High Grade
Colorado School of Mines Journal of the Arts
Submission Guidelines

The call for submissions is open to the entire Colorado School of Mines community. Only original works are accepted. The submission period is each Fall. All literary submissions must be in a Microsoft Word document. Limit one submission per document. Art submissions should be in .jpg or .png format. Music submissions should be in .mp3 or .wav format. Please submit through our website, highgrade.mines.edu. Limit five submissions per contributor.

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Front cover art by Halle Nicholas (photography). Back cover art by Vy Duong (watercolor colored pencil) and Halle Nicholas (photography). Contextualized by Connor Weddle.

Special thanks to:

Toni Lefton, for her commitment to this journal and the creative community at CSM.

The Division of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences for fostering a creative spirit on the Colorado School of Mines campus.

The HASS Music Technology Program for their audio support.

The Board of Student Media for bringing together the creative outlets.

The Undergraduate Student Government for their generous support which allows for the quality and integrity of the journal.

The Foothills Art Center for sharing their beautiful space for the release of this journal.

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Dear Reader,

Leaving home is simultaneously a rejection and acceptance of self. Home is the place we grew up, the place we learned our first words, and took our first steps. Perhaps that is home for you. Or perhaps home is the place of tense quiet and closed doors. Perhaps it is the place where you’ve allowed detritus to build up. There are broken toys behind the T.V. stand; dust billows from the rugs you hang over the clothesline and thrash with a bat—regardless, home is a place built by people. The foundation is infancy, the walls your inhibitions, and the roof is what separates you from sky.

Consider this volume both a Spring cleaning and change of address. You dust out old cabinets and repaint the house a neutral shade of beige. Maybe your cleaning is so thorough and obsessive you move out. You travel and create for yourself a new identity. Now that you are elsewhere—where do you go after home? The context has changed, yet some things are eternal. There is a call to home that echoes even upon leaving home, upon the destruction of home. You carry with you the innards of your childhood. You stack the dishes in the same way your parents did in the kitchen cupboard. You have a habit of leaving lights on, accidentally. You never clean the oven like you’re supposed to. External landscapes do not change these learned behaviors.

It is our hope that this collection of pieces moves you through the journey of familiarizing yourself with estrangement of place. The dichotomy of the internal and external home is framed through the short story, “The House on Walnut Street.” We found the obsessive parallelism of this piece particularly moving here at the Colorado School of Mines—a community of students, faculty, and staff from around the world. We hope you find in this journal, as you would in a home, both discomfort and solace.

Respectfully yours,

Wenli Dickinson & Kyle Markowski
Editors-in-Chief
Part 1
The blue house on Walnut Street had a fresh coat of paint and a broken chair on the porch. A taxi drove up to the sidewalk, and a man and woman stumbled out. The man put his arm around the woman, clutching a beer bottle in the other. They stumbled across a battered lawn. They kissed in front of the broken chair, then found their way inside.

The blue house on Walnut Street had a black car in front of it. Tin cans were strung off the back, flower petals and rice grains stuck on the windshield. A man in a tuxedo helped a woman in white out of the car, then picked her up and carried her inside.

The blue house on Walnut Street had a bright green lawn and a new porch swing that swayed in the wind. The lights were on upstairs, and the air filled with a mix of laughter and infantile coos.

From “The House on Walnut Street,” by Zach Schlittenhart
Uncontaminated
Ronghua “Andy” Bei
Floating
Amara Hazlewood
after Song of the Telegraph by Charles Burchfield

If the hills decided to shake
they’d shake with sound
with a groan of moving again
after centuries abed

if the fence posts trembled,
they’d tremble with ecstasy
caused by the warbling
of the blind bluebird on top

if the bluebird saw
she’d see telegraph wires
humming with messages
winging toward lovers

if the blind bird spoke hum
(and of course she does)
sh’d hear I love you’s
and sorry’s crackling together

if she gave I love you a picture
unseen, I’d bet on flight
or maybe eggshells
still wet with concern

if sorry made her cry
I would wonder about foxes
and hold the blind bluebird
tight against my chest

and if I could see sound
I would have already known
the hills have been
thrumping for her all this time.
I roll the windows down to let the cigarette smoke snake its way out into crisp air, thinking about where you might be. What you might be doing in this moment. My muscles clench at the thought. I need air. Exit the vehicle and try to dry heave that sick feeling. That restlessness. The stars blur out the stub I grind into the gutter. The abandoned buildings sleep off in the distance. The nostalgia makes my stomach churn. This place, where I used to spend every Friday I could, sitting on the hot asphalt, watching the kids skate by. I fall asleep to the gritty sound of small plastic wheels rolling over rough pavement. The circular motion like goodbye goodbye goodbye over and over again. The dull hum of traffic a quarter mile away. I regret stubbing the cigarette out, my fingers now shaking. Nothing to ground them. Nothing to touch. I flex them, curl them tight together. Think about how elegant things become hard. How our favorite foods eventually stale. How grasses shrivel to small, decaying mass.

Remember last June when we were walking down the sidewalk in my hometown. Our shadows were skipping crookedly between broken pickets when we saw that dog in the middle of the road. You got down on your knees in your ripped-up jeans and your wifebeater, holding out your hand, like you were holding an offering. You used to hold your hand out like that to me, too. The dog whimpered, its eyes reflecting cloudy green in the way that animal eyes do. It turned back down the road, sauntering away from us. You knelt on the pavement a moment longer than you needed to.

Then June heaved itself into July. You are leaving in August, you said. I knew this to be true because we didn’t watch horror movies anymore or talk about teaching or the future. You would say, “Let’s go on a walk.” So we walked, but what to do with hands? You absentmindedly reached out for me. Looped our arms together. But the restlessness got the best of you. “Let’s go for a drive, instead.” The tan, plastic interior of the car comforted us. Your uncalloused fingers shaped for this machine, for this movement, the uncertainty of direction.

We drove through lamplit streets, the radio beat punctuating each turn. I didn’t buckle, and you said nothing about it. After a few minutes, the car lurched to a stop. Slammed on the breaks, screamed, “It’s all your fault!” You became an extension of the car, hard metal, momentum carrying you forward. You balled your left hand into a
fist and swung it at me—the same hand that had touched mine, softly, the same hand that played guitar, the same hand that was attached to your wrist that was attached to your arm and then to you. Your fist stopped two inches from my face. You pulled back, laughing, putting the car back into drive. “You flinched,” you said.

The next morning, I woke up early. Dark infiltrated the living room where we had fallen asleep. You were on the dirty carpet, your hand curled around the edge of a blanket. You were boyish-looking in this moment. A cowlick on your head, eyelids closed, socks and no shoes. Desire for you pivots around this moment. Maybe I should have woken you. Said, “Wake up, you are you now.” Woken you back into your hard self. Maybe I could have run my fingers over the ridges your knuckles make, understood the joints and parts which made you, but I didn’t.

September and you are already gone. It’s been raining for days, water pounding my driveway. I crawled up to the roof of my house, rooting once green leaves now brackish out of the gutter, wonder what you were doing in that moment. What you were doing last night when the roads became rivers from the thousand-year rain. Maybe your car hydroplaned down the highway. Maybe your tires found traction, scraped the grit on the road, your hands clamped on the wheel. You don’t pick up the phone all morning. I prayed you were not dead, prayed your body wasn’t lost in debris, that you weren’t kneeling on the side of the road. Then remembered the last time I saw you, how you pushed my head into your lap and my bare knees into unforgiving gravel. I pray you are (not) dead.

I run into your stepmom sometimes. She asks how you are. She tells me you have trouble, sometimes. She wants to hug me hello, she wants to shake my hand. I shy away, find some excuse not to touch, how her soft grasp could become hard at any moment. Knot my fingers behind my back instead. Go home and drown myself out with the creaky sound of the stairs, the lonely opening and closing of doors, the empty-and-not-at-all-frightening revving of an engine. The motion of my foot on the gas like good riddance good riddance good riddance. Still have to convince myself. It’s another New Year’s Eve. Who knows where you are when the ball drops. I forget to watch it fall right at midnight. I purposefully do not watch it drop. The motion makes me sick, but not as much as it used to. Our not-love will someday be recognized for what it truly was. My fingers clasped around the phone, thinking about how I want to call you just so you can fill the silence, just so we’d have something to say, an opportunity to make amends we will never make. I dial your number, hang up before the first ring, I always do, still afraid of your hands, on the other end, picking up.
Pop Corn Reading
Aspen Anderson

Remember in elementary school
when turned reading into popcorn
when reading turned into popcorn
Jumping across the room
popping from one kid to another

I dreaded being the next kernel
Strategically predicting how many pops
until I was chosen
Placed in the microwave
not ready to shatter any more

The others were perfect
white with a little bit of butter
Flying through paragraphs
even they felt embarrassed

When I was plucked
the burnt edges blackend
Mixing up even the words simplest
leaving a tainted flavor
Shame radiating like distance of a burnt batch

Every line
read twice
Every word
deskysed
desigused
desgiused
disguised

She’s just dumb
they whisper
She’s just dumb
ringing in my ears

Years pass
the burnt edges
slowly chipping away
with every struggled page
Nothing left
but the small
broken kernel

There stands the word
DYSLEXIC

The simple word
a beacon of light
but even beakens burn
For people think differently
when your kernel is tainted
Circle of Life
Aidana Khabdesh
The Resistance of the National Parks Service

Colton Kohnke

When the armored bears attack the White House, do not seek refuge in the forest. It is not safe. The Rangers have rallied the trees, roused the buffalo, and worst of all, pissed off the mosquitos. The deer are trained to shoot AK-47s and the sloths practice hand to hand combat while swinging on vines. Even the weather is enlisted by the Park Rangers.

Blood has been spilled on the sandstone. The rivers that carried salmon upstream now float their bodies back to the sea. The Great Arches, sparkle orange in the morning sun, a war cry against encroaching policies. A common rallying point to bring the fight back to Washington.

The Appalachians offer an unrivaled view of the swamp. A perfect vantage point for tacticians, long range ballistic missiles, viewing a faun drinking from the lake below. Send troops if you must, the snow, trees, and caves already hide our ranks. The marmots anxiously cradle grenades in their nests. Watching. Waiting.

Know that when the bears claw at the windows, when the bees dip their needles in poison and fly through the air ducts, when the sandhill cranes
drop bombs on your forces, there will be no reprieve—
no ceasefire when you wave the white flag in defeat.

Know that when we try and bury you, the soil
will resist. Your corpse will lay rotting
unceremoniously next to some unused
trailhead latrine. Only the birds dare
peck at your flesh, their feathers slowly
turn orange as they digest your skin.
Their tweets echo through the park,
tweets of victory.
In the Shadows, but Not Oppressed

Vy Duong
I.
    a ribbon,
    small and red.
    a pop of color,
    like fingers of lace
    around my neck,
    to help me say,
    I Am Confident.
    I Will Survive
    if you leave me,
    I will still have this:
    a necklace,
    dark and bold,
    a reminder,
    that blood runs
    through my veins,
    and I am alive

II.
    a hand,
    placed strategically.
    pressing firmly
    down
    on my trachea.
    while you yell,
    Look At Me.
    if our eyes meet,
    or if I leave you,
    I will still know the truth,
    like a noose,
    bruises blossoming.
    a promise.
    dark and thick
    like molasses,
    because my heart
    still beats.
Ever Present Time

Bryce Deshazer

Watercolor & India Ink
Part 2
The blue house on Walnut Street had three baseballs scattered across the lawn. A tired man slumped in the porch swing, glove in one hand, beer in the other. The smell of apple pie drifted over the windowsill. A call came from the kitchen, and the man trudged inside.

The blue house on Walnut Street had a shiny red car with a white racing stripe on the hood. A man gave a boy the key and led him across the manicured lawn. The young boy stared at the key, then the car. He got in the driver’s side, and the man gave a wave to the porch before entering the passenger side. A woman on the porch swing smiled and waved back. She laughed as the car jerked forward a few times, then slowly drove away.

The blue house on Walnut Street had hip-hop breaking through the exterior and the funk of microwaved Totino’s seeping through the cracks. Three teenagers laughed and cursed their way out the door and to a red car. The car swerved into the street and peeled out of the neighborhood, leaving acrid smoke and a woman at the door shaking her head.

The blue house on Walnut Street had a tow truck in front of it. The tow truck carried a fragmented red car in front of the lawn. A man from the insurance company stood by the porch swing, pointing to the cratered engine block and tapping places on his clipboard. A woman stared at the car and nodded in rhythm.

The blue house on Walnut Street had cars lined in front of it. People in black walked up the thirsty grass, past the porch swing, and inside to candlelight and picture frames. Two men in suits were whispering on the porch. A man and woman stood by a table of envelopes, clutching each other and forcing smiles. “Such a handsome young man,” they said.

From “The House on Walnut Street,” by Zach Schlittenhart
Frost covered the bare,  
skeletal trees outside the window  
but for all you knew,  
it could have been the height of summer.  
You called me by my mother’s name.  
For you, it was 1981,  
President Reagan was just inaugurated  
and shot.  
Diana of Wales was the People’s Princess  
and every girl’s dream.  
I didn’t bother to look any of this up.  
Just nodded along  
adding a bored affirmation  
every couple minutes.  
Ignoring your desperate attempts  
to connect.  
I could have pretended for your sake,  
let you believe that I  
was your beloved granddaughter.  
let you believe that you and I  
still lived in New York City,  
pretended that I loved the music  
echoing from dusty vinyl records.  
For the thirteen years,  
I answered to “Laurie,”  
I could have done it one more time.
Loggerhead Shrike

Connor Beekman

Photography
Convenience Store
Kyle Markowski

Characters
- Malcontent (You) - bland, sitting, cross-armed, un-caressed, milky-skinned, trapped, rapt, trembling with rage
- Scholar (Me) - steeped in literary mystique, wanting so badly to find truth in posture that I do find it. I become a parasite, magnified through many lenses and wreathed in neon. My words ring, and yours fall flat.

Camera angles include every mirror of a rose-red sedan, every window, reflections of the car off the store’s plate glass. Neon everything, and the scene begins with tubes flickering, then snapping on.

It’s a sway-rhythmic ritual — ratio of place and time and you — each part of you dragged in a different direction ‘til you’re fettered in knots and still it surprises me you’re in one piece, together, here. We are never truly together. There is an equilibrium of drift when we kick back.

Your eyes drop to your hands clasped together in your lap. You ask where this twine comes from. Where are the ropes? You beg for an answer, as your hands involuntarily search your person (I shrug, offhandedly suggest a search of your mind). Your fingers fish out a loose thread in your blue woolen sweater: the unraveling commences.

I suppose happiness isn’t a matter of perspective. Happiness may be universal, and that each of us is imparted with whatever perspective: that is happiness in itself.

In a flash, you recognize my evasion. The neon tubes give a synchronous flash. You seem to decide violence is the answer (I give you a wry look, mocking shock). A gruesome smile stretches across your face like an insect. I have found the bug in your code, what bugs you to no end. You slam your feet into the windshield.

Stop with this meta shit! You’re not a fucking novelist.
Then again.

If you are happy and I am not, have I betrayed you? Have you betrayed yourself? Consider the neon sign coming in cavalier against the windshield. “Convenience,” bought at your leisure.

You open the door, step out, slam it shut. Tromp through the neon garden, glass shattering under your feet. For the briefest moment you’re a deer escaping headlights. Bid the stage set adieu, invisible rigging and all.

Noble gases hiss as they escape. A cloud weaves flume in the headlights, then dissipates.

The headlights snap off.

I close my eyes.
Proper Kitty
Samuel Vaughn

Colored Pencil
John inspected the glinting features of his pistol, prying open the slide to see its sinister brass casing peeking out at him, but he decided to leave it be. He relished his first few crunching steps into the glass alleys of the city, a long journey nearing its end, taking but a mere moment to look back at the broad, black horizon. A column of black smoke still smudged the sun-bleached sky. The great black phantom had loomed over him for days and, apparently, had not stopped burning yet.

John missed spring flowers and the bronzy autumn leaves. Now, as far as he could tell, there were only two seasons—cold and hot. It was getting cold. All the more reason to press on to the city center. One would be hard-pressed to find a better place to eat—and eat he would. He knew that there was always a can of beans, a forgotten bottle of clean water, undefeated gun safes and storage lockers, poorly-hidden bandit caches and very old and happy stories put to print. There was no place quite like it to make a fortune in the wastes. John wanted to be well-fed for his last winter.

The fields of black mud, stained with the apocalypse, and the frail skeletons of once mighty oak trees, coated in wheat-colored residue, revived bitter memories of the first end to civilization. It reminded him that things could be worse. He’d remembered his thirteenth birthday a month prior to the war and then stopped counting. The stench of chemical death and the encroaching roars of gunfire made timekeeping quite the luxury. He guessed ten years ago. Had he faced a burning sun in a chemical suit ten times? Had he froze half to death ten times? That sounded right. He found comfort knowing that a decade separated him from a booming ground war and storms of bombs delivering that dreaded mist that killed everything. It was a great horror show of fantastic colors—the gold flash of guns, the dancing white and red tracers, the pale skin of poisoned souls, crimson rot, ashen snow and a dull yellow wafting through the air like a formless demon. Then, when the fighting ceased and the mist stuck to the walls and seeped into the ground, the sky shone grey, smothered by ash and soot from across the sea, and the land was black from horizon to horizon—poisoned. He’d considered suggesting that Ol’ Scriabyn—poor soul—compose a ballad or even a symphony about The End. It would’ve been magnificent if he had. The fool always talked about his masterpiece right up until raiders blew the top of his head off.
Entering the city was a dangerous prospect, but John had skulked through unscathed many times before. At any rate, he didn’t care as much this time. He knew he would survive anyway. He had an uncanny talent for it in a land consumed by death.

John turned from the trodden path at the thought and instead looked to the respite ahead. A million shattered windows lay spilled out on the crumbing asphalt in a luminous stream. Time ground the glass into a fine powder that streaked the wind like pixie dust. John found his way to 142nd St. where he knew that there was a clear path where he could slip into downtown quietly. A narrow alley between two toppled buildings shot straight into the heart of downtown. Slowly, John meandered down the alley way, hiding himself behind corners and watching the floors above him carefully. The great steel frames leaned precariously overhead and each window was shattered without exception. Curtains flapped in the wind like banners. John scanned each window, studying each malformed shape and each suspicious glint for signs of life. He’d passed through unseen countless times, yet always mistrusted the virtual constancy of the cityscape. Memory was important. Each misplaced detail was an omen.

He considered that, in a sense, his one blessing was also his only curse. He was well-equipped, skilled and never doubted the value of better gear and a stronger body. He managed to seal himself in a plastic suit of his own design, cobbled together from scraps of water-tight tarps and bags. He had thick rubber gloves that kept his hands soaked in nothing worse than his own sweat. He breathed clean air through the maw of a military-grade mask and stared back at the rotting landscape through two glass panes. He bore a warm jacket on his shoulders. He’d wrapped himself in a hooded nylon cloak that shrugged off decay. He struggled to let himself die in his mind, but saw the death and gloom around him and felt ostracized… unfit for his world.

This is my world, he thought, I’ve lived here all my life. I was just a visitor to civilization. I’ve marched thousands of miles in these boots and I will march a thousand more and live.

The illusion didn’t last long. He’d tried to think of himself as greater than his world. No, he was the pulse of the rotten place.

Polaris really was the last chance. The Renaissance. The Comeback. He remembered gazing into a sea of bodies in a grand market of scavenged goods and reborn tradesmen. It had a remarkably warm touch of civilization. Gunsmiths armed travelers for their journeys into the wastes. Intrepid adventurers braved hell itself to feed life into this little colony. For once, life thrived. Even Scriabyn managed to get his bony hands on an old fiddle for a few rifle rounds, some canned meat, and porno mags.
Joy at Gunpoint

Paradise, truly. John missed the clouds of breath and dusty winds. He missed the music and the sound of words on the wind. He missed the friendly rituals and niceties surrounding the day’s trading. He even missed the cold bite of the night air as he and the others sat enveloped by a star-painted sky. He missed the camaraderie. He missed the humanity.

John drove the thought from his mind. It would never be so good for him again. He knew it well. The time spent starving rung too true in his stomach and the flames erupting from Polaris’ walls flickered behind his eyes. It was doomed from the beginning.

Satisfied that he was alone, he stopped to plan his route to his first and only target on his return. When he’d served as a Gatherer in Polaris, these sorts of runs were a matter of business that he treated with a deal of professionalism. Luckily, he’d kept his records. He found a spot hidden from most sight lines and pulled a collection of frayed maps from his backpack. He consulted the one he kept for the downtown district. He’d almost forgotten how clean he’d left the west side, scribbled with crosses that indicated where he’d scavenged. It was peppered with symbols and notes, crossing off areas known to host bandits, circling areas with good promise and placing stars on large caches of goods.

John traced his finger to a big star on the map—Riverside Apartments. This unimpressive pile of rubble was, on the surface, little more than bricks and splinters. However, behind a hidden door lay what must have been the product of the owner’s tireless work. The old owner had made part of the cellar into an impenetrable bunker should the worst happen. John had stumbled upon it about a year prior and decided to make it his secret—a hoard that would last him months if needed. He found it pristine and untouched. Apparently, no one had made it there in time. Now that he fled from a home in Polaris, he supposed that it would be a fitting replacement. Perhaps it would be a fitting tomb as well.

John skulked from alley to alley south-west toward Riverside, scurrying across wide streets like a mouse boldly dashing from wall to wall. The often-unsettling part about cutting through buildings and back alleys was that John often saw what became of those caught out in the open. He stopped and stared at such an unfortunate fellow—flayed, butchered and stripped clean of anything edible. Little was left but bone and sinew. The belly was split open and hollowed out. Ribs were sawed away at the spine and taken. The head was missing. John felt that he saw his reflection in the pile of blood-splattered bones and gripped his rifle tighter. He ground his teeth behind the
mask and felt a familiar pang in his stomach. He pictured the macabre ritual of butchering a fresh kill as if it were happening right before him. It was something he’d promised himself to abandon. It nonetheless haunted him. If he were to die, it would be on his own terms. Of this, he would be sure. He gazed at the corpse. It would not be him. Not ever.

... 

He approached Riverside. It was an old Victorian building that had survived surrounded by concrete titans. It sat at the peak of a tall hill overlooking the river stained yellow with deadly runoff. Rusting steel bridges cut across and wound into a spiraling road that wrapped the hill. John inspected it to confirm his memory. The cellar was largely uncontaminated since the complex drained water around the building and down into the river. John followed the black streaks through the hillside and decided that he was right. It may still be a clean site. He passed over the bridge, keeping low. He ran up the road to the building’s doorstep.

The front door had been kicked in. The welcome mat was turned over and the rocks were haphazardly tossed about. A window to the right of the door was scarred with a large crack, but held firm under the beating. Nearly a year’s time had kept John from Riverside, but he shouldered his rifle and prepared for the worst.

Each broken lock, each empty drawer and each open door gave the same warning. The curtains had been ripped from the windows. The kitchen had been raided and stripped of silverware. Someone had ripped a leg from the table and left it collapsed. John heard slow footsteps creaking on the floor above. He stopped, squatted and listened with all his concentration. A great crash above him rang through the floor as if a wardrobe had toppled over. A voice muffled by a gas mask cursed its bad luck. He held his breath and hid himself in the kitchen keeping one ear pointed to the stairs. The faint pitter-patter of footsteps and clanking of something metal rung overhead. The stranger ambled down the stairs. Light soles planted on the wood floor of the first level. John waited patiently behind the three-legged table ready for a fight.

The snout of a stubby carbine poked around the corner along with the black brim of the stranger’s hat. Soon the mechanical face of the mask with its wide glass eyes came into view. John fired. The shot careened right past the front of the stranger’s nose and shattered the cookie jar on the shelf above. The stranger reeled back away from the shot and crashed to the floor. The trespasser scrambled back past the door-
way to cover. John fired a few more shots determined to keep the intruder subdued. The fork of a Kalashnikov sight peered around the corner and the barrel spat blindly back. John flattened himself against the refrigerator and hid from the screaming bullets. The booming rifle quieted and John whipped around muzzle-first and found that the stranger had advanced upon him. He choked back on the trigger, but pulled his whole body back from his opponent’s sightline and hesitated for a split second, paralyzed by indecision. John surely thought that it was his demise. But, astoundingly, the same panic and hesitation was mirrored across the aisle and for a moment the two simply stared at each other, in awe that they were both somehow still alive. Held in a standoff, neither fired another shot.

The stranger was a girl about John’s height and thin. She wore a long jacket and jeans. Her sneakers were coated in black mud and thick black trash bags flared out from them, tied over the cuff of the jeans with twine. She wore leather gloves, damp and similarly lined with sealed plastic, this time with surgical gloves. The mask was a foreign, grey visage with a filter at the left cheek and two large circular glass eyes. She wore a black baseball cap with a blonde braid winding out onto her left shoulder that ended in a shriveled tail stained with inky filth like a dirty paintbrush. John shook with each deep breath that he heaved in and out.

“I was here first! Scram!”
“Bullshit.”

“Fuck you! I’ll shoot you dead!” she roared. John figured that she wasn’t bluffing, but he was still trying to figure out why she hadn’t shot him already. He noticed that she was loaded with salvage and scrap. She had a full pack of goods, the table leg strapped to the side of the backpack and the kitchen’s butter knives stacked against a sheathed machete stuffed into her belt. Her pockets where full and bulging. She was a scavenger—no doubt. Maybe. Just maybe, John thought.

When he’d lived inside Polaris’ walls, the trading post served as a little beacon of civilization—guarded, ruled by law, and oddly, in its own crooked way, warm and friendly. The faces from day to day changed every time. Wayfarers who'd heard hushed rumors of a fort to the North that piled food, water and ammunition available for barter passed in and out of the wooden palisade. Caravaneers cropped up with teams of men bringing in trains of supplies and leaving armed and ready with new iron. Some people came just to see if the rumors were true. A ‘castle,’ they always mocked, unim-
pressed. For a blink in time, it seemed as if the dark ages when men slaughtered and ate one another were slowly coming to an end. Only a few ever took a permanent stake in Polaris. Scriabyn managed to scrape by, gathering enough to start playing again—the first time in nearly a decade. He’d just finished the crowning note of “Little Sadie” when a bullet shattered his skull. Westborough and Hobbs were talented gunsmiths working day-in and day-out with files, hammers and torches. They were hacked to pieces when raiders broke inside, caught before they could arm themselves. Guards stood watch on the palisade, ready to raise hell to push off invaders, but would always greet John kindly on his victorious march home. Raise hell they did. Hold off the siege they did not. Captain Quinn erected the walls himself, gathered the whole posse and ran the show. John had never met a more magnificent man. They roasted him on a spit and looted his little boom town for all it was worth. John never truly wanted to leave—more a squatter than a mere regular—but he always set off to scavenge and do what he could for this beacon on a high hill. He watched it burn and squeal. He didn’t know what happened to the many faces that came and went—the ones who were away.

John took his left hand off his rifle slowly, crossed his pointer and middle finger and gave a small, slow wave to the stranger. It was the signal for a queer ritual that had developed among the traders, scavengers and caravaneers of Polaris. It was known only as a left-handed swap. The stranger was taken aback, then sighed in a huff and took her eyes from the sights. She kept the barrel pointed at him but relaxed a bit. She mirrored the gesture. John’s gamble paid off.

The two kept each other in the standoff, as was the way, even among friends in Polaris, to keep things civil. John emerged from behind the pocked table and sat down on the floor. She followed, propped her rifle up by the magazine on her right knee, and slid the backpack off of her left shoulder. The setting sun painted half of her gold and left the rest shaded.

“First things first, asshole,” she said. “You owe me some ammo for that horse-shit just then. Shoot at somebody and then try to play nice? What kind of game is that?”

“Oh, shut up. You root around in someone’s place and expect me to play nice. I didn’t realize scavs even came around here anymore. You could be eating me right now if you were hungrier, you know.” John stared, unflinching, rifle couched under his arm and pointed on-line. She was red in the face behind the steaming little windows on the mask, but conceded:

“Oh, fine. We’ll call it a wash.” She unlatched her pack and prepared for an
Joy at Gunpoint

exchange. She looked back over and introduced herself with a sarcastic bite: “Charlotte Katz, at your service.”

“John Granger.”

“Not fucking pleased to meet you. Better than a bullet in the head, I suppose.”

“Funny.”

“Thank you. Now then, shall we?” She unloaded some of her stock out in rows on the floor. She placed out the stolen silverware along with a few more with trimmed stems and sharpened heads, fewer still already fletched on thin shafts as arrowheads. She plopped a bag of rifle rounds next to it. Next, a few cans of tuna with a smiling Long John Silver dented and beaten on the side (past expiration), a plastic bag of rice and packets of sugar. Iodine pills. The enigmatic table leg. A frayed deck of cards. The curtains, folded neatly into a square. A bottle of Kentucky bourbon. A stack of books crowned with Inferno.

“So, when did you stop by Quinn’s fort? I didn’t recognize you.”

“Clearly not. I stopped by there a few times, stocking up to take food out East where they really needed it. Not many of ‘em left. They’ll pay a lot in rounds for even a few morsels. It was hit pretty hard in the war, so I got plenty for this little beast.” She patted her rifle like a loyal companion.

“We’ve probably crossed paths, then. It’s a shame that I never met you properly.”

“I can’t say that I feel the same if your idea of a hello is a firefight. Luckily for me, your aim is terrible. Whatever happened to that place anyway?”

“Attracted too much attention. It got harder to move in and out and less people started coming since it was too dangerous. Traders like yourself became game and were slaughtered. The caravaneers would get ambushed by thieves in the passes and canyons leading up to the place. Our wake-up call became gunshots and war cries. Eventually, the bandits figured that they’d strangled the place enough, got bold and burned the place to the ground.”

“Oh. That’s a shame, I guess.” she said. John stayed silent for a moment. He placed out a Folger’s tin filled nearly to the brim with smokeless powder and empty casings. Next, a chili MRE. Three unopened bottles of water. A .45 calibre handgun loaded with a single shot set close to his side. A bottle of vitamins. Three pocket knives. An empty Bakelite magazine, 5.45mm. Replacement violin strings.

“Hey, did you ever know Felix Scriabyn? He was a close friend of mine. Seemed to know everybody in Polaris. I wouldn’t be surprised either since he never
“The old guy with the fiddle? Yeah. I never really talked to him that much. Odd one, though. Seemed to just talk into space if I ignored him.” She studied John’s stock while she spoke. “Always singing, too. I forgot what singing sounded like. The world’s pretty quiet now.”

She slid half the stack of books forward with the left hand. “Water,” she said. John was literate and liked the idea, although Inferno didn’t ring well in his mind. He picked and chose, but eventually accepted the deal, sliding over two bottles of water. He had plenty hidden under their feet. The two continued, arguing along the way, swapping and withholding until neat rows crowded around their bodies. John had traded away his food, save the chili, confident that much more lay undiscovered underground. He’d gained back the silverware, happy that it had been returned to its rightful owner but then considered that he had no use for it. He had no idea what possessed him to demand it back. Charlotte had won herself the Bakelite magazine—a perfect fit for her rifle—the week’s meals, two pocket knives and a handful of vitamins.

“The cards,” John said, offering the battery. Charlotte flicked over the deck of cards and collected her battery. “You know, I was thinking. I should thank you for doing business with me after, you know, trying to kill you.”

“Don’t mention it. I’ll eat a little better on this.” She’d calmed down, but remained unamused.

“Hey, what’s the deal with the arrows anyway?”

“Out East, some people prefer to live in the country away from ruins and don’t scavenge ammo, so they use bows. Rumor is that they still have elk out there to hunt, but I’ve never seen one in ten years of wandering those woods.” She paused for a moment, looking over her new supplies. “They’re hunting different ‘game’ on the highways and trails. I know it. Not my problem. They pay well for good arrows and leave their friends alone, which is enough to sway me.” John thought a moment about the bloody leftovers he’d found.

“I suppose you can’t blame them.” He paused. “They ate Quinn, you know, when they got to him.” She stayed silent and after a moment slid the bourbon over to him. John went to make a counter-offer and she waved her hand to stop him.

“Huh, thanks.” He took the bottle and she gave a quick nod. “Tell you what, you want to win back these forks and knives?” he asked.

“Sure. What do you want?” John decided to call Charlotte’s bluff on the tough girl act. She didn’t have wild eyes of a cannibal that John knew so well. If she shot him,
Joy at Gunpoint

so be it. He'd get some deserved rest. He put his rifle down to his side and uncased the deck of cards.

“Play me for ‘em.” She stared at John, feeling a trap and turned over the issue in her head. Misdirection was a cruel killer, something that Charlotte had seen a time or two before. She primed her legs for a quick get-away and rested her rifle on her knee.

“What are you doing?”

“I want to play cards.”

“Why?”

“Because it’ll be fun.” She distrusted the move and felt she may have dash out.

“No. This doesn’t feel right. I’m not falling for it.”

“You think that I want to kill you?” His voice morphed into a snarl. “What a waste that would be.” He looked at the rifle he set down and said, “You’re afraid of this? Fine.” With a sharp kick, he struck it against the far wall and swatted his pistol aside.

Charlotte leapt up to her feet and pinned her back against the wall. She tensed up on the trigger.


“Congratulations! You’re the one with the gun now. Now then, wouldn’t you like to just indulge me for a nice time? Let go of the bullshit paranoia and just enjoy the one person who decided not to fucking hunt you like an animal?” he growled.

Charlotte shivered. She kept the sight on his head, but still hesitated. In an odd way, he prodded at her heart and appealed to a phantom of her old self. She, too, was once a little girl thrust into the apocalypse. She’d been on her own ever since. “If you’d like to run, then run. If want to kill me, then do it. Otherwise, just humor me. You have the gun. You make the choices here.” She thought, hesitated and battled with her instincts. Then, she finally lowered her guard and unlocked her lungs, heaving in and out. She sat back down, clutching her rifle close to her body.

“You’re an idiot. Or mad.” She wiped the dust off the lenses of her mask and said, “Five card. Deal ‘em out.” John smiled widely behind his mask.

“Mercy’s an underrated quality these days. It shines well on you.”

“Shut up and deal.” Charlotte cut and John slid ten cards into two piles. He and Hobbs had been gambling men. Winning and losing jackpots of rifle rounds and little bottles of whiskey by starlight, cackling drunkenly beside a bonfire, shined as one of his best memories. He felt the warmth in his stomach and cool breeze stroking his skin.

Charlotte looked at her cards, face impenetrable behind the rubber mask and
eyes uncaring. The sun was quickly setting. She reached for a lantern in her pack and lit it. The tainted air smoked when she struck her chrome lighter and she set the kerosene alight. She shined pale white like porcelain, neck streaked with faint phantoms of veins. John pushed two forks into the center and Charlotte called with one of the pocket knives. They checked until John showed a pair of fours. Charlotte revealed twin queens and claimed her arrowheads. He surrendered the deck and she dealt. “I can say this at least: This is better that what I had in mind for the rest of the night. Burn the air until it burned clean, choke down some of this tuna and shiver off the cold night until dawn. I hadn't imagined I'd ever play cards again.” She paused. “Tell me something. Why did you want to play so badly?”

“Just an itch. Something I needed to do, I think.”

“You got a death wish? I could’ve capped you and left. I would’ve if I was smart.”

“You could say that.” He pointed at the handgun he'd shoved aside. “I only keep one shot. That pistol only has one job left to do.” Charlotte shot a glance away from her cards back at him.

“I suppose you’ll save me the trouble, then.”

“Suppose so.” He was silent for a few hands. He piped back up. “You know, you shouldn't judge your friend back East quite so harshly. I have a venison steak in my bag.” That got her attention. Interest piqued, she set down her hand and said,

“What do you want for it? Name your price.”

“If I wanted to sell it, I would’ve left it in the lineup. I’m saving it for the day I decide to die. I picked it up in Polaris about four months ago when a caravan came in with the thing dead on a stretcher. They said it might be the last in the world for all they knew. I paid quite a lot for it, fried it well and salted the hell out it so that it would keep.” Charlotte scrambled through her collection strewn about and clawed her way through her bag. She must’ve offered everything she had for that bit of meat. But each time, John refused. She slowed herself, thinking. She slid her denim-wrapped legs out to the side and leaned her head on her right arm to show herself off.

“You’re sure that there's nothing you want?” She tried to act sweet.

“Tempting, sweetheart, but no.” Speechless, she turned her face into her palm and huffed.

“Fine. Fuck you.”

“Nothing personal. Stick around and you might catch me dead too early. I’m going to eat that steak, but I’ll at least give you the first rights to it should the worst
happen."

“Right. That makes me feel better,” she said with bitter sarcasm. She picked her hand up and checked one last time. She’d beaten John with a straight and claimed the last of the silverware John had offered her back. She half-heartedly giggled in strange tones behind her mask. “I should have shot you.”

John smirked imperceptibly behind his mask and thought, And yet you didn’t.

• • •

The game ended, but they sat there in silence. Night had fallen and they were trapped inside the brick walls of Riverside, two souls together by lamplight in the most peculiar circumstances. Charlotte didn’t sleep, still sensing something awry, but lounged lazily watching John and sharpening a butter knife into her next arrowhead. John mused over Charlotte and his pistol.

“I want to show you something.” John said. Charlotte turned her head, curious, and nodded. John packed up his gear and stuffed the pistol into his belt. Charlotte cradled her rifle, hawk-eyed. “Follow me.” He led her down a level, lantern held out over his head, to the wall that hid his tomb and slid the false wood panel out the side.

“What the hell is this?” Charlotte asked. He produced a note that held the combination to the door, discovered on the landlord’s corpse and reproduced by John for safekeeping. He opened the steel door, swung it open and stepped inside.

John shined the lamplight inward. She stood in awe of racks upon racks of food, gallon upon gallon of fresh water, medical supplies and the arsenal of a maniac hidden cleverly beneath her feet the entire time. She stepped in slowly and cautiously, unsure if she had been dreaming. She held herself back as if she’d mistakenly walked through the pearly gates. John shut the door with a slap of its rubber seal.

“Take out your lighter,” he said. She obeyed and stuck the flint. It burned clean and bright. John removed his mask and breathed deeply. Refreshed, he set the lantern on one of the many shelves and patted Charlotte, who remained speechless, on the shoulder. “It should be safe to take off the mask, if you’d like.”

She threw off her hat and unsealed her face. It was streaked with red marks where the seals of her mask had been. She was something of a decrepit beauty, face streaked with little scars, pale and unhealthy. Her eyes shone green like an ancient grassland, hopeful that she might share in the splendor that John had led her to. She turned to him, awaiting an answer. He twisted the cap off of the bourbon she’d given
him. He pointed at it and said, “As thanks, you can stay here as long as you like so long as you share this with me.” She shuddered with joy, flashing him a wide yellow grin with a single canine missing and set into a slow, steady chuckle. She still disbelieved all of it and wondered when she’d wake. She stripped off her gloves, produced a tin cup from her pack, topped herself off and toasted. They knocked back the strong drink and couldn’t help but cheer. It echoed and boomed back with the voice of many. They emptied half the bottle together and slumped down the thick concrete walls until they sat giggling in their stupors.

The warmth burned steadily in John’s stomach. He smiled widely and forgot the freezing air clawing at the bunker’s door. For a change, he was satisfied—at home. The chunk of iron in John’s belt weighed on his hip with a morbid presence. The cold surface of the slide brushed his leg. The heel of the grip jabbed into his gut and called his attention. The envious touch, for once, brought John a cold shiver. He dreaded it, but didn’t know what he had to lose. Perhaps he’d won something. Perhaps he’d never lost anything. John set his gaze squarely upon Charlotte.

Eventually, John pulled the venison steak from his pack.

“I was saving this to leave a fine taste on my tongue before I did myself in. It’s meant for a special occasion. I don’t know about you, but this night has baffled me. Who am I to argue with all this?” He flipped open his last pocket knife cut open the seal on the morsel and held it out in front of him. “Fuck it. Now’s as good as ever.” He split it down the middle and stabbed a half. He pointed the tip toward Charlotte. She plucked it off the blade, awestruck once again. “Enjoy.”

• • •

Time passed and John pulled the pistol from his belt and racked the slide once. The cartridge popped out high and even drunk under the table, John caught it as it fell. He leaned forward and whispered to his friend, “One last favor for me, if you would.”

“Anything.”

He took her hand, dropped the pistol round in her palm and closed her stiff fingers.

“When you leave in the morning, a few days from now, or whenever you please, take this with you. Hide it where I may never hope to find it. Don’t die. Do this for me and, should you wish, come back and drink and play cards with me again. Come and I’ll feed you. Come back and you’ll sleep easy, safe from the world
out there.” His words echoed endlessly in her mind. She thought that she must have died. She must have fallen asleep and John must have slit her throat in the night. She thought this, but then proved herself wrong: *This isn’t Hell. This is Paradise.* And yet, the casing felt heavy in her hand. It was a strange burden for her to bear. John leaned back against the wall. He stared at the glint bouncing off of the powerless light bulb of the shelter and pictured the North Star in its place. He looked back down at the pale, trembling thing in front of him. She clenched the casing tightly. She nodded at him, face streaked with tears, a wide smile struck across her face.
EZ Magic
Alex Sauer
Man in the Mountains
Sam Van Sickle

Photography
Dhow
Aspen Anderson
It is impossible to not leave something behind. 
There is something left every day: in the hotel room,
on the boarding platform, in the morning at home 
with one or two dishes to clean in the evening. 
And when left, who picks it up? 
Who knows what to do with leftover chaff? 
How did they know 
it would fuel the black locomotive in the mountain pass 
with its steam caressing frost in the trees? 
And the frost in trees, relaxing that night, 
melting and fracturing with relief; 
And where does innocence go, 
once we get older? 
is it taken too? 

There is a speeding train 
burning so much wood, a long head of steam 
trailing one silver incision 
in moonlight. It has a thunder, 
a voice in conversation with the gods 
as it rumbles past. 

A person may make a fire 
or hold a fire. 
There is a difference in the man 
who shovels coal into a furnace (while angry snow, 
just blowing by, is a world away) 
and the man with a ticket, though, both make the train go.
I want to know where I can buy a ticket, sit in the passenger car all full of smoke and stories, children and suits and whiskey, all while stones of the earth and the snow are left behind. All the while a fire burns, a fire burns. And then, looking out past the chorus of frost glazing the window, orange, with light from inside, I want to know where we go.
Emergency Call Box, out of order
Katharyn Peterman

i.
we waited by the phone all night
hands clasped over Bible
bodies aching for the call
each breath
an eternity
and we laughed
at the typicality
the existential absurdity
of waiting for
someone to die.

ii.
land locked for too long
she searched for an escape
purchased a kayak, leaned it up against
her balcony
she sang to it
ate with it
covered it in blankets when the snow fell
and with the first spring rain
she strapped her helmet on
set her kayak down, in the middle of
the nearby interstate
closed her eyes
and let the urban drool
take her
aching body
away.
The blue house on Walnut Street was quiet. A car left once a day and returned, but otherwise everything stood perfectly still.
A Watchful Eye
Agata Bogucka

Photography
Ketchikan Rainforest in IR

Alex Clymer
I read the inscription on the piece of paper that resided in my wallet. It was torn in places, in others there were splotches of ponderosa sap that gave it the smooth scent of vanilla. ‘I can remember the moment, and that is killing me.’ These trembling letters stared back at me. The photo was still folded, held between my right hand’s sweaty thumb and pointer finger.

The door loomed before me.


It had been two months since I had been home. She called every day, but the voicemails had stopped after the second week. The voicemails she had left were filled with choked sobs, questions of a return, and cries of anger. Only once had I picked up the phone, just for a moment, but when her voice cut through the tears, asking me, begging me to come home, I hung up. After that, I kept my phone on silent.

It had been almost seven months since it had happened, but I still couldn’t bear to be around her. So, I left. I left for the mountains, my sanctuary from the world, from the life I had left behind. It was her fault; she had asked me why I couldn’t look her in the eyes and I couldn’t give her the answer: they were Sarah’s.

My latest endeavor was a hike in the Weminuche wilderness, an area that I had heard about that was just north of Durango. Somehow, this place seemed like it could help me. Could cure me. It would be a long hike, so I had asked Mitch to come along. He was the person to keep me out of trouble, and it would be nice to know that I had him as my lifeline.

We started the hike at night. Scenery that we passed was illuminated by the hollow light of our headlamps and fell into blackness with every step. We walked and talked, making steady progress towards the mountains nestled in the high country. After the initial descent into the valley that connected to the basin, we crossed a bridge over a river. Water rushed below us, and the bridge swayed up and down as we crossed. Mitch stopped halfway and looked up at the sky that was filled with a billion pin-pricks of light.
“Pretty incredible, isn’t it?” Mitch said, staring upward into the glittering sky. I looked up at them. But, feeling the eerie gaze of the heavens made my neck prickle. I dropped my eyes and continued across the bridge.

“They’re cool, but you know those are the same stars you’ll see every night right? Come on Mitch, I’m not going to wait around forever.”

“Why don’t you go ahead and keep moving ahead. You having a head-start will give me a chance to finally walk at my own pace!” Mitch called out after me.

“Screw you Mitch.” I said and gave him the bird.

As I reached the other side, I stole a glance back to see if he had moved, when my beacon of light came to rest of Mitch’s face I saw his eyes, still raised towards the stars, and a little smirk hanging on his lips. Under my breath I cursed myself.

“Yeah that’s what I thought James. You know it would be you that’d be screwed without me.”

The granite’s pink and rosy colors blossomed as the sun finally crested over the ridge and fell on Sunlight and Windom peak. Their jagged ridges shone vibrantly against the blue of the sky. Mitch stood, bookended by a cliff in front and behind, soaking in the brilliance of the mountains across the valley. Two small lakes were nestled in the valley’s depths, surrounded by green alpine grass and a thick forest of firs and pines lower down.

“Looks like we only have about a hundred feet to the summit.”

“James, we can afford to take a little break right here.” Mitch replied, his eyes fixed on the two peaks. “In fact, we probably should. We have been hiking for eight hours, and have been making pretty good time. A little rest will fend off the exhaustion for a little longer. We may even be able to get the other two.”

“Well we haven’t even summited this one yet, why stop now?”

“James, we have time. There aren’t even any clouds in the sky. We are ahead of schedule, so there’s no need to rush.” Mitch had taken his eyes from the waning sunrise, and was looking at me. I walked past him, careful to mind the cliffs and his eyes, then began to scale the crumbling ledges of the ridge that led to the summit. “James, I think it’s time we talked about it?” Mitch called after me.

“I’m doing fine, I just want to get these done.” I replied, cresting the ridge and climbing on the opposite side, out of Mitch’s view.
“Mitch, where do I put my hand?” I asked, voice wavering. I was standing on a ledge. It was no bigger than a deck of cards, and three fingers on each hand were clutching at a crack to steady myself.

“Give me a second, I’m trying to scout the route up.”

“No Mitch, I need to know where to go now because there’s a fucking cliff below me.” I looked down. Through the gap between my feet I saw the pile of rocks this cliff face had shed. Maybe it would shed me too.

“Hmm, that pillar doesn’t look right.”

Mitch pulled out a folded set of papers with pictures of the route. He was standing, legs split onto two different rock ledges smaller than the one I was perched upon. Mumbles came from his mouth and he would rotate the pictures slightly eying the pillar quizzically.

My palms were growing sweaty, and I could feel my legs beginning to shake. I couldn’t help myself from looking at the rock pile below me, seeing myself crashing into it with every glance. My mind was conjuring up a slide show of images of falling. Or was it crashing? My stomach was twisting and turning. The shakes were becoming worse.

“Ah, we are on the wrong face James. All we need to do is cut down and to the right, then we will head up on the right side of this pillar, not the left. We were trying to climb something that most people would have wanted ropes for!” Mitch said, chuckling while deftly moving down what to me seemed to have nothing to hold on to.

My mind had reeled itself back into sanity, and my legs were once again solid. “Hilarious,” I replied breathing a sigh of relief and climbing around to where Mitch had directed.

We were descending from the summit of Windom peak, the last of our journey, and were moving towards the two lakes we had seen from the ridge. The trail wove through piles of loose rock, making its way down towards the mouth of the basin and the river. Hikers passed by us, and we shared fleeting conversations of greetings
and good-lucks.

I could feel the ache starting to settle into my left leg, and my feet were already hurting immensely from the mileage and terrain, but the weight on my heart remained.

I sighed loudly, “To tell you the truth, I can’t believe we did it Mitch.”
“What do you mean?”
“We finished all the mountains in one day.”
“James we’ve still got to make it back to the car. And what we just did was the easy part. Now is when it starts getting weird. I hiked a thirty-six miler with a guy once, who nearly walked off a cliff because he thought that the trail led off every direction except where it actually did. No James, we’ve got a long way to go.”
My right leg began to ache.

• • •

“Ugh, another centaur is standing in the trail up there Mitch.”
“What’s new James? I just saw the fifth dragon of the day.”

We’d been hallucinating for the past hour and a half. I had begun to stop believing what my brain told me I was seeing. A witch flying on a broomstick could be a fallen lodgepole caught up in its comrades, a gnome was just an old stump.

Everything was muddled, and my brain had no qualm about filling the blanks with images and mirages that would vanish as we grew closer to them. The hallucinations weren’t terrible, in some cases they were comical. It seemed that my brain was bored, and picking up the slack by keeping the hike interesting and helping me forget how badly my body was hurting. Only fifteen miles to go.

I felt more and more like I was sleep-walking through the land that lay on the other end of the rabbit hole. My feet were killing me, but this pain was the only thing keeping my mind in this reality. Somehow, through the pain, I didn’t want this trip to end. I wanted to be here, because here wasn’t home. Here I could see centaurs rather than streetlights. In this place, there were dragons instead of tragedies. And all you had to do to keep the dream alive, was to keep walking.

“Hey, James. Listen, uh, I just wanted to see how you were doing with Sarah.”

Rocks, and the occasional poison dart frog, moved through my vision. I glanced up and saw a single ponderosa amongst the lodgepoles. A swing hung from the lowest branch. Why would someone hang a swing out in the middle of the forest?
“James, you know I loved that blonde cutie more than anyone, and I know it’s hard, but I think that Mary is hurting, man. I think she could really need you.”

My boot plunged into a small brook. Water flooded between my toes and up to my ankle.

“Huh. Sorry what was that? I kind of zoned out.”

• • •

The hair on the nape of my neck prickled. I could feel someone’s gaze beating into my skin. My heart quickened, and I began to look around, trying to see where the eyes were lurking. Off to my left I saw her, blonde hair shimmering in sunlight sitting on the swing I had made her before she was born. Behind her small figure, sat a lodgepole forest that was cast in the shadow of the storm cloud that resided over the basin.

I could feel my blood pulsing through my body, faster with every shortened breath. Her curls, pulled back into a ponytail just like Mary had done every morning before school. Behind, and in front of her, leaves were shaken by small droplets of rain. My ears heard nothing but the thrum of blood, pounding like a car horn.

She was wearing the pink lace dress that she had worn the first day of school in August, her blue eyes, glistening like tiny sapphires, stared at me without blinking. Something pink landed on the hair that rested on her shoulder.

No, it wasn’t pink, but red. More droplets fell, staining the once brilliant blonde hair with deep, dark red. Her dead eyes never wavered from me and all the while she became more and more covered in that horrible scarlet. My jaw slackened, and my vocal cords moved trying to scream but they couldn’t. Finally, my heart crashed to a halt and my voice came to life.

“Sarah!”

“What?” Mitch asked.

The lodgepole forest stood quiet and still in the light rain. Slowly, my heart began to regain its previous rhythm. Sarah was gone. I turned to look at my partner, still recovering from the shock the specter had left me with.

“I thought I heard you mumbling or something.” He said as he walked past me.

“Huh, I dunno. Must’ve just been talking to myself or something.”

“Probably were, I’ve been doing that for awhile now. Why did you ask me to do this again?”
“I thought we were going for a leisurely drive in the countryside. Are we not in the Hampdens?” I chuckled half-heartedly, but Mitch only looked at me skeptically and walked past. The feeling of dream-like wonder had left me with the last hallucination. Now I kept my eyes on the trail, trying to stave off any more spectral encounters and continuing on the trail through a purgatory I wasn’t sure I would ever escape.

... 

After nineteen hours of continuous hiking, I was still walking. I don’t know how, considering that my brain was telling my body to stop, lie down, and die. No matter what my mind told my feet they just kept plodding along, like soldiers on parade. A piercing screech of bending metal filled the air, tearing my mind from its complacent slumber.

I stumbled and threw my head from side to side to find the culprit. As I searched, my nostrils were filled with a rancid odor, that of burnt rubber and oil. On the side of the trail sat a 1969 Chevrolet Camaro, mangled against the thick trunk of a ponderosa pine. My eyes burned from the putrid smoke. I coughed, and my eyes closed for a moment, when they opened, I was sitting in the driver’s seat. Ringing filled my ears.

Blood was splattered on the console and windshield in front of me. I felt the hairs on my neck prickle. To my right I saw a figure. I could feel eyes looking towards me, unblinking. Slowly, I turned my head. The steering wheel came into view, then the radio. Strands of blonde hair sat on the passenger airbag, thick with crimson blood. A head slowly eclipsed my vision.

“Hey. James what’s wrong?”

Coming to, I turned and sat on the side of the trail, trying to forget the dream that I was walking through. My stomach was in knots, but I couldn’t vomit. I struggled to my knees, breathing hard. My hands were pressed into the pine needles and twigs that covered the forest bed.

“I’m alright Mitch. Just got a little sick to my stomach, that’s all.” I leaned back and struggled to my feet. My legs were stiff. There was pain too. Far too much pain.

“Where are we?” I asked.

“I’m not sure exactly. When we were here last it was pitch black, and nothing looks the same. But we should have about another twelve or thirteen to go. Are you drinking enough water James. I don’t want you to get dehydrated on me.”
“Fuck.” I didn’t think I could make it another five, and we still had so much further to go.

“I think we’re gonna make it?” Mitch said looking down the path that we would be descending another two or so miles before we took a left to meet the river.

“Man, I really don’t know.” I said looking solemnly down the same path.

“Do you ever get that feeling like you might see death staring you in the face around the next corner?” Mitch asked as he picked up the march.

“Dude, I don’t know what you’re talking about.” But I did, and I was afraid that it wouldn’t be a feeling for much longer.

• • •

“Oh, thank God!” I screamed.

We dropped our bags as we reached the sign that pointed back up the way we had just come down. It stated: “Needle Creek Trail, 6.5 miles to Chicago Basin.” Ten feet further there was a smaller one, it did not inspire the same happiness though: “Purgatory Creek, 11 miles.” I sat down, leaning my back on my bag. Mitch did the same behind me. It felt good to sit down and rest, but we couldn’t afford to spend too much time relaxing. I knew if I spent too much longer in Purgatory, my mind would wander into oblivion.

‘You’re worthless.’

“What’s that?” I asked, chuckling and turning to look at Mitch. His eyes were closed, and his chest was rising and falling slowly. Asleep.

‘All your fault.’ My head spun around to see who the whisper belonged to. Trees, bushes, pine needles, and dirt were the only culprits my eyes could see.

‘She hates you, and she should.’

“Shut up.”

‘Why did you do it?’ Out of the corner of my eye I noticed movement through the trees. The shadow wove through them deftly. I stood and followed. My sore legs began to scream as I ambled through the forest.

“James?”

The shadow, which now I saw had the body of a man, was always ten trees ahead of me, barely in view, and moving faster with every sighting. My mind sifted sluggishly through everyone who knew about Sarah. Branches tugged on my shirt and face, leaving welts and lines of tree sap in their wake.
Mitch knew.
Rocks shifted under my feet, throwing me from side to side as my body automatically adjusted, fighting gravity to catch the phantom.
My parents knew.
Bushes parted beneath me, tearing my pants and cutting my exposed thighs into a crimson spider-web. The Phantom Man had stopped ahead of me. I would finally catch the bastard and ask him to quit his incessant whispering.
Mary deserved better than this.
Sarah deserved better too. I had buried these bones in a closet and locked the door, where they couldn’t hurt anyone anymore. He was right in front of me. I reached out, grabbing the rough cloak, readying my right hand to clench and punch.
“Why are you running awa—,”
My hand was clutching a juvenile Douglas fir. My legs stung. My arms were burning. My head was spinning.
“James! Where are you going?”
Fuck.

• • •

We were walking with a cord between us now. Mitch was trying to make sure I didn’t run off the trail again. He said that eventually the trail would be lined with cliffs, and wanted to be sure he could keep me from following my hallucinations into a freefall.
“How is it that you don’t get so confused by these things Mitch?”
“Well after you do this type of thing a couple of times, you learn how to prioritize. The trail starts to become more important, and the mermaids sitting on the side of every mud puddle become a little less.”
“Mermaids? Come on Mitch, that shit is just over the top. They’re Porky Pigs dressed up as mermaids.” We both burst out laughing. Jokes were somehow funnier when you had managed to elude sleep for forty hours. I heard the emptiness in Mitch’s laugh though.
‘Piece of shit!’
The damned voices were back. And now they were screaming.

• • •
Figures were moving between the trees. Or they were in my mind. I knew that nothing was wrong though. Mitch was walking in front of me, plodding along in the dying light, unnerved by the creatures that surrounded us. The shadows and wisps scampered through the trees, chanting and cackling.

‘All your fault! All your fault! Damn You, Damn You! All your fault! All your Fault!’

I reached up, putting my thumb and pointer finger on my sweaty brow, massaging it, knowing that this would do little to change what my brain was conjuring up. The tug from the cord kept me on the trail. I tried to breathe deeply.

‘Damn you!’
In.
‘All your fault!’
Out.
‘Damn you!’
In.
‘All your fault!’
Out.
There was another tug. A cord pulling in the wrong direction.

‘Damn you!’
Or maybe, the right direction, and the other was the wrong one.
‘All your fault!’
Another tug. A different direction.

‘Damn you!’
Another tug.

My lungs burned. I opened my eyes to a fiery onslaught. The trees were ablaze. They were pouring out a black acrid smoke that covered everything in its veil. I opened my mouth and breathed deeply, my lungs catching fire. Mitch was nowhere in sight. I looked down at my waist where the cord had been tied. Where there had been one knot, there were now a hundred. I looked around at the cords which snaked off into the fiery blackness on all sides.

“What do you want from me?” I yelled to the chaos around me.

Behind me I heard a snap. Expecting to see the Phantom Man charging me, brandishing a spectral sword, I whirled around. A cord had been cut. It fell limp at my feet. Another snap. Another cord falling limp. I looked in horror as the lines were
Ponderosa

severed.

At first it was slow, but it began to speed up. Soon tens or hundreds would snap at a time and fall limp. I saw the Phantom Man dancing wildly in the forest. Wherever he moved, a lifeline was cut. What if my only lifeline to reality was torn from me?

His laughter sounded like the cackles of a hyena that only come in the dark of the night. Then, the cutting stopped, and I saw no lifeline intact. I was surrounded by severed rope. Severed bridges. Trees smoldered around me, the once immense blaze was now almost completely out. The smoke had gone for the most part, casting the barren landscape in the eerie gleam of twilight.

I just stood, eyes wide, staring at the ground. My mind was finally silent. Then a cord began to rise from the ground. An inch. Then a foot. Three feet. A tug. There was one lifeline left.

• • •

I walked, following the cord that slithered along, its source out of my sight. Twilight had fallen, and the night had taken its place in the sky. Luckily the moon was full and it cast its glow over the charred landscape. The trail began to climb, but my pace didn’t slow. After what seemed like an eternity of walking, I began to doubt the intentions of the cord that I had been blindly following. I grabbed it and began to walk faster, reeling it in as I went.

My speed grew to a brisk walk, a jog, and then a run. Miles flew by, and I didn’t get any closer. Burnt trees became saplings growing out of the ash. The saplings grew into a new, and thriving forest of skyscraper lodgepoles. Then, the trees stopped. The cord sat on the ground in front of me, making a line that pointed towards a pond.

The Phantom Man was standing at its edge, cord in hand. He looked at me, face obscured by the hood of his cloak. A familiar tug pulled my waist, then a jerk.

The cord was in his hand and he was pulling it with a force that shattered any courage that remained in my body. He slowly leaned backwards, seeming to be swallowed by the pond’s still surface, wrenching me towards him all the while. I tried to pull away.

Tried to claw at the ground with my bare hands to find some purchase to avoid looking at what lay beneath his dark hood. But his resolve was too great. Finally, I submitted and lay limp as my body was hauled towards the placid waters. As I
reached its edge, I raised my head to look at the person who had caused me so much pain.

His face looked back at me. Gaunt cheeks. Bags under the eyes. A pallor that could never be confused with fair skin. And a crease between the eyebrows. I knew his face well. I saw it every day in the mirror.

“You messed this up James,” he said.

“I know.”

“Why did you run away? You know she needs you.”

“I know.”

“It’s not about you anymore, it’s about your family.”

“You mean the one that I tore apart?”

“You haven’t destroyed it yet, James. But if you leave, then you will. You’ll destroy her.”

“And then they’ll both be gone.”

“Then you need to go back James. You need to make things right.” I knew he was right. Knew I was right.

“Hey, stop talking to yourself and get in! It’s a long road back home from all the way out here.” Mitch was standing next to his truck stuffing his bag into the covered bed.

“It is a long road home, isn’t it?” I said under my breath looking down at my reflection in the pond. The gaunt face that looked back at me seemed to be awake now, finally forced to listen to what his heart had been telling him for the last two months. I turned, grabbed my backpack, and walked towards the truck.


I unfolded the photo. My sweet Sarah was looking back at me, laughter bubbling up from her chest. She was in the swing that hung from the ponderosa in our backyard. A laugh broke out of my tight chest and tears rolled down my cheeks. She was so high in the air, trying to ‘Go all the way around’ no doubt. It had been taken on a sunny day in August, and her hair was burning like fire against the dreary lodgepole forest background.

Somehow, though, her smile was the brightest thing in the picture. I was beginning to shake with fear and sadness. My legs were growing weak, and I wasn’t sure I’d be able to stand much longer. I gruffly brought the picture to my lips and kissed it,
wetting it with my tears.

“I love you Sarah.” My voice broke as I said her name. I tried to choke out any of the infinite things I wish I could have said to my daughter, but my voice had left me. Slowly, and carefully, I placed the photo and note back in my wallet. Before my body could shut down, I reached out my hand and knocked on the door.

Our bedroom light came on. It was five AM, Mitch and I had driven through the night. I heard steps coming down the stairs. Then the dead-bolt was turning. My heart slowed to a stop, and my stomach flipped. The door was opening, and I saw Mary’s tear-stained face peering through the growing crack.

She was beautiful but looked so terribly tired. Tears flowed freely down my face as I tried to choke the words out. Finally, my vocal chords came alive.

“Mary, it’s all my fault.” After the last syllable escaped my lips, my legs finally gave out. I crumpled to the floor, landing on my side. I laid on the ground weeping at the feet of my wife. The wife I had abandoned.

I felt her kneel over me. I raised my head to meet her gaze, and I was met with the eyes that I had been running from. They were confused, tired, and searching.

“James, I’ve lived this dream a hundred times.” Her voice was flat, devoid of life. “You may come home tonight, but in the morning, you’ll be gone. It’s always the same.”

Mary began to rise to her feet and turn into the doorway. A heat rose in my chest as I saw her turn away. I had turned away from her, and I knew that neither of us could survive in the hell we had been thrust into without the other.

“No Mary,” I said struggling to my feet, and reaching out to grab her fleeing hand, “I’m never going to leave you again.”

I pulled her back towards me, into my weak arms, and held her close. She tried to pull away, maybe she was worried that if she leaned too hard into this dream, she wouldn’t return, wouldn’t want to. But as I held her, and as she began to hold me, the dream fell away, and we were together again.

• • •

We stayed there on the porch holding each other for hours. Then we moved inside, falling asleep on the couch. At sunrise, I awoke. My body was exhausted, but my mind needed to see it. Carefully, I pulled my arm from underneath Mary. Her face had grown more color than when I had seen it in the crack of the door. She was
beautiful. There was a kindness to her face that I knew I could never wander from again. I brushed a lock of her hair behind her ear and kissed her gently on the cheek, then made my way to the door.

I opened it, stepping out onto the porch and was hit by the brisk morning air. The few clouds that hung in the sky burned in the sunrise. After descending the front steps, I skirted around the side of our house, walking through the grass that was covered with the morning’s dew. I opened the gate and walked the rest of the way to the ponderosa, Sarah’s favorite place.

It sat there, restless I’m sure, untouched for longer than it had since she’d been born. I sat down on the swing and lightly kicked myself off the ground. It swung, and I swung with it. It felt good to sit where she had so many times before. I could hear her laughter grow as I swung higher. The sun had risen enough for its glow to rest on my face.

A smile sat where it hadn’t in what felt like an eternity.
Then, a whisper. ‘It’s not your fault.’
The alarm goes out.
The watchdogs are assembled.
But the Coyotajes
are still out there,
watchful faces
lifted
towards the sun or the moon.
Biding silently.

there are corpses
at the mexican border.
This isn’t a call to arms:
they aren’t crossing.
some killed by Coyotajes
others the sun, bullets.
pale, rotting faces
fixed
towards the sun or the moon,
silent.

The mexican border’s silence
can be interpreted
in all the ways
silence can:
for funerals, fear,
patience, or reverence.
Some Coyotajes
murder and rape
their passengers.
But some
take their young
to church.
Worship silently.

Some watchdogs
don’t understand
the difference between
being the Lord
and being the Border Wall
as long as they can imagine
the silence
as a set of full pews.
Binding a body’s mouth doesn’t heal its wounds.
Empty policies prolong problems.
Just like the Coyotajes
at the mexican border
biding until re-election doesn’t mean the young aren’t here.

The children of
Tigers, Coyotajes, Racoons
The children of
chinks, wetbacks, terrorists,
and whatever the hell they want to call us
need solutions.

the grand-daughter of a Coyotajes
the daughter of a Tiger,
the newly arrived Raccoon
all have their borders to cross.
In time, we will say, “We will not be silent” we will mean, “We do not fear” we will mean:

“this country was also built for US.”
Northern Harrier at Crown Hill Lake

Andi Niess
Milky Way Over Summitville

Alex Clymer

Photography
Flutist
Kasra Taghikhani
We collected in the town square. Perhaps it wouldn’t have been such an event if someone had found it in the middle of a field, in a ditch on the side of the road, washed up on the beach with some driftwood. But it fell into the middle of the town square. Water from the fountain washed over its expansive wings.

An angel, no doubt. And more than that, it was a sign. It was pure white, from its skin to the wings, which would shimmer when they caught the light. How could this have been an otherworldly creature, however, when the white was stained with red blood and the limbs were twisted and broken? Perhaps it was cast away from the heavens as punishment for unspeakable crimes.

The angel barely moved as it took in labored breaths.

The Priest arrived, speaking for the angel since it could not do it itself. “Be not afraid.” He said, assuming that is what the angel would say if it could speak. The angel groaned and moved, its arms shaking as it tried to pull itself out of the water. Some of us stepped back in fear, others heeded the Priest’s words. It mumbled in a strange tongue; a staccato language made soft by its sweet voice. It gazed up at us, showing eyelids that were lined in an organic pink, irises bright blue like the sky. Its hands slipped and its torso collided to the water.

Who were we to touch such a being? We leaned in, hands up like we’d help at any moment, but no one dared to contact the angel. There was nothing we could do, for how could an angel be physically hurt? Perhaps its appearance was a reflection of the damage to its soul. But who were we to judge its innocence?

We stood close to observe the being. It wasn’t a man with wings, but something else entirely. Through the corner of our shifting eyes we gawked at the genitalia, or rather the lack thereof. A tuft of feathers was collected in the pubic area, yet nothing identifying could be seen. A true sign of its etherealness.
It showed no indication of being uncomfortable with our presence. But under the gaze of the Priest and our neighbors we didn't dare test our boundaries. The angel's stare was set straight forward as half of its face rested in the water. It mumbled and moaned, its whole body writhing, wings shuddering as it tried to move them to a more comfortable position.

As night came, some of us snuck out of our houses. We crowded around the fountain, dipping our hands into the bloodied water. We splashed the water to our faces. We drank it down. We collected the wet feathers and stuffed them into our pockets.

The next morning, we awoke to something new in the fountain. It perched like a gargoyle, its back hunched as it reached down and touched the angel, gently rubbing the space between its shoulder blades. Its own wings were neatly folded, though so long that the tips grazed against the ground.

We tip-toed forward, disappointed that we could no longer get close to our angel. The new being heard our steps, spreading its massive wings and flapping them as it turned then hunched over like a defensive dog. Its body was the same shape of our angel, but it wasn't the same, pure white. The wings were brown, speckled on the inside like an owl's. But as the morning sun hit them the feathers glistened. It stared at us with deep yellow eyes that stood out next to its dark skin. Its sharp voice stabbed at us as it bared its teeth, speaking in a language riddled with hard sounds that forced its tongue against its teeth.

Our angel lay limp in the fountain, one wing splayed and hanging over the edge onto the ground. It no longer writhed and groaned, just softly whimpered in a forlorn manner. We tried to step forward but the new angel growled, hunching over and aggressively splaying its wings as it let out a loud, two-syllable screech.

No longer could we observe our angel or collect its feathers. The new angel was ever diligent, screaming and darting at us with spread wing if we ever dared to get too close. We'd watch from a distance, concealing ourselves long enough that the brown angel focused its attention on the other. The white angel screamed in agony as the other grabbed it, pulling it out of the fountain and gently laying it on the ground. If we listened close we could hear the brown angel softly coo like a mother consoling her child.

Despite our own scolding, our children darted toward the beings, giggling as they scattered in every direction as the healthy angel chased them away. It was like tormenting a goose guarding its nest, though less threatening since the angel never bit. As the days went on the brown angel grew more sluggish though ever persistent. An
all too mundane expression of fatigue distorted its dark complexion.

In the evening, the priest would bring a plate of bread for the angels, though it always remained uneaten. Perhaps they would have preferred fish.

Every night we heard our angel scream. We’d still sneak to the fountain, picking up feathers as the brown angel was distracted. It picked up the other, grunting as it tried to drag the crying, injured angel away. But every time it was too much to bear and it’d gently set the other down, leaning in and rubbing its face to the other’s neck as it softly begged for forgiveness.

Eventually the smell kept most of us at bay. The fountain was surrounded by smears of excrement despite the being’s attempt to keep the space clean. Those of us who dared to watch the angels commit such an act were often met with the brown angel tossing it in our direction. It washed its dirty hands in the fountain. Soon the water was too foul to drink.

Perhaps the resentment grew from us being fooled. We demanded explanation but not even the Priest could offer a satisfying answer.

“It is a test of our faith! Of our good will.” The priest said, standing between us and the fountain, arms spread as if to protect the beings from the stagnant air of hostility. But what a lie! They bore no good news, made no sacrifice. The water of the fountain had made some of us sick, but we could feel the shimmering feathers held some powers in keeping evil spirits at bay.

We ran circles around the fountain, some of us leading the brown angel away as others finally reached our angel. We grabbed at the wings and tugged, taking handfuls of long, white feathers before we darted away. It took quite a bit of strength to free the feathers from the skin. Our angel could not muster the strength to physically react, only screaming out in pain. In some spots, more blood seeped out.

We braved the smell, curious to observe now that the brown angel no longer reacted to our approach. It hunched over the white angel, head tilted up and eyes piercing us as we came closer. The wings of the white angel, once lush and incomprehensible, were now just pink skin, covered in scabs. The brown angel bared its teeth and scolded us as we quickly plucked the last feathers that we could.

We displayed the white feathers in our homes in hopes that they’ll bring good fortune. But how could one know they weren’t merely taken from swans?
That night the singing reverberated through the streets. It was something slow, sorrowful, difficult to listen to. A mix of sobbing and pleading and apologies and curses.

Our angel’s cloudy gaze showed us the body held no true meaning. It no longer screamed as we pulled the fluffy down off of the base of its wings. The brown angel no longer scolded. It rested its face in the crook of the other’s neck, eyes wide open and chest slowly heaving.

The brown angel was a dumb thing, guarding the lifeless body that swelled and stank. We never kept it from leaving, but it stayed.

After the last angel died we cut off its wings. For how else could we prove they ever existed?
St. Coloman Church, Fussen, Germany

Alyssa Schwarz
poured myself a cup of oil
took a lubricating pill,
with my daily vitamins.
stretched my stiff arms,
massaged fingers on edge of desk.

Type.
I am a good cog.

Self. 21 years. Enter.
motivated, yet
spiritually desolate
emotionally faint.

nine hours. force quit.
pull the headphones —
pull the plug.
gears grind down.
bad head hurts bad today.
drive home, question
turns taken.
lay on living room floor,
naked,
tears cried
leak like old motor oil.
beg the sun to rise slowly —
beg it to be afraid of me. perhaps,
to not rise at all.
Well Rested

Samuel Vaughn
The blue house on Walnut Street had a beer can collection on the porch and a cracked window upstairs. A man holding a brown bag stumbled across the yellowed yard and crashed into the front door. He found the door knob and was greeted by a harsh voice.

The faded blue house on Walnut Street had a moving truck in front of it. A man sat on the porch swing. It creaked every time he lifted his bottle. A woman marched from the house, carrying a dining chair. She tossed it in the truck and, with eyes set straight ahead, marched back inside.

From “The House on Walnut Street,” by Zach Schlittenhart
Life as an Inverse Problem
Colton Kohnke

for Yaoguo

When you ride your bike to work
do you think about the objective function
your wheels are spinning on?

The topography replaced by valleys
of minimization and hills reaching
towards the global maximum.
The road just an iterative path, spreading
like streams in search of the low sea.
Your own personal inverse problem.

Is the climb worth the steep descent
towards your target misfit?
Do you smile as the wind bites
through your floral jersey?

Potholes shake handlebars,
cars honk as wheels drift roadward,
stiff shoulders soften when you
walk through your front door. Screams
greet dad as mom changes diapers.
Noise is a fact of life.

Does your wife glare when
you talk Tikhonov at the dinner table?
Do you tell stories of Bayesian
Theory between bites?

The heat flow PDE wafts
the smell of dumplings
through the dining room.
Later you’ll consider the importance
of the model parameters
to make the smell linger, if only
by a marginal amount.
Le Brouillard en Paris

Sammie Inks

Photography
Metamorphosis #2
Clayton Haines
lavender chamomile tea almost scalds my hand,
    I won’t use the
    handle of the mug
    heat on skin is a ritual

I set down my brew
and slip under
neatly packaged
sheets,
half sitting up

I wait for the desire to  
    read
    or sleep

hoping to turn
off the bedside lamp

click

and it comes,
this moment between.

peaceful resounding
sound of no sound
mindlessness
in the lack of control
    and no desire for it
Dust motes, leaded glass:
    stagnate signs, old bones bent (but unbroken), perpetually listening
For ivory keys, any sudden disturbance of particles:
    let loose, sing soul in narrow pipes.

Sound built, something sustained:
    not quite song; too unpolished, too many edges.

Light bounces, builds and diminishes:
    capture that resonance, resolve into song.

Plumb the depths of past and patterns
    now, let love sing soul to surroundings!

Suddenly, small death:
    Darkness drops its heavy hand, balanced by small brilliances in memory.

Dust settles, leaving

silence:
    Gratitude rings in our ears.
Wilson Peak
Connor Beekman

Photography
“More coffee, sugar?” Sonya was already pouring before Beth could think of answering. It was one in the morning, the Witching Hour, and her final started at seven; of course she needed more coffee. Beth had taken the corner booth of Planet of the Crepes for the past three nights, not that Sonya minded. She was just glad to have some coherent company. Usually the only people that came in this late were the town crazies unwinding after yet another unsuccessful night of hunting Sasquatch or a frat house taking a break from depleting the town’s liquor supply. Tonight a lone boy from Tappa Kegga Brew sat on the other side of the room, his cheeks full of food like a squirrel storing nuts for the winter.

Sonya walked back to the register, looking out into the empty night. A shiver ran down her spine. It was darker than usual, the kind of dark where the sky transforms into a colorless sea of nothingness. The kind of dark whose lack of stars paints an even wider unknown expanse around the tiny planet. The kind of dark that leaves the world completely exposed to anything lurking in the shadows. A sign was missing. Sonya looked back at Ray, still sweating behind his griddle full of pancakes, reading one of his favorite tabloids. Tonight’s cover featured a woman marrying the ghost haunting her house. Had Sonya stayed at the window, she would have seen the blanket of darkness penetrated by three red dots of light in a triangle with another light resting in the center, casting a devious red glow on the land.

“When did the Express Inn lights go out, Ray?” She leaned back on the counter. Ray set down his magazine gently, careful not to lose his place in an article on the strong correlation between crop circles and missing children in the tri-state area. He looked up only briefly before crinkling his nose and opening back up his magazine.

“Whaddaya mean? Them lights have been on nonstop for the past six years. Well, except for that Halloween when someone made it say ‘SIN’ instead, but they fixed that sucker right up. Speaking of sin, have you noticed that every crepe I’ve made today has looked just like Jesus? And all the pancakes have looked a little like Babe Ruth. Spooky, huh?” Sonya rolled her eyes. Every conversation with Ray was a long road veering further and further away from the point. He may not have been a good conversationalist, but he always cooked a mean plate of food. Sonya sauntered over to
the jukebox and pressed C4, signaling the end of their talk. Above the crackling static, the soft crooning of a woman and her piano beckoned the end of the world to come and ease her broken heart.

Sonya sighed and grabbed her own cup of coffee, looking out at her well-worn diner. Everything had its own particular place, including the people. Something was off tonight though, something she couldn’t quite place. It was almost as if she were being watched. She shivered slightly, searching for the gaze she felt. Beth took a sip of her coffee and flipped another page of her textbook in one corner while the frat boy guzzled down a second omelet at his booth. Ray flipped a pancake, made an outdated baseball reference, then chuckled to himself. Everything was normal there. Her eyes slowly tracked back to the window, catching on the hypnotic red lights.

Sonya clutched her coffee mug to her chest and took a step back. The lights hovered listlessly above the parking lot, slicing through the air like a moth missing a wing. The jukebox turned entirely to static, catching the other three’s attention. It was only once the lights were a few tens of feet above the pavement that Sonya noticed the mirrored triangle attached to the lights. A hatch began to open, leaving a deep black hole in the middle of the slick chrome reflection of her own diner.

“Woah, is anyone else seeing that, or is it just me?” The boy in the booth said in bewilderment, dropping another piece of omelet on the table. All four people in the diner had their eyes locked on the object. Wheels emerged from the triangle, slowly descending until touching the ground. From the new rectangular void on the side of the craft, a platform rolled itself out and into a handicapped parking space. Beth began to rock back and forth, knees hugged up to the table. Her breath was choppy, loud, and choking. If this was a hallucination, she thought, it was one hell of a realistic one. Ray brought her a doggy bag, which she almost popped on her first breath. A being stepped out of the darkness and onto the platform wearing the face of death. Upon seeing this, Beth popped the bag.

The creature walked with dignity, its pale gray skin glistening in the light of the triangle. It had the eyes of a hammerhead shark, two polished onyx stones sitting an entire foot apart. The eyes locked onto the door as its ropy gray body halted on the pavement. Its mouth, stretching so far back on both sides that the corners almost touched, slowly began to open. A row of sharp, pearly teeth peeked out as a high-pitched screech permeated through the diner’s walls. Inside, the jukebox crackled.

“Hello, Crepe Planet.” The once crooning woman now spoke through the jukebox. “We’ve been watching you for some time now. It isn’t every day that we find
such a thriving micro-planet.” The lilting voice of the singer was jarring. Sonya backed up toward the jukebox and pressed B1, an old country love song sang by a smooth tenor. The creature outside dropped its jaw again and let out another wail. The jukebox replied with a small popping noise.

“Is this voice better for you?” A drawling man’s voice dripped out of the speakers; it would have to do. “Please open your force field and let me in. I come in peace.” Beth dropped her knees from the table and began to breathe again. The boy covered in omelet bolted up, clutching his unused knife in his hand until the knuckle turned white.

“No way. No fucking way. I’ve seen Mars Attacks, man. These things just want to kill us by any means necessary! My ma would always tell me, ‘Adam, if an alien ever asks you if it can come inside, you say no!’ She was a nut job and gave the same advice for strangers and vampires, but it’s some pretty damn sound advice.” As Adam paced around the diner muttering different ways he thought the aliens in Mars Attacks might have been defeated and practiced stabbing the air, the jukebox whined as if it had picked up feedback. The creature outside whined back.

“I do not understand what you mean; Mars has no intelligent life. I do not wish to harm you. I come from the Intergalactic Council, Sector Omega. My name is Ergok and I am here to judge your accomplishments.” The diner patrons looked at each other. Beth stood from her booth and began walking to the door.

“I say we let him in. What’s the worst that can happen: we all die right here? I’m pretty sure my heart exploded earlier so I’m probably going to die either way. Might as well have something interesting etched on our tombstones, right?” As Beth’s ink smudged hand reached for the door handle, Adam leaped out and tackled her to the floor.

“Are you crazy, woman? What part of ‘never open a door for aliens’ don’t you understand? This is real life! That thing will definitely try to eat us, starting with you.” Beth clawed out of Adam’s grasp and scrambled to her feet. She grabbed the handle and turned toward the boy lying on the faded checkerboard tile with disgust. He always got in her way, even as a grubby-handed child.

“Fuck you, Adam. At least if I get eaten I’ll know you’ll be dying right behind me.” Beth pushed the door open and felt the cool night air spread across her face. The creature took a small step toward her, eyeing the knife still glued to Adam’s hand. Beth motioned inside and, almost reluctantly, Ergok stepped into the diner. Adam curled tighter into a ball on the floor, hoping to become invisible. It was either dinosaurs or
aliens that couldn’t see people when they didn’t move, so he gave himself a fifty-per-
cent chance of making it through this. Ergok cleared its throat and screeched. The
sound was deafening, dropping Sonya to her knees and forcing Ray to create makeshift
earplugs out of buns for the third time in his life. The Southern drawl of the jukebox
erupted in manic laughter.

“All right friends, let’s eat!” The voice boomed out over the diner. Adam began
to rock back and forth.

“I knew it! I knew it, man. We’re gonna get eaten and then we’re gonna die and
I’ll never know how to play anything but Wonderwall on guitar!” Ergok sat down in
the nearest booth, looking patiently at Sonya with its solid black eyes. After a few sec-
onds of silence, it barked out a quick scream. A gruesome smile formed from one side
of its head to the other.

“Can I get whatever the chef’s special is today and a slice of pie?” The mean-
dering drawl politely asked as the horrid grin stayed plastered on Ergok’s face. Sonya
got up from the ground and stammered.

“The, uh, chef’s special today is The Crepes of Wrath. It’s a Crepe Suzette with
a hash brown, steak, cheese, and pepper omelet. Is that okay for you, uh, Ergok?” Her
hands were wringing her apron as she spoke. Ergok turned to the jukebox and wait-
ed for it to translate, nodding once its screams were complete. Sonya ran behind the
counter and began to unlock the pie case, hands still shaking as if a robbery was taking
place. She removed a slice of cherry pie and slid it into the oven.

Behind the kitchen window, Ray chopped, flipped, and whipped with the grace
of a dancer. Each movement was beautifully choreographed and oozing with passion.
Not even the clamoring of Sonya’s shaky hands carrying a plate and fork to the crea-
ture in the far-left booth could throw off his timing.

“Would you like coffee with this?” Sonya asked with some renewed confidence
in her voice. If it’s service that the creature wanted, then service it would receive. A
slight ‘eep’ noise emerged from Ergok’s gray lips. It grabbed the fork delicately with its
left hand, the right still clenched under the table.

“Yes, please. And thank you.” It put half of the pie slice on the fork and opened
its mouth like a garbage can, dumping in the fork’s contents. Ergok gave a toothy,
pleased smile. Sonya gave a customer service smile back and shot a look at Adam,
still covered in omelet but now sitting up on the floor. At least aliens know how to use
utensils. She grabbed her coffee pot and filled Ergok’s mug.

After a few moments of uncomfortable silence, Ray emerged from the kitchen
with a steaming plate. Sonya looked away; he just had to choose today of all days to wear a stained undershirt as his only shirt. Ergok didn’t notice. It didn’t even notice that Ray was talking about the special. Its eyes were locked on the orange glaze dripping from the crepe.

Finally, the plate was set in front of it and the crepes lit on fire. There was a glint in its eyes. Cooling be damned. Hell, silverware be damned too! Unhinging its jaw once more, Ergok placed the entire dish in its mouth, plate and all. Ergok smiled a lopsided, satisfied grin. Its right hand opened to reveal a sizable golden nugget. Ergok gave a warbling yell, sticky with caramelized sauce.

“Is this enough for payment or should I run back to my ship and grab more?” Sonya and Ray looked at each other, bewildered, and vigorously nodded their heads. Ergok gave another toothy smile and took a long drink of coffee. He shrieked again, this time more pleasantly than before.

“You’ll hear back from me soon with the official rankings but between you and me, I think you might be a top contender this year for the Intergalactic Council Annual Cook-Off! In all my years of judging I cannot think of a time I’ve had a better plate of fire.” The drawl broke into a hardy laugh. “I’ll take my leave now. Good luck, Planet Crepe.” Ergok walked with poise to the door that Beth had run back to. It gave her a slight bow and climbed back into the triangular ship.

“Y-yeah, we sure showed him who’s boss, huh?” Adam mumbled to himself as he got back on his feet, wiping tears from his eyes. Ray put a hand on the frat boy’s shoulder, the knowing hand of man who’s seen it all before.

The diner was piled at the window, awestruck at Ergok’s silent liftoff into the heavens. Even after the sky returned to its scheduled program of total and complete darkness, the four just stared out at where there once was a UFO. It was only after the Express Inn lights flickered back to life that the four dazed humans mutually agreed that the diner had been open for far too long that day.
Summit Lake
Xan McPherson

Watercolor & Pen
Mooring
Darin Meeker
Recently, I found my heart pumping salt water from the Great Barrier Reef. The swell of the tide in my chest like abandonment, standing in this place once called home. It was the first time I’d felt the white sea-foam inside me but not the first I’d found part of myself missing;

The first must have been my eyes, feathers and fur dotting the rings of now feral irises, my pupils wandering savannahs in search of warthogs. Stay! I’d said, Keep watch while I’m gone, tell me when the wildebeests thunder on.

But later it was my hands, my fingers replaced with vine covered pillars of peeling red bark, smelling of life and thick ferns of the vast forest floor, orangutans swinging across the webs of my palms.

And later my arms, displaced by the climbing columns of the Arc de Triomphe, heavy marble a merciless reminder of an embrace lost to the Rue de Paris and my lips, whispering prayer flags across the peak of my jaw breath wandering through bitter thin air, never to return home.

I’d dismissed it at first, suffocating the small voice shrieking at me to stop. Because a part of me craved these badges, my skin a quilted map of the places I could now call my own.
But as my heart began to rock with the sea
and my hair shimmered with far-away dew, the beauty
I bore began to burn deep leaving wistful white scars.

Peering down at myself, not at each piece,
but as a whole, all the parts of me split
in all these glorious places, seeing no home
for my soul.
Part 5
The beige house on Walnut Street had pamphlets for roof repair scattered on the welcome mat. The mailbox was overflowing. A '95 Honda Accord was parked sideways on the dirt in front. A broken bottle of Jack Daniels sat on the porch swing.

The beige house on Walnut Street had an ambulance in front of it. The midnight moon watched a stretcher roll past chains that used to hold a porch swing. Blue and red strobes illuminated the chipped door as paramedics rushed inside. The moon turned in the sky, and the stretcher finally wheeled back outside, carrying a heavy plastic bag. The stretcher was lifted into the ambulance. The strobes turned off, and the driver slowly pulled away.

The beige house on Walnut Street had a For Sale sign staked in the dirt.

The green house on Walnut Street had a newly laid lawn and chimes that played keenly in the wind. A grill sat on the porch, and the smell of sizzling marinade lifted through the air. Two kids were running through the yard, laughing and hollering as they chased each other. A young husband stood at the grill, flipping a spatula between his hands. A woman came outside. She glared at the new grill and shiny Audi in the driveway, then called the kids inside for dinner.

From “The House on Walnut Street,” by Zach Schlittenhart
after Song of a Pond in Spring by Charles Burchfield

1. from afar: song of a pond
   Mother-song makes mosaic
   in my ears. She counts for me: 2 ears, 2 eyes,
   no nose because she pinches it right off.
   The sweep of dust from afar,
   wide eyes fixed. World I take in one gulp,
   it spills against every part of me.
   Giggles boil me over: how I love the mess.

2. come closer: bog among fronds
   Another sings, shades and crosshatch
   paint me with pointed question:
   what makes mosaics grow old?
   child eyes watch grown-up worlds,
   growing into big dress shoes, business schools,
   people in pieces, utility in the mince.
   Pair of headphones so songs drown out
   rain patters.

3. closer still: smog, only, beyond
   My melody fades, flat on every note.
   Up close, pointillism: liver spots reside at edges, wrinkles creep to center.
   Pieces of people float through boggy memory, and I stand
   within enfolding fog looking closely at the ground.
   Blue-screen tired eyes, every introduction a screening
   for unhappiness that may relate to mine, the sound
   of credit cards swiping, the calendar (bog-like) drains—
   medley of years
   patched over shoes, ankle-deep.
Breath of Fresh Air
Julia Cormos
I should have crossed the street.
Too late now. Already under the overpass, no gap in traffic across four lanes, and it would be really obvious (if he noticed me at all) that I was crossing because he’s on the same side of the road as me. I don’t want to offend him, anger him. I’ll keep walking straight. There’ll be plenty of space between us, even when I pass him. Why do I assume he means harm?

Probably because at the moment he’s bashing a stick against the concrete wall holding up the overpass for no clear purpose other than to destroy it.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! A ragged man breaks a big stick again and again against concrete.

The word thwack sounds oddly close to the actual sound that that stick made as it broke against concrete. Especially when said with a very hard ending consonant.

Thwack! Rings out again and again and I move closer to it.

You should’ve crossed long before you saw him. You shouldn’t even be walking on the left side of the road, even if it is a sidewalk!

On the left side of the road you can see the cars coming at you. Though none are coming now. Must be a red light ahead. Maybe I should try to run across now and jump the divider to the other side? Nope, traffic is moving on the other side of the road.

Christ, no homeless person has ever done you any harm, even the crazy ones, chill out.

I speed up my pace to pass him while trying to keep low the sound of my footsteps. Passing under the overpass is a hasty, awkward struggle. There he is, ten feet to my left, his absolute concentration given to breaking that stick, doesn’t look up.

I walk past him.
In the clear.

_He turned to follow once you went past him._

I really don’t think he did. I could only see him out of the corner of my eye. I could’ve seen anything.

_Humans evolved peripheral vision for a reason._

Doesn’t matter. I’m out from under the overpass now, out in the open in broad daylight. Just have to cross the bridge over the railroad tracks and then I’m in downtown. In busy streets filled with people. Traffic light must have just changed on the other side of bridge, cars start whooshing by rapidly, one after another.

_Whoosh_ is an odd word to use to describe the sound a car makes. It does perhaps capture a piece of the sound made by a car as it pushes air aside, a bit of the Doppler Effect. The word _whoosh_ rises and falls. However, the word neglects the sounds of an engine running, of rubber rolling on pavement, and the multitudes of small clucks and clicks. Still, if I write, “the car whooshed by me” people know what I mean.

_Are you absolutely sure he’s not behind you._

_Yes, you’re sure. There’s no reason why he would be, he was happy breaking his stick, stop being so suspicious._

I turn my head the slightest bit to left to see what my peripheries can capture.

_He is behind you._

_Behind you, yes, as you knew he was because you passed by him. He appeared to be, in fact, in almost exactly the same place as when you passed him._

_Almost? Makes you think, doesn’t it?_

A coal train is coming. I feel it through the bridge, hear it in the air, turn my head left and see the engine light just a little ways north. The traffic light must have turned red, there’s a break in oncoming car traffic.

It’s unfortunate that there isn’t a good word for the noise trains make anymore. _Low rumble_ is probably the best way to describe it but you wouldn’t immediately think _train_ if I simply wrote
low rumble. It used to be so simple, choo-choo. That phrase of course grossly oversimplifies the enormous complexity of sounds a steam locomotive creates. But, it was a ubiquitously recognized phrase, and one that carried on generations after steam locomotives ceased to be used. So I’d bet if I had written that I heard “choo-choo” coming from the north, you would know I meant that I heard a train coming, even if I sounded childish saying it.

And what else did you see when you turned your head?

Another traffic light must have changed at the other end of the bridge, cars are rushing by again. Whoooshing over low rumble.

And yet, I’m pretty sure you can still hear footsteps behind you.

I look back over my shoulder, not at all trying to hide what I’m doing. Fear in this moment is indeed persuasive against Kindness and Reason.

…Fuck, he’s absolutely following me.

Just keep walking. Just keep walking.

Downtown’s not far.

Keep walking. It’s broad daylight he’s not going to try to do anything. Keep walking.

Even if he did twenty cars would see in it in as many seconds.

New plan! Turn around and face him! Bystander effect, if he gets a good jump on you no one’s going to stop until you’re beaten to a pulp and bleeding on the sidewalk.

Foot steps very audible now.

Turn around!

I turn.

The train arrives and passes under me. The mélange of sounds making up the low rumble begin to become individually discernible: the squeaking, grinding, sliding. He’s a few feet behind me, eyes dead set on me, footsteps knocking. I keep walking forward but angle my head back, trying to see him, the cars, and my destination. I look forward, sideways, and backwards at the same time.

He probably just wants some change.
“Can I help you, my friend? Do you need some change?” I don’t stop walking. I can’t discern what he says in reply. I’ll assume it means yes. Don’t let your wallet get within arms reach of him!
While you’re at it don’t step off the sidewalk into traffic, or off the bridge onto a train!
Only a five in my wallet, nothing smaller. Ah well, he clearly needs it more than you do and it’s a small price to pay if it makes him go away.

“Here sir, take this.” I crest the bridge, downtown seems so close. He stops walking to examine the bill and through some odd social instinct I stop to let him. He mumbles. It’s clearly not what he was expecting me to offer to him.
“Here, take it.” He takes it and looks incredibly happy. “Dude!” I think is what came out of his mouth. He stretches his arms to hug me. Don’t let him hug you! Try to be polite about it!

He sees that I don’t want to be hugged. “Nah it’s ok man. I know I’m dirty. It’s ok. It’s ok.” The first discernible words out of his mouth. He shoves the bill into his pocket. “Woohoo”, or something similar, he shouts and begins to dance around a bit, teetering on the edge of the sidewalk. “Have a nice day sir.” I leave him to dance and continue my walking. After a few steps I hear the thuds of running footsteps behind me, I whirl around. He didn’t follow you for money apparently. Run!

Then he stops running. I decide to just face him. At first it looks like he’s got toned muscles, but then I realize he only looks like that because he has no fat. He’s emaciated. I don’t want to tell myself it would be an easy fight, but I don’t think I’m going to lose. The coal train thunders below us. The cars have stopped, must be a red light ahead.
“Hey man, thanks for the money.”
“No problem.”
“Hey man.”
“Yes?”
“What’s Snoopy’s bird?”
“Sorry, what?”
“Snoopy. What’s his bird? What’s it called?”

You know the name of the god damn bird, it’s somewhere in here!

It’s not an actual name, it’s something related to hippies, it’s…

“Woodstock.”
His body seems to freeze while his eyes go wild. Somewhere behind the eyes I can see pure joy flowing. It flows into his limbs and he begins to truly dance.
Step by step.
One calloused foot over the other.
Jumping, landing on the sidewalk with soft thuds, first on the sidewalk and then onto the road. Little drum beats over the train sounds.

Pad thud thud twirl pad thud pad thud
Rumble hum squeak wheeze hum rumble
Whoosh whoosh

Splat!

Even though that’s not really the sound a body makes when life is expelled from it by an oncoming vehicle.
Flash
Cliff Ghiglieri
find yourself in a wide granite crack,  
gently flared, like the slack lips of a sleeping giant  
do not smear your skin with the thick, sweet salve of bravery  
leave your hands to tear, your mind to teeter  

feel your pulse scatter the swarming chatter between your ears  
chalk flurries fall in your personal stratosphere,  
let the smoke pacify the hive.  
now, rip off a chunk of dry wind with your teeth and swallow it hard  

your romping pulse and lyric breath ornament the ancient  
hum of the mountain. lend your voice to the hymn,  
kiss the rock with your mangled fingers:  
you cannot love something without giving it the power to destroy you.  

realize that this moment is no different from any other:  
everything has always been at stake.  
but at this altitude, every movement is a prayer  
and God  
is listening.
Shower

Carolyn Pauly
Not Too Close
Hannah North

when you spilled your curls in my lap,
I shrank like a stranger on a city bus
I could hear the opening notes of a pavane in my gut
wailing oboe snaking desperately through my veins like a child in a hedge maze
your breath tickles my palms,
a brief resolution in E flat major
coy chimes lift the corner of your eyebrow
sleepy rendition of a smile
you are suspended between worlds for a beat,
looking at me through the delicate haze of afterglow.
music tumbles over itself in somber cacophony
timpani, bass, a tsunami of thick blue paint
crashed on the rocky beach of my rib cage
the vibrations threatened to make every vertebrae sing
like my spine was made of ancient church bells.
but you were asleep,
and you heard nothing anyway.
Permanence
Julia Cormos
I.

Label: Inbox.
The emails you won’t delete, the receipts, coupons, certificates stacked in the corner of our kitchen. These artifacts, painstakingly, timestamping our mileage, delineating a digital period of record, 62 years long (and longer, I hope).

II.

Your boxy truck, rumbling down potholed roads, sputtering slightly; more than it used to. My feet on the dashboard, your careful instructions, teaching me how to drive. Meanwhile, I dream highways, I nightmare stoplights at attention. When you are no longer the driver, will momentum (the memory of your foot on the pedal) keep this truck rolling.

III.

The shoebox in my closet with old ski passes and pressed pennies from touristy places, letters with your ugly but neat cursive, scribbling things of (little) consequence: Don’t forget to grab the milk.
from the milk box.
Granola on sale.
Banana bread recipe.

IV.

At home, the boxcutter slips from your grip,
slices callused hands. Your skin didn’t used to wound
so easily. You continue working, come in after dark, don’t notice
the drywall lining the hallway,
ever textured or painted over,
(you meant to finish this
years ago).

V.

One day, this truck will rumble around
a too-tight curve, or maybe the road will just
end, and when you are thrown
from the driver’s seat,
there are no records
of lazy turns, where we went
when you pulled the key from the ignition,
the long and (un)eventful trips across county lines. Instead,
I’ll pull the black box from the wreckage, read your last
numbers: dates and times of your foot
jerking on the brake (not ready not ready)
and how fast you were going when the tires
were still sparking road.
Perseid Meteors
Max J. Phannenstiel
The Weaver
Ahmad AlQudaihi
7:55 AM September 15th, 2017; or the second day the Earth smiled

for Cassini

I dreamt the Earth had rings that glistened in sunbeams
and cast soft lime shadows against towering mountains,
just beginning to snuggle into their winter clothes.
satellites surf through the flattened hula-hoops, scattering debris
into the atmosphere, turning into meteors,
comets, the dust we inhale
after their fall to Earth.

_Cassini_, your name speaks of Gods:
a dust mote sitting at the table of giants—
Titan, Pandora, Atlas, Prometheus,
and the great Saturn all welcome you
with fermented hydrogen
pouring forth from golden goblets.

drink with them until they divulge their secrets.
laugh with them until new moons coalesce from Saturn’s pregnant sea.
play in their gravity. weave between their rings.
tell stories of Life, of kids with galaxies in their eyes and nebulae on their lips.
Cassini,

my favorite pictures
are the ones you took of home— “look
at all those smiling faces!”
and of Enceladus, diving below the horizon
to reassure you. falling is inevitable.
our mote of dust, become a meteor,
pierce through acrid skies. A single
tear on the face of giants.
Circular Motion
Annabelle Peterson
Online Content

Object Series

Alien Invasion Brenda Bain glass
Assemblage in B Minor Laine Greaves-Smith mixed metals
Chain Gang Laine Greaves-Smith mixed metals
Framing Stuart Shirley steel
Lamp Laine Greaves-Smith mixed metals
Metamorphosis #4 Clayton Haines ceramic
Metamorphosis #5 Clayton Haines ceramic
Murrini Swirl Brenda Bain glass
Obscurity Julia Cormos photography
One Night Stand Laine Greaves-Smith mixed metals
Opposing Wedges Stuart Shirley steel and copper
Tripod Stuart Shirley steel and brass
Under the Sea Lindsey Nield beads and string
Creation Series Chloe Johnson mixed media

Music

Dee Josef Bourgeois
Evergreen Mitchell Cutts
Lucerne Mitchell Cutts
Salvage Khris Clymer
Tears of the Arizona Khris Clymer
The Limit Joren Froschheuser
Contributors

Ahmad AlQudaihi
An adventurous traveler.

Brenda Bain
Currently retired, I graduated in 1983 with a degree in Chemical and Petroleum Refining Engineering. I started in stained glass in 1995 and within a few years got interested in glass fusing. In addition to taking classes all over the United States, I have taught stained glass and glass fusing. I love to experiment with new techniques. The piece, Murrini Swirl, is made using a vitrograph kiln which has an opening in the bottom of the kiln that allows glass to flow creating rods which are then cut (murrini). This piece has about 500 individual murrini. Alien Invasions is made by stacking glass and fusing into a block, then cutting cross-sectional slices which are then laid out into a design. I live in Golden with my husband (also a Mines graduate).

Connor Beekman
Connor Beekman was born in 1998 in Aliso Viejo, California. He received his first camera as a gift for his eighth birthday and enjoyed taking pictures of animals at the zoo. Since moving to Aurora, Colorado in 2012, he has taken nearly 80,000 photographs, approximately 0.004% of which have been published in *High Grade*. Connor enjoys hiking, taking pictures of nature, and going on long road trips. He is now a sophomore in Civil Engineering with interest in transportation.

Ronghua “Andy” Bei
Andy is probably a fake engineering major. He reads at least two extracurricular books per semester. ETS (a test agency for grad school) told him that he actually scored higher in verbal reasoning than in quantitative reasoning.

Agata Bogucka
Agata Bogucka does video and photography for the Office of Communications and Marketing, and is the faculty advisor for Mines Photography Club and Filmmakers at Mines. She has always had a passion for the sciences and visual storytelling, and is happy to have the opportunity to combine both in her work for Mines. Agata’s dream
is to one day move to New Zealand and start her own documentary production company.

Alec Boyd
Alec is the Music Editor for this year’s *High Grade*. When not at school his time is spent at local bookstores, music shops, and in front of his piano. He not only finds joy in the creation and discovery of these media, but also through the sharing of them with those around him.

Jack Brinkman
A Junior in Mechanical Engineering and flirting with a minor in Mathematics. I’m relatively new to creative writing with only a few disorganized attempts at stories, but nonetheless keep getting drawn back to writing, hopefully this time with a little more structure. I’m hoping to make this a regular outlet for my ideas and to entertain a few people in the process. My other pastimes include historical fencing, reading and wandering.

Alex Clymer
Alex Clymer (Mines B.S. ‘10) currently lives in Lakewood, CO. She is a painter and photographer specializing in animal portraits and nature photography. Alex works her side-hustle art business while also working full-time as a technical writer for Oracle. Even though she enjoys both gigs, Alex longs for the days when she can escape the corporate world and be an artist full-time.

Julia Cormos
Julia Cormos is a high-flyin’, photo-takin’, math-lovin’ chick. She enjoys finding innovative ways to challenge the status quo of photography and also loves playing and listening to music. If you run into her, ask her about her love for an amazing color scheme or a well-crafted joke!

Landen Cross
Will work for food.

Wenli Dickinson
Scientists have rejoiced after discovering that Wenli Dickinson is no longer considered
an endangered species. Here at Mines, with mentorship and friendship from Toni and Kyle, she has flourished. It is reported that this not-endangered-but-still-rare Wenli thrives on a steady diet of poetry and environmental stewardship. Though it is her senior year, scientists do not foresee any future endangerment of her species.

Cliff Ghiglieri
Cliff was born a rabbit in a lush English down in 1885. He grew up strong and fast and tolerant to inclement drizzles. When his entire family and extended family’s extended family was suffocated in an unseasonably thick fog, he made his way to Colorado on the pancontinental railroad in time to be a cowboy. Rabbits are not cowboys and so had to invent a new identity fast. He recalled some advice given to him in the steerage car on his journey west of West: “I tell you there’s a whole lot of pissin’ in this world and not enough gumption. You have to break a lot of eggs to get breakdance legs.” It took a hundred odd years to get his gumption, long past the age of the cowboy. He’s given up nibbling carrots for burning the midnight liquid crystal display. Tall as any one and with an eye for what’s good, you would never suspect this animatronic talent is operated by a rabbit.

Laine Greaves-Smith
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.

Ann Gustafson
Ann Gustafson is a senior in Computer Science with a focus on Robotics and Intelligent Systems. Her hobbies include watching movies, talking about dogs, and using humor to mask the pain of being an engineering student.

Clayton Haines
Clayton Haines is a second year student at the Colorado School of Mines. He enjoys
making ceramics, skiing, and wasting time on Netflix.

**Amara Hazlewood**  
Aspiring Chemical Engineer, accidental artist, admirer of animals.

**Sammie Inks**  
Sammie grew up in Colorado and is currently a sophomore at Mines majoring in chemical engineering. She has always pursued photography as a hobby, and especially loves travel photography. She is very excited that two of her photos have been chosen to be published in this edition of *High Grade*!

**Derek Jacobsen**  
One bright day in the middle of the night,  
two dead boys got up to fight.  
Back to back they faced each other,  
drew their swords and shot each other.  
The deaf policeman heard the noise;  
came out and shot the two dead boys.  
If you don’t believe this lie is true,  
ask the blind man who saw it too!

**Chloe Johnson**  
Although currently a first year Ph.D. student in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering, visual art has always been one of Chloe’s passions. Within use of different media she found another challenging use for creativity in materials engineering, and specifically fell in love with minerals and metals. With all of her work she tries to learn more about God and who He is, and her work is an expression of what He brings to life in her mind. This particular series of 4 canvases (with one more to come) was inspired by a trail in the DuPont State Forest in Asheville, NC, and the verses in Romans 8:18-25, part of which says “For the earnest expectation of creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”
Aidana Khabdesh
A proud Kazakhstani with an aptitude for the realm of both science and arts. Hereafter, I decided to pursue science for my profession and arts as my hobby. Particularly being keen to earth sciences, I chose petroleum engineering for my major.

As for the arts, I am passionate about photography, drawing and painting. I appreciate the beauty around me and try to capture it. In addition, I like to express how and what I feel through my hobby.

Continuing the trend you saw in my little biography above, I am someone who likes both cats and dogs, both tea and coffee, and my favorite color is a mix of both green and blue or in other words turquoise.

Colton Kohnke
Colton Kohnke is bad at directions and once got lost going to his high school a week before graduation.

Matthew Kowalsky
Matt’s graduating in May 2018 with a Bachelor’s in Physics. He’d like to thank Toni Lefton, Wenli Dickinson, and Kyle Markowski for making *High Grade* a space for development, sanity, and creation throughout his three years publishing in the journal.

Alexandria Leto
*Alexandria* would be mad if you actually called her that. (Sorry mom.) Please just call her Alex. Anyway, she’s an artist trapped in the mind of a scientist...or maybe the other way around. Just like the rest of us here at *High Grade*.

Kyle Markowski
Kyle is a scholarly and artistic chap who plans to vacate the premises and circumnavigate the Earth on a sailboat with his husband, Chad. He then plans to circum(?), navigate the universe in search of those futurehumans who stole his brain many years ago. He considers his introduction to Wenli in Calculus II Honors, and his consequent introduction to *High Grade* via Wenli, and his consequent introduction to Toni via *High Grade* and Wenli, and his consequent introduction to poetry via Toni, *High Grade*, and Wenli, and his consequent introduction to a more intimate experience of
his emotions via poetry, Toni, *High Grade*, Wenli, and Chad, pivotal moments in his life. He looks forward to exploring the boundaries of existence with these incredible people, institutions, and forms of artistic expression by his side.

**Xan McPherson**
Xan McPherson is a Colorado native who has always been obsessed with mountains and snow. She is an avid skier and has been skiing for 27 months in a row. She is also a member of the Women’s Rugby Team at Mines. She plans to major in Engineering Physics so she can work at a nuclear power plant in Switzerland and ski and paint the Alps for the rest of her life.

**Darin Meeker**
Darin Meeker is always on the go, and uh you’re lucky if you catch him. Cause he’s too fast. Um but not like “woah too fast,” but fast?

**Nicholas Mizenko**
Nicholas is a real hooligan of a guy who’s head fell out of the clouds and got lost in the mountains. That’s where you’ll find him.

**Rachel Mizenko**
Rachel is a senior in Biochemical engineering who has told herself she would submit to *High Grade* for the last three years. Turns out the fourth time is the charm.

**Pen Name**
Call me Bic. Call me Sharpie.

**Lindsey Nield**
Lindsey is a Statistics major who would rather sit on her ass and bead than get an internship and become a productive member of society like the rest of her peers. She would like to thank Grey’s Anatomy for providing optimal background noise, her cat whose antics doubled the completion time for this project, and alcohol for always being there when she needs it.

**Hannah North**
Hannah North is a fledgling poet, rock climber, violinist, and senior in Engineering
Physics at CSM (in that order). She would like to thank Dr. Seth Tucker for his poetry instruction and candor. This is her first published work.

Carolyn Pauly
Carolyn is a second-year Master’s student in Geology.

Katharyn Peterman
Katharyn is a graduating senior in Civil Engineering. She discovered through her time at Mines that she could string words together that sounded pretty nice...and thus she started writing poetry. Thanks for reading my little strings!

Annabelle Peterson
Annabelle Peterson from Parker, Colorado is a student constantly in motion. She is the astrophotography officer for CSM’s Astronomy Club and loves taking her Nikon D750 out to photograph the stars when the temperature is at its lowest. Although she loves astrophotography, she is a well-established professional concert photographer and has photographed both local and internationally known screamo and metal bands such as Miss May I, Motionless in White, Pierce the Veil, and We Came as Romans. Portraits and candids make the world go ‘round for her. When she is not photographing the universe, she finds herself studying physics and aspires to work as an astrophysicist to change the future of space exploration. You can find her buried under four kilotons of homework and to-do lists during the week. On the weekends, you’ll find her in the moshpit/behind the barricade.

Max J. Phannenstiel
Max Phannenstiel is a freshman studying Chemical Engineering this year. Photography has recently been one of his biggest passions, and it has taken him all over the world to places like Alaska, Central America, Iceland, and multiple destinations throughout Europe. Growing up in Vail, Colorado, he has always appreciated beauty that has surrounded him. He’s been lucky enough to turn his passion into a small business where he’s been hired for shooting portraits, landscapes, lifestyle shots, and anything in between. Please visit his website at www.maxjphotos.com for more photos!

Carson Pierce
Please do some research before getting an exotic pet. Just because an animal will sur-
vive in captivity doesn’t mean it will thrive. Can you provide the same enrichment that the animal could get in the wild? Are you getting this pet just to look cool? Go volunteer at a bird sanctuary or something. So many pet birds are given up after a few years though they can live up to 60 years.

Alyssa Rozendaal
Alyssa is a Mines graduate adjusting to life in the Midwest and generally preferring poetry to chemistry.

Zach Schlittenhart
Zach is a junior in MME. When he isn’t busy with the whole Mines thing, you can find him playing basketball, strategizing chess moves, or attempting to write stories that are either deeply profound or completely absurd. He would like to thank all of the people who stoked his creativity, and hopes this is just a step in his journey as a writer.

Alyssa Schwarz
Alyssa Schwarz is a masters graduate from Mines’ Geological Engineering department, is a proud native of 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. She believes art should gently tug at your edges, motivating you to think, do, create, explore... If it even causes you to linger for an extra second, it has served a purpose.

Richard Sebastian-Coleman
Richard is an alumnus of School of Mines and served as Co-Editor-in-Chief of High Grade from 2015-2016. He now works as an Environmental Engineer but has continued artistic pursuits after graduation. He is honored to have his work be part of High Grade once again and hopes you enjoy this edition of the journal and artistic expression of the Mines community in general.

Stuart Shirley
Stuart has been forging steel for six years. He started welding in high school, with his instructor’s encouragement he built a gas forge and a treadle hammer, both useful tools for a blacksmith. During this time Stuart became active in Rocky Mountain
Smiths (RMS). Over the last few years Stuart has focused on forging tools for his own shop. This focus led to his demonstration on how to forge a hammer for Rocky Mountain Smiths. Last year Stuart spent five months away from school working full time in a Blacksmith and fabrication shop in New York state, where he helped teach classes and explored multiple methods for shaping steel. The works displayed here in High Grade are pieces that Stuart created while working in New York.

Katrina Steinman
Katrina is a senior in Mathematics, and plans to attend Mines for the Computer Science graduate program next year. She enjoys reading and creative writing.

Kasra Taghikhani
He is a Mechanical Engineering PhD student from Tehran, Iran. He came a long long way from his hometown to find himself again and make a difference.

Samuel Vaughn
Mechanical engineering senior, artist and musician.

Connor Weddle
Please, God, don’t make me write another contributor bio.

John Whatley
John lives in Highlands Ranch, Colorado and transferred to Colorado School of Mines from Arapahoe Community College. He is a junior studying Chemistry with a Biochemistry Specialty. He wishes to continue his education with graduate studies in Molecular Biology, and then research antibiotic resistance. He was awarded Outstanding Photograph by the American Scholastic Press Association for his picture “Visitor” in the 2015 edition of the Progenitor, ACC’s art and literary journal.