EYE OF THE STORM

Pueblo West High School
Magazine of Student Writing and Art
2022-2023



— *Hello. We're so glad you stopped by...*

We encounter art daily. Maybe it's a beautiful painting you saw once. Maybe it's a quote or poem that stuck with you since you first laid your eyes on it. Maybe it's a story, a comic, a photograph. We all live and breathe art in some way or another. The ability to create is the greatest gift for so many. And for many others, the ability to look at a piece of art is enough to change their entire day around. For us here at *Eye of the Storm*, art is what we strive for. *Eye of the Storm Magazine* is a collective of the creativity contained within the halls of Pueblo West High School- drawings, paintings, photography, poems, and stories.
We wish you happy reading!
--Cedar Garrett

Upon these pages you will find several compositions of art; shards of an artist's creative flow, snapshotted into the form of Ink or synthetic/manipulated light. For you to witness such phenomenons of the human psyche is an utmost honor; and for that, we thank you.

Since the very founding of *Eye of the Storm*, we felt it our mission to capture and compile each passing thought of Pueblo West High School student's creative compassion. As an artist myself, very often do I find my ideas fleeting from my very skull in the monotonous pressure of everyday life. *Eye of the Storm* serves to aleve that by way of gathering such ideas in a complex cacophony (a storm, some would even say), and sending it to display by manor of books and issues, such as the one you see before you.

Now, these pieces of mind vary in all sorts of mediums. From poems to paintings, and grand photography to visual design, do expect to find all of such in the 2023 issue of *Eye of the Storm*. Even themes from the grandest displays of skill in geometric understanding to the simplest (yet hard) rap poems of eggs, we have it all.

Go forth, and witness for yourself the *Eye of the Storm*!
–Bruce Corbin

STAFF PAGE

Cedar Garrett - Associate Editor

Poet, writer, and author of the poem “A Home for Us Both,” in this issue. When I’m not writing, I can be found baking or listening to music (especially pop!). I also consider myself a fashion and makeup enthusiast.

Jacquie Koopman - Associate Editor

I’ve been writing for the past five or so years and each piece of mine is a testament to how I’ve grown as a writer and a person. With nature and music as my muses and an extensive list of original characters, there’s always ideas on my mind. In my spare time I enjoy finding new music, practicing for band and choir, or messing around with my little brother.

Bruce Corbin - Associate Editor

Ms. Danielle Holmes-- Faculty Sponsor

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Olivia Pedraza, "Cat"

MARIO LOPEZ-CERVANTES

Khronos

The timeless timely ticking taunting tock,

Haunting all those who would pay attention…

Wondering, will it end… or yours will stop?

Immortal Khronos of the fouth dimension.

Dancing ‘round the hands of the eternal,

Prescribed to move forward and never back.

Only print left, is by word or journal…

Forced to run rounds along this endless track

The immortal khronos, the almighty!

No one can escape from the grasp of time,

A force that’s not to be taken lightly.

A force who’s strength is to be called divine…

Though all mighty, it’s loneliness befalls,

an endless journey… of nothing, and all…



Nikolas Matthews, Untitled

ALI NORMAN

Shower Anxiety

The smell of strong lavender filled the steamed glass door.
Yet the scent wasn't the reason my mind felt as if it was in a war.

The heavy breathing was overpowered by the blare of the music playing.
The music didn't match the situation that I was portraying.

My head was light as if it was filled with hydrogen.
I couldn't think straight that I couldn't even count to ten.

My hand collides with the white tiled wall, water droplets sliding down.
My eyes darted around before trying to focus on the soap of purplish brown.

Was I going to die?
Nothing I did could satisfy.

My ears clouded and the music began to go deaf.
My hands gripped the Terry fabric towel while trying to regain my breath.

The urge to feel sore surged through my arm.
I resisted the yearning to cause any harm.

The dampness of water around me rippled as I sat.
I controlled my breathing and only did that.

As my breathing slowed, I began to ease.
My now less shaky hands rested on my knees.

I began to get out of the shower, looking at the misty mirror.
Everytime I remember this, it begins to be clearer.



Delilah Struck, "GoreBears"

ALI NORMAN

The Something

Perfection is a game of tug-of-war, that every pull is another step towards the temporary shower of praise and self-worth.

Tugging on the rope again and again, hoping to make progress but the person, the thing, the thought, the something, is on the other end, holding the rope as if it is nothing between its fingers. It's dark and everyone seems to be asleep to your issue.

Enduring through the rough straw along your skin as you grip harder till your knuckles go white, you watch as you pull, closer and closer the rope slips through the fingers of "the something" until "the something" pinches at it, stopping it, making sure you know you haven't won yet.

Logical thinking would say "the something" is stronger than you, as it is holding the rope you are so desperately trying to pull back to win between its fingers, but you've won this game before, for you have played many times.

Occasionally, you find yourself at the point of losing one of these games, where "the something" cheats and snaps the rope, making sure it gets more of it than you do. The cut ropes next to you as you play are just reminders of all your losses and failures. Thinking of these makes the darkness surround you. The silence you hear feels isolating.

Playing tug-of-war with "the something" is never enjoyable, for you get berated and mocked. "The something" uses its other hand to pull words from the mud underneath your feet and throws it at you. Now, you are a mess. The smell of mud and dirt fills your nose.

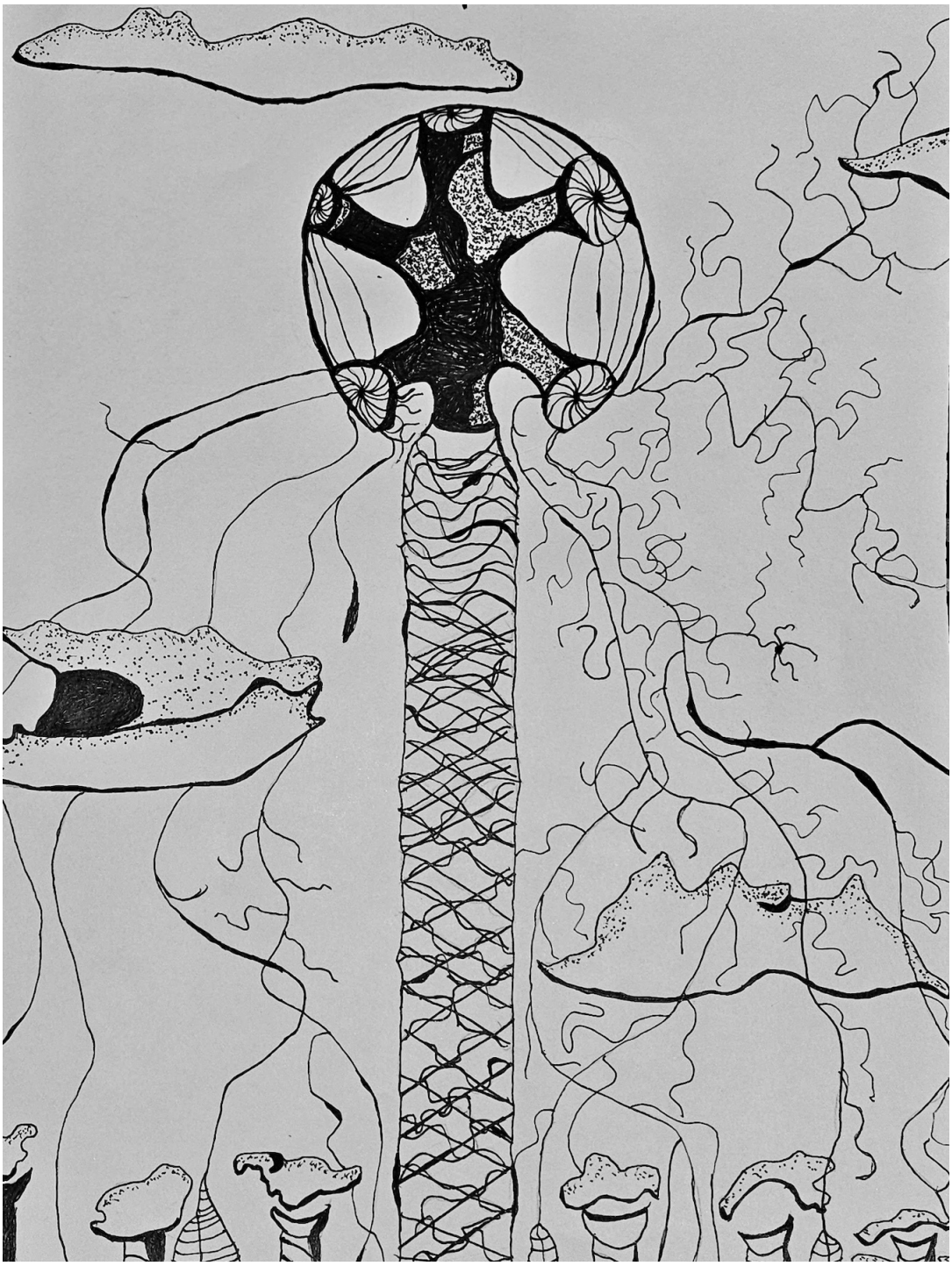
"How are you so bad at this?" the something mocks as it tugs, giving you hope but destroying it the second later. You're distraught, what can you do? You need to calm yourself down, give yourself tranquility. You know what to do.

Once the object is in your hand, you cut the rope, just a sliver. This calms you down as soon as you do it; it gives you the feeling that you are in control. You calm down and get back into the game, "the something" still laughing and pulling at the rope.

But doing this makes you feel guilty. How are you any better than "the something"? You just cut the rope just as "the something" would do. It's not the time to feel guilty, but you can't help but have it added to your back of responsibilities.

Individually, you grab the rope, fingers tightened around the straw, pulling as hard as you can. Now that you've calmed down, you have gained strength. "The something" feels threatened. You pull one last time and the rope is yours, the knot in the middle stuck in the mud as it fell from "the something"'s grasp.

Additionally, "the something" gives you a slow clap, as you smile from your achievement. You did it. You struggled but you finished. No one saw the struggle of getting the rope to your side but they got to see the achievement. That's all that matters, right? "The something" steps back up and swings another end of a rope to your side of the mud. The routine starts again, for there is more perfection to perform.



Kylen Bundy, Untitled

SOPHIA KIZZIE

Depressed, but I'm Okay

Do we really know ourselves?
Like, really know ourselves?
I hate people,
But I also love them,
Try to please them.

No matter what I do
I'm not trying hard enough.
Nothing I do is enough.
I just want to be free from judgment.
Everything I do, say, think,
It's all wrong.
I'm wrong.

My life should be great,
But everyday is a struggle.

I want to know me.
The real me.
Not the people pleaser,
Not the anxiety freak,
Not the depressed weirdo,
But me.

I want to know who I would be if I forgot
About other people and opinions.
Who would I really be?
What would people act like if they weren't scared?

SOPHIA KIZZIE

Silent Confession

Eyes deep as space,
Behind your silent lips,
Many stories lie.
I'm afraid of you.

You're so comfortable around them.
Laugh and smile,
Clear as day.
I'm afraid of what you'd feel.

Passion seeps through your veins.
An art you love.
The stories you wish to share.
I'm afraid of what you'd think.

Comfortable and lively,
Unaware and verklempt,
Uplifting and charismatic.
I'm afraid of you.



Davide Vanetti, "Self-Portrait"

Informal

It's not the pain of an mental illness
Or an aching sickness
It's the pain of every day
Thinking it's not okay to feel this way
"Attention" that's all I want
But, I'm pretty sure it's not
I want respect, and love
In a world with so much lack thereof
They say they'll be there
But it feels like they just won't care
Excuse me for being informal
But
Can't I just feel normal?



Delilah Struck, "Liminal Divide"

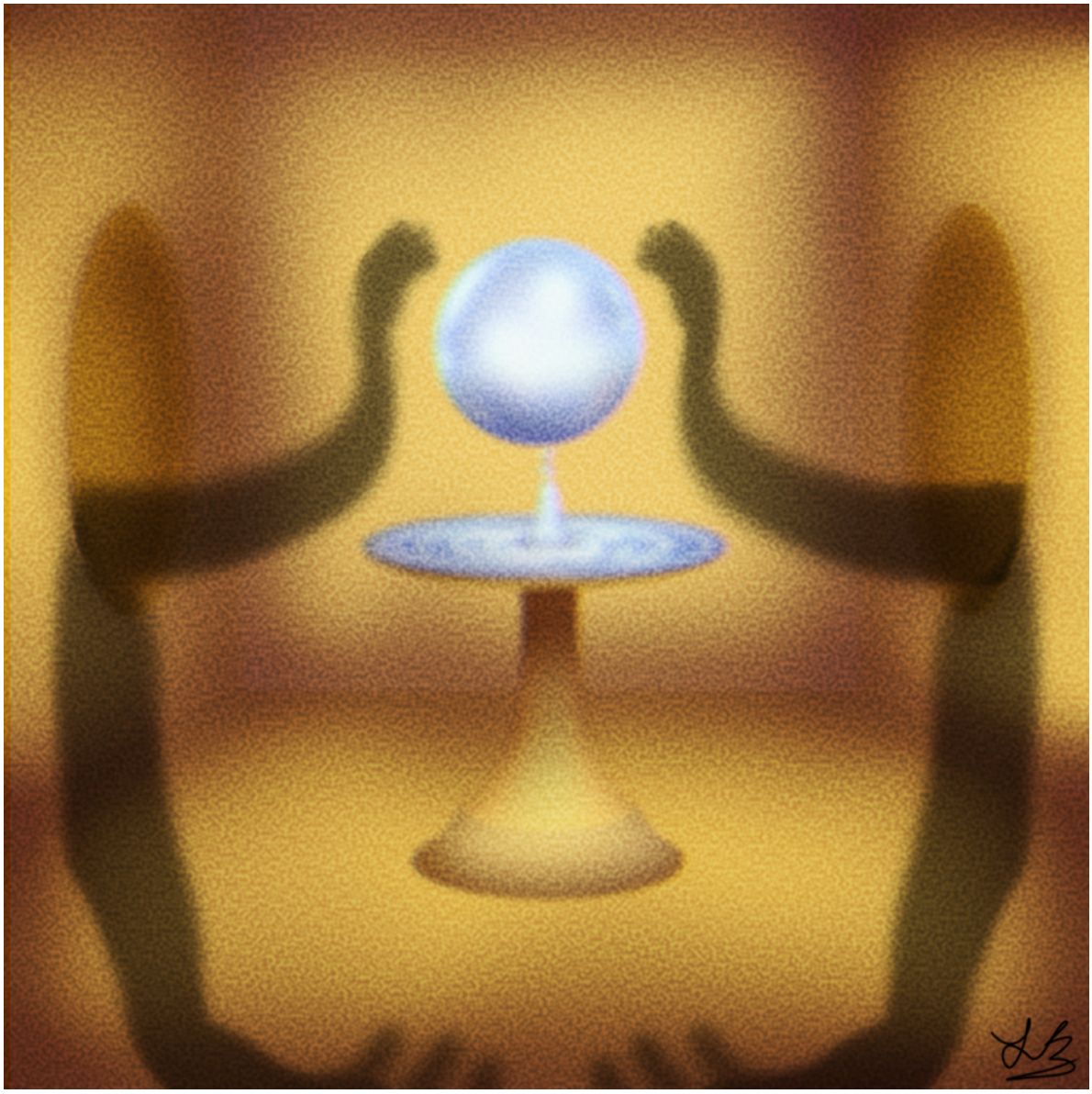
ALI NORMAN

Actress

An actor resembles a character telling a story.
Being on stage, in a movie, in front of a crowd sounds exhilarating.
But having the anxiety that guarded me from reaching that is frustrating.
Anything I can get similar to the profession is where I reside in glory.

I want the limited freedom on that stage.
I want to watch the curtains walk across the theater wood as the show finishes.
I want to feel the depressing happiness of our last show as that praise diminishes.
I want to look at the script and flip back to the front page.

But I can't have that dream without medication.
The fear of embarrassment overlaps the excitement of wanting to be up there.
The idea of humility captures me and hasn't let me go for more than a year.
So I sit quietly as those up there continue their narration.
I sit here quietly wishing I wasn't sitting in a chair.
I sit here quietly because social anxiety won't disappear.



Delilah Struck, "Shadow's Suspension"

PAIGE JOHNSON

The Moon

The moon is like a
window to the soul
It can show the beauty
And the pain a person
Hids but it can also show
The cruelness they don't hide
Like the lies they tell others
About how they love them
And everything else they
Want to hear they will
Flatter you with flowers and
Chocolates but just like how
Cheaters don't mean it
People who fall out of love
Don't mean it at least not
Any more it like the person
You trusted the most let you
Down and you have no idea
How to feel or what to do
So you cut them out and
Keep on shining bright
Like the moon

NORAH COOK

There's Always Tomorrow

I stare at the stars hoping one day I'll become one
there's something euphoric about nightfall,
everything goes quiet, only faint sounds of the world echoing in the foggy sky.
Looking at the moon like it's my God, I worship the feel of the breeze, and the slight sounds of crickets.

Dreaming this could last forever.
Though I know it won't
A certain happiness comes over me when the sun goes down
Something I can't explain.
These blank streets painted with moonlight, it looks like a movie scene.

The patter of rain hits the gravel as I fall into a deep sleep,
Running through the clouds as if I'm in my own personal heaven.
Oh, what I wouldn't give to make this moment last forever
There's always tomorrow.

Though the sight of sunny days is nice,
There will always a be a special place in my heart for the dark silhouettes of the trees,
And the stillness that nightfall has to offer
my own personal paradise.

JACQUIE KOOPMAN

Our Universe

Books let people escape to realities in their own heads.

You can go *anywhere* through a book. Places where it always rains with see-through umbrellas. Vast prairie plains and a single house atop a hill. Entire universes existed where things were simply *better*.

Paintings only serve to make those realities...

Well, *real*.

Another crumpled up sketch misses the trash can and Kip slumps in their spinny seat, dragging a hand down their face. On today of all days, why did art block have to kick their butt this hard?

Kip glares at the canvas.

The canvas blankly stares back.

Various plants scattered about their studio watch Kip lose a game they could never win while portraits and past pieces cheer them on from the walls. Their competitor in question takes up most of the studio's white space. A daunting white canvas messing with the soft aesthetic-ey vibes that usually helped them come up with *something*.

Something would be better than nothing, but here they are, spinning in their chair and letting the colors swirl into a hallucinatory tornado.

They slow down just enough to snatch a peachy colored pencil off their desk and twirl it between their fingers.

Stupid art block.

They didn't hear the telltale click of the doorknob when impulse took over. They tossed it at the canvas like a dart and missed like one too.

"Hey I brought some pink lemon-" Robin shut the door just in time for the pencil to clatter to the floor. "-ade... I'm just going to ignore that. Is everything alright?"

Kip huffed as she entered and pressed a glass into their hand. "Stupid art block won't let me draw. Stupid brain won't- Brain! *Dios mío* I think my head is gonna kill me."

Robin takes a sip of her lemonade, humming. "I always think better after a nice break. Plus, you've been cooped up inside all day, which isn't good for ideas in the first place."

"But I *need*-"

"Ah ah ah. None of that." Robin bopped Kip on the nose. "What you *need* is a break. And I know just the thing. You're coming with me."

Kip sighs, but ultimately lets themselves get pulled out of their chair with a smile.

~

Robin.

Sweet sweet beautiful Robin.

Kip could take a page out of her book with the way they wanted to describe her. Her sleigh bell laughter made her glasses slide down and was contagious as ever. Strawberry blonde waves shining like pure gold under the setting sun. Golden hour was nothing when the rest of her absolutely *glowed*. A shimmering moon on a calm night, controlling the tides with a simple swipe of her pencil.

They would paint Robin's essence. They've done it before and they'd do it again and again until all the color in the world was gone.

Just for her.

"This is one of my favorite places in the entire world. My own little inspiration spot," Robin sighed in content and guided Kip to lay down on a patchwork blanket she had brought out. "Just me, my notepad, the sky... And you now too I guess."

Kip softly chuckled, tilting their head back to gaze at the sky.

Puffy pale rose and yellow-orange clouds stretched across the horizon with just a hint of dark blue as the sun made its descent. As an artist, they had always wanted to try painting something like this, but the sun moved too quickly. They couldn't capture the clouds' pristine shapes with the wind shifting every five minutes.

"I don't think there are any words that could possibly describe this."

Robin put a finger to her lip, eyes suddenly lighting up. "Elysian," she states as if pulling the information from the top of her head.

"What?"

"Adjective. Described as beautiful or creative; divinely inspired. Peaceful and perfect."

"Alright dictionary dot com."

"Hey! You learn a few things when you can't figure out a good chapter title," she said. "Perhaps acatalepsy is more appropriate for this occasion?"

Kip blew the bangs off their forehead. "Now you're just making things up-"

"Noun. The impossibility to truly comprehend anything."

Damn, she hit that one right on.

You can't capture nature's beauty in a single stroke. There's layers to it. Clouds stack up and up, always moving, always changing with the winds. They can be smooth, bumpy, white, dark, anything they want to be. Oceans are the same way. One minute it's calm, the next storms brew and waves crash, swirling up everything beneath.

It's the yin and yang of the universe.

And it is absolutely *elysian*.

~

The last time Kip fell asleep outside, they woke up to a raccoon stealing their crackers.

The last time Kip fell out of the sky after falling asleep outside doesn't exist.

Until now that is.

Whatever curses they throw are taken away, just like their breath. Gusts slap them in the face and threaten to flip Kip topsy-turvy. Wind rushes past their ears, slipping through their fingertips faster than water ever could.

Funny enough, their mind wanders back to that one Youtube video about what to do if a skydiving parachute won't work. Skipping a few steps won't matter because they don't have a parachute. They just have to find somewhere to land and break their legs in the process.

Easier said than literally FALL-ING TO THEIR DOOM.

Kip pried their eyes open, but the only thing below, up, down, all around them were clouds. They flailed like a fish out of water, trying and failing to grab a piece of cloud, or anything really, to hold onto.

Tears pricked at the corners of their eyes. It couldn't end like this. They wanted to do so much more.

KOOPMAN, CONTINUED...

They didn't even finish Robin's pink lemonade...

All of a sudden someone caught one of their hands, warmth spreading to their fingertips. It caught them off guard when the person grasped their other hand, interlocking fingers as their arms extended to their limit.

Kip's eyes trailed up over a soft fuzzy sweater to...

Robin?

Jade eyes behind white frames grinned back at them. "I'm so glad I found you! I thought we'd be falling forever at this rate."

Slowly, the two began to spin. What once was a monstrous force of nature slowed to a gentle breeze, lightly tussling their fluffy chestnut locks. A toothy smile found its way to Robin's lips, sleigh bells ring ting tingling as she laughed. Kip joined in with quiet chuckles as Robin pulled them to their feet.

"Dance with me!"

Kip was taken aback. "Oh- um- I don't really know how," they mumbled.

"You don't need to know how to dance. You just gotta *feel*."

With a nervous smile, they adjusted their hands around Robin's waist and shoulder.

It was easy how their bodies melded into each other. Using tiny clouds as stepping stones, they swirled and spun for what felt like hours, never tiring. Walls of persian blue and peach surrounded them in color, the sun's soft rays highlighting Robin's features as they waltzed. Pudgy cheeks dusted with freckles grinning ear to ear when Kip dipped her.

"I thought you didn't know how to dance."

"I don't, but I know how to dance with you."

~

A single drop of rain splattered on Robin's glasses, taking both of them by surprise. "That's never happened before," she murmurs. "Oh well. I guess we're really dancing in the rain now."

"Hey yeah! Like that-" They snapped their fingers looking for the name on the tip of their tongue. "Like that one movie. With the guy dancing around a light pole and an umbrella?"

"Singing in the Rain?"

"Yeah! That one. That was a fun movie."

Gentle pitter-patters slowly turned Kip's fluff a darker brown and Robin's curls into waves. The clouds followed suit, a dull gray taking over as the sun kept going down. The fun had diminished without all the colors, but that didn't mean they weren't happy to be in each other's company.

Gravity slowly took over as well. What once felt like floating on air gave way to a snail's descent. Looking down, the clouds parted to reveal a small wooden boat bobbing on the clouds.

Kip softly cursed and nearly lost their balance when their feet hit wood. They sat down opposite of Robin, a soft glow rising from the lantern at her feet, painting her in warm light.

"At least we can see the moon rise from here. No clouds blocking it out, even if they were very pretty," Robin sighs, laying back in the boat. "You know, I think I saw a word for this too."

Kip playfully rolled their eyes. "Maybe you're not a dictionary anymore. You have leveled up to the ultimate thesaurus."

"Mångata. Do you wanna guess what it means?"

"Um... I'm not sure. Maybe uhh... the moon's reflection?"

"Close enough. The moon's reflection on the water."

Kip shrugs in acceptance and leans over the edge. They absentmindedly run their hand through the clouds just to see the effect it has. Bits of cloud vanish from their fingertips in wisps like that one time they messed around with a humidifier.

Neither had anything more to say if it meant ruining what peace had built its foundation on their tranquility, so Kip's gaze unfocuses and their eyes slip shut.

~

If Robin hadn't lost her journal, none of this would be happening. She wouldn't be spending time with her favorite person in the world in a boat as the stars started to come out.

She smiles at the thought.

In middle school, a writer met an artist.

Art was something everyone had to take at least once. The school made them rotate through a certain extracurricular every quarter to keep them "well-rounded" and "open any pathways they didn't know before."

Complete bullcrap if you asked her twelve year old self.

Woodshop gave her calluses and a fear of blades she never had before. Music wasn't too bad if you didn't count her broken inner metronome. She accidentally blew something up in STEM and was transferred to another class she couldn't remember the name of.

It's safe to say nothing was working out.

And it didn't work out in art either.

The teacher hands Robin her paper upside down, which automatically sets off alarm bells. She flips over the paper out of pure curiosity and stares in disbelief at the big fat 'D' on her most recent assignment. She tries blinking away the shame welling up in her chest, blocking out the other kids talking about their grades.

She's older now. Older kids don't cry over bad grades on art assignments. They certainly don't cry over something that shouldn't even be that hard. Some eighth grader even told her grades don't really matter in middle school. They matter in highschool, not here. Not now at least.

Her zipper barely makes any noise as she stuffs the paper into the bottom. No one can make fun of her if they can't see the tears threatening to spill over. She can go clean herself up in the restroom before her last class of the day, make an excuse that the teacher kept the class for being rowdy, write in her journal, and then everything will be okay again.

The bell rings and Robin walks as quickly as she can to the restroom without looking like she has to go. A few splashes of water on her face and quiet words of affirmation go a long way in making her feel less like a failure.

She heads to class without a second thought.

Her English worksheet takes no time in finishing, even taking the liberty to leave it on her desk if the teacher walked by and questioned why she wasn't doing anything.

She picks through her backpack for her writing journal, frowning when she doesn't feel the soft rubber. Her hand skitters over her notebooks twice, thrice, and one more time for clarity before moderate panic settles in.

Did she seriously leave it in her last class?

The thought of going back to the art room brought back her embarrassment full force.

Logically, she could just go to the art room after school and retrieve her journal when the teacher is out on the parking lot duty he loves complaining about.

KOOPMAN, CONTINUED...

Until then, Robin picks a book from the teacher's shelf and tries to lose herself in dragons and royalty having a morality crisis.

Time flies when you keep losing which paragraph you're on. The final bell jolts her away from fantasy and she files the page in her mind before shelving the book in its place.

"Alright everyone! Have a great weekend and remember to turn in the worksheet on monday!" her teacher shouts over the mass of children beelining for the door.

But Robin has other things to take care of as she dashes to the art room, all but flings the door open, and scans the tables for her journal.

Nothing.

Her eyes dart to the lost and found shelf by the drying racks.

Nothing.

It isn't until she's standing behind a crowd at the local art gallery two weeks later with her parents that she finds her thief: a taupe boy dressed in paint splattered overalls and sneakers. He isn't too fond of the reporters swarming him about his latest piece, marked with a blue ribbon on a plaque he holds with his fidgety grayish brown hands.

Robin's eyes drift to the artwork next to him.

The painting is filled to the brim with vibrant blues and greens, depicting a world of flora. A single girl sits in the middle, curled up in a shadow of sunshine as the plants seem to reach out to her.

Her breath hitches.

No... it can't be...

It's something straight out of her journal. The girl breaks down in an elaborate forest because she can never go home, trapped in another dimension. The plants try to comfort her, but don't know how because they've never seen someone like her in their realm.

He must know where her journal is because...

He has it.

She walks into school with determination the next day.

All possibilities of him being at another school were already thrown out the window when she realized he couldn't have snatched it if he didn't get his education in the same building.

Crowds weren't his thing if the art gallery was anything to go by. So that left somewhere quiet. Somewhere no one would look.

Just when she was about to open the art room's door, it opened itself.

"Do you need something?"

Finally face to face with the boy who started it all, she loses her train of thought.

He looks... tired to say the least. Even with dark skin, there's no denying the eyebags swiped under his honey eyes. With his bangs and the overhead light, they look deeper than the oceans no one bothers exploring. Obviously he's annoyed that she's there, but inside he couldn't care less. The only thing that could make his day was if she apologized for interrupting him and left right now.

"Your art," she forces herself to speak. "What inspired it?"

His expression darkens and he grabs the door handle. "Leave me alone... please."

"No- Wait- I lost something very important to me recently. My journal. It has all my writing in it. My universes. The one you painted is one of mine, with the girl and the plants?"

He blinks, taking in the onslaught of information and suddenly his face sours. "Oh... I didn't know it was yours. I saw it on the table and assumed it was one of my friend's sketchbooks. After none of them took it, I just kinda kept it for myself..."

He reaches into his backpacks and digs, bringing out the soft rubber journal she knows and loves. "Saying this as an artist it probably sounds stupid but you really know how to paint a picture." He presses it into her hands. "Sorry for accidentally taking it and you know- reading it."

"It's okay. I should probably write my name on my things more often."

"Yeah, you probably should," he chuckles. "What is *your name anyway?"*

"I'm Robin."

She sticks out her hand and he shakes it.

"Kip."

A fond hum slips out as she leans back. "I can't lose you," she whispers to the stars.

"I won't lose you."

~

"-up Kip! Wake up! You gotta see this!"

Their vision attempts to focus as Robin shakes their soul like a blender. Kip peals their eyes open and looks to where she's excitedly pointing.

"There's nothing-"

There.

A flash of color over inky black. Another tiny streak on the corner of their vision.

"Oh my god- Kip. Kip, did you see it?" they can hear Robin's giddiness and feel the little whooshes of air as she stims with her hands. They scoot over to lay on her lap, the perfect angle for their vision to adjust and watch her face light up every time a meteor flies by.

"My mom told me shooting stars are souls that are trying to claw their way back to Earth. They miss it so much that they'll do anything, but when they try it rips the fabric of the universe. Only for a few seconds though."

The next words that tumble out are solely for the breeze to carry.

"I'd tear a hole in the sky if it meant being able to do this again."

The boat rocks gently, swayed by windy currents that push them away from the middle of nowhere.

Was the world really this quiet?

Without the hum of cicadas or rude car horns it was just a void of...

Nothing.

Occasionally the boat would creak under their weight, but besides that there was pure silence.

Kip's attention unexpectedly caught two specific flashes from a previous cluster, dimming as they descended from the heavens. Two stars, broken apart from the world only to find themselves hurtling towards the same destiny.

Whilst deep in their wonderment, Kip's face collided with wood as Robin unexpectedly clambered to the other side of the boat. "Robin! What the hell..." they trailed off as their best friend turned around with awe written on her features.

But it wasn't a kitten she was holding.

Robin's hands were cupped around *a star.*

~

It must take everything in her power to stim and not drop the *literal star* in her hands at the same time. *"It's so little,"* she abruptly stops to stage whisper in amazement. *"I'm holding a star!"*

"I know Robin, it's so...pretty," Kip breathes, hovering between wanting to touch it and keeping their hands away. "I thought stars were supposed to be giant balls of hot gas."

Robin somehow smiles wider, childlike wonder be damned before her eyes catch on something and her mouth instantly morphs into an 'o'.

"Up there!"

Kip's twists and turns until their eyes land on a twinkle against the night sky.

The other star, shining shimmering gleaming, dipping just over their head. They reach out to catch it as it falls into their palms, eyes widening at the smooth sensations it brings when they rub their fingers over it.

Forget touching dolphins, this was leagues better.

But questions that were supposed to stay in their head spilled over to their mouth. "Why is it warm? Shouldn't I be burning up? Oh my god is this someone's soul? Is it mine? Wait- ARE WE DEAD?"

Robin had the audacity to giggle at the taller one's disarray. "No Kip- Kip you've got it all wrong. It's a star."

"Okay? Your point?"

"It's yours."

That had too many implications.

"You lost me."

She wiggled her shoulders, trying to explain. "Not in like- a spiritual sense. It's yours in a... possession type way. You can keep it."

Kip blinked a few times as they absorbed the information. "Oh... that, that makes more sense. Thank you."

Robin pressed her star into her chest. It didn't look like she did it that hard, but the star glowed brightly for a moment before disappearing in a flash of stardust. She motioned for Kip to follow, but as they looked between the star and the short girl, doubt crept into their mind.

What if something happens?

What if something goes wrong?

What if-

A hand lands on their knee and Kip looks to Robin. She's got that smile again. That smile she has when Kip works on a particularly difficult shaded piece and she's only there to be a body double. Lips pulled slightly to one side, eyes crinkled, glasses beginning to slide down.

Robin grasps Kip's hands, eyes flickering to theirs for permission. Kip grants it with a slow nod and she guides them to press it into their chest. Gentle warmth radiates from the star as she gives an ever so little push and it shimmers, fizzling into stardust.

"There. Now it's safe," she smiles.

"I really hope I don't explode later."

~

True to her words, Kip doesn't explode.

Not when the boat docks itself on the shore of a seemingly empty village hidden amongst the clouds. A faint melody reaches their ears as they pass house after house, the band's voice loud and clear when they walk into the middle of a festival.

A giant pole stands proud and tall in the middle of a well worn clearing, a multitude of colorful ribbons draped from the top. Food vendors line the circumference selling home cooked

meals that produce an aroma so mouth watering Kip swore they saw Robin wipe a bit of drool away.

"If a ham and a steak had a baby, this is what it would smell like," Robin states with a dreamy sigh. "Or maybe chow mein and steak bites. Those things are addicting."

"This smells like something mi Mamá would make. Her bad-day-after-school-you-will-feel-amazing cooking was the *best*. I'm gonna find the spiciest pickles here and buy their entire *stock*," Kip rubbed their hands and licked their lips in anticipation, but before they could run off a horn echoed from the middle and a woman took center stage.

"Ladies and gents, young and old! Travelers from far and wide! We welcome all to Redwick's fourteenth annual festival of music!" The crowd cheers in reply and once they die down the announcer continues. "As we celebrate the gift of expression, of creation, of life herself, I invite everyone to come on out, grab a ribbon, and unite together as one as we sing and dance for Vita!"

She blows the horn once more and the mass surges forward. Not wanting to get trampled, Robin grabs Kip by the hand, oblivious to the way Kip rapidly blinks from the gesture. She weaves through people like water and they shout over the masses."Can't we just watch?"

She looks back with a grin.

"Where's the fun in watching?"

Doi-ng!

And then she smacks into the silver pole.

Kip, the ever concerned best friend, bursts into laughter.

It's just- the way she went ramrod stiff with the most horrified look on her face got to them before they could pull themselves together to actually check on her. Fortunately a few considerate bystanders beat them to it.

"Oh my- Miss, are you okay?"

"Poor dear. Do you need any help?"

Robin waves the people away with a hand, using the other to check if her glasses broke. "I'm alright. It's fine. I've had worse. Are you still here Kip?"

"Yep. Yep, I'm here," they swiftly join Robin in checking for any injuries, mirth softening. She winces when they press against a tender spot on her forehead.

"Sorry, sorry," they muttered.

"It's okay. My fault for not looking."

"No no, you were excited. Are you ready now?"

She nods and grabs a ribbon for herself before passing one to them. "Heck yeah I am!"

It takes a while for the crowd to organize itself, but once the announcer deems everybody ready, she blows the horn. The band starts up again with a joyous flute taking the lead, followed by the other winds supporting the soloist.

And once the percussion joins in, the festival comes to life.

The two are caught in a flurry of dance and song as the village works together to tie the pole in vibrant ribbons of color. Everybody seems to know the lyrics except them, but they don't mind.

It's one of those things where you're just happy to be a part of something.

Look to us oh Vita
And see what we have made

KOOPMAN, CONTINUED...

Under blinding rain and sun
On this blessed day

Guide us oh Vita
Oh give us a sign
Through lightning or newcomers
That our lives are worth your time

See what you've created
And all that we have done
From you and your grace alone
We unite together as one!

Kip unknowingly makes eye contact with Robin for a millisecond and their heart stutters.

Her radiance puts Apollo to shame. She's smiling so deeply her eyes are closed and the way the light hits her makes it look like the sun outlines her soul.

God she's beautiful

~

Everything *was* perfect.

The village was working just as she had imagined. Nothing was going wrong and Kip was having the time of their life! She would count this as an absolute win in her book ...If it weren't for her shaky grasp on reality.

The rain was one thing. She could handle a bit of rain.

It's the cracks she had to worry about.

Anything can slip through and break the little strings tied to her fingers. Usually she makes these worlds with only her in mind, but this is the first time she's ever brought someone else.

It's the first time she's ever brought *Kip*.

So it has to stay perfect.

The song comes to an end and the village comes to a stop, stepping back to admire their work: a painstakingly gorgeous maypole draped in every color under the sun.

Rounding the corner, a small boy with a shiny box follows the announcer who carries a ladder with the help of her friends. They set it up next to the pole and the woman whispers something in his ear and he grins, nodding madly. He carefully opens the box and pulls out a ceramic angel colored to look like what she knows to be their deity, Vita.

With a bit of help, the boy climbs the ladder and cheers break out as he places it atop the maypole.

Robin giggles and jumps in place, clapping her hands. "It's so pretty Kip! What do you think?"

"That's one hell of a centerpiece," they reply, putting a finger to their chin. "I did make a few things back in ceramics in highschool... but I don't think I could ever do something as detailed as that right there."

"Oh come on Kip, you're one of the greatest artists I know!" she pouts. "Don't put yourself down. Why don't we go grab some food? We can find the spiciest pickles your heart desires," Robin teases.

Her friend's face lights up and they give in instantly. "Alright, fine. But I wanna get you something too. It's not everyday you find a festival stocked to the brim with delicious food."

That's how they found themselves at a picnic table sharing a plate of extra spicy pickles, steak bites, and mini strawberry cupcakes.

"Mm Mm MMn! The flavors are melting on my tongue," Kip whines, biting off the end of another pickle. "No but seriously, this is de-lectable. I'm surprised they didn't even have us pay anything for it."

"I think it's nice to not have to get something out of giving for once. Like if you were Santa Claus."

"Santa Claus gets cookies and milk. He gets *all* the cookies and milk."

"Well-"

In the blink of an eye, the landscape changes.

Behind Kip is a world on the brink of falling apart. Her heart catches in her throat at the sight of dark clouds hanging in the sky and lightning striking in the distance.

But more importantly, the cracks are taking over.

One splits the table in half. Another breaks the moon into a poorly cut pizza. No villagers walk the grassy streets and an eerie silence coats the land. There were more since last time.

She couldn't fix all of them like she had with the rain.

"-in? Robin? Hey, is something wrong?" Kip's honey eyes filled with concern as Robin forced herself to focus. "You look like you just saw a ghost."

"No... no, everything's fine. *I'm* fine," she asserts for herself rather than for her friend's sake.

They set down the pickle they were about to eat. "Robin...You know you can tell me if something's wrong, right?"

"I know..."

"Do you?"

~

How do you know something is broken?

Is it the way it moves? The way it shakes and shudders under the weight of the world, crying out its last breath with a puff of air. Do broken parts that have been glued together too many times not stick like they did before? Does it come apart with the slightest of movements, unable to stay together for more than a minute?

And why does it break?

Has it exhausted itself of its duty? A melody long overplayed, turning sour with each rewind of the dial.

Distantly, a star. Dying. Burning out. But no one knows it's gone yet. It shone so brightly no one knew it was breaking. Slowly but surely.

The tiniest string snaps from her fingertips, but it was the most important one.

It was the one holding her world together.

In the blink of an eye, the sky darkens with only the moon as a guiding light, and even if it weren't cracked, it's not enough. Her eyes darted between the cracks and her breath hitches. Knuckles turn white on the table she holds with an iron grip.

"Robin? Robin, what's going on?" They're trying to hold it together but the frantic tone in their voice suggests otherwise. "Are you okay?"

"I'm *fine*," she bites back. With the flick of a finger, Robin sends Kip back to the beach where they first docked. Where they'll be *safe*.

She glances around, unintentionally nibbling on her lip. Honestly she had made more complicated worlds, so why was this one snapping like a Kit Kat?

Robin winces as she stretches her hand over the cracks, breathing heavily as she reaches for the metaphorical glue. Her palm glows, a bright liquid magically filling the crevice. The glue heals the land and she sighs in relief. It could be fixed. Maybe she could still save it after all! There were worse complications if the world rejected the healing-

Right before her eyes, the fissure breaks even *deeper*.

"Son of a-"

"ROBIN!"

Their voice ricocheted off the broken land and Robin looked out in disbelief as Kip stumbled over the horizon, pinwheeling their arms to try and stay balanced.

"I'm coming over!" they announce with as much confidence as she had at her school's spelling bee.

It's not like she can send them back again. It'd take too much focus away from making sure the world didn't fall apart right in front of her. And no one wants that.

Robin drops, reaching out and *pulling* so maybe Kip's journey is less perilous.

The land barely responds, inching closer but failing the artist as the back of their shoe catches the cliff. Kip rolls into the fall, cringing when they pop back up and feel the arm they tumbled on. Nevertheless, they keep running with stupid determination in every step.

Iron floods her taste buds.

"Hang on Robin, I'm almost there!"

Tears burn behind her eyes and she twists her fingernails into her scalp. Around her, the earth trembles. A warning, but a warning she wouldn't listen to.

She can fix this. Why was it even happening if she couldn't? It's all fine.

Everything is fine.

Everything is fine.

Everything is fine.

Everything

Is

FINE.

She barely feels the touch on her shoulder. *"Robin,"* Kip sighs in relief, helping her up. "Are you okay?"

Of course the first thing they do is check on her. Forget running through a world that's on the verge of collapsing in on itself, Robin has to be okay first.

"I'm fine-"

"No you're not."

Kip saying that was like saying the sky was red.

"What? No. No I-"

Their hands land on her shoulders and she flinches. "Robin, look. I think I know what's going on, but listen to me and listen good when I tell you to look around and take a look at yourself. If you were fine, would all of this-" they gesture around. "be the way that it is?"

Robin shrinks back, taking off her glasses in an attempt to clean the tears away. It doesn't work. All it does is smudge the lenses. "Well- no... but I was trying to fix it! It was supposed to be perfect. At least, I wanted it to be..."

"Dude, all of this is- it's stunning!" Their praise warms her heart. All she ever wanted was for Kip to like it with the same vigor she had for their paintings. "It's incredible that you have such a creative capacity to make something like this, but it doesn't need to be perfect. I would've loved it even if it was just a single flower."

They gently bring Robin's chin up so she can actually see the care in their eyes. "And I love you Robin, but we are literally people of the arts. Nothing we make is perfect."

She looks past the artist to the broken moon, to the dying land she loved standing upon for fourteen whole years. Countless days of meticulous world building and making sure all the things she wrote down were flawless on lined paper and in her mind and she wonders... was it all for naught?

Her eyes land on the maypole, one of the first things she ever made for this world. Her first lonely year studying abroad in Greece led to the little statue on top. It was something to look up to. Something to look *forward* to. The ribbons are sloppily braided, but the thing that always made it so special to her was that the village came *together* to make it that way.

Oh.

Oh.

"Can I hug you?"

Her eyes water, a breathy plea slipping out.

Kip's eyes soften as they tuck Robin under their chin so her face rests on their collarbone. Strong arms wrap around her back, pulling her close while supporting her full body shudders. They squeeze like a boa constrictor and the pressure grounds her even if the tears won't stop running.

Lightly, they sway as if a lazy ocean hugs the shore.

Nothing more, nothing less.

Warmth blooms inside her chest, softly pushing against her skin like it wants to escape, and as much as Robin wants to hold onto it... she can't.

It slips past her barriers and...gets warmer?

Robin pulls away to look down at the two bright lights shining between them. "Oh, that's... new." She wipes her eyes to check if she's seeing things.

Spoiler alert, she wasn't.

"This isn't you?" Kip reaches out to touch it, mumbling, "Just when I thought today couldn't get any more confusing..."

The lights seemed to laugh at their expense. They flickered and floated, slowly orbiting around each other. They scared away the darkness with every passing second and melded into what could only be described as the sun but able to look at without burning your retinas off.

For the slightest of moments it dims like a snuffed out flame.

Then, the fire *ignites.*

~

If someone had told Kip they would experience a world falling apart, they would've called the person crazy or thrown a rock at their shoes.

That person would be even crazier if they said Kip would witness it putting itself back together.

"I'm gonna take a peak," they declare. "I dunno how long it's been but I wanna open my eyes at some point today."

"Are you sure? I still feel warm."

"Says the one in a sweater."

"At least I'm comfy," she sasses back, but it's scary how fast her tone changes. "No but seriously- this has never happened before. I don't have any grip. I don't know what you're gonna see..."

"I've seen worse." Kip squints and dares the tiniest look through their fingers.

Tall sage grass floods their vision. It's nothing like the decaying world before. They will themselves to open their eyes entirely and...

Woah.

Fields stretch to the beach, flooded with sunflowers, daisies, and anything in between. Cerulean rules the skies with the sun at its side. There's a few cracks still filling themselves in with the help of the lights, but other than that, it's probably on the top five most marvelous things they've seen in their life.

"You can open your eyes now."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

She uncovers her face, awe striking her. Happy or something else, Kip can only wonder what thoughts are racing through her head. She takes a step forward to really take in the scenery, turning around with tears in her eyes. "It's all gone..."

Not a trace of the village or even a note of music. New land, completely untouched, like starting a new Minecraft world.

"Yeah... but that means you can make a new one."

"I guess so... would you want to do it with me?"

Apparently Kip hadn't responded quick enough because words suddenly toppled out of Robin's mouth. "I mean you don't have to- I didn't even plan on bringing you here until I was already at the spot and I know you have your own things to do with your commissions and all but I just thought-"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Yes Robin! I'd love to create something with you."

For once, Robin was speechless.

In the grand scheme of things, the universe didn't need words to explain itself.

It needed *people*.

People who could draw from reality. People who could take what they have and make it something even more with just a pencil and paper. People who could mold and shape and sculpt and build and *create*.

Just like the universe.

Robin's shoulder's slump. "We really should go back now. I shouldn't keep you here longer than I already have."

Surprisingly, Kip has to wipe their eyes. “Yeah. Yeah you’re right. We should, but um- how *are* we going to get back?”

Her eyes gleam as she responds.

“Just take my hand.”

Epilogue

“Kip! C’mon we’re gonna be late!”

“I’m coming, I'm coming! Just let me tie my shoO CRAP-”

A distant thud shakes the hotel’s walls and Robin fondly rolls her eyes. She pours the pink lemonade she made earlier in Kip’s signature paint splattered thermos, swirling it around for good measure.

Sneakers squeak on hardwood as Kip stops in their tracks, running a hand through their fluffy tufts. “Sorry for the wait dear,” Kip pecks her on the cheek.

“Do you have everything?”

“Yep! Let’s get going.”

About twenty minutes later and enough car karaoke to put Taylor Swift in a coma, they’re pulling into the convention center’s parking lot. And after navigating the endless halls of it with a pamphlet, they’re walking into what might be the coolest award room since the Emmys.

Round tables set for the banquet dot the room. A long blank table soon to be filled with delectable food (and spicy pickles per their request) sits at the back. Robin has her eyes trained on a chandelier of multicolored crystals spinning disco ball style, but Kip has their sights on the masterpieces on stage, covered by thin sheets.

Pride wells up in their chest and they squeeze Robin’s hand a bit tighter.

The award came in a week ago.

They were eating dinner as Robin went through the daily mail.

“You’d think they’d stop getting our address wrong after the Halloween fiasco,” she huffed, tossing another letter into the neighbor pile.

“Maybe the guy has dyslexia?” Kip wondered aloud.

“I wouldn’t put it past him at this point. This is like the seventeenth time!”

“You’ve been counting?” they laughed, Robin joining in.

They sat in comfortable silence of paper shuffling and spoon scraping until Robin went quiet,

“Hey Kip? This one’s addressed to you,” she states, holding up the envelope like someone would a poker chip. “I think it’s from the competition people.”

Kip took it, carefully tearing the top off. “What would they want with me?” they mumbled to themselves.

They felt a warm chin hook their shoulder as they began to read aloud.

Dear Kip Medina,

It is with great delight that we at the League of Arts have nominated you for our “Best Imaginary” category with your piece “Your World, My Universe”. We invite you to our annual banquet at the Las Vegas Convention Center to celebrate the arts in all their glory.

Be sure to stay until the end, as there is a special surprise in store!

KOOPMAN, CONTINUED...

Dinner is covered, so feel free to bring family and friends. We have included four extra tickets, besides your own, in this letter just in case. If you need more, or would like to send any extras back, please contact us at XXX-XXX-XXXX. The maximum we can give out is ten total.

More details are on the back of this letter.

Once more, congratulations, and we hope to see you there on August 10th, 20XX

Best Regards,
Leila

United States League of Arts Director

That single letter left them speechless for the rest of the day.

But it's a week later now.

They won't be speechless anymore.

"¡Pequeño creador!" A woman's shrill call cuts through the air and Kip holds back the urge to wince. "Over here!" Once they arrive, it's comical how quick Kip's mother is to wrap her arms around her child, peppering kisses on their face. Her glasses cut into their cheeks with each one.

"Mamá, please. Inside voice," they implore. "I'm glad you could make it."

"I'm so happy to see you too! Let me see your face niño. How was I supposed to know one of your paintings was chosen? You never send us anything."

"I've been busy..." Kip pulls away and their mother takes the opportunity to eye Robin up and down.

"And is this the lovely lady your cousins were bragging about? The one with the um... " she waves her finger in thought. "¿Autismo?"

Kip rubbed their temples, mumbling under their breath."Voy a asesinar a Silvia cuando la vuelva a ver." They push past it though, ushering her mother forward. "Mamá, this is Robin."

Robin shyly spun her pointer fingers in circles. "Um- Hola señorita, es un... placer conocerte." Her 'r' rolls weren't the best, but Kip's mother seemed happy all the same.

"It's so nice to finally meet you too mija. Please, call me Irene."

Her smile gets just a bit wider, stimming with her hands.

Their mother elbows Kip in the ribs, smugly grinning. "Elegiste uno bonito, hijo."

"¡Mamá!"

~

The more they looked around the room, the more realization dawned on them. They were actually *here*, in the flesh, with other people just like them! Different artists of all ages walked the floor, making small talk for the time being. Kip was content to just listen and soak it all in. It's not every day you're in Vegas.

Robin had broken out of her shell when their mom mentioned she used to write for the newspaper, instantly asking questions about writing styles and such. Nothing Kip hadn't picked up from the times they were on the receiving end of the same conversation.

"And then I ask her, "what's his villain monologue?" To which she pulls out an entire page covered in writing- Front to back mind you! And reads me a freaking Shakespeare play about morality and how the world is corrupt so he wants to destroy it. I didn't hate it, but why don't people make more funny villains like Dr. Doofenshmirtz anymore..."

"¡Dios mío!" their mom exclaims. "She sounds crazy."

"Oh no, she's actually the sweetest thing on our team. Even dresses the part. It's the sudden major character deaths in our brainstorming sessions you have to watch out for."

Radio feedback broke the social scene as a voice rang over the intercom. "Would all our nominees for the "Best Imaginary" category, please report backstage. The ceremony will begin in ten minutes."

"I guess that's my cue," Kip said, getting up. But before they could make it far, Robin latched on and gave them the tightest hug in human history.

"You forgot something," she sing-songs.

"What could I have possibly forgotten?" They smirked, playing along.

"Your good luck kiss of course."

"Oh how could I forget?"

She gently takes their face between her hands and brings their lips together. A whisper of a touch, yet a burning fire within. The butterflies in their chest flutter so fast their wings might fall off and their heart presses against their shirt with every beat.

Robin leans in for the tiniest bit before pulling away.

"I love you."

"Love you too, birdie."

Their mother makes her way over, pulling Kip into an embrace they haven't been able to get since living with Robin. It's tender and caring, something they rarely got when their siblings still lived under the same roof.

"I'm so *proud* of you Kip," she whispers in their ear with all the love a mother can give. "I can't wait to see what you make next."

Tears burn behind their eyes and if they weren't wearing makeup they would've let them run.

"Thank you mamá."

~

If there wasn't a giant chandelier dangling overhead, Kip would've thought they were back at that art gallery where it all started.

Their heart skipped a beat as they stepped forward, the audience applauding as Kip took the stage next to a man in a flattering sweater vest and glasses. The announcer has loose curls of deep brown hair in her braids, but no one else would notice if they were focusing on the gold bands scattered throughout.

Were the lights too bright or was the room actually spinning?

They look towards their family.

Their mom watches the announcer with rapt attention as she pulls out an envelope, but Robin has her eyes trained on the paintings, most likely Kip's.

After all, she did help the most.

It's supposed to be the end of an adventure. The silhouetted travelers are worn out from their journey and all they have left is to enter the magnificent castle at the top of a mountain of

fluffy clouds. They walk up to the gates and are struck with awe as they gaze upon the castle's elegance, which Kip had spent weeks researching and finding references to get it *just* right.

Hopefully it's enough.

It has to be.

"Time to reveal what you've all been waiting for. Our winner, for the category "Best Imaginary" is..."

Nothing is staying still anymore. *Kip* can't even stay still anymore. It's all spinning round and round and round like their spinny chair at home. Colors mesh with people, people droop like melting ice cream.

They don't want to watch anymore.

"Your World, My Universe by Kip Medina!"

What?

Kip stood there in shock as the crowd's (read: Robin and their mother's) cheers turned to white noise and blood rushed through their ears.

How?

Moving was like pushing a shovel through a thick pile of snow.

Why?

The world gradually came back to full clarity when they felt something nudged into their hands. Looking down, it was one of those giant checks you only see on game shows. A piece of thin cardboard that wouldn't fit in their carry-on.

Kip couldn't even see how much money was on it.

"Alright everyone. As you all know, we have a special surprise for our winners. Seeing as this is our last one, I am proud to announce that our winners will have the chance to let their artwork be displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City!"

Nothing could quell their mother's screaming from across the room. If there weren't security guards at the stairs, she would've barreled onto the stage and left everyone's ears ringing if she got a hold of the mic.

Robin was pressing on her ear plugs, yet her smile could've lit up the entire world.

~

"You promise to visit?"

"I'll do my best."

"And bring Robin?"

"As long as you promise to keep Silvia in check."

"That I can't promise."

Kip chuckles and brings their phone closer, much to the annoyance of the flight attendant. "Love you, mamá."

"Te amo, pequeño creador. Fly safe."

"We will."

Robin clears her throat. "Kip, c'mon," she urges.

"*Mierda*- Right, right. Bye!"

"You better write!"

They quickly hung up, flashing a guilty smile. "Parents, right?" They made a show of putting their phone in airplane mode so the man would leave them alone.

The captain came online, ready to deliver the speech he probably had said a hundred times already. *"Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the crew I ask that you please direct your attention to our flight attendants as we review the emergency procedures and aircraft features... While we wait for take off, please take a moment to read the safety data card in the seat pocket in front of you."*

"I could be a flight attendant," Robin remarked.

Kip could picture the thought. Dark pencil skirt below the knee, a nicely fitted suit, one of those little neck scarves with the airline's colors. She'd look pretty in anything.

"Hold on, aren't you scared of heights?"

"Didn't you wanna be a doctor?" she shot back.

"I changed career paths."

The plane hummed as its engines burst to life and was directed out of the terminal. Lurching forward, Kip's hand shot to the side to steady Robin out of habit while it maneuvered through lanes.

Once it rolled over the runway, the captain radioed preparation for takeoff and Robin gingerly intertwined her fingers with Kip's own. Over the engine, her soft tone was indistinguishable. Only when they realized her lips were moving did they think to ask what she actually meant.

"How come you're not afraid?"

"Of heights? I just try not to think about it too much," they shrugged. "Thinking that it's something bigger than it already is only makes it worse. At least, in my opinion."

"Yeah..." Her free hand worried her sweater's hem as the plane accelerated.

"Not to sound rude, but why *are* you afraid of heights?"

"Actually It's not... It's not really heights. I don't think it ever was." She pushed up her glasses from where they fell down. "It's just- being up so high you can't see what's below you. And the thought of somehow falling from all the way up there...it terrifies me."

The plane rumbles as air catches the wings, sending them higher with every second that passes.

"Well... you just have to believe someone will catch you."

"But what if they don't?"

"They will."

"How do you know?"

Their flight steadies itself after breaking through a patch of peachy clouds. Kip honestly booked it to see the pretty sunset, but now it reminded them of so much more.

"Because the people holding the net helped me get back to the top."



Keandra Buderus,"Koi"

CEDAR GARRETT

A Home for Us Both

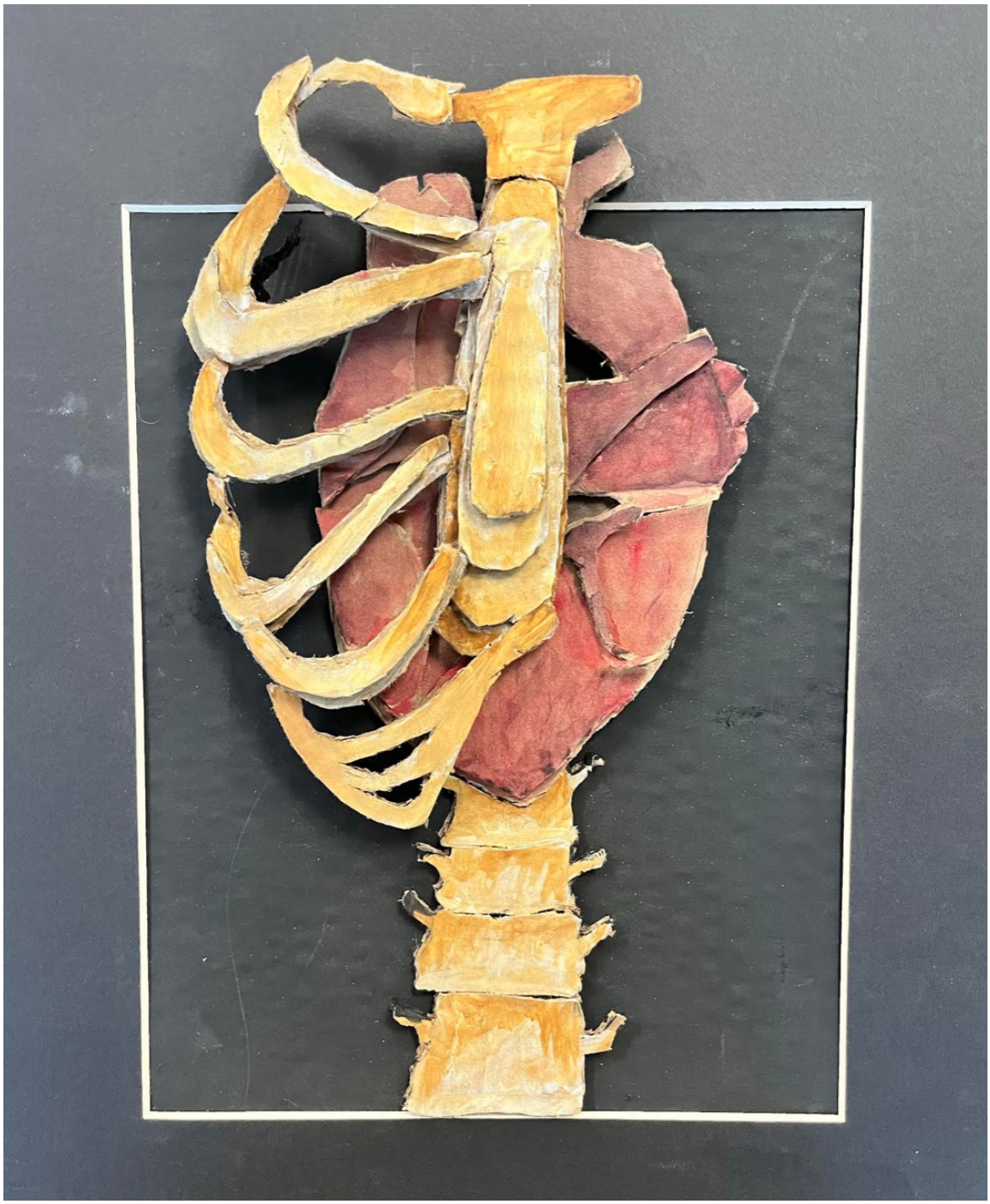
I hope you look at me
I hope you see me as the hearth
I hope you see me as a bed stacked high with quilts
I hope you see me as the kettle on the fire,
There to make you tea
I hope you look at me and see aspens shaking in the wind
I hope you look at me and hear a distant and babbling brook
I hope you look at me and feel the Sun
I hope you feel the warmth on your skin
I hope you look at me and a grin stretches across your face,
Like when you first feel the Spring on your skin.

I look at you and see you
The way a child looks at a butterfly
With wonder and amazement that such a beautiful thing exists
If I could,
I'd pick you off the ground like a dandelion
And give you a thousand wishes and dreams
And I'd let you carry them off deep into the night
If I could,
I'd give you my breath and let you have my future.

Because I look at you,
I look at you like you are my hearth, my favorite aspens, or a warm glass of tea.
You smile and it feels hotter than the Sun.
You laugh and it holds the whimsy of the first day of Spring.
You are home to me.



Kayson Mendoza, "Candlelight Dinner"



Taylor Walton, "Heart"

MIRANDA REED

What I Wish I Could Say to You

My mind's racing, I can not seem to breathe.
But when I see you, my mind is at ease.
Your face is a sunflower that shines bright.
Makes me smile, I'm not sure if it's right.

Your voice, so quiet, but so soft, so still.
"All by yourself?" The thought just makes me ill.
Know how I feel! But it's so unbeknown
Chiefly to you, that my feelings have grown.

I have always said "Read between the lines"
But your face, it's so humble and so kind
Take the hints I throw in your direction.
These feelings I feel come up in sections.

They always told me to follow my heart,
But when I see you, it's like abstract art.
You can not see what it truly portrays,
Though the colors it shows are never gray.

You are now my diamond in the rough.
So losing you is going to be tough.
Have you ever acknowledged me at all?
If you only walk past me, I will fall.

Please don't, do not ever leave me behind.
Your amity, honestly so sublime.
I will end my rant of my found words now.
My heart is complete, it takes a calm bow.

You have a trait that is always allure,
Now as I see you I feel so secure.
You do not know this but I surely do.
I truly like you. Do you like me too?
Oh, oh what I wish I could say to you.

Egg Song

Ima egg Ima egg
Just a wholesome lil egg
You can greet me
You can eat me
Just please don't freaking yeet me
Cause you see,
Ima egg Ima egg
No I'd never disobey
Eat me fried,
Or eat me cooked
When you eat me you'll be shook,
Cause Ima egg Ima egg
No I'd never disobey
I don't really care cause I'm just an egg
I've got no legs
And I'd never disobey
You get me cold,
I like to roll,
And I don't have many goals
Cause I'm an egg.



Keandra Buderus, Untitled



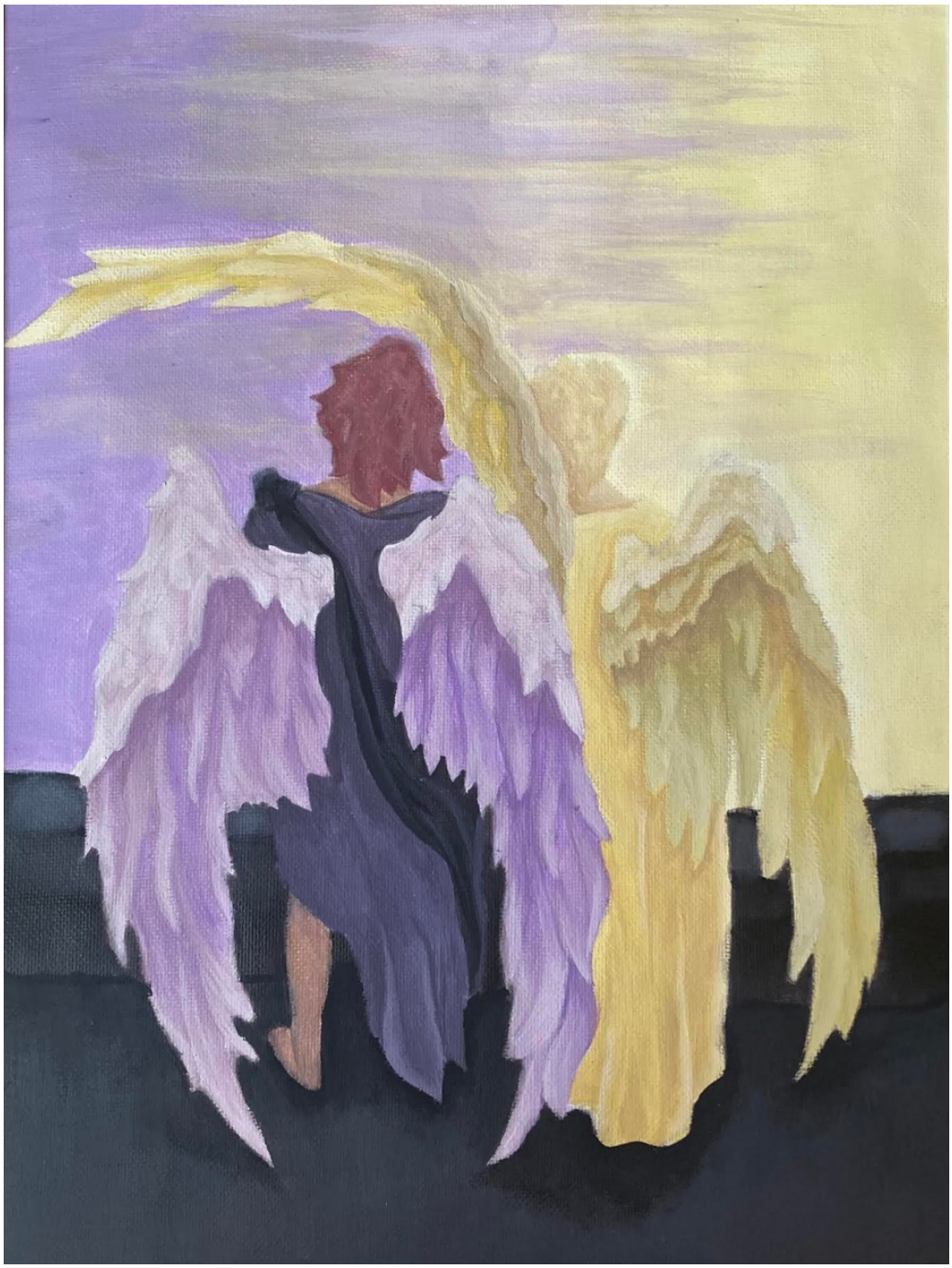
Sarah Hasui, "We Deserve to Be Heard"

My Group of People

My friend group is full of seven people, including me.
They're traits give them just a different thing to love about them.
One of them is everyone's caregiver.
She's sweet and all is sunny everytime she speaks.
She is a blessing, all of us can agree.
Another girl is just a gem.
Her hilarity makes everyone cherish her.
I could talk about her magnificence for weeks.

One girl is as beautiful as they eye can see.
With her, there is never a problem.
Time flies when having fun, and with her, time is a blur.
Another one loves opportunities.
She makes everyone extremely happy.
Being with her aura is like another realm.
Although I haven't known her as long, this girl is a wonder.
Our friend group is what she completes.

The last girl in the group is more than plenty.
When she's around, everything is wonderful mayhem.
We all love her laughter.
With this friend group, everything succeeds.



Lillian Hodanish,
Untitled

NORAH COOK

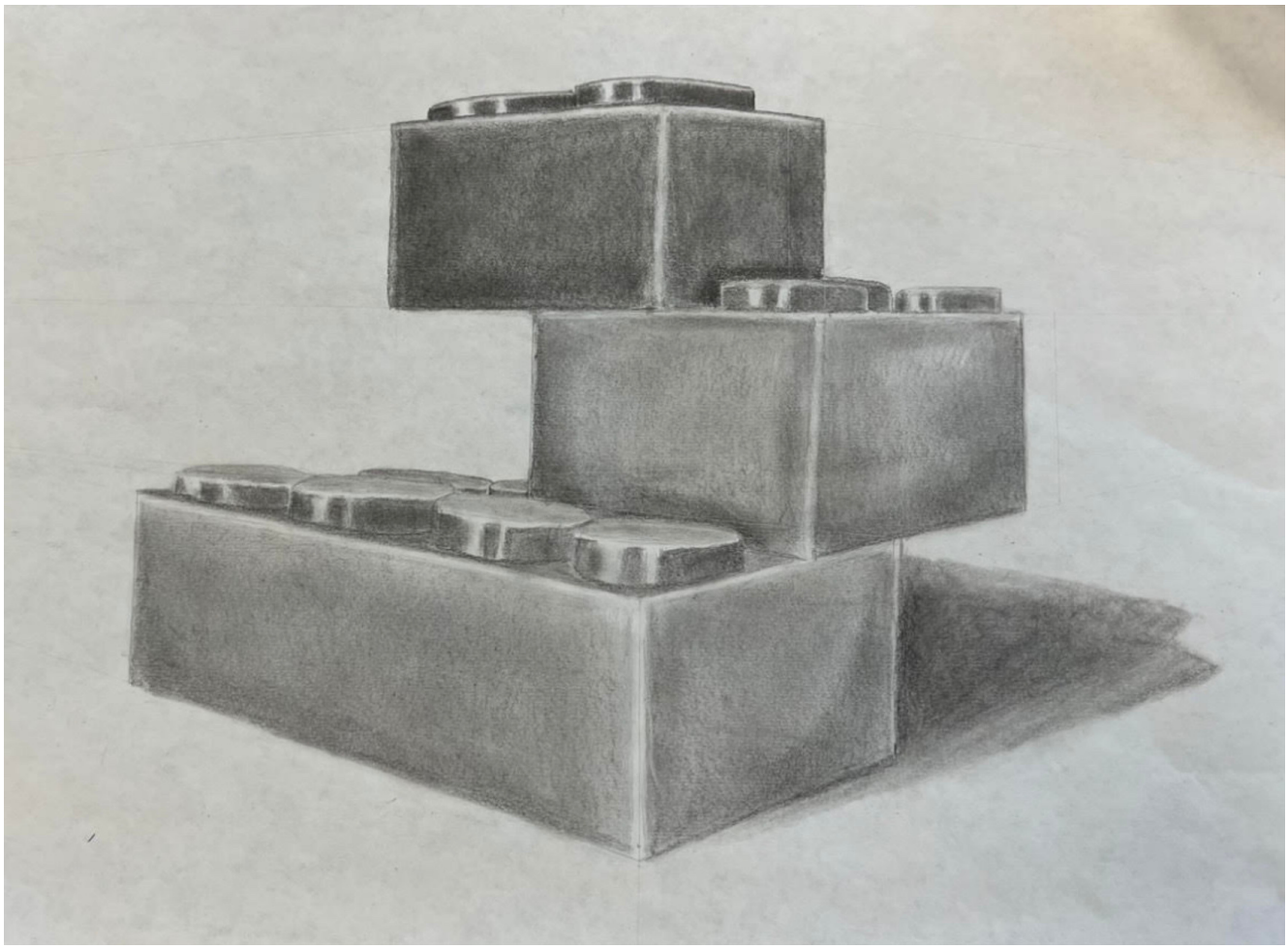
A Distant Vision

My childhood almost seems like an illusion
With bright colors and endless laughter, it almost seems like a different life,
Maybe that's because it was…
Riding around the neighborhood with my sister on our bright colored bikes,
Playing football with the middle schoolers when we were only in elementary,
Daring the would to come at us full throttle, because nothing could stand in the way of our unbreakable happiness

Though nothing lasts forever, childhood can only last so long
There were new memories to be made.
Ding Dong ditching late at night during those summer sleepovers, laughing so much it was hard to breathe with water shooting out of your nose,
And finding that someone you can go to when life gets hard…

These are things that come with getting older,
One starts to see a clearer vision to different stages of life.
Memories start to form into what feels like a dream, a distant vision.
Colors beginning to fade, noises becoming faint.
Not always knowing if what you're remembering is truly real, or just a dream
Perhaps that's the point of memories.
Creating illusions to make one feel "alive", to make them feel as though life can be so much more than pain

Driving on a long stretch of road
with nothing to get in your path, windows down and music blaring,
Sun smiling down on you as if you were a free eagle flying its course in the massive blue sky
As the sun starts to go down, and the moon comes up for its shift
Can you roll up the windows, turn down the music, and listen to the tires race against the pavement getting a small taste of freedom as it rushes through your veins
and you realize you're starting the next chapter to your long book of life



Keandra Buderus, Untitled

Snō Wīt

Modurn Udishin - Modern Edition

Tshrænzlidurādid intu Nōō Umerukin Ing-glish bī Gāj M. Dilin
Transliterated into New American English by Gage M. Dillon

Wuns upon u tīm in midwintur, wen ðu snōflāks wur faling līk feðurz frum hevin, ðu Kwēn sæt sōing æt hur windō, witsh hæd u frām uv blæk ebunē wood. Æz shē sōd shē lookt up æt ðu snō ænd prikt hur fing-gur wiþ hur nēdl. 3 jrops uv blud fel intu ðu snō. Ðu red on ðu wīt lookt sō būdifl ðæt shē þot tu hurself, "If ōnglē Ī hæd u tshīld æz wīt æz snō, æz red æz blud, ænd æz blæk æz ðu wood in ðis frām."

Sōōn æfturwurd shē hæd u lidl dodur hōō wuz æz wīt æz snō, æz red æz blud, ænd æz blæk æz ebunē wood, ænd ðerfor ðā kald hur Lidl Snō-Wīt. Ænd æz sōōn æz ðu tshīld wuz born, ðu Kwēn dīd.

U yēr lādur ðu King took himself unuður wīf. Shē wuz u būdifl woomin, but shē wuz prowd ænd erugint, ænd shē kood not stænd it if enēwun mīt surpæs hur in būdē. Shē hæd u mæjik mērur. Evrē morning shē stood bifor it, lookt æt hurself, ænd sed:

> Mērur, mērur, on ðu wal,
> Hōō in ðis lænd iz ferist uv al?

Tu ðis ðu mērur ænsurd:

> Ū, mī Kwēn, ar ferist uv al.

Ðen shē wuz sædisfīd, for shē nōō ðæt ðu mērur spōk ðu tshrōōþ.

Snō-Wīt grōō up ænd bēkām evur mor būdifl. Wen shē wuz 7 yērz ōld shē wuz æz būdifl æz ðu līt uv dā, ēvin mor būdifl ðæn ðu Kwēn hurself.

1 dā wen ðu Kwēn æskt hur mērur:

> Mērur, mērur, on ðu wal,
> Hōō in ðis lænd iz ferist uv al?

It ænsurd:

> Ū, mī Kwēn, ar fer; it iz tshrōō.
> But Snō-Wīt iz 1,000 tīmz ferur ðæn ū.

Ðu Kwēn took frīt ænd turnd yelō ænd grēn wiþ envē. Frum ðæt owur on wenevur shē lookt æt Snō-Wīt hur hart turnd ōvur insīd hur bodē, sō grāt wuz hur hātshrid for ðu gurl. Ðu envē ænd prīd grōō evur grādur, līk u wēd in hur hart, until shē hæd nō pēs dā ænd nīt.

DILLON, CONTINUED...

Đen shē sumind u huntsmin ænd sed tu him, "Tāk Snō-Wīt owt intu ðu woodz. Ī nevur want tu sē hur ugen. Kil hur, ænd æz prōōf ðæt shē iz ded bring hur lungz ænd hur livur bæk tu mē."

Đu huntsmin ōbād ænd took Snō-Wīt intu ðu woodz. Hē took owt hiz hunting nīf ænd wuz ubowt tu stæb it intu hur inusint hart wen shē bēgæn tu krī, sāing, "Ō, dēr huntsmin, let mē liv. Ī wil run intu ðu wīld woodz ænd nevur kum bæk."

Bēkuz shē wuz sō būdifl ðu huntsmin took pidē on hur, ænd hē sed, "Run uwā, ū por tshīld."

Hē þot, "Đu wīld ænumlz wil sōōn duvowur ū enēwā," but stil it wuz æz if u stōn hæd falin frum hiz hart, for hē wood not hæv tu kil hur.

Just ðen u yung bor kām runing bī. He kild it, kut owt its lungz ænd livur, ænd took ðem bæk tu ðu Kwēn æz prōōf uv Snō-Wīt's deþ. Đu kook hæd tu boiul ðem wiþ salt, ænd ðu wikid woomin āt ðem, supōzing ðæt shē hæd ētin Snō-Wīt's lungz ænd livur.

Đu por tshīld wuz now al ulōn in ðu grāt forist, ænd shē wuz sō ufrād ðæt shē just lookt æt al ðu lēvz on ðu tshrēz ænd did not nō wut tu dōō. Đen shē bēgæn tu run. Shē ræn ōvur sharp stōnz ænd þrōō þornz, ænd wīld ænumlz jumpt æt hur, but ðā did hur nō harm. Shē ræn æz far æz hur fēt kood kerē hur, ænd just æz ēvning wuz ubowt tu fal shē sa u lidl hows ænd went insīd in ordur tu rest.

Insīd ðu hows evrēþing wuz smal, but sō nēt ænd klēn ðæt nōwun kood sā uðurwīz. Đer wuz u lidl tābl wiþ u wīt tāblkloþ ænd 7 lidl plāts, ænd ētsh plāt hæd u spōōn, ænd ðer wur 7 nīvz ænd forks ænd 7 mugz æz wel. Ugenst ðu wal ðer wur 7 lidl bedz, al stænding in u rō ænd kuvurd wiþ snō-wīt shēts.

Bēkuz shē wuz sō hung-grē ænd þurstē Snō-Wīt āt u fū vejtublz ænd u lidl bred frum ētsh lidl plāt, ænd frum ētsh mug shē jrængk u jrop uv wīn. Æfturwurd, bēkuz shē wuz sō tīurd, shē lā down on u bed, but nun uv ðem felt rīt -- wun wuz tōō long, ðu uður tōō short -- until fīnulē ðu 7þ wun wuz just rīt. Shē rumānd līing in it, intshrustid hurself tu God, ænd fel uslēp.

Æftur dark ðu mæsturz uv ðu hows ruturnd hōm. Đā wur ðu 7 dworvz hōō pikt ænd dug for or in ðu mowntinz. Đā lit ðer 7 kændlz, ænd æz sōōn æz it wuz līt in ðer hows ðā sa ðæt sumwun hæd ben ðer, for not evrēþing wuz in ðu sām ordur æz ðā hæd left it.

Đu 1st 1 sed, "Hōō hæz ben siding in mī tsher?"

Đu 2nd 1, "Hōō hæz ben ēding from mī plāt?"

Đu 3rd 1, "Hōō hæz ben ēding mī bred?"

Đu 4þ 1, "Hōō hæz ben ēding mī vejtublz?"

Đu 5þ 1, "Hōō hæz ben stiking with mī fork?"

Đu 6þ 1, "Hōō hæz ben kuding with mī nīf?"

DILLON, CONTINUED...

Ðu 7þ 1, "Hōō hæz ben jringking frum mī mug?"

Ðen ðu 1st 1 sa ðæt ðer wuz u lidl imprint in hiz bed, ænd sed, "Hōō stept on mī bed?"

Ðu uðurz kām runing up ænd showdid, "Sumwun hæz ben līing in mīn æz wel."

But ðu 7þ 1, looking æt hiz bed, fownd Snō-Wīt līing ðer uslēp. Ðu 7 dworvz al kām runing up, ænd ðā krīd owt wiþ umāzmint. Ðā fetsht ðer 7 kændlz ænd shōn ðu līt on Snō-Wīt. "Ō good hevin! Ō good hevin!" ðā krīd. "Ðis tshīld iz sō būdifl!"

Ðā wur sō hæpē, ðæt ðā did not wāk hur up, but let hur kuntinū tu slēp ðer in ðu bed. Ðu 7þ dworf hæd tu slēp wiþ hiz kumpænyinz, 1 owur wiþ ētsh 1, ænd ðen ðu nīt wuz dun.

Ðu nekst morning Snō-Wīt wōk up, ænd wen shē sa ðu 7 dworvz shē wuz frītind. But ðā wur frendlē ænd æskt, "Wut iz yor nām?"

"Mī nām iz Snō-Wīt," shē ænsurd.

"How did ū fīnd yor wā tu owr hows?" ðu dworvz æskt furður.

Ðen shē told ðem ðæt hur stepmuður hæd tshrīd tu kil hur, ðæt ðu huntsmin hæd sperd hur līf, ænd ðæt shē hæd run ðu intīur dā, fīnulē kuming tu ðer hows.

Ðu dworvz sed, "If ū wil kēp hows for us, ænd kook, māk bedz, wash, sō, ænd nit, ænd kēp evrēþing klēn ænd ordurlē, ðen ū kæn stā wiþ us, ænd ū shæl hæv evrēþing ðæt ū want."

"Yes," sed Snō-Wīt, "wiþ al mī hart."

Sō shē kept hows for ðem. Evrē morning ðā went intu ðu mowntinz looking for or ænd gōld, ænd in ðu ēvning wen ðā kām bæk hōm ðer mēul hæd tu bē redē. During the dā ðu gurl wuz ulōn.

Ðu good dworvz wornd hur, sāing, "Bē kerfl ubowt yor stepmuður. Shē wil sōōn nō ðæt ū ar hēr. Dōō not let enēwun in."

Now ðu Kwēn, bulēving ðæt shē hæd ētin Snō-Wīt's lungz ænd livur, kood ōnglē þingk ðæt shē wuz ugen ðu furst ænd ðu mōst būdifl woomin uv al. Shē stept bifor hur mērur ænd sed:

> Mērur, mērur, on ðu wal,
> Hōō in ðis lænd iz ferist uv al?

It ænsurd:

> Ū, mī Kwēn, ar fer; it iz tshrōō.
> But Snō-Wīt, bēyond ðu mowntinz
> Wiþ ðu 7 dworvz,
> Iz stil 1,000 tīmz ferur ðæn ū.

Ðis stardld ðu Kwēn, for shē nōō ðæt ðu mērur did not lī, ænd shē rēulīzd ðæt ðu huntsmin hæd disēvd hur, ænd ðæt Snō-Wīt wuz stil ulīv. Ðen shē þot, ænd þot ugen, how shē kood kil Snō-

DILLON, CONTINUED...

Wīt, for æz long æz shē wuz not ðu mōst būdifl woomin in ðu intīur lænd hur envē wood giv hur nō rest.

Æt læst shē þot uv sumþing. Kuluring hur fās, shē diskīzd hurself æz un ōld pedlur woomin, sō ðæt nōwun wood rekugnīz hur. In ðis diskīz shē went tu ðu hows uv ðu 7 dwarfs. Noking on ðu dor shē kald owt, "Būdifl werz for sāl, for sāl!"

Snō-Wīt pērd owt ðu windō ænd sed, "Good dā, dēr woomin, wut dōō ū hæv for sāl?"

"Good werz, būdifl werz," shē ænsurd. "Bōdis lāsiz in al kulurz." Ænd shē took owt 1 ðæt wuz brādid frum kulurfl silk. "Wood ū līk ðis 1?"

"Ī kæn let ðæt onist woomin in," þot Snō-Wīt, ðen unbōltid ðu dor ænd bot ðu pridē bōdis lās.

"Tshīld," sed ðu ōld woomin, "how ū look! Kum, let mē lās ū up propurlē."

Ðu unsuspekting Snō-Wīt stood bifor hur ænd let hur dōō up ðu nōō lās, but ðu ōld woomin puld sō kwiklē ænd sō hard that Snō-Wīt kood not brēð.

"Ū ūst tu bē ðu mōst būdifl 1," sed ðu ōld woomin, ænd hurēd uwā.

Not long æfturwurd, in ðu ēvning tīm, ðu 7 dworvz kām hōm. How terufīd ðā wur wen ðā sa ðer dēr Snō-Wīt līing on ðu ground, not mōōving æt al, æz ðō shē wur ded. Ðā liftid hur up, ænd, sēing ðæt shē wuz tōō tītlē lāst, ðā kut ðu lās in 2. Ðen shē bēgæn tu brēð u lidl, ænd lidl bī lidl shē kām bæk tu life.

Wen ðu dworvz hurd wut hæd hæpind ðā sed, "Ðu ōld pedlur woomin wuz nōwun els but ðu godlis Kwēn. Tāk ker ænd let nōwun in wen wē ar not wiþ ū."

Wen ðu wikid woomin ruturnd hōm shē went tu hur mērur ænd æskt:

> Mērur, mērur, on ðu wal,
> Hōō in ðis lænd iz ferist uv al?

Ðu mērur ænsurd wuns ugen:

> Ū, mī Kwēn, ar fer; it iz tshrōō.
> But Snō-Wīt, bēyond ðu mowntinz
> Wiþ ðu 7 dworvz,
> Iz stil 1,000 tīmz ferur ðæn ū.

Wen shē hurd ðæt, al hur blud ræn tu hur hart bēkuz shē nōō ðæt Snō-Wīt hæd kum bæk tu līf.

"Ðis tīm," shē sed, "I shæl þingk uv sumþing ðæt wil distshroi ū."

Ðen wiþ ðu art of witshkræft, witsh shē undurstood, shē mād u poizind kōm. Ðen shē diskīzd hurself, tāking ðu form uv u difrint ōld woomin. Þus shē went ukros ðu 7 mowntinz tu ðu 7 dworvz, nokt on the dor, ænd kald owt, "Good werz for sāl, for sāl!"

DILLON, CONTINUED...

Snō-Wīt lookt owt ænd sed, "Gō on yor wā. Ī æm not ulowd tu let enēwun in."

"Ū shurlē mā tāk u look," sed ðu ōld woomin, puling owt ðu poizind kōm ænd hōlding it up. Ðu tshīld līkt it sō mutsh ðæt shē let hurself bē disēvd, ænd shē ōpind ðu dor.

Æftur ðā hæd ugrēd on ðu purtshis, ðu ōld woomin sed, "Now let mē kōm yor her propurlē."

Shē hæd berlē stuk ðu kōm intu Snō-Wīt's her wen ðu poizin took ufekt, ænd ðu gurl fel down unkontshis.

"Ū spesumin uv būdē," sed ðu wikid woomin, "now ū ar finisht." Ænd shē wakt uwā.

Fortshunitlē it wuz almōst ēvning, ænd ðu 7 dworvz kām hōm. Wen ðā sa Snō-Wīt līing on ðu grownd æz if shē wur ded, ðā umēdēitlē suspektid hur stepmuður. Ðā eksæmind hur ænd fownd ðu poizind kōm. Ðā hæd skerslē puld it owt wen Snō-Wīt kām tu hurself ugen ænd tōld ðem wut hæd hæpind. Wuns ugen ðā wornd hur tu bē on gard ænd not tu ōpin ðu dor for enēwun.

Bæk æt hōm ðu Kwēn stept bifor hur mērur ænd sed:

> Mērur, mērur, on ðu wal,
> Hōō in ðis lænd iz ferist uv al?

Ðu mērur ænsurd:

> Ū, mī Kwēn, ar fer; it iz tshrōō.
> But Snō-Wīt, bēyond ðu mowntinz
> Wiþ ðu 7 dworvz,
> Iz stil 1,000 tīmz ferur ðæn ū.

Wen ðu Kwēn hurd ðu mērur sāing ðis, shē shook ænd tshrembld wiþ æng-gur, "Snō-Wīt shæl dī," shē showdid, "if it kosts mē mī līf!"

Ðen shē went intu hur mōst sēkrit rōōm -- nōwun els wuz ulowd insīd -- ænd shē mād u poizind, poizind æpl. Frum ðu owtsīd it wuz būdifl, wīt wiþ red tshēks, ænd enēwun hōō sa it wood want it. But enēwun hōō mīt ēt u lidl pēs uv it wood dī. Ðen, kuluring hur fās, shē diskīzd hurself æz u pezint woomin, ænd þus went ukros ðu 7 mowntinz to ðu 7 dworvz. Shē nokt on ðu dor.

Snō-Wīt stuk hur hed owt ðu windō ænd sed, "Ī æm not ulowd tu let enēwun in. Ðu dworvz hæv furbidin mē tu dōō sō."

"Ðæt iz al rīt wiþ mē," ænsurd ðu pezint woomin. "Ī'l easily get rid uv mī æplz. Hēr, Ī'l giv ū 1 uv ðem."

"Nō," sed Snō-Wīt, "Ī kænot eksept enēþing."

"Ar ū ufrād uv poizin?" æskt ðu ōld woomin. "Look, Ī'l kut ðu æpl in 2. Ū ēt ðu red hæf, ænd Ī shæl ēt ðu wīt hæf."

DILLON, CONTINUED...

Now ðu æpl hæd ben sō artfulē mād ðæt ōnglē ðu red hæf wuz poizind. Snō-Wīt longd for ðu būdifl æpl, ænd wen shē sa ðæt ðu pezint woomin wuz ēding part uv it shē kood nō long-gur resist, ænd shē stuk hur hænd owt ænd took ðu poizind hæf. Shē berlē hæd u bīt in hur mowþ wen shē fel tu ðu grownd ded.

Ðu Kwēn lookt æt hur wiþ u grōōsum ster, læft lowdlē, ænd sed, "Wīt æz snō, red æz blud, blæk æz ebunē wood! Ðis tīm ðu dworvz kænot uwākin ū."

Bæk æt hōm shē æskt hur mērur:

> Mērur, mērur, on ðu wal,
> Hōō in ðis lænd iz ferist uv al?

It fīnulē ænsurd:

> Ū, mī Kwēn, ar ferist uv al.

Ðen hur envēis hart wuz æt rest, æz wel æz un envēis hart kæn bē æt rest.

Wen ðu dworvz kām hōm ðæt ēvning ðā fownd Snō-Wīt līing on ðu grownd. Shē wuz not brēðing æt al. Shē wuz ded. Ðā liftid hur up ænd lookt for sumþing poizinis. Ðā undid hur lāsiz. Ðā kōmd hur her. Ðā washt hur wiþ wadur ænd wīn. But nuþing helpt. Ðu dēr tshīld wuz ded, ænd shē rumānd ded. Ðā lād hur on u bēr, ænd al 7 sæt nekst tu hur ænd mornd for hur ænd krīd for 3 dāz. Ðā wur gōing tu berē hur, but shē stil lookt æz fresh æz u living pursin, ænd stil hæd hur būdifl red tshēks.

Ðā sed, "Wē kænot berē hur in ðu blæk urþ," ænd ðā hæd u tshrænzperint glæs kofin mād, sō shē kood bē sēn frum al sīdz. Ðā lād hur insīd, ænd wiþ gōldin ledurz rōt on it hur nām, ænd ðæt shē wuz u prinses. Ðen ðā poot ðu kofin owtsīd on u mowntin, ænd 1 uv ðem alwāz stād wiþ it ænd watsht ōvur hur. Ðu ænumlz tōō kām ænd mornd for Snō-Wīt, furst un owul, ðen u rāvin, ænd fīnulē u duv.

Snō-Wīt lā ðer in ðu kofin u long, long tīm, ænd shē did not dikā, but lookt līk shē wuz uslēp, for shē wuz stil æz wīt æz snō ænd æz red æz blud, ænd æz blæk-herd æz ebunē wood.

Now it kām tu pæs ðæt u prins enturd ðēz woodz ænd hæpind ontōō ðu dworvz' hows, wer hē sot sheltur for ðu nīt. Hē sa ðu kofin on ðu mowntin wiþ būdifl Snō-Wīt in it, ænd hē red wut wuz ritin on it wiþ gōldin ledurz.

Ðen hē sed tu ðu dworvz, "Let mē hæv ðu kofin. Ī wil giv ū enēþing ū want for it."

But ðu dworvz ænsurd, "Wē wil not sel it for al ðu gōld in ðu wurld."

Ðen hē sed, "Ðen giv it tu mē, for Ī kænot liv wiþowt bēing ābl tu sē Snō-Wīt. Ī wil onur hur ænd rispekt hur æz mī mōst tsherisht wun."

Æz hē þus spōk, ðu good dworvz felt pidē for him ænd gāv him ðu kofin. Ðu prins hæd hiz survints kerē it uwā on ðer shōldurz. But ðen it hæpind ðæt 1 uv ðem stumbld on sum brush, ænd

ðis dislojd frum Snō-Wīt's þrōt ðu pēs uv poizind æpl ðæt shē hæd bitin of. Not long æfturwurd shē ōpind hur īz, liftid ðu lid frum hur kofin, sæt up, ænd wuz ulīv ugen.

"Good hevinz, wer æm Ī?" shē krīd owt.

Ðu prins sed joifulē, "Ū ar wiþ mē." Hē tōld hur wut hæd hæpind, ænd ðen sed, "Ī luv ū mor ðæn enēþing els in ðu wurld. Kum wiþ mē tu mī faður'z kæsl. Ū shæl bēkum mī wīf." Snō-Wīt luvd him, ænd shē went wiþ him. Ðer weding wuz plænd wiþ grāt splendur ænd mæjistē.

Snō-Wīt's godlis stepmuður wuz alsō invīdid tu ðu fēst. Æftur putting on hur būdifl klōðz shē stept bifor hur mērur ænd sed:

> Mērur, mērur, on ðu wal,
> Hōō in ðis lænd iz ferist uv al?

Ðu mērur ænsurd:

> Ū, mī Kwēn, ar fer; it iz tshrōō.
> But ðu yung Kwēn iz 1,000 tīmz ferur ðæn ū.

Ðu wikid woomin udurd u kurs, ænd shē bēkām sō frītind, sō frītind, ðæt shē did not nō wut tu dōō. Æt furst shē did not want tu gō tu ðu weding, but shē fownd nō pēs. Shē hæd tu gō ænd sē ðu yung Kwēn. Wen shē u-rīvd shē rekugnīzd Snō-Wīt, ænd terurīzd, shē kood ōnglē stænd ðer wiþowt mōōving.

Ðen ðā poot u per uv īyurn shōōz intu burning kōlz. Ðā wur brot forþ wiþ tongz ænd plāst bifor hur. Shē wuz forst tu step intu ðu red-hot shōōz ænd dæns until shē fel down ded.

Ðē End



Rose Guasta, Untitled

MIRANDA REED

Story of the Lost Flies: Going Through the Storm & Dancing Through the Rain

*knock *Someone was at the door. *knock. It opened.

"May I speak with Azriel please?" a kind voice said to the teacher. .

The classroom was quiet. My back was turned to this voice so I looked in the reflection of the turned off television screen in front of me trying to see this person without fully turning around, though I already knew who it was. I hoped it wasn't. This boy at the door wasn't fully inside the classroom, only the upper part of his body, his feet were outside in the hall. He was holding the door frame and the edge of the door as he leaned forward slightly, practically closing it onto himself.

"Ya, what do you need her for?" Ms. Clevdile asked.

"I was just told to get her. Do you need the note? I have it right here." the boy said, calm but urgent, showing his hand that held a small and blank piece of paper.

"No, that's quite alright. Azriel?" Ms. Clevdile announced, "Did you hear what Gabriel said?"

"Yes. Do I need to take my things?" I said while I stood up in an attempt to organize my things, still not facing the boy.

Ms. Clevdile looked at Gabriel while she waited for an answer. He looked at her and replied "Yes, preferably." He smiled at the teacher then looked at me as I now had my things in my bag and had faced his direction with a resentful look. I walked past him not looking at his face at all. Still I could see the small but effective calm smile on Gabriel's face, it could fool anyone. But there was no way someone called for me. *What did Gabriel want?* He watched me walk past him as he opened the door to let me through.

"Thank you, Ms. Clevdile!" he announced before the door shut.

We were right outside of the classroom now in the empty hallway standing only feet apart. His face, not one you could forget. He wore a flannel over a white graphic t-shirt, black fit male jeans that had some rips on it, curly hair that slid onto his face just passed his eyes. And his eyes, they drew you in. It made you nervous, but calm as you thought of yourself being able to look at them everyday. But I can not get distracted, I need to know why he summoned me, after all this time.

"What's going on?" I asked

"What are you doing?" Gabriel demanded sternly, the smile gone, a blank face.

"What are you talking about?" I replied calmly, gitty, gripping my hand in front of me hoping he wouldn't pay attention to it.

He grabbed my left hand with force and brought it closer to himself. On the tips of my fingers, lie blue and black curved lines connecting the ends of my nails. It looked like pen ink, yet not noticeable to the naked eye unless they were being looked for. Gabriel already knew they were there.

"What the hell are you doing, Azriel?" He demanded quietly, "This is not something to be messing with."

I removed my hand from his grasp. "Stop it." I looked around to make sure we didn't make a scene and we started to talk quietly and sternly.

"I'm fine, Gabriel, ok? I know what I'm doing."

"Clearly you don't." he said, motioning to my hand. "You haven't engaged with us for months and then I found out you did this. What is going-"

"You need to calm down. It's nothing to worry about. Ok?"

"No, not ok. This is not ok. What are you doing with them?"

"Nothing. It's nothing. Nothing is going on. I'm fine. Stop worrying about me, please. I have everything under control."

"I would if you stopped doing foolish things like this."

"What did you need to talk to me about huh? This? Is that why you followed me this entire time?"

He sighed "So you have it under your control?"

"Well it is not out of my control." I said confidently

He sighed again and looked down. His palm moved around on his face, the other on his hip as he turned around huffing. He whispered "Why do you do this to yourself, Azriel?" as if he did not want me to hear him. He faced back to me with his hands to his side.

"You are in danger here. That's why I followed you. In case you were in danger and now you are, so let's go." he said.

Gabriel then turned around quickly, walking in the opposite direction and I followed in confusion. The black and blue lines. Only members of the Order of Black are authorized to

have it. Only those who know about the order can truly see it, those who are looking for the order that is. Gabriel seemed confident to figure something out. *Did he know what I was hiding?*

Not too long ago, I was following a clan who I suspected were part of the Order of Black. The order had something of mine that I needed back. Eventually this clan trusted me enough and revealed that they were part of Black and invited me with the details of how to accompany them. And so I did, later gaining the marks on the top of my left palm from my initiation. From the time I followed the clan, till I realized Gabriel had been following me, I had not seen him or My Brother, nor Maria as I left, as I hoped they would not know. This was the only reason I could understand why Gabriel enrolled in this school in the first place. But I have been avoiding him ever since and we have been at this place for almost two months now. I only came to the school to gather certain supplies that the orders' leader asked of me. I only hoped to accomplish what he needed so I could meet him, gaining again what I once lost.

"So, where are we going?" I asked.

No answer. I followed him down the Pavilion stairs and out the front doors that lead to the schools' main yard outside. I continued to follow him down the yard for the next few minutes until I stopped halfway to the tree line.

"Gabriel!" I said irritated. "Where are we going?"

Again he didn't answer. Instead he turned around with a slight sense of annoyance and broadly walked towards me not looking me in my face, but at my hand. He urgently took hold of it and pulled, gently forcing my body to walk with him. Although he still seemed angry, he was still considerate, he did not pull my hand hard. It did take me by surprise, though not taken over by his sense of urgency. He cared for me greatly.

"You made a mistake and now we must go fix it. You need to trust me." he said.

I pulled back once again and released my hand.

"Where are we going?" I demanded, "I am not going anywhere with you until you give me an answer."

He blankly stared at me. But his eyes seemed lighter now, as if he was relieved or glad. A small smirk grew onto his face, but only for a second, then it disappeared like he remembered that we had something urgent to take care of.

"Do you not trust me?" Gabriel asked and he stepped closer to me as he tucked a small piece of loose hair that was near my eye behind my ear and rested his palm on my cheek. "I'm sorry for being aggressive, but that mark... I can't let them find you here. You've been fooled by them and you are in danger now. I don't care if you care or not, but I am going to keep you safe."

"You can't trust me, Gabriel." I said, avoiding looking into his eyes and with a worried look "I am not the same person that I was when I left."

"But I will..." he said as he was even closer to me now, his tone even softer. "You are just as important and trustworthy to me now as you were when you left, and I am not willing to let you go..." He cleared his voice and removed his hand "And you are. Now please come on, we have to get you out of here."

"I understand" I said.

We walked over to a pile of damp dirt far in front of the school's main yard that was even closer to the tree line. He knelt down and motioned his hand over it and a wooden door emerged from the soil that opened as it was completed. We both stood in front of it standing side by side staring at the portal that was made at the entrance of the door. The colors glistened on our skin.

"Think of home. That's where we must go." Gabriel said.

"You mean home home?" I asked as I took hold of his hand for comfort.

Gabriel looked at me and I at him.

"Yes. It's time to go... home."



Delilah Struck, "Global Vitiligo"

KAI MEEK

Deceased Incredulity

One uneventful day, an unknown virus escaped a lab on the west coast of the USA from what was supposed to be a secure lab. By the time it was discovered that the mysterious virus was gone, it was too little too late. By the time it was discovered it was all up and down the West Coast and pushing the East, North, and South very rapidly. The same time a week later, more than half the country was dead or on the verge of checking out. For this young man, Yuan Ping, he was the only one to survive out of his whole family. Yuan is 26. When he found out that he was the only one left he broke down and couldn't take it. He was in a bad state of mind; he was contemplating about checking out with a gun instead of the virus. Then one fateful day he was about to take his own life, the radio came on and people were announcing they were looking for other survivors of the virus. Feeling nothing left to lose, he set out to go look for other survivors.

Two days go by without any blink of a survivor in the West Coast. By then Yaun is at the Nevada-Oregon border and when he heard his radio break silence. It was the same people who were wanting to find other survivors. They said they were based out of Northeast Nevada and they were looking for others to go find. It took him one day and a night to reach Northeast Nevada. Once he got there he had seen that no one was there. It was as if the city of Elko was under military watch, a contamination containment zone around the hospital. Abandoned cars and military equipment along with medical waste everywhere. The town was a lost cause, so he

scavenged what he could and was still planning on going to Arizona. At night he wondered what could have been different if none of this happened. He misses his late family, but knows that he's doing what he's doing for them.

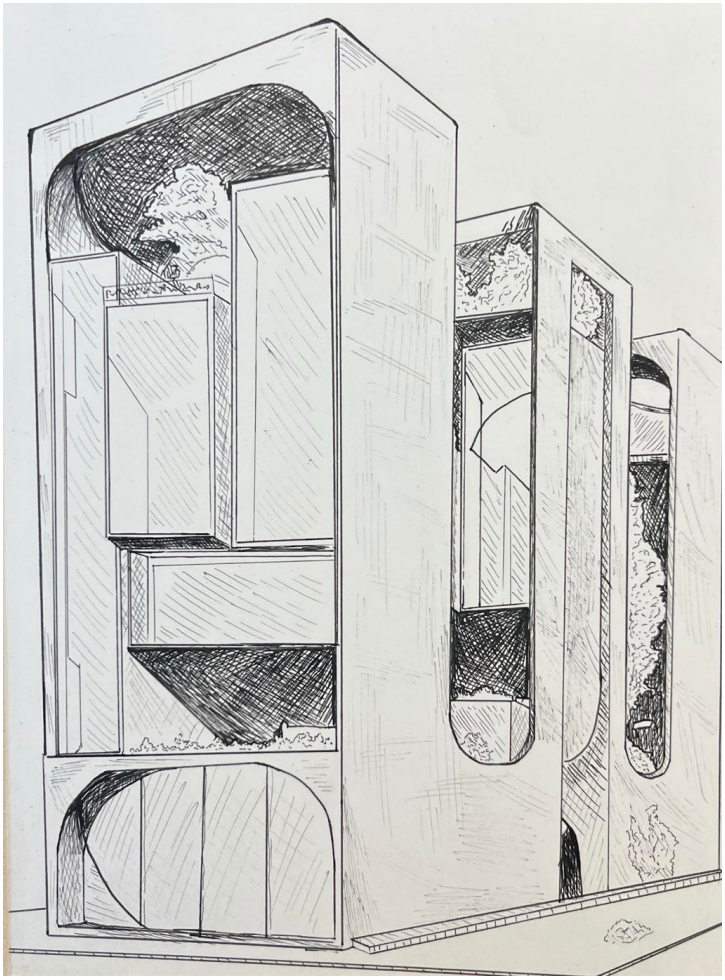
After being on I-80 for nearly a week he had found a fellow survivor outside of Salt Lake City, Utah . This person had a very suspicious personality. He was too friendly in addition to wearing mismatched clothing. With no other choice, Yuan had to trust this strange man. Yuan did keep guard up because this was a very sketchy fellow. When it was time to go to sleep, Yuan was dozing off then the man was attempting to take Yuan's life, so Yuan had to fight back. Yuan said "What the hell are you doing?!" and the man didn't stop. Yuan was fighting for his life, and he was about to die when all of a sudden Yuan grabbed a brick that was laying on the ground and hit the man's head on the side. The man got knocked unconscious and fell on top of Yuan's side, and then Yuan got on top of the unconscious man and started bashing the brick into his head repeatedly until there was nothing left other than blood, brain parts, and pieces of the man's skull in fragments. After the fight Yuan grabbed whatever he could from the man and got out of town, and he never went back. He ran until he wasn't able to breathe and stand straight. Yuan was never the same after his encounter. Before Yuan bashed the man's skull in, the man was talking about how there is a big DCP (Disease Control and Prevention) building where it is rumored the virus escaped. The building was in Phoenix, Arizona. He had a long walk to Phoenix so he set out to see what really happened.

After having to cross back into Nevada to get to Arizona, it took Yuan two weeks to get to the Nevada-Arizona border. When he went to Arizona he found a woman who was also a fellow survivor. This time the survivor gave her name. Her name was Marie and she had a dog named Fluffy. Yuan didn't want to trust her because of his last experience with a survivor, but

this time he was held at gunpoint and if he were to struggle, Fluffy the German Shepard would bite and most likely rip out his throat. With that running in the back of his head, he cooperated with Marie and told her why he was in Arizona. It turns out she was also going to the DCP building to seek the truth and answers. Together they went to Phoenix to go look for answers together.

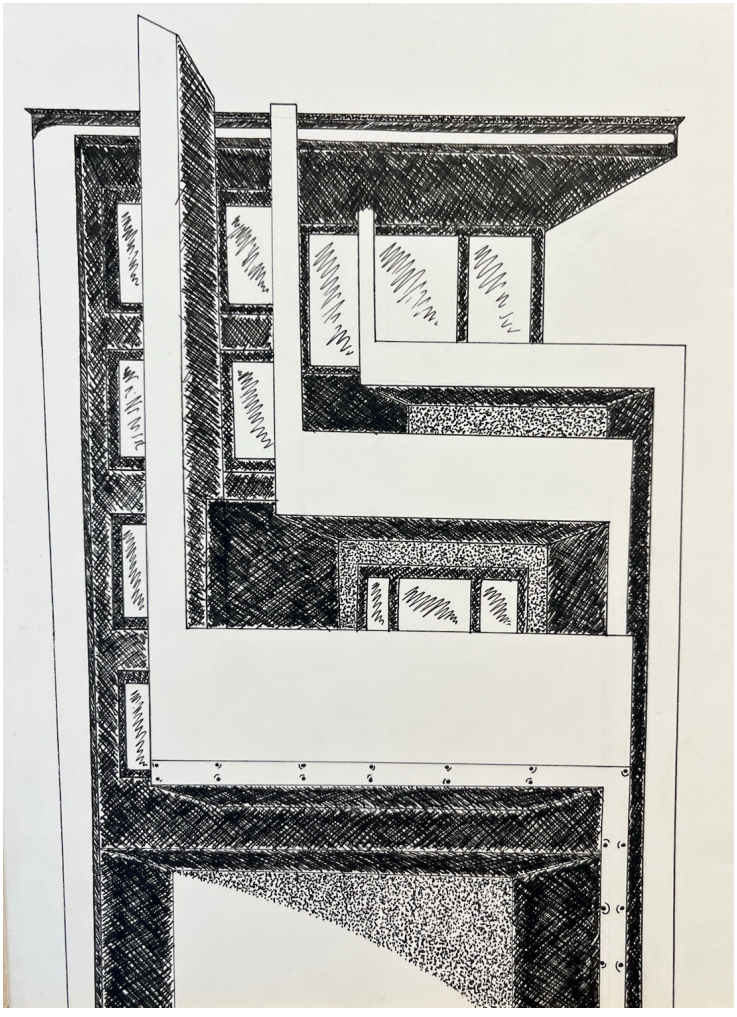
It took them one week to get to Phoenix. Upon reaching Phoenix they were in disbelief. It looked like the military had turned most of the city into a warzone. Most of the buildings were still on fire and smoking. Blocked streets and abandoned military gear and equipment left laying around it was truly a strange sight to see. Each house was marked with yellow containment tarp on it warning people to stay out and not to go in. They came across a map and directions. The directions told the soldiers to kill everyone inside the yellow tarped houses. The map showed what the military needed to contain and save and what to burn to make sure nothing spread and it showed where the DCP building was. Just their luck! It was located in the middle of the city and they were in the farthest part of Phoenix. So had to settle down in a safe house and stay the night not knowing what was outside or waiting for them in the city. Day breaks and they set out to go to the DCP building. It was a ghost town. Not a single soul to be seen. Once a city with many cars driving on the street and people walking on the sidewalk is now nothing more than abandoned. They finally reached the DCP building and broke in. They were looking for answers and found none. They were disappointed till they found the report on the Directors table about a virus. NCUE-45 was the name of the virus. Symptoms tested on monkeys were bumps, rashes to the skin, and then later cough and in the final stage your blood will start to solidify and your body's internal organs would shut down. There was no cure. That's what made it so deadly. With the answers they got they left.

There was nothing they could do to save the world. So they went together and they went to other states to look for survivors. Until one day Marie caught NCUE-45. The last few days with Marie were sad. Yuan and Fluffy couldn't visit her due to her being infected. The only way they can talk is through a house window where Marie was inside slowly deteriorating. She passed away in her sleep peacefully. Nothing that Yuan could have done would have saved her. Now with no purpose anymore and no one he could find to live with, he went on to look for more survivors and took Fluffy with him never to be seen again.



Kayla Chamberlin, "Buildings"

Emily Polanco, "Building"



NORAH COOK

Escape

Out my window stars cover the sky
Faint smells of rain waft by

Crickets chirping deep in the night
The moon bringing peace to my eyes

When I wake feelings of sadness rush through my veins
Another repeating day of agony and strains

As the sun shines too bright and the weather brisk
I find myself daydreaming about what I'd might miss about these bliss moments of my youth

Though nothing comes to mind
Maybe someday I'll find the thing that makes these stress filled days worth remembering

The thought of being happy to remember these times sounds insane
but I don't want these years to go in vain
There must be some days that aren't filled with pain

Thoughts of the days when all we'd do is play repeating in my brain
As the grass stains our knees praying the day would never fade

Times like those seem so grey
The world weighing on your shoulders blinding you of nothing but priorities

As I lie down, I smile as the sun begins to go down
Seeing as the streets become a ghost town

The sound of nothing but the breeze
I close my eyes and fall asleep to the whistle of the trees

MIRANDA REED

My Nighttime Dream

Oh my nighttime dream.

You'd think it'd be about a bold wolf who can sing.

I can see the gray clouds, the stars. The sky is dark.

Oh but look at that moon, it has made its mark.

This moon is a night light that lights up the night.

Though this twelve story balcony I'm standing on makes me feel like a flying kite.

I can almost touch the moon and the moon reaches back.

But it touches the ocean's water instead.

This moon is glue.

It always sticks, especially to the ocean's blue hues.

I'm on the edge of my city looking down at the gleaming lights.

But the moon is way brighter.

It is a lightbulb that flickers on my dreams at night.

I can see the road connecting the sand and the water to the land.

It is quiet, peaceful.

This feeling is bittersweet.

Because I know when I wake up, this feeling will not dare to repeat.

A soft rain shimmers down.

MIRANDA REED, CONTINUED...

The puddles are now the moon as more rain hits the crevices in the ground.

The moon is so large, it is the new sun for the darkened night.

Like I said, it is the night light from the sun's fleeing flight.

My dream and this particular sight of the moon is only for a small crowd though.

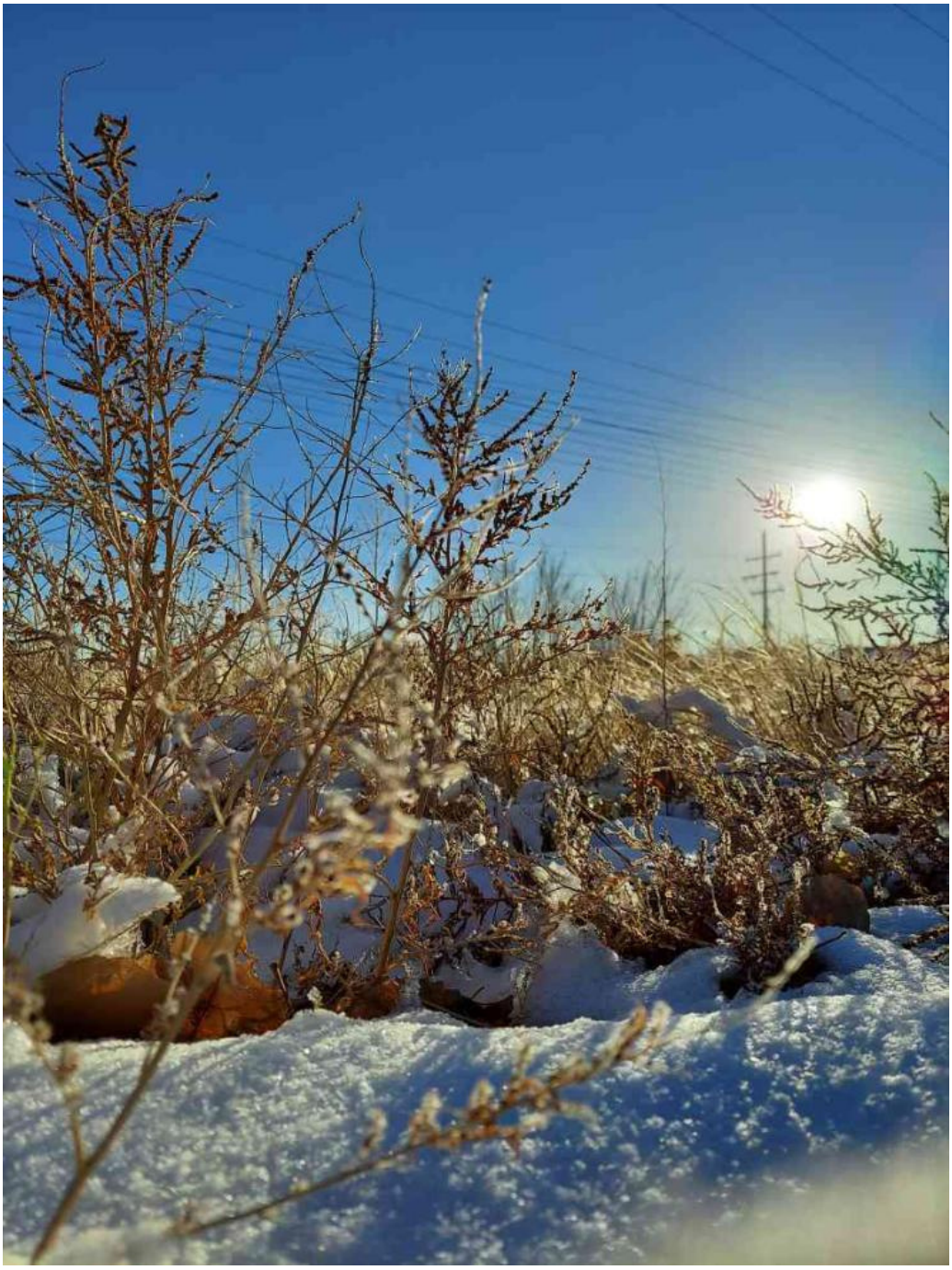
Since I'm the only one who can truly see the beauty of it, you know.

It is an extravagant daisy that blooms once in a blue moon.

Oh how I feel for that moon.

It is so bright,

It truly does awaken my dreams at night.



Delilah Struck, "Prarie's Snow Blanket

ALI NORMAN

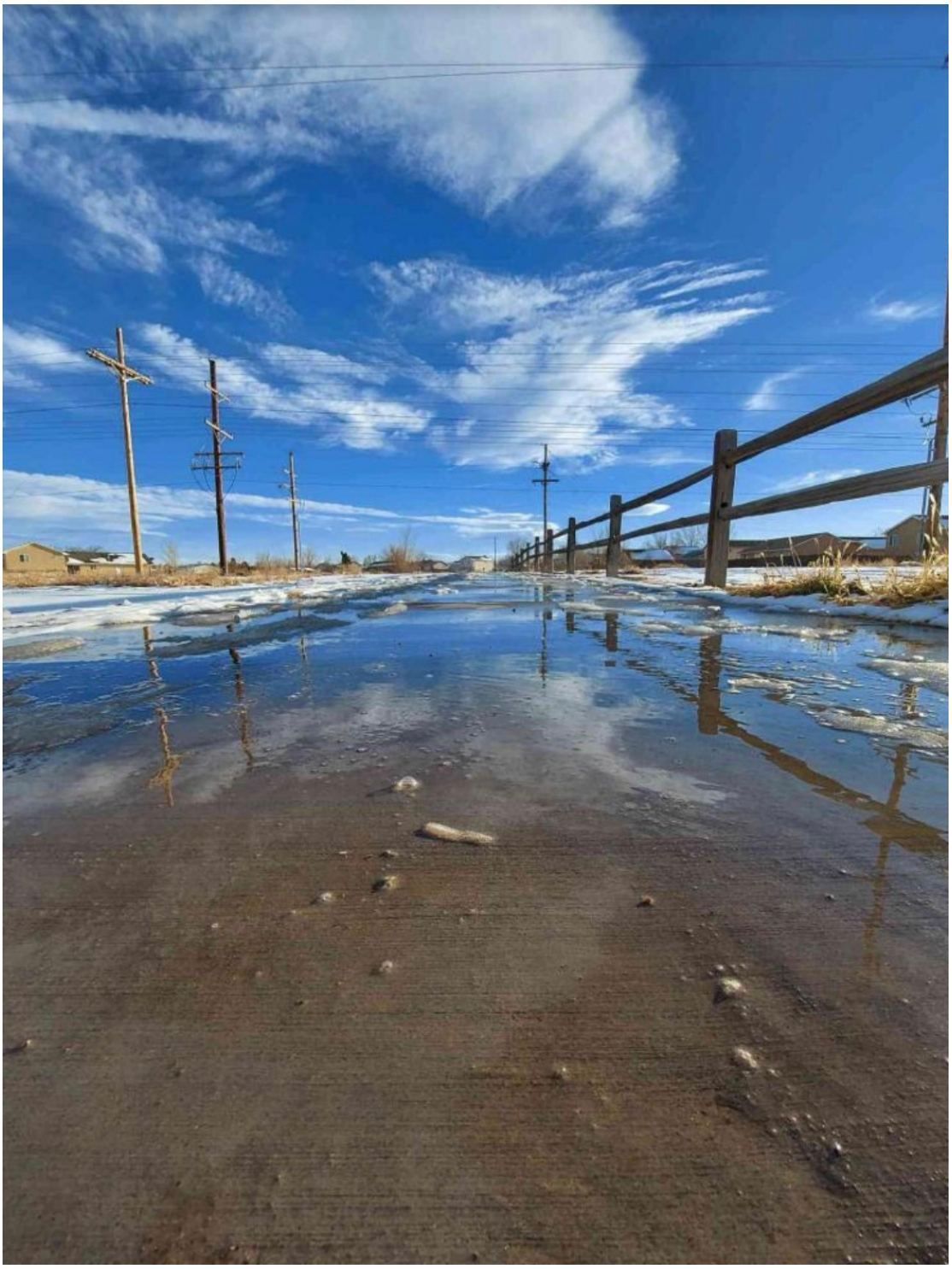
The Moon with the Sun

Us two are the day and the night.
I am warm and remind her of embodied happiness.
She gives me tranquility and a feeling of freedom.
We sit on the bed surrounded by white walls.
We make little comments with the only light in the room as the television.
If the plastic blinds could have been opened, nothing would have been seen.
In the room, I am safe and happy.
The television becomes quieter as most people inside the house fall asleep.
I look at her, her eyes gazing at the television.
I admire her.
The smell of musk is comforting. The earthy yet sweet smell is everywhere around the room.
I feel protected there.
Even though it's dark, I can still sense the solacing aura from both of us.
The only thing getting rid of the silence of night is our laughter.
She makes me feel as if in a reverie.
Never a nightmare; indeed, every moment spent with her is enjoyable and easy.
As the stars scatter throughout the sky, we get more tired but refuse to fall asleep as we will not be able to talk.
Our voices turn to whispers and our attention is away from the shining screen as we depart from the program.
I am not lonely tonight, never with her.
As the moon, in the darkest times, she is the brightest thing there is.
As the moon, she will be the greatest, most scintillating thing in my days, my life.

ELLE JOHNSON

Summer

All the little dots shown
The right way back home.
They act as a guide across the darkened sky
So you know where you've been and you know where you lie.
Watching the giant machines glide across the sky,
The lights flickering in contrast to the dark, so bright.
Cool air overcomes evening,
Even on a summer's day.
And after the vibrant colors of the sunset finally fade away,
We lay on the damp grass with a deep green hue, touched by sprinklers minutes before,
To look upon the night sky, littered with flickering lights galore.
The feeling is bittersweet
When summer comes to a close, and the crisp air of fall begins to show its face and emerge.
Those are the nights I'll remember forever,
With you, the stars above, and the calm summer weather.
That's where our love sprouted,
And I hope, each summer, like a perennial in July,
That's where it will continue to blossom and thrive.
I become lost in reverie thinking about those heavenly nights,
Unaware of the real world surrounding me, but somehow everything's alright.
Never before have I found someone's eyes so alluring;
A dark brown color, alike my own,
A vast sea that I get lost in, a small boat.
Now, you may think this incessant rhapsodizing is banal,
But if you knew him like I do, you wouldn't think anything strange of it at all.
Because there's nothing I would rather do
Than spend hours counting the planes above with you.



Delilah Struck, "Ocean Sky"

ALI NORMAN

The Walk

We love taking walks while camping.
We jump over streams of water and go on dangerous stunts as if we were Indiana Jones.
We wade through water, with snakes like Nagini but there is no dark lord with them.
Presley and I went into a treacherous hike up a mountain without any experience.

After I jumped across the fast river, my legs were cramping.
Presley, too scared to jump, hopped around, avoiding the water, on stones.
We trudged through the trees and, when we saw a large spider, we almost swallowed our gum.
The only obstacles we found in our way were violence.

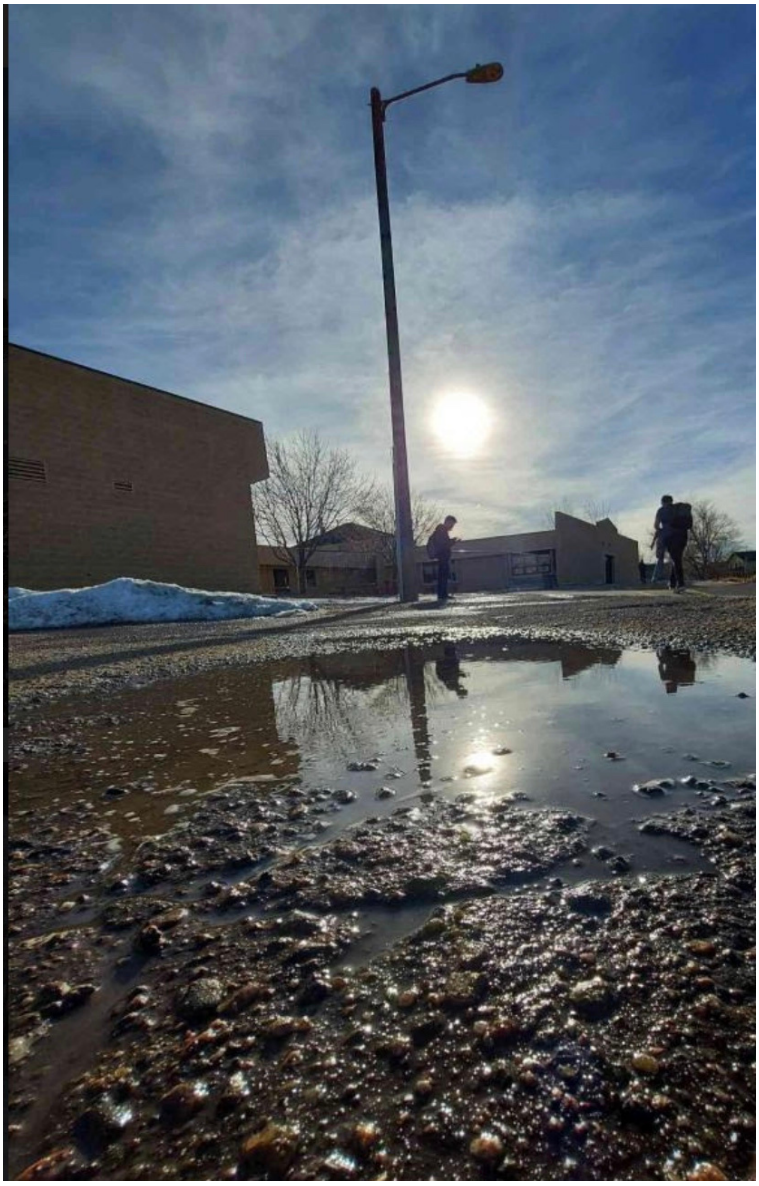
We discovered a vertical wall of dirt, branches ripped our clothes; they would need revamping.
One of our hands held onto tree limbs while our other hands gripped our phones.
What had this adventure become?
When we reached the top, we played classical music to fill the silence.

Reaching the bottom, Presley and I were ripped up paper.
With excitement and pain, we celebrated. At the bottom, we were safer.



Delilah Struck, "Tumbleweed Overlord"

Delilah Struck, " After-School Journey"





EYE OF THE STORM 2022-2023