



2015

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# CURIOS

Our intent for Curios literary magazine is to foster the breadth of creative expressions across our northern Arizona community by providing publication opportunities to local writers and artists. Curios is produced annually by Coconino Community College students enrolled in COM 181 with the guidance of CCC faculty and staff.

**For Submission Guidelines and Charitable Contributions, Please visit us at:**  
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**Inside cover image:** *Greg Hill*

**Back cover image:** *Kiril Kirkov*



greg hill

# **Curios**

## **Magazine**

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ECHOES | Rachel Soumokil

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DROPLETS  
| Ariel Nepsky

## SLEEPWALKER

Rebekah Barrett

The wind rustled the tall, tan Indiana grass where Philippe lay sleeping. He awoke to the chilly bite of the cold breeze on his bare arms. Struggling into an upright position, he sleepily brushed away the dirt and rocks that clung to his skin. He finally forced himself to look around and assess the uncomfortable place in which he had made his bed at some point the night before.

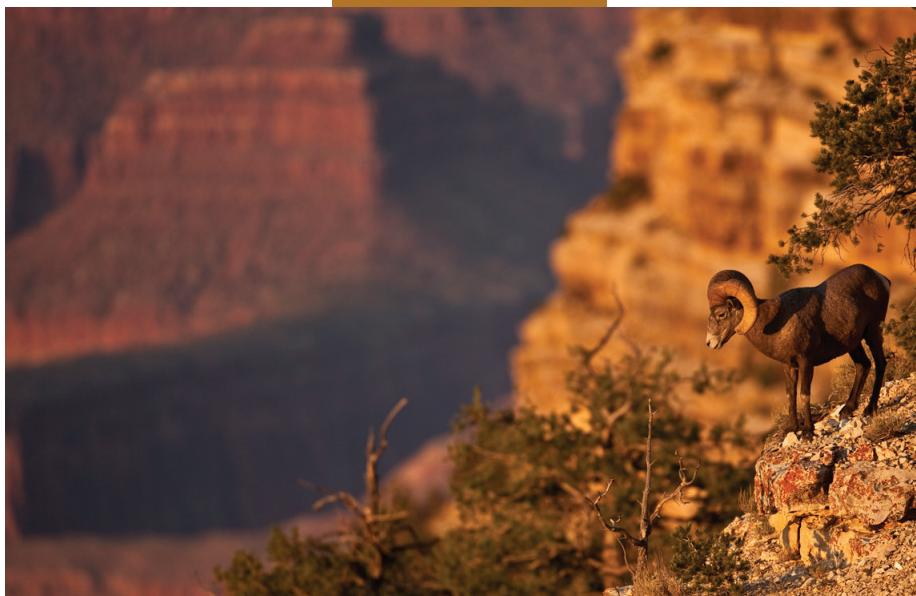
Philippe Rohhan was a proud Latino teacher at the local elementary school. He spent a lot of time outside class researching and trying to come up with ways to enrich his classroom and make school a more enjoyable activity for his students. Though he was a reasonably attractive guy with soft brown eyes and dark wavy hair, he found himself struggling to maintain relationships. They were just never his priority.

Now as he sat, his trim body shivering against the brisk night air, an image appeared in his head. Green eyes, short, soft, red hair, and a smile stretching across her face in the starlight. But what did she have to do with his current predicament? Maybe nothing; maybe he just

conjured up her face in his imagination. Perhaps she was just the wish of a cold man to acquire some human warmth.

As he stood and pulled out his phone to GPS the way back to his house he couldn't help but imagine her with him. He imagined them meeting, mutually attracted and strangely similar; she was a teacher too. They talked all night, maybe had a few too many drinks, and took to the fields to romp and roll around, becoming hopelessly entangled in her... scarf? He lifted his foot to see that he had just trod upon a baby blue scarf just a few feet from where he had awoken. It was nothing; he was sure. Just his subconscious playing tricks on him again. Luckily he was not far from his home this time. He smiled inwardly. There was a chance he would meet the green-eyed lady again next time he went sleepwalking.

THE ONE | Kiril Kirkov





SENSE OF FLAGSTAFF | Kiril Kirkov

## SESTINA: SOUTH OF THE TRACKS

Kate Harkins

The wind sends the news along the one-way street  
And curls that day and the day before like oil paint.  
Thunder cracks by the Mission Church, south of the tracks,  
where men walk  
toward the evening meal. The Mission takes up a corner,  
and the one-legged man swings toward it on crutches.

I don't know the man on crutches.  
He appears like an apparition, continues down the street.

He combs the curbs and corners  
of urban desert for cigarette butts still burning. A can of spray paint  
rolls like a grenade toward his staccato walk.  
A train stops hard on the tracks.

The Mission south of the tracks  
blares its message of sin and salvation. The crutches  
rub underneath his arms as he walks  
past the alley along the street.  
A storm rumbles in the distant painted  
desert; lightning, like a zipper, opens the corners

of the sky. The Mission lights stare from the corner;  
the neon cross reflects a horizon of tracks  
that carry a cargo of the wrong kind of dreams painted  
with a horizontal smile, a social crutch  
to share with the faces in the street.  
Wise ghosts sail by as if they could walk

from place to place like many of us walk  
with form and mass filling space with dimension. A corner  
bar draws people from the street  
full of ink hiding faded tracks  
and scars. A legacy of crutches  
waves them like brushes full of paint.

Memory paints  
a history of others who walk  
on heavy journeys to gather crutches,  
like the man cornered  
by a treacherous mile where tanks dig their tracks  
here, again, and now, far away along San Francisco Street.

After dinner, night begins to paint deep into the corners;  
darkness empty, the man on crutches heads toward the tracks  
on that walk toward Main Street.

# SOMEWHERE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL

Julie Widmann

Both hesitant and anxious, I could feel the plane making our gradual descent into the foreign land I had been anticipating for months. The place my parents forbade me to go. The place I would run to get away from home and everything that it represented: church, authorities, and confinements of my freedom. The person: a skinny, blond, eighteen-year-old girl on a mission; the place: Europe. What did I know of this place? Absolutely nothing. What was I going to do? Where would I go? I had no answers but hoped to find them. The plane made a startling thud as we touched down and skidded to a halt. This was the end of my itinerary, but the beginning of my life, and I had no idea what was to come.

Three months of travelling exposed me to many things: new languages, cultures, art, history, foods, and alcohol. It was a freedom I had never felt before. I decided where I would go, what I would do, and the company I kept. I was in love with the independence, so at the end of my three months, I knew I wasn't ready to go home. I needed more time. I had not found my answers. A job at a hostel became available in Rome, so I called up my parents to give them the news. My mother, a quiet, very sweet, Christian middle-aged woman was doing the dinner dishes while my dad went back to work on some project around the house when the phone rang. I had to ease into this one.

"Mom and Dad, I am doing good. I have met some interesting people, but don't worry I am staying very safe. Sorry I don't call more often, and by the way I have decided not to use my plane ticket home."

....pause, hold my breath, clench my teeth, and wait for the anger and disappointment. But all was silent. My dad started to speak; surprisingly, he had some news for me too. They told me of a position in Bulgaria working as a teacher at a Christian school. I hadn't pictured myself working at a religious school, but it was a year in another country getting paid relatively well. Maybe just this once I could compromise with my parents. So, after a few days of thought, I took it and began making my way from Rome to Sofia, Bulgaria. I had the whole weekend to get there, so I thought I would check out a few other countries on the way.

The past three months were the most amazing experience of my life until I made my way to Greece. There it all fell apart. Everywhere I went, people were hissing and propositioning me. There was to be no rest for the weary in this place. Instead of staying another night in Greece, as planned, I thought I might find peace in Turkey and catch a train out of there. To my dismay, Turkey was even worse. As soon as I stepped out of the crowded, dusty train station, men were staring, kids were running up to me and putting their hands in my pocket, and people were pulling over requesting for me to get in their cars. I was in utter shock and frightened out of my mind. My perfect adventure was going terribly awry. I had to come up with a new plan. I was going to get to Bulgaria.

I quickly stepped off the street back into the train station to head in a new direction. This just wasn't working. Shaken and very afraid, I found a train to Bulgaria, purchased my ticket, and sat on the bench waiting. The loneliness and helplessness was beginning to take over me. Were my parents right? Was this a mistake after all? Maybe I should have gone home. What was I thinking?

An old man working in the baggage office approached me and asked if I wanted some tea. I could smell a sweet aroma coming from the pot. The man was short, with a round belly and a pleasant smile. He had grey

hair and kind eyes. After days of being harassed, it was refreshing to find some warmth of a fellow human being. I gladly accepted and walked into his office, where we shared tea. He could barely speak English, but we managed to communicate in broken grammar.

It was a pleasant conversation. He had an eighteen-year-old daughter as well, but he travelled far from home for work to support his family. He actually happened to be taking the same train home as me; it made multiple stops on the way to Bulgaria. He politely asked if we could sit together on the train to continue our conversation, and I consented. I enjoyed having some relaxing human interaction. Once we boarded, I noticed immediately that we were the only people on the train, but thought nothing more of it. We continued our small talk, sharing the pleasantries of life and culture. I slumped back into my seat, kicked up my feet, and relaxed. I was finally on my way. I suppose I let my guard down, too, because as soon as I threw off the cares of the day I was rudely awoken to the reality of the situation. This wasn't some nice old man sharing some tea. This wasn't a loving father and husband. This man was a pervert.

"You, me, sex please." What?!

My head started spinning, my eyes were tearing up, and I couldn't believe this was happening. I had thought he was a safe haven. I began screaming at him and telling him "no," but he persisted. I begged him to get off the train at the next stop and leave me alone, but he just kept on and on. After what seemed to be hours of begging, he gave up and left the train.

I sank back into my chair, shocked by what just happened. My stomach was nauseated from the stench my travel-mate left behind: stale cigarettes and creepiness. There was no one I could have gone to for

help. I was still all alone. He could have done terrible things and nobody would have known--but I forgot--what about the train attendant? There must be one. Just as this thought crossed my mind, he poked his head in my car. Thank God! Yes, the terrible man was gone, but for some reason knowing there was an attendant made me feel safe. He introduced

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*"GOD, THERE IS NOTHING  
I CAN DO.  
IF YOU ARE REAL,  
PLEASE HELP ME."*

---

himself, and as he spoke his first words, there was a swarthy scent of booze and cigarettes on his breath. He came in closer with drunken movements and asked me to join him in his compartment.

Oh no, this man too? Once again, I found myself pleading to be left alone. After another hour of bargaining for my safety, he left and told me he would come back for me at the Bulgarian border. I was in a daze trying to make sense of it all. What happened to the journey of my dreams? This wasn't it.

I rode the train to Bulgaria praying to God to protect me. Once we reached the Bulgarian border, the country I was so desperately seeking to reach, the attendant came back and asked me to get off the train. I wasn't so sure about following his direction, but this time I could see other people outside getting off other trains and walking towards an office, so I left the attendant and followed, realizing this was where they would give me a Bulgarian stamp on my passport. After a long wait, I walked through the shack of a passport office and sat down at a desk. An older woman with a weathered face asked me if I had any hard currency. I reached in my pocket and pulled out one-hundred dollars' worth of Turkish lira.

She looked at me sternly, and I knew my money situation wasn't to her liking. My heart sank. A cold rush ran through my body when I

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realized what this meant.

“Back to Istanbul. No Sofia,” she said. I no longer had the gumption to continue the fight to make it to Sofia. I had no idea of how I would get past this obstacle.

“I can’t go to Turkey. I have to go to Sofia!” I cried. “Please, Please, Please, I have no money, I have no plane ticket, and I have no train tickets. I have to go to Sofia.”

It was of no use. She pointed the way to the train back to Turkey. I walked onto the platform crying. I looked up into the sky and loudly spoke.

“God, there is nothing I can do. If you are real, please help me.”

It wasn’t more than a minute when a man came from the side of the platform and asked me to follow him. I begged him to help me and he repeated the request to follow him. He led me to the train going to Bulgaria, put me into a train compartment, and left. The train jerked forward and began moving. I had gotten through. God must have heard me.

It was there I found spirituality, the thing I had been avoiding. My questions had been answered, and life was ready to begin. I was strong enough to handle any situation, and there was something out there bigger than me that would guide the way. Some might say it was all a coincidence, and maybe it was, but for me it marked the beginning of my life’s journey and how I would live it.



GREETING | Dan Begay





SEDONA | Ariel Nepsky

# PORCELAIN

Karen McCoy

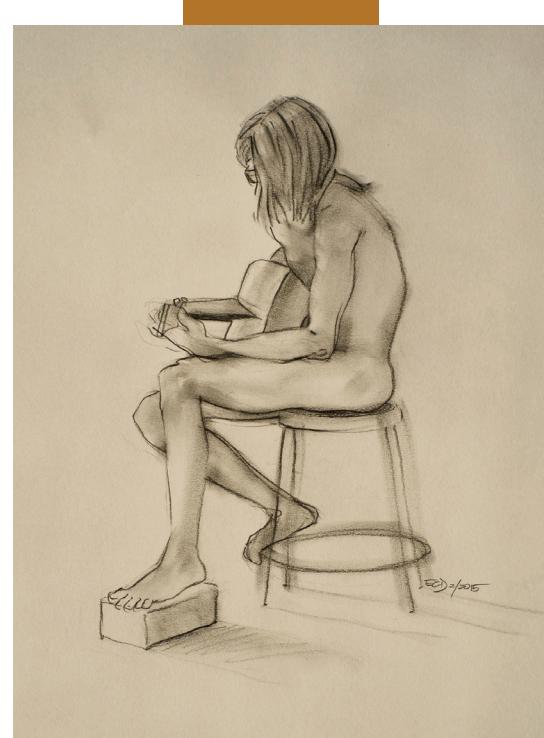
Whenever I move a muscle or twitch my lips, he touches my cheek with his gloved hand, and I become porcelain again. I remain his Venus-like statue, naked except for the ivy that swirls my body.

His friends admire me and the other statues when he opens up his house for yet another fancy fundraiser. All I can do is stare while they chew \$400 lobster with their mouths open.

There's a man who hovers near my corner, picks his nose, and eats it.

It wasn't that long ago that I was one of them, eager for a tipsy drink and a good time, wearing a red dress to make sure I got noticed.

My captor, with his thick mustache and eager eyes, called me over after the first course and handed me a glass of champagne that tasted like spun sugar. I downed it, and the world turned black.



NICHOLAS WITH GUITAR | Elaine Dillingham

I woke up alone and naked near the fireplace, where he finished wrapping me with ivy. I was sore, raw, and bleeding. He'd obviously had his way with me while I was unconscious. The other statues, all women, all in ivy, stared at me with prying eyes. One tried to move her lips.

I attempted to respond, but my lips were frozen too. He already had his power over me. Adjusting his deadly leather gloves, he touched the rest of me until everything turned solid, my living, protesting brain encased in porcelain to keep me fragile.

Since then, I've tried to see a way through his magic. Get a hold of those gloves.

He shares more alcohol with these guests, and the room gets dense with drunkenness and sweat. Women stagger in heels and reddened men elbow each other.

Soon enough, he spots his next victim. A blushing brunette in a blue dress. He removes his gloves and hands her a glass of the sugary champagne, glimmering like a devil's wink.

No. I won't allow it. My cheekbone clenches, freeing itself from the porcelain. My neck follows. I fall to the floor, and my encasing breaks.

Appalled party-goers gasp. More porcelain shatters. I struggle to move, my muscles atrophied, reaching for the discarded gloves. But my arm seizes. Another woman statue, the one who tried to warn me that first night, holds my wrist with her stiff fingers.

"If you touch the gloves, you'll freeze. Please. Let me."

Before I can stop her, she swallows them whole, and turns back to naked porcelain.

The party is in complete disarray. Wine spills. People yell and trip over one another. Gathering my sore legs, I run to the other statues and continue to break them. The one who saved us remains petrified, gloves lodged in her system.

Our captor, face red with rage, chases me. But without his gloves, he's helpless. He touches my cheek, but nothing happens. Smug, I punch his face, and he collapses.

Porcelain crumbled at last, we make our escape.



MV11 | Dan Begay

# LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Audrey Benally

Growing up, words never came out the way I'd wanted. I never really knew about my heritage, the language, or the mannerisms. That's when I'd look to my parents for guidance to repeat the words they'd said when speaking to the elders. They sounded so clear in my head. I kept repeating them over and over. Then, when I thought I was ready, I'd open my mouth and let the words roll out. What I said was strange and foreign; the words never sounded right.

I never thought of myself as different growing up. I was good at the simple traditions: the basic bad juju and the good. I remember in grade school, my dad used to tickle my brother's nose with horse hair from the tip of his pear-shaped gourd. My brother would close his eyes, his nose would crinkle up, and *ah-choo!* Then it would be my turn to have my nose tickled. I would always stare at the gourd and its intriguing beaded design. Light blue, black and yellow beads repeated in zig-zag patterns along the bottom. White beads along the border made the color pop. Every night before we went to bed or any time we were in our parents' room, my dad would shake the rattle. It didn't sound like a baby's rattle; it had a calming tune, a careless harmony that would intertwine with the singer's voice. I always loved hearing my dad sing; his voice was perfectly pitched, loud but gentle. It made me wonder how many traditional songs he knew by heart.

I would be sitting in my room watching TV, doing homework or reading. The walls so thin I could hear the conversations going on from the comforts of my room. I would hear rumbling in the kitchen, the refrigerator door opening, and my dad asking in Navajo, "What should I eat?" When he'd start singing a tune, I would turn down the TV to listen to him. You could hear him still singing from the kitchen to the garage door, and then he would stop. "Augie," he'd yell, then "Chump."

This meant "You better get outside. I need help." My dad would either be fixing the vehicles, bringing them back to life, or cussing the car out saying "chiidii" or "ma'ii nii." He'd do yard work around the house, saying, "I have one in one million things to do." Those are probably the only Navajo words I understood when I was younger.

When my dad had weekends off, he would take us to Kayenta to visit his mom and grandma. We always stopped at Grandma Betty's home first. Turning off the main highway, passing five cattle guards and turning left at the sixth cattle guard, we'd hit a dirt road leading to a hill a quarter-mile from the paved road. The road was so washboarded that everything in the vehicle was jostled out of place. At the top of the hill, we saw little dots of homes scattered amongst the dry desert with little patches of green shrubs showing. It was as hot as Phoenix.

Grandma Betty had a little two-bedroom home where my dad and some of his siblings grew up. The house next door, my dad's mom's home, was where his younger five siblings grew up. Grandma Betty's home was always inviting. Ego, her dog, would greet you by barking and coming up to lick your legs or hands. A small dog like Wishbone, but less yappy, Ego used to live with us during the time we lived in Houck. But Grandma Betty needed a new dog since her other dog was run over. Her home faced east and had a small deck, a chair and table, and a little potty.

When we saw Grandma Betty, she had a face filled with happiness and delight, grateful that her grandson and great-grandkids came to visit. I would walk up and give her a hug, and she would respond in Navajo. I always looked to my mom for some sort of response. "Shinali," she'd say. Then I would repeat it. Grandma Betty would say something else in Navajo, and all I could do was smile. Then the mysterious conversation would go on. I caught on to simple words: "hello," "grandpa," "grandma," "water," "here," "sheep," and "dogs."

My brother and I were shy when we were at Grandma Betty's house.

Neither one of us spoke Navajo. We sat on the couch or in the other room, always digging through our bags; we had to bring what we needed since there was no electricity or running water there.

Yogi and Sugar would come over thirty minutes to an hour later. We would talk about the latest with school, friends, and music. My brother and I didn't really know about Michael Jordan, Nikes, and athletic gear.

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*GRANDMA BETTY HAD A LITTLE  
TWO BEDROOM HOME WHERE  
MY DAD, WILSON, LAWRENCE,  
JOHNNY, AND LENA GREW UP.*

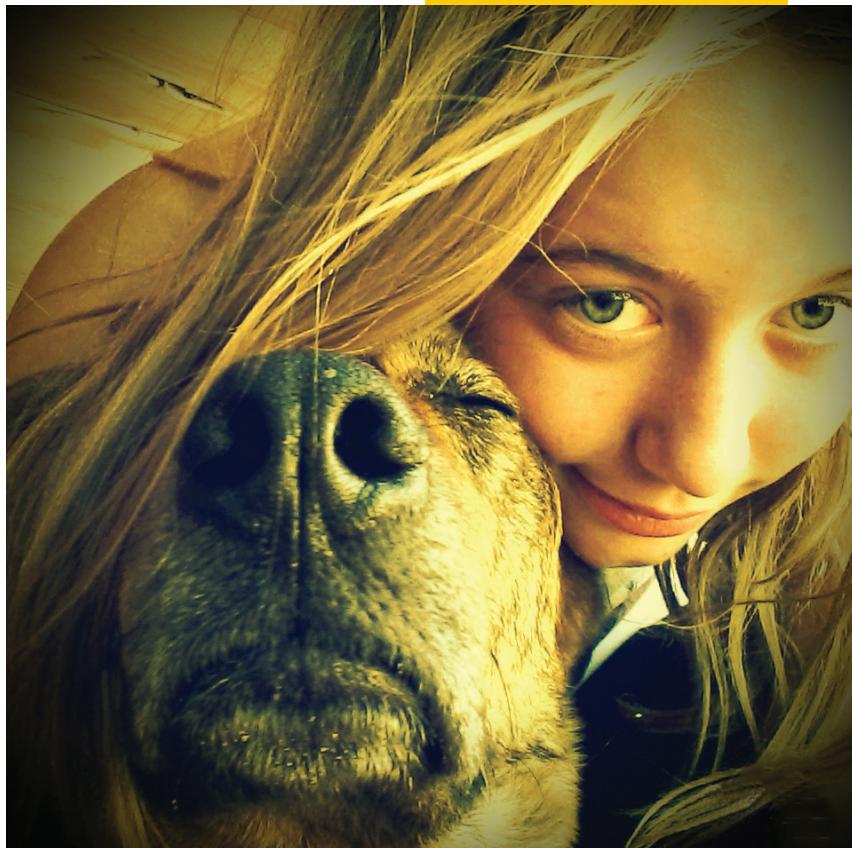
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Afterwards, we all walked to Grandma Helen's house. She would be surprised to see my brother and me when we walked inside, and the routine began again.

Grandma Helen spoke to me in Navajo, and I would look to Yogi or Sugar for help. One of them would usually say, "Grandma asked when you guys came." I'd lean over and tell one of them, "This afternoon." Yogi or Sugar would turn to Grandma Helen with their gathered thoughts. They would tell her in Navajo what I said in English. All Grandma Helen would do was nod and say something else in Navajo, but Yogi and Sugar wouldn't say anything else after that. This was the usual way of speaking to my grandmas: my cousins would be my translators.

Over the years, I learned the basics of my Navajo clans and took Navajo in high school, barely scraping by. I noticed my parents' conversation become more careful when I was around, and Sugar and Kenneh would make fun of me for fumbling the language.

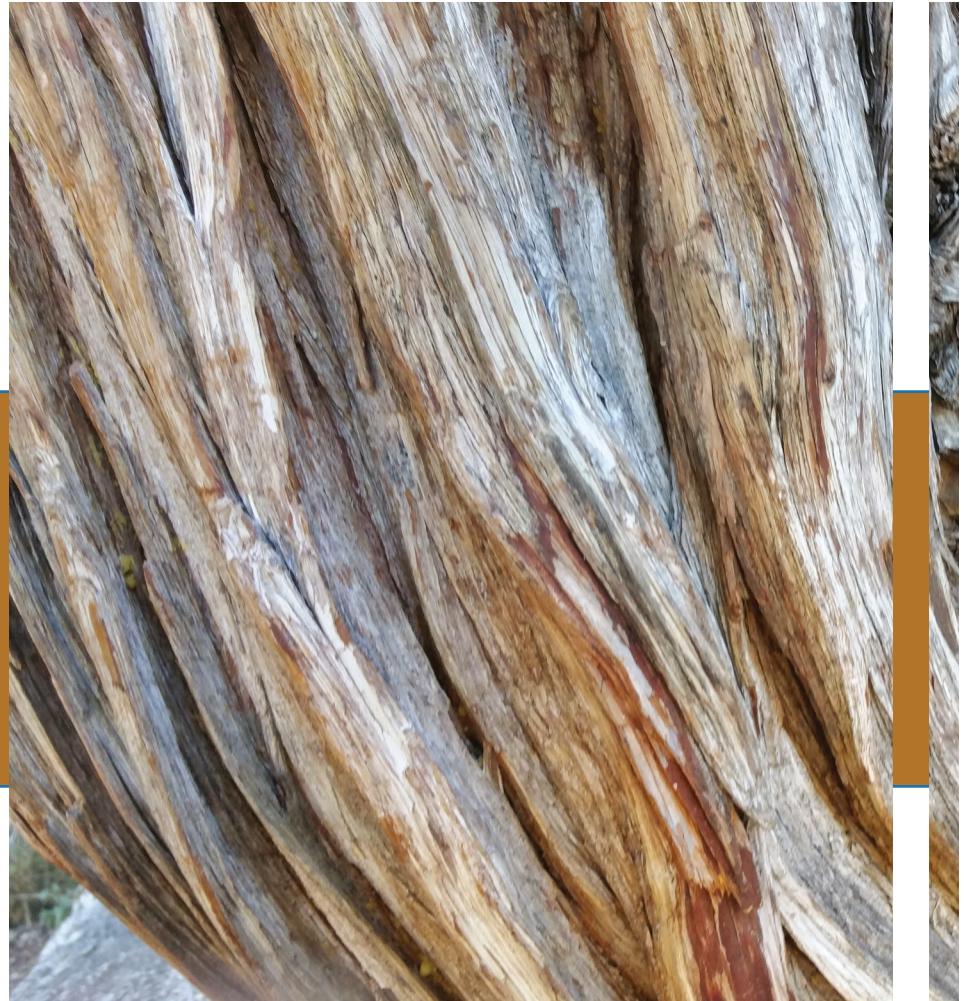
I've noticed some of the younger generation taking their language for granted. Some are even embarrassed by it, claiming they do know but don't speak a great deal of it. I think they're so lucky to have a second language, especially one so well-known.

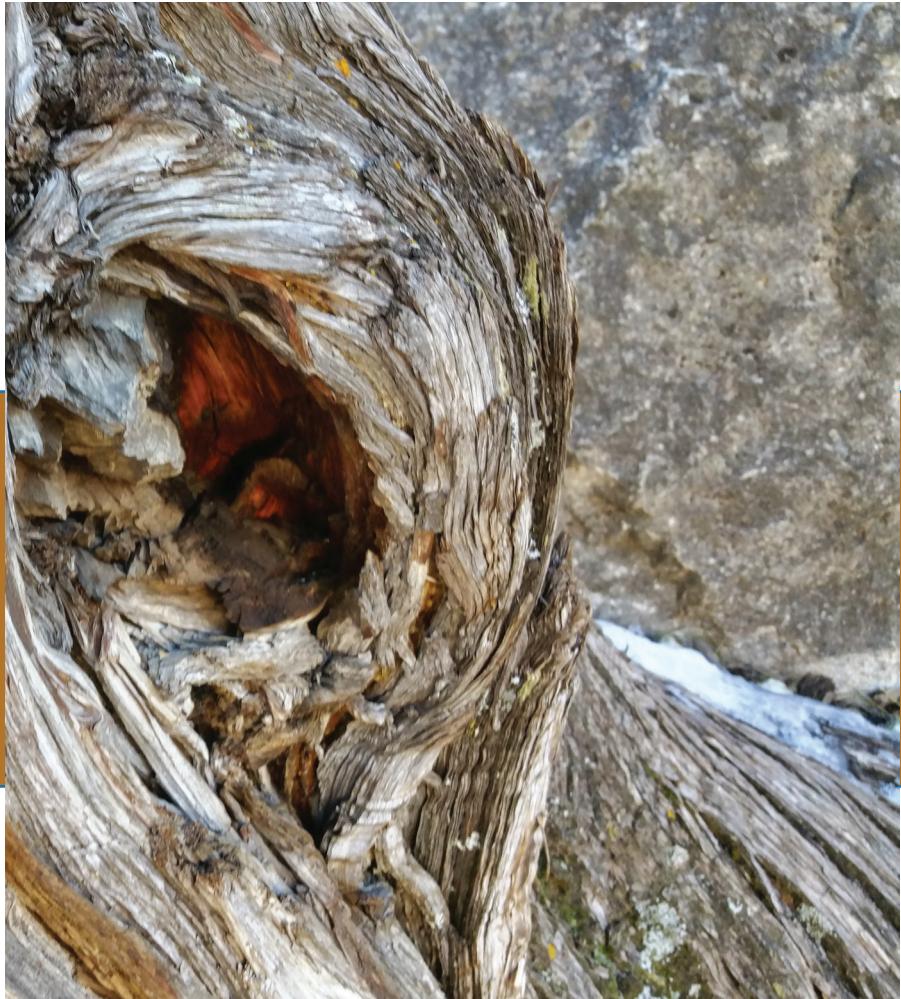


Tiger and Me | Nina Dihlmann



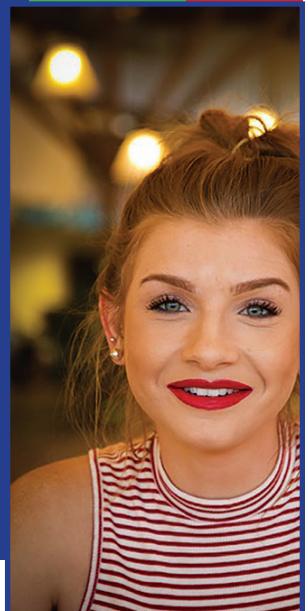
FLAME | Ariel Nepsky





Flow | Rachel Soumokil

*Bryan: "I'm in engineering, but only because my parents want me to. What I really want to do is be in music. I sing R&B."*



*(Me) "Tell me about your morning?"*

*(Her) "Well, my roommate and I listened to rap music and I made her late to class."*



Simon: "Where do you see yourself in 10 years?"

Phillip: "Hmm. In 10 years I see myself with more skin damage, more freckles, and still a redhead."



*Rock Climber:* "I tried to get some sleep last night, because I was bouldering all day yesterday. My upstairs neighbor played their EDM music too loud so I had to bang on the ceiling with a broom."



Simon Asher

# Where The Buffalo Roamed

Zoni Eaton

Every time we come here, it's just for a few hours to get away from stress. That stress, of course, is from life, bills, school, and work. Every few weeks we need a release from the fast-paced, over-caffeinated lives we live as college students. Buffalo Park in Flagstaff has a fantastic Frisbee golf course within the trees. We bring six-packs of beer and our five Frisbees, one for each friend.

Baker the dog trots along side us as we pass the bridge and ice-skating rink. The piles of leftover ice melt in the sun. His brindled coat looks shiny and clean, something that probably will not last.

It is still a little cold, but we have cabin fever. Time to leave our apartments, those winter fortresses we have bundled up in for the last few months. Hopefully, we get warmer as we play through the eighteen holes. Already, the first few holes are shady, giant pine trees towering over us. Wind whips through their branches and makes it hard to fling our Frisbees straight.

Leaves from last season barely cling to the twigs holding them. New buds are starting on the smaller trees. The fastest-growing plants are the bushes, with thorns bigger than the ones on rosebushes.

I stop for a moment and get a long talon of a thorn out of my right boot. Running ahead to catch up, I notice how hard it is to keep my balance. Not because of the beer; don't be silly! The path is well-marked, but strewn with rocks, big and small. Really, they're the perfect sizes to trip on and stumble.

A gigantic thick tree stands at the beginning of hole five. On closer inspection, the notches on the tree are deep and grooved from the



TIGER BALL  
| Nina Dihlmann

Frisbees that have smacked into it for years.

People are playing next to us, since the “frolfing” holes overlap and crisscross. Baker’s favorite game with other dogs is making them chase him. He runs faster as soon as they get close, their mouths open, excited for the chase. It is all friendly, and the dogs follow us every now and then to try to catch Baker.

Just ahead of us, there are a few little kids, and I wonder if they can hear us. Frisbee golf is a game of its own. When throwing a miss, most people yell “Fuck!” instead of “Fore.” The parents of those kids might be telling them it is fore anyway.

At hole ten, we all twist one foot on the lucky horseshoe implanted within the tee-pad. It is a memorial for the man who first dreamed of building a Frisbee golf course on the Buffalo Park grounds. But it is also just a random horseshoe that construction workers found on the ground. The horseshoe has been twisted on so many times, the cement around it has eroded and makes the horseshoe seem obscure.

Further down, as our Frisbees fly through the air, mine happens to fling into a pile of rusted metal. It is extremely ductile, bending as I place my boots on top of it to take the shot. Play it where it lies! More of a “Happy Gilmore” rule, but we play the part, balancing our beers in our hands as we take frolfing shots.

A blue jay dives across the path in front of us. I always think about how the state bird of Nevada (my home state) is a blue jay, and Arizona’s is a cardinal. There are far more blue jays in Arizona, as far as I can tell.

The most challenging hole is approaching. It is about halfway through the course, and also looks way easier than it is, tricking most newcomers. A rusted fence stretches along the side of the course. The hole is wide open with no trees on top of a hill. The wind is still blowing

as hard as when we walked into the park. As we line up our Frisbee, that wind steals them away past the fence. I must balance to throw my next shot from on top of the fallen fence. I bounce a little off the ground and hurl my Frisbee to the left, hoping to avoid the fence again.

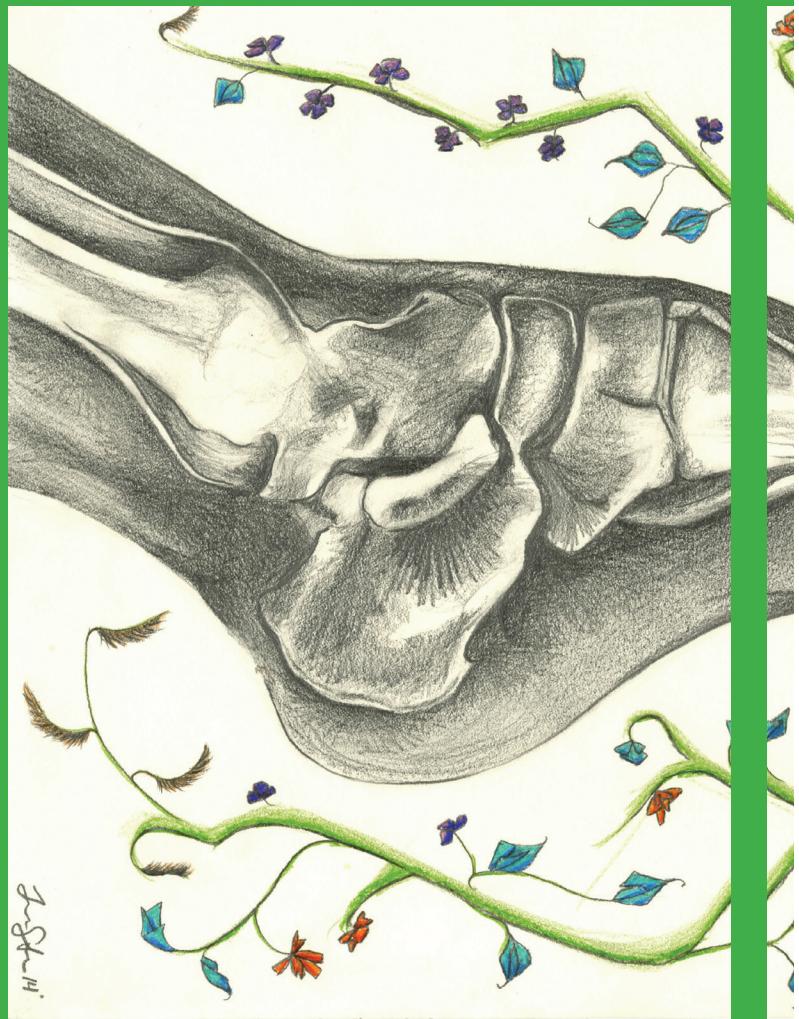
I've heard that animals were kept in the park about fifty years ago. Buffalo and antelope once played on the grounds that humans have now beaten into paths. I wonder where the animals went after Flagstaff grew as a town. Maybe the fence that steals Frisbees was used to keep animals from wandering too far.

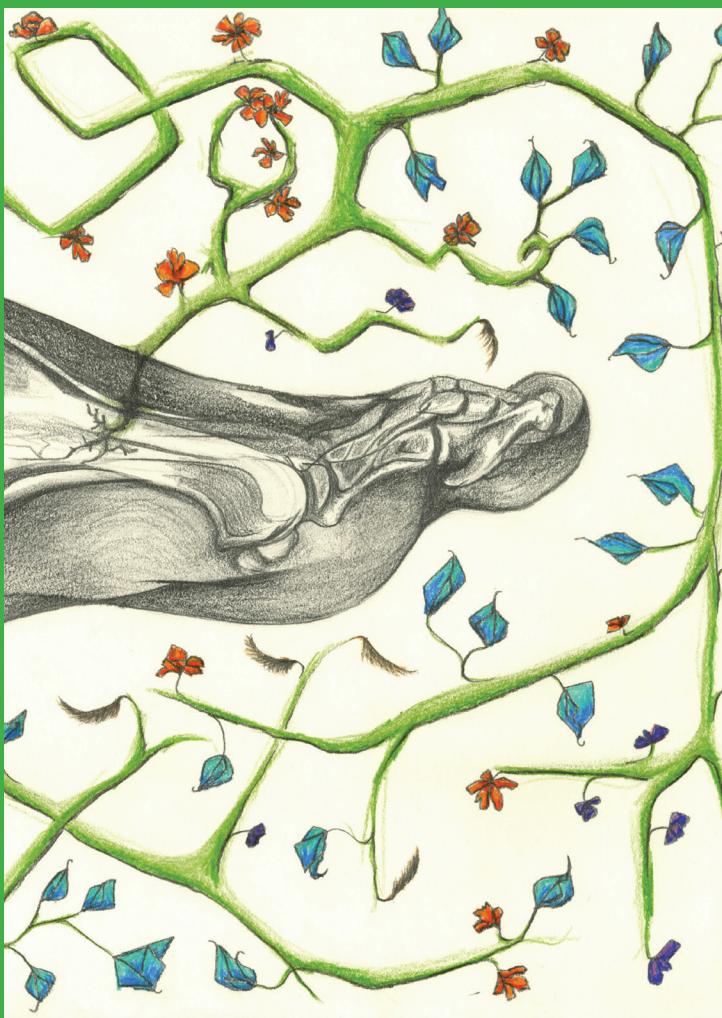
The boys all run up the steep hill to the next five holes, so I keep my speed and run up with them. Mountain bikers would love this part of the park. We actually have time today to play all eighteen holes, a rare treat. After hole fifteen, we explore the park for sixteen, a hole we usually skip because we can't find it.

We double back along the course and come across the neglected tee-pad. It is obvious we are not the only ones to skip it; the group in front of us did not even notice they only played seventeen holes. The hole is nothing special, but gives us another fifteen minutes to play.

It is time to start finishing up the game. The boys are competitive, and two of them fight for the lead on the last hole. There are no hard feelings; the game did its job. The sun feels hotter as we make our way back to the car.

Having a day to ourselves, where no boss or professor is telling us what to do, is necessary. I think we would all go crazy without little breaks like Frisbee golf. We never get to walk around observing how different all the lichen on the rocks are, or other random things about nature and people. Most days, I run around so fast I never notice the little details. It is important to slow down, breathe, and take everything in.





Tamara Seaton | Healing

# HEATSEEKER

Pamela Donovan

An accordion.

That's what the snout of Will's baby looked like. Even as he sat there in the driver's seat of his once-cherry Mustang, dazed from his collision with another car (a fucking Cadillac hearse, for chrissakes), he could only think of an accordion as he gazed at the hood of his car through the windshield.

He'd been driving along a country back road, the deep rumble of the car's engine vibrating underneath the AC/DC playing at top volume. At 2 a.m., the roads were deserted. The night was so clear and the moon so bright, he'd decided to drive with his headlights off. Pleasantly buzzed from the kegger down at the lake, the idea of driving by moonlight had seemed like a fucking brilliant plan. He'd clicked off the headlights, enjoying the feeling of driving through a surreal, blue-lit landscape.

Will remembered no screeching of tires before the deafening crunch of Addams' Family Truckster crashing into him. His seatbelt jerked tight, and he saw a bright electric flash from the car stereo. Now the only sound was the hiss of his radiator.

The adrenaline pumping through his bloodstream helped clear his head. He flexed various body parts, deciding he wasn't hurt badly. He fished around on the front seat for his cell phone, but the screen was smashed, the phone dead. He popped open the door, which swung wide with a terrible metallic groan that told him the frame was likely bent. After climbing out, he surveyed the damage to his baby. Totaled. Outrage battled with the thought that his dad was going to kill him.

The other vehicle's front end was crumpled as well, but not as badly as the Mustang's. The hearse was an old one, maybe from the 1950's, all curves with big fins on the back. What the hell was a car like that doing out here in the middle of rural farmland in the dead of night?

No one had emerged from the death mobile, and an icy spike of fear pierced the scarlet cloud of anger in his head. Jesus, what if the other driver was hurt bad? Or worse? He approached the driver's side door, looking for movement behind the cracked windshield but seeing nothing. Peering in the side window, he saw that the seat was empty.

"Hey, you in there? Are you okay?"

Nope, the front seat was definitely empty. Will straightened and looked around, suddenly feeling very alone. The road stretched out from the intersection in four directions, straight, glowing ribbons of patched blacktop. Not even a glimmer of light from a farmhouse anywhere. Wheat fields edged three corners of the intersection, the fourth with corn, rows and rows as high as an elephant's eye. A night breeze rustled through them, the dry scratching of the stalks emphasizing just how alone he was.

Where was the driver?

"Hello!" he called out into the night. No one answered. He eyed the cornfield. Maybe the driver had been injured, and staggered off through the rows. He walked a circle around the hearse. Thick curtains, drawn over the elongated side windows, prevented him from looking in. After one trip around, he got on his hands and knees to look underneath. Nothing, nobody. He stood back up and ran a shaking hand over his face, trying to think of what to do. It was too far to walk to town, but the idea of sitting out here alone and waiting for another car to come along to help didn't appeal to him, either. At all.

He turned his eyes back to the hearse. There was one place he hadn't checked. The hair on the nape of his neck prickled as he stared at the rear door, the one leading to the compartment where the occupants took their final cruise before being placed in the ground. The idea of opening that door filled him with dread. And why bother? It's not as if the driver would have crawled back there. Still...he had to be somewhere, and besides wandering into the cornfield, the back of the car was the last place to check.

"Quit being such a pussy," he muttered to himself, and reached out to grasp the handle. He secretly prayed it would be locked, but it clicked easily. Swallowing, he pulled the wide rear door open.

A casket rested inside. He barked out a laugh. Great, not only was his Mustang totaled, but he was stuck out here in the middle of nowhere, at night, alone, with a fucking casket. The sight of it made his heart hammer and his skin crawl. Was there a body in it? The way his luck was running, probably.

"What are you doing?"

Will let out a very unmanly yelp and spun around. A woman stood behind him, looking past his shoulder at the casket.

She was almost as tall as he was and couldn't have been older than

twenty-five. Her long, platinum-blonde hair cascaded over her shoulders. It glowed in the moonlight, reaching almost to her waist. The short dress she wore was classy and form-fitting. Sleeveless, it showed nicely toned arms, and alabaster skin. Her legs were long and shapely. Fuck-me pumps of pale snakeskin were on her feet, and a diamond necklace glittered hypnotically at her elegant throat. She was a bombshell. Under other circumstances, he'd probably try to get her to take a few laps around a mattress with him.

"Jesus, lady, you scared the hell out of me," Will said. "Where did you come from?"

Her dark, unblinking eyes shifted to his face.

"I was in the car," she said. She spoke with a slight lisp.

Will glanced over her again, looking for signs of trauma, but she appeared perfectly...perfect. "Are you okay?"

"Oh, yes, I'm fine." She shifted forward slightly. "Just a little hungry."

He blinked. There was something wrong with this woman. He didn't know what, but he suddenly wanted nothing to do with her. The backs of his legs hit the hearse's bumper as he took an instinctive step backward to get some distance between them. He stepped quickly to the left to get around her, but she moved to her right sinuously, blocking him.

An unreasonable panic was clawing in to his chest. "She's just a chick," he told himself. Calm the fuck down.

"You, ah, got a cell phone by chance?" His voice cracked, and he cleared his throat. "Have you called for help?"

"I don't need any help. But you do." She smiled, and Will saw the reason for her lisp. The only teeth she had were fangs, two long, terribly sharp, snake fangs. With growing horror, he watched as her mouth opened wide. With a grotesque motion, her bottom jaw unhinged itself, dropping open.

His logical brain refused to process this new information, rejecting it. His primitive hindbrain, on the other hand, decided it was time to peace out. He shoved out at her with a strength fueled by terror. His only thought was to escape, to hide, and the only place that offered refuge was the cornfield.

He tore into the rows, the tough leaves of the stalks whipping his face

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*"DON'T WORRY MASTER.  
I'VE TAKEN CARE OF THE PROBLEM."*

---

and hands. The ground was mucky and uneven, making it difficult to move fast. And Lord, God, Jesus, he really needed to move fast. Behind him, he heard something crashing through the corn. Something big. He didn't dare look back. He ran like he had never run before, even in high school football, but he could hear her gaining on him.

Hot, white agony shot through his ankle as he stepped wrong, the snap audible even over the thrashing of the cornstalks as the woman closed in on him. He couldn't stifle a shriek of pain as he fell hard, landing on his knees and elbows. Unable to stop himself from turning to see what hellish thing was after him, he turned over to look back the way he'd come. A scream tore from his throat. An impossibly large serpent, as big around as an oil drum and longer than a school bus, was slithering toward him like lightning. Its scales were white, the moonlight sliding over them like quicksilver.

Will screamed again, crab walking backwards as the monstrous thing reared back, the inside of its mouth wide and black, fangs as long as Will's forearm flashing.

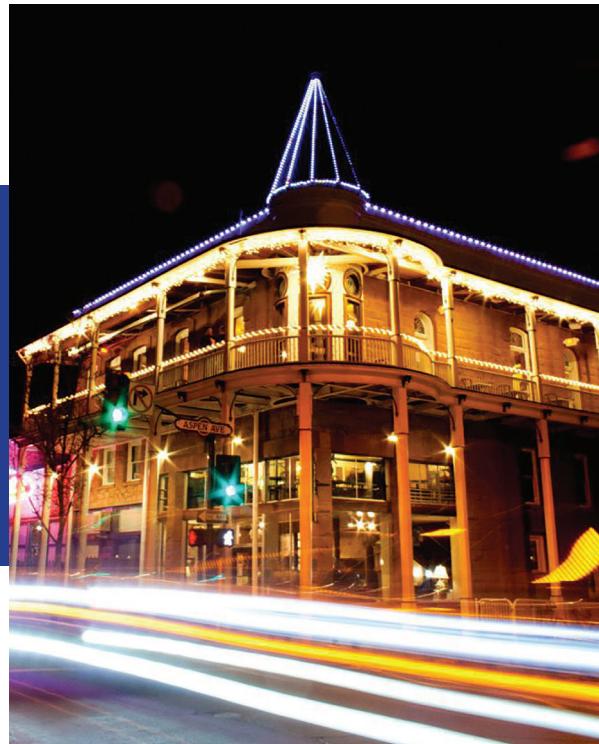
It struck, sinking its teeth into his back and chest at the same time, piercing through muscle and organs. He was lifted and spun, the snake's heavy, muscled body wrapping around him, squeezing. He tried to scream, but his lungs were compressed, no air. Spots of color began to dance in front of his eyes, a crushing pressure building behind them. His ribs snapped. It was the last thing he felt before death.

Twenty minutes later, the woman emerged from the cornfield. She stepped into the moonlight and smoothed her dress. It was tight across her abdomen now, her belly distended. She wiped her hand across her mouth and walked back to the hearse. The casket was still securely in the back. She placed her hand on the coffin's smooth wood.

"Don't worry, Master. I've taken care of the problem."

A low growl rumbled from within.

With a smile, she patted the coffin affectionately before closing the door. Walking around to the front, she placed her hands on the hood, and the metal obediently straightened itself with metallic pops and pings, the spider-web cracks in the windshield mending themselves. She got behind the wheel and started the engine. It purred to life and she drove off into the night, leaving Will's baby a lonely, crumpled heap at the intersection.



LIGHT  
| Kristen Pizzuto

## FIREWORKS ON YOUR BIRTHDAY

Nick Faulk

His stomach really did hurt, seeming to twist around in his core. He could not stop burping. He was overflowing, overfull. In a brush of a hug before he left, he claimed that he would head home. That white IPA got to me, he offered as explanation to the profile of a listener illuminated in flashes of geometric blues and whites from the stage. He waited for an acknowledgment, something final, finite, but it never came. Then he slid out the side door, his back to thunderclaps and electro.

Despite his home-bound thoughts as he walked through the alley, he did not walk west, towards his apartment, towards the observatory,

towards California, and, beyond that, towards a long-set sun. Instead, he turned south where he should have kept straight. One step on wet pavement, then another, then, inevitably, another still, as he crossed Route 66. He crossed the tracks. A few more steps, and then he shot down the first side-street.

He heard the show before he saw its warehouse home. First, he heard the drums. Then, the bass. Then all the rest. He stepped through the shaking front doors and into a tiny lobby. The lights were dim, and the desk unstaffed. Four dollars admission, according to the chalk written above the interior door. He waited a moment, then placed a five dollar bill on the desk and made an entrance.

The band of five played on a low stage in the opposite corner of the room where from he stood. A few dozen people crowded around them. Some of them danced, some nodded their heads and held their arms crossed, and some just stood on the outskirts, unmoving, unmoved. He remained close to the door and looked around. He examined their faces individually, but each belonged to a stranger.

The song ended, and it was announced there would be one more.

Staccato baseline, then vocals. The crowd surged into movement, more forcefully than before. They seethed, they writhed, and he seethed and writhed right along with them. He danced. He shuffled his hips to drum. His head banged up and down and up again. Faster and faster. A body slammed into his, and, shoulder first, he slammed back. He closed his eyes and saw fireworks, saw their reds and verdant greens, the music a series of sonic booms. The song dissolved into chants and percussion. He screamed and he huffed and he danced.

All of their screams turned from a rage into accolades. Okay, one more, he heard as he snuck out the front door, his five dollar bill still sitting on the desk.

He walked to the side of the building and squatted against the aluminum siding. His stomach hurt, still, but less acutely than before. He pulled out his phone. One new text: *feel betteeeeer*. He placed his face into his hands and his fingers pushed into his eyes. Fireworks burst before him, from a distance, fuzzy, but brilliantly burning bright.



# FIRE

Megan Reigh

Shayla walked into the local diner. The bell on the door rang. Shayla was a police officer, thirty-five years old. She had followed in her father's and grandfather's footsteps. Her dad had always wanted a son, but they only had her. Still, that was OK, because she was still daddy's little officer. She felt an innate sense of loyalty to the police force. Since her father retired, the guys on the force had taken to looking after her.

Shayla took the bar stool seat at the diner counter. *I like this diner*, she thought with a smile. The red-covered chairs were pretty comfortable, and the location downtown was a perfect place to stop off for coffee during work. But her shift didn't start for another couple of



A SHADOW OF A KING  
| Kiril Kirkov

hours.

The waitress Sue Ann called out, “The usual, Shayla?”

“Yeah, just make it two, I’m meeting someone today, Sue Ann.”  
“Alright hun, you got it,” she said with a wink and a smile.

*She sat quietly sipping her coffee. Oh, I really hope Andrew likes me. It's been so long since I've met a guy I liked and one that my dad likes... Today has been such a good day. The weather is nice, my dad's health is doing great, and I am seeing one of the most handsome men I have ever met for coffee.*

Shayla checked her watch. *He's late. I hope everything is alright.* She finished her first cup of coffee and decided to text Andrew. She opened up her flip phone and wrote,

Hey, just wondering where you are.

Thankfully she didn't have to wait long. He texted back and said,

Sorry running late I'm stuck, this morning's meeting is  
running long. Meet you in 30min?

*Oh man I'm so glad that's all it is,* she thought. She wrote back,  
No worries I'll see you soon.

Feeling a little hungry, she ordered a cinnamon roll to go with her coffee. She picked at it and dunked it in her coffee. Only twenty minutes had passed, and she was antsy. Just then, she heard a loud boom, so loud she could feel it in her body as it rumbled through the air.

*This is not good,* she thought as she instinctively jumped from her seat, cautiously making her way to the diner door. She drew her weapon, ready for anything, but she wasn't ready for what she saw next.

Shayla dropped her gun down to her side as she stood in awe of the scene in front of her. Her heart sank at the thought of the consequences.

*Pull yourself together, Shayla, those people need you. Now let's move!* She willed herself to run towards the smoke-filled tower in front of her. As she made her way down the street, hundreds of people were running toward her and away from the explosion. Some of them stood there, video-recording it, and others were stunned in their places on the grey sidewalks, crying, not knowing what to do.

She was about halfway to the tower when she saw something she had never seen before in the skyline. It was a jetliner. She couldn't comprehend what it was doing in the middle of downtown New York. Then it turned and headed straight for the second tower.

That was Andrew's tower.

As she ran, she yelled, "NO!" She hadn't realized she had fallen to her knees. She was sobbing. She thought, *This didn't just happen, I must be dreaming, that couldn't have happened, no, no, no, no, not here, not now.* The hysteria was rising out of her chest. She knew she had to get it under control. She was an officer and she needed to be strong. She grabbed the radio on her shoulder turned it on and said, "*3147, I am en route to what appears to be a jetliner that has crashed into tower two of the twin towers.*"

*"Copy 3147. Please be advised fire and medics are en route. A temporary base camp is being set up two blocks south of the towers."*

She wiped her eyes and stood up, and continued to jog towards the towers. She had hope that most of the people that were below the explosions had gotten out. She had hope that Andrew was one of those people.

It was then that one of the towers started to fall. The sound was unlike anything she had ever heard. People were screaming and running. As it fell, a wall of dust headed her way. She ducked into a store front to escape the dust cloud with some other citizens.

*Are you kidding me?!* she thought. *This cannot be happening.*

She could hear sirens wailing in the distance. It was chaos; people were crying and screaming. She looked around at the people she was standing next to, and that was when she saw him.

"Andrew?" she said aloud.

"Shayla?" Then he pushed his way through the few people that stood in between them, and he picked her up and hugged her tight. She squeezed him back like she would never let go of him. And that is exactly what she did: she never let go.

# BLIZZARDS AND BISCUITS

Justin Dueck

Wooossshhhh! A cold wind poured into the tired diner as gentle bells tied to the door rang the arrival of a new customer. When the flurry of cold and drifting snow ended, a young woman emerged. She walked briskly to the counter. Her shiny black boots echoed in the nearly empty diner.

"Well, I was in a good mood when I entered this joint," she chuckled as she brushed snow from her oversized coat. An elderly waitress reached across the counter and filled a chipped mug with coffee.

"You'll be in a good mood when you leave here too, sweetheart."

In the far booth, a middle-aged man in a ruffled brown suit sat with his head in his hands. His tie hung loosely around his neck with his top shirt buttons open. His table was scattered with the papers his briefcase vomited out. Wrinkled cigarette butts filled multiple ashtrays. On the other side of the room, a teenage boy hidden in a dark ski jacket sat by the door, fixated on the windows. The man in the suit stood and approached the young woman.

"What did you want to be when you were a kid?" he asked as he helped himself into the stool next to her. She hesitated, but welcomed a conversation.

"Well, I just became a cop," she replied. "Graduated today."

"You celebrate here? This is not really the place where proud people



showcase themselves.”

“It’s a long story.” She thought a moment. “My dad was a cop. He wanted his sons to be cops, but only had me. He told me I would never be the son he wanted. He didn’t come to the ceremony.”



“Is this what you wanted? I wanted to be a fireman. Run into a building, save a child and hand it to mother. Now, I’m a divorce lawyer. I run into court, grab a baby, and hand it to mother half the time and father on weekends and holidays... Sorry. That’s not important.” He stood to return to his booth. “Lost a big case today... My own.”

“A dancer,” she said after a moment. “I wanted to be a dancer.”

“You’re young,” he said with a smile. “Dance.”

As the man stood, deciding between returning to his booth or to the young

woman, the waitress came from the kitchen carrying a tray of biscuits. The fresh warm smell turned every head in the chilled diner. Stepping toward the counter, the swinging door hit a stray fork and bounced back into the waitress’ Coke bottle glasses, littering the floor with flakey rolls. The cop and the lawyer rushed to help. She was not injured but quite embarrassed.

“Oh deary,” the old waitress said as they helped her to her feet. “Bless your hearts, kids.”

She straightened herself out, giving extra time to her outdated hairstyle. As everyone focused on the waitress, no one noticed the movements of the boy by the door. He slalomed the room like an alpine skier, returning to his

seat before anyone realized he had moved. As the others looked around, they noticed something had changed. They turned to the only other person. The boy was huddled to the window with his back to room, hiding something.

“Are you OK?” asked the lawyer. He reached to touch the boy’s shoulder.

“Leave me alone!” The boy gave a muffled shout toward the window.

“It’s OK,” the young cop said as she gently moved her jacket, revealing a Glock .45. “No one is going to hurt you.” She leaned closer.

“I said leave me alone!” he yelled, confronting his accusers. His grimy face was covered in buttermilk flakes. He labored to shovel a pile of crumbs in his mouth. His lips were chapped and cracked in bloody grooves.

“Oh sweetheart,” said the waitress, “lemme get you something fresh.” She headed for the kitchen.

The cop refastened her jacket, trying to hide what was behind it. The lawyer stood, still staring at the boy. It must have been days since he’d eaten.

“I ain’t never had a choice,” said the boy, mouth full of biscuits. “I ain’t never had the chance to dream, nothin’ but to live. Can’t imagine a life so beautiful that I could choose.” He gobbled up every crumb on the table in time for the waitress to come back with a fresh plate and tall glass of milk.

“Take your time, sweetheart,” said the waitress. “Plenty where that came from.”

As the boy continued eating, the cop and lawyer returned to the counter. She rummaged through her pockets.

“I don’t know why,” he began, “but there’s something I have to say.” He looked around, then leaned in and sobbed quietly. “I’m dealing drugs. They found me on South Street with a garage full of meth. I lost my kids, but I deserve worse. I got off easy cause I know the judge. You’re a cop. Lock me up. Take me away.”

“What are you telling me for? I’m just an aspiring dancer.” She gave a pirouette. “You’re young... Go fight fires.” She dropped a handful of bills on the counter, thanked the waitress and leapt gracefully into the blowing snow.



SUNSET | Ariel Nepsky

## GLIDING IN HEAVEN

Amanda Rowse

Drifting down. Not a thought in my mind. Escape from everything: work, worries, money, not a single thing could bother me. I chose to listen to my old iPod Shuffle with my snowboarding playlist on it. Listening to it brought all those memories rushing back. I had taught myself how to snowboard when I was about seventeen, right after I had gotten my driver's license. It wasn't just the memories; it was also the feelings that I had when riding. It wasn't about being cool or doing the best tricks on the mountain; it was the freedom.

I remember my first time on the mountain. I was so afraid. Having both your feet strapped to a board doesn't give you the safest feeling in the world. I went on the bunny slope, the smallest slope they had at that mountain, because it was my first time. Riding up and up and up made my stomach turn because I was so afraid of heights. The ride to the top was only a few minutes, but the feeling in my stomach made it seem like it was forever. My friend Brianne told me I had to jump off a hill to get off when we stopped. My palms were sweating. I wanted to turn back. She lied. It was a slope, but you didn't have to jump. I did end up falling on

the way down, though. That was the first time I ever went snowboarding.

I was hooked. It took bruises, muscle aches, and more pain, but learning to do something that you were afraid to do at first is a very satisfying thing to do. I remember making the playlist. In the beginning, I couldn't listen to music because people would shout at me to get out of the way, and I wasn't about to get hit by someone. When I made the playlist, I knew it was official, and I was good enough to go all the way down the mountain without falling.

Music, goggles, pants, boots, and my snowboard were the only things on my checklist when going up to the mountain. Nothing else seemed to matter. The one song that I heard that really brought on the memory flow was a song by MIA: Paper Planes. It was the hit song at the time. I really liked it, and it had the best beat. The feeling going down the mountain with no worries, just you and the music, was pure ecstasy.

I went almost every day. I couldn't get enough, and when I wasn't physically at the mountain, I was thinking about being there. Each day, I would take my skill a little further. I'll never forget my first box. I wasn't afraid at all. I just remember wanting to conquer everything I could. I failed, and that first box kicked my butt, literally. I fell so hard on the side of the box that I had a bruise going all the way up my back and I couldn't move for days. I vividly still remember my board catching a groove in the box, and shutting my eyes and trying not to tighten up because I knew that I was about to be in a lot of pain. Even after the intense pain I went through, a month later I was back at it, and I conquered that box. I had accomplished my first box. The feeling was pure bliss.

The memories this brought back were intense. I can't remember when I smiled so much, thinking about the good days. I made so many friends and great memories that I will never forget. Listening to these songs brought back the good memories. When I think of the past, I only seem to focus on the bad memories, never wanting to repeat the mistakes that I made. The songs reminded me that it wasn't always bad. Those were probably the best days of my teenage years.



RICKSHAW  
| Natalia Maks

## RICKSHAW Rhapsody

M. Allen Copeland

I am either standing on the edge of the most active road in the Kathmandu Valley, or I am dreaming of a city at the bottom of the ocean from my hotel room. At first blush, Bhagawan Bahal road is a cacophonous blare of noise and visual chaos. Isolating the individual sounds set aloft from the road is as tricky as singling out the soft faint notes of the flute in a hundred-piece symphony orchestra. Sounds of laughter and serendipity merge with the trotteling of cow hooves that echo through the market place. I close my eyes briefly in order to connect to the scene with my other senses.

I hear the sound of street cleaners splashing pails of water out onto the warm road to keep dust and grime from flaring up into the air. The earthy scent of water converting to vapor fills my nostrils as warm

moist air travels up my exposed calves. I open my eyes to see eddies of slow-moving haze rise off the warm pavement, and twirl around my ankles like translucent cats pining for an affectionate caress and a scratch behind the ears. Approaching are overloaded dark blue and white buses that glide calmly through the loud roar of downtown Thamel like giant stuffed toy whales. Seated on top, inside, and hanging on from outside the bus are a hundred people or more, secured like barnacles along with their luggage and livestock. Goats, red roosters, and multi-colored travel cases the color of gumballs adorn the roof of this thirty-five foot, rolling behemoth. Then it occurs to me that I might be in a dream. Inside the bus, smiling faces greet one another, standing back-to-back, shoulder-to-shoulder, and face-to-face. Some are hanging out of the window with closed eyes and smiling faces to feel the breeze, while others hold on to the outside, attaching themselves like remora fish hitching a ride along the flanks of a humpback whale.

I stand motionless as hundreds of people, young and elderly, walk or limp along the marg in every possible direction. Shuffling along, they trudge through a muddle of blue exhaust, sandalwood incense, and the scent of cow dung that hangs suspended in the cool morning air. An opera of faint and burly horn blasts punctuate the grinding sounds of the morning commute. Every second of every minute, they sound off in the chromatic scale, touching every tone, and just as well, because there is a sacred cow taking rest in the middle of the congested road. With her wet nose in the air she wiggles her massive ears and bounces her tail to and fro while images of traffic reflect off of her gentle, moist brown eyes. Flowing around her are blue buses, orange and white miniature taxies, red motorcycles, and yellow and pink human powered rickshaws, each one darting along the road like tropical fish in an aquarium.

“Is that a cow in the middle of the road, or a white and tan mound of coral at the bottom of the ocean?” I wonder. This morning, I am like that obstinate coral cow observing the flow of life. Across the street, a family of five is taking turns lathering up under a concrete and copper relief sculpture of Lord Ganesha. I try not to stare at this private ritual taking place in public, but there is beauty surrounding it and I cannot turn away. Water flowing from the elephant god’s mighty trunk washes away milky-white soapsuds, and perhaps the sins of yesterday. They glide off

of their shiny brown bodies as they make prayer offerings that blur the lines between bathing and worship.

From above the earth, this little slice of life in Thamel must look like seed and ovum as commuters like schools of fish dash along and penetrate into the center of Tri-Devi Marg. Yet within the midst of the scurrying chaos and stray voltage vibrating throughout the city, a current of joy flows that I do not feel when walking down the tidy, well-ordered streets of Manhattan.

The wealthy American dreamers residing in the boroughs of the Upper East Side have tamed the bears and ridden the bulls of Wall Street, but a happy countenance is a rare find in the sea of human foot traffic that flows like vacant-eyed great white sharks down the affluent lane of apartments along 42<sup>nd</sup> street. Here in Thamel City, the Nepalese Rupees that line the worn out pockets of the poor are equal to a few American pennies. Most of these salt-of-the-earth families are poor, but a gloomy expression is as likely a find as bargain real estate along Central Park.

That family who bathed on the street under the protection of Lord Ganesha is now sitting in a circle, laughing and sharing a simple meal of hard-boiled eggs and warm chapattis for breakfast. Their youngest boy, no more than five, is already at work. Smiling and energetic, he hails a three-wheeled motor taxi for an elderly tourist couple in exchange for a few rupees. Somehow this little boy is all grown up at the tender age of five. I am overcome with emotion and cannot decide whether to smile or to weep over his ephemeral childhood. The family takes notice of me, and offers a warm smile. These grateful, hardworking people are the best of humanity, and I am at home among them most off all.

That immovable pile of coral is a cow after all. She is up and moving slowly with traffic. An accidental nudge from a passerby knocks me into forward motion, and after a brief and sincere apology, I confirm that I am not dreaming among the fish at the bottom of the ocean. I am awake on the roaring road. Ahead, a swarm of young, male rickshaw drivers gather like crows around a tourist information booth. As I approach, they thrust their hands in the air screaming for my attention as if I were a floor broker at the New York Stock Exchange. I walk past them and pretend I am invisible, and soon their crowing grows silent. Away from

the crowd and down the road, an older man with reflective silvery hair, a shining brown face, and missing front teeth stands calmly with his covered rickshaw in hand. He waits patiently, like a fisherman. I take the bait.

Smiling, my charioteer asks, “Where to, sir?”

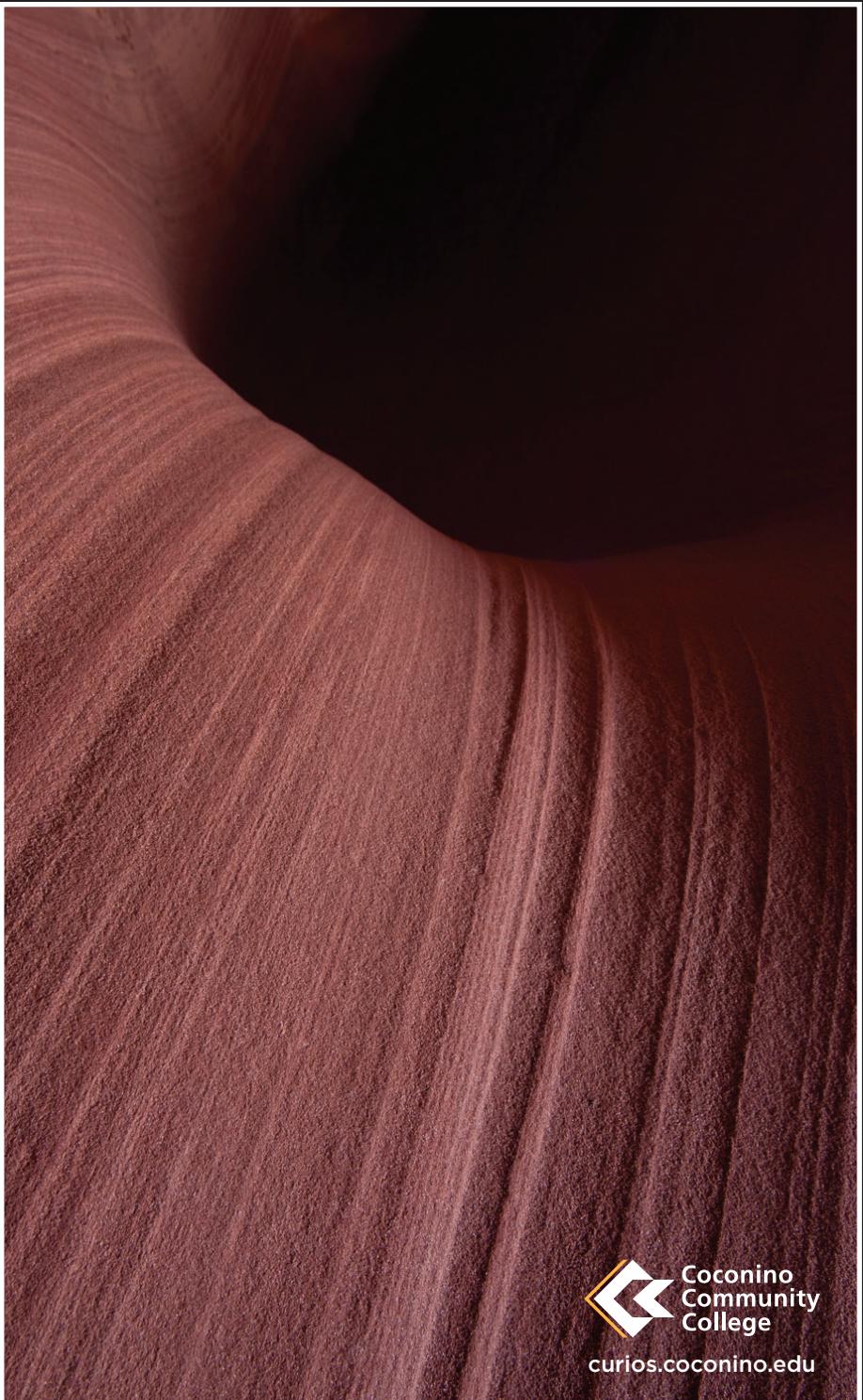
“Just drive anywhere you like,” I say. Smiling, he nods his head from side to side, like the pale blue bobble-head dolls of Lord Shiva sitting atop of a wooden table a few feet away.

He pedals strongly, and before long we are weaving in and around traffic. Swishing by are the pink, green, cobalt, and ocher-colored rugs, saris, flowers, and woven handbags that adorn the tightly clustered merchant shops. At this speed, they merge together in a blazing smear of vibrant hues. I close my eyes and open my nostrils. A steady breeze flushes across my face as the fragrant scent of flowers and incense lifts us above the noise and turmoil of the market place. Suddenly I am Arjuna, gliding aloft in Krishna’s chariot, free of the bustle and of the small parts of myself. For the moment, I am transcended, free from name and form, free from location and circumstance. I am everywhere and nowhere to be found.

Days later I touched down in the States. I enter the study inside of my two-story apartment, leaving the lights off, and climb into my favorite red leather upholstered swivel chair. I switch on my Westmorland illuminated globe, search for the pin rising out of Nepal, and pluck it out. A pinpoint of light reaches out from the tiny hole over to the east wall, touching a portrait of my mother that hangs there. She will turn seventy-five today. As I dial her up, I give the illumined earth a gentle nudge, and watch as points of light dance around the walls of the darkened room like charioteers gliding aloft in a miniature galaxy. An elderly, sweet-sounding voice comes over the line. “Hello?”

“Happy Birthday, Mom.”

“Welcome home, Michael.”



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