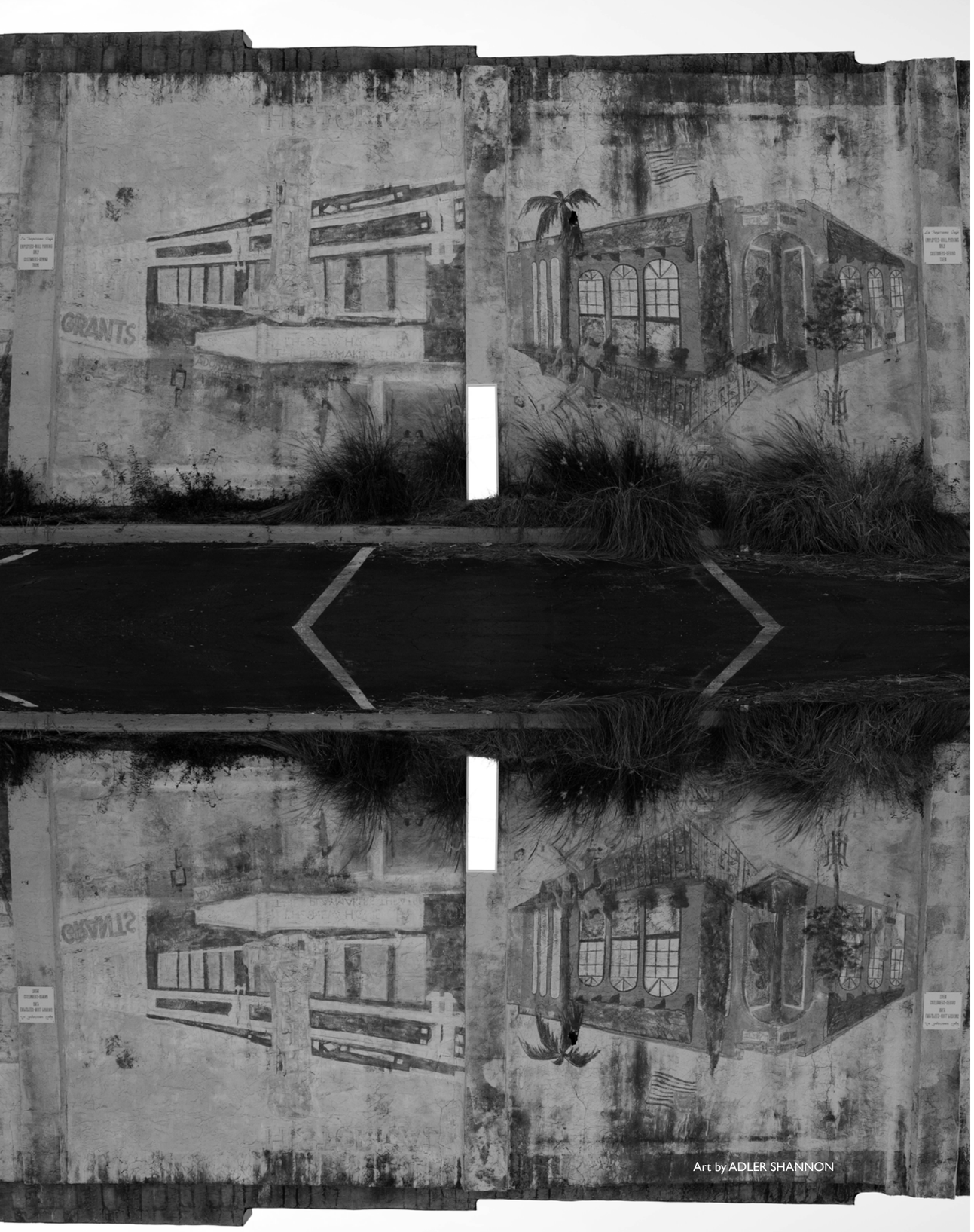
"You're going to love this," she laughed, well aware of my love affair with the inside of purple onions.

"These are a limited trial so we're the first farm to harvest them - they're called Flame Beets."

Noah sent me a picture, and I rubbed the grime off my cracked phone screen to get a better look. An unbelievably purple beet, the purest form of the color I had ever seen. The next picture the beet had been halved like a geode, revealing the internal blaze, fluorescent compared to the deep pigmented skin. In its core bright yellow and orange flames rose, housed within each other, dripping as if they were painted with oil. I was in love, this time with a beet.

Noah heard my reaction over the phone and read the quote on the back of the package.

"The tales soil will tell can only make us richer."



Art by ADLER SHANNON

GOING SOMEWHERE

by GRACE SMITH

The gold watch on my left wrist was vibrating non-stop while I sleepily sat in my Anthropology lab. I looked around to make sure the coast was clear before I checked my phone. The only eyes on me were the blank stares from the dusty primate skulls sitting on the fake marble countertop. Coast clear. When I peeked at my phone, I noticed my mom had texted me one too many times. "That's odd," I thought to myself as I slipped my phone back into the bottom of my backpack to keep all my receipts and broken pens some company.

For the next hour, my brain tried so hard to focus on not dropping the monkey skull I had in my possession and on ignoring the annoying sipping sound the girl behind me made every time she had a taste of her latte, but I simply couldn't. I wasn't concerned that my mom was in a horrible accident, that she had bad news, or that the world was going to burst in flames, but seeing all the message notifications made me feel like something was up.

As soon as lecture ended, I grabbed my bag and bolted to the bus stop, mindlessly forgetting that my phone was at the bottom of my bag.

"I'll check it later," I said to myself out loud while walking down the auburn-colored stairs inside of Hale. The clock had just struck 3:05 P.M. when I reached the bus stop, which meant the Buff Bus would be there any minute.

I had an internal debate with myself for a minute until I finally got around to grabbing my phone from the bottomless pit that was my backpack. Seventeen unread messages. Two missed calls. One Snapchat notification. Hey! An album release. "Oh my God," I quickly gasped. "That's what I was forgetting. No… Maybe?" That annoying little version of myself, the one that walks and talks inside my head and that I insist remind me of things later, flashed a giant stop sign inside of my brain. I unlocked my phone to see a picture of a photoshopped cat with pasta on his head, giggled, and clicked on my messages. My mom's texts popped up on the screen and then I realized what I had forgotten. Eviction day—or moving day, as my mom liked to call it.

Eviction day—or moving day, as my mom liked to call it.

Eviction day. From over one thousand miles away on the California coast, my mom texted me a few pictures of her tiny silver Honda Civic packed and ready to go to their next home—Motel 6. In every picture, my dad was in the background, sitting on the ground with his head buried in his arms. In every picture, my mom was cracking a smile. The last text read, "Don't worry about me, I will be ok." She would be okay. I knew she would be. However, I wasn't OK. I thought I would be, but I wasn't. I snapped out of my clouded thoughts. A flood of backpacks and people kept pinballing me between them, keeping me from getting on the Buff Bus. "Damn it. Ugh, well, maybe the next one."

While standing on the concrete sidewalk watching the campus visitors look at the brand-new CASE building in awe, my brain went back to thinking how my entire life had just been placed inside a couple boxes in a Motel 6. As I stood there waiting for the next bus, a redheaded girl wearing a bright blue backpack stamped with her sorority letters mindlessly chatted with her sorority sister loud enough for me to overhear. "Oh my God, I am so excited to go home and sleep in my bed. Ugh, so comfy."

My bed. My house. My chair, my desk, my bathroom, my shower. My pink pillow case. The pictures, the concert tickets, the movie stubs, the play bills. My life. Gone. A ding from my phone brought me back to reality with a text from my best friend. "Did you listen to the new Hippo Campus album yet!?" "Nope, about to listen :)" I opened my music app and saw that my phone had already downloaded the entire Bambi album for me. How convenient. As I pressed play, the second Buff Bus came around and opened its doors. For some reason, something inside me refused to let myself on. Just as quickly as the bus came, it went. I had missed another.

My soul felt nonexistent. I couldn't move. "What do I do? Where do I go? I'm only nineteen." My thoughts were once again interrupted by the autotuned sound of an electric keyboard.

> "I swear to God I wasn't born to fight
> Maybe just a little bit
> Enough to make me sick of it…"[1]

My attention turned to these lyrics as if the universe was giving me a weak pat on the back with a mediocre "sorry to tag along." I was sick of it. So sick of the universe kicking me down when I'm just getting back up. After a few seconds of self-pity, I decided to focus on the album. The album was permanent. It wasn't going anywhere. I commanded the little voice in my head to shut up - it was the least she could do for me. We could deal with reality later.

The next thirty minutes were spent focusing on the music and trying not to spiral. I was sad. I was so sad I couldn't move. I couldn't get on the bus. Where was I going to go? I spent those thirty minutes watching the buses come as quickly as they went, trying to convince myself to hop on and just go. But I didn't. Not until the album played its last note. My headphones went silent and once again I had to face my reality. The next bus was waiting for me to make my decision. The bus driver impatiently tapped his hand on his steering wheel.

I'm not sure where or why or how, but I soon came to the conclusion that whether I got on that bus or not, my situation wasn't going to change. No matter how many times I played that album on repeat and stood still on that sidewalk, the album was going to end, and I would have to go somewhere. The least I could do was give that old, crowded bus a shot while drowning myself in the soundtrack that would define my life up until this day. So, that's what I did. Humming along, I pressed play, moved my legs and got on the bus that took me somewhere...

> "I'll be making my
> Own way now to
> Where I got to be…"[2]

1. Hippo Campus, "Bambi," track 4 on Bambi, Grand Jury and Transgressive Records, 2018.
2. Ibid.

DANCING CLOUDS

by NATHANIEL HANKINS

Like sand in an hourglass with no time left. Just trapped. This saddens me for some peculiar reason. Time stands still in the scorched remains of this vessel. I finish my cigarette and flick the cherry over the railing of the porch and throw the butt in a trash can by the door. I head inside and place the jar inside a bag that has been packed for a pocket of time I have long since lost track of. My journey has no brake pedal, or so it would seem from the outside looking in. I head into the kitchen. My dad slides a letter across the table with a cup of black coffee.

"It's from Colorado," he states.

I open it. It's a congratulations letter from the university.

"I was accepted."

"You just got back, leaving again?" he asks.

"Not for several months, but I will be gone for a few days. I am leaving tonight to go back south."

"A lot of grim stuff down there, I'm assuming the ashes, you sure it's a good idea—alone at that?"

"Yea, I'll be fine."

Art by BAILEY MICLETTE

We finish our coffee in silence. I get up from the counter and go grab my backpack and bag from the bedroom and take it out to the car. I start the engine and drive to the gas station. Top the car off on fluids, air and gas; drive home in time for dinner. I say thank you to my mother and father for the food and tell them I will be home soon enough. I hop in the car and hit play on my playlist while lighting a cigarette. Reaching into the bag, I extract the mason jar and set it on the console. I pull out and head south on Route 100 to I-95 southbound. It's 12 hours to Savannah.

I love to drive. Nighttime is the best. Especially in the summer. Turn the music up and roll the windows down. No one to bother you with meaningless small talk. I hate small talk. Good conversations should either have deep meaning or should be the evolved, overly revealing discussions that can only come from two friends who have been around each other for so long that small talk has disappeared and been replaced by topics that make normal people cringe or feel uncomfortable with that level of honesty. Without that it's just quiet, and the air takes on a peaceful aroma filled with the sounds of songs I've listened to a thousand times, fading into the wind. It is just me and my own thoughts. Lately, my thoughts of Thomas.

If one turn, one choice, or one passionate reaction would have been different, you would still be here.

If one turn, one choice, or one passionate reaction would have been different, you would still be here. I wouldn't have to do this. Everything happens for a reason but what twisted purpose could this serve? No obvious phoenix will rise from your ashes. Little grains of memories vibrating to the rhythm of the asphalt. By chance? Is that how we got here? We base some theories of existence in simulation, random evolution, maybe the Big Bang or God. Maybe evolution was just a means of how and not necessarily why. Even free will, from some perspectives, can be considered a mere illusion or the mistake of a craftsman. Every creation has at least one. I don't think it was. I believe the old saying is true, that coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous. The moments in life where it becomes impossible to calculate the odds. Like sitting on church steps waiting for them to open, but the doors are locked. When you're about to leave, a guy rides by on a bike and says that it's always better to keep minor sins between you and the big guy. He winks and rides off, pointing up and smiling.

I pull over on 95 somewhere in Virginia. Get out of the car and stretch. Swipe my card at the pump; while it's fueling, I walk

into the 24-hour piolet. These places became my home away from home a long time ago. I left home at 17 and never looked back. A rolling stone gathers no moss sort of thing, I suppose. That was before she ruined everything. Now all I can remember at these places is that day.

What could the sheer odds have been? The odds that when I went to get gas, she's standing there with scarlet curls halfway down her back. Arms stretched wide and looking up. Something caught her attention. She saw me and smiled, walking right up to me without hesitation. I said yes, just to the sheer confidence. She's never stayed in one place for long and neither have I. What are the odds that in that time and place our journeys would collide? When cold fronts meet hot fronts, they often create powerful storms. I used to think weather patterns were meaningless. Her eyes were always perfectly prepared, beautiful, and she knew it. Never overdone or falsely advertised. Just enough liner to create a raven tail reminiscent of Ancient Egypt. A bright green that slowly faded to a blue on black. Each eye had three little triangles of brown that disappeared in the sun or when you made her mad.

The year we spent in absence of control. Drowning each other in wine and moonlit beaches. Gently feeding each other gourmet meals that inevitably turned into food fights in public and getting kicked out of a friend's house. Lengthy walks on cobblestone streets guided by the gentle breeze through Spanish moss-draped willow trees. Ripping clothes off in the rain, racing back to an apartment where there is barely enough room for a bed, but it doesn't matter because it's enough. Waking up naked, face down on a balcony, surrounded by empty wine bottles and dirty looks from neighbors. These are the places where time stands still, and phones no longer work because you don't care enough to plug them in. True love exists in the place where judgment doesn't travel. There are no limits in these places, and they are a possibility for anyone who wants it bad enough. Courage is the only barrier. As long as you don't go looking for answers why, the magic just continues.

I had a friend in high school whose heart exploded while running the mile in gym class. His parents made staying together after his death look so easy. Not that it was in the slightest, but it looked that way. They had a daughter that was older than him. Maybe that made it easier, having that hope to cling to. The

pressure to keep it together for her. We didn't have that. When Thomas went, whatever we were vanished with him. I haven't seen her in a long time. She resents me and I resent her. Somewhere in South Carolina, around three in the morning, I pull over and get gas again. I take a lengthy walk around the ghost-filled Lowes parking lot, chain-smoking cigarettes, forcing the smoke to dance in an irreverent way.

South Carolina takes forever to get across when you have been driving all night. I get back in the car and out on to the freeway. The rest of the drive is long and silent. I turn the radio off somewhere in North Carolina. The only noise is that of the wind and turbo diesel engines on tractor trailers passing by. I have often understood the appeal of such a profession. Interminable periods of silence and isolation. There's a certain freedom that comes with that life, and it has the potential to be quietly rewarding if you can shake the fear of your own thoughts. Suddenly the sun comes up. It directs my attention back to Thomas.

I often wonder, Thomas, what kind of person you would have become. I see your face in my dreams at night when I sleep. You have your mother's eyes. I often wonder what sports you would have played (if you had at all), or if I would have been at ballet practice screaming like I was at the football game. Either way, you were mine. I wondered how old you would be before I had to bail you out of jail for the first time. Or send money to Vegas because you're too broke to leave. I wouldn't have minded as long as you were truly living life.

Finally, I can smell the ocean.

"We are almost there, kid, hang on."

I turn off on Route 17 towards Island Expressway. We are hopping from island to island towards Tybee. I pull into the Tybee hotel, drive underneath it, park next to the water. I light a cigarette. It's quiet. I get out of the car and stretch my legs. The sun has just risen over the ocean. The clouds are large and fluffy like the jar of cotton balls in the doctor's office. There is a heavy sense of peace here. I step out into the sand, carrying the ashes with me. It's cool between my toes from the blanket of stars that's just been pulled off. I walk down to the water, turning right and walking towards the pier. The water, still warm from the day before, feels pleasant around my ankles. I walk down to the very southern tip of Tybee Island, past the pier.

There's a certain freedom that comes with that life, and it has the potential to be quietly rewarding if you can shake the fear of your own thoughts.

The water gets rough here. There is an old concrete crowd barrier with flaking yellow paint and broken corners. It's old and weathered from hurricanes blowing salt water. The rebar sticks out and curls back on itself like a caterpillar that's been touched, cringing in discomfort at its situation. For a second this makes me smile. I dig my heels into the black sand, then sit on the concrete barrier.

We sit here together for a while. Early in the mornings on the ocean, all the wind pushes the clouds around restlessly, in a chaotic way. Formations transform and blow about rapidly. They just sort of—dance. It has a rather breathtaking quality. Like Ancient Rome, a photo just can't express it. A tall formation breaks free from its formation and floats up, shielding the sun's emanating rays of sunlight.

I take my keys and toss them on the beach with my shirt and shoes. Unscrewing the lid of the jar, I gently tilt the container down. A gust of wind picks up and carries the ashes out to sea. I say goodbye to my son, Thomas, for the last time. Many years will pass, and it will never get easier. I will learn how to live with it without letting it show. This wound is one whose bleeding never ends. Every memory is a flash of warmth that races over your chest with thoughts of events that could have possibly gone another way. The odds were astronomical that it would play out like this. I awaken to the tragedy I am coauthoring. Everything happens for a reason, for which I have yet to realize.

I close the jar after rinsing it out and then something comes over me. I can't explain it. I run straight out into the water, smiling and riding waves. In this moment, I'm on fire.

MY MISSING PUZZLE PIECE

by CLAIRE KURKER

I was three years old when my baby brother was brought into this world, screaming and crying as all newborn infants do, held tightly and lovingly by my mother in the hospital bed. This was the first time I met CJ, my brand-new younger sibling, and as I stared at him under the pale fluorescent lighting, I knew that I would love him unconditionally. As my parents told me years later, the day that he was born I refused to leave my brother's side and spent the next several days cuddled up next to him and my mom in that tiny hospital bed.

I was five years old when I sat on the kitchen floor of our old house watching CJ, now two, play with miniature toy cars. He slid them up and down the tiles, back and forth, occasionally making them race each other. With his chubby hands grasping his beloved cars, he gleefully exclaimed "vroom, vroom" and imitated other various car noises.

I was five years old still when CJ got his first ear infection. After a day of him holding his head and screaming, my parents took him to the hospital, where he was prescribed antibiotics.

Art by KENNA REYNER

They worked, and he got better—but not for long. CJ's immune system was weak, and he was prone to sickness. This incident was followed by more infections, more illnesses, more trips to the doctor, each time leading to the same end result: more antibiotics.

I was six years old when I heard my parents' worried voices through the paper-thin walls of our home. CJ was three years old, and he wasn't speaking. The "vroom vrooms" that once came out of his mouth were long gone, as was his desire to race cars. Something, they began to accept, wasn't right. Something, they were certain, had changed within my baby brother.

I was nearing seven years old when CJ received his diagnosis— his several diagnoses, to be exact. Each doctor had a different opinion, and each had something different to suggest. It was about six months after my family's initial concern that CJ was correctly diagnosed with severe nonverbal autism.

I had just turned seven when CJ was enrolled in preschool. Moore-Weis was a private school for autistic children in a quiet area of downtown Austin. Each day, my mother would pick me up from first grade and together we would make the drive to Lorraine Street to pick him up from school. Next door was an old-fashioned drugstore with a diner in the back. On a good day, CJ would want to go inside and get a strawberry milkshake. On a bad day, he was already crying by the time he got into the car and he wouldn't stop until we pulled into our driveway.

I was eight years old when the therapy sessions began. Each week, strangers who would later become like family would come into our house and work with CJ on things like motor skills and basic language. Aside from Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy, every Wednesday my parents would drive him to a center that specializes in working with special needs children. They had a tire swing inside the building, which I thought was the coolest thing. Every Wednesday, CJ would go to a therapy session and I would swing back and forth on that swing.

I was nine when I first began to notice the looks and the comments we would sometimes get out in public with my brother. It isn't just kids who can be cruel. Adults, often, are just as ignorant. CJ wasn't always reserved and well-mannered. He would make loud noises if he was happy and would cry or scream if he was sad. My parents refused to keep him at home out of the public eye.

They weren't going to dull his childhood for the sake of someone else's comfort.

He was a human being, and he deserved to live the happiest life he could. The stares never bothered my parents, who would kindly explain to strangers that he had autism, and they weren't going to dull his childhood for the sake of someone else's comfort.

I was twelve when a boy in my class rudely asked me what was "wrong with" CJ, and "when was he gonna get better?" I vigilantly defended the boy who was still to me my baby brother, snapping at that dumb sixth grader, calling him ignorant. For a long time growing up, I got extremely defensive every time CJ was brought up by anyone outside of my family. I slowly learned to be more tolerant, and to educate people instead of reacting with anger. However, part of what that boy said stuck with me. Would CJ ever get "better?" Would there ever be a cure?

I was sixteen years old and going into my junior year when CJ started high school. He was at the same school as me, in an amazing special needs program. I would be able to check on him whenever I felt like he needed me—even though it usually turned out to be me needing him. High school could be overwhelming, and anytime I felt myself becoming wrapped up in the chaos of tests and grades and social pressures, I would find myself walking to room 342, peeking my head in to ask if CJ was available. CJ's presence relieved any stress I was experiencing, and it was often that I would go and "check on him" when I was just having a rough day and wanted a hug from my little brother. I felt content knowing he was safe, and that I had a family member so close to me when I needed support. I felt content knowing he was right down the hall.

I was eighteen when I got ready to go off to college and leave my family in Austin. Before I left, I got a puzzle piece, the universal symbol of autism, tattooed on my inner arm. When it came time to leave, saying goodbye to CJ was the hardest part. I had no way to know if he understood where I was going, and no way to ensure he knew I would be home soon. It was my hardest goodbye. This was the first time I could remember not being with my brother.

I was eighteen years old when I started school at the University of Colorado Boulder. The adjustment hasn't been easy, but it makes me all that much more excited to go home to my brother. He sends me emails every day, and they brighten my day each time I receive one. There is still no cure for autism, but that's okay. I will always love my brother the same. We may be miles apart, but CJ will always be my missing puzzle piece.

Art by AIDAN JONES

A CUP RUNNETH OVER

by NATALIE FINAMORE

I was late almost every day of my senior year of high school. I'd wake up ten minutes after seven and watch the clock change through gummy eyes. When I finally dragged myself to the icy bathroom, I'd try and fail to put my frozen contacts in with shivering hands. When I finally came downstairs, slit-eyed against the bright kitchen lights, my mother would sigh and repress her usual reprimand. Before I slipped out the front door to face my unscraped windshield, Mom would hand me a travel mug of hot English breakfast tea with cream. "I love you, drive safely," she'd say. I'd arrive ten minutes after seven thirty, having gone ten over the speed limit with one eye closed against the glare of the sun.

When humans are faced with extreme, sudden stressors, our sympathetic nervous systems trigger a release of adrenaline, cortisol, and epinephrine, spiking our heart rates and dilating our pupils. The peripheral bodily functions, like digestion and the immune system, slow, and the surplus of energy prepares us for sudden, violent action. Our ears ring, and we must make the split-second decision on the best course of action for survival.

Scientifically, this is called the acute stress response, but we know it best as the "fight-or-flight response."

In my last track meet of seventh grade, I ran the third-fastest girls' 400-meter time in the state of Colorado. Track always made me nervous. In the moments before the gun sounded, I'd feel sick with fear, staring at my feet braced in the dusty gravel of the track. My vision would darken around the edges and my heart would feel heavy, each beat sounding through my echoing chest as if shouting its dread to my brain. I'd shift my sight up, looking for the puff of smoke in the air, because with the ringing in my ears, I didn't trust myself to hear the gun.

When it finally sounded, I'd flinch and force myself to push off the line. My legs would drag for the first hundred meters, like I was wading through six inches of sand. By the time we reached the 200-meter mark, the nerves would wear off; my heart would then concentrate on the task at hand. I'd look around at my competitors as we rounded the third curve, wondering if they were as miserable as I was, but they wouldn't seem interested in commiserating. I don't remember ever losing a race. In high school, I switched to team sports.

In the West African country of Senegal, there are two ways to drink coffee. The first is instant, with piping hot water and powdered milk. The second is called Café Touba, named after the largest religious hub in the country. It's heavily sweetened and spiced with cloves and Selim pepper, and it tastes a little bit like drinking hot Listerine, but not in a bad way.

I stopped playing in piano recitals at some point through middle school. Just the mental image of sitting at a Steinway in front of my peers and their parents, trying to hear the Beethoven through the ringing of my own ears, sent my heart racing like I was lined up for a 400. At my last recital, I'd forced my shaking fingers through the first half of Bach's Minuet in G before losing my focus and having to start over. My mom sat next to me on the stairs when I finally told her, through a thick layer of snot, that I hated performing. "Oh, that's all?" She asked with a little laugh, "You don't have to do them. You just had to tell me."

When I was young, probably seven or eight years old, we heard a rumor about a boy who'd died taking too many caffeine pills before a wrestling match. My older brother told me his heart had exploded. I eyed the baristas at my local coffee shop when my mom would take us in for Italian sodas and wondered if they knew they were dealers of death. In sixth grade, my friends and I went into that same coffee shop, and I ordered a *café au lait,* because I wanted to look cool against the vanilla steamers and hot chocolates they liked. That night, I lay awake until three, mystified and distressed at my own pounding heart.

In fourth grade, I won my class spelling bee, which qualified me to participate in the school-wide competition. On the day of, I stood with the other class winners in the biting cold of the cafeteria, dressed in a new green shirt. A mass of students sat on the floor before us, the competitors' parents leaning against the back walls. I went up for my first word, "corner". My heart had never beat so fast, my vision never so blurred with fear. "C-O-R," I began, and then immediately doubted myself. My hands went cold and shivery, and I tried to unclench them from my jeans. I hated whatever path of victory I'd taken that led me to this point. What letter had I said last? C? "O," I said, then, "Can I go back?"

At the end of the school day, I sat on a bench next to the playground, waiting for my mom and contemplating my failure. A boy I'd never seen before stopped in front of me. "Hey," he said. "You

They were dealers of death.

did really well." Later, my mom told me, "It's okay, because you actually spelled "coroner," which is a much harder word."

Even now, having passed fourth grade, I lose my ability to multitask when I'm stressed or nervous. I envy my peers for their ability to compartmentalize, to say, "it's not productive to think about this right now, focus on the task at hand." A single "can we talk?" text sends my heart into fits, sets my brain on a singular track of worst-case-scenarios that can't be derailed until it's seen closure. The starting gun for a track meet still gives me shivers, turns my muscles cold. The word "coroner" still makes me think of that frozen, grey cafeteria, trying to focus on the red blur of my mother's winter jacket against the back wall.

My first real relationship took two and a half years to end. Sometime after, I went home for dinner and fought with my mother, who was worried about whether I was sleeping enough. To apologize, she drove me home and helped me change the sheets on my bed. That weekend, my dad texted me, and we went to his favorite café in Denver to talk about anything but my breakup. He got a pour over and drank it black. I got a Vietnamese, satisfyingly over-sweet and coated in cinnamon.

When we drink caffeine, our bodies release adrenaline, cortisol, and epinephrine, the same hormones that trigger our fight-or-flight response. Our blood vessels constrict, our hearts race and our minds can focus more easily. The average adult human can safely consume up to 400 mg of caffeine per day, but over time, we develop a tolerance and need to consume greater quantities for the same effect.

I try to keep my tolerance very low: a cup of tea a day through high school and most of college, a rare cappuccino on test days or for hangovers. In high school, a friend of mine drank two quad-shot caramel lattes a day. Her system was constantly flooded with caffeine and sugar, and her backpack rattled with spare change and anxiety medications. I'd give her the Starbucks Rewards stickers off the Costco-sized bags of coffee beans my parents would buy, hoping to relieve the fifteen-dollar-per-day burden on her bank account.

There have been over eight thousand episodes of Jeopardy! aired to date, the last 36 years of which have been hosted by Alex Trebek. In a recent interview, Trebek confessed feelings of deep depression while undergoing treatment for pancreatic

cancer. But he says his job helps him keep going, because it wakes him up. [1]

At least once a week, my roommates and I gather in front of the television and binge on recorded episodes of *Jeopardy!* until one of us gives up and goes to bed. We shout our mostly incorrect answers, and we have a house rule that if someone needs extra time to answer the question before the timer goes off, we pause it until they settle on an answer. I watch the competitors sweat under the bright studio lights, their hands shaking on the little remotes, and I'm glad I'm here, comfortable and warm in my living room, with a pause button and no public humiliation if I get a wrong answer.

In Senegal, tea is served after dinner in a series of three small glasses, each round sweeter and stronger than the last. The leaves are a mixture of peppermint and Chinese green tea, mixed with sugar and poured back and forth between two pots to develop a froth. It's considered a useful social tool, good for making visitors comfortable.

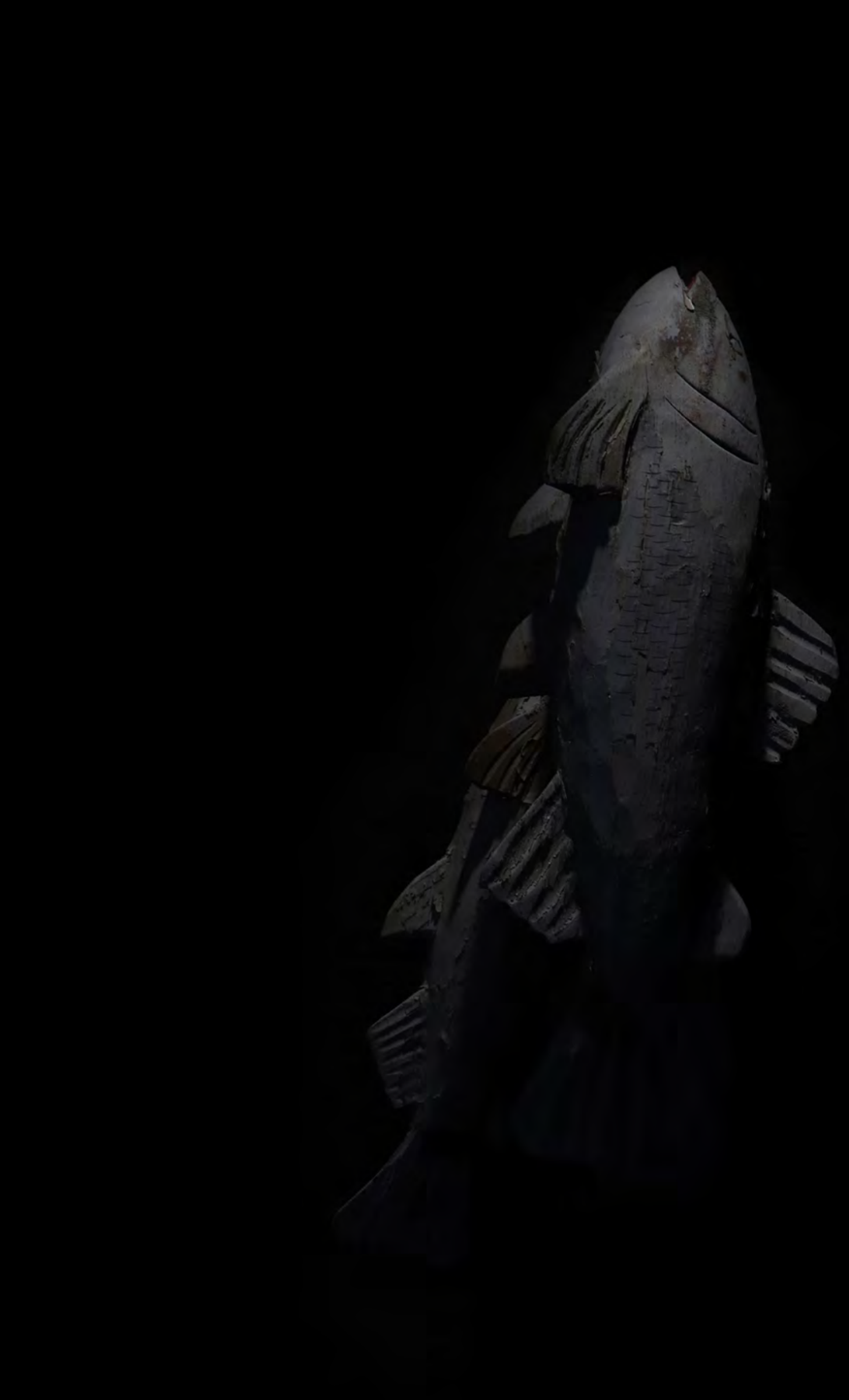
I barely slept my first week in Dakar. The mosquitoes slipped through the gaps in my curtains, ravaged my exposed arms, and swelled the space above my left eye. On my third day, I acquired a mosquito net, which I rigged up from the corner of the wardrobe using the handle of a spray bottle and a heavy book. Over the next couple of days, the itching slowed, and my eyebrow returned to its normal size, but I still found myself wide awake into the early morning. When I learned to politely decline the third glass of tea, I began to sleep better.

After every Hanukkah dinner with my relatives in Massachusetts, my uncle Eric takes drink orders and spends the next twenty minutes distributing cups of hot Irish breakfast tea and black coffee, which we are free to augment with cream according to our own Kosher preferences. We sit around the packed table, starting conversations and debates while we wait for our mugs to cool. My younger Jewish cousins make a beeline for the playroom, because hot chocolate is made off-limits by the presence of milk. I always ask for decaf tea, because the time change already makes it hard enough to sleep when we visit.

My father loves coffee, which is lucky, because he also loves staying up late. It's a trait we share. Our brains work best between the hours of 11 PM and 2 AM, as if we'd just finished a fresh pot. When I come home to visit, the two of us will sit in comfortable silence for hours every night in the spotty light of the floor lamps, until he gets up, stretches, and gives the cat a last kiss on the forehead. One of us will ask, "Wanna drink coffee and stay up all night?" And the other will laugh, because of course we do. The comfort of the night is somehow purer than the light of the day. But if we never go to bed, we don't get to drink the first morning coffee.

1. Proto, Dominick, Angeline Jane Bernabe, and Cameron Harrison. 2020. "Alex Trebek Shares Details of Experimental Treatment for Cancer Battle". Good Morning America. https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/culture/story/alex-trebek-opens-battle-cancer-experimental-treatment-memoir-71872701.

Art by AIDAN JONES



Art by MORGAN CLEMENS

JERSEY BOYS DON'T CRY

AN ODE TO THE GAY VOICE IN POETRY

by CHAD TANNOUS

Burn

When walking on the cobbled sweating streets,
Through center town, I stop to have a drink.
Begrimed the fog in valley sets to speak,
To visions of the "what's already seen."

Like one who acts like god is here to give,
The mucid trace of once experienced:
Begets my physic, like a snuff, and hence.
The lighting call of music down the lane.

The frisk and gambol sure'd my measure;
That I should keep on dancing like a child,
With youth by candle light and flushed with mead...
Not drowning now but flying promenade.

By the labyrinth of what's Implied in thee,
I'm running through the halls of jubilee.

With longing to the forests edge I creep...
Imbibe upon the sweet lycanthropy.

Magnolia

you'll find it on the back streets
on hot and humid nights.
you'll smell the night is tinged
with something saccharine bleeding
melancholic.

remembering nights when me and my guy
would be altered and grow nostalgic;

remembering times when decaying crusts of summers
    browning bronzed you;
ask me how the back end of his thigh tastes...
fluorescent?
what about the inside of his neckline...
phosphorescent?

full gut but somehow craving,
so sweet but somehow rotting,
in the halogen lights,
what is this smell?
magnolia

Deep Shreds

new paper shredding machine
warm plastic air blowing out
fresh and clean
take all the discourse
and throw it away
matrice the letters
and get them to say

01010001
I'll give you my mistakes
to make people forget them
I'll give you my cards
so nobody can use me
give you my statements keep the stuff and
stop giving my hours away for free.
I think all day about coming right home
opening the mail and then shredding away,
the cascading strips like pieces of meaningless data concerning and conversing with one
    another about meaning
I daydream about feeling your pinion gear beating
against that matte black edge I banged in on the way out of staples
to plug and press
shuffle and set
wait and guess
do I lead or feed?
confetti or slice?
dice or dash?
slash or gash?
this open hole
of teeth and cutters
cluttered and covered
by spacers and bases
eating the faces
of people I pretended to be
just pulling them in
ripping strand by strand
skin from flesh
muscle from joint
name from sex
temper from mind

Burn it down

last time we tried to change the world too fast to try to change the world too fast we tried to
    change the world too fast last time we tried to change the world too fast to change the
    world this time we hope the change we try will last.

FLYING THE LONELY SKIES

by NATALIE FINAMORE

On a standard Tuesday night, Chicago O'Hare airport is a quiet, sparsely populated landscape of fluorescent lighting and muted carpet hallways. The escalators hum and the odd gate agent passes by, heading for the CTA Blue Line that runs under Terminal 1 and winds its way downtown to the Loop. The sound of footsteps on tile floors is muffled by the rolling of suitcase wheels, the light murmur of check-in kiosks, and the beeping of an electric cart as it creeps along. But this library-like atmosphere is hardly O'Hare's only mode of operation: the airport was 2019's sixth busiest airport, handling an average of over two hundred and thirty thousand passengers per day. In terms of total passengers for the year, it ranked just behind Tokyo Haneda and Dubai International. From 1963 to 1998, it was officially the World's Busiest Airport, and today operates an exceptionally equal ratio of international to regional flights. It also happens to be, in a way, my brother's second home.

March 17 of 2020 was a Tuesday, but it was hardly standard at O'Hare. It followed the worldwide recall of Americans abroad on the Saturday before, which resulted in a bottleneck of travelers at International Arrivals and an internet-famous six-hour wait for customs. Thankfully, I arrived late to that particular party, and when I found myself at the top of the same staircase where I'd seen hundreds of luggage-laden Americans waiting in line, their shoulders brushing and breaths mingling, I paused. The hallway before me was barren, the customs line in front of it barely filling half of the rope barriers. An unmasked customs officer compared my unmasked face to my passport photo and handed it back to me.

Art by JASEY CHANDERS

At baggage claim, the conveyor belts trundled their way along, muffling our worries with their hums. I found my suitcase and pinballed around the International Arrivals terminal, hopelessly lost. After three passes, I received guidance from a kind older Wisconsinite couple and finally found my way onto a bus to meet my brother in the frigid Chicago air outside Terminal 1. He hugged me and slung one of my backpacks over his shoulder. A pamphlet from customs on disease transmission poked out of my pocket the whole time.

Will is a young pilot, recently turned 25. He started flying out of O'Hare as a first officer for a small regional subsidiary airline at 23 after graduating from flight school just over a year ago. Late last fall, we stood together in our hometown rec center, sweating between sets of squats, discussing his job. An older man, having overheard our conversation, approached us and asked Will to confirm that he was, in fact, a professional pilot. Upon receiving an affirmative, he turned away, but gave one last glance back at my brother. "Huh," he said. "That's a little scary."

Will's love for aviation began early, so I've never been intimidated by his ability to find a career so young. But my brother barely looks his age when he's in uniform, much less when he's in shorts and a t-shirt, his curly hair just a bit too long. Even when he is dressed to fly, in a white button down that would make 1960s NASA engineers jealous and a black suit jacket with silver stripes across the cuffs, I think, "it's not Halloween yet." Of course, I would (and have) trusted Will with the task of flying me in any metal tube through the sky, but the man's reaction makes sense. We want to believe that when we fly, our lives are in the hands of the experienced pilots, the ones who have seen and done it all. But the ranks of the commercial airborne can hardly provide us that comfort, because most of them look just like my brother. His classmates, fellow graduates from the University of Oklahoma Aviation program, present a similarly youthful face of the future of commercial flight. While they're all highly trained and qualified pilots, they could also pass for the pledge class of a Midwest frat: just baby-faced enough to get carded at the bar, just ragged enough for you to know they've each ducked death once or twice.

Upon graduation from flight school, new pilots are assigned to fly out of a major flight hub, which for the big-league airlines is a high-capacity international airport like O'Hare, Dallas Fort

They could also pass for the pledge class of a Midwest frat: just baby-faced enough to get carded at the bar, just ragged enough for you to know they've each ducked death once or twice.

Worth, or John F. Kennedy. If the pilot doesn't have the luxury of uprooting their life to be close to their hub (a friend of Will's, with a wife and newborn in Dallas, was recently assigned to JFK), they have to catch flights to work, known as "deadheading." But new pilots flying red-eye shifts and sitting early-morning reserve (pilot-speak for on-call) hours can't easily find flights that get them to their hub in time, and that's where the crash pad comes in. A crash pad is an apartment outfitted to hold six or more temporary sleepers while they're on duty, like a truck stop for aviators. Occupants can rent a "cold bed," which is a spot in a bunk that's guaranteed to be empty when they need it, or a "hot bed," which—you guessed it—has the chance of being occupied when they show up. With one bathroom and unwashed sheets, most crash pads are hotspots of drama and disease, but they do the trick.

Anyone could tell you that flying is a lonely profession. Most pilots are away from home a minimum of sixteen days every month,[1] which doesn't leave much time to make new friends in a new city. An average trip lasts four days, and a crew sticks together for that whole time, so they do have plenty of bonding opportunities on and off-board. Will's been to Mexico twice with two different crews, and they went to a gay club the first time and an ice-skating rink the second. The more experienced crew members recommend their favorite restaurants and bars in a new city, and last week Will sent our family group-chat a picture of him and his crew sightseeing at the lighthouse in Providence, Rhode Island. The problem is it doesn't last. "Each member of a crew can come from a different city," Will tells me, and crews are rarely scheduled together more than once. "It's not like an office job, where you see the same people every day. You get four days with people to see if you want to be friends, and after that, it's up to you."

When it comes to family, time off is prioritized by seniority, so new pilots are almost guaranteed to miss several years' worth of Thanksgivings, New Years' Eves, and other high-travel holidays—Will spent last Christmas in a hotel room in Portland, Maine, and the one before that on reserve in his apartment in Chicago. And maintaining a personal life is hard: many airlines

1. Blakemore, Erin. 2016. "Think Your Job Is Depressing? Try Being An Airline Pilot". Smithsonian Magazine. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/airline-pilots-are-really-depressed-180961475/.

don't grant time-off requests for crewmember weddings simply because they happen so often. A study by the *Journal of Environmental Health* [2] puts longtime airline crew members' rates of depression, insomnia, and feelings of social isolation much higher than normal, although it's not clear that these issues stem directly from the lifestyle. As passengers, we often think of flying as a social calling, to see our family and friends. But to the people who fly the planes, the same flights that bring us closer to our loved ones bring them further from theirs.

Of course, they chose this path. My brother loves flying twice as much as I could ever hope to love my job. He grew up learning to fly with our dad and spent his afternoons with remote control airplanes in the park. He hit a thousand hours on Microsoft Flight Simulator before I reached the fourth grade. He spent the summer after his senior year of high school getting his private pilot's license, his first two years at the University of Colorado studying aerospace engineering. When that line of interest ran its course, he transferred to OU to learn to fly professionally. Now, he flies for half the month and plays flight simulators with his friends the other half; sometimes, when I open my computer, I get a Steam notification that he's playing a game called "Airport CEO." When he comes home on a weekend off, he takes our Dad's little Cessna out for entire days. The longer he can stay off the surface of the earth, the better. Flying was originally my dad's hobby, but it's become my brother's livelihood.

When I call Will, he has an equal chance of being in a generic hotel room in the eastern United States as he does of being in his Wicker Park apartment. This month and through the New Year, he'll be living out of a hotel in Dallas, training to fly a new type of aircraft. When he is on duty, his airline, a subsidiary of American, flies regional routes that regularly put him in Fayetteville, Providence, and White Plains, which he does his best to explore through running and the occasional restaurant. But he can't deny that transient life gets to him sometimes. "The problem with Southwest pilots," he complained to me the other day, "is that they're so goddamned happy all the time." South-

2. Wu, Alexander C., Deborah Donnelly-McLay, Marc G. Weisskopf, Eileen McNeely, Theresa S. Betancourt, and Joseph G. Allen. 2016. "Airplane Pilot Mental Health And Suicidal Thoughts: A Cross-Sectional Descriptive Study Via Anonymous Web-Based Survey". Environmental Health 15 (1). doi:10.1186/s12940-016-0200-6.

west Airlines pays hotels to provide their crew with meals when they arrive, so they don't have to carry a four-day trip's worth of dinners and breakfasts with them. According to Will, no matter where you travel, a Southwest crew will have none of the expected cynicism that comes along with the career and far too much pep. It's implied that a respectable pilot should and will act unflappably blasé, regardless of the circumstances. When asked about what it's like to land a full aircraft, Will shrugs. "It's just landing a plane, but with sixty-five people in the backseat."

My family had Thanksgiving eleven days early this year to accommodate Will's schedule. He tends to pop in and out of my childhood home with little fanfare. There's a new girl he's seeing in Chicago who works in healthcare and lives near Wrigley Field with her two special-needs cats. "I was a little nervous the first time she came over," he said, taking a glass out of my hand and drying it off. I can see why—with a foldout of a cockpit on the wall and a cold soldering iron on the floor next to the closet door, his apartment stands as an engineer's poster child for bachelor pads. His closet is full, not of skeletons, but of aviation paraphernalia. "I think I need to get a bed frame," he said right before we went back to the dining room. "Where'd you get yours?"

He's also frustrated, he said, because he started texting with a cute flight attendant recently. But given the nature of their jobs, they're rarely ever in the same city. "Twenty-some years of minding my own business, and suddenly I have options? In a pandemic?" He hasn't even been able to get a cat yet—such

Art by NATALIE FINAMORE

solitude is prohibitive for even the most independent of pets. I can only imagine two girlfriends might be significantly more difficult.

If being a pilot is a lonely profession, being a pilot in a pandemic can hardly be easier. Isolation has descended upon us all, and airports have taken the brunt of the bad publicity. For many, abstaining from travel was the easiest adjustment to make, rather than cancelling birthday parties, lunch dates, or any of the other mundane activities that made life humane. And when the initial surge of travelers dwindled, it really dwindled: Forbes.com reported a drop from 2.6 million air travelers per day in the United States to just over 95 thousand by mid-April.[3] Flights were canceled, pilots were furloughed, and planes took off half-empty. In late April, many major American airlines opted in to the CARES Act, which included a $25 billion bailout meant to keep them afloat through the passenger shortage. Will managed to avoid near-certain furlough in this way: instead of being unemployed for the next several months, he was assigned to sit reserve, but never received a call. For most of spring and into summer, he did what most of the rest of us did, which is to say that he sat at home being only occasionally productive and socially isolated. A friend of his, a former employee of Air Wisconsin, wasn't so lucky—hired just six months after Will, he didn't make the cut-off and now, waiting to come off furlough, works for Swissport managing fueling schedules.

Kids these days are lonely—there's no two ways about it. More than any generation before, young people are experiencing social isolation—and not just because of the pandemic. Over-emphasis on productivity and professional advancements means that we are encouraged to spend every idle moment working on our futures and our résumés, not building friendships. In the airborne world, this translates to flying as often as possible to build a logbook of flight hours upon which promotions are based. But this summer, we all experienced a period of forced idleness everyone responded differently to: journaling, workout videos, and virtual internships all made it into my newsletters from the university. Instead, I went to stay with Will in Chicago for the month of June while he sat reserve, which meant we just had to stay within two hours of O'Hare during his on-duty hours. We toured Jackson Park, after which I read *Devil In The White City* in two days on the back porch. We went to visit his pilot friend—coincidentally, also named Will—and sat on the back porch of the attic apartment he shares with his partner, Daniel, and two guinea pigs named Molly and Marina (so I must concede the point that it is, in fact, possible to have pets as a pilot, but only if you live with someone who will take care of them). We bemoaned our woes under the bright sun: my brother Will his lack of flight hours, our friend Will his furloughed state, and Daniel his twice-a-week retail job, watching the airliners fly the pattern into O'Hare and feeding leaf after leaf of romaine lettuce to the squeaking pigs. It was, after all, the most conversation any of us had had all summer.

Even when he is flying, Will struggles to find people to relate to. "There's such a large gap in age between direct coworkers," he texted me from Dallas, after I accidentally called him during his class to ask for remarks. "Most captains I fly with are 20 to 25 years older than me, and that can be difficult because we don't often see the same way on social issues." Indeed, aviators tend to make up a strongly conservative community, and Will often spends hours in the cockpit with captains who still call it the "Chinese Virus," or who will rage against the youths of today without realizing they're talking to one. His job places him in most direct contact with people—usually men—who are old enough to be his father and have been doing the job as long as he's been alive. Their disenchantment with the lifestyle can get frustrating to someone who's hardly ever wanted to do anything else with his life, so he and I will trade venting sessions over text every so often: I about my classes, he about the racists to whom he occasionally must demur.

But the dissonance isn't necessarily one-sided. When 9/11 transformed the commercial aviation industry entirely almost twenty years ago, many of these older pilots were already established in their positions and have since struggled to adjust to the changes. The wide gap in pilots' ages means that the newcomers are presenting challenges to such an ideologically settled population. Some of the people they're now working with were barely out of kindergarten in 2001, and halfway through middle school when the economy collapsed in 2008. "Those events are a bit

3. Sachmechi, Natalie. 2020. "Airlines Are Being Bailed Out Again, Here's What Economists Think Will Happen Next". Forbes. https://www.forbes-com/sites/nataliesachmechi/2020/04/17/airlines-are-being-bailed-out-again-heres-what-economists-think-will-happen-next/?sh=6b524214356f.

more abstract [for us] than they are for our older co-workers," Will says graciously, although I'm not certain he'd receive the same kindness in return. Many of these older pilots bonded over and shaped their careers around these struggles, but to their new co-workers, they're barely even memories.

Will and I grew up flying; our dad was a hobby pilot before Will was even born. An early photo of my brother shows him in a Cessna 182 sometime in the first six months of his life, smiling toothlessly at the camera in my mother's arms, the distant ground visible out of the window. Dad used to fly us to Christmases in Buffalo, which was slower but cheaper than flying commercial, or a quick twenty minutes out to breakfast in Greeley. But this was all a bit too tame for him, so in June of 2004 my parents thought, "what if we put two under-ten-year-olds in a small plane for two weeks?" And we packed up and flew across the Yukon to Alaska. I don't remember much from it, having been five at the time, but the photos are priceless.

Dad's whole camera was packed with images, each named with his typical cynicism, of the desolate mountain ranges and deep valleys I was too young to appreciate. Instead, I am drawn to "ho hum.jpg," in which an eight-year-old Will stares resolutely at his Game Boy Advance while Mt. McKinley looms out the window. Another, "watch where you're going.jpg," shows him in the co-pilot's seat, smiling at the camera, not looking at the mountainside that sits just a little too close for comfort to the right side of the plane. When we got home, we absolutely hated the slideshows, because they ended up being what felt like hours and hours of mountains and glaciers and lakes and "Dad, can't you take pictures of people for once?" Alaska has by far the lowest population density of all the United States, with 1.3 people per square mile,[4] and the highest ratio of small airplanes to people. We desperately wanted Dad to show us pictures of people, but the fact is that there weren't all that many people to take pictures of there. Little Cessnas, like the one we were flying, are often the only way for Alaskans to get mail, medicine, and

Another, "watch where you're going. jpg," shows him in the co-pilot's seat, smiling at the camera, not looking at the mountainside that sits just a little too close for comfort to the right side of the plane.

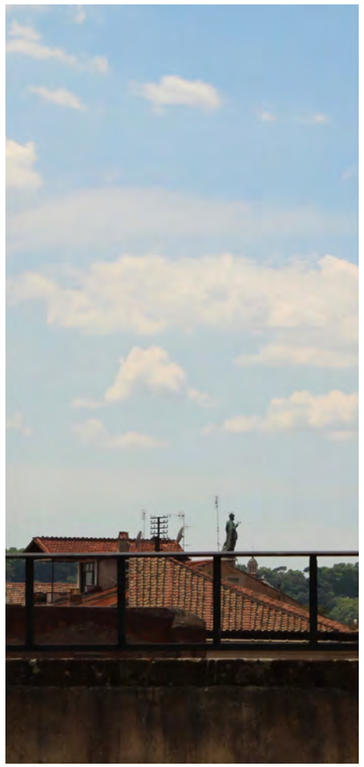
4. "Population Density In The U.S., By State 2020 | Statista". 2020. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/183588/population-density-in-the-federal-states-of-the-us/#:~:text=As%20a%20whole%2C%20there%2were,1.3%20residents%20per%20square%20mile.&text=Simply%20put%2C%20population%20density%20is,the%20area%20of%20the%2country.

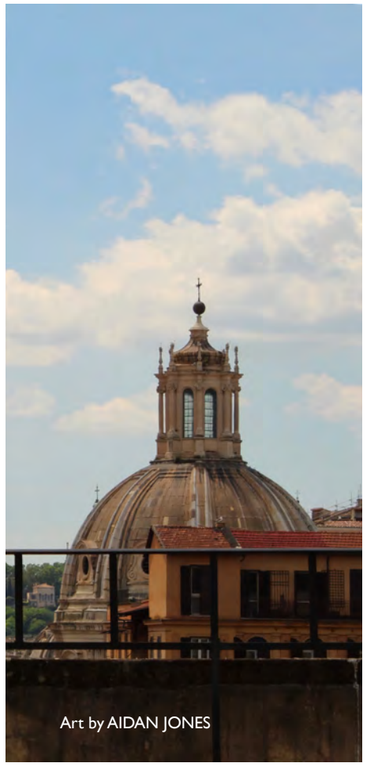
tourist traffic. We were traveling through the loneliest state in the country, and it showed.

For one week each July, a hundred thousand airplanes of all sizes converge on Wittman Regional Airport near Oshkosh, Wisconsin. Small planes line up in rows and attendees camp under their wings for the week, risking thunderstorms and mud for the world's largest fly-in airshow, which offers aerial spectacles and more explosives than a Texan Fourth of July. Aviation's age gap exists at Oshkosh too, but leans even more heavily towards the geriatric, which can become downright cringeworthy. When older men strike up conversation with Dad, it's not uncommon for me to receive either absolutely zero attention or absolutely inappropriate amounts of it, complete with condescending questions: "And do you fly too, young lady?" We love Oshkosh, but a great deal of that comes from our ability to laugh at it. Every afternoon, patriotic music and misguided proclamations issue from the airport loudspeakers seemingly at random, as Soviet-era war trophies make low, loud passes along the flightline, trailing blue show smoke and pursued by triumphant—if not chronologically realistic—Mustangs.

Will hasn't been able to make it to Oshkosh the last couple of years, but he's usually amused and unfazed when we tell him about the political environment. It reminds me that while this is a tourist attraction to us, it's not too far off from the realities of his job, the consequences of a transient lifestyle. It's easy to try to pin the conservative politics of aviation on age alone, but the truth is that by nature, a professional pilot is removed from the neighborhood, the diverse community, and is socially isolated from nearly everyone but his co-workers. It's easy for him to sink into the culture of a heavily capitalist, economy-driven industry, the echo chamber of blame and who's costing who jobs. And it's easy to forget that, among all of this chaos, young pilots are growing into a career that actively nudges them away, that says, "Aren't you tired of all this? Your captains disrespect you, your bunk might be occupied tonight, your friends are scattered across the country, and you can't even get a cat!"

But that's the thing, isn't it? They're not tired of it. Some people like to stand on the ground and gaze at the stars, but for pilots like Will, the view from the cockpit will always be sweeter.





Art by AIDAN JONES

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

by EMILY ANDERSON

A dim haze filters through the blinds covering the two windows of our cave-like dorm room. The first window sits in the far corner, so tucked away that the light barely reaches the edge of the rug. The other window casts the same stale light on my roommate's bed, where I can see her legs sprawled between her comforter still wearing the jeans she wore last night.

I am disoriented in the dark corner of our room. My skin is cold and dry. I sit up and feel a headache coming on as I start feeling for my phone in my sheets. No luck. I glance at the floor hoping it fell in my sleep, but instead let out a sigh. I scan the crumpled biology homework, dirty laundry, napkins, the tins of Chipotle take-out containers, a hairbrush, an exploded compact of bronzer, mini red Solo cups, two rotting apple cores not far from the trash can lying on its side, an open bag of tortilla chips, strawberries—there are strawberries on the ground, free from their container, slowly losing their bright red coloring. I take note of the different cosmetic bags, all open and spilled across the desk, each belonging to the girls here last night, yet I am not sure

where they ended up. My makeup brushes are sporadically laced between eyeshadow palettes foreign to me, a few somehow finding themselves in other girls' bags. I have always hated sharing.

The clutter on the desk complements the elaborate trappings of the wall—maps of Chicago, skylines, sorority letters, pictures.Too many pictures cover the wall, edge to edge: me and my best friends, me and my dog, my brother's football picture and my sister's yearbook photo, a picture of the view from my bedroom window, pictures from prom, graduation, so many pictures of familiar faces that my roommate knows the name of every one of my best friends from home. I glance over the faces smiling back at me and I feel like crying.

It's Sunday, I think to myself. Again. Already Sunday. The list of to-do items swirls around in my head, which includes a lot of what I put off last Sunday. This list includes cleaning the room. Our room isn't messy in some Project-X, ridiculous time-of-our lives, teenage mess type of way. Our room is a disaster that screams nothing is going that well and I lost my Sociology textbook and I'm out of clean yoga pants and I had FatShack delivered three days in a row and I can't find my Buff One. The cycle continues, or rather, pushes me along.

The cycle continues, or rather, pushes me along.

I hear the muffled ringing of my phone somewhere underneath me. I frantically slide off of my bed and land on my feet with a smack to the cold, tile floor. I fall into a pile of clothes under my bed and start tossing things this way and that. My phone hits the wall with a thud, and I dive to answer.

"Mom?" My voice breaks. "I want to go home."

The air feels different. This type of cold feels clean. Smells clean. I roll over in my bed, my sheets smell of fragrant detergent. The soft blue walls glow in the light cascading in through the window which overlooks my backyard, and from here I can see the row of snow-capped arborvitae trees lining the edge of our lot.

My bed, two nightstands, a desk, and a dresser are the only things touching the floor. Now my feet. I walk across the room to my own bathroom, the glass shower door and its white tile shining in the sun pouring in through the skylight. My gaze locks on my reflection in the floor-to-ceiling mirror. I look different. A little different than I used to. Maybe it's being back in this lighting, maybe it's. . . I don't know, my eyebrows? I'm almost alarmed at how pale and sunken my face looks.

Over the sound of brushing my teeth, I hear the low rumbling of my siblings yelling at each other a floor below. Almost bittersweet, at first. I can track their movements by recognizing the sound of each of their footsteps. I take note of my mom's frantic and angry stomping and hear as she makes her way up the stairs to my door, her words becoming easier to make out as she continues yelling at my siblings to stop yelling.

My door flies open. I pause, toothbrush dangling from my mouth. My mom is almost short of breath, her blonde hair sticking out every which way from a low bun. Her eyes are tired, yet obviously upset with me when they meet my gaze after scanning the room.

"Em, c'mon, it's almost 12:30," she says, practically still yelling, basically whining. She shakes her head in disappointment.

"Yeah?" I murmur as I finish up brushing, spit, and turn the faucet off.

"Are we going to breakfast or not?!" She throws her hands up.

"We're going to breakfast?"

"I wanted to. But that's great, Em, good afternoon. You know what, how about you go back to sleep. Just go back to sleep." She starts closing the door.

"Wait—Mom—Wait, what?"

"No, Em, it's fine," she screams back, already stomping down the stairs again, where I hear her muffled, "You two can stop arguing because we're not going anymore anyway."

I fling my door open and follow her. I scan the various lines needed to talk her down, as per usual: Mom, I didn't know we were going to breakfast, why didn't you say something yesterday, I'm sorry I slept in, I needed the sleep, you should have woken me up, it's 12:30 anyway, why did you wait this long, what's with the dramatics this morning, all to which she'll cut me off with a "Will you stop it?! Stop! I have a lot to do."

"Good morning, stupid," my brother snickers in passing. "Glad to see you upright today."

It's only 12:30, I think to myself. I've had worse wake up times in the recent past.

I start walking back up the stairs as my mom attends to the pile of envelopes and magazines and miscellaneous papers and lost things in the pile on the dining room table that still sat tall when I left for school four months ago. I check my phone for the first time today and end up tripping on a barricade of laundry baskets on the second floor, some full of clothes, some full of crap—books, hangers, old Little League trophies, mementos. I drop my phone and it tumbles near my sister's door, who pauses, stares at me as she wears her grouch expression, slowly picks it up, and hands it back to me in disgust. She glares for another second or two before slowly turning around and hiking through the piles of clothes and boxes of old sentiments that I tripped on in the first place.

"Aren't you all so glad I'm home?" I yell sarcastically, angrily, before closing my door, jumping on my bed, and throwing the comforter over my face. I set an alarm for 1:00.

As I close my eyes I hear my dad's booming voice from downstairs scream, "What the hell is everyone yelling about?"

"No seriously though, how's Boulder?" All attention in the familiar basement shift to me. I give a telling shrug, and some of the boys roll their eyes. My girlfriends' glance at each other, then back at me in a slow panic, knowing I'm not sure how to answer and that I'm hoping my moment in the spotlight fades quickly.

"C'mon, you go to school in the mountains," Nathan laughs. "It looks ridiculous."

"Yeah, it looks like you're having a riot," someone adds. I know I haven't posted anything in a while since that would require me leaving my dorm room, which has lately felt like a black hole. I guess one post on the top of a mountain in the middle of August leaves a mark.

"I mean, it may look like that but.... I'm not gonna lie, it's just alright."

"Dude, I go to school in Iowa and you're telling me Boulder's just alright?" The boys laugh and snicker in confusion; some think I'm being coy, and some think I'm being a brat. I think of the only two people I consider friends and the landfill that is my dorm room and my non-existent social life, since the weekends seem ruled by kids who live on campus, far from my overflow-dorm, a bus ride away. I think of the parties that kids who don't go to Boulder must think I live for, but I picture myself alone close to 1:00AM, scavenging through the crowd for something to chug to cloud the awareness of the fact that I know no one in the room. I think of how desperately I look at the pictures on my wall every day and wish that I was back here, in some basement we used to hang out in, in the middle of my hometown, with people that remind me of who I am.

"Yeah. It's just alright."

I picture myself alone close to 1:00AM, scavenging through the crowd for something to chug to cloud the awareness of the fact that I know no one in the room.

It's a weird thing to go back and visit your high school after you've spent a year in college. It's weird catching up with old teachers and coaches, engaging in conversation while they have to pause at times to supervise the classroom, take a question, address the team—like they're responding to a life now foreign to you, yet right in front of your face, a life they've still been living since you left it behind. It's weird to see a part of your life moving on just as gracefully and uninterrupted as it did while you were still a part of it.

It's weird to come back home and realize that the mess seemed to follow me. Home was no longer the glittering daydream or the fallback plan. My house was a mess, my family was still rough around the edges, and I still found myself draped in the sadness and fear for the future that I carried while at school. Messes can behave like that—shapeshifting, following you wherever you roam, meanwhile Home seemed to be something that kept running from me. I couldn't find it anywhere. I didn't feel that my hometown was really for me anymore, just a pit stop to look back and reminisce before we all got on with our new lives again, back to school. The start of sophomore year was coming in hot.

My room is very pink. Super pink. I mean, the walls are grey, obviously cheaply repainted too many times, and the closet doors are a weathered wood with outdated gold knobs. But anything not up to my landlord is pink, which I would have never picked in the past. Too girly, too prissy. But now, this year, I love it. It's mine.

The walls are adorned with my own drawings and a few posters. On the corner of my full-length mirror hangs a fuzzy leopard print coat and a pink cowgirl hat. My desk is white and clean, built myself per Target's instruction manual. On it sits three mason jars—one for eye makeup brushes, one for blush brushes, and one for pens and pencils. All of my makeup has found a place in one of three cosmetic bags, all of which are neatly packed into my makeup drawer. My bedding is simple and pink. I have two pictures in the room, each framed, each of my two best friends from home. One sits on my desk, the other on my nightstand in between my digital clock and a small plant. There's one other picture in the room, huge, printed, and hung over my desk—me and the friends I made earlier this year.

It still gets messy sometimes, as everything does. But the mess doesn't run as deep anymore. Everything has a place.

I get a text from my roommate, my best friend: Where r u? Wanna hang

I respond: Ya, I'm Home.

PEGASUS: SONG TO MIKE

by CHRISTEN MALLOY

He showed up like a long shadow
on an evening sun
hidden behind grey boiling clouds,
accompanied by a howling wind
and a driving rain.

His face was long and bothered
his Native roots bringing out red
in an already ruddy
stubbled salt-and-pepper visage
of years spent flowing through life
with different types of people
through different passages of time.

The tattoos, faded green-and-black
on hairy arms that shined
and sagged slightly from age
showing through in wrinkles and frowns -
a map of life, of all those that mattered
told silent stories
of lives, loves and losses,
all present in between faded lines -
a canvas of lived experiences,
a face that could charm
with piercing-blue-eyes
and a cunning, sharp, smile.

Master craftsman, motorcyclist and guitarist
last of the true old hands
of some guard of men, whether good or naught,
that had hands that longed to fix,
solve, tinker, measure, and gesture
in broad sweeping waves
with their fingers in the air.
We stripped the large musty carpet
and rolled it into a corner
and measured the old floorboards below
setting bags of tools
round in a circle on the floor -
he paced the room thinking
hands tracing across walls and moldings
up-and-down along the sides
of doors and windows
as eyes saw through -
beyond what was,
in order to see what could be -
a future space
envisioned and planned
inside a steel trap
set behind a furrowed brow.

In the dead of winter
weak coffee and strong cigarettes
got work on the farm done
in all weathers,
for the better
because a farm always needs fixing –
somewhere.

I would meet you
by the rusted old red barn
beneath the solitary
brown-and-yellow chinaberry tree
that would bloom the brightest shades
of purple and pink in spring
only to shrivel and wither in summer
under the unrelenting gaze of a sun
that cooked and cracked the earth,
turning soft soil to broken clay -
the green grass,
losing its color -
would change to swaths of
russet golds and mustard yellows,
beneath bright blue skies
and rolling clouds,
marching inland from the Gulf -
folding and flowing across the land
shaped like motherships,
anvils or crowns -
depending on the season
and the direction of the wind.

His hands worked on wood
like Moses parting water
a magician of measures,
cuts, and corners -
his eye for carpentry
was fine and precise.
A series of thoughts
became actions -
a man of his word:
who sometimes spoke
in riddles,
rhymes
and verse.

You took me to places
secret spaces
small and dark
and full of smoke and cards
old boys hanging around tables
like sausages in a smoker
drying out and seasoning
over time.

You taught me to roll smokes
in the wind and rain
untold numbers of hand-made pleasures -
the smell of Bugler from an open bag
shoved hastily back
into long coat pockets,
would mix with the rain on the earth
and wet hay and fresh shit
as thoughts drifted back to work
amid hacking coughs and growls
glancing sideways to spit like a cobra -
always with an attention
to the direction of the wind.

Your tiny silver airstream
parked by the shiny tin barn
above and beside
the long stretch of cow pasture,
the metal gate, and the town graveyard –
filled with the history
of local Black folk -
going back so far in time
tombstones get lost
in the unending encroachment
of a densely growing forest line.

His greatest gift
a skill beyond words -
to sing the steel harp
like Hendrix bent chords.

A twangy wail
would rise up
echoed from inside
the carapace of the silver trailer -
or sometimes around campfires
bright and warm -
or carried up
on the wind in storms -
to flutter and warble
bittersweet songs
beneath brooding clouds
masking pale full moons.

Art by HAILEY CADE

THE ROCK PUBLIC

by PATRICK YEHLE

I was young when my political career kicked off. I have seen friends turn to enemies and enemies turn to friends all for one cause, for one sole purpose, for one aspiration. Power. Two syllables, five letters, simple enough to teach a child but strong enough to destroy an entire society. Power led me down a road of creation, a road of enlightened thought, and poisoned my heart and mind into destroying both myself and everyone in my wake. This word is what led to the creation and downfall of my greatest childhood achievement, Rock Town.

Fourth grade in Crested Butte, Colorado began like any other year. My classmates and I returned grudgingly to school, where we endured classes and escaped by the end of the day with our minds barely in one piece. We suffered through the morning looking forward to the only true release from the shackles of our desks: recess. When recess came around, we would race out the doors like a stampede of rabbits. Our activities consisted of what you would expect. We had the swingers on the swing-set, the ballers with the wallball, and anyone who was not a part of those

groups dispersed into the perimeters of our school. I, for one, could not find any true group to identify with. I would often find myself in a little grove just playing with rocks and sticks, trying to occupy my time before I was called back to my classroom prison.

I was a bit of an outcast in fourth grade, or at least I was during recess. I would find that many of my closest friends would play soccer in the fields or perform flips off of swings and I preferred to keep to myself. Was it because of my inquisitive mind? My thirst for knowledge and wisdom? I would like to think so, but if you asked my colleagues, they would have said that I was fat. Regardless, I was a child who aspired for more than sports or toys; I craved for something outside of the standard form of childhood, I wished to break the mold. This grove was where I could think of everything I hoped to achieve one day.

This grove was my recess home. It sat in the corner of the lot, trees lining the perimeter, the center filled with grass. The groundskeepers would only tend to the lot once a month, leaving the scenery often untamed. It was a garden of the wild, fierce mountains, filled with rocks and twigs, leaving space for my mind to run free.

As an orange glow filled the valley and the breeze rolled in, more people joined me in that grove. Some were outcasts like me, some were expelled from the swingers for hogging the set, and some just got bored playing wallball every day of the week. As we sat and twiddled, two classmates approached my corner.

The first to introduce himself was Josh the Divine. He stood over me with angelic grace, due to either the sun blazing behind his head or his divine essence. His hair was dark and brown, flowing to his shoulders. His voice was high pitched but smooth; he soothed everyone with his presence. His eyes were blue as the sky, his face soft but caring. As he approached, I felt his loving presence through my bones calling me into a deep friendship.

Standing next to Josh the Divine was Noah the Wise. Noah was not Josh, not by a longshot. While Josh the Divine carried this divinity in every step, Noah the Wise stepped on the footprints left to soak it up. His voice would crack on every syllable. He had a set of teeth that only a bunny could replicate and hair blonde enough for a farmer to harvest to meet his wheat quota. Despite his unpolished appearance, he was no fool. Josh the Divine could lift your soul; Noah the Wise could lift your mind. As Josh the Divine would fumble on his words, Noah the Wise would fill the holes with ideas of a thinking philosopher. These two young men joined me in this grove and sat next to me. As we sat there and played with rocks, something happened. Something changed.

"Everyone gather around me!"

My ears perked up as I heard Josh the Divine yelling at everyone.

"I created something! Something awesome! Something of my own design!"

Everyone turned to Josh the Divine to see his hands trembling, a marker at his feet. That marker, a red Sharpie fresh out of the box. That marker, fresh-scented and full of life. That marker was the spark that gave life to our Adam. Josh the Divine was holding a rock, but this rock was no longer just earth, it was no longer just an extension of nature, this rock was life.

The rock had two eyes, eyes that could pierce even the coldest of hearts, and a nose that was chiseled by the gods themselves. And a smile that could swoon any heart. This rock was now Bob, and Bob was the foundation upon which we built our magnificent new civilization, Rock Town.

Suzie followed Bob, Tom followed Susan, and soon our tribe became a village. Neighborhoods were created out of cardboard from our trashcans. Town squares were filled with statues made of sticks depicting famous rocks that came before. Streets were lined with crisp fall leaves. This grove was growing, and it could not be stopped. Each rock was given a unique job: some were bakers, some were smiths, some were farmers. Every recess saw a new citizen join as we used every marker given to us by our teacher to bring life to our newly founded society. By the end of the first week, the grove had a center that sprawled out to the edge with rocks and cardboard structures inspired by the ancient Greeks' marble temples. Each street was bustling with static life, rocks posed with their tasks.

Just as the ancient Hammurabi had his code, we developed rules for this new land.

Love Everyone
Hate No One
No Copying Rocks' Names

The rules were simple, yet perfect. Inspired by Plato's *Republic*, we strived to discover the true meaning of justice within our society as our little village exploded into a sprawling metropolis filled with generations of Rock families. Bob had grown into an old man with 15 pebbles of his own. Susan had passed when the rain came through and washed her soul from her body. And Tom? Tom was convicted of violating the second law when he was found destroying the local bakery for selling him stale stick bread. We sentenced Tom to spend the rest of his days in the local river.

The flow of time progressed as the branches of the aspen trees turned barren, and the mountains surrounding our town began to transition to inverse ice cream cones. Fall was cementing itself throughout the town. Our school decorated itself with the kindergarten hand turkeys and the elementary school Halloween projects. Rock Town continued to grow.

The city became increasingly difficult to manage, and eventually history took its course. We had to form a governing body.

I met with Josh the Divine and Noah the Wise after snack time.

"I created Bob. I am the creator of the rocks and therefore rule over them."

"Josh, that is unfair. I made rocks like you. Hunter made rocks. We all made rocks. Are all of us rulers then? Or do we rule over all the rocks we made? Then who tells us the rules? I believe we should vote."

Noah the Wise made a good point. If we were to succeed as a true society of just values for our Rock People, we must follow a truly equitable governing system. While Josh the Divine called for the creation of a divine monarchy, Noah convinced the group to shift forward to a democratic system. Not knowing what a "democracy" was, I immediately called dibs on being mayor. I was promptly shut down.

Recess rolled in and we all rushed outside to our majestic grove. As Avery set up her neighborhood and Gage was busy making Tony (the quarterback of the Rock Ville Roccos), we gathered everyone in the town square.

"Hear ye hear ye, next recess we will hold elections for Rock Ville mayor, anyone who wishes to participate please raise your hand."

Everyone raised their hands.

I anxiously glanced at Josh the Divine. We could not have this many people run. I reconvened with the founding members.

"Now what?"

"Tell them they all can't run."

"How?"

"Hmm, Noah do you want to run?"

"No, I like making rocks and don't really want to be in charge."

"Ok then you can decide who gets to run."

He seemed content with the role he was assigned. We all proudly marched back to the town square.

"Noah is now the leader of the election, Noah who can run?"

"Everyone can!"

Josh the Divine and I nudged Noah.

"I… mean only people who I like can run!"

"And that is only Josh and Hunter! See you all next recess for the election!"

The group grumbled and complained a little, but they eventually went back to expanding our town. Noah the Wise, Josh the Divine, and I all high-fived. I came to a sudden, yet startling realization. I was no longer their friend; I was their opponent. Friendship vanished from my mind as I plotted to convince everyone to vote for me. Josh looked at Noah, Noah looked at me, I looked at Josh. We held a three-way staring contest in silence. We knew big changes were coming.

I sat down in my rock mansion with my colleagues of rock citizens and devised a plan. I would promise a society of perfection. We would enforce all laws equally, and we would strive to better the world not as individuals, but as a group. We would move society forward collectively and work to make sure no rock was left to die, like Suzie, who was left to the elements. This was my purpose, and there could be no way for me to lose.

The next two hours of class flew by and recess returned. The air was vibrating with anticipation from the citizens of Rock Town. Everyone wanted to know who would lead the future of our society. We sat in the grove, eager to have our first Rock Town election. As Noah the Wise approached the group, something seemed off about his demeanor. He carried a swagger that was overly confident, especially for Noah the Wise.

"Welcome to the first Rock Town Election! First we have Hunter!"

I waved to the group. Some kids clapped, but most were just indifferently drawing on rocks.

"And we have…"

Noah stopped. Noah and Josh whispered to each other. Noah stared at the grove for a whole minute in deep thought. Josh smirked as he glanced sideways at me. I knew something was wrong.

"And we have Josh with me as his Vice Mayor!"

I was floored. I had been betrayed by the same two men who founded this land. The same two men who helped pen the three perfect rules. The same two men who knew the stakes of such a political backstab. I ran away in tears, thus disqualifying my ticket. Needless to say, I lost.

Rock Town continued the same as before: I advise changing to "as more rocks were added and jobs created, society moved forward as though no election had been held at all. However, Noah the Wise and Josh the Divine had changed. They wore a paper hat with *Rock Town Mayor* and *Rock Town Vice Mayor* etched on the rim. They had final say as to who was allowed in the town. Something was changing.

As I sat in the bathroom crying every recess post-election, I grew exceedingly disillusioned with the original ideologies of our society. Justice? Fairness? Equality? All were distant concepts to me as I reflected on my failure. I had one more trick up my sleeve, a move that would cripple Josh and Noah's tyrannical rule. I would make a new town, a town where only one rule existed. I ran to my desk and grabbed a piece of paper, a red crayon, and a piece of Scotch tape. Just as Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door, I walked to the grove with my materials. Noah and Josh stared, everyone else glanced up from their houses, and I wrote. I wrote like a madman for five minutes straight and derived a document that would kindle the flames that burned Rock Town to the ground.

NEW ROCKY HILLS!
COMING NEXT RECESS!
ONLY RULE IS NO RULES!

I left the note taped to a tree. The fall wind promptly blew it off, but the message was sent. Josh and Noah had a new competitor. The times were changing.

The next day, I strutted into school with a box of fresh markers and my secret weapon, Legos. I started building houses in the back of the grove. The Rock Town community looked out at my new creations, with Lego houses, some envious of the prospects of a rule-less society. It started with Christian. He complained that Gage had stolen his rocks name for the third time. I offered for him to make all the rocks he wanted over in Rocky Hills, regardless of name. All he had to do was move here. He accepted. Next came Avery. She had run out of cardboard to build a house for Tiffany. I handed her a box of Legos and let her loose.

And like moths to a lamp, I took Rock Town. One by one, I had citizens joining the ranks. We had Tim the Fireman, Tim the Tight End, and Tim the Bold(er), all citizens of Rocky Hills. We had a growing film industry ever since Jordan got an iPod with a camera and could record movies. Avery made houses that could have never been dreamed of with the old cardboard material of Rock Town. I had won.

The mountains were now turning into fully fledged white caps and the leaves were all but a fading memory for the town. Camp 4 Coffee went from serving iced coffee to hot coffee. We had to start bringing snow pants to recess, and my dad made me shovel the porch once a week. Rock Town was fading into obscurity as Rocky Hills emerged as the next great empire.

But as every great empire rises, it too must fall. I ran out of Legos, Christian and Gage were not speaking due to the abundance of Tim's in our society. Noah the Wise and Josh the Divine had no one to govern. The grove was getting emptier by the day and was soon as barren as when Bob was first brought into this world. By the time lunch rolled around, I noticed that Josh the Divine had left me a note.

Meet us in Rock Town after lunch.

Although I had seen Rocky Hills fall just as Rock Town had, I could only blame Josh the Divine and Noah the Wise for its demise. What could they wish to speak to me about? Peace talks? Never. A union of cities? I would rather die. An apology? As if. I ate my food and ran to the grove.

"What's this about Noah?"

"Hunter, we are… sorry. Josh never meant to harm you and I could not see the town turning to," Noah looked out over the now baron grove, "this."

I did not know what to say. I was bitter. My friends betrayed me for power, and now that I had achieved more than they ever could, they dared apologize? What could I do? Well, being a fourth-grade child, I had an obsession for action movies, and somehow my brain came to a perfect conclusion. I turned to Josh the Divine and Noah the Wise.

"Walk with me."

We walked along a ridge that separated the grove from the playground. As we looked out on the children playing and what used to be our perfect society, I reflected. I saw a land of potential. A land where men could achieve more than any mortal could. A land where anyone could be anything. A land where Tim could be a defensive tight end who also fought fires. A land where Bob grew from a small child to a grandfather of 20 pebbles. A land where we came together for one true cause. As I stood looking out, I saw Josh the Divine to my left and Noah the Wise to my right. Josh the Divine, the creator of the first stone. Noah the Wise, the father of democracy. And I, the one who did nothing. We stood in silence.

"Well Hunter, do you accept our apology?"

I raised both my arms forward, as if I were to put them behind their shoulders for one big group hug. I elbowed both in the stomach, like any good action hero would, and bolted to the playground. I saw both of them writhing behind me on the ground, and Josh the Divine screamed out something along the lines of *'I curse your descendants'* or *'What the hell dude*.' I could never tell.

Politics is never easy, but power is. Power creates, power unites, power corrupts, and power destroys. Power was all I wanted and is what I achieved. All in the name of Rock Town.

Art by HAILEY CADE

Art by AIDAN JONES

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

by KELLY VANDEKOPPEL

You're never expecting that call. The emotions flood your body and you cannot comprehend if you want to cry, scream, or sit in utter shock. It is a call that sends you into panic. Your heart feels torn. That call was the call a 17-year-old girl from suburban Colorado received one Friday afternoon near the end of July, 2017. Her older brother arrived with tears already streaming down his face. Together they hopped into his car and raced to the hospital. Speeding in a panic, she tried to comfort him by rubbing his back as they drove the short distance.

"It's gonna be okay," she tells him. "She will be okay."

They arrived at the hospital, rushing through the white-washed halls towards the luminescent red letters spelling EMERGENCY ROOM. They found their dad standing in the doorway. Their mother lay with her eyes closed, in a hospital bed clearly too short for her 5'10" frame. She looked pale and thin, a lifeless expression on her face. The girl's brother rushed to take the wobbly chair at her side, grasping their mom's hands tight as the girl sat at the desk in the corner of the room. They all sat in

silence, preparing themselves for the doctor to knock on the glass door. The next half an hour became a blur as the words, "tumor," "baseball sized," and "surgery" circulated their heads and tears welled in their eyes.

Looking back, I now realize how I believed it was some sort of game, an imaginary experience where you are existing, but your physical body and mind are not connected. I remember when my mom first came out of surgery, her head was wrapped in bandages. She remained completely unconscious for several days. We nicknamed the surgeon, Dr. Rauzzino, the "Blue Flash" because he could be in and out of the room within minutes, having attended to every inquiry. He was the best neurosurgeon in Colorado and he happened to be in charge of my mom's surgery. He was a true Godsend. Yet even those angels cannot perform the miracles you wish for. The "Blue Flash" knew it was bad just by looking at it. Pulsating, vicious tumor. We were going to have a long road ahead. She had a stroke during surgery. We were told a centimeter cut could be the difference between life and death. The morphine they prescribed made her more of a ghost than before.

The years from sixteen to twenty-one are arguably some of the best of a person's life. The number of milestones and new adventures that begin can be the catalyst for the amazing life anyone can have. Most teenagers and twenty-somethings are excited about taking road trips with friends, going to college, meeting new people, finding someone who loves them and maybe being a little rebellious. I would say that I have had my fair share of such events - getting a tattoo with my best friend spontaneously, going to frat parties and finding out they are not all they are chalked up to be, and meeting new friends that I never expected to meet. A month before my 18th birthday, I had just come back from a mission trip to the Philippines, where I had experienced God in ways that I had never seen before. The laughter of kids and the work we did to help restore the churches and schools on the island provoked such a "Jesus-high," I knew nothing could break me down. I was wrong… My dad used to joke that when my mom did something, it was all or nothing, and in this instance he was right. Of all the cancers she could have had, she had to have one of the most aggressive forms of brain cancer possible. Can you ever expect something like that to happen? There are always chances for any sort of disease, but the words "cancer" and "my mom" in the same sentence never came to mind before. She was one of the healthiest people I knew. She should not have been chosen for the fate she received.

My mom handed down the lovely genetic trait of a bad back, requiring the occasional chiropractic adjustment. It was one of the things we loved to do because our chiropractor was more of a massage therapist who could remove all the knots built up. At this point, she had been sick

for several months but was getting better. She relearned how to walk by herself, she used the cane that turned into a whacking stick when one of her kids got too far out of line. Her head was shaved, not due to the chemo as we had all feared, but instead from a secondary treatment in which she had little electronic probes put on her head. She became skilled at wrapping different colored head scarves over her smooth scalp, meticulously tucking the cords that connected the probes to the battery pack she carried. Her oncologist was happy with her progress. The treatments she received every other week were becoming easier for all of us. Yet during this time I resented her. There were so many things that I felt I was missing out on during my senior year of high school and I blamed her. When my mom lost her balance and slipped off the adjustment chair at the chiropractic office, I almost felt like she deserved it because of all the things she took away from me. I felt like I had been given this burden of a thousand pounds resting on my shoulders in those moments, with the fear of the unknown clouding my mind. She was fine, and we walked around the aquarium that afternoon, four trips back and forth through the maze of fish tanks. She wanted to get her steps in. I have not been back to those places since.

My mom is a supermom! I know that everyone says this, but in my case it was true. She was an athlete who could have gone to the Olympics if it hadn't been for a back injury in college. Afterwards, she became a psychology teacher at our local high school. She was so clearly loved by all her students that it became a running joke in our family. They'd find us at restaurants, stores, even on vacation in Mexico, yelling 'Hi Mrs. V!' Their adoration even worked to our advantage, securing us discounts at places where her students worked. Mom was dedicated to her family, always making sure to call her own mother every afternoon. She did everything she could to make sure her kids were successful, even down to having boxes of extra school materials in our basement that could sufficiently stock an entire classroom. Those are the things I'm grateful for. She was the type of mom who came to every practice, school event, swim meet, football game, team lunch and piano recital. She was always there. You could rant to her and she would listen. You could discuss hard topics with her, and she would always have the best advice. She was also very fashionable, even if her style was slightly stuck in the 90s with turtleneck sweaters, bright colors, pointy shoes and occasional blue eye liner. Her hair was naturally curly, like a blonde afro that made her unique among the other moms her age. My mom could also make this whistle sound that both my brother and I could identify from far away - it definitely came in handy when she needed to get our attention during an event. It's these moments, that whistle, that I miss most.

December was her best month. She had been home for three months at that point and was becoming independent again. That Christmas was the same as usual; dinner at my Grandpa's house, cookies for Santa (even though I was 18 years old), the annual 'I got the family heirloom orange juicer' picture to my Uncle Bret. When she became sick again in February, her

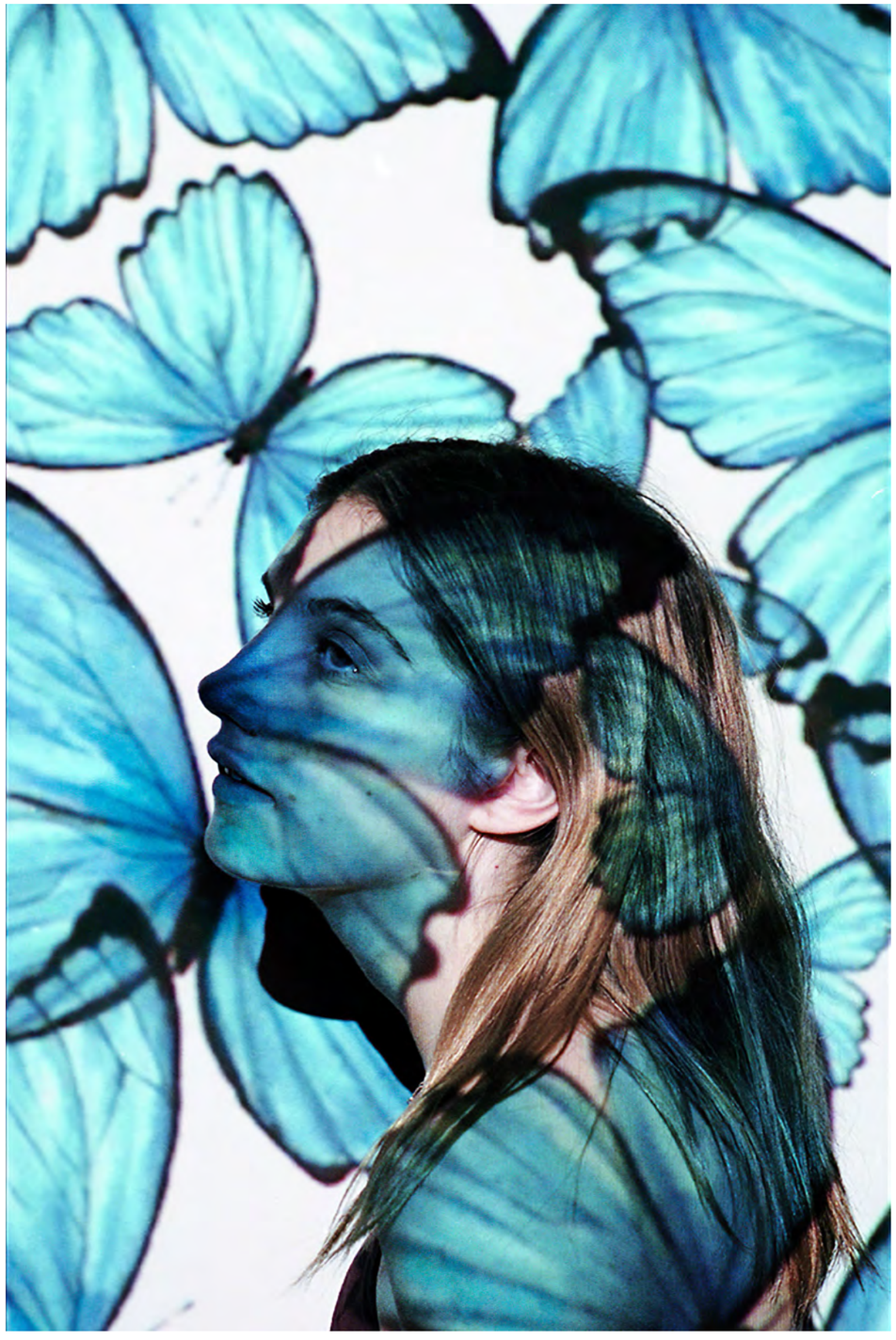
personality changed. She spoke less and her use of emojis in texts became more frequent and random. Even after the first few falls, no one wanted to acknowledge what we all were seeing, and we certainly wanted to hide our fears from her. I sought ways to bring back my mom, such as trying to entertain her. Sometimes through crafts or trips to the mall where we would attempt to find the ugliest pair of shoes. Other times we would watch *Say Yes to the Dress* or take our dogs on a short walk. Dancing was another amusing activity that I did in attempts to get her to laugh. I would say "Jump, shake your booty, jump, jump, shake your booty" as I hopped around our living room like a buffoon, waiting for her to smile and shake her head like she knew I was a total dork. As that next fall semester came, I went off to college only an hour from home. I attempted to live as normally as I could knowing that I wasn't. I went home every weekend, called every night and cried often in my dorm room when I felt the stress of it all caving in. The questions would swim around my brain and become prevalent during those silent moments where you cannot help but think of the "what ifs." One of those nights I practically begged God to make it stop, to fix the situation, to make everything better… as it should be. I wished so hard that something would change because we had tried all the treatments. We were running out of time.

Saying goodbye was one of the hardest things I have ever experienced in my entire life. What does a person say to someone who is minutes from slipping away? I do not really remember what I said except that I hoped she could hear me. Watching her again in a hospital bed, this time without cords or tubes. Her hair was still shaved short except for the dirty blonde

peach fuzz peeking through. Many people came to see her in that last week, some who had been there through it all and others who had not. My best friend flew in from college to be with me even if the conversations were just to distract my mind from the sounds and smells of hospice. What I really hated were those people who said she would want to pass alone all by herself. It would be the most peaceful situation for all of us. I hated everything they were saying, I hated the idea of not being there and the feeling of coming back in the room to find her still awake. The guilt rushing into my heart. When that bell finally rang, I didn't really know what to expect. What are you supposed to do when the person you have paid so much attention into for the last fourteen months isn't there anymore? Are you just supposed to pick up your life and start again? Are you supposed to grieve? I don't even know how to grieve.

I live everyday questioning if I did everything I could have done in those moments.

It has been four years since I received that call and two years since my mom left this earth. I live every day questioning if I did everything I could have done in those moments. Some days it brings pain and the fear of something similar happening to me in the future. Other days, I remember the good moments and joke with my dad and brother about the look she used to give us with the squinchy eyebrows and lips telling us that she clearly did not approve. At times, I feel lost without my mom and I wonder what it will be like to live without her. I wonder what it would be like if she were still here. Would she approve of the choices I have been making? What would she think about the pandemic and the quarantine? Sometimes, I feel like cancer is mocking me when I see other people survive it or when we learn about it in one of my biology classes. I hate Mother's Day. And her birthday. I hate when other people talk about how annoying their moms are. I hate when I have to go to the cemetery. I wish I could do it over again, just so I could have her back. Life has become new and different; some things get easier and others don't. I do not know what the future may hold but I hope that whatever comes, my mom will be there, watching over me through it all.



Art by CALLIE JAMES KEATING

WHISPERS OF CHILDHOOD

by SRAVYA DHANWADA

Waking up is easy in Hyderabad. While the heat of the afternoon discouraged me from waking up late, mornings energized me. Mornings contained the leftover chill from the previous night and mist from dew that made it easier to breathe. The fresh air would enter my lungs and cool even the angriest cells in my body. Mornings didn't attract the neighborhood aunties and their loud gossip, so the birds had it all to themselves. The sparrows, ah those darlings, were sure to be participating in some bashful chatter, but the croaking pigeons, oh! They were plotting where next to take a poo. "Hmm should we try the house at the end of the lane? They've been too rude to our brother pigeons lately. Or maybe we should try that lovely Shabana auntie's house! It seems like they've just gotten a fresh new paint job!" Ah, but even those hateful pigeons couldn't ruin a morning like this. Like Snow White, I was greeted with the chirping of the birds and the smell of damp soil. If I woke up early enough, I'd be able to hear the faint and distant sounds of *azan*, calling Muslims to prayer. I never understood Arabic, nor the messages

of Allah sung by the muezzin, but that gentle hum of prayer that traveled through the town never failed to enter my heart.

Hyderabad isn't perfect. In fact, it is far from perfect. It is always hot and there is too much dirt on the roads. There are no crossing signals for pedestrians, so one would just have to trust their gut and gamble with death each time they wanted to cross the roads. If it knew we were having too much fun, it'd cut the power at the most unsuspecting times, leaving us to fend off the heat without the air conditioner. Hyderabad also witnessed the bulk of my awkward and embarrassing childhood. I dreaded the weekly errands run the most, when my mum would send me out to get some household essentials. Despite having taken Hindi as a second language in school for nine years, I was incessantly stubborn in getting better at it, and in my shy, mumbling voice I'd ask for a kilo of *"dal"* (lentils). The problem came when the store cashier would ask for *"bees rupiya"* (20 rupees). I'd never gotten to counting in Hindi past ten.

Sometime in the last two years I lived in Hyderabad, I grew to be less picky with food and enjoyed it more. I came to understand that fine dining never offered the same satisfaction that a *bandi* (food cart) on the side of the street could. Restaurants were just an outlet for fancy people to spend their money. The real fun was getting to stand underneath the hot Hyderabad sun, eat a fantastic plate of *Idli* (steamed rice cakes) with an assortment of spicy coconut and tomato chutneys for under 50 rupees, walk a few steps to the chai stand, and finish off breakfast with some lemon tea. On days too hot to drink chai, I'd settle for a chilled glass of sugarcane juice. If I begged enough, my mum would let me eat *meetha Paan*, a betel leaf wrapped around jam-like mixtures of tutti-frutti and chopped dates.

Thursdays were auspicious days to visit the nearby Sai Baba temple in Jubilee Hills. It was a small two-storied temple with only one main prayer hall, tucked away in the gullies behind the main road. It sat between the house of a shady politician and a men's tailoring store that altered all my sister's pants. After offering coconut and marigold petals and receiving the priest's blessing, we'd sit on the marble floor for a few minutes before we left. I was convinced that I accompanied my mother to the temple simply for the *prasadam* (religious offering) in the form of delicious roasted chickpeas, but a small part of me was drawn to the temple. Perhaps it was the ringing of the temple bells, or

Hyderabad also witnessed the bulk of my awkward and embarrassing childhood.

the sight of young ladies with jasmine garlands weaved through their braids, or the smell of calming incense that wafted through the halls that charmed me. An empty temple had all the qualities of a peaceful sanctuary.

Sundays were for nerds. Real nerds. Like those who had some monstrous insatiable appetite for books. My sister, for example. The city had a lot of secrets and the weekly book fair in Abids was one of them. There was no WhatsApp group, Facebook page, or city events department that scheduled and organized the booksellers to appear. They just came. Vendors would lay out mats on the side of the Abids main road to stack their books and would sell them every Sunday as long as it didn't rain. I have no clue when this crazy tradition started. I just hope these traditions will remain until I visit again. Books would stretch out for a few kilometers and in between, my sister and I would stop by for a *chaat* (spicy and sweet Indian hors d'oeuvres) break. We'd come across exhilarating teenage fiction, historical non-fiction, decades-old magazines, cute little children's books, and even those ancient saucy adult romances with half-naked white people on the cover. It was here that my sister tried to teach me how to bargain (i.e. throwing pride away for the sake of a good deal).

First, one must act like they've seen a book with much better print and quality than the cheap photocopied pirated version being sold. Then, one must harness that mindset to offer a price so shamelessly low that one would think they hadn't a cent in their pocket to spare. If the vendor is humiliated, well… no problem! This kind of audacious selfishness—to not care about the respect of the seller—was something I've never actually learned well. So, while I ate chili-seasoned cut guavas, my sister would go ahead and take matters into her own hands. She'd make sure she saved enough money to buy two bus tickets for the journey back home and finish off our day with a shared cup of *ice gola* (sweet flavored ice).

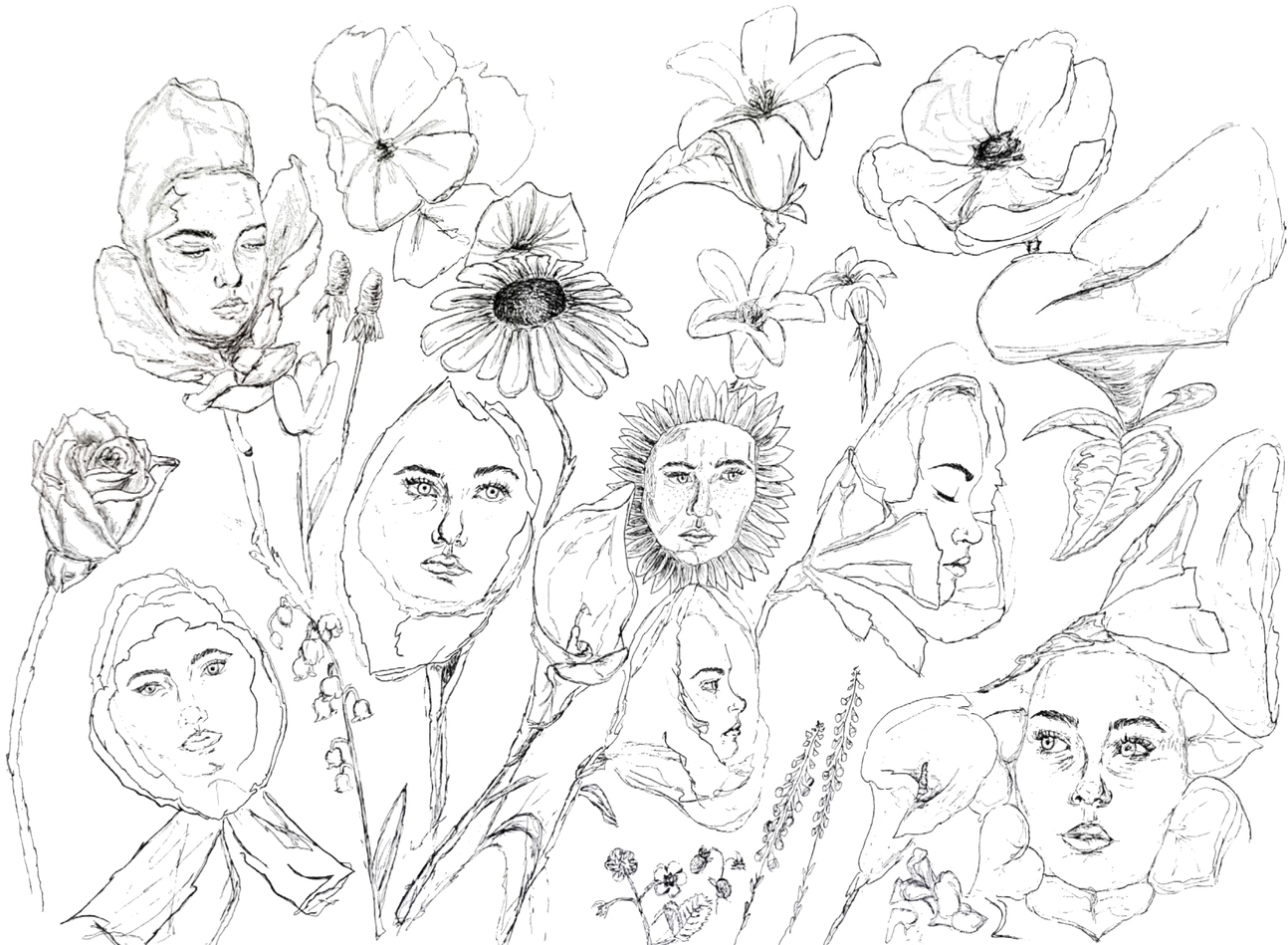
Monsoon season is Hyderabad's first-born son.

Monsoon season is Hyderabad's first-born son. It receives more love and attention than that received by the hot and dry seasons combined, as in a city that feels like it's constantly on fire, rain soothes the dry earth and relaxes the roasted air. Magic would settle around as each leaf gets wiped of dust, glowing a splendid green underneath the cloudy sky. Every evening that our kind monsoon visits us, we tell stories of how monsoon and chai fell in love centuries ago. My sister thinks monsoon is too

clichéd and wrote a love letter, but my grandma thinks they both are brave enough to elope. I personally think that they never got married since they're still madly in love. Like this we gossip, sipping on tea while I quietly wonder if the love I'll have will be just as warm. Of course, the hated mosquitos want to hear the stories too—they've got nothing better to do when it rains.

Hyderabad was founded by Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah. The Qutb Shahi dynasty took care of Hyderabad and its states—Telangana and Andhra Pradesh—until the 1600s, when the Mughal Empire annexed the region. The Qutb Shahi Tombs, located on the border of Shaikpet and Towlichowki, house the past rulers of the Qutb Shahi Dynasty. Built centuries ago, the tombs are one to two-stories high, square-like and topped by a circular dome, constructed in Indo-Islamic architecture. The tombs are scattered across the land, separated by neatly-manicured gardens. The archways that line the border of the tomb are tall and grand. Restoration work is always ongoing, considering only a few of the colored decorative tiles remain. Unfortunately, the tomb walls still bear scribbles of hearts and the typical "Raju loves Lalitha" graffiti. Sometimes the gardens would be used to hold concerts, not the head-banging youthful ones, but the ones where guests stayed seated in their chairs. I remember swaying to the romantic voices of Runa Laila and Shafqat Amanat Ali as they sang old Bollywood classics while wondering if the Qutb Shahis felt equally as satisfied (most probably not). Historical monuments like these are spread throughout the city but the tombs always feel the least noisy and crowded. I guess the thought of spending the day with dead men from the 16th century could have been a slight turnoff to most tourists. The sky over these gardens was uniquely vast. The city had too many narrow streets and towering apartments to ever get a good view of the sky, but the gardens of the tombs offered a rare horizon. When the sun was getting ready for the night, it would wash the sky a hazy yellow and disappear silently.

Nights in Hyderabad were a secret affair, passionate and dreamy. When most of the public retreated into their homes, the empty streets became sacred. Any unease twisted up in my heart would melt away instantly if I took a late-night scooter ride. The light from the streetlamps tinted everything and everyone a soft orange, and any unfamiliarity that tensed the air before was replaced by an intimate understanding. The smell of dust danced with the warm wind to the tune of a happy child. Strangers in a nearby auto (auto-rickshaw) became friends if an '80s Hindi love song played from the auto's speakers. Hyderabad was so beautiful that its shortcomings didn't matter anymore. After all, it knew my deepest secrets, watched me stutter and cry, and loved me constantly. The city whispered some affectionate lullaby on those nights, making falling asleep easy too.



Art by BECKY HARKIN

WATER'S EDGE

by CAROLINE SITTER

change : something we tell ourselves to escape the present.

present : something we hope will change in the future. something we neglect as we hope for the future.

future : if we keep using fossil fuels, aquatic life will die due to acid rain.

rain : i have always hated crying, even when i'm alone.

alone : i'll never cut an onion in public.

public : according to Greatist Magazine, here are seven tips to cut an onion without crying:

1. freeze it until it's numb
2. soak it in cold water (not as effective)
3. use a super sharp knife
4. microwave it until it nearly burns
5. lodge a piece of bread in your mouth (even when it's soggy)
6. wear goggles
7. plug the onion's wound with your cutting board to stop the bleeding

bleeding : a physical and emotional reason for people to feel miserable.

"There are two means of refuge from the miseries of life: music and cats."
Andrew Schweitzer

cats : they say cats have 9 lives … they say lots of things.

"If you kill a black cat, you sacrifice your soul to the devil."
"If a cat sneezes three times, someone will catch a cold."
"Cats can suck the breath from sleeping children."
"Black cats protect fishermen at sea."

sea : different from seeing.

seeing : how many people would wait in line to see an aquarium for the souls of the dead?

dead : yellow-finned clusters and eels that spiral, the stingray flutters effortlessly - a different world trapped behind a shred of glass.

glass : something we rely on to keep us safe.

us : pollution affects everyone, on every scale.

scale : rat races and coral crawls, plucking daisies in protest to pushing, all in hopes to forget.

"Forgetfulness is a form of freedom."
Kahlil Gibran

freedom : something we all want.

want : synonymous with the root of suffering.

suffering : the precursor to laughter.

laughter : something you probably can't do when you're dead.

dead : death is bad because we don't understand it, forgetfulness is worse because we do.

do : the opposite of don't.

don't: important lessons learned from childhood:
1. don't step on the cracks, or you'll break your mother's back.
2. don't jump into water after you've eaten or you'll cramp up.
3. don't place the dishes directly into the dishwasher… let them soak first, then rinse the gunk away.

"Sticks and stones can break your bones,
but words can never hurt you… unless you believe them.
Then, they can destroy you."
Charles F. Glassman

you : a reference point we use to identify "me."

me : an abstract concept.

concept:
noun: concept; *plural noun:* concepts
1. an abstract idea; a general notion.

notion :
1. there is a Japanese art known as Kintsugi. the purpose of this tradition is to use a golden lacquer to repair broken pottery, making them more unique and beautiful than they were before. sometimes, I felt like this. sometimes, I didn't.
2. a word that rhymes with ocean

ocean : 70% of the Earth's surface is water.

water : water is both a solid and a liquid.

liquid : there are two main properties to a liquid:
1. liquids cannot be compressed, they are free flowing
2. liquids have volume, but no fixed shape

shape : something we rely on in order to create a sense of meaning in our world.

world : a place full of hatred.

hatred : one of seven deadly sins.

sin : a taboo way to have fun.

fun : the art of the pyromaniac.

"It was a pleasure to burn"
Ray Bradbury

burn : according to Urban Dictionary, "burn" can be defined in three ways:
1. slang: to disrespect someone (to diss); to make fun of someone; used by a third party after a first party makes fun of a second party. Brought back to life by the ever-popular *That 70's Show.*
2. slang: to smoke marijuana.
3. verb: to char or scorch something using fire.

fire : to be consumed in one catastrophic moment, silent but beautiful.

<u>beautiful</u>:
type 2 supernovae explosions are the most mesmerizing in space. their violence captivating seas of dark matter, living out the darkest, most secret stories deep in divots embedded in fabric brains. to float within fantasy, stuck between space and mind as opposed to forgotten time. Temporarily brighter than the rest of the galaxy, they live fast, and die young. much like water, much like the ocean, a sea of blue and red.

red : the color of 6 pomegranate seeds.

seeds : a way for men to gain control.

ctrl : + alt + z

z: a number. According to buzzfeed "staying up past 11 is super hard" when you're twenty six.

6: a letter for gibberish. a letter for failure, freaks, flowers, and Swedish fish.

fish : jelly fish have no brains, hearts, or eyes. they flow freely with the current.

current : cyclic. also synonymous with present. something we neglect in hopes that people will change.

JUNE 27, 2020: AURORA, CO

by CHLOE ANDREWS

"They are lucky that what Black people are looking for is equality and not revenge." [1]

It is not a coal train with the rickety, rusted metal and open roofs that is stopped before us. There are none of the familiar insignia on the beige carts, even with the graffiti forming little mountains of pinks and purples at the base of the car. The panels are almost transparent with the lines between the slats clear. All the cars are empty. Empty, hollow, and frozen on the tracks in the center of the road. The railway lights haven't stopped blinking, the little black and white gates dropped like the train isn't enough of a barrier. I think, is this legal? Can a train stop without an emergency in the middle of the highway? I see a man

1. Yashar Ali, "'They Are Lucky That What Black People Are Looking for Is Equality and Not Revenge." Pic.twitter.com/j1G6ZOe13G," Twitter (Twitter, June 5, 2020), https://twitter.com/yashar/status/1268933041864364032?lang=en.

Art by CLAYTON MONTGOMERY

standing before the train, holding his bike and waiting in the summer heat rolling off the asphalt. Ten minutes, twenty-five. Standing completely still.

Not one of us is surprised when Lauren suggests that the blockage is intentional, the cops closing the road to the protest, just as it starts. We sit, watching as suburban cars with too clean paint pitch themselves over the median and escape the line of traffic. Four wheeling in the middle of a city. It's not about whether the cops truly prevented us from exercising our rights, but that none of us would argue that they wouldn't.

The train moves, over half an hour later, crawling down the tracks. The man with the bicycle cycles away, stillness to movement.

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People pour over the sidewalks, waiting patiently for the lights to change, riddled with signs like ants carrying the cast-off crumbs of a picnic. People honk and cheer as they drive by, waving in recognition of "Justice," "the cops and the Klan go hand in hand," and "Elijah McClain." Elizabeth's horn is broken, but we wave as we circle the parking lots and fields, searching for parking where the cops won't slash her brand-new tires. We settle at a Family Dollar, retracing the white lines and moving cars until she selects a spot in the corner of the lot. We run in for candy and snacks because the sugar will push us through hours of standing. All I can think is that Family Dollars stock desperation on the shelves, packed between all the orange price tags. The kind that sinks through your pores and sticks to your ribs, perfectly compact in the shape of a dollar sign. There is so much wrong with a world where people who aren't broke college students need this, that the woman checking out before us asks the cashier for her total before placing an item on the counter. $21.37. $23.48.

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We follow the signs, stepping across crosswalks, waiting patiently for the little white man to appear and give us permission to reach the other side. We follow the people with their boards dug from the recycling, embroidered with their handwriting,

Not the tired, exhausted hope that's frayed at the edges, but the kind of stubborn hope that refuses to yield because they will change the world themselves, even if it means they have to pull it apart with their teeth.

their time. Their devotion. His name follows us down every street, entire signs covered with his last words.[2] Elijah McClain. Red, black, and all of them echoing with the gasping memory of being unable to breathe while officers of peace, of the people, held him down for the color of his skin.[3] It's a movement of the people, in a world where we boycott stores for justice, where reusing means something. There are high schoolers, standing on the stage, organizing all of us. Speaking of allies and their own lives. Of their world, their community. Their leader is young, a girl in mom jeans, and bold in the face of the injustice she's stared at all her life, telling us to stand up, because this is a protest, we're supposed to be uncomfortable.

I think, "I respect your rage." Other people whisper their awe and amazement because she just told off a crowd of adults. They are proud of her, though none of us know her personally. Someone else whispers that they would follow her anywhere as she leads us through the streets, chanting "Whose streets?" "Our streets." Because they belong to us, the people. Not the cops, not the government. Us. For a moment, stopping traffic feels like it reminds people of that. Abiding by laws is a choice, and even traffic signs can be disobeyed if there are enough of us. We kneel in traffic, circling in the center of the intersections with the teenagers in the middle, and yell his name until the neighborhoods hear us, until the cops and the city officials hear us. We march for blocks, walking between the carefully painted lines on the blacktop. We balance on the sidewalks, the medians, the yellow and white lines. The government is a government of the people, and laws only work if the people decide to listen. A Karen, a white supremacist, yells at us, and the high schoolers stop us all. They tell us that we are better, that there are things to be ignored and people like that are it. We are better than that.

We march down streets emptied of cars as a mass of bodies, standing in the middle of the street and rejecting the rule of law that tells us where we are allowed. Our physical presence empties

2. The Last Words of Elijah McClain: A Candlelight Vigil in Los Angeles by Black Women Lead, The Last Words of Elijah McClain: A Candlelight Vigil in Los Angeles by Black Women Lead (L.A. Taco, 2020), https:/www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOPIb9WCg4A.
3. Rose Minutaglio, "Elijah McClain's Family Is Suing Colorado Police and Medical Officials," ELLE (ELLE, August 11, 2020), https://www.elle.com/culture/career-politics/a32959153/elijah-mcclain-last-words-bodycam-nathan-woodyard/.

the streets, and it is amazing that the cops have not emptied them for us. And I am so ridiculously proud of these kids, though I am barely older than them, standing for what's right and speaking better than most of our elected officials. They are filled with rage but are filled with hope too. Not the tired, exhausted hope that's frayed at the edges, but the kind of stubborn hope that refuses to yield because they will change the world themselves, even if it means they have to pull it apart with their teeth. It burns, fills the megaphone and the echoes off the buildings.

We stop, kneeling in a circle around them, knees pressed against the asphalt where it digs into our knees, and scream. We shout and slap our hands against the cardboard signs, drumming noise from the depths of our bodies, and she turns in a circle. She looks at all of us, watching everyone follow her directions, standing for what is right. She must feel like the center of the universe, one filled with hope, and people willing to make it better.

We march back towards the capitol to the police headquarters. Lauren gets a text that the police are preparing to release a long-range, weaponized sound device. Ear plugs will not protect us. I feel insanely protective of the high schoolers, feel the need to put my body, my privilege between them and the people that clearly want to hurt them. They are kids, and I respect their rage. If I can use my body to keep them safe, I'm going to. It's irrational because they're not my kids. But I think it anyway, feel the need to defend these bright lights, this bravery with all five feet two inches of me.

An echo of a different protest years ago fills my head: "this is what democracy looks like."

The high schoolers get the message about cops preparing to use military grade weapons on their own citizens and encourage all the middle schoolers and high schoolers to leave. When we get close enough, it's obvious that these people are boiling with a rage built after years of staring at injustice and seeing nothing change, that they are ready to stand. They have ski goggles, helmets. Gas masks. I tighten the goggles around my own head, and stand among them, chanting until my voice cracks, and I keep screaming anyway. Until I feel my vocal cords breaking over the words, crackling around the edges. Elijah McClain. Over and over, to the cops that know his killers. They took those officers off the streets to protect them. Part of me wonders if that protects us too because this is a sea of anger. Righteous, but still

burning, and I know if we seek revenge, it's over. But we fill the trees and the sky with his name, reminding the cops dressed in military grade protectants that they cannot murder people and expect to walk away. To call their mothers. We stand before the police station, watching cops in full riot gear staring down at the unarmed protesters, chanting back at them. Watching them try to intimidate us into leaving. Every time they make a move, reaching for the canisters before them or the bright orange rifles, someone shouts, "hands up" and we reply, "don't shoot."[4] Over and over, an entire crowd with hands in the air, shouting "don't shoot" to the people meant to protect us. Every time the cops try to tell us we're there unlawfully, we drown their words in our rage and disappointment, and the chanting only grows louder. Until my body is trembling with the force of my yelling and my throat is sore. I don't stop.

I think, "if you're going to tear gas me, go ahead, and I watch the kids in front of me, moving so they can shift farther back." Farther from the cops not wearing masks, and when they emerge with gas masks, we drop goggles over our eyes. They shoot off a false round and the protesters scatter, stepping back. Ready to run. And then we step back into formation. Waiting for them to truly begin shooting.

People tell us not to run, that we'll bottleneck and trample our own people. When the cops start advancing, they don't look like people. They look like insects, encased in black, bullet proof vests and double layered helmets. Lauren refuses to move, says she sat down, and we lose her in the crowd. She's there one moment, standing by the tree with her bright blue leggings, and swallowed by the crowd the next. We don't run. We walk, taking single jolting steps over the grass, always looking back for Lauren as the cops advance. But she's lost in the rush of people. The adrenaline races through our body until we're shaking. But we still stand before the violins because Elijah used to play for the kittens at the humane society. And now we're trying to make society humane, trying to remember someone as more than a hashtag, another name on an endless list. And so we stand, and

4. Marc Sallinger, "Aurora Police Came on the Loudspeaker Multiple Times to Tell People the Protest Was Declared an 'Unlawful Assembly.' I Have Not Heard Any Correction #9News Https://T.co/ciRMoiGBM0," Twitter (Twitter, June 28, 2020), https://twitter.com/MarcSallinger/status/1277036849207422976.

people tell us not to give the line, to protect the stage. Like we're at war.

I know what either tear gas or pepper spray tastes like, but I don't know which because they don't tell us what they sprayed.

There is a girl, running and sobbing through the crowd, in a white shirt, the letters BLM painted on the fabric, separated from her friend in the rush, and terrified. Not for herself, but for her friend, because of the cops. The medics circle her, trying to help her find her friends while she sobs.

Lauren texts back, saying she's burned and that we should bring water. When we find her through the crowds, her skin is covered in chalky a white powder, burning red underneath, from the medics. She gave her tear gas neutralizing spray to a man who got it in his eyes and couldn't see. Couldn't breathe.

The paper masks don't stop it from getting into your lungs. And Lauren wants to stay. So, we do, standing across from the cops. All five-foot-two of me against these people in full body armor, staring directly into their eyes. They won't look at me even as I take the smallest steps forward. I want them to see me. Their eyes are flickering over the crowds, never stopping long enough to really meet my eyes for more than a second. But they look at me as I barely blinking, and even when they look away, I know they can feel me staring. I know they can see me, hear the people around me laying their pain at the feet of the cops. To know I'm a person, that we're all people. Completely unarmed, in shorts and raincoats in case they gas us again. I lift my goggles to stare at them better. To watch their eyes.

All five-foot-two of me against these people in full body armor, staring directly into their eyes.

They rotate the cops, moving them down the line to prevent them from getting too attached to the protesters. The second cop is visibly uncomfortable, shifting, moving his baton. Back and forth. Rocking on his feet. His face twitches, the muscles contracting, barely noticeable expressions rippling beneath his skin. Like he might be listening. I want to tell him that he's a person. That he has a choice in all of this. That "I was just following orders" has been an excuse used in too many atrocities. I just keep staring, waiting for the seconds he meets my eyes. I don't know if he can see me as a person, as an individual.

We watch the violins and cellos, the haunting rise of it, because we are here for Elijah. They play "Tis a Gift to be Simple," a song that I remember singing in second grade, and I don't know

if anyone else knows the lyrics. But I do. Tis a gift to be free. Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be. And isn't this it?

A man interrupts the violins and talks about armed aggression. That it's legal to carry weapons in Aurora. That "this peaceful shit will get you killed." That the civil rights movement didn't come just because people marched. That revolutions are not always peaceful. He reminds us of history, of the thirteenth amendment, and being 3/5th of a person. He is jaded, and so certain that new laws won't save us until after his people are already dead. Because aren't there laws against killing? What does it do if you're already dead? "They should be grateful that we're seeking justice, instead of revenge," echoes in my head from earlier, from the teenager whose heart burns. And somewhere in his head, in seeing his own country vilify and damn him, there isn't a line between the two. And I know where I stand. They can tear gas me; they can shoot me. Attack their own people as we march on the government that belongs to us, but I'm not going to show up with a gun. I am a child of peace and that is not my way. I could not kill someone. I think, stupidly, of Batman, and how this system might be an absolute wreck, but it's what we have. I have to believe we can fix it, that by standing here, with my body as a physical barrier to stop traffic and my voice raised with hundreds of others, we can make something better. I do not agree with him, but I do not blame him either. He's spent his life so afraid, attacked by the institutions meant to protect him, that there is nothing but rage left.

This is my chance, our chance, to make this world better. We might not have made this system, but that doesn't mean it's not our job to fix it.

CONTRIBUTORS

AUTHORS:

EMILY ANDERSON grew up outside Chicago, Illinois, and is currently a sophomore at CU Boulder. Originally eager to pursue Biology, her sophomore year writing class, WRTG 2020, reinstilled her passion for writing and was one of many factors that led to her changing her major to English this year. Aside from writing, her passions include drawing as well as playing the guitar and piano.

CHLOE ANDREWS is a senior studying Creative Writing, Philosophy, and Women and Gender Studies. She grew up in Breckenridge, Colorado and developed a love for the steading feeling of the outdoors, as well as a love for all things fantasy. She likes to joke that it comes from growing up in a place directly in the junction of fairytale and horror movie. Chloe is currently trying to figure out how to make a living in creative writing in a post-coronavirus world.

JAQ BRODY has been writing since the age of eleven and currently pursues a double major in Creative Writing and History from the University of Colorado Boulder. Their work has been featured in literary journals including Voice of Eve, Random Sample, and Light and Dark. Jaq typically focuses on LGBTQ themes and interpersonal relationships while making use of lyrical language. “Liner Notes from a Trans Kid” is dedicated to their brother, Sinjin, for contributing to a better world.

SRAVYA DHANWADA is a Biochemistry major with a heart that dabbles in the arts. She relives her memories and feelings through writing and occasional slam poetry (when she can find the courage). She is an EMT hoping to pursue a career in healthcare.

KELA FETTERS graduated from CU Boulder in December of 2020 with a degree in Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology. She is currently pursuing her dirtbag ambitions in the high country as a backcountry ski instructor. She can't keep away from the keyboard, and continues to write essays on topics of personal interest.

NATALIE FINAMORE is a CU senior studying International Affairs, French, and Political Science. She was born in Boulder and grew up in Louisville. She has studied in Dakar, Senegal and Edinburgh, Scotland, and loves traveling, dancing, cities, and staying up late. After she graduates, she hopes to disappear to Eastern Europe and Turkey for several months and get a little more experience in the wider world as she studies.

NATHANIEL HANKINS wrote “Dancing Clouds” to capture a transition from uncertainty in chaos to peace through a long drive.

CHRISTEN MALLOY is a student at the University of Colorado Boulder finishing a degree in Computer Science with a minor in Mathematics. She is a poet, author, programmer, musician, and avid cyclist.

SHANNON ROSS is a senior at CU Boulder, where she studies Environmental History and Evolutionary Biology/Ecology. She began to farm during a year off in order to find a cheap place to live and has been playing in the soil with plants every summer since.

CAROLINE SITTER is entering her senior year at CU Boulder, majoring in English and minoring in Film Studies. She was born with a statistical anomaly known as microtia; in other words, she is half deaf. As writing has been a great source of pleasure in her life, she often finds herself using writing to explore her relationship with the physical world through sensations and emotion, while pushing herself to paint new, abstract perspectives on the world around us.

GRACE SMITH is a CU Boulder alum who graduated with a degree in History. She spent her undergraduate career writing in her journal about the ups and downs of being a college student and began publishing some of her work via Her Campus Media. After graduating with the class of 2020, Grace began to freelance more of her writing and hopes that one day writing will be her full-time job. This piece is dedicated to her 18/19 year old self who so desperately needed to know that the bus would eventually take her home.

CHAD TANNOUS is a senior at CU Boulder studying PR and English. He is the Vice President of CU's Psychedelic Club, and the chapter president of CU's Students for Sensible Drug Policy chapter. He is currently writing and self-publishing a thesis that examines the correlation between prohibition and rape culture.

KELLY VANDEKOPPEL is a junior studying Molecular Biology at CU Boulder. She wrote her personal essay “Uncertain Future” in a Creative Nonfiction class she took this fall. This is her first time submitting to a journal.

PATRICK YEHLE is not often a writer of nonfiction storytelling and stays more in the territory of argumentative essays. However, he had such a blast writing “The Rock Public” and considers it some of his best work.

CONTRIBUTORS

ARTISTS:

ROB BALSEWICH is a senior at CU Boulder studying Studio Arts and Psychology. When he's not playing the drums in a live band, Rob makes art about color, multisensory experience, and self-portraiture, among other things. Rob most often works with acrylic, graphite, light, and digital mediums.

HAILEY CADE is a double major in Environmental Studies and Studio Art, discovering knowledge throughout her college journey that she transforms into expressive artwork representing these two lifelong passions. She is inspired heavily by contemporary sculptures, the environmental art movement, and American traditional tattooing. Ultimately, her artwork expresses problems from environmental epidemics such as societal inequities, anthropogenic pollution, and ecological degradation.

JASEY CHANDERS is a freshman at CU Boulder double majoring in Computer Science and Creative Technology and Design. A passionate designer and creator, she is happiest when diving into a new project. Whether it's painting unique bird artwork, writing code, starting businesses or volunteering, she loves turning ideas into reality. She has been drawing and painting birds since 2015 and has developed a style involving a mix of watercolor, acrylic and ink to capture the avian world around her. She's always loved the complexity of the faces of raptors and finds painting them to be a powerful way to appreciate the beauty of our fellow creatures.

JORDAN ECKES is a graduate of English Literature at the University of Colorado Boulder. Storytelling is her passion, and she has long been pushing herself to discover all the ways that one could tell a story. That's when she stumbled upon the camera. Her challenge is always this: to try to capture the exact feeling of a certain moment in her photos, so when you look back on it you feel that same exact way. When she isn't diving into photography, she is skiing the back bowls of the Rocky Mountains on the weekends.

BECKY HARKIN was born in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, and spent the majority of her childhood in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. She began her studies at the University of Colorado Boulder where she is double majoring in Sociology and Studio Art. Her art emphasis is split between painting and drawing, as well as the digital arts. Harkin's piece, *Garden of Quarantine*, was created in the initial lockdown of April 2020. This pen and ink piece arranges a series of self-portraits describing the various emotions and fears people face when forced to look within.

AIDAN JONES is a sophomore majoring in Strategic Communication with a focus on Media Design. About six years ago he enrolled in a digital art & design class which sparked his curiosity for all things design. Starting with logos and graphic design pieces for clients, he later fell in love with photography and began incorporating it into his art. More dedicated than ever before, he strives to create a portfolio that displays his photography, videography, graphic design and personal art. Always experimenting with new forms of media, Aidan's main focus is to capture the world how he sees it.

CALLIE KEATING is a freshman at CU studying Business with a minor in Art Practices. Callie has been exploring photography and digital media since she ran her first editing Instagram account in the sixth grade. She fell in love with photography because of the way it can capture a single moment and isolate it from time. She likes to use this ability, along with Photoshop, to create surreal images that make the viewer question the photograph. She hopes that whatever she ends up doing in the future will involve both her business degree and her creative skills.

CLAYTON MONTGOMERY studies Creative Writing. He's from the small Colorado mountain town of Basalt, where he grew up skiing, snowboarding, hiking, and camping. Photography has always been one of his favorite ways to exercise his creativity, whether it be with his film camera or simply his phone. Clayton is excited to continue building his portfolio of photography and writing once he graduates. He hopes to publish both a novel and a book of his photographs one day.

ALEX POSEN is a senior studying Geography and GIS at CU. He grew up in the mountains of Colorado where he found photography was the perfect hobby to accompany his outdoor adventures. Alex is passionate about the intersection of art and technology, using one to enhance the other. In the spirit of this fusion, he used a drone to capture the fall scene depicted in his photograph.

ADLER SHANNON is a senior at CU studying Media Production and History with a minor in Anthropology. Born and raised in an incredibly diverse area of central Florida, Adler's work focuses primarily on unseen and underrepresented beauty in his local communities. Adler shifts between photography and film as his primary artistic medium, with a recent ethnographic focus on the Nepali community of Golden, Colorado. Going into the future, Adler hopes to attend grad school for an MFA in film direction and screenwriting.

HINDSIGHT

CREATIVE NONFICTION

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

2022 • VOLUME II

CREATIVE NONFICTION 2022 VOLUME II

FOREWORD BY:
MICHAEL ELIZABETH SAKAS

HINDSIGHT

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After a nine-year legacy of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishing CU Boulder students, HINDSIGHT continues to print annually, while providing an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction, and in our next issue publishing nationally. We acquire First North American Serial Rights, welcoming all artists and writers of creative nonfiction to future issues. See our submission guidelines on our website: HINDSIGHTJOURNAL2020.COM.

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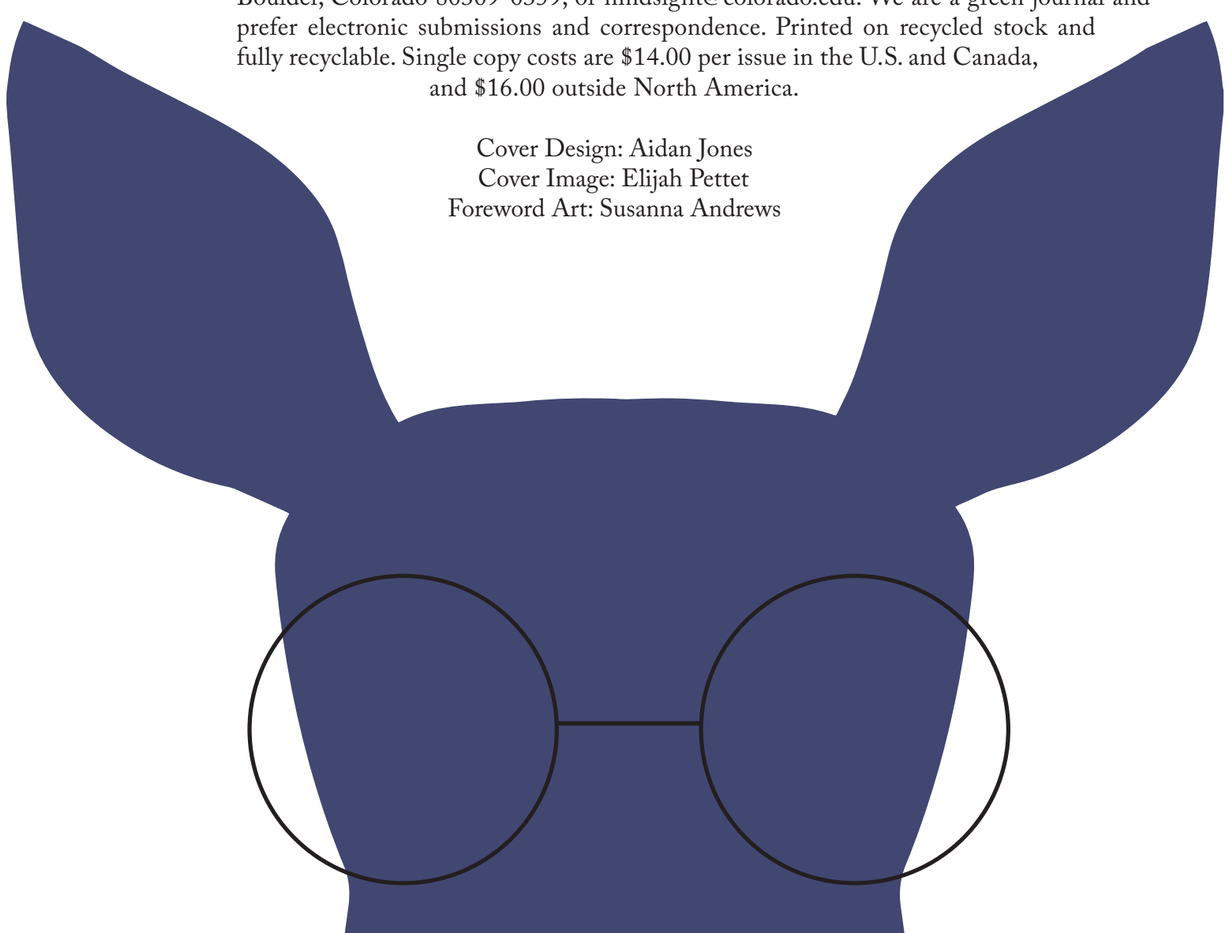

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FROM THE STAFF

HINDSIGHT started as a student journal in both production and content. From our first issue in 2013 to our ninth in 2020, we even had a different name. JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY came from the course (WRTG 2020) that produced the first issue. We used blind review to publish only the best writing from the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER campus; now we're ready to use it to publish the best writing from anyone, anywhere. As we take HINDSIGHT beyond Colorado, we look forward to amplifying voices from all over, valuing not just our community but a larger fellowship of writers who have true stories to tell. Volume II of HINDSIGHT lays the foundation for our expansion, as the issue you hold in your hand includes art from beyond our campus. The writing in this Volume showcases the exceptional talents of our Front Range contributors. We are thankful for our staff, who produced this Volume while also laying the groundwork for a brand new journal, composed of writing on climate change, to be published in Fall of 2022, CHANGING SKIES.

HINDSIGHT STAFF

Each semester, Art Direction is astonished by the creativity presented by photographers and artists alike. As HINDSIGHT began to grow, submissions became open to those unaffiliated with CU Boulder, allowing more people to share their perspectives through writing and art. As another year went by, still recovering from a pandemic, we witnessed natural disasters affect our own communities. Despite these tragic events, we saw people coming together to heal. Much of the artwork and writing in this Volume embodies the emotions many of us have felt during these times. HINDSIGHT will continue to showcase the visionaries all around us, encapsulating the world we live in.

ART DIRECTION

The HINDSIGHT Marketing Department would not exist without the help and dedication of everyone on staff. Every member participates in different roles to spread awareness of our journal and gather great creative nonfiction work not only from CU Boulder but from our growing audience. Each semester we run campaigns on our website, social media accounts, Radio 1190, and in print. Despite COVID struggles, we've continued to spread our journal's message. Please enjoy the second volume of HINDSIGHT. We thank you for providing our team with valuable artwork and writing, making the process of spreading our message that much easier. To keep up with HINDSIGHT, sign up for our newsletter by going to our website or by following us on social media @hindsight.journal on Instagram and @cu_hindsight on Twitter.

MARKETING

GET PUBLISHED

IN PRINT OR ONLINE

Any writer, anywhere, is eligible to submit creative nonfiction prose and poetry for consideration by HINDSIGHT. Submissions go through blind review by our editorial staff. We seek only previously unpublished creative nonfiction in any of its genres:

- Creative Scholarship
- Narrative Journalism
- Humor
- Lyric Essay—the truth told with a poetic slant
- Travel, Food, and Sports Writing
- Portraiture and Memoir
- Graphic Creative Nonfiction
- Digital Compositions and Videos for Web Publication

Artists, send us your work to accompany writing in HINDSIGHT print, online, or marketing. We accept previously unpublished work including but not limited to photography, video, or music.

JOIN OUR STAFF

Take the Journal Practicum (WRTG 3090) or sign up for a one, two, or three-credit INTERNSHIP with one of our Faculty Advisors. Internships are offered at both the upper and lower division level. We seek anyone wanting to learn Editorial, Art Direction, Digital Production, Podcasting and Video Production, or the Business and Marketing of a print and online journal of creative nonfiction—no previous experience required. A position on the HINDSIGHT staff fosters professional skills while learning about the exciting genres of creative nonfiction. As a member of staff working on a premier print and online journal of only creative nonfiction, students learn with other students, gaining an unparalleled experience on campus. We exist to serve and further a community of creative nonfiction writers (and artists) across campus.

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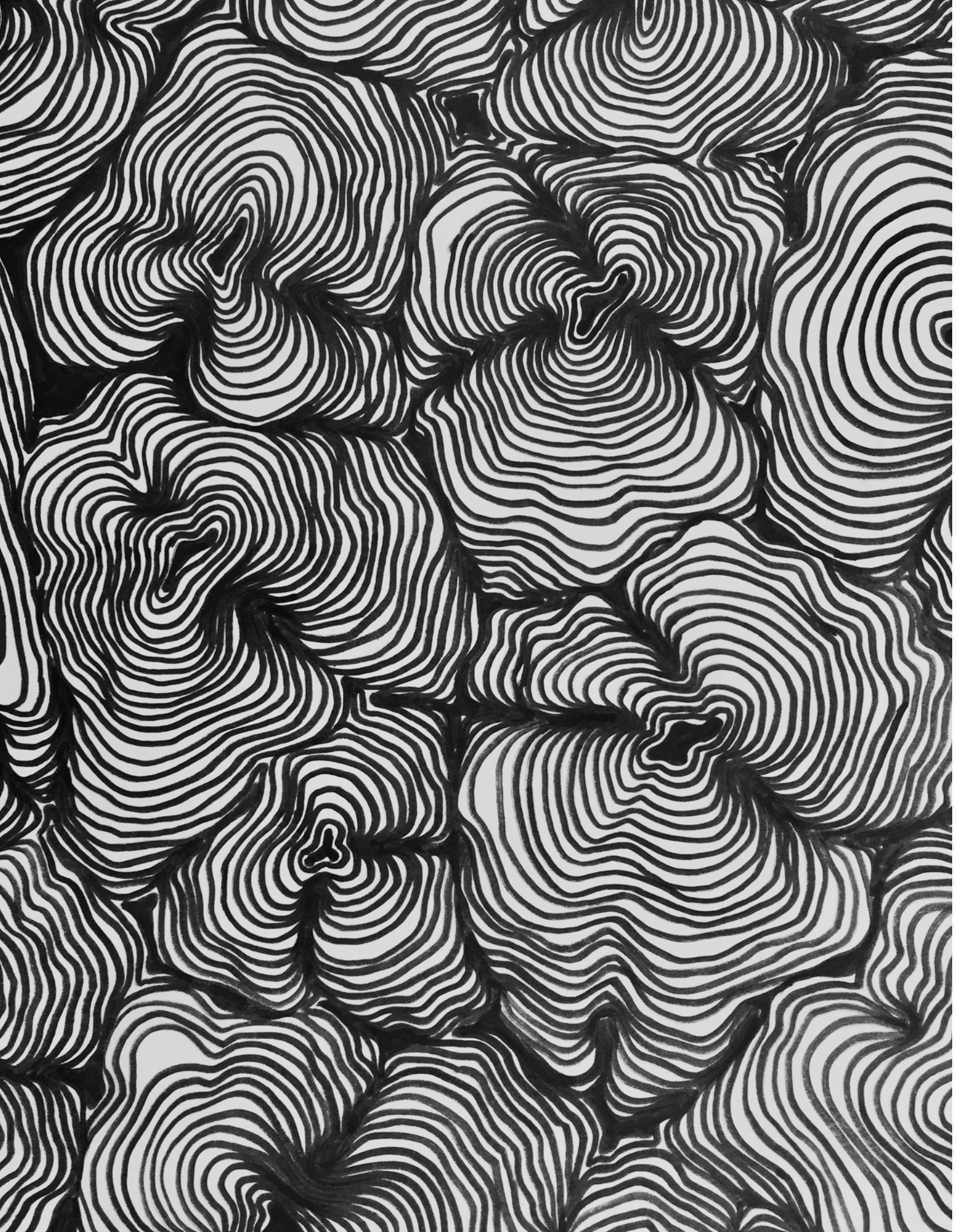

ON HINDSIGHT

by MICHAEL ELIZABETH SAKAS

When I took on climate change reporting, I wasn't sure how to tell stories about a hotter world. I assumed writing about rising temperatures meant focusing on numbers and complex research so readers would take the issue seriously. I was up for the challenge, but I expected my reporting style to shift significantly. In one of my first interviews with a climate scientist, our conversation suddenly brought her to tears as she shared worries about her child's future. I respected her expertise, but the scientist's emotion made the interview real—and human. Reporting that story taught me that the heart of good climate reporting lies in the voices of people trying their best to make sense of our changing world. I was honored when University of Colorado Boulder faculty and students invited me to celebrate the launch of this year's edition of HINDSIGHT. These authors exemplify how writing empowers us to find our story and place in times of adjustment.

In "After Many A Summer", the pressures of growing up seep through the walls of grandma's house: a home that once felt immune to change, where life paused for waffles and card games. Beneath the tranquility is an anxious energy, the sound of a ticking clock and the growing murmur of car traffic that drowns out the once-familiar chirps of nighttime crickets. "The apple tree outside seems to have given up bearing its inedible fruit, choosing instead to blossom and then fall," writes Jenny Brown. In "Tie-Dye Swimsuit", author Anna Haynes finds an extra-large bikini that holds the curves of her body in a way she wishes she could do more often. It had been almost a decade since she last wore a swimsuit, and the memories of elementary school bullies and years of crude comments made her "want to tear my own stomach out, like thrusting my hand into a glass of orange juice and removing a pulp-filled fist." But this swimsuit honors her and encourages the author to do the same. "Frankie Goes to Hollywood" takes readers on a rapid-fire tour of a pig farm turned childhood home. Changes in the natural surroundings punctuate memories of divorce, like the recollection of an old cottonwood tree that once stood where the fence is. "Can you smell the potatoes in the oven? Can you hear the emotions behind the closed door?" writes Evi Judge. The fire pit has become overgrown with weeds since the family stopped lighting it after wildfires engulfed the state.

The recent Marshall fire in Boulder County is Colorado's most destructive wildfire on record. More than a thousand homes were lost. Even more lives are forever affected by a climate change-driven catastrophe. As more devastating events like this happen, it is critical that we share our stories of trauma, resiliency, and hope as reminders of what's at stake in the fight to secure a liveable future. Melia Hawthorne Klingler's *The Rains* embodies these themes as she shares her family's longing for a world that no longer exists. "The air would smell like freshly picked coffee beans and Christmas, a promise of another year of crops and rain. That promise is broken now," writes Hawthorne Klingler. HINDSIGHT and Mission Zero's series of climate writing contests resulted in an impressive collection of stories, including "The Rains". To highlight these works, a separate issue called CHANGING SKIES will be published later this year. It will devote its pages to climate and environmental writing—and who better to write these stories than students? They hold the power to make significant changes today and in the days ahead.

Michael Elizabeth Sakas is a climate and environmental reporter for Colorado Public Radio where she started as a news fellow in 2016. Her work has been heard on NPR's Morning

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THE NAIL

by NOAH LUSTI

The lights in the room had suddenly turned on; the sting of the white walls burned my eyes. It's still dark out and I didn't know the time. I looked around my room. It wasn't as big as the other ones because a wall came across the room, making one end a triangular shape. I thought to myself, "Why did the lights turn on?" Before I could think of anything else, I felt a needle stick into my arm and draw my blood. A small team of three nurses traveled from room to room, drawing people's blood. I always assumed they did it so early because they knew nobody would argue about it.

Did I just accept it and go back to sleep? Why am I here? I know why I'm here but why am I here? Am I crazy? I'm crazy. My mind's racing but I just want to go back to sleep. Eventually the team of nurses got enough blood; they taped a cotton ball to my arm and left the room without saying a word. I don't think they said anything the whole time. The lights eventually turned off and finally I felt myself falling asleep.

Art by JUSTIN HEIN

I opened my eyes; the sun shining through my window made me squint. The window only provided a view of the wall of the clinic building next to the hospital. There isn't much to see, but the window connected me to the outside world. I can imagine I'm not in here when I'm looking out of it. The window had a windowsill that you could sit on, and most mornings, I would sit there for about 30 minutes, looking out at the wall. I preferred sitting in this room compared to talking with the other patients, especially in the morning. I felt uncomfortable around them, and I didn't think I belonged in this place. But why did I consider myself any different? Why don't I belong here?

Years ago, as a kid, I used to visit Fred and Linda's farm. They were an older couple and two of my mom's close friends. These visits usually consisted of me running around the farm while the adults got drunk. During one of these visits, I found myself walking on a stack of old boards, trying to balance myself as I made my way along them. I noticed several rusty nails sticking out of the boards, but I pretended I didn't see them. I saw one just a few inches in front of my foot. Step on it. Step on it. Step on it. I raised my foot slowly; I remember thinking to myself, "what will this feel like?" as I slowly lowered my foot down on the nail. I felt the nail go through my shoe and into my big toe.

I didn't feel anything at first, but after a few seconds a sudden sting of pain set in as I lifted my foot off the nail. Feeling the nail slowly slide out of my toe almost felt like pulling out a big splinter. I immediately freaked out, took off my shoe and inspected my injury. My sock had a large red splotch of blood soaking through around my big toe. I quickly peeled it off like a band-aid so I could see the damage. My toe appeared as a gory mess; blood had pooled around a small hole where the nail had gone through. The realization of what I did started to set in. I fixated on the hole in my toe, and the hole stared back at me as it spit out my blood. Why did I do that?

I hobbled over to my mom, and she took me to a clinic. I remember thinking, "I'm going to lose my toe!" Even though it wasn't nearly that serious. I remember sitting in the doctor's office for what felt like an eternity before he came in and inspected my injury and rebandaged it up. It was an accident.

The realization of what I did started to set in.

I sat in my regular spot at a long conference table during a group meeting with the other patients. We have them twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Nobody wants to talk, nobody wants to be here, nobody wants to be alive. Despite that, we are talking, we are here, and we are alive. I talk the most because I want to appear to be trying to get better so I can leave. There are two exits in the main living area. I considered making a run for it but where would I have gone? I can't run away from the situation; I can't leave until I convince them that I'm getting better.

A girl my age talked about why she's here. She took a bunch of pills. I don't know why I have to listen to everyone talk about their problems. How does that help me? I got ripped out of my life and dropped in this weird room with weird people. But maybe I'm just as weird. How can I even confront my issues in this environment? How will I get better? Can I get better? I'm more depressed now than ever before, between the early morning blood drawings and daily adjustments to my medication I don't really feel like I can get better. This system is a joke. Nobody actually cares about helping us get better. Some of us can't even get better. We're just prisoners, and they want to keep us here as long as possible.

Art by TASHA SMITH

THE MIND GAME AND THE MORGUE

by IAN HALL

The bitter fluid violated my tongue, but I still swallowed the medication. Young, I feared the pill blocking my throat, so my mother and I compromised. Each morning, a pill cut in half, its horrid liquid contents poured into my yogurt, meant to fix me up and get me ready for school. It never worked except to make my tongue shrivel and convulse in disgust.

I could never shut up, a fact that remains. Despite the best intentions of the medication and the berating quips from teachers around me, my mouth ran a mile a minute, and the discipline I faced reflected that. Torturously long days of no recess, sitting inside staring at my name written in bold, embarrassing letters on the chalkboard, became the norm. After a short trial run, we abandoned the useless pills, and my teachers cooked up a less subtle solution. “Give the kid some gum. Give his mouth something to do besides yap.” So I chewed, a luxury my fellow students surely hated me for.

Stepping into the morgue, I feel a chill. I am not alone down here.

I could never sit still, a fact that remains. I'd heard adults say "shake your sillies out" enough to have it rendered meaningless, like the maddening mental repetition of a mundane vocabulary word, said until it became unrecognizable mush. Yet no matter how much I enjoyed recess, I would always return to my desk and tap my foot as if beating out a disjointed tempo to the world's most chaotic drum solo. To remedy the distraction my hyperactivity produced, my teachers fitted my rigid prison chair of a desk with a cushion on the seat and stretched a large rubber band around the legs, so I might kick without audibly thumping against the ground. I felt an acute awareness of my classmates, remaining in their back-breaker seats. I felt them seethe.

Outfitted with my very own tools, I sit, fidgeting, at my workstation, resigned to another long night in the morgue. Shadows cast against the wall twist and judge as I remove my outlet, my vice, from its case. Placing the cursed laptop on the desk, I stare.

I could never focus, a fact that still very much remains. I wouldn't learn the term 'procrastination' until my teen years, but even in youth I found myself a dutiful servant to it. Days shrank into hours, and then again into minutes and I often found myself scrambling to complete an assignment or household chore. Upon sitting down to write, I would find myself roadblocked by the blank page for hours, words fitfully swimming around my head, as tangible and fuzzy as a swarm of horseflies scavenging a carcass. Occasionally, like Daniel LaRusso in *The Karate Kid*, I would get lucky and snatch one from the air with a pair of metaphysical chopsticks. However, this became a rare occasion, certainly not common enough to celebrate, and certainly not sustainable.

There it goes again. That fuzz. Like an old radio that needs a whack to achieve the proper frequency. It pours out of my mouth, my eyes, my ears, my fingers. I start writing in this place, this cocoon of mine that too closely resembles a cold cement basement housing the recently deceased. The room could almost be alive—if

It's as if I'm playing a long round of cat and mouse with my own brain.

morgues could breathe. It glares at me. True enough, it has become a haunted place. I hear the taunts reverberate.

My ADHD – another term later learned – has not improved in my adult years, so much as squashed and spread to all corners of my life like the dough ball of a zealous pizzaiolo. Those facts that remain, my motor mouth, overactive motor functions, and inability to focus, glare at me all the more painfully as I progress through my adult years. Responsibility for my own wellbeing—cleaning my room, doing my laundry, staying on top of payments and appointments and assignments—has become something I'm still adjusting to, something that has proven itself to be one of my greatest challenges. It's as if I'm playing a long round of cat and mouse with my own brain: a self-inflicted mind game perpetually in the bottom of its ninth inning. It makes learning difficult as well. My impaired focus means I face great challenges with absorbing new information, especially in fast-paced, impersonal settings like large classrooms. Learning via small groups or one-on-one instruction are the most efficient ways I manage my journey through academia.

Unfortunately, these educational formats are rarely available to me in the world of standardized schooling, which has led to some close calls with grades in the past. Along with the strains of ADHD come anxieties and insecurities that manifest in nearly every waking moment of my life. Coming to grips with my own mental state—do I really have ADHD (even though a diagnosis from my childhood proves I do)—wages an impostor-syndrome-fueled tug-of-war between my logical and emotional hemispheres. My best days turn schismatic.

This second-guessing even my most intimate self-knowledge bleeds into every aspect of my day-to-day. Do I really deserve this good grade? Am I really a good friend? A good brother, or son? My friends tell me I'm a good writer, guitarist, speaker, and many other things; surely, I must have lied to them somehow to make them believe such absurdities. This toxin exhibits itself even in my lonesome. Sitting here, writing this, working on my own, I still hear the voices of perceived jurors peering over my shoulders, casting doubt on every keystroke. Why did you use that word? Why didn't you make a line break there?

And why did you make a line break there?

This anxiety, paired with the difficulty of focusing both mind and body, creates an impenetrable mental health sludge, thick and sour. Usually, though I thrash in it purely invisibly, I spend days at a time fighting against my self-flagellating mind. Ridicule by others of my own creation often presents itself as a common manifestation. The walls around me squeeze and contract, the desk I work at folds in around me, and my fingers rebel in spasms as I search for the next correct word, or even thought. My bedroom often feels morgue-ish. Cold and clammy, echoing every slight sound and breath I make. In fits of frustrated determination, wishing I could uncross whatever mental wires prevent me from clarity, I operate on a body that has since died. The word processor my slab, the keys my scalpel and suture, I perform cosmetic alterations on a corpse, praying that no one but the jeering shadows over my shoulder may witness my shame.

It's morning now. I wake up and address my slab of concrete, tending to the body that lay upon it. Three hours of labor for a measly four sentences, half of them fragmented and rough. I wish the medication worked.

Art by TASHA SMITH

HEADLIGHTS

by CODY FIELDS

It's one of those clear, quiet moments. A tall peak on a long, flat graph. The biannual heartbeat.

The wedding's over, and I wander off towards the stage and the twilit view of the ocean. Everyone's saying goodbyes and packing their things into their rental cars: purses, left-over food, and someone I respected a lot more before I saw them blackout drunk.

I'm leaning against my brother's car's hood, trying to look cool even though it's midnight and no one's around. It's a little higher up in the hills, the only place on the road that gets 4G and has a decent pullout, and it happens to have a good view of the plains. I anxiously check my phone and wait for reception..
I take a deep breath of cool autumn air and sit down behind the wheel. I adjust my green striped hoodie that my mom will throw out after the zipper breaks and think about if that's ever happened to me before. I start the car, turn on the radio, and I'm on my way west.

Art by ADLER SHANNON

There are a few red cups scattered around on the stones of the stage, where the turned and gathered chairs can get a good view of them. The lights look blurry in the photo on my phone screen. I look up to compare, and I think yeah, that's about right. It's not muggy, but there's a heaviness to the air, which makes the light refract and scatter as it passes through. Or that's the vodka talking. I stay put on the stage; I want this feeling to last a little longer.

The dry gravel of the pullout crunches under my feet. I'm walking around now, just about doing slow laps around the car. There's a weight off my chest, and I'm taking a few steps around to see how it feels. And besides, the view here never gets old, no matter how many times I've driven out here to calm down. I keep pacing; I want this feeling to last a little longer.

I'm almost out of Boulder and into the canyon part of Canyon Drive, but on a whim I take a right towards Pearl, taking my time to watch the stop signs light up in my headlights at every corner. It's been a good night and pulling into that dark house would mean it's over, I'm back in bed, and I'm waking up to a mediocre day. I keep driving; I want this feeling to last a little longer.

In Mexico, I'm still working the vodka out of my system. Someone thought it was funny that I went straight for vodka, because I'm half Ukrainian. Someone also probably thought it was funny when I got up on the stage and danced for the first time too, but I don't really give a shit. I'm done caring too much, at least for now, and that feels good.

Back in the foothills, I take another look at Twitter, absentmindedly checking on the election that happens to be happening tonight too, since the power's out at home. It's a surreal night, but it's not really why I'm out here. I give it a few glances, then look back at Boulder, and it feels like a weight is gone.

And in my brother's Subaru, I'm still thinking back on the night I just had, just hanging out with a few old friends and a few new ones. I'm pretty sure that's the first time someone's hit on me, and I'm probably right. Right here, I don't know that I'm not going to see him again after graduation, or that it's all going to get worse before it gets better. But in this moment, I'm having a good night.

I've taken my photo, and people are coming to clear out the tables and chairs, the sounds of the waves being replaced by idle chatter. I stand up and head back to the parking lot. It'll be a long, quiet twenty minutes back to the room. A day or two later, it'll be a short two hours home, and things will go back to normal.

I get back in my brother's car and head downhill towards the dirt road home. There's nothing good on the radio, but I'm happy enough being alone with my thoughts, which is something new. In just a few minutes I'm home, and things will go back to normal.

And then, down the road, I make a right off Canyon. It's cold, but I've got the windows rolled down anyway. I feel free, for the first time I can remember. Before I know it, I'm pulling into the driveway, and things go back to normal.

It's 2018, 2020, 2011, and one of those clear, quiet moments. In Mexico, after my sister's wedding, the anxiety's gone, and I feel like a man for the first time I can remember. In the foothills, checking on my grades and settling into the winter, I'm a month away from straight A's in my first night classes, and realizing that I'm ready to start living again. And in Boulder, on the way back from a rare night out, I'm just starting to heal, realizing I'm more than nothing, with a few long years ahead of me.

I don't know if these moments are as meaningful as they feel, whether I'm better for them or not, or if I'm just assigning meaning to something that doesn't really need any. As it is, they stick out to me as moments my perspective changed, punching through years of half-remembered fugue-like bright lights through fog. Whatever the case, they certainly always end. Headlights always turn back towards home, and the graph goes flat, though hopefully not for long.

THE RAINS

Art by ALLISON NOWELS

by MELIA HAWTHORNE KLINGLER

I come downstairs and my mom is on the phone with Tio Jose and Tia Saida again.

"We used to be able to predict the rains," Tio Jose says. "Every spring the clouds would gather low in the sky and then we could say, 'The rain will start tomorrow.' And the next day we would be sitting on the porch sipping *café con leche* and the rains would come."

My mom shakes her head and by the way her eyes look sad I know she's thinking over the well-worn conversation about how things just aren't the same anymore. I've heard it too. Before, everything worked like clockwork. The people of Cuatro Cruces would work the soil, placing each fragile seed in the ground. The rain would come and make things grow and the village would become green and lush and sleepy under the weight of humidity and growing fruit. Then, after the monsoons had passed, while the soil was still wet, the children would run out and everyone would harvest. The women would gather at Church to make tamales and the trucks, laden with fruit, would head into town. Then the rains would stop and the tin roofs would become hot with sun. Coffee season. The air would smell like freshly picked coffee beans and Christmas, a promise of another year of crops and rain.

That promise is broken now. The rains, once well behaved, have become a fickle child who hides when he's called and jumps out when he's not wanted. The crops drown, the roads collapse into squelching pools of mud, and Tio Jose and Tia Saida call my mom again. "We used to be able to predict the rains," they say. "What's happened to our beautiful Earth?"

Often, with the clicking of a tongue and the sorrowful shake of a head, the conversation turns to *Los gringos*, their supersized companies and supersized machines that beat the earth, squeezing every last drop of life from her. Ravenous for pineapples and profits, they devour the land and spew grey clouds into the sky. Tio Jose sighs. "You have to be gentle with the soil, let it run through your fingers and treat it gently, like a lover." *Los gringos* and their harsh language don't know how to speak of love.

And now my mom is asking about Don Orlando. "How's the farm?" She wants to know if the lush paradise where she fell in love with my dad still exists. Does the stream still gurgle and do the *manzanas de agua* still grow red and delicious and do the howler monkeys still try to chase away the early hours of the morning with their cries? And I have to watch her face fall as she hears that, for the first time since Sibú cursed his people a thousand years ago, Don Orlando's river has run dry. "Baptisms were strange this year," says Tia Saida. Spraying down believers with a hose isn't the same as watching them emerge, soaked and smiling, from the same clear water that flows from Nicaragua to Panama.

I run back upstairs because I don't want to hear any more. I don't want to hear about the rains or us being here and them over there. I want the pain that seeps through the speakerphone to evaporate into the warm summer air. I want to be back in Cuatro Cruces, sipping coffee on the porch, watching the rain fall steady once more.

DO MY ARMS PULL TAUT?

by S.G. GREENE

Prelude: A Bit About Manhattan

Despite its sheer size, New York is as much a labyrinth as a chessboard is. If you're on First Avenue, you're near the frigid East River that separates Manhattan from her sister boroughs. If you're on Eleventh Avenue, you're next to the Hudson and across the way is the epitome of the exact opposite reason you came to Manhattan—New Jersey. If you find that the cross-street numbers are getting higher, you're heading north toward Harlem. If the opposite occurs, you're heading toward One World Trade Center, Battery Park, and the Statue of Liberty herself. Of course, when you're there, nothing about the city seems that simple (unless you're a native). You're but a termite scurrying amongst colossal monoliths that make you feel dizzy and insignificant. Yet your feelings are contradicted when you realize that without your fellow termites, there would be no towers. Humans are as much of the city as the structures are. It's one giant organism at work. If you were to defy physics and float above Manhattan in sped-up time during the night, you'd see the traffic moving up and down every other avenue, stopping and going as if it was being pumped by some mechanical heart hidden deep in the catacombs under the island. Move even higher up and it seems as though it's just a network of cells stitched together by veins of orange and white light. There's not one sign indicating the controlled chaos you feel when submerged deep inside this organism. It just seems as natural and insignificant as a patch of spreading lichen on the side of a black oak or a network of white scars against the dark scales of a wolf fish. Not much else.

One: Nothing

I am alive relative to nothing. My legs kick as if I am moving but I see no light. I have it in my head that I am twirling wildly like a dust devil, endlessly spinning into a great void. I can't be sure that I feel the weight of my guts pressing against the back of my vessel. There is nothing. No planet beneath me. No stars to guide me. No ship. No debris. No gas and dust. I cannot even be sure if there are electrons and atoms. I do not know if I am significant enough to carry the weight of time across the fabric on which I think I am rolling. Am I idle, doomed to speculation the rest of my life? Does that even have a meaning? With no guide, there is nothing to know. With no attraction, there is nothing to see. I spin? I stagnate? With nothing as my backdrop, do my arms pull taut? [1]

1. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos.* Vintage Books, 2005, p. 34

West Twenty-fifth Street. I'm six weeks old. I am inside a Goodwill that seems unnaturally empty for being one of many cells in the steel hive in which I have fled to hide. How could one feel alone in one of the most densely packed places on the planet? My brain wants me to stand there and think. Instead, I pull my new jeans over my perforated shorts and zip up my new hoodies. I am stationary relative to the things moving beyond the walls of Goodwill. I take a breath and leave the dressing room and as I do so, divert some of my motion through time into motion through space.[2] Things slow down for me, even if it's minute. (Remember, the faster you travel, the slower time gets!)[3] Feels good. I pass by one soul as I make for the exit. Outside, the cold March air stings at my enervated face. I crack my stiff six-week-old knuckles and get a satisfying pop as I look each way down the noisy street. Now I'm better prepared to wander the grid and find its hidden treasures. With a frozen nose, a dilapidated sense of self, and a very hazy understanding of why I'm even in Manhattan in the first place, I follow the organ that always knows best in times of trouble: my stomach. Onward I march into the Kingdom of Towers in search of a warm bowl of ramen. Without hunger and a love for taste, I'm not sure I would have had meaning. For now, my purpose is clear.

Two: Universe

A crescent moon hangs dimly before the pupil of my eye. From the fabric its shape cuts free. My iris dilates as a trickle of light beams through the night. The distant moon passes beneath my feet from time to time. A sense of relief washes over me. From above all, my eye watches intensely. It searches the cosmos, darting from new star to new star as the fabric is peppered with birth. I am spinning relative to the distant jewels deep within the cosmos. Relief surges through vein and bone until it grows cold. Within darkness, anything can be a light. Within the light, I am now free to see. I am moving. My arms pull outward, threatening to rip me asunder. I smile. This is my universe, no?

2. Greene, Brian. The Fabric of the Cosmos. Vintage Books, 2005, p. 34
3. Ibid., p. 34

Strewn about the cosmos, my body lounges in wait. Gas clouds collapse and suns explode into being. Swirling disks of fiery afterbirth careen across orbital planes. From grains to celestial bodies within a blink of my eye. The Heavenly spheres pull noxious blankets across their surfaces and in these skies' hellfire rains. From above, I see that a code has been written. Laws have been formed. Rules that cannot be broken. My muscles strain! Why did I have to ask? I feel this new balance. I know that I cannot exist within its confines. My body buckles beneath this new weight. I watch, frightened, as a star implodes, passing into itself from all directions. Only familiarity remains. My bones go from cosmic superstructure, binding the universe together, to material victim of crushing mass. Reality threatens to fold. The imploded sun lurks in my mind. I did ask. I did want to know. I am both shrinking and falling, and gravity subsides.

Sixty-five Fourth Avenue. I wander my way into Ippudo having been informed by a friend across the country that I might not be able to get a table as a walk-in—it's a very popular restaurant. To my surprise, I find myself walking to a seat at the bar in the main dining room. As soon as a I enter, the entire wait staff greets me: *"Irasshaimase!"* It means "welcome" in Japanese. I feel a detached smile form across my rubber face. Who am I to these people? I am sitting at the bar, facing inward toward the focused chefs who cook in front of the guests with a glass of water in my hand within seconds. The restaurant is alive: a large party cheers when a champagne bottle is opened at the head of the table. A baby wails in the corner, fierce with unbridled emotion. A gulf of flame whips from the chef's grill, prompting sounds of awe. The entire waitstaff greets another guest with gleeful hospitality—all of it relative to my absorbing eyes. Twenty minutes later I have three steamed pork buns in front of me. My infant mouth takes in the food for not just one soul, but two. I think it is the whole reason I am there. Five minutes later, a bowl is placed in front of me: red-orange pork tonkatsu broth with oily islands floating atop, udon noodles, chashu, sesame kikurage mushrooms, scallions, seasoned bamboo shoots, naruto and a spicy house paste. It looks like a little Eden floating atop a reservoir of spice and oil. A universe in its own right; a location in space my mind can fixate on. I dive in with my chopsticks. A man sits next to me and watches me curiously as I eat. It's not long before he tries to talk to me. I look at him and do my best

It looks like a little Eden floating atop a reservoir of spice and oil.

to pretend that I'm there. That I am not just an apparition with an appetite. The conversation dwindles as I stare at the last of my broth. I place the bowl to my lips and drink the last of its contents as if I have just been given a chalice containing the blood of Christ. How long had I been in New York? Days. Days. Days. I nod to the waitstaff as they cheerfully bid me farewell. Now that my stomach is full, what is my purpose? I head up Fourth. The cross streets get higher and higher. A freezing raindrop smacks my cheek. As I buckle inward having accomplished my only task for the day, the Kingdom of Towers gives way to the Empire of Light.

Intermission: A Bit About Light

Light is a spectrum of electromagnetic energy made up of photons. Radio waves are a type of light. Microwaves are a type of light. Our retinas can only detect visible light on this broad spectrum. If not for light, nothing would exist. It is only because of light the trilobite grew compound eyes 541 million years ago.[4] If light is moving away from us, it will appear red because it is being stretched. If light is moving toward us, it will appear blue because it is being squished. Stars can never appear green because of Blackbody Radiation —stars whose light peaks in the green spectrum still have too much blue and red light (16% green, 13% Blue and 13% Red).[5] When combined, it creates white. Therefore, our sun glows white instead of green.[6] (Dang!) Light travels at 670 million miles per hour.[7] This is an absolute point that is true regardless of how fast you are traveling.[8] If you were moving 570 million miles per hour relative to a beam of light, it would not be traveling at 100 million miles per hour. It would still be moving at 670 million miles per hour. But if light can travel through the emptiness of space, and there is nothing as its backdrop to give it a standard of rest, what exactly is it moving relative to?[9] How is there a fixed speed? *"The speed of light is 670 million miles*

4. Laird, Isabella, "Trilobite Eyes Have Lenses Made of Calcite", Beaty Biodiversity Museum, The University of British Columbia, 2017.
5. Kipping, David. "The Star that Can't Exist", YouTube, 2021
6. Ibid.
7. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos.* Vintage Books, 2005, p. 42
8. Ibid., p. 45
9. Ibid.

per hour relative to anything and everything," Einstein had once declared.[10] Doesn't this challenge common sense? What sort of trick does light play on our feeble human perceptions? What is the difference between light and time? If the speed of light is absolute, do photons age? Hmm?? Hmm?! What is light, anyways?! Is it a wave or a particle? Apparently, it's both.[11] Kind of. Ha! Confused? Me too.

Three: Materiality

I crash through a thick band of choking ash as the Heavenly sphere pulls me down to its molten surface. Ash turns to dust and dust to cloud. Fire turns to gas and gas to rain. The birth throes of Earth howl into my ears as she breathes for the first time. Through these harmonic layers I scream to the ground. Magma turns to glass and glass to dirt. Life springs upward, pulled from the ground, from the points of light I yearned so long for. Onto my back I roll and through the canopy of trees I see night and day, night and day, night and day. Once on my feet, I feel the downward pull. As the Earth spins, I spin with it. I'm afraid to jump and lose my balance.

A moment of peaceful solitude paralyzes my senses. I feel the dew in my hair as the mist rolls through the thick forest. I hear the birds singing unseen from deep within. My arms outstretched on either side hold steady. Warm lips kiss my own. For a moment, I am made of light. A tiny hand grasps my finger and two blue jewel eyes undefiled by foolhardy questions stare up at me. In a brief flash of euphoric bliss, I have won the game. It isn't long before I begin tumbling again. But is it quiet reflection? I feel my hands start to tremble. My senses heighten. My jaw clenches. The distant drums of war pound with great fury and desire. I drop to my knees and grab hold of the Earth. I sink my rabid claws into her flesh and hold on for dear life. I cannot lose what I've found. But I know the code is written. The laws are made. A dejected snarl tears from my milky mouth. My arms do *pull taut. How fatuous.*

Fourty-fifth and Seventh. It's raining. If it were a few degrees colder, it would be snow. My hands are red and numb as they grip my camera. A man tries to sell me a see-through umbrella for ten bucks, but I ignore him as my wandering eyes search the environment for the perfect moment to capture for safe keeping. I'm in Times Square, a place I know not to wander anywhere near during the day. The rain is falling in cold curtains between the steel behemoths that tower above me. Pinks and oranges, greens and purples, reds and blues—they light up not only the wet steel careening into the low hanging clouds far above my head, but also the slick black pavement where the rainwater streams and pools. Aided by Hans Zimmer's *Blade Runner* soundtrack blaring through my headphones, I capture all these momentary pieces before the colors from all the billboards shift into something else and present to me a different scene. As people run for cover, I am crouched by the curb, pointing my telephoto lens at a small puddle forming by the sidewalk. I take solace in the fact that I am the only one who will ever witness this transient happening in real time. The photo is so that it will never be truly lost. A selfish capture of a passing moment, all made possible by light. I stare up into the towers that make me feel unimportant and small, a feeling that I have come to enjoy. As the puddle shifts colors, I'm reminded that my kin are halfway around the world caring for the ashes of someone that was not unlike me. Flocks of people run back and forth around my hunched body. I laugh to myself as my cold wet

10. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos.* Vintage Books, 2005, p. 45.
11. Smethhurst, Becky, "Is light a wave or a particle? Great debates in physics", YouTube, 2020.

skin absorbs the visible spectra: Violet, 400-420 nanometers, Indigo, 420-440 nm, Blue, 440-490 nm, Green, 490-570 nm, Yellow, 570-585 nm, Orange, 585-620 nm and Red, my favorite and the longest of them all, 620-780 nm. My camera battery dies, and I turn from the lights. My stomach is full. The day is done.

Four: Microverse

A concussive gust of searing flames topples the growth around me. A cyclone of embers turns about the universe I have just found. My seeking soul has stumbled upon furious graze. Speculative desolation might have been better. There is no pity wailing inside. Now only voracious respect glowing in drying eyes. Mother Sun descends upon her child. The beauty. The horror. The torture of staring into barbarous light. My lips dry and curl over ashy teeth. An animal cannot go willing and will run into her gaping maw. My mind will wait and see if unabated power can consume an entire reality. I raise my arms still trapped inside. My breaths are deep and without pause. A smile is stretched across my burning face. Through flame and ash, I see my escape. I see a flaw in the code. The Earth halts suddenly and my body is thrown. I fall. Not down, or up, but in.

I am beneath it all, somehow out of the grasp of the infallible laws of the entirety of space. To grow small, even in a universe of light, is to go unseen. Down here it is but a ballet in which I pirouette and port de bras. Halfway across the universe, I spawn and mirror my movements. It is a dance predicted by waves and bound by entanglement. Down here, there is no space between anything. Somehow, I am back where I was before, yet I do not worry if my arms pull taut. In this place, if my eyes are closed, then there cannot be anything anywhere. It is unfamiliar yet unburdening. Electrons march forward through that dividing slit in space and somehow, their distant partners will know exactly what to do.[12] It is with them, I will journey and learn what they know. It is with them, I will defy natural order and seek the furiously spinning gyroscope that contains my mind to set it free—even if I am at one side of the universe, and it, another.

370 Eigth Ave, sixth floor. I make my way up a steep flight of creaky stairs. Yet another day of wandering through the concrete jungle is done. How many days has it been? Weeks? I am nearly two months old. I fish around in my pants for the key to the Interfaith Hostel in Chelsea, whose name nearly stopped me from buying a room. Faith! How I hated that word. I slip my way into the tight hall and see a row of what looks like closet doors stretching far in each direction. Each lead to a room with an open ceiling. Some have light seeping through, others are dark and alive with rumbling snores. I make my way to my little room and step in; it is six feet by four. Just enough room for a bed, a little side table and some room on the floor for my things. It's hard to think about the metropolis of glass and steel just outside the walls of the Interfaith. My senses are compressed and cut off. I relax after a day of raw experience. To the left of my room, I listen to a young man cry over the loss of his girlfriend the night before.

12. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos.* Vintage Books, 2005, p. 85.

Mother Sun descends upon her child. The beauty. The horror. The torture of staring into barbarous light.

I tuck myself into the blanket and listen intently as he explains to whomever the consequences of his breakup: he had thrown up in the lobby of her apartment building mere moments after she cut things off. I turn the light of my little closet room off and I am bathed in darkness. All that I can sense is the feel of my bed, the sound of crying, snoring, and shuffling, and the rapid pulses of image and memory that flare in my mind like a thunderhead from a plane window at night. It is with these false echoes of light that I find relative peace, and drift asleep. It's impossible to say whether we will all dream the same dream as we lie side by side, even if it's but a fleeting moment of subconscious harmony. A displacing shift of center is all one needs to see that the game is "all of space" vs "our universe," and nothing else.[13]

Epilogue: Schrödinger's Universe

On average, humans blink once every ten seconds. On average, one blink lasts 400 milliseconds. Once every ten seconds, for exactly 400 milliseconds, the universe blinks out of existence. It becomes a superposition. In other words, it hangs in a fuzzy state of all possibilities until it is measured.[14] Is it there or not there? What the hell does that even mean? That the universe is what I want it to be for 400 milliseconds every ten seconds? When I dream of tropical bliss, or of cosmic horrors crusading between the stars, is it real? Fuck you, quantum physics. Because of you, scientists now use the term "classical physics". HA! But also: thank you. If it weren't for interference patterns, I'd…Yeah, I don't know, actually, so don't ask.

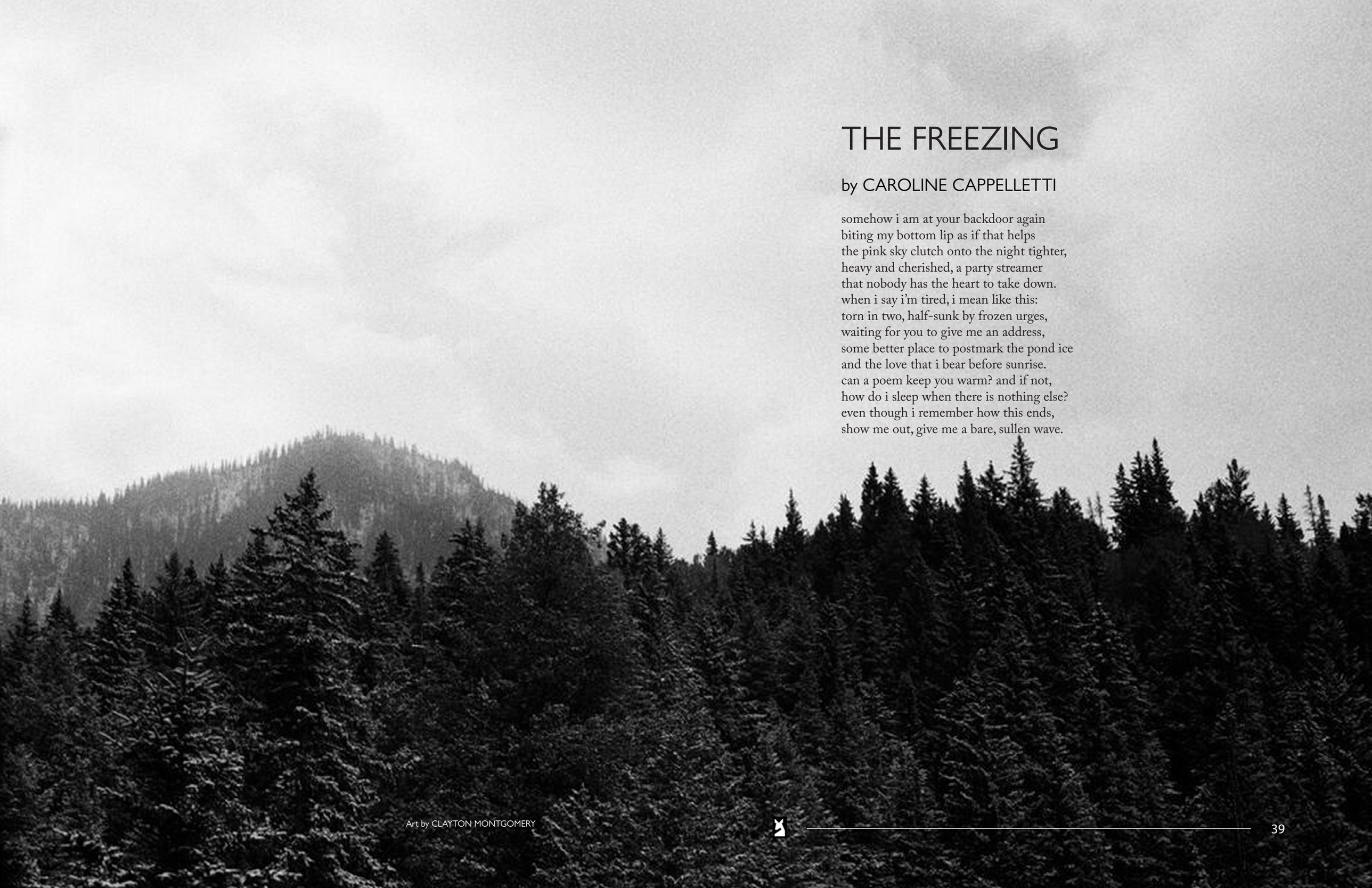
Just blink.

13. Tyson, Neil Degrasse. "Cosmic Queries—Multiverse Madness with Max Tegmark" Startalk, Max Tegmark, Chuck Nice, Spotify, 2021
14. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos.* Vintage Books, 2005, pp 95, 112.

THE FREEZING

by CAROLINE CAPPELLETTI

somehow i am at your backdoor again
biting my bottom lip as if that helps
the pink sky clutch onto the night tighter,
heavy and cherished, a party streamer
that nobody has the heart to take down.
when i say i'm tired, i mean like this:
torn in two, half-sunk by frozen urges,
waiting for you to give me an address,
some better place to postmark the pond ice
and the love that i bear before sunrise.
can a poem keep you warm? and if not,
how do i sleep when there is nothing else?
even though i remember how this ends,
show me out, give me a bare, sullen wave.



Art by CLAYTON MONTGOMERY

Art by DANIEL WORKMAN

FIVE TO NINE

by JULIAN EBERT

The clock strikes 5:15 p.m. I punch in my employee ID, grab a walkie-talkie, and step through the sliding glass doors that designate the front of the supermarket. I breathe in. The weather's pleasant—about 80 degrees. The early evening air soothes me. It's lightly perfumed with the smell of rain and passing cars, serving as a comforting reminder of those tempestuous night shifts I had survived months before. As I bring my eyes up, billowing clouds stretch over the eastern horizon, their previous presence pronounced by the damp asphalt and muddy puddles that cover the parking lot in front of me. US-36 shrieks and wails in the distance, its echoes bouncing across the row of big box stores that comprise the larger shopping center. Back in the lot, a skinny white man garbed in rags and knapsack meanders back to whatever clandestine underpass he probably lives under. An Indian family loads the back of their Nissan SUV with soda cans and breakfast cereals. A mother grabs the hand of one of

her dawdling toddlers as he looks at me with a crooked smile and a jolly "Hi!" I wave back. A college girl with thin-rimmed glasses perched on her nose strides towards the store with equal amounts of swaying hips and confident conviction. My gaze rests on her for a moment—before I then quickly recall that I have a job to do—and busy myself with pulling up a podcast on my phone. I pop in a single earbud, fasten my sunhat, straighten out my safety vest, and venture out into the parking lot. It's a Tuesday, probably.

September 2021

I've been working as a cart attendant for over a year now. It's monotonous, and at times, exhausting, but there's something almost meditative about it. And besides the occasional chatter from the radio I have clipped on my shirt, it's just me and the elements. No matter the weather, no matter the icy numbness gnawing at my hands, the painful water wrinkles carved into my aching feet, or the plumes of dust stinging and crusting in my wincing eyes, no matter what—I keep pushing. Step after step, heave after heave, I keep going. Now, of course, I am exaggerating just a tad. Not every single one of my shifts is like this. Most of the time, the weather is pleasant, or at least manageable, and I have plenty of energy to do my job. But regardless, it's a Sisyphean task. And although I might have shepherded all of my four-wheeled flock safely into their pens one night, there's always the next.

August 2020

A dull throb squeezes my temples, each sluggish undulation tightening the invisible vise clamped around my skull. I'm not in pain, but it feels as if I might be poisoned. My mind turns over and over, on and on, spiraling deeper and deeper, like an infinite fractal. I lower the brim of my sunhat to cover my quickly

I'm not in pain, but it feels as if I might be poisoned. ...

... My mind turns over and over, on and on, spiraling deeper and deeper, like an infinite fractal.

moistening eyes. The sun has set, but it glows on underneath in the twisted foggy bramble of the clouds above. My blue and green tennis shoes swing below me. I watch them as they go back-and-forth, not because I'm fascinated with the intricacy of my gait or anything. I just don't know where else to look. Right foot, left foot. Right foot, left foot. I stop. On the concrete pathway in front of me, a diamond-shaped feature rises out of the ground. A scrawny little tree stretches up from a patch of soil in the center of it. I can't remember if the tree was alive or dead. Smooth flagstone tiles the brim of the feature, its broad, flat surface inviting me to rest on it. Tears stain the thighs of my shorts. I wail softly to myself, doing my best to remain unnoticed. I keep crying. I can't even specifically remember what about. Maybe I was overwhelmed again at the thought of everything that lay ahead of me. Maybe I was berating myself for how bad of a person I thought I was. Maybe I was having obsessive intrusive thoughts again about how I might hurt somebody or conduct some other unsavory act. Maybe I was guilting myself over something I had never done. I cried some more.

January 2021

I raise my head slightly and open my mouth. A dense, feathery snowflake lands on my tongue and instantaneously melts. The black sky above shifts this way and that. Formations of white specks sway from line to line, falling into each other and falling back out again. The snow is in order, and yet it's in chaos. It's mesmerizing, hypnotically beautiful. My mom always told me that when she was a kid, she would lie upside down and look upwards out of her bedroom window whenever it snowed. She said that when I was about eight years old, and since then, I've made a habit of doing the same. I recall thinking it was bizarre that the same weather associated with death and starvation can look so charming at the same time. My mind slowly goes blank. Not empty, just blank. Gone is the constant self-analysis, the endless standardized examination, the unyielding internal interrogation. I feel free. And as the silence of the night overwhelms my senses, a wide smile creeps across my face. But my hands are getting a

little numb. So I trot back inside the store, dusting off the icy powder caked over my safety vest as I go.

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September 2020

"Mom, I don't know what to do anymore." I pause. "I wish it would stop." She rubs my back affirmatively and scoots closer to me on the metal bench we're sitting on.

"Son," she says, "look around. It's a beautiful day outside!" I raise my head and survey my surroundings. It's busy. People hurry to and fro, some with groceries in hand, others with hand in hand. The sun is shining. Gleams of light sparkle off of the neat lines of cars that stretch across the parking lot. I wonder why I do this to myself.

"Just think!" She grabs my hand and smiles at me. "These are your last eight hours of being sixteen. Get out of your head, okay? You don't even have that much longer on your shift, do you?" I nod. I can see that behind her grin she's beginning to tear up. I hug her.

"I know, Mom... And I'm sorry. You made me feel better, though. And I'm still excited for presents and cake tonight, so don't you worry." She holds me a little tighter.

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May 2021

My throat constricts. I can breathe, but it feels like that might not be the case for much longer. My mind narrows. Thoughts stretch. It's as if someone over-tuned a radio; screeching white-noise blares to such a point that it begins to sound like nothing. There's a slight buzzing in my ears. How will I do this? I ask myself. The buzzing spreads throughout my limbs, numbing my every sense. I can hear myself breathing.

"Hey, are you okay?"

I look over my shoulder. A coworker of mine extends his hand and leans forward, as if trying to tame a wild animal. I shudder, bracing myself against the row of carts next to me. My coworker pauses for a moment, then furrows his brow. He asks

again if I'm feeling okay. My mouth opens, but no words come out. Suddenly, tears are streaking down my face and I'm throwing open the cart bay doors. As my thoughts blur and fuse together, so too does the world around me. My breath quickens and a heavy vignette squeezes my vision. I stumble over to the side of the building, driven only by the most rudimentary of thought processes. Eventually, I collapse against a stack-stone wall. Rising and falling. In and out. In and out. In and out. I crumble into a little ball, my muscles stiffening almost to the point of petrification. My eyelids creak open. I drop my jaw in horror as I stare at my contorted hands. I try to peel back each finger to a straight position, but they shrink back as soon as I let go. My face is numb, my body—my legs—my arms—my hands—my tongue—I can't feel my tongue.

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November 2020

The ceiling in my bedroom is vaulted. It creates a sense of openness; makes the space feel bigger than it is. It's quite nice, really. There's nothing on it, though. Nothing but the cool hue of early morning light. I like my room, I think. My head falls to the side, and my body angles itself upwards from its resting position. I let my feet touch the floor, and feel myself walking in the direction of my bathroom. The cabinet underneath my sink opens, and I grab from it a white-topped orange cylinder. It rattles slightly as it moves. I empty a very small portion of it into my hand. A gulp of water from the sink helps to wash it down. I look in the mirror. There's a boy there, aged approximately 17 years. He looks innocent and still holds some of the roundness in his face from his youth.

Why don't you just do it? I think. *You are morally obligated to do so. Because might I remind you, you are a fucking monster.*

The boy doesn't respond. He doesn't show any indication of agreement or refusal, just a dull expression of complacency. I continue berating the boy for quite some time. He goes about his day; attending his classes, socializing with friends, listening to music. The boy doesn't seem to fully acknowledge that I am speaking to him. Later on, he goes to his job. Then he starts to

listen. I make sure to get the point across. I tear, rip, and nag at his brain like razor wire, interrupting his train of thought every few moments to remind him of his flaws. I flay his memory, exposing his deepest secrets and worst mistakes. Although he is upset about this, I am sure to tell him that I do it for the best. The world must know of his sins, know of what atrocities he has committed.

The clock hits 9:50 p.m. I shut my car door, key the ignition, and turn on the headlights. I start driving. Street lights cast rhythmically through the windshield. The road hums beneath me. I am silent. My knuckles turn white on the steering wheel. My foot presses hard against the accelerator. The engine roars. I clench my teeth. I scream.

Everything else in my life had been normal. I still cackled as I cussed out my friends while we beat each other in some fighting video game. I still drearily poured myself a cup of coffee from the Keurig every morning while I wiped at my crusty eyes. I still wanted to gouge my eyes out in frustration as I chipped away at the latest assigned math homework. And I still went to my job whenever they scheduled me. Weekdays or weekends, rain or shine, you bet your ass I was there no less than ten minutes before my shift. But something was always wrong. There was always that little voice at the back of my head, standing as a proctor for my minute-to-minute actions. He was most present in times of isolation. I didn't hate him, though. In some ways, I thought he was there for my own sake. So I gaslighted myself, believing every seed of doubt he sowed within me. Day in, and day out. I certainly didn't like it when I had those episodes of intense self-hatred, yet I kept on having them. For no other benefit than to destroy my self-esteem. But I pushed away any attempt at reconciliation with myself. I feared it. I was scared of it. I was disgusted at the fact that I said such horrible things to myself. I was appalled that I even had the audacity to think the things that I thought. But I liked it. I was addicted to it, almost. And it was annihilating everything that was my life. We all self-destruct. We all have our vices. And I figured out what mine was.

June 2021

A great calm flows within me, ebbing in and ebbing out. Air slowly fills my lungs, its notes of freshly cut grass and sprouting honeysuckle sweetening my consciousness, then rushes back out again, taking all of my anxiety and nervousness with it. The sky is painted with vivid streaks of rose and apricot, swirling together occasionally to make a light lavender color. Behind the silhouette of the storefront, the Flatirons etch themselves across the rapidly darkening evening sky. I sit cross-legged on the broad hood of the cart pushing machine, my head angled upwards. I feel no anxiety, no worry. I am in a state of deep tranquility and mental fortitude. I take another deep breath, then lie still.

Why do you torture yourself so much? No response. I press on. Almost every single night, you feel the need to analyze every little detail about yourself. You choose to pick apart your psyche, to dismantle your ego. You claim that you do this so that you may heal what has been broken, yet nothing has. Every night, man. Every night. And have you gained any newfound personal insight during this time? No? That's what I thought. So stop. Just stop. Look at the clouds. Feel. Listen to the birds. Just be. That's all you have to do. Stop bullying and start loving yourself. And before you do this type of shit again, I need you to ask yourself: What have you accomplished by doing this?

Stop bullying and start loving yourself.

It takes a considerable amount of time before I respond. This question troubles me quite a bit. All these nights, and I still had never really answered it. Or, if I did, it certainly wasn't what I thought. It was a lie. I was lying to myself. I had wasted so, so much time. I wipe a tear from my face. My chest rises and falls: four seconds in, four seconds out. I look into the parking lot. There's a toddler joyously bouncing towards her father. She waddles a little closer to him, then clutches his leg. The father grins and lifts her onto his shoulders. The toddler can't help but giggle, her purity unable to know malice. A faint breeze brushes wispy locks of hair away from her face and reveals a tiny, gleaming smile.

"Nothing," I answer.

Art by TASHA SMITH

FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

by EVI JUDGE

Come in, just there—right there—through the gate. Yes, I know, but the foyer is unacceptable. So come in through the gate, step there—right there—I'll close the gate, it sticks a bit. No, I don't remember if the gate was here when we arrived.

No, don't take your coat off yet; we're staying out here for a while. Can you look over here? Can you glance to your left? To your right? Beneath the telephone wire and next to the apple tree? Can you see me? Seven, eight, nine, ten? Heck, even twelve? Jumping up and down, running in circles—all on that squishy black material. The springs bending and giving, then giving way to the tension and—duck! Those springs were temperamental, letting go and flying off whenever they desired. It was safe. Don't worry; it was as safe as jumping on the incline next to the apple tree and beneath the telephone wire. It was safe.

Now walk with me; we can go back through that sticky gate or walk across the weedy grass. Oh yes, we created a fence with this gate to keep the poulets at bay, but before the fence, there stood a cottonwood tree. We felled that tree and built a fence. Cottonwoods don't like to die; we don't like to die. There's a difference, though—to kill a tree you'd have to pull out its roots, and we didn't pull the roots. Don't you see the new sprouts poking out? Oh well, through this gate a lot of things have died. Except that cottonwood; it keeps on growing. A

neighbor's dog got loose and murdered my geese and my ducks. It was a massacre, the geese, the ducks. Then my dog. Then my parents' relationship. Then the presidency. You remember that year, right? Just a few years back that that all happened.

Let's go through this gate but don't touch it—the weather has eaten away at the bungee cord, leaving it sinewy and rough—let me guide you through. Right there, skip looking at the rows of wood, the boards, the flat-tired tractor. Look to your left—through the weeds—right there, that plum tree holds on, just as the cottonwood. The plum tree clings to life through drought and thin air. Sorry sight. Sometimes it hangs low to the ground with fruit that the wasps steal. Maybe come back later and I'll give you a few. We canned them one year, two years, maybe even three years. I don't know, I wasn't much help in the process—I was busy outside, jumping under a telephone wire.

Do you hear that? The French would say it sounds like, "cocorico!" Do the French use exclamation marks? I don't recall. Armed with spurs and iridescent plumage, only Billy the Rooster could have sounded that alarm. We buy chickens almost every year, and last year, we picked a rooster by accident. Okay, let's look at the hens instead. Look to your left while I feed them. See those three-foot tall weeds? They're growing from our fire pit. We enjoyed the fire pit until the state caught on fire. Until our garage caught on fire. Until the chicken coop burned down. Now? Greedy weeds grow thistles and house grasshoppers and take up space in this former fire pit.

Here are the hens: Araucanas lay green eggs, Leghorns lay white, and that Rhode Island Red lays brown eggs that sometimes have a funny dent in the shell. Oh! Did you just see that? Look straight ahead but just a little to the left—see? See? Leaping from Russian Olive to Russian Olive, my rat-trap cat. Why do I say that? When I was leaving for high school one morning, I saw a little kitten. We caught him in a rat-trap. Look at all of the wire encasing the chicken coop: reinforced walls, green and silver wires wrapped around a wooden frame, and beneath the earth, the wires plunge down. At night, all of these precautions protect motionless chickens from raccoons and weasels. The racoons pull a motionless bird through the wires piece by piece, and weasels slip in like vampires, sucking blood from the unsuspecting hen.

Let nature do her business—out of sight and out of mind to our automated world.

Well, I said this place stinks with death. Let's go down and I'll show you the creek. Bring a stick, we'll use that to weed-whack our way back. It's hot, isn't it? Well, this gate—this gate is tricky because it fell down. It falls down. My dog jumps over it and it falls down. So I've chained it up—barricaded it to the best of my ability. Let's walk through the yellow grass—be careful, these weeds will hitch a ride to anything—whack them aside with your stick.

This path used to be more clear—back when I ran down it with my neighbor, sticks and bugs in hand. We were mean kids. I was a mean kid. Look down there, right down to the left of the wooden plank—do you see me? I'm maybe eight or nine. I'm making mud-bug soup. I burned ants with a magnifying glass and tore grasshoppers' legs off. They all went into my mud soup—I stirred it with a stick. Do you see the little creek waterfall? Do you see me watching my ducks? They would waddle after me as I fled from the goose attacks, but everyone loved the water. Listen closely, the water runs, gurgles, trips, and falls—slipping by nearly unnoticed. Now cross the plank and look up. There used to be steps there. And I think we used to own the lake just up this dirt hill. Not anymore, no, the new owner pushed dirt down this side and covered our steps. He pushed dirt down this side and trash down that side—right over there.

You'd have loved the lake, but not anymore, it reeks of green algae and disrepair—no longer would I dare play by the water's edge. Once, I saw a snapping turtle there with my friend. A rock with eyes, we thought. We saw a face, so we didn't step on it. We didn't touch it, and it didn't move. We didn't measure it, but I swear it was three feet wide. Things were bigger when we were smaller, huh?

Sticks and leaves and weeds waste themselves in stagnant water. Pollutants of nature that no one clears, but does anyone care? Let nature do her business—out of sight and out of mind to our automated world. When you were driving here, did you feel the road tilt sideways? As if perhaps your car might tip onto its passenger side? Well, the road drapes over a metal hole and from that hole, water feeds the creek. One year, this water froze down to its bed, leaving a floor of ice on which to adventure. Straight through the tunnel we went, my mom and poodles, arriving on the other side in a field of crisply frigid grass and

powdered white snow. Then somehow, we ended up back on that dirt hill again—look up there. That incline was covered in snow and we toppled down carefully. Let's go back up—I think the mosquitoes are coming out. I'll show you where the Slovakians played ping-pong.

Can't you hear the plastic white ball? Tok, tok, tok. An herb garden struggles to breathe on your right—choked out by one mint plant. I wouldn't plant mint unless it's in solitary confinement. And up behind that big rock, a Philadelphus coronarius is hiding from us. Turn around for a second—look at that swing set. Can you see the varnish has worn off the wooden seats? Just splinters and gray wood left. Do you see the slide that is long gone? Up the slide I go, and before I turn to slide down? Whoomp! The slide falls down, taking my teeth with it, down to meet a waiting metal bar. "Hey, I lost a tooth!" It was loose anyway, but what's that? Oh, my nose is bleeding and my other tooth is chipped. Let's run up the deck.

Do you remember, maybe ten years ago now, when it snowed so much that school was cancelled? I think it might have been 2008. I built a fort and went sledding down the deck stairs. Can you see my mom coming home from work? She was surprised to find me packing snow into my fortress and to see sled marks down the stairs. And that table? It watched me build the snow fort, and I may have even used some of the now unraveling chairs as extra support. Don't mind the ashtray sitting on the table now—that addiction started after the massacre. Come on through the door, it's not much cooler but we can lock the bugs out.

Look at that table, do you see the far side? At the head of the table. I'm probably twelve, and I'm holding back tears because I've just had a terrible thought: what if my adoptive parents killed my real parents, and these people I call "Mommy" and "Mama" are just robots? This is horrible news! The robot is bringing my dinner now. Can you believe that's what was going through my mind? What a crazy idea.

Look to your right—yep, that countertop used to be tiled. My parents poured concrete over and the new cats walked in it. I think you can still see the concrete steps they left in my room afterwards. If you look right there, can you see me sitting there just a few years ago?

Whoomp! The slide falls down, taking my teeth with it, down to meet a waiting metal bar.

Can you see my mom coming home from work? From therapy? Telling my other mom, "Let's talk." It's the end. Can you see me concentrating on writing something? I wrote one page a day for a whole year, and I was writing that page that day when I heard my parents split up. Can you smell the potatoes in the oven? Can you hear the emotions behind the closed door? I knew our last family vacation had passed. Remember? The ashtray is just a side effect of this breaking. It's why I don't trust therapy—it broke my childhood.

Do you know about the psychologist Abraham Maslow? He built the Hierarchy of Needs. I suppose that my basic needs were built here, as I would think that many people solidify their basic needs in childhood to early adulthood. I digress! Why do I care about Maslow? I don't, not really, but I think Abraham Maslow's grandson lived next door for a long time. I think he smoked lots of weed. At least that's what my mom says. She tells me too that this used to be a pig farm. The biggest lot on the block, great for pigs and kids. Yes, this pig pen turned into a play pen, and a lot has happened here.

We can't go downstairs; it's indecent. We have renters because breakups don't support mortgages. We have leaky water because we run on septic and every time it rains, I'm afraid to do laundry. I don't understand it much, but the water from the washer meets the rainwater somewhere and causes it to flood. So, on principle, I refuse to do laundry on rainy days.

Look, that's all. That's all without going into too much detail about every little fight, jab, good time, bad time, laugh, what have you. Those signs, did you drive that way? Did you nearly turn into them? Yes, the series of signs back up to about three feet away from the train tracks, and if you're turning fast, well, you might smack into them. Those signs are stationed there to prevent the train from blowing its horn. They didn't always stand in the way. Not when our toy poodle crossed the tracks, crossed the highway and went to live with rich people for a day. That's when Frankie, the toy poodle, went to Hollywood. Come visit again, maybe I'll have more stories. Maybe I'll have plums. Maybe I can remember us into the story.

Art by TASHA SMITH

AFTER MANY A SUMMER

by JENNY BROWN

A clock ticks.

A dog barks.

Crickets chirp to let their friends know they're there; cars can be heard, faintly, from the main road.

A clock ticks.

Out there, out in the world, people are celebrating births, promotions, graduations, nothing at all; people are mourning deaths, job losses, sports losses. They are preparing themselves for another average, mundane day of their life, waiting for something to happen, and you know that tomorrow you will join their numbers. You will return to your house and do what is asked of you; homework, dishwashing, dog walking, room cleaning.

But not yet.

Tonight, you are sprawled on a blue couch in a small living room with faded brown carpet and a popcorn ceiling. The couch and the carpet and the ceiling are in a house at the end of a cul-de-sac, and there is an apple tree in the front yard that sheds its bitter fruit each fall. The beige curtains are drawn against the dark outside, and the air conditioning is on high to ward off the summer night heat. Loose papers weakly try to escape the weights pinning them in place.

You love your own house, but you love this house a little bit more. The room is comfortably silent; your sister just got done talking about her latest school assignment, and your grandmother is doing a word search puzzle. You have returned to reading your mother's copy of Nancy Drew, enchanted by this independent teenager who solves mysteries. Far too soon, it's time to go to bed. You change into your jammies and brush your teeth with your purple toothbrush. You all sleep in your grandma's bed, for your sister is afraid of being alone in a room that is not hers and you maybe, possibly, definitely not could be afraid of the dark.

The room itself is dwarfed by a massive bed that must be nine feet high and six feet wide, as the song goes. There's a tall wardrobe in the corner that cuts an imposing silhouette in the dark, and when you read the Chronicles of Narnia for the first time, you imagine that this is the wardrobe in which Mr. Tumnus and the White Witch live. There's a dresser at the foot of the bed that carries two mirrors and decades' worth of jewelry, trinkets, coins, clothing. A closet to the side of the bed holds clothing, as closets must.

You and your sister eventually giggle yourselves to sleep, after getting politely asked to just "try and go to sleep, please." You drift off, knowing that there will be waffles and cartoons waiting for you the next morning before you go home.

You return to this room over the years, watching it age as you age with it until the inevitable happens; you grow out of sharing the bed. You now sleep in a guest room, and your sister moves in another, and that's that. You still go over to your grandma's house, of course, and it is almost the same.

Years later, you return with your arms laden with plastic grocery bags of belongings. The unthinkable has happened; the doctors use so many words to describe it that you're still not really sure what happened. The phrase 'pulmonary embolism' rings in your head, and you're too afraid to find out what it means (even as you write this, you are tempted to Google it, but you know it will haunt you like a lingering stare from a stranger). After moving these bags from the five-day stay at the hospital to the two-week stint at your house, your grandma is finally back where she belongs. The small house at the end of the cul-de-sac with the apple tree and the faded brown carpet and the popcorn ceiling and the Narnia wardrobe and the large bed. Never mind that, what's important is that she's going back home. You and your sister have been commissioned to stay the first couple of nights, to make sure everything goes alright. Between the two of you, you create a shift system, so someone is always awake. Secretly, you know you'll be awake for the entire night regardless.

You love your own house, but you love this house a little bit more.

It's 12:37 a.m., and you wait for the clock to tick. It never comes, it stopped working months ago, and no one has replaced it. You strain your ears, waiting for the rhythmic sound of breathing, weaker than it was years ago, but still steady. The neighbor, who, as you found out years ago, actually breeds dogs, yells at said dogs to stop barking. You laugh to yourself, because it audibly doesn't work. There are no crickets out; fall is rapidly morphing into winter, and the last couple of weeks have been cold. Cars cannot be heard from the main road; the construction has shut down that stretch of road. They're expanding it from a two-lane to a four-lane (at the cost of the open land on each side). The apples on the tree, once round and proud, have fallen and rotted on the ground, nibbled at by the occasional rabbit and bird and deer, but otherwise left alone because no one's been over to throw them away. You return to your book, which has evolved from Nancy Drew to the Tale of King Arthur and the Round Table. It is yours; you bought it with your birthday money from Barnes and Noble because it had a fancy cover. You are enchanted by the tales of Sirs Galahad and Gawain and Merlin and Morgan Le Fay (you love it almost as much as you love *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*). It's now 1:07 a.m., and you stop to listen for breathing. The night passes safely.

You wake up early the next morning (your grandma wakes up at 4:30 a.m., a habit from decades of working at Safeway) with a smile and dark circles under your eyes to make waffles (no bacon) for your grandmother because that is something you can do now. You play all of her favorite music (in lieu of cartoons), dancing around to Merle Haggard and John Denver and Glen Campbell. You stop for a second and reminisce about how it used to be the

opposite, and then move on, because life doesn't stop for nostalgia, and your waffles are starting to smell a little bit burnt (okay, you only knew how to make waffles in theory, but hey, these turned out okay).

You return for one final night the summer before you move away to college, with many visits in between (and one nerve-wracking week you spent when she fell and shattered her collarbone). Things have almost returned to the way they were, but not at all. You watch Jeopardy with your grandma and your sister, and then you talk for hours about college, high school, what a weird year it's been. You haven't seen her almost at all in the last year, and there's a lot to catch up on. Eventually, you must go to bed, because you have work in the morning and packing in the afternoon. As you stop by her room to say good night and make sure she gets to bed safely (a task which you know she does every night perfectly fine on her own, but still feel the need to check on), you notice how time has worn away at the room that you once loved.

The enormous bed doesn't seem so large, and the mattress sags more than you remember. The Narnia closet has been moved out because it was more of an obstacle for your grandmother than anything else. One of the mirrors on the dresser now rests on a wall, and the dresser itself has collected a fine layer of dust. The closet door has fallen off a track, and it looks miserably crooked. On your way to get a glass of water, you notice more of these changes. There is a water stain on the popcorn ceiling from the swamp cooler that no one knows how to fix, and the curtains don't seem to ward off the scary dark anymore. They are just curtains. The apple tree outside seems to have given up bearing its inedible fruit, choosing instead to blossom and then fall. The house, already old when you first learned it, seems weary now.

You return to your room, and your bed. Your new book is *The Silmarillion*, and to be honest, it's horrible to try to read. But you started it, so now you must finish it. Tomorrow, when the sun has yet to rise (twenty years after retirement and she still wakes up at 4:30), you will get up and make waffles, something you can competently do now. Still no bacon, but that's alright; hash browns have replaced those. You turn off your light and know that you will sleep soundly tonight.

The house, already old when you first learned it, seems weary now.

A clock ticks (you bought a new clock that makes the same noise).

A dog barks (new neighbors have moved in with two adorable corgis that frequently converse with the dogs down the street).

Crickets chirp just the same as ever, and the traffic is even louder with the new two-lane addition finally completed.

A clock ticks.

You are sitting in your dorm room, five fans going but still not enough to ward away the awful heat creeping in (indeed, not enough to even move any papers). The blinds are closed, in an attempt to let in less sunshine and therefore less heat. There are no loud clocks here; the only timepieces you have between you and your roommate are on your respective electronics. Sirens have replaced the barking dogs, and there will be no homemade waffles and hash browns in the morning. You just texted your grandma (she mostly understands the iPad now), apologizing for not being able to make it down for her birthday (you had to attend a football game in Denver for marching band). It was her eightieth birthday, and the next time you'll be able to go home will be Thanksgiving. You tell her you love her and return to writing an essay about her, coincidentally. You suddenly have the urge to listen to Merle Haggard and John Denver and Glen Campbell. You think about going back home for Thanksgiving and staying over for the night. You know what will wait for you there.

The clock ticks.

The dog barks.

No crickets, but certainly cars.

The clock ticks.

HOW WE ARE

by CAITLIN JOHNSTON

How are you?

The brief and simple way to redirect a conversation away from yourself. But when it truly comes to answering that, how are you? It's rather likely that the only one that truly knows how you are is that four-legged friend sitting between your legs as you read this, or maybe your favorite coffee cup with ringlet stains circling the inside. Or it might simply be the ceiling that you've stared at a few too many sleepless nights. We usually will dodge saying anything beyond a "pretty good" or an "I've been fine."

Over Zoom, it is simplified to a simple thumbs up or continual nodding of the head. We always avoid voicing the true answer out of fear, agitation, frustration, sadness, and dozens of other emotions. Why do we feel the constant need to put up a front that everything is just roses? Is there a secret code that we are all communally trying to crack? How are we, you ask? How about how are we not?

We are not shiny and new and perfect. We are not a surprise or present for others. So how are we, truly? We are tired. Tired of being dragged through political turmoil, confronted with racial injustices, burned and scorned by humans and Mother Nature alike. Tired of feeling that we are getting nowhere and losing time all at once. Tired of being forced to put up this façade that we are okay. Because we are not. We are not okay, and that's okay.

We are in need of support. We are in need of the little victories in life. You did the dishes? Good for you. You got out of bed today? So proud of you. You turned in your homework assignment? That's an accomplishment. We are caught in the world of do, or lose all. We are full of moments that are non-stop. What do we miss in our lives because we simply fail to see or hear or listen or smell? We miss the roses. None of us are perfect. Look to your best friend or back again to that pet at your feet. That is how we are. Loved, fulfilled, capable, and ourselves. We are us. We are willing to admit our faults, even when they are difficult, we are the future.

Every single day I think about what it will be like to work in that classroom. I think constantly about the youth's lives I will be touching and how the smallest of sentiments can make or break their world. How I can empower or destroy a dream with a few words. And that is scary. It is hard. We are shaping their future, our future.

It is not about asking how we are, but about asking how we will be. Because right now, we are not okay, but we will be.

Art by EMILY DIAZ

Art by TASHA SMITH

BROKEN PIECES, BROKEN PROMISES

by KATE ROBINSON

"I feel my bones breaking when I look at you." He said this to me, his eyes filled with pain, and I knew I was supposed to feel something, anything, when I looked at him, but I just didn't. "Please say something, I have to know what you are thinking."

I sigh. "Spreading me open is the only way to do that, I can't offer you anything else."

Somehow, he looks even sadder than before, and his voice cracks, "please, I can get us a drink, we can sit down and talk about this."

"I don't want to talk about it, not when you're thinking of her."

"I always only think of you," he cries, "I don't suppose I could buy your time?" He grabs my hands, too quickly for me to pull them away.

"I think you should look for something else to buy."

His eyes were glazed over and his body seemed closed off, but I feel his hands go limp in my own and then drop to his sides. I know they will never touch again, I leave him there in the cold, to sleep in the dirt.

Our conversation plays in my head, over and over, similar to the record player I have that rests beside my bed. The thought of listening to that record again, our record, makes me feel sick. A curse he placed on me so I could never listen to my favorite songs the same way again. There are things he'll never know, not that I could ever tell him now, but the memory of him still sits in my head, encompassed by cracking glass, teetering on shattering. I am afraid of what will happen once it does. I feel as though I surrounded myself with bubble wrap and as soon as he breaks, there will be nothing to protect me from the shards of him that will pierce my skin and leave me bleeding out on the floor.

It seems unfair how easy it was for him to go, and I think now it was so easy because he never placed me on the same pedestal where I placed him. First prize, I always thought, I won. The years we spent together only meant something to the loser, and ultimately the loser was me. How ironic. I pace back and forth, wondering how long it will take for me to feel anything again. They say it's half the relationship, that's how long it takes to get over someone, but I feel as though even years from now, the gap between my chest and my back will lie empty, and in place of it will be a dark hole that can only be filled by the same record he ripped away from me. Maybe one day when I am able to listen to it again, things will feel different.

I close my eyes and turn it on. The familiar scratch and melody play through my head, wrapping me in his cold, dead hands that once held my own. He does not seem real anymore. Maybe he never was, maybe the thought of him was simply imagined and I have been locked away in the insane asylum this whole time. At least then I could blame something other than myself. I will always blame myself. He will never come back to me, not without the record, and I think forcing myself to listen to it will forever be the last way I can ever feel his hands on my body and his lips on mine, back when they were warm.

I picture his face in my mind; the glass cracks, he used to be so beautiful, with light hair and freckles I used to try and count, placing each and every one as a constellation in the sky. How

The familiar scratch and melody play through my head, ...

...wrapping me in his cold, dead hands that once held my own.

unfair it was that he took my record and my sky and all of the stars with him when he left. He hung my moon in the same way I warmed his skin. Now we just sit in silence in my head and I can feel only icy hands and icy lips, frozen in a place in time where I could feel his presence, intimate, caring, and lovely. Now it is just darkness. A glass case filled with memories and feelings and touches. Glass threatening to break. Begging me to let it shatter and kill me in the same way they killed him.

When I close my eyes I try to feel the same darkness he does. The same darkness he did. Is it peaceful? Are there angels that take you up and over and around to all the places you have never been? Is he here with me now? I don't believe in that stuff, but maybe for him, I could try. I put the record on again, playing it over and over. Letting the melody wash over me, the pain stays where it is, always in my chest. But I can feel it in my fingertips too. They itch to reach out to him, so I comply, placing my hand in the air and picturing him grabbing it, so we can dance. How lovely it was to dance with him, another crack in the glass. I picture his eyes, blue as the sky, a robin in the spring, another crack in the glass. I feel him spin me around and pull me into him, lips the color of baby's breath, another crack in the glass. The sound of his laugh, a melody all on its own, another crack in the glass. We spin faster and faster, the music picking up pace as we go. We are laughing and bumping into each other, I can feel his body close to mine. Another crack in the glass. My head begins to feel dizzy, I can feel his presence, he's calling to me, begging me to come with him. I reach out to him, but I am not close enough. Another step closer, another crack in the glass. I take a deep breath, he's so close to me, another step, another crack. Things are too close to breaking.

"Just let them break," he says to me.

I meet his eyes and touch his hand, and finally, I let the glass shatter. Every memory, every feeling, every movement flooding back. I let it all wash over me, drown me, just to feel him again. I never wanted to lose him, but now all I can have are the twelve songs that play over and over in my head and the trepidation that he will know me again.

Art by KATIE GINSBURG

LETTING GO

by CHRISTINA WILLIAMS

When I was little, I read a lot of books. I loved that the pages took me to another world. A world where my parents were not, and where I was able to peek into a character's life. But as I got older, I read less. The pages were replaced by a blue light that gave me a peek into other people's lives. I never liked social media for showing off my own life, but I loved it for looking at other people's. Maybe it was the way it put me in another world that distracted me from my own problems and anxieties, or the way it always invited me to stay a little longer when I was at my loneliest. All I know is that by the time I turned 20, my phone was my life; my screen time was uncomfortably high, but I couldn't stop. My phone was my best friend. My confidant. My lifeline.

2020 was a hard year for everyone. So many of us saw our screen time go up as we FaceTimed friends and checked in with our families on Facebook. As August rolled around, I realized I had stopped checking in with myself. My screen time bordered on 10 hours per day. My mind felt empty. I had become a zombie that desired not brains but rather new things to like on Instagram and repost on Twitter. I spent hours on end scrolling through TikTok, perfecting my algorithm. Between the pandemic and the political turmoil, I felt so anxious, and Instagram no longer made me feel alive and in touch. It made my stomach flip and ache, my head pound, and my eyes burn. I always felt like I was trying to post photos and tweets that would make people like me more, and that pressure seeped into my reality. My phone became the center of my universe, and I had sun poisoning. I knew I had to confront myself on how I spiraled. One day I was 12 years old, downloading an app that would connect me to my peers, and then I blinked and suddenly I was 20, scared of how people would perceive me. So I did it. I deleted the app that had once made me feel connected.

I remember the night well. It was a cool evening in late August. As I scrolled, I started thinking about the person I was in the past, the person I was in the present, and the person I wanted to be in the future. Past me wanted to be popular to the point where she cared too much. She did not know who she was, but she was constantly anxious and used Instagram and Twitter for validation. As for present me, I felt like I didn't even know who she was. I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted for my future, but I knew I wanted to be happy and free of that constant worry about how others perceived me, so I pulled the metaphorical trigger and started with Instagram. Relief washed over me as I eyed the Delete Account button. My life with the app flashed before my eyes: the years I obsessively checked One Direction fan pages, the texts in high school when I needed to find a caption and my best friends would always come to my aid, the times people's comments and assurance made me feel accepted — all would be erased. Before I pressed the final button, Instagram asked the question: "What if we just hold your account for you for 30 days? That way you can always come back." I accepted. Just in case.

The next morning, I woke up, and—on instinct—grabbed my phone. I searched for the little sunset-looking camera. It took a minute to hit me that I had deleted it. I almost forgot the reason, but I knew I did not want to break. I should mention I had also deleted Facebook and Twitter. Usually, I would start with Instagram to see what old acquaintances were up to and end up feeling terrible, so I would go to Twitter for a giggle. Of course, most of the time Twitter news led me to existential dread, not laughter. As much as I wanted something to occupy myself with that morning, I did not necessarily desire to be on social media. That being said, all of my usual options for my morning scroll were gone. It had been so long since I had woken up and not had a social media platform to distract me from starting my day that I did not know what to do with myself. I wanted to see what people were doing; I wanted to peek inside whatever they were willing to show. After ten minutes of lying with my phone on my

heart, staring at the ceiling, I decided what I was missing wouldn't do anything besides pull me back into the rabbit hole.

That first day, I did yoga to ground myself as well as provide some relief to my tech neck. I read a good portion of Jane Eyre. I sat outside and watched the clouds at one point. One day is obviously not enough time to reconnect with yourself, but it was a start.

I held strong for about two weeks, but eventually, I broke. My mind made the excuse that it had been so long, of course I could go without social media if I really wanted to. So I did it. I logged on to Instagram on my computer, expecting to feel fulfilled. Instead, I was met with photos of people I hadn't talked to since high school and advertisements of meticulously styled mannequins wearing greens and neutrals. Do you know those stories of people who cut milk out of their diet to be healthier and then decide to have ice cream months after? They get sick. The ice cream no longer satisfies their stomach. In the end, there is just regret. That's what getting back on Instagram did to me. I felt that regret of working hard to keep something up and having a lapse of judgment.

That was the last time I went on Instagram. I remember hearing somewhere that kids who read a lot when they are little are really just trying to dissociate from their reality. Growing up with divorced parents who never talked, escapism was always something I relied on to distract myself from loneliness. I think, in a lot of ways, I replaced my books with my phone because it distracted me in a way that also connected me. As I got older, I realized that my phone was not fixing my problems. Instead, it was pulling me deeper into my insecurities without my consent. It has been over a year now since I deleted Instagram for good. I believe I have a better understanding of myself, and I no longer feel a need to change for others' acceptance. In my conversations with friends and family members, I feel more present, and we talk about what is going on in our lives. I no longer know what is going on with other people unless we each make an effort to find out. Although I miss being tagged, I find a lot of comfort in knowing that my 30 days to change my mind have expired. Knowing that people's perceptions of me can only be made by face-to-face interaction feels miraculous.

Though sometimes I ask myself the question: Will I ever go back?

Art by BRAEDEN SLOAN

i2

by BEAU FARRIS

the screen grabs my eyes, drags them. asks me to lol
but not out loud. i scroll up or to the side, it's the same
post from yesterday, but i will type four lies: lmao
or some other jargon, and i don't say haha
to the power button. the side is too far away, jk
it doesn't shut off at night, nvm.

put it down then pick it up, nvm.
illuminating my face: a cold blanket of light lol
the penetrative photons are blue. red too jk
blue seeps into red eyes, and i am the same
as these emissions of sleep apnea haha.
a blue wave swelling against circadian rhythm, lmao.

colors indicate the receiver's type. blue bubbles are free *lmao*
green messages cut the distance and indicate *nvm*
ellipses are footsteps typing down the hall *haha*
listening to thumbs. three dots encapsulate all *lol*
the battery cannot be removed *same*
i'm thinking about returning my phone *jk?*

but i can't. my fingers are bound by ten violin strings, jk
they are tethered to the screen by railroad ties lmao
eyelids are pried closed with gauze tape. the screen is the same
so it's easy to keep gazing, but who is to define the last nvm?
nothing is easier than scrolling for one more lol
my thumb, my representative. 2 to 4 letters, a dictionary for haha

twins who look alike, only when together: haha
an unjust wound that can reverse time: jk
a silent stare between two Ls: lol
a laugh that partitions part from body: lmao
three letters to take away from meaning: nvm
a simile between us without like or as: same

eyes can become blind to the same
things that are seen over and over again, haha.
as if in training, a breaststroke pushing past water, nvm.
like fingers forgetting the cold, given time will respond jk
to anything. habitually dousing fires with lmao
darkness. and where to look when nothing's loading lol?

i too have seen the same face, staring back at me. he doesn't lol
when the screen is a black sun. i race to load who he is before the lmao
but my eyes strain to focus on themselves, and the content eventually wins so
nvm.

Art by SUSANNA ANDREWS

TIE-DYE SWIMSUIT

by ANNA HAYNES

I'm in the dimly lit half-bathroom of my parents' house, a small Bath & Body Works candle next to the sink the only thing illuminating my body. I just bought an extra-large tie-dye swimsuit from Amazon. I almost ordered a large, but my mom warned me that the sizing is probably smaller since the swimsuits were made in China, and she knew from a long history of dressing room incidents that if the large was too small I'd have a mental breakdown. So I bought the extra-large.

It's a harshly-colored one-piece with loose strings, bra cups stuffed haphazardly into the chest and a thin piece of paper stuck inside the crotch for "hygiene." It's cheap and smells slightly like the factory it came from. Maybe I should have washed it before trying it on, but part of me is just too eager to see how it looks. Another part of me wants to get it over with.

I haven't worn a swimsuit in almost a decade.

My roommate, inexplicably thin in spite of a diet of Frosted Flakes and microwavable pizza, had been asking me to go to our apartment complex's swimming pool with her. I always found a way out. As far as she knew, I was always too busy or tired or unshaven.

Back in the mid-2000s, the beauty standard was to look skeletal. We aspired to look like "heroin chic" icons like Kate Moss, super-skinny supermodel who penned the iconic quote, "Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels." Children, young girls especially, have never been immune to beauty standards, as much as we'd like to think that they are. I don't remember it, but my mom tells me that one day in first grade, I came home and told her that the other kids called me "big and fat."

I wasn't. But I had to lift my arms to make my ribs protrude from my tiny torso while the other girls in my class didn't. I learned early on that any extra space I dared to occupy, no matter how small, was too much.

What followed was years of strict diets and workout regimes, all of which ended with me gaining more weight than I had lost. Workouts with my parents would end with a stitch in my side and me in a fit of frustrated tears, yelling that I couldn't do it. My ribs stopped poking out as my stomach rounded out and my thighs began to chafe against one another underneath my uniform skirt. The skin on my hips split into stretch marks. I got my period first, I suspected, because the other girls didn't weigh enough to get theirs. While they always went for extra slices of pizza, it seemed like I gained ten pounds just from catching a waft of pepperoni.

For the rest of elementary school, other kids (mostly boys) taunted me, reminded me again and again of my undesirability, lest I gained some confidence, forgot my place in the social hierarchy, stepped out of line. One day in fourth grade, a boy in my class named Joe—a British soccer-playing heartbreaker with platinum blonde hair and blue eyes—passed a piece of paper around the classroom with even more smug pride than he usually carried wherever he went. He sauntered over to my desk and shoved the piece of paper in front of my face. His posse of soccer boys chuckled behind him. At the top of the page he had written, in his crude ten-year-old handwriting, "The Ugliest Girls in School."

I was ranked at number three.

I sat quietly as the teacher snatched the list away from Joe and scolded him. A wave of joy washed over me. He was the cutest boy in school — every girl in my grade had a crush on him, including me — and he thought I was prettier than two girls!

Beggars can't be choosers, I guess. By that point, I had accepted that I was uglier than the other girls.

I wasn't. Looking back at photos, I'm taken aback by how beautiful I was as a child. My brown eyes, huge and round, sparkled above my rosy cheeks, button nose and full lips, and contrasted against spotless porcelain skin.

But nobody was looking at my face. I was a girl, after all. Even then, they were looking at my body. Looking for ribs that could no longer be found.

By high school I had learned to suck my stomach in whenever I stood up (and ignore the cramps it caused) and cover it with something (a backpack, a jacket, anything) whenever I sat down. The outright bullying stopped after elementary school, but it remained abundantly clear that the smaller I was, the better. The thing about microaggressions, those tiny instances of prejudice, is that they build up. Straws on a camel's back. Everything from "You're not fat!" (like that's a bad thing) to "Congratulations on losing twelve pounds in two weeks!" (like that's a good thing and not at all evidence of an attempt to starve myself).

They build up, slowly, and then suddenly one day I want to tear my own stomach out, like thrusting my hand into a glass of orange juice and removing a pulp-filled fist.

I don't remember when it started. At some point I developed a ritual of feeling my stomach and my thighs as I lay in bed, grabbing the rolls of extra fat and moving them around in my palm. They were soft and malleable, and I'd imagine how easy it would be to take sculpture wire and slough them off like hunks of clay. Or, if I just gripped a little harder, maybe I could tug the fat right off like the membrane of a pork rib and expose the shape of the bones. Maybe I could make myself smaller, make myself less, and then nobody would say that there's too much of me.

My therapist told me to get the swimsuit. I was already thinking about it — in part because I want to bond with my roommate in a way that didn't involve going to cemeteries during the night — but I also recalled how much I loved swimming as a child. On land, I felt the extra weight on me pulling me down to earth like sandbags underneath my skin. In the water I was weightless. I somersaulted and glided with just as much ease and elegance as everyone else. My classmates' nasty comments rippled away with the waves I made diving into the pool. I focused not on what my body looked like, but on what my body could do.

I tighten the last strap on the swimsuit and step back to look at myself in the yellow-tinged glow of the bathroom candle. I feel my eyes sting.

I look good.

I don't remember the last time I thought that about myself. The swimsuit grips at my curves, but not with the same violence of my hands or the pointed gazes of my peers. It hugs them with a tenderness that is alien to me, shrinking around my waist before stretching delicately around the shape of my stomach and my thighs, honoring the extra space. Honoring the extra parts of me that I so badly wanted to constrict.

What if I did the same thing? What if I regarded my body with a means to cultivate and not to destroy? I could open my palm, stop gripping and pulling at the fat and glide gently over it instead, follow the hills and valleys, discover what it feels like when it's not being squeezed, sucked in, stowed away. What would happen? Would the universe implode if I learned to forgive myself for my existence?

I could rediscover my body, not as a thing of excess but as a thing perfectly sculpted just for me. The thing that lets me move through air, through water, and isn't that beautiful?

I can't see my ribs, not even when I lift my arms, but my body lets me breathe, and isn't that pretty?

I could let my body take as much space as it needs.

I admire myself for a few more moments before taking a picture in the mirror and texting it to my therapist. The tie-dye swimsuit, even being the cheap and flimsy thing that it is, gives me permission to exist in my entirety. I accept it.

I hope I still remember how to swim.

ROLLIN' WITH RESISTANCE

by NATALIE SCHOENHALS

He nudged me with his toe.

"You should go dance," he said with eyes wide.

I averted my gaze and prayed he would detect my reluctance.

"C'mon, Nat, it's not every day your Dad gets marri…." he petered out once I met his gaze. I knew he recognized my irritation and I glanced back across the room once more. We were in a big, single-room barn filled with milling guests. Round tables framed the room and housed the majority of guests. There was a bar in the corner opposite the DJ booth. In between the two was the infamously empty dance floor.

"It's not their fault, it's not any of their fault," he tried again, this time with more desperation.

"You think I am mad at them?!" I finally flung back, appalled.

He just met my stare, waiting. "This is a family event but I only know half the people, I am all dressed up and feel so... formal. Did you know my dad doesn't even fart in front of her yet? Any time I mention it he turns red and gives me that look." I finally expelled with a huge breath. There was a DJ playing "Happy" by Pharrell Williams and a back room filled with pizza and cupcakes. "You know, sometimes I hear him come down the stairs in the middle of the night, fart, then head right back up." I had to smile at that a little and I looked back up at him.

I scanned the room, hoping to spot someone whose eyes were as scathing of the dancing guests as mine. Instead, I caught my sister surreptitiously grabbing drinks from the open bar. When she noticed me, she suddenly froze like a racoon rummaging through trash. It was in character for her to seize the opportunity to steal cocktails while the crowd was entranced with celebration. They robotically sang along to the music. Happy. Happy. Happy. Are they really this happy? As that word played over and over in my mind, the last trace of forged enthusiasm left my face. I thought this was the one time my sister might actually stick by my side.

"Do you see that?" laughed Ethan. "It looks like your sister is enjoying the wedding."

Art by MADDIE CAMILLI

I was infuriated.

"How could she do this?" I fumed. "I thought we were feeling the same way about the wedding."

"Your Betrayal" began humming in my ears.

"Do farts mean anything to you?" I scowled.

A few guests from nearby tables let out small breathy laughs as they heard my question. I was utterly mortified. My face was reddening as I turned to stalk out of the barn. As if sensing my discomfort, my sister ran over to prolong it.

"What are you talking about?" she questioned.

I was trying to give her the cold shoulder, but her liquid courage was making her noisier than usual.

"You know," she proclaimed with a knowing twinkle in her eyes, "a wedding is no place to talk about farts."

"Shut up!" I whisper-yelled at her. "You don't even know what it's like to live there in a house of strangers."

The room fell into a sudden hush and for a moment I was worried that I'd drawn attention again. One of my new cousins was leaving the DJ booth and I was relieved to see heads were turned away from me and towards the dance floor. All of the strangers were heading towards the center of the room as the twangy guitar of "Proud Mary" began playing. They lined up, bobbing their heads animatedly. By this point the rest of us had gotten back to our conversations, but we all had the corner of our eyes on the scene in the middle of the room. I continued ignoring my sister as the lyrics played.

Big wheel keep on turnin'

The mob motioned for the DJ to turn up the music and began to sit.

Proud Mary keep on burnin'

They were all lined up like anchovies in a tin can. By this point no one was feigning disinterest. All heads were looking directly at the scene in the middle of the room. Wedding guests were all lined up laying on the floor.

And we're rollin'

The anchovies rolled over to the right.

Rollin'

And then to the left.

Rollin' on the river

Two rolls to the right.

The song went on and everybody got up dancing like normal. My sister began dragging me towards the center of the room. Sometime along the way she'd managed to corral our step siblings as well. The whole wedding party, sans bride and groom, had hopped right into that tin can and joined the salty brothers.

But I never saw the good side of the city, til' I hitched a ride on a river boat queen

And just like that, we were all squatting down on the dirt-dusted floor in our nice clothes,

ready to roll. We laid flat, our backs on the ground and eyes up. For a moment, I searched worriedly around the room for my father and Carrie.

And we're rollin'

Before I could find them, the entity forced me to the right. We each rolled counterclockwise.

Rollin'

I was forced back to the left. There was a moment of dark as I faced the ground and forgot to lift my head. This clockwise turn had crushed my nose at six o'clock and left me kneeing my stepbrother at nine. I laid on my back at twelve with only a second of visibility before I was pushed back counterclockwise.

Rollin'

This time I had anticipated it and rolled to the right twice without any scratches. The candy cane of colors disoriented me to the point of feeling high. I felt myself being transported to another time.

I was a little kid and my sister and I were playing on a playground.

"Get down here, it's time to go!" my dad yelled from the red minivan in the parking lot.

As we raced down the hill I tripped on my shoes and tumbled the whole way down. My body was bruised, but not as much as my six-year-old ego.

"Samantha pushed me!" I cried.

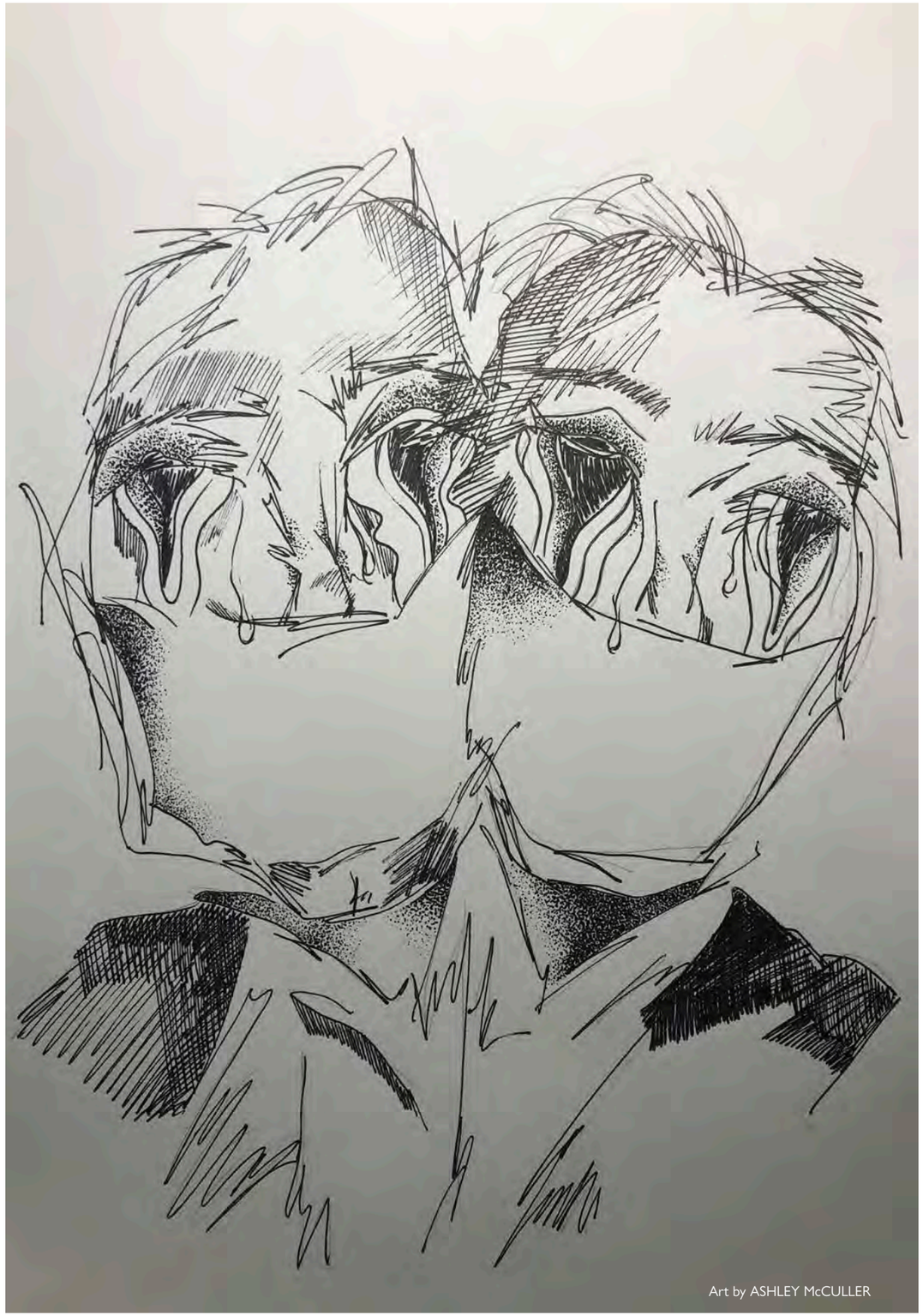
My parents immediately came to check on me. My dad scooped me up to carry me to the car.

"This is why we don't bark commands at our children, David!" my mom said sternly.

"Maybe if you taught your daughters manners then this wouldn't happen!" my dad retorted.

The car was silent as my dad buckled me up and got to his seat. My parents were quiet, but my sister poked me on the shoulder. I nervously peeked over at her, worried about receiving her wrath too. She studied my tear-stained cheeks for a moment before smiling into a silly face that caused me to giggle. She held my hand the rest of the car ride home and we spent the rest of the night playing all the games I wanted.

I laughed as I fell on my back for the final time and looked up, feeling my hair splayed everywhere. I was back on the hardwood of the red barn surrounded by my family, new and old. Situated right above me were my dad and Carrie, laughing harder than those of us on the floor. I made eye contact with my sister and gave her a smile as I got up to prepare for round two.



Art by ASHLEY McCULLER

PRETEEN

by BECKY HARKIN

Every once in a while, my eight-year-old body was allowed some prestigious "girl time" with my mom and my sister. These were the good times, when my parents' fights and the family problems were more under the table. Being included during these moments gave me a sense of belonging in my given gender identity, filled with nights of makeovers, dress up, and music sung by iconic women of the 80s and 90s. Articles and items of clothing became magic, my mother's small walk-in closet a transformative cocoon. My mother channeling her inner Madonna, my sister as Angelina Jolie, and I as Shirley Temple all combined to make a girl-powerful team. I watched my mother put on her makeup every day, idealizing the way she opened her mouth to put on mascara or the scrunch in her brow when she overlined her lips in red. Walking out of the closet as someone else, complete with blue eyeliner and a clip-on wig, strutting as if on a runway, really does something for a girl.

Fourteen years old. I reached for the handle of the door to the fifth house I had moved into in four years. The knob was unlocked like always. Despite being in not the best neighborhood, my mom always kept it open in case my sister decided to come home from her most recent bender, or if my brother miraculously decided to show up after leaving us for the past eight years. I was hit with the now disturbingly comforting scent of ammonia from the cat piss. Every time I walked inside my home I was full of disappointment. It seemed to be a replica of my

mother's mental state. I crept up the stairs, gently announcing my presence, only to get no response. Spotted: Kristin, my mother, 42 years old, 5 foot 3 and ¾ inches, now a whopping 105 pounds, unbothered by my presence. I stood there for a moment.

"I'm going to homecoming this year, Mom. This guy named Michael asked me to the dance, and I don't even have a dress or know what makeup to do or—"

"Listen, honey, I really don't have time for this today," she snapped.

"I-I just thought… you'd want to know. I haven't seen you in a while."

"Why would I care?"

At the age of ten, I went through a reading "phase." Flipping through the pages of the first Percy Jackson book, I had just gotten to the scene where they reached an abandoned amusement park. Then I heard the front door slam. Yelling. Again. My sister must've just gotten home.

"Dolor, listen to me—" I heard my mother say through my door.

"What do you want, Mom? I'm fine," my sister interrupted, laughing.

"Did you smoke pot again? What are you on?"

The yelling in the front room of our small apartment escalated, but in this post-divorce apartment it was so routine, I quickly blocked it out.

My mother must've done something wrong, again.

I heard a loud slump on the wall outside my door.

"Becky!" my mother yelled.

God, what does she want?

"Oh, hold on!" I said, just trying to finish a page.

She yelled again.

Taking my time, I reached for the flimsy handle and peered into the narrow hallway. There was my mother against a wall, clutching my sister's stiff body. It seemed like it was possessed, twitching uncontrollably like in one of those scary movies Dolor let me watch when Mom wasn't home. I stared at what seemed to be white glue forming at the corner of her chapped lips, her yellow skin, the whites of her eyes as her pupils rolled back in her

head. I froze, unable to stop gazing at those whites, where brown orbs once held me lovingly.

"Becky, Becky, call 911." My mom pleaded.

Hands shaking, my chubby little fingers dialed those three numbers for the first time.

I didn't know what a drug overdose was until I saw one.

I didn't know what a drug overdose was until I saw one.

In the fifth grade, the age of 12 was not kind to me. I chose to wear prescription glasses and had the teeth of someone whose parents stopped caring two years ago. My frantically frizzy curls peeped out from behind my ears, self-cut bangs dangling over purple frames. I was overweight due to malnutrition and a pantry of only ramen and other dollar store finds. Unlike my fat-kid dreams, I never had access to Fruit Roll-Ups, Gushers, Toaster Strudels, or Cosmic Brownies. The dollar store and Aldi, the local discount grocery store, only provided certain products: frozen soft pretzels, frozen lasagna, boxed mac and cheese. The brand of the mac and cheese really made a difference, in my 11-year-old opinion, and by this time my father had started to pay child support for both me and my half-sister from my mother's first husband, so we could afford the occasional Kraft.

Two days before Christmas, my mother had come out crying, telling us we were going to get lots of gifts due to the increase in monthly money. While the toys came, the demonizing of my father also arrived, and his purpose seemed to slowly transform into a walking ATM.

Broken things don't always come broken. As a young girl, I often received hand-me-downs from my sister's worn closet, excited to have something new. Forever 21 bags, Claire's necklaces, and body glitter with eternal grime stuck around the cap fulfilled my material needs.

This seemed to be a common theme for me growing up, not seeing what was so obviously broken to others. I remember my Aunt Rebecca coming into town, looking me up and down all day. She later went to the bathroom with me and found out that I had been wearing maternity jeans. I was only 11 and 125 pounds. I had quickly gained weight after the divorce and none of my old clothes fit anymore. She took me shopping. I remember squeezing into adult skinny jeans, feeling fat and stuffed, missing

my maternity pants. Even the people who tried to help only made it worse. Aunt Rebecca's facial reactions to everything I put on in the TJ Maxx dressing room instilled a deep-rooted shame. My body became the enemy, unable to meet the standard even in clothes that weren't from Goodwill.

Naturally, at the age of 15, I began my battle with anorexia. An incoming high school sophomore, I decided to go on a diet, as heavily "encouraged" by my cheerleading coach to avoid being cut from the team. But this wouldn't be my first. In the second grade, I went on a restrictive diet where I wouldn't eat artificial sugar, yeast, dairy or peanuts. After losing eight pounds from my tiny body, I asked my parents when it would be time to go off the diet. They responded with, "Well... never. This is just gonna be our new normal." That didn't last long; all sense of stability, including orderly meals, went out the window when my mother went to rehab and their ten-year marriage came to an end. But in my vulnerable teens, I resorted to what I knew worked: my restrictive diet from when I was eight. I cut out all the same food groups again, desperately seeking the same sense of approval as before.

I cut out all the same food groups again, desperately seeking the same sense of approval as before.

The delicate light flowing in from my window, the sweet silence of the morning. No one would be up until at least 2 or 3 p.m., so I had our tiny townhouse to myself. Finely painted porcelain dolls and World War II coins sat in heavy wooden boxes on shelves, all antiques from my late great-grandmother Dodo, a witch. The mother of a famous singer from the 60s and my grandfather, her energy was overpowering. Quite a forceful lady, and a bitch, honestly, if you ask me. My mother's mommy issues were completely projected on that woman's existence, resulting in an unhealthy obsession. And that obsession decorated our entire home. I sat on the couch, trying to figure out what I would schedule for myself for the day. Trying to plan happiness since it wasn't given.

I hold these moments dear to my heart, for sometimes labeling moments can get too messy. I hold these times desperately; I clutch them close in an attempt to rewrite the horrific moments and relive the highs. I question the what-ifs, trying to predict what my personality would have been had my mother's mental state stayed stable, or my sister not gotten into drugs, or my parents remained married. I look back on that shell of a girl, who would enter the magical walk-in closet on a rainy night to feel special. Who couldn't even find someone to help her with what felt like "the biggest deal" of ninth grade. Little did she know that conversation would be the last time she would see her mother for two years.

Today, at 22, I find myself sitting on my plush red velvet couch, reflecting on the past. I look down at the table in front of me, spotting my half-eaten dinner. The math begins immediately in my head: *two half slices of bread (100 calories), plus one tablespoon of mayo (100 calories), lettuce (5 calories), one ounce of turkey (45 calories), a half bag of chips (around 140)...*

This is the captivity of anxiety: rhythmic measuring, purging, dieting, binging, all in the name of control and approval. The standard for physical approval was instilled in me at a very young age. Being beautiful was the only way to be successful. Tainted with twists and lies and toxic femininity, the little blue house that this life brought me into came with ribbons and bows and flowers bound to my brainlessly bald newborn head. Pretty, pretty-little-girl. Hearing those words alone could bring me to the toilet bowl, chugging salt water down my throat in an attempt to lubricate bringing back up my lunch. Nothing humbles you like your own vomit splashing back up into your face after you finally flush away your accomplishment. A mother's love comes in an assortment of flavors, all sugar-free.

Art by KELSEY GILLIAM

YOUR CAREFUL, LITTLE PARASITES

by MARIA CORREA

I'm alone. The room is dark, and the shadows of objects I know are there fill up the spaces around me. But I am alone, I keep reminding myself. The sound of my own breathing terrifies me, and I shut my eyes tightly, pushing them into the back of my skull before feeling tiny, parasitic organisms crawling through my body. I'm alone. There is no one there. Please fall asleep.

Everything shifts when my mind starts to wonder if tonight will be just like every other night. Then I feel a shadow crawl up my body and its eyes begin to swallow me whole. Just keep them shut, and you'll feel better in the morning.

It makes me wonder: do you ever feel the way I do?

As part of our ritual, we spent all morning playing, and by the end of it, my chest was heaving for an adequate amount of air to calm my struggling lungs. My skin glistened with a thick coat of sweat from the summer heat, my breasts were swollen and sore with their continued adolescent development, and

my legs ached from standing for so long. I fell onto the weathered armchair behind me. You sat next to me on a matching recliner, and I closed my eyes as I gave in to my exhaustion. I must have stayed there for a long time, or maybe not, but I had yet to fall asleep.

One breath after another, the world around me began to fade. Then, there was a touch—shaky and hesitant. My body suddenly gained awareness when a hand pulled at the collar of my shirt, peeling it away from my chest. I wanted to open my eyes. I should have opened my eyes, stopped whatever was going on, but I felt myself being tucked farther and farther away into my mind. My mouth tasted sour, my throat swelled up with a noise, or a word, or a scream that my body stubbornly swallowed down, and my nose caught your scent: bitter, musky, sweaty. It made me dizzy. The recliner shrieked whenever you moved, but I remained as stiff as a board. My emotions and my logic battled endlessly for dominance in my thoughts, but neither came to my rescue. I just sat there, begging myself to move, to open my eyes, to scream, but there was nothing. I could feel the air vibrating around me, the fabric of the armchair digging into my skin as my body sunk deeper into its creases.

Finally, there was a noise. It was so faint, yet it had broken through the constricted muscles in my throat, ripping through my vocal cords and scratching them raw. The recliner squealed in alarm as you jerked back. My head continued to spin. My heart was bursting from how quickly it was beating, waste-filled blood rushing through my body while my lungs refused to take in any significant amount of air. My head fizzled as my thoughts reduced themselves to nothing, my senses deciding to follow suit. One last conscious breath and another careful tug peeled the protective layers of my skin.

The coolness from the refrigerator made me sigh, my body grateful for a break from the hot air.

You liked it, didn't you? Did you like feeling my skin beneath the very tips of your fingers as you pulled my shirt away from my breasts, or was it the view that amazed you the most? It makes me wonder: would you ever feel the way I do?

I didn't remember falling asleep or anything prior to that, but I did feel slightly uncomfortable in my own skin once I woke up. I stood up from the armchair and walked to the kitchen to get myself a drink. The coolness from the refrigerator made me sigh, my body grateful for a break from the hot air. There was a feeling in my chest, almost like a tiny organism biting at the inflaming nerves within my left breast. It produced a heat that invited me to scratch at my skin until it bloomed red. A rash, I thought, from sweating so much, that was it.

However, once you—my dearest cousin—ran into the kitchen, my body flinched, and the parasite crawled closer to my epidermis. I continued to scratch, blood vessels bubbling on my skin. I didn't trust you. I didn't know why. We decided to play again, but it wasn't the same as before. I was distant, quiet, unfocused. It felt like my body was afraid to be that close to you, but I couldn't understand why. I must have had a nightmare then, I settled upon.

Daylight faded, and my body and mind finally agreed that, despite my physical discomfort, it was time to sleep. I laid down next to you like I always did. I was going to sleep. I needed to sleep. I begged my mind to let me sleep. Then, I felt your eyes caressing the buttons of my favorite baby-blue pajamas. Your heavy breaths licked my chin, creating a thick layer of sweat that dripped down to my collarbone while the bed moaned with your movement. I was frozen, stuck in the rotting corpse that was my body. Feather-like touches popped the buttons open, one by one, with a grace seemingly acquired through practice. One breath, then another, and it only grew hotter and more sporadic.

You were enjoying yourself, weren't you?

I tasted something foul crawl up my esophagus, felt something warm flow out of me and into my panties, and the air around me suddenly filled with a pungent smell of vomit and urine. Small parasites caressed my body, every pore receiving their attention before they dug into me and buried themselves within my gut. Run, attack, hide, do something, I begged myself. But my body laid still, afraid that even a singular breath would make things worse.

Tears welled up in my closed eyes. I fought to open them. I needed to open them. I shouldn't have opened them. I saw you there, through the crack between my lids, wide-eyed, smiling, panting, blushing. Your eyes glowed in the dark as the parasites you had implanted into my body eagerly consumed me. Everything became blurry, my eyelids grew heavy, and my mind and body became numb to everything but the tiny organisms pulsating within my dermis.

And I feel you—watching me, touching me to remove the barrier between my body and your eyes. When do you think the feeling goes away? Do you think it'll ever go away? It makes me wonder: would you ever understand how I feel?

I opened my eyes and was greeted with your sleeping form across from me, your soft breaths barely touching my chest. You looked so young, so innocent. The buttons of my blouse were undone only enough to reveal my chest, and I suddenly became acutely aware that my breasts spilled over the fabric of my outgrown bra. There was a burning sensation in them, a tenderness without any physical origin. There was no bruising, no residue, only the feeling of organisms settling under the layers of my skin.

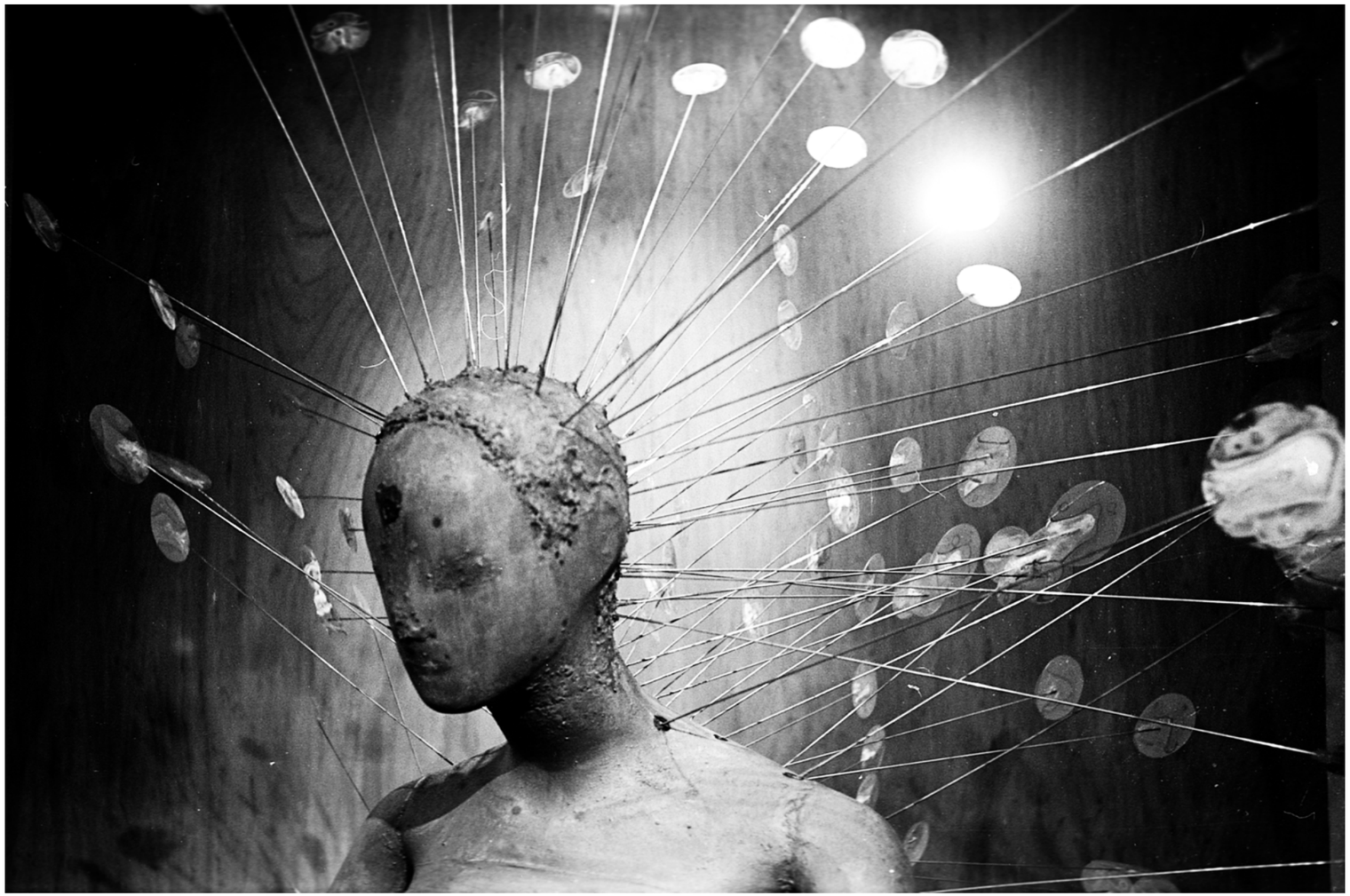
"Titi, I wanted to tell you something." I knew she responded, but my ears only caught the sound of my screams within my head. Tell her, tell her, they repeated, echoing loud enough to make my head spin. Before I could finish my story, she interrupted me. "Oh, he's a growing boy. Of course things are going to be awkward between you two. I'm sure he'll grow out of it soon." Her smile was wide, bright, and I mimicked it, but I felt those

little parasites rip a hole twice their size into my heart. I could hear them cackling as their ejaculations coursed through my body.

What do you think would've happened if I told on you then? Did you ever think of that? Because I sure did. I would have loved to see you thrown out of the house, taken away—far away—from me where you could never fantasize about fucking me again. But I feared that I would be cast aside, humiliated, and belittled by everyone in the family—just as your mother had done.

My life is now haunted by your eyes, your hands, your smile—by the careful, little parasites you forced within me. It makes me wonder: would you ever fucking listen to how I feel?

Years had gone by before I saw you again. You were still dreadfully skinny, but you had finally grown taller than me. Your hug was respectfully short and familiarly tight. I was nervous and the organisms chewing through layers of scar tissue reminded me why I felt nauseated, but I refused to let my thoughts prevent me from reconnecting with you. I had convinced myself that it had all been a nightmare, a projection of what men had already done to me. You had situated yourself in that weathered recliner, but I found myself unable to sit in the matching armchair. We sat across one another in a different part of the house, one I felt was distant enough from my nightmares as we caught each other up on our lives. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, you interrupted me.



"I would fuck you, but I know that it's wrong. Still, I feel things when I think of you."

My eyes widened, the palms of my hands started to sweat, my heart began to beat rapidly, my breasts ached, and I felt your tiny parasites shove themselves down to the walls within my vagina. They feasted on the shedding linings of my uterus, panting with the impish grin you mimicked across from me. I laughed. I forced myself to laugh. The world crumbled and dissolved around me as your eyes glowed brightly. This wasn't possible. Out of all people, why were you doing this to me?

"Fuck, you're hot."

I couldn't move away from my seat. I was trapped in my own body, but I couldn't feel my nails digging into the skin on my thighs. It was happening all over again. Your pants, your fingers, your groans, it all came back in a flash that swallowed me whole. I wasn't real, this wasn't real. Nothing around me felt real anymore. I'm a whore, I thought as I examined my shorts and t-shirt in hopes to cover the rotting flesh that enticed you.

Do you know what it was like to sleep after that? Every night, like the nights before, I would feel parasites roaming through my body while your faint breathing slipped into my ears. You'd think it would only haunt me at night, but they continued to feast during the day—calculating my every move and pulling me away from life. The little parasites would make my breasts throb, forcing me to scratch marks into my chest. I would try to peel the layers of

contaminated, rotting skin from my body, but the disease you somehow infected me with only grew worse as I tried to rid myself of your remnants.

You are always there, in the back of my mind, in my consciousness, in my life. You live your day to day free from the parasites you, my friends, my exes, boys in school, strangers, and pedophilic men have implanted within me throughout the years. You don't hear their whispered reminders that no matter how someone is related to you and no matter how much they say they love you, they could always hurt, objectify, and forcefully take parts of you for their enjoyment.

The parasites you left in me burn my skin, punish me while I write down what my mind constantly forces myself to relive. They break through my nerves, make me numb to everything for months on end as I suffer in silence. They whisper the nauseating words you gifted me and try to convince me that you were merely a child. They remind me you are younger than me. They criticize me for not fighting harder against you, even though at the time I barely knew what consent meant. They laugh at me, telling me you were simply looking to fulfill your sexual curiosities as teenagers tend to do. They screamed at me that you were my cousin, my brother, and, at times, even my child.

The memory of you entices your parasites within my body to tear at my flesh, ligaments, muscles, bones, nerves, everything I could possibly have left. They mock me, hoping to watch me shred my skin into pieces again. They fool me, making me believe I'm a whore, a toy, a thing made purely to be fucked into. I struggle to connect the boy I loved with the monster that pumped its spawn within me. I struggle to remember what exactly happened that night. I struggle to remember who I was before you brought your sexuality to life.

While I seemingly convinced myself multiple times that I was worthless, broken, and replaceable, where were you?

Do you want to know what it's like to feel the way I do? I fear to touch my partners because I think my skin will contaminate them. I feel the parasites crawl up my throat and constrict me when anyone initiates intimacy with me, just as they do when I tentatively touch my flesh in a similar curiosity to yours. They eagerly whisper that those who treated me like a hole for them to fuck are simply curious about sex. Sex, a thing

that is supposed to intimate. Sex, a way to show your love for someone. Sex, my biggest source of discomfort. Sex is the thing I fear the most, for I fear the possibility that my lover's face could turn into yours.

And it makes me wonder: would you ever truly regret making me feel the way I do?

I sometimes forget that I no longer have to protect you. I forget that you miss me, as you've told our grandmother to relay to me. I forget what you've done. I forget your words. I even forget your name, but those two words, four syllables, eleven letters pull me back to those moments, and I wish someone had used them to pull you away.

While I am forced to live my life infested with parasites that bite, and screech, and roam under the layers of scar tissue I tried to pry them out of, your life goes on. The scars are still there—and will always be there—and the memories of you and all the other people that have taken advantage of me for their own pleasure still fucking haunt me to this day. You'll probably never hear about the suffering you've caused me. You'll probably never understand what it is like to live as a survivor of your curiosities. And you'll surely never comprehend how scared I am that there are others like me, who are forced to live with your careful, little parasites.

There was no bruising, no residue, only the feeling of organisms settling under the layers of my skin.

INDICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: A BARRIER ISLAND

by CLARA MASSEAU

Quadrats of boxed oysters and cultch multiply,
wading deeper reveals no victory transect
The estuary's opacity starves life of sunlight
not even a shallow shoal grass can survive
one mile east, the Atlantic

A sea turtle on the spoil island's sandy microplastics,
land an inappropriate habitat for such –
of course, now exposed, dead and decaying,
smell and shell its only legacy
an inlet away, the Atlantic

Kids, don't let the water above your necks
swim, but not if you have a scratch, adults
stay on shore, while their actions infiltrate the ecosystem
The Indian River Lagoon teems with enteric bacteria
a larger dump, the Atlantic

Swells and whitewash grow and swallow
an already shrinking coast, sending heavy
machinery to trample in and replace
sand, but the indigeneity is lost indefinitely
slowly sinking us, the Atlantic

Art by ELIJAH PETTET

DISTANCE

Art by IONA BRUCE

by ANDREW MERRILL

Northwards, beyond the United States and Canadian border, caribou herds roam the length of the Canadian wilderness in search of living conditions. They graze these regions, taking time to lean over, sniff the ample amounts of lichen, and make their decision.

As herds of caribou cross into the eastern portion of Canada, they arrive in massive numbers. Each herd is no smaller than fifty thousand, with some containing more than one hundred thousand. These animals navigate arctic living conditions in the most spectacular of ways. On the tops of their heads sits an extraordinary rack of antlers coated in velvet. These beautiful members of the deer family exemplify exceptional unique traits. Their fur coats transform from a deep grey into a blazing shade of white in order to handle the frigid temperatures of northern Canada. The velvet that coats the spider web above the reindeer's forehead is filled with blood vessels that are vital to the growth of the deer's antlers.

Just south of the reindeer's migration path, flocks of Canadian geese begin to make their way to parts of the Midwestern United States. Breeding conditions in Canada just would not suffice for these creatures. They need warmer temperatures to incubate their egg and raise their young.

On the ground, these lanky birds may seem foolish and irritating, even plain stupid at times. Their necks flop around like wet noodles and when you step in their feces nothing seems more cathartic than grabbing one and swinging it around. However, in the air, a sphere in which humans are not present, these feathery creatures are impeccable. In order to survive, migratory species like geese are forced to travel extreme distances.

In their encyclopedia of science, authors Bill Friedman and Randall Frost state that "most species of goose undertake substantial migrations between their breeding and wintering grounds, in some cases traveling thousands of miles, twice yearly."[1] To do so, species such as the goose have adopted clever and indispensable tactics to complete these journeys effectively and efficiently.

A classic example of this is the iconic "V" that the goose travels in. Formations such as these improve flight efficiency for

1.Freedman, Bill, and Randall Frost. "Geese." The Gale Encyclopedia of Science, edited by Katherine H. Nemeh and Jacqueline L. Longe, 6th ed., vol. 3, Gale, 2021, pp. 1922-1925. Gale In Context: Environmental Studies.

migratory birds. By improving the aerodynamics of their flight formation, geese and other birds are able to conserve much more energy, making for a safer expedition.

Competition lurks behind the lines of animal migration and its essence. The animal kingdom competes. For everything. Mother nature forces animals to compete on a level so much higher than humans must. To pass one's bloodline, to be retained in future generations, and help your offspring flourish, the fittest, most well equipped of the available competitors will dominate others to blossom into a stronger, more powerful species.

For example, as gazelles cross African plains in search of shade and water, dominant packs of lions prowl and ransack herds of these deer-like creatures. After taking a couple down, the assertive males in the group drag the bloody carcass across the sand like dirt. As they exit a nearby river, a crocodile lunges out and snaps off part of a gazelle's lower leg. The lions rejoin the rest of their pack. The females are offered the first pickings of the gazelles while the cubs were forced to watch, they were still young.

In an article written by Xiangtao Li, Jie Zhang, and Minghao Yin, they explain an animal migration algorithm that explains this to more extent.[2] Neighboring individuals play a significant role in the migration process. As groups move in excessive numbers, the authors state that three rules apply, "move in the same direction as your neighbors; remain close to your neighbors; and avoid collisions with your neighbors."

Species that travel in herds, such as zebras, flamingos, and buffalo have complex guidelines that play out during the migration process. Distance relative to neighboring members of the herd impacts their pilgrimage in several ways. Area traveled, time traveled, and the motion in which the group is moving in are all factors that play into migration tendencies. The most critical factor that animal position controls when migrating is the position of others relative to the examined individual. Migratory species position themselves specifically around others to track their motion and keep track of their migratory path. Because of this tracking method, herds and packs of animals essentially collaborate to maneuver each other in the correct direction.

2. Li, X., Zhang, J. & Yin, M. Animal migration optimization: an optimization algorithm inspired by animal migration behavior. Neural Comput & Applic 24, pp. 1867–1877 (2014).

Some of the most beautiful and complicated creatures on earth have migration cycles that humans will never fully be able to comprehend. The monarch butterfly, humpback whale, and great white shark are just some of the animals that participate in migration cycles.

In subtropical waters, like those off the coast of Florida and in the Caribbean, the manta ray slices through the current. It's making its way north; Chesapeake Bay is its destination. The ray begins in light blue, teal, and turquoise waters. As it makes its way further up the coastline, deeper shades of blue and green overwhelm the once turquoise-waves. Hundreds of yards away the rays are seen leaping from the water, and white caps form. Suddenly the waves grow even larger before they whack the shoreline, maybe even giving some surfers a ride before they do so. Just below the surface, a giant manta ray spreads its wings to take off, with a thirty foot wingspan, they throw themselves from underwater and shatter the surface of the Atlantic. As it breaches through the air, a shiny white belly and eight gills are the only things visible. It reaches nine feet and shatters the surface again, this time it disappears. The nighttime reaches and as the moon paints its light over the ocean, the mantas take note. A full moon lights up the night and bioluminescent phytoplankton swarm beneath the surface. The moon will begin to wane soon. Heidi Dewar conducted a study regarding manta ray positioning habits and feeding sites along this certain migration path.[3] She recorded her observations off the coast of Komodo, an island adjacent to Indonesia, and found that "The moon and tides affected visits at both north and south Komodo." She continued to say that "manta ray abundance was higher when currents were strongest during full and new moons."

The two most important reasons animals participate in migratory patterns are to obtain a resource that is not accessible at their current location, and to find ideal breeding environments.

Human intervention with the environment has proved to affect animal migration cycles in several different ways. Environmental patterns have been instilled into the instinctive nature of all species that migrate; this plays into their directional intelligence in terms of their destination. Frank Seebacher and Eric Post use an example regarding migratory birds and state that "Arrival date and hatching date are phenological markers in migrating birds, for example, that can be strongly affected by global warming."[4] Environmental adjustments such as temperature affect all migratory species, not only birds. Changes in climate can lead to species changing their nesting areas and moving to different regions that include habitats that cater to the needs of these specific species. This can lead to food scarcities as well as deterioration within the habitat itself because of the lack of biodiversity needed to maintain the habitat.

3. Dewar, H., Mous, P., Domeier, M. et al. Movements and site fidelity of the giant manta ray, Manta birostris, in the Komodo Marine Park, Indonesia. Mar Biol 155, pp. 121–133 (2008).
4. Seebacher, Frank, and Eric Post. "Climate Change Impacts on Animal Migration." Climate Change Responses, vol. 2, 2015. ProQuest.

Art by SUSANNA ANDREWS

CAN THE MIGHTY BANKHAR DOGS OF MONGOLIA SAVE THE STEPPE?

by BEAU FARRIS

march comes in like a lion. bit by bit
its paws linger. partially in-between
february's terracotta warriors and brown couches
who thrifted themselves. and parched green clay
conversely, the palms of feet smack hard
wood floors. eye-lids and known faces
and grooves in the sidewalk. once again
acquaint themselves with melted snow
many last names are changed to gardener
watering cans are inverted. rusted
beside wheelbarrow chickens. now
drive-through concerts escort this sickness
away from used bookstores selling ocean views.
and it goes out like a lamb

Art by TAMI KUO

STATE OF BEING

by JAMIE LAMMERS

Here comes that feeling again. Like you're vicariously living through yourself? Is that even possible? It must be if you're feeling it. Is this dissociation? Or are you overanalyzing your Google searches from the previous week? Should you even be self-diagnosing right now? Or is that nothing but an overreaction? Most likely a desperate attempt to put words that don't exist to feelings that can't be described.

You thought you'd found the solution to your distress through the media you consumed and related with. Comedians singing about the funny feeling that comes when you hear distressing news or get absorbed in scrolling through Instagram. Protagonists in musicals acting debilitatingly anxious in a way that you thought was exclusive to the way you acted, convincing you that someday, you will be found. Movies from the 2010s, movies from the '90s, even movies from the late '40s that somehow manage to portray anxiety and depression and methods of dealing with mental health in unexpected ways.

Even those can't fill you now.

Even those can't stop the never-ending questions running through your head.

Am I doing enough?

Am I living my life to the fullest potential?

Am I experiencing every moment as I should?

Or am I just moving along and making my youth disappear in front of me?

Am I not taking the chances I should, making the friends I could, finding the experiences I would if I just got out more?

Am I thinking too much?

Or, God forbid, too little?

And why isn't there enough time or mental capacity to experience everything that can be experienced?

You walk down the hall of your apartment as you ponder these questions overwhelmed by their sheer magnitude. There's something about the way you usually see the world, both literally and metaphorically, that's changed at this moment. Before this, you saw the world as a beautiful place, a place of good people and exciting prospects. You probably didn't even think about how you processed the information put in front of your eyes. Now, you wonder if everything you've learned is a lie, if everything you've trusted is something you need to pull away from. You start walking down the stairs, suddenly processing the banister of the stairs, the white tile floor, your hands, arms, and legs moving, as more than just your surroundings. Before this, your brain processed the world in various angles and cuts, like a movie. Now, you start to process the world from your own POV, your own eyes. You're stuck in a single place in your mind, unable to escape as your thoughts slowly consume you, taking over as you realize what's happening to your perspective.

As you reach the bottom of the stairs and head for the front door of your apartment building, you wonder if you'll ever feel the same again. If there's ever anything that can be done about the way you feel right now. About the world, about life… about yourself. Are you in a dream that will end someday?

CONTRIBUTORS

SUSANNA ANDREWS is a freshman at CU Boulder. Susanna is a Business major minoring in Art. Susanna also plays for the women's club lacrosse team.

JENNY BROWN is currently a freshman at CU Boulder majoring in Political Science. She's from Golden, Colorado and loves to play her trumpet. She is still, in fact, working on reading *The Silmarillion.*

MADDIE CAMILLI earned her BFA with a concentration in printmaking and ceramics. She enjoys every aspect of creating, and loves working with natural materials to incorporate them into clay, fiber work, illustration, and photography. She currently lives and works in Boulder.

CAROLINE CAPPELLETTI is a second-year English Literature student at the University of Colorado. She loves reading, writing Notes App poetry, and is obsessed with Carmen Maria Machado. You can find more of her work in Cornell's Rainy Day Magazine, Sunstroke Magazine, CU Honors Journal, and Walkabout Creative Arts Journal or on Instagram @waldenitwithyou.

MARIA CORREA was born and raised in the City of Witches in Puerto Rico. Due to the eager support of a high school teacher, she began to write poems, fiction, and essays. Writing soon became a way for her to accept and work through her trauma. She is now a senior majoring in Creative Writing and spends most of her time writing body horror, nonfiction essays, and poetry. Her biggest aspiration is that one day, she will pay her English teacher's kindness forward by helping her students find and express their voices.

EMILY DIAZ is a sociology major with minor work towards Peace, Conflict, and Security Studies. She has dedicated two years to working as a family services caseworker as she studies for her upcoming entry to law school in 2023. Emily is thrilled to have her work among many wonderful local artists and looks forward to continued contribution to the journal.

JULIAN EBERT is a film production major and award-winning video editor. He is a media manager for the CU Esports organization and works as a videographer for a real estate company based here in Colorado. He is an adamant video game connoisseur, part-time writer, self-proclaimed filmmaker, and lover of all things food. In the future, he hopes to develop his writing skills and publish more creative fiction.

BEAU FARRIS is a senior pursuing a double major in History and Creative Writing. He is the recipient of the Gentian Ascension Scholarship and the Jovanovich Imaginative Writing Scholarship and has been published in various journals. As a daily practice, he enjoys reading and writing poetry, and is creating a book-length collection titled 'Can Opener'. After obtaining his undergraduate degrees, he plans on pursuing an M.F.A. in poetry.

KELSEY GILLIAM is a Biochemistry graduate (May 2021). She is currently applying to PA school and working as a medical assistant. Kelsey is very passionate about continuing to create art even if it is not directly related to her career path and enjoys using influences from her scientific background as inspiration for her art.

KATIE GINSBURG is studying studio art and advertising at CU Boulder.

S.G. GREENE is obsessed with writing about emotionally complex characters, the weight of time, and the vastness of the cosmos. S.G. is a non-traditional student embarking on a mission fueled by a love for storytelling. S.G. has come to CU Boulder to bring dreams to life through novels and film. S.G. has written nine novels, each in different states of editing. While quiet at heart, S.G.'s inner sanctum could not be any more different! Come take the deep dive!

CODY FIELDS grew up mostly in Houston, Texas, before moving to Boulder during high school. Cody doesn't regret moving, to say the least. Cody started at CU with a major in Astronomy, changed to Biology, and is strongly considering at least a minor in Creative Writing because Cody can't make decisions. Cody is often lost in thought, and Cody's hobbies center around fiction and fantasy: especially film, writing, role-playing games, and painting.

IAN HALL is a sophomore at CU studying Anthropology and Film. He joined Hindsight in the spring of 2022 and is hoping to continue working in similar creative spaces until someone catches on and stops him. Sometimes his brain works.

BECKY HARKIN is a multimedia artist, originally from the Chicagoland area. She currently studies at The University of Colorado, Boulder, where she is double majoring in Sociology and Studio Arts. Expecting to graduate in fall 2021, she is just now dipping her toes into published writing. All of her work is heavily influenced by her struggles from her eating disorder and childhood traumas. With aims to lead a creative life, she is looking forward to future artistic careers!

ANNA HAYNES is a senior majoring in journalism and political science with certificates in Writing and International Media. She is the former editor-in-chief of the CU Independent and currently one of two head editors of the University of Colorado Honors Journal. Her favorite hobbies include reading books, watching video essays, and making jewelry for her Etsy store. She hopes to pursue a career in publishing.

JUSTIN HEIN is a photographer from Boulder, Colorado. Justin does portrait photography professionally, and his other favorite kinds of photography include landscape, astrophotography, macro, architecture, and street. Aside from photography, Justin is a beekeeper, a mandolinist, and a double bassist. Justin is studying Integrative Physiology at CU Boulder.

CAITLIN JOHNSON is a Pueblo-born native attending the University of Colorado at Boulder to study Elementary Education as well as seeking minors in Theatre and Leadership Studies and is set to graduate in 2024. Within her community, Caitlin has served as a part of many local organizations. She enjoys volunteering through CU Boulder's Undergraduate Enrichment Programs and says that her greatest accomplishment was being awarded the

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esteemed Colorado Boettcher Foundation Scholarship in 2020. In the future, Caitlin looks forward to sharing her knowledge with elementary students.

EVI JUDGE is an undergraduate student pursuing a double-major in Linguistics and Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences with a minor in Computer Science. As a person who has always enjoyed writing, Evi wants to describe her childhood home as if on a walk with the reader. She invites the reader to find their own favorite spot in this essay.

MELIA HAWTHORNE KLINGLER is a high school senior currently studying abroad in Amman, Jordan. Previously, she has lived in Costa Rica, Mexico, and Chicago, and her experiences in these different places have inspired her poetry and other writings. Melia is passionate about using writing to create change and uplift the voices of the next generation.

JAMIE LAMMERS is a current sophomore at CU Boulder with a major in Humanities and a minor in Music. He loves everything about art and humanity at large: theater, music, writing, art, film, storytelling, history, culture, psychology, and fun facts in general. He has been writing seriously since his junior year of high school, around which time he started writing for The Mountain Ear. He has been officially writing for the newspaper, which covers news events in the Peak to Peak area of Colorado, since April 2019.

NOAH LUSTI is a film student at CU Boulder who loves writing.

CLARA MASSEAU is a senior at CU Boulder, graduating with a degree in Environmental Studies and Creative Writing. Clara grew up in Vero Beach, Florida, a dynamic environment squished between the Atlantic and the Indian River Lagoon. Both systems are facing major environmental changes. Clara is continuing her education in marine conservation, resource management, and policymaking to focus on the marine and terrestrial ecosystems of Florida and beyond. Clara wants to use writing to tell stories and convey the natural world and climate change through a more artistic lens as well to accompany future research and fieldwork.

ASHLEY McCULLER is based in Dallas, Texas, Ashley's artwork has been displayed in various art competitions and galleries such as the Fort Worth Country Day Black and White Images Exhibit, Young American Talent, and Blue Print Gallery. Ashley was a part of her school's visual arts department for six years. At CU Boulder, Ashley is pursuing art as her major and plans to attend grad school for art. Ashley one day hopes to work as an art curator, as well as do commissions.

ANDREW MERRILL is currently a sophomore at CU Boulder. Andrew is from Salt Lake City, Utah, and started at CU Boulder in the fall of 2020. Andrew loves to write and has started to focus more on studies in this field. Andrew is looking to major in Journalism and join the Communications school.

CLAYTON MONTGOMERY graduated from the University of Colorado in the spring of 2021, having studied creative writing and advertising. He has since moved to the Spanish Basque Country, where he is teaching English and working on his writing. He one day hopes to publish a novel and a book of his photographs.

ALLISON NOWELS is an artist and photographer from Los Angeles, California. She found her interest in photography from her father, a professional location scout, and her interest in drawing from her aunt, an illustrator for adult coloring books. She enjoys finding beauty in everyday life, and capturing it in whichever medium she can. When she isn't creating, she is likely to be found inventing conspiracy theories or walking her two cats.

ELIJAH PETTET is a fourth-year in the Cinema Studies program. Photography is more of a hobby for Elijah, although he loves capturing beautiful things with his lens.

KATE ROBINSON is a senior at the University of Colorado, Boulder where she is studying media studies and journalism. She is currently a junior movie news writer for MXDWN Entertainment. Her favorite hobbies include writing, reading, fashion, and riding horses.

NATALIE SCHOENHALS is a Mathematics major with a love of music. She spends most of her time as an intern performing data analysis and finishes her day in aerial dance classes. She enjoys going on walks around Boulder, playing the flute, and reading. In the future, she hopes to travel the world and build musical instruments or pioneer research in the applications of data sonification.

ADLER SHANNON is a 2021 graduate of CMCI's Media Production program. He currently works as an editor for the media production company Boulder Media House, working with commercial brands to create memorable advertisements. while also applying to Master's programs for directing and screenwriting.

TASHA SMITH is an artist and student in her junior year at CU Boulder. She has always had a passion for creating, whether that be illustrative art or written works. She grew up in Colorado and loves hiking and experiencing the world around her. She loves complex things. She hopes that her work, above all, makes you think.

CHRISTINA WILLIAMS is focusing her studies on English Literature and getting a minor in Business. Writing has always been her favorite outlet, and she has always found beauty in small parts of life. When she is not writing, she can be found practicing yoga and reading her favorite books. She believes that life is something to be documented, and writing is the perfect way to express the emotions that come with it.

DANIEL WORKMAN is a CU alum that obtained his AAS from the Isaacson School for Professional Photography. Although he is attracted to all forms of art, he focuses his energy into mediums such as writing, photography, filmmaking, and songwriting. His interests in culture and anthropology strongly influence the work that he creates. His accomplishments include work with Pulitzer Prize winning photographers at the Eddie Adams Workshop in New York.

LOOKING AHEAD

GOING NATIONAL AND LAUNCHING CHANGING SKIES

HINDSIGHT now welcomes submissions from far beyond our home on Colorado's Front Range. We'll still publish only previously unpublished creative nonfiction, but now welcome writing and art from outside CU Boulder. Student staff will continue producing a gorgeous print journal every Spring, including only whatever local submissions make it through blind review, with most of that only online. We're going national—which these days means international, at least with English language content, or writing with en face translation. The journal that started in 2013 as Journal Twenty Twenty is just too good to keep to ourselves.

Unlike our journal, which is too good to keep local, climate change proves too bad to stay local. In 2013, Climate change left rain-swollen clouds stuck overhead in Colorado long enough to wash people out of homes on hilltops far from canyons, carrying away whole houses, killing eight people, and costing two billion dollars in damage. Last year, long rains replaced enough of our regular springtime snowstorms east of the Rockies to grow grassland fuel that dried through a summer with fewer monsoons than usual, then a beautiful fall with no snow, into December still without snow. Fire started on the western edge of our beloved "open space" on the second-to-last day of 2021, 115-mile-an-hour winds blew the flames east, burning over a thousand buildings, most of them homes, most to the ground.

While we will continue publishing writing on sustainability in HINDSIGHT, we're launching a new title, solely devoted to writing and art on the climate crisis. Along with student writing and art from CU Boulder, we will take submissions from beyond our literary and artistic postage stamp. CHANGING SKIES will feature creative nonfiction as memoir and other forms, but also include interviews with and profiles of experts on, and those suffering from, the effects of this ongoing threat to the earth and all its inhabitants. We'll mourn what's irrevocably lost, but we'll also look for the positive changes humans can learn to make more often. Mission Zero, funded by CU alum Scott King, is a series of initiatives to help CU students across campus fight climate change. This project funds not only our new title, but also students in Engineering working on fuel cell exchange for sustainable transportation, and business start-ups in green building. These initiatives will reinforce CU Boulder's place at the forefront of research and teaching to address the climate crisis—but Mission Zero also aims for a larger audience, to see other universities grow their commitment to fighting climate change. We'll interview a professor who lost her home, but we'll also profile those kids working to create a future we can live with—even through an uncertain future. After we publish teasers on its own website, look for our annual print issue of this new title every Fall, to debut soon, as CHANGING SKIES.

—Jay Ellis, Faculty Advisor

HINDSIGHT

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

CREATIVE NONFICTION

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

2023 • VOLUME III

HINDSIGHT

FOREWORD BY:
ERIKA KROUSE

CREATIVE NONFICTION 2023 VOLUME III

HINDSIGHT

creative nonfiction

2023
VOLUME III

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The third volume of HINDSIGHT is made possible thanks to the support of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric, John Stevenson, Director; and grants from the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, Director Joan Gabriele and Assistant Director Tim O'Neil. HINDSIGHT is also part of the Collective to Advance Multimodal Participatory Publishing, Amanda McAndrew, Project Manager; part of Arts and Sciences Support of Education Through Technology, Blair Young, Innovation Catalyst. The University of Colorado Boulder's Student Organization Allocation Committee generously provides print marketing funds and production facilities. Special thanks to Scott King and MISSION ZERO for ongoing support of CHANGING SKIES: WRITING THROUGH THE CLIMATE CRISIS.

HINDSIGHT continues printing anually into its eleventh year, including its previous title, JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. We now provide a print home and online community for all genres of creative nonfiction, nationally and internationally. We acquire First North American Serial Rights, welcoming all artists and writers of creative nonfiction to future issues. See our submission guidelines on our website: HINDSIGHTJOURNAL2020.COM.

Queries: HINDSIGHT, Program for Writing and Rhetoric, UCB 317, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0359; or hindsight@colorado.edu. We are a green journal and prefer electronic submissions and correspondence. Printed on recycled stock and fully recyclable. Single copy costs are $16.00 per issue in the U.S. and Canada, and $18.00 outside North America.

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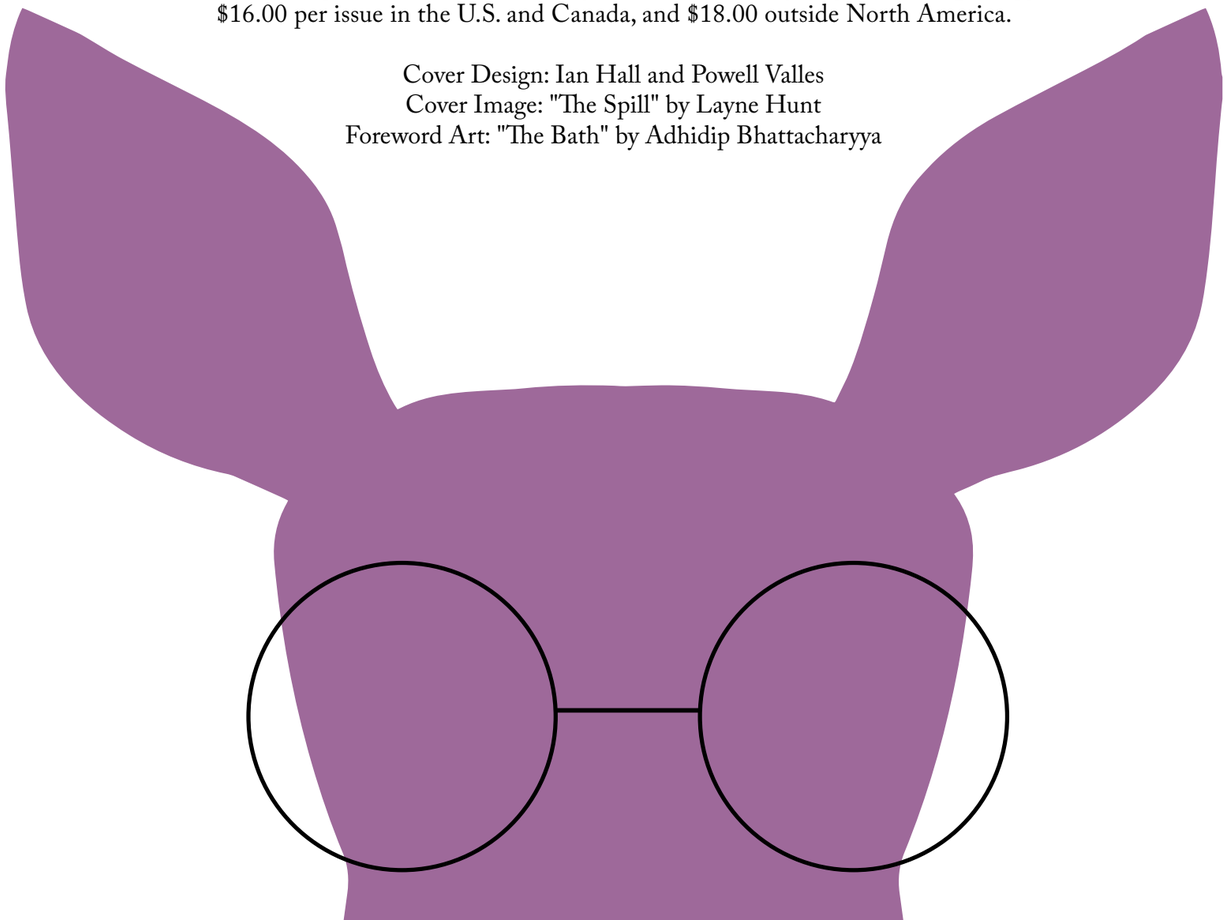

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FROM THE STAFF

Every spring, a motivated crew of writers, scientists, artists, and swashbucklers unites under a common goal: publishing a collection of the best creative nonfiction we can get our hands on. We take a great amount of pleasure wading through countless compelling submissions and carefully reviewing them for consideration in our volumes. The compilation of our efforts are chronicled in the following pages.

EDITORIAL STAFF

We in the art department at HINDSIGHT are always incredibly grateful to those who can capture their fleeting experiences for us to present. Through print, paintings, photos, and the prisms of artistic representation, the breadth of submissions continue to astound us. The quality of these works received makes us incredibly grateful to be able to contribute to this encapsulation of human creativity. We consistently strive in search of incredible and unique art from a myriad of backgrounds from all over the world that serves to beautify this collective platform that is HINDSIGHT.

ART DIRECTION

HINDSIGHT's Marketing Department would not exist without our dedicated staff. Each member takes on a different role to spread awareness of our journals, challenges each other to produce great work, and keeps the creative nonfiction genre alive at CU Boulder and beyond. Each semester we run campaigns on our website, social media accounts, and in print. Every semester brings new challenges; however, we have been able to continue expanding the HINDSIGHT audience and staff. Please enjoy the third volume of Hindsight. We thank you for providing our team with valuable artwork and writing, making the process of spreading our message much easier and more meaningful.

MARKETING

It was an absolute pleasure to lead HINDSIGHT through the completion of its third volume. In the year since the release of the second volume of HINDSIGHT, we have received so many unique, well-crafted stories and art; however, we could select only a small handful for our latest edition. It has been a privilege to provide a platform for authors and artists to express their voices and creativity.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

GET PUBLISHED

IN PRINT OR ONLINE

Any writer, anywhere, is eligible to submit creative nonfiction prose and poetry for consideration by HINDSIGHT. Submissions go through blind review by our editorial staff. We seek only previously unpublished creative nonfiction in any of its genres:

- Creative Scholarship
- Narrative Journalism
- Humor
- Lyric Essay—the truth told with a poetic slant
- Travel, Food, and Sports Writing
- Portraiture and Memoir
- Graphic Creative Nonfiction
- Digital Compositions and Videos for Web Publication

Artists, send us your work to accompany writing in HINDSIGHT print, online, or marketing. We accept previously unpublished work including but not limited to photography, video, or music.

JOIN OUR STAFF

Register for our Digital Publishing Practicum (WRTG 3090) or reach out to our primary Faculty Advisor for a one, two, or three-credit internship—offered for both upper and lower division students. We seek anyone wanting to learn the editorial, art, digital, business, or audio visual aspects of a print journal—no previous experience required. A position on the HINDSIGHT staff will foster professional skills while you explore diverse mediums within creative nonfiction. Staff members have autonomy and foster a student-led community to gain unparalleled experience in several fields. We strive to further the community of writers and artists across campus, and the globe.

FIND US ONLINE AT

HINDSIGHTJOURNAL2020.COM

Art by ADHIDIP BHATTACHARYYA

ON HINDSIGHT

by ERIKA KROUSE

I worked for fifteen years as a private investigator, and the job was all about human connection. If I could establish rapport with witnesses, they overshared and become invested in the case, and those informational networks solved crimes. So, it was surreal that midway through writing a memoir about the experience, Tell Me Everything: The Story of a Private Investigation, the pandemic hit and my human bonds degraded overnight. Isolation became customary, and I often struggled to remember my P.I. "tricks" enough to write about them. So quickly, I lost the ability to connect with people and turned into a bumbling outsider, awkward and strange. In exile from others, I no longer recognized myself. This issue of Hindsight shows me I wasn't alone. The essays spotlight an escalated struggle with isolation, as many of the brilliant writers in these pages fight to understand where they belong in the world, or if they belong at all. In Edward Kincaid's "The S.S. Rhode Island," the narrator eats microwaved meals alone in bed, keeps his blinds closed most of the time "like my own haunted house," and discusses suicide as preferable to facing a trip to Target. In Vivian Luckiw's "Are You Better?" her own body distances her from friends, family, and medical professionals as her stage 4 endometriosis becomes a disability, necessitating a cane and constant pain medications. In Quentin Parker's "To Walk in the World," Parker explores exile from the natural world as a Black American, describing communities where Black neighborhoods were physically and metaphorically drowned, turned into lakes and parks intended for white enjoyment. "History tells us relentlessly that white land has nothing to offer Black bodies…The value of nature had never been measured in Blackness." Parker combats fears of harassment with the reminder that "the world is my own to walk on, too."

In "My Dad and the Gay Soldier," Michael McGuire, a self-described "gay rebel iconoclast," struggles to connect with his conservative veteran father. But when, in a pointed message to his son, the father narrates a story about a gay soldier he openly admired, the two of them find a safe space to bond inside that narrative. McGuire writes, "To this day I do not know if he loved me or not. I have no evidence of it. Or do I? Because I have this story he told me." And perhaps that is how we can find kinship, despite world disasters, diverging experiences, cultural differences, and the barrenness of technology—through the open borders of narrative. In "Tracking Orbits," Deelia Sherman investigates the entropy of our tenuous bonds but finds the solution in our orbits, our relationships and letters. Sherman writes, "We all orbit around one another, drawn to each other like magnets, connected through the gravitational forces of words and wonder." I invite you to explore these honest, compelling essays and contribute your own sense of wonder, your own words of connection.

Erika Krouse is the author of *Tell Me Everything: The Story of a Private Investigation*, *Contenders*, and *Come Up and See Me Sometime*. *Tell Me Everything* was a *New York Times* Editors' Choice and has been optioned for TV adaptation by 20th Century Studios. Erika's work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *Granta*, *Ploughshares*, *One Story*, and elsewhere. She teaches creative writing at Lighthouse Writers Workshop.

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RABBITS DON'T KNOW EASTER

by DEELIA SHERMAN

There used to be this rabbit. Every now and then, my brother and I would see it lounging on the bright green neighborhood lawns. It wasn't a normal, wild rabbit. More of a bunny than a rabbit, really. He—we presumptuously labeled him a "he," because we were kids, and because we were already good friends with him in our heads—looked like someone's abandoned Easter gift or escaped pet, with his lush chestnut brown fur and his plump cheeks, and his round eyes that exuded calm domestication whenever a curious toddler or little dog attempted to befriend him. We waved every time we passed him sitting comfortably in the grass, a semi-constant character in the background of our lives. We named him Nutbrown Hare.

Eventually, Nutbrown Hare stopped showing up—hopefully taken in by a new owner, but more likely fallen victim to another, less fortunate scenario. We didn't think much of his absence. He wasn't meant for the outdoor lifestyle, to be fair. He was an indoor rabbit. I've heard of this phenomenon where animal shelters get this huge influx of abandoned rabbits a couple of

months after Easter, after the novelty of the holiday mascot has worn off and families realize the true responsibility of owning a pet. We hypothesized that this might have been Nutbrown Hare's origin and what eventually led to his end. Ironically, the day of Jesus' resurrection became Nutbrown Hare's death sentence. Nutbrown Hare didn't even know what Easter was.

My family's Easter celebrations never involved impulsive rabbit adoptions, but rather the customary suburban egg hunt and an extra-long church service, which meant wearing an uncomfortable pastel dress and visiting family from out of town. I grew up in a household of drastically differing ideologies that peacefully coexisted through some form of willing cognitive dissonance on the part of my parents. Both from the grand emptiness and rich rural culture of South Dakota, my mom and dad saw eye to eye on most topics. Most topics, that is, except for religion. Dad—having grown up just off the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation with his Oglala Lakota family—saw himself as "spiritual," but not "religious," maintaining that any organized religion must be a cult. Mom—Scandinavian if you look far enough up on the family tree—grew up Catholic and decided to raise her children Catholic as well, which Dad never seemed to take any issue with.

Every Sunday morning, Mom, my brother, and I would hop in the car and drive to St. Mark's Catholic Church. As the car delivered me to my hour of boredom, I would watch the houses fly past, observing the ladies walking their dogs and the rabbits dotting their lawns. At that time, I never wondered why Dad didn't go to church with us. It was just another fact of life. Rabbits belong on neighborhood lawns, and Dad doesn't go to church. Looking back, my parents must have made a mutual agreement about my religion, spoken of before my birth and before my baptism. Eventually, that agreement brought me to the soft red fabric of the church pew. I spent every Sunday morning singing hymns and forming list after list in my head of random observations to point out to Mom once the priest was done with his stories. For years, I didn't give my church routine a second thought.

But, as time went on, I realized that my family must have made some grave mistake in the way of religion. The pinnacle of doing religion "right" in my innocent eyes came in the form of my friend Catherine. Catherine had ginger-red hair and an obsession with horses. I met her in gym class when I was two years old. Our mothers chatted as we tumbled across primary color foam mats, forming some kind of parenting-alliance with each other, as mothers often do. By their all-powerful will, Catherine and I became close childhood friends, the kind of friends who've known each other essentially since birth, who've never lived life without the knowledge of each other's presence. Naturally, this led to frequent playdates and sleepovers at Catherine's house, playdates and sleepovers that occasionally consisted of following Catherine's family to church. Catherine's family had a reverence for God that I never did, even though I was theoretically supposed to. Catherine's bedroom decor consisted of horse photographs and plastic soccer trophies interspersed with pink Bible verses and flowers painted on wooden signs. I began to wonder why my mom never hung up wall art reminding me to "Trust in the Lord with all my heart" (Proverbs 3:5). Did I even trust in the Lord with all my heart? I couldn't shake the sense that I was an imposter, a lost Nutbrown Hare thrown into a world that wasn't meant for me.

For most of my youth, the hints of Indigenous spirituality Dad introduced to me existed in a completely separate part of my brain. There were days I would go to Catholic confirmation class after school, and there were days I would come home and the house would smell like burning sage. Whenever my brother woke up in the middle of the night, frightened from a horrible dream, Dad would perform a smudging ceremony to cleanse the house of bad spirits and negative energy. We attended powwows together, and Dad would remind me to feel the powerful drumbeats in my bones, the healing medicine of the music. On long mountain drives, Dad would tell me about the animals sacred to the tribes. He taught me that horses were called "sunka wakan" (or šúŋkawakȟaŋ, meaning "big dog" or "holy dog") and bison were "tatanka" (or tȟatȟaŋka, meaning "big beast"). Elk and eagles and rabbits populated my mind.

"Look up there!" Dad would say, pointing to the sky whenever he saw a raptor circling some poor prairie dog or rabbit in the fields. "Whenever you see a hawk or eagle, that's your ancestors wishing you safe travels."

Dad would smile and grab for his camera to capture a snapshot. Now, whenever I spot a bird of prey, my confidence swells at the thought of my family watching over me. To me, that always seemed more sincere than guardian angels or confirmation saints.

Despite his knowledge, I think Dad felt disconnected from his culture, a symptom of the unfortunate cultural erasure that has forced American Indians into their less-than-ideal reality. I understand now that perhaps he believed he had no authority to try and teach me the Lakota ways, since they already seemed foreign to him and were even more removed from me. But the walls had already started to crack as I grew older and noticed the incongruities between Mom's institutional religion and Dad's spirituality. I couldn't sustain the balance, the homeostasis, that my parents had found in their relationships with religion. I soon learned that I couldn't reconcile these two worlds forever.

At Sunday School, I contentedly spent my time on crafts or coloring sheets, until the day my naive worldview was shattered. "You know," the old ladies gossiped to each other as they watched over us that day. "Native Americans only see their crazy visions because of all those drugs. Their deities are blasphemous," they said with matter-of-fact tones. At this devastating news,

I stopped dead in the middle of beading my "Jesus Loves Me" bracelet and instantly felt ashamed. I wished that I had the safety of some underground burrow to retreat to like Nutbrown Hare. Instead, I had to hold my tongue and listen to their hateful language, returning home more confused about who I was than ever before. Uncertainty and skepticism set themselves into my bones.

"This, right here, is the body and blood of Christ," my confirmation class teacher told us another day, showing off the deep red Communion wine and pale Eucharist wafers. "This is the real flesh of Jesus." I ignored his stories and enjoyed the snack, reasoning that there was no way the small morsel of bread could morph into actual tissue and muscle and blood. Impossible, I told myself. A part of me, however, remained intrigued, wondering if I would ever know for sure whether the stories were true or not. To this day, I don't know. A part of me wants to believe. But some mysteries remain unanswered. I'll never know what really happened to Nutbrown Hare, and I'll never know if the bread I ate could really turn into flesh.

Today, I dance around my rocky religious landscape as best I can. It's complicated. I no longer go to church on Sunday mornings, but sometimes, late at night, I make the sign of the cross and pray. Whenever I feel a ghostly presence, I light sage and smudge my room. I love going to every powwow I can. I listen as my brother confides in me about the resentment he holds towards God, voice full of restrained vitriol. "Where was God when I prayed?" he asks. My brother hates having grown up in a household that falsely promised him a god that would help him when he needed. I've asked Mom before if she thinks that maybe raising her children Catholic was an unintentional form of colonization, that maybe it aided in minimizing Indigenous spirituality. She was confused by my question. I hold no ill will towards Mom, nor towards religion, but all my life, I have been confused and torn in two. It all seems so vague, so subjective. I am searching for my own form of worship, one molded around my own beliefs rather than beliefs decided for me before my birth.

I search everywhere. At concerts, when the bass seeps into my body and rattles my bones, I feel medicine coursing through my veins like the words of a preacher or drum beats at a powwow. It's fleeting, like a rabbit rushing past on nimble legs, but it is in

those moments I come closest to God. In the woods, surrounded by trees and mist on a crisp morning, I breathe in the cool air and touch the ground, communing with the Earth. I regard the dreamlike view of the mountains outside my window with as much devotion as I once held for Jesus on the cross above the altar. The world is rich with holiness. I choose to widen my horizons and partake in its wonders to the fullest rather than burden myself with the futile hunt for certainty. Beauty exists in both of my parents' religious lifestyles. Only through the mosaic and the combination of every perspective can even the smallest hints of truth be found.

Nutbrown Hare, bred originally for the cushy life of a house pet, adapted quickly to brave the neighborhood streets. Despite his incomprehension of Easter, religion fundamentally shaped his life, as it did my own. Though no higher power took his input into account, he played well with the cards he was dealt. He was a combination of the tame and the wild, a product of his differing environments. I am a combination of my mom and her Catholicism, my dad and his spirituality, and the tumultuous interactions between the two. Just like Nutbrown Hare, I am an ever-changing combination of parts, reborn into new incarnations again and again, forever. Though I'll never truly know Nutbrown Hare's fate or my own, and I'll never truly know what resides in the heavens, I know that I'll always have my mom and my dad and the bright green grass on the neighborhood lawns.

Art by JONATHAN SLINGER

TO WALK IN THE WORLD

by QUENTIN PARKER

Black people don't go hiking.

I don't hate nature. I hate insects, high humidity on a 95-degree day, freezing wind, and bird shit on the sidewalk. The years between elementary school and college were where I felt the lowest inclination to do any outdoor activities. Due to this aversion, I've never been white water rafting, rock climbing, bird watching, fishing, hunting, or gardening.

When I disclosed that my college friends and I were considering going hiking as a fun activity, both of my parents laughed. "What are you going hiking for? That's for white people."

This wasn't the first time I experienced that criticism. Something you learn growing up Black is that there are some things we have no business doing. Many of those include adventurous explorations of nature.

I often wonder if Black people avoid pursuing more outgoing ventures because of the associated risks. Journeying to the top of Mount Everest claims around five lives a year. A relatively small number but, in the grand scheme of things, five too many to be worth the trip. Dozens die every year from canoeing and kayaking. The internet shows us white people hanging from cliff edges for an Instagram photo and somersaulting thirty thousand feet in the air in parachutes. These actions are met with the usual response of disapproving hums and headshaking.

Other times I consider how accessible nature has been for Black people, and whether we'd simply been deterred from doing these things. You get to "act a fool" in nature when the consequences end with just you, and Black individuals are habitually seen as monoliths for the community. The internet also shows us the Black people who are harassed in—or ultimately, ousted from—spaces like public parks and beaches, based solely on their presence being too much of a disturbance to the non-Black people occupying those spaces. I can say I choose not to hang around outside because the elements put me in a less than ideal mood, but I know subconsciously that my existence in nature will one day, somehow, violate someone else's space.

The large Maryland house was adorned with numerous Christmas trees. Each one was meticulously decorated with different festive ornaments and twinkling lights, some in the living room, the foyer, the upstairs hallway, the bedrooms. I have to assume some of the locations, though, as I didn't get to see every one of them that night.

Walking into a room where there are no other Black people immediately sets off warning bells. It's a self-preservation response, one that isn't always needed but is there subconsciously. You can never know for certain how you're perceived as the lone person of color.

My mother, brother, and I didn't need to know what everyone else at this Christmas tree viewing party thought of us, as their eyes never left us. We'd seen less than a handful of the trees my mother's coworker had decorated her house with before we isolated ourselves to an unseen corner of the dining room. When they could spot us, we were watched like enigmas. Under their judgmental gaze I analyzed the way I was dressed. I was twelve—maybe thirteen—at the time, so I wasn't exactly styled to the nines. I tried to rationalize every way in which we could draw attention. Maybe they wondered who we knew here or why we had come. Maybe they thought we were lost and saw the pretty lights from outside.

It was my first brush with the tensions that can come up when Black people revel in the glamour of nature—even when artificial. These elegantly garnished trees were for the eyes of the older white guests. I feared the encounters we could have if just one of us left the others to take a closer look or inquire where the plants were from. Everyone but us were able to marvel at the beauty of these pampered firs. This space belonged to them.

I learned recently of the secrets buried beneath the United States' lakes. History books often omit the adverse relationship between Black people and nature. Particularly, they conceal the Black American towns that have been destroyed and "purified" with a lake or natural park. Lake Lanier is one of the most prominent of the "Drowned Towns," one in a long line of culture decimated and replaced with greenery that was more pleasing to the eye.

Oscarville, Georgia was drowned by Lake Lanier after two Black teenagers, Earnest Knox and Oscar Daniels, were accused of raping and murdering a young white girl, Mae Crow. They were tried and lynched in the same day. The white men in the area—Night Riders—killed or forced out the rest of the Black population and destroyed their land, churches, and schools. Kowaliga, Alabama was drowned by Lake Martin, along with the first Black-owned railroad. Seneca Village in New York City, a thriving Black community, was torn down in favor of Central Park. Vanport, Oregon gave way to Delta Park after a massive 1948 flood wiped out the town in a day. The Black residents there were never warned of the increasingly high water levels. Many didn't evacuate, and thousands of Black families were displaced.[1]

The value of nature had never been measured in Blackness. A glistening fishing spot and splotches of forest were more to the taste of the white people in those areas. History tells us relentlessly that white land has nothing to offer Black bodies, and the comfort of both racial groups could never be mutual in nature. These spaces have always belonged to the oppressor. The exclusion started when they conquered the land, then made us work tirelessly on it, then took it back by any means. If they saw fit to make more room for nature in their world, they would be sure it was solely for them and their enjoyment.

I learned to appreciate sunshine and fresh air during my first year of college. The COVID-19 pandemic had turned the campus into a ghost town, so my walks outside had gone mostly uninterrupted. I would sit at the picnic tables in front of the library and find solace in how green the grass was. I would breathe, close

[1] Diakite, Parker. "5 Black American Towns Hidden under Lakes and Ultimately from History Books." *Travel Noire*, July 9, 2021, travelnoire.com/black-american-towns-hidden.

my eyes, and bask in the warmth of the sun. Breathe again, look over my shoulder. Realize it was the sound of squirrels scouring the grass and trash cans for food, not footsteps. Sigh in relief, then hope I could enjoy five more minutes of this.

Attending a Predominantly White Institution after growing up in a Black county comes with caveats. I hadn't faced overt racism before, and aside from the Christmas party, any subtle racism has eluded me. In hindsight I can't say for sure if I had much reason to be so paranoid. My classmates were all nice, as were my professors. I'd seen other Black students around campus, though rarely in any of my classes. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that I shouldn't be outside.

I am unsure of whether Christian Cooper experienced that same feeling while birdwatching in Central Park. In 2020, Cooper captured video of a white woman who refused to put her dog on a leash, despite it being the park rules. He recorded her, as many other birders have before with unruly park-goers, and she weaponized both of their races to establish claim over her space. She called the police and emphasized that an African American man was recording and threatening to harm both her and her dog, which clearly wasn't the case on video. Cooper knew in this situation that his accolades—former assistant editor at Marvel Comics, senior editorial director at Health Science Communications, Ivy League graduate—would not protect him from the scary Black man stereotype, or the entitlement of this woman to let her dog vandalize the plants in the Ramble.[2] In that moment he was a Black man encroaching on a white space.

Social media has done well to emphasize these moments where Black people's enjoyment of nature were met with backlash. Black families have been harassed for having outdoor barbecues, Black children harassed for playing too loud outside, Black conservationists harassed while helping local families get connected with nature. In the eyes of many, nature is not a shared space, but rather one to be preserved from those who did not stake claim to it centuries ago. Nature is continuously kept under lock and key from Black people who simply wish to exist within it; our interest in partaking in the thrill of outdoor adventure has all but diminished.

[2] Betancourt, David. "Christian Cooper Hopes America Can Change. Because He's Not Going to." *The Washington Post* (WP Company, June 23, 2020), https://washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2020/06/23/christian-cooper-central-park-birder-comics/.

Our fears can, at times, be unfounded. In the moments that I looked over my shoulder while trying to enjoy the warm breeze and sunshine, I never encountered any problems for being outside. But, when I walk on campus at night, I still hope that I am recognizable as a student—that I have a place in this area. The social conditioning we endured has taught us to evade nature, and left many of us out of touch with our connection to the environment.

Nature has been used as a tool of oppression, a method of gatekeeping individuals from looking at the forests, oceans, and mountains as anything other than a means for resources. Black people have a right to go bouldering, to scuba dive, to stand in a public park and take pictures of the blooming flowers. Our space is shared between us.

If insects didn't exist, I'd be a little bit more eager to try hiking one day. My home in a largely flat state means greater exploration for hiking spots with the best scenery. I cross my fingers and hope that along the trail my presence doesn't disturb or unsettle those we pass. I drown my fears in the knowledge that the world is my own to walk on, too.

AFTER SIX HOURS

by CHARLOTTE WHITNEY

snow-burned fingertips itch
to pull hard on my roots.

shaking, chapped hands close over my throat,
gouge out wet eyes with dry nails.

if I looked down from outside what would I see?
scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle depicting something better,
poised to join your apple cores in the incinerator.

just a faltering step toward what's decent
good is unattainable.
love is impossible.

not even a yawning heart is on my side.
it screams to wake me under the covers.
the snow has buried me.
how alive I do not know.

Art by DANIEL WORKMAN

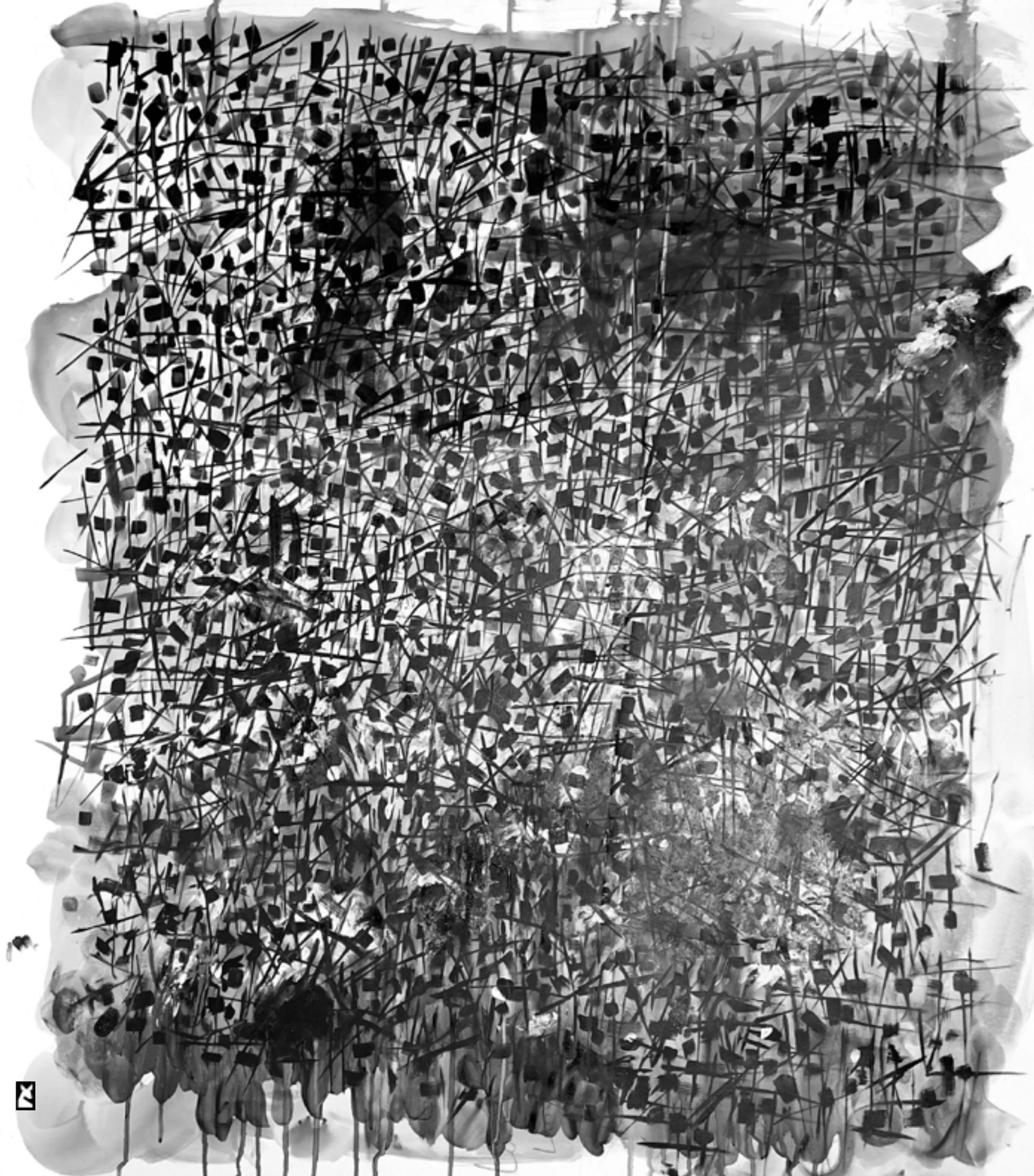
DEATH WITHOUT A SOUL AND THE SPACETIME BETWEEN US

by S.G. GREENE

Something's happened. Something's happening.

Sweat beads on your face as the controlling drum of your heart hammers away inside your chest. Just seconds before, reality seemed within your control—the sandwich in your hand was the main goal and the last half of the day was all that was ahead. A night of work, dinner, and maybe a movie or show to cap before you fall asleep in anticipation of doing it all again the next day. Earth dances on its axis as it revolves around the shortest and most convenient path around our local star.[1] The temporal illusion continues as you twist into the night. But now, your brain is firing so rapidly you cannot think. Are you having a heart attack? A stroke? Are you choking on the cheap bologna sandwich you lazily made yourself when you woke up? To choke on three dollars of low effort food would be the ultimate irony of a life not fully lived. Across the creek, at rest with you in the same local reference frame, the love of your life has emerged. For

[1] Thorne, Kip. *Black Holes & Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* (Commonwealth Fund Book Program). W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 551.



Art by LAYNE HUNT

a moment, your time is atomically synced with theirs. A soggy piece of mayo-ridden bread drops from your slack-jawed mouth. They have locked eyes with you. Panic seizes you! Of all days, bologna! The memory of you deciding to leave the rest of your porterhouse steak and seasoned wedge potatoes for dinner later that night screams at your consciousness. Damn fool! What person would be attracted to mayo-ridden white bread and questionable meat? You toast your poorly timed sandwich to the person across the creek and, to your surprise, they toast a mayo-dipped corn dog back. Your eyes dilate. Madness rushes in.

Something's happening. Something's happened.

Out beyond the influence of Earth's gravitational field, time speeds up. In an existence where Earth has not yet split its supercontinent into seven, a main-sequence star fuses hydrogen to helium in a dance of cosmic equilibrium.[2] Though this star is unaware of its existence, it is winning against the crushing force of gravity. Thermal energy radiates out from its fusing core and pushes against the will of the greater universe.[3] It is the ultimate need to survive happening entirely by physical circumstance. Indifferent to the fact that no planets orbit its might, the star floats through space in tandem with the galactic flow of its neighbors. Across the empty silence, something wanders through. Uncaring and unaware because it is a star, it does nothing. After a long journey through the galactic plane, the beaming little traveler finally finds the willing embrace of another object. Unbeknownst to the Main-Sequence star, one of the most furious things in the universe has altered its orbit. The two do not exchange words or gestures and there is no animosity projected from one to the other. The Main-Sequence star does not care that something called the Pauli Exclusion Principle is directly responsible for causing something called "degeneracy pressure," which in turn keeps the little diabolical corpse from imploding through the universe itself.[4] It does not know that the little radio pulsar wandering into its gravitational influence is the equivalent of a radioactive nuclear zombie that's on fire wandering into Grandpa Lou's annual Christmas party. It does not know that one day it will find another main-sequence star and prey on its energy to topple its Tolman-Oppenheimer-Volkoff Limit.[5] They both are indifferent to their futures because they are stars. All is well. All is normal.

Something's happened. Something's happening.

Just as the Main-Sequence and Radio Pulsar do not know of their own existences, you do not know of theirs. All you see is the human before you. All you feel is the spacetime between. Your fingers interlock and you feel the sensation of being intimate and close. Being any closer

[2] Ibid., p. 37.
[3] Begelman, Mitchell, and Martin Rees. *Gravity's Fatal Attraction: Black holes in the Universe*, 3rd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 24.
[4] Thorne, Kip. *Black Holes & Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* (Commonwealth Fund Book Program). W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 21.
[5] Ibid., pp. 193-196.

To be human is to know what this means.

would make you and them a star. No matter how hard you try, no matter how hard you press into one another, kissing their neck, their chest, their groin, you cannot fuse your soul into theirs. Skin rubs against skin. Sweat drips from your face to theirs and theirs to yours. Your hearts beat madly in unison and your nerves flare like a cosmic display. To a being that could see wavelengths in the infrared spectrum, you're both but red-orange silhouettes of energy trying to merge into one. But because your bodies cannot fuse so that your minds inhabit the same plane, you manifest a version of them in your head. Your inner selves align. When sitting alongside the creek eating your sad sandwich, you had never considered your place in the universe. Your life was a series of repetitive steps leading toward the inevitable. But then something awoke inside you. The world around became dismally apparent and then it struck you; what does it mean to be alive? Why are Earth and Sun not considered alive? The universe was not made as a playground for you to inhabit, you are just a product of cosmic happenstance. All things are born from energy. To be human is to know what this means. The sun cannot feel the electromagnetic radiation it emits, just as you cannot fuse with your love to create a singular entity. You stare into the eyes of the one who broke you free; a mortal being whose essence was forged in the same star as yours. Together, you are the afterlife of a star gone supernova, reunited in a gravity well that bore your existence. You both breathe the atmosphere like newborns struggling for their first breaths. Gazing into one another's eyes with a sort of clarity no other thing could comprehend. You picture yourself crawling out from the surface of the sun; born from a flare, the universe as Man but for the blink of the eye.

Something's happening. Something's happened.

As fast as it came, the Radio Pulsar accelerated away from the Main-Sequence. Two polar jets exploding from its poles flicker a message into the eternal night beyond.[6] For the Main-Sequence, it's not long before the little devil is but a blinking speck lost among the glare of its cosmic neighbors. To many curious eyes and feelers, the pulsar will be a discernable message necessitating

[6] Begelman, Mitchell, and Martin Rees. *Gravity's Fatal Attraction: Black Holes in the Universe*, 3rd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 44.

interpretation.[7] For the Main-Sequence, it would have been a fundamentally different future. The glaring radio beams are the cosmic equivalent of a relationship red flag. Even though they spin into the distance, the consequences of their brief interaction are irreversible. Through a slight perturbation in its elliptical orbit around the unknown host, its fate has been set. Another meeting is in motion. Had the Main-Sequence paired with the Pulsar, it might have had a better chance, whatever that might mean from a cosmic perspective. To keep its core burning? To keep fusing? To swell and collapse, only to explode into a spectacular fertile event? As it reaches apoapsis around the entity in which it is in orbit around, it joins its close neighbors in their uniform swing back toward the invisible apparition. They are linked. Less than a light year "down" its path, through the field of blazing jewel oases of the galactic center in which they reside, X-rays flicker off the horizon of a cosmic antichrist.[8] Its hunger **grows.**

Something's happened. Something's happening.

Ahead of you, your loved one runs away in a playful dance. Their hair blossoms in the wind as they lay their arms out to feel Earth's tickling embrace. You've never consumed alcohol, yet you feel intoxicated. Your body feels at once dense as steel and as weak as bologna. You run after them, afraid that they will soon be too far away for you to feel. Laughter fills the air as the long grass around you sways in the midday sun. You take their hand and together you spin, watching the cloud and sky swirl round and round. Something fills the space unseen; a frame of reference only the two of you could understand. All time is irrelevant. It is neither moving forward nor backward nor standing still. Millions upon millions of souls who reside in the same gravity well die every second. Millions fall in love. Millions grow old. Millions are born. Millions grow bored. Millions simply watch the night sky in total disbelief, growing restless fighting between curiosity and envy. The two of you rise above the planet, hand in hand, and twist into the night sky. The universe has no power in the reference frame of the human mind. You lie next to them and

[7] Thorne, Kip. *Black Holes & Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* (Commonwealth Fund Book Program). W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 42.
[8] Begelman, Mitchell, and Martin Rees. *Gravity's Fatal Attraction: Black Holes in the Universe*, 3rd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 59.

do something that the universe could never: imagine the future, the possibilities, the potential and best of all, new life to love. With a mindful twist of your body, you bend to the susurrating grass and pluck one of the fibers from Earth. With great care and focus, you twist it into a ring and hold it high for the wind to kiss. Your loved one's eyes open wide enough for the galaxy to spill in. You slip the earthen ring around their finger; it rains diamonds on other worlds, but not wood or grass; you are sure they are unique to home. With the knot tied, the future is set.

Something's happened. Something's happening.

If the Main-Sequence weren't a star, it might have begun to panic. Something was off, its field of view slightly different. Periapsis approaches. But with what? Bright flashes give away the looming beast's presence. They are different from the Radio Pulsar's morse—more random and indifferent to the universe beyond. The dark madness that is pulling the Main-Sequence in stalks the cosmic night, bending the light of the background stars around its perfectly smooth horizon. For the first time since its violent birth, the Main-Sequence feels its equilibrium being tested. A force it has never felt in its two-billion-year life tugs at its approaching face. The great entity is spinning. It uses its ungodly existence to claw at the Main-Sequence through the very fabric of spacetime. To the other stars in the galactic center, their sibling dims. Its light shifts as its essence is pulled around the horizon. Time begins to slow—the greater galaxy moves faster and faster through time as the Main-Sequence moves slower. With mass comes the burden of time.[9] A tendril of matter snakes from the facing surface of the Main-Sequence It spills around one end of the Black Hole's event horizon. It has entered its ergosphere—a point of no return. There is nothing in the universe that can stop the events unfolding, yet the Main-Sequence fights as if it can best the fundamentals of the universe. Cosmic equilibrium gives way to tidal disruption. The star is pushed and squeezed as its mass begins to accrete around the event horizon. Somewhere within, the jaws of something unimaginable pull at the mass as if it were starved of matter. The tendril of gas whips around the horizon of the black prison, exploding all its light to the opposite side.[10] With the blinding flash of tens of trillions of Suns, a ring is formed.[11] The bind is set. The demon is alive and feasting. Slow matter rubs against fast matter, and it falls inside in a grand display of law and power. The remains of the sun are whipped far into space into a future from which it had been briefly lost.[12] The Antichrist screams forth two magnetic beams of indescribable power in an act of indifferent hubris and bravado for all the universe to see. With the knot tied, the future is set.

[9] Thorne, Kip. *Black Holes & Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* (Commonwealth Fund Book Program). W. W. Norton & Company, 1995, p. 100.
[10] Ibid., p. 549.
[11] Begelman, Mitchell, and Martin Rees. *Gravity's Fatal Attraction: Black holes in the Universe*, 3rd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 59-60.
[12] Thorne, Kip. *Black Holes & Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy (Commonwealth Fund Book Program)*. WW Norton & Company, 1995, p. 100.

A calamity has come.

A calamity is coming.

With the booming force of the universe channeled through your organic vessel, your heart thunders with apoplectic fear. You can feel every tendril in your body, every fighting cell. Your knees are at risk of shattering from weakness, yet something is keeping you moving along. The glare is blinding. You squint as you pass under light after light down a hall that seems to never end. Your irises dilate, letting all the spectrum in as the radiation encircles the horizon of your eyes. There seems to not be enough air to breathe yet you manage to drink it in. There are other people running around you, indifferent to your presence. You are there but not there. All focus is upon the pale husk of a human whose clammy hand has never slipped from the indestructible grip of your own. The gurney drifts at a hard right angle into a room that seems even brighter. Figures resembling humans run about the room in a hurry. They are a blur, operating outside the influence of your own gravitational pull. For you, time moves faster. The fabric seems to be slipping through your fingers as they gain viscosity. You touch the hand of the one you love. There is no heat. Their skin grows cold. You feel other arms and hands pulling you away, but there is no budging you. You feel something they cannot feel. You see something they cannot see. You stare into the radiating lights of the operating room and all light begins to bend to your will.

You know where they are.

You know where they are going.

With a trembling roar of agony, you feel the Calamity at the other end of the universe. In a single bound, you disappear into the void through a visceral tunnel of space and time. Tears stream down your face as all the universe bends before you in a singular circle of light and matter.[13] A spiral galaxy appears, and you see its horrible taunting beams of insurmountable power. Dust gives way and stars bend round your all-seeing hemisphere. Within a second, the universe snaps back into position. Everything you've known has been lost entirely. Before you, the Calamity awaits in stubborn silence. You skim along its accretion plane and feel your very soul begin to stretch. A glaring ring of fire burns along the black sphere's silhouette as light from behind is bent around. Fear nearly takes you whole.

You find a hand in the blinding light.

Two solemn eyes stare into yours.

You have found them.

You squeeze hold of the departing hand as the two of you slide closer to the black horizon of purgatory. You stare into their eyes, uncaring of the spherical nightmare pulling you in. Your bodies begin to stretch. You see their legs grow thin along the boundaries of nothing and everything, and everything and nothing. The black curve of an unknown dimension of space spills around the horizon on one side of you and on the other the universe bends with the spin of time. You see them shed a tear and shake their head no. The grip of their hand loosens, and they gently slip free.

[13] Thorne, Kip. *Black Holes & Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy (Commonwealth Fund Book Program)*. WW Norton & Company, 1995, p. 42.

"Don't!" you scream, but your voice carries away in a screaming pitch.[14]

A gentle look settles on their face as their body is pulled. Their being begins to shift away to the red. They see the anguish in your eyes and spread their arms wide for one last distant embrace. Their mouth opens as they recede into the darkness. A song graces your ears as its very essence is slowly redshifted from existence; the loving voice you once knew slowly becomes demonic and baritone.[15]

"M.a.y.b.e…y..o..u'll…t..h..i..n..k…o…f….m.e…w…h….e**….n…y.….o.….u.….a.….r.….e**……**a.….l.….l.….a.……l.……o.……n.……e.……**"

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They are frozen. Time stops. You feel the pull. You feel the crashing of your heart hundreds of millions of light years away. Four pairs of hands seize your thrashing body and force you to the ground as the monitor chimes a monotonous tone. Your old body feels young again as the adrenaline pumps from the glands to the heart. A needle plunges into your neck and you feel suddenly very calm. Your bygone mind relaxes against the floor as a warm cloth is laid across your forehead. Your heart beats once and, from across the gulf of space and time, you feel it beat once more. The face of the one you loved is frozen in your head at the precipice of unknowing eternity.[16]

There they remain. ꕥ

[14] Ibid., pp. 100-104; 556.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p. 42.

Art by DANIEL WORKMAN

TO: EMMA

by JOAN McENHILL

Siblinghood is fickle. Each sibling grows at their own pace, or they don't. Each finds their own interests, or they don't. And each has the freedom to be their own person, or they don't. They are hopelessly intertwined and every decision that one makes will irreversibly affect the other.

Or maybe I'm just talking out of my ass.

More than that, we are twins. We are imperfect halves of each other, and everything we say and do reflects upon the other. The lives that we live will never be separate from each other, and I want you to know:

I don't want them to change.

I care about you more than anything else.

Get your own life.

Why are we always seen together on the tips of people's tongues?

You are the most important person in my life.

I love you.

We're sitting in the car together, prompted by our shared wanderlust. I hold something close to my chest as you hold the wheel. We talk about errands, dancing around our father's deteriorating health. We laugh about a video you showed me. You avoid looking in my eyes so I don't remind you of mom. It's a tense dance, more so than those of our youth, you might joke. But that doesn't leave your lips because you know that's not true.

"I guess that's where it all started."
"What do you mean?"
"Well, most of my problems probably came from that dance studio."
"..."
"..."
"Yeah, same."

They could all be traced back to that Russian lady, one Teresa Lubarsky—whom I have to thank for my social anxiety, you for your issue with authority—and a joint "thank you" for our body dysmorphia. That was something that we wished we didn't do together, because then at least one of us wouldn't have to carry the baggage given to us by that lady's crushed dreams.

I sat behind the painted door on the sticky Marley, trying to hide from everyone. You put rosin on your pointe shoes that caused haunting physical and emotional damage. We are not the same.

"We definitely were the same. I mean, look at us now."
"Actually—truthfully, respectfully—no fucking way were we the same."
"What."
"At least you were talking to people."
"Yeah, but the people I was talking to sucked."

Whether we liked it or not, dance was the hobby we shared for the longest time. We fell in and out of love with it around the same time, but we still look back fondly at our formative years and wish we could warn four-year-old us not to do ballet.

We broke apart after that, after class at least. In school, we were still Joan and Emma. Emma and Joan. The twins.

Attending different high schools helped us find each other. It finally felt like we could be our own people. And it also finally felt like we found a good reason to stay out of the house, away from Mom and Dad. We started working in restaurants sophomore year and even as I type this I dread my upcoming shift as a busser, just as I did when our mom still drove us around.

I don't remember much from our last dinner as a family, just the clinking of forks against plates. The small talk always made me feel like we could get along, until you and mom inevitably transitioned, flawlessly, into argument. After that I would run back and forth trying to repair the damage from her comment about your body; all while she forgets my name.

"Dad's always easier to talk to."
"Says you."
"Am I wrong?"
"He's easier to talk to for you, I feel like he hates me most of the time."
"Well—"
"I don't think he likes me all that much."

He took you halfway across the state so you could go to an aquarium together and he looks at me like I'm a stranger when I ask him for help around the house. I hate how different we are. The amount of time that he invests in you and your interests makes me so *happy* I want to

That was something that we wished we didn't do together, because then at least one of us wouldn't have to carry the baggage given to us by that lady's crushed dreams.

throw up. I've spent so many nights crying my eyes out because my dad threatened to hit me when I asked him if he could play catch with me. I wanted that cliché experience with him and I couldn't even get that. And now we can't even say anything bad about him because of his condition, but I'm just so tired. He doesn't like me. He never has and I'm tired of pretending that it's okay. I want my dad to act like small talk with me isn't the deepest we're ever going to get. Let me spend time with him, let him realize that he messed up with me, and he's why I flinch whenever a man raises his voice. Let me just have that.

I know Mom is better with me than she is with you, but not by much. I know how to talk to her, and I know how to talk to you, but neither of you knows how to do that for each other. I'm a bona fide translator in my own childhood home because of the disconnect between mother and daughter.

"I'm sorry."
"Parents suck."

But you don't. We might have our differences.

The way we fight.

Who we like and who we talk about over lunch.

Our taste in music.

What we want to do with our lives.

The ways we show love.

The ways we don't.

But, you'll always be my sister.

There will never be anyone I'm more willing to confide in. No one can match your skills with a rolling pin. No one else with whom I can communicate sans words. No one who understands the joy and hardship of having our parents and our lives. Ultimately, you're my other half. I'd say you're the better half and you'd say the opposite and that argument wouldn't get us anywhere.

Being siblings with you is hard.

But you know what?

You couldn't be anyone else.

"Hey."
"Yeah?"
"You know I love you, right?"
"Yeah, I do."
"I love you, too."

Art by LAURA PETERSON

SALTED COFFEE

by SOPHIE WAYMAN

BANG! The gun goes off and my legs start pumping. My new track spikes comfortably grip the surface as I gracefully sprint the ever-so-familiar 400m oval. I know every turn by heart and have memorized the precise number of steps I need to take until I have to round another corner. As adrenaline courses through my veins and into every single muscle in my body, my mind is free to wander back to where it all began.

My long-distance best friend, Eloise, calls me every morning and helps me drag myself out of bed. We make coffee together and sweeten it until it stings, because somehow a few of my tears always drip-drop into the mug.

Saltwater and burnt coffee beans, delightful.

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I tell her that everything exhausts me, that I don't know what I'm going to do after I get this degree.

I miss you more than I've ever missed anybody, because when you are not here, I feel like I have wandered too far out of my own skin. Everything feels hot and bitter and empty and foreign. Now that I've had a taste of your presence, being without it seems impossible. You forever linger on the tip of my tongue and in the back of my mind. I don't know how I did it before, and I don't ever want to do it again. So please just stay. For me, please just stay.

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I slip on my brand-new Twinkle Toes sparkly shoes that my grandmother bought for me during our routine back-to-school shopping trip. Horribly ugly, I realize now. But four-year-old me was enamored by their beauty. The cheap, plasticky feeling engulfed my feet and the bright-pink leather wings put a bounce in my step on the way home. But really, the only thing that mattered is that if all the other girls wore them, I had to wear them too. When I left school that first day, I realized my shoes were the only ones streaked with mud—the only ones with sticky burrs tangled up in the dusty laces.

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So I move on and do as I'm told and just exist. She reads me her old poetry. We both thank God we don't write like that anymore, while knowing we will hate everything we've written today in approximately a month. Can you ever really win with your art?

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Middle school. I strutted into school with a—let's call it unique—sense of style. I rocked my Vibram FiveFinger shoes with socks that individually hugged each of my toes like a warm winter glove. I was so proud to show off my new shoes to my

P.E. teacher, who gave a presentation to the class on the benefits of barefoot running. I could hear the soft murmurs and giggles when she showed them to the class. I realized that as I began to embrace myself, I had a smaller circle of friends that were like me. I grew sad that I couldn't be more like the other girls. Why did I think like this? I guess that I so badly wanted to fit in that I risked washing away my true identity in order to conform to the mold.

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She tells me to make soup, that it helps her. I go to the farmers market and pick up aromatic heirloom tomatoes and sticky yellow onions and brightly-scented cloves of garlic. I see an old lady with gray hair pick out strawberries. We make brief eye contact. Ease, I think. Youth, she thinks. Can we swap? If only I knew that she fears death. If only she knew that I fear life.

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I stepped off the train and rode up the crowded escalator to a bustling street filled with faces. Old and young cascaded with rainbow attire. I immediately felt overwhelmed with joy and a sense of belonging as I rushed over to join the parade heading towards the Civic Center Plaza. My Old Skool Vans with rainbow soles carried me through the crowd of smiling, laughing faces. Each of these people carries a story with them, similar to my own. I had hidden my identity for so long but carried it with me every day on the soles of my feet. I lay down on the wet plaza grass and kicked my feet up, exposing the worn rainbow pattern for all to see.

Looking up at the sky as music played and as the crowds of unique faces and stories engulfed me. This feeling was almost melancholic. It was unsettling to be the same as everyone else. This time, I wanted to be different. I wanted to stand out. I needed to. I needed people to know who I was.

ꕥ ꕥ

"The grass is always greener on the other side, I guess," I tell Eloise when I get back home. She watches me cut onions and

cry. Holding me as tight as she can from so far away. Just some more salt water in my food, as if my body doesn't have enough. This is nice, I say. It's like we're in Ratatouille, she says. I tell her I wish I could just live in her pocket and watch her do even the most mundane things like watering her plants or walking to work. Or even when she's in the midst of a war with her own everything, I need to be there for her. And my dear, it's platonic and it's perfect. Oh, how dearly I miss her.

As I continued to grow up, my view of myself did, too. I realized that my shoes were, literally and metaphorically, the foundation of how I was perceived. Why should I care what people think about me and how I dress? The day before my first high school cross country meet, I slipped on my rainbow Hoka One One shoes. Perfectly shaped to my feet, the result of endless miles on the trails.

I found comfort in the black dust caked on the soles. The same sticky burrs tightly enveloping the laces that pinched my fingers when I tied them. I didn't care that they were there. In fact, it's a sign of my love for myself. Perfectly imperfect and sometimes that's painful. It hurts to not be seen as the right one.

"Maybe in another lifetime. I know we're not anything anymore, but it hurts to see you thrive without me. I went into this knowing it wouldn't last. I can't deal with you anymore."

I don't know how to come back from that. Parts of me ripped away with a single text message. Little white letters quickly typed on a screen in a matter of seconds, destroying me for a matter of years. And as you sat there on the edge of my bed giving me advice about the future you knew you wouldn't be in, I stared at you with all the love you did not return. And now you sit and watch my profile pictures change and I watch yours like you didn't promise me you were going to stay.

Everything exhausts me. What will I do after this degree? I mourn the loss of her even though she's not really gone. I hear her voice every day and we talk and laugh, but somehow, it's not the same. I can't feel her laughter radiate through my chest and her smile seems dim through the screen. She left two years ago to go live on the other side of the world.

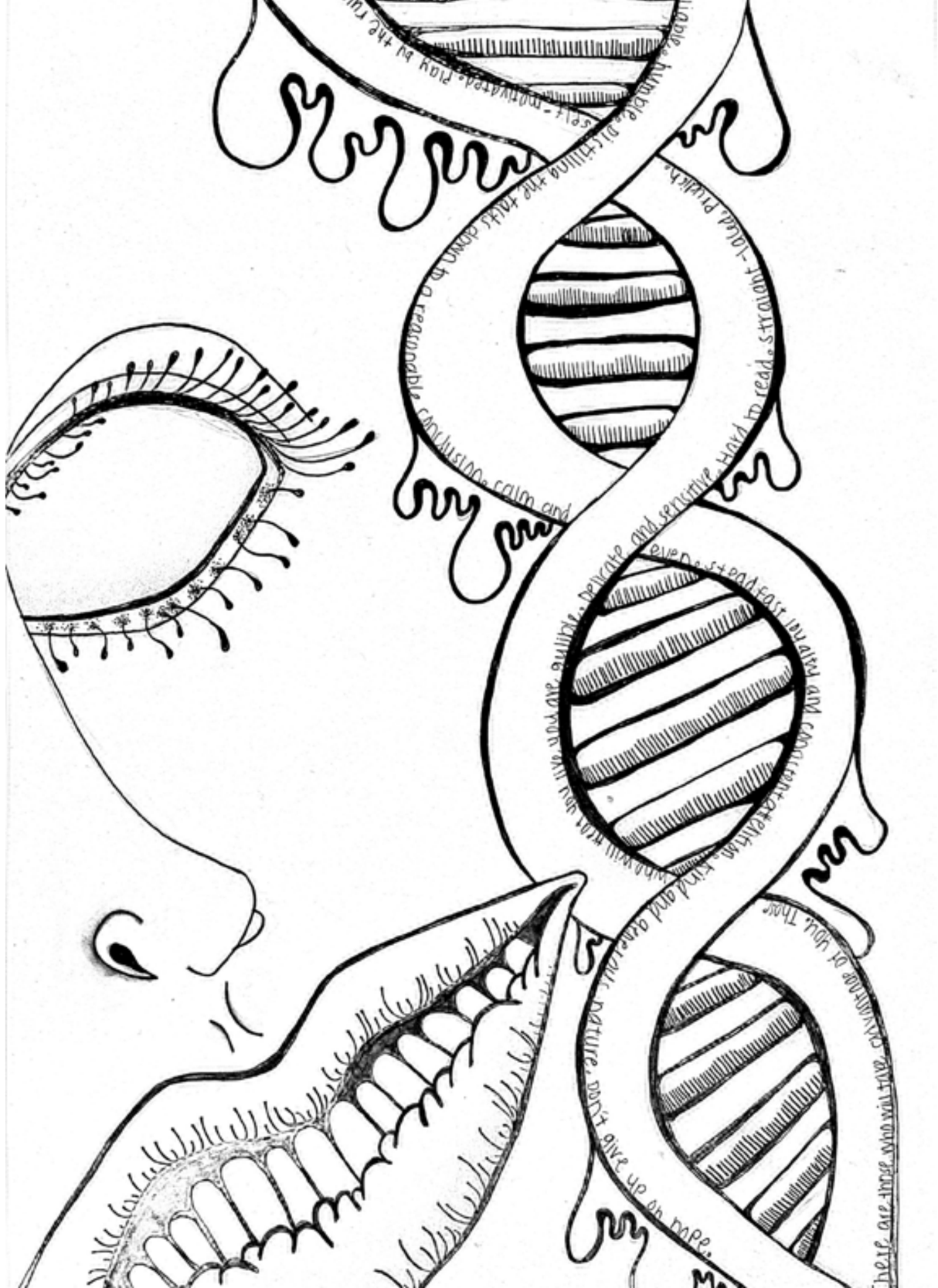
But every day, we still make coffee together and sweeten it until it stings. Because somehow, a few of my tears always drip-drop into the mug.

Salt water and burnt coffee beans, tragic.

BANG! The gun goes off and I sprint into the front pack of runners, carefully dodging the feet of others with swinging ponytails and clouds of dust swirling around me. I cross the finish line, feeling overwhelmed with emotion. This time, I'm happy. I am at peace with who I have become, and I am ready to take on the world.

I never thought it would come down to this. Me and her, and her and I. Approximately 5,217 miles away. She makes her coffee at night, and I make mine in the morning. She used to drink it black, but ever since she left, she joins me in adding cream and sugar. Sometimes I think that things got too overwhelming for her and that's why she left. I don't hold it against her, and she doesn't hold it against me for not coming with her.

Ç'est la vie.



ARE YOU BETTER?

by VIVIAN LUCKIW

XX

"Are you better?" Jack asks abruptly as he sits down across from me. He's looking right at me with a pensive look in his eyes.

Both Hannah and I look up from our food. Before now, it was quiet, all of us eating or doing homework, and I don't think either of us expected it to be broken so suddenly.

"What are you talking about?" I ask, setting my fork down on my plate.

"You know, your thing." He makes a sweeping gesture towards his lower abdomen. I look down at my own. "Your period thing. Is it better?"

I blink and look back up. Hannah now shares the same expression as Jack, both of them looking at me, waiting for my answer.

"Better?" I ask quietly.

Art by LIV TIERNEY

XI

You're weeping. Most days, you're sobbing like you're about to die. You're lucky that today you're only weeping as you step out of the car, the two boys you carpool with stumbling out behind you.

"Don't worry," Annette says as she leans out of the driver's seat. "I know what's been going on. Your mom told me everything. Every girl starts out her period this way. It'll get better once you get used to it."

You sniffle. A couple of girls in your grade shoot you judgmental glares. You turn red, a little embarrassed, and you lean back into Annette's car. "How did you? Get used to it, I mean?"

Annette shrugs. "With time." She gives you a sage-like smile. "And it'll happen for you too, eventually. You just have to be patient."

You nod slowly and step back onto the street, slamming the door behind you. Annette's dark blue minivan pulls away, leaving you standing alone in the one place you dreaded most of all. That morning, you had begged your mother to let you stay home from school. It felt like you were drowning in a sea of hellfire, and you didn't think you could make it. She had you take a couple of ibuprofen with your morning probiotics and told you to power through. If you needed to, you could go see the school nurse, and she'd come pick you up.

As you shuffle into the cold, concrete building, your face is still red from your tears and embarrassment. It's almost as red as the blood you can feel leaking through the night-time pad you'd put on maybe a half hour before. You stare at the three flights of stairs you need to take to your classroom, the burning in your abdomen as persistent as ever.

Yeah, you'd probably end up going to the school nurse today, just like you had every day for the past two weeks. Hopefully she'd be a little more sympathetic today than she normally is.

XII

"I can't seem to find anything wrong with her," Dr. Best—or, as you call him, Dr. Worst—says as he shows your mother the pictures of the scope he performed.

"Then what could be causing her pain?" your mom asks, worry painting her voice.

"Through my best medical knowledge?" Dr. Best scratches his chin and shoots you a brief look, and you almost glare at him. You hate how he only addresses your parent, and never you. "A lot of young women at this age—especially those as emotional as your daughter—go through bouts of hysteria. Some can be so powerful as to convince them there's something actually wrong with their body. She's just scared about her periods, and her hysteria is causing her to believe she's in actual pain. You need to stop giving in to her delusions, and eventually, it'll stop. She won't have a reason to pretend anymore."

He never even looked at you when he spouted off all that bullshit. How qualified is a gastroenterologist to diagnose you with a serious mental disorder, especially since you're certain none of this is in your head? Why won't he just listen to you?

XIII

Your parents had been trying the 'ignore the problem' solution Dr. Worst suggested. Since then, you still complain of fiery pain and near-constant periods on a daily basis. But now, they either ignore you or tell you to stop. Nothing can convince them that you still need help.

Maybe this will, you think as you walk into your mother's bathroom. It's 10 at night, she tucked you in an hour ago, and for the third time in twelve days, you bleed through your bedsheets. It was so bad tonight that you threw up on top of it all as well.

Your legs shake, struggling to keep you upright as you walk into the bathroom. Blood leaking down your legs, vomit drying on your shirt, and tears making shiny paths on your face. You're too afraid to speak, since there's a decent chance you'll start screaming at the top of your lungs.

Mom catches a look at you in the mirror. Her hands stop scrubbing at her face as she stares at you, a look of sheer horror frozen on her face. The air is heavy with silence, save for the running faucet and the heavy breathing you're struggling to control.

XIV

It's only one more month. One month until you find out what exactly is wrong with you.

When you finally convinced your mom to take you for a second opinion, you found a much better doctor. Dr. White is a pediatric gynecologist, and she said she had a few ideas about the issues you're facing. She refused to tell you what those ideas were, since she didn't want you exploring WebMD, which is fair, but still kind of frustrating.

You're in too much pain to walk for more than a couple minutes consecutively, so your parents pulled you out of middle school for the last half of the year. According to Jessica, there's a rumor going around that you died. People are even saying they went to your funeral. Whatever. You don't really care about denying it. You already feel dead anyway.

You try to push yourself farther into the couch, hoping that you could disappear into it. Everything sucks.

Your dad walks in, handing you a bowl of Kraft dinner before settling down to watch season four of *Supernatural* with you. You hold back a sigh and ignore the tear sliding down your cheek as you dig into the food.

XV

"Congratulations. You're one in ten," Dr. White says dryly as she walks into the room.

You look at her, scrunching your eyebrows together in confusion. Your hands let go of where they were toying with the examination table's paper. "What do you mean?"

She gently sits down in her chair, mindful of her pregnancy belly. "You have what's called endometriosis. Stage four," she calls it. That word feels both vindicating and threatening at the same time. You lay a hand on your bloated, scarred stomach. Although you may be very sick, at least you know that you were never crazy.

"Essentially, what happens is the tissue that grows on the inside of your uterus is growing on the outside, all over your other organs. The tissue on the outside still menstruates, but unlike what's in your uterus, it has nowhere to go, causing a vicious cycle inside your body." She shifts in her seat, trying to keep herself comfortable.

XVI

A school trip is supposed to be fun. But instead, you're locked in a San Francisco hotel room, unable to move because you're in too much pain.

Within the past year, you've been on seven different medications—both hormones and painkillers. While your periods are a lot more under control time-wise, your pain is not, and it's still incredibly hard to move. Even physical therapy hasn't been that helpful. Before coming on this trip, you switched to a new medication called naproxen with the hope it will help. So far, it has not.

Your A/V teacher was supposed to be helping you if you were having any troubles, as mandated by your school's disability plan. But tonight, she ignored your pleas for help and went to get white-girl wasted with her colleagues while all your classmates snuck out to a fancy lobster restaurant for dinner. That left you here, completely alone, watching old cartoons on cheap hotel TV.

Your parents didn't pay almost a thousand dollars for you to be stuck in your hotel room shackled down by your pain, did they? If they wanted that, they should've just given you a thousand dollars. It may still have hurt physically, but the emotional ache wouldn't have been half as bad.

XVII

As you hobble through the city, you wonder if it was truly the best idea.

Oh, you don't regret graduating early. Not in the slightest. Your high school was hell, and getting out of there was the best idea you've ever made.

But university in Chicago? Maybe not. As much as you love the city and your friends, your

You look down and grimace.

mobility has become much more of an issue than ever before. Without your parents or doctors nearby, you don't have a proper support structure, and all you can do is call them every once in a while, and try to make do.

Originally, the cane was your idea, technically, since you didn't want the wheelchair your doctor prescribed. Your pain is as bad as ever, maybe even worse, and you're finding it more and more difficult to move around. So, Dr. White floated the idea of a wheelchair. Being so far away from her, you don't really have access to one, so a cane is the next best thing.

You look down and grimace. You're not sure if you're walking with it right. People are definitely looking at you weird. All the attention is making you want to curl into a ball and start sobbing.

"Hey, bitch!" some ragged looking man yells as you trudge by him. "How dare you do something like that!"

"I cannot believe you would mock the disabled like that!" A woman your age fingers her invisible pearls.

An old couple turn their noses up at you. "Girls these days are attention-seeking monsters. I wonder if her parents are proud of their 'cripple' daughter."

But you are crippled. Technically. Right?

It never works well with the cane, but you try to walk faster anyway. You probably look ridiculous, but it's all you can do to get back to your dorm faster and start searching for universities closer to home.

XVIII

"So, I've read your medical history, and—"

"I want a hysterectomy," you blurt out, interrupting Dr. Jones. Honestly, with these massive masks over everyone's faces, you were only 60% sure she was even speaking.

Dr. Jones, your *adult* gynecologist, blinks in surprise. "Can you tell me why?"

You sigh and firmly look her in the eye. "I've known since I was 15 that I can't have kids. I'm having constant issues with pain, and meds, and mobility. Hell, I couldn't stay in Chicago because of all the complications! I'm just done!" You take a composing breath. "I'm so fucking done, doctor. This is the best option for me." The paper on the bed crinkles beneath your anxious fingers.

"If you want it, then you've researched it. That means you

know that this isn't a cure for endometriosis. There isn't one at all."

"But this is the next best thing. I know that it would be best for me. And if it helps even a little better than all of those insane medications, then I'm willing to do it." You straighten your back, trying to display your absolute certainty. "Please, Dr. Jones."

She clicks her pen and sets it down on the clipboard. "I'll look into it. After reviewing your chart, it may well be the best thing for you. But you need to know that just getting the surgery is a long process. We don't typically do it for young, unmarried women. There's going to be a mental evaluation, a thorough review of your medical records, and so much more. This conversation is only the beginning."

XIX

This is, what? Your third appointment with someone who isn't your gynecologist? First a psychologist, then a gastroenterologist, and now it's… a fertility doctor. Wonderful. You sigh, running a hand through your hair. At least it's over Zoom so you don't have to go into the city.

The screen lights up, signaling that the receptionist has arrived. She starts by smiling at the camera, but once she sees your face, she barely covers the blatant shock that crosses it.

"I thought I was talking to someone who was considering a hysterectomy," she says, as if you're not the name on her schedule.

You fake a smile. "You are, ma'am. I'm the one getting a hysterectomy."

"But you're young! Why would you waste yourself like this?" she basically yells at me.

Your smile feels a lot tighter. "Because I'm sick, ma'am. I need to have the surgery for my own wellbeing."

The woman opens her mouth like she wants to argue, but quickly closes it. She wants to try and convince you not to, like everyone else, but at least she has the decency to stop before she starts. You're tired of listening to people who think they know your problems trying to tell you that they aren't that bad.

The woman begins her little speech. This time, you're being talked at about either freezing your eggs or donating them. You're more than happy to hear what she has to say, as long as she and everyone else to whom Dr. Jones sends you stop trying to keep

you from your hysterectomy. Nothing anyone says can convince you that having your uterus is better than not. They don't know what you've been through.

So, it was the psychologist, then the gastroenterologist, now the fertility doctor. Was there anyone else? Or can you finally be deemed ready?

XX

I stroll up the driveway, walking through the door without knocking. Honestly, it would probably only annoy them, and it's not like they care, so I just walk in the door, taking careful steps to compensate for my tender abdomen.

I can hear Jack and Hannah in the kitchen, so I step around Jack's tubs of LEGO and walk down the short hall. Jack is standing by the stove, cooking. Judging by the smell, it's a copycat of his mother's biscuits and gravy. He sees me and gives me a short "hey," before popping the biscuits in the oven. Hannah is at the table with her laptop open, clearly frustrated with whatever she's working on. She looks at me and smiles. I walk to the table and set my tote down before carefully taking the chair next to hers, looking over her shoulder at the paper she's writing. I pull out my sketchbook to start my own homework—the perks of being an art-adjacent major.

I can feel Jack's eyes on the top of my head. I'm not sure why he's staring at me. He seems thoughtful, like he wants to say something but he's too scared. Looking up, I shoot him a vaguely annoyed glare. He startles a bit before turning his eyes back to his cast-iron. Why was he looking at me like that? I sigh, shrugging it off before Hannah and I get up and start making our plates.

FOLLOWING EQUINOX

by CHARLOTTE WHITNEY

Let us be gentle.
Now, when branches are beginning to soften in the wind
and the moonlight seems to bathe the streets longer every night.

Let's fall into the languid rhythms of the grass,
breathing in the final rays of sunlight before sleep.

Let's slow our heartbeats
while we walk under streetlights wearing old jackets.
Let's clutch blankets,
grasp hands,
breathe words,
sing them.
Write them down.

Let us be gentle while the air allows.
Let's share plates,
and touch,
and dappled shadows cast by the growing cumulus
that herald the new world.

Let us be gentle,
for the clouds have asked us to be.

Art by ELIJAH PETTET

BLUE FISH

by DELANEY HARTMANN

I am eighteen months old, flying through the sky. The chains that suspend me hit their peak, and I soar back down towards my dad's open palms, waiting to push the swing again. This is our Saturday morning routine. We eat scrambled eggs and sausage—he cuts mine into little pieces—pack the stroller with water bottles and toys, and head to the neighborhood playground. Once I tire of the swing, Dad lets me waddle around the park and explore. I examine shiny pebbles and run my fingers through blades of grass. I learn to trust that my legs will hold me.

My favorite feature of the playground is a large, plastic, blue fish. The fish is hollowed out in the middle to provide a bench and handle so that children can rock back and forth. Essentially a rocking-horse, this fish is my favorite because of its smooth plastic skin and big eyes. Sitting on its bench, I use the weight of my body to tip forwards and backwards, enjoying the way my stomach flips with the movement. I watch as a mother and her son approach my rocking-fish. The mother makes small talk with Dad, probably discussing the weather.

Art by LINDSEY LEWIS

"Your daughter is so cute, and so tiny!" she says suddenly to Dad.

She doesn't know that she has hit a sore spot, as my dad and mom are concerned about my health. I was born with complications, and I am much smaller than other eighteen-month-olds. Dad tries to direct the conversation back to the weather, but the mother keeps discussing my size, and how "she can't be more than ten months old!"

Dad tells her that I am eighteen months old, and she suggests that I need to be fed more. She tells Dad that her son, Jeffrey, is two years old and so smart! As she says this, Jeffrey walks towards the fish I play on.

He points at the fish, walks back to his mother and says "Wawa! Wawa!" His mother is thrilled.

"Yes, Jeffrey, that's water! Great job." She looks to Dad and brags, "See, Jeffrey knows all sorts of things!"

I climb off the fish's bench and walk towards Jeffrey. I look him in the eye, point at the fish, and say clearly, "Blue. Fish." Dad suppresses a laugh and looks at the mother.

"I think she'll be alright," he says.

I am eight years old, in third grade. During my time in elementary school, I have learned that boys and girls are different. Boys are good at sports and girls are good at crafts. Boys are strong and girls are sweet.

I stand on the sidelines while the boys play soccer, even though I just got new cleats.
I keep my hands in my lap, even when I know the answer to the teacher's question.
I stay quiet when one boy bullies another, even though I know it's wrong.

I am eleven, in middle school.

I let the boy in Spanish class lead our presentation, even though I practiced for longer.
I sing quietly in choir, even though I know all the words.
I hear that boys are better at math than girls.

I am sixteen, in high school.

I don't speak up when a boy grabs a girl's ass without consent.
I let it slide when a teacher makes a sexist comment.
I learn to question myself.

I am twenty-one, and I meet with my therapist every week. Our topics of conversation change frequently, but there is a common thread. I want to know: How do I unlearn my cultural conditioning? I tell my therapist that I don't want to be small or quiet or demure. I want to be a woman who takes up space, speaks her mind, and is confident in herself. This process of unlearning is slow, and it is not linear. But over time, a sense of rebellion builds up inside me, and it fuels my confidence. It becomes easier to take up space and speak my mind. I raise my hand during lectures and stand up for people who need an ally. I feel increasingly comfortable demanding respect. Sometimes, my confidence falters. I tell myself that I am too bossy, or too opinionated, or too bold. But I am reminded by my therapist, my mother, and my friends that these are words given to women who can't be controlled. I do not want to be controlled.

Over many years, the conviction I was born with was teased out of me. This life teaches young girls to sit back and shut up, and it does so with impunity. If they are lucky, these girls might get the chance to unlearn this sexist conditioning, just like I am trying to do.

If I know that it's a blue fish, I say so.

Art by JULIA SMITH

MY DAD AND THE GAY SOLDIER

by MICHAEL McGUIRE

My father liked to tell war stories. When I was growing up, he told them all the time, and retold them. I was never his best witness to these alpha male narratives of bravado, preferring my Beatles records, or Mad magazine, or baking a Betty Crocker cake with mom. I had stopped hearing them after I left home. However, he had apparently withheld one particular story all his life, the one I'd always needed to hear, until a summer day's lunch when he finally told it to me.

The 1970's were winding down in San Francisco. Disco still ruled. Donna Summer and the Bee Gees were on the radio, along with the Village People extolling the virtues of the Young Men's Christian Association. My father would have been oblivious to all that. Popular culture was rapidly passing him by, as mirrored in the recent death of his hero John Wayne. Meanwhile I was still drunk on my youth and autonomy, having left home and moved to what was then being called a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. Such was the dichotomy of those years, reconciling the bright thrill of my newly minted

adulthood with the darkness of the Jonestown mass suicide, and the assassinations of Harvey Milk and George Moscone. My father commuted into the city from the suburbs. I was just beginning my professional life, and he was on the brink of retirement. Briefly, our working lives had overlapped, and our office buildings stood five blocks apart.

My dad and I had a fraught relationship. We were never more than an unsolicited opinion away from a verbal brawl—he the WWII veteran, devout Catholic and social conservative, who had voted both Nixon and Reagan into office, and myself, the gay rebel iconoclast who threatened every one of his cherished but unquestioned beliefs. If you had asked me then what I thought about my dad, I'd have told you unequivocally that I hated him. Despite our physical proximity we rarely met. A shroud of animosity had always obscured one from the other. A few years before, he had egregiously mistreated me when he discovered the truth of my sexual preference and had never apologized. But occasionally a forgiving light broke through the murk that separated us, and I'd receive an invitation to lunch at his men's club.

My father relied on the comfort of routine, and these lunch dates always followed a strict play book. I'd wait outside his building at a punctual 11:55 a.m., then we'd walk the two blocks to the Merchants Exchange Club at the corner of California and Leidesdorff Streets. The maître d' would always seat him at his usual table. He'd always order the fillet of sole with a ramekin of tartar sauce on the side, and I always chose spaghetti with meatballs and a Coke. We'd exchange pleasantries, deferentially avoiding toxic topics like the Dan White verdict, or Anita Bryant's Save Our Children campaign. We'd steer towards the safety of a banal shore instead, updating each other on sibling news. A well-tread and familiar plot, these luncheons always followed the same quotidian scenario, governed by the ordinary and the non-controversial. But on this particularly warm and sunny day, once those usual niceties were dispensed with, the highly unusual occurred: My dad wanted to tell me a war story.

Contaminated as I was by the gay, ultra-liberal society of San Francisco.

I have always believed my dad could only understand the world through the prism of his experience in WWII. And I'm sure he saw me as understanding nothing of the world at all, contaminated as I was by the gay, ultra-liberal society of San Francisco. Forever trying to interpret the modern world as seen

I was still trying to process that bombshell of a revelation when the tale took off.

through a war-torn America, nothing else made sense to him. This failure to grasp the necessities of change and progress was put in stark relief when the 1960's rolled around, and the shifting social norms and cultural values were upended and redefined by the generation I belonged to. Threatened to his core, that set in motion the generational conflict between us, which then escalated to operatic proportions when homosexuality was added, like fuel on flame, to the incendiary mix of radical politics and experimental drug use.

And yet, an endlessly redeeming feature of his personality was the chivalry and civility of an old school gentleman, a fast-vanishing breed. I used to try and list the things I liked about him, challenging me to come up with at least a couple, and his mild-mannered nature usually topped the list. He had graduated from Stanford University with a degree in journalism. I rated that highly, too. He clung to an obsolete version of life, but at least he wasn't desperately clutching at guns and bibles. He was sympathetic to the principles of Republican conservatism, but I appreciated his valuing common sense over conspiracy theories. And he wasn't a hothead; he could reveal a temper, but it was never mean-spirited.

At the club we had no sooner placed our orders when, without warning and without context, he suddenly launched into a swashbuckling tale of a guy on his ship in the Pacific theater during the last years of the war. He prefaced his tale by describing the man as, in my dad's less-than-charming anachronism, "a little light on his feet." This detail was key, and once he was sure I understood the subtext that this soldier was gay (the word "gay" not existing in my father's lexicon), he proceeded to tell me that he was "the bravest son-of-a-bitch on that whole goddamn ship."

I was still trying to process that bombshell of a revelation when the tale took off. It quickly darkened with war clouds falling over New Guinea, Japanese snipers hiding in trees poised to ambush, and this light-footed soldier risking his life repeatedly, running interference for his unit, and dodging incoming fire while tracking enemy positions to warn his fellow soldiers.

He'd climb the tower of the ship without a harness. He'd rush forward when others held back. He may have been reckless but only at his own peril; all his actions were invested with the

same intent, saving his buddies' lives, thus earning backslapping admiration from those brothers in arms. All this derring-do in spite of those light feet. And my father said he could cuss a mighty profane blue streak. He was gutsy and intrepid, and my father clearly was a fervent fan. This warrior had made an indelible impression; all these years later you could still hear the veneration in my dad's voice. And with an overwhelming poignancy it suddenly occurred to me that my dad had never told anyone else this story before. It was mine alone.

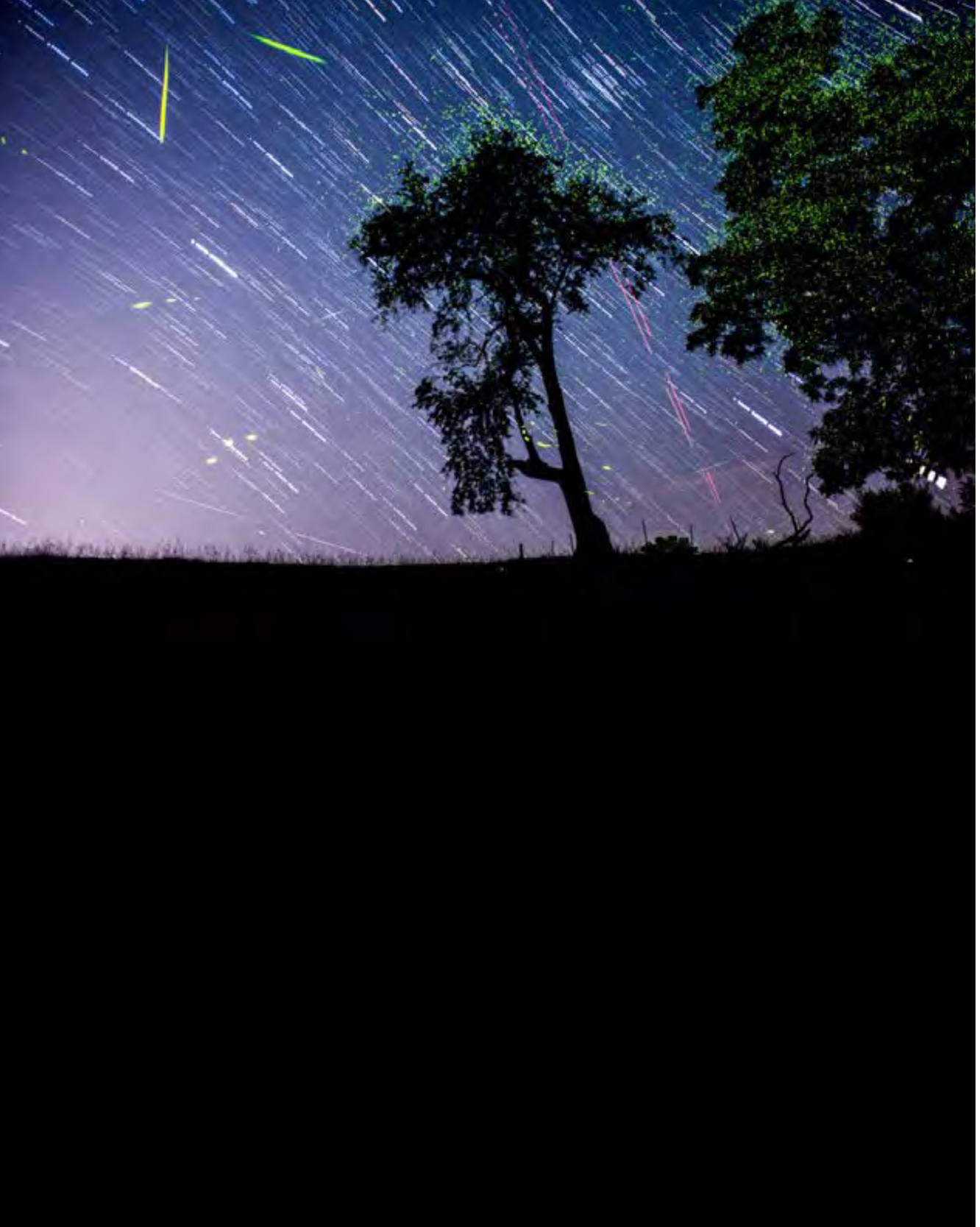
The waiter appeared at our table to take our dessert order. We both always had the usual, egg custard with a sprinkling of nutmeg on top. As we dug into our custard cups I waited for the end of the story. Surely there would be an epilogue, a coda. But whatever the intended point, it had already been made. There was no more mention of heroic feats by this bold and salty soldier, whom I liked to imagine dancing the light fantastic across the just-swabbed deck of the USS Ancon. The story was over. Before I had time to think about it, we had said our goodbyes outside on Leidesdorff, and I made my way down Montgomery Street blinking back the summer sunshine with a series of epiphanies detonating in my mind.

I never received the acceptance any son needs from his father. To this day I do not know if he loved me or not. I have no evidence of it. Or do I? Because I have this story he told me. And I think it means something. If it isn't a declaration of acceptance, then surely it must have been an attempt towards reaching one—a fumbling in the dark, but no less an attempt. And although he could never quite achieve it, I later came to see something noble in his willingness to try.

I walked back to work in a highly pleasurable fugue state, aware that something both mysterious and momentous had occurred, something so densely significant it was going to take years to fully assimilate its meaning. One of those exploding epiphanies was the realization that my father in wartime had sealed a covenant of fraternal trust with a homosexual. That he had loved him then, and still praised him today. It had the power to buckle my knees as I steadied myself on a corner streetlamp. These thoughts were tumbling around in my head, and I have to think they were profound ones because I can locate myself at

an exact spot in history, at the exact hour of 12:55 p.m. at the corner of Montgomery and California Streets in San Francisco on a summer day in the year 1979 when they entered my consciousness.

Maybe I was wrong about my father's inexorable need to process his life through the lens of his war, long after that war had ended. Maybe without that framing device I would never have heard the story of my dad and the gay soldier. Maybe we all have idiosyncratic prisms we pass our experiences through in order to understand our lives. I may not have gotten much in the way of acceptance from my father, and my memories of him are scant of the tender kind, but when I think of him in that long-ago July, I can still feel the warmth of the noonday sun on my face.



TRACKING ORBITS

by DEELIA SHERMAN

Paper, pencil, envelope, stamp. Trip to the mailbox and back. Walk along the sidewalk, look at the leaves on the trees. Wait for a response. A loop of communication, a thread holding two together.

I've been thinking in circles lately. I've been thinking about the circles I belong to and the people I'm tied to through their rings. People across counties, across countries, across continents. Every one of these circles has a center of gravity keeping it tight, keeping its members from falling away into empty space. A focal point. A significant presence to hold everyone together. Maybe it's a frequently shared place or common niche interest or some inexplicable force that draws people towards one another. But no matter what that center is, we continue to circle around each other.

Across religions, glowing gold halos encircle the heads of holy figures, signifying their glory, their perfection. Around 300 BC in the place we now call Iran, the disk halo first appeared in religious art and dispersed across cultures at a rapid pace from

Art by DANIEL WORKMAN

there. Buddha, Jesus, and deities from a multitude of religions are depicted adorned with these crowns of light.[1] The wholeness of the halo—the way it loops around endlessly, perfectly—captured the human mind in a way that never let go.

In an old wooden cigar box in the very back of my closet, I keep all the handwritten letters I have ever received. Its contents include words written on all kinds of materials, from crumpled lined paper handed to me in person, to postcards from family living halfway across the country, to gift bag tags ripped off of presents. I love collecting scraps of sentimental paper. There are birthday cards, confessions of love, and holiday greetings from people all over, people who've never met each other and will never even know of each other's existence. Yet somehow, they've all found a place in the cigar box in the back of my closet. I cherish that box.

How many licks does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop?

The United States Postal Service processes 17.7 million letters every hour.[2] That number doesn't even include letters handed off face-to-face or letters that, after pained deliberation, are never sent, forgotten in drawers. These letters draw their lines of travel between sender and receiver, crisscrossing the world's crust like Venetian cobblestone canals or like the lattice dough on top of a warm apple pie. Every hour, millions of letters containing billions of words and uncountable numbers of alphabetic characters flutter and twirl around us. We wade through our word-saturated atmosphere, watch as a's and b's and c's fall from the sky, snow globed inside spherical raindrops. Letters circle all around us.

Spinning 238,855 miles above all those letters,[3] the Moon hurtles through space, circling the Earth at 2,288 miles per hour[4] while the Earth circles the Sun at 67,000 miles per hour.[5] Simultaneously, the Earth's seven companion planets and their own moons speed around each other, all circling the solar system's central Sun. Space is made up of invisible concentric circles overlapping concentric circles like the shining ripples made by pebbles thrown in clear water. Hundreds of centers of gravity draw the matter surrounding them and those centers of gravity circle their own centers of gravity too, repeating endlessly.

Reports of strange patterns popping up in grain crops have circulated since the 17th century. They made people wonder; could these intricate designs emblazoned on the Earth be evidence of otherworldly aircraft landings? From the years 1976 to 1991, Doug Bower and David Chorley exacted the most ambitious string of "flying saucer nest" or "crop circle" hoaxes in history.[6] They traveled across England, pressing down stalks of wheat with garden rollers wherever they went. Despite their eventual confession, crop circle enthusiasts remain skeptical, choosing to continue wondering about the otherworldly secrets space may contain. Some circles will always remain mysteries.

[1] Wilson, Matthew. "The Halo: A Symbol That Spread around the World," June 24, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20210623-the-halo-a-symbol-that-spread-around-the-world.
[2] USPS. "Size and Scope." Postal Facts - U.S. Postal Service, 2022. https://facts.usps.com/size-and-scope/.
[3] "How Far Away Is the Moon? | NASA Space Place – NASA Science for Kids," 2023. https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/moon-distance/en/.
[4] CALTECH Cool Cosmos. "How Fast Does the Moon Travel around Earth?," 2022. https://coolcosmos.ipac.caltech.edu/ask/176--How-fast-does-the-Moon-travel-around-Earth-.
[5] CALTECH Cool Cosmos. "Why Don't We Feel Earth Move?," 2022. https://coolcosmos.ipac.caltech.edu/ask/60-Why-don-t-we-feel-Earth-move-.
[6] Irving, Rob, and Peter Brookesmith. "Crop Circles: The Art of the Hoax." Smithsonian Magazine, December 15, 2009. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/crop-circles-the-art-of-the-hoax-2524283/.

My box, within its four wooden walls, also contains envelopes, some sealed with stickers or tape, some with little wax stamps that nest perfectly in the palm of my hand. I love the ones with little wax stamps. I love the idea of lighting a candle and melting sealing wax cubes into liquid the way my box of letters melts the illusion of distance, watching the colors swirl around the tiny bowl like dolphins in a pool. I love the idea of molding intricate images onto the hot wax, stamping it onto the outside of an envelope, and then dropping it into the depths of the mailbox, trusting—hoping—that, with the help of planes and trucks and people, it will make it to its destination.

I think it's nice to hold the wax stamps in my hand. I flip and turn them over forwards and backwards like coins and I run my fingers over the ridges of their designs. One in particular, colored red spiraled with silver, depicts two half-moons, facing different directions, overlayed on a pattern of arches and diamonds.

It's hypothesized that, sometimes, a gravitational pull in space becomes so strong that it causes a singularity. According to some physicists, black holes occur when atoms compact in super-high densities, creating a singularity that nothing, not even a single photon of light, can escape from. Giant stars consume gas and decrease in volume until they collapse, yielding to the might of the gravitational pull. This creates a feedback loop and eventually an event horizon, the point of no return.[7] Sometimes elements of our own lives become so close that they are inseparable, transcending space and time, a testament to the power of these relationships and their centrality in our existence.

Relationships and letters hold us together like hot wax, those little disks of color that reveal how much someone cares. We all orbit around one another, drawn to each other like magnets, connected through the gravitational forces of words and wonder. Across the cosmos, all of that sweetness—those kind gestures and letters—sits at the center of our circles. Paper, pencil, envelope, stamp. Trip to the mailbox and back. Walk along the sidewalk, look at the leaves on the trees. Wait for a response. A loop of communication, a thread holding two together.

[7] Curiel, Erik. "The Many Definitions of a Black Hole." Nature Astronomy 3, no. 1 (January 2019): 27–34. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41550-018-0602-1.

FROM THE GREYHOUND

by CHARLOTTE WHITNEY

she held your finger
tight as the cold.
tight as your jeans on the floor,
tight as
the time Annie had left in her hourglass.
the sand made fingerprints on her back.

your feet bled tracks onto the street.
they led back to her and
broke you in two.
broke two into half,
broke halves into kaleidoscope fragments of
a throbbing mass of bodies,
searching.

joe could be anyone.
a neon statue noticed only by streetlights
and those who no one noticed.
we watchers want warmth, too.
we crave the animal movements you promise
while he watches.

on a bus heading south you
held a broken man.
held him
until the last drop of sweat
dried on his forehead.
until your thumb touched his eyelid
for the last time.

and you held him still.

Art by COLIN TURNER

Art by MISHAAL JAN

THE DEBATE

by ERIK HOVLAND

Failure is a part of everyone's life. For some of us, it's most of our life. But the amount and degree of failure is not what matters. In the end, it's how you respond to that failure that matters.

In 2016, the world suffered a great loss. My promising career as a bench-warming second string free safety on my high school football team had just been brought to a screeching halt. Well, it wasn't so much my career being brought to a halt as it was my entire body, courtesy of a 250-pound high school sophomore, who celebrated his victory by toppling onto my arm, breaking it instantly. It quickly became apparent that I would no longer be able to play football for at least the remainder of the season. This truly devastated the rest of the team—who responded by replacing me immediately.

But like I said, it's not the failure that matters. It's how you respond to it—and my response was joining the debate team. Like they always say, "Sticks, stones, and 250-pound sophomores may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." If you aren't familiar with high school debate teams, picture a group of

incredibly insufferable people howling incoherently at each other over something that doesn't matter. I'd fit right in.

Granted, I had a lot to learn. On my first day my coach walked up and slapped a massive stack of paper down on the table in front of me.

"Here's the brief on the new topic. It's about nuclear power. Start reading."

I was horrified. "That's like 200 pages!"

My complaint was met with little more than a wry chuckle. "More like 327. Better get started."

As I quickly learned, debate is voluntary homework. It requires the participants to research and prepare a case to argue both sides of a contentious issue. It's a complicated process of creating solid arguments that you must also be prepared to counter in a challenging game of intellectual rock paper scissors. Only the most inspiring rhetoric and powerful evidence will prevail. And when you're an idiot, like me, the difficulty multiplies. But eventually, I managed to get my feet under me, and with my freshly minted cases, I was on my way to my first debate tournament.

My confidence fled the day of the first tournament. Waddling down foreign hallways in an ill-fitting suit, searching desperately for the tournament room, did not feel like the glorious comeback I had imagined. I had been assigned the affirmative side of the debate, arguing in favor of the mass adoption of nuclear power. Alas, it was far too late for cowardice. I gathered the few scraps of courage within my soul and entered the room.

I was immediately met by the piercing stare of my opponent. It seemed as though she had known I would enter at that exact moment. That look in her eyes—pure, undiluted hatred, so intense it stopped me dead in my tracks. A tense moment passed before her hateful glare vanished, replaced with an unreadable mask as her focus shifted to the large stack of paper in front of her.

Wordlessly, I crept to the table next to her to begin setting up my case, stealing looks to try to gather information. It was not good news. She wore a full suit, far nicer than mine, and more importantly, it actually fit. Her hair was pulled back so tightly it looked like she had glued it down to her scalp. She was a career politician, prepared for the greatest debate of her life; I was two kids stacked on top of each other in a trench coat, lost while sneaking into a movie theater. She stared intensely down at her case, as if she was trying to scare it into being a more effective argument. Every movement she made was precise, calculated, robotic.

Great, I thought. My first debate round, ever, and they matched me up against the damn Terminator. Her case file was twice the size of mine. She had a plastic tub bursting with evidence. Her timer for her speeches had double the number of buttons mine did.

After about a minute, the tension became too much for me. I had to do something before I lost my competitive nerve. I didn't know if it was normal in the debate world to act cordial with someone you knew you were about to argue, but since that's what my family always does at Thanksgiving, I figured it was worth a try. I introduced myself.

"Hi, my name's Erik. Nice to meet you." I extended a hand in greeting.

She looked shocked. Had I broken an unspoken rule?

"I'm Katie." She shook my hand hesitantly, expecting it to explode at any minute.

I needed to defuse the situation. "I, uh…like your timer. It's got a lot of buttons." Expertly done, I thought. Surely there could be no awkwardness now.

"Thank you?"

"Have you done this before?"

"Once or twice. I'm guessing you haven't." She eyed the 25% off sticker I had forgotten to peel from my tie.

"What gave it away?"

It seemed like once she realized that this was my first round, she became a completely different person. She actually seemed quite friendly. I began to think I may have misjudged her. Maybe she was just nervous, too. At last, my terror started to dissipate.

The judge came in shortly after, prompting me to return to my seat and prepare my first speech. Shockingly, high school debate tournaments are not the most popular extracurricular activity. Finding judges is not easy, so they'll take anyone they can get. I do mean *anyone*.

I knew this going in, and yet was still surprised when the judge stopped me before my speech to ask, "So are there any, like… rules I should know about or anything?"

Not the most inspiring start, but after my opponent gave an alarmingly fast and efficient rundown of the rules, I began. At first, I stumbled meekly over the words, my nerves still getting the better of me. But as I spoke, I found myself growing more confident. I had a rock-solid case, and the more of it I revealed, the more I convinced myself. I was making great—nay, exceptional points. The judge was nodding. Nodding! I had already won. This was easy! I had found my calling! Why had I ever been worried?

I ended my speech with three minutes to spare. I had been given six minutes to present; this meant I had read at twice the speed I had intended, likely rendering much of it completely indecipherable. Yet, it felt like the very concept of time had simply faltered before the strength of my argumentation.

Next came the first cross examination, where Katie would ask questions about my case to try to reveal weaknesses. This was the moment I had been dreading, but I was actually feeling fairly optimistic. After my triumphant first speech I felt like an intellectual giant, and Katie and I had gotten along quite well previously, so I was confident that it couldn't possibly be that bad.

It was, in fact, worse.

From the moment her timer started, it was already over. The friendly smile plastered on her face vanished, and she was the

merciless robot once again. For the next three minutes I endured a barrage of questions.

"Are you aware that for your second contention, subpoint 2A, you cited the 2013 Krieger report that was subsequently deemed to have an insufficient sample size to support its conclusions?"

"Well… I, uh…"

"How can you rationalize using the criterion of utilitarianism to uphold the value of justice, when utilitarianism is perfectly comfortable flying in the face of what is just, in favor of what is perceived as the maximal good?"

"Why…"

"According to your own stated values, would it not be our moral obligation to invest in existing technologies that have been demonstrated to be entirely safe rather than those that have been shown to pose significant risks to human life in the past?"

"But… I…"

It was the longest three minutes I have ever experienced. Halfway through I looked desperately to the judge for help. There was none to be found. A mix of horror and fascination played upon his face as if he were witnessing a train hitting a car parked on the tracks. All he could do was watch me be reduced to rubble, haphazardly strewn across the earth. I returned to my seat, devastated. Dejected. A failure.

But it's about how you respond to it. Unfortunately, the only way I could respond in this case was to listen quietly for seven minutes while she flawlessly dismantled my entire case. I wasn't sure what exactly to look for in the face of the judge to gauge how I was doing, but I was fairly certain that pure pity is not the emotion one strives to inspire.

Needless to say, the rest of the round went much the same. By the end I was reduced to babbling, incoherent, desperate responses to points I wasn't even equipped to fully comprehend. When, at last, it was over, I sat stunned until Katie walked up to me. She extended a hand just as I had done before the round. Her vice-like grip crushed the last shred of self-respect I had managed to cling to. She then disappeared, without saying a word.

The judge was in a hurry to leave. He was packed and headed for the door like he was fleeing an active crime scene. Just before exiting, he stopped and looked back at me.

"Are you alright?" he asked, genuine concern writ large upon his face.

A choked "No" was all I could manage in reply.

"Yeah… that was really brutal, man." With that, he was gone.

But it's not about the failure, it's about how you respond to it. And I responded by dedicating myself to debate. I spent countless hours honing my cases, rhetoric, and argumentation skills into a well-oiled machine, ready to challenge any idea with rigorous logic and skepticism. In other words, I became entirely unbearable to everyone around me. This was a small price to pay to avoid reliving the butchering that was my first round.

It paid off. My senior year, I found myself in the final round of the State Championship. This was my shot at redemption, at victory. Every second of the past several years had led me to this moment. And my opponent? None other than Katie.

At first, I was afraid—petrified, even. But I was no longer the bright-eyed young lad that she had humiliated and destroyed so easily. So, I gathered my resolve, and with both of our teams watching us, we started the round.

∞ ∞

And you know what I learned? I learned that no matter how you might fail, how completely and utterly you may embarrass yourself, if you respond to it in just the right way—you may do the exact same fucking thing again, but this time with a much bigger audience. ∞

EULOGY OF THE GREAT BLUE HERON

by DEVIN FARMILOE

A great blue heron stands sentry on the banks of the Cuyahoga, sweeping its gaze slowly over the landscape. Stock-still and deliberate with her observations, she acquaints herself with all the life veiled beneath the early morning fog. The salamander, unaware of the great blue heron's company but anxious nonetheless, darts from rock to rock. The spotted turtle pokes his head above water on a recon mission, eyeing the heron suspiciously. The spring peeper sings regardless of his adversary's presence, his "peep peep peep" a taunt to call the heron from her post. Minnows swim alongside a rare, prized perch.

After some time, the great blue heron opens her wings and takes flight for home. Her sycamore abuts the land of a white farmhouse, where bloodroot blossoms look like cotton balls littered at the base of trees and yellow trout lilies dip their heads toward the forest floor, breathing in the musk of decaying leaves.

Art by EMMA FRIDAY

Years ago, my great-grandma sat sipping her morning tea, watching out the front window of her farmhouse across from the Cuyahoga River on Everett Road. It was a supremely silent time of day as she watched the great blue heron survey its land.

For the last year of her life, every time I saw my great-grandma she was swaddled in blankets sitting in her nursing home dorm room. She never listened to the radio, read, or watched any TV.

"When I walked into this room and saw all of my things, my pictures on the walls, my favorite mug—I knew I would die here," she told me on my first visit to the nursing home.

Her short-term memory was dwindling, and I believe she sustained herself on memories of the past. I like to hope that as she lounged in her chair, she was flipping through the snapshots of her life on the inside of her mind, transporting herself.

To her home on Everett Road, where her white farmhouse was cradled in the ridges of the Cuyahoga Valley. Where on hot summer days she would swim in the Cuyahoga River near the covered bridge. Where my intoxicated Papa John drove his 1974 Ford Maverick down the driveway and kept on going straight into the river. Where Saturdays were spent drinking tea with her children, as her ever-growing gaggle of grandchildren turned her home and its surroundings into their playground.

When my father was young, he flitted through the ridges and valleys that made up my grandma's backyard like a silver-spotted skipper. To this day, when you ask my father his favorite place in the world, his response is "Grandma's house."

She lived in the farmhouse with my Grandpa Ned. He was a sensible man who maintained his Chrysler K-car religiously and made the most out of the things they had. During one Saturday tea, after the home had been reduced to rubble and Grandpa Ned had been buried for a long time, she mused, "Ned was the man for me."

The land was taken over by Cuyahoga Valley National Park in the late 90s. My great-grandma has not lived in the house on Everett Road within my lifetime, but whenever I think of her

home, it is there. We have spent countless Saturdays drinking our English tea with a splash of milk and a spoonful of sugar, but the table I have never been a part of is the one where I imagine she fits best.

Her home is no longer standing. The graffitied foundation full of profanity is all that remains. When my father and I first found the concrete slab laid bare to the early summer sun, we grieved in silence for a moment. He was mourning the loss of his sanctuary.

As I sit here on the foundation of her home, a couple years later and a few days after she has passed, I think of a quote from Wordsworth[1]:

> [...] Grieve not, rather find
> Strength in what remains behind;
> In the primal sympathy
> Which having been must ever be.

I realize it was never about the house itself.

Her home is gone, and so is she, but this land is filled with her memory, preserved forever within the protection of the park. I feel her here as I walk over the slick, wet rocks of the Cuyahoga, as I hike up and down the ridges and valleys that held some of the best years of her life. The great blue heron that watched over the rivers of the Cuyahoga while she sipped her morning tea has long been dead, but maybe the heron I pass today on my river walk is her heron's child, or its child's child, standing sentry to its ancestors' memories.

[1] William Wordsworth, "Splendour in the Grass", Poem Analysis, poemanalysis.com/william-wordsworth/splendour-in-the-grass/

DIM RED

by JAMES MEAD

You're having trouble
swaying into and away,
eyes tinged ochre;
glassy shallow sick.

The tumbler in your
boney fingers
gleams with malice—tipping—
thin wine on linoleum.

You're worth seeing—
but bleary-eyed.
You talk about other things,
I can't even notice.

Nicked Achilles (how?)
I don't know
but you're leaking,
leaking and falling.

Slip in the cocktail and
sanguine cavern yawns,
new lid opens,
seeping more and more.

Spinning lights.
Blue cut red.
Open windows.
Shrieking supplication.

You didn't even feel it,
but those sterile blue gloves,
they want terribly
to touch and to take you.

We escape by your limping staircase,
now together on the broken bed,
and a rough, little tongue
traces the vein.

But suddenly you're
dead weight on my chest.
Sleep it off.
Breathe me out.

Blood on the coverlet
may upset you terribly.
You won't remember
rusty irregulars.

Spewed without reason,
obstinate by new light.
I won't tell.
Wounds must speak.

Now I'll shirk off your
feather light and
moaning yoke.

Now I'll walk home the long half hour,
trodden gravel
under big black boots.

There will be pavement in my ears.
Monotone by lights out,
then quiet again.

Art by ISABEL MOTTER

THE WILD WOODS

by CHARLIE CHILSON

The Woods were home to dense clusters of mountain mahogany, juniper trees, tall fescue grasses, yucca, and prickly pear cacti. Traversing them as a child, the mahogany branches became alien tentacles, the juniper trees friendly giants, and the grasses a perfect hideout. Our abundant yucca became minefields of spiky urchins upon the ocean floor, and the prickly pear became grenades to launch against one's foes, which in my case meant my younger brother. With an untamable mop of shockingly blonde hair, darting hazel eyes, an irrepressibly devious smile, and a loud and bossy voice with just one volume setting; Beau was wild and raucous, the perfect adventuring accomplice.

It is here, in the Wild Woods as we called it, that we ran from fearsome creatures both real and imagined. Day after day we adventured along our mini-dragonback hill nestled within the Rocky Mountain foothills. From as early as I can remember, once my brother and I had finished our homeschool work, we'd firmly announce to our parents that we were embarking on an expedition into the Wild Woods. The great unknown began at the sun-scorched backdoor with peeling red paint and whining brass hinges. As the younger brother, Beau would proudly demonstrate his strength by dragging over a cinder block to hold the door open so Mom could hear us.

Art by EMMA FRIDAY

The house itself was modest and old. In 1938, our living room comprised the entirety of the house, which had been an old, one-room miner's cabin. This cabin was built in the old ghost town of Noland and was brought into our town by railcar and hauled into place with horses and logs. The handwriting we have uncovered on the structure's original framing, be it building measurements, random scribbles, or longhand thoughts, give evidence of the house's long string of owners over the years. While remodeling, an ancient unopened condom or stale pack of Pall Malls found in the walls gave us glimpses into these people's lives. Rooms added by successive owners show the echoes of the previous decades within their design. Outside in our yard, before my parents cleaned it up a bit, I remember unusual items left by the previous owner: dozens of painted plywood geese, an assortment of hubcaps that he used when creating his resonator guitars, and even a large mushroom sculpture that he made from a downturned and shingled over satellite dish that sits atop a massive old tree trunk. As a young adult writing this essay, I can appreciate the significance of the lives lived in this home, yet as a child, I gave little mind to the house itself. It was always the Wild Woods that called me the loudest.

It was always the Wild Woods that called me the loudest.

Armed with as many wooden swords, homemade bow and arrows, and pinecone missiles as our small arms could carry, we excitedly fled the dungeon of schoolwork and chores. No matter the weather, we hollered farewell to our parents and set off on one of our quests. We marched north along the red stone path that led past pear and apple trees. The path came to an end at the edge of billowing buffalo grass, a place marking the end of our parents' domain and the beginning of the Woods. Keeping watch over the Woods is the Grotto, a place that oversees all that transpires in the Woods. A sort of shrine that contains pictures of those we have loved and lost, the Grotto is the heart of the land. A curly-branched black locust hovers over a carnival of iris, roses, potentilla, trumpet flowers, delphiniums, and flax. Hidden within this floral jungle is a thick sandstone slab with a natural indentation that collects water and serves as a drinking hole for the abundant wildlife. The Grotto is where the groomed and curated part of our yard meets and mingles with the otherworldly Martian red soil and tangled overgrowth of the Wild Woods.

The next destination was usually The Chamber of Game Plans and Rules, a fort constructed from pruned branches pulled from the dry compost pile. The strange play of light and shadows in the fort enticed us and fired up our imaginations as we crafted the spells and rules and characters that would comprise that day's adventure. Bursting forth from our lair onto the large, steep hill, we would excitedly run up and clumsily roll down it, searching for ants, beetles, spiders, wild turkeys, foxes, and deer—all of whom were unwitting characters in our quest. Though we might brag to the contrary, we were always a bit nervous about encountering larger creatures like bobcats, mountain lions, or bears. To protect ourselves, we would dig in the hillside for "ninja powder" whenever we found the rare vein of pure white limestone within the endless red clay terrain.

As evening approached, just like in the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, Mom would call us in for dinner and we'd pretend we didn't hear her and quickly hide. Eventually, our older brother Jade, equipped with a bamboo kendo sword, would be sent to persuade us into returning home. Not even ninja powder, thrown to confuse him, nor frantic casting of spells could best the ogre known to us as Jade. After dinner, we would again ascend our hilltop, where we were treated to a bird's eye view of our sleepy little town surrounded by rolling foothills and a sweeping panorama of the stunning Rocky Mountains to the west. From our perch, the dusky light played tricks on our eyes. What we knew to be wide open meadows, fiery patches of sumac, and somber stands of blue spruce, would kaleidoscopically melt into a mighty giant as he lay his tired body down to rest upon the horizon.

For years, the Wild Woods was an entire and boundless universe for us. It was only as we got older that we realized 3rd Avenue, where we knew other neighborhood kids, was only a few hundred feet to the west. Being homeschooled in a small town that offered a rather traditional public school, other kids in the neighborhood rarely took interest in us and didn't care to join in our fantastical games. We were often met with shades of disapproval. These kids lived in grand houses with expensively landscaped yards and grand windows providing sweeping mountain views. At best, some of their parents would tell us that we were "kind of normal"

for homeschooled kids. But more commonly, they seemed visibly put off by our fixer-upper of a house, enclosed within the riot of color that burst forth as a result of my mom's incurable passion for gardening. Neighbors whose homes were higher up on the hillside viewed from their windows the same sunrises and sunsets that our family only experienced after climbing to the top of the Wild Woods. These differences, unfortunately, seemed to be part of the equation these kids used when choosing whom to play with. They didn't choose us, and for this reason, the Wild Woods became a refuge where Beau and I could create a world where all the beings we encountered were wild and engaged.

My parents were also not immune from this exclusion. They ran a small house cleaning company, in large part so that my mom, who has a Master's in Education, could have the flexibility she needed in order to homeschool us. Despite having been amiable, generous, and responsible neighbors, they wonder how all the invitations to neighborhood parties keep blowing away. Fortunately for Beau and I, they have a well curated collection of extraordinary friends whom all became deeply involved in our lives. When I was 4 years old, Beau and I started art lessons with my mom's friend Jane. She was colorfully dressed yet quietly spoken, witty yet gracefully playful, a trusted guide in all things creative, and so spirited she would even join our adventures in the Wild Woods. As a sensory kid who often found the world unbearably overwhelming, Jane was kindred and the one person who could truly relate to what it felt like to be inside my skin most days. I admired and adored her with every cell in my body, and when her photos were placed in the grotto shrine just before my 11th birthday, I was devastated. I felt entirely hollowed out. Again, I turned to the Woods both for solace and regeneration.

Together, as a family, we soldier on, continuing what must be the longest remodel in town history, and finding even more places to start new gardens. It's the only home I've ever known, and the only one my parents have ever owned. They met in town shortly after my mom returned from a yearlong around-the-world-trip with my oldest brother, who was just seven at the time, and just after my dad had purchased the old Soda Fountain on Main Street after finishing a decade long stint at an anarchist art commune in Wisconsin. Taken in by the history and uniqueness of the house and property, and by the flamboyant and semi-famous luthier who was selling the place, my parents decided to forego the nomadic life for a while and raise a family. Twenty-two years later, together we have crafted, restored, and reinvented every inch of this property. Today, we do more than just live in this home—the home also lives in us.

These days, capitalizing on the skills I learned at home, I now also scrub people's bathtubs for money in the winter, as well as landscape their yards in the summer. Beau is still wild, but also fiercely ambitious. At age 16 he started what has become a successful masonry business. We are all worker bees, and that makes us happy. Despite being a student at CU, I prefer to sleep outside for 7-8 months of the year. I still keep a tent pitched in the Woods, what my parents affectionately refer to as "Charlie's affordable housing." This serves to carry on the family tradition of bewildering the neighbors. While it might look to some like I am stuck in these Woods, clinging to a childhood that has passed, I am instead still learning from this land on how to embrace all of life's experiences. It is the Wild Woods that teaches and inspires me to live in, with, and for this world.

Art by TASHA SMITH

THE S.S. RHODE ISLAND

by EDWARD KINCAID

I spend a lot of time eating in my bed lately. It's a developing situation—not necessarily anything abrupt enough to make the news ticker on CNN, but it is something that should be addressed. Kind of like global warming.

I didn't used to do it. I started by eating dinner at the table like a regular, vertical person. But then I decided that I couldn't be alone with my thoughts and so I started to read a book with dinner. This proved unsustainable as my attention span waned and I kept getting dollar-store tomato sauce on my overdue copy of *The Corrections*. More than that though, it just became hard to think about *anything*, let alone to dissect a book while dissecting a thawed meatball in Barilla noodles. Sorry to my gay friends for eating Barilla noodles. They're just so damned cheap.

So, I moved to the couch: dinner and a movie. I actually bought one of those TV dinner stands. You know, the little half tables that allow you to eat and watch TV at the same time. On the whole, I have to say that it was one of the more depressing things I've bought on Amazon. Nobody with their life on track

orders a tool that makes it easier to eat microwave dinners while watching TV. A TV dinner stand can only portend decline. It's not something you *want* to buy. It's something you *have* to buy. The arrival of it via Prime was more therapy fuel than respite. But even after I got the TV dinner stand, I barely used it. You have to sit up to use a TV dinner stand. I was lying down too much.

I became more and more horizontal until I was eventually just lying down on my couch while I ate. Then eventually I realized that I was already supine, so why not take things into the bedroom? The *fait accompli* came when I moved my Netflix-emitting laptop into my room and omitted my jeans in favor of just perpetually wearing pizza grease-stained sweatpants and lying in bed. Pretty soon I would just lay there for entire days, only getting up to force myself to go to class, pick up a book, or pretend like I was doing schoolwork—and getting my freshly-microwaved, MyPlate-noncompliant breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

So nowadays I mostly just lie in bed and eat, catching up on Ukraine or watching GIFs with titles like "Satisfying Acrylic Pour," or "Bubble Wrap goes through Shredder (SOUND ON)." When I do sleep, it's not a particularly pleasant experience—what with all the crumbs sticking to my naked skin. I feel like I'm rolling myself in breadcrumbs, being prepared for the fryer. *Bon appétit*.

Really, I think it's kind of funny—my eating in bed. Whenever somebody has the gall to call me during regular business hours, I grudgingly tell them "You're interrupting my bed eating." It's nearly funny. And that almost makes it worth it.

You're interrupting my bed eating.

I've begun using my final notices as bookmarks, out of spite. It's my own form of silent protest. I did the same thing with a parking ticket I got the other day, a charge which I found officious on the part of the meter attendant. Who gives a car with a busted taillight a ticket? What makes them think I have the cash to pay a $60 parking ticket if I can't even buy a $37.99 taillight?

It's the same kind of logic that informed my landlord's policy of charging late fees on rent. If I can't pay $1600 for a one-bedroom shithole with an air conditioner that emits cat piss

odors, then what makes them think I can pay a thirty dollar late fee? Was my rent and a half deposit not enough?

Want to give me a $60 ticket for parking in the University parking lot? Well guess what, you get to live between pages 231 and 232 of *Klara and the Sun*. Want to charge $30 for late fees and then tape a notice to my window? Guess what, you get to snuggle in the ample bosom of Dave Eggers, between pages xx and xxi of the foreword to *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. I hope there's not a fee for that.

I keep the blinds down most of the time. I used to only do it when I napped. But now I'm pretty much always pre- or post-nap. If I'm awake. So, it's more efficient just to keep them down. It gives the place a spooky aura. It's atmospheric. Like my own haunted house, complete with cobwebs and poor ventilation. I should charge $3.50 upon entry and leave a bowl of Kit Kats on the doorstep.

The darkness *can* be a bit depressing. But I feel like the energy saved by the blinds, coupled with the palliative effect of the soothing dark, more than makes up for it. Plus, it makes things look cleaner. Everything looks better in the dark. That's why Hollisters look like they're lit by tallow candles and rushlights. That's (partly) why I never let the shades up. My house just looks better when it's dark. You can't see the pile of cans overflowing out of my trash can. You can't see the ramen noodle crumbs on the counter. You can't see the sink full of crusty dishes. You can't see the Chick-fil-A bag full of trash half-shoved under my couch. Again, sorry to my gay friends for the Chick-fil-A; I might as well make a craft run to Hobby Lobby just to get the hat trick.

The darkness can be a bit depressing.

No. I never want to let the blinds up. Then I would see the mess I've made and I might even have to deal with it. Besides, I'm out of dish soap and trash bags and I have no plans for restocking. Sometimes I feel like offing myself just so I don't have to go to Target in sweatpants and slippers again—the annoyingly telegenic door greeter beaming at me "Welcome to Target, sir!" With her fucking white teeth and khakis.

I think I'll just keep the blinds down. The packaging called them "Venetian blinds." *Venetian* blinds. As if Scamozzi whittled each individual slat and had Da Vinci sign off on their design.

Such a term just seems too highfalutin to denote something made out of maquiladora sweat and beige plastic. Maybe if they were gilt or had a few naked sibyls painted on them, then I could countenance such an appellation. But, as it is, they look less like *Venetian* blinds than they do a cost-saving measure by a miserly landlord.

I think keeping the blinds down makes me stronger. Like you know how blind people are supposed to have a stronger sense of hearing and smell or whatnot? I feel like my spatial awareness and auditory capabilities are increasing. So really, it could only be detrimental to let the blinds up. If I keep going like this for a few more years, then maybe I'll develop a kind of Spidey-sense. Like if someone is about to throw a punch then I'll just dodge it and scissor-kick them in the throat. I'll be able to feel things coming thanks to my self-imposed blindness. Homer, that guy was blind. And he wrote the Iliad. Or did he just tell it, it being an oral tradition and all? Either way, the old codger didn't need to see to be a success. Justice—justice is blind too. And everybody demands justice. They don't always get it—ACAB anyone?—but they certainly demand it. Really, letting up the blinds could only harm me.

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I'm a big proponent of adding a candy coating to SSRIs. Maybe some chocolate, too. I think it would decrease rates of depression. I'm not saying all SSRIs should have a thin candy shell—but there should be an option. I know that if I had some chocolate and nougat to look forward to, then I would probably remember to take mine more often. It would be something to look forward to. But, as it is right now, taking my little blue "friends" is—maybe ironically—one of the more depressing parts of my day. Which is kind of funny now that I write it down.

Sometimes I'll try to sneak it into a mustard sandwich. Or shove it down between gulps of a Coffee mate-laden Folgers Classic Roast. But I never look forward to it. Maybe they should just start putting it in the water supply. Like we do with fluoride. Hear me out: since the John Birch society isn't around anymore, there probably wouldn't even be that much kvetching.

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Okay. So, maybe it's not such a great idea to put SSRIs in the water supply. But it would certainly help me. Maybe we could bake it into Wonder bread. Or randomly throw a few pills into every SweeTarts packet.

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Everything I eat is either microwaved or from a can. My personal chefs are Messieurs Boyardee and Campbell. Either that or it's freeze-dried. I call it the Fallout Shelter Diet. But I wouldn't judge if I were you. Granted, I'm not you. But still. Don't judge. "Ye who is guilt-free shall cast the first stone," or something like that.

I get all my vegetables. If you count the Lucky Charms vegetable bits at the top of a Cup O' Noodles, then I get at least a serving every day. I even get in my grains. If you count the bezel of a Pop-Tart as a grain.

Look, I know it's not the best. But it's just so damned easy. Every time I microwave a can of Campbell's Vegetable Soup, that's a night that doesn't have to be spent cutting up vegetables, using the rough side of a sponge to half-clean the stove top, and remembering to pick up the soiled dishes off the edge of my mattress when I'm done. Plus, you have to remember that I'm doing most of this in the dark. Because letting up the blinds could only hurt me, etc.

And using a toaster—well, don't even get me going on that. There's nothing more satisfying than that initial click. When you push down the plunger, you can feel the mechanical apparatus lock into place. More satisfying yet is the finishing pop. Some toasters even ding. But I like the spring-loaded pop most. The pop of a fresh piece of toast, ready for Country Crock—it's like an orgasm. I wish I could change my ringtone to it. I probably could, but who has the time?

The pop of a soda can tab, too. To a lesser degree, but still. It lets you know that there's a delicious, frosty Coke or Dr Pepper or Mountain Dew waiting for you. The beep of a microwave is slightly less satisfying—this, of course, depending on the model of microwave. But the suggestion of it is enough to make the mouth water. Or the eyes tear up. It means there's a Hot Pocket steaming, its tantalizing cheese and pepperoni frothing under a few millimeters of mass-produced dough. Maybe you even splurged and got a Red Baron microwave pizza. Toaster pops, soda tab clicks, and microwave beeps. It's all good shit—a symphony of Capitalist calories, lulling me off to my pre- or post-nap torpor. If I lived the best life possible, I think that it would begin with a toaster pop and end with a microwave beep.

I can't help but tear up just thinking about it. ᔐ

Art by SUSANNA ANDREWS

HOME BLEND

by RACHEL LYSAGHT

Dad grabs the ceramic blue teapot and carefully swishes it with hot water. "You've got to scald the pot—it's the most important thing you can do. Keeps the tea hot." He pours the water out and reaches the pot towards me. "Give it a feel." It's hot to the touch. The rest of the water in the kettle is slowly rumbling, its sound the low howl of the night breeze caressing window sills. He pours the remaining water in the pot and adds two tea bags, one for me and one for him. A pair of dainty cups and saucers decorated with pale yellow and dusty blue olive branches are already waiting for us on the table. He lets the tea steep for four minutes—the perfect amount of time so it's not too weak and not too strong. "It's a saying in Ireland when the tea is too strong that 'you could trot a mouse across it,'" he chuckles.

I let him make the cup for me. The tea is a warm pumpkin orange with notes of rusty mahogany. Dad smiles when he sees the color. I can feel the warmth of the steam dance from the cup to my face, and immediately it smells of dark wood, earthy and savory yet floral and sweet. A familiar duality that brings me

back to the homes of my aunts and uncles in Ireland. I watch him pour a heaping spoonful of white sugar into my cup with a dash of milk, clouding into a pale tanbark shade, and we begin to drink.

You would never want to offend the Irishman by equating Irish Breakfast Tea to English Breakfast. Much like we prefer our whiskey, our tea is stronger and more bitter—which is why it is naturally enjoyed with milk, sugar, and an arrangement of scones, soda bread, or biscuits such as Hobnobs and Digestives. Personally, I've always preferred custard creams with my tea—a sweet vanilla custard sandwiched by two flaky crackers—although that's not what traditionally accompanies a cup. And if you aren't a fan of the classics, supermarkets commonly have entire aisles devoted to various assortments of biscuits. Having the right biscuit is almost as important as properly preparing the tea.

Tea is served six times a day at least—one in the morning, one around 11 a.m., one after dinner (which is the name of the meal served early afternoon), one during midafternoon, one during teatime (the name of the meal that is equivalent to what we know as dinner), and tea before bed. That excludes the times it is served with guests. Tea is the first thing you're offered when you walk into the home of an Irish person, and it is the last thing you're offered after dessert.

Europe's obsession with tea began with Bohe tea (an oolong tea).[1] Bohe was not favorable in Asia, which made it accessible to the common people of Europe in the 1700s.[2] Tea became so popular in Ireland that Irish physicians started to become concerned with the effects of excessive tea drinking among the working class.[3] In the 1870s, economic decline in Ireland made it difficult for working classes to afford nutritious foods.[4] Most notably, mothers would drink grand amounts of tea as an

[1] Purcell, Clíona, "Tea: The Origins of Our National Drink," Waterford Treasures The Blog, Waterford Treasures, May 26, 2020, https://waterfordtreasures.wixsite.com/wattreasuresblog/post/tea-the-origins-of-our-national-drink.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Miller, Ian,"Insanity, Poverty and Excessive Tea Drinking in Late-Victorian Belfast." Epidemic Belfast, Ulster University, 2021, https://epidemic-belfast.com/the-insanity-of-malnutrition-poverty-and-tea-addiction/.
[4] Ibid.

appetite suppressant to quell hunger pains so that they could provide their husbands and children with the nutritious food that was difficult to afford.[5] By the 1890s, tea drinking was blamed for making Irish housewives "chronically dyspeptic," and some Irish physicians even coined the terms "tea drunkards" and "tea mania," which were conditions that resulted in symptoms of heart palpitations, cognitive difficulties, depression, and suicidal feelings.[6] Irish doctors associated tea with issues of morality and compared it to alcoholism.[7] But, of course, that didn't stop anybody from drinking it. We loved it too much and still do.

When I smell a cup of Barry's Gold Blend, a favorite tea brand within my family, I smell the rich floral perfumes of my aunties. I smell the musky cologne of my uncles. I close my eyes and I feel the chill of the Irish air and the warmth of the fading sun. I hear the seagulls caw and the slow pitter-patter of the horse hooves against old Dublin cobblestone and the puffing and squeaking of the double-decker buses as they make their way throughout the city. I see the fluffy clouds painted across the richly blue sky. The flavor of the tea's sweet and milky tannins is Aunt Mary's laugh and the soft melodic strings of Uncle Mark's guitar. It is the sound of my cousins singing Molly Malone in a Guinness-sponsored splendor.

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

CONTRIBUTORS

SUSANNA ANDREWS recently graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder. With ample experience creating digital and print campaigns, Susanna looks forward to starting her career in advertising.

ABHIDIP BHATTACHARYYA pursues painting as a hobby and way to escape from the limitations of reality. Abhidip studies Computer Science at CU Boulder as a PhD student.

CHARLIE CHILSON attends CU Boulder and discovered Hindsight in one of Dr. Eric Burger's writing classes.

DEVIN FARMILOE reports on the environment and uses experiences with nature to better understand herself and the world around her. Devin studies Environmental Journalism as a graduate student at CU Boulder.

EMMA FRIDAY attends CU Boulder, where she pursues a major in Sustainable Product Design and a minor in Art Practices. Emma's art skills include mediums like acrylic, graphite, charcoal, ceramic sculpture, and embroidery. The blending of Emma's two passions, dance and art, inspires her. Additionally, women's empowerment and spirituality drive her, which she explores through her creations.

S.G. GREENE set out on a journey to reinvent themself after the passing of their brother. However, the pandemic hit shortly after they landed in Colorado, and their plan to meet other people ground to a halt. Instead, they found themself writing like a belligerent scientist on the verge of finally proving their theory. The absurdity of humanity in the face of a seemingly endless universe fuels their need to write.

DELANEY HARTMANN works at a domestic violence shelter and hopes to specialize in gender violence advocacy. Delaney attends CU Boulder as an undergraduate student, where she majors in Political Science and Women and Gender Studies. When Delaney isn't contemplating the state of the world, she enjoys reading memoirs, cooking, and practicing yoga.

ERIK HOVLAND enjoys making others laugh with his writing and drawings. As a fourth-year student, Erik studies Environmental Design, with an emphasis on Architecture, at CU Boulder.

LAYNE HUNT, a realist before an artist, understands the world as it is, horrendously broken, but filled with opportunity. Layne appreciates the beauty that exists in the cracks and intends to emulate it with their pieces. In Layne's art, rather than reproducing reality, they use abstraction to evoke memories and emotions, creating a sense of history within each layer.

MISHAAL JAN graduated from CU Boulder with a BA in Astrophysics in 2020. Mishaal recently moved to Madison, Wisconsin and works for Epic Systems. Mishaal's time studying abroad in London, Rome, and Madrid inspired their photography.

ELIZABETH KALIKA started creating art during their childhood in the Soviet Union. Today, at 65 years-old, Elizabeth is an American citizen who raised their child by themself. As an activist, Elizabeth wants their art to reflect their social feminist values.

EDWARD KINCAID pursues a double major in Art History and History with a focus on growing a thin hipster mustache as a super(-duper) senior at CU Boulder. After graduating from CU, Edward hopes to study the migratory patterns of starving artists. Edward, a feisty Sagittarius, enjoys reading the New Yorker and has a crippling fear of intimacy. He likes to take long walks on the beach with his pet snake Theodore, who also has a crippling fear of intimacy. Previous Managing Editor of Hindsight, his work underwent a blind review to get published in this volume.

LINDSEY LEWIS attends physician assistant school at South University in Savannah. Lindsey graduated from CU Boulder in 2021 with a B.S in Integrative physiology and a minor in Art Practices

VIVIAN LUCKIW channels her history into her art. Born in Calgary, Canada, Vivian moved to the United States as a child and grew used to sudden changes and uncertain events. As a senior at CU Boulder, she majors in Cinema Studies with a minor in Philosophy. Ultimately, she hopes that one day she can publish more of her own story and inspire others to use their experiences to create their art.

RACHEL LYSAGHT uprooted her life in the Bay Area, California, to attend CU Boulder after falling in love with the Rocky Mountains. Rachel studies Psychology as a current sophomore at CU Boulder.

JOAN MCENHILL attends CU Boulder as a Junior in the BFA-Musical Theatre Program. Joan finds their passions in theatre and writing.

MICHAEL MCGUIRE, a San Francisco-based writer, believes in metamorphosis, and seeks to illuminate, through memoir and creative non-fiction, the shrouded road that connects who we were then, to who we've become today. When not writing, Michael can be found in the kitchen attempting to perfect his already sublime recipe for spaghetti Bolognese, or power walking with his husband through a silent Golden Gate Park at dawn.

JAMES MEAD, an undergraduate student at CU Boulder, studies English Literature. James works as an RA and serves in the Colorado Air National Guard in Aurora.

ISABELL MOTTER finds solace in embracing her femininity. Through her art, Isabell discovered a way to tap into a part of herself that she had previously been afraid to explore. Isabell's pieces combine beauty and darkness and explore the horror of her life and the beauty of survival. Despite the trauma that has marked her life, she has found a path to healing and empowerment through her art and the embrace of her femininity.

QUENTIN PARKER studies Creative Writing at Salisbury University. Quentin lives in Bowie, Maryland and attends college in Salisbury, Maryland. Quentin works as a fiction editor and a creative nonfiction associate editor in Salisbury University's literary magazine, The Scarab.

LAURA PETERSON, a photographer of ten years, loves to photograph beautiful people and places. Laura graduated from CU Boulder in 2020.

ELIJAH PETTET graduated from CU Boulder's Cinema Studies program and now works at Sunlight Ski Patrol. As a passionate photographer, Elijah feels honored to see his work paired with the beautiful and topical writing in Hindsight.

DEELIA SHERMAN, an undergraduate at CU Boulder, enjoys writing, reading, and creating. Deelia hopes to continue expressing herself through the art of writing no matter where life takes her and is excited for whatever the future holds.

JONATHAN SLINGER grew up in Boulder and competed in alpine ski racing before dabbling in other sports, including big wall climbing and ski mountaineering. He currently volunteers as an adaptive ski instructor with the National Sports Center for the Disabled at Winter Park, Colorado.

TASHA SMITH loves local art and music, reading, and spending time outside. Tasha attends CU Boulder as a senior.

LIV TIERNEY studies Art with a minor in Sociology as a junior at CU Boulder. Liv has spent many years exploring and growing their artistic skills and passions. Liv hopes to continue their passion for creativity post-graduation and find a highly creative career.

COLIN TURNER, born and raised in Denver, CO, now lives in Boulder. An artist in his free time, Colin's favorite mediums include film photography, drawing, and mixed media. Colin is a certified CNC machinist, completing a degree in Computer-aided Design.

SOPHIE WAYMAN felt overwhelmed encountering 30,000 new faces as an out-of-state undergraduate student at CU Boulder, 1,000 miles away from home and family. Sophie finally felt grounded and at home in Boulder after discovering her passion for expressing creativity through words. In the future, Sophie hopes to continue improving her writing.

CHARLOTTE WHITNEY loves words, in all their various forms. Charlotte attends CU Boulder as a third-year English Literature major with minors in German Studies and Political Science. In addition to poetry, Charlotte enjoys writing analytical pieces that set literature and radical politics in conversation with one another and hopes to continue this work beyond her undergraduate years at CU. Previous Editor-in-Chief of Hindsight, her work underwent a blind review to get published in this volume.

DANIEL WORKMAN, obtained his AAS from the Isaacson School for Professional Photography and graduated from CU Boulder. Daniel focuses his artistic energy into mediums such as writing, photography, filmmaking, and songwriting. With an interest in culture, anthropology strongly influences the work he creates. Daniel's accomplishments include work with Pulitzer Prize winning photographers at the Eddie Adams Workshop in New York.

TEN YEARS ON

In 2013, JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY began out of a single classroom. Inspired by the incredible writing from the students of WRTG 2020, off launched a spectacular annual print project that would go on to produce eight original volumes of writing and art. Rebranding to HINDSIGHT in the year 2020, we asked—where do we go from here? The definitive, pointed answer to that question we have yet to discover. However, with three volumes of HINDSIGHT under our belt and no end in sight, we know at least *an* answer: we go on.

A lot has happened in a decade. We've expanded, attending several conferences for the Association for Writers and Writing Programs, experimenting with online publication and audio/visual work, as well as extending our printing ambitions by beginning an entirely new title, CHANGING SKIES, focused on exploring climate change through creative nonfiction. In that time, we've opened up our submissions internationally, bringing a whole new world of incredible writing and art to our pages. With each passing year, as is the nature of a student-run journal, old faces move on and new faces emerge. In rotating the guard each semester, the journal is allowed to exist in flux, evolving with its new fingerprint while staying true to the principles that formed it to begin with. After a decade, this remains true.

Here's to another volume, another amazing staff, and another ten years.

WE CAN ENSURE THERE IS A FUTURE BY FIGHTING FOR PERMANENCE IN THE PRESENT

-Solastalgia, Hannah Lindberg

CHANGING SKIES

CREATIVE NONFICTION

2022

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

CREATIVE NONFICTION

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC and MISSION ZERO

HINDSIGHT PRESENTS

CHANGING SKIES

WRITING THROUGH THE CLIMATE CRISIS

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2022

VOLUME ONE

Volume One, First Edition, Second Printing, February 2023.
University of Colorado Boulder Imaging Services.

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CHANGING SKIES is a subsidiary of HINDSIGHT and The University of Colorado Boulder's Program for Writing and Rhetoric. We acquire First North American Serial Rights, welcoming all artists and writers of creative nonfiction to future issues. See our submission guidelines on our website: CHANGINGSKIES.ORG

Queries: HINDSIGHT, Program for Writing and Rhetoric, UCB 317, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0359; or hindsight@colorado.edu. We only accept submissions through Submittable—See our submissions guidelines at the end of this issue. We are a green journal and prefer electronic submissions and correspondence. Printed on recycled stock and fully recyclable. Single copy costs are $20.00 per issue in the U.S. and Canada, and $25.00 outside North America.

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FOREWORD
by SHADIA NAGATI

15,000 sheets of glossy paper, 300 double-sized sheets of plastic-coated cardboard, thousands of hours on laptops writing, editing, emailing, digitally producing layouts and proofs, shipping, commuting, countless hours of light bulbs burning into dry eyeballs.

What's the carbon footprint of printing a journal?

How much coal-burning electricity powers the printer? How many kilowatt-hours go into creating and reading the digital version? We can calculate these figures. We can make them smaller or larger.

How many people deny the threat of a changing climate? How many acknowledge it but remain indifferent? We can guess these numbers. We can try to make them smaller.

Climate writers seek more than reader "awareness"; they elicit the grief we share from witnessing irreversible environmental devastation. The places we love lose the nostalgia we hold for them when they no longer look and feel the same—changes that appear with fires, floods, and warming average temperatures. Jake Szabo's "The Cube" transports us to time immemorial, when Coyote taught people how to survive off of the land; to the interruption from colonizers' defilement of their homes, dispossession of their lands; to a second defilement through further man-made degradation. "Only as soon as we all acknowledge these traumas can we remedy them," he reasons, "and unfortunately it may take generations to see how far we have strayed from the path."

The pieces in Changing Skies present opportunities to communicate the trauma, opening dialogues to bridge the gap between despair and apathy. We have become divided over climate issues. Complete denial sprung up against perceived enemies: scientific evidence and the leftist, tree-hugging archetype. This dynamic has increased political polarization, hindering climate policy creation and action to mitigate further human-caused warming.

Changing Skies and Mission Zero collaborated to amplify the message: climate change is personal. Whether or not we act, or acknowledge its effects, we feel it. If we burn fossil fuels to print stories that will incite action, well, you know what they say about omelets.

Mission Zero's Climate Action Fund supports multiple projects at the University of Colorado Boulder toward carbon neutrality by 2050. In addition to projects at CU, Donors joining the Founder's Circle can help promote Climate Action at other colleges and universities across the country.

Scan here to donate:

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SOLASTALGIA

HANNAH LINDBERG

One

The thought of spending a significant amount of time in the desert climate preemptively dried my mouth and burned my skin. I spent my formative years between Colorado and Alaska, accustomed to extreme weather, but this was different. Stereotypical, western movie, sandy, dry *desert*. Desert with lizards and cacti and sand that would find its way into every crevice of your clothes so the best souvenirs and reminders of what ensued were orange tinted Chacos and a greater sense of urgency.

Art by JACK ELDER

Two

The earth here is desolate, but it is untracked, and it is beautiful. It is centuries old, but only in recent history did people walk, inhabit, and explore here. There aren't words that can describe the blend of landscapes that comes together under the wide-open sky, and quite frequently I find myself speechless when immersed within the red walls of the canyon.

Ruminating in the words of the volunteer ranger, "It's a hot one out there for early May," I settle on the pair of canyons nearly an hour down the wide dirt road. The descent is simple and marked with an occasional cairn. Dropping down first into a ravine nearly breaks the instinct that I must always go up—up to the sky, up the ski lift, *up* the mountain. But down I go: a naïve young twenty-year-old descending quickly into my first slot canyon. Backpack slung haphazardly across my shoulder, hot, dry sweat quickly soaks through the back of my shirt. I think about the guy in *127 Hours*, whose only option to escape entrapment in the remote Utah canyon is to cut off his own arm. I'm not prepared to do that; I forgot my pocketknife in the car. Not until that first drop and subsequent *thump* of my body hitting hard earth do I become fully aware of the risk potential in this situation. I hope the need to chase a constant adrenaline high is temporary, and someday I can enjoy something tamer, like knitting maybe. But for now, I feel the need to touch the last of the wildlands before someone more powerful than me decides they are no longer wild.

Three

The singular route into Escalante climbs a few thousand feet over mountain passes that resemble those of my childhood comfort in Colorado. As the car reaches the peak of US scenic byway 12, the two-lane road is a mere blemish over taupe sandstone sprinkled with sacred sagebrush. Eventually, this monotone gives way to deep red rock across the land and the road opens to the richest blue sky I have ever witnessed. The town of Escalante, home to 800 residents, is a dark spot on the landscape in the distance, and the last car we encountered was miles before. Arid plateaus grace us with their presence as they seemingly appear out of nowhere in the vast expanse of the Utah desert. Henry Mountains peek through in the distance. A river basin with a slight trickle of a stream comes into view, so small in such a large place, yet so important.

The shape of a canyon is one of the true shapes in nature that cannot be replicated. I'm fascinated by canyons because every time you get deeper, the soul of the earth thumps louder. At one point the same trickle of river had enough force to carve rock. As the water seeped through cracks and crevices, it slowly wore away to yield smooth walls and lines of various vibrant reds and oranges. I imagine this desert was a little less dry back then, and the thin white lines on the canyon walls following me on my adventure down its rim are evidence of the river's depth that slowly shrank to a trickle year after year of drought. Unnatural heat has dried up the lifeblood of the desert—water. The same water western states fight over to this day. The same water that would be rapidly depleted by extraction activities to remove the elusive natural resources through a sharp, disrupting scar within the rock.

How could anyone want to save this for anything but wonder, awe, and reverence, so that someone someday can experience the adrenaline high I can attest for, here deep in the soul of the earth?

Four

Grand-Staircase Escalante National Monument is positioned in Southern Utah somewhere between the mountains, sky, and desert. It represents over a million acres of untouched public land, that in theory, should be completely protected. The underuse, underappreciation, and lack of knowledge surrounding public lands in America is apparent through the sparsity of dull bumper stickers like "protect public lands" or "keep public lands public" in the sea of national park or unnaturally bright colored destination stickers. Due east of Escalante is its sister land, Bears Ears National Monument. Wildly untouched and unexplored, 2017 brought controversy and uncertainty to these wild places. Just like that, the borders of both Escalante and Bears Ears diminished to nearly half their original sizes under the premise that, someday, we might look for oil, coal, natural gas, or minerals deep down under the red rock, and allow cattle to freely graze the sagebrush and sparsity of plant life dotting the landscape. Under this bold assumption, a name given so fast was quickly stripped away with new borders seemingly drawn by a toddler as the last of the wildlands shrank with the swish of a pen. Borders aren't nearly as permanent as we make them seem.

Standing here, I'm sad. I feel overwhelmingly powerless. And while I'm frequently confused by myself and others, the reason we're put here, what we should do both now and later—acting with poise and gratitude now ensures there is a later. What is the best way to spend time that is so limited? I *overthink.* Surely, this isn't it. The prioritization of political agenda, economic greed, disregard for wildlands, and lack of consideration sends me deeper into mourning for a place I've developed such closeness to in the shortest time.

It isn't until nearly two years later I learn a word to appropriately encompass my thoughts and feelings. Anger, sadness, fear, helplessness.

Solastalgia.

You see, climate change isn't natural; it's human.

While I couldn't see the exact pieces of land that were taken away from their protected distinction, I mourned. My soul's instant connection with the beauty and untamed nature of this place fought with the American ideal that must always place ownership and purpose to land—often made in decisions of greed and carelessness. Can't the sole purpose of these lands be that innately, wild lands are part of our identity? I can't help but think that there's no way the ones signing the paper have stepped foot into the rich, red dirt before they decided to make the decision to corrupt this sacred space. Since when did preservation not become an adequate purpose? There are countless other places we have already pillaged out of greed without ripping from the heart of southern Utah.

Every new act of land desecration in favor of human activity seeks to destroy the places that have made us, well, human. Not headlined in the news or political agenda is the rich history of the area. Archeological history holds rich importance to indigenous peoples. Species, now endangered by climate extremes, whose existence easily could be wiped by resource collecting on the land. Biodiversity, comfortably living on public land, soon to be eliminated by corporate pollution and interest. Untapped natural resources, soon tapped beyond their limit will leave the familiar, neglected reclamation site in its wake. The trickle of water that has made comfort in the deep canyons, is soon vulnerable to the same polluting activities that can overtake habitats. A land already touched by climate change is about to become a victim.

Five

I spend the next hour sitting cross-legged in the sand. The wind fills my soul with a familiar rumble as I look at the rock giants around me, but it doesn't quite reach my eardrums. My heart pounds and reverberates.

The fight doesn't have to end here. This land is still wild and can be for decades. We can ensure there is a later by fighting for permanence in the present. The rich dirt and current fragility of Escalante and Bears Ears can cradle future generations and not simply fuel the flame humans have stoked for years. We have voice and we have choice.

The sun is still high above Monument Valley, which is barely a shadow on the horizon. Heat graces my skin. This land is spiritual, grandeur in its purest form. It has its own heartbeat in the form of fleeting birds and rustling grasses. I lay my hands in the dirt, thankful for this opportunity to connect so deeply with the earth. As the sun sets, I can't imagine this landscape overtaken by anything else but the intense orange, yellow, pink, and purple of the sky. The namesake formation, Bears Ears, is perched so precariously, yet it has survived thousands of years of wind whipping across the desert. Thousands of years of wind to be wiped out by ink on paper.

THE LAST HAWTHORN TREE

KRISHNA SHARMA

Art by EMILY GIBSON

Are those my limbs
Tangled in the power lines?
No, they are the hawthorn tree
Whose frozen scarlet berries rip the air with color

It's my mother's tree
The last hawthorn tree on Hawthorne Ave

Winter brought a diamond shawl
That laid across the tree
Its berries crimson crystals
That would fall, a rain of rubies

Something in that tree
Made it slowly claw the wires
Wires sprouted up like weeds
Draped across its sacred limbs
To fuel my house and keep us warm
Run our freezers, televisions

Winter lost its frantic breath
Instead approached with lazy gait
The ice storms of my youth
Are leagues stronger
Than what I see now

I was 12 when the hawthorn tree on Hawthorne Ave lost its grip
On my mother's power lines
We put it to the axe
But did we cut down winter too?

No berries
No ice
No diamonds
No rubies
No grave marks the spot
Where the last hawthorn tree on
Hawthorne Ave fell

I had the last hawthorn tree on Hawthorne Ave
The last tree on
The last hawthorn tree on Hawthorne Ave

Now I don't have winter either.

THOMAS

A.J. ADAMS

Natural disasters never come at a good time. In December 2017, the searing grind of completing my dissertation had barely abated, and I was still adjusting to life. Yet, the wildfire that would become the largest in California history—for a short time—ignited when extreme winds brought two power lines into contact, showering molten aluminum into the crispy undergrowth in the canyon below. The fire was named Thomas—after the nearest landmark to the ignition site, Thomas Aquinas College—the saint who insisted that faith and reason are not mutually exclusive.

In December, autumn rains would have normally soaked the vegetation, ending the fire season. In the fall of 2017 that did not happen. Scientists have tracked the shrinking California rainy season: as it contracts into shorter timeframes, it lengthens the fire season and focuses intense rain into shorter periods, creating a perfect storm for late autumn wildfires immediately followed by heavy rains, which in turn create mud flows.[1]

This is exactly what happened.

That night, while heading into a late meeting with colleagues, I had to lean into the wind to keep my footing. It blew sand into my eyes and dry leaves into my hair. Two hours passed indoors. When the meeting had ended, I checked my phone. I had an unusual number of text messages, none of which made any sense:

"You can stay at my place if you need to."

"Stay put. I've got the dogs and I'm coming to meet you."

"Hey, I saw about the fire. Are you ok?"

My colleagues and I pieced together the rapidly-unfolding events. A wildfire had started just to the east. The wind was pushing it rapidly toward town. We had to get to our families and get out. Goodbye. We literally scattered to the winds, in the direction of what matters most.

Outside, the dry gale picked up intensity. I couldn't smell smoke yet. My spouse pulled into the parking lot just as I was stepping outside. I climbed into the front seat. The dogs were happy to see me, as usual, but anxious. The back seat was piled high with blankets, sleeping bags, dog food. We didn't yet know where we were going.

I texted back the friend who had offered the four of us a place to stay in her little apartment southwest of town.

Once we arrived, we were still exchanging polite greetings when one of our dogs relieved herself in the middle of the living room floor. Embarrassed, already feeling like

1. Swain, Daniel L. A Shorter, Sharper Rainy Season Amplifies California Wildfire Risk. *Geophysical Research Letters 48,* no. 5, 2021.

a burden, I leapt with cupped hands to catch the rest of the warm lumps before they, too, landed on the carpet. We were all laughing at the absurdity of it—I couldn't myself believe what I had just done—and I made my way to the toilet to flush them.

"Wait—where are you going?! Take it outside!!" She yelled. But it was too late. I washed my hands. All five of us were on edge.

She generously gave us her bed and took the sofa, though we knew none of us would be getting much sleep. This would be the first of many sleepless nights. At dawn, she gently tapped on the door, her voice muffled from concern but sharp as it squeezed through the crack in the door jamb.

"Guys?"

"Yeah?"

"The fire is getting close to here now too. It's time to go."

She was eerily calm, despite the fact that we were all trying to escape the biggest natural disaster any of us had ever experienced. She works for a nonprofit that deploys dogs to search for victims in the eye of the world's biggest crises. Her composure was steadying, strengthening mine.

Bleary-eyed and sleep-deprived, we packed our things. Where would we go next? Whom should we call? Clearly, going west again was not a good idea; if the fire was really this out of control, it would burn all the way to the coast (and it did). I took a chance.

"Meet me at Esther's," I said. "I'll call her on my way."

She answered immediately.

"Hi—are you ok?"

"Can we come over?" I asked, giving up trying to hide the shaking in my voice, finally grasping the magnitude of the situation.

"Come over." It was more of a demand, as if to say, don't think. Don't ask. Just come.

I took a deep breath and gripped the wheel tightly. I was dizzy. It was difficult to focus. The sun was coming up and the birds were at their peak daybreak energy. A small songbird flew directly into the left headlight of the pickup and ricocheted at an angle into the shrubs at the side of the road. None of us saw this coming.

We should have, though. Our area had not burned for more than 30 years, creating a buildup of fuel for an intense wildfire. It had not rained yet this water year, which began in October. The intense, easterly, dry, hot winds, which usually abate by mid-fall, were still here, and were in full force.

We caravanned and took the coast, trying to give the approaching front of the wildfire a wide berth. Cars flowed north on the 101, meeting their daily rush hour appointment for gridlock as if nothing was amiss. Overhead, a reddish-brown sky streak stretched across the highway and out to the ocean. It reminded me of the midcentury horror movie The Blob: a sinister, amorphous being wreaking havoc on unsuspecting victims just trying to have a nice time at the local swimming hole. The beach was tranquil, the

ocean on a different time sequence than the fire.

We arrived at Esther's. In Oxnard, south of Ventura, we were sure to be safe, separated from the fire by concrete, agricultural fields, freeways. And we were. We walked into the house and while we were exchanging our greetings, as if on cue, our other dog relieved herself on the rug in the middle of the living room floor. This time I neglected to dive for it. I was tired.

"It's alright," Esther reassured us. "This carpet has seen worse than that."

Although we did not yet know it, this would be our home for the next ten days. We had more questions than answers. The local news was not helpful, just reel after reel of reporters standing in front of one burning mansion after another, lamenting the loss of people's stuff. The most useful information came from a community group formed on social media. Our neighbors were reporting from the front lines. Some had decided not to evacuate, to instead weather the firestorm with garden hoses, rakes, and shovels.

As it was December, Esther had decorated her house, with delicious delights in reach. I wasn't very hungry during the evacuation, but one thing I did find appealing was the dish of red and green chocolate candies that sat on the counter. I ate so many, emptied and refilled the dish so many times, that I felt guilty and bought more bags to replace them before we left. I mindlessly popped them like pills while scrolling social media, refreshing, refreshing, hoping for answers that slowly trickled in, then having to separate the alarmist chaff from the information wheat.

Night after night we tossed and turned, lucky if we got a few hours' sleep. Still, we were safe and warm. Each night Esther and I would get together in the living room to eat ice cream and watch DVDs of The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel. Esther grew up in New York City at the time that the storyline is set. Observing her watching was more fulfilling than watching the show myself. For those couple of hours each night, I was elsewhere. I would see comfort and nostalgia in her eyes and would miss a past I had never even known. ⁓

A CONSERVATIVE PROPOSAL

SHADIA NAGATI

The liberals can't get anything right. The Wall Street Journal reported that the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change "shows less cause for panic" and that the planet will more likely warm three degrees Celsius than five degrees.[1] Less cause for panic doesn't sound like a climate crisis to me. Al Gore must've set off their alarm bells with An Inconvenient Truth fifteen years ago. This documentary bombards its audience with digital projections of flooding in China and India (biggest polluters) and parts of Manhattan (worst city in the U.S.), including the Islamic center built on the site where Americans died on September 11, 2001. "They can measure this precisely," Gore asserts of rising water predictions attributed to the global warming theory.[2] How precise have they proven to be?

Environmentalists label researchers such as Exxon-funded aerospace engineer Willie Soon as "climate change deniers," but these researchers spit the facts: climate change simply does not threaten human beings any more than it has for all of mankind's existence.[3] Skeptics called Soon's credibility into question, ignoring the fact that conservative think tank the George C. Marshall Institute* awarded him their Courage in Defense of Science award.[4] The fossil-fueled scientist discovered the true culprit of global warming: the sun![5]

Soon's work aligned with other studies coming out of the Marshall Institute that sought to defend Ronald Reagan's Star Wars* plan from rebellious scientists. The "Union of Concerned Scientists" attacked Star with verbal torpedoes, but Reagan's empire struck back. Physicist William Nierenberg (speaking of Manhattan) released the "Changing Climate" report, presenting research that verified an increase in carbon dioxide emissions, but found no need for alarmism, as the Marshall Institute would conduct atmospheric experiments to monitor emissions.[6] The Nierenberg trials sufficed for government placation; why the American public needed more action towards weaning us off fossil fuels confounds me. Surely, they wouldn't call it "natural gas" if it damaged the environment!

1. Ip, Greg. "IPCC Climate Change Report Shows Less Cause for Panic—But More Urgency to Act." The Wall Street Journal, August 11, 2021.
2. Guggenheim, Davis, Director. *An Inconvenient Truth.* United States: Paramount, 2006.
3. Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt.* Bloomsbury Press, 2010.
4. Climate Change Awards, 2014. climatechangeawards.org/willie-soon/.
5. Baum, Eric. "Sunspots May Cause Climate Fluctuations." The Harvard Crimson. April 14, 2009.
6. Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt.* Bloomsbury Press, 2010.

Globally, governments spent $366 trillion on renewable energy projects from 2011 to 2018, but carbon dioxide emissions continue to rise.[7] Safer for the environment? Ha! Just ask bats, one of wind power's greatest casualties. So-called progressives install wind turbines to capture "natural power," but these dang things kill almost as many bats as domestic cats do![8] The United States and twelve European countries built offshore wind farms near coastal towns and plan for more.[9] Joining bats in protest, we hear from wealthy coastal elites who gasp at the thought of a spoiled ocean view from their beachfront vacation homes. Their grandfathers broke hardworking backs to earn the millions of dollars invested in these homes. Governments have no authority to impinge on leisure homes. These renewable energy advocates are full of hot air.

Growing economies mean growing pollution and waste. We cannot avoid this simple fact. What will we do, stop buying things other than necessities? We may as well quit our corporate jobs, too! Work makes you free, and we can sum up economic freedom to a burgeoning economy in one word: plastics. The cheapest, most versatile material has recently been villainized by eco-terrorists and sea huggers, who choke us with pictures of bloody, contorted sea turtles. They want us to stop using one of our most important resources because plastic waste in the ocean has started to form rock/plastic hybrids called plastiglomerates.[10] They detest these colorful contraptions that wash up on shores, sprinkling the sand with bright colors. Well, I say let them eat Funfetti cake. Throw the plastic in the ocean and we'll enjoy beautiful neon colors of rocks and sand, like in the fish tank at your pediatrician's office.

One cannot, however, ignore that human beings have negative impacts on the environment. You may be familiar with the Earth "overshoot day," the day of the year when we have used natural resources that should last the entire year. This year, it fell on July 29th, meaning the entire globe uses 1.7 times the amount of resources that can be naturally replenished. The average U.S. citizen, however, uses four times the replenishable amount.[11] We can't deny that as GDP and population increase, so does pollution. Economist Reverend Thomas Malthus* detailed the possibility of depleted food supply in what we now call a "Malthusian catastrophe": exponential population growth will eclipse linear resource renewal.[12] Malthus, a man of God*, advocated for abstinence (from sex, not eating) to reduce the population. Don't go Keeling over just yet, I do not condone giving up sex to stop carbon emissions. As idyllic as a society without relationship complications may sound, I'm afraid I can't live without indulging in my God-given marital rights.

7. ÓhAiseadha, Coilín, et al. "Energy and climate policy—An evaluation of global climate change expenditure 2011—2018." September 16, 2020.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. De-la-Torre, Gabriel, et al. "New plastic formations in the Anthropocene." Science of the Total Environment 754, 2021.
11. "Earth Overshoot Day 2021." Geneva Environmental Network, July 28, 2022. genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/events/earth-overshoot-day-2022/.
12. Pham, Nhat Minh, et. al. "Environmental consequences of population, affluence, and technologocial progress for European countries: A Malthusian View." Journal of Environmental Management 260, 2020.

Now, we've overlooked the simplest solution to this tragedy of the commons, a solution that will reduce emissions, plastic pollution, the energy crisis—hell, even bigger problems like traffic and having to wait 45 minutes for a table at the Cracker Barrel. Call it eugenics, euthanasia, population control, or what you will: kill 'em. If we humanely slaughter the amount of people necessary to reduce the global population to 25%, we can all live like Americans without worrying about the libs trying to install solar-powered electric tofu stands on every corner. We'll begin with everyone whose health and fitness would flunk them out of Basic Combat Training. Can't run up a flight of stairs? Dead. Pass out after running thirty miles in the freezing rain? Nope. These weaklings will not stand a chance in our Newtopia. We can finish the job COVID started by eliminating anyone over sixty and anyone with pre-existing health conditions. This will serve to improve overall health statistics—diseases will disappear when the genetically inferior bodies hosting them disappear. Right now, U.S. cancer cases are up because we have the best testing in the world, and we have the most testing. If we start killing right now, we'd have very few cases of cancer.

Think of the billions of dollars we could save by eradicating the root problem: people. Forget installing solar panels and having to take the extra step to get a $4,000 rebate when you file your taxes. Screw recycling! Throw your trash in the ocean and someday we'll gawk at fossilized Crystal Pepsi* bottles instead of dinosaurs in museums. Society will flourish. There will be no Earth, no World. Just two billion good, old-fashioned Americans, keeping the environment safe from Democracy.

* Now Defunct.

Art by ALLISON NOWELS

Art by PARKER HALCOMB

IN THE DEEP WHITE

CLAYTON MONTGOMERY

It's one of those things you don't realize until it's happening: you're out enjoying a day in the Colorado high country. It's winter, but the sunshine warms you from above, and the wind sends little specks of crystalline snow swirling all around you. They sparkle in the light.

You're standing on the top of a mountain whose name most people will never know, just another anonymous peak. You strap on your skis, feel the familiar click of the bindings. Maybe you give your friend a high-five before pointing your skis downhill, or maybe you're alone. You make your first turn, beginning your way down the slope.

The snow is soft. Light and delicate. It invites you to ski harder, turn deeper, go faster. You oblige. Your turns are flourishing and a smile has found its way to your face without you even realizing it. But then, you notice a crack in the snow. And now all the snow around you is cracking. The whole slope moves like a wave quickly rushing back to the ocean. It whisks you off your feet, almost gently. And now you're now sliding in it, uncontrolled, downhill. This is an avalanche, you realize, and you're no longer smiling. The snow, which is carrying you, engulfing you, picks up speed. Faster and faster you're racing downhill. Some snow gets in your mouth and your nose, and you find it harder to breathe. You cough as the avalanche grows more violent all around you. And now you're approaching the tree line, and you're moving very fast. If you hit a tree, you'll die. But you don't hit a tree. You get lucky. But you notice yourself sinking deeper in the snow. You try to swim with flailing arms. In an avalanche, snow behaves more like a liquid—this you remember that from an avalanche course you took years ago. But the swimming is pointless, and your sinking continues. And now you're up to your neck. Your eyes. It's above your head.

The avalanche stops. You can't help but feel a sense of relief, but you notice the snow has now solidified like cement. You can't move, and it's dark. Buried alive. You can hear the dull pounding of blood in your ears. The heat of your breath melts some of the snow in front of your face. It helps you to breathe a little easier, but you realize it won't last long. Eventually you will run out of oxygen.

If you went out with friends, they'll start searching for you, that is, if they weren't buried themselves. If you're alone, you'll have to pray that someone sees the fresh avalanche path, or by some other miracle, comes looking for you. Either way, someone might find you, but if not, well, that's how it happens.

Colorado. Winter 2021. Twelve people died in avalanches amidst an explosion of interest in backcountry skiing[1]. Seven of those deaths came in February alone. One avalanche outside of Silverton killed three people and buried another. It took Search and Rescue two days just to recover their bodies. Another deadly slide occurred in March when a pair of skiers exited a backcountry gate ("backcountry" meaning mountainous terrain that's wild, beyond the boundaries of defined ski areas). One of the riders triggered a slide and was buried. Unfortunately, he didn't survive.

Across the nation, 37 people died in the winter from 2020 to 2021, the most seen in a single season since at least 1950.[2] Avalanche deaths are on the rise, with the past fifteen years seeing annual death tolls rise into the thirties multiple times.[3] Over the past few years, interest in backcountry skiing has exploded. Mountain states such as Colorado have experienced a population boom and, with that, more people accessing the backcountry.[4] Worse yet, with the closing of ski resorts during the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, people took to the backcountry in greater numbers—new converts to a dangerous game. At ski resorts, avalanches are prevented using explosives and other techniques, but in the backcountry, the dangers are often hidden and up to the individual to discern. Many of these backcountry novices have little-to-no knowledge about avalanches and how to stay safe from them. Avalanche information centers across the country have put out ad campaigns warning people, begging people, to stay away from the backcountry without proper training. They've doubled down on their education efforts to keep people safe, but if the past few years are any indication, the problem of avalanches in Colorado will continue to worsen.[5]

According to François Louchet, "an avalanche may be defined as the destabilization and flow of part of the snow cover."[6] Snow destabilizes, and as it moves downhill, it flows like a liquid. Over the course of a winter season, snow piles up on slopes in layers. There's the layer of snow from early in the season on the bottom, and then the most recent snow on top. Some snow is thick—dense with water, heavy—while other times it's light and fluffy. The factors that create different types of snow are many, ranging from temperature, humidity, and how much water a storm is carrying. All it takes is one of these layers to fail, wherein it cracks and loses all stability, to trigger an avalanche. This sends all the snow in that layer, and usually all the layers above it, hurtling down a slope.

1. Colorado Avalanche Information Center. "US Avalanche Fatalities." CAIC.
2. Page, Charles, Dale Atkins, Lee Shockley, and Michael Yaron. "Avalanche Deaths in the United States: A 45-Year Analysis." Wilderness and Environmental Medicine 10, 146-51, 1999.
3. Statista. "Number of Deaths Due to Avalanches in the U.S. 2021."
4. State Demography Office, Colorado's Changing Population §.
5 Condon, Scott. "Safety from the Slides: CAIC Looking to Educate What Is Anticipated to Be a Large Backcountry Crowd." AspenTimes.com. AspenTimes.com, November 26, 2020. aspentimes.com/news/safety-from-the-slides/.
6 Louchet, François. "Snow Avalanches: Beliefs, Facts, and Science." Oxford Scholarship Online, December 2020. oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198866930.001.0001/oso-9780198866930-chapter

Not all snow, however, is created equally when it comes to stability. Weak, "sugary" snow (like the kind that's impossible to make snowballs from) plays a part in many avalanches. This friable snow is incapable of supporting heavier snow on top. If there's a layer of sugary snow hiding somewhere in a slope, all it takes is a skier, snowmobiler, or more snowfall to trigger an avalanche. Once these weak layers are created, they tend to stick around for the entire winter, and rarely improve in stability. Of course, there are multiple different kinds of avalanches ranging from slab, loose snow, and wet snow, but in general, it's usually these weak layers that are to blame.

Avalanches are fickle animals, varying in type, and even more in size and severity. The Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) rates avalanches on a scale of one to five, which measures their likelihood and size. On this scale, a one implies low avalanche danger, where a five would indicate the potential for severity. Similarly, when it comes to measuring avalanches, a D5 is the highest possible rating for an avalanche, which is code for absolutely massive.

Winter 2019. Colorado experienced a winter storm that dropped feet of heavy, wet snow across the state. According to the Aspen Times, Colorado experienced 87 D4 avalanches in the 2018/2019 winter season alone. This dwarfs the 24 total D4s that were reported from 2010 to 2018. That March also saw three D5 avalanches when most forecasters had thought that size impossible for Colorado.[7]

D5 avalanches, never seen in Colorado until that 2019 season, are of course the most spectacular. They contain the power to rip up thousands of trees. One of the D5 avalanches in Aspen was two miles wide and filled the creek at the valley floor with snow. Another massive avalanche outside of Hinsdale destroyed the sheriff's home while he and his two daughters were asleep inside. Somehow, they survived largely unscathed, though their house was literally flattened.

Skiers and snowboarders assume a certain risk when they venture into the backcountry. They know (or at least they should know) that they risk triggering an avalanche that could leave them helplessly buried beneath a mountain of snow. But the sheriff and his family hadn't assumed a risk. Motorists on roadways are similarly unsuspecting. Nobody expects an avalanche to come roaring down a mountainside while they're driving. But in 2019, that's exactly what happened, more than a few times. One avalanche even managed to completely bury three unsuspecting cars:

On March 7, 2019, an enormous avalanche released high on the west side of the Tenmile Range. It roared down an existing chute… above Copper Mountain—toward Highway 91… snow thundered through 1,100 linear feet of dense forest, snapping or uprooting every tree in its wake before burying three vehicles on the highway—and five people inside them.[8,9]

8. Condon, Scott. "Researchers Take Deep Dive into Large, Intense March Avalanche Cycle in Aspen, State." The Aspen Times, November 8, 2019.
9. O'Neil, Devon. "Takeaways from Last Season's Historic Avalanche Cycle." Colorado Summit Magazine, December 16, 2021.

The people on Highway 91 weren't harmed, but the trauma they endured will likely stick with them for a lifetime. Similarly, Interstate 70, the vital east-west artery in the western U.S., was buried a few times in the span of two weeks—the worst instance resulted in a ten-hour closure of the highway. Luckily, no cars were fully buried, though many people were stuck in deep snow for hours. The March 2019 avalanche cycle was nothing other than Biblical in size and scale.

With the increasing death toll, and with the growing magnitude of avalanches, it's worth asking the question: are avalanches getting worse?

With each passing day, climate change bears down harder on us. "The influence of climate warming becomes every day more and more visible in our environment, and more particularly in mountainous areas," wrote François Louchet. In Colorado, we're already seeing signs of this change. In an avalanche-specific context, one team of researchers analyzed tree ring data in the Himalayas to learn about the correlation between climate change and avalanche risk. They found that "the warming observed in recent decades has been accompanied by increased snow avalanche frequency in the Western Indian Himalayas."[10] In the context of avalanches, climate change is highly visible, utterly terrifying, and deadly.

According to early avalanche research, the correlation with climate change is obvious. Changing climate equates to more frequent and larger avalanche events. Louchet offers more insight: "In such a transient period, the succession of heavy snowfalls and thawing episodes would probably favor spontaneous full-depth avalanches with larger run-out distances." As identified by Louchet, "full-depth avalanches" essentially send the entire winter's snowpack hurtling down the slope all at once. A rise in full-depth avalanches would mean more D4 and D5 avalanches like those seen in the 2019 season—events that change the landscape forever. They're the kinds that reach very high speeds and destroy homes without warning.

An article published in Aspen Journalism explains how future winter storms are expected to be warmer, and the snow that they drop will have a greater snow water equivalent (SWE).[11] More water in snow means that it's denser, heavier, and more difficult to support on a slope. The snow that catalyzed the epic March 2019 avalanche cycle had a very high SWE, which caused the lower levels to naturally fail (almost none of the largest avalanche events that year were human-triggered). "Increased activity will likely be driven by warmer, more extreme storms [...] which

10. Ballesteros-Cánovas, J. A., D. Trappmann, J. Madrigal-González, N. Eckert, and M. Stoffel. "Climate Warming Enhances Snow Avalanche Risk in the Western Himalayas." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 115, no. 13 (March 27, 2018): 3410–15.
11. Stewart-Severy, Elizabeth. "One Year Later: What the March 2019 Avalanche Cycle Hints at on Climate Change." Aspen Journalism, March 9, 2020.

hold more energy and thus deliver lots of precipitation and wind. Avalanches at higher elevations, which in Colorado is usually above treeline, are likely to be bigger and more destructive."[12] This is entirely consistent with the cycle, when most of the large slides began well above treeline before barreling into the valleys below.

Back to the question: are avalanches getting worse? Yes. These past few years of giant avalanches and staggering death tolls are the beginnings of a new normal. In this future of larger, more frequent avalanches, the consequences will be severe. Users of the backcountry will have to be even more careful and able to stomach more risk. And should they decide to brave the backcountry, they could trigger avalanches that crash into mountain-side communities, where people have built homes and roads and bridges. Colorado and other mountain states will have to spend millions more on avalanche mitigation and the winter death tolls will continue to rise. So too, will the destruction of unsuspecting communities. It's time to start finding real, tangible solutions, otherwise we'll face tragedy after tragedy, winter after winter.

12. Ibid.

Art by PARKER HALCOMB

DESIDERIUM

GRACE SCHWENK

Looking out my window what do I see
but the grasp of spectral hazing looming in the Valley.
When I long to see
the sublime beautiful Bitterroots standing
tall and proud
above me.

What do I see
but the limp and lifeless bodies of dry grass clustered about my yard. When I long to see
green strands grow in
lush, vivacious
a lawn buzzing with bumblebees.

What do I see
but the orange apocalyptic sun
poking out
sheepishly through the haze.
When I long to see
the bright, white sun
front and center
against the vibrant blue sky.

What do I see
But the creek behind my house dry and empty
haunted by the ghost of rushing water.
When I long to see
my little sister running
up from the gushing creek hands covered in mud
as she cups a frog to show to me.

What do I see but a sprinkler
resting upon my neighbor's roof
intending to ward off the ferocious flames.
When I long to see my old lab dashing
in and out of a grounded sprinkler watering the grass.

What do I see
but the helicopters
dipping their red buckets
into our irrigation pond.
When I long to see darkness
as I cannonball off the dock into the water.

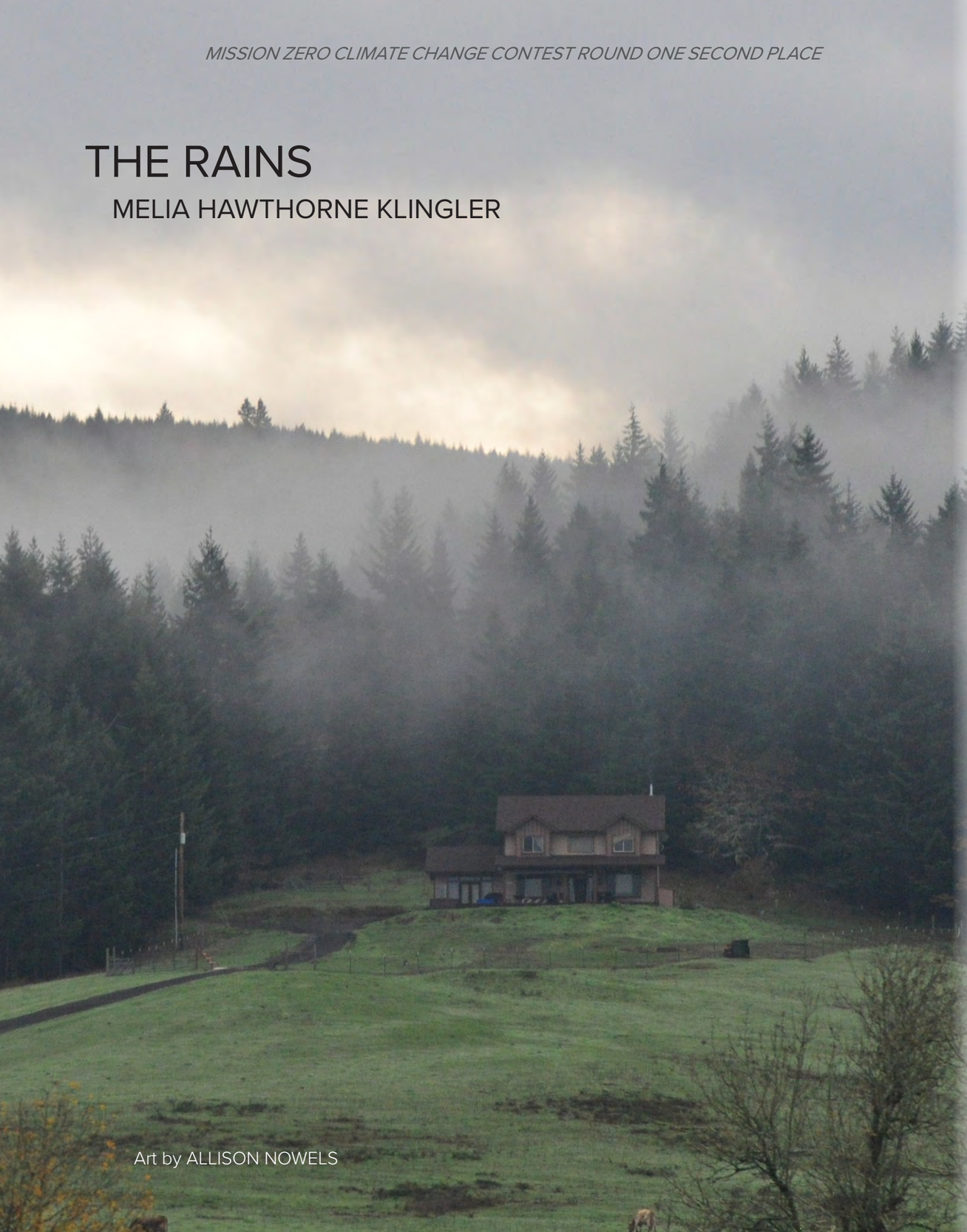
Looking outside my window what do I see
but the black bear and her two cubs scurrying through my yard
fleeing the relentless torch raging behind them.
When I do not long to see the frightened forest animals displaced from their habitat running into a bullet.

I look outside what do I see
The forests are burning all around me.
When I long to see a way of life,
now long gone, as I once knew it.

MISSION ZERO CLIMATE CHANGE CONTEST ROUND ONE SECOND PLACE

THE RAINS

MELIA HAWTHORNE KLINGLER



Art by ALLISON NOWELS

I come downstairs and my mom is on the phone with Tio Jose and Tia Saida again.

"We used to be able to predict the rains," Tio Jose says. "Every spring the clouds would gather low in the sky and then we could say, 'The rain will start tomorrow.' And the next day we would be sitting on the porch sipping *café con leche* and the rains would come."

My mom shakes her head and by the way her eyes look sad I know she's thinking over the well-worn conversation about how things just aren't the same anymore. I've heard it too. Before, everything worked like clockwork. The people of Cuatro Cruces would work the soil, placing each fragile seed in the ground. The rain would come and make things grow and the village would become green and lush and sleepy under the weight of humidity and growing fruit. Then, after the monsoons had passed, while the soil was still wet, the children would run out and everyone would harvest. The women would gather at Church to make tamales and the trucks, laden with fruit, would head into town. Then the rains would stop and the tin roofs would become hot with sun. Coffee season. The air would smell like freshly picked coffee beans and Christmas, a promise of another year of crops and rain.

That promise is broken now. The rains, once well behaved, have become a fickle child who hides when he's called and jumps out when he's not wanted. The crops drown, the roads collapse into squelching pools of mud, and Tio Jose and Tia Saida call my mom again. "We used to be able to predict the rains," they say. "What's happened to our beautiful Earth?"

Often, with the clicking of a tongue and the sorrowful shake of a head, the conversation turns to *Los gringos*, their supersized companies and supersized machines that beat the earth, squeezing every last drop of life from her. Ravenous for pineapples and profits, they devour the land and spew grey clouds into the sky. Tio Jose sighs. "You have to be gentle with the soil, let it run through your fingers and treat it gently, like a lover." *Los gringos* and their harsh language don't know how to speak of love.

And now my mom is asking about Don Orlando. "How's the farm?" She wants to know if the lush paradise where she fell in love with my dad still exists. Does the stream still gurgle and do the *manzanas de agua* still grow red and delicious and do the howler monkeys still try to chase away the early hours of the morning with their cries? And I have to watch her face fall as she hears that, for the first time since Sibú cursed his people a thousand years ago, Don Orlando's river has run dry. "Baptisms were strange this year," says Tia Saida. Spraying down believers with a hose isn't the same as watching them emerge, soaked and smiling, from the same clear water that flows from Nicaragua to Panama.

I run back upstairs because I don't want to hear any more. I don't want to hear about the rains or us being here and them over there. I want the pain that seeps through the speakerphone to evaporate into the warm summer air. I want to be back in Cuatro Cruces, sipping coffee on the porch, watching the rain fall steady once more.

Art by WEISS BLEIWEISS

WHEN THE CLIMATE CHANGES WE CHANGE

CHRISTINA EISERT

"Do not trouble yourself much to get new things,"
said Henry David Thoreau in Walden.
"Things do not change; we change."

I've never particularly loved the term "climate change." Instead, I prefer the terms "climate chaos," or the "climate crisis," because "change" is often seen as a good thing. I mean, Americans like change. A popular president recently ran on "Hope and Change." When we want to make things better, we "change things up." A little "change will do you good," we tell one another when our lives or even our wardrobes become too routine. Change is something Americans tend to embrace. It's just in our nature. So, when the climate changes, Americans don't necessarily get concerned. After all, America isn't really where most of these changes have happened, so far. Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia have been far more likely to feel the effects of a changing climate, though they contribute far less greenhouse emissions than China, the United States, India, Russia, and other industrialized nations.[1] [2] Middle America has for decades adapted an out-of-sight, out-of-mind attitude toward the drought, flooding, and famine other members of the human family have already been living with due to climate change. It has been others' fate to reap the chaos. Climate change has meant change in other ecosystems in other parts of the world, for other people. For a long time, most Americans were fine with that.

However, Americans can no longer escape the chaos. We are a part of the climate. Americans' lives are changing right now due to rising greenhouse emissions, much of this emitted by the people of the United States throughout the course of the industrialization of our nation.[3] The American people can no longer expect to be insulated from the consequences of our massive emissions. Instead, the chaos is coming home. We can choose to care. We can choose to educate ourselves, to prepare and meet this change head on. Or, we can let it catch us unawares, the way it caught me, my family, and our entire community the morning the Marshall fire burned through Boulder County, killing two, destroying more than a thousand structures, and displacing tens of thousands of people.[4]

1. Eckstein, David, KünzelVera, SchäferLaura, and Germanwatch. 2021. Global Climate Risk Index 2021 Who Suffers Most Extreme Weather Events? Weather-Related Loss Events in 2019 and 2000-2019. Bonn Germanwatch Nord-Süd Initiative E.V.
2. "Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Climate Watch." n.d. climatewatchdata.org. climatewatchdata.org/ghg-emissions?end_year=2019&start_year=1990.
3. EPA. 2019. "Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks US EPA." US EPA. April 11, 2019. epa.gov/ghgemissions/inventory-us-greenhouse-gas-emissions-and-sinks.
4. Strange, Chet. 2022. "Their Neighborhood Leveled by Fire, Grieving Residents Wonder: Can They Go Home Again?" Washington Post. January 25, 2022. washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2022/marshall-fire-colorado-rebuilding/.

December 30, 2021 was a truly beautiful morning. Morning light shone through the sun catchers. The pine boughs smelled deeply of menthol and earth as the wind tossed them. Squirrels ran friskily along the back fence, though the dozens of birds that normally flitted through the tree branches were nowhere in sight. Smoke poured into the sky in a quick black column behind us as I packed my two teenage boys into the car to go get haircuts.

As we pulled away, the big picture emerged, and I realized the source of the smoke was close by. Very close. I then noticed that cars were streaming out of the Costco parking lot adjacent to our neighborhood. No phone call or knock on the door had to come for me to realize we needed to evacuate. I attempted to turn my car around and head back to our house to collect our dogs and some personal items, but was stopped by firefighters. My heart broke and my voice cracked as their words began to hit me and I made a horrible realization. "My dogs!" I yelled in a panic. From where we were, I could see the back of my house. I decided to go for it. I drove around the firefighters and pulled back into my neighborhood.

It was already a hellscape. The atmosphere was thick with a rush of fire and smoke. The approaching inferno sucked the oxygen out of the air, replacing it with acrid chemicals and soot from my neighbors' already burning homes. Dinner-plate sized sheets of ash rained down from the sky, actively burning at the edges. They landed on the car and were piling up on the roof of my house as I approached. A barrage of intense heat and sound met me as I leapt from the car. The fire storm was upon us.

Hardly able to see or hear, I ran up the stairs still lit with Christmas lights, opened my front door, and screamed inside for the dogs. The fire alarm was blaring. I was unable to step inside, unable to grab things that sat where they'd been left, just a few feet from me across the living room. Our Christmas tree stood in the front window, newly opened presents still lingering beneath it. My laptop was on the kitchen table. Everything we owned, every precious heirloom and a lifetime of memories, was in that house. There was no time for that now.

I could see my young dog, Bella, hiding behind the couch and frozen in fear. I called to her and to my elderly dog, Sasha, who was now bolting up the stairs from the basement, a terrified look on her normally sweet face. Petrified, neither came to me. In a last-ditch attempt, I screamed to the dogs as if I had a bullhorn: "Let's go!" They came. I will always be so grateful that they did. So many of our friends and neighbors were unable to save their pets that day. I got the dogs safely in the car and took off. After that, we never saw our home again.

However, we were not out of the woods yet, as we quickly found ourselves stuck in the traffic now streaming out of the giant shopping center that lay between us and

safety. Cars were everywhere, many simply frozen in the middle of the road, unsure of where to go. Barely able to see through the thick smoke, I tapped my horn as I drove so that people would know we were there. Trapped behind hundreds of shoppers who were scared but not quite aware of the approaching cataclysm, the situation was becoming more dire. Choking on smoke and trembling with terror, I feared the firewall that was now devouring our neighborhood would soon overtake us. I decided to get off the road. I turned my car and tentatively put a tire up on the sidewalk. I paused for a moment to look at the wide eyes of each of my children, took a deep breath, and drove straight into the park—past the playground and basketball court where we had played a thousand times, cutting through the center to get out of the neighborhood. Instinct taking over, I headed for clear skies and breathable air. As we broke out of the smoke we looked back and saw the extent of the inferno. Our entire neighborhood was gone.

For decades perceived as the purview of the far flung world, like perpetually flooded Indonesia or drought-baked Sub Saharan Africa, long the misfortune of those without the agency to demand attention from media or policy makers—like the Gullah Geechee Nation whose native heritage is sinking into the sea as their islands off the coast of South Carolina succumb to sea level rise—the chaos wrought by climate change is now unfurling itself across the European, Australian, and North American continents.[5] The data gets harder to deny as fires taint the air, beaches wash away, and the heat rises.

It is hard to deny something that wipes out your home and almost kills you.

We can no longer pretend to be passive observers, clicking through the news of hurricanes and famine, safe in our Middle American cocoons. Change is coming; in fact, it is here. We can change, too. Or we can wait. We can continue to deny the reality of what is happening to us, of what we are doing to ourselves and the world, and wait passively for the consequences to occur as more drought and more fires dehydrate the West, as coastal communities are wiped out, as mass extinction unfolds and wars break out over scarce natural resources.[6] [7] We can wait until it is too late, even for Middle America.

We are a part of the climate, and as it changes, we change. As we lose polar bears and butterflies, we also lose artifacts and architecture, art and history—even our favorite sweaters and teapots passed down to us by our grandmothers. This affects us. We change. Like it or not.

5. "Rising Seas Threaten the Gullah Geechee Culture. Here's How They're Fighting Back." 2022. Environment. July 27, 2022. nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/rising-seas-threaten-the-gullah-geechee-culture-heres-how-theyre-fighting-back.
6. "Wildlife Populations Have Decreased 70 Percent in Only 50 Years, Report Finds." 2022. Popular Science. October 13, 2022. popsci.com/environment/living-planet-index-70-percent-decline/.
7. "Is Climate Change Causing More Wars? - the YEARS Project." n.d. Theyearsproject.com. Accessed October 18, 2022. theyearsproject.com/latest/is-climate-change-causing-more-wars#:~:text=Evidence%20links%20rise%20in%20temperature.

Many things have changed in my life since this fire. It is my new reality. The home I shared with my children, our beautiful neighborhood, our park—it is all gone. Our community is already rebuilding, but nothing will ever be the same. I will always feel that fire bearing down on me, threatening to burn away everything I know and love. It is creeping up on you, too.

The other day I found a bag tucked into a corner of the small apartment I rented after my family lost our home. Inside I had placed the shoes we wore as we fled for our lives that morning—a pair of green suede ankle boots. I liked these shoes a lot before the fire. Since then, I have not been able to even look at them, no less wear them. I hid them away because seeing them triggered real trauma, even panic attacks, soon after the fire. But now, as I untucked this bag and sucked in my breath as I realized its contents, I feel grateful to have them. In fact, I loved them. Ashes still cling to the familiar green suede and a slight smell of woodsmoke lingered. I took them outside, dusted them off, then slid them on. They still fit. Not everything about me has changed.

Art by SHADIA NAGATI

THE SAN JUAN RIVER

KATE BAUGH

Sand and pebbles blasted my face as I poked my head out from behind the dingy Bureau of Land Management restroom to check if the adults were back from shuttling cars to the river'stakeout. The three youngsters—my younger brother Jack, my friend Scarlett, and I—had sought refuge there to escape the brutal upstream wind that whipped off the San Juan River, pelting sand and gravel from the boat ramp into every exposed inch of skin, and sending anything left unsecured flying into the vegetation far beyond our reach. Storm clouds gathered in the west, above where the river flowed under a bridge and disappeared around a corner into the canyon. Rain spit on us. We dreaded and longed for the sight of our returning parents; this would mean a reprieve from the stench of the only shelter available, but also that we would have to shove our motley fleet of rafts and kayaks off and strain against the wind, hoping the shifting current would help us travel downriver to our campsite and toward eight days of falling into the soothing rhythm of life on the river. Such was the beginning of one of our San Juan river trips, a thirteen-year tradition that began in 2003, until the year before Scarlett and I went off to college.

I grew up rafting on this river and no two years were ever alike. One particularly low water year, my dad and I smashed our waterlogged and unresponsive rental canoe into a rock that towered over our heads, leaving a deep dent in its plastic bow. The next high-water year, mydad wedged his raft on top of the same rock, now barely submerged, with the powerful current threatening to flip the heavily laden baggage boat like a child's plaything. Sometimes the heat and bugs were so intense I wanted nothing more than to jump into the river to take shelter in the shade of the scraggly vegetation clinging to the banks. Other years we huddled grumpily on the rafts through days marked by wind and rain.

Change is the only constant in this ever-shifting landscape. The San Juan River emerges from its headwaters in the mountains of Colorado and begins its journey as a clear, trout-laden mountain stream before swelling to the broad, sediment-laden river that meanders through deep multicolored canyons in Southern Utah. Several native and endangered fish species call these turbid waters home, such as the bonytail chub, razorback sucker, and Colorado pikeminnow.[1] Here, its insistent flow has revealed millions of years of geologic history of the American Southwest while it journeys toward its confluence with the Colorado River, now under Lake Powell. Over the 84 mile stretch of river between the launch at Sand Island, past

1. Kearsley, Lisa. *San Juan River Guide: Sand Island to Clay Hills Crossing*. Flagstaff, AZ: Shiva Press, 2007

Photos provided by KATE BAUGH

the boat ramp at Mexican Hat, and down to the takeout at Clay Hills Crossing, the river meanders through a remote and varied landscape. Our journeys began where the river sweeps across a wide floodplain, populated by scrubby vegetation and contained by sheer sandstone cliffs that were sometimes adorned by dark desert varnish dripping down from above. After the river passes through Comb Ridge's multicolored spine and into a narrow red canyon, the cliffs briefly fall away to reveal the Mexican Hat boat launch and dusty gravel road that winds up to the dwindling 1920s oil-boom town of Mexican Hat. We would often stop to tie up the rafts and trudge up the road to treat ourselves to some hard-earned gas station ice cream at the lone Exxonstation before returning to our rafts to once again plunge under a bridge and disappear around a bend into the canyon, leaving behind the last civilization for the next 57 river miles. Past Mexican Hat, the San Juan enters Goosenecks State Park, where the river has dug itself a steep- walled and winding path into fossil-rich gray limestone that replaces the now familiar red sandstone. The river thunders through many of its few "real" rapids below the Goosenecks.

Government Rapid, one of only two class III rapids on the San Juan, presents the river's final challenge before a two-day slack water section prior to the takeout. Below this rapid is where Isee lasting changes in the canyon.

The San Juan River flows into Lake Powell shortly after the takeout at Clay Hills Crossing. However, the water begins to slow much further up the canyon causing the entrained sediment to fall to the riverbed, creating a treacherous labyrinth of shifting sandbars. Slickhorn Gulch, a spectacular side canyon rife with cool, clear swimming holes, spat massive boulders into the river during powerful forgotten flash floods to form the final named rapid of the river, Slickhorn Rapid. We often pulled over and camped at one of the willow-lined sites near the mouth of Slickhorn where we had to contend with the river's hydraulics dragging us away from the promise of a comfortable camp and swimming in the cool waters of the side canyon, and out onto the turbulent water created by Slickhorn rapid. The last year we rafted as a group, we secured one of the coveted Slickhorn campsites on our permit, but nearly floated past it on placid chocolate-colored water because we were expecting the telltale sounds of a looming rapid to alertus to our approaching destination. We were baffled by this change until John, Scarlett's dad and our river sage who has been running the San Juan since 1993, reminded us that silt deposits had been traveling upstream and must have finally smoothed the rocks that once formed the rapid.

This haunting reality brought back something he said many years prior: in 20 years the river would probably be unrecognizable due to the impacts of Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Powell. In its pre-dam state, the river sustained human life in the region for millennia. People have used the San Juan as a water source since the first Paleo-Americans made their way to the region around 10,000 years ago. Ancestral Puebloans inhabited the area from approximately 500-1300AD. The river's water sustained agriculture along the banks of the river for this population.[2] Their traces can still be seen today in hastily abandoned cliff dwellings, complete with thousand-year-old corn cobs and pottery shards. Today, the Navajo Nation borders the southern bank on the lower segment below Mexican Hat, and the San Juan provides a major source of water for the region. European settlers were enticed by the potential for farming and agriculture enabled by the river and established extensive farm-based communities, particularly along the upper stretches of the San Juan near modern-day Farmington, New Mexico. Further west beyond where the San Juan drains into the Colorado River, the lower Colorado basin states of Arizona, Nevada, and California saw several destructive floods in the early 1900s. These floods obliterated agriculture and left the desire for dams along the unpredictable Colorado River to provide flood control, stored water, and hydroelectric power.[3] Today, it is tamed by 15 dams spaced every few hundred miles.[4] The once mighty Colorado no longer meets the sea in the gulf of California, except during unusually wet years, due to the American Southwest's insatiable thirst.[5]

The Colorado is joined by several rivers, including the San Juan, under Lake Powell. Lake Powell is held back by Glen Canyon Dam, one of two dams that bookend the Grand Canyon; its sister Lake Mead is impounded by Hoover Dam near Las Vegas. These two dams work in conjunction to supply power and water to the region. Completed in 1963, Glen Canyon Dam was constructed to meet the terms of water agreements between the upper and lower basinstates

2. Kearsley, San Juan River Guide: Sand Island to Clay Hills Crossing.
3. Glen Canyon Dam. 2.kenyon.edu/projects/Dams/glen.html.
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and Mexico. It provides carbon-free hydroelectric power to six states and supports a booming tourism economy. Millions of visitors flock to the region every year to explore the intricate coastline and fantastical red sandstone formations in personal watercraft or rented houseboats.[6] At highest capacity, the water level reaches 3,700 feet above sea level, spreading out across the landscape and flooding numerous side canyons to create a twisted coastline. However, this water level has been declining due to extended drought conditions in the upper basin states in the 21st century. On February 10, 2022, the water level reached 3,529', the lowest elevation seen since filling began in 1963.[7] The losses of water from Lake Powell due to evaporation and seepage into the porous sandstone walls amount to enough water to supply domestic water to 4 million Americans for a year.[8] In addition to causing the loss of water due to percolation and evaporation, the reservoir also flooded or altered many sites that are important to the Native Americans of the region, including the Navajo Nation, Hopi, and San Juan Southern Paiute.[9] Most notably, the Rainbow Bridge. The Rainbow Bridge is a soaring natural sandstone bridge made easily accessible by the swollen waters of Lake Powell, and therefore vulnerable to damage from overuse by thousands of annual tourists. This site has strong spiritual and cultural importance to many native groups in the region. These losses have spurred conversations about whether the dam is actually beneficial or if the reservoir should be drained and the dam removed. Proponents of removal say that if terms of the water agreements were renegotiated with more current water flow data, the need for the dam would be negated and the renowned beauty of Glen Canyon could once again be revealed. Opponents of reservoir removal bring up the loss of a reliable source of hydroelectric power, a loss of income to those supported by the tourism economy, and a loss of lifestyle to those reliant on the water for farming and agriculture in the arid western states. Some compromise plans have been drafted, such as preferentially filling Lake Mead first to mitigate some of the evaporation and percolation issues surrounding Lake Powell, while still maintaining the benefits of hydroelectricity generation and flood control.[10]

We could feel the effects of Lake Powell on the last day of our San Juan adventure. Our exhausted group pulled into the final camp at Steer Gulch after a long day of slogging the rafts over a maze of sandbars deposited by stagnating waters. When we tied up our rafts and assessed the campsite, we were met with a haze of bloodthirsty mosquitoes who called the algae riddled pools in the side canyon home. The droning cloud was so thick and starving for weary campers that we made the decision to raft out the last few miles to the takeout despite the looming dusk. We hastily packed up the few things we had brought to shore and shoved our rafts back out into the slow current, leaving behind the marshy mosquito homeland. As the darkness intensified, wewere glad for the slow current for once: it would keep us from missing the last possibility of getting off the water before encountering a non-navigable waterfall created by the silty deposits of Lake Powell's still waters forcing the river over a sandstone ledge. We rafted in moody silence, individually digesting our trip and misfortune with the last campsite. The steadily falling canyon walls suddenly opened up and revealed an awe-invoking sight: the full moon had poked its head over the pale pink cliffs and reflected off the river as we emerged from the canyons for the final time. It sparkled off the calmly eddying waters and held everyone spellbound. Content to float and watch, we pulled our oars into the boats, so the only sounds were the quiet splashing of river otters playing in the shallows and crickets singing on the vegetation-choked shores. After what felt simultaneously like a lifetime and a fleeting instant of watching the moon's pale light illuminate the canyon scene, the oars were gently lowered into the water and the rhythmic creak of the oarlocks and slow splashing of the paddles resumed until our headlamps illuminated the sign warning of the dangerous waterfall ahead, signaling us it was time to steer our rafts towards the boat ramp and end our journey.

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THE LANDING PLACE

Interview with LONNI PEARCE

This spring, Changing Skies editor-in-chief Ian Hall had the opportunity to interview Dr. Lonni Pearce, the Associate Director for first-year writing at the University of Colorado Boulder. Lonni, along with her husband and two sons, were some of the many people impacted by the Marshall Fire, a wildfire that raged for two days and destroyed many homes. In our conversation, she recounted the events that led to the loss of her family home and offered some insight into the realities of climate change.

This Interview was recorded on April 25th, 2022.

HALL: Tell us a bit about your experience when the fire started. Were you all at home? How did you hear about the evacuation notice? How did you hear about the fires themselves?

PEARCE: It was December 30th. It happened over the holidays. I was sitting at a table doing a jigsaw puzzle with a window behind me, and all of a sudden, things got really dark. I turned around and there was a giant cloud of smoke. My first thought was "Oh, there must be a brush fire someplace." I started checking social media and saw that there were some reports of a grass fire close to Marshall. We live... lived in Louisville, south of Harper Lake, so I didn't worry too much because that's a ways away. But we kept seeing clouds of smoke, started seeing more things on social media, started seeing that the fire was moving toward Superior, which is the next town over. When we saw that Superior was being evacuated, I told my Husband, "This is weird, but we may have to evacuate." [...] We started thinking about things a little bit. We took a video of all the rooms in our house. I started checking the emergency website. Then we heard we had to evacuate, and we had about 20 minutes. There were law enforcement driving through, smoke was just everywhere. We just grabbed a few things, our cat, and evacuated.

HALL: I noticed you said "Live" and then corrected yourself to "Lived." Is this transitional period still affecting you and your family, and if so, how? How have you tried moving on?

PEARCE: As far as being a transition period, well, first of all, we're still trying to figure out what we're going to do. We're either going to sell our lot and move someplace else, or rebuild, which seems more likely. During the transition, everything moves more slowly than you might imagine. We're still waiting for our lot to be cleaned up, so it's still basically the same as it was right after the fire. We're renting a duplex, [but] we don't call it a home, we call it "the landing place" because it just feels like a temporary place right now, it just feels like where we're going to be for a while. We've been really fortunate that there has been a lot of community support to help all the families really. I mean, we have basic support we need for furniture and kitchen stuff and clothing. But, yeah, it doesn't feel like home. So, it's both a weird space of, looking back on what we lost, but we also have to start making plans for where we're going, and we didn't choose this, we weren't in any way ready to do any of this, so there's a lot of balancing. Like, there's all the emotional stuff about losing our house and losing all of our things that we loved and treasured. But then there's the mundane things of, "Okay, we have to, you know, sign up with FEMA for debris removal." So, there's the pragmatic stuff and then the emotional stuff in there, and you have to jump back and forth.

HALL: Colorado has seen a lot of fires in 2022, so far. From Marshall to NCAR, experts have said that we may be in for an above-average fire year. How have you and your family prepared for the possibility of more fires?

PEARCE: I'm very aware now of some of the government conversations around wildfire preparedness, around emergency evacuation systems. There's a conversation going on in Colorado right now about the wildlife- kind of wildland urban interface and how we have to do a better job of that space that's for where urban areas join wildlands and grasslands and that we need to do a much better job of thinking carefully about those kinds of spaces, because that was clearly a big part of this problem, that it moved so quickly through the grasslands and just jumped right into neighborhoods.

HALL: Would you say that your experience with the Marshall fire and its subsequent fallout has altered your opinion on things around climate change, or made you more aware about some of the things that climate change can have an effect on?

Photos provided by LONNI PEARCE

PEARCE: We were already really concerned (about climate change). I think a lot of people who live in this area are very aware of the concerns of climate change. And certainly, we had never ever anticipated that our quiet little urban neighborhood would go up in flames. I mean, that just seems, like, completely unreal, and still feels very unreal. So, I don't think it's altered my views, but it's made them really deeply personal. Also, I do think that in areas, especially the American West, where we don't have a lot of water, we're going to have a lot of wildfire problems, and we're going to have a lot of water problems. We should start thinking about urban design differently, landscaping differently, anything we can do to conserve water is going to be really important. I've learned a ton about building codes, so there was a big conversation in Louisville about Building codes and thinking about more sustainable building codes, fire resistant structures.

HALL: Is there anything you'd like to say to others that were impacted by the fire, or that are maybe worried that something like this could happen to them, either living in Colorado or anywhere else that's prone to fire risk?

PEARCE: Have an evacuation list, even if you think you don't need one. Know exactly what you would grab if you had 20 minutes and know exactly where it is in your house. Don't worry about stuff that can be replaced. Birth certificates can be replaced, but the drawings my sons made in third grade can't. Think about your treasures. Also, think about participating in something that makes you feel hopeful about the future. While we're aware that climate change is going to continue to affect our area for a long time, that there's no quick change, I think that it's important that people become involved in something that they feel hopeful about; Nature conservancy, wildlife preservation, planting a garden. Doing some things that make you feel hopeful and also recognizing the power of collective action, that when a lot of people do make changes, it does make a difference. Pay more attention to local politics. Know what's going on in your community and influence government on the levels that you can. And also appreciate kindness. When the fire first happened, the first thing that we heard was "Okay, file a claim with your insurance, and start making a list, you're going to have to list every single thing in your house for your insurance policy," which is gut wrenching and awful. Fortunately, we did not have to do that, but we had started to. I started a list of the things that I treasure that I know we can't replace. But I also started a kindness list, because people were incredibly

kind, and total strangers shared food, clothing. So, in the midst of crisis, human beings take care of each other. We're grateful for that.

Since the Marshall fire engulfed more than 6,000 acres of land in Boulder County, thousands of people remain in transition. The landing place, as Dr. Pearce christened it, is the continued reality for many who still live in limbo. Though those family homes and memories will never be replaced, efforts are being made to return these victims to some semblance of a normal, comfortable life. A group of designers hailing from all corners of the Colorado architecture community have joined forces to create the Firewise Colorado RESTORE Passive House, a cost-effective, energy efficient, small-footprint house design meant for the victims of the burn.[1] The Passive House model is nothing new, having been introduced to Europe in 1991 by designer Dr. Wolfgang Feist.[2] As of 2022, roughly 200 Passive House designs have been verified by the Passive House Institute of the US (PHIUS), a non-profit that reviews and certifies each Passive House to ensure they meet the climate-efficient standards expected of the project.[3] Each house is built with three distinct requirements in mind, regarding air circulation, energy usage, and internal climate control. In Colorado, RESTORE Passive House is taking advantage of the Colorado government's $10,000 rebuild incentive offered to designs that fit the bill of eco-friendly and electrically-efficient.[4] For the victims of the Marshall fire, this means an opportunity to start fresh, with climate compatibility at the forefront of their minds while looking for a new home.

Look for the full video interview with Dr. Lonni Pearce on our website, CHANGINGSKIES.ORG.

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2. "Passive House." HARRISON architects, August 17, 2022. harrisonarchitects.com/passivhaus-plus-passive-house/.
3. Ibid.
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THE CUBE

JACOB SZABO

When the tides flowed in enveloping all the land, Eagle clutched in its claws Hummingbird and Coyote, lifting them from the blue below. Eagle carried them to respite atop a mountainous pinnacle, all surrounding it submerged. After the waters receded, Eagle instructed Coyote to search for land. Coyote found the valley exposed. There, Coyote found a wife to birth the people, and he taught them to survive upon the land.

Red rust hides amongst the gray rock and golden grasses. They come out from the cave, their skin painted in speckled red. Toward the opcean, tan hills sit below green-blue mountains who rise like men at the break of dawn and cast the sun's shadow when it falls. A summit, whom they call the resting place of the hummingbird, "Umunhum" in their native tongue, protrudes from the earth. Its gift comes in the water, who flows down its canyons leaping and scuttling into the bowl below.

The missionaries arrived on horseback with the clip-clap of hooves upon raw soil. From the Ohlone they heard stories of a red ore found in the caves below the towering mountains of the west. The Spaniards recalled their native Almaden, with its vast red mineral riches buried deep, bringing exploitation and wealth. They dubbed the place "New Almaden." Axe in hand, they marched into the cave at morning's call, the dull echo of iron on stone welcoming them through the wooden arches into blackness. Thousands labored tirelessly digging and shoveling behind the roar of extracting furnaces. And quicksilver flowed like chrome molasses, its heavy sediment festering at the bottom of riverbeds and hiding in flesh and bone. A century of devastation passed, and with it trees fell, rubble amassed, and the hills grew like volcanoes, stark and devoid of life.

Atop Umunhum, they erected a tower of stone and metal, a rotating array upon a stone pedestal. Searching for cold war rockets that'd never come, it poisoned its holy surroundings all the while. In company, radio towers were raised on the ridges as spinal columns communicating messages both to minds and the environment. The desecration of the physicality of Almaden made it lose its soul, even its humble farmhouses have been corrected to blend with the façade of the modern era.

From my childhood I recall the rain, the shade of greenery, the transparent air. Every year the heat becomes more suffocating, the sun blazes everywhere you tread, and the air obscures the mountains. You find yourself walking streets in an orange haze, dancing a claustrophobic and aimless waltz. Some days I hope the whole place burns to the ground and the ashes fertilize the valley. I imagine nature reclaiming

the structures, and over millennia her slow erosion washing away the evidence of our meddling.

Things don't need to return to their prehistoric conditions. Rather we must conserve and cherish our history, revitalize it, and embrace it, not ignorantly trample and forget it. As a child I found mystique in Almaden's environmental beauty, charming with its sense of isolation from the concrete jungle that the urban spread of the rest of San Jose conjures. But no longer do people plant trees in the place, they simply cut them away when they become an inconvenience, the environment holds importance only so long as it isn't an obstacle to suburban autopilot.

I want this place to ooze the nostalgia that a familiar place does, a place where you can feel the homeliness of childhood in adulthood, a place where you don't see the terrain grow gray and the sky grow blank. To see the environment conserved and valued, the landscape not seen as disposable but instead a part of us. To protect the environment, to conserve our history, to embrace the legend and follow the lessons taught by Coyote.

There is a folk legend known to the residents of Almaden and abroad telling a tale of a back road in the hills of the mining district. On Hicks Road, a colony of blood albinos congregate on the roadside awaiting potential victims in the night. To me, the story exposes the demons of our history. Rising from the grave, the blood albinos who seek vengeance and pleasure in killing those that left them behind remind us of the unmarked graves we've built upon and forgotten about. The story exhumes those laid to rest for the cause of destruction. They are all the Indians gone mad by mercurial waters, all those who stroked carving away at hilltops from the treeless sky, they are our haunting guilts of those who passed by our physical demolitions.

For them do Almaden's residents silently cry for a reckoning, for someone to say something and inspire change. Only as soon as we acknowledge the trauma of environmental destruction can we remedy it. And while it may take generations to see how far we have strayed from the path, this fate remains inevitable. Most of us will find alienation in our own homes and change will bloom from there.

Art by JACK ELDER

SEVEN YEARS

GRACE DONNER

Something old

I unzipped my tent and stepped outside onto the moss-covered granite in which we set up camp. My dad was by the fire already cooking breakfast. The smell of rolled oats mixed with damp springtime was a calming wake-up. My sister squatted by the lake, pumping water into our filter to make coffee with breakfast. As we paddled to this campsite, we passed moose, birds, elk, deer, and fish. I never knew how lucky I was to experience such untouched earth. I never knew that others did not. I never knew that others lacked this desire. It was this unknown innocence of experiencing beauty that guided me through life. After all, I was only seven years old.

Something new

I lay on my front lawn, feeling the sun rays kiss my warm skin. The grass was the greenest it had been that summer. Not any greener on the other side. I bit into my chicken nugget dipped in the special sauce from Chick-fil-A, enjoying the simple pleasures of life. Then I took a sip of lemonade from their Styrofoam cup—not my most sustainable moment. After cleaning up I headed to the trash and noticed my friends had dumped theirs in the recycling. When I asked why, they said, "I literally do not care." I said, "How can you be sitting outside on this beautiful day, enjoying this beautiful weather, and not want your future children and grandchildren to enjoy this same life?" The frustration I felt made me realize that not everyone looked at the world the same way I did. I guess that's just a part of growing up.

Something broken

I sat at the picnic tables, surrounded by all the other kids in my fourth-grade class. The teacher led a quiz to see how many total Earths we would need to survive if everyone lived like us. My mother gardened and my dad hunted. We had our own well for water, but we used a lot of heat during Minnesota winters. I thought about the amount of trash I had used that day. I brought a reusable bag for lunch and only had one snack in a wrapper. Along with a few other things I counted, it fit into a small milk carton. I still needed three Earths if everyone lived like me.

Something bruised

I drive an old car with the worst gas mileage ever. Pumping horrible chemicals into the atmosphere I claim I want to protect. I am a sucker for fast fashion and get Starbucks tri-weekly. I preach all these tips for sustainability, but who's to say I'm correct?

The world around us
On the ground that we step
Cannot be fixed
Until our views are met

Fixing what is broken is contingent on the collective realization that something went wrong, and we need to act to reverse its effects. But in this day and age, society cannot agree on anything. How can we fix anything in a world of cancel culture? Someone will say one wrong thing, and no one will give them the air to fix their words. This pandemic made us the un-United States. No one can agree on how to be nice and how to forgive. Never mind trying to fix the broken things.

A group of climate activists, scientists, and artists set up a clock in Times Square showing us the countdown until our time is up. Our time to reverse our destruction of the natural world. "How long does the world have left to act before an irreversible climate emergency alters human existence as we know it?"[1]

A set of LED lights rapidly counting down. A symbol of a bomb. "A slow-motion carbon time-bomb we are dropping on ourselves and all of Nature."[2] If this makes you uneasy, anxious, stressed, or worried, then it is doing its job.

There's another clock in NYC that tracks the amount of US debt. It was created in 1989 to encourage a change in our country's actions regarding financial decisions. At its early stage the total read $3 trillion, and it now sits at $29 trillion.[3] It begins to make me think... will the climate clock not matter either? Maybe in a few more decades there will be a new clock aiming to encourage our society to create a sense of collectiveness we have yet to learn.

We have about seven years left to try to agree. Agree to fix this broken thing that some people don't even believe is broken. Cut the selfish actions and feelings and think about someone else for once. Think about everyone else for once. Think about this planet for once.

We have about seven years to reverse the effects of climate change. The effects of our mindlessness, our carelessness, our overlooking, and our greed. In seven years can we all agree?

We have about seven years to find the missing pieces. The pieces to put this broken thing back together. The pieces to convince the people that this thing is broken. The pieces to convince the people that we know how to fix it.

We have about seven years to fix this broken thing. Seven years to come to an agreement. Seven years to learn how to forgive. Seven years to learn how to love. Seven years to appreciate the world around us and find the collective desire to preserve the most natural state.

1. Hassan, Jennifer, "How long until it's too late to save Earth from climate disaster? This clock is counting down," Washington Post, September 21, 2020, washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/09/21/climate-change-metronome-clock-nyc/
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EARTH OVERVIEW

MARCUS TEN LOW

The sun blisters the day wide open.
Possessed with money, obsessed with tough dealings,
Humans grow fat on the flesh and secretions of livestock,
Purchasing and unwrapping and dwelling
Among the feedings of technology and its endless, shaping machinations.
I never denied that shades of emotion like love, affection, and more
Were a part of this;
But also thoughtlessness,
Awash with the slogans and prowess of corporations.
It became rationale for sex and procreation too.
The dumping grounds are a shimmering expanse of multicolour.
Vast tracts of land are not only divided up
But are carved up, cleared to make way for cattle and other animals.
You hear the stockmen and -women whingeing about drought,
Flood, fire, and natural disaster re-perpetuated by their acts.
It's no longer natural.
Fighting the elements, and pulling out their bolt guns,
Manning kill-lines and factories of sentient beings
To kill what they've bred as soon as profit makes itself appear.
In the cities
Are the threads of roads, the push and pull of traffic.
Locked out of millions of empty rooms,
Beggars sit, kneel, lie stranded along streets
Filled with this plug of motion.
If only we knew, but in the spirit of showing rather than telling,
The world's blister will only show once it has become
(Not only a frown of obstinance, but)
A bruise, a boil, a cyst, too late
A cancer of the moral death of humankind.

BURN AREA

GEORGE HAKALA

Winding mountain roads always made me sick when I was young. I grew up on such drives: pilgrimages to small mountain towns and scenic trips through Rocky Mountain Park. I can't count how many times I've buried my head between my knees on the slopes of Berthoud Pass.

And yet, despite growing up where the wild things are, I've never felt natural out in nature. Don't get me wrong, I still buy a fishing license every year and I've made a tradition of boys' trips to the mountains, but the endless expanses of green pining over slanted white canvas never serve as more than a backdrop to coincidentally remote experiences. The awe-inspiring views are, for me, usually just shrug-inducing.

Winding mountain roads always made me sick when I was young. Now, in the driver's seat, it's the blind corners and Boulder cyclists that turn my stomach. Google Maps directs me to the heart of Lefthand Canyon.

Whistling wind rattles the canyon walls. Smokey the Bear warns, "Fire Danger." Sheer slates of tan rock break up the seas of green that flank me on either side. When I turn up towards Salida, I pass another bad sign.

"Entering burn area."

You wouldn't know it otherwise. The golden leaves of fall only get more vivid the further into the valley I go. That is, until I round a bend and see the aptly named Bald Mountain. Mossy green coats the base, climbing up the mountain until cutting off, revealing a straw yellow hillside dotted by charcoal tombstones. Ashen graveyards crown the mountain ridges.

Bighorn Mountain, its peak torched by last fall's fire, looms over the valley. A gray bird rests atop a mostly bare pine tree midway up the east side of Gold Hill's namesake. Does it remember when these hills bathed in flame? Kindling cracks underfoot as I climb the hill to get a closer look at its charred remains. The bigger logs don't creak like normal as I step over them. Instead, a knife crashes through a phonebook as my foot snaps the fragile, hollow layers of the firewood.

Along the fire line aspens wear coats of dalmatian fur, their bark only teased by flames. One tree, felled by a crack at the base, bears its tan-gray-

brown bark to the heavens and hides its burned side in the dirt. Just five feet away lie the not so lucky ones. Branchless blackened pillars tower over charcoal stumps across the sweeping expanse.

Until recently I would never have thought to spend my afternoon sitting in the site of a forest fire, much less writing about it. Maybe it's because I spent the year cooped up inside, like everyone else through the pandemic, that I seem to finally hear the call of nature. But I'm not convinced by that. While we all spent 2020 inside, things got pretty heated outdoors.

The Cameron Peak Fire, East Troublesome Fire, and Pine Gulch Fire. 208 thousand acres, 192 thousand acres, and 139 thousand acres. Burned. The top three largest wildfires in Colorado history; each came in the summer of 2020.

This wasn't some coincidence of time and space that just so happened to devastate Colorado's forests. No, this was a long time in the making, an unwatched pot reaching its boiling point.

A 2014 study of fire-regimes in Rocky Mountain subalpine forests found that fire severity worsened as summers got warmer and dryer, a consequence of global warming. "Over decadal to centennial time-scales, future climate warming may have more notable influences on fire severity, through direct impacts on fuel moisture and indirect impacts mediated by vegetation and fuels."[1] As temperatures rise and summer precipitation falls, forests get dryer and dryer, making them more perfect fuel for scorching wildfires. The climate crisis is finally leaving real, tangible marks on our Earth. Burn marks.

Lefthand Canyon left me unsatisfied, so I set out to get a better idea of what Colorado's largest wildfire looks like a year later. About 40 minutes out from Mummy Pass, I decide again to forgo my formal destination and instead simply wander off from the side of Buckhorn Road. On one side of my van, there's exactly what you'd expect from a national park: a lush forest bed resting beneath pine green pillars that seemingly go on forever. On the other side, nothing remains.

Dead logs resemble smelted steel ingots, their bark almost scaly, shining in the unusually warm November sun. Tufts of soot painted stone jut up from ash gray dirt only adorned by the fallen leaves of other forests, carried here by the same winds that stoked last summer's flames. I can tell the fire leapt from peak to peak. Seas of straw underbrush pool in the valleys where burned beams stick out like remains of an ancient shipwreck.

1 Higuera, P.E., Briles, C.E. and Whitlock, C. "Fire-regime complacency and sensitivity to centennial-through millennial-scale climate change in Rocky Mountain subalpine forests, Colorado, USA." J Ecol, 102: 1429-1441. 17 July, 2014.

Violent winds storm the hills, so I take shelter behind a crowd of coal-colored rocks. Rays of light materialize in clouds of ash and dirt; an illusion of stillness.

Winding mountain roads always made me sick when I was young, but they can't be blamed for my thoughts on the trip back from Roosevelt National Forest. It's so easy to get caught up in the moment and lose track of the unraveling thread that is climate change. I never really cared to hold on to it in the first place, until I got out there to see it for myself. But now I can't unsee it, the desolate forests. The burn marks.

A STUDY IN ELUSIVENESS

TASHA SMITH

I.

If you venture just below the equator and veer toward the east coast of Africa, you will reach Zanzibar. A quick snapshot reveals pristine white beaches framed by lush greenery. The forests are home to monkeys, antelopes, and lonely leopards who bear their endangered status like weights upon their chests. Chances are you will never catch one, as generations of elusiveness guide the leopard's careful slink through the shadows of the palm trees.

On these islands live Old Gods, their hands weathered by the elements; the dirt underneath their nails is a remnant of their good work. Unassuming at first, they form the tenets of knowledge and stability for the local communities, and in their blood runs generations of quiet observation, as much a part of the landscape as the motion of the clouds.

It is strange to think about our instincts, programmed into us from generation to generation. Is my love of the summer rain—of parchment paper—really the love of my great-grandfather, passed down to me?

I am sad to see the smiles of the Zanzibari farmers wane when they describe the recent drought. It is mumbled in speechless statements as they wring their hands and run their fingers through their beards; less water means less harvest. The main island and its cousin Mafia Island were once called the "Spice Islands" due to their spoils. But now that the rain has stopped nurturing the soil, the livelihood of the farmers is put into question as their profits suffer. The available fish are smaller, less hearty, shrinking as the hunger of their hunters grows.

There's a certain feeling of loss associated with the change of the only things we think of as stable. The Earth is a funny thing because it's not something that we have ever truly owned or could ever truly own. She does not belong to us. And yet we have grown up with her, and we have thought ourselves attuned to her cycles.

And who are closer to the Earth than her protectors, those who tend to her gardens and harvest her fruit? Something about this way of living seems more attuned to our purpose.

The farmers have done nothing to upset the natural order, and yet they suffer. The loss is infinitely more severe because it is felt by countless generations of people who have been born on the island and put to rest on the island. It is felt by future sons and daughters who will sense that something has changed, that something is not right, in the very core of their beings and in their bones.

II.

With every season comes a different view of the city, its buildings holding unquantifiable histories and memories. The city of Milan has been here since time ran backward, and it lives on in ancient paintings and ancient stories. It is populated by ghosts, but that is precisely the charm of old cities. And ghosts can make just as good of friends as anyone.

In this city, there is a small boutique. Its contents are carefully chosen and picked through by the owner to present only the best to its patrons, the style savvy city-dwellers who are lucky enough to live in one of the world's four fashion capitals.

The owner has aged gracefully. Her health has declined, but it has made no impact on her demure personality or her quiet professionalism. She has been in the industry for a lifetime and has traveled Europe extensively. Her collection contains all the best pieces from all the best places. She can quietly tell you about the only places worth going to in the heart of Paris; she can piece together your expertise with a quick glance from your collar to your boots.

Remarkably, she does not keep this knowledge to herself. You need only ask, and she will give you the key to her wealth of wisdom. She will smile and invite you to brunch, where she will serve you pasticciotto and espresso as light breezes fan the curtains in the windows seen from the patio.

Fashion is marked by the seasons. A long-awaited spring collection, a lukewarm fall collection: the boutique owner is well-attuned to these shifts, adjusting her wardrobe accordingly as they arise, storing the sundresses and light trousers of summer to welcome winter's fur and peacoats.

But in Italy, temperatures are rising slowly, and wildfires are growing in prominence. The waters of the Mediterranean Sea lap playfully at Venice and threaten to pull it underwater. In the Mont Blanc massif, the Planpincieux glacier dances closer to boiling, flirting with the Val Ferret valley like a lover crossed. What must it be like, to live underneath a falling glacier? When I imagine falling from the sky, the trip is endless, and I live full eternities before my limbs hit the ground. Can you live an entire life in freefall?

I see generations living in the valley as the glacier's shadow licks at the edges of the village.

If only winter would come to Milan. The boutique owner longs to see the frost cover the windows and the snowflakes come drifting softly down. Her winter collection is gathering dust.

III.

Colorado mountain winters are exceptionally beautiful. The evergreens catch the snow with arms unfolding. The Colorado landscape is a strange mix of green and dry. Soft rustic browns litter the ground in summer, the trees a muted green, unlike the wet, saturated foliage of the Pacific Northwest.

I'm lying on the couch waiting for the year to start. I keep running but I always land at a standstill. Yesterday, our car was stuck behind a train for an hour as the snow fell and we waited for the crews to get it up and running again. It's funny, two moving objects meeting at a crossroads and having no place to go. I keep daydreaming about taking a train far, far away up into the mountains and beyond this place. But a train is what is keeping me rooted.

It's windy today—too windy to drive, he says. It's okay, I get it. But why is my happiness so fragile that canceled plans hit me as hard as that train does?

But it's not only windy... There's a fire burning, a far from metaphorical fire, and it is burning north and south of us right at this moment. I'm the type who's addicted to the news. Constantly refreshing Twitter, refreshing Instagram, refreshing Safari. It's like a TV show with writing so random, so surprising, that I'm stuck to the screen. There's a shooting nearby—there's another shooting nearby—there's an anniversary of a shooting nearby. Born and raised in Colorado, it's in my blood.

My mom is texting me. The fire is getting closer, but I don't think it's going to reach us. I think it's safe to fall asleep.

I've always tried to get into minimalism. I want to be free from possession, from objects that keep me from living and being in the Now. But something always stops me; we've evolved to rely on our comfort things, our baby blankets.

So, I can't imagine losing everything.

"What would you take? What three items would you take?" We ask each other quietly, slowly nodding off in muted nests of light and sound. We hold each other when the future is uncertain. I don't deserve to sleep when there are people spending 24 hours awake in graveyards.

The snow comes the next day, but it's just a few hours too late. Didn't you get our call? If you had only come a day before we would have welcomed you. But now you taste like ash.

The downfall of life will be climate nihilism: the belief that we are trapped in a building, burning, with no escape and no way to stop the spread. And yet we are the ones dousing it with gasoline, urging it onwards and feeding its appetite. One day the rain will cease to fall in Zanzibar. One day the glacier will fall into Val Ferret valley.

There is a marked difference between lighting up a burning house and watching a boulder rolling down a hill, pushed at its beginning but otherwise unaided, its unstoppable motion fully out of our control. We can put down the gasoline, but first we must believe that we can stop the fire. For things will always end, just as they must always begin, but the difference between lying still and living in this world is that to live in it you must first believe in it.

NYC, 20TH CENTURY

TAMAR SHAPIRO-TAMIR

Remember the big ships
In the harbor,
The worn, the tired, the huddled masses
That shuffle off them,
Spending their last coin for
A place to rest their heads tonight.
Remember the buildings
That rise ever higher,
Threatening to, when they
Inevitably tumble down,
Take the sky with them.
Remember the time
When man literally
Reached his peak,
When he made himself
Equal with the gods,
When he built an empire
On a base of democracy,
On a grid of lies,
On the backs of woman, child and animal.
Remember this tall, proud city,
This shining emblem,
The new Rome.

Remember what happened to Rome?
You will.
You will remember when you watch
The sky come crashing down into the sea,
Squashing the city flat,
Sending the ships under
In a huge tidal wave
That will rise up,
Towering into the universe
Like the skyscrapers before it,
That will come back down
And wash over teeth, eyes, everything.
Remember as you suck in
One final deep breath.
Remember as you dive
Beneath the surface.
Remember for the millennia
That you drift through oblivion.
And when the world rebuilds itself,
And a new race of beings comes to power,
Resurface, and tell them
What you
Remember.

Art by JOHNBEL MAHAUTIERE

INDICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: A BARRIER ISLAND

CLARA MASSEAU

Quadrats of boxed oysters and cultch multiply,
wading deeper reveals no victory transect
The estuary's opacity starves life of sunlight
not even a shallow shoal grass can survive
one mile east, the Atlantic
A sea turtle on the spoil island's sandy microplastics,
land an inappropriate habitat for such—
of course, now exposed, dead and decaying,
smell and shell its only legacy
an inlet away, the Atlantic
Kids, don't let the water above your necks
swim, but not if you have a scratch, adults
stay on shore, while their actions infiltrate the ecosystem
The Indian River Lagoon teems with enteric bacteria
a larger dump, the Atlantic
Swells and whitewash grow and swallow
an already shrinking coast, sending heavy
machinery to trample in and replace
sand, but the indigeneity is lost indefinitely
slowly sinking us, the Atlantic

Art by ELIJAH PETTET

THE LAST SONGBIRD

DONALD GUADAGNI

Would you notice one less snowflake or even if the snow was fake? Childhood memories as it seems are nothing more than fondest dreams. December snows I would embrace and walk to school with lifted face, all so white and crystal clean, those snowflakes now forgotten dreams.

The decades pass and now it seems, cold winter rains replaced those small white dreams. Each passing year the snow and cold retreat beyond the new year's hold. Transparent nights and twinkling stars gave way to haze that swept the dimmest ones away. Light pollution and emission haze cloak night skies with stagnant greys.

5000 stars up in the sky, when I was young each one was a prize, each year it seems as I recall, the number dwindled, the number now small, I think last night I stood outside, the stars all but gone, all that is left and all that remain too faint to be beautiful, too few now remain. Another childhood dream fades slowly away in a world that embraces profit and decay.

Winter solstice used to mean all things resting to wait for the spring, the last few years I watched winter die, as it merged into nothing more than brown dead time. No longer the slumber through darkness and cold, just languid decay, just warmth and black mold.

There was a joy that was the spring, when children played and returning birds began to sing, each year, it seems, from childhood days, fewer birds return, fewer stay to brood. The grass and trees never turn quite green, muted, blunted, is all that I see. Bygone days of vivid blues, of fluffy whites and bright green hues. The air is now a dull grey haze, the vivid colors from my childhood days, washed away, muted, and replaced with industrial haze, industrial waste.

When I was five, ubiquitous white butterflies danced in the sky, things and creatures everywhere, fireflies chased in the twilight air, time passes by, each year it seems, these creatures were just childhood dreams. The stunted flowers and hot spring days seem to have melted these creatures all away. The spring showers that I adored are now sluggish drizzles for a few days, no more.

Summertime in my mind was the ultimate dream, the greatest reward and freedom from school, lazy times to play, and swim outside and explore. Everything was alive by day and by night, creatures, cicada, crickets and mice. As the years slowly passed and time moves on, that cacophony of life, diminished, retreated, until it was gone. The days are too hot, the summer too long, the monsoons have retreated and now they are gone.

Grey water it seems, is all that remains, to quench the thirst of the plants that remain; fresh water, it seems, is as scarce as the rains, the streams are all dry, just a trickle in the river remains. A childhood dream, to swim and to laugh and chase thunderstorms and rainbows that pass. I listen at night and strain to hear the childhood sounds that I found so dear. The death of stars, the creatures, the plants, the seasons it seems will merge into one at the last.

One season all year, my heart has great pain, as I listen to the last lone bird of the spring, the last song, the last hope, goes unanswered it seems, there is no reply, no echo, a vast loneliness, a tear and despair for the death of all things, if only we cared about these simple things. One last breath, one last gaze, the last green fades away, everything brown, everything grey. All childhood memories now lost in the haze.

Art by IAN HALL

DESTRUCTION OF THE AMAZON

KIMBERLY CASTELINO

The mata mata may not be the cutest animal you've ever seen. With its flat, ruffled head, it looks like a cross between a turtle and a leaf. However, like most animals in the Amazon, it serves an important purpose to the ecosystem. The mata mata resides in the rivers of the Amazon. It hunts by opening its jaws, creating a vacuum that sucks in any unsuspecting prey nearby and then expels the water out.[1] This animal is one of the more important predators of the ecosystem. They help control aquatic populations by feeding on small fish and invertebrates.[2] And while the mata mata is not currently on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's list for endangered species, by continuing to deforest the Amazon there is a possibility that this endearingly grotesque creature could vanish forever.

As the sun rises in the sky, the Amazon springs to life like clockwork. Morning dew drips off the leaves of towering kapok trees. Macaws emerge from their nests on their way to a morning meal and black panthers trudge back to their dens after a long night of hunting. Everywhere you look, something amazing is taking place. But while animals roam through the dense thicket of trees, an army of bulldozers and tractors tear through the Amazon, destroying every tree and plant in their path to make space for a new dominant species: Humans.

The Amazon is the world's largest rainforest and millions of species call it home, but forests are cut down to make room for farms, ranches, and living spaces. As the demand for products like beef rises, cattle ranchers expand into the rainforest. They cut down vast expanses of trees using bulldozers and tractors. Then, they burn down the remaining plants and tree stumps to clear the area for their cattle farms. While deforestation creates more space for farming,

1. "Mata Mata Turtle: The Dallas World Aquarium." *The Dallas World Aquarium*, November 25, 2013. dwazoo.com/animal/mata-mata-turtle/.
2. "Mata Mata." *Animalia*. animalia.bio/mata-mata.

it also demolishes the home in which all these magnificent species live. According to the National Science Foundation, "an average of 6,500 square miles of the Brazilian Amazon has been deforested," which is about 4,924 football fields.[3] Scientists also say that the increase of human activity and climate change has brought the Amazon near a "tipping point".[4] This means that the Amazon has reached a point where the impacts of deforestation could turn the once thriving rainforest into an uninhabited wasteland.

The Amazon is also known as one of "the most biologically diverse places on Earth" and contains nearly 10% of the world's known species. Namely, "40,000 plant species, 3,000 freshwater fish species, and more than 370 types of reptiles."[5] But as fires continue to rage through the Amazon, it puts the

3. Cimitile, Matthew. "Amazon Deforestation: Earth's Heart and Lungs Dismembered." *National Science Foundation*, January 23, 2009. beta.nsf.gov/news/amazon-deforestation-earths-heart-lungs.
4. Sandy, Matt. "Why Is the Amazon Rain Forest Disappearing?" *Time Magazine*, December 9, 2019. time.com/amazon-rainforest-disappearing/.
5. "What Animals Live in the Amazon? and 8 Other Amazon Facts." *World Wildlife Fund*. worldwildlife.org/stories/what-animals-live-in-the-amazon-and-8-other-amazon-facts.

thousands of species at risk of becoming endangered or even extinct. Take Atelocynus microtis, the short-eared dog, as an example. This animal plays an important role in the Amazon ecosystem. By spreading seeds throughout the rainforest, it creates a new source of food and a home for other species. Demolishing the short-eared dog's habitat would not only further endanger its species, but also put other organisms that depend on it at risk. This chain reaction would cause mass extinction, resulting in a signi cant change in the Amazon ecosystem.[6]

We share the world with millions of other plant and animal species, many of which we have not discovered. Losing these unknown species could have a major impact on the Amazon's biodiversity, which is not only extraordinary but is something that keeps the Amazon ecosystem in balance. These species, although unknown, have a role in the Amazonian ecosystem that helps other species living alongside them to survive. A mass extinction from the effects of deforestation could have a major impact on people from all around the world. Scientists like Thomas Lovejoy have been researching the Amazon and how its biodiversity is vital to the world's climate. Lovejoy states that "Amazon biodiversity also plays a critical role as part of global systems, influencing the global carbon cycle and thus climate change, as well as hemispheric hydrological systems, serving as an important anchor for South American climate and rainfall."[7] Preserving the Amazon is important; its biodiversity helps keep the global climate stable along with keeping all living things

6. Geib, Claudia. "For the Amazon's Rarest Wild Dog, Deforestation Is a Very Real Threat." *Mongabay Environmental News*, October 1, 2020. news.mongabay.com/2020/07/for-the-amazons-only-wild-dog-deforestation-is-a-very-real-threat/.
7. "Why the Amazon's Biodiversity Is Critical for the Globe: An Interview with Thomas Lovejoy." *World Bank*, May 22, 2019. worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/05/22/why-the-amazons-biodiversity-is-critical-for-the-globe.

healthy. Losing the Amazon will not only affect animals and plants, but the state of the world itself.

More than half of the world's medicines are derived from plants in rainforests. Extractions from plants yield anything from simple painkillers to Quinine, which treats deadly malaria.[8] As the largest rainforest in the world, the Amazon could possibly contain some of the cures to treat the world's deadliest diseases. However, deforestation is preventing researchers and medical scientists from discovering and evaluating plant species from the Amazon. "Potential cures for devastating diseases like cancer and HIV/AIDS may then become extinct before they are ever discovered."[9] People have been using natural resources as medicine for thousands of years. For example, the Matsés, a tribe native to the Amazon, has relied on the rainforest's raw materials to help or even cure diseases. Destruction of plants and animals could have a devastating impact on these tribes as well as others all over the world: "Around ve billion people across the world rely on traditional plant-based medicines as their primary form of healthcare."[10] Deforestation in the Amazon prevents pharmaceutical companies from manufacturing these medications, thereby restricting patients from accessing them.

For decades, humans have turned a blind eye to the destruction of unique ecosystems all in the name of pro t. Yet the bulldozers keep coming, and if we continue at this rate, a few decades from now there will be no humans left to drive them. We are the last and best hope to stop deforestation and mass extinction. Countries around the world need to collaborate to preserve the Amazon before it is too late. If the Amazon disappears, it will have a massive impact on the world's ecosystem and humanity.

8. Blair, Jenny. "An Encyclopedia of Medicine from the Amazon." *Yale School of Medicine*, February 12, 2016. medicine.yale.edu/news/yale-medicine-magazine/article/an-encyclopedia-of-medicine-from-the-amazon/.
9. Fullerton, Ken. "Forest Deforestation Threatens Medical Cures." *Sense & Sustainability*, October 12, 2017. senseandsustainability.net/2017/10/12/forest-deforestation-threatens-medical-cures/.
10. Ibid.

WHERE THE LIGHTNING STRIKES THE SAND

HOLLY HAGMAN

A swarm of gnats nibble on the carcass of a dead fish. Its bones, pin-like and ivory white, poke visibly through the sand. The remaining flesh is silvery and pale—a ghost reflecting the rays of the sun. Even with the rhythmic sloshing of the waves and chirping seagulls—the constant buzz unnerves me. As Paul and I move down the shore, we notice another fish, this time just the bones and a head. A pigeon lands near the water, pecking at what remains, enamored with his good fortune; the sand is his buffet table. We continue our stroll and feel seasick. Corpses littered the beachfront. Fish scales shimmer like lost coins, and rotting eyeballs, clouded, stare outward toward an endless, unreachable horizon.

Wishing desperately that I had worn sneakers, we dodge the bodies as we head toward the spot at the end of the sand where the creek feeds into the bay, the perfect spot to skip seashells. Paul is always careful to tell me when there is another corpse, a splintered piece of driftwood, or a shard of broken glass. The soles of my feet sink slightly in the warm, soft sand.

I bend down to grab a flat, white stone. Its rounded edges are perfect for skipping across the water, out toward the sandbar where seaweed sways gently in the breeze. I bend and flick my wrist, but the rock sinks with a violent plop as it disappears into the brackish water. Paul chooses an abandoned clam shell. Perhaps its curve creates the proper aerodynamic shape because it flies across the water, nearly landing in the thick brush of seagrass growing on the other side of the creek. I turn to grab another rock or shell and am faced with more death—a newly washed-up fish, this one covered in a thick layer of tiny, black flies.

Disturbed and a little nauseous, we decide to turn back, and go home. When we get there, we will scour the internet for answers to find out that vibrio bacteria often found in poorly prepared seafood is wreaking havoc on the local waterways. When I research these bacteria, I learn that they usually affect people with symptoms that mimic food poisoning. When Paul goes for a walk by the lake near his house, there will be more fish on land than left in the water as a result of the bacteria's rapid spread. We consider the power of such bacteria, something so small with enough strength to make us ill without internal infection.

The salty breeze tickles my nose as I feel the sand sinking underneath my feet. I nearly step on a broken piece of a beer bottle left there, perhaps, by a teenager sneaking alcohol with his friends. Paul moves me out of the way, saving us both a trip to the hospital. He adjusts his glasses and wishes that we had instead found sea glass. As if by magic, I notice a small, white shard with dulled edges peering out of the sand. I pick it up, brushing the dust off its rounded-rectangle form. I hand it to Paul, who smiles. He told me once that sea glass is made when lightning strikes the sand. The molecules of each grain change and fuse to create a tangible item, a cross between the scientific and the enchanted. I had always thought that sea glass was formed as a result of pollution, nature's way of creating something beautiful from its pain.

We leave the beach, brush the sand from our bodies, let the breeze knot our hair and the sun kiss our skin. Now, the piece of sea glass sits on my dresser, origins unknown. I wonder if it is from a secret bottle of booze left there by teenagers hiding in the reeds, smoking homemade joints, taking solace in the waves crashing to cover the sound of their vomiting on the sand. Instead, I like to imagine an electrical storm with dark clouds swirling over the water. A strike on the sand sends shards scattering across the beach, evidence of the supernatural—like hidden treasures for us to find.

REMEMBERING WHAT I FIGHT FOR

PALOMA SEIGEL

It's a Wednesday, or Thursday, or maybe Monday, or maybe it doesn't matter. It's summer and the sun is shining bright. Brighter here, in the high latitudes above the Arctic Circle. Much brighter. I pull my collar up above my chin to keep my skin from scalding. The sun here feels like daggers, burning me from every angle. Good thing it's a cold summer day in Greenland. Beneath my feet, the wooden gangplank creaks. Moss creeps out from the shade and reaches for sunlight, anxious to get its fill before the inevitable clouds roll in, before the sun dips below the horizon for half the year. We stay on the trail, though all I want is to run through the soft tundra, roll in the heather, and climb over rocks. The excitement is tangible. We speak in a hushed murmur, laughter occasionally ringing in the air. Rounding a corner and over a hill, the ice first catches my eye. Jagged skyscrapers of white jut towards the sky, floating on the bluest water I've ever seen. I want to race up and touch it all, the ice too perfectly chiseled to be true.

I want to touch it all before it's gone.

The trail ends and I tumble into the heather coating the rocks. Our grins are too wide to conceal as we settle into nooks in the granite. Alone I sit, entranced. Together, we are spellbound. I've never seen ice like this. I've never felt this vulnerable, this close to the heartbeat of the planet. With a roar, blinding white ice cracks into the river of turquoise, a cacophony of collapse. Through the granite, a cool wind whispers and tugs on the ends of my braids. Tears pool in the corners of my eyes. My heart is pounding; it's all I can hear. I am happier than I have ever been, and yet cannot stop crying. Each crack and crumble sting me with more and more ferocity. Ice extends for what looks like eternity, but I know it's not eternity. I know it's all so very finite, so precious, so fragile. I am acutely aware of time, as I sit here cradled by the earth. I notice how very small I am, how very big this ice fjord is, and how very quickly it is flowing out to sea.

We all feel it. We are all silent.

Watching these icebergs that broke off the Greenland ice sheet pour into the ocean is magnificent and terrifying. I am sixteen, and I already know too much about climate change to sleep at night. It is all I talk about with my friends, all I learn about at school, and all I feel as I sit here in the Arctic. I hear climate projections in terms of my birthday. By 2030, you will be getting married on a scorched earth, far from your coastal home that is now underwater. By 2050, your kids will ask you why you chose to bring children into a collapsing world. I know they will ask me that, because I ask my parents the same question. Some days I come home in tears, asking my mom why they thought to raise me in a world disintegrating before my own eyes. Will my children ever see ice? Will they know what healthy rivers look like? Will they learn to ski on real snow? In 2016, California's drought was so severe that I had forgotten what a snowstorm felt like. Snowfall became so novel that my dad would pull me out of school and up to the mountains at the faintest dusting of powder. By the time I am twenty-one, "nearly all" of the ski resorts in the United States will rely on artificial snow making, taking an enormous toll on already strained watersheds.[1]

I am sixteen and I do not know that next year, school will be canceled for a week as wildfire smoke engulfs the air and obscures the sun. I do not know that I will have to stay inside because the air outside will suffocate me. The fires of 2017 in Napa County, just 45 minutes north of my home, will burn down over 8,000 structures and result in 44 fatalities.[2] That year alone, over 1.5 million acres of California will burn after five years of devastating drought.[3] I will smell the smoke from my bedroom as I am finishing a homework assignment late at night and wonder why someone is having a bonfire on a Sunday at midnight. I will wake up to my best friend frantically calling me, in tears because her childhood summer camp burned down. I do not know how much I will miss the sunset, the blue sky, and the taste of crisp air. I do not know what it feels like to have my world turned inside out.

I sense, but do not know, that ice will alter my life's course. I will turn twenty-one and find myself skiing across an icefield in Alaska. Every day I will wake up to dig snow pits and drill ice cores. Every night I will contemplate the fate of Southeast Alaskan glaciers and the fate of the planet. I will try to hold my chin high as I feel wind twist through the granite and tug at my braids, feeling the ice crack beneath my feet.

I do not know because I am sixteen and I am in Greenland, sitting above a sea of ice, under a pristine sky, taking deep breaths in the glacial wind.

1. Jason Palmer, "Withdrawal Symptoms: Afghanistan goes hungry," *The Intelligence* by the Economist, podcast audio, February 11, 2022.
2. "October Fires' 44th Victim: A Creative, Globetrotting Engineer With 'the Kindest Heart.'" n.d. KQED.
3. California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL Fire). "2017 Fire Season." Cal Fire Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

WHEN THE FIRES CAME

JEANINE PFEIFFER

We were suspended, surrounded, subsumed by smokestacks.
Choking, we ran out of breath, out of words.

Until/while/after we evacuated, we endured no power, no phone lines, no Wi-Fi, no Internet, no potable water, no showers, and worst of all, no idea of what the hell [the literal hell] was going on, or where/why/for how long it would endure.

We fled to the coast, where it snowed ash. We hauled our horses, alpacas, and emus to fairground lots and searched for pet-friendly accommodations. We picked through donations, seeking the vegan, the lactose-free. We congregated at bars broadcasting nonstop radio coverage. We lingered in gas stations, hooked on reports of roads closed, neighborhoods gone.

Only the smartphone savvy could decipher the satellite maps when they materialized, angry polyhedrons outlining active fires and no-go zones laid over territories to our north and our south and our east and our west.

The rest of us gauged fire intensity using the tenor and depth of the stench, the shade and texture of smoke clouds, or the hue and structure of billowing plumes: dark grey + vertical = freakier, hotter, advancing fires; smudged ivory + horizontal = diminishing, dissipating fires.

Climate change, the great irrevocable amplifier, has screamed past every scientific prediction. Pandora's box has been flung open, and the demons are amongst us, gleefully turning up the volume on what we used to call "natural disasters."

When we translate the burps of carbon atoms trapped in ice cores and sea floors over hundreds of thousands of years, data for every planetary metric zigzags up and down graphs, apparently randomly but always within clearly defined upper and lower thresholds.

Humanity's box of demons remained shut until our parents' generation. At that point, like over-stimulated hippies grooving on E, the lines for global temperatures and ice loss and wildfire incidence and sea level rise and all those pesky greenhouse gasses began abruptly shooting straight up. They kept shooting up and up until they blew by the highest points on every graph, and the graphs had to be redrawn for this new geologic era, the era of the Anthropocene.

Art by SHADIA NAGATI

When the fires came, the Diablo winds—routinely occurring warm and dry, northeasterly winds—were the largest scale ever recorded, for any time or season or place. Slamming into local mountain ranges, the gusts accelerated, splintered, and became "squirrely," spawning gales within gales at every possible elevation and creating infinite numbers of jiggered explosions.

Instead of "Diablo" we got "Diablo-plus," customized versions of Dante's Hell.

During the first week, our evacuation center was shut down, everyone to be moved elsewhere. The closest conflagration quadrupled in acreage, mocking the superheroic efforts of water-laden helicopters, firefighters, dozers, tanks, and the 747 jet dumping tons of crimson retardant.

There was no logical reason to remain cooped up on a patch of fairground asphalt. Yet despite the smoke, the irrepressible, inescapable, smoke, the unchanging updates of "0% containment," the tenuous links to the outside (non-burning) world, most evacuees didn't want to leave.

Our hearts claimed these hills, those oak trees, that river. Abandoning the area, even as a helpless witness, felt disloyal—until even more friends messaged and called, expressing concern, offering places to stay.

I left.

The fires remained.

The winds persisted.

Three counties distant, I kept vigil, devouring live-streaming news updates, constantly refreshing online maps, watching the polygons grow, the death toll mount, the acreage increase, the losses reach incomprehensible levels, flames traveling so fast that first responders were forced to flee instead of fight.

Local residents—although that term proved nebulous, fungible, a cruel joke—took in more evacuees. A city vivarium offered to care for homeless reptiles and arachnids, while regional animal shelters shipped off existing strays to make room for incoming ones. Media broadcasts repeated Red Flag warnings for dangerous air quality levels; stores ran out of N95 air masks.

We began obsessively using "d" words: deadliest, disastrous, devastation, dispossessed, displaced, destroyed, dental records, distinctive tattoo.

Hell was extinguished on Day Twenty-two, All Hallows' Eve. By then, the smoke had burrowed so deeply into valley clefts that it was indistinguishable from the rest of our sky, the fringes of troposphere and stratosphere stitched together in shared misery.

Our post-fire zip codes echoed with deathly quiet, deader than graveyards, because anything that could have been obliterated, was.

Armies of electricians in powder-blue Pacific Gas & Electric trucks—from the same company that neglected rural transmission infrastructure, sparking uncontrollable fires that destroyed the beyond-ironically named town of Paradise—restored power, and life trickled back.

Community meetings heated up with debates over the tangled puzzle of rebuilding (or not) in fire-prone areas. "How can we make sure our buildings meet fire codes?" asked an audience member.

"One of the fires was a mile wide," responded an expert, "It doesn't matter what you build with. Nothing will survive that kind of fire."

Displacement begins as a geographical question, but quickly flares into a philosophical one. For decades I dreamt of an off-grid cottage nestled in the Northern California woodlands. I no longer trust this dream. Blackened, cratered moonscapes infuse our highways and byways, more common than road signs. Their acrid stink testifies that this can happen again: Anytime, anywhere.

I think of this as fires rage in the Arctic Circle, where once-stable landscapes are becoming unrecognizable, melting glaciers, thawing permafrost, their contours muddied into obscurity. In this New Not Normal, facing the erasure of areas once well-defined and the blurriness of places once conjoined, we struggle to know where we can go, where we can stay.

We who survive firestorms, floods, hurricanes, droughts, and rising seas, we have become climate refugees. Many of us, emulating prototypical refugees, relocate to blue and brown tarps, to tents and makeshift shacks peppering the streets of every Californian city. Others, like me, live invisibly in our vehicles, poised for takeoff, prepped for the inevitable.

Our transience, our disconnectedness, our inability to answer the simple question, "Where do you live?" when asked by a dating app, has reconfigured our essence, as the lines circumscribing who and what we are dissipate. Once solid, we liquified into tears. Eventually, wearily, our tears evaporate into gas, and we are able to inch back towards solidity.

Until the next time the fires come, and our world goes up in smoke.

A REAL-LIFE ABILITY TO SEE THESTRALS

J. MAAK

"The only people who can see thestrals," she said,
"are people who have seen death."
—Hermione Granger in Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix, by J.K. Rowling

you shift weight, one foot to the other, avoiding eye contact, when a group's eager conversation turns to bright forecasts for the stock market. you hear bones rattling as the Forbes 400 grows even more obscene, while you witness working mothers and grandmothers lining up at food banks to feed the children. you flash angry—one of the Kübler-Ross stages—when a friend regales how a corporation's "gone greener," which turns out to be mere micro-steps, treading water, greenwashing. day in, day out, busy LAX shakes your walls, hustling SUVs shudder by—yet no one stops puking endless emissions. you search for pretty ways to phrase it, so that someone might listen, as you hear words of hope tumble out of your mouth.

your garden journals—a mere twenty years' worth, far less than a lifetime—document the changes, their citizen science somehow more horrifying than the official kind: spring bulbs finishing in March, when they used to bloom til May. European starlings and tropical parrots now common in SoCal. honeybees, curled fetal, dry and crispy. this year, one single week of rain, scant other measurable moisture.

your body tremors with the bark of chainsaws as once-tree-lined neighborhoods decimate their grand overstory. maybe they replant with twigs, which you know won't capture meaningful carbon for two decades. more likely they rework barren concrete, sealing soil, laminating life. soon, they landfill the houses to build consumer palaces, lot-line to lot-line sans gardens—pushing away the very element that could save us from ourselves, teach us, help us reconnect.

and yet, a small voice tells you, through thestrals we gain the ability to fly.

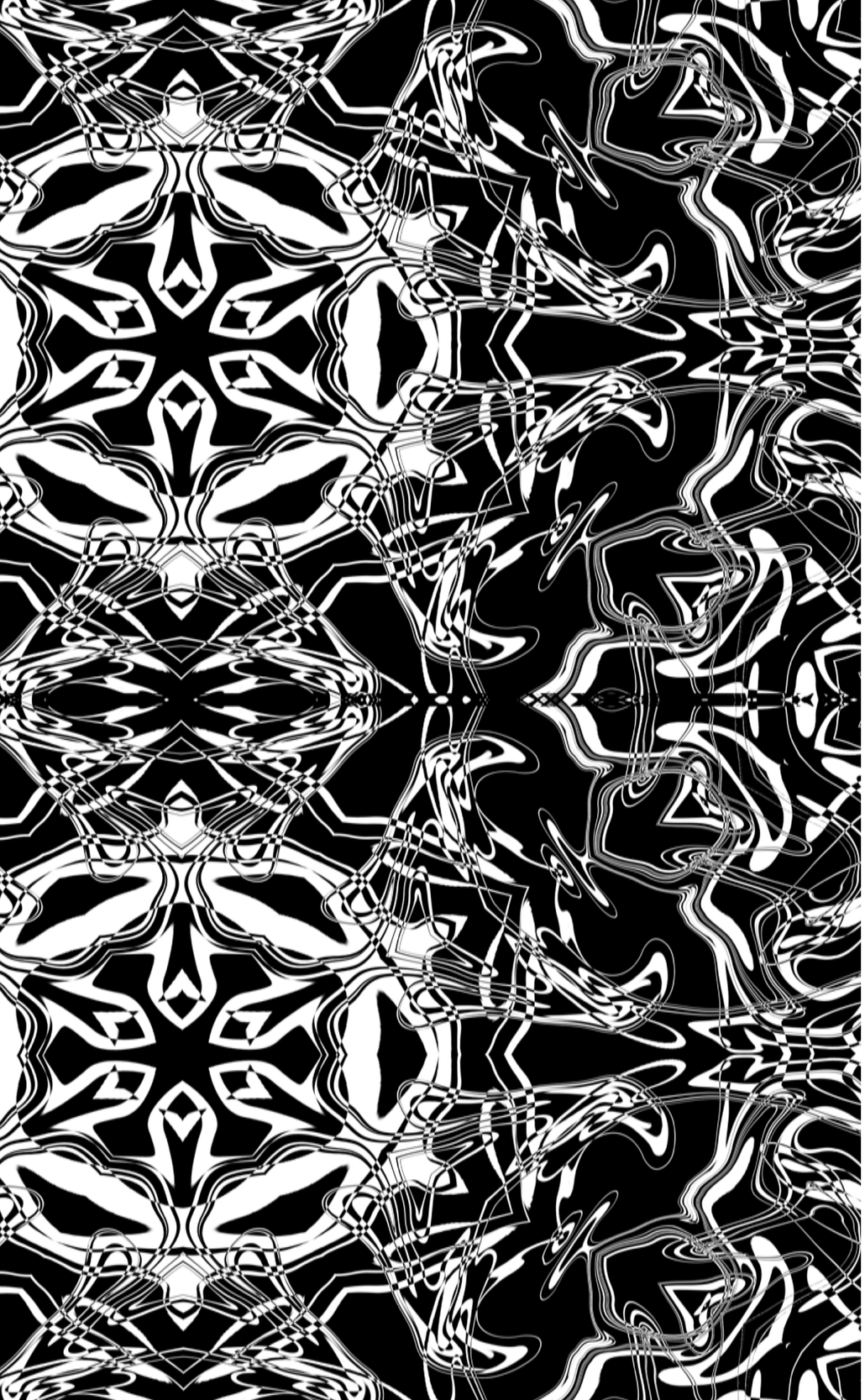
Art by SHADIA NAGATI

Art by SUSANNA ANDREWS

HAVE YOU LISTENED TO WILDFIRE

J. MAAK

that time when wildfire coursed through the canyons
faster than the elementary schools could call
parents to come pick up the kids,
sirens screamed, charred chunks rained down,
you were all breathing thick orange-gray air.
    what if we listened to our Mother,
    listened to those who understand Gaia's messages,
    those who hold the pulse of the land—
    Chumash, Gabrieleño-Tongva, Kizh—
    those who sense what the land needs next.
that gut-knowing the sickly orange smoke is coastal sage scrub,
the white smoke, when firemen arrive,
the black, your neighbors' houses.
those times you found curled gray ash on your car
and wondered whose home, childhood, memories it once was.
    what if we listened
    to Mohawk/Kanienkeha:ka, Cahuilla, Apache,
    who know the old ways to manage fire—
    seasonal ground burns, cultural burns,
    moving with the land.
that time when brush fire burned
the churches, rectories, parish halls,
like a god's wrath proclaiming this society is on errant course.
    what if we cleared invader plants,
    nurtured native ecosystems to flourish,
    following indigenous guides.
those many times your young family packed the car—
which stuffed animals to take, which to leave burn,
a decision no child should ever face.
    what if we embraced managed retreat—
    doomed the developers, stopped suburban sprawl,
    designed for urban density,
    built walkable, livable cities.
those times you heard the clatter of helicopters
arcing so close, you felt it pound your breastbone.
the mechanical voice of emergency broadcasts
a chilling overlay to the forced laughter,
the stunned silence of evacuees.
    what if we got serious about climate—
    foregoing fossil fuels forever, clipping consumerism,
    supplementing sequestration—
    to suppress the scale of megafires.
that moment when you realize:
over less time than your lifetime
fire season has now become every season of the year.
    what if we, the colonizers, remembered
    our own ancestry, rekindled the values
    of that time when our ancestors knew, honored,
    upheld agreements with the land.
that time when fire got you,
swept your family home of thirty years,
photos, mementos of your mother and grandma
now ash so fine it only qualifies as dust.
you comb the debris in futile hope—
nothing there to find.



MINING OURSELVES INTO A HOLE

MCKINLEY NAHUM

The places where Earth meets water summon a single, simple word: magical. Great ocean currents clash with hard landscapes in a never-ending battle for territory. For millions of years, land and water existed in equilibrium, allowing organisms of all kinds to exist in symbiosis. As we push further into the 21st century, this balance becomes further skewed.

Take Tokyo, Earth's most populous city. Its residents rely on resources from both water and land. Japanese people have long appreciated life in all aspects, from climates and landscapes shaping the country to the diverse plant and animal life with which they strive to coexist. The majority of Tokyo's 37 million people rely heavily on the city's proximity to the Pacific Ocean for resources, leisure, and trade. These all lie at risk. The threat? The ocean itself.

Sea levels rising due to climate changes will greatly impact world cities. Shusaki Miyaji, a Japanese geographer, predicts that most of Tokyo will be underwater in the next 100 years if sea levels rise another 10 meters.[1] The melting of the Antarctic ice sheet results in climate change. If we continue to burn fossil fuels at the current rate, we will exhaust our supply in 150 years and raise the global sea level by 60 meters.[2]

You and a group of friends visit a local café on a beautiful Sunday morning. You pay for your coffee at the counter using Bitcoin. It's the easiest and most secure way to send money, and you can do it straight from your phone! No pesky banks or cards necessary. Unknown to you, your small transaction used a massive amount of energy and pumped nearly 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.[3] How? It's called cryptocurrency.

Cryptocurrency is a form of digital currency that has surged in popularity over the last decade. It relies on a peer-to-peer system that enables anyone with access to the internet to securely send money. The payments exist as a record in an encrypted

1. Murasaki, Kevin, Mark Kennedy, Layla Knight, & Christian Dakin. "What Would Tokyo Look Like if Sea Levels Rise 10 Meters?" Japan Insider, (August 9, 2021). japaninsider.com/what-would-tokyo-look-like-if-sea-levels-rise-10-meters
2. Grade Eight Learners. "Water is Life." Republic of South African Department of Water and Sanitation, 2020. dws.gov.za/2020Vision/docs/GRADE%208%20LEARNERS%20-%20WS.pdf
3. Forex Suggest, "Global Impact of Crypto Trading." forexsuggest.com/global-impact-ofcrypto-trading/. Accessed Jan. 10, 2022.

public ledger while the cryptocurrency itself is stored in a user's digital wallet. With no inherent value, its users assign its worth.

It seems like a revolutionary way to securely send money, but the way it functions harms the environment. Cryptocurrencies exist on a large, encrypted public ledger known as the blockchain. The blockchain holds the record of every transaction, consistently updated through a process known as "mining." Mining is the process of validating and recording new transactions to the blockchain. People around the world use several computers to partake in the mining process. They refer to themselves as "miners."

Miners must verify the authenticity of transactions, grouped into a "block." The miners then compete with other miners to solve an incredibly complex algorithm. Once they solve the algorithm, they combine it with the data from the block. They then add the block to the ledger and chain it to the other blocks, verifying the transaction. The miner that accomplishes this first receives cryptocurrency in return for their efforts. The higher the price of the cryptocurrency, the more miners competing, and the harder the algorithms.

Bitcoin, the most popular cryptocurrency, is perhaps the most problematic when it comes to energy consumption. Capital Counselor[4] predicts that there are around one million Bitcoin miners operating in the world. A study performed by UK financial site MoneySuperMarket found that a single Bitcoin transaction consumes 1,173 kilowatt hours of electricity.[5] That amount of electricity would power the average US household for 6 weeks and the average UK household for more than 3 months. The cost of electricity for using Bitcoin to buy a latté or transfer money to a friend is around $173. The electricity cost is never incurred to the person performing the transaction and is a direct result of the incredible amount of computing power required to validate the transaction. The process of mining is essentially trial and error and can take trillions of tries.

The problem of cryptocurrency becomes even more dire when looking at energy consumption from a global perspective. A University of Cambridge study calculated 2021's consumption from bitcoin alone was 142.4 TWh of electricity.[6] This accounts for 0.6 percent of the energy consumption of the entire world, more than the energy consumed in 2021 by Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Apple combined.[7]

As the prices of cryptocurrency continue to rise, so does the incentive to mine it. Much of the energy consumed from cryptocurrency transactions comes from the burning of fossil fuels. In 2021, only 39% of cryptocurrency's energy came fromrenewable resources.[8] A 2021 Quartz article reported that 65% of Bitcoin mining

4. Puac, Sanela. "How Many Bitcoins Are There and Will They Ever Run Out?" Capital Counselor. February 23, 2022. capitalcounselor.com/how-many-bitcoins-are-there/
5. MoneySuperMarket. "Crypto Energy Consumption." 2021. moneysupermarket.com/gas-and-electricity/features/crypto-energy-consumption/.
6. "Cambridge Bitcoin Electricity Consumption Index (CBECI)." n.d. Ccaf.io. ccaf.io/cbeci/index.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

occurs in China due to cheap electricity costs, and 63% of that electricity comes from fossil fuels.[9] Bitcoin Energy Consumption Index calculates that the carbon footprint of Bitcoin is equal to that of New Zealand, both emitting 37 megatons of carbon dioxide.[10] If Bitcoin continues to rise in price, emissions from mining could rise dramatically.

The fight to slow the environmental effects of cryptocurrency is ongoing. Every year sees new regulations to edge towards renewable energy infrastructure. Unfortunately, mining rigs must be set up near existing renewable energy sources for the purpose of efficiency. There are also substantial changes that can be made to cryptocurrency algorithms to make them more energy efficient. One form of cryptocurrency, Ethereum, has already become the second most used in the world of crypto and does not require specialized equipment, saving 99.9% more energy.[11] While alternative methods may not be as secure, they are far more sustainable.

Perhaps the best method for making cryptocurrency more sustainable is through education. Over the past several years, organizations have been forming to help raise awareness for the negative impact we've been making on the environment through the rushed adoption of cryptocurrencies. The Crypto Climate Accord has many great resources to learn about the impact of cryptocurrency and is working towards the goal of having all blockchains powered by renewable energy by 2025.[12]

The real problem with cryptocurrency arises from users' unawareness, not directly witnessing how much energy they expend with a simple transaction. We all love experimenting with new technologies—they can drastically improve our lives. As we progress through the information age, it's important to learn how our actions shape our world. There's a little bit of something for everyone in the realm of cryptocurrency, but it's important to make informed decisions. Anyone with internet access can make the choice to prevent the release of thousands of pounds of emissions into the atmosphere. Through education and advocacy, the population can become more aware of their digital carbon footprint and work to shrink it.

9. Li, Jane. 2021. "Bitcoin Has a Xinjiang Problem." Quartz. March 3, 2021. qz.com/1978807/bitcoin-has-a-xinjiang-problem.
10. Digiconomist. 2022. "Bitcoin Energy Consumption Index - Digiconomist." 2022. digiconomist.net/bitcoin-energy-consumption.
11. Rodeck, David. "What Is Ethereum? How Does It Work?" Forbes Advisor. Updated May 30, 2022. forbes.com/advisor/investing/cryptocurrency/what-is-ethereum-ether/.
12. "Accord." n.d. Crypto Climate Accord. cryptoclimate.org/accord/.

THE UNFORTUNATE TRUTH OF SUNSCREEN IN THE CLOUD FOREST

ISABELLE SEASE

"Hey look! I think I can finally see the sky!" my sister, Margot, laughed as we trudged through dense Costa Rican cloud forest. That meant we were close to the top. Finally, I thought. My feet burned and my entire body was drenched in sweat. Despite being completely sheltered from the sun by the thick rainforest canopy for the majority of our hike, the heat was suffocating. As we made our final ascent, the canopy thinned, and we were blasted by the sweltering mid-day sun.

"Gosh! What a beautiful day!" my mom exclaimed. "Not a cloud in sight!" She was right; the sky was a bright shade of vibrant blue and despite the heat, I was happy to have escaped the rain.

As I peered out over the ridge at the top of the mountain, my heart began to pound. A vast network of trees and dense vegetation spanned my vision. I stood there quietly, listening. A soft breeze brushed against my face, comfortable and warm. Sounds of life saturated my ears. The air seemed to vibrate with the buzzing of insects; frogs croaked, birds screeched, and even the trees seemed to tremble with sound. Yet, the earth remained still. The forest below me felt infinite, untouched by the human hand. It reminded me of the images I had seen in textbooks of the Jurassic era: a world filled with abundant life and imminent danger. A time when reptiles ruled the land, and the idea of humankind was merely a fantasy. As my mind wandered to the unknown, a feeling of uneasiness crept over me. What exists within the impenetrable forest below? I looked for signs of human activity. None. Aside from the few trails that lie within the forest, the rest was virtually undiscovered. The forest seemed endless; one misstep and you'd be lost forever. Even so, I was unquestionably drawn to the boundless greenery in front of my eyes.

The cloud forest made me feel small, weak even. Standing atop the mountain, I was completely vulnerable. I had little control of the earth below me, a feeling somewhat unfamiliar in days of technology and suburbia. For my whole life, I felt as though I had power over my surroundings. But here, in the middle of the cloud forest, I was defenseless, and while daunting, it was also peaceful. I found comfort in

the idea of my own insignificance, realizing that my problems were trivial in a world so vast. The blisters on my feet and the smell of sweat permeating from my t-shirt did not matter, at least not here, in the face of the majestic cloud forest. Although I didn't know it at the time, I had just experienced a glimpse into the sublime.

Alain de Botton, British philosopher and founder of the "School of Life," describes the general consensus of the sublime to be "by virtue of their size, emptiness or danger, a variety of hitherto unconnected landscapes [...] such places that provoke an identifiable feeling that [is] both pleasurable and morally good."[1] In other words, the sublime consists of vast landscapes that arouse the mind to feelings above human comprehension, a pleasant mix of fear, wonder, and peace. However, the definition of the sublime is, as most things are, complex. De Botton explains how in the eyes of eighteenth-century Irish philosopher, Edmund Burke, "sublimity had to do with a feeling of weakness [...] a landscape could arouse the sublime only when it suggested power—a power greater than that of humans, and threatening to them."[2] Meaning, that in order for a landscape to evoke feelings of the sublime, it has to make the person feel small and insignificant in the process. Not in a humiliating way, but in a way that demands awe and respect. Sublime locations have the power to show us how our creation was at the hands of something greater than us, a higher power, a force that continuously reminds us of our own fragility and insignificance.[3]

In the case of the cloud forests, the vast network of trees reminded me of my own insignificance, not in a malicious way, but rather it returned my ego to a humble state. It helped me to understand my place on this earth, allowing me to accept the things that I cannot control, and find peace within the frenzy of life.

"Honey, do you want any sunscreen?" my mom called from below, jolting me out of my stupor. While annoyed, I was also grateful. My back was already the color of a ravishing sunset due to my own ignorance on a hike the day prior.

"For being in a cloud forest, there aren't many clouds," a

1. Botton, De Alain. *The Art of Travel.* (Pantheon Books, 2002), p. 163.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

man standing behind us joked. We awkwardly laughed, but unfortunately, it was the sad truth.

Cloud forests portray very unique geographical and climatic features. They exist within higher elevations of tropical regions and are sometimes called montane forests. Their distinct weather patterns are a result of moisture-laden air currents from lowland oceans that move up the mountains, cooling and condensing as they rise, due to colder temperatures as elevation increases. Subsequently, areas become enveloped in consistent cloud cover and high rates of precipitation.[4] The unique weather patterns in the cloud forests yields an abundance of fascinating biodiversity ranging from epiphytes to venomous snakes. Although these cloud forests make up a small percentage of Earth's landmass, they generate a significant portion of the world's biodiversity.[5]

Unfortunately, due to the planet's warming temperatures, we are seeing a significant decrease in the cloud cover. Species that previously occupied lower elevations are beginning to migrate up to areas that have a more temperate climate, and species that relied on the previously cooler environments in the cloud forests are beginning to die off as temperature rises and precipitation decreases.[6]

Although we often hear about the bleak futures of our cherished natural landscapes, we rarely see the sad truth. Artist Hannah Rothstein creates a visual depiction of the future of our national parks through her collection National Parks, 2050. These pieces illustrate our national parks as toxic wastelands, juxtaposing our current lush and vibrant parks with images of stark and desolate landscapes. In the posters for Yellowstone National Park, Rothstein illustrates one poster with a robust geyser and bright colors, including the words "Nature Walks, Field Trips, and Campfire talks," shedding light on the aspects of national parks that we are so accustomed to.[7] In the other Yellowstone National Park poster, Rothstein il-

4. Helmer, E.H., et al. *Neotropical Cloud Forests and Paramo to Contract and Dry from Declines in Cloud Immersion and Frost.* (PLOS ONE, 2019).
5. Oliveira, Rafael S., et al. *The Hydroclimactic and Ecophysiological Basis of Cloud Forest Distrubutions under Current and Projected Climates.* (Annals of Botany 113, 2014), pp. 909-20.
6. Oliveira, Rafael S., et al. *The Hydroclimactic and Ecophysiological Basis of Cloud Forest Distrubutions under Current and Projected Climates.* (Annals of Botany 113, 2014), pp. 909-20.
7. Rothstein, Hannah. "National Parks 2050." Hannah Rothstein n.d, https://www.hrothstein.com/national-parks-2050.

lustrates the remnants of a geyser and a grizzly bear whom you can see virtually all of its ribs. The coloring in this poster is darker as well, using more greys and muted colors to depict the overall mood of the environment. The words in this poster are "disappearing geysers, dying trout, and starving grizzlies," providing a rather grim feeling to the piece.[8] By placing both depictions of Yellowstone side-by-side, Rothstein illustrates humanity's effects on the environment as we enter a new era of life through climate change. She instills a sense of horror and fear into the viewer through the sheer vastness of the environments, which could fall into the category of the sublime–yet through a different understanding of it. Rather than depicting the sublime through the more common definitions, Rothstein can create visualizations for a new understanding of the sublime: the toxic sublime.[9]

Jennifer Peeples, an associate professor in the department of Languages Philosophy and Speech Communication at Utah State University, describes how the toxic sublime refers to "the tensions that arise from recognizing the toxicity of a place, object, or situation, while simultaneously appreciating its mystery magnificence and ability to inspire awe."[10] In other words, the toxic sublime is a result of the intense emotions inflicted by beautiful places that have been altered due to toxicity and pain, leading to the similar feelings of wonder and fear that the typical sublime invokes. The idea of the toxic sublime is fairly new, however that doesn't undermine its relevance. As climate change rapidly alters the planet, the toxic sublime is inevitable for the most fragile and cherished locations, such as the montane cloud forests.

I thought back to our nature tour the day prior. The guide explained how climate change is driving the clouds away because the temperatures on the mountains are too warm for the water to condense, leading to a much drier rainy season. Even more so, these changes are happening rapidly. He told us that the rainy season shortens by about one week every year. "When I was a kid, we rarely saw the sun during the summertime, now, the sun is out every day," he said somberly, "I fear that even my own children will never experience the cloud forest in its full beauty during their lifetimes." It seemed as if he were going to cry. "They are saying that these forests may not even be around in fifteen years or so." I looked around, trying to grasp what he just said. The forest surrounding me was teeming with life. Moss wrapped almost every surface and the buzzing of the cicadas was deafening. Fifteen years. That is shorter than my own lifetime. In fact, I was starting school fifteen years ago. In the grand scheme of our planet, fifteen years is nothing, and for forests that have existed since before humankind, the loss is devastating. Climate change is occurring at an exponential rate in virtually every ecosystem around the world, and we are running out of time to stop it.

The World Meteorological Organization released staggering results in their most recent climate report. WMO researchers explained how "there is about a 40% chance of the annual average global temperature temporarily reaching 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level in at least one of the next five years—and these odds only are increasing with time."[11] Given that global temperature increases are happening at an exponential rate, we are headed down a very grim, potentially catastrophic path.[12] In fact, scientists from the United Nations explain how the accumulation of heat in our atmosphere has "propelled the planet into uncharted territory, with far-reaching repercussions for current and future generations," a terrifying fact for humankind, especially for us young college students.[13] For the last 11,700 years, our planet existed in the Holocene, an era characterized by abundant growth and relatively stable temperatures. However, as human activity has ravaged the earth, we have moved into the Anthropocene: the era of the unknown.[14] WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas describes how "increasing temperatures mean more melting ice, higher sea levels, more heatwaves and other extreme weather, and greater impacts on food security, health, the environment and sustainable development," illustrating the interconnectedness of the systems on our planet and how our actions will ultimately affect every aspect of life.[15] Unless humankind significantly changes our actions immediately, the fate of the earth and

8. Ibid.
9. Bergman, Nicolas T., and Briwa, Robert M. *Re-envisioning the Toxic Sublime: National Park Wilderness Landscapes at the Anthropocene.* (Annals of the American Association of Geographers 111, 2020), pp. 889-99.
10. Peeples, Jennifer. *Toxic Sublime: Imaging Contaminated Landscapes.* (Enironmental Communication 5, 2011), pp. 373-92.
11. *New Climate Predictions Increase Likelihood of Temorarily Reaching 1.5 C in next 5 Years.* (World Meterological Organization, 2021).
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. *Anthropocene.* (National Geographic Society, 2019).
15. *New Climate Predictions Increase Likelihood of Temorarily Reaching 1.5 C in next 5 Years.* (World Meterological Organization, 2021).

its inhabitants will cease to exist as we know it.

The acceleration of climate change is sort of like running down a hill. At first, you gain momentum. This period is great, you're moving fast, but still totally in control—such as the time when humans first discovered the magic of fossil fuels. But, with every step, that momentum builds. Factories are assembled and the air becomes polluted. As you begin to run faster and faster, you begin to lose control, which is exactly where humanity stands right now. Species are dying, the climate is changing, but we still have a chance. However, if you don't begin to slow down, face planting is inevitable, and there is no telling what the damage will be from there. Humankind stands on the threshold between control and destruction. Former General Assembly President of the United Nations, María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, describes how "we are the last generation that can prevent irreparable damage to our planet," warning that we only have 11 years to prevent catastrophe.[16] Humanity is losing control, and if we do not act immediately, the survival of our species is extremely uncertain.

The sublime is often related to ideas of control, or rather, the lack thereof. De Botton explains how the sublime calls us to recognize that "the universe is mightier than we are, that we are frail and temporary and have no alternative but to accept limitations on our will," meaning that in the face of the universe, we are utterly powerless.[17] However, as humanity builds more cities, cuts down more forests, and pollutes more oceans, we begin to harness the landscapes that were once considered to be completely out of our control.

When the original theories of the sublime emerged, philosophers categorized powerful landscapes as sublime because they elicited senses of wonder and fear due to their sheer size and magnificence; a fear that often resided within the lack of power. They never would have predicted that one day, humanity would have the ability to destroy these vast expanses at such an abominable rate.

However, due to the powers of extensive capitalism and modern-day technology, the places that were once regarded as sublime are now becoming toxic wastelands. Although the idea of the sublime will continue to live on through centuries, it may only exist within its toxic version. In an attempt to control what was once out of our control, we lost control of something even greater: ourselves.

Humans have tirelessly manipulated the environment to fit our needs, harnessing the resources of the natural world and leaving destruction in our footsteps. As climate change hurdles towards us at an astonishing rate, we are losing what made us: mother earth. As time moves on, the nature that gave us the resources to prosper will cease to exist, and humankind will be left with somewhat of a shell of what once was.

Our planet has provided us with the food to nourish our bodies, the mystery

16. "Only 11 Years Left to Prevent Irreversible Damage from Climate Change, Speakers Warn during General Assembly High-Level Meeting" *UN Press*, 2019.
17. Botton, De Alain. *The Art of Travel.* (Pantheon Books, 2002), p. 163.

to nourish our minds, and the beauty to nourish our souls; and without that, we are nothing. The sublime reminds us of our own humanity, but as we destroy the planet and lose our understanding of the beauty within the sublime, we begin to lose ourselves.

On my last day in Monteverde, I finally got to experience the cloud forest in its true glory. Standing atop a lookout, fifty feet above the lush greenery, I truly felt alive. The air was fresh and cool, smelling slightly of moss and fruit. The far reaches of the forest were hidden, veiled by the dense, opaque clouds that consumed us. They encircled my body, moving in and out with the natural flow of the air. The swollen, incandescent beasts produced a fierce howl, unlike anything I had ever heard before. The wind pierced through my thin jacket, sending shivers down my spine. Its menacing cry echoed through my ears, dominating every conversation; I had to scream to be heard. The wind, similar to climate change, is powerful, invisible, and remains unnoticed until the damage is already done. I close my eyes. Listen. Feel. Breathe. The earth below me dances to the song of life, but slowly but surely, gets drowned out by the cry of the wind.

MY PLASTIC DINOSAUR

SPENCER STEPANEK

Consider this massive irony: I made a recent purchase after browsing the toy aisle. Boxes lined the shelves with images of small building bricks. This system of connecting components was known to practically every child to have been the most amazing thing ever. Some of their products depict quite realistic things; maybe you wanted to build a car, or a house, or a dinosaur. I like dinosaurs, so naturally I was captured. This one had two horns, green skin, and four stubby legs. I stared for a moment while I constructed it in my head. Nostalgia and other primitive, child-like sensitivities overtook me. I ripped it from the shelf and clutched it close to my chest. A sad thing would overcome me when I revealed the box's contents.

It was all as expected. Pouring the box onto your workspace reveals not but many small pieces, in many small bags. I tore through the plastic bags it came in and threw them away. I had all those pieces in a pile in front of me, those which would've been a dinosaur if I didn't freeze up. I stopped right in my tracks and considered the following: these small, versatile blocks are all made of plastic. Plastic is a petroleum product. Petroleum is derived from crude oil and crude oil is derived—hear this—from dead dinosaurs. My heart sank.

Never had I seen a greater symbol for human vanity than this pile of processed materials lying in front of me. They snap together and sit there—what a pathetic afterlife. Once, long ago, they died and sank into the ground. A Triceratops would cry and wail in pain for just a brief second. Its life flashed in front of its eyes and then it became a product, a good. Millions of years later we suck the essence of their lifeless bodies out of the ground. We drill and drill just to reach one of these lots of gas or oil. This process frightens me. I had never before thought of the implications of desecrating another life form so vividly. We literally use their aged, rotting corpses to sustain our little selves today!

I was unmoved when a dear friend of mine commented on my detail. "Actually," she interrupted, "most of the petroleum underground was made from plankton." Thank you. But still I stand perturbed and moved by this sad paradox. Since, I have dug around in my own time. The building bricks, which everyone regards as their favorite, are a plastic called ABS.[1] This injection-moldable stuff is made from dipping polybutadiene in acrylonitrile and styrene

1."Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene - ABS Thermoforming and Injection Molding." Advanced Plastiform, Inc., June 10, 2019. advancedplastiform.com/materials/abs/.

monomers. Much of that is bad for you. Some of it could kill you. Acrylonitrile is quite toxic and deadly.[2] But one of the components, styrene, is derived from petroleum (that's what those huge smokestacks are doing, burning crude oil and gas).[3] And petroleum, is dead dinosaurs.[4] Partly. Enough.

This flung me into a woe so immense I considered skipping school. I considered crying. I considered re-involving myself with 350.org, a climate activism group that hates crude oil as much as I do. I was distraught over the fact that we are literally rebuilding these massive creatures at a bite-sized scale, perfect for the grabby hands of a child. It hurt me that this principle goes so severely overlooked. Who cares about dinosaurs? We make fun of dinosaurs all the time—despite their name meaning, "terrible lizard".[5] As big and as horrifying as they were, they still died. Each and every one. Maybe that's why it's so easy to poke fun at them, given that there's no chance one will storm into your house and eat you alive. Now they exist solely in our image. On our bedsheets, in books drawn for kids, and as plush, huggable animals. Our image is one of quaint benevolence and aesthetic disposition. We would show our kids these things now, and rock them to bed while they grasp at a 50-foot-tall beast.[6] Yes, I had to look that up. Do you know how tall the Brachiosaurus could get to be? Exactly. And now they stand, so valiant, a mere four inches.

In a way it makes me glad for the dinosaurs. They had the luxury of living without others tainting their bountiful planet. Humanity is doomed to sit and watch. It is torture to sit and wait for the day when banks stop investing in crude oil, if that day comes. If I were a Triceratops though, I wouldn't give a single damn what other dinosaurs were doing to the Earth. I wouldn't feel so—accountable.

But staring at my plastic dinosaur makes me feel responsible. I am furthering the irony with this quaint scene, a green triceratops made of many small plastic bits. I feel a collective shame that humanity should bear together. I feel the shame of a movement in climate action

2. "Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene - ABS Thermoforming and Injection Molding." **Advanced Plastiform, Inc.**, June 10, 2019. advancedplastiform.com/materials/abs/.
3. "Styrene and How It's Made." **Michigan Foam Products LLC**, April 1, 2019. michiganfoam.com/styrene-and-how-its-made/.
4. "Petroleum." **Encyclopædia Britannica**. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.
5. **"Dinosauria: How the 'Terrible Lizards' Got Their Name." Natural History Museum.**
6. Dinosaur sizes—Enchanted Learning Software. enchantedlearning.com/subjects/dinosaurs/anatomy/Size.shtml.

that's larger than me. I want this irony to end. I only hope that, when humanity sees our final days, it was not the notion of this plastic dinosaur, our addiction to crude oils and other gross things, that led to our demise.

And so here it sits. Here on my table, pieces of a forgotten legacy. I try not to think about it. It's a symbol for our own end, as humans. To be honest it is quite close to driving me mad. I cannot shake the notion that someday, some alien thing will go for commerce and come back with a small, plastic human. They will sit there with it and attempt to disregard the plastic in the item. They might end up thinking about how those materials came to be. They'll think of why the sky is dark and black, and why the air is repugnant. And they might just blame it all on the tiny human sitting on their desk.

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- Portraiture and Memoir
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LOGIC SAYS IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO ERASE OUR SPRAWLING EXISTENCE. OUR LEGACIES OF CONCRETE AND PLASTIC SUPERHIGHWAYS AND SUBURBS. ...BUT THE EARTH MOVES ON

- A Novelty of Strata, Karuna Eberl

CHANGING SKIES

CREATIVE NONFICTION

2023

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

HINDSIGHT PRESENTS

WRITING THROUGH THE CLIMATE CRISIS

CHANGING SKIES

2023 - VOL. II

FOREWORD BY ERIN ESPELIE

HINDSIGHT PRESENTS

CHANGING SKIES

creative nonfiction

2023

VOLUME TWO

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CHANGING SKIES is a subsidiary of HINDSIGHT, the University of Colorado Boulder's Program for Writing and Rhetoric publication of creative nonfiction. We acquire First North American Serial Rights, welcoming all artists and writers of creative nonfiction to future issues. See our submission guidelines on our website: HINDSIGHTJOURNAL.ORG/SUBMIT

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FROM THE STAFF

EDITORIAL TEAM

This second edition of CHANGING SKIES recognizes that the best way to understand something is to engage with it, and the best way to understand another human being is to appreciate their story. In a world saturated with both climate alarmism and greenwashing, we strive to shine a light on individuals without deep pockets or cryptic underlying agendas. We look to all perspectives on the unprecedented challenges posed by climate change.

Some grieve for natural spaces now lost.

Some demand immediate policy changes to protect what remains.

A dejected few fear they may never be able to experience our natural world in the ways they'd always dreamed, while others patiently anticipate the extinction of our species at our hands; a lesson not learned, but suffered.

We go on, however, also looking for solutions. Our species creates problems but also solves them. Even in worst-case scenarios, we must adapt.

In future issues of CHANGING SKIES we challenge writers to explore every angle and to express their well-researched takes on the inevitable social, economic, political, and personal changes we face as a species. We challenge you to effect your change.

ONLINE TEAM

We in the Online department are dedicated to giving the work of our contributors a worldwide stage. The second volume of CHANGING SKIES represents our goals of looking outward to an international base of authors, artists, and readers.Through the publication of online exclusive pieces, pieces from past issues of both HINDSIGHT and CHANGING SKIES, and full PDFs of all volumes of our print titles, we hope to reach readers, writers, and artists from every mountain, desert, forest, and river of the world. Scan the code on the previous page to learn about submitting to our journals or to read and admire the writing and artwork we're passionate about publishing.

ART DIRECTION TEAM

HINDSIGHT's Art Direction team searches for visual complements to writing about both the urgency of addressing climate change and the beauty of what is at stake. We look to create a dialogue between image and text through juxtaposition and contrast, more than simplistic visual echoes.

MARKETING TEAM

HINDSIGHT's Marketing team would only exist with our dedicated staff. We all take on different roles to build awareness of our journals, challenge each other to produce great work, and keep the creative nonfiction genre alive at CU Boulder and beyond. We run campaigns on our website, social media accounts, and in print. Each semester brings new challenges, but the team continues to expand the audience, staff, and knowledge of HINDSIGHT.

We thank you for providing our team with valuable artwork and writing, making spreading our message more straightforward and meaningful. Please enjoy the second volume of CHANGING SKIES.

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THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT THE SKY: AN INTRODUCTION

by Erin Espelie

I
Above twenty snowy mountains,
the only moving thing
was the body of the cloud.

II
Our readings of the sky can be interpreted in Rorschach-fashion
to gauge our mood—steel gray, lace-like, sunny, inky black,
bathed in alpenglow, red at night a sailor's delight,
or tinged with enough blue to patch a Dutchman's trousers.

III
Looking down at Earth from the Moon
we can see straight through to the oceans, but looking up
in daylight the Sun obscures the cosmos. The atmosphere
acts as a one-way scrim, light scatters, and stars only appear as pinpricks
of light to the naked eye at night. We project ourselves up there
into a singularly shared space, to see a small part of the pantomime.

IV
In 2004 filmmaker James Benning pointed his camera up.
He made a 100-minute film, *Ten Skies*, in which he filmed ten
distinct skies for ten minutes each. Viewers can choose to see stasis
in the lack of camera movement or aberrations in the skyscapes,
from crossing aircraft to drifting wildfire smoke.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
the sublimity of sky that hides the destructive human hand
or the one that reveals the daylight scrim to be
stained by smog and smoke, scratched by satellites,
the nighttime skies bleached by artificial light.

VI
Stable ice in Patagonia, I prefer that, as Whitney Brown describes
in the pages that follow, in her dreamscape, Perito Moreno,
how to travel with the mind to the Andes Mountains.
"Sky-puncturing mountains, turquoise-hued lakes," and a notch
of earth called the Península de Magallanes, protect
one of the last stable glaciers on the planet, one that might even speak
to us, if we have faith enough to write, to listen, and interpret. Because,
we know that humans cannot, nor should not, provide all that we know.

VII
James Benning made another film in 2004 called *13 Lakes*,
in which he filmed thirteen lakes, each shot lasting, again, ten minutes without moving.
The film, therefore, is 130 minutes, each frame split, half-sky and half-water.
Benning explains that his formal choices relate to how the 2004 films are
"the antithesis of war" because atmospheric portraits are precisely about
"the kind of beauty we're destroying."

VIII
Destruction comes in so many forms. On these pages, Samuel Myers-Verhage writes
in "Obsolescence of an Oasis" of the impact of drought on families,
whole communities, in eastern Morocco. People must uproot,
become semi-nomadic, without knowing where they might land.
Myers-Verhage describes one such haunting, "The father's mile-long stare,
not directed anywhere, aimlessly wandering as a ghost."

IX
Flight and escape take another shape in the poem "Six More Weeks of Winter."
James Mead calls upon our myths to remind us how reliant
we and so many other species, like the "scrupulous" migrating birds,
are to the circular cycles of seasons—and what we lose when disruption comes,
when those in power get greedy and the powers that be get more powerful.

X
In the essay "Marine Murderer," Nancy Whitecross
remembers the most magical dive of her life,
underwater off the coast of South Africa, in the waters of Aliwal Shoal,
searching for beauty and biological symbiosis among scores of dolphins,
anemone tentacles, wrasse that "do a small dance," groupers, and more.
Ecosystems like this one may be relegated only to memories or memories of images.
What sharp cry can we utter?

XI
Wallace Stevens wrote, in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,"
in section XI that "once, a fear pierced him" when "he mistook the shadow"
of his carriage for blackbirds.

XII
The climate is changing.
Creatures must be flying.

XIII
As you experience the words and images ahead, I ask you to consider,
What have we mistook as shadow? How much more beauty might we
discover if we make room for speculation, as Whitney Brown does.
What formal structures might we create to understand change, both subtle and extreme?
What kind of sky do we want to see—betwixt the cedar limbs or across flat desert?
Clock your minutes, mark your mood, and gauge how you want to see your future up there.

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BEFORE THE FLOODS

by Rosalind Moran

There is a sense of waiting in Cambridge. The small English city swells and shrinks with the migration of students and tourists, who lend pace to the foot traffic coursing through the wishbone of streets forming the city's centre. In summer, the students mostly depart and the colleges, keen to take advantage of their residents' absence, hastily erect scaffolding and begin repairing another year's worth of wear on their limestone fortresses. This is a seasonal city, one still functioning in response to the distinctly religious underpinnings of old British universities. Calendars here mark feasts for saints and the Holy Trinity, exactly as they did when monks and clergymen, as opposed to modern-day undergraduates, pored over readings in the halls. This is a city of tides.

When I moved to Cambridge in 2020, Cantabrigians and long-term residents delighted in telling me the eeriest of the local lore. Was I aware that the city sits a mere six feet above sea level, and that the surrounding region used to be largely underwater? How did I feel about flooding?

I went home and googled Cambridge's elevation. The internet proffered information about medieval and modern drainage, as well as articles inviting me to discover whether the street where I lived would be underwater in 2050.

Cambridge is a fenland settlement, built on former and current marshlands. Much of this part of England was originally wetlands, far better for sailing than for walking, glistening under a weak sun. I am told name of the nearby town of Ely derives from "isle," because the low hill on which the town is set was the only piece of land above water for miles around, for millennia. Fen-dwelling parishioners would row through marshes and swamps to reach the Ely Cathedral for prayer; it was not so long ago that the town and cathedral were inaccessible but by boat or causeway.

art by Sonali Roy

It was the Victorians who eventually drained the land, trading black-garbed boating parties for pheasant shooting in forests where the land squelched underfoot. The peat began to oxidise, drying into a more stable foundation for houses built of brick, as opposed to the huts on stilts that locals tell me were once common here. Did I know that the ancient people of the fens were rumored to have webbed hands and feet? They were supposedly master navigators, disappearing into the mist and then emerging again, purposeful, as they paddled through the British Isles, an ecosystem akin to a rainforest. This landscape, though seemingly nondescript, is a marvel and unique in its flat expanses; its mud and its drains; down its fabled boatpeople, skimming silently between their perched dwellings.

…if flood prevention strategies are not maintained, the land may simply slip away beneath rising sea levels.

It is strange to imagine the land surrounding central Cambridge submerged by saltwater. Human-delineated locales—Midsummer Common, Stourbridge Common, parts of Fen Ditton—all underwater. This eventuality is far from relegated to the past: the Cambridgeshire Fens are among Britain's lowest-lying regions. Local councils warn that if flood prevention strategies are not maintained, the land may simply slip away beneath rising sea levels.

Imagining this area obscured by floods—its topography of plains and hillocks gradually forgotten as maps update to show bodies of water and islands—is harder still given England is currently in drought. When it rains, drops fall noncommittally, sometimes barely wetting the houses' dark slate roofs. Heat expands within the thick walls of buildings, built to trap warmth—a home feature here that is usually welcome, but which has in recent months grown oppressive. In our offices overlooking dry London streets, my colleagues comment that rain does not fall as it used to, neither as frequently, nor in such torrential downpours. Strange, then, to think of floods being on their way in time, of their threat seeping a little further into public consciousness with every passing year. Yet such is the intricacy of climate, and the interdependency of human-made land modifications and ecological adjustments within the natural world. Now, as in so many places worldwide, England experiences the consequences of the changes it has helped sow.

Last year's drought in the UK turned grass brittle and straw-like, and the earth grew hard and packed to the point that when rain did come, the ground struggled to absorb it. Rivers and reservoirs around the country ran dry, revealing abandoned stone bridges and centuries-old roads that were forgotten as waters swallowed them entirely. In Cambridge parks, novice initiates to hot-weather living made questionable choices, setting up portable barbecues on tinder-dry lawns and stripping down in the sun instead of covering up or staying indoors. Being Australian, such sights caused me unease; where I come from, the sun safety slogan "Slip, Slop, Slap" forms, for a broad cross-section of society, a Trinity holier than the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Will sun safety become the dominant religion here as well, in time? Perhaps this notion is not altogether fanciful. Does spiritual belief not tremble, at least for some, when faced with the hot breath of a seemingly godless summer?

Will the drought come back? This past weekend, the marshes were already gasping, and cracks appeared in the soil of the fens. The fragmentation of the earth reflects the hairline fissures spidering along the walls of the country's weakening institutions. Strikes abound, and trains are cancelled as the metal rails supporting them warp in the heat. As for the rain and the tides, these grow ever harder to chart.

A former Australian Prime Minister described the UK rather facetiously as "an old theme park sliding into the sea." Whether he is correct regarding this decline remains uncertain. In a parched park in Cambridge's south, meanwhile, a Ferris wheel slumbers through the closing days of May. Its steel limbs grow hotter by the day, a static reminder of carefree days past, and possibly future. It looms like a giant exoskeleton, a dinosaur for our times.

FENLAND IN HIGH SUMMER

by Jessica Hansen

Anywhere else, it would be beautiful:
Whispering golden grass,
Soil baked dry and white
Like bones of some ancient beast
The wind—a gentle caress
Under the pulsing sun.

It stretches on forever:
Desiccated dead that trembles,
Flattened fields one mistake away,
A hundred miles of tinder boxes;
Kindling waiting for a match.

It has been betrayed,
This land that used to be sea,
Screaming for water it cannot drink,
For rain that never falls
While elsewhere sodden valleys drown,
And lightning does not burn acres to ash.

We do not need river stones to say,
“If you see me, weep.”
We need only see the cracked soil,
Plants dying months too early,
And hungry flames licking at our heels.

art by Clayton Montgomery

OBSOLESCENCE OF AN OASIS

by Samuel Myers-Verhage

I sat cramped between a mother and her violently-puking child in the backseat of a minivan. The vehicle propelled down twisting mountain roads, barely dodging the edge of bottomless cliffs. Confidence oozed from the driver, who burned incense on the dash and argued loudly on the phone over the radio's deafening Moroccan music. His boldness wasn't misplaced; he was driving a route he knew well: a single-lane highway, the lifeline for his hometown of Merzouga, Morocco. Arriving at the final destination of this vomit-initiating excursion, I was startled to find a desert town awaiting: more than half the houses in Merzouga were abandoned. I asked the driver, "*Qu'est-ce qui s'est-il passé ici?*" ("What happened here?") and he responded simply, "*Sécheresse*."

Drought.

This oasis sustained the locals for thousands of years through war, disaster, and famine. What forced these people to move away from the land of their ancestors?

art by Sonali Roy

In villages like Merzouga, a unifying pattern emerges: desertification. The most recent definitive UN assessment in 2005 states that 10 to 20 percent of the planet's drylands (6 to 12 million square kilometers) have already degraded, making desertification "among the greatest contemporary environmental problems."[1] The dire damage of desertification owes to its perpetuation as an environmental feedback loop—a dangerous process whereby previous grassland environments transform into more deserts due to a warming climate. On top of that, the increased surface area of these deserts encumbers the formation of new grasslands on the edges of the desert. This means that desertification will only grow exponentially if poor land use practices are kept, possibly leading to a Dust Bowl scenario when the next drought inevitably hits.

During the 1930s Dust Bowl, farmland in the Great Plains of the United States was reduced to dust because of the overproduction of crops. This led to a decline in population of every one and five people in the affected states. The concurrent Great Depression exacerbated the fragile nature of the situation; the two events made the era one of the worst in American history, due to environmental collapse on top of economic stagnation.

History repeats itself, and while not on the same scale, Merzouga faced a comparable situation. On my first day in the village, I went to the only local café, striking up a conversation with the owner in my subpar French. He had a simple response to my questions about why people left the area.

"Too many crops and tourists."

His words were unquestionably true, if brief.

1 Tal, Alon. "Degraded commitments: Reviving international efforts to combat desertification." The Brown Journal of World Affairs 13, no. 2 (2007): 187-197.

Desertification isn't a new problem; the Dust Bowl and Merzouga testify to that. So, why hasn't the issue received the proper attention? Desertification is fueled by inadequate focus on critical drivers, insufficient funding of initiatives to combat land degradation, and absence of effective domestic policies mandating continuous future use.

Owing to the lack of these factors, unpredictability is the norm in this scientific community—most scientists don't have a definitive time frame for when desertification will take center stage. These issues demand intense, preemptive action, because inhabitants of these affected areas only see desertification happening when it's too late to reverse.

Entire regions such as Drâa Tafilalet, which contains Merzouga, have been decimated by this negligence. Just north of this lies Oriental, or Oujda region, inhabited primarily by an ethno-social group known as the Aït Unzâr. They differed from the Drâa Tafilalet with a combination of sustainable mandates and well-organized institutions in rural areas—where water scarcity was most prevalent. The bilateral arrangement is known as the two qabîla system, where tribal assemblies make decisions about the basic concerns of collective socio-economic life.[2] The two qabîla system establishes an equitable framework for issues that need the most balanced interpretation that champion equitable arrangements.

This system also efficiently settles disputes with grazers, helping to keep the peace in an otherwise fractured society. Such fracture was also evident in Merzouga, where the only people with large social representation in the area were semi-nomadic goat herders. This decentralized system of the two qabîla can only be effective to an extent, as what has to be done in tandem is efficient environmental rejuvenation programs for the fragile desert ecosystem. These programs show success in healing desert ecosystems. There is a recent effort in eastern Morocco, where one program to combat grazing-related desertification increased rangeland productivity on 461,000 hectares, with plant biomass growing from 150 to 800 kg/hectares, with a $47.7 million price tag over ten years.[3] This project demonstrates the viability of present methods for combating desertification—and their accounting profits.

The full issue delves deeper than this basic economic model. Places like Merzouga can barely acquire the small amount of money necessary to make the changes that would save real people's lives.

Some locals don't have time to wait for this capital, as just 23 miles north from Merzouga outside the town of Rissani, Hassan Sadok took matters into his own hands.

"Date palms are a natural barrier against desertification," says the former hotel owner-turned-farmer, from lack of tourists. "In the beginning everyone laughed at me. The land was very dry and sterile, and growing anything in it was very difficult. Look over there. Those lands are dead. But on my farm, thanks to my date palms, the land is fertile. My farm turns a profit and is environmentally friendly."[4] Hassan Sadok was able to save his farm due to smart farming techniques, yet imagine how many more locals could be able to revitalize their farms if just given a little more money. If the locals possessed the capital for these initiatives, then they would almost always know how to use said capital meaningfully. Therefore, the responsibility of this issue falls less on the victims, and more on their donors.

The United States is a global outlier for this opportunity due to the sheer amount of money they invest abroad, compounded with their global contributions to desertification through greenhouse gas emissions. After World War Two, The US normalized overproduction of special synthetic crops, thriving on unregulated large-scale greenhouse gas emissions. A laissez-faire economic approach became the norm.

The nomadic Aït Unzâr rejected most of these principles since their lifestyle uses almost opposite resource management. "We follow the rains, deciding every time where to move with our herds; that is the reason why we are called 'Aït Unzâr'."[5] This semi-nomadic lifestyle is crucial for survival in a desert environment where rainfall is scarce, vegetation limited. The land can't support the excessive demands of capitalism, and yet must sustain its current inhabitants.

When desertification strips people of their land and they lack money to support solutions, its inhabitants will unwillingly become semi-nomadic, like in Merzouga. I remember riding by the hotel one last time the day I left Merzouga. My cab passed a family of seven crammed together in a minivan, their belongings tied together on the vehicle's roof. They glared at the hotel as the car trudged along, and their expressions will haunt me forever. The way the mother leered at the hotel which sucked out valuable water, while unsure if her family would eat that night; her face revealed the uncertainty of her future, and her children's future. The father's mile-long stare, not directed anywhere, aimlessly wandering as a ghost. Their lives have been blown away into dust, erased from the face of the earth with insulting insignificance. To the readers that haven't been swayed, who disagree with the consequences of desertification, or who don't empathize with thousands of families who have lost everything. I ask you,

What does drought mean to them?

2 Casciarri, Barbara. "Rare resources and environmental crises: Notes on water management among the Aït Unzâr Pastoralists in South-Eastern Morocco."" *Nomadic Peoples* 7, no. 1 (2003): 177-186.
3 Tal, Alon. "Degraded commitments: Reviving international efforts to combat desertification." The Brown Journal of World Affairs 13, no. 2 (2007): 187-197.
4 *Morocco's Oases Fight Back Creeping Desert Sands. 2016. Standalone Media Collections.*

5 Casciarri, Barbara. "Rare resources and environmental crises: Notes on water management among the Aït Unzâr Pastoralists in South-Eastern Morocco."" *Nomadic Peoples* 7, no. 1 (2003): 177-186.

art by Daniel Workman

DIVINE WILL

by Mary Silwance

My daughters want a real Christmas tree.

We have a perfectly serviceable fake tree in the basement already decorated with colored lights, jewel-toned ornaments, and shimmery silver tinsel. It was a gift from a friend moving, eager to travel light. I prefer used goods over new, anyways.

A real tree? I'd never even considered it.

But Christmas was barreling at me fast, so I caved and went to a nearby nursery. I found one that was just right. Well, just right in a Charlie Brown Christmas way: small and spindly. It shivered in a corner with another scrawny scrap of a fir, reminding me of the leftover kids who never got picked for kickball at recess.

I took home the discounted, desiccated tree to decorate. When my girls were small, we cut holiday cards into a long chain. This colorful homemade garland paired with tiny white lights adorned the gangly fir perfectly. After we finished, I sat in the darkened living room enjoying the Charlie Brown vibe, a soft glow gracing the room.

But I was uneasy.

Ecosystems were exterminated to plant acres of fir, spruce, and pine. What synthetic inputs forced them to grow in to marketable shapes and sizes? How far did they have to travel to get to a store near me? What kept them fresh? Were they shipped in refrigerated trucks like fruits and vegetables? That all seems ecologically excessive when we've been averaging 50-degree weather this December in Missouri.

Besides, what will I do with the tree after Christmas? If it's loaded with chemicals, I don't want to compost it or toss it in the backyard for

critters to nibble on. I don't want it decomposing near my garden beds nor do I want chuck organic matter into a landfill.

And then I remembered.

To secure the tree, I bored screws into four sides of it, shredding bark—tree skin—in the process. Trees feel. They form families, create diverse communities, take care of each other. I imagined rows upon rows of firs just like this one in monocrop plantations across the country. Indentured. Trees bred to be consumed. Then discarded.

Even my environmental concerns about a live tree, regarded the tree as an it, as an object. I feel a disconnect. The Christmas ritual in which I'd just participated doesn't match my growing awareness of the sentience of all beings; doesn't match my growing awareness of the sacredness of all beings.

To force a being to grow in unnatural conditions, kill it, then artificially keep it fresh to adorn and display her for one's enjoyment to eventually discard her, is a sacrilege. A tree is a being with a right to its own life.

I think of the common Christmas refrain, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." While this excludes certain people, it certainly discounts nonhumans. Whatever falls outside of "men" can be othered: dominated, abused, used, enslaved, marginalized, even killed for the "glory of the most high."

Progeny of this God—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have littered history with those deemed underserving of good will. The legacy continues as goodwill is still not extended to all beings, let alone all humans. But because Sacredness pulses and shimmers in every speck of Earth, all beings are deserving of goodwill.

This startles me. If Divinity is the fabric of everything, why don't our Christmas traditions reflect that? Why participate in rituals that subjugate other beings? What's more, these traditions—the trees, lights, decorations, excess, grand religious services—rely on extractive practices that don't foster good will or peace on earth but jeopardize others to provide material accouterments for the holiday season.

How does that honor the Divine?

I've been told it's not that black and white. We can celebrate while we pray for those suffering. Maybe adopt a family, volunteer, donate. I'm weary of this equivocation. Inequity, marginalization, and suffering flourish; not peace on earth and good will. If the Christ child was supposed to be revolutionary, it's not working. That miracle has been pimped to uphold oppressive, marginalizing systems while a few get to feel virtuous for their charitable deeds.

Complicity in the desecration of Earth and Her Beings, denial of the Sacred in its wondrous omnipresence means we have become severed from understanding ourselves as Sacred. We have denied our own Holiness. Otherwise, how can we be callous to the Sacredness of the other? As I journey toward my inner Divine, I understand Divinity as the fabric we are each knit from. Which means we ourselves and all we encounter are Holy beings, deserving of reverence.

The anemic fir in my living room bolted to a tree stand is propped up on a yellow plastic milk crate hidden under a snowman tree skirt to give her height. It is time for new rituals. Let's develop traditions to honor the Sacred within and in every being so we can authentically manifest good will toward each being. Indeed, Divine will.

MARINE MURDERER

by Nancy Whitecross

The ocean was calm that day; there was no wind, only the sun beating down on my head as the dive boat sped on top of the water. The sky reflected an azure blue, with not a cloud in the sky. My fingertips gently touched the water. People asked me what I was doing when they heard me calling my friends to come and play with us. Within minutes, they had surrounded the boat, jumping gracefully in and out of the water. The bottlenose dolphins knew I was there; they waited for me to join them.

Just six kilometers off the coast of Umkomaas (South of Durban in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa) is Aliwal Shoal, one of the top ten dive sites in the world.

John, a fellow instructor and friend, brought a student on his first dive. The conversation was exciting as the student, his father, anticipated an incredible dive while we tried to play it down, as Aliwal Shoal could be daunting. More often than not, the visibility is less than five metres. When we dive in this glorious place we must remind ourselves that we are invaders of the fish species' habitat. It is not an aquarium.

I had my camera on the boat that day, hoping to glimpse my friends playing underwater. We kitted up. When I was ready, I did a back roll into the water with the dive buoy.

Immediately, the dolphins surrounded me as I dived to the bottom of North Sands, ten meters underwater. John and his father followed me. Once our student was safe, I handed the buoy line to John and immediately pointed my camera at the dolphins scratching their backs in the sand, one after the other, as though they were dancing to music. An albino dolphin joined in the fun. John and I tried to count how many of them were playing; it must have been close to one hundred. Our student was mesmerised as he knelt in the sand, watching them. As they ascended to breathe, two giant manta rays appeared out of nowhere, one covering

art by Maya Katz

my whole body as I lay horizontally above the sand. They disappeared into the depths of the deep blue ocean. Adrenaline rushed through my body. I had experienced pure love and joy from the living creatures below.

We had not moved from North Sands and needed to get to the reef to show our student more of nature's wonders. John, holding the buoy line, hovered just above us as we swam away to find the reef. The current was gently swaying us as we were propelled forward. In our vision was a magnificent sight: two clownfish playing in an anemone's tentacles. Even though their tentacles are poisonous, the clownfish are protected there. They live a symbiotic life without harm or fear. Their black and white stripes over their bright orange coats are beautiful against the bland pink anemone. As we swam over the many different types of coral, our student looked blissfully happy and content. The visibility was around eighteen metres and we were so lucky to witness a ragged toothed shark approaching us, gently flicking his tail. Aliwal Shoal is a breeding ground for the ragged toothed shark, also known as the grey nurse shark. Although he looked ferocious, he was a gentle giant as he swam past, enchanting us and our student.

As we swam further, an alien-looking moray eel peeked at us from his hideout. They are carnivorous predators and feed off small fish and crabs. Knowing he could deliver a nasty, painful bite, I avoided contact with him. He ventured out of his home and swiftly swam away on the hunt for his next meal. We swam around the beautiful colored coral, which had taken many thousands of years to evolve. I am particularly interested in montipora coral, which is preyed upon by butterfly fish. There are many types of montipora, some with branching arms, others with twisting spirals, and even more that grow on top of the rocks, blanketing them in color.

We came upon a cleaning station as we watched the many fish species swaying in the gentle current. We tried to explain to our student why several species of fish were waiting patiently to be cleaned by several cleaner wrasse. The cleaner carefully picked off dead skin, bacteria and parasites from each fish, taking particular care of the mouths and gills. Once clean, the fish happily swam away, leaving the wrasse with a full meal. Shrimps and cleaner wrasse then do a small dance, indicating to other species that they are ready for business. It reminds me of a car wash. Even predatory fish like groupers allow the cleaner fish to swim inside their mouths, removing hitchhikers and bacteria without harm.

Our time below had ended, and the magic of that one dive will live in our students' minds forever.

Our time below had ended, and the magic of that one dive will live in our students' minds forever. Seeing so many of my friends swimming beside us was a rare sight.

Almost twenty years have passed since that magnificent, magical dive, and although I have travelled to many dive sites worldwide, I have never experienced another dive that I could compare to that one.

Over recent years, I have witnessed what the temperature rise has done to my precious place. Oceans absorb ninety percent of the excess heat from global warming, endangering life in and around them, including humans.[1] The oceans cover seventy percent of our planet's surface, and forty-four percent is experiencing what has been called a "Marine Heatwave." The warmer the oceans get, the stronger the storms get. When a hurricane forms, the hot sea exacerbates it, creating more devastation. Warmer water contains less oxygen than cold water; therefore, fish's oxygen demand is much higher in warm water. During the ocean's heat waves, more fish will die.

Venomous sea creatures are increasing due to warmer waters and the acidity level of the oceans, especially the deadly Box Jellyfish and the coral-eating crown-of-thorns.[2]

Many corals in various parts of the world have been bleached by the sun and have died, devoid of color. The breeding grounds of several species of fish and mammals have been destroyed. I have observed how the increase in numbers of the crown-of-thorns has devastated some reefs by eating their way across the coral, a direct aftermath of climate change. If this continues and people do not take responsibility for their actions, in 2100 the oceans will be depleted.[3]

In the last eleven years, we have lost fourteen percent of the world's total coral reefs, equivalent to half of Australia's living coral.[4] A recent report claimed that the cause of the tragic loss is due to climate change, rising ocean temperatures, overfishing, and declining water quality. The report also mentioned that the coral reefs could recover. But we would have to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, coral takes many thousands of years to grow.

We will not see it recover in our lifetimes.

I realized that what I have seen and treasured during these last thirty years will soon be a memory as the oceans become depleted of their beauty. Many of the coral reefs are already barren. My grandchildren and great-grandchildren will only know this memory from the photographs and tales that I will pass down from generation to generation.

The changing climate is the enemy that has murdered my friends deep down in the once-magnificent waters of the oceans.

Note:

The excellent picture of that day, of the back-scratching dolphins, was later published in the DiveStyle Magazine.

I have been diving since 1994 and have had the good fortune to visit the Great Barrier Reef, the Red Sea and many Islands for over thirty years. As a diving instructor, I have had the pleasure of qualifying many students who have found a passion for scuba diving.

1 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "How Does Climate Change Affect Coral Reefs?" NOAA, January 20, 2023. https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/coralreef-climate.html.
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3 Lotterhos, Katie E., Áki J. Láruson, and Li-Qing Jiang. "Novel and Disappearing Climates in the Global Surface Ocean from 1800 to 2100." *Scientific Reports* 11, no. 1 (August 26, 2021): 15535. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-94872-4.
4 United Nations Enviornment Program. "Rising Sea Surface Temperatures Driving the Loss of 14 Percent of Corals since 2009." UN Environment, October 5, 2021. http://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/rising-sea-surface-temperatures-driving-loss-14-percent-corals-2009.

LULLABY

by Nicholas Barnes

I told her I like that color:
Sky with fire behind the hill.
It was gray, blue, and saddening,
But below, it was opal black.

It's spring, but not nearly summer,
More than winter, in fact.
These days feel like eighty
And the nights are all heart attacks.

Go away, go away to the movies,
I know I'll see you again.
I'll be sitting in my own theater,
The last showing starts at twelve.

Midnight comes with soldiers
And stars in their crowns.
We're all following the commander,
Though she seems a light year off.

Tonight I need my own party
Or an orchestra; symphony will do.
I want a country music singer
And a pedal steel: cry me to sleep.

Give me crickets, bullfrogs aplenty,
I know it's that time of year:
When her soothing anthem
Is whispered in the smoky air.

art by Daniel Workman

SEA WALL

by Denise Thornton

The team we gathered to build our timber frame house was a group of artists working construction day jobs, and when it came to setting our stone foundation, they all agreed Tom should take the lead. A lanky guy with a graying ponytail, Tom carried a dog-eared copy of *Living the Good Life* with him everywhere. Helen and Scott Nearing's self-published 1954 chronicle of their move to rural Maine has been the bedrock for many a back-to-the-land journey, and includes a how-to guide for building a strong, straight stone wall.

Doug and I were feeling our way toward building the greenest house we could—both a home and laboratory of sustainable shelter ideas with a carbon footprint the size of a baby's bootie. That meant passive solar design, and locally sourced, natural materials. We were inspired by the generations-old limestone foundations of faded red barns along our country road.

Thirty years earlier, during Doug's postdoc in the Netherlands, we lucked into renting a 300-year-old farmer's cottage along the edge of what was originally a Roman road. It stretched our sense of what a house could be to include axe-hewn timbers supporting wattle-and-daub walls and a thatched roof. We ate our meals, tucked our daughter into bed, and dreamed through the long winter nights in a structure that has sheltered families for centuries. So when it came to constructing our own house, no envelope-pushing idea seemed like a bridge too far. We were determined to lay the foundation for a home that might last as long as that Dutch cottage.

The land that the Nearings went back to was rich in a hard, igneous rock created some 400 million years ago when magma cooled and solidified deep underground. Our own rock is somewhat softer—soft being a relative term if you drop a chunk on your foot. Our bedrock was formed about 500 million years ago when Wisconsin lay near the equator

art by Ethan Lahm

beneath a warm, shallow sea teeming with creatures whose shells drifted to the ocean floor, bonding with quartz sand, and compressed over eons.

We paid a visit to Swiggum Quarry about ten miles away. Some of their limestone was broken into pieces of about the right size, and they glowed a pleasing, yellowish tan on that sunny morning. I was totally on board when I realized this kind of rock can be chock full of fossils—especially trilobites—that flourished into thousands of shapes and sizes, from three inches to three feet, in that ancient sea. Primeval precursors of insects and crustaceans with a pleasing pattern of triple ridges down their backs, trilobites grew by molting—each little fellow leaving a series of exquisite exoskeletons in its wake.

Wisconsin's state fossil, the Calymene celebra, was an adorable little trilobite scavenger who could have fit into the palm of your hand. If they were around today, you might keep a few scuttling across the bottom of your aquarium. Good luck catching him before he burrows under the sand!

Peter Brannen, in *The Ends of the World*, dubbed trilobites the standard bearer for the Paleozoic era. They survived the End Ordovician mass extinction 444 million years ago, and the Late Devonian 360 million years ago, but burrowing could not save them from the End-Permian Mass Extinction about 250 million years ago. Called the Great Dying, 96 percent of all species then alive were wiped out of existence. Intense volcanic activity in Siberia threw sulfur and CO_2 into the atmosphere, causing brutal global warming and acid rain.[1]

Trilobites that had scurried across the sea floor for 300 million years were suddenly slime, along with those who had crawled onto land and evolved into reptiles—some as big as the dump truck that delivered our stone. By the end of the Permian, nearly all of them had perished.[2]

The world in which trilobites thrived is long gone, but their fossils show up around here in places where roadbeds have been cut through the hills. Some of the richest roadside fossil viewing in our state is just minutes away from our land. We'd ordered a truck full of rocks and received a treasure trove of relics in the bargain.

Tom was not pleased with the quality of our rock when he saw the pile next to our house site. We belatedly learned that the rock from Swiggum Quarry is not generally considered attractive enough for building or landscaping and is usually crushed for roadbeds.

O.K. So our stone was not ideal, but when you're building a house with a sod roof, you are already (apologies to R. Frost) far down the path

1 Brannen, Peter. *The Ends of the World: Volcanic Apocalypses, Lethal Oceans, and Our Quest to Understand Earth's Past Mass Extinctions*. New York, NY: Ecco Press, 2017.
2 Ibid.

off-the-path of the path less traveled by. We forged ahead, helping Tom set up plywood forms and began to set stone knee walls that were basically straight and definitely strong.

Each stone was contemplated, then pivoted to fit its flattest side against the frame, more or less snugly next to its siblings. We shoveled concrete into the gaps, and let it set up before pulling away the forms and moving them on to the next section of wall. Because our stone was not as flat and smooth as Tom would have wished, concrete often oozed and hardened between the rock faces and the plywood. Every day of fitting stone was followed by two days of chipping concrete. The perfect tool for this dirty job turned out to be some of the smaller chunks from our rock pile.

Squatting in front of our growing wall, pounding away errant concrete globs, I felt as close as I've ever been to prehistoric humans who hollowed out canoes and shaped their own shelters with a rock in hand, though honestly, for someone with a cell phone in her hip pocket, it got a bit tedious. Bang upon endless bang. Each impact transferred through the bones in my hand and resonated up my arm. An hour of chipping felt like an epoch, but the wall slowly took shape, and the rock pile shrank.

...I felt as close as I've ever been to prehistoric humans who hollowed out canoes and shaped their own shelters with a rock in hand...

We had almost enough rocks for the job, but Tom and I eventually had to take his rusty pickup back to the quarry to find the best stones we could for the final push. Rick, the quarry man on duty, weighed our empty truck at the entrance and warned us to work fast because they were setting up to blast deeper into the rock face that day.

We wound our way through the lifeless, lunar landscape till we found a pile that looked promising and were picking through it for usable chunks when Rick roared up in a gigantic dump truck. Time to get out of the quarry. Now!

Dropping the rocks we were holding, we hopped into Tom's truck and raced after him to where Jerry, one of the explosives technicians, was waiting at the entrance. He phoned his partner. Three warning honks reverberated, then a crack like doom shook the valley.

Jerry told me he blows something up just about every day. Swiggum Quarry, he said, gets "shot" about twice a year. He grinned when I asked him if his partner had plunged a handle to detonate that mayhem. Explosions these days, I learned, were triggered by a hand-held device with two yellow buttons and a red light.

No sticks of TNT either. Acetic acid, the main ingredient in his explosives, was transported by tanker trucks. Jerry and his partner always mixed the explosives on site, so as not to be driving around with a volatile load that could come to a bad end on a train track or in a highway pileup.

Before the dust drifted away, Tom and I rushed straight for the new blast site. My nerves were still jingling from the explosion, but I was excited at the prospect of fresh rock. Local and fresh? How good can roadbed rock get?

As we approached the avalanche, Tom looked at me with a raised eyebrow. We were both struck by a distinctly pungent smell. I stopped and closed my eyes. I knew that smell, though I had never smelled it in Wisconsin. Could we be inhaling the long-trapped scent of an ancient ocean? I filled my lungs deeply and held it as long as I could.

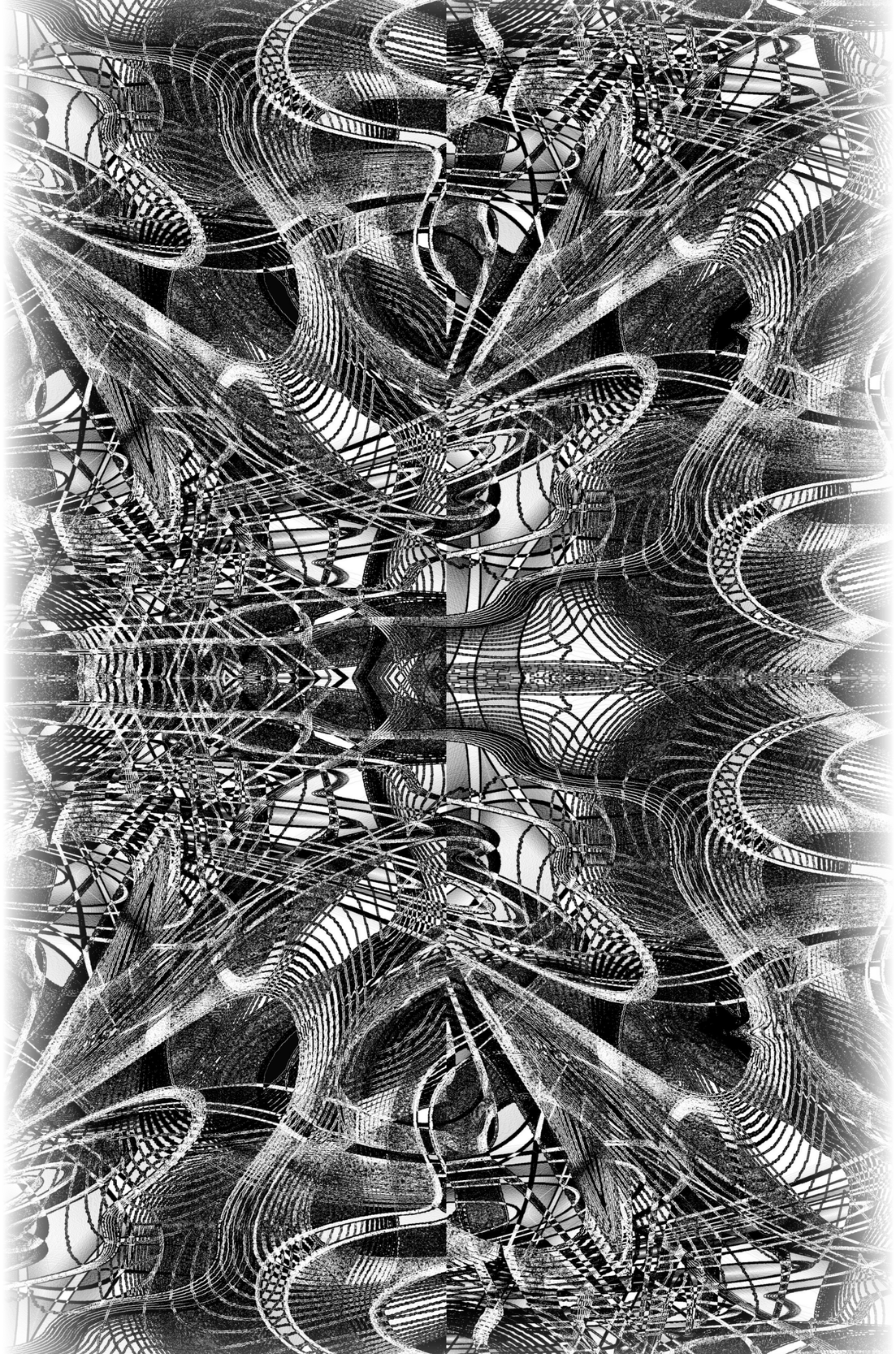
That overpowering sense of sea breeze dissipated quickly as we searched, and soon we were sweating in the same hot, dusty air we had been breathing before the blast. We loaded the pickup with enough rock to finish our foundation, got weighed again, paid 12 dollars, and left.

The next few days, as I mindfully fitted those rocks into the last of the wooden forms, I found myself inhaling hopefully as I hefted each stone, dreaming about that long-lost sea bottom under my feet.

Later that week I called up Richard Slaughter, the Director of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Geology Museum, who maintained that I could not have been inhaling odors of an ancient ocean. Though Paleozoic seas might well have smelled a bit like their modern counterparts, I was assured that any such smell in our limestone had been washed away by millions of years of fresh groundwater.

Still, ten years later, when I look at our sturdy, fossil-studded foundation, I believe that I did once inhale the last breeze of a lost world where trilobites scuttled freely across a warm and friendly ocean floor, as if they could go on forever.

art by Sherry McCarver



NOTHING

by Nicholas Barnes

I'm a dangerous gal. I never look at the walls that surround me. Everywhere, I'm caged in.
I wish I had that key, that's the one keeping me locked up, insane, and distorted.
Sometimes, I feel I'd be better off walking through the desert all alone, but I'm no Jesus Christ.
I can't turn water into wine anymore. Help me with this vintage.
I think of living things, and those that aren't, passing in and out of my skull.
He said: lift the curtains and let the sun shine on your precious little head today.
But there's no sun to see. It's not a crime, not yet. The skies, they're screaming Thursday.
I dream of arenas filled with fanatics facing their idols with guitars in hand.
And they preach to me from that lonely stage: you don't have to do all that you're doing!
I fret about my health, and my looks too. I wonder, what will thirty years do?
And I worry about my impact, my footprint. I fear that my shoes are far too large.
But I'm no clown. Just a bleeding heart, to a fault at times.
Come forth, you hedonist. You once put a spring in my step. A queen of 23 finds abstinence.
Come down from your hill, down to my level. Take me to that golden El Dorado.
Show me a picture of those ivory gates, and I'll shave off all my hair with that pendulum razor.
Let me find a way to live without worry or fear. Let my blood beat of my own accord.
I'm waiting for a boy who can stitch and sew. I'm an old quilt, patch me up with your miracles.

art by Edward Michael Supranowicz

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

by Karen Davis-Brown

Living in rural, northern Wisconsin, we are used to cooler temperatures, plentiful water in all seasons, and thousands of acres of forests and wetlands to explore and enjoy. Imagine our surprise when, for weeks on end, our pristine air was filled with a haze that blurred the horizon and turned sunrises a brilliant, ominous red.

It was the talk of the neighborhood, which in this case means the eight households—each on forty-plus acres of woods or hay fields—ranging a couple miles to the north and east of where I live. We shared our concerns with each other about itchy eyes, sore throats, headaches, and the imperative for our more medically fragile friends to stay indoors. We found ourselves checking the air quality rating daily, sometimes several times a day, something we never thought we would do in this verdant and socially isolated place. There was also the seldom-spoken anxiety of the potential return to face masks even after the COVID pandemic. A real concern that these masks were, perhaps, here to stay in this age when the air that we depend on for life may often carry danger as well.

This year was unusually warm and dry in our part of the world. Local rivers, usually welcoming to canoes and kayaks in late spring, ran so low we could only stand on the shore and marvel at huge stones which before were always hidden beneath a swift current. Our rainwater catchment barrels were empty—for the first time in recent memory we had to water our small flower and vegetable gardens from the pump. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources even prohibited campfires and issued air quality warnings for residents in all parts of the state.

art by Kelsey Kennedy

We learned that this uncomfortable, worrisome haze came from massive wildfires spanning the breadth of the Canadian provinces, resulting from the same shift toward a warmer, drier climate that we were experiencing farther south. They began in March and continue as I write. Winds from both the northeast and the northwest brought the haze, smell, and particulate matter from those fires not only to Wisconsin but as far west as Montana, as far east as New York, and as far south as Iowa and Washington D.C. Even European countries were affected.

These days, the evening news is full of reports on extreme weather and catastrophes all over the world, and we watch the footage with awe and compassion. We shrug and say the words "climate change" as we talk about our own weather, but we do not fully grasp the connections between the changing climate and human decision-making—our own or anyone else's.

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), comprised of representatives from 195 countries, prepared a 2023 report titled *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report.* It explicitly states that "Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gasses, have unequivocally caused global warming" and that "Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe," leading to "widespread adverse impacts on...human health..."[1] It goes on to assert that "Emissions reductions in CO2 from fossil fuels and industrial processes...due to improvements in energy intensity of GDP [Gross Domestic Product] and carbon intensity of energy, have been less than emissions increases from rising global activity levels in industry, energy supply, transport, agriculture and buildings."[2] The report continues to detail an explicit correlation between more frequent and intense "hot extremes," "heavy precipitation events," and "increases in agricultural and ecological droughts...due to increased land evapotranspiration" resulting from humanly caused climate change and predicts that these events will worsen in the future if alternatives are not put in place.[3]

Those of us who live in the rural United States are shackled, often unconsciously, to this fossil fuel economy that does so much damage. We often live miles away from shops and public services, and we depend on tractors and other machinery for our lifestyles and livelihoods. Not only is there a shortage of sustainable public transportation, even the chainsaws, log splitters, and generators we use to produce electric or

1 H. Lee and J. Romero, eds., *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report.* (Geneva, Switzerland: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in press, 6.
2 Ibid., 10, 12.
3 Ibid., 34.

wood heat often require petroleum products to operate. The need for fossil fuel products is so pervasive and ubiquitous that we don't even realize that there might be options when we pull up to the pump. We do not recognize this common habit for the cage that it is.

There are two fundamental reasons for this seemingly unsolvable dilemma. One is that the infrastructure of this country—rural and urban—presumes an unlimited supply of fossil fuel. There are few obvious options available for personal transportation, transport of goods, or even recreation, that do not require a petroleum product of some sort. The second is that the industrial and financial entities who generate wealth from this dependence spend a great deal of time and money to keep other possibilities from being openly researched, publicized, or developed on a broad and accessible basis. In its marketing, lobbying, and economic pressures to persuade local communities, the "corporate speak" is like a distorted mirror of deceptive language intended to trigger fear and a sense of false patriotism and thereby influence our perceptions and control our behavior.

Whether they use smooth and sophisticated words to convince us of how their products are somehow beneficial to us, or they deny the damage that they do, we need to develop the capacity to think more critically about our options and work together to develop more independence from corporate influence. We need to ask in response to their advertising ploys, "Where's the money?" Without a doubt, someone is profiting from our ignorance, fear, and perception of what it means to be happy and successful.

A striking example exists in is the network of pipelines that stretch from Canada across the north central region of the United States, reaching as far as the Gulf of Mexico. Line Three through northern Minnesota and the lands of the Anishinaabe people and Line Five across northern Wisconsin, home of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, highlight the corporate duplicity and constant collusion with local authorities, resulting in violence and exploitation in the name of cheap oil as well as the violation of rights of these sovereign nations and the division of local communities, sometimes beyond repair.[4] [5]

4 Hassanzadeh, Erin. "Line 3 oil pipeline: A look at what's happened since the pipeline started operating in northern Minnesota." CBS News Minnesota. May 3, 2023. https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/line-3-oil-pipeline/
5 Kaeding, Danielle. "Judge orders Enbridge to shut down part of Wisconsin oil pipeline in three years." Wisconsin Public Radio. June 19, 2023. https://www.wpr.org/judge-orders-enbridge-shut-down-part-wisconsin-oil-pipeline-3-years

People in across the Midwest and in rural communities across the country are overwhelmed and confused by the claims and counterclaims of environmental "experts." I sought out the aforementioned IPCC report on my own, but most of my neighbors are not so curious or persistent. They either believe the spin of the oil companies or they perceive themselves as powerless and the dilemma—too big to understand or change. Like so many others, my neighbors do not see the connection between the four-wheel drive pickups they drive, and the smoke that fills our once-clean air. We are all over sixty years old and have our own children and grandchildren. Not only our children, but children all over the globe have less and less access to clean air and water every year because of individual, corporate, and governmental decisions. The winds need to shift, and that change needs to start with us. It starts by asking, "Is this my only option?" and "Who's making money from my decisions?" Information is power. Becoming curious, persistent, and informed can make all the difference in the world.

art by Jordan Eckes

SIX MORE WEEKS OF WINTER

by James Mead

Demeter was deep downtrodden
when April winds were dry
Hades held her daughter still
unable yet to fly

waterfowl scrupulous
returned on tight time tables
to find the earth still
frozen hard and
not a morsel to be taken

weeping willow wept
still louder
to find her boughs still barren

and all the people
shook their heads
except the crude oil baron

surrounded by bright poppies now
that non-eternal winter
and being found
just wrong for now
my hands are hardly shaking

mother holds her daughter scared
new gleam in Hades' eye
in his mind a new deal making
six then six revised

art by Colin Turner

SNOWMAGEDDON

by Macy Kay Naughton

"Would you rather be too hot or too cold?" my mom reads from the box of cards at the dining room table. We unanimously decided "too cold." Maggie Mae, my sister, argues that it's easier for someone to warm up than to cool down. I agree while drawing another card.

If someone asked me now if I would rather be too hot or too cold, I would doubtlessly choose "too hot." Texas and "too cold" are seldom found in the same sentence, at least until February 4, 2021.

Maggie Mae clamors into the kitchen, announcing "School is canceled tomorrow!" We scramble to the couch to turn on the Weather Channel. Our eyes grow wide as we read the bold red headline: SNOWMAGEDDON. I can't remember the last time it snowed here, in Texas. We rush to the windows to see tiny pellets of snow spilling from the sky.

I roll my eyes at Maggie Mae, "Yeah, right. 'Snowmageddon.'"

I rush out the door with my sled, excited to have the day off. But when the cold slaps my face, I run back inside to grab a scarf. Finally, all bundled up, we embark on a day's worth of building snowmen and making snow angels. My sister and I are carefree even with snow in every inch of our clothes. I am freezing but content. Once the sun goes down, we conclude playing in the snow. We trek up and over the hill on our way to the house when we notice that the entire street is in total darkness. "It's only seven o'clock. Why is everyone asleep?" I wonder. I am too cold to understand what is really going on. Nearing our house, I have a rude awakening. My toes are freezing as I enter the front door—the temperature is the same inside as it is outside.

"Mom, what happened?" Maggie Mae asks, shivering.

Mom replies calmly, but I can see the worry in her eyes, "Everyone's power is out, but they said it would only last a few hours."

I sigh, annoyed that I must stay in my frosty clothing.

art by Aidan Jones

Except, we have no power for two weeks. In the following days, events escalate quickly. On the fourth day, I try to fill my water bottle, only to find that we are out of water. I start crying out of frustration. "I think this is my breaking point," I say. On the ninth day, I stare out the window, imagining warm weather. I had never been truly cold, but now I know it's the feeling of pins and needles sporadically piercing me. I broaden my gaze to see if I can spot the neighbors. I hope they are okay. Two blurry red lights grab my attention.

My mom notices the confusion on my face and hugs me, whispering, "They've been sleeping in their car to keep warm." I immediately feel my heart breaking. A ten-year-old child and her mother should not have to endure this.

On the tenth day, my best friend, Camryn, calls me. I can sense the tears in her eyes as she says, "I have to move in with my neighbors. Our pipes froze and burst." We open all our cabinets, hoping we do not face the same fate. On the fourteenth day of Snowmageddon, a single lamp begins to flicker. My mom sighs in relief, anticipating news of liberation. We entangle ourselves in a cliché family group hug, excited that we can finally stop the firing burning in the fireplace.

As I think of the grid failure causing Snowmageddon, I realize that the built and natural environment coincide more than I had ever thought. This correlation is both positive and negative. Sustainable design in homes can be used as a tool to mitigate climate change. I wondered how energy within my home could be different or if there were any solutions that could have prevented Snowmageddon altogether. The "Whole Building Design Guide" suggests that "Implementation of the sustainable design strategies across scales is an important step towards reducing GHG emissions, thereby mitigating climate change effects and promoting healthier living."[1] Building green reduces energy and promotes renewable energy.[2] This strategy could have helped the grid failure that occurred during Snowmageddon. The Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) highlights the importance of retrofitting existing buildings.[3] The idea of modifying homes made me ponder, "How can my house use energy efficiently?"

Renewable energy is essential to tackle the climate crisis. In the article, "Drafting a New Architecture for Energy," Jatin Nathwani provides crucial statistics that "Current global primary energy demand is met by 85% fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas) and 15% non-carbon sources (hydro, nuclear, bioenergy, wind and solar.)"[4] He stresses how there must be a shift in source use which starts in homes. Nathwani supports his claim by documenting the impact in home architecture of providing alternative energy, such as enhanced geothermal, hydro, nuclear, or solar energy.[5] I wonder if the grid would have failed if one of these alternative energies were present during Snowmageddon.

1 Sijakovic, Milan and Ana Peric. "Sustainable Architectural Design: Towards Climate Change Mitigation." ArchNet-IJAR : International Journal of Architectural Research 15, no. 2 (2021): 385-400. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/ARCH-05-2020-0097.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Nathwani, Jatin. "Drafting a New Architecture for Energy: Keystone XL's Rejection Ought to Unshackle Us from Viewing Fossil Fuels as the Only Path to Prosperity-here are Three Alternatives." The Globe and Mail (1936-), Nov 28, 2015. https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/drafting-new-architecture-energy/docview/2121479722/se-2.
5 Ibid.

Geothermal energy is the most effective of these forms of alternative energy.[6] The Life-Cycle Assessment emphasizes that geothermal energy is a "key renewable source for sustainable heating and cooling applications."[7] Compared to common air-conditioning, geothermal heat pumps "present higher performance in output thermal energy over the consumed electricity."[8] Likewise, geothermal heat emits fewer greenhouse gasses.[9] Unlike other energy sources, geothermal energy is always available.[10] Additionally, because geothermal energy is naturally occurring, no fossil fuels are required to extract it.[11] If more homes in Texas utilize geothermal energy, another unexpected weather storm won't be so devastating.

On the last day of Snowmageddon, I hug my mom as we appreciate the feeling of warmth in our fingers slowly creeping in. I begin to get up but jump back into my chair. The floors are still frigid. A proposed energy alternative to forced-air heating is heated floors. Heated floors are eco-friendly, as well as more efficient than other heating systems.[12]

Another energy alternative that is beneficial to homes is energy-efficient lighting. At night, my house is shadowed by trees, so the flame of the fireplace had been our only source of light for those two weeks during Snowmageddon. Energy-efficient lighting minimizes energy consumption with daylight-linked controls.[13] My house already has more windows than necessary; therefore, we do not usually have lights on during the day. With these wireless network controls, the sensors would optimize the use of energy consumption daily by limiting its time.[14] Furthermore, daylight-linked controls reduce energy consumption in lighting by 60%.[15]

Snowmageddon has shifted the way I think about energy. Before, I did not think twice about how my house was supplied with light or heat, but now I understand all too well the consequences of poor design decisions. A power grid failure that causes power outages in 4.5 million homes is a devastating consequence. However, we can stop Snowmageddon from happening again by implementing sustainable energy sources. Whether it is heated floors, energy-efficient lighting, or geothermal energy, renewable energy in homes is essential for mitigating climate disasters like Snowmageddon.

6 Aquino, Andrea, Flavio Scrucca, and Emanuele Bonamente. "Sustainability of Shallow Geothermal Energy for Building Air-Conditioning." Energies 14, no. 21 (2021): 7058. doi:https://doi.org/10.3390/en14217058.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 "Geothermal FAQs." Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, 2019, https://www.energy.gov/eere/geothermal/geothermal-faqs
11 Ibid.
12 "Radiant Heating". Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, 2022, https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/radiant-heating.
13 Tsangrassoulis, A. and DHW Li. "Energy Efficient Lighting Strategies in Buildings." Energy and Buildings 165, 2018. https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/energy-efficient-lighting-strategies-buildings/docview/2066202170/se-2.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.

NUCLEAR ENERGY IS GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE: AN APPEAL TO DEMOCRACY

by Kevin Ember

art by Aidan Jones

This paper was initially aimed for the mailbox of a senator who sits on the Energy and Natural Resource committee, but upon researching solutions for America's nuclear waste problem, I found that this would be a futile effort. Nuclear energy is an intensely bipartisan issue which has seen disagreement for multiple decades, partly driven by fear of the lethality of nuclear energy. In this paper I aim to address a reader who believes in taking necessary action to counteract climate change. Generally, the younger generation is more vocal about this call to action; however, its realization requires that we place our trust in the democratic process, the idea that every vote counts. This power must be realized by citizens of the United States to counteract the deathly grip that climate change has on our society. I hope to shed light on why citizens should err on the side of nuclear energy when politicians inevitably try to reason a way out of the hole humanity has dug for itself.

Nuclear energy has had a tarnished reputation during its short life in modern society. One main reason: average citizens' fear of radioactivity, a process so dangerous it can cause entire reactors to melt down, and, in the wrong hands, create nuclear weapons. Nuclear energy's significant dangers come with impressive advantages. Before nuclear energy can reliably take over non-renewable energies' role, we must address the issue of nuclear waste management.

Many proposals, such as the Yucca Mountain repository in Nevada, have attempted to create a permanent waste repository site. Since its inception, this plan has been plagued with countless legal issues and ground to a halt after President Obama asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to pull its license.[1] Creating a long-term storage solution will take not only decades and lots of money, but also a shift in public opinion about nuclear energy. For nuclear energy to proliferate and propel society into a greener future, citizens have to understand the necessity of proper waste storage.

Undeniably, climate change creates unprecedented effects, and reducing humankinds carbon footprint requires action. This leads to the push for cleaner energies like solar, hydroelectric, and wind—with nuclear the forgotten child of the bunch. On paper, nuclear energy has everything that our nation seeks in clean energy: a small carbon footprint and remarkable efficiency. Nuclear doesn't depend on external variables to produce energy, and is equally efficient any time of day, any time of the year. The U.S. Department of Energy states that nuclear energy has the highest capacity factor at 92.5%, which means that over 90% of the time nuclear power plants in the U.S. operate at full capacity.[2] This eclipses the capacity factors of wind and solar energy at 35.4% and 24.9%, respectively.[3] Comparable energy outputs from solar or wind would require massive land areas to supply the less-efficient forms. Despite nuclear's potential for solving green energy problems, why hasn't its adoption been more widespread? Simply put, political opposition and cost.

Nuclear energy is vastly more nuanced than the fossil fuel industry. Opening a new nuclear power plant often costs hundreds of millions or billions of dollars. Some might criticize its high costs, but as technology develops, new reactors become "more fuel efficient and [...] inherently safer."[4] While reactor performance certainly is a salient concern, waste storage is extremely problematic since it reflects fossil fuels' comparable difficulties. Until recently, fossil fuel waste freely joined our amorphous blob of an atmosphere with little to no oversight, which we now know contributes to global warming. While nuclear infrastructures contribute very little to carbon emissions, its challenge of waste removal causes external problems to energy generation. If we adopt nuclear energy on a large scale, let's not make the same mistake we made with fossil fuels, where we didn't deal with external waste until after it had caused irreparable damage.

Since the first nuclear reactor started up in 1957, the US has generated 86,000 metric tons of nuclear waste, all of which is spread across the states.[5] 20,000 of these tons are under the responsibility of our own government as side products from nuclear weapon production.[6] Since 1982 when the Nuclear Waste Policy Act was passed, it stipulated that the Department of Energy (DOE) find a permanent site for all spent fuel which a majority of which is stored on site at nuclear reactors in dry casks.[7] To fund this search for a new site, a small amount of the tax that consumers pay for nuclear energy goes towards this fund, which currently stands at around $45 billion dollars.[8] Roughly $400-800 million are added to this fund yearly in effort to find a permanent repository site, which seems to be stuck in limbo since the 2010 decision to stop consideration of the Yucca Mountain site.[9]

The Yucca Mountain site was a glimmer of hope to deal with waste, but, as I earlier stated, is no longer a viable option. Immense controversy over the decision to end the work on Yucca Mountain resulted in a lawsuit between South Carolina, Washington State (both states holding some nuclear waste that is property of the US government), and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) versus the DOE, claiming that only Congress, rather than President Obama, held the authority to stop the project. Despite this lawsuit, the DOE began breaking up the Office of Civilian Waste Management, the agency responsible for facilitating the Yucca Mountain site. This caused further outrage with states that were storing spent fuel destined for Yucca

1 Weeks, Jennifer. "Managing Nuclear Waste". CQ Researcher, 28 Jan 2011. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2011. 21 Sep 2023, doi: https://doi.org/10.4135/cqresrre20110128
2 "Nuclear Power Is the Most Reliable Energy Source and It's Not Even Close." Energy.Gov, www.energy.gov/ne/articles/nuclear-power-most-reliable-energy-source-and-its-not-even-close.
3 Ibid.
4 "Advanced Nuclear Power Reactors ." Advanced Nuclear Power Reactors | Generation III+ Nuclear Reactors - World Nuclear Association, World Nuclear Association , world-nuclear.org/information-library/nuclear-fuel-cycle/nuclear-power-reactors/advanced-nuclear-power-reactors.
5 "Commercial Spent Nuclear Fuel: Congressional Action Needed to Break Impasse and Develop a Permanent Disposal Solution." U.S. Government Accountability Office, www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-603.
6 Weeks, Jennifer. "Managing Nuclear Waste". CQ Researcher, 28 Jan 2011. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2011. 21 Sep 2023, doi: https://doi.org/10.4135/cqresrre20110128
7 "Used Nuclear Fuel." Nuclear Energy Institute, 2023, www.nei.org/advocacy/make-regulations-smarter/used-nuclear-fuel.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.

Mountain. A non-partisan group called the Center for Public Integrity researched the Yucca Mountain long-term repository and concluded that this project was an example of a "broken government."[10]

This outrage isn't unfounded considering the lack of options for storing the sheer amount of waste that is being stockpiled. When a fuel rod is removed from a reactor, it sits in a cooling pool for a minimum of five years, as stipulated by the NRC. With limited space for cooling fuel rods, many of the nuclear power plants operating today can store them in casks, encased in metal and welded shut in five to fifteen-inch thick walls.[11] These casks often take up lots of limited space, preventing the redevelopment of power plants, costing taxpayers millions every year. In some cases, "the entire plant has been demolished and removed, leaving only fences and guards protecting fuel canisters."[12]

There were plans to build interim storage in Texas led by Interim Storage Partners (subsidiary of Orano USA) and Orano USA, a company specializing in managing spent nuclear fuel among other things. Interim storage is meant to be a temporary storage site for spent fuel with the site in Texas being able to hold up to 5,000 tons of spent fuel which was granted by NRC in September of 2021, with plans of expanding the facility of the next 20 years to store up to 40,000 tons subject to future approval by the NRC.[13] This was a step in the right direction, but this facility was only intended to store spent fuel for only 40 years until a more long-term storage solution was found. This plan was recently axed, though, as the half-life of nuclear waste demands a final resting place where the radiation won't interact with society for thousands of years.[14]

Plans to use the remaining energy in spent fuel rods face limitations as well. The DOE estimates that after one fuel cycle a fuel rod uses only 10% of its total energy. Engineers can harvest the remainder of the energy on a closed-loop cycle, but this increases energy waste.[15] Additionally, refining spent plutonium rods has received political pushback due to the potential use of highly-concentrated plutonium in nuclear weapons. Recycling spent fuel would require building "fast" reactors, which experts tout as more dangerous than conventional thermal reactors. The purification process involving breaking apart plutonium's actinides creates a more unstable system than that which drives nuclear power plants. Repurposing fuel would be costly compared to the more dangerous "fast" reactor process, and would create more radioactive and dangerous waste than spent fuel rods.

The DOE seems to have its hands tied with little-to-no wiggle room finding alternatives to store the spent fuel, eating away at taxpayer dollars. This ties back to the original dilemma: our government must handle this waste, but hasn't made advancements toward solutions due to political opposition and financial struggles. I don't have any solutions, either. I'm simply a college student who is worried about the future of our country, and, more importantly, the state of our world's climate. I am certain that nuclear energy has great potential for driving humanity into a green revolution, an era where we can power our homes without having to worry about adverse environmental impacts. To reach this era, we must first be able to adapt and change as a society, and remold ourselves to a less self-destructive form, and that begins with all the citizens who live in the United States.

I'd like to leave the reader with some food for thought. Climate change will continue to worsen without our intervention, and renewable energies alone cannot offset our carbon footprint. Nuclear energy is the strongest contender for solving our energy crisis and mitigating further warming. It's clear that the DOE needs to provide the public with a solution it once promised but has yet to fulfill. We are at war with our own existence, every day closer to the tipping point where anthropogenic climate change will irreparably change our world in ways that we can't even begin to comprehend. Inevitably, when there is some call to action to bring about a long-term storage facility, will you stand proudly on the side fighting to preserve our dying Earth?

10 Weeks, Jennifer. "Managing Nuclear Waste". CQ Researcher, 28 Jan 2011. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2011. 21 Sep 2023, doi: https://doi.org/10.4135/cqresrre20110128
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 "Court Annuls Licence for Texas Used Fuel Store." *Court Annuls Licence for Texas Used Fuel Store : Waste & Recycling - World Nuclear News*, 30 Aug. 2023, world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/Court-annuls-licence-for-Texas-used-fuel-store
14 Ibid.
15 Weeks, Jennifer. "Managing Nuclear Waste". CQ Researcher, 28 Jan 2011. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, 2011. 21 Sep 2023, doi: https://doi.org/10.4135/cqresrre20110128

DEBUGGED

by Ralph La Rosa

Global warming burns our bugs till dead,

as if some god of fools roars out, More heat!

It's sparking storms and wildfires, causing dread

by scorching earth throughout the human zoo.

Mosquitoes, spiders, gnats that found us sweet—

make them extinct, will we be bugged out too?

art by Winter Ross

PERITO MORENO

by Whitney Brown

art by Elijah Pettet

I like to daydream about magnificent places, and one of the planet's most incredible sights is in the Southern Patagonia Icefield, among sky-puncturing mountains, turquoise-hued lakes, and wind-shaped clouds. This sight, the Perito Moreno Glacier, is something to behold—98 square miles of snow and ice, ridges and crevasses, marvel and wonder.

So, as Perito Moreno transforms Andean snow into ice, we'll marvel. And as the glacier curves 19 blue miles toward a lake, as it towers hundreds of feet above the water, we'll wonder. Finally, when the ice cliffs calve under the weight of upslope snow, we'll behold: a cathedral's worth of glacier tumbling into the lake.[1]

I've never set foot in Patagonia. Even so, my daydream passport bears shimmering stamps from Argentina, slick-as-ice stickers of Perito Moreno.

In tangible Patagonia, most people look at Perito Moreno from viewing platforms. But in my wildest imaginings, I can go wherever I like, do whatever I want: scale the ice cliffs, cartwheel between the ridges, camp at the bottom of the crevasses. More than anything, I like to pretend that I'm swimming in the lake.

From the surface, Perito Moreno would look as jagged as a geode, and huge crystals would conceal the ice clifftops. I'd lounge on the lake, the water somehow bath-warm, but the glacier would calve, ice splintering from the cliffs, and in the second before the shards hit the water, I'd try to dash away. As the frozen mass struck the surface, I'd sink through the lake, where ice chunks would look like teal silhouettes. Then one silhouette would rise beneath me, and I'd look down to see a piece of ice surging to the surface. Lifted by that ice, supported by it, I'd burst back into the air. Flecks of mist would fall like rain, but once they had subsided, I'd see the ice cliffs' new facades: azure, angled, sharp. I'd wonder if the people on the viewing platform could see me, or if I melted into the jay-blue water.

Glaciers shrink when they melt and calve faster than they receive new snowfall, and in the era of climate change, most of Earth's glaciers are shrinking. But Perito Moreno is stable, Andean snowstorms making up for its calved ice. For a dreamer like me, one whose nightmares are often linked to climate change, Perito Moreno's stability is a delight. It's a source of awe, wonder, gratitude.

I ask myself: should I make a pilgrimage to Patagonia? What would it be like to see Perito Moreno? To wave hello to a glacier, to surround myself with ice?

I think I would cry. I know I would cry.

1 Bocchiola, Daniele, Francesco Chirico, Andrea Soncini, Roberto S. Azzoni, Guglielmina A. Diolaiuti, and Antonella Senese. "Assessment of Recent Flow, and Calving Rate of the Perito Moreno Glacier Using LANDSAT and SENTINEL2 Images." *Remote Sensing*, (2021).

But my pilgrimage would spew carbon into the atmosphere, an air-altering action that—on a planet hurt by many air-altering actions—threatens glacial stability. I'm not one to travel lightly, but I do travel often, and if Perito Moreno ever tipped toward catastrophe, I suspect I would fall apart. Crumble.

So I haven't planned a pilgrimage. Not yet. Instead, I picture myself, swimming and soaring, at the glacier. Shining.

Sometimes I dream that I'm an Andean condor, my wingspan nearly 10 feet long, blue sky coursing through the gaps in my flight feathers. I'd reel across the wind, coasting, gliding on thermals. But I'd rarely pump my wings. The air would keep me afloat.

No meal would await me at Perito Moreno, that loud-thundering field of ice, but the place would feel special—like a source of primordial wonder, or inarticulable power. I would return there often.

As the ice fell, I would hear familiar sounds: waves crashing, splashing, rocketing; onlookers exclaiming. Air is invisible to humans, though, so they couldn't consider its moods, its wobbles, the way that I could.

They wouldn't know that the icefalls make the air crackle.
Or that the crackling air makes me shake.
In the gusts, I would steady myself, airborne still.

The Canal de los Témpanos—the Iceberg Channel, an arm of Lago Argentino—abuts Perito Moreno and catches the calving ice. Human again, I dream that I'm swimming through the icebergs, through the many miles of channel. Backstroke to see the sky, freestyle to look into the lake. Breaststroke to move from one domain to the other, like an ambassador between air and water.

When I reached the lake's main body, more space would open around me: slopes backing away from the water, sunlight streaming into the valley. A perch would swim to me, and we'd exchange a few pleasantries. We'd agree that it was a soul-sustaining day, the whole world alive, the whole world fresh. To be fair, the perch would joke, this is freshwater. She'd flutter a fin, then take her leave.

I'd make it to the lake's far side, a few dozen miles away, and look for an outlet. Then I'd see it: the Santa Cruz River. Someday, in another daydream, I'll follow that river through miles and miles of cocoa-brown landscape. I'll swim to the place where the river flows into the ocean.

A notch of earth, the Península de Magallanes, protrudes into the Canal de los Témpanos, and scientists say that this has kept the glacier stable. As Perito Moreno flows downhill, it reposes against the peninsula, and in this way, the land has become a buttress; the lowest ice, a dam.[2]

Every few years, the dam collapses, a blue arch crumbling: ice shards and chunks and columns falling, breaking, bursting. On the lake, the waves roar, while the air fills with mist. Before long, the sky contains so many droplets that a gauze filters the spectacle, and through that gauze, onlookers glimpse calving ice, splashing water, heightening drama. Then, after the collapse ends, the dam spends seasons and seasons building itself back up.

When the dam has become substantial, you and I could stand on top of the ice. Imagine it with me: a splendid, sapphire-skies day at Perito Moreno. On Perito Moreno. The air would be cold, but we'd feel the sun on our cheeks, our hands, our foreheads.

Far below, we'd see the Canal de los Témpanos, the Península de Magallanes. Behind us would sprawl an expanse of ice, the glacier's beginning 19 miles away, among fleecy clouds and white slopes.

Smiling, we'd sashay across the dam.

In Patagonia, we could trek across Perito Moreno, and along the way, we'd see meltwater, the glacier dotted with blue pools. We'd kneel next to one, hit its surface with our palms, have a water fight. We'd send up a spray to plaster our hair, to push a shiver down our spines.

Later, we could kayak on the Canal de los Témpanos. As we paddled, we would spot ice chunks. When we saw one shaped like a bottle, we'd write to Perito Moreno. We'd slide our letter into the ice, trusting the lake to deliver the message, trusting the glacier to respond.

2 Lodolo, Emanuele, Federica Donda, Jorge Lozano, Luca Baradello, Roberto Romeo, Donaldo M. Bran, and Alejandro Tassone. "The Submerged Footprint of Perito Moreno Glacier." *Scientific Reports 10*, no. 1 (2020).

Dear Friends, the reply would begin.

It wouldn't come in the mail. Instead, blue-tinged words would rise from Perito Moreno, like particles of cool air, and an Andean condor would direct the words. They'd swirl over water, over land, sometimes getting lost. Then a gust would forward them, curling and spiraling.

The words would arrive on a breeze. We'd understand them easily.

Thank you for caring about me, the glacier would say. *I know that you have visited me, by watching videos and reading and daydreaming. I have sensed you here, so I have loosened ice columns near you. Sent a perch to greet you. Helped you keep your balance as you danced on the ice dam.*

Although you are strangers, I feel kinship between us.

Every day, as the perch swim, as the clouds scud, human visitors gasp at the sight of me. But I'm pleased to know that other people glow and smile and hope when they envision me.

Sometimes, for people like you, it is enough to know that a glacier is still in its prime. This knowledge can sustain humans; what humans do with this knowledge can, perhaps, sustain glaciers too.

I am tens of thousands of seasons old. About one thousand seasons ago, the air began changing: sooty specks in the atmosphere, hotter sunlight in the sky. But I remain blue, mighty, beautiful.

Yours, imaginatively,

Perito Moreno

So we'd tuck the letter into our minds. Keep it safe. Never lose it.

SUNFLOWERS AND SELFIES

by Mary Silwance

To catch the 7:04 sunrise, we left in the early dark. Along the forty-minute drive, we savored hot coffee and morning stillness while alert for deer. As the cityscape unraveled into countryside, we felt ourselves expand with the wide rolling fields. Dawn revealed sheer sheets of mist over fields of late soybean, speckled golden brown. At times skunk peppered the cold air.

For weeks, friends had posted pictures of themselves on social media in a sea of sunflowers. Their smiling faces peeked up at brown seedheads bigger than basketballs, their toddlers like little elves shaded under petals. Based on their pictures, we imagined acres of sunflowers, their splendor magnified through the rays of the rising sun. But when we turned down the final rural two-lane road to our destination, we felt underwhelmed. Then, disillusioned.

Indeed, there were acres of sunflowers. I glanced around and noticed smiley faces and hearts in some of the flowers' brown heads. Seeds deliberately pulled by humans. This felt like mutilation, or marking territory.

As we approached the fields we sought a path, not wanting to disturb or trample vegetation underfoot. But the ground was hard soil without mulch or weeds. Maybe a stray morning glory vine or bindweed, but it was mostly barren. This field of gorgeous sunflowers typified industrial farming. This was monoculture. Of course it was. What did I expect?

Monoculture is the agricultural practice of producing or growing a single crop—plant or livestock species in a field or farming system—at a time. Monoculture hinders beings from living where and how they're naturally inclined to, as members of multi-species ecosystems. Healthy ecosystems present a pluralistic population that cohabitate in mutually beneficial, self-sustaining ways. A mono-crop field, say of sunflowers, requires intensive chemical intervention to exterminate plants that

art by Justin Hein

would otherwise naturally occur as well as to artificially support the focus crop. Such interventions degrade air, soil, and water.

Our ecological upheaval and extinction crises are driven in large part by monoculture. How can I celebrate this, albeit stunning, instance of it knowing it is the brainchild of practices that ruin habitats for living beings?

I stood on the cracked bald ground, a haze obscuring the sunrise. I felt sad. What is monoculture, but the elevation or separation of a species, breed or genetic strain at the expense of others? At the expense of the collective good? Glorification of monoculture elicits themes of ethnic cleansing, racial profiling and race based subjugation that have devastated people the world over. Besides, there is little life for these sunflowers shivering in the morning cool when you think about what life could have been if they existed in a prairie or plains ecosystem with the other plants, critters and insects that make up their natural family. Are they lonely?

Remember that the science which once claimed certain races couldn't feel pain and were intellectually inferior created monoculture farming, is also the science now "discovering" plants communicate, and in their own plant way, form community. A truth long known by peoples who honor belonging to mutually beneficial pluralistic ecosystems. Who understand it's a form of mutilation and dominance to live otherwise.

But if you're just there for the selfies and hoped to catch the sun shimmer on the green, yellow, and brown bodies of sunflowers, none of what these beings need—matters.

That's how supremacy works.

art by Daniel Workman

THE PROMISE OF GRANITE

by Mara Buck

A rock lies in the path. A half-buried boulder. Common Maine granite never destined to become an upscale kitchen countertop, merely reclining where the glacier abandoned it, satisfied with its status as a dusty undignified mass. Something to trip you if you're careless. As long as I've walked this path, that damned rock has occupied that spot. Several times I've forgotten and stumbled, once even landing face first, getting personal with the woodsy world at eye level. Bruised my cheek and my ego. Damned rock.

I'm not a hiker. I'm a stroller, a painter wandering the trails of my hundred rural acres, plopping down whenever the mood strikes and the light is right to capture the moment. Such moments are increasingly rare, even here behind my gate. The world intrudes. The state highway department appropriates more and more of my property for their wider ditches, insisting that my innocent roadside trees are a menace they must eradicate. Despite my desperate protests, they continue drenching my milkweed and rugosa with toxic weed killer that trickles into the woodland brook flowing by my house. It seeps through the soil into the planet's core to infiltrate the groundwater, kills fish and frogs, and sickens whatever drinks or feeds or breathes. Sickens me as well. This chemical has been on trial as a carcinogen, banned in numerous countries, but recently our government has lifted the restrictions, considering the corporate bottom line more essential to the future of the planet than a few milkweed plants. Or a few cancer patients.

I've tried to preserve my woods as nature intended. This place where I live is not particularly pretty. It's a mishmash of ice-downed trees and new growth, ticks and deer tracks, stately blue heron and the occasional fox, the whole traversed by a perennially muddy driveway. Climate change and its accompanying ice storms have inflicted increased carnage on the forest. Centuries-old maples have tumbled like dominoes, their

frozen tonnage crushing their relatives until the former natural growth has morphed into a war zone. The emerald ash borer and the hemlock woolly adelgid have taken their toll, but woodpeckers eat the insects before any arboreal species are totally eradicated and the storm fatalities become apartment complexes for creatures whose rental fees replenish the woodlands. Throughout my twenty years in these woods, nature has continued to thrive, but currently nature has begun to gasp, her pleas pitiful, and I'm helpless to intervene. I can only rant. And watch.

They are truly wedded, the house and the land, in a perpetual embrace.

I live in a house without vinyl, freed from the trappings so adored by the real estate market of today. My hand-built house performs as a good neighbor to its site, quiet and thoughtful, and the one doesn't suffer for the other. Moss intrudes on my roof; I consider it charming. My house grows increasingly camouflaged, every day becoming more a part of the land that surrounds it. They are truly wedded, the house and the land, in a perpetual embrace. The trees maturing now outside my windows are the children of the trees whose lumber was sacrificed to become the bones of the house, and that seems just right to me. An occasional pileated woodpecker agrees as he pecks away at the posts of the porch. But this year he is alone. I'm terrified that next year I'll look for that cartoonish redhead and find nothing.

Every spring I would welcome the phoebes to their nests on my porches; one on the back, another on the front, sheltered from the weather under the roof's wide overhang, ancestral homes that are at this point as old as my own. I'd witness any number of newly-hatched youngsters fledge from those porches, their fragile tiny wings struggling until they reached the closest branch, and I would sigh in relief at their success. They made delightful tenants, but last year the nests were empty. Historic daubs of mud and dry grass, unpretty things littered with bits of shell and feather and feces, now sad relics. I've left them in place, intact, hoping, *hoping*, but in my heart I know there's been a decided change. The only birdsong I hear now is the hoarse cry of a lonesome crow, and I try to disregard the message.

This small forest, my home, a microcosm of a larger, wilder system, has been the perfect size for a single artist to share with a secret deer herd, rabbits, foxes, squirrels, but in recent years I cheer whenever I notice any hint of movement in the undergrowth, in the trees, along the brook. I saw one squirrel today. One, where there had been whole noisy families, chasing each other up the maples and down the oaks. Last week, I glimpsed a solitary doe browsing beside the brook. I wanted to rush up to her, to grab her and trundle her inside to cherish her. I often hear gunfire, even though my land is posted. I've never found deer remains, no evidence of slaughter, yet I fear something more deadly and insidious is the killer. The warmer climate has exploded the tick population and the animals have suffered. As have I. Each foray outside brings more ticks attached to the dog and to me. The new normal. How long can we adjust?

Rachael Carson wrote *Silent Spring* to warn of the demise of wildlife and the dangers of chemicals. Those words, *Silent Spring,* whisper in my ears, taunting the absence of birdsong, the stilled humming of bees and dragonflies. Wild blackberry and raspberry bushes produce stunted flowers that yield no fruit. When I see a bee, which is seldom, I smile and greet her, try to encourage her to find her relatives, to enjoy the brightness of the day. The goldenrod still rises triumphant, the asters bloom still colorful in the fall, but the lupine are scraggly. The Joe Pye weed has disappeared entirely. The Monarchs used to love the tall Joe Pye, gaudy orange flirting with the purple. Now they've disappeared as well. I've tried to replant milkweed, but it never blooms. There are no more apples on the twisted ancient trees. The land is diminished. What was lush years ago has become sad and threadbare, an elderly comb-over of its former self. The balance is tenuous. The future is questionable.

Now those nights are silent, with only the gulping of an occasional amorous bullfrog.

This is all so personal, so trivial, yet so unusual in the world of today that I feel I myself may be a vanishing species. My simple way of life is strangled by the cat's cradle of drooping wires that connects the vinyl houses perched along the highway to the power grid that struts across a field where deer used to graze at dawn. The residents of those vinyl-clad behemoths anxiously await the time when drones will deliver pizza directly to their fiberglass doors. I lack the money and the technology and the strength to live entirely off-the-grid, but my own wires are subtly buried and only the one pole at the highway announces the possibility of a twenty-first century human residence hidden beyond that road, beyond the driveway, beyond the trees. The rest of my property is referred to by the power company as

a “dead zone” along which I’ve forbidden poles and wires. I’m proud of my dead zone and it gives me great pleasure that my life is framed by nature, not the crudeness of transformers. The tree canopy remains so dense around my house that Google can’t find me and I doubt any nosy drone could penetrate. Yet changes have come and more will come, and I’m powerless to stop them.

My one hundred acres is wild but certainly not wilderness. Although I can hear a low rumble of traffic from the highway, I can see no other houses. No intruding light pollution disturbs the dense black sky; the Big Dipper hangs proud over an eighty-foot spruce. I used to hear night noises of foxes, owls, scurrying feet, and love songs in the dark. Now those nights are silent, with only the gulping of an occasional amorous bullfrog. The chorus of peepers has vanished. I remember last summer watching a single lightning bug pulse on the window frame. Only one. Pulsing for a missing mate. Can an insect be lonely? Not so long ago the evening twinkled with tiny green strobes, and I can see in memory Norman Rockwell children proudly showing off Mason jars overflowing with buglight, They are happy and carefree at summer’s dusk, rolling on chemical-free grass until they’re called inside to supper. Their grandchildren will never know such simple pleasures. Their lights will be digital, their grass Astroturf, and their suppers microwaved. Their mothers call, “Kids, don’t drink from the hose! Use your plastic bottles.” Such is progress. And the lightning bugs disappear into memory.

My knees won’t allow me to hike the mountains anymore, my back too cranky to carry a pack, but my mind looks down on untamed vistas, on the wildness of the wilderness, and I vow to do whatever I can to preserve it from the chemicals. From the intrusive chainsaws and the feller bunchers and the developmental horrors cloaked in greenbacks and lies. So many lies. Now that the clean water regulations have been eroded, perhaps to force us all to drink from the plastic spring, what can we expect in the future? What will be the future when the water is too tainted for the wildlife who are critical to the balance? I dream of things that were, but I have nightmares that extend beyond my humble personal home.

I think of that rock, that buried boulder in my path, and I try to consider it as metaphor, as a sign that beneath that which we can see lies the solidity of granite, bedrock that can neither be fracked away nor eroded, granite unchanged as a testament to the durability of the planet. The durability that will endure beyond this era of destruction.

art by Daniel Workman

TILL THE RIVERS COME HOME

by Udochukwu Chidera Amarachi

art by Daniel Workman

In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth,
He gave man dominion but he pushed the earth to its dearth,
All things were bright and beautiful,
All creatures, great and small, male and female were bountiful,
The lush pink of the rose flower,
The plush purple of the wild hibiscus,
Everything was bright and beautiful till a man came,
And earth never remained the same.

It was the year 2023 and the northwest winds carried the dust and brown sands from the Sahara and blew them into the Okitankwo River. It blew across the rainforests and the savannah like a goddess on vengeance, carrying sands and hot-blooded reptiles in its wake. We had never witnessed a dry season so vicious that it made all the wells dry and the sand very hot. This was the first year our river didn't come home.

The Okitankwo River had always been of cultural and spiritual significance to our people. Grandma told us that in the days of her youth, a mother and her newborn usually stepped outside for the first time after four weeks and would be cradled by the traditional priest who would scoop a handful of water from the enamel bowl and sprinkle the droplets on the forehead of the baby who would cry as the cold water drenched her. There would be a roar and laughter from the crowd at her naming ceremony. The child would be given to her father who would raise her with outstretched hands to the wet skies and call her name. The child would stop crying, watching her father as he whispers her names, Mmiriozuzo—the rain has come, Obianuju—born into wealth, Nnenna—our mother has returned. That way, the child would never forget where she came from; she would always follow the river home.

This was how it was done in the past. Now for those still in tune with the ways of our ancestors and as the water kept on becoming small and polluted, the mother and child would stand under an umbrella and the father would take some sand from the earth, mix it with the little spittle his tongue could produce, smear the wet earth on the head of the child making a sign of the cross. The father would pray that child's life would be filled with the memories of moist soils that still grew greens and of rivers overflowing their banks. He took the umbilical cord and buried it under the leaves of the udala tree whose roots reached deep into the ground. It had been a wonder in its youth when the waters ran through its veins but now, its snarling face etched on its bark was ridden with woody wrinkles, recalling the agony in its death, looking twisted and thirsty.

…the hot November sun reached into my eye glands and milked all the tears I had to cry, leaving them liquid-less.

The heat was relentless as I sat on the veranda and pondered on the loss of the place I had once called home. I tried to cry but my eyes were dry as if the hot November sun reached into my eye glands and milked all the tears I had to cry, leaving them liquid-less. When the child finally grew, he would never know about the Okitankwo River; the small plantations that bonded us together-sweet potatoes and sugarcanes that we grew along its edges, a few kilometers away from home. The famous Okitankwo River was the sparkling joy that ran through at least five villages including my own, Mbieri in Imo State, Nigeria. It didn't cower in the face of the fierce sun in the dry season. It came at the beginning of the rainy season and signalled the Ofa season. We would carry our cans and buckets to the river to get some water and use the smooth white pebbles that lay at its bank to scrub our dry feet till they become soft. The waters were so clear that we saw fresh fishes gliding with the tough currents—so clear that one could reach out and catch fish with both hands. Now the little water left was too warm and too toxic to support aquatic life. The fish displayed on the table by the fishermen had been dried so much that it could leave cuts in someone's mouth.

The children of today don't know what fresh fish from Okitankwo river tasted like, they were content with eating the dried crayfish and tilapia. They saw the toughness as normal, but I knew that was not what fresh fish tasted like. Fresh fish was a staple of our nsala soup; we would roll our eba into the thick spicy broth, laden with the traditional fresh catfish, and swallow it *gbim gbim* down our throats. The white sands on the Okitankwo riverbank would be used together with paw paw leaves to scrub the blackened backs of our pots and kettles till they shone like a mirror. Shouts of "Mmiri ayola, mmiri ayola" would rent the air but as the seasons came and changed and the sun grew closer to the earth, the river ran no more. We would rush to the riverbank when we heard the slightest noise but would end up staring at the hot baked earth and white stones where the water had once passed through. The edges of the river were where we dared nature, forcing the marshland to produce sweet sugarcane when we farmed with skill and patience. We would put seedlings into the ground, tend to them as the greens shot out from the earth, and wait patiently for the sweet yellow bananas that hung clearly on evergreen trees. The women in our household would carry the bananas in long baskets and ferry them to the next village where other women would hustle for the white sugarcanes in exchange for cubes of soap and seasoning. We would sit under the full moon sharing the fruits and telling folktales. But when this child would sit under the moon, he would hear stories of a gift of nature that had once been of cultural significance to his people, a source of a rare food crop and foreign exchange of some sort. With the waters went a part of us. He would be taken to the Okitankwo River and shown the pathway the waters followed—the swamp that held our crops was now ridden with remnants of water grass and the waters had retreated like a tortoise into his shell. No one uses the sands anymore; tiny green worms danced on the surface of what was left of the swamp with different generations of mosquitoes that invaded our houses at night, disrupting our sleep with the constant ringing sound and pumping malaria into our veins.

We would rush to the riverbank when we heard the slightest noise… the edges of the river were where we dared nature.

My mother said we had offended the gods, so they had cursed the land and taken back the gifts of water and the crops that grew therein. Anytime I went to what was left of the river, I saw eggs wrapped in red

clothes and bottles of Fanta. All were offerings to the gods to bring back our Okitankwo River. But it didn't come back. As I grew older and watched how nature changed all around me, I knew the gods were not to blame but we humans, and the way we didn't notice how nature was changing all around us. We kept on polluting the atmosphere with gases from our machines and cut down the trees that trapped the carbon. We told the younger ones our stories, remembering when the grass was greener and what we would have done to prevent the earth from overheating. Why had we ignored the red flags when we engaged in a toxic romance with our climate? The penguins, surrounded by their melting home, the sunflowers blossoming far earlier than they should because of temperature rises, forest fires swallowing up different species of plants and animals with their homes set in concrete.

It happened too fast: the rains not coming in April, the increasing heat, and the taint of dust. I remembered the Twitter banters, the Facebook posts, and the various threads of "Climate change is fake" and "Global warming is a conspiracy theory." I took a trip down memory lane and I concluded that it was not this bad when we were younger. Each generation met a degrading state of nature, but instead of preserving and improving on it, we perceived the decaying nature as normal, leading to a downward spiral in what we termed good nature. Present day children will find themselves left with what had once been called our home, a fading memory becoming a part of their history curriculum, and the once lush greens becoming the center of exhibition centers. Our children might never get to see nature in its true form. Our parents grew up watching palm squirrels chop from tree to tree with nuts and rats scurrying through the ceiling stealing fish from the basket but our children have forgotten that stars are part of the night sky. My little cousin hadn't put a paper boat on water before and watched it sail seamlessly with the water currents. In our carelessness about nature, we forgot that nature doesn't forget and any name you call your pet would be what it would answer. The earth was changing rapidly around us, and I was afraid. They called it eco-anxiety—fear of climate change. The idea that nature was shifting from one generation to the next, children didn't know that tigers were not just emojis in their phones but wild cats with orange stripes that ruled the forest. We are slowly forgetting what bird songs sound like and the satisfying feeling of crunching leaves under our feet on a forest floor.

No one has touched the few aquatic plants left where the Okitankwo water once was because we wanted to preserve whatever was left of our magical river. No one listens when the Federal Ministry of Water says that Nigeria's wetland loss increases by 6.5 percent per annum due to rapid urbanization. I didn't originally set out to be a writer to safeguard the environment. My first fascination was to be a doctor—like most Nigerian parents wanted their child to be, but I was perplexed when I saw that people were not noticing the darkness that enveloped the land because of the decline in the dance of fireflies. Memories of our gone river pushed me to be an environmental activist. But Mama knew I would always follow that path; I never outgrew chasing butterflies in the gardens and trapping fireflies in bottles. I moved from embracing nature to defending it. I chose my present residence because of the wild greens that grew behind it. I was hopelessly in love with nature, and I was happy to discover that a big patchwork of woods, fields, and umbrella trees behind my hostel remained untouched amid the expanding suburban grid of streets and lawns.

One morning, I woke up to the sound of a roaring chainsaw, the big ones with wicked edges used for felling giant trees. I watched the blade drive through the fleshy bark of the tree like a knife to the bones and my back twitched. I had heard about the rumors

of the government coming to build a secretariat on the land but I didn't know it would be true. I thought it was one of the stories that would fade away with time, but the chainsaws were real and the trembling sound it made was nerve-wracking. Then the bulldozers uprooted the giant trees, leaving gaping holes where they should have been.

Silence,
Melancholy,
The cooing of passenger pigeons stopped,
The whisper of sweet breeze on green leaves paused,
Loss, grief,

I felt like a part of me fell with the trees. It felt like I was never going to see a dear friend again. I felt the same type of pain that accompanied the loss of our sacred waters. It was happening over again, this violation of nature, this accelerated loss of species and life. Why didn't the government try to preserve nature in its true form, why were we robbed of the little greens we had left? What happened to having conservation centers to protect the trees that gave us oxygen and trapped carbon dioxide? Where would we run when the floods came? Whose roots would hold us firmly on the ground when the waters came? Every day I woke up to something new on the land—soon a foundation was dug and the house started taking shape. I took up my pen and wrote to the Ministry of Water and Land Resources but no one came. I went to the secretariat and sat all day waiting for the Commissioner, only for his secretary to tell me he had left by 5 pm. We lost hope and watched a building rise from a massive land that held Amazonian trees and different species of birds.

The people from the Ministry of Land came and we heaved a sigh of relief. They came, gathered in small circles, had small talks, and left. I was hopeful that they had ordered work to stop on the site, but I was wrong. The next day I came back from school and the building was wired with electric bulbs. I heard from whispers that handshakes and envelopes with a lump sum of money had been exchanged. They were giving out portions of our nature like pawns in a chessboard. This degradation is by our own hands, our creation. My friend shook her head as I took pictures and wrote columns for the school newspaper talking about the destruction of wetlands and forests due to urbanization, population explosion, and weak implementation of laws. The big men in Abuja already knew but there was nothing anyone could do; my heroic attempts could do little. I was applauded for my efforts, for drawing attention to the path of self-destruction we were heading to—but nothing more.

A year after I moved to Lagos for my internship program, I often refreshed my timeline to see news of angry waters carrying vehicles and people away. When we had cut down our trees, what did we expect? It is very important to train the future generation to have a higher appreciation for nature so that they do not make the same mistakes we are making. They should be taken outdoors to experience nature in its unadulterated form, the cooing of pigeons in backyard gardens, the beauty of corals, and hermit crabs on beaches. If not, our children will not only inherit the crimes of a generation that didn't get it right with its environment, but continue setting forests on fire and worsening the current situation. Instead of being in classes learning, they will be home, praying that the floods don't get to dangerous levels, watching as terrible winds uproot the zinc roof of houses and sail slowly away like paper boats. Till we understand that we have wronged nature, our rivers will never come home.

art by Allison Murphy

A NOVELTY OF STRATA

by Karuna Eberl

"How will we let them know? How do we leave them a message about what we did wrong, so they can get it right?" My love has posed this question several times. For him, our situation seems too bleak. He feels the weight of the future day when we lose the last emperor penguin, the day children are born onto a planet without blue whales. For him, the demise of human civilization is also inevitable, so he's seeking a solution on an expanded timeline. A way to leave seeds of wisdom for the future ones; the ones who will rebuild, so they may do so with more kindness and forethought.

It's an interesting challenge, leaving messages on a geologic timescale.

Logic says it's impossible to erase our sprawling existence. Our legacies of concrete and plastic, superhighways and suburbs. Knowledge and creativity. Physics, philosophy, biology, music, and art.

Actually, humanity is a fragile beast. But geology is not so dainty.

In a century or two, if we fail the carbon test, atmospheric CO_2 will reach 1,000 parts per million.[1] It was just 50 million years ago when the Earth was last there. The Eocene, as we dubbed it, was a humid jungle world, almost 30 degrees hotter than today,[2] where hoofed wolves[3] stalked fish from the beach and swamp-forests grew in the Arctic.[4] Humanity will not adapt well to the reincarnation of the Eocene, if we make it there at all. Earth will not just turn into a steamy jungle overnight. It will first become hostile and inhospitable.

1 Masso-Delmotte, V., et all. "Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways." IPCC, 2019.
2 News Staff. "How hot did Earth get in the past?" Syracuse University, 2022. news.syr.edu/blog/2011/07/05/geology-magazine/
3 Black, Riley. "How Did Whales Evolve?" Smithsonian Magazine, 2010. www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-did-whales-evolve-73276956/
4 Handwerk, Brian. "Primate-Like Critters Survived in the Arctic When It Was A Lush, Warm Swamp." Smithsonian Magazine, 2023. www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/primate-relatives-lived-in-the-arctic-circle-52-million-years-ago-180981503/

Just a handful of decades from now, at the pre-dawn of Eocene II, billions of people, displaced from submerged coastal cities and homelands turned to infertile desert, will roam the planet in search of… anything. Those with food, water, and soil will not have enough to share. Epidemics, famine, and war are now the backdrop to everyday life.

As time moves on, survival takes urgency over civilization.

Internet servers and the power plants that gave them life wither and go offline. Our ability to command satellites and communicate globally dissipates. Industrialization falls silent, along with paper mills and whatever factories in which ball-point pens were made. When the toilet paper runs out, books become a new sort of comfort item. The irony that we have just now finally quit carbon escapes most conversation.

In a few hundred years, humans will persist in scattered tribes.[5] Hunter-gatherers, mostly. Enough generations will have passed to lose accurate oral histories of the time before.

The elders tried to preserve some knowledge. They carved warnings into the rocks about greed, land ownership, and splitting atoms. They scratched equations of exponential population growth, the compounds of carbon dioxide and methane, and comforts long gone that they wanted to remember. A moose. A honeybee. A chocolate croissant.

By now, along the coasts—all oil-soaked from the billows of dislodged offshore rigs—only the skeletons of skyscrapers remain.[6] Supercharged storms and 16 feet more of ocean did away with the rest. Inland, abandoned nuclear power plants lazily contaminate the land, seep into the rivers.[7]

But the Earth moves on.

Plutonium half-lives tick down. In twenty-four millennia, only remnants of low-level radiation carry on, imprisoned below 40 feet of peat; dark soil made from the sequestered carbon of trillions of plants and other organisms that have since run their lifecycles in the tropical forests of the West.[8] On the ocean floor, only a faint layer of oil-carbon lingers, covered by a deep pillow of marine snow; the bodies of micro-animals that lived, died, and fell silently to the depths.[9] New coastal forests rise. Seabirds adapt.

5 Kiehl, Jeffrey. "Data from Earth's past holds a warning for our future under climate change." Yale Climate Connections, 2019. yaleclimateconnections.org/2019/06/data-from-earths-past-holds-a-warning-for-our-future-under-climate-change/
6 Golledge, N.R. et al. "The multi-millennial Antarctic commitment to future sea level rise." Nature, 2015. Sea level rise 5 meters by 2300. earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/148494/anticipating-future-sea-levels
7 "How to Tear Down a Nuclear Power Plant." Scientific American, 2023. www.scientificamerican.com/slideshow/how-to-tear-down-a-nuclear-reactor/
8 "Background on Plutonium." U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, 2021. www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/plutonium.html
9 LaCapra, Véronique. "Chasing Ocean 'Snowflakes'." Oceanus, 2019. www.whoi.edu/oceanus/feature/chasing-ocean-snowflakes/

The last traces of Missoula, Salt Lake, and Denver become encased below 500 feet of rhyolitic ash. The Yellowstone caldera's fourth eruption.[10] It will still be 3 million or maybe 300 million years until the cooling returns.[11] The first snowflakes fall on the poles. Great ice sheets grow, migrating from the north. Thick beasts flowing over mountain and plain. The rusty dust of all of the cattlemen's barbed wire, the crumbled foundations of every dam and tailings pile stripped away, eroded and churned into the finest silt. An erosion period, an absence in the geologic record, is called an unconformity. An unconformity. All that is left when the glaciers retreat, ringed by moraines, those little jumbles of rocky rubble.

During the next warming, energetic, freed water carves canyons through the new layers of sediment and rock. This reveals a captivating puzzle for them—the future ones—to solve.

In Montana they find the Belt rocks again, that ten-mile-deep formation of stromatolites, the very algae which granted oxygen to Earth more than a billion years ago. Under the Yellowstone rhyolite tuff, they discover the fossils of long-extinct creatures and trees.[12]

Below that, they piece together a global layer of strange, plastic conglomerate; the sole sample of such material in the Earth's billions of years of strata.[13] They deduce it represents a cataclysmic event. A sixth mass extinction.[14] If do they find one of our messages, implausibly preserved on some slab of rock in some ancient cave, will they decipher our warnings in time?

CO_2, CH_4, $y = a(1 + r)^x$?

Or will they label the markings primitive art and debate whether we were intelligent enough to have loving relationships and complex language? Either way, what would it matter?

By then evolution might have made our warnings antiquated, our shortcomings obsolete. A road-worn sequence of genes ending in a fatally flawed branch of hominid.

Though they may ponder us, they will never unravel our full story.

Our warriors, priests, and chief executive officers. Our politicians and silicon masters. Our pipeline protestors, trash collectors, astronomers, nurses, newsreaders, basketballers, bartenders, backyard gardeners, shipwreck divers, nature writers—and, of course, my love, who so gently yearned to leave a warning—the lives of each and every one of us simplified into a narrow and bizarre novelty of strata.

10 "What caused Yellowstone's past eruptions and how do we know?" USGS.gov, 2019. www.usgs.gov/faqs/what-would-happen-if-a-supervolcano-eruption-occurred-again-yellowstone
11 Scott, Michon. "What's the coldest the Earth's ever been?" USGS.gov, 2021. https://www.climate.gov/news-features/climate-qa/whats-coldest-earths-ever-been
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13 Trinastic, Jonathan. "Plastic rock: the new anthropogenic marker in the geologic record." Scitable, 2015. www.nature.com/scitable/blog/eyes-on-environment/plastic_rock_the_new_anthropogenic/
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WHEN HUMANS SWARMED

by Marcus Ten Low

When humans swarmed the Earth,
Breathing down each other's necks,
Titillated, shaped as zooming crowds:

Our natures were bitter, some sweet,
Some replete with more and more children,
Churned-out like blobs from factories.

Setup with desks and chairs,
And a million brilliant material items,
Sat-up with a babyfied bewilderment of stares,

As we watched the greenwashed oceans,
Eyed by their blackish deadzones,
With poisoned fishes darting furtively.

Babies' needs and wants, "chimey" songs
Flowed us into happy illusions,
Celebrated further in creamy advertising.

Despite such smiles, and baby sighs
With sealife thrashing in nets, pulled from
The wasting oceans, the oceans slowly rise.

Widespread obesity resizing, we relearned it
As beautiful, just as frankenchickens
Assumed their own neat sacrifice.

It was our grace, to say something nice.
Dr. Dolittle came over—we had a ball
Trusting that plenty more animals,

Nonhuman, were left in tracts of forest or ice.
The glaciers, dripping in sunlight, had shear
And shred, leaving so many gazes dead.

We really should do something now, we
know—
But eight billion living on the globe cannot
Be unlearnt. The Earth has not long to go.

art by Gabriel Sanchez

CONTRIBUTORS

DEBORAH AJILORE, a Nigerian writer and photographer and member of the Frontiers Collective, has published work in *Invisible City, Mud Season Review, Salamander Ink, Stanchion Magazine*, and many more. You can find her on social media (@deb_ajilore).

Nigerian writer and pharmacist **UDOCHUKWU CHIDERA AMARACHI** counts several literary awards in her career, including 2022's Movement of the People Poetry Contest, Shuzia Songs of Zion Poetry Contest, and the Shuzia Prose Contest. She has contributed to *Tabono Anthology*, *TUSH Magazine*, *Conscio Magazine*, *Ngiga Review*, *World Voices Magazine, Valiant Scribe*, *Our Stories Defined Anthology*, *Writer's Hangout Initiative*, *Arts Lounge*, *Aayo Magazine*, *Renata*, and *Writers Space Africa*.

NICHOLAS BARNES earned a Bachelor of Arts in English at Southern Oregon University. He currently works as an editor in Portland, enjoys music, museums, movie theaters, and rain. His poems have been accepted by *Platform Review*, *Mortal Mag*, and *Barzakh*, among others.

WHITNEY BROWN primarily writes travel essays about climate change. She just graduated with an MFA in creative nonfiction from Brigham Young University. You can find some of her academic writing in *ASSAY* Journal.

MARA BUCK writes, paints, and rants in a self-constructed hideaway in the Maine woods. She won The Raven Prize for nonfiction, The Scottish Arts Club Short Story Prize, and three Moon Prizes for women's writing. Other recent first places include the F. Scott Fitzgerald Poetry Prize and The Binnacle International Prize. Her work was recognized by the Faulkner and Wisdom Society, Hackney Awards, Balticon, Confluence, and other numerous literary magazines and print anthologies.

KATE M. CHRISTENSEN, a bilingual speech language pathologist, climate activist and writer, uses writing to emerge from climate despair and imagine possibilities for the future that include a thriving planet. She lives with her family on the unceded ancestral lands Núu-agha-ttuvu-pu (Ute) and Hinono'eino (Arapaho)–in what we now call Colorado's Front Range.

KAREN DAVIS-BROWN recently retired from a career in human services and currently lives in northwest Wisconsin. For years she wrote newsletters, grants, research reports, and website content for her day job while simultaneously serving as an author and editor for the regenerative agriculture journal *Biodynamics* where she still works. Now she spends her time among trees and stones in the woods and by the water and writes to share her observations and the joy of this life with others in creative nonfiction and haiku.

KARUNA EBERL, a freelance nature writer, primarily focuses on place, history, and diversity. Her work was recently featured on the cover of *National Parks Magazine*. She calls Boulder and the San Luis Valley home.

JORDAN ECKES graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder with a degree in English Literature. Her passion is storytelling, and she has constantly pushed herself to discover the many ways one could tell a story–that's when she stumbled upon the camera. Her biggest challenge has been trying to capture the exact feeling of a certain moment in her photos, so when you look back on it you feel the same exact way. When she isn't diving into photography, you can find her skiing the back bowls of the Rocky Mountains on the weekends.

KEVIN EMBER, a student at the University of Colorado Boulder, doesn't have extensive knowledge about the field of environmental science or nuclear energy but remains passionate about preserving the earth and hopes to share this passion with others.

JESSICA HANSEN graduated from the University of Kent with a degree in English Literature with Creative Writing, currently finishing up an MA, before starting teacher training. Her work mostly concerns real world issues and human struggles. She has a complicated relationship with her home region, though it does have a certain beauty to it, and she hates to see it suffer as a result of climate change.

JUSTIN HEIN studies MCD Biology and Visual Art Practices at the University of Colorado Boulder. He grew up in Boulder and has always loved anything to do with cameras. Much of Justin's recent work relates to his love for beekeeping and bee research; although, he'll photograph just about anything (and have a fantastic time doing so).

AIDAN JONES is a graduate of the University of Colorado Boulder that is majoring in Strategic Communication with a focus on Media Design. Starting with logos and graphic design pieces for clients, he later fell in love with photography and began incorporating it into his art. More dedicated than ever before, he strives to create a portfolio that displays his photography, videography, graphic design, and personal art. Always experimenting with new forms of media, Aidan's main focus is to capture the world how he sees it.

MAYA KATZ graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder in 2021 with a Bachelor's Degree in Business Marketing. Her piece is a three-dimensional 48x24 acrylic on canvas utilizing mixed media like sand, shells, beads, rocks, foam, and glue.

CALLIE KEATING studies Business with a minor in Art Practices at the University of Colorado Boulder. She fell in love with photography because of the way it can capture a single moment and isolate it from time. She likes to use this ability, along with Photoshop, to create surreal images that make the viewer question the photograph.

KELSEY KENNEDY is a writer and photographer based in Brooklyn. She works on Broadway, only bombs at stand-up comedy half the time, and will collaborate on any creative project she can get her hands on—if it has to do with storytelling, she's interested. She graduated from Mizzou (M-I-Z) with degrees in journalism and theatre. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram (@kelseyskennedy (don't forget the middle initial)) or at her website kelseysue.com.

ETHAN LAHM currently attends the University of Colorado Boulder as a Senior earning his Arts Practices BFA. In his free time, he enjoys drawing, painting, petting dogs, and exploring the Boulder area. Ethan also hopes to make comic books one day!

RALPH LA ROSA has published a variety of prose, short fiction, poetry, and film scripts. These days, he mostly writes poetry, appearing widely on the Internet, in print journals and in anthologies. His books include the chapbook *Sonnet Stanzas* and the full-length collections *Ghost Trees* and *My Miscellaneous Muse: Poem Pastiches & Whimsical Words*.

MARCUS TEN LOW aspires to be "kind to all beings" as an ecological ethicist and artist. He has published many works in the field of animal rights and environmental protection along with being deeply observant of human character. He currently volunteers for the Animal Justic Party Qld in Australia and writes for *Stop Having Kids*. You can find him on social media (@ antibreeder1m).

SHERRY McCARVER, a wildlife photographer based in Gorgia, finds peace and solace in the wild places and enjoys capturing the beautiful sights with her camera–from the tiniest of insects to the most majestic of wildlife–the pursuit of the perfect photo brings her great happiness.

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CLAYTON MONTGOMERY graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder in the spring of 2021 after studying creative writing and advertising. He currently works on his writing and teaches English in the Spanish Basque Country. He hopes to soon publish a novel and a book of his photographs.

ROSALIND MORAN writes fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and plays. Her writing has appeared in *The Guardian*, *Electric Literature*, and *WIRED*, among others. In 2023, her creative nonfiction writing was shortlisted for the CRAFT Hybrid Writing Contest.

ALLISON MURPHY graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder with her BA in history and obtained her MA in English Studies from Arizona State University. Along with being a part-time lecturer, Allison also dives into the world of social studies, fine art, and creative writing.

SAMUEL MYERS-VERHAGE, a Geography major at the University of Colorado Boulder, also enjoys creative writing. He likes to implement personal experiences from traveling in his writing and hopes you enjoy reading his work.

MACY KAY NAUGHTON is a freshman at the University of Colorado Boulder interested in environmental design. She writes about her passions, including climate change.

ELIJAH PETTET graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder's Cinema Studies program and now works at Sunlight Ski Patrol. As a passionate photographer, Elijah feels honored to see his work paired with the beautiful and topical writing in CHANGING SKIES.

WINTER ROSS, an eco-feminist artist, writer, environmental activist, mental health advocate and shamanic practitioner, studied painting at Hartford Art School and received a BFA in Communications Design and Illustration from Rhode Island School of Design. She's had a long career as a graphic designer, including work for Rocky Mountain PBS. She has also held numerous artist-in-residence, teaching, and museum positions and received grants for independent curatorial projects which highlight environmental issues while exploring visionary and spiritual themes. Winter lives in Taos, New Mexico and Crestone, Colorado–same bioregion, both magical.

SONALI ROY takes interest in holistic approaches for maintaining good health both for humans and their nonhuman friends, as well as business management, latest science discoveries, technology, robotics, archaeology, architecture, food and nutrition, history, spirituality, art, and culture. She is a passionate traveler and photographer, music composer, singer, painter, 3-D art designer. She enjoys yoga and meditates regularly.

GABRIEL SANCHEZ, an artist, oil painter, entrepreneur, creative, and muralist whose strengths lie in his ability to bring ideas to life through visual expression. With a keen eye for detail, he has honed his skills, allowing him to bring unique perspectives to every project he undertakes.

ADLER SHANNON is a graduate of the University of Colorado Boulder. He has bachelor's degrees in History and Media Production, and also has a minor in Anthropology. After college Adler joined Boulder Media House, a production company in Denver, Colorado, where he worked as a commercial editor and videographer on a plethora of commercial projects. He currently works for the Zealand Youtube channel, based in New York City. He serves as the director and lead editor for the channel, catering to an ever-growing viewer base with over 300k subscribers and 3.5 million views in the last month.

Originally from Egypt, **MARY SILWANCE** now lives in Kansas City. Mary provides workshops on writing and serves on the editorial team of Kansas City Voices. While her poetry and essays appear in numerous publications, Mary explores ecology from an

intersection of justice and spirituality in workshops and at her website (www.marysilwance.com). Mary recently attended the Bread Loaf Environmental Writers Conference. When not outside, you can find Mary begging her three teenage daughters to play charades.

EDWARD MICHAEL SUPRANOWICZ is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in *Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine, The Door Is a Jar, The Phoenix,* and other journals. Edward is also a published poet.

A science writer focusing for the past 15 years on environmental issues, **DENISE THORNTON** currently writes for The Aldo Leopold Foundation and has a blog (www.digginginthedriftless.com). Denise and her partner pour themselves into prairie and woodland restoration on their 44 acres in the Driftless Area of Wisconsin, where they live cozily and with clear consciences in the branching, unmilled timber frame, straw bale, passive solar, sod roofed house referred to in her essay.

Born and raised in Denver, Colorado, **COLIN J. TURNER** now lives in Boulder. An artist in his free time, Colin's favorite mediums include film photography, drawing, and mixed media. Colin is a certified CNC machinist, completing a degree in Computer-aided Design.

NANCY WHITECROSS, a poet and author from England, currently resides in South Africa. She previously qualified as an accountant in England. She last worked as a financial director of a company until she retired and began her autobiography. As a dive instructor who has traveled the world, she has witnessed firsthand how climate change has impacted the oceans.

DANIEL WORKMAN obtained his AAS from the Isaacson School for Professional Photography and graduated from the University of Colorado Boulder. Daniel focuses his artistic energy into mediums such as writing, photography, filmmaking, and songwriting. With an interest in culture, anthropology strongly influences the work he creates. Daniel's accomplishments include work with Pulitzer Prize winning photographers at the Eddie Adams Workshop in New York. Daniel is a frequent contributor to HINDSIGHT, having now appeared in five issues, including our earlier title, JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. You can find more of Daniel's work on his website (themodernnegative.com).

art by Daniel Workman

HINDSIGHT + CHANGING SKIES

BEYOND THE PAGE

Since the launch of Hindsight's second print title, CHANGING SKIES, our staff has been exploring ways to expand our committment to publishing incredible, diverse creative nonfiction. With two print titles, an ever-growing body of online publication, membership with CLMP, and more to come, HINDSIGHT is looking onward and upward as we try to answer that ever-present question: where do we go from here?

This year, HINDSIGHT joined the Community of Literary Magazines & Presses (CLMP), an organization committed to bringing small publishers together into a shared wealth of knowledge and support. Through the community at CLMP, HINDSIGHT can explore new heights of independent publishing and continue to promote incredible work.

HINDSIGHT has also joined Duotrope, a catalogue of publishers and agents from across the globe. Duotrope will help more writers and artists find their way to our pages, providing us with an even greater diversity of experience and artistry to highlight.

Updating our website, HINDSIGHTJOURNAL.ORG, has been a major project for us. Through our year-round submission portal, we recieve exeptional work that doesn't make the page. Developing a web space for HINDSIGHT to publish work outside of our print titles has allowed us to put more incredible creative non-fiction out into the world without the same production constraints.

Attending the annual Association for Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) conference has been another feather in the cap of our journal. AWP has served as an outlet for HINDSIGHT to spread its wings, enjoying a distribution of over 500 individual print issues at 2023's Seattle conference. As we approach the 2024 season and our third conference, we look forward to continuing to build relationships with both the literary community at large and with artists, wisened and fledgling, around the globe as they search for new ways for their work to be seen.

- Ian Hall & Marisa Lange

[clmp] who we are and what we believe

[clmp]

Community of Literary Magazines & Presses

who we are and what we believe

We—the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses—are hundreds of small publishers creating print and digital books, magazines, online publications, chapbooks, and zines, who have come together to do our work as publishers better and to organize around a shared set of beliefs:

[We believe that small literary publishers play a vital role in our culture by connecting the greatest diversity of distinctive writers to equally diverse communities of readers.]

[We believe that literary publishing is an artistic practice that helps writers realize their artistic vision and readers discover their work.]

[We believe that by increasing the organizational capacity of small literary publishers we contribute significantly to the vitality and vibrancy of our literary culture.]

[We believe that being a member of our community means participating in an environment of mutual support with both rights and responsibilities.]

[We believe in actively engaging those who share our passion for literature—readers, writers, booksellers, librarians, students, educators, funders, business leaders, and others—to ensure that small literary publishers, and the work they help shape and make public, will continue to thrive.]

[clmp] celebrates excellence in both the how and why of what our publishers do: bring readers and writers of literature together in the true spirit of community.

www.clmp.org

TEN YEARS ON

In 2013, JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY began out of a single classroom. Inspired by the incredible writing from the students of WRTG 2020, that project went on to produce eight volumes of writing and art. Rebranding to HINDSIGHT in the year 2020, we asked—where do we go from here? The answer, of course: we go on. We have since produced three volumes of HINDSIGHT, and now our second volume of CHANGING SKIES.

We now publish writers from around the globe, while still preserving a space for University of Colorado Students. All submissions go through blind review first reads, with our top editors ensuring a majority of work from beyond the front range makes it way to our pages. As we continue on into a new decade of publishing creative nonfiction, our staff is committed to working with a vast array of international contributors while still remembering HINDSIGHT'S roots as a student-led publication.

Here's to another volume, another amazing staff, and another ten years.

Program for Writing and Rhetoric | University of Colorado Boulder

FAWN ISSUE I

HINDSIGHT VOLUME I

HINDSIGHT

creative nonfiction

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FAWN ISSUE I

DANGLE EARRINGS

by TAYLOR KRING

Don't pierce your ears; don't wear dangly earrings, they are too feminine; don't paint your nails, people will think you're gay; your shorts are too short; your pants are too tight; your shirt doesn't fit right; your hair is too long; don't wear so many colors; that bag makes you look like a girl; stop getting dressed up all of the time; you need to learn how to work on a car; you're too sensitive for a man; don't sit like that; only gay men cross their legs when they sit; you can't wear that jacket, it's made for women; what gender did you decide on today?

I walk into Sportsman's Warehouse, a store crawling with toxic masculinity. There are guns on the walls, racks of fishing poles, and aisles of camo clothing that bring eerie memories of homophobic kids in high school. There is a man wearing a Make America Great Again hat. I look down to see I'm wearing short baby blue shorts, bright orange fingernail polish (it's springtime, so I need something festive), and baby blue toenail polish to match my shorts. To top it off, I'm wearing silver hoop earrings. I shove my hands in my pockets to try and cover my fingernails so as to not draw attention. The man makes eye contact with me, and my thoughts start to race. What if he hates me? What if he becomes violent? Nothing comes out of the interaction, and we both go on our ways. I leave the store and get back on my bike to ride home. As I'm crossing the intersection of East Roseville Parkway and Douglas Boulevard, someone yells out "Faggot!" as they drive their diesel Dodge Ram 3500 by me. The back of their truck has a Blue Lives Matter sticker and a Don't Tread on Me flag.

I arrive home from Colorado to be with my family for quarantine. Over the past few months, I've been trading out Patagonia logos for bright colors, patterns, and pinstripes: a change that makes me anxious to return to the conservative community of Placer County, CA. I get home and smell the welcoming scent of laundry detergent, dog shampoo, and a clean kitchen countertop, but the nostalgia is quickly interrupted. "You look bad in big earrings, but those don't look terrible," my mom says to me. It's the type of backhanded compliment only a mother could deliver. The tiny comment sends a flurry of thoughts that launch me into a blizzard of my own insecurities. Am I just acting this way for attention? I take out the earrings, grab acetone for the nail polish, and change into stale black running shorts: actions that will shield me from the comments that siege my thin skin.

Art by GREGORY GORSKIY

FAVORITE COLOR

by MAGGIE MCMANUS

My favorite color is yellow. I learned this about myself recently. I've always said my favorite color is blue. Maybe it used to be. It's my mom's favorite color, blue. It's a great color, beautiful. The color of the night sky (when there's a full moon so it's not completely black). The color of her eyes; the color of mine and my sister's and brother's and father's. It's the color of my first childhood bedroom. The dress I wore to the ceremony celebrating the completion of sixth grade. The same color I wore to my first homecoming dance. Then the color I wore when I graduated high school. I've always said it was my favorite color. My favorite color is yellow, though. While I still adore the color blue, I've come to find more comfort in the joy that the color yellow brings.

While my mother's favorite color is blue, she loves sunshine. Growing up, she'd sing that song to me: "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are gray."[1] She taught me to spread sunshine in the form of

1. Johnny Cash, "You Are My Sunshine," by Jimmie Davis and Charles Mitchel, track 10 on Unreleased Session, 1969.

kindness to others. Through a smile to a stranger, or tiny acts of service. Stand a little longer at the door to hold it for the next person. Leave a penny on the metal horse at King Soopers so that a kid can have a ride when they beg their parents. Do the little things that could change someone's day for the better. Spread sunshine. Be sunshine.

Yellow was the first house I remember living in. We lived in two or three houses before living in the yellow house in Boise, Idaho. Though, that's the first one I remember. This is the house where I met my little sister. I was two and a half years old, and she was so small. She didn't like me then. (That hasn't changed.) When she was born, my parents gave me a little Winnie the Pooh plushie. He was yellow. I wouldn't go anywhere without him. There was a little supermarket down the street where they had miniature shopping carts for the kids to practice shopping with their parents; I'd bring Pooh with me and I'd sit him in the mini cart like he was a baby. I liked to take care of him. I took him across the country when we moved to Atlanta. When we moved to Colorado, I lost him in a box somewhere. (I hope he's doing okay.)

In Georgia there was always sunshine. I only lived there a year or so, maybe two. I've got an abundance of nostalgic snapshots that lie buried in my memories from those years, but I mostly just like to remember the fireflies. I'd spend what felt like forever chasing them around the yard. "Don't keep them in a jar, it will hurt them," my parents would warn me. I would catch them in my palm. I'd unravel my fingers with great caution, afraid my tiny companions would fly away. Instead they'd linger, glowing and dimming in mesmerizing cycles. I've always liked the creepy crawlies, and they've never seemed scared of me. My mom always said they could sense good people and that's why they weren't scared. I'd smile at the idea of myself as a gentle giant to these little creatures. Their protector. I think I liked the fireflies so much because they were like little stars that I could hold. Some tiny tangible piece of an otherwise incomprehensibly large universe. When I was only five, why couldn't they be stars? Or little drops of sunshine there for me to touch? If I could be sunshine, why couldn't they?

When we moved to Colorado, my room was purple. A light violet. I don't remember why I chose it; I think my mom said it was a good choice. It was purple all the way up until my dad sold

the house last year. I don't really like purple. I guess that's an odd thing to have an opinion on. Everybody has their favorite colors, but no one ever talks about the colors they don't like. I guess I don't really have anything against it, but I mostly associate it with the bedroom I couldn't have been more ready to move out of. There's a small irony in the fact that my favorite book is titled The Color Purple. Alice Walker writes, "I think it pisses God off if you walk past the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it." I'm not religious but I do appreciate the idea that you have to notice the tiny beauties where you can find them. If I saw the color purple in a field of wildflowers I'd stop, and I'd notice it, and I'd appreciate it for its beauty. But I don't really like purple. I only mean to say, you'll never see me paint another room purple.

When my parents separated, we weren't allowed to paint the walls in my mom's new apartment. My bed set was blue, and my brother and sister had matching ones. My sister and I shared a bunkbed and my brother slept on a blue futon on the other wall. (Or maybe he shared a room with my mother? I barely remember anymore.) Most nights I dragged my comforter off the top bunk, through the door and down our short hallway. I'd walk slow and soft in order to not wake my mother. (In hindsight, she probably couldn't sleep well either.) I'd turn on the TV and let the sound of whatever Disney show was on at that hour sing me to sleep. I'd pull the blue comforter tight around myself as I heard the heater's attempt to warm me up. I'd wake up to golden sunlight, warm on my face, through our balcony window. That was always the best part of my day.

I've tried to be the sunshine, but I've always found I prefer to bathe in it. I was 16 when my therapist asked me to think of a happy place. With eyes closed, it was the middle of summer. My feet were numbed by the icy snow melt that flowed in Clear Creek through Golden, Colorado. My face felt warm as I stretched it upwards towards the summer sky, the sun stretching itself back towards me. I hear my friends laughing nearby and one says, "Holy fuck, it's cold." I laugh along, and my heart feels full. With eyes closed, I see yellow.

I've always been timid about the color red. My mom told me that red would make us look pale and flush our cheeks. I think red is a nice color. I wore red to a dance at school once and a nice-looking boy asked me to dance. I guess the dress was short and red is the color of desire, so when I wore red, I was

asking for things I didn't mean to ask for. I didn't wear a red dress again. It doesn't matter, red isn't a good color for someone with my complexion. It makes me pale and flushes my cheeks.

I had to stop writing here for a moment. I had to take a second to breathe before discussing the next color that comes forward in my mind.

I love to wear the color black. There isn't a color you can't pair it with. It's universally compatible, and I think I try to be that too. Easy to get along with. I try to be sunshine, and though black is essentially the opposite of that, it is nice to think that it's as important. We can't have light without dark. I was wearing black on the worst night of my life. I was wearing black until I wasn't wearing anything at all. Until he tore the clothes off of my body and I squirmed in a futile attempt to leave his bed. Black may be universally compatible, but it is also the color of mourning. Of sorrow. Of fear. I closed my eyes as he held me there, and I saw red. At night, now, I rely on a lamp that glows like a dim sun at my bedside, so that I know I am here and not still trapped in that moment. That night was a turning point for me, and maybe when my favorite color became yellow. The sun came up and I was able to leave. I want to use the word escape, but in reality he let me go. It was a beautiful day and the sun washed away the night's events (at least for a little while). I wanted more sunshine; I couldn't have enough.

I have a tattoo of the sun on my left clavicle. My mother has a matching one on her foot. They remind us that our sunshine comes from within. I placed mine deliberately above my heart to remind myself exactly where I draw mine from. I attempt to pull sunshine from my heart, and to let it radiate both within and around myself. I surround myself with light.

My favorite color is yellow. I learned this about myself recently. I was asked my favorite color, and, before I could answer, my friend answered for me: "Oh, her favorite color is definitely yellow."

Somehow, she knew, and I beamed. "Yeah, it's yellow. Like sunshine." GR

Art by MARK HASELMAIER

INVISIBLE MAN

by ALEXANDER WILLIAMS

I'm tall, dark, and handsome. A stereotype. A thug. A nigga.
The Black man coming for your precious white women.

When you see me comin' you walk to the other side of the
street like you got somewhere to be.
There's J's on my feet, and bling on my teeth,
I got money to spend, but no air to breathe,
no blood to bleed, no heart on my sleeve,
just a chain and this fine ten piece.

I'm the culture you wish you could be,
the song you wish you could sing,
the puppet at the end of the string
praying for a day of when I'll be free.

I'm terrorized and mesmerized
by the hellish lies you tell my kind…
the truth agonized and colonized,
so I am surprised?
No.

I'm tall, dark, and handsome. A stereotype. A thug. A nigga.
The Black man coming for your precious white women.

I'm lazy and murderous,
armed and dangerous.
There's not too many that hang like us…
two dead niggas? Now that's a +

I'm the dream deferred, but the skin preferred
in the echo chamber where no voice is heard,
where logic is blurred, my death is confirmed,
and "nigga" is only a word.

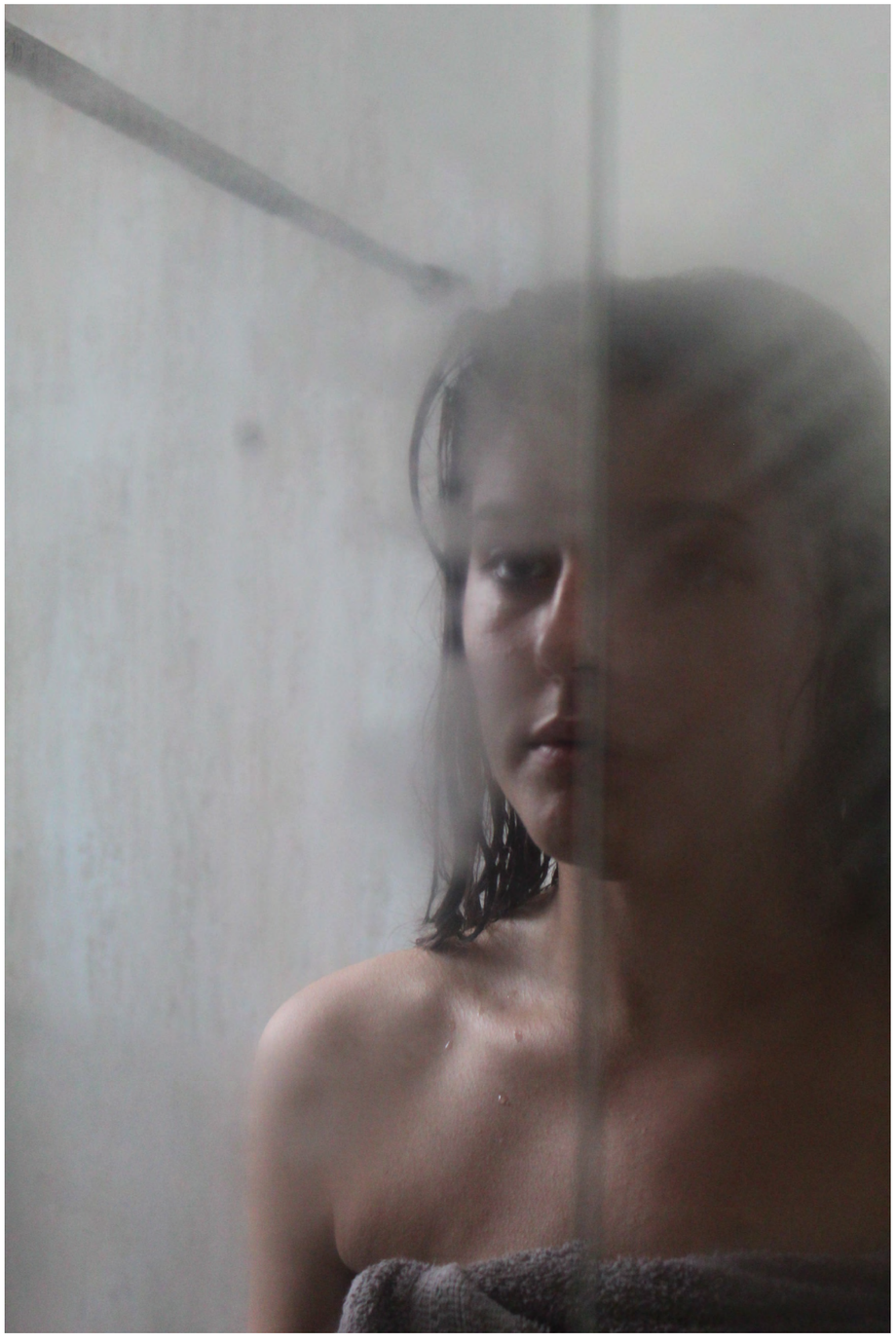
I'm tall, dark, and handsome. A stereotype. A thug. A nigga.
The Black man coming for your precious white women.

You put crack in my streets and blame it on me…
my mother was born a queen, and died a fiend…
you put lead in my water and say that it's clean,
you say I can't read or write, so let me paint you a scene:

Some pig talks into his shoulder.
[gunshot]
I need backup. Suspect is male, 6'5. Black.
[gunshot] [gunshot] [gunshot]

Blood spurts out of my mouth as everything fades to black–
my auntie cries over my corpse as I become another hashtag.
No amount of thoughts and prayers is gonna bring her baby
back,
he's gonna be put on administrative leave and that's a wrap.

So who's the killer…me or you?



Art by JORDAN ECKES

THE ACT OF FORGIVING

by SYDNEY MCPHAIL

The first memory I have is of my parents fighting in the hallway of our family home. I snuck quietly out of my crib and peek out of my bedroom door. I was so small that they did not notice me.

My father eventually cheated on my mom with a stripper. I was not told this information until I was fifteen years old, years after they committed this act of adultery. I found myself remembering the woman who helped ruin my family and how kind she was towards me. but After finding out who she was, those memories ceased to exist. My parents got divorced when I was six and I continued to live with my mom. I felt stuck in the middle of a tug-a-war and I was the rope. My mom despised my father. Whenever someone mentioned him, she'd change the subject as though she was trying to protect me from the truth and why our family felt broken."

I would watch the other kids from school get picked up and hugged by their parents. Once a week, my father would pick me up from school so we could have our weekly ice cream date.

He was either waiting for me outside of school, or, sometimes, he would forget about me". On the days he forgot, I would sit waiting for someone to claim me. That is when my mom would come to my rescue.

My father abused alcohol and seemed to only care about himself. He died when I was eight of a heart attack and organ failure trying to detox from alcohol. The night he died, my mom and I had been over at our friend's house having dinner. My mother and her friend drank heavily even with their two eight-year-olds were playing with barbies in the next room. My mother left me there while she drove home drunk. In the middle of the night, two paramedics delivered the news to my mother. I did not find out until the next day after my friend's mom drove me home. Her mom knew what happened, but she also knew my mom needed to be the one to tell me.

The car ride back to my house was full of laughter. I was living a somewhat normal childhood. When I saw a line of cars parked outside my house and thought there was a celebration going on. The mood in the room grew darker as I walked inside. I was sitting on my mother's bed when she told me my dad died. I did not know how to feel. I had never seen my mother cry until that day. As my mother cried in my arms, I did not say a word. I was more worried about my mom than myself. She looked as if her best friend had died. My house seemed haunted after that day.

Not long after my father died, my mother's alcoholism spiraled out of control. I remember sitting with my mom, drunk on her bed, searching for cruise options. I was nine, so I definitely did not know how to book a cruise, but my mom thought I could. When I couldn't, she began yelling for me to figure it out. Confused and scared, I wondered why she was yelling at me for something I did not know how to do. She grounded me and I ran into my room holding my dog, Lucy. I sat in my closet for hours clutching my dog, waiting for her to fall asleep so I could run away to my friend's house.

Her alcohol binge lasted for four months before she was forced to go to a rehab in North Carolina. I did not know how long my mom would be gone or if she would ever be healthy again. A week into my mom leaving, I was playing Wii and became frustrated with the game on the screen. That frustration turned into anger but also a sadness that my mom was not around. Even though her drinking severely affected my childhood, I still

thought of her as a loving mother who was supposed to take care of me and wipe away my tears. That was the first time I cried for my mother.

She stayed at the rehab for a month until my nanny, Carole, and I drove up to get her. As a repercussion of my mom's time in rehab, I underwent group therapy sessions with other children that were in similar positions. We were asked to share how we felt about our parents being at rehab and how we were coping with this addiction. I did not share much, as I was still coping with my emotions about my father's death.

When driving to our group sessions, my mom planned to intercept the van so she could see me. This was the longest time I had been away from her. Once the van slowed to a stop, my mom ripped open the door and hugged me. Being away from my mom for that long was terrible. I missed her waking me up in the morning for school, running down the stairs to greet her at the door after work and living in the same house as her. The drive back to Charleston was full of optimistic hope that life would return back to normal.

Through my middle school years my mother and I had grown closer. Life was good. Those years were the least chaotic of my life. I was in a routine – go to school, do homework, go to volleyball, eat dinner, and then go to bed. I would hang out with my friends on the weekends and was not burdened by the past troubles of my parents. When high school came around, my mom and I were closer than ever. We spent a lot of time together and all of my friends called her the "Cool Mom." Unfortunately, life never stays easy.

One night while up late and unable to fall asleep, I heard my mom walk downstairs. It was around eleven on a school night and she normally fell asleep around eight, so I knew something was off. I walked down the stairs to find my mom in the laundry room. As soon as she saw me, she frantically put down whatever she was holding and ran to me. I questioned why she was awake and said she needed to do the laundry, but knew I was suspicious, so she went back upstairs. Once she was gone, I went to go find what she had put down. As soon as I saw it was a beer bottle, I felt anger I had never felt before. I found out my mother had started drinking again. I marched upstairs and confronted her with the bottle. When she said she did not know where that came from, I poured the whole thing down the sink.

I was only fourteen and scared out of my mind. I was left alone, and my future was more uncertain than it had ever been. I knew how she would get when she drank – angry with everyone. I was left uncertain with what to do. I did not tell my family about my mom's drinking until a week after my mom's secret was exposed a week after I found that beer bottle. She began coming home drunk from work and I knew this was an environment I could not survive in. I made the decision to leave my home and move in with a close friend.

The night I left, I waited for my mom to pass out from drinking. I had orchestrated the plan with Brooke and her dad. I crawled out of my window, which was on the second floor, and shimmied down the drainpipe. I was terrified that my mom would wake up and emotionally abuse me for "abandoning" her when she needed me the most. As I ran down the driveway, I did not look back once. The following morning, when my mom found out I was gone, she blew up my phone with texts, "You're the worst daughter ever!" and "Why did you abandon me?" These texts continued until I blocked her number my sophomore year. I would continue to move between other people's homes throughout my four years of high school.

My mom was six months sober when I moved in with a new family, the Emersons. The Emersons helped me through my anxiety and taught me how to live in the present. Their kindness and alternative thinking shaped my thoughts today. Though I had everything I needed, I still felt something was missing. I began to go down a deep hole of depression. I barely ate, slept, or saw my friends. I would cry myself to sleep every night wondering what was missing from my life, and then it hit me. My mom. After my dad passed away, the only person left in my family was my mom. She had missed my junior prom, my first heartbreak and my lowest of lows. A daughter needs to have her mother to guide her through these things, and I did not have that. I was left alone in these things and even if other mom's tried to help me, it was not the same.

The beginning of my senior year was exciting. I had been waiting years to graduate and go off to college. I was tired of living in a place where I had no control. One question still was unanswered: Would I ever live with my mom again? I made a pact with myself that I would not go back home until she was over a year sober. After years of no contact, I wondered how

our relationship would be. I decided that since she was a few months sober that I would begin contacting her again. We met for coffee on a cool October day. I had never felt as anxious as I did when I was driving to this coffee shop. My mind was filled with questions like: What if she has been drinking? How am I going to react when I see her? But As soon as she got out of her trusty yellow mini cooper, it hit me how much I missed having her in my life.

During my life, all I had was hate for my mother during high school but after reconnecting the hate began to melt away. Our conversations were uncomfortable at first. She asked about my life and what had happened, but I felt that if I told her all of the shit I went though she would start drinking again. This is the mindset that I had throughout my life – being scared to say or do something if it would send my mom off the deep end again.

The months leading up to Christmas of 2018 were difficult, as I was craving to be home with my mom, knowing I could not break the promise I made to myself about moving home. Things with the Emersons became shaky. Now that my mom was back in my life and my move home was fast approaching, I felt uncomfortable being parented by other adults instead of my own. It felt as if they were taking my independence away, something that gave me a sense of control over an uncontrollable life. I began flexing my independence, arguing more with them, and breaking their rules which caused tension in the house. December came around and my mom was over a year sober, so I decided it was time to go home. Telling the Emersons I was leaving was one of the hardest things I had to do. Things were already tense, so I sprung it on them. They were taken by surprise, but they understood where I was coming from.

The transition home was harder than I imagined. All of the corners in that house gave me flashbacks to the terrible, stress filled moments of my mom's drinking. It took me a while to get used to living back in that house, but I knew it was best for me. I moved back into my family home with only six months left before I left for college. Without those few months with her, I think our relationship would not have recovered. We began therapy together and started opening up wounds that were still healing. In that space, I was able to open up to her about my entire life; I was still terrified about how she'd react, but I knew it was important to rebuild our relationship. She was so oblivious

of her actions while drinking that she does not remember texting me hateful things. She did not realize how her actions affected my life. That was a tough thing to hear from the person who made your life a living hell. I was angry, but I also understood. Alcoholism is an addiction that is affected by and affects parts of the brain. People who suffer from alcoholism will always choose a drink over someone they love, so I had to understand the disease before being able to accept her actions.

Throughout my life I have had to be an adult, but the months leading up to college made me feel like a worry-free teenager. My friends and I were closer than ever and my relationship with my mom was the best it had been. Everything felt right, which made it easier to leave everything behind. After finally leaving Charleston I left my old life behind. All of the challenges and heartache I went through created the person I am today. I am grateful and also disgusted by my childhood, but the challenges my mother and I went through strengthened our relationship to a level that would have not been met without forgiveness.

Art by KELSEY RUGGAARD