

SCJ 2021



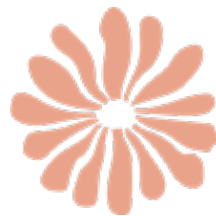


The cover of this journal was designed by Lindsey Barber. Illustrations throughout were designed by Brooke Nugent, Lindsey Barber, and Sarah West.

The Salmon Creek Journal is a student-run literary and visual arts publication that encourages, publishes, and elevates the Washington State University Vancouver community.

This issue of Salmon Creek Journal was produced during the 2020-2021 school year at Washington State University Vancouver, and was printed by University Publishing in Pullman, Washington.

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www.salmoncreekjournal.com
van.scj@wsu.edu
360-546-9216



Note From the Editor

Welcome to the 23rd issue of Salmon Creek Journal. First published in 1997, and every year since 1999 after that, we, the current team, are delighted to present our contribution to that ever-expanding legacy with the 2021 Salmon Creek Journal:

The Growth issue.

This was a difficult year for everyone, students, professors, and creatives around the world, and SCJ was no exception. This is the first year in which Salmon Creek Journal was produced entirely online! The 2021 team utilized Slack for meetings and conversations, held Zoom events and social media contests, emailed and texted and video called and didn't once meet each other offline. It was a learning curve: how exactly does a team do something like this? What does it mean to be virtual? How do we stay true to our roots while continuing to build from this year's difficulties? The answer to that was flexibility, creativity, comradery, and – very aptly – challenging ourselves to grow from it all.

This year, we asked our submitters, too, to show us how they grew. There are poems, stories, photographs, paintings, and more on love, loss, friendship, hardships, discovery, tragedy, the self, and all the quiet moments in between. We hope that as you read through this issue, you find yourself growing as well.

The 2021 team would like to thank everyone who sent their works in to Salmon Creek Journal. We had a record amount of submissions this year, with pieces from WSUV students, the greater PNW community, and around the world! The team would also like to thank Nikki Hinshaw and the Office of Student Involvement for their support, helping us navigate through events, paperwork, and the publishing process.

Thank you for reading.

Yours sincerely,

Mallory Hobson

Editor-in-Chief, 2021 Salmon Creek Journal

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Gateway
Sarah West

In Regards to The Smoke

Constance Bacchus

we need to plant more
trees I think we need
to feed more birds we
need to walk on paths
we are half afraid to
take & dare to dream
bigger heart beating
faster feeling alive
breathing cold water
air smelling the fish
near docks on the lake
wandering, wandering



He Will Be Home for the Holiday

Edward Jackson

After every holiday that would be considered major to a ten-year old child, Mason Robertson lost control of his behavior. Mason resided at the Scenic View Mobile Home Park in a faded mustard yellow and rusted white two-bedroom trailer with his mother Tammi. His father resided just north of Buford at the medium security Phillips State Prison for Men where he was serving time for cooking and distributing meth. Mason's grandmother Ginny moved in after her son's sentencing to keep an eye on Mason and his mother.

Ginny stayed on the plaid, tan tattered couch most nights. Mason and Ginny spent the afternoons watching talk shows whose daily themes were reveals of paternity. She smoked Newport cigarettes in the trailer and the couch became infested with the smell of menthol and tiny little burn hole patterns that Mason would trace and connect with his chewed-up fingernail like a dot-to-dot instead of doing his reading homework. His teacher only ever assigned reading homework for Mason who was still a non-reader.

His third-grade teacher, Mrs. Sanderson, felt cursed to have drawn the short straw that August. She'd heard rumors about the foul mouth redheaded boy. Early in the year, she reached out to the school psychologist to have him meet with Mason weekly. Mrs. Sanderson wore wool pencil skirts and white shirts buttoned to the top. Her colleagues would whisper to each other she had overextended her stay in the teaching profession. She was quick to hit the call button when Mason acted out, and by the second month of school, the principal was called down to assist her over a dozen times.

One person had Mason's back, the special education paraprofessional Nikki Tompkins. Nikki attended the same school as a child, worked in the cafeteria while pursuing her associates degree, then got the job with the special education department. Miss Nikki had a way with the tough boys that was a gift. The boys every other adult casted in the role as future inmate. And that role was not totally undeserved as so many of the boys that came through the Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) classroom ended up incarcerated.

Miss Nikki was a calm, patient woman. She was trained in Restrain Without Harm (RWH) techniques in the EBD classroom. When she used the restrain technique, she made the boys feel hugged.

Mason was aware his daddy was in a men's prison but didn't understand what a prison was. He thought it more like a camp. And as the months passed, Mason would make unrealistic predictions when his father would be home.

By spring, Mason was still a non-reader. During reading centers, while sitting at the kidney shaped table, he would not silently read to himself for practice while the other kids took their timed fluency test. Instead he would use a pencil or bent paper clip to draw designs on the plastic flap that circumnavigated the table. That spring day, he etched thirteen stars in the pattern of an X, like the flags flown where he lived.

"My daddy gonna be out by Easter." Mason said.

"I understand Mason. He will be out by Easter," Mrs. Sanderson said. "Just like last month when you said he was to be out by St. Patty's Day. Now let's get back to the story and I'll restart my timer. Remember, no questions."

The story in the reading series contained a sequence where a young girl dreams of a pink river but emerges from it bald after taking a swim. It made no sense but contained words easily decodable for a third grader who read on a first-grade level.

"Why she dream about not having hair?" Mason asked. "And why that river pink in the picture Miss Sanderson?"

"Mason, it's Mrs. not Miss. It really doesn't matter to reading why she dreams she's bald. I just need you to read the words so I can count your mistakes."

He hated when she counted his mistakes. Each tally mark on her clipboard was amplified in his eyesight. The noise of the pencil slowly scraping that tally mark on the page sounded like the metal spatula his mother used to scrape burned flesh specks off the frying pan. Mrs. Sanderson was metal on metal to him. What he hated the most during this tally mark of shame exercise was the diagonal tally, indicating he'd reached a group of five mistakes. All the kids could count by fives and see he had the most mistakes.

Mason had a meltdown and tore up Mrs. Sanderson's bulletin board titled hopping into spring. It had white cotton ball bunny rabbits and colorful collage construction paper eggs. Mrs. Sanderson called down the hall for Miss Nikki who came in and picked Mason up like a linebacker. Miss Nikki used her hybrid Restrain Without Harm/hugging technique until he calmed down.

"I just wanted to know why that girl dreams she's bald?" he asked. "You know my daddy bald."

"There isn't anything wrong asking. I think it's strange she dreams that she's bald. Maybe it means she will win the lottery," Miss Nikki said.

"Why you say that?"

"Not sure. Lots of times people say dreams mean the opposite of what they are. Perhaps losing her hair means she'll win some money."

"I just wish Miss Sanderson would stop counting my mistakes. I fucking hate those tally marks."

"Language Mason. Maybe you and I just work together so she



Regeneration

Dillon Gohl

won't have mistakes to count. What do you think about that?"

Mason stopped the body jerks that sometimes resembled a seizure. Miss Nikki stopped the restrain. He was ready to go back to class. He looked at Miss Nikki's soft dark eyes, her jet-black weave sprinkled with teal tracks, and wished she could be his teacher.

Miss Nikki always made eye contact with Mason. Her eyes had just a speck or two of hazel. She was his safe space, his trusted person in that school building. Miss Nikki was in her seventh year serving as the special education paraprofessional and her title meant she was the lowest on the economic and political level in the building, yet when any child acted up a fool, she was the first they called.

Tammi Robertson pulled out her dollar store calendar and circled the Saturday before what she considered the most major holiday of that month. It could be Yom Kippur or Flag Day, it didn't really matter. Her mother-in-law questioned this and felt it should only be Christian holidays, since they were Christians. Even though she was raised Baptist, Mason's mother practiced no religion. The closest she got to church during this time in her life was shopping at the church sponsored thrift store called *The Good Shepherd*.

That May, the major holiday she circled was Mother's Day. The Saturday before the holiday she took Mason to the prison for a visit.

"Daddy, can I just come live here with you?" Mason asked. Mason sat on his mother's lap while he spoke into an antiquated phone and looked pleadingly at his father through scratched, fogged plexiglass.

"Maybe buddy. We will look into that," Bobby Robertson said. Tammi gave Bobby the look. She hated when he wouldn't be straight with their son even though she refused to do it herself. She didn't have the energy to tell Mason prison wasn't like normal camp. She feared escalating Mason's behavior if she explained to him what the situation really was. She didn't realize the negative implications of allowing this

idea of it being a camp to cement in Mason's head.

"Mason, right now your daddy got lots of work to do on week-ends," she said.

"That's right buddy," Bobby said. "Your daddy working hard on weekends."

During the car ride home Mason rapid fired questions to Tammi.

"Is daddy a mechanic? Is he a garbage man?"

"Baby, why you ask me that?"

"He wear the same kinda suit they do," Mason said. "A onesie. His just orange."

"I see," Tammi said. "Yes, he do."

"Do what?"

"He do one of those jobs."

"Which one?"

"Whatever one you think."

The summer proved to be difficult for Mason. Following the Mother's Day visit, he learned that he was being kept back by Mrs. Sanderson who indicated his lack of reading was the mitigating reason.

After the June Flag Day visit to the prison, Mason went about slashing tires and his grandmother covered for him with the police. Fourth of July, Mason got his hands on a lighter and started a small brush fire that burned up an abandoned car.

Mason spent most his time on the couch that summer with his grandmother watching her stories and talk shows while a red box fan blew heat on them. It was the same box fan his father used in his cooking area out back of the trailer on the cracked car pad. Bobby had wrapped that car pad with blue tarp to keep eyes out, but the neighbors in Scenic View could still smell the meth cooking.

One mid-summer day, Ginny noticed a round spot on his arm.

Mason was a pale child prone to sunburns since his mother found sunscreen unnecessary. That round spot on his arm was darkly colored, a bit scabby to the touch, and somewhat crusted and flakey. Tammi put triple antibiotic cream on it and covered it with a bandage, but it grew to the size of a quarter.

"You gotta use something stronger on that Tammi," Ginny said. "It's the mark, his daddy had them."

"Like what?" Tammi asked. "This medicine is the best."

"For a mark like that you need something better than medicine. Mason, go get grandma that red can out back on the car pad. And a clean rag."

Mason came back in with the gas can and a torn-up t-shirt that was laundered. It was the same gas can that his father used in his meth cooking. Ginny soaked the fabric in the gasoline.

"You a brave boy like your daddy, aren't you?" Ginny asked.

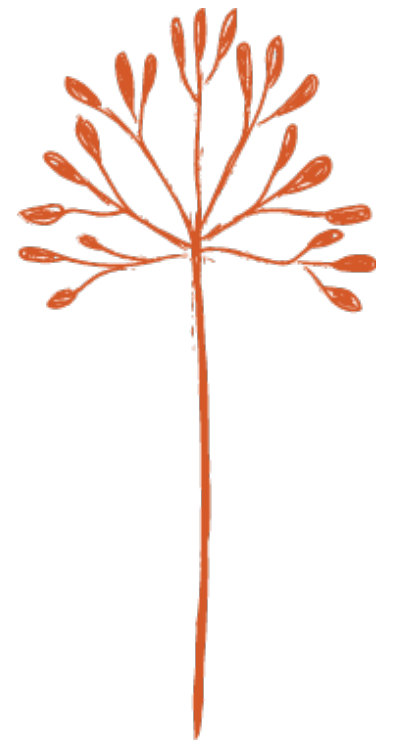
"I am," Mason said.

"Don't you flinch. I gotta rub this deep in that mark. Only way to get a mark like this off a boy like you is to use fire making juice."

Mason noticed his grandmother was rubbing the gasoline on his mark in a counterclockwise movement. She did this for seven straight days, always counterclockwise, and the dark mark on his skin went away. Although it took the dark mark away, the gasoline created a circle on his skin that was whiter than his already pale white skin. In the right light, his skin looked translucent. His mother swore she could see through that mark to his bone.

Another round dark mark appeared on the back of his head. His grandmother insisted on shaving his head and keeping it shaved even after the dark mark subsided.

Mason quite liked his shaved head, it was just like is daddy's and his dad complimented him on it. The spot on the back of his head was twice the size of a quarter. His mother swore that she could see the



skull bone through it, if the light were just right.

Tammi's calendar had no August holiday, so she took Mason on the Saturday before the new moon to see his father. She let Mason's red hair grow in to cover the spot so no one could see it when the school year started.

Mason started his second year in the third grade and sat next to a girl named Misti Harris. He was again placed in Mrs. Sanderson's class. She never thought he'd be placed back with her when deciding to retain him. The administration told her it was a random computerized program that made class lists, but she doubted that.

She continued to overuse the call button, but the principal long tired of going to her room so, the school secretary would get on the intercom and make an all call. "Miss Nikki, please report to room 298."

The all call felt undignified to Nikki. It wasn't because they called her to help with Mason. It was that they called her Miss Nikki. No other adult was referred to by their first name.

When his daddy was not released after Labor Day, Mason went on a tear in class destroying a bulletin board decorated with fake leaves and titled falling into a new school year. He broke the clipboard with the reading tally mark mistake page and stabbed several students with sharpened pencils.

Nikki noted that it was the first day back from a three-day holiday weekend and Mason visited his father. She wondered about his father often. Like Nikki, he attended the school as a child. Unlike Nikki, he was enrolled in the EBD class, albeit back then it was in the basement next to the custodial cleaning supplies. Bobby Robertson often was found in that closet smelling the chemicals.

Nikki remembered him as a quiet, stoic boy with a mean streak who often hurt others. Nikki and Bobby didn't run in the same circles back then. Georgia schools were only integrated in theory, even in

1996, the school maintained a segregated situation inside the walls. But not by race, it was segregated by ability, which in turn, meant it was economically segregated.

Nikki asked the psychologist about techniques beyond RWH. He was exasperated not just with Mason, but Nikki's inquiries. The psychologist brought in an inflatable punching clown in hopes that maybe Mason could get some aggression out.

That clown lasted only one week before Mason took Misti's rainbow handled scissors and stabbed it to deflation. Mason was barred from using scissors.

By September, Misti reached her boiling point because he teased her endlessly about her custodian father. Mason would eat bags of Hot Takis and then vomit them on the floor just to make Mr. Harris come to the room to clean it up. He would then rally the other kids in a chorus of "garbage man."

"I heard Mrs. Sanderson say your daddy was in jail," Misti said
"Shut up. My daddy work at a men's camp," Mason said. "He can leave whenever he want. Anyway, I may just go live with him, and you will still be fat."

Over the Labor Day visit, Bobby Robertson sported a new prison tattoo on his neck. It had thick bold lines creeping up his neck to the left of his jaw. Bobby had that same pale skin as Mason that would burn in the yard during recreation. If he couldn't get his hands

on a razor, his receded red follicles would peek their way through his skull forming an orange ring around the middle of his head. Tammi noticed that Bobby had one of those round marks on the new ink, making it appear like a polka-dot on that black tattoo.

After that Labor Day visit, against Tammi's wishes, Ginny shaved Mason's head to see about the mark. It was back and she commanded Mason to get the gas can so she could remove it. Mason loved his shaved head. It made him feel like his daddy. But when she was done, Ginny thought she could see his skull through it, sometimes it appeared to pulsate. She wondered if her boy Bobby had put something more in that red can beyond gasoline.

Monday, in a preemptive strike, Mason began teasing Misti, knowing that she may make fun of his head. And he was right to fear that because in a counterstrike she did make fun of his head, but one could never know if she would have done this first.

"You know what Mason, you a bald-headed freak," Misti said. "That weird bleached out mark on your arm, you got one twice as big on the back of your big ass head. Sometimes it moves like you got an alien in you."

"Fuck off you fat fuck. Maybe you should spread some gasoline on your skin to lighten it a little," Mason said.

Just then Mason was yanked by his collar out of his seat.

"Come with me," Miss Nikki said.

"What I do?" Mason asked. He yelled the entire way down the hall to the EBD room. He thrashed and threw punches at Nikki.

Miss Nikki wrapped her legs around him and crossed his arms around his stomach, like a strait jacket. It was classic RWH moves.

"You stop teasing that girl. Or else," Nikki said.

"Or else what bitch?" he asked.

"Or else I won't have your back. I understand when you act out when Mrs. Sanderson makes fun of your reading. But that girl don't

ever start nothing with anyone. You leave her and her daddy alone. Her daddy is my friend and if you mess with my friend, I'm about ready to mess with you."

"I didn't know he your friend, Miss Nikki. Sorry."

"Don't sorry me. You say your sorry to Misti. You hear?"

"Yea."

Nikki released her legs from around him and he hugged her. She looked down at the round mark and swore it was moving.

The two of them made their way to the art room so Miss Nikki could get some fancy duct tape to fix Mr. Punching Clown. She hated to admit it, but maybe that school psychologist was onto something and Mason needed to get aggression out. Mason picked the American Flag decorated roll.

"For pride Miss Nikki. American Pride," Mason said.

Miss Nikki took Mason to see Nurse Rawls so she could look at the spots. Nurse Rawls gloved up and examined the lightened skin.

"Mason, does anyone put medicine on these spots?" She asked. "Do they itch and scab up?"

"Yes ma'am. My momma put some cream on it and it still itched, so my grandmother put gas juice on it."

"Gas juice?"

"From the red can that my daddy used for cooking."

"I see," Nurse Rawls said. She turned to Miss Nikki and spoke as if Mason wasn't in the room. "Does he live at the Scenic Trailers?"

"He does."

"It's probably ringworm, a fungal infection. Those folks over there have some weird thinking and put gasoline on skin rashes. Try Medicated Selsun Blue shampoo and leave it on the ringworm."

"Isn't there medicine?" Nikki asked. "You want him to use dandruff shampoo on it? Look at it closely, can't you see some of the bone through it?"



Nurse Rawls examined it and said, “Maybe, but it’s skin wearing off due to the gasoline. He needs a doctor, but it’s not like his mother is going to take him. What hillbilly let’s her mother-in-law rub gas on a kids fungal infection?”

“It’s none of our business what they do,” Nikki said.

“Well, his father made it all our business when he got caught cooking. Who knows what chemicals they have actually rubbed into this boy’s skin?”

Mason fixated his eyes on the randomly placed green tiles on the floor and spun the American flag duct tape roll around his finger.

Back in the classroom, Mason kept his head down on his desk. He removed a staple from his reading workbook and was poking holes into the ringworm spot on his arm. He broke a ball point blue pen and was rubbing the ink into the punctures. He was tattooing himself.

Miss Nikki came back at the end of the day and saw it. Home made tattoos were not uncommon around those parts, but the symbol took her aback.

“Do you know what that symbol is?” she asked.

“It’s my daddy’s symbol.”

“Yes, do you know what it stands for?”

“Pride. American pride,” Mason said. “I like it. I like how the lines go up, and then to the right, then down, and to the left.”

Miss Nikki took Mason back down to Nurse Rawls to have her clean it up and sterilize what surely was going to be an infected tattoo.

“Dear God. This boy tattooed a swastika on his ringworm,” Nurse Rawls said.

“Let it go,” Nikki said. “He doesn’t understand what it means. He thinks it’s American pride.”

“Where’d you see this symbol young man?” Nurse Rawls asked him.

“On my daddy’s neck ma’am.”



It Takes Time
Mya Bolds

“Nikki, how can you work with this boy as a Black woman?”

“It’s not him. It’s his father,” Nikki said. “And it’s more complicated than I can explain. I went to school with Bobby Robertson. I know more about it than I want to.”

“Nothing complicated about this tattoo Nikki, you have the patience of a saint.”

Mason again fixated his gaze on the random green tiles while Nurse Rawls applied a alcohol solution on his tattoo that smelled no better than gasoline to him. She was no different than his grandmother. He started to believe they all wanted to wear away his skin to the bone. All Mason Robertson wanted now was to live with his father.

On Saturday, October 28th, Mason, and his mother went to visit his daddy.

“What you gonna be this year for Halloween buddy?” Bobby asked.

“Scream face,” Mason said. “I got a Scream face mask from The Good Shepard. It’s still in the box, never used. But the blood juice in it is all dried up. When I push the air pump, the fake blood is all red powder.”

“Sounds good buddy. Scary stuff,” Bobby said.



“You gonna be out of here to take me trick-or-treating daddy?”

Mason asked.

“Maybe. We’ll see. I might just could.”

“If not, can I come live here?”

“Well, only bad boys live here,” Bobby said, “So you’d have to do something really bad to come live with daddy. You think that gonna happen Mason?”

Mason smiled.

Monday October 30th , Mrs. Sanderson sat at the kidney shaped table and held another reading fluency assessment.

“Mason you have the largest tally count and it’s your second time in the third grade. What are we going to do with you?” she asked. She said this loud enough for the entire class to hear.

Mason looked down at the tiles on the floor and fixated his gaze on the maroon ones randomly placed around the room. It was in that shaming moment he made his decision how he would go live with his father.

Miss Nikki walked into the room while the tally mark shaming session was beginning and simply interlaced her hand with Mason’s, walked him to the EBD room, and inflated Mr. Punching Clown and let him beat the hell out of it.

Before the parade of costumes around the school, Mrs. Sanderson had art activities for the class. Every year the same, construction paper pumpkins and coloring sheets. While handing out the materials she gave Mason his in an envelope.

“Here Mason, yours are pre-cut. We can’t trust you with scissors you know,” Mrs. Sanderson said.

Nikki was dressed head to toe in glitter and a pink tutu. No one quite knew what the costume was, but it elicited smiles. Mrs. Sander-

son refused to take part in anything so childish as to wear a costume on Halloween. That day, she wore a brown houndstooth tweed pencil skirt that ended right at the knee with dark shaded pantyhose.

“My daddy said he might could be out today, to take me trick-or-treating. You think he here Ms. Nikki?” Mason asked.

“Mason, your daddy won’t be out anytime soon, you need to know that,” Nikki said. “It may just be a long time he lives there.”

“If he ain’t coming out then I go live with him, bad boys get to live there, so I’ll be a bad boy.”

“Mason, I think you are a good boy. It’s Halloween, let’s have a great day,” she said. Nikki smiled at Mason who ran his arms over hers picking up some glitter along the static way.

Miss Nikki, unaware of Mason’s visit the previous weekend, paid little mind to that sentence Mason spoke, but it would haunt her for years to come.

Miss Nikki went back to the EBD classroom assured that Mason seemed in good spirits and calm enough to not need hand holding during the parade. He looked so happy in his costume. And she had another student who was troubling her mind that day.

“Misti, give me them scissors,” Mason said.

“No way Mason, they are mine. What you want with Rainbow anyway? Misti asked. “You ain’t even allowed scissors and if Mrs. Sanderson sees you with them, she’ll take them.”

“I promise I won’t tease you for a week. And I’ll hide them in my costume.”

“Two weeks. And you leave my daddy alone too.”

“Deal.”

Mason didn’t just choose those scissors because he could manipulate Misti. He chose them because kid’s scissors were too small for Misti’s hands and she had grown up scissors. The ones with points at the tips. Perfect for stabbing. He remembered stabbing Mr. Punching

Clown with them.

The parade started and Mrs. Sanderson expressed exasperation over it. She walked ahead of her class asking one of the other third grade teachers to watch the kids. The loudspeaker was playing Monster Mash and she found a spot on the wall next to Nurse Rawls to complain about the noise.

Miss Nikki was bringing up the rear of the third-grade classrooms, trying to keep an eye on Mason. Among a sea of Scream faces, Mason was unrecognizable in the costume parade. One would have thought that the dried fake blood in the mask would be a giveaway, but so many of the Scream masks were dried out that year.

Mason hovered close to the wall. He saw ahead that Mrs. Sanderson and Nurse Rawls were leaning against it where randomly placed cinderblocks were painted auburn. He pulled the scissors out of his white, waffle long sleeve undershirt he wore under the costume. At first he thought he’d keep them closed when he stabbed, but on second thought he quite liked the idea of opening them just wide enough to make tally marks on their legs.

He stabbed Nurse Rawls first. She seemed the kind that needed to be wounded first, if not she may have prevented any further stabbing. He plunged the pointed tips inside her right shin and dragged them downwards, tearing her fleshy leg skin along the way. Blood didn’t squirt out as he imagined, instead it oozed slowly, without any excitement. He turned the handles just enough to force the wind out of her lungs.

Mrs. Sanderson was in shock and couldn’t do more than scream. Mason plunged his scissors into her left shin. She doubled over and fell to the ground. This made making skin tally marks more laborious for Mason as he did not have the weight of gravity on his side. He pulled them out after moving them down her shin, and plunged them back in. No one but Miss Nikki knew he was attempting to make a



five-tally mark on her skin, but he was stopped before he could get to the diagonal one across the four to indicate five.

The wound on Mrs. Sanderson's skin was deeper and the blood pooled around her torn pantyhose. Soon the pantyhose was all but gone, exposing legs desperately in need of a shave. Miss Nikki ran to pull Mason off her, and held him to her chest, forgetting all RWH techniques. Looking down she saw two bones. The first was in the wound on Mrs. Sanderson's leg. But it was the second one that was far more concerning. She pulled Mason's Scream mask off and could see the translucent spot on the back of his head, pulsating vigorously exposing skull bone.

Ambulances were not needed but the two women required stitches on the tally marks on their legs. Immediately after the incident, Mason was held in the EBD room with Miss Nikki while they awaited a social worker, the school resource officer, and his mother. Miss Nikki felt foolish in her pink tutu that once seemed so whimsical. She held him close but wouldn't touch his head, it was still pulsating where the mark was.

"Mason. Honey. Why?" she asked.

"I'm gonna go live with my daddy," he said. "Bad boys live there and I'm gonna go live with my daddy."

Tammi Robertson and her mother-in-law made their way to the school and they watched as Mason was escorted to the resource officer's car to take him to the Gwinnett Youth Detention Center. They kept shaking their heads and smoked Newport Menthols on the steps of the school. Miss Nikki walked out and stood next to them and for the first time since she was in her twenties, smoked a cigarette.

Nikki took silent grief from the staff at Eagle Eye Elementary the remainder of the year. Mrs. Sanderson and Nurse Rawls reminded her almost daily with just their looks. Although both recovered with no long-lasting effects on their legs, the jagged horizontal scars were visible daily just below the hemline of Mrs. Sanderson's pencil skirts. Whenever Nikki looked at them all she thought was tally marks.

She didn't go see Mason for a long time although she thought of him daily. However, she did visit someone who was incarcerated. On the first Saturday of each month, Miss Nikki would drive north on Interstate 80 and take exit 120 and follow the signs to Phillips State Prison for Men to see the man she once went to elementary school with.

During those visits she would converse with him about what happened. She tried to understand the root cause of this. She wanted to know what was in that gas can. Bobby Robertson never told her. Nikki would stare at the round mark on his swastika tattoo that Tammi thought looked like a polka-dot. Each time when Bobby Robertson would get angry over Nikki asking about the gas can, she noticed that the spot would pulsate.





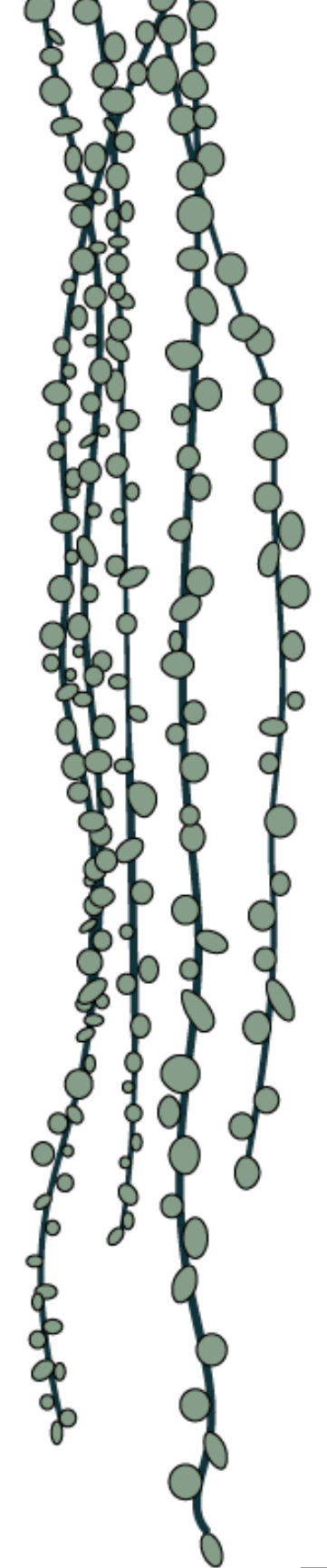
Fern
Laura Ballard

In the Retelling
Natalli Amato

We can say that there was goodness;
that we witnessed it more than once
and from more than the ones we had already decided
were capable; like my dear
stranger father
who gave me a light
even if he never gave himself.

In the Dreams to Come
Natalli Amato

We will be far enough from this season
that the only way for it to come back
will be a holy dream: tent pitched
under Adirondack stars, dark
save for the lantern light
bouncing of our mosquito-puckered bodies.



Bloom
Nicole Davis



Visual Arts Mini
Contest Winner

Volcanic Regrowth
Catherine Hansel



Spring Photo
Showcase Winner

Twitter Short Story Contest Winners

Barysh Agaliyev

Reminiscing of his younger self, he laments at all the refused chances. All those people are not just a few old glances.

“I wish I could go back.”

“The future’s past is now.”

He refuses to fall apart.

Afreen Shanavas

“Promise me we’ll always be like this,” he smiles at her as he took a drag of his cigar.

“Even in death, I promise”, she watches, as the wisp of smoke twirled away.

All Those Busy Times

David Subacchi

All those busy times
Travelling here and there
Early and late
Those ‘just a quick coffee’ times
And join any crowd times
The ones we cursed
Because they filled up space
That should have been
For the important things
The real things

They disappeared.

At first we laughed
Shrugged shoulders
Waited for resumption
Of normal business
Up and down
Went our hopes
But nothing much changed
So slowly we began to fill
Those busy time gaps
With important things

We grew up.

Life on Pause - Portland

Ceenan Calzadilla





Life on Pause - Germany
Ceenan Calzadilla



Life on Pause - Thailand
Ceenan Calzadilla

Inhale

Arabelle May

There I am on the mat, standing in *tadasana*, waiting for the online instructor to begin her flow.

I'm not experienced enough to call myself a yogi. I only know that I enjoy the ebb and the flow, the deepening of breath, the dropping out of my head and into my body. I didn't realize until I started doing yoga that most of the time, I forget to breathe. I mean really breathe, not the shallow, robotic, autopilot thing we do out of necessity for life.

"Inhale and ground yourself into the earth," hums my instructor. "Exhale, hinge at the hips."

I think too much. Maybe we all do. It's kind of a quintessential American thing—go go go until you can't go anymore. Today my brain is overburdened, spent from the anxiety I've been feeling all day, weakened further by my masquerade of normality. I grew up not really understanding things like anxiety and depression. Now I know to check for the signs—heartbeat rapid, chest tight as a clenched fist going in for the blow. And, of course, breath.

Today mine is shallow, hurried, working urgently to get oxygen to my heart so it can be pumped through the rest of my body. The bare minimum of survival, my lungs think, come on, pick up the pace. Hastening to keep up with my brain, becoming debilitations in their attempt. I often wonder what one would see, observing my chest during one of these episodes. Does my upper body resemble the wings of a hummingbird, darting away from its predator? Maybe it's more akin to the tremor of a drum's head after it's been struck—that coerced vibration. If one were to record my abdomen's rising and falling, would it look as though the video had been scrubbed?

“Inhale, rise. Exhale, bend the left leg and extend your right arm overhead, feeling the lateral stretch.”

There's something in the movement, in the synchronicity between muscle and lungs. It's become habit to drop into a flow after hours at my laptop, or before a shower, or upon rising. At first it was all fear of rigidity, now it's knowledge that breath is resilience. The lengthening, I've found, reveals itself throughout the day, in the moments between trigger and reaction, in the swell that has learned to temper itself rather than snowball. I do still find myself on the edge of a thought sometimes, teetering but addicted to the uncertainty of it all. Trying to remember to breathe is like trying to forget—you have to let go of it in your mind, to take that uneasy step away from the judgement we've learned to rely on. Into the bodily awareness that so many of us have discarded. Everything in my reality is restless. Maybe that's the fire in me.

“Inhale, touch utkatasana, and push through to standing. Exhale, lower into chair and hold here. Feel your breath deepening the longer you hold this. This is how we unravel our karma. We watch as the story unfolds, the heat arises. We simply witness instead of reacting.”

I learned recently that I have a pitta imbalance. In Ayurveda, this means I have an abundance of fire. Too much heat, and I overexert myself. Too little, and I'll fizzle out. I've been trying to straddle the line between ember and inferno, but that's like stepping on the gas when you're first learning to drive. You're either the tortoise or the hare—there's no in-between.

“Inhale the arms up. Deep nourishing breath. Exhale, straight spine, fold.”

Sometimes it seems like a karmic joke that my dosha is the one that governs heat, when all I really wanted was a break from my own intensity. They say, Be careful not to go too high. Heat rises. It's no wonder my mind ignites at the slightest provocation. I was born into this danger.

I don't always resent the heat. Frequently I crave stimulation—find myself disquieted by inactivity. Stagnancy does not find a suitable home in my body, nor my mind. I'm anxious when things are idle; I'm aroused by vulnerability and risk.

My mother brought me into this world under the archetype Sagittarius on an impatient winter night, igniting a fire that's been burning for twenty-two years. I sometimes wonder what the pain was like. Was it a welcomed discomfort, a pleasant warmth? Did I leave her exhausted from the venture, seeking the tranquility she'd left behind?

Maybe one day I'll ask her.

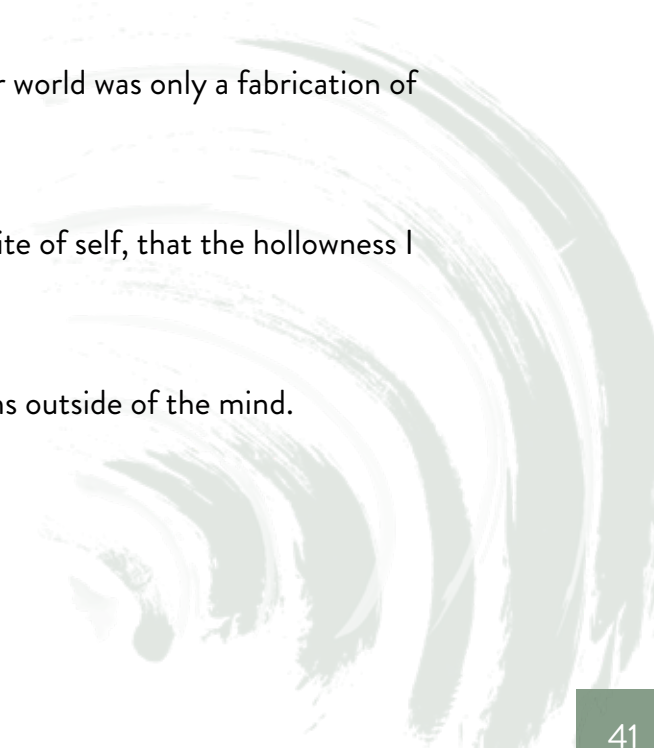
“Keep your breath deep. Hold an even ratio between inhale and exhale as we close this practice.”

In my old poetry, the depth of my mind was a dark and quiet place, one where I pictured a small version of myself buried in her loneliness. I yearned for a beam of light, for someone to peer into me and discover what I'd hidden—something I didn't even know myself.

I didn't realize for a long time that this version of my inner world was only a fabrication of the mind.

I didn't recognize until I was older that fear was the opposite of self, that the hollowness I visualized was only space to be filled by light.

Only recently did I understand that presence only happens outside of the mind.



Pheonix Queen

Mary Nguyen



My name was never my own.

I was introduced to the world
by having it chained
to the name of a Man.
The hungry air bit and
swallowed
My ripe newborn face,

and nothing was mine,
because I was born into a
world that did not belong
to me.

They did not even let me
have my own name,

or the name of the person
that I lived inside of
for three trimesters.
Ultimately,
she was unnamed,

and we were both tamed
like dammed rivers
or stuffed wolves.

I have spent
most of my life
trying to release myself

and name myself,

as Others dug their own
names into my tender skin.
I drag their claims to me
around like an old bone

I have spent a lifetime
uprooting my pines
and wilderness
in order to make Others
feel safe,
and more significant.
I have spent
most of my waking hours

extinguishing the infernos
sparked from my dust,

and apologizing
for taking up space
in places that “belong” to
Others.

I can't anymore.

I will not tame myself
to make Others feel
civilized and comfortable.
I will not abandon my wild
to pledge allegiance to
Someone Else's definition
of Society.

I will not put out my fire
with Holy Water.

I will not be ashamed of
my glow.
I won't make myself
smaller
to let Someone Else buy
more space
and more land
with more money

My magic is not for sale.
My magic is not
negotiable.

My wings have sprouted
from my curving spinebent from
years of bowing
and curtsyng,
and staying within the
lines.

My feathers are pink,
yellow, blue, and shades of
wholeness.

Fountains of stars spurt
from my cosmic palms,
and my hair is a
moon-soaked mane.

My heart pounds.

My brain unfurls.

My eyes glint with
sapphire clarity.

I am discovering my
Goddesshood,
and I am finding that it is
unbreakable,
unshakable,
and unchained.

I chose to name myself,
and I remain unnamed.



Goddesshood and the Unnamed

Emily Degn

Daughter

Rasha Alkhateeb

Her name has a typo, like parents of newborns who drop vowels to say less or because the last time they played was with alternate spellings of sounds, before the baby's cry made them phonologically aware of parenthood. When she heard her name, she knew it was mispronounced. She writes letters down, knowing her name isn't in the right language. Like her family's misspelled assimilation, they thought raising consonants in second countries began at deciding on script sides, marking their first argument with her misunderstood fluency and turning eyes. Her parents say they thought vowels were interchangeable. She says she wants to change her spelling. They say it's right in the mother tongue. She says she doesn't need it to be anymore.



Queer Roots

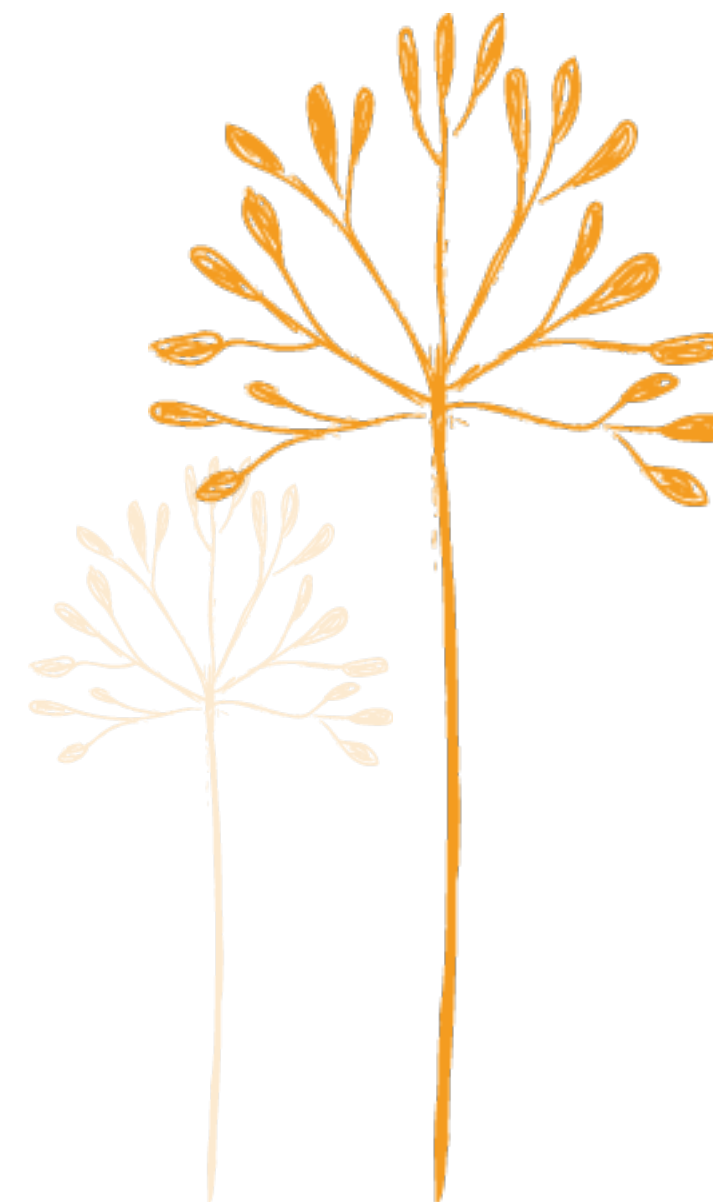
Gabrille Hancher

i hadn't known you yet
sweet seeds were planted
but denied essential nourishment
a growth cycle spent
watering sapphic enmeshment

yet here i am
welcoming you into my life
i won't hide this galaxy brain body anymore –
witness my blooming, my unfolding
my becoming

fertilize this transformation,
until the tender blooms unfurl
out of this soft earth
let it be perfectly messy –
a reflection of all possibilities
in this lifetime

& when i kiss my beautiful husband each night
marveling at our holographic existence
tasting the sweetness of it on my tongue
i know my queer roots run deep



Cactus Blossom
Sarah West

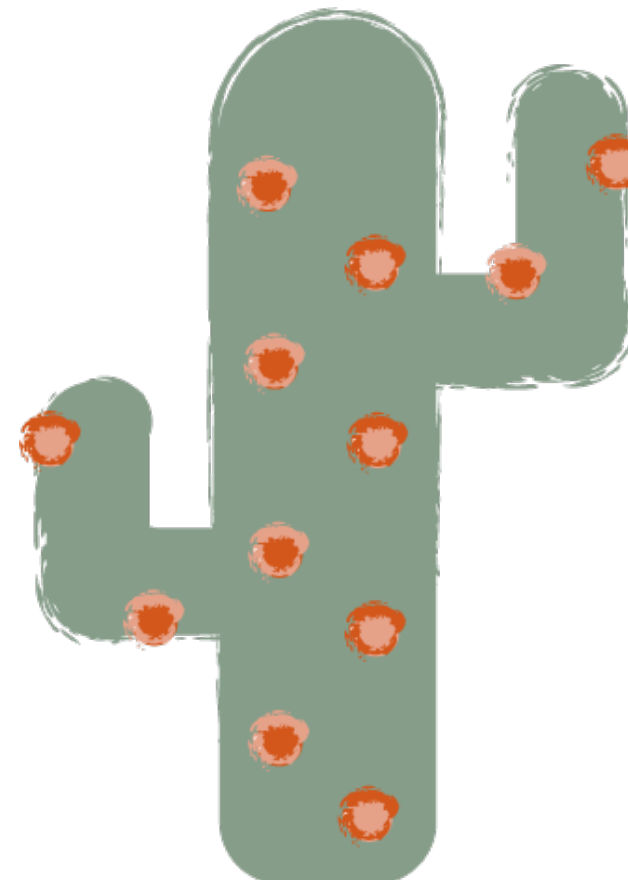


Coyotes howling in winter
Sarah Summerhill

Coyote dances naked in the selenic night
when the moon is three-quarters empty
and makes itself known to particular stars

Flying South
Sarah Summerhill

California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico
Unnumbered stars roll by
Tumbling wild in the deep blue desert
Wild running in the deep blue sky
Sonora, Chihuahua, Mojave
Meet on the cerulean blue expanse
Cherub's rolled puddy arms
Dangle out the passenger's side
And trickster keeps us gliding along the road





Neowise Over Snake

Faun Scurlock



Neowise Light

Faun Scurlock

Divorcing Flowers, Bulbous, Early Spring

Constance Bacchus

i. muscari blues

the hyacinth is in a mood
a warrior pose has done this before
it stinks she say as she puts on a tulip face
keep calling keep sending photos
keep not being here, keep freezing me out

ii. galanthus

the snowdrops are running away as fast as
they can they have run out of gas
been cold are tired of waiting

they make it easy only leave twice & carry
their own milk are upset red-eyed
on time, beautiful, nod their heads wise

iii. crocus purple, mauve, amarillo, white

the crocus class is a portrait in blue
in a parking lot among
stray battered cats & daffodil
starts eluding chamomile embraces

they live in gravel they
shout I want a divorce

& leaves pop up & pretend
not to do what they do
pretend to be mistaken



Ophelia
Dillion Gohl

Releasing Dracula

Charlie Klever

I poked myself with a fishhook during a zoom meeting. My camera was set up so that you could only see my face, hiding the harpoon sized fishhook and bundle of string I held in my lap. I tried to hide it but my low pain tolerance betrayed me and the zoom audience saw my noticeable wince.

I turned my camera off in the middle of someone's presentation and went to the bathroom to clean up. My Dad and I had been talking about taking up fly fishing after the pandemic got under control, and he asked me to practice tying knots. You have to make the hook look like a native fly that the fish feed on, otherwise you wouldn't be prepared. The worst crime a fisherman can commit is to come to the river unprepared.

The first time I went fishing with my dad I remember being incredibly bored. I didn't like getting up at 6 in the morning, and I was annoyed that he asked me not to bring my Gameboy. We drove to the North Fork Reservoir and rented a dinghy to troll for Rainbows. The lifejacket clipped just beneath my chin, it was the law that I had one on for my age and I scooted in the boat awkwardly. My dad blended in with the boat with his gray overalls, while I illuminated the river with my bright orange armor. I felt like a satellite for the fish below us.

I have a hard time sitting still. I get anxious when I'm not occupied with a screen. Fishing is one of the most disciplined sports, as it requires your attention and quick reflexes, but most of the time I daydreamed. The river was still and we drifted at a brisk pace underneath hanging branches. The sun started to cook my face, the reflections on the water made the lifejacket smoldering. I ate Cheetos

and Coke. I think the fish were staring at me. The lake is a relatively easy spot to catch Rainbow Trout and a lot of kids threw Cheetos over the boat. I threw cheese puffs at the water and laughed when they scattered. We caught a couple Rainbows and I touched one with a curious repulsion. They weren't elegant, they reeked of sea scum and were slimy to the touch. Their eyes stared blankly at the sky. I caught a tiny one and wanted to take it home for dinner. My Dad said, "Let's put this one back, he'll grow and be a king of the lake."

The last time I fished was in the desert living my best life. Friends from college wanted to spend the weekend in the woods. We drove 6 hours past abandoned towns, almost stopping at the local "Meat Bonanza", and parked at a cabin in La Pine, the last of the small towns on the Deschutes River. The neighbors advertised their policy on trespassers with red lettered signs. We drank cheap beer and chopped wood, and we were able to take our jackets off to throw baseballs. I cooked chili with expired spices and too much ground beef. It was deep red and heavy in our guts. We kept the door open which let in the mosquitos. Our warrior instincts were unleashed and we sprayed Raid all over the door, killing all insect invaders. A waft of poison gas crept its way to the beefy chili, ruining our supper. We should have stopped at the Meat Bonanza.

We needed to catch a fish. Honor demanded there be a trophy for the boy's trip. We packed dry fishing poles and worms, and crawled up a rocky bank at Wickiup Reservoir. We knew right away that there were probably no fish in this spot. It was too late in the afternoon and we made too much noise. There was no launch point or boardwalk for us to cast out, we threw lines off the bank. We didn't have any Cheeto's to chum for trout so I knew a fish had no reason to swim this close. We kicked over stones and found snakes.

Just then, the pole jumped and the tip tugged hard and we bolted for our rods. Dust scattered around our feet and we reeled in the three other lines. I felt a vein burst in my forehead as I rapidly reeled, bending the rod against this un-

known warrior fish. We beached the monster to shore and I grabbed it by the tail and belly. A deep and ancient smell belched out, baking in the sun. The fish was a Kokanee and it shined like bright steel, with deep white scars on its sides and another fisherman's hook still in its mouth. The Kokanee had a crown of monofilament wire wrapped around his face, with bulbous eyes. We named it Dracula. It was obviously not the first time this coelacanth-like creature had been captured. We released this abused king back to his underwater castle.

I think about that trip often now, in the year of our pandemic 2020. I'm back in my bathroom cleaning my stuck finger. Not quite as battle scarred as Dracula, but I wouldn't go back to the breakout room until I patched myself up. I couldn't help but feel anxious as the Zoom gallery view looked like everyone was looking straight at me, like fish looking to the surface. Everyone peering straight ahead, straight at the professor, straight at me. I'd prefer the company of Dracula to that of 20 different eyes.

One day when this is over, me and my dad are going to go fly fishing. Fly fishing demands your tutelage and respect. You must observe a patch of water and study the insects to "match the hatch". Mimicking their likeness in a way that can confuse a fish. Boats are not necessary, as it makes more sense to waddle in the shallow water. You could use worms or Cheetos, but I need to match wits with a fish. Otherwise, I might unleash another Dracula in the pond.

What I didn't understand in North Fork Reservoir or Wickiup is that it turns out you don't go fishing to catch fish. You go fishing to forget meetings and online appointments and mind the serenity of the water splashing. Actually, getting the fish is arguably the worst part of fishing. You need an excuse to share stillness with your tribe, to be mindful of the woods. I don't want to go to any more meetings or send and reply to emails. I just want to go fishing with my dad.



Junonia Coenia

Sofiya Levina

An Adult Education

Penny Milam

Grease hitchhiked from Charity's uniform to the interior of the old green Nova, coating the vinyl seats with a slick oily layer, scrawling the air with the overbearing signature of hamburgers and fries. After breathing it for nine hours, the smell turned her stomach. Washing the car wouldn't get rid of it, just like washing her polyester uniform wouldn't completely erase the stink she brought home three nights a week, plus Saturdays and Sundays. McDonalds was only seven miles away from home, but a thirty-minute drive. Other people might complain about not having any alone time, but Charity harvested meditative chunks of thirty-minute drives on a daily basis. She liked the white-noise undulation of her car, the persistent demand of her attention to the asphalt corkscrew down the mountain. She liked the bump onto city-paved streets, and she conversely liked the crunch of gravel as she left the main road. It was monotonous and soothing.

Pulling into the drive, she jimmied the keys from the sticky ignition, shoved the heavy car door open, and inhaled mountain air dark and heavy with midnight. The woods dozed around the house, noth-

ing awake except Charity and the cicadas rasping an interminable symphony that would last all season. She hesitated a thin minute, breathing in the inky comfort of the humid night, but the front porch light was a slender yellow runway cutting through the dark, calling to both Charity and crowds of moths. She dug the house key from her back pocket on the way to the porch, hopping the splintered third step, unusable since Charity was ten and had watched her Daddy's foot break through it like a toothpick. Daddy swore a cuss word and a typical threadbare promise to fix it—eight years later as much a fixture of the house as the hanging gutter or the shaggy, neglected rhododendrons.

The warped porch screen mildly protested as she hooked her hip against it, trying the knob of the inner door. Locked, though Mama knew Charity was heading home. Mama kept the door bolted at all times, disproving the sentiment of the faded blue welcome mat underfoot, equally afraid of Jehovah's Witnesses as she was of serial killers. Charity nudged the door open with her key, not sure if the house was asleep, already irritated that it most likely was.

Too much furniture dominated the tight rabbit warren of a living room; a big-screen tv hulked in the corner. Memaw dozed in one of the two recliners, her gray head propped against the cushion, her arthritis-swollen fingers still clawed around the remote. In the tv's blue glow, a clear sheet of saliva gleamed on her chin; love and revulsion twined in Charity's grimace as she kissed the mess of her grandmother's tight pin curls without waking her.

Mama sat at the kitchen table, working a crossword puzzle and ignoring her only daughter slinking toward her. Charity stood behind a scuffed wooden chair like a scolded child.

"Sorry I'm so late, Mama. Grady needed somebody to close."

"Don't matter," Mama said, waving her pen negligently, riveted to her puzzle. "I was up anyways. There's soup beans still on the stove if you're hungry."

Charity tucked a string of brown hair behind her ear. "I can't eat nothing. I'm full up from smelling hamburgers all night long." She tiptoed around the next question. "Didn't you keep Marjorie up like I wanted you to?"

"I wasn't goin' to keep that precious baby up past midnight. She needs her sleep."

Refraining from smarting off to her only babysitter, Charity sidled down the hall past an open



doorway. Daddy's snores overflowed the queen bed to leak through the house. The door to Charity's old bedroom was cracked, and the bunny-shaped nightlight dripped a yellow puddle on the carpet. A twin bed rested vacant against the wall—its newest tenant preferred the comfort of the living room recliner. Charity leaned over the edge of her old crib, a Jenny Lind with tooth-scarred spindles and no safety regulations, to timidly stroke her daughter, balled into a tight fist of footie pajamas and bed-head. She traced circles on her daughter's back like a ritual blessing, enjoying the small consistent pulse of life under her palm.

"Thanks for watchin' her," she said over her shoulder, avoiding the judgmental stare dragging against her shoulders like a heavy coat.

"Just let her stay the night," Mama commanded. "No sense getting that baby up when she's

sleepin'. 'Specially if she's just gonna end up back here again come mornin'."

Charity didn't look at her mother. "Alright. Besides, I wouldn't wanna get this hamburger smell on her." She stroked Marjorie's curls, a lighter, newer shade than her own, before following Mama back to the kitchen. "Why didn't Lee come get her? He was s'posed to get off at seven."

"I don't know. I heard him pull in 'round 7:30, but he didn't come by. I saved 'im some beans, too." Mama found an old Cool-Whip container and ladled soup beans from the pot on the stove. "Take this with you. Lee can have it for his lunch." To Mama, just by working his shift Lee had done enough for his family. She didn't offer Charity the same generosity.

"I 'preciate it."

"You got school tomorrow?"

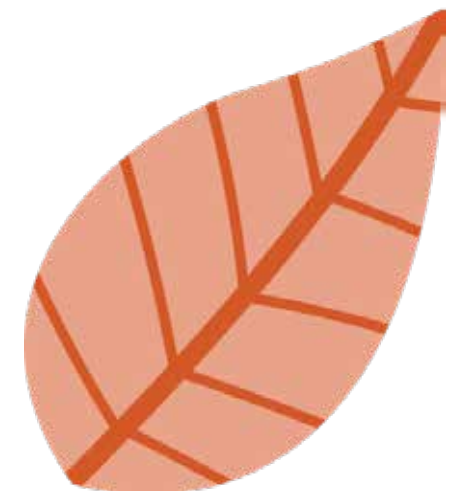
"Yeah. I'll come by before I go, so I can see Marjorie."

Mama already turned her back, hands in cooling dish water rinsing out the stock pot. Now that Charity had come, she'd finally go to bed, join her snores with Daddy's. Memaw would stay in the recliner—like Marjorie, it was kinder to let her sleep where she was.

Charity crept out the back door like she was meeting up with a secret boyfriend, which had in

fact been the case two years ago. She crossed the backyard, bypassing the empty clothesline and the plastic wading pool scummed slimy with mildew. Roscoe, the ancient coonhound, snuffled at her familiar scent, but she didn't stop to pet him. She headed toward the trailer parked at the back of her parents' land. Charity and Lee had dived deep into debt for the new double-wide with two bedrooms, a pantry, and a laundry room; Charity had felt rich when they bought it last year, smugly banking on Lee's future to keep up with the payments. But after only a year, she saw problems with the trailer—doors didn't close quite right; cheap fixtures already tarnishing; thin carpet worn nappy from foot traffic.

Charity slipped into her own unlocked door, no one waiting here at the kitchen table just to ignore her. She deposited the Cool-Whip tub in the fridge and shed her uniform in the laundry room, trading it for a clean shirt of Lee's still in the dryer. In the master bedroom, she slid in behind Lee's hot back, wrapping an arm over his thin shoulders.





Tree Under
Highway Bridge
Beverly Joyce

She burrowed her nose in the back of his hair that smelled like coconut. As she nuzzled against him, he grunted contentedly but didn't wake. Halfway through her prayers, Charity fell asleep. In the morning she'd feel the same guilt for the unfinished prayer that she felt for leaving Marjorie with Mama, but it would pass. God was more forgiving than her mother.

Charity woke to an empty bed. She hauled herself into the living room where she was met with Marjorie's gummy grin, sitting on Lee's lap while he idly flipped through the channels. "I was about to come get you. Wouldn't want you to be late for school." Lee keenly eyed her naked legs beneath his shirt as Charity deftly edged around him into the kitchen.

Charity poured a bowl of Rice Krispies and leaned against the door jamb, safe out of reach.

"What're you doin' up? I figured you'd sleep in."

Lee went back to channel-surfing. "I went to bed early."

"Why didn't you pick her up last night?"

"I was wore out. Plus, I didn't want to deal with your mama."

"Sounds about right," she agreed. "Then why'd you get her this morning? I was goin' to go see her before I left for school."

"I don't go in til 11, so I thought I'd see my girls before my shift. I'll take Margie back before I leave."

As she ate her cereal, Charity felt a warm rush of love for the both of them, watching the tv so intently. She kissed Marjorie's dandelion curls before heading for a shower, laughing as Lee managed a good pinch on one exposed thigh as she passed. She got ready in a hurry, grabbed her backpack and headed back to her family.

"Prom tickets went on sale yesterday." She shoved half-finished homework and textbooks from the table into the bag. Lee didn't respond, laser-focused on the screen. She stiffened. "I can buy two before I leave today."

Lee didn't answer. "Lee? I said I could buy two tickets before I come home."

Still with no eye contact, he polished the nickname he only used when he had bad news. "We ain't got the money, Tee."

Frozen with a book halfway in her bag, Char-



ity tried for reason. “We do so. That’s why I worked those extra shifts this week. The tickets’re fifty dollars each, and I should have enough in my next check to cover ‘em.”

Lee did look at her then, his eyes gleaming. “You got an extra hundred bucks comin’ on your next check? That’s damn fine; the Chevy needs new tires.”

“I didn’t work all those hours to pay for truck tires, Leroy Simerly. You promised you’d take me to the prom. I’ve saved up money for tickets, and I wanna go.”

Lee shifted Marjorie, deliberately drawing Charity’s gaze to another thing in her life that could use a hundred dollars. “Why you wanna go, anyways? It’s just a stupid dance with a bunch of kids. Besides, you already went to mine. Ain’t that enough?”



For Lee’s prom, Charity had worn a hand-me-down dress from her cousin, and she’d done her own hair and make-up. This time around, Charity planned to do it just the way she wanted—it might make up a little for her lost wedding day. But she saw all those plans evaporating in front of her and she couldn’t seem to grab hold to save them. “Don’t you wanna take me?”

Lee rolled his eyes. “I ain’t got no desire to hang around that old gym with a bunch of high school kids.”

“You promised.” The words hung between them, but Lee’s silence was answer enough.

She finished packing up her backpack and dropped a quick kiss on Marjorie’s head, regretfully ignoring the grasping chubby hand. Before she could second-guess herself, she dropped a kiss on Lee’s head, too. “Mama sent you some soup beans for lunch; they’re in the fridge. I’ll see you tonight.” She didn’t say she loved him, because the words stuck in her throat, but she felt them there, a painful lump that wasn’t any less true for being unspoken.

Charity walked back to her parents’ driveway, avoiding the house. She ran into Daddy at her car, kneeling beside the driver-side tire. He jumped up, thrusting his thumbs in his belt loops, not looking at her. He hadn’t looked her in the eye since she’d told him she was pregnant. “Your tire’s getting low,” he said. “Stop by the Exxon and put some air

in ‘er.” She leaned over and gave his stiff shoulders a squeeze. “Thanks, Daddy.” He shrugged and went back into the house as she drove to school.

That evening, Charity painted Marjorie’s toenails mermaid-green, and caught her cowlick in a pink plastic barrette. She wrapped her good and tight in a fluffy blanket and drove back to school without Lee. He worked till seven, but never wanted to come to the games, anyway. She found her friends at the very top of the stadium bleachers before the first kickoff.

“Look at that angel baby!” squealed Sophie, reaching out to take Marjorie onto her lap. Charity sat down beside her best friend, keeping a finger on Marjorie, but the little girl adored the attention. She flirtatiously cooed, while Charity’s friends acted as if she’d done a somersault.

“She’s adorable!” one of the girls from biology said.

“I wish I had me a little darlin’ like her,” said another. It wasn’t true, of course, but it made Charity feel good for a minute. The same girl pointed toward the bottom of the bleachers. “I heard Mrs. Hughes’s expectin’.” They all zeroed in on the English teacher sitting with her husband. She didn’t look much older than her students in her sweatshirt and ponytail. There were some dirty comments about the teacher’s sex life, as the girls judged her



young husband and found him acceptable.

“Wonder if she’ll quit,” Sophie asked.

Charity didn’t see why she would. Mrs. Hughes seemed to love her job; she’d gone to this very same high school, gotten an academic scholarship to the local university, returned with optimistic promises that her students’ dreams were also not out of reach. In class, Mrs. Hughes smiled a lot, but she took their answers seriously, which Charity appreciated. The young teacher’s enthusiasm was infectious, and last year in World Literature, Charity had started to believe her. But then she got knocked up which seemed to prove Mrs. Hughes’ theory all wrong, her stomach ballooning under her shirt, taking up any space for future plans. Charity delivered Marjorie in April, missing the last two weeks of junior year. When she returned, Mrs. Hughes had given her a baby blanket and welcomed her to American Lit.

The girls’ attention shifted to the game for a while, critiquing the players in their tight white uniforms. Prom was on everyone’s mind, and they

gossiped over who, if anyone, would invite them. Charity's mind filled with empty longing; she added nothing to the talk and absently petted Marjorie's growing fretfulness. The baby's discomfort turned into anger as her mother ignored her.

"What's wrong with her?" Sophie asked, false concern only barely covering irritation. Neighbors on the bleachers were starting to throw dirty looks their way.

"Nothin's wrong with her. She's just tired and cold." Charity hugged the squalling body close. "I guess I am, too." She stood up. "I'll see y'all on Monday." The girls politely protested and waved bye-bye fingers at Marjorie, now silent and openmouthed at the abrupt departure, but Charity wasn't fooled. She was spoiling their good time. She wide-stepped down the bleacher and smiled tightly at Mrs. Hughes who waved at her as she passed. By the time she got to the car, Marjorie was asleep.

When the last bell rang on Monday, Charity waited until the other students filed out the classroom, leaving her alone with Mrs. Hughes. The frazzled teacher sat behind a mountain of papers, but she greeted Charity with a smile.

"How are you, Charity?" she asked warmly. "How's Marjorie? She sure was a cutie at the game."

"She's real good, thanks." It meant a lot that Mrs. Hughes not only remembered her daughter's name, but pronounced it correctly instead of slur-



ring it into 'Margie' like everyone else did.

"I'm glad. Can I help you with something?" She gestured to a desk beside hers, but Charity didn't take it.

"Actually, I got two things to tell you." She dropped her backpack into the vacant desk chair. "One, I got some baby clothes of Marjorie's that I wanted to give you. Some real pretty things I thought you might be able to use."

Mrs. Hughes' eyes widened, but then she grinned, her secret revealed. "How'd you know? I haven't told anyone yet." Her hands dropped to her still-flat belly.

"Let's just say I know the signs."

"I guess you would, at that."

Charity was quick to reassure her. "Don't worry. I won't tell nobody. But I gotta say, everyone's talkin' about it."

"I guess I wasn't as sneaky as I thought." Mrs. Hughes paused a moment. "I'd appreciate you not mentioning it to anybody else, though. I plan to finish the school year and then stay home with the baby, but I haven't told the school board yet."

"Do you know if it's a girl or a boy?"

Mrs. Hughes shook her head. "It's still too early. But only a week or two more and we'll know." She glowed at the words. Charity remembered her own excitement at finding out the sex of the baby, and the simultaneous thread of shame woven through the entire pregnancy, undermining any pure enthusiasm with the neon sin of premarital sex and illegitimacy. She envied Mrs. Hughes' righteous excitement, but she fought the ugly emotion.

"Well, a lot of the stuff I brought you is girl stuff, but there's still plenty that's good for either one. Lots of yellow and green."

Mrs. Hughes accepted the generosity graciously, from one mother to another. "That's really thoughtful of you, Charity. I'd love anything you can pass on. But don't you want to keep some of it? In case you can use it again later?"

Charity laughed bitterly, unthinkingly. "I won't be makin' that mistake again any time soon, I can tell you that." Hot, searing shame gushed into her stomach. She felt like she'd betrayed Marjorie, like she'd murdered her. But Mrs. Hughes glided over the words. "Well, one baby is plenty to handle,

I'm sure. I'm already overwhelmed and mine isn't even here yet." The two women traded smiles. "I appreciate you thinking of me."

"There was something else I wanted to tell you," reminded Charity, shuffling her feet like she was standing before Mama, awaiting judgment. "I decided to drop out." Mrs. Hughes' mouth fell open and her hands clasped into sudden fists on the desk-top. Charity worked quick to defuse her shock. "It's not what you think! I'm still goin' to finish school, just not here. I'm going to get my GED."

Charity could see the teacher sorting through all the correct things she needed to say to her student. Don't throw away your future. Give yourself a chance. You're too smart for such a dumb decision. But instead of discharging platitudes and arguments, she chose a different route. "What made you decide this?"

Charity looked out the window, gathering her thoughts. "I ain't a kid, Mrs. Hughes. I got a mortgage. A mortgage, and a husband, a job, and a baby. And this morning in Chemistry I had to ask permission to go to the bathroom."

Mrs. Hughes listened intently. Then she sighed, nodding. "And you think getting your GED is a better option for you?"

Relieved at Mrs. Hughes' neutral tone, Charity answered, "Yeah. You can do most of it online, in your own time. I can get it quicker while I'm home

with Marjorie, and I don't gotta sit in a class while everybody else is dealing with the next ballgame, or the next pep rally...or the prom. That's just...not my life anymore." It had taken her all weekend to come to the decision, but the choice had clicked in her head like a key in a lock. It wasn't Lee's fault she couldn't go to the prom. It wasn't Marjorie's fault she couldn't watch a ballgame. It wasn't McDonald's fault she couldn't finish her math homework. It wasn't anybody's fault.

Mrs. Hughes' eyes were sad and they punctured Charity, but they were also kind, which somehow punctured harder. "You've got to be eighteen to take the GED test."

"I turned eighteen last month. I already got the withdrawal papers from the office today. They even gave me practice tests and stuff to study. I can start next week and might even have my GED before I'd've graduated anyway."

Mrs. Hughes sighed. "Do you think this is a good idea? Most students who say they'll get their GED never actually do. I just want what's best for you, Charity."

"I can't think about it like that. I gotta do what's best for my family, for Marjorie." She was glad Mrs. Hughes looked her in the eye because Charity was proud of her decision. She stood straighter; sometime during the day, the guilt that shrouded her shoulders had slipped off.

"Well, if anyone can do it, I believe you can."

And it was so final and so pure that both women were silent for a moment, no longer teacher and student, but two women comprehending the beautiful pain of sacrifice and love.

"I'll go get them baby clothes out of the car for you."

"Thank you, again."

As Charity sprinted down the hall to grab the gift, she felt buoyant, unshackled from disappointment over childish wishes and dreams. She had a good man to love, a baby to protect, just like Mrs. Hughes did. College might not be in the immediate future for Charity, but that didn't make it impossible. She was smart, she was ambitious; she just had to get through the obstacle of an adolescence sound-tracked by a baby's cry. She just had to overcome the hurdle of inexperience, masquerading as the wholesome odor of hamburgers in an old green Nova. If anyone could do it, Charity could. She would get her GED within a month, quick and focused, dedicated to the things that truly mattered in life. She would.

In that moment, she really believed she would.

Lines

Kevin Griffin

Lines of chalk on the driveway get
you to thinking about those long

lines of cocaine you never did,
or how easily people heed

the blunt and broken lines as they
roar past one another each day,

or the time when the power lines
crashed after the ice storm and you

stayed home from work and drank coffee
and listened to lines of Neil Young

and tried to get inside his mind,
or when in the grocery line

a professor once assured you
lines with the same slope are the best,

or how "Lines Composed a Few Miles
above Tintern Abbey" makes you

feel as if you are in the same
line as so many before you —

white trails of jets in bluest sky.

And now you can't stop picturing
intersecting lines all over
the place, and lines at Disneyland
under an unremitting sun

when you knew nothing of Auschwitz,
and all those perfect lines before

the kill in movies, like "Smile, you
son of a bitch!" So many lines

in the sand and, as far as you're
concerned, the palm's strong fate line means

nothing, but the crow's feet are lines
that even you can't deny when

you look straight into the mirror
and see between the lines of age,

so you hit the gas when you glimpse
yellow lines at the roundabout,

so your index fingers ache for
those lines under keys "F" and "J."

Manhood
Tom Holtslander

bitters – SHUT UP

drowning – SHUT UP

sticky – SHUT UP

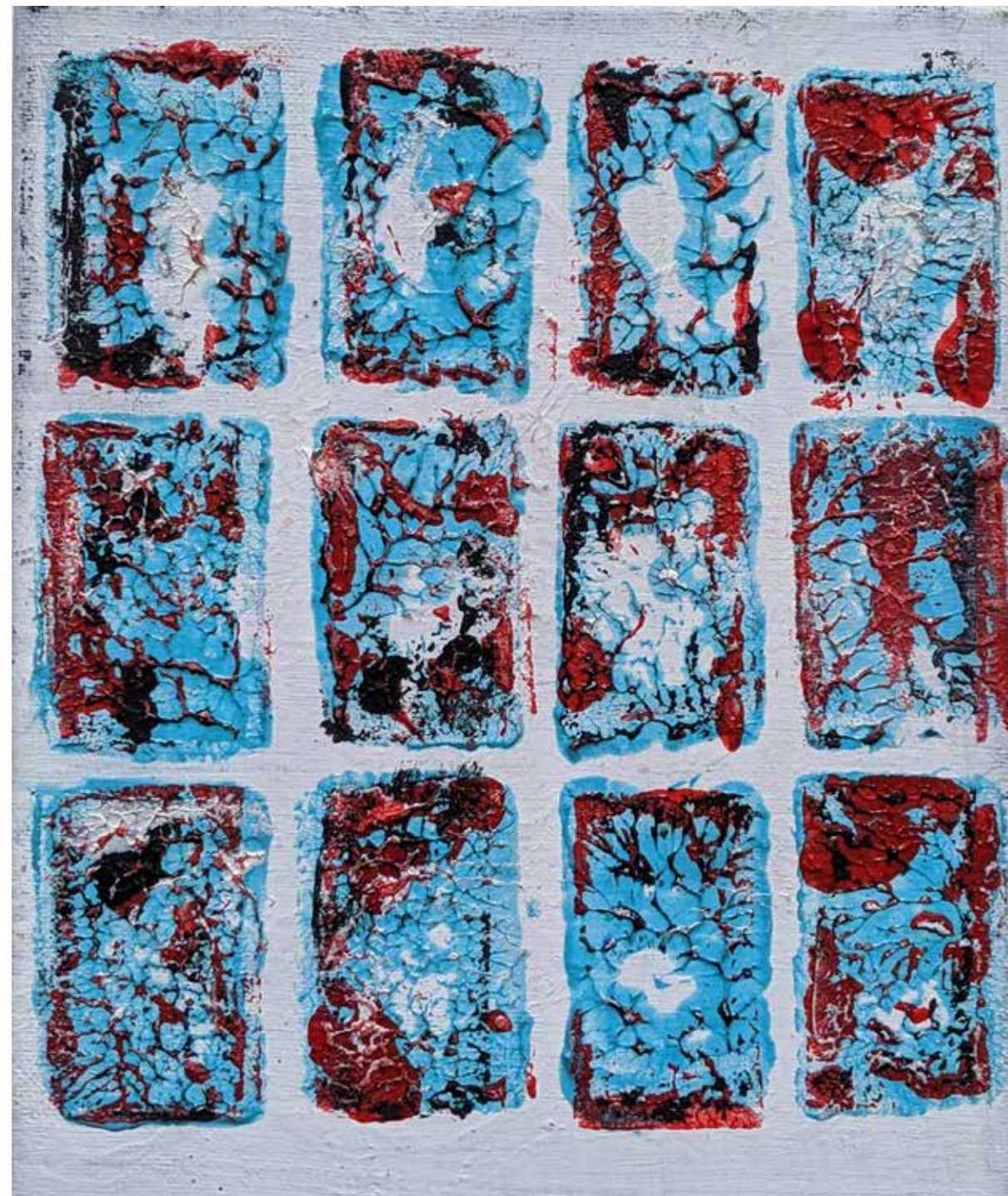
cold – SHUT UP

sober – SHUT UP

delicate – SHUT UP

amalgam – SHUT UP

bootstraps – **MANHOOD**



Unique is Not a Special Word

Lucas Gubala

#422 (pt. 1 & 2)
Roxy Hong



How to Grow Poems

Allan Lake

Focus on any old thing, a sausage, say –
nothing big as the end of the world.
Senses can't do much with worlds ending
so think small. Next, write about it till
your neck hurts. Poets must suffer.
This scribbling may result in a poem
but often doesn't, which can be verified
by reading through a host of poetry mags.
Don't burn sausage but don't undercook,
which is way worse. Scorch one side.
Bit of char never hurt anybody, did it?
I've had blocked arteries so should dis-
pense with flip, amateur dietary advice.
Writing poems, not cooking, is subject here.
Change a word here, delete, shift your ass-
onance. Home now smells of burnt sausage
and there's a worrying puddle of hot fat
in pan but you're committed; you devour
sausage with fried-in-fat slices of potato



and there's nobody can stop you.
Once was somebody but that body turned
vegan and flew away, not like a butterfly
but on a plane to a distant city back before
Pandemic, when flights were cheap.
Could be another poem in that, as well as
more sore neck. Perhaps that's where
the end of the world might queue up
behind last bite of sausage and get
a walk-on part as tired metaphor before
being retired to bottomless pit full of
cold leftovers and distasteful whatever.

Lily the Clown

Jason Wallace

When Lilyana Tuipulotu was a little girl, she dreamed of being a ballerina. She wished she had a neck like a swan and long, svelte legs like the dancers she saw on public television. But Lilyana was built like her father, Tevita Tuipulotu, a rugby player who had thighs the size of watermelons, calves the size of cantaloupes, and biceps the size of coconuts. When Lily danced in the kitchen while her father made Lu Sipi, her uncles would pinch the flesh on her thighs and tease her. “Look at these legs. You’d make a good prop Fakafotu. Or a numbah 8.” Lily would cross her arms and scowl and remind them that she was a ballerina.

By high school, her dreams of becoming a ballerina ended. She was the catcher on the Eureka High softball team, center on the varsity basketball team, and on a few occasions she played prop on the boy’s rugby team. Most of the girls at school assumed she was a lesbian. None of the boys ever asked her to a dance or to go on a date. Most of the boys were afraid of her, certain that she could kick their ass. In her spare time Lily taught herself magic tricks, juggled a collection of colored balls, and drew pictures of ballerinas in her sketch book. She also practiced tripping and falling, striving to make it seem natural and funny. Lily’s new dream was to be a clown. She was fine with letting her classmates believe what they wanted about her. For the most part they cheered her accomplishments in sports, said hello to her in the hallways, but left her pretty much alone. None of them ever imagined that Lily wanted to be a ballerina. And none of them knew that she wanted to be a clown. Her father, who Lily considered her best friend, didn’t even know this.

Tevita often worried about Lily, his only child. Lily’s mother had left them when Lily was ten. Tevita was to blame for her leaving. His guilt tugged heavy at his heart. In between his vibrant expressions of love for God, his family, and Tonga Rugby, Tevita suffered bouts of depression and violence, fueled by drinking. He left Tonga to pursue the American dream. He moved in with an uncle who lived in Eureka, California, a blue-collar city on the cold north coast, far from the glitz of Hollywood and the palm trees and the sandy beaches where bronzed surfers with gimlet eyes surveyed the ocean for the perfect set. Tevita worked on his uncle’s construction crew as a form setter and then as a roofer. “I’m moving up,” he would joke in the bars after work. He loved fighting and earned a reputation as a brawler. On the weekends he played rugby for the local club and was known as the club “enforcer.” He was a warrior and nobody messed with him.

At home, away from the bars and the rugby pitch and faced with mounting bills, an unemployed wife, a daughter who was built like a rugby player but dreamed of being a ballerina, and fewer and fewer construction jobs, Tevita turned ill-tempered and mean. He’d hit his wife for dropping food on the floor or leaving the toilet seat down. He’d grab Lily by the hair, shove her face into a mirror and say, “Look at you! You’re never gonna be a ballerina! So quit spinning around and clean up your fucking room!”

And then one day Tevita returned home from work and found Lily crying on the front steps.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” he asked.

“Mom left. She ain’t coming back.”

Tevita burst into the living room, searched the bathroom, the two bedrooms and the pantry. In the kitchen he found a note written in Tongan. It said that she couldn’t take it anymore, that she was hoping he would quit drinking, that she wished him eventual peace and happiness, that she was sorry she wasn’t a good enough wife, and that he must take care of Lily because she didn’t have

the strength to do so. Lily walked into the kitchen and sat down beside him.

“Do you want me to leave too?” she said.

Tevita took a long hard look at his daughter. In the black pools that stared back he saw uncertainty and sadness. Sadness as deep as the ocean. In that moment he didn't feel like a warrior. He wondered to himself, “How did I let it come to this? What would a man, a real man, do?” And then he pulled his daughter tight against his chest and Tevita Tuipulotu cried and asked God to help him become a man. A real man.

From that day forward Tevita did his best to provide for, care for, and support his daughter. He worked every job he could get framing homes, pouring concrete, clearing lots, and making runs to the dump. He even walked people's dogs and picked up their shit, as long as it paid. He worked while Lily was at school and even worked on the weekends while she studied. When he had free time, Tevita would take Lily to the park to, the Bayshore Mall, or to the ocean. They would take long walks along Clam Beach and talk about everything from Justin Bieber to what life was like back in Tonga. “You shoulda seen me back then Lily. I could hold my breath forever. I'd swim like a fish in the ocean and catch the lobster and tuna with my hands.” At that point in the story he'd tussle her hair or grab at her arms and legs with his hands to prove how nimble and quick they were. Lily would squeal. “And on the rug-a-bee pitch I was unstoppable. Da bruddas couldn't catch this,” he'd say as he would slap his chest, high step away from Lily, and sprint along the edge of the surf, weaving away from and then into the briny foam, evading invisible tacklers.

After Lily's mother left them, Tevita quit playing rugby, quit going to bars, quit drinking altogether, and swore to never raise his hand at another human being in anger. He attended church on Sundays, went to AA meetings, and watched cooking shows. He learned how to make meals using ingredients like kale and jicama. He'd cajole Lily into going on runs with him. “You gotta get healthy daughter. So you can take care of me when I'm old.”



Expectations
K Carlton Johnson

On special occasions he'd make Lu Sipi. Lily would help him by spooning the moist chunks of lamb onto glimmering taro leaves, rolling the leaves into neat packages like tiny Christmas presents. The smell of the cooking lamb and steaming taro would fill the kitchen and her father would sing his favorite Boyz II Men songs. In addition to having been a terror on the rugby pitch, Tevita could sing like an angel. At night, her stomach full of Lu Sipi and root beer, Lily would practice juggling in her room. She imagined herself in her clown shoes, her thick black hair teased into a giant black mane beneath her top hat, a bright red nose affixed to her face, and her face painted in white and red and black. She'd toss a red ball into the air, then an orange ball, then a yellow, green, blue, and violet ball and announce to an imaginary crowd of delighted children, "Behold, all of the colors of the rainbow!" She would keep the balls floating on air, rising and falling into her large but gentle hands. And then she'd add a dazzling gold ball and announce, "And now the Sun in the Heavens!" In her room the imaginary children, the ones who people beat or ignored or forgot, would squeal in delight at the spectacle. Lily practiced each night for them, her room filled with their imaginary clapping and laughter.

"So what are you going to do for college?" her father asked one day towards the end of her senior year in high school.

"Well, I've been thinking really hard about this, I don't think you're going to approve," Lily said.

"Don't tell me you don't wanna go to school. You're still going to community college, right? Just like we planned, so you can go to Humboldt State and become a teacher?"

"Father, I want to go to college, but I want to go to clown college."

Her father stopped washing the lettuce he was preparing for their salad. He looked at Lily long and hard. He blinked twice. He could tell she was serious. He told himself not to make fun of her and to not get mad. He thought about all of the weekend jobs he worked to save up money for her college. He was

going to give her the money as a high school graduation present. But there was no way he was going to give her any money so that she could become "a clown." His hands began to shake. Rage boiled within his belly. Old angers and disappointments bubbled to the surface.

"Seriously Lily, what the fuck? You want to go to college to become a clown? A fucking clown?"

Lily looked down at the floor. She had not heard her father swear since her mother had left. Old fears came flooding back. Her father saw this. He threw the lettuce in the sink.

"I'm going for a run. We'll talk about this when I get back," he said. He walked out of the kitchen. Lily heard the front door slam behind him as he ran into the foggy Eureka night.

Lily waited on the front steps for her father's return. It was dark and he had been gone almost two hours. The fog could make the world seem mysterious. At those times Lily loved the fog. But sometimes she feared it, the dark shapes or dangers that lurked within its mists. She wondered if her father had gone to a bar. She wondered if he was angry at her. If she was just another disappointment in a long string of them. The clown college was located in Blue Lake, only twenty miles from Eureka. She could live at home while she attended school. That would save some money. They were famous for training clowns and jugglers. Their graduates performed all over the world. It was expensive, but she would work hard in her first year to get a scholarship. And she could work at Safeway as a customer service clerk. Or in the deli.

Her father walked out of the fog, breathing hard as he ascended the steps. On his way into the house he gently tapped the top of her head with two of his meaty fingers. They were rough and calloused after years of gripping tools, ripping drywall off of studs, pulling sheets of plywood out of trucks, shov-



eling wet cement. “Alright Lily, time to talk,” he said, his voice gentle, soft. That night, they talked until three in the morning.

As the sun rose behind the thick coastal fog, Lily woke up to the sound of her father starting up his truck. It was a 2016 Chevy Silverado. It had leather seats and automatic everything. Besides Lily, it was his pride and joy. It was also his work truck. She peered out her window and saw its taillights glow red as he made his way to work. He must have been as sleepy as she was, she thought. But he had work to do. Lily thought that if she became a clown, she’d work just as hard as her father. Maybe that would make him proud.

At school that day Lily had a hard time concentrating. She was able to convince her father that she was serious about being a clown. She even juggled four steak knives. In the kitchen her father laughed and begged her to put them back in the drawer before one of them got stabbed. But the cost was too much. The school was for “rich kids whose parents had lots of money to spend on stuff like that.” Her father explained that he couldn’t afford it. He suggested that she work for two years, go to community college, and maybe save up enough money to pay for some of the tuition. By then he might be able to help her out. On the outside, Lily smiled and said she understood. On the inside, Lily was crushed. She would never be a ballerina. She would never be skinny. Boys at school were never going to ask her to a dance. And now it looked like she would never be a clown.

That evening, Lily washed the lettuce for the salad and thought about the conversation she had with her father. He didn’t have the money to support her dreams, but Lily knew that her father tried his best. He came back from his run and listened to her. He even suggested a plan for going to clown college later. But Lily was seventeen. Her dream couldn’t wait; it yearned to be released. It pulsed with each beat of her heart, ready to burst from her chest. She was almost in tears when she heard her father’s truck pull in.

But it wasn’t her father’s truck that pulled into the driveway. It was her

uncle’s beat up 1987 Mazda.

“Why are you driving Uncle Villiami’s truck?” Lily asked.

“Oh, I’m just borrowing it,” her father said. “Villi’s got two.”

“What happened to the Chevy?”

“I sold it.” Her father was smiling. Lily was confused. She knew her father loved the Chevy.

“But I thought you loved that truck.”

“Naw, it was a piece of junk.”

“Dad, you even named it! Did you get wreck Lola?”

“Let’s stop talking about the damn truck,” he said. He pulled out an envelope stuffed with crisp one hundred dollar bills. Eighteen thousand dollars. “Let’s talk about you becoming a clown.”

It was the first day of clown college. Lucy Savage, the co-director of the clown college, told the students to sit on chairs in a half circle. Lucy was the task master, the one who “got things done.”

“The Maestro will be here shortly. Look sharp people. This is your first impression,” she advised. The Maestro was the venerable Wavy Gravy. He was the heart and soul of the college, the one whom all of the students liked, whom all of the students thought was “cool.”

Lily sat on a creaking chair, one of thirteen new freshmen who sat in the half circle. Wavy Gravy entered the room. An awed hush fell upon it.

Come, come everyone, sit on the floor. Take off your shoes. Get comfy,” he said. Lucy rolled her eyes. Gravy asked each of them to say their names and to explain why they wanted to be a clown—why they really wanted to be a clown.

The first student stripped naked in front of the others and told them that her name was Mitzy and that she wanted to tour the world and perform as Mitzy the Naked Clown. A thin smile appeared on Wavy Gravy's face. Lucy muttered "Jesus." The next student said that his name was Bob, that he was bisexual, that he was very flexible, and that he wanted to go to New York and be known as Bi Bob, the most bendable clown in the world. And then there was Tanner who wanted to swallow swords for the Cirque du Soleil because he thought it was so cool to do; Maria who wanted to be known as the saddest clown in town; Delaney who had a marvelous voice and who wanted to move to Paris and be a singing clown. The others said similar things. Lily was last. She rummaged through her backpack, dropping some of her colored juggling balls. The other students were clearly destined for great things. Their horizons spread far and wide and lit on much grander shores than Lily's. Mitzy thought that the big Latina looking girl with the frizzy hair was too mean looking and large to be a clown. Lily gathered the balls and held them against her belly. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Then she began to juggle.

"My name is Liliyana Tuipolotu," she said. "I am the daughter of Tevita Tuipolotu from the island of Tonga." The red, orange, green, blue, and violet balls flew through the air. Lily told her audience to behold the colors of the rainbow. Wavy Gravy straightened up in his seat. Lily was good. That was obvious. Next, Lily tossed the dazzling gold ball into the kaleidoscope of colors that danced beyond her fingers. "And now for the Sun in the heavens!" she announced. All were transfixed. Tears began to run down Lily's cheeks. The colored balls flew higher and higher, her arms a windmill of motion, each ball a planet hurtling through space in the orbit of a dazzling, golden sun.

"I want to bring joy to the children," Lily said. Lucy sarcastically muttered "Aren't we dramatic?" to herself. Gravy looked at her and said, "Ah Loose, isn't that the point?" He shouted, "Go on Lily, Go on!" She was no longer speaking to the class. It was as if she was addressing God. It was as if Lily had become the sun. "To all of the beaten ones, to the forgotten ones, to the ones

who are ignored." The balls flew impossibly higher as she juggled. Her classmates erupted in applause. Bi Bob embraced Delaney who began to sing "Send in the Clowns." Tanner immediately decided then and there that sword swallowing was lame, that juggling was where it was at. Mitzy the Naked Clown began sobbing while Maria, who wanted to be known as the world's saddest clown, couldn't stop smiling. Wavy Gravy leapt out of his chair, laughed delightedly and clapped his hands. Lucy stopped scowling.

"Alright, alright," Gravy said to the freshman class of the clown college. "Now, it is time for us to begin."



Field Notes from Within

Mallory Hobson

There's a forest here, in the space between your shoulders and your collarbones. The cedars hang heavy with a soft dark fur of moss and shaggy needles; the air is thick with motes of dust, mildew, pollen from fiddlehead ferns. The tendrils brush your wrists as you pass, curled green fingertips trailing gold over your own bare skin.

There's a dip here, a shallow valley in the well of your hips, and within it lies a pool: a deepening that grows with the rains, swelling with frog-song and fish as foxes and rabbits alike lap from it. The ferns dip and weave into lacy lakeweed. Your own face ripples out from the almost-smooth surface. As in dreams, it is never quite right, never quite accurate: lilted and pulled, dancing with sun and shadow, dappling and shifting in the water.

You wonder if it matters, to see yourself in pools and in dreams, or if it's better to look beyond: the frogs and the small grey fish that dart behind rocks and waterlogged branches. A wavering ring of tiny mushrooms, mournfully dancing for the long-gone trees at the edge of the water. Juncos staring with wide black eyes from the rowan trees. The sun, running her hands over the glowing leaves so far

overhead, casting blue-black shadows within the evergreens, skimming her fingers over your own cool cheeks until they, too, begin to glow.

If you could follow this moment, you'd never see your face again. You'd cling to the sun's warm hands like a child to a mother and only let go when the nighttime came: then you could run, shrieking with the screech owls, leaping over ferns and fallen logs, dancing until the dawn arrived and the owls flew back to the safe darkness of your ribcage, and the sun held your hand once again.

But this moment isn't yours to follow. The sun's hands fall from your face, bright but distant. Your moment lies outside of this forest of cedar and owls. It sits on your bones, not in them: black loafers and white resumés, coffee cups and weekly planners. Enough Estee Lauder Softening Lotion so that everyone can see your face exactly the way you want them to, exactly as it's displayed within the flat, clear mirrors.

There's a forest here, in the pit of your stomach, in the beating of your heart. But you button it under your blouse for now with cool, empty hands.



The Perils of Progress

Krysten Stewart

Baby Ramguana

Dillon Gohl

Alchemy

Kris Whorton

In summer I collected odd leaves
furry-bellied from plants whose names
I didn't know, the dry brown seeds
of a plant I called tobacco but still
don't know by name,
and roship pods which lay
in my palm like rare, rough cut jewels.
With a pinch of fine dirt
and water from my canteen,
I crushed them on the flat part
of a lichen covered rock,
and made a brew I used more
than once to conjure storms.
I called cirrus from the east
with solemn incantations

and watched as they raced
across the vast, treeless plains.
With another potion, I pulled cumulus
from secret green valleys to the west.
Elk grazed and disappeared
as my storm built and tumbled
over a sea of white peaks.
And once, my skin smeared
with the dust of my efforts
and the pungent paste
from my own hand, I was caught
by my conjuring. The small, gray feathers
and smooth stones brought a torrent
I couldn't see my way through.



The Shaman Rattles the Goat Hooves

Marianne Forman

The Shaman Rattles the Goat Hooves

and invites me to journey inside the birch tree.
She tells me to find my way down
to the bowels of the earth
where tree roots talk to one another,
an intricate network of conversation
cloaked in stem and root, in branch and bark.

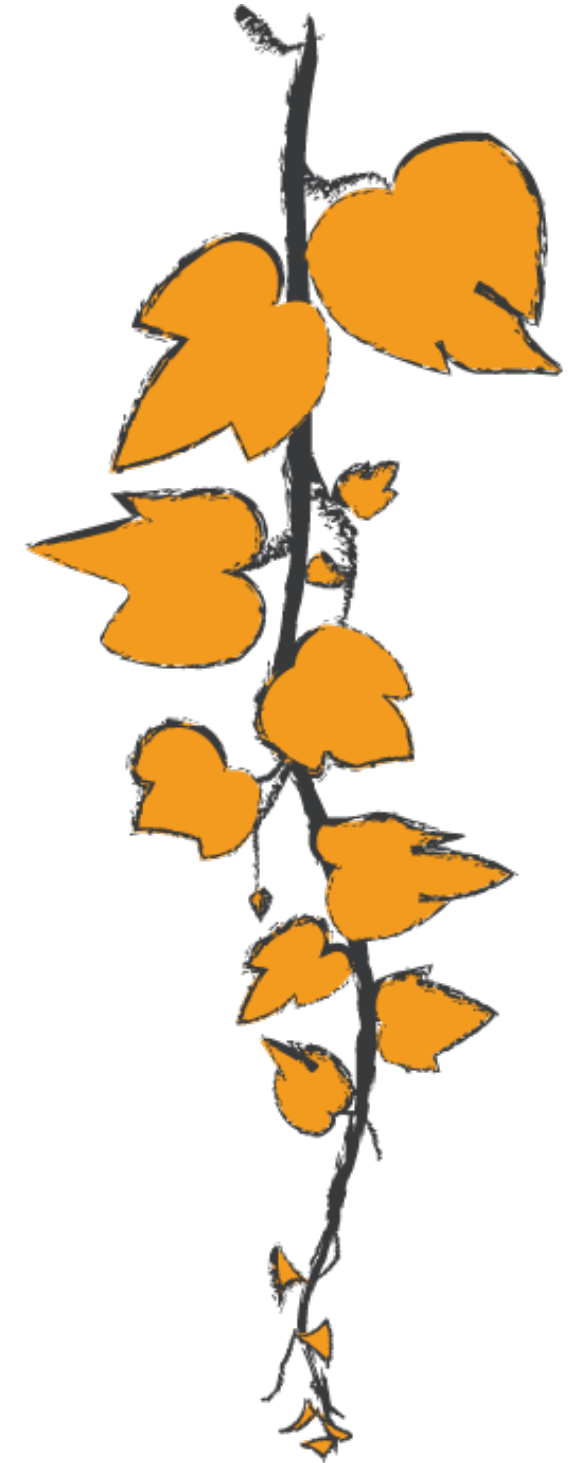
And I hold my breathing tight in my chest
as I descend down the inside of the trunk,
bumping my shoulders against the interior rings,
rings concentric around my waist.
Here, I am corseted
by her interior, giving me safe passage
to the earth below this floor of forest.
A carpet of pine needles, sharp edges softened.
I land in this pine blanket.
Afghan Mother Earth.

I am greeted by faceless shadows,
circular dancers, all holding hands,
then linked elbows, then shoulders close, touching.

Spinning one against the other. Chest pressed to chest.
Shoulder blades pressed to shoulder blades.
A whirling dervish of shadows and singing.

With a drone hum as deep as the earth,
I am invited to join their circle
where I twirl and spin on the very edges of my toes.
We are insteps arched,
we are backs arched,
we are throats open to the scent of pine.
I am a gyroscope of motion, my arms interwoven
with these song-infused shadows,
whole bodies as musical notes moving
across a page of manuscript.

The rattle of goat hooves
calls me to the surface.
My body zigzags up the trunk,
returning me to suspended branches
where I chant praise songs, where I weave
blue lights into the cloudy night,
where I sing effortlessly
long, long into the night.





Mushroom Drop

Faun Scurlock

Henry Fullacre

Dr. Alex Van Huynh

Our unbreathing youth swallowing summer
– Hail the primeval crown!

O'er barefoot-earth, toes with daisies
and lace Walking around waters

Like champagne on the sun-cracked fields
until Day kisses half-hued lips

Near down, oblique light across the sweet gums –

By their star-energy,

A higher child advances into time.

The memory of our Henry

Fullacre appears his fullest –

Young boys in the berry bushes

Eating their fruits, dying someday –

But how they loved one another

And left it there by a noontime

Pond's windless water, spirits' fare.

Beyond, the interface of autumn –

fire Briefly, the cabbage whites

collide,

And the same undivided sensation

As rain-jeweled impatiens reflects

Bridal waters in the new cold morning

– Old Europe has come in color,

Cathedrals of asters – the afternoon

Sunsets on the fourth horizon,

House of wind in the darkening tree lines.





In Cemento Veritas:
Vespa
Mario Loprete

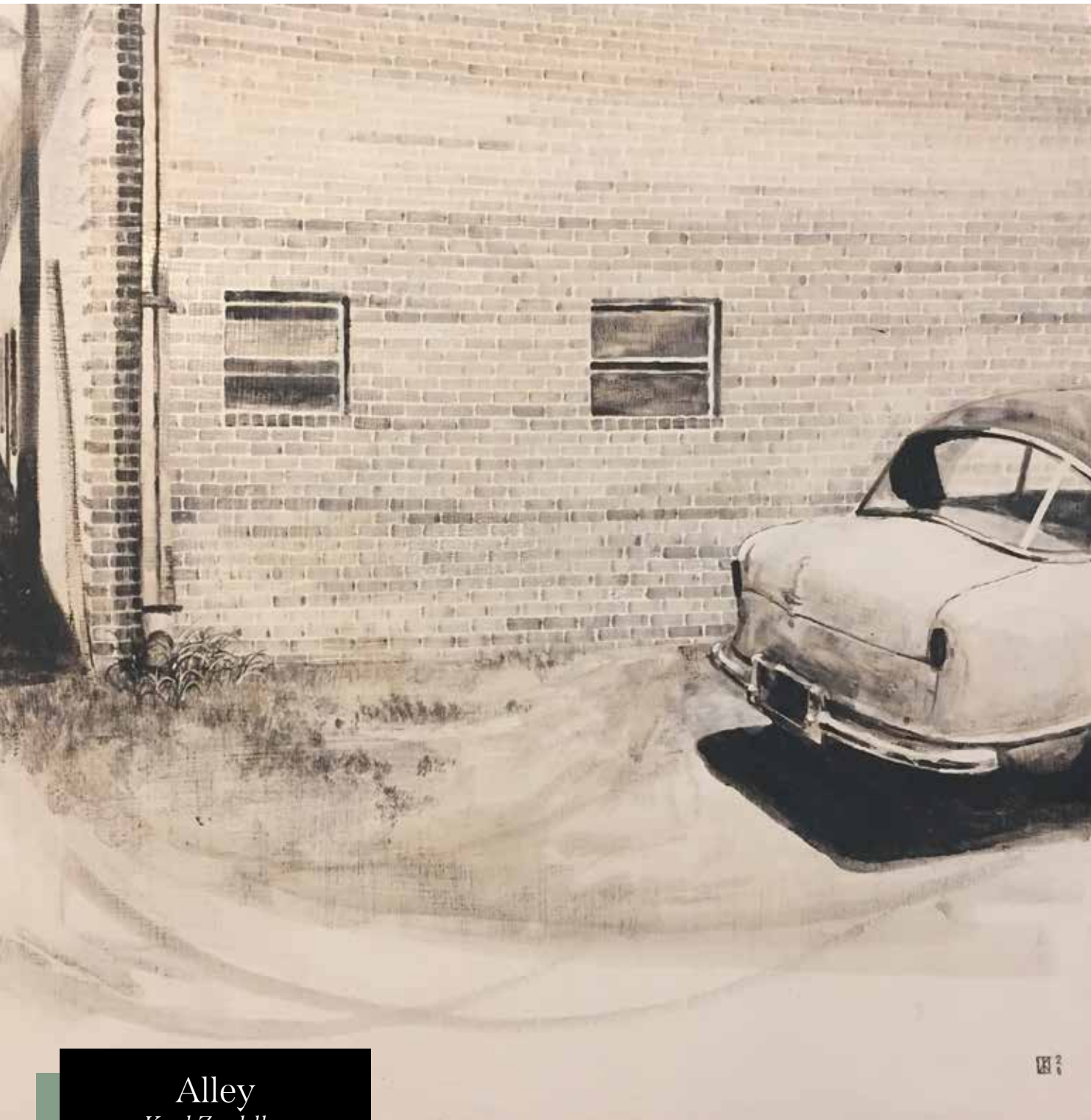
Exit 16 to Future E

Mallory Hobson

I can no longer read the highway signs,
Not through the evening's growing, driving rain --
Just my white knuckles, following the lane;
The headlights of another passing by;
The raindrops as they hit and fractalize.
My high-beams lost within the downpour's haze,
I lean forward, try to recall the ways,
The directions they told me I should drive.

The road behind me falls into the dark.
I'm going where I've never gone before --
And, really, I have never been scared more --
Just me, alone, inside my little car.
But soon enough I know I'll find my way.
My headlights are still strong despite the rain.





Alley
Karl Zuehlke

A Fruit Fly Drowned in a Shot of Vodka

By Kory Vance

I

A fruit fly drowned in a shot of vodka
So it was for the Americans and the Aliens
As a response, we the rag-tag drunks stacked our bar stools to Heav-
en-took up mountaineering
Climbed-climbed-climbed to the tippy top-cried out for meaning
Cried for texts back from Fox News or CNN-for an innkeeper and a
room in their inn-for the
president to say if aliens exist-ask the bug
Was it the vodka or America?

II

A fruit fly drowned in a shot of vodka-vodka does not gamble
Vodka learned the word "Heaven" and then forgot it
Vodka is a mean mugged maniac with a water gun-a lip ringed lover
with a hitcher's thumb-
vodka is the pothole streets in the city slums where the lock ness mon-
ster creeps in the
rain
And the lights out alley where Beelzebub hides away
Vodka is the pride of Babylon



As an economy we left that fucker out on the table-the one with the
vinyl top in grandma's
kitchen covered in wet wipes and crumbs of an American pie
It is the fruit flies-mostly-who want a genocide
What a feast for the fruit fly teeth!
All yur beautiful babies-all yur bankers-all yur Bernies and the bour-
geoisie
It is the fruit flies-mostly-who still believe
In Jesus and justice

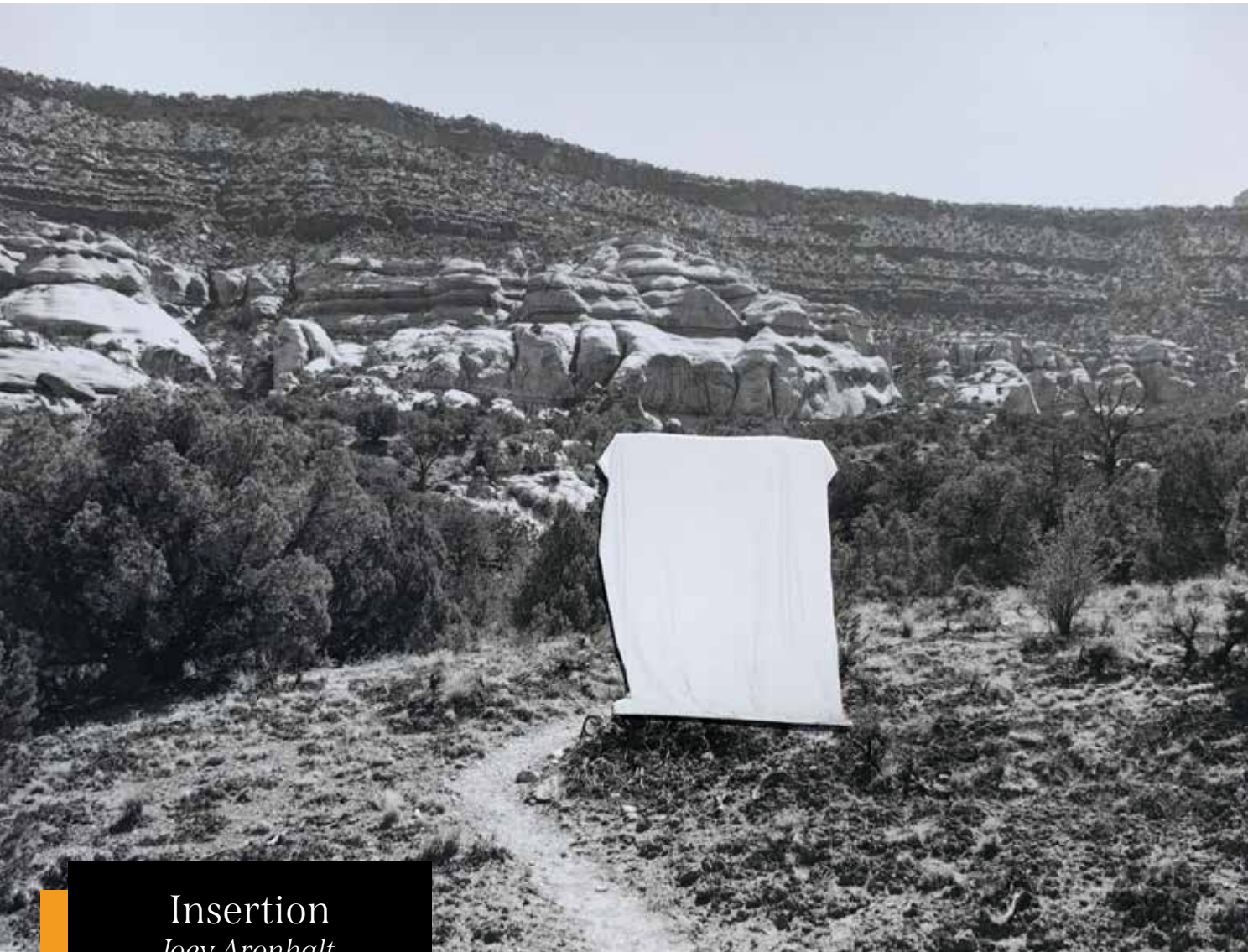
III

A fruit fly drowned in a shot of vodka
Drink to her health!
Drink to white cake and wedding bells
To packed churches and empty factories-to fields of hospitals and
fields of wheat
Drink to the mayonnaise on a ham sandwich-to the Ozark farm gurl
eysk'n fur a sammich
Drink to Iowa hog houses losing existential battles
to antibiotics
Drink to podcast heretics and ugly Samaritan-giving out apples
Drink to smart phones and the news on T.V.-to green politicians-blue
police
Black and brown and white moms-to food stamp families praising god
in the streets
Drink to the mandates of crowded cities
Drink to the cracked marble purgatory for wilting kings

Inch by Inch

Michael Thompson



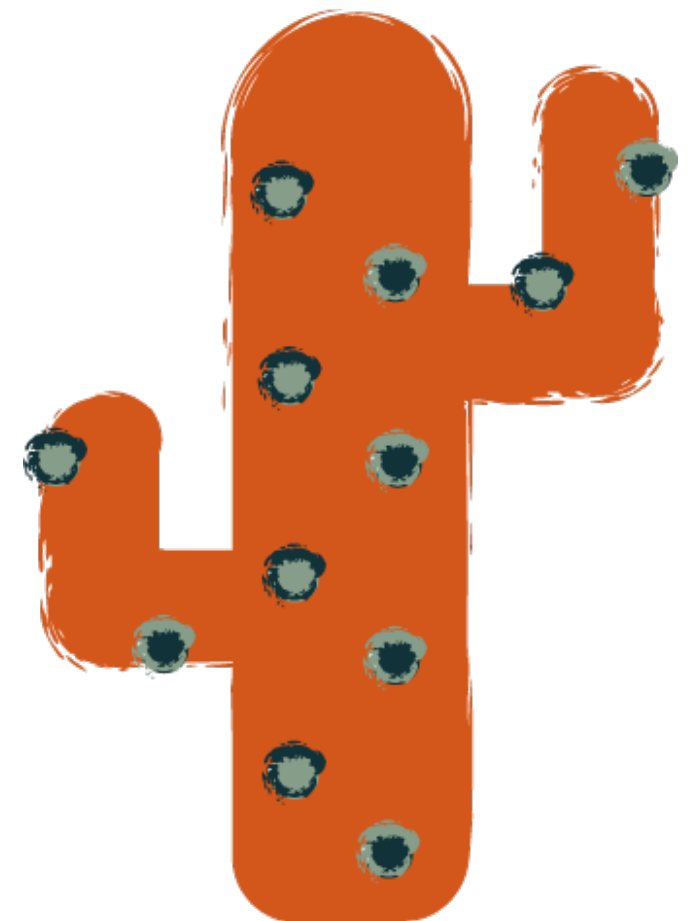


Insertion
Joey Aronhalt

Ofrenda

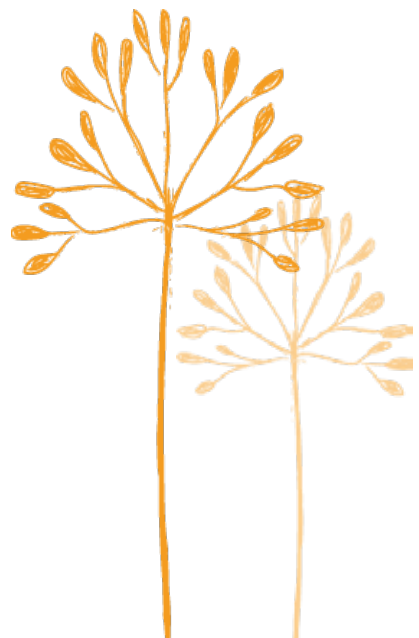
Nicole McCaffety

My mother taught me about borders—
How they are not the same as boundaries—
That the river may drown you—
That the desert may scorch you—
That there is no clean water,
So we drink milk of the cactus —
Pluck the spines, spoon the flesh.
There is still something for you there, mija.
I open a border every November,
Flowers kissing the alter & fruit open,
The smell of it like mercy between us—
The living & dead still touch
Through glass between photos,
I whisper each name & they whisper back.
There is still something for you here, mama.
Our names are crushed into the velvet.





Dungeon Series
Kavin Wicker



Calamity

MelekweAnthony

RUM RUM the grounds shake
Not a quake, not a dream. The riders are coming.
Listen. Listen to the drumming of stables racing
through cuttings of drizzle and storm. Closer
and faster, they come for Father. The devil who
accused kings of deeds unsaid. The careless Holmes that
bore me and pointed the ravens this way. A feast of
bones and ash they will meet. No flesh escapes Alexander.
So run I run testing fate. Run I run leaving the devil to his scribble.
Run I run till the sun finds me wet, soiled and fugitive.
The smoke of home is speck in the dew.
Home is no more.

Hymnal for the Dead

Andrevn Elias

hymnal for this weekend
is a black tie affair. a motorcycle
tire & the bleakness of a tarred street,
a wild wild body of open mouths
& sharpened spleen. a boy in the
body of his lover, the memory of a lost kiss,
& the fire licking his bones free.

BOMBING CASE UPDATE

November 1996

FBI had no right and no authorization to investigate us. This is the exact kind of abuse of activists rights that the FBI was found guilty of and ordered to cease in the COINTELPRO hearings in 1975. And this is why they tried to cover up their prior knowledge of Darryl and me before the bombing.

Nicholas Karavatos
San Francisco, CA
18 November 1996

another of our accomplishments this past year was to win a court order forcing the FBI to turn over their long-withheld San Francisco field office file on the Arizona Earth First! bombing operation. This operation, which lasted from 1988-1990, was a classic COINTELPRO-style campaign in which the FBI infiltrated the Arizona Earth First! group with agent provocateurs. These provocateurs, including undercover Agent Michael Fain and paid FBI informant Ron Trazer, won the trust of a small group of activists over a period of two years then convinced them to cut down a power line. The FBI agents bought the tools, taught the activists how to use them, chose the site, drove the activists there, and of course busted them in the act.

The FBI claimed that the Arizona FBI case had nothing to do with us. We claim that the case is key to ours, because it shows that at the time of the bombing, Earth First! was an active target of an FBI COINTELPRO operation. **no more floof** words of J. Edgar Hoover) to misdirect, disguise and neutralize us. Even more important, the FBI, **finishing nails under her seats** as **of roofing sinkers from the trunk** of the FBI's **not her bag** any other explosive, **under the driver's seat**, or **taped to the bomb**. But, as shown in the file, the two provocateur cars **finishing nails** telling the EFlers they cc **finishing nails** and trying to convince them. Eventually, the activists to convince them with an acetylene torch to note that Operation **motion trigger** consist of the FBI infiltrating EFl to break up a thermite conspiracy. It consisted of the FBI using provocateurs to infiltrate EFl and try to create a thermite conspiracy for them to bust. It is in the context of this ongoing COINTELPRO operation against EFl--this attempt to discredit us by linking us with explosives--that the FBI terrorist squad moved in after I was bombed in Oakland and declared Darryl and me to be the bombers.

(Note: This update assumes that you already know the basics of the bombing case and FBI lawsuit, and the basics of the FBI's COINTELPRO program. If you don't, please write or call us for a copy of the brochure, "Who Bombed Judi Bari?")

The November 22 court hearing (see accompanying letter) is not the only thing going on in the FBI lawsuit. Quite a bit has happened since we last sent you an update a year ago. We are still battling the FBI for release of files and information, but the information that we have succeeded in prying loose has been very interesting, revealing new layers of FBI wrongdoing.

Throughout their sworn testimony in this case, the FBI agents have repeatedly said that they never heard of Darryl or me before the bombing, and they were not investigating Earth First! in 1991. The FBI even made this claim in writing to Congress in a reply to a set of questions from Congressman Frank Riggs.

Yet the Oakland Police have said in their sworn testimony that the FBI appeared at the bombing scene and told the OPD that Darryl and I were known terrorists, that we were Earth Firsters, and that we were the type of individuals who would be involved in transporting bombs.

One small victory that we have won in the past year was to force the FBI to reveal the file passages (which they originally blacked out) that show who is lying. And surprise! It's the FBI. Their own field report, written minutes after the bomb exploded, states that Darryl and I were already known to the FBI and were the subjects of an FBI investigation in the terrorist department. This charge, along with references to Earth First!, is also repeated in two other reports written just after the bombing, and originally withheld from us.

This information is important for several reasons. First, it shows that the FBI lied under oath in this lawsuit, and that they lied in writing to Congress in 1991. It also give credence to our claim that the true motive for the bombing arrest was to discredit Earth First!

But even more important, it shows the FBI engaging in illegal spying, targeting political activists in phony "terrorism" probes. Because of course we are not terrorists, and we were not involved in any illegal activities that could justify the FBI's interest in us. Instead, we were highly public organizers of mass nonviolent demonstrations, and the

Purple Bike

Kathy Price

I, girl warrior riding my bike in twilight my
bike, i girl warrior, accelerate purple bike with white straw basket

and i girl warrior, touch the purple plastic
flowers on the basket my bike. our father

rose up each morn at 6am, his cigarettes hissing in the bath
room sink, stars out, the house hung with smoke, and dawn slipped in.

his wiry body swung on the golden gate bridge, he was a sky
walker, wld he die falling off the golden gate bridge

that was not golden, but purple. purple paint spattered his cheeks
it was his limbs brought money that paid for four bikes

but i girl warrior remembers only feeling
wind in my face





Echeveria
Sarah West

Cosmos

Abby Wheeler

after Jericho Brown

Purple dusk.	seams stitched	a purple	busted body
Purple dark.	plumb across	wound, kiss	keeps beating.
Misty purple	my middle.	my midnight	Tender love.
spring. Earthworm	You patch	eyes. This	Purple blood.



Maribel the
Nature Witch
Madiera Vath

Catalog of the Unremarkable

Jackie Chicales

morning still dimmed. & damp
swell of sky the color of soft ash.

Deluge of light from kitchen's
fluorescence, its sharp & sterile haunt.

Chrysanthemums trimmed
& dilated in a sympathetic vase.

Cat dozing on the window sill,
her larynx the rattling pour of rainwater.

Smell of wet earth broken open.
Hole large enough to swallow

an entire heart. Forgotten
brew of spiced apple tea

steeped to a bitter,
untouchable dark.



Ginkgo Leaves

Emily Rose Miller

After Ruellia Noctiflora by Marilyn Nelson

The yellow future beckoned
To me between the umbrella-shaped
Leaves of the ginkgo tree.
All around swarmed an orange
Atmosphere; anxiety's manifestation
On that December day. Southern
Savannah winter swept me up in its arms,
Whispered that I would be alright
If I clung to the umbrella-shaped
Leaves of the ginkgo tree.

I stood beneath its many limbs
That reached haphazardly to nowhere,
Afraid that I may be doing the same
In my own life. Meanwhile, the umbrella-shaped
Leaves of the ginkgo tree
Shivered in the December breeze,
And I pulled my sweater tighter to my body.

Bloody orange closed in on
My prone form; a burgeoning

Young woman without a clue.
It was only once an umbrella-shaped
Leaf from the ginkgo tree
Smacked me square in my face
That the fiery sky dissipated
And was replaced with my yellow future



MacMillan Sunset
Faun Scurlock

We Are the American Sunrise

Debra Elisa

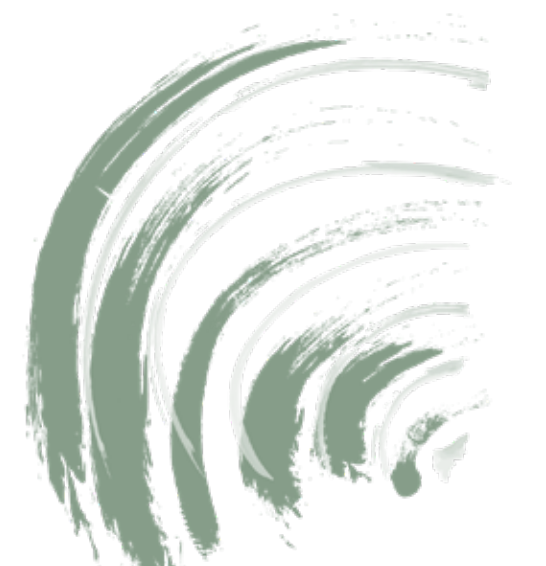
after Joy Harjo

We grew up with hand on heart, told to stand
straight—horses as neighbors, some houses shack,
others with marble. We grew up in time
when women began to swim from harbors
into ocean. We talked of freedom
for all—200 years of Us! Some burned
if we stood too long naked and waiting—
a wave to carry us to Mars. We looked
at our skin and kept out of the sun or
we looked at our skin and wanted more. We
said skin mattered or we said it didn't.
We understood so little: evaporation,
virus, the way bacteria grow and
spread though we said we knew more than ever.
We called ourselves modern, contemps, poets,
magicians. We thought words mattered. We believed
in a vote. We told stories. We lost our
wallets and felt anxious. When the cat hid
in the closet, mystified by her joy,

we stood in wonder—followed her as she
leapt

followed her until we again were lost
and knew we knew so little and could not
see enough in this dark

which gave us hope.



Circle Song

Arabelle May

I have known only desire, only
the intrigue-and-disguisedness of it,
only the drumbeat.
You might call that
 a heart.
you might curve your fingers round your ear, leaning in
just to hear it
 (it would be smart to do that
 because your drums alone
 cannot sense mine—
 I have learned to bury my rhythm
 deep).

Do not remember me as language nor eyes,
as a glint between spaces, nor as mist,
momentary blip,
nor as the ring you catch only on particularly
gusty days, desperate
encircling cyclone, fingertip chimes,
orchestrated fragments of breath.
(With all due respect to the roots
of Empedocles, I have always thought of air as
 feminine.)
Remember me as your own, as a loop in your faith, as a pit.
As a ritual, remember me
as kin.

Ancestor

Arabelle May

They say we are containers of energy, that
stardust floats through our veins. So you picture
something luminous
chipping away at shadow something
unlike your own chaos something
more like the sumac-red healing you must have once
known. Then you wonder
about the histories that hurtle through your blood,
how they've been twisted how
startled would your great-great-great someone
be, to see herself sewn into the potpourri
existence of you.
Would she see her own being
reflected in your eyes,
would her heart be stabbed with your pain?

Anew

Hannah Burbach



Mating Season

David Radavich

Somehow I feel like
an apple tree
bursting forth in
bloom.

That is strange
in a time of death and
dying, day after day
this flowering image.

Full of vigor.

Enjoying its lushness.

Daring others
to be jealous
or chop it all down.
This singular tree

we live in
without thinking
without memory

roots deep in soil,
clusters opening in air.

Afterwards, what can
one remain but a specimen?

An example of ardent
life that keeps celebrating

even at dusk,
even knowing the end.



Colony
Sarah West

Blind Date

Abigail Hughes

“What did you think?”

“He’s nice.”

“Nice? The bar was ‘nice.’ This walk is ‘nice.’ Denver is perfect. When he told me he was single, I was absolutely floored! You don’t run into a guy like him often. Did you see the way he inhaled that live goat? That was incredible!”

“If you say so.”

“Don’t tell me you’re not interested.”

“Sorry.”

“Are you serious!?”

“Let’s talk about this later.”

“No way, we’re going to talk about it now, in the middle of the sidewalk, like adults! Denver is perfect for you!”

“Denver has twelve eyes and a gaping, toothy, hole in the center of his body.”

“I knew you were going to bring that up.”

“Yeah, it seems like something I should have known going into this.”

“He has such an electric personality, I didn’t think that it was important.”

“Electric!?! Dude, we’re talking about him right now, in front of his face, and he’s not even blinking. Does he ever do anything other than roll his eyes back in his head and spew toxic waste?”

“It’s not his fault that the new plant opened a few blocks from his apartment.”

“I’m not suggesting that it is, I only meant-”

“Radioactive mutants can live totally normal and full lives. Raise families. Hold careers. Read minds. Lift over twenty times their weight. They’re just like you and I.”

“Except they’re rotten.”

“Rotting .”

“What’s the difference!?! Alright, look. Denver, I had a great night. Thank you for your time. Uhh, I’m going to take that groan as some kind of affirmative response and order a ride home.”

“No you’re not! Wait here, Denver, I’m going to have a word with my friend in private.”

“Let go of me! You know I hate being dragged around. Oh, great, you tore my sweatshirt. Why are you looking at me like that?”

“What’s this really about?”

“It can’t be that hard for you to believe that this is “really about” the fact that you thought I would be interested in dating someone so severely mutated.”

“We’re all mutated!”

“Yeah, a little! I have a few tentacles and you have an extra mouth. Our flesh isn’t literally melting off of the bone.”

“Jennifer had a tentacle too, didn’t she? Replaced it with a

robotic arm when she turned eighteen.”

“You helped pay for it with your Burger Planet job if I remember correctly.”

“That has nothing to do with this.”

“Yes it does. We both know that this is about Jennifer.”

“I’m leaving for real now.”

“She chose cybernetics, you didn’t, and she left. Big deal. It happens every day.”

“I’m not listening to you.”

“You were with her for five years. That’s a long time. It’s going to impact you.”

“Man, how hard is it to get a rideshare in this city?”

“You haven’t been the same since you two split up. The only time I have been able to contact you is on the Ether Box, and even then you don’t use your own avatar skin. You use Jen’s. It’s creepy.”

“Awesome, a driver is only three minutes away in a Red Hovercar.”

“You guys had a long, long, history, and that’s going to take forever to build with someone else--but it’s possible. In fact, it’s normal. It’s healthy! Nobody stays with their high school sweetheart, especially when one becomes a heartless android.”

“Do you see a Red Hovercar? Oh, there’s one! Wait, no, that’s just a Fire Bot.”

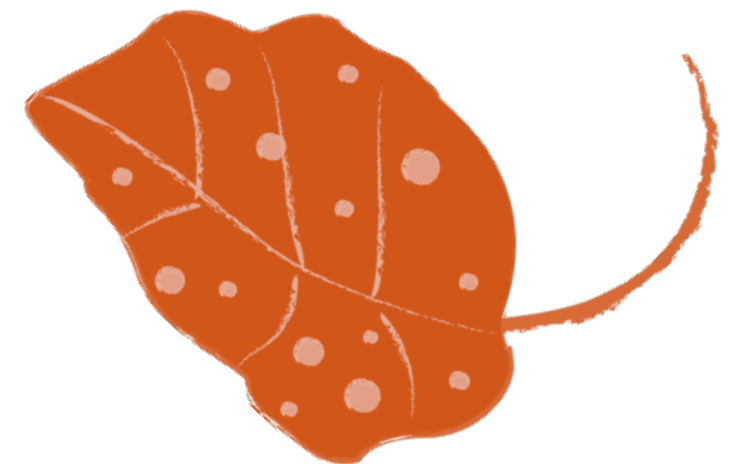
“Look at me! Jennifer is gone and the left side of her brain isn’t coming back. The minute she replaced it with a brain drive, she found you an objectively poor match. That’s just science, dude. No, don’t you

dare start crying! I’m not going to let you ruin a good thing just because you can’t get your head out of your ink sack. If I did, I wouldn’t be a good friend.”

“Ah, here it is. I’m sorry, I’m just not ready. I’ll see you on the Ether- agh! Did you just push me!?”

“Only because I love you. Now stay down. If you make me kick my best friend in the face I’ll never forgive you. Robo-driver, Change the coordinates to Accutane Avenue and step on it!”

“Hold up, no! Come back! Oh, great. They’re gone. . . I guess I’ll walk home. Thanks for helping me up, Denver. You can, uh, let go of my hand now. Wait, what are you pushing out of your open stomach? That’s not - is that a miniature replica of organic rights activist Dr. Hobbs? For me? Wow. It’s gorgeous and, well, kind of sticky. It looks like it was made of ivory. Wait a minute, the goat! You made this out of that goat you ate at the bar. Dang, you must have some killer abdominal muscles to pull this off. How did you know I was interested in organic activism? You were listening during dinner. Obviously, yeah. Ugh, I’ve been a real jerk tonight. Thank you, Denver. I had a great time. Wait, actually, you don’t have to let go of my hand. . . walk me home?”





Splashing Roses
Faun Scurlock

That Summer in 1939

Jeremy Hight

The old woman and her dog. He long recalled seeing her when he was very young. Grass. Hill. Wooden fence seeming ready to peel away above oceanside cliff. She had walked slow and languid in all black. Water. Something in her shoulders and steps. Water. She was holding an umbrella in the mist and fog like it was either bright sun for a parasol or sure flooding rain. Her face had the kind of expression at a distance that read anywhere from contentment to blank.

She spent that summer just out of view it seemed. He won the money in a game at a bar. She was said to just float around and stay in room 4D in the last bungalows on the left. It was 1939 that summer or was it 37. The boats came in lone and billowing steam into that harbor far below. The sky was often chalked with dust. The hours seemed not endless as he expected when he won and was between jobs, not at all. He was 21 and the summer hung, it slouched, it was tight against the skin and sagging at once all around even to the waves and hills.

Pat watches her glide seemingly forever across that grass. Always ending. Always becoming. Sometimes in memory, she is near tears. Sometimes she is near lifting off the ground in ebullient joy. Sometimes she never was. Sometimes she still is. He is 94 now. He sits in his room in his house once lit with the noise and lines of movement of others, all quieted now. He sits in a chair by a window by a yard by a pool by a fence by some kind of sky. He sits and the exact outline of his once wife sits waiting in the indentation on the mattress he

refuses to change for it holds her, at least the curve of her when he sleeps.

That summer in 1939 or was it 37 was a break from a line of dull jobs, of becoming in his now long dead career. Becoming seems so painful when it is all around, it is so warm gauze comfort cut clean in recall when such things have long passed. Pat is a man in a chair. He is a father. He is a grandfather. He retired in small comfort. He is drinking lemonade and eating a sandwich. He is 154 pounds. He is a widower. He is worried about one of his daughters, but he has chosen not to let it and other things be known.

Pat is not: an artist, a writer, a teacher, a provider, a driver on the many free-ways and roads, a voter, a person waiting to become. He is none of these things as he once was all of them. Things are shed in time. He sits in a wooden chair with two pillows. He listens to the far-off sounds of roads as someone else would listen to music. He has bargained with many things in conversations with no other person around. It is not people that he has needed to speak to anyway. Not at all.

That summer the water shimmered below when the fog or dust was not too thick. It seemed most golden threaded just before the day was to begin or end, always just out of reach. Pat was sure that the afternoons would somehow lead to something shimmering too, but this was never to be. A bored older man who seemed to live in the beach resort like another bungalow said “the days are just so much filler.” The man said it laughing but not at any sort of humor. He said he was always there. He said that days always were. He said he came from the ancestry of someone great he made a great gash in the world anew. He said that ancestor was brave and bold and original and kind in their later age. He never said anything about himself at all. Ever.

Pat sits now in his chair and the afternoon is early summer warm. It is early summer blue with uncommitted flat clouds sure to bring no dramatic beauty or

rain. The air is warm but not yet hot. Summer is days and weeks away. It will rage with heat and thunder. It will mark nights with that suffocating warmth when the post storm clouds hold the last day and its once afternoon air close. Pat sips his lemonade and it almost is too bitter. It almost is too sweet. Almost. A breeze rises up along the trees blocks away then brushes past, quieting almost as soon as it began. His ice cubes are melting now. Soon the lemons will lose to water, a sort of rain. If he sits long enough it will be a flood in a glass. He is still jolted by the sheer volume and mass of the quiet in a day.

That woman and her dog. She moved along a periphery. She glided through sun or fog. She walked briskly, surely off to end or begin something of some great reward or importance. Pat would go stare at the waters once she passed and imagine a whole image of her inner life, of her life beyond that grass and door. Pat had been in America since he was 4. They came from Italy to start anew. He could that summer barely remember the boat, the smells, the faces, the arriving. It all was breaking away into past, into so much forgetting.

There were bad smells on that boat that still linger even now. The food going bad below. The sweat of a hundred others crushed close. The rotten sweet smell too. The bad one. The one that his parents tried several times later to explain away in stories. The smells too linger of other boats of past: the roses overly sweet at a few weddings and that funeral, the oranges with breakfast when his family was in the house all rushing to school or work or lingering on a lazy Sunday, the smell of the big fires over the years.

Pat has been told that this will be his last summer. A kind face has assured him; the face has been his doctor for 25 years. This will be time to prepare. Time to get the paperwork in order. Time to get the plot ready and the cakes and food and all the rest. Pat has a lawyer. This all has been readied incompletely for many years. Pat sips his lemonade. The ice cubes have broken water. The trees again enliven in a short and slight to near imperceptible breeze. The humble

mediocre clouds sit near pinned to the sky. The quiet is comfort pierced by a few distant cars on some road.

He won the contest in a bar that at one time had been famous. It at another had been reeking of rot and mold. When he was there that day it was somewhere benignly dully in between all such things. Pat had 6 beers and then entered figured why not. A slip of paper. A jar. Something to do for a moment. The winner was announced when he was on beer something around ten. The money was from days of entries. Days of little slips of paper. The money was just enough. Just enough for a summer. A summer stolen from somewhere else.

The bar was old in 1939. It was old in 1910. It was old in 1900. The wood almost spoke of its years with wear and what some locals called “beer sweats”. The dartboards were new which made them scream their colors red, blue and black against the whispers of wood in all directions and outside the bricks complied in 1887. None of this mattered of course in any particular moment in any day, nor should it. Pat won the money on that third visit and after never was to return. The place was hit by disasters for decades and still stood. He knew none of this. The bartender who served him was once sure to be a great actor. He did not know this either. One of the bricks held a primitive time capsule made by one of the first owners. No one remembered this and when it was demolished for a book shop then gas station then another bar then post office then nothing no one saw anything but bricks and mortar; trash of the past.

The summer he had a bungalow of his own. There were meals served three times daily. He did not have to find a new job for 3 whole months. Everything was taken care of. He could spend his days working. He could spend them sleeping. He could spend them in bed and no one would mind. He for a moment was to be not the child of recent immigrants like he was. He was not to be the promising --- his teachers had pushed to move on or derided for always

crashingly underachieving. Such a cliché both said behind his back. He had the abilities beyond his blab la bla. He had the lines of --- the colors of ---. He had the wander of leaves down a drain. He had . He had. He should. He will likely not---

The sky seemed stifling in those afternoons. It seemed endless. He would wait for each meal. He would wait to see her and her dog and maybe finally talk to her. Pat waited. He waited to be inspired. He waited to become. The days passed as did boats. He wrote letters to his brother. Some letters were long and detailed reports of the little things seen and overheard. Most were just questions about his brother’s business and family health and sickness and polite generalities of the news and weather with some name omitted out of politeness or forgetting.



Lena is Pat's older daughter. She is 56. Her hair is growing out from a haircut to something wild again. She sits in traffic on one of the roads. She is listening to a podcast about death and the supernatural. The host makes fun of legends and myths but has a tendency to lower his voice with the big twist and about the deaths in each tale. An accident is likely somewhere on some twist or turn up ahead. The mountains loom high to the north and the road cuts in little lines and curves cowardly along their base as it has for a hundred years in different forms.

Lena once was almost many things. She once was talked about by teachers in a way similar to her father, not that she will ever know. She was a shy child who loved colors and textures in everything around her. She tested out of two grades into another only to shrink even further into herself. She once was sure to be. She once was surely never. She went to a college that her father once had taught at. His name lingered at times like an odd odor. Other times it was like he never had been there. She almost got the job and internship and scholarship. She never got anything.

Lena has a son who can never hold a job. He can never finish school. He once made an amazing thing out of old boxes and paper. He then ripped it apart. He is 35. She sits now in traffic and the sky is pale and the clouds seem to be burning slowly away. Lena has a random thought.

This moment is just people sitting in traffic on this road. The road was built almost a hundred years ago. This moment is surely repeating, plagiarizing the past. It has to be.

Lena looks at her little disco pattern speaker she got cheap at a store by a gas station as the man drones on about death and some old ghost tale that sounds very familiar even as she half-listens.

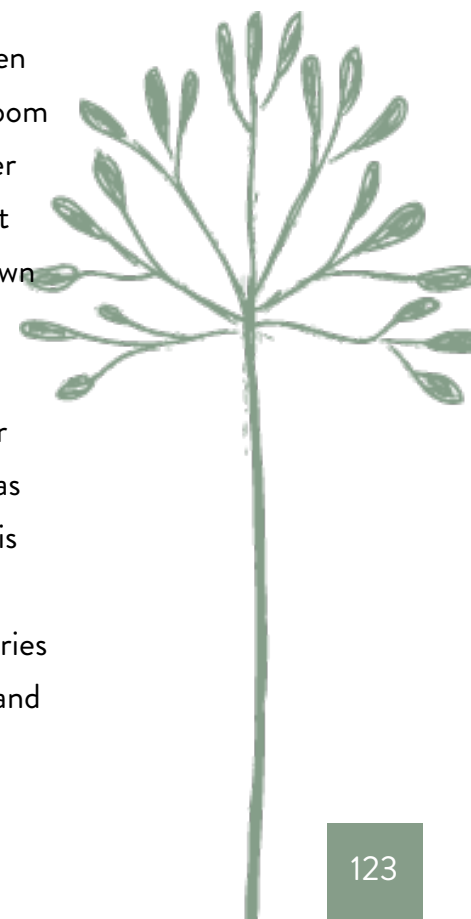
This moment is mediated by the things we carry. This moment is predicated by how we pass the time.

That little speaker years back would have been a book on tape, would have been a cassette tape. This road once had 3 lanes not 4. This road once had two lanes. It once had one. It once was dirt. Nothing is original. I bet even this thought was had by someone here in each of those times but with a tape or a conversation in some car.

Lena almost sees the accident up ahead now. The lights flash. The cars are surely crushed by the collision and speed. She looks up at the sky and is sure it too is the same as a thousand others before it. The clouds are generic. The sky is pale blue. A small fire is burning somewhere in the hills. She is heading to throw more of her father's things away today. She tried selling them, but no one was interested again. He once was-- he almost was--- the one newspaper someone digitized even had that headline that he was going away to study. The one web link holds photos of him. Lena undoes and redoes her seatbelt unsure as to why. something in her insists.

Lena was young when her father stopped it all. She was learning to walk when he that one day decided to just stop. She only saw the things in the spare room and the stuff in the garage. It was not until high school that some kid told her that her dad once was almost famous. Was almost great. She had no idea. It surely was some odd rumor, some obtuse kind of teasing her like a pizza thrown across the lunchroom past her face.

The car accident is coming nearer now. The traffic is lurching ever so slighter faster than the dead stop that a moment ago seemed a sure forever. Lena has found traces of who her father almost was. She mostly has accepted that this stranger left long ago. She turns the podcast up a bit as the man hosting it sarcastically lays into the absurdity of an element used again and again in stories of death and mortality, the moldy cliché of what lives on and what does not and the absurd notion of something living beyond one's years immortal.



This dumb sky. There is nothing to it. I am sitting here on this road like someone else did an hour ago and did decades ago. This is all there is. Waiting. Looking around. Things beginning. Things ending. How depressing. Just things repeating.

Lena stops this dull annoying thought and turns the podcast off. She turns on the playlist of music she loves from her college years. The songs once were selected as favorites, once tied to specific moments, periods and life, faces even. that was then. She long has just loved it is a sort of mulch, a garden soil of things together, nothing specific at all anymore, cut from memories and all that. The accident is nearing view, lights aglow, the ruin not yet visible, but like so many times before, she and the others can feel it near. The same.



Dorado Del Mar Boulevard
Willy Conley

Pat sits in his chair as a bird briefly hovers by his window then flutters forever away. He finds an odd but deep comfort in the ice cracking, in the way the shape once made has begun its transformation, its end. He can hear the sirens turn off on one of the roads down below the hills now. He sees the smoke of a distant fire.

The chair soon enough will pain his legs and side from sitting too long. The sun will soon enough reach that later afternoon angle that goes too much to his eyes. Soon enough he will need his nap. Not yet. Not yet. not yet. His sip of watery lemonade slides cool and slow down his throat. The glass cools his fingers and palm to the delicious touch in the warm afternoon not yet hot of summer, not for hours cool as the sun sets.

Pat that summer in 1938 or was it 36 saw things as a young 21. He saw an idle time he thought sure to be luxurious and endless seem to tighten by the day. He watched ships move in an out far below. He saw dust color the sky chalk or yellow. He saw fog below as though it was of some busy commerce beyond his touch. He watched the old woman and her dog pass on the grass always seeming to be just close enough to grasp in view and his young imagination and wonder, just far enough away to be beyond reach. He one afternoon lay down on the grass that summer as the waves broke far below and felt the world open in all directions.

He lay upon the grass almost seeming wet and cooled by morning dew even in afternoon and looked up at the sky chalky white with haze and could almost see the years laid out before him, that joy and terror of youth of a sense sure that some future awaited, some sure becoming, but not yet, not for sure. That moment felt visceral in young Pasquale (pat for short) as potential and drift were what people surely had saw in him before in school, he heard the murmurs a few times. The sky seemed at once deep cold dead space far beyond revealing itself naked and vulnerable behind the clothing of some afternoon and something

close enough to break if not careful.

Pasquale lay on that grass that afternoon and it was though something had grasped him from that great beyond, that great everything and nothing, future and past, something of a lineage back to him from things both unborn and long dead, a grasping of who he may really prove to be or should at least try. It was like filling to the edges. It felt profound at once and pretentious. It was to never happen again. Not even close he sat for a few young moments feeling very old in a not bad way, the sense lingering, spirit and drink then nothing. He got up and was late for lunch.

The woman and her dog ate 4 tables away. She was not old at all but actually quite young. He had just never seen her in close enough view. He had longed to be of this place, this world, to be savoring fine lunches served by men his age. He had been practicing his proper use of forks and polite, empty conversation. He was a child of poor immigrants. He was supposed to become something. To be. He had his chance to sit beside her. She was actually quite lovely and young. This might be a chance

His nerves shot hot and sharp in him as he approached her. The nerves. The doubts as a wave broke hard somewhere below on the rocks of some shore. The clouds seemed to gather back the morning fog with each step. He might get to know her. Know this other world. He may just be.

Lena sees the accident now. It is being cleared away. The tow trucks have already left the scene. All that waiting for the thing after the thing, the thing before the thing. Like so many other times. The song playing on her speaker from her phone is a giddy guitar nothing chirping away like a thousand times before. She graduated from that school dad once taught at. She had a few promising meetings too. He had carved the doors of the college she found out the day they tore the place down. Her son is waiting at home. He will never get a

job or get married. Her sister hints cruelly that this is a tragedy and somehow his family's fault. Lena secretly is thankful he will never be flogged with things becoming, the unoriginality of so many days sitting in conversations or dead still traffic, in all the someday looming ends. Her son waits at home in the air conditioning with the television on. She will be home soon enough until she is no more.

Pat sits in his chair as the last ice cube audibly cracks and breaks open in the last bits of lemon juice, sugar and water. He grins slightly at the noise. He never spoke to her that day. He in his memory always just might. He in that summer may become things too.



Because: Reasons Why I'm Leaving *or Anatomy of a Relationship in Four Parts*

Lisa D. Gray

I

because over cocoa on our third date you confessed, “I’m a reader” as if that were a bad thing; because you brought me flowers, once a week, huge bouquets that I didn’t have enough vases for and so had put them in water glasses and empty bottles of wine; because you read the paper every day – three of them – The Times, The Wall Street Journal, and USA Today, cover to cover; because your crooked left baby toe is kind of cute; because you remembered my niece’s birthday and found the perfect gift, an old school name plate like the one Carrie wears in Sex and The City and she loved Sex and the City even though there are no black people in it except Blair Underwood who dates a white girl; because when I looked into your eyes, time stood still; because you said you really liked my poems; because I wanted to make babies with you, three of them and you said you wanted that too; because I wanted to bury my nose in the grinding all day smell of you when we lay in bed at night; because I could trust you and wanted to tell you about that time, with that guy, at that party and how I cried for 64 days after, and I’ve never shared that with anyone; because when you said I love you, you licked your lips and tugged your left ear like Carol Burnett at the end of every show.

II

because you wear white shoes and I hate white shoes, not just after Labor Day but all the time; because when you read the paper, your lips move. Nothing else, just the paper as if the small print taxed your brain and required more effort or attention than a book, which you never read; because you didn’t get that you’re not funny, which is actually kind of funny but you don’t get that either; because you squeeze the toothpaste from the middle and no matter how many times I rolled it up from the bottom to push every drop of paste to the top, you squeeze from the middle; because you don’t get WuTang; because even when you put the seat up, there’s still piss on it; because you make a big deal about tipping but never left enough; because you leave shit everywhere – on the couch, the kitchen table, on the bathroom floor like a five year old waiting for someone to clean it up, and I am not your mother; because you fart when we fuck; because you don’t know Zola or Zora or Marquez or even Dr. Seuss really; because you say you’re open to new things but won’t even try Horchata or curried goat or even calamari; because you shovel food in your mouth and hover over your plate as if a man imprisoned and unsure of who to trust or what might happen next; because when I want to lay back and watch clouds become, you want to catch a game on ESPN; because when I met your mom that first time, she called me Janice. That’s not my name.



III

because when something important happens in your life, you call your mother first; because you still bring me flowers, but never the ones I like; because sometimes when you're talking to me, I see your eyes shift to the bump and sway of the heels I hear clicking on the sidewalk behind me; because at Christmas, you gave me a Snuggie, purple like Barney, and when I opened it you said, "I was gonna get you some of those skinny jeans but," then you raised your shoulders as you eyed my now fuller frame; because you never read not one of the poems I wrote for you, and they sit unopened in your sock drawer mocking me every time I put away the laundry; because you always ask me where I'm going, but never tell me where you'll be; because you say you will, and I believe you, but you never do; because you seemed so different but really you're the same guy in a nicer suit; because when you lie, you lick your lips and tug your left ear like Carol Burnett at the end of every show; because I still want children, just not yours; because sometimes when I smell you, I see other women; because of that text message you sent me a few weeks ago that read, "Hey been a few weeks since we tangled," followed by a string of smiley faces which you never sent to me. Never. And her name was Janice; because I still haven't told you about that time, with that guy, at that party and how I cried for 64 days after, and I probably never will; because your crooked left baby toe reminds me that you are broken in ways that will never change; because time doesn't stand still anymore when I look in your eyes;

IV

because sometimes in the dark when I hear you breathe, I think about placing the pillow over your head and waiting.



Three Lips
Willy Conley

How Do You Start Over?

Rebecca Hetherson

begin with bare feet, no, take off your shoes, no
take off hers - the girl who put them on.
scrape, peel, scratch scour her hands face
in the mirror, you see blood and dead skin
a pinwheel in motion, she is blurring,
she is running down in streams, off
your cheeks, into the seams of her clothing,
take them off too.
step naked into the shower, step in the hollow
part of the drain where the hair and the lips
and the girl who wished so badly to be here
is not, she is not, she is being carried, carried away,
a carriage made of drain pipes and soap, rust
and decay. whisper,
a song, a song, a lament, in a hoarse voice
that has been waiting to be used, bubbled underneath
sinew and tissue, has been waiting for the echoes
of an empty ribcage,
of a tiled shower floor.



São Paulo

Laine Derr

For some unknown reason the thought of you taking singing lessons in Bishkek crossed my mind this morning. I hope you are still singing, opening windows and laughing at our absurdities. I am static. A strong sense of blooming is upon me. Every morning I open up to the back deck and look at the colorful array of life. This morning I especially like the pale mauve orchid, left in the hedge (really gangly bushes), left to its own devices. It is flourishing.



Traveler's Palm
Willy Conley

This is our Somalia

Anna Idelevich

This is our Somalia,
you and I in the morning.
There is nothing but children of rags.
Hot sun, black backs and drinking sea,
sky and beach where you and me.
Grandfather blows into his phone,
as if into a dictaphone.
Someone is crawling into the market,
a hillock under a slope.
A wet shirt stuck to my leg
cold, hot, sworg.
Sand between your toes, your sand.
It's easy for me to dance with you.
Above us, the sky is plump, such
gray, not blue.
Humid southern heat.
I hold you with my hand and everything
is yours sticks like a T-shirt and runs nose.
There is only the horizon ahead, and what is behind?
Behind someone's poor and not our city.
You will raise the spray to the sky, beloved, beautiful.
Maybe black, maybe blue, maybe long, like fireworks
and visible in all directions. To me. And there is nothing.
Be here with me someday.
The sky will be bad, like that.
Or maybe stormy and maybe gold.



The Hummingbird
Alexandra Buxbaum

One of Leaves

Lucas Gubala

A soul's weight, a feather
A generation of men, one of leaves
Homewreckers and renovators
Both tethered to sledgehammers
Reprinted classics line display shelves
Glued veneer on particle board
Moths in repose after a full meal
Chopin, Whitman, Salisbury
Pulped, bound and made to cakes
 broiled and consumed
 Pleonastically seasoned
 to spite palatability
 Indulgence in repetition
 Prophecies in identity
Deliberation for a moment
 Stricken by an instance
Penthouse had articles on geopolitics,
New Yorker cartoons penned with ink
 Some things don't change
 Others lose color and gall
 To dare and become unbecoming
Tumult to dirt through composting lineage
 Some wait for inspiration
 Other's pride leaps before Fall

How Surgeons Learned to Operate on Beating Hearts

Kris Whorton

My husband's story about his aunt freezing her goldfish, then putting them, thawed and alive, back in the bowl

after her trip, seems crazy. His family is prone to tall tales, so he comes by it honestly. Freezing water works on humans

too, especially in 1952 for the seven-year-old with the hole in her heart. Surgeons dropped her body temperature and six

minutes later, fixed her good as new. An immature cardinal collides with my French door. While he's stunned and still,

I crouch close to look for a heartbeat, scoop him out of the sun, place him on a bed of sedum so he can come too. Days ago,

my friend texted that her mother died, suddenly, hours earlier. I didn't ask how, only what I could do for her as I thought

of freezing water, gentle hands and knew it was far too late for that. My own heart contracts and expands in the shadow

of death, my father's silences, my mother's warm attention. How will they end? I wait for the call, yearn to live closer,

but with my surgery only weeks old, the world of flying and hugging absent, it is the five-inch incision burning

at my touch, flinching at my husband's claim he can barely see the scar, keeping me still. The surgeon tells me my heart

beats 45 times per minute so they had to reset their machine. He says I bled little, lost nothing. He tells me I have heart.



One More Moment

Jessica Kennedy

A small crowd stands waiting for the elevators, silent and sleep deprived, blocking my pathway and wasting more time. Panicked and in a rush to get to the Intensive Care Unit, I search for the door to the stairs, not considering the seven flights it'll take to get there. My heart threatens to beat out of my chest as I run as fast as my legs will move, trying to make every second count. I don't even care that my breathing is loud and labored, echoing off the walls. I think, if anything goes wrong at least I'm in the hospital. The stairwell is identical to the rest of the inner hospital areas--bland, clean, uneventful. A complete contrast to the events consistently taking place within these walls, day in, day out.

I get to the correct floor as quick as I can, my legs feeling like jello, and shove open the door. The halls in every direction appear the same. In a frenzy I search for the signs that point to the Intensive Care Unit to guide me. My phone is in hand, but I have no service. People pass by in about the same panic as me, paying me no mind. Some are already established visitors, with a somber dread clinging to them, matching their stale clothes. After several minutes, I



find the ICU doors located to the left of the elevators. On the opposite side of the hall from the ICU doors, past the elevators, I can see a waiting area and wonder if my grandmother, aunt, and uncle are sitting anxiously, hoping for news. One of the rules for the ICU is only two visitors at a time, so they won't be able to visit him with me in there. I consider checking in on them, but my father is my focus right now and it took me over an hour to get here.

I approach the two large double doors and try to push them open with no success. To the left is a call box, a phone hanging on a receiver and a note saying dial 0 for the nurse's station. I lift it: no answer. I dial my mom on my cell, but it won't connect. I repeat this sequence a half dozen times, uncertainty building as the seconds pass and I pace the laminate floor, until I hear the nurse's voice on the other end.

"Room five," she says when I give her my father's name. The doors open.

The rooms in the ICU are larger than the ones in the rest of the hospital. Inside, the walls have more decorative wallpaper, but not by much. Blue, green, calming hues. Posters about procedures, safety handling, information about the hospital, alongside limited patient information on dry-erase boards under room numbers cover the rest. Every couple of feet hangs an automatic foam hand sanitizer from the wall. Wheelchairs wait for passengers, empty outside the doors. Narrow beds on wheels and mobile monitors line the other side of the hall. I make it to my dad's room, his name scribbled on the outside.

The glass doors are open but curtains are drawn around his bed, hiding him from my view. From inside I can hear my mom's voice. I pause for a minute, catching my breath in the dimly lit hall, my heart pounding against my ribs. Several minutes pass by before my mom, two ICU doctors, an oncologist, and two interns—all in white coats, their names and titles embroidered on the right side just above the breast—drag aside the typical blue hospital curtains hanging on rings, attached from a bar on the ceiling. It rattles and sways until it exposes the room inside.

My mom comes and embraces me, squeezing so tight I struggle to breathe. She kisses me, holding for a moment longer than usual. I close my eyes,

relishing the silky feel of her long hair that cascades like a tumbling waterfall. She pulls away and I can see the tear stains on her face, but she is strong and composed. I wonder if she has come to terms with the gravity of the situation, but decide it's best not to mention it.

"Go to dad." She gestures me inside, eyes bloodshot and hair in disarray. "He'll be so happy to see you."

I watch as she joins the doctors who form a semicircle in the hall outside my father's room. Pulling over a portable computer on a stand, the interns look over the charts they cradle in their hands as the attending doctor accesses records in the system.

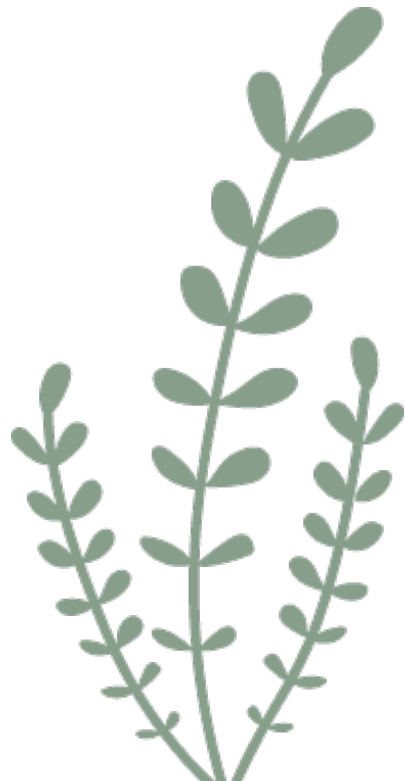
Inside, my dad lies on a large hospital bed, the side railings up to keep him secure and adjusted so he's at a slight upright angle. He attempts a smile and calls me over, his hand weak, with IV tubes stuck in the arm they didn't amputate, a blue cuff



around his bicep and a smaller monitor with a little red light on the tip gripping his index finger. The repetitive beeping heart monitor, computer screens that display colorful lines representing his vitals, and metal stands holding bags filled with fluids and medicine, cram the room and overwhelm my senses.

I go to my dad and kiss his forehead. His skin is damp and warm in the cold room. He is groggy but gives me a smile before his eyelids grow too heavy and close. Time seems to slow down now that I'm with him. As he rests for a moment, I look for a place to set down my belongings.

I notice a small window-seat in front of the three wide windows that reach to the ceiling. The city out beyond is dark but the lights from buildings near and far create a speckled romantic view. Resting on the window seat is my mom's work bag, jack-



et, and the emergency hospital bag I prepared for her. The better I care for her the better she can care for my dad; a communal effort she likes to call it. It's filled with food, water, energy drinks, vitamins, an extra set of clothes, a binder with important documents, pens, phone charger, an assortment of toiletries—anything I could think of that she would need in the case of another surprise overnight stay. I dump my bulky winter jacket, heavy backpack, and phone next to her belongings, sighing with relief from the loss of its weight which I've been carrying around almost all day.

I check in on my dad. His eyes, still closed, resting, but his chest is struggling with the effort of breathing. Curious, I move closer to the door where the doctors are discussing my dad's case and watch my mother listening with intent. This morning as he was being discharged from treatment his lungs collapsed. My mom was out of the room when it happened, a few minutes, if that. He was unable to breathe or move, but she came back in time to call the nurse. He is stable now. The cancer has metastasized aggressively, however. It's in his bones. It won't be long until it reaches his brain. They discuss options, treatment, the potential quality of life he can have left. The time.

I fight the pain behind my eyes that threatens to spill tears down my cheeks. I close them and will it to stop, feeling the pain shift down to my throat, tightening until I'm struggling to hold back

my anguish. Breathe in deep, I hear his voice say from inside my memory. I fill the air into my lungs, down to my belly. My heart pounds in my chest, loud in my ears, all but drowning out the rhythmic beeping that means my dad is still alive. The clock's ticks are steady in the background. Deep breath out; the air whooshes as it escapes, and I feel the blood rushing under my skin. I, too, am alive.

My dad stirs, so I return to his side. He moves his leg over as much as he can and I sit next to him, clutching his hand into mine. I want to lie on his chest but I'm afraid of the strain it would put on him. I note every freckle on his face, the way his lips move as he smiles, the color of his eyes, the stubble on his chin, the way the oxygen tube wraps around his nose. The cliché light blue hospital gown is loose around him. I feel the warmth of his fingers around mine and the unexpected strong grip that tells me without words how important I am to him and how terrified he feels. The room smells clean and sanitized, the way hospitals do, yet I could smell the unique tinge of his sweat, his signature on the room. Soon he falls back asleep.

The doctors have said that in the worst-case scenario, he will have a few weeks. In all honesty it's the most likely scenario, since his body isn't taking to the treatments, but still, they remain optimistic. Yet I know we found the cancer too late, too far gone. Even so, my dad still wants to fight. I don't blame him. I want him to still fight. It's hard for me



to imagine my life without him. What will I do when he is gone? Who will I go to for advice? For love and comfort? For support? Outside the room, I hear them discussing blood transfusions to help with the quality of life he has left.

My dad opens his eyes again and smiles when he sees me, more alert than before. "I've missed you," he wheezes. "I didn't want to go before I saw you." I look up to the ceiling, widening my eyes to stop them from watering. I squeeze his hand, as if somehow I can keep him here with me, forever, by sheer will and never letting go.

Without warning I can't help wondering if he knows how much I love him, how much he means to me. So often we move through the motion of daily life, focusing on the material, the mundane, the unimportant. We say I love you as reflex, like reciting a song we know by heart. Yet how often do we feel

what we say, understand its meaning, its core? In the blink of an eye, our loved ones are taken from us, without hesitation, without warning, and returned to the vast cosmos of our universe. To a next stage that is unknown. How can I, can others, waste our precious moments as if we have second chances? Once they're gone, we can never get them back. I breathe in deep, understanding that if today has taught me anything, it's that time is valuable. I must seize this chance to tell him how I feel before all I have left is a regretful memory of what could have been.

"Dad," I smile to him. "I love you. I always have and I always will. You have, without fail, been there for me, even when I didn't deserve it."

I think about my teen years and all the tantrums I threw, the nights I snuck out, the white lies I told.

"You've always deserved my love," he coughs.

"You're my rock," I continue in a rush. "You love me without question, you support me during my best and worst days. You are patient and kind and generous. You taught me how to be all these things in

turn. How to follow my passion, to seek out knowledge, to never stop growing, to love unconditionally. To go through with something even when I'm scared of the outcome. Thank you for making me laugh when I wanted to and more importantly when I didn't. For introducing me to a world full of wonder and excitement."

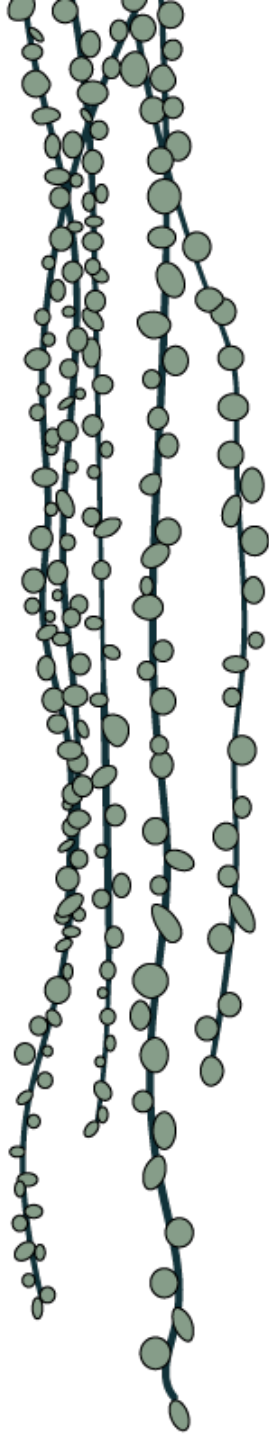
I pause, the pain of emotion contracting my throat. "You're my hero, I love you." My eyes are hot with tears as I try, without success, not to cry. He smiles a smile I've seen a million times before, of love and happiness and pride.

"Come here." He pulls me in for a hug. "Thank you," he says, "that was beautiful." And it's worth the sadness I'm feeling right now, to let him know his importance before I will no longer have that chance.

I bury my face in his neck, feeling his clammy skin against mine and I know one day I will long for just one more moment with him. Again and again.



Indebted to
Your Kindness
Kevan O'Connor

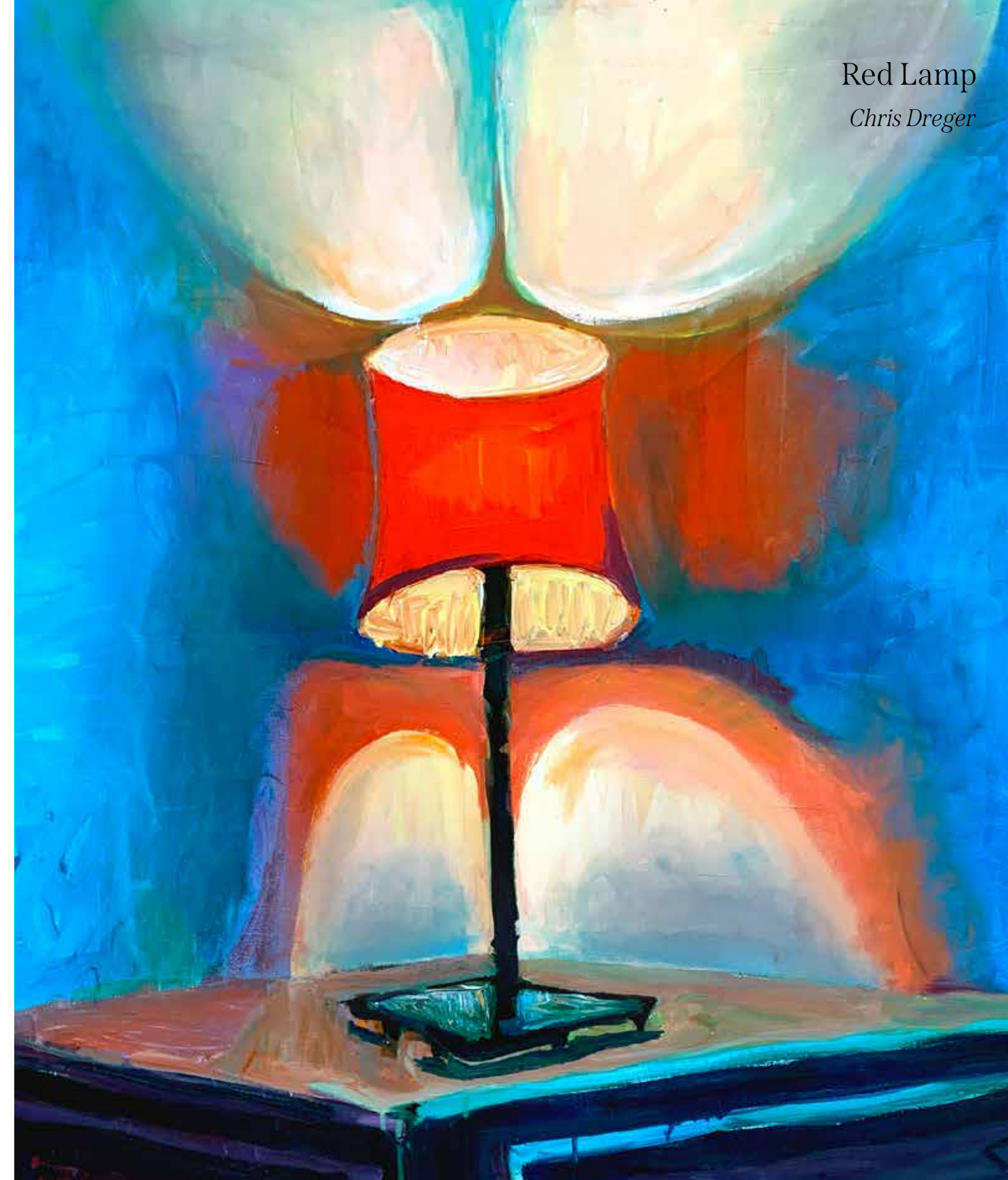


Feeling Agile

William Mullins

I am eccentric, surreal, authentic,
bathed in the gentle chaos
like silken jazz, swaying,
in rapid starts and stops
and soothing eddies moving onward,
buckling, reforming in the air,
tongue pressing bones,
sex in syncopation,
dazed in arousal,
layered in lovely sweat,
washing wayward in open minds,
past detritus of dogma,
resplendent in renewal,
my progeny charge forth,
healing, vision, progress...

Red Lamp
Chris Dreger





Motivation
Lindsey Barber

When You Share A Couch

Catherine Hansel

When you share a couch with someone you don't know
At a party
On the road
At a show

You end up feeling like you know them much more than you really do
A foot touch
A leg bump
A brush of the shoe

Suddenly his leg shakes out of a nervous habit
On the other end, your cushion flops and jumps up and down like a rabbit

Without a glance, you feel the prescience of someone there
For you feel the movement of another being, without much need to stare

And though you may not know that being all too well
Sitting on a couch with them will give you some knowledge to tell

When you share a couch with someone you don't know
You feel like you know them
Like you know them well

For Whom the Question Begs

Scott F. Parker

I like philosophy as much as the next guy
But sometimes—when Zen asks Who am I? or
Descartes concludes I think therefore I am or
Nagel wonders what it's like to be a bat or
Let's not even get into Heidegger or
You can probably summon other examples
Of philosophy's invitations to recursivity
That you accept at the price of paralysis
Whirlpools sucking you into oblivion,
When that happens, as it happens—
I try to remember what Wittgenstein said
About showing the fly out of the fly bottle
But what in the world is a fly bottle?
And would Wittgenstein agree that
Whatever the self is or is not, sometimes
When the coffeepot gurgles, it gurgles for me?

Bulbs

James B. Nicola

Stalactite and Stalagmite
parent and progeny
for a seasonless eternity

one leaving deposits
the other feeding and growing on them
in spite of the stifling air and shrinking space

in calcifying darkness
blacker than the beyond of the stars
hidden from all eyes but One
in the innocuous nest of their cave

till brave spelunkers dared explore
with a match then a torch then a lantern to hang,
and then the National Park Service.

Now the magic of wires and bulbs
illuminates myriad hues of stone walls
made by time, minerals, and time

in a dankness that knows no End
but Becoming.

The darkness beyond the light
keeps vigil over the slowness,
a progression barely audible but
for the occasional drip and step
and the echoes of yearning and loneliness
resilience and endurance.

The past feeds on the future
but in the cave, it's the reverse;
yet both expand from a bottomless pitcher of drip

drip

drip

* * *

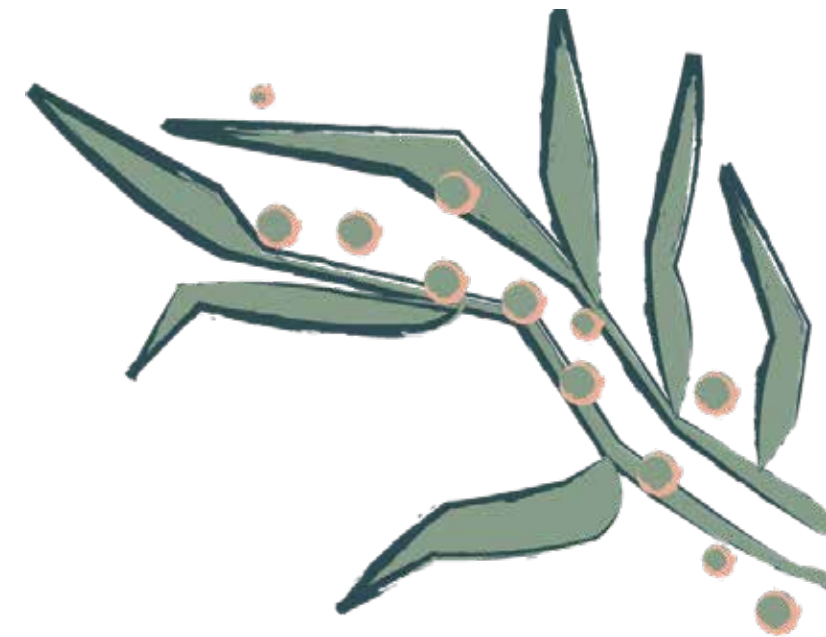


Drip
Lindsey Barber

Blow Away

Anna Idelevich

The rains are wet from the cheeks with your lips,
as if there is nothing, and ink is fuel oil.
And drink a tear like I'm yours
and drink a tear, drink a tear.
And drink a tear like I'm a country
the rains bring spring, and I am old for a long time,
as old as autumn, a dream and a thousand years ago,
catching a star in your forest



Photograph of a Star at Night

Mark Robinson

Light still rising from the halfway
Sunken sun it seems to rest
At the bed of the horizon

And in the foreground a grove
Of wild pines each speaking her needles
Into the breeze, into the morning,
Or into the night, I cannot say.

Our fabric is the luster of innumerable stars
Appearing in clusters or alone

If we could endure the loneliness
And sit for a moment
With one burning apple

There would be nothing else
But the long flaring out
In the wide universe

Nothing around for months, for years
Except the orbiting martyr
Singing for home and in its blazing melody
Giving permission for us to speak.



Milkyway Spotlight
Faun Scurlock

Shattered Glass

Lucas Gubala

Hey you
shattered in a thousand pieces
leader of a thousand lives
born anew

giver of a thousand blessings
flitting through noxious eyes

tossed down
forgotten in realm of madness
roller of a massive stone

fly high
soar until you scrape the bottom
violent in spiral dives

forge on
'member why you lost your blessing
carry weight until you die

Never gonna to see a day
when the darkness fades

Never gonna light the way
till cows are home to stay

take heed
listen when the cricket belows
hideaway your tears and smiles

live long
foolish in a war torn hamlet
trudging through icy snow

pay now
empty out your fateless coffers
ravaged by a debt unknown

ask now
am I for whom the bell must call to
fuss about your worthless soul

laugh now
nearly you have been forgotten
taken to the sea and shown



Mountain Traveler

Dillon Gohl



Sequestered Atman

Vera Nikolaychuk

*A sequestered atman forgotten on earth. He is in
grievance on a sea shore as night steals the daylight.*



Panoply daisies
scattered by a breezy wind
faded into sable.

Buoyant motion and
ephemeral aria
that beckons me close.

Evocative joy
that was meant only for me
dwindled like blossoms.

Saline fragrances
and sand like pulverized cane,
I saunter to sea.

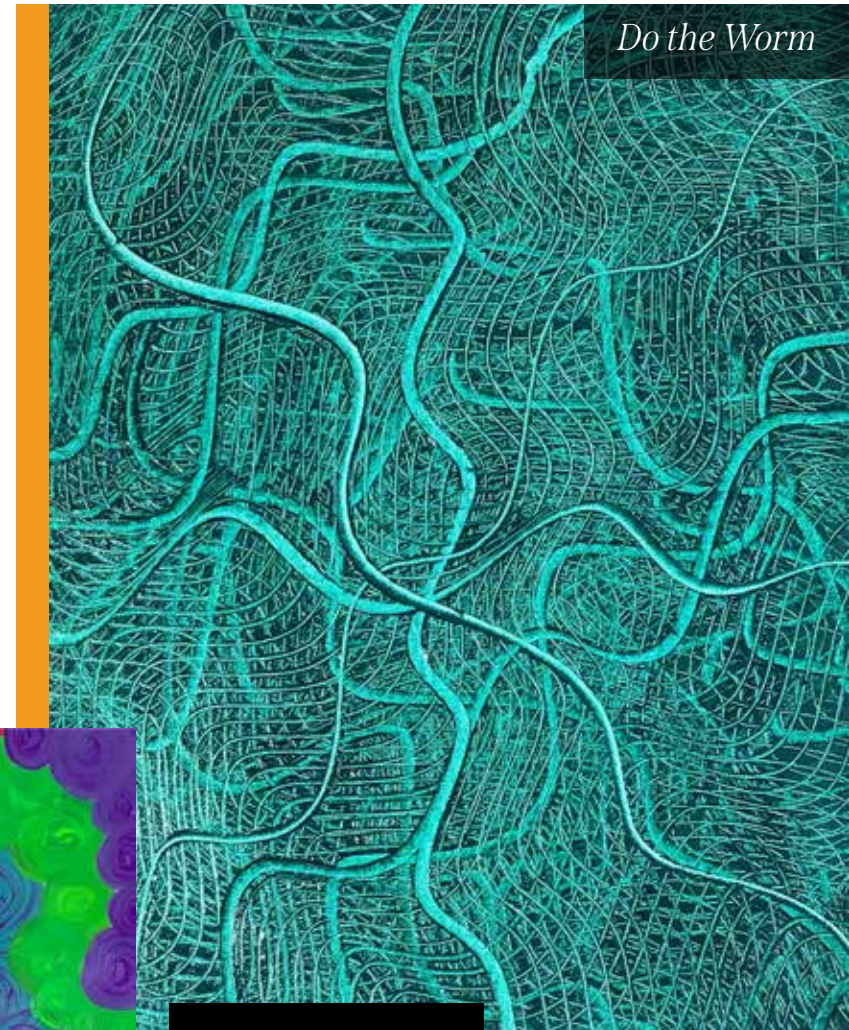
Kaleidoscope lilt
like a fluttering cure whilst
graced with civil dusk.

Turning pale and dark
the striking waves creep and steal
to ebb back again.

With colors of dread
I sulk as the day darkens
and clasp a haste cold.

Solar day evanesced.
this enigma that I see
so grievous anew.

Again, and again
a foe never fails to steal
my jubilation.



Josh Stein

Growth and the Inanities of Greed

Tim Fab-Eme

Grandma says a hungry babe doesn't like lullabies.

I shake my head, pick her words like
rotten grapes and wrap them in a long

long laugh the way I mummified the Paris
Agreement and the other gabs against my growth.
Arms must be made, wars waged and heroes

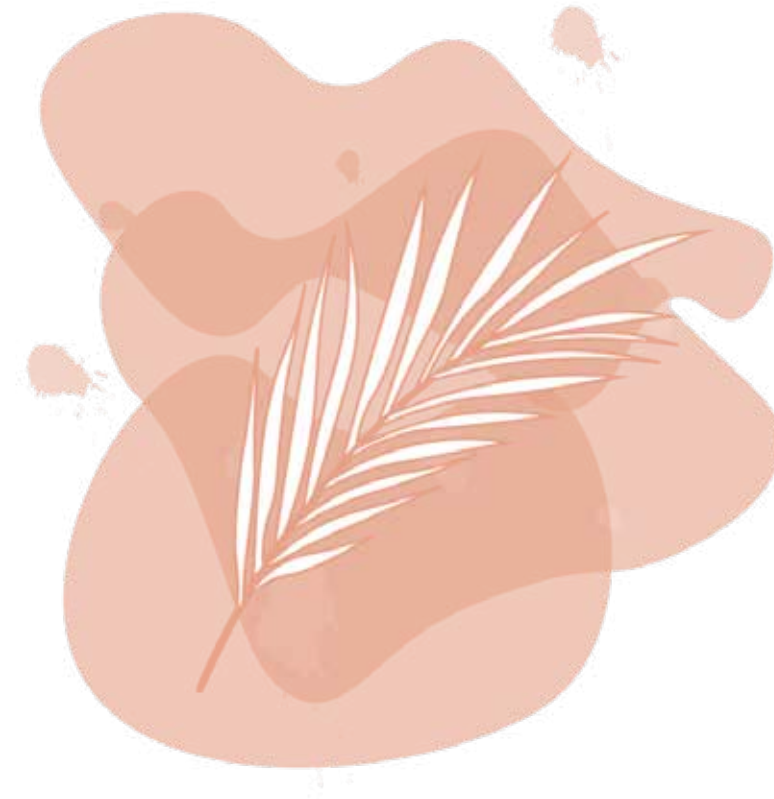
honored with the broken spines of the crybabies;
who doesn't know that the very big birds
fly backward? Why must the Earth even out
for all to walk and run at ease?

Last night I saw the Arctic melting away
like ice cream on the soft, hot lips
of a girl who disapproves all the beautiful
things her great poppa seized trying to pin
the world to his small armpit. I'm lost.

Mia doesn't call me dad or anything sweet
as belongingness; she said that her lips shiver
and freeze like touch-me-not each time she tried,

so she makes her mouth a fine potty
calling me all the sword-edged names that end
with rot—ruiner, polluter and the other sorts.

I see no wrong taking more than I
give the Earth no matter what my child
mumbles or the pale proverbs that my granny
jazzes out each time I extend my estate.
But hold on, folk, it's ain't no joke
singing a love song in a funeral home:
I'm torn between my wealth and my life.



Spokane Piano

Lucas Gubala

Walking through a mall in
Spokane, Washington, USA

i was roughly 5'8"
which i guess made me
about 12
walk a mile in my eyeballs

a woman breastfeeds her
child next to the benches
in front of a yogurt
stand

spitty, sneering noises
from a mall in Spokane

Not a sparkle in the eyes
of the Cinnabon Man
even though he's young enough
to remember his
mitzvah

walls of glass, clad with ads
plastered across Spokane, USA

jet black against the beige
walls, Steinway sat nestled
between Victoria's Secret
and some yogurt stand

passersby brush the velvet bench
the odd wistful twinkle
of keys
before turning about face
picking up plastic, resuming consuming

we walk our way down the neckline
of somebody's little girl
the fruits of her labor hung
behind laminated glass
rotated seasonally

a sad looking man in drab black
slacks, approaches the bench in Spokane

i couldn't hear a squeak
as he sat down, plonked a little
then swung the first hammer
clamor gives way to a symphony

(it emerges from their footfalls)

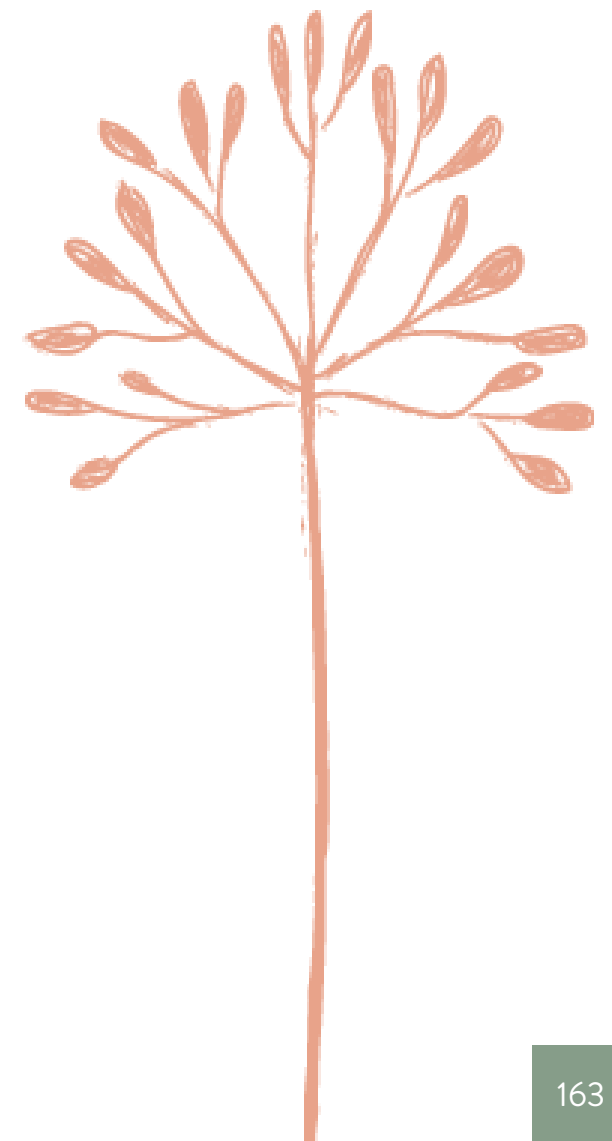
we walk to his hands
articulating metronomes of flesh
striking chords, coyly foreshadowing immensity
like showers before
sex or a storm

he enunciates a phrase
with a ringing candor
now they listen, as they've
heard his sadness first

but nobody stops
to hear the sad
sad man
where he splaid out his heart
across a yogurt stand

so i continued to sit and listen

the baby continued to suckle.





A solid color video background is required. Green color

Campus Dreaming
Sharalee Chwaliszewski

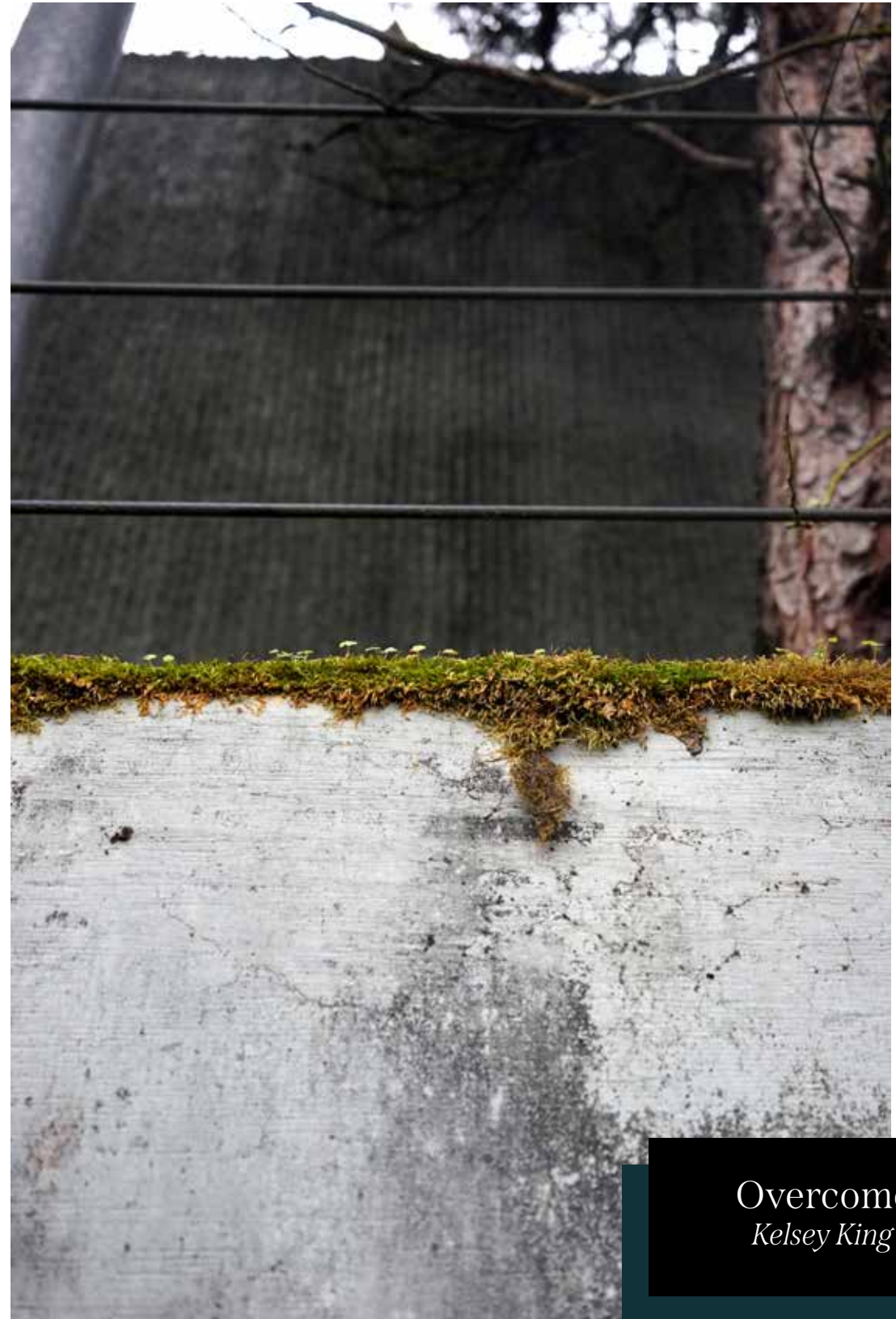
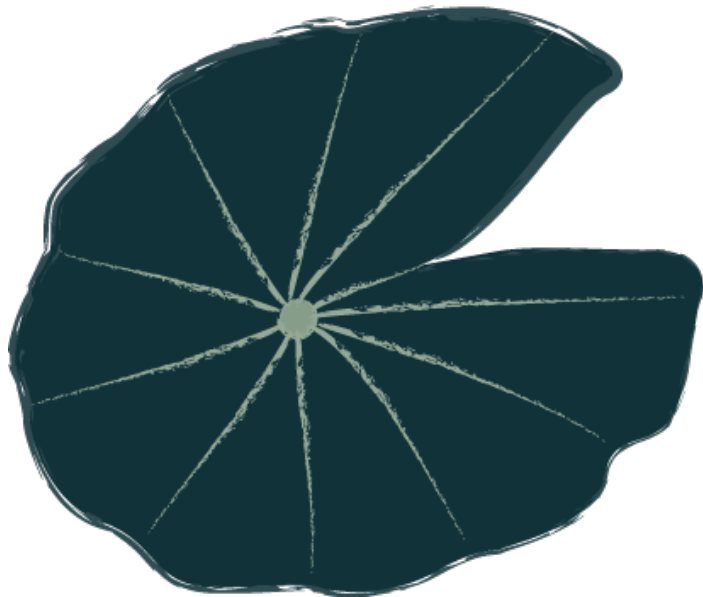
A Love Letter to Organized Sports

Renee Hollopeter

When we were kids, our feet cut through
blades of grass just long enough
to brush our ankles—
together, stocky little bodies fumbling
and stampeding in an orchestration
of celebratory chaos. Our feet eager
for that moment of contact
with the icy chunk of black and white, chasing
the percussive crack of shin guard contacting
inflated rubber, watching the ball arc skyward
like a tiny solar system passing the sun
and becoming momentarily brilliant.
We were unafraid
of our cleats imprinting
the soft mucky earth.

We played soccer with our parents huddled together
under umbrellas, cheering, hugging each other
after each goal, our coach extending
a hand we reached up to slap with our own and being met
with an unmasked smile, knowing
that even if our grandmother ended her life
on a ventilator in a grey room we could be at her bedside
to hold her hand.

I walked past that field today. The goals
were away somewhere in a shed, the grass unscrambled
and untainted. I want summer that is strong enough
to hold itself up without slipping;
a May, June, July, August
ripe and bursting and streaking the hours
with light. I want something
I'm too afraid to ask for. I want to see
kids trailing after an icy chunk
of black and white
because I'm tired of grey.
I want to hear little feet sending ripples
through the merciful earth, to sit on the sidelines
someday and watch my daughter in a stampede
of movement and rhythm,
momentarily brilliant.



Overcome
Kelsey King

Kite

Allan Johnston

Up there the symbols of wind swoop,
vivid, vertiginous. Each of these whippings
windows some world. Such play
takes sharpness, thinness, connection, the trembling
dance on a lifeline of string. The vibrancy,
the moment of near lunar beauty
found in the flight before the kite crumbles
into the nest of some passing tree
relates to not simply going, not losing. Without
the tautness of the string, the balance
of arm and wind, this kite would not cling
in its air but lift to some atmosphere,
believe the game of weightlessness
enacted by these breezes, toss
the skeleton cross, the papery stretch
of its skin.

The string is the thing.

No second chance wings in the thrown-together
winds; just lift and balance, a pulling
or lessening blending with will and chance,
as if all grace notes for poems,
accents in an oblique, prosaic sky.



Rise

Dakota Martin

Bird Carries Shark Carries Fish

Roy Bentley

On a television Trump is blathering about there being, at last count, fifty-four thousand dead from COVID-19.

CNN harmonizes: “The number of Americans killed in Vietnam.” Onscreen, this osprey fills its talons with a

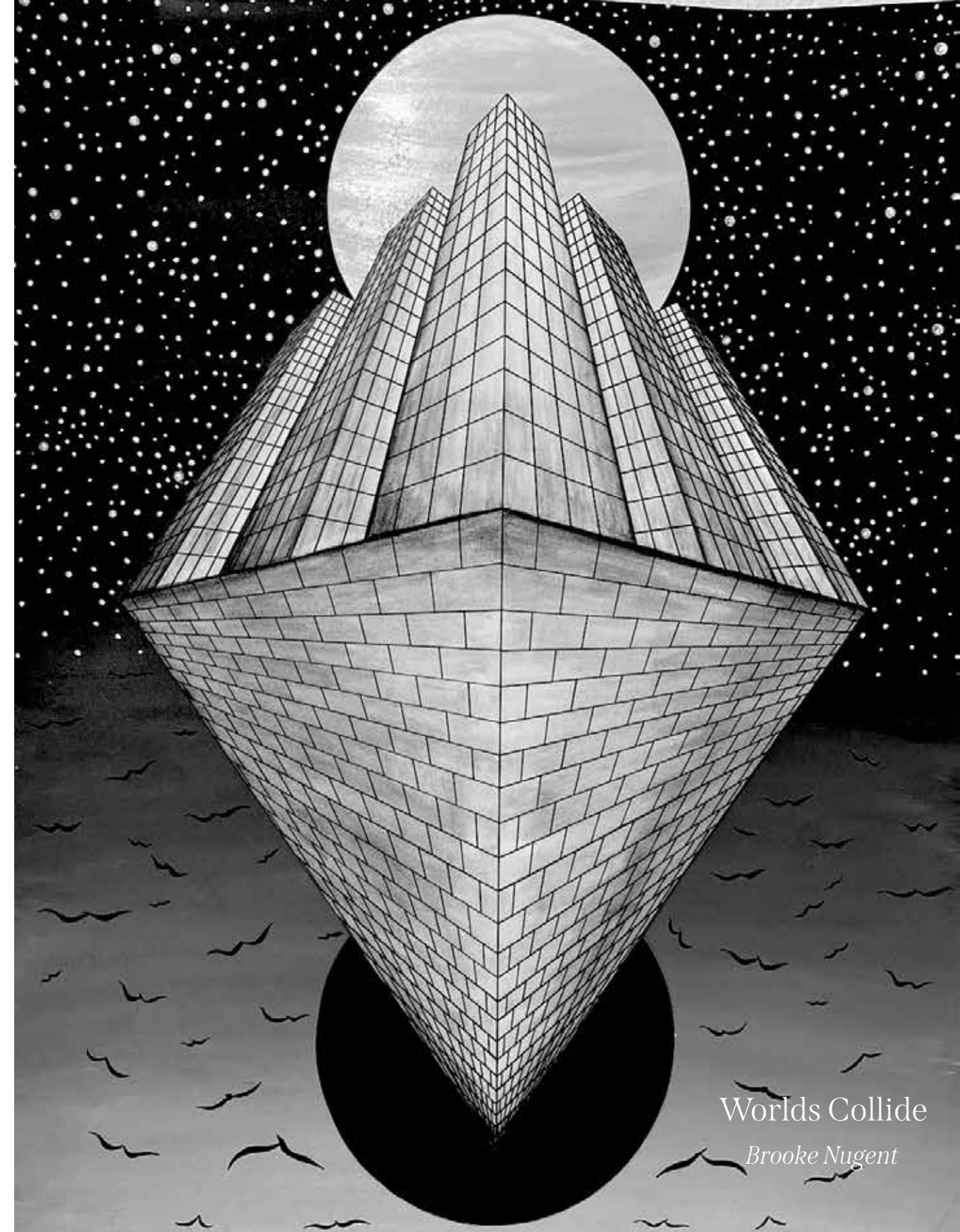
dogfish taken mid-bite. I suppose the bird is the world, hunger, the sacrificial chordates the still-beating heart.

I have to speak, now, as if the grace of words matters. I need to tell the fish in the mouth of a bigger fish this

is what it is to die with food deliveries continuing and liberal tipping encouraged—given the risk to those in

cars turning into driveways with wild-caught sockeye from the waters off Alaska and cartons of organic milk

from an Oregon farmstead where cows know kindness and mercy as a human hand rubbing the flesh of ears.



Worlds Collide

Brooke Nugent

The Looking Glass House

Madeline Ewanyshyn

Three of the comb's teeth snapped off as it tore into the girl's hair. Mother told the girl she could stay in her pyjamas, but it was time to go.

Walking to the car, the girl filled her lungs with the early morning air. It was still dark out and the cold, damp air was thrilling. This was the time of day when adventures began, she thought.

Their beige Volvo rattled as it started up. Mother gripped the steering wheel with fingernails that were all chewed off.

Every home has its own perfume that goes unnoticed until you go away and come back. Their car had the fragrance of forgotten McDonald's fries and that pen that had exploded on the carpet. The girl wondered if she'd learn to crave this smell.

I don't know how long you'll be there, Mother said.

How far away is it? The girl asked. No answer. Her sneakers were muddy, so she raised her legs up in the air.

The floor is lava, she said.

Mother shook her head. No point in keeping this car clean.

The girl frowned as she tried to read her copy of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by the light of passing streetlamps. It scared her to think that one day the lights could go out for good, so she tried her best to imagine her own stories every day.

It was a three-chapters-long drive. By the time the car turned up the unpaved driveway, the sky looked like an overripe plum. It was a dark rich purple,

with cracks revealing the juicy red sunrise. The girl's stomach rumbled.

The foot of the property was forested with dark trees that led where her eyes could not follow. The girl saw fields, a chicken coop, a small barn, and a playhouse. The house itself was more like a castle. She named it Thornhill and wondered what haunted its attics.

Stepping out of the car, Mother wouldn't let the girl hold her hand.

Come on, said the girl. We can't stand here forever.

Mother nodded and they knocked on the front door together. The woman who answered the door was called Aunt. Aunt had blonde hair like Mother's, but it was different. Mother's hair was captured moonlight, while Aunt's hair was golden like late afternoon.

Alright, said Aunt. Come inside.

The girl looked back at Mother and saw in her eyes that she was ready to leave.

Where are you going? The girl asked.

I need to get some help, Mother said.

She generally gave herself very good advice- though she very seldom followed it, the girl quoted Alice. But Mother didn't listen and walked back to the car.

Aunt closed the door. They were in a foyer, which is a whole room dedicated to staring at the spiral staircase and taking off your muddy sneakers.

You need new shoes, Aunt said.

The girl replied that the floor was lava, and ran up the stairs crying *ouch ouch ouch* with each step.

There were four doors upstairs. The girl knew all about doors. A wardrobe door would send you to Narnia, a door at the bottom of a rabbit hole led to Wonderland, and there was always the possibility she'd find a secret garden.

The first door, at the end of the hallway, revealed the largest bedroom the girl had ever seen. The bed was what they called King Size and had crisp white sheets and blue pillows. There was a bathroom *connected* to the bedroom, and a closet that was bigger than the girl's bedroom at home.

The second door was called a Linen Closet. This was where the girl realized what this house's special scent was—cleanliness. Lavender and shoe polish. Lemon juice and Windex. It was like a strong vinegar and made the girl cough. She shut the door.

The third door was another bathroom. This room was delicious. The girl inhaled the warm-vanilla-sugar-lotion-coca-cola-chapstick-cupcake-whipped-cream-lush-bath-bomb smell.

The room across from it contained a girl. This was surely Cousin Ava. She looked just like her mother, only smaller.

I'm ten and a half, Cousin Ava said, so I'm the boss. The girl nodded, willing to take orders from someone so experienced.

Cousin Ava's walls were a brilliant green color, stenciled with delicate roses and butterflies in flight. She had a bookshelf that was tidy and alphabetized. The girl ran a finger along the spines of each book. Some of them looked identical to the ones the girl had at home the ones with the blue leather covers. *Curiouser and curiouser.*

Why are you here? Cousin Ava asked.

I don't know, the girl said.

You're probably an orphan now, Cousin Ava said, like *Oliver Twist*.

Or *Jane Eyre*, the girl suggested. Being an orphan was dreadful, but she would accept it if that was her fate.

That's what happens when parents abandon their children, Cousin Ava said. I read about it many times.

So have I, the girl said. What should we do now?

Well, we might as well go play outside.

The girl put her muddy sneakers back on and Cousin Ava wore brown boots that laced up to her knees. They trotted off across the property. Cousin Ava introduced the girl to her sheep named Barbara and Babette. The girl curtsied as she was introduced to each one. She asked why Cousin Ava didn't name the pigs or the posse of plump chickens who nibbled on sweet corn and slop. Cousin Ava pinched her nose and said yuck.

The playhouse was nestled next to the chicken coop. It looked like a smaller version of Thornhill. They sat down in the play kitchen, and Cousin Ava gave them each an empty teacup.

We're going to play *Little House in the Big Woods*, Cousin Ava said, "I'll be Mary because I'm older and prettier, and you have to be Laura."

The girl bitterly sipped at her pretend tea. She'd forgotten to ask for milk or sugar. Playing Mary and Laura made the girl think of a story that Mother once told her.

Once upon a time, there were two sisters. Even though they had the same parents, and the same advantages in life (so they were told), they were very different. They say that one of the girls was raised by wolves. Each night, when the sun went down, she'd run wild and leave her family behind. In the morning, she'd wake up and pretend she belonged again.

What happened to the sisters? The girl asked.

They grew up and had daughters, Mother said.

When sweeping the floor and polishing the plastic cutlery became boring, the girls ventured out into the woods.

I've brought breadcrumbs in case we get lost, Cousin Ava said.

Will we get lost? The girl asked.

I hope so, Cousin Ava said. That's the game.

They walked the path that wound around in a loop, stopping to inspect wood frogs or pick a wildflower. They played the game of lost little girls, starving in the woods. The girl was especially dedicated to this role and felt her stomach ache more and more. They picked mushrooms, fiddleheads, salmonberries, crabapples, swollen blackberries, and wild bergamot. But they didn't have a single bite of their beautiful feast. Instead, they presented it on ivy leaf plates and left it for the fairies.

They need it more than we do, Cousin Ava said.

The girl suspected that Cousin Ava had never been lost before, as they abandoned their game and made their way to the backyard where the pond was.

Be careful of that pond, Cousin Ava warned, it's much deeper than it

seems. If you even look at it for too long, you could drown.

The girl lowered her eyes and remembered another story Mother told her, while she was in the bathtub. She had been struggling to comb the knots out of her hair- their nighttime routine.

Once upon a time, there were two sisters. They both had beautiful blonde hair, but the First Sister looked like their mother. Her hair was like honey and everyone loved her. The Second Sister's hair looked like their father's. It was like curdled cream. So the Second Sister begged the First Sister to cut off all her hair.

Why didn't the First Sister want to look like her father? The girl asked. What do you know of fathers? Mother replied.

The stories never lasted as long as the girl wanted. Mother would get lost along the way. Cousin Ava and the girl walked back to Thornhill and explored downstairs. The living room was not for children to sit in, so they looked, but did not touch. There was a real Christmas Tree that grazed the vaulted ceiling. It was decorated with yarn, popcorn you couldn't eat, and sparkling baubles.

Where did you get those books? The ones with the blue covers, the girl asked of Cousin Ava.

Those are from Santa Claus, Cousin Ava shrugged. I'll get new ones this year.

Oh, said the girl, me too.

For some reason, it unsettled the girl that she had received the same gifts as Cousin Ava. Sometimes the girl wasn't sure she even believed in Santa Claus- not the way she believed in fairies (who needed to be believed in, or they would die). But she knew it wasn't Mother who'd brought her those books. Mother didn't have much respect for books.

Once upon a time, there were two sisters, Mother had said. The First Sister was a good little girl, and always read quietly. The Second Sister couldn't sit still. She had no time for books.

They were very different sisters, weren't they? The girl asked. Mother nodded. But what about the daughters? Did they like to read? The girl said.



Squirrel Castles

Beverly Joyce

Yes. But that's how they keep you tame, Mother said. Telling you what to do -what to read. The First Sister always did what she was told. But the Second Sister knew better.

The girl thought the Second Sister sounded a bit stupid. These stories didn't mean much to her, so the girl shook the memories away and ventured down into the basement with Cousin Ava.

Here is where we keep my toys, Cousin Ava said. There were half a dozen clear tote containers stacked atop one another on the carpeted floor. Cousin Ava reached up and brought one down, wobbling with the weight.

They opened it up and took out porcelain dolls with painted faces and dull eyes, tiny doll furniture, and wooden building blocks.

Why are they all trapped in boxes? the girl asked.

These are the toys that are going to Goodwill, Cousin Ava said. The girl inspected a doll with dark hair like hers. She ran a finger through it and not a single curl was out of place. Why didn't the doll's hair knot?

What's Goodwill? The girl asked.

For Poor People. Orphans, like you, Cousin Ava said. I'll get new toys when Santa comes. She dropped the doll she'd been holding and started up-stairs. It was dinnertime.

They sat around a long table and had water glasses with ice cubes that clinked around. The girl stuck one in her mouth, savouring the taste of nothing.

How do you like those books that Santa gets you? Aunt smiled like she knew a secret when she drank her very big glass of wine.

The girl spilled some water, and Cousin Ava handed her a napkin.

It goes on your lap, she said.

This didn't make any sense to the girl. She let it flop to the floor. The dinner didn't seem logical either. They were eating lobster, which was covered in a hard shell. They might as well be eating bugs.

'Tis the voice of the Lobster; I heard him declare, You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair, the girl sang.

She's certainly wild like her mother, Aunt said to the man who was called

Uncle. He had a thin moustache and watched the girl eat, like she was an animal in a zoo.

After dinner, Aunt said: your Mother is coming to pick you up, so go get ready. The girl was not an orphan, after all.

The girl slowly laced up her shoes, watching Cousin Ava plant herself in the rocking chair. She was distraught to lose her new plaything.

Oh, it's so sad you're going away, Cousin Ava said. I will never see you again.

Really? the girl asked.

Probably not.

Mother rang the doorbell this time. She was soaking wet and not wearing a raincoat. But she smiled for the first time today, and grabbed the girl's hand. She nearly pulled her out of Thornhill.

Thanks and Goodbye, she said to Aunt.

They reversed the car and drove down the driveway. The sun was setting now, and it didn't look as beautiful as before.

Mother and the girl did not talk about their days. They just drove in silence. The girl looked down at her muddy shoes. She unrolled the window and dropped the shoes out, watching them clunk in the middle of the freeway.

You don't have any other shoes, Mother said. She wasn't smiling anymore. But she wasn't frowning either.

We played *Little House in the Big Woods*. I had to be Laura because I have dirty shoes and knotty hair and I don't know how to eat lobster and I don't believe in Santa Claus, the girl said.

Mother was quiet again and tapped her fingers against the steering wheel.

Well, she finally said, remember that Laura is the writer of her own story.

The girl considered this and scratched her sockless feet. She took a deep breath in, inhaling the familiar smell of home. She hadn't realized that a wild girl like Mother could know things too.

At the End of a Song

Carolyn Adams

I won't miss the ruin of this world,
its sinister hungers,
the stolen, loose hours of leisure
wasted in stubborn self-regard.
But I will regret the loss of beautiful things:
the rose-gold palette of an autumn sunset,
the long cold breath of a stormfront coming in,
the silvery laugh of a happy child,
either my own, or another's.

I've rearranged purpose and ambition,
like furniture in a doll's house.
I've mended seams and basted hems,
only to have the whole cloth tear, irreparably.

In the still hours of early morning,
when it seems I am the only one awake in the world,
deep silences echo with the electric hum
of an officious appliance somewhere in the house.
And always, underneath,
that stubborn tick of a clock.



When my time comes,
dress in crisp white to remember me,
or better, in every color you have.
Find me in the slow folds of spring,
in the simple dreaming of things.
In the way music falls
at the end of a song.

Wireless Poem

Matthew James Babcock

The good idea says we should replace
the steel cable to the gas pedal
with a humming zone of space
no one knows how to fix
so when the accelerator sticks
and, racing screams, we throttle
through traffic, as murderous as a plague,
our fluorescent blood will stripe
the frenzied offramps of our veins
and stoke the ragged catalogue
of the latest customized escapes
from facing the ways we worship pain.
Those richest from stitches and glitches
will say which isn't a good idea
and which is. The runaway dream itches
to shoot fuel through the automatic plea
for outlawing every outmoded tether.
I'm still attached to the young father
I was—sawing the umbilical line,
each time astonished at the tough cord
twisting like a greasy rope to heaven,
my pulse an uncoupled undertone
saying to my hands: all ideas are good
that cut away no more than they are given.

Do I have a body?

no

yep

nothing does really

Do I?

Jeremy Hight

“Do I?” is an electronic literature work made in the software program Twine. It questions the reader/viewer as to what is a body, what grows or is seen to grow in nature and if the digital can have a “body”.

You can experience this work and other digital pieces on the Salmon Creek Journal website at www.salmoncreekjournal.com

Let Us Pray

Nathaniel Terrell

God Bless America
and every place else!

This world is in peril
and we need your help

Anger, impatience and unrest are growing stronger
confrontation and conflicts are all around

White supremacists and Antifa
will continue to clash
even if forty five gets voted out

Cowards slide until judgment
hero's get laid to rest

We are all contradictions
not everyone can accept change
and many of us live with regret

All I have is my word
so I speak from my heart

It will be wonderful when we can finally embrace
but for now COVID keeps us apart

Is this the book of Revelations being revealed
is the Beast rising before us?

Compassion is dying a slow death
much of humanity is being tortured

Blue lives matter? All lives matter?

As black man I'm beyond
fed up with institutionalized racism
countless injustices and the execution of my people
most of whom were unarmed

So I declare with conviction, Black Lives Matter!

Oppressors and colonizers are hurt by
loss of resources, loss of capitol and war,
few revolutions have been successful without violence

SARS brutality, children are trafficked
in the sex trade,
gentrification and the unloved suffer in silence

We search for something more
something of substance, something greater

Even if your heart is pure with good intentions
you will still encounter haters

Even when it looks hopeless
we must exhaust all possibilities to find a way

The sunken place is real
people perish there every day

There are too many invisible barriers
let us break chains
and demolish constructed walls

Deep division poisons heart and minds
retarding moral compasses
leading a dynasty to an inevitable fall

Segregated education and
targeted areas with little to no opportunities
plagued with high rates of unemployment and
extreme poverty

and also a justice system that
is broken and a painful joke

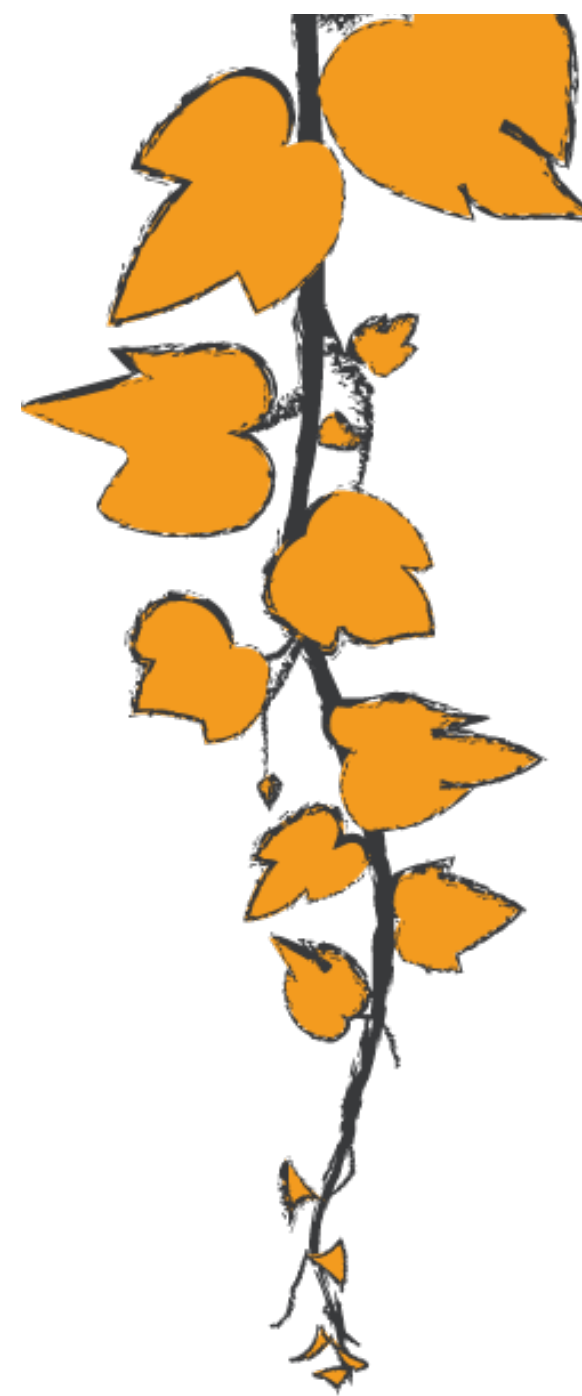
Woe to the lying prophets
that defile consecrated temples
getting fat, spreading lies and selling hope

God Bless America
and every place else

This world is in peril
God we really need your help!



* Listen to the reading of Let Us Pray at
www.salmoncreekjournal.com



Bite Your Tongue

Sharalee Chwaliszewski

The process requires patience
and a swift, hissed release of breath
to bleed off the pressure.

Your mother's whispered disapproval
still drumming against your inner ear
restrains you from giving in to the
sweet, sharp pull of argument.

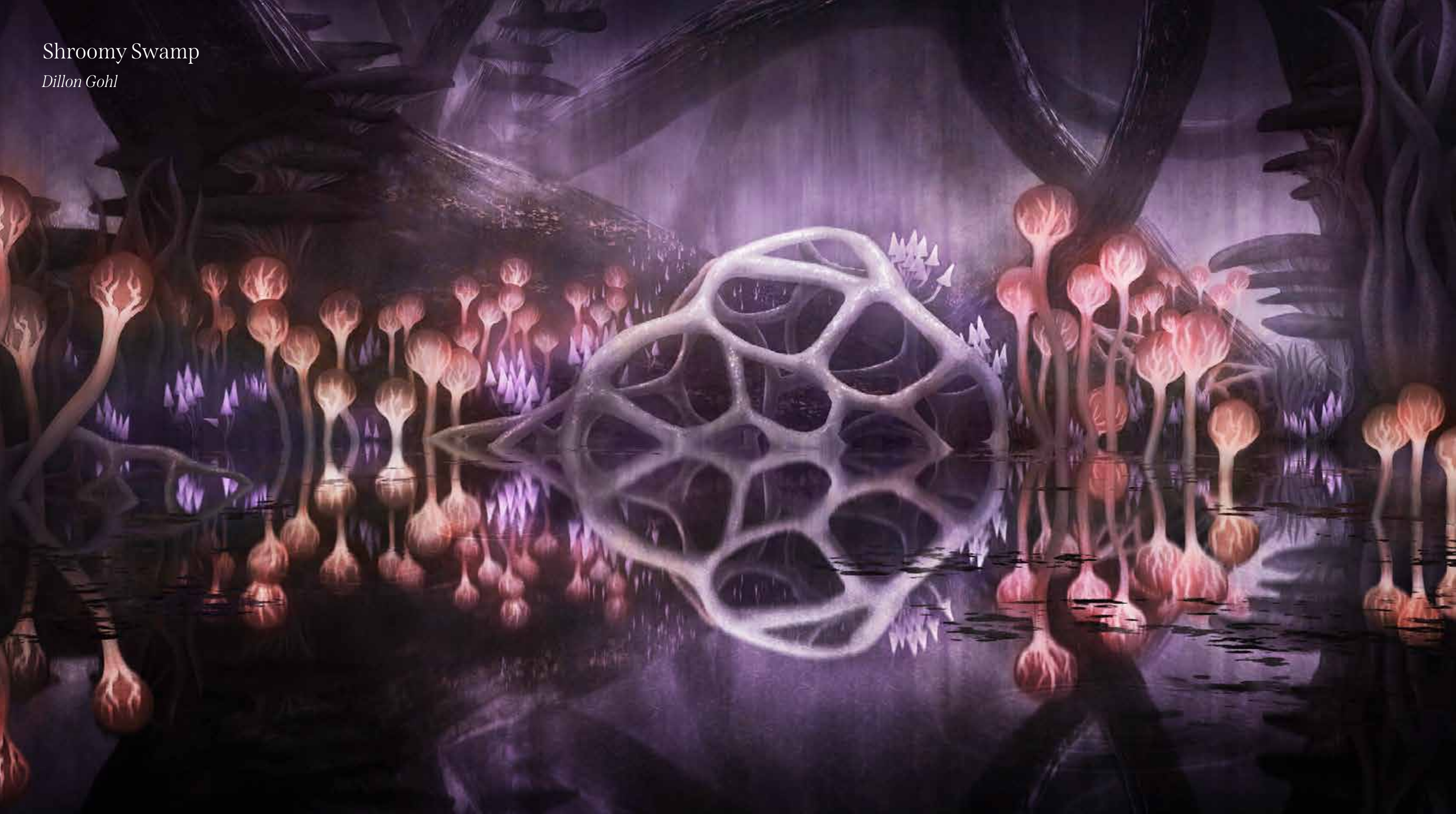
Bite your tongue if you can't hold it.

Inside, your anger is
fabulous and ice-bright, dazzling
darker too, and thick, oil-slick
slippery.

Outside, smile. Spiral
your fingers tight into your palms
so that moon-shaped marks remain, reminding:
only the thin, reflected light of
a single side defines you.

Shroomy Swamp

Dillon Gohl



False Dreams, Dour Music

Christopher Viner

I lived between bed sheets, a teary-eyed
clammy beast, having been crucified
during the cruellest spring on living record.
I bandaged my lame arm, the dark-frayed veins
had turned oddly weak, as though the cells were suicidal.
When I took the bandage away to show acquaintances,
the arm was symptomless, a tanless milky thrump.
But some shifted their focus to my pale eyes
and told me in that end-is-nigh-voice: "you're sick."
The leafless boughs shook in the blushing vaults of skies

I took walks, ill, in the dark world,
as if I really were dying. And I failed
to distinguish between allergy tears and real tears.
In fact, I was hardly conscious, being so in the world,
and yet so far from its usual rhythms of acceptance.
I took walks sprinkled with silver leaves
crunching under my boots like moon sperm.
the child's imagination contagioned to this new-old man.
I was alone, hearing the hot boughs run their codes
down banks and trunks, in pellets of beetles and fireants.

The world was dripping black oils, an oleander
in my unsteady palm. I watched its death,
so beautiful, so easy. As it curled in its stamen
like a seahorse stolen from the hand of god.

White pearls falling from its retracting abdomen.
Snow drops of the tears I'd forgotten
rolling off my nose, and into the damp dew;
hot forest fires mottled in the hurting floors.
The wolf's song on the moors: impossible to say why
the lines echoed a sacred book, somehow mine.



Haze

Tom Holtslander

Is my mind going?
I cannot seem to concentrate

Are my cogs stuck
Or am I?

Am I bored?
Unsatisfied?
Unchallenged?

Maybe my roots are too deep
Maybe I assimilated too quickly

Maybe it's time to travel again
On the wind like a dandelion seed

Growing my roots a new
Get my mind moving once more

Push the haze from my eyes
And let me see

The Tea Party

VJ Hamilton

It was school break and the children took over the mansion. No one called it the mansion, exactly; in the village it was known simply as the big house, a fine English understatement of its twenty-one rooms and palatial premises. The children had enormous fun in the back part. Forts made of blankets on chairs, cats dressed up in doll-clothes, boardgames set out and abandoned. The nannies kept an eye on things, but still.

Today the children decided they must have a tea party. Guest of honour, Queen Mummy—even though she had been a little mean and would not give them a break from chess lessons. Brownie, the eldest child, had to make the invitation because her computer skills were best, and Delta, the youngest, had to deliver it, because she was cutest, and most likely to receive a “yes.” Amanda, second eldest, made a tiara out of florist’s wire and an old bead necklace, saying, “Mummy is ever so beautiful, she deserves to wear a tiara every day.”

“Certainly, Delta,” Mummy said, smiling but speaking solemnly. “I accept your invitation. Shall



we wear our best frocks?”

Delta ran away, squealing, and her nanny let it be known that the tea party was dress-up time.

Cook made plain biscuits and each girl got to decorate a biscuit for someone else. That was the rule: you always had to think of the others. Also, you couldn’t eat any decorations or lick the icing spatula. Anticipation hung in the air like the scent of butter-vanilla. The children all ran off to choose their best outfits. The nannies got ready with curling irons and safety pins. Some even got out cosmetics, until the chief nanny said, no, that was against Mummy’s rules. (The nannies were chiefly women from the village but occasionally included one or two young men, so that the children would learn not to be alarmed by a male presence.)

The five children prepared the play table where they and Mummy would sit. They laid out the toy tea set, small china pieces with Jemima Puddleduck stamped on them, ever so sweet, and asked Cook to brew a pot of real tea in her Brown Betty, and transfer some to the small tea-party pot. Cook doled out one sugar cube per child, which nearly filled each toy teacup.

“One more cube, please,” Amanda said. “Mummy gets two.” Cook gave one more cube. Brownie saw Amanda palm it into her pocket, but she said nothing. Not yet, anyway.

Brownie said she and Mummy would need big-size chairs. She was 11 years old, a century older than Amanda (6), Barbara (5), Carlotta (4), and Delta (3). Brownie should really have been out with girls her own age at the mall or having pyjama parties with her village friends but, as Mummy said to the pediatrician, “well enough in good time, she’ll get into that mischief.” For now, Brownie had fun hanging out with the little ones—the Bluebies, as she called them. They brought as much joy as a litter of puppies, and they weren’t nasty, like some of the girls at Brownie’s school.

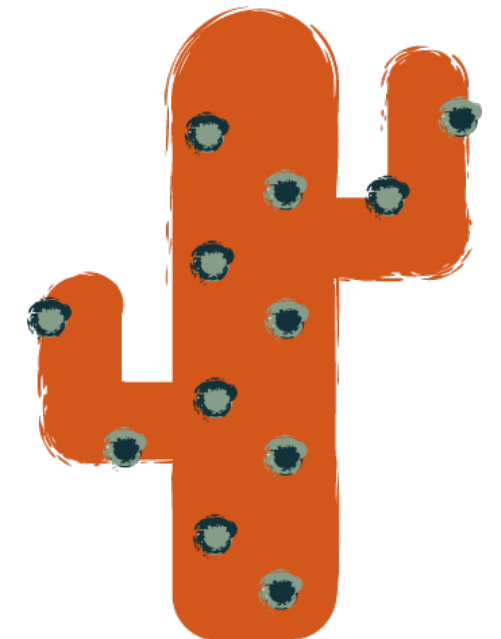
Mummy had skin like ivory and eyes like sapphires. She wore her purple dress, the one with gold piping and buttons. It was made of brocade, with chiffon sleeves. It made the tea party such a special occasion. Brownie wanted a dress just like that when she got older; she vowed to grow big and soft and

sugary-smelling to fill it just like Mummy.

Mummy sipped tea and chatted and the conversation was ever so brilliant, all about some fair coming to the village next month and the new baby Mummy was expecting. Pale faces shone and blue eyes blinked all around the table, except where Brownie sat, because she had neither. Everybody tried to remember “pinky out” when sipping tea. Soon the nannies came in and took the youngest Bluebies away for nap time. Amanda and Brownie remained alone with Mummy.

“Where do babies come from?” Amanda said, nibbling her decorated biscuit.

Mummy explained the male-female thing, which was ever so boring to Brownie, because she had already learned the whole rigmarole in school (and scored top marks). She was first in everything



at school but Mummy said she mustn't boast except to her when they were alone. Cook came in to refill the Puddleduck teapot from her Brown Betty pot.

"Amanda, don't forget to give Mummy the extra cube," Brownie said, sipping her tea, pinkie extended without even thinking of it.

Her sister reddened and handed over the sugar cube. She began pouting. Mummy gave a small laugh, as if she had figured out a magic trick but didn't want to hurt the magician's feelings.

Brownie put the cube in Mummy's cup and refreshed her tea like a proper hostess.

Amanda got cross and whiny and whispered to Brownie, "You don't belong, you ugly duckling." A nanny came to get Amanda, who cried, "I don't wanna go! No! No," as she tore a seam.

"Ah, bedtime," sighed Mummy. "Kiss-kiss."

The nanny led Amanda away.

Brownie ignored Amanda's mean words. For now, anyway. She was alone with Mummy and that felt extra-special. She needed to keep the conversation going so she remarked, "Weren't the frocks ever so pretty?"

"It brought back memories of my own girlhood," Mummy said, sighing as she stirred her tea. "How amusing to see all the little ones in pink."

Brownie fingered the hem of her tunic, which was orange, with teal stripes. Pink, to her, was the color of death. No, that was wrong, she remembered. That was the rule: you always had to think of the others. Pink, to her, was the color of the very young— even Mummy, when she was little.

"How did you know Amanda had an extra sugar in her pocket?" Mummy said. "You are such a sharp-eyed girl."

"She's sneaky," Brownie said. "She needs constant correction, the nannies say. That's all." She hesitated to speak her mind, feeling oddly shy. But she pushed ahead. "May I ask you a little more about the baby—the one in your tummy?"

"What would you like to know?"

"Did you go to the clinic and pick out a daddy?" Brownie asked. She smiled, remembering the fun they'd had a couple years ago, picking out hamsters.

Mummy readjusted her brocade bodice. "Since you asked, sweetheart, it's time for us to have The Talk." She dismissed Cook, who was tidying up the table. "At your school, in your grade, they have covered only sexual reproduction. In your upper-year classes you will soon learn about asexual reproduction. Or parthenogenesis, as it's called."

"Par-then-o-genesis?" Brownie repeated while Mummy nodded encouragingly. She hoped Mummy wouldn't tell her she had to wait until the teachers took it up in class.

"It's a different way to get babies, Lucinda."

Brownie sat up a little straighter. When Mummy called her by her real grown-up name, she took extra care to pay attention.

"It's how I get Bluebies," Mummy said, and then adopted the professor-ish voice that Brownie liked so much because it meant Mummy was sharing potentially dangerous information. Stuff she should not divulge to kids in class or people in the village. "Scientists have known for centuries that some animals—aphids, scorpions, and certain lizards—can naturally produce clones of themselves. A clone is an exact genetic copy. Some very clever scientists figured out which genes controlled natural cloning and then they triggered those genes in humans."

"Did they 'trigger' you, Mummy?"

"Yes, sweetheart. I went once to the daddy



clinic for you—"

"Yes! And you picked out my lovely brown eyes!" The girl jumped in with the singsong of recounting family lore.

"Yes, your lovely brown eyes and copper-colored skin!" Mummy said in singsong too, then she switched back to the professor-type voice. "But then the Mars team—you know, the engineers on Earth who want to send people to Mars—asked me to participate and, well, it seemed very..." she paused, searching for a word. "Significant."

"Participate in what, Mummy?"

"Well, the Mars project," she said with a small laugh. "A couple years later I went to the Mars clinic, where they triggered the natural cloning."

"Without a daddy?"



“Correct. And now, every 14 months or so, ploop! A new baby.”

Ploop! The way she said it sounded so funny Brownie had to laugh. “Ploop!” she said, mimicking Mummy’s high voice. “Oh...” then a realization dawned. “Is that why the Bluebies look sort of the same?”

“Yes, dear, unless they get a scar like poor Barbara from her trike accident. Over time, the Bluebies will all grow up to look more or less like me.”

“You are ever so pretty, Mummy. Everybody says so,” Brownie said, and she took a swallow of tea. “Is that why they triggered you?”

“I’m afraid so. Well, that and all the other things—physical fitness and test outcomes and so forth.” Mummy gave a look of distaste; boastfulness was not becoming.

“Ploop—ploop!” Brownie took her mother’s hand. “I do so love the Bluebies.”

“Yes, I’m ever so glad the triggering worked. It doesn’t work on most women.”

“You’re a special mummy.” The girl squeezed her mother’s hand.

“And you are an extra-special big sister. You understand many things, and that’s why I count on you.” The mother took a deep breath and her voice became stark. “Lucinda, I will soon have to travel for



work.”

“Is it Portugal again, Mummy? Can we come, too?” Brownie had a sudden remembrance of the family, with a battalion of nannies, standing on the train platform under the blinding sun.

“No, sweetheart, it’s a work trip to Mars. I need to go make Bluebies on Mars.”

“Make Bluebies?”

Mummy stuck out her tongue in a comical way and Brownie knew she was supposed to laugh so she did, a little. “Well, I mean, I have to go have babies. They will send a few of us off to Mars with a medical team.”

“Mars? Mars, the sky-Mars?” she cried.

“Don’t leave us, Mummy!”

“I must, Lucinda. Since the trigger thing works for me, I will be among the first settlers. After this baby’s born, I will be leaving on the next transport.”

Brownie felt a sob rising inside her—it would maybe strangle her before she could wrench it free. She took Mummy’s hand with both of her own. “I don’t want you to go, Mummy!”

“Please... calm yourself, Lucinda.” With her free hand, the woman smoothed her pearl necklace.

“I want to go with you!”

“There, there,” she said, patting the girl. “When you turn eighteen, you will have the choice. You can come to Mars and live with me. Forever, if you like.”

“I want to go now!”

The woman’s face flooded with concern. “I need you to be very brave, Lucinda. Do you think you can do that? Be brave, hold down the fort, keep an eye on your sisters.” She stroked Brownie’s back until the girl’s sobs quieted. “We’ll talk by vid-comm every day,” she said softly. “It’s only seven years.”

Brownie blew her nose on one Jemima Puddleduck napkin and wiped her eyes on another. Ideas flooded into her like flotsam in a tidal pool; ideas involving law and order and control. “I’ll make sure they brush their teeth,” she said, voice quavering, “and say their prayers every night.”

“That’s the girl.”

“And no more skipping chess lessons,” Brownie added with a rueful smile.

Mummy smiled, too, and put her arm around Brownie. “The nannies will help you keep order.”

“But Mummy, tell me something.” Brownie put her damp hands on her mother’s cheeks and brought the woman close to her own tear-streaked face. “Do you love me best of all?”

“Yes, sweetheart,” the woman answered with the barest hesitation. “Of course I do.”





Daydream
Colton Kent

Alder Leaves

Sonya Wohletz

The alder leaves aren't thinking what I am thinking.
They are busy folding light away into brown and orange,
engraving water courage into mottled maps

and sun love on their proud skins
as they welcome the urge to
fall.

They shuttle away the sweet world
back to the core where it sleeps with us
here below.

My thoughts are run through with the remnants of regret
And I wander lost from crumb to crumb, looking for a whole
That will never come to form in this world.

But the leaves and I meet as equals
in the warmth of the 2' o'clock gaze
here among the brittle chirp

Of a thousand winds threading through the heavy tilt
Of time. I search
For any kind of sky through the vine clerestory

and climb the light to
my mother's attic, counting each rung



with the seeds of cold in this
tired fist of November.
Here are her one thousand tiny jade soldiers,
a dozen velvet dresses, photographs, and ceremonies
that no one remembers the names for anymore.
She spreads out a deck of cards before me
24 suits of shame pride and forgetting, painted
In arrows the color of tumbleweeds
chalcedony and brocaded silver light.
The querent runs in quick instinct around the dark
Whole that others will forget to see. I
turn towards the brightest bank of awareness. Here,
an old river breathes out light mist that gathers among
The plants and hedges in the valley
Ride of autumn. I do not wish
To keep pace with the commitments of the world,
Confused voices scattered like refuse
Deep in the crease of knowing.
I want to walk slow through here instead,
split shard of bloodlight,
Opal singing in the river calm,
waiting, thinking it all through
until the winter pulls us out of the banks of habit,
chases spirit down from the cloud thrones
where rains give witness to the will of the body,

its constant breaking into seasons.
On the darkest days light gifts us
grey and purple silks,
we cover our heads and dream again of water
always water.
It will not matter how many times I've forgiven myself,
the light will still fall to the world, the river
banks will always flood in winter. And
I will always seek
out water spirits wherever I go,
Desert daughter that I am. They
Sing back the dreaming of dry arroyos
Coyote hunting in the draught of flame
Mother asking for a cool drink in the night,
Amid the fever ache of memory.
In her torn-apart attic the cards
are showing us that We want the world,
not knowing any other kind of world
but this one.
We spread our Lavender palms out anyways and
Catch the scent of it against our skin.
It crumbles like a tired leaf,
leaving behind the veins,
the stem.



When we talk of stolen sisters

Jessica Mehta

When we talk of stolen sisters

we talk of bodies gone to ghost
or given back for goodness—as if

we are

sweets snatched from superettes
discovered post-wash in sticky pockets.

When we think on stolen girls

we imagine

pluckings from roadsides,
wild

flowers wafting honey-sick. Passed ‘round,
stuffed in vases to wilt,
before given back to ground.

When we hear of stolen daughters

we listen

with colonized minds. Settle
into armchair arguments,

share, shake heads, repeat.

When we read of stolen women,

We say,

*But it’s not me, my cousin,
my child, my life—not really
(until it is).* When they speak

of taking us

it’s not an outing, a going,
a coming back ‘round again.

Stolen implies ownership, so

who then owns these sisters?



Beach Trees
Sarah West



Tree Shape

Sherry Weaver Smith

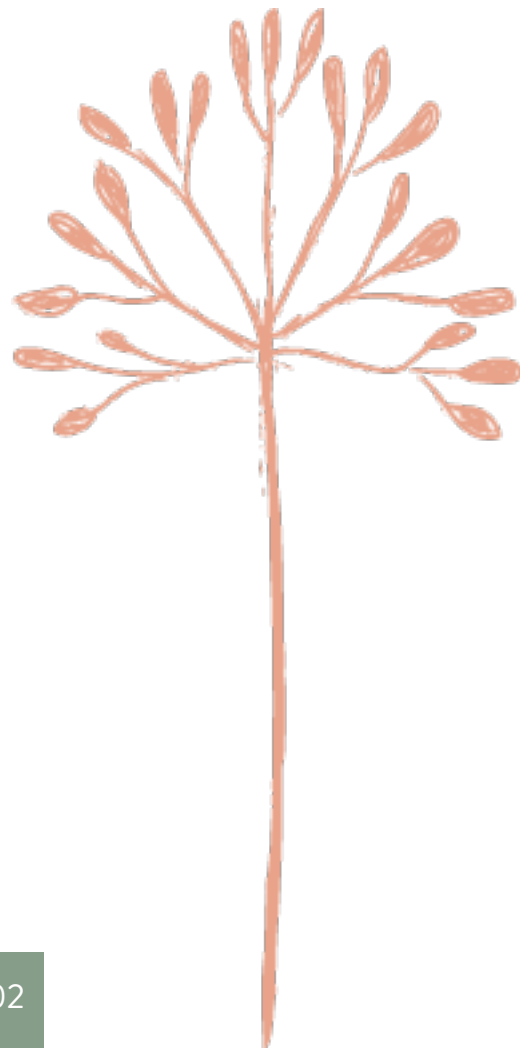
The birch grew up for light,
but it caught the rain.

It swept the horizon
to reach the sun,
but it pierced a tear
in the gunmetal of gray clouds.

Boughs sheltered the hearts of birds.
Branches turned rainy days into pages of leaves,
then let go of them--
the tree remembering
one thin line.

I find it now only as
the birch has fallen down.

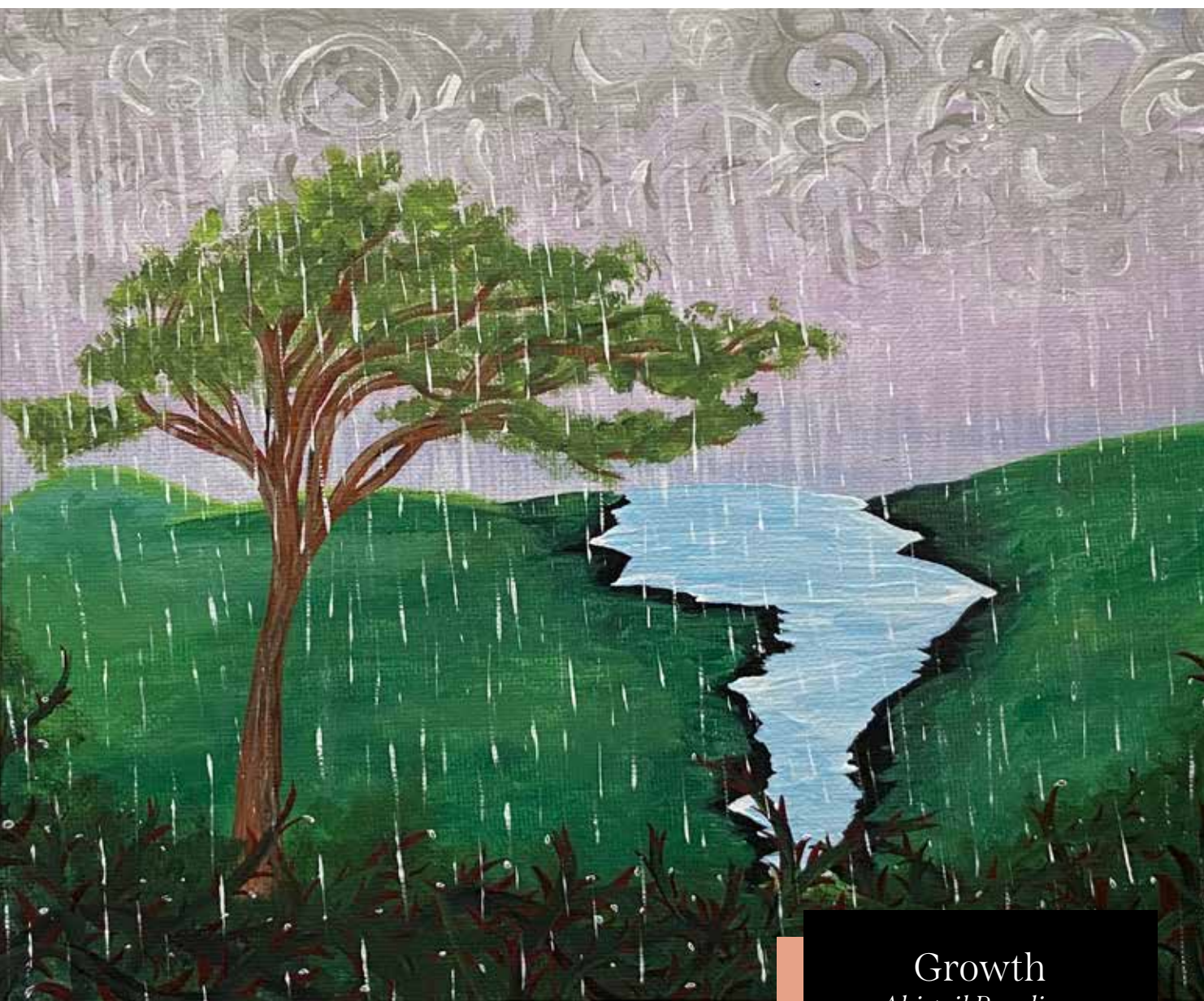
Though the tree grew up and up to gather light,
each year etched a circle inside,
because at the heart,
the birch aimed to embrace the world.



Chain of Rocks

Richard Stimac

A chain of rocks cleaves the river in two.
In spring floods, the hidden peaks can wreck
A flat keeled barge, crew scattered on the deck,
One man, fore, fallen in the swirling slue,
Beyond the wake. In June drought, trash will strew
The granite: Igloo coolers, tires, long-neck
Bud bottles, a fridge, a bed, each scrap and speck
Of our lives we made, used, grew tired of, threw
Out. Sometime, I walk on that water, stone
Beneath my feet, bearing me just above
The current. I fish for scraps of the past,
Artifacts, relics that prove what I love,
Though cast into memory, is not cast
Adrift. I want forever to be known.



Growth
Abigail Pandina

Lies about Equus Ferus Caballi

Arabelle May

You'll never see one truly wild. Like everything that humans touch, they've ebbed

sequestered and blind. The only true freedom, they say, is Przewalski's Horse, and even she was once extinct.

At twelve, I fancied myself something of an equestrian, babbled like a river on and on about the white star between Maisie's eyes, as if I painted it there myself. My stomach leaped when her velvet nose kissed my stretched fingers, shaken as if by flight or

familiarity. That I spent all day on her back was a lie. What they insist of these creatures is their domesticity and tact. What I've felt firsthand is the fury. The truth is, unlike her, I've never known what it means

to be feral
to be free.



Freezing

Mina E

Freezing
between immeasurable spaces
asphyxiated by shared breath
and the frozen air through the window at
4 am
i sat silently listening to the scream of a faucet
the static of the sheets
on my ear
impressionable at best, your puppet
regurgitating remembrances and memoirs
by months before meeting
cold hands covered by cloth you'd bare
my skin for your warmth
omnivorous awe

abandoned
transfixed focus on some distant worry
a thing scorned which was nonexistent now, then
parting pathways of such icy betrayal
words whispered
oh my monotonous daydream
where love in darkness alone
i sigh
sedentary sorrow
shut the door, the shades open
bliss, bliss!
the sun's rays on the petals
the flower in birth
juxtaposing these incredulous delights



Winding Mountain Road
Catherine Hansel

Forgetting

Mina E

i think i found you in the overdose
weary sky holding on
another attempt, holding on
my skin is hanging on the walls over there
can't you see what i've done for you?
any attempt at holding on
your blood submerged in mine
what a heavy sigh
i'd never seen him cry
before
what a scummy guy
turmoil, turmoil

such a sad sky
it has its own way of making my heart sharp
im afraid to put in my retainer
my bloody gums raw and willing
only a sadist could say what i would to you
if you were standing in front of me
once more

i forget what to write so i go back to what i know
your hands
the ends of your mouth pulling back your cheeks
emptiness when you're gone
and nothing
not even hope

Thoughts On Maiden Names on the Eve of Your Wedding

Natalli Amato

For the girls in the Flats

I cannot say how many years it took
for me to realize Mary Canale is Mary Hughes.
I still pause facing the valley between first and family name
while my mother speeds through it.
Our Mother's tongue is our native-born language
and it is my Mother's tongue that rolled her name out smooth
through the decades like a meatball cookie
and plucked it down on a baking sheet
next to Joanne Carbone, Leslie Spaziani, Tia Morgia and Lisa Renzi as if all girls
from Boone to Cedar
never stopped walking to the bakery with a ten cent piece;
never ceased their Sunday lessons in pronouncing numbers more like their
names rather than the hard cement of ten; never aged
into women who walked down the aisle towards a love
so powerful it changed the very spelling of their lives.
From Boone to Cedar, Cedar to Boone, girls stayed girls
and in this sentence, girl doesn't mean small,
girl means light.
As in, "I'm having the girls over."
As in, "I'm bringing the light into this house."
Now when I hear my mother's voice roll out a smooth Joanne Carbone I hear
my own playground intonations -
that become thick with childhood honey

when I try to learn this second language of married names.

I must revert back to the syllables
that have been with me longer than the cells in this body
if I am to say how happy I am
for you, Elena Alteri.

Dinosaur

Lisa Krawczyk

The dinosaurs never saw time
as infinity, nor as the end. When
the asteroid hit earth—as surprising
as your taco dinner tonight
that sits in front of me—the great
dinosaurs (as clumsy as me
spilling your lovingly crafted taco,
the fillings are everywhere by now)
were none the wiser. There was an end,
but nothing ceased. The end comes
with no closures. The earth still quakes
and sputters and comes; something new
tries to flourish.



Helens

Emily Shirron





Trees Grow Tall

Colton Kent

The View

Benjamin Green

I have to list the obvious:

Mention the blue-green prickle
that is a cacti's idea of leaf,

and the dark flame-shaped shadows
of juniper pooling on the mountain soil;

write of the striated layers
of rising and scraped rock:

blood-red, brown, apricot, then the orange-white
mesa rim studded with ponderosa;

note the red dust on my boots. Then describe

how the heart-shaped cottonwood leaves, glow
like the sun when it rises from the horizon
before being shuttered by the clouds
that the rude song of three ravens climbed into.

I Still Want the Peaceful Morning

Carolyn Adams

I write these lines alone, and I cannot forget.

Do they hover over your night bed?
Spiders benignly weaving:
eyes, lips, a poised hand.

What matter if I must wait months and years?

You could wait a lifetime.
Waiting to be heard.
Waiting to be met, again.

She neared that time when maidens pinned their hair.

Each soft strand laid in place.
Close to the skin, warming.
Held by the pin, impermanently.

At first they put us in jail.

Darkness was a hollow mouth.
Loss was always near.
And sorrow the bit between your teeth.

In my heart, I've been thinking of two verses in a poem.

One is blank, its face a smooth moon.
The other, vivid as the sun on the sea.
A mosaic of speech, suspended in air.

The stream of stinging tears ran low.

What was said, was long ago.
What was done, is history.
What will come, is unfinished.

And of course, besides all that, I still want the peaceful morning.

When the day rises,
its light blooming on delicate stems,
into flowers of memory.



Down the Right Path
Hannah Burbach



How we've grown

1997-2021

As we looked to the future of the Journal this year, the 2021 team found ourselves reflecting on the past as well. Salmon Creek Journal has a deep-running history, with our roots stretching back almost a quarter of a decade.

In 1997, the first issue of Salmon Creek Journal was envisioned, created, and published as a run of 500. It was sold in the WSUV Bookie at \$2 for students, \$5 for non-students.

In 1999, the second issue was published, and Salmon Creek Journal became an annual publication.

In the early 2000s, Salmon Creek Journal moved from being sold at the Bookie to being distributed free of charge, funded by WSUV's Student Media Board. Poetry was the dominant category in these early issues, with Visual Arts rising through the late-2010s. Prose remains a steady constant throughout the years.

In 2019, Salmon Creek Journal opened submissions to the general public. It received submissions from around the globe.

Now, in 2021, we continue to forge new paths. This year was the first year to be produced entirely virtually. Along with traditional prose, poetry, and visual arts, we received two born-digital works: a hyper-text story, and a spoken word recording, both of which are available on salmoncreekjournal.com.

The 2021 team has had a great time looking back at our history, and would love for you to see it, too. We present to you now the Growth Segment: a look at covers and selections from each Journal, from 1997 to 2020.

I can't wait to see where the Journal goes from here!

All the best,

Mallory Hobson

Editor-in-Chief, 2021 Salmon Creek Journal



1997



BASILIA PAGAN



Jim, Why Not?
for Jim

Why not, live for one more day,
the rose is still in bloom.

Sunrays warm the back porch,
you can hear a dog bark
and see a plane above.

Hearts are listening
eyes glisten
kids need hugging
your wife kneeling.

Love.

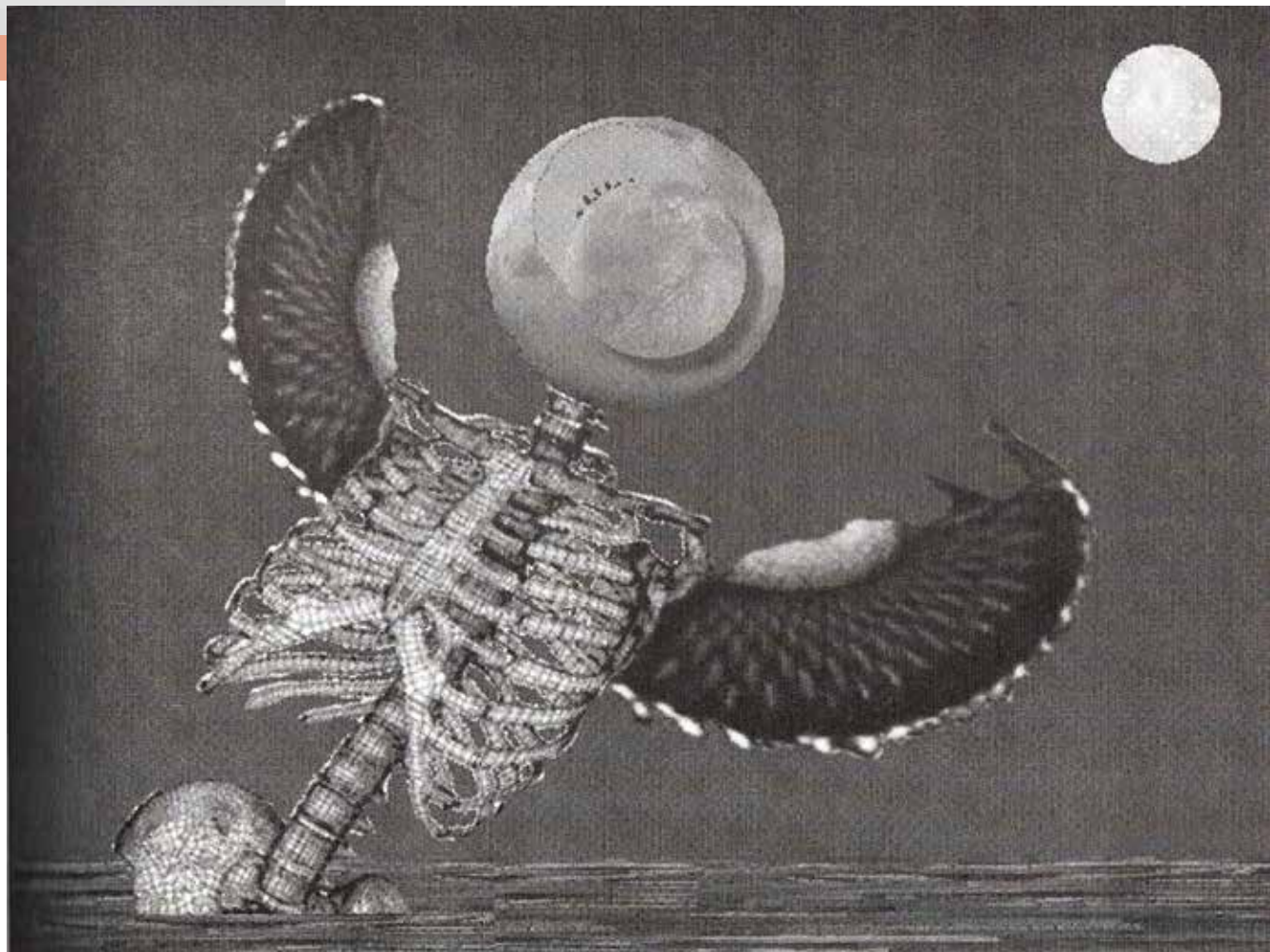
It is powerful
and near.

Why not, Jim?

1999



Flight of the Planetal Melon-core
Clint Williams



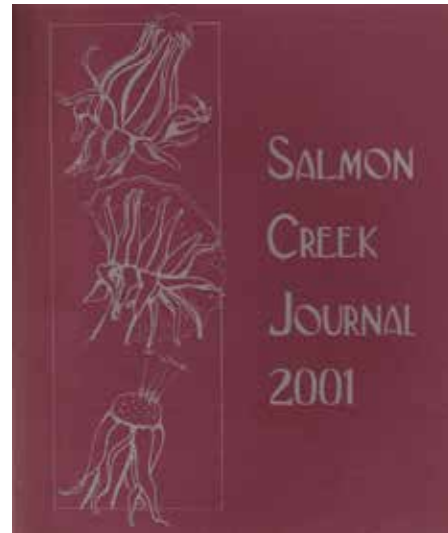
2000



Eternam
Jackie Meeker



2001

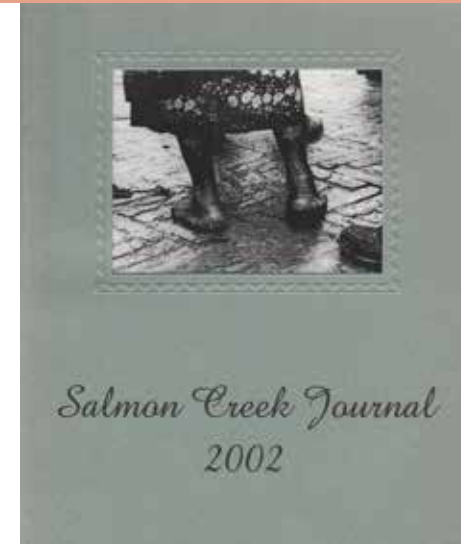


One mile out from Honolua Bay where
 the ocean breaks above coral reefs,
 I scan the surface for the next set of waves.
 White caps rise, rippling sun light.
 They arrive, heaving me up.
 I wait for the highest peak. Cresting,
 I kick, rushing forward,
 stroking down the curving hollow
 as the wave tunnels 'round me.
 White bubbles thunder above and below,
 spraying a mist over my head.
 I ride the surf till I flip 'round
 diving into the ocean's universe
 spreading into the colors of marine life.
 I shift through the depths
 to mushroom coral domes
 lying layer on layer on layer
 looking like castles and shrines
 for mythical sea gods an' goddesses.
 Masked, I swim with the sea's warblers—
 parrotfishes like uhu; butterflyfishes
 like kikakapu and lau-wiliwili; damsel-
 fishes like kupipi and alo-ilo'i; opelu schools—
 among fractions of light, we glide
 through lobe, tube, finger corals
 till I stroke upwards, distancing my limbs
 from the red slate pencil urchins'
 fingers. Bursting out, I embrace
 the air, catching the hallowed space
 of an on-coming wave and shoot forward
 like lightning from nimbus clouds
 into the white foam and soft
 textures of water carrying me onto a sandy beach
 where I drift in sun dreams
 till I lift lobster red.

Tunneling Through
 Water

Patricia Hoopiaina Shaw

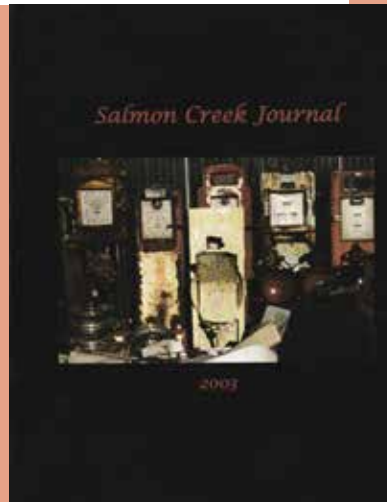
2002



Woman
 John Fitzgerald



2003



John D. Axford

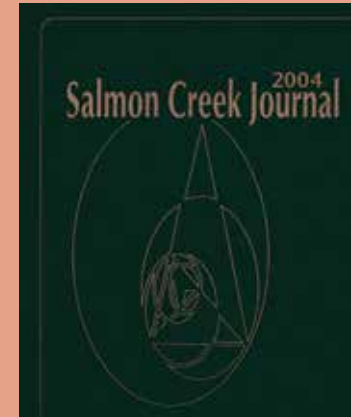
JOHN D. AXFORD
Stumbling Down Stairs After

The poet bled first.
Builders of stone towers must bleed—
such labor demands sacrifice,
and the sky isn't kissed for free.

I merely paid three dollars,
and filed quietly through. Yet
I lingered on the parapet
until the others climbed and returned,
I wanted solitude and found it,
alone at the top with the ghosts.

Then I slipped descending:
third step from the top,
I opened my knee above Tor House,
and paid for my piece of the sky.

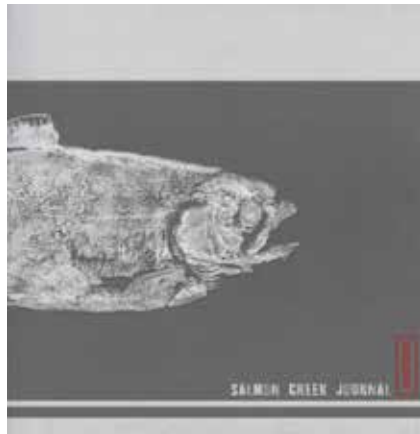
2004



Mirror Lake Lillies
Sandra Phillips



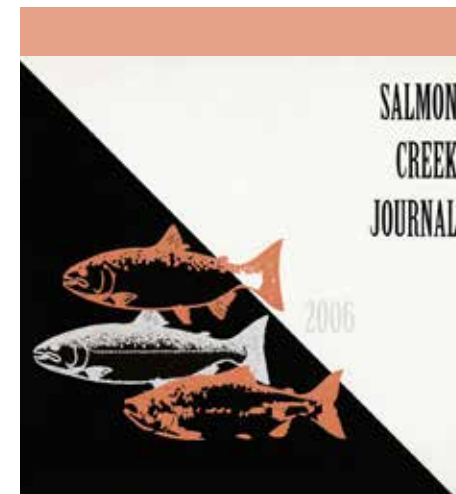
2005



Ragamuffin
Kathryn M. Bade



2006



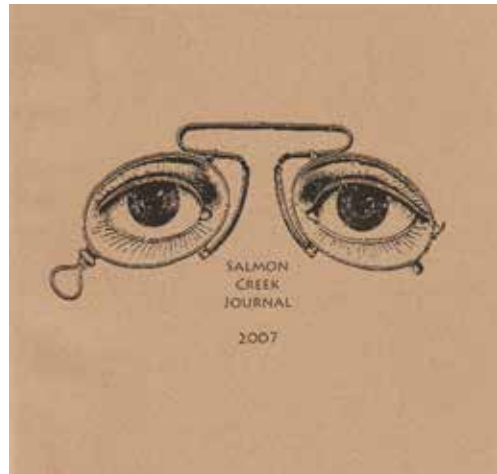
**KATRINA
BY MEGAN
MASCHMANN**

WINNER: *BEST POETRY ENTRY*



She begins in the cellar.
Saturating boxes of childhood toys
her liquid limbs entangle themselves
among careless strands of Christmas lights.
Slipping between the precious junk
she creeps up stairs worn well by laughing children.
At the crest she is greeted
by freshly washed carpets of bouncing beige-
a pallet to stamp her mildewed feet
in decaying patterns of recklessness.
Inching her head around the corner
like a child eager to destroy,
she leaps into the room
surprising the end tables,
forcing the over-stuffed couch
to hike up her billowing skirt
and wade through the morbid murk.
The grandfather clock is caught snickering
about the use of coasters
on such costly antiques.
The wildness smothers his remark.
Rushing to the wall,
she hugs the customized paint,
a spiteful embrace of finality.
Behind her, knickknacks
bobble along the surface.
Silver thimbles, like miniature sailboats,
collide with picture frames and baby bottles.
She ignores the entourage.
Mischievously skimming the ceiling
like a finger at the back of your throat,
she triggers the roof to gag and gurgle,
an attempt to rid itself of the poison.
Spasms of last minute life surge
and stop.

2007



DNA
Christa Herzer



EDITORS' CHOICE: INTEGRATED ENTRY

The original is Dymo and aluminum duct tape on canvas and measures 38 in by 24 in.

The following is encoded in the work:

mankind
like all life a mystery

yet life at its center
strangely simple
elegant

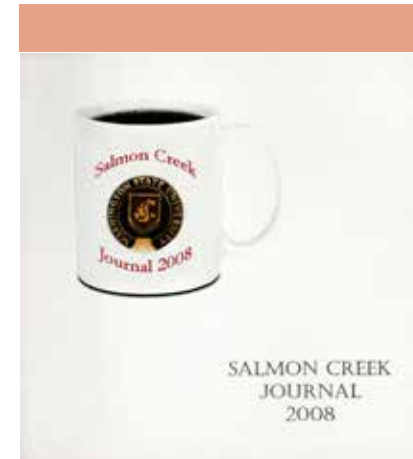
hidden deep within each cell
littered with ancient ancestral remnants
a master plan entangled with endlessly
whirling pairs repeated

a message in cipher

at each life's dawn latent secrets are made
manifest
each destiny half free
half fettered with tiny thread

Notice that the preceding does not contain the letters b, j, o, u, x, or z. This is because there are not corresponding amino acids for these letters. Also note that the artist would have rather used "humankind" in place of "mankind." Unfortunately, humankind contains a "u," one of the unavailable letters, and translation always begins with an m, the amino acid Methionine. Stop codons were used for the spaces.

2008



Driftwood
Nina Westerberg

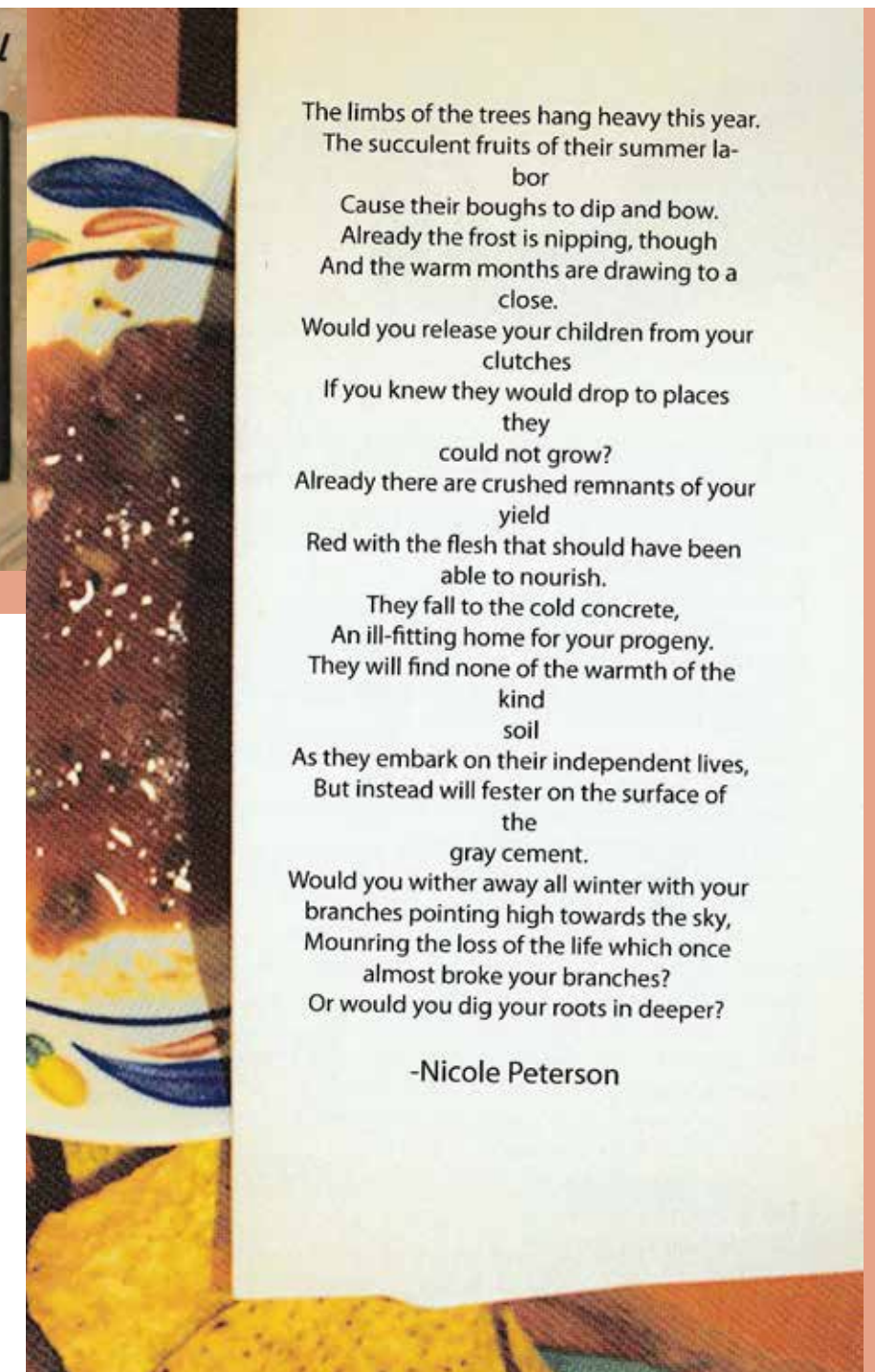


2009



Burning Tree
Niel Hayes

2010



The limbs of the trees hang heavy this year.
The succulent fruits of their summer labor
Cause their boughs to dip and bow.
Already the frost is nipping, though
And the warm months are drawing to a close.
Would you release your children from your clutches
If you knew they would drop to places they
could not grow?
Already there are crushed remnants of your yield
Red with the flesh that should have been able to nourish.
They fall to the cold concrete,
An ill-fitting home for your progeny.
They will find none of the warmth of the kind soil
As they embark on their independent lives,
But instead will fester on the surface of the gray cement.
Would you wither away all winter with your branches pointing high towards the sky,
Mourning the loss of the life which once almost broke your branches?
Or would you dig your roots in deeper?

-Nicole Peterson

2011



Things of Day and Dream

by Dene Grigar

Sometimes when I wake up
I can't believe
those things that happened
live outside my dream
or these things of sleep aren't really there

But seldom I escape
the waking things
when I go to sleep

And lurking between day and dream
things yet imagined just waiting for me

2012



tap.tap.tap.tap.tap
Isabela J. Oliveira

My fingers curl.
I tap them, keeping
perfectly timed rhythm on
the chair's arm.

I stop. I resist.

Tap.

I touch my hair.
Just once. I swear.
No - not once,
lots of times.

Gotta stay symmetrical.

Tap. Tap.

I touch my face with
one index finger.
I hold back. A few labored minutes
later - I brush my skin
with the other hand.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

I picture my mother dying
by breaking her neck on the
open kitchen drawer. I close
the drawer softly. I wipe down
the counter. Better.

Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.

There is something hiding
in my closet. It wants to kill
me. I check in on it
five times. I sleep,
facing the firmly shut door.

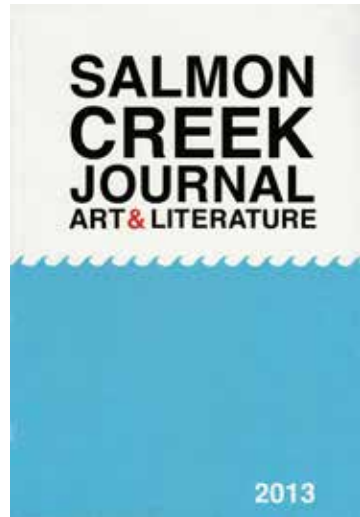
Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.

I resist.

I breathe five breaths.

Tap.

2013



IVY

BY CHRISTOPHER CHAFFIN

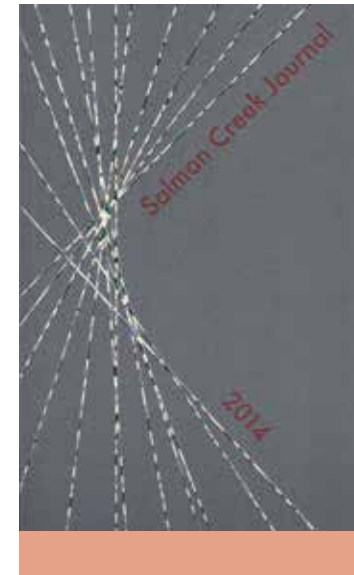
Ivy appears without warning,
carried by unsuspecting wings,
silently stealing nutrients, choking out air,
thriving in stagnation, sheltering vermin;

life strangling life.

Science has labeled her an invasive species,
emerald-flecked majesty gone wrong,
destroying all who dare stand in her path.
She reminds me of my mother.

I think she is beautiful.

2014



Bricks without Straw

By Byron Nalos

my life is poured out
in sections of work for money,
the back of my neck flakes off
in sections of sunburned skin,
my knuckles are calloused with overtime,
and in the evenings i fold
into a felt chair out back
and let my bruised heel rest
on the compost tin can.
my dog digs up ferns
and occasionally i tell
her NO.

II.
my life is sectioned off
to the heel of the loaf;
in the heat my veins are
thick roots swollen from the trunk,
my body sweats like this glass
with ice melting,
i am tan and bent like this august grain
slunk into a felt fold-up chair,
who studied the sun
now bows to the page,
my dog digs up ferns
in the shade.

2015

III.

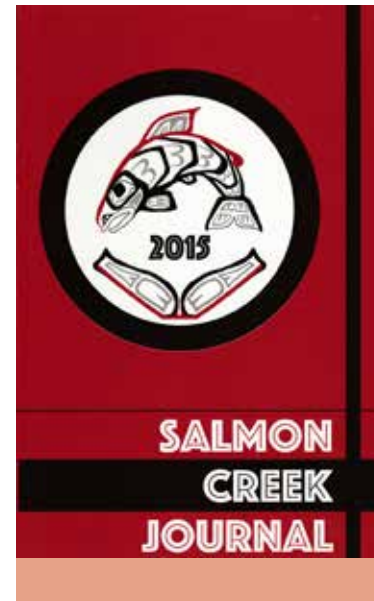
my life passes in drops of sweat
like granules of sand
through the hour glass,
i am shook out for pennies
like a cloth purse,
i am the blessed meek
who shall till the earth,
and blessed be the sections of salsa
in my chest hair.
my dog digs up ferns and
occasionally i swear.

IV.

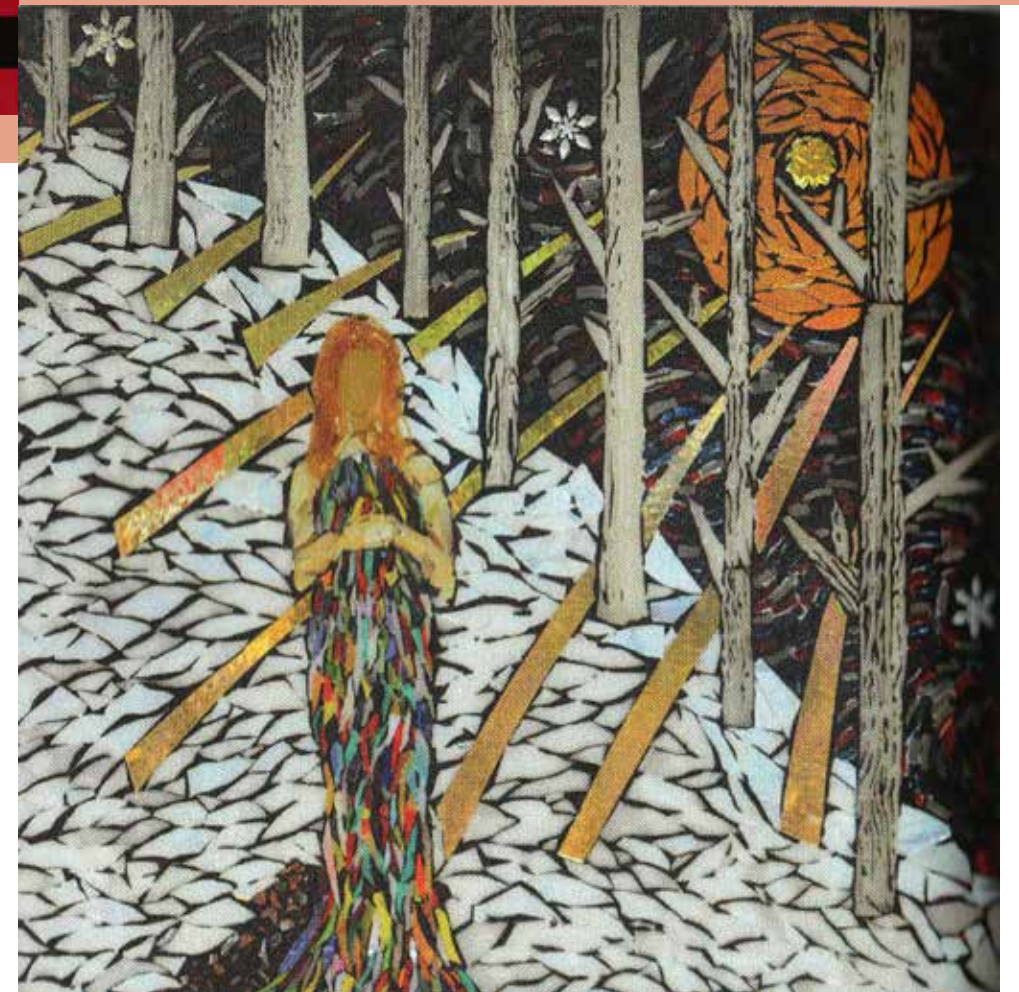
my life is poured out
in sections of work for money,
i am building pharaoh's obelisk
from the dusty floor,
i am for one hour resting
in the thin shadow of the sun dial,
and my dog digs up ferns
at the base of an old growth.

V.

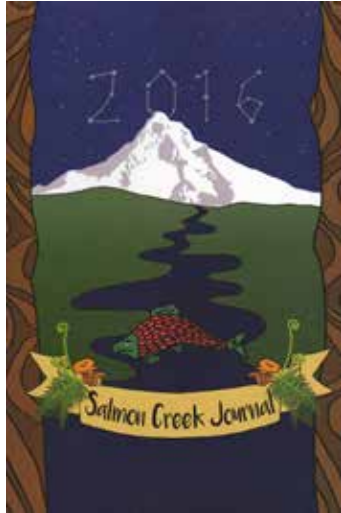
my life is poured out
in sections of pain for money
and i am a slave in the city.
but in the evenings
my shadow thins and elongates
from the back porch into the prairie
like a hawk leaving the suburbs,
my dog digs up ferns...



Midnight Sorrow
Kory Dollar



2016



Birds
Jordan Byman



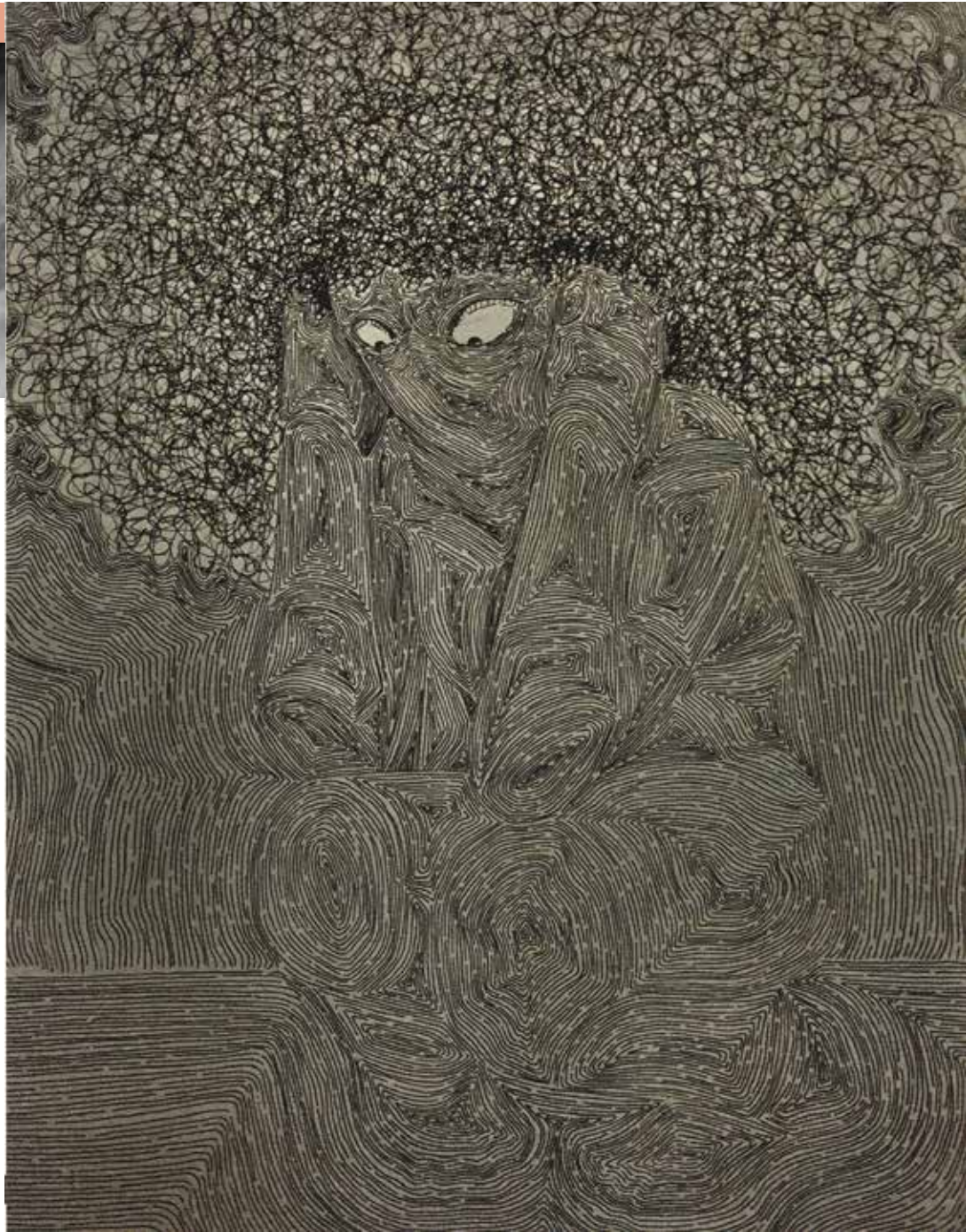
2017



Preferred Passtime
Grace Walton



2018



Static
Cecelia Martin

2019



Dig

Randal Houle

To forget how to dig the earth and to tend the soil is to forget ourselves.
— Mahatma Mohandas Ghandi

Thinking of Ghandi I grabbed a shovel went to the back yard and dug. I dug, ripping through carefully tended sod, roots a carpeted phalanx protecting the earth from what I was about to do. As I dug, I tried to remember why. He said, to forget this thing is to forget ourselves. Or was it, to forget that is to be something else. I dug and I dug and I slept in the hole and woke up again and, breaking fast with grubs, I took up my shovel again and dug. A few feet deeper, I found a clay layer. There, I dug a large round room, and then doors. Carving frescoed artwork with my shovel's edge. I began to dig into other areas, outward, inward;

a place to sleep,
a place to eat,
a place to make more dirt.

I kept digging, down, left, right, round,
down again,

down,
down,

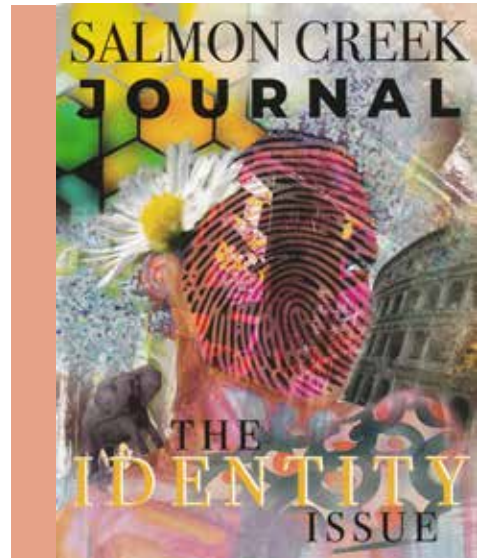
until the sun was only as big as the north star.

I dug six days and through the Sabbath, my sweat and tepid breath coating the walls, while dirt and mud and grime clogged every pore. I kept digging round rooms, square rooms, tall rooms and short rooms.

I dug clay and dirt and rock. I dug tunnels for miles and cavernous W
E
L
L
c

On my final day, I knew I was done. I rose and ate nothing. I dug a final bed:
six below, nine long and four at the head.
Laid with my shovel, flat as can be
and watched it all cave in on me.

2020



Lungs
Sarah Summerhill

set my skin afire, warm my cheeks, embed my heart with glowing embers, and I'll take your breath away, cause your raw pink skin to become base again.

you've tendered my organic evergreen landscape with nuclear pigment.

electric pink aside orange-corrupted skies tower over scintillating city-lights, mirrored in my cool belly.

beneath swims silver smolt in summer, spawns of mossy green and cardinal upon the fall, when leaves strip from trees and you pick them to cover your body.

when the flames cease to burn my bark, they'll find your heart, and lungs.

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