

THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

FOREWORD BY:  
MICHAEL ELIZABETH SAKAS

CREATIVE NONFICTION 2022 VOLUME II



HINDSIGHT  
creative nonfiction

2022  
VOLUME TWO

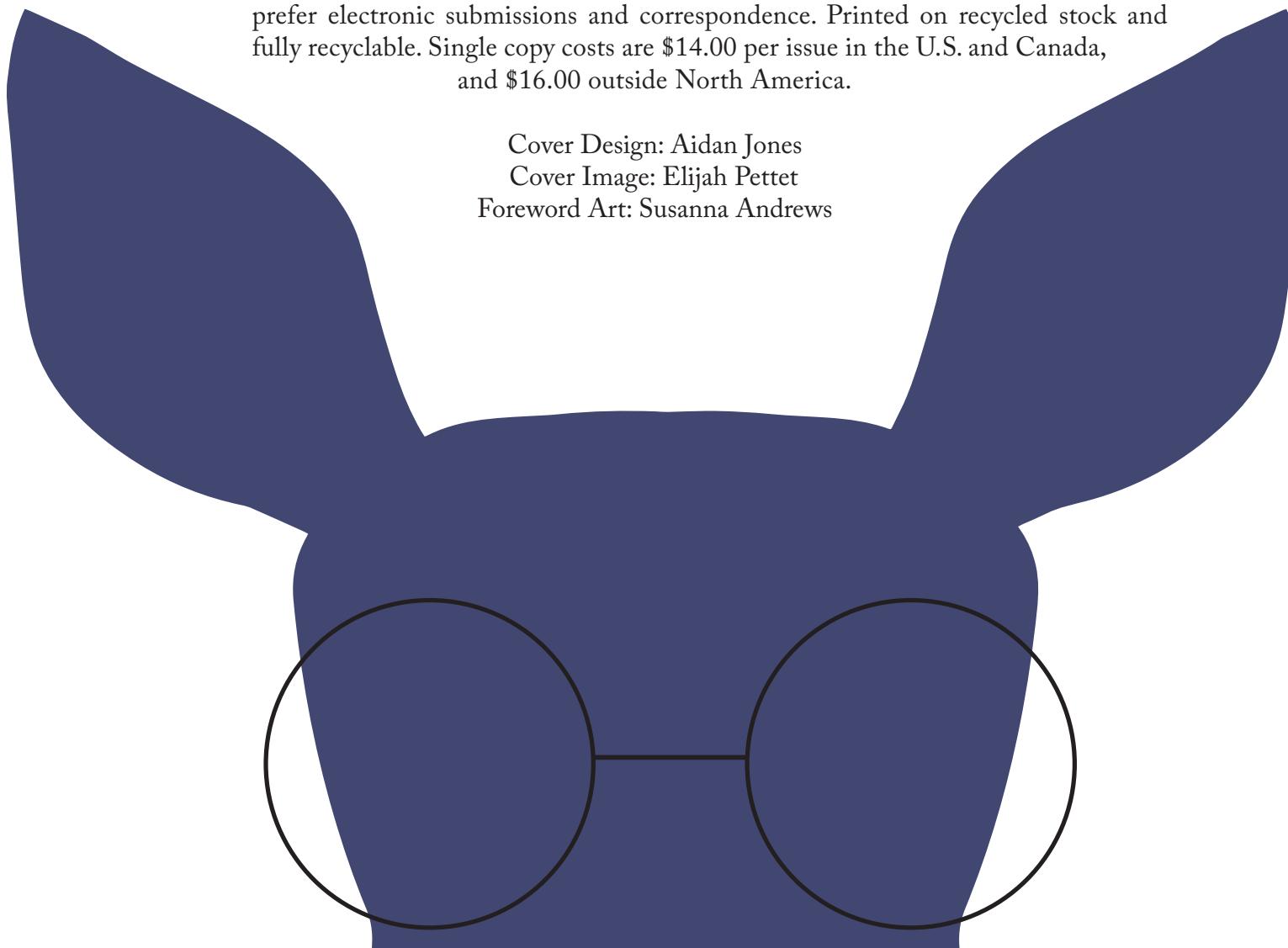
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After a nine-year legacy of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishing CU Boulder students, HINDSIGHT continues to print annually, while providing an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction, and in our next issue publishing nationally. We acquire First North American Serial Rights, welcoming all artists and writers of creative nonfiction to future issues. See our submission guidelines on our website: HINDSIGHTJOURNAL2020.COM.

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## FROM THE STAFF

HINDSIGHT started as a student journal in both production and content. From our first issue in 2013 to our ninth in 2020, we even had a different name. JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY came from the course (WRTG 2020) that produced the first issue. We used blind review to publish only the best writing from the UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER campus; now we're ready to use it to publish the best writing from anyone, anywhere. As we take HINDSIGHT beyond Colorado, we look forward to amplifying voices from all over, valuing not just our community but a larger fellowship of writers who have true stories to tell. Volume II of HINDSIGHT lays the foundation for our expansion, as the issue you hold in your hand includes art from beyond our campus. The writing in this Volume showcases the exceptional talents of our Front Range contributors. We are thankful for our staff, who produced this Volume while also laying the groundwork for a brand new journal, composed of writing on climate change, to be published in Fall of 2022, CHANGING SKIES.

### HINDSIGHT STAFF

Each semester, Art Direction is astonished by the creativity presented by photographers and artists alike. As HINDSIGHT began to grow, submissions became open to those unaffiliated with CU Boulder, allowing more people to share their perspectives through writing and art. As another year went by, still recovering from a pandemic, we witnessed natural disasters affect our own communities. Despite these tragic events, we saw people coming together to heal. Much of the artwork and writing in this Volume embodies the emotions many of us have felt during these times. HINDSIGHT will continue to showcase the visionaries all around us, encapsulating the world we live in.

### ART DIRECTION

The HINDSIGHT Marketing Department would not exist without the help and dedication of everyone on staff. Every member participates in different roles to spread awareness of our journal and gather great creative nonfiction work not only from CU Boulder but from our growing audience. Each semester we run campaigns on our website, social media accounts, Radio 1190, and in print. Despite COVID struggles, we've continued to spread our journal's message. Please enjoy the second volume of HINDSIGHT. We thank you for providing our team with valuable artwork and writing, making the process of spreading our message that much easier. To keep up with HINDSIGHT, sign up for our newsletter by going to our website or by following us on social media @hindsight.journal on Instagram and @cu\_hindsight on Twitter.

### MARKETING

## GET PUBLISHED

### IN PRINT OR ONLINE

Any writer, anywhere, is eligible to submit creative nonfiction prose and poetry for consideration by HINDSIGHT. Submissions go through blind review by our editorial staff. We seek only previously unpublished 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 work to accompany writing in HINDSIGHT print, online, or marketing. We accept previously unpublished work including but not limited to photography, video, or music.

## JOIN OUR STAFF

Take the Journal Practicum (WRTG 3090) or sign up for a one, two, or three-credit INTERNSHIP with one of our Faculty Advisors. Internships are 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 HINDSIGHT staff fosters professional skills while learning about the exciting genres of creative nonfiction. As a member of staff working on a premier print and online journal of only creative nonfiction, students learn with other students, gaining an unparalleled experience on campus. We exist to serve and further a community of creative nonfiction writers (and artists) across campus.

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## ON HINDSIGHT

by MICHAEL ELIZABETH SAKAS

When I took on climate change reporting, I wasn't sure how to tell stories about a hotter world. I assumed writing about rising temperatures meant focusing on numbers and complex research so readers would take the issue seriously. I was up for the challenge, but I expected my reporting style to shift significantly. In one of my first interviews with a climate scientist, our conversation suddenly brought her to tears as she shared worries about her child's future. I respected her expertise, but the scientist's emotion made the interview real—and human. Reporting that story taught me that the heart of good climate reporting lies in the voices of people trying their best to make sense of our changing world. I was honored when University of Colorado Boulder faculty and students invited me to celebrate the launch of this year's edition of *HINDSIGHT*. These authors exemplify how writing empowers us to find our story and place in times of adjustment.

In "After Many A Summer", the pressures of growing up seep through the walls of grandma's house: a home that once felt immune to change, where life paused for waffles and card games. Beneath the tranquility is an anxious energy, the sound of a ticking clock and the growing murmur of car traffic that drowns out the once-familiar chirps of nighttime crickets. "The apple tree outside seems to have given up bearing its inedible fruit, choosing instead to blossom and then fall," writes Jenny Brown. In "Tie-Dye Swimsuit", author Anna Haynes finds an extra-large bikini that holds the curves of her body in a way she wishes she could do more often. It had been almost a decade since she last wore a swimsuit, and the memories of elementary school bullies and years of crude comments made her "want to tear my own stomach out, like thrusting my hand into a glass of orange juice and removing a pulp-filled fist." But this swimsuit honors her and encourages the author to do the same. "Frankie Goes to Hollywood" takes readers on a rapid-fire tour of a pig farm turned childhood home. Changes in the natural surroundings punctuate memories of divorce, like the recollection of an old cottonwood tree that once stood where the fence is. "Can you smell the potatoes in the oven? Can you hear the emotions behind the closed door?" writes Evi Judge. The fire pit has become overgrown with weeds since the family stopped lighting it after wildfires engulfed the state.

The recent Marshall fire in Boulder County is Colorado's most destructive wildfire on record. More than a thousand homes were lost. Even more lives are forever affected by a climate change-driven catastrophe. As more devastating events like this happen, it is critical that we share our stories of trauma, resiliency, and hope as reminders of what's at stake in the fight to secure a liveable future. Melia Hawthorne Klingler's *The Rains* embodies these themes as she shares her family's longing for a world that no longer exists. "The air would smell like freshly picked coffee beans and Christmas, a promise of another year of crops and rain. That promise is broken now," writes Hawthorne Klingler. *HINDSIGHT* and Mission Zero's series of climate writing contests resulted in an impressive collection of stories, including "The Rains". To highlight these works, a separate issue called *CHANGING SKIES* will be published later this year. It will devote its pages to climate and environmental writing—and who better to write these stories than students? They hold the power to make significant changes today and in the days ahead.



Michael Elizabeth Sakas is a climate and environmental reporter for Colorado Public Radio where she started as a news fellow in 2016. Her work has been heard on NPR's Morning

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## THE NAIL

by NOAH LUSTI

The lights in the room had suddenly turned on; the sting of the white walls burned my eyes. It's still dark out and I didn't know the time. I looked around my room. It wasn't as big as the other ones because a wall came across the room, making one end a triangular shape. I thought to myself, "Why did the lights turn on?" Before I could think of anything else, I felt a needle stick into my arm and draw my blood. A small team of three nurses traveled from room to room, drawing people's blood. I always assumed they did it so early because they knew nobody would argue about it.

Did I just accept it and go back to sleep? Why am I here? I know why I'm here but why am I here? Am I crazy? I'm crazy. My mind's racing but I just want to go back to sleep. Eventually the team of nurses got enough blood; they taped a cotton ball to my arm and left the room without saying a word. I don't think they said anything the whole time. The lights eventually turned off and finally I felt myself falling asleep.

I opened my eyes; the sun shining through my window made me squint. The window only provided a view of the wall of the clinic building next to the hospital. There isn't much to see, but the window connected me to the outside world. I can imagine I'm not in here when I'm looking out of it. The window had a windowsill that you could sit on, and most mornings, I would sit there for about 30 minutes, looking out at the wall. I preferred sitting in this room compared to talking with the other patients, especially in the morning. I felt uncomfortable around them, and I didn't think I belonged in this place. But why did I consider myself any different? Why don't I belong here?



Years ago, as a kid, I used to visit Fred and Linda's farm. They were an older couple and two of my mom's close friends. These visits usually consisted of me running around the farm while the adults got drunk. During one of these visits, I found myself walking on a stack of old boards, trying to balance myself as I made my way along them. I noticed several rusty nails sticking out of the boards, but I pretended I didn't see them. I saw one just a few inches in front of my foot. Step on it. Step on it. Step on it. I raised my foot slowly; I remember thinking to myself, "what will this feel like?" as I slowly lowered my foot down on the nail. I felt the nail go through my shoe and into my big toe.

I didn't feel anything at first, but after a few seconds a sudden sting of pain set in as I lifted my foot off the nail. Feeling the nail slowly slide out of my toe almost felt like pulling out a big splinter. I immediately freaked out, took off my shoe and inspected my injury. My sock had a large red splotch of blood soaking through around my big toe. I quickly peeled it off like a band-aid so I could see the damage. My toe appeared as a gory mess; blood had pooled around a small hole where the nail had gone through. The realization of what I did started to set in. I fixated on the hole in my toe, and the hole stared back at me as it spit out my blood. Why did I do that?

I hobbled over to my mom, and she took me to a clinic. I remember thinking, "I'm going to lose my toe!" Even though it wasn't nearly that serious. I remember sitting in the doctor's

office for what felt like an eternity before he came in and inspected my injury and rebanded it up. It was an accident.



*The realization of  
what I did started  
to set in.*

I sat in my regular spot at a long conference table during a group meeting with the other patients. We have them twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Nobody wants to talk, nobody wants to be here, nobody wants to be alive. Despite that, we are talking, we are here, and we are alive. I talk the most because I want to appear to be trying to get better so I can leave. There are two exits in the main living area. I considered making a run for it but where would I have gone? I can't run away from the situation; I can't leave until I convince them that I'm getting better.

A girl my age talked about why she's here. She took a bunch of pills. I don't know why I have to listen to everyone talk about their problems. How does that help me? I got ripped out of my life and dropped in this weird room with weird people. But maybe I'm just as weird. How can I even confront my issues in this environment? How will I get better? Can I get better? I'm



more depressed now than ever before, between the early morning blood drawings and daily adjustments to my medication I don't really feel like I can get better. This system is a joke. Nobody actually cares about helping us get better. Some of us can't even get better. We're just prisoners, and they want to keep us here as long as possible. ☀





Art by TASHA SMITH

## THE MIND GAME AND THE MORGUE

by IAN HALL

The bitter fluid violated my tongue, but I still swallowed the medication. Young, I feared the pill blocking my throat, so my mother and I compromised. Each morning, a pill cut in half, its horrid liquid contents poured into my yogurt, meant to fix me up and get me ready for school. It never worked except to make my tongue shrivel and convulse in disgust.

I could never shut up, a fact that remains. Despite the best intentions of the medication and the berating quips from teachers around me, my mouth ran a mile a minute, and the discipline I faced reflected that. Tortuously long days of no recess, sitting inside staring at my name written in bold, embarrassing letters on the chalkboard, became the norm. After a short trial run, we abandoned the useless pills, and my teachers cooked up a less subtle solution. "Give the kid some gum. Give his mouth something to do besides yap." So I chewed, a luxury my fellow students surely hated me for.

*Stepping into the morgue, I feel a chill. I am not alone down here.*

I could never sit still, a fact that remains. I'd heard adults say "shake your sillies out" enough to have it rendered meaningless, like the maddening mental repetition of a mundane vocabulary word, said until it became unrecognizable mush. Yet no matter how much I enjoyed recess, I would always return to my desk and tap my foot as if beating out a disjointed tempo to the world's most chaotic drum solo. To remedy the distraction my hyperactivity produced, my teachers fitted my rigid prison chair of a desk with a cushion on the seat and stretched a large rubber band around the legs, so I might kick without audibly thumping against the ground. I felt an acute awareness of my classmates, remaining in their back-breaker seats. I felt them seethe.

*Outfitted with my very own tools, I sit, fidgeting, at my workstation, resigned to another long night in the morgue. Shadows cast against the wall twist and judge as I remove my outlet, my vice, from its case. Placing the cursed laptop on the desk, I stare.*

I could never focus, a fact that still very much remains. I wouldn't learn the term 'procrastination' until my teen years, but even in youth I found myself a dutiful servant to it. Days shrank into hours, and then again into minutes and I often found myself scrambling to complete an assignment or household chore. Upon sitting down to write, I would find myself roadblocked by the blank page for hours, words fitfully swimming around my head, as tangible and fuzzy as a swarm of horseflies scavenging a carcass. Occasionally, like Daniel LaRusso in *The Karate Kid*, I would get lucky and snatch one from the air with a pair of metaphysical chopsticks. However, this became a rare occasion, certainly not common enough to celebrate, and certainly not sustainable.

*There it goes again. That fuzz. Like an old radio that needs a whack to achieve the proper frequency. It pours out of my mouth, my eyes, my ears, my fingers. I start writing in this place, this cocoon of mine that too closely resembles a cold cement basement housing the recently deceased. The room could almost be alive—if*

*morgues could breathe. It glares at me. True enough, it has become a haunted place. I hear the taunts reverberate.*

My ADHD – another term later learned – has not improved in my adult years, so much as squashed and spread to all corners of my life like the dough ball of a zealous pizzaiolo. Those facts that remain, my motor mouth, overactive motor functions, and inability to focus, glare at me all the more painfully as I progress through my adult years. Responsibility for my own wellbeing —cleaning my room, doing my laundry, staying on top of payments and appointments and assignments—has become something I'm still adjusting to, something that has proven itself to be one of my greatest challenges. It's as if I'm playing a long round of cat and mouse with my own brain: a self-inflicted mind game perpetually in the bottom of its ninth inning. It makes learning difficult as well. My impaired focus means I face great challenges with absorbing new information, especially in fast-paced, impersonal settings like large classrooms. Learning via small groups or one-on-one instruction are the most efficient ways I manage my journey through academia.

Unfortunately, these educational formats are rarely available to me in the world of standardized schooling, which has led to some close calls with grades in the past. Along with the strains of ADHD come anxieties and insecurities that manifest in nearly every waking moment of my life. Coming to grips with my own mental state—do I really have ADHD (even though a diagnosis from my childhood proves I do)—wages an impostor-syndrome-fueled tug-of-war between my logical and emotional hemispheres. My best days turn schismatic.

This second-guessing even my most intimate self-knowledge bleeds into every aspect of my day-to-day. Do I really deserve this good grade? Am I really a good friend? A good brother, or son? My friends tell me I'm a good writer, guitarist, speaker, and many other things; surely, I must have lied to them somehow to make them believe such absurdities. This toxin exhibits itself even in my lonesome. Sitting here, writing this, working on my own, I still hear the voices of perceived jurors peering over my shoulders, casting doubt on every keystroke. Why did you use that word? Why didn't you make a line break there?

*And why did you make a line break there?*

This anxiety, paired with the difficulty of focusing both mind and body, creates an impenetrable mental health sludge, thick and sour. Usually, though I thrash in it purely invisibly, I spend days at a time fighting against my self-flagellating mind. Ridicule by others of my own creation often presents itself as a common manifestation. The walls around me squeeze and contract, the desk I work at folds in around me, and my fingers rebel in spasms as I search for the next correct word, or even thought. My bedroom often feels morgue-ish. Cold and clammy, echoing every slight sound and breath I make. In fits of frustrated determination, wishing I could uncross whatever mental wires prevent me from clarity, I operate on a body that has since died. The word processor my slab, the keys my scalpel and suture, I perform cosmetic alterations on a corpse, praying that no one but the jeering shadows over my shoulder may witness my shame.

*It's morning now. I wake up and address my slab of concrete, tending to the body that lay upon it. Three hours of labor for a measly four sentences, half of them fragmented and rough. I wish the medication worked. ☀*





# HEADLIGHTS

by CODY FIELDS

It's one of those clear, quiet moments. A tall peak on a long, flat graph. The biannual heartbeat.

The wedding's over, and I wander off towards the stage and the twilit view of the ocean. Everyone's saying goodbyes and packing their things into their rental cars: purses, left-over food, and someone I respected a lot more before I saw them blackout drunk.

I'm leaning against my brother's car's hood, trying to look cool even though it's midnight and no one's around. It's a little higher up in the hills, the only place on the road that gets 4G and has a decent pullout, and it happens to have a good view of the plains. I anxiously check my phone and wait for reception.. I take a deep breath of cool autumn air and sit down behind the wheel. I adjust my green striped hoodie that my mom will throw out after the zipper breaks and think about if that's ever happened to me before. I start the car, turn on the radio, and I'm on my way west.

There are a few red cups scattered around on the stones of the stage, where the turned and gathered chairs can get a good view of them. The lights look blurry in the photo on my phone screen. I look up to compare, and I think yeah, that's about right. It's not muggy, but there's a heaviness to the air, which makes the light refract and scatter as it passes through. Or that's the vodka talking. I stay put on the stage; I want this feeling to last a little longer.

The dry gravel of the pullout crunches under my feet. I'm walking around now, just about doing slow laps around the car. There's a weight off my chest, and I'm taking a few steps around to see how it feels. And besides, the view here never gets old, no matter how many times I've driven out here to calm down. I keep pacing; I want this feeling to last a little longer.

I'm almost out of Boulder and into the canyon part of Canyon Drive, but on a whim I take a right towards Pearl, taking my time to watch the stop signs light up in my headlights at every corner. It's been a good night and pulling into that dark house would mean it's over, I'm back in bed, and I'm waking up to a mediocre day. I keep driving; I want this feeling to last a little longer.

¤ ¤

In Mexico, I'm still working the vodka out of my system. Someone thought it was funny that I went straight for vodka, because I'm half Ukrainian. Someone also probably thought it was funny when I got up on the stage and danced for the first time too, but I don't really give a shit. I'm done caring too much, at least for now, and that feels good.

Back in the foothills, I take another look at Twitter, absentmindedly checking on the election that happens to be happening tonight too, since the power's out at home. It's a surreal night, but it's not really why I'm out here. I give it a few glances, then look back at Boulder, and it feels like a weight is gone.

And in my brother's Subaru, I'm still thinking back on the night I just had, just hanging out with a few old friends and a few new ones. I'm pretty sure that's the first time someone's hit on me, and I'm probably right. Right here, I don't know that I'm not going to see him again after graduation, or that it's all going to get worse before it gets better. But in this moment, I'm having a good night.

¤ ¤

I've taken my photo, and people are coming to clear out the tables and chairs, the sounds of the waves being replaced by idle chatter. I stand up and head back to the parking lot. It'll be a long, quiet twenty minutes back to the room. A day or two later, it'll be a short two hours home, and things will go back to normal.

I get back in my brother's car and head downhill towards the dirt road home. There's nothing good on the radio, but I'm happy enough being alone with my thoughts, which is something new. In just a few minutes I'm home, and things will go back to normal.

And then, down the road, I make a right off Canyon. It's cold, but I've got the windows rolled down anyway. I feel free, for the first time I can remember. Before I know it, I'm pulling into the driveway, and things go back to normal.

¤ ¤

It's 2018, 2020, 2011, and one of those clear, quiet moments. In Mexico, after my sister's wedding, the anxiety's gone, and I feel like a man for the first time I can remember. In the foothills, checking on my grades and settling into the winter, I'm a month away from straight A's in my first night classes, and realizing that I'm ready to start living again. And in Boulder, on the way back from a rare night out, I'm just starting to heal, realizing I'm more than nothing, with a few long years ahead of me.

I don't know if these moments are as meaningful as they feel, whether I'm better for them or not, or if I'm just assigning meaning to something that doesn't really need any. As it is, they stick out to me as moments my perspective changed, punching through years of half-remembered fugue-like bright lights through fog. Whatever the case, they certainly always end. Headlights always turn back towards home, and the graph goes flat, though hopefully not for long. ¤

# THE RAINS



by MELIA HAWTHORNE KLINGLER

I come downstairs and my mom is on the phone with Tio Jose and Tia Saida again.

"We used to be able to predict the rains," Tio Jose says. "Every spring the clouds would gather low in the sky and then we could say, 'The rain will start tomorrow.' And the next day we would be sitting on the porch sipping *café con leche* and the rains would come."

My mom shakes her head and by the way her eyes look sad I know she's thinking over the well-worn conversation about how things just aren't the same anymore. I've heard it too. Before, everything worked like clockwork. The people of Cuatro Cruces would work the soil, placing each fragile seed in the ground. The rain would come and make things grow and the village would become green and lush and sleepy under the weight of humidity and growing fruit. Then, after the monsoons had passed, while the soil was still wet, the children would run out and everyone would harvest. The women would gather at Church to make tamales and the trucks, laden with fruit, would head into town. Then the rains would stop and the tin roofs would become hot with sun. Coffee season. The air would smell like freshly picked coffee beans and Christmas, a promise of another year of crops and rain.

That promise is broken now. The rains, once well behaved, have become a fickle child who hides when he's called and jumps out when he's not wanted. The crops drown, the roads collapse into squelching pools of mud, and Tio Jose and Tia Saida call my mom again. "We used to be able to predict the rains," they say. "What's happened to our beautiful Earth?"

Often, with the clicking of a tongue and the sorrowful shake of a head, the conversation turns to *Los gringos*, their supersized companies and supersized machines that beat the earth, squeezing every last drop of life from her. Ravenous for pineapples and profits, they devour the land and spew grey clouds into the sky. Tio Jose sighs. "You have to be gentle with the soil, let it run through your fingers and treat it gently, like a lover." *Los gringos* and their harsh language don't know how to speak of love.

And now my mom is asking about Don Orlando. "How's the farm?" She wants to know if the lush paradise where she fell in love with my dad still exists. Does the stream still gurgle and do the *manzanas de agua* still grow red and delicious and do the howler monkeys still try to chase away the early hours of the morning with their cries? And I have to watch her face fall as she hears that, for the first time since Sibú cursed his people a thousand years ago, Don Orlando's river has run dry. "Baptisms were strange this year," says Tia Saida. Spraying down believers with a hose isn't the same as watching them emerge, soaked and smiling, from the same clear water that flows from Nicaragua to Panama.

I run back upstairs because I don't want to hear any more. I don't want to hear about the rains or us being here and them over there. I want the pain that seeps through the speakerphone to evaporate into the warm summer air. I want to be back in Cuatro Cruces, sipping coffee on the porch, watching the rain fall steady once more.

# DO MY ARMS PULL TAUT?

by S.G. GREENE

## Prelude: A Bit About Manhattan

Despite its sheer size, New York is as much a labyrinth as a chessboard is. If you're on First Avenue, you're near the frigid East River that separates Manhattan from her sister boroughs. If you're on Eleventh Avenue, you're next to the Hudson and across the way is the epitome of the exact opposite reason you came to Manhattan—New Jersey. If you find that the cross-street numbers are getting higher, you're heading north toward Harlem. If the opposite occurs, you're heading toward One World Trade Center, Battery Park, and the Statue of Liberty herself. Of course, when you're there, nothing about the city seems that simple (unless you're a native). You're but a termite scurrying amongst colossal monoliths that make you feel dizzy and insignificant. Yet your feelings are contradicted when you realize that without your fellow termites, there would be no towers. Humans are as much of the city as the structures are. It's one giant organism at work. If you were to defy physics and float above Manhattan in sped-up time during the night, you'd see the traffic moving up and down every other avenue, stopping and going as if it was being pumped by some mechanical heart hidden deep in the catacombs under the island. Move even higher up and it seems as though it's just a network of cells stitched together by veins of orange and white light. There's not one sign indicating the controlled chaos you feel when submerged deep inside this organism. It just seems as natural and insignificant as a patch of spreading lichen on the side of a black oak or a network of white scars against the dark scales of a wolf fish. Not much else.



## One: Nothing

*I am alive relative to nothing. My legs kick as if I am moving but I see no light. I have it in my head that I am twirling wildly like a dust devil, endlessly spinning into a great void. I can't be sure that I feel the weight of my guts pressing against the back of my vessel. There is nothing. No planet beneath me. No stars to guide me. No ship. No debris. No gas and dust. I cannot even be sure if there are electrons and atoms. I do not know if I am significant enough to carry the weight of time across the fabric on which I think I am rolling. Am I idle, doomed to speculation the rest of my life? Does that even have a meaning? With no guide, there is nothing to know. With no attraction, there is nothing to see. I spin? I stagnate? With nothing as my backdrop, do my arms pull taut?*<sup>1</sup>

1. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos*. Vintage Books, 2005, p. 34



## Two: Universe

*A crescent moon hangs dimly before the pupil of my eye. From the fabric its shape cuts free. My iris dilates as a trickle of light beams through the night. The distant moon passes beneath my feet from time to time. A sense of relief washes over me. From above all, my eye watches intensely. It searches the cosmos, darting from new star to new star as the fabric is peppered with birth. I am spinning relative to the distant jewels deep within the cosmos. Relief surges through vein and bone until it grows cold. Within darkness, anything can be a light. Within the light, I am now free to see. I am moving. My arms pull outward, threatening to rip me asunder. I smile. This is my universe, no?*

2. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos*. Vintage Books, 2005, p. 34

3. Ibid., p. 34



*Strewn about the cosmos, my body lounges in wait. Gas clouds collapse and suns explode into being. Swirling disks of fiery afterbirth careen across orbital planes. From grains to celestial bodies within a blink of my eye. The Heavenly spheres pull noxious blankets across their surfaces and in these skies' hellfire rains. From above, I see that a code has been written. Laws have been formed. Rules that cannot be broken. My muscles strain! Why did I have to ask? I feel this new balance. I know that I cannot exist within its confines. My body buckles beneath this new weight. I watch, frightened, as a star implodes, passing into itself from all directions. Only familiarity remains. My bones go from cosmic superstructure, binding the universe together, to material victim of crushing mass. Reality threatens to fold. The imploded sun lurks in my mind. I did ask. I did want to know. I am both shrinking and falling, and gravity subsides.*

Sixty-five Fourth Avenue. I wander my way into Ippudo having been informed by a friend across the country that I might not be able to get a table as a walk-in—it's a very popular restaurant. To my surprise, I find myself walking to a seat at the bar in the main dining room. As soon as I enter, the entire wait staff greets me: “*Irasshaimase!*” It means “welcome” in Japanese. I feel a detached smile form across my rubber face. Who am I to these people? I am sitting at the bar, facing inward toward the focused chefs who cook in front of the guests with a glass of water in my hand within seconds. The restaurant is alive: a large party cheers when a champagne bottle is opened at the head of the table. A baby wails in the corner, fierce with unbridled emotion. A gulf of flame whips from the chef’s grill, prompting sounds of awe. The entire waitstaff greets another guest with gleeful hospitality—all of it relative to my absorbing eyes. Twenty minutes later I have three steamed pork buns in front of me. My infant mouth takes in the food for not just one soul, but two. I think it is the whole reason I am there. Five minutes later, a bowl is placed in front of me: red-orange pork tonkatsu broth with oily islands floating atop, udon noodles, chashu, sesame kikurage mushrooms, scallions, seasoned bamboo shoots, naruto and a spicy house paste. It looks like a little Eden floating atop a reservoir of spice and oil. A universe in its own right; a location in space my mind can fixate on. I dive in with my chopsticks. A man sits next to me and watches me curiously as I eat. It’s not long before he tries to talk to me. I look at him and do my best

*It looks like a little  
Eden floating atop  
a reservoir of spice  
and oil.*

to pretend that I’m there. That I am not just an apparition with an appetite. The conversation dwindles as I stare at the last of my broth. I place the bowl to my lips and drink the last of its contents as if I have just been given a chalice containing the blood of Christ. How long had I been in New York? Days. Days. Days. I nod to the waitstaff as they cheerfully bid me farewell. Now that my stomach is full, what is my purpose? I head up Fourth. The cross streets get higher and higher. A freezing raindrop smacks my cheek. As I buckle inward having accomplished my only task for the day, the Kingdom of Towers gives way to the Empire of Light.



#### Intermission: A Bit About Light

Light is a spectrum of electromagnetic energy made up of photons. Radio waves are a type of light. Microwaves are a type of light. Our retinas can only detect visible light on this broad spectrum. If not for light, nothing would exist. It is only because of light the trilobite grew compound eyes 541 million years ago.<sup>4</sup> If light is moving away from us, it will appear red because it is being stretched. If light is moving toward us, it will appear blue because it is being squished. Stars can never appear green because of Blackbody Radiation —stars whose light peaks in the green spectrum still have too much blue and red light (16% green, 13% Blue and 13% Red).<sup>5</sup> When combined, it creates white. Therefore, our sun glows white instead of green.<sup>6</sup> (Dang!) Light travels at 670 million miles per hour.<sup>7</sup> This is an absolute point that is true regardless of how fast you are traveling.<sup>8</sup> If you were moving 570 million miles per hour relative to a beam of light, it would not be traveling at 100 million miles per hour. It would still be moving at 670 million miles per hour. But if light can travel through the emptiness of space, and there is nothing as its backdrop to give it a standard of rest, what exactly is it moving relative to?<sup>9</sup> How is there a fixed speed? “*The speed of light is 670 million miles*

4. Laird, Isabella, “Trilobite Eyes Have Lenses Made of Calcite”, Beaty Biodiversity Museum, The University of British Columbia, 2017.

5. Kipping, David. “The Star that Can’t Exist”, YouTube, 2021

6. Ibid.

7. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos*. Vintage Books, 2005, p. 42

8. Ibid., p. 45

9. Ibid.



per hour relative to anything and everything," Einstein had once declared.<sup>10</sup> Doesn't this challenge common sense? What sort of trick does light play on our feeble human perceptions? What is the difference between light and time? If the speed of light is absolute, do photons age? Hmm?? Hmm?? What is light, anyways?! Is it a wave or a particle? Apparently, it's both.<sup>11</sup> Kind of. Ha! Confused? Me too.



### Three: Materiality

*I crash through a thick band of choking ash as the Heavenly sphere pulls me down to its molten surface. Ash turns to dust and dust to cloud. Fire turns to gas and gas to rain. The birth throes of Earth howl into my ears as she breathes for the first time. Through these harmonic layers I scream to the ground. Magma turns to glass and glass to dirt. Life springs upward, pulled from the ground, from the points of light I yearned so long for. Onto my back I roll and through the canopy of trees I see night and day, night and day, night and day. Once on my feet, I feel the downward pull. As the Earth spins, I spin with it. I'm afraid to jump and lose my balance.*

*A moment of peaceful solitude paralyzes my senses. I feel the dew in my hair as the mist rolls through the thick forest. I hear the birds singing unseen from deep within. My arms outstretched on either side hold steady. Warm lips kiss my own. For a moment, I am made of light. A tiny hand grasps my finger and two blue jewel eyes undefiled by foolhardy questions stare up at me. In a brief flash of euphoric bliss, I have won the game. It isn't long before I begin tumbling again. But is it quiet reflection? I feel my hands start to tremble. My senses heighten. My jaw*

10. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos*. Vintage Books, 2005, p. 45.

11. Smethurst, Becky, "Is light a wave or a particle? Great debates in physics", YouTube, 2020.

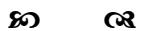


*clenches. The distant drums of war pound with great fury and desire. I drop to my knees and grab hold of the Earth. I sink my rabid claws into her flesh and hold on for dear life. I cannot lose what I've found. But I know the code is written. The laws are made. A dejected snarl tears from my milky mouth. My arms do pull taut. How fatuous.*

Fourty-fifth and Seventh. It's raining. If it were a few degrees colder, it would be snow. My hands are red and numb as they grip my camera. A man tries to sell me a see-through umbrella for ten bucks, but I ignore him as my wandering eyes search the environment for the perfect moment to capture for safe keeping. I'm in Times Square, a place I know not to wander anywhere near during the day. The rain is falling in cold curtains between the steel behemoths that tower above me. Pinks and oranges, greens and purples, reds and blues—they light up not only the wet steel careening into the low hanging clouds far above my head, but also the slick black pavement where the rainwater streams and pools. Aided by Hans Zimmer's *Blade Runner* soundtrack blaring through my headphones, I capture all these momentary pieces before the colors from all the billboards shift into something else and present to me a different scene. As people run for cover, I am crouched by the curb, pointing my telephoto lens at a small puddle forming by the sidewalk. I take solace in the fact that I am the only one who will ever witness this transient happening in real time. The photo is so that it will never be truly lost. A selfish capture of a passing moment, all made possible by light. I stare up into the

towers that make me feel unimportant and small, a feeling that I have come to enjoy. As the puddle shifts colors, I'm reminded that my kin are halfway around the world caring for the ashes of someone that was not unlike me. Flocks of people run back and forth around my hunched body. I laugh to myself as my cold wet

skin absorbs the visible spectra: Violet, 400-420 nanometers, Indigo, 420-440 nm, Blue, 440-490 nm, Green, 490-570 nm, Yellow, 570-585 nm, Orange, 585-620 nm and Red, my favorite and the longest of them all, 620-780 nm. My camera battery dies, and I turn from the lights. My stomach is full. The day is done.



Four: Microverse

*A concussive gust of searing flames topples the growth around me. A cyclone of embers turns about the universe I have just found. My seeking soul has stumbled upon furious graze. Speculative desolation might have been better. There is no pity wailing inside. Now only voracious respect glowing in drying eyes. Mother Sun descends upon her child. The beauty. The horror. The torture of staring into barbarous light. My lips dry and curl over ashy teeth. An animal cannot go willing and will run into her gaping maw. My mind will wait and see if unabated power can consume an entire reality. I raise my arms still trapped inside. My breaths are deep and without pause. A smile is stretched across my burning face. Through flame and ash, I see my escape. I see a flaw in the code. The Earth halts suddenly and my body is thrown. I fall. Not down, or up, but in.*

*I am beneath it all, somehow out of the grasp of the infallible laws of the entirety of space. To grow small, even in a universe of light, is to go unseen. Down here it is but a ballet in which I pirouette and port de bras. Halfway across the universe, I spawn and mirror my movements. It is a dance predicted by waves and bound by entanglement. Down here, there is no space between anything. Somehow, I am back where I was before, yet I do not worry if my arms pull taut. In this place, if my eyes are closed, then there cannot be anything anywhere. It is unfamiliar yet unburdening. Electrons march forward through that dividing slit in space and somehow, their distant partners will know exactly what to do.<sup>12</sup> It is with them, I will journey and learn what they know. It is with them, I will defy natural order and seek the furiously spinning gyroscope that contains my mind to set it free—even if I am at one side of the universe, and it, another.*

370 Eighth Ave, sixth floor. I make my way up a steep flight of creaky stairs. Yet another day of wandering through the concrete jungle is done. How many days has it been? Weeks? I am nearly two months old. I fish around in my pants for the key to the Interfaith Hostel in Chelsea, whose name nearly stopped me from buying a room. Faith! How I hated that word. I slip my way into the tight hall and see a row of what looks like closet doors stretching far in each direction. Each lead to a room with an open ceiling. Some have light seeping through, others are dark and alive with rumbling snores. I make my way to my little room and step in; it is six feet by four. Just enough room for a bed, a little side table and some room on the floor for my things. It's hard to think about the metropolis of glass and steel just outside the walls of the Interfaith. My senses are compressed and cut off. I relax after a day of raw experience. To the left of my room, I listen to a young man cry over the loss of his girlfriend the night before.

12. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos*. Vintage Books, 2005, p. 85.

I tuck myself into the blanket and listen intently as he explains to whomever the consequences of his breakup: he had thrown up in the lobby of her apartment building mere moments after she cut things off. I turn the light of my little closet room off and I am bathed in darkness. All that I can sense is the feel of my bed, the sound of crying, snoring, and shuffling, and the rapid pulses of image and memory that flare in my mind like a thunderhead from a plane window at night. It is with these false echoes of light that I find relative peace, and drift asleep. It's impossible to say whether we will all dream the same dream as we lie side by side, even if it's but a fleeting moment of subconscious harmony. A displacing shift of center is all one needs to see that the game is "all of space" vs "our universe," and nothing else.<sup>13</sup>



Epilogue: Schrödinger's Universe

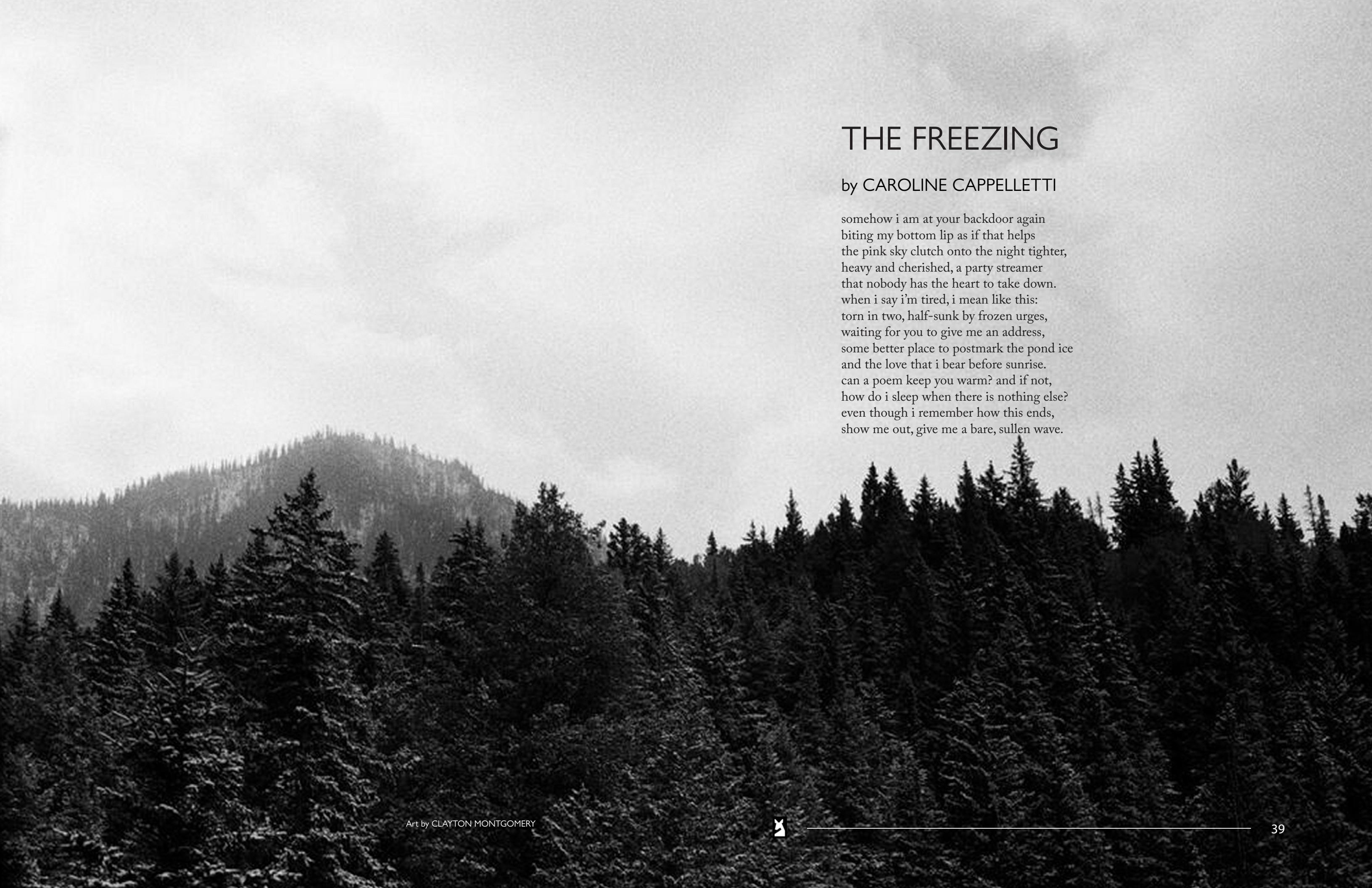
*O*n average, humans blink once every ten seconds. On average, one blink lasts 400 milliseconds. Once every ten seconds, for exactly 400 milliseconds, the universe blinks out of existence. It becomes a superposition. In other words, it hangs in a fuzzy state of all possibilities until it is measured.<sup>14</sup> Is it there or not there? What the hell does that even mean? That the universe is what I want it to be for 400 milliseconds every ten seconds? When I dream of tropical bliss, or of cosmic horrors crusading between the stars, is it real? Fuck you, quantum physics. Because of you, scientists now use the term "classical physics". HA! But also: thank you. If it weren't for interference patterns, I'd... Yeah, I don't know, actually, so don't ask.

Just blink. ☀

13. Tyson, Neil Degrasse. "Cosmic Queries—Multiverse Madness with Max Tegmark" Startalk, Max Tegmark, Chuck Nice, Spotify, 2021

14. Greene, Brian. *The Fabric of the Cosmos*. Vintage Books, 2005, pp 95, 112.





# THE FREEZING

by CAROLINE CAPPELLETTI

somehow i am at your backdoor again  
biting my bottom lip as if that helps  
the pink sky clutch onto the night tighter,  
heavy and cherished, a party streamer  
that nobody has the heart to take down.  
when i say i'm tired, i mean like this:  
torn in two, half-sunk by frozen urges,  
waiting for you to give me an address,  
some better place to postmark the pond ice  
and the love that i bear before sunrise.  
can a poem keep you warm? and if not,  
how do i sleep when there is nothing else?  
even though i remember how this ends,  
show me out, give me a bare, sullen wave.



Art by DANIEL WORKMAN

## FIVE TO NINE

by JULIAN EBERT

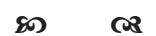
The clock strikes 5:15 p.m. I punch in my employee ID, grab a walkie-talkie, and step through the sliding glass doors that designate the front of the supermarket. I breathe in. The weather's pleasant—about 80 degrees. The early evening air soothes me. It's lightly perfumed with the smell of rain and passing cars, serving as a comforting reminder of those tempestuous night shifts I had survived months before. As I bring my eyes up, billowing clouds stretch over the eastern horizon, their previous presence pronounced by the damp asphalt and muddy puddles that cover the parking lot in front of me. US-36 shrieks and wails in the distance, its echoes bouncing across the row of big box stores that comprise the larger shopping center. Back in the lot, a skinny white man garbed in rags and knapsack meanders back to whatever clandestine underpass he probably lives under. An Indian family loads the back of their Nissan SUV with soda cans and breakfast cereals. A mother grabs the hand of one of

her dawdling toddlers as he looks at me with a crooked smile and a jolly “Hi!” I wave back. A college girl with thin-rimmed glasses perched on her nose strides towards the store with equal amounts of swaying hips and confident conviction. My gaze rests on her for a moment—before I then quickly recall that I have a job to do—and busy myself with pulling up a podcast on my phone. I pop in a single earbud, fasten my sunhat, straighten out my safety vest, and venture out into the parking lot. It’s a Tuesday, probably.



September 2021

I’ve been working as a cart attendant for over a year now. It’s monotonous, and at times, exhausting, but there’s something almost meditative about it. And besides the occasional chatter from the radio I have clipped on my shirt, it’s just me and the elements. No matter the weather, no matter the icy numbness gnawing at my hands, the painful water wrinkles carved into my aching feet, or the plumes of dust stinging and crusting in my wincing eyes, no matter what—I keep pushing. Step after step, heave after heave, I keep going. Now, of course, I am exaggerating just a tad. Not every single one of my shifts is like this. Most of the time, the weather is pleasant, or at least manageable, and I have plenty of energy to do my job. But regardless, it’s a Sisyphean task. And although I might have shepherded all of my four-wheeled flock safely into their pens one night, there’s always the next.



August 2020

A dull throb squeezes my temples, each sluggish undulation tightening the invisible vise clamped around my skull. I’m not in pain, but it feels as if I might be poisoned. My mind turns over and over, on and on, spiraling deeper and deeper, like an infinite fractal. I lower the brim of my sunhat to cover my quickly

moistening eyes. The sun has set, but it glows on underneath in the twisted foggy bramble of the clouds above. My blue and green tennis shoes swing below me. I watch them as they go back-and-forth, not because I’m fascinated with the intricacy of my gait or anything. I just don’t know where else to look. Right foot, left foot. Right foot, left foot. I stop. On the concrete pathway in front of me, a diamond-shaped feature rises out of the ground. A scrawny little tree stretches up from a patch of soil in the center of it. I can’t remember if the tree was alive or dead. Smooth flagstone tiles the brim of the feature, its broad, flat surface inviting me to rest on it. Tears stain the thighs of my shorts. I wail softly to myself, doing my best to remain unnoticed. I keep crying. I can’t even specifically remember what about. Maybe I was overwhelmed again at the thought of everything that lay ahead of me. Maybe I was berating myself for how bad of a person I thought I was. Maybe I was having obsessive intrusive thoughts again about how I might hurt somebody or conduct some other unsavory act. Maybe I was guiltily myself over something I had never done. I cried some more.



January 2021

I raise my head slightly and open my mouth. A dense, feathery snowflake lands on my tongue and instantaneously melts. The black sky above shifts this way and that. Formations of white specks sway from line to line, falling into each other and falling back out again. The snow is in order, and yet it’s in chaos. It’s mesmerizing, hypnotically beautiful. My mom always told me that when she was a kid, she would lie upside down and look upwards out of her bedroom window whenever it snowed. She said that when I was about eight years old, and since then, I’ve made a habit of doing the same. I recall thinking it was bizarre that the same weather associated with death and starvation can look so charming at the same time. My mind slowly goes blank. Not empty, just blank. Gone is the constant self-analysis, the endless standardized examination, the unyielding internal interrogation. I feel free. And as the silence of the night overwhelms my senses, a wide smile creeps across my face. But my hands are getting a



little numb. So I trot back inside the store, dusting off the icy powder caked over my safety vest as I go.



## S

eptember 2020

“Mom, I don’t know what to do anymore.” I pause. “I wish it would stop.” She rubs my back affirmatively and scoots closer to me on the metal bench we’re sitting on.

“Son,” she says, “look around. It’s a beautiful day outside!” I raise my head and survey my surroundings. It’s busy. People hurry to and fro, some with groceries in hand, others with hand in hand. The sun is shining. Gleams of light sparkle off of the neat lines of cars that stretch across the parking lot. I wonder why I do this to myself.

“Just think!” She grabs my hand and smiles at me. “These are your last eight hours of being sixteen. Get out of your head, okay? You don’t even have that much longer on your shift, do you?” I nod. I can see that behind her grin she’s beginning to tear up. I hug her.

“I know, Mom... And I’m sorry. You made me feel better, though. And I’m still excited for presents and cake tonight, so don’t you worry.” She holds me a little tighter.



## M

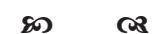
ay 2021

My throat constricts. I can breathe, but it feels like that might not be the case for much longer. My mind narrows. Thoughts stretch. It’s as if someone over-tuned a radio; screeching white-noise blares to such a point that it begins to sound like nothing. There’s a slight buzzing in my ears. How will I do this? I ask myself. The buzzing spreads throughout my limbs, numbing my every sense. I can hear myself breathing.

“Hey, are you okay?”

I look over my shoulder. A coworker of mine extends his hand and leans forward, as if trying to tame a wild animal. I shudder, bracing myself against the row of carts next to me. My coworker pauses for a moment, then furrows his brow. He asks

again if I’m feeling okay. My mouth opens, but no words come out. Suddenly, tears are streaking down my face and I’m throwing open the cart bay doors. As my thoughts blur and fuse together, so too does the world around me. My breath quickens and a heavy vignette squeezes my vision. I stumble over to the side of the building, driven only by the most rudimentary of thought processes. Eventually, I collapse against a stack-stone wall. Rising and falling. In and out. In and out. I crumble into a little ball, my muscles stiffening almost to the point of petrification. My eyelids creak open. I drop my jaw in horror as I stare at my contorted hands. I try to peel back each finger to a straight position, but they shrink back as soon as I let go. My face is numb, my body—my legs—my arms—my hands—my tongue—I can’t feel my tongue.



## N

ovember 2020

The ceiling in my bedroom is vaulted. It creates a sense of openness; makes the space feel bigger than it is. It’s quite nice, really. There’s nothing on it, though. Nothing but the cool hue of early morning light. I like my room, I think. My head falls to the side, and my body angles itself upwards from its resting position. I let my feet touch the floor, and feel myself walking in the direction of my bathroom. The cabinet underneath my sink opens, and I grab from it a white-topped orange cylinder. It rattles slightly as it moves. I empty a very small portion of it into my hand. A gulp of water from the sink helps to wash it down. I look in the mirror. There’s a boy there, aged approximately 17 years. He looks innocent and still holds some of the roundness in his face from his youth.

*Why don’t you just do it? I think. You are morally obligated to do so. Because might I remind you, you are a fucking monster.*

The boy doesn’t respond. He doesn’t show any indication of agreement or refusal, just a dull expression of complacency. I continue berating the boy for quite some time. He goes about his day; attending his classes, socializing with friends, listening to music. The boy doesn’t seem to fully acknowledge that I am speaking to him. Later on, he goes to his job. Then he starts to



listen. I make sure to get the point across. I tear, rip, and nag at his brain like razor wire, interrupting his train of thought every few moments to remind him of his flaws. I flay his memory, exposing his deepest secrets and worst mistakes. Although he is upset about this, I am sure to tell him that I do it for the best. The world must know of his sins, know of what atrocities he has committed.

The clock hits 9:50 p.m. I shut my car door, key the ignition, and turn on the headlights. I start driving. Street lights cast rhythmically through the windshield. The road hums beneath me. I am silent. My knuckles turn white on the steering wheel. My foot presses hard against the accelerator. The engine roars. I clench my teeth. I scream.



Everything else in my life had been normal. I still cackled as I cussed out my friends while we beat each other in some fighting video game. I still drearily poured myself a cup of coffee from the Keurig every morning while I wiped at my crusty eyes. I still wanted to gouge my eyes out in frustration as I chipped away at the latest assigned math homework. And I still went to my job whenever they scheduled me. Weekdays or weekends, rain or shine, you bet your ass I was there no less than ten minutes before my shift. But something was always wrong. There was always that little voice at the back of my head, standing as a proctor for my minute-to-minute actions. He was most present in times of isolation. I didn't hate him, though. In some ways, I thought he was there for my own sake. So I gaslighted myself, believing every seed of doubt he sowed within me. Day in, and day out. I certainly didn't like it when I had those episodes of intense self-hatred, yet I kept on having them. For no other benefit than to destroy my self-esteem. But I pushed away any attempt at reconciliation with myself. I feared it. I was scared of it. I was disgusted at the fact that I said such horrible things to myself. I was appalled that I even had the audacity to think the things that I thought. But I liked it. I was addicted to it, almost. And it was annihilating everything that was my life. We all self-destruct. We all have our vices. And I figured out what mine was.



June 2021

A great calm flows within me, ebbing in and ebbing out. Air slowly fills my lungs, its notes of freshly cut grass and sprouting honeysuckle sweetening my consciousness, then rushes back out again, taking all of my anxiety and nervousness with it. The sky is painted with vivid streaks of rose and apricot, swirling together occasionally to make a light lavender color. Behind the silhouette of the storefront, the Flatirons etch themselves across the rapidly darkening evening sky. I sit cross-legged on the broad hood of the cart pushing machine, my head angled upwards. I feel no anxiety, no worry. I am in a state of deep tranquility and mental fortitude. I take another deep breath, then lie still.

Why do you torture yourself so much? No response. I press on. Almost every single night, you feel the need to analyze every little detail about yourself. You choose to pick apart your psyche, to dismantle your ego. You claim that you do this so that you may heal what has been broken, yet nothing has. Every night, man. Every night. And have you gained any newfound personal insight during this time? No? That's what I thought. So stop. Just stop. Look at the clouds. Feel. Listen to the birds. Just be. That's all you have to do. Stop bullying and start loving yourself. And before you do this type of shit again, I need you to ask yourself: What have you accomplished by doing this?

*Stop bullying and  
start loving yourself.*

It takes a considerable amount of time before I respond. This question troubles me quite a bit. All these nights, and I still had never really answered it. Or, if I did, it certainly wasn't what I thought. It was a lie. I was lying to myself. I had wasted so, so much time. I wipe a tear from my face. My chest rises and falls: four seconds in, four seconds out. I look into the parking lot. There's a toddler joyously bouncing towards her father. She waddles a little closer to him, then clutches his leg. The father grins and lifts her onto his shoulders. The toddler can't help but giggle, her purity unable to know malice. A faint breeze brushes wispy locks of hair away from her face and reveals a tiny, gleaming smile.

"Nothing," I answer.





Art by TASHA SMITH

## FRANKIE GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

by EVI JUDGE

**C**ome in, just there—right there—through the gate. Yes, I know, but the foyer is unacceptable. So come in through the gate, step there—right there—I'll close the gate, it sticks a bit. No, I don't remember if the gate was here when we arrived.

No, don't take your coat off yet; we're staying out here for a while. Can you look over here? Can you glance to your left? To your right? Beneath the telephone wire and next to the apple tree? Can you see me? Seven, eight, nine, ten? Heck, even twelve? Jumping up and down, running in circles—all on that squishy black material. The springs bending and giving, then giving way to the tension and—duck! Those springs were temperamental, letting go and flying off whenever they desired. It was safe. Don't worry; it was as safe as jumping on the incline next to the apple tree and beneath the telephone wire. It was safe.

Now walk with me; we can go back through that sticky gate or walk across the weedy grass. Oh yes, we created a fence with this gate to keep the poulets at bay, but before the fence, there stood a cottonwood tree. We felled that tree and built a fence. Cottonwoods don't like to die; we don't like to die. There's a difference, though—to kill a tree you'd have to pull out its roots, and we didn't pull the roots. Don't you see the new sprouts poking out? Oh well, through this gate a lot of things have died. Except that cottonwood; it keeps on growing. A

neighbor's dog got loose and murdered my geese and my ducks. It was a massacre, the geese, the ducks. Then my dog. Then my parents' relationship. Then the presidency. You remember that year, right? Just a few years back that that all happened.

Let's go through this gate but don't touch it—the weather has eaten away at the bungee cord, leaving it sinewy and rough—let me guide you through. Right there, skip looking at the rows of wood, the boards, the flat-tired tractor. Look to your left—through the weeds—right there, that plum tree holds on, just as the cottonwood. The plum tree clings to life through drought and thin air. Sorry sight. Sometimes it hangs low to the ground with fruit that the wasps steal. Maybe come back later and I'll give you a few. We canned them one year, two years, maybe even three years. I don't know, I wasn't much help in the process—I was busy outside, jumping under a telephone wire.

Do you hear that? The French would say it sounds like, "cocorico!" Do the French use exclamation marks? I don't recall. Armed with spurs and iridescent plumage, only Billy the Rooster could have sounded that alarm. We buy chickens almost every year, and last year, we picked a rooster by accident. Okay, let's look at the hens instead. Look to your left while I feed them. See those three-foot tall weeds? They're growing from our fire pit. We enjoyed the fire pit until the state caught on fire. Until our garage caught on fire. Until the chicken coop burned down. Now? Greedy weeds grow thistles and house grasshoppers and take up space in this former fire pit.

Here are the hens: Araucanas lay green eggs, Leghorns lay white, and that Rhode Island Red lays brown eggs that sometimes have a funny dent in the shell. Oh! Did you just see that? Look straight ahead but just a little to the left—see? See? Leaping from Russian Olive to Russian Olive, my rat-trap cat. Why do I say that? When I was leaving for high school one morning, I saw a little kitten. We caught him in a rat-trap. Look at all of the wire encasing the chicken coop: reinforced walls, green and silver wires wrapped around a wooden frame, and beneath the earth, the wires plunge down. At night, all of these precautions protect motionless chickens from raccoons and weasels. The raccoons pull a motionless bird through the wires piece by piece, and weasels slip in like vampires, sucking blood from the unsuspecting hen.

*Let nature do her business—out of sight and out of mind to our automated world.*

Well, I said this place stinks with death. Let's go down and I'll show you the creek. Bring a stick, we'll use that to weed-whack our way back. It's hot, isn't it? Well, this gate—this gate is tricky because it fell down. It falls down. My dog jumps over it and it falls down. So I've chained it up—barricaded it to the best of my ability. Let's walk through the yellow grass—be careful, these weeds will hitch a ride to anything—whack them aside with your stick.

This path used to be more clear—back when I ran down it with my neighbor, sticks and bugs in hand. We were mean kids. I was a mean kid. Look down there, right down to the left of the wooden plank—do you see me? I'm maybe eight or nine. I'm making mud-bug soup. I burned ants with a magnifying glass and tore grasshoppers' legs off. They all went into my mud soup—I stirred it with a stick. Do you see the little creek waterfall? Do you see me watching my ducks? They would waddle after me as I fled from the goose attacks, but everyone loved the water. Listen closely, the water runs, gurgles, trips, and falls—slipping by nearly unnoticed. Now cross the plank and look up. There used to be steps there. And I think we used to own the lake just up this dirt hill. Not anymore, no, the new owner pushed dirt down this side and covered our steps. He pushed dirt down this side and trash down that side—right over there.

You'd have loved the lake, but not anymore, it reeks of green algae and disrepair—no longer would I dare play by the water's edge. Once, I saw a snapping turtle there with my friend. A rock with eyes, we thought. We saw a face, so we didn't step on it. We didn't touch it, and it didn't move. We didn't measure it, but I swear it was three feet wide. Things were bigger when we were smaller, huh?

Sticks and leaves and weeds waste themselves in stagnant water. Pollutants of nature that no one clears, but does anyone care? Let nature do her business—out of sight and out of mind to our automated world. When you were driving here, did you feel the road tilt sideways? As if perhaps your car might tip onto its passenger side? Well, the road drapes over a metal hole and from that hole, water feeds the creek. One year, this water froze down to its bed, leaving a floor of ice on which to adventure. Straight through the tunnel we went, my mom and poodles, arriving on the other side in a field of crisply frigid grass and

powdered white snow. Then somehow, we ended up back on that dirt hill again—look up there. That incline was covered in snow and we toppled down carefully. Let's go back up—I think the mosquitoes are coming out. I'll show you where the Slovakiens played ping-pong.

Can't you hear the plastic white ball? Tok, tok, tok. An herb garden struggles to breathe on your right—choked out by one mint plant. I wouldn't plant mint unless it's in solitary confinement. And up behind that big rock, a *Philadelphus coronarius* is hiding from us. Turn around for a second—look at that swing set. Can you see the varnish has worn off the wooden seats? Just splinters and gray wood left. Do you see the slide that is long gone? Up the slide I go, and before I turn to slide down? Whoomp! The slide falls down, taking my teeth with it, down to meet a waiting metal bar. "Hey, I lost a tooth!" It was loose anyway, but what's that? Oh, my nose is bleeding and my other tooth is chipped. Let's run up the deck.

Do you remember, maybe ten years ago now, when it snowed so much that school was cancelled? I think it might have been 2008. I built a fort and went sledding down the deck stairs. Can you see my mom coming home from work? She was surprised to find me packing snow into my fortress and to see sled marks down the stairs. And that table? It watched me build the snow fort, and I may have even used some of the now unraveling chairs as extra support. Don't mind the ashtray sitting on the table now—that addiction started after the massacre. Come on through the door, it's not much cooler but we can lock the bugs out.

Look at that table, do you see the far side? At the head of the table. I'm probably twelve, and I'm holding back tears because I've just had a terrible thought: what if my adoptive parents killed my real parents, and these people I call "Mommy" and "Mama" are just robots? This is horrible news! The robot is bringing my dinner now. Can you believe that's what was going through my mind? What a crazy idea.

Look to your right—yep, that countertop used to be tiled. My parents poured concrete over and the new cats walked in it. I think you can still see the concrete steps they left in my room afterwards. If you look right there, can you see me sitting there just a few years ago?

*Whoomp! The slide falls down, taking my teeth with it, down to meet a waiting metal bar.*

Can you see my mom coming home from work? From therapy? Telling my other mom, "Let's talk." It's the end. Can you see me concentrating on writing something? I wrote one page a day for a whole year, and I was writing that page that day when I heard my parents split up. Can you smell the potatoes in the oven? Can you hear the emotions behind the closed door? I knew our last family vacation had passed. Remember? The ashtray is just a side effect of this breaking. It's why I don't trust therapy—it broke my childhood.

Do you know about the psychologist Abraham Maslow? He built the Hierarchy of Needs. I suppose that my basic needs were built here, as I would think that many people solidify their basic needs in childhood to early adulthood. I digress! Why do I care about Maslow? I don't, not really, but I think Abraham Maslow's grandson lived next door for a long time. I think he smoked lots of weed. At least that's what my mom says. She tells me too that this used to be a pig farm. The biggest lot on the block, great for pigs and kids. Yes, this pig pen turned into a play pen, and a lot has happened here.

We can't go downstairs; it's indecent. We have renters because breakups don't support mortgages. We have leaky water because we run on septic and every time it rains, I'm afraid to do laundry. I don't understand it much, but the water from the washer meets the rainwater somewhere and causes it to flood. So, on principle, I refuse to do laundry on rainy days.

Look, that's all. That's all without going into too much detail about every little fight, jab, good time, bad time, laugh, what have you. Those signs, did you drive that way? Did you nearly turn into them? Yes, the series of signs back up to about three feet away from the train tracks, and if you're turning fast, well, you might smack into them. Those signs are stationed there to prevent the

train from blowing its horn. They didn't always stand in the way. Not when our toy poodle crossed the tracks, crossed the highway and went to live with rich people for a day. That's when Frankie, the toy poodle, went to Hollywood. Come visit again, maybe I'll have more stories. Maybe I'll have plums. Maybe I can remember us into the story. ☀





Art by TASHA SMITH

## AFTER MANY A SUMMER

by JENNY BROWN

A clock ticks.

A dog barks.

Crickets chirp to let their friends know they're there; cars can be heard, faintly, from the main road.

A clock ticks.

Out there, out in the world, people are celebrating births, promotions, graduations, nothing at all; people are mourning deaths, job losses, sports losses. They are preparing themselves for another average, mundane day of their life, waiting for something to happen, and you know that tomorrow you will join their numbers. You will return to your house and do what is asked of you; homework, dishwashing, dog walking, room cleaning.

But not yet.

Tonight, you are sprawled on a blue couch in a small living room with faded brown carpet and a popcorn ceiling. The couch and the carpet and the ceiling are in a house at the end of a cul-de-sac, and there is an apple tree in the front yard that sheds its bitter fruit each fall. The beige curtains are drawn against the dark outside, and the air conditioning is on high to ward off the summer night heat. Loose papers weakly try to escape the weights pinning them in place.

You love your own house, but you love this house a little bit more. The room is comfortably silent; your sister just got done talking about her latest school assignment, and your grandmother is doing a word search puzzle. You have returned to reading your mother's copy of Nancy Drew, enchanted by this independent teenager who solves mysteries. Far too soon, it's time to go to bed. You change into your jammies and brush your teeth with your purple toothbrush. You all sleep in your grandma's bed, for your sister is afraid of being alone in a room that is not hers and you maybe, possibly, definitely not could be afraid of the dark.

The room itself is dwarfed by a massive bed that must be nine feet high and six feet wide, as the song goes. There's a tall wardrobe in the corner that cuts an imposing silhouette in the dark, and when you read the Chronicles of Narnia for the first time, you imagine that this is the wardrobe in which Mr. Tumnus and the White Witch live. There's a dresser at the foot of the bed that carries two mirrors and decades' worth of jewelry, trinkets, coins, clothing. A closet to the side of the bed holds clothing, as closets must.

You and your sister eventually giggle yourselves to sleep, after getting politely asked to just "try and go to sleep, please." You drift off, knowing that there will be waffles and cartoons waiting for you the next morning before you go home.

You return to this room over the years, watching it age as you age with it until the inevitable happens; you grow out of sharing the bed. You now sleep in a guest room, and your sister moves in another, and that's that. You still go over to your grandma's house, of course, and it is almost the same.

Years later, you return with your arms laden with plastic grocery bags of belongings. The unthinkable has happened; the doctors use so many words to describe it that you're still not really sure what happened. The phrase 'pulmonary embolism' rings in your head, and you're too afraid to find out what it means (even as you

*You love your own  
house, but you love  
this house a little  
bit more.*

write this, you are tempted to Google it, but you know it will haunt you like a lingering stare from a stranger). After moving these bags from the five-day stay at the hospital to the two-week stint at your house, your grandma is finally back where she belongs. The small house at the end of the cul-de-sac with the apple tree and the faded brown carpet and the popcorn ceiling and the Narnia wardrobe and the large bed. Never mind that, what's important is that she's going back home. You and your sister have been commissioned to stay the first couple of nights, to make sure everything goes alright. Between the two of you, you create a shift system, so someone is always awake. Secretly, you know you'll be awake for the entire night regardless.

It's 12:37 a.m., and you wait for the clock to tick. It never comes, it stopped working months ago, and no one has replaced it. You strain your ears, waiting for the rhythmic sound of breathing, weaker than it was years ago, but still steady. The neighbor, who, as you found out years ago, actually breeds dogs, yells at said dogs to stop barking. You laugh to yourself, because it audibly doesn't work. There are no crickets out; fall is rapidly morphing into winter, and the last couple of weeks have been cold. Cars cannot be heard from the main road; the construction has shut down that stretch of road. They're expanding it from a two-lane to a four-lane (at the cost of the open land on each side). The apples on the tree, once round and proud, have fallen and rotted on the ground, nibbled at by the occasional rabbit and bird and deer, but otherwise left alone because no one's been over to throw them away. You return to your book, which has evolved from Nancy Drew to the Tale of King Arthur and the Round Table. It is yours; you bought it with your birthday money from Barnes and Noble because it had a fancy cover. You are enchanted by the tales of Sirs Galahad and Gawain and Merlin and Morgan Le Fay (you love it almost as much as you love *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*). It's now 1:07 a.m., and you stop to listen for breathing. The night passes safely.

You wake up early the next morning (your grandma wakes up at 4:30 a.m., a habit from decades of working at Safeway) with a smile and dark circles under your eyes to make waffles (no bacon) for your grandmother because that is something you can do now. You play all of her favorite music (in lieu of cartoons), dancing around to Merle Haggard and John Denver and Glen Campbell. You stop for a second and reminisce about how it used to be the

opposite, and then move on, because life doesn't stop for nostalgia, and your waffles are starting to smell a little bit burnt (okay, you only knew how to make waffles in theory, but hey, these turned out okay).

You return for one final night the summer before you move away to college, with many visits in between (and one nerve-wracking week you spent when she fell and shattered her collarbone). Things have almost returned to the way they were, but not at all. You watch Jeopardy with your grandma and your sister, and then you talk for hours about college, high school, what a weird year it's been. You haven't seen her almost at all in the last year, and there's a lot to catch up on. Eventually, you must go to bed, because you have work in the morning and packing in the afternoon. As you stop by her room to say good night and make sure she gets to bed safely (a task which you know she does every night perfectly fine on her own, but still feel the need to check on), you notice how time has worn away at the room that you once loved.

The enormous bed doesn't seem so large, and the mattress sags more than you remember. The Narnia closet has been moved out because it was more of an obstacle for your grandmother than anything else. One of the mirrors on the dresser now rests on a wall, and the dresser itself has collected a fine layer of dust. The closet door has fallen off a track, and it looks miserably crooked. On your way to get a glass of water, you notice more of these changes. There is a water stain on the popcorn ceiling from the swamp cooler that no one knows how to fix, and the curtains don't seem to ward off the scary dark anymore. They are just curtains. The apple tree outside seems to have given up bearing its inedible fruit, choosing instead to blossom and then fall. The house, already old when you first learned it, seems weary now.

You return to your room, and your bed. Your new book is *The Silmarillion*, and to be honest, it's horrible to try to read. But you started it, so now you must finish it. Tomorrow, when the sun has yet to rise (twenty years after retirement and she still wakes up at 4:30), you will get up and make waffles, something you can competently do now. Still no bacon, but that's alright; hash browns have replaced those. You turn off your light and know that you will sleep soundly tonight.



*The house, already  
old when you first  
learned it, seems  
weary now.*

A clock ticks (you bought a new clock that makes the same noise).

A dog barks (new neighbors have moved in with two adorable corgis that frequently converse with the dogs down the street).

Crickets chirp just the same as ever, and the traffic is even louder with the new two-lane addition finally completed.

A clock ticks.

You are sitting in your dorm room, five fans going but still not enough to ward away the awful heat creeping in (indeed, not enough to even move any papers). The blinds are closed, in an attempt to let in less sunshine and therefore less heat. There are no loud clocks here; the only timepieces you have between you and your roommate are on your respective electronics. Sirens have replaced the barking dogs, and there will be no homemade waffles and hash browns in the morning. You just texted your grandma (she mostly understands the iPad now), apologizing for not being able to make it down for her birthday (you had to attend a football game in Denver for marching band). It was her eightieth birthday, and the next time you'll be able to go home will be Thanksgiving. You tell her you love her and return to writing an essay about her, coincidentally. You suddenly have the urge to listen to Merle Haggard and John Denver and Glen Campbell. You think about going back home for Thanksgiving and staying over for the night. You know what will wait for you there.

The clock ticks.

The dog barks.

No crickets, but certainly cars.

The clock ticks. ☀

# HOW WE ARE

by CAITLIN JOHNSTON

How are you?

The brief and simple way to redirect a conversation away from yourself. But when it truly comes to answering that, how are you? It's rather likely that the only one that truly knows how you are is that four-legged friend sitting between your legs as you read this, or maybe your favorite coffee cup with ringlet stains circling the inside. Or it might simply be the ceiling that you've stared at a few too many sleepless nights. We usually will dodge saying anything beyond a "pretty good" or an "I've been fine."

Over Zoom, it is simplified to a simple thumbs up or continual nodding of the head. We always avoid voicing the true answer out of fear, agitation, frustration, sadness, and dozens of other emotions. Why do we feel the constant need to put up a front that everything is just roses? Is there a secret code that we are all communally trying to crack? How are we, you ask? How about how are we not?

We are not shiny and new and perfect. We are not a surprise or present for others. So how are we, truly? We are tired. Tired of being dragged through political turmoil, confronted with racial injustices, burned and scorned by humans and Mother Nature alike. Tired of feeling that we are getting nowhere and losing time all at once. Tired of being forced to put up this façade that we are okay. Because we are not. We are not okay, and that's okay.

We are in need of support. We are in need of the little victories in life. You did the dishes? Good for you. You got out of bed today? So proud of you. You turned in your homework assignment? That's an accomplishment. We are caught in the world of do, or lose all. We are full of moments that are non-stop. What do we miss in our lives because we simply fail to see or hear or listen or smell? We miss the roses. None of us are perfect. Look to your best friend or back again to that pet at your feet. That is how we are. Loved, fulfilled, capable, and ourselves. We are us. We are willing to admit our faults, even when they are difficult, we are the future.

Every single day I think about what it will be like to work in that classroom. I think constantly about the youth's lives I will be touching and how the smallest of sentiments can make or break their world. How I can empower or destroy a dream with a few words. And that is scary. It is hard. We are shaping their future, our future.

It is not about asking how we are, but about asking how we will be. Because right now, we are not okay, but we will be.





Art by TASHA SMITH

## BROKEN PIECES, BROKEN PROMISES

by KATE ROBINSON

“I feel my bones breaking when I look at you.” He said this to me, his eyes filled with pain, and I knew I was supposed to feel something, anything, when I looked at him, but I just didn’t. “Please say something, I have to know what you are thinking.”

I sigh. “Spreading me open is the only way to do that, I can’t offer you anything else.”

Somehow, he looks even sadder than before, and his voice cracks, “please, I can get us a drink, we can sit down and talk about this.”

“I don’t want to talk about it, not when you’re thinking of her.”

“I always only think of you,” he cries, “I don’t suppose I could buy your time?” He grabs my hands, too quickly for me to pull them away.

“I think you should look for something else to buy.”

His eyes were glazed over and his body seemed closed off, but I feel his hands go limp in my own and then drop to his sides. I know they will never touch again, I leave him there in the cold, to sleep in the dirt.

Our conversation plays in my head, over and over, similar to the record player I have that rests beside my bed. The thought of listening to that record again, our record, makes me feel sick. A curse he placed on me so I could never listen to my favorite songs the same way again. There are things he'll never know, not that I could ever tell him now, but the memory of him still sits in my head, encompassed by cracking glass, teetering on shattering. I am afraid of what will happen once it does. I feel as though I surrounded myself with bubble wrap and as soon as he breaks, there will be nothing to protect me from the shards of him that will pierce my skin and leave me bleeding out on the floor.

It seems unfair how easy it was for him to go, and I think now it was so easy because he never placed me on the same pedestal where I placed him. First prize, I always thought, I won. The years we spent together only meant something to the loser, and ultimately the loser was me. How ironic. I pace back and forth, wondering how long it will take for me to feel anything again. They say it's half the relationship, that's how long it takes to get over someone, but I feel as though even years from now, the gap between my chest and my back will lie empty, and in place of it will be a dark hole that can only be filled by the same record he ripped away from me. Maybe one day when I am able to listen to it again, things will feel different.

I close my eyes and turn it on. The familiar scratch and melody play through my head, wrapping me in his cold, dead hands that once held my own. He does not seem real anymore. Maybe he never was, maybe the thought of him was simply imagined and I have been locked away in the insane asylum this whole time. At least then I could blame something other than myself. I will always blame myself. He will never come back to me, not without the record, and I think forcing myself to listen to it will forever be the last way I can ever feel his hands on my body and his lips on mine, back when they were warm.

I picture his face in my mind; the glass cracks, he used to be so beautiful, with light hair and freckles I used to try and count, placing each and every one as a constellation in the sky. How

*The familiar  
scratch and melody  
play through my  
head, ...*

*...wrapping me  
in his cold, dead  
hands that once  
held my own.*

unfair it was that he took my record and my sky and all of the stars with him when he left. He hung my moon in the same way I warmed his skin. Now we just sit in silence in my head and I can feel only icy hands and icy lips, frozen in a place in time where I could feel his presence, intimate, caring, and lovely. Now it is just darkness. A glass case filled with memories and feelings and touches. Glass threatening to break. Begging me to let it shatter and kill me in the same way they killed him.

When I close my eyes I try to feel the same darkness he does. The same darkness he did. Is it peaceful? Are there angels that take you up and over and around to all the places you have never been? Is he here with me now? I don't believe in that stuff, but maybe for him, I could try. I put the record on again, playing it over and over. Letting the melody wash over me, the pain stays where it is, always in my chest. But I can feel it in my fingertips too. They itch to reach out to him, so I comply, placing my hand in the air and picturing him grabbing it, so we can dance. How lovely it was to dance with him, another crack in the glass. I picture his eyes, blue as the sky, a robin in the spring, another crack in the glass. I feel him spin me around and pull me into him, lips the color of baby's breath, another crack in the glass. The sound of his laugh, a melody all on its own, another crack in the glass. We spin faster and faster, the music picking up pace as we go. We are laughing and bumping into each other, I can feel his body close to mine. Another crack in the glass. My head begins to feel dizzy, I can feel his presence, he's calling to me, begging me to come with him. I reach out to him, but I am not close enough. Another step closer, another crack in the glass. I take a deep breath, he's so close to me, another step, another crack. Things are too close to breaking.

"Just let them break," he says to me.

I meet his eyes and touch his hand, and finally, I let the glass shatter. Every memory, every feeling, every movement flooding back. I let it all wash over me, drown me, just to feel him again. I never wanted to lose him, but now all I can have are the twelve songs that play over and over in my head and the trepidation that he will know me again. ☀



Art by KATIE GINSBURG

## LETTING GO

by CHRISTINA WILLIAMS

When I was little, I read a lot of books. I loved that the pages took me to another world. A world where my parents were not, and where I was able to peek into a character's life. But as I got older, I read less. The pages were replaced by a blue light that gave me a peek into other people's lives. I never liked social media for showing off my own life, but I loved it for looking at other people's. Maybe it was the way it put me in another world that distracted me from my own problems and anxieties, or the way it always invited me to stay a little longer when I was at my loneliest. All I know is that by the time I turned 20, my phone was my life; my screen time was uncomfortably high, but I couldn't stop. My phone was my best friend. My confidant. My lifeline.



2020 was a hard year for everyone. So many of us saw our screen time go up as we FaceTimed friends and checked in with our families on Facebook. As August rolled around, I realized I had stopped checking in with myself. My screen time bordered on 10 hours per day. My mind felt empty. I had become a zombie that desired not brains but rather new things to like on Instagram and repost on Twitter. I spent hours on end scrolling through TikTok, perfecting my algorithm. Between the pandemic and the political turmoil, I felt so anxious, and Instagram no longer made me feel alive and in touch. It made my stomach flip and ache, my head pound, and my eyes burn. I always felt like I was trying to post photos and tweets that would make people like me more, and that pressure seeped into my reality. My phone became the center of my universe, and I had sun poisoning. I knew I had to confront myself on how I spiraled. One day I was 12 years old, downloading an app that would connect me to my peers, and then I blinked and suddenly I was 20, scared of how people would perceive me. So I did it. I deleted the app that had once made me feel connected.

I remember the night well. It was a cool evening in late August. As I scrolled, I started thinking about the person I was in the past, the person I was in the present, and the person I wanted to be in the future. Past me wanted to be popular to the point where she cared too much. She did not know who she was, but she was constantly anxious and used Instagram and Twitter for validation. As for present me, I felt like I didn't even know who she was. I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted for my future, but I knew I wanted to be happy and free of that constant worry about how others perceived me, so I pulled the metaphorical trigger and started with Instagram. Relief washed over me as I eyed the Delete Account button. My life with the app flashed before my eyes: the years I obsessively checked One Direction fan pages, the texts in high school when I needed to find a caption and my best friends would always come to my aid, the times people's comments and assurance made me feel accepted — all would be erased. Before I pressed the final button, Instagram asked the question: "What if we just hold your account for you for 30 days? That way you can always come back." I accepted. Just in case.

The next morning, I woke up, and—on instinct—grabbed my phone. I searched for the little sunset-looking camera. It took a minute to hit me that I had deleted it. I almost forgot the reason, but I knew I did not want to break. I should mention I had also deleted Facebook and Twitter. Usually, I would start with Instagram to see what old acquaintances were up to and end up feeling terrible, so I would go to Twitter for a giggle. Of course, most of the time Twitter news led me to existential dread, not laughter. As much as I wanted something to occupy myself with that morning, I did not necessarily desire to be on social media. That being said, all of my usual options for my morning scroll were gone. It had been so long since I had woken up and not had a social media platform to distract me from starting my day that I did not know what to do with myself. I wanted to see what people were doing; I wanted to peek inside whatever they were willing to show. After ten minutes of lying with my phone on my

heart, staring at the ceiling, I decided what I was missing wouldn't do anything besides pull me back into the rabbit hole.

That first day, I did yoga to ground myself as well as provide some relief to my tech neck. I read a good portion of Jane Eyre. I sat outside and watched the clouds at one point. One day is obviously not enough time to reconnect with yourself, but it was a start.

I held strong for about two weeks, but eventually, I broke. My mind made the excuse that it had been so long, of course I could go without social media if I really wanted to. So I did it. I logged on to Instagram on my computer, expecting to feel fulfilled. Instead, I was met with photos of people I hadn't talked to since high school and advertisements of meticulously styled mannequins wearing greens and neutrals. Do you know those stories of people who cut milk out of their diet to be healthier and then decide to have ice cream months after? They get sick. The ice cream no longer satisfies their stomach. In the end, there is just regret. That's what getting back on Instagram did to me. I felt that regret of working hard to keep something up and having a lapse of judgment.

That was the last time I went on Instagram. I remember hearing somewhere that kids who read a lot when they are little are really just trying to dissociate from their reality. Growing up with divorced parents who never talked, escapism was always something I relied on to distract myself from loneliness. I think, in a lot of ways, I replaced my books with my phone because it distracted me in a way that also connected me. As I got older, I realized that my phone was not fixing my problems. Instead, it was pulling me deeper into my insecurities without my consent. It has been over a year now since I deleted Instagram for good. I believe I have a better understanding of myself, and I no longer feel a need to change for others' acceptance. In my conversations with friends and family members, I feel more present, and we talk about what is going on in our lives. I no longer know what is going on with other people unless we each make an effort to find out. Although I miss being tagged, I find a lot of comfort in knowing that my 30 days to change my mind have expired. Knowing that people's perceptions of me can only be made by face-to-face interaction feels miraculous.

Though sometimes I ask myself the question: Will I ever go back? ☀



Art by BRAEDEN SLOAN

## i2

by BEAU FARRIS

the screen grabs my eyes, drags them. asks me to lol  
but not out loud. i scroll up or to the side, it's the same  
post from yesterday, but i will type four lies: lmao  
or some other jargon, and i don't say haha  
to the power button. the side is too far away, jk  
it doesn't shut off at night, nvm.

put it down then pick it up, nvm.  
illuminating my face: a cold blanket of light lol  
the penetrative photons are blue. red too jk  
blue seeps into red eyes, and i am the same  
as these emissions of sleep apnea haha.  
a blue wave swelling against circadian rhythm, lmao.

colors indicate the receiver's type. blue bubbles are free  
green messages cut the distance and indicate  
ellipses are footsteps typing down the hall  
listening to thumbs. three dots encapsulate all  
the battery cannot be removed  
i'm thinking about returning my phone

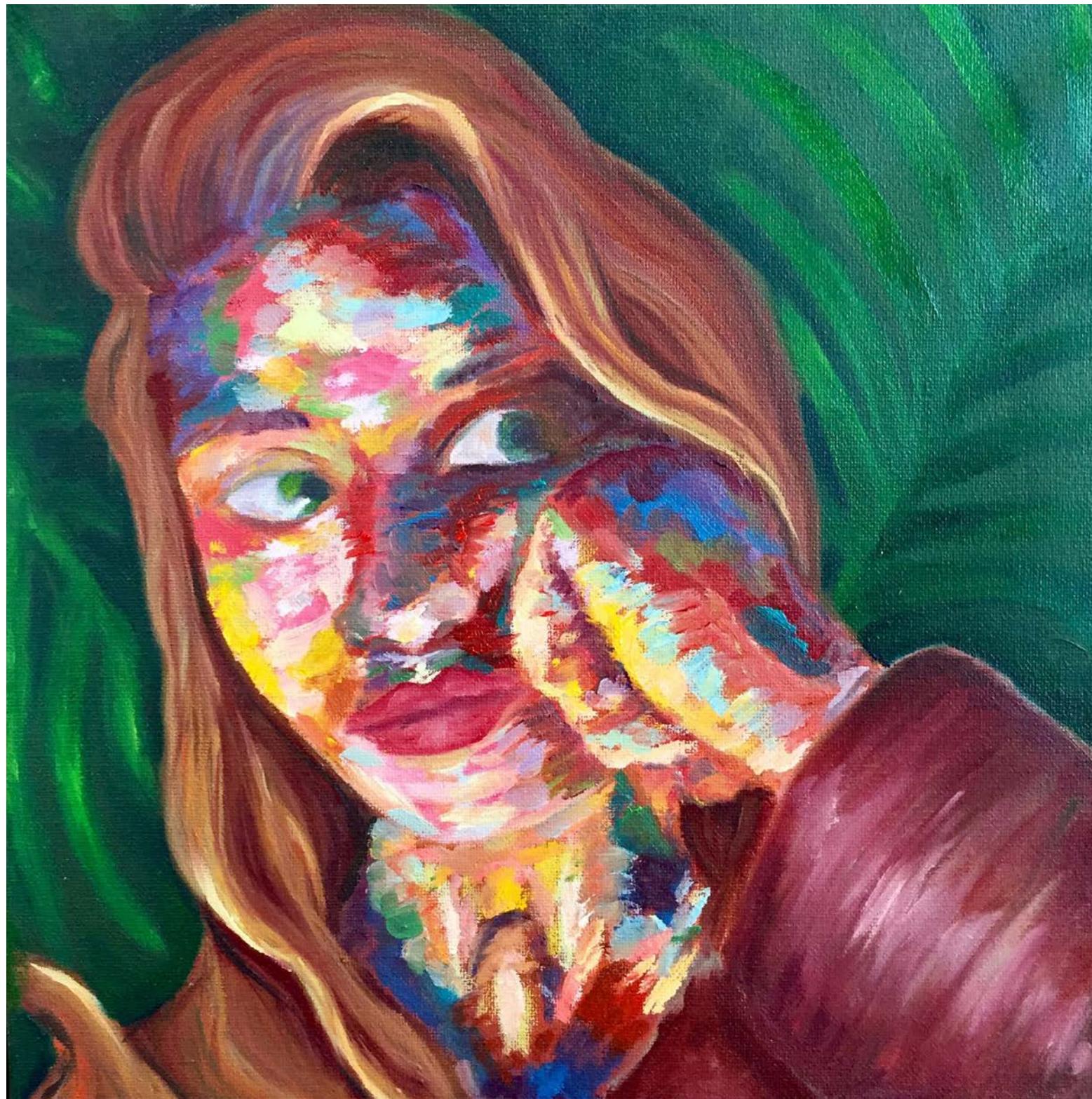
*lmao  
nvm  
haha  
lol  
same  
jk?*

but i can't. my fingers are bound by ten violin strings, jk  
they are tethered to the screen by railroad ties lmao  
eyelids are pried closed with gauze tape. the screen is the same  
so it's easy to keep gazing, but who is to define the last nvm?  
nothing is easier than scrolling for one more lol  
my thumb, my representative. 2 to 4 letters, a dictionary for haha

twins who look alike, only when together: haha  
an unjust wound that can reverse time: jk  
a silent stare between two Ls: lol  
a laugh that partitions part from body: lmao  
three letters to take away from meaning: nvm  
a simile between us without like or as: same

eyes can become blind to the same  
things that are seen over and over again, haha.  
as if in training, a breaststroke pushing past water, nvm.  
like fingers forgetting the cold, given time will respond jk  
to anything. habitually dousing fires with lmao  
darkness. and where to look when nothing's loading lol?

i too have seen the same face, staring back at me. he doesn't lol  
when the screen is a black sun. i race to load who he is before the lmao  
but my eyes strain to focus on themselves, and the content eventually wins so  
nvm.



Art by SUSANNA ANDREWS

## TIE-DYE SWIMSUIT

by ANNA HAYNES

I'm in the dimly lit half-bathroom of my parents' house, a small Bath & Body Works candle next to the sink the only thing illuminating my body. I just bought an extra-large tie-dye swimsuit from Amazon. I almost ordered a large, but my mom warned me that the sizing is probably smaller since the swimsuits were made in China, and she knew from a long history of dressing room incidents that if the large was too small I'd have a mental breakdown. So I bought the extra-large.

It's a harshly-colored one-piece with loose strings, bra cups stuffed haphazardly into the chest and a thin piece of paper stuck inside the crotch for "hygiene." It's cheap and smells slightly like the factory it came from. Maybe I should have washed it before trying it on, but part of me is just too eager to see how it looks. Another part of me wants to get it over with.

I haven't worn a swimsuit in almost a decade.

My roommate, inexplicably thin in spite of a diet of Frosted Flakes and microwavable pizza, had been asking me to go to our apartment complex's swimming pool with her. I always found a way out. As far as she knew, I was always too busy or tired or unshaven.

Back in the mid-2000s, the beauty standard was to look skeletal. We aspired to look like “heroin chic” icons like Kate Moss, super-skinny supermodel who penned the iconic quote, “Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels.” Children, young girls especially, have never been immune to beauty standards, as much as we’d like to think that they are. I don’t remember it, but my mom tells me that one day in first grade, I came home and told her that the other kids called me “big and fat.”

I wasn’t. But I had to lift my arms to make my ribs protrude from my tiny torso while the other girls in my class didn’t. I learned early on that any extra space I dared to occupy, no matter how small, was too much.

What followed was years of strict diets and workout regimes, all of which ended with me gaining more weight than I had lost. Workouts with my parents would end with a stitch in my side and me in a fit of frustrated tears, yelling that I couldn’t do it. My ribs stopped poking out as my stomach rounded out and my thighs began to chafe against one another underneath my uniform skirt. The skin on my hips split into stretch marks. I got my period first, I suspected, because the other girls didn’t weigh enough to get theirs. While they always went for extra slices of pizza, it seemed like I gained ten pounds just from catching a waft of pepperoni.

For the rest of elementary school, other kids (mostly boys) taunted me, reminded me again and again of my undesirability, lest I gained some confidence, forgot my place in the social hierarchy, stepped out of line. One day in fourth grade, a boy in my class named Joe—a British soccer-playing heartbreaker with platinum blonde hair and blue eyes—passed a piece of paper around the classroom with even more smug pride than he usually carried wherever he went. He sauntered over to my desk and shoved the piece of paper in front of my face. His posse of soccer boys chuckled behind him. At the top of the page he had written, in his crude ten-year-old handwriting, “The Ugliest Girls in School.”

I was ranked at number three.

I sat quietly as the teacher snatched the list away from Joe and scolded him. A wave of joy washed over me. He was the cutest boy in school — every girl in my grade had a crush on him, including me — and he thought I was prettier than two girls!

Beggars can’t be choosers, I guess. By that point, I had accepted that I was uglier than the other girls.

I wasn’t. Looking back at photos, I’m taken aback by how beautiful I was as a child. My brown eyes, huge and round, sparkled above my rosy cheeks, button nose and full lips, and contrasted against spotless porcelain skin.

But nobody was looking at my face. I was a girl, after all. Even then, they were looking at my body. Looking for ribs that could no longer be found.

By high school I had learned to suck my stomach in whenever I stood up (and ignore the cramps it caused) and cover it with something (a backpack, a jacket, anything) whenever I sat down. The outright bullying stopped after elementary school, but it remained abundantly clear that the smaller I was, the better. The thing about microaggressions, those tiny instances of prejudice, is that they build up. Straws on a camel’s back. Everything from “You’re not fat!” (like that’s a bad thing) to “Congratulations on losing twelve pounds in two weeks!” (like that’s a good thing and not at all evidence of an attempt to starve myself).

They build up, slowly, and then suddenly one day I want to tear my own stomach out, like thrusting my hand into a glass of orange juice and removing a pulp-filled fist.

I don’t remember when it started. At some point I developed a ritual of feeling my stomach and my thighs as I lay in bed, grabbing the rolls of extra fat and moving them around in my palm. They were soft and malleable, and I’d imagine how easy it would be to take sculpture wire and slough them off like hunks of clay. Or, if I just gripped a little harder, maybe I could tug the fat right off like the membrane of a pork rib and expose the shape of the bones. Maybe I could make myself smaller, make myself less, and then nobody would say that there’s too much of me.

My therapist told me to get the swimsuit. I was already thinking about it — in part because I want to bond with my roommate in a way that didn’t involve going to cemeteries during the night — but I also recalled how much I loved swimming as a child. On land, I felt the extra weight on me pulling me down to earth like sandbags underneath my skin. In the water I was weightless. I somersaulted and glided with just as much ease and elegance as everyone else. My classmates’ nasty comments rippled away with the waves I made diving into the pool. I focused not on what my body looked like, but on what my body could do.

I tighten the last strap on the swimsuit and step back to look at myself in the yellow-tinged glow of the bathroom candle. I feel my eyes sting.

I look good.

I don’t remember the last time I thought that about myself. The swimsuit grips at my curves, but not with the same violence of my hands or the pointed gazes of my peers. It hugs them with a tenderness that is alien to me, shrinking around my waist before stretching delicately around the shape of my stomach and my thighs, honoring the extra space. Honoring the extra parts of me that I so badly wanted to constrict.

What if I did the same thing? What if I regarded my body with a means to cultivate and not to destroy? I could open my palm, stop gripping and pulling at the fat and glide gently over it instead, follow the hills and valleys, discover what it feels like when it’s not being squeezed, sucked in, stowed away. What would happen? Would the universe implode if I learned to forgive myself for my existence?

I could rediscover my body, not as a thing of excess but as a thing perfectly sculpted just for me. The thing that lets me move through air, through water, and isn’t that beautiful?

I can’t see my ribs, not even when I lift my arms, but my body lets me breathe, and isn’t that pretty?

I could let my body take as much space as it needs.

I admire myself for a few more moments before taking a picture in the mirror and texting it to my therapist. The tie-dye swimsuit, even being the cheap and flimsy thing that it is, gives me permission to exist in my entirety. I accept it.

I hope I still remember how to swim. ☀





## ROLLIN' WITH RESISTANCE

by NATALIE SCHOENHALS

**H**e nudged me with his toe.

"You should go dance," he said with eyes wide.

I averted my gaze and prayed he would detect my reluctance.

"C'mon, Nat, it's not every day your Dad gets marri...." he petered out once I met his gaze. I knew he recognized my irritation and I glanced back across the room once more. We were in a big, single-room barn filled with milling guests. Round tables framed the room and housed the majority of guests. There was a bar in the corner opposite the DJ booth. In between the two was the infamously empty dance floor.

"It's not their fault, it's not any of their fault," he tried again, this time with more desperation.

"You think I am mad at them?!" I finally flung back, appalled. He just met my stare, waiting. "This is a family event but I only know half the people, I am all dressed up and feel so... formal. Did you know my dad doesn't even fart in front of her yet? Any time I mention it he turns red and gives me that look." I finally expelled with a huge breath. There was a DJ playing "Happy" by Pharrell Williams and a back room filled with pizza and cupcakes. "You know, sometimes I hear him come down the stairs in the middle of the night, fart, then head right back up." I had to smile at that a little and I looked back up at him.

I scanned the room, hoping to spot someone whose eyes were as scathing of the dancing guests as mine. Instead, I caught my sister surreptitiously grabbing drinks from the open bar. When she noticed me, she suddenly froze like a racoon rummaging through trash. It was in character for her to seize the opportunity to steal cocktails while the crowd was entranced with celebration. They robotically sang along to the music. Happy. Happy. Happy. Are they really this happy? As that word played over and over in my mind, the last trace of forged enthusiasm left my face. I thought this was the one time my sister might actually stick by my side.

"Do you see that?" laughed Ethan. "It looks like your sister is enjoying the wedding."

I was infuriated.

“How could she do this?” I fumed. “I thought we were feeling the same way about the wedding.”

“Your Betrayal” began humming in my ears.

“Do farts mean anything to you?” I scowled.

A few guests from nearby tables let out small breathy laughs as they heard my question. I was utterly mortified. My face was reddening as I turned to stalk out of the barn. As if sensing my discomfort, my sister ran over to prolong it.

“What are you talking about?” she questioned.

I was trying to give her the cold shoulder, but her liquid courage was making her noisier than usual.

“You know,” she proclaimed with a knowing twinkle in her eyes, “a wedding is no place to talk about farts.”

“Shut up!” I whisper-yelled at her. “You don’t even know what it’s like to live there in a house of strangers.”

The room fell into a sudden hush and for a moment I was worried that I’d drawn attention again. One of my new cousins was leaving the DJ booth and I was relieved to see heads were turned away from me and towards the dance floor. All of the strangers were heading towards the center of the room as the twangy guitar of “Proud Mary” began playing. They lined up, bobbing their heads animatedly. By this point the rest of us had gotten back to our conversations, but we all had the corner of our eyes on the scene in the middle of the room. I continued ignoring my sister as the lyrics played.

*Big wheel keep on turnin’*

The mob motioned for the DJ to turn up the music and began to sit.

*Proud Mary keep on burnin’*

They were all lined up like anchovies in a tin can. By this point no one was feigning disinterest. All heads were looking directly at the scene in the middle of the room. Wedding guests were all lined up laying on the floor.

*And we’re rollin’*

The anchovies rolled over to the right.

*Rollin’*

And then to the left.

*Rollin’ on the river*

Two rolls to the right.

The song went on and everybody got up dancing like normal. My sister began dragging me towards the center of the room. Sometime along the way she’d managed to corral our step siblings as well. The whole wedding party, sans bride and groom, had hopped right into that tin can and joined the salty brothers.

*But I never saw the good side of the city, til’ I hitched a ride on a river boat queen*

And just like that, we were all squatting down on the dirt-dusted floor in our nice clothes,

ready to roll. We laid flat, our backs on the ground and eyes up. For a moment, I searched worriedly around the room for my father and Carrie.

*And we’re rollin’*

Before I could find them, the entity forced me to the right. We each rolled counterclockwise.

*Rollin’*

I was forced back to the left. There was a moment of dark as I faced the ground and forgot to lift my head. This clockwise turn had crushed my nose at six o’clock and left me kneeing my stepbrother at nine. I laid on my back at twelve with only a second of visibility before I was pushed back counterclockwise.

*Rollin’*

This time I had anticipated it and rolled to the right twice without any scratches. The candy cane of colors disoriented me to the point of feeling high. I felt myself being transported to another time.

*I was a little kid and my sister and I were playing on a playground.*

*“Get down here, it’s time to go!” my dad yelled from the red minivan in the parking lot.*

*As we raced down the hill I tripped on my shoes and tumbled the whole way down. My body was bruised, but not as much as my six-year-old ego.*

*“Samantha pushed me!” I cried.*

*My parents immediately came to check on me. My dad scooped me up to carry me to the car.*

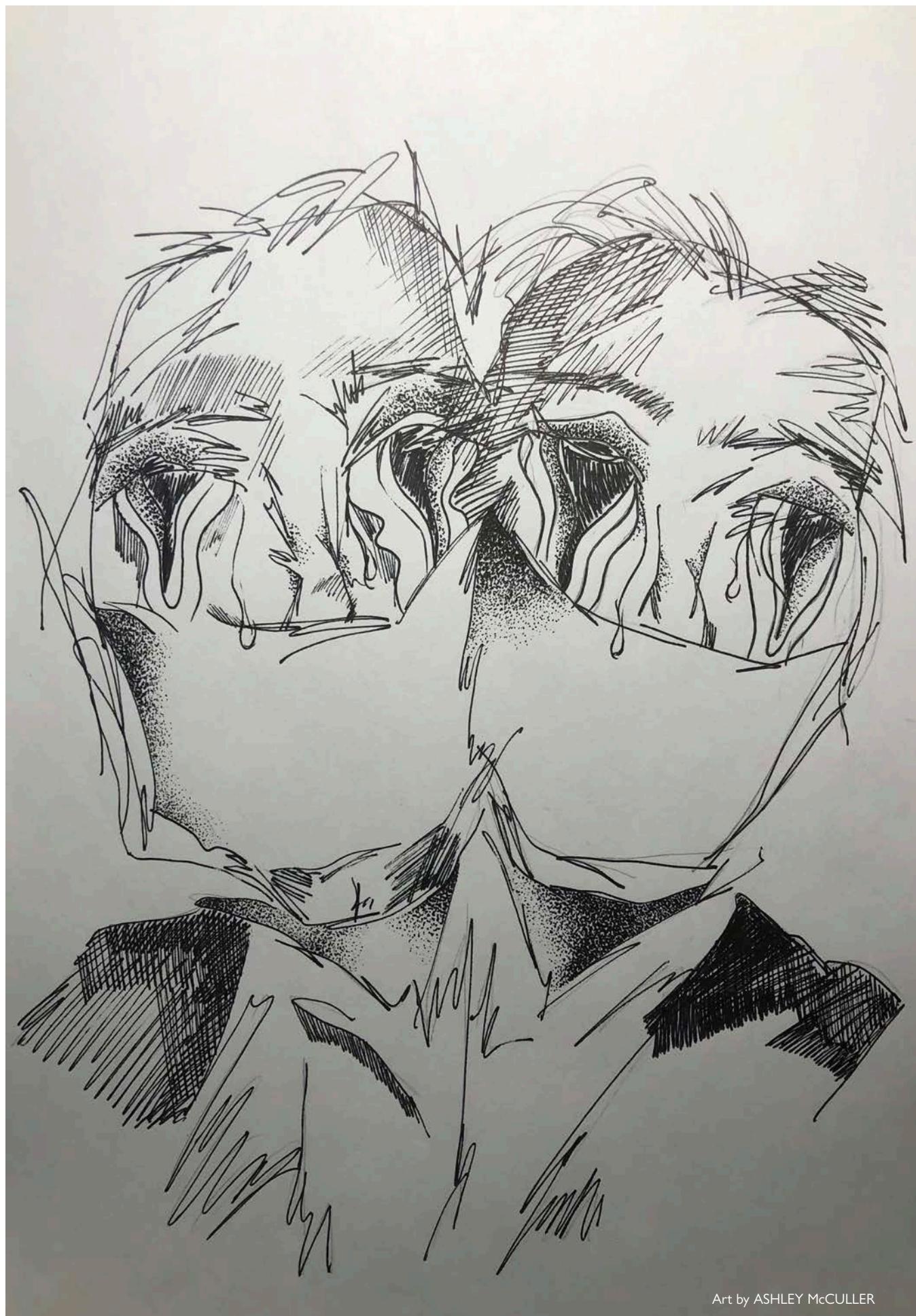
*“This is why we don’t bark commands at our children, David!” my mom said sternly.*

*“Maybe if you taught your daughters manners then this wouldn’t happen!” my dad retorted.*

*The car was silent as my dad buckled me up and got to his seat. My parents were quiet, but my sister poked me on the shoulder. I nervously peeked over at her, worried about receiving her wrath too. She studied my tear-stained cheeks for a moment before smiling into a silly face that caused me to giggle. She held my hand the rest of the car ride home and we spent the rest of the night playing all the games I wanted.*

I laughed as I fell on my back for the final time and looked up, feeling my hair splayed everywhere. I was back on the hardwood of the red barn surrounded by my family, new and old. Situated right above me were my dad and Carrie, laughing harder than those of us on the floor. I made eye contact with my sister and gave her a smile as I got up to prepare for round two. ☀





Art by ASHLEY McCULLER

## PRETEEN

by BECKY HARKIN

Every once in a while, my eight-year-old body was allowed some prestigious “girl time” with my mom and my sister. These were the good times, when my parents’ fights and the family problems were more under the table. Being included during these moments gave me a sense of belonging in my given gender identity, filled with nights of makeovers, dress up, and music sung by iconic women of the 80s and 90s. Articles and items of clothing became magic, my mother’s small walk-in closet a transformative cocoon. My mother channeling her inner Madonna, my sister as Angelina Jolie, and I as Shirley Temple all combined to make a girl-powerful team. I watched my mother put on her makeup every day, idealizing the way she opened her mouth to put on mascara or the scrunch in her brow when she overlined her lips in red. Walking out of the closet as someone else, complete with blue eyeliner and a clip-on wig, strutting as if on a runway, really does something for a girl.



Fourteen years old. I reached for the handle of the door to the fifth house I had moved into in four years. The knob was unlocked like always. Despite being in not the best neighborhood, my mom always kept it open in case my sister decided to come home from her most recent bender, or if my brother miraculously decided to show up after leaving us for the past eight years. I was hit with the now disturbingly comforting scent of ammonia from the cat piss. Every time I walked inside my home I was full of disappointment. It seemed to be a replica of my



mother's mental state. I crept up the stairs, gently announcing my presence, only to get no response. Spotted: Kristin, my mother, 42 years old, 5 foot 3 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches, now a whopping 105 pounds, unbothered by my presence. I stood there for a moment.

"I'm going to homecoming this year, Mom. This guy named Michael asked me to the dance, and I don't even have a dress or know what makeup to do or—"

"Listen, honey, I really don't have time for this today," she snapped.

"I-I just thought... you'd want to know. I haven't seen you in a while."

"Why would I care?"

20 22

At the age of ten, I went through a reading "phase." Flipping through the pages of the first Percy Jackson book, I had just gotten to the scene where they reached an abandoned amusement park. Then I heard the front door slam. Yelling. Again. My sister must've just gotten home.

"Dolor, listen to me—" I heard my mother say through my door.

"What do you want, Mom? I'm fine," my sister interrupted, laughing.

"Did you smoke pot again? What are you on?"

The yelling in the front room of our small apartment escalated, but in this post-divorce apartment it was so routine, I quickly blocked it out.

My mother must've done something wrong, again.

I heard a loud slump on the wall outside my door.

"Becky!" my mother yelled.

*God, what does she want?*

"Oh, hold on!" I said, just trying to finish a page.

She yelled again.

Taking my time, I reached for the flimsy handle and peered into the narrow hallway. There was my mother against a wall, clutching my sister's stiff body. It seemed like it was possessed, twitching uncontrollably like in one of those scary movies Dolor let me watch when Mom wasn't home. I stared at what seemed to be white glue forming at the corner of her chapped lips, her yellow skin, the whites of her eyes as her pupils rolled back in her

head. I froze, unable to stop gazing at those whites, where brown orbs once held me lovingly.

"Becky, Becky, call 911." My mom pleaded.

Hands shaking, my chubby little fingers dialed those three numbers for the first time.

I didn't know what a drug overdose was until I saw one.

20 22

*I didn't know what a drug overdose was until I saw one.*

In the fifth grade, the age of 12 was not kind to me. I chose to wear prescription glasses and had the teeth of someone whose parents stopped caring two years ago. My frantically frizzy curls peeped out from behind my ears, self-cut bangs dangling over purple frames. I was overweight due to malnutrition and a pantry of only ramen and other dollar store finds. Unlike my fat-kid dreams, I never had access to Fruit Roll-Ups, Gushers, Toaster Strudels, or Cosmic Brownies. The dollar store and Aldi, the local discount grocery store, only provided certain products: frozen soft pretzels, frozen lasagna, boxed mac and cheese. The brand of the mac and cheese really made a difference, in my 11-year-old opinion, and by this time my father had started to pay child support for both me and my half-sister from my mother's first husband, so we could afford the occasional Kraft.

Two days before Christmas, my mother had come out crying, telling us we were going to get lots of gifts due to the increase in monthly money. While the toys came, the demonizing of my father also arrived, and his purpose seemed to slowly transform into a walking ATM.

Broken things don't always come broken. As a young girl, I often received hand-me-downs from my sister's worn closet, excited to have something new. Forever 21 bags, Claire's necklaces, and body glitter with eternal grime stuck around the cap fulfilled my material needs.

This seemed to be a common theme for me growing up, not seeing what was so obviously broken to others. I remember my Aunt Rebecca coming into town, looking me up and down all day. She later went to the bathroom with me and found out that I had been wearing maternity jeans. I was only 11 and 125 pounds. I had quickly gained weight after the divorce and none of my old clothes fit anymore. She took me shopping. I remember squeezing into adult skinny jeans, feeling fat and stuffed, missing

my maternity pants. Even the people who tried to help only made it worse. Aunt Rebecca's facial reactions to everything I put on in the TJ Maxx dressing room instilled a deep-rooted shame. My body became the enemy, unable to meet the standard even in clothes that weren't from Goodwill.

❀ ❀

Naturally, at the age of 15, I began my battle with anorexia. An incoming high school sophomore, I decided to go on a diet, as heavily "encouraged" by my cheerleading coach to avoid being cut from the team. But this wouldn't be my first. In the second grade, I went on a restrictive diet where I wouldn't eat artificial sugar, yeast, dairy or peanuts. After losing eight pounds from my tiny body, I asked my parents when it would be time to go off the diet. They responded with, "Well... never. This is just gonna be our new normal." That didn't last long; all sense of stability, including orderly meals, went out the window when my mother went to rehab and their ten-year marriage came to an end. But in my vulnerable teens, I resorted to what I knew worked: my restrictive diet from when I was eight. I cut out all the same food groups again, desperately seeking the same sense of approval as before.

❀ ❀

The delicate light flowing in from my window, the sweet silence of the morning. No one would be up until at least 2 or 3 p.m., so I had our tiny townhouse to myself. Finely painted porcelain dolls and World War II coins sat in heavy wooden boxes on shelves, all antiques from my late great-grandmother Dodo, a witch. The mother of a famous singer from the 60s and my grandfather, her energy was overpowering. Quite a forceful lady, and a bitch, honestly, if you ask me. My mother's mommy issues were completely projected on that woman's existence, resulting in an unhealthy obsession. And that obsession decorated our entire home. I sat on the couch, trying to figure out what I would schedule for myself for the day. Trying to plan happiness since it wasn't given.

❀ ❀

I hold these moments dear to my heart, for sometimes labeling moments can get too messy. I hold these times desperately; I clutch them close in an attempt to rewrite the horrific moments and relive the highs. I question the what-ifs, trying to predict what my personality would have been had my mother's mental state stayed stable, or my sister not gotten into drugs, or my parents remained married. I look back on that shell of a girl, who would enter the magical walk-in closet on a rainy night to feel special. Who couldn't even find someone to help her with what felt like "the biggest deal" of ninth grade. Little did she know that conversation would be the last time she would see her mother for two years.

❀ ❀

Today, at 22, I find myself sitting on my plush red velvet couch, reflecting on the past. I look down at the table in front of me, spotting my half-eaten dinner. The math begins immediately in my head: *two half slices of bread (100 calories), plus one tablespoon of mayo (100 calories), lettuce (5 calories), one ounce of turkey (45 calories), a half bag of chips (around 140)...*

This is the captivity of anxiety: rhythmic measuring, purging, dieting, binging, all in the name of control and approval. The standard for physical approval was instilled in me at a very young age. Being beautiful was the only way to be successful. Tainted with twists and lies and toxic femininity, the little blue house that this life brought me into came with ribbons and bows and flowers bound to my brainlessly bald newborn head. Pretty, pretty-little-girl. Hearing those words alone could bring me to the toilet bowl, chugging salt water down my throat in an attempt to lubricate bringing back up my lunch. Nothing humbles you like your own vomit splashing back up into your face after you finally flush away your accomplishment. A mother's love comes in an assortment of flavors, all sugar-free. ❀



Art by KELSEY GILLIAM

## YOUR CAREFUL, LITTLE PARASITES

by MARIA CORREA

I'm alone. The room is dark, and the shadows of objects I know are there fill up the spaces around me. But I am alone, I keep reminding myself. The sound of my own breathing terrifies me, and I shut my eyes tightly, pushing them into the back of my skull before feeling tiny, parasitic organisms crawling through my body. I'm alone. There is no one there. Please fall asleep.

Everything shifts when my mind starts to wonder if tonight will be just like every other night. Then I feel a shadow crawl up my body and its eyes begin to swallow me whole. Just keep them shut, and you'll feel better in the morning.

It makes me wonder: do you ever feel the way I do?

As part of our ritual, we spent all morning playing, and by the end of it, my chest was heaving for an adequate amount of air to calm my struggling lungs. My skin glistened with a thick coat of sweat from the summer heat, my breasts were swollen and sore with their continued adolescent development, and

my legs ached from standing for so long. I fell onto the weathered armchair behind me. You sat next to me on a matching recliner, and I closed my eyes as I gave in to my exhaustion. I must have stayed there for a long time, or maybe not, but I had yet to fall asleep.

One breath after another, the world around me began to fade. Then, there was a touch—shaky and hesitant. My body suddenly gained awareness when a hand pulled at the collar of my shirt, peeling it away from my chest. I wanted to open my eyes. I should have opened my eyes, stopped whatever was going on, but I felt myself being tucked farther and farther away into my mind. My mouth tasted sour, my throat swelled up with a noise, or a word, or a scream that my body stubbornly swallowed down, and my nose caught your scent: bitter, musky, sweaty. It made me dizzy. The recliner shrieked whenever you moved, but I remained as stiff as a board. My emotions and my logic battled endlessly for dominance in my thoughts, but neither came to my rescue. I just sat there, begging myself to move, to open my eyes, to scream, but there was nothing. I could feel the air vibrating around me, the fabric of the armchair digging into my skin as my body sunk deeper into its creases.

Finally, there was a noise. It was so faint, yet it had broken through the constricted muscles in my throat, ripping through my vocal cords and scratching them raw. The recliner squealed in alarm as you jerked back. My head continued to spin. My heart was bursting from how quickly it was beating, waste-filled blood rushing through my body while my lungs refused to take in any significant amount of air. My head fizzled as my thoughts reduced themselves to nothing, my senses deciding to follow suit. One last conscious breath and another careful tug peeled the protective layers of my skin.

*The coolness from the refrigerator made me sigh, my body grateful for a break from the hot air.*

You liked it, didn't you? Did you like feeling my skin beneath the very tips of your fingers as you pulled my shirt away from my breasts, or was it the view that amazed you the most? It makes me wonder: would you ever feel the way I do?

I didn't remember falling asleep or anything prior to that, but I did feel slightly uncomfortable in my own skin once I woke up. I stood up from the armchair and walked to the kitchen to get myself a drink. The coolness from the refrigerator made me sigh, my body grateful for a break from the hot air. There was a feeling in my chest, almost like a tiny organism biting at the inflaming nerves within my left breast. It produced a heat that invited me to scratch at my skin until it bloomed red. A rash, I thought, from sweating so much, that was it.

However, once you—my dearest cousin—ran into the kitchen, my body flinched, and the parasite crawled closer to my epidermis. I continued to scratch, blood vessels bubbling on my skin. I didn't trust you. I didn't know why. We decided to play again, but it wasn't the same as before. I was distant, quiet, unfocused. It felt like my body was afraid to be that close to you, but I couldn't understand why. I must have had a nightmare then, I settled upon.

Daylight faded, and my body and mind finally agreed that, despite my physical discomfort, it was time to sleep. I laid down next to you like I always did. I was going to sleep. I needed to sleep. I begged my mind to let me sleep. Then, I felt your eyes caressing the buttons of my favorite baby-blue pajamas. Your heavy breaths licked my chin, creating a thick layer of sweat that dripped down to my collarbone while the bed moaned with your movement. I was frozen, stuck in the rotting corpse that was my body. Feather-like touches popped the buttons open, one by one, with a grace seemingly acquired through practice. One breath, then another, and it only grew hotter and more sporadic.

You were enjoying yourself, weren't you?

I tasted something foul crawl up my esophagus, felt something warm flow out of me and into my panties, and the air around me suddenly filled with a pungent smell of vomit and urine. Small parasites caressed my body, every pore receiving their attention before they dug into me and buried themselves within my gut. Run, attack, hide, do something, I begged myself. But my body laid still, afraid that even a singular breath would make things worse.

Tears welled up in my closed eyes. I fought to open them. I needed to open them. I shouldn't have opened them. I saw you there, through the crack between my lids, wide-eyed, smiling, panting, blushing. Your eyes glowed in the dark as the parasites you had implanted into my body eagerly consumed me. Everything became blurry, my eyelids grew heavy, and my mind and body became numb to everything but the tiny organisms pulsating within my dermis.

And I feel you—watching me, touching me to remove the barrier between my body and your eyes. When do you think the feeling goes away? Do you think it'll ever go away? It makes me wonder: would you ever understand how I feel?

I opened my eyes and was greeted with your sleeping form across from me, your soft breaths barely touching my chest. You looked so young, so innocent. The buttons of my blouse were undone only enough to reveal my chest, and I suddenly became acutely aware that my breasts spilled over the fabric of my outgrown bra. There was a burning sensation in them, a tenderness without any physical origin. There was no bruising, no residue, only the feeling of organisms settling under the layers of my skin.

"Titi, I wanted to tell you something." I knew she responded, but my ears only caught the sound of my screams within my head. Tell her, tell her, they repeated, echoing loud enough to make my head spin. Before I could finish my story, she interrupted me. "Oh, he's a growing boy. Of course things are going to be awkward between you two. I'm sure he'll grow out of it soon." Her smile was wide, bright, and I mimicked it, but I felt those much, that was it.



little parasites rip a hole twice their size into my heart. I could hear them cackling as their ejaculations coursed through my body.

What do you think would've happened if I told on you then? Did you ever think of that? Because I sure did. I would have loved to see you thrown out of the house, taken away—far away—from me where you could never fantasize about fucking me again. But I feared that I would be cast aside, humiliated, and belittled by everyone in the family—just as your mother had done.

My life is now haunted by your eyes, your hands, your smile—by the careful, little parasites you forced within me. It makes me wonder: would you ever fucking listen to how I feel?

Years had gone by before I saw you again. You were still dreadfully skinny, but you had finally grown taller than me. Your hug was respectfully short and familiarly tight. I was nervous and the organisms chewing through layers of scar tissue reminded me why I felt nauseated, but I refused to let my thoughts prevent me from reconnecting with you. I had convinced myself that it had all been a nightmare, a projection of what men had already done to me. You had situated yourself in that weathered recliner, but I found myself unable to sit in the matching armchair. We sat across one another in a different part of the house, one I felt was distant enough from my nightmares as we caught each other up on our lives. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, you interrupted me.

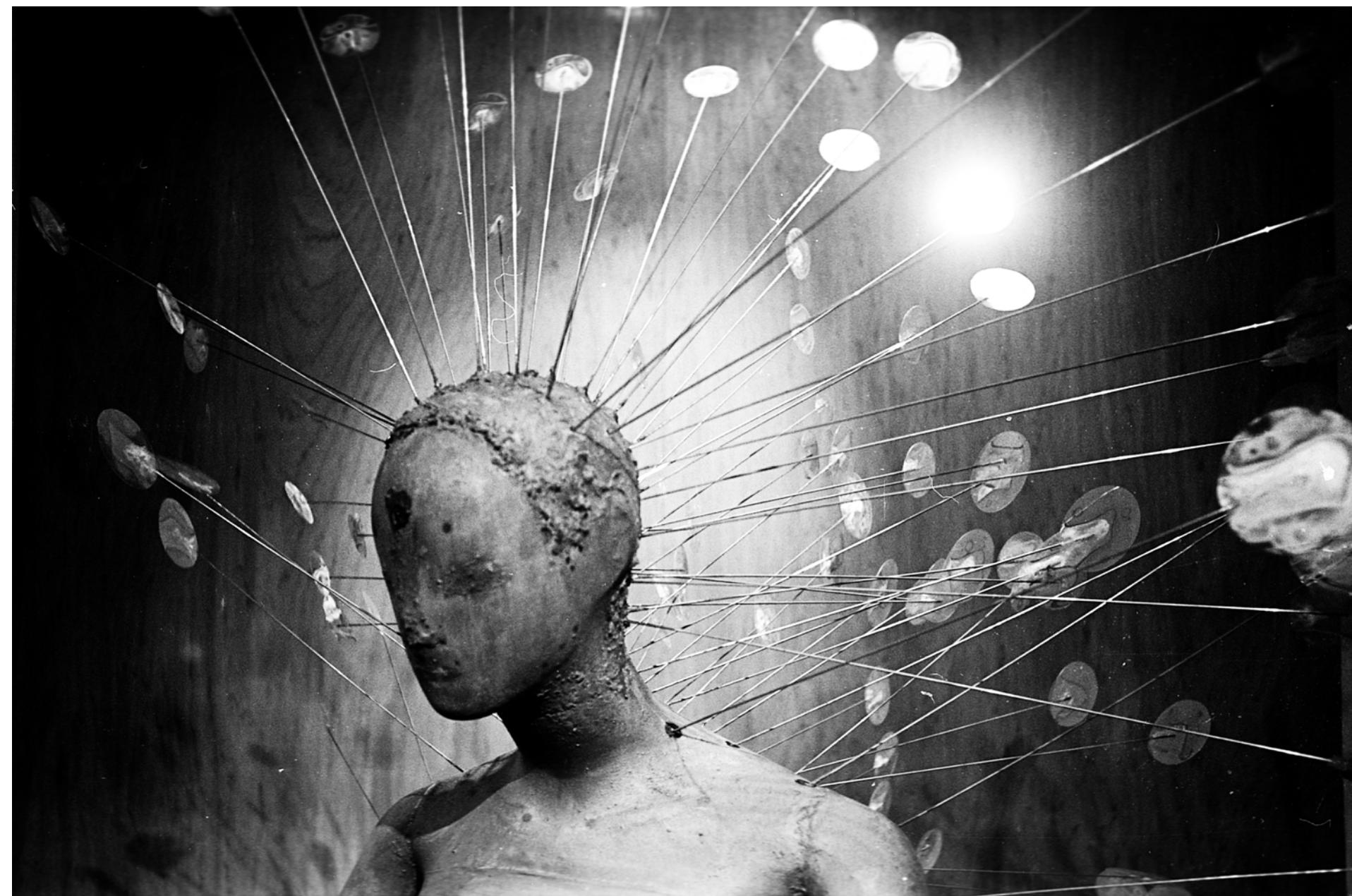
“I would fuck you, but I know that it’s wrong. Still, I feel things when I think of you.”

My eyes widened, the palms of my hands started to sweat, my heart began to beat rapidly, my breasts ached, and I felt your tiny parasites shove themselves down to the walls within my vagina. They feasted on the shedding linings of my uterus, panting with the impish grin you mimicked across from me. I laughed. I forced myself to laugh. The world crumbled and dissolved around me as your eyes glowed brightly. This wasn’t possible. Out of all people, why were you doing this to me?

“Fuck, you’re hot.”

I couldn’t move away from my seat. I was trapped in my own body, but I couldn’t feel my nails digging into the skin on my thighs. It was happening all over again. Your pants, your fingers, your groans, it all came back in a flash that swallowed me whole. I wasn’t real, this wasn’t real. Nothing around me felt real anymore. I’m a whore, I thought as I examined my shorts and t-shirt in hopes to cover the rotting flesh that enticed you.

Do you know what it was like to sleep after that? Every night, like the nights before, I would feel parasites roaming through my body while your faint breathing slipped into my ears. You’d think it would only haunt me at night, but they continued to feast during the day—calculating my every move and pulling me away from life. The little parasites would make my breasts throb, forcing me to scratch marks into my chest. I would try to peel the layers of



contaminated, rotting skin from my body, but the disease you somehow infected me with only grew worse as I tried to rid myself of your remnants.

You are always there, in the back of my mind, in my consciousness, in my life. You live your day to day free from the parasites you, my friends, my exes, boys in school, strangers, and pedophilic men have implanted within me throughout the years. You don't hear their whispered reminders that no matter how someone is related to you and no matter how much they say they love you, they could always hurt, objectify, and forcefully take parts of you for their enjoyment.

The parasites you left in me burn my skin, punish me while I write down what my mind constantly forces myself to relive. They break through my nerves, make me numb to everything for months on end as I suffer in silence. They whisper the nauseating words you gifted me and try to convince me that you were merely a child. They remind me you are younger than me. They criticize me for not fighting harder against you, even though at the time I barely knew what consent meant. They laugh at me, telling me you were simply looking to fulfill your sexual curiosities as teenagers tend to do. They screamed at me that you were my cousin, my brother, and, at times, even my child.

The memory of you entices your parasites within my body to tear at my flesh, ligaments, muscles, bones, nerves, everything I could possibly have left. They mock me, hoping to watch me shred my skin into pieces again. They fool me, making me believe I'm a whore, a toy, a thing made purely to be fucked into. I struggle to connect the boy I loved with the monster that pumped its spawn within me. I struggle to remember what exactly happened that night. I struggle to remember who I was before you brought your sexuality to life.

While I seemingly convinced myself multiple times that I was worthless, broken, and replaceable, where were you?

Do you want to know what it's like to feel the way I do? I fear to touch my partners because I think my skin will contaminate them. I feel the parasites crawl up my throat and constrict me when anyone initiates intimacy with me, just as they do when I tentatively touch my flesh in a similar curiosity to yours. They eagerly whisper that those who treated me like a hole for them to fuck are simply curious about sex. Sex, a thing

that is supposed to intimate. Sex, a way to show your love for someone. Sex, my biggest source of discomfort. Sex is the thing I fear the most, for I fear the possibility that my lover's face could turn into yours.

And it makes me wonder: would you ever truly regret making me feel the way I do?

I sometimes forget that I no longer have to protect you. I forget that you miss me, as you've told our grandmother to relay to me. I forget what you've done. I forget your words. I even forget your name, but those two words, four syllables, eleven letters pull me back to those moments, and I wish someone had used them to pull you away.

While I am forced to live my life infested with parasites that bite, and screech, and roam under the layers of scar tissue I tried to pry them out of, your life goes on. The scars are still there—and will always be there—and the memories of you and all the other people that have taken advantage of me for their own pleasure still fucking haunt me to this day. You'll probably never hear about the suffering you've caused me. You'll probably never understand what it is like to live as a survivor of your curiosities. And you'll surely never comprehend how scared I am that there are others like me, who are forced to live with your careful, little parasites. ☀

*There was no bruising, no residue, only the feeling of organisms settling under the layers of my skin.*

# INDICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: A BARRIER ISLAND

by CLARA MASSEAU

Quadrats of boxed oysters and cultch multiply,  
wading deeper reveals no victory transect  
The estuary's opacity starves life of sunlight  
not even a shallow shoal grass can survive  
one mile east, the Atlantic

A sea turtle on the spoil island's sandy microplastics,  
land an inappropriate habitat for such –  
of course, now exposed, dead and decaying,  
smell and shell its only legacy  
an inlet away, the Atlantic

Kids, don't let the water above your necks  
swim, but not if you have a scratch, adults  
stay on shore, while their actions infiltrate the ecosystem  
The Indian River Lagoon teems with enteric bacteria  
a larger dump, the Atlantic

Swells and whitewash grow and swallow  
an already shrinking coast, sending heavy  
machinery to trample in and replace  
sand, but the indigeneity is lost indefinitely  
slowly sinking us, the Atlantic



# DISTANCE



Art by IONA BRUCE

by ANDREW MERRILL

Northwards, beyond the United States and Canadian border, caribou herds roam the length of the Canadian wilderness in search of living conditions. They graze these regions, taking time to lean over, sniff the ample amounts of lichen, and make their decision.

As herds of caribou cross into the eastern portion of Canada, they arrive in massive numbers. Each herd is no smaller than fifty thousand, with some containing more than one hundred thousand. These animals navigate arctic living conditions in the most spectacular of ways. On the tops of their heads sits an extraordinary rack of antlers coated in velvet. These beautiful members of the deer family exemplify exceptional unique traits. Their fur coats transform from a deep grey into a blazing shade of white in order to handle the frigid temperatures of northern Canada. The velvet that coats the spider web above the reindeer's forehead is filled with blood vessels that are vital to the growth of the deer's antlers.

Just south of the reindeer's migration path, flocks of Canadian geese begin to make their way to parts of the Midwestern United States. Breeding conditions in Canada just would not suffice for these creatures. They need warmer temperatures to incubate their egg and raise their young.

On the ground, these lanky birds may seem foolish and irritating, even plain stupid at times. Their necks flop around like wet noodles and when you step in their feces nothing seems more cathartic than grabbing one and swinging it around. However, in the air, a sphere in which humans are not present, these feathery creatures are impeccable. In order to survive, migratory species like geese are forced to travel extreme distances.

In their encyclopedia of science, authors Bill Friedman and Randall Frost state that "most species of goose undertake substantial migrations between their breeding and wintering grounds, in some cases traveling thousands of miles, twice yearly."<sup>1</sup> To do so, species such as the goose have adopted clever and indispensable tactics to complete these journeys effectively and efficiently.

A classic example of this is the iconic "V" that the goose travels in. Formations such as these improve flight efficiency for

<sup>1</sup>Freedman, Bill, and Randall Frost. "Geese." The Gale Encyclopedia of Science, edited by Katherine H. Nemeh and Jacqueline L. Longe, 6th ed., vol. 3, Gale, 2021, pp. 1922-1925. Gale In Context: Environmental Studies.

migratory birds. By improving the aerodynamics of their flight formation, geese and other birds are able to conserve much more energy, making for a safer expedition.

Competition lurks behind the lines of animal migration and its essence. The animal kingdom competes. For everything. Mother nature forces animals to compete on a level so much higher than humans must. To pass one's bloodline, to be retained in future generations, and help your offspring flourish, the fittest, most well equipped of the available competitors will dominate others to blossom into a stronger, more powerful species.

For example, as gazelles cross African plains in search of shade and water, dominant packs of lions prowl and ransack herds of these deer-like creatures. After taking a couple down, the assertive males in the group drag the bloody carcass across the sand like dirt. As they exit a nearby river, a crocodile lunges out and snaps off part of a gazelle's lower leg. The lions rejoin the rest of their pack. The females are offered the first pickings of the gazelles while the cubs were forced to watch, they were still young.

In an article written by Xiangtao Li, Jie Zhang, and Minghao Yin, they explain an animal migration algorithm that explains this to more extent.<sup>2</sup> Neighboring individuals play a significant role in the migration process. As groups move in excessive numbers, the authors state that three rules apply, "move in the same direction as your neighbors; remain close to your neighbors; and avoid collisions with your neighbors."

Species that travel in herds, such as zebras, flamingos, and buffalo have complex guidelines that play out during the migration process. Distance relative to neighboring members of the herd impacts their pilgrimage in several ways. Area traveled, time traveled, and the motion in which the group is moving in are all factors that play into migration tendencies. The most critical factor that animal position controls when migrating is the position of others relative to the examined individual. Migratory species position themselves specifically around others to track their motion and keep track of their migratory path. Because of this tracking method, herds and packs of animals essentially collaborate to maneuver each other in the correct direction.

2. Li, X., Zhang, J. & Yin, M. Animal migration optimization: an optimization algorithm inspired by animal migration behavior. *Neural Comput & Applic* 24, pp. 1867–1877 (2014).



Some of the most beautiful and complicated creatures on earth have migration cycles that humans will never fully be able to comprehend. The monarch butterfly, humpback whale, and great white shark are just some of the animals that participate in migration cycles.

In subtropical waters, like those off the coast of Florida and in the Caribbean, the manta ray slices through the current. It's making its way north; Chesapeake Bay is its destination. The ray begins in light blue, teal, and turquoise waters. As it makes its way further up the coastline, deeper shades of blue and green overwhelm the once turquoise-waves. Hundreds of yards away the rays are seen leaping from the water, and white caps form. Suddenly the waves grow even larger before they whack the shoreline, maybe even giving some surfers a ride before they do so. Just below the surface, a giant manta ray spreads its wings to take off, with a thirty foot wingspan, they throw themselves from underwater and shatter the surface of the Atlantic. As it breaches through the air, a shiny white belly and eight gills are the only things visible. It reaches nine feet and shatters the surface again, this time it disappears. The nighttime reaches and as the moon paints its light over the ocean, the mantas take note. A full moon lights up the night and bioluminescent phytoplankton swarm beneath the surface. The moon will begin to wane soon. Heidi Dewar conducted a study regarding manta ray positioning habits and feeding sites along this certain migration path.<sup>3</sup> She recorded her observations off the coast of Komodo, an island adjacent to Indonesia, and found that "The moon and tides affected visits at both north and south Komodo." She continued to say that "manta ray abundance was higher when currents were strongest during full and new moons."

The two most important reasons animals participate in migratory patterns are to obtain a resource that is not accessible at their current location, and to find ideal breeding environments.

Human intervention with the environment has proved to affect animal migration cycles in several different ways. Environmental patterns have been instilled into the instinctive nature of all species that migrate; this plays into their directional intelligence in terms of their destination. Frank Seebacher and Eric Post use an example regarding migratory birds and state that "Arrival date and hatching date are phenological markers in migrating birds, for example, that can be strongly affected by global warming."<sup>4</sup> Environmental adjustments such as temperature affect all migratory species, not only birds. Changes in climate can lead to species changing their nesting areas and moving to different regions that include habitats that cater to the needs of these specific species. This can lead to food scarcities as well as deterioration within the habitat itself because of the lack of biodiversity needed to maintain the habitat. ☀

3. Dewar, H., Mous, P., Domeier, M. et al. Movements and site fidelity of the giant manta ray, *Manta birostris*, in the Komodo Marine Park, Indonesia. *Mar Biol* 155, pp. 121–133 (2008).

4. Seebacher, Frank, and Eric Post. "Climate Change Impacts on Animal Migration." *Climate Change Responses*, vol. 2, 2015. ProQuest.



# CAN THE MIGHTY BANKHAR DOGS OF MONGOLIA SAVE THE STEPPE?

by BEAU FARRIS

march comes in like a lion. bit by bit  
its paws linger. partially in-between  
february's terracotta warriors and brown couches  
who thrifited themselves. and parched green clay  
conversely, the palms of feet smack hard  
wood floors. eye-lids and known faces  
and grooves in the sidewalk. once again  
acquaint themselves with melted snow  
many last names are changed to gardener  
watering cans are inverted. rusted  
beside wheelbarrow chickens. now  
drive-through concerts escort this sickness  
away from used bookstores selling ocean views.  
and it goes out like a lamb





## STATE OF BEING

by JAMIE LAMMERS

Here comes that feeling again. Like you're vicariously living through yourself? Is that even possible? It must be if you're feeling it. Is this dissociation? Or are you overanalyzing your Google searches from the previous week? Should you even be self-diagnosing right now? Or is that nothing but an overreaction? Most likely a desperate attempt to put words that don't exist to feelings that can't be described.

You thought you'd found the solution to your distress through the media you consumed and related with. Comedians singing about the funny feeling that comes when you hear distressing news or get absorbed in scrolling through Instagram. Protagonists in musicals acting debilitatingly anxious in a way that you thought was exclusive to the way you acted, convincing you that someday, you will be found. Movies from the 2010s, movies from the '90s, even movies from the late '40s that somehow manage to portray anxiety and depression and methods of dealing with mental health in unexpected ways.

Even those can't fill you now.

Even those can't stop the never-ending questions running through your head.

Am I doing enough?

Am I living my life to the fullest potential?

Am I experiencing every moment as I should?

Or am I just moving along and making my youth disappear in front of me?

Am I not taking the chances I should, making the friends I could, finding the experiences I would if I just got out more?

Am I thinking too much?

Or, God forbid, too little?

And why isn't there enough time or mental capacity to experience everything that can be experienced?

You walk down the hall of your apartment as you ponder these questions overwhelmed by their sheer magnitude. There's something about the way you usually see the world, both literally and metaphorically, that's changed at this moment. Before this, you saw the world as a beautiful place, a place of good people and exciting prospects. You probably didn't even think about how you processed the information put in front of your eyes. Now, you wonder if everything you've learned is a lie, if everything you've trusted is something you need to pull away from. You start walking down the stairs, suddenly processing the banister of the stairs, the white tile floor, your hands, arms, and legs moving, as more than just your surroundings. Before this, your brain processed the world in various angles and cuts, like a movie. Now, you start to process the world from your own POV, your own eyes. You're stuck in a single place in your mind, unable to escape as your thoughts slowly consume you, taking over as you realize what's happening to your perspective.

As you reach the bottom of the stairs and head for the front door of your apartment building, you wonder if you'll ever feel the same again. If there's ever anything that can be done about the way you feel right now. About the world, about life... about yourself. Are you in a dream that will end someday?

# CONTRIBUTORS

**SUSANNA ANDREWS** is a freshman at CU Boulder. Susanna is a Business major minoring in Art. Susanna also plays for the women's club lacrosse team.

**JENNY BROWN** is currently a freshman at CU Boulder majoring in Political Science. She's from Golden, Colorado and loves to play her trumpet. She is still, in fact, working on reading *The Silmarillion*.

**MADDIE CAMILLI** earned her BFA with a concentration in printmaking and ceramics. She enjoys every aspect of creating, and loves working with natural materials to incorporate them into clay, fiber work, illustration, and photography. She currently lives and works in Boulder.

**CAROLINE CAPPELLETTI** is a second-year English Literature student at the University of Colorado. She loves reading, writing Notes App poetry, and is obsessed with Carmen Maria Machado. You can find more of her work in Cornell's Rainy Day Magazine, Sunstroke Magazine, CU Honors Journal, and Walkabout Creative Arts Journal or on Instagram @waldenitwithyou.

**MARIA CORREA** was born and raised in the City of Witches in Puerto Rico. Due to the eager support of a high school teacher, she began to write poems, fiction, and essays. Writing soon became a way for her to accept and work through her trauma. She is now a senior majoring in Creative Writing and spends most of her time writing body horror, nonfiction essays, and poetry. Her biggest aspiration is that one day, she will pay her English teacher's kindness forward by helping her students find and express their voices.

**EMILY DIAZ** is a sociology major with minor work towards Peace, Conflict, and Security Studies. She has dedicated two years to working as a family services caseworker as she studies for her upcoming entry to law school in 2023. Emily is thrilled to have her work among many wonderful local artists and looks forward to continued contribution to the journal.

**JULIAN EBERT** is a film production major and award-winning video editor. He is a media manager for the CU Esports organization and works as a videographer for a real estate company based here in Colorado. He is an adamant video game connoisseur, part-time writer, self-proclaimed filmmaker, and lover of all things food. In the future, he hopes to develop his writing skills and publish more creative fiction.

**BEAU FARRIS** is a senior pursuing a double major in History and Creative Writing. He is the recipient of the Gentian Ascension Scholarship and the Jovanovich Imaginative Writing Scholarship and has been published in various journals. As a daily practice, he enjoys reading and writing poetry, and is creating a book-length collection titled 'Can Opener'. After obtaining his undergraduate degrees, he plans on pursuing an M.F.A. in poetry.

**KELSEY GILLIAM** is a Biochemistry graduate (May 2021). She is currently applying to PA school and working as a medical assistant. Kelsey is very passionate about continuing to

create art even if it is not directly related to her career path and enjoys using influences from her scientific background as inspiration for her art.

**KATIE GINSBURG** is studying studio art and advertising at CU Boulder.

**S.G. GREENE** is obsessed with writing about emotionally complex characters, the weight of time, and the vastness of the cosmos. S.G. is a non-traditional student embarking on a mission fueled by a love for storytelling. S.G. has come to CU Boulder to bring dreams to life through novels and film. S.G. has written nine novels, each in different states of editing. While quiet at heart, S.G.'s inner sanctum could not be any more different! Come take the deep dive!

**CODY FIELDS** grew up mostly in Houston, Texas, before moving to Boulder during high school. Cody doesn't regret moving, to say the least. Cody started at CU with a major in Astronomy, changed to Biology, and is strongly considering at least a minor in Creative Writing because Cody can't make decisions. Cody is often lost in thought, and Cody's hobbies center around fiction and fantasy: especially film, writing, role-playing games, and painting.

**IAN HALL** is a sophomore at CU studying Anthropology and Film. He joined Hindsight in the spring of 2022 and is hoping to continue working in similar creative spaces until someone catches on and stops him. Sometimes his brain works.

**BECKY HARKIN** is a multimedia artist, originally from the Chicagoland area. She currently studies at The University of Colorado, Boulder, where she is double majoring in Sociology and Studio Arts. Expecting to graduate in fall 2021, she is just now dipping her toes into published writing. All of her work is heavily influenced by her struggles from her eating disorder and childhood traumas. With aims to lead a creative life, she is looking forward to future artistic careers!

**ANNA HAYNES** is a senior majoring in journalism and political science with certificates in Writing and International Media. She is the former editor-in-chief of the CU Independent and currently one of two head editors of the University of Colorado Honors Journal. Her favorite hobbies include reading books, watching video essays, and making jewelry for her Etsy store. She hopes to pursue a career in publishing.

**JUSTIN HEIN** is a photographer from Boulder, Colorado. Justin does portrait photography professionally, and his other favorite kinds of photography include landscape, astrophotography, macro, architecture, and street. Aside from photography, Justin is a beekeeper, a mandolinist, and a double bassist. Justin is studying Integrative Physiology at CU Boulder.

**CAITLIN JOHNSON** is a Pueblo-born native attending the University of Colorado at Boulder to study Elementary Education as well as seeking minors in Theatre and Leadership Studies and is set to graduate in 2024. Within her community, Caitlin has served as a part of many local organizations. She enjoys volunteering through CU Boulder's Undergraduate Enrichment Programs and says that her greatest accomplishment was being awarded the

# CONTRIBUTORS

esteemed Colorado Boettcher Foundation Scholarship in 2020. In the future, Caitlin looks forward to sharing her knowledge with elementary students.

**EVI JUDGE** is an undergraduate student pursuing a double-major in Linguistics and Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences with a minor in Computer Science. As a person who has always enjoyed writing, Evi wants to describe her childhood home as if on a walk with the reader. She invites the reader to find their own favorite spot in this essay.

**MELIA HAWTHORNE KLINGLER** is a high school senior currently studying abroad in Amman, Jordan. Previously, she has lived in Costa Rica, Mexico, and Chicago, and her experiences in these different places have inspired her poetry and other writings. Melia is passionate about using writing to create change and uplift the voices of the next generation.

**JAMIE LAMMERS** is a current sophomore at CU Boulder with a major in Humanities and a minor in Music. He loves everything about art and humanity at large: theater, music, writing, art, film, storytelling, history, culture, psychology, and fun facts in general. He has been writing seriously since his junior year of high school, around which time he started writing for The Mountain Ear. He has been officially writing for the newspaper, which covers news events in the Peak to Peak area of Colorado, since April 2019.

**NOAH LUSTI** is a film student at CU Boulder who loves writing.

**CLARA MASSEAU** is a senior at CU Boulder, graduating with a degree in Environmental Studies and Creative Writing. Clara grew up in Vero Beach, Florida, a dynamic environment squished between the Atlantic and the Indian River Lagoon. Both systems are facing major environmental changes. Clara is continuing her education in marine conservation, resource management, and policymaking to focus on the marine and terrestrial ecosystems of Florida and beyond. Clara wants to use writing to tell stories and convey the natural world and climate change through a more artistic lens as well to accompany future research and fieldwork.

**ASHLEY McCULLER** is based in Dallas, Texas, Ashley's artwork has been displayed in various art competitions and galleries such as the Fort Worth Country Day Black and White Images Exhibit, Young American Talent, and Blue Print Gallery. Ashley was a part of her school's visual arts department for six years. At CU Boulder, Ashley is pursuing art as her major and plans to attend grad school for art. Ashley one day hopes to work as an art curator, as well as do commissions.

**ANDREW MERRILL** is currently a sophomore at CU Boulder. Andrew is from Salt Lake City, Utah, and started at CU Boulder in the fall of 2020. Andrew loves to write and has started to focus more on studies in this field. Andrew is looking to major in Journalism and join the Communications school.

**CLAYTON MONTGOMERY** graduated from the University of Colorado in the spring of 2021, having studied creative writing and advertising. He has since moved to the Spanish

Basque Country, where he is teaching English and working on his writing. He one day hopes to publish a novel and a book of his photographs.

**ALLISON NOWELS** is an artist and photographer from Los Angeles, California. She found her interest in photography from her father, a professional location scout, and her interest in drawing from her aunt, an illustrator for adult coloring books. She enjoys finding beauty in everyday life, and capturing it in whichever medium she can. When she isn't creating, she is likely to be found inventing conspiracy theories or walking her two cats.

**ELIJAH PETTET** is a fourth-year in the Cinema Studies program. Photography is more of a hobby for Elijah, although he loves capturing beautiful things with his lens.

**KATE ROBINSON** is a senior at the University of Colorado, Boulder where she is studying media studies and journalism. She is currently a junior movie news writer for MXDWN Entertainment. Her favorite hobbies include writing, reading, fashion, and riding horses.

**NATALIE SCHOENHALS** is a Mathematics major with a love of music. She spends most of her time as an intern performing data analysis and finishes her day in aerial dance classes. She enjoys going on walks around Boulder, playing the flute, and reading. In the future, she hopes to travel the world and build musical instruments or pioneer research in the applications of data sonification.

**ADLER SHANNON** is a 2021 graduate of CMCI's Media Production program. He currently works as an editor for the media production company Boulder Media House, working with commercial brands to create memorable advertisements, while also applying to Master's programs for directing and screenwriting.

**TASHA SMITH** is an artist and student in her junior year at CU Boulder. She has always had a passion for creating, whether that be illustrative art or written works. She grew up in Colorado and loves hiking and experiencing the world around her. She loves complex things. She hopes that her work, above all, makes you think.

**CHRISTINA WILLIAMS** is focusing her studies on English Literature and getting a minor in Business. Writing has always been her favorite outlet, and she has always found beauty in small parts of life. When she is not writing, she can be found practicing yoga and reading her favorite books. She believes that life is something to be documented, and writing is the perfect way to express the emotions that come with it.

**DANIEL WORKMAN** is a CU alum that obtained his AAS from the Isaacson School for Professional Photography. Although he is attracted to all forms of art, he focuses his energy into mediums such as writing, photography, filmmaking, and songwriting. His interests in culture and anthropology strongly influence the work that he creates. His accomplishments include work with Pulitzer Prize winning photographers at the Eddie Adams Workshop in New York.



## LOOKING AHEAD GOING NATIONAL AND LAUNCHING CHANGING SKIES

HINDSIGHT now welcomes submissions from far beyond our home on Colorado's Front Range. We'll still publish only previously unpublished creative nonfiction, but now welcome writing and art from outside CU Boulder. Student staff will continue producing a gorgeous print journal every Spring, including only whatever local submissions make it through blind review, with most of that only online. We're going national—which these days means international, at least with English language content, or writing with en face translation. The journal that started in 2013 as Journal Twenty Twenty is just too good to keep to ourselves.

Unlike our journal, which is too good to keep local, climate change proves too bad to stay local. In 2013, Climate change left rain-swollen clouds stuck overhead in Colorado long enough to wash people out of homes on hilltops far from canyons, carrying away whole houses, killing eight people, and costing two billion dollars in damage. Last year, long rains replaced enough of our regular springtime snowstorms east of the Rockies to grow grassland fuel that dried through a summer with fewer monsoons than usual, then a beautiful fall with no snow, into December still without snow. Fire started on the western edge of our beloved "open space" on the second-to-last day of 2021, 115-mile-an-hour winds blew the flames east, burning over a thousand buildings, most of them homes, most to the ground.

While we will continue publishing writing on sustainability in HINDSIGHT, we're launching a new title, solely devoted to writing and art on the climate crisis. Along with student writing and art from CU Boulder, we will take submissions from beyond our literary and artistic postage stamp. CHANGING SKIES will feature creative nonfiction as memoir and other forms, but also include interviews with and profiles of experts on, and those suffering from, the effects of this ongoing threat to the earth and all its inhabitants. We'll mourn what's irrevocably lost, but we'll also look for the positive changes humans can learn to make more often. Mission Zero, funded by CU alum Scott King, is a series of initiatives to help CU students across campus fight climate change. This project funds not only our new title, but also students in Engineering working on fuel cell exchange for sustainable transportation, and business start-ups in green building. These initiatives will reinforce CU Boulder's place at the forefront of research and teaching to address the climate crisis—but Mission Zero also aims for a larger audience, to see other universities grow their commitment to fighting climate change. We'll interview a professor who lost her home, but we'll also profile those kids working to create a future we can live with—even through an uncertain future. After we publish teasers on its own website, look for our annual print issue of this new title every Fall, to debut soon, as CHANGING SKIES.

—Jay Ellis, Faculty Advisor

