

# Forces

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## 2020 Forces

Scott Yarbrough

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# FORCES 20 20



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## INTRODUCTION

## WHY FORCES?

By Texas Poet Laureate: Carol Coffee Reposa -  
30th Anniversary Speech reprinted at the request of the author.

"I am delighted, honored, and above all proud to help launch this milestone 30th edition of *Forces* and would like to thank Collin College President Dr. Neil Matkin, the Board of Trustees, and Professor Scott Yarbrough for inviting me to take part in these proceedings. I think that all of you here at Collin are very fortunate, first in your capacity to produce a journal of this caliber and—even more important—in having leadership that recognizes the immense value of supporting such an endeavor. How lucky you are!

There probably are scores of reasons to cherish literary journals like *Forces*, but five stand out to me, so here they are. **REASON #1:** The ideas and images they contain ripple out into the communities they serve and to the world beyond, enriching the lives of their readers and thus exerting immeasurable influence.

But that's just the start. **REASON #2:** Literary journals advance—and often launch—careers. Periodicals like *Forces* have brought to the public the words of such literary titans as Edgar Allan Poe, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Ernest Hemingway and have given us such works as *Great Expectations*, *Anna Karenina*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Moby Dick*, all of which first appeared serialized in literary journals well before they ever emerged as stand-alone titles.

**REASON #3:** Literary journals stand as bulwarks against oppression and autocracy. In his landmark *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville warns us against what he calls 'tyranny of the majority,' or mob rule, but adds that the existence of a free press—including, of course, serial publications—is a sure-fire way to preserve freedom and independence of thought. Thus, when you support journals like *Forces*, you not only advance the arts; you protect our democracy.

**REASON #4:** Even as periodicals safeguard civil liberties, they also unite us. In a nation as diverse as ours, there must be at least a few common threads to pull us together, and journals do just that. If people are reading and responding to the same stories, poems, and essays from coast to coast, mountaintop to seashore, farm to sprawling city, they will have at least some shared values no matter how different they may be in other ways.

**REASON #5:** Works included in literary journals often draw attention to public ills and thereby change society for the better. Consider this dramatic and famous example: Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, a blistering expose of dirt, danger and exploitation in Chicago's notorious meat-packing industry, stirred up a firestorm which resulted in passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act and the creation of the FDA. Today, anywhere in this country, we can buy brisket for our weekend cookout without wondering whether eating it will kill us. And for this reassurance we may thank a single writer and a single novel which first appeared (you guessed it) serialized in a literary journal.

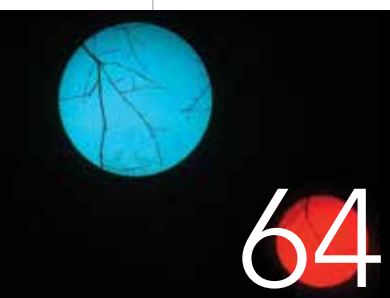
I work for a small literature/arts quarterly published in San Antonio. Like many of its kind, it struggles financially, and people sometimes ask me why I continue to toil for a magazine that might go under any day. It never takes me long to reply. When I think of all the good that literary journals do—generating positive ripple effects in the community, launching careers, protecting democracy, fostering dialogue and toleration, spearheading social reform—my answer is always this: The question is not why I work for a literary journal. The real question is, 'Why don't you?'"

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As editor of *Forces*, I would like to thank Carol for taking her time to express the importance of Collin College's continued support of our journal now in its 31st year of continuous publication. To put that into prospective, the first editor, Dr. Peggy Brown will be retiring this year, which marks the longevity and vibrance of the journal. As always, thank you to Dr. Neil Matkin and the Board of Trustees, Digital Commons Manager Mindy Tomlin-Paulson, the student editors, Dean Dr. Meredith Wang, Dr. Kelly Andrews and Public Relations Staff Marlene Miller, Donna Kinder, Keli Fink, and Nicole Luna, and the ultimate *Forces* team, Rachel Walker, Deborah Hall, and Susan Matthews.

*Forces* Editor – R. Scott Yarbrough

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**Rainbow Bird** Jordan Quidatano





**String You Along** Emily Agrisano

## Wild Man

Scott Montague

The low rumble of the engine died down as we pulled up to the campsite. Two hours ago I was a kid ready for an adventure. Now, I'm a bundle of nerves and anxiety. Five weeks in the woods, no phone or coffee or... Still, the group I'm joining looks kind and welcoming. I can't possibly know that though, as I start this journey on a thing called Earth Phase. No interacting with the group outside my mentor, Rachel. Armed with a journal, a 90-liter pack full of gear, and a plastic spoon, I'm as prepared as I'll ever be to live in the Ochoco National Forest of Oregon.

The first couple of days I spend adjusting to life without constant stimulation. *"Grounding in the present" and journaling, as if that will help me in the future.* On day four, after I've finished writing the story of how I got here, I start the next step called Fire Phase. Step one, meet the group I will be spending the next five weeks with. The life of the wild man is much better when spent with companions. Step two, my plastic spoon is broken. We start with the plastic spoon so we can adjust to life in the woods. After you join the group your plastic spoon is broken, and you eat with sticks until you can carve your own. Step three, join the chore rotation. *Now that I'm a part of the group I guess I need to help cook dinner and to set up camp.* This also includes cleaning up dishes after dinner as well as moving water and food shipments from drop off points back to camp. Step four, hike. It's my first of just over 100 miles of hiking I will complete while I'm out here, and I'm all the better for it. Today, we see wild turkeys, but in the coming weeks we will run across falcons, eagles, elk, jackrabbits, ground squirrels and much more. I miss technology, being connected to the grid, and my family, but it's tough not to be enraptured by the beauty out here. One afternoon at a campsite, the wind through the trees brings the sounds of the ocean to the forest. The leaves ebb and flow with the breeze, gently submerging me in their magnificence. The final step to Fire Phase is therapeutic growth, the whole reason I'm out here. This means weekly counseling sessions. This means emotionally checking-in with the group in a structured manner. This means, after three days in the group, reading impact letters to the

Step one,  
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I will be  
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companions.

group. These are letters written by family members that outline the impact my behavior has had on them. In my case, these are written by my mother and father. Nothing helps one gain emotional comfort with others like bawling your eyes out in front of them while your mistakes are laid bare.

For a few weeks life stabilizes in the woods. A routine emerges that starts every day with a breakfast of oatmeal, then either packing up camp and hiking or spending the day journaling and carving my spoon out of juniper wood. After the group comes together to cook a dinner consisting of rice, or quinoa, and various vegetables we pack all our food away in a large canvas sack. This sack is attached to a rope, and we hoist it about 30 feet into the tall ponderosa branches in a process we call "bear hang."

Soon, however, change is afoot. Our group is merging with another group that is down to two people, and a couple of the girls I've been spending this time with are on their way out. *Seeing as much of this process is about getting me out of my comfort zone, this is probably a good opportunity for growth. But right now I'm just upset and anxious at the idea of change.* It's a good thing there's a licensed therapist on staff for precisely this reason.

While it takes some time, I start to accept the fluidity of life out here. The butterscotch scent of the ponderosa pines is inescapable, and it starts to grant a comfortable familiarity to my new home in the woods. As new people come and old friends leave, I sense a palpable shift in my demeanor. Where I used to feel anxiety, I catch myself feeling confident. Where nerves used to

### **Shadow Forest** Michael Carney



eat away at my self-esteem, love now rushes to fill it up. I'm not the only one who notices this internal shift. Two significant changes to my life out here are just around the bend.

The first adjustment is the transfer of the program to the Oregon High Desert. This is done in late August to prepare for the coming fall and winter seasons. While I relish the rare chance to listen to music in the truck on the way, I recognize how much I've come to love these woods. However, soon after we arrive in the desert, I am "promoted" to Water Phase. This is a privilege not every participant will receive. I am granted a "crazy creek" camping chair to use around camp. Additionally, I am allowed more ownership in how the group is run. This includes leading my first hike, charting the course beforehand and navigating with a compass as we go. On this hike, or rather as we finish the hike, I see something I will carry with me forever. The golden rays of the setting sun give way to a pink splash of brilliance behind a cliff seemingly as wide as the earth itself. Overlooking a deep dried lake bed the night sky opens up with a starlight show that imprints my memory like a tattoo. Streaks of illumination tear the tapestry in two at a rate of unimaginable business. We lay down in the dirt and watch it for hours. Later, I will look back and understand this to be the annual Perseid meteor shower. That night, it was pure magic.

Nine long weeks have passed since I first arrived in the woods of Oregon. It's been almost twice as long as

I expected to be out here. While I appreciate many of the unique things I've experienced here, I'm ready to leave. Before I do, I'm "promoted" once again to Air Phase. This is rare, and it's a privilege of mine to receive this honor. I am granted an air mattress to sleep on, and given the opportunity to request one meal from base camp. Since I came out here, I have craved a Philly cheesesteak. Sloppy as possible, loaded up with mushrooms and onions, it's better than I could have possibly imagined. I don't stop licking my lips for an hour after finishing.

Finally, my time to leave has come. The best 10 weeks of my life I never want to do again has come to a close. I've spent hours preparing for altogether fifteen minutes of time on a satellite phone with my family to plan my next step. For me, this means choosing a sober house in Boulder, Colorado. Oh yeah, did I forget to mention why I went to the wild? I was arrested for DWI, but that's the least important part of this story.

#### **New Day** Daphne Babcock





## **A Little Bit of Him is Better Than Nothing**

Marilyn Abedrabbo

Disappeared from what was natural  
Living the life of discomfort for family  
Living the life of unconsciousness for myself  
Secrecy for love kept me silent  
But who was fooling whom, a little bit of him was satisfying

An automatic creature lured by hopeful thoughts  
Displeasing is undesirable, unacceptable and dark  
Submission was applauded  
Regretful yesterday, but today there is laughter  
But who was fooling whom, a little bit of him quenched my thirst

Power lays on his lap  
"JUMP" how high... this is temporary  
A lover is to be worshipped, cherish his being  
Tears evaporate it is untraceable  
But who was fooling whom, a little bit of him kept me yearning

Disappeared from what was natural  
Moments of unease was alarming  
Markings of disruption in the name of love  
Cannot be so bad it is understood  
But who was fooling whom, a little bit of him kept me planted

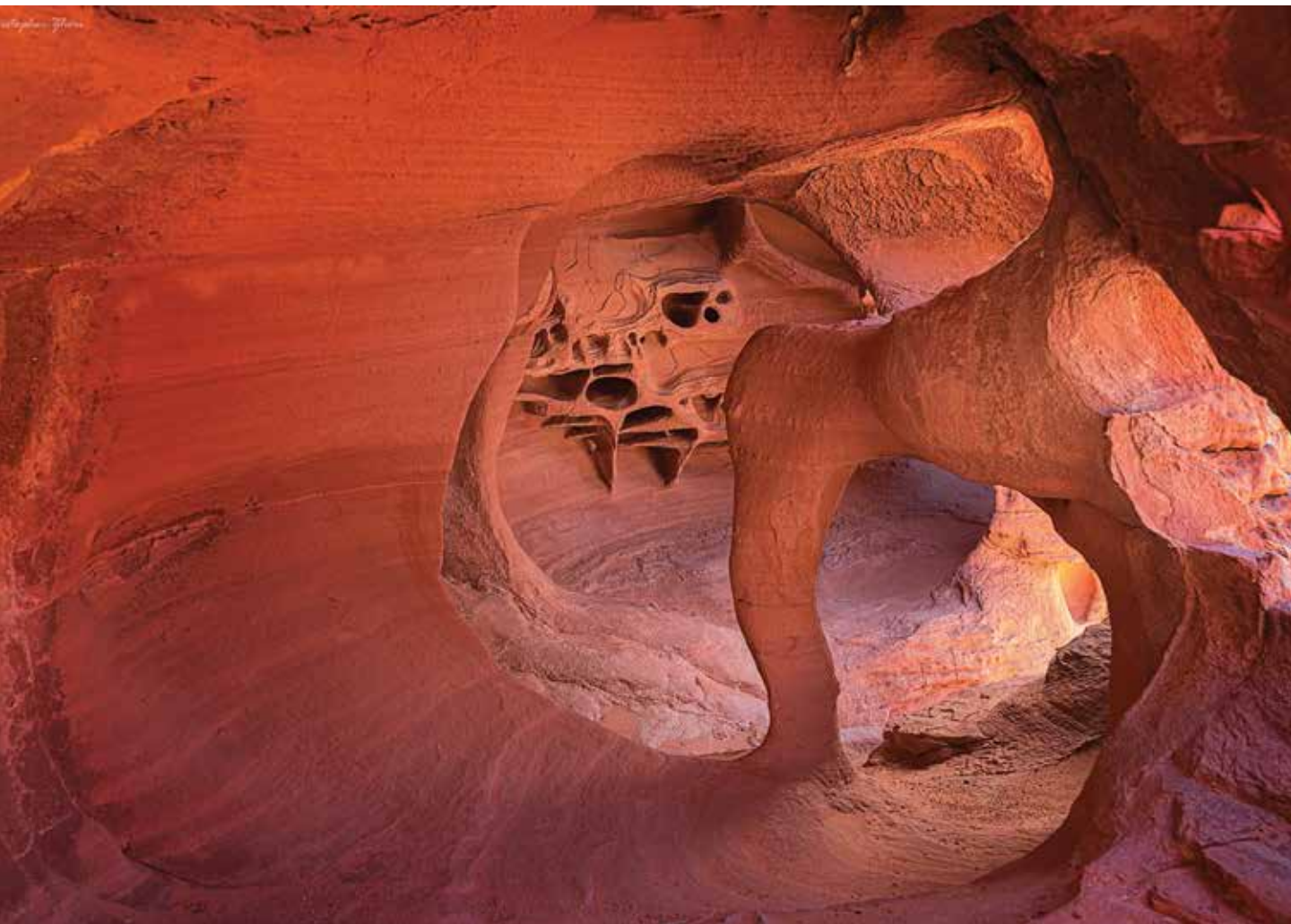
Because a little bit of him is better than nothing



**Emotion** Jessica Meyer



**Haze** Jessica Meyer



**Photo Unnamed** Christopher Zhou

## A Space Opera

John Achomuma

FADE IN:

INT. SPACESHIP - NIGHT

THE DANCE OF THE SUGAR PLUM FAIRY

by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is playing from a vinyl record player.

There is a spaceship constructed entirely of cardboard boxes, with childlike drawings of constellations. At the center of the ship is the main control system, right above a study table and chair. A fake window to the left has been drawn on a wall displaying the "exterior."

A man in a bio-suit (complete with tinted helmet) is sitting on a bed, playing with a tennis ball with the wall across him. He is surrounded by objects reminiscent of a child's bedroom. There are notably chalk drawings of the *Iron Giant* and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, among other space related references on the wall.

POET (V.O.) (bouncing tennis ball)

2's a team, 3's a crowd. Any number over 3 is too many people for me... and any number over 3 digits is too much math for me. I'm not a scientist. I'm not an astronaut . . . I write stories. I write stories for children. I couldn't write for adults because I never had perspective. The only adult I knew was my late mother. I couldn't write for teenage girls because I've never had romance. I'm honestly not sure if I even write for myself. In any case, it worked out. My first and only collection of short stories garnered enough acclaim to earn a fortune. Enough to pay for this trip to space. My editor worries I'm taking too long to write my next work. The isolation is supposed to help me concentrate. My psychiatrist trusted me to take this trip as my panic attacks have lessened and I'm generally doing better. I did get a few tips just in case.

I'm not a

scientist.

I'm not an

astronaut. . .

I write stories.

I write stories

for children.

I couldn't write

for adults

because I

never had

perspective.



### INT. PSYCHIATRIST OFFICE - NIGHT

A PSYCHIATRIST is seated.

**PSYCHIATRIST** (handing out ball)

Play with this. It should train you to fixate on one thing.

### INT. SPACESHIP - NIGHT

POET puts ball away and walks towards window.

**POET (V.O.)**

(looking out the window) Sometimes I miss the little things I neglected. For instance, even if it was possible for this spaceship to approach the sun, it would be nothing compared to watching the sunrise or sunset. I miss the seasons, too. The only thing that comes close is winter, but who wants that?! The higher you are, the colder it becomes and the more depressing things can be. On occasion suicide seems like an option.

He turns around and faces the whole room.

**POET (V.O.) (CONT'D)**

To feel more at home, I decorated the interior to look like my childhood bedroom.

Music stops.

### INT. PSYCHIATRIST OFFICE - NIGHT

**PSYCHIATRIST**

Well, your childhood is an important time in your life. It's where you begin to shape your first ideas about everything. Life, love, everything. That's why those memories are so clear. Or maybe subconsciously you're forcing yourself to stay a child so you don't lose your imagination.

### INT. SPACESHIP - NIGHT

Poet changes the vinyl; Vivaldi's *THE FOUR SEASONS*.  
Poet walks away from the vinyl with a bounce in his step.

**POET (V.O.)**

I don't agree with either. I think people remember events  
where they were vulnerable. And like the way danger makes  
one vulnerable, so does being a small child in a big world.

Music suddenly stops. A cold female voice:

**MOTHER** (sternly)

What did I say about the music? (beat)

**MOTHER** (CONT'D)

Did you hear me?!

(beat)

Take off that thing on your head and face me.

Taking a few deep breaths, he slowly takes off his helmet and turns  
around. He has a bald cut and a clean shave.

**MOTHER** (CONT'D)

What did I say about eye contact? Look at me.

Eerie silence.

**MOTHER** (CONT'D)

No food, no water, no break, no music. You do not leave this  
room until your writing quota is completed for the day.

(beat)

Do you understand?

The son nods.

**POET (V.O.)** (tense, heading to the main control system)

I've heard stories of parents who force their kids into music.  
About how their parents will play classical music for them in  
the womb and hand them an instrument right after birth. The  
intense classes, the crazy hours... All so they can end up third  
seat violinist for the national orchestra.

A shelf filled with classic literature.

**POET (V.O.)** (CONT'D)

I'm no different. Forced to appreciate art at a young age.  
Sometimes she comes out of her hole to check on me.

Staring at the pen, he starts panting slowly.

**POET (V.O.) (CONT'D)**

Third best selling children's author of all time...  
so much for the effort.

Taking off his right glove, he reveals his knuckles are filled with bruises  
apparently dating from a few years. Pen in hand, he still can't seem to write  
without shaking.

Tearing up a little:

**POET (regarding bruises)**

Once in awhile, the pain returns.

He drops the pen. He puts his right hand away and stares at the wall.  
An "I" shaped cursor appears on the wall. The poet's thoughts are typed  
up on the wall; "Once upon a time..." The poet is stuck.

TITLE CARD: SPRING, SUMMER, AUTUMN...

His breathing becomes faster. TITLE CARD: WINTER

He gasps heavily.



**INT. PSYCHIATRIST OFFICE - NIGHT**

**PSYCHIATRIST**

If you start panicking, don't forget to name 5 objects in a room.  
The poet scans the room: A poster of Pam Grier from Jet Magazine.

**POET (V.O.)**

My girlfriend.

A crumbled piece of paper.

**POET (V.O.) (CONT'D)**

My passion.

A trashcan.

My talent.

He stops in his tracks.

**POET (V.O.) (CONT'D)**

(sighs heavily)

I don't think I can do this.

Scattered dialogue:

**MOTHER**

No food, no water, no break, no music.

**MOTHER (CONT'D)**

No food, no water, no break, no music.

No food, no water, no break, no music.

**MOTHER (CONT'D)**

No food, no water, no break, no music.

The voices become more and more distorted.

**POET (V.O.)**

(panicking heavily)

I want to leave this room. I want to leave this spaceship.

I want to give it all up.

**POET**

STOP!

In a fit of rage, he runs off.

**FADE TO BLACK.**



**FADE IN:**

**INT. PSYCHIATRIST OFFICE - DAY**

The psychiatrist is seated and facing the camera. Dead silence. Finally:

**PSYCHIATRIST**

Go ahead.

The poet (casual outfit) is sitting across the table. Beat.

**POET**

I... I... Uh It wasn't really a panic attack. I was so caught up with work I... I started talking to myself...

(MORE)

**POET (CONT'D)**

I forgot to refill the oxygen tank. (Chuckles awkwardly, beat)

I actually tried to kill myself. I tried to jump out. The most predictable thing that could happen, right? (hand gestures)



But before I could open the thing, I fell. (fearful)  
 I couldn't breathe; It was so scary. Then and there I realized  
 I didn't wanna die. I... I barely made it to the tank. (sigh of relief)  
 But I'm fine now. (laughs awkwardly)  
 After that, I'm definitely ready to write again.

**PSYCHIATRIST**

Are you sure?  
 The poet is confused.

**PSYCHIATRIST (CONT'D)**

Are you saying you wanna write because of your near death  
 experience, or because you love it?

**POET** (reflects)

This is all I've ever done.  
 Beat. Psychiatrist flips pages from notebook.

**POET (CONT'D)**

(excitedly)  
 Do you wanna hear one of them?  
 Psychiatrist pays attention to him.

**POET (CONT'D)**

I would like feedback for some of the stories before  
 I send them to my editor.

**PSYCHIATRIST** (perks up)

Tell me your favorite one.

**CHILDLIKE ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE FOLLOWING STORY:**

**POET**

(beat)

One snowy night, a wolf pack has to go hunting. Unlike other  
 nights, the mother of the wolf pack decides it is time for the  
 youngest to join them. To please his mother, the youngest accepts.  
 Hunting for prey, the snow blends perfectly with the white  
 wolves. Unfortunately, the youngest trips on a branch wounding  
 himself. Later that night, a human hunter spots the wolves and  
 chases after them. The red of the cub's wound has betrayed  
 their camouflage. The cub runs too fast and slides down a slope,

holding on to its edge. Struggling to climb up, he is relieved to see his mother. (sad)

She grabs her cub by the neck with her teeth. Unfortunately, she bites too hard and hurts the cub. In pain, the cub pushes her away and falls off. The cub wakes up a day later in a pool of mud. Injured and hungry, he is saved by a wolf pack of brown wolves who mistake him for one of them. He is still angry at his mother. He doesn't understand that his mother was trying to save him the only way she knew how. "If and only if she didn't rush me into hunting," he also said to himself. The cub joins the brown wolves. A few days later, he learns from one of the brown wolves that the leader of a wolf pack was shot by a hunter and died a few days later. That night, the cub sneaks out to visit the spot where the wolf was buried. The cub follows the sounds of wolves howling and finds his brothers who don't recognize him. Looking over the grave of his mother, he starts crying... The cub cries so much that the tears wash off the mud on his skin.

## **INT. PSYCHIATRIST OFFICE - DAY**

The psychiatrist had been illustrating the tale in her notebook.

### **PSYCHIATRIST**

That's interesting. What are children supposed to get out of this?

### **POET**

It's a kids story. They are not going to think too much about it. Psychiatrist thinks.

### **PSYCHIATRIST**

That's not what I meant... What was your intention behind this story?

The poet ponders for a long time. No answer.

The psychiatrist takes out pen and starts taking notes.

### **PSYCHIATRIST (CONT'D)**

Tell me another one.

**FADE TO BLACK.**

**THE END.**



**Take a Bath in the Forest** Deborah Hall

**Anaconda, Montana: December, 2011**

Jonathan Harrell

I got in my car and drove to the Montana Rockies and stood  
 in the Clark Fork. It was along that red riverbank  
 that I drank rain from a canteen and ate ostrich jerky.  
 No, that's not what I did. That's what I would have done  
 if I hadn't gone out for groceries. For five days in a row,  
 I would have camped there alone. Truth is I have never  
 even heard of ostrich jerky.

The sound of the water passing over the gully, well,  
 the gutter of my house, is all the romance of loneliness I need.  
 The half-mile trip to Wal-Mart is all I've got of good enough.  
 So let's call the EXXON sign a blue-ridged mountain  
 and when I look back past the smelter  
 at Smoke Stack State Park, the police  
 and the rainclouds are an unruly Ash tree  
 and a black pickup truck some big, strong  
 ranger drives. Here out in the Rockies,  
 here out in the backyard, I'm always heading back  
 to the lookout. Look, see the bobtail, how the Toyotas  
 break even over the horizon?

That's just a part of this Midwestern mysticism.

These woods here are my wood blinds, the green light  
 a tornado on my meadow's lip. I say howdy, head to the kitchen  
 and reverse all the way back home, to a keyboard,  
 to a stream of smoke from a stick of  
 homemade incense.

And I think to myself I will start taking things apart.  
 I will start washing myself in the river.





**Mermaid Hair** Starlit D.S. Taie

## Backburner Friend

Starlit D.S. Taie

I found out that night that  
You'd broken up with your boyfriend  
Of three years  
Through a text message  
Coupled with the words  
'I thought I told you  
...wait  
Maybe I told [REDACTED] ...'

It's fine  
I'll say that over and over  
Eventually it will be  
Your second best friend  
Can wait to be your counselor  
When you're ready

Somehow I leap the line between  
Heinously selfish and  
Astoundingly selfless  
Yet somehow  
I can never cross the line to  
Best friend

You can't shatter a person better  
After three years  
Than starting with the sentence  
'Oh? I didn't tell you?'  
When you are the only person  
I do tell

In my selfishness I'll wonder  
Am I not good enough for you?  
Did I mess it up somehow  
Say the wrong thing that other time  
How can I fix it  
How can I change for you  
How can I be  
You best  
Friend?

In my healing  
Three years later  
I play with this idea  
Perhaps...  
It's not my question to ask?

Somewhere in the moments  
Someone said  
'If it lasts 7 years  
It'll last forever'  
But somewhere after 7 years  
I'm still struggling  
With my texts being left  
Not on read  
But delivered

The 7 years  
Still plays on my brain  
And I wonder why  
It hasn't gotten better

But 7 years  
Has played on my brain  
And I think  
Why would it get better?

It's only taken  
7 years to realize  
It's not me who is the  
Backburner friend  
But you  
Who has backburner friends

7 years to realize  
That there is no  
'You and Me'  
Only  
'You and Us'  
  
If asked  
What my favorite color is  
You probably couldn't guess  
Yet  
I could recite your  
Top 10 favorite colors  
Backwards and forwards  
Because you forgot you told me  
  
Twice.



**Sailor's Delight** James Goodman

## Centralia

Rebecca Frazier

Nobody strikes a match  
Quite like the Keystone State  
Presses smoldering lips  
To Mother Nature's  
Incendiary face

She has been blushing  
For well over half a century  
A courtship that burns so hot  
That all it leaves in its wake  
Is barely an afterthought

It will outlast us  
For untold lifetimes

In nineteen sixty-two  
Centralia woke up  
Experienced an adrenaline rush  
Within its network  
Of powder-keg veins

No man could quell or contain  
Centralia is quite literally  
Bursting at the seams  
Producing enough fire to forge  
Timeless American ghost stories  
The haunting of a place  
That simply ceased to be

## Kill Yourself

Starlit D.S. Taie

30 minutes into traffic  
 I say the words outloud  
 Without realizing I said them  
 They write themselves  
 Like the people I pass  
 Forgotten  
 Just like my sister in my car  
 Who turns to me  
 And asks  
 "Why'd you say that?"  
 The only thing unwritten  
 In her voice  
 'What's wrong with you?'  
 I usually leave it out  
 I don't forget it  
 It's ingrained deep enough  
 That between the 7 am  
 And 2 am in my planner  
 It finds its own time  
 Between color coded ink  
 I see color coded images of reds  
 Or smashed up silver metals  
 Frayed browns and broken whites  
 Little fragments settling  
 Under weighted silence and dark  
 Words repeat until the meaning's forgotten  
 Yet I sit  
 Obsessed with this movie  
 I don't ever remember liking

"Kill Yourself"

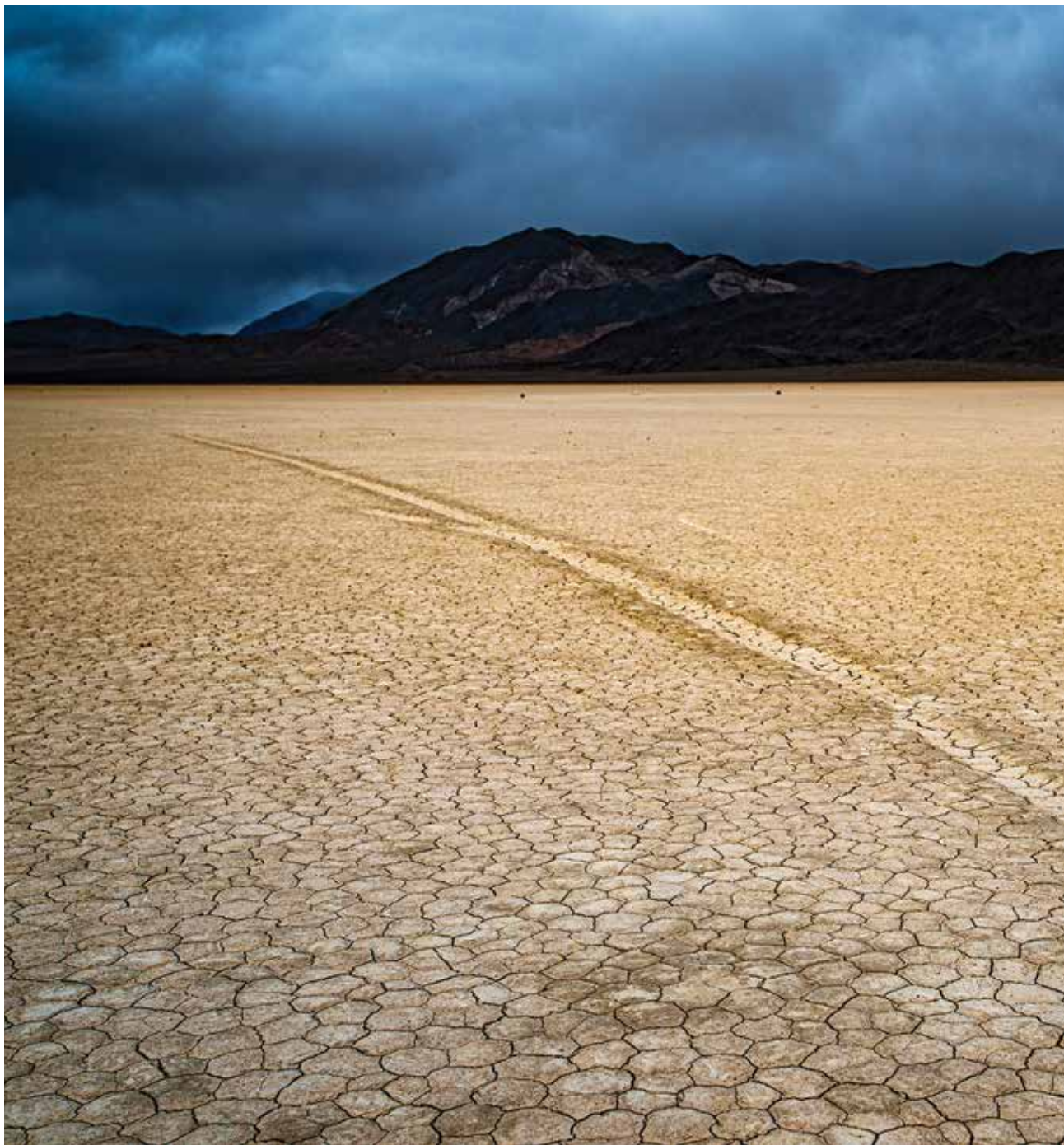


**Stretch** Brianna Teafatiller



**The Call** Brianna Teafatiller







## Dead End, Texas

M.J. Scott

out where the sand inhales  
paling bones from the boiling surface  
kissing the flats of scorpions' feet  
and caressing their empty stomachs

where unbearable torridity  
are just handsome words in abusive affairs  
tempting the stewed gazers  
to dream of being anywhere that is elsewhere

where the land takes shade  
chasing the waking snakes from bathe  
and grim masses in the sky bring  
gnarling howls that warn their prey

where barbed wires cloaked in rust  
slither across dying prairies parched in dust  
and what once bore the colors of a pretty gown  
is now just hollow thorns within rolling brush

where the night sky shyly bats its eyes  
to the weary whistlers of a long traveled tale  
who lie on scorched earth under blankets of dirt  
in graves where violent stars once fell

#2 Christopher Zhou



## Every Time

J.D. Isip

there is a fire the sap goes to a stop,  
pulling ourselves inside of ourselves  
for fear, we let the extremities drop off—

each kindled needle, each scorch mark, if  
it survives, will form a ring within; without  
them who or what are we, we think  
but marks on the horizon?

year by year, winter flurries, sun, and moon,  
we grow back large and hard with scars, with  
life that welcomes the flames and heat  
to push us past the tree line in ourselves

until, one autumn afternoon, the final fire  
fells us soft and noiselessly and we are smoke  
and embers rising higher still.

**Lens Flare** Jessica Meyer





## Fluorescent Urine

M.J. Scott

all the crooks in the mirrored towers  
they salivate over predicted destruction  
before calculating the prices for mail-order brides  
you know,  
the type that come equipped with disposable feelings  
and smiles that can be accidently beautiful  
they are all so happy to be so angry  
over fluctuating digits and burning latte's  
these cheaply made male dolls with kung-fu grips  
suit themselves in class-action forgotten fashion  
and when their string is pulled  
they recite the first law of power  
they are the authoritative types that can  
"piss in the night and light up the sky"  
or so they would have us believe...

**Me and Shadow** Gilbert Hu





## For Ray Bradbury

Rebecca Frazier

The oil slick black of space  
Makes curious rainbows  
And has an odd way of  
Branding itself into the souls  
Of marvelous storytellers  
Who can't possibly grow old.

The captain loved his cat.  
He let it traipse over the control console  
As the pinprick stars swam by.  
He relaxed within his chair  
With his Melville and Steinbeck,  
Bookmarked pages in Dickens,  
And reflected upon  
His years among the unbelievable.

He drummed his fingers  
On a cover and said,  
"This is how we travel  
Between universes.  
If history never repeats itself,  
Then we will all become  
Ambassadors."

**A Visit to a Temple in Kyoto** Salena Parker











**Up in the Air** Alyssa Cardenas





**Baby Loved** Gilbert Hu



## Fortune House: Open for Business

WenQing Liu

A red and blue neon sign beams through the roads that read "Open." Families shop for groceries, but kids are running around and mothers

are trying to tame their kids in a busy plaza. Suspicious men are smoking at the back of the plaza as the cigarette smoke wafts its way through thin air. Finally, a small restaurant sandwiched between a donut shop and a hair salon run by different families, but with similar backgrounds. In the restaurant, fumes of hot fire, spice, and oils with a hint of sweetness fill the atmosphere as customers walk in. The waitress is running around picking up phone calls, taking orders, and packing take-out food all while speaking the little English she knows to the best of her ability. In the back, the chef splashes oil into the wok as the fire is roaring back to his face. With his other hand, he tosses barbecue pork, cubed carrot, and frozen peas, flipping the heavy metal wok with one hand and letting it bounce back and forth with the fire. He is preparing three dishes all at once. Fire and metal clash, and people chatter all together as two kids just quietly sit behind the register, bored out of their minds. The kids are a nuisance to their mother as she is taking an order on the phone. The mother, in response to the chaos, throws a quick glare to the kids to be aware of their misbehavior. As the busy day finally start to settle down, the kids are asked to start on their daily tasks. They fold napkins, place clean cups back on to the racks, and pre-pack bags for take-out orders. Later on, they also answer the phone for take-out orders and package food just as their mother did. Growing up in a restaurant became their childhood, they have little memory of being at home. The kids were sent right to the restaurant after school rather than a daycare. This is a life of Chinese American children when their parents own a restaurant. The restaurant is their life.

Fire and metal

clash, and

people chatter

all together

as two kids

just quietly sit

behind

the register,

bored out of

their minds.



**Water Lilies** Bridget Scott-Shupe

## Grief

Bridget Scott-Shupe

**You've haunted me since the day you died. I stood in the kitchen that night and stared into the living room. The lights were off, and nothing moved in the house.**

The chair you used to sit in had reclaimed the space of the bed you died in. The silence somehow felt more alive with your ghost stalking the halls than when your living body was still here, withering away. Even then, I could feel you behind me, watching me as I remembered you. The skin would prickle along my spine and I'd move on without looking backwards. I was afraid you'd somehow reach out and touch me, afraid that turning around would call you into existence again.

I would lie awake in bed and wait for you to find me. You'd crawl in through the empty space between reality and dreams until you were a vision rather than a feeling. My heartbeat would pound in my ears as dread dragged me down into the bed. I prayed you wouldn't speak, but you'd call my name anyway. Tears ran hot into my pillow as I struggled to remind myself that you weren't really there.

In the wake of your wake, I moved back to my apartment. I hoped you were bound to the house and wouldn't follow me. Of course you did. It didn't matter where I was, or who I was with. You'd search the streets and slowly creep up from behind. I'd choke, stutter, and run from the memories that drew you to me. You were everywhere.

Eventually, you grew weary and slow, found me less often. A day without you became a week, one week became two. I relaxed. That had been a mistake. You were still looking for me, but you had changed your tactics. My phone began to chime with texts of how your day would be going if you were still alive. How it was about the time you should be getting hungry or ready for bed. How today was the day you were supposed to meet your friends for lunch, but never would again. I stopped looking at my phone. I didn't know how to reply to a ghost.

I would lie  
awake in bed  
and wait for you  
to find me.  
You'd crawl  
in through the  
empty space  
between reality  
and dreams  
until you were  
a vision  
rather than  
a feeling.



I finally went to claim your ashes. I knew you would follow me back, but it didn't matter anymore. You would get in no matter what I did. Frustrated with my own fears and grief I buried myself in work. It seemed best to leave myself no time to think, and if I collapsed at the end of every day, all the better. At least some of those nights were dreamless. I had finally found the pace I needed to run at to keep you away.

Run. Yes, that's exactly what I did. Ran to a new life in a new state to a new calling. That's when the letters started. They were written on blank cards the hospital had sent as thanks for our donations to the cancer fund. Each one was printed with little paintings children in the cancer ward had made. They had sat in your home for years as you struggled alongside

them, two floors up where the adults were kept. I guess we never got around to throwing them away. You would be so proud of me, they said, you would be so happy. I dreaded going to the post office to pick them up, but they appeared every week like clockwork. You came along with them.

Now, when you're not waiting by the bed again, you reach me by phone call. Every insignificant accomplishment met by saying how much you'd have liked to see this, experience this with me. As my skin crawls and tears turn me glassy-eyed I just nod, my throat too tight to speak. You do see it, see me, every day. You haunt me still. No matter how hard I try, I just can't argue with your ghost.



**Suckle** Brianna Teafatiller

**Grief**

Lydia Jacques

What to do, when our love moves away  
Not next door – a whole new space and time  
In response to the darkest of all mysteries  
We simply box up her flowery dresses  
Read her will  
Place her favorite watch on her wrist

Clock ticks in a grave far away  
Meanwhile, Grief moves in  
Wears a black scarf round his arm  
Sits where she once did  
A new companion

Together we watch her lilies bloom  
Taste the warmth of her favorite tea  
Feel the crisp air in the pines  
Never washing the lipstick off her mug



**Daisy** Brianna Teafatiller

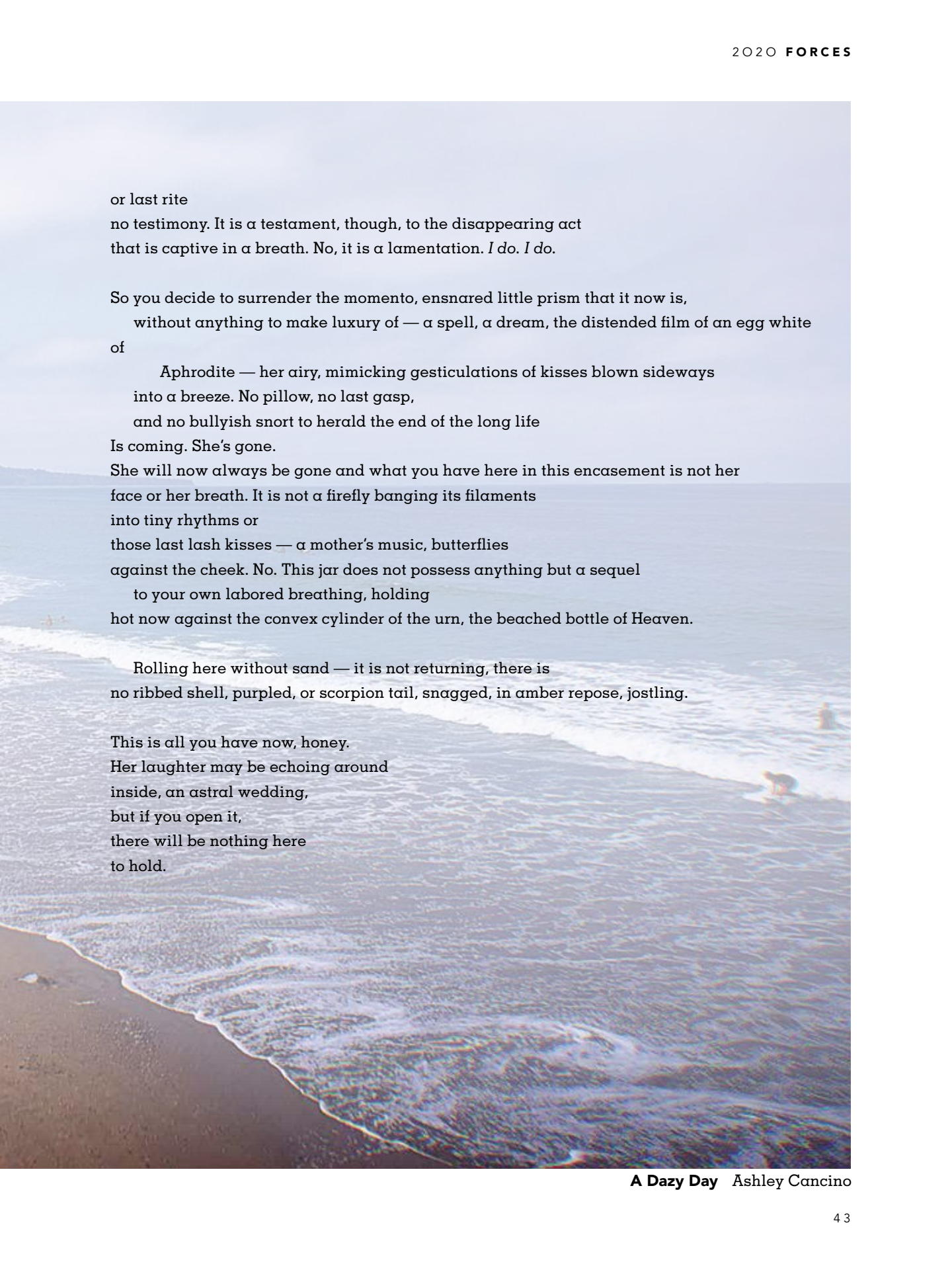
**Hutch and Holder***for my mother*

Jonathan Harrell

The moment-captured, in essence, like wind in a jar. Its essence,  
rounded out and wholly different than the sunset, that brisk and  
Flamingo-pink whoosh with the oranges of a nascent flag wavering  
In the hollowed-out gorge of yesterday. The release, or your release — back into  
the same pigment of song you were left with at that birth day,  
screaming,  
aged out of one womb and into this  
other  
place, is this essence of that same hallowed realm  
wherever the last round marble  
rolled through your marrow, its harrowing journey  
through DNA and those paternal inscriptions that  
your father made onto your mother, both caressing your figmentation  
Into a future, you, of whom was  
made into the littlest of gossamer scripture.

This moment is duly not  
that moment, not that essence with its perfunctorily different day  
whose wind is in this jar, in theory  
without sound or color, Clear — nothingness from some night of speculative gestation.  
*You've got nothing in there*  
but you wish for a thought, a regret, a mental image picture  
that has gone more than just blank, having blinked out and around  
the metal circle twisting along the glass strakes  
which hold no rust  
but  
hold no wind, or promise, or any weather really — not a broken gust or huff  
has the will  
to invoke itself into memorabilia, the caught smoke





or last rite  
no testimony. It is a testament, though, to the disappearing act  
that is captive in a breath. No, it is a lamentation. *I do. I do.*

So you decide to surrender the momento, ensnared little prism that it now is,  
without anything to make luxury of — a spell, a dream, the distended film of an egg white  
of

Aphrodite — her airy, mimicking gesticulations of kisses blown sideways  
into a breeze. No pillow, no last gasp,  
and no bullyish snort to herald the end of the long life

Is coming. She's gone.

She will now always be gone and what you have here in this encasement is not her  
face or her breath. It is not a firefly banging its filaments  
into tiny rhythms or  
those last lash kisses — a mother's music, butterflies  
against the cheek. No. This jar does not possess anything but a sequel  
to your own labored breathing, holding  
hot now against the convex cylinder of the urn, the beached bottle of Heaven.

Rolling here without sand — it is not returning, there is  
no ribbed shell, purpled, or scorpion tail, snagged, in amber repose, jostling.

This is all you have now, honey.  
Her laughter may be echoing around  
inside, an astral wedding,  
but if you open it,  
there will be nothing here  
to hold.



Exploring Starlit D.S. Taie



## In the Collin Library

Lishan Desta

As you read US history  
Did you wonder  
At an enigma, at a paradox —  
At “a nation born half free,  
— half chained?”

When you studied Gettysburg, Shiloh,  
— and Antietam  
Did you cringe at the blood,  
— at the mayhem?  
Where brother killed brother  
— in utter abandon  
‘til the meadows soaked in blood  
— turned crimson?

When you studied the end of slavery  
Did you sigh in dismay  
For Blacks lynched, wantonly slain?  
Did you wonder why  
Society looked askance  
That the Great God  
or Good Government  
seemed not to care?

When you studied the Progressive Era,  
— that time of change  
As women rose up as one for their rights,  
— for their suffrage  
When angry workers went on strike,  
— on rampage  
Did you envy their pluck  
Their stand; their sacrifice  
What they paid for a price  
To make reform; to make change?

When you studied the Great Depression  
Did you sigh for the people’s plight  
For the rural poverty, for urban blight?

Did you break into joy  
Seeing a man on the rise —  
A man of courage, of steady hand  
Who speaking words of hope  
Could put fear to flight?

Did you rejoice for this man  
Who dared fight on many fronts:  
Depression, fascists, Nazis  
In the villages, in the cities  
On the land, on the seas?  
For this man?  
In our angst, in our night  
Through his fireside chats?

## La Luna

Carlos Contreras

Your head rested on my shoulder,  
as our chests grew further  
with each and every sigh.

You were here with me  
but we could both see  
the growing distance between us.

I looked up through the sky  
into the stars divine  
and onto the big gray bulb.

And at that moment I saw you  
wandering clueless  
so I cried for the moon.

I raised the sea to get closer.  
You weren't much older  
But you acted like a stone.

Beaten by waves  
and that bond we craved  
seemed farther away.

But I still crawled toward heaven,  
lying a mile away from the shore,  
desperately trying to catch up.

I stretched my hand,  
so I could touch land,  
but you pushed me away.



Choices, Changes, Chances - Life in my 20's Malibet Karanja

## Open Ears

Hannah Hansen

I've always thought of myself as a listener,  
 Hiding behind surnames, and second hand emotions.  
 Swallowing the problems of others, never recognizing mine.  
 so i listen  
     i listen  
         i listen  
 I muse myself in fantasy,  
 With wild thoughts and a clear universe.  
 I'm an open book with closed chapters, only mentioning doubt in a footnote.  
         so i listen  
             i listen  
 My own words have rotted in my mouth.  
 Waiting for pauses in breath, and simple silence.  
 Waiting for the right moment to take the lead, only to be disappointed in anticipation.  
                 so, i listen  
 I sit back with folded arms and open ears,  
 Listening to problems, hopes, and happy endings.  
 The danger in doing this is you have answers, solutions, responses, for everyone.  
                                 except you.



**Fly Boy** Salena Parker



**Secret** Melody Black



## Last Summer

Phoebe Cave

**It was our last summer. Our last days spent fanning off the heat, waiting for the breeze to chill the sweat on our faces. The sum of our afternoons**

spent at the corner cafe, sitting at our favorite table, fawning over all gorgeous names and faces and then daring each other to reveal which one we desired most. It was our last chance to perfect our swan dives and cannonballs off the clunky public pool diving board as our lungs were filled with the scent of chlorine and cheap sunblock that was oddly soothing. It was the last of the nights spent sitting on a scratchy blanket atop our special hill where you'd laugh and rattle on about things I couldn't understand your passion for, but I nodded as if I did. It was our final night when the stars struggled to outshine the light of our small town square as we'd go on and on about our plans for the future, now tainted by the sound of weight impacting the ground and of boots running to find it's source. Oh, how I long for that summer. How I wish to be standing in the sun beside you. How I want to tell you which name and face my heart really cried out for. How I dream of that moment of peace before our water wrinkled feet hit the cool, chlorinated water. How I'm dying to tell you not to come with us. How much I try to scream your name louder in my dreams, as if that would somehow change anything. How I needed that summer to have lasted forever, but it didn't. The sun still rose later in the morning. Classes still started with a seat now vacant, and hallways echoing with rumors of your disappearance I am to blame for. Leaves of saturated hues still fell on the place we found you, and the place my erupted stomach contents from the sight fertilized new life for the spring. You were still in the spot we hastily picked and dug, wasting away with the worms. I'm still here, without any rest, without any sleep, without any peace from the memory of how you looked in the soil as I took up shovel and started to fix everything. It was our last summer, the last of everything, and ended with the final mound of soil falling from my hand; swallowing you, and the truth, whole.





**Renaissance Plovdiv** Dorothy Ho

### Library Dreamer

Bridget Scott-Shupe

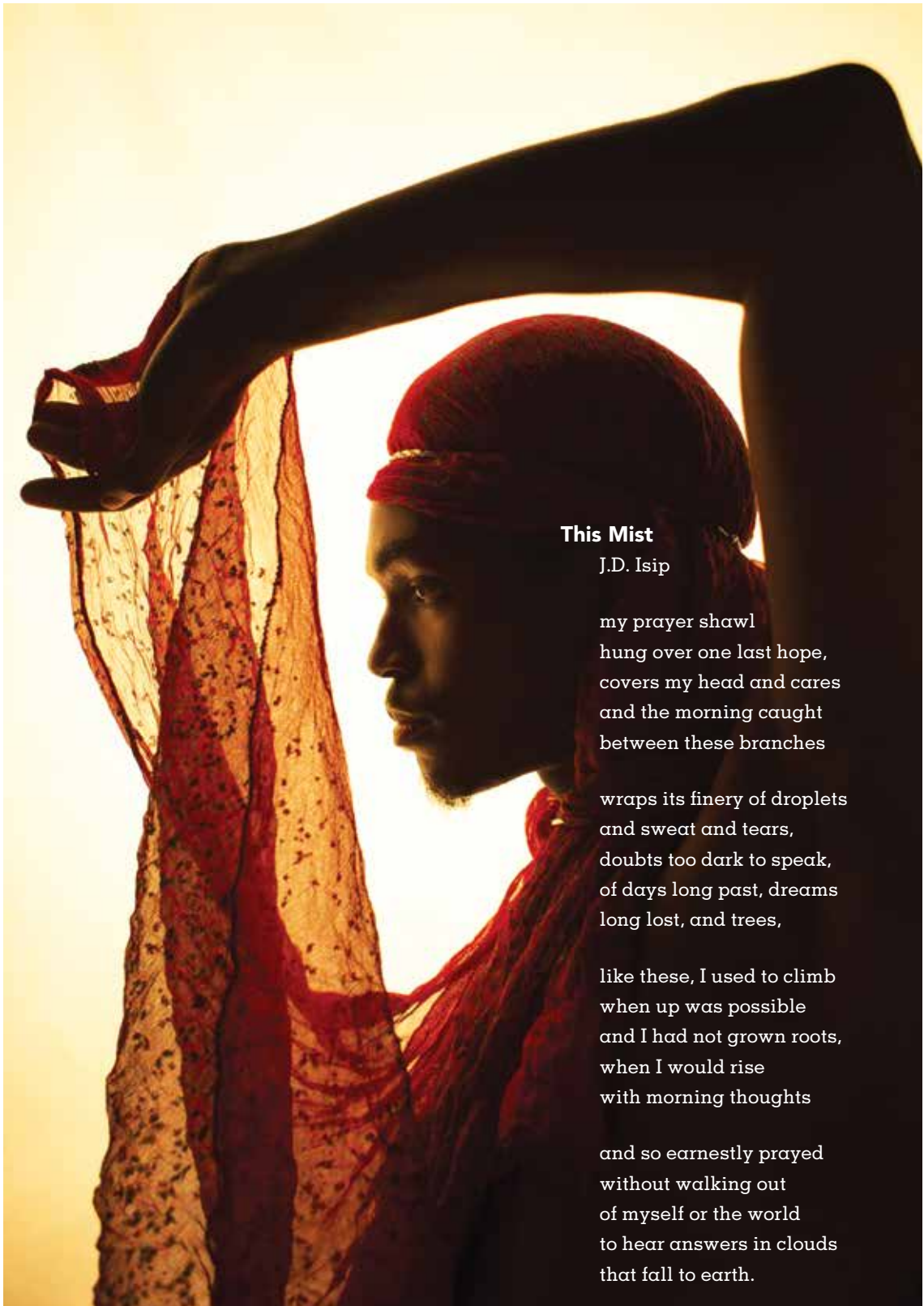
While you were sleeping  
Grand castles fell  
Lost forests sprawled  
Demons left hell

While you were sleeping  
Deep oceans churned  
Mountains sprung up  
Red letters spurned

While you were sleeping  
Bandits did ride  
Animals spoke  
Good soldiers died

While you were sleeping  
Proud houses wed  
Books were burnt up  
Orphans not fed

While you were sleeping  
Through clarion call  
The world moved around you  
You slept through it all



### This Mist

J.D. Isip

my prayer shawl  
hung over one last hope,  
covers my head and cares  
and the morning caught  
between these branches

wraps its finery of droplets  
and sweat and tears,  
doubts too dark to speak,  
of days long past, dreams  
long lost, and trees,

like these, I used to climb  
when up was possible  
and I had not grown roots,  
when I would rise  
with morning thoughts

and so earnestly prayed  
without walking out  
of myself or the world  
to hear answers in clouds  
that fall to earth.





**Justice** Pouran Lashini

## Serendipity

Austyne S. Chetwood

Love me like I am archangel Gabriel,  
Coddle my wings,  
Smother me with your ethereal purity.

Breath,  
Let me ease your mind,  
Relax,  
The love to be fulfilled by the embrace of you,  
It's like no god I believe in;  
But I want you to look up to me,  
To fight with your ambiguous gaze.

Unsheathe yourself,  
Show me the sharp edge you've always had.  
Sing the lullaby,  
Resonate my inner chakras.

No, I am not asking you to worship me,  
But do endear my presence  
Respect my hesitation, reassure me that when time ends,  
You will still be there.  
When judgment day hails upon the wretched.  
You'll remain.

In return,  
I will stand in your trees  
I will take away the pain  
I will make sure the rest of your life  
Ends breathlessly.

By God himself,  
I will treat you like King Tut and build a pyramid.  
We will celebrate death before we experience it.

Our home will be a haven for the wicked.  
Because only sinners experience forbidden love.

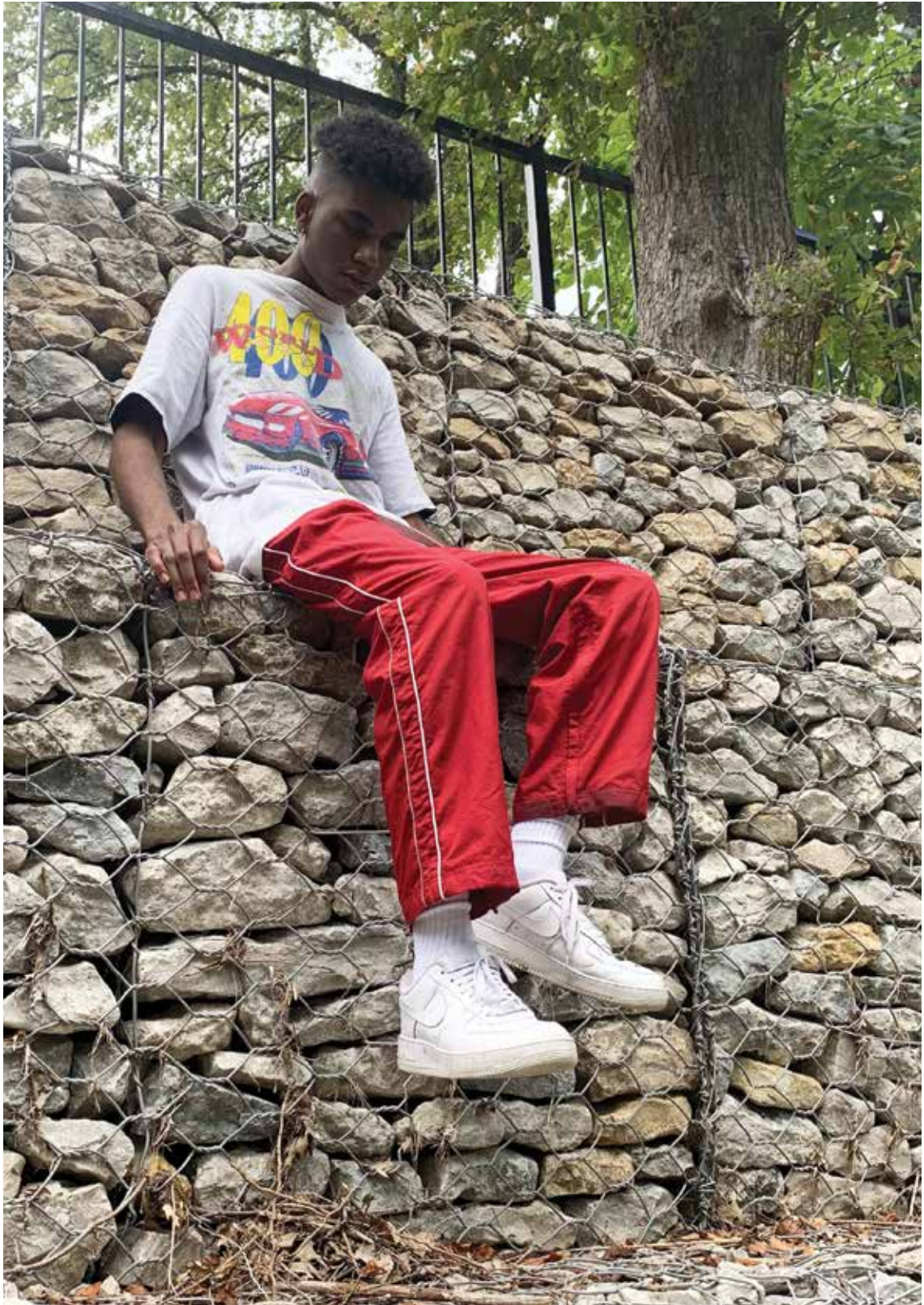


**Yellow Hibiscus** Virginia Owen



**Dancing Spider Lilies** Virginia Owen





**Trees** Jared Sanders

## South Side

Caleb Bray

Our footsteps clunked along the sidewalk almost in unison. It was a cold evening on Chicago's south side, in a neighborhood I can't remember the name of but sure didn't feel like I belonged in. "Two

more blocks," my dad said. We had come to Chicago for Thanksgiving, my Dad, my cousin Jake and I. So far we had toured Michigan Avenue, the busiest street downtown, visited museums and ate deep dish pizza. On our left side, apartment buildings were erected for blocks on end; they were worn out and their lawns and shrubbery were unkempt. To our right across the street was a strip mall; closed at this time of day, with large signs screaming the name of the salon, electronics store and pizza joint. The streets weren't empty. Under almost every other lamp post or in front any fast food joint, people were huddled outside. Attending to whatever business they had in front of a McDonalds at 9 o'clock at night. We turned left on a similar sized street, footsteps a little less in unison now. "There it is," my father said.

The sun was just setting, and we were a block away from the tram. It was cold this time of year, much colder than anything I had felt in Texas. The cold air pierced my coat, sweater, and undershirt. Freezing my bare skin and warm blood underneath. But we moved on nonetheless. My dad was on one of the numerous business trips he would take each year, and my cousin and I were along for the ride. Jake, is my Aunt's son; he is a few years older than I but never asserted it in anyway. The tram station nearest our hotel was well kept and clean as was most everything in downtown Chicago. We scanned our cards and boarded the next train going south. I was raised in the suburbs, in Frisco, Texas. I was not accustomed to big, sprawling cities let alone rundown neighborhoods, which were numerous on the south side of Chicago, where we were headed. This was an entirely new experience to me. The majority of the ride there was filled with humorous conversation between us three. We had been riding for fifteen minutes, when the buildings below us started to grow distinctly different from the skyscrapers and classic architecture of downtown. The streets were not bustling, there were no men in suits and ties taking calls on their newest Blackberry. Rather, autumn colored leaves

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littered the sidewalks and vines grew on the side of each apartment building. It was our stop, my Dad took the lead and exited the train, with Jake and I soon following.

"There it is." Jake and I looked up and saw the Church's Chicken. The LED backed logo on the store front cut through the night sky; featuring red, blue and yellow that snatched my attention. We crossed the street where a few men hung out in front of the store. They were drinking out of some Church's cups and talking, but I felt their eyes pierce through me as we opened the door and walked

The air was warm, and the scent of hot oil, fried chicken, spices and honey butter biscuits filled the air.

inside. The air was warm, and the scent of hot oil, fried chicken, spices and honey butter biscuits filled the air. I snapped out of my food filled trance, and took a look around me. Not one person wore Nike brand shoes like I was or a thirty-dollar beanie from NFLshop.com. I felt like an outsider. "Find a seat, boys," Dad said. Jake and I sat in a corner booth farthest away from most of the Chicagoan patrons. A few men were gathered around the soda machine, and a few booths down a man and woman sat side by side, looking right at us, and then back

#### Boxes A.J. Sanchez



at each other when I made eye contact with them. I felt uneasy, remembering stories my dad would tell me of awful neighborhoods in cities he visited, and tales of hearing gunshots outside while conducting his business. Minutes felt like hours and all I could focus on outside of conversation with my cousin were the cracked tile floors littered with crumbs; not to mention the overflowing, dilapidated trash cans. I wish I had some cards or a Nintendo like Jake did to make me feel more at home. But no, I sat there, bored and intimidated by my surroundings. I remember thinking of home and the mornings where I would put my clothes in the dryer to warm them up before braving the chilly walk to the bus stop. I thought to myself, "There are no subdivisions here. There are no 10 high schools to a school district; the people here lived a harder life." I was coming to the realization that I didn't really live in the real world.

"Come on boys, let's get out of here," Dad said, startling me. We walked the same path on cracked sidewalks back to the train, then up a narrow set of stairs to the station itself. As we turned toward the platform we came across some lockers.

Bang! Bang! Bang! I tensed up, and adrenaline chilled my spine and neck. A muscular man in a tattered hoodie and sweatpants stood in our path, punching a set of lockers with his bare hands as if he was Apollo Creed pummeling Rocky Balboa in the early rounds of their second fight. The sweat glistened off his forehead, and blood had been smeared on this particular locker as the skin on his knuckles wore away. I couldn't begin to imagine what drove this man to do what he was doing. Who in their sane mind, mindlessly

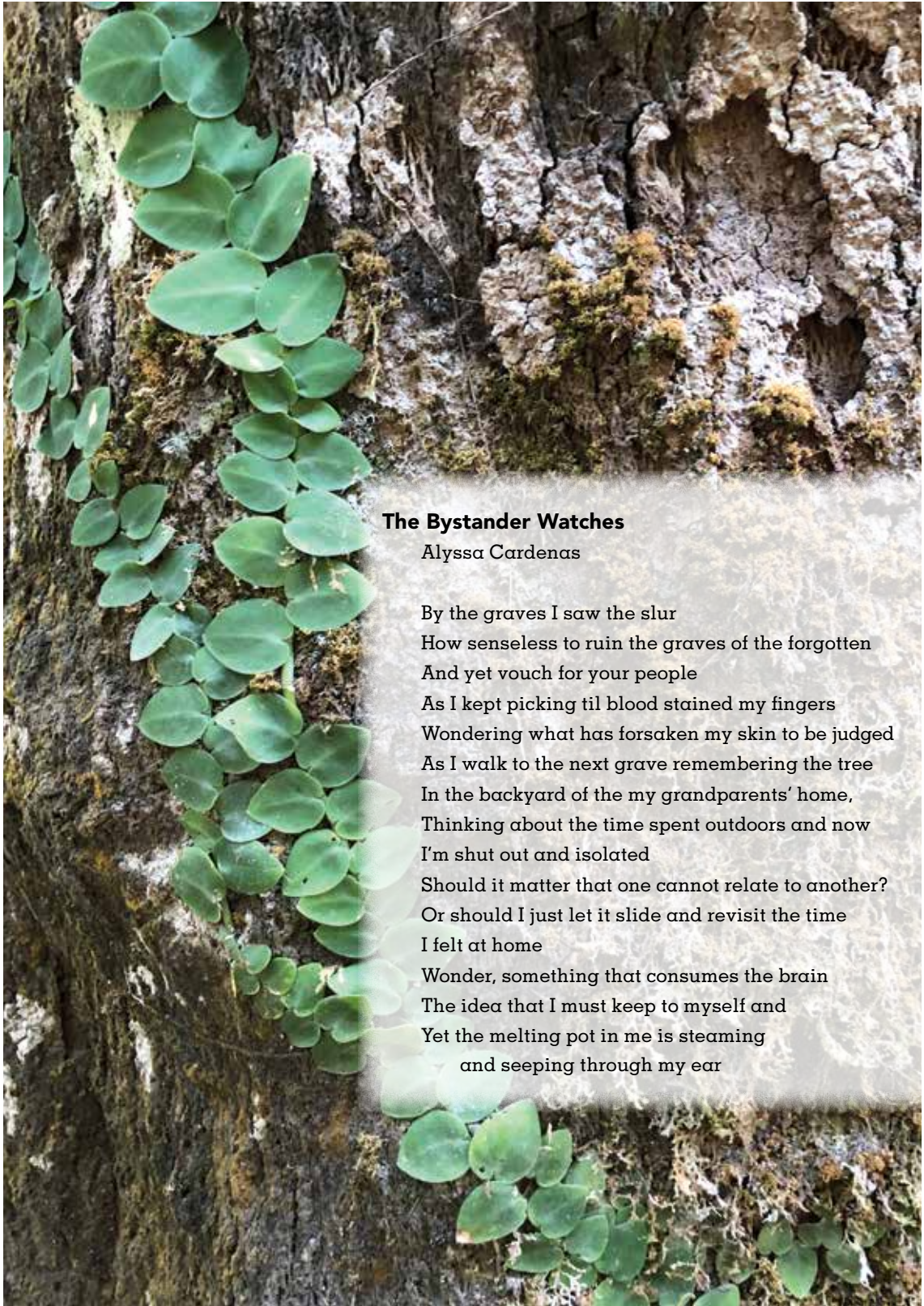
pummels a set of lockers in a train station during the dead of night? The scene was raw and visceral; I definitely lost innocence in this moment. Who knew 30 seconds in a train station would change my perspective so drastically? Despite this we moved past him, and boarded a train back to Chicago. I sat in a seat, separate from my father and cousin, and thought once more about my home and what I just witnessed. It was humbling to say the least. There were moments of awe and terror, but I gained valuable perspective from the experiences. Perspective that I could not have gained elsewhere.

The train gained momentum and took us through a tunnel. When we came out the other side, my eyes were fixed through the window, where the buildings grew nicer and taller once again.



**Their Eyes Were Watching God** Robin Horst





### **The Bystander Watches**

Alyssa Cardenas

By the graves I saw the slur  
How senseless to ruin the graves of the forgotten  
And yet vouch for your people  
As I kept picking til blood stained my fingers  
Wondering what has forsaken my skin to be judged  
As I walk to the next grave remembering the tree  
In the backyard of the my grandparents' home,  
Thinking about the time spent outdoors and now  
I'm shut out and isolated  
Should it matter that one cannot relate to another?  
Or should I just let it slide and revisit the time  
I felt at home  
Wonder, something that consumes the brain  
The idea that I must keep to myself and  
Yet the melting pot in me is steaming  
and seeping through my ear

**Ancient Forest** Bridget Scott-Shupe





**Little Climber** Liling Zheng



#3 Christopher Zhou

## The Crucible

Matthew M. Rogers

*Thud, thud, thud, thud. "You're never going to make it, recruit." Thud, thud, thud, thud. "You're why good men die, recruit." Thud, thud, thud, thud. "When we get to the obstacle course, there's a faster way down." Thud, thud, thud, thud.*

My chin strap broke on my helmet and now it banged against my face when I crawled. With every dig of my elbow, a plume of Camp Pendleton moon dust caked onto me and all of my equipment. As I dragged myself along my belly, the shrieking screams of the D-day invasion scene from *Saving Private Ryan* echoed across the California desert. "Better keep that skull dragging Rogers," said Sgt. Rodriguez. "Turns to pink mist real quick." Under barbed wire, we kept our heads dragging on the ground while we crawled on our backs and stomachs in order to keep a smaller profile. They taught us that it gave the enemy a smaller profile to shoot at, which I was sure wasn't wrong; but that night it was beside the point. We were 24 hours into the infamous "Crucible." The final trial in Marine Corps boot camp where a recruit, if strong enough, finally becomes a Marine. But before we could earn the coveted Eagle, Globe and Anchor on top of "The Reaper," we had to hike 50 miles and do 30 different obstacle courses on two MREs (Meals Ready to Eat, a.k.a rations) and four hours of sleep in two and a half days.

I had just started to eat my favorite meal, the brisket plate from Hutchins Barbeque in downtown McKinney, when I heard the click of a flashlight and saw the brightest beam of light I'd ever seen. "Rogers wake up. I'm not trying to be a blue falcon, but you have fire watch. Sorry bro." Scratch that, now three hours of sleep in the crucible. Although my day had started earlier than I'd liked, it was finally time to climb "The Reaper." There was a 3-mile hike just to get to the base of the mountain. We'd left our bivouac at four in the morning. So when we got there, it was still dark.

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"Crucible."



**T**he Senior Drill Instructor for our platoon, Staff Sergeant Tena was going to lead us up the mountain from the front. In a letter home to my father, I described SSgt. Tena's duty to our platoon as "[He] covers paperwork, keeps DI's from getting too brutal, arranges the schedule, and goes over/teaches life stuff. Considered the 'dad' and doesn't discipline unless we really mess up." It was a shot of motivation to want to keep up with the Senior Drill Instructor.

Another source of motivation was Sgt. Staton who would be leading from the rear of the platoon. He would

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Instructor.

be providing words of wisdom for any recruit who needed a reason or two to get up the mountain. His vast vocabulary, I was sure, was about to be displayed. I had found in all my letters, I had only written about him once. "His only job is to make us sad, depressed, miserable and unmotivated. I hate this man more than anything."

**E**ach of us were checking to make sure our boots were still rigid and our laces taut when the Senior Drill instructor decided to give some words of wisdom. "In case you were wondering, I can't confirm nor deny



**Untitled** Sara Carpenter

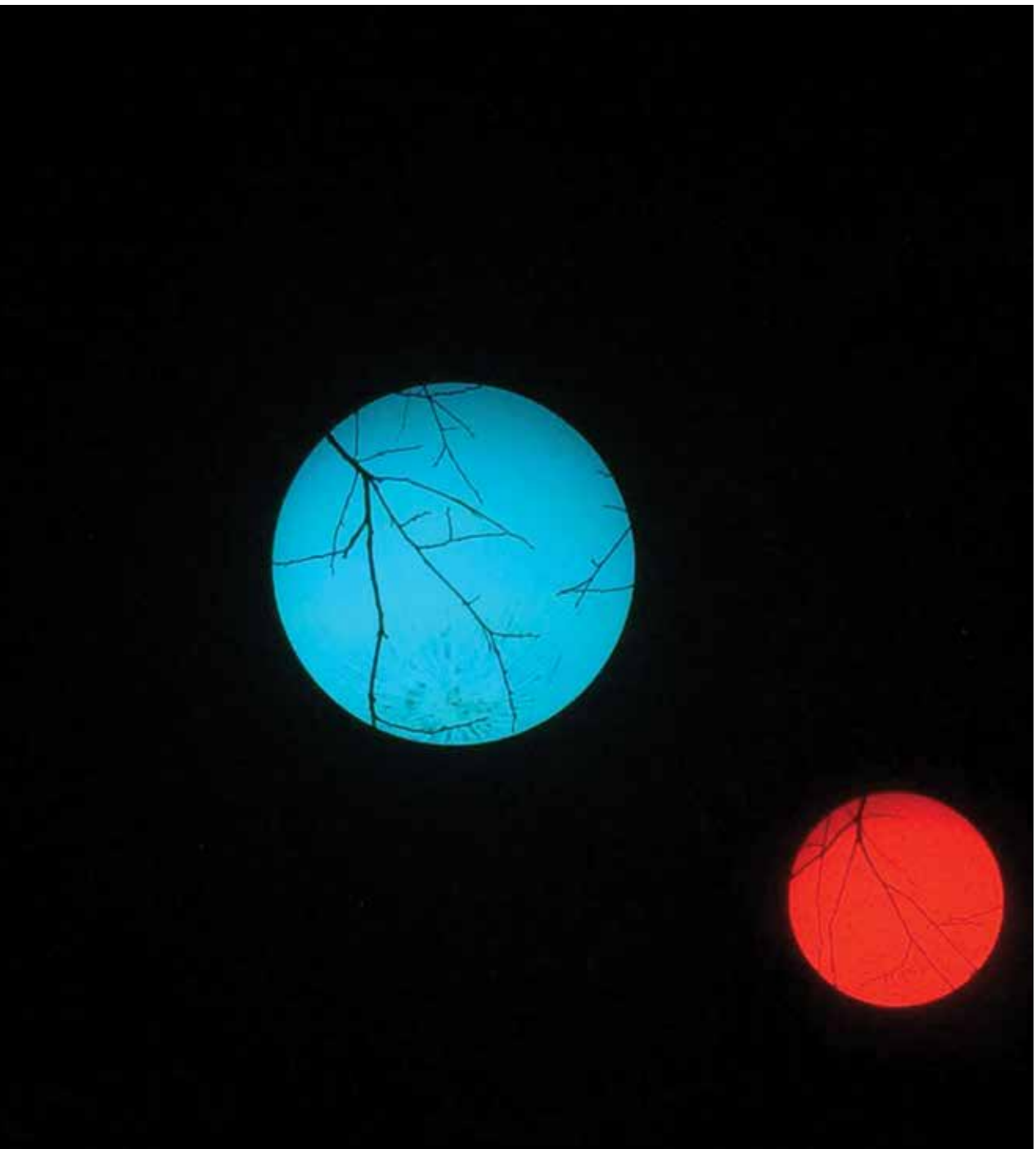
whether or not I've killed someone," he said. "But I know, in Afghanistan, I was slinging rounds down range and someone got got. But don't turn around." Obviously at that moment the whole of platoon 1046, myself included, had to turn around. Way out in the distance, two cardinal red lights in near pitch black darkness took off vertically as if they were spaceships. Not a soul in platoon 1046 would've minded being on that injury vehicle at that moment. "You all didn't wanna listen," SSgt. Tena said. The hill was so steep that, standing up, you could reach out and touch the ground. The 50 pounds of gear and a rifle on our backs made it that much harder to get up the mountain. Yet, once we got into the thick of it, it was as if nothing could touch us. When we went to sleep that last night, most of us fell asleep before we could even get into our sleeping bags. But now we were on top of the world. The end was in sight.

Once we reached the top of "The Reaper", all of Charlie Company went into the final crest of the hill together. All 600 of us recruits war cried like animals as we ran down. The company first sergeant and the Commanding Officer did a speech, then we all sang the



**New Growth** Maria Guadalupe Guerrero

Marine Corps Hymn. *"From the Halls of Montezuma, to the shores of Tripoli. We fight our country's battles, in the air, on land and sea. First to fight for right and freedom, and to keep our honor clean. We are proud to claim the title of United States Marine."* The company first sergeant called Charlie Company to attention and ordered the drill instructors to "turn these recruits into Marines." Sgt. Castro, the one who rode me the hardest for every hour of the last 87 days came up to me. He looked me in the eyes and shook my hand. "I always knew you had it, Marine."



**Sun and Starlit Moon** Starlit D.S. Taie

## A Disastrous Sunset

M.J. Scott

**When the news broke that the sun would be seen for the last time this evening I was unsure of which train of thought I should follow.** Should I even believe this is real? What will be the effects on the natural world according to the laws of physics? Is it possible to get back to my mother in time? How long do I have? I had begun to panic very quickly when I realized that life on earth would cease to exist soon after the sun disappears. I was three bites into my club sandwich at a two-star rated diner when the volume went up on a tv attached to the beveled chrome backsplash. An official from the National Security Agency had just delivered estimated details of how and when this was going to happen. I missed all of that, but what I did catch were his last words. "God speed," he said. Then, a banner began to loop across the screen reading, "BREAKING NEWS...THE SUN IS GOING TO VANISH TODAY...TAKE SHELTER."

An elderly gentleman with silver hair and a handsomely aged face placed his spoon back in his soup and turned to me, "You're young enough to be concerned about this I suppose. You might want to find the ones you love before it's too late," he said calmly. How could he be so calm? I thought of my mother and how worried she might be. That is, if she even knows yet. She can't possibly know or my cell would be blowing up. I'm easily a three hour drive away from home, and all the major highways will be undoubtedly congested. I could already hear cars making hard turns in the streets, and the noise of human commotion.

A city bus was receiving ungodly verbal abuse while quickly zipping by several pedestrians as I exited the diner, and drivers were carelessly ignoring the rules of traffic. Tail lights are beginning to compound by the second, and I have only begun to gather my surroundings. I stand in this capital city with few towering structures and inexcusably narrow passages through a dated infrastructure. I know I'm not getting out of here in my car, but the reality of this situation is rather sobering. That old man is wise to keep calm.

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enough to be  
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I suppose.  
You might  
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you love  
before it's  
too late.



My phone is vibrating in my pocket; that is surely my mother. If I answer this call she will absolutely breakdown because my voice will be lost within the city-wide panic. I will call her from somewhere safe, but a safe place may be a hard find. I see the spire of a church peeking over the local bank just a block away. It may be my best shot at finding safety. Just as I begin to cross the street the sky brightens quickly like a flash bulb. My heart sinks as all the screams of startled people around me rattle my ears. My eyes involuntarily closed when the flash happened, and as they reopen I instantly notice a much brighter city, as if we had been placed directly under an LED lamp. I begin to walk as swiftly as I can while the others near me are standing still now in awe of the white city. As I approach the church, it is evident there will be no chance of entering. A hoard of people are pushing themselves through the double door

entrance and there are several people in the back of the group shoving and cursing each other to fit into tiny gaps.

I think of the old man and his calmness; thank God for his composure. After a long breath, I begin searching for another position. I quickly spot a water tower, and it makes total sense to pursue it. Just as I begin to climb the white gleaming sky begins to dim back to a yellow hue, but my back is to the sun and I fear turning to look. I can only hope there is time to call mother back. I've reached the scaffold and I'm still afraid to turn and look. I quickly dial for mother, and I tear up because I know she will definitely hear me now. She doesn't answer. I have no choice now but to look. I turn to see a complete blackness behind the sun, and the sun itself is being pulled away in streaks. Without knowing why, I hold the phone to my ear... "Mother, it's a mesmerizing disaster."

### Red Sun Starlit D.S. Taie





**Yarra River at Night** Jeanne Johnson

### **Filling Space**

Carlos Contreras

I haven't looked up at the stars in a while.  
I'd forgotten the lonely comfort  
of imagining constellations.

Similar to finding forms in bubbling clouds,  
connecting disjointed dots.

A juvenile desire to see an empty sky shimmer  
with nothing to fill up the blank space.



**Girl's Best Friend** Emily Agrisano

## **Rest**

David Drane

When the winds of life blows against your sails  
When the troubles of this world begins to tip your scales  
When you carry on with tired bones  
When the enemy gives chase with sticks and stones  
When you've given your all and there is nothing left  
When you've walked your heart a thousand miles and can't catch your breath  
I pray that love finds you  
I pray that love gives you rest

# **FORCES** 2020

