



HIGH GRADE

Colorado School of Mines Journal of the Arts

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

I woke up, and I put my pen to paper, and I walked into the woods. The grass crackled, gold parchment, beneath my feet. The inky trunks dropped their fluttering leaves onto my shoulders. I remember how it smelled—like fungi and fireflies—and how I understood, finally, the difference between untouched and forgotten. The trees got taller the further I went. The space behind them became blacker. I no longer heard the wind. When I knelt to turn over rocks, the thoughts beneath them scurried away on insect legs.

I stayed kneeling, because my hands felt right when they touched the soil. In the soundlessness, I set out on four limbs. I could taste something, right on the tip of my palette. An answer I'd been looking for a long time.

This wasn't the first time I'd gone looking for it. Each time, a few more steps. Each time, a little deeper into the woods. Each time, imagining I would see the heart of things.

The undergrowth whipped at my sides and my face. The stones tumbled into my path, and I leapt over them to land between the eyes of the aspens. They blinked. I met something's gaze. We'd been walking together a long time.

I remember knowing I wouldn't catch it that day. I won't catch it tomorrow, either, but the trees still whisper.

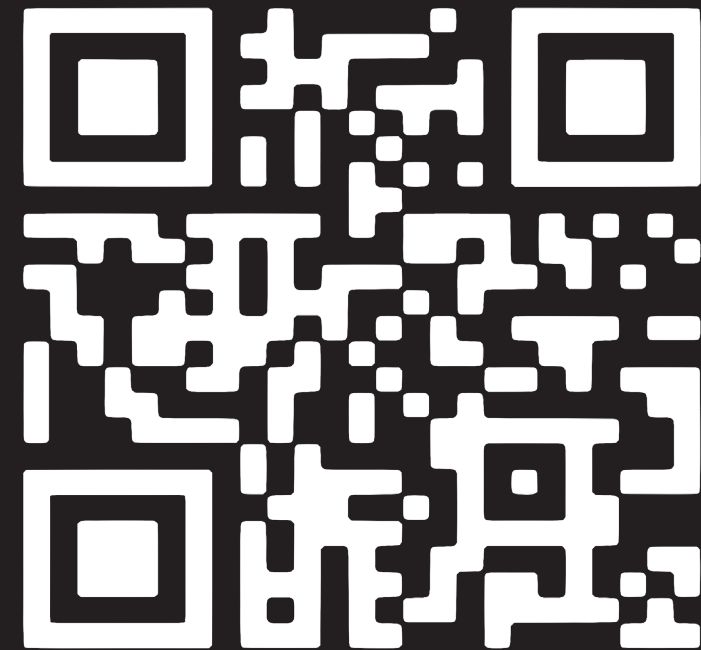
It's a beautiful day for a chase.



TOBIN HOUCHIN

ONLINE CONTENT

View more amazing content on the *High Grade* website highgrade.mines.edu. With limited print space, the website enables additional pieces to be featured. Enjoy more visual art, fiction, and music from talented contributors.





THE EYE

Zanskar Stohler



WONDER MOON

Colleen McCulloch

leaning off the porch, eyes on the august moon.
wondering where you've been.
where you've gone.
the panel creaks beneath me, as I shift my weight back and forth.

september moon. the air is crisp.
I take a breath, to no avail.
the cold keeps me still, yet
I wonder.
the leaves remind me of you.
I stand there, lean a little further.

alone again, october moon.
tonight the wind is still, as if to allow me a moment.
I've seen you and you've seen right through me.
seems about right.

I suppose that's all there is to it.
The door closes.

VAN GOGH'S CYPRESSES

Emily Fastoff

Cypress, my empress, you impress upon me
the prints of your needles, dendritic & inside out, my lungs.

Tap your trunk & sweetness flows,
I drink the syrup on the pierced wooden bark to get to it, my heart.

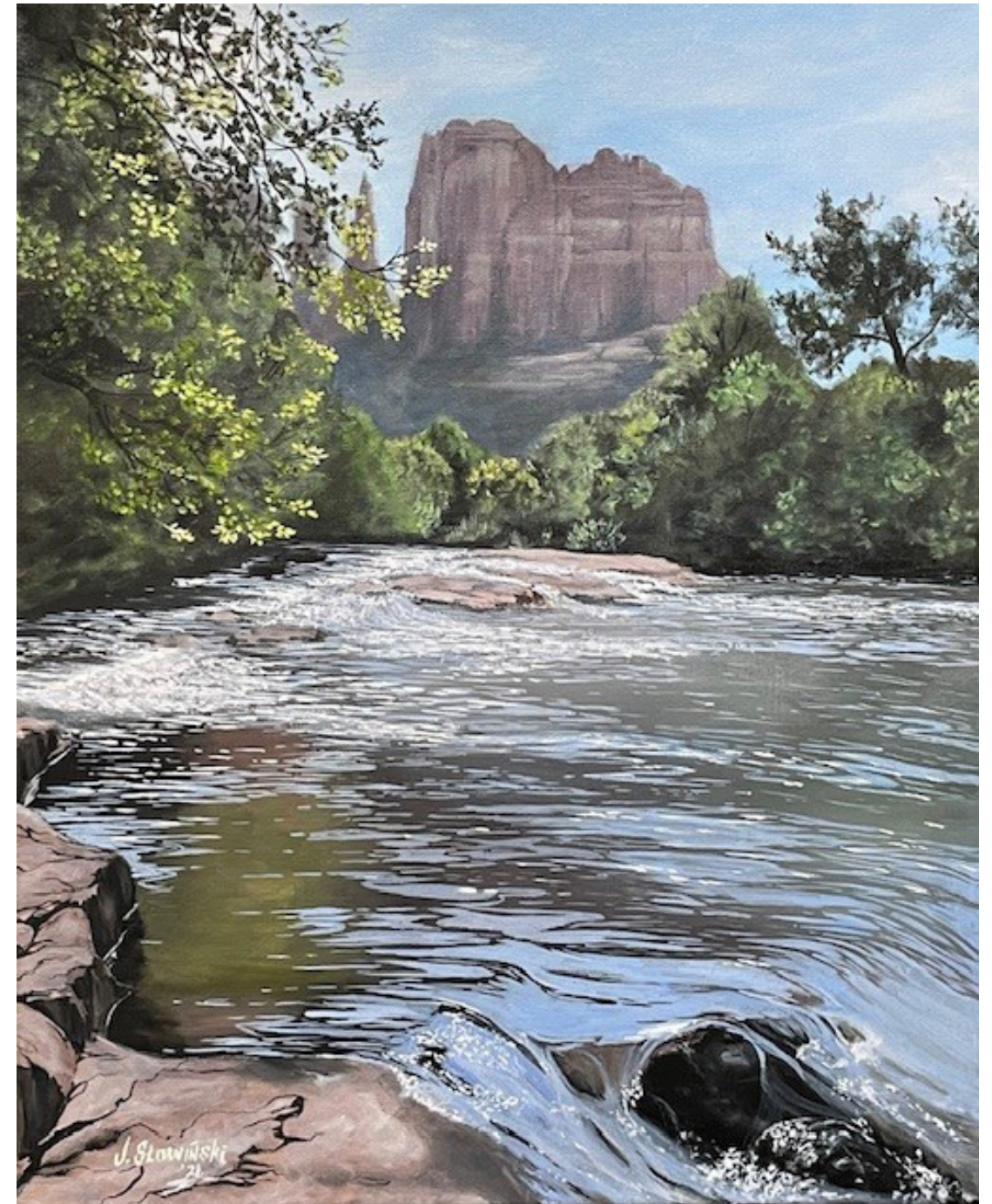
Wrap your glistening limbs around me,
I rest in nooks & nests, capable of bearing the weight of it all, my flesh.

Play under your shade,
I widen my eyes in laughter & kiss the cracks your my lips, my roots.

Because when the summer heat mâtchés the cloth to my skin
and I rest my head on your bed of soil,
we share each other's spirit.

OAK CREEK—SEDONA, ARIZONA

Jason Slowinski



GOLD DUST DAY GECKO

Ryder Fine



SPRING EYES

Arthur Sacks

The age demands
Technique
But I give rough meaning
Rolling through the rhythms
That strike the stars
And sing earth's music:
Once again spring comes
Uneventfully
In Wisconsin snowstorms
Melting by morning's end,
Once again open water
The promise of blossoms
From stone and ice—
The seduction of the real,
The strain outward
Urging motion
To the tops of trees
To leaf's edge
Ready for the touch of melodies
That filled the silent wood
White with hoarfrost
Ten millennia ago
And longer,
Trapped in the forest floor
And in the core
Of pines and firs,
Of burr oak and black oak,
Contained in the elk's eye.
We can smell the spring
Taste its fecundity
In the coolness of morning fog

Edging across the lake
Immersing the shoreline's fingers
Deep in white,
Losing trees
Still gaunt with winter.
This structure of the fingertips,
The warbler's feathers,
The whiteness of snow,
Tears through style's coat
And wears out our world
That will not receive it
With eyes.



THE FINAL GAZE

Zach Greer



THE GRAND TETONS (ON CORRUPTED FILM)

Colleen McCulloch



PAPER

Zach McLoughlin

She looks at you with eyes sadder than you've ever seen them. She clenches her trembling hands and shoves them into her pockets.
She takes out a small piece of paper, unfolds it, reads it, folds it again.
Takes your hand for a moment
And presses the paper into your grasp.
She looks at you one last time.
The door closes behind her as you fight back the blurry vision.
Your eyes finally clear, and you unfold the note.
"These things are beyond us. I love you, I always will."
You press the paper to your tongue.
You savor the temporary taste of ink and pulp and love.



PERFECT TIME

Rachel Zimmerman

The woman is tired of lousy news.

She has had a career of lousy news. She spins in her chair—once, twice—before her next patient comes in. Her sight whirls but does not refocus as she opens the manila folder with what she knows will be the patient’s name and blood pressure and weight. That’s only the top sheet. The next sheet is the one the doctor never needs to read. It always means the same thing: *You will die sooner than you think.*

Oncology. Oncologist. From the Greek onkos meaning “mass.” She used to enjoy telling that fact at dinner parties. She could not remember the last dinner party she went to.

In medical school it sounded noble. It sounded *good*. It sounded like something her father could brag about for the next thirty years. *Well, my daughter treats cancer. She saves lives. What does yours do again, Nancy?* She knew he’d like that.

She should have delivered babies, she thought, finally looking at the tumor in the brain in the folder. Her friend Sarah from medical school—she became an obstetrician. Then she got married and she had two kids of her own and sent a Christmas card every year. They looked happy hanging from the woman’s refrigerator. They *were* happy, she assured herself.

She thought of Mark from residency. They’d fizzled out within the first year because he was bad with details like anniversaries and dinner plans and everything to do with her. And the doctor was demanding and exacting and precisely what her mother warned her she would be.

He became an orthopedic surgeon. Knee repairs for athletes and hip replacements for the elderly. He lived in a nice big house on the hill where the sea raged against the cliffs below all day and every day. It was a lonely house, she thought, when she went there for a twenty year reunion party. No tissues in the bathroom. Art that only looked nice hanging on the walls. But the sea was charming and Mark was charming and his large house on the hill was all very charming and the woman almost regretted letting him go. Names and dates and anniversaries surely weren’t that important.

The door opens and the woman looks up. It’s one of her nurses. She smiles. The nurse asks a question about a patient and the doctor answers perfectly, professionally, concisely. That is what the doctor does. She looks back down at the MRI. The feeling of forgetfulness bumps insistently against her thoughts but she pushes it away. She grabs a red marker from the cup and circles the area of concern near the cerebellum.

She prepares herself for the patient to come in. She prepares to tell them, “*You will die sooner than you think.*” Only nicer, because she was taught bedside manner and she knows it wouldn’t be received well without softening.

The doctor prepares to dull her words and sharpen her scalpel. It’s just a preliminary scan, but it will require intervention. It is not a good prognosis. She amends the news in her head: *You will die far sooner than you think.*

No patient enters. The minutes tick by. The woman checks her watch—the one her father gave her when she graduated medical school. The only ornament on her hands or neck except for her stethoscope. It keeps perfect time even so many years later.

Once again, the doctor feels as if she’s forgetting something, but the doctor remembers everything. That is what the doctor does. She remembers her patients’ names and faces and diagnoses. She remembers the first time she sees them and the last. She remembers what it felt like to be young and sure that she could ease the news that could not be eased. She remembers what it felt like to be sure that she would do good in the world and sure that in turn the world would reward her.

And yet, she feels as if she’s forgetting something important. And yet, she does not remember who her next patient is. And yet, her head pounds, an annoying drumming threatening to take over. She forces herself back to the present moment.

The doctor looks back at the folder. She turns to the top sheet. She sees her own name, her own blood pressure, her own weight. The doctor turns back to her own MRI and the large red circle.

She suddenly remembers the sound of the machine—the pounding, like the gunshots her father must’ve cowered from in Korea. Her father had told her if she did this—if she was smart and prepared and responsible—she’d never have to cower from the noise like he had. Fathers were wrong sometimes.

The woman remembers slipping the folder from a different counter in a different office that looked just like hers. She wonders if the other doctor—her doctor—would notice it was gone and call her. She wasn’t supposed to take the file. The woman never did things she wasn’t supposed to do. That’s why she was here and not somewhere else.

The woman thinks of Mark and his cold house. She thinks of Sarah and her two kids and her smile lines in Christmas cards that deepen every year. She thinks of her father and the watch on her wrist, keeping precise track of her life.

She decides it would have been better to deliver babies. She decides it would have been better to hang warm paintings in the house by the sea—paintings that make you feel something in your chest. She wishes her father had given her a cheap watch that lost time.

The doctor files the folder away into the cabinet. It joins hundreds of others.

The woman is tired of lousy news.

A MINER'S SILENT SENTINEL

Lucas Stephens



DOPPELPAUKE [ANALOG TYMBAL]

Kyle Markowski



BORROWED BEGINNINGS

Kaz Kassisse

Waterloo Men

About 3 o'clock in the mornin',
you left. I watched your truck go by.

Forests of leaf-barren oak
Ache and bend behind your headlights.
Symphonyed shadows follow the
music of your mumbling tires on the gravel.

Those screeching and gritting
springs, up and down and up and down and up. It was
raining now.

Cool drops trickled down my face, as
water glided across your rearview mirror.

Meknes, Morocco

Frantic hearts echo,
Summer heat, soggy.
Quick eyes, racing 'round.
Tongue and lips stuck
Togethered, too dried.

To: whoever you may be,

Can you hear me whisper to
you from all the way down here?
Sit-ting up in the clouds, can you hear me
with the storm of voices swirling around me?
Me! Can you hear? Please.
Beneath my quilt of scratchy fabrics, and

the heat of my suffocated breathing. Can you?
Shadows outside my door blaze
and thrash like wild flames. Can you make them
stop? I am tired. All
the way up there, in the vast, endless night
sky, can you tell them to be quiet?

From: me, all the way down here,
wanting and waiting.



THE GHOST LIVING IN MY SHOWER

Mason Weems

There's a ghost living in my shower. I think he moved in with me when I carried the shard of glass home in my heel. I had to pry it out with a pocket knife on my kitchen counter. There wasn't any blood.

I found the knife in the western desert. It was hot and dry. Red rust red dirt red rocks red sun red eyes red skin blue sky. It was buried next to crushed tire tracks. Someone must have dropped it. Black in the cracked mud. I saw it under the dirt. I carried the knife home in my pocket. Nobody moved in with it.

It had rained so much that September. I would walk around the lake near my apartment. When it rained the sidewalk would fill in with huge puddles but there wasn't much to reflect. I'd walk through them to see the ripples from my footprints. I never heard the splashes. I took my shoes off so they wouldn't get wet. I couldn't see the broken glass under the water. I limped all the way home. I couldn't see it under my skin either. There wasn't any blood.

There's something living in my amp too. I borrowed it from my dad when I built a guitar. Sometimes the music is drowned out by static voices. I can't make out what they say. I think it's two different radio shows. They're just people barely there. One is just too quiet to make out any words like someone talking from behind a wall the next room over. The other is louder but jagged just spare consonants every couple seconds between electrical hum power lines crackling on a humid day can you hear me I think the signal is breaking up. I assume they're in cahoots with the shower ghost. He's barely there too.

I'd been showering in the dark for years of course. Door closed lights off no windows dark so I don't know exactly when he started living in the shower. But that's where the blood was. Little sprays of blood just above head height on the white tile. I never had any head injuries. I would only find the splatters in the morning when I turned the light on. They had turned brown by that point. It wasn't mold. You could see where it had dripped down. I washed them out and they'd be back a few months later. I'm not going to get it tested to see if it's mine or someone else's.

I'm not very flexible I had to use my hands to prop my heel up on the counter so I could see it and twist around so I could get at the glass with the point of the knife. It wasn't rusty there wasn't any red left on the knife no red dirt red rocks red sun red eyes red skin red blood. I used the point of it to dig into my skin and cut the glass out it wasn't a very big shard it fell on the floor and skittered under the counter like a mouse that was just about to be caught in a glue trap and get stuck barely there. I don't know if it's still barely there I haven't checked I think that's when the ghost moved in. There wasn't any blood.

I had a dream about a man who goes insane when a ghost starts living in his apartment. Have you ever heard of a Lichtenburg figure? A fractal pattern of lightning bolts that happens when an electrical current hits an insulator like a broken wire in a wall or a knife in skin. The man spends night after night watching the sparks grow across his bedroom wall taking pictures of it with a polaroid camera that would never be found by the detective where are the polaroids who's blood is this what did you do with the body. The red green blue glowing flashing pounding arteries roots sparks bang bang bang it's the police open up spreading out from a black knifepoint heart on the wall chest arms legs head child-size hovering above the ground by inches crackling bang bang bang someone talking like power lines in the next room can you hear me I think the signal is getting stronger paint peeling off the wall burning smoking the knifepoint heartbeat flashing pulse bang bang bang never sets off the fire alarm wake up panting. Wash the sleep off in the bathroom sink. Turn the light on. Dry brown blood on the white shower tile from the night before that I didn't notice in the dark.



MABEL BAKER

Addison Olstad

“That was my grandma’s house”
My own grandma points out as we drive
It’s a property now owned by other people
A decrepit white house
Rots there on the grass

They were farmers.
“Mabel Baker”
Was her name.
I wonder if she had any big dreams
Or if getting through the winter was enough.
I wonder if she didn’t have to worry about the winter, she would’ve dreamed bigger.

Mabel Baker.
I don’t share a last name with her anymore
Nor do I know her at all.
To my grandma she’s a long memory behind, a time she thinks she’s coming too.
“Why do things have to change?”
She asks me.
The tears don’t fall, but I am unable to respond.

To the owner who leaves that house up, thank you.
Who never cared to bring it down
And the earthly wind could never shake.
That memory, like others, sticks behind like old graves
Unmarked with flowers but loved by wandering eyes.

WHISPERS OF A JOURNEY

Aidan Williams



RUINS

Lucas Pereira-Suarez



I DREAMED OF OUR VOICE

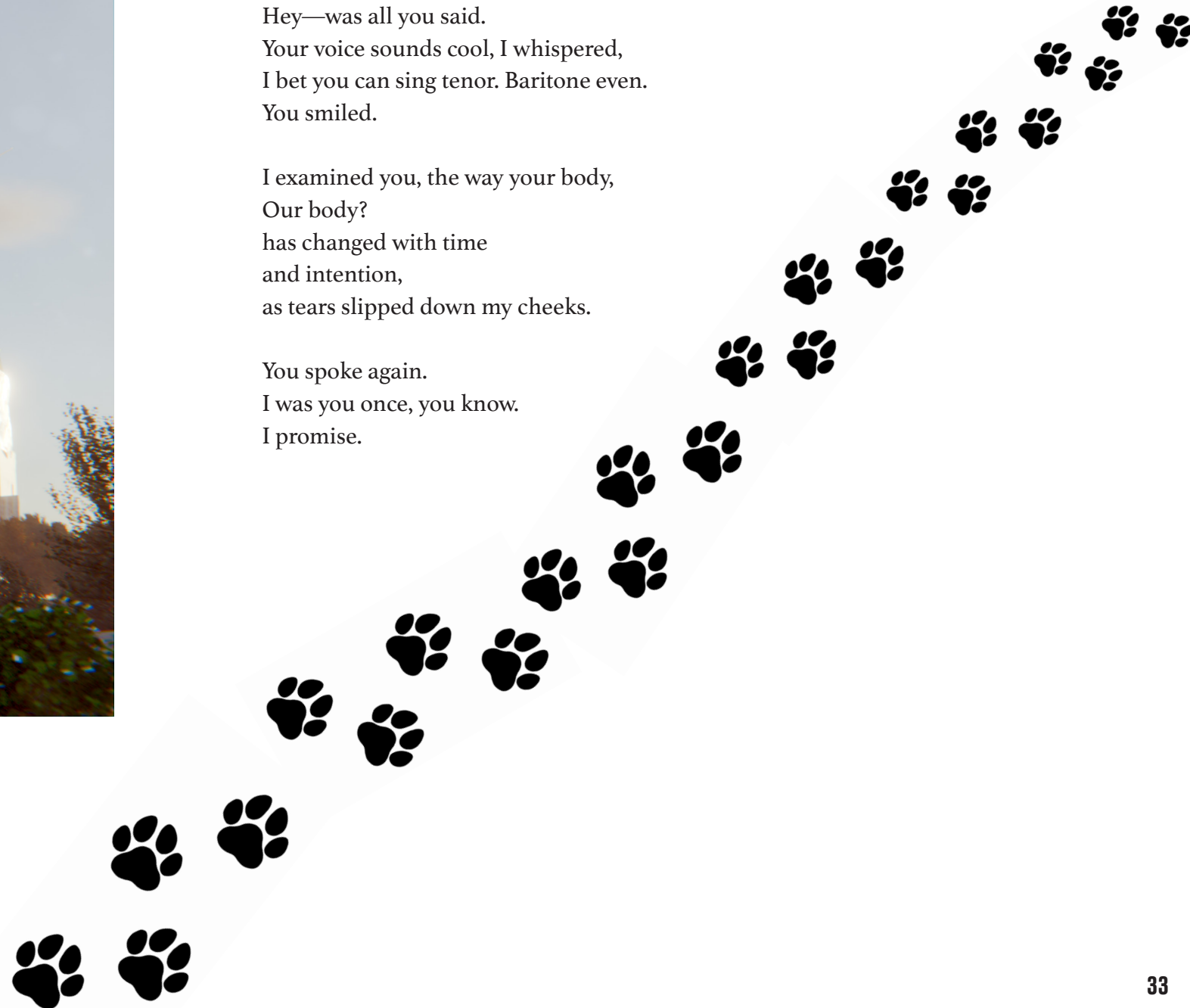
Luke Smith

I imagined you sat
at the foot of my bed the other night

Hey—was all you said.
Your voice sounds cool, I whispered,
I bet you can sing tenor. Baritone even.
You smiled.

I examined you, the way your body,
Our body?
has changed with time
and intention,
as tears slipped down my cheeks.

You spoke again.
I was you once, you know.
I promise.



SUNRISE FROM MT SNIKTAU

Patrick Barringer



COLLECTIONS

Allison Sobers

Hearing a whisper from the only other person in a room, underlit through dust by halogen lamps, cutting through the rolling buzz of computer fans—a stranger with their nose in a notebook and a pencil scrunched in hand: *positive, positive, negative... dammit.*

Stumbling upon the oldest note page in my phone—the list of my friends’ phone numbers from middle school—and realizing with a jolt that firstly, it has passed its tenth anniversary, and secondly, that the name at the top of the list is my current roommate (even then she must have been dear to me.)

Feeling my foot fall asleep from sitting on it too long—I stick my leg out and roll my ankle, watching from afar as it seems to move of its own accord before the nerves awaken and the stinging begins.

Feeling my tongue grow numb from holding it too long—I fill my lungs with air only to breathe it out, my teeth becoming a wall instead of a gate, my body feeling abnormally lightened from unspoken turmoil holding me afloat. I watch from afar as my mouth moves to no avail, before the words finally burst out—in the wrong order—and the stinging begins.

The flowers I picked from the side of the road that sat in your vase until they withered to dust, then stayed there for another month more—yet another sign that maybe something that seems worn, and fragile, and unstable looks beautiful and worthy of love through your eyes. Maybe something that doesn’t always work so well and crumbles at the slightest touch can be cared for and given a home by someone as good as you. Maybe these snapped stems and shedding petals are yours, not begrudgingly, but proudly.

Hands on the sink, the words “*enough, enough, enough*” ringing in my head, and my mother is in the mirror. With the tears in my eyes, they are almost as blue as hers, although my father’s green still rings the middle. When my reflection ripples back to myself, I see their gifts, my inheritance—a brain that finds analytic beauty in creation and a heart that carries love through it as freely as a river—and my breathing slows again.

The charred husk of the neighbor’s bush months after the fire, and the solitary, bright yellow sunflower growing right through the middle of it.

THE FOREST BELOW

Adam Zeigler





SAINTS AND ANGELS

Rachel Zimmerman

A knock sounded at the door. Jim turned and looked at it impatiently. His game was just about to start and his feet were aching from a long day on site. Who could that possibly be? “Kathleen,” He called, “Are you going to get that?”

His wife’s dry voice answered back from the bathroom. “I’m giving Jack a bath. I’d like you to think about that question again.”

With a grunt he sat up in the recliner, set his beer on the side table, and hurried to the door. Hopefully he could just say, “No Solicitors,” and call it a day. It was a neighborhood bylaw that had led him to buy this particular house ten years ago rather than a similar one across the highway. He didn’t like people trying to sell him stuff from his front porch while looking over his shoulder to see inside.

He peered through the side panel window of the door. It was obscured by privacy glass, meaning he could only determine the approximate shape and clothing color of a man standing on the porch. He gave a final look back towards his television set before pulling open the door.

A young, primly dressed man in a suit smiled at him from the porch. He looked handsome and innocent enough to play some saint in a TV program. “Hello, Mr. Mayers, I’m assuming. I’m Michael. I met your wife, Kathleen, earlier today at the grocery store and she invited me over to talk some more.”

He held out his hand, and Jim shook it without hesitation. He didn’t think he’d ever shook a softer one.

“May I come in?” Michael asked, ever polite, not even toeing his way closer to the threshold.

Jim looked back at his game; they were completing the coin toss now. He only had a few minutes before it started. It was just like his wife to strike up a conversation with these door-to-door type spiritual folks of which Michael certainly was one. If he turned the man away and Kathleen had wanted to talk to him... Well, he didn’t want to consider that. “Of course. Come in, come in,” He replied, ushering the man in perhaps faster than necessary and hurrying back to his recliner in front of the TV set.

Michael was still idling near the front door, hands folded neatly in front of him. Jim glanced up, remembering his guest more out of habit than concern. “Kathleen is giving our son a bath. I’m sure she’ll be just a minute. Feel free to have a seat while you wait.”

Jim did not bother to move the blanket from the seat of the couch or offer his guest a drink. Michael nodded once before crossing the room and perching himself on the edge of the sofa. “Are you a big fan?” He asked, nodding towards the TV set.

“Mhm,” Jim replied, leaning back with his drink in hand as the first whistle was blown.

Finally, after a long day of work—well more like a long year of work—the start of the season. A chance to relax and watch his team in his house in his favorite chair with his favorite beer—and yet. He glanced at the young man.

He was just as upright as before, sitting on the very front of the couch with his hands sitting in his lap. Hands as soft as ever like they’d never done a thing, could never do a thing in their entire lives. Like they were hands just made for greeting and being neighborly and loving others. Something about his young, innocent-looking face irritated Jim. He didn’t buy it for a minute. “What group are you with? Are you one of those Latter Day Saints - or whatever you like to call yourselves now?” Jim couldn’t help but ask.

His wife had invited all of them in here before. The Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses and even a Buddhist or two. She was spiritually curious or aware or whatever you'd like to call it, but she couldn't seem to commit to any of it for more than a month or so.

Jim never paid much attention to them. He'd grown up with a mother so Catholic her rosary beads might as well have been surgically implanted into her hands and a Lutheran father so drunk you must have thought he did it for a living. Their divorce was the perfect way of learning that whether you were good or bad, religion didn't get you anything in life you didn't get for yourself. But Jim did wonder what this one was peddling. He sincerely doubted it was anything different from what the others had to say but the fact that he hadn't launched into something already was surprising.

Michael shook his head. "No, I'm not with the Mormons. Or any group, really. It's just me."

Jim's eyes drifted back away from the TV set and to the man at least ten years his junior. He hadn't heard that one before. "And what exactly were you wanting to talk to my wife about?"

"The redeeming power of Jesus Christ," He answered not in an eager, practiced way but rather like he was stating something so fundamentally true that it required no explanation, like gravity or the sun rising in the east.

"Mhm, that's about what I figured," Jim replied, his focus back on the game. He had certainly heard that one before. "I'm sure my wife will be out in just a minute."

His team made a bad play, fumbling the ball and letting their opponents run it back all the way to the opposite end zone. He let out a groan of disappointment. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Michael looking around the room, taking it in.

There were pictures of him and Kathleen and Jack framed in the entertainment center by the stereo system. They were stuffy, professional photos Kathleen had insisted on a few years ago when Jack turned three but she liked them, so Jim didn't mind too much. The needle was sitting above some Bruce Springsteen record they'd been playing earlier. His wife wanted to buy a CD player for Christmas but Jim knew they were some fad destined to be gone by next year and the record player would work just fine. Pictures of Jim and Kathleen from when they were newly married some fifteen or so years ago were framed on the wall.

They looked young. And thinner. Jim glanced down at his ever rounding stomach and then back to Michael. He didn't like the idea of this basically-kid passing judgements on him and his family. They may not have had the church but they were good, honest folks. "What did you mean when you said it was just you? You're not with anyone? A church or something?" Jim asked, suspicious.

Every one of these folks came in here with agendas and pamphlets and proud declarations of epiphanies on street corners and in bars. But Michael was different in some way Jim couldn't quite put his finger on.

Michael shook his head. "Just me. I saw Billy Graham speak. Do you know him?"

Jim nodded. It would be hard to be alive and American and not know who Billy Graham was. Just the other day he was being flashed on the news for offering counseling and prayer to President Reagan at the White House. Jim had quipped that if Reagan really wanted the Soviet Union gone for good he should work on guns and men, not thoughts and prayers. Kathleen hadn't liked that comment much.

"Anyway," Michael continued. "I was watching Billy Graham and he invited us all at the end to pray to accept Jesus Christ to be our personal Savior. Ever since then, I couldn't think of anything better to do than try to tell other people about this good news I've got. So I've been traveling around and talking to anyone I can about it."

"Mhm." Jim looked back at his game. His team scored a touchdown and yet he did not feel much like cheering. There were few things he liked less than talking to these spiritual folks but at least he usually knew what they wanted. This kid either wasn't very good at selling his so-called beliefs or was employing some strategy Jim had yet to see.

"Well, my wife will be back in just a minute, I'm sure. Then you can talk to her about all of this."

His team completed the extra point and punted the ball back to their opponents. The ugly clock his mother-in-law had given them as a wedding present chimed seven times from the wall.

Jim glanced at Michael out of the corner of his eye. He was sitting with perfect posture, staring directly ahead. The only movement he could see was the slightest twitching of Michael's fingers, almost as if he was playing the piano or plucking a harp. The soft gesture from those soft hands annoyed Jim into speaking.

"And when you do tell people about this Jesus, what do you say?" Jim asked, curious what game Michael was playing at.

Michael leaned even further forward, like a bird perched on the edge of a ledge. "I tell them how Jesus makes me feel. Like I finally understand something larger and more important than myself. Have you ever felt like that, Mr. Mayers?" He said in an intent way that made Jim glance back towards the TV.

Jim considered the question. His thoughts flickered to visiting the local parish with his mother. Not on Sundays during Mass. That was when the church was chock full of phonies and people-pleasers and there was far too much standing and kneeling for his taste. But sometimes they'd go on Wednesday nights after service when the place was nearly empty. And his mother would let Jim light a candle and wander around the sanctuary, looking at the stained glass. It wasn't very beautiful in the dim night lighting but Jim liked it better that way. He liked the way the colors ran into one another, creating amorphous blobs rather than saints and angels.

But mostly he liked the quiet of the place and the flickering shadows of the candles along the wall. Some nights he'd sit in the pew with his mother while she prayed. He liked the way her whispering sounded as she just barely mouthed her deepest desires to God. Jim didn't listen to the words she was saying but rather the rhythm of them. They reminded him of a tide slowly ebbing and flowing its way onto the shore unrelentingly.

His mother had been unrelenting in her prayers even as she got divorced and struggled to earn a living. She had been unrelenting in her prayers even at the end of a hard, bitter life. She lived for a larger purpose and all it had gotten her was a smaller funeral bouquet.

"Yes, I have," Jim answered the question finally. "But it didn't have anything to do with some god or deity. It was because of a person. My mother, in fact."

Michael nodded understandingly with those soft hands folded in his lap like he was halfway to praying for Jim's salvation already. Jim looked back at the TV set, waiting for Michael to give him the ten best reasons to join up and convert like they always did to Kathleen. But the other man did not speak.

Jim turned up the volume and drank from his bottle. His team had scored another touchdown in the time he hadn't been watching. They were in the lead now, and yet there was a sour taste in his mouth.

"My wife will be out in just a minute. I really don't know what she could be doing in there," He turned his head towards the bathroom.

He opened his mouth to ask her how long she'd be but decided against it. She didn't like being rushed—especially when she was doing something for their son. And even if he wished Michael were gone, annoying his wife was a far greater price to pay.

Jim looked at Michael again. He had neatly parted brown hair and a white, shiny smile. His face was perfectly clean-shaven and his suit did not have a single wrinkle. It didn't even look like it had been worn before.

He couldn't help but ask another question of this strange man with his perfectly pressed suit and pearly white teeth. "How old are you anyway, kid? Do your parents know you're here?"

Michael laughed, a light, tinkling thing that sounded more like a musical instrument than anything else. "Yes, my parents know I'm here. But I'm plenty old enough to be on my own even if they didn't."

"And what do they think about all of this? About you being out here doing this instead of going to college or working?" Jim couldn't stop thinking of those damn, soft hands. His father would've been ashamed of him if his hands were that soft. A man's hands were a sign of how hard he worked for the people he loved. Jim's hands had been ragged and sore every day since he was eighteen years old.

"They understand, Mr. Mayers. Why they were the first ones I told my good news to when I learned it. And they understood how good it was too and why I needed to share it."

Jim drained the rest of his beer instead of replying, set it on the table, and opened the next one while sighing loudly. He watched a few plays. This might've been the best game he'd ever seen his team play on both sides of the ball. Offense and defense they weren't letting anything past them after that first slip-up with the interception.

But Michael's gentle hands and passive questions were making Jim nervous. It was time to move this conversation onto his turf, where he could control it.

"You watch much football, son?" Jim asked, not taking his eyes from the screen.

"No, not much, Mr. Mayers. I can't say I watch much television at all."

"This is my team. The Chicago Bears. No Walter Payton this season, it looks like but MacMahon will get the job done," Jim did not know why he was still talking. Perhaps it was because Michael was saying so little and the Bears *always* were a safe topic of conversation.

"The Bears were my dad's team. We weren't from Chicago but he said he liked the work ethic of Chicagoans or whatever they're called. Said they knew how to put in a hard day's work." He took another pull of his beer before continuing. "Dad was a fan in the rough years when the Bears were the laughingstock of the league. And he stuck with them even when they didn't get any better. He liked that they were the underdogs. I think maybe they reminded him of himself. He believed they'd turn it around someday..."

Jim trailed off. He wasn't sure why he was telling Michael about his father. He didn't talk to anyone about his father except Kathleen, and only her very seldomly. It was usually late at night when they were laying in bed and Jim couldn't sleep. He'd get this awful pain in his chest. Kathleen said it was heartburn and he should watch what he ate but Jim told her that his family didn't get heartburn. Anyway, some nights he'd lie awake from these chest pains and he'd start talking about his dad and the times they'd go to the horse track together or the one time they flew from Indiana to see the Bears play.

The Bears lost badly; they got whupped by the Packers at home but Jim's dad hadn't minded and neither had he. The Bears were meant to lose and you were meant to believe that they might not. Jim figured they were like his dad. You were meant to believe that this time he'd turn it around and finally quit drinking and he'd give it his best effort. But when he fell off the wagon again you knew that some

people weren't meant to leave their sins behind. Those ills were meant to stick with them doggedly no matter how hard they tried to leave them in the past. Dad was a drunk as much as Mom was a Catholic. Nothing would change those facts.

In the same way Jim and Kathleen weren't meant to be anything. Not Catholic or Buddhist or Muslim or whatever else. Jim had accepted this. They were good people without the church. They didn't need the church and they weren't meant to need the church.

Kathleen was like his dad; never admitting that her lot wasn't to stick with it. She'd try religion after religion like different hats in a department store only to realize that none of them would ever fit. They weren't hat people. They were simple, football-loving, family-raising, working folks and nothing was going to change that.

Not this strange man with his soft hands and his good news. Not Jim's mom pushing rosary beads into his hands as they said goodbye to one another.

Michael's voice interrupted Jim's thoughts. "Well, your dad must have been happy when the Bears won the Super Bowl a couple of years ago. They turned it around, didn't they, Mr. Mayers?"

"Huh?" The question sunk in. "Yes, the Bears did win a couple of years ago. Dad would've been happy, I think. If he was around for it."

But Jim wasn't sure the words were true. His dad seemed happier rooting for the losing team and watching them lose. He guessed that his dad might've even been disappointed if he knew the Bears had won the Super Bowl in 86'. "*There my team goes. Ruining what they had by going and winning. They used to be hard working, simple folks and now they've gone and won the Super Bowl. Nothing'll ever compare to that. Only disappointments from here on out,*" He imagined him saying.

And yet the Bears had turned it around, and Jim was still here watching.

A horrible, uncomfortable feeling reared up in Jim's chest and he stood up, startlingly himself and Michael. "I think you better head on home now, son. My wife seems to be busy. Come around another time and we'll see."

He was tired of this child-like man and his questions and probing. He didn't want to talk about his dad. He didn't want to remember the smell of whiskey on his father's breath or the smell of incense in the chapel that clung to his mother's blouses for days.

Michael's young face did not look surprised or disappointed, rather it was like he'd expected this all along. "Of course, Mr. Mayers. Of course."

He stood up from the couch. "Well, it was nice to get to speak to you. You'll have to let your wife know I came by."

"Mhm," Jim replied, showing Michael to the door.

He pulled it open. "Take care now. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Mr. Mayers," Michael held out his soft palm and Jim shook it. "I appreciate you having me over, sir."

Jim nodded once as the young man turned and walked out the door. He watched his reflection in the side window of the door as he went down the front steps. Michael's black suit melded with the setting sun outside. A mix of blacks and oranges and the green of the lawn through the obscured glass. He turned back and gave one look back towards the front door, his face a pale blur amidst the other colors.

The young man was framed there for a moment, the black of his suit and the white of his face in stark contrast with the flaming sunset behind him. All blurred together by the privacy glass into something fit for a chapel—a chapel like the one Jim hadn't been to in so many years.

Jim took in a breath. He wasn't sure at that moment if he'd seen anything more unexpected, or beautiful, before.

Before he'd thought about what he was doing, he opened the door. "Michael, wait up a minute."

The young man turned, halting halfway down the sidewalk.

"You should come back tomorrow. I think my wife really does want to talk to you."

Michael smiled calmly as if he'd known it would always come to this. "If you say so, Mr. Mayers."

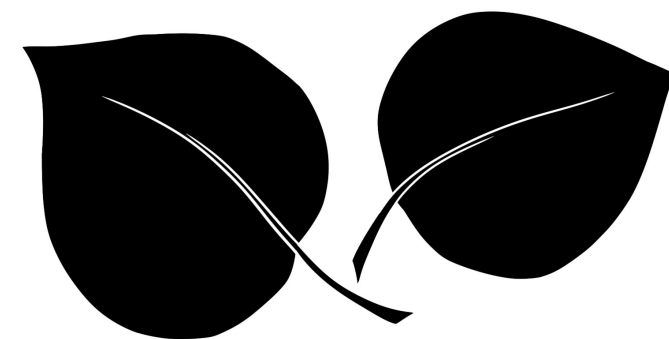
"It's just, well, Kathleen would have my hide if she knew I sent you away before she got a chance to see you."

"Of course," Michael replied, knowingly, "Have a goodnight now, Mr. Mayers."

"You too, son."

Jim shut the door again and sank back into his recliner in front of the TV. The Bears were winning, even widening their lead as the game progressed. He took another drink of his beer and turned up the TV, but his mind was somewhere else. It was somewhere with candles and the hum of an organ and most importantly the whispers of his mother. But also somewhere with the roar of a crowd and the brightness of stadium lights and his father's arm around his shoulder. He knew they were the same somewhere in some inexplicable, miraculous way. Just like he knew that he had to try to get back there, somehow.

With a click of the remote, he shut off the TV and got up to find his wife and son.





AVARICE

Jade Njo



THIS IS A CONFESSION.

Anonymous

I have neglected
you. I have
burdened you with
heaps of Heavy.

You didn't say
a word but
I can see
you folding.

Forgive me.
It was too
easy
to become so cold.





LION NEBULA IN THE CONSTELLATION CEPHEUS

Tom Boyd

GRIMTAIL

Hadley Bell



CLIFF HANGER

Emily Fastoff

It's hard but it's always been this hard. Not this kind of hard. A hard that does not repel me but pushes me to the edge. Hanging off the cliff by my fingernails, something within me knows my work here isn't done. If I fill the ground with my billowing form, kissing her, leaving me undone, a faraway voice in the back of my brain would have wished to be starved of her touch. Just not yet. I am biting down on the bruises beneath my beds soothingly but in time, their blankets of shell will split off. Eventually, you must grip instead of claw, use the hinge of your body to open the door, stand on ground, do not dive down.



AGNES

Tobin Houchin

There are cockroaches in my attic.

I can hear them at night, their legs skittering down beneath the hardwood planks and puckering drywall. The exterminator has been here twice. Both times, he missed the heart of them, or the stragglers that came back to rebuild. Or perhaps the folktales are true, and it really is impossible to kill a cockroach. They'll outlast the Earth, we say.

I've never been afraid of bugs, but I screamed when I first saw them. Shiny, pulsing, and gold like the acrylic coating of a smartphone. I heard them hissing when I threw the chair at the dog to stop him barking. At night, I hear them running races. I wonder if they cheer for each other when they win.

My daughter sits beside me on the couch, and we talk while the news shows helicopter shots of gunfire. "The exterminator is so expensive," I say.

"It won't do any good," she says. "Once they set up shop, they're here to stay. They're smart, you know. Like monkeys, before they turned into us."

"Maybe, but they're still animals," I say. I don't want them ruining any more nights with Agnes.

My daughter pats me on the shoulder, her grin like the dog's. "For now. Maybe in a hundred thousand years they'll have banks and presidents and wars of their own."

I look up at the ceiling, where on the other side, the cockroach mass is smearing filth over the attic in which I'd prefer to be keeping my carpentry supplies. I don't want to think about that right now. My daughter asks if she can try the chicken I've fried, but I slap her away. It's for Agnes.

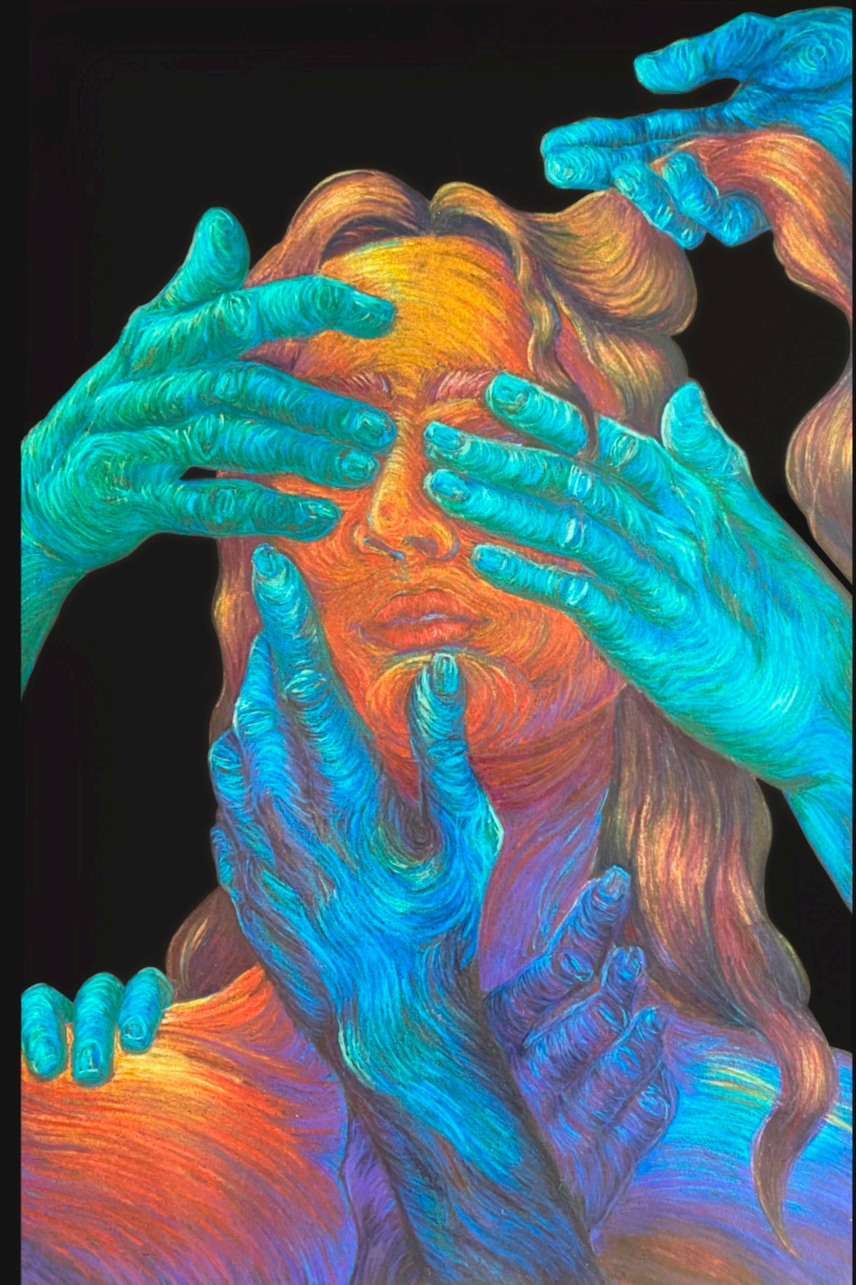
When my daughter leaves, she tells me to change my shirt, and when Agnes arrives, she compliments it. We sit across the long table as we eat. The air hisses between her teeth, her lips puckering like drywall. She has gold acrylic fingernails. They skitter against the neck of her wineglass.

"Maybe you just need a better exterminator," she says, her eyes compound.

There are cockroaches in my attic. My daughter says they'll be just like us, someday.

CAN'T HELP MYSELF

Atziry Ricalday Aguilar





KHALIFAH

Briar Martin

The wax drips onto my palm
As our sniffles and heavy breathes
Over extrajudicial kills
And state sanctioned violence
Are interrupted by rhythmic clapping
And chants of “chug! chug! chug!”
From the event center behind us.

My candles not even 1/3 of the way burnt
Before the stinging on my palm,
And the hardening of the wax,
Seem more distant than the juxtaposition:
Of a party;
Of a statue of lady justice, scales balanced
Next to a timeline ending at an assassination
And a mere 20 of us, gathered for another.

We stay late into the night
Try to talk and comfort and bond
But I can't pull my eyes away from the slow melting of the wax
From the balanced scales:
Violently racist acts timelined on one side
And quotes about nonviolence on the other.

I want my candle back—
The sting a balm for an anger I'm scared to feel but even more scared to let go of
I know the longer it's on the ground the quicker it'll burn out
But no amount of me shielding it from the wind will change the reality that it will
burn out.

Maybe next time it'll be 30 candles
And the next it'll be 60
And I have to believe that's what this candle burning out means

Because praise be to Allah in all situations
And rest in power Marcellus Khalifah

Have to mean something too.



THE PHEASANT HUNT

Rita Kowalski



TALON MARKS

Kayla Jasmine Long

have I dug my nails in deep enough to leave a mark
that won't get swept away by passing breezes and gentle rain

will the claw marks I left still be here when I'm gone
will the floors I've walked still remember the clicking of my heels
Am I more than a transient passing through

I will remember you with a bittersweet melancholy
 "Its the Best Years of my Life"
since I met you I've been waiting to leave
but I'm not sure I know how to say goodbye

How do I say goodbye

will you remember my voice raised above the noise
my laugh breaking though the silence
and they way my tears—like raindrops down the windowpanes

will the space i took stay empty
or will it be swallowed into the shifting crowd of too bright eyes

have I dug my presence in deep enough to leave claw marks that the next will
marvel at and know

I cared that I was here

ICARUS ANEW

Curiosity Steen

A young woman swoops down on wax wings / and lands onto white sands as she / catches her
breath from / the candle doubly lit at feather tips. // The rest of this week will be Icarus / recollecting
her wax. / She cannot wait for her next flight / to be close to her love once again. // She recalls
having changed, / for she is no longer who / she used to be, but / she feels finally her own Self
now. // Having unknowingly traveled / the sea named after her “death” / she steps from the beach
inland / and returns to her respite. // She arrived on
Lesbos / some time ago, / and now listens
to the prose of Sappho, / taking
words of inspiration
from her stanzas. //
Flopping into bed, / Icarus
glances out the window, /
and gently closes her
eyes / as warm light plays with
her glowing hair. // Even from afar, /
she knows the sun loves her. / And with every
take-off, / Icarus tells the sun she loves her too. // She dreams of the
day she can fly high, / enough to be held aloft, / floating and basking in her lover’s warmth. / But
until then, she collects her wax to fly once more. // The flights of Icarus are the chase of dreams /
and the chase of dreams are her means by which to fly, / so for now, she sleeps, / and prepares a
love letter upon each of her feathers. // Catch alight, / effulgent love, / strive again, / and fly forever.

IGNITE

Anahi Villanueva



1977 PONTIAC FIREBIRD

Mars Piazza

Lights phase past the car like stars from the window of a spaceship. I stare out the window with the intent of a man hiding his face from a friend, avoiding emotions that threatened to show their colors.

You look out at the road ahead.

The car is silent save for the radio.

I recognize the voice of the DJ but say nothing. You say nothing.

We are heading into the city, seeking the heat of club lights and the deafening beat of the music. I am pretending to be normal. I am *being* normal. You aren't paying attention to my distress; you are looking at the road.

I jolt as you stop the car. We're under an overpass, you pull to the side of the road, and we sit in silence still. Three feet of concrete above us blocks the signal of the radio.

I am still looking out the window. You are still staring ahead.

Do something. I think. *Anything.*

You look at me (finally) and I return the favor. We are sitting here, in the darkened underpass, staring at each other's faces and not really looking anywhere in particular.

"You haven't talked this whole drive." You sound concerned.

"I don't know, I don't have anything to say." I respond, it's partially true.

"Yes, you do. I can tell in your face."

I try to look away, but you cup my cheek and turn me back.

"It's nothing. You wouldn't like it."

"Maybe I would. You don't know."

We are sitting in your car, and we are staring at each other, and you are holding my face, and I am feeling the blood rush to it.

"I don't know." I move toward you and press our foreheads together. "I can't say it out loud."

"Then don't."

It's happening all at once and suddenly the car is full of light and full of music.

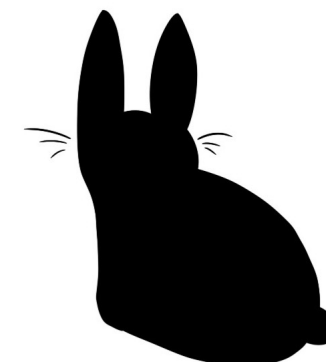
You are pressed against me and there is no one else around. We are hidden and safe from the prying eyes of our small town and the darkness of the underpass cradles us.

You are warm and the air outside is cold, and we are something else entirely.

—

We are driving back from the city. The speed limit increases the farther we get away from the lights. We listen to the radio; we recognize the DJ.

We are something else entirely.



LOTKA-VOLTERRA

Addison Olstad



A PAINFULLY SHORT SEASON

Madison Schlarman

Buzzes and gold dust swarm about in short spring,
Posy and poppy plunder a windy wall.
Adore the outer, another song lungs sing,

Scream pain in fire, for a haven, shall bawl.
For scathing cold or scorching heat, they lament,
To give the taste of sweet warmth, it has such gall.

Set the earth ablaze as if incandescent.
Savor the beauty that is born, birds say,
For this bit of the year, the world does augment.

Again not long the arrival of the day
Spring becomes a peasant under tyrant king.
Ink on paper holds fading spring on display,

To a fleeting life, flowers desperately cling,
Buzzes and gold dust swarm about in short spring.



WALKING TOWARDS CORONA HEIGHTS

Sylvia Hoyt

When there is something that I really don't want to do, or a conversation that I am having with myself in my head, the solution looms large over my bedroom. It sits a couple hundred feet higher in elevation, more exposed to the elements. The wind rips past that naked place where things become more visible. It's not just that there's a better view, but that the rocks and the sky and the city and the wind come together, to clean and break free.

So I put on my shoes and close the front door behind me and turn left. On the third block away from home, trees fill two missing squares of sidewalk. There are many street trees on my walk, but this eight stride domain is a popular dumping ground for the more unpleasant ephemera of San Francisco life. And like a cut on my own hand healing over, I see it often enough to notice when the dead rat I reported was retrieved by a 311 crew, or when the seed pods that are usually scattered by the wind have been neatly swept into the street, or when a dried dog poop is finally picked up. Whereas I walk through, somebody else pauses, taking care that the garbage sitting on the roots of the trees does not linger long enough to become incorporated into the tree. I notice no changes to the tree wells since yesterday: the seed pods are still loosely scattered, and a newspaper runs in circles in the wind.

Onwards, I pass the labyrinth to my left, walk uphill and then flat alongside the hospital, and move past my elementary school. I don't look back because it's cheating but I could steal glances at a skyline starting to emerge. This world still wears too many layers: oncoming dog walkers with packs of canines, the 37 Corbett with the characteristic honk, and exhilarated bikers soaring downhill enjoying a gravitational gift. The cars squeal around the turns, and the sidewalks shrink until the trees and the parked cars force only one person at a time to pass. I keep climbing, until I am at the top of one hill and the base of another.

I have been here before. Stepping from the concrete sidewalk realm to the true organic mulch, my foot lands among previous impressions.

Stair by stair, I climb the rocks and wooden blocks staked into the hillside. If I was out for a morning run, the breeze coming off the ocean would lean the surrounding grasses east, and they would tickle my bare calves. But today I'm just walking, and the wind blows my pants onto my legs. With each stride I approach a fence off to the left, and now I carefully step over the rocky patch. A coyote lives in this face of the hill. Once, I saw it curled up on one of the rock shelves in the sun. It took a long time to see it because it was so well camouflaged. But I do not see it today, and have no other reason to delay. Each exhale falls out of me. I follow the path as it eases to the right, and rise with the wooden block of the last stair.

Underfoot the gravel is ground to a fine dust. It is dry purple-y red, in a mound before two rocks. As my head rises in the last few steps, more and more San Francisco spills into my view between its "crown."

Here, I can stop. I am nourished by the sun peeking through the clouds, and the blackberries growing behind the guardrail, and the water collecting in puddles on foggy mornings. If I were to surgically insert the way to Corona Heights into my body nothing would be rejected as foreign material. The texture of the path below my feet, the façade of every house, and every blade of grass I see on the way is a part of me. Having traversed my own body from toe to head, I arrive where I can't see the things that have changed since yesterday. I am satisfied.

I have struggled with the discomfort of gritty feet and finally I have come to a clean bank to rinse them. The water stings, it is so cold. I still have that problem in my head, turning around and around. It feels like a headache; I feel like I might cry. My jaw is tense. Maybe I can say the words out loud or maybe the thought brings me to tears. But now I have stopped walking, and I can finally breathe. I find a sharp rock to sit on. It's not exactly comfortable, but with the right companion, somebody holding my hand who I want to kiss, or boots matching my friends and a sunset to

watch and a delicious picnic dinner to eat, the ground once appeared inviting. So it stays inviting to me now. The view stays expansive. There are California poppies blowing in the wind, and this moment resembles another.

Like when the sun is rising for the first time that summer and I am complete. The light of the earliest sunrise illuminates my freedom, a path down there somewhere, winding between the streets and around the hills.

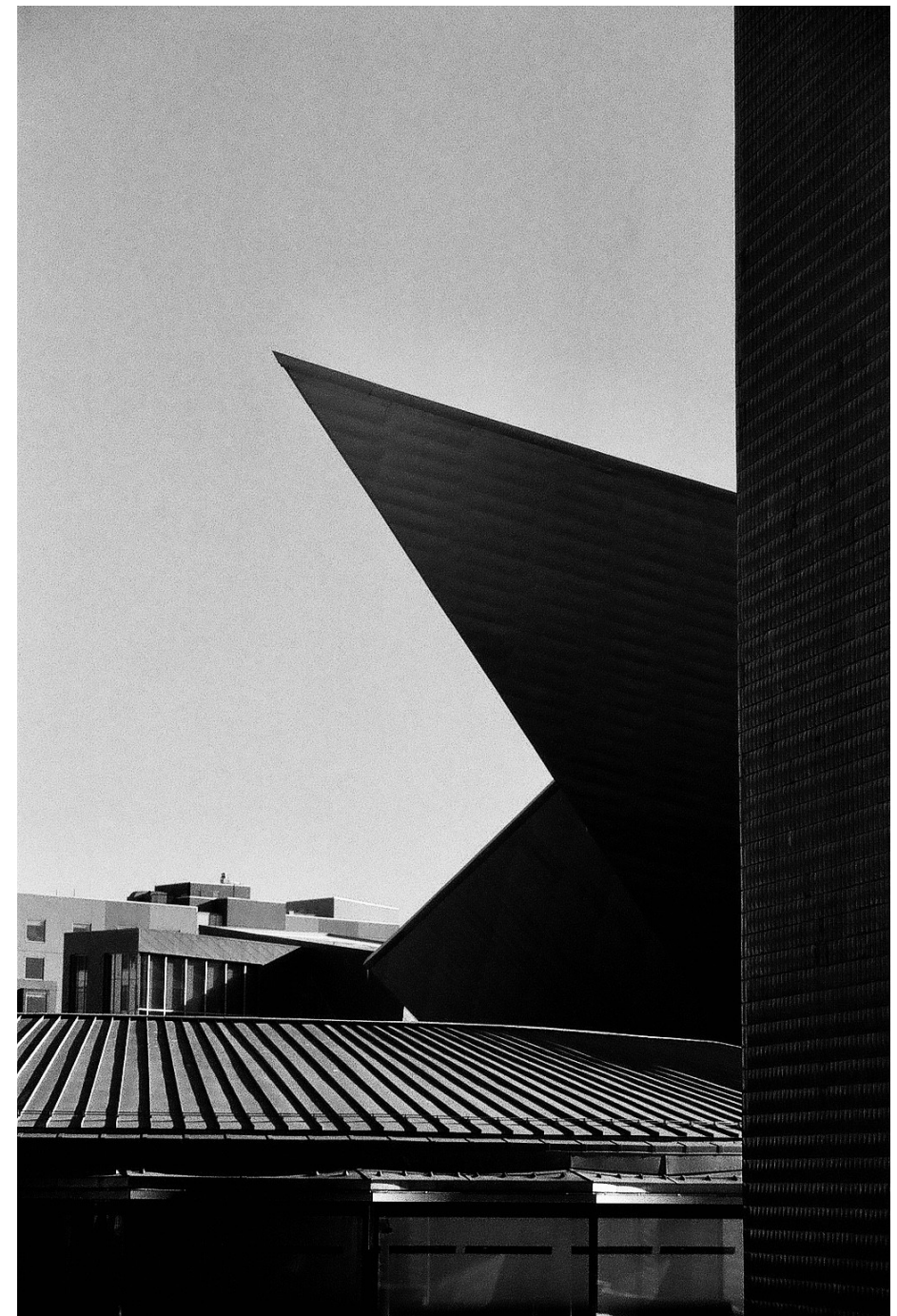
But maybe it is the previous winter and I am on the last run to summit the hill that night. It rains, and I am delighted for a few seconds. And then I feel the dread, the anxiety of waiting to know where the future that has a grip on my wrist is heading. Only a certain amount of those days, let's say 0.1%, was allotted for delight. 0.1% of a day... there are 24 hours * 60 minutes * 60 seconds = 86400 seconds. Of course I had to calculate percentages, because I knew that 45% of my time was school and then 39% was robots and then 12% was commuting and then 2% was walking the dog and so on. So if $0.001 * 86400 = 86.4$ I allow myself 86.4 seconds to stand here with a smile on my face before I simply must rush down the hill in the rain, and think once again about the writing prompts, and with a new idea (that is not all that new), tear off my rain jacket and trade my soggy socks for my dry ones and sit, under a slightly damp towel in the warmth of my bedroom, listening for the fifth time today to some synth tune that convinces me it is alright to work so close to failure.

For years I bring the math tests and big soccer games and birthdays with the neighbors. Corona Heights witnesses my fractured self and the best completeness. Rocks crumble from the highest point and the grasses change colors with the seasons. Like all the times before, the simplicity of being present, and here, brings truth.

I am in that naked place, and I, too, am bare. I breathe out towards the city and my breath joins a current of air moving east. So I am able to have that conversation I don't want to. My jaw has made space for deep breaths, and now my shoulders release tension as my back finds comfort against the rock with no comfortable features. I realize that all along I was acting under an assumption, or that my communication was unclear, or that I need to give myself grace. The birds start chirping again, over the millions of eucalyptus leaves rustling at the park on the next hill over. So my hands stop swirling the flakey gravel I sit on. And now the edges of the rocks I nestled myself between connect with my palms, and I push up onto my legs. Off to the north I watch the clouds move. A sailboat is there.

DENVER ART MUSEUM

Brock Ewing



YELLOW

Ashwini Shrestha



TO QUIT AN ELEPHANT

Tobin Houchin

There's an elephant in the aviary.

See it, there, between the wall and the cage where they keep Chili, the flightless Senegal parrot with the attitude problem. It's a great lump of skin and gentle, needy eyes, pearly black. Children point. Parents take photos and don't bother to keep their chuckles private. Why would they? It's pretty funny. What the fuck's an elephant doing here?

The birds don't seem to mind. They've grown used to sharing their space, their food, their attentions. They've made the most of the newcomer. An elephant's back is nice to ride on when their wings are a little tired. Visitors can see it always covered in white blobs of bird shit, with the exception of the few hours after its (frequent) baths.

Glass walls can't exactly get *used* to an elephant, but they can be adjusted. The aviary staff have become fast experts. Elephants aren't destructive, but all things demand their needs be met. The walls are reinforced now. Visitors must now stay behind *this* line at all times, thank you, yes, the separate elephant pen will be finished when the funding comes through in a year. Someday, this'll be a combined aviary-and-elephant sanctuary, though no one was particularly warned of or equipped for it originally. The animal has nowhere else to go, though. Poor thing. And Darlene, the grumpy budgeteer with the bad hip, has grown a soft spot for it. The staff do what is necessary, and add "elephant" to the animal handling experience line in their resumes.

They wonder sometimes, though. Did the donors not notice it was an elephant in that box? Or did they just not care?

LOST WORDS

Arthur Sacks

Crumpled, the poem's changes
Balled up, readied to start
The woodstove,
The words aflame turned into smoke
Spiraling up the chimney
Into the night air,
The words catching the kindling,
The kindling catching the logs
Now warming a cold house
Filled with images,
With stone carvings and woven cloth,
Bright weavings and wooden walls.
Warmth comforting bones,
Easing the tension of flesh tightened
Against the winter's cold
And failure.
Some use now for these discarded
Sounds meant to sing,
The wrong sounds
Silent now
Ready for other music.



FLIP [QUERELLE DE FEMMES]

Kyle Markowski



Multiphase Collage

NEBLINA

Lucas Pereira-Suarez



THE MAN AND THE MACHINE

Billy Kinsey



FLESH AND METAL

Curiosity Steen

my mind is short-circuiting
every spark is a bite
I can't tell if the static hum is of malfunctioning current or the buzzing of hornets.

PARASITES ARE IN MY MIND.

My flesh is being devoured.
or perhaps my circuits are melting.
I can't tell which is which.

Am I flesh? Or am I metal?

My imperfections surely show that I must only be human.
But the goal of the most exact precision is unending
and everyone else seems to agree.
And I know and they know that all I have accomplished
is not enough.

As such, punishment comes with tearing and gorging,
Hammering and battering,
Stabbing and digging with blades,
to pry the meat from shattered bones to grow anew.
Every penalization to correct my algorithm must be, *must be* met with
AMBIVALENT RESPONSE.

Pierce the spear through my abdomen.
Rip out the cords and the components.
May the blood and coolant gush forth onto the floor
Where I will lie in the pool of my flaws.

SOMETHING IS VERY WRONG.

And if it isn't the test scores,
then it is me.

It *must* be me.

It doesn't matter if I'm human or robot.

I don't feel very good right now.



MURDER

Maddox Chastain



SLEEPLESS SUMMER NIGHTS

Zach McLoughlin

Another summer night spent tossing and turning.

After some time, you get up. Put on the too-big slippers and shuffle out onto the balcony.

The breeze flutters your clothes. The wood creaks a familiar hello as you step toward the railing.

The crickets keep you company.

The distant car engines hum with your thoughts.

Are you alone?

The warm air feels like a friend.

The clouds shift. Moonlight waxes and wanes. Sticky air fills your lungs.

You think about the past. You think about the future.

The crickets keep you company.

MISPLACED STREET LIGHT

Jesica Schmidt



A PERFECT FIT

Annabel Lee



MORNING NAP

Emily Fastoff

pasta jars filled with water & ice
each gulp swells & cleanses my throat
for the next morsel of buttery egg and rye.

my eyes sink into the green poplar's leaves, waving hi
my skin soaks in the savory sun & the heady wind
my face, a tired honey brown home for your kisses and ivory soap
lulling nods & cuddles in the crest of your shoulder.

the linen wrapped around my geometry
billows & gently shades my tired limbs & I drift away,
sinking into the patch of grass beneath me, holding me

LOVERS IN CONTRAST

Brock Ewing



PARADISE

Teddy Blum

Perhaps, all along, the Fountain of Youth was only water
The Philosopher's Stone was always my notebook and a dream
God was simply a strip of sunlight sailing over the eaves
And perhaps, all along, Paradise was plain old forgiveness;
The chance to start again.



CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Hadley Bell

Hadley Bell is a graduate student researcher in the M3Robotics Lab. She is also a student athlete for the Cross Country and Track and Field teams. Her goal in life is to pet as many dogs as possible.

Teddy Blum

Teddy Blum is a longtime scientist and poet. You might find him in a library, a leather store, a vision of the Wild West, the color orange, or a strange dream you'll have soon. Stop by and say hello, if you see him. He believes that one should never wait to write, and that one should always write what is True. Whenever he makes a wish, he wishes for something beautiful to happen—which he can reveal because it always comes true, as long as one keeps their eyes open.

Maddox Chastain

Maddox Chastain is a first-year student in Geophysical Engineering at Mines. Her hometown is Pensacola, Florida, which is where she's lived her entire life until now. She has a passion for many mediums of art, including painting, illustration, pottery, lapidary, and wire wrapping. She's really cool and interesting. Also based. And real. Maddox knows at least 3 different people. She likes rocks. Also math, sadly.

Brock Ewing

Brock is a fourth year senior pursuing a masters in Structural Engineering, and is a linebacker for the Mines Football team. He loves film photography, abstract art, and Jesus.

Let quarreling cease,
Let brotherly love remain,
Seek peace, let joy reign.

Zach Greer

Zach Greer is a first-year student majoring in Metallurgical and Materials Engineering. He is a saved son of God and praises the Lord for giving him an outlet in photography, and is beyond grateful for the opportunity to be published in *High Grade*. Most importantly he offers all glory to God for creating such beautiful things to take photos of.

Tobin Houchin

Patterns, of course. Patterns, and particulars, and all the promises they've made to themselves without meaning to.

Sylvia Hoyt

Sylvia writes. She is a first-year undergraduate studying Geological Engineering. She is interested in the intersection of cities and nature.

Andrew Hurter IV

Andrew J Hurter IV is a junior studying Civil Engineering who enjoys traveling the world, golfing, and hiking in his spare time. The piece 'Into the Unknown' is a photograph of an ice cave inside the glacier Vatnajökull, located in southeastern Iceland. A fun fact about ice caves is that they only last for a few years before collapsing. This particular cave is a connector to a hidden, frozen valley of unimaginable icy beauty. So Andrew hopes you, like him, will dare to venture into the unknown. See Andrew's work on the *High Grade* website.

Kaz Kassisse

Kaz Kassisse is an undergraduate student at Colorado School of Mines, where they are studying Electrical Engineering with a focus in integrated circuits and electronics. They also have a minor in Culture, Creativity, and Communication. Outside of their studies, Kaz enjoys painting with acrylics, listening to music, biking in nature, thrifting for outfits, and making a mess in their kitchen. They are also a proud member of Mines Little Theater—come see a show! "Borrowed Beginnings" is their first publication in *High Grade*, and they are excited to see where their writing journey will lead them.

Billy Kinsey

Billy is currently a first-year student in Geological Engineering. He loves the mountains. He loves hiking, climbing, trails, trees, but most importantly he loves running. He likes to think he can find the positivity in the simple things and he tries to spread that to the people he cares about.

Zach Magloughlin

Zach is a writer, photographer, visual artist, and nerd. He hopes his writing can build beautiful moments, feelings, worlds.

Kyle Markowski

sings his greatest hits:

staccato sun breaks—the window chorus-startled—be seated [“dark side of your room”]—throne for a loupe—to get a rise out of [throw/ lift]—synonymous wings—lisbon girls [“a room dim at noon”]—inferior planet, unsung dichotomy—an informal fallacy [lost on me now]—rapture b/w rupture

Briar Martin

Briar Martin, who (more than) occasionally moonlights as a 60-hour workweek disguised as a human, works passionately to support oppressed people across the globe. Unapologetically trans, and barely surmountably uncomfortable with praising themselves, they invite you to enjoy the first poem they ever read at their own open mic and go forth and live its message through your experience of it.

Colleen McCulloch

Colleen McCulloch is a master’s student in Humanitarian Engineering & Science. She is an avid journaler, backpacker, embroiderer, and geocacher. She loves a good side quest—whether it’s adventuring somewhere unexplored, being an absolute beginner at a new obscure hobby, or living the motto "every stranger is a friend you haven't met yet" and striking up a conversation with random folks. Colleen is honored to be a part of this collection of incredible work and stoked to continue writing poetry and taking sick outdoor photos as life takes her onward. (:

Jade Njo

Will soon be Jade Pappous. Jade (Mines ‘21) will marry her high school sweetheart in Greece this summer. They plan to explore the many islands of Greece afterwards, including Milos, where they got engaged in 2024. Jade is beyond excited for this next chapter in life and is grateful for her fiancé.

Jade dedicates her contribution to this year’s edition to her middle school art teacher, Gail Cary, who passed away in late 2024. Mrs. Cary fostered a warm and welcoming artistic classroom, where Jade spent many early mornings before school and often ate lunch. Everlasting be her memory.

Addison Olstad

Addison wants nothing more than to continue to listen to music, to create art, and to live freely as their entire full self. They want the same for you too. So, watch YouTube video essays, doomscroll, model biological functions, drink AriZona tea, learn about the opioid crisis, visit Castle Rock in Kansas, ski down black diamonds, create fanfiction of your own characters, listen to screamo, and study the origin of life.

Lucas Pereira-Suarez

Lucas likes to share snapshots of his country.

Mars Piazza

Mars is a writer obsessed with stories written in 2nd person and fiber art of all kinds. They spend most of their time crocheting and weaving, but also often get inspired to write (very) short fiction. Their piece "1977 Pontiac Firebird" was inspired by the pop culture and new wave music of the mid to late 1980s. They recommend reading it while listening to The Smiths.

Atziry Ricalday Aguilar

Atziry Ricalday Aguilar is a student studying Electrical Engineering who loves making art. She's from Denver, Colorado and enjoys the little things in life while taking a small sketchbook wherever she goes!

Bryn Russell

This beautiful sword was handmade by senior, Bryn Russell. He spent over 500 hours crafting this blade on behalf of the school in honor of Mine's 150th anniversary. The blade is fully forged from Damascus steel. Damascus steel is made from welding two or more alloys of high carbon steel before folding them to create a pattern. He folded and manipulated this pattern 5,312 times to create a beautiful pattern he calls “Diamondback Mosiac.” The guard and pommel are also made of Damascus and the guard features a 2 carat tanzanite gemstone, set in a bed of sterling silver. The handle was made from blue dyed mango wood and is wrapped in twisted sterling silver wire. To finish it off, the blade fits snugly in a matching sheepskin leather scabbard. See Bryn's work on the *High Grade* website.

Arthur Sacks

Arthur B. Sacks, born in Brooklyn, New York, now lives in the north central mountains of Colorado. His degrees are in English literature (BA from Brooklyn College, MA/Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison). He is Professor Emeritus of Environmental Studies, Film Studies, and English at the Colorado School of Mines, an elected Foreign Member of the Russian Academy of Education, and Director Emeritus of the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW-Madison. He has been writing poetry for over 60 years during which time some of his poems have been published in little magazines and anthologies.

Davian Sandoval

Davian is a 2024 Mines graduate in Mechanical Engineering with a minor in Public Affairs through the McBride Honors Program. He quoted Patrick Star for his high school senior yearbook quote and doesn't know what he's doing with his life. See Davian's work on the *High Grade* website.

Madison Schlarman

Madison is an undergrad student at Mines pursuing her love of earth sciences and applied mathematics. She was raised on art, music, and literature, and developed her love of STEM soon into schooling. Madison considers herself a multi-medium artist but is also an animation lover, creative writer and poet, and a band kid of 9 years. Her favorite thing about being an artist and engineer is the intricacies of design and construction, natural and man-made.

Jesica Schmidt

Jesica turns blank canvases into vibrant stories—sometimes planned, often improvised, always heartfelt.

Richard Sebastian-Coleman

Richard is a Mines alumni currently working as an environmental engineer in Colorado Springs. He enjoys writing plays and has been frequently produced by Pikes Peak region theaters. Notably, his comic melodrama “All Railroads Lead to Home” ran for the entirety of the 2023 season at the Iron Springs Chateau, and his short comedy “There’s Room on Top” was featured in the 44th Samuel French Off Off Broadway Festival in New York City. He is also lucky enough to have had several works play during *High Grade* release parties and be included in the magazine. See Richard's work on the *High Grade* website.

Jason Slowinski

Jason Slowinski is an Associate Vice President at Colorado School of Mines, where he oversees campus infrastructure and operations. In addition to his administrative role, he teaches a graduate-level course in political risk assessment.

With a wealth of experience in the strategic management of public sector organizations, Jason served as the City Manager for the City of Golden for nearly seven years, further honing his leadership expertise.

A passionate self-taught artist, Jason specializes in oil and acrylic painting, focusing primarily on portraits and landscapes. He has been dedicated to his craft for over a decade and his work has been showcased at the Art Students League of Denver. He has sold numerous paintings to private collectors throughout the country. Jason is an ardent supporter of the arts and believes that nurturing his creative side helps him to continuously grow and be the best version of himself.

Luke Smith

Luke is a sophomore in Applied Mathematics and Statistics, and if he could eat a sine wave, he would. His poem, "I Dreamed of Our Voice" is about a lot of things, but he wants you see the hope in it as you read. Luke has found there is no greater joy than living a life that is entirely your own. He invites you to hug a trans person today, they probably need it.

Allison Sobers

Allison is thrilled to be a part of this wonderful process and is thankful to every person behind the curtain who has taken the time to show her the ropes (and really, they're pretty great ropes).

Recently, she has determined that making things—art, poetry, music, prayers, decisions, mistakes—returns meaning to life and expands the little world between our eyes. Of course, you'll first have to find the dark skittery voice in your head that whines about the dangers of another person seeing you through the things you make (after all, vulnerability does make one vulnerable). However, if you can manage to remember that one cannot be loved without being seen and beat that voice back with a broom, well, the hardest part of creating is over and you are now free—enjoy it!

Curiosity Steen

Described as eclectic, Curiosity is just a girl trying to do the things she's always wanted to do—from transitioning and buying a suit of armor to writing yet another character sheet and learning all she can about the strangest of subjects. Among her favorite activities, there's procrastinating, being silly, jamming out, stimming, doing fuck-all, getting out of scuffed situations, and loving her friends. Curio's loot drops include a calculator with a secret bug on it, a fake cigarette, and a 1% chance for an antler.

Lucas Stephens

Lucas is a second-year Mechanical Engineering student, but one of his greatest passions is photography, particularly film photography. Over the last six years, he has spent countless days out in the wilderness, often braving the grueling cold, searching for forgotten locations to capture stories from unique perspectives.

Zanskar Stohler

Zanskar is a senior in Civil Engineering who enjoys expressing his creativity through art. When not focused on coursework, he often spends time doodling in his notebooks, using mainly colored pencils and markers to bring his ideas to life. While his studies keep him busy, he's always looking for ways to blend art with his academic life, especially in his painting and drawing class. Zanskar finds that adding small drawings to his notes makes the material more enjoyable. He's also eager to try new mediums, including paints, to expand his artistic skills. Art serves as a creative outlet for him, helping to balance the structure of engineering with a more personal form of expression.

Grace Strongman

Grace is so honored to work doing layout and design for *High Grade*. She loves learnign from all of the wonderful pieces and watching the journals come to life.

Anahi Villanueva

Anahi is a first year studying Civil Engineering from Colorado Springs. Her two loves are cats and photography. She's thrilled to have her work published in *High Grade* and looks forward to submitting more pieces in the future! Above all, she's thankful to the Lord for His blessings.

Mason Weems

Mason is a 2nd year PhD student in the Metallurgical Sciences department. Outside of school, he loves climbing, skiing, and playing frisbee, but most of all loves creating art. He has run the blacksmith shop in Hill Hall for 6 years, and taught more than two hundred students.

Aidan Williams

Aidan Williams is an environmental engineer, photographer, and passionate traveler dedicated to capturing the world's unnoticed beauty. With explorations spanning 20 countries, particularly in underdeveloped regions, he employs photography to document spontaneous moments that convey powerful narratives. His work often embodies themes of impermanence, nature's resilience, and the complex relationships between people and their surroundings. Aidan's experiences in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand, have profoundly influenced his artistic vision, motivating him to unveil the hidden layers of everyday life. In addition to his photography, he is committed to conservation efforts and environmental advocacy, actively working to protect and restore natural habitats.

Adam Zeigler

Adam is a graduate student in environmental engineering and an employee in the EHS department. He enjoys using photography to document new places and experiences. He primarily shoots on black and white 35mm film.

Rachel Zimmerman

Rachel is a senior majoring in Mechanical Engineering and minoring in Computer Science and Biomechanical Engineering. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, working out, and studying US history. Her life aspirations include glorifying Jesus Christ in all that she does, writing words down that help explain (mostly to herself) what it means to be human, and loving others as well and as deeply as she can. She is honored to be a part of this year's publication of *High Grade*.



SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The call for submissions is open to the entire Colorado School of Mines community. Only original works are accepted. Submissions are rolling and are considered for acceptance in the Fall semester. 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 per genre.

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