

CURIOS

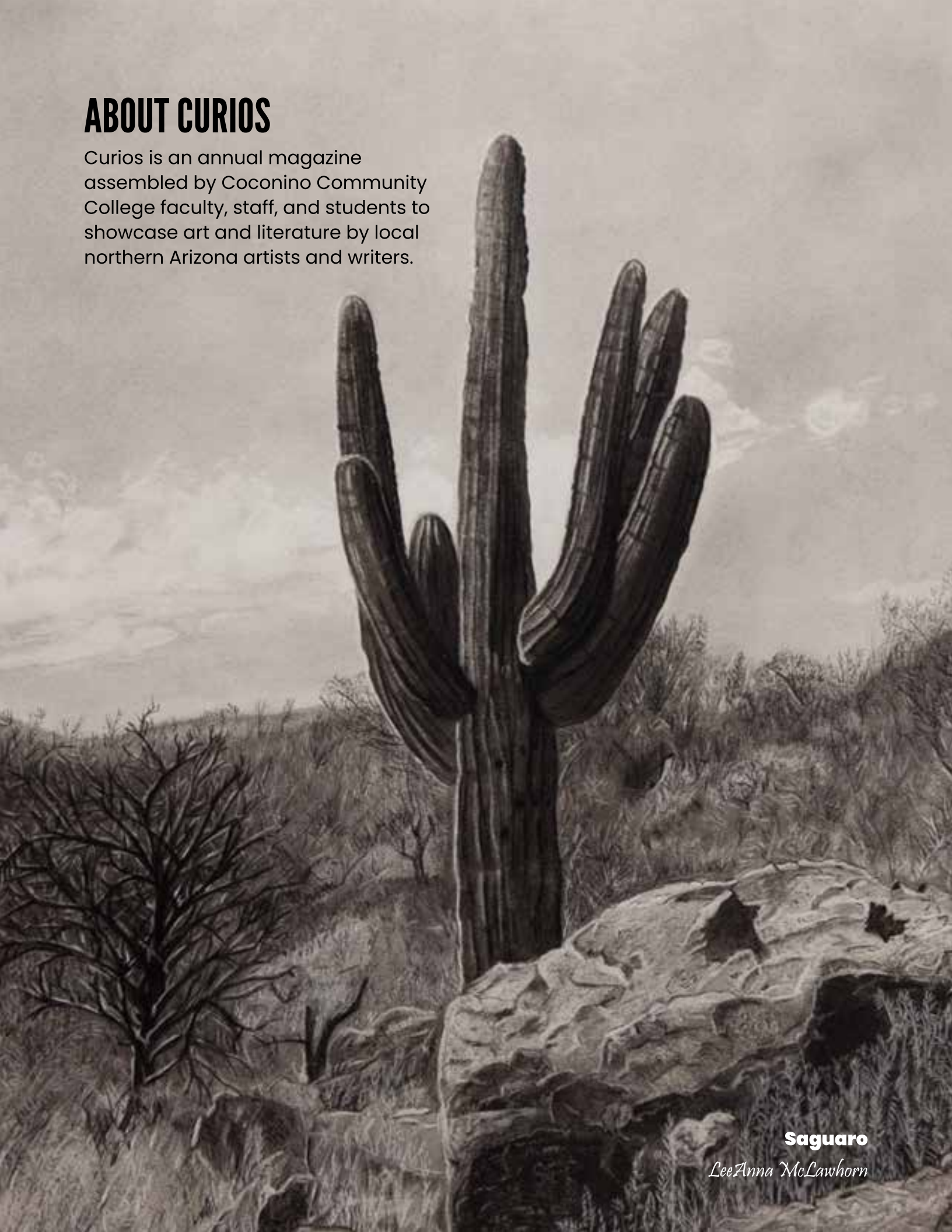
CURIOS

Literary Magazine 2025

Volume 17

ABOUT CURIOS

Curios is an annual magazine assembled by Coconino Community College faculty, staff, and students to showcase art and literature by local northern Arizona artists and writers.



Saguaro

LeeAnna McLawhorn



As this year unfolds, the world's symphony resonates with both harmony and discord. From the unified call for climate action at COP-28 to the unsettling rhythms of conflict in Ukraine and Gaza, this duality profoundly shapes our global narrative.

In election-year politics, communities craft melodies of hope. Urban gardens flourish, interfaith groups come together, and citizens rise to advocate for change. Technology introduces new instruments; artificial intelligence and social media both amplify our divisions and bridge our differences.

Like a complex musical piece, the tension within our world seeks resolution. The dissonant notes stemming from climate change, social upheaval, and cultural clashes propel us toward harmonies of innovation, reform, and deeper understanding. We aim to navigate through the conflict, not simply erase it, blending our distinct voices on the global stage and within our local communities.

This edition of Curios explores themes of harmony and dissonance, inviting you to contribute your own notes to the collective symphony playing out on the pages within.

- *Emilio Gonzalez*

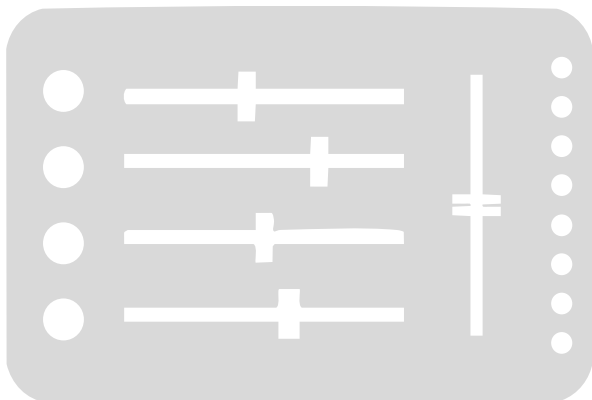
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Namibian Dunes III
Randy McNiff



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Saguaro
LeeAnna McLawhorn



INSIDE BACK COVER
Andrew Wyeth Farm Pond (Master Copy)
Collin Cockayne



BACK COVER
PoraKid
Christian Kayne



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Left to right front row: Janelle Stone (Nonfiction Editor), Angie Ponce (Nonfiction Editor), Audrey Reel (Nonfiction Editor), Kate Karpowitz (Nonfiction Editor), Hannah Field (Fiction Editor), Breana Biggambler (Nonfiction Editor), Will Tucker (Fiction Editor), Bee Scarbrough (Fiction Editor), Emilio Gonzalez (Curios Staff Letter)

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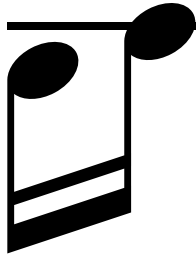
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after the storm

Taylor Gantz

monsoons came & washed away everything between us,
lightning crash
electrocuting my bones; in the aftermath

as I mop up muddy water
that snuck beneath the back door, I smell creosote—
scent of rain, lingering perfume

of what we nearly had, that disappeared down the gutter
with other trash & debris
rushing waters grabbed on their descent

down filthy neighborhood streets; & creosote blooms
forever remind me of you, but perhaps like
new life sprouting from rain-nourished ground

a new love will emerge between us,
trailing up my thighs, wrapping 'round my waist
with blossoms of trusting kinship braided

through our dewy hair, & this fresh love will whisper
sweet nothings in our ears as we embrace
tin a haze of golden sunset after the storm.









Ladybug

Victoria Oehlbaum



THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A QUEER GIRL (AFTER WALLACE STEVENS)

Taylor Gantz

I
Among city streets
The only sound
Was the carabiner-*click* of the queer girl.

II
We are one minority
Like a room of five hundred thirty-five bodies
In which there are seven queer girls.

III
The queer girl met her eyes.
It was the start of a love story.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
Two queer girls, together,
Are one.

V
I do not know which to prefer,
The beauty of femmes
Or the beauty of dykes,
The queer girl's touch
Or just after.

VI
Legislation fills the chamber
With spilled blood.
The ghost of a queer girl
Watches, to and fro.

The threat
Traced in black ink
A fraught cause.

VII
Oh God,
Why do you forget us?
Do you not see how the queer girls
Are absent
In your preaching?

VIII
I know true love
And I know heartbreak;
But I know, too,
That the queer girl is involved
In what I know.

IX
When the queer girl came out,
It marked the beginning
Of one of many rebellions.

X
At the kiss of a queer girl,
Soft yet passionate,
Even Cupid himself
Would cry with delight.

XI
She explored within
For answers.
Once, she gasped relief,
In that she understood
The love in her heart
For other queer girls.

XII
The right is rising.
The queer girl must stay strong.

XIII
It was June all year.
We were fighting,
And we were going to fight.
The queer girl sang
In the passenger's seat.



Resolute

Samantha Biter



The Level

Erin McHenry

Peter's green-eyed glare from across the street burns into me. I'm deeply in love with that scar-filled face. I hold my breath as I move my head down, facing the tiled floor, slap my hand on the back of my neck, and pull. The wire is strong. My hand moves in front of me, balled into a fist. Gathered is a chunk of hair, a thick brown wire, and blood. Breathe out.

Wires are used for control by The Levels. They give orders through a speaker and force movement in our bodies; we are man-made robots. After the wire is placed, people shouldn't be able to regain control of their bodies. Peter and I are that exception and were put here by our master to learn more about places like this. I'll know if Peter can get his wire out when I see him for work. Right now, I must move as they make me and stick to my schedule.

I know when to leave based on the consistent schedule I'm on. Peter and I must pick up the dead from outside. Cleaned up, I walk to the lobby, gaining no strange looks from The Watch. I hear screaming once I walk through the door leading to the blown-up city. My stomach churns just at the sound. In a couple of feet, my "wire" will be set to the roam feature, which allows me to clean wherever. A few more steps before I can see what's happening.

Calmly, I search the ground and find a body about 15 yards away. I approach and bend down to start bagging the deceased. This man had tried to fight his way out of here, carrying an old Colt .45. I angle away from The Watch and peer up to see who is shouting. His scar-filled face and roped-off limbs are saddening. His green eyes are on me. We knew it could come down to this, but we had prayed for a different outcome. No god will save us, and I am done praying.

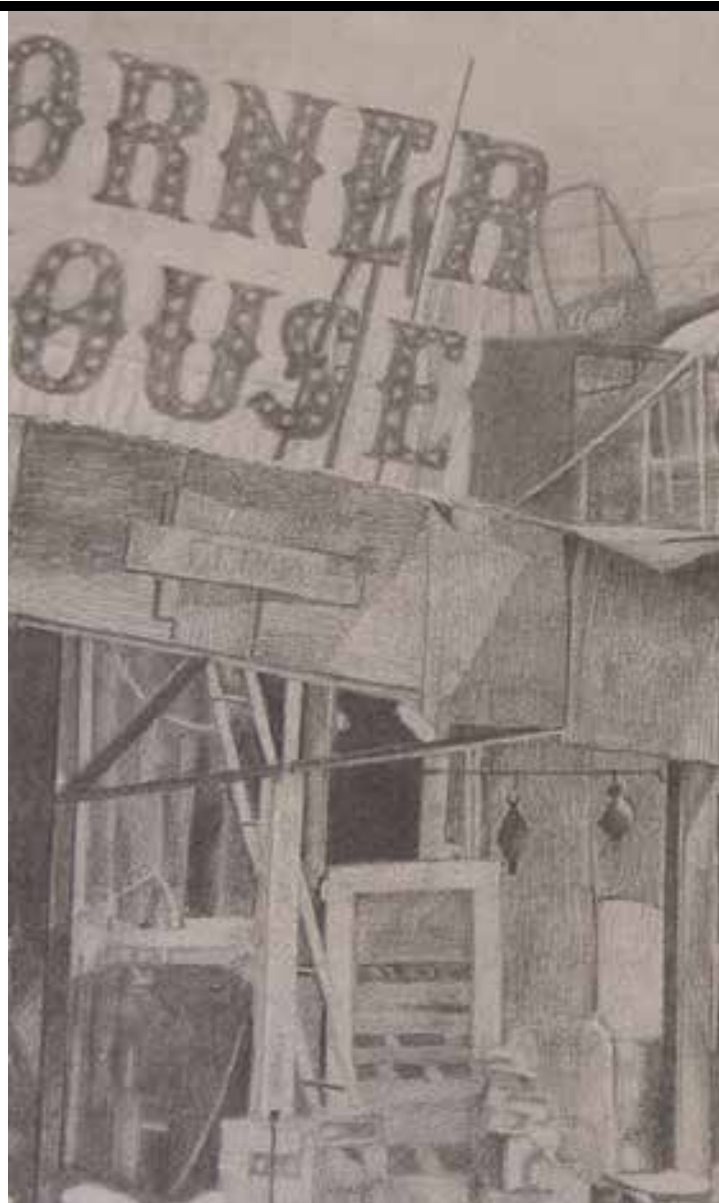
Having finished my job for the day, I start walking back to the building. Throughout my shift, I have made my way closer to Peter, knowing that on my walk back, I could pass him. I come up behind him. His head hangs low. I kick my foot gently, hoping a rock picks up and hits him until his head slowly rises. I pass him, having slowed my pace just enough.

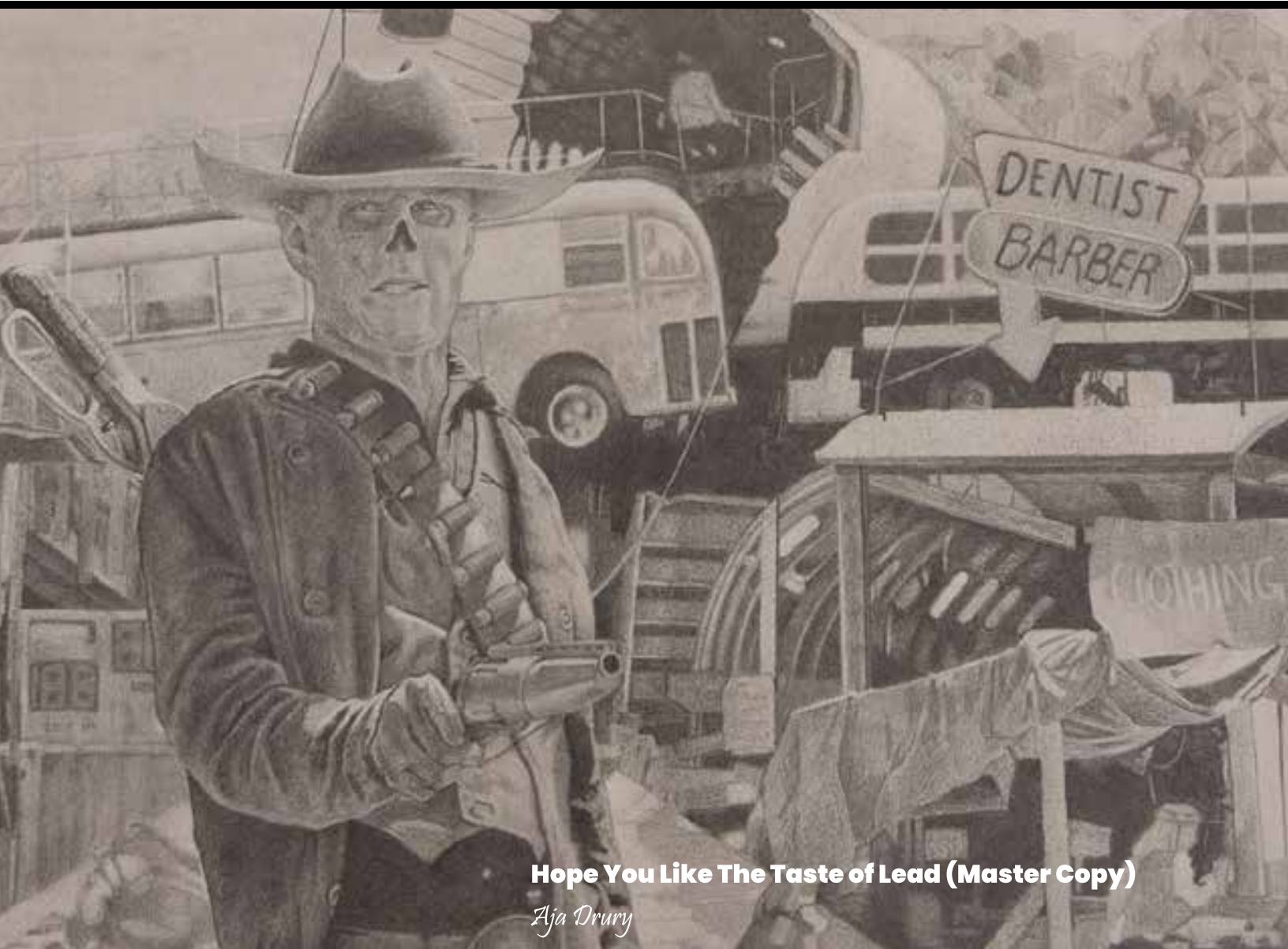
"Bly," Peter says, his voice low, stopping me dead in my tracks.

"Someone in The Watch mentioned the gates opening early," I tell him.

"Go today. Once you are there, The Level will be destroyed."

I know I am the key to tearing this place apart.





Hope You Like The Taste of Lead (Master Copy)

Aja Drury

“Run east, five miles out; they are waiting,” he whispers back.

My decision to leave becomes final as the ground shakes, and I feel the gates open to the free world. Shouting comes from the distance. I look up, and two guards are running toward me. Earlier, I had shoved the Colt .45 into the side of my pants. I reach for it, shooting twice, resulting in a headshot to both guards.

“I love you, Peter,” I tell him as I touch the barrel to his temple and pull the trigger. Not far ahead, the gates are fully open, so I turn and run. I ran the five miles until I made it home. I shot two bullets into the air, alerting them I was back. The big metal door shifted, and I pushed through. I was dragged up the stairs by my master. We entered the office, where I lunged forward, my hand touching a soft surface that called for my handprint. I feel the wave of an explosion pass through the building, and as the sky turns orange, I know I just blew The Level up. All my master says is, “It’s time for your next round.”



Misery Loves Company Except for the Crow

Nicolas Silvestris

Two crows joy, one crow sorrow. These monochromatic avians are attributed value by our superstitions. Perched on an overflowing dumpster, feasting on mounds of wasted consumption. Some of the smartest birds, I'm told.

There, you are perched on the sink. One crow reflected in the mirror as you pull feathers from your scalp. From the moment you first witnessed the black bird in the background of the bathroom glass, you should have flown away. Left the nest instead of letting your mother regurgitate her pain down your forced-open throat.

Now you live with a watchful eye, examining the fear others hold when you tell them why the smell of trash is sweet.

When you show them scars borne from abandoned love. Birds of a feather fly together, yet the flock is repulsed by your song.

You can fly as far as you can from where the egg broke, yet when drinking from the fountain—one crow meets your gaze.



Catch Me If You Can

Echo Smith



Natsukashii

Nicolas Silvestris

When days have turned
into years gone,
weeks become grains
becoming hills
transforming time
into longing.

Hoping for once
was the present,
now memory
stuck inside of
photographs stuck
inside of boxes.

Laughter erupts
tears stream from smiles.
From mementos
of a past life:
one in which we
did not pretend.





Yéego

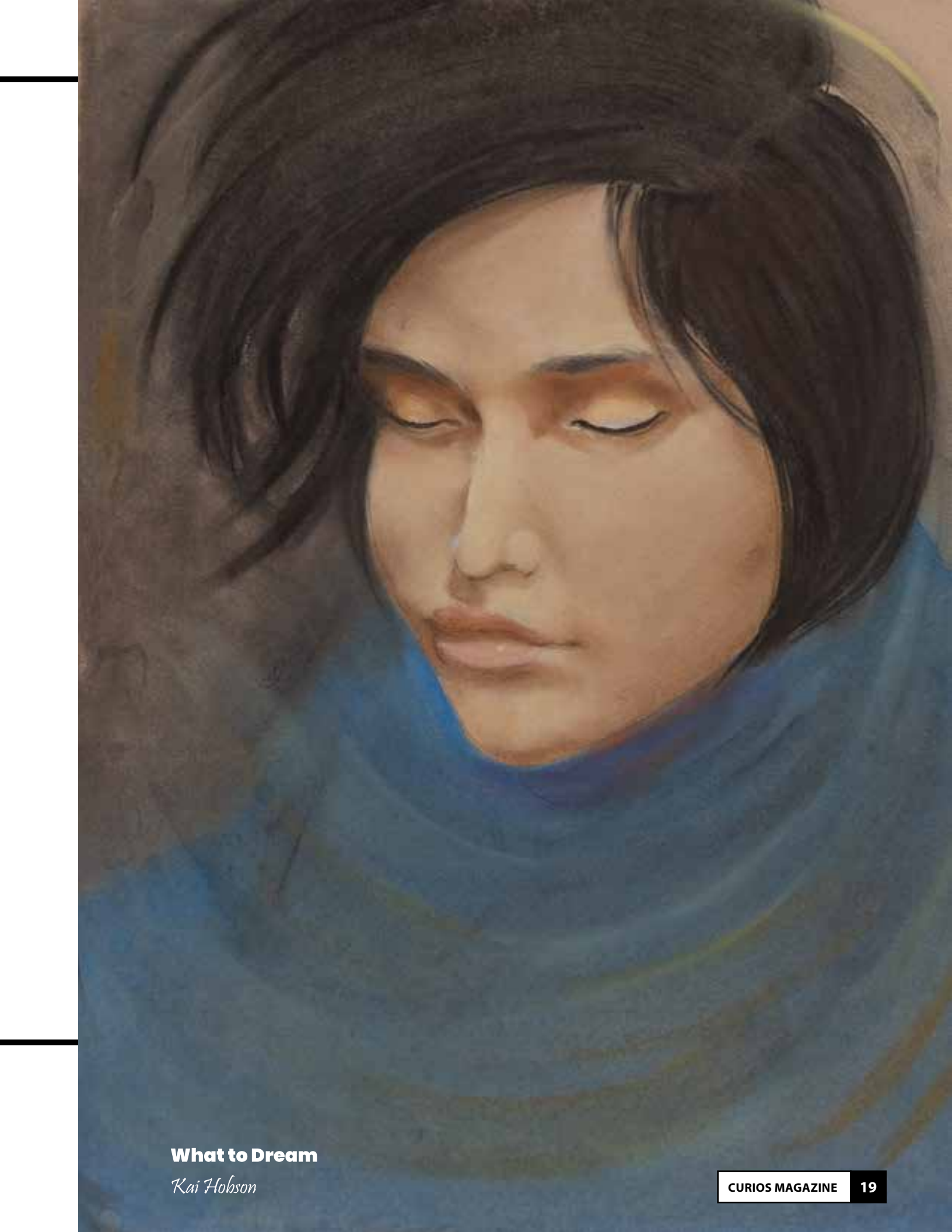
Breana Biggambler

In the heart of the desert, where the red rocks stand tall, runs a brave Navajo girl, answering her call. With each step she takes, her spirit soars high as she races with the wind beneath the vast open sky.

Her feet touch Mother Earth with a rhythm so pure, but whispers of doubt she's had to endure. For they see her heritage, not the fire in her soul. Yet she runs with the strength of her ancestors' cries.

Through valleys and peaks, she craves her own ways, proving with each stride, she's here to stay. For in her veins flows the courage of her tribe, and no disbelief can ever dim her pride.





What to Dream

Kai Hobson



Third-Degree

Nicolas Silvestris

Inferno erupting
All around her
Poor girl with
No one to douse the flames.
Writing the next great prose
Poised to tell
All she said
During fights, saving love.
Sitting alone with burned skin
She wonders
Why he won't
Promise to never promise.



Need a Light

Nickey Yanez

Trash Panda

Spencer Bauer

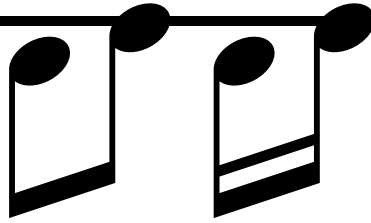
The trash in my room embarrassed me, and the shame followed me everywhere. I couldn't take care of myself. Everyone had all of these friends and dreams with real chances. The room in which I lay day in and day out reminded me of hopelessness. All that was left for me was a shot of dopamine straight into the arm—instant gratification. I wanted nothing to do with you if you had nothing to offer. Bowls of old cereal were hidden and reeking in my room. Mold grew and encouraged sadness. The aroma was musty and of unwashed sheets. I spent most of my time lying in dead skin and old sweat from restless nights—the perfect prison. It was a sinkhole, with walls that were profusely muddy.

Climbing out was futile; you'd only get covered in grime and lose minimal strength. A television sat on a shelf on the wall. It constantly told me it was alright, that I could trust it with my life. It pretended to be my best friend. Bright colors, flashing lights, and games were the problem. They were such a violent thrashing of rushing reward and anger and itch and crushing anxiety. They would tell me they loved me, then suck every last drop of everything out of me. You could find me in this state of whiplash any time; you just had to knock on my door. Surely, I would reject your invitation.

I was drained and devastated. I hated you. Close the door on your way out. I'd stand up and lock it. Then, I'd sit down at the end of the bed with my feet avoiding the trash on the floor. I would stare through the wall, through whatever was on the other side. Maybe my eyes were fixated on a faraway star I could not see. Then, I would try to get someone else to sit down and look at their TV too, so I had someone to talk to who wasn't judging me. Those people made me feel like I was okay, and maybe that did save me. Maybe that's what kept me around to be sitting there that day.

On one emotionless morning, I was lying in bed. I heard voices entering the home, and I felt a chill. These voices were odd—like I had heard them before—but in this house, they felt alien. Faint familiarity turned to inference. It couldn't be him? What possibly could be his purpose here? Is he going to rip me from my home? Will he reprimand me? There was this fire in my belly like cavalry was coming over the hill, and I needed to roar. I felt paralyzed with apprehension. Who allowed this to happen?

My mom, my mom, my mom; I swear it's always her. She is so weak; she gives in and cries. I'm going to melt; they're coming. He is walking down the hall with another. Towards my room, certainly. He is not coming here to inspect my bathroom. I am the only other person in this house, and he is coming towards my room. Truly, if by some misfortune I had a gun in my hands, in that moment of anticipation, I would have used it on my own head. It was this disgusting pinnacle of self-pity and loathing. I loved it. I would drown in it all day to feel something.



Hating myself and believing that I could never climb out of any hole was thrilling. Fuck, I'm ready. Open the door, I'm going to bark.

I swear I'm going to bark so loudly he'll be stunned. He is so beyond a simple boundary, so tone-deaf, and so reckless; there is no way I will feel an ounce of shame for anything I say to him. What an unpleasant feeling to hold inside. Open the door, I'm not even kidding, just open it. There were two chipper, unfamiliar knocks. This moment taught me that you can recognize a friend or foe from the sound of a fist on a door. The knock demanded access to me. Genuinely, it gave me the option to run, hide, or welcome the intruder in. It immediately washed away the atmospheric fury and fear, leaving me with only sobering reality.

"Spencer?" he said.

I felt stiff skin and bones. I had on only underpants and socks.

"Yeah," I said.

The door opened. I was shaking. Submerged in a frigid ocean, a shark was approaching me. I was not shivering because I was scared; the water was cold, and I had a shark to fight. The misconception about a moment where you need to survive is that you feel fear and dread. *This is wrong.*

"Climbing out was futile; you'd only get covered in grime and lose minimal strength"

At that moment, my high school's vice principal and head counselor stood in the doorway at the far end of my room. They were staring at me, trying not to peek at the surrounding horrors. At that moment, I was sitting upright, leaning against the head of my bed, practically naked. In my room, I felt like I was being examined at the doctor's office. I could not

believe these people were looking at me lying half-naked in that disgusting bed with an Xbox controller tossed off my lap in the middle of third period. One man whose office I'd sit in waiting on a detention sentence, and the other, a stranger with files under my name. They saw. It was like two rigid atheists laying eyes on Bigfoot. Through the doorway, they pioneered a glance at the shame I had hidden for years.

I don't think that I had spoken like that to someone before, especially an adult or two. They had come to escort me to school. They tainted my innocent hallway because I was on the brink of dropping out. I remember thinking, *even if I came, it wouldn't make a difference. I've already failed.* Now, I can reflect. Looking past my teenage defense mechanisms, my mind fluttered with simple, alluding thoughts, and I felt a deep confrontation. I saw the dirty dishes stacked on the grey shag rug. The sour smell grew thicker over the months. I pushed those who cared further and further away. I couldn't take a clammy step without landing on my wardrobe. Genuinely, the days of overdue

work stretched so far and wide that the sun's rays could no longer slip to the earth to touch my skin. My mother would remind me that I was approaching the psych hospital. There were two important men from my district here to take me to school because that's what this had come down to. I could ignore it all and chase quick feelings, but somewhere inside, I knew, I had to know, that it wouldn't last forever.

My heart pounded and shocked my chest repeatedly. "I know why you guys are here, and . . ." My words throbbed like the moment before you puke. My head was spinning, and my eyes felt heavy and sharp. "I appreciate it, but I am not coming with you." I felt drunk with painful confidence. "There is just no way you're getting me out of here. It doesn't matter what you say. You'd have to drag me by my feet. I mean it. Thank you for coming. I'm sorry that you came all the way here. I'm just . . . not . . . coming."

They tried to slip encouraging words in between my barrage of declines. *It meant nothing to me.* I didn't hear what they had to say. I needed them out. *Gone.* Those two heard me. Looking down at the floor-- glancing at my eyes with their lips pressed together, hoping I would extract anything from this--they took their leave. The floorboards creaked as they walked down the hall. Softly, through the wall that my head rested on, I felt the soft buzz of my mother's voice. She asked the two how it went, as if she hadn't heard everything. Moments after, the side door to the driveway shut. It always made a loud crack before the seal was fixed.

It fell so silent. The emptiness through the wall told me my mother was crying. I was emotionless, a solitary stone in a cave. Though I didn't cry, I could think like I had. My eyes were swollen, my cheeks fatigued, but the buzz in my mind had faded, so I could enjoy the ocean while the tides rolled back. I looked around me and saw the mess. I couldn't believe what I had said. I couldn't believe they came. I wondered what would have happened if I had gone along. Suppose a student had seen me step out of that car with him; how that rumor would have spread, and how I would have never gone to school again.

The violating nature of the experience lit a fire underneath me. I felt so anxious, and my problems felt so real and concerning that my daily fear of school seemed trivial. It didn't compare to the thought of that happening again, or whatever my mom was threatening with. For maybe the wrong reasons, those men entering my room were enough to get me to school later that week. Before the First Period, I saw him in the hallway. *We'll call him Mr. P.* I waved at him as I passed.

"How's it going, Buddy?" he asked.

I replied, "I'm doing well, how are you?"

Now, far behind me, he said, "Good," with his thumb up.

He kept my secret.



Horned Toad

Aspen Hollamann



The Cybernetic Jester

Gloria R. Holtje

My sister and I are currently preparing for our highly anticipated performance. This marks the third instance in which we have been relocated, and consequently, the third occasion we find ourselves under new management. For this performance, we are required to embody the roles of a Steampunk Jester and a Clown Duo. As the curtain ascends, a sudden burst of light temporarily blinds us; we execute our routine flawlessly, despite one of my sister's costume bells becoming detached. Although the audience noted this mishap, we concluded the performance without incident. The audience responded favorably to our presentation, but the management expressed discontent. We were sent back to our creator, with the unfortunate stipulation that we would not be permitted on stage again.

Elysberg was situated in one of the hotel rooms near the theater. As we approached him, our nerves heightened by uncertainty regarding the consequences of our return, we observed an expression of sadness on his face upon our arrival. Some time prior, he had discovered us wandering along a frigid mountain path, close to death, and offered us salvation, aiding in our transformation into stronger iterations of ourselves. He now appeared older and less capable of assisting us as he once did. Elysberg presented us with his final creation: a cybernetic machine that replicates any robot to resemble a cartoon character. He constructed two specifically for us: charming fox bunnies with large blue eyes and a yellow-and-white patterned coat.

Later that evening, as I retired, I perceived distant voices while immersed in a desolate desert landscape. Although uncertain if I was in the desert, I inexplicably found myself in the snowy mountains. Initially, I appeared as a human girl experiencing joy; however, the reality was that I was an android—specifically, a diminutive android. I was taken to a hotel and introduced to a man named Elysberg, who was skilled in cartoon robotics, actively engaged in robotics competitions, and had collaborated with cartoon characters. It was revealed that I had once been human; the only remnant of my humanity was my brain, leaving me in a state devoid of corporeal existence. What I looked like now included lavender-brown hair, pink eyes, and a dress made from yellow and purple stripes, which would add to my costume as a jester. Then I blinked, seeing myself happily robotic and not feeling panicked; it felt like it was a part of me.



Kyōjurō Rengoku Demon Slayer (Master Copy)

Tavia Bedonie

I awoke on a winter morning, pondering whether that was a memory or just a figment of my imagination. My sister and two companions had been relocated to new owners in a dilapidated traveling carnival. I had questions to ask Elysberg, but he was irresponsible, and he passed away soon after we left with the circus. I was reminded of a previous occurrence: the adventure required me to take periodic blood samples, along with a directive to look away. He applied pressure to my palm before assessing my wrist, prompting me to examine my palm, which subsequently revealed intricate cybernetic gears.

A message from Elysberg materialized:

Greetings, Diana. Many years ago, I discovered you. You had perished and were on the brink of death. The only aspect that was salvageable was your brain. I apologize for how you learned this; however, if my assumptions are accurate, I have departed from this world, and you will finally comprehend the truth that you are cybernetic, the most advanced creation I have ever crafted. Nonetheless, by all definitions, you remain entirely human, as well as my beloved daughter, whom I have cherished all these years.

The message dissipated, and my palm reverted to its original state.

In this new carnival, we have now taken on the role of circus animal acts, diligently training our two foxes to execute extraordinary tricks, unprecedented in their nature, and attracting significant crowds to this otherwise neglected establishment. Subsequently, we acquired the skills to operate Elysberg's machine, enabling us to create more cartoon animals and enrich our new carnival, which we now manage as the creators of a cybernetic cartoon extravaganza. The journey from abandonment to our current success running this carnival remains a mystery. We invite you to visit the Glorious Cybernetic Circus and witness the remarkable feats of our modern-day steampunk, accompanied by these exquisite animal acts composed of gears and wires.

We promise it's a show you will not want to miss.



april showers

Anilysa Roman

my boots sank into the cushions
of mire; a rarity of rain in april.

I can still smell the naked bark of ponderosa shedding dead skin.
gnawing on needles, leaves of copper and maroon lie there ready
for revival. we were strangers there – just as much as we were to
one another. balancing my posture on the large bridge of wood,
I stared at the wilted bodies below me. I like to imagine you
would have embraced me if I fell. your lenses created a delusion,
concealing loose threads and burdened faces.

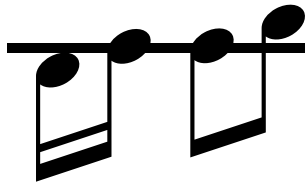
you captured my innocence, so well. slender figures of pine stalked
us as we left. our love had only been breadcrumbs, reclaiming
expired spaces that only made us absent. like a little girl, i stepped
in the prints of your shoes playing my own silly game. grey clouds
cried above us where i laughed and you smiled. our love had been
the rain in april.



Esteemed Aspen

Kai Hobson





ageusia

Anilysa Roman

an aroma of fear joins us at the
dinner table: he doesn't have
good manners. prepared raw,
i indulge in the skin of seasoned
tenderloins and feel my teeth
grind against the tough tissue.
aluminum-wrapped chocolates
make up for the palate's absence with notes of cocoa that
dissolve on my tongue – i savor them in its countdown.
labeled a prohibited trespasser to the world, i'm a guest to its
holiday. it's rude to leave without excusing myself, first.
i swallow his kiss of copper and
listen to blank screens that
expose distant truths. there is nothing more comforting
than false
backdrops of imaginary friends.







kintsugi

Anilysa Roman

false apologies mended my wounds
with ninety-nine-cent white adhesive
bought at your favorite hardware store.
left on the cold tile scattered into
– several fragments

you didn't bother to pick up the pieces.
there is only so much warning you can
give someone with fragile labels
and handle-with-care notes.
soft skin became chaffed, and the
colored complexion had finally peeled
off.

gold lacquer dug its fingers into each sore crevice
pouring at the seams that left me suffocated, a polished
finish that made me feel undesirable.

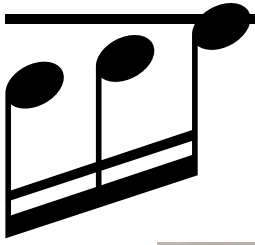
I didn't come prepared this way.

draped in precious metal to conceal my
blemishes, brand-new and unused are terms of
endearment I long for again.



Ellie the Dog

Jonathan Whitehorn



Beatrix Potter (Master Copy)

Sonya Baker



Salt Squared
Sandie Dihlmann





Red Rocks Crossing Sedona

Samantha Normoyle

head-full

Kate Karpowitz

my head is slow now
thoughts trickle in like gutter run-offs
instead of floods
but in my empty little front yard
of a mind
you sit on a green lawn chair
with sage and brown pillows
we chose to match.
I want to curl up on your lap,
take in your nose and lips and eyelashes and the way your hair
smells and the way you curl back into me.
you sit and I sit with you
and that's the rest.
in my grassy little front yard
of a mind
you hold my hand
and rub my knuckles with your thumb
and the birds call over head
and in the trees
and they are singing
to us their cover of friday
i'm in love
and in trickles a run-off thought past our chairs;
What a trick that song is.
I am in love with you every day of the week, whether or not you are loving me
back, and I know you are.

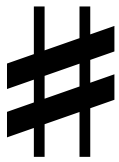
this time next year
you will roll over in bed and I
will still be there and I
will blink my sleepy eyes and reach for
your body getting comfortable
and we will sink into each other,
our own little home
under the blankets we laid out.
and in my empty front yard
of a mind,
the stars stretch from corner to corner
of our little world,
and we are sinking into the grassy bed
beneath us and into the outstretched arms we keep forever
open and we will have spent more
of our lives loving each other than
we will have spent
just knowing each other.





Trinidad Sky God

Elisa Williams



An Ultimate Life Experience

Timothy Woods

Being one-track-minded, I had planned to graduate from high school and play football in college, but when I lost that, I felt lost.

In 1995, during my senior year of football, my school was reclassified to a 2A division level, which meant that a sports scholarship was highly unlikely. Disappointed but not deterred, after graduation, I packed my bags for college to live with the other players in the dorms. Arriving at Hell Week Football Training in Arizona, I went from being one of the biggest guys on my team to one of the smallest. This, coupled with the fact that I was denied all the grants and scholarships I had applied for, forced me to return to my hometown to regroup.

Back home, feelings of defeat overwhelmed me. I drank and partied every day for the entire year. I hit rock bottom when I woke up to a burning tent set on fire by the friends I'd been partying with. No doubt, drinking beer and eating mainly at Taco Bell took its toll on my health, and, at that point, joining the military was my best option. I walked into the Marine Corps recruiting station and signed up.

I was still partying with my friends while taking my ASVAB and going through MEPS. MEPS is like a hotel with medical desks. Once you have your ASVAB score, the recruiter will show you the types of jobs you can have. Luckily, I scored high enough to become a helicopter mechanic, which was the job I'd hoped to secure. My MOS was my job title. They call you a 6113, so if someone asks what you do in the Marine Corps, you answer, "I'm 6113."

As a 6113 Helicopter Mechanic, I signed on the dotted line. While waiting to leave for boot camp, on the very last night of MEPS, I stayed up until 2 a.m., drinking. That night, while wrestling with my roommate, I jammed my big toe on the edge of the bed and sprained it. Despite the pain and my lifetime injury, I boarded the plane the next morning and flew to the San Diego Marine Corps Recruiting Depot. When I arrived, all recruits were directed to the white military bus parked outside of baggage claim at the San Diego Airport. Drill instructors walked us out, lined us up in a single file, and proceeded to march us onto the bus. "Don't look at me," the drill instructors warned. "Keep your eyes straight forward, and don't say a word!" The bus left the airport for the Marine Corps Recruiting Depot, fewer than ten minutes away. When

we arrived, the drill instructors ordered us off the bus. "Keep your eyes straight forward and hurry up," they commanded. There were hundreds of us lined up in a single file. We stood for hours without so much as a muscle twitch.

The next three days were hell. We didn't sit, sleep, or eat. We were given uniforms and had our heads shaved. Over those three days, we stood at attention and received so many shots that we became completely numb. On day three, we were assigned to a barracks where we showered and used the bathroom. *The drill instructors never leave your side and never stop yelling at you.* They rushed us into the shower, shouting, "Hurry up and keep your eyes straight forward." We pushed each other to use the bathroom, with five or more people sharing a urinal.

Those three days were life changing. I made unbelievable friends from all over the United States, and I've seen over a dozen different countries. If you're looking to see the world, being part of the Air Wing in the Marine Corps is the way to go. It's amusing how life unfolds. I never wanted to join the military; it was my backup plan. My original plan, who I wanted to be, is still within me, which is why you see me in college today. The plan never changed; it just took a little longer than anticipated. I learned that when things don't go as planned, it's important to recognize the bigger picture. Keep the faith, stay true to yourself, and let life work.



Philbert

Maddie Sieg



Together in Steel

Jake Rasband

It was an endless cacophony of whirring and industrial pounding. What once served as a stable mantra of mechanical stability now seemed like the thumping of cannons around her. It was inside her; her pounding heart made its voice heard inside her ears while her lungs filled like air sirens—just a few more adjustments.

The heavy turns of the rusted valves and the slight ticking of the needle indicated that the pressure in the system was starting to rise. Her boots pounded against the oil-stained concrete beneath her as her hands rushed into a flurry of work.

Calloused and rough from labor, one hand sent the steel line crashing into the press, permanently breaking the machine as splinters shot out everywhere. Her other hand—a faded silver chrome implement of a mechanical nature—used its augmented strength to bend the sensitive components of another machine into a crooked mess. A small smile crept onto her lips as she worked, remembering her mother's disdain for the inorganic limb.

It pained the woman designated "Unit Delta" to destroy everything she had worked on for several years. She had been a machinist since her family had the opportunity to sell the land they lived on for the certification to manufacture Unity's weaponry in the concrete maze of the country's capital. Funny how her mind kept dragging her back now, showing glimpses of a past she had never taken the time to appreciate. A grimy-stained hand wiped matted locks of red hair from her brow. The sweat and industrial dust mixed into an eye-stinging irritant that matted her hair.



Poppy Pod Jar

David Semanas

Another turn, another pull, and alarm claxons wailed through the air as steam and pressure built up in the steel furnace. This place would be erased along with every mistake she made in service to her country. "Kelly, you were given such an honor, you know," her mother had often told her. False pride led her to believe she was doing the right thing and could help. Delta stopped using the name her mother gave her after she passed; it just felt painful somehow. She wondered if her mother would be proud. She wished they could talk again. She wished she could borrow some of her strength.

Loud sirens cut through the mechanical chaos. She had hoped for more time before the unit showed up. She knew them as a hundred hushed stories of silenced noncompliance—the silent death knell of traitors and terrorists, both of which she supposed she now was. How did they get wind so fast? The sound of treads grinding along the asphalt meant it wasn't just regular protectors or civil peacekeeping forces, as she had thought; somehow, she had already been compromised. It was as if the moment she stepped out of line, they came crashing down. Her head was rushing even more than before now; a fire just wouldn't cut it. Acting fast, she closed more pipes, added a few shovels of coal to the furnace, and ran to the foreman's office. Ripping filing cabinets out, she heard the heavy footsteps of combat boots enter the building as she tossed personnel files into the flames, starting with her own. She kept coming up empty-handed about how fast she had been caught. Suddenly, she felt a horrible chill shoot down her spine like electric firecrackers. A hand reached up the back of her neck, where she thumbed over her operating chip.

The thought of someone being in her mind, in the minds of her augmented coworkers, made her stomach knot. She had let them into her head—her thoughts. Was that pride in her work, even hers? How much of her was even the one she thought she strived to be? A metallic taste filled her mouth as she pulled the chip out, taking some skin and the housing hardware with it. It wasn't meant to be removed except by a certified technician, and she could now see why. Her vision filled with sparkling stars, her body lurched forward, and she screamed. They wouldn't take her. Looking at the pressure gauge, she laughed as the boots came closer. She always tried to do right by people. She wondered what her parents would say when she saw them again.



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Welcome To Seligman  Birthplace of Historic Route 66



God Speaks English

Isabella Scarbrough

The ocean is crossing itself
They crossed it too
In bellies of rusted prayer
A family gets lost in translation
A woman folds her home into a handbag
A man is deported
who has lived here longer than I've been alive Survival here is an accident of
birth
The house is on fire, but I sleep inside
Because I was born with the right key
These gods in glass towers
Believe in just numbers
Their prayers manifest in wire transfers
But they are entrepreneurs
Visionaries
Job creators
This profit is holy oil
And I am dry ground
I witness men build empires out of loopholes
The laws love them
The system is a gift sculpted from their hands
The wealthiest nation in the world cannot afford school lunch, Cannot afford
education
Cannot afford healthcare
This is a country where the ladder sells
Federalists read our bedtime stories
And by candlelight
In houses that flood when it rains
Still, we dream, not for more, just for enough
Enough to breathe without counting
And enough people who refuse to burn





The Wave

Sandie Dihlmann

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Andrew Wyeth Farm Pond!

Collin Cockayne

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