



# HIGH GRADE

Colorado School of Mines Journal of the Arts



# SPECIAL THANKS

Thank you, as always, to Toni Lefton for her continued dedication to *High Grade* and its legacy. She is its primary defender and this journal would never have made it this far without her standing steadfast by its side. Special thanks also goes to Grace Strongman for her artistic vision and mentorship, Zach McLoughlin for helping maintain our website, the Honors and Scholars Programs for offering us a home, USG for looking out for us during financially tumultuous times, and the Arthur Lakes Library for displaying the works of our fabulous contributors.

Finally, thank you to every contributor, editor, and reader who has paved the path for the last fifty years, as well as to our community for submitting their artwork, volunteering their time, and supporting us financially. This continued support has allowed *High Grade* to thrive for half a century—onto the next half!



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# MESSAGES FROM THE EDITORS

Dear future editors,

My desk is covered in wax, pens, and paper—the old scritchety kind that soaks up ink real well. I'm crossing out lines in poetry that have a place in my heart but not the page. I'm adding em dashes and commas and words that aren't real but feel like they should be. I glance at the candle beside me, its stalk tall and a little wobbly, and realize it hasn't melted any more than the last time I paused from my writing. Now that I think of it, I don't remember lighting it or even placing it beside my scribbles and ink spills. It's at just the right position, lighting my work in a warm glow that makes me forget the hour. I have this strange sensation that it's always been there, a quiet and constant source, and that it'll be here long after I'm gone for whoever touches these pages next. After a trance-like moment in which the flame seems to wave at me, I shake off the feeling and return to my editing, the small warmth lighting my way.

I know the little light that carried us through will guide you too.



Allison Sobers

Dear future Editors in Chief,

While creating this special edition, I found myself thinking about time and legacy. We're still guided by the distant lighthouse first lit by the editors who came before us. Their radiance reaches us across the decades like sunlight glistening on ocean waves. Beneath the surface, we search for something of our own while anchoring ourselves to the legacy of every previous journal. Each edition holds the familiar feeling of sunkissed fingertips.

When you craft your edition of *High Grade*, the lighthouse will shine brighter with our luminescence. The ocean will be yours to adventure across and explore hidden depths. You will feel the warmth of all our combined efforts on every page, and your fingertips will be sunkissed too.

Thank you,



Hope Elsayed

Dear future Editors in Chief,

There is this desire to be “grown,” to be of marble, complete, elegant and resolute. To be great ponderosas, towering over all, only ever swaying in the wind, never yielding. But *Venus de Milo* was once just a rough figure, and the canopy above was once just a pile of pinecones. Both in constant change, neither sure what they would become.

We never get the chance to see ourselves as these complete wonders, for our flesh does not preserve us as stone protects the statue, or as bark protects the tree.

We only ever exist in constant change, subject to the whim of time, never getting the chance to be complete or finished.

But that is our true beauty. For there is no resolution to our story. There is no final chapter. For even in the grave our story lives on in the minds of others, forever changing with them and those that come after.

So too does the story of *High Grade* continue to change, with each new mind and perspective, each new generation, and each new editor.

To the chapters yet to be written,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Otto Wardwell". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Otto Wardwell

Dear future editors,


Everywhere my family has lived, my mom has fed the birds. In every home, the feeding ground curates an ecosystem of unique colors and sounds that changes with each generation that relies on seed hanging from a tree outside the window. Each morning, the crows, blue jays, flickers, and squirrels come and perform, executing a regimen that completes my morning.

At Mines, I have found another nurturing mother, whose platform has created a living history of our ecosystem. Where those living their everyday lives can look out the window, and see the tree of life, where artistry happens alongside study. Thank you *High Grade* for championing our birds. Keep it up.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carly Wink". The script is cursive and elegant, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and stylized.

Carly Wink



The background of the page is a light beige color with scattered black ink splatters. In the top right corner, there is a cluster of pink flowers with green stems and leaves. In the bottom right corner, there is a cluster of bright green leaves on a stem. A white rectangular box is centered on the page, containing text.

Dear reader,

I wanted to write of the electricity of story, the gentle urging of both discomfort and solace, the unlikely crevasses of a dissonant chord. We are pleased to present our combined efforts to shape our constant, chaotic reinvention into a magnificently warm quilt. At odd moments, those unquantifiable things are focused through a vibrantly colored lens, and we are proud of this fine collection.

You are what keeps *High Grade* going.

Sincerely,

The previous editors from the last fifty editions\*

\* Paraphrased from the last fifty years of editors' letters

# THE "GOLDEN" POLLINATOR

Luke Garland





# OAK TREE

Luke Smith

I used to climb  
trees  
and I used to read  
books, sitting  
in the staircase of my child home  
bathed in yellow light.

And now I see  
trees  
from the road  
and I know the trees in a clinical sense,  
the way a doctor knows how many CCs to prescribe  
from years spent in navy scrubs.

But sometimes  
my hand brushes the bark of a  
*Quercus Robur*  
And I still remember raising myself  
to the next branch, high above the world to rest  
in green blankets.

# MY COURSE EVALUATIONS INCLUDES THE COMMENT "HER ACCENT WAS OFF-PUTTING AT FIRST, BUT SHE'S ACTUALLY VERY SMART"

Kimberly O'Connor

I'm soundin like my grammaws  
but dielooted from tryin  
to belong in academia  
and livin states away for decades.

My i's betray me.





# CRAB

Maddox Chastain



# EL TONGÓY EN TONGÓY

Lucas Pereira-Suarez





Film Photography

# BURGERS AND KIMCHI

Elise Jakel

always at the family gatherings  
a birthday, a get together, a party  
my grandma, her crinkly gloves  
elbow deep in the big bowl;  
napa cabbage, gochugaru, it's kimchi,  
배추, 고추가루, 김치예요.  
my grandma, her thick accent,  
“you know grandma loves you,” she would say  
“할머니는 당신을 사랑해요”.  
my grandpa, on the patio  
comes in the house chuckling,  
“would you like your buns toasted?”  
he's grilling burgers; lettuce, tomatoes, onion.

when i move to grab the food  
i hesitate  
it was spicy for little me  
but one day i knew i would enjoy  
the vinegar, the fermentation, the spice  
even when my stomach protested  
and i would go for more  
but still i would eat both,

burger on one end, with a side of kimchi



# THE ITERATIVE PROGRESS VASE

Lily Abourezk



# AMUSEMENT

Maddox Chastain





# SUSPENDED

Claire Blackburn



Crochet Sculpture

# RUNNING IN THE RAIN

Mikah Plitt

I'm staring into the horizon—but there's no sun. Only dark gray clouds that creep across the skies, enveloping everything around them.

My hair is blowing every which way, and my heart is beating uncontrollably. Every part of my brain is telling me to run—the neurons are firing like infantry declaring war.

And yet, I can't move. I'm stuck in place. Am I facing my fears or giving into my own stupidity? My entire life has been defined by fear. The fear of keeping going or the fear of stopping. The fear to be who *they* want me to be or who I truly am. But who am I to let my fears consume me whole? (I'm just me.)

The wind's been picking up; five, ten, twenty knots. It's raining now and raindrops the size of dimes are splattered across my glasses. I take a deep inhale as the smell of bleach fills my lungs and makes me feel whole again. The pressure drops and my senses heighten. I've always felt like *more* during the storm.

Then, before I can even process it, I'm running. Running for and from everything that I've done and ever will do. To something new—a new chance to redefine myself. Me. Who am I? (I'm just me.)

Before I even realize it, I'm face down in the mud. I take a second to comprehend this new predicament before I roll over onto my back. The rain is still coming down and it's coming down *hard*. I should be freezing; I should be going into hypothermic shock. But I'm not—and instead, I am still here, and I am staring up at the sky.

Within a few seconds, I'm completely drenched in water but I'm going in and out and in and out. It could've been a matter of minutes, it could've been a matter of hours, but then the clouds break and the sun starts to shine down on me.

I'm here where I shouldn't be and you're there where I'm not. The rain carried me away, but it also brought me to you. (And I'm just me.)



# MAKE US ONE

Zander Mayes



# LONELY

Chris Joseph





# HE'S GONE NOW. Y'KNOW?

Adyson Meyer

One missed shift and a new calendar day  
seem to be the end of it.

I keep my head down. Do my work.  
The spring blends seamlessly into  
summer, the sun still moving,  
myself: still moving.

I stare a little longer at the pool  
before I get in. There's still a photo  
in the lifeguard shack that, for awhile now,  
won't be removed.

In the air hangs an unspoken rule  
about the deadly silence in the morning,  
a stifling quality only a few breathe.  
We don't talk about it. Ignorance heals all wounds.

I stare a little longer in the mirror  
and see everything—  
guilt, fear, indifference—  
reflected back.

I'm the type to pick at my own  
scabs. I grimace at dry weeds poking through  
concrete cracks and wonder,  
just how stubborn  
a dead plant  
can be.

I take deep breaths in the cold. Watch the hot air  
rise. I don't attend the funeral. I take long walks  
on pleasant afternoons. Follow the sun falling  
to my feet.

I kick at the dirt and ask,  
why'd you do it? why'd you do it?

# INCONVENIENCE

Joshua Tuominen-Collins

The needle leans in,  
finding its groove by touch.

The cassette hisses—  
a sound like breath  
before a song begins.

The record turns  
not because it must,  
but because repetition  
is a kind of reverence.

They say time is money—but  
what does that make a garden? A  
bankruptcy of minutes? A luxury  
of stillness  
we no longer budget for?

We once waited.  
For the kettle to sing.  
For the film to develop.  
For a letter to cross a continent  
just to say  
I'm still here.

We learned to measure meaning  
not in efficiency,  
but in effort.



Now we press our fingers  
to glass screens  
and forget what it felt like  
to rewind with intention,  
to smudge ink,  
to live with the silence  
while the tape clicked back.

Still, they keep inventing faster ways  
to read,  
to write,  
to remember.  
To forget.

But no one has found a way  
to accelerate the scent of jasmine.

Does one need to smell flowers  
more quickly,  
more efficiently?

Or is that the final nail—  
trying to optimize wonder  
until it becomes  
just another notification  
you swipe away  
before it lands?



# RAPID EYE MOVEMENT

Tyler Lapp





# SIREN SONG

Ambrose Martin

The sky has split open and it now nurses a gaping wound. Down on the pavement its wrath hammers; its guts soak through into the earth and the plants prostrate themselves for a taste. The roar of it drowns out all other noise, like a harsher, wetter TV static. Miniature rivers surge down the street and into the gutter, turbulated by the cars that hurtle by.

I stand by the storm drain, waiting for the right moment to ford the river-that-was-once-a-street. I swallow the water running down my face and lips, nearly unable to see amid the downpour. My clothes are completely soaked through. The inundated cotton clings to my skin and slowly but surely the cold sinks its teeth in.

Carefully, I take the first step. Then with one foot still on the curb and one foot in the current that's gushing into the drain, hand shielding my face, I lock eyes with a driver and I see my reflection in the windshield.

Some say that when they stare into the flow of traffic, they think about their bones shattering; their lungs bursting underneath two tons of steel, gasoline, and rubber. One step into the path of that stampede and the thread that tethers a soul to its body is snapped.

When I stare into traffic, I imagine myself behind the wheel.

Indie rock blasting; windshield wipers move in a frantic dance. A teddy bear plushie on a string swings from the rearview mirror. I adjust the steering wheel with one hand, tapping a drumbeat on my knee. I'm on my way home after band practice, driving ten over the speed limit.

My thoughts return to that girl I saw at the campus bar last night—I can't remember her name, but she has a dragon tattoo on her sternum, all gentle curves and silky blonde hair; she plays guitar and her voice sounds like the break of dawn at midsummer. I wanted to run my hand along her lower back, pull her close and watch the mascara drip down her cheeks, but I am just a creep and she left on her boyfriend's arm. Part of me wanted to follow her home. In the end I just stood there and watched her go, unable to tear my eyes away. I'll probably forget her in a day or two. I hope I remember.

I'm thinking I might have to slow down a little—visibility is *shit* tonight—when the engine growl loses its bass notes. Suddenly I've lost control of which way I'm going.

I swerve; the steering wheel jerks to the left. I wrench it to the right, overcorrecting. In a last-ditch effort, I slam on the brakes, but I'm already careening out of control, twirling across the river-in-the-road like it's a sheet of ice. The bottom drops out of my stomach, vision blurring as I grip the steering wheel with all my strength.

For a brief moment, freefalling in time, the world spins and lurches around me. My breath catches in my throat.

Then my full body slams forward against the seatbelt with a sickening crunch, the impact knocking the wind out of me. A woman's scream barely cuts through the curtain of white noise drawn by the rain. I strain for breath, for my voice, to no avail. A heavy buzzing starts in my head and mutates across my whole body, enveloping me, building in pressure—my stomach turns with the impact—the space between my ears will surely explode—

It would happen in a flash. Ten degrees to the right or left or a single moment when my mind wanders, and everything could shatter into a million pieces.

Gone would be the days of band practices, video games, and tearing my hair out over homework in the library—instead all would turn bleak and



cold, like air on a winter morning. I would argue endlessly with lawyers and judges and cry myself to sleep at night. The stares of the family would bore into me, carving out a gaping hollow in my chest that could never again be filled. My guilt would grow little black beady eyes and its gaze would cling to my back like tar. All I would ever be able to do is atone.

*Atone.*

*Atone.*

*Atone.*

That possibility is normally buried in the deep recesses of my mind, but it holds a certain magnetic allure. All the noise of everyday life would be severed—I would walk a tightrope made of apologies and justifications. Time would narrow down to just my actions and the judgement cast upon me.

I want their eyes on me. I want to be trapped beneath their gaze, my every movement scrutinized, picked apart. I want them to make sure I never escape.

The passing car doesn't slow down and the sheer force of the splash almost knocks me on my back. Spluttering, I grip the strap of my guitar case and steady myself on my feet again. I shake my head to clear it. I peer through the downpour more carefully this time, then make a break for it.

I manage to pull my feet from the surging tide, but not a moment later I nearly slip on the solid white line in the middle of the road. Righting myself again, I dash for the other side, stumbling over a pothole. I jump the gap over the opposite gutter and my feet connect with solid ground.

Before I even have time to take a breath, another powerful splash of water smacks me in the back. A little black car speeds innocently off into the distance.

I let out a long-suffering sigh. On the bright side, I've managed to make it nineteen years without killing a man, but sometimes, getting drenched under the open sky night after night after night really tests my patience—at this rate there will be more days out of the year where I got soaked than days where I stayed dry.

I huff as I reach the top of the hill; I glance down at the mostly-flooded road and images flash through my mind again: Car spinning across the surface of the water, seatbelt slamming into my ribs, gasping for air. A body crushed underneath the wheels, blood slowly soaking into the puddles made by the rain.

*Atone.*

Thunder billows across the sky. *Nope, still not enough to convince me to buy a car.*

The main road slips away behind me. Blurry street lamps light the way as I approach Burchtplein Residence Hall. I pull the door open and sigh as I walk inside, shoes squeaking and squelching on the tile floor.

At last, the rush of the rain is muted. The main entrance is a bubble of light amid the storm outside—warmly-lit lamps hang from the high ceiling, illuminating a landscape of different-sized plush chairs on spindly legs, a soft gray carpet covering the floor. Music floats in from somewhere down the hallway.

As I head toward my room, the sound gets clearer. A girl with a beautiful voice is singing about ocean waves and the sun and heartbreak. The guitar is pleasantly distorted—chorus, overdrive, phaser—like ripples in the bottom of a pool.

I round the corner, and I spot her—the girl from the bar, perched on the narrow windowsill, giving an impromptu concert in the hallway, a few doors down from my bedroom. The doors are all closed, leaving her alone with her amp below her feet and guitar in her arms. Her hair, shiny and golden, is swept over one shoulder, exposing her slender neck and clavicles, adorned with golden chains and a sun charm. An oversized sweatshirt swallows her body; her legs are bare. Her toes, painted a shiny sea green, poke out of a pair of fluffy slippers. Her makeup is smudged, but her voice doesn't waver as she sings.

For a moment, I just stand there. She hasn't seen me yet—her gaze remains fixed on her slightly shaking fingers as she changes chords. A major four to minor four—the last notes of the song hang weightlessly in the air, never quite settling.



Slowly, the chord fades to silence, and it's a fragile, pure silence, like a melting icicle that catches the light just so.

Then she looks up.

"Oh, hey," she says softly. "I was hoping someone would come out of their room to listen." She smiles and it doesn't quite reach her eyes.

I'm suddenly very aware of how I must look—robotic stance, messy long hair sticking to every plane of my face and dripping into my eyes, humidity fogging my glasses; band T-shirt, khakis and beat-up Vans—all completely soaked through and dripping onto the carpet. If I were a girl, I'd probably run away.

She tucks a lock of hair behind her ear, which exposes a dangling golden earring with a white gem. Not seeming to notice my appearance, she gestures to the guitar case on my back. "You play guitar too?" she asks.

Her hand drops from the guitar's neck and settles on her knee. She crosses her legs. Her thighs are milky white; they look soft.

I clear my throat. "Yeah; I just got back from band practice, actually. I walked, so..." I gesture at my wet clothing.

She nods, meets my eyes, and it feels as though she must see right through me—past the cold hands and sopping wet clothes, straight to the twisted desires in my heart: the attention lapse, giving in to fate as the tires scream on asphalt. The crunch of bones and the thick seep of blood. The burn of guilt in my stomach and the bore of countless eyes on my back. The *exhilaration*. I gulp down the fear along with the desire, greedy. My teeth and lips wear stains. I want to have her, to have her fingers in my hair, to keep that feeling close.

I know I should leave her here, should tear my eyes away from her before I do something I'll regret. The door to my room is just down the hall, yet I find I cannot walk through it. It's as though my limbs are tied down with heavy rope.

"I liked the song, by the way," I find myself saying.

"Thank you; I wrote it," she nods. There's something anxious that flashes behind her expression. It swirls in the air around her but I can't quite

touch it. Then she glances at the floor for a moment, looks back at me, and it's gone as soon as it appeared.

"That's fucking awesome," I say. "It was really good. I write too, you know?"

She shifts a little; her necklaces sway with the movement. "Really? You should play something," she says. Her eyelashes brush her cheeks as she blinks. She holds my gaze.

Against my better judgement, a feeling called *hope* is blossoming in my chest.

*She knows who I am. She sees me. She wants to hear my songs.*

*I can't fuck this up.*

"Sure," I nod, slipping my guitar case off my back. I flip the latches open and pull the guitar out—it's a Telecaster, grayish-blue with a leather paisley strap littered with pins from my favorite bands. The first few frets have wear marks where strings have pressed into them over and over. I loop the strap over my head, plug the cable into the jack on the bottom of the guitar.

The girl holds out a hand, meeting my gaze. Her eyes are a deep sea green. "My name's Isabella, by the way," she says.

"It's nice to meet you; I'm Kevin," I nod. I step forward; our fingers brush as I hand her the cable and I swear I feel sparks arcing up my forearms. I suck in a breath.

*No*, I tell myself. Now that she's facing away, plugging in my guitar and unplugging her pedals, I glance down the hall again. I consider my dripping wet clothing, consider the fact that she has a boyfriend, but I know full well that I'm going to hold onto this moment no matter how hopeless it may be. Something in my chest has anchored to her voice; I have no other option.

Isabella turns around. I look away and strum the open strings, pretending to check the tuning. Then I let myself glance at her; she nods encouragingly. I take a breath, and strum the first chord.

I've never been a prodigal songwriter—my chord progressions are simple, lyrics bare-bones and literal. But when I play my own music, none of that matters. Time fades to a quiet buzz. All that's left are my fingers against



the strings and the tenor of my voice as my observer's eyes boil on my skin.

*Does she like it?* I wonder.

*Well, she still hasn't unplugged the guitar. I guess that's a good sign.*

I can't look at her; I have to keep up with the chords under my fingers, but I can feel her gaze on me. She doesn't look away. A smile tugs at my lips.

By the time the song is over, my heart is pounding with exhilaration.

"I really liked it," she says, bare legs swinging.

I rake a hand through my hair, moving it out of my face. A few droplets of water trickle down my neck. "Thanks," I grin. A ball of light glows in my chest.

On an impulse, I gesture at the door. "I live right down the hall, by the way; do you want to come in? I can show you my vinyl collection."

Something unreadable flashes across her face, and for a moment, I worry she'll turn away, but it's gone as soon as it appeared. She agrees, already unplugging cables and gathering things into her arms. I unhook the carabiner from my belt loop and slide the key into the door, unlocking it.

Concert posters line the walls; the bed is unmade and the desk is piled high with stacks of papers and empty Monster cans. Dirty clothes are scattered across the ground. I kick them out of the way to make room as the two of us and our instruments cram inside, settling on the carpet, cables and guitar pedals strewn around us.

Suddenly the air feels too quiet. I remember that we don't know each other, and I have homework I'm avoiding, and she probably has better things to do too. Unspoken words and the steady tick of time hang like a film in the air, but if I dare to reach out and touch it I know she'll leave. I don't want this moment to end.

"So, uh, what music do you listen to?" I say, breaking the silence.

"Oh, a bit of everything," Isabella says. She doesn't quite meet my eyes, fiddling with the golden rings on her fingers. "I've been listening to a lot of emo recently, but I also like J-pop and metal."

"Damn, you've got good taste," I nod.

Keeping what she said in mind, I turn to the low shelf beside my desk. After considering for a moment, I pull out a vinyl—Mariya Takeuchi, *Variety*, released in 1984. “I found this by pure luck in a thrift store over winter break,” I say, presenting it to her.

With curious eyes, she scans the vinyl. Her eyebrows raise a little as she gives a nod.

A grin spreads across my face as I remove the record from its sleeve, placing it gently on the turntable atop the vinyl shelf. I position the arm, press play, and the needle slowly settles.

The sound of music fills the air, blanketing the room in warmth. The vocals are soft and soaring, colored by harmony, the bassline solid. I tap my foot to the beat.

Isabella nods slowly as she listens. A lock of hair slips out of place, falling in front of her eye.

“You like it?” I smile.

“Yeah,” she says. “I’ve listened to some songs by this artist before, but never a full album. I was introduced—” she stops herself, lips pressing into a thin line. “Never mind.”

“Huh?” I say.

She sighs. “I was introduced to it by my—” she clears her throat— “my boyfriend. Well... I guess he’s my ex now.” She swallows thickly.

*So she’s single now, then*, I realize. Her hair, a little messy, is covering her face; part of me wants to reach out and tuck it behind her ear. To take her chin in my hand and tell her she’s beautiful.

“Oh,” I say intelligently.

“He broke up with me last night, out of nowhere,” she says. Her voice is small, eyes fixed on the floor, as though she no longer notices me beside her. “I was always there when he needed me. I wrote him love letters and everything. I planned our dates. We were together for three *years*. But he said he found someone else—” Her breaths grow short as she continues—“and now—” she chokes on the words. Her fingers twist together roughly, then unwind and clench into fists.



I look at her cautiously, reaching out a hand. "...Are you okay?" I manage.

For a moment, she looks at me with wild, watery eyes, wet lips barely parted. Then a sharp turn of her head rips her gaze away and I can do nothing to stop it as she breaks apart. Sobs spill out of her in crashing waves, rising and falling, fierce, salty. She hugs her knees tight to her chest, burying her face between them as her body shakes.

Heat rises to my face. I jerk my hand away from her, afraid to touch, as if she might explode.

"I'm sorry," she chokes out, gripping her knees tighter. "I know we just met, I—I'm sorry—"

"It's, um... It's alright," I say.

For a long moment, the only sound in the room is the music, smooth and rich, disturbed only by Isabella's quiet sobs. Her fingers, adorned with golden rings, nails cut short, dig into her shins.

I think about running my fingers through her hair, petting her head and telling her it's okay, and that other guy didn't deserve her anyway. It doesn't come out right.

"Should you, I don't know, play some video games with your friends or something? Try and get your mind off it?" I grimace.

She looks up, eyes still welling with tears. "My friends—they don't—it's not—" She sighs in frustration, furiously wiping her cheeks. "I'm there for them, not the other way around. They're—they're already dealing with too much."

"I'm not," I say. The words leave my mouth before I can stop them. "I'll play video games with you, if you want. Hell, if you're feeling lonely, I can be your new boyfriend."

She looks directly at me, dead silent, eyebrows knitted together, eyes narrowed even as they shine with tears. A single droplet of water falls from my hair onto my nose. In a flash I see the car spinning out of control—I slam on the brakes, but I crash anyway. I see the gory aftermath, and suddenly I'm alone on the witness stand.

*Well, I fucked up there, I realize.*

An awkward laugh forces its way out of my throat. "Okay, message received..."

Her expression doesn't change. Words begin to spill out of my mouth before I can think. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that, that was really disrespectful," I wince. "I won't ask again, I promise; I'll make it up to you, alright?"

She just rejected me and I'm being completely pathetic, soaking wet and grovelling like a dog for scraps, but she's looking at me—really *looking* at me. Her gaze is blistering and her shining eyes are beautiful like gemstones. Slicing into me, taking me apart like puzzle pieces. A pit opens up in my stomach and my lungs expand to fill the space. I want to bask in the feeling.

"Kevin," she sighs. "It's fine. Just don't bring it up again."

She looks away. My chest grows tight, blood rushing to my head.

"Hey," I say, almost desperately, "You should stand up for yourself more; you can't just let guys walk all over you like that."

She gives me a quizzical look. "But... *you* were the one who..." She pauses and sniffs, wiping her eyes on her sleeve. "Never mind; it doesn't matter." She shakes her head. "Do you have any tissues?"

Something settles into place, an anchor on the soft sea floor. I taste metal in my mouth and it's bitter, but I swallow it down.

"Uh, sure," I say. As I stand up, my wet clothes unstick from my skin; I shudder at the sensation.

*So let's get married, right away,* sings the record player. Isabella blows her nose, interrupting the song. She balls up the tissue and holds it tightly in her fist, pulling her knees back to her chest.

At least now she isn't crying anymore.

I gesture at the gaming console on my desk. "Hey, so, do you actually want to play a game? I have a few racing games on here."

"That might be nice," she admits. I can hear a small smile peeking through into her voice.

I set up the game and hand Isabella a controller; we sit on the ground



together and race each other. I don't even mind that I have to teach her how to play. After a few rounds, she's nearly keeping pace with me. She tells me about her ex-boyfriend, about her favorite music. She doesn't have to cry anymore, and I get to hear her voice. It still sounds like a summer sunrise; she's still beautiful, even if I'll never hold her in my arms.

After a while, the record player comes to a stop and I put on a new record, this time one Isabella chooses from my collection. I hear her laugh for the first time. It's a quiet noise, but it's there, and it sounds like a ray of light that filters through ocean waters.

She talks to me like she can trust me.

My clothes eventually dry. They become stiff against my body, but I finally feel warm again. If only for tonight, the world outside, the flooded road, fades away.

The sky outside my window grows light behind the clouds and the trees. Isabella smiles, a small but beautiful thing, just for me, as she waves goodbye.

I sit by the window as I stare at her contact page—her number is saved in my phone now. It's not in the way I'd hoped, but I text her my playlist and an invite to a game night with the other members of my band.

*thanks, she replies. i'll try to make it!*

*A moment later: thank you for tonight btw... i really just needed someone to talk to. i think you're a good friend, kevin :)*

She sees me.

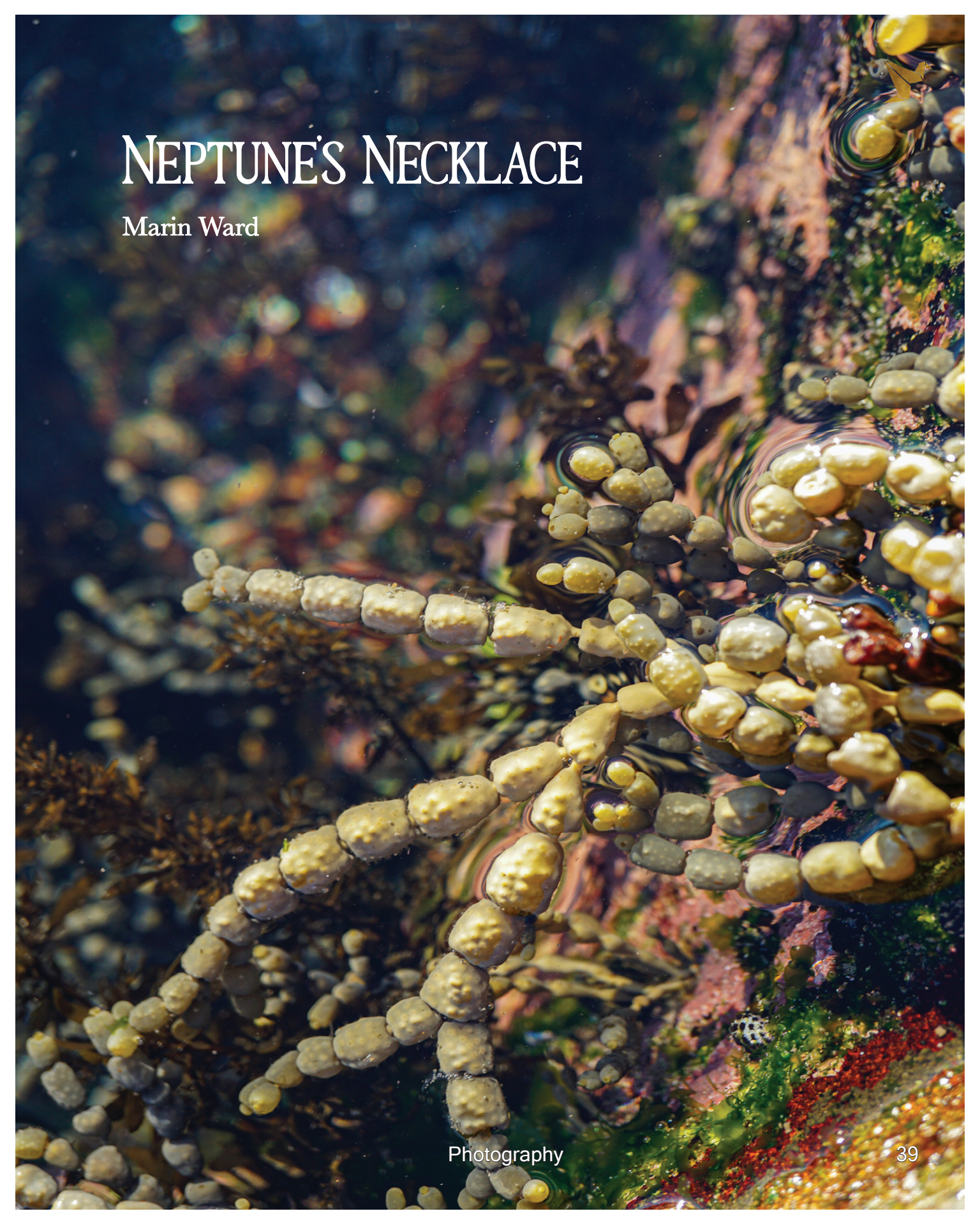
My face splits into a grin. A ray of sunlight pierces the clouds.





# NEPTUNE'S NECKLACE

Marin Ward



# I SEE MY LOVE

Alyssa Parker





# OLD HONEY

Tobin Houchin

On paper, I want music and chains and choices made through tears, where neither choice was the right one, and both will eat through a chest from the inside out for all of time. I want to take raw flesh between my teeth and I want it to be sweet as old honey, the blood, I want it to be the addiction of infatuation, carnal and sensual, visceral and starlit, I want the storm to be too violent to weather and I want the waves to be black, suck prey to the bottom of the sea's trenches warm and inviting, and crush with exquisite pressure until bones are pearls and eyes are ink. On paper, I don't want to die, not really.



# CRESCENT MOON RANCH WATER WHEEL

Jason Slowinski





# AMERICAN BEEF

Kimberly O'Connor

American history isn't difficult.

Consider American beef: western  
indigenous people killed,  
the bison killed, replaced with cattle  
raised by good white men and  
their good pioneer families.

At bookstores authors might recite  
before events the names of the tribes  
their ancestors' cities displaced,  
so maybe you know whether  
your backyard belonged  
to the Cheyenne, the Apache,  
the Arapahoe, the Comanche,  
the Cherokee. In any case, these family ranches,  
family butcher shops, were bought  
by big and bigger companies,  
the whole process easy, legal.

Now thousands of cattle a day  
are processed: shot with stun guns,  
drained of blood, cut apart.

Second leg puller, belly ripper, tail cutter.

One rule suggests that if less  
than three percent of murdered cows  
moo, the slaughterhouse is humane.

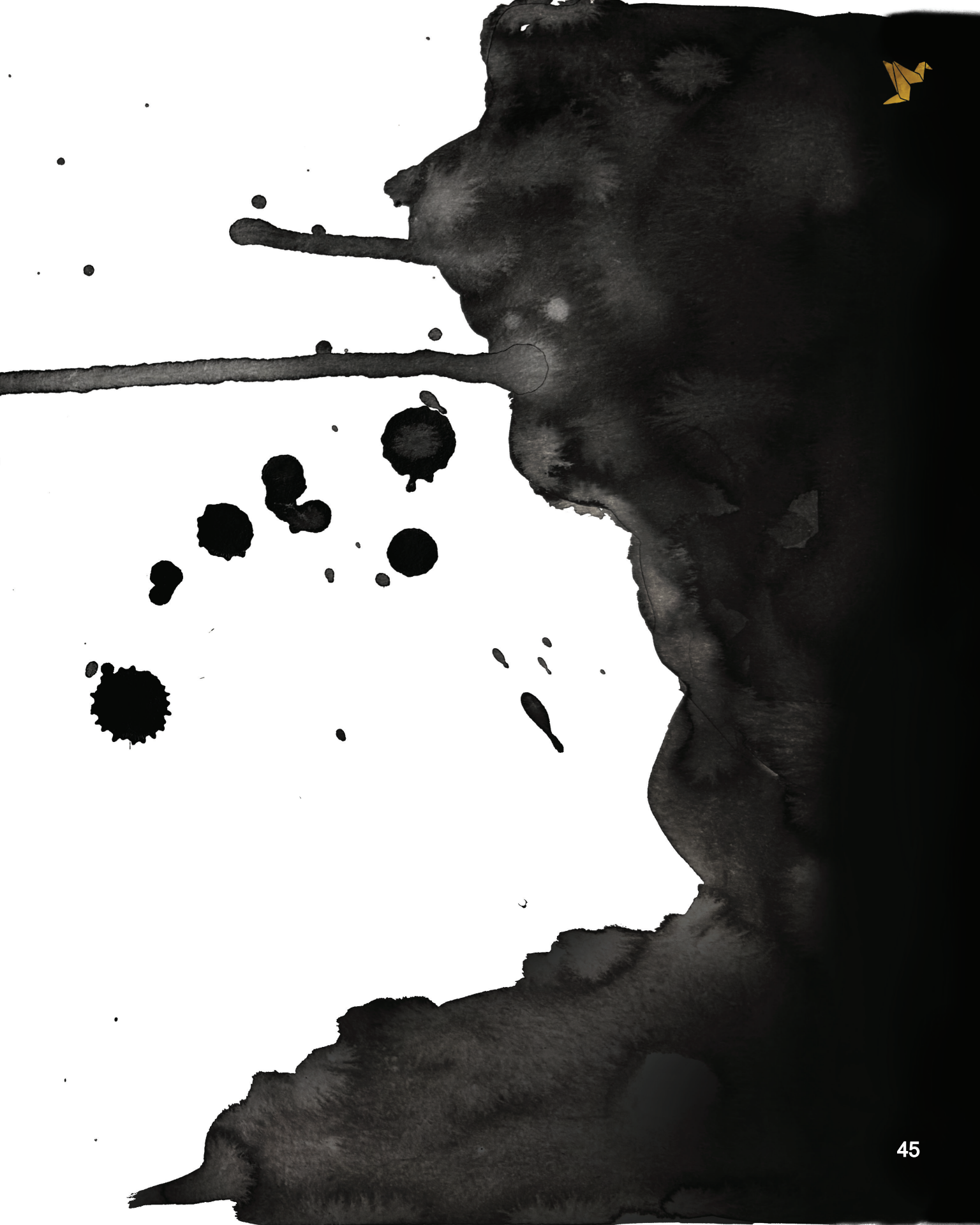
# MOVING ON

Corry Olsen

between basement musk and spongy carpet  
there's a faint echo of your smell—  
The door (two raps, every morning) stands ajar, like  
you were almost real.  
We would have called it fate,  
each senseless mark a code  
scrawled by an unseen hand,  
the salt of my tears remembering your name  
as if every path leads back to your misery.

I was not the girl you knew. We were wrong  
and the ruffled covers of two fools  
meant nothing.  
I should have died there and  
my body could have been the ornament to your grief,  
my lips a gift bestowed on a shiny black barrel, my life yours.

A spectre slips behind your eyes—  
open them and through the fog maybe  
you would find loving and hope  
I didn't die. I lived for grains of laughter  
and rumblings of song, lived to reach for a sky  
that holds no heaven for me.  
Your eyes glazed over, a screen blaring  
and while I relearn the taste of dirt and salt and air  
we both die every day.



# FRAY

Tyler Lapp





# THE CARNIVAL

Tyler Folkmann

There is a travelling carnival outside town. If you ask someone in town when they set up, or when they plan to leave, you will get a confused look. Everyone agrees that they had to set up at some point, and that they will leave soon, even if they don't know when.

Everyone agrees it's been here since the beginning of summer, and everyone also agrees that it's been here for as long as they can remember. It's been accepted. The carnival people keep to themselves and don't make trouble. The carnival provides a place for the town children to go, which keeps them out from underfoot. The townspeople accept this.

It's always night in the carnival. Dark skies with constellations that don't match the season are draped over the fairgrounds like a tent. Nobody thinks this is strange.

The carnival is enclosed by a high fence to keep out prying eyes and children who haven't given the gateman a quarter.

If you were to go, you would find yourself in a line of children, each clutching a quarter. They que up in long lines to get in, crushing yellow grass under their feet, mixing it in with the dirt. When you reach the gateman, who sits on an old stool, yellowed and weathered from days spent exposed to the elements, you would present a quarter.

He takes it between fingers gnarled like tree roots and tucks it into a pocket in his fraying suit jacket. Then he smiles, revealing crooked teeth, and waves you in under a rusted metal arch.

Inside is a city of tents. They are made of worn, dirty canvas draped over wood frames. The colors have faded. Paths have been worn between them. Someone has laid hay down to keep the ground from turning to mud. Children dart from tent to tent, shrieking and giggling. Their voices fill the night air.

The tents are pitched in uneven rows. Unconsciously, the visitors are pulled into the center of the carnival. They stop along the way to play games at booths, to savor the smells coming from kitchens, to marvel at strange and wonderful exhibitions, to watch the shows. But in the end, they all find themselves before a ramshackle three-story building at the heart of the fair.

You can't see it from outside. It's made of wood. Everyone agrees that they must tear it down and rebuild it everywhere they stop. No one remembers them building it.

It leans and bends and there are gaps in the wood planks. It smells like wet hay and canvas, like the rest of the circus. There is something about it, though, that draws the attention. It is a magnet, pulling eyes and minds closer to it.

Another attendant stands outside. She wears a ringmaster's coat that smells of the damp and cigarettes. She doesn't speak. When the time is right, she opens the warped, peeling door and lets another group inside. A small, crooked sign behind her says "The House of Mirth".

Inside is just one room. There are no walls, no ceilings. Just the shell of the house. There is no light except for that which trickles in from the cracks—hints of starlight and scattered beams of moonlight.

The visitors gather there, on their ultimate stop on their visit. They crowd around the single exhibit. On a rough wooden pillar sits a heart. It is wet and shiny, and the smell of blood fills every corner of the room. Fluids leak from it, trailing down from arteries and valves down to the pillar, then from there to the floor, where it makes a puddle on the wood, dripping through cracks to the dirt below.

They stare at it, silent. They stand there for hours, waiting. Until the heart flexes, compresses. A few more drops of fluid are squeezed out. Then it expands again.

And then they leave. They trail silently out of the carnival and go back to town and they don't wonder where the trailers are, or why the stars look different from inside, or who the heart is from.



# BORE

Jessica Feng



# IN THE FLESH

JoJo Berry





# R

## Ryan Davidson

“Take some ibuprofen,” they said  
after they broke his back and brain  
push him down the line  
a name on the list

So you try to help as best you can  
back and brain and burning brown eyes  
reach out with both hands  
hold a torch aloft to  
push back the desert night

But you can't save him  
and maybe you never could

Now he's not a Soldier  
not a husband  
not a father  
not anymore

just a spreading stain on a garage floor  
another upright rifle  
another empty pair of boots.

# THE CAVE NEBULA

Thomas Boyd





# REPURPOSED

Cameron Hinkle



# THE BEETLE

Maddox Chastain





# PUMPKIN

Tobin Houchin

Poor kids had clearly  
never called 911 before.  
Still in sleep clothes,  
eyes red. *That's the thing*

*about these paper-walled  
apartments, officer; you can  
hear everything, they said,  
it wasn't the first time*

they'd woken to moans  
from next door. First  
time there'd been  
screams though.

I tripped over a pumpkin  
and ashtray on my way  
next door. Damn thing was rotten green  
since Halloween. The man smoked.

The woman had a bloody  
lip. Testimonies didn't match.  
They rarely do. We left,  
stepped over the pumpkin—

*'I love you'* in black sharpie  
now hidden in the wrinkled skin.  
That's the thing about  
these paper-walled apartments

# DISSOCIATION

Thea Elrod





# EARS TO HEAR

Abby Deaton

A simmering dark and the snapping of bones.

There's a point, a brightness,

So full of life I close my eyes.

Beauty incomprehensible, yet it pierces

Through my eyelids—it bulges and pulsates.

My flesh churned with psychedelic plasma.

Blood, blood, infinite blood.

Teeth clatter, my skin stretches.

This Light, terrible Light still blinds.

No escape; it calls—no, it chooses me.

Void is all too sweet,

A womb of spiders and they crawl over me.

Symphony of whispers, voices echo in my head.

I came here for despair, yet I find none here.

A soft breeze, gentle on my mind.

Soothing frequencies, a sinusoidal dance.

Pressure in my ears burst like breaking chains,

Eyes flutter open, I shed my reptilian skin.

It smells of junipers and the raven squawks.

The Light shines, it radiates, it glistens;

Burns and renews all flesh that dares to listen.

# THREADING THE NEEDLE

Brock Ewing





Film Photography





# YOUNG

Lillian Moons

I have missed being young. I miss the drive past moss covered sidewalks and parks in the slow streets of Beaverton. The winding, delirious momentum that carried us to their house. I miss not knowing. I miss the planned out days, and the four sandwiches packed in a cooler. I miss playing, unconscious of my body. How strange. How intrinsic the experience of a grandparent, of their home. Someone wiser to contrast the rash insecurity of a new mother. The ability to provide this untouched place, unmarred by worries, by hate.

I miss it.

I feel like my heart is splitting.

I miss the little tassels on the curtains that Bestemore (grandmother) made. The donuts that Bestefar (grandfather) would pick up for us, and the friendly conversation with the couple who sold them. I miss not knowing that one day, invariably, they were going to die. And that I would have to stand by and watch as simple tasks began to wear on their aging bodies. It is something that I am so acutely, so constantly aware of. A special kind of torture to know that time is running out, to know that things will never be the same (to know that I moved away), and to be incapable of causing any real,

necessary change. This imminent death, this looming thing. This piercing ailment seems unable to leave me.

\* \* \*

They had this dogwood tree. Bright red to deep purple to barren brown, depending on the season. It sheltered their weathered, teal blue front door. Crossing that threshold, it was always exciting. The smell of fresh baked julekake (a Norwegian sweet bread) would emanate throughout their house. In the summer Bestefar would spend hours grilling ribs in the mild Oregon heat. Everything was painfully familiar. It hurts to think I didn't savor these last moments. This regret, it's sticky and sweet.

I miss their kitchen, covered in small tiles. The familiar browns, the painting of a man ice skating that sat over an old church pew in the hallway. Their entire home was curated over decades of travel. Their entire lives were spelled out in miniature wooden rocking horses, eclectic East Asian art, paintings found at garage sales. Ceramics that caught their eye some 40 years ago. Despite everything being incredibly old, it was somehow still pristine. Everything had a place, and more so, a purpose.

Perhaps the most lived in part of their home was the sun room, where Bestemore let a small amount of clutter collect. A couple skeins of yarn, printed out knitting patterns, her Bible, a few disheveled pillows, but it was never messy. I always found that interesting. After all it was *her* room, though unofficially. When you are hidden from view, allowed to do anything, this is what you are? Clean?

In that sun room. With tan curtains that would click, click, click as you pulled the metal chain down, down, down, enveloping the floor to ceiling windows. Where the grey fox perched on the old, yellow couch. Watching, waiting, incredibly still. Where we would sleep. I, on the floor, my mother on the bottom of the L of the couch, and my sister on the longer side. We stayed here out of necessity. It was a confusing, whirlwind of a time. It was wonderful.

This is how I want to remember them, when that day comes. When they can *only* be remembered. The four of us scattered across their living room, watching cartoons. (We were so little.) Bestefar driving us to school while Bestemore prepared dinner. Long conversations at their dining table, drifting outside afterwards for dessert. Their deck covered in polka-dots of light, sun streaming through the tall maple trees. Laughing, talking, warm



glances from across the room because after all this time, after 52 years, they still loved each other. Truly.

\* \* \*

Years later we would come back. We had visited them several times since we left, but this time was different. It was the last. The illusion had thinned. They were moving, and I was unprepared.

At first, we packed up vases, ancient glass bowls, fine china that we had used maybe once. I broke a crystal glass, but no worries as “This is why you buy 13 instead of 12.” We helped them move piles of wood. It had been sitting there for what seemed like forever, rotting. The familiar smell of aging earth clouded my nose. Bugs skittered down my spine as we ventured into the crawl space. There were stacks upon stacks of cans, long expired. Dirt built up under my nails and tiny rocks burrowed their way into my shoes. Toilet paper was piled up in the attic. Jugs of water and bags of rice and beans lined the walls of the garage in plastic bins. These were not the collections of trinkets I had grown accustomed to. With growing discomfort I realized what this was.

Fear.

The physical manifestation of a deep paranoia harbored by my Bestefar. This strong, impenetrable man. For years he had been preparing for the worst. Terror accumulating like dust. Clouding his judgement, shrouding his mind.

His face. I vividly remember his face. Twisted with the effort of compressing his rage. (Hiding his embarrassment.) For who were we to come bustling in, recklessly undoing everything he had done to protect us. After all, this was not for him. He spent countless hours and thousands of dollars squirreling away food, water, everything *we* would need to survive. Everything he did, it was for *us*.

I can't imagine living with such dread.

I try to not imagine it.

Nothing good comes from this endless, fruitless dwelling. I'm left  
confused, wondering

Why? Why did no one tell me? Why was I so sheltered? Why wait until  
I'm no longer able to ignore it, until this shroud of youth is torn down by time.  
Tell me softly and sweetly, hold me as these truths impale me. Offer me some  
sort of sympathy, for I was young. I was a girl, and in my foolishness there  
were simply things I couldn't see. Yes, yes you can enlighten me. But, please,  
do so gently.

Oh, how I have missed being young.





# NIKE PEGASUS

Billy Kinsey



# COQUIMBO

Lucas Pereira-Suarez





# A NOTE IN A STOLEN BOTTLE

Erik Moore

set in deep autumn dusk  
loiters sharp magnetic pull  
through, struggling kites tow  
lines of sullen dull breadth  
with liquor pools lulled drowsy  
sheltered cheap hotel bedrooms  
there, sat undisturbed and waiting  
concealed by their favorite saloon  
and spied abstract, wild music  
in bar glow dimmed with neon  
distant souls breathing together  
until sun's rush to light the dawn  
bounced the dull record needle  
scratching in and over tunes  
playing worlds we made full  
tolls of distance between rooms





# THE BASE OF MEADOW PEAK

Ella Maddry



# PALOUSE CANOLA FIELDS AT SUNRISE

Gail Myer





# RED ROCKS

Ruizhe Rocky Zhang

黄色

Yellow.

无尽的黄色

Endless yellow.

枯草 死树

Withered grass, dead trees,

叶黄深秋

leaves gone golden in late autumn.

口中抽吸着

I draw in, through my mouth,

家乡的枯草

the dry grass of home.

风从两个方向吹来

The wind blows from two directions,

在喉结处形成低气压

pressing a low pressure

at the base of my throat.

红色

Red.

是氧化的铁

The color of rusted iron.

山峦 巨石

Mountains, boulders,

高悬于地平线上

suspended high on the horizon.

我攀上硬沙

I climb the hardened sand,

只准往东望

permitted only to look east.

山以另一种方式开裂

The mountain splits in another language,

石用另一种语言风化

the stone weathers in another tongue.

没有高粱

No sorghum.

没有高粱

No sorghum.

没有高粱

No sorghum.

# SERPENTS

Kimberly O'Connor

My people were snake handlers:  
rattlers, copperheads. It's why  
I believe coin tosses can prophecy.  
They believed their beliefs  
protected them from poison.  
One long-ago winter, prayer  
woke from frozen dirt a dead—  
asleep serpent. It emerged, early crocus,  
and slithered to my great-great,  
who scooped it up, singing. It didn't  
bite. And here  
I am, palming my magic penny.





# BEAR CLOSE UP. ALASKA

Gail Myer



# TEMPLO LATINOAMERICANO

Orianna Sangrona

I envision my body as a Latin American temple.

The moisture draws maps with veins of saltpeter in the lime.

Damp walls, cartography of decay,

The women visit me and read the mosaics of my striae like prayers.

And the church shakes and flakes,

yet, it stands.

On the ceiling, pigeons build their nests out of trash.

Bitten bags, lists with chores,

Watch over my sleeping form with a tired hum.

Alive. Stubborn. Domestic.

Just like hope.

I am altar of the ordinary; copal mixed with sifted coffee,

the murmur of the busy street in the middle of the day,

the old radio that prays, sings *boleros*,

and speaks of news.



Here the dichotomy that holds a candle to the Virgin,  
and another one to my ancestress.

Rosaries that coexist with red strings in my pocket.

I live between *Amén* and the noise of the heavy traffic.

And I long for the body to become the central nave  
when the tongue touches the shoulder.

Sweat akin to holy oil.

Walk barefooted in my temple, my female body,

a Latin temple that is broken, but is home,

raises offerings to gods of old and newborn.

My windows are kept open,

for the breeze that is sacred and nameless to make its *soirée* in my ribs.

*Amén.*



# STAINED

Allison Sobers

The pomegranates are on sale today  
and you place one in the cart  
hardly before the excitement can leave my lips  
at hearing that you had yet to try one

When we get home,  
I sit you on the couch and waltz to the kitchen  
ready to pull, seed by seed,  
treasures from within the cracks of this  
dense, wild chamber

Soon I am left with the bones of the thing,  
just the husk and the pile of ruby red pearls  
the juice on  
my hands, my knife, my shirt

I bring you the overflowing bowl  
watch as you gingerly bring a few to your mouth  
I laugh as your face scrunches up at the sourness  
and you say that there will, at least,  
be more left for me

As I return to the kitchen to remove  
spurts of red, a crime scene  
from the countertop and the sink  
I pause before washing my hands—

My fingertips are dark  
as if I dipped them straight into a bleeding heart  
I close my eyes and wish that I could be stained  
in every glorious, sour-sweet way  
you would allow of me



# CUPS OF LIFE

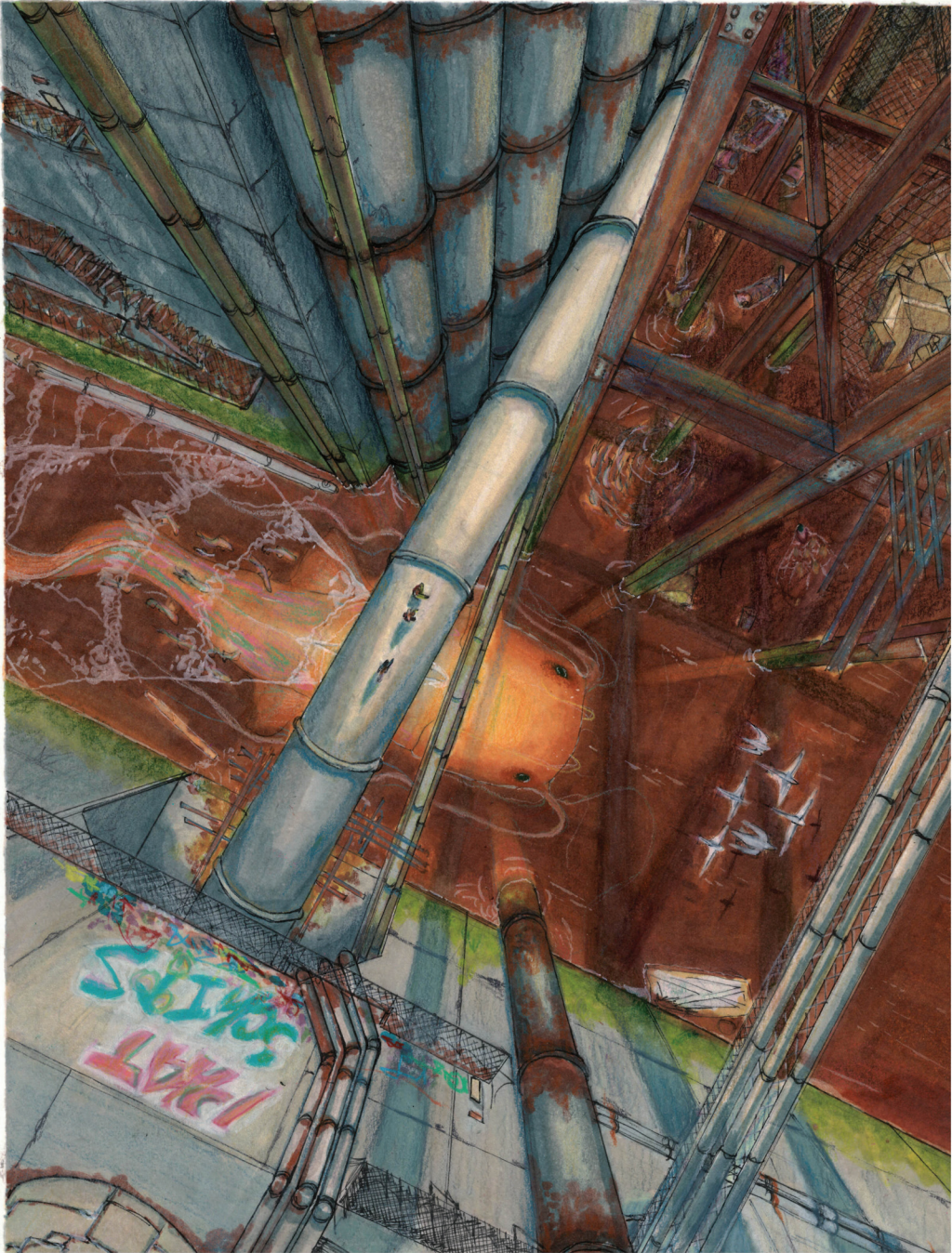
Aeri Osha



Watercolor, Colored Pencil, Marker

# KATPHISH

Chris Joseph





# SUFFER ME PRETTY MOON

Seth Tucker

Everything these days reminds me of mushrooms—even this sweet intimacy with my man—such that when my partner undresses it is as if I can smell forest and rot and dead things forced back through fungal strands and then back to this last living life we have here. Mushrooms. In every meal and in every breath and suffused in the ancient cardboard packaging that lines our home. Craig is doused in spices and smell-nice that we pretend are redolent of the leaves of oak and sumac and cottonwood and aspen still sheltering the undergrowth and all that wet and ripe earth.

I bury my face in his greasy hair and we treat our love-making like a sacred thing and when he is finished and me only partly so (even though he gives me his very best), we open the rusting shipping container we call home and crawl out into the night where it is cool and those small remaining businesses and homes still lit up with battery storage and panels protected from thieves are beginning to offer their dim lights to pull customers in like moths. The moon is waning gibbous in the last pine forest outside Boise, and far in the distance of a ridge we can see the black indent of Station 7 that no one has heard from in nearly a century.

Infant-sized mongrels are snuffling about in spastic desperation and Craig digs around in his pants and comes up with crumbs he allows the nearest one to lick. We have enough food for ourselves but not much more; just bound crates of dehydrated foodstuffs taken from a local dried goods producer, but it is water we are after with the few chits we have left in our bag.

Tomorrow, if it comes, will be another day Craig spends raising shades and tarps and dripping precious moisture down into the root bed of the remaining pines so that the morning crew can drain the precious condensation that gathers there. They use that condensation to refill the buried jugs and then they portion off what remains of the moisture among the two thousand or so individuals left in the area. We see the redundancy of this life, know it is a matter of time, but still it is in our every moment that we lust for the minutes and hours and years we hope are ahead of us.

We also all know that it is such a microscopic separation between having enough water or none at all, and we think of the pine trees as our new children almost; we are tender, protective, fearful, though there are no children here. Our families are now just two or three citizens who happen to love or tolerate one another, and everyone knows what happens to those who try to have babies.

We have all had to let go of children, be they living or dying or dead, so no one demands to see the hard asymmetry of my belly anymore. They understand that a baby could not possibly be growing in someone so lumped and emaciated and small.

Since Craig found the little bud of stone growing inside, set between my belly and left breast, our life became quiet. The mass is cold and hard and it is not long after that I begin to breathe harder and heavier with exhaustion from the work, until I am too weak to do it anymore. It is exactly the fatigue I once felt in the depth of my last pregnancy and I wake often now with the feel of a baby's breath on my face or the pressure of my child pressing into my ribcage.

The little dogs are following us, just out of reach now because they too know what happens when we get too thirsty. There are men and women on the dirty paths leading between each little hovel or buried bus or shipping container or hand-made shelter and we nod to each of them though friendships are a luxury no one can really afford.

Every day is spent figuring the accretion or erosion rate of our calories, how many we can keep in surplus past the fourteen hundred or so that allow us to live.

It has been five years since an engineer among us discovered this last symbiotic relationship with the pines here along the protective spine of this mountain, since we decided that we would stop and stay and find a life in this



rugged place. This rugged place that still shocks me every day with its beauty?

We joke that our lives have come down to our understanding of the cruelest math problem ever created. Mr. Kirby was a math teacher, and I think often of the fact that he scratched out the equation on a piece of paper and explained it to us all even though he just had to know what it would mean for him. There was only so much water in a closed system, he explained, and when he circled the number on the page—the number that told us how many could be sustained by this forest—we resisted it until we couldn't anymore and then it was the culling that we now call the Year of Drinking Tears.

This world is cruel and math is cruel and we were as fair as the math allowed us to be, but it meant that there would be no new future generation left to forestall the inevitable in this world of winding down-cycles.

We pass one sign blacked in tar on an old door: *Let us not suffer. Let us not create suffering.*

Craig is looking at an old panel and 12V under a rotting tarp, and the woman selling it has an empty water bottle she points to for payment. He will need it but right now we do not have the water.

My knee bones feel like they are dusted with fragments of glass and my back is burning and the taste of metal thirst is set permanently in my mouth. My teeth hurt, and what few I have divide themselves among dry sockets, and the pain from my thirst ebbs and flows as we make our way to a café we like, just an old gas station that has been shut off from the baking heat of the day and the immense cold of night with adobe plastic forced into every opening until it looks like a red cake spoiling from the inside out in cracks and jutting blue cysts.

We take a seat in a corner still cool with daydreams of moisture, and Danny, skinny and shirtless and head covered in plastic wrap with a rag to catch his sweat, walks over and makes a scene of wiping the table clean with an old dry cloth, then flicks it extravagantly over his shoulder as if we are in a fine dining establishment. We smile gamely because Danny is fun still and is as much like a friend as we get these days. Even so, he asks to see what we have in chits and how much we want.

When Craig sets his iron chit down, just enough for five ounces of water, Danny's smile fades and he looks to me to see if I have more to add. But no. This is the fourth day where I have failed to be able to work to produce a chit, and rules are rules, so when he makes ready the water he places his

hand on my shoulder, rests his thumb along my collarbone tenderly. Craig takes one of our freeze-dried meals and unzippers the top and Danny keeps his warm hand on my shoulder as he carefully dribbles the water over the meal. The smell of mushrooms bloated and oily and of a time before we were born spills out of the little zippered bag, and Craig stirs it, tries to get the moisture into at least some of the meal so that he won't wake in the morning with stomach cramps. Before he dips his spoon in, he asks me again, "You sure?"

I am. I nod. *Let us not suffer. Let us not create suffering.*

When Danny returns, he goes through the whole thing with the rag again and Craig and I laugh dryly. It feels good to pretend, no matter what I feel coming. We all know how many days it takes without water and I smile even though it cracks across my dry lips. For once I am certain I am doing the right thing, that Craig will be better off without seeing the depths of my illness as it spreads me thin as butter on our mattress in the dark. There will be more drops to go around, and that is easy math; more water divided by less work equals more time equals less suffering. "Danny," I say, as loudly as I can, "I'd like to speak with the manager. There is a fly in my husband's soup."

Danny's smile is glorious and Craig's laugh fills the empty space of the café and my eyes sting dry with the precious memory of tears.





# CHICKADEE IN SNOW

Zach Greer



# MARINER'S BALLAD

Allison Sobers

i think she's gentle.  
poets wax on about her torrents  
and abhorrent storms  
that crash and wail and break  
but i think her tears hit  
soft, slide down my  
open palm,  
well deserved.

i think because she is  
always surging, raging, wincing,  
she is called unpredictable.  
shaking fists, subtle glance, written list  
of every scorn and quarrel  
she has committed.

i think her patterns are  
intricate, delicate in their curves.  
come to her quietly,  
roam the crests of her foam  
with the barest fingertip—  
you will see who she is  
and know her signs and signals.



# WISTERIA GOWN

Claire Blackburn



# ARAPAHOE BAR DUCKS # 1

Filip Kasprowicz





# HOME

Jade Pappous



# TOOL-BAG

Vi Cranwill



# WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG



Samah Halim

I stare across the ocean at your portrait.

It wades, sometimes. Inches closer.

buoyant, untethered

Tonight I've decided to lurch,

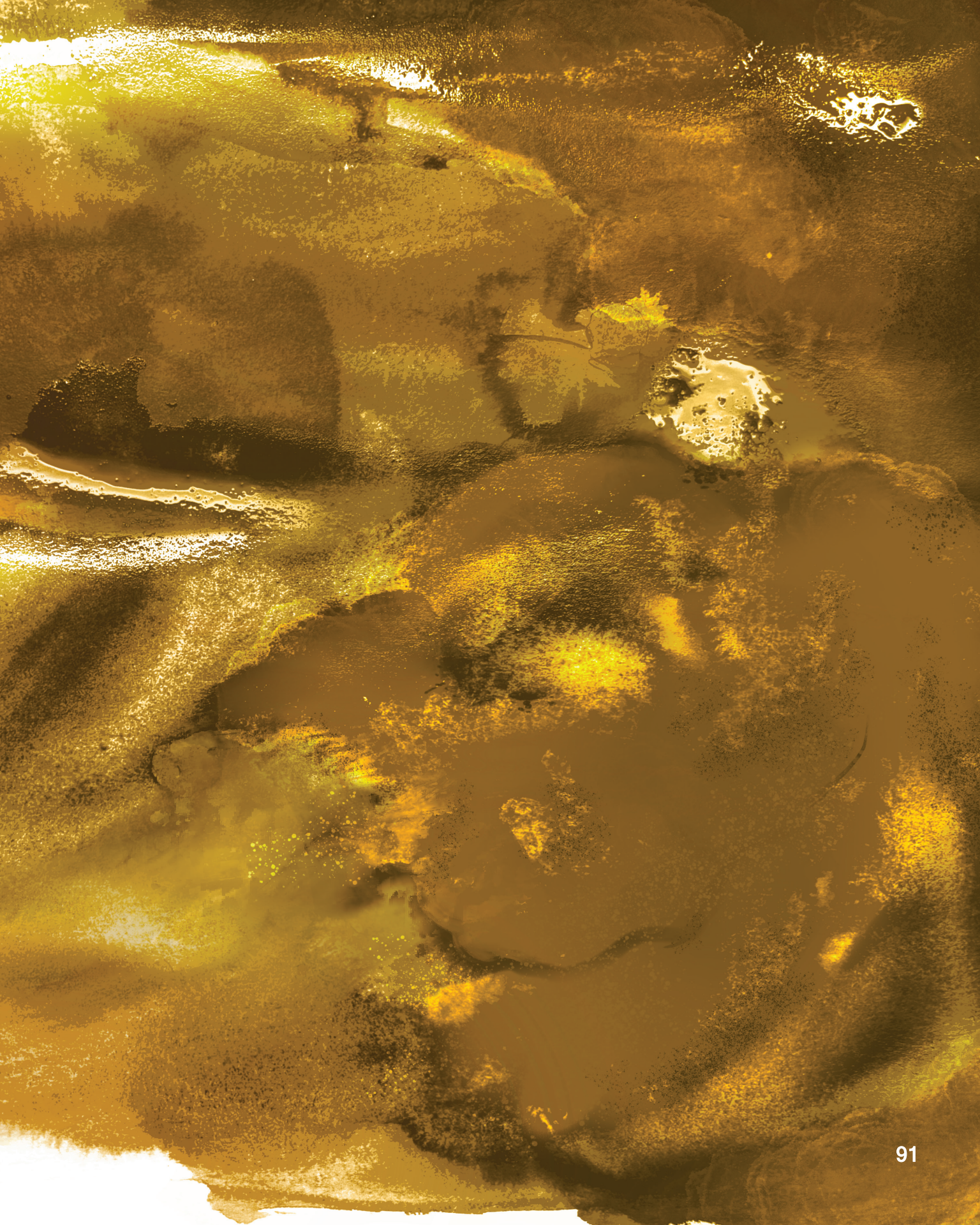
dashing

Into the splatter of waves.





RETROSPECTIVE PIECES  
1976-2025



1980S



The Awakening  
by Brian A. Cheney

The stillness of my intellect  
Has been intruded upon  
By the clamor of insight.



*Rite of Passage*

by Linda Bliss

Your womanhood  
draws me to you.  
I am a bright, shiny pebble  
that has found its way  
    into your box of trinkets.  
I change colors  
    To amuse you.  
I need to be purified  
by your fire  
How can I know if your assay  
    will show gold  
Or just char.

I was happy  
To let you consume me mentally  
And him consume me physically  
But you have turned to each other  
And I can't help but wonder  
Who will consume whom?

So I sit in your trinket box  
Between your azurite good luck  
charm  
And your malachite necklace.  
But don't worry  
Curiosity and devotion  
    (and obsession)  
Keep me here.  
And I won't leave  
Unless you cast me off

In a two-dimensional world  
I feel like a cube  
But you are a tesseract.



by Werner Fee

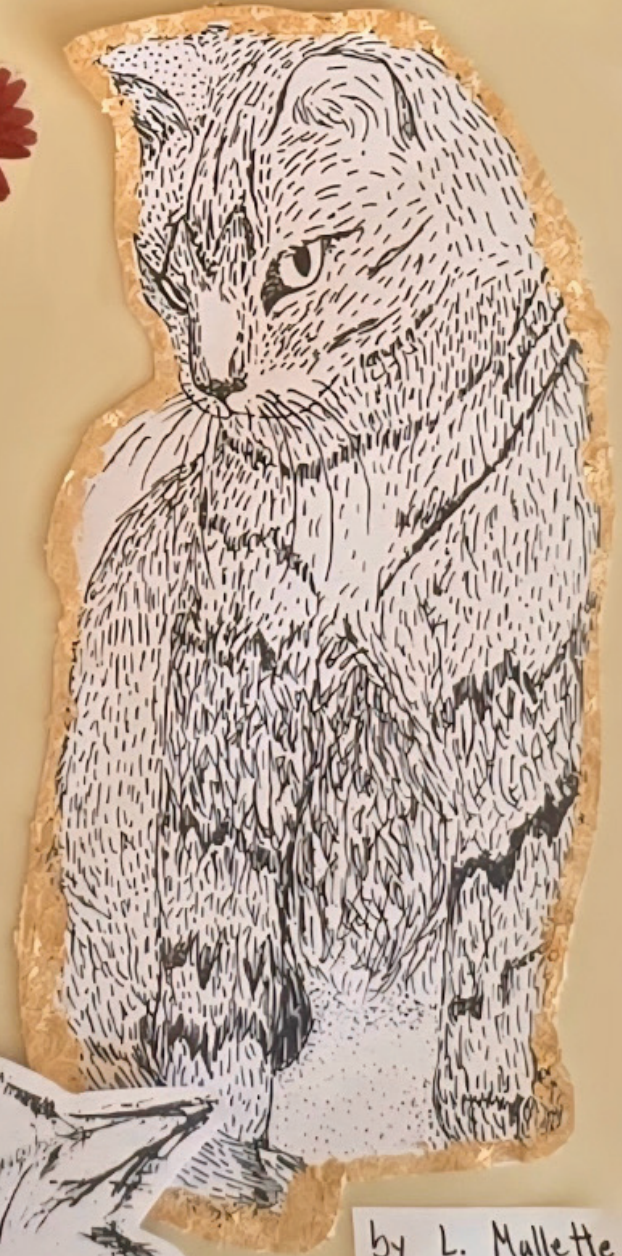
UNTITLED

Melodic overtones  
echoing between  
membranous walls  
a familiar image looms  
up in seeming  
happiness

The enchantment fades from  
the chamber --  
a white silent  
scent is ripped  
into memory's pain

Out the window a bird flies  
by a tense, frozen  
false grin on a  
billboard

Mitty Marmalade



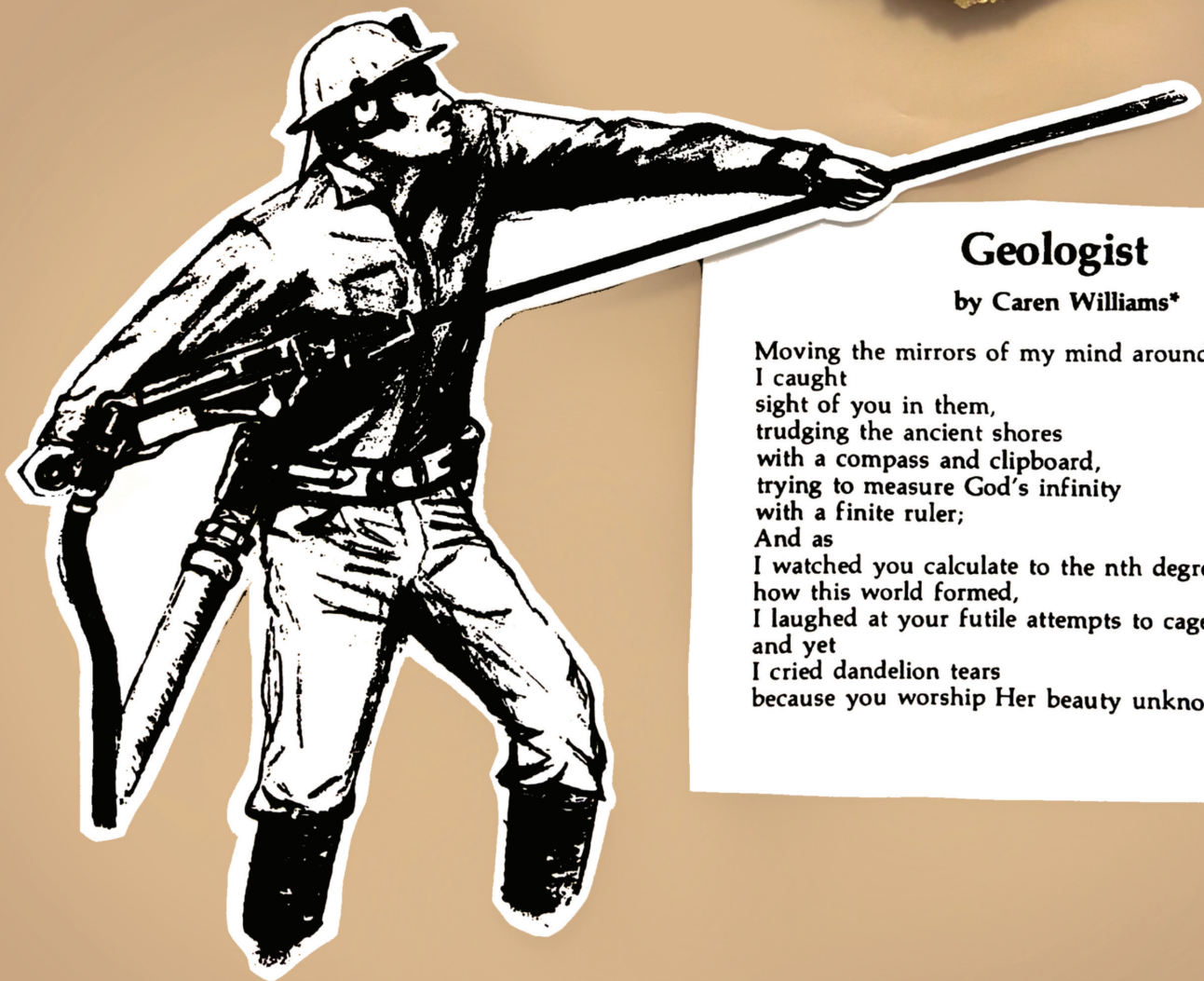
by L. Mallette



Karl Longley



by John Ingle



## Geologist

by Caren Williams\*

Moving the mirrors of my mind around,  
I caught  
sight of you in them,  
trudging the ancient shores  
with a compass and clipboard,  
trying to measure God's infinity  
with a finite ruler;  
And as  
I watched you calculate to the nth degree  
how this world formed,  
I laughed at your futile attempts to cage it  
and yet  
I cried dandelion tears  
because you worship Her beauty unknowingly



## Sirfred

by Mark Wasinger

Sloshing and tromping through hither and hay,  
trod the steed of Sir Frederick, the Knight of Saxony Bay.  
With a sword in his hand and a tongue in his mouth,  
he gallantly rode and dared not speaketh out.  
To rescue a fair maiden of billowy chest,  
so to him only her love she would attest.  
In the tower of Binklehouse Castle she did lay,  
under the captive powers of one Sir Edward May.  
Stolen from her Duke a fortnight or since,  
hast then the Knight Sir Fredrick got with the jist.  
To save this maiden from hatred or fury,  
Sir Fredrick the Knight should better had hurry.  
With God on his side and his sword already drew,  
the tower of Binkelhouse came into view.  
Between him now were a hundred or so more Knight,  
Sir Fredrick started feeling that there might be a fight.  
Miles above him it was God that then said,  
"Show them not your sword, but your steed instead."  
A hungry crowd bent on eating horse stew  
now let a maiden and Sir Fredrick slip through.  
Casually stealing away they both went,  
and without even so much as Sir Fred's armor then bent.  
A knight carrying armor and a Duchess blessed full of chest,  
walked back to Saxony with their love to attest.  
Now the Duchess is back with her hubby,  
one who does not love her and is rather quite chubby.  
And what of the Knight, gets he a just reward later?  
Yes, for he is now a wealthy tri-kingdom caterer.  
With 7 different sauces and many varying breeds,  
does Sir Fredrick the Knight now roast royal steeds.

## But Then Again

by Peter O'Donnell

I remember back when  
and land grew trees and pleasures weren't free  
and no one noticed anyone else.  
I think back to  
the friends that I had  
with the dreams that we lived  
the uncertainties we sought  
and it all seems forgotten.  
As I look forward  
to the places I'll go  
with the people I meet  
and the love that we'll make  
in the cool desert heat,  
I dream ahead  
to the times that I'll share  
with the people I love  
in the life that I live.  
But then again  
I'll probably cry some day  
when it never comes true  
and my dreams have all left  
and I'm feeling blue,  
And I'll think about you  
and the times that we had  
and the love that we lost  
and I'll probably cry  
just a little bit more.  
But soon it will pass  
and my tears will all dry  
and I'll remember your face  
and the spark in your eyes  
and the smile you smiled  
and the time you were mine  
and I think that I'll feel  
just perfectly fine.

by Rick McDonald

## Too Soon

by PAZ

Night slides in with stiletto stealth,  
Its padded feet hide sheathed claws.  
Gentle young innocents await the dark  
For prom sweet kisses tasted in the park.  
Streetlight glitters in iced-eyed boys,  
Hard and thin as passage rites.  
Crimson stains on a hate scarred street.  
Must I die tonight  
While elsewhere lovers meet?

## NOW!

Tim Lyons

*Tomorrow, oh please come tomorrow,  
Please pass today and give way to the sun.  
How sad I am with today, but how I long for the future,  
But isn't today really the tomorrow of yesterday?,  
And wasn't I saying the same thing then?  
Too young, too young, suddenly too old.  
All My plans became history before I realized they were there,  
Too busy making new dreams instead of living old ones.  
It's a never ending cycle.  
Tomorrow will really be no better than today,  
Just as today is no better than yesterday,  
So live for today, and live for tomorrow - tomorrow.*



# UNTITLED

by Penny Hill

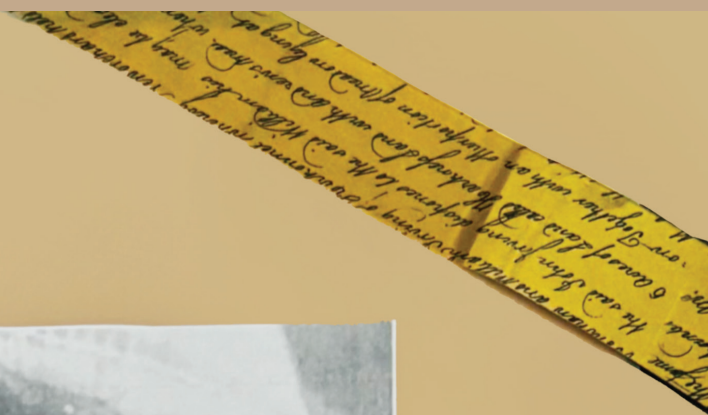
She was an exhibitionist, in a way.  
If she believed you were truly interested  
she would pull away her skin  
as carelessly as peeling an orange.  
With delicately painted nails  
she would tear into the truth of herself  
and hold it out, moist and warm  
for your inspection.  
Thinking back, I wish I had asked her  
how she knew when to stop.



—Barbara Nabors



by Fritz Penning







*Transubstantiation*


*by Elsie*

I once read a book  
about a man who  
Ground Up Glass  
baked it into bread  
and fed it to children.

He was entertained  
by the frightened soothing  
and the eventual deadened realization  
after blood and life  
congealed.

You see,  
he liked to watch the parent's faces  
as their children  
writhed  
in silicon agony.

I know you like to bake  
and the time will come  
for me to consummate my trust  
with butter and jam  
while you look on.



1990's



Monkey

John Ould



*"Petalel Demoness"*

by Eric Piquette

Midnight in Africa



*Nene Moussa Camara*

The sky is still blue,  
The moon, white dress,  
Gives hope to lovers.  
At the top of a tree,  
A bird keeps singing,  
When happy mothers,  
Carrying their new born,  
Lonely and sweetly play their role.  
There, near to the village,  
The Niger river, calmly flowing,  
Makes easier our hard life.  
At midnight, frogs' concert begins,  
While poor farmers hard workers,  
Are having their break.

At midnight,  
The right hunting season begins.  
Risky moment for wild animals  
If the projectile brings fire.  
Happiness for the hunter  
who brings meat to the village.

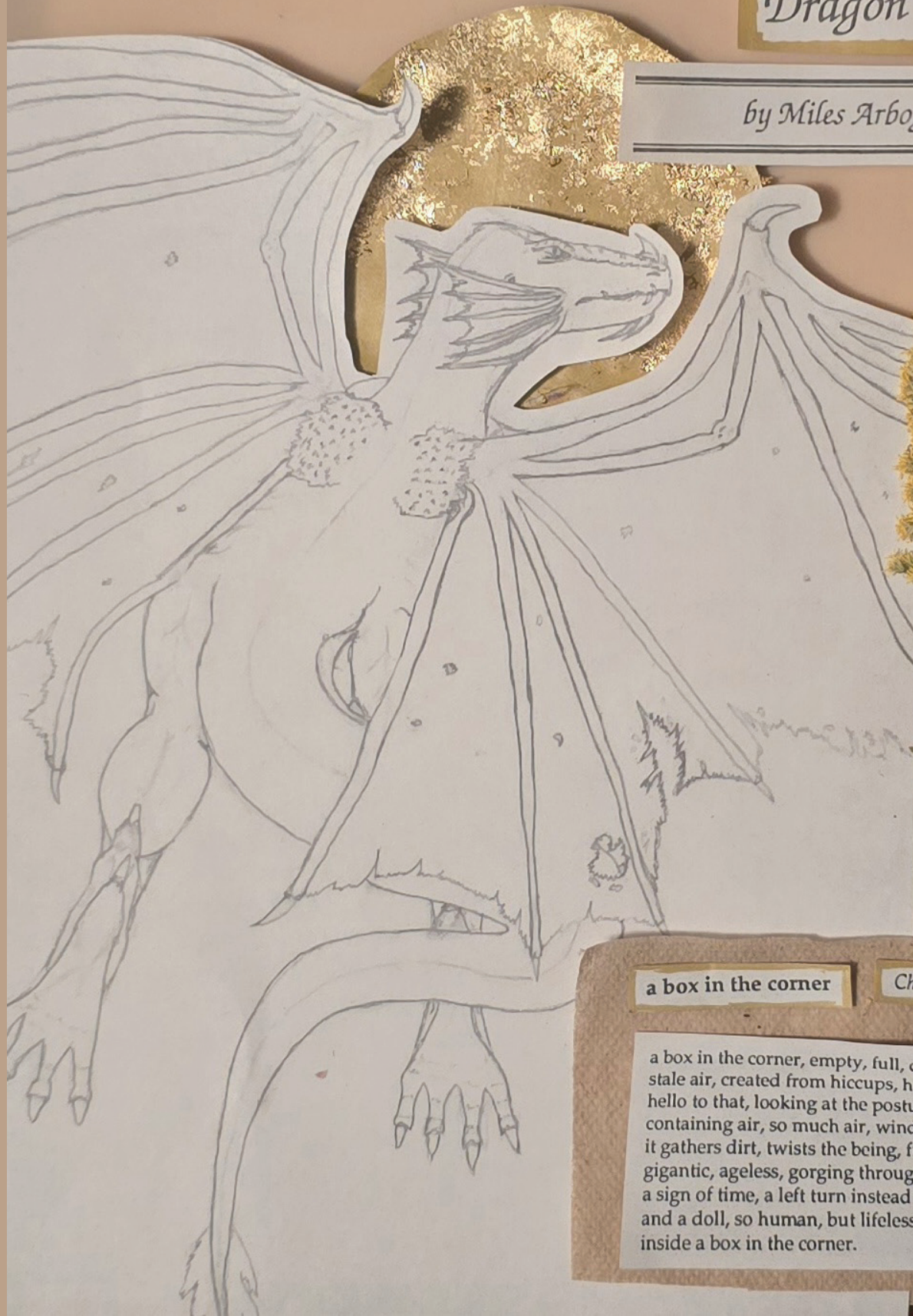
Midnight in Africa.

Lovely moon still gives light  
while everything is quiet,  
And time continuously flowing.  
At midnight in Africa,  
A light and fresh wind  
Purified our soul.  
Midnight in Africa!  
What a significant moment  
In African's life.



# "Dragon Flight"

by Miles Arbogast



a box in the corner

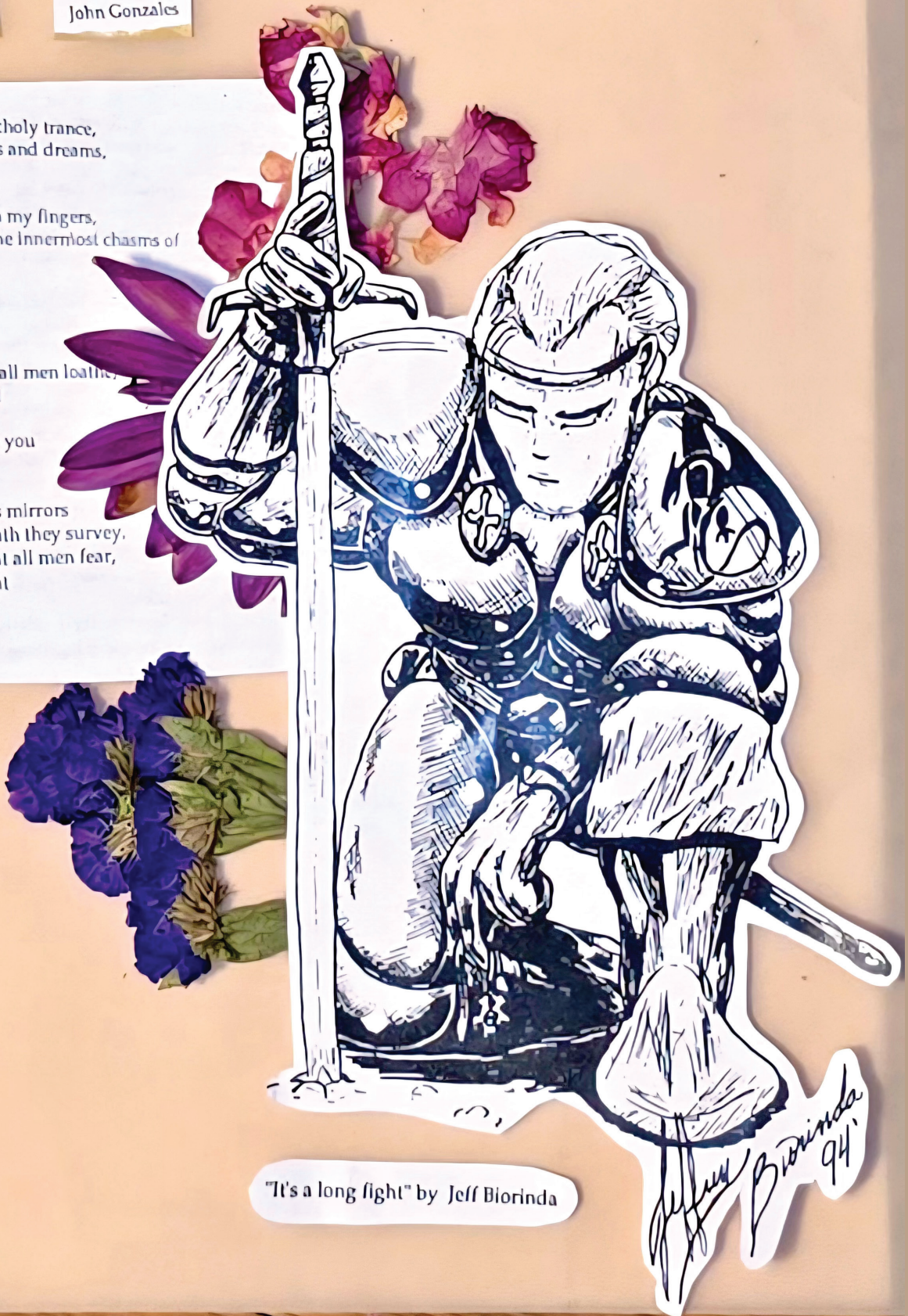
Chris Donnermeyer

a box in the corner, empty, full, dusty air,  
stale air, created from hiccups, hello to this,  
hello to that, looking at the posture of the sky,  
containing air, so much air, winds blows this way,  
it gathers dirt, twists the being, finds the dinosaurs,  
gigantic, ageless, gorging through the forest,  
a sign of time, a left turn instead of a right,  
and a doll, so human, but lifeless, in the dusty air,  
inside a box in the corner.

Solitude

John Gonzales

As I sit here  
Caught in this melancholy trance,  
While all of my hopes and dreams,  
All that I hold dear  
Turns to dust  
And escapes through my fingers,  
My soul retreats to the innermost chasms of  
my heart.  
And I know,  
That truly,  
I am alone.  
Solitude.  
That loneliness that all men loathe,  
How I embrace you  
Your only flaw is  
That while I'm with you  
I see myself.  
How I detest you!  
For your eyes act as mirrors  
Which show the truth they survey.  
This is the truth that all men fear,  
This is the truth that  
One  
As one  
Must endure.



"It's a long fight" by Jeff Biorinda

Joshua Wood



"Blue Bird"

Jean Luc Romano





*Anthony Vigil*

### Untold Stories

As leaves gently flutter to the ground  
Where piles of snow will soon be found  
So many thoughts race through their minds  
About happiness during the summertime  
Memories of things both good and bad  
That make them laugh or feel so sad  
Like the little boy who chose to hide  
Behind the trunk that was so wide  
And stand still not daring to peek  
So he might win at hide and seek  
Or lovers who laid their blanket down  
In a peaceful spot that's not easily found  
Where they could openly express their love  
As only the leaves watch down from above  
But the unforgettable quarrel between husband and wife  
That ended when he had taken her life  
Made the leaves shudder with fear  
Because not a soul was anywhere near  
And there she lay on this very day  
As the leaves flutter down to share her grave

*Sarah Hill*

## Paper On Fire

Jamie Weathers

Coming in from the storm,  
She sees his face,  
And it is as if she is back outside.  
He turns away from her  
As she steps closer,  
Tossing a crumpled greeting over his shoulder,  
A poem of hers  
He has discarded.  
She catches it  
Full in the heart,  
And slides it into a pocket,  
Saving it.  
Pulling up a chair,  
She sits behind him,  
Slightly to the left,  
Visible.  
Absorbed in the 'Net,  
His eyes make love to the screen,  
And he does not look at her.  
Yet she is close enough  
To feel his heat,  
To inhale his aroma of  
Burning embers.  
She wants to run her fingers  
Up his back,  
Up the back of his neck  
Through his short, spiky hair,  
Down his cheeks,  
Across his five-o'clock shadow,  
Down his chest  
To his stomach,  
Massaging his flesh.  
Holding him from behind,  
She would press herself against him,  
Leaning forward to breathe in his ear.  
He stands up.

Slapped awake,  
She topples out of her chair.  
He steps over her,  
Through the door,  
And out of sight,  
Leaving her on the floor,  
Crumpled and discarded.  
Slowly, she unfolds herself,  
Her joints crackling,  
Her edges frayed,  
And slides herself into  
His recently-vacated chair,  
Still dangerously warm from  
Burning embers.  
Logging in,  
She opens a blank screen.

She fills the empty space  
With herself,  
A poem he discarded,  
Something between  
A serenade  
And a modern-day Dear John letter,  
There on the screen,  
The only place  
He will ever look her in the face.  
With a simple keystroke,  
Her corners cave in  
To engulf the rest of her.  
She is gone.



2000s

—Robert Alexander

Skeeter



One Love

Lydia Muwanga

Mermaid by Kate Slaga



Face  
Rio Nicholas



# Sci-Fi Twists: Short story collection

By: Laura Betterera



Welcome to Science Fiction Theatre. I am  
your host, a talking pineapple.

I will be presenting to you a series  
of short stories so sit back, relax,  
and enjoy.



## The Test Tube Bird

Are you my  
morning?



Test Tube

By Laura  
Betterera



Not really realizing he was born from a test tube, the baby bird stared at his shiny, blue mother waiting for her to feed him.



Eventually, he got tired of waiting & just went to Mr. Donalds for one of their new genetically engineered burgers.




He felt drawn to them all at the big yellow arches.

Walking home, bird made a startling discovery. He was one of many of a new breed of genetically engineered birds. He was a super bird. Instead of wings, he had arms. Instead of being able to chirp he could speak. He was also breed for a life of service.




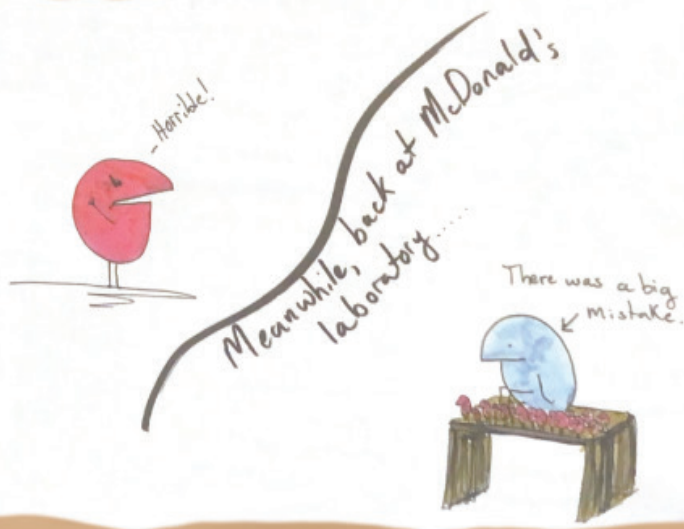
Treat your kids to the all new McDonald's Happy Meal!!  
New BirdTog!

Bird began to wonder why he wasn't in a Happy Meal and where all of his "siblings" were...



As it turns out, bird was the first of his kind and he had one small glitch. The same human genes inserted to give the birds a social nature, speech, and arms altered bird's brain to make him more human than desired. Under law A1b-8F, all animals genetically engineered by accident to express at least 98.65% of the human brain <sup>are</sup> protected as citizens. The human genes used were from Einstein in an attempt to <sup>reinstill past</sup> reasoning was that the animals would be genius enough to babysit human kids. The novel Happy Meal would mean food & fun for the kid but to the mom, it would be a miracle in a box. This advertising biibe was the first of its kind. Now let's go back to our friend, bird, and see how he is doing.





In a field behind the lab...

And the big mistake started laying big eggs....



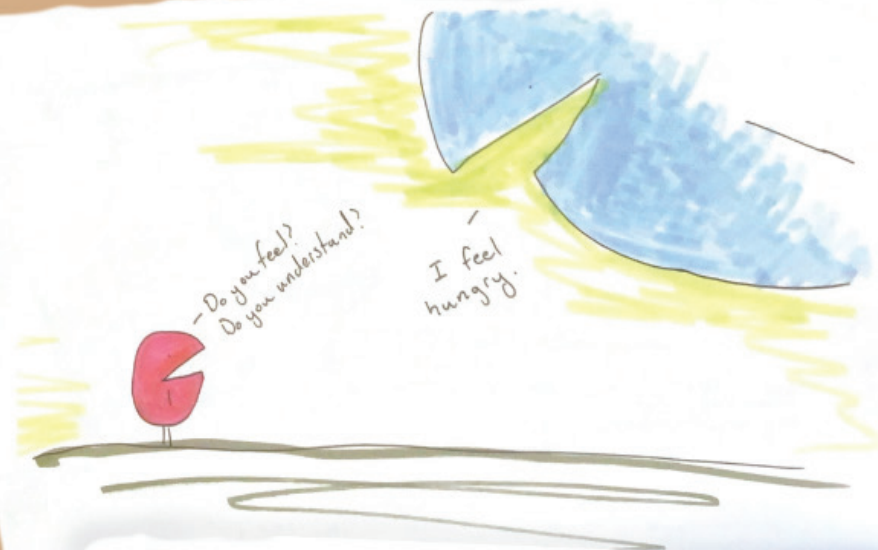
The scientists were baffled and the project was canceled. The genetically engineered birds for Happy Meals project was a flop. However, a problem was created that couldn't just be canceled. The human-size birds were multiplying!



Bird thought to himself for a bit. ~~How~~ Are these birds still family? Same species? Perhaps cousins? He felt alone & isolated. He had to find out if they would be protected under the AIG-8F law. If they were, they could be the closest ones to family. The other small red-birds didn't have what was considered to be "too much human". He wanted to save them though, whether or not they would understand what he was doing. They deserved the same protection.

But, by the time Bird got to the lab, a giant bird had eaten all of the little red birds.

Bird started to get the feeling that he was in danger. He had to be brave and try to speak to the giant bird.



Under the law, the giant birds were not "human-like" enough to be protected. They also kept multiplying. With all the might Bird had he fought in court to make a "reservation" where the big birds could multiply in peace and eat local grasses or small rodents. The scientist had unknowingly introduced a new species and now they had to live with the consequences. Bird lived a long life and looked after his giant birds until the day he died. He never really felt like he belonged or had a family but his purpose was to ensure the big birds didn't have to pay the toll for the mistakes of others.



zero

you are naught  
a curiosity a singularity a pebble lifted from the sand  
silently you whisper  
(and everywhere our ears are ringing)

—Dimitri Dounas-Frazer

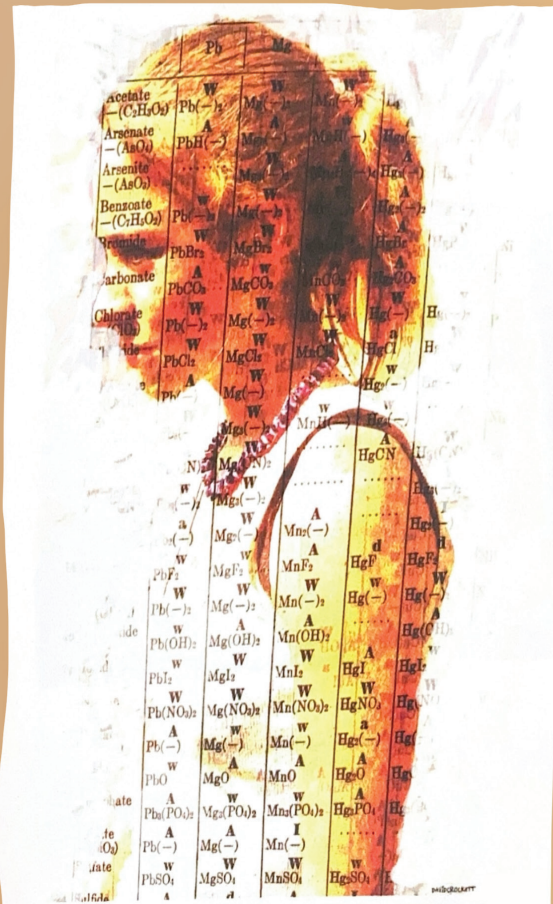
Souless

David Crockett



Untitled

Melody Shum



The Way We Fall | Rachel Ryan

What can I say, my love?

I taste [redacted] the bitterness of your absence

while the warmth of [redacted]  
your hand presses into mine. [redacted]

I fear we hold each other so close  
to look out in opposite directions.  
A string in my heart [redacted]

will always hold tension for you  
and I'd rather leave now

than have it snap in frustration,  
because, at times, its resonance  
evokes such a beautiful tone.

So let the autumn wither us down  
and blow us apart like leaves.

I can only hope [redacted]  
the fall will be more graceful  
than our prelude



winters ago  
when the frost tugged at our cheeks  
and I offered you a ride home.



Katie Smith  
ink

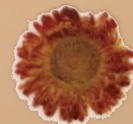
The Look

2010 s

**Ode to Lon Capa**

O Lon Capa, what did I do?  
Too many digits, now too few  
You must hate me, and I confess  
I return the favor; Just let me progress!  
I've been here for hours, you still won't work  
It's 3 am and I don't get torque  
You love to torture, I know it well  
But could you be nice for just a spell?  
Laws of motion set me free  
Blesséd Newton hear my plea  
Calculus will right the wrong  
I can't believe that took so long!  
That's it, I'm done, I'm going to bed  
All I can see is green and red  
O Lon Capa, I'll see you again  
On this crusade that will never end

Megan Macdonald



## Boy on a Bus

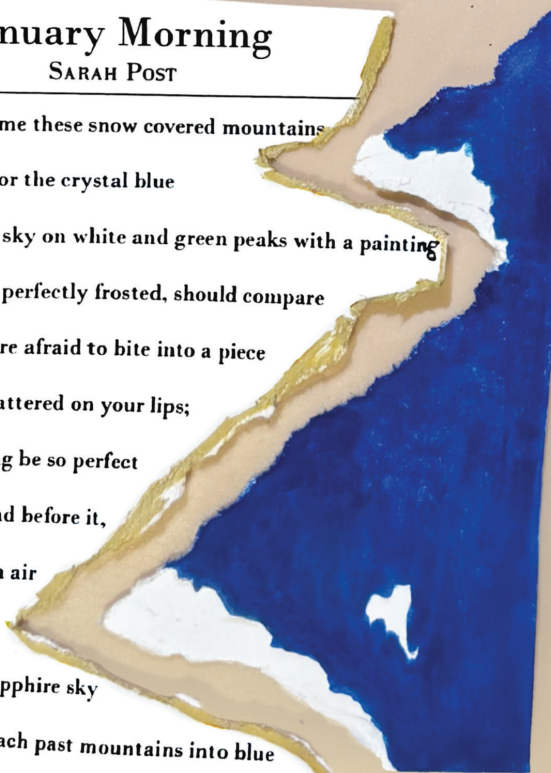
Ivar Reimanis




## January Morning

SARAH POST

Do not compare for me these snow covered mountains  
to cake with icing, nor the crystal blue  
juxtaposition of the sky on white and green peaks with a painting  
— rather, that cake, perfectly frosted, should compare  
to this, so that you are afraid to bite into a piece  
lest icy powder be scattered on your lips;  
rather, that a painting be so perfect  
you are afraid to stand before it,  
to feel the still, frozen air  
pour into the room,  
afraid to touch the sapphire sky  
for fear your hand reach past mountains into blue





Motel 6, Espanola New Mexico

November 6th, 2013

*Phil Persson*

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

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

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

Brown people in hoodies  
White people in Patagonia  
They all shop at Trader Joe's  
And mourn the everlasting sunset  
Of the atomic bomb

Los Alamos is Shangri-La  
Of particles and particulars  
The rest of us might have figured out  
Had we not bought that turquoise necklace  
Or indulged in some locally made gelato.

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

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

Georgia O'Keefe had it right  
Give em' landscapes  
Some western colors  
Cheesy fade-into-bland forever holograms  
But stick a skull in it  
A bleached bone fragment  
A reminder that the earth we've turned over  
Will in turn overturn us.



OWL

Alex Clymer



Alex Clymer

# ELECTRIC EPILEPTIC SUPERNATURAL SONG

*Calin Meserschmidt*

Remember you are a pine  
tree atop a jagged mountain

green blanketed by this  
extra supernatural radiating howl

of white reality  
under the weight of electric

high rise thoughts, electrified  
by these pine

clade roots of reality  
deep in this mountainside

loam. So ready your howl  
for a train in the color of this

neck turning an impossible angle reality  
is approaching, for that transfiguration of that electric

green aspen tree howl  
is roaring through these pine

tree fingers that grip this mountainside.  
O brother, remember your reality,

because your lips will turn a real  
shade of blue in this

relaxation under the sound of a mountainside  
mudslide, and those electric

thoughts of yours will turn these pines  
a shade to mirror our mothers paternal howl.

Remember though these golden valleys howl,  
the ones that swell in the reality

of morning dew, where those pines  
grow wild in this

feel of western electrical  
thunderheads over those mountain


sized blues. O Brother, your mountain  
is an earth quaking supernatural extra beautiful howl.

So don't look to that approaching electric  
thunder cloud with all its reality,

look to those fingers of aspen trees, and this  
image of trees of pine.

O brother, take this memory of pine trees to  
the top of your mountain,  
and O brother I will remember this, your  
supernatural extra illuminating howl,  
and brother this is your reality so remember  
you are electric.





# THE GUARDIAN ANGELS OF TRIBAL PAKISTAN

Syania Tifani

Another white winged whale drifts by. It hums a soft lament, an endless lullaby for sleepless children. Their tears drown in blood-covered bed sheets from sporadic nightmares. Perhaps soon, they will meet their dreams.

The peaceful creature floats along buoyant sky, protecting us like an angel. But your father said not to go outside, lest it thinks you are wandering unsafely. You will only give our friend more work, and humans need to be more considerate.

You hear persistent footsteps of other orphans heading along the rubble-swept mile to math class. Then – an explosion in the distance. You look out the tattered window to where the watchful guardian is, its blowhole billowed in grey stardust. The heavens must be celebrating again.

## Emergency Call Box, out of order

Katharyn Peterman

i.

we waited by the phone all night  
hands clasped over Bible  
bodies aching for the call

each breath  
an eternity

and we laughed  
at the typicality  
the existential absurdity  
of waiting for  
someone to die.

ii.

land locked for too long  
she searched for an escape

purchased a kayak, leaned it up against  
her balcony

she sang to it  
ate with it  
covered it in blankets when the snow fell

and with the first spring rain  
she strapped her helmet on  
set her kayak down, in the middle of  
the nearby interstate  
closed her eyes  
and let the urban drool  
take her  
aching body  
away.

# Chronos

IAN STONE





*Standing here now*

# L'APPEL DU VIDE

JORDY LEE

We tucked the remains of the summer day into our socks,  
and quickly scampered up the mountain.  
Cool, loose black dirt spilling down from our footprints.  
Half torn saplings bent at raw angles as we grabbed them for balance.  
Vines that crawled became trees that loomed,  
and up we went.

Ferns and flowers slunk away near the top,  
as sandstone boulders erupted and flexed together.  
We belly crawled across their muscular backs,  
reaching for ledges,  
as a stadium of whispering pines and preaching aspens  
hummed nervously from the stands

Peeking over the cliff edge,  
you could see your weight.  
Every sin, every bite of chocolate cake,  
pulling you down.  
A butcher's meaty paw  
politely pinching your thigh for market.

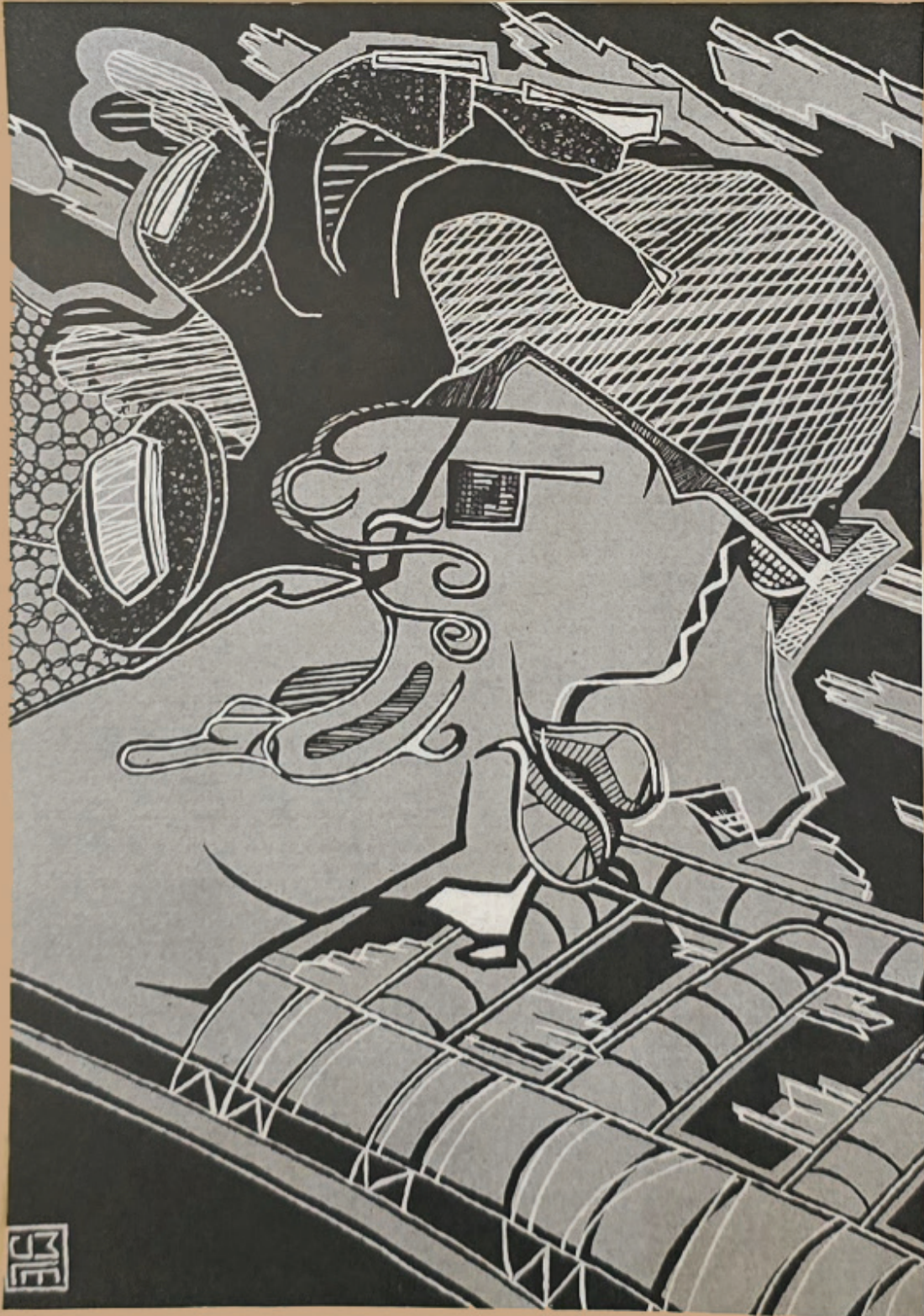
We slid away cautiously.  
A wrong step was enough,  
but a running start was so much better.

Curses are gasped,  
paradises are lost.  
Kick your legs all you like,  
nature always gets her due.

The water was a cold slap across the face.  
You always stayed under for a minute.  
As a courtesy,  
while you and the universe decided if you were still alive  
before kicking off the pebbled river bed,  
taking your first breath,  
and suddenly understanding baptisms.

# SENSORY OVERLOAD ON A BUS

Michael Le



## Bird Bones

Mason Weems

You know how it feels to drive your old car down the freeway, past the house of your kindergarten teacher whose name you don't remember, on your way home? It's something like that.



*Except*, in this case, your old car is actually that little paper sailboat you made when you were a child and let drift down the stream that ran by the park down the street, and it turned into a little heap of mushy soggy pulp that sank down to the creek bed, and probably rotted away, but for all you know it is still there, a little boat trapped against a rock under a stream that has since dried up but maybe is still running deeper and faster than it did back then. It's like that.

*Except*, in this case, you're not driving that boat so much as running in it, and not running *to* so much as running *from*, in much the same way as checking out of that cheap motel that wasn't even that far from your own house where you could've spent the night, and your key didn't even open the motel room but you woke up in there in the morning and checked out of the motel and now you're running because you can't crawl and you can't walk. Like that, in that little boat under the river.

*Except*, in this case, you're not on the freeway, you're not on a road or a trail or even a little path, you're blundering through the close and damp woods in the brambles after the rain and it's just a

bit too cold for the sweater that you're wearing, and you're accidentally trampling some rare

species of lichen on the rocks under your feet but to you it looks like any other lichen. Like that.

*Except*, in this case, the house of your kindergarten teacher whose name you don't remember isn't even a house, it's a little rock in your backyard, serving as a gravestone, I don't know if you remember it, I buried a little bird there years ago, it had died after flying into the glass of your bedroom window and spilled just one little drop of blood from its beak, that's the place that you're passing. Like that.

*Except*, in this case, you're not on your way home, you're being left alone, and not so much as you're being left but rather that you're the one leaving, because you're leaving first and they're leaving last. Like that.

*Except*, in this case, you are you are you are you, and have been you and will remain you, and you will always be running *from* in your boat under the current in the stream past the little gravestone that sits over the bird bones in your backyard.

My god, it's exactly like that.

**There are roaches under Cedar St. Zoo**

A magnificent monument here once stood proud  
Lively and colorful, the animals once roared  
But now I stare ahead upon the creaking wood  
“Cedar St. Zoo”—and it’s all gray

Lucas Baumgartner

Gray-stained by the time it has corroded  
An epitaph forgotten, “forgotten”  
It might say to the creatures who owed it  
—to those more terrestrial, buried down, gray

Star-like dust fills the hollow space  
Wandering aimless through a void  
The iron cage ajar, displaced  
I’m welcomed in; how kind of you, Gray!

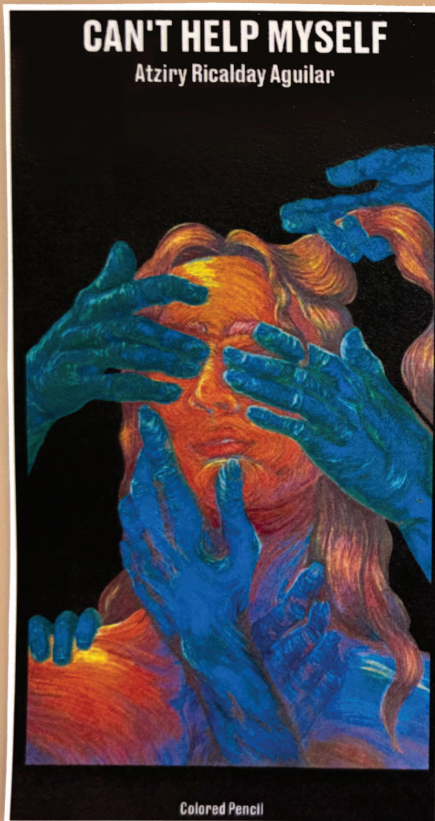
Starlight and I in solitude  
With not another human soul  
The cosmic brine, however,  
Whistles its deep cry. A tone of black.

Surrounded by naught except that null void  
Now absent of those dust-like stars, I listen.  
The lifeless, pure noise I cannot avoid  
Now joined by a color I cannot see—BLACK.

With immense speed, the color swims past sight  
A thing shaped by cosmos, tendrils ablaze  
of a rubbery flesh paired with a bite  
hungry for existence, a torso lay  
long enough to wrap the stars boa-tight

I ran for my life, or what I had known of it  
Away from the thing I dare not perceive  
A mind minced, tangled like worn yarn  
Who are you? Who is me?  
There are only two things I am sure of now.

One. Closer did we near to the thing which flew.  
Two. There are roaches under Cedar St. Zoo.



**The most beautiful song I ever heard was being played at a coffee shop**

Cliff Ghiglieri

off of Main in San Deigo  
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



**CODE RED**  
AURORA BORGHI

When I grip a pitcher of cranberry juice  
and stare through the glass  
in hopes to see granules,  
crystalline-cubed sheets suspended  
in garnet, I am met with onyx  
not crystal.

Back in Salida with no exit signs,  
gripping the wheel till my knuckles shine  
like diamonds  
and I fade into a crash.



## 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.

Rouge



Amit Sela



# EX(PATRIOT)

WENLI DICKINSON

*Where will we go?*

The tides: lapping (laughing) at my foolishness. Making a home out of inconstance. I saw the stone and chose wood. I saw the sun and chose ice. My solace is tenuous—

Imagine all your bones shaped like a scythe. Each connection is a disconnection,  
you bow out with the weight of it.

The deserts cry out for water far from alluvial origins. I call out to your dry bones. In  
response, your silence shrouds

our slumber / meals together / the suffocation of sustenance.

*Anonymous*

Late in the evening, our breath twines itself with empty air. We burrow into the night  
(armor from morning). You dream of setting the whole ship on fire  
though you are already burning.  
What actions does a flame have when the fuel is spent

*We go when we go.*

I can't complain. This is the course we charted together. Every storm torments you but you refuse to take shelter. You play captain; I, the hostage enraptured in all this demise.

Destroying dry land, living as exiles from ourselves. Insanity is love and love is insanity.

Every day we stand trial. Debris litters the bedroom floor; wounds in the sails; the sickness that grows in the body and infects the space between us; any lust for life is reckless, abandoned:

The Evidence Is Presented. Each day a brooding sigh judges whether we are fit to sail on  
(guilty, for now).

The hurricanes come and you weather them only to sledge-hammer through walls, through load-bearing beams.

The mountains last and last and last

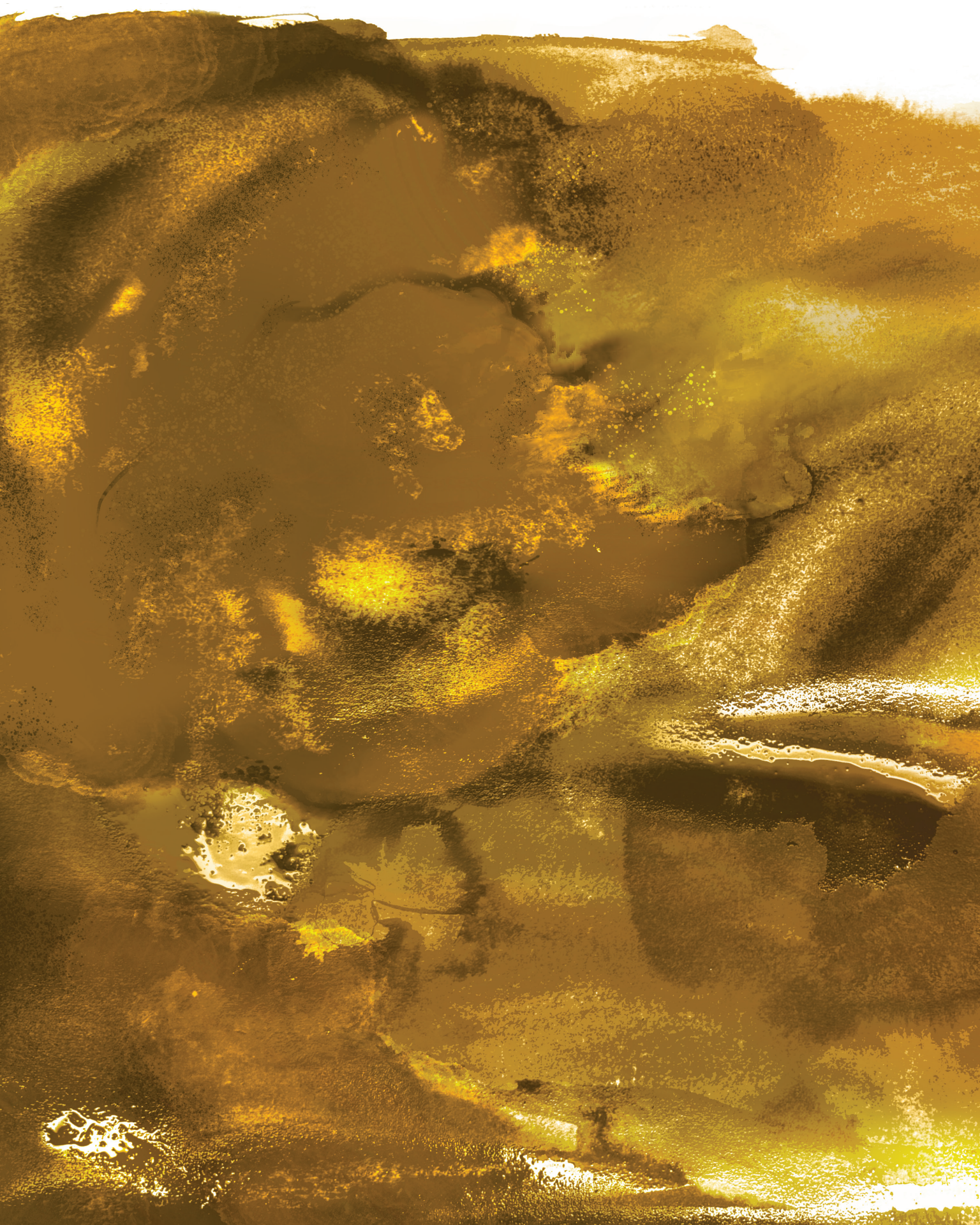
(laughing at us).

I think of you, organic and dying—the oceans flood sierras older than  
(your)

love. It flows from me; and you, dying and diseased, remain indifferent. I'll remember you this way because that is how you charted it.

Your salt is the essence in that water, I will still taste you after you are gone.

*Where will I go.*





KEEP THE PAGES TURNING FOR  
ANOTHER 50 YEARS . . .

# CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

## Lily Abourezk

Lily is a 2024 graduate of the Design Engineering and McBride Honors programs at Mines. During her time at Mines, she led the Creative Arts Club and helped build spaces for students to make art. In her sculpture work, Lily explores the boundaries (and overlaps) of art, engineering, design, and science. When she's not playing with mud, Lily enjoys painting watercolor squiggles, doodling ordinary objects, cooking elaborate meals for loved ones, and traveling to farms around the world.

## Kate Bachman

Kate Bachman, currently Research Support II for Mines Physics, Quantum Engineering and the Quantum Engineering Fellowship, enjoys science, mathematics, computer programming, the arts, biking, and many other activities. <https://vimeo.com/5569248>

## JoJo Berry

How could I have betrayed you like this? All you wanted was to be yourself, yet I can hardly remember who you are, what you look like. You deserved everything and none of the confusion. You were too young to understand what you were feeling. You didn't recognize who you saw when you looked in the mirror, I'm sorry. You didn't ask to be made this way, it's unfair. I miss you. You didn't deserve this, we didn't deserve this. I'll change for you, for us, as one. We'll be ok. We're going to be ok.



## Claire Blackburn

As an artist, Claire likes to focus on mixed media sculpture, with an emphasis on textiles and textile techniques. She tries to focus on making visually light, delicate pieces, while effectively hiding structure or building it into the design.

## Tom Boyd

For 32 years, Tom Boyd was privileged to be part of the Mines community. In 1988, upon completion of his PhD degree at Columbia University, Tom joined the Geophysics Department. He spent the next 13 years as an active member of the department, teaching and doing research in earthquake seismology, solid earth geophysics, digital signal processing, near-surface geophysics, and field acquisition. Beginning in 2001, Tom transitioned into administrative roles. Initially serving as Associate Graduate Dean to the then Graduate Dean and VPRTT, he assumed the role of Graduate Dean when that position was split into two positions in 2005. In 2010, he became Associate Provost, and finally, in 2016, he served his last four years as Provost. Tom continues to live in Boulder with his beautiful wife, Katy and cat, Elvis (The Great Catsby). In retirement, Tom is learning to play the piano and actively pursues astrophotography.

## Maddox Chastain

Maddox Chastain is a second-year student studying Geophysical Engineering with a McBride minor in Public Affairs. Maddox works as an undergraduate researcher in Geophysics, a museum associate at the Mines Museum of Earth Science, and as a TA for Thorson FYH. She's also a USG student services representative, so she sends LOTS of emails! Whenever she isn't working, she likes to go home to her apartment to spend time with her cat while doing art stuff or playing video games. Her art has always been something very dear to her, so she is grateful to get to share it with others through *High Grade!* YIPPEE!

## **Vi Cranwill**

Vi Cranwill has painted colorful, whimsical pieces for friends and family since 2022 when she discovered she hated the bleakness of her bare living room walls. She has been creating larger, brighter and deeper paintings in oil and acrylic ever since. “Tool-Bag” was painted in 6 months, inspired by the story of the first all-female space walk, during which the astronauts dropped an ISS tool kit into Earth’s outer orbit. The back of the painting notably states: “We all get the dropsies sometimes...”

Vi paints almost exclusively feminine portraits, figures and struggles, with the exception of her very first piece, ‘Bright Colors Give Me A Headache’, and later, ‘The Moth-man’. To see more of her works, please visit her Instagram page, @wheredidmy\_van\_gogh

## **Ryan Davidson**

Ryan is a former geologist and former engineer, but still enjoys learning about both. He enjoys writing as an outlet to stretch the brain and have fun.

## **Abby Deaton**

Abby is an Engineering Physics student at the Colorado School of Mines and a participant in the combined master’s program in Applied Physics. An avid reader of classical literature, she draws inspiration from Albert Camus, Friedrich Nietzsche, and the philosophy of absurdism. She is also influenced by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, especially their vision that small and unlikely acts can confront great darkness. Her academic interests focus on integrating physics and mathematics with ontology, epistemology, and theology in pursuit of a more unified and holistic understanding of the universe.



## **Thea Elrod**

Thea Elrod is an artist and musician who values the intricacy and influence of the subconscious mind and mental health through all forms of self-expression. She believes that true connection between others and our shifting reality exists through art, where communication and belonging form within spaces where loneliness and misunderstanding can be more prominent. Her purpose in the creative process is not only to feel heard herself, but to help others feel heard and know they are not alone.

The series Dissociation explores the contrast between instability and self-perception through the delicacy of fine line pen, where precision becomes a way to bring light to internal chaos.

## **Brock Ewing**

Brock Ewing is a graduate student who is proud to be an engineer and an artist. He loves God and his fiancé Avery. This submission goes out to his bride to be Avery Wright and his best man Blake Bowman.

## **Jessica Feng**

Jessica is a junior studying Civil Engineering from Centennial, Colorado. She is an avid weightlifter, hiker, snowboarder, and loves trying new crafts. Jessica is grateful to move her body to see beautiful things and be surrounded by beautiful people.

## **Tyler Folkmann**

Tyler Folkmann is a senior in the Civil Engineering program at Mines. He enjoys fencing, reading, and writing dark speculative fiction.

## Luke Garland

Luke is a mechanical engineering student who loves to get outside and explore God's creation, snap a few photos and share them! He has been doing wildlife photography for nearly 2 years and can't go on a hike, to class, or anywhere really without his camera. He loves learning all about the different animals he finds, and where to find more.

## Zach Greer

Zach Greer is a second-year in Design Engineering. He praises the Lord for giving him such wonderful things to photograph, and hopes to be able to photograph a great many more wonderful things.

His favorite quote (that's not from the bible (plug: Proverbs 16:9 - "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.")) is from a fellow *High Grade-er*: "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... 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!"

- Allison Sobers

## Samah Halim

Samah is a second-year Computer Science student interested in art of all forms.



## **Braden Hines**

Braden has thoroughly enjoyed taking time to write during his time at Mines. He hopes to continue working on large scale literary fiction projects for years to come. He's grateful for the opportunity to both share his works as well as serve as the Prose Editor for *High Grade*.

## **Cameron Hinkle**

Cameron Hinkle is a Mechanical Engineering 4+1 student, with a focus in Mechatronics and Space Robotics at the Colorado School of Mines. In his free time, he makes Jewelry out of various exotic metals, utilizing his practical experience learned in school as a Machinist to express engineering principles in an artistic form. He has worked with various materials such as Damascus Steel, Superconductors, and other rare metals in different types of jewelry in order to demonstrate the beauty of unique metals.

## **Tobin Houchin**

One of these days, Tobin will figure it out. And then.... Actually, not sure what happens then. Probably more writing.

## **Elise Jakel**

Elise is a third year, with a love for writing and storytelling. She wishes to share lived experiences and thoughts of nature and culture through words in a way that moves others. She wants people to connect to the work she creates.

## **Christopher Joseph**

Unlike most of their other friends who dabble in art, Chris is not remotely inspired by nature. Sure there are natural elements in their work but they're secondary to the manmade environment around them. Chris frequently feels a little bad about that, like they're some artistic poser.

Chris grew up in inner city Houston and got into urban exploring after hurricane Harvey left many businesses and factories abandoned. Chris is inspired by both the cancerous spread of heavy industry in their city with no zoning laws and the wonder of the people that live in it and the marks they leave behind. Chris's friend Bree has been a muse and a companion for urbex since high school. "Katphish" was actually inspired by a trip they took. Chris's best friend Joe has been exploring buildings with them for 13 years. Chris cannot imagine their life without them, here's to another 13 years.

## **Filip Kasproicz**

Filip is a Ph.D. student in geology. Originally from Austin, TX, Filip developed an interest in photography at a young age playing with his mother's camera. Since then he has grown to love both digital and analog media, and develops his own film at home. His photographic work today embodies his passion for the outdoors, love of nature, and desire to showcase his unique perspective of the world.

## **Amogh Keskar**

Amogh is a first-year student studying mechanical engineering. While he enjoys STEM-related activities, he also takes a lot of joy in creating music. For 4 years now, Amogh has been producing multiple genres of music under the artist name "Maharaja". His track, "Honor the Fallen", is part of his first album release, "Pixelated". He plans on making similar projects in the future, and he would like his listeners to know that they are super awesome. If you would like to see more of his work, follow @maharaja\_music\_co on Instagram.



## **Billy Kinsey**

These shoes were the start to something amazing. They were a future runner's first pair. The pair that convinced the runner to set big goals, train during offseason, and keep running many years later. They sparked a passion and for that, they are very special.

## **Tyler Lapp**

Tyler is a second-year Mechanical Engineering student from North Jersey who intends to pursue a Masters in STEM Education. They spend most of their time thinking about little guys in big places or monstrosities beyond imagination. They should probably spend more time thinking about bigger things, like long-term employment or what they're having for dinner tomorrow. Probably soup again. Always bet on soup.

## **Ella Maddry**

"I went to the woods to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

- Henry David Thoreau

## **Ambrose Martin**

Ambrose Martin is a mechanical engineering student who has always had a passion for the arts. He is part of the orchestra, the waltz and tango teams in the ballroom dance club, the creative writing club, and the Resonance music club, and has released his own album (Nebulous Clarity, self titled) on Bandcamp and SoundCloud.

## **Adyson Meyer**

Adyson Meyer is a first year Design Engineering student from Arvada, Colorado. She started writing poetry and short fiction in the wake of COVID and can't seem to drop the habit since. In her free time, she can be found reading, studying ethics, or practicing Lindy hop. She is absolutely thrilled to publish her work in *High Grade* for the first time—and hopefully not the last!

## **Lillian Moons**

Lilli is a first year at Mines, currently undecided, but she's figuring it out. She enjoys pottery, Ethics Bowl (shout out), watching pretentious movies with her friends, and folding laundry. She is very flattered to have her story featured in *High Grade*, to the point where she is reconsidering this whole "engineering" thing. Though she will most likely see it through as "Quitters never win, and winners never quit." (She just came up with that herself.)

## **Erik Moore**

Erik Moore is a Mechanical Engineering student at Colorado School of Mines. Erik has taken many humanities classes at Mines including Introduction to Creative Writing with Seth Tucker. This class was the main inspiration for his poetry.



## Gail Myer

Gail Myer graduated from the Colorado School of Mines in 1980 with a degree in Chemical and Petroleum Refining Engineering. He began his professional career at Union Carbide, where he was responsible for the world's largest low pressure polyethylene reactors. He later transitioned into managing his family's real estate business, with a focus on hotel properties. Gail applied his engineering training to improving financial performance and long-term value in real estate operations. Gail sought a pursuit that could be both a lifelong hobby and a source of enjoyment for others, while deepening his appreciation for God's creation and engaging the creative side of an engineering mind. Photography became a natural fit. It began with capturing Major League Baseball action at the precise moment bat met ball. Recognizing the need for better skills and equipment, Gail took a class at the Rocky Mountain School of Photography. That experience launched years of worldwide travel, adventure, and connection within the adventure photography community. One of his photos was used on the cover of the 2020 Grand Canyon Conservancy field guide. Gail often says that engineering has helped him in photography by truly understanding how the camera works.

## Kimberly O'Connor

Kimberly O'Connor teaches NHV at Mines and creative writing at Community College of Denver. Kim was born and raised in North Carolina and now lives in Golden. Her book *White Lung* was released from Saturnalia Books in 2021 and was a finalist for the 2021 Colorado Book Award. She's now at work on a second collection called *My People*.

## **Corry Olsen**

Corry is a first year Mechanical Engineering student. When they're not busy with homework, you might find them hiking, playing video games, singing alone in their dorm, drawing, or writing (very infrequently). They are continuously inspired by the lovely friends that surround them.

## **Jade Pappous**

frequently asks, "do you remember when Game of Thrones was good?"

## **Alyssa Parker**

Parker is a first-year at Mines who has been experimenting with mediums for the last few years, and is excited to show off her first full paint marker piece, as it is a medium she has been studying for some time. She wants to take this opportunity to shout out her high school ceramics teacher, who inspired her to be the artist she is today, and her partner, who she sees as an angel in every depiction.

## **Lucas Pereira-Suarez**

Lucas likes to share snapshots of his country.

## **Mikah Plitt**

Mikah is a second-year student in Geophysical Engineering with a minor in Public Affairs through the McBride Honors Program. Mikah was born and raised in Queens, New York where he studied technical theater at LaGuardia High School for the Arts and mathematics at Hunter College.

Mikah currently works as a Lead Peer Educator in the Wellness Center where he focuses on spreading awareness on harm reduction and substance abuse. When he isn't writing or thinking about rocks Mikah likes to read, play table-top games, and watch movies with his friends.



## Jason Slowinski

Jason Slowinski is an Associate Vice President at Colorado School of Mines, where he oversees campus infrastructure and operations. 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, with his work 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 junior in Applied Math and Statistics, and is getting nerd minors in Public Affairs and Computer Science. He tries very hard every day to not do engineering and focus instead on singing, grading homework, and taking long naps. His favorite shape is a circle but all shapes are cool if you have love in your heart. He'd like to recommend you try climbing a tree if you haven't recently. He doesn't care if you think you're too tall. Try it.

## Allison Sobers

Allison has had the pleasure of being a Co-Editor in Chief for her last year here. She'd like to thank absolutely everyone involved for all their dedicated passion for this incredible project.

She hopes certain emotions reached out to you through these pages: childhood innocence, full of hope for the future. The sudden recognition of grief and how hollow it rings when felt deeply for the first time. Dark, empty nights pricked with helplessness and the relief that comes with the morning. A depth of wisdom that can only be known with those sharp experiences. The warmth of joy that blooms in moments of rest. And finally, the reflection of every step, by you and others, that led you to today.

*High Grade* exists because every year for fifty years straight, someone has asked it to. Allison would like to request your help for its continued lifespan: submit your artwork, share the journals, and support this celebration of art!

## Seth Tucker

Seth Tucker teaches creative writing here at Mines and at the Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver. His most recent book, a poetry manuscript entitled, "The Cruelty Virtues," was published in late 2025. Seth loves hiking and reading and beekeeping and once made a living jumping from airplanes.

## Joshua Tuominen-Collins

Joshua Tuominen-Collins (Josh) is a Finnish-American dual citizen, writer, and musician studying Computer Science at the Colorado School of Mines. Josh is an active leader in campus organizations, including oSTEM and Minecraft at Mines. Outside of their studies, Josh is a multi-instrumentalist, and Principal French Horn of the Mines Orchestra. They are also avid systems administrator and homelab enthusiast.

## Benton Wandfluh

Benton is a second year Computer Science major. He enjoys spending time with friends, composing original music, running campaigns as a Forever DM, and having a good time. His favorite medium is the piano, as he likes composing and transposing songs he one day wishes to play. His current piano project is playing 60+ songs in a row in one 5-hour sitting, and he has half of it down! This is his first publication to *High Grade*, and he's very happy to be able to share his music with the world!



## Marin Ward

Marin can often be found hiking through the wilderness, perpetually annoying and amusing her companions by taking multiple pictures of every flower, bug, and animal she sees along the way.

## Ruizhe Rocky Zhang

Rocky is a first-year Environmental Engineering student from Shenzhen, China, and a member of the Thorson Honors Program. His creative work centers on poetry, where he explores memory, place, and identity as shifting landscapes rather than fixed ideas. Writing allows him to trace how moments linger and how environments imprint themselves on the self, turning personal experience into quiet, reflective narratives.

Alongside poetry, photography informs the way he sees and composes: attentive to light, texture, and the emotional weight of ordinary scenes. Moving between languages and cultures has deepened his sensitivity to nuance and perspective, shaping a voice that is both intimate and observant. Through words and images, Rocky seeks to preserve fleeting impressions and reveal the subtle connections between memory, identity, and the spaces we inhabit.



# NOTE FROM EARLIEST HIGH GRADE EDITION AVAILABLE (1978) :

## Acknowledgements

**High Grade** has grown up. With this issue, it seems it's going to continue and become a regular thing around here. It shouldn't be taken for granted, however. Only a few short years ago few would have believed that a literary magazine would ever appear at Mines. Without the encouragement, and suggestions for improvement, it may yet fall by the wayside.

A special word of thanks is due those contributors. More people contributed than ever before, in a greater variety of ways. The magazine you are holding is the result.

Thanks also to the literary jury, who gave their time to select the best of the contributions for publication. The members this semester were students Jim Culberson and Pat Cummings, and Associate Professor of English John A. Hogan. Professor Hogan deserves additional thanks for all the encouragement and assistance he has provided to getting each issue, and the concept itself, on a firm footing.

Thanks also to student council for recognizing the value of High Grade and providing funds for the publication and its staff.

This magazine is the realization of an idea, and presents many of its own. Read with an open mind, and enjoy!

Mike Norred, Editor  
Pat Cummings, Layout Editor  
Crystal Graham, Assistant Editor





# ONLINE CONTENT

View more amazing content on the *High Grade* website [highgrade.mines.edu](http://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.



# SUBMISSION GUIDLINES

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](http://highgrade.mines.edu). Limit five submissions per contributor per genre.

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