

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

JOURNAL TWENTYTWENTY

SPRING 2020 • VOLUME VIII

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PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

CREATIVE NONFICTION
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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.

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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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.



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 herself 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



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
- 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 **INTERNSHIP** in any semester with one of our Faculty Advisors. Internship 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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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. ☞



SLEEPING, SKINNY BEAUTY

by REILLY GABEL

더운 텅 빈 무대에 섰을 때
팬한 공허함에 난 겁을 내¹

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.



아무것도 없던 열다섯의 나
세상은 참 컸어 너무 작은 나²

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.



순결했던 날 찾아줘
이 거짓 속에 헤어날 수 없어³

"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."

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.



숨겨도 감춰도 지워지지 않아⁵

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 this place?	Where am I?
Where is the floor?	How did I get here?	What's my name?
Never seen this place before	Can't remember anything but a chair	In some sort of game
Darkness here and there	A chair and rope	A noose above a tilted chair
Not a single frame in sight	In a dull, dank room	There I hang and swing
I can't help but say "I'm scared"	Not anything happy, I hope	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 to 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 Theology*. "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 됐는걸¹⁰

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

¹⁰ Verse 2 of "Awake" by Jin from BTS: "Even so, what I'm saying is / it's time to leave."

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. ❧

¹¹ Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. "Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips." Indiana University Press, 2013.



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. 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

*A mind in active
addiction is terrifying.*

*Anger was my
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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.

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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

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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. 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.

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.

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.

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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, each pebble cast the shadow of a boulder, and the dusk bled moans and howls. ☞





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.



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 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.

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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. ✎



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 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

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*Who are you? You don’t
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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.



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 backyard 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.

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

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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,
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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. ✎



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-smearred 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.

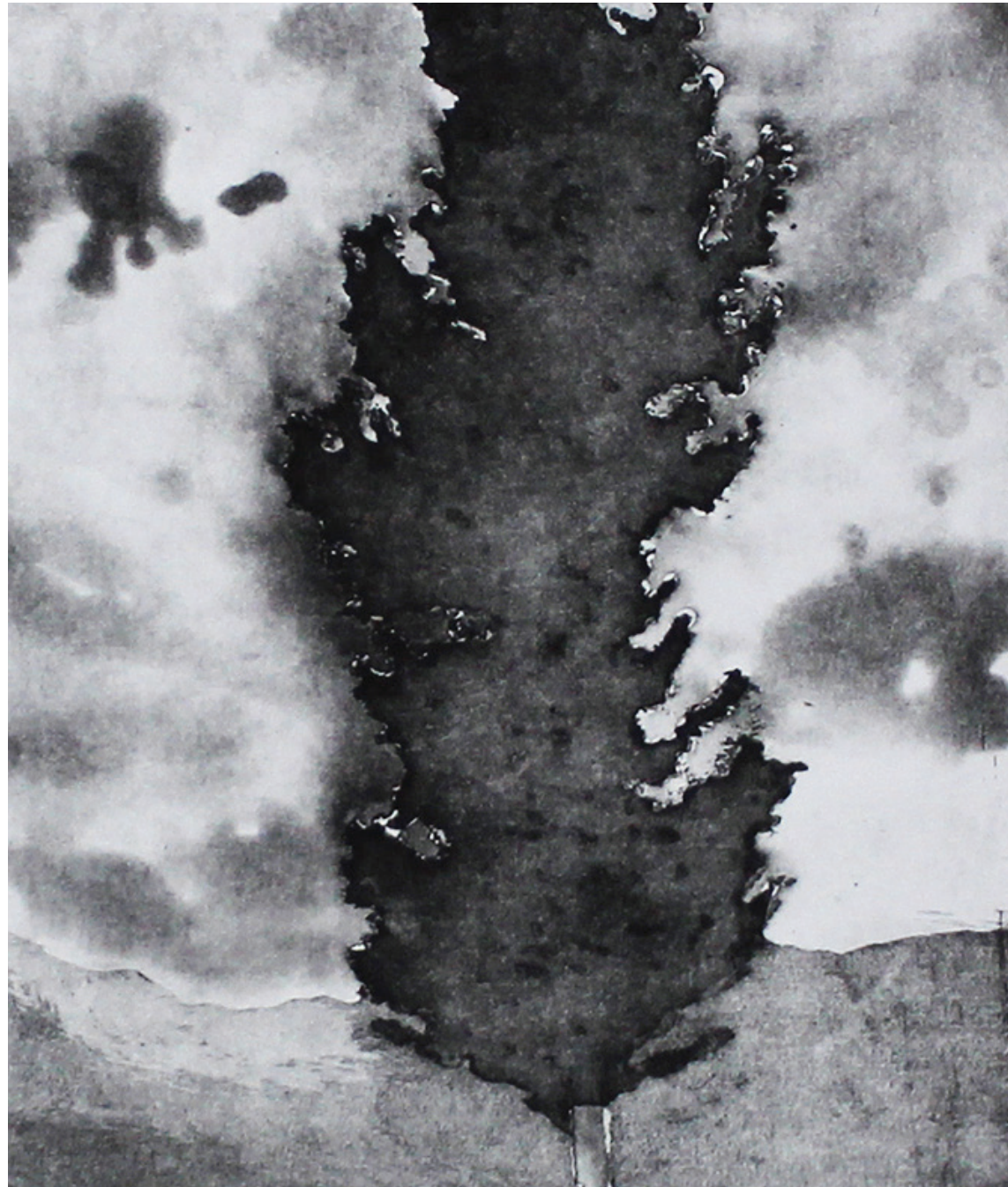
For three years it sat in the same spot. It magically shimmered and glowed in the darkest of places, but now I couldn't find it.

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." ✨





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.*

*The glow was
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Apocalyptic.*

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."

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.

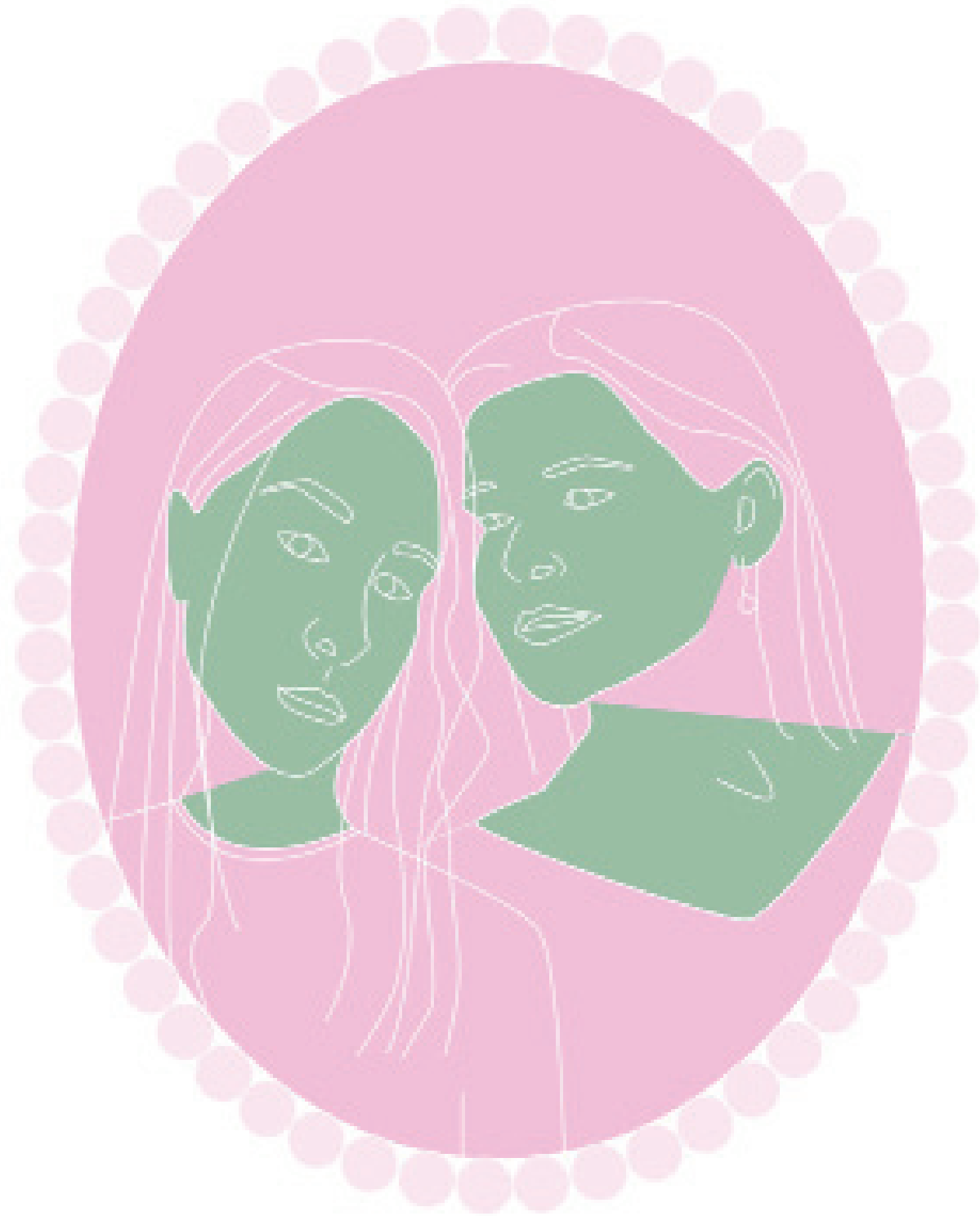
The first half of 2018 was also quite strange in the precipitation department. Between January and July, 2018 only saw 72% of the precipitation that it would normally see in that time span. 72% doesn't sound too bad, but problems arose with how sporadic and uneven that precipitation was. March saw only 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,
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*The goal, though,
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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. ✎



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.

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 secretly
downloaded Tinder
and switched my
preferences from men
to women.*

*I want her both closer
and further away.*

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.

"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 her that 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.


*It is still painful
to feel like I am being pulled in two
directions,
tearing in the middle of my chest.*

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

*Resentment is a
muddle of anger and
love wrapped in
confusion; it is heroin
for the hurt.*

Art by Iona Bruce

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. 



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. ❧



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 summates
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. ✎



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 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.

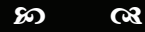


Growing up as the son of a surgeon, I saw the burden that these physicians carry firsthand. My mom often described surgery as fun, like solving a human puzzle. Sometimes, though, her job seemed like it required more than just solving puzzles. My mom told me of a nightmare she had a couple times where 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.

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. ☞





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

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

*It was people
that made life
entertaining.*

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 dysfunction 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 expedencies. 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. ☞



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. 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. ☞



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!".

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."

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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?*

CR

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 although originally from Southern California, was raised in the beautiful state of Colorado. She is a Mexican-American, first generation college student, who is currently a candidate for a Biochemistry degree. 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 Cameron 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 amongst a dozen different (and more "practical") degrees, Jordan 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

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.

—Journal 2020 Staff