

# Forces

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## 2023 Forces

R. Scott Yarbrough

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**F O R C E S**  
**2 0 2 3**



**F**orces 2023 is an awakening, a sunrise chasing a full moon, each curiously sneaking to our horizon, each a singular celestial cyclops by night or day peeking out of its cave; they both search the terrain to see if it is safe to return each rotation. They trade for the responsibility of each new morning or the guard of each new night.

For two years, our outside-selves have hibernated. We have mostly seen walls. The sun seemed to forget to rise.

Walls became computer screens. Walls between friends and family morphed as they became mere moving heads and mouths on a screen or scrolling texts to ignore or to answer – or to half-ignore or to half-answer. It seemed for a few years the sun forgot to “also rise” and the abnormal became the normal of abnormality.

Maybe the full moon is a yawn, an awakening? A whole note as pure and as central as middle C, singing out a mouth wide-open solo note, clean and full.

The *purpose* of this journal is to document – through creative written word and art and photography – our world and journey through each year. Thus, the journal ultimately is to be observed as a complete object, a new moon, absent at first, then, with “Slender silver crescents filling slowly” to an eventual rising sun. Each year, therefore, becomes an addition to an already aging legacy that has revolved around itself; **Forces** has survived 9/11, COVID, a “once a century winter storm;” in fact, **Forces** started when Ronald Reagan was president.

Hopefully, it continues to reflect our journey forward from typewriter to computer, to the present as a gracefully filling vessel that allows us to navigate this everchanging – undeniably – sometimes troubled, sometimes miraculous, world we travel through.

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**Forces Editor - R. Scott Yarbrough**



**Sphere of Sparkle**  
Kirsten Schmidt

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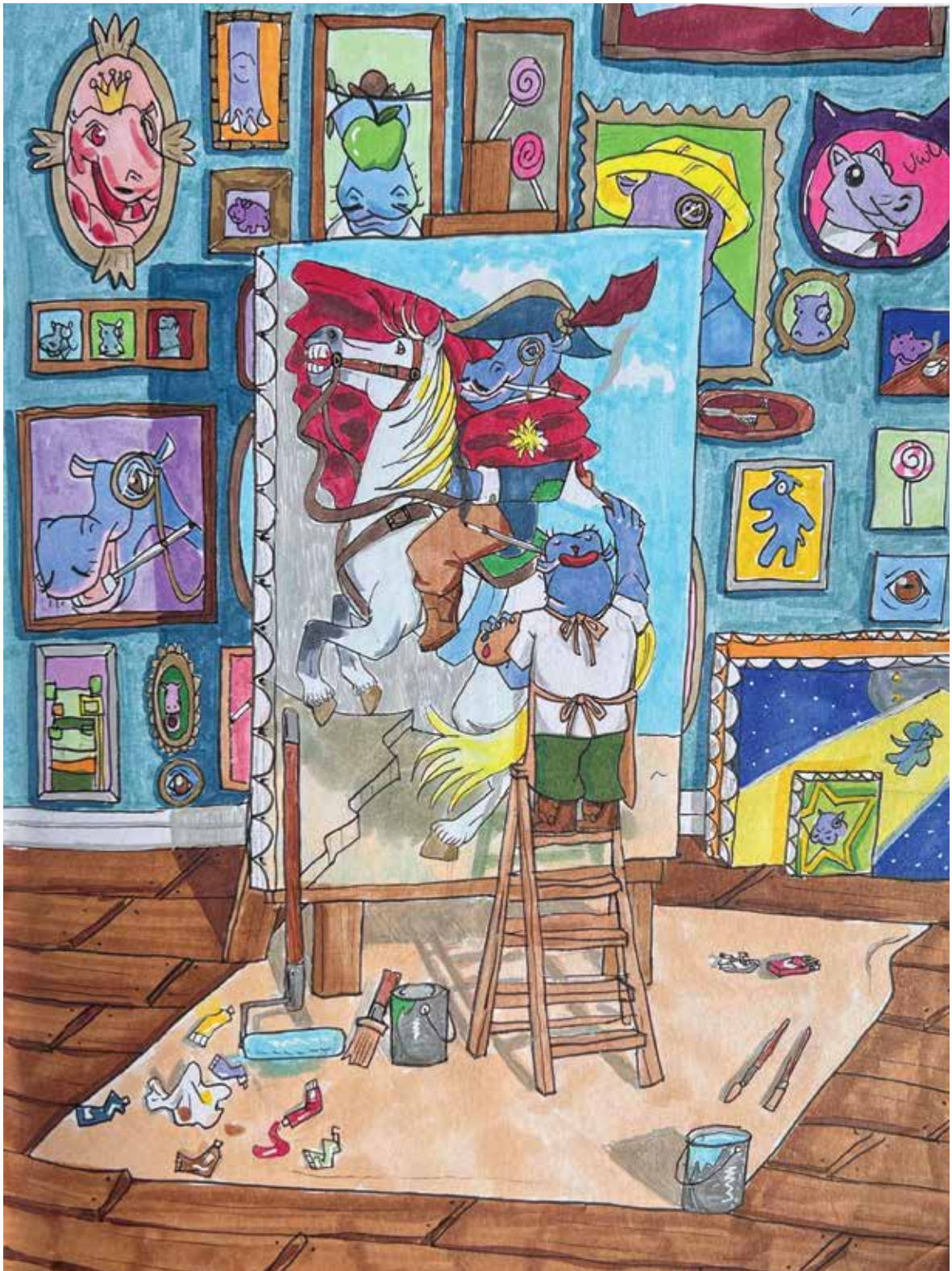




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**Biff Biffington's Art Gallery** Clair Jackson





Another decade in an instant.

**Autumn Colors**

Braxton Farms



## 14th

Steven Ramos

I am somewhere I don't belong.

We buried our Grandmother  
In California  
On Valentine's Day.  
It felt more like a Wednesday.

What's it been between you and I?

As jets roared over  
The young Father who presided.  
He blessed the coffin  
As we sat in silence.

Was it so true what we said to one another?

The day dragged on  
Until we found ourselves  
Speaking in the same room,  
Sitting at distant ends.

I've wondered how you've been.

Like when your mother died  
And I still had mine.  
Now you look through me;  
I vanish into thin air.

Another decade in an instant.

It all still remains.  
But I'll pray for you,  
Or whatever it is people do  
When they hold onto hope.

## Dandelion in the Wind

Vera Spence





### **A Terrible Privilege**

David Drane

Pouring rain while the sun is shining,  
 In rhythm, hearts and daisies dying,  
 Failing hearts and newborns crying,  
 Trauma caused and trauma bonding,  
 Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring ...  
 War-torn world's elusive peace,  
 Manmade mysteries, famines, and feasts,  
 Perfect shelter, pristine water, and peaceful sleep,  
 Sun-withered crops for the underprivileged  
 Conflicts, riots, and spirits pillaged  
 Cheerful children build the future  
 Laughing children sustain the village  
 O' what a terrible privilege

O' this terrible privilege ...  
 Of heart and heartaches,  
 Brokenness and restoration,  
 Sickness and health,  
 The, "haves" and the "have-nots"  
 The safe and the unsafe,  
 The just and the unjust  
 The kind and the unkind,  
 The friendful and the friendless,  
 The lost and the found,  
 The wrong and the right,  
 What privilege?  
 O' the terrible privilege to  
 Decide.



We struggle.  
We strive.  
We carry on.

**Beaches Closed - No Swimming**

Amanda Duncan

Live it, love it, respect it, and share it with an attitude of gratitude.

The privilege of the human condition,

The privilege of human experience,

Like riches out of reach of the poor. Like anxiety leaping out of the shadows. Like carrying the weight of depression. Like a tired body meeting the daily grind. Like injustice winking at justice. Like political promises unkept. Like a full stomach surrounded by hunger. Like the hungry at the table of gluttons. Like usury and the mishandling of money of others. Like the grooming of young bodies for the worldwide war machine. Like the healthy visiting the sick. Like birth beset by the reality of death. Like the living at the bedside of the dying.

We struggle.

We strive.

We carry on. Another day, another chance, another  
Opportunity to relent, to be reconciled, and restored.

Life is bittersweet; life is a terrible privilege.

## Sunset at the Chapel

Braxton Garms



### Always Now

Joani Reese

Three years spool out a never-ending now.  
Blue hours fillet skin, fishhooks of steel peel  
day that slides from day, safe weave unbound.  
Songs wait, unsung, we're ever more undone.  
Long evenings pass, unchanged, forgot, erased;  
slipping in slo-mo, friendships falter, fail.

Words suppurate, unaided, like the wound  
one self-inflicts to stop feeling alone.  
Fatigue bubbles like froth over each night.  
(contagion plays no favorites, left or right)  
Insomnia's a bum bereft of booze, and 3 a.m.  
incarnates every loss. Reasons for speech grow  
frail under moonrise that calls the tide inside  
me ever home.

**Pacific Avenue**  
Christopher Diego





**Cowboy Boots**  
Daphne Babcock



## Bareass Barracudas

Esperanza DeHoyos

Hot night air and cold beer.  
Sitting on ice chests and catching up as  
Loose lipped fathers begin to tell,  
Tales of bicycle ransoms on  
dorm room roofs.

Two stepping pairs spinning  
but never touching.  
Two Aggies, 30 years too late.

Long live H Hall.  
With no A/C and very little windows,  
Filled with dank clouds of egg soup  
And Mary Jane that could knock out Relverie.  
Possible-but-not names of godfathers fly by overhead.  
Cheech, Davis, Marty, Diego.

A couple feet away Army men march,  
One with no wild nights (that we know of).  
Living on the same dirt,  
Haunting the same halls.  
"Aah, long love H Hall," we all knocked back a drink.

Dancing down the Hall of Fame,  
Twirling to the whine of a steel guitar and the  
Croon of the King of Country.  
Dual lines in motion,



Untitled 2

Rachelle Rabay

Two stepping pairs  
spinning but never touching.  
Two Aggies, 30 years too late.  
Could they have met?

A wild accountant, a military tech guru.  
At Hall of Fame or the fabled H Hall,  
Maybe at one of the parties my father  
And the Bareass Barracudas yelled,  
"10 dollars or we drop'em"?

Only God or whoever is up there will know.



**The Solemn Goodbye**

Amanda Duncan

**The Sum of Me**

Brandon P. Barnhart

Seventy miles an hour down a long country highway  
 The beautiful trees wrapping their arms around me  
 Reminding me that I'm almost home  
 My mind wanders to the sum of my life  
 A kaleidoscope of moments that are me  
  
 Riding with Me Maw in her LTD  
 Spotting blackberries on the side of the road  
 My cousins get out to help  
 Standing knee-high in the brush  
 Me Maw says, "Y'all watch for snakes!"

I freeze – looking and thinking every stick is a snake  
 Sitting in her kitchen  
 She drops a handful of berries in a bowl  
 With heavy cream and a sprinkle of sugar  
 Our reward for helping  
 Nothing tasted better  
  
 Spearmint kisses and forever promises  
 Under the willow tree by the lake  
 Reading our poetry to one another  
 Just a couple of crazy, vulnerable kids  
 Opening our hearts and souls to one another  
 Wasting a summer day together



A shadowy cove on the lake  
In an old flat-bottom boat  
Throwing out our bait and waiting patiently  
No need to talk, we sit and listen  
The sound of the water slapping against the boat  
The distant buzz of the bass boats across the water  
Ice-cold drinks and MoonPies  
We sit and fish – the joy and peace of friendship

Blasting through the Piney Woods on my bike  
The pure midnight air fills my lungs  
Laughing and joking all night with friends  
Finishing with coffee and a stack of pancakes  
Going to bed at sunup  
Looking forward to tomorrow

Bouncing up and down a runway  
At an old, country airport  
Learning to fly my dad's old Cessna  
Soaring above the lakes and pines  
Wiggling our wings at fisherman below  
Nothing beats the view

Church with Mom on Sunday  
Road trips with Grandma  
Domino games with Pe Paw  
Camping and hiking with friends

I wouldn't trade a moment of it.

When I die, scatter my ashes in the Piney Woods of East Texas.  
My soul never left



### **The End of the Road**

Michele Cruz



### **Ash the Dog**

Clair Jackson

## Mother's Daughter

Elizabeth Guevara

Two of my cousins joined the army last year.  
One did it to find his passion,  
the other to support his family.  
Two of my other cousins became teachers last year.  
One did it to find her passion,  
the other to start her family.

Living in their childhood towns and homes.  
So that they may make new memories,  
where the old ones still lurk.

The boys followed our grandfather into the military,  
the girls went with their mothers into teaching.  
Our ancestors, who passed down these desires.  
To the boys: the need to take arms at the innocent.  
To the girls: the need to mend the arms of the innocent.  
Equally desperate, with two different paths to follow.

So then,  
what is the present?  
If not a reprise of the past.

Some nights I lie very still,  
and I can hear my family breathe.  
I fall into rhythm with them, breathing the same stale air.  
But some nights I dream of a new life.  
One where I'm so far that their breaths don't reach me  
and I can gasp freely.

But I know that old air has snuggled into my lungs.  
Because I am not my mother,  
but I am my mother's daughter.



**Channeling Audrey**

Karen Stepherson



But I know that old air  
has snuggled into my lungs.

**The Way I See You**  
Maximus E. Adamson

Because I am not my mother,  
but I am my mother's daughter.





**Anna**

Maximus E. Adamson



### **Float Like a Butterfly**

Emory Engles

### **Constraint**

Melisa Clifford

how small is she  
that he won't heed  
her presence  
he  
will only need  
to hold her when  
he holds her down  
filth of such men  
upon her gown  
she thinks  
she knows  
she must submit  
like wearing clothes  
that don't quite fit  
the mirror lies;  
won't show her face  
a stranger spies  
within that space  
how small is she  
that he won't heed  
her dignity  
he'll only need  
her now and then  
to make no sound  
to hold still when  
he holds her down

**On the Bus**  
Claire Jackson



## **The Room That Raised Me**

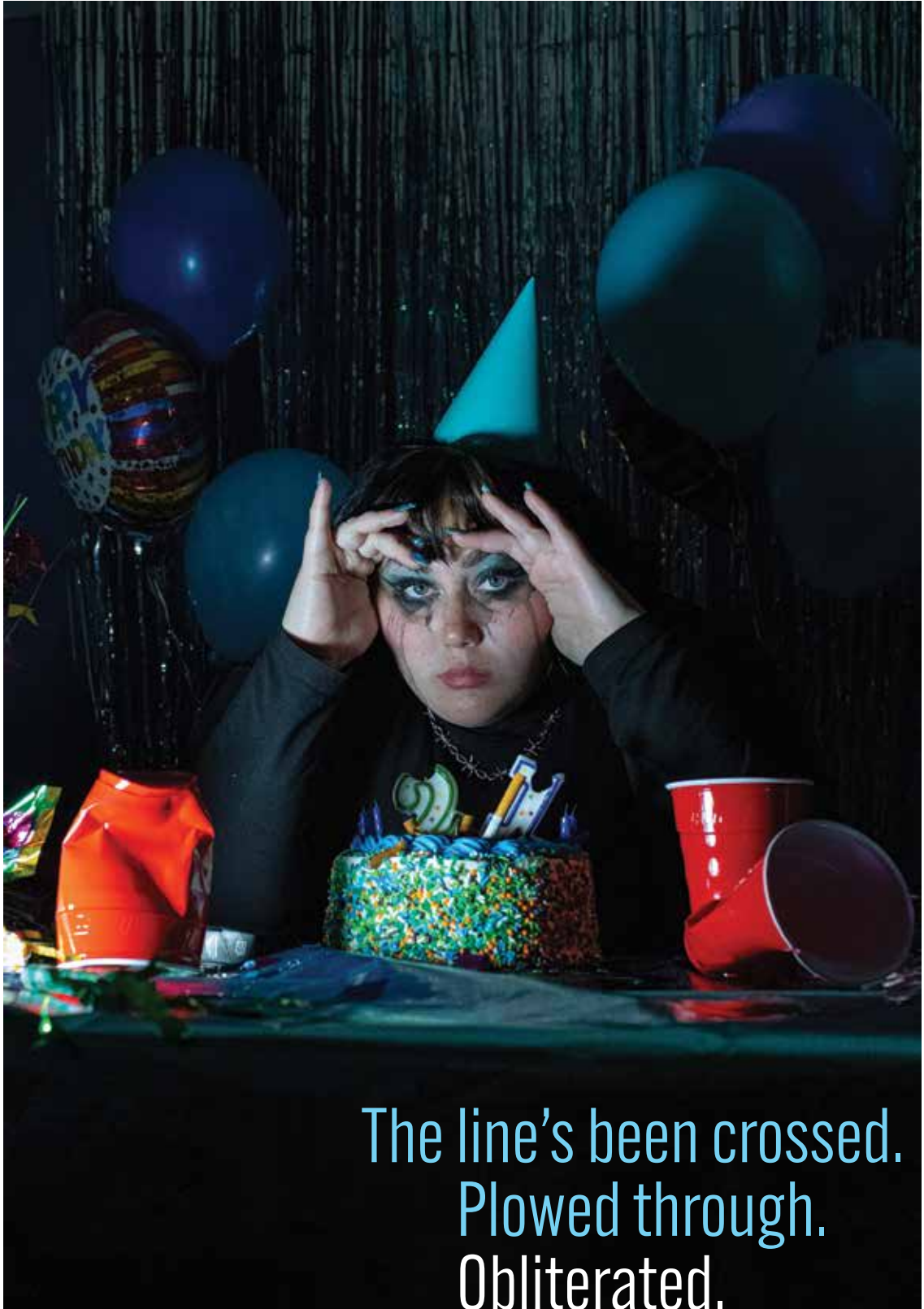
Rachel Foree

I come home from a long day at work and walk into my childhood bedroom. It feels different since I've been away. Almost 10 months of living on my own before a tragic fire forced me to leave my apartment nearly a month ago. I sit down on the twin size bed that used to be mine. The room feels colder than it used to, even though the summer heat still lingers. The gray walls that I had painted during my senior year of high school were once covered in posters and my tapestry, and now they stare back blank and empty. My step-dad's office desk sits where my mirror and shoe rack used to be. The dresser and armoire remain in their places, as they didn't fit in the little studio I had moved to. The room fills with the rich scent of burnt vanilla as I light an incense stick and blow out the flame. I can hear my family in the other room complaining about the incense and how the smell has now filled the entire house, so I put my headphones in to drown them out. Music has always been my escape, and the memories of what feels like a past life play back with the gentle melody of my comfort song, "Space Song" by Beach House. The metallic flavor of pennies and a sharp sting alerts me that my pinkie is bleeding; a result of my anxious habit of biting my cuticles. My cat, Mouse, senses my anxiety and moves closer with a soft chirp. Her soft fur sticks to my tear streaked face and tickles my nose, and I can't help but laugh at her clumsy attempt to cheer me up. I stand up and see my reflection in the mirror, the bare walls in the background threatening to swallow me into their abyss of nostalgia. If these walls could talk they would scold me for not loving them more when they were mine, and my only wish is that they could have told me that back then.



**Tiny Details**  
Jessica Hughes





The line's been crossed.  
Plowed through.  
Obliterated.

## Glass to Gallon

Emma Montgomery

Both friend and foe.

No matter the form,  
transparent, amber or red;  
it is the gateway to two paths.

Turn left and enjoy the  
earthy sharpness of the elixir.  
The delightfully pungent aroma  
slows the mind long enough to see the truth.

But turn right and find yourself  
gripped by the bitter thickness  
of its riptide, drowning you  
in what you thought were the shallows.

A glass awakens the senses  
of an otherwise unconscious mind,  
but a gallon distorts reality  
to the point of no return.

Endorphins run high,  
turning frowns into Cheshire cat smiles.  
With liquid glee coursing through you,  
how can negativity persist?

The better it feels,  
the blurrier the line becomes.  
Warning signs muffled by the  
roaring of laughter and slurred speech.

It's a painful irony, really.  
To her, it's joy. Comfort. An escape.  
But to you, it's a criminal holding  
her hostage with a charming chokehold.

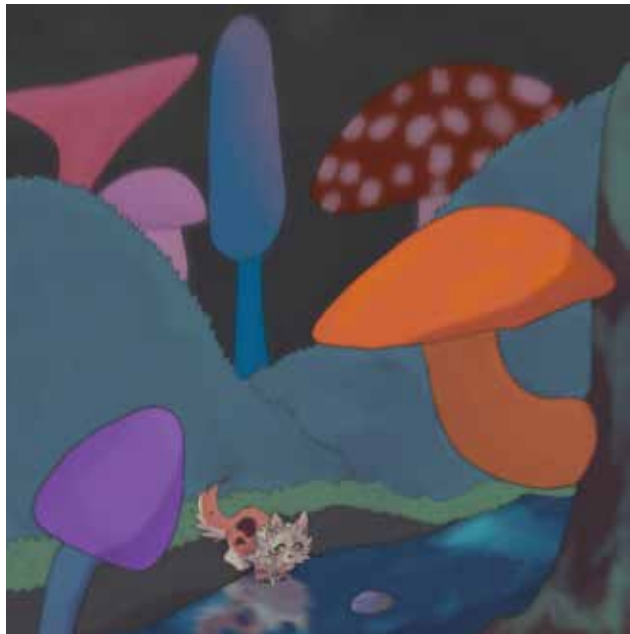
The line's been crossed.  
Plowed through. Obliterated.  
The path back to the left is out of sight  
unless led back by a strict guide.

It was supposed to be a joy;  
A taste of true maturity after  
7,665 days. 252 months. 21 years.

But somehow a glass  
turned  
into  
a  
gallon.

## Just Another Diamond Day

Esperanza Dehoyos



## Turning 21

Nicole Bellin



## Home Décor

Joani Reese

Sunflowers will be the theme for my mother's 97th birthday.  
My sister says so, and she's bought out the Dollar Store to prove it.  
Should I tell Ellyn mom used to hate sunflowers?

Sunflowers will be the theme for my mother's 97th birthday.  
Wish she could still remember those objects she dislikes.  
Should I tell Ellyn mom used to hate sunflowers?  
I miss her opinions. Amusing since we used to argue whenever possible.

Wish she could still remember those objects she dislikes.  
The days overflow with See's Victoria Toffee, naps, and Ensure.  
I miss her opinions. Amusing since we used to argue whenever possible.  
Now, she just smiles and asks, "Is this my house?"

The days overflow with See's Victoria Toffee, naps, and Ensure.  
She was once quite vocal about sunflowers and their ugliness.  
Now, she just smiles and asks, "Is this my house?"  
My sister says so, and she's bought out the Dollar Store to prove it.

**Temporalis**  
A.J. Sanchez



**Hello Sunshine**  
Ann Tilger





## **Metronome Nights**

Elizabeth Guevara

The clock kept ticking as it melted on the wall.  
The arms drooped lower with each drip  
Creating a menacing smile which continued to grow.  
But its ticks continued to click in my ears.  
Its angry face glared asking,  
"Who's gonna fix me?"  
Ticks so loud they caused a frenzy  
Shaking, pulling, tearing  
At our reality.  
Was the clock ticking anymore?  
Its metronome became a natural inclusion of my thoughts.  
My thoughts,  
The ones I wrench from my brain  
As soon as they speed up.  
But when it's silent, I hear the ticks  
And find myself  
Wishing for the day when life didn't imitate art.

**Untitled**

Rachelle Rabay



## **Lonely Sunset**

Jayna Burch



Thread has always told a tale.  
Humans have long been  
fascinated with thread.

**Self-Portrait in Autumn**

Tesa B. Morin

It's woven all throughout myths and legends.



## One Stitch at a Time

Lauren Limburg

Thread has always told a tale. Humans have long been fascinated with thread. It's woven all throughout myths and legends. Metaphors hiding a history of string that is just waiting to be pulled. I wanted to chase that thread. I wanted to pull and pull, unraveling like my old sweaters under the paws of a beloved cat.

I gave myself three weeks to learn how to knit. It was my own quest. In my eyes, I had nothing to offer in terms of trade. Not physically. I cannot draw. I cannot weave or use a loom. I wanted to learn a craft. A trade. I wanted to sit at the feet of an expert and watch her hands create.

And so, I sat.

On the first Thursday, we learned how to hold our needles and cast on. I held the needles like a child or like one might hold their cutlery. Eventually, we all learned that the needles were sharp enough to puncture fabric but not our skin. Although even now, I hear the mantra our teacher taught us to remember the knit stitch: stab it, strangle it, pull out its guts, and throw the body off the cliff. We never drew blood, but the mistakes hurt all the same. It was a slow process, unraveling a misplaced stitch or counting and finding you had magically and erroneously added a new one.

At the end of the night, as we packed up our needles and skeins, she said, you are creating fabric, you are creating something, never forget that. As if she was scared that we would diminish our skills like those before us. That we would forget how far we had come. That we would forget what we now had to offer.

On an island, there was a thread that conquered the beast. No one sings the praises of Ariadne or her string. They sing of Theseus. They sing of a fearsome minotaur and a labyrinth. We forget the thread. A single strand to bring a

**Dickcissel**

Daphne Babcock



hero from an impossible labyrinth. A single gift. Ariadne gifted no sword or magic lantern. Those would not have been hers in the first place. She gave what she had to offer: thread.

On the second Thursday, we learned how to purl and combine it with a knit stitch. We were creating patterns within our own works. Within our thread.

At the end of the night our teacher gave us her rule: never stop in the middle of a row.

Maybe it was hubris, but I would forget those warnings as the sun fell every night. On my lap sat a rectangle, for a moment a perfect square, and then a new rectangle. As my confidence grew, so did my speed. I laughed at the girl I was a mere week ago. I had adopted the continental style to match my pace. I continued on.

Knit.

Purl.

Knit.

Purl.

I paused, reveling in my excitement and success, to look down at the work in my hands. Athena would not have bothered to curse me. I would not have been good enough. I was not Arachne. But I still tempted my own success by

laughing at the rules, assuming I would never make that mistake. I had forgotten to pull my working yarn.

On the third and final Thursday, we learned to cast off. We learned to say goodbye to our work. We learned to start something new.

At the end of the night, our teacher told us she hoped to see us again and with a completed project.

She was tempting the Fates. The Fates, the mystical and all-knowing weavers of each man's life. If they so choose to cut your life short: snip. Your life ended and woven in as a way to keep it all together. They knew the patterns involved in each life they began and ended.

No, she was not tempting them. She was invoking them. She was reminding us that we had been gifted the knowledge of the Fates. The Fates did not weave boring tapestries, boring lives. Just as we would not knit boring scarves, hats, sweaters, or even small squares. We would no longer look at any knitted goods the same. We would see the time, counted in rows, it took to create the work of art. We now had the eye of the Fates to see the story, the love, and the life knitted in each piece.

Thread was the way women could tell their story and history. It is the way I tell mine.



## Patience

Sherry Scamardo

## **Scattered Shoes: Hugged with Security**

Avreen Arif

The wind burned my cheeks as it blew the biting freezing air, making my cheeks bright red, and my nose runny. I stood outside the door with the scattered shoes of kids my age. The dread filled my veins as it was the weekend and all I wanted to do was be home and play Minecraft or watch YouTubers play Minecraft. After a long week of school, I had to look forward to more learning. My cousins all came to this small Masjid run by a Kurdish Imam who was well-known in the community. He opened the Masjid for the Kurdish people living in Plano, but also for anyone who needed to do prayer before heading back onto the road. It was in front of an old mall that was popular in the late 80s, maybe early 90s, a silver and gold shop next to it, and behind the old mall, the massive Church could be seen. It was 10 times the size of our small Masjid, and I am not even exaggerating. Still, I hated going. Which was a horrible thing to think about, but at the time I was 10, but the second my right foot stepped through the doorway, the feeling of security overcame me. I felt safe in the house of God. The feeling I felt standing outside was thrown out and was replaced with comfort and warmth. The nostalgic scent of freshly placed carpet made me aware of my surroundings. On Saturdays it was dim inside with the blinds being shut at 6 p.m., but on Sundays they were open to allow the bright sun to shine into our small Masjid. My teacher would look over at me and smile at my arrival. "Assalumu Alaikum." (Peace be upon you) She greeted me. Same with the Imam's wife. I greeted

them back with "Wa Alaikum Salaam." (And upon you peace). She knew my dad and was excited to know that my siblings and I were learning how to read the Quran. My eyes landed on the vanilla tape lining the carpet that helped the girls stay in a row while praying, the divider that separated the men and women, and the paper taped on

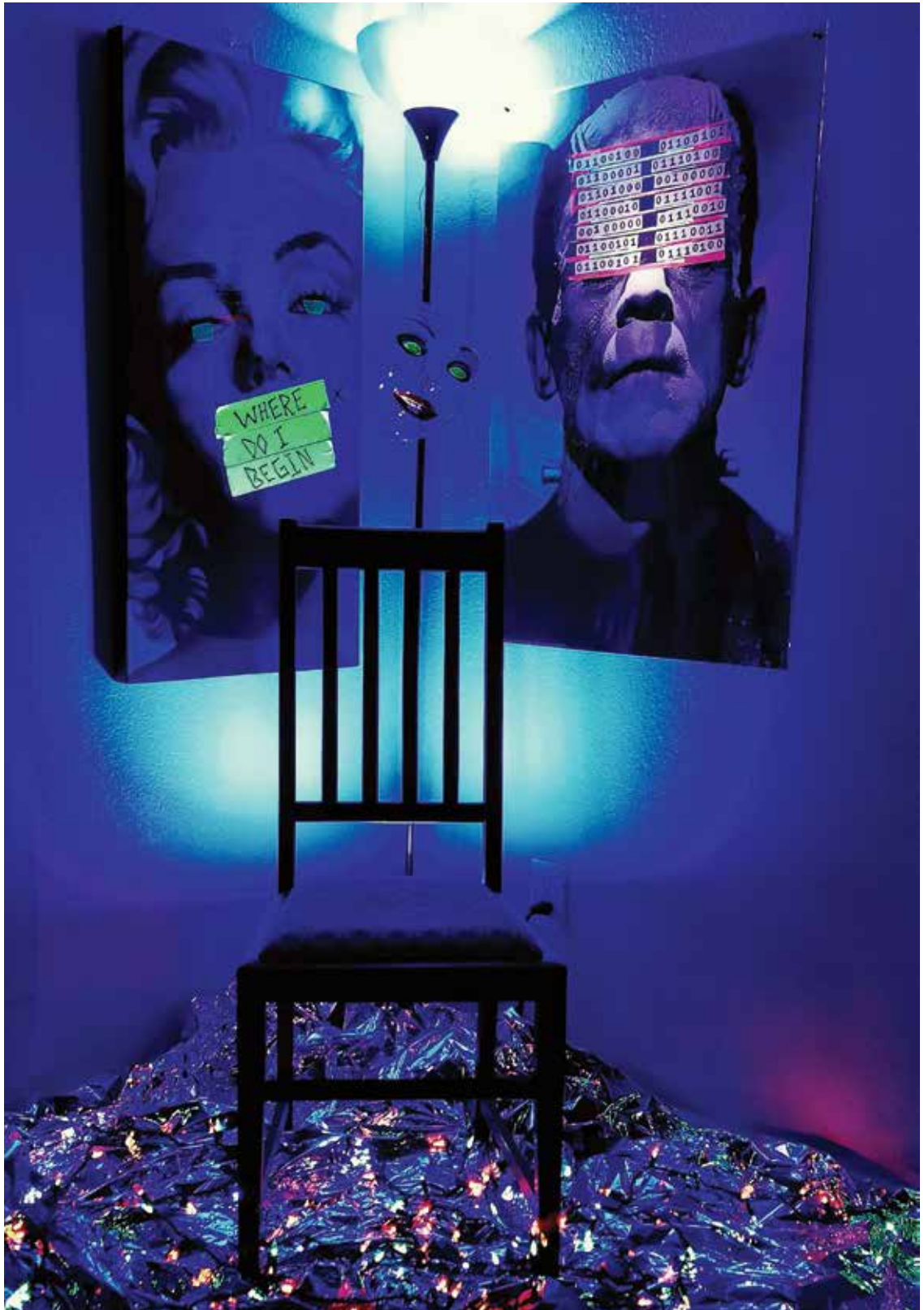
## **I felt safe in the house of God.**

the divider with the Arabic alphabet. Behind the divider was the minbar where the Imam stood to lead prayer. "Allahu Akbar" (God is the greatest) he began the prayer. I could still hear his faint voice in the back of my head when I pray now. His recitations were beautiful, something that you want to continue listening to even after he was done, and when it was done, you feel all your sins stripped away from you. You are a blank sheet of paper with no pencil markings.

### **Lollipops**

Maris D. May





## Desert of Knowledge

Jake M. Epler

"She was my oasis of mystery  
in the dreary desert of knowledge" – George Eliot

Can mystery be an oasis?  
Can it refresh?  
Can an abundance of knowledge dry out my already aching throat?  
Is certainty an oppressive sun?  
The sand.  
The incalculable number of grains parallels  
the terrifyingly numerous bits of decided-upon facts  
in our books,  
on our screens,  
in our little heads.  
I want to sprint to the oasis, panting,  
heaving in pain,  
almost drowning in the suffocating desert heat.  
Don't tell me.  
Let me wonder.  
Let me hungrily feed off the nourishing fruit of  
wonder,  
of happy ignorance.

## Cracking the Code #5

M.J. Scott

Don't  
tell me.  
Let me  
wonder.

## The Earth Rises

Amanda Duncan







## Madness is a carnival.

Excitement, fear, and reality are thrown together in a five-setting Tilt-a-Whirl blender set on pulverized destruction.



### **Air Waves**

Christopher Diego

### **The Carnival Blender**

Sara Mendoza

Madness is a carnival.  
Excitement, fear, and reality are thrown  
together in a five-setting Tilt-a-Whirl blender  
set on pulverized destruction.

The sanity that is gathered in a greasy popcorn box is  
less desirable than the golden funnel cake of delusions.  
The pure powder of white obliviousness is sprinkled onto  
the warm, sweet-scented breaded indulgence.

The sound of frying batter is blinding.  
Ringmaster Cain E. Vall calls my attention to the funnel cake stand,  
inviting me forward in bliss to consume deep-fried happiness—  
But the cake is a lie.

Getting lost in the House of Mirrors is terrifying.  
The terror is lowkey exhilarating.  
Each bump into a glass pane fuels a collision  
in the bumper car ring next door.

Vall is assuring in that the violence is all in good fun;  
the repetitious trauma “makes ya as tough as a pine knot.”  
The sturdy tracks of self-control have derailed  
and sent the cars of an emotional roller coaster flying into the ground.

Vall’s form is so contorted with glee  
that he could lick his tailbone.  
Sara’s mind is just as twisted.  
The razzle dazzle of the carnival will forever entice me.

Running through concrete is an easier feat  
than escaping the rides and leaving  
the persuasive demonic carnies,  
all of whom I am now too comfortable with.

“Me hecho amigos de los diablos de mi mente.”  
An immortal ticket who lives in my hand  
materializes into the world and giggles at me.  
“Welcome to the carnival,” it whispers. “Puree or liquify?”

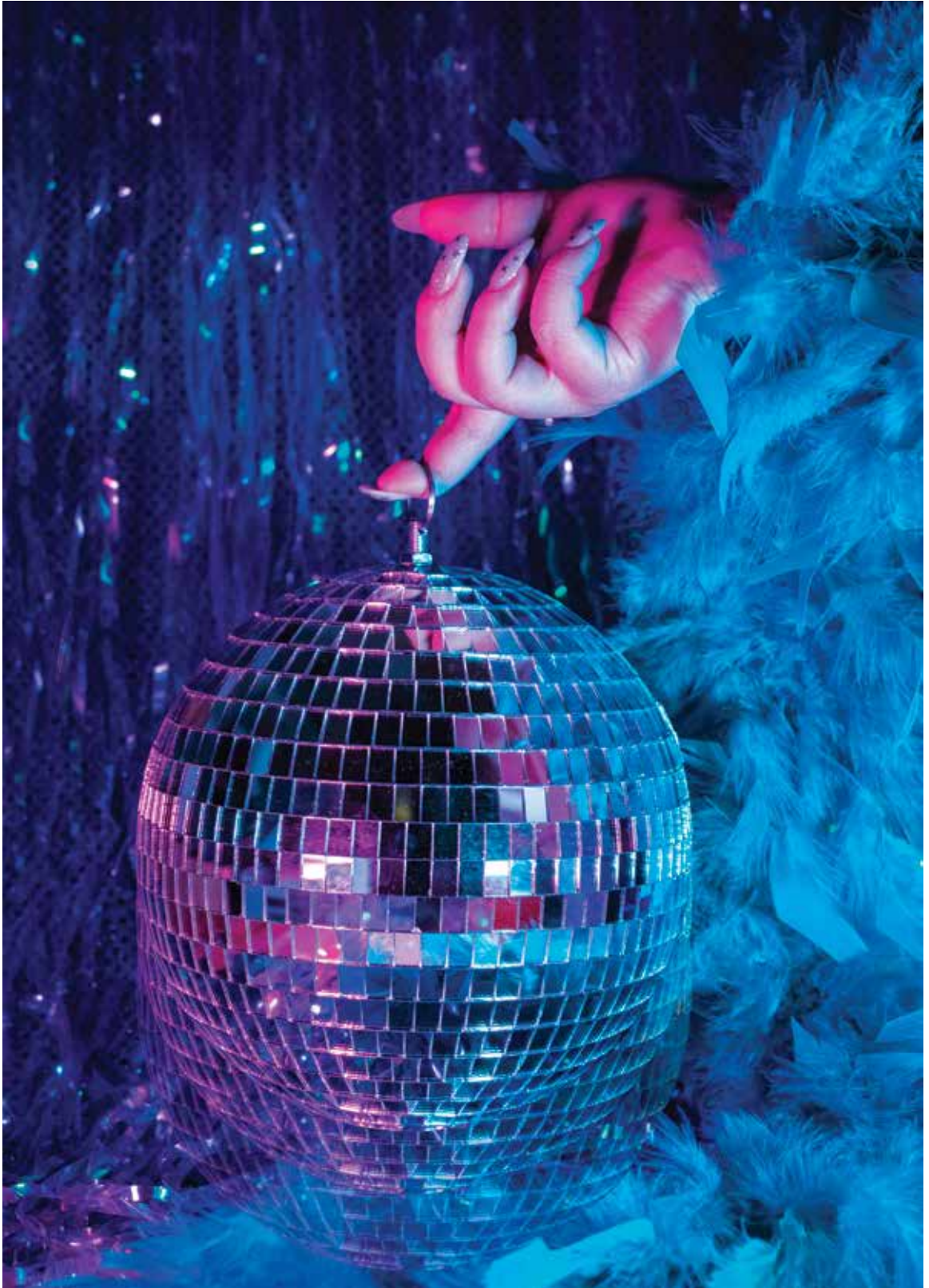


**Real R & B**  
Emory Eagles



**No Apologies**  
Emory Eagles







## How Lucy The Harlot Stole My Friend

Steven Ramos

He was a disco ball  
living off cheap gas station hot dogs,  
perpetrating his hazy fog.  
Our feelings tasted like wine for him.

Mr. Redacted Redacted Redacted of White Avenue  
claimed he ate, and drank  
properly.  
There was no fog, just his vibes.

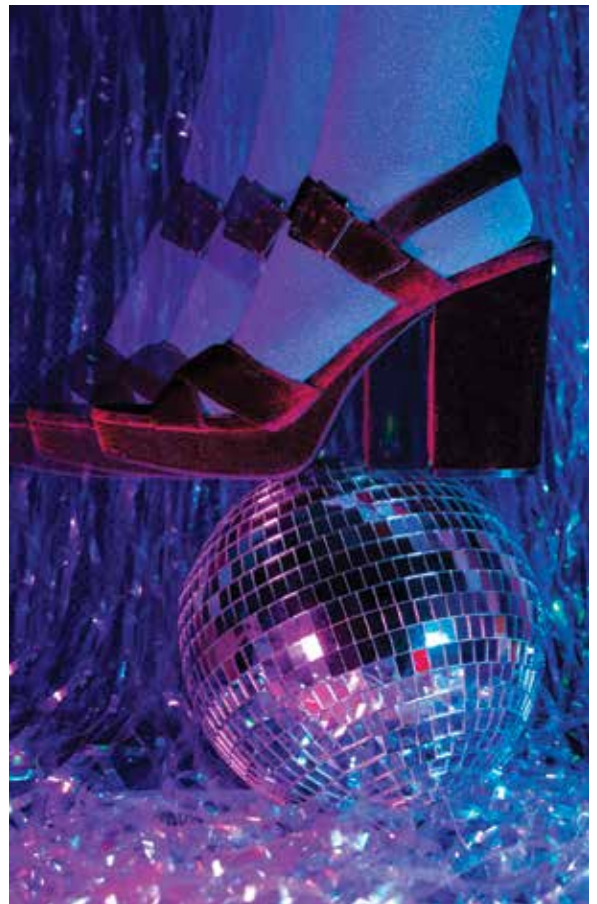
I watch him drop the mickey in his mouth  
"No I'm telling you, They hate me because I'm ...  
cool now, because I'm thin now, because I know what they  
don't." This, the Relaxed Mind of Insanity

In his eyes,  
the sun never looked so dim  
and acid sapped from trees.  
Eventually he flew away.

Far away ...

"Stevo never understood, He  
didn't let him in.  
I just wanted to touch his soul  
And make him dance."  
So he will drive his car for miles,  
A soured friend.  
Filled with LSD, I'm sure  
Ay, dios mio ...

Wherever he lands the trees will greet him  
Dripping their sap into his mouth  
Forever and  
Ever ...



**Disco Ball One**

**Disco Ball Two**

Nicole Bellin



**Out of the Darkness**

Olivia Olson

**Covid Soup**

Jenna Le

Days turn into weeks  
Weeks turn into months.  
Months turn into years.  
Time begins to blur together as the covid-pot stirs.  
Unrecognizable nonsense.  
Boiling frustration.  
Never-ending madness.  
This pandemic, this plague, this pointless struggle  
Of back and forward then up and down...  
    makes me dizzy with exhaustion.  
Round and round I go as I withstand the burning  
    of the stove  
Burning resentment.  
Burning aggravation.  
Burning hope.  
Round and round I get stuck in this runaway carousel.  
  
Like air, it flows out and away,  
As I melt into the madness of this boiling broth of time.

## How to Have a Rare Disorder

Cora Yoesting

**Step one of having a rare disorder is to have a rare disorder.**

**Step two of having a rare disorder is realizing you have a rare disorder.**

This is where things get complicated. Ever since I was very young, I remember thinking, “Does everyone breathe like this?” But I didn’t think to ask any follow-up questions. When I was in the fourth grade, I started furrowing my eyebrows. I thought it was because I wore my ponytail too tight. I did it so often that my friends began to notice. One friend offered to help by slapping me on the forehead anytime I did it, regardless of the situation. We tried that for a couple of weeks, and it seemed to work. I didn’t think any more of it for years.

Scratch that – step two is realizing you have something.

Over the years, my symptoms very slowly, almost imperceptibly, worsened. I had my first big tic attack – or what we called a tic attack at the time – in August of 2019. Maybe it was the stress of beginning my senior year. Maybe it was random. All I know is that one day I was a normal teenager who sometimes had twitches, and the next day I was disabled. Now, it wasn’t just my eyebrows furrowing. My whole face would morph into what looked like a silent scream. Silent because, at the same time, my throat would close so that I couldn’t breathe. Over and over, these spasms continued throughout the day, and by the evening, I was utterly exhausted. My chest was tight. I was lightheaded. My throat hurt. I could barely function. This was when my mother caught a candid video of my spasms for the very first time. Finally, I had something I could show to a doctor. I soon received my first diagnosis: Tourette's syndrome.

**Step Three: Adjust to living with your new diagnosis.**

Throughout my senior year of high school, I slowly grew more comfortable with having a visible disability. For a while, every time I talked to someone new, I would preface

**The Barn**

Nicole Bellin





**Butterfly and Pink Flower**

Ann Tilger

It became clear very quickly that,  
whatever I had, it was rare.

our interaction with a disclaimer that I had tics. Eventually, however, I learned that it was best to simply let people be confused. When I stopped explaining myself and started presenting myself confidently, I found that the frequency of the questions decreased significantly. At the same time, I developed a very laid-back personality and sense of humor, which is often necessary for survival when you have such a potentially isolating condition. In response to this, people seemed less worried about walking on eggshells around me, and the previously concerned questions turned to curious ones. Just as I began to feel really comfortable in my skin, it was time to move on to step four.

**Step Four: Wait, what was that thing about breathing?**

In mid-December of 2021, following a period of stress and sleeplessness, I experienced another attack, this time significantly more severe than the last. I quickly became extremely lightheaded and weak. I simply had to lie down and focus on trying to breathe, eventually being hooked up to an oxygen machine. For days, I was completely incapacitated. It took me months to feel somewhat normal again, but I don't think I ever truly recovered.

At this point, I knew something was very wrong. I had heard of extreme cases of Tourette's, but this felt different somehow. So, I began researching. For hours, I scoured medical journals describing dozens of different movement disorders. Only a few sounded anything like what I had been experiencing. Hours turned into days which turned into weeks. My brain was constantly rotating through a list of potential leads and keywords: myoclonus, dystonia, myokymia, dyskinesia, ataxia. It became clear very quickly that, whatever I had, it was rare.

Eventually, I came across an article about something called, "Meige syndrome." For the first time, I felt like I was reading about myself. Finally, I had a name for what I had been experiencing for what, in retrospect, seemed to be my whole life. Upon reading further, it seemed that I had an incredibly rare presentation of this already rare disorder; therefore, my journey from here on out would not be a simple one.

**Step Five: Start treating yourself like a case study.**

With this newfound information in hand, I made an appointment with a neurologist. During the months in which I waited for an initial evaluation, I began regularly filming my symptoms. In the few previous videos I had taken of my "tics," I was laughing at myself and at the absurdity of the situation. In these, however, I was sometimes calm and casual, but never laughing. Some were taken after my symptoms had kept me awake and constantly fighting to breathe for all hours of the night, my hair greasy and eyes puffy. In a few videos, I broke down crying. During this time, it felt like my symptoms would never stop worsening. I felt like I was going to die, and never had I wanted to live so badly.

I had an incredibly rare presentation of this already rare disorder; therefore, my journey from here on out would not be a simple one.



**Frozen Heart**  
Jayna Burch



**Step Six: Get comfortable with needles.**

When I finally saw a neurologist for the first time, he approved me for the one available treatment option—botulinum toxin, or Botox, injections throughout my face and neck. The first time I received Botox, I got fourteen total injections. The second time I got seventeen at a higher dose. It caused my eyebrows to look somewhat Vulcan but had no effect on my spasms.

**I felt like no one was listening to me.**

After my first appointment, I had to come back for an MRI. The nurse poked me six times, trying to get my IV, and blew out the vein on one arm. Once I was finally in the machine, I prepared myself for the noise level I had been warned about and focused on staying as still as possible despite my spasms. What I didn't expect was for the machine to sound more like something out of a goofy sci-fi movie than a printer. My laughter ended up being a greater hurdle for staying still than my spasms.

**Step Seven: Don't let disillusionment become discouragement.**

When I saw an ENT for my throat spasms, she stuck a camera down my nose, declared that I had vocal cord dysfunction, and referred me to a voice therapist. I told her that I had looked into vocal cord dysfunction, and I was sure that it wasn't what I had. Nevertheless, she said I would have to attend at least a few therapy sessions before she would consider treatment with Botox.

Six months later, I nearly broke down during my last voice therapy appointment. We had seen no improvement. As it turns out, you can't do breathing exercises when your throat is closed. Meanwhile, some of my symptoms relaxed for a while, others worsened, and I was now in chronic pain. I felt like no one was listening to me. When I finally saw the ENT again, she once again stuck a camera down my nose and told me I had vocal cord dysfunction. Still, she conceded that we could try Botox injections into my vocal cords. She told me, as I already knew from my extensive research months prior, that the outlook for injections here wasn't nearly as positive as in other muscles and negative side effects were much more likely. The only other potential options if Botox failed were experimental deep brain stimulation or a full laryngectomy and tracheostomy. I left her office on the brink of tears, feeling like I was fighting a very expensive losing battle.

**Step Eight: Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.**

At this point, it had been nearly a year since the major episode that had sent me down this spiraling path of appointments. I now knew that what I had been calling a "tic attack" was really a "dystonic storm," but I was seemingly no closer to

**Standing**

Davis B. Lyle

relief. I once again began doing my own research. This time I came across a group of people with the same condition. Their website was a wealth of information, all compiled by people like me who had been forced to become their own advocates.

I attended a support group meeting and was by far the youngest person there and the only person visibly spasming, as everyone else seemed to be much farther in their treatment journey. They were all brutally honest and extremely open about their personal medical history. They had to be. If we didn't help each other, no one would. It was refreshing. I learned more at that meeting than at any appointment I had ever been to. They knew all the best and worst providers in the country. They very bluntly told me that I needed to leave my current neurologist and go see an expert down in Houston. I made an appointment the next day.

I'm incredibly young for my diagnosis, so they were very worried about how my condition might affect my well-being. They gave me all the advice they had and got my contact information so they could personally help me. I felt like I had been newly adopted by several loving and supportive grandparents. With a comforting and cheerful smile, one of my new grandmothers sent me off with their favorite saying, "Keep your eyes open!"

**For the first time in a long time,  
I was hopeful. I was excited.**

Afterward, it was like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders, and I couldn't stop smiling. For the first time in a long time, I was hopeful. I was excited.

**Step Nine: Keep your eyes open.**

**Step Ten: See step one.**

## **Who Sits in That Empty Chair**

Amanda Duncan





## Fire in the Sky

Jayna Burch



## Adrift in Silence

Eric Ables

Kayla stared out the small round window, and into the diamond dotted void of space. Earth hung in the distance, bright and blue as her capsule floated away in a day's long journey to the moon. She knew in her head that she was traveling at incredible speeds but seeing the stars and Earth as they hung motionless in her window, it felt as if she were standing still.

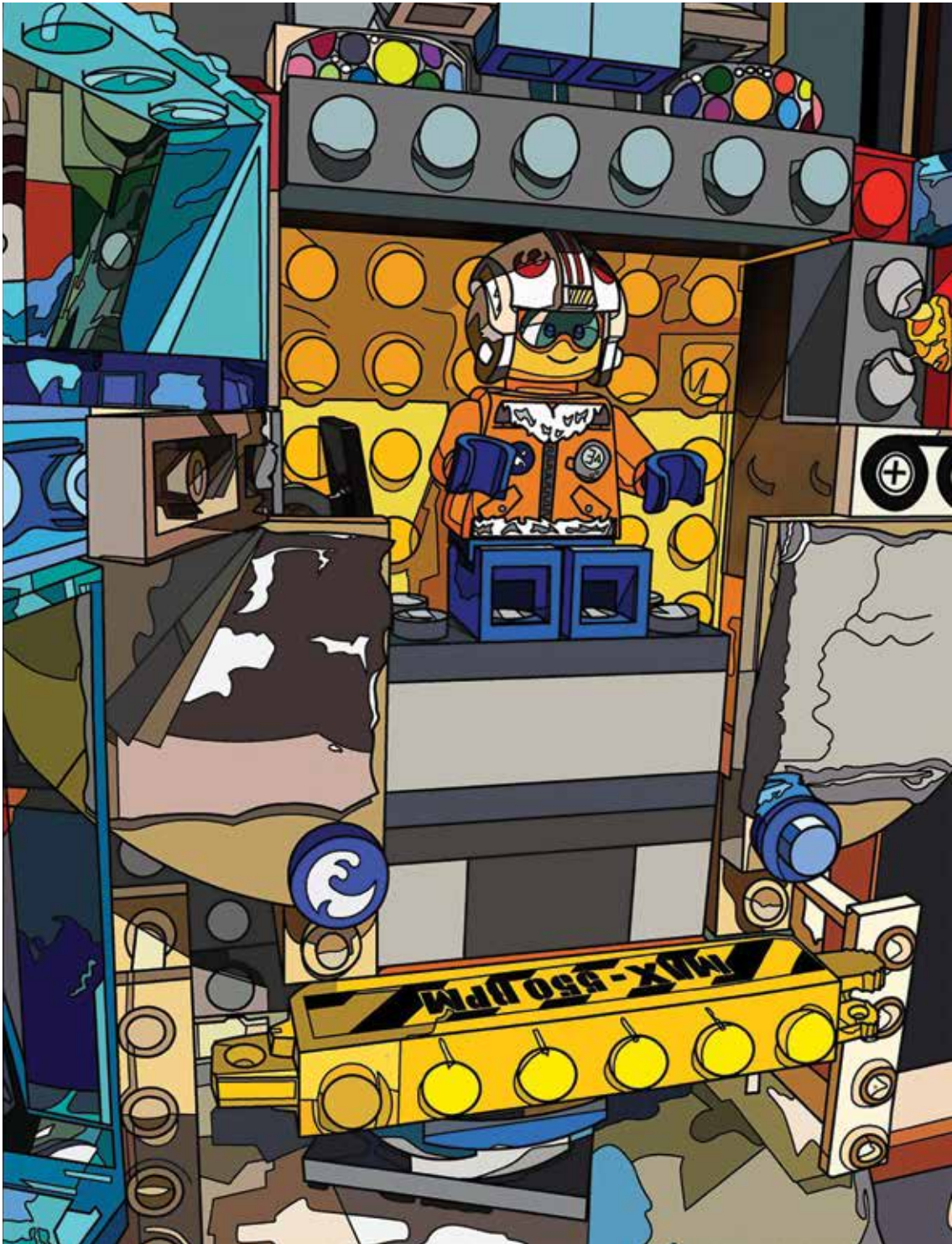
She sighed as she wrapped a foil blanket over her suit to insulate it. There were only a few dim lights in the capsule, not for illumination, but only to mark important controls. Everything non-essential had been shut off ever since she had missed the rendezvous with the refueling station.

One little digit, that was all it had been to cause her to miss the dock and set her back days. She could have aborted her trip, returned to earth empty handed, instead she waited for her orbit to put her in a position to reach the moon on what fuel she had.

She took another look out the window, then tried to settle into sleep. She was not one to let discomfort get in the way of her ambitions.

She awoke with a start, taking several long, flailing moments to reorient herself. It was not her first time sleeping in weightlessness, but she could never get used to it. She scraped her arm on a button's protective cover, and clenched her teeth, her breath hissing through them. She became acutely aware of how every breath seemed to echo in the confines of her temporary home.







The vastness of the universe lay beyond the thick glass of the window, yet its voice was muted, no sound reached across the chasm of nothingness to reach her ears. Listening to the air slip in and out of her lungs made her long to turn something, anything on to provide a soothing background noise. Back on Earth, a riotous cacophony of noise was a near constant companion. Even in the quietest moments, there was always something. Even outside of civilization there was wind, nature, never a moment of true silence, and among the colonies, there was the ever-present hum of the generators, and the sounds of hundreds of colonists living their lives under a dome.

breathing had become louder as well. She could swear she could hear the air eddy and rasp as it passed through the various internal passages to and from her lungs. Soon another sound grew. A steady throbbing, pulsing sound that rushed in her ears. It took her a moment to realize it was the sound of her heart.

Three days, she only had to hole up in her capsule for three days. She thought maybe she might be able to sleep through them, but the sound of her breathing, the throbbing of her heart, the rush of blood through her veins, they blared in her ears, like a klaxon against the utter silence of the universe outside.

Sleep eluded her.

**The vastness of the universe lay beyond the thick glass of the window, yet its voice was muted, no sound reached across the chasm of nothingness to reach her ears.**

In her capsule however, there was nothing. The engine sat silent, not to fire until its precious reserves of fuel were absolutely needed. Even the gyroscopes were shut down to save energy until she was within reach of the moon. Her ears burned with a need for something, anything. She longed to turn on the sound generator, the heater, lights. Something to make a buzz, a click, beep.

Frustrated, she tapped at the glass with her fingernails, wallowing in the rhythmic assemblies she crafted in a desperate bid to stave off the silence. Too soon, her fingers tired, and the sound had become too loud anyway, the tapping pounding in her head like a hammer. Her

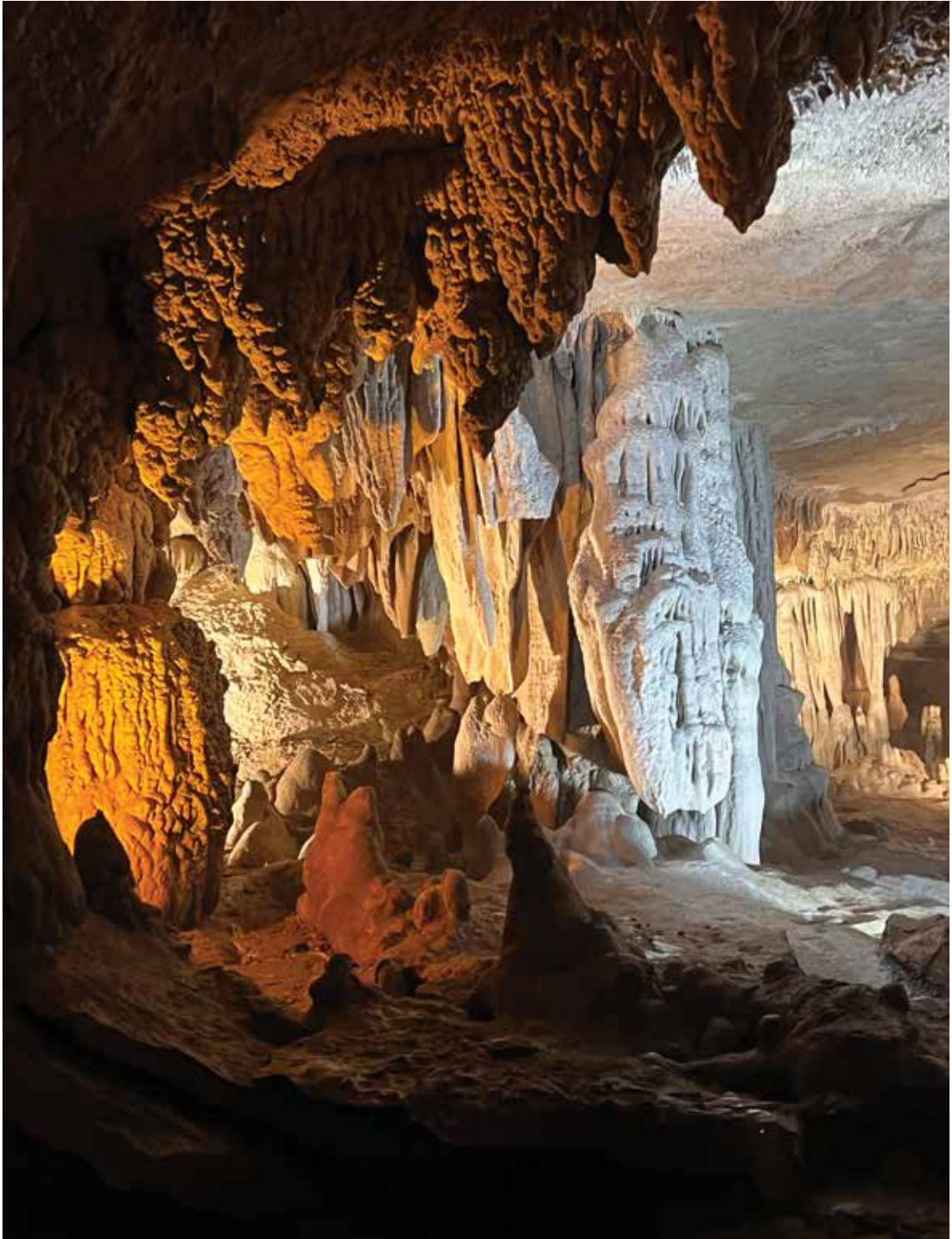
She checked her watch, the dull glow of its digits telling her only a dozen hours had passed. She wished she'd brought an analog watch. Perhaps the ticking would have helped her fight against the silence. The sound of her heart, her breath, the rustle of the foil blanket, the creak of her suit, everything grew louder and louder, drowning out her ability to even concentrate. She threw the foil blanket off, the sound of it deafening for a moment, but it was at least off her body, where it would no longer rustle with each breath, each twitch of her muscles. Louder, everything grew louder.

Staring out the small window, she put her hands to her ears to block everything out, to no avail. Just three days, three days ...

## **Upcycled Robot Head**

Kelly Park

**Hidden Beauty**  
Jayna Burch



## **Olumirin Waterfall: My Hometown in Nigeria**

Adedoyin Ogunduyile

The sun cast a gleaming glow with enjoyable condition as I journeyed to the waterfall named Olumirin in my hometown in Osun State, Nigeria. On the road to Olumirin driveway on the right side were old-fashioned African restaurants, one of which one was named Iya Basira Canteen. The Dongoyaro trees along the road were dancing to the tunes of the northerly wind. Birds were humming while harmless speckled frogs' clucking sent chills all over my body. The flowers around the park smelled like crispy cinnamon pie, making me want to dive into the water quickly.

I love nature, and I knew I was in the right place.

The amazement of this waterfall is its distinct layers of seven cascades with water gushing over the cliff. The water is so clean, refreshing, and warm. The water pounding the rock, which tumbled down to the splash pool was therapeutic.

# I love nature, and I knew I was in the right place.

I thought that was the most astonishing thing I had ever seen until I climbed to the second level. The water gushing down from the second level was as white as snow. I went in to feel the water; the feeling was heavenly, and I thought I was on another planet. The water welcomed my skin and hugged me so tight like a child lost for a long time. The climbing was thrilling because the rocks were ancient and wet with a blanket of greenery moss, but the excitement did not make me stop. "This is a gift from mother nature!" I said to myself. Climbing to the third level was incredibly challenging because there were no steps. I had to crawl like a cobra with a full stomach to reach the level. The fourth, fifth, and sixth levels were serene and were easily accessible. I felt like a baby taking her first step when I got to the seventh level which hosted a settlement called Aba Oke which means "settlement on rock" situated in Ekiti State, Nigeria. This is a settlement filled with red bricks huts and mango, banana, and coconut plantations. I had some mango fruits, and they were so sticky sweet. One of the things that puzzled me the most was when I got to the top tier, I saw the source of the waterfall, a small pot-shaped rock; this made me ponder – how so much water could come from such a small structure.

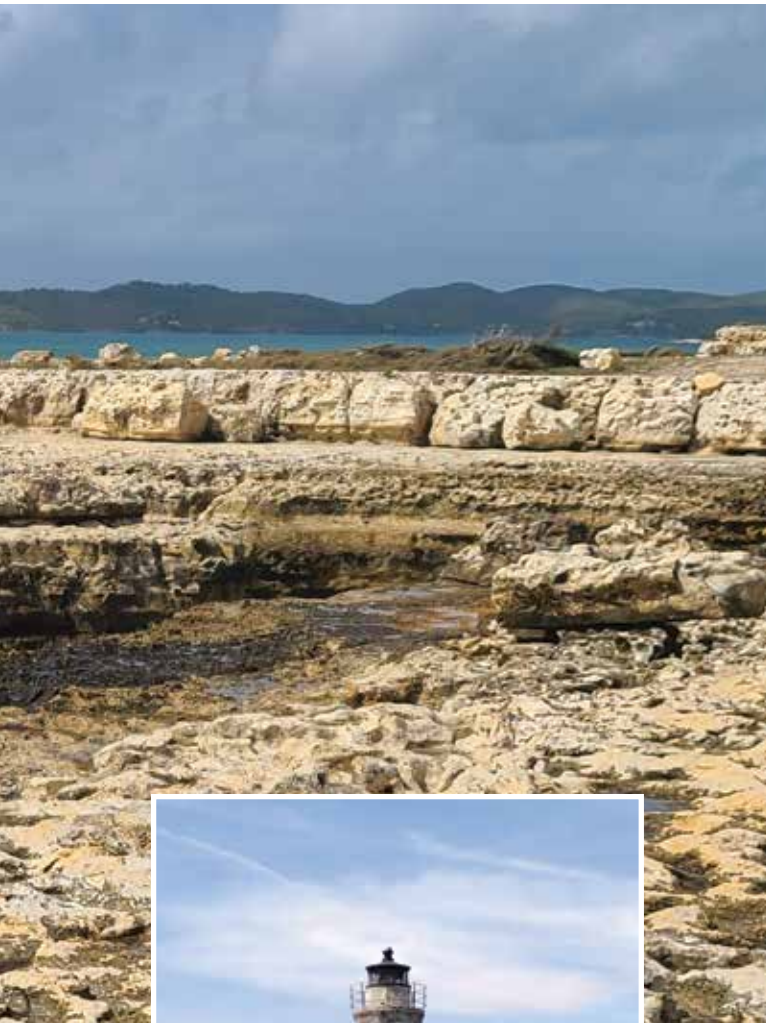




**Devil's Bridge**

Brittany Cortez

The Sea sighed full of longing and desire  
Reaching forward  
Only to be swept away in its own embrace.



## **The Sea and I**

**Jenna Le**

The Sea sighed full of longing and desire  
Reaching forward  
Only to be swept away in its own embrace.

Seagulls croak shrill siren-like songs  
Sunlight burns  
Salty sorrows  
Stings my eyes and curl my nose  
As she reaches forward  
Reality reels her back once more.

The wind howls its sweet and tranquil song  
yet despite this peaceful lie  
I sigh in exhaustion.

The sea rushes forward  
And pulled at my knees.

Jenna swims away from the shore  
Yet always finds a way back  
Circling the edge of the sharp bank.

Small and giant vessels lined the edge of the water  
"Bon voyage" the ships would say  
"À bientôt" she would whisper back  
The sea sighs in agreement.

## **Lighthouse**

**Karen Stepherson**



**Sky Walkers**  
Christopher Diego





Winner of the NaNoWriMo Community Member Writing Contest

## Teaching

Dru Richman

There are many types of yeshivas\* in the world. For the most part they are populated by extremely talented students. And some are populated by truly exceptional students. *But what*, pondered Rabbi Adam Tannenbaum, *about the boys who would never be considered exceptional students or even merely talented? What's to become of them?*

It was there and then that he decided that he needed to open a yeshiva for students who had difficulty studying. Or who fidgeted in class. Or who had ADD. Or who had other learning differences. Jacob Goldbaum was one of those boys.

Rabbi Tannenbaum didn't know what to make of it. Jacob's older brother was a model of Torah learning. But no matter what Jacob did, he only seems to get further and further behind his fellow classmates. And so Jacob felt no small amount of trepidation when he was summoned to Rabbi Tannenbaum's (the "Rosh Yeshiva" – the Dean of the yeshiva) office one day just before sixth period. *This is it*, he thought, *they're probably going to expel me. Dad will be furious!*

Jacob was ushered in and sat in the big chair across from the Rabbi. The Rabbi looked at the smallish 15-year-old across the desk from him and said, "Jacob,

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\* a Jewish institution that focuses on the study of traditional religious texts, primarily the Torah and the Talmud (the Oral Law).

I see from your teacher's reports that you seem to be having trouble keeping up with your fellow students in your Talmud class."

Jacob was about to explain when the Rabbi held up his hand and continued. "You know," he said somewhat conspiratorially, "When I was a boy your age, I also had trouble with my Talmud studies."

"You?" said Jacob incredulously. The Rabbi beckoned him to lean in over the desk.

Shaking his head the Rabbi said, "I was not such a good student either. In fact, I almost failed my first Talmud class. If it weren't for another student helping me, I would have failed miserably."

Jacob wondered how that could be; the Rabbi was a great Talmud scholar.

"Tell you what," said the Rabbi, "I am needing a study partner and maybe we could help each other learn some Talmud. Whatdaya say?"

Jacob was stunned. *Me ... study with the Rabbi?* He took a deep breath and nodded, yes!

"That's wonderful," said the Rabbi. "What shall we study? How about something that none of the other boys are working on?" The Rabbi leaned back in his large chair and thought for a second and then a knowing smile crossed his lips and he almost imperceptibly shook his head yes. "How about we study ... 'Chullin'?"

Jacob looked up with a horrified look in his eyes. *Chullin* was one of the hardest books in all of the Talmud. It deals with how to properly slaughter animals to make sure they're fit to eat and a multitude of other laws relating to keeping kosher. Certainly not for the faint of heart. *And not*, thought Jacob, *for someone like me*. But before he could object, the Rabbi gave him some "homework."

"Let's start," said Rabbi Tannenbaum, "with every other day for one hour and we'll see how that works. For Wednesday, I want you to memorize the first line, and only the first line, of

the Mishna\* and be prepared to answer questions about it. And I want you to make up some questions for me, too. And in this way, we'll study." While he was speaking, he was also writing on a small pad, which he tore off a sheet and handed to Jacob. "Here's a hall pass to get you back into class. See you Wednesday."

Stunned, Jacob could only take the paper and leave the Rabbi's office.

When they met on Wednesday, Jacob recited the first line of the text. And the Rabbi asked him questions. Which prompted him to ask the Rabbi questions. Which begot more questions. When the Rabbi announced that they were done for the day, Jacob was amazed to see that an hour had already passed.

"Your homework for Friday is to memorize the second line, and only the second line, of this Mishna," said the Rabbi. "And just like today, I'll ask you questions and you can ask me questions too." As Jacob stood to go, the Rabbi told him that he had done well on the first line ... but it would get harder after that. He smiled and told him to have a good day.

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\* The Mishnah teaches the oral traditions by example, presenting actual cases being brought to judgment.

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On Friday, the Rabbi asked Jacob to repeat not only the second line, but also the first. And when the Rabbi asked questions about this point or another, Jacob (with, in some cases, the Rabbi's guidance) found the answers and the reasons behind the answers.

And so it went. First a few lines. Then a paragraph. And in a short time, Jacob had memorized a half a page. Then a full page. Then a second ... and a third. And by then, he had memorized seven full pages! And all the while, Rabbi Tannenbaum quizzed him at every opportunity. And just to show the Rabbi he

understood what he was memorizing, he hurled some terrific questions at the Rabbi. And all the while the Rabbi praised him for his devotion to Talmud and his understanding of the text.

Several months later, the yeshiva received an invitation from one of its former students that he was getting married and all the Rabbis, teachers, and students were invited to the ceremony and the reception.

While glancing out over the sea of dancing students and rabbis, Rabbi Tannenbaum spotted his longtime friend Rabbi Maury Burger, who was the Rosh Yeshiva for one of the most prestigious yeshivas in the country. They shook hands and retired to the side of the reception hall. After some chitchat, Rabbi Berger asked, "So I haven't seen you in a while, Adam. What have you been up to?"

"I started a yeshiva," said Rabbi T.

"Really? What kind of boys do you have?" asked Rabbi Burger.

"They're incredible. You would never believe such talent."

As he was speaking, he was scanning the room. In a moment, he spotted Jacob and summoned him over. Jacob was in awe as he was introduced to Rabbi Burger. Everyone had heard of Rabbi Berger. He was even a bigger Torah scholar than Rabbi Tannenbaum. *Oy!* thought Jacob.

"Jacob," said Rabbi Tannenbaum, "I told Rabbi Berger that we had the best Talmud students of any yeshiva anywhere. Let's give him an example, shall we?"

Jacob looked at his Rabbi with that deer-in-the-headlights look, while his insides were screaming for help. He looked around for someone, anyone, to come to his aid, but there was none to be had. He was trapped! And Rabbi Tannenbaum was talking again.

"Let's do something a bit tough," he paused as if to think. "How about ... Chullin? Why don't you recite it for us?"

## Cattails in the Wind

Sherry Scamardo



Jacob looked at the Rabbi with the fear in his eyes of a condemned man. But he took a deep breath and began repeating from memory what he had learned. After about half a page, those that stood closest to Jacob stopped talking and began to listen. By the time he had gotten to the second page, there was a circle some 20 feet wide listening. And by the time he got to the fourth page, the entire room, even the band, had stopped whatever they were doing and were listening with rapt attention to Jacob's recital. You could have heard a pin drop.

Jacob repeated, word-for-word, every line. And as he got to the bottom of the seventh page, Rabbi Tannenbaum stepped in, put a hand on Jacob's shoulder and said, "I think that's enough Jacob. Thank you." Jacob breathed a sigh of relief. And the room spontaneously erupted in a cacophony of cheers and whistles and applause at the amazing feat that Jacob had done.

"That's the kind of boys we have!" said Rabbi Tannenbaum proudly.

I will never forget that moment and how it made me feel.

Even now, twenty years later, as I, *Rabbi Jacob Goldbaum*, sit at my desk as Rosh Yeshiva of the very school I studied in. It brings a smile to my face as I sit staring at a very scared Noach Rotensky.

"Noach, I see from your teacher's reports that you seem to be having trouble keeping up with your fellow students in your Talmud class.

"You know, when I was a boy your age I also had trouble with my Talmud studies. I was not such a good student either. In fact I almost failed my first Talmud class. If it weren't for another student helping me, I would have failed miserably. How 'bout we study together? Whatdaya say?"

*Epilogue –*

"If they can't learn the way we teach, we must teach the way they learn." – *Ole Ivar Lovaas*

## Father and Son Picnic

Olivia Olson

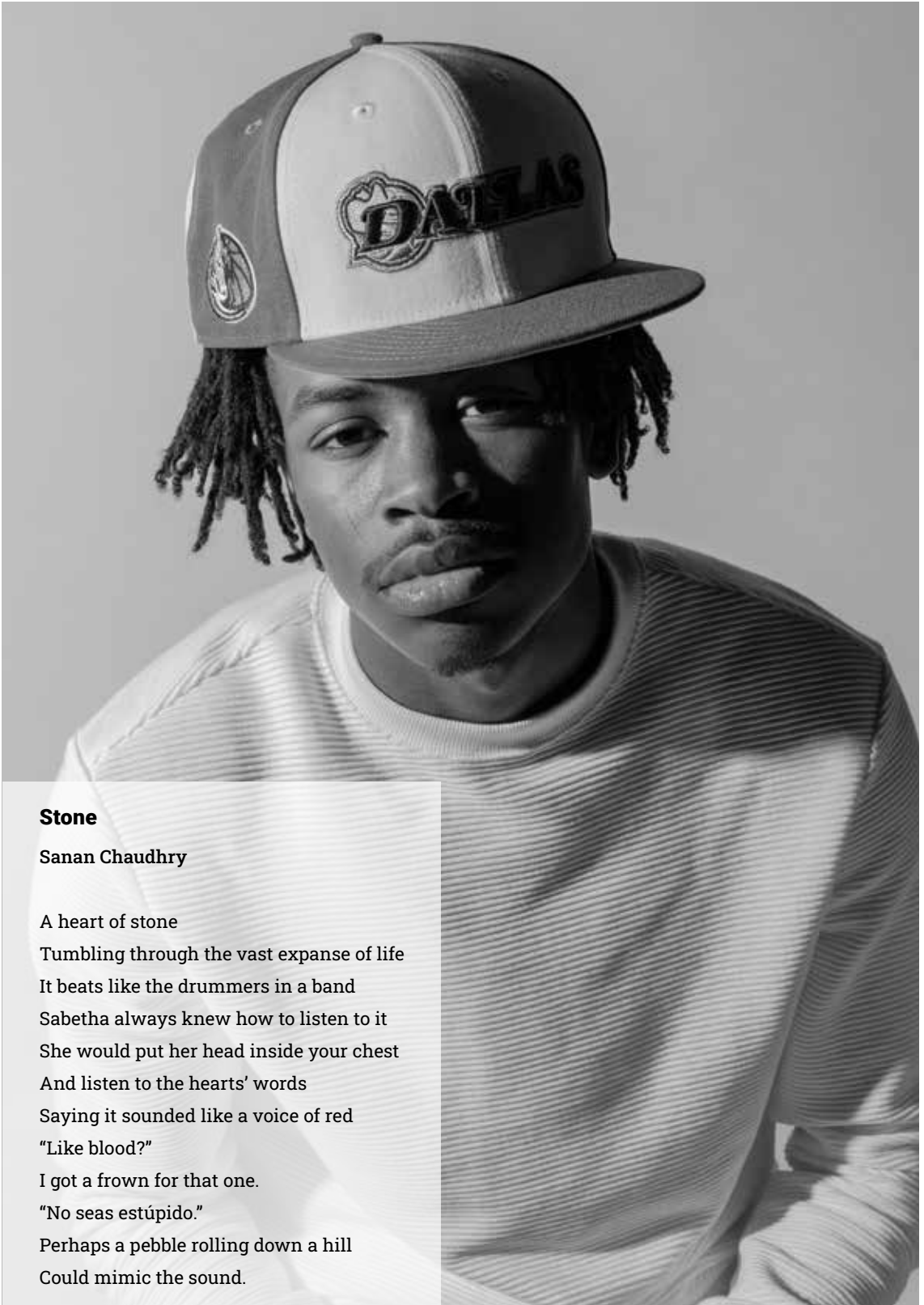




## Umbrellas – Dominican Republic

Brittany Cortez





**Stone**

Sanan Chaudhry

A heart of stone  
Tumbling through the vast expanse of life  
It beats like the drummers in a band  
Sabetha always knew how to listen to it  
She would put her head inside your chest  
And listen to the hearts' words  
Saying it sounded like a voice of red  
"Like blood?"  
I got a frown for that one.  
"No seas estúpido."  
Perhaps a pebble rolling down a hill  
Could mimic the sound.

## Every Which Way

A.J. Sanchez



### sensible diet

Melissa Clifford

feed me spoons of apathy  
numbness broth and don't care tea  
menu  
breakfast: life is lame  
lunch: lethargic  
dinner: same  
freeze  
conform  
desensitize  
squeeze into this new disguise  
penetrate my private thoughts  
dim them down to 15 watts  
here and there paint white the noise  
quite discreetly  
with such poise  
words dissolve like kosher salt  
chasms brew beneath the fault  
recipe for empty space  
written here upon my face  
love me in this new disguise  
love most what i most despise  
choke me with a rock-hard lie  
wake me when it's time to die

## No Love in the South

Emory Eagles



## **Dancing Water**

Brittany Cortez

## **The Rudder that Turns the Ship**

Casper Njuguna

Wars fought at the cost of my liberty,  
Race invented at the price of my identity,  
Wealth gained at the cost of my penalty,  
Knowledge spread at the price of my authority,  
Civilization appeared at the cost of my rationality,  
Empires created at the price of my ability,  
Future determined at the cost of my mortality,  
I am Africa, the rudder that steers humanity.





**A Dark History of America**

Natalia Cano



## The Traffic Light

Sara Mendoza

I am a god.

I look down upon my kingdom from my perch in the sky.  
Hundreds upon thousands of citizens look to me every day.

They celebrate me.

They pray to me.

They hate me.

My visage is praised when my green eminence allows  
The People passage through my dominion.

The People beg for my patience and my mercy  
when my aura glows a cautious yellow.

When my temper has flared and the redness of  
my eye shines upon The People, I am cursed.

Blamed for being nothing more than what I am.

I do not change my pattern.

I do not believe in chance.

Every day, at the same time, in the same place,

I imitate an ever-lasting cycle of Fall.

These colors are my words,

And my word is law.

Those who disobey me are punished.

They pay with their purses,

With their bodies,

Or with their souls.

The fault is not mine when your free will defies me.

I create order in a world of chaos and ruin.

And do you acknowledge my compassion?

I am a thankless god.



## The City at Sunset

Abrielle Shakh



I look down upon my kingdom  
from my perch in the sky.

**Downtown Dallas**

Gilbert Hu

Hundreds upon thousands of citizens look to me every day.  
They celebrate me.



**Garden of the Gods**

Sioban J. McGrath

That center was huge, with  
fresh and white plumeria flowers  
guarding the entrance.

## **Between Hooves and Neighing**

Giovanna Oliveira de Silva

Thirteen years ago, when I was 7, I used to practice horse riding at an equestrian center located in Manaus, Brazil. That center was huge, with fresh and white plumeria flowers guarding the entrance. The entrance gate was large, and the first thing I would see were the big brownish letters at the top of the entrance naming the building: "Haras Nilton Lins." The way to the stalls was an adventure. The orchestra of the "bem-te-vis" birds made the road relaxing. There was a little grey office on the left side of the short road along with a large sand arena with brown fences, where sometimes I could see people having riding lessons. On the right side of the road there was a smaller sand arena with white fences, where kids would usually take lessons on ponies. The stalls were right at the end of these arenas. The first thing I used to do was visit my favorite horse in his stall. The stalls were large with a long hall between them. As I would go down the hall, I was welcomed by greeting heads neighing and looking to see if I had some treats. The fresh leather smell of the saddles and equipment felt like I was in cowboy times, joining the fresh smell of grass and horse. My horse's stall was almost at the end of the hall, so before getting to him, I was welcomed by energetic horses neighing out loud, and looking for the treats I used to bring. The sound of their hooves hitting the ground like soldiers going to a battle was their way of showing excitement. Sometimes a horse would be bold enough to try to touch his nose on my arm to get treats, and it always felt like soft cotton balls tickling my arm. The stalls were all the same, green colored filled with hay inside; the smell of hay was kind of dry, sometimes making me want to sneeze. In each stall there was water and their daily mix of fresh cut grass and rations, which created an interesting smell of greens. The fresh carrots and apples I used to bring were devoured in seconds by my favorite horse. He would first put his soft tongue out to get a big bite like a huge dog licking my hand. His brownish color matched the green of the stalls, along with the white star on his forehead, and his white legs, which made it look like he wore socks. He was a Brasileiro de Hipismo (BH), so he was tall and very muscular. When I ran out of treats, he always rubbed his head against my arm. His soft coat left some hair on my shirt, and his rough brown hair always hid his white star like bangs. His perfectly cut hair and tail made him seem fancy. Even though I don't remember his name, I will never forget that horse, the one who initiated my passion for horse riding.





**Blue Views**

**Mount Vesuvius  
Rainbow**

Jeanne Johnson





## Observation

Stacy W. Johnson

### The Treadmill

Emma Montgomery

My legs are aching.  
I wheeze with each ragged breath.  
My lungs are screaming.

Are the runners around me  
struggling as well?  
Am I alone in this  
turbulent moment in time?

The world is a treadmill  
on a speed that our fragile legs  
cannot match.  
The controls are broken.  
No one can shut it off.  
Momentum spirals out of control

If we don't keep up  
we'll fall  
My fellow runners are  
stumbling around me.  
Others are falling  
never to get back on  
the treadmill

Will it ever slow down  
Will some omnipotent creation  
runners pray and scream to  
take pity on us  
Or do our cries fall on deaf ears  
We continue to flounder  
Stuck but ever moving  
on this forsaken treadmill



I contemplate the meaning of Christmas

## Somewhere

Sydney I. Portia-Diggs

Somewhere between the Normangee and New Waverly exit,  
Past the Yellow Rose R.V. Park and Arena  
Traveling west on I-45 on Christmas Eve  
I contemplated the meaning of Christmas  
and tried to visualize a bearded and red-suited  
elf riding in a sleigh filled with toys and holiday spirit  
drawn by tiny reindeer over snowy rooftops  
Rarely is Christmas white in Central Texas  
No picturesque winter backdrop  
When most winter skies are  
a drab gray as if someone  
Took my mood and smudged it  
Across a blue steel sky  
No bright baubles of red and green  
Spreading yuletide cheer  
But that year, two days  
Before Christmas it sleets  
I drove over an icy bridge and  
Saw an 18-wheeler slide into  
an SUV sending it spinning ahead of me and  
Towards me  
Coming to rest facing ongoing traffic  
My car eased to a shaky stop while the cars  
Behind me kept coming and coming  
While the stranded vehicle tried to turn  
around on the treacherous overpass  
I sat watching the car turn around slowly  
With tentative starts and stops before  
Parking on the shoulder  
I inched my car alongside praying

That no one hit me as I checked to see  
If everyone was okay. As I drew nearer  
And leaned forward hoping my face displayed  
Some of the concern I felt  
the startled faces of the passengers  
Who said they were okay – did not look  
Okay to me but seemed more  
Interested in waving me on ...  
I supposed that  
Some people didn't seem to recognize  
Compassion or show it often ...  
So when  
I contemplate the meaning of Christmas  
And I imagine a heavily pregnant  
Mary and a concerned Joseph  
Searching in vain for a place to spend  
the night searching  
for holiday spirit in short supply  
for a little compassion  
I imagine the people  
they would meet

## A Different Perspective on Christmas

Jessica Hughes

## Victory Celebration

Olivia Olson







**Reflection After the Rain**

Paul Korach





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