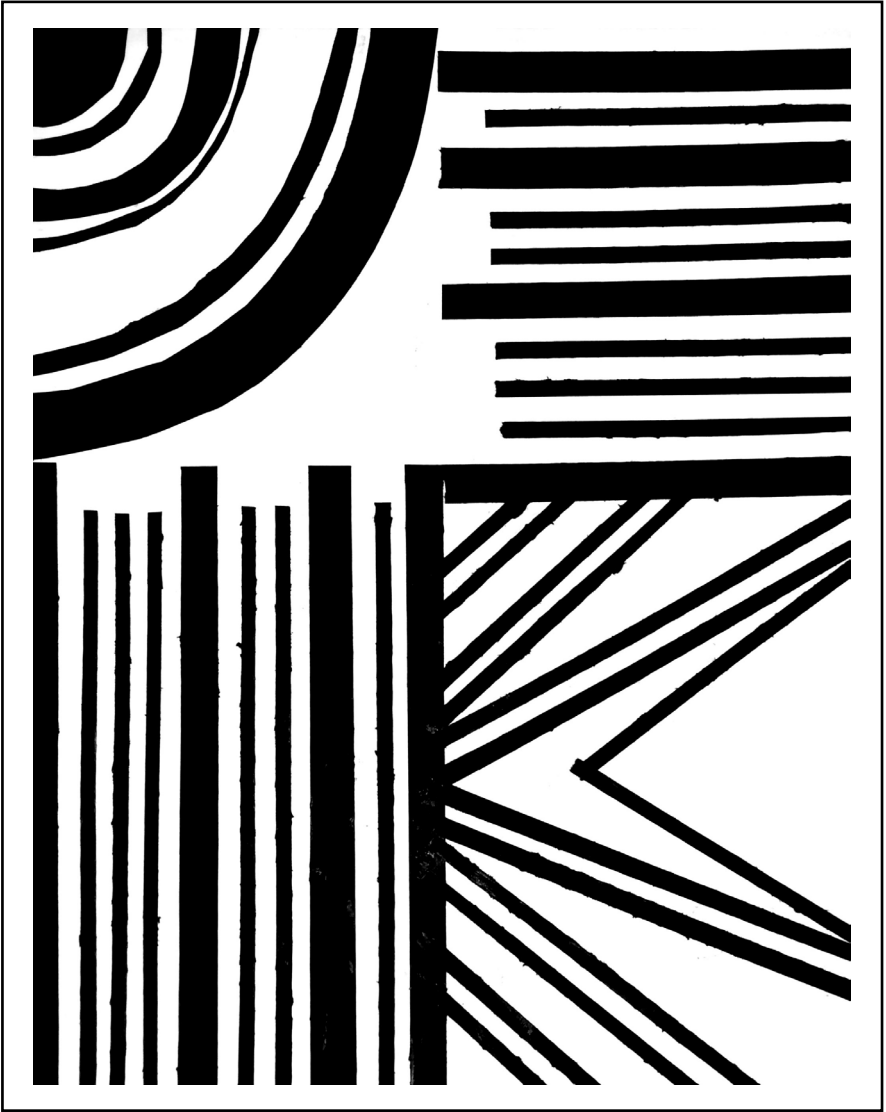


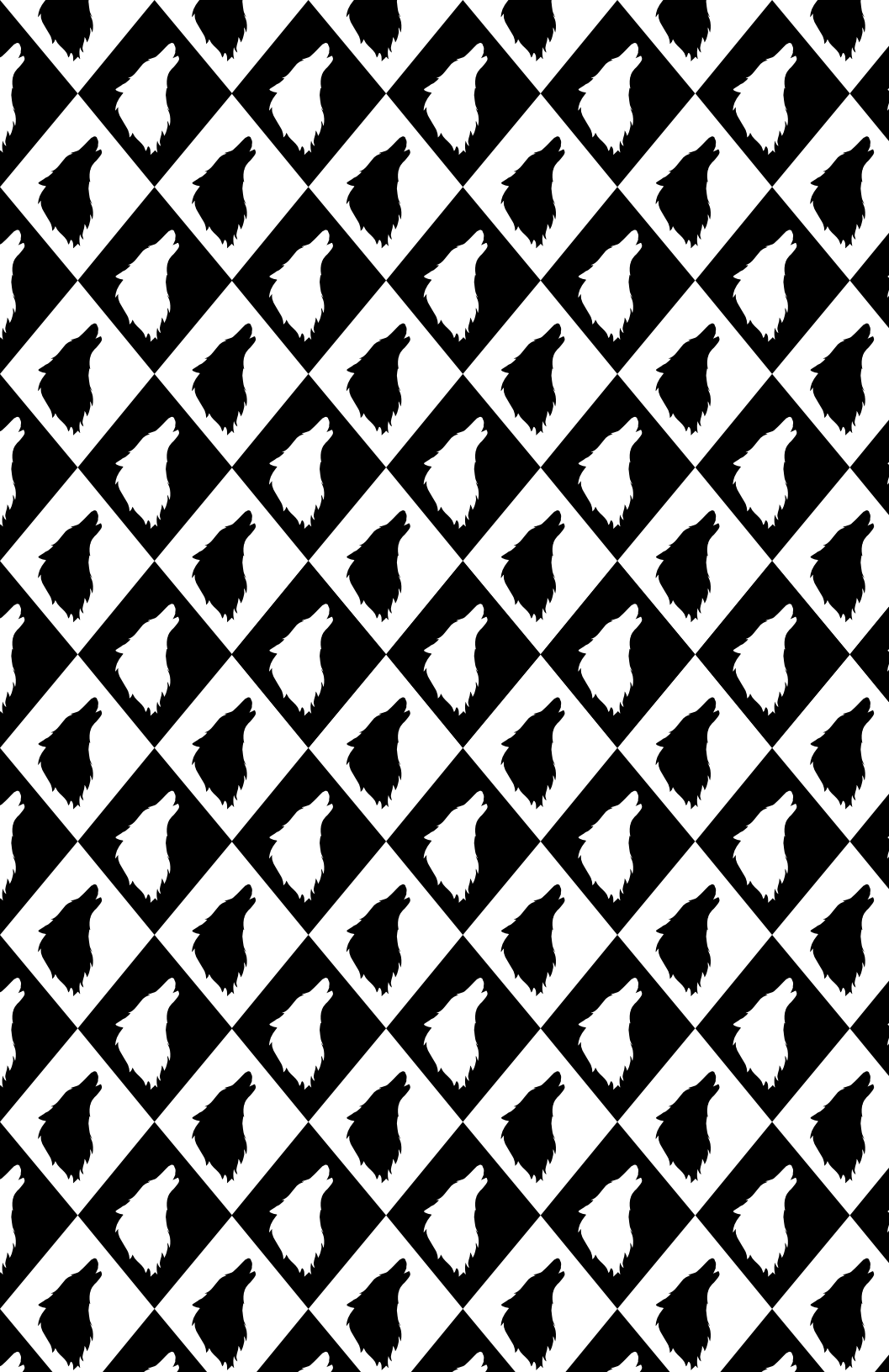
Howl

ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE



COPPER MOUNTAIN COLLEGE
Joshua Tree, California

2016
VOLUME 20



Howl

ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE



2016
VOLUME XX

Art and literature by
Copper Mountain College
students and community members

Joshua Tree, California

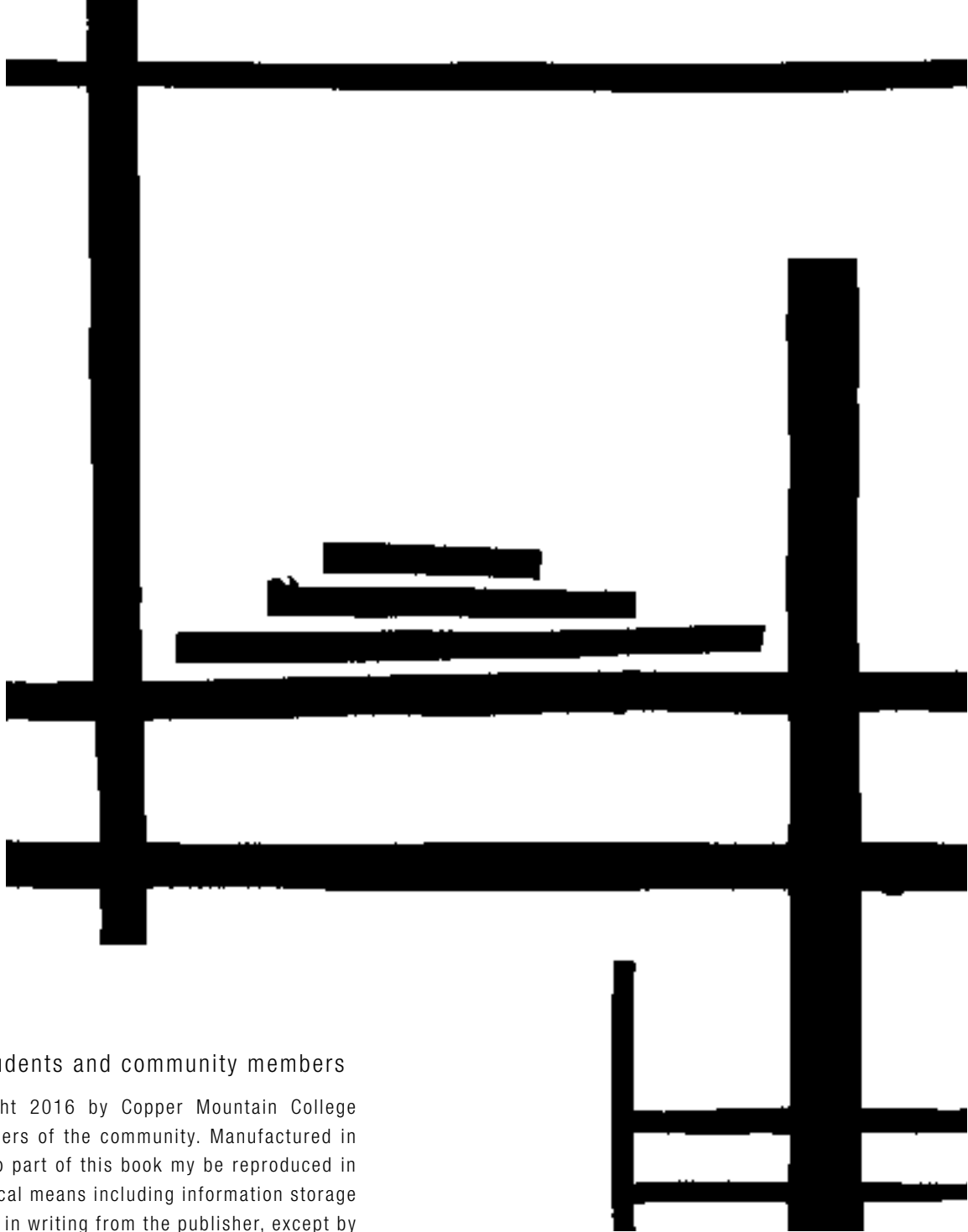


Howl 2016

Art and literature by

Copper Mountain College students and community members

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UNTITLED
by Tyler Tilton

STAFF & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Top: China Ice, Ellen e Baird, Brianna Hams, Gary Tufel Bottom: Alena Zebley, Robert Wanless

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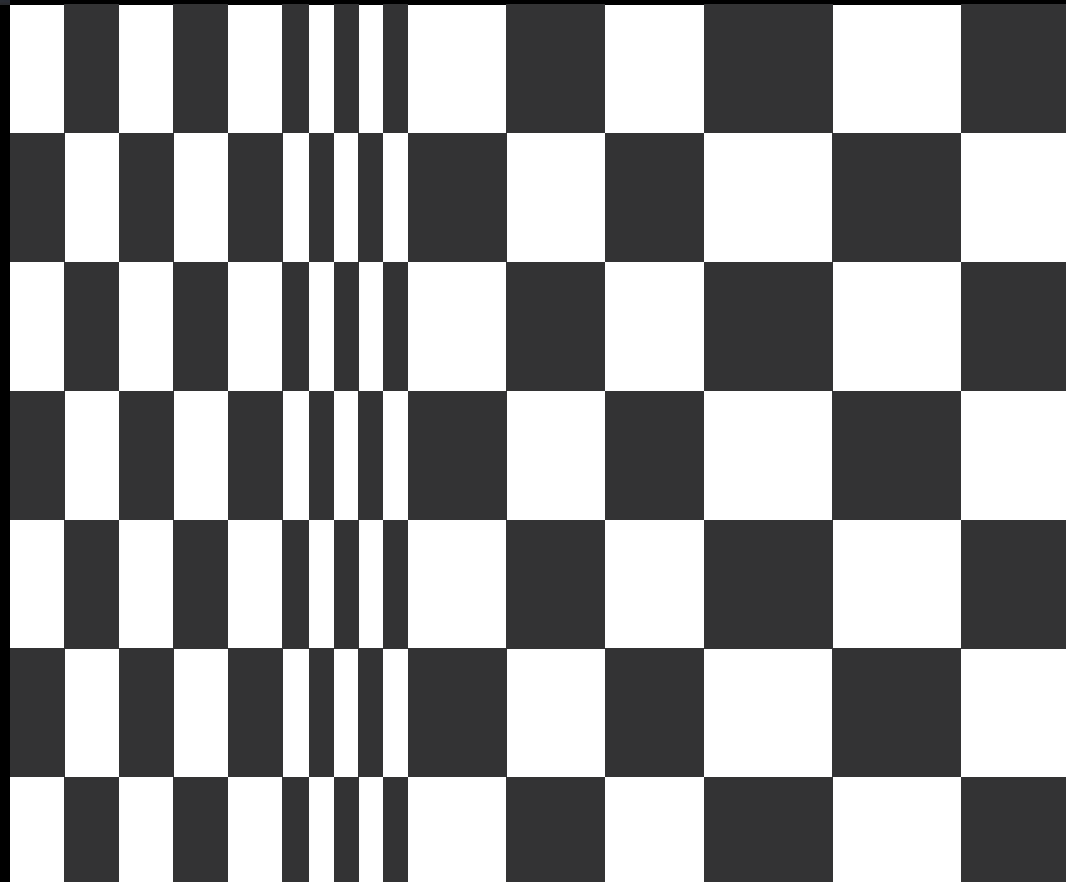



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by Kim King

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As we complete our third year of a team project and celebrate the twentieth year as a magazine publication, I am struck by the realization of the enjoyment and hard work, which make this a compelling process.

This year, three dedicated and uplifting individuals joined the Howl editing staff. Their energy shaped our team dynamic and brought times of laughter and levity. There were times I had to show them the big face, so we could complete our tasks at hand.

Alena Zebley made her talents apparent in an English class, and I did not hesitate inviting her to join us as an editor. There are certain students who shine in a sea of personalities and writing. Alena is one of them. She also knows most of the hip references we older folk often miss (Sublime). Alena also wears the coolest T-Shirts. She took our quirkiness in stride and never missed a beat. We are pleased to welcome Alena to the Howl team, and we hope she stays with us.

Brianna Hams is a writer whom I am envious of. She made herself known to me on one of the first days of English class by dancing interpretively and proceeding to fall on her derriere in front of all of her classmates. Once I caught a glimpse of her writing, I invited her to every writing opportunity on and off campus, and she responded in kind. Brianna reminds me of the writer I once was, and I do not think it is a secret she is my favorite student.

Gary Tufel is a long time friend and the only professional editor in the group. He approached me after hearing Aubrey read at Gretchen's Creative Center and Gallery. I did not have a doubt in mind he would make an excellent editor; however, I did not know how well he would mix with Rob's and my egos. His dry humor has helped the weekly meetings turn in to laugh fests. He is to thank for the majority of the edits in this twentieth edition; he also buys bomb cookies. Gary's and my friendship has deepened because of our work together, and I hope that will continue to be the case.

China has grown professionally in this past year to such an extent she is now handling much of our computing and transcribing work. Our process has become streamlined, which allowed us to send our work to edit sooner this year; consequently, we are able to provide these magazines at our first event. Always beautiful and graceful, China manages to bring calm and constancy to our meetings. We nominated her the face of Howl, as her photogenic images in our staff photos humbled us all. China created networks in the community, which have spread far and wide. Some day, China may become Howl ambassador.

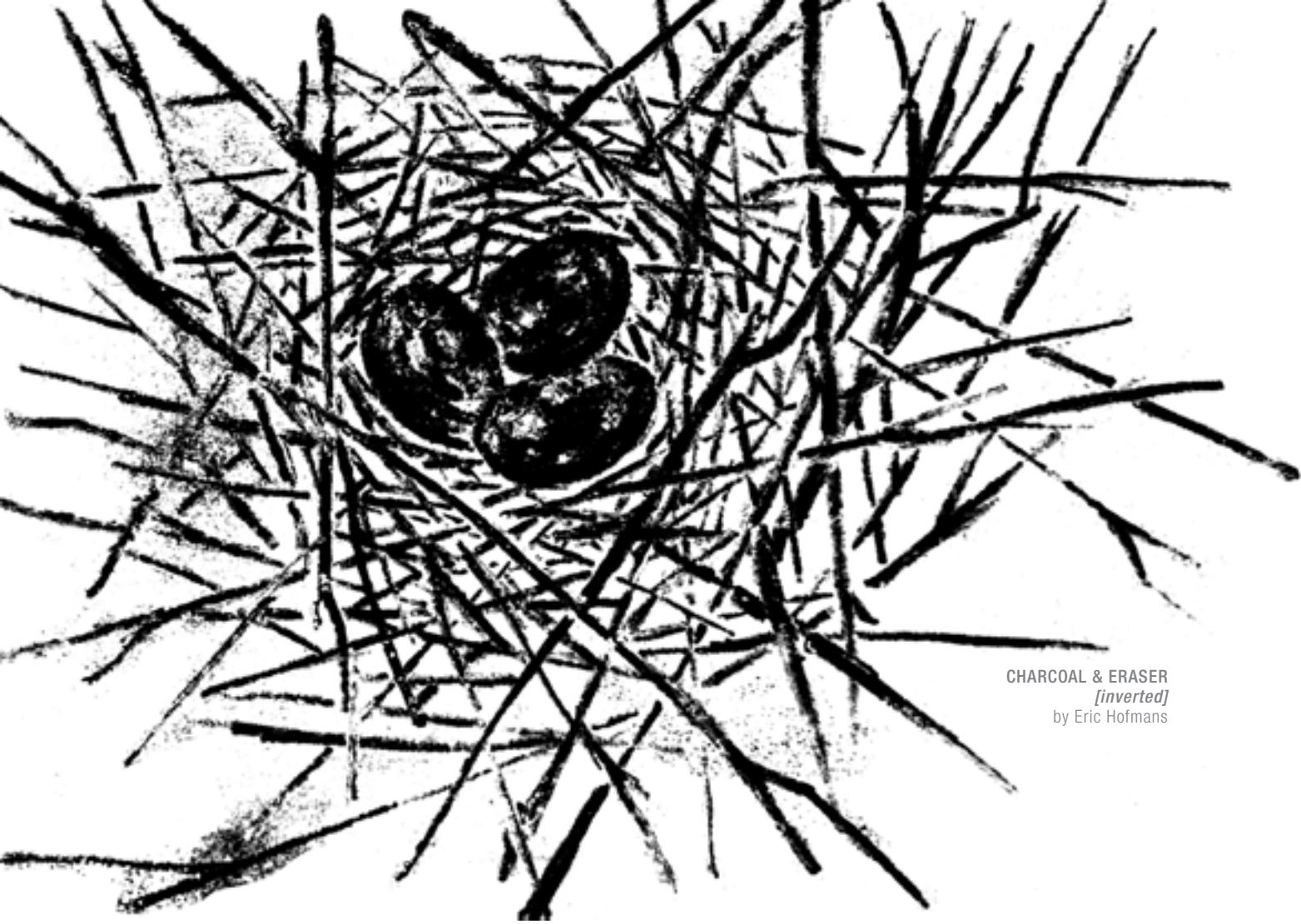
Rob – my goodness. I can't say enough because Melissa will roll her eyes at the length of my letter. Rob is the best person one could ask for to work with on a project. Rob has the ability to say yes to everything and mean it. He is unflagging in his work ethic and energy. We have had to ask him to use the pickle jar at times, as he is excited to talk about anything and everything. Once his energy is directed, he is a force of power. Even in the face of fear and uncertainty, he maintains a smile, a shrug, and a good attitude. I could not complete Howl without Rob.

Many thanks again this year to Melissa and Rosa (can I move in with you?), Sandy and Diana in the Foundation for their support and contributions, Jolie for her assistance and artwork, Michel's students for their contributions, Cathy and Spelman for their students' submissions and themselves for their commitment to the magazine, Cathy McBride for printing, and the sponsors and contributors to the magazine and the events. Separately, thank you to Greg Gilbert for beginning this wonderful magazine twenty years ago. I hope it continues beyond the life of the youngest contributor, who turned ten this year.

As for me, once again, my gratitude is sent out to my boyfriend and biggest fan. He sacrificed time with me and endured my constant nudges to practice his trumpet so he could play for the event. My son Lowen has become more interested in the arts due to our work with Howl and its players. May the spark of creativity catch a fire in his young heart. My family, friends, and colleagues have continued to support, praise, and encourage my efforts. In the fall of 2015, I lost my sister-in law, and my nephew.

This 2016 edition of Howl is dedicated to Mary Caroline Monroe and Jarrett James Hill and their families.

Ellen e Baird
Joshua Tree, California
2016



CHARCOAL & ERASER
[inverted]
by Eric Hofmans



“THE FEATHER”

Certain exemplary works were selected by the editing team for Howl’s Writing Challenge. Winners of the Writing Challenge receive cash awards generously funded by the Copper Mountain College Foundation. 2016 Howl recognized six winners. Those works are tactfully indicated throughout the edition with this feather.

MOM

By Brianna Hams

this woman of mine
this muse that i serve
tells me where to place every noun, adjective, and verb

this woman of mine
with hair like the sun
chooses my battles so the war may be won

this woman of mine
with her secret art
shows me the very depths of my own beating heart

this woman of mine
this divine being
has taught me that dreaming is more important than seeing

when she asks for a kiss
i cannot decline
i love her to death
this woman of mine

MIDNIGHT FROST

By Lowen Baird

So the rain began.
It was very cold on March 16th.
The sky was dark blue.
I had never seen a day like this before.
There were puddles, a ton of them;
all filled with tears, God's and mine.
They looked so sad as they'll always be.
The day was blue from then on.
Stars are in view with the moon over a lake
and its soul reflected my own.
It wasn't a ferocious beast, but a shallow gentle creature.
I'm very pleased with the way it looked at me.
I never knew it was so crystal, so clear, so beautiful.
But then I turned and saw the beast that was ferocious.
It was awake with all its anger.
The battle was raging until the raging beast picked me up
and carried me off to who knows where.
...Then it all went black.

**THE BRAKE LIGHTS LIMNED THE
INEFFABLE MOMENT OF BEING**

By Chuck Von Nordheim

The semi lumbers out of night's void
Pausing with hissing impatience at the insistent stoplight
The Circle K across the intersection hopefully blazes its flirtatious light
But the freight refuses to allow for a convivial halt
Coffee is left undrunk and alone as it often is.



BLUE LANDSCAPE PAINTING

by Tony Mason

A Hypothetical Adventure

by Brianna Hams



It's just past three a.m. when Mezter knocks on my window. I'm curled up in bed watching *Goodfellas* for about the seven hundredth time because I can't seem to fall asleep no matter how hard I try. Mezter knocks on the window again. A sharp tat-tat-tat sound. From the other side of the window I hear him trying (and failing) to whisper. "Ellie? Ellie, you awake? Ellie? C'mon, girl, get up. Ellie? Ellie?"

"I'm coming, I'm coming. Gimma a minute, would ya?" I gripe. I put the movie on pause and get out of bed. I walk over, push back the curtains, unlock the window and slide it open. The night breeze rushes in as Mezter pops the screen out of its track and lets it fall to the ground. I climb back into bed as he scrambles inside and shuts the window behind himself. "You gotta learn to not make so much damn

noise." I tell him. "One of these times you're gonna wake my Ma and then we'll both catch Hell."

"Sorry," Mezter replies. He doesn't ask why I'm still awake and I don't ask why he has a busted lip. "I'll be quieter next time-" he says. "Like James Bond level quiet."

"Yeah, yeah," I sigh. I scoot over to the left side of the bed, throw back the covers, and say "Get in."

Mezter toes off his Vans and shimmies out of his skinny jeans. He stands there for a moment in nothing but his bright yellow Spongebob boxers and a well-worn Silverstein t-shirt that he got when we went to see them play the Troubadour last summer. He slides into bed next to me, squirms his way down into the sheets until he's tucked against my side. He loves being the little spoon. Mezter's feet dangle over the edge of the bed in a ridiculous fashion until he folds his legs up under the covers. He deliberately brushes one ice cold foot up against my calf.

"Jesus!" I yelp. "Don't do that! You know I hate that."

"I know," Mezter snickers. "But that doesn't stop it from being funny."

"Well hardy-har-har Mr. Igloo Feet," I snark back. Mezter makes an affirmative sound in the back of his throat. I rearrange my pillow until it sits under my head just right. He fishes the remote out of the sea of blankets and pillows ensconcing us and un-pauses the movie. I wrap an arm around Mezter's torso and pull him even closer. I comb my fingers through his shoulder length hair and he lets out a contented sigh.

Mezter has beautiful hair; soft and thick and bone straight like a curtain of black silk. He's also got dark caramel colored skin, almond shaped brown eyes, and high cheekbones. He has a truly dazzling smile and a goofy laugh you can hear from a mile away. Mezter's body isn't half bad either. He's a bit thin at the waist but broad in the shoulders and more lithe than muscular. He often wisecracks about how he makes sure to keep a good six feet between the top of his head and the soles of his feet at all times. One time I asked him how he got to be such a hottie. He just shrugged and said, "Good genes, I guess."

See, Mezter is full-blooded Navajo. Grew up out on a Reservation in Utah and everything. At least until his Mom died from cancer. After

she passed away the rest of his family pawned him off on his gin-soaked excuse of a father here in California. We met not long after he moved into the neighborhood and the rest is history. Well, it's more like the rest is him crawling through my bedroom window on nights when his Dad decides to hit the bottle, and anyone or anything within arm's reach, particularly hard.

Then there's my Ma.

Being the good Christian woman that she is, she has nothing but love for Mezter; probably even more so than me. She doesn't mind him lazing about the house after school or staying over for dinner as long as we both do our homework and he accompanies us to church. Every Sunday morning when he shows up in his good jeans and his carefully ironed button down shirt, I swear that Ma starts loving him even more. Although I highly doubt she'd feel the same way if she knew Mezter was sleeping with me; even if it's only the 'steal the covers and drool everywhere' type sleeping and not the 'naked, writhing, headboard knocking against the wall' kind of sleeping. My mind ruminates on the subject until Mezter shifts around and pokes me in the side a few times to get my attention.

"What's up, Sir Pokes-A-Lot?" I ask.

"Ellie, I gotta ask you something." He says. "It's, like, hella important and no matter what your answer is you gotta promise we'll still be friends after, okay?"

"Dude, you've boosted a box of tampons from Walgreen's for me and I've woken up to the feeling of your morning wood trying to drill a hole into the small of my back," I answer. "I think we're pretty much friends for life no matter what you ask me."

He shifts around again, rolling over until we're face to face. I can feel his breath on my chin. He asks, "If I left would you come with me?"

"What do you mean 'left'?" I ask. "Like if you ran away? To where?"

"I don't really know," Mezter admits. "But I've been thinking about it. You know, leaving here; maybe going back to the Rez. But I only wanna go if you'll come with me."

I feel my eyebrows hitch up toward my hairline. "You want me to go and live on the Rez with you? Me? With my blonde hair and blue

eyes and vanilla ice cream skin? Don'tcha think that might attract a little too much attention?"

"It was just an idea." He murmurs. "But it doesn't even have to be the Rez. We could go anywhere you want. There's always San Diego. We could live on the beach and swim in the ocean every day. Or we could leave Cali completely... go to Vegas and count cards and win big."

"We're both barely passing algebra, Mezter," I interject. "We can't count cards."

"Like I said," Mezter replies in a downtrodden tone, "It was just an idea."

"It's not a bad idea," I say, trying to reassure him. "It's just an incomplete one. If we were gonna actually do it we would need a plan, like, a real plan; one with contingencies and stuff."

"Yeah?" he asks. I can hear the hope in his voice. I run my fingers through his hair again and nod.

"Totally," I say. "We'd need money and, like, a car and a place to stay. We'd have to get our GED's and then find jobs. Most of all we'd have to figure out how to keep the cops from finding us and forcing us to come back home."

"But we could do it, right?" Mezter asks. "If we really wanted to, I mean. We could do it?"

"Yeah," I answer, "We could. Not, like, tomorrow morning but eventually."

"Eventually," he sighs, pauses for a moment, and then says. "Eventually sounds pretty good to me about right now."

"Yeah. Me too." I reply. "Now shut up and watch the movie; Joe Pesci's about to get his head blown off."

ENCOUNTER

By Lynda Burns

ANGRY emails
Bitter tone
Frustration sparks

Fear lingers
In daylight & dreams
Panic hovers

Savage gestures
Rage ignites
Violence sizzles

In the struggle
Strength fades
As safety flees

Does he know the fear?
Does he see the pain
He has caused in me?

My life changed
Parallel to his own
The cycle continues

Shaking hands
Gasping breaths
Broken sobs

Lynda Burns-- A wife, sister of veterans and one who serves veterans.



FIGURE STUDY

by Robert Krietz

BIG SKY

By Carey Ann Hays

Big sky,
 Full of wind,
 Stop my mind from wandering,
 Bring me back to earth again.
 Desert devils disappear,
 Whisper lies into my ear,
 But the big sky tells what I need to hear,
 Everything will be OK.

Big sky,
 Full of stars,
 High above the rushing cars,
 Past the neon lights and bars,
 Everybody's dust-blown dreams,
 All the has-beens and used-to-bes,
 But the big sky wraps her arms around me,
 Everything will be OK.

Big sky,
 Blue and bright,
 Shower me with love and light,
 And a billion sparkling stars at night,
 Let your peace surround me,
 And leave me where you found me.
 The big sky doesn't make a sound,
 But I know that everything is fine.

GLORIFIED FALSE

By Robert Howell

Many a star,
 fallen,
 never lit.
 Many a fallen,
 lit,
 never a star.



RHYTHM

By Carey Ann Hays

The wind has no rhythm here,
No crashing of the waves
Or rushing of the river.

The wind has no rhythm here,
There are no factories, no foundries,
No assembly lines.

The wind has no rhythm here,
No sound of wheels on the train tracks,
Or the bridges, or the highways.

The wind has no rhythm here,
It feels no music, no soul,
No heartbeat.

The wind has no rhythm...
It's paid no dues, nor felt the blues,
Just dances carelessly
To a song of its own.

Fear the World

By Jessica Kinney

Where did this hate come from?
The fear always hanging in the air.
Finding entertainment in the violence.
Fear to leave your house.
Fear to speak your mind.
Find the evil in a person,
Before you ever see the good.
We are a society built on hate.
Hate for the unknown,
Hate for different colors,
Hate for different religions.
Will it ever end?
"Imagine," he once said,
But is that all it will ever be?
Our imaginations?

CAUSEWAY

By Greg Gilbert

He can't help but wonder if natural selection had favored
 Daydreaming, romanticism, or a questing tendency
 To become absorbed in a conversation or a cause
 Or a sunset or the meaning of a word or phrase
 Or the sound of a loon calling across an expanse
 Of sunset water – to the near exclusion of anything else –
 If he might have found himself less alone in this world

My dear friend Bernard has been called to speak
 On behalf of Eden. You know. Virgin soil, rich and black
 Detritus and teaming with earthworms, roly-poly bugs
 And any number of small, damp, organic, benign
 Beings living their lives amid roots as fine as arm hair
 And as massive as any ancient allegiance to towering
 Vine entangled forest canopies. Earth, Eden, untouched
 Older than any mythology purporting to venerate
 The comings and goings of great striding gods

The simian cries that rend the air, the shadows of
 Vast wings that crenellate the land, the huffing behemoths

Horned elk, deer, rhino, and the back and forth swagger
 Of slow slung reptiles, the serpents and fishes and all of those
 Bottom scuttling, glow-in-the-dark mysteries that ride
 The turgid, hydra-headed channels of undersea volcanoes.
 Or life buoyed up in onion skin skies, gassy mists held fast
 By the mass of a small organic orb at the wits end of the universe.
 The out breaths of broad leaves, of undersea jungles that
 Gesticulate beneath the waves, all of this living
 Light-filled entanglement inhaled, swallowed whole
 An angelic radiance coursing within the young Bernard
 Revealing to him his life's work in an instant of knowledge.

When Everything Was Covered With Water

by Margo McCall

My favorite things in the world are buried inside a metal box Dad gave me when Mom left. Nobody can see them, not even if they beg or promise to buy me a strawberry fruit rollup at school. What's inside that box is mine. All mine. When no one's around, I dig it up, creak open the rusty lid, and let my treasure feel the sun: hard, sparkling like jewels.

My stepmom Chrissie takes everything else: my dolls, my microscope, my Wind Rider Barbie, my Go Away Monster game, my Ghost of Lizard Light book, my Snakeword puzzles.

Gone all gone.

Chrissie squeezes them into a cardboard box and closes the flaps,

one over, one under, then carries the whole shebang out to the storage shed like it weighs nothing. Chrissie's a bodybuilder. She's strong and she's mean. She tells me I can't get them back until I smarten up.

"But I'm already smart," I say, and that's when Chrissie lunges at me and I run into the wall trying to get away.

"Quit mouthing off, Ruth," Chrissie sneers, her frosted lips turning downward like they do when she and hate are best friends.

Smart. I'm smart, smart enough to bury my favorite things—deep, where no one will ever find them.

Sometimes I can't find them either, since the place where I live with my dad Fred, brother Alex, dogs Rusty and Lulu—and now Chrissie—is all dirt. The wind steals the markers for my secret hiding places, hurls trashcans, howls at night, and spins dust devils sky-high. The dirt covers everything: Dad's truck, our stucco house, the dogs' water dishes, Alex's bike—and now, Chrissie's shiny red Mustang. Sand comes in through cracks, piling up in corners of the kitchen floor, making our sheets gritty, coating the inside of our nostrils.

Before Chrissie steals my microscope, I take it for show and tell, but nobody wants to put their eye up to the black tube to see a speck of sand turn into a boulder. Not even my best friend Irma, who calls me an idiot on the bus home. "If we want to see sand, all we have to do is look out the window," she tells me.

Before Chrissie moved in, our house was crammed with stuff: newspapers, dirty dishes, bags of trash, soiled clothes, scattered toys, and beer bottles—all mixed with a bunch of sand.

"If you want me to live in this shithole, hon," she tells my dad, "Some of this shit's got to go."

"Sure babe," he says. "I want you to be happy."

That's his answer to everything now that he no longer sits in his old blue recliner drinking Pacifico and staring at the junk piles, now that he's got that goofy smile on his face. I can't decide which is worse: seeing him sad or seeing him happy.

Dad's got a piece of paper saying Mom's dead, but I think he's wrong since I've run into her out in the desert, heard her voice blowing on the wind, felt her fingers on my arm.

Chrissie's the first bodybuilder I've ever met. She has silver bullet eyes, a tortoise-beak nose, and a smile that looks slashed into her face with a knife. Ropes of hard muscle wind around her skinny chicken neck, along her shoulders and down her arms, over her back and all up and down her legs. She's brown from going to the tanning salon, and her spiky yellowy hair looks like our dead front lawn. Alex and I are ninety-nine percent sure she takes steroids.

The first time we get to meet her, Chrissie lifts her t-shirt to show us her six pack. "Try punching it," she suggests, glaring at us with those scary silver eyes.

Alex won't look, maybe because he's ashamed he doesn't have muscles like that. He just stands there with his hands in his pockets, looking at his shoes.

Alex likes to be left alone. All those years he was supposed to be babysitting me, he'd shut himself in his room and play videogames or work on the monster-truck models Dad bought him for his birthday. That's how my expeditions started. I'd set out with Rusty and Lulu for one of our secret hideouts, either the abandoned trailer, the checkered couch, or the clump of Joshua trees where we could sit in the shade.

Rusty and Lulu are on alert when I'm out there, chipping at hardpan with the trowel Mom used in her flower garden, hoping for the sound of metal on metal. Lulu, a yellow lab with hard black eyes, follows the curve of the horizon with her pointy nose, and Rusty, a border collie, pants in the shade, pinning me with his gold-flecked eyes. I just need to whistle and they're at my side, waiting to be scratched behind the ears or to give me a sloppy kiss.

The sand is like concrete, except when it rains. And this year, it's hardly rained at all. I hit it and hit it until I crack the crust and reach cool sand, moist from all the sweat dripping down my arms or from the water left over from last year's rain. But lots of times the hole's empty, and I have to start over.

I lose track of time. It could be a million years ago, when everything was covered with water. The wind and water spend thousands of years laying dirt, then thousands more wearing them away. That's what I learned in school. I imagine how the place looked when it was covered by Lake Bonneville instead of parched and dry like it's been as long as I've been alive.

Sometimes Mom looks over my shoulder and tells me where to dig. I smell her earthy perfume even when the wind's blowing hard. But she's always invisible. And I have to walk far from the house to find her—way out here, searching for what blew away, digging through time to when she was a girl like me.

This week, our class gets to go in the library and pick out one book. I choose "Simon & Shuster's Guide to Rocks and Minerals," a field guide with over 1,000 spectacular illustrations—600 in full color.

Our substitute teacher Ms. Johnson asks, "Why did you pick a book on rocks? Do you want to be a geologist?"

"No," I say. "I want to be a rock."

Ms. Johnson smiles and moves on. Our real teacher, Mrs. Vantage, had a breakdown right before Halloween. Irma says it was because her husband left. I'm hoping Mrs. Vantage will come back, and still be wearing her amethyst necklace and all the bright rings and bracelets, in all kinds of stones and silver and gold, all sparkling when sunlight shines through the classroom window.

If what Irma says is true, Mrs. Vantage won't be wearing her diamond ring, which catches the light and makes dots as she erases the whiteboard or explains things with her hands. Once, she let me see it close up, and it looked like things were trapped inside, struggling to get out.

If Irma's right, Mrs. Vantage has taken off her diamond, put it in a box and left it to the dark. And she's probably not Mrs. Vantage anymore, but someone else. Someone who's not coming back. I know about rings, since I saw Mom throw hers in Dad's face on one of the awful nights from a long time ago.

Today, I leave school without dawdling to look at the shiny trophies in the case outside the principal's office. I get off the bus at 90th and start my long trudge up the gravel driveway, stopping to see the sand's bright sparkles in the afternoon sun.

Later, I gather the dogs and we go off to dig up my favorite things. It's my lucky afternoon. They're right where I left them, buried three feet west of the fourth cottonwood north of the house, close enough so that Rusty can sit in the shade and watch for people sneaking up. The pale sky's streaked with white trails like eggs cooking in a frying pan.

I give my treasures a kiss, close the metal box, and put it back underground where it's dark and cool.

Safe.

Their names are a secret spell. Granite, feldspar, quartz. They are rocks and they are hard. I'd like to throw one at Chrissie. I'd like to swallow one to make the clench in my stomach go away.

Chrissie digs into the spare room as soon as she moves in. She throws out the rusty clubs from when dad played at the Desert-Aire Golf Course, the Hefty bags crammed with baby clothes my parents kept just in case, the trays of assorted wire and screws from dad's home improvement projects, even our old family pictures. Everything dragged out for the trash truck.

Gone, all gone.

After Chrissie empties the spare room, she makes it into a workout space. For weeks, it's all we hear about. First, Chrissie needs a ladder she can stand on while painting. Then Chrissie needs a shelf for her bodybuilding trophies. After that, a cupboard for her protein powder and supplements, and then help putting up the pictures of herself looking all brown and shiny, like she's a caramel covered in plastic.

Then she starts in on us. No more chips or soda or pizza. Only boneless chicken breasts, green leafy vegetables, whole wheat bread. "Sure, babe," dad says, staring all loopy-eyed at Chrissie in her tiny tank top and shorts. "We could all eat a little healthier around here."

Chrissie won't let us buy lunch at the cafeteria. Too expensive, she says. Plus, we need more than pizza, tacos, and chips to meet our "daily nutrient needs."

She wants to make our lunches herself. But dad's dubious. "Are you sure you can fit that in with your workout routine, babe?"

"No problem, sweetheart," she says, turning on the slightly less downward smile that she reserves just for him. "Believe me, the kids will concentrate better in school without all those processed food chemicals in their systems."

With the money saved from buying lunch at the cafeteria, Chrissie gets me and Alex insulated bags in what she thinks are our

favorite colors to keep our lunches cold all morning. Mine's pink and purple, and Alex's is blue and green.

Every night now she makes us sandwiches—usually turkey on whole wheat with lettuce and tomato—and every morning she slips the lunch bags in our backpacks. At first, I'm eager see what she made us. But I quickly learn it's always the same—a sandwich, an apple or orange, some nuts, a bottle of water.

I drink the water and eat the nuts, but give the sandwiches to Irma and hurl the fruit out the window of the bus as it barrels down 90th Street West, aiming for the street signs. Every now and then, I hit one.

I hope Chrissie will get tired of living with a sad man and his two kids in the middle of nowhere. But Dad's not sad anymore. Dad's eyes don't look like beer-bottle caps, and his work shirt is ironed instead of wrinkled when he heads off to the county roads department with one of Chrissie's tongue kisses on his lips. And he drinks bubbly water now instead of beer.

I miss my old dad, the one who sat in his chair staring into space, and sometimes made me and Alex climb in his lap so he could hold us. Maybe he's locked in the storage shed with my toys, or got dumped in the trash with everything else. I feel like I did after Mom disappeared.

One Saturday afternoon when Chrissie is meeting with her personal trainer, we're sprawled on the couch watching TV and eating popcorn, breaking Chrissie's rules against food in the living room, when Dad asks, "Aren't you kids glad to have a mom again?"

I look him in the eye and say, "She's not our mom."

I wait for him to slap me, but his eyes get that old blank look, like all he sees is sand and sky.

"Well you better get used to her. I'm asking her to marry me," he says. He picks up the remote and switches to the game, knowing I hate football more than anything—anything that is, except Chrissie.

"Do you ever hear your dad and Chrissie doing it?" Irma asks me on the bus, pressing against me on the sticky leather seat.

"Doing what?"

"You know," Irma says, lifting up her red and white flowered skirt

and pressing a wormlike finger deep into the fold of her underpants. She wiggles her finger back and forth and closes her eyes and her mouth forms a round O.

“Stop that, Irma. You’re in public,” I remind her.

If Irma isn’t lifting up her t-shirt, she’s opening her legs and touching herself. My dad says that’s because Irma’s father messed with her. That’s why Irma lives in the Shady Elm Estates trailer park with her big sister, who I’ve heard called the biggest slut around.

Irma seems hungry for something. One hot day, she fainted and my dad carried her in the house. He fell into his chair by the swamp cooler and stayed there a long time, holding Irma like a baby instead of a crazy girl with chubby thighs.

I didn’t mind sharing my dad with Irma. They looked happy and sad at the same time, but then my dad got up, looking like he’d done something wrong. Not long after that, a friend from work set him up with Chrissie.

Irma pulls out her finger and sniffs it, then smoothes down her skirt. “I’ve seen my sister and her boyfriend do it lots of times.”

“That’s disgusting,” I say, then open my science textbook to the periodic table of elements. My stomach hurts when I think of dad poking a finger into Chrissie.

I’ve seen Dad and Chrissie kissing and rubbing up against each other, but that’s all. The minute she hears Dad’s truck coming up the driveway at night, she rushes out to get first dibs. They push their tongues around inside each other’s mouths like hands fishing for a favorite stone. When my turn comes to brush my lips against my father’s, I can’t stop thinking of Chrissie’s sharp tongue tip darting around in there.

It turns out Chrissie is allergic to dogs, so Dad lets her tie Rusty and Lulu outside the house, which makes them howl and whine with outrage. One night, I sneak outside and sleep with them under the moon. Curled up between them on the sand, I dream we’re the last creatures on earth. The next day when we come home from school, they’re gone.

Gone, all gone.

Alex and me look for them in the desert. We whistle and call until our throats are raw and the sun falls behind the mountains and the wind kicks up the sand.

“Ruu-ssty,” Alex bellows. “Looo-loo.”

“Come on home guys,” I shriek. “We miss you.”

At dinner, I can’t even look at Chrissie, let alone eat the salad and green vegetables she’s heaped on our plates.

“Don’t worry—they’ll probably come back when they get hungry,” Dad says. “If they don’t, we’ll call the pound and put up posters.”

I go to my room and cry. Rusty has been around my whole life. We got Lulu when I started Grade One. I wonder where they are, what they’re doing, if they’re wandering around, hungry and thirsty, or have been hit by one of the cars that zoom past our place at 80 miles an hour. I put my hands together like I’ve seen on TV and pray Mom will find them out there and send them home.

Alex shuts himself in his room. The next morning, we walk down the road to catch the school bus. Just before he gets in, he says, “I’m gonna kill that bitch.”

Dad and Chrissie decide to hold an engagement party. They want to keep it small—a couple dozen people on a Sunday afternoon. Alex doesn’t have anyone to invite, but I get to ask Irma.

“A fiesta,” Irma exclaims excitedly. “Will there be any guys?”

“Just don’t lift up your dress in front of everybody,” I warn her.

The afternoon is hot, the sun blinding white, but for once, there’s no wind. That’s good for Dad and Chrissie, since it means the plastic tent to shade their guests won’t blow down. Alex and I think that’s funny, since the people sitting at the white plastic tables are either people from Dad’s work who spend their days outside working on roads or else bodybuilders and trainers whose skins are that same orange-brown as Chrissie’s.

Alex, me, and Irma have our own table. Like the others, it’s adorned with a plastic vase of yellow supermarket mums and a pile of carrot sticks and celery ribs on a disposable plate. No one at our table has touched the appetizers, but at the bodybuilders’ tables, the

plates are empty. The guys from dad's work, meanwhile, are getting their exercise walking to the cooler for more beer.

Even if I liked celery and carrots, I couldn't eat any. I spent hours scraping skin from carrots and slicing them julienne-style like Chrissie wanted. I didn't want to do it, but Dad grabbed both my hands and said, "Please, do this one thing for me."

Chrissie had been planning the party for weeks, but decided at the end that it should be a "family project." Alex didn't want to do anything either, but finally agreed to help Dad pick up the plastic chairs and tables and plastic tents.

Dad has asked me to do one more thing: hold the ring until it was time for him to propose. I put it in the pocket of the flowered dress Chrissie bought for me to wear. The box keeps bumping against my thigh and I have the urge to throw it in her face.

Dad and Chrissie smile at everyone and absently nibble appetizers from their table, which rests up on pallets so everyone can see them. Chrissie's been pumping extra iron for weeks so her biceps will look better in her strapless peach dress. Dad's pale blue shirt is stiff and his thin hair is sprayed into place so the wind won't blow it around.

I feel sick. I hope I don't throw up when I give him Chrissie's ring. Earlier, when I went to the bathroom, I opened the velvet box and looked at the ring and almost flushed it down the toilet.

Irma squirms in her seat and kicks Alex under the table. "Knock it off," Alex says, shooting her the evil eye.

"I'm hot," she whines in singsong voice. "Are you hot, Alex?"

I'm about to warn Irma to leave him alone when she picks up a carrot stick and inserts it into her mouth suggestively. "Are you hot for me, Alex?"

Irma laughs, but it's too late: Alex's eyes flash and he bolts.

Dad used to keep a framed wedding picture buried in the junk on his dresser. It was so dusty you couldn't see the faces. I rubbed the dust with my finger so I could see Mom's face. I rubbed a long time before I realized she didn't have one. Dad must have cut it off with scissors.

I asked Alex once what she looked like. "Look in the mirror," he said.

But all I saw in the mirror was a girl with hard eyes and bones that stuck out, like the flesh had been worn away by water and wind. This girl opened her mouth to show off her pebble-like teeth and say the word "mother," but all that came out was a sigh.

It's the time of afternoon when the sunlight's blinding, the time of afternoon when it's easy to get heatstroke, and without Rusty and Lulu to help me sniff out Alex, I'm lost.

A few minutes ago, I saw a puff of dust from his bike on the gravel road. But now it's disappeared.

I'm far enough from the house that I can't see the sunlight reflecting off the parked cars or hear the drone of the swamp cooler. Far enough away that I've forgotten why I felt like throwing up.

Not far enough away to forget what I carry in my pocket. Treasure to bury deep, where no one will ever find it.

The velvet box feels hard as a rock as my fingers close over it. The box opens with a thump and when I hold the ring up to the sunshine sparkling dots of light are everywhere.

And then she's there. She holds out her hand and I slip the ring on her finger, and then she puts her arms around me and holds me tight. Hot tears fall on my arm, a rain that drips onto the sand to slowly seep underground.

"Mom?" I say, the word feeling strange on my tongue.

"I'm here," she says. "Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere."

I struggle to see her through the dancing dots of light. My eyes flow from the sparkling ring, and up her arm to the ropy muscles of her shoulders and the strapless peach dress. And think, for the first time, that she looks pretty when she smiles.

SMALL PRICE TO PAY

By Margaret Snyder

I hate summer when the temp hits 100 degrees.

While other women “glow”, I sweat like a
truck driver driving across Texas in July.

My face is always an unhealthy shade of red.
People ask me if I’m alright – no, I’M HOT!

Skimpy clothes and my figure, which is round,
just don’t go together. Short pants and t-shirts will have to do.

The local market won’t let me lay on top of the
frozen veggies any more – they’re now behind glass doors.

Summer lasts forever, or it just seems that way.
It does not obey the calendar – June to September only.

But it’s quiet here. No traffic. Lots of open space.
A few extra months of summer is a small price to pay.

I don’t much like winter either,
with 50 degree days and 30 degree nights.

Turning up the heat and still feeling cold.
Wearing layers and layers of clothes.

My nose slowly drips – I think it must be frozen.
They make ear muffs. Do you think they make nose muffs?

I drag my big blanket around the house
to snuggle in every time I sit down.

I know why bears hibernate.
They aren’t sleepy. They’re just cold.

But it’s quiet here. No traffic. Lots of open space.
A little frostbite is a small price to pay.

My Little Golden Dog

By Anne Alice Kuiper-Thacker

My Little Golden Dog is fast asleep
 The Wind outside is howling at the Moon.
 I feel so cold and lonely I could weep
 I really hope the dawn comes very soon.
 The Sun is rising I feel oh so blessed
 I leap up from my bed and find my shoes.
 My Golden Dog jumps 'round and 'round with zest;
 It's time to run and play off nightly blues.
 A glorious day shines brightly on our path;
 Night's melancholy sadness disappears.
 It's time to dance and sing; enjoy a laugh,
 The bright sunshine will dry off all our tears.
 My thanks to you sweet little Golden Dog;
 You always help to lift me from my fog!

RIO DE LA PLATA

By Mike Green

I watched a storm come in
 over Buenos Aires
 like the ghost of Borges enigmatic
 of course it filled the sky north and south of the city
 without totally obscuring the silver sun showing in its navel
 this made me think of the lost poets and
 how they plot their escape from the dark cities of the world
 delicate like night moths
 leaving only the gray dusting of their verse
 powdering the streets of someone else's memory

I heard them
 their footsteps in the dark
 cafes parks 2 am bars their verses like shadows
 only the blind can see their destinies vanishing crushed
 fragmented
 the names of ancient gods in vanished temple mouths

today the Plata looks like all the poets of Buenos Aires have been washing
 their sonnets
 and ringing out totally new verse forms it's their silver hour
 for sure that's how these things go when
 each iamb leads to the river's mouth open to the sea
 blood circulates in each breath
 what is it the streets tell you from the lost epic of their silence?

Steam Punk Corridor

by Lynda Burns

Facing west, I stare at the flatness as the setting sun dips on the horizon. The glaring sun blends into the seemingly apocalyptic landscape of industrial haze, empty roads, and urban sprawl. Since our first visit in 2002, we were eager to spend more time here: West Texas!

Having driven north from San Angelo that day, we scout for a campground or RV park, which are all full due to housing for workers in this boom-or-bust oil patch. During our drive around we notice empty buildings and surprisingly little traffic. We settle for a convenient chain hotel instead of driving further. As we check in, the scented air reminds me of oil and dust and imagined sweat. The vista is filled with metal seahorses rocking ceaselessly while fires burn on the towering oil platforms, burning off natural gas for the pursuit of oil. Stark, massive,

geometric, intriguing. We visit the Petroleum Museum with more art and cars than the history we had hoped for due to an in-process renovation. Still, having the place to ourselves, we walk in the heat and wind to view the exterior displays, full of gears, cables, and rust. A quick dinner at a regional chain and off to bed. No nightlife nearby for us; blue laws still exist on Sunday night in Texas. Distant banks of lights and flames are visible throughout the night; I wonder about what's happening, who may be working, how the oil industry works. I can almost hear cranking and grinding, metal against metal. I can almost feel the heat. I want to go and see it all.

From an early night to up early, we're on the road, headed west on Interstate 20, headed home. First stop, coffee. What just yesterday was a quiet Sunday afternoon has morphed into a throbbing, demanding Monday morning. Rugged, wet-behind-the ears rookies learn the ropes and the lingo from seasoned roughnecks, stocking coolers with water, Gatorade, and ice. Mini-marts and convenience stores double as fast food restaurants dispensing breakfast to go and lunches to pack. Further down the road, what seemed to be graveyards of tanks, pipes and equipment now are lots reverberating with activity and noise. As we follow the I-20 corridor, the road is rough, beaten down by heavy loads and weather. We are buffeted by big rigs, tankers, and oversized dump trucks. Even in our truck and camper, I feel small.

Yet, from my perch I can see glimpses of beauty. Away from the dun colored subdivides are hillocks of sand dunes, wildflowers, Monahan's State Park, wildlife corridors. Ranches and farms are interspersed with towering windmills casting long shadows in the light of dawn. We continue on through Midland, Odessa, Pecos, Van Horn, to some an endless, boring drive, but to me, a countryside unseen. Read the map, view the land, and absorb it. Oh the joy of a road trip!

All too soon, we start to see the 'burbs of El Paso: smog, blight, and barbed wire fences, traffic congestion and shopping malls. The drive is interminable; shoulder tightening vigilance, relief only when we escape into New Mexico. We breathe easy again.

Many consider West Texas a harsh environment and it is; almost a different state from East Texas. More Western, less Wouthern yet the folks are still welcoming, kind, and sweet talkin' Texicans, hard working in a hard place. West Texas: a land to explore and see. We'll go again.



BIOMORPHIC DRAWING

by Jim Aldrich

The Census

by William Hillyard

It was 2010, the most recent year we in America took our decennial census, and all over the country, households got their US Census Bureau census forms in the mail; right in their mailboxes, right to their houses. They were to fill them out and return them. Most did—some didn't—but whether they did or not was none of my concern. Even though I was a sworn US Census Bureau Enumerator, those folks were SEP: Somebody Else's Problem. Out in the desert, though, out beyond the stucco tracts and Rain-bird greened lawns, beyond the fast food joints and the liquor stores, was a grid of washboard tracks scraped from the sparse greasewood hardscrabble where there was no mail service. Those folks didn't receive census forms. And it was my job to count them.

I hadn't planned to work for the Census, actually. I planned to write a story, a story about the census, about taking the census in an isolated patch of nowhere. And it was going to be such a great story, too: here was a vast, remote area spotted with the rubble of broken down and uninhabitable shacks, a place peopled, I was told, by misfits and methheads with no interest at all in participating in any census or for that matter of even being found. Many lived out here with no running water, some with no electricity. And because there was no mail service, the Census Bureau enumerators would have to go door to distant door to do a physical head count by hand.

I pitched that story idea to a big glossy magazine, a lifestyle mag with blondes with buxom cleavage on the cover and ads for Swiss watches inside. I would be the Census Bureau's first-ever embedded journalist, I told them. I'd accompany Census Enumerators as they did their job, as they rattled around the area's washboard tracks, trudged up to broken down shacks, knocked on doors that hadn't been knocked on in years. Already, I told them, the material was proving to be ripe and colorful. A crotchety old desert rat, for example, had frog-marched a Census Enumerator off his property at the muzzle of his rifle. Seems the old man had booby-trapped his road too, scattered nails in the soft sand and barricaded parts to discourage others from passing. The Census worker called the police, who confiscated the man's weapons and charged him with threatening a federal agent with a firearm. They say the old man passed away before he could stand trial. The court, however, still lists his status as fugitive. The magazine editors loved the idea. The assignment came with the promise of a hefty check.

The Census Bureau had already given me the go-ahead, too. Public concerns for privacy had given the Census a dubious cast with fringe bloggers suggesting the government would use the collected data to round up its citizens. Even then-President George W. Bush expressed reservations in participating. "This story could be really good for the Census," the Census Bureau's Regional Director said to me. He pulled the strings to get me involved. Within days, I was riding around the desert with a Census supervisor and a photographer. We peered into dilapidated shacks, conferred over maps, tramped over miles of open desert.

But as Albert Einstein once said, "bureaucracy is the death of

all sound work". After just two days, the Regional Director called. "Clearly there's been a misunderstanding," he said. Why was I still with the Census workers? They had work to do and I was interfering with it. I reminded him that I had asked to accompany Census workers for a couple of weeks at least, not just a couple of days. I told him what a great experience it had been so far, about my two days in the desert with Census Bureau enumerators driving the dirt roads, going house to house... "You saw respondents' houses?" he asked, stopping me mid-sentence. "People's houses are PII! We said no PII!" PII--that's Personally Identifiable Information in the parlance of the Census. PII is any information through which someone might conceivably be able to identify a census respondent. The Census Bureau was concerned about the possible disclosure of PII obtained through the census process. More than that, in the PR battle they were fighting, they didn't want anything to make them appear to be compromising personal information. But how could I possibly accompany Census employees and not see the houses they were visiting?, I asked the director. I shouldn't have. Citing issues of privacy, he cut my access off. "It's a free country," he said, "You can go where you want to go, but we can't allow you to go with Census employees." And that was that. My time as the first-ever journalist embedded with the forces of the US Census Bureau was over, before it really began.

I was shattered. I knew I was on to a great story, but beyond that, there was the promise of that big fat check, a check, as it turned out, that in my particular station in life I was especially looking forward to, seeing that I was, with the exception of that single freelance job for the big, glossy magazine, otherwise unemployed. Survival dictated I either find a job or I get this story.

Coincidentally, as it turned out, the Census Bureau was hiring. And, as it happened, having recently spent some time with Census Bureau employees, I knew just what kind of person they were looking for. They wanted someone with a four-wheel drive vehicle--so I borrowed one. Check. They wanted someone who spoke Spanish--I'd taken some classes in college. Check. They wanted someone who lived in the area--and coincidentally, I was at that moment in my life going through a phase where I found myself around here quite frequently, sleeping on

my parents' couch in the nearby town, so Check. I volunteered to work in the desert outside of town--few people, I knew, were willing to do that. Check. Thus, as the Census Bureau fired me as the first embedded journalist in the history of the census, they hired me as one of the very people I had been embedded with. I was now a Census Bureau Enumerator.

But the thing is, now that I was a Census employee, I can't say anything about my time working for them. In taking the job as an enumerator, I swore an oath and signed legal documents forbidding me from divulging any Census data. Under the terms of that oath, I am, of course, expressly prohibited from disclosing PII. But nor can I divulge the information contained on Census Bureau documents, including addresses and locations indicated on the rather generic Census maps, nor Census tract numbers or operation specifics such as where the census is even being conducted. For the rest of my life. And since every HU--that's every Housing Unit in the parlance of the Census--was to be enumerated, every single domicile or structure that could be or maybe once was a residence in the whole entirety of the country is conceivably PII.

I can't even say where I worked. The details of my AA--Assignment Area in the parlance--are protected information, too. Maybe my AA covered about 60 square miles well off any pavement, crisscrossed by rattletrap roads and dry dusty washes in the arid wastes of the Mojave Desert, and maybe it didn't. Nor will I say if the 800,000 scenic acres of heat varnished rocks and twisted Seussian trees south of my AA was a high-desert national park. I cannot confirm or deny such rumors.

I will say, however, that my first day as an enumerator took me down a rutted road past a skull and crossbones sign that read "No Trespassing, Armed Neighborhood." I stopped there to ponder that sign. The armed part I got--armed like a Taliban stronghold or an outlaw hideout. The claim of neighborhood, however, was simply gross exaggeration. Neighborhood implies neighbors, people--this was better described as habitat, home to jackrabbits and coyotes, scorpions and snakes. Greasewood scrub crouched in low clumps, late spring wildflowers tinted the arid wastes yellow. A covey of quail undulated across the road like a deconstructed snake.

There were signs of human habitation, of course. Hundreds

of skeletal cabins leaned against the whipping wind as lifeless shells. According to the last census, 1,200 Housing Units remained in the area, more than half of them vacant and most of those unlivable. Wind rattled the corrugated metal of the forgotten cabins, howled through the bare studs and banged flapping doors. Regurgitated owl pellets littered bare concrete floors. Now you might suspect that each of these dilapidated shacks was a spot on the Census Bureau map and that it was my job to tramp across the arid wastes over the abandoned junk and rubble to bang on broken doors or peer through glassless windows to determine if anyone--desert rat or squatter--lived there, and if so, enumerate them. But that is Census business, the details about which I am not prepared to comment.

There were people scattered around my AA, however. That first day, for example, materializing out of a cloud of pure nowhere like some kind of desert djinn, a man in a dust-stirring truck skidded up, out almost before it had stopped, "Can I help you?" he said. A silver stubble grew stunted on his cheeks, an American flag cap slouched on his head. His tone was the desert's gravel and dust. "Can I help you," he said in the parlance of the desert: What the hell do you want? He grinned a toothless grin, but he wasn't smiling. "You're liable to get shot out here," he said.

I thought of that crotchety old desert rat marching the enumerator off his property and I suddenly understood why so many Census workers avoided this area. Besides, the dangers are not just the residents. The heat and the sun coupled with the sheer isolation and poor road conditions meant a breakdown could be disastrous. Not long before I started with the Census, an enumerator trying to negotiate these rutted tracks in a Japanese car hit a rock and cracked his oil pan. His oil ran out and his engine seized before he could make civilization. His long walk and hundreds of dollars in tow fees weren't covered by his 50 cents-per-mile Census Bureau reimbursement. There were other dangers, too, like people's dogs-- pit bulls predominantly--chained to the front stoop if you're lucky, or let to run wild to "guard" a cabin if you weren't. Packs of feral dogs roamed the area, scavenging human waste and growling threateningly at anyone stupid enough get out of the sanctuary of his car. People had been mauled. In training, Census workers were admonished not to leave their car doors open when they approached a house--an open car door could risk the exposure of PII to

wandering eyes. But I learned very quickly to leave the car door open in case I needed to make a dash fleeing vicious dogs. I got good at the routine and consequently was only bitten the once.

I had gone up to a scroungy place where an old dog with a gray muzzle bared its teeth and growled at me from inside, smashing against a duct-taped window as I approached the cabin. Other dogs joined in, howling and barking, banging against the door. No one answered.

When I returned later that day, a truck was there. The dogs piled out the door when the cheerless owner answered. "Can I help you," the owner said, staring at me defiantly. The dogs yelped and jumped around me, jockeying for attention. The old dog with the gray muzzle trickled out last. "They won't bother you," the owner said as the old dog with the gray muzzle clamped its jaws down on my arm just below the elbow. I danced in place swinging my arm trying to avoid the old dog, which just stood there looking up at me, silent.

"Did you get bit?" the owner asked, a cold smirk drifting across his face.

"YES!" I cried, my elbow quickly turning blue. I examined the bite for punctures.

"Which one did it?"

"The black one!" I pointed an accusatory finger at the old gray-muzzled dog. I cradled my throbbing elbow.

"Oh, it couldn't have been that one," the man said dismissively.

In spite of that man's tone, that dog bite proved to be a boon, however, because the owner, now a little concerned that his dog had just bitten a Census worker, gave me the interview without the typical fuss. I rubbed my throbbing arm, writing down the man's responses. As I worked my arm turned purple, which yellowed to black over the coming week.

With so few of the cabins out there inhabitable, let alone occupied, it would be easy to conclude I did very few actual enumerations--that is, counting the people who lived and slept at a particular Housing Unit. You probably think that my job with the Census came down to little more than driving around the desert checking cabins and crossing them

off a list. But then you aren't thinking like the federal government. If you were thinking like a government bureaucrat, you might expect enumerators to confirm the occupancy status of every Housing Unit in their AA, even the most broken-down, dilapidated, windowless, bare stud-walled, gaping-roofed and clearly uninhabitable pile of rubble (Open to the Elements, in the parlance of the Census) by getting a statement from a Proxy--a neighbor or knowledgeable person--who can attest to the occupancy status of the Housing Unit, which may or may not be what we Census enumerators were required to do. Statute prevents me from saying either way. I will tell you, though, that I did stop at any house with glass in its windows and a car out front to ask questions about the clearly unlivable dwellings. Maybe I made those stops on Census business or maybe I was just being neighborly, I'm not at liberty to say.

I will say that you got so you knew which cabins were occupied and which weren't. You looked for signs. Occupied cabins had cars with all four wheels, and often even current tags. They had fresh tire tracks in the dry dirt, signs that people come and go, trash and garbage and junk and dogs. There was this one house, for example, that was surrounded by dozens of broken-down cabins that I may or may not have needed someone to proxy, as per Census protocol. In the window of the house a woman washed dishes, her gray hair pulled tightly into a bun. I didn't knock. She saw me approach; I overheard her talking over her shoulder, something about the goddamn something or other. A man came to the door, a man with a deeply grooved face and no front teeth. His eyes fixed on me through the door's tattered screen. "Can I help you?" he said in the parlance of the desert. I held my Census badge out like a crucifix.

"Does anybody live in those places," I eventually asked. I was aware, I'll admit, how ridiculous the question sounded. The man with the deeply grooved face just looked at me for a moment, just looked at me through the tattered screen like I was some dumbshit from down below. "Down below," in the parlance, the big city, the concrete desert these people come up here to get away from. The man just looked at me shaking his head. "That one was old man so-and-so's place 'til he died," he offered finally, pointing at a rubble of two-by-fours. "That one was never nothing, just a shed." A smile crept to the man's face, "See that place over there? Stay away from it. One night a SWAT team came

rappelling out of helicopters raiding it. Rappelling right out of their goddamn helicopters. It was a meth lab.”

He pointed at places and rattled off road names, none of which matched what was on my Census-issued map. “I’m looking for a road,” I said, “My map shows it runs right by your cabin...”

“Sweeney?” the man said. Or something similar. I’m not about to disclose the actual street names and risk a \$250,000 fine and five years in jail.

“Sweeney?” the man said, we’re pretending.

“No, it’s...”

“Halston?”

“No...”

“Coyote Trail?”

“No...umm...”

“End Run?”

“No...”

“Prickly Pear?”

“No...on this map...it says this should be Piedmont?”

“Never heard of it. This road here is really Sweeney but when them people there built their cabin they changed the name to Halston. And that jerk on the end, he wants it to be End Run. Prickly Pear is that up there, but it’s just that old lady’s driveway. Everybody wants to call these roads something different and the county just lets them; they don’t give a shit. It gets so confusing. I once had a tractor-trailer pull in here looking for an address. Turned out he was twenty miles off. I never could figure how he got that rig across the wash.”

Statute, of course, forbids me from commenting on Census specifics, but I think you will agree the man with the deeply grooved face would have been a great proxy for all the wrecked cabins around--if that was what I needed--giving me the story of each, check, check, check. Other cabins were so isolated, however, I often found it difficult to find anyone to talk to me at all. At one particularly remote part of my AA, I watched a car buzz cabin to cabin like a bee to blossoms, a swirling contrail of dust in its wake. I eased my truck up to an abandoned cabin

and the other car noticed me. The driver yanked the wheel over and barreled my way. It was a fancy German SUV, a rare vehicle in these parts. I gunned my truck up another road but the German SUV flanked me, careened over to me and skidded up opposite my window. Frantic, the driver waved at me. She thrust something at me: her badge. “Hi, I’m with the Census...” she said breathlessly. I held up my Census badge. “... and so are you.” She collapsed down like she’d sprung a leak.

The enumerator in the fancy German SUV told me about a clutch of cabins out on the edge of the open desert, all alone miles from any others. She didn’t want to take her fancy German SUV out there, she said, not on these roads. I had the map and the addresses before I could say no.

The cabins out there were in good repair, the windows covered and locked, but no signs anyone had been there in a long time, no trash or tire tracks or empty beer cans. Vacation cabins, I thought, and now that it was summer, there was little chance anyone would come out. Shit. I felt duped. I left an NV--Notice of Visit, in the parlance of the Census--at the door of the last cabin, and turned to go.

Rounding the corner of the cabin, a black rain of insects fell over me. Hundreds of tiny little bees came tumbling out of the eaves--stingless bees, I discovered to my relief as they fell onto my head, into my shirt, tangling in my chest hair, climbing over my sweaty body. They followed me like a cloud as I jumped into my truck, they crawled around on my face, into my ears until I wrenched the truck to a halt and flung open the doors and dashed into the sand and scrub, ripping off my shirt as I ran.

Later that same day, a woman called. That was her family’s cabin, she said, what a coincidence, they hadn’t been there for years, but came out that day and found my note. A miracle, I thought. The cabin had been in her family for a generation, she told me, and so-and-so has the one beyond and such-and-such the other and they used to all come out together but none of them used their cabins anymore. Check, check, and check. The woman didn’t mention the bees.

Had no one called, Census protocol may or may not have required me to go back time and again until I found someone home or someone to attest to the status of the Housing Unit; I really can’t say. In fact, there was one such isolated cabin in my AA where I saw all the signs of

occupation--laundry on the line, pet food in a bowl, the accumulation of junk and rubbish around--yet no one answered the door. As it happened, it was the only occupied cabin in an area of broken down shacks that I may or may not have needed to find someone to proxy in accordance with US Census Bureau procedures about which my lips are permanently sealed. Every time I drove out to the cabin, my Notice of Visit was gone, yet no one ever came to the door. I visited the cabin nearly every day over the course of a couple weeks.

One time, as I walked around the cabin, knocking on doors and windows, a truck appeared from the barren nowhere and a kid got out. "Can I help you?" the kid asked in the parlance, then he banged on the cabin door calling out a woman's name.

"Who lives here?" I asked. "Can you tell me about these vacant cabins?"

"I don't know," he said, "I don't live around there." Then he jumped back into his truck and just as fast was gone.

On another visit, a taxi cab with a turban-wearing New York taxi driver came down the rutted roads and across the wash, then out of the cab almost before it had stopped jumped a man in a fedora, "Can I help you?" he said.

He carried a bottle of Black Velvet and told me about the steaks he'd brought to grill--but he had no steaks, just that bottle of whisky. I asked him who lived there, about the cabins around. "I don't know, man," he answered. "I'm not from around here." I left him standing there.

Then a week later, my phone rang. It was the woman from that isolated cabin. She talked, blathering, racing, "I found your notes, sorry, I've been sick, I really think the census is important, I want to participate, I don't want to lose my benefits, I'm on disability..."

Out at her cabin, she invited me in. "Sorry about the mess, I've been sick," she went on, still flying through words. "I had the flu for three days. The medication makes me sick, it messes with my immune system, let's go back here. Don't mind the mess." She was ping-ponging, redlining, 10,000 rpm. Her blond hair was piled on her head, scooped and stacked there, stray tendrils sprouted from the nape of her neck, looping to her shoulders. She was pretty once, I thought to myself.

We went into her bedroom, a cave with the windows blackened, clothes scattered. She sat on the bed, a mattress on the floor, and patted a spot for me next to her. She bounced her leg up and down as she yammered, the hem of her dress creeping up her thighs, her breasts swimming freely in her top. Census workers are admonished in training not to go into anyone's house, to do all interviews at the front door. But here I was practically in bed with a woman wearing little more than a negligee in an isolated cabin in the middle of flippin' nowhere. I could barely write her responses the bed was shaking so. I stammered through the interview. Did you live here on April first? Is this your usual home? How many people live here? Your name? Sex?--sorry, I have to ask... Age? Date of Birth? She answered everything in a breath, going on about the neighbors, the dilapidated, tumbledown cabins all around her, shaking her leg, jiggling all over, until I stood up to leave, she was talking, talking, as I backedpedaled to the door, goodbye, goodbye, comeback later, as I backed out the door and into my truck and was gone.

Check, check, check.

My perseverance paid off. But things didn't always work out so well. There was one small shack with boarded windows facing the wide open mountains, where a man walked out as I pulled up. I could tell by his look he was not from around here. He had all his teeth for one thing, and standing braced against the sun with a hipster's tussled bed head and a scruffy three-day beard, he was too young for these parts--late 20s or early 30s tops. "Can I help you?" he said, in the parlance.

"Hi, I'm with the Census."

"I do not live here," he said, "I am here only for the day." He was European; his accent French, I thought. There was a little Korean car parked in front, I couldn't imagine how he got it down that rutted, sandy road.

"Is there someone else I can talk to?"

"The owner, he is not here," the man replied in that halting French way.

"When is he going to be back?"

"I do not know."

"Well, when did he leave?"

“I do not know.”

I had the feeling that the man didn't understand me, that I was with the Census, and it was my job to ask these questions. “I'm with the federal government; I'm here to take the census...” Surely they must have the census in his country.

“I know who you are,” the man spat back. “You do not scare me, Mr. Federal Agent! You are on private property, you must leave!”

I was suddenly in a scene from a Monte Python movie. “Your mother is a hamster and your father smells of elderberries!” I filled in the dialogue by rote. “Now go away, or I will taunt you a second time!” But the man just stared at me until I slinked away.

When I went back later, the little Korean car was gone. No one ever returned. In fact, it seemed as though no one had ever been there, ever in a million years. There were no proxies, if that was what I needed, I would never check the place off. Now it's SEP--Somebody Else's Problem in the parlance of the federal government.

And that was that. That was my time with the Census. I had gathered so much great material, I was going to write such a great story. Oh, but then I got a letter from the Census Bureau. There were restrictions, the letter said, in addition to the lifetime oath I took to uphold the confidentiality of census information, that sacred oath the violation of which carried a fine of \$250,000 and up to five years in jail, there were also prohibitions on writing and publishing about the Census, a ban on writing about Census programs, operations and the assignments I was given as a Census Bureau employee. The ban, the letter said, specifically forbade me from receiving payment for writing about my time with the Census. The payment restrictions turned out to be the least of my problems, by the way, because when the lawyers for that big glossy magazine read the letter they fired me on the spot, tersely informing me that in case of prosecution they would be obliged to testify against me. They advised me in the strongest possible terms to find a good attorney. Seems I had crossed some big, fat, black line between embedded reporter and sworn federal employee.

There would be no census story, no hefty check. I didn't even complete my Census assignment, or so it seemed. It all seemed so unreal anyway. I wondered, thinking back, what was it with that French guy with the hipster's tussled bedhead? Was he some shape-shifting djinn,

a desert nagual straight out of a Carlos Castaneda book? I wondered about some of those others, too--guy in the taxi cab, jittery woman, the dust-stirring truck man warning, “You could get shot out here.” And then there's the guy who frog-marched the enumerator off his property. They say he died. I went to check his place out.

I drove to his cabin, down his road. I looked for tracks; no one had been there for a while. The end of the road was barricaded by barbed wire buried in the sand. I stopped in front of the house--it looked normal, like a regular house: it had trees, still green, well cared for. A six-foot wooden fence isolated the house from the ramshackle shacks and the world beyond.

Then, out of the dirty, dry nowhere, down the trackless road, a truck turned toward me, and raced my way, the driver, a woman, glaring at me. She barreled around the buried barbed wire barricade and out of the truck almost before it had stopped, grabbing a chrome garden spade, and in a flurry sand flew while she prairie-dogged up and stared at me between shovelfuls. I pretended to be writing. Then it dawned on me. I walked over to her. “Can I help you?” I said, you know, like you do. The wheel of her fancy new jeep was buried to the hub.

“Oh, darn,” she said, seeing my badge flapping in the breeze. She held up her own. “You're with the Census too.”

CATAclysm DAYS: A REPORT FROM THE COAST

By Chuck Von Nordheim

The diamond-tentacled tornado approached
 Forests jeered
 Rivers kissed
 Modern Noahs prophesied heavy weather
 We continued, though, to live Babylon lives
 Our ecstasies more autopsy than freedom

 Oceans yelled
 Magma fled
 The chromium-fanged tornado came closer
 Contemporary Isaiahs earned our scorn
 When, to save us, they sought to defenestrate
 The topaz orbits of our hemlock egos

 The ricin-breathed tornado swept all away
 Mountains swore
 Tundra judged
 Afterwards, the displaced, advised by new Cains
 Sought the warmth of conflagrations of grace
 Stoked with the raped flesh of ordinary angels

PURPLE

By Jake Sharp

Unexpected,
 You came into my life that way.
 “Just another co-worker,” I thought.
 That changed quickly.
 I always liked turning around
 And making accidental eye contact.
 You wouldn’t turn away
 And I wish I hated that.
 I wish I hated a lot of things
 You did that made me feel
 Special, wanted, ecstatic.
 I wish I had finished school earlier.
 I wish you didn’t move back home.
 I wish I could go back
 And tell you that I loved you first
 Before you sent me a text
 Reading those words.
 A text.
 I can’t remember which ear I used to whisper into.
 Whispers in that ear drove you a special kind of crazy.
 But I do remember
 Your beautiful singing voice,
 Your God-given smile,
 And your favorite color.



UNTITLED
by Remington Edwards

314
by Shyanne Thompson



Number 314 squinted at the row of squiggles. They had no meaning for her brain to connect to, which made reading them a daunting task. Still she pressed on, her white finger guiding her eyes over each row, pupils dancing between the book in her lap and a chart of the Thalesian alphabet. At the end of each word, she mouthed out the syllables, filling the quarters with soft whispers.

“...of... the... cel—es—tial... bod—ies...”

314 felt a presence linger beside her. She turned her head to meet a boy who shared her ethnicity, with his scruffy head of silver hair and

fluid blue eyes. She met his stare, her own eyes of gunmetal blue so cold they exuded a natural glare.

The teenage boy crossed his arms, pale eyebrows arching down to the same unfamiliar squiggles.

“You n’ that book,” he said. “What’s a book got that’s so fun anyway?”

Number 314 rolled her eyes, hoping to roll him out of the room, too. Number 366 was one year her junior but acted much less.

He pinched his nose. “It smells like the warden’s study.. Ya shouldn’t take things from there, ya know.”

She continued to grunt out syllables from the text, “Jup... i... ter... Say, 366, what’s Jupiter?”

Giving her a lopsided frown, the boy shrugged.

None of the prisoners understood. They all would give her the same look he was giving her now. Their faces said it all: what good is reading? It won’t set you free.

They were all prisoners of war, handcuffed at birth. Very few lived a minute of freedom, nor had their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents. The people of Thales referred to them as prisoners, as though they were incarcerated for committing a crime, as though they chose to be there, but the nature of their incarceration was more like slavery, and their only crime was being born in the wrong place.

The destiny of every bare-footed prisoner was assigned to them. If there was a war, they crafted the weapons. If the economy was booming, they produced the textiles. If their country was beginning to starve, they kneaded the bread, which would make it to the mouths of freed men before any Thalesian prisoner. But, it is believed, if they worked hard enough, one day they could break their shackles.

“You can’t even read,” said Number 366.

A vein throbbed in 314’s temple at his words. He was breaking her hard-earned concentration.

She snapped, “I can read better than you, dumbass!”

His shoulders twitched, but anger arose, as no girl would give him a fright.

He huffed, “Call me a dumbass again! Do it!”

314 closed her book, hard. That was enough to collapse his facade, but it slowly turned into something else. For a split second, the corner of his mouth curled. His facial expression mimicked a soundless sigh. He slipped onto the bed beside the ledge of the u-shaped, glassless window that 314 draped over like a cat.

He went flat on his back. This time, he did sigh softly, fingering the sash at the back of her prisoner’s garb.

She could hear the grin in his voice as he said, “Say... know what’s really fun?”

He tugged on the sash, only enough for it to undo a little.

She had already been uttering what she was reading, but as she felt his tug, she heightened the volume of her voice.

“Tch.” 366 dropped his hand. “You’re boring as shit.”

314 prevailed to mumble, “Grav—i—tational... I need a word dictionary...”

She groaned at the foreign word. She was trying to make sense of the sentence without it, but it seemed the message hinged on the word.

Number 366 spoke up. “That doesn’t sound like a good time to me.”

Her concentration came through in her voice. She insisted, “Someone’s tellin’ something to me, through these words... I just gotta figure out what they’re saying.”

She exhaled, uncurled her spine and crooked her head to the world she knew outside the edge of the window. The tops of clay-tile roofs shrouded the small civilization in the belly of a crater. Number 314 spent her entire life in this gape in the earth. Only a select few knew what it looked like above. Most only had the view of the steeply-inclined wall of earth that encased them, and the crater’s horizon, a rigid edge. Their world is finite, and yet (314 was smiling in thought as she looked up) they have the infinite right above their heads. A window holding the entire universe.

Number 314 has heard many stories about her home. According to one, the crater was created when the god of storms was disturbed from his sleep by the screams of men in battle, and was so outraged

that, rather than striking lightning, he struck the Earth with his fist.

Another myth was that the crater was the center of the world, slowly sinking the rest of the world in like quicksand, until one day, everything would implode into a single piece of dust. In fact, there were claims by philosophers on the outside that they measured the crater and swore it was getting deeper.

There was another myth, told by her superiors, that the crater was a special place for prisoners because it was closest to hell. That one was her least favorite.

How the crater most likely came to be, as she came to find out, was by impact of a meteorite—some hunk of rock from outer space—hundreds of years ago. That story was painfully simple, cut-and-dried, but it happened outside of her, her superiors, or any human who ever lived. The meteorite didn't care about human interpretations. It was real. Number 314 loved that.

What more is out there, waiting to be known? The question made the butterflies swim in her, made her blood pulse like a rose perfume, made her head swell with dopamine. No other pleasure could compare. The pleasure to think left her sated with knowledge.

She looked up to the dusky sky. Perhaps knowledge is the only flight to liberty.

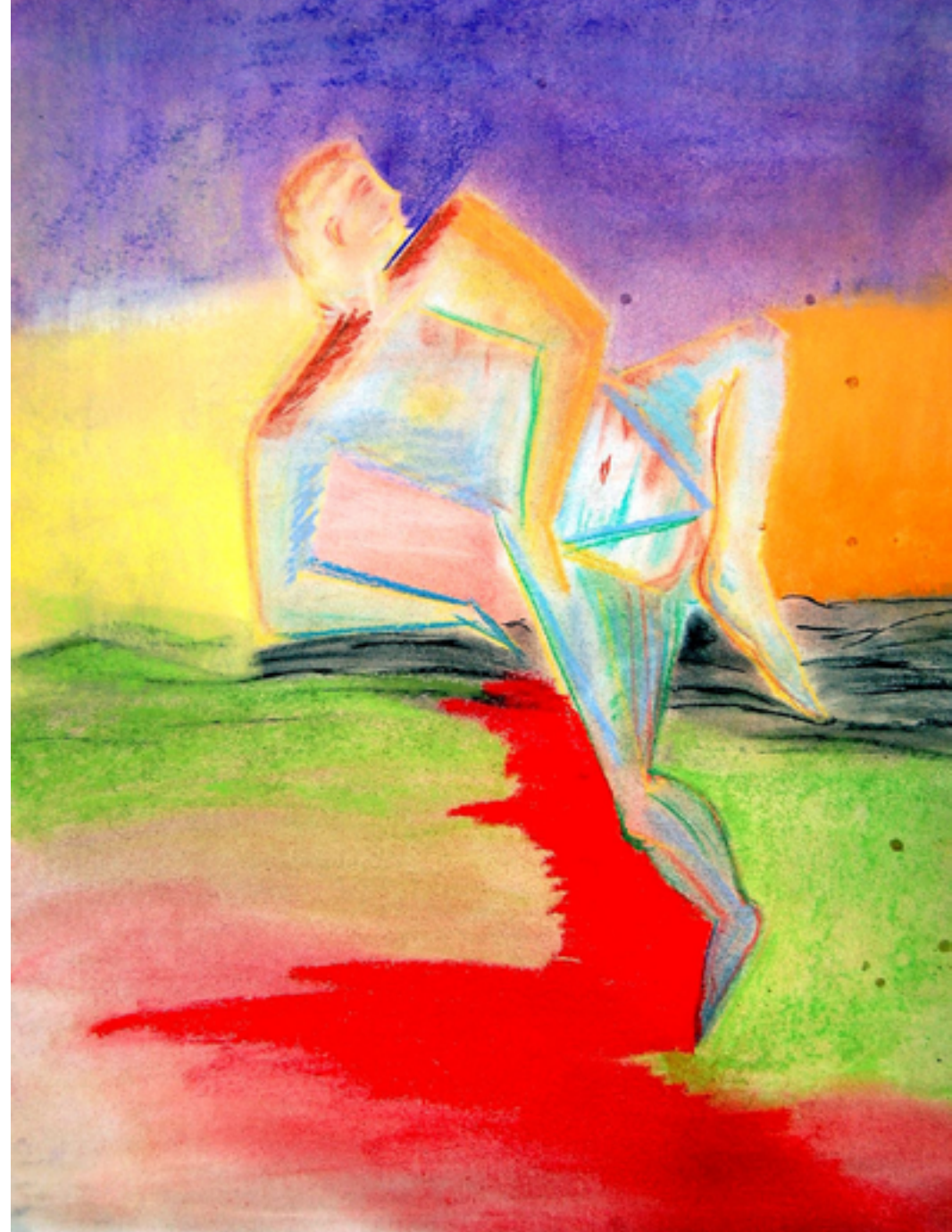


FIGURE STUDY
by Doreen Bird

DEATH AND DYING

By Betty O'Connell

I KNOW YOU WON'T FORGET ME
THAT'S NOT WHERE MY WORRIES LIE.
IT'S THAT I WON'T BE HERE TO REMEMBER YOU
THAT MAKES ME AFRAID TO DIE.

WHO I AM

By Courtney Paige Freeman

My leaves have been so green
I had the energy to dance with the summer breeze
Yet now my leaves have changed to colors I have not seen
And now I am tired beyond belief

I begin to weep
When a tree snaps at me, "Child do not weep, for you are not a weeping
willow."
I reply, "But I have lost my green!"
With an irritated sigh, "Small child for you are not an Evergreen."
Confused I ask, "What do you mean?"
Another sigh and the tree replies, "Your leaves have changed as the
season has."
The tree explained it all to me.

I now know why I am small and others stand tall
For I am young, not nearly as old as the wise oak
Who has taught me who I am



THE BROKEN

By Lynda Burns

the broken man stands, trembling and humble.

he speaks, to break the solid silence, yet i hear only his suffering.

he said, this isn't about joe. he said umpqua is my college.

and it's real. and it can happen here. and he is persuasive in his sorrow.

a moment, a minute, quiet steps offering

a tissue, some water, caring hands outstretched.

the struggle continues, to offer words of an irrevocable experience,

a burden he couldn't, wouldn't share.

a sob of gratitude, of pain, as he comes home,

to us, the other family, to share his grief, to start healing.

i sit in the solid silence, cold tears dripping, glasses fogged.

my hands clasped in unutterable pleading.

i am sick for my friend, my colleague, shaking,

queasy with the thought of the upcoming food.

i leave, instead, unsettled, unsure of what i'm doing.

a numbness, i act as an automaton, 'til the hidden tears burst out.

i am broken hearted for my broken friend, for a broken world.

but then, this isn't about me.

The “L” Word

by Jake Sharp

My mom used to tell me when I was young, that the word “love” was like a curse word. I never knew what she meant by that, but for some reason, her words stuck in my head. I didn’t use that word often. Someone outside of family would say it to me, and I’d just smile in reciprocation. As I grew older, I’d go to parties with good friends, get drunk or high, and tell them that I loved them. Sometimes when I was like this, I’d say it to strangers. Now, I could pretend that I was too “fucked up” to remember my actions and words from the night before, but I always remembered, I was always embarrassed, and that word always left a horrible taste in my mouth.

I used to watch couples who had only been dating a few days, maybe a few weeks, tell each other that they loved each other. Hearing those words come out of the mouths of people who barely knew one another would send me up a wall. I had always told myself that love takes time and work and, at the very least, you have to know the other person. Love at first sight is a joke. You can be attracted to someone; you can actively seek out each other’s attention, but you can’t be in love. That is what I think, anyways.

Then, I met my first girlfriend. I was nineteen; she was twenty-one. Our relationship was great. We never fought, and we enjoyed each other’s company. One day, about a month into our relationship, she left her diary on the bed and told me that it would be okay if I read it while she was in the shower. I opened the book, meant for her eyes only, to a random page. At the bottom of the page, I read the words, “I love you, insert full name here.” I nearly had a heart attack. I immediately wished I hadn’t opened the book. I then realized that my girlfriend was one of those people I despised so much. Against my better judgement, I decided to stay with her and pretend I never read the book.

A month turned into a year. A whole twelve months had passed, and I was still unable to bring myself to tell this girl that I loved her. I started believing that we could get married, have kids, and grow old together without ever using that word. Because that’s all it was. A word. One day she told me she was leaving to go back home. I helped her pack her things and when I hugged and kissed her for the last time, I could not bring myself to say what I knew she wanted to hear so badly. She got in her car, waved goodbye, and left me alone. As I contemplated my newfound loneliness, my phone buzzed in my pocket. A text from my girlfriend read the words I so badly wanted to say in person: “I love you.” A text message. I couldn’t believe it. How could I let this girl do this? How could I?

It’s been two years since then. We’ve broken up in that time period. I still hold on to my beliefs. I still try not to use that word. I only hope that my future wife or girlfriend understands that I can’t bring myself to use an overused word that can’t possibly describe the way I feel for her.



FIGURE STUDY
by Eric Knabe

South Central
by Sara Cruz



My mother likes to believe she is from Watts, the L.A. hood of the 1965 riots and Rodia's 99 foot steel towers. When I ask her how long she lived there, her answer is always, "Long enough to get my ass beat." She hung out in the streets, in a city in which the population shift was only the surface of the frustrations of people living in poverty and deindustrialization: black, white, or Latino.

She was nine in the late 70s, a tough and round 150 pounds, standing on the front porch of an old man who would sell her one joint

for one dollar every day when Zigzags would still dye the rolling papers orange.

My grandmother was a single parent who worked the cafeterias at every hospital in Southeast Los Angeles, and rarely home. The notion of the lack of respect and common sense among children of the hood was null. Most, including my mother, were left to raise and teach themselves.

My mother went to school at Grape Elementary along 111th, whenever she felt like it. She kept to herself, she tells me, but it didn't help that she was only one of the few white kids enrolled. One day along the basketball court, a group of three boys from the 6th grade were compelled to chant "fat cracker" in my mother's direction. This continued for the rest of the day, all the way to her front door. Finally she turned around and opened her mouth to say it, the word of ignorance. Her argument was valid in her child-mind, and it fashioned a reason for retaliation within the boys.

Before they could react too quickly, they walked away tense, and the biggest warned my mother, "You're gonna get it."

She wasn't crushed by the insults of the dark-skinned boys, but rather the anticipation of her jumping. My mother waited, and waited. Two days turned into two weeks, but it felt like twenty years to her. In the time between, she became more cautious with her words, whom she kept as company, what streets she took home, where she found her drugs, and which ones she bought. She likes to tell me Watts was where she learned everything.

One afternoon, my grandmother came home with a trunk full of groceries. My mother was a seasoned resident of the ghetto, sure, but she knew her duties as a kid, and stepped out in the driveway to bring the bags of food inside. There on the corner were the three boys, waiting to strike. They had followed my mom home a number of times without being noticed, monitoring her activities and taking note of her schedule, like true assassins.

All at once, the boys ran up to her, each hitting her one time, then fled the scene. Her lip was bleeding, and her knee was scraped. With no witnesses, my mother picked up the groceries she had dropped and brought them into the house. The boys never bothered her again.

My mother likes to say she was a kid when she moved to Watts. But she got out; escaping the circular processes that made it hard for a mother like hers to break the cycle. The rest of the world forgets about the people and places like these. The cycle of poverty becomes a teacher, the streets a classroom, and my mother's lost pre-pubesence means nothing to the streets of LA, except maybe the cost of their tuition. The streets hold the weight of every sized person who walks along them, carrying lessons that have no age limits or prerequisites, for the price of a decent, normal childhood.

WORDS

By Margaret Snyder

I see the words inside my head.
They're headed toward my mouth.

But will I be able to form those syllables,
and will I find all those sounds?

My aging brain is lots of fun
and keeps me on my toes.

Words that were once so easy to find
disappear without a moment's notice.

I see people I've known for years,
their faces are my dear old friends.

Don't ask me to introduce them to you.
Their names are just not with me right now.

But in the middle of my dinner tonight
that name will fly out of thin air.

I will shout, with a mouth full of food,
"Pegwee, her num is Pegwee."

Sorry, Aunt . . . eh, . . . ohh. Aunt whoever you are!
I didn't mean to spray you with peas.

You gotta grab names when they pop into your head,
and shout them when your brain comes through.

Now, if I could just remember my aunt's name!



FIGURE STUDY

by Frank Ramirez

Where
by Margo McCall

Let's go. Go where? Where we once went, back where it's hot, where the winds are living, breathing; everything is breathing, alive: everything.

You know. Desert landscape, territory of sand and scrub, where we left our hearts in a cave, beating in the dark.

OK, start packing. Pack up the canteens, binoculars, snakebite kits, water, food, shorts, sweaters, extra socks. Let's go. Now, before the beating hearts die.

Rubber on road. Road a ribbon. Ribbon of sky. San Bernardino Mountains rising above the flat desert. Desert towns growing: more traffic lights, more people, more mock adobe banks, more mini malls: more, more.

Highway 247. Old Woman Springs: sounds like someone weeping, tears from a rock, feeding green in deluge of dun dirt. Flamingo Heights, high on a ridge, but where are the birds? And Landers, the earthquake epicenter: where is it that the road ripped in two?

Two, two sides: a lake rubbing up against the edge of the road, like driving over a mirror, reflections of symmetry, fluid evidence, two worlds, two hearts, two.

Numbers, we are here: more than one million visitors, thousands of Joshua trees, hundreds of plant species, thirteen points of interest, five designated camp areas, four seasons, two Jeep trails, one designated highway.

Here. Here we are: here are the rangers, here is the list of rules, here is the monthly newsletter, here are the people, with climbing gear and mountain bikes. None of that for us. We want what's back there, beyond the setting sun, rays turning to shadow, secret place where mountain meets sky.

The signs, bad omens: Campground Full, No Vehicles Allowed, Re-vegetation in Progress, No Overnight Parking. Barriers: stakes in the ground and lines of boulders to keep us out.

Barriers we cross, beating need in our chests, beating the system, beating a retreat. Walking in darkness: dark, away from the road.

Overhead the dark blue dome has dropped. Curtain call. This is your world. First come the stars, then airplanes on flight paths, blinking lights, silence, the shadows of mountains, us. The night wind sneaks down, licks our cheeks. We have arrived. Are you scared?

Eyes of wild dogs caught in flashlight beams. Circling our tent in a pack. Then the vegetation, a low hum: this is our place, don't crush us. We have spikes and spines, we can hurt you too.

Sleeping, curved together like worms, dreaming of mountains, tracking constellations, grinding acorns into mash. Over centuries. We are.

Morning, breeze through the tent door: wake up, day is here. Sense of deep rest. Sense of place, a different place. Cactus, sage, and ocotillo waking up, raising their spines to sun's golden mist. Flock of migrating birds, bits of paper tossed in the air.

And there's a hawk. And there's a cactus wren perched on some spines. And there's a black lizard like the one you once caught. Wriggling, blue belly pinned down by your thumb.

We've taken: bladderwort gathering dust, spitting rattlesnakes in a cage, Joshua tree that died, old man cactus ripped from dirt. Now we take only the sparkling essence, effervescent fluid of experience. Take, take, take: nothing.

And onto our rounds. Picking up pieces of the past to make ourselves whole. Long walk to the Desert Queen Mine, over tailings, broken rocks, rusted cans, bits of barbed wire. Pounding hearts fill with blood. Bang, bang, bang: closer with each step.

And then darkness at high noon. Deep in a cave: tons of rock overhead. On the wall: the hearts intertwined with an arrow. With a piece of burned wood, you write: years.

Outside, lunch on a rock, peeling oranges. Remember, remember when? Standing on a rock. The first time I knew what alive was. Alive was us. Alive was everything.

Alive, the wind slapped my face. Wake up, girl. We're all around you. We're old men with puffed cheeks blowing down tents. And rocks crushing flesh. And cold sucking warmth. And bushes drawing blood. We can take your life, reduce you to pure spirit. And we are all around you: don't you ever forget that.

Later, back to the other world. The way out: people climbing rocks like ants, riding bikes on the main road. They don't know what we carry: where we've been: where. Where it all started, where everything is living, breathing, alive: everything.

THE LITTLE BOY IN THE MAN

By Cynthia Aholelei

Receding hairline, scarred up hands from hard labor,
 Not a day goes by he doesn't wonder,
 Yet the child locked deep inside wants to play,
 Boats, trains, motorcycles, remote control cars,
 The toys he dreams of having one day.
 While he works at his job in the day,
 His nights are spent in the playground of his dreams,
 Camping, hiking, horseback riding, fun and games.
 Quickly the time goes by time to face a new day.
 Yet passing through all these windows
 Hollow dreams of reality seep in to remind
 Him of the daily routines,
 Responsibilities, family, friends, bills, insurance, house payments
 College funds, food etc.
 As he labors hard, a smile comes upon his face
 Trade this life of hard times and broken dreams
 She smiles at him; he embraces it and a thousand more
 Massaging sore muscles, content his worn body.
 As he falls asleep in the solace of his bedroom
 The dreams of all the toys come back to those days
 When worries were less troublesome
 Playing hard, while becoming the man.

Homophonia.

By Aubrey Leahy

In the English language there are at least 14 words that sound the same but have different meanings. That word sounds like a beautiful flower. Rose. But it can also be spelled in several different ways. How many do you know?!

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 1. <u>Rose.</u> | <u>A fragrant flower.</u> |
| 2. _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | _____ |
| 6. _____ | _____ |
| 7. <u>Roes.</u> | <u>Fish eggs. (Think caviar!)</u> |
| 8. _____ | _____ |
| 9. _____ | _____ |
| 10. _____ | _____ |
| 11. _____ | _____ |
| 12. _____ | _____ |
| 13. _____ | _____ |
| 14. <u>Rows.</u> | <u>Michael rows the boat ashore. Hallelujah.</u> |

That's the last! Stumped? Final answers may be obtained by sending a cheque for \$100 (or more!). Made payable to: C.M.C.F.; Mail to P.O. Box 1398, Joshua Tree, CA 92252. If you Googled the answers, shame on you! Please double your contribution.

LUCERNE VALLEY: SCATTERING ASHES

By Chuck Von Nordheim

In the crook of the Joshua tree's arms,
 Gleamed a hubcap.
 I taught my six-year-old son in this green, fat desert.
 I put a pistol in the space between two hands
 Clasped like halted prayer.
 Through the sights, mi hijo.
 Freeze your heart.
 Fence in your breath.
 Then squeeze.

Mi hijo, did you find some girl
 Among the thistle and briars of that desert
 So far and so high that they sent you to?
 Did she have breasts round as hubcaps?
 Did you cup them in the space between two hands?
 Did you hold your breath the moment before?
 Did her love freeze your brain with her clear white light?
 Did she fence in your fear and loneliness?
 Did she teach you better lessons than your stupid papa?

The white flash of the mortar teaches nothing.
 It leaves nothing but empty space two hands can't hold
 His platoon found one foot in one boot.
 Mi hijo, gone like a prayer taken by the wind, mi hijo.
 Sometimes in the wild desert I left
 Cactuses flower.
 But I deserve only the kiss of the thistle.
 I deserve only the embrace of the briar.
 Nothing will ever bloom again in the desert your death made of my heart.

The Last Words

by Jake Sharp

“911, what’s your emergency?”

“Hi, uh, I need help.”

“Okay, what’s the problem, where are you?”

“I’ve been stabbed. I’m on the corner of 5th and Indian, ma’am.”

“Okay, I’m sending an ambulance right now. What’s your name sir?”

“Jacob. My name’s Jacob.”

“Okay, Jacob, where have you been stabbed?”

“My stomach. I was just walking, he came up, he... he stabbed me.”

“Do you know where he went, who’s ‘He’?”

“I’m not sure I can answer either of those. He took my wallet... *cough* and shoes, haha.”

“Jacob, I need you to put pressure on your wound. The ambulance is on its way.”

“...”

“Jacob?”

“Yes, I’m still here... *cough* Hey, can I ask you to do me a favor, ma’am?”

“Of course, Jacob, what is it?”

“Deliver a message... or messages I should say.”

“Jacob, you should be able to deliver the message yourself. The ambulance should be there any minute now.”

“No, I just... I just need a ‘just in case’... please *cough*.”

“Okay Jacob go ahead.”

“Please tell my ex-girlfriend that I still love her. *cough* I need her to know... that. I need her to know that I’m sorry... that I didn’t want to do what I did. God, she is beautiful. Her name is Rachel. She lives in Seattle. Please let her know... *cough*.”

“Jacob you need to stay with me now.”

“I’m still with you... I’m just tired... that’s all. Also, tell my sister that I’m sorry I didn’t tell her I was leaving, and that I love her very much. She always felt that she had to live up to... the expectations my parents wanted from her. Her name is Katie. She was the middle child... do you have siblings, ma’am?”

“I do. How’s your wound?”

“So, you probably know what I’m talking about. Hmm... *cough*. My wound is still bleeding. It’s coming out of my mouth *cough*... too. The blood, I mean.”

“Jacob, are you still applying pressure?”

“Yes, ma’am. Also, please tell my dad that I was so close to making it to him. I was supposed to see him... in Washington. I was really excited. We always have fun. Just the two of us... *cough*... he’s

a good guy. He raised me right; will you let him know that... please?"

"Jacob, you'll be able to tell him yourself. The ambulance will be there any minute."

"My mom... she's the most important. My dad left her with us. My sister and me... *cough*... we always came first. Our needs. I mean. She wouldn't eat. She wouldn't sleep. She doted on us. She'll be so upset when she hears about me."

"Jacob..."

"Just listen, please... Let her know I tried. Let her know I tried so hard, every day to make her proud... *cough*... she made me proud every day. I never told her that. I was selfish."

"You need to stay with me, Jacob. They're almost there."

"Tell her that all the money in my savings goes to Max. Only when he turns 18 though... he also needs to be in college. I still have her down as a co-signer for my account. She should have no... problems *cough*. Max is my little brother. He's going to be a great man... Please, tell her this. I love her so much... *cough*... please."

"Jacob, you're going to be okay! Stay with me. You'll be okay, your wound, apply pressure!"

"I never got... your name."

"Joyce. My name is Joyce."

"Joyce... what a beautiful name... *cough*."

"Jacob, stay with me now."

"..."

"Jacob, hey, they're almost there, keep talking to me; keep pressure on your wound!"

"Thank you... Joyce. Thank you..."

"Jacob!"

"..."

THERE IS NO ESCAPE

By Katrina Phipps

A gentle kiss

A soft caress

My wings falter

As I gasp for breath

Laces bind me

Wrapping around so tight

I have not escaped your torment

Your endless night

NOVEMBER 5TH, 2015

By Aubrey Leahy

Bonfire night in Great Britain

It's a day of celebration to commemorate

the failure of a plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605.

Remember, remember

The fifth of November.

The gunpowder, treason, and plot.

The chief plotter, Guy Fawkes, who was reputedly

The last man to enter Parliament with honest intentions,

was hanged, drawn, and quartered

on January 31st 1606.

Not much of such a great import happened in Britain on that date for
another

448 years when, on January 31st 1944,

a day when fires were still being quenched

and people still were being dug out of rubble,

battered, bombed, and

shattered homes and shops and

hospitals and houses

and steeples

and a multitude of newly created widows and orphans

abounded.

All as a result of

an event the night before

when an aerial armada of 221 German bombers

sought to pulverize London

into a war-ending submission.

That was the morning I was born.

I never found out how Adolf H heard, but know ye, know ye all

This was the very same day he knew his number was up.

Coincidence? I think not. Remember, remember

The fifth of November

The gunpowder, treason, and plot.

All while the second war to end all wars

was drawing to its close.

WHEN I CAN'T SLEEP

By Jake Sharp

Sometimes I lie in bed before I drift off
 And think about traveling back in time
 Sometimes I'm a ghost or a guardian angel
 Guiding myself towards the goals I could have and should have achieved
 Maybe a slight breeze, a rush of cold air
 Just a chill to make myself realize that I am going in the wrong direction
 Sometimes I'm physical
 An older me
 Appearing out of nowhere
 In the middle of my junior year chemistry class
 Beating myself up in front of friends
 Because I was daydreaming instead of studying
 Or slapping myself before I said something I shouldn't have
 Or dragging myself out of bed when I was feeling lazy
 A constant reminder
 Then sometimes I become myself
 I change my personality
 I know when the light turns green
 I know when to stop
 I know that I'll play football
 I know I'll get straight As
 I know how to be a better boyfriend
 I know how to be a better brother
 I know how to be a better son
 I know and remember everything
 But how could I be happy

Knowing that there is a me
 In another reality?
 My reality
 That still struggles
 That still cries
 That still wants to do things
 He tells himself he can't
 He wants to be able to travel back in time
 And make sure his mistakes
 Don't become his reality
 He needs to accept that
 I need to accept that
 One day I will not lie in bed
 Before I drift off
 And wish that I could travel
 Back to the days
 That make me feel the way I do now



LANDSCAPE
by Andrew Seaberg

The Supes
by J. Scott Blankenship

There were three that went missing, so the other guy's not far from here. All that's left of these two are skeletons adorned with a little desiccated skin and some disintegrating denim. I'm not getting any closer. The summer sun seems to have cleaned up the bones, but I'll leave the poking around to the Sheriff's Department and the coroner—after all, as my wife likes to say, I'm just a Forest Service cop. Anyway, I'm glad the mystery is solved. Well, it wasn't exactly a mystery; everyone knew they were out here somewhere. These morons thought they were going to find the Dutchman's gold.

The bones seem to fit the landscape. I know it sounds a little ghoulish, but it's true. The Supes, the Superstition Mountains, are like a big desert garden. This is the look the xeriscapers in Scottsdale are shooting for, and these two skeletons look like they belong. If I could take the five hundred square feet surrounding these remains and magically transport them to the side-yard of some Scottsdale mansion, there's no telling how much they'd pay me.

Every so often some nutjob comes up here thinking he's gonna strike it rich and ends up getting himself in trouble. We can usually rescue him (yep—always a him). We cite the nitwit for messing with the desert ecology—picks and shovels can play hell with some of our fragile ecosystems—and send him home to his family, if he's got one. Never before have we had three at once. The idiocy required to pull a stunt like this isn't all that common.

It's getting on toward three o'clock, so I better get back to my rig and call this in. For the life of me, I don't know how we missed these guys. It's pretty embarrassing. They were long dead before we even knew to look, but somebody had to come right past here. I'm surprised nobody smelled them. I shake my canteen. It's over half full, so I take a long drink. Plenty of water—this is a pretty easy hike on a relatively cool day like today.

Turns out one of the three came looking for the Lost Dutchman Mine a couple of years back. That time, the rescue team got to him in time—barely. I guess he was able to talk a couple of his buddies into joining him for another try. Natural selection.

Becky is parked in front of the tube watching some MTV reality nonsense. As usual, she doesn't acknowledge my arrival.

"I found some human remains up in the Supes. Figure it's those guys that went missing last summer."

"Wow," Becky laboriously hauls herself from the, a depression she's created in the sofa and turns toward me, "That was all over the news! They were looking for that stupid mine."

"Yeah, I think so. I only found two of the three, but the other one has got to be close by. I radioed the sheriff, those guys had an ongoing investigation, so it's their baby now."

"Stupid Californians. That place is an idiot factory," Becky says.

"They were from Colorado."

"Wherever," says Becky, "Are you going to be interviewed on the news, or anything?"

"The Sheriff's Department spokesperson will handle the press. I'm walking a couple deputies out to the site in the morning."

Clearly disappointed, Becky sinks back into the sofa. "You never

get any credit with this goddamned Forest Service job. The sheriff's deputies don't even treat you like a real cop. You should have never left Mesa."

I don't bother to say "I wasn't happy there" again. Every conversation with Becky eventually comes around to her dissatisfaction with my career choices. "Where are the kids?"

"Mom's got 'em. She's taking to them to Chuck E. Cheese and a movie."

"Gross," I say, "Jake hates Chuck E Cheese."

"No he doesn't. He's nine. As long as Grandma's paying for video games, he's happy. You're the one that hates Chuck E Cheese."

I want to say, I hate you, your trailer trash mother, and Chuck E. Cheese, but instead I blow her off and head toward the garage.

Before I can close the door, Becky yells, "Besides, Maude still loves it."

I stow my service weapon, a Glock 9mm, in the safe, and then take the iPod out of my shirt pocket and plug it into the dock. Droning noise rock comes on and fills the garage. I've been downloading some indie stuff. I don't like all of it, but at least it sounds fresh. Becky doesn't listen to music anymore. It's just as well; she used to love Matchbox Twenty and Faith Hill. I hope the music keeps Becky from coming out and mounting a spirited defense of giant rats and bad pizza. In Becky's world, nothing is too trivial for an argument.

The marriage really went south when I left Mesa P.D. Becky was in love with that job, but she wasn't the one that had to do it, was she? She doesn't know shit about what it takes to be a cop. The kind of shit you've got to put up with. The first thing you learn on the job is that you're not a hero; you're a fucking garbage man. The upstanding citizens usually aren't the victims of serious crimes. I know that's not what you see on CNN, but it's the truth. Sure, some unlucky bastard winds up in the wrong place at the wrong time once in a while, but most of the people involved in criminal activity, perps and victims, are on the fringe of society. They're poor, addicted, abused, neglected... crazy. Check the list. Many are all of the above. Put it this way, these aren't folks you're likely to have over for Sunday dinner.

It's probably not always their fault that they ended up on the trash

heap. Look, life deals some people a shitty hand, but I was a cop, not a social worker. A cop's primary job is to make society's dregs and their unseemly activities invisible to the nice taxpaying citizens. To make sure the nice neighborhoods stay nice. The nicer the neighborhood, the more taxes its residents pay, the more attention they get from the local police. To protect and serve. It's a dirty job on many levels.

I applied to the Forest Service for a ranger position, but because of my background, I ended up being hired as an LEO—a Law Enforcement Officer. Now, I check use permits and deal with drunken boaters bouncing their way home from the reservoirs on the Apache trail. You get the occasional armed redneck poacher, but they're not in enough trouble to do anything crazy. Out in that desert there is no gang violence, no deranged transients, no drug-deals-gone-bad. The pay isn't great, but the benefits are good, and I enjoy the team I work with. Becky loves that cop culture. The Thursday nights at the karaoke bar. I don't.

When the kids get home, Becky sends them into the garage to say goodnight.

"Yeah, it was okay." Jake's trying to be neutral, neither wanting to betray me nor be unappreciative of his grandmother's kindness.

"Grandma let you play every game in the place?"

"Yeah," the kids answer in unison. Maude chirps, "I won Jakey in Jelly Cannon," and Jake shrugs like he has no idea what she's talking about.

"Better go on in and get to bed. Love you." I know Becky will stay upstairs once she puts the kids to bed, so I wait an hour and go into the family room to crash on the couch.

I'm early, it's not even 7:30, but the deputies are already at the trailhead when I pull up. We were supposed to meet at 8:00. Old Jimmy Parsons, along with two young deputies I've never met, takes the hike with me. The young guys are anxious to get to the site, but we have to hang back with Jimmy. He's cussing and complaining the whole way. If not for those high-profile bones, not in a million years would he drag his paunchy, fifty-eight year-old ass up this trail.

There is no excuse for not finding these guys sooner. Truth is, it was hot, we knew they were dead, and we just couldn't be bothered to look that hard. When we get to the site, the deputies, neither of

whom was involved in the initial search, are trying to politely ignore the elephant in the room, or the bones in the wash, as it were. We find the third guy, maybe half a mile up the little arroyo. Unlike the other two, his remains were scattered. He died in an exposed area and something bigger than a bug got to him before he dried up. Coyotes. Buzzards. He must have been the first one to drop out.

In summer, a young, healthy person can survive two days up here without water—tops. If you get seriously lost, you're fucked. The critters—moving only at night—can scare up a little water, but sixty-five-year-old assholes with gold fever don't stand a chance. They don't see so well in the dark. I head back to my truck, leaving the deputies to wait for the mounted recovery team. By the time I get back to the trailhead, the team has the horses out of the trailers and are busy saddling them up.

I'm different from most of the people I know. My blood pressure actually goes down when I'm at work. When I'm on the job, I try not to think about my domestic problems, especially on a beautiful day like today. In October, my job just kicks ass. There's less to do, more time to do it, and much better weather to do it in. I'm going to see Charlie at the maintenance yard and pick up some free coolant.

Charlie's been trying to give away the coolant for weeks. Now that the Forest Service only allows the stuff that's been spiked with Bitrex, he's stuck with a fifty-five gallon drum he can't use. Ethylene glycol is a major component of coolant. It's sweet so the wildlife laps it up, if they find it. These days, the manufacturers add Bitrex to make the glycol bitter and unpalatable. With the old stuff, if anything leaks out of your vehicle, the critters are right on it. Twenty four to thirty-six hours later, it's goodbye endangered red squirrel. It will be fine in Becky's car. There are no endangered species between our house and Walmart. Ol' Becky's always had a bit of a sweet tooth. I grin at the thought.

When I pull into the maintenance yard, Charlie comes out carrying two five-gallon jerry cans of coolant. Charlie is skinny and leathery with unruly white hair, and he always has a red shop rag hanging out of the back pocket of his greasy khakis. I can't believe he's carrying both cans at once. He looks like he's ready to slip a nut. I don't have the heart to tell him that I won't use much of it. I can run the rest of it down to the household hazardous waste drop-off. Charlie and I

wrestle the coolant into my Expedition.

He says, "I told 'em I could just mix it with the other one. It'd probably make it bitter enough, but they want to get rid of it...so."

When I tell him that I'm going to see Xochi, he raises an eyebrow and grins. "Yep."

"She's the boss, Charlie."

"Uh huh," he says dubiously. I don't respond.

I feel like some love-struck adolescent when I spot Xochi's truck in the district office parking lot. We've become friends, but part of me would like it to be more. A big part, maybe. Xochi's one of the District Rangers. District Rangers are more important than they sound. Xochi is essentially in charge of the Mesa District. The kooks usually start searching for the mine in Lost Dutchmen State Park, not our jurisdiction, but our federal wilderness area surrounds it. The Superstition Wilderness Area is part of Tonto National Forest—and that's part of Xochi's district. I found the old boys' bones on federal land. Law Enforcement Officers have their own command structure, so Xochi's not technically my boss, but the District Rangers are all-powerful within their jurisdiction, and she likes being kept in the loop.

"You guys located the third man?" Xochi says as she comes out of her office and into the visitor's area to greet me. The volunteers have gone for the day, so it's just her and me. Xochi's no glamour queen in her khaki shorts, asexual Park Service shirt, and big clunky hiking boots, but something about her just does it for me. Maybe it's because she's the opposite of Becky—athletic, ambitious and enthusiastic. Xochi's got her black hair pulled back in a long braid and her Smokey Bear hat sits atop her head like she used a level to straighten it.

She looks down and shakes her head, "Such a sad thing. No matter how much we try to warn...how far in are the remains?"

"They were about seven or eight miles from the trailhead. Once they got dehydrated, they were probably really disoriented."

"Jesus. What the hell were they thinking?"

"They thought the Lost Dutchman Mine was just over the next rise. We think they only had one bottle of water each. You know the twenty-ouncers like you get out of a vending machine. We didn't find

any canteens."

"Poor cabezons," Xochi says.

"The sheriff's department brought up a recovery team on horseback. My guess is, these guys were scouting up the wash, went too far and took a couple wrong turns. They eventually headed back in the right direction. We heard from a family member that one guy had a bad ticker, and he may well have been the one who got in trouble. I'll bet they waited around to see if he would recover, and by the time they realized he wouldn't, it was too late for everybody."

Xochi says, "I don't know what we can do. We post signs all over," she sighs and shakes her head again. "How long do you think they were out there? You know...alive."

"The rule of threes doesn't apply around here in summer. Considering their age and questionable health, they would have probably been incapacitated by early the second day. Walking down those rocky washes is challenging in the best of conditions. A twenty-year-old might have made it. By day three they were gone."

"I'd like to go out there with you tomorrow, if that's okay," Xochi says, "I want a better sense of what happened."

"No problem, I'm sure the recovery team has it all mopped up. We can meet at the trailhead. You want to hike, or should we pick up the horses?"

"We can hike." Xochi doesn't care much for horses.

"We should get up there early. It took me about two and a half hours to reach them. Nothing any of us could have done, Xochi. The old guys were nuts. Their own fantasies did them in."

"Yeah, I know. But they were guests of the Park Service. Our customers." She's really upset. She takes her job seriously. "See you tomorrow, Matt." Xochi spins around, whipping her braid as she does, and heads back into her office.

I'm realistic about my relationship with Xochi. Even if I leave Becky, I can't be positive she'll date me. I know some of our coworkers are curious about our relationship, but at this point, we're just lunch buddies.

As usual, Becky's burrowed into the couch when I get home. Just

the sight of her puts me in a foul mood. "Where are the kids?"

"Upstairs, I guess."

"What the hell do you do here all day?" This isn't completely fair; she keeps a pretty clean house. What I'm really pissed about is that she keeps putting off going back to work. The kids are old enough for her to start contributing financially. We discussed this before we had Maude, and Becky agreed. Now it's just one fucking excuse. Working would be good for her. Seems like she's already gone to seed. Sitting around watching trash TV. And now she's hitting the sauce. She's becoming one of those closet drinkers. That's where I found the booze—in the closet. I've never come home to find her obviously drunk, so I haven't confronted her about it. She'll deny that there's a problem and it will just start another pointless argument, anyway. I'm keeping a close eye on the situation, for the kids' sake.

"I clean your goddamn house and take care of your children. What do you think?" Becky looks confused and a little shocked, but not hurt.

"I want a divorce," I say, "I've had enough." Now, she looks hurt and I feel a twinge of regret. Five years ago, the look on her face might have gotten to me.

"Fine," Becky says, "If you want to give up your kids, move out. Go play house with that ranger you're so sweet on. What's her name again? Splotchi?"

"Xochi? The District Ranger?" I act like I can't believe what I'm hearing. "We're colleagues—nothing more." Who the hell told her about Xochi? Some loudmouth from the Sheriff's Department must have blabbed about us on karaoke night at Bad Ass Barbecue. There's always a lot of local law enforcement there on Thursday nights. Including people we know from Mesa P.D. What is it about cops and karaoke?

"Uh huh." Becky's not buying my characterization of Xochi's and my relationship, even though it is largely on the level.

"You shouldn't believe everything you hear from those Mesa cops."

"Shouldn't I?" Becky says.

"No you shouldn't," I say, "Look Becky, we've got nothing. We never talk about anything besides the kids and bills. We don't have sex anymore."

"That's not fair. Try living with migraines and endometriosis."

She's full of shit and that pisses me off, even though the thought of having sex with her makes my skin crawl. "Whatever. You're a fucking hypochondriac. When were you ever diagnosed with endometriosis?" I'm not a hundred percent sure what endometriosis is, but I'd bet my bottom dollar she doesn't have it.

Becky's shouting now, "Look it up on the internet. I have all the symptoms. You're a fucking insensitive asshole."

I head upstairs. Jake and Maude are at the top. I remember that I'm supposed to take them to get their Halloween costumes tonight. Maude's crying and Jake has his arm around her shoulders. They've heard something in our voices. They sense that this is more serious than usual.

I say, "You two ready to get your costumes?"

Maude says, "Are you leaving us, Daddy?"

"I'll never leave you, pumpkin. I'll always be here for you--you too, Jakester. Now let's hit the road. We're going in Daddy's work truck." It's a government issue Expedition, which I really shouldn't use as a personal vehicle, but if I tried to take the Tahoe, Becky might turn vindictive and claim she needed it. I load them up and we're off to Target to pick out costumes. Jake loves riding in the police truck. Maude doesn't care. I hope Jake avoids police vehicles, as either driver or unwilling passenger.

In Target, Jake takes forever deciding between Ironman and Zombie Ninja. Maude grabs her costume within thirty seconds of our arrival. It's a genie costume, and I wonder why she likes it so much. I don't remember any of her books or DVDs having girl genies. Jake finally decides on Ironman.

As we put the costumes in the back of the Expedition, Jake sees the two five-gallon Jerry Cans of coolant. "What's that? Gas?"

"It's coolant for the Tahoe. They were giving it away at work. I forgot to put it in the garage."

“Is it dangerous?” Jake asks. I’m always on him about safety.

“Only if you drink it.”

Xochi’s raring to go when I meet her at the trailhead. She’s always dressed for a hike, but I don’t think she gets out in the desert as much as she’d like. The deputies have the trailhead parking area secured, but Xochi has moved one of the barricades so I can pull in. On the ride in, I got confirmation from the Sheriff’s Department that the last of the remains were removed late yesterday.

“Had your coffee yet?” Xochi asks. “I brought you one in case you didn’t.”

“That was nice, thanks. You’ll never see a cop turn down a cup of coffee. Did you remember the donuts?”

“Sorry, I forgot. I’ve got a couple of Luna bars, though.”

I tell myself not to discuss my marital situation with Xochi. Be patient I tell myself, but we’re only a quarter-mile down the trail when I start to tell her about last night’s argument. “She thinks I’m cheating on her.”

“You?” says Xochi in a tone I find mildly insulting, “With who?”

“Uh...she doesn’t know.” I shouldn’t have mentioned that part. I hope she doesn’t notice me blushing. I change the subject and tell her what Becky said about her and the kids staying in the house.

Xochi says, “I think she has a bit of a fantasy going about what life after divorce will be like. My sister went through it. You’ll pay child support, get Maude and Jake every other weekend, and maybe a week or two during summer vacation. Becky and the kids will probably have to move into a condo. You’ll have a little apartment somewhere. That’s what it’ll be. It’s not like this is uncharted territory.”

“I don’t know if I can handle being separated from the kids.”

“Becky’s basically a good mom, right? So you have zero chance of getting custody of the kids. Even if she was less than perfect, the nature of your job and your hours would be a problem.” Xochi, probably without realizing it, shakes her head pessimistically.

We’re at the site in just under two hours. Xochi is a hardcore hiker and my male ego forced me to keep up.

“Oh my god! They were only right here?” She says when I point out the spot where I found the first one. “How did we miss them?”

“Remember, it was two days before the families even suspected anything was wrong, and another day before the sheriff’s deputies identified the car at the trailhead. Everybody assumed they started from a trailhead near the Lost Dutchman visitor center. By the time we got here it was recovery. It was never a rescue.”

“I’m not blaming you guys.” Xochi puts her hands on her hips and gazes over the rugged landscape.

“It was hot... We should have looked harder.”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself. You did your job.” Our gazes lock for a moment. Looking away she asks, “Where were the other guys?”

Xochi’s back to the district office, and I’m patrolling the Apache Trail. I don’t know why the guidebooks encourage people to take this route. It’s a narrow dirt track with few guardrails, but plenty of three hundred foot drops and washboard. Every so often we get some retiree that panics on Fish Creek Grade and just sits there in his Buick blocking the road. The seniors would be better off going to the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix.

I’ve been thinking about Bitrex, or the lack of it in the coolant Charlie gave me. I heard it takes about a cup of ethylene glycol-based coolant to kill an average-sized person. Becky might take a cup and a half. That baby weight’s been pretty stubborn since Maude. Since Maude and the new Ben and Jerry’s shop at the mall. Pretty goddamn stubborn. I’ve heard it’s all on the Internet, the dosing information. If I was really going to off someone, there’s no way I’d leave a trail like that. I stop the truck at an overlook and survey the canyon below. Rugged and remote. You could put a body down there and no one would ever fucking find it. That’s a fact.

People poisoned with it get sick as hell. Ethylene glycol, that is. They start vomiting and eventually go into convulsions. After that it’s coma, organ failure, and adios muchachita. Takes a while, though. On the upside, glycols don’t hang out in the environment very long. If I got Becky, for example, to swallow a couple good-sized doses and hid her out in this desert, by the time anyone found her, there would be no evidence. Not without soft tissue to analyze. Even if there were fancy

forensics that could be done, no one would think of it. The forensic pathologist would look at those bones, sanitized by the desert, shrug her shoulders and say she died of exposure. I get to the pavement near Roosevelt Dam and turn around. I haven't seen another vehicle the whole trip.

I couldn't do it at home. I couldn't have Becky puking and convulsing in front of the kids. I think it takes a while. It's not instantaneous. Days maybe. I'd have to get her to go camping with me and then say she got lost. I could falsely identify the search area and play the concerned husband. I pull into another overlook, this one above Apache Lake, and mull over this scenario. No good. Camping to her is an RV by the lake with a bunch of Mesa cops. I could never get Becky to come out in the desert—just me and her.

I get out of the truck and walk down the steep canyon a little ways. I've walked down here many times. There's a little outcrop of smooth limestone, which is pretty rare in these parts. It's mostly volcanic rock around here, dacite, andesite, rhyolite, and basalt—rough, rugged rock. This spot is not as cruel and unforgiving as the rest of this canyon. There must be what passes for a spring somewhere near. Palo verde and ironwood trees contrast the ocotillo, cholla, and barrel cactus further down slope. The saguaro are really hearty here. They look like they're raising their arms in celebration of this little oasis.

The only way the glycol would work is if I gave it to her in small doses and poisoned her over time. The slow ethylene glycol poisoning has been done. I saw it on Forensic Files. They had a hell of a time proving that case. Prove it or not, everyone would know it was me. Her parents would get custody of the kids. Instead of going to college, Jake would get a trucker hat, a sleeveless t-shirt emblazoned with a Confederate flag, and become a regular at dirt track races and Toby Keith concerts. Maude would have a meth-baby at seventeen. She'd have a gold front tooth, a bad complexion, and an abusive, ex-con boyfriend with initials J.D. for a name.

We're all about appearances, Becky and I. She looks like a good wife and I look like someone to be trusted—a nice policeman. I hike up to the overlook and get in the truck. I'll be off-duty by the time I get to Apache Junction. I start the Expedition and it comes to me. Appearances... there's that bottle of Jack in the closet. No one knows

about it but Becky and I, and she doesn't know I know. If they found glycol in her system, I'd be screwed, but they'd never look. She'd never tell anyone about the hidden whiskey bottle. Our shitty doctor would claim it's a virus and the HMO wouldn't approve any sophisticated tests. They'd be my unwitting coconspirators. I could have her cremated and scatter her ashes up here in the Supes.

When I arrive in my neighborhood, the streets are wet from a brief thundershower. The monsoon is long over, but the odd afternoon storm still passes over leaving Mesa warm and muggy. The rain never lasts more than a few minutes, but it knocks down the dust and, at least for a little while, gives our cul-de-sac a tropical feel. I'm anxious as I pull into the driveway. My fantasy has left me feeling guilty. I don't feel like going in, but after a few minutes, I force myself out of the truck and into the house.

Becky's kneeling in front of Maude and Jake on the family room floor. The kids are in full costume, make up and all for Maude, even though it's still three days before Halloween.

"Look Daddy, we've got a genie and Ironman right here in our family room!" Becky says with a weak smile.

"Well look at that. Aren't you guys a little early for Halloween?"

"We're practicing, Daddy," Maude says and gives me an exasperated look for not knowing "This way when it's Halloween we'll know how to get ready."

"I see," Jake's too into his Ironman persona to join the conversation.

"Cute, huh?" says Becky.

"Yep. Pretty cute."

"I grilled some burgers, if you're interested " Becky's a little distant now, the Kodak moment having faded, but still cordial "Liz and I were gonna have a girls' night out, if you don't mind looking after Maude and Jakey."

Liz is the wife of a Mesa cop. "Knock yourself out." I knew she wanted something. It's still Becky. She's never nice without a reason.

"I'll get the kids out of their costumes, but then I have to get ready."

I walk into the kitchen to grab a bite to eat and Becky follows me. “Go upstairs, I’ll be right up,” she yells back at the kids.

I say, “We’ll have to sit down and talk at some point.”

She says, “Let’s let the kids enjoy Halloween, then we’ll figure it out. Cuchi, or whatever her name is, can hold on until then.”

Becky just can’t keep her white-trash nature in check. I fight back the disgust. “Xochi? I told you, we’re just friends. Lunch buddies, I guess. I’ve never slept around on you, Becky.”

“But you have feelings for her.” Becky is now in full Jerry Springer mode.

I say, “I don’t know. I do know what we have isn’t working.”

“What do you expect after ten years of marriage and two kids—some torrid romance? Aren’t you a little young for a mid-life crisis?”

“I’m also a little young to give up on happiness. We don’t owe it to anyone to stay in a bad situation, Beck.”

“What about your childrens’ happiness?” She stomps back into the family room.

I follow her, “Don’t ever question my commitment to the kids,” I say in a low voice. “Stop laying on the fucking guilt. This is about us—not them.”

Becky goes upstairs to deal with the kids, and I return to the kitchen. I’m too pissed off to eat. I grab a beer out of the refrigerator, but then put it back. I’m watching the kids tonight and I want to maintain the moral high ground.

Sitting at the kitchen table, I try to think back to a time when Becky and I were happy. I guess it was when Maude was a baby. It felt like a new start. Everything good in our lives had come from Jake, and we were kind of like drunks trying to extend a perfect buzz. You know, if one was good, two must be better. And it was better for a while.

The kids have been acting up all night. When they’re not fighting with each other, they’re conspiring to do something I’ve asked them not to. Jake spills Dr. Pepper on the new carpet in the living room after I’ve just told him to drink it in the kitchen. I spent twenty-three bucks a yard for this fucking Berber carpet that Becky had to have.

“Jake, I told you not to bring that soda in here!”

“Sorry,” he says in a snotty tone that reminds me of his mother.

I grab his arm. Too hard.

“Ow, ow, you’re hurting me!” Tears well up in Jake’s eyes, more of shock and frustration than from any pain I caused him.

I let him go and calm myself. He’s getting to be a big boy, but not that big. Maude peers around the corner, not wanting to miss the action. The reality of having sole responsibility for these guys is setting in like the heartburn after a three-pound apple fritter and a half a pot of Forest Service coffee. It’s nothing I can’t handle, but it’s in stark contrast to my fantasy over the past few days. I have to admit that I let Becky do a lot of the dirty work, but simultaneously I realize I don’t approve of the way she’s doing it. Jake and I clean up his mess, and then he and Maude run off to find more opportunities for mischief.

The kids are finally asleep. I go out in the garage and look at the Jerry Cans full of coolant. I go back into the house and look at Becky’s stash of booze. Just like the last time I checked, there’s about half a bottle of Jack Daniels. She doesn’t seem to be drinking it very fast, or maybe she is and this is a new bottle. Becky used to only drink Jack when she was really partying. I imagine her, a big tumbler full of Jack and Coke, rooting for some pregnant trailer-park princess on TV—as the woman defends her nineteen year-old baby-daddy from her heavily muscled, recently released from prison husband—while the kids are in the garage plugging in my Toro 22” Power Hedge Trimmer.

It’s 11:30 and Becky will be home soon. I’m rifling around in the kitchen cupboards and drawers looking for a measuring cup. I just want to remind myself of actual physical space required to contain a cup of liquid. I come across a turkey baster and set it next to the sink. I go upstairs and check on the kids. They’re both sleeping peacefully. I go back downstairs and out on the front porch. The hair stands up on my neck as I look up and down the street for signs of Liz’s faded old Mercedes bringing Becky home. I feel like a teenager getting ready to take his sleeping parents’ car for a late night joy ride. I grab the baster on my way into the garage. My heart’s pounding a little. Listening for Liz’s car pulling into the driveway, I try to remove the cap from one of the Jerry Cans. It won’t budge. I consider just going back in the house, but decide to try the other one. I twist hard on the cap and it resists, but

then there is slight movement and the cap begins to loosen.

The baster holds nearly half a cup. It looks like it's filled with Mountain Dew. A Jack Dew. Becky use to drink those in college. I wipe off the baster with a red shop rag then wrap the baster with it. Back in the kitchen, I put the baster on the counter next to the sink. I go into the hallway and grab the bottle of Jack out of the closet and take it back to the sink. I can hear my own heartbeat as I empty the contents of the syringe into the whiskey bottle. I watch to see how much the coolant changes the appearance of the whisky.

I hear something behind me. I whip around to see Maude looking up at me.

"Daddy, I want a drink of water."

"Okay, honey." My hands are shaking as I put down the baster and bottle and wash my hands twice before getting a glass from the cabinet. I fill it from the tap. "Here you go."

"I don't like that water. I want it from the fridgerator."

I pour the water into the sink and go to the fridge to refill her glass. "Here you go, plum."

I hear Becky's key in the lock. Shit! I never heard Liz's old car rattle into the driveway. When Maude starts toward the door, I open the cabinet door beneath the sink and jam the baster into the wastebasket. I quickly empty the Jack Daniels bottle, as I glance out the kitchen window. The car pulling into the street isn't Liz's. It's a sporty new Mazda I don't recognize.

I hear Becky say, "What are you doing up, Maude?" She walks in with Maude on her hip.

"She wanted a drink. They went to bed around nine," I say defensively.

Becky edges closer to the sink and spies the Jack Daniels bottle. She shoots me a puzzled look and takes Maude up to bed without commenting. I know she'll be back, so I stay at the sink, taking the opportunity to rinse the bottle. When she gets back, I hold up the empty bottle, "I found this in the closet. Gettin' hammered when you're supposed to be watching the kids?"

"I take one little shot every once in a while. I never get hammered.

You drink at home, why shouldn't I?" Becky says.

"I don't stash a bottle."

"Don't get all high and mighty with me. You're the one abandoning your family." Becky's buzzed and doesn't seem interested in making this a long conversation.

I ask, "Who dropped you off?" Becky cocks her head and gives me a dismissive sneer. She turns around and stomps upstairs. I listen as she goes into the bathroom. As soon as the bathroom door closes, I fish the baster out of the trash and sneak out to the garage. I stash it in my roll-around toolbox. Back in the kitchen, I rinse the Jack bottle ten or twelve more times with hot water and put it in the recycling. Becky never comes back down, and I spend a sleepless night on the couch.

It's Friday morning and the commander doesn't have any special tasks for me. I tell him I'm gonna go up the wash where we recovered the bodies. Clear up a few things for my report. The boss is fine with me going; he just tells me to make sure I've got my radio with me, in case anything comes up. Xochi might make the hike with me if she had time, but I don't want to see her. Tomorrow, I'll use the baster to top off the Tahoe's coolant reservoir, and then take it and the two Jerry Cans down to the local household hazardous waste drop-off.

It's almost Halloween, but when I get to the trailhead, the day is quite warm. As I trudge up the trail, a pair of Great-tailed grackles flies ahead of me. They land and look back to screech their accusations. I get to the spot where I found the fortune hunter, and I realize that I've lost two hours. I don't remember anything about the hike, except the Grackles. I don't even remember getting off the trail.

The only trace of the old-timer is a little disturbed soil where the coroner removed his remains. I try hard to feel bad for this guy and his buddies, but it's just not there. Sitting on my haunches near where I found him, I take a long draw from my canteen and think about how the desert purifies everything--how the flesh, the desire, the need, are all eventually burned away. The grackles fly over, no longer interested, and when I stretch out in the shallow depression left by the technicians from the coroner's office, it seems like a perfect fit.

COLORS OF CANCER

By Betty O'Connell

They say your cancer has a color,
Of this I did not know.
Do they think by giving it a color
The facts won't hurt us so?

When I walk into your room
The first color I see is red,
From the anger burning deep inside
As I see you lying there in bed.
I'm angry at the cancer
I'm angry at lots more too.
I'm also angry with myself
Because there's nothing I can do.

Then the red turns into black
As the anger turns to fear.
I'm being swallowed up by darkness
With screams no one can hear.
It feels like walking through a maze
Where I cannot see at all,
Mentally reaching out with my hands
To try and find the wall.
I know the black can't stay for long,
I have a job to do.
The most important job I've had
Is taking care of you.

As the black fades in to grey
I see you watching me.
The colors flashing through my mind
That I'm glad you cannot see.
The grey has settled over the room
As you smile and hold my hand.
It takes a moment for my mind to clear
And I know you understand.

So as the grey is cleared away
I see with some surprise
The color of your cancer
There within your eyes.



WIND STORM, WAVE & MARSHMALLOW IN A FIRE
by Lowen Baird



UNTITLED
by Unknown

WRITERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Cynthia Aholelei

page: 84

I have been writing poetry for the last 25 years, there are over 100 poems in my portfolio I have enjoyed the arts for as long as I can remember. My two sons are my biggest fans; in fact, my youngest son has done some artwork on some of my poems. Someday I would like to publish a book of my work with my son as the illustrator. I have been published in the Howl for 2 years now and enjoy reading the other poems by my peers. I also make quilts and embroider whenever I have time left from studying. I love to read books and poems whenever I can.

Lowen Baird

pages: 15

Age: 10 Name: Lowen Baird Job (hobby): Portrait Art
Favorite Food: Pizza, burritos & burgers

J. Scott Blankenship

page: 97

received his MFA in Creative Writing and Writing for Performing Arts from the University of California, Riverside. His work has appeared in Black Denim Lit and the San Francisco Bay Guardian's Haiku Corner. He lives in Aptos California with his wife Cynthia and their two cats Maleka and Milo. In addition to writing short stories, Scott is hard at work on the second draft of his first novel.

Lynda Burns

pages: 22, 44, 70

"Art comes from joy and pain. But mostly from pain." Edvard Munch

Sara Cruz

page: 75

"How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live."
—Henry David Thoreau

Courtney Paige Freeman

page: 69

Courtney has always enjoyed writing and plans to continue it in the future.

Greg Gilbert

pages: 28

Greg Gilbert taught English at CMC until his retirement in 2011. In 1996 he and a group of extraordinarily dedicated students founded HOWL, now in its 20th year. Today Greg serves on the CMC Board of Trustees, remains active with state and local education issues, but mostly he enjoys being a husband to his wife Candace and the Papa to their four children and five grandchildren. As always, Greg is grateful to the CMC Foundation for funding CMC's literary magazine and to Professor Ellen Baird for her ongoing role as the magazine's Faculty Advisor. He is thankful also to Michel Walker for years of creative writing student submissions. Twenty

years of HOWL! Hey, Dena Gast and Catherine Inscore, how about this, eh?

Mike Green

page: 43

born Michael James Green, Chicago, Illinois, (south side) 1946. Father: Hank, auto-mechanic, professional baseball player. Mother: Rena, musician, painter, poet, secretary (104 wpm Remington manual). Education: El Rancho High School, Merchant Marine, USMC, CSULA, St. Catherine's College, Oxford. Married: Nancy, 45 years (met in 6th grade). Children: Molly and Hank. Grandchildren: Aidan and Bradley. The father is father to the man, also the mother.

Carey Ann Hays

pages: 24, 26

I am a graphic designer, website developer, and communications specialist with more than 25 years' experience in my trade. I graduated from Copper Mountain College in May 2015, with an Associate Degree in Computer Information Systems, and will complete my Computer Programming degree from CMC in May 2016. As a young person, I fancied myself a writer. I ventured into journalism in high school and early college. Journalism is such a structured and disciplined writing style, it drove away my creative writing muse; however, it also inadvertently launched my career into graphic design when I landed my first newspaper job. The words still come to me every so often, but few are worth sharing.

Brianna Hams

page: 14, 18

a twenty four year old Joshua Tree native pursuing an English degree at Copper Mountain Community College. She spends her free time sneaking into people's houses and alphabetizing their DVD collections, rescuing books from thrift stores, and watching Korean soap operas without subtitles. She also enjoys listening to Japanese death metal, taking showers with all of her clothes still on, and throwing sticks of butter at her family members. Her greatest dreams are to see Bruce Springsteen in concert and to visit Easter Island.

William Hillyard

page: 47

In addition to his stint with the Census, William Hillyard has been a waiter, a guitar maker, an environmental scientist, as well as 48 hours as the executive producer of a reality TV show. These days he calls himself a fulltime writer, which is really just a euphemism for being unemployed.

Robert Howell

page: 25

Born in 1968 in the back seat of a '68' Charger on the Texas-Louisiana border I live to go fast. Transplanted to the San Fernando Valley in 1973

I have made Cali my home with friends and family all across the states. Divorced father of four beautiful children, Devan, Mallory, Holden and Matthias I am taking new direction I life. Former OEM Division Manager of RYCO Hydraulics, and Fire Fighter One with San Bernardino, Ca., I am finding that direction here at Copper Mountain College. To those sharing my experience here, I look forward to making new and lifelong friends. Best wishes on your own ventures. BOBO

Jessica Kinney page: 27

Jessica is finishing her fourth semester at Copper Mountain. She hopes to move to a university and earn her Bachelor's in English and History. She loves spending time with her two rescue dogs, and sleeping instead of doing homework.

Annelies Kuiper-Thacker page: 42

I was born in Kenya, East Africa and lived there the first eighteen years of my life. I traveled extensively through Africa, Europe and the British Isles, before immigrating to America. I moved up to the North Joshua Tree area, because it reminds me of Africa. I have been writing ever since I can remember. It is my way of expressing my art: I paint pictures with my words. I wrote the "Kenya Cowgirl" series; as well as "Once Upon a Bushman Dream", reams of travel, self-help and children's stories and a ton of songs. I never considered writing poetry. Thanks to Professor Baird's Literature class, I was forced to write sonnets and here they are. One is sweet, the other bawdy: just like me!

Aubrey Leahy pages: 85, 92

This summer this ancient scholar saw fit to follow the medieval pilgrimage route known as the Camino de Santiago. Whilst meandering along the hallowed route he composed many, many, many brilliant wordworks. All, without exception worthy of inclusion in the latest edition of HOWL. Unfortunately he left his pen at home.

Margo McCall pages: 30, 81

Margo McCall's short stories have been featured in Pacific Review, Heliotrope, In*tense, Wazee Journal, Sidewalks, Rockhurst Review, Sunspinner, Toasted Cheese, Writers'Tribe, and other journals. Her nonfiction has appeared in Herizons, Lifeboat: A Journal of Memoir, Pilgrimage and a variety of newspapers and other publications. A graduate of the M.A. creative writing program at California State University Northridge, she lives in the port town of Long Beach, California, continually kissed by a sweet sea breeze. For more information, visit <http://www.margomccall.com>.

Betty O'Connell pages: 68, 114

I grew up reading poetry my Scottish great grandmother had written and started writing myself when I was 16. My poems have always been for myself or my children until last spring when I wrote a couple for my Death Journal. Thanks to Itnyres' encouragement I decided to go ahead and put something out there for others to see.

Katrina Phipps page: 91

My name is Katrina and I grew up here in the desert. Books became a passion because it allowed me to travel without leaving the comforts of home, it let my imagination run wild because everyone has their own interpretation of the written word. It is my hope that one day I will become a published author and teacher.

Jake Sharp pages: 61, 72, 88, 94

My name is Jake Dain Sharp. If you are reading this just know that I am one happy camper.

Margret Snyder pages: 40, 78

I've completed my 69th lap around the sun and want to make the rest of my laps fun. Everyone be happy with me.

Shyanne Thompson page: 63

I write with the aim of using story to give someone, somewhere a new insight on the world, like story has done for me. Maybe I just like turning people into idealists. I also enjoy creating characters with mouths that deserve a bar of soap.

Chuck Von Nordheim pages: 17, 60, 86

Chuck lives in the northeast corner of Los Angeles County where chaparral merges into true desert. When not writing, he fills his hours with the collection of Highway 66 memorabilia and taxidermy lizards. His work has taken up space in Poetry Quarterly (Prolific Press), Northridge Review, and Statements Magazine, among other venues.

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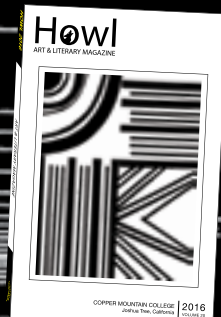


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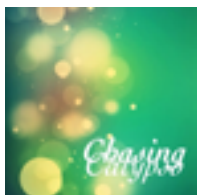
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Jesse Henry 760-574-5212 mrmsjhjr@att.net



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Facebook: route62vintagemarketplace



Chasing Calypso

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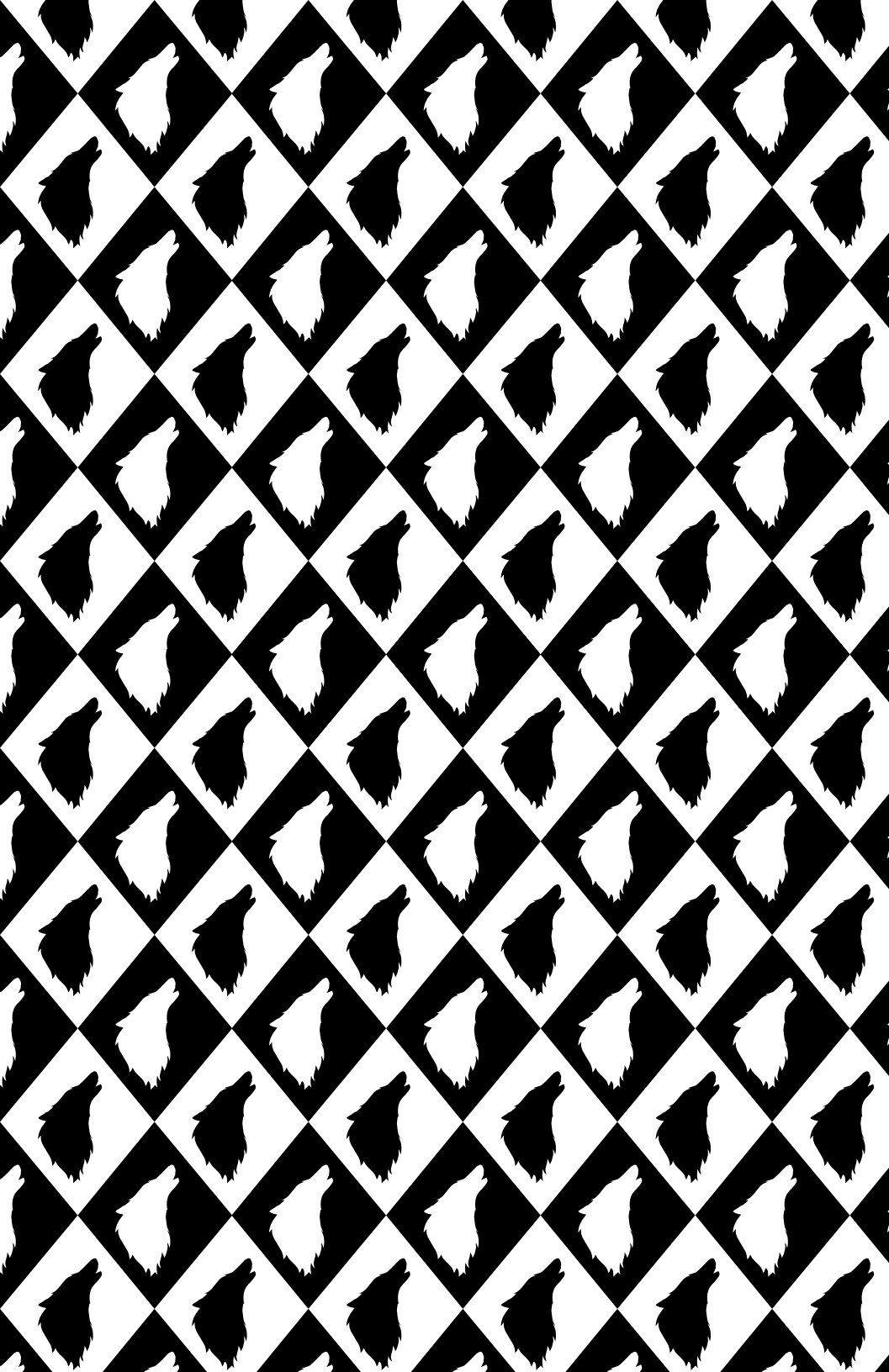
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