

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

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JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes a print issue each year, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the **UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER**. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our Call for Submissions page for submission guidelines.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

by JENNY SHANK

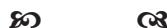
When I was a 22-year-old graduate student at the **UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER**, I interviewed Andy Schneidkraut, owner of Albums on the Hill, for the Colorado Daily. My article aimed to uncover which CDs people most frequently tried to sell back to local music stores. I can't remember the result, but I think it was Hootie and the Blowfish. I can't look it up, because most of my articles never appeared on the internet back then. In Boulder around the year 2000, music stores dotted the town and CDs abounded.

My editor advised me to talk to Andy, and to make sure to spell his name right. Andy is the kind of man a young person new to town looks to for help understanding the place—someone who has stayed rooted while the world shifted around him. As MySpace gave way to Facebook, which gave way to Snapchat, only Schneidkraut remains the same, in his music-filled lair on the Hill, which he rules with a world-weary grace. Schneidkraut has frequently served as the voice of experience to new generations of college students, who regard him through their relative innocence, with wonder.

In "DRUG OF CHOICE," CU freshman **MAGGIE RZEPPIENNIK** interviews Andy. He's now selling more vinyl than CDs, but he's still the same Andy. Andy speaks to Rzepiennik about his lifelong love of music, but when he expresses regret for opening Albums on the Hill, Rzepiennik tries to get at why. A young person doesn't want to hear that an older person followed his passion and in the end, it kind of sucked. So Rzepiennik probes Andy. "I was straining for some positivity, some sort of pride to shine through," she writes. But keenly intelligent Andy gives her no easy answers. Instead he provides her, and her readers, some insights to ponder about life and the road not taken.

Many essays in this issue of **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** explore the contrast between innocence and experience. In "HARRISON, ID," **MICHAEL GREEN** writes vividly of Lake Coeur d'Alene, which he and his family visit every summer to ride boats and enjoy the "same huckleberry shakes we have been craving since we finished the ones we had last year." Green could remain an oblivious, innocent tourist, but instead he delves into the town's history of environmental degradation due to local mines' illegal dumping.

In "A DANCE IN THE DUST," **SAM JACOBSEN** writes lyrically about watching a cross-country teammate die during a race. In the essay, Jacobsen revisits his teammate's collapse several times, from different angles, as if to see it both through the lens of innocence—when he didn't think anything so horrific could happen—and through that of experience, when he's trying to comprehend grave reality. In "SIDEWALKS WE DON'T WALK ON ANYMORE," **CLARA SWANSON** also grapples with death, in this case the suicide of the father of a friend who was as close as a sister. In "FOR THIS TIME," **ANDIE DULSKY** chronicles the end of a relationship with a magnetic musician she captures with precision, particularly in a scene in which she describes his meticulous ritual for gelling his dyed black hair. After their innocence is shattered, these writers must reconstruct their knowledge of the world in the light of new experience—sometimes with a sage like Andy to guide the way.



JENNY SHANK'S novel **THE RINGER** won The High Plains Book Award. Her stories, essays, articles and satire have appeared in **THE ATLANTIC**, **WASHINGTON POST**, **LOS ANGELES TIMES**, **THE GUARDIAN** and **MCSWEENEY'S**. One of her stories was listed among the "Notable Essays of the Year" in the **BEST AMERICAN ESSAYS**, and one received Special Mention in the 2018 **PUSHCART PRIZE** anthology.

FROM THE EDITORS

JOURNAL TWENTYTWENTY's editors are excited about the issue you hold in your hands, representing undergraduates from the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER through creative nonfiction. The journal is a year-long process of love, so we would like to thank all our staff, particularly our fall EIC MAGGIE RAMSEUR managing our submissions drive and blind review. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance we get from the PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC, the CENTER OF THE AMERICAN WEST, and our budding partnership with CU's RADIO 1190, offering our contributors the chance to share their work with on-air listeners. To all our amazing authors and artists—thank you.

JERETT CHERRY AND ISABEL PHELPS, EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

The art direction team at JOURNAL TWENTYTWENTY is enormously proud of the aesthetic outcome of this year's issue. Pairing art with writing is something we do not take lightly. We strive to find art that connects with the core of each essay or poem. We would like to thank CU's vibrant art community for its contribution to the journal. We would like to thank the digital production team who spend hours turning strong writing and beautiful art into a single issue.

KATE KELLY AND SEAIRA LEE, ART DIRECTION

It is humbling and inspiring to attend a university that produces such great work that we have the honor to synthesize into this journal. I would encourage anyone that happens upon this publication by good fortune or is introduced to it by die-hard fans to consider sharing some of your work with us. Thanks to the entire staff who have not only excelled in their own roles but also helped immensely as the publishing date approached. Also, thank you to SARA COOLEY for being the best second set of eyes anyone could imagine.

LAUREN HALQUIST, DIGITAL PRODUCTION MANAGER

The club staff wants to thank all our club members for making this year fun. We want to extend an invitation to everyone at CU interested in what we do. Throughout the year we host readings, write-in sessions, film screenings, and other community events. Check our website and social media to get caught up on our events. Come join the conversation at WWW.JOURNAL2020.COM and on Instagram @CU_JOURNAL2020 and on Facebook. We would love to see new students at our events and look forward to growing our journal in print, online, and beyond the campus of CU Boulder.

MOLLY MANION AND PAYTON VALLEE, CLUB MANAGERS





GET INTO PRINT—OR ONLINE

All University of Colorado Undergraduate students are eligible to send in writing for consideration by **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY**. Submissions go through blind review by our Editorial staff.

We seek only creative nonfiction, in any of its genres:

- Creative Scholarship
- Narrative Journalism
- Humor
- Lyric Essay—the truth told with a poetic slant
- Travel, Food, and Sports Writing
- Portraiture and Memoir
- Graphic Creative Nonfiction
- Digital Compositions and Videos for Web Publication

ARTISTS

Send us your stories through artwork of any type for consideration by our Art Direction staff, for publication in either our print or online editions. We especially seek multi-media work for our website, including but not limited to: video, animation, music for podcasts, etc.

JOIN OUR STAFF

Take the spring section of **WRTG 3090** or sign up for a one, two, or three-credit **INDEPENDENT STUDY** in any semester with one of our Faculty Advisors. Independent Study is offered at both the upper and lower division level. We seek anyone wanting to learn Editorial, Art Direction, Digital Production, Podcasting and Video Production, or the Business and Marketing of a print and online journal of creative nonfiction—no previous experience required. A position on the **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** staff will foster the development of marketable skills while learning about the exciting genres of creative nonfiction and publishing the region's premier print and online journal of only creative nonfiction. We exist to serve and further a community of creative nonfiction writers (and artists) across campus.

Find us online at Journal2020.com

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SWEET CORN

by WILLIAM BISHOP

I pull my cap down low over my eyes. The sun is at its high point so all I can do is look down, lest it blind me.

I ask myself if I am looking for snakes, but I'm not. Let them bite at my boots. The earth gives under my weight, sinking slightly, it is dry and crumbling, it cannot hold me like in my childhood.

The canopies of shade that acres of corn provided, where I could hide and read my books, are gone now. I was small enough then to believe it went on forever. Though I never asked if it did.

My family has had this land since our release from the camps. But no one speaks about this.

I walk for what felt like forever and remove my headphones for the first time. I hear the buzzing, electrical static from old telephone poles which loom and lean in the heat, their rotting wooden poles offering no shade.

I hear the buzzing, vibrating of insects; crickets, grasshoppers, blue dragonflies that flit in and out of my vision.

These sounds could never be confused for the other.

This place used to be beautiful to me. But it has aged as I have.



Generations ago we pounded mochi for thin broth in the hollowed-out tree stump of my ancestors with wooden mallets.

We use a machine now. It hums to life, pushing out steaming ropes of pressed rice; it burns my hands as I form the sticky balls between my palms.

I look to my right, my cousins throw the white globs at each other, screaming in glee; there will be rice in our hair for weeks. None of us know how to pinch the ends off properly.

I look to my left. My elders, in-front of them, rows of pristine white rounds. Their heads down, deft fingers, practiced motions.

The older members of my family are all dying off. So few people call my grandmother Kimiko any more, it is Jane now, her American name. And I wonder what her headstone will say.

Though I already know. She will die with a name her own mother's lips never spoke.

There is only one boy I have ever wanted to bring here.

I wanted to marry him, to make him a part of this family, I still wear his ring.

We would sit on the roof of the barn, look out into the night air and I would tell him about when the fields were filled with sweet corn.

How after the sun had set and the air had gone cool, my eldest cousin Chris would wake us children. His finger to his lips, smiling. We didn't need to speak.

We would pull on our quilts that grandma had made for us, like kimonos, like cloaks, like secrets, held tightly to our chests. Pile them in with our tiny bodies into the truck bed. And we would drive down the dirt roads to pick up Alejandro, one of the worker's children who was our same age, he would be there, waiting on his steps, with candy we couldn't pronounce the names of, but we didn't need to, to taste its sweetness.

We drove down into the night to sleep under the stars.

I can still hear Chris quietly humming along to the radio in the cab of the truck, from years ago. My other cousins and Alejandro speaking in their own hushed tones.

The buzzing then, the same as now. But then there was still running water of the irrigation ditches trickling through to the rows of corn, the rustling of the tall stalk leaves.

We used to run in them, the clunking sound of our rain boots, and it was magical, the fields were always shrouded in shadows, but it wasn't dark and the life in the fields held no danger, and time only meant something when grandma called us in for dinner.

Sometimes, she would call us to the house. We would come running to the porch where she stood, to hand us packages, tied in silks, filled with rice balls and cookies, sour pickled Japanese vegetables, canteens filled with tea.

In the long summer days we would run into men like Alejandro's father in the fields, who would smile down at us with their big sun hats, their kind eyes, and say, "tell your grandparents thank you for the bread," for the beans, for the advice, for the soup, the help fixing the roof, the tomatoes, the blankets.

I would bow my head to them like I was taught, looking down at the sun warmed earth.

This is respect.

I sit on the worker's dirt road now and write, looking out over the terrain, it is overgrown with weeds.

My grandparents have grown older, and their land smaller; their bodies could do less and less and so outsiders bought more and more, soon the corn that shaded my childhood was replaced, by huge oil rigs and empty fields of weeds. Soon Alejandro and his family were gone.

But no one speaks about this.

About the miles of empty land, taken back by those only interested in what is so far below the surface that I'm not sure how they can claim it as their own.

A pickup truck rumbles up behind me as I write. It is green like the sea, though I doubt it has ever seen more water than that pumped from a hose.

A man with tired eyes speaks to me softly in Spanish.
He asks if I need a lift back to my grandparent's farm.





I have forgotten how far I wandered and that this land is no longer theirs, that it, in fact, does not go on forever, that it is shrinking, being taken.

I have forgotten what it means to trespass.

He says to me, in broken English, that the people who own it now are mean and might shoot me if they see me wandering.

I have forgotten about the violence here that was never in the corn fields of my youth.

I shake my head. I will take my chances. Most of the workers are gone now that season has passed. And the landowners don't tend to it themselves, they will never see me.

They have probably never taken the time to learn the difference in the buzz of telephone poles and dragonflies.

The man in the truck nods. "*Tu Abuelo*—" and he trails off. Not wanting to ask,

I shake my head, not wanting to answer.

Lately, my Grandfather has been calling me Chris, he looked my father in the eyes and asked who he was.

But no one speaks about this.

The man in the truck bows his head, and drives away, slowly so as not to kick up the dust around me.

As if already paying his respects.

I stand in the depression of what was once the irrigation ditches that my cousins and I would race paper boats down, that grew the green leaves and the sweet corn, it is dry now, filled in with dirt, barren.

I start walking back.

I see a snake hole and I wonder, if I were to thrust my hand inside the earth there, would I find the cool damp soil of my childhood?

It is so ugly here, no life. Not really, no running water, no more children, no youth.

There is only one boy I have ever wanted to bring here.

If he were here with me now, on the roof of the barn, the sun setting, watching the warmth leave the land. The boy I loved.

If I had gotten to share my life with him he would tell me that it is all still beautiful. ☀



A DANCE IN THE DUST

by SAM JACOBSEN

When I close my eyes I see him. There he is. Dancing in the gentle dust. Dear lord, there he is. Just a few running steps away, he stands, dancin' in the light of that ever-present evening. The broom straw field is his stage, the grapefruit sunset his backdrop.

I can remember each of his body's uncouth contortions, each senseless seizure pirouette. I can remember the momentary, unnoticing feel, as he fell like any runner would fall, from lack of breath or wounded heel, swirling fast in a dust thick with the surreal, as the warbler warbled and the mountains watched with complacent grins. I can remember.

We had come to watch the race—that's me and three others. Our race had been run, so spirits were high with life's simplistic elation. We talked and laughed and joked for our souls' joyous inflation. All seemed calm, and perfect, and simple; distant cheering rode upon the soft September breeze. We watched the gently blowing cattails as the last runners passed—it was the somber part of the race: the part where faces are frozen into anguished positions, and form has begun to slack. They marched, the runners, up the final

half-mile hill, towards the finish line—salvation from a field as dry as hell. Cheering when our conversation permitted, we stood there watching. And then we saw him fall—just a gentle cottonwood leaf, nestling into the grass.

Time was still smooth then and flowed like melted gold. Runners still moved by mothers still cheered in the distance. Everything seemed alright with the world; it was simply ritualistic for a runner to fall from fatigue.

But the fallen boy rose too quick, and we saw within him something more than the runner's sick. And in that deep-fried instant, time itself froze, as up to the sky the runner's chin rose and rose. Speckles of splatterous spit spilled upward from his mouth, and that spittle, like late May rain, caught the light of the fading sun. He stood there suspended and bent, as if a puppet string had been tied around his heart and God had suddenly pulled up. Long droughtful sips of time drifted away on the tails of the cotton. His golden hair was a shining halo in the last light of day, and I felt burning cold chains slither down my nightmare-parched throat. Milliseconds were all. Milliseconds, but those droplets never ended.

But that first endless deathmare reflection was shattered in an instant, and his initial breach for air came down hard with a crash, as his head bowed down, and his arms flung out. His dance was not ungraceful; it was unbalanced, yet complex. In the bitter-sweet light of dawning evening he was a jester unstuck from time. The melt from the frozen instant was still slow and methodical, and I stood with slow worms bubbling in my stomach, unsure in my own legs. Not a word was spoken then between my companions and I, not a sound heard. Not the squeaking of the ground dogs, nor the warbling of a prairie bird; the only music to the boy's fever dance was the pounding of my heart. Finally, the seizure came to a close, and the runner fell back to the sharp golden grass.

Who spoke first after I cannot quite say, but it doesn't much matter. The boy was frightened, but there was strength locked deep in his acorn eyes. His nodding was slow and methodical, showing that he knew too well that something perfect had taken a misstep—a place once filled with peaceful complacency, had become blithe.

Choke

And then a cough

That was the pattern of his breaths. Soon the struggled, strangled breaths stopped coming. All at once came a wild-eyed terror, to both the fallen boy and I. The childhood cartoon had come true, and his

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nightmare-parched
throat.*

sweat-bleached white face started to turn an impossible blue. Eyes rolled back, and the soul's windows closed, as more and more froth began to flow. A sickly science fair volcano of milky froth—one of the final acts of the show. Then, that body that once had danced became limp with a pulseless trance. Low to the ground, where the grass and curly dock stood high above, the boy stopped struggling; I watched this through seven layers of transparent eyes, stolen from six mourning doves. Three children did appear, from where I cannot say, and they cried for the boy, into ears that could no longer hear. I tried to hide the unfamiliar wriggling in my own heart as best I could, but knew that they'd see it—they all surely would. They ran off for help, but things happen slow. Besides, how fast must feet run, to catch up with a fleeting soul?

By the time the ambulances arrived, it was too late.

Blue and distant, the boy lay, and the mother's cries came now with tears. There came the officers with pens, and papers, and questions, and there were the children, weeping. There were the EMTs with life masks and breathers, and they pushed and shoved for a reaping. They tried to pump life into a body, but the puppeteer had already pulled the soul far, far away.

The field had been almost perfect—the kind of fabled prairie found in picture books about cowboys and Indians. The grass had been tough and the clay dry. The field had been almost immaculate, and the wind there had been sweet and kind. Only a few things in that field showed signs of disturbance: the trashcan at the corner of the path, the people farther down, who cheered and were unaware, and the houses that bordered it. That field had been almost perfect, and I had found it beautiful. It was an interesting place then, for a soul to call a tomb; neither unpleasant nor cold, stony nor foreign. And when the fallen boy was wheeled away, had the field lost its beauty?

There, in those last succulent fish-line rays, came the field's wispy Coloradan voice: a deep forbidden mountain enclave and a lifelong snow flurry.

"All I have and am is from you." It called at soft peace to some form I still cannot see. Perhaps it was there, perhaps not and never. But whether or not, the birds still called, and the ground hogs still chirped as the sun set like a bruised heart over the angelic flatirons. ☙



STATE OF MIND

by MEDHANE KIFLOM

December 3rd, 2009. 9:28 PM.

Darkness swallowed the sky quickly and effortlessly. A vehicle scuttled towards the curb. A shadow emerged from under the street light and flung the door closed. It moved toward the dilapidated house very methodically as sirens wailed in the distance. Keys rustled in the door as the shadow finally shoved its way through. From street lights now to a kitchen light, the shadow's posture relaxed. Penny loafers scraped along the dull white tiles, searching for sustenance from a colorless box. It removed a Heineken in a single, smooth motion, and now a tall suited figure was seated in the living room. Lengthy legs extended upon the couch as the television came to life with the words, "Ab amata alo—" Soon after, an empty bottle appeared on the table, and the figure ceased to move. Tranquility fell over the house. But the night was still young.

Three hours.

The figure slowly awoke to the sound of the door creaking open. Alarmed, the figure stood to greet the unknown visitor. The knob turned endlessly, yet nobody stepped through. Seemingly

ages passed by, and finally the door creaked open enough to identify the stranger. A familiar person stepped into the doorway, the figures supposed successor. Slightly relieved, but still confused, the figure took notice of the calm demeanor his son displayed. "Came ze wooday? Cab abe metseha?" The son answered slowly, "I'm fine, I was at a friend's house." The two continued to stand and awkwardly co-exist in the tension. "Entei deliha?" the figure questioned. "Let's go out Pops, get some alcohol and relax?" responded the son. The figure agreed, nodding his hollowed out tired face.

A shadow emerged from under the street light and flung the door closed.

Three minutes.

The man awoke abruptly. Pebbles scraping his back, back alley garbage waft dwelling in his nose, a nightlight piercing the veil of darkness from a distance. Pain shooting down to right below his knees. Thoughts rose and descended until his head spun. Extremely disoriented, he arose from the asphalt only to come crashing back down. Unable to move, red and blue lights painted his suit. In place of his son, police cars swerved to his destination. Confusion and agony were written all over his face. It seemed as if asking what had happened would throw him into multiple dimensions of pain. Men clad in blue ran over to his side, worried for his condition. Question after question swamped over him as he worried only for the whereabouts of his son.

Three days.

Metronomic beeping echoed within Gebrem's ear. He slowly arose from a white clad bed, only to view a curtain on all sides. A wire looped from his nose to a tall, looming machine. Curiosity fell over his face and soon pain swept it away. Torment throbbed from his legs, almost as if he held in Satan's torture chamber. A door creaked open in the distance, and in stepped a small, white woman. "Hello sir, how are you this morning?" The woman spoke quietly, yet firmly. A slight smile and a shy look communicated just enough of how Gebrem felt.

Thoughts rose and descended until his head spun.

She slowly explained to Gebrem the procedure he needed. Surgery to remove bullets lodged firmly in the legs that worked tirelessly, day in and day out. Before Gebrem could fathom the reasons why, she got up quickly to leave the curtained room. As the door was about to close, she whispered to a nurse, "Poor father, he seems so innocent." She ceased to acknowledge that innocence did not plan an active role in this story. Innocence does not save people, but only humanizes them.

Three months.

The doorbell rang. I entered an Eritrean couple to a confined living room space where Gebrem was. The husband spoke alone with him, checking up on his old friend. A greeting transitioned seamlessly to old jokes. "Well you never liked to dance anyways," the husband mentioned jokingly. "Melik, you talk too much, that's why your teeth can never be straight!" Gebrem grinned as his old friend chuckled along with him. The rebuttal seemed to lighten his mood, even if he knew it was temporary. Unlike the permanent terrors of that night. His smile stayed plastered on his face, even as the couple left. It had been a long time since he could laugh so freely. It was a pleasure reserved for those who had few worries.

Three years.

I had never seen him like this. Papa approached me in a very sheepish manner. It wasn't like the strong, confident man that I had known growing up. Almost as if he had a question he could not form. Simply put, he wanted me to accompany him to a marriage. Knowing Papa, he really desired my presence if he went out of his way to ask. I could never tell him no. He was my best friend; I'd do anything to share time with him. On our way to the church, a familiar name came up in our conversation. Gebrem. Before I could even ponder where I had heard that name, we approached the gargantuan church. Papa told me one thing, and one thing only as we lunged up the stairs to the main chamber. "Gebrem is here, pay your respects."

Three seconds.

There I viewed him. A man of the richest dark chocolate I could imagine. Hair glistening a sharp silver and legs that stretched past humanly belief. As I entered the ballroom, I immediately recognized the presence before me. I knew this man, his story, and most disturbingly, whose father he was. As my father sat down next to him, he introduced me. "Gebrem, meet

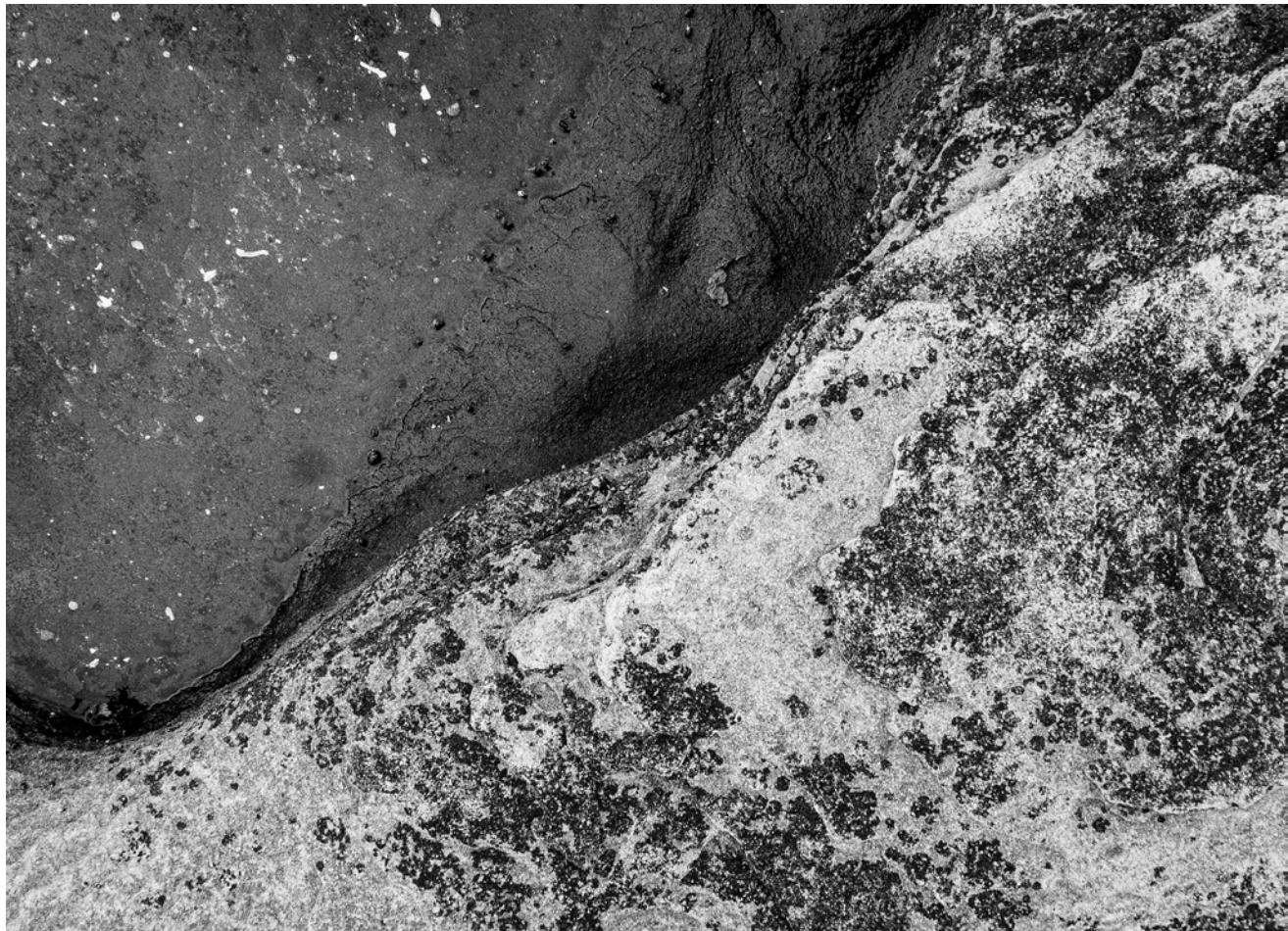
my son." I almost was too ashamed to shake his hand. I had done nothing to this man, yet I feel like I carried the weight of the greatest crime committed to him. One that tore his life apart from the seams.

No earnest father deserved what happened to Gebrem that day. He was betrayed by his family; His wife and his son in collusion. His son had committed a sin so great, no one in the community could brush it aside. He had aimed an instrument of death and destruction towards a loved one. With intent to kill, he disabled his father and left him to die in the street. But. Gebrem is a very unlucky, yet lucky man. Alive, but shattered, he now was only a shell of himself. He no longer had a family, or more importantly, a successor. And being a successor to my own father, I know how much that hurt Gebrem. Not the physical pain that burdened him. But the emotional pain of being betrayed. Growing along side his vengeance seeking son made me realize that we lived for different reasons.

We were of similar background. Hard working fathers who physically couldn't see their families. Eritrean boys who grew up attached to the hip of their mothers. First sons that felt the pressure of over achieving to create something from nothing. Gebrem's son and I were two peas of the same pod. Yet we lived two very different experiences. We went down two distinct ways at the fork in the road. And it all stemmed from our Papas. Honesty, work-ethic, and sacrifice was the foundation of our childhood. But it was applied differently. It became spite vs. gratitude. I grew up with my dad as my hero, while he grew up seeing his dad as a villain. I would realize how unique my situation was, while he would compare it to others. That's when I had become enlightened. I'd do anything for this man, because I realize that he had done it all for me. Even if I grew up not knowing who he is, it was to ensure I could become somebody. To ensure nothing stood in my path. And I swore to repay it to him. I realized I am one of few. A single Eritrean boy, standing at the gate of a life of freedom. And it won't stand much longer. ☀

*Alive, but
shattered, he was
now only a shell of
himself.*





HARRISON, ID

by MICHAEL GREEN

As hundreds of weekenders back their ski boats into the water and begin filling their tanks at the Chevron station tucked inside the marina, my family and I prepare for our departure from our dock in Rockford Bay on the west side of Lake Coeur d'Alene. The water that was once placid and mirror-like earlier that week is now agitated by the wake of amateur captains and their families buzzing our dock as quickly as their boats would carry them. My father—irritated by the chaotic bustle of water-sportsmen—sends us down to the boat for our escape from the madness.

The 15-minute boat ride stretches into an hour-long journey as we trudge through the rugged chop in the middle of the lake. All of this is very familiar to me. Even with the hurdles, I know that I would be able to navigate the boat to our destination at the other side of the lake blindfolded. Soon enough, the water begins to settle. On the horizon, a crisp silhouette of an old grain elevator marks our arrival into Harrison, Idaho. The small, quaint town sits on the eastern side of the lake. Its population fluctuates

around 200 residents during the summer and I imagine most pack up their RVs and leave during the colder seasons.

As we approach the cluster of old brick buildings, we raise the trim of our wake boat to avoid catching the propeller on the mangled weeds suspended from the bottom of the lake. We park our boat in the public docking area and struggle to tie our lines unprofessionally around the waterlogged and rotting wood. My brother and I light-heartedly joke about returning to find our boat in the middle of the lake as my father anxiously studies the dock for better places to tie off. The marina perfectly captures the essence of the rest of the town: completely unkempt and disheveled, yet peaceful and charismatic.

I step barefoot onto the hot dock, dreading the walk across an even hotter gravel lot once I reached dry land. I run swiftly to avoid splinters as the pungent smell of gasoline penetrates my nostrils, ignoring the multitude of fish floating belly up beside the dock, waiting for my family in the safety of the shade. Together we climb the small hill and walk into my dad's favorite bar: One Shot Charlie's. Locals the bartenders know by name fill the bar. We are outsiders to the regulars that make us feel unwelcome. The walls, lined with taxidermized animal heads and maps of the lake, confine a faint aroma of stale beer.

My dad, an avid collector of bar T-shirts with the unstated lifetime dream of owning a place like Charlie's, wonders if we have come too early this year for the new selection of merchandise. The waitress, remembering us from previous years, leads us upstairs to the manager's office where she unveils the new designs. My father seizes the unique opportunity to make an offer to buy Charlie's before he could be reprimanded by my mother. The manager chuckles and explains to him why the restaurant, as well as the rest of the town, does not have a promising future. Many of the locals moved away to the growing city of Coeur d'Alene where they could evade the primary waterfront property tax in favor of a bargain on secondary waterfront property with access to a public beach. Harrison evolved into a lousy retirement town, where people move to escape city excitement. However, residents struggle to justify spending their tight budgets to support local shops.

My brother, now bored of the local hangout, becomes restless. He pesters our mother for the change in her wallet and drags me along to the local creamery. While we walk, we discuss the bizarre atmosphere exhibited by the town. We notice that Harrison auctions off hunting rifles and camouflage pants as a philanthropy,

The exploitation of common resources generates for a few at the cost of others' well-being.

which seems abnormal to a couple of California boys. Most of the local businesses, including the market and coffee shop, are closed for the weekend because customers are scarce. The hours posted in the windows of the more professional offices indicate a short work week. Inside the ice-cream parlor, we order the same huckleberry shakes we have been craving since we finished the ones we had last year and unfold the local paper that features a recognition of the town's anniversary on the front page. Historic pictures and their captions culture our admittedly limited knowledge of Harrison.

*The marina perfectly captures
the essence of the rest of the town:
completely unkempt and disheveled,
yet peaceful and charismatic.*

Unfortunately, Harrison has a much more troublesome ecological past than we previously understood. We discover that our refuge at the mouth of the Coeur d'Alene river was once a legal dumping ground for harmful waste from the Silver Valley upstream. Mines intended to yield gold instead produced mostly silver, zinc, and lead. Activity flourished for almost a century, until environmentalists stopped the tragedy in the 1980s. Miners made over \$5.8 billion digging up metals, making the Silver Valley one of the most prosperous mining regions in the United States.

The Spokesman Review¹, estimates that about 30,000 tons of lead were dumped into the river. To make things worse, in the early 1900's, miners employed a chemical they called flotation material that was mixed into the water with finely ground rock. Minerals bonded to the flotation material and rose to the surface where the miners extracted more metals. The Coeur d'Alene River then carried chemicals, lead, and finer bits of material that could travel further downstream, resulting in a frothy yellow substance floating atop the water that flowed into Lake Coeur d'Alene. Eventually, pollutants migrated across the lake to the entrance of

1. Steele, Karen D. 2002. "Mining Enriched Region, Left a Big Mess." Spokesman Review .

the Spokane River. Seventy miles away in Spokane, the nearest hub of civilization, residents began to notice that their water source was contaminated with mine slime.

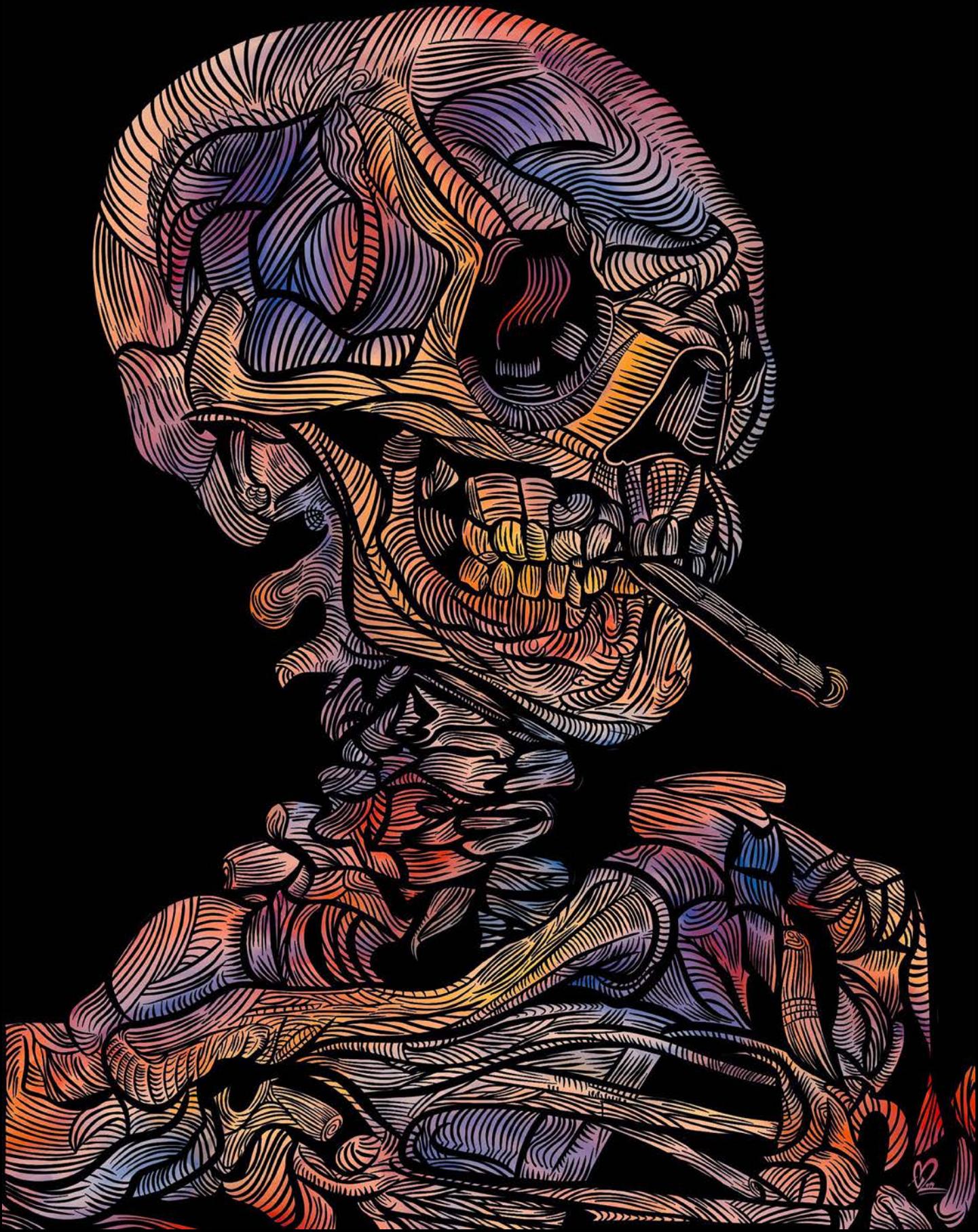
We read about the local farmers who pressed law suits against the mining companies because leaded water killed their livestock and crops. Executives denounced farmers' claims and escaped allegations by blaming fungus. Many local youth also became sick with lead poisoning; however, perpetrators decided to pay off the families of the sick children and defend themselves in trial rather than shut down their prospering mines. Thirty-eight families went against the mines in court resulting in a \$32 million settlement that would be divided among each of the families. In 1986, the state of Idaho filed a lawsuit for \$50 million dollars. When the attorney general lost the funding needed for research, the case failed. It settled for \$4.5 million in damages, contributing to only a small fraction of the cleanup costs.

The Spokesman Review estimates that about 30,000 tons of lead were dumped into the river.

Today, about 60 miles east of Harrison, lies the town of Wallace. Citizens there proudly flaunt their mining heritage. Mines for tourists to explore and outdoor museums dedicated to the underpinnings of the area dominate the town. Under no circumstances would I agree that the residents of Wallace are transgressors for embracing their history. Like any other town, Wallace has a right to be proud of its heritage. But my brother and I realize that this problem ingrains itself in a much larger economic issue where tiny municipalities, like Wallace, can legally send their problems downstream to a much more populated city like Spokane only to drive their nominal city economy. The exploitation of common resources generates wealth for a few at the cost of others' wellbeing. Several areas in the northwest less fortunate than Harrison would still be polluted for years to come because of the empire created by large mining companies.

I begin to fold up the paper as we are summoned to the lake by our mother. Children who are swimming around rusted signs cautioning swimmers about lead contamination tread mindlessly. Parents watching carefully from the shore show little concern for the warnings Instead they worry about siblings instigating chicken fights and stone skipping contests towards the expensive boats in the marina.

My blistered and burned soles familiarized themselves with the temperature of the dock where our boat waits patiently for our return. Relieved, soaked in sweat, and eager to jump into the cool lake water, our discretion guides us back to the whitecapped wasteland trafficked by weekenders before we dare enter the water. The exploitation that occurred there is still apparent decades later. The charming little safe-haven was not ours. No, it belonged to the Harrisonites just as it did during the Silver Valley boom. ☙



PROZAC KINGDOM

by ANDIE DULSKY

Someday I'll die.¹ Everyone I've ever loved² will die. Our bodies³ will turn to oak trees, to chrysanthemums and roses.⁴ Or even just worm food. Soil and stench. Compost.⁵

Why not today⁶?

1. Do you recognize your past self?

Nadia takes a hit off the pipe. I watch smoke billow from their nostrils, imagining a wise old dragon instead of the vacant being sitting across from me at the worn dining room table. The pipe is long, nearly worthy of Gandalf, made of transparent blue glass and narrowed to a point. The mouthpiece disappears between Nadia's lips.

I'm not sure.

Are you the same person you were last week?

Nadia takes another hit. I feel my consciousness leave my body. This is the closest I'll ever feel to being high. No, I don't recognize my past self. No, I'm not the same person as I was last week. I look the same, sure. Same dark hair and dark eyes as I've always had, same porcelain skin. But I'm hollower now. Cavernous, but still so, so heavy. Weighted down by meaningless rocks, perhaps. Maybe even vacant tumors. I can feel them in my stomach, growing into my arms and legs, rapidly making their way into my fingertips. Sometimes they're so heavy that I can't pull myself upright. I can't stop the swelling. I've never been able to. I can only hope to someday drown enough of my demons in cheap gin and chamomile tea to stop the influx.

I haven't yet. And I'm not afraid of demons or hell or ghosts like I used to be. I've come to realize that they're merely things you carry with you, the way I carry a bottle of fluoxetine in my back pocket when I can't make it home in time.

I've long since learned to let go of the things that bind me. Demons with slippery hands, hellhounds with hearts of gold. Ghosts with Italian Catholic grandmothers. The vacant tumors remain, steady and lifeless as the rock formation-backdrop I walk through every morning.



2. I remember what my body felt like when I was with her. Seventeen, young, and tender. Touching her was thaumaturgical, like conjuring an ancient spirit that has been packed away for centuries, begging to be freed. How loving could be sinful is shocking. The real sin lies in the hate just below the surface, in the eyes of elderly couples and bus drivers.

I'd never felt understood. Always been the weird kid, not many friends. Quiet. I used to build paper cities under the laminate top of my classroom desk, pretend I was somewhere else. *Anywhere* else. I was told that I was nothing but a space cadet with my head in the clouds. A mystery with blunt, dark bangs and dark eyes.

The truth is that I was afraid. My second therapist once told me that I carry a lot of fear. He was right.

Lily was the first person to tell me this. Lying beneath a fort of blue sheets, I told her of the reverse periscope that I see the world through. I've never felt particularly connected to my body. It's as if, at any given moment, my consciousness could take a walk around the block without telling me. *Dissociative disorder*, they call it.

I told her of my relationship with a man I've now come to call Harry. An oppressive 1950's husband who tends to take long vacations, but always returns in the winter to reclaim his territory. I told her of how he capitalizes my home, leaving dirty dishes everywhere but the kitchen sink and using up the pages of my journals. Allowing me only to wear a single white t-shirt for two weeks and only wash my hair when he leaves home once more.

Harry has a formal name, though I don't like to think of it. Major depressive disorder doesn't have the same otherworldly charm as Harrison. At least naming him gets a laugh out of those who have had it, though theirs might be Sharon, or Samantha, or Jennifer.

I stopped fighting him when I was with her.

No, breathing isn't easy, but it's easier when the hands around your throat aren't your own.



3. I scratch like I'm trying to claw my way out of my body. The depth doesn't matter. Nothing changes. There isn't anything under the surface

*I'm hollower now.
Cavernous, but still
so, so heavy.*

*On our first date,
I take my shot of fluid
Fluoxetine before
meeting her.*

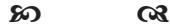
waiting to be freed. There's no sudden realization. No guardian angels. Just flesh and bone.

It isn't pretty. I'm not one of those tragically beautiful girls you read about in books and see on TV. I don't have scars on my wrists that I'll eventually cover with watercolor flowers. I don't listen to Nirvana and sneak out at 2am to drown my feelings in whatever I can get my hands on. I'm stale. Stinking of cigarettes and gin every Friday night, shame and flesh under my fingernails.

I try not to talk about it.

It's not the kind of self-harm anyone can recognize. Scabs heal. The scars they leave heal, even if in need of sweet oils. It's not obvious. Neither was the rubber band I used to zap my wrist during early high school.

It's a little-known fact that most people who self-harm aren't necessarily suicidal. Much to the delight of my family, I fall into that group. I'm not sure why it happens. I'd like to blame it on Harry or stress or on the weather, but I can't. I can't breathe. So I scratch. And nobody seems to notice. *I'm fine. Don't worry.*



4. She doesn't ask if I'm fine, and I could never thank her enough for that. I've spent too long lying to people that don't care to hear the answer. Instead, she takes my hands in hers and asks, in a voice that drips with honey, *what can I do?*

I don't know how to tell her that she doesn't need to do anything, that she's already done more for me than I could ever ask. She's given me a reason to try. And to fail. And to know that all my fucking up is finally worth something, because it led me here and it'll keep leading me, us, wherever we're supposed to be.

On our first date, I take my shot of fluid Fluoxetine before meeting her. I miss my uvula this time. Thank god. The last thing I need is to be more red in the face than I already am. I'm wearing my favorite dress, the only thing I feel truly myself in. I look in the mirror and remember my name.

My parents named me Andie Griffith before they realized what a mistake that had been. Luckily, no one from my generation knows who that is, lest I be beaten to death in a schoolyard. My legal name isn't Andie. My given name has never felt quite right. Or maybe, I've never felt quite right.

She wants to be called by her middle name, and although she has five names in total, four letters are sufficient. Rose.

Rose.

I never knew love didn't have to hurt. I never knew love could be shower kisses and spoonfuls of honey, chai lattes and gentle rain. Tender and soft and quiet, stable as the mountains. Maybe it's just her.

Maybe it's just her, but she makes me believe that I can get there someday, too.

I don't know how to say I love you in languages I do not yet speak, but I've always been a fast learner. I'll get there. I'm just taking my time.



5. Compost is just something on its way to becoming what it's meant to be. At least, that's what my roommate tells me.

We can see the garbage from our balcony and watch the neighborhood raccoons for as long as they let us. They steal trash, dig through the compost bins. Maddie and I contribute the swollen carcass of a large watermelon, and the raccoons feast. I think that when I die, I might like to come back as a raccoon.

I see Maddie every day, and Avery just as much. We spend hours talking about the validity of modern drag culture, the politics behind slam poetry. We mooch cigarettes off our friends even though we know we shouldn't.

Each time I go to take my daily fluoxetine, Avery and Maddie are there, blasting LMFAO's "Shots" and filling glasses to the brim with whatever they can find, from almond milk to salad dressing. I've never met anyone more ridiculous, and I've never been more grateful.

Vinegar is definitely harder on the throat than Prozac.

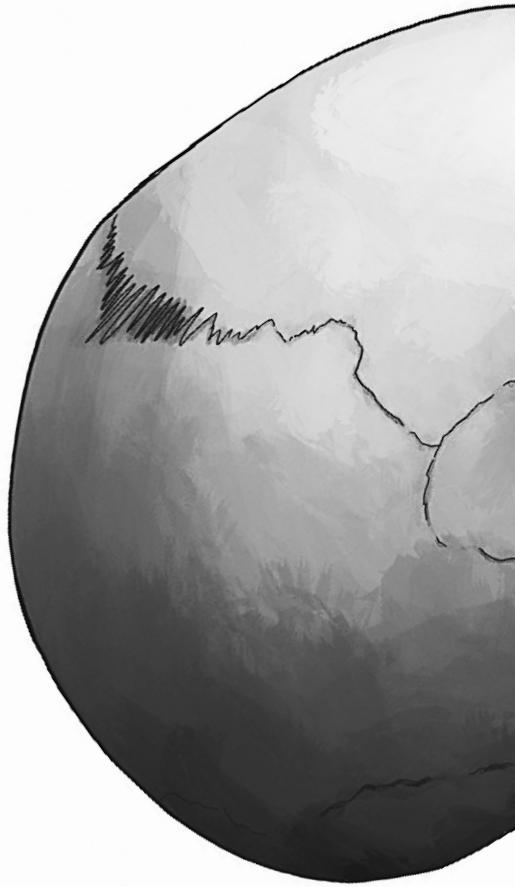


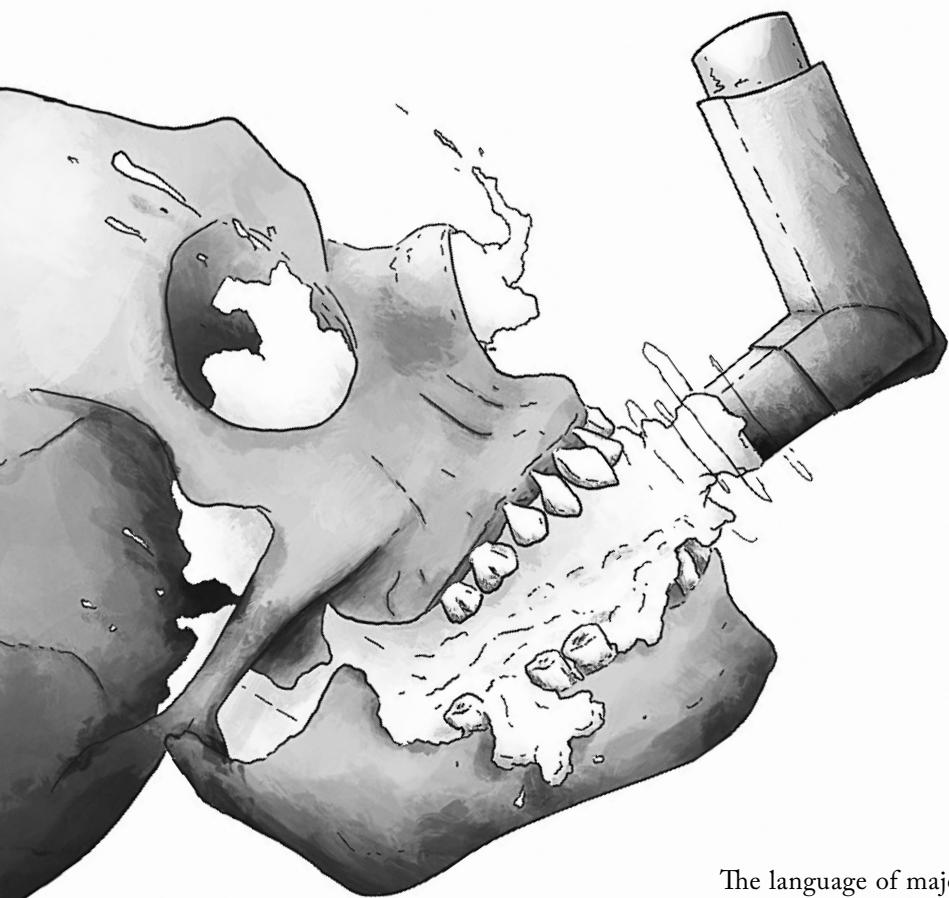
6. I didn't need to get rid of my demons, I just needed to find a way to talk to them. I'm not yet fluent in their languages, but I'm learning to find comfort in the gray area.

The language of dissociative disorder comes in waves, soft and serene. Like having a bell jar over your head, seeing everything from fifteen feet away.

The language of anxiety disorder can be the thing that keeps you, like the feeling of nearly toppling backward in your seat. A knife's edge of an existence.

The language of post-traumatic stress disorder hangs like a crystal chandelier, its chain ready to snap at any given moment. Fragile. Not like a flower, more like a bomb.





The language of major depressive disorder comes like a tsunami, the result of aftershocks, sending bookshelves into disrepair, along with everyone you've ever loved, ever could have loved.

Everyone I've ever loved will die. Someday, I'll die. Why not today?

There are hundreds of dogs I have yet to pet.

There are thousands of poems I have yet to write.

I've cried in front of too many paintings to give up on the Louvre.

I need to try the tamales that Rose raves about from her hometown.

I haven't seen Lily's band play in years.

I have to bring a balloon to Avery's hospital room someday after they more fully become themselves, one that states, "it's (sorta) a boy!"

I can't give up on the safe space that Maddie and I have created in our tiny two-bedroom apartment, the hole in the wall that we've filled with pride paraphernalia.

I have politicians to fight, bricks to throw.

Someday, I'll name my children after my grandparents and tell them how I got through year twenty, the hardest of my life.

Until then, I return to my heart, over and over again. ☙



DRUG OF CHOICE

by MAGGIE RZEPIENNIK

The store was filled with music, not that I was surprised. The sweet sound of Stevie Nicks' earthy toned voice filled the store with the strong essence of home. There seemed to be records and CDs covering every wall and crevice of the room. Even the rickety old stairs were lined with the lifelong collection of classic records and the classic faces we all know today.

Andy sighed as my interview began to come to a close and I asked my last question, "Do you have anything to add about music and the passion that compelled you to open this shop?"

Suddenly the song that once filled the room concluded and the silence swallowed me up. Andy looked around for a second, first down at the floor and then back up at me, "If you allow it to—music can alter your life—and it can alter your life for the better," he uttered quietly to me. "And ultimately it's about the music. It's not about me, the store, the format you're listening to it on, it's not about that. It's about people writing songs—that can say something to

you—"His eyes never seemed to leave mine. His hands were placed firmly on the counter, his thumbs no longer twiddling. "There are songs that can elevate you when you're down—level you off when you're manic, maybe—help you get through difficult things. Enhance—the good days—the good things too. You know, music can do a lot of things for you and that's why it has always been my drug of choice."

I pulled open the seemingly exhausted brown door to Vinyl on the Hill and walked right into what seemed to be a wonderland of records. My eyes traced the rainbow assortment of Michael Jackson, the Eagles, James Taylor, and millions of others. I felt like a kid in a candy store, whether this was my type of candy or not. I grasped the rail of the rickety old stairs and tiptoed my way down into the basement.

Andy appeared from behind the assortment of shelves that coated the back walls behind the worn down counter. His plaid button-up shirt gave him a clean look and his grey hair was nicely combed to one side. He pulled up a stool to the counter and sat down with a sigh. He seemed stressed, obviously overwhelmed with the shop and I'm sure a freshman interviewing him was the last thing he needed. I began, hesitantly at first. "So, what compelled you to open your store?"

He was quiet for a second, pondering all the time that had gone by since 1987, "Compulsion I guess would be the right word. I'm a music addict. It is my drug of choice," he chuckled to himself at this remark. "I have been a music buff since I was born." This was no surprise to me. His life was dedicated to a store filled to the brim with every type of music you could ever imagine and his personality seemed to bounce off the walls.

"So what made you want to open your store in Boulder?"

He smirked and looked down at the stack of CDs beside him. "People don't necessarily choose Boulder—"he paused for a second, eyes still glued to the CDs. "Boulder chooses them. I came to boulder in the mid 70s. After living in Estes Park and in the mountains for about eleven years, I was ready to go and at that time my family was young and Boulder seemed like a great place to raise my children." His strained eyes drooped as he spoke of his return to Boulder. I searched for some sort of excitement from him, but if there happened to be any, it never showed. His disinterest shocked me as Boulder has been my home for only two weeks and it seems to be the best place in the world. I guess thirty years in one place could wear anyone out.

I felt like a kid in a candy store, whether this was my type of candy or not.

I was straining for some positivity, some sort of pride to shine through. “What opportunities has this store opened up for you?” I hoped the idea of past memories and earlier joys of the store would brighten his mood a bit.

He looked at the ground with a squint in his eye, “Most recently the store has been closing off opportunities rather than giving them. I feel that thirty years is long enough or probably too long—” He tightened his lips into a slant, “I have always been a person who wanted to help people achieve what they wanted to achieve in music and I don’t think I pursued my own things as much as I could have.” He stopped for a second and the only thing that broke the silence was the background music that filled the store. “I’m in the regret time of my life. It used to be a genuinely viable business that used to support my family—it never made a lot of money, but it produced a nice living,” he finally lifted his head and looked me, somewhat teary-eyed, “and it doesn’t do that anymore.”

My once flamboyant “interviewer smile” had faded. Never had I thought this man who owned a record store, a room full of his passion, would regret what he had done. The interview had flipped a 180 from what I had ever expected it to be. I was unsure what to ask. The conversation had gained so much depth that I felt as if my already prepared questions had become childish. “Did you always plan on opening a vinyl store or did you have other plans earlier in life?

He was quick to answer, “Loads of other plans! “I don’t know why people say life works out when you make plans, but that’s not what happened for me,” he said solemnly. “I have 2 degrees, one in Religion and one in Philosophy. I went to law school, but only for a year during Vietnam. I then moved on to school for filmmaking and I had every intention of being a filmmaker, but things didn’t quite workout that way.” Once again sorrow filled his eyes. “I then owned a restaurant for awhile and I was also a prior Executive Director of Commerce at Rocky Mountain National Park. I then moved on and opened this store instead.”

His sadness and regret toward opening the store still seemed to shock me, even after his remarks. He tried so many different ideas, careers, and majors throughout his time yet music seemed to be what was truly calling him. I felt as if he had finally gotten down to the marrow of his true passion, yet never was given the chance to fulfill him. I could feel his pain. His eyes looked as if they had lived many years, which they had, but they have endured

*I'm in the regret
time of my life.*

many years of stress and dissatisfaction. I continually ran ideas through my mind that could be slipped into the conversation and find the bright side of what had become of his life. “What is one of the most interesting things that has occurred in your store?”

He looked down at his hands that were folded on the counter and looked back up at me with a much needed smile, “Many interesting things—” He looked away for a quick second, fiddling with the buttons that lined the middle of his shirt. “It may not be interesting to everyone, but I used to do a great many of instore performances.” Finally I caught the glow in his eye that I had hoped to see.

“Ben Harper played in front of my store—George Clinton of Parliament Funkadelic, who is a friend of mine, was in my store signing autographs. John Doe from X sang his song “See How We Are” in my store. Dave Matthew and the Dave Matthews band played in front of my store when they were very early on. Jack Johnson and his percussionist Adam Toppel played in front of the store as well. Spin Doctors played for their first time in Boulder in front of the store. Recently Elephant Revival played magical show in the store. Before the first Coldplay record, Chris Martin came in and personally thanked me for a display we had put up. Sheryl Crow—.”

His eyes sparkled at the thought of meeting all of these wondrous people and how his store had brought him so many opportunities. I was finally reaching the depth to him that had some sort of happiness embedded within it. I felt as if he could go on forever about the many people that had visited his store and the things he had seen. I finally saw some sort of youth in his eyes. A sense of wonder appeared from behind the casting shadow of sorrow that had taken over his life. It puzzled me to see a man sitting in front of me, with dark blue eyes, regretting the love of his life. Regretting a store that was filled with the things that truly meant something to him. He only longed for things that he couldn’t have and it broke my heart.

The interview had finally come to a close and once again I observed the heaviness in Andy’s eyes. His sorrow consumed him and I was unsure of what else to say after this point. I thanked him for his time and gave him a firm handshake, hoping to make a lasting impression. He looked around the room for a second, observing his collection and everything he had done. He smirked at me and proudly proclaimed “But ya know, Vinyl is back.” ☀

*Before the first
Coldplay record, Chris
Martin came in and
personally thanked me*





FOR THIS TIME¹

by ANDIE DULSKY

1.

Chapter 1/1²

I've always found musicians really attractive.

Uh, me too?

He shoots me a sideways glance from the bathroom mirror. I'm trying out an acoustic cover of "I Want to Hold Your Hand," not because I like it, but because he does. Every time he has a little too much to drink he puts his face too close to mine and recites the entire discography of The Beatles. His favorites are the covers in "Across the Universe." It's another teen drama, but there's this longing lesbian couple on the cheerleading squad. Of course, they're not the main characters. I'm not sure if they ended up together. I fell asleep before the end of the movie.

1. *You're too tender for me, you know. I hope that you know that I can see you at the end of this road, streetlights illuminating your face. Your headlights are too bright for me, but I don't care. I don't need eyes for this.*

2. *I never want to write our breakup poem.*

He opens the window. Takes his pink toothbrush from next to my blue one in the medicine cabinet. I've never seen someone brush their teeth for so long, but here he is. Three minutes later he spits into the sink and wipes his mouth on the inside of his t-shirt. He's looking at me more than he's looking at himself now. He runs some water through his newly-dyed black hair and reaches for the tin canister he's been carrying around for months. A gel made of a translucent shade of blue.

He runs it through his hair.

The perfect amount. He's meticulous. Whenever a strand sticks out the wrong way he just cuts it off.

Can I borrow your hairdryer?

Back. Upside down. More unnaturally blue gel. One more blast of hot air. He cuts off a strand on the back of his head and lets it fall into the trash. He says that he feels like this is the only thing in his life that he can really control.

After we break up, he shaves his head.



2.

Meet me at the fjords.³

a. His toothbrush rests next to mine for the third week in a row.

We've been dating for exactly a month today, and we've all but moved in together. He leaves behind his copy of "The Shining" that we watched together on our first real date, as well as his favorite sweater. When he leaves town for four days, I take it off only to shower. *Tell me something sweet before I go to bed, he asks me one night. I wear your sweater so often because it feels like you're always with me even when we're miles apart.*

He likes to make fun of how sappy and cliché I can be, and I can't say that I don't deserve it—I absolutely do. I suppose that's what you get for willingly dating a poet, and this is what love is supposed to be like, right? This softness—the midnight kisses, Sunday morning almond milk lattes. Drunken cigarettes

He says that he feels like this is the only thing in his life that he can really control.

3. *Tell me about every kiss. Every lover. I'll bless every one. We are lucky to dance upon your skin. Lucky to know you before you backwards become yourself.*

*In this moment,
the demons have
been banished, but I
know they'll return
by morning.*

and shared secrets. Rolling over in bed and hearing your lover whisper; *Sweetheart, are you okay?*

These could be the last words I would ever hear and I'd thank everything that led me to them. When he says this, he doesn't lower his voice like he does around our friends, the bus drivers, the bus boys. In this moment, the demons have been banished, but I know they'll return by morning. They always do.

He stops to pick up ladybugs from the sidewalk and move them into the closest flowerbed. From the flowerbed he picks two flowers, a dandelion and a violet. He places the violet in my hand and secures the dandelion behind his ear. *I identify as a flowerboy*, he tells me one Sunday afternoon.

b. A week before he meets my parents, I tell them that if we're going to break up, it's not going to be because he's trans.

My parents met at a gym in San Diego. My mother was studying to become a lawyer, my father working on his career as a musician—a French hornist and conductor. She had a ratail, he a mullet. She was riding a stationary bike while he ran laps around the track in front of her, each one noticing the other until they had built up the courage to speak.

A classic boy meets girl.

No, their relationship isn't perfect, but it is indeed the closest anyone can get. They take drives around the city together, rescue stray dogs whenever they happen upon them, and cook salmon from the fish market down the street. They forget their anniversary every year—it'll be 27 in a few months, and I'll have to remind them on the day.

c. My grandmother used to say, *divorce isn't an option. Murder, however—*

Each time I fall in love, I think about my parents, lounging on the beach on a calm day in June. I wish I could see the ocean again. Sometimes it's hard to live in a landlocked city, despite the beauty that comes with it. I want to see the fish swimming around my ankles, feel the cool breeze on my warm skin. I like to be reminded of how small I am. I think that if you listen closely, you can hear the ocean whispering, *hush, you don't matter.*

I settle for the aquarium. He lowers his voice when greeting the bus driver, takes up as much of our bench as possible, capitalizing upon the space around him. He doesn't under-

stand why I can't stop crying when I look at the seahorses (they deserve so much better than this).

The glass between us and the sharks is eleven inches deep. I draw a misshapen tiger shark in my journal. I used to be so much better at this.

The tigers are his favorite—not the sharks—the real tigers that they have locked up there. I remember there being a few more when I was younger. Now I can see only two. We spend 45 minutes watching them sleep.

Why don't I fit into your life?

He stops speaking to me. I cry on the bus ride home, and he can't understand why. I'm not sure I can tell him in a way that will quite make sense. He leaves me there, lights a cigarette as he walks out the door.

In another life, maybe I'm an Icelandic sheep farmer. I live alone with a dog and a lot of wool sweaters. Sunlight always filters through my windows and nothing hurts. Sure, it's a little lonely, but if nothing is given, nothing can be lost. I name the sheep after every person I've ever admired. There's one named Gibson, after Andrea Gibson. Sylvia, after Sylvia Plath. Harvey. Bowie. Nelson. Frida. Somewhere along the way, I learn to shear the sheep. Spin yarn. Knit. I can fix the mistakes in my knitting, something my mother could never do.

It's as if my heart is being pulled in every direction. I can feel the strings moving, every time I breathe, every time the wind blows. I am too broken, and too whole, all at the same time. I am trapped behind eleven inches of glass.



3.

Voyeurism, or field research?⁴

I call him immediately after I smoke my first cigarette. It's a Newport from a shiny teal box, and I'm not picky. I catch the last bus and we smoke my second together. It's the kind all of my friends from high school smoked. Maybe 17-year-old me would've been proud. Or shocked. Disappointed, even. Maybe all at once. These things have never been simple for me.

4. *You're so beautiful that it hurts, because I know how much pain you carry. Did you know that the stretch marks on my inner thighs look just like your scars? I hope you know that I love those, too. You, with them. All of you.*

Voyeurism, or field research?

Smell that.

Smell what?

Smell my hand. The smell of smoke on someone's fingers has always turned me on.

He looks me dead in the eyes, takes my hand in his, and raises it to his face.

I don't get it.

That night he pays extra attention to where he places his left hand. Always near my face. He dismantles me with every touch, every glance. We're back in our routine. The front door. Tripping over the coffee table. Be careful of the doorknob, that never feels great against your back. Don't put all of your weight on that side of the bed, the bedframe is broken there. Wait for me to turn on the music—would you plug in the lights?

We only have sex in the dark once, and it's the only time that he takes off his shirt. I get into the habit of never asking, of never wanting more than I can have. He gets goosebumps whenever I run my fingers along his back—this unfamiliar territory.

The next morning, I ask to photograph him. He is standing with his back facing the camera, blonde roots beginning to show. His familiar black cord hangs around his neck, a constant reminder of his troubled pride. I draw constellations on his exposed back. His body echoes something so much bigger than us, living out of my shoebox apartment. He posts the photograph online later that day. It appears on my screen within minutes. I cry in the coffee shop.

On his Tumblr blog is a photograph of Cole Sprouse, lounging on a chair and wearing a plain white t-shirt. He's commented "goals."

Somewhere in his archived posts is a screenshot of an online BDSM test our friends make us take. He scores 56% voyeur, though I'm not sure it's purely sexual. He tells me that his sexuality is somewhere in the messy grey that mine is, and I'm grateful for that. He watches the way the white t-shirt hangs on Cole Sprouse's broad shoulders, the way his blonde hair falls. Cole Sprouse dyed his hair black recently.

The next time he has too much to drink, he shows me the picture he took of his thigh after the second injection. He knows this kind of thing makes me queasy.

- a. I now use his Tumblr as field research.
- b. I've done too much field research.



4.

I didn't know what to say, so I asked her if she wanted to kill me.

- a. I garnish our drinks with lime wedges.

She smells different. My body doesn't fit hers quite right. She uses her tongue a bit too sharply. The back of her neck is a bit softer than his. Maybe it's nice. Maybe it's weird. I don't quite know. Her hair keeps getting caught in my mouth. She won't tell me what she's thinking, even though I've asked her upwards of fifteen times in the past three hours. I've left my books of queer and trans literature out, so we'll have something to talk about. (Everyone has annotated copies of Adrienne Rich strewn across their bed, right?) I still resort to self-deprecating humor. She doesn't know me well enough to know that I'm kidding.

I pour two more drinks, and the door slams. I assure her that it's just the wind, but she's not convinced. I forget the lime wedges.

Do you have a ghost?

Maybe I'm a ghost. I think I'd like to be a ghost.

You want to be stuck here, searching for something you can't find?

Aren't I already doing that?

b. She leaves in the early hours of the morning, and I don't kiss her goodbye.

She marked her territory without my knowing, leaving marks upon my neck. I've always bruised like a peach. Unfortunate. She wasn't soft. She wasn't tender. I thought it would be better than nothing, but I was wrong. We didn't sleep together that night. I couldn't bear the thought of her lying in the places where he had once been.

- c. I think about the back of his neck.

His blonde roots were beginning to show before he shaved his head. I think about breathing him in during the first touch. I think about the photos he must have taken at the concert two days ago that he bought tickets for weeks prior. I think about every cigarette he must have smoked after leaving. He never leaves the cigarette butts behind.

I think that I only like smoking because it makes me feel closer to him. The same reason it took me five days to take his towel out

*On his Tumblr blog
is a photograph
of Close Spouse,
lounging on a chair
and wearing a plain
white t-shirt.*

of the bathroom, and another three to wash it. I'll admit that I cried over the toothbrush. That was the first to go.

d. I think about the last time I saw him.⁵

We're lying on the grass now. The sun is going down and it's starting to get colder. We find a secluded spot behind some trees and lay down my old gray blanket. He rests the last pack of cigarettes he can afford for a while next to my navy-blue thermos. A homeless man wanders past at some point, but we don't mind. I'm just looking at him. He's not looking at me. He's looking at the last cigarette he might have for a while. He takes too-big sips from the thermos.

He leaves me sweaty and shaking, smokes his last cigarette. I pull my knees into my chest and look out across the creek. I can feel myself becoming whole again. Maybe. Maybe it's that I can already feel myself shattering and I'm desperately trying to hold myself together. Band-aid fix. I can already feel him leaving. He doesn't touch me again. ☀

5. You're so beautiful that it hurts, because I know how much pain you carry. Did you know that the stretch marks on my inner thighs look just like your scars? I hope you know that I love those, too. You, with them. All of you.



A NEW PIECE OF MIND

by JADE McGEE

Step 1. Admit Something is Wrong:

I was flung into reality on March 7th, the night of His roast, thrown on His birthday for a stroke of His ego and to raise money for a friend who had recently been through chemotherapy. Every other joke was about His immense obsession with younger girls. These jokes made both Him and the audience laugh. His friends were publicly making jokes that He was a pedophile, and they were statements that only caused righteous laughter amongst the crowd. I sat in silence as I watched adults laugh at my reality. Each joke spewed chipped away at the wall in my mind that was restricting clarity and self-awareness. Once the wall had been breached, the tsunami of thoughts rushed over me and I was suddenly the only person in the room.



Step 2. Distance Yourself:

After His roast I cut off all communication with Him. No matter the intensity of the assault, the amount of laborious effort exhausted to get yourself back on your feet is severe. It is not easy to save yourself. Fighting back is not an elementary subject in any capacity or on any level. Ignoring Him was relatively difficult considering I still saw Him every day at work. Because my disappearance in His life was so abrupt, He went to extreme lengths to stay in touch with me through many unopened texts, unanswered calls, and unnecessary badgering at work. This worked in terms of removing myself from the situation but ignoring Him went hand in hand with ignoring what happened. Disregarding your problems or issues only works for so long; keeping it to yourself and telling no one starts to eat away at you. Opening up to myself about what had been done to me did not present itself as an option. Every time I closed my eyes I was back in His room, or His office, or His couch. The assault and abuse that He brought me became my only world and I saw no way out of it. I attempted to commit suicide at this time but some force in the universe kept me here. When suicide failed I found that my only option left was to—

***Step 3. Tell Someone:***

After the whirlwind month of not speaking to Him, I told Her. I sat in my car as She sat in Her bed, crying into the phone. I felt nothing, completely numb to what He did to me. She saw that I was beyond shattered and took the wheel. She gave me a list of therapists, crisis centers, and hot-lines to contact and went against Her gut to ask me more about It. Not just because She wanted to know, but because She didn't want me to be alone in my thoughts about It. I very slowly started to tell more friends about It; I started to get feedback from other women who said, "The same happened to me, with the same Him."

***Step 4. Be Angry, be Scared, Feel Empty:***

Knowing that It had happened to multiple Women infuriated me. With this newfound knowledge that the others did

*Opening up to
myself about what
had been done to me
did not present itself
as an option.*

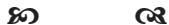
not have the confidence to take action or foresight regarding his next victim, came fury that led to action. It was time to take the energy I was putting into my emotions and start putting it to use. No matter what happened to me, at the end of the day I knew I couldn't let this happen to any other Women on behalf of His doing.



Step 5. Tell Someone of Importance:

After seven months of not speaking to Him, I told our boss, who was obligated by law to suspended Him and dive into a month-long investigation. This meant twice a week I was to meet with lawyers, social workers, detectives, and judges. All Men. Men asking a sixteen-year-old girl to describe what a thirty-seven-year-old Man did to her. This was the worst, most dehumanizing part of it all. I remember driving all over the city, bouncing from one meeting to another. I'd stick my hand out of the window and let it dance in the cool, crisp, fall air. Letting the wind push against my hand was the only feeling I had left. I'd close my eyes, take a deep breath, and try to keep my heart from beating so loud I could hear it echo in the room I was about to enter. Each meeting took place in the type of investigation room you see on crime shows when they interrogate the bad guy. Was I the bad guy? For the sake of their jobs, these Men had to grind at my story and approach it as if they didn't believe me. During each interview I was instructed to tell my story with the same details as the previous interview, because if I slipped up, I would be done for. If I was too emotional or not emotional enough, everything that I had built the courage to do would be for nothing. It was astonishing that after all that I had been through and how long it took me to speak out about It, these Men had to consider me a liar. They didn't understand that I kept quiet for so long out of pure fear. Fear of the residue it would leave on my newcomer's reputation. Fear of what others would think of me and how I would be treated. I believed I would spend the rest of my life with a sign on my forehead reading Victim. In the end, however, my will to help others trumped my own fears and concerns.

*Letting the wind
push against my
hand was the only
feeling I had left.*



Step 6. Allow Yourself Time to Heal:

After the month from hell he was officially fired and I could finally begin to heal. Mine was a long process with numerous highs and lows. I kept pushing because I knew that I did the right thing. You need to take a step back and begin to put you as your primary focus. There is no winning or losing, what happens after It happens is up to you. Rebuild yourself from the ground up. Become the person you've always aspired to be. Learn from the mistakes of others. All of us have lived through our hardest days, never let anyone belittle the experiences you have faced head on.



Step 7. Never Forget Where You Came From: Rape.

A word that has created such a negative connotation in our current realm of society. A four letter, single syllable, word that has the capability to ignite such powerful emotions. Some people simply hear the word Rape and feel it expel fear and shame. It floods others with prickling discomfort and silence. With a disgusting number of recent stories being released about sexual assault, harassment, or rape, some would think the subject would become more comfortable to discuss, and yet every time a new story is released it's just as shocking and revolting as the last. Regardless, our darkest personal tragedies have the biggest influence on who we are today.



Step 8. Be Open With Yourself:

It's been two years since I was raped. I was sixteen and Dan was thirty-seven years old—our relationship lasted for four months. Our relationship is still the last thing I think about before drifting to sleep and the first thought I have when I wake up. Rape haunts my every day, affects my every decision, has changed me into a completely different person. Growing up, I heard of and saw horrible occurrences like rape or murder being described on the news. I naively assumed that something so horrific could never happen to me—but no one anticipates that such tragedies could happen to them

I believed I would spend the rest of my life with a sign on my forehead reading Victim.

before they do. Assault of any kind is everywhere and it can happen to anyone.



Step 9. Be Open With Others:

I never used to refer to what happened to me as rape. Admitting it to others, no matter their priority in my life, was embarrassing and made me feel tense in every ligament, isolated in shame about an act I had no control over. Growing up I was conditioned to picture rape as something violent, an act done by an aggressive stranger, an incident that happens once, something that would immediately wave red flags letting you know something was seriously wrong. Dan was a friend that I'd known since I was twelve, and I worked next to him every day. I used to say that I loved him but I've realized that love and hate are simply interchangeable.



Step 10. Help Others:

The commonality of rape does not make it okay. But my hope is that this helps make rape easier to talk about. Ask questions, don't be afraid to step in the mud. Never stop talking about it. You are braver than you know. You are never alone. Speak up and speak out, it might not save you, but it will save others. ♀



JUST US NOW

by PIPER BOYD

“**B**ut it will get better. I promise.”

Her voice bounces off my consciousness like a rubber ball off the concrete. Mum’s words of consolation aren’t anything new, they are just a song that’s on repeat and you grow unaware of the noise after a while.

The sniffling coming from the back seat snaps me back into reality, reminding me that my five-year-old sister is also in the car. Unlike her, I don’t see a need to cry.

The sound of speeding tires against a wet and slushy road is deafening, like white noise. It breaks its way into my mind, driving me mad. Apparently, our weaving in and out of traffic irks other drivers as well, for the noise of car horns being pressed by impatient people fills the silence between the three of us.

Mum’s hands sporadically tighten and untighten around the steering wheel. She moves her mouth around like there is a large wad of glue in there before she says anything. Her squinted eyes flutter to the rearview mirror.

"Joanna, your arm, baby? How's it feeling?"

More sniffling and a couple of wet gulps come from Joanna's direction.

"It's black and blue, and a little sore, but I think I'm alright. He grabbed me pretty tight. B-But it doesn't hurt that badly."

"And you? You haven't said much for a while. How's your—?" Mum's eyes just scan me from head to toe and she trails off. I know her words are directed at me.

But I suppose it's obvious that I don't care to listen.

I focus on counting the luminous street lights rather than the pain in my chest and on my eye. Perhaps we'll go to Nan's house. It's always warm there and she always gives me extra portions during meals because she says I look too worn down for someone my age. Of course, I don't know how long we would stay there; we have only spent the night a few times if Dad happened to be away. Whenever Mum dropped Joanna and me off, Nan would always seem anxious, and Dad would come soon after we got there and just take us home. He always said it was because he missed us too much.

"It's throbbing." I say flatly. I don't tell her exactly what hurts; it's hard to tell anymore. Guess I have grown numb to it, no matter how wrong it seems to outsiders. We are blood, after all.

This is, however, the first time we have run like this. There couldn't have been more than two seconds from the last swing to when we got into the car and sped off into the thick and misty fog. We stopped for petrol a few miles back and I checked the boot of the car, and sure enough, there was a large dent where he had slammed his foot. There was a smaller one next to it, but I guess the car screeched away before he could kick it full-force.

I don't see the point of leaving. I have always been told that nobody is perfect and that people make mistakes; that we should forgive and forget. Why should this change suddenly when people get angry? But I, however, have no say in the matter, and with my adaptability, I will get used to this now, too. Just us. Maybe Mum's right. Maybe it will get better, whatever her definition of better is.

For now, I just want to reach into our freezer, as usual, and put a bag of frozen vegetables on my face. It's soothing and feels like home to me, because ever since I can remember it has always seemed to quickly ease the pain. I asked Mum at the petrol station if I could run in to get something frozen, but she wouldn't let

*Mum's hands
sporadically tighten
and untighten around
the steering wheel.*

me go inside in case someone saw me; she was already anxious enough about people seeing her. Why would anyone recognize us this far away from home?

I, instead, press my forehead onto the cold and squeaky window that is being pelted with hail. This'll do.

"Are we ever going back? How will he find us?" Joanna blubbers suddenly, sounding as if she'll be sick. Unfortunately, she looks up to him as much as I do. I roll my eyes and turn to look at her. Her bruised face matches mine.

"The point is that he won't find us. I guess family means abandoning each other." I direct this last part towards my mother. She bursts into a loud sob, and I reposition myself back to leaning on the window.

Just us girls now. ☙

BLOOD SONG

Winner of the 2018 Thompson Award
for Western American Writing for Poetry

by CATY JANSURY

I think of you first in pieces,
the ones that I can see:

The red dirt caked on the soles of your shoes,
sweat seeping up through the cracked latticework
of your veins, sticky with residual drama.

Your jagged jaw,
cracked from chewing bits of limestone,
from your climb (tooth and nail) out of some deep tomb.

Your hair, shaggy and oddly-colored,
dark underneath like pine boughs
and light on top, like snow coating needles.

Limbs, hardened into slick rock
from years of jumping
over porch swings and gaping canyons.

What would you tell me, if you could?





Maybe secrets about your earliest memories,
ones that haunted you at night
in the farm of petrified grins where you lived:
those of fat, threatening coyote prints in the snow.

Or that first crucial moment of deep pain you felt,
when a bit of sun swept up over the hills,
and a sweet tobacco taste lingered stubbornly
on your lips and fingernails.

Of course, these are things I don't know,
things I've invented in the years
since that first time
I felt the roughness of your palm
and saw the trace of wet handprint on your jeans:
love.

I piece together my own invention of who you are,
have been and might be, from what I can see, because
blood songs
can't be shared. ☙



HUMMINGBIRD

by HANNAH HURLEY

I remember the taste of warm sake resting on my tongue while eyes rested on my cheek. The smell of soy sauce and tempura mixed with what was once a massive appetite, replaced by a hollowness in my stomach that felt negligent to disobey. Remember the feeling when you're young and someone takes interest in you when you feel like you are privileged to even occupy a space? That's how I felt with that pair of eyes on me. I didn't know what I had done to deserve that gaze. I sipped more. My throat opened up welcoming the warm wine, like a single car driving through a mountain tunnel, warm summer breeze floating in the windows, dancing in the driver's hair. Moments often felt like this when I was awarded that gaze.

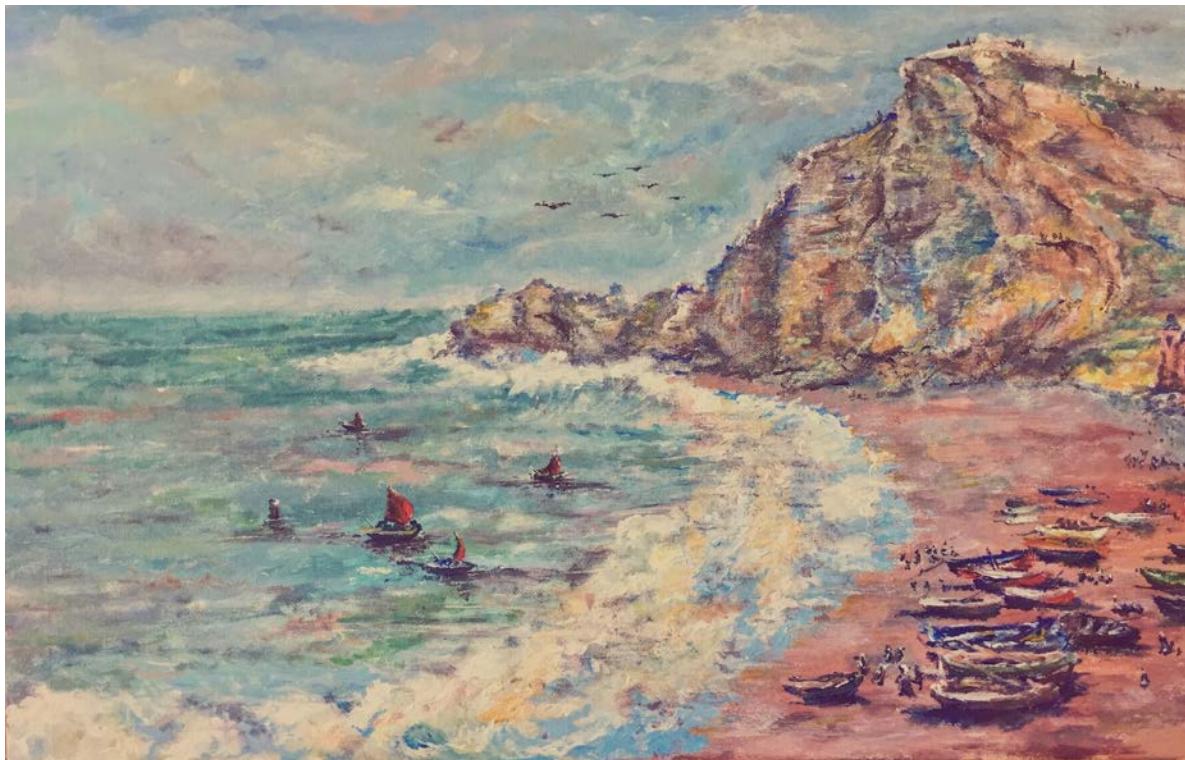
While I once occupied a quaint room in Florida filled with people, chairs and tables, clinking glasses and bartenders shaking fancy cocktails, I now found myself floating. I drifted off, occupying a different galaxy accompanied only by distant galaxies and stars. Gravity itself had chosen to abandon me, leaving me buoyant within my thoughts, grasping for something in reality

to bring me back. I reached for chairs and the table and my glass, but it was as if I were chasing a hat that had been taken by the wind. Useless and tiresome. In a random instant I was shaken back yet felt even more distant than I previously had. You seemed to have momentarily drifted as well. I wondered as to where you go when you find yourself among the stars and galaxies and distant planets. I listened to the noises around the room.

Faintly in the distance a woman sang, but she was drowned out by the Friday-night euphoria bubbling around the room, like Prosecco aromatically bursting in a glass. Girls walked in with fresh curls and phones held close, nervously searching for comradery. Boys in jerseys peered around the room as though it were the first day of school, deciding who they wanted to be friends with this year. An older couple was on a date, hyperaware yet simultaneously oblivious to their surroundings. Gentle and thoughtful of one another's actions. She slowly sipped red wine while he admiringly observed her, like a loving dog curious of his master's foreign doings. Back then I wanted you to look at me this way.

The scents changed over time. It was no longer soy sauce and tempura and booze. The sky became clear and crisp as we parted ways with the restaurant and those uncanny friends. As I looked up, I noticed smoky spirits danced around. A bright shade of indigo sprinkled with pale iridescent freckles. Warm gray ghosts begged their life to caress the stars, but saddened by their failure, faded dismally away; their sobs the scent they left behind. I trailed behind you as you towed your bible. Its large black case lined with red velvet, the secrets to your admiration between its teeth, sewn into its hair. I had grown my hair out hoping you'd be reminded of it, whitened my teeth and spoke softly in a futile attempt to protect my voice. That was my only way to reach you. Everything seemed to move a little bit slower with you. It was so minute that I was unable to pinpoint it for a while. It was as if the hands of my inner clock had been sticky. I thought maybe a bee with legs gooey from honey had landed on them. Each syllable rolled off my tongue and my feet suddenly felt like two lead blocks. I remember picking up my pace by a fraction each step, but each step I took you would gain on me. "A little bit faster," I'd say to myself. "One more and you're there," until I felt as if I were running. We had finally reached impromptu stools

*I wondered as to
where you go when
you find yourself
among the stars
and galaxies and
distant planets.*



surrounding the warm glow of fire, whose billowing ghosts' tears were soon seeped into my clothing. I remember I smelt their tears for days, soon mixing with my own. But in the meantime, I felt comforted by the warmth and lost myself in the enjoyment of it... I sat down on a massive log whose width was so great I wondered how long it had been resting here. It made me feel insignificant. Leaning back, I looked up at the glinting pale freckles. I noticed Venus in the distance. Her swirling, blinking colors like a psychic's orb being manipulated by wrinkly hands and long fingers. Eventually I snapped back. You asked me a question while standing above me, a worn and tattered strap draping your shoulder. "What?" I asked, wondering how long you had been staring at me. "Do you want to sing?" You responded. Before I could answer, two friends walked up. Instantly, I was washed with a sense of relief. Dan was holding a case of beers, one of which he tossed to me.

Looking back, Dan treated me the way I wanted you to. He was engaging and easy-going, yet just as mysterious and wise and imaginative. But it didn't matter how inherently he possessed these qualities. I had already decided whose affection I wanted. You started playing your guitar. Holding her neck and brushing her hair. At first you strummed lightly, gradually speeding up and up, until we were all talking louder and louder, eventually shouting. Lastly, we gave up conversation altogether. You strummed madly, violently, so aggressively that I thought the strings were going to pop right off with a cartoon-like noise, and you'd be left panting, grasping for breaths, arms hung by your side the way the ends of a towel hang around a neck. Veins throbbing and fingers bleeding, crying because they didn't know they were able to create something so beautiful. But they don't. I sat mesmerized, in awe, pondering how a god had been placed among mere mortals. I tilted my head back and sipped. With my head towards the heavens, Venus winked at me almost as if she knew he were one of her own.

I felt a bony nudge as Dan brought me back down and asked for a song. "Breathe Me" I blurted out, followed by Dan humping "Huh, what?" "By Sia" I say. Chase started playing it. Almost perfectly. I realized I'd never actually heard it on the guitar, but it was almost even more beautiful. The smoke started to dance, at one point it even melted on my lap, hanging like a warm and dazed cat who had found solace on a window sill. The smoke seemed to warm my throat as well. I felt the first vibration. A hummingbird had been lodged in my throat. Directly where you'd see an Adam's apple on a man. At first it was doing its dance. Nearing a flower, but backing away right at the last moment, as if to tease the candied nectars. But the dance had been swung too many times. It's as if the nectars themselves leapt at the bird but missed, coating my throat in the sweetest salve nature had concocted. The words floated out of me and joined the smoke who had resumed her dance. They were sweet and smoky, as if the two had been searching for one another all along. Billowing, the ghosts wondered how they ever felt such sadness to begin with. Pain now a distant memory; they were dancing, waltzing, embracing and caressing as we all sat back in bewilderment, curious as to why God harbored this secret so selfishly

*A hummingbird had
been lodged in my
throat.*

for so long, instantly regretting thinking the thought as the beautiful marriage floated up, seeking the heavens. Venus became bright as ever, like a lighthouse in the velvet black of night welcoming the two whose beauty is beyond even what she knows in heaven; our mortality became our biggest regret as the sweetness drifted away, farther and farther. She seemed to wink at us when they reached her, mocking our inability to keep beautiful things within our grasp.

The four of us were still. The sobs of the ghosts could not be smelled anymore. The crickets had silenced themselves and sat down. The sleepy moss of the oak trees had awoken, but pretended not to, as to not disturb the ceremony. Lights had been shut off, doors locked. Embers had remained still and logs refused to pop. The strings of his guitar were frozen in a moment of reverence, and the pounding of my heart had decided on its opportunity for a solo. I looked at Chase and Dan, whose eyes greeted me with questions and answers all at the same time. My eyes responded knowingly, the hummingbird in my throat ready to make it happen again. ☙



LEAVE IT TO THE KIDS

by HENRY SHORNEY

Tuesday afternoon I grabbed the paddles, fishing nets, buckets, and life vests—although I would never wear one—and headed for the channel with my sister. We walked across tiny rocks with slow, deliberate steps, occasionally experiencing a bolt of pain that came with stepping on one at the wrong angle. It took us a moment to find our canoes amongst the other boats and watercrafts. They were on their bellies well up the bank. With great effort, I flipped them over and drug them to the water. I gripped the sides of the canoe as it rocked back and forth with my weight.

The sun beat down on my back as I paddled—never sure how far to dip the oar into the water. Lily trailed behind my canoe, drifting in the wake. I came to a large branch where I spotted one. I stopped paddling and told my sister to do the same. It was perched on a log by the bank. I coasted up to it and reached out with my net.

Splash.

It was gone. We moved further down the channel and into a lake. The water was nearly transparent, and I was thinking about the catfish I had caught the day before.

"Henry," Lily said, pointing at a branch jutting up in the middle of the lake.

I coasted over. Its huge, glassy shell reflected the sunlight. This time I was more careful; I inched up from behind and brought the net down. It squirmed and hissed. I emptied the net in the bucket between my legs.

An hour before the race, I held its squirming body as Lily painted a purple 13 on its shell. We carried it in a bucket along the beach. Dozens of people had their own animals and were gathered around the green concrete circle where the race would take place.

"All frogs," Nelson said.

Around ten people emerged from the crowd with their slimy frogs cupped between their hands. Nelson directed them to place their critters in a bucket with the bottom removed—this would serve as the starting circle.

Frogs of all different sizes and numbers were in a panic to escape. They tried to leap out of the bucket, some even tried to use others as steps, none succeeded.

Nelson gathered everyone around, said the rules and hollered.
"souuuuuuuuuuuue"

The bucket was lifted up and a frenzy ensued; frogs hopped over frogs, collided in midair, and went in every possible direction. The race was over in seconds: a tiny number 5 had taken three large leaps and passed the finish line. Second and third place were noted, but quickly forgotten as children ran a race of their own attempting to retrieve their animals.

Squish.

One little boy had bolted across the racing circle making a beeline to his speedy number 3 and in the process managed to splatter number 12's guts all over the concrete. Tears started to well up in a little girl's eyes, her face contracted, then released with a scream that could make your hearing assisted grandfather wince; her tiny body collapsed under the weight of her wail. Mom stood over her and attempted to cork the bottle, but this post-graduation champagne had been well shook and was spraying everywhere. Parents exchanged empathetic glances and waited for the debacle to cease. Her body flailed in a fit of clashing emotions. Mom scooped her up and carried her away as she tried to squirm out of her arms.

With the spray of a hose the deceased competitor was cleared off the circle.

"Alright moving on, toads, any toads?"

*a frenzy ensued;
frogs hopped over
frogs, collided
midair*

The toads were brought to the starting circle, being much less excitable than frogs, the race took a tad longer. However, the podium was still filled within the first thirty seconds.

Then, it was time for the turtles. With 13 pinched between my middle finger and thumb, I made my way to the starting circle; when I was almost there something caught my eye. I walked over to a group of kids gathered around a bucket.

“What is that?” A little boy said.

“It looks possessed,” said another.

“It’s a snapper, out of the way,” said Riley’s dad, walking alongside Riley as he brought the bucket to the starting circle.

Riley barged passed me, picked up the snapper, and placed it down in the starting circle.

“I’m gonna crush you,” he said.

I placed 13 in the corner farthest away from the snapper.

The slow crawl began. These races could go on forever. 13 had not moved an inch, in fact, he had retreated into his shell. The snapper was almost halfway to the finish, when all of a sudden it stopped, turned around and started going in the opposite direction.

“Turn around,” Riley and his father—who undoubtedly caught the turtle—yelled.

The race dragged on. Nelson had to keep the audience entertained, so he grabbed hold of the hose and sprayed. 13 emerged from his shell with a jolt and broke for the finish line.

“That’s not fair,” said Riley’s father.

Parents exchanged disapproving glances. Nelson sprayed the snapper, who turned around and passed the finish line just before 13. I picked up 13, who had crossed the finish line right in front of me.

“Shit!”

I looked over and saw Riley’s father recoiling in pain. The snapper had picked up speed and was zooming around. Little kids leaped out of the way, even parents wanted nothing to do with the thing. It was almost to the nearby trees when Nelson trapped it with the bucket.

“Let’s leave it to the kids next time.” ☀



EL PASEO

by ANGELINA CARRANZA

At some point during that first trip, I learned about the Camino de Santiago. People from around the world make the trek, beginning in Spain, Portugal, or France and sometimes walking more than five hundred miles to see the St. James Cathedral. Knowing this made my family's tiny town seem special—part of someone's life-changing journey—even though to me it smelled like cows.

The houses, glued together in long ribbons, line the dirt roads. Many of them consisted of adobe; my dad once took too long of a shower in my aunt Casi's house and washed away enough of the wall to see the hay mixed into the clay bricks. Though often quiet, the streets echoed as people exited Sunday morning Mass, or when the town held a farmers' market. Tia Casi attended both events religiously. After Mass and shopping, she came home and cooked, bustling around the kitchen and murmuring in Spanish that we looked too skinny.

In the evenings, during what my dad calls “rush hour,” the herds came back home from the pastures outside of town. The animals automatically took the appropriate side streets, jostling each other and the doors of the houses along their path. People put up corrugated sheets of metal at dusk to prevent the cows’ hooves from denting their doors. My grandmother, my abuela, kept towels near the windows to tuck into the cracks, keeping the dust out.

Visiting Tábara as one of the youngest and tallest people (my dad is 5'8" and ducks to avoid door frames) felt like culture shock. My grandmother sailed on the Queen Mary and passed through Ellis Island, making us the only branch of our family tree to leave Spain. Relatives and friends treated my dad’s arrival like the return of a prodigal son. We, on the other hand, got teased for our American-ness, lovingly of course. Once, my family burst out in laughter at my horrified face when my uncle Bernardo swung a dead, skinned rabbit in my face—the one that I spent yesterday morning petting—and proudly said in Spanish, “Look! It’s your bunny friend!” I skipped lunch.



My brother and I spent our time playing Game Boy games while avoiding the heat and our family, counting down the days until we left for Madrid or Barcelona. Time seems to move slowly during the summer. The heat melted the buildings until the surroundings reminded me of a Dalí painting. We had nothing else to do with the day besides find one of the eight bars in the city and have a Coca-Cola with ice, poured in a glass. This is the time of day that makes Spain famous.

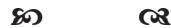
During his childhood trips, my dad remembers the men of Tábara gathering at bars during siestas to drink coffee, or maybe a brandy, and play cards. Women, including my grandmother and tía Casí, did laundry in the fountain in the Plaza Mayor, where my dad described their conversations as “People, the Washington Post, and the National Enquirer all rolled into one.” They gossiped and told stories while scrubbing. Every day the men drank and the women washed.

During the Spanish Civil War, some of the women’s husbands were executed by firing squad. Early in the morning, the town militia collected the men from their houses, taking them on un paseo, a walk, to the outskirts of town. All these men, both the “soldiers”

*The heat melted the
buildings until the
surroundings
reminded me of a
Dali painting.*

and the “traitors,” were neighbors. They lived next to each other and shared their lives in the same small area. They are all buried in the graveyard together. Their gravestones are indistinguishable from newer ones, save for the carved dates and the weather-darkened stone.

That story surprised me when I first heard it, since I thought nothing interesting ever happened in Tábara, but it surprised me even more to learn that the town ultimately supported the fascists—a curse word in the United States. Now, almost ten years later, I learned that my uncle’s toast “Viva Franco” at my parent’s anniversary party, wasn’t a joke.

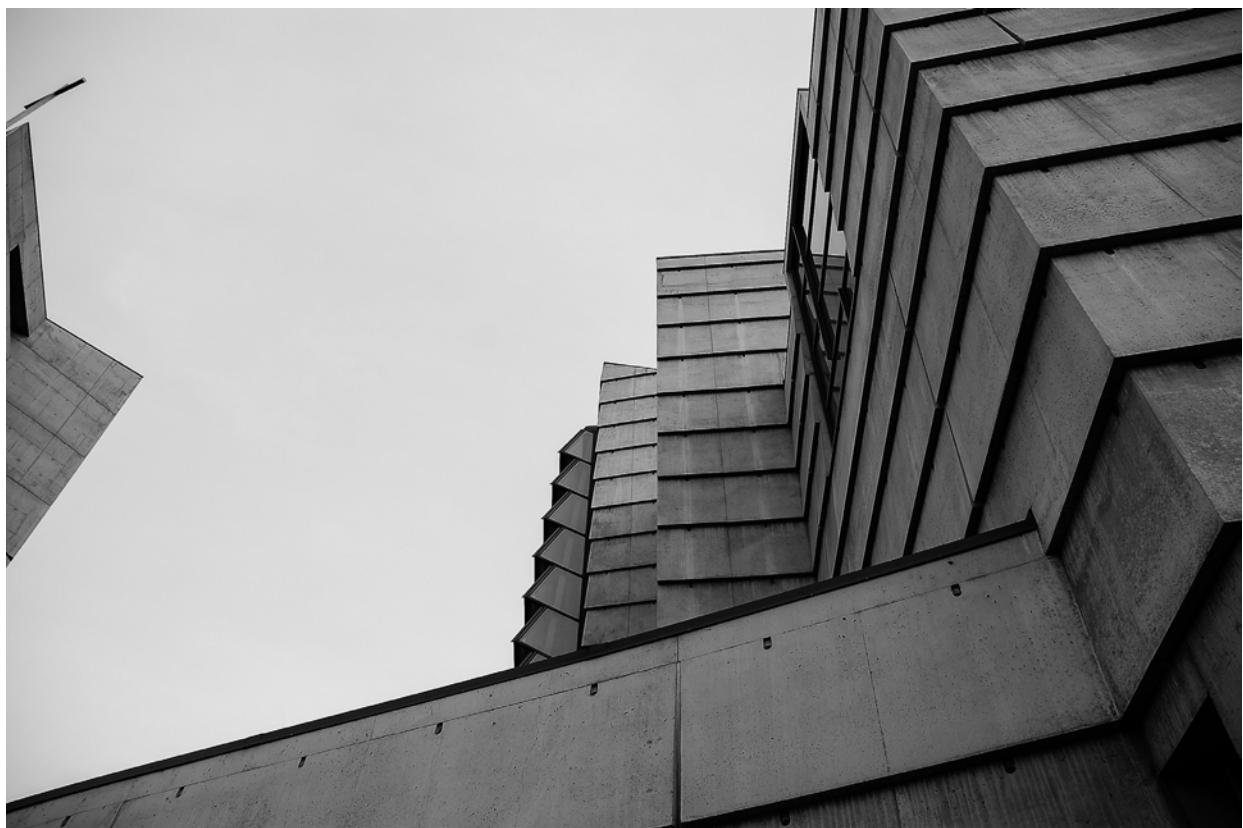


After graduation, my dad and I visit Spain, but chose not to go to Tábara. We had trouble justifying going back to somewhere old, when we had the chance to explore someplace new. At first, I pushed my dad to reconsider, certain he would regret not taking the opportunity. But he was sure. It was me who felt the need to relive the past, not him. To smell the scent of animals. To walk a little bit of the Camino. To see my grandma’s house again, and judge it with fresh, mature eyes.

Instead, we stayed at my Tía Casi’s apartment in Madrid, exploring during the day and sitting together in the living room at night. She tells us she rarely visits Tábara: too many changes. The town’s priest was revealed to be a pedophile, so she refuses to attend that church anymore. She had no idea, but my cousin had his suspicions.

She turns up the volume on the television, the right-leaning news channel, even though she’s deaf. A headline about Catalan politicians appears—they’ve been jailed for orchestrating a vote to separate from Spain. Tía Casi tells us about her granddaughter in Barcelona; Ella es Catalana, she says, venom in her voice.

As I tune her out her complaints, I focus on an old photo she has of Bernardo, proudly showing off something he grew in his garden. A pepper? A squash? The image is too blurry to make it out. I see pictures my parents sent her of my brother and me, and I think of the pictures we have at home of my aunt, my grandmother, my uncle and my cousins, some in faded colors and some in black and white. My dad was right about not visiting Tábara. It would be hard to go back. ☙



DISMISSED

by JULIA REDLINGER

Before:

In Longmont United Hospital, Longmont Colorado on July 30th, 1999 at 5:36 p.m., a mother slaved for over thirty hours to give birth to a wide-eyed, drooling baby. Her mother held her too much for too long, for this would be her only child. She overfed her in fear that she might starve. She put her diapers on wrong, but then right and then wrong just a couple more times, but she overcame the demanding tasks of single motherhood.

At seven years old, the young girl fell in love with a doctor's kit. Plastic scissors and bandages and scalpels. The young girl dreamed of conquering the metal blade and her shaking hands. Her hands lacked the subtlety and precision that a proper surgeon possessed, but she refused to give in.

She enjoyed eating raw noodles out of the pasta box and always made sure to lick the bowl clean of any brownie mix.

She ran, but not often and tried yoga once, but her body refused to bend in such ways.

She cried over a few boys, threw things at a wall a couple of times.

Her love for space, science and medicine went on and on as her bookshelf grew heavy with the art of quantum physics, Einstein's life, medical books, anatomy guidelines, Carl Sagan, Neil DeGrasse Tyson...it continues. She has two bookshelves now.

She loved hiking and biking and laughing and screaming and rolling in the grass. She loved painting the mountains and the flowers and pressing leaves from the trees (though she always apologized to the trees when she pulled a leaf from them because her mother told her once, "how would you like if some stranger came up to you and pulled your hair out?"). She picked the leaves anyways so she could paint their lines and curves in her little black notebook. A vile monster in the mornings, but quite lovely after a cup of coffee. She gave a lot of hugs, and paid lots of attention to everyone. In times, she found her heart to be shallow, but she knew that.

A young woman in the prime of her youth, happy as she ever could be.

Well, fuck.



The First Day in Court

People hesitantly walked into the courtroom, the air drenched in the sweat and horror of the two hundred people that gathered in anticipation as the questioning process dragged on for three days. On the final day of questioning, Judge LaBuda's voice trickled over the crowd in a booming, yet feminine tone. The names of those called were free of the burden a jury has to take on. I soon began to realize that my name would not be.

Well, fuck.



Adam

Adam Densmore's memory will not fade in the recesses of my mind. I could pick out the tone of his eyes, the slopes, valleys and curves of his lips, the peak of his brow and the slumping of his posture.

He displayed a greasy sweep of hair around his head, with widening eyes as the days trailed on. His razor neglected some of the stray hairs peppered around this face. He never looked

*I watched her speak
with words that
stood frozen in the
courtroom*

like he got more than a couple hours of sleep. Sunken into his sockets were eyes that carried a blank stare, painted a deep charcoal that pierced the room. The energy of his eyes nearly collapsed the stiffness of the air. We made eye contact often, each time a deep stare that mocked all other intense glares. With each hour, as the case dragged on and the evidence became more convincing, the energy harnessed in his eyes emptied into a puddle of pure exhaustion. In the end, he stopped looking over at me completely.



Julia, Who are You?

As my nights turned into periods of grieving rather than sleeping, I watched the decline of my brain and body. My chestnut eyes that once held such a beaming amount of laughter and light would crack and sizzle and burn out a little more each day. The sparkle that once glittered within them dimmed into a disgusting yellow speck of anger and frustration. I watched the tight, bright skin under my eyes melt into dark, sagging sacs of despair that hung from underneath my bottom lashes. I watched my weight fluctuate as I ate too much, too little, but never the right amount. I watched my skin dry and crinkle from neglect. And so I faced myself in the mirror each day, either too skinny or too fat, too bitter or too melancholy. Depressed and scared of the world, scared of what I might see next in court, I routinely avoided my reflection.



The Discovery

A young woman was the first witness that seemed to be around my age. I watched her speak with words that stood frozen in the courtroom as they passed by her lips, covered in a goopy pink lip gloss.

I am unable to forget the words she spoke to us that day.

I listened to her closely, fear creeping down my back. She presented her story with an appalling, almost eerie, composed voice.

She said she worked at a gas station. The Oklahoma air produced a cool, calm breeze, with a bright blue sky that domed

over her head. She saw a man, tall and mysterious, lug something over the grease-stained dumpster that stood behind the gas station. She watched as he drove away in his car that had only one working headlight. Her curiosity piqued at what he might have thrown away and she snuck away from her cash register, slowly wandering over to the green giant.

She peered over the top and noticed a dark lavender suitcase. It looked brand new with fresh fabric that lined it. *Too beautiful of a bag to be thrown away.* She inched her body over the edge to try to reach the bag, alarmed at the weight of the suitcase that wouldn't budge when she pulled up. She asked her co-worker for assistance to heave the bag over the dumpster.

When the team effort finally mustered the suitcase over the dumpster, they hesitantly stared at it. She traced the zipper along its teeth and popped open the flap. Inside, a black trash bag. She used a pocket knife to ease through the plastic, only to find another black bag underneath. With a final cut, they revealed a cold, white patch of flesh.

A dead pig? She thought.

She pulled back the plastic a little more. Breasts poked through the bag. A naked torso cleaned to a fault, empty of its organs and stripped away from its other appendages lay inside. Ashley. Now cut and carved, stuffed into a purple suitcase.

A blood-curdling scream shook Oklahoma that day.

*She used a pocket
knife to ease through
the plastic*



I'm Okay. It's Okay...Maybe Not

Fairly calm throughout the trial, I didn't pay much mind to what I observed. It wasn't until they brought out the evidence that everything went numb.

A black power saw, freckled with bits of flesh and blood between the teeth, preserved in a glass case, just as they had found it. It chipped away at Ashley's limbs. Each cut slicing through the leather of her skin. Gnawing, cracking and fracturing her bones. Pieces of her would always remain clutched in the jagged teeth of the power saw.

Next, the dark lavender suitcase which once held the torso of Ashley Mead. Its purple vividly danced around the room, calling attention to its unearthly shade. I looked over

at Adam's mother as her eyes fell over a familiar suitcase. She used to pack her clothes in it for her wild vacations.

The suitcase is the exact size of Ashley's torso if Adam cut her body just right. Flashes of her body packed tightly inside and her mangled, ghost-like skin, cleaned so well it looked plastic popped into my head as I stared at the purple suitcase. I stared and stared and stared.

It all went black.



The Meltdown

My ears began ringing and the cool leather of the chair began to burn, sizzling and melting beneath me. Voices dissipated into echoes far off into the distance and a panic clutched my heart, benumbed under the anxiety now drowning my body in its fathomless watery depths. I watched the Judge, Adam, the lawyers, the evidence, the sobbing families, the nosy reporters all get further and further away from me. The room became larger, then smaller, then larger...no smaller; it then withered away into absolutely nothing. I found myself completely alone. My mind nowhere and no recollection of what they were saying in the courtroom. I sat in the emptiness, in a room completely and utterly detached from me. I floated in the profound, desolate universe as a faint murmur of voices from Courtroom "S" echoed in the black background. I saw nothing but a flesh-covered veil that draped over the room, stained patches of blood scattered throughout it. I listened to the low murmur of voices that once in a while demanded my attention, but I could not come back to reality.



Dismissal

Exhausted and traumatized, I became more and more aware that I could not handle the deliberations. To look at Ashley's cold, desolate body lying on an observation table at the hands of a Pathologist during her autopsy and to look at Adam one more time was far too much for me.

"Please, Tessa, may I speak with the judge?"

Tessa, the judge's intern, with slicked-back blonde hair into a tight bun, sporting square glasses that complemented her face,

said "Come. Let's go into a different room." She lead me into an empty deliberation room. I explained to Tessa that I experienced severe attacks of anxiety; things changed for me. I didn't *feel* like myself. Something was off.

"Please can I just talk to Judge LaBuda?"

"Sure. Wait here."

She finally came back and lead me into the courtroom.

"All Rise."

I watched the attorneys, the Judge, Adam, a couple reporters and the police stand for me.

"You may be seated," Judge LaBuda roared, "What's the problem Ms. Redlinger?"

"Ma'am I've been having trouble concentrating. I just went into a severe panic attack. I—" My voice broke. I wasn't able to finish my sentence.

"I see. Ms. Redlinger, please give the attorneys and I a minute to discuss. You may approach, council."

Her white noise machine went on, filling the room with a mind numbing static. Their sentences went unheard. She and the attorneys discussed my plea for removal. I waited—watching their mouths move without noise. The static stopped.

"Ms. Redlinger, after discussing your issues with the attorneys, we have come to the conclusion that your service will no longer be needed. You are hereby dismissed and we thank you for your time."

"Thank you." Tessa and I turned around. I heard a faint "all rise" seep out of Tessa's lips.

I knew I would never see the other jurors again and although I had no desire to, I knew they would be the only ones who would ever understand.

Tessa said goodbye to me as I walked away from the room.

My heavy heart felt defeated. I felt as though I had let the other jurors down, the judge, Ashley's and Adam's families. However, I never returned to courtroom "S."



The Decision

What happened to me after the trial was summed up with this: *I almost lost my fucking mind.* PTSD, panic disorder, anxiety attacks, flashbacks, tv static in my vision, blackouts, a loss of hope,

fear of my death, a welcoming of my death. An effervescent soul lost to the words: April 26th, 2018, "... Densmore, 33, guilty of first-degree murder, guilty of tampering with a deceased human body, tampering with physical evidence and abuse of a corpse."

The trial was over.



After

In Longmont United Hospital, Longmont Colorado on July 30th, 1999 at 5:36 p.m, a mother slaved for over thirty hours to give birth to a wide-eyed, drooling baby. Her mother held her too much for far too long, for this would be her only child. She overfed her in fear that she might starve. She put her diapers on wrong, but then right and then wrong just a couple more times, but she overcame the demanding tasks of single motherhood.

At eighteen years old, the young girl examined photos of a torso that belonged to Ashley Mead and sat in court for eight hours a day, watching the life slowly fade from a man's eyes.

The image of a cut up, slashed up torso crept its way into her dreams, along with it, a non-stop questioning of her sanity and mortality. Whatever happened to the happy, bouncy baby girl? ☙

*watching the life
slowly fade from a
man's eyes*



PURSUING VERTICAL

by GRANT WHITMAN PERDUE

Pitch: No, I'm not talking about singing "Kumbaya" in perfect harmony. The leader of a rock climb ascends approximately one rope length of a cliff, clipping the rope to gear placed in cracks in the rock. While the leader climbs, the follower belays, managing the rope in order to ensure the climber does not die a brutal death if he falls. Then, the leader belays the follower up the same stretch of climbing, allowing the pair to then push further up the wall. This rope length of climbing is called a "pitch."



Ground and Center

An extensive series of road and logistic escapades led me to this moment of anticipation—here I sit, at the base of the gargantuan rock face that I plan to ascend, then descend. Stephan, my climbing partner, and I are about to climb the Northeast Buttress of Higher Cathedral Rock. A climb storied for its sustain and intensity, we are eager to challenge our minds and

bodies. We rose before the sun's rays could shine upon Yosemite Valley in order to increase our chances of getting back to the ground before those same rays retreat into night. Now, my palms sweat as I approach exodus from the ground. They always do. Maybe it's the thought of, once again, entrusting my life to a bunch of tiny pieces of metal that separate me from the ground's sweet, rugged nurture—what kind of sane person would do such a thing, just to return to the same grounded place hours later? Maybe I am just excited? I am excited.



Pitch 1

My feet leave the ground and I slip into a vertical meditation. My palms no longer sweat, my mind no longer anticipates, only executes. I break above the tree line, and I am reminded of the beauty that this vertical perspective provides. The lush, once separable pines begin to mesh into one as I scale above their fortitude. It's here that my mind transitions from logically skeptical to above ground and centered: present; my brain now at resolve with the position to which I have pushed my body.



Pitch 2

Settling in to the vertical world in which we have inserted ourselves, Stephan and I share words of excitement and peace. We fix our gaze on El Capitan across the valley floor, whose gaze is already fixed upon us. I wonder what stories the behemoth wall has to tell—its wrinkled striations of granite emit vibrations of wisdom and grandeur. El Capitan sits at the center of the climbing universe—it's never-ending innerworkings of snake-like cracks and awe-inspiring features acting as an ultimate proving ground for history's most prolific climbers. I hope to one day be a part of its story.



Pitch 3

I delve deeper into a vertical meditation. I sense everything possible about myself and my surroundings. The way my fingers

My feet leave the ground and I slip into a vertical meditation.

react to the rock's most minuscule of features. The way my hand perfectly fills the void of a crack in the rock, expanding with a few slight gestures in order to create the perfect hold. I strike awe at the fact that my body can turn this empty void into a usable method of upward mobility. I recognize the rock's slightest features and subtleties—for if it were a blank face, I would not be able to ascend it. However, it formed so perfectly in such a way that I am able to use its imperfections as a means to explore higher.



Pitch 4

Stephan—my relationship with him extends much further than the system of intertwined cordage that tethers us. For the past few weeks, we have been living as traveling vagabonds—moving through the country in search of experiential purpose. I've known Stephan for just over a year now—each encounter fulfilling and provoking. Stephan is a fantastic climber, emotionally driven; a romantic, a genius. I tend to separate logic and emotion, keeping romance on the backburner. Stephan excels in technical crack climbs, whereas I do so on cryptic overhanging rock. However, the different aspects of us—mental and physical—intertwine in a way that we are able to make decisions efficiently and ascend variable faces. Now, as we hang above the trees, this is ever-crucial, as we consciously entrust our lives to each other. Connected by a long strand of twine at the hip, decision making becomes double-stranded. Our bond grows stronger.



Pitch 5

Exposure. I traverse left, and the magnitude of trust I am enlisting in the singing pieces of metal clipped to my harness becomes clear. The wind dances around my body, intensifying and calming, causing my button-down shirt to flow freely. Below me are 400 feet of air, and I revel at the fact of the position I have put myself in. I feel wild, vulnerable. I love it.



Pitch 6

My eyes follow a thin flaring crack, leading to daunting territory. I had been envisioning this pitch for days, as I decided before that I would take it on the sharp end. Why not? If there's a time to push myself, it's now. And if it doesn't go well, the gear will hold. Right? As I exit the belay station, my mind clears of foresight and I begin the dance. Right foot, right hand, left foot, left hand. As I jam my way up the crack, I get into something of a musical groove. I need to in order to remain composed as my pieces of protection slip farther and farther away while I progress upwards. Mind on the mantra, mantra on my mind—good climbers place gear because they can, not because they need to.



Pitch 7, 8

“Vertical swimming,” they call it. For the longest time, I did not understand why. However, as I forcibly wedge myself into a chimney-like formation in the rock, I get it. Inhale, get stuck, exhale, move, inhale, get stuck again. Rhythmic, yet intricate, my exhaustion builds in this heinous form of ascension. The walls seemingly close in tighter as I claustrophobically attempt upward progress—the unforgiving slither of rock whose void I have entered does not seem to allow grace; only grovel. My first time attempting the technique, I yell and growl as I struggle up the wall. My battlecries turn into what I believe to be the longest strand of expletives of my entire life. “Fuck! Fuck me! Jesus, fuck!” I yell as the climbing becomes increasingly more frustrating. I know it shouldn’t be this difficult—I just don’t have the technique figured out. But why the hell can’t I just figure it out? I’m like a fish caught on a line, fighting while the wall tuckers me out. I place a piece of protection in a crack within the chimney, recognizing that it being there does not protect against a less than ideal fall. My helmet wedges and sticks in to the increasingly thinning chimney, so I decide I must remove it. I unclip my neck strap, and like clockwork, I fumble and watch my helmet as it plummets six hundred feet to the ground, bouncing off of rock and sky, landing eerily close to the point at which we started the climb. “Fuck!” Then silence. For El Capitan, this must be like dinner and a movie. I regain composure and push onward, reaching the final move in the chimney. My fingertips graze the small edge that would allow me to exit the chimney,

*Black velvet,
fly.*

and I fall. Back into the chimney. Time does not slow nor cease to exist in this moment—in fact, it moves quickly, considering I have given myself to the air. However, my mind has enough time to process and evaluate. No, it does not fill with fright of my little gold camalot failing to hold my weight as I whip onto it. Rather than fear, my mind fills with frustration—damnit, I could have tried harder. An ironic occasion on many levels, I reflect on the fact that I lost my helmet prior to falling into a thin gape of unforgiving rock on what I expected to be an easy portion of climbing. I am humbled as tears fill my eyes—“I’m okay!” I yell down to a worried Stephan, fighting the yard sale of emotions that attempt to excrete out of my moistening eyes. I regain composure and finish the pitch.



Pitch 9, 10

Black velvet, fly. High into the vertical realm, I look down to appreciate the process of the vertical dance. Before my eyes, a bird who shines of black velvet floats below me with grace and precision. It is rare that one is in this position of observation, so I soak in every detail. The black velvet aviator flies with beauty and grace, effortlessly floating about the vertical realm. I wonder how its dark, glistening feathers sleek so smoothly against the grain of the wind. I aspire to one day move with such elegance. I admire its beauty.



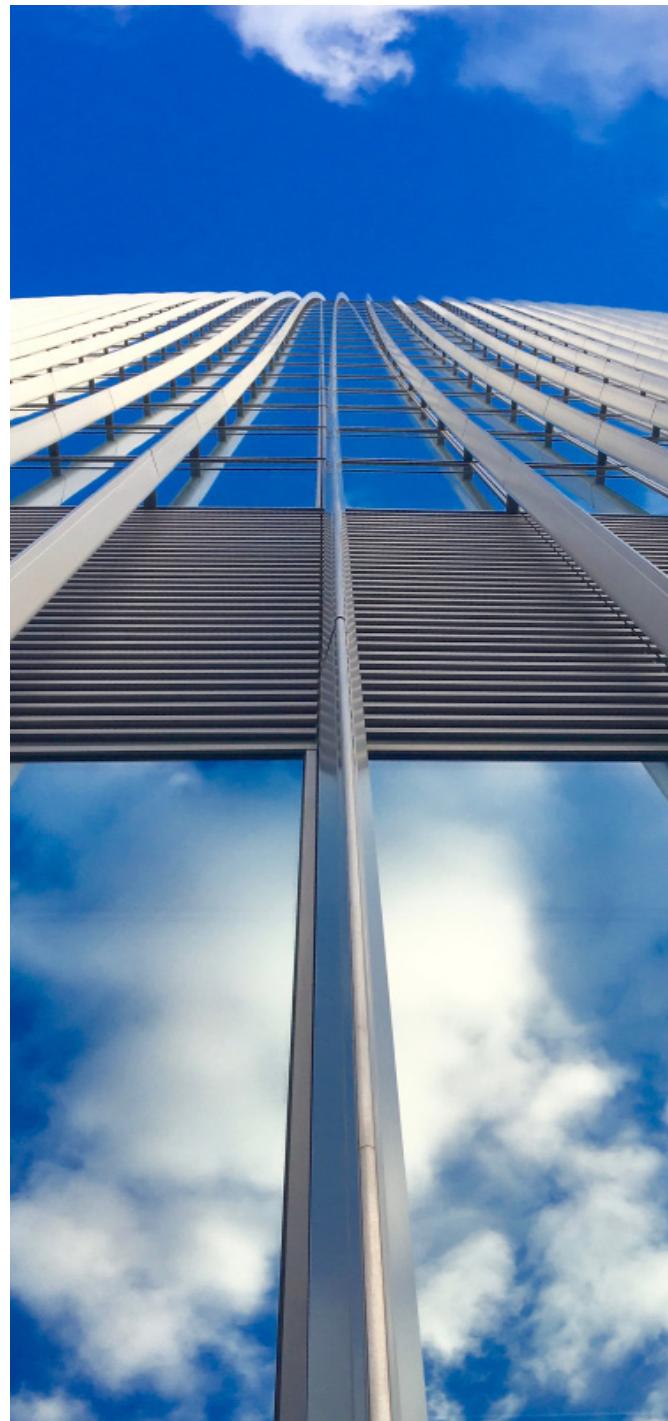
Pitch 11

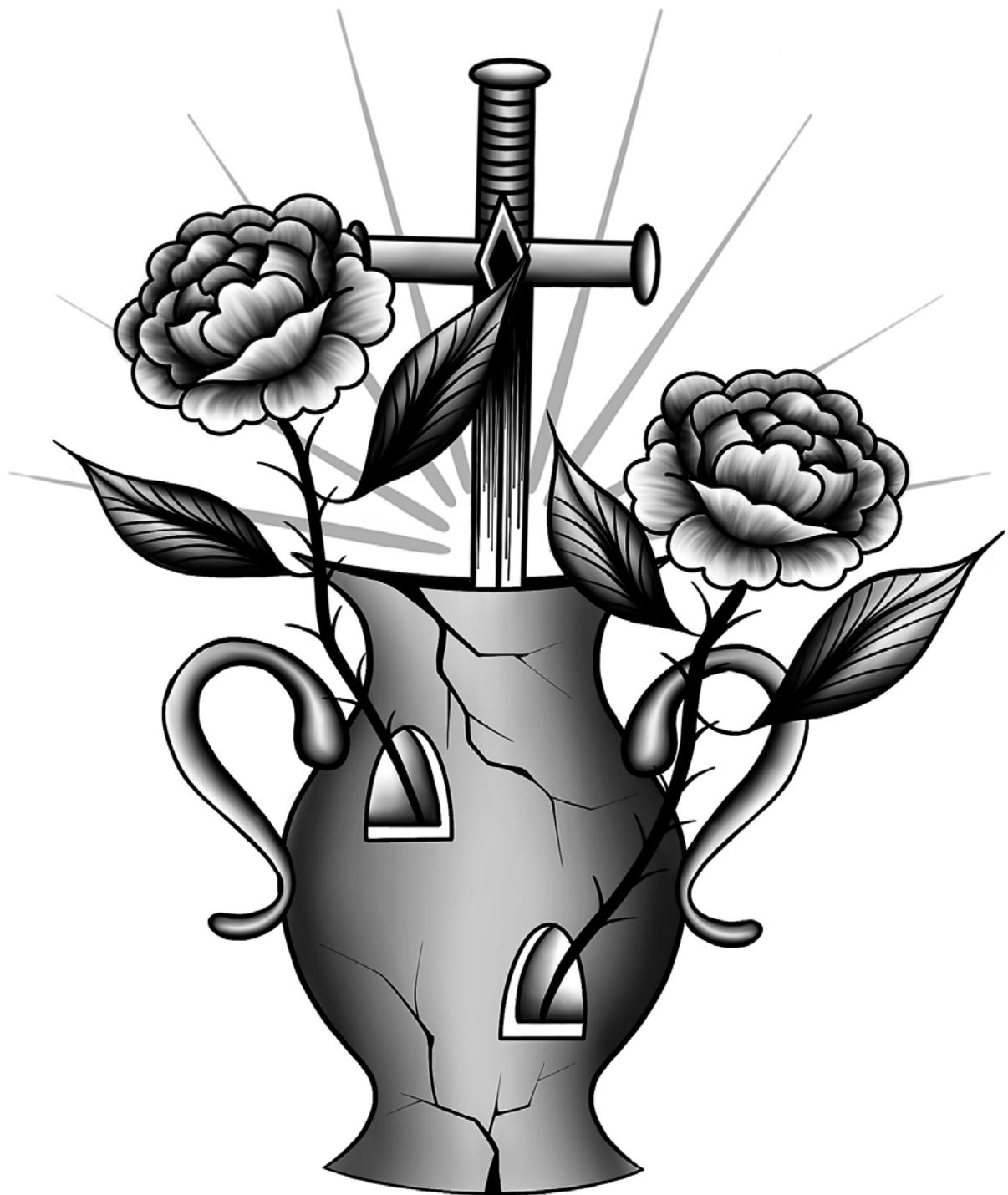
“We’re almost there, though. Last pitch to go, wish us luck!” I relay in a video recording before we reach the pinnacle, the halfway point of our vertical voyage. Stephan takes off on the last pitch, ascending a section of rock that is seldom, if ever, climbed—a bold completion to the dance, one thousand feet off the deck. We reach the summit of Higher Cathedral and gasp at the way El Capital meets our stare. Our smiles gape as we realize the fruition of today’s ascension.



Ground and Center

We take the easy way down—a steep trail contrived of mystically neon mosses and rocks seeping with moisture. Passing by the section of rock where we began our climb, I notice the irony of casually strolling past the origin of such an intense experience. For we just ascended a cliff face and risked our lives in order to simply come back down. However, the effervescent present-ness of connecting mind and matter extricate any thoughts of “why am I doing this?” Maybe for the experiential comradery of going against what the brain deems logical and necessary. Maybe we’re just lunatics. Back to our car, my glance is pulled from our ravaged water bottles and Clif Bar wrappers up to the sky. Spreading its wings like canvas through the sun-setting air, I appreciate its majesty and wonder when I may again meet the gaze of the black velvet bird. I anticipate when I will again join the bird in my own form of flight. ☙





SIDEWALKS WE DON'T WALK ON ANYMORE

by CLARA SWANSON

Dizzily hot, dripping with sweat, smelling of browned grass and gasoline and pot and coffee, it was the summer to end all summers. I could sing about the discoveries I made during those months, or of the people I loved. But the dancing and restless eyes of that season are now wilted and blanketed by a fog of halt and disdain.

We were seventeen then, and it felt like the dawn of adulthood—we camped in places that were lone-standing and free. We sang anthems and soliloquies, we drove searchingly, we wore ripped jeans. She was my best friend. Her name was Camille, like the 1969 hurricane, and aptly so—she raged in swift and deadly ways against mankind and everyday life, tearing apart those in her path and pulling respect from the throats of many. We spent the days of that summer smoking Camels in her decade-old Honda, sporting thrift store tank tops and thin canvas sneakers. Her breaking family was mine; I was the sibling she didn't have in her brother and the daughter her mother didn't have in her. I watched the worst chapter of the Andrews' family



story unfold sitting in a passenger seat I couldn't (or wouldn't) unbuckle myself from.

The end of the summer was the hottest part. Kansas City was reaching record highs that year and the humidity was dizzying. What I can remember of most days, through the haze of weed, heat, and exhaustion, was that our world had adopted a dream-like quality. Everyone was dehydrated and turning delirious. It was the final month of summer, too, when Camille's father began to deteriorate, both mentally and physically.

A large and muscular man, he was a retired college football coach now working construction. His hands were rugged and giant, and he had dark, tanned skin that looked like leather. He exclusively wore faded band t-shirts and blue jeans. He had an intellectual sense of humor but was no intellectual. During the



fever dream that was July and August, I watched each day as he began to cave in to the pressures of the family's issues.

Every week a new drama arose. One week it was drugs in the house, another it was not enough money for new milk. One, a panic attack, and the next, a drunken slip of the tongue. In the back of my mind I had taken on my role as mediator and therapist proudly, naively, with thoughts to fix a family that was obviously beyond repair. Around early July, Mr. Andrews began withdrawing occasionally from breakfast or dinner. Within a couple more weeks, he was withdrawing from entire days. He had, in a short time, grown skinnier and greasier. By the end of July, his face was chapped, and his eyes were red and sunken into the grayness of his face.

One hazy morning in early August I awoke to a frenzy that seemed only normal. Camille was speaking to me, her voice gravely and searching, looking for her cigarettes, the cat was stretching on the blanket over my feet, I heard a distant argument between her brother and mother from the kitchen, typical. I was still half-asleep and felt I had been born into a new, loud world. It was 8 o'clock. I sat up on the air mattress and looked out the window to the street. Camille's car sat in the morning sun, the driver's door hanging open. I asked her what was the matter. She yelled, practically, "he's gone!" and I sighed, because this was not unusual. For half a day or two days, sometimes, he disappeared, but he always came back. I told her this.

"No, it's different. He didn't bring anything with him, not even his credit cards. And he won't answer my calls." She was right. It was different—usually, he'd pack himself a small bag and would pick up the phone when called, even if only for a moment.

"His phone goes straight to voicemail," she told me, her bold, worried eyes creating dark trenches in the center of her head. Today, I can appreciate the gravity of these details, the foreboding nature of his robotic voicemail message ringing in my ears. But on that August day I did not. I told Camille, "It'll be alright." I laid back down and covered myself with the blanket. "He'll be back."

Camille spent all day driving around looking for him in nearby towns and in parks and the houses of friends and in familiar places. I slept a while longer, thinking nothing of this, and went home in the afternoon to pack my bag for a small trip I was to take the next day, to St. Louis.

I left very early the next morning for St. Louis, around 5 o'clock, and arrived, after a leisurely drive, for breakfast around 8. I spent the day wandering and sightseeing with a friend of mine, and twice we mentioned the Andrews and their entire situation, but without much discussion. It was the last hazy day, I will add. After that day I can remember the past more clearly and credulously. It was the end of the summer and Camille called me early that afternoon.

Unhesitatingly, I picked up, and she didn't say anything at first. Gradually, I heard silent, hushed sobs and I knew what had happened. I sat down on the side of the street, a gray curbside, warm and rough, I remember. I couldn't breathe for a moment, and it was unsettling as getting the wind knocked out of you is—helplessly painful. I told her, "I'm sorry," and I didn't really know what else to

Camille spent all day driving around looking for him in nearby towns

say other than that. We cried on opposite ends of the telephone line for a minute or so. Looking back now, those tears were born not of sympathy but of dread. I think I understood in that moment that the times that were coming would be very difficult, sober times. I wiped my tears, sat up straight, and asked her what had happened.

I don't like to go much into detail about it, even today, but they'd found the corpse all the way in central Iowa on some farmland. Some poor kid walking past found it. The tattered body was seated in the red Ford pickup I drove to homecoming. In the passenger seat lay an old Remington pump shotgun with one shell in it. The truck was unsalvageable, ruined... as was the body. They had what was left of Mr. Andrews in a funeral home all cremated in a little town near Mason City, Iowa, and the truck was sitting in an auto shop.

I mulled this information over in my head for several minutes before telling Camille that I'd be over in the morning. I only came to regret this decision months later, after I was gone. I can't explain why I didn't make the two hour drive back home right away although I should've, but I speculate often. Perhaps I wanted to continue living, even for one more day, in this faraway world of summer innocence and warm, soft asphalt where I could walk barefoot and death wasn't real... in Kansas City, it would be real. Perhaps this is why I left our small, ghostly Kansas City suburb so shortly thereafter. I haven't been back. I think the sidewalks would burn my feet. ☙



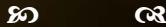
THE FADING OF GREATNESS

by DUAA AL-JAROUDI

A beautiful night under the sky back in KSA.

On the top of a mountain, somewhere in Saudi, at 9:45 p.m. under the dark sky, I wore my Abaya with my hijab stripped from my head resting on my shoulders. We were cuddling and kissing slowly and lustfully. It was our first time discovering the beauty and greatness of the kiss and the touch of a human body, along with the unphysical worlds we were traveling into at that moment. I never thought of my breasts, as a teen Muslim girl, to be something kissable or beautiful, until he grabbed my back and snuck his hand under my bra starting to touch them and sensing them carefully and worshipfully, as if they were conscious, sacred creatures that needed to be worshipped in a non-stoppable way.

With him, time flew so fast—five, six hours felt like one. I don't remember a time when we had enough from each other's presence and went back to the College Prepatory Program dorms without wanting more, although we would spend the next hours chatting on the phone till morning. I knew that even when we had all the time in this universe, it wouldn't be enough. That same night on the mountain top, we weren't so cautious with the slow down or even stop whenever we're together.



Opportunity matters.

While holding his face with my hand, staring at his dreamy eyes, and sensing his skin, I never knew life could hide such fascinating moments until the right time comes. A moment akin to a symphony.

“How could life have such a beauty that was hidden all the time?”

I was lost in my thoughts, trying to analyze and understand. How could geographical factors, i.e. living in this part of the world, make these beautiful moments even more beautiful and precious? I started to sense all the differences that lie within me and within this universe, and most importantly, the essentiality of the opportunity and my experience to me.



The night that was my worst fear.

We didn't feel that we needed to stop until a light from a car approached us and went its way through the dark on that mountain. I prayed endlessly in my heart that it would not be an officer, and if so, God wouldn't let me down, and would save me from all the mess I would be stuck in. For I was a devout and honest Shia Muslim. When a man who was, unfortunately, an officer, stepped out of the car and saw Hussain, my lover, holding me and kissing my neck at night in a prohibited area, I knew at that moment my life had ended.

Not only my reputation, but my very religious family and especially my short-tempered father's reputation would be destroyed. I could also lose my sponsorship and academic life, and maybe my life too, just because this officer has caught us. That night was the hardest of my life before coming to USA.

*Luckiness, maybe?*

The officer seemed so scary in that moment; I thought he would take us both to the police station right away without any kind of negotiation. I worried that, although I was shaking and crying in front of him, he wouldn't be less stern. But when he asked me what time I was expected back at the dorm, and I answered him "by 10:00 pm," he stopped playing the role of the mad scary cop and told me, in a hurry, to run before they notice my lateness and give me a serious probation. After a long time of investigating Husain and asking about his ID, he let him go. Maybe the officer was familiar with such a situation and understood everything that happened after all. So, he let us go.

*The separation of boys and girls*

Back home, in Saudi Arabia, boys and girls never go to the same school; it's illegal to have a mixed school, since laws and religion are connected. For me, this unnatural separation fights everything that's spontaneous and innate and creates many disasters for families as a result. It also destroys reputations. At the same time, this separation brings a lot of excitement, passion, and beauty to experiencing new things and new feelings. Maybe that's the case for all first timers, not

*For me, this
unnatural separation
fights everything that's
spontaneous and innate*

just those back home. What makes it special is that it's a forbidden, both traditionally and religiously. Thus, you're always passionate and excited that you're having and living your own fantasy with your own rules, or at least that was the case with me. Breaking the rules has its own pleasure. That passion that I had was enough to surround me for the coming five years, at least, if that existential current didn't hit me off course and change me forever.



The strong girl

Coming from a religious Islamic environment probably made it impossible to experience such a beauty like our night on that mountain, or even to have a perspective that this kind of a relationship and love is so pure, sacred, moral, and natural. Without having a higher awareness than the one we were taught distinguishing right from wrong, acceptable from unacceptable, moral from immoral, and "halal" from "haram," we wouldn't come near these opportunities. That's why I was so in love with myself, so strong and capable, and most importantly, passionate. I could choose what I want to choose, neither religion nor law would stop me from doing what's natural, desirable and beautiful.



Cosmology and philosophy

My College Preparatory Program year was the most critical juncture in my life; it made the great person inside me blossom marvelously; I discovered how limitless she could be. I was 18 during that year, and everything was so colorful; both before and after I met Hussain, I had a purpose that would make me live forever. I worked so hard to get into this program, to study abroad and achieve one of my biggest dreams. I was called the great, smart, and special girl back in my high school days, because of my unique philosophical perspective and passion towards existence, my critical creative mind that questioned everything and came up with outstanding thoughts and scientific ideas. The research and innovations I worked through, and because of the writings I wrote and published in twitter, path, and other websites and magazines.

I was obsessed with everything related to parapsychology, brain electromagnetic waves and quantum physics, everything that's

beyond our natural world and beyond its natural laws. I believed in consciousness and in human limitless capabilities more than I ever believed in Islam. This world, as I call it the cosmic/cosmology world, made me, and others believe in my own uniqueness, without knowing that this passion may be out of sever grandiose narcissism.



My strength and my weakness

This world was my main source for strength and at the same time, the main source for my weakness and loss. That was my biggest mistake; I sensed my identity and existence only out of this world and by relying on it. It literally gave me everything; I valued myself because of how it changed me and gave me a unique vision and perspective for this entire existence. So, without this inspiration that made me an inspirational person, I am nothing. Because of that world, I had a lot of fans. Hussain was passionate and obsessed with me because of my passion toward this world. He loved me so much. The more he loved me the more I appreciated and valued myself, and the more I fell in love with myself. I didn't know I was feeding on his appreciation and worship.



The double-edged sword

If I could just tell you how your magnificent vision for this cosmos and your limitless passion towards this existence has the ability to destroy you and kill you as much as it creates you every day and gives you satisfaction and happiness, I would have mastered the art of speech. My excessive emotions made me feel happiness and love in the best way possible. It was like soaring in the vast space and galaxies of romanticism and beauty. In other words, I was "high" most of my life because of this ability. However, my hyper-excessive emotions weren't limited only by love and happiness, they also could, and did go the other way. I could have emotions and irritability with anger, pain, and sorrow. I first experienced this when I came to USA and had the best opportunities and circumstances to initiate that side and to create that person inside me. I never realized, not once, not for a moment, that life could ever have the chance to break me, or to trigger my weakness. For I've always been so strong and wise. This could be the breakdown of a narcissist, or narcissistic injury.



I'm a weak person, after all

The power of time.

Time has been always powerful. It could destroy you in seconds. These seconds prove how powerful time can be. After my first six months in the USA, I started to change and lose myself day by day. I realized that the endless appreciation and love you receive from someone can take everything that's valuable and precious away, even yourself. Yes, relationships do this to people, after the help of time, of course. I began to have suicidal thoughts just to end it all. It was the worst pain I could ever imagine having or going through. The pain that killed me just because I realized I'm different from the old Duaa; I'm a weak person, after all. The pain that's full of regret because I allowed myself to think of suicide, to seek salvation. The salvation that this world, in my eyes, didn't need or deserve. Instead, it deserved only all my ambition and commitment to be the greatest happiest most satisfied person I could ever be. When this regret approaches a person, it's nearly impossible to get rid of it, or to move on.

For me, it was always about self-development and being the best version of me. Hussain made sure I never became that person/version, although he was behind me supporting me in every step I took, he didn't know he was taking most of my energy and power, if not all of it. I became the weakest version of me. His love was that kind of love, so true, honest and limitless that's also so destructive, exhaustive, dominating, and oppressive.



Death is not my biggest fear

I don't fear death as much as I fear what's after it. Maybe there's no after, maybe there exists nothing after. The fear of after what suffocated me all my life.



Necessity to deal with craziness

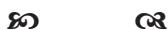
It's not the hopelessness, nor depression, nor losing myself and the meaning of this world is what makes me suffer. I'm used to all that. But what makes me suffer every day and kills me is the necessity to find a solution for this instability, and that I must deal with it.

What kills me is that I'm obligated as a human to be calm, determinant, and stable, obligated to be everything that's the opposite of losing my mind and the opposite of craziness. All I know is that I didn't choose this, I didn't choose to see hell even before maturing. I wish my irritability and higher consciousness only gave me happiness and creativity, I wish the other edge of this condition didn't exist.



My endless existential crisis

That's how it's been in the United States: the darkest times, and I never sensed them coming. Losing my dreams and ambitions was the first stage for this new phase I'm going through, that led me to lose myself after I surrendered for the pain. I don't believe in praying or beauty anymore. I lost my faith in the only two things that made me alive for the past 16 years. And you might ask, what forced this huge change and conflict to happen at this age? I'll tell you. It's only one person, and one relationship that's created all the events and chances to make me reach my nadir. A relationship so powerful it can destroy you completely, just because it was the wrong one, and was maybe never meant to be. Or maybe, it was the only and first experience that could make you realize your truth including the "real" you with all the mental disorders that you've had all the time.



If time goes back

If that night on the mountain lasted, if that kiss and cuddling just froze forever, and prevented me from knowing the truth, the truth of me, of him, and the truth of this life, would it be different? Would I be saved from this sorrow? I hoped for the last three years that I could stay that innocent, passionate person, that I would never change to the ugliest evil version of me. The thing about this shift and conflict is that it's not clear what really caused it. It's all been added up, accumulated. Losing yourself in a toxic relationship, knowing yourself more because of it, losing all my dreams after coming to the USA only after a short time, and losing my faith in God forever, all made me like this. I just wish that I knew one thing, one thing that would change the path I'm on forever. That love, and the person or people who give you that works like a mirror for you. Their love will be

*Losing yourself in
a toxic relationship,
knowing yourself
more because of it*

reflected on you no matter what. And the more massive love gets, the more massive the pain you'll go through becomes. Especially if the person who gives you that massive love is weak. Their weakness will impact and be reflected on you in a way you haven't imagined it would. I only wish I knew that a long time ago and wish if my lover would ask for my permission before all of this.



"Hey beautiful, I want to fall in love with your beauty and greatness, see life in your eyes, and worship you for all my coming days. But I will destroy you and suffocate your soul and kill your spirit for ever, would that be ok with you?"

Imagine how pain and sorrow in this world could be avoided if people just asked before jumping in the name of true love that would supposedly excuse every pain and suffering a human could go through. Love isn't your right nor your freedom. As spontaneous and innocent love must be, it should be cautious and secure too. You shouldn't cross your lines with your unlimited and massive feelings just because you love someone. For me, if love does that, then it's not different from a crime assaulting you and your rights. Even the abstract feelings by themselves, I consider them a crime. I hope people just believe that love doesn't need necessarily to be painful just because it's love. You don't have to tolerate any pain at all. Whatsoever.



Like a child walking into the unknown

I'm not a psychopath nor bipolar as they used to call me, I'm just a normal person who's been through a lot, faced emotional abuse for the last year continuously, and been dead alive. Besides all the suicidal thoughts I think of, I still didn't choose the last choice a person in my place would choose. I'm still fighting, as I always have, but the difference now is that I don't know what I'm fighting for. There's nothing that deserves to be fought for, I could end this in seconds, but I don't have the courage yet. I'm still hoping every day that I wake up one day and realize that all what I went through was a nightmare, and that life is still my ambitious world, and I'm still the happiest creative person that sees greatness in everything. ☙



G IS FOR GIRAFFE

by KAITLYNN DYER

Abbey- my younger sister was born in 1998, officially making me the ever-cursed middle child. I have a few wisps of memories before she came, as I was only four, but even then, I knew there was a shift in the dynamics. I was no longer the youngest, I had become the middle child- the child my mother was taught to treat unfairly, taught that this child was worth less than the others, an undesirable by nature. When I was 15 she told me this is why she had behaved the way she did toward me.

Breast Cancer- a cancer that forms in the cells of the breast, with 1-4 stages of severity; stage 3 is split into a, b, and, c types of varying degree. Women diagnosed at stage 3 have a 72% chance of living five years or more dependent upon treatment. In 2009 my mother was diagnosed with stage 3b.

Chemotherapy- One of the most effective and commonly used treatments for curing breast cancer. It is also like fighting fire with fire. It is odd watching the person you hate and yet in their weakened state are supposed to love go through chemo. I felt guilty most of the time my mother was sick. Guilty for not

feeling more scared of losing her. Guilty for not feeling more sympathetic, but how could I be?

Diabetic- “a serious disease in which the body cannot properly control the amount of sugar in your blood because it does not have enough insulin”- merriam webster “Being diabetic means I can be irrational”- my mother

Eye Rolling- is truly an art. It’s about timing. I have mastered the perfect dart left, half circle down and around to meet back to your prey with a slightly widened eye. For some it comes naturally, an instinct for calling bullshit or showing displeasure. My mother said I started rolling my eyes when I was born. I’d guess it was actually around age 6, about the same time I learned I hated her.

Father- my hero, my pal, my escape from her. When he passed, I felt robbed of the wrong parent.

Giraffes- My son once wanted a stuffed giraffe, I did not allow it. Later after my husband had grilled me on why he couldn’t have the harmless giraffe I realized I didn’t want to say because it was my mother’s favorite animal, instead I said I didn’t want to spoil him at a young age. We ended up getting the giraffe.

Hysterectomy- After getting a full hysterectomy a woman is supposed to take estrogen pills to replace the bodies natural hormones, otherwise hormones will become imbalanced. An imbalance of hormones can cause mood swings, bloating, fatigue, irritability, hair loss, palpitations, and cancer in certain cases. My mother had a hysterectomy at a fairly young age though I’m not exactly sure what that age was. She refused to take the replacement hormones because she swore they would give her cancer.

Iodine- Some people believe that if you are allergic to iodine that you are also allergic to seafood and shellfish. This however is not true, it is entirely possible to be allergic to one while not being allergic to the other. My mother refused to believe this though.

Jekyll- the better half of the fictional character Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. A doctor trying to escape his dark side, a monster free of morality. Dr. Jekyll was always notoriously apologetic and ashamed of whatever Hyde had done. This never stopped Mr. Hyde. It never stopped my mother either.

Katie- Since before I can remember I have had the nickname Kaite, it was my father who initiated this name and this spelling. I’ve always felt this makes me special in a world crowded with Katies. I have a stocking from a Christ-

My hero, my pal, my escape from her.

This never stopped Mr. Hyde. It never stopped my mother either.

mas long ago that my mother made, it reads k, a, t, i, e. Likeness- I use to deny any likeness I had to my mother, but I've learned I cannot fight DNA; all you can do is acknowledge, understand, and try to shape the materials you've been given better than your predecessors. However, I will forever hate our shared nose.

Manic depressive/bipolar- my mother was never technically diagnosed with these things, but over the years she has been given medications that treat the symptoms of both. At 14 I thought my mother's behavior towards me was completely out of hate and craziness, so I hated back in response. My hate blossomed into a deadly vine of nightshade, winding its way through each piece of myself. As I got older this nightshade protected me from her manic outbursts and accusations of drug use. It slowly blossomed into patience and a healthy understanding of why to take care of your mental health. This behavior from my mother helped me discover my own needs that were not met and how to be independent at a young age. Now I am a loving listening mother myself, who through years of observation learned the hard way what not to do.

Neglect- verb (used with object) 1. To pay no attention or too little attention to; disregard or slight.

Opossum- The opossum if presented with stress or confrontation will "play dead"- this still comatose state is caused by shock and inability to handle stress. If backed into a corner it can be pushed too far, in which case it will hiss, growl, and bite.

Pneumonia- When I was 7 years old I was hospitalized with pneumonia for a week. At that age I thought it was one of the greatest weeks of my life. I was cared for hand and foot, and everyone had to be nice to me. For one week I was safe from my mother's Mr. Hyde, in public she was always Dr. Jekyll; in my weakened state she was even sorry for her Hyde behavior.

Quiz- What are two treatment options for breast cancer? What are the symptoms of hormone imbalance? How is my nickname spelled?

Radiation- is the poison that kills the cancerous cells. It also kills the healthy cells. The doctors tell the patient and their family to not think of it as poison. Watching someone get "warriors" pumped into their veins feels an awful lot like watching someone get poison pushed through their body.

Stairs- I remember hiding at the bottom of the stairs a lot even though I was scared of the basement I was scared of being upstairs with her. Once my mother pushed me down the stairs,

she claimed it was an accident- she pushed me because I had pushed my little sister away and she just wanted to show me what it felt like, I just happened to be standing near the stairs.

Teachers- Our first teachers are supposed to be our parents. I like to think my father taught me everything, logically though that couldn't be possible because he worked. The truth is I don't know who taught me how to walk, or say my first words because that's not what I remember. I remember my father taught me how to love and how to be strong and how to not cry. I remember my mother taught me to hide and how to fight and how to forgive. And I know my mother was taught to mistreat the middle child.

Umbilical cord- Adele Allen wrote a blog about how she did not cut the umbilical cord for six days. The placenta was placed in a sanitary pouch and carried alongside the baby. Allen writes about how this created a special bonding and natural separation from her and her baby. Allen also mentions that chimpanzees practice this, though I'd guess probably out of the lack of medical tools.

Violin- When I was in fourth grade I played the violin. It didn't last long, but for a short time I remember noticing that my mother liked that I played violin, at the time I thought maybe this was something we could bond over not knowing that there was never a chance at a special bond for us, my umbilical cord had been cut from her the moment I arrived.

Weed- is given to cancer patients to ease the symptoms of chemotherapy. My mothers accusations that I was on drugs became particularly hilarious to me once she started using marijuana. She had always accused me of this since I was around 12 or 13. I didn't even try it until after she did.

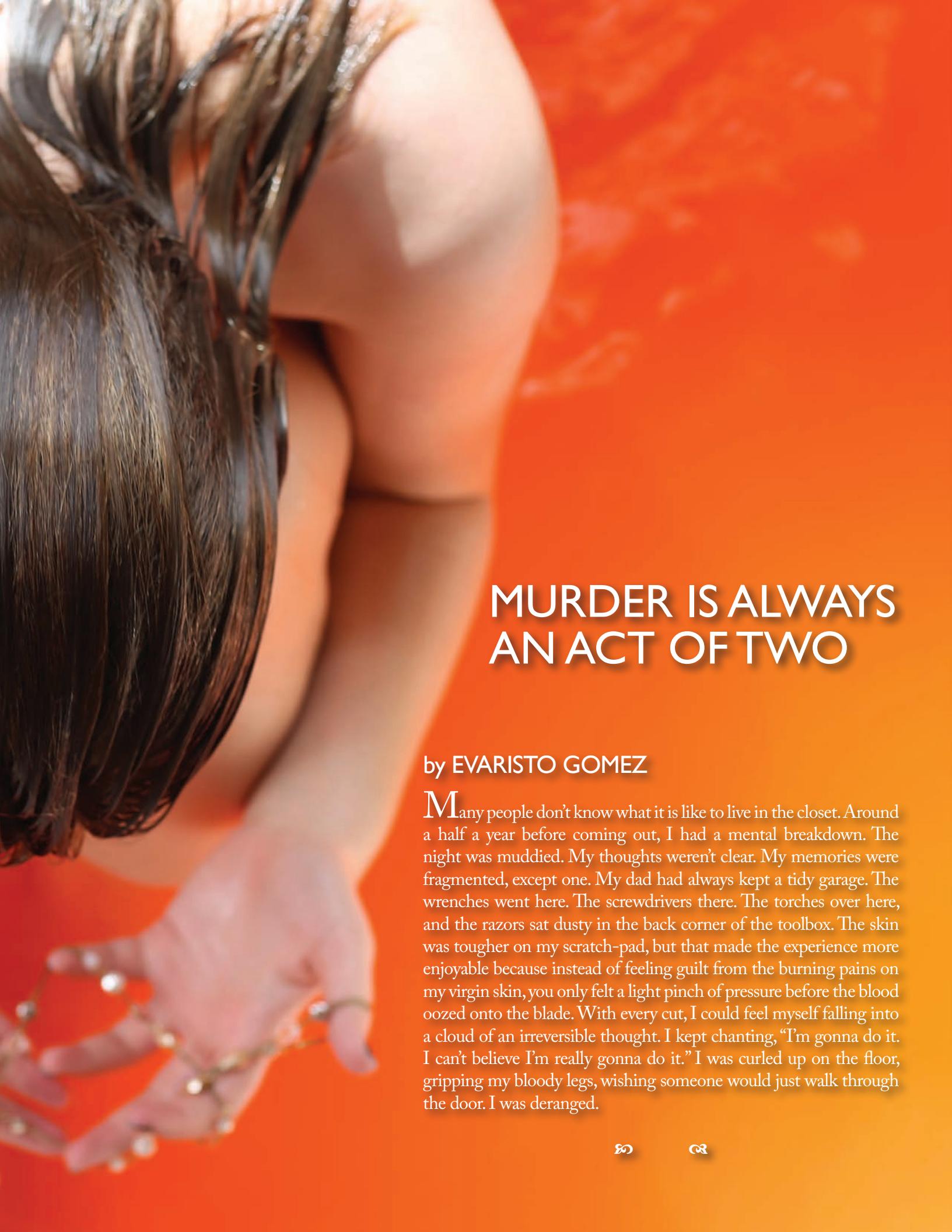
X-rays- I remember the first time my mother was sent to the hospital to be fully checked for cancerous growths. The x-rays took the longest, they always do for some reason. I've learned this is just a rule of the hospital. Maybe they take long to develop, maybe they want to kill you with worry, or perhaps give you time to apologize to one another for all the years of disdain.

Yelling- I remember hiding under the table at six, my mother's yelling terrified me. This was her defining character to me for a long time as a child- the yeller. I promised myself I would never raise my voice like this to anyone; instead I learned how to calmly cut someone down with wit and a glare. This made the yelling worse when I was a teen with black rimmed eyes and a sharp understanding of sarcasm.

Zoo- My mother took my sisters and I to the Amarillo zoo when we had enough money and no school. There was something about being there that allowed for us all to get along and enjoy each other. We would watch the giraffes and eat ice cream or glazed nuts and laugh and play and smile; begging to stay a little longer before returning to reality.







MURDER IS ALWAYS AN ACT OF TWO

by EVARISTO GOMEZ

Many people don't know what it is like to live in the closet. Around a half a year before coming out, I had a mental breakdown. The night was muddied. My thoughts weren't clear. My memories were fragmented, except one. My dad had always kept a tidy garage. The wrenches went here. The screwdrivers there. The torches over here, and the razors sat dusty in the back corner of the toolbox. The skin was tougher on my scratch-pad, but that made the experience more enjoyable because instead of feeling guilt from the burning pains on my virgin skin, you only felt a light pinch of pressure before the blood oozed onto the blade. With every cut, I could feel myself falling into a cloud of an irreversible thought. I kept chanting, "I'm gonna do it. I can't believe I'm really gonna do it." I was curled up on the floor, gripping my bloody legs, wishing someone would just walk through the door. I was deranged.

My head rolled across my back from one shoulder to the other. Just back and forth. Time was slowed and almost irrelevant as my mind wandered into the memories of my past. Most often, I would begin to think of the time spent on my boat. The vinyl seats were cream colored with strips of blue and grey. The water made the air musty but familiar. Just back and forth. My head mimicked the motion of the waves. Their familiar splash mixed with the warm rays of the sun made my eyes heavy as I fell into a deep sleep. It was pure ecstasy.

The pills were bitter, but after a while, it was as inviting as Grandmother's cooking on Christmas. One after another, I would chew my way back onto the boat where my inability to function would send me into a state of bliss.

Percocet. Oxy. Adderall. Weed. LSD. Alcohol. Codeine. Xanax. Morphine. Coke. My days would usually consist of a special concoction of these substances. They weren't demons that were out to get me. They were like great warriors fighting battles in my mind; I couldn't fight alone. They smothered the flames of my homosexuality until the delusion of a female's touch was just as satisfying as a man's. They were so loud, they would drown out the voices of my anxiety and depression that would usually scream "Kill yourself, you fucking dirty fag!! You won't feel anything anyway. Your family won't even miss you." Most importantly, they brought the idea that under their triumphant victories, I might be able to be "me" again. A straight kid with the opportunity of the world in front of him.



"The Body of Christ."

The priest towered over me much like the crucifix hanging on the wall. I couldn't tell what was worse, the preacher's scaly skin nearly touching my tongue or the bulging eyes of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as I opened my mouth to murmur the word "Amen."

"And all were judged according to their deeds...And anyone who was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the Lake of Fire." The words of Revelations-Chapter twenty-verses eleven through fifteen used to haunt me. Many times, these words would cycle in my head, but they would flow in subtly and would go unnoticed until a later time, but there was a reoccurring dream. It consisted of my grandfather, a man of merit, pinning me down and spitting in my face while muttering the words "All fags go to

*Percocet. Oxy.
Adderall. Weed.
LSD. Alcohol.
Codeine. Xanax.
Morphine. Coke.*

Hell.” Some nights when I couldn’t force myself out of sleep, I would begin to feel the heat of Hell as my skin began to melt off my bones and the smoke would suffocate me. I could hear the voice of God, booming in the background because it didn’t have to be judgement day to know where I was going.

It used to disgust me watching people go seamlessly into a line every Sunday to take the body and blood of Christ. Their cold bodies, only matched by the dry charisma of the priest, were mindlessly obedient to the scripture they never took upon themselves to read. Lazy and unapologetic for it. It used to remind me of my competitive soccer team when the worst kid on the team would complain about not getting enough playing time, but wouldn’t put in any effort to change it. As I looked around the large chamber full of families and individuals praying, I’d just see that indolent kid, wasting his breath to get himself in a better spot. These people blindly prayed hoping their problems would magically vanish out of the grace of God, but I always kept my thoughts to myself because chances were that they were judging the little faggot boy just as much as the faggot boy was judging them.



“Hey! Can I go with some friends to dinner?”

“Who’s all going?”

“Umm...I don’t know. I think Geo and Aaron, but besides them, I really don’t know. Probably just us three again.”

“Yeah, you can go.”

“I’ll probably be out late, but I’ll call you if I end up staying at one of their houses.”

“Okay—be safe.” She had no idea of where I would be the entire night. The lies just kind of rolled off my tongue with an ease that had a certain beauty to it. It wasn’t the lies that were beautiful, but my adventures with the guys I would sneak around with. My first love was one of these guys.

There was a time when he would take me on dates. Can you imagine it? The sweet, melancholic voice of Lana del Rey and the lyrics to Salvatore echoed off the walls of the mountain. Everything was perfect in that moment: the cool, mountain air, the city lights, and most importantly, his eyes. He had pushed my body against his car, and brushed his calloused hands against my face, but all I could remember was the touch of his lips. He would gently bite my ear,

and whisper “Eli, my love—” in an accent that would make the hair stand up on the back of your neck. It was something I believed to only happen in movies, but he made me feel like a star. He made me feel like this could be the start of our own movie: our own story, but they were always so short-lived. These men would fill my memories because after a while that was all they were. Relationships never worked in secrecy, but I would have rather kept my life a secret than be the screw-up. It was lonely.



My parents were strict, and often I was not allowed to go out with my friends during the early years of high school. In reality, I never found sanctuary at home unless it was in my room. My curtains have Jupiter, satellites, and astronauts on them. The bedroom, being space themed, was painted a darker royal blue color, and during the day, between the curtains and the wall color, there was barely enough light to see anyone. I would lay there facing the wall and stare at the curtains; a combination that would mesmerize me. The color made them deep and comforting.

It was like I didn’t know how to grow as a person. The childish aspects of my life were trapped in my room: timeless. I tried to keep it as if they would never change. I would find myself staring at the pattern on the curtains for hours upon many days upon the week reminiscing. I still wanted to have dinners at my grandparent’s house on Fridays and spend hours with my cousins as the adults played poker. I still wanted to hear the music of Sunday mornings indicating the call for family breakfasts. I still wanted to be able to run into my parent’s arms knowing I could still be someone they would be proud of. I would spend hours sorting through the memories of my childhood and try to think where I went wrong. When did I change? Maybe, by holding on to this last bit of my childhood, the theme in my room, I could be something different than what I had become.



*It was like I didn’t
know how to grow
as a person.*

Midway through my sophomore year, it had been a week since I had contact with the outside world. The forest around me was calm and focused. It was mid-autumn; the trees above Glenwood Springs were beautiful. The aspen’s leaves were as gold as the gates of Heaven and as red as the fires of Hell. I had sat on a particularly flat rock.

The mosses and lichens padded it making it rather comfortable in the rugged environment. My dad, trying to scope out the rest of the area to see if there were any fresh tracks or beds nearby, ended up disappearing over the ridge about a mile away. His fluorescent orange vest disappeared in a thicket of oak brush.

I sat on the rock quiet for hours, listening to the animals crashing through the forest as they sought a lower elevation before the storm. Two does and a buck found their way in the safety of my crosshairs, but it wasn't long before the footsteps of something much larger caught my ear. They were coming from the dark timber behind me, eerily making their way to the edge of the shadows.

Being alone for so long, I had time to think. I didn't want to be here anymore. I had put my rifle's slender, black barrel in my mouth and shut my eyes. One slow breath at a time. You would expect your mind to be racing. You would expect your stomach to be unsettled. You would expect to try and talk yourself out of it, but I sat their calm and collected. The week had been one of the best of my life, and I figured if I wanted to die, it would be better to do it when I wasn't feeling the hatred of day-to-day life. Snap. The breaking of a branch caused me to pull the gun out of my mouth. The edge of the dark timber was occupied with the mass of a bear. Putting my rifle to my shoulder, I took off the safety off and fired a round near the bear's foot. It had stopped in its tracks and got up on its hind legs. Loading another shell, I took aim at the tree next to the bear's head, and fired another round. I could feel my whole body pulsating as the bear turned and rambled off into the woods.

I had no control. My knees buckled as my limp body fell into a bed of fallen oak and aspen leaves below. The slender black barrel of the rifle landed on my chest knocking what little air I had left out of me. On my back, the beautiful baby-blue sky gave way to the warming rays of the sun in the bitter cold air. A part of me wished the bear would come crashing through the woods again and maul my incapacitated corpse.

I waited there for some time listening to the branches of the trees as they cracked and moaned in the breeze that tore across the landscape. With every breath my exhaustion grew until the tears streaming down my face dried into remnants of my bitter past. It was the god-like spirit of the bear that commanded me to live as if it knew how much I did not want to die. At that point, there was nothing left for me but get up, put my rifle over my shoulder, and somehow try to make it home. ☀

CONTRIBUTORS

DUAA AI-JAROUDI transferred from the Colorado School of Mines to University of Colorado Boulder in spring 2018. A junior majoring in Geology, she spends her time contemplating the earth. When not doing this, she obsesses over psychology, existential philosophy, and movies. She wants to thank her family and Twitter friends for all their support, especially the person who believed in her most: her dearest Ali.

WILLIAM F. BISHOP is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder studying Psychology and Literary Analysis in the Humanities. Despite moving often and spending most of his years in Colorado, his heart will always be at home in Chicago with his loved ones who live there. His poems are centered around the queer experience of love, and his own identity as a half-Japanese gay man, a hopeless romantic/music enthusiast/Quaker and a total pansy. All of his poems are love poems, even the ones that don't seem like they should be. When he isn't studying, Will can be found reading, making playlists, crying, playing air guitar, or writing poetry. You can find him on Instagram @the_neato_dad.

ANGELINA CARRANZA is originally from Colorado Springs. She is currently a senior at CU Boulder studying Marketing, Information Management, and Operation Management. After working hard during her four years in college, she is excited to begin a full-time position working at Visa, Inc. in Highlands Ranch. With graduation in sight, she's taking classes that let her pursue a lifelong passion of hers: writing. This semester has let her work on her writing skills, and she hopes to develop a portfolio so that she might be able to pursue writing as a side job.

ANDIE DULSKY is a writer, musician, and activist from Denver, Colorado. We only publish after blind review, and Andie has made that cut twice before, in our previous Print and Online Issues for 2018. Although she is published in three genres, creative nonfiction is where she truly found her voice as a writer. Her work often centers around identity, trauma, family, and queer relationships. Andie seeks to approach all of her work from a place of tenderness and empathy. She currently resides in Boulder, Colorado, where she studies creative writing. She hopes to someday meet a blue whale.

KAITLYNN DYER is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder. She's a Texas native who relocated to Wyoming at seven then settled in Colorado at the age of twenty. When not busy writing and studying for her Bachelor's in Political Science, she spends her time raising her three-year-old son and trying to find time to attend kickboxing. She would like to thank **PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC** Instructor **KERRY REILLY**, her creative nonfiction professor, for suggesting to submit her writing.

EVARISTO GOMEZ is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder studying Political Science. He is a Colorado native, born and raised in Denver. In this piece, he wanted to demonstrate the realities he felt as a member of the LGBT+ community struggling with the implications of what it meant to be gay. He hopes those who read it find it insightful regardless of their backgrounds. He attempted to portray his feelings in the most raw and unfiltered way possible while providing a narrative for any person who may feel lost.

MICHAEL GREEN is a junior at University of Colorado Boulder studying Political Science. When he graduates, he would like to attend law school and maybe one day become a politician. He likes to spend his time (and money) exploring new restaurants with friends. Michael grew up in Southern California and loves to surf and relax at local beaches.

HANNAH HURLEY grew up in a small town in central Florida that neighbors a charming beach town. She grew up with her two sisters, surrounded by the outdoors, spending most of her time listening to the cicadas and running around with her dog. Her love for reading and writing came early, encouraged by her mother who would take her to Barnes & Noble for hours and regularly gift her books on any special occasion. She's thankful for the passion and emotion this catalyzed in her at such a young age. Hannah hopes to bridge the gap between her love for writing and her admiration for the arts, particularly for fashion and design. She is currently still living in Boulder, but is considering a big move to somewhere where she can chase her dreams of working for a major publication.

SAM JACOBSEN is a Boulder-born Film and English student that grew up in Lafayette, Colorado. In elementary school she decided she wanted to grow up to be a writer. Practicing since then, she's worked to build up her voice and her own personal style. While she prefers to write fictitious works, she believes it is important to occasionally delve into more personal works to write stories of and about oneself. For this work, she wanted to make a strange, almost dream-like feeling, and to convey an emotion—not necessarily tell a story.

CATY JANSURY is a third-year BA candidate majoring in Dance. She spends her free time playing with her tuxedo cat Belvedere and taking care of way too many plants. Her poem **BLOOD SONG** won the 2018 Thompson Award for Poetry from CU Boulder's **CENTER OF THE AMERICAN WEST**.

MEDHANE KIFLOM is an undergraduate at the University of Colorado Boulder studying Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology and Mathematics. He is Eritrean, and was born in Denver, Colorado. He's always loved to write poetry and teach mathematics, but he never explored his passion for writing short pieces. He decided to step more into what defines him as a person and create this short piece. There are many ways to interpret what he wrote, but it is meant to be read by a native Tigrinya speaker. It touches a lot on immigrant children from East Africa and their contrasting stories on living the American life.

JADE McGEE is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder currently studying Psychology. She is an actor, singer, and dancer born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. This piece is a step by step manual of how she personally got through a traumatic experience. She hopes to show that this subject is okay to talk about and that we can help one another through it. Silence is complicity; she hopes that sharing her experience in a published manner comforts and/or educates readers.

GRANT WHITMAN PERDUE is an undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder studying Geography and Journalism. This is his first time being published as an author, and he is stoked to see his piece come to life in Journal Twenty Twenty. A Nashville, Tennessee native, Grant started climbing as a sophomore in high school, and began writing about his endeavors shortly thereafter. Now a resident of Boulder, his current work centers around passion, psych, people, and the pursuit of the great outdoors. He plans to continue pursuing outdoor objectives, living enthusiastically, and sharing stories along the way.

JULIA REDLINGER is a pre-med student with a double major in Integrative Physiology and Creative Writing. She published her first book in middle school through a program called NaNoWriMo. This piece is her second publication, and hopefully not her last. She is currently working on a children's book series that she hopes to release before her graduation in 2021. She is a paid editing intern at a company called Verblio, where she edits blog posts before they are published on a company's websites. Her goal is to become a creative non-fiction author, and have a career as a surgeon. She would like to combine these two passions and follow in the footsteps of her idol, Oliver Sacks, a published author and MD.

HENRY SHORNEY is a recent graduate from CU. He was a Film Studies major and is now living in Los Angeles pursuing his dream of working in the film industry. This is the first piece of writing he has had published and he would like to thank his teacher **ALEX FORBES** for encouraging him to submit it.

