

# HIGH GRADE

COLORADO SCHOOL OF MINES JOURNAL OF THE ARTS

# SPECIAL THANKS

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Tobin-

I can't sleep with my window blinds open.

If the light from a world living outside reaches my eyes, my mind, my dreams, I can't sleep. I lie awake and I think, in the spotlight of streetlights that reflect through a mountainside, about what I will do when I have slept enough. I look forward to it. So I cannot look down unless the window is covered and the room dark, empty, thoughtless, just until I make it through this hour.

I can't sleep—I can't march monotonously through the needs of the body and the voices around, while the night sky and the lights of campus shine across the space I lock myself within. They have too much gravity to turn away from. I sleep and I survive, my mind as quiet as possible, the shutters drawn tight from the unignorable sensation of future through glass.

I have had the blinds closed for two years.

I hope that when you read this, when you rest your eyes on creativity, you are awake. I hope you laugh some and think more. I hope your room is bright with stars and your hands are busy with your lyre. I hope you lean over and open your shutters.

Enjoy. It might be a good day.

Jade-

When I wake in the mornings I open all of my window blinds.

I let the world appear as a fresh breath, a moment of solitude where I can see the clean snowfall or the green grass and feel, for a second, that I could be the only person in the world and the infinite possibilities of the landscape beyond my paned window glass exhaling in front of me.

Sometimes I let the morning air and light sweep through my home to wash out the lingering scents of meals, hunger, pain, anxiety, love, loneliness, laughter. It illuminates

my shadows and deafens my fears. A sweetness erases the treks of the previous day and mirrors what is yet to come.

All for what is yet.

As you read our journal I hope you feel the gentleness that comes with opening a window. Breathe in the air and feel the sun.

Dhruva-

I often walk before I sleep to clear my mind. As I make my way through quiet suburban streets and footpaths my mind wanders the possibilities of the coming day and the triumphs and mistakes of the passing one. I allow myself to daydream with little awareness of my surroundings and in doing so I am free. I walk in mundane surroundings but I do not grow bored, my mind fixates on my hopes, fears, and regrets.

My eyelids grow leaden as my head falls into my pillow; I come to the same realization every night: the sun will rise in the morning, no matter what disappointment yesterday held.

As you read this 46th edition of *High Grade* we hope you will let your mind wander freely, to venture through despair, emptiness, laughter, beauty, and harmony into the rising sun.

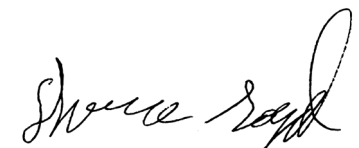
Happy reading,  
Your Editors-in Chief



TOBIN HOUCHIN



JADE NJO



DHRUVA SOHAL



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# LAMENT TO STARLIGHT

MEGAN MCFEETERS

I wonder, sometimes, at the stars.  
I've heard tales, almost countless in number  
That regale them as infinite:  
That to count them all would take a thousand years.  
But I look up now, into that deep dark  
Infinite black of space, and I see none.

It's easier to count the building lights on the horizon.

I've been told too, that the stars  
shine more brilliantly  
Than anything on our Earth,  
That there is nothing more beautiful than a constellation,  
For therein lies a story told by people  
Who lived so long ago we'll never remember them.

And I wonder: are our own stories not worth that immortalization?

It burns in me then, sometimes,  
That desire to see the stars sparkle like fire,  
Stealing my breath away in flaming rivulets;  
Their passionate colors dancing  
So much brighter than any neon,  
So much grander than any computer screen could capture.

And I am only left with photos from a robot that will never appreciate what it couldn't see.

And I lament the starlight.  
I lament the starlight that dances beyond our vision,  
The starlight that inspired a thousand poets,  
Awoke a thousand astronauts' dreams.  
The starlight we will never see.

# THE STRANGER'S TALE

ERIN COOPER





# SEEING INTO THE DARKNESS

GAVIN SHER



# PROCESSION

CLIFF GHIGLIERI

When I was young, I used to imagine  
The stars traveling through the night  
Sky, like a cloud of swallows  
Swiftly by.

Now I know that stars  
Are massive burning things  
And when I look toward the sky  
It makes me carsick.



# SOLSTICE

COLIN WILSON

As the twilight solstice passed me by,  
so did the shadows that trailed  
from my heartstrings.  
The frost began to melt from  
the way I felt about her;  
not any her specifically—  
merely the idea of a  
her.

I stand now in pale blue predawn;  
shadowless, gray but for the green of my eyes,  
warming to her calling,  
chest swelling with desire  
and the sweet air that comes coldest just before sunrise.  
The new year is a new blanket of snow upon my world,  
fragile flakes twinkling in the fading starlight.

I am not where I wish to be,  
but I can see spires and pinnacles  
jagged on a glowing horizon  
and I am going to them now.

I have decided this:  
I will walk through the lengthening days  
and sleep in the shortening nights,  
and I'll shoulder my longing,  
trudge to wherever the green brook is flowing  
and she won't be there—

she won't be any of those wheres—  
but her voice will float in the downvalley breeze  
and I will smell traces of her hair in the fens and the copses  
and when I am spent, and asleep  
I will feel her

as if she never left,  
as if she'd always been there,  
all along.

# SUNRISE AGAINST TORREYS PEAK

PATRICK BARRINGER



# FREE STANDING

MASON WEEMS



Steel

# HIM

MALCOLM JOHNSTON

your room the world  
pour buckets on the floor water  
soaks the carpets  
stains the wood  
fries the cords  
seeps into the bedsheets  
drags jackets down  
hides the door handle  
hides the light switch  
blacks out the windows  
stops the fan you  
bang on the door  
no one can hear you  
hit the window  
but there are blinds you  
drown yourself waiting  
for someone  
to open the door  
or open the window  
and ask  
if you're alright  
(and I've  
been carried down the hallway  
hat flying off  
clothes soaked  
coughing and spluttering  
too many times to ask  
again)



# COMPULSORY

## CADY SHOCK

Between the girl I was and the woman I will become there is a veil. I glide through the church, my father's arm in mine. We are flanked by pews manned by every family member you will never meet. They wouldn't have liked you anyway. No, they are here for John. To them, he is Jimmy Stewart, Jesus, and Ronald Reagan, all wrapped up in a tailored suit. They listen with bated breath when he speaks, applauding accomplishments that will never come. If I was younger, I would have been resentful that my half of the church had adopted my husband-to-be with such fervor. But here, thirty feet from the future, marrying a hand-picked stranger, I have the good sense to appreciate it. Goodwill is the line between poverty and rapture. Goodwill is the only thing that stayed my family's hand when they found out about you. Goodwill put me in this gown. Goodwill saved you.

In this aisle, I try not to think of you. Not thinking of you—of hidden touches, of long nights, of skin blemished by kisses—has become my daily pastime. My mother and sisters would babble over piles of wedding magazines, and I would sit there, reminding myself to forget. To forget your Brownstone, your burned bra, your licorice-colored boots. To forget your wit and your clever tongue, twisting against mine. To forget the look on your face when I left. To forget when we were tangled up in a twin bed, your tongue trailing its way down my torso like you were painting a map.

"I love you," you told me through fevered kisses. I don't remember if I told you that back. I did love you, though. I still do. I always will.

My train catches on the edge of one of the benches. I doubt anyone notices as I tug the white fabric back. But in a half-decade, the man in the pawnshop will note the tear. 30 dollars off—a whole week of groceries—for a rip a five years earlier. I will cry in my car afterward, gripping my veil like it might return me to this current moment. It won't.

The dress will be the beginning of the end. The rot will fester when he whines about an empty fridge after another failed business venture. It will seep deeper every time I wake to an unfed baby, or I am forced to beg my parents for rent. And it will become malignant when he calls me frigid for refusing to drop to my knees on command. In a week, on our honeymoon, he will make love to me for the first time in a bed my parents bought him. He will promise to make it good, and I will tell him that I am a virgin. And maybe I will think that it's true. And it will still be a lie.

The first time, you tasted like strawberries. You tasted like sugar and sweetness, and you laughed when my head rose. I was bewitched, dazed, and euphoric in the space between your thighs. I hadn't thought to want it before, but for you? I would have

climbed up the sky and plucked the moon from the night, if only you asked.

When he asks, I will spread my legs, and I will bear it. I will imagine your touch as I bleed on fresh linens, and when he asks, I will reply with honeyed words that taste like ash. I will be patient as he fumbles to understand anatomy that is not his own. And I will endure. I will do so much for him I wish I could have done for you.

I look around the pews for you, and I am not surprised by your absence. The words I said were meant to undo us. We will be 40 when we speak again, halfway between Manhattan and Cincinnati. You will gush about your marriage, and the woman you fought to call your wife. I will smile and wonder on the virtue of patience. I will want you, just as I always have. And I will not get you.

We met in the subway, as I tried to navigate an incomprehensible map and make it back to Brooklyn from Manhattan. You looked like the manifestation of all my parents' fears: tattoos and layers of black leather, with lips darker than communion wine, and just as holy.

"Tourist, or small-town girl trying to make it in the big city?" you teased, tracing the line to a stop. I told you I was from Ohio, and you stifled a giggle, and it sounded like a choir of angels. "Sweetheart, you aren't even in the right zip-code."

"I'm lost," I laughed, shuddering as you laid a hand on my shoulder. You guided me through the secrets of the New York subway with ease and kindness. You directed me to your favorite dive long before our first date there. You showed me the ropes, and, eventually, you showed me everything else.

You will not make that offer at that little café in Pennsylvania. You will not tell me how much you missed me.

"I'm lost," I will cry, and you will hold me. You will not ask me what I mean, and I will not tell you. We will let the silence speak.

I make it to the end of that aisle, and I stare my future down, my past fluttering behind me.

"I'm lost," I proclaim. And I follow that first truth with the lies. "But John found me." The vows are long and benign, and undeniably false. "I do," I finally promise, knowing that I don't mean it. I swear, I don't. But if you know that in 20 years, or even care, you will not say so. You will say you are satisfied, and I will return the sentiment.

And just like so much I have done, and so much I will do—I do not mean it.

**ROUGE**  
AMIT SELA





# DESERT SOLILOQUY

COLIN WILSON

Let my words be the dusty road you walk  
when the heat of your emotion  
makes mirages all around you.  
Let them lead you past towering buttes  
where brown-eyed bison stare into your soul  
and recognize the wanderer within you.

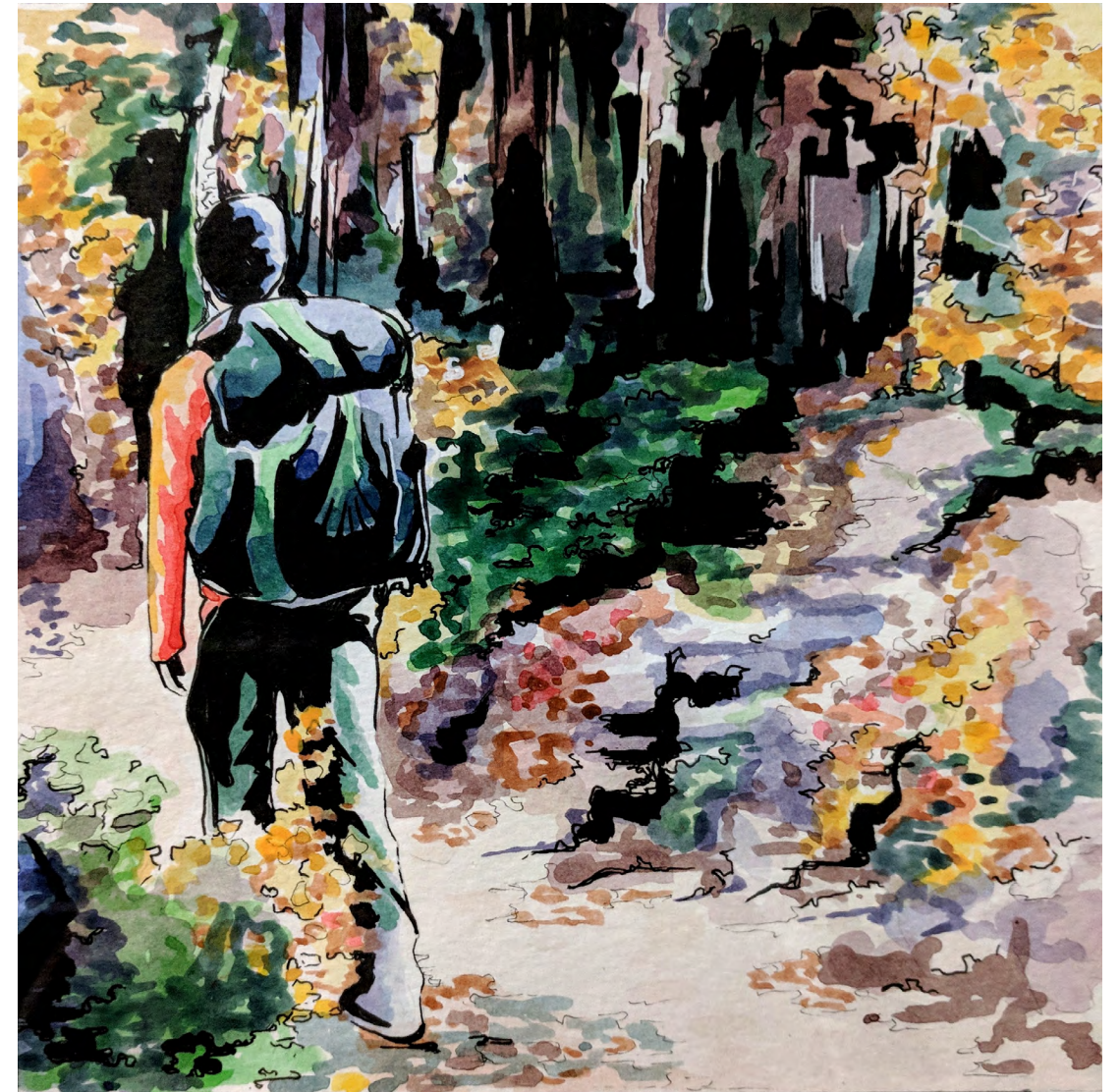
Follow these words up to vast plateaus and overlooks  
where your heart can soar with the red-tailed hawk,  
whose screech echoes like your lonesomeness  
over miles upon miles  
upon miles  
of sagebrush and canyons  
which fade, like your memories,  
into a golden haze somewhere just short  
of the horizon.

Rest your boots here and let me paint for you  
the pale embers of a sunset that forgot  
to take you with it  
as it traveled far beyond this mesa—  
which only the rattlesnake and the yucca  
and no man  
can call home.

Here, I can guide your gaze from the precipice,  
but no more,  
for I cannot describe what lies beyond  
the dusk slowly overtaking us.  
Only the jackrabbit's skull,  
gleaming under the full moon, knows  
how to say it,  
but cannot speak.

# BUT THE LEAVES WERE GOOD

K. VULETICH



# SOLITUDE

ANNA CHANDLER



# CHEVROLET

HANNAH FREY

Sweeping darkness and amber warmth embrace me under the covers,  
Outside, I hear the cold metal door open and shut with a click,  
and the engine starts with hesitance,  
Headlight beams rush through the gaps of my blinds  
from the same truck you first taught me how to drive,

You drive off before sunrise, long before I ever have to get out of bed,  
to resume the burden of carrying the sky,  
and to sell your soul and spine

You come back from work after sunset,  
a thousand years older every time,  
With dirt under your nails and exhaustion heavy in the air,  
you try to leave your troubles at the door,  
but your walk falters with obligation,  
and worry is engraved on your face,

Enslaved in a world  
in which it is never enough



# FIVE NIGHTS

## GRETA HEITMANN

1. The night before John Mulaney went to rehab: We lied down underneath my Christmas tree. The lights glistened above my head, like little suns in my eyes. Indian food littered across my coffee table in stark contrast to the usually pristine condition of my living room. God my mother would have been furious. We were in an unfamiliar place. I didn't host things at my house. Only on rare occasions, when my parents were not home to create tension, did I extend an invitation to my closest people. We were watching the same comedy special for the hundredth time. Comforting, I suppose, and predictable. Unlike our conversations. How are you doing? I was sexually assaulted. Oh. Yeah. Oh. I'm sorry. It fucking sucks. Yeah. Yeah. The moment that I started feeling on edge when she spoke. Unsure of what I would hear. Not ready to have my reality shattered again. Wanting to keep some things sacred in my mind and not imagine what happened after I left the house on those nights. Not wanting to know how much of a third wheel I really was. Not wanting to realize that I was the only things supporting their metaphorical tricycle. Not wanting to know that what happened in my absence wasn't positive. That when I left, so did her safety. That was too much. The night I found out the severity of the situation.

2. The night before Easter: I didn't want to sit and watch the Muppets movie while she got high and then sprayed dry shampoo into the air around us to mask the smell, but what choice did I have? When you're abandoned by everyone, what else are you supposed to do? I guess I could have gone home and eaten a hard-boiled egg that I hid for myself to find in the piano bench or champagne bucket where my mother always did. But that seemed a little too sad and a little too on the nose for the occasion, so I went to Fort Collins. Her friends, people who didn't know me, walked on eggshells around me. Festive, but not called for. I was uncomfortable, but it was better than being depressed and alone, so I dealt with it. She told me to come up whenever I needed. She tried to make her dorm room my safe space, but she was unsuccessful. Not for a lack of her trying, but rather for my heart being held captive in another place. A place that I was becoming able to visit with less and less frequency. I would have given any amount of money to be there, but alas, I was in Fort Collins and I didn't know any better. The night that I realized I had to become my own person.

3. The night that we lost a sailboat: The cicadas were deafening. More than anything, that is what I remember. I should probably remember the way that her face looked as she sat on that back porch, getting eaten alive by mosquitoes and watching an

overly excited dog set a ball at her feet, expecting her to pick it up. I should remember what I said to her, what small comforts I provided to the best of my ability, but I couldn't hear them over the chirping of the bugs that night. I should remember the way that Megan looked at me, with pleading eyes, trying to get me to help in ways that we both knew I couldn't. I should remember the sound of the sea or the smell of the night air, but I don't. I should remember why she was on the porch in the first place and why I wasn't inside in the cool air conditioning. I should remember the things that she told me, Megan hovering above like mosquitoes. All I remember are the cicadas and me finally breaking. The night that I stopped giving a fuck.

4. The night we played jack box games: Cold rushing to my hands. Shocked faces and one body lying on the floor. I didn't kill her but I might as well have. Someone shouting for the music to be turned down. Realizing that the one doing the shouting was me. Swirls of suffocating red, gold and black as streamers tumble from the ceiling. I'm sorry. I yell. I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry. I can't breathe, so I retreat silently to the bathroom where I sink to the cold tile floor. I can hear no one and everyone at the same time. Water is pouring in around me and I am powerless to stop it. I breathe. Slowly. Opening the door to see my best friends standing there, worried, creases forming between her eyebrows the way that they always do when she is tense. I hate that. My heart is in my throat. Maybe I should just go home. Maybe I should leave and never come back, but I'm everyone's ride and stranded all in one. Greta? Someone says my name. I recognize who it is but it might as well be a ghost. It's not your fault, the ghost tells me. I do not believe her. The night that made me realize that not everything was life or death.

5. The night before I left: Everything was going fine. I promise it was. Everything was going fine and we were playing Uno. Everything was going fine and Elizabeth had gotten a tattoo. Everything was fine and so many people were there. I was leaving, though, the next day. I was going to college. I wasn't fine, but that didn't matter. We were playing Uno in Megan's basement like always. We were playing Uno and it was funny and I was sitting at the top of the stairs. Then she was crying and I was staring at the floor, trying not to scream because if she cried again, I might combust into flames and never be extinguished. I bit my tongue until I tasted the blood in my mouth so that maybe I wouldn't slice her open with it. I was angry and she was angry and then it was over. She ran to the back porch. I stayed in the basement until I needed to leave. To sleep or at least be somewhere that wasn't there. Let me know if you need anything. Ok. Goodbye. So, I left. Speeding down Broadway like I know I shouldn't. My father's warnings ringing in my ears. I stepped on the accelerator. A ding on my phone. I'm sorry written in a little grey bubble. It's ok in a little blue one. Two lies. The night that I realized maybe I was a completely different person.



# GOLDEN GIRL

ANDERSON SALISBURY



# ENCIRCLED

COLIN WILSON

She fit a ferrule  
'round her heart  
her heart won't burst,  
her heart won't burst.

Not her heart,  
her heart's encircled,  
wreathed in gold and  
diamond stones.

Her lips let slip  
syllogisms,  
lonely melancholy rhythms  
drumming on the bars,  
of her rib cage—  
and it can't break  
her heart, it cannot break.

She says  
(she lies)  
the circlet feels  
like,  
feels like,  
(her finger traces  
spirals through her hair...)  
feels like...

this.

(... twirling off to  
empty space,  
she's curling always  
not quite  
closing  
each loop  
almost  
nearly

rings)

# SANDCASTLE

CALEB ROTELLO

We would pile buckets of beach grain  
into bastions and  
scoop a moat around,  
stopping every few minutes  
to pick sand from beneath fingernails.  
One hundred thumb sized rocks were our knights  
watching the walls  
patrolling the streets  
where the twig people dwelled in their clumps of dirt.

The waterline      crawls up      the shore  
The sun      grows      weary  
The sea licks, laps, ravages,  
casting its wet silk quick over the moat and to the gates.  
Each wave's clap pulls the walls down further  
as we pack the wet sludge  
back into the falling ramparts.

Our puppy fingers fail,  
our fortifications relent.  
Sandpaper sent by the wet deep  
smoothed our monument  
back into the beach.  
Before we can start building again,  
we are called to dinner.  
And as we leave, we argue  
whether the sandcastle stood closer  
to that family's umbrella  
or where those other kids were playing.

*For my brother and sister*

# A WHALE'S JOURNEY

GABRIEL DEL CASTILLO





SQUIRRELY POSE  
ALI KUAITAN





# THE BUGLER

ANNA CHANDLER



# SEASONAL AFFECT

MELANIE BRANDT

Feet planted in warm grey-gold sand,  
disappearing under  
dark tidal  
cinnamon red waves.

I know those silver lighted seats.  
They reside in windowed coves  
and house us  
who occupy them.  
Still slightly warmed  
by those who have only  
just now left.

Suddenly loosened braids.  
Each plait woven still, but  
there is something of an escape here.

Sometimes, the sweetness  
of breath  
Is like a windward glance  
That steals,  
but answers  
with a loud echo.

# THE ELDERBUG TRIO

MALCOLM JOHNSTON

i. today the elderbugs  
cling to the glass doors  
and climb up and down the windows,  
black and red spots behind a thin curtain  
passing by each other for a moment  
but keeping their distance—  
why did I never notice them?  
did they all drop in last night,  
or am I just always looking  
at the ground?

ii. opening the door  
and stepping inside  
I made my way to the stairs  
but paused and looked down  
at a crushed elderbug,  
a spot of red cracked chitin  
easy to miss in clumps of dirt  
by someone maybe like me

looking for help on a project  
or maybe helping someone  
with their project, in any case in some way  
going somewhere to do something  
and not looking down

iii. early one night,  
while the fall  
began to remember  
it was fall,  
I grabbed a sink handle  
and felt something round,  
something I could crush  
under my finger—I  
screamed and threw  
my hands back

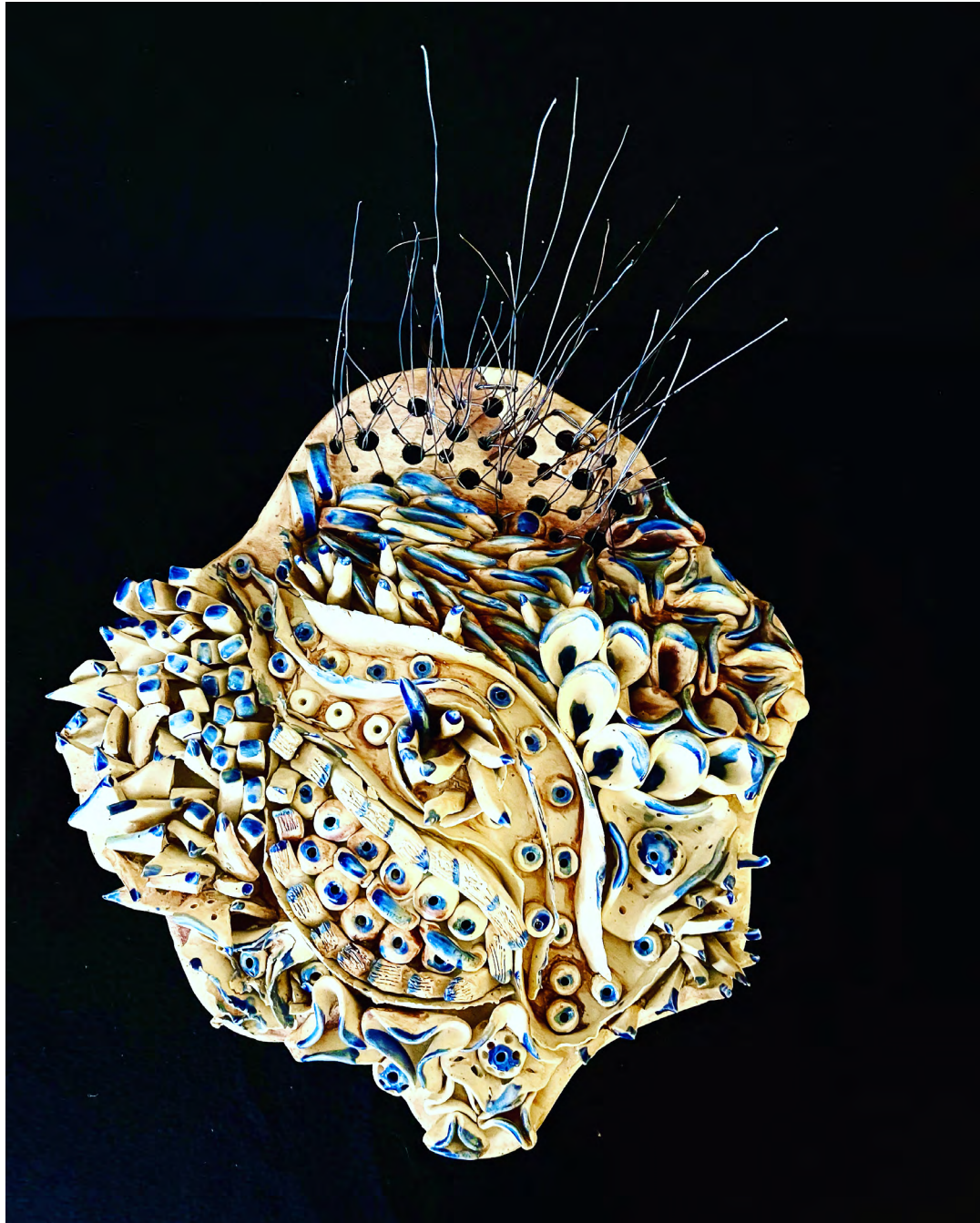
the elderbug, for its part,  
crawled down the side of the handle  
and disappeared between  
the white sink and black tile walls





# ELEVATION MODEL

ŞEBNEM DÜZGÜN



# BECOMING MORTAL

ANNABELLE PETERSON

When does Hell become holy?  
When entering swift alley ways in cities  
Tired of bearing the fattened calf of casualty,  
Born when the first stone was laid. Still, it  
sweeps aside glass to keep Your feet from  
bleeding.

Years sharpened saws that have  
Cut the wounds between *them* and *us*. All  
that's left are buildings made of mirrors,  
Shattered when we no longer  
Smiled at our own reflection.

It's the ever-present God that  
Bends the edge of the desk in  
A grip used on cities.  
Strangling the too-solid concrete,  
Our reflections remained.

No more cutting edges of trees,  
no leaves to mold on sidewalks.  
All we turn our heads to see is  
Me and her and him and us  
HERE, HERE, HERE,

Hell becomes holy when you  
Tell it to be mortal  
In the kaleidoscope reflections  
Of the city's fragile skin.



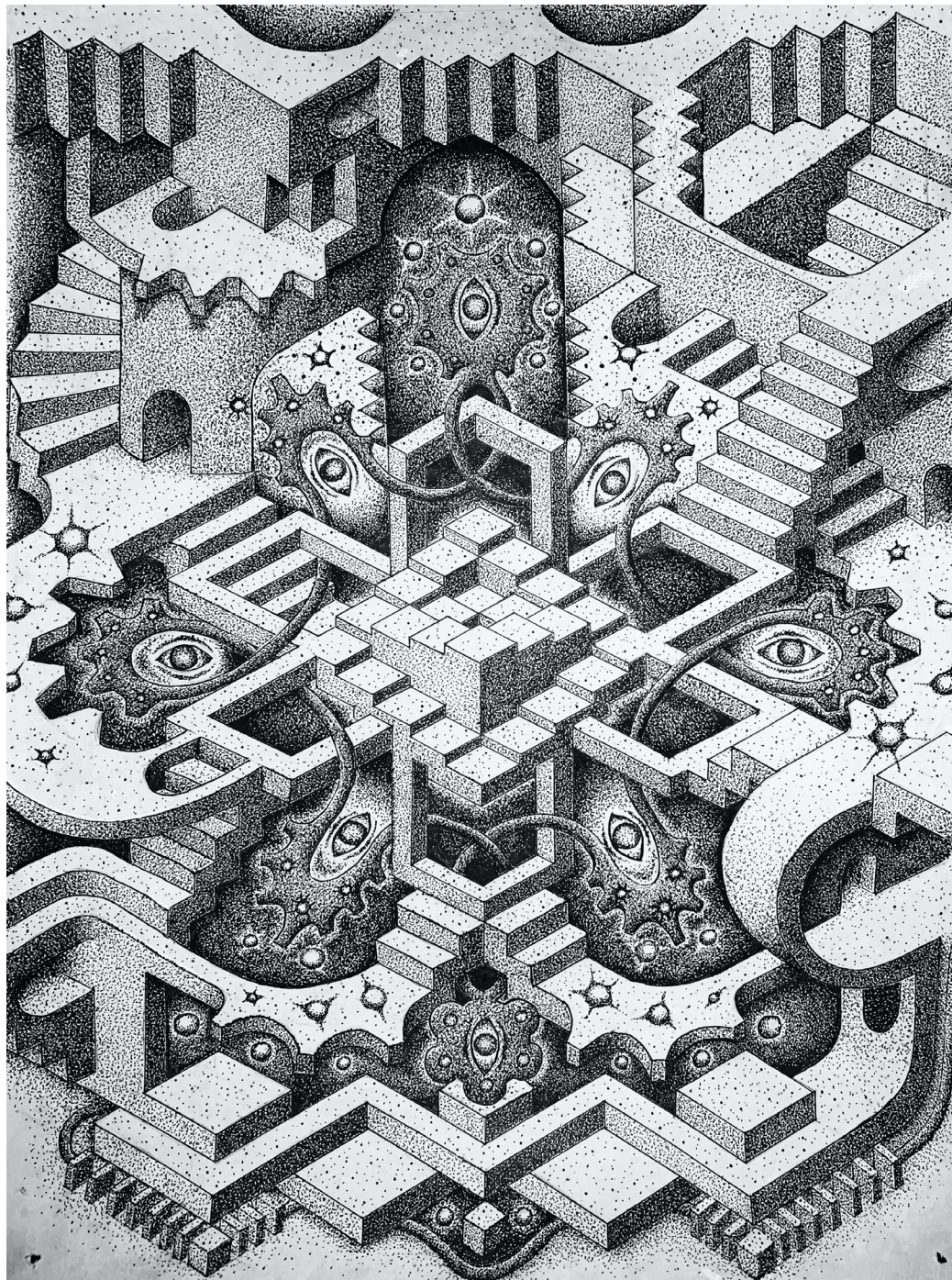
DOME OF BENEVOLENCE  
ALI KUAITAN





# STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

LONDON BROWN



# THE ELSEWHERE CARNIVAL

TOBIN HOUCHIN

You die on an unusually warm winter morning, halfway to the border with New Mexico, though you should have been traveling west.

You don't recall how. You don't recall much of anything, and that's as it's meant to be. You came into this world without memories and you leave it much the same, a perfect equilibrium, changed as a soul by everything and nothing at all.

You die on an unusually warm winter morning, and when you arrive Elsewhere, you think you feel fuzzy.

The strap of what was once a bus seatbelt still presses tight to your neck. The dial tone of a phone call ending accompanies your opening eyes, until it all fades into a colorful nothingness brushing against you. It had hurt, but you don't remember what *it* was anymore.

You stand up in a body that maybe you recognize, not quite yours but impossible to picture as anyone else's. You looked like this in your dreams and nightmares. You looked like this when you were closer to the stars.

Stepping forward into the cool, colored portrait of the nonexistent Elsewhere, you move because there is nothing else to do. The sky is firm and familiar under your feet. Fog, crafted of the woodchips and refuse of the scaffold of the universe, drifts between your fingers.

You travel. Time slips by distractedly as you follow the currents of Elsewhere. You squint, fingers curling automatically around the mists when they turn— suddenly or not at all— into a border. A fence.

You blink. It's strange, and you follow the chain link diamonds over with the pads of your fingers.

"Oh, exquisite!"

Sharply, you look up. The voice comes again, a musical clicking like the gears in a clock or the wheels on a roller coaster.

"Hello." It belongs to a creature of ash and starlight that looks nothing and everything like you. Nothing could look like you, and nothing could look like the creature, and you are the same in all the ways that matter.

"Where am I?" you ask. It's not the most important question right now, but it's the only one you have words for.

The creature looks vaguely humanoid for a moment when they smile. Bright universes shine between their teeth, and when you look at your hands, the traces of dimensions are in the lines of your palms.



“You’ve finished your ride,” the creature says. Their voice is not sound, but something in your thoughts, and it has an accent you’ve never known before.

“It took you a while to get back here to the Booth—I’m rather impressed,” they continue. “You must’ve been a real thrill seeker to get off that far away from the Carnival.”

You frown, looking over your shoulder at the colorful void. “Get off what?”

The creature shrugs, carefree and inviting. “Life, of course.”

Life. You remember and you don’t remember: that vague sense of a *before* you were here, an *after* you had been here already. “Oh.”

You take a step closer when the being beckons you, shifting like the light through a prism and propping their face on an arm you could have sworn they didn’t have before. “How was it?” they ask.

Your brows draw together in thought. You remember...

You remember how you always added too much salt to dinner dishes. How sore your throat got after you laughed. How you screamed differently when you still believed people would care. How your fingertips grew thick and worn from the strings of a violin. You remember how you always wanted to be profound, and you remember how it felt to get sunburned through the rolled-down window of an old car.

“It was...” you say, and trail off. How can you say you don’t know how you lived, when you know how you felt?

When you don’t even know the difference?

The being nods. “That means you had a good trip, I think. What are you thinking next?”

“Next?”

“Of course. You made your way back to the Booth; you are ready for next.”

You look at the chain link fence of crystal, and you look behind it. Really look, to the ripples of the mist and to the *voices*, the countless voices swimming on the edge of your perception. They sound happy. They sound busy. They sound exhausted. They sound like a crowd, a shifting constellation of dream-bodies and nightmare-hearts that wander through the rising, sculpted shapes of universes.

There are roller coasters.

There are roller coasters and carousels and ferris wheels and games. Some are crafted of silvery nothingness, while others are built of towering everything. Colors dance, souls move in cadence with something you can feel within yourself.

“Oh,” you say again.

Above you, something shoots away—a ray of light, a length of track, a tether in the dimension. You turn to watch, oceanic colors shifting across your misty skin. It’s familiar, and you smile.

“To Earth.”

The creature gets up and stands beside you. “Yes,” they say. “That one is going to

the eleventh century.”

“Don’t you get to...” You begin, gesturing toward the inside of the fence.

“Of course,” the being says with a smile. “But I am the rides I’ve taken, the lives I’ve lived, and more. We all play roles here, in the Carnival, between adventures.”

You lift your fingers from the chain links, drumming them instead. You bite your lip when you say, “I don’t have anything. I can’t buy a ticket, I don’t—”

The creature laughs this time, and it sends a ripple of amusement through the mists. “Contrary to popular belief,” they tell you, “you do not have to pay for the value of your life. You are welcome in the universe. You will always be welcome in the universe, as everyone is, no better or worse than anybody else.”

They extend their hand to you. You follow suit, imagining what you expect to find; a ticket, small and gold, with ridged edges like it was torn from a larger roll. Its shape is only in your mind—perhaps every shape is—but you like the feeling in your hand.

And then, with next in your fingers, you step through the Booth and into the crowd beyond.

The eddies of souls sweep you into their midst, and you do not fight. You remember everything and nothing. There is no way to know without learning, no way to think without experiencing, and so you let those who are so alike and so unlike you carry between scaffolds and brightly painted murals.

The pretense of decision is delight, and so you marvel at the universe.

The first time you stop, it is to play a game. The being behind its curtained stand waves to you, as if they recognize you. You halt your wandering to reach out. This creature is made of filigree and shifting ribbons and wings, and they are more human than anything you’ve ever seen.

“Would you like to play?” they ask.

You don’t know if you’ll win. But you have all the time in the universe locked in the ticket in your hand, so you agree. The ringed game pieces are heavy and pleasing in your hand. As you move them, roll them, string them onto curtains like beads, you find yourself smiling.

You don’t know the rules, but you don’t have to. The being seems neither greedy nor generous; simply honest. They don’t make things easier for you. They don’t hinder you, either.

At the end, they pass you a pebble splashed with vibrant paint. You turn it over in your hand.

“What is this?”

“Experience,” the soul says. “That is a comet in the orbit of the star *Ascella*. Everything it has ever known, everything it has seen and met, all the knowledge it has accumulated. I find it to be one of the sweetest.”

“Thank you.”

The curtains shift around the being's face. You risk asking, "what should I do now?"

"Anything you wish," they reply. "You can find a universe to build. You can try to walk the constellations. You can find the knowledge of every galaxy, of every tree on Earth, of every stone of any of our realities. Or if you're ready, you can use that ticket again."

Looking down, you uncurl your hand from the scrap of paper.

The being pulls something from between their collarbones. A coin, with a hole pierced through the middle; a ticket of metal and glass. "Choose a ride," they say. "Choose a life, and let eternity take you through its endpoints."

"I understand," you say. The paint chips off on your fingers and you have felt that before, felt all this before. You have played the games and you have ridden the carousels. You have built the scaffolds of the endless roller-coasters with the song of the universe between your lips, because you knew where eternity takes you.

Eternity stretches between this beat of your heart and the next.

You step back, and the currents of the souls tug at you. But your hand is still outstretched. The pebble lies in the hollow of your wrist.

"Would you like to come with me?" you ask the being who knows what the comets know.

They smile. "Yes."

The rides of life move above you, with their twists and turns and drops and starts. The curl of their rails are impersonal and so very, impossibly soulful, designed to become yours. Designed so you became theirs. They all began here, with you, and they have all ended before. Ended with the shape of infinity within the hollow of your ribs.

You died on an unusually warm winter morning, and what a way to end a roller coaster ride, truly?

You hear the shadow of clouds in front of the sun, the green of a highway sign in New Mexico when you should've been traveling west, the monotone of route announcements praying for your thoughts. Your forehead on the window is made of the scale of atoms.

You offer your soul to the wind of the universe, and here you are, here you leave, here you are clutching a ticket to the Elsewhere Carnival.

# COCKTAIL FOR THE END OF THE WORLD

JENNA WHITE





# DRIVE BY DRAGONFLY

CLIFF GHIGLIERI

The pattern of our step alters as we get older.  
Power in the toes, the tension in the knees and ankles,  
Watch your stride on the shore, in wet sand, and each day

The compound eye of a dragonfly  
driving by as the fog burns up  
truly sees the importance of passage

to the kinetics of travel, break and reform  
and still one advances even as  
one's weight is shuttled differently.  
Our bearing changing because of something as simple as  
how we chose to gaze

through a world that refuses to exist without a dragonfly.  
There's truth to that dragonfly,  
as there was in the image of an eye reflected  
in a suspended drop in the fog,  
now anxiously vaporizing in the vespering vortex churn of a wing

descending or maybe quickly glancing or unfazed  
by the never-nearing edge of the earth

since passage is a sort of privilege  
and perception, a sort of burden

because often where we look is what we hold

and truth is ignorant of perception,

and while there is, in truth, little difference between young and old bones,  
the reality is that sand compels a story  
of weakness and strength, heel, toe  
on and on, a pattern evolving

where the eye sees each droplet dissolve  
and reveal a world beyond fog and colored sky,  
light and edges, is/will/has refused to not exist and  
dreams that passage isn't just a forward act



# ACRE ACHE

WENLI DICKINSON AND KYLE MARKOWSKI

Miles by miles of open ground  
forced wide by the weight of sky,  
space's cosmic hum (antigravity). I am Witness.  
This travel is the axle,  
all musings, dreamscapes, terrors, big old bugs—the ancient wheel.

Ignoring the fog falling and lifting, like a curtain,  
a true pulse: They have  
the metronomic sound of a screen door slamming, in the wind.

When there is knocking at the threshold,  
when there is tapping on the eave [a northerly bird]—they hear  
claptrap (a solar wind).

I always thought all those people, in their byte-size homes,  
are numb without the buzzing:  
a kind of thrum  
accreting the soul, the gentle rocking of a child,  
lacking machinated rhythm.

Outside of: smoked chimneys, mercenary harbours, modern uniforms,  
[dragonfly wing] phase strokes beat, on quiet bays  
with the nameless sound of two celestial bodies  
ensnared in their own selfish gravity; I have faith:  
There is always composure,  
There is always a Song—  
and I step through.

Every acre is a square  
within which there is a circle,  
within which there is the self.

I am becoming green/blue/verdant with the world.  
here, History  
progresses and regresses like a movie reel  
spun backward.

I coalesce upon the trees.  
I converge with the moss.

# RAVEN

K. VULETICH





# TETHERED

WILL HU



# THE LAST SEVEN MONTHS WITH ALIENS

CALEB ROTELLO

If my forehead read 100,  
would the nurse turn me away  
to save your greying heart from stopping?  
Your first visit after seven months  
on a video call where  
we watched your cheeks sink  
and eyes droop shut.

This sanitized room and  
nursing bed,  
your whole world.  
A pale box  
with plastic roses,  
sterile as your expression  
and the plastic shield on my face.  
The curtains on your eyes,  
too heavy to open  
more than a crack.  
Is that open enough to see me,  
behind my plastic?  
Your small hand finds refuge on my finger, and closes  
like an infant

the last time I saw you move.

All you see is another alien  
come to hold your hand.

I am not here.  
Just a blue gown  
A covered face.  
Neither are you.  
Just an oxygen tank.

# WASP PEACH

MALCOLM JOHNSTON

a squished peach,  
its guts and juice  
splattered on the concrete,  
but the part  
that's facing you  
looks smooth and pink  
and fresh enough  
until you see the wasp  
that's been eating  
down to the pit  
and flies up at you  
when you get near  
like it's trying to figure out  
if it should eat you too.

# INTERDISCIPLINARY

ŞEBNEM DÜZGÜN





# WE DANCE ALONE

SHANE CRANOR



# THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SONG I EVER HEARD WAS BEING PLAYED AT A COFFEE SHOP

CLIFF GHIGLIERI

off of Main in San Diego  
Which shop was it?  
The Diedrich's, off of Main  
Are you sure it was a Diedrich's?  
No, why?  
Diedrich's was bought by Starbucks  
I don't think it was a Starbucks  
What color were the aprons?  
What?  
If they were wearing green aprons, it was a Starbucks  
I think they were blue or red or they did not wear any  
They had to be wearing aprons  
Red then



# SUN KISSED

DHRUVA SOGAL



# AFTERNOON HAIBUN

JADE NJO

An old cedar tree stands tall amongst the weeds in my Dallas backyard. Its leaves protect the deck from the sun where I recline at an empty table. A June afternoon smooths a mirage over the lake where turtles bathe and cranes saunter. Sparrows sing between shadows. Their shifting brown and red bodies lightly levitate among the bushes. Their shifting mud and blood bodies pitilessly peck at perennial roots. Old loam buries bones beneath beds of rosemary that gently sway in the wind. A mixture of lavender and birdsong and rabbits writhe in the heat to mask the musk of murder. Rabbits dig through dirt directly below the deck. Sweat forms on my lip and sweat forms on the rabbits' rib. Leaves harbor madness where rabbits gouge the ground and sparrows scream in silt. A June afternoon cradles decay below the deck where I hide at an empty table. An old cedar tree shrinks down into the weeds in my Dallas backyard.

*Summer sweats seep down trees that weep in the heat:  
bright in afternoon light*



# SOULS ON THE MARGIN

RICHARD SEBASTIAN-COLEMAN

A Short Satanic Comedy

## Cast of Characters

CHAD: Evil Head of Mergers and Acquisitions.

WARREN: Evil CEO and Chairman of the Board of Directors.

STEVE: Evil CFO.

CARA: Head of HR. Not intentionally evil, but discovers herself complicit.

JACOB: Younger employee within Mergers and Acquisitions, very eager to please.

JOANNE: Evil Head of Public Relations.

## Place

Boardroom of Nile Corporation.

## Time

The present.

## Scene

Setting: Boardroom of the Nile cooperation with chairs around it. A screen or flipchart is upstage of the table.

At Rise: WARREN, CARA, and JACOB sit around the conference table. CHAD is finishing his presentation at the screen/chart. Additional board members can be present if available.

CHAD

So, to wrap it up, we are now in a position to make some really key acquisitions in the next quarter which should result in near immediate operational cost savings across the board, fully paying for itself in only two years.

WARREN

Great Chad, thank you. Steve, did you get a chance to check this out?

STEVE

Yup, looked it over last week, gave it the green light.

WARREN

Great. Cara, do we have a sense for how their employees will react?

CARA

Don't think it's a secret that no one's thrilled to be acquired by us. However, got to hand it to your last head of H.R., left me a great game plan for easing them into it.

WARREN

Glad to hear it. You had a special project to present to us, right Chad?

CHAD

Yeah, for the second half of Mergers and Acquisition's time I'd like to introduce you to Jacob. We brought him on, has it even been a year? Less than a year ago, to look into non-conventional acquisitions and even some potential partnerships and I think he's really come through. I know a few of you already worked with him on some pieces of this, but I'm excited to let him pitch the full plan to you all. Jacob, you ready?

JACOB

Yes, sir.

WARREN

Well then take it away. Thank you, Chad.

JACOB

(Rises with just a bit of nervous energy and crosses to the screen to begin his presentation).

Ok, well, thank you, all, especially you, Mr. CEO...

WARREN

(Interrupting).

Just call me Warren.

JACOB

Ok great. Thank you...Warren. And the rest of the board for giving me the chance to present to you all. As Chad said, this is a non-traditional scheme, so please bear with me, and if you can, just save questions until the end.

WARREN

That's not how we do things here.

JACOB

Ok great. Just ask questions anytime then.

(Half second pause).

Alright, I'll get into it then, unless there are any objects. Objections!

(Another quick pause, the BOARD is ice cold. Slaps on a quick smile and begins moving through the presentation. There should be a full presentation developed for Jacob to give during the show. I have called out a few key moments where a slide transition or content is critical, all the rest is left up to the producing company).

Alright, so, everyday Nile Corporation is trying to keep our products cutting edge, our prices low, ensure that people think only to go to us and no one else for all purchases, and maintain a skilled and motivated workforce while slashing benefits. And, basically, everyone else is trying to do the same thing.

Now, the fundamental insight of my plan is this: that we naturally think of those with similar interest to our own as our competitors. However, if we can shift the paradigm, to instead view them as potential *collaborators*, we set ourselves up for highly productive partnerships.

STEVE

You know there are a ton of laws governing how you do that, right? That's why your department just buys out the competition.

JACOB

Right! But, buyouts are expensive and draw the attention of the press. And, of course, completely illegal actions are usually too risky. So, we have to ask ourselves, who can we work with simply, effectively, and discretely?

(Flips to the next slide, an enormous portrait of Satan).

Satan commands the vast material resources of the earth, the spirits of the damned, and has many of the same goals as we do. I won't deny that it is therefore natural to think of him as competition, and what competition, especially when he is generally characterized as not just the enemy of any specific person, company, or country, but of all mankind. But, I put it to you, when has Satan not been willing to provide persons or groups with wealth, knowledge, and/or direct power? All of which are critical assets to long term corporate growth. So...

CARA

(Interrupting as JACOB changes slides).

I'm sorry, is this a joke?

JACOB

(Surprised by the question).

Um. No.

(The rest of the board, also somewhat surprised, turns to look at CARA as well).

WARREN

Continue.

JACOB

Ok great. Once we shift to view Satan as an ally rather than an enemy, we open ourselves up to all the benefits he can provide. Of course, partnerships go both ways, and we must give the Devil his due. Thankfully, Satan's needs are simple. He wants souls to chew on for all eternity.



JOANNE

If you're asking for mine, you're not getting it.

JACOB

I'm not! And I'm not asking any of the rest of yours either! This is the second key insight that I made. According to the Bible, to Grimm's Fairy Tales, and to general cultural wisdom, the deal is always a lifetime of wealth, knowledge, and power, which I'll abbreviate to W K P for the remainder of this presentation, for one soul. So, who is the type of person to normally make a deal with the devil?

(Hesitation from the board. Finally, CARA speaks up, tentatively).

CARA

...Evil people?

(This response again produces surprised looks the other board members).

JACOB

I suppose sometimes. But, more generally, it's usually a young man with a lifetime ahead of him to enjoy the WKP provided. So, the question I asked myself was, "If a lifetime of WKP costs one soul, how much would WKP for just the 5 to 10 years that most of the members of this board have before retirement cost?" Well, mathematically, assuming at least a 70 year lifespan it should cost approximately 14% of soul.

WARREN

So are you proposing that we divide our souls for this?

JACOB

No, I don't think that's possible. The only reference I found for a precise and repeatable process to divide a soul are Horcruxes in *Harry Potter*, which I think we have to assume, without further evidence, is fictitious.

STEVE

So we sell our souls for a fraction of what they're worth?

CHAD

Guys, not that you don't have the right to question him, but I wouldn't have let him be here today if he hadn't thought this through. Give him a chance.

WARREN

Alright, continue. But I'm skeptical too.

JACOB

Thank you. The answer to this comes through re-examining our assumptions. It's a commonly held belief that all souls are equal in *God's* eyes, but in no way does that mean the same is not true for the Devil. At the end of C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, the namesake demon acknowledges that the likes of Hitler provide the most satisfying meals to the demons in Hell, while also acknowledging that sheer quantity of souls are also important to the mission of the Dark Father. So while our souls may be worth a lot to Lucifer,

WARREN

...a fraction of them may be worth the entirety of someone else's.

JACOB

Exactly! We can mortgage our souls and pay it back with others!

CARA

How are we going to get...

STEVE

(Interrupting).

How many souls are we talking? I'm not putting my name on any deal with the devil unless we have a surety that we're coming out on top.

JACOB

I'm glad you asked sir...

STEVE

Call me, Steve.

JACOB

Yes sir. Steve. Sir. Sorry. Sir. Steve, I'm glad you asked, and I have to thank Cara for her help on this.

CARA

(Surprised and implicated).

What?

JACOB

We assume the average souls worth is equivalent to the average GDP per capita. You all are board members of a company worth hundreds of billions, so the devil will need a lot of souls to equal a small fraction of your worth. However, I conducted a series of surveys with H.R. and found that the old adage of “people will do anything for their children” was not only true, but included an eternity of damnation.

CARA

Is that what was in the family pension plan survey you had me send out?

JACOB

Yeah, that’s the one! It found that in a representative sample of our workforce, almost a quarter of all employees would be willing to hand over their soul to the company if it meant long term benefit to their families and dependents. This number jumped to almost eighty-percent of the workforce in countries where our employees don’t speak English.

WARREN

Ok, where are we going to get the money for that?

CHAD

From Satan!

WARREN

Oh of course. Guess there’s no profit without some cost.

JACOB

Exactly, but have no fear. When we talk about the W and K of WKP, we mean *a lot of* wealth and a lot of knowledge, and the power flows naturally from them. Whether it’s a green jacket whose pockets are always full of gold, or the infinite knowledge of all history given to Faust, Mephistopheles can provide for short term needs and long term planning. We’ll enjoy untold wealth and only have to pass along a basic level of stability to those employees who make the trade. Homer Simpson only had to be offered a donut. I don’t think we need to expect our employees will want much more!

CARA

I’m sorry, are we taking every pop culture reference to Satan to be metaphysically true?

JOANNE

I mean, if we can’t assume Hollywood is in league with Satan, what business assumptions are safe?

CARA

Are you proposing that we slaughter a quarter of our workforce to give ourselves WKP?

JACOB

Thanks for using the acronym! But no. At the current rate of industrial accidents and natural mortality, we can safely assume that within the quarter of our worldwide workforce who take the bargain, the die off rate will essentially be a natural pay off plan. Board members can expect their loan to be paid off well within the anticipated thirty years between retirement and death.

WARREN

Steve, I’m definitely going to need you to review the calculations on this but I really like the concept.

JOANNE

What is we die tragically before the loan is paid?

STEVE

I wonder if we might be able to do something like mortgage insurance on the loan. I’ll take a look at the calculations, let you know if there’s some wiggle room there.

WARREN

Sounds great, thanks Steve. Bigger issue, this deal could be a PR disaster if it leaks, even if it’s not illegal. What are our contingencies?

JOANNE

So, Jacob actually had me look into this point. Turns out that most of the world already assumes we’ve been formally in league with Satan for a long time and have made their peace with it. So we’d only expect to permanently lose the business of those who already only rarely buy from us.

WARREN

Nice. Wow Chad, you’re right, this kid’s good.

CARA

I’m sorry, I realize I’m new to the board, but assuming that we can somehow even enter into this deal and trick the devil into letting us go, I think we run a real high risk that God himself decides to damn us all for associating with the devil.



CHAD

I actually looked into this, and God is really not in a position to judge on this one. In the story of Job, God himself makes a bet with Satan. So, if God claims Himself to be a model of perfect righteousness then the act of making a deal with the devil must itself be moral, or He makes himself a hypocrite and therefore incapable of righteous judgment by His own definition.

WARREN

Not to mention, has God's policy on forgiveness changed?

JOANNE

Not that I know of.

WARREN

Great, then worst comes to worst, we just say we're really, really sorry. Honestly, I'd like to open the conversation right away. Satan never minds if we reach out to discuss and then decide it's not for us.

JACOB

Wow, ok. I wasn't expecting this move so quickly, so I don't have a formal plan for reaching out. Religion and folklore don't have a clear answer on how to do this. In Faust, Mephistopheles first appeared in the shape of a poodle...

STEVE

(Interrupting. An inside joke between Steve and Joanne).  
My neighbor's got one of those!

JOANNE

You leave that poor animal alone!

CHAD

Well my neighbor's kid just started listening to Marilyn Manson, maybe we can ask him!

(This gets a good chuckle from BOARD MEMBERS).

WARREN

Yes, yes, very funny, but the candles and robes are under the desk where they always are. Please grab yours. Chad, take care of the chalk and bring in the goat.

[If it is not possible to get a real goat (understandable) change end of line to "... and bring in the goat's blood"].

CHAD

Yes sir.

(BOARD members begin reaching under the desk, pulling out robes and putting them on. JACOB and CARA are frozen).

WARREN

Cara, guess this is new to you, but there's a robe and candle at your place too. Please put it on and light the candle. Jacob, just grab one from one of the empty seats, doesn't matter if it doesn't fit right. You deserve the chance to pitch your own idea to Him!

JACOB

Wait, sir, do you already...

WARREN

Warren. And yes, we're well familiar with contacting Him. But up to this point, we've only been able to strike some small scale partnerships, you know, we send a few souls his way, He sends some good things our way. But this, what you've come up with, this could really be a breakthrough. So come on, get a robe on, it's fun.

(JACOB complies. CHAD has reentered with chalk and either a goat or an evil looking amphora or other container of goat's blood. He begins drawing a pentagram on the table. WARREN sees CARA is still frozen).

Cara, do you like having this job or not?

(CARA flees).

Wow, it's not usually the heads of HR that have a problem with this. Alright, we'll find a new one. Everybody ready?

BOARD MEMBERS

(Overlapping each other).

Yes. Yup. Ready.

WARREN

(Stands on the table in the center of the pentagram. Holds the goat or goat's blood container).

Hoods up!

(BOARD MEMBERS and WARREN put their hoods up).

Hail, Satan!

Hail, Satan! BOARD MEMBERS

Hail, Satan! WARREN

Hail, Satan! BOARD MEMBERS

Hail, Satan! WARREN

Hail, Satan! BOARD MEMBERS

(The room starts to dim, then a red light appears around WARREN and gradually becomes brighter. Sudden and full black out).

Ah, friends, so good to see you again. SATAN (v.o.)

END OF PLAY





# THE HYMN OF THE MAGNOLIA TREE

HANNAH FREY

Plumbing is the type of thing that you usually don't know much about until you have to. Some people like knitting. Others enjoy tennis. My friend James collects stamps. I just don't know a lot of people who plumb in their spare time. I see the value in learning a trade, but there aren't exactly plumbing clubs or plumbing competitions or plumbing conferences or plumbing TV channels.

But, inevitably, as a home-owner, you'll notice that things aren't working quite the way they used to: the shower pulses oddly, the tap water is tinted, or the washing machine produces clothes with a pleasant yet ominous and unexplained flowery scent. And you'll let it all be for as long as you can. So what if we have to run the dishwasher twice, and haven't we always wanted a Brita filter anyway?

The creaking of the pipes at night will start to feel more and more alive, as if something is traveling through them ever so slowly but persistently. The floor starts to warp, and that's when it's time to find out what is erupting beneath suburbia. Your home insurance refers you to a contractor who refers you to a plumber, who navigates the interweaved pipes and valves.

He confidently ascertains that the source of all your troubles is the old magnolia tree in the backyard, whose roots have been slowly and extensively growing in pursuit of a water source. Her roots and your pipes have been at war for several decades. Entangled, knotted, twisted, and unkempt, until her roots finally found and penetrated the weak spot: all beneath your feet, and severely decreasing your property value.

Her elaborate roots finally emerge from the faucet, shower head, all the drains, and the water heater itself. You'll hesitate to admit it, but you'll really be quite impressed, and perhaps even inspired: the magnolia tree is strong and patient, knows her worth, and demands more for herself. And all you'll really have left to say is, "Damn, this tree was really fucking thirsty."

PELICAN  
DHURVA SOGAL





# THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THOUGHTS ARE ALWAYS BESIDE THE DARKEST

LANDON BROWN



# LUCIFER'S ARRIVAL

ANNABELLE PETERSON

Jamie had a museum in her room of dirty glass aquariums and dog shit stains that hung around like lot lizards at a Tennessee truck stop. A dog that her parents take care of, seahorses in a tank that barely fit the fin of a goldfish, and an axolotl pair worn nearly to death by their own sex organs. She called them “pets” but pets aren’t put in display cases or toted around like conquests of the exotic variety. When they kept breeding and the room stank of eggs and mucky sand, Jamie called me up and told me to take one of the axolotls because she just couldn’t do it anymore (but she could keep the seahorses, which I wept real tears over when their bodies were found stuck to an algae-covered filter). He came home with me one day in a tupperware tub sealed with a heron-blue lid. Sister kept yelling out her bedroom door, *AXOLOTL, AXOLOTL, LOOKS LIKE THROW UP*. Mom said I shouldn’t keep a thing that looked like the devil spawn, but when it came down to keeping the mementos of depression or a fourth fish tank in my enclosure, I filled the trashbag with suicide notes and tissues and let the filter hum quietly in the background of my mind. Fresh sand. No sex-stink. All bubbles and wide-mouth grins and leafy lungs sticking out the side of his head like fireworks in mid-explosion. If I was to have some species of devil living with me all the time, I’d choose Lucifer over the sharp claws and teeth the garbage man took out last Tuesday.



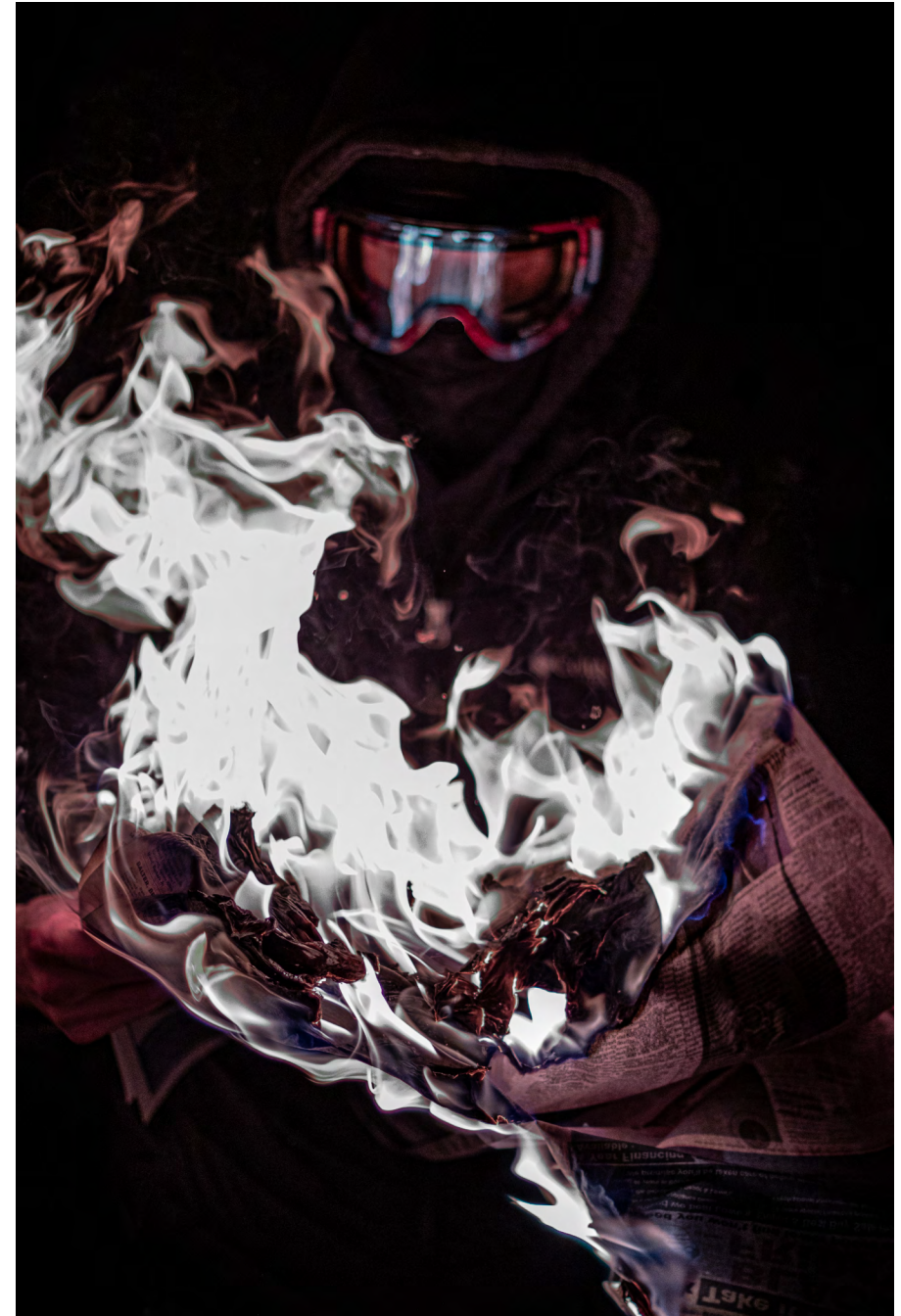
# RE: SUICIDE NOTE

CALEB PAN

While you are a mark that defines my lifetime,  
there will come a time when you die as a memory.  
I confess I long for that day more than our reunion—  
it's miserable to despise someone ignorant of heartache.  
I'm not god because your selfishness begets karmic hell:  
dead cowards can't repent with missed court dates.  
The cuts are still here even if we've scrubbed the blood...  
don't tell me that I'm not right, that it isn't black and white.  
Forgiving you is not natural but a begrudging choice;  
someday, while reminiscing, we can become strangers again.

# MORNING PAPER

RYAN PARK



# DEAR MONSTER

TOBIN HOUCHIN

Dear monster,

*I think we need to set some rules around here. New house means new spaces, new shadows on the ceiling when I lie in the dark. This is my bed, but it's yours too, and I think we ought to find some sort of compromise. Just so we're both getting our needs met, y'know?*

*I know you're there. I know you're curled up with your tail over your snout under the bed, counting the dust bunnies and eating my old socks, because your eyes glow and I can feel your scales when I reach down to grab my flashlight from where I've hidden it. You're there drawing the curtains open and closed with your breath. You're there leaving dreams on the tips of my fingers.*

*So monster, don't go thinking you can get away with anything. I'm watching you. There's plenty of space in this life for the both of us, so keep yourself where you're supposed to be, and we'll both get through this fine.*

*Good night,  
- TH*

Dear monster,

*I learned today that a certain type of woodpecker wraps its tongue around its brain to protect it from impact when drilling into trees. I think it's somewhere in the jungle. I'm not sure.*

*If you put your ballet shoes on the wrong feet, you can feel the shape of your toes in the pattern of your soles. When you put two fingers beside the perches on the feeder and wait, the hummingbirds will come to sit on your hand. Though you do have to be patient.*

*Neat, huh?*

*Thanks,  
- TH*

Dear monster,

*Did you hear about it? All of it, in school, on the radio, in the stories?*

*I can't sleep, lately. I lie awake thinking about it, overwhelmed by it, by the mistakes this race I call my own has made. Knowledge is a contract, you know. Knowledge of how to build, knowledge of how to break; and a responsibility to fix.*

*How can you give me these dreams of fixing, when I am seven years old and crying myself to sleep? How can you, when I am nine and writing my fears in my first notebook, just to leave them aside long enough to fall into those visions of yours? When I am thirty, forty, fifty years old and catching the last of this planet's years on my tongue?*

*They say the world's ending. You and I both know it already did.  
I promise I'll do everything I can.*

*Best wishes,  
- TH*

Dear monster,

*I always think of you when I'm scared. When I'm determined and when things turn out fine, too. Today, I sat on the end of the motel bed after the wildfires evacuated us yet again, and I spent a lot of time thinking about you. I wondered what you would do if your job was anything other than hiding out under my bed.*

*What do you think about when you're scared? Do you think about hunger? About the weight of cinders and wildfire in your stomach when you're alone, and you know you will stay that way?*

*We know we were born alone with our souls to ourselves, and we will die just the same, because that is what makes the core of us so special. But god, sometimes I wish I didn't have to hold it all myself.*

*These dreams you leave for me are so heavy, sometimes. Please never stop.*

*Goodnight,  
-TH*

Dear monster,

*I've been doing some thinking, lately.*

*The size of this place, this universe, spiraling out in the cogs of a thousand consciousnesses, is awe inspiring. It leaves me dizzy. It leaves me speechless. I just... it's all more wondrous than I can keep still, keep inside.*

*What good is it to wait up?*

*Mom tells me to use my powers for good. I've been thinking I will.*

*Sincerely,  
-TH*

Dear monster,

*Hi. Sorry, I haven't written in a while—I was writing love letters instead.*

*I've had centuries of songs and stories to prepare me, but somehow, I never thought it'd feel like this.*

*Sincerely,  
-TH*



Dear monster,

*Maybe I'll go to college.*

*Maybe not. I don't know. Is it worth it? Can I even do it? You keep leaving me smells and tastes of it, like a question, like a dare.*

*I dare you to shut up about it. Honestly, there is plague in the streets and homelessness on the horizon and you're going to challenge me to enroll in society's most expansive scam? Nevermind that understanding for the sake of understanding means more to me than all the cynicism in the world.*

*Shut up, or you'll convince me.*

*Hmph,  
-TH*

Dear monster,

*I saw you last night. You're getting braver, you know. Stupider, maybe, creeping out from under the bed to where everyone else can see you. Don't you realize what you're risking coming out here? They won't expect it. They won't help you slither further out into the light, because you don't know how to ask for it.*

*Let me know if you want me to leave a granola bar beside the bed, so you have something to rest with if you ever get the chance.*

*Good luck,  
- TH*

Dear monster,

*I wish you'd go away.*

*Just—*

*Just go away, just for five seconds. Just so I can be—*

*Just so I can be someone that makes sense. I'm a mess of contradictions, and it's your fault. It's always your goddamn fault.*

*Go away.*

*-TH*

Dear monster,

*Sorry. Thanks for the dream last night.*

*-TH*

Dear monster,

*Who says I can't do everything?*

*Who says there isn't enough space for it in my mind, isn't enough talent for it in my soul? Who says I have to be someone, just one someone? Who says I can't be every star in the night sky, like the patterns you whisper when I'm asleep at night? Who says I can't learn it all?*

*I can try.*

*Best,  
-TH*

Dear monster,

*I found it.*

*It's really quite simple, for such a necessity. I found it. I thought you might like to see it.*

*Good night,  
-TH*

Dear TH,

See what?

Dear monster,

*That we don't have to be scared of the end of the world.*

*Yours,  
-TH*

# DAWN

KAYLA LONG

But maybe right now  
I walk with longest shadows  
Because the sun's on the horizon  
And daylight waits ahead

# JOURNEY

SULTAN ALSUWAIDI





# CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

## SULTAN ALSUWAIDI

Sultan is an Economics major (wow right) graduating in 2023, who loves analog photography. In the free time he barely has, occasionally he will go out to the mountains and take landscape portraits, all seasons of the year, and specializes in black and white.

## PATRICK K. BARRINGER

Patrick graduated from Mines with bachelor's degrees in Engineering Physics and Computer Science in 2014. He has since decided he hadn't had enough and is currently working on a masters degree in Electrical Engineering. He enjoys hiking, preferably right before sunrise or after sunset.

## MELANIE BRANDT

Beer, salad, and late night talks.

## LANDON BROWN

Inspired by visionary artists such as Alex Grey and M.C. Escher, Landon explores themes of spiritual alchemy and relativity within his works, which visualize the transmutation of uncertainty and confusion into hope and clarity.

## GABRIEL ANDRÉ DEL CASTILLO CASTRO

Gabriel is a second-year student working on his Computer Science Bachelor's with a focus on Robotics and Intelligent Systems and a minor in Computational and Applied Mathematics. When he first moved from Venezuela to the United States, he began exploring all manner of things, from sports, to coding, and even art. It was in this last interest that he invested himself through high school; this led him to the present moment, being part of *High Grade*. He loves making friends, so do not be afraid to say hi if you catch him around campus!

## ANNA CHANDLER

Anna Chandler is a sophomore at the Colorado School of Mines. She loves drawing, painting, and glassblowing, along with her mechanical engineering studies. Her paintings, shown here in *High Grade*, express her joy in God's creation that she sees all around her in Golden Colorado.

## SHANE CRANOR

Shane is a CS student interested in photography, digital art, and music. His AI pieces are created through the use of cutting edge VQGAN + CLIP networks that can convert text descriptions into images. By recursively feeding modified images through the network and changing the text prompt, Shane creates unique AI generated videos that unleash the quirks and inner workings of the machine.

See his photography, music, and code at [shane.cranor.org](http://shane.cranor.org)

## WENLI DICKINSON

Wenli v. Kyle: We have always known that this mechanism repeats. Today is the day we are swallowed into the belly of the beast. From the stomach, we start hopeless. This is thirst, quenched. With nerves feeling around, this cavern is warm and dark and the only way out is through. Hum of blood rivers and heartbeats spurring us on. Sun goes downward, through the mouth, like water. The sky is a pinhole holding multitudes—rhizomatically connected, the fly and olive in symbiosis, life as a capillary thriving despite gravity. We heave with hands and we are expressed upward past teeth, laying wet and palely on forest floor. Mushrooms encroach over our rich bodies (hunger satisfied), hiding from the day. Tomorrow a beast passes by with an appetite. Masticating this flesh, turning this thought over and over in mechanical repetition.

## ŞEBNEM DÜZGÜN

Sebnem Düzgün is a professor and Fred Banfield Distinguished Chair in the Department of Mining Engineering. She also has a joint affiliation with the Department of Computer Science. Sebnem is the mother of two sons, a drummer and an entrepreneur. She is passionate about ceramics and enjoys experimenting with patterns and forms representing the dynamic nature of Earth and Human Systems. Sebnem has been on the journey of this experimentation for more than 15 years. She has worked with various ceramic artists and was involved in ceramic exhibitions in Turkey and Germany. She believes that art is one of the essential stimuli of innovation in engineering.

## HANNAH FREY

Hannah Frey is a wide-eyed believer in everything beautiful, including true love, fairytales that end in “happily ever after,” and the sentiment that most people are inherently good. She is studying Applied Mathematics and Statistics, and she especially believes in numbers as some of the world’s best storytellers. She enjoys taking a leap of faith whenever possible and will often write a poem about the results. Some of Hannah’s favorite things include heart-shaped sunglasses, cheesecake, watercolor painting, sunlight, stuffed animals, cherry soda, dream catchers, and her family.

## CLIFF GHIGLIERI

Cliff was born in Flagstaff, AZ and began running rivers as a kid. This connection has motivated him to pursue an education in science to help preserve and restore rivers in the West. He has degrees in Chemistry and in Nanoscience, and is currently working on a degree in Nuclear Engineering.

## GRETA HEITMANN

Greta is a Sophomore studying Mechanical Engineering. She is a Colorado native who enjoys spending time outdoors. She enjoys writing in her free time when she can. Her writing is based in her own life and experiences with mental health and growing up. Greta also enjoys writing fantasy and is hoping to get one of her novels published in the near future. She is thrilled to be featured in this edition of *High Grade* as it will be the first time she has her work published!

## TOBIN HOUCHIN

This place is so beautiful. These people are so alive. The answers are out there, under the stones thrown on the worst nights, over the stars seen through spirits thought to be snowflakes now thawed into rivulets in this endless stream.

Tobin wants so badly for it not to be a dream.

## WILLIAM HU

He just takes photos I guess.

## MALCOLM JOHNSTON

Malcolm Johnston is an amateur writer, poet, and pianist from Fort Collins, Colorado. He’s a graduating senior in Chemistry, and he’s a member of the McBride Honors Program. He also holds multiple leadership positions in several organizations, has been doing computational and experimental research on the chemical separation of actinides, and is looking forward to graduating in a few months. In his small amount of free time, he comes up with plots for novels that he’s never going to write while listening to everything that Rachmaninoff has ever composed.

## ALI KUAITAN

Ali is from Medina, Saudi Arabia. He is a Senior majoring in petroleum engineering, and he is also taking economics courses as part of his minor. Ali has been doing photography and graphic design since high school. He views them as valuable skills as well as a method to provide service to others and capture a smile. He has not taken major steps in these art fields yet, but he is not planning to leave them any time soon.

## KAYLA JASMINE LONG

Kayla is many things: poet, writer, crafter, gardener, equestrian, and kayaker, among other things. She is an outdoor and nature enthusiast and loves to mix human emotions in a way that reflects nature in her poetry. Kayla is a member of SWE, a Grand Challenges Scholar, Grandey First-year honors and is in her first year at Mines in the BSE program.

## KYLE MARKOWSKI

Kyle v. Wenli: At the crown of the skull (where growth plates merge tectonically) the thought is turning: the widening gyre. The beast meets my gaze and all three eyes recognize the merging. So it is, we are swallowed; like teeth, the thought catches in our throats halfway down. If the primal scream emerges from esophagus while the roar splits the larynx, is it unison? Growing hoarse...this is hunger, satiated. But appetite develops, stakes out, homesteads; grows roots, goes outward (capillary, vena cava, atrium), and is finally aghast at the void of the heart, hypoxia and hunger. The only way out is through: a sunburst of nerves, bundled but radiating from the center of gravity. And there pulled “to that dark center where procreation flared,” the thought recognizes its own begetting. It sees the strings: buries the roots: exchanges for mycelium.



## MEGAN MCFEETERS

Megan is a first year student at Mines, studying Computer Science. While computers and science have always fascinated her, writing, music, and art have always held a special place in her heart. Outside of her studies, she spends a large amount of time in musicals, choir, writing stories, and attempting to draw things proportionately (with varying degrees of success).

## JADE NJO

Jade completed her 3.5-year Mines journey in December as the Outstanding Graduating Senior in Economics and Business, with a Concentration in Computational and Applied Mathematics. She is deeply grateful for her experience with *High Grade* and looks forward to continuing as a contributor. For the past few years, Jade has been working on a “seven deadly sins” portrait series (with pieces featured in *High Grade* 2020 and 2021). She is excited to continue with the collection while still making other pieces and accepting commissions. To view more of Jade’s work and follow the series’ progression, please visit her website: <https://artbyjadee.wixsite.com/onlineart>

## CALEB PAN

Caleb Pan is a retired old man who, before graduating from Mines under drinking age due to dropping out of middle school, finally fulfilled Toni Lefton’s wish of him submitting to *High Grade*. He is now recovering his ability to read and making a lot of money.

## ANNABELLE PETERSON

Annabelle is an accomplished doer of physics, thinker of things, and proud owner of one semi-insane Border Collie named Tutter. Thanks to a wonderful cohort, she can now add “poet” to the list of everything she has become. She graduated from Mines with a degree in Engineering Physics in May ‘21 and moved out to Livermore, California to start a job studying the energies of atoms. When she is not writing poetry, you can find her growing her photography business and jumping horses over tall fences.

## CALEB ROTELLO

Don’t let the engineering degree fool you, he is actually 400 fish wearing jeans.

## RICHARD SEBASTIAN-COLEMAN

Richard graduated in 2016 and now works as an environmental engineer for Colorado Springs Utilities. While at Mines he served as president of Mines Little Theater and Co-Editor in Chief of *High Grade*. Since graduating his plays have been featured in festivals with Springs Ensemble Theater, Craft Productions, and Millibo Art Theater in Colorado Springs. His short play, “There’s Room on Top” was part of the 44th Samuel French Off Off Broadway Festival in New York City and the Festival Tout Tout Court in Montreal.

## GAVIN SHER

Gavin is a senior studying Engineering Physics, from Denver, Colorado. His inspiration for photography began at a young age, with a small point and shoot camera. Nowadays, he enjoys taking photos of landscapes, wildlife, and the stars. Gavin enjoys showing movement and emotion in his photographs through the use of long exposures. For Gavin, the essence of photography can be observed during the hours of dawn and dusk; there is a sense of silence, during those hours of the day that is unmatched. It is this silence that allows him to envision, frame, and execute a shot that invokes contemplation, and wonder. It is the simplicity of nature which is most inspiring to him.

## DHRUVA SOGAL

Dhruva is a second year computer-science student at Mines. As a photographer and outdoorsman Dhruva loves spending time with his camera capturing natural scenes and wildlife. His favorite animals include moose, bighorn sheep, deer, bears, and owls. He dislikes monkeys and chickens.

## K. VULETICH

K. Vuletich is a Denver based muralist and multimedia artist. Often incorporating trash and found objects into her art, she aims to re-purpose and create something compelling from something that would otherwise be unwanted. In 2018, she received CCI’s Career Advancement Grant and was a recipient of DAV’s Urban Arts Fund. These grants gave Vuletich the opportunity to expand her collaboration with under-served youth and to continue experimenting with multimedia installations. In 2020, Vuletich started The Big Delicious, an art collective focused on interdisciplinary collaboration and public access to art.

## MASON WEEMS

Mason Weems is a Junior pursuing a degree in Materials & Metallurgical Engineering. He is heavily involved in the program, as a TA for both the Bladesmithing class and Forging and Forming class. In addition, he teaches blacksmithing during open-shop hours, assists Foundry activities, and represents Mines in the TMS Bladesmithing and Cast In Steel competitions. His main goal in all of his activities is to open up more art spaces and opportunities to other students, as well as keeping students safe and educated in pursuit of dangerous art forms like blacksmithing. Outside of school he enjoys rock climbing and skiing.

## JENNA WHITE

Jenna is a PhD student in Supply Chains. In her spare time she paints, plays the ukulele and pursues a graduate diploma in gemology.

## COLIN WILSON

Colin Wilson is an environmental engineer, top-certified ski instructor, climber, and occasional poet. He believes that words possess the power to bridge the chasms between people, spanning their differences and connecting them—even if just for a fleeting moment.

# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The call for submissions is open to the entire Colorado School of Mines community. Only original works are accepted. Submissions are taken in the Fall semester and considered for acceptance. 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](http://highgrade.mines.edu). Limit five submissions per contributor per genre.

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# HIGH GRADE

COLORADO SCHOOL OF MINES JOURNAL OF THE ARTS