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HUE
NORTHERN ECLECTA
NO. 16

| C O N C E P T

Established as Carbon World in 1995 and rebranded in 2007 as Northern Eclecta, this journal was created with the intent of representing the creative talents of North Dakota State University undergraduates. Over the years the journal has featured fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and photography, with the goal of representing a more diverse collection of talents and interests. The name Northern Eclecta is a name meant to embody our geographic region and eclectic mix of artistic work. Our symbol is a species of moth named “Bacculatric eclecta.”

In recent years the journal has expanded to include submissions from the community, including faculty and alumni, but this year especially our team has branched out beyond the Fargo Moorhead area. Another new idea to this year’s journal is that we have expanded our submission criteria to include other mediums of creativity like digital print and painting. This year’s team has also implemented technology, as you will see through the use of QR codes in the journal, which direct you to the Northern Eclecta website that showcases our longer works of writing and extended content. Northern Eclecta continues the legacy of promoting creativity and advocating the arts in our community. As you read through Volume 16 of Northern Eclecta, we hope you will appreciate and enjoy this manifestation of artistic imagination.

| M I S S I O N

Northern Eclecta is North Dakota State University’s annual literary journal and is dedicated to publishing diverse and creative voices regardless of genre or background.

| TO THE READERS . . .

It is with utmost excitement to present the sixteenth volume of Northern Eclecta. This year's theme is "Hue, Color Your Story"; an interpretative theme left for the readers to color the pages with art and writing. We wanted to pick a theme that was unique and exploratory. People in their everyday lives associate color with emotions. Red signifies anger, blue is a nod to sadness, and so on. Another reason we decided on the name of the title in specific was that "hue" can be seen as a play on words with "you". This allows our journal to center on the author's and artists' individuality of emotions through a variety of colors.

The journal is split up into three sections, warm hues, cool hues, and neutral hues. Each contributor has identified a singular color that best represents their piece. The journal follows the flow of the rainbow, starting with red and ending with black. You will find pieces in our neutral section that are categorized with the color white such as "Rainbow" by Hannah Khan and "The Kaleidoscope Of Eyes Burned Into My Memory" by Sara Sabharwal, where you, the reader, get to visualize the multitude of colors conveyed through the writing.

This journal is not a literary journal based on the seven colors of the rainbow; it is based on hues found within those seven colors. There are over one-hundred shades of pink, each very similar – yet so different. The only thing that makes the hue different from the next, is how the wavelength of the light is refracted back to our eyes. Unironically, the same thing can be thought of in writing and art. The class would read one piece and present a multitude of differing perspectives. We hope that you interact with the pieces and find differing themes, imagery, and look beyond the one identifying color.

Just like with writing, not all art has to be colorful to invoke powerful emotions through color. Such as "passing by #12" by Maria Brien, which is a black and white photography piece. Regardless of the "colorless" photograph, one can imagine

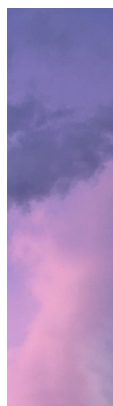
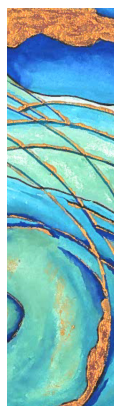
the green dusted on the leaves and the overcast cloudy gray skies in the picture. You can find a variety of black and white images for you to visually “color in” the art. Traditionally, the journal has had more writing than art, however, this year we were able to make half of the pieces in the journal, art. Most of the art pieces are accompanied by a like color. “Serenity” by Yuki Coyle, an oil painting, can be found next to the poem by S.J. Williamson, “Body of Water, One I Love”; both pieces are categorized under blue, and share common themes of waves.

At the end of the day, I wanted this journal to be a labor of love and creativity. I believe that we have done that. I wanted to open this journal and feel their emotions through their pieces. To no avail, we received over 200 submissions all associated with a color. In my past two years with Northern Eclecta, I have never seen such a magnitude of submissions – something I would not have been able to do without the class. I thank everyone who helped make this journal a reality. Finally, thank you to each contributor for being vulnerable with us.

Thank you for letting us color our story,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Luna M. Zauhar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Luna" is written in a large, elegant script. The middle initial "M." is smaller and more compact. The last name "Zauhar" is written in a similar cursive style, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

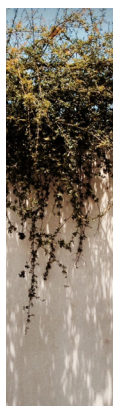
Luna M. Zauhar



CONTENTS

WRITING

Lucky Hannah Olson	3
My First Sunset Without You Sydney Larson	5
Misted Emily Nouv	7
Harm Unlimited (Excerpts) Austin-Alexius Klein	10
Aftermath Thomas Mehrer	15
Pinned Cyan Coello	17
Twenty-One Tea Towels and a Bottle of Whiskey Jennifer Sheets	21
My Favorite Color Marie Sayler	24



ART

4

Love for Grandma
Mysha Wenzel

9

Growth
Summer Hovanec

16

Aftermath
Thomas Mehrer

20

3 of Swords
Winnie Weninger

23

Citrus
Allie Jo Brines

25

Breath of Autumn
Brandi Malarkey

27

Quiet
Kent Kapplinger

31

Ukraine's Sunflower
Winnie Weninger

W R I T I N G

Beneath the Surface Monika Sauer	26
I am Asian, I am Human HảiVy Từ Châu	28
Evangelicalism Ruby Richard	33
The Color of Feminism Kayla Jones	35
Gilded Promises McKenzie Salyers	37
My Sister is Working Emily Nouv	38
Yellow Monika Sauer	39
Words of Encouragement Emily Nouv	40
¡Sí, Se Puede! Luna Zauhar	41
The Meanings of Red	44
The Lottery Ticket Emily Nouv	45
When One Stops to Think Monika Sauer	48
Best Friend Marie Sayler	51
Along a Forest Path Monika Sauer	53

ART

- 32 Daffodils
Brady Bergeson
- 47 Bird on Net
Anthony Faris
- 49 I Wish You Could Read Me
Rachel L. Luebke
- 50 Renewed
Brandi Malarkey
- 52 Jordan
Austin-Alexius Klein
- 54 C. sexgutta fabricius
Beth Twomey
- 57 Inverted Monarch
Brandi Malarkey
- 58 Caverns of Ice
Mysha Wenzel
- 62 Serenity
Yuki Coyle
- 70 Sky
Kylene Kubas
- 99 On The Edge #12
Maria Brien
- 103 Passing By
Maria Brien
- 110 Badlands
Jenni Lavin
- 114 Will You Be My Yellow
Sydney Ulrich

W R I T I N G

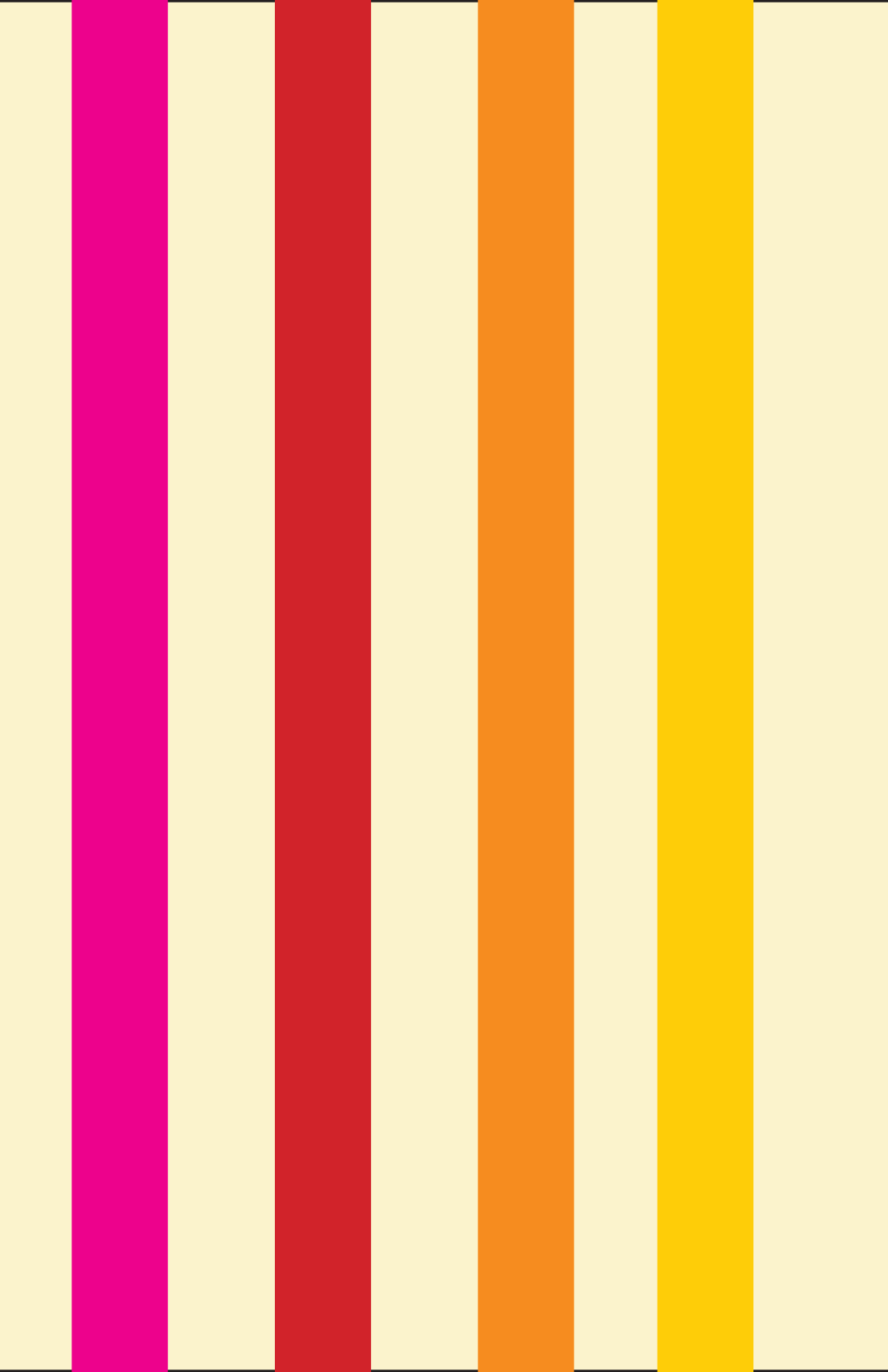
The Color of My Grief Hannah Slater	55
Body of Water, One I Love S.J. Williamson	59
The Incident In The Village Jake Willisims	63
The Jeweler and the Diamond Nick Steinbrecher	71
Grandpa Mike Ruby Richard	75
Flashbacks of Standing Rock Austin- Alexius Klein	77
Spaces Cameron Bauder	87
Sob Stories Austin- Alexius Klein	87
The Experiment S.J. Williamson	95
I'm Here Again Jenni Lavin	100
The Lonley Stone Max Borman	104
The Kaleidoscope Of Eyes Burned Into My Memory Sara Sabharwal	111
Rainbow Hannah Khan	113
Island of Exile William Heinzen	116

ART

- 115 Shadow
Anthony Faris
- 130 No Justice, No Peace
Emma Zauhar
- 132 Golden Doodles
Lucas Belanger

WRITING

- 124 What We Hide Within
Cole Kralieck
- 129 Quote
Clara Kranz
- 129 What We Can Not See
Clara Kranz
- 129 Wind
Clara Kranz
- 131 Morse Code
Reign Wegscheid
- 133 Uzma
Aiden Akkerman
- 133 Window Story
Aiden Akkerman
- 134 The Lonesome Goodbye
Aiden Akkerman



W A R M

P I N K S

R E D S

O R A N G E S

Y E L L O W S

LUCKY

Hannah Olson

How lucky am I to experience heartbreak
Lucky to have felt the warmth of your touch
Only euphoria can cause this ache

The thought of you kept me awake
Of how one simple look could make me blush
How lucky am I to experience heartbreak

We agreed we both made mistakes
And being together was just too much
Only euphoria can cause this ache

What we had was never fake
Finally built trust, never judged
How lucky am I to experience heartbreak

The highs and lows I could never escape
I would never trade for another rush
Only euphoria can cause this ache

I'm moving on, but there's feelings I'll never shake
Maybe you'll understand too with this small crush
How lucky am I to experience heartbreak
Only euphoria can cause this ache



“LOVE FOR GRANDMA”

Mysha Wenzel, Watercolor

MY FIRST SUNSET WITHOUT YOU

Sydney Larson

The sunset dripped pure fire the day you left
beams of golden smoke mingled with the tangerine background.
The world felt like it was caving in as you fled my apartment.
After sitting in shock while you drove further and further away from me
I ran away too.

Roads receded from view as memories sped their way
through watered down thoughts.
Remembering the past three years with rose-tinted glasses
ignoring the red flames that hid in the corners.
The tears didn't stop until the sun was gone
when the sky no longer reflected the inner monologue of my head.
After three years of sunsets
this was my first without you.

That's when the anger hit.
All-consuming fury that flooded the blanket of charred nightfall
only the reflection of headlights breaking its silence.
The same stars that we wished upon in Washington
now look down on me in pity from North Dakota.
How stupid of a girl must you be to think you got it right on the first try?

My throat turned raw from screaming in my car
speeding down the interstate uncaring of the outcome.
Once upon a time you and I had both traveled that interstate
to get to my home.
To see my family.

Now I walk into my parents' house
dark except for the flashing light of the TV.
Ignoring the soothing words of a mother heartbroken over the loss
of her perfect future son-in-law:
It doesn't make sense. You should check on him.
You were best friends. He had no reason to leave you.
Only he did.
And I did too
but I'm too stubborn to abandon a fight I once struggled to win.

Soft skin against scratchy sheets
my mind itched with the reasons you might have left.
The hidden ones you covered behind words of self-blame.
The questions you avoided in the chance you'd slip up
revealing your true rationale.
I didn't need protection
I needed the truth.
Don't I deserve the chance to grow as much as you do?
Sleeping felt like a present I didn't deserve.

The sunrise bloomed with perverse purples and pinks
Birds chirping in idyllic ways only animals who have monogamous lovers
do.
Watching the glowing horizon spread across the hills and river into my
house
I began to lay back down.
Falling asleep to the gentle touch of the sun's comfort
pretending it was you
hoping yesterday was just a nightmare.

Fast forward nine months, and I can now look at the sunset
not thinking of you.
I can look at the stars
barely remembering their pity.
I can drive at night
forgetting the blinding rage that coursed through my veins.

Over the past months I've come to a realization:
The sun will always set for the rest of time
losing you is never going to change that.
The sun doesn't care that you left
and quite frankly neither do I.
I may never fully heal from you
but I can't wait to have more sunsets without you.

MISTED

Emily Nouv

Inspired by Joy Harjo's "She Had Horses"

I carry persistent skeletons with names like "Thoughts."

Thoughts that are jars of silt.

Thoughts that are oceans of lake water.

Thoughts that are ice and down feathers.

Thoughts that are portraits painted from blood.

Thoughts that are volcanos and might erupt any second.

I carry stubborn ideas.

Ideas that loved to camp.

Ideas that drank too much.

Ideas that pressed for attention.

Ideas that wept in their father's wings.

Ideas that swallowed hydrogen balloons.

I carry demanding secrets.

Secrets that begged for avoidance.

Secrets that hurled eggs at fragile windows.

Secrets that loved socializing with their friends.

Secrets that developed muscular, bronzed biceps.

Secrets that thought their discretion might keep them.

I carry resolute desires.

Desires that pardon their upbringing.

Desires that rid their skin marked as albino zebras.

Desires that sign their name on thousands of copies.

Desires that nurture new humans in matching pajamas.

Desires that stargaze once every year on the beach far away.

I carry tireless memories.

Memories that lied, that remain thick and cozy in their beds.

Memories that spoke only in their minds, that are desperate to come out.
Memories that lassoed innocent cattle, that ride on their high horses for cash.

Memories that breathed underwater, that discover a new universe when they are only kids.

Memories that managed to rescue him, that nestle in his arms and finger comb his hair as he cries.

I carry persistent skeletons with names like “Emotions.”

Emotions that aim at their trans brother, that are upset with themselves.
Emotions that aggravate each other, that can't decide between light and dark.

Emotions that are counterproductive, that keep digging themselves in a deep hollow.

Emotions that think they are plants, that make their vines grow and become tangled wilderness.

Emotions that whimper out of fear of the noise, that keep guns to defend themselves from nightmares.

I carry persistent skeletons that I intend to bury.

I carry persistent skeletons that I hope never die.



“GROWTH”

Summer Hovanec, Stain Glass

HARM UNLIMITED

- EXCERPTS -

Austin-Alexius Klein

1.

I was so afraid when I saw you
I did not get the chance yet, to bloom—
I hoped you would spare me
but you were looking right at me.
I did not need to bloom
for you to see I was beautiful.

2.

She used fake names, a fake ID, wore fake jewelry,
carried glassware to and from broken hearted or
heartless, insatiable country bumpkins,
street rats, vampires, wolves, and rakes.
She came from the middle of nowhere
and her name didn't matter.
She couldn't sing about rainbows
or dance on yellow bricks, so she danced
for dollar bills. She danced like the storm
that had carried her away, a twirling tornado
in the screams of dancefloor sirens.

3.

He stood in his boat, on the water
that would freeze over in a few days
He was alone in the boat
He came by himself
Took nothing with him into the boat
Alone with nothing but the cold water
surrounding the boat
freeze over in a few days
He came by himself with the boat
The water was too cold for anyone else
He took nothing with him
in the boat as something beckoned
to him beneath the cold water
whispering long lost dreams

only he could understand
 as the waves kissed the sides
 of the boat on the cold lake—
 He washed up on the beach
 They found him face down in the sand
 Everything came out of him
 when they took his body from the water
 and nothing was left in the boat
 He came by himself, died by himself
 in the boat on the water which would
 freeze over in a few days

4.

I was not ready, but it does not mean I didn't still love you
 when I was driving back to North Dakota. I was not ready,
 but it does not mean I didn't feel you, every time
 I was in the arms of someone else. I was not ready,
 but it does not mean I felt anything but pain
 when I thought abandoning you was my only option.
 I was not ready to go down with the ship if it sank.
 I was not ready to fall, clinging to the edge of the cliff.
 I was not ready to jump, even if the water was warm.
 I was not ready to let go. I was not ready to hold on.
 I was not ready to face the overwhelming doubt
 telling me I was not ready for love—
 to go back to where I came from,
 even though I had always dreamed of the life we had.
 But when I got back to North Dakota, I was not ready
 to be alone.

5.

I didn't know when I first saw you bloom
 that I was capable of so much harm
 for something I had loved, unlimited
 harm. Depraved, dirty, reckless
 harm. Faithless, dishonest, emotional
 harm. Unfair, degrading, lascivious
 harm. Passive, masochistic, obscene
 harm.

6.

“Why can’t you let me love you?” He asks, tripping on ecstasy.

“You let me fuck you, but that is not synonymous.”

We are looking into each other’s poisonous, dilating pupils.

Receptive, I say, “People fall in love with people they’ve never met.

People fall in love with ghosts, with serial killers.

Sometimes only once, sometimes many times.

People risk death for love, believing love transforms and conquers all.”

“So, why don’t you let me love you?” He asks again, firm, stubborn,

brave. I ask, “Would you open yourself to me,

the way your pupils are opening wide and unwavering right now?”

“When have I ever been closed, shut off to you?” He asks.

Our intimacy deepening, his anguish is magnified by the drugs.

“How can you tell if someone’s heart is open?” I wonder aloud.

“Because my heart is filled, overflowing from thinking of you,” he says, kissing the place where I burned myself. “I am drowning in you.

Lost in the silent ocean of your despair that has forsaken my love.

And it is ruining me. I am destroying myself, caught in a tsunami

of my own tears because I am watching my love sink beneath you,

unnoticed, not knowing which direction will kill me,

or where I can finally rest my head. Your love would be my lighthouse,

guiding me through death.”

7.

He had spent so much time fighting the pain of others

he didn’t notice that the boat was shuddering, its walls

crumbling, caving in on itself, water was pouring into

his lungs, the current slamming his body against the rocks—

He didn’t know which direction to swim

The shoreline was too far away

He was afraid of what he had done

and the light came pouring out from the lighthouse—

He had spent so much time in the shadows of the pain of others

He didn’t notice that he was headed for the bottom of the sea,

that the boat had been broken to pieces by the current

that came pouring into his lungs—

He was already so far below the water

that he didn’t know which direction to swim, the shoreline

had faded away with the warning of the lighthouse

and he was afraid of what he had done—

He was afraid of the bottom of the sea, of the darkness
 of the water, and the current that was filling up his lungs,
 afraid of the lighthouse that was still glowing
 above the surface of the waves, afraid of being alone
 in the boat as it sank slowly into the mouth of the sea,
 and of the rocks that were carving into his skin—
 He prayed for the shoreline, he prayed for mercy from the current,
 and for God to tell him the direction to swim
 He prayed for the light to keep glowing above him,
 but as he swam towards the light, the water kept getting colder,
 and he knew he was nowhere near the shoreline

8.

She was afraid of being someone else. Something emanating
 from inside her. She did not recognize herself in the mirror.
 There were so many faces in the mirror. She was afraid
 of doing things someone else wanted her to do.
 Her bad decisions following her home. Up the stairs.
 Into her room. Beneath the sheets. Shadows across a face
 she didn't recognize. She was afraid of being taken in and used
 by someone else. So many doors. So many slamming doors.
 Sharp cracks in the wood. Furious. Wanting to get inside.
 Some guilt-ridden conscience that lives on and on in her mind.
 As she runs down the hall. She cannot breathe.
 The pounding on the walls gets louder. It follows her.
 Waits for her. Listens. Filthy. Soiled.
 Gluttonous house. Monstrous. Dying light.
 She flicks an empty cigarette lighter on spilled gasoline.
 Unforgiving house. Her bloody hands. Her hands scrape.
 Rub the skin off. Against the walls of the house. Bleeding hands.
 Possessed. Against the concrete walls. Something wants inside her.
 Something she will recognize is. Already inside.

9.

With my flashlight
 I see something moving in the trees
 Blood on my lips, cigarette in my teeth
 Could it be love? Moving towards me—
 My cold fingers on the gun, ready for the reveal
 Something is crying in the dead grass
 Hiding in the snow, below the pine trees

Something I lost long ago, never to find again
So I thought it could be love—
My flashlight pointing at something in the trees
My finger on the trigger
But it was harmless, it was lost, it was love

10.

It wasn't that you broke my heart.
Maybe I had to break it myself
since you were no longer there to do it.
It was that my feelings, my devotion,
my unwavering soul—kept living,
persisting, swarming, and visiting
you in my dreams, and dwelling upon you
in the relentless, steadfast moments
I was awake—
It wasn't that you had broken any promises.
It was that my fears and hopes, my memories,
my attempts to ignore, suppress,
and redirect the impact of the moment
we collided and transformed each other, healed,
wounded—loved—despised and held each other.
It was what you had shown me. What you had told me.
Why you had chosen me. How you opened me.
How you came through and exposed me.
To love—
and I don't want to believe that love
could ever be lost even though it may be mangled,
bruised and distorted through the experience of loss.
It keeps holding on to me. It keeps pouring down on me.
It carries me through my grief and regrets. It carries me
even through death.

AFTERMATH

Thomas Mehrer

As the smoke clears, a realization appears.
A jester is crowned king, an unholy
choir begins to sing.

What are we going to do now?

For war is far from over, yet victory cries ring out.
Death rages on the streets,
the devil's voice still shouts.

Where will we run to now?

Be wary of what you're told, uncertainty lies ahead.
If we follow as if we're sheep,
those who are lost will eternally weep.

Will we find the way out?

So continue to doubt, question authority, reject normality.
If the one who is followed is a fool,
What does that make the ones who follow?



“AFTERMATH”

Thomas Mehrer, Acrylic

P I N N E D

Cyan Coello

The promise of nightfall cooled the sweltering heat of the dry Arizona landscape. The fluorescence of the brightly colored orange and yellow sign accompanied by the piercing eyes of a 1991 Buick broke the darkness into pieces. As fate might have it, the driver, a woman, pulled into the Shell gas station, a light flickering. The shimmering neon reflected off her blonde hair as she got out of the car. The old building in front of her barely seemed to keep itself from toppling to the ground but in the dimness of the windows, she noticed a man staring and signaling her to take the pump. She stood there noticing the constant hum of pump intruding on the deafening quiet of the dark road ahead. As the pump finished, she walked inside the building to pay.

“Hey, there,” she said to the man behind the counter.

“\$21.73”

“Right, here’s \$30. Quiet, tonight, isn’t it?” she said, trying to fill the void of the near empty shelves around her.

Silence.

“You know the ‘S’ on your sign is flickering?” she continued.

“Yes,” he muttered, counting out the change. He weakly handed it to her, his hand grazing hers in the process. Even in that slightest of touches, she felt the bitter coldness and stiffness of bones. While turning away, the figure walked past her into a small storage room near the rear of the store without another word. As she left the building, she noticed a small ringing around the corner.

“Hey, mister? Your payphone’s ringing! Hey!” She called out to no response. She walked towards the phone and, unsure why, picked up the receiver.

“Hello?” she asked. No response; a dial tone; a wrong number, she thought. The woman, unconcerned, left towards her car, ready to face the darkness ahead. As she continued down the road, the neon lights once so intrusive to her eyes faded farther and farther from sight. It was only her and the quiet now. As she continued her drive, she noticed a small spark of blue in the distance. Perhaps an old water bottle that had been discarded on another journey much like hers, she thought. As she drove closer, the speck became a form, a form that instinctively drove the blood from her face. The blue buttons, so gently sewn on a matching sweater, glistened in the headlights.

Its piercing eyes—four feet above the ground—shone brighter and stronger. The woman screamed, closed her eyes for a second, and prayed that the figure would not be there. Her eyes opened once again and, thanks to all that was good, the empty desert filled the space in front of her. Slightly relieved, the woman convinced herself that she had fallen asleep. She began to speed up her car, as she couldn't bear the thought of risking another nightmare, but she nonetheless felt connected to whatever apparition was on the road.

She had never known her imagination to be so detailed. She could still see the lights of her car reflecting off the small figure, illuminating the strands of golden hair resting softly on slim shoulders. The smell of the deep, red blood dripping from the knife carved into the side of the figure seemed to hang heavily in the air. Still unsure, she glanced in her rearview mirror to relieve her mind once again; but then, there was an ear-piercing scream. The car swerved along the road, screeching to a halt. Paralyzed in fear she shut her eyes tightly. Could she hear breathing in the backseat? Was someone there? Would she see the unmistakable smile of a small figure buckled in? No. No, it had to be the wind pushing through the cracks of the window. Her imagination was doing her no favors tonight. She had to open her eyes. She had to wake up. She couldn't let her imagination take control. One... Two... Three... Nothing. Dust seemed to be the only occupant of her back seat. It must be the dark. It must be the quiet. It must be her imagination. Uneasy, she sped towards the nearest lights and the life that it promised. So again, she drove.

The speed of her car gave the woman confidence. She was going to get control of her imagination, whether it liked it or not. Twenty-five more miles to the next station. The piercing eyes haunted her even now. Twenty more miles. The silhouette of the flowered dress covered by the light blue sweater. Fifteen more miles. The way her headlights shone on her hair. Ten miles. The trusting innocent smile shifting to a questioning frightened glare. Five. She was almost there. She just needed to see another human and she would be alright. Only a few more miles to go, she could see the faint glow of civilization. It truly was just her imagination. She sped up even more.

As she approached closer, a familiar bright orange and yellow neon assaulted her eyes. The 'S' completely out.

When she reached the station, the woman bolted towards the payphone. She frantically dialed a number she had memorized in case of an emergency like this. Answer, she thought. Please answer.

"Hello?"

"Oh, thank God, Mark." Never had she been so relieved to hear his voice.

"Why are you calling here? I told you not to."

"Mark, please. Is everything alright? Nothing is up, right?"

"Why are you asking? Are the police asking questions again? You worry way too much. There is no way anyone would think to pin it on u—"

"Listen to me. Just listen. Have you checked on her recently? Is she still there?"

"Are you drunk or something? Where else would she be? Seriously, I'm done with these frantic phone calls. Don't call me again." Click. The dial tone buzzed. She was alone once more.

"Damnit," she muttered as she placed the receiver back. Maybe he was right, she thought. She needed to let it go. Why on earth would she see her here? In the middle of the desert? She was hidden from all prying eyes in the backwoods by her old home. She was safe there. No one would even walk near those woods, let alone dig them up. She would be alright now.

"Mom," a slim voice squeaked. The woman turned around and there stood a ghastly slim figure to match, "it's going to be O.K., right?"

As if on command by the whim of some sick ringmaster, she began to bleed—profusely.

"You said it wasn't going to hurt," she pleaded, a mixture of blood and tears began to stream down the small girl's face.

No, no, no, she thought. The woman turned back to the buzzing pay phone quickly and shut her eyes. The sweater, the dress, and the golden hair. The zing of a recently sharpened blade. The deep, red blood pooling at a child's shoe. The memories all came back in that moment of darkness. The woman's eyes sprung open to escape and a shrill scream filled the desert air.



“3 OF SWORDS”

Winnie Weninger, Print

TWENTY-ONE TEA TOWELS AND A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY

Jennifer Sheets

I have twenty-one kitchen tea towels. I counted them as we packed up boxes from every cupboard and forgotten drawer. They were great for wrapping fancy glasses and liquor bottles, but I was surprised when the last bourbon bottle was wrapped, and I still had a stack of way too many tea towels. My younger self judges harshly. Some had been gifts, others were purchased in haste as my husband, Dave, and I moved from one apartment to the next, needing something for the kitchen as we unpacked and ate frozen pizza to Aretha Franklin on vinyl. Four of them are red with striped patterns. Two are blue with striped patterns. One has a photo print of asparagus; another carrots. One has cartoon cowgirls on horseback; another cartoon cowboys slinging pistols. One says “Uffda” — an homage to my midwestern roots. Another is an eye chart with animals found in Montana. Both gifts. Two are as neatly folded as the day they were received: pure white with embroidery, too nice for everyday use. I imagine them holding bread rolls in a basket someday. Or, if neglected to be enjoyed while I’m alive, then draped over my casket. Also preferably stocked with dinner rolls. I shoved the remaining tea towels in the liquor box, except for the two “guest tea towels,” which I laid neatly on top, and sealed up the box. Cocktails — and messes — would have to wait until the new home.

I didn’t know I’d become the person with twenty-one tea towels all folded neatly in a drawer “just in case.” I also didn’t know I’d be moving back to my hometown after nearly two decades, especially when at my departure, I shook my fist and vowed never to return. We had lived in Montana nearly 15 years. I was proudly a sixth generation Montanan, which made our new son a seventh. The mountains had been the backdrop to our life for so long. Mornings were spent pedaling up steep trails in the summer and calling the snow phone in the winter. “Good morning and thank you for calling the Bridger Bowl snow phone! This morning we have 10 new inches, recorded at the top of the Alpine lift.” I knew every turn of every trail, the best streets to bike home late at night, which breweries would allow us to run into which friends, where to sit at the ski movie premieres, and the best tree lines to ski at the mountain. Kitchen appliances

weren’t the only things getting packed away. Most of these memories were of a by-gone ski town and our youthful roaring twenties quickly fading

in the rear-view mirror.

I started to panic about the tea towels. Where would they go in the new house? We were moving into a house back in Minnesota, minutes from both of our parents, that we had never seen. I had looked at pictures, zooming in and out on every detail, but what if there wasn't a drawer substantial enough for the tea towels? Twenty-one tea towels take up a lot of space. I completely forgot to check!

The thought of reducing the size of my kitchen towel collection never occurred to me. I did not feel sentimental or especially attached to any of these towels, but for some reason they all had to come with me across two states, they would require significant thought, and I must find the right drawer.

We said goodbye to our Montana house on a Thursday morning, leaving our keys on the counter and locking ourselves out. The mountains looked even more beautiful that day than the five thousand days before. Dave lumbered east in the U-Haul, and I drove my vehicle with Baby, Dog, and our dozens of houseplants. We met up in Dickinson six hours later at a hotel built for the oil boom, now empty from the oil bust. Each room came equipped with a kitchen for the long-term field workers. It even had real plates, glasses, and cutlery. It made for a fine studio apartment. Except on the counter, standing tall and out of place: a roll of stark white paper towels. I could have furnished the entire floor of rooms with my precious set of tea towels.

We pulled into Fargo mid-afternoon. Two lanes of traffic turned into three and then four. Part of the journey felt familiar. I recognized buildings that had been there for decades, the ones I would always pass before I pulled off the interstate and made exactly three turns to my parents' house. The other part made my stomach twist. Fargo was an "in-and-out town" for us. We swung in and we swung out. Now, we were parking. Parking in the driveway of a midwestern home on a midwestern block with my midwestern family standing at the back door, waiting for us to turn the key and hang up our coats. Our realtor even showed up. "I want to see your faces when you walk in."

We have lived in a lot of places and slept between many different walls. Hell, we are nearly 40 years old; this was far from our first place. But, watching everyone watch us as we unlocked the door and walked inside, it felt like things were already in motion for us, like this place was expecting us.

Days later, when the boxes were opened ("finally, the bourbon!") and shelves started to fill, rest assured that every single tea towel, all twenty-one of them, fit nicely in a drawer just under the fancy teacups.



“CITRUS”

Allie Jo Brines, Painting

MY FAVORITE COLOR

Marie Saylor

yellow was my favorite color
for four years
only because it reminded me of your smile
and all i could see
was a future and a home
together

i knew every second of you
every half-smile and inhale
i could tell what you were thinking from half a room away and my left
shoulder did nothing but melt into your side
i don't see you anymore
but sunrises are sitting with you
on damp grass and dewy mud
the book i wrote is half your head
and coffee is something you make me
but now i just can't see you

we are in the same space but the
yellow powder blue and brown of you
are things i no longer hold the key to
we inhabited the same head once
two girls one girl one person one life one
now our skulls are separate
and the sutures are closed forever

i miss sharing a mind
i can't go back now but
i can wish i felt so sure again

it feels wrong to have cut you up like this
taken the parts of you i kept and made them a part of me when we
didn't stay together
but i know you did the same
there are pieces of my body that are yours forever and thoughts that
will never be mine again
but i wonder if you miss it too
the knowing you had someone to talk to



“BREATH OF AUTUMN”

Brandi Malarkey, Art

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Monika Sauer

Often overlooked for more cheery colors, orange is a lovely color in its own right. It pervades seasons, like fall, and holidays, like Halloween and thanksgiving. It's a transitional color no doubt. Seasons changing and time moving forward as the world shifts from green to orange to red and then brown. Orange reminds us of the creamsicles that melted in the car. It asks us to remember our first time carving a pumpkin and the grimace we made at touching the slimy interior as we did so. Orange is also a lazy color. It tells us to forget the tests and plans and stresses of life. To drink hot chocolate with friends and sit down with a good book. Orange appears where we are most peaceful. It may not be as vibrant as red, or cheerful as yellow, but it allows us to reminisce on days gone by, and reminds us that life is more than the gears that attempt to shape us. It may not be the strongest color, but it teaches us, and it centers us. A rainbow, no matter how pretty, is not a rainbow without orange.

I AM ASIAN, I AM HUMAN

Hải Vy Từ Châu

Olive.

The sun shining down on me.

My skin, "yellow," you watch and stare as I pass by,
as if my being is foreign to you

- even though we were born in the same place.

My eyes: almond and dark in hue;

but your fox-eye trend was embraced,

while I got bullied for having "slits for vision."

My culture, full of tradition and story

... that fast fashion that has made appropriated
instead of appreciated.

On screens, anime is beloved by many,
an imaginative world of animated visuals.

But outside, I become sexualized,
fetishized,

and submissive to dirty minds.

Please stop asking "so where are you really from?"

Do you know how many times that someone has come up to me with
that to spark conversation? Coughed in my face?

Called me slurs?

Or the "Kung-Flu virus"?

I am tired.

I am tired of being erased in the media.

I hate seeing me portrayed on the screen as a stereotype made by
Western culture: "An exotic sexual partner...

a faceless doctor, lawyer, or engineer...

a nerdy student upset with anything less than an A..."

- just a punchline.

I am tired.

I am tired of being the model minority,
held up as a shield against white supremacy

- creating the false narrative that “Asians are aligned with whiteness.”

I am tired.

I am tired of being seen as prey that is hunted.

You can hate the virus, so do I!

But you do NOT take out your anger on the innocent, defenseless,
and vulnerable who cannot fight back.

- Six Asian women have been murdered, it “started” with.

My newsfeed now filled of our elders being pushed to the ground to their
death. My people punched, stabbed, beaten, robbed, and mocked.

You love our food.

You love our culture.

Why do you not love our people?

Stop. Asian. Hate.

STOP! AAPI! HATE!

I have been sidelined and disregarded in the fight against racism.

I am so tired of being racially gaslit,

my reality denied by people who don’t even look like me,
who don’t live like me,

and therefore, cannot understand what it is like to be me.

My condolences to all Asians who must put up with such...

Humiliation,

Disrespect,

Stereotypes,

Abuse,

HATE AND VIOLENCE.

There is such a shock to the headlines of rising Asian hate,

But anyone with common sense will realize that, after listening to this,

It is not a new phenomenon.

Asian hate has always been present.

It is the current circumstances that are allowing it surface blatantly.

Black Lives Matter.
White Lives Matter.
Asian Lives Matter.
WE ALL MATTER.

We are human beings, and we deserve to be treated for who we are.
Is it really that hard to understand?
Not one person in this world is okay with being discriminated.

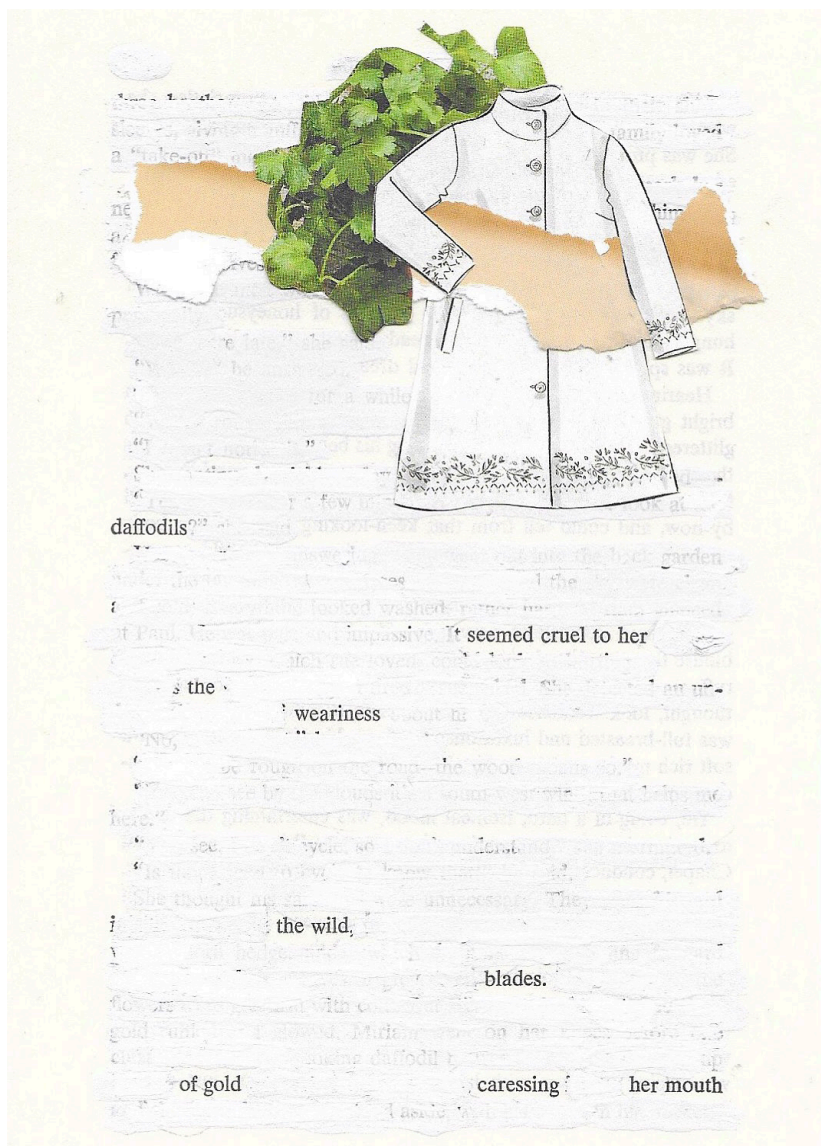
***“Take these seeds
and put them in your pockets***



***so at least sunflowers will grow
when you all lie down here”***

**“UKRAINE’S
SUNFLOWER”**

Winnie Weninger, Illustration



“DAFFODILS”

Brady Bergeson, Poetry and Art

EVANGELICALISM

Ruby Richard

Dear God I accept you as my savior
 Into my heart as I go through life
 I want to live like you
 I want to be like you
 I was made in your image
 Please make me your image
 Take away my sins
 Wash me of my desires and
 Make me more like you.
 Or strike me down so that I may join you free of sin
 For you made me in your image but I have strayed
 And I am sentenced to hell for who I am
 And who I love
 Just take me now so that I may not disappoint you
 Wash me of my sins
 Make my soul clean again
 So that I might join you.

Did you mean it when you said I was damned?
 Is every step I take driving me further from you?
 Have you set up an eternal and impossible relay race?
 Was I doomed to fail from the start?

Dear god I am unsure of my faith
 I want to believe in your power
 But why would someone of your stature leave me with so much pain
 In your all seeing omnipotent glory you decided to punish your very own
 creation
 If I am not prim and proper
 If my skirt doesn't reach my ankles
 And my hair doesn't reach the ground
 If my skin doesn't stay untouched
 I cannot be in your bride
 I cannot serve you if I do not serve you in this way.
 I must hide so much of myself
 All of myself

Pieces that are intrinsically woven through me
I must rip out if I want to live in your image.
I do not want your image.
You did not make me in your image,
Unless your image is also flawed.

Dear God I no longer need you as my savior.
I no longer wonder why you may not love me
I no longer yearn to be like you.
I am flawed, and I am human, and I am done.

THE COLOR OF FEMINISM

Kayla Jones

I rise

I am black

I am strong, courageous, made up of history, art culture, I am black and I am proud I am a feminist

I speak up

I defend all women

I push for the rights of those who stand beside me and share my pain

I cry for my sisters, my tears stain blue

I mourn my brothers in all black

I explode

Forgive me if I speak over you when talk about my experiences as your own

Forgive me as I humble you

Forgive me as I lash out when 3/5 of my opinion matters.

Forgive me as I see red.

Forgive me as I ask to speak for myself

Forgive me as I question why you joined this ethics class because you care but cry out when you are corrected

Power

You tell me all feminism is good feminism!

But where do black women fit into this all-inclusive feminism?

Is it in the media when we are told we are too masculine? Perhaps it is politically where our passion is mistaken for aggression?

Could it be when white women get box braids so they can normalize our look?

Or should I reflect on the trends of the first waves of feminism where black women had to root for a movement they weren't even included in?

Audre told me that feminism is different for women who look like me and shes right. Angela told me feminism isn't feminism without people who look like me and shes right.

bell hooks told me intersectionality allows us to focus on what is most important at a given point in time.

Reflection

As I reflect on this I think

My clothing was never an issue, you were.

That shade was not too risky if compliments my brown skin

My outfit is NOT inappropriate, I am a grown woman.

My anger is justified, and I do not care that it scares you

Intimidation is a you problem

I belong in the arts, I can be painted in yellow and orange and pink

I belong in athletics, I can be covered in purple and red and black

I am a world changer

I am feminine and I am masculine and I am loved.

I am a feminist

GILDED PROMISES

McKenzie Salyers

my sun is golden, holding promises in its ambers it paints across
the sky every night. my moon is gray, flashing its light upon the
night owls of the masses.

my stars are a map, piecing together my destiny in its silvery glow.
my rain represents growth, feeding the flowers that beg to be
picked.

yet,

that sun is not mine. it lies and keeps secrets, poisoning me with its
facade of beauty.

that moon is wrong. it whispers like the devil in my ear praying for
my downfall.

those stars are too dull, burning out as i have already done.

the rain was never rain. it was tears from a grieving soul giving up
as sure as the sun shines, as the moon changes, as the stars burn
out.

now,

my sun is fire, scorching all those that dare to come too close.

my moon is dark, hiding forever behind its own shadows of doubt.

my stars are spread thin, with no plan to trace for a lost soul.

my tears have since dried. all that remains is regret, and the
dimmed dream that I once was consumed with.

MY SISTER IS WORKING

Emily Nouv

My sister in the middle of the night. My sister with the attentive voice wondering what's wrong. She sounds worried on the other end of the line, getting a cup of water, dressings quickly and finding her car keys. My sister who hasn't eaten dinner yet but is thankful we'll likely share food momentarily. My sister in Springfield but already on her way over. My sister who doesn't want us to carry it alone. My sister with the pregnant belly. My sister with concern quietly thinking to herself how she can help knocking at our door saying you'll make it, I promise. My sister who calls over five times in two days. An outpouring of recent encounters and childhood stories that come out of nowhere. Everyone else seems to float through life. My fearless sister and the boring one with a mountain of debt pretending she's not asking for money. My younger sister whose gender identity has been opposite for his entire life. My sister in Charlotte who wants our brain to feel like an airplane landing. My sister in Hawaii drinking piña coladas on the beach as she bathes her tan skin in her backyard. My sister in paradise wondering why she's not happy with her new puppy. My sister in a different time zone who doesn't call as often. My sister who paces around the apartment with anxiety like we do. My sister in Odenton my life-long friend in the military my sister in the department store my sister in her new home where even the doorknobs smell new my sister who got a promotion my sister who complains about having no friends or cash but we've offered everything we can and she still doesn't want you my sister in Jacksonville who thinks we're lame because we worry too much and always ruin the fun my sister who is feeling bored with us my sister who steals our ideas and starts a fight my sister who refuses to think we're educated our selfish sister who won't consider our wishes even though she insists that she cares, reluctantly naive as we say I'll see you soon this was fun and she forgets to say thank you or pay us back, working will keep us full no matter where we are when rejection strikes but even our co-workers have lunch plans for the Thursday before a holiday weekend and the cousin we wish we'd known better gets hit by a drunk driver, we hold onto the hug we shared only weeks ago. When else would they be free? When else is the right time? Never. Everyone busy in the morning and evening and in the far edges of our gut consumed in loneliness near the shopping plaza with BOGO SALE signs the names of middle-class designers on billboards by the buzzing 13th Avenue strip.

YELLOW

Monika Sauer

Yellow as an image, of course, leads us to visualize the sun. But creativity lies beneath the surface, beyond the expected. What then, does yellow symbolize if not the sun? A person then, who radiates kindness and joy. Or else art, like a child's chalk drawing or famous gallery piece. All fine examples of course, but there may yet be more unexplored. One might think of a bruise, healing but still visible. Perhaps the facade of a building, intending to trick you subtly into hunger or curiosity. No no no, there must yet be more. A curling page from a book centuries past its prime. Better yet, a fruit so sour it puckers the mouth. Think then, of rainboots, and dandelions before they mature. Surely these convey more than simple sunshine. Age and beauty, timelessness and joyous memories. All those who wander this earth have known someone who embodies yellow. Someone who would give more than their fair share to earn a simple smile. Someone who would make too many cookies as an excuse to give them away. We have all engaged too hard in a game and left, fulfilled, with bruises as evidence. We know the cute little diner or vendor with the yellow facade we can't help but smile at. We know the books at the library, whether public or private, whose pages are marked with the evidence of delicate care and love as they are passed between generations. We remember childhood, daring others to try a lemon or giving one to a small child to see their face twist from the flavor. We remember the weeds we'd give our parents as gifts even as they stained our fingers and the rainboot we wore as we jumped from puddle to puddle. We all recall sunshine when thinking of yellow, but memories and the joyful past are lurking just a little further, for all those who deign to look.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Emily Nouv

Suck it in, honey.
You need to stand up straight!
Seriously, just look at your tummy.

You must have gained weight.
Are you really wearing that?
How much did you put on your plate?

Don't you want your stomach flat?
You know, I hate to say it,
But you kinda look fat.

So sensitive, no need to throw a fit,
What happened? You were doing so good,
Get back to the gym, maybe run a bit!

Or get sick- I would if I could,
But I shouldn't say that- knock-on-wood.

The first thing that comes to my hair-
I mean head, is embarrassing.
Starin' at me with that glare.

Dry as the Sahara, quite distressing.
It's like a bird's nest.
Do I really need his blessing?

Shit, at least you got a chest!
But it's nappy, naturally curly,
You should wear it up, like the rest.

You say it takes time, why not get up early?
Do you even wanna date?
Surely you could at least try to be girlie.

Cuz it's not my taste!
Just wear it straight.

¡SÍ, SE PUEDE!

Luna M. Zauhar

I pressure myself to be
Perfect
Smart
Successful

No matter the melancholy that fills my brown skin

And some tell me to
“Relax”
“Take a break”
“Go easy on myself”

But how can I?

When my people are wrongfully called
“Rapists”
“Murders”
“Uneducated”

I must fight for my name
To prove to them that I-
That we are not your stereotypes

These deleterious generalizations have been painted over our skin

They give them reason to hate us
To them the skin of my ancestors means that we are bad people
I make myself suffer to prove them wrong

My people bleed
red
white
and blue

Because they love the country that gave them hope.

This is the “land of opportunity”

Jobs

Education

A better life

So when people tell me to

“Relax”

“Take a break”

“Go easy on myself”

I think of my mother at 18.

Leaving her country

Trading

Red

White

And Green

For

Red

White

And blue

I think of my grandmother.

Leaving her country

To give her sons a life

She did not have

My Mother

My Grandmother

And millions of other Mexicanos –

Immigrants,

First generation children

They can’t “relax”.

Working the jobs that many other Americans do not want

Working towards an education

Feeding their families check by check

All with a smile.

So, when people tell me to “relax”

I don't listen to them

There is no time to relax in a world of privilege and discrimination.

We will always have to work harder to prove that we belong.

We are strong.

We are resolute.

We are grateful to be in America.

And when I start to doubt myself even a little

Or if I hear ignorance from them

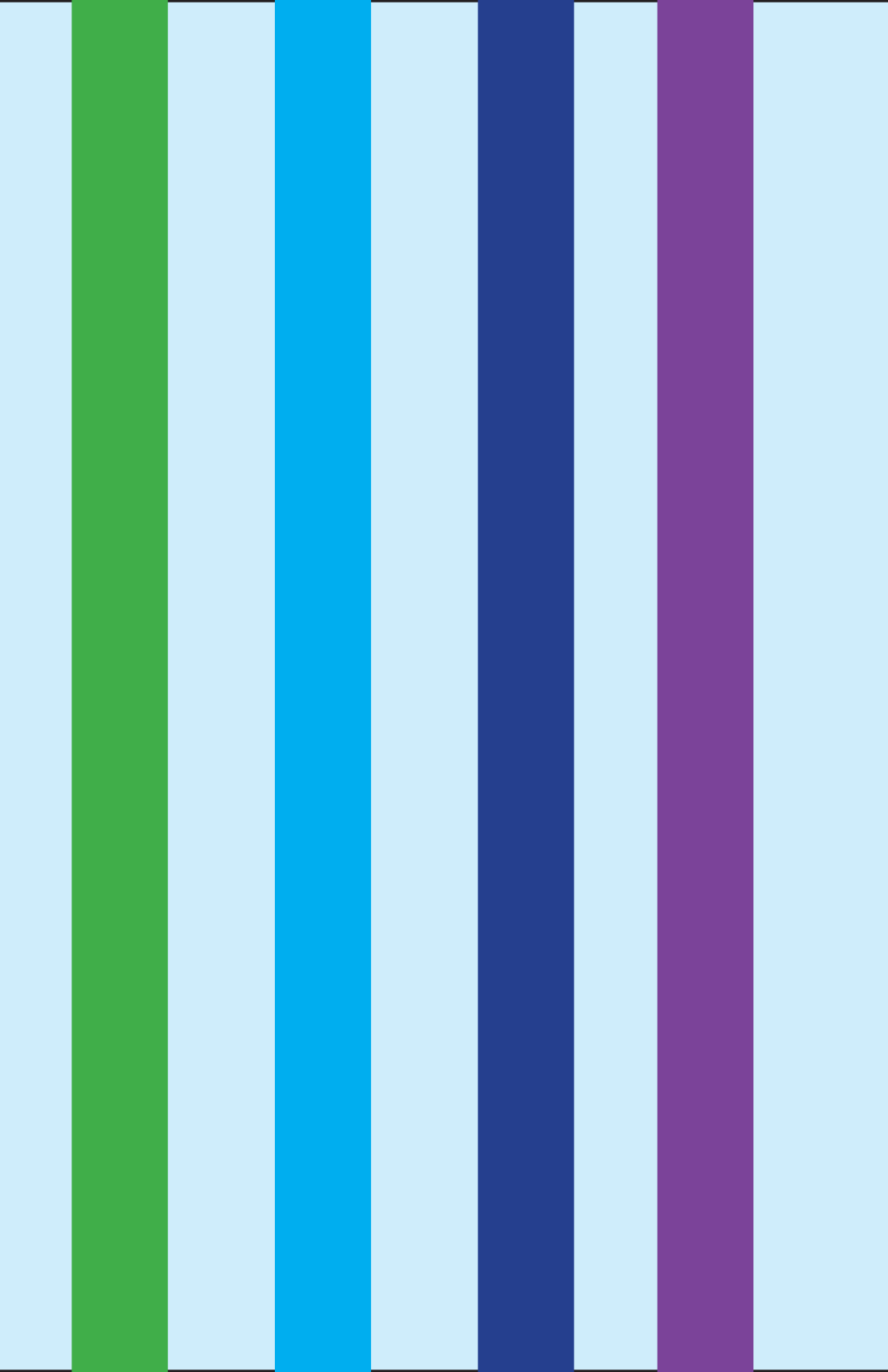
I just tell myself

“Sí, Se Puede”

THE MEANINGS OF RED

McKenzie Salyers

falling in love has been a concept so intimate and far away that i have
never dreamt i'd capture it.
the desire to feel the ecstasy we grew up hearing about is a fairytale, such
as the story goes about buried treasure in the sea.
it's a wishing well of energy;
the flush of cheeks,
the cherry color of lips,
the glowing of two eyes locking together.
i have thought many years about where it might blossom, where i might
find that long lost mystery.
i only know of lust,
that market of bad habits we are warned against.
a red and dangerous knife that one may protect themselves with.
it's hidden behind every confession of love,
every seductive stolen glance,
whisper behind a hand,
secrets and lies to condemn a soul.
for a lifetime one may search for that innocence, but be met with a heart
oozing red. i do not blame our hearts for hiding;
lust protects our love,
for it is pure and forgiving,
because once that trusting glow is broken,
there is no way of relighting that fragile flame.



C O O L

GREENS

AQUAS

BLUES

PURPLES

THE LOTTERY TICKET

Emily Nouv

Found out at work. I shed a tear
when the pizza gave me heartburn.
Bring the antacid over here.
Took a test that made my stomach turn.

Seeing faint lines, is that one or two?
Jumping the gun, I wonder pink or blue?

After all this time,
we tried for so long.
It's unreal, sublime,
could have broke out in song.

He's going to make the best dad.
God, we wanted this so bad.

I wanted to break the news to him,
reveal clues in a unique way.
Throw him off guard, go out on a limb.
So, I bought a scratch card, not the usual cliché.

We don't gamble he said.
I know, but it could be fun.
Scratched the ticket and read,
what's in the oven? A bun.

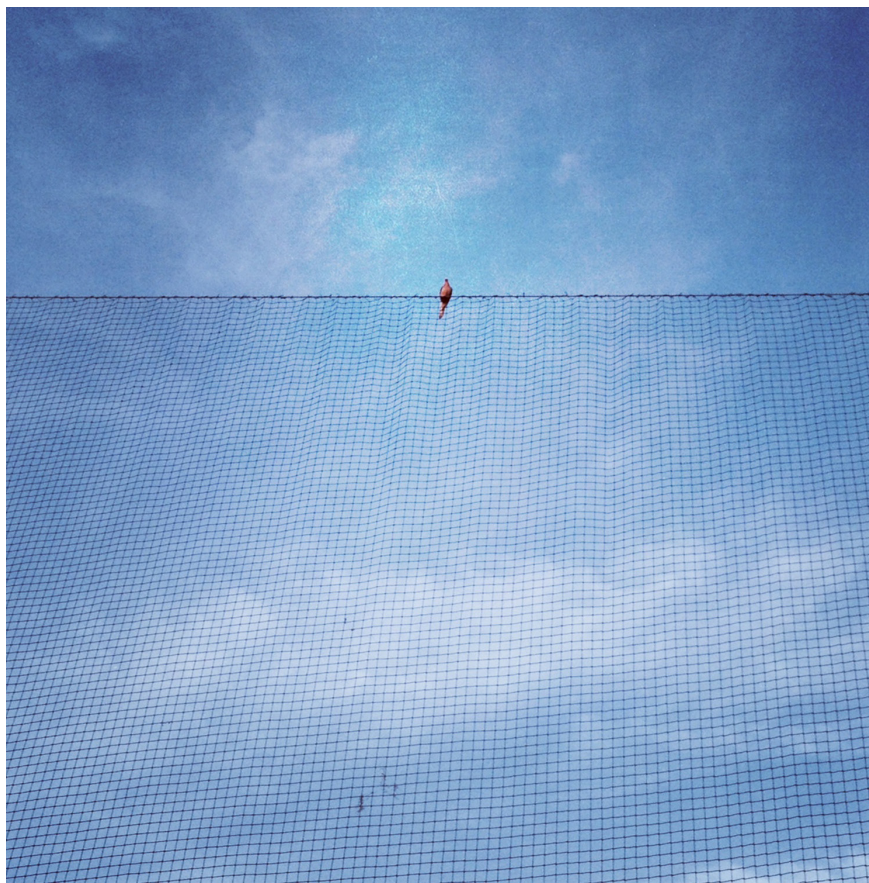
Wait, you're expecting?
Is this what I'm detecting?

Soon months went by,
and yet another trimester.
Eating so much Thai!
With raging hormones that pester.

Oh my god, It's a boy!
We cried so hard with joy!

Routine visit with physician,
the nurse was being too discreet.
While checking his condition,
I'm sorry, there's no heartbeat.

I can't breathe. Then I had to deliver.
Rest in peace. My baby, dear Oliver.



“BIRD ON NET”

Anthony Faris, Digital Print

WHEN ONE STOPS TO THINK

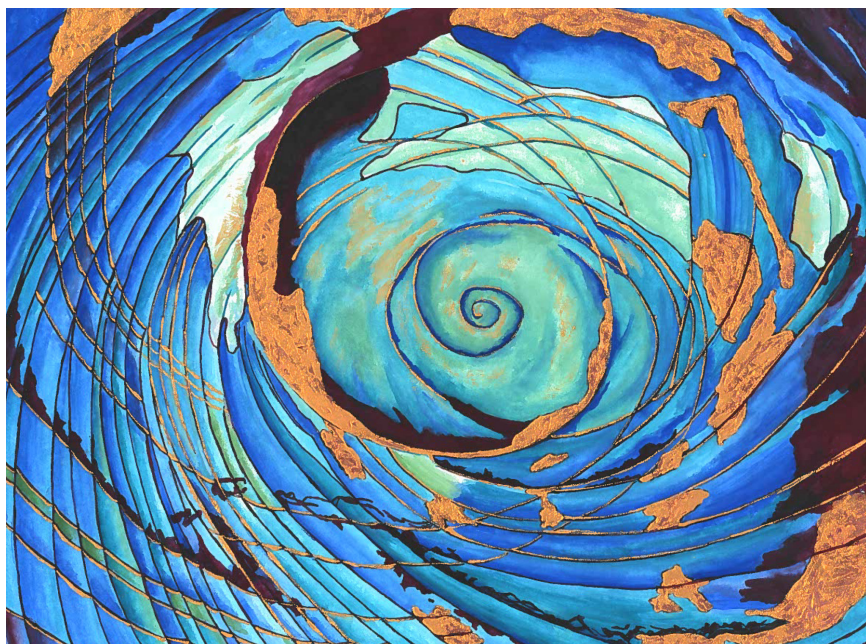
Monika Sauer

Purple is, without a doubt, my favorite color. It has been since I was a child. I never wavered in my appreciation either. Never consider that another color might take its spot. It's a nice feeling, knowing that no matter what else happens you'll always have an answer to that question. You wouldn't think you'd be asked that question often enough for it to matter, but oddly enough it's been a common theme since elementary school. Now though, the question is a little more academic, case in point this writing here. Rather than just knowing your favorite color it seems knowing the symbolic meanings and uses is of greater importance. Purple as many know was a symbol of royalty for a long time. This was due to the rarity of the ink used to dye clothes the color. Only people with enough money could even dream of affording it. This didn't stop rich merchants from trying though, but soon enough laws were put in place to prevent such things and the world kept turning. Kingdoms fell and industry took over. Clothing color and status became secondary to working life as people pushed forward into the modern day. At some point someone must have figured out a cheaper way to make purple fabric, and now we see it in clothing stores around the world. Most people know that part of purple's history. What they might not know about is the ties to mysticism and spirituality. Here I have no well-known examples, but only what prior research has taught me. Purple is a color of mystery. It also has ties to wisdom and bravery, likely a runoff from its ties to royalty. When I think of purple my mind turns to my purple winter coat, old with use and in need of washing. Not exactly in line with the theme, but it is where my mind goes first. Chances are it's the same for you as well. You never really think about where you see purple, at least not with its symbolism for context. Where then, would you find examples? Perhaps the sky at twilight, or a deep sea fish. Maybe you think of amethyst, crystals are well known for their spiritual ties. Of course my questions will go unanswered, such is the way with writing. I do enjoy the prospect though, of forcing unwitting students to think about color symbolism. I will enjoy immensely the looks of concentration as readers peer at my writing and begin asking their own questions. Or perhaps that is the purple in me, begetting mystery and exploring wisdom.



“I WISH YOU COULD READ ME”

Rachel L. Luebke, Watercolor and Collage



“RENEWED”

Brandi Malarkey, Painting

BEST FRIEND

Marie Saylor

i think of
frogs by the river

and grimy bathroom tiles
standing out the roof of a car
that one glorious, unrepeatable summer
where everything mattered
because the world was ending
and nothing mattered at all
because it was the end of the world

i think of
driving hours away just for used bookstores
and late nights in a coffee shop past close
shouting in my living room
crying in the kitchen
and countless hours and countless movies and countless words

i think of old camcorders
and badly written scripts,
declan mckenna,
french fries in checkered paper,
and driving just to feel like we had somewhere to go

i remember what it was like with all the windows down,
i remember you love me,
and that is what makes me stop.



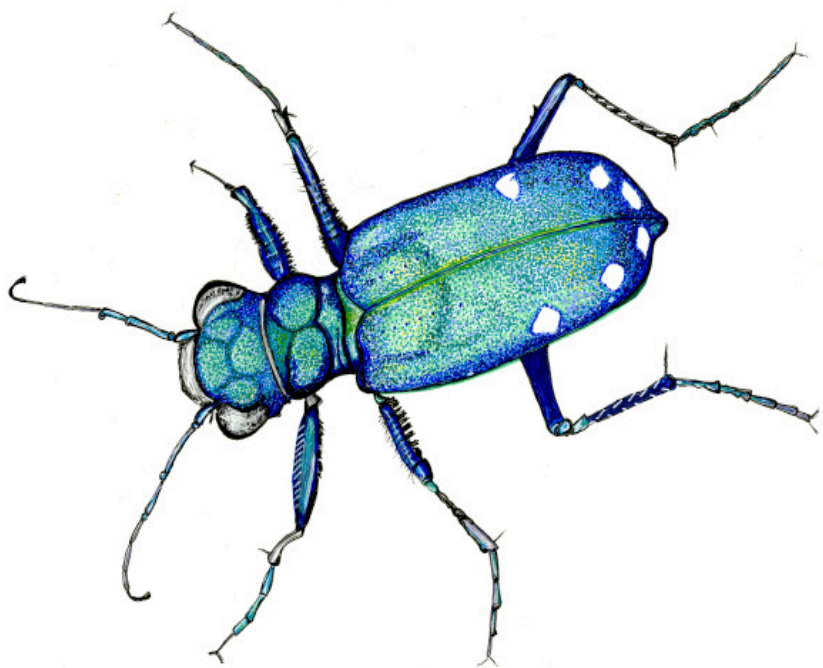
“JORDAN”

Austin-Alexius Klein, Photography

ALONG A FOREST PATH

Monika Sauer

The shadows of pine trees encircle me. They encompass my whole sight and draw me further from the dull grayness of the city. The grass below is gleaming, damp with what soon will be morning dew. The natural world is seductive, and I continue to push forward, trees and shadows alike moving with me. The energy here is different, and I can't help the deep breath I take. Damp air like I've never breathed before enters my lungs, and the idea of returning to the smog of my home is nightmarish. Who would leave the musty, moss scented heaven in which I have found myself? In this place, the stars still shine. The sunrise is not covered by fog and emissions. It swirls and shifts in ways I have never seen. My own imagination had no grasp of the beauty it had been missing. Perhaps I would be missed. Perhaps the world would wonder just where I went. But the world isn't what I want, it isn't what I need. This forest, swirling with life from the ground below to the treetops overhead are everything I could ever dream of.



**“C. SEXGUTTA
FABRICIUS”**

Beth Twomey, Illustration

THE COLOR OF MY GRIEF

Hannah Slater

*For La Verne; my beloved cat and best friend
September 1st, 2008 - May 24th, 2021*

The color of grief
for me is leafy green.
Why? Such an odd color
to choose.
I see it when I blink
or think
of you.

It hasn't quite been a year
since I had to make that choice
to put you
down.
It still hurts.

You were my world,
My everything,
My soulmate,
and I'll never see those
beautiful leafy green
eyes open again.

So, of course, the color
of my grief
is your eye color:
Beautiful, soft, kind
ones I will never see again.

There will never
be eyes like yours.
Not only in color, but
also never reflecting
my own soul.

Despite all the pain
of losing you,
I still got 12 wonderful
years with you.
I would not
trade any of it
for all the world.

Leafy green:
a color that pains me.
Brings me back to the past
and that awful day.
Yet a gentle
reminder of you
and unexplainable
love.



“INVERTED MONARCH”

Brandi Malarkey, Digital



“CAVERNS OF ICE”

Mysha Wenzel, Photography

BODY OF WATER, ONE I LOVE

S.J. Williamson

You are ineffable.
It has been a while
since I last submerged myself
in you, in love,
and let the waves take me down.
Do I love you for what you are
or do I love how you make me feel?
Swallowed by something too big
for me to understand,
too inhabited for me to be alone,
too inviting despite the cold.
How could one be too afraid
to throw themselves carelessly
against all your strength
and let you have your way with them?
I'll never know.
I've always wanted you.
I always will.

Why does everything in me
want what I cannot have?
You are not mine to hold
though you've always held me,
and I know you don't need me.
Do I throw myself into the waves anyway,
knowing you don't purposely catch me?
Or do I let you slowly pull away
until you're gone,
waiting for the moment
you decide to rush toward me again?

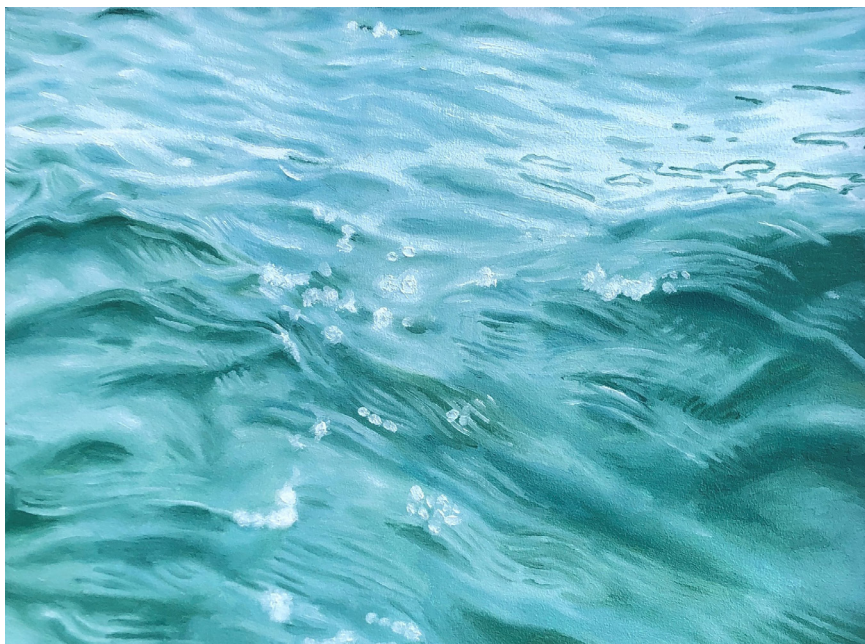
I need something to look forward to,
I need a little hope,
I need a strong foundation,
and I need you not to know.
I need it to happen naturally,
I need to know it's not just me,
that you feel it, too.
Make waves because you love me!
Fill valleys to surprise me!
Flood the shores with all you got
to prove you'll stop at nothing
to get to me!
I need a purpose other than work

I need to know...
Why can't I be yours?

Struck by trauma and heat,
I rush to the coolest crashing waves
I can find to aggressively take me
and rock my world
back to a place of sanity.
I've been triggered
and I feel my body
tense up
and go
for its
natural
cringe.
Then I feel your gentle touch.
Why haven't I felt something like this before?

Ignore it. Ignore it. Never mind.
I see your beauty and know
you're fading fast.
I have these impulses
to throw it all away,
to wreck myself and maybe you.
Who knows if I'll ever see you again?
This is all I know: love and letdown.
Setting suns would be less lovely
if we knew they'd never rise again.
Your rolling waves would not.

To dive into pleasure
of being with you
is a wonderful thing
I long to feel
once more, one day.
If only for
a fleeting moment,
it is worth it.
I could follow you anywhere
though I know it's not the same
for you, you who deserve great things.
That's the risk.
I knew that
and I jumped anyway
and I'd do it all again, too.
For I've always wanted you.
I always will.



“SERENITY”

Yuki Coyle, Oil Painting

THE INCIDENT IN THE VILLAGE

Jake Williams

The incident occurred in May of 2023. I wasn't there for it, as I had left on the eve of the New Year of my own free will. The government called it a "freak nuclear explosion," conspiracy theorists called it an "overgrowth from the Hollow Earth", and religious figures called it "The war zone between God and Satan." As someone who lived there for years, and spent some of my saddest and happiest moments there, I knew what had really happened. I can safely say the reality is more creepy than the former options.

It was an old and run-down apartment complex. There were no wooden walls filled with drywall, but rather just a layer of brick as protection from the elements. It was sturdy enough, but made summers the equivalent of living in a boiling pot of water, and much the opposite for winters. Everyone always tried their best to cover the walls with paintings, pictures, murals, tapestries, anything to make them more exciting. However, the white brick always found a way to stand out. It stuck out like a sore thumb, or more accurately, like something in the past that you just can't get rid of.

The rest of the apartment interior wasn't much better. The floors were tan tile, which just like the walls, couldn't be covered up no matter how many rugs you set down. The appliances all worked with little need for repair, but were far from visually appealing. The only part of the apartment that stood out aesthetically was the bathroom as it swapped the tan tile for a dark brown wooden-style floor. It wasn't a masterstroke of interior design by any means, but looked genius given its surroundings.

There was a block of these apartments that stood around the one I lived in. However, when the incident occurred, my apartment was the only one standing. There were a few remnants of some of the others, an appliance or random wall here or there, but from the outside my apartment looked completely untouched. Again, I had left at this point, so I haven't a clue why my apartment would be left standing.

I had no idea what was happening in the rest of the apartments, but I knew what was happening to the leadup of me leaving. It started as weird behavior of those who entered. I was attending college at the time, and I would often have my friends over to hangout in between classes. For the majority of my time there everything was normal. However,

leading up to the months before I had left, their behavior had begun to change. They still kept their entire personality, some being witty, some being quiet, it was just in the way that they stared. Whenever I looked away and subsequently looked back later, they always had their eyes on me. When I arrive back after a trip to the bathroom, they would always look at me just a little too long, long enough to know that there was something behind their eyes. Not only that, but they would start becoming more insistent on hanging out after each of their classes.

“Hey, can I hang out?”

“Where are you?”

“Why is your door locked?”

I didn’t hang out with my friends anymore after that.

While this was occurring, I started noticing strange things happening with the apartment itself. There were no “haunted house” lights turning on and off, misplaced items, or any kind of otherwise stereotypical paranormal activity. It began with the softening of the living room floor. At the edge of autumn, a large portion of the living room floor had gone to mush under our feet. It still looked fairly normal, minus a bit of discoloration, but as someone stepped on the tiles it would slightly sink into the ground like jelly. The landlord said it was perhaps a minor sinkhole and that he would send someone to check, but that never happened. My friends barely seemed to mind, even when their ankle was sinking into the depths.

I also had strange occurrences with my bedroom walls. It was rare, happening only on the windiest and coldest days of the early winter months of that season, but it was enough to lie prominently in my memory. I would wake up in the middle of the night to find that my walls were in a strange transitional period between gas and solid. To put it bluntly, I could see out of my bedroom walls as if they were covered in windows. The temperature would stay the same, but I would see the outside area of my apartment in the dull blackness of nighttime. The first two times I had chalked it up to the ending of a dream, as it often dissipated as I raised my head to look around more easily. The third and final time however, I had the wherewithal to not move, which allowed me to sit and stare for a longer moment. I saw a man with a bright red winter jacket walking down the sidewalk, and when I went to stand up the wall solidified once again. I looked out the window to see if the man was real, and when I saw that shiny red jacket, I knew something strange was afoot. It felt as though I wasn’t supposed to see what was going on around me while I slept, and the fact that I never saw it again only solidifies this belief.

While the situations were perplexing, it wasn't until the beginning of December that I felt the need to leave for my own safety. The day was particularly busy for me, with classes and extracurriculars galore, and due to this I had forgotten to lock my door after leaving my apartment. Halfway through my day I had found time to check my phone, where which I was greeted with a text,

"Hey, I'm coming over."

This wasn't unusual for this time, and I had far too much on my plate to focus on it. After my day was finally over, I went back to my apartment only to find the door wide open. At first, I panicked before realizing that it was most likely one of my friends after forgetting to lock the door. I prepared to scold them for leaving the door wide open, but upon setting my backpack down on the ground and peering into the living room I no longer had words that were worth saying.

What I found shook me to my core. In the soft spot of the living room floor, protruding from the edges of the tile that were slowly beginning to peel away from the others, was a thick purple liquid that began to soak into the other tiles surrounding it. Upon further inspection, it first emerged as a flowing liquid, just like you would find water coming out of your faucet, but upon resting on the tile it began to turn a dark purplish color and gain the consistency of thick sludge. My friend was kneeling beside it, the sludge beginning to penetrate their pants, and I went to back them off in case it was toxic, but when I grabbed their shoulder, I was greeted with the memory that haunts me.

They didn't acknowledge my hand, but instead reached their own into the congealed mixture lying in front of us, and grabbed a handful of the jelly-like substance. I went to kick it out of their hand, but before I could they brought it up to their lips and devoured it like a wolf devouring a hard-earned kill. My jaw dropped as I wondered what kind of world I had found myself in. Even though I had turned myself to stand adjacent to them, they still didn't look at me, but instead pushed against the tile causing more of the liquid to push up from the ground. Once it had risen and promptly gone into its more devilish form, my friend ate it once more. It wasn't until they had finished eating their second helping that they stopped when facing my shoes. They slowly raised their head until their gaze met mine, and at that moment I could truly see the primal energy that was going through my friend while eating this substance.

After a few seconds of awkward silence, the remnants of the substance sunk back into the earth, and my friend slowly rose from the ground and sat on my couch. If I wasn't sure before, I was sure at that moment that the apartment, and possibly the people I knew as friends, were

hiding something from me. The apartment was doing something, something that I couldn't wrap my mind around, and it didn't want me to know about it. My mind couldn't think of anything else to do except run out of the room and into the cold as quickly as I could, and upon feeling as though I had reached a safe distance, I called the police. A few officers picked me up and took me back to the apartment, escorting my friend out in the process, but the look on their face still keeps me awake at night. They didn't look at me with any fear, concern, or anger, but instead with soft and comforting eyes. They looked at me the same way a mother would look at their baby while they played, and due to that I knew that I needed to leave.

I packed up my things as quickly as I could and moved back home with my family. A few months later I heard that the government had evacuated a few areas in that town and began to destroy them, one of which including my apartment complex. Through all the confusion and chaos I knew that it had something to do with what I saw that day. I could never confirm it, and the lack of confirmation led me to coming back all these years later.

I couldn't drive straight to the site as the abandoned roads had degraded over time making them impossible for a car to get through. As a result, I had to enter the city from the north side and pull over once the roads weren't drivable anymore. It was only a few minutes before this became the case, and I prepared to hike the next few miles to my destination. I double checked my backpack for my flashlight, spare batteries, food and water in case of emergency, and notebook. I put a few pencils from my glove compartment into my backpack and began to walk southwest.

The streets were a mess, just as I thought. The sections that weren't covered in debris and garbage were littered with potholes. The lines were faded enough that only small bits of paint could be made out. The sidewalks, although not perfect, were easily traversable. I only needed to be cautious when crossing a street so I didn't step in a pothole and break my leg. Much of the trash consisted of plastic bags and food wrappers, but occasionally I would come across newspaper clippings from the time of the incident. One of the headlines read "Strange sightings on the NorthSide! Government says it's taken care of."

Maybe it's the power of hindsight, but I would've found that headline dubious at best.

After an hour of walking, I found myself in a familiar location. A few blocks from the apartment was a street lined with various restaurants, and as I scanned the horizon and saw four familiar billboards advertising

old deals that have long been discontinued. At that point I knew where I was and felt a tinge of anxiety upon realizing how close I was to my destination. Many of the buildings had some kind of structural damage, almost all from general disuse, and these restaurants were no exception. None of them held a complete foundation which allowed the leftover food from the rapid evacuation to waft its rotten smell into the air all around it. I covered my nose with my shirt to keep myself from vomiting, and attempted to walk as fast as I could to the next block where my destination lay.

It wasn't long before I was able to spot the entrance to the apartments. The white bricks stuck out like a sore thumb in conjunction with the rest of the architecture around the city, and while most only remained as rubble, some managed to maintain some semblance of foundation. There was only one that stayed in perfect condition that lay at the edge of the block, and that was my former apartment. I rushed through the street even faster than before to get to it, because as much as it filled my mind with unpleasant memories, it also felt like it was mocking me the more that I stared at it from afar.

Unfortunately for me, being up close and personal with the entrance didn't ease my nerves. Standing next to the only mint condition apartment amongst a field of broken buildings felt liminal at best, and harrowing at worst. I checked my backpack once again, partially to be safe and also to stall time before I was forced to go in. I must admit, I did feel a certain amount of liberating confidence when walking through my town, but that surely dissipated upon being faced with what I actually trekked here for. I readied my flashlight and slowly opened the front door, a familiar creak echoing into the air.

I entered the apartment with my eyes partially closed, mostly out of fear that some kind of eldritch monstrosity was going to halt my plans as soon as they started. I left the door behind me open in order to provide some light and a possible escape route. My eyes were forced open from fear when I first took a step into the apartment and the floor squished like the tile in front of the couch. I initially jumped back, scared of getting the unknown sludge on my skin. I recoiled onto the cement outside and tested out the floor by gently pressing onto it from a safer position. When I gently pushed my foot into the tile it squished down into the Earth, but didn't produce any liquid, similar to squeezing a dry sponge. I decided it was safe to continue walking inward.

The first area was the living room. I expected to see trash, dust, and overall disarray to layer the floors and walls, but to my surprise everything had been left in a nice state. The couch still stood dormant

while the troublesome tile in front of it sat no different than the others. Whatever substance that spewed out from the ground had either rendered itself invisible or nonexistent. The shelves were still lined with the same books and knick knacks with no signs of decay to be seen. A few blankets were neatly folded on the cushions, but these were the only things I didn't remember owning. I didn't have much time to think about this, however, as a putrid smell from the nearby kitchen overtook all of my other senses.

I opened the door on the left expecting a scene of old dishes and rotting food, but found that it was also in a liveable state. There were no dishes in the sink, food left on the counters, and I was shocked to hear the hum of the refrigerator still going after all of these years. The lightbulb in my head went off upon realizing that the smell certainly came from the refrigerator and the freezer, as the food in there must have been beyond rotten. I lifted my shirt over my nose to cover up the smell and yanked on the handle. When I saw what was inside, the idea that somebody else may have been living here seemed like a guarantee.

All of the food that should have rotted 10 times over looked like they were freshly bought. The ham slices, the bread, the fruit, none of it had even the slightest sign of discoloration. I was left perplexed, as surely something was lying in the back of the refrigerator creating the smell. My curiosity was far beyond peaked at this point, and abandoning the search was not feasible. Thus, I decided to dig until I found the source. I started the process of hauling out items by grabbing the package of ham slices, and upon making first contact I immediately knew something was wrong.

Instead of grabbing onto a crinkly package with wet pieces of meat inside it, I instead grabbed onto something that felt akin to wet clay. All of the object, pac aging and all, molded into one mesh of rubber as I applied force. I was horrified to find that as I squeezed harder onto it, the different colors of the package and the meat all turned into one familiar purple. I threw the package back into the refrigerator and emphatically closed the door, but some of the substance clung itself onto my hand and began to liquify. I attempted to turn on the faucet, but no water came out of the tap. I opened the drawers to try to find a towel but found none. In a last ditch effort to get the ooze off of my hand I shook it desperately, but to my horror almost none of the original liquid flung onto the walls and furniture. Instead of acting like water and shaking away, this substance instead soaked into my hand.

My hand turned purple afterwards. It smelled bad at first, but it went away. My heart started to feel better and I felt less nervous around the apartment. I left the kitchen and went into the office.

A lot of the artwork on the walls was taken down, but I'm sure whoever did it had a really good reason to. Just like I thought there was something just like that when I looked down on the floor. In front of me was a giant piece of art made up of my other pieces of art. Much of my old art had been ripped up and torn apart and put together in a beautiful way. It was like something that a famous artist would make. I was very appreciative of whoever did that, as I felt more ready to create now.

I left the office and went back into the living room. I noticed that the couch and blankets would pulsate every once in a while. It was like a heartbeat. It might seem scary, but it made me feel safe. I was alone in this town, but now I'm not. I walked upstairs.

On the left there was a door that wasn't there before. I tried to open it, but it refused to do so. Under the door I found a note, and this is what it said:

To the previous resident,

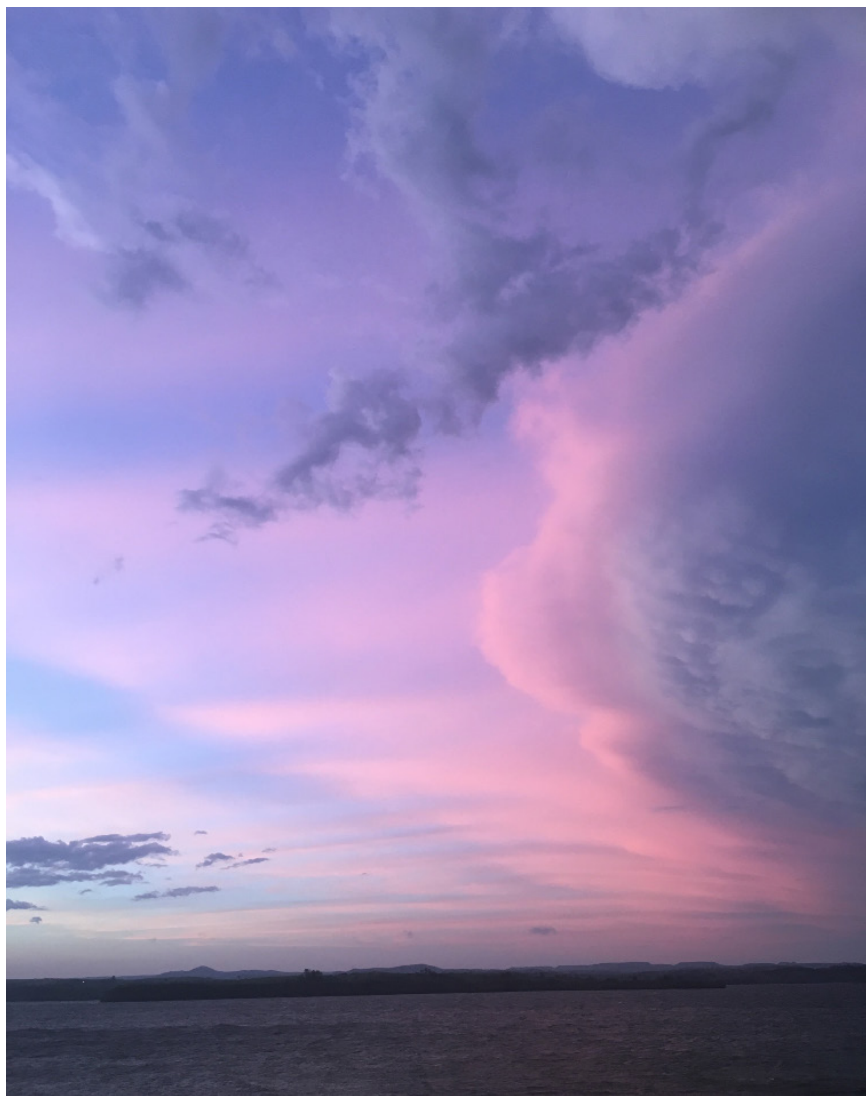
I'm sure that you're quite confused. Before you do anything, make sure you grab something to eat from the refrigerator. It's all still fresh and it's very difficult to think on an empty stomach, so make sure you do that as soon as you can. Rest assured, everything that changed is for your benefit. We found all of your artwork, and while great on its own, put together it makes something groundbreaking. For your sake, the door in front of this note doesn't exist.

We are slightly concerned about something, however. We found it interesting that you thought the proper response was to leave this apartment. How would that make us feel? How did it solve anything? You just ended up coming back anyway. We were very confused about your decision. Don't get it twisted though, we're very happy to see you back. Please go to your room. Don't worry about the bathroom. Unlike this room, it exists, just not right now.

Sincerely,

Your Friends

I was overcome with guilt. I was so sad that I cried on the floor. I don't know why I did that to my friends. Selfishness, I suppose. I walked to my room, avoiding the bathroom along the way. I wasn't going to hurt my friends again. I opened the door and found my bed perfectly made. I felt tired so I went into bed and got under the covers. It was squishy just like the floor. I sank into the bed and felt better than ever. In the bed I could see the faces of all of my friends. I was glad to see them again. I felt loved in their embrace. The walls melted away and it was a beautiful scene. I felt scared to come back, but I don't know why. I am never leaving again.



“SKY”

Kylen Kubas, Photography

THE JEWELER AND THE DIAMOND

Nick Steinbrecher

Everything breaks. There are few sureties in life but this is one of them. A raw diamond, awkward and clunky as it is, would not sit well on a wedding band nor balance so perfectly when suspended around the neck by a thin, silver chain. It has to be broken, shaped to fit its intended purpose through the carefully applied stress of a skilled craftsman. As stated by the Cape Town Diamond Museum, “When cutting a diamond there’s simply no room for error; once a diamond is cut, the brilliance and value is instantly influenced.” I once stood on yellow footprints, prepared to go into the hands of a jeweler who had arguably produced some of the finest cut diamonds the world had ever seen. Diamonds that are known in places such as Gettysburg, Omaha Beach, Hamburger Hill and Falluja. Although my adventure with the Army felt more like a senseless and relentless bludgeoning than a series of well-placed cuts from the hands of an expert, I was, nonetheless, formed into a useable stone.

The room was long and narrow, allowing just enough space for beds and footlockers to sit against the walls either side of a walkway that ran up and down the middle. The ceiling was relatively low given the size of the room. Old fluorescent lights, that sometimes buzzed loudly, and a singular four-by-four foot window on the end wall were our only sources of light. It could almost feel claustrophobic at times. Young men milled about, some excitedly chatting to one another, others laying on their beds and sleeping or playing on their phones. I sat on the floor next to my bed, not daring to sit on its perfectly made surface. I had heard once that sitting on your bunk was, in the eyes of a drill sergeant, a cardinal sin for which you would be fervently punished. I took no chances. This was day three of our time at Fort Jackson, a phase in which the training had not really yet begun, known only as ‘Reception’. During this time, we performed all the necessary preparatory paperwork, physical examinations and supply issue that preceded training. Since actual training had not yet begun, our cell phones had not yet been confiscated. So it was that on the third day of my seven and a half month time away from my wife, that I would receive a life changing phone call. She was driving. I remember that much because the road noise that the Bluetooth microphone picked up on, coupled with the chatter of recruits around me forced me to find a quiet corner so that I could better hear what she was saying. “I’m pregnant.” That’s the only part of the conversation I truly remember. I have

always been good with kids, mostly because, in many ways, I myself never truly grew up. I don't know exactly when I decided I wanted to be a father, but it was very early on in my life. Now I was being told that I would be one and I wasn't there to hold my wife as we celebrated this news. I feel no shame in sharing that I wept quietly in my corner, both in joy and sadness. Separation. I would later realize that this was the jeweler's first cut.

We quickly learned that life in basic training would rarely make sense. All communication to the outside world, with the exception of letters from home, had been cut off. As far as we were concerned, nothing existed outside the confines of our training area, yet somehow, we were constantly impacted by external influences. Chief among these influences was the Covid-19 pandemic. The DEFAC, which is simply the abbreviated compound of Dining Facility, was a building we would not see the inside of until our fifth week of training. Meal time consisted of outdoor dining, sitting on chilly, hard cement, shivering as we ate our cold 'Hot As' and 'MREs'. Social distancing was the reason cited for our meal conditions. There was not sufficient space for us to maintain our six-foot radius from one another they would say. It was infuriating as we knew it was a lie. "Keep your masks on and soon you will be able to eat at the DEFAC." This was a common phrase used by our drill sergeants and company leaders alike. We were isolated from the world, forced to share eight showers between sixty people, crammed into small living quarters where we slept less than five feet from one another and exercised together daily, all without our masks on. Social distancing was impossible. We knew that. They knew that. They held this over us, like an obstinate mule being led by a carrot on stick. I knew that no matter how hard I chased that carrot, I would never get it until they let me. Don't ask questions, don't argue the logic, just obey. The second cut had been made.

The M4A1 is a lightweight, 5.56mm, magazine fed, gas operated, air cooled, shoulder fired carbine. It has a maximum range of 3600 meters, an effective range of 600 meters at an area target, 500 meters at a point target, weighs 6.4 pounds empty and 7.75 pounds full loaded. It features semi-automatic and fully-automatic firing modes, has a muzzle velocity of 2,970 feet per second and as I would come to learn, has the ability to shatter a diamond. The first two weeks of basic combat training mostly consists of confusion, yelling, muscle fatigue and whole lot of regret. It's not until week three, when you sign your name on DA form 2062 and they place that weapon in your hands for the first time, that you begin to feel like a real soldier. After finding out just how heavy 6.4 pounds can be, carrying an M4 doesn't feel quite as cool. Perhaps that was the point. Range days were equal parts stressful and exciting. On one

hand, we were actually firing our weapons instead of just cleaning them and cradling them in our arms, but on the other hand we were now subjected to an even more intense form of scrutiny from our drill sergeants. They told many stories of trainees who had been unsafe on the range in previous cycles and had found themselves, quite literally, under a drill sergeant's boot. Everyone behaved a little better and moved a little more carefully, never wanting to be the one to get tackled to the ground but always secretly hoping to see some other poor soul get laid out. It never happened. Range day concluded with a detail of trainees walking up and down the shooting areas, picking up brass while everyone else returned magazines and were patted down and 'wanded' with metal detectors. Once the range was clean and we were all in formation, we would march back however many miles to our scratchy green blankets and blue plastic beds. Sunday mornings were our day off. It didn't matter that it wasn't a full day off but rather only a half day, the break was still a welcome one. I recall hearing a distant bang that sounded like a door slamming or something heavy colliding with something else, either way I thought nothing of it and neither did anyone else. Not until Drill Sergeant Richards came hurriedly into our bay. "At ease!" I called out loudly as I snapped to parade rest. The rest of the room echoed me as they too assumed the position. "Steinbrecher," Drill Sergeant Richards had a sense of urgency about him that ran counter to his usual slow, calculated manner. "Get everyone in the bay down to the bleachers time now. Form up and get accountability." "Yes, Drill Sergeant." I said as I started to move towards my locker to get into uniform. "I don't care what you are wearing Steinbrecher, just get everyone out of the building now." At this moment I knew that someone had been hurt. Leaving the barracks building out of uniform was an excellent way to get you and your battle buddies doing extra physical fitness training. The firetrucks arrived first, then the ambulance and finally the police. A 17-year-old kid, who we will call Kay, had shot himself in the bay next to mine. Everyone in their bay had been sitting around, enjoying their morning off, some chatting, some reading bibles and a few had snuck into corners to take naps. Kay had been cleaning his weapon next to a group of other trainees, close enough to be associated with the group, far enough away not to be a part of the conversation. Kay removed his BFA (blank firing adapter) from the barrel of his weapon, popped a live round into the chamber and turned the weapon on himself and pulled the trigger. It happened fast enough that no one could react in time but just slowly enough that some realized what he was about to do a moment too late. The round entered the right side of his chest and came out somewhere between his shoulder blades. He had been aiming for his heart but had

somehow missed. I spoke with one the people who had been there and watched it happen, “Have you ever watched a deer die?” He asked. “He got all stiff and slowly fell to the ground. He was just staring off into space.” I had seen many deer die. I knew exactly what he meant.

I had joined the Army to change myself, to become something I wasn't, something better. I thought of the Army as my jeweler, an artist who would remove the misshapen pieces to reveal the perfectly cut diamond beneath and add value to my existence. I was wrong. I realized during the course of my training that each person around me reacted differently to the same situation. We had the same beds, same clothes, same haircuts, same drill sergeants, we even had the same underwear. No one was unique in any way other than how we chose to respond to our surroundings. If we were all the same, then why did some people put in more effort than others? Why did some people stay up at night and cry while others slept soundly in their uncomfortable beds? And why did some people choose to quit or to end their life rather than finish what they had started? The answer was not immediately obvious to me, but I did eventually come to a conclusion that has stuck with me ever since. The Army was not the jeweler, the Army was the jeweler's toolkit. I was put under nearly every kind of stressor I could think of during the course of my training. With every new stress came new ways to respond, new tools to shape the person I was and the person I was to become. The Army was not my jeweler, I was. Kay had been in the same situation as everyone else with access to trained suicide prevention officers, psychiatrists, peers and even suicide prevention training for himself. All of these tools were at his disposal, ready and waiting to be picked up and applied to the rough stone. He chose the M4 carbine. Kay would live but an amputated arm would serve as permanent reminder of a misused tool. So, I conclude with this simple thought; as you journey through life's twists and turns and as you encounter obstacles that hinder you, consider your tools and choose wisely.

“I'm on the front line, don't worry I'll be fine, the story is just beginning. I say goodbye to my weakness, so long to the regret and now I see the world through diamond eyes.” -Diamond Eyes by Shinedown

GRANDPA MIKE

Ruby Richard

I like for everything in life to have meaning
To have flow
To make sense lyrically even when it hurts
But there's nothing poetic about this.
Nothing poetic about my grandpa getting cancer again
About the fact that I left his old jacket back home
And have nothing to curl into when I cry about it
Nothing poetic about him not being able to eat
About him getting thinner every time I visit
About his inevitable death
Which I can do nothing to prevent
About me googling the lifespan of people with metastatic bone cancer
And being met with grim results.
Nothing poetic at all
It just hurts.



FLASHBACKS OF STANDING ROCK

Austin-Alexius Klein

It was September 2016, my friends and I were headed to Cannon Ball, North Dakota to write about and photograph the Sacred Stone Camp, formed in April by a group of women from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe with the goal of monitoring and eventually stopping the Dakota Access Pipeline from crossing the Missouri River and threatening their reservation's water supply. The pipeline had been rerouted from crossing north of Bismarck, where the majority are white, after an environmental assessment found that it would pose a risk to the city's drinking water.

Energy Transfer Partners designed the 4 billion dollar pipeline to transfer oil from the northwest corner of North Dakota, where an oil boom dependent on fracking that injects water mixed with toxic chemicals deep underground—putting aquifers used for drinking water at risk according to records obtained by ProPublica. Nearly 570,000 barrels of oil would be transferred from North Dakota to Illinois daily. According to Energy Transfer Partners' website, it would transport 40% of North Dakota's oil production per day by much safer means than by trucks or train. According to the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, oil and gas pipelines have leaked 3,300 times since 2010—about 9 million gallons of oil.

My friends and I took the trip to the heart of the protest activity surrounding the pipeline with the goal of bolstering awareness of the Sacred Stone Camp's mission and to donate some of the clothes we received from people in Fargo. We traveled 250 miles west towards the site of Sitting Bull's murder 126 years ago by the federal government, past an "information checkpoint"—in reality a military checkpoint complete with guns to interrogate anyone who lived near or was headed in the direction of where construction on the Dakota Access Pipeline had come to a halt before crossing the river.

The Standing Rock reservation has a history of resistance and perseverance against the encroachment of white settlers, when the Ghost Dance movement reached the Dakotas (a religious movement with the goal of preserving Native American lands and culture) white settlers were frightened that Sitting Bull, who united the Sioux tribes, would use the

movement to energize an uprising. As tensions between Native Americans and the United States' government became increasingly volatile, Sitting Bull surrendered to secure the safety of his people from genocide, and Standing Rock became the place of their confinement, and soon after, the place of their leader's murder. Two weeks after Sitting Bull was killed, the United States' army massacred over 250 men, women, and children at Wounded Knee in South Dakota.

That spirit of resistance and perseverance against the legacy of colonization was alive and well in the Sacred Stone Camp. A Native American man wearing a red "Make America Native Again" hat was directing traffic in a congested field filled with cars as we tried to find some place to park. Upon entering the camp I am cussed out by someone for trying to take a picture and directed to a large tent hooked up to a generator and complete with a computer where each of my friends are interviewed by a white activist before being given a permit to take photographs.

When it is my turn to be interviewed she asks me why I am interested in the camp, what kind of story I am trying to write, where the story will be published, etc. My answers seem to satisfy her and I am given permission to take photos and write about the camp. It was ignorance on my part for not doing enough research into the camp to know that we needed to go through a process to be allowed to document it.

But I was unsure at the time what kind of story I was trying to write, although I believed in the Sacred Stone Camp's mission of stopping the pipeline from crossing the Missouri River, was that enough? As a white man who grew up in Bismarck, the place where the pipeline had been rerouted to avoid contaminating their water supply in favor of jeopardizing Standing Rock's, could I ever be fully aware of how high the stakes had become?

You could sense the tension in the air, the Sacred Stone Camp was a prayer camp that also functioned as a resistance camp not only to the Dakota Access Pipeline, but to the larger frameworks of racism and colonization still at work against the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe at the hands of state and federal governments.

On the outskirts of the camp, I run into one of my friends, Allison, a Native American woman of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate tribe. Together

we planned a protest outside of the Williston Basin Petroleum Conference in Bismarck last May where Donald Trump had been a keynote speaker. She is talking to Danielle, “Miss Indian World.” They are picking wild sage while admiring a herd of buffalo. When I call them “bison” I am admonished. “We’re close enough to the rez, you can call them buffaloes,” Allison tells me.

I ask for permission to take Danielle’s photograph, and she poses, powerfully, smiling below her crown, in her right hand a bushel of sage, buffaloes gathered in the distance. It is such a wonderful moment that I nearly forget that this is a few steps away from where Energy Transfer Partners had unleashed attack dogs on protestors trying to halt the desecration of what they believed to be a sacred burial site a few days earlier. Dina Gilio-Whitaker wrote in *As Long as the Grass Grows* that footage of one of the dog’s mouth covered in blood went viral on social media and was “a chilling reminder of a history of brutality used against the Lakota Sioux by the US military.” She also referred back to Christopher Columbus’ genocide of the Taíno people, where attack dogs were used.

A letter from the Army Corps of Engineer’s senior field archaeologist, Richard D. Harnois, detailed 5 recorded “cultural sites” that might be disturbed by the pipeline as well as over 30 others within a 1-mile radius of the construction site, varying from scattered artifacts, stone circles, to an earth lodge village (the traditional dwellings of the Hidatsa, Mandan, and Arikara tribes) in a series of reports, only one site had been evaluated by the government for entry into the National Register. The reports also detail the inspection of Galpin Cemetery and an attempt to verify local reports of an exposed burial site that would be threatened by the pipeline with the help of LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, who has sadly since then passed away from cancer. Although no remains were found at the time, Allard was “committed to following up with her source for more information and later action.”

Standing Rock’s request for further archaeological surveys were denied. On September 3rd, the tribe publicly condemned Energy Transfer Partners for demolishing a two-mile-long area that the tribe’s historic preservation officer, Tim Mentz, said contained “multiple graves and specific prayer sites.” A few days later, on September 8th, Governor Jack Dalrymple would activate the National Guard to “monitor” demonstrations.

A day before Danielle would receive her crown, on April 29th, her tribe (Standing Rock) petitioned the US Army Corps of Engineers to do a more thorough study on the environmental impact the pipeline would have on the Missouri River. But they had been opposed to pipelines since 2012, and in a meeting with Energy Transfer Partners, an audio recording from September 30th, 2014 captured by the Bismarck Tribune showed that when informed that the Dakota Access Pipeline would cross less than a mile from the reservation's border, they were concerned about damage to sacred sites and possible contamination of their water supply.

A man on horseback watched over us from a hill as we approached the entrance of the camp again, adorned with hundreds of tribal flags. In September, NBC News reported that over 300 federally recognized Native American tribes had come together at the Sacred Stone Camp. The New York Times called it “the largest, most diverse tribal action in at least a century, perhaps since the Little Bighorn.”

Allison is playing Brandy's “The Boy is Mine” from her speakers. When she tells me I'm too young to know who Brandy is, I tell her one of my favorite songs of all time is “What About Us?” My friends and I sit on some lawn chairs and observe a prayer ceremony that has seemingly been going on for hours. I look over at Allison and Danielle and they seem to be at ease, enjoying the ceremony and the company of so many activists and friends. I cannot stop worrying about what will happen to everyone.

I have flashbacks to the protest at the Williston Basin Petroleum Conference where things started out so peacefully and ended with us being surrounded by a mob and people spitting and screaming, threatening, and for some, pushing and hitting. A nice lady with a clean shaven head told me to relax, that these kinds of things happen at protests. But I felt like my blood had turned to lead and I wished I had been born anywhere but Bismarck, anywhere but the center of this far-right, evangelical, anti-gay, anti-diversity, anti-abortion hate-parade. Half of the people who showed up to protest against Donald Trump's keynote address had been friends of Allison's, Native Americans who were opposed to the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. To be honest, that was the first time I had heard about it. I was only beginning my descent into the madness of oil industry regulation activism in western North Dakota.

Now, in September 2016, it's all anyone who cares about environmental

activism can talk about, and it's slowly taking over the national news as tensions escalate. As I sat there, in the lawn chair, listening to a language I didn't understand (Lakota), but is native to the land I was born, I feel out of place mainly because I am so afraid. My friend, Mama, a photographer from Ghana, is smiling as she poses for a selfie with my other friend, Billy, who was, at the time, a gay rights activist from Mandan, is calm and collected as usual. We all met at the Williston Basin Petroleum protest.

Although I truly believe in environmental activism, I do not want to be attacked by a dog, or spayed with mace, or sit for even a day in Morton County's makeshift prison-cells that are filled with people they have arrested for participating in pipeline protests. I can't help but wonder why it has come to this—why the authorities have resorted to such violent means of dealing with protestors, “Water Protectors,” as some prefer to be known.

The Sacred Stone Camp is a massive expanse of teepees, tents, cars, and campers from people all over the continent. This was a place where borders were irrelevant—the bottom line that united everyone was the belief that access to clean drinking water was a right far more important than oil. Various signs throughout the camp read “you can't drink oil,” “water is sacred,” and “mni wiconi” which is Lakota for “water is life.”

After such an unprecedented display of unity, resistance, and perseverance against the pipeline by Standing Rock and their allies in the face of such violence, aggression, derision, and injustice displayed by Energy Transfer Partners and their militarized police force, I wonder how our government's leaders could have turned a blind-eye, how they could be so desensitized and shameless in their further exploitation and destruction of Native American's livelihoods.

Why were those who lived on the reservation considered expendable in the extraction and transport of fossil fuels, but the metropolitan areas surrounding Bismarck were spared? If an environmental assessment deemed the pipeline a risk to the drinking water of a predominantly white community, what was being done to ensure that the drinking water of Native Americans and the preservation of important cultural sites would not be compromised?

The timing of the pipeline crossing the Missouri River in the lead-up to a contentious presidential election could not have been more unfortunate.

Hillary Clinton was trapped between some (certainly not all) labor unions who supported the pipeline in its creation of jobs and Native Americans and environmentally conscious voters who believed the pipeline jeopardized Standing Rock's drinking water and would further contribute to climate change.

Native American activists set up a teepee right inside Clinton's campaign headquarters in New York City, urging her to make a statement of opposition to the pipeline. A political organization named Our Revolution, born out of Bernie Sander's campaign, issued a statement, "There is one person who will have the power to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline: Secretary Hillary Clinton. If she is to be our next president, she will have the power to stop the pipeline. And our best opportunity to get her to oppose it is before the election."

Clinton's response was steadfast in its neutrality (when she wasn't refusing to talk about it at all), "It's important that on the ground in North Dakota, everyone respects demonstrators' rights to protest peacefully, and workers' rights to do their jobs safely," Tyrone Gayle, a spokesperson for her campaign, said briefly. In other words, the Water Protectors assembled at the Sacred Stone Camp should just sit back and watch as the pipeline workers plow through cultural sites that are important to them, and threaten their future generations' access to clean drinking water.

Barrack Obama, in one of the few visits made to a reservation ever by a sitting US President, travelled to Cannon Ball with the First Lady in 2014 promising to work on ways to further economic and educational development on Native American lands. In one of his last actions as President in December, he would bring construction of the pipeline to a halt, angering North Dakota's Republican Representative Kevin Cramer, who labeled Obama "lawless" in a statement that went on to say, "I'm encouraged we will restore law and order next month, when we get a President who will not thumb his nose at the rule of law." Alex Seitz-Wald writing for NBC News, reported that President-elect Donald Trump had not only invested his own money into the pipeline, but received a \$100,000 donation to his campaign from the CEO of Energy Transfer Partners. Once inaugurated, he would select a member of Energy Transfer Partners' board to be his energy secretary.

In the events leading up to Obama's decision, on September 9th, U.S. district Judge James Boasberg wrote, "the United States' relationship

with the Indian tribes has been contentious and tragic” as he denied Standing Rock’s request for construction on the pipeline to stop. Later in October, Energy Transfer Partners would proceed with construction. Morton County police would arrest nearly 30 protestors at the construction site.

It’s here where things start to get horrifying, and something I would never have foreseen happening so close to my home. On November 20th, They moved from attack dogs to tear gas and spraying a group of about 400 people with a water cannon in temperatures that had dropped to below freezing. Amy Sisk would report for Prairie Public that “protest leaders were concerned about hypothermia” and medical personnel at the camp were overwhelmed by the injuries so that “the local community of Cannon Ball opened their school gymnasium for emergency relief.”

It seemed that the best option North Dakota law enforcement had decided on for dealing with protestors was to make them potentially freeze to death in a place far from any hospital, and to make matters worse, a burning vehicle (it was inconclusive who started the fire, unless you want to take the police’s word for it) would block the bridge providing access to their camp, blocking the way of ambulances. Protestors said the police had intentionally barricaded access to the camp with the car, and that they were attempting to move it when police began spraying them with water.

“It was chaotic, dark, freezing” said Jade Begay, spokeswoman for the Indigenous Environmental Network, who says she and others gathered for a peaceful demonstration that turned to chaos “caused by the police and their law enforcement putting out the noise cannons, spraying people with water.” In a video of the incident, people can be heard screaming “water is life” as they protest. The Standing Rock Medic and Healer Council criticized the “potentially lethal use of these confrontational methods against people peacefully assembled.” In response to Morton County Police’s spokeswoman Donnel Hushka’s insistence that the water cannons were being used to put out fires started by protestors while also admitting they were being used to control the crowd, Begay said police were “paint[ing] their own picture. They don’t need to be meeting us with mace and rubber bullets when we are nonviolent. There is no form of aggression or violence.” Atsa E’sha Hoferer, a member of the Paiute tribe, said that if any fires were started by protestors, it was a desperate attempt to keep warm.

Fires burned ominously in the background as police shot rubber bullets and water on demonstrators, and various news outlets speculated over why the fires were started, with Morton County Police laying the blame on protestors and protestors laying the blame on police. LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, one of the founders of the Sacred Stone Camp, would say in a letter to *The Guardian*, “from the beginning, we at Standing Rock gathered in a spirit of prayer and non-violent resistance to the destruction of our homeland and culture. We came together with our ceremonies, songs and drums. Weapons are not allowed into our camps.”

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, mere days before Donald Trump’s inauguration, bringing with it the promise that construction on the Dakota Access Pipeline would be renewed, police responded to protests with renewed aggression. Police charged and arrested 16 demonstrators, that they believed were trespassing and rioting. Activists said in honor of Martin Luther King Jr., they planned to peacefully walk toward the construction site of the pipeline and then to Backwater bridge, where protestors had been sprayed with water cannons by police on November 20th. The bridge had since then been occupied by police who were refusing to let anyone pass, including emergency services.

Nataanii Means, a hip-hop artist from the Oglala Lakota tribe, witnessed police fire rubber bullets as well as tear gas at protestors, he said “It was a lot of violence for unarmed water protectors.” Johnny Dangers, a photographer at the scene, said police “just started pushing into people.” Irina Lukban, an activist at the scene, said she received a concussion after being hit on the head by a National Guard soldier with his shield, who then continued to shoot her with rubber bullets. Nataanii Means told *The Guardian* “We’re acting in prayer, I don’t know why they keep reacting in violence.”

Why then, was such brutal military force exercised at Standing Rock? Antonia Juhasz reported for the *Pacific Standard* that TigerSwan, a private security firm “with experience fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan launched an intrusive military-style surveillance and counterintelligence campaign against the activists and their allies [...] label[ing] the protestors ‘jihadists.’” The Sacred Stone Camp would hold out until February 23rd, 2017 when the national guard and law enforcement officers would march through the camp, guns pointing, helicopter flying, heavy machinery bulldozing, arresting any remaining demonstrators on the pretense that flooding in the spring would pose a danger to those living in the camp.

Linda Black Elk, a member of the Catawba tribe, speaking to *The Guardian*, said that “I’ve been watching police officers use knives to cut tipis and point their guns inside blindly.” The North Dakota Department of Emergency Services sent out a tweet with a photograph of the decimated camp with the hashtag “#NoDapl #YesDapl,” as if even after all but bombing the camp out of existence there was still a need for the appearance of neutrality. Tom Goldtooth, director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, said that the seizure and destruction of the camp was a “violent and unnecessary infringement on the constitutional right of water protectors to peacefully protest and exercise their freedom of speech.” A few hours later, the newly elected governor of North Dakota, Doug Burgum, signed laws into place passed in response to the Dakota Access Pipeline protests that had to do with trespassing, rioting, and wearing facemasks. A bill that would make it legal to run over protestors with a car did not pass.

I refused to go to any protests after what happened at Standing Rock until 2021. Even though I was not physically there when protestors were being sprayed with water cannons, shot with rubber bullets, sprayed with mace, etc.—I felt traumatized. For years I dreaded to reexperience the senseless violence and hatred that unfolded first-hand at the Williston Basin Petroleum Conference, and on a much larger scale at Standing Rock which I am lucky to have only witnessed through videos, photos, and news articles. Many of the protestors report a sense of trauma after the event, and it saddens me because these people are not monsters and did not deserve to be treated so indignantly.

I witnessed first-hand at the Williston Basin Petroleum Conference how and why some protests turn violent. I remember trying to ask one of the protestors to stay on the sidewalk, because the police officers had asked us to stay there with our signs far away from the guests, but he insisted on antagonizing someone with a Trump hat. That’s probably the last few seconds I remember of things going smoothly. In a few moments, we were surrounded by Trump supporters, and police were ordering us to leave the site—only we couldn’t, not without coming into direct contact with what was growing into an angry mob.

And we were certainly outnumbered. Next thing I knew, people were screaming that they were being hit, spit on, grabbed. I remember the nervous girl who I promised nothing would go wrong to crying because someone had grabbed her sign away. I remember my friend Hannah’s

eyes wide in disbelief or fear at how quickly things had descended into turmoil. And of course, I remember the words of the nice clean-shaven-head-lady telling me soothingly that things would be alright, that these sorts of things happen at protests.

In the case of Standing Rock, I was not physically there to see who started the fires or who reportedly threw rocks, water bottles, etc. at police to prompt them to retaliate. What I witnessed in September 2016 was a peaceful, organized prayer camp filled with people from all over the continent that were camping out in teepees, tents, and campers—a lot of them brought their horses, some of them were picking sage, admiring the buffalo, asking (nicely) that I put my camera away, or to be careful not to walk in certain areas they considered sacred, some of them were cooking, dancing, and of course praying.

It is my conviction that the people of this prayer camp did not deserve to be labeled “jihadists” and treated as such by a private security firm with experience fighting wars in the Middle East. I think the “information checkpoint” was unnecessary. I believe the reports of many witnesses who saw police trying to incite a riot as they injured members of a peaceful protest. I believe that my friend, Allison, who was at the camp during the height of the violence, could very well be dead from the brutality of the police—or the military—whatever you want to call the attack force that descended upon people trying to fight for clean water to drink. I believe that when police were stabbing knives into teepees, they really didn’t care if there were people still inside. Unlike the government officials of North Dakota, I do not feel the need for the appearance of neutrality on this issue.

SPACES

Cameron Bauder

The lights reveal a studio with many paintings. An old woman sits behind an easel. She appears to be preparing the space for her next painting. Finally she sits down and wets her brush.

The old woman begins painting using the color black as Charlie enters.

He enters nonchalantly and begins his journey around the space.

It's a long journey as he looks at the paintings.

CHARLOTTE

If you have any questions feel free to ask.
Charlie quickly turns to face her.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry?

CHARLOTTE

The paintings dear. If you have any questions about them feel free to ask.

CHARLIE

Did you um... paint all these yourself?

CHARLOTTE

Oh yes. Of course.

CHARLIE

They're very well done.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you.

CHARLIE

Do you only paint portraits of people?

CHARLOTTE

Not always but I find that people are fascinating to paint.

CHARLIE

Why's that?

CHARLOTTE

It's hard to explain to someone who has never painted one.

CHARLIE

How do you know I haven't?

CHARLOTTE

Then you wouldn't need to ask.

CHARLIE

I see.

CHARLOTTE

(Pause)

You want me to explain anyway don't you?

CHARLIE

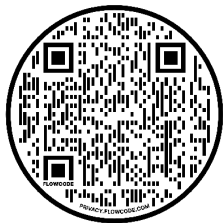
If you don't mind. I'm interested in listening.

CHARLOTTE

Why don't I just show you? Grab that chair over there and take a seat. I'll paint a picture for you.

He takes a nearby chair and sits down in front of her. She looks at him and then begins painting again.

Visit This QR Code to finish reading *Spaces*!



SOB STORIES

Austin-Alexius Klein

Daniel Sisk gave up playing the piano when his parents divorced. Not to punish them for staying together long enough for one last photo after his graduation ceremony. Not because he would never be good enough to compete against anyone who played in a real city. Daniel resented the time he had spent confined alone. He wasn't just insecure about the man he was becoming, but ashamed. As he drove on the interstate past familiar fields and pastures, he couldn't stop thinking about his struggle to fit in and relate to the majority of people he had known. Thoughts of the lies he had told girls he admired in hopes of earning their admiration in return filled him with unending embarrassment and guilt. He was frightened of his own behaviors, expecting to helplessly keep repeating them for the remainder of his life.

He was nineteen when he came to Fargo, a place he had never been, and the city he had chosen to study in with hopes of finding some sort of meaning and belonging outside the melodramas of his claustrophobic upbringing. His home had been full of slamming doors and loud TVs, followed by moments of unbearable silence. Not that this had made him a necessarily unspoiled child. His mother who had spent her childhood and adolescence in poverty, cleaning up the filth of strangers in hotels, instilled in her son an awareness of the consequences of privilege. His father, who talked over anyone he didn't agree with, would not allow his son to lack any advantage. Daniel's only disadvantage in life was that consistent conformity and rigid reproaches had drowned any sense of direction, robbed him of purpose, and replaced these with a tendency to rebel, an impatience for not getting what he wanted, and a repressed longing for attention, whether it be good or bad.

When Daniel arrived at his dormitory he became aware of the unavoidable, impending collision with his roommate, who by the looks of it had arrived before him. Clothes were thrown haphazardly around the room and formed a mountain on one of the beds. Even though this was their first day in the dorm, it appeared to Daniel that more than half of the clothes were already soiled. Covering the entirety of one of the desks was

with protein powders, supplements and medications. Daniel picked up one of the pill bottles to learn it was Prozac prescribed to a Clay Dunningan. It was then that the collision happened, and Daniel found himself shaking embarrassingly as he tried to put the pill bottle back on the bookshelf, but his roommate appeared not to take offense.

“You must be?” his roommate asked.

“Daniel... I’m sorry.” He said as an introduction.

“I’ve been anxious to meet you. I’m Clay. But you already knew that.” Clay said glancing for a moment at the shelf of medications and supplements. He has spread himself all over the place. Daniel thought. Doesn’t he know that some of this room belongs to me? I hardly know where to put any of my things, seeing as he has already claimed it all. He set down the box that contained a few valuable items; a computer, a lockbox with some cash, and a camera, on the floor of what he hoped would be his side of the room. He looked out the open window. It was the peak of August and the room was unbearably hot. He noticed how sweaty Clay was, and then felt uncomfortably with his hand at the sweat beginning to seep from his hairline. He had not even been in the room a few minutes. “We need to get a fan if either of us wants to survive this.” Daniel said, and he was surprised how dramatic everything he said sounded.

“Sure, we could steal a fan from one of the hallways... Or we could go to the store and get one if you have a car,” Clay replied. Daniel answered yes, and Clay observed out loud that Daniel was spoiled. For a moment, Daniel wasn’t sure whether or not he was kidding. When they got into the car Clay asked, “Is it okay if I smoke in here?” but was already lighting a cigarette. Again Daniel answered yes, but began to eye Clay too much to escape his notice, prompting him to laugh, “Relax, I promise not to get any ash in your new car.” Daniel forced himself to smile and wondered if Clay really thought that on such a windy day as this, the ash would end up anywhere but outside the open window. “Do you smoke?” Clay asked, and this time Daniel said no, that he was entirely ignorant of cigarettes, vaping, of anything that shouldn’t be inhaled.

“You don’t smoke anything?” Clay said, and then added despairingly,

“Damn, I’m definitely not in California anymore.”

“Is that where you’re from?” Daniel asked.

“Yeah, Santa Barbara.”

“What is it like?”

“A lot of the people don’t have souls but at least you’re surrounded by

beauty everywhere you look.”

“I’ve always wanted to go there. To be where everything happens. To see where culture comes from. Nothing, I mean nothing happens here.” Daniel noticed again that he was being a little dramatic, but he truly believed that everything he said was true. And he was surprised at how open he was being towards someone he barely knew. I suppose we’ll know too much of each other soon enough, he thought with a little bit of horror. I might as well reveal myself now.

It was five o’clock and cars hurled down every lane and began to swarm Daniel’s car. He was unaccustomed to driving in a place with so much traffic and tried to hide his nervousness from Clay. When they got to the store each of them picked out a fan to put beside their beds. When they returned to the dorm room it was still too hot to stay there, and Daniel decided to wait to unload the rest of his things from the car until it was dark. Clay asked him if they could go on a drive to check out things around town and Daniel was compelled to agree since he had already driven around campus and was curious to see what more there was to the city surrounding them.

Clay had left California in disgrace. He had spent his whole life competing against his brothers for the attention and approval of his father. The last time he saw his mother had been nearly a year ago. She was alone in her home rocking back and forth slowly as she crouched on the floor, staring with wide unblinking eyes on the needle she had poked into her veins

She had surrounded herself with empty glass bottles forming a circle around her and Clay had wondered what would happen if he stepped into it. Would it be like stepping on a wasp’s nest? Would the prick of a needle feel as bad as it looked when it stung him over and over again as he gave into his cravings? And who was there to blame for these cravings? “Why are you doing this?” were the last words he remembered saying to her, and for a moment, he didn’t think he would get a response. What kind of question was this anyway, to ask someone who had spent so much time destroying themselves rather than being there to love, to at least witness the unraveling of the life she had created. “It’s to keep me safe... I’m safe here...” The response was enough to keep Clay away from her, to convince him that she was as good as dead. Clay had done everything he could to earn his father’s trust and respect. He had set and defeated his own records as a

sprinter. He had dedicated much of his time to training and toning his body. His success as a wide receiver on the football field had attracted the attention of prestigious universities who offered him scholarships. He was often seen smiling in photos with his dad's arm on his shoulder as he posed with trophies and medals. But no matter how hard he worked, there was always more to be accomplished. And there was one test he could not pass, the drug test. As a result, his aspiration to be a professional athlete, the possibility of attending a college where his older brother wasn't there to watch over him in case he messed up again, and his father's approval had been ripped away. Clay started smoking cigarettes and spending all of the money he earned on weed and spending more of his time in front of the TV rather than at the gym. His girlfriend would not follow him to some frigid, unknown place and neither would his friends. He arrived in North Dakota knowing nobody except his brother who was to report back to their father everything Clay did and because of this he stayed as far away from him as possible.

Daniel and Clay got out of the car to walk along a trail beside the river. Men and women jogged past them, some pushing strollers or walking dogs. Grasshoppers flew up in front of them as they were disturbed from basking in the sun. They reminded Daniel of when he and his family had moved into a new house in the countryside where swarms of grasshoppers and crickets had tormented him. In the summer, he couldn't go outside without clumps of grasshoppers jumping into his shirt, up his pants, into his hair. In the fall, crickets seemed to be hiding everywhere in the house, screaming through the night, especially in the dark basement where he slept. No matter how hard he looked, he could never find them. Daniel simply remarked that he couldn't stand insects, flinching a little as they flew by. "I don't think you'd like California much," Clay laughed. "My dad has a pretty nice place, but it still has roaches." Daniel had never seen such a thing in real life before, and was troubled that his perfect idea of California could not coexist with such horrors.

"I still wish I could see it," Daniel persisted. "At least then I could see behind the curtain, I guess. See if I'm missing out."

"Missing out on what?" Clay asked, baffled.

"How can I explain it to you? You just got here. You don't know how it feels to even exist here." He thought for a moment about the books, the movies, and the music that celebrated where Clay was from. They

all seemed to converge and testify to a promised land where people could express themselves and their identities with terrifying power. He wanted to embody a cultural moment, or at least witness one unfold. California was where people went to scratch their names into the minds of every American, even if only for a moment. "I'm sorry—I just feel like growing up here you're forced to accept that you're nothing. And no matter how hard you try to change that you'll never get anywhere. Even if you painted better than Picasso or sang like Whitney Houston there would be no one to see it... you'd be singing in some run down church for funerals as your talent decays and fades away."

"What is your talent?" Clay asked, unfazed by Daniel's depressing tone. "Nothing really, I've never achieved or succeeded in anything. I'm worried I'll never find the thing that I'm good at... that I'll always be alone because of that. I played piano for as long as I can remember. I wrote some songs—"

"Really? I've tried writing some songs too—rap music. Maybe you could play something while I rap?"

"I gave it up. I stopped. I only played to make my dad happy. When he left I had nobody to please but myself and sitting in a room alone with my dead sister's piano playing chords and scales was not making me happy."

"But you wouldn't be alone if you played in front of a crowd."

"What crowd?"

"You act like you're still in the middle of nowhere, but look around you. This city is new to you too, and it may not be Hollywood but this could be the place where you find out who you want to be and what you're good at. You act like you're so alone, but you've got somebody right by you, listening to you. Being alone, for you, is a choice."

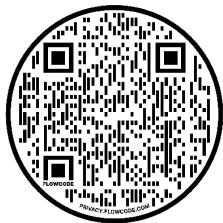
"You sound like the self-help books my mom gives me for Christmas." Daniel laughed, but he realized with despair that morphed into hope that maybe being alone had been a choice for him.

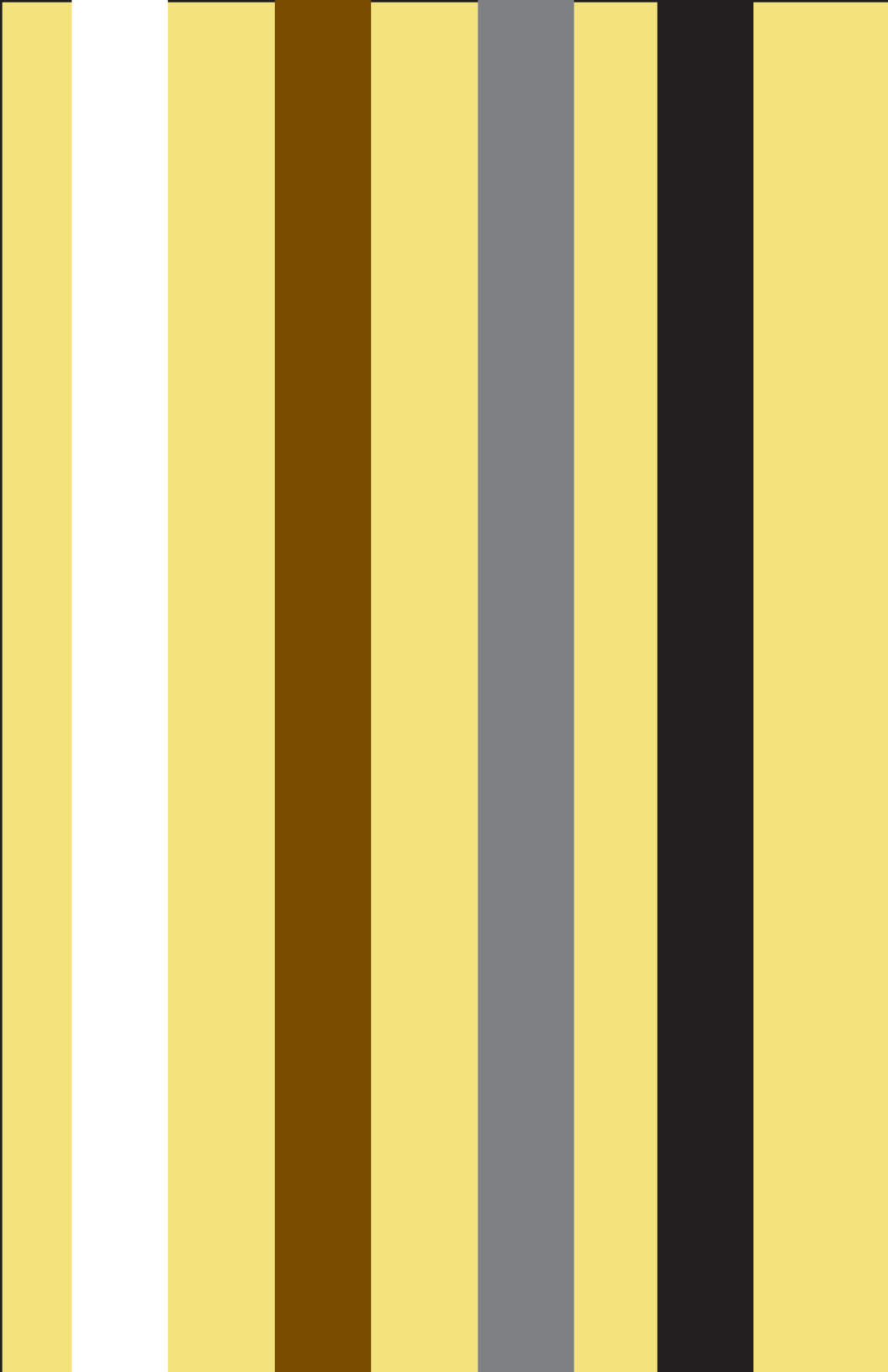
"At least you have a mother," Clay said quietly, but without any of the sharpness in tone that would indicate he was offended. Daniel felt a pang of anger and embarrassment at this remark. He felt like the conversation had slipped down the stairs into the unforgiving shadows of parental absence, neglect, and domination. This was the price of getting to know someone else, to bear witness to these shadows, and to reveal your own.

“I’m so sorry,” Daniel said uncertainly, “when did she—?”

“She’s not... but she’s never, you know, thought about whether her son might need a self-help book... She’s never been there. Before my dad got full custody over me and my brothers I remember being in her house—a small house—so I should have felt close to her” Clay shuddered, “I watched her... these men... when they were done... they—” He stopped and Daniel froze, he didn’t know a way to appropriately fill the silence that had fallen over them. He listened to the chorus of the wind as it filtered through the tall grass and tree branches, unrelenting, forceful, violated by a car alarm. Clay continued as though he hadn’t stopped talking for a minute, “came for me... and she was right there. She was passed out right across the hall... I remember calling out. I screamed. But she wouldn’t wake up.”

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NEUTRAL

WHITE

BROWNS

GREYS

BLACK

THE EXPERIMENT

S.J. Williamson

I, for one, never thought I'd be the one to try and hide who I am. I was known for being loud, outspoken, and weird for most of my young life. When I made that appointment at the JCPenney salon, it was the first time I made an appointment for a reason other than to feel more like my true self. I did it for the experiment.

Moving to Minnesota didn't seem like such a big issue for me at first. In the depths of my despair, I prayed about it and God told me to go, so I went without hesitation. Most people warned me of two things regarding my move: the cold weather (I loved the desert heat, driving with my windows rolled down for the dry summer heat to hit me unless it's over 120 degrees) and the lack of authentic Mexican food, both true warnings. While I heeded the winter cold warning, the lack of authentic Mexican food didn't really hit me as meaning "lack of Mexicans." I didn't think moving here would be as much of a culture shock as it really was.

I had a hard time making real friends when I moved. And I know I'm a lot to handle, but people treated me differently. Perhaps it was my outlandish clothing choices, or abnormally colored lipsticks, or my strong opinions. Two months into my first semester in the Midwest, I asked the forbidden question: What if it's my race?

I want to believe the best of people, I really do. When I pushed down the forbidden question, it wasn't just because of the pessimism of it though. I thought I passed. In California I was often seen as gringa. I got my white dad's white last name, so on paper alone my ties to Cuba were erased unless some diversity quota gave workplaces and schools a reason to ask if I was Hispanic, to which I responded "yes." My skin was less and less tan over the years as my time playing videogames inside took over my time outside. My English skills far surpassed my Spanish ones. My deep brown eyes and brown but almost black hair weren't enough to prove I was Cuban in California. I fell victim to what Marcus Lee Hanson called the problem of the third-generation immigrant: "What the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember." In my case, I felt raised to have strong Cuban pride regardless of missing the cultural connections my Nona passed on to my mom and tía. I always wanted to know more and feel more Cuban.

Growing up in a state of mostly Hispanic people never taught me to be ashamed of my Cuban blood. Even while I was mocked as a

“Communist” when we learned about the Cuban Missile Crisis in history class, I took none of it personally. Cuban pride prevailed. I didn’t expect moving to the Midwest to change any of that. With the forbidden question I not only assumed the worst of others, I assumed the worst of myself. Pride turned to shame each moment I allowed the thought to take space in my mind. The shame doubled as I considered how I let other people make me want to water myself down, to be more of what they wanted me to be rather than be my genuine self. I didn’t let the forbidden question guide my actions until two distinct moments made it abundantly clear that the answer wasn’t no.

As an underpaid graduate assistant, I struggled to survive as over 60% of my income went toward rent alone. I decided to seek help from a local food bank after barely having money for food my first few months on the job. When I went in for my interview, which was supposed to assess whether or not I was eligible for their services, I was asked the standard questions: name, address, employment, etc. During my interview with an older white man, there was a slight deviation during my questioning. It was quick, but all the more evident to me.

“Race? Native, right?” he asked, without a blink.

“No. Hispanic, Cuban,” I quickly responded.

“But you have the eyes,” he objected.

“No,” I argued back, “Cuban.”

I was trying to receive help from these people. I wouldn’t make a scene. Still, I was shocked. The thing that really bothered me was that even though I told him straight up “No,” he insisted I was, like I was lying, like I was wrong about my own ethnic background, like my eyes themselves were proof that I was a liar, an imposter. I’m not sure what he meant by it. Maybe he was trying to make conversation. Maybe he was trying to be funny. I don’t know. But our short conversation haunted me for months. I got my food assistance, but at what cost?

Around the same time, I started preparing to find summer work. Logically, I asked the only experienced professor who had seen me teach in Minnesota to write me a letter of recommendation. I’ll be honest, he wasn’t exactly my favorite person to begin with. He handed me my letter and unknowingly solidified my feelings toward him. In our meeting, I quickly looked over it.

“Is it okay,” he asked, “that I called you piquant, since you’re Latina?”

“Yeah, yeah,” I sheepishly said. And we spoke nothing more of it.

When I left school that day, I begged a friend to go to happy hour with me. I showed her the letter and cried over him using the majority

of my letter to make himself sound smart, ending with the final statement that my personal style was piquant. She didn't understand, so I Googled the word to show her it meant spicy, a particularly blatant Latina stereotype. I ranted on and on about the picante salsas I felt compared to and how if the professor had to ask if it was racist or not, he should have realized the answer was yes. Would he have used the same word if I wasn't Cuban? Once again, someone who I sought help from seemed to underhandedly attack my Cuban pride.

This idea consumed me for months afterward. When negative things happened, or people around me treated me in negative ways, the thoughts floated around in my head: Do they think I'm Native American? Do they hate Native Americans? Do they hate Cubans? Are they treating me poorly because of this? Am I a bad person for thinking this is the reasoning behind these actions? Am I just looking for trouble? Has Minnesota changed me into a strawman liberal who rages against anything that can barely be taken as offensive, all because of my perceived race? Who am I?

I wondered how else to once and for all prove or disprove my theory. After a recent breakdown where I chopped off some of my hair one night, I knew I needed to dye it again. Dying my hair normally made me feel beautiful, other than a plain Jane corporate puppet. Over the years my hair had been red, purple, blue, and green. It came to me quickly: would people here treat me differently if I was a full-on blonde? Would it be enough to help me pass as a white girl, or would my dark eyes or skin tone give it away, show people I was pretending? I had to at least try.

I went to the JCPenney salon on the Monday of spring break, showing the hair stylist over five pictures of what I wanted my hair to look like, a bleach blonde with natural-looking roots. I worried that if she was racist, she would do a purposely bad job, but I remained hopeful when she cheerfully talked to me over the 5 hours it took to do my hair.

What I didn't prepare for was what my hair would turn out to be. After a Malibu treatment and not one but two sessions of stripping color, my hair was the same, but older. She had given me highlights when I wanted my whole head dyed. It wasn't even light blonde. It was just a lighter brown. It wasn't even close to what I wanted. I looked like my tía, who got highlights to cover her grays.

When I put on my glasses to see the final product, the stylist spent 10 minutes combing through my hair and showing it to me in different lighting. She could tell I wasn't pleased. She told me to trust the process and wait for the toner to wash out of my hair during the week, saying it would turn into more of a blonde than greyish-browns.

I told her I had to trust her. I couldn't afford to pay to have it redone. Over \$150 down the drain.

When my friend picked me up, he tried to reassure me even though I was set in my feelings toward my new hair. I had planned to keep the social experiment to myself, to get solid results, but I was so disappointed I slipped. He asked me why I wanted to go so light like the pictures I showed him.

"This is stupid. I know it. I thought that if I lightened my hair, I'd fit in here. I thought they'd treat me differently if I looked more white, not Native American or whatever else they thought I was. Now, I'll never know. And I hate my hair. And I had to pay for it. I paid for something I didn't want. It's a waste." I vented, overemotional.

"That's not stupid," he replied. He of all people here knew how I felt, I guess. If he could pass as white instead of black, would he pay for it, or even attempt it?

When I got to the home of him and his girlfriend, she tried to reassure me, but agreed when I said it made me look old. I almost told her about the experiment too. But I knew what she would say, the same thing she said when I told her I thought people here mistreated me because of how I looked. "Oh boy..." she'd say. Then she'd try to come up with excuses to fight my negative thoughts. No, my experiment would be lost on her.

I vented about how I felt about my hair to anyone who asked about my spring break, since it was the major event of my break. I was disappointed and even more poor. None of them dared to ask why I wanted to go blonde. Not until the 15-minute break during my 3-hour Literary Criticism class the following Tuesday.

"Why did you dye your hair anyway?" a classmate asked.

"I just needed something different. I hate my normie hair. It's boring. And I chop it off when it's boring," I said. I almost mentioned the experiment, which had failed. I thought about the room, which was silent during many of my ideas of race for our text *Americanah*. I considered how the whole class consisted of white people except for an international student from Saudi Arabia and me, a partially white girl. They wouldn't understand. What if they thought less of me for it if I said it? These were more than peers, but colleagues who I taught with.

So I said nothing. Then, I wrote it instead. The experiment never took off. Perhaps it is better that way, with ugly things staying undiscovered, uninterpreted. It would only kill me more if my theory turned out to be true.



“ON THE EDGE #12”

Maria Brien, Photography

I ' M H E R E A G A I N

Jenni Lavin

I'm
here,
again.

in the
same
place.

between
yesterday
and today
and tomorrow.

in both
the inhale
and the
exhale,

discovering
that
happiness
and sadness
can coexist
in one
and hold
their own
in the other.

inside
the noises
and the
memories,

recognizing
the difference
in seeing

life
and hearing
it breathe.

watching
the seconds
and the
minutes
sift past,

understanding
that being
can take
place
in the
in-between.

learning
that the
light leaves
no room
for the
shadows.

that
between
this inhale
and the
next,
light will
enter and
darkness
will leave.

that
in the
middle of
everything
and nothing
there is
something.

and where
I exist,
it is in the
everything
and the
nothing,
in the here
and the now,
in the
inhale
and the
exhale,
in the
space
between
this moment
and the
next.

I exist
in the
same
place
I've
always
been,

here.
inhaling.
and
exhaling.



“PASSING BY”

Maria Brien, Photography

THE LONELY STONE

Max Borman

"We have been searching this damn tomb for three days now." A disgruntled stuffy man bellowed from one of the various caverns. "These things don't exist."

A younger woman stood by a makeshift table with a map sprawled across it. On the map were red Xs over various paths. She stood staring at it as she took a swig from her water canteen. "It has to. We didn't come all this way for nothing."

Another yell came from another one of the caverns. An older man's voice. "Maybe you got the wrong tomb? This part of the world is filled with tombs."

She scanned the map again. Looking at all the possible routes. "This is the right tomb. I've done the math over and over again." She drew another X on the map. "I triple checked. This is where it is supposed to be."

The disgruntled man came out of his cavern covered in dust. He had stubble growing on his chin that had been caked in a thick cloud of sand. With a cough he exclaimed, "You triple checked shit. I coulda told you these things didn't exist." He pulled out his canteen. Instead of water there was thick whiskey. He took a swig. "Oh wait. I told you that thousands of times you just didn't listen."

He walked over and sat down in a ripped green picnic chair. Catching his breath. The woman sighed. "So, it wasn't in that cavern either?" She drew an X on the spot the man came from.

He laughed. "Wasn't in that cavern. Or that one. Or that one. It isn't in any of these damn caverns missy. Let's just pack up and go home."

The woman ignored him. She was used to his anger and pessimism; she had been stuck listening to it all for over a month. "Not when we are this close." She turned towards another cavern "Annabeth! You found anything?"

A deeper voice came from that direction. "Just rocks. Rocks. And more rocks. Ooooh what's this? Oh, just a smaller rock." Annabeth yelled.

The older man came out from his cavern, he was carrying a shovel over his shoulder. As he approached, the disgruntled man adjusted in his seat. The older man walked towards him, set the shovel against the table, and grabbed the whisky canteen out of his hand, taking a swig. "Why don't you ever bring bourbon?"

The disgruntled man took his canteen back with anger. "Bring your own booze next time." He replied as he wipes the top of the canteen. "Let me guess? Nothing in your cave either."

The older man groaned as he lowered himself onto the floor. He had brought the chair for himself but of course the selfish one always gets it. "Derick.... you got some attitude don't ya? Why'd you even come on this trip?"

Derick rolled his eyes. "For the pay of course. If some uppity chick wants to chase a fairytale and offers me some good money, then I'd be foolish not to pass it up."

The woman at the table ignored him. Derick had been spewing that crap ever since they left New York. She studied the map deeply, looking at all the caverns they hadn't explored. Another cry from Annabeth, "Hey Alison! I found something.... oh wait. It's just a rock." A pause. "This rock is kinda odd lookin...Has some weird ass symbols on it."

Alison looked up from the map and down the cavern Annabeth was. "What kind of symbols?"

Quiet. Alison waited. No response. She looked at both Derick and the older man sitting on the ground. "Arthur stay here. Rest. Derick with me."

"Don't have to tell me twice." Arthur laughed.

Derick groaned as he rose. With one of the swiftest motions Arthur has done in years he slumped into the chair. Alison grabbed the shovel and headed towards Annabeth's cavern, Derick close behind.

The cavern was dark, cold, and damp. They walked down the narrow passageway. Past some dilapidated pillars, empty torch holders, and a couple of rotting skeletons. They kept walking until they approached a rock wall, Annabeth was nowhere to be found. "Annabeth! Where are you?!" Alison yelled.

Derick scanned the rock wall. "She probably ran off. Got too scared."

Alison looked down at the floor. Laying against the rock wall was a strange stone. It had a blue shine to it and strange markings up and down the side. She knelt and picked it up, turning it over in her hand. Derick looked over her shoulder. "What is it?"

Worth any money?"

Alison shrugged him off as she analyzed the stone. Turning it over once more it shined in the darkness. Some pebbles fell from the rock wall. Then more. Derick took a step back. The rock wall itself began to shudder. Rocks began moving to the side, slowly revealing a passageway. Alison looked back at Derick with glee and then towards the slowly opening passageway. "Onwards I guess." Alison shrugged.

Derick took a couple more steps back. "I'm not going in there. It could cave at any moment."

"What? Are you scared?" Alison chuckled.

Derick stammered. "Scared? Ha funny. No, I'm just all for self-preservation. Besides, someone has to guard the entrance."

"Guard the entrance? From what? The dead skeletons? I sure hope they don't make any moves towards me." Alison laughed.

The rock passageway seemed to solidify as the rocks stopped moving. "We are in a strange tomb. You never know. And what if Arthur makes a move against you? I don't trust that old man."

"I trust him a lot more than you." Alison turned towards the rock passageway and took a step forward. "If you want to cower here then go ahead. I'm going to find Annabeth."

Derick gulped. "Can you at least leave the shovel? You know...in case of danger."

"Sure. You beat back the imaginary danger with a shovel. Here you go." Alison handed him the shovel.

Derick took it and brandished it like a weapon. Alison started to approach the rock passageway. The rocks themselves shook and shivered as she walked closer, the strange stone still in her hand. With a deep breath she walked in.

The passageway was dark but the stone in her hand lit up. As she walked further, the passageway shook and shifted. The rocks behind her closed, sealing her on the other side. "Well...looks like I'm getting out a different way." She muttered to herself.

She kept walking and walking. The passageway seemed to go on forever. It kept shifting and changing as she walked. After what seemed like an eternity, she saw light at the end of the

passageway. She sped up; her walking became more of a trot. The rocks sped up to, closing around her now. She began running, rocks hitting her in the sides. The passageway in front of her began to close and the stone began to dim. With all her effort she pushed through and came out of the passageway in one piece.

She fell to the ground and caught her breath. The strange stone in her hand vanished as if it never existed. Did it exist? Did any of this exist? She slowly rose to her feet and scanned the new cavern she was in. There were torches along the walls lit with a blue flame, and large statues stood around the cavern. Yet they did not seem like statues of humans but rather statues of creatures. One had horns, one had cat like eyes, another seemed to be shapeshifting before her eyes. There seemed to be about six main statues with smaller statues around them.

She pulled a small notebook out of her pocket and a very short pencil. Scanning the statues, she jotted down details and tried to draw pictures of them. In the back of her mind was the thought of saving Annabeth but these statues called to her for some reason.

First, she drew the one with the horns. They weren't very large horns, maybe the size of a fully outstretched hand. They were hidden by flowing hair. It was missing a nose, but she couldn't tell if that was due to the subject missing a nose or the fact it just broke off after years of decay. It wore long flowing robes that seemed to be torn in many places.

She navigated around that one and passed some of the smaller ones, they all seemed to be sculpted out of the same model of a man. The second statue seemed to have eyes like a cat. A scar ran through its left eye and the eyes felt like they were peering into her very soul. It wore a trench coat looking thing and dog tags around its neck, which stood out. These statues seemed old, but the dog tags seemed like a new addition.

The third statue seemed to be a conglomeration of a bunch of different people. This was the only one with color, but it seemed that it was more graffiti than a stylistic choice. The eyes were different colors, and the hair was spray painted a deep purple. The hands seemed old but young at the same time.

The fourth statue looked the most sinister, its eyes like

shadows. The robe it wore seemed to move in the darkness as if the statue itself was alive. It seemed to be cracked in places as if someone tried to destroy it. She didn't want to linger on this one for too long.

The fifth one seemed the most normal. It looked very tall and elegant, almost like it shone. Plants grew all over it and they seemed to be thriving without any sunlight. Vines up and down the side formed the outline of the statue. The eyes had roses growing in them.

The sixth statue was the shortest. It was short, stubby, and stocky. The muscles seemed to be sculpted in such detail that Alison thought she could see the veins in them twitch. A long beard lived on the face, and it seemed to touch the ground.

She finished drawing them and looked around at the rest of the cavern. The other statues seemed boring compared to these six. Behind the six stood what looked to be an altar. Sacrifices maybe. Mummifications possibly. It didn't seem filled with old offerings lost with time. She approached it and studied it. Inscribed was writing from years and years ago. But also, more modern language which was puzzling. Hieroglyphs next to modern English. She jotted down what it said and tried to draw the hieroglyphs for future study.

In the distance she heard a scream. Right. She came in there for Annabeth, at least she thought that was her name. Everything before the cave was a little fuzzy. Was there a man with her earlier? Another scream drew her attention. She should probably chase it down. Interesting. Her very thoughts seemed to be going into third person. What was this cave?

She followed the sound of the scream down a passage. Another scream. They seemed to be getting louder. Were they screams? Is that what a scream sounds like? Are screams the quiet or loud noises? She stopped to pull out her notebook to see if she wrote any notes about that. Wait...where'd she get a notebook?

Another scream? Yes, it had to be a scream. What else could it be? Now which way did it come from? Left? Wait. Which one is left? What is left? Another yell? Was yell the right word? Whisper? She looked down at the notebook in her hand. Did it change color?

What is she supposed to do with this thing?

Her head began to ache. Another sound. Or was that the first one she had heard? Where is she?

She fell to her knees clutching her head. It hurt like hell. So many thoughts running through it she couldn't comprehend anything. Which way is up? Which way is down? Are those even directions? What's a direction? Is a direction an action?

Some disturbance came from somewhere. Some type of a noise. She clutched her head harder and laid down on the ground. Curling up into a ball. Wait. What's a ball?

Her eyes began to grow dark as if she was forgetting how to see. No. She wouldn't die like this. Not here in this place. Wherever and whatever it was. With all her energy left she pushed herself up off the ground. Her head banged harder than a drum. Every step she took towards the unknown disturbance felt exhausting.

Another one of those pesky disturbances. What were they called again? Actions? She pushed towards the loud action until her cloudy eyes spotted a figure slumped over. Did she know this person? The person seemed lost. Holding their head and letting out the occasional scream. Alison. Yeah, that was her name. Alison put her hand on this person's shoulder.

The person jumped and turned their head to face Alison. Their face expressionless as they let out another noise. Alison felt like she was supposed to know this person but couldn't pinpoint why. Instead, she slumped down next to them as her eyes gave up.

The rock wall shifted a little as Derick grabbed hold of the stone that had just appeared on the ground. He turned it over and over again looking at the etchings. They seemed different this time. The rocks shifted and shook as they began to form a passageway. He shuddered but something beyond the passageway called to him. He didn't know what it was, but it seemed to be overwhelming his fear. He took one step forward, clutching the shovel.

Arthur sat sleeping on the picnic chair. The rest of the crew had been gone for too long, so he dozed off. Laying there, asleep, in the picnic chair, alone. Yet something in the back of his head called to him. Calling to him as if it wanted him to follow it. Deep into the dark caverns.



“BADLANDS”

Jenni Lavin, Photography

THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF EYES BURNED INTO MY MEMORY

Sara Sabharwal

His eyes were green
and they sparkled when he smiled at me
The end of summer serene when the trees begin to drop their leaves.
Golden hour
Yellow flowers
Spinning me around,
Kissing me in a crowd,
My first taste of love.
I wanted so badly to believe you
When you promised heaven above
And that I was your only one

His eyes were gray as the fog rolling in off the ocean that day Like the
clouds gathering in the sky
Blackening until they cried
Spilling thousands of sparkling snowflakes
Eye to eye stare causing my breath to shake
Lips trembling as they impatiently wait
For the warmth of yours
Immediately wanting more.
Cards and letters, all night calls
Sun fades to black as it all falls
Closing the chapter, moving on
Waiting ever so patiently for your karma

His eyes were blue,
Sang every song we ever knew.
Sneaking around in star draped skylines
Lips stained from too much red wine.
Secrets and sins pulling us in,
Undercover lovers lost in a sea of dreams
But nothing is ever as it seems

His eyes were hazel
Our banter was playful
Back and forth for what felt like forever
Do you ever think of me?
Of what we couldn't be?
Or could we have been?
If we had only given it a real chance.
Instead of leaving it at a sideways glance.

His eyes I swore were black
Dark, intoxicating like cognac.
Velvet touch under starlit skies,
Made a crown of the tears I cried.
Mind games and blaming

Yelling and shaming,
Every day I dreamed of escaping
Weaving a web of lies draping
Me in words wrapped in lace
I pray I learn from my mistakes

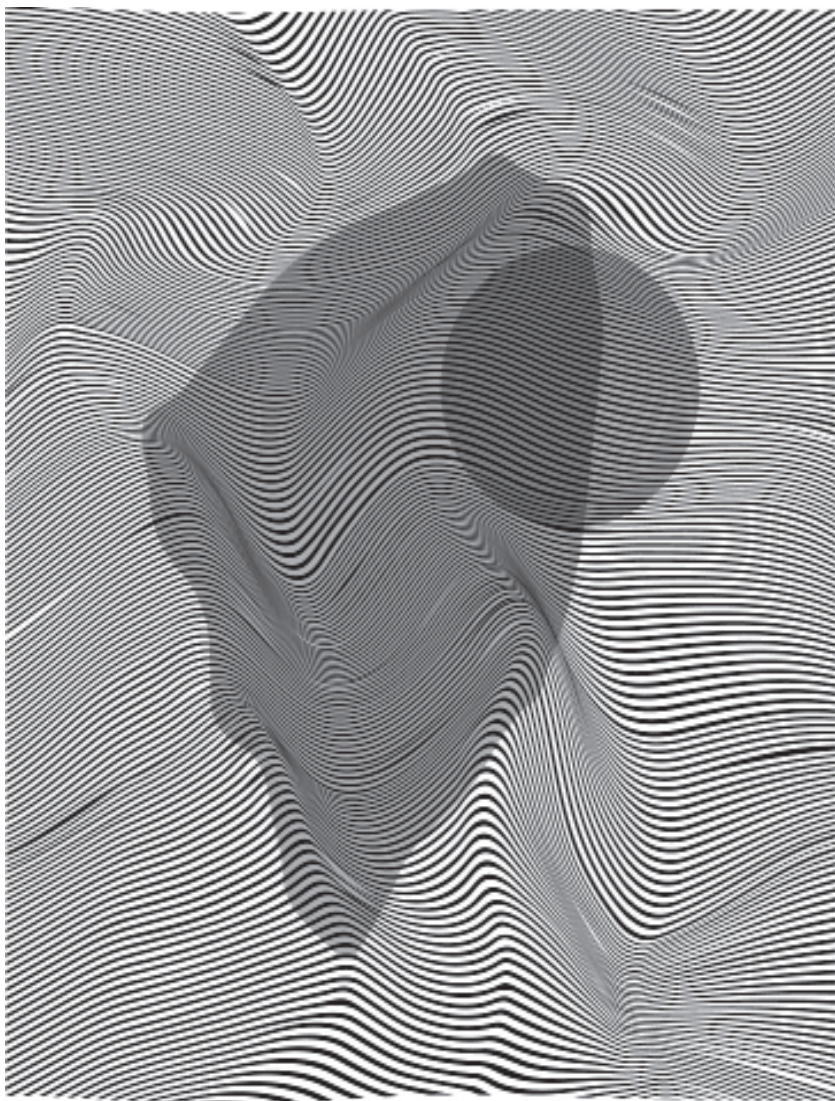
His eyes were brown and warm like honey, His arms felt like home when
he embraced me. Creating a home I'd never want to leave, Building the
life he was promising.
No monsters of the past to slay
Taking it day by day,
Walking hand in hand to our forever I guess I do believe in happily ever
after

RAINBOW

Hannah Khan

raging expanses of red poppies
omniscient skies with overwhelming orange sunrises
yearly sightings of yellow buzzing bees
glossy dew drops poised on green grass
birds gliding through the bright blue sky
intriguing waters holding indigo sunset reflections
vibrant fields full of violet flowers

all of these, the rainbows of nature
yet we only see in black and white
if we simply opened our eyes
we would find tranquility



**“WILL YOU BE MY
YELLOW”**

Sydney Ulrich, Digital



“SHADOW”

Anthony Faris, Photography

ISLAND OF EXILE

William Heinzen

The following is an excerpt from Island of Exile, a novel by William Heinzen to be published in late 2022. Island of Exile is a sequel to Heinzen's previous novels Warrior of Light and City of Darkness.

In the Korlan Forest, an ant crawled up the surface of a yewleaf trunk. Black, splotchy veins covered the tree's bark, running alongside a series of swollen bulges that looked ready to burst. A faint odor of decay, reminiscent of overripe fruit, wafted from the dying tree. Overhead the Korlan's thick canopy prevented any substantial light from reaching the forest floor, which was strewn with wet leaves and desiccated foliage. All around the vegetation creaked and groaned in subtle but continual motion, indicating the restless undergrowth of the Korlan Forest stood ready to ensnare the unwitting after any entered its depths.

On the tree the ant moved in an erratic line, pausing on occasion, its antennae quivering to test its surroundings. At last it reached one of the abnormal lumps and seized a crumb of soil between minute mandibles. In this moment, a silvery rectangle appeared in the air beside the yewleaf. Barely perceptible at first, it grew in brightness and clarity until a doorway hovered beside the oblivious insect, the area inside of its outline shimmering and opaque. A hairsbreadth later this rippling wall peeled away to reveal the interior of a small room with a long table and two chairs, where a bulbous lighted instrument hung from the ceiling.

A man stepped out of the hovering doorway. He glanced over his shoulder toward the room, and with an idle wave of his hand the portal vanished. Nearby the ant dropped its crumb to scurry down the tree. When it reached the loam of the forest floor it sought the nearest entrance to its underground colony and disappeared.

The man surveyed the surrounding gloom. He wore a light brown robe over tunic and trousers, and his only accoutrements were a knife and a belt pouch. He stroked the length of his beard and stepped toward the yewleaf, touching its diseased trunk. A frown creased his features, further deepening the creases in a face already lined with age.

The newcomer sensed a dichotomy in the air, which had the oppressive feel of the swamps in the Fertile Lands but possessed none of their accompanying humidity. This place held the chill dryness of a Northern winter, none of which explained the moisture upon the ground or the increasingly prevalent rot in the flora. True, the Korlan had never

been healthy, but of late it was worse than ever. Where everything else in the North was rid of the blight of Zadinn Kanas's former presence, the Korlan had continued its deterioration, and this worried Nazgar of the Kyrlod. He had made too many assumptions the last time he was here, and it was time to rectify that mistake.

He walked forward, boots making soft indentations in the fallen leaves. The shrubs around him continued their delicate rustling, filling the background with soft susurrations. This undercurrent of malice indicated that the forest was literally alive, and that should have been Nazgar's clue all along: where the Erdrar was dead, the Korlan was not. But prophets use foresight, and that is hindsight. Nazgar allowed himself a grim smile. He and his fellow Kyrlod had been fond of saying that whenever they found themselves guilty of prior error.

He approached a knoll and climbed to its top, which narrowed into a steep ridgeline lined with trees. Brambles tore the cloth of his robe and at his skin, at one point drawing droplets of blood from his forearm. In his memory Nazgar heard the sound of hoofbeats, and though he knew it to be only his imagination, the shadows around him seemed to lengthen. After a short distance the ridge tapered, leading him back to the forest floor where a line of flames had scarred the undergrowth. Though the damage had been done some time ago, the wounds had never healed, leaving a blackened, flaking residue. Nazgar sensed his own residual essence like a fingerprint, six years past but not erased. His magic was nowhere near powerful enough to leave a permanent impression under ordinary circumstances, and the fact that evidence of it remained here spoke more to the Korlan's motives than it did to Nazgar's efficacy. He picked up a charred branch, which crumbled in his hands, then dusted off his palms and looked at the shadowed foliage. I always wondered what you would look like in your twilight years. Now I know.

The Korlan did not respond. For a moment Nazgar was not sure which of them was more afraid of the other. He pushed his way into the thicket, half-expecting the vegetation to root him in place—vines snaking around his throat, choking his life away—but he came free of the brush without incident and emerged into a familiar space. Though the forest canopy covered the area in gloom, here the trees were spaced far enough apart to offer ample room for mobility. Flames had once scorched this ground too, leaving behind a ring of ash. Again, rather than mend itself the Korlan had let the damage remain, preserving its strength. Its time is nigh.

Nazgar stepped into the circle's center, where Tim Matthias had faced and defeated Zadinn's Hunter. He had not come to this spot for any

practical reason—the Korlan’s evil permeated the entire forest, ebbing and flowing like a tide against shore, and so his purpose in selecting this location was merely symbolic. Given what had transpired here, it was a fine place to make a stand

Nazgar knelt, placing his palm on the ground and closing his eyes. The Lifesource swelled within him, filling him with vitality and sharpening his senses. Every time he seized the power, it felt like riding a canoe down a river. Nazgar could not control the undercurrent, but as a passenger on the surface he could use its strength to direct his own course. He had been traveling this river for many years, and he knew its secrets.

The Kyrlof stretched out, testing his surroundings. He felt the scorch marks on the ground as if they were burns upon his own skin, heard the whisper of wind as it sighed between decaying trees, tasted the swell of rot within his mouth, and smelled stale death upon the air. An oppressive weight doubled down upon him, threatening to flatten him against the earth, and still Nazgar went deeper, seeking the mind that operated beneath forest’s façade. This mind had trapped Tim, Nazgar, and the elion refugees on their journey toward the Northern Mountains. Tim had repelled it, for Nazgar had been wary to use his powers for fear of opening his mind to Zadinn Kanas, but if he had known then what he did now, he might have risked using the Lifesource anyway. In retrospect the Korlan may very well have muted its defense against Tim’s attack, unwilling to draw either Nazgar or Zadinn’s focus onto its hidden sentience.

He found the presence tonight, though. It had no tangible form, and the closest thing that came to mind was a black, pulsing ball with oily tentacles readied to ensnare the minds of those careless enough to enter its shadow. This awareness recoiled at Nazgar’s incursion into its domain, giving the equivalent of a hiss. It pushed back, the savagery with which it lashed out belying the weakness Nazgar knew to be lingering beneath its surface. The presence was old, and more afraid than powerful. *You should have let yourself wither and die, he said to it. You might have avoided my notice.*

He heard a snarl. For a moment he thought this had occurred only occurred in his mind, one of the imagined physical attributes he was granting to the sentience behind the Korlan, but when the noise heightened into a piercing shriek he opened his eyes and saw a creature at the treeline. It was a four-legged, hunchbacked beast with a row of spikes running along the ridge of its back. The beast bared its fangs at him and hissed.

There would be no illusions this time. For one, Nazgar had

already been prepared to defend against such attacks, and for another, the Korlan was no longer strong enough to deliver them. It had to resort to physical threats like those that presented by the creature facing Nazgar. He stood slowly. The creature growled low in its throat, the muscles of its haunches drawing taut as it readied to spring forward. Nazgar curled his hand into a fist, the Lifesource rising within him. A sphere of purple flames blossomed around his knuckles.

The creature held fast. Through the Lifesource, Nazgar sensed the ripple of additional presences, a sensation soon validated by additional movement in the shadows. More glowing yellow eyes appeared, revealing a pair of the creature's companions stepping from the darkness. Nazgar closed his second fist, and another set of purple flames appeared.

Additional movement followed as monsters materialized on all sides, twelve in total, their steps slow and deliberate. Soon an entire ring of creatures enclosed the smaller circle of blackened ash and the Kyrrod standing within it. When the leader of the beasts opened its mouth, it seemed the corners of its jowls turned upward in an approximation of a smile. Slaverling drool ran down its fangs, and for the first time since Nazgar had sought its presence, the being within the Korlan spoke to him. Indeed, Nazgar thought, it might be the first time it had addressed anyone directly in centuries. *Did you truly think me defenseless?* it asked.

The monsters attacked, surging forward in a whirlwind of tooth and talon, their long claws tearing furrows in the dirt. Spots of black mottled their leathery brown hides, which Nazgar knew were impervious to both blade and flame. From Boblin Kule's accounting, the creatures would have soft, vulnerable underbellies—but the elion had only faced two, where Nazgar now stood against a dozen. He cast his first spell, raising a sheet of purple flames into a wall before him, causing the forward half of the creatures to halt their advance. Turning to face those charging his unprotected rear, Nazgar summoned the wind in a funnel and knocking three more sprawling. The final three converged atop him, one coming at him straight on, two upon his flank, slamming him to the earth. Nazgar kicked the first beast away, reinforcing the blow with the Lifesource to send it skidding across the ground, and seized the necks of the other two in each hand. Flames surged from his fingertips and coiled around their throats. The animals shuddered in death throes, their saliva dripping over his knuckles.

After he cast their bodies to the ground, the first creature resumed its attack. Nazgar drew his knife, and when it landed atop him, he drew his blade across its jugular. Gushes of blood spurted forth. As the next three came, their savagery only increased by the deaths of their

companions, Nazgar reached into his pouch and drew forth a small blue stone. It flared a brilliant, blinding blue. For the next few heartbeats an incandescent light consumed everything, a column of radiance from which emanated tongues of fire and curls of smoke. Growls and snarls turned to yelps of pain, and by the time the light from the focusing point waned, three more blackened corpses lay upon the ground.

Behind Nazgar, the final six creatures growled behind the wall of flames. They had been shying forward and back while he fought the others, their natural fear of fire vying with the pressure the Korlan exerted upon them, until the sentience behind the forest won and drove them forward. Two died in the inferno, four survived. They emerged with smoke curling from their spines, sporting angry blisters, and leapt upon Nazgar while his back was turned. He went face-first to the ground, spears of pain stabbing into him as claws scored his skin and hot breath blasted his neck. Nazgar drove his elbow into the first beast's underbelly, gaining enough leverage to spin and face his assailants. He reached out with the Lifesource to touch the Korlan's vegetation, noting that the sentience—focused as it was on setting the creatures against Nazgar—held only a tenuous grasp on the surrounding undergrowth. A set of vines rose at his bidding and wrapped around one of the beasts, dragging it away from him. The monster scrabbled in defiance, attempting to tear free as the vegetation constricted further, crushing the life from it. Roots shot up from the nearby floor to seize another creature and pull it beneath the earth. The soil above where it disappeared roiled for several moments before going still.

Two final monsters remained atop him. The first raked its talons across Nazgar's abdomen, and while his cloak and undershirt prevented the swipe from spilling his entrails, it left a trio of deep scarlet gashes on his skin. Nazgar thrust his belt knife between the creature's open jaws and into the roof of its mouth, driving the tip into the monster's brain. Its hilt stuck when he tried to pull free, blade jammed in the beast's mouth, and so his right forearm took the brunt of a bite when the final surviving monster bit down on him. Nazgar uttered an oath and reached for the blue focusing point, but it slipped between his fingers. The beast clamped its jaws, shaking its head from side to side in a tactic meant to wring necks and break bones. Nazgar knew he had only the space of a few breaths before his forearm shattered. Instead of using his left hand to tear himself away, he shoved his fist into the gap between the creature's jaws, where teeth scraped his knuckles and drew forth more rivers of red.

The monster gave a throaty growl, its yellow eyes burning, but Nazgar was where he needed to be. He shoved his fist all the way down

the beast's throat, summoning the Lifesource one last time, and a fountain of purple erupted from within the creature's body cavity. The impact was so forceful that the monster lifted off its feet, the flames from inside incinerating its organs. It died before it had any chance to react, collapsing into a smoking corpse.

Nazgar panting lay on his back. Every breath seared his lungs. The pain of trying to lift his arm sent a wave of blackness across his vision. The limb was a mangled, bloody mess. His stomach roiled from the sickening scent of charred flesh. *That was close.* Just because he had already died once did not mean he couldn't die again.

Though the beast's teeth had left substantial gouges on the knuckles of his other forearm as well, the hand at least remained functional. Like Tim Matthias, Nazgar knew little of healing with the Lifesource, as that had been Lenzel's forte, but the room behind the doorway would take care of healing—so long as he survived to reach it.

He gathered his strength slowly. It took the better part of a minute to sit up, and it took another minute to shift onto his knees. His right arm hung useless the whole time. Peeling away a section of his shirt, Nazgar looked at the trio of long gashes the trio across his stomach. Those would leave scars, even after the room took care of him.

Several vines began to curl across the ground toward him. Nazgar reached for his focusing point with his good arm. He did not think he could manage standing, not yet. Once his fingers curled around the blue stone, the encroaching vines ceased their movement. *That is right,* he said to the Korlan. *You no longer hold the power that you once did. You gambled with the monsters and you lost. Do you truly wish to test me?*

Silence reigned as the pain in Nazgar's body throbbed in cadence with his heart, and then a reply came: *We were something, once. We would have broken you, made you beg.*

Nazgar drew the focusing point to his chest. *Your words do not endear me to be merciful. Mercy? I did not ask for mercy, old man. I asked for respect. If anyone owes us respect, it is you.*

You say that as if you anticipated the consequences of your actions, but you cannot claim credit for the double edge of Homdee's blade.

His response was more silence save for the sound of his blood dripping onto the leaves. Darkness nibbled at the edges of his vision. Nazgar began to wonder if the conversation was over, and then the being spoke again. *You do not look well, old man. Are you sure you can finish this?*

The focusing point in Nazgar's hand glowed, filling him with the

soothing sensation of the Lifesource, giving him peace and strength. This was good, for he needed both. *I see you are still clinging to the misconception that fear will grant you the respect you crave. For one so ancient, you are—as always—short-sighted.*

The sentence rebutted with a snarl. *You never change. So self-assured, so righteous, so haughty! Would you be anything without us? We made you, old man.*

And I have been paying for it ever since.

Then do us each a favor and die.

In spite of the pain, Nazgar managed a smile. *You first.*

The final pause came. *Why now?*

It was Nazgar's turn to go silent. As the quietness stretched, he sensed the being's anger and fear melt into a desperate sort of amusement. *Ah, it said. Another survived.*

I suspected, but I had to be sure. Nazgar tightened his grip on the stone. *I needed proof, at a bare minimum, that it was even possible.*

Lots of children are disappearing on their birthdays, then?

The stone flared with all the power Nazgar could summon. *Die, you bastard.*

By definition, you are the bastard.

And by definition, you are the one that will be dead. Nazgar slammed his hand onto the ground. A circle of fire shot out in all directions as he dove deep within his own mind, attacking, shredding, tearing past whatever feeble defenses the forest could erect. None forestalled the Kyrlod's vengeance, and within the Korlan the oily orb shrunk as layer upon layer of its darkness disintegrated. Its final gasping vapors blew away, leaving only a small, feeble dot of its former self. The being spoke one last time, and it sounded terrified. *Are you sure you cannot find mercy?*

Nazgar summoned the last vestiges of his power. *Never for the likes of you.*

Then he killed it.

Around him, the undercurrent of rustling within the Korlan stopped. While the preceding conflict had ensued mostly in silence, the forest still managed to fall even quieter, its former oppressive sensation disappearing like a pricked bubble. With the Korlan's malevolent presence dead at long last, Nazgar found himself breathing clean, wholesome air.

However, he had little opportunity to appreciate the changes around him. The battle had drained his strength, and with consciousness waning fast he spun the silvery outline of a rectangle in the air. The action taxed every fiber of his being. Nazgar feared he could not finish the task,

but then the door snapped into existence, its shimmering interior peeling away to reveal the familiar room with table and chairs at its center. This place would heal him, but he had to climb through the portal first. Thighs trembling, Nazgar used his good hand for support and rose to his feet. His vision spun and a wave of unconsciousness threatened to descend. If that happened it would be the end of things, leaving him to die on the ground in full view of salvation.

Swaying, in a last desperate gambit Nazgar used his final shred of control to turn around. With the doorway positioned behind him he fell backward, tumbling through the opening and collapsing on the room's wooden floor, where even the hideous pain the fall inflicted upon his forearm could not keep him conscious. After his thoughts winked out, the silvery outline in the Korlan disappeared, leaving behind a soundless forest. The only movement came from a scurrying ant, disturbed from its underground colony by all the commotion, as it crawled across the fallen leaves in search of new soil.

WHAT WE HIDE WITHIN

Cole Kralicek

Something, in the darkness, fluttered as if hung in a heavy mist; it was great, bulky, and moist. With one fell *whump*, Pyotr felt it soar overhead into the deathless void of dreams. In the distance, there was a hideous screaming—or screeching—Pyotr couldn't tell. It sounded like an injured animal, maimed or dying, alone in this rapturous night, amidst a great, swirling typhoon under the damning crack of lightning. The screeching, the thunder and lightning, and the otherly sense of false isolation made Pyotr think of his home, Aleksandrovskaya, and a particular sequence of events. His childhood chamber was lined with tall, firm shelving. Over the years, he began to gradually change—rearrange, if he could, into careful order, the rotting books with spines so hairy with moss and fungus that, if they fell, their *thump* would be deafened by it. They were often heaped promiscuously into the corners of the room, sometimes spilling into his father's room next door. The boards were cracking and subsumed under each other as dust and other things piled up between them and the beams supporting them below.

The house was spacious and had a peak roof. The kitchen jutted out North and nestled into the rocky hillside. It was enough for the family of four, Pyotr, his mother, his father, and his sister. The strength of great men, before Pyotr, constructed their home, exhumed the massive boulders that stood where its baseboards creaked, and created a place of relative safety for him. In the Summer of 1995, when Pyotr didn't have to attend school and his father didn't require him in the gardens or forest, he would alarmingly pore over book after book. Soon he had exhausted every book in his room and the rest of their house which, for comparison, acted as their hamlet's library. On short trips to Berezniki, Pyotr's mother Maria would allow him to bring home used textbooks from the library there. The boy tried to learn another language but became disinterested in them before finding a college textbook on computer programming principles and data structures. Infatuated, Pyotr carried as many of the textbooks with him as possible and even convinced his mother to buy two of them instead of one. Reading textbooks was not enough, though, and the family was not equipped with the technology to advance Pyotr's newfound interests, so he began renting computers at the library in Berezniki and spending some of his free time there loitering around tech and computer shops. When he was not rereading his new books, he would try and explain the concepts to his parents, who obliged him —

hoping he would eventually stop and give up.

Before long, his father had enough of the talk of computers. He was considered a smart man who grew up in their fledgling town, dreamed of leaving, committed, and returned with his fancy diploma only to take up ranching and woodworking instead. He created his family and much of the improvements on their property. He was the type to disprove of his son's 'outsider' dreams but still love him so. It pained him to take away Pyotr's textbooks, but—as he saw it—simply removing them would not dispel this infatuation. He burned them that night as Pyotr stole glances from the between the spokes of the railing beside the stairs. His father beckoned him inwards.

"I know you've already read those books and having them doesn't matter to you other than sentimentality," he said to his son without breaking gaze with the charring, crumpling paper below the mantle, "but I felt that I needed to get through to you."

"Pyotr, I don't mean to scare you. I appreciate that you have taken an interest in things like this and the changing world," he sighed, "but there are things you don't know about. Things more important that may be expected of you." He pointed at Pyotr and his large finger rested firmly in the center of his own chest and moved towards his head.

"It's you, Pyotr," he said.

The boy was confused, rightly so, and said "Huh?"

"The world is a physical place but that's only half of it," he said, "the most dangerous thing is what we hide *within*. Tomorrow, if you will, come to my workshop at dawn and I will show you something."

As the sun's tendrils reached into the sky, and shafts of light poked through Pyotr's bedroom window, he dressed himself and met with his father at the barn a few hundred meters into the forest. As he walked by, he always stared at the loft of the barn, where—instead of a loft window as the other neighbors had, Pyotr had a solid plank door and a large wrought-iron lock leading into the gable. His father was in the barn, below the loft, with his wood-chopping axe.

"Come," he said simply. From around the corner on the East side of the barn, they had a large wooden stairway that was hidden under some branches and greenery. Pyotr knew it was there as he poked and prodded around their property before, but he never knew what it was for. His father rolled the stairway over to the front of the barn and it lined up perfectly with the plank door attached to the loft. With ease, his father climbed the stairs and heaved his axe overhead and brought it down on the lock of the door. It opened promptly. Pyotr was immediately discomposed by the rank stench of a foul, singular odor. Such a stench, he told

his mother later, he had never—nor ever wanted to again—smelt in his entire life. He knew that whatever it was it was either alien or a hundred thousand of whatever created it before. His father, still as a stone, entered the loft with ease and an aura of near smug. The people of Aleksandrovskaya weren't exactly known for their olfactory capabilities—but this was something else entirely, Pyotr thought. Inside the loft, a person laid on the ground in a seat of hay, surrounded by dried blood.

"She's dead," his father said before he could chime in. Pyotr couldn't even enter the room willingly before his father grabbed him by the collar and yanked him inside. He fell onto the floor only inches from what had to be a corpse, as it was the only thing that he could imagine creating such an odor.

"What—" Pyotr began before he was interrupted by a loud groan. His father brought the axe down on the corpse. It sank into its abdomen with shameful indignity, as the body appeared unscathed. Pyotr was busy retching, but he saw what had happened. He crawled and pulled himself across the splintering boards and poked his head outside, heaved a chest full of fresh air, and asked his father, "Why?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I found her in the forest, as your mother went into labor with you. She was dead then, too." Pyotr couldn't comprehend. Her corpse was in a state as if it was thrown into the ditch a few days ago, yet appeared like a sickly sleeper. His father turned her over with the blunt side of his axe onto her back. In place of her chest, Pyotr saw, a massive mold took root. It pulsed with extreme, uncomfortable agony. For a brief moment, the horror in his mind told Pyotr that it was a monster—and it kept her alive. His morbid curiosity compelled him closer, to look her in the face, and he—though trusting of his father—confirmed it for himself.

"It came from within her," his father said. "It happened in moments. I tried to hack it off, but it seemed to harden." Pyotr seemed to stagger, his vision was hazy, and he lost his balance. They left soon after. The next night, Pyotr's father lit a massive bonfire outside the barn and, as he walked out to deliver him his supper, the rank odor invaded him again. As he walked back through the dark forest, eyes darted at him from the neighbor's enclosure, and the silent calls of the skylarks pervaded the night sky. Pyotr listened to the hills rumbling faintly from afar, wondering now if what his father said about them years prior were true or just tales to scare a young boy?

In 2001, Pyotr's father died horribly while hunting that autumn. In the small hours of a mid-October morning, the wild and fierce cries of mad wolves awoke Pyotr and his mother. They mounted in volume but

quieted every now and then, intermixed with the painful cries and screams of a grown man. The deep, terrible, snarls of a half-mad, rabid wolf drowned him out with hideous pauses. The screams of their father haunted the people of Aleksandrovskaia forever; although, it may not have been the screams themselves but how long they endured. Even into the late morning, his father screamed. An uneasiness befell the people as each knew nothing could be done to help him. A rabid pack had found him, and they surely circled nearby, hoping one might answer his screams.

Pyotr didn't *really* miss his father. After going to the loft, he began to notice particular things about him that were never really prevalent before then. He saw that he began to read strange books bound in a coarse leather, darkened, and seared by flame. Their letters were not inked but etched into thick pieces of parchment. Pyotr wasn't allowed to read or even see them, as his father carried the books on him in a knapsack wherever he went and, the night he died, they were likely on him. Though he still did his patriarchal duties, Pyotr never felt connected to his father. His death was, though gruesome, otherwise unremarkable. He would hardly be missed.

In 2002, Pyotr was reading by the fire as his mother plucked various foodstuffs from the garden outside, watching the sun set and the chilly night roll in. As if it would warn him, Pyotr heard a loud screech before something crashed into the North side of the house, as if a tree billowed and fell—crashing into the kitchen jut-out from atop the hill. Something continually made noises and Pyotr thinking it a large deer, moose, or elk, crept around the corner to peer inside. At worst, he thought, it was a bear that stumbled about. There was something about the rustling around the corner, just out of sight of the dancing flames, that indicated great, sappy, and wet bulk. By now, his mother was now at his side. At 17 years old, she pushed him to peer into the kitchen. There, Pyotr saw:

His father. It wasn't him though, no. Pyotr recoiled from a too-familiar stench, while a rumbling emanated from the nine-foot-tall man sprawled across the floor, struggling to reach its knees. The thing that was now his father was half-bent, on its side, and somehow laid in a putrid pool of ichor and retched stickiness. He saw now, in the light, that his father was a gangly creature—a man fused with a rabid dog. His clothing was wet, sticking, or even fused into portions of his skin. The hair on his arms was long, brown, and thin; as he struggled, the hair came loose in complete handfuls and fell to the floor. Its massive chest whipped and agonized with the call of the skylarks outside, as if mimicking the wind

on the boughs of great evergreens.

Its madness had no rhythm. It stretched and encroached on the planks or boards of the kitchen with impunity. It would be complete and utter dishonesty to assume that one might be able to describe the creature's complete and otherworldly terribleness. Its man-like hands, goatish hooves, and inexplicably canine structure couldn't be hidden by the earthly garments that it was stuck to. It struggled so much, like a wounded animal that, after Pyotr overcame his fear, he shot it point-blank in the chest with a simple revolver his mother kept on the mantle. It recoiled heavily, shaking the Earth as it fell to the floor again, breaking some of the boards as it tried to catch its own fall. It quickly found its own balance and faced the young family, hardly fazed. Above the waist, Pyotr recalled, it was slightly more human. Its arms ends were not claws but hands. They culminated where his own would have been to create leathery—not cow-like but alligator-like—scales. Pyotr tried to reason with it, call it by his father's name, but the creature snarled with its deep-set jaw, where some of its teeth seemed to point at entirely ninety-degree angles from where his father's perfect teeth used to be.

Pyotr shot at it again. He missed squarely and the boards below the cupboard splintered. The beast lumbered heftily towards him. Pyotr stared at its chest, where a score of black, protruding masses dangled limply. He recalled it from the women in the barn loft. Just below the masses there were large, pink orbits of an eye-socket. If Pyotr looked long enough, he knew they would open to reveal a festering ocular seer. At his core, Pyotr did not want to be seen by it. It lurched closer and Pyotr took the final shot that he could.

Square in the chest, the black mass exploded into ridge-veined pads of disgusting, patchwork combinations of dog and man. They stuck firmly to the boards of their home. Now that it lay face-first on the floor, Pyotr corrected himself: it was near ten feet tall. Gasping for breath, the dog-thing's great, black eyes fell to the floorboards and puddled into a milky white. It sighed greatly with its final breath. Pyotr liked to think to himself that it was a final sigh of relief, of rest, that the creature's son had finally afforded him. With no heavenly warning, Pyotr began to retch over the rotting corpse. He fell backwards onto his mother's feet and nearly choked himself to a similar grave, entering a manic, haze-filled torpor.

Whump.

As if awoken from a nightmare, Pyotr felt the storm calm, the screeching ceased, and whatever-it-was seemed to flutter away like a butterfly; its memory faded, slipping like sand through his fingers.



Y O U N G
W R I T E R S
A N D
A R T I S T S

QUOTE

Clara Kranz

My heart is in two different places and I can't tell where it is beating more

WHAT WE CAN NOT
SEE

Clara Kranz

When I wake I see the sun
Simply waiting for the moon
The sun so far away
We can't see its face nor the tears that it cries as it shines its
light on the flaws of humankind

WIND

Clara Kranz

I feel like a tree whose losing all its leaves
My hope and my trust blow of into the gust
I hope the rain hides my tears I can't let them see my fears but if I'm being
honest I'm scared of everything i'm scared of growing up because I don't
know if I'm good enuf
I'm scared of letting things go because that's all I know I'm scared of not
succeeding not achieving all i'm dreaming
So like a tree loses its leaves i'm losing a part of me everything I know is
in my leaves
and with every gust of wind it takes a piece of me until I'm bare and
there's nothing there
I have nothing left to give
like the giving tree i'm giving everything I am until there's nothing left of
me



**"NO JUSTICE, NO
PEACE"**

Emma Zauhar, Painting

MORSE CODE

Reign Wegscheid

I thought that learning Morse Code
Would be one of those fun things
Just knowing that you know more
Than what everybody thinks
But now that I have learned it
Now that I've had my fun
I'm starting to regret it
Because the rain tells me to run



“GOLDEN DOODLES”

Lucas Belanger, Illustration

U Z M A

Aiden Akkerman

Wake to the sunrise bright beams of yellow and orange. Birds fly through the blue skies. Soul plays as she moves to the music. Curly hair and rosy cheeks, and a smile warm like the summer beach. Eyes deep brown like the dirt that lays upon the earth and beauty like the flowers that grow from it. Uzma is a name destined for greatness, a name strong like diamond and as pretty as pearl. Her value outweighs gold and her will is free like the birds that fly through the blue seas.

W I N D O W S T O R Y

Aiden Akkerman

A sky filled with milk blue, casting over all in view. Trees every shade of green, waving with the gentle breeze. Road stretches out of view, with cars driving from many to few. Women walking and talking down the sunny gray sidewalk where I used to play. I look out this window and I wonder away, saying that yes I will make it one day. A day where I am free to dream, and tell stories the world would love. But for now I work at the hotel high up above.

THE LONESOME GOODBYE

Aiden Akkerman

There was a time where two people met. They shared stories and memories. They lived through journeys and adventures. And stared at far landscapes. These people were true friends. Through the thickest and the thinnest there bound would stay true. But like the biggest of Boulders all most split and part ways eventually. But one does not simply say goodbye to years of bounds and memories. That would be an incredible insult. No one should say peace. Peace, a wish, a promise, and a prayer all in the same. To say peace is to wish for a safe travel and a fulfilling life. To say peace is to promise that you will see them again. To say peace is to pray that you may never have to say goodbye. And to say peace means that your spirit will never die. For goodbyes are meant for the dead or the despised. Goodbyes are meant to last a lifetime.

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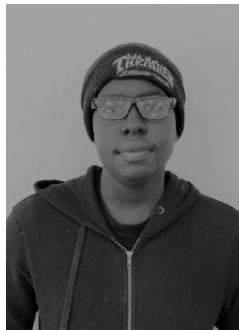
Alyson Murphy
Design Team



Cyan Coello
Design Team



Kylie Menge
Design Team



Emmanuel Lodu
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Jason Fincel
Promotional
Team



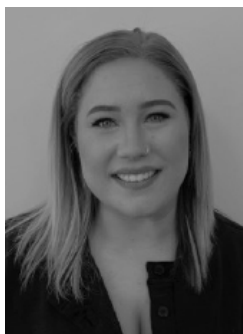
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Jessica Utke
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Emily Nouv
Editorial Team



Kylene Kubas
Editorial Team



Monika Sauer
Editorial Team

| CONTRIBUTORS

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| A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

“No one can whistle a symphony. It takes a whole orchestra to play it.” ~ H.E. Luccock

In the fall of 2021, I was asked if I wanted to teach our Literary Publications class, taking over for the incomparable Eunice Johnston, who retired after deftly leading the production of Northern Eclecta since 2007. She left vast shoes to fill, and the enormity of the task was at times overwhelming.

Without the dedication of this year’s class, I am not confident that we would have been able to produce a journal of such high quality. Thankfully, I was given the gift of Luna Zauhar, our editor-in-chief, and Tabbitha Erceg, our teaching assistant. Luna can best be described as a force. Her fierce commitment to excellence pushed all involved to dream big and not settle. We created a new website to house past editions and highlight this year’s contributors and production team. The class wanted a more interdisciplinary journal, so we have included more art and multi-genre pieces. The result is a unique journal that embraces all that Northern Eclecta has been and looks to push it into new spaces. I could not be prouder of this group and the 2022 edition.

Thank you, Eunice, for all that you have done for Northern Eclecta. Your presence loomed large and can still be felt on each page. Luna, words cannot adequately express my indebtedness. Your leadership enabled us to strive for greatness. And Tabbitha, thank you for sharing your time and talents. Finally, thank you to all the students that helped put this journal together. I hope you are as proud as I am.

With gratitude,

Jamee Larson, MFA
Senior Lecturer

| E P I L O U G E

Over the course of several months, the Northern Eclecta team has worked to find the best and brightest creators among the community. With our theme of Hue, we sought creative works of all genres and mediums. Embracing the broadness of our theme we left a lot up to interpretation for the contributors, and while this posed some challenges, it allowed our team to create a unique and diverse journal. With our new team, Northern Eclecta brought exciting new developments such as our website: www.northernelecta.com, where we will showcase previous journals, extended content, team bios, and more. In the future we hope this will be a tool that will continue to push the horizons of creative expression. Thank you to the English department for your generous endorsement and thank you to everyone who contributed to this journal. We couldn't have done it without your continued support. We hope you enjoyed this journal as much as we enjoyed producing it!