SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please make all literary submissions to highgrade@mines.edu as a Microsoft Word document. One submission per document. Note any special formatting needs. Art and music submissions will be handled through the High Grade office.

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 40th year of *High Grade*! As Co-Editors-in-Chief, we wanted to honor this milestone by building the journal with pieces that speak to a legacy of *High Grade* and the arts at Mines. We spent a lot of time looking through previous editions and thinking about the people who put them together. We went all the way back to the third volume in 1978, a 22 page black and white stapled pamphlet. We realized, despite all the growth that has happened in the last forty years – color printing, binding, more pages and more contributors—the goal of every editor-in-chief has been to create an experience that lasts long after the reader puts the journal down, and calls them to pick it up again.

With this simple but profound idea in mind and in response to the pieces submitted to *High Grade*, we sought to evolve the idea of reflection—both internal and external—throughout the magazine. We looked to previous editions of the journal to create the future, and found the act of looking into the past made this moment prescient. When we put the pieces in order the journal began to reflect in on itself, the pieces shifting and morphing in meaning and appearance every time we changed their location. The first piece you read may act as a stone skipped across a lake, only an initial impact and small surface impression on your mind. But then feel the ripples grow out from it into the next piece and the next in repetition and release. We have bound this edition together visually by the recurring elements taken out of the cover and ordered in such a way as to generate a reflection of holistic ideas, so that each poem, story, painting, essay, or photograph is the accumulation of each one before and after it. After you read through it, read through it again but in a different order. You'll be amazed by how many ways you can skip a stone across a lake.

We conclude the journal with an interview from Mines alumnus and celebrated author George Saunders. His thoughtful responses to questions about writing, inspiration, and his life at Mines give a voice to many of the silent struggles students face while simultaneously putting them at ease. We, as students, alumni, staff, and professors, may not be able to relive our own time at Mines, but we can certainly learn something new about everything we invested here with a little help from Saunders.

*High Grade* now moves into its fifth decade and its lifetime spans close to a third of that of CSM itself. The past forty years of the journal are a testament to the artistic ability and artistic growth of the Mines community, and that growth is showing no signs of slowing down. We know the future is bright for *High Grade* and the arts at Mines. It is our honor to be the facilitators of bringing together and presenting the best artistic work of our community. We hope you will find something in here that gives you the opportunity to reflect on your own life.

Sincerely,

Frances Richardson and Richard Sebastian-Coleman
Co-Editors in Chief

“The past is the present, isn’t it? It’s the future too.” – Eugene O’Neil
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Photography
The trouble with writing is that you never know where to start. Should you write about a king on a mission? A teenager being bullied? A struggling college student worrying about his next term paper? A little girl who gets abducted by aliens? The choices are so endless that they inherently limit you.

And then, of course, once you do choose and get going, your inner editor instantly comes along behind your rambling words, sweeping up terrible punctuation and crossing out stupid sentences even if you’re not finished writing them. The editor is the hardest to kill.

But you have to kill it before it kills your spirit.

The trouble with writing is not necessarily ending something – humans are good at ending things because we, as a rule, end more things than we probably create.

The trouble with writing is instead harnessing passion and containing it within pages. It is difficult to pin down the ephemeral nature of emotions; you cannot preserve proper tears with ink, and you can’t replicate surprise when your reader can read what happens out of turn, perhaps just to spite you.
The trouble with writing is that it is a lonely and social job. It requires vocal silence and silent energy. Writing means you're quiet on the outside, but inside your head is bursting with names and faces and personalities that aren’t your own. It means you read people as well as you read words.
For example:
A writer sits in a coffee shop and watches. He sees another man at a nearby table sip black coffee out of a ceramic yellow mug. His hands have grime on them. He squints at the paper beside him when he reads. His used napkin sits curled into a ball adjacent to it. The man stirs the coffee and then deposits the spoon directly on the public table. The writer would take this action to be a revelation of his character somehow, then sketch him deftly with words like “slumped,” “divorced,” “needs glasses,” “big ears,” “alone,” “slovenly,” or “wrinkled.”

The trouble with writing is finding other writers. Writers are strange creatures. Reclusive. But also recognizable. Nocturnal, constantly tired. Bright eyes, bent fingers, sipping black tea as strong as battery acid, constantly having inner conversations with people that don’t exist. Always carrying a pen. We are a rare breed, yet anyone can become us. And joining is easy. The entrance fee for writerhood is life.

There’s no trouble being a writer. Just let things happen to you. Then share them.
Motel 6, Espanola New Mexico, November 6th 2013
Phil Persson

Overlooking a stucco empire
Adobe, rather, but less insidious than the kind which asks you if
It can download a software update
Every damn day.
Well, slightly less.
It’s pretty, just
A little orchestrated for my tastes

Kids playing in the parking lot
Sounds of reality in strip mall
stripped soul
America.
Fancy cars whip by
Not just fancy but clean; well-kept
The bright yellow plates look handsome on them, exotic
Not just garish and sad, like the rez dog running across
I-25; does anyone even give a fuck?
Placitas, Peralta, Prenumbro, Petaca
Que?

The ladies at the front desk exchange a quick rapport
In Spanish; a hint of some sort of mestizo localism
Or maybe that’s just my dumb yuppie privileged
Cracker ass
Not realizing they know I don’t mind
We can afford to be open-minded.

Brown people in hoodies
White people in Patagonia
They all shop at Trader Joe’s
And mourn the everlasting sunset
Of the atomic bomb
Los Alamos is Shangri-La
Of particles and particulars
The rest of us might have figured out
Had we not bought that turquoise necklace
Or indulged in some locally made gelato.

Motel 6 has seen it all
Dead red earth that spawned the best queen-size bed and continental breakfast
45 crumpled one-dollar bills with bits of chile stuck between a number of them will get you—red or green?
Same ground on which a chief’s tepee, his daughter’s wedding night
In a hallowed circle on red dead thinly spread earth
Turned over into Spanish conquista-something-we-haven’t
Conquered yet.
Finally paved and offered to the somewhere-else bound travelers
Or maybe just the fans
Of stucco empires and sun-bleached fringes
Of places we used to belong.

Motel 6,
Where the Internet doesn’t work
So $2.99 per day usage fee (sir please read this card) in hand or otherwise
It’s time to use your goddamn imagination
So where’s the party at? The cool locals?
The artists?

Georgia O’Keefe had it right
Give em’ landscapes
Some western colors
Cheesy fade-into-bland forever holograms
But stick a skull in it
A bleached bone fragment
A reminder that the earth we’ve turned over
Will in turn overturn us.
My spinal snake, it curves both ways,  
two C’s, mirrored and attached at top and end.  
Strung together like childhood and adulthood,  
each vertebra stacked almost straight  
like the side of a deck of cards  
after you press your thumb against it,  
setting the edge in a slant.  
They make ridges on my back each time I sit,  
and bruise the skin that binds them,  
like a worm fighting from inside an apple,  
the sour green flesh turning brown,  
one spot at a time,  
one year at a time,  
during a lifetime of trying to sit upright.
Wedding Ring
Tessa Rider

Jewelry - Gold
Perhaps it was simply in response
To a thoughtless question
From another celestial being

A vague, unknowing gesture
Meant to convey indifference or
A lack of knowledge on the subject

Of celestial season-based fashion
Or the correct way to pronounce tomato
Or what time is good to catch fish

But.

How often is godspeak trivial?
Perhaps this question was instead
A weighty and important query

A plea for help on a convoluted decision
In which love, life, and the future of the heavens
Were poised on the brink of extinction.

And so the gesture was meant to suggest
A feeling of futility – or that Atlas sensed
That decision should be not be his.

But.

I cannot help thinking that
For Atlas, shrugging is a mighty effort
Not to be undertaken when words might do

And that when he shrugs
The world entire shakes
And his tendons creak and groan

And so perhaps Atlas shrugged
Because he knew the world
Was in need of shaking.

Why Atlas Shrugged
Matthew Kowalsky
‘Hey Jimmy; where’s Sam at?’, the boys called after me, their shadows the long sad forms that filled the narrow leafiness of the Silver Valley this time of year.

‘He’s on nights this week’, I answered dutifully, though I should have ignored them; I knew they wondered about us.

I’d gotten the letter late last week- 4 years tuition in Seattle with room and board. When I’d told Sam that night, he’d smiled, shaken his head in that way that made me want to kiss him and look away at the same time. His mom was over in Coeur D’Alene for a few days working at the big new Indian casino and his pop’s name formed a fading inscription in the brassy candlelight the civic association ladies always kept burning at the Sunshine Mine fire memorial up by the interstate, so I stayed the night with him as I’d been doing more often. His shoulders felt tougher lately, made of unbreakable 19-year-old stubbornness, and I liked the building stubble under his chin, his proud cheekbones building into the cocky smile in the portrait of his father that hung down the hall.

‘How was it down there today?’, I asked, filling the space between his back and the uneven wooden wallboards next to his bed.

‘It was good, I ran a jackleg myself; drilled 2 rounds- my partner said I might get promoted from helper this year if I keep it up; we made tonnage and shift bonus’, he informed me proudly.

Suddenly I felt the ground under Kellogg, Idaho shake slightly, just barely, and we all knew there were no earthquakes here. ‘Jesus…’ I mumbled under my breath.

I saw Sam’s eyes flinch for a second; his pupils go cold.

‘Rockbursts been getting bad down there on 6800’ level’, he said to no one in particular. ‘Or maybe they’re firing 2 shots per shift now on nights; Alhambra vein down there is running 200 ounces to the ton and ‘prolly 20 feet thick…’ he said wistfully, with the same love his dad must have had of the suit-and-tie on Wall Street kinda money these miner made, but also a profession so dangerous and addictive if you’d never done it you just didn’t get it.

‘I love you Sam’, I said with eighteen years of sincerity, and my hands drifted across hard fleshy angles somewhere to the south. ‘TsssshhhFaaaa… he breathed raggedly, shifting slightly, his toothy smile a mirror of his father.

‘You don’t know what it’s like there… if these guys knew about us’, he mouthed into the pillow.

‘You think just cuz I’m going to Seattle I’m gonna forget about you?’, I fire back. I don’t know why I said this. I felt alone. I wanted him to say my name again, hearing it felt like waking up from a deep sleep.
Suddenly I heard the boys from before, maybe from the future stumble by below the cracked window outside, their drunken laughter ringing through the cold November fog.

‘Aww hell you didn’t fuck her, that’s my sister!’ ‘Thought she seemed like a Brackenbush…’ followed by an echoing ‘Ooooo…’ 2 sharp bells rang across the valley from up Wardner Gulch, the mine shift signals we’d all remembered since we were small. The click of the sheave wheels ratcheting into place and the acceleration of the hoist bringing a few tons of Silver and a dozen unbreakable men to the surface was barely audible through the window. The voices piped up again outside.

‘Guess Ernie’s closed early tonight’ Sam ventured. They must be out of kegs, I thought. A man not much older than us spoke again. ‘You guys know Sam, right?’

The vague murmur of approval spread across the group. ‘He was on my shift last week, real solid guy for being so green’, one of them chimed in. ‘His dad and mine were friends, said he was the best hunter in North Idaho’, another added.

‘Yeah, well, I saw him kissing Jimmy Archer one day up in them woods by Shoshone Creek’, the first voice said hesitantly. Silence. The vague hum of the hoist making its way to the surface. Another bell.

‘Ain’t nothing wrong with that’ the second voice ventured hesitantly. ‘Good for him, you know my dad told me Jimmy got a scholarship to Seattle’ a new voice said more confidently. I turned towards Sam, but he’d hidden his face in the pillow and tears pooled around square cheekbones. I pried it close to my own, and our smiles outshone every ounce of silver than even came out of these hills.
HIDDEN PEAK

Diane Roher

Photography
I want to hear about your landscape:
Your understandings by the marsh.
   News of the water.
   Fog, Sun, Stars.
The preen of cormorant or osprey.
   The bask of the sky.
Your skin in the rain.
The muck of the sand.
Your aching feet.
Your walk to the shops.
The rattle of your bike.
What beer, what wine.
Cheese pizza or stir fry.
   Herbs.
Marie’s garden tomato.
The round dimpled fruit in a bowl.
   Irises.
A movie, a play, music too.
The colors, pretentious impasto and genius chiaroscuro.
   And you.
Girl With Parrot

Ali Moradi
A bridge that linked you to me
I don’t remember how it came to be.
A box full of letters, or the tree in the park,
I only recall that your world was dark.

Just like mine, your sky was black -
the stars were too tired of being stabbed in the back.
Your hopeless words found their way to my ears
and I remember us sitting there in your puddle of tears.

Oh I cried too, I will never forget
that you were the wound and I was the tourniquet.
I would hold you forever underneath that tree. . .
ah yes, now I remember the bridge that linked you to me.

A beautiful willow it was,
weeping with fragile leaves - just like us.
But then it changed, as did your world and mine;
so beautifully instilled, but never truly entwined.
I-70

Duc Nguyen

Photography
Andrew Hemesath

Echoes. The echoes of my pounding feet, of heart beating against ribcage, of biting words and forgotten threats. Sound surrounds me as I fly up the stairs. I am lost in it; I am lost in my ragged breath and screaming legs. The dull murmurs of angry voices nip at my ears and still I climb. My memory of this place is dusty from years of neglect.

An hour ago the phone rang, a number I didn’t know. A voice that was barely a whisper sent every nerve ablaze. The voice of this ghost had me frozen; it had been so long since I heard her speak. She wanted to see me one last time; she wanted to watch the stars like we did when our lives were full. She said to be there soon or not to go at all.

I lost her, but now, in this place that lost us, she waits. I don’t know how long she’ll wait and what’s next my heart refuses but my mind can guess. In agony I pursue her, sweat runs down my back. I take hold of the hand railing and throw myself around to face another flight, surely the end is near. On my tongue I taste the fresh night; the roof is close, with every step I rise above the dead air of our forgotten stairwell. The flights are numbered, only a few floors left, with every sideways glance I glimpse the top. My muscles cry mercy and my stomach sinks. There is the door. The final steps fall behind me. My hand grips the knob, twists, I blink and all is dark.

I grew up climbing the white trellis to her window when her parents had gone to sleep. My fingers mingled with the vines tangled around the wooden frame. There were times I’d pause at the top and watch her, my reflection in the glass coupled with her. She would turn to me, her grey eyes lit up in the fading light. I still remember the sound her window made when she’d slide it up. Her arms would reach out, her soft hands grabbing me around the middle pulling me through the window. As kids we’d laugh at the closeness and push each other way, until one day we didn’t laugh and I pulled her close to me.

Her breath is warm, steaming in the brisk winter evening air blowing through the open window. Her dark brown bangs sway softly. My frozen fingers, buried in the folds of her oversized Christmas sweater, tingle as rushing blood returns. Our eyes lock in teenage tension, her nose brushing mine. One final exhale and our lips meet. Hers so supple, eyes closed, her hands slipping lightly through my hair, her fingers pulling gently on my curls. We fall to the floor centered in the moonlit rectangle projecting from her skylight. I’m lost in her, the way her body molds to mine. The moon glides across the sky and our patch of light shifts with it. She pulls away, her hair a tangled mess. She’s smiling. Her laugh so sweet, mingling with mine. Her head drifts and settles on my shoulder. Her fingers slide up and down my adolescent chest. My arms wrapped round her waist, our legs woven together.

In time she fell asleep her breathing shallow and rhythmic. All night I watched the stars fascinated by their blinking light. Pulsating like a heart, sometimes fast and other times slow.
The cold night pierces my lungs. Halos of light dance across my sight. My ears are ringing and my head spins. My body had found equilibrium in the noise, in the pain, in the industrial white light and now there is nothing: no light, no sound, no pain. I may just throw up. I flail, reaching for something, anything to right my tossing ship. I heave all my weight to my right arm and it on the door frame. My breath slows, my heart relaxes, and my eyes adjust to the dim light.

...

Her hand feels warm in mine; we’ve been lying on the roof for hours. Our icy breath kissing the air. She pulls in closer. She’s cold; it’s the first day of November and winter stirs through the city not far from our childhood home. We’ve lived here since August in an apartment halfway up the tallest tower.

After graduating from high school we spent a summer working meaningless jobs. I scrubbed dishes at Rosie’s Diner and she sold clothing to our neighborhood’s desperate housewives at the Uptown Mall. The daytime was a bleak and repetitive existence disturbed only by the evenings we spent at the top of the highest hill in town.

Her backyard opened out to the hill, a grassy island dotted with low lying trees surrounded by a rippling suburban sea. Many childhood summers were spent rolling and running until our youthful limbs betrayed us and exhaustion laid us down. And there we’d wait concealed by the tall, seed tipped grass waving in the wind. The setting sun tinted our refuge orange and painted the deep blue summer sky with a burnt red hue. As the warmth faded and the shadows grew her mother’s voice would ring out, “Time for dinner.” But in silence we’d always wait. The far off shutter of her screen door signaled that we were safe. On our island we watched the stars rise and the sun set. We made a home for ourselves. The waving grass our walls, and night sky our roof.

The grass that once tickled our childish feet now itched at us as we climbed every night to the top of the hill. Our gaze never drifted to the dim lights of the cookie cutter houses spiraling away below. Our eyes preferred the bubbling glow of the far off city skyline. Its tallest towers like arms outstretched, grasping at the velvet sky. Together we stared, lost in the dream of our lives there. It was the middle of July and a choir of crickets serenaded the surrounding homes when we decided to leave.

In the city, we still work meaningless jobs. I sell cell phones and cell phone accessories, and she gets coffees for the assistants of fashion magazine executives. Most nights we fight the monotony watching the stars from the rooftop of our apartment building.

“We should go to Fifth Street Underground tomorrow, Stacy is going. She says it’s one of the best clubs, the best DJs, the best dancing.” I turn my head, she’s looking up, a silver snowflake rests on her nose, it melts. “What?” she says, my silence did not go unnoticed. “Do you not want to go? I really want to go, the girls at work are just starting to like me. I’d love you to meet them.” Her voice brimming with excitement and her smile bright like the coming frost.
“Yeah, we should go. I’ve heard good things and you know I love dancing with you.” I say squeezing her thigh and pulling her on top of me. Flakes of snow collecting in her dyed blonde hair. She dives forward catching my lips. She presses down hard and snaps back producing a satisfying smack.

“I love you, but I’m going inside. It’s cold and there aren’t any stars left in the sky,” she says pushing herself up, hands pressing my chest.

“I love you too, I’ll be down in a few.” The door closes with a heavy thud punctuated by a metallic clang. The roof is silent except for the whispering wind and dull roar of traffic on the streets below. The grey clouds tinted orange by city lights roll noiselessly above the stretching buildings. There’s a small gap in the clouds, a gateway to the hidden night sky. Between the clouds there is a pulsating star, its light is soft and seems to fade with each cycle. You’d never expect it to stop shining, to disappear. But it kept on beating, falling behind the cotton snow clouds.

On the ledge, her silhouette, blurry at first but sharpening with every flick of my eyelids. She’s turned away, her body framed by the familiar skyline stretching on and falling into a blackened sea. Below her the urban hustle, the blaring of horns, the shouting of voices and the clamor of city life. Her head is turned up, dark brown hair spilling down her back. Her concentration unbreakable, my arrival twenty feet away or a thousand it makes no difference. She turns to face me. So calm on the ledge, like a dove she waits, no fear of falling. Her smile at odds with her sullen eyes. She knew I would come. I always have.

My hand fumbles in the back pocket of my jeans. My collared shirt is soaked in sweat with the top three buttons undone and the sleeves rolled up. Stains crisscross my clothing. Finally, my twitching fingers grip the plastic bag buried deep in my pocket. I rip my head around to face her. She’s inches away perched on the battered toilet of this cramped bathroom stall. Its walls, covered in the art of America’s nocturnal youth, surround us, hide us from view. The air is dank and thick with the scent of urine. The rumble of electronic bass fills my ears. The noise swells and falls with the opening and closing of the bathroom door. The air vibrates around me, my skin prickles and my tongue trips clumsily over my cotton mouth teeth. The light is dim, and her face flows with the air’s vibrations, like the wings of a hummingbird never anywhere but everywhere. My pulse quickens and a bead of sweat rolls off my nose exploding on the plastic bag. I close my eyes, swallow hard, and dig to get a grip. Her features slow and settle in one location. Eye shadow infects her darkened eyes, trails of it roll down her cheeks propelled by the dried sweat which pollutes her face. The silver of her eyes has dulled, their sparkle forgotten. Her hair is wiry wisps of blonde strewn out in every direction. Dark roots emerge undyed and damaged. Her mouth falls slightly open. Her breath is hurried and plagued with alcohol and cigarettes. Her sequined dress falls loosely around her shallow frame. Elbows and knees jut out of skin that is red with cuts and black with bruises. Her eyes do not fall on my own pockmarked face but on the bag of pills which rests in my soiled hand.

“Only three,” her eyes dart from my own to the bag. “Only three, three from how many? So many enough to last forever,” her hands rush frantically through her hair, jagged fingernails caressing her scalp.
“You said we’d never run out,” she leaps from her porcelain perch onto unsteady and tattered pantyhosed legs. “You said I would always be happy, you said you’d always be there.”

“I’m right here,” I say frantically dumping the pills onto my outstretched palm. “And they’re here,” I said thrusting the featureless white discs in her face.

“But this is it, it’s not enough,” her lips start to quiver and her eyes swell.

“I’ll get more, I promise, take these, they’re yours, I’ll get more,” again I thrust the pills toward her.

“You don’t have any money,” she whispers, her head falling to one side, eyes closed and out of sight.

“What?” I say.

“You don’t have any money,” an unbelievable howl rattles from her petite frame. She grabs me by the collar and pulls my face down to hers. Her pupils are huge, her teeth are bared and appear sharpened in my panicked state. Her acrid breath stings my eyes and her nostrils flair with the heat of her exhalation. “I don’t need you,” with her other hand she knocks the pills from my grasp and they scatter on the grimy tile floor. “I never needed you,” she slams my back against the stall door. Its brittle lock shatters and the door swings open sending us plummeting toward the bathroom wall. My back strikes the tile and my head whips back with a crash. Eyes spinning, she dances in front of me until her image settles. She’s close to me, her face inches from my own. Her blonde hair brushing my eyebrows and her grey eyes locked to mine. She exhales, standing up and pushing me away. “Goodbye,” the clack of her stiletto heels echoing off the cold floor.

“But I love you,” I say. The door closes with a heavy thud punctuated by a metallic clang. My head rings as I crawl around the bathroom hunting the fallen pills. With the three collected, I lean back against the wall, swallow hard, and let my gaze drift upwards to a moldy paneled sky.

…

Her broken eyes meet mine then dart away, their shadows deeper. The winter wind pulls her fragile dress taught to her waning figure. In her eyes, a moment of longing. Longing for our wind swept hill with its tickling grass, and cloudless nights. I step forward, her hand swings out, a warning against my coming closer. She’s out of reach, behind her window pane. She’s always let me in. Her eyes lock to mine, flecks of forgotten silver magnified by her watery gaze flash across the rooftop. Her words catch on the wind. “It’s good to be home.” One backward step and she’s off. Plunging into nothing. I rush forward; all sound escapes me in my own quest for the ledge. She leaves my sight briefly but in a moment I’m there leaning over the edge. She’s staring back at me. Farther she falls, looking up into the electric light washed sky. Her eyes are lost in what little stars remain and still she falls. To fall like that, to see the floors flash by, to feel the rush of the wind and the tug of the earth. To gaze into those stars and to find peace. The approaching ground is long forgotten, a childhood trouble from summers past.

Hand in hand we rush down the hill, arms outstretched, begging to fly. One misstep and we’re tumbling caught in each other’s momentum. The soft ground, wet from recent thunderstorms catches us in its dewy grasp. Patches of mud mar her clothes and sunlight cuts through the grey rain clouds. She smiles, thunder rolls, and I flick a piece of grass from her nose.
I fall with her, the air is cool on my sweat soaked skin. I catch frames from people's lives as the windows fly past. It's like a movie, some moments so vivid and others brief flashes of forgotten black. A cut scene between windows and the characters are changed. They're older, they’re laughing, they’re sad, they’re alone, they start new beginnings, they face the end, they seek what they love, they seek their home.

... 

A man pulls himself up from a musty tile floor, streams of light from dusty windows reflect in bathroom mirrors. He shields his swollen, bloodshot eyes and stumbles through the exit door. He lays in bed barely breathing counting the ceiling’s spots. Dust dances in the shifting light. Nights fall, suns rise, consecutive eternities and no rest for tired eyes.

The doorknob twists and new characters enter the room. The man barely stirs only twisting his head. His sunken eyes meet the light of his mothers. She shrieks and his father pulls him to his feet. The man rests in between as the two carry him to the stairs. Slowly they step down each flight until finally they emerge into a cold spring night.

The man sits atop a tall hill, dotted with small budding trees. Green spring grass whips in the early March breeze. The wind sweeps brown hair across his fuller face. He's leaning forward against knees pulled up to his chest. His right hand buried in the folds of his sweater. His left hand placed firmly on the ground. His fingers digging down between the grass, gripping the dirt. A pale blue sky hangs over the distant city skyline. His back to the buildings. His eyes rest on a house. On a white trellis tangled with vines rising to meet a second floor window.

The man waves to his parents, they stand on the train station platform. They’re smiling and waving. He’ll see them again soon. The train gathers speed, and the platform disappears behind the first bend. Outside the window, houses flash by. An emerald green hill rises above the rooftops and beyond it lies a familiar skyline, its tallest buildings reaching for the cotton ball sky. He presses his hand against the glass, as the hill disappears, the man closes his eyes.

It's a cold November night many winters past. The man is walking home from work. In his hand, Chinese takeout, dinner for two. His foot reaches forward for the first stair of his stoop when his cell phone rings, a number he doesn’t know. He answers the call, “Hello.”

... 

The floors are running out. My hand reaches for hers. I turn my head to get one last look. Her brown hair ripping upward obscuring her face. The roar of our fall culminates in silence. I blink and she’s gone. I’m alone on the roof, the wind whistles in my ears. Snow is falling. I look up, in between the grey clouds tinted orange by the city lights there is a gateway to the starless night.
ANNA

Julia Cormos

Photography
Orange dreamsicle
slipping down my throat,
as I swallow whole that warm day
that place in time
when you had time
to sit
on our concrete white railed porch, a piece
of the city hidden
by the trees you planted,
one for me.

And it’s still here,
deep in my belly,
in every time I drive that way
to see those white
bricks that held us so close, safe
from untrusted neighbors—
who never left me to heal my mother’s ego
nine years old
who never held a blade on her neck
Christmas Eve
who never broke my bedroom door
another fight—
yet, it’s inside four walls
I learned, never trust.

First to wake
I tip toe down creaky wooden stairs,
you’re asleep on our brown checkered worn
down couch—
maybe you were watching soccer
on the spanish channel, it comes on at 3AM:
“GOL! GOL! GOL!”—
but I didn’t hear you come home and
she doesn’t know where you were.
“OJ for SJ!” you proudly announce
because that’s what you called me.
Your callused fingers count my toes,
“Just right,” you say,
and laugh because
I always thought they were called
orange dreamsicles.
INTROSPECTION

Bryce DeShazer

Acrylic
A just occasion for new adventure;
Toil for payment, trade to nurture.

A crust of bread between two fingers;
Taste departed, but hunger lingers.

A gust of courage between two organs;
Victory mothers, but conquest orphans.

A lust of impulse between two kisses;
The first endeavors, the second misses.

A trust of utmost between two lovers;
Doubt is fleeting, but contrast hovers.

A rust of contact between two notions;
To hunger leisure, but also motions.

A bust of frailty between two fervors;
Now Hope has faltered, but Thoughts are servers.

A dust of deadline between two Kingdoms;
The cusp held expiry, but shift bore freedoms.

A thrust of vigor between two stages;
His status cancelled, but morrow ages.

Adjust for comeback—this modern moment;
Toil to nurture, trade for payment.
Life Embers

Katie Romano

Charcoal
I came back the next night to see her. Even sat on the same stained, lumpy velvet cushion near the front of the stage, ordering a scotch neat while I waited. Some other woman – older, with short, black hair and dull asphalt eyes – stepped into the dim footlights after I’d been there a while and began singing a ballad of lament in a soft language I couldn’t make out. I wasn’t impressed much, and I asked one of the passing waiters what happened to the girl from the night before. He said he didn’t know, that the performers changed up most every night and did I think he made a point of writing down the schedule when he had drinks to serve.

I kept my mouth shut as he growled at me and said thanks only after he had already headed back to the bar. The woman with dull eyes finished and the stage went dark. Cigarette smoke kept building up in the corners of the room until I had to go outside, up to the empty Brooklyn street, to clear my lungs. It was a cold spring in New York, and the rain slipping between my upturned coat collar and shirt froze every pore it slipped past on its way down my back. The hairs stood up on my neck and told me to go back in, but the rest of me was iced up and immobilized and I let the invisible misty drops plaster the hair on my forehead.

Being an insurance adjustor, I didn’t make it to that part of town much. My apartment was a few blocks away from Central Park on the fourth floor of a quiet Upper East Side building, and most days I was never more than seven miles away from it. Two fifteen-minute taxi rides – one to the State Mutual Incorporated Insurance Company offices off of 51st and Madison and one home. Once in a while my boss would ask me to take a client out on the town. Nothing racy, just a drink or two and a decent show. Talk up the business, get the customers a little drunk on the big city. I’d been with the company since 1969, five years ago this January, and they seemed to think I had a knack for schmoozing potential big spenders into being even bigger spenders. It felt like I was in on some kind of crooked deal when I had to wine and dine them, and I always told myself I’d say no the next time. But steady paychecks were something I’d gotten used to.

Bill in annuities told me about the place in Brooklyn. It used to be some kind of speakeasy, with secret passages and a little metal grille on the door that slid open and closed to check the people outside. I nearly walked past it the first time. He hadn’t said it was sublevel, hidden down a steep set of stairs and tucked underneath the shadows of the brownstone sitting above it. Sounded interesting, though. Unusual. And as much as I hated playing babysitter to all the country hicks we wrote policies for, at least it beat hanging out in my apartment alone, watching basketball and packing up the next box of Cynthia’s sweaters and shoes for donation. Anything was better than counting up my worth in designer clothes and knick-knacks she’d left behind. Apparently seven mohair turtlenecks, a portable record player, and two angel figurines were the going rate for being a good sport when your fiancée
moved overnight to Arizona to study Indian bones and healing charms and spells with her new-age, graduate student boyfriend.

The man I had with me that night, Mr. Goldberg from Minnesota, interested in modestly large corporate policies, seemed pleased about the whole thing when we were sitting in the cab and I was pointing out the rain-sla
d window to all the typical landmarks and tourist traps and lying to him about the great little club we were going to, the one I always went to when I stopped in Brooklyn. It’s the sort of dive Cynthia would’ve appreciated if she wasn’t busy with Cypress or Clover or whoever he was in Arizona. I saw Goldberg stiffen up a little when we waited at the door for the grille to open and a pair of suspicious eyes peeked through at us, and even more after we sat down at a cramped front table because the rest were full. He realized that it was the sort of place with quick drinks and a hazy, intimate atmosphere and he didn’t like it. He didn’t like talking shop, either, but my boss told me in no uncertain terms before I left that afternoon that I was being paid to keep the man interested in insurance, not tell him that I collected old coins and grew up with three other brothers and listened to jazz. My boss said that Goldberg was big money and if this deal went south I shouldn’t bother showing up the next day.

Goldberg blinked and blinked, like a grey, overgrown fish trying to keep himself awake, as I explained the advantages of long-term policies versus short-term. The pianist in front of us wasn’t anything special, and after a few ginger ales and bad jokes from me Goldberg muttered that he was feeling tired and would like to leave. I asked if he didn’t want to possibly settle on that policy before going, and he said he didn’t think it would work out after all and could I point him back to his hotel, please. Not all visiting clients were looking for the night life, it seemed. No longer in the mood to humor my boss and ruin Goldberg’s night along with my own, I walked up to the street with him to pay for his cab. Before closing the door he asked if all out-of-towners got the same treatment, and I told him it was the company way to thank them for their business. He just looked at me and sighed, and then asked the cabbie if anyone in New York knew how to have a quiet, decent evening. The cabbie just laughed, turned off his light, and they drove away down the block. I nearly went home myself after that, but I still had half a glass of single malt sitting down on the table. And Cynthia’s ghost was waiting at home. I decided to go back in and finish it, to savor the rare feeling of warmth brought on by a nice glass of alcohol.

I usually only drank when I was out with a client. It wasn’t about the money. On my salary, I could manage a night of champagne and caviar if I wanted, though I didn’t have anyone to do it for anymore. I just never liked the idea of going too far, having too much of anything. My one spree was season tickets to the Mets, and an annual trip to Radio City Music Hall around Christmas with my mother when she complained about not seeing me much. Other than that it was two cab rides a day, twenty cents for coffee from the drugstore around the corner, groceries once a week, and a single drink if I had a night out with a client on the company dime. Like I said, not too much.
The waiter was picking up my glass so I didn’t notice her coming through the stage curtain until the lights dimmed and a soft, rasping voice burned through the microphone. It wasn’t what I would have called a pretty sound, nothing worth putting on vinyl, but after looking up at her the voice seemed to make sense. She was about my age, maybe a year or two younger, with vines of golden, curly hair hanging free around her pale face as her head dipped with the swell and ebb of the piano melody. The lights caught the edge of her face and a billowing sort of shawl that was wrapped around her arms and waist. She reminded me of an old photo I’d seen in my grammar school’s encyclopedia of a gypsy, draped in scarves and jewelry and staring at the camera like a wild animal. The girl singing looked like that, uninhibited and free.

She moved back into the light and I saw the dark shades of eye shadow and rouge layered on top of each other; her arms were hung with beads, bangles, and little slivers of lace. On anyone else it all would’ve made her look cheap and kitschy, but everything I saw seemed to fit, like she’d come that way naturally. I couldn’t stop looking, not even when the weak applause had died and a moustached guitarist took her place. The shape of her was still there, occupying space without weight or substance. Almost like the moment I was living had continued when all around me the world spun just as fast as ever. The only thing I could think to explain it with was… mesmerized. Hypnotized, even, like a kid I once saw at the circus who looked too long at the revolving mirror.

I must have stayed like that a while, because when she sat down across from me another act had gone up and the place was pretty cleared out, other than the bartenders and a few couples in the back. I thought I was having a hallucination at first. The vision I’d been remembering was right in front of me; the same flowing shawls, jangling bracelets, pink and dusky cheeks. All untouched by any sort of skewed remembrance that might make me think something was different from before. This time I could see her, actually see her, and her surging grey eyes had little pinpricks of white lighting up the edges of the iris that held onto me tight.

“You were sitting here earlier with a sad, overestimated man,” she said, her voice low and level like she was reading from a history book. She reached for my hand and turned it palm-up in hers.

“I don’t know about Goldberg being sad and overestimated, but I’ve had this table all night.” I felt I’d just been pulled forward in time, back to the present, when she touched me.

“You came back.”

“I wanted to finish my drink.”

“Your glass is gone.” She lifted the last syllable an octave so it hung as a question on the air.

“I know, I just… I must’ve gotten a little distracted, I guess.”

“I get lost like that, too,” she said with a slow nod, as if she knew exactly what I was talking about, but she didn’t explain any further. Just held onto my hand. “Why are you still here, then, Mark?”

It took me a while to replay the words in my head and recognize what felt wrong about them.

“How do you know my name?” Maybe my hypnosis idea wasn’t too crazy after all.

“I know more than that.”
"This is the floor show, right? You get ahold of someone’s credit card and put them on the spot?"

"Not exactly," she said with a quiet laugh. "I have a gift."

"Go ahead, then. Tell me all about me."

"Okay." It sounded more like a warning than an agreement, and she took a deep breath before speaking again. "Hanna. Mark Hanna, junior claims adjuster for the State Mutual Incorporated Insurance Company."

That's exactly the way it was printed on my business card. She even said it the way I did, mumbling over 'junior' to get to the more important-sounding 'State'.

"Twenty-nine, Episcopalian," she continued, "not an only child, and always a little afraid of ice breaking when you step on it."

I started blinking like Goldberg, trying to clear away whatever fuzziness sat on my brain that was preventing me from recognizing her from someplace else or remembering talking to her before. "Are you some kind of profiler? How do you know that?"

"I can tell you because I know you won’t ever tell anyone else about this until you're very old."

"How?"

"I’m an oracle." She said it the way a barber would introduce himself as a barber. Confident and sure, wondering how anyone could have thought he was something else.

"A what?"

"A fortune teller, a seer. Psychic, if you like that better."

My face must have betrayed me with some very obvious disbelief because she let go of my hand and leaned across the table until I could feel one of her curls brush my forehead.

"You think I cheated. I promise you I never have, ever, and I can prove it." Her voice was sharp and powerful then, defensive.

"How?" I was beginning to sound like a stuck record.

"Does it matter?" she whispered, looking at the dilated pupils within my eyes like she really could see straight through into my thoughts.

I glanced around the room, my eyes landing on anything that wasn’t her. I felt foolish and rude for even suggesting she was faking it. But it didn’t stop me from thinking it. I tried to move my mind onto something else, just in case she could tell. “I guess not.”

"Good. I wasn’t wrong about you." She sat back, apparently satisfied. Just that quickly the storm was over. One of her long nails ran itself over the creases and baseball-bat callouses on my fingers.

She could have been reading my palm the whole time, but for some reason I didn’t actually think so. I got the feeling she knew me without knowing me; the way she stared, the strange, dry-tongued sensation I had in my mouth that made talking difficult but listening easy – it was like a bizarre fantasy that made perfect, deep sense to some dream self of mine I hadn’t met yet.

"Thanks," I finally said.

"You’re welcome, Mark Hanna. That’s a full name, you know. Really full. Very… complete."
I didn’t know what she meant but it sounded like a compliment, so I smiled. “What about yours?” I asked.

“You can call me whatever you want. Barbara, Diane, Jen, Marguerite. It doesn’t matter. Mine’s not finished yet.”

“How do you know?” She just smiled at my question, a set of white teeth breaking the continuity of her red, red lips.

“Right. Psychic. I’ve never met one before. So, what are you doing here instead of seeing the future and preventing disasters?”

“I go where I’m called,” she said with a cryptic grin. I got the impression she was humoring my suspiciousness; maybe it made her laugh to meet someone so obviously a nonbeliever.

“That makes sense.”

“I like you, Mark Hanna. It’s very easy to see you. Like the reflection of stained glass.”

“What does that mean?”

“I don’t know. It came to me. When a word comes to you, you should never ignore it. Say it, no matter where you are, and then it can grow all by itself into something real. That’s one of the first rules of real fortune-telling.”

“Oh,” was all I said. I wasn’t even sure I knew what she was talking about anymore.

“Go ahead,” I said. She tipped her head back, breathing loudly a few times to get ready for… whatever it was. And then she nodded, and began murmuring in a strange, bumpy rhythm.


It just sounded like playful gibberish until I heard the last one. I pulled my hand off the table and frowned, almost as upset at hearing her name as I was by the broken spell of our time together. “How do you know that name?”

“Sad. Suspicious. And she never understood how patient and jealous you were.”

“What do you know about Cynthia?” I demanded.
“I told you, words come to me. But you still think I cheated.” Her eyelids lowered in hurt and disappointment.

“I think I don’t really believe in oracles or psychics or whatever it is and I want to know how you know her name. Getting my age and company is one thing but this… Did she set this up?”

“Mark Hanna, I’m giving you your words. I’ve never heard them either until tonight.”

“I bet.” I pushed my chair back to get out of there, but she grabbed my arm and held it tight.

“Don’t leave.” I thought I saw real tears in her eyes as she gripped onto me. “I said I’d prove it. Please don’t leave, not until it’s finished. Do you have a pen?”

I pulled one out of my coat pocket and gave it to her, wishing she would just hurry up and let me go. She slipped a paper napkin off the table next to us and began drawing, talking fast as she ran the ink tip over the square.

“I was waiting, and it came to me. We’re all just waiting. It comes at different times for all of us, and we should never ignore it. I know you don’t believe in it, but you will eventually. I did, and I know you will, too. Just don’t leave. Don’t leave. Not before it’s finished.”

The necklaces at her throat jangled against each other like wind chimes as she talked and wrote and talked. I felt a little ashamed when I thought of how long I’d sat there, transfixed by her and whatever slick racket she was running. She still seemed upset, so I waited. Waited until she was done and I could go home. I suddenly wished that Goldberg was still there with me. If I’d closed the deal with him he might’ve stayed and gotten his failed love-life thrown back at him.

“Come back tomorrow.” She folded the napkin up and held it in a closed fist. “You have to come back tomorrow, and then you’ll know. Promise you will, Mark Hanna. Promise!”

“Okay, I promi-”

“I have to leave now,” she interrupted, a new authority grounding her voice as she rose to her feet. “Goodbye. And remember: if you’ve never been empty, how do you know what it takes to make you full?”

And she rushed away, her skirt brushing table legs with a soft whoosh, growing into the only sound I could hear in the place. She took the steps up to the stage and disappeared behind the curtain, leaving me alone in the room, I found, after looking around when she was gone. The place was completely empty; I didn’t even know what time it was. Somehow, the thought that I had to get up early in the morning and take my fifteen-minute cab ride to work and explain why Mr. Goldberg from Minnesota, interested in quiet, non-alcoholic nights at home, would not be continuing business with the company bubbled to the surface, and I slid my coat on and grabbed a taxi home on its last fare of the night. I went to bed as soon as I got to my apartment, and I dreamed about the gypsy I’d seen in my school encyclopedia. She wanted to tell Goldberg’s fortune and pulled him into the photograph with her. It was the same picture I’d seen before, only she looked younger. And blonde.

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My shoes were filled with water when I squelched back down to the speakeasy door. I shook my coat before going in. Four stained scotch napkins sat at my table, breaking my rule about drinks—I needed those four, though, after the day I’d been through. I sank into the cushion, waiting. It was stupid and I wasn’t in the mood, but I waited. I’d promised, and maybe she’d appear after all. The memory of the night before had gotten dim throughout the day, and it felt irrational and ridiculous to even show up, let alone be curious about whatever was probably not going to happen.

I ordered a cup of coffee to clear my head, and the waiter brought it by with a basket of powdered creamers and sweeteners for the table. I was tearing the tops off too many sugar packets when I saw one that was larger than the others. It wasn’t a packet at all. It was a napkin, and then I knew it was the one. The one she’d used last night. I folded back the edges and looked at the spidery handwriting scratched across the paper.

“She’s was right,” I muttered to myself, not believing what I was saying. She was right.

She laid it out like a map, one step after the other. I’d come back, sit in the same chair, order drinks and coffee, find the napkin. Very specific. But it didn’t stop there. She’d written that I would quit my job and want to move out of the city and sell the apartment. I had to laugh at that. I’d left the State Mutual Incorporated Insurance Company offices off of 51st and Madison for the last time almost – I looked at my watch to get it right – five hours and twenty-seven minutes ago.

It was pretty simple how it happened. My boss found out Goldberg had scurried back to Minnesota that morning without a long-term or a short-term corporate insurance policy and he hounded me all afternoon for losing him, dressed me down like an angry football coach would after losing the state championship. I got fed up and told him to stuff it, and he asked if I wanted those to be the last words the company ever heard from me and I said that the words ‘I quit’ were more to my liking.

She was right about the apartment, too. After clearing out my desk and carrying my box down in the elevator at the end of the day I thought about what she said the night before, about not knowing about being empty and full. I got home and decided before even unlocking the door that I wanted to leave New York. I could live in New Jersey, closer to my mother. I liked the idea more and more as I shoved Cynthia’s remaining things outside my door and left them in the hallway for the janitor to get rid of. Lose the apartment, the leftover presence. Find somewhere new, maybe travel. What was one of those words the girl had told me? Gypsy? I could do that, move around and try out different cities and work here and there as I lived off some of my savings.

I apologized in my head for ever doubting her. She really was psychic or a seer or whatever she called it. I stared at the napkin, turning it over in my hands. On the other side of it was two words surrounded by a red lip print.

‘Finished’ and ‘Cynthia’.
CHAINDELIER
Laine Greaves-Smith
WHATSOEVER TONI SAYS...

Richard Sebastian-Coleman

Photography
Recovery

Jesse Glover

Drawing
I don’t like coming here. It’s not my favorite place. I don’t know why Frederick lives there, even when I’ve offered to house him somewhere else. He just nods and waves his hand and says the place fits. “Ain’t dingy just home is what it is.”

Frederick lives in a 1 bedroom apartment. In a word, it’s shitty. Most of the wallpaper left a long time ago. Concrete was the carpet and weird stains were the throw rugs. A mattress lay pressed into the far corner, kept warm by a threadbare grey blanket. A too-old mini-fridge is plugged into the wall within arm’s reach of the mattress. A door whose paint had given up stood closed to my left. It was never open, but I assume it’s his bathroom. There were no windows.

He’s standing when I enter, wearing that rabbit mask of his. The one that blinks and talks and twitches like it’s his real face. I sit down on the edge of the bed like I always does, not looking at him. Not talking to him. He knows why I was here. He just needed me to say it.

“My turn init? My turn to gnosh? My turn to break those eggers yeah?”

I shrug.

“What fun I gunna have with them. So fucking hungry. Gonna eat ‘em up.”

The mask’s left eye twitches

“Well, what you waitin for then?”

Frederick leans over me. He grabs my head and tilts it so the mask’s eyes were level with mine.

“SAY IT,” he half growls, half screams, “SAY IT TO ME”


Frederick lets go. The mask is grinning too big for its face. The eyes swing wildly to the mini-fridge. He walks over to it, opens it up, and removes the bat. Then he slams the fridge door, and sprints out the room into the hall of his apartment building. I can hear him lock the door behind him. Now I do my part of the deal.

Here’s the rules so anyone who’s just now joining us in the middle of the thick and thin can get all acquainted with the what’s what and the how now. While Frederick works I gotta stay in his room. Can’t leave, no matter what. Door can’t be opened from the inside, broken handle see? Not a lot to do here but wait. I could check the bathroom but I never want to. Never in here long enough to get desperate enough. Frederick does his work real quick see? Never in here longer than 30 minutes. A real professional, he calls himself. That’s one thing you could call him.

He’s back pretty fast. No more than 3 minutes in and out. Come in wiping his bat with his shirt. The mask still grinning like some sort of maniac. His whiskers twitching something fierce.

“Come visit me again soon. Cuz if you don’t I’ll come find you meself.”

I stand up. He steps to the side, so the door is clear. I walk out, not looking back, because if I do bad things happen. Lock the door behind me, even though I know he ain’t not trapped in there. I hear the bastard laughing. Probably has a window in his bathroom or something.
Sometimes he shows up when I don’t want to see him. Sometimes I just wake up in his room. But it’s not like I’m afraid of him. Not like he would kidnap me, sometimes I just don’t remember stuff. He’s my only real friend see? Had some other friends but they didn’t like Frederick so they stopped hanging with me.

“Can be right creepy sometimes, “ My chappers says to me on the times, “don’t want somebody like that around us not I do.”

“Sorry I am,” I say.

“Need new friends,” they say. Hurts but I get it. So I talk with Frederick alone.

Whenever I feel the hurts and the pains I always go to Frederick. He takes it for me. Takes it away or just deals with it. I guess that’s why I still go to him. Cuz he’s the only one that can take it every time. Maybe he likes it. Masochris, think he is. Whatever. Everyone has their kinks. His just does the trick for me.

I think first time met the guy was teenschool. Can’t remember the first time to be honest. Just know he’s been around since teenschool. Cuz sometimes when I hear a messed up joke he was there. Guess he must be pretty close to my age then, cuz he went to my teenschool. Right?

Anywhorse, where was we left off. I’m in the parking lot you want to forget. You know the kinds, the kinds with the cracked pavement and the potholes and the one flickering light that’s holding on longer than the rest of its brothers but just barely, the one that those movies were written about. The one that fights for the ones that were dead. I guess I never saw those movies. Cuz I picked up a rock and threw the light out. I see my car alone at the party and go seduce her. She wants me to drive her home but instead I take her to my place.

My apartment is nice. Not like Frederick’s. I work at the local supermarket so I can pay for it. I don’t really need to say more than it’s everything Frederick has but the opposite. Guess you could say the same about Frederick and me. He’s the toughy and I’m the dough. Oh well.

I got work in the morning. I like work. The supermarket gives me something you might say would be inner peace. The lights. The shoppers. The food, the food it sits there like a new partner saying, “Pick me. I look good. Pick me I’m good for you.” Pick me I’m cheaper than the others. “ I don’t love it but it’s a thing I don’t hate it. Pick your battles I guess.

Anyway. Here I am doing work the right way. Not too fast but I’m doing it. Lady at the register starts yelling bout something, how the price ain’t what it was supposed to be. Isn’t what the paper said. Get it free! Get it free!

“I don’t control the prices ma’am sorry. Can’t do that sorry. Newspaper was wrong sorry.”

Manager comes over. I always liked her. Didn’t talk to me. That’s why. She gets angry at me. First time this happens. I don’t like it. But I don’t need Frederick right now. This isn’t that bad.
Finish the shift. It’s dark. I like it. The, how you say? Amb-ee-ants. Yeah. Click they keys, the missus clicks at me. The miss ain’t the prettiest but she runs good and she’s loyal so I take good care of her. Get her oil changed yearly, pay the mechanic for all the massages she needs. Anyway I drive home.

Wake up in Frederick’s apartment. He has a deer head on his wall now. A girl deer, pretty sure, no horns see? Anyway Frederick’s there, says get going. He says he had to borrow my car. Says he’s hungry and goes over to his mini-fridge as I head to leave.

I’m in my car. I drive home. The miss is complaining about something. Steers a little funny. Off to the left? I’ll have to get that checked out. I have tomorrow off. I can go to the mechanic tomorrow. Yeah, I’ll do it tomorrow. Road is pretty dark. The trees around here look real creepy around this time. Like something could jump out. I get home and go to bed.

Day off. I wake up, but I slept in. It’s ok, I have the day off. Shower first to wake up. I’m not hungry in the morning so I skip breakfast. Glass of milk for me though. I watch YouTube videos for a while. Then I go to my mechanic. He’s downtown but it’s pretty safe there. That’s why I like that mechanic. When I get there, “What the fuck did you hit man? Jesus Christ.”

“I didn’t hit nothin,” I say. He gives me a look.

Car needs some work. So I go for a walk. Look for something to eat. I don’t really like the area around the mechanic cuz there’s some real wierds around here. But I got a lot of time to kill. So I head to the local Micky –Dees. I love them Micky-Dees. So warm in my hands. Got more time. So I walk around some more. Don’t look where I’m going and now I’m in a scary place. A bad part of town yeah? A guy is sitting on the steps of a door. He look scary. The guy stands up, eyes on me. He has a knife. I don’t run, but I don’t look at him. Walks up to me. He touches my shoulder.

“Wallet. Hand it over.”

I walk into Frederick’s apartment. He isn’t here. I walk over to his mini-fridge and look inside. His bat is in here, along with a jar full of pickles. I close the fridge. I go over to the bed and sit down. The bathroom door shakes for a second and I look over startled. I hear the door to the hall open. Frederick stumbles in. He’s got a knife in his shoulder. He walks over to me, bends down, and pulls the knife out, puts it in the fridge. Grabs a pickle.

“Well that was fun. Still hungry”

“You ok? Shouldn’t we take you to the hospital?”

He just laughs and falls onto his bed.

“I’ll take care of all of it. Don’t worry. “

I try to get a closer look at his shoulder but he just tells me to fuck off and rolls over. I’m not sure but the chapper might be crying. Or laughing. Or both.

We need to go to the hospital, but he keeps wacking my hand away. There’s blood everywhere. I go to pull out my phone but it isn’t in my pocket. My wallet isn’t either. I ask him where they are and Frederick says they in my pockets. So I go to pull the phone out of his pockets but this time he hits me hard. His face is buried in the blanket on the mattress.
“Ok. You want to help so bad? You think you can handle? Go in the bathroom. You’ll find stuff to help me in there.

I look at the bathroom door. It open a little. I touch my hand to the doorknob. It’s cold. I open the door.

There’s nothing. And when I say nothing I mean no walls, no floor, no light. Just nothing. And I turn my head and out the corner of my eye Frederick stands up backwards. Like, he was laying torso down but he just sorta, lurches up.

His back still towards me, he says, ”Tag. You’re it.”

And I’m standing over that guy in the alley. He’s got a huge bite out of his neck. I’ve got his knife in my shoulder. And my mouth is full of blood. And Frederick starts laughing and I start crying.
SERENITY IN NATURE

Dhrupad Parikh

Photography
Only because
the smooth grey paint
of the lamp post beckoned
Did I glimpse the half moon
hidden between adobe walls,
ghost white against the blue sky of morning

Only because
the moon bobbed its head shyly
and covered its face with its hands
Did I see old sheets
heaped against a high window,
stained with stories,
peering out onto a steep tiled roof

Only because
the sheets pressed their eager cheeks
up against the dirty windowpanes
Did I hear the fall leaves
whispering secrets to my heavy feet
Did I smell their dry and dusty perfume
Did their thousand shades
of saffron and tawny gold
draw my body
home to the earth.
SNOWDON PEAK

Alyssa Schwarz

Pen
INspiration

Bryce Deshazer

Water Color, India Ink, and Colored Pencil
We are a single night,
24 hours to lie in the dark;
but this, too, shall pass—
though we try to slow time and make it last.

Your breath is a tribute,
a sullen swan song,
a lonely note in a vitreous night,
dying with a morning drenched in light.

In dreams, the clocks turn around to face us,
to distort our memories into nostalgia.
We rage; we rip the hands from the faces
and rush to retrace these backward paces.

Then comes the breaking dawn
that catalyzes us down that endless slope.
Try to brake, but you board a plane in a sky of emerald;
try to jump, but we are a desert flower, ephemeral.

We are the following day,
24 hours—now, wake to a sobering light;
and this, too, shall pass—
now, the night we raged against is past.
LESSONS I LEARNED FROM RUNNING

Sean Patrick McGinley

1. Running sucks.
2. You love things that suck for other people so running makes sense for you.
3. You don’t look attractive while running (no matter what you think) so if the strain of his rock-hard calves makes your heart flutter from something other than the cardiovascular strain, then he is definitely worth your time.
4. Don’t do it just because you want to brag. Do it because you love the feeling of walking past a mirror and knowing you’ll wear a smirk of confidence all day.
5. Just because lines of escaped reality and lost love sound revolutionary during a midday jog, it does not mean that others will boast of your success.
6. Screw what others say.
7. Listen to the radiating tingles from your upper lumbar. When all is said and done, your body may be the only thing smiling at you from the finishing line.
8. Get out of your head. Seriously.
9. Ignore that text message.
10. You will crave to stop. Don’t. You’ll feel accomplished only by striding up each hill. So, yes, the last switchback lying between the graying boulders does make a difference.
11. Remember that time you cringed with each step across campus because you slipped a disc? A misplaced rock or overextended ankle is the only mishap between you and that place. Don’t take advantage of this run.
12. If being gay doesn’t stop you from running then how in the hell is it going to stop you from anything else?
13. Mud exists.
14. Running is the only time you have to yourself, so, when you dream here, know that you have the power to make it a reality.
15. You can’t scale rocks at full speed so slow down, breathe, and summit each one-by-one.
16. You’re not gonna want to do it, but that moment when your legs move without thinking, the wind blows behind you, and each jagged, purple peak unfolds in front of the shifting golden light, know that it’s totally worth it.
When did my hands get this way? So old and wrinkled. Spotted, weak, ugly. Emma didn’t care though. Emma. A smile creeps across my lips as I think about her, how her dark brunette hair flowed down past her shoulders, those few gray hairs that she plucked away, until there were too many to pluck anymore. She looked as beautiful as ever to me though, the way her eyes crinkled when she smiled at me, the way she kissed me when-

“Tom,” the doctor said gently.

“What? Ah yes I’m sorry,” I had drifted off again, “my mind tends to wander with age,” yes making a joke of it blunted the pain that I felt; losing control of the thing I held second closest to my heart.

Her eyes looked at me expectantly. She was waiting for something. Had she asked me a question? Or worse was she watching for how I would take it?

“In all honesty, this is what I was expecting,” I smiled, blinking back the tears that were threatening to form in the corners of my eyes.

The doctor, goddamn it what was her name, smiled sympathetically. “Just because you weren’t picked, doesn’t mean we don’t have other options.” She was trying to get excited, she was so young, full of life.

“Come on just up this hill!” Emma yelled back at me. My lungs burned and I had lost the feeling in my legs a mile ago. God I hate running. I told myself that with every other step. Only I never questioned why I was here.

Emma’s dark brown eyes met mine; she had just broken a sweat and it dripped off her tiny nose, it wrinkled as she smiled at me. She pulled a little farther ahead to tease me.

“… and the care there is the best money can buy,” the doctor paused, suddenly uncomfortable in her choice of phrasing. There was a plaque that said ‘Dr. Irene Miller’ on her desk.

“Oh? Is that so?” I said nodding.

“You’re going to lose this bet if you don’t get your ass in gear!” She laughed at me.

“There’s still a lot of hill left for me to beat you to the top!” I shouted back in between gulps of air. I tried to pick up the pace and narrow the gap between us, but my legs were rubber.

There was only one more bend in the road, once around it, the top was in clear view. I needed to be there before she rounded it. I put my head down and sprinted as fast as I could.

“Hey!” Emma shouted as I passed her, “you’re going to die before you reach the top!”
I rounded the corner victorious, barely glancing at the top before turning around so I could watch her. I knew I would never forget this moment for the rest of my life. She rounded the corner, surprised that I had stopped completely, she slowed, then she saw the top. Confusion, and then clarity. Her hand went to her mouth and I could see the tears forming in her eyes.

I had beaten her to the top six hours ago, to help our families and friends set up. In the clearing at the top of the hill they stood, with a banner hanging ten feet above them that asked the question I had wanted to ask Emma for a very long time.

“I love you, Emma,” I grabbed her hand and went down to one knee.

“I mean all we are, are living memories,” Dr. Miller went on, “We have no concept of now, we are a reflection of what we think we remember from a moment passed.”

I nodded. What is she saying?

“There would be no pain this way…” She trailed off, looking for some confirmation, anything from me. “A lot of people are looking for more time, this is what many people choose to do, a way to ‘do it all again’ so to speak.”

Why the hell do I have so many emails? Seriously? No I don’t want to go to that conference; Listen to Dr. Dan Jackson talk about using Newtonian dynamics to reconcile General relativity. What a load-

“Professor?”

I looked up from my Surface, there was a boy standing in the door to my office.

“Yes, come in, have a seat,” I smiled, trying to be as welcoming as possible.

“I have some questions about the homework,” he said sitting down. He opened his backpack and pulled out a worn notebook, the paper cover peeling back in the corners.

I nodded waiting for him to go on.

“It’s the summing of the energy given off an infinite wire problem.”

“What about it?” I asked. I could almost hear the response in my head, some half hearted response, ‘well professor I tried like three times and couldn’t get it’ even though they don’t have a single piece of work written down.

“Well first I just used the biot-savart law and integrated but when I did, the bounds on the integral blew up on both ends,” He looked nervous as he glanced over his work.

So change the bounds, give the wire some arbitrary radius.

“So then I changed the bounds, and found the magnetic field created by the wire, inside and outside of some arbitrary radius.”

I was taken aback. I should be ashamed, to have judged a student so quickly. “And?”

“And I found that the energy from the magnetic field inside the wire wasn’t dependent on the radius of the wire, while the energy on the outside still was indeterminate.”
“And why do you think that is?” My phone started buzzing on my desk. “I’m sorry, hold on.”

The caller ID said Emma.

“Emma?”

“Tom, It’s time,” Her voice was pinched and breathless.

“Time, time for what, it’s only noon?”

“Tom! It’s TIME!”

“Time? Oh my god, time! Where are you?” I stood up, my heart racing.

“My mother is driving me to the hospital, St. Mary’s,” she grunted on the phone, holding back the pain.

“I’m on my way right now!” I was out the door and ten feet down the hallway before I remembered my keys were sitting on my desk. I ran back in to see that student, still sitting, wide eyed and confused at my desk. “You! Come back Monday!” And then I was in my car, dodging between cars in heavy traffic, racing to the hospital.

A myoclonic jerk brought me back. I’m not in the office anymore, where am I?

“You’re doing good, Tom, just a little more, okay?” Dr. Miller’s voice came over the intercom. The rhythmic thundering of the MRI machine started again. Ah, she must be checking the progression.

Three A.M. Like fucking clockwork. Emma was struggling to get out of bed, unable to throw the heavy comforter off of her. I grabbed her wrist and pulled her back down to me.

“No, it’s my turn,” she said, but her eyes were already closed again.

I struggled out of bed and walked down the dark hall. At the end I opened the door to the love of my life. She had pulled herself into the standing position in the crib and was wailing at the top of her lungs. She quieted a little when she saw me appear in the doorway. Her tears rolling down her chubby little face, snot running down her button nose. Babies are gross.

“Shhhhh, Shhhhh, Ellie, Daddy is here, shhhhh,” I picked her up and rocked her, gently up and down. She immediately wiped her nose on my bare shoulder and continued crying.

“Yes, that’s right. Daddy’s a big tissue, shhh, shhh.” Ellie still had that baby smell, god did I love it, not so much at three A.M. but god I love that smell.

“It’s accelerating, faster now.” Dr. Irene Miller was looking grim, defeated. Hadn’t she known this whole time?

“Yes, I’d imagine that was happening from what you told me the last time I came in,” I smiled trying to make light of the situation. I couldn’t remember the last time I came in, or if I’d ever left. Hopefully she didn’t know that.

“Tom,” she took a deep breath, steeling herself for what needed to be said, “you no longer have a year.” She let her voice trail off.
“Oh? Oh my, well,” I couldn’t think of anything, my wits deserting me. She shook her head, “You, you don’t even have months at this rate, not anymore.” She met my eyes but every moment was a struggle.

I nodded. I didn’t know what to say, what to think, what to do; was there anything TO do? I wanted to float back into my memories. Where is Emma? Why isn’t she here?

“We need to start seriously considering those two options we talked about earlier,” Irene said, her jaw set, her eyes sad.

And what were those again?

“I don’t wanna go!” Her little jaw was clenched, her little arms were crossed across her chest and she stomped her little foot on the floor with every word. She was her mother’s child.

“Well too bad, we’re going,” I said, trying to keep the temper that was rising under my collar out of my voice.

“But I don’t wanna!” She cried.

“I said we’re going.”

“But-“

“ELLIE!” I roared. That did it. It scared her, I watched her take a half step back in shock. Watched her defiant little face break, along with my heart. And she started crying.

“What’s going on?” Emma walked down the stairs, putting the last pin in her hair.

“Nothing, Ellie decided to throw a fit,” I was still too angry to say anything else, even though the shame was growing in my stomach.

“So you shouted at her?” She accused, raising her eyebrow in that questioning way she had.

“Don’t look at me like that, we’re already late!”

“Stop shouting,”

“I’m not shouting!” I took a deep breath trying hard to calm myself. “We’re already late, can we please get going.”

“You could have left; we could have met you there.”

“I don’t want to have this fight right now; we need to leave.”

“In a minute,” she responded coolly. “Ellie, come here, lets dry your eyes, we need to get going, Daddy’s in a hurry.”

She scooped Ellie up in her arms and carried her back up the stairs, leaving me at the bottom, alone, defeated, and full of rage.

“Do you like it?” Dr. Irene Miller opened the curtains. Outside was nothing but beach view and ocean. Where am I?

“Yes it’s a lovely home,” I replied.

She flinched. Home, it had to have been home, what a clumsy slip. She knew I didn’t remember now.
TIME FOR REFLECTION
Ryan T. Heather

Acrylic
“Yes, this will be a lovely, home, for you,” she looked at me with those sad eyes. At least she was nice enough not to correct my mistake.

“Over here is the bed,” she bent over and grabbed a remote that was attached to the bed with a cord. “You can use this to call me or a nurse, I’ll be on call so don’t worry about calling me for anything, anytime.”

There was no joystick on my chair but it moved on its own all the same. Something inside of me knew it would, and why it was moving. But that something was buried now, growing fainter and fainter.

“You’ll be comfortable here,” she said as two nurses I hadn’t noticed lifted me out of my chair and laid me gently on the bed. When did I become so fragile?

“We have medication for any discomfort, anything you want, you just need to ask. We’ve notified your daughter, Ellie, she’ll be arriving in the morning.” Dr. Miller paused. Not sure how to continue. “Tom,” she said gently, “we need to know, we need to start prepping right now, if you want to go with our second option. The MRL.”

I smiled up at her. The MRL. How tempting, how beautiful. What a terrible fate.

“All I’m saying is we have an opportunity to change the world here,” John was always excitable.

“We have a theory, that IF we can actually finish writing a proof for, and that’s already a big if, seeing as we can’t yet reconcile gravity, we could change how our peers see the expansion of the universe, the creation of black holes, and the fundamental principle of wormholes. But as of this moment, in the grand scheme of things, we are nowhere.” I took a sip of my beer and looked around the bar.

“Oh come on professor, this explains everything—“

“It literally explains nothing until we find a way to finish our proof.” I didn’t want to be mad at John. But my own disappointment was eating away at me. We had to be close. But every simulation we ran couldn’t reconcile infinitely large space with no beginning or end, physically and temporally; expanding and folding over itself in a dimension that is impossible to comprehend spatially where the only thing transcending all barriers is gravity, which is impossible to reconcile with any relativistic idea that I know.

I felt my phone buzz in my pocket. Four missed calls from Emma. What did she need? Was I supposed to be somewhere? I opened my voicemail and listened to the first message.

“Tom, where are you? Ellie’s meet is about to start, I’m saving you a seat in the back, love you, see you soon.”

My heart sank as I looked at the clock above the bar, 11:34.

“Tom, Ellie swam in the first relay, she lead off and she did great! Where are you? You’re going to miss this! Love you”

“Tom, Where. Are. You? Diving is going on right now, the meet is half over. Get here soon.”
“Well you missed it. Ellie did great. I told her you were here and saw her swim but had to run to the lab for some last minute tests. She made the state cut time in the hundred breast. See you at home.”

“They won’t all be good memories,” Dr. Irene Miller said. I was in my bed; it was dark outside so I figured it must be night. Where’s Emma?

Dr. Miller was wiping something cold on my bald head. “You don’t know what you don’t remember so it will feel like a continuous story even though to an outside observer it may not make sense. But if you choose this, it will be like living in a dream. You won’t remember that you’ve already lived this before, it will truly be like living it all over again.”

Dr. Miller carefully stuck each adhesive probe to my head, tenderly, making sure each one was in its right spot.

“And what happens when I reach this memory?” I asked.

“Then you’ll be given a choice again,” She said grimly.

Just need to walk 100 feet. Just one foot in front of the other. No tearing up, just walk straight.

The music started, the heavy organ pumping its rhythm into the high vaulted ceiling. I looked over at her. She looked amazing.

“Dad,” She said holding out her arm. She hadn’t stopped smiling.

I took her arm and together we walked forward. The ushers opened the doors for us and the sanctuary came into view. Giant stone arches rose 100 feet, reaching up towards the high vaulted ceiling. Sunlight poured in through beautiful stained glass windows that stretched from floor to ceiling and lined the walls on either side. There was a thunder of a hundred feet standing at once.

The music changed its tone, a beautiful hiccup, a signal that it was time.

And we walked, one foot in front of the other. Ellie laughed and tears were forming in her eyes as she waved to her friends. But her eyes never lingered on the crowd for long. There standing at the alter, was David.

My heart felt like it was going to explode. I was so happy and proud for Ellie, seeing her like this made me happier than I could possibly explain. But at the same time I was afraid. Illogically afraid that I was losing her. And in a way I was, but this was better.

The rest of the ceremony was a blur. I kept looking back and forth at the two loves of my life, Ellie and Emma. Both of whom couldn’t stop crying.

“I feel so old,” Emma said.

I laughed, “We are old.”

“No we’re not,” she pouted.

I smiled at her and grabbed her hand.

“Can you believe it?” She asked. “Ellie is our little girl, what happened? I thought there would be more time.”
“She’s not dying.”
“But she isn’t ours anymore,” Emma started tearing up again.
I kissed her hand, “She will always be ours. She hasn’t lived with us since college anyway, at least now she’ll be closer to us.” I could see that Emma liked that idea by the way her deep brown eyes lit up while she thought.

“Dad?”
“Emma?” I was being woken up. A sad face looked down on me, she looked remarkably like Emma. But something I said seemed to just make her sad.
“No Dad, it’s me, Ellie.”
“Well I know that, you look so much like your mother.” Why are you so sad Ellie, I could never forget you, don’t you know that?
“I know,” she smiled to herself looking down, she took my hand in hers. It was warm, I hadn’t realized how cold my hands were before.
“How are you? Where’s David?” I looked around, as far as I could tell it was only us in the room.
“David is checking into the hotel and putting Sam down for a nap. He dropped me off, we came straight from the airport. He’ll bring Sam around later tonight,” she said smiling at me, gently rubbing my hand.

Who’s Sam? And where is Emma?
“Dad, how are you feeling?” I could see the concern in her eyes.
“I feel old,” I joked smiling up at her, but she just rolled her eyes.
“But do you need anything, I can call the nurse, or Dr. Miller.”
“No, no, I’m fine,” I patted her hand with my free one. “You must be tired though, it’s a long flight from Sweden.”

Her face faltered just enough for me to see I had fucked it up again. Why was this so hard?
“I’ll be fine,” she said gently. “Talk to me about Mom.”

I love the ocean. The smell of salt in the air, the crash of the waves against the shore. The hot sand sticking to my wet legs as I lay down on my towel. I scooped a handful of the fine sand and watched as it slowly trickled through my fingers, pouring like water back towards the earth. Slowly slipping away from me. Like something was buried deep down but I couldn’t remember what, and every moment was bringing me farther and farther away. I did that three more times, letting my mind wander, everything felt so soft and warm.

I let the third handful fall and turned toward Emma. She had been watching me, a smile creeping across her lips.
“What?” I asked, smiling.
“Nothing,” She replied.
Seville, Spain

Jesaja Lemke

Photography
“Well there has to be something.”

“Nope,” she smiled wider, shaking her head teasingly. Her long brunette hair, still wet from our swim, falling carelessly on her bare shoulders. She looked so beautiful.

I rolled over so I could kiss her lips. She tasted sweet, so I kissed her again. She laughed and pushed me back onto my towel.

A young couple walked by, holding hands, swinging in unison. They looked so happy, so in love. Not a care in the world as the surf washed over their feet. At first the girl screamed, the water was cold, but the boy pulled her back towards him. And they kissed and continued walking on their way. Not even pausing to notice my wife and me.

Were we old? I don’t feel old. I looked at Emma, she never seemed old to me. Every freckle, every wrinkle, every gray hair was just one more thing to love about her. On the other hand though, we certainly weren’t young anymore.

“Be careful around Grandpa, okay Sam?” Ellie’s voice was soft and gentle when she spoke. In her arms a wide eyed child was staring back at me. His curly hair coming down just over the tops of his ears. He had deep blue eyes just like David, but Ellie’s nose.

“Oh my, aren’t you getting big!” I smiled at him, wanting to comfort him in this alien environment. So this is Sam. “Come sit by Grandpa, the bed is big enough for the both of us,” I said patting the space beside me.

Ellie set him on the edge of the bed and he crawled cautiously towards me. He put his cute tiny face an inch from mine, looking at every detail. I smiled wider and gently patted the top of his head with my hand. His curls were soft and sprung back into place. But the effort took more than I thought. My hand was shaking horribly and the strain to lift it was quickly becoming tremendous. When did that happen? I laid my hand back down on the bed, exhausted.

“Mommy, what’s wrong with him?”

“He’s just a little sick, Sam. Let’s not talk about it okay?” Ellie smiled for Sam but I could see the hurt in her eyes.

“But why?” He asked.

“Because, Sam,” David stepped forward.

“Oh it’s alright,” I said. Sam turned his big eyes towards me. “I’m just a little sick right now, but that’s why I’m here. There’s a really good doctor who’s going to care for me until I get all better.”

Behind Sam, Ellie covered her mouth and silently started to cry.

“Courtney, where is your sister? She should be here!” Emma asked.

“She’s running late as usual,” Courtney replied rolling her eyes.

“I can’t believe this is happening,” Emma said bouncing with every word. “This is so amazing!”

“I know, I know!” Courtney said bouncing with her.
Excitement was in the air; I couldn’t be still. I walked around the lobby, stood in front of the vending machine, walked back, sat down, stood up.

“You’ll have walked a mile by the end of this,” Cameron said jokingly.

“If I haven’t already,” I laughed sitting down beside him.

His leg was jumping and I realized he was just as excited as I was. And why shouldn’t he be.

“Smith family?” A nurse called.

We all jumped, Emma and Courtney screamed.

“You can come back now,” the nurse smiled.

As we followed her back the sound of the little cries grew louder and louder. She left us at the door to their room. The women went in first, then me and Cameron. Laying on the hospital bed drenched in sweat was Ellie. Next to her sitting in the chair next to the bed was David, with his arm around her and their heads together. They were both peering down on the little bundle of blankets that were emitting the little cries.

Ellie looked up at us, smiling triumphant. “It’s a boy. We’ve decided to name him Sam.”

I was knocked back on my heals, me and Cameron caught each other. The girls were screaming and hugging eachother. Ellie laughed at us and David walked up and hugged his mother and Emma. And then we were all hugging and happy.

“Tom you need to make your choice,”

I was alone with Dr. Miller again.

“And what choice is that?”

“To stay here and live out the next day with your family,” she paused, “or to use the MRL.”

“What am I choosing doctor?”

“To stay and live it out with your family, or to re live it all again, everything your conscious remembers.”

“If I choose the MRL?”

“You won’t remember anything; you’ll live your memories again as if for the first time. All of them, up until this point.”

“And what happens then?”

“Then you make the choice you’re about to make now, and this will continue until the tumor reaches its critical mass, putting too much pressure on your brainstem—“

“And kills me.”

“You’re more lucid today.”

“How many times have we had this conversation?”

“Tom,”

“How many times?”

“More than even I can remember.”
I sat at the edge of her bed. Watching, waiting, numb. I don’t know what I’m waiting for. Something buried. The rhythmic beeping of the cardiac monitor long ago faded into the background noise.

I looked at her. Slowly, I reached out and gently pushed a strand of brunette hair back from her bangs. I don’t know how many times I had done this motion in the last hour let alone the last week. She breathed steadily from the oxygen tube under her nose, watching her chest rise and fall with every breath gave me a small comfort.

There was a knock on the open door. I turned towards it and saw John, with his suit jacket hung limply over his arm, standing in the doorway.

“Tom,” He said.

I got up and joined him in the hallway, closing the door quietly behind me. He held out his hand for me to shake. I could see his platinum plated Rolex poking out from under his sleeve and almost made out the words Gravmat Corporation, inscribed around the face. We had been anything but modest back then. I pulled him in for a hug.

“How’s she doing?” He asked when we broke apart again.

“She’s not in any pain now, the meds are starting to work, but they knock her out. She’s sleeping now.”

John nodded. “If you ever need anything G-CO is behind you. Anything you want. Nothing is too much.”

I smiled, “Thank you John, that means a lot.”

“Seriously, Tom, say the word and it’s yours.” He paused, waiting. When I didn’t respond he went on, “I’m going to grab a cup of coffee from the lobby, want some?”

“Absolutely.” I hadn’t realized how tired I was.

“Good,” He squeezed my elbow affectionately, “take care of yourself, I’ll be back.”

I watched as he walked away. So much has changed since that scared little boy entered my office.

I walked back into the room, closing the door softly behind me, and took my seat next to her again. I grabbed her hand and held it in both of mine.

Her eyes fluttered open and locked on mine. She smiled and said, “I thought you left.”

“Only for a moment.”

“You’ll always come back to me?”

“Always.”

She pulled me closer so she could whisper in my ear.

“Tom it’s time.” Dr. Irene Miller was standing above me. She touched a button and the bed moved me into a sitting position.

“Time?”
“Yes,” she looked sad. She was tired and defeated. She was the best GCO could buy. “Time to choose. Before we let your family back in; you either need to be here, or be in the MRL.”

“I understand.”

“Here,” she said, handing me the remote. It felt heavy in my hand. “Pushing that blue button in the middle will put you in the MRL, or you can set it down and I’ll let your family in right now.”

“How many times have I made this choice?”

“Unless you choose to put down the remote, I have no idea how many times you’ve pushed the button.”

Emma. I remember now. Why I buried it.

I can see her. Her smiling face, her deep brown eyes looking into mine. So happy and full of life. Her brunette hair falling in curls, carelessly down her shoulders. I can see Ellie, laughing and smiling while playing with Sam in the sand on the beach; while me and David drink beers on the deck, bullshitting about the future.

I can see John, who grew to be my best friend. The long nights working together, building G-CO after our discovery.

I could do it all again, or I could see them all now.

I lifted the remote to look at that curious blue button. MRL was printed in bold font in the center of the button. What the hell does that even stand for? I knew it once, but now it was lost like so much else. If I only pushed the button I would remember again.

“Tom,” She whispered her last words to me, “I love you so much.”
Independence Pass

Alyssa Schwarz

Watercolor
I TRied TO Make A CUP Of tea
BuT IT Made me (I, II, & III)

Misha Lantsov

I.

I turned the kettle on
by pressing a little button
on its metallic side
slightly downward.
The light went on,
a cold blue hue,
warmed the water,
while I sat
while I looked out the window.
It wasn’t raining
but I wished it was.
An idle hand took the kettle
and poured boiling water over my head.
It spilled on carpeted floors.
They were shitty but
hot water doesn’t ruin carpet.
Damn.
It rained.

II.

I turned the kettle on
by pressing the contoured button
slightly downward.
I stared into the see-through opening
to watch it boil.
It didn’t
because the power was out.
I should have known
because the refrigerator
smelled of dead fish.
III.

I turned the kettle on
by pressing the little button
slightly downward.
The light went on
so I knew it was working
and sat down to look out the window.
   It was raining.
   I wished to smell it
so I opened the window.
   It smelled of rain.
   I was not surprised.
The bubbling sound
was made by boiling water.
   I was not surprised.
The ceylon tea
smelled of earth.
   It was refreshing.
Vapor danced over the surface
of the hot water,
over the wet herbs infused in it.
   I danced holding the cup.
The vapor danced with me.
   I put the hot tea to my lips.
   It warmed me while
   I cooled it.
   It spilled on the carpet
   But I did not care,
   for I had more water
and it was shitty carpet anyway.
Palm Sunday

Alyssa Schwarz

Watercolor
Hope is like eating an apricot,¹ and dropping the stone, feet rolling over it and pushing it into the ground, pushing it into your gut, like a boot in your stomach because you look like an atheist with your clean-shaven face. How many euros for a meal?

*Meze.*²
€3,000 for the army.
Are you still hungry?

*Za’atar.*³
€10,000 so you can keep your shop, and not turn your neighbors against you. Are you still hungry?

*Ka’ak.*⁴
€30,000 so we do not paint your doorstep with your children’s blood. Are you full yet?

And so you put your children on the sea, weeping as they become little figures on the horizon, because “no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.”⁵

It’s like biting into an apricot, your teeth breaking skin, and it is not sweet, it is bitter in the mouth, like the taste of a little toy boat in a tub, and the little waves crashing over the sides.

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¹ In Portuguese, the word for apricot is damasco, as the fruit was associated with Damascus, Syria.
² An appetizer in Syrian cuisine.
³ “Main course” of a Syrian meal.
⁴ A dessert.
⁵ Taken from the poem “Home” by Warsan Shire.
There is an American song, “I looked over Jordan and what did I see?” A chariot to carry my children from home, then to drown them in water, never to make it to Lesvos, and you wish they were calling you from that shore, so that you could cry into the phone: “If you get there before I do Tell my friends I’m coming there too.”

The next little toy boat is for you. There, the night and sea merge, and there is no horizon, and there is, perhaps, a shore—you cannot know in the darkness—and you fall on land with sea legs, as if the ground was your childhood and it has been stolen out from under you like a rug.

Hope is like eating an apricot, and dropping the stone, and it rolls around over packed earth, feet stepping over it as they rush toward the terrible sea, and when you look back over your shoulder toward al-Sham, your homeland, you are afraid to open your eyes, because you are hoping that the seed will root there in your kitchen floor and, despite these violent seasons—where Arab Springs bring Arab Winters—how can you not hope to see those green leaves and white flowers blooming against a black sky, like a flag dancing in a Syrian breeze?

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6 Song by Wallace Willis, 1909.
7 Arabic word often used to mean the city of Damascus.
AMBIGUITY

Julia Cormos

Photography
It’s interesting how easily using a shovel comes to humans. No matter what occupation a person has ever had, holding a shovel and driving it into soil is something that feels nearly instinctual. We dig and dig and dig and dig.

So here I am, the sole population of a metaphor, digging. I haven’t been at this long, just enough time to have some meaningful thoughts about the day. My shovel is old and greying, but it hasn’t splintered or shown any signs of weakening so I continue. I started out just digging straight down, but the hole begins to take its shape with each shovel toss over my shoulder. I take a moment to look at my palms, well callused, but that is because many a human has calluses. Hard work is our trade mark.

The sun is past midday and I can no longer see the horizon, and the hole looks finished so I climb out to rest.

I sit at the edge. Not perfectly square but it would do. Pop was modest and wouldn’t ask for anything more. He wasn’t very big when he died. Tumors in his gut never gave him peace and he’d often turn down all but the best tasting food, meals he was willing to suffer for. I have him wrapped in a blanket and I carry him gently on my shoulder to the edge of the pit and begin to un-wrap him like a somber present. He looked all right having died yesterday. He was a little discolored but didn’t smell. Tumors do a good job of clogging things up.

I manage to pry open his cold hand and extend his fingers. I look at his hand and compare it to my own. It looked a lot different since I grew up. I remember it being a hammer when he hit me once as a child. Even at the feeble end when the flesh was starved off of it, it was caked in thick, yellow, leather callous. Thick from bearing the world, and much, much more. My hand is a little bigger, and for a moment shameful pride bubbles up before I retract it.

I remember how I got my callous. The countless hours I spent digging holes, farming, hammering metal, holding a rifle, building bridges, holding children in my arms, soldering PCB’s. I used to watch him build things with such admiration. I thought that no one could ever build like he did. But I did. I took after my father and he was proud of it. Embarrassingly enough, the last time I saw this hand open to me like this was years ago when he met his new granddaughter and he shook my hand with face grinning wide.

I stand and heave my dad on my shoulder and ease myself in the pit. He’s very easy to carry; he couldn’t have been heavier than 70 pounds. How mighty he seemed when he used to carry me after my incessant pleading. He used to boast about me learning to walk. I couldn’t walk very far at first. Nothing but a great circle. But soon I touched the moon. When I got older, I ran farther than that. Much farther.
I set him down in the soft dirt. I brush his gut lowering him from my shoulder, grimacing slightly. I think of a snake that swallowed four or five baseballs, skin stretched across them like plastic wrap.

Before I left home, the tumors weren’t there. He was gnarled and thick like a tree that grew into the wind. Never what you would call fat, only hearty, like a young Santa that fought in the war. I laughed at the thought of this and sat with him for a moment in that hole. I left a young man with steady hands, ready to make what I could from the universe. Some kids take a look over their shoulder when they leave home forever. I knew it would still be there and looked at my hands instead, certain that I was the one in danger of disappearing outside the safety of his house.

A breeze knocks a small avalanche of dirt back into the hole on us. Nothing major. I brush the dirt away from his face and in doing so I open up his eye. I opened the second, but seeing that it pointed in another direction, I closed it to quiet my discomfort. It looks at me blankly and I expect to have some great epiphany. But I don’t. I know as much about the reason I’m here as ever. I close his eye and cover his face with a t-shirt. I smooth it out so it doesn’t have any wrinkles.

Instinct takes over again and I let my mind run blank as I shovel dirt over Pop. The dirt falls and I laugh out loud with the thought of him sitting up, taking off the t-shirt, and angrily shouting about nobody letting him sleep and assuming he’s dead. Instead he is gracious and allows the dirt to cover him. I move a little faster now that I can’t see him. When there is nothing left but a small mound, I drive my shovel into it. I carve his name into the shaft of the shovel with my pocket-knife. He’s not the type of man to enjoy a flashy headstone. At least this way if he does decide to wake up, he can get back to work quickly.

As the sun falls it casts a red hue across the vast planes of wheat in the land of the dead king. I take a glance at it, bright and violent to the eye even in its final moments. I nauseate myself slightly with the metaphor of it and hear my father’s voice mock me with laughter that I pause for poetry after burying him.

I alas, am not setting and have work to get done. I, Man walking the footsteps of his father without remorse or grief. King of the domain of my father. The universe is vast and inviting.
Podore Table
William (Yitz) Finch

Wood
Space
Carolyn Pauly

Jewelry
PEACEFUL TYPE OF HELL

Vy Duong

Acrylic
SEEING MYSELF OFF

Xinwei Yan

送行

我向往一场完美的死亡
早上四点与危险的行路者
卷着满车破衣烂衫于我却一生铺盖
我鞭策我二十世纪的引擎
我鞭策它七千转
呼啸乌云般的烟
然后我质问它 何时停止
然后我质问我心脏 何时停止
然后我质问草径里萎靡不振的蛇 何时停止
然后停止
死亡温柔如笑
如开往边疆玻璃草原般 不顾一切
幸福给仇人
责任给农夫
负担给儿子
记住的事不交给谁 或者
交给黑
浑河上冻之前我是有害的生物垃圾
浑河没什么可壮观的但于我如同恒河
我肋骨间会生出花草树木 不痛不痒
这样会有霞光照在我身上
I yearn for a perfect death.
On the road, four o’clock in the morning, passed by dangerous drivers
Their entire lives fully loaded in the shabby trunk,
sleeping bags, pots and pans, towels, guitars and photographs.
I flog my twentieth century engine
I flog it to seven thousand revs
whizzing smoke as black clouds
I interrogate it, time to terminate
Then I interrogate my heart, time to terminate
And I interrogate the melancholy snake at the trailhead, time to terminate
Then terminate.
Death soft as a laugh
driving to the glass prairie at the frontier, recklessly
I give the blessing to my enemy
Responsibility to the farmer
Regret to my son
I don’t give the things I memorized to anybody
Or to the dark.
Before the freezing of Hun River I’m the biohazard trash
There is nothing spectacular about Hun River but it’s my Ganges
Flowers, grass, trees and wood will grow from my ribs
No pain, no itch
Then there will be rays caressing my body from the east.
Surf’s Up
Susan Schwarz

Watercolor
PACIFIC RAIN DROPS

Dingxin Cai

Photography
I’ve caught a lot of different fish.
I know the cool places.
Where there’s a sea of girl’s smiles.
No effort’s needed to catch something there.
But only you, are the fish of my dreams!
Fish, by Leningrad

I’ve caught a lot of different fish. Rainbow trout, found outside clubs with fancy scales that flash and sparkle in the night light, are common but taste great. Catfish, found in the feminism section of the local bookshop wearing red lipstick, are only good to eat when they’re cooked right. Otherwise they’re too bitter. Salmon are some of my favorite. Usually you find them on the local running trails or at the nearest park. They’re never flashy but they’ve got this natural, fresh taste. After years of fishing I know all the best places to catch fish: bars, malls, gyms, even laundromats and grocery stores. All of these places are a sea of girls’ smiles. All of them barely require any skill or patience. All you need is the right bait. Then you’ve got them. Hook, line and sinker.

The first time I saw you was at my favorite fishing spot – a little café two blocks from my apartment where I go whenever I feel the need to unwind. The gently flowing current of people in and out the door guarantees variety and the fish at this place always travel in groups. People call them schools but I’ve never understood why. I mean, whenever they’re in groups the fish just seem to get dumber. One of them will tell a story about the last time they got caught and the rest will giggle and gape their mouths like they’re starving for air. But you’re different. You travel alone. When I saw you I was hooked.

I was sitting at my usual place in the back corner of the shop, eying a common trout. You could tell she knew I was watching. She kept puckering her lips and pushing out her chest while she pretended to work on her computer. It was obvious she wanted me. I was trying to figure out what spice to pair with her magnificent rack when I saw you. You swept through the door on a warm current of air, leaving behind a trail of cardamom and tangerine. You were a species I had never tried before, something foreign. Everyone’s eyes followed you around the shop, making it clear you didn’t belong here. You were an invasive species.

Though I already had a guaranteed catch, I completely forgot about the trout I’d been thinking about gutting before you walked in. I went hungry that night. Nothing I brought home during those weeks satisfied my hunger. Fish I had enjoyed for years suddenly tasted horrible. I returned to that café at the same time everyday hoping I would catch another glimpse of your beautiful scales. But you never came back.

Now you haunt my dreams. You swim about my head, causing tidal waves of desire and disappointment. Every night you visit me but I know you’ll be gone in the morning. Yet still I hope that one day I’ll see you again, so in my dreams I practice what I’ll say that fateful day when you reappear.

I won’t hesitate, I’ll walk right up to you. “I’ve caught a lot of different fish,” I’ll say, “but you’re the fish of my dreams.”
BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU FISH FOR

Becky Reeve

Acrylic
PARROT IN THE DOOR

Duc Nguyen
Her view of the street from our second story bedroom
veiled by the mulberry in snow and bloom.

Finches and nuthatches ratchet through the elm.
   Her elm.

She sat with her head propped on the chair back
as if she were a tree creature too.

She roused to visages of postman,
   neighbors and then us.

   A squeal, a rut for joy,
as we reappeared from a journey.

Odysseus’ Argos after years of separation’s doze
seeing through the crinoline of disguise:

   recognizing our tone, our breath
   our pose.
LEVI

Dustin R. Crouse

Soft Pastel
After over 300 hours in the field,
    two ancient cities,
    and many nights spent
    on a sheet-less hotel bed,
    I must say adieu to you.
Though we may never meet again,
I know your çay-colored sunsets
    and gentle people
    will always hold a place
    inside my fig-covered heart.
A Pantoum

The air in the room hangs low and heavy
   Do you see me looking at you?
Voices buzz around me like flies but
   like flies, I pay them no attention.

   Do you see me looking at you?
How would they ever know that
   like flies, I pay them no attention.
Only you break through this heavy air and

   how would they ever know that?
The drink in those silver glasses is for guests
out back. You break through this heavy air and
find a lonely corner across the room.

“The drink in those silver glasses is for guests
out back.” A girl, reveling at her own triumph. I
find a lonely corner across the room,
escape from the buzz. I can slip

out back. A girl, reveling in her own triumph, I
can’t believe the words evading your lips. “Let’s
escape from the buzz. I can slip
through that gap.” you say. I hope you mean what I

can’t believe. The words evading your lips. “Let’s.”
How could they ever know
that I would let him slide into that sacred gap.
Only you break through, this heavy air and me.
Love On Fire
Agata Bogucka

Photography
‘Girrrrrlllllllllll…’ I could hear Sam’s voice from all the way across the ballroom, probably all the way across the East Village if I listened close enough. The way all those little intangible murmurs of the city must drive some folks to schizophrenia; that was how Sam sounded to me today. ‘What now, Mr. Beckett?’, I answered wryly. We were always referring to each other in glimpses of wonderful people we thought we could become; Jimmy the hustler became ‘Mr. Joyce’, Oscar the Puerto Rican bellboy ‘Mr. Wilde’, myself ‘Mr. Redford’ when I wasn’t Robbie the underpaid coffee slinger. We all had our stories, our troubles, but the unspoken rule was when you entered the ballroom, it wasn’t about you, or your broke-ness, or your mama who didn’t talk to you after you told her, it was about making something.

‘You just watching today, mister?’, Sam countered.

That was mean.

He knew I was new to this; that I wanted just to be around other boys like me, that my folks still didn’t know where I was.

‘I only dance when we go to the Disco, or when Danny calls me’, I replied evenly.

Oooooo, I thought, I shouldn’t have said that. The boys in the back were already hollering and whistling. ‘Someone just got reeeeed….’

So Dramatic. But I guess that’s sort of what it was all about.

Danny was his guy. Well, he wanted him to be his guy. Just like every fag in the city. Sam just arched his eyebrows at me, his posse posturing ineffectively behind him.

‘Don’t get yourself hurt now, babe. You know how he plays’, he mouthed my direction. He always had to rub it in, that I was the Midwestern farmboy with the sunflower hair and freckled arms who’d left high-holy-lonely Minnesota for the big lights of New York.

I knew his deal, we all did- in our group, even if you weren’t friends you were friends; we stuck together like the stray dogs down in the meatpacking district, because we had to.

I remembered the night I’d spent in a dusty corner of Sam’s parent’s 5th floor walkup in the Bronx when I first got to the city, the smell of fried plantains in the kitchen so foreign and delicious, then overhearing Sam’s father talking to him.

‘Son, you already got two strikes against you; you’re a black man and you’re gay…this city don’t love you- you have to be so much stronger than you think you can be.’

I remembered how hard it was for me not to sob with him that night, how I had to be the strong one when I wasn’t sure I could be.

Sam was performing, he informed me proudly, casually. He looked radiant, really, as much as I didn’t want him to be, he was awash in his own light. Funny how a bunch of homos could turn a dim warehouse in the bad part of the Village into something Madonna wanted to rip off.
Suddenly I saw Danny over in a corner; the boys from uptown everyone was afraid to talk to surrounding him like one of those Chinese blinds the owners hid behind in cheap dim sum places. ‘Shit...’ I thought. We’d met for lunch last week at a place I couldn’t afford, a place where happy couples talked about 401K’s and soccer practice in the park. I’d told him I was a sculptor; that I’d show him a few of my pieces at hip galleries down in SoHo sometime.

Well, I was a sculptor.

The library even took a few pieces for their ‘local student exhibit’ when I lied and told them I went to NYU. Remembering this, I stuck my chin up a little bit, subconsciously, the way I used to in high school when the Nielson boys would wad spitballs at the little stone and ceramic pieces I’d bring into shop class to work on.

I was, goddamnit. It just wasn’t easy to make it; to convince myself I might be alright- might have something worth getting lost in.

I remembered the old man in the shabby beret and paisley shirt who followed me out of the library.

‘You made those?’, he’d started to say.

‘Look, I’m not one of those’... I’d begun; all sass and attitude. I wasn’t about to get propositioned by some creep for the 50th time.

‘Never mind. Just wanted to say since you probably don’t know who I am, I can say in confidence your work is better than half my graduate students.’

My jaw landed somewhere beyond the pigeon shit on the curb.

He glanced impatiently at his watch.

‘Got to go; late for lunch with my wife.’ The only other time I’d felt so crumpled up and happy at the same time was when Maryanne, the prettiest girl in our class, had asked me out to the senior prom in front of the Nielson boys.

Anyways, Danny didn’t need to know this. Hell, he didn’t need to know anything except the address of my cheap studio on Avenue C. ‘Stop it.’ I heard my mother say to me. Sometimes the guilt of having fled her upper Midwest tough love served me well I guess. I smiled anyways. Who could be sad about how cheap the canvas was when the periphery of life was so great?

‘Heyyy Robbie!’ pantomimed Oscar across the room, from the safety of Danny’s aura. Oh, how I hated him right now. He wore a silver track jacket I knew he’d stolen from the Sak’s over on West 31st Street, because I’d seen it in the window displays a week earlier and had thought about doing the same thing. I knew it was wrong, maybe I was wrong- lost and alone and the blue-eyed preachers and my mother had been right all along. I avoided his eyes and looked at Danny again. I just wanted to walk down those muddy roads where the maples faded in the wisest shades of auburn these city folks couldn’t imagine, holding his hand, lost in how strong his shoulders were so that nobody’s glances could burn me.
'Hi, Oscar! How arrrre you? Love that jacket by the way', I finally replied in my cheesiest voice, that voice I said I’d never speak in again after ‘the latte incident’ at work a few weeks ago. He started saying something about how it was on sale and he had to have it and it was perfect for blah blah blah party in Brooklyn last weekend, but my eyes were behind him. Danny looked bored. He wore this striped shirt with holes in all the best places, where the sharp collarbone bends reluctantly into the neck, where the back joins the enviable symmetry of the waist, where the pectoral muscles meet the mysterious depths of the armpit. The kinda places that made me think I’d always known, always been- maybe Danny was right, we were born this way. Crystal came up to him from the backroom, whispered something in his ear, and he smiled, his eyes wandering towards me.

‘Fuck.’

I felt a bead of sweat across my forehead, like the first day of work when I thought ‘Americano’ meant expresso and chocolate syrup. He must be thinking of this silly farmboy, the overall lines under my t-shirt, the way I kept looking down at that stupid plastic flower on the table at lunch last week. I thought of his piece that had appeared in The New Yorker a few months ago; how shy he’d been about it, how I pretended I didn’t know every damn line in my head.

Crystal came back out, but this time it was legit. ‘Is is realnesss?’, she boomed on the microphone from across the room. Somewhere in the catcalls and bright lights and heels on linoleum I felt an arm across my back. I didn’t bother to look. Jimmy had been acting really fresh with me lately, like I was one of his customers or something. Stop it. Thanks mom.

A few fingers curled around mine, they were strong, angular- hesitant?

Now I knew it wasn’t Jimmy.

I felt myself turning, turning, turning like the leaves or the sun in that magic in-between season in the Minnesota woods, turning out of the ballroom and into the brisk air of 2nd Avenue.

‘Where we going?’, I ventured.

‘The Library’, the voice said confidently.

‘Isn’t it…’

‘They moved them to the window case; I knew they were yours as soon as I saw them.’

‘Buuu…..’ I wasn’t sure I was even speaking anymore. My throat sure could go for one of those chocolate syrup Americano’s right now.

‘I want you to tell me about them, then maybe if you want we can watch a movie aa, aaa- at my place.’

His voice was wavering.

His voice never waivered.

Ohhhh, it was realness.
Autumn Sanctuary
Ryan T. Heather

Acrylic
Creativity. Imagination. Inventiveness. These attributes are among a growing list of extra-technical talents that are considered vital for 21st century engineers and applied scientists to be successful professionals in a world of constant and complex change.

Thanks to the generosity—and imagination—of Colorado School of Mines alumnus J. Michael Blackwell, Class of 1959, the Division of Liberal Arts and International Studies acquired the capacity to recognize superior student performance in the creative arts with the establishment of the Blackwell Award for Excellence in Creative Expression in 2006. The Blackwell Award recognizes those who have excelled in the evocative representation of the human condition through the genres of poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, film, music, or the artistic representation of academic inquiry. The winner of this award will have produced a creative work in the fine arts, literature, poetry, music, film, or technical arts of stunning originality.

It is a distinct pleasure to be able to showcase the work of this year’s recipient, Cullin Kin—Mechanical Engineering, Class of 2017—whose piece appears on the following pages.
Andre Agassi was a tennis legend. The last match of his career was on the television at 8:00 a.m. on September 3rd, 2006. He was pitted against the German, Benjamin Becker, in the 3rd round of the U.S. Open. I was eleven at the time and spent every other weekend at my father Finn’s house per the parenting plan. Finn was an educated man in his mid to late 40’s who used the weekends to let his gray-white facial hair flourish as he unwound from the previous week. He and I agreed the night before to watch Agassi’s final match. I remember waking up at 7:00 a.m., making sure not to miss a single moment of the broadcast, the fluorescent glow of Finn’s 190-gallon saltwater fish tank radiating through the room. I was elated to witness the end of a tennis era with Finn; I missed his presence at home with mother, and Agassi was our favorite player. Finn always told me stories of when he was a kid, of how he wanted to help other people, and followed his dreams into that profession. Little did I know he was the one who needed help.

I set his 50-inch flat screen to the right channel and volume, then proceeded to the kitchen to acquire two glasses of purified water, and sat down on the couch patiently waiting. The neighborhood seemed frozen; the hustle of Mercedes and BMW’s vanished as Agassi made his final opening serve. On the living room table laid the carnage Finn left from the night before. Missing was his constant companion, that rare stone mug that usually remained in position overnight after use, every night before. 7:30 a.m. came and went and not a sign of Finn, his room remained static. 7:45, 7:52, 8:00, 8:10, and I began to wonder if he had missed his alarm. By 8:30, Finn still wasn’t on the couch watching the match with me and I knew something was awry. I timidly poked my head into his room and what I saw was difficult to comprehend.

I always knew that Finn enjoyed his poisons, especially from his rare stone mug. Finn was sprawled-out on his king-size bed, stark naked, glossy-eyed, unresponsive, and taking small erratic breaths. As I advanced towards him, I noticed the liter of Sky vodka he had purchased the night before was a quarter full and on the ground laying next to his stone mug. Finn continued to take shallow breaths, but all of my attempts to elicit even a minimal response were failing. I decided to let him rest and to check on him regularly, though I should have called an ambulance. I told myself, “He’s just sick, he has to be,” when in reality, I had absolutely no idea he could have died from this. Finn remained unresponsive until 7:00 p.m. that evening when I heard a crash and saw the door to his room swing open. Finn barreled out of his room heavy-footed and unbalanced, mumbling unintelligibly. He had attempted to put on a bathrobe over his naked body, but ended up tying the sash like a ‘cat’s cradle’ around his lower waist with the robe folded over itself, covering his butt like a cape. He teetered over to me as he tried to untie the knot, ceasing with his genitals suspended mere inches from my face. When I asked him if he was okay, he responded with slurs and moans; he was incapable of even pronouncing
a syllable. While in front of me, Finn kept reaching for miscellaneous items, such as the TV remote, with the intent to drink them.

My next mission was to untie the tangled vine Finn made of his sash, but there was a complication: the knot rested directly atop his manhood. An 11-year-old boy’s worst nightmare, but I gathered the courage to help. I fixed the twisted mess that was Finn’s sash, placed his bathrobe on him correctly and ushered him back to his room. He proceeded to grab a bottle of his girlfriend’s hair spray and raised it to his mouth; in his mind it must have been another drink. Despite his apparent illness, all that was on his mind was obtaining his next drink. I directed Finn to his bed where he collapsed and immediately lost consciousness, and then I proceeded to collect and hide every poison that Finn could possibly consume. I thought to myself, ‘What is wrong with my father? This is the man I’ve looked up to my entire life? He’s lost all control.’ For the next 36 hours, Finn was in some sort of comatose hibernation and, when he woke, he was normal with absolutely no memory of the past two days or even the current date. That night, his constant companion was right by his side once again like nothing had ever happened.

As a child, the people around me always said that those who choose to use drugs and drink alcohol excessively are defective, selfish, and not to be associated with. However, the nature of addiction was never mentioned. That day, I finally understood the significance of my father’s constant companion. It was darkness; it was a parasite. Finn’s stone mug was a conglomerate of beautiful white opal held together with black obsidian. Just like the opal, Finn had a beautiful life and was a compassionate, successful person who helped and cared for others. However, just like the black obsidian, darkness was invading my father; an uncontrollable darkness quickly drowning the light that brought him this far. At the heart of it all, just like the dependence of the opal on the obsidian to hold the mug together, my father was dependent upon his mug. It never left his side, his constant companion. My father believed he couldn’t function without that rare stone mug, when in reality; it was the root of all dysfunction in his life. To this day, that rare stone mug sits by his side every evening. His constant companion, refill after refill, will always be there for him no matter how much his life suffers for it. It’s a vicious cycle; a cycle my father cannot currently escape. Until my father realizes that mug’s true beauty is when it’s lying empty and in pieces, his life will trend towards the same.
George Saunders writes short stories, essays, novellas, and childrens’ books. Born in Texas and raised in Chicago, he graduated from the Colorado School of Mines in 1981 with a degree in geophysical engineering. After working in Sumatra for a few years he attended Syracuse University for an MFA in creative writing. Since then he has published multiple short stories with the New Yorker and travel pieces with GQ, among many others, and has written several short story collections. His work has appeared in the *O’Henry Prize for Fiction, Best American Short Stories, Best Non-Required Reading, Best American Travel Writing, and Best Science Fiction anthologies*. He was named as one of the top 100 most creative people by Entertainment Weekly in 2001 and as one of the best writers 40 and under by the *New Yorker* in 2002. He has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, a MacArthur Fellowship, and an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has also appeared on the Charlie Rose show, Late Night with David Letterman, The Daily Show with John Stewart, and The Colbert Report. He currently teaches at Syracuse.

After reading everything George Saunders has accomplished, you might wonder how a small arts journal from a small engineering school was able to get an exclusive interview. In 2015, the editors attended the AWP Conference, the world’s largest conference for writers and writing programs. While sitting at our *High Grade* booth, one of Saunders’ students approached us and said his professor still speaks fondly of his time at Mines. We found his publishing house website and left a quick comment, thinking not much - if anything - would come of it. Next thing we knew we were directly corresponding with Saunders himself! The *High Grade* team compiled a list of interview questions about his time at Mines and how his experiences contributed to his career. Please enjoy our conversation with this great American writer who makes us laugh and reflect as he strikes inspiration for any CSM grad who wants to pick up a pen and imagine new worlds and indelible characters.
Q. Since we have all heard the mantra “write what you know” our readers would like to get a sense of who you are, beyond the obvious: an award-winning author who writes fabulous, and often satirical human stories. Can you share an epiphany or an awkward memory from your life that has inspired your writing?

A. I think a lot of my writing came out of my post-Mines twenties and early thirties, when I was realizing for the first time how pervasive the influence of money is in our culture – especially a shortage of money. It wasn’t one particular moment but an accretion of moments, where a series of lights went off concerning the relation between material well-being and grace. Then, a few years later, when we had our kids, the final light went on – this notion that the great unspoken story of America has to do with class and striving and the different ways wealth colors every moment of our lives. And running parallel to that was a sunnier, less buzz-killy track that had to do with realizing that I had a very opinionated relation to language – that whatever I was going to do in art would be coming out of my sensitivity to language (rather than, say, plot or theme or politics). All of this culminated around 1990, when I was working a tech writing job and working on fiction in spare moments at my desk – and started searching for a newish language in which to describe the corporate culture I found myself in. That ended up being my first book, “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline.”

Q. What would be your “I got to say it was a good day” day?

A. Well, I try to feel that way about every day – if we’re here to learn, then theoretically any day is as good as any other. Even a bad day might open your eyes to something. But one recent memorable day was the one in which I sent off my first novel. It was a nice, clear feeling afterward, for sure.

Q. You’ve been interviewed on many late night shows such as The Colbert Report and the Daily Show, which has been hugely popular to a wide audience. These outlets are also where many young people get their news. What was your favorite moment on late night tv?

A. I enjoyed a recent moment on The Late Show, when I commented that I felt I looked like a Muppet, and Stephen Colbert said something about it not being easy for me to have had Jim Henson’s hand up my...you know. That was a shining moment. I was sad, however, that I missed the obvious follow-up line (“Well, it was no picnic for Henson either.”) But seriously – I have really treasured the experience of being onstage with Colbert. None of it is scripted, so it is an unique and terrifying improv opportunity – similar to being put in a cage with a tiger. He is just lightning-quick and has this ability to sort of sculpt a structure out of the conversations as it’s happening – to pick up on an image or notion and grow it out into something bigger. Really a genius, and incredibly generous. Being on the show is always a little scary but I really feel it enlarges a person, to try something like that.
Q. We enjoyed reading your piece for the NY Times (“My Writing Education”)—any way we can get you to tell us what Doug Unger’s advice on writing dialogue is that you wouldn’t originally share?

A. It was basically just the idea that, when two people are talking, they are both doing so out of their respective thought-clouds – so the resulting exchange is often a little askew and non-linear. Also, that dialogue on the page has the same burden as the rest of the prose: to be fast and smart and charming (i.e., not so important whether it is “real” or “accurate,” except in spirit). Sometimes, especially in the arts, the magic teaching moment is a combination of what is said and where the student is in his arc – that moment was like that for me. He said just what would be most beneficial for me to hear at that exact moment.

Q. We’ve always loved the “one-off-ness” magic of the people and places you create. Many of your stories live in worlds very similar to ours with one or two science fiction or what Jerome Stern called “Blue Moon” elements. How do you develop the significance of these ideas and their effect on the world?

A. In a word: rewriting. Revising a piece makes it better in ways you couldn’t have imagined at the outset. We might start out with certain theoretical thoughts about a piece, but those are always going to be lame compared to what our minds will produce via iteration and incremental improvement. In this, writing a story is not so different from doing an experiment – you start out with one intention, but also open to the experiment going off in a new direction and yielding results you didn’t expect. So it’s that quality of openness and curiosity that makes a good writer/scientist.

Q. Would you like to see one of your stories made into a film or theatrical performance? If yes, which piece do you think would work best and why? Who would direct the production?

A. I’ve had a few plays made and a few close movie-calls – but at this point I’m less invested in that possibility. I am starting to realize that my one true love in art is fiction – I love the honesty and strangeness you can get away with, and the fact that you don’t need a team or any “financial viability” to get the work done – it just takes a computer and a vision. The TV and film worlds are very, very dependent on a financial payoff, and that can morph (aka deform) a story. I have a lot of confidence in the ability of prose to get at the deep and essential truths of the human condition, better than any other form.

Q. Do you feel that your time spent at CSM had a positive effect on your writing and literary career?

A. Incredibly positive. The main thing I learned was to work hard, without complaint, and without confusing effort for results. At Mines, if I studied 17 hours a day and got a 31 on the test, that was still an F. End of story. Likewise,
in writing, if you work on a story for three years and it still isn’t working – well, it isn’t. Another way of saying this: I learned that persistence and faith can be transformative – we are not stuck in whatever the current reality might be. Work can cause self-enlargement. And change can come in small increments which, over time, take you to some new and exciting outcome that you couldn’t have predicted – true in the arts and true in engineering.

Q. Mines has changed a lot since your time here in the 1980s. The humanities and the arts have been expanded in the types of courses offered, and there are more student clubs such as the Creative Writing Club and Anonymous Right Brains. There’s even a themed learning community in the freshmen dorms for the visual and performing arts. What advice would you give Mines students about how to balance their STEM curriculum and science careers with the desire to create and contribute to creative arts?

A. Well, I think I would challenge them to imagine that these things are not really different at all – they are just two manifestations of the same thing: an open-minded quest for truth. The arts, you could say, access a different set of human capabilities in that quest—intuition, iteration, access to the subconscious—but that set of capabilities is just as real and valuable as logic,
induction, etc. In a sense, we want to be engaged in a sort of “ultimate empiricism” – trying to use every part of ourselves and every ability we have to get closer to the huge and unknowable truths of existence.

**Q. What should every Mines student read?**

**A.** I wouldn’t presume to say – but I would definitely say that every Mines student should throw themselves into reading something, in whatever mode he or she is drawn to. It’s an amazing mind-expanding experience, even if it doesn’t come naturally to you (as I know it doesn’t to some subset of “natural” engineers). What I find wonderful is the idea that through books we gain direct access to minds now gone, who had experiences that we otherwise would not have access to. A good book is an incredible act of generosity from someone far away (in space or time). And odds are, there’s some writer out there who is going through just what you are. And the experience of knowing that you are not alone in history can be comforting and energizing, I think. I’d also stress that reading well is a learned capability – just because it doesn’t come naturally doesn’t mean you can’t acquire that skill. It’s no sin to have difficulty reading, or to take no pleasure in it – but as someone who took no pleasure in differential equations and had a lot of difficulty with it, I can say I am glad I tried to master it – that process made me a bigger person.

**Q. In your evocative and passionate graduation speech at Syracuse University in 2013 that was so well-received it has been published as a book titled Congratulations, By the Way you say “What I regret most in my life are failures of kindness.” You emphasized that we must dedicate thought and effort to being kinder because “kindness, it turns out, is hard — it starts out all rainbows and puppy dogs, and expands to include... well, everything.” Is there a particular message in there that you would emphasize for a CSM student?**

**A.** I think one can make a pretty good logical, scientific case that what we are here to do is to get more expansive and loving – to outgrow the bounds of self. And it seems to me that this sort of thinking could be very useful to scientists, as a way of contextualizing the work we do – that is, a way to answer the question, “OK, so we can do [Scientific Task A] but why do we want to? What is the overall effect on our real mission here (which is, according to me, to grow more loving and outgrow the bounds of self)?” So, in this model, “kindness” is more than just being nice – it actually has to do with properly understanding what “self” is, and why believing in it too much is actually sort of delusional – and then adjusting our behavior accordingly. Or: coming to a more complex and scientific understanding of “self” (i.e., coming to understand, somewhat, from whence that feeling that we are separate from everything else comes) will automatically cause us to behave differently (and more sensibly/logically). This way of thinking will have repercussions for our environmental politics, our corporate culture, in the political sphere. And ultimately it is very good science to look at things as they are (including our minds and our
moral-ethical habituation) and live according to the truths we find there.

Q. Despite the jovial proclamations that the Colorado School of Mines is ranked as a top school for engineering in the U.S., CSM can be a hard place sometimes. Do you have a favorite memory from your time here or perhaps a memory in retrospect that has become really funny over time?

A. It can be hard. I remember that very well. One thing I took from the Mines experience was this notion that to be truly good at something might include some element of pain or self-denial or even torment. I think that’s ok. It’s certainly true in writing. I love writing, but when I say that, I am saying that I (also) love, or at least ‘bless’ all those horrible moments contained in the notion of “writing” – the blockages, the frustration, the feeling of never being good enough, the rejections etc. But Mines taught me that a good result might contain genuine horrendous difficulties.

One good moment I remember: sitting down by Clear Creek, reading a book of stories by DeMauppasant. I think that was one of the first moments I ever thought of becoming a writer, and it was because the prose was really speaking to me – was coming alive in my mind, there with the sun coming off the water. And I could feel all of that Mines-stress falling away. And I thought, “Huh, maybe I could have an engineering degree and not be an engineer – maybe I could be a writer.” I was still committed to graduating, but I had this feeling that this mini-immersion in art was a foreshadowing of a time to come, when my life would be less about laboring to achieve an abstract goal that wasn’t all that close to my heart, and more about doing something I really wanted to do and was good at (as I was not at engineering, alas). So I guess what I’m saying is, students at Mines are engaged in an incredibly difficult and challenging task – but it’s good now and then to step out of it, and ask, “OK, what else is there?” This generation in particular, I think, has this (honorable) notion that if they do everything right, all will be well. But it’s not so, actually. You can do everything right and the world can still knock you down. Now, I’m guessing the 2016 Mines has a lot of this built-in, in a way that 1980s Mines didn’t – a more varied curriculum, and some recognition that our humanity involves more than just straight-
forward calculation and accomplishment. But I have to say how grateful I was to have been dropped into the intense and rigorous world that is Mines. My take on it is that once a young person has experienced that level of rigor, she will never forget it, and everything she does thereafter will be blessed with that sense of being willing to engage and take a hit and keep going – a kind of fearlessness. Mines toughens us up, and I’ve been amazed again and again by what a powerful gift that is, in a culture that increasingly shies away from being tested, or tends to see hardship as necessarily indicative of unkindness or abuse.

Q. Rumor has it that one of your first short stories was published in High Grade. Do you remember what it was called and what it’s about? We believe it was published under a pseudonym, but the mystery just makes us want to know more…

A. I’ll take the Fifth on that one. Luckily I don’t remember the pseudonym, even. At that time, I was doing this dumb young-writer thing of writing when I had never really read anything. But it was a nice feeling, to have something I’d written in print. It was also a nice feeling, given how crappy it was, to not have published under my own name.
Molly Baron - pg 111
Molly Baron is a senior in Geology and Geological engineering and is part of the McBride Honors Program. Writing poetry is important in her life because it helps her comprehend the world and process her experiences. She is also an avid trail runner and a yoga student/instructor.

Dustin Burchett - pg 111
This year Dustin published an album on I-Tunes. His song ‘fibo_thing’ takes two percussive elements based off the fibonacci sequence and the Lucas numbers as the main percussive element. In the cover song, ‘square,’ he designed a complex algorithm in Matlab that transposes any input of numbers and gives them harmonic value, rhythmic value, tonality etc.. As such, he took a series of numbers that can represent triangles, squares, and hexagons and turned each melody into a different harmonic sequence for the song!

Dingxin Cai - pg 79
Dingxin Cai is a geological engineering sophomore from Beijing. Before transferring to Mines she lived in Boston for a year and half. She enjoys film photography, sketching, drawing, being by herself, dressing up, going to concerts, and art exhibitions.

Lincoln Carr - pg 44
Lincoln Carr has been writing poetry since he could pick up a pencil. Much later, he discovered quantum physics, another kind of poetry. Professor Carr teaches in both the physics and the McBride Honors programs at CSM. He was (in)famously featured on the Oredigger “dirty seven” list of toughest professors on campus, but somehow students still come to his classes, even ones that aren’t required.

Olivia Cordova - pg 16
Olivia Cordova is a first-year student at Mines. She is part of the Nucleus Scholars community and is a Colorado native. Though she is pursuing a degree in electrical engineering, she has always loved reading and writing. She especially enjoys the beauty and power that poems subtly possess and how they tend to unveil a critical piece to an unknown puzzle. Indeed, she lives by the quote: “You are a piece of the puzzle in someone else’s life. You may never know where you fit, but others will fill the holes in their lives with pieces of you.”

Julia Cormos - pgs 23, 67, 70, 86
Julia Cormos is a Colorado native who likes Jesus, Olive Garden breadsticks, and the ukulele. She can also sometimes do math and is honored to be a part of High Grade.
Aspen Davis - pg 111
Aspen Davis is a first year student at CSM with a lifelong love of the arts. She enjoys exploring both written and spoken word, and is looking forwards to pursuing these interests while at Mines.

Bryce DeShazer - pgs 25, 46
Bryce DeShazer works in acrylics and watercolors and any other medium that allows him to push his abilities. His goal is to feature silhouettes and contrasting colors in his work to express the desire for knowledge and the impact of the unknown.

Vy Vu Nhat Duong - pg 75
Vy Vu Nhat Duong’s interest in art began with a yellow plane, drawn in Crayon during preschool in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Vy, a sophomore pursuing a civil engineering major and a double minor in humanitarian engineering and public relations, is a Harvey Scholar and a member of the McBride Honors Program. Born and raised in Vietnam, Vy came to the U.S. when she was ten. As a child, she aspired to be an artist, but she realized her true passion was in humanitarian engineering, where she can use her creativity to develop innovative scientific solutions for the benefit of others. When she moved to the U.S., she realized “art is a universal language,” and relied on this to express her inner thoughts when she felt the initial isolation from being in a completely different environment, often exacerbated by the language barrier.

Emma Ely - pg 111
Emma Ely is a senior in Environmental Engineering and the McBride Honors Program. Upon graduation she will move to Denver as an Environmental Specialist for Phillips 66. Emma loves the outdoors and enjoys hiking, running, skiing, and traveling. Emma is really really going to miss Mines, but she is super happy she was able to be a part of High Grade and McBride, and has gotten to know so many awesome Mines students.

Creed Flynn - Front, back and transition pages
Creed Flynn is a senior in Mechanical Engineering. After being inspired by a palette of wet paint, he decided to photograph the medium instead of waiting for it to dry. The blotches of black and white scattered throughout these pages are some of the results of this experiment.

Ryan T. Heather - pgs 54, 92
Ryan has been painting for eight years, after being influenced by his grandmother, but plans on painting more once he graduates and has time to think. Art is something he needs to do but hardly does. He once read that “flow” is achieved by recognizing and doing the things in which time goes by without notice and you enjoy what you’re doing. For him, that is the definition of peace. Art helps him find it.
Laine Greaves-Smith - pg 35
Laine Greaves-Smith graduated from CSM in December 2015 with Mechanical and Electrical Engineering specialties and now incorporates these engineering concepts into functional artistic sculpture and furniture. He believes that art isn’t just for walls and display cases but that artistic design should be incorporated into everyday items and surround people in daily life. The direct reuse of automotive, bicycle, and industrial components in art forces the viewer to appreciate the carefully engineered parts that are often overlooked. Many of his other pieces can be seen in previous editions of High Grade, Mines Magazine, and in galleries along the Front Range.

Jesse Glover - pg 38
“May your glass be ever full. May the roof over your head be always strong. And may you be in heaven half an hour before the devil knows you’re dead. “

Andrew Hemesath - pg 18
Andrew Hemesath would prefer not to talk about Andrew Hemesath. Andrew Hemesath would much rather talk about Andrew Hemesath’s alter ego, Ronnie. He first became Ronnie in a bar in Denver in 2014, based off Donnie from the movie Donnie Darko. Andrew Hemesath changed the D to an R to maintain a slim thread of originality. He becomes Ronnie after 2-3 drinks (typically). Andrew Hemesath’s friends were concerned at first but now reluctantly accept/avoid him after this 2-3 drink threshold. Andrew Hemesath, the morning after a drunken evening opens his eyes and says, “Wake up Ronnie.” Andrew Hemesath laughs at this joke every time.

James Henry - pg 39
James Henry is a fiery redhead who lives in a dragon-guarded castle surrounded by a boiling lake of lava! But don’t let that cool you off. He’s a loaded pistol who likes piña coladas and getting caught in the rain. Yours for the rescuing: James... Henry!

Derek Jacobsen - pg 50
Absolute silence is terrifying. I can’t imagine a time where I wasn’t listening to something or singing to myself.

Alyssa King - pg 28
Alyssa King is a reader turned actress turned chemical engineer turned historian turned writer… The list is eternal, the passions are strong, and she is terribly pleased to share a short story with the Mines community. She feels that, sometimes, like her story Gypsy, the best ideas are happy accidents. Sometimes they’re brought on by an overheard conversation or a leaf blowing past the doorway, or even in the form of a Fleetwood Mac song. Sometimes a fictional gypsy turns out looking a lot like Stevie Nicks. Sometimes a young, ambitious writer tries to reconstruct the symphony of
words and thoughts that flow through a disjointed, distractible, thoroughly regular brain and weave past and present together to create a knotted, bumpy timeline of life that leaves the story’s ending wide open for interpretation. And sometimes it’s just more fun to hang the picture on the wall whichever way you want instead of finding a “this side up” sticker on its back.

**Kelsey Kopecky - pg 37**
I’m a Computer Science alumnus, and wouldn’t you know it, I love video games. Vrtra is a god in the game Tales of Innocence and I fell in love with her design the moment I saw her. I really wanted to do something special with this project, so she is my first ball-jointed plush and also the largest plush I’ve ever made! She is completely hand sewn (with a few resin and clay parts) and is 6 feet long.

**Matthew Kowalsky - pg 9**
Matthew Kowalsky has been reading books voraciously since the age of roughly three, when he requested a return to diapers to maximize reading time via elimination of potty breaks. The likes of Terry Pratchett, J.R.R. Tolkien, Jonathon Stroud, Mark Twain, Billy Collins, and Patrick Rothfuss have all blessed Matt with their wit and wisdom, conveyed by ink across time and space. The pleasure they so obviously take in the act of writing has been a pleasure to emulate. In case it wasn’t abundantly clear by the dramatic nature of the last two sentences, this is Matt’s first published piece. He’d like to thank his parents for continuing his potty training, despite protestations.

**Misha Lantsov - pgs 7, 64**
Writing is like making music. It’s like having a conversation with yourself. Or others. It’s like walking in the park and you stop to get a piece of pie and eat it slowly. It’s like engineering a bridge except I didn’t have to go to school for it and if I mess up no one dies. But it’s still a sort of bridge. If it feels good, write it.

**Sean Patrick McGinley - pgs 48, 85**
Sean Patrick McGinley is an aspiring lawyer stuck in the land of engineering. After his four years at CSM, Sean Patrick will enter the land of international human rights law with a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering. After constantly explaining why engineers can become lawyers, how to pronounce Nevada, and that someone should hire him, Sean Patrick will one day seek to change the world for LGBTQ+ people everywhere.

**Ali Moradi - pg 15**
I started taking pictures as an amateur photographer to express how I feel and to chronicle the poetic elements of the environment. Photography provides an affordable yet powerful tool to capture the “fragile moments”—the moments with artistic quality that last just for a few seconds before fading
Photography is not just snapping a button without paying attention to the nuances, tone and the messages embedded deep inside those “fragile moments”. No matter what tool we can afford, whether it is a camera lens or a blank paper and pen, we, as human beings are fortunate to be able to express how we feel at the moment and to let others know about our unique experience of living in an adventurous and beautiful world.

**Drupad Parikh - pg 43**

There is a fear that I hold close—to not be able to see beauty. I took the same bus to work day in and day out for two years, most eyes would find boredom; I strove to find little snaps of everyday that surpassed banal existence by their un-assumed beauty. Each moment is a singularity that cannot be replicated in time, and the desire is to distill a moment for eternity. In color, in black and white, in words, in memory. And there is the root of all art—to mimic life. And if possible to create it. To see things as they are and in some ways better than their usual portrayal. And all I aim to do in sub second exposure is to make myself believe in the beauty of all things.

**Sujee Park - pg 24, 111**

I’ve always doubted my ability to honestly express my emotion through words. I think that’s why I turned to music from a young age; I found that through singing I could connect my heart and my throat. Writing music has become such a large part of who I am, and through this expression I’ve been able to communicate on a deeper level. Our perspectives shape our reality, and I don’t think I can truly know anything outside of my experience. That is one of the most beautiful, and yet challenging aspects of writing poetry and music, because it’s an attempt to extract a piece of my world for others without losing the authenticity of my voice.

**Phil Persson - pgs 4, 11, 89**

I am a Geology grad student and came to Mines in 2012 after completing my undergrad in geology at CU Boulder. While at Boulder I took an advanced fiction class somewhat on a whim and discovered I loved writing short stories. I’d started writing fiction around 2010 when, between exploration geologist gigs and back in Boulder, I tried ‘national novel writing month’ (“NaNoWriMo”) and ~300 pages later found myself still writing. I like to explore themes of ‘otherness’ and what it is like to be an ‘outsider’ in a particular place or time. I think the lens of science and engineering can be a great place to explore such themes, and maybe get all of us thinking a little more creatively.

**Becky Reeve - pg 81, cover**

Becky would like to thank all of the professors who don’t give her the stink eye when she was drawing in class instead of paying attention. They are the real MVPs of her continual practice of art. #artiscool #toocoolforschool #ijustwanttopaint #gucciswag #mineslife #butnotreally #llamas #thankyou #artisrad #art
**Molly Reicher - pg 49**

I would like to dedicate this piece to Alexa Rogers, my best friend and cross country coach. Thank you for always encouraging me and pushing me to persevere in running, faith, and life. Thank you for teaching me that my identity is not in the things that I do, but in Christ and the person that I am. You always inspire me to pursue God in my talents and passions.

**Frances Richardson - pg 80**

Knit Fast, Die Warm

**Tessa Rider - pg 8**

I am a first year graduate student in nuclear engineering. When I was young I spent many hours watching my father make jewelry. I would help in little ways like finding small stones he dropped or picking up the long spirals of wax that came off the lathe. My favorite job was dunking the hot molds into a bucket of cold water after casting, hearing the turbulence of the water as it instantly boiled, followed by the tiny ‘clink, thud’ as the new piece came loose and fell to the bottom of the bucket. Over time, I learned a few things of the craft and this summer was given the unique opportunity to make my husband’s wedding ring.

**Diane Roher - pg 13**

Diane Roher is a graduating senior in Environmental Engineering, originally from State College, PA. She plans to pursue a graduate degree in Environmental Engineering, with a focus on contaminant fate and transport and site remediation. In her free time, Diane enjoys hiking, snowboarding, fishing, cooking, and drinking tea. She enjoys taking inspiration from her travels and adventures and capturing them in different art mediums.

**Dan Rosen - pg 71**

Perhaps the horse will sing.

**Alyssa Schwarz - pgs 45, 63, 66**

Alyssa Schwarz is a senior in Geological Engineering at CSM, is a proud native of Golden, Colorado and an award-winning artist. She enjoys painting and drawing the beauty found in nature through precise detail and realism in order to best capture the subject, combining the precision of engineering with the creative expression of art. Alyssa has displayed her artwork throughout the Denver metro area in numerous exhibitions, has provided artwork for multiple professional societies, and plans to exhibit her current portfolio in the newly renovated Marriott Hotel in Denver, CO. She is the art editor for High Grade and an active member of the Arvada Fine Arts Guild. She believes art should gently tug
at your edges, motivating you to think, do, create, explore, love, smile… If it even causes you to linger for one extra second, it has served a purpose.

Richard Sebastian-Coleman - pg 36
God and artist know creation seldom obeys creator.

Jim Studholme - pg 83
Jim Studholmean is an adjunct instructor in LAIS. He has two children, one dog and one cat. His lives in Boulder with his wife, Rae.

Sam Van Sickle - pg 6
Sam Van Sickle is a freshman at Mines from Lakewood, Colorado. He began taking pictures using his father’s camera his senior year of high school. One of his favorite things to do is go and relax with friends in Moab, Utah. This is where the picture was taken.

Hugo A Villa - online
I was born in a small town in Cody, Wyoming, went to high-school in Arizona, and I think old people are awesome. I actually ended up getting this piece tattooed on my right arm, and it’s got to be my favorite one I have. I am honored to have it be accepted into the magazine.

J. West - pg 2
J. West is a senior at CSM. One of the founding members of the Creative Writing Club and one of its blog managers, J writes fiction short stories and novels. Continually inspired by the dedication of other writers, J is grateful to be part of High Grade this year, and plans to continue writing after graduation. Trouble, J’s first High Grade submission, was written at a local coffee shop while observing the various methods of storytelling from the perspective of someone struggling with writer’s block.

Xinwei Yan - pg 76
Xinwei Yan was born and raised in Shenyang, China. He’s a Mines alumnus in Petroleum Engineering (B.S. 2013, M.E. 2015). He has a strong enthusiasm for creative writing, especially in poetry, lyric composition and fiction. Xinwei is also an individual songwriter of pop rock and folk. Though most of his writings are in Chinese, he believes the beauty of art can be beyond the barrier of language, and can be delivered graphically and abstractly. Xinwei is currently a graduate student and academic professional lecturer at the University of Wyoming.
FOUND AT HIGHGRADE.MINES.EDU

All artists recorded and mastered by CSM Music Technology unless otherwise noted.

1. **I Love Walking** - Molly Baron

2. **My Big Fat Ass** - Emma Ely

3. **A Drop** - Aspen Davis

4. **Neptune On My Mind** - Sujee Park
   *Recorded and Mastered by Sonic Conscious Studio with Jason Wagner*

5. **Persephone, Again and Again** - Sujee Park
   *Recorded and Mastered by Sonic Conscious Studio with Jason Wagner*

6. **Quantum Infinity** - Lincoln Carr

7. **Fibo_Thing** - Dustin Burchett
   *Self Recorded and Mastered*

8. **Square** - Dustin Burchett
   *Self Recorded and Mastered*

Please visit the Editions section of highgrade.mines.edu to view and download all of this year’s audio works as well as some additional art pieces.