

Camas

Volume 25
Number 1 *Winter 2016-2017*

Article 1

Winter 2016

Camas, Winter 2016-2017

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(2016) "Camas, Winter 2016-2017," *Camas*: Vol. 25: No. 1, Article 1.

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et al.: Camas, Winter 2016-2017

THE NATURE OF THE WEST

Camas

Winter 2016-17 | Country

Seth Kantner p. 4

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Brian Doyle p. 38

Published by ScholarWorks at University of Montana, 2017

THE NATURE OF THE WEST Camas

VOLUME 25 NUMBER 1

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Camas Magazine cultivates a community of writers and artists dedicated to land health and cultural resilience in the American West.

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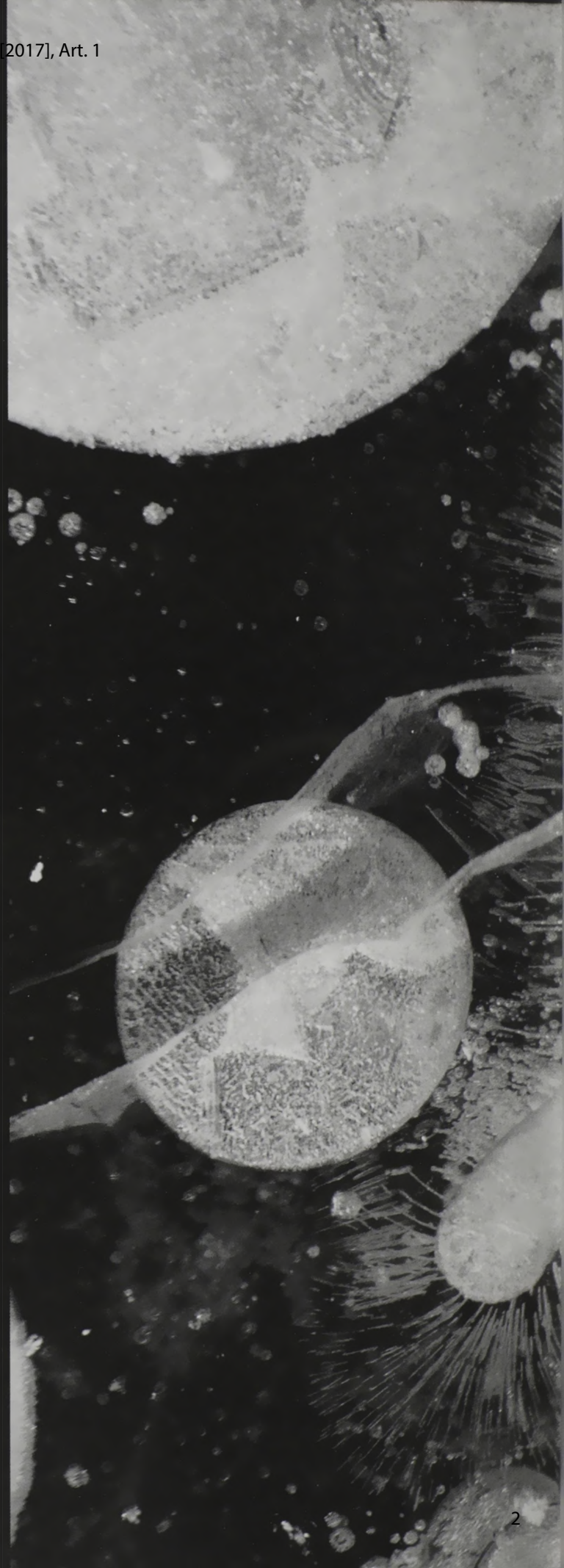
OUR TITLE *Camas* takes its name from the plant *Camassia quamash*, which is native to the American West. *Camas* has historically served as a staple food and medicine for indigenous communities. Its harvest continues longstanding reciprocity between land and people.

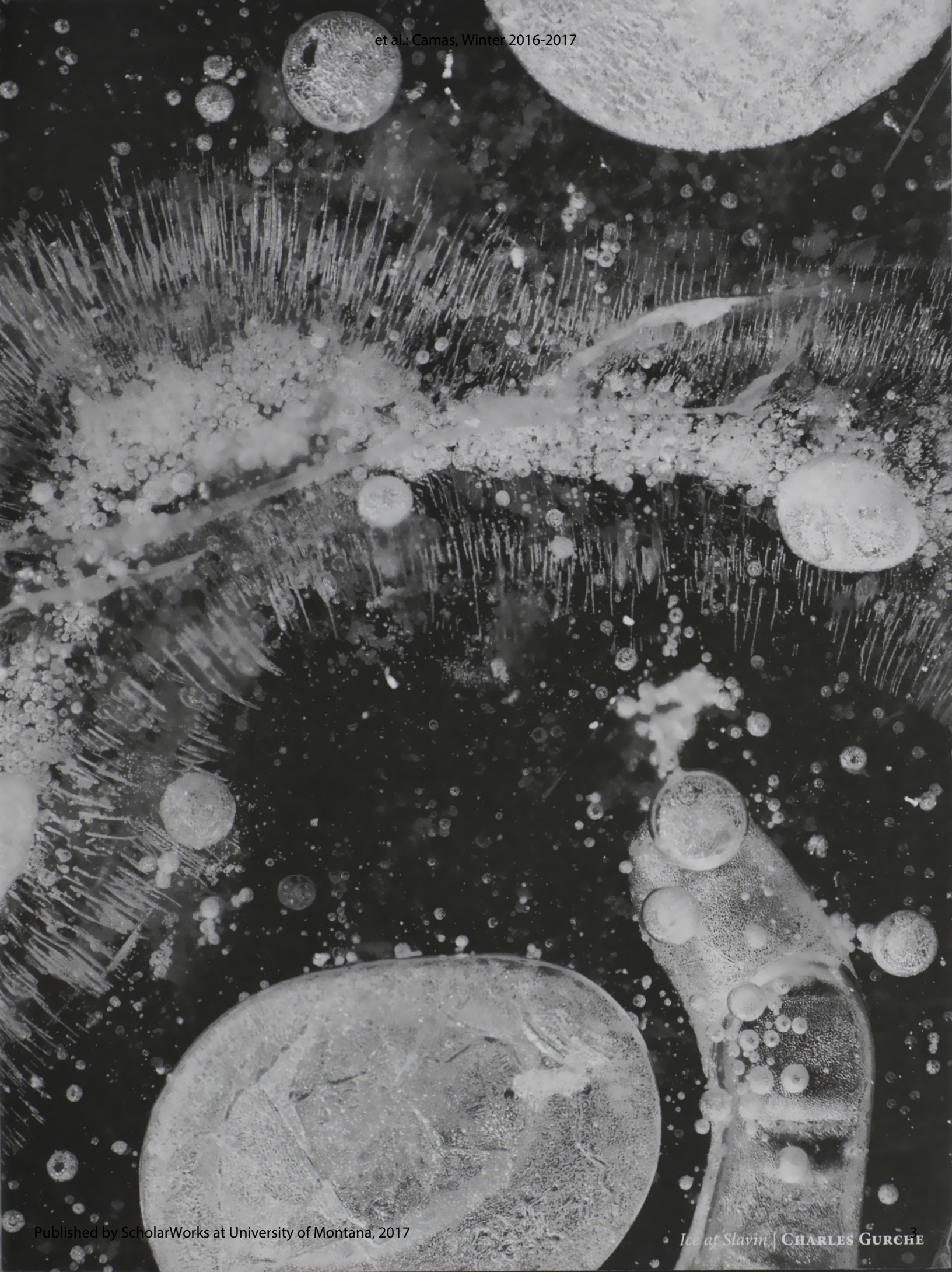
OUR HISTORY Founded by Environmental Studies graduate students at The University of Montana in 1992, *Camas* continues to provide an opportunity for students, emerging writers and artists, and established voices to publish their work alongside each other.

OUR FRIENDS *Camas* received support for this issue from the Associated Students of The University of Montana, the Clark Fork Coalition, the Wild Rockies Field Institute, the Missoula Writing Collaborative, the University of Montana Environmental Studies Program, and individual donors.

SUBMIT AND SUBSCRIBE online at www.camasmagazine.org.
\$8.50 per issue, \$16 per year

Printed by UM Printing and Graphic Services. ISSN 1092-5198





FROM THE EDITORS

The country shook on November 8. The political earthquake of our presidential election ripped open national fault lines, exposing the vulnerable flesh of our democracy as fear and anger ruled the coming days. In Missoula, a middle school reported a barrage of Swastika graffiti on its walls. In Portland, Ore., protesters smashed windows and torched dumpsters; police responded with tear gas and rubber bullets. Twelve hundred miles to the east, in Cannon Ball, N.D., the same violent tactics dealt injury to men and women protecting the rights granted Native peoples by treaty more than 150 years ago.

With the nation's collective spirit murkier than we've ever known, we turned to *Camas*. On November 9, a bright and mild day in Missoula, we sought the solace of art as we laid out the pages of our Country Issue. When we came up for air, it was from a landscape filled with truths, where honest voices ask hard questions, traverse tangled places, and grapple with citizenship.

We bear witness to changes of land and changes of mind in Seth Kantner's "Terrain I Knew," as an Alaskan hunter and author prepares to travel down-states. In fiction by Mary Pauline Lowry and Sarah Rau Peterson, we meet distinct Westerners, an introspective firefighter and a compassionate rancher who break the crutch of stereotype. And we meet new Westerners—and new complexities—in "Passengers," Terri Nichols' story of Congolese refugees in Missoula. Later, Gibson Collins' riveting debut essay, "No Meat," delves into the heart of colonialism, as a headstrong young wildlife conservationist searches for justice in Malawi's troubled Liwonde National Park. And we close with the resounding voice of Brian Doyle, who stumbles into that sloppy and unpredictable spirit of America in his story, "The Summeriest Concert Ever."

Shots of light dapple our pages, too, in the poetry, art and photography of the issue. In two short poems, Tom Versteeg draws us from ground-level beauty to "Global Perspective," while the precise images of Brandon McMahon, Brenna Rietmann and more remind us of the wondrous detail and space that fill our western country.

But there are voices and experiences missing from these pages; what's here is some fragment of an elusive whole. Amid absence and presence, words and art and silence, we must each engage in "ground truthing," what Terry Tempest Williams defines in *The Open Space of Democracy* as "walking the ground to see for oneself if what has been told is true."

In our walking, we might find the energy that steels and sustains us for the work ahead, the great and necessary and spirited reimagining of country.

With warmth,
Peter Gurche & Matt Hart

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TERRAIN I KNEW

NONFICTION | SETH KANTNER

TO GET TO MY THREE-DAY environmental writing class in Missoula I had to boat up the Kibuk River. First, though, I had to finish editing my students' essays—which wasn't turning out to be easy, as I know nothing about the genre of environmental writing.

I also had to stash my smaller tin boat in the willows, which wasn't easy either, winching it up this steep bluff with an ancient come-along and one pink roller.

And then there was dealing with the rest of that first caribou I shot—the meat was getting sour in our unseasonably warm weather—and emptying my water barrel so it wouldn't freeze in case winter did arrive while I was down south. Plus boarding up the food cache and putting my gas jugs in the old sod igloo so bears wouldn't bite them.

Meanwhile, I continued to struggle to comment on those essays—about a woman's discovery that Mary Kay cosmetics poison people; another about a park ranger dispensing rules in wilderness, and one man's contemplation on how society ranks Illinois cornfields less loveable than polar bear habitat—all of them caring, and urging me to care. What, I wondered, did I know or have to say about these things?

Boating upriver was windy and cold, snow turning to rain. I wasn't complaining though—thirty years ago, before our climate changed, this river would have been running heavy ice. My face was red, I know, and my hand holding the tiller went numb. It was hard to see, and with all the crazy new brush growing on the sandbars I could hardly recognize old landmarks like Lone Spruce and Molly's Island.

Below Onion Portage I passed other boats, Eskimo hunters, most of them parked along the south shore, skinning animals and waiting for more caribou to cross so they could shoot them in the water. The boats were all aluminum and fiberglass, many with cabins, and windshield wipers, and probably heaters, too. It made me realize that I'm about the last one these days with a homemade wooden boat.

Three bends farther up, I had to stop and warm my hand while I waited for an opening in a continuous line

of swimming caribou. Floating back down the current, I glanced around the boat, at my gas tank and load, feeling good about all the work I'd accomplished—until I spotted my camera bag and instantly remembered those essays and my unfinished homework.

Caribou passed beside the boat, swimming in a tight crowd, their antlers clacking. The bulls were monsters, heavy with fat, perfect meat for winter. I watched, mouth watering, agonizing over my commitment to leave home during hunting season and the rush, beauty and intensity of autumn in the Arctic. I unzipped my pack, pulled out my Nikon, and snapped a few parting shots before continuing on upriver.

I was chilled and damp by the time I anchored at the lower end of the village. I ran up the hill. My second mom, an Eskimo lady named Mary, hugged me and hurried to make coffee. "You'll stay?" she murmured, her eyes encouraging.

I wiped my glasses and took off my pistol. I expected this; she always wants me to visit, and now she wanted me to stay the night to have turkey and celebrate her 72nd birthday. Unfortunately, I knew there were no seats the next day, Sunday, on Ravn Air's Cessna, so I had to pack quickly. Of course, first I had to winch out my wooden boat, because who knows anymore when Freezeup will come—maybe while I was teaching environmental writing "down states," as we call the Lower 48.

There wasn't much time, and it was still raining; I handed Mary a caribou heart and intestine fat and she fried it fast. Her knees are bad and she moves stiffly. She and her husband, Don, don't have running water, and the house is one room, tilted, falling over the hill, cluttered and heaped beyond belief—but Mary had pies and cakes she'd baked lined along the top of the freezer. A big yellow turkey was thawing on the floor by the woodstove.

"I already make potato salad. You want?" she offered. Smiling fondly at me, she sliced into a pie, and then a second, sliding big wedges of her birthday desserts onto my plate.

Don looked up, hopeful. He grew up in Ohio, a lifetime ago; he likes pastries and sweets and knew that a



Kobuk River | SETH KANTNER

passel of hungry grandkids would show up soon for the party. Mary stared him down. “You wait!” She gestured, like sweeping a fly off the counter. “Get ready! Seth need ride!”

Don shut off his western movie and clambered out of his giant recliner with the John Wayne blanket across the top. He poked around behind the stove, looking for warm clothes to wear to drive me on four-wheeler to the airstrip. He’s 80 now and moves around pretty spry, but their house is dark, and it took him a bit to find his beaver hat and gloves. He knew the trip would be chilly in the rain and wind.

Up past the village, which has about 300 residents, the old airstrip was unrecognizable. I couldn’t get my bearings. Someone in Juneau or Washington, D.C., had penciled \$20,000,000 on a line on some paper and now trees were mowed down and heavy equipment and workers were scurrying everywhere. Monstrous yellow trucks rolled past. Huge orange backhoes swiveled and scooped, transferring gravel. The runway towered above the cottonwoods now and seemed a mile long.

Don pulled up next to a bulldozer with an open cab, tilted backwards on a steep incline. A village man

was operating it, bundled in a parka and beaver hat. It took me a second to recognize Don’s son and my lifelong friend, Alvin.

He grinned and spat and lowered the blade to hold his place while we shouted at each other over the rattling engine—chatting about the country: moose and bears and caribou, and those wolves I saw the day before yesterday.

The mail plane was late, and came in fast, wings rocking in the wind as it descended. A crowd gathered, everyone helping unload mail and the customary cases of Pepsi. Eight of us were outbound, and the pilot got grumpy about the amount of weight. We passengers milled like caribou, cold and nervous. I handed him my bag, embarrassed about how heavy it was. My sodden cardboard box of meat was worse. I decided this wasn’t the time to mention a pistol.

He gave it throttle hard, and we lurched into gloomy gray clouds. I’d asked him to fly low, if possible, because of my eardrum damage, and on board everyone was peering down, looking for caribou or playing with their phones. Or both. My window fogged up, and grudgingly I reached into my jacket for my homework.

The essay I pulled out was by a philosophy student from New York. I couldn't understand anything—except the sentence where he said that birch trees have lives too. I knew that was true. The rest was way above me. I looked out the window, desperate, questioning if it might be inappropriate to ask this writer to fly lower, too.

I tried another. The author had his resume stapled to the front; it listed a Phd, books he'd written and 116 articles he'd published. The plane pitched and plummeted in turbulence. I felt nervous and sick. Not nervous about crashing—that would drop me back on terrain I knew—nervous about going down states to try to teach super smart people anything at all, let alone how to write about their environment.

I peered down, leaning heavy against the window, inhaling the tundra with my eyes. I recognized the squiggles of Ahnawetut and Niaktuvik creeks, flowing

through that country to the south of our old igloo—where Alvin and my brother and I used to hunt from the kayaks my dad made, portaging from lake to lake, hunting ducks and geese and seagull eggs, beaver and muskrat. It felt strange to see it now, and from up here—a time traveler in an airship, so unsure of where he was going.

The plane plunged into gray mist. I stuffed the papers back in my jacket, crumpled now and messy with muddled marks, and stared out at nothingness, thinking about the cranberries I still needed to pick at home, the caribou I still needed to harvest, the logs I still needed to peel. Thinking too about all the airplane rides ahead—big warm jets with little plastic cups—trailing contrails across the sky, carrying me thousands of miles south and east along the curve of the Earth, to attempt to plant tiny words on ground so huge. ☹



Heaven in Central Washington | **BRENDAN MORRISON**

A MAP OF VAUGHN, NEW MEXICO

JEFFREY ALFIER

Te vas? No. Alas rotas.

—Frieda Kahlo

Clues puzzle out of broomweed and windbreaks.
A fourth of the town lives south of the poverty line.
The high school fields a six-man football team.

I jaywalk streets barely paved, short-cut someone's
weak attempt at a lawn. Hit Phillips 66 mart
for booze, then east to the Santa Fe station, its freight

of moths and starling nests. Seated on the platform,
I face the tracks. Malt liquor sails my mind out of idle.
Now I'm back at Bel-Air Motel. The clerk said the "No"

in front of "Vacancy" has never been lit. Cigarette stains
on ageless Formica. Furtive occupants. I sprawl
on the bed and share the vacancy. The headboard

in the next room thumps the wall behind me.
I hear a car pull up. Doors open and slam.
A child's voice asks if this is where they live now.

It's About Being Lost

FICTION | MARY PAULINE LOWRY

ON THE DAY OF THE ACCIDENT I was still feeling sort of lowdown about Cheryl. She's my girl, or I guess she was my girl. We grew up together in Bloomington, Kansas, and when I left home in May to fight forest fires on the Lolo Hotshot crew, Cheryl said she'd wait for me to come home at the end of September. But right before the Lolo left Missoula for that fire in Wyoming, I got a letter from her saying she'd been on a date with Garth. She'd been on one date with him and she didn't think that'd be the end of it, the letter said. So basically, the letter said, we were through.

Garth? I wanted to ask her. Garth whose papa owns Shoresucker Feed Store? I held the letter in my hand. I imagined Cheryl visiting Garth at work, where he tends the chickens in their metal cages, where he pours seed into a burlap bag and weighs it on the feed scale. Garth is boring, I said to the piece of paper covered in Cheryl's hand. Garth wouldn't know what to make of a forest burning red against the night sky. The paper didn't answer me, but I know what Cheryl would say. Boring, yes, she'd say. But Ralph, Garth is here, and Montana and all your forest fires ain't.

When we were riding southeast in our crew buggies towards the Black Hills, I told Lee and Tommy Markalunas about what happened with Cheryl. Tommy and Lee sat in the two chairs up front and I was right behind Lee. He's twenty-seven and knows a lot. He ain't gonna be on the Lolo Hotshot crew forever, he tells me some nights when we're sitting on the ground, eating our chow. He's going to the Police Academy one day, he tells me. He's going to train to be a police officer so that he can shoot people. Lee knows where he's going in life.

Lee said I ought to be real nice to Cheryl. He told me to write her a sweet letter about how I understand her need to have a man around. Then, he said, at the end of the season, when I get back to Bloomington, I ought to take Cheryl out and Hate Fuck her. Tommy pulled his ear when Lee said that, then he looked over

his shoulder and gave me that twinkly look of his, like he does when he thinks Lee is talking bull.

That sounds like a good idea, I said. I told Lee I'd think about that, probably give it a try. I didn't want him to think I don't take his advice serious.

But it's Tommy I usually talk to when I'm feeling lowdown. He tells me things. He wouldn't have any trouble keeping Cheryl, not even with her all the way back home in Kansas. Tommy knows about women. He goes with Tootsie, a sweet helitacker works on the Gallatin National Forest. And in the off-season I hear there's a coven of hot witches lives in the spare bedroom of his house. And Tommy would never say it but word is they rotate in and out of his bedroom and he keeps 'em all happy so they don't put any sort of hex on him. They just heap his house with blessings, is what he says.

Even with all that going on Tommy still lives—for the most part—alone in that old mountain cabin must have been built in the 1800s. Days the screen door always slams behind some ex-girlfriend or other bringing her new baby by for a visit. Nights Lolos show up to do shots and drink beers and knock shit over wrestling and then throw up in the yard. But I wonder sometimes about the times when no one's around. I bet Tommy puts on a Lolo sweatshirt and goes outside to swing in his hammock under those constellations of his.

When we got to the fire in the Black Hills we woke at dawn everyday and dug line. Sixteen hour days of swinging my pulaski and in the evening I didn't want to quit. I worked as lead tool, breaking ground, and each swing was aimed at Garth's head. "Look at the boy, go," Tommy would say, giving me a wink. At night, he'd lay his sleeping bag down alongside mine and say, "Aren't we living the dream, getting paid to sleep out under the stars like this?" And then he'd point out constellations until I passed out so that there was no time before sleep for me to fret over Cheryl.

On our fourth day on that fire in Wyoming, we did a big burn off the line we'd been digging. Tommy was wearing the new cargo pants our crew boss Shane'd finally ordered. The pockets are so big he can keep a weather kit in them. Tommy keeps one of his two books slipped in a pocket of those pants, too, tucked in next to his shin, for those times when we have to hurry up to get somewhere, but then end up waiting for hours once we arrive.

"They don't weigh much," he says, "but they are heavy books." Tommy kind of talks in riddles. He doesn't make clear sense the way Lee does. Tommy always carries the same two books. He never swaps them out for new ones when we go back to the work center for our R&R.

"Don't you ever finish them?" I ask Tommy and he just smiles. "What's the name of that book you're reading?" I ask him, for the umpteenth time.

"The Old Man and the Sea," he says.

"What's it about?"

"It's about trying your hardest even when you're destined to fail."

"What about the other book you always got in your pack?"

"It's a play. By Shakespeare," he says.

"I know about him," I say. "I went to see a movie by him. Romeo and Juliet."

I didn't tell Tommy about how, after the movie, Cheryl said she thought Leonardo di Caprio looked like Garth. I didn't tell Tommy how I told her I think Leonardo di Caprio looks like my little sister.

"Is that the book you have?" I ask. "Romeo and Juliet?"

"No," he says.

"Good," I say. I hate that one. "Well," I say, "which one is it?"

"It's called Hamlet," he says.

"What's that one about?" I ask.

"It's about being lost," he says.

"Oh," I say.

Tommy Markalunas doesn't get lost, not out in the woods, not when the season's in full swing. On fires he never has to ask which flank we're working or which



Above Vance Creek | DOV WEINMAN

way is fire camp. But during the off-season I hear he doesn't do much but collect unemployment and walk Shawnee down to O'Malley's Pub so they can both have a beer. The bartender always makes the same old joke, asking to see Shawnee's ID.

"She's forty-nine in dog years," Tommy always says. "Way too old to be carded."

Tommy doesn't pretend like he does other things in the six long, cold months that stretch out between fire seasons. "I would go snow camping," he says, "but sometimes I feel like all that whiteness would bury me."

I can't help but think that's an excuse, because Tommy used to be a timber beast. All winter he'd walk through the snowy forest with a 50 pound bag of paint on his back. He'd stand under a tree and smoke a little weed in a blown glass pipe his second ex-wife made him and then the trees would kind of call out to him,

the ones that wanted to fall giving off a different sound than the ones that should stay standing. But he said it started to hurt his bum knee, carrying all that weight all year round. And now when it's cold out he just stays inside. And so it's not the snow that keeps him there, is it?

I kind of worry about what'll happen to me when fire season ends. Winter in Bloomington is wind whipping over the plains, and how could I even try to win my own girl Cheryl back, from Garth di Caprio Shoresucker, of all people? I told Tommy I was glad we were doing a burnout. He looked at me like he knew what I meant, which was that if Garth had my girl, I might as well get to burn down a forest.

You see, if a fire's burning towards you, you can dig a fireline a ways out in front of the main fire and light off of it. If everything goes right, the main fire sucks the lit fire into itself.

"Fire is greedy like that," Tommy says.

Then the fire doesn't have no place to go. It already burnt up what's behind. It already burnt up what's ahead. So it just peters out, if everything goes right.

Tommy said why didn't I go ahead and start the burn. I lit a fusee, which looks like a long red stick of dynamite. It sprayed burning slag out of one end and let off its sulfur smell. The fire started out small. Just grass and little clumps of bushes. Pretty soon, though, it started dinking and torking and popping and the low limbs of the big trees caught some of that heat and things started rocking and rolling.

A cluster of ponderosas torched out and Lee said, "Whoo whee."

I smiled, kind of proud, kind of embarrassed at what I'd done. It's all just part of the job, though.

At first the burn I was lighting went well enough. We looked up at the burning trees, listened to them blowing apart with the heat, trying to launch themselves from the earth itself. Like the moment with Cheryl in the dark when I was overwhelmed with the glow seeping through her to me and I was flying off the earth like one of those trees exploding from the inside out. But then the wind shifted.

I looked up to see embers flying over our fireline. They floated down into the unburned forest. Tommy told our squad to watch the green and we did. We peeled our eyes and looked for smoke in the unburned trees and bushes. Lee called out that he saw a spot fire and we hustled towards it. That first spot was only about three feet wide, but it was burning hot and smoking like crazy. I scratched some line around it fast. The smoke blew right up into my eyes and by the time Lee and I had that spot lined my face was streaming. I pulled the dirty

sleeve of my Nomex shirt across my nose and mouth to clear up the snot and tears just as I heard our crew boss Shane calling to Lee on the radio to give him a yell so he could establish our location. When we hollered he told us to giddy-up to another spot thirty yards to the east so we ran that way. We met up with Tommy there and busted out a line around that spot too. But then more popped up and all twenty of us chased them down for hours. When it finally looked like we had them licked we headed back to our line to monitor the burn. "That's the kind of running and gunning could get a guy eaten by the bear," Tommy said. "But he's not eatin' anyone around here." Lolos call any sign of weakness being "eaten by the bear." Like if we have a steep hike in to a fire coming up, someone might say "the bear, he's hungry," and if anyone falls out on that hike, well, "the bear's getting fed."

As Tommy and I walked, I caught my foot on a stob sticking out of the ground. The fire burns away the little tree or shrub or whatever and all that's left is a stob, a little stump, sharp and hard as steel. It threw me off balance and then the weight of my pack took me down into the ash. As I scrambled to my feet, Tommy said, "Those Nomex aren't made to stay pretty. Now it looks like you've been out on the line."

I smiled at him to let him know I appreciated him turning something embarrassing that happened to me into something I could feel okay about. I wanted Tommy to understand how his being friends with me helped me see things different. "Damn stob," I says, "You gots to admire it. Fire turns the whole plant to ash, all that's left is those four inches of root sticking out of the ground. Instead of burning the stob up, the fire makes it hard as fucking diamonds."

Tommy grins huge at me like I haven't seen him do for days. "That's it," he says. "You're telling it now." And I know he gets what I'm really saying. That fighting fire either breaks you or turns you into a stronger somebody than you've ever been. A somebody who understands about things. Who knows how to help a buddy out when he needs it, without letting on you notice you're helping at all.

OUR CREW BOSS SHANE walked off of our line and cut through the part of the forest we'd burned to make sure it was clean black. Trouble was, he found an island of green he said was too close to the line. It could catch fire days later and throw sparks. Then our line would be lost. The Lolo is a crew that doesn't hardly ever lose a fireline. Shane radioed Tommy and asked him to light it.

I'll always remember what Shane said then. He said,

"It's a perfect job for those stubbies you been saving."

Tommy Markalunas looked damn near gleeful. He shucked his pack long enough to pull out the three stubbies he'd been keeping there for the last month. Tommy put two stubbies in the front cargo pocket of his fancy new pants. He lit the end of the third one.

A stubby is shaped like a beer can, but it's smaller. You light the wick on it and it sputters and nothing much happens at first. But when the wick burns down to the base, the stubby goes off like a fireworks show. It sprays slag all around in a big circle like one of those rotating sprinklers.

Tommy stood there on the fireline looking compact and suddenly almost small. He cocked his arm back and lobbed it high into the air and it came down, we hoped, in the island of green sitting in the middle of all that burned up forest.

We waited. Nothing happened. Tommy opened the velcro flap of the cargo pocket on his right thigh. He pulled out those stubbies, closed the flap. He dropped

body ran towards the spray of light before my head even knew what in God's grace was going on. Tommy howled and rolled on the ground, twisting every which way. Suddenly I stopped short. I wanted to move to him, to crouch down next to him, to break through the smell, but it was like trying to run through a wall of brick and burning hair. The horror of what was happening had me frozen solid and I couldn't push through it. I heard the flesh on his chest and maybe his neck sizzle and pop.

"I'm here, buddy. I'm here," I wanted to say to him.

And then Lee was kneeling beside Tommy, trying to get the stubby out of his breast pocket as it fizzled out, radioing our crew boss Shane to come and come quick. I couldn't look at Tommy's chest, like a fire in his heart had burst out through the front of him, so I looked at his face. Part of his neck was burned and a little of his chin, too. His skin looked waxy and strange and his eyelashes fluttered like a moth cut in two. I couldn't get to him. My knees locked out. They wouldn't

The fire burns away the little tree or shrub or whatever and all that's left is a stob, a little stump, sharp and hard as steel.

one stubby into the front pocket of his Nomex shirt and lit the other. I watched that stubby go up and up and arch and then fall.

We waited again. But this time we heard a crackle, then a roar when the trees in the island torched out. After that we just stood there on our line. We spaced ourselves out, about ten yards between each of us, so we could keep on watching the green side for spot fires. I was in between Lee and Tommy. I could look to either side of me and see one of them there, kind of holding me to my spot in the forest. The only sounds were the rustle and pop of the fire dying. I leaned on my pulaski and tried not to think about sitting down. I got real still and listened to the late afternoon sounds that a just-burned forest makes.

But suddenly I heard a fizzing sort of a sound and then a voice that was and was not Tommy's voice. It was Tommy's voice blown up and stretched out. It was Tommy's voice that screamed, "Goddamn motherfucker." I looked over and saw that his whole chest was a shower of slag. Like one whole side of him was blowing up into sparks. He started stop-drop-and-rolling like crazy but the explosion stayed with him. My

bend into a crouch like Lee's. Suddenly Tommy's lashes stopped their dead moth fluttering. His eyes steadied and focused right on me. Usually Tommy gives me a twinkle and I know what's what. But right then Tommy looked at me through one-way glass and I don't like to think what he saw.

Shane came trotting up and told us there was a ridge a ways down the fireline where we could cut a helispot. We'd wait there for the helicopter he'd radioed to come medivac Tommy. They'd fly him to a hospital and see about fixing him up. It smelled to me like maybe the stubby had burned straight through to his insides, but I didn't say nothing to that effect. Lee and Tan lifted Tommy Markalunas's shoulders and a Lolo named Russell picked up his feet.

Then Lee said something to me that wasn't nothing near as bad as what I deserved. "Ralph!" he said. "Are you gonna just stand there with your mouth hanging open like a goddamn retard or are you gonna help your buddy out?"

That set me to moving, and I stepped up to take one of Tommy's feet from Russell. Shane went up the line first. The four of us followed along carrying Tommy the

best we could. A couple of other Lolos walked behind us, each of them with a chainsaw to cut the helispot. I walked and walked, holding up Tommy's leg all the while. I didn't hardly see the trees around me. I didn't hardly hear the noises Tommy made. I'd call them whimpers if they'd come from someone not-so-tough. I don't remember if anyone else spoke. There's a big blank space in my memory where that hike out ought to be. All I remember is Tommy's chest, the hole burned through his Nomex and his undershirt to the skin below. The way the skin had blackened and rippled and buckled and how I wasn't sure how deep the burn went, or what exactly I was seeing. For the whole of our hike to the helispot, that's all there was for me in this world.

When we made it to the ridge we set Tommy down careful on the grass. The two sawyers yanked their saws to life and the sound—aringadingdingdingding—kind of brought me out of it, so that I could see what needed to be done.

I started swamping for one of the sawyers. I grabbed all of the little trees he cut and threw them to the side. Bushes and branches, too. We'd barely cleared ground for the helicopter to land in when we heard the chopper sound. I crouched low by Tommy—my knees finally bent like they should—and I tried to protect his chest from the rotor wash. I felt like I wanted to protect his very heart, and what if the shock of the burn made it stop beating? My eyes searched Tommy's face, but he wasn't looking at me. Two paramedics jumped out of the open door and ran towards us. They crouched low to protect their heads. They lifted Tommy onto their stretcher. He gave the thumbs up sign. I wanted to say something to him, but nothing came to mind and he wouldn't've heard me anyway, not over the chopper noise. The two paramedics and the stretcher carrying Tommy disappeared into the helicopter. And then the machine lifted up into the air and flew away.

THAT NIGHT AS I LAY IN MY SLEEPING BAG I cried and cried and the tears and snot poured down my face just like it had when the smoke was blowing right into my eyes when I was lining those spots with Sam beside me. And I tried to stay quiet because I didn't want the other Lolos to hear me, but then part of me didn't even care. If being eaten by the bear was showing weakness, then the bear had already gotten me and so what was the point of pretending I wasn't broke down?

"Don't sweat it," Lee told me the next morning. "Tommy'll be fine. He lives to be a crusty old firefighter and now he'll have the burn scars to prove it." And sometimes I wish I was more like Lee. Once he's a cop and he finally gets to shoot someone, he won't feel bad

about it or even question himself. That's one thing I know for sure.

I'm glad we're back at the fire center in Missoula. I was jittery on the fireline after. Doctors at the burn unit in Laramie say Tommy will be released in a week. As soon as he's home, I'll head straight over. And sure I feel ashamed, but that won't stop me from trying to make things right.

I don't know what I worry most about, fire season ending and me being on my own or us having to go back out to another fire. I'm sure if I could just learn all the things to watch out for I'd feel better. I know to be careful of falling snags—if I stop paying attention for a second one of my buddies could get splanged by a tree. When I swamp for a sawyer I watch to make sure he doesn't get too tired. I know chainsaws are hungry for wood to cut or human limbs. I remind guys on my squad to never stand below a tree as it burns. Flaming branches could fall from the sky, or the tip could topple. But even if I don't put the stubby in my pocket, one of the other Lolos might. Could be I won't think to warn him against it. I never imagined one could light on its own. Was it just a little friction that did it? Before the Lolos, friction was me and Cheryl moving against each other in the perfect dark of her room and how I knew by our skin touching what a forest would look like burning, that deep ruby glowing through the trees. I never thought then to worry about the Garths of the world.

I know now to be on guard, but it seems no matter how many things I remember to watch out for, new dangers always pop up, the way smokes do in a stretch of three-day-old black. In the morning light it seems like the heat has passed. But as the sun rises, the smokes do, too. They drift up from pockets of ash I could've sworn were cold. I just wish I'd known all along what to watch out for. Like Cheryl's eye roaming soon as I left. Like not letting that bad smell of burning muscle and skin get between me and taking care of Tommy Markalunas.

There are only twenty days left of fire season. I can kind of see them rising up from the ground in front of me and I want to grab them and pull them in tight to my chest. But even the hottest pockets of ash will cool and the end of season will come. And I'll be turned out into the world alone. I won't be a Lolo anymore, not for six more months anyway. I wonder if I'll drift back to Bloomington. It doesn't feel like the right thing to do. Without Cheryl I'd feel like a tree all burned out at the roots. One side of the tree looks solid, but you walk around to the other side and the base is all blackened and cat-faced and you know at any minute it could fall

right over. And I think about that empty back bedroom at Tommy Markalunas's, all decorated with Indian stuff, and maybe they'd give me a job down at O'Malley's Pub and I could take Shawnee on walks for Tommy. Or maybe I could be a timber beast myself—I think I might like it, hiking through the still white forest with a bag of paint on my back. Even with the ex-girlfriends and their babies coming by, Tommy'll need someone to keep him company. And sure the coven likes crashing at his house, but how much help would they really be? It'll be awhile before Tommy can even do his own laundry or cook himself a baked potato.

But maybe he doesn't want me popping up at his house like the last smoke of a fire he thought was out. Maybe he'd rather spend winter mostly alone, looking out at his yard buried under all that snow.

Since the accident I spend my time going round and round about it, trying to gather up days and dangers and possibilities, like they're those wisps of smoke, but even I know it doesn't work that way. They're smokes, not flowers you could pluck to take to your lost girl or your buddy just home from the hospital. They're smokes and they just drift away. ☹



Transitory Space | LEAH OATES

WE MUST NOT

MACKENZIE COLE

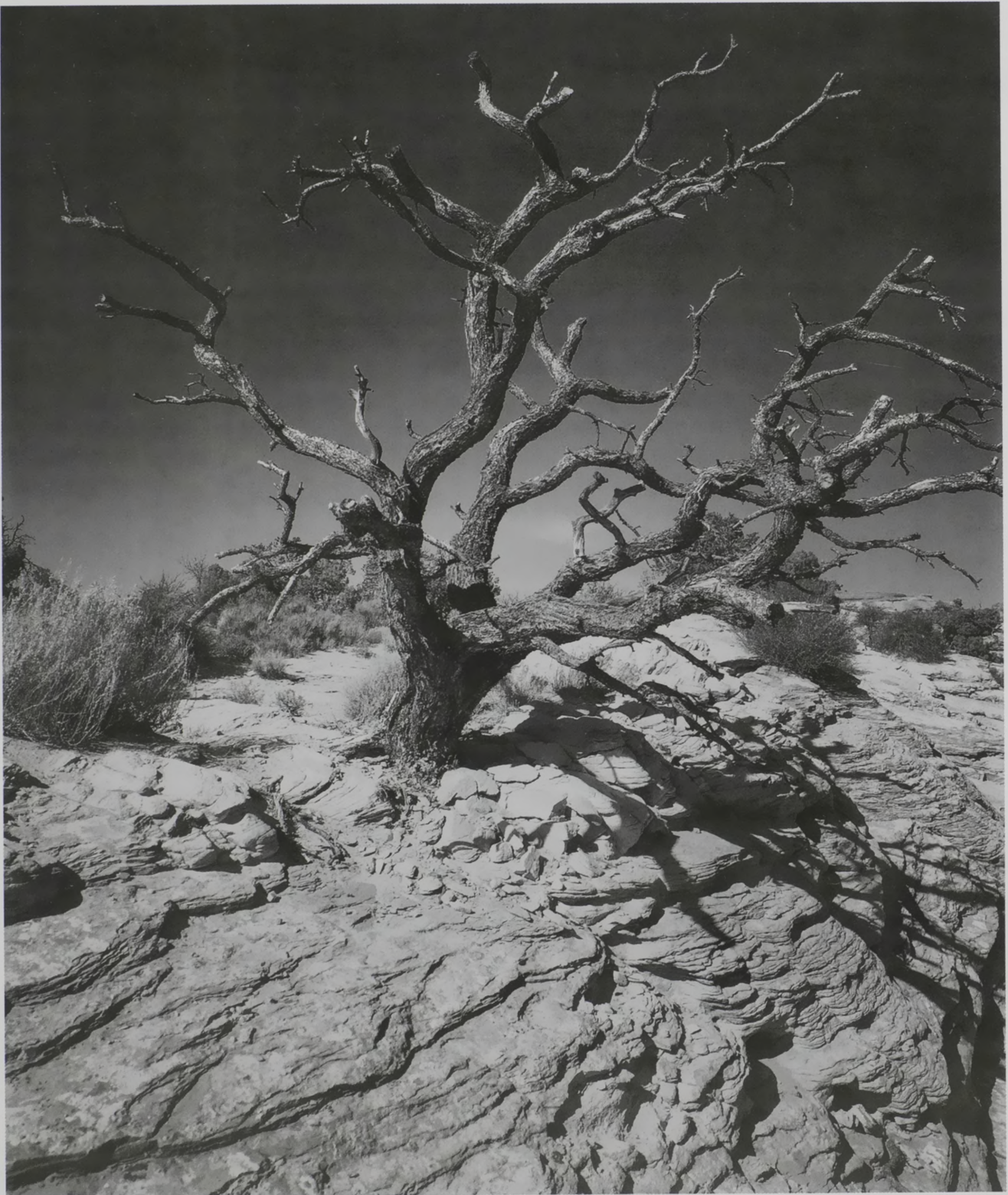
starting up the bath extinction in the night
a vast dullness half asleep at the fridge
waiting on the water I'll never stand another night
with gusts from the bats washing into my face

the snow continues to melt which was once here and cracking
an egg on the corner of the fridge shells fit into my hands
like the stick bugs their legs spanning a palm
chuck the shell in the trash back in the bathroom

when I didn't understand English lost in grasses
craning over my head the water so hot and standing naked testing
with a toe I remember the frogs laying on her all their eyes closed
no more frogs there water misting from the tub

and the ring of grease skin and soap I remember the river
tearing down the hills like the bison filled the coulees
between the mountain ranges one vast bulk shuttering the ground
a thing before me but the woods are a part of me

the water so hot now blisters my thighs
and I know terrible destruction has been done
and I know we must not get used to this



Dry | BRENNa RIETMANN

PASSENGERS

NONFICTION | TERRI NICHOLS

WE ARE SITTING on the Number 2 Bus, waiting to leave the transfer station. A Congolese woman, her four children, another family mentor and I are on our way to the laundromat. The kids are refugees, eight weeks into their lives in Missoula, and already learning the ways of their American peers. They head to the back of the bus, leaving mom up front with the two volunteers.

A young girl, perhaps five years old, probably a native Missoulian, latches onto me and the Congolese mom, asking us questions and eagerly investigating my smartphone. We are engaged in English-Swahili translations of farm animal names, so we don't realize, at first, what is happening at the back of the bus.

A middle-aged woman with blond hair and a Wal-Mart employee name badge pinned to her chest asks me, testily, "Are you responsible for those kids?" She inclines her head toward them, and I think she's about to admonish me for some misbehavior I hadn't noticed, or, worse, make a xenophobic remark.

It's pretty easy to pick out a Congolese family in our town. During the past two months, I've lost track of the number of times people have slowed their pick-up trucks or stopped us on the sidewalk, just to say, "Welcome to Missoula!" It's been heart-warming.

But I've also noticed the occasional scowls. I know there are some who are angry about refugees coming to live in our community—angry with us for supporting their attempts to make a new life here. Not everyone is happy to see a family of six Congolese working in our local businesses, shopping in our grocery stores, attending our schools, riding our buses.

So despite all of the kindness I have seen, I haven't been able to help thinking that it can't possibly last. I have been steeling myself for an anti-refugee outburst.

For the moment, though, I am wrong. Guilty of my own stereotypes, I have misinterpreted what the woman who caught my attention was trying to say.

"Is there a problem?" I ask.

"That woman is saying terrible things to those kids," she tells me, looking to the back of the bus.

And then we hear it. The thing I have been waiting for. "You don't belong here. Go back where you came from." The words come from a woman sitting right in front of the four refugee children. I don't know if they

understand her words, but her anger is unmistakable.

By now the bus has left the station. My fellow volunteer goes back to sit with them. She asks the woman not to say such things in front of children. This only increases the woman's anger, and now we learn the roots of her rage. She is one of the few truly native Montanans among us. She is shouting about how horribly white people have treated her people, about injustices I cannot fathom. About all the wrongs and violence committed against Native Americans by the U.S. government and its citizens.

"White people stole land from the Indians, and now they're giving it to them!"

Her ancestry does not excuse her behavior toward a bunch of kids. But it changes my perspective on justice. It shifts my own biases. How would I feel if I were in this woman's shoes? I certainly hope I wouldn't take out my pain and anger on others who have lived through their own tragedies. Yet I might very well feel exactly as she does.

ACCORDING TO THE UNITED NATIONS, there are currently more than 65 million people who have been forced from their homes worldwide—the largest number in recorded history. This includes 21.3 million who have fled their home countries entirely and cannot return for fear of violence and persecution. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, two decades of war have displaced 1.6 million people and killed millions more. The conflict began when Hutu militias entered the Congo to avoid retribution for their role in the 1994 Rwandan genocide; it has continued because of the large number of neighboring countries that became involved in an effort to exploit Congo's weak government and great mineral wealth, which includes diamonds, gold, and coltan—a mineral used in virtually all electronic devices.

Many Congolese, including the family we are trying to help, have lived in refugee camps for years or decades, unable to return home, unwanted by the neighboring countries where they have sought refuge, unwanted by developed nations that can afford to take them in. Unwanted, too, by many Americans who fear that refugees are really just terrorists in waiting, biding their time in the hopelessness of refugee camps, willing to endure for years a lack of food, basic sanitation, job

prospects, and dignity, just so they can come to our shores and plant bombs.

Native Americans have also been displaced, discarded, deprived of basic rights and dignities, and treated with suspicion. For hundreds of years, European Americans who look like me have forced them out of their homes, stripped away their languages and cultures, kidnapped children and sent them to boarding schools to be “re-educated,” deprived them of food, deprived them of dignity. This oppression continues in many places and forms, but most of us look away, just as most of the world looks away from the refugee crisis. We do not want to acknowledge our culpability or make reparations. We do not want to get involved. We do not want to listen to Native Americans any more than Syrians, Afghans, Somalis, or Congolese.

FINALLY, the Native woman leaves the bus, yelling the whole way down the aisle and into the street, allowing

us to breathe a sigh of relief as she disembarks. At least that scene is over. Now we can all go on with our lives and get to our destinations.

But we don’t pull away from the curb just yet. The bus driver is calling the police, telling them about the incident. The woman is still standing on the sidewalk, screaming at us. The driver tells the police, “There’s a Native American woman yelling and causing a scene here.”

I cringe. Please don’t do this, I think. But I don’t say anything. I just sit with the knot in my gut, trying to will away the tragedies threatening to overwhelm me. All I am supposed to be doing is introducing a Congolese family to the laundromat nearest their new home.

The woman who first alerted me to the scene gets off as well. I thank her for her kindness. I don’t tell her about my initial misconceptions of her, or of my own guilt. I am simply grateful that she chose not to look away.

Moments earlier, she had told me, “I’m so angry, I’m shaking.” It is only now that I notice—so am I. ♡



Roots | CARL BOWLBY

Of Elwha, Kootenai

SAM OLSON

1.

OF ELWHA

Crossing to the grey
market, I hear rocks
tacking down the beach
in an undertow.

...

He swings his bough
into *Juan de Fuca*,

our camera only seeing
freighters,

Chinese lanterns
in the wake.

...

Each morning at the sawmill:
Calvin and I.
A cormorant in the bay.

2.

AT THE CRIPPLE CREEK NATIVE ART SHOW

In a glass case
was a model city of balsa,
a silver mine on a hill,
tiny ponderosas,
a red false-fronted bank,
a jail.

In a stack by the wall
was a print of a calf
and kneeling stag, beneath two black
firs. A card on the back
read *Chippewa*.

3.

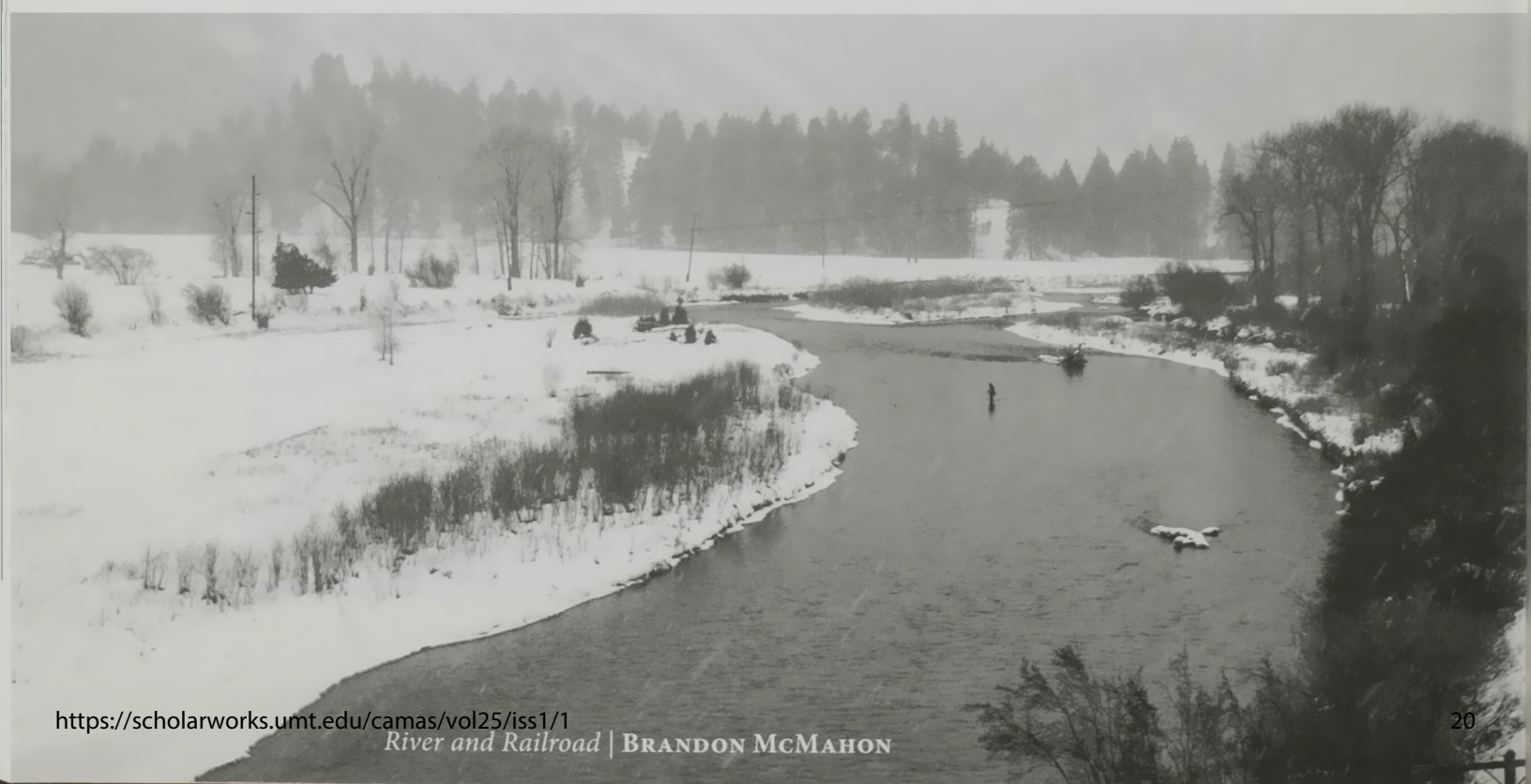
LIBBY

The caretaker's red Ford
under firs. Drawing
a long cigarette, he hoists

his baby into the toy fire
engine in the cemetery park.

Where four roads converge
I see mother's iron
star

still hung.



4.

TROY

midnight awake. hear ash
leaves, the dog
up Lake Creek.

On the porch above
my bed is a chinook,
enameled, blue.

....

why this lot
Jim?
or canary grass?



San Francisco | JOHN KIRSCH



Road Story

ABBY CHEW

On Oolie's trip to see Coyote,
he sleeps in a culvert with his blocky head
tucked under one wing. He slugs a pint of whiskey,
considers why his feathers just won't sluff the rain.
He walks west mostly, and never toward home.
Oolie can't tell the lines of the sky
from the lines of his own legs.
He sleeps in the culvert, feather fingers tracing circles
on his thighs. There's the smell of diesel,
the rumbling of a semi coming,
and the concrete at his shoulders.

Hunting Geese

FICTION | SARAH RAU PETERSON

HE'S PARKED ON THE RIVERBANK to get away from the wife, holding his thermos mug and staring out at the decoys. The sky has gone pink, and he's waiting for the geese to drop for their nightly visit. The shotgun's loaded but the safety's on and he can keep it on the seat next to him since Dog died. He sips his coffee-with-brand, but it's lukewarm despite the thermos and the bitter taste gives him heartburn. The radio won't stop blaring talking head commentary about the upcoming presidential election—Jesus, it's still over a year away—and he wishes he could get a sports show, maybe some rock and roll out here instead. His hands ache from the cold, his old hands that have set hundreds, thousands of decoys into frozen riverbanks, lakeshores crusted with ice, waiting, waiting. He thinks of Freezeout Lake, so cold that winter—what, damn near forty years now—he remembers it was too cold to wait for the birds outside even though the first few were already scoping out his decoys. Scattered cars and pickups around the shorelines puffing clouds from the mufflers. He knew, too, that every one of those vehicles were tuned into the same AM station out of Calgary as he was, and nobody stopped listening even when the geese came down, and all at once the horns and flashing headlights, noise that all but drowned out the sound of the startled birds lifting off and out of range, but they all whooped and hollered, all the hunters like young boys, because they believed in miracles, yes they did, when the Ruskies lost that hockey game. The wife, a few years back he had told her about that cold night in '80, after they made that movie and everyone was talking about it again, and he teared up and then downright cried over how nobody pulled in any geese that night, but they were all brothers who emerged from warm vehicles to chant USA! USA! together into the frigid air. She wasn't really listening, he could tell, but he got downright pissed off when she told him she didn't remember it. Didn't remember it! Didn't remember the call? Al Michaels? Beating the freaking USSR, the Red Army guys? Her face was blank, and she'd said—she actually said—that she didn't follow football. He chuckles to himself, now. That had been a hell of a conversation.

He warms his hands against the heater vent, rubs them together, arthritic knuckle against arthritic knuckle.

Oh, he still loves her, even though. He cuts her some slack, she's a good wife, and she eats the goose liver pate he makes with cut-up pickles even if she's never set a decoy, never field-dressed a bird in the cold and smelled the rusty scent of still-steaming blood, never even fired his shotgun. Even though she is clueless why he gets excited about Griz football, even though she laughs at the way he cries every time Seven Bridges Road comes on the oldies station. She teaches third grade, kids with bucked out teeth learning multiplication, and still cooks every night and does the laundry and even lets his old body climb on top of hers once in a while. She can appreciate the sound of a thousand geese coming in to settle along the riverbank, she's told him so, the way she listens for it every night when she pulls in the driveway after school, her sensible shoes crunching the gravel, a cup of tea while grading papers. But damn.

She calls it anxiety when she gets worked up, and the therapist he sees at her request (always her request) calls it anxiety, but he calls it plain batshit. She complains about too many people in the grocery parking lot and that's why she didn't go in. The sound of the wind whistling around the eaves and she has to lie in bed, ears stuffed with cotton. An assembly at school that made her nerves jangle like a tambourine. She says she's a sensitive person, but he can't put his finger on how she can wrangle twenty eight-year-olds all by herself, but she can't face the produce aisle. What he does understand is the sound of her voice when she's nagging him about leaving his tractor magazines on the couch, an empty coffee cup, dishes in the sink but not in the dishwasher, and don't even get her started on his habit of using a handkerchief (she calls it a snot rag) instead of a disposable tissue. The germs, she's worried about, says she gets enough of them in her classroom. He can understand the sound of the heater cycling on so she can be comfortable, seventy-four degrees in the damn house, the electric bill climbing, her refusal to use the fireplace because it's dirty, when they have five hundred acres of beetle-busted trees.

Sometimes he feels like she's taken just about everything from him. He can't tell her that he uses handkerchiefs because his father did, because she only knew him as a drunk old bastard who did nothing but tell racist jokes first at the VFW and then in the VA. She didn't know Dad in his bronc days, back when he rodeoed for so little in winnings, when Dad would come home with stitches in his chin or arm in a sling and a hospital bill, and he, just a youngster then, would get to rub down the bronc saddle with a special oil. How Mother worked nights in town emptying bedpans and wiping drool from toothless old mouths, just so Dad could rodeo and he always brought her something, usually beaded by the wives of the Indian riders. Mother's drive back home after work just in time to take him to the bus stop. He didn't tell the wife that Dad only started drinking hard after he broke his pelvis in a bad wreck with a bad bronc named Pearly Gates. How then, as a ten-year-old, he had to chop wood and haul square bales to the yearlings and the horses, how the work made him muscular and sad. How they had to sell everything, even the horses and the bronc saddle, the collection of beaded jewelry, and move to a rented house in town. The whiskey drinking like water. A neighbor man taking him on the banks of the Yellowstone for his first goose instead of Dad. The wife doesn't know all that because he hasn't told her in their fourteen years of marriage (a second for him, third for her), hasn't let her in to all the corners inside his heart, because if he starts telling, he might not stop and it's terrifying to have someone know all the parts of him. But she thinks he has, and she tells him everything, too much, like the time she got drunk as a high schooler and blew the starting five on the basketball team—she thinks these stories will bring them closer together.

Last night she ranted about his boots tracking mud—into the mudroom for Chrissakes, he'd said—and then it turned into the decoys in their mesh bags just where she wanted to park her car and gun oil smell in the kitchen, so he slept on the couch and stayed pretending to be asleep until she left for school. Before she got home he loaded his pickup bed with the decoys and the shotgun he plans to give his own son for a gift when he finally comes clean about his relationship with his "roommate."

But it's only here
that he can let
it out, when the
weak sun leaves
the cottonwoods
in shadows on the
east-flowing river,
it's here that he
can think about
the mistakes he's
made...

Oh, he knows all right what that means. He isn't stupid even if he was brought up traditional—hell, his own parents had had twin beds—but he is mad that the son tries to disguise it, doesn't have enough faith in his old man to tell him the truth. And God, but when he tries to talk to the wife about it, she has all kinds of things to say to prove she's okay with it but still uses words like "the gays" and once, "those people," which to him grated like a bad wheel but he didn't say boo to her because she's not the boy's mother. Now, he lights a cigarette, a habit he hides from her and only does when he's well away from the house. Blows the smoke through the window he's rolled open, revs the engine a bit to keep the heater chugging warmth. He punches the button to silence the radio, so all he hears is the crackle of the icy river and his own breath.

And the girl, he thinks, his daughter, with her high Slavic cheekbones and eyes like a cat from her mother's mother, and he just knew as she had grown older and more beautiful that people questioned her paternity, wondered if that was the secret to implode that marriage and left him with not much more than a pickup full of decoys and his three-legged dog named Dog. Smart and sassy since the day she was born, that one. She never called him Daddy, must have heard everyone else call him Harv, and so she did from the time she could talk.

She always went her own way, and he was proud of her when she up and moved to Texas to work at a horse ranch. He still thought of her sometimes as a girl who played ponies while riding a broomstick through the kitchen, and not as the teenager busted for smoking marijuana and then let off with only probation when the drug test also revealed a pregnancy, because he could never reconcile the two girls in his mind. He blamed himself for the divorce that happened when she was a child, thought she wouldn't have turned out the way she did, and he blamed himself after the arrest and the announcement and told her out of pure anger that he would remove the guy's balls and hang them from his rearview because damn it, didn't she know better and why was she so stupid. And then she called him a week later and told him not to worry because it was done now, and her voice was flat and she said she'd enrolled in an equine studies program at the JC for early admission

while she finished high school, and he'd immediately regretted his words and his anger and his inability to see the girl inside.

He stubs out his cigarette on the pocked dashboard and pockets the butt, reminds himself to get rid of it before laundry day. Sips at the coffee and shudders at its taste and at the emotion building from thinking about his children, the way it makes his heart ache and the tears fall from his eyes, and he thinks of his father, how he would laugh at the tears, how he always laughed and called him a bawl baby, a milk-sucking calf. He thinks of his wife, saying she's sensitive. But it's only here that he can let it out, when the weak sun leaves the cottonwoods in shadows on the east-flowing river, it's here that he can think about the mistakes he's made with his children and both of his marriages, can think about Dog, who finally died in his sleep at fifteen years old, the three legs twitching a final gallop in the night and lying cold on the floor when he went to feed him that morning. The tears roll down the lines in his face and catch in his moustache, and he can't believe he's still crying about that dog, even though it's been a goddamn year, but he remembers Dog as a pup, when his daughter was still a child and screamed every night in her sleep, and he'd went to the pound for a kitten, something to keep her company and instead found this sad little creature, all black and white fluff and smiling border collie face, and the lady there had said that they'd gotten rid of the rest of the litter, even the mother, but nobody wanted a dog born with only three legs, and that had touched his heart enough to pay the adoption fee, sign the paper that promised a neuter, and brought the dog home to the house where his marriage was already flailing. It was enough trying to house-break a three-legged dog, enough on top of that wife who was sick and tired of him always working in the field, always hunting in his spare hours, and she didn't realize the Fed job that required him to be in the field put money in their bank account and gave health insurance to the family, that the hunting put good deer on the table, a goose for the holidays, jerky for an after-school snack. It never was enough for her, and it was almost a relief when it was over, but nearly every day since then (even now, all these years later), the guilt stabs him in the gut, gives him diarrhea in the middle of the night, when he thinks that if he'd only stuck it out that the kids wouldn't have moved on and out, that maybe his son would be in the pickup with him in the cold, sticking goose deeks into the frozen dirt, instead of clear to Missoula at the big outdoors store where he worked, or the daughter would still be interested in cleaning the purplish gizzard to find the grit inside, something that still amazes him, the way a bird's body works.

God, but the things he finds peace in, now. The bench seat of the pickup still sheds fine white hair from Dog, and he's glad to have saved that pup from the pound and the inevitable cold injection to stop his heart, his body tossed in the incinerator with the others, the worthless, the old and sick. The way the cold bites at him in his fingerless gloves, makes his skin crack and bleed every time he sets the deeks; even that gives him peace, the





Camas Creek | BRANDON McMAHON

routine of it a ritual. The way the river sounds when he's the only one to hear it. The leafless cottonwoods that line the riverbank, limbs like his own old fingers grasping at the sky. The winter is enough to send him weeping into his handkerchief, the thick hair on his horses beautiful and life-affirming, the sound of their hooves on a crust of snow. The spring, the buds on the trees, the smell of earthworms and dirt and brand new calves still covered in birth fluid. The summer heat, alfalfa cut, dried, and baled before a storm hits, sweaty armpits from the un-air-conditioned hay truck, the taste of a cold beer like gold. The brilliance of fall, leaves drying and dying, a bonfire in the slash pile where he watches from a nearby stump, brandy in his coffee. He can cry just thinking about all of these things he does, he sees and smells, over the course of the seasons, and it almost makes him ashamed, these emotions.

His father never got worked up about the seasons, the earth and its land, the river. His father never cried, not when he returned home with a broken body, not when he lost himself trying to find the bottom of a whiskey bottle, not when he was widowed and spent his days at the VFW from open to close. Not even in his last years in the VA when he stared right in the face of his mortality; no, he was an ornery old coot, pinching the nurses' asses and spitting phlegm into a Coke can. Telling jokes about Mexicans and Indians, about their food and their bodies and their drunkenness, jokes that everybody laughed at, politely, meeting knowing glances above his eye level there in the bed. He sat in his own waste because his legs were gone by that point, because he was too stubborn, too drunk to take care of himself and just see a doctor already, and the infection that set in his knee, infectious arthritis, they'd said, was just too dangerous to treat with antibiotics alone, especially since he kept drinking; they'd had to mete out shots of whiskey throughout his amputation and recovery so he wouldn't die from the shock of withdrawal.

No, the crying came from a place deep inside his body, and he pictured (although he knew anatomy) his heart connected directly to the thought center of his brain with a cord like those old curly telephone wires, that made his chest squeeze and his eyes water with most any thought, the damn trees for Chrissakes, the way the sun sets into pink and orange and seven shades of blue, the sound of the geese he can hear for miles, and the noise they make, the sheer number of them, it's like a train landing there on the bank among his decoys, and he blows his nose into his handkerchief and then stuffs it into the pocket of his woolen vest, swipes at his eyes with his rough fingertips. He's parked behind a dense copse of juniper, and if he can get out without much movement or noise, he's pretty sure he can knock a few out, he doesn't need many, from right where he's standing.

He sighs, removes the key from the ignition and opens the pickup door, leaves it open as he shoulders his shotgun. It's time to kill some birds. ☹



Mystic in the Gorge | **BRENNA RIETMANN**

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

TOM VERSTEEG

in the heart of Hebei Province
bright red banners are licking
the dirty air while at luncheon
in the Wichita headquarters'
executive dining room
the operations director
for Koch Industries toys with
his grilled ahi on wilted greens



Knead | BRENNAN JOHNSON

NO MEAT

NONFICTION | GIBSON COLLINS

THE SMELL OF UNSHOWERED BODIES stacked shoulder to shoulder fills my nose. Sweat drips down everyone's necks and pools along the tips of our respective collar bones. The sun beats hard against the mini-bus windows. "Mini-bus" seems a generous term. More like a glorified tin can on wheels bound for fiery vehicular death. Catfish hang from each of the bus's windshield wipers, whiskers and all flapping wildly in the wind.

As we careen thirty-five kilometers per hour over the national speed limit heading south from the capital city of Lilongwe toward the tiny town of Liwonde, the tin can's rear wheel catches one of the highway's many pot holes. My head slams hard against the roof. I massage the slowly rising bump atop my scalp. Birds chirp in my ears and I struggle to locate where my body starts and the sixteen other bodies in this van built for nine stops. Crammed in the back, an infant mewls on her mother's lap adjacent to me. I wipe my brow with a damp bandana that used to be white and rub the nape of my neck. I toss an empty beer can between my left and right hands. I twiddle it, spin it, stare at it, and consider its future disposal. I chuckle to myself that at eighteen years old I'd legally bought and drank it in a moving vehicle. The only other white body in the bus turns to take me in.

"You should toss it," she says.

"Hunh?"

"I said, you should toss it."

Her brown hair pulled back in a neat bun. Tanned, sunbaked skin. Big glasses. She looks like she's been here a while.

"You just get in?" she asks.

"No. I mean yes. I mean sort of. I got off the bush-train from Kilimanjaro yesterday."

"Ah. Kili. How was it?"

"Big. Fun. Awesome. Lots of litter but beautiful. Really high."

"That's why they call it the roof of Africa."

"Yeah," I reply dumbly. "What about you?"

"Peace Corps. Been in the shits for about a year now. One more to go."

"Oh. Cool." I stare back down at the empty can in my hands.

"You should toss it," she repeats. "It'll end up on the side of the road in a burning pile of plastic and shit no matter what you do with it. Toss it."

"I'm not sure I—"

"You need help?"

In a flash she snatches the can from out of my trembling hand and chucks it out the window and into the thick, humid atmosphere. The can makes a few revolutions before crumpling on the side of the road.

"Welcome to Malawi." She smiles. "You'll get used to it."

I look out the back and watch the lonely can become an invisible speck of litter in a land of rolling greens, reds, and monolithic baobab trees. A loud and piercing BAAHHH emanates from between my legs, ripping me from my stubbornly eco-western reverie. I look down beneath my seat and see a goat lying there, casually chewing on my shoelace. I recollect myself and look back out the window as we pass a pile of burning maize husks and plastic and watch it fill the dusty-red sky with black and noxious fumes.

"See. Told ya."

I GET OFF THE BUS AND PRAY for the modest vehicle as it heads south towards Zomba Plateau and Mt. Mulanje. I haul my big green backpack up and onto my sunburnt shoulders, heavy as it is with all the carefully selected necessities and overpriced synthetic quick dry clothing an over- yet under-prepared eighteen-year-old could possibly need for nine months of romping through the Southern Hemisphere. I walk through the rising dust and the busy streets to a market with a tin roof and mud walls and purchase a Coke because it's cheaper than bottled water. I hand the man behind the counter a few hundred kwacha, say a quick "zikomo," and grab hold of the cold bottle. I step out onto the porch and press the

cool glass against my peeling forehead.

Minutes go by. Then hours. A few cars bump along the pot-hole-ridden dirt road, jostling goats, dogs and human bodies as they pass. Men, women and children hawk vegetables, fruit, fried bread, plantains, cheap sandals, black-market petrol and plastic goods. I hold my seat on the edge of the porch outside the small market beneath the shade of the awning and do my best to avoid the bustle and thrum of market life. I snatch my harmonica from my breast pocket to pass the time. "Amazing Grace" and "Redemption Song." Minutes later, a young man sidles up next to me. Lean. Mid-height. Just a few years older than myself. I resist the impulse to distrust him for the sole fact he's a stranger and I'm a white boy in Africa alone.

"Muli bwanje?" he asks.

"Bwino. Bwanje?" I respond.

"Ah! Bwino. You know Chichewa?"

"Pang'ono."

"Bwino." He smiles a big, full-toothed smile. He asks me what I'm playing and I tell him it's a harmonica. I blow a few licks of blues and show him how. He asks me my name.

"Dzine langa ndine Gibson."

"Ah! Bwana Gib. Dzine langa ndine Jimmy. Jimmy Lunga-Tai."

He tells me his story. He tells me he works for a pet food company. He tells me it's a good job as far as jobs in rural Malawi go. Better than farming maize and herding goats. He advertises, ships product, lives alone, drinks occasionally, likes to dance, and recently had his heart broken. I tell him I'm sorry and me too. He asks me my business and how it is a mzungu like me came to speak Chichewa. I tell him I'd been to Zambia three years earlier on a high-school volunteer trip to introduce laptops and Microsoft to a

local secondary school. I tell him I'd befriended the owner of the lodge where we'd stayed and that the owner in turn promised to connect me with his former boss, the notorious South African wildlife conservationist Jack Steenkamp, should I make good on my promise to return. Jack, the mysterious man for whom I was currently waiting.

"I'm worried," I confess.

"Why, nzanga?"

"I've been waiting for three hours and I still haven't heard from him."

"He'll come, bwana Gib. Don't worry. You're on Africa time now."

We exchange phone numbers and he tells me to call if I ever get a break from work and want to come in for a Sawa-Sawa night on the "town." He waits with me on the porch and we shoot the breeze and he rolls a cigarette which he offers to me. I thank him but tell him I don't smoke.

"At least not tobacco."

"Ah. But herb?"

I tell him I'll call if I get a break from work. He smokes. I sip away at my Coke 'til the bottle is empty. The sun sets and as it does it bleeds a peculiar kind of red found in few other places. So total in its redness. So perfectly a circle. It falls to the earth like a grapefruit. Jimmy finishes what's left of his cigarette and stomps it into the dirt when Jack's big white truck pulls up. Jack steps out in a cloud of dust, a stout behemoth of a man,

bald save for the pony tail draping down his thick neck which shares the diameter of my thigh. A rose-coiled skull stares at me menacingly from the surface of his left bicep. The Rhodesian flag and Special Forces emblem wave stubbornly along the surface of the right. Everything about him defiantly screams Afrikaans.

"You Gibson?" he asks gruffly.

"Yeah."



Ventral View of a Dog Skull in Ink
RACHEL CRAMER

"Lekka. Alright, bru. You're in the trunk."

"Hunh?" I ask, curious as to the apparent vacancy of the passenger seat. Suddenly, the ears of a big, brown Rhodesian ridgeback prick up above the headrest, tail wagging between the seats. Jack points resolutely towards the bed of the truck.

"Get in."

I get the picture. I hop up off the porch, heave my pack over the lip of the bed, and climb on in. Jack roars the engine to life and we take off down the bumpy dirt road in a cloud of dust. Before he's out of sight I yell out to my new friend, "Tionana nzanga mwanga!" He waves back smiling, and as he does a pothole nearly throws me from the bed of the truck and into the bush. I bounce back into the truck-bed on my bony ass with a loud thump and grip tight the bed walls. I see Jimmy begin to crack up laughing before becoming just another speck in the dusty distance. Domestic life thins as we drive deeper into the bush. Houses turn to huts turn to empty, dried-out land, forest, and the sun-cracked Shire

colonial cloth from which our respective aspirations were cut. How much of Livingstone's colonial dream we shared. How like that bumbling British explorer of old we both were in our pursuit of the mysterious dark star. In our pursuit of the other. To speak nothing of our own English blood. Thus, I anticipated a simple mission. Go to Africa. Save animals. Come home a celebrated, road-weary, sunbaked, good-doing hero. Come home the man who danced with the wild and the rough. The man who dove headfirst into Conrad's immemorial heart of darkness.

"THAT TREE'S OLDER 'N JESUS." Jack spits and rolls a toothpick between his thumb and forefinger. "Shit."

The baobab towers over bush-camp, tall and stout, round green fruits dangling from its thin and thick limbs above our tents and sleeping pads and the two impressively high towers of stacked up cable snares. A tree straight out of Dr. Seuss's imagination. Wide in the trunk from bottom to top before it narrows and branches

Thus, I anticipated a simple mission. Go to Africa. Save animals. Come home a celebrated, road-weary, sunbaked, good-doing hero.

River plain. Mighty baobabs pass me by and soon so too do random clumps of elephants and antelope. I smile the way children smile in candy stores and watch the grapefruit in the sky disappear beneath the earth. I lean back and savor the inhalation of dusk and dust.

I CAME TO MALAWI during the twelve months between high school and college for all the reasons my grandfather didn't when he was just a little older than myself. To save animals. This is not to say that my grandfather's Livingstonian hunting missions to sub-Saharan Africa necessarily prompted my trip to the dark star continent. No. This was no rebellion against my heritage. An internal lust for adventure and exploration, a seemingly resolute moral compass, a decent amount of previous exposure to the continent, a couple grand in the bank earned through long sweaty hours spent bussing tables and calling "corner," a need to put life (or some stale and easily digestible form of it) off for as long as possible, and an earnest desire to do good; these were the moving pieces that together sent me to Malawi.

But being the well-intentioned wander-lusting young American buck that I was, I could not see clearly then how intimately related my motives and my grandfather's were. How red, white and blue the English

out in strangely short and bifurcating limbs, thinly leafed, the baobab almost always looks bloated, as if it has singlehandedly drawn the last drop of water from beneath the earth and is about to burst. Only the tree's well-aged majesty could justify such gluttonous thirst in a land otherwise starved for water. The sprawling scrub-lands, the grass covered plains, the floral belt of the upper Shire River which runs through the park and the town, and the rolling green hills of the Shire River Plain are all speckled with them, transforming this wild bushland into a fantastical fauna-filled dream. It's dusk and the red sun falls slowly across the river where a family of giant heron walks.

"Why's it so torn up at the bottom?" I ask, gesturing towards the long lacerations that run along the tree's base.

"Elephants. Bastards like rubbin' on 'em." He spits. "Which reminds me. You gotta piss at night don't be walkin' far, eh? Bring a headlamp and some dynamite."

"Dynamite?"

"Here." He hands me a few, brown, pocket-sized sticks. "You go wanderin' into the middle of a herd at night you blast 'em and you run like hell. You hear?" I hear and I nod, wide-eyed and earnest. I feel my hands tremble and my spine start to shake. "Them mamas are

mean and they'll buck, trample, and skewer ya alive." I nod vigorously and compliantly. "Alright boy. Now I need some help."

"Hunh?"

"You ever given a shot before?"

"No," I respond nervously.

"I'd usually ask GJ to do this but he's not gettin' in till tomorrow. Here." He presents an orange and a Post-It note with a crudely drawn picture of a human ass on it split up into four quadrants. "If this is an ass, I need you to inject this here needle," he puts the needle into my hand, "into this here quadrant," pointing towards the specified quadrant on the Post-It note. "Practice on the orange." I lift the needle with a trembling hand and thrust it through the air. On my first attempt, I completely miss the orange. "Christ, bru. I'm the one gettin' the shot, eh. Why are you shakin'?" I try a few more times until I finally get it right. "Good. Now before you press down and put these here anti-inflammatories in my ass, you need to make sure the needle's all the way in. You got it?"

"Got it."

"Good." He drops trou and presents his bare ass to me. "On the count of three. You ready?" I nod dishonestly, hand still shaking. "One... two... THREE." I scream and plunge the needle into the upper right quadrant of his right buttock.

"Is it in?" It's not. I push the needle in the extra few centimeters of the way hoping he doesn't notice.

"Yup! It's in!" I push the plunger down with my thumb, injecting the mysterious fluid into his blood stream, and withdraw the needle.

"Phew. Good. Good. Great. That feels great." He pulls up his trousers and takes the needle from me. "Alright now. You can set up yer tent anywhere under those trees, eh. Just steer clear of the river. A kaffir gone fishin' got croc-bit last week and bled out."

"A kaffir?"

"A nigger."

"Oh."

"Serves 'em right. Fookin' monkeys." He spits. "This continent wouldn't be as shit as it was if we were still runnin' the place." I scratch my head and think briefly of the IMF, the World Bank, and the bloody legacies of Livingstone and Leopold. "I mean Christ knows we're some fookers too, eh? Some Afrikaaners playin' slap the hippo got pretty messed up last month. So don't go fookin' around."

"Slap the hippo?"

"It's when you and your brus get some beer and some paint and go down to the river."

"How do you win?"

"By slappin' the most hippo ass. And livin' to tell it. So don't go playin'."

"Okay."

"In the mornin' I'll fill you in on what we expect from you over the next four months. Welcome to Liwonde, boy. Try not to get eaten. IFAW doesn't like the bad publicity."

TWO SEPARATE BOUNDARIES comprise Liwonde National Park. The outer fence, which contains all three hundred and twenty square kilometers of the recently established reserve, and the inner fence, which contains the forty-eight square kilometers of Liwonde's protected black rhino sanctuary. Once this land ran wild and replete with eland, zebra, lion, wildebeest, hartebeest, black rhino, African wild dog, and the rest of motley crew. Before white hunters set their sights on Liwonde in the late nineteenth century, the Chewa people of southern Malawi maintained a healthy relationship with the land and its wildlife, surviving primarily on subsistence hunting practices. Bush-meat, mostly impala and other antelope, made up the bulk of the Chewa diet. For thousands of years this ancient dance of tribe and game persisted in relative harmony. After the British brought their guns and their trophy-hunting to the land, Liwonde and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa saw sharp declines in biodiversity. The lion prides vanished first, followed by the zebra, then the eland, then the rhino, then the buffalo, and on down the line.

In the late 1960s, white hunters—alarmed by the decrease in their trophy populations—voted to designate Liwonde a controlled hunting area. It was soon upgraded to a protected game reserve before finally achieving national park status in 1973. To make room for whites and their guns and their need to decorate their homes with wild heads and tusks, the designation of Liwonde as a national park necessitated the removal of the Chewa people and their hunting practices from the land. The government erected barbed wire fences and relocated the Chewa outside the newly drawn boundaries. Meanwhile, the methods by which the Chewa had survived for many a millennium received a new label. Poaching became a federal offence. The World Bank and the IMF gave seeds of maize to the tribe and told them to build an economy of monoculture and cheap export-foods instead. White hunters continued to flock to the land, coughing up forty-thousand dollars without batting an eye to put a bullet in the head of any one of Africa's "big five."

Hunting concessions in Liwonde National Park have since been reigned in (largely by international forces), and various conservation projects such as The International Fund for Animal Welfare's (IFAW's)

Liwonde Black Rhino Project have taken their place. A deadly, carnivorous tendency born from the loins of Livingstone, born from a deep and rabid impulse to conquer the wilds of the much whispered about dark star, born from that colonial yearning to meet, tame, and best the other, now gets steadily hacked away by the same forces that bore it. Eland have been shipped in from Botswana. The zebra from Zambia. Wildebeest from Mozambique. And the rhino from the Disneyland equivalent of all African wildlife reserves: South Africa's Kruger National Park—where commercial poachers buzz the tree-tops in helicopters and gun rhino down from the sky with sniper rifles. They'll flip the horns for sixty thousand to one hundred thousand dollars a kilo to Saudi princes for their knife hilts and to Chinese doctors for their obsolete aphrodisiacs. An ancient species now stands poised on the knife-edge of extinction so that international masculinities might be reinforced.

Hundreds of black rhino once lived in Liwonde. Now there are ten. We confine them to forty-eight square kilometers. We fasten radio collars around their necks. We monitor them. We keep them safe from poachers. We carry semi-automatics and handguns because out here you can't take chances. We buy camera traps from the US. I teach meagerly paid park rangers how to use them. Tripped motion sensors capture bulks of bodies moving through the untamed night. We comb the park for cable snares. We comb the sanctuary for poisoned water holes. I make a rhino genealogy. We monitor them. We keep them safe. We keep them safe from poachers because we know that in Africa—the international Alamo of mega-fauna conservation—the wildlife comes first.

TWIGS, BRANCHES, AND DIRT crunch and crack beneath our boots. Levy Chisola and Joseph Banda, dressed from head to toe in green and armed with M-16s, lead the way. We follow big foot-prints down a dried out creek bed. Levy, a seasoned tracker, bends down frequently to press the pads of his fingers into the places of the earth where Bentley—the sire of most of the sanctuary's young rhino—has left his mark. Levy reads the impressions in the wash and tastes for freshness. A rustle in the brush far off catches my ear. I hop up to the edge of the bank to locate the sound. I peer into the bush and lock eyes with a kudu—tall, beige, and grey. Its horns spiral elegantly into the air, and the low striped hump along its spine stands well above my head.

"Mzungu!" Levy calls out to me, deploying the Chichewa equivalent of gringo and jolting me from my reverie. The kudu starts and bounds off in long, spring-loaded leaps back into the bush. I jump back down into

the wash and crouch next to Levy who bites his lip and thinks. I grab the tape measure from my back pocket and mark the diameter of Bentley's print in a field journal. We follow clumps of scat and broken sticks up out of the creek-bed and into the woods, removing cable snares from trees and bushes as we go. We do our best to follow Bentley's tracks without losing sight of our transect. We pass a small watering hole not far from the river. The carcass of a young warthog—brown, withered and bloated—floats belly up in the languid, green waters. Rib bones poke out white and bloody through the matted hide. I mark the coordinates on my GPS unit and label the site: potentially poisoned waterhole. We press on.

After thirty minutes of bushwhacking we realize we've lost Bentley's track and return to our transect to link up with the intended rendezvous site with Jack and GJ. As we approach a clearing, the sour smell of rot and death rises up on the air and almost knocks me out. I double over and try to catch my breath. Levy and Joseph chuckle while I regain my composure. We push into the clearing, rifles raised and noses pinched. As we emerge from the trees we come upon the culprit of the stench. A big grey body the size of a semi-truck lies cold and lifeless in the warm dirt. Flies hum and buzz amid rising vapors of decomposition. The mottled hide wraps tightly around the elephant's room-sized rib cage and jagged haunch-bones. Even partially decomposed, it's the largest elephant I've seen yet in the park. We walk up close, arms over our faces, and inspect the carcass. Tusks intact. Tail untouched. Presumably a natural death. Or perhaps an unintended victim of water-hole poisoning. "A few days. Maybe a week," Levy concludes. I note the coordinates in the GPS. Levy checks his watch and mutters something I can't make out in Chichewa to Joseph. Joseph nods. The two unsheathe their machetes and walk around to the elephant's rear. They bend down, grab hold of the elephant's limp tail, and hack off the broom-like end of it. I ask them what they're doing and they tell me they'll give me an elephant hair bracelet for free if I don't tell Jack.

These bracelets sell to tourists for twenty to thirty bucks a pop which goes a long way in kwacha. I have a hard time saying no to the machetes in their hands. I know too how little they get paid and that I, an adolescent mzungu with zero prior tracking experience, get paid more than they. I know that at least half of the rangers poach bush-meat to feed their hungry families because they can't afford to do otherwise. I consent to keep my mouth shut. Levy shoves the tail into his pack and we push on to the rendezvous. The pungent scent of death hangs over the duration of our four-mile walk back to the river.

"Well?" Jack asks me gruffly when we reach him along the banks of the Shire. I recount our findings. "We'll send some runners to inspect that water hole tomorrow." I nod. "How many snares?" I hand him twenty-three. "Good work. We'll add 'em to the rack." He smiles. "Alright brus. Let's go home, eh?"

We follow the edge of the river back towards camp. The air cools off as the sun sets. A light breeze blows over the water and rustles the leaves and swirls the dust about our feet. Kingfisher, heron, and four hundred other bird species return to their nests. We pass a family of warhogs strung up in a tree by barbed wire, genitalia mutilated. "Fookin' bastards," Jack mutters

to no one in particular. I mark the site on the GPS and we continue walking into the setting red grapefruit of a sun in somber silence. Two miles from camp we hear the unmistakable cries of an animal caught in a trap. We cut left into the bush and stumble upon the prone body of a young female impala thrashing wildly on the forest floor. The sinister barbed wire of a cable snare coils out from around the base of a nearby shrub and loops tightly around her ankle.

"GJ!" Jack commands. GJ—Jack's twenty-six year old, lion-haired assistant—runs up alongside the body of the flailing animal and holds down her forelegs. Jack stabilizes her neck with his meaty hands and I grab hold the ungulate's rear leg. The flesh and hide have been pulled back like a sleeve from around her ankle bone. The tips of her ribs stick out precariously against a thin layer of skin. It's apparent she's been here for a number of days. I cringe, grit my teeth, and try to loosen the wire. She screams and flails as the cable rubs deep against her exposed bone. Joseph gets a knee on her neck and Levy holds down her hindquarters. I breathe and do my best to calmly work the snare loose without causing further damage. After a bit of wriggling, I work the loop

of wire free from around her ankle and it comes off in bloody clumps of flesh and fur.

"On three!" Jack announces. We brace ourselves. "One... two... THREE!" All four men release their hold on the frail creature at once. In a flurry of limbs the doe rises and bolts. She takes ten shaky leaps before landing back in another snare. We repeat the process over again and let out long sighs of relief when she finally bounds off, out of sight, and back into the wild bush.

We spend some time clearing the area of remaining snares. It's arduous work. Though the traps are designed for common antelope, they're large enough to wrap around the legs of young and unsuspecting rhino and elephant calves. I take a trap in my hand and look at it. The wire seems familiar. I soon realize that the snare's been crafted from stretches of the park's outer fence. I do my best to stifle a laugh. We rack up the rest of the life-claiming loops.

Just as we're packing up and about to return to camp, a high-pitched whistle pierces the air. The strange melody draws near. We stand stalk-still and quiet and listen to the bush rustle when out steps a young boy of maybe fourteen years old. He smokes a cigarette. Khaki shorts, green vest, a baseball cap, and a dozen snares looped around his forearm. He's come to collect his bounty and his traps. I watch his eyes lock with



Cat Skull in Ink | RACHEL CRAMER

the ice blue of Jack's and a subsequent wave of fearful recognition washes over his face. He tries to bolt but Jack fires a shot at the ground beneath his feet. The boy freezes. Jack raises his pistol and walks forward. The still smoking cigarette falls from the boy's lips as he starts to shake. Jack presses the cold mouth of the silver gun hard into the boy's sweating forehead. In a series of movements that seem rehearsed, Jack takes the boy by the neck, throws him to the ground, and slips one of the snares over his head. Jack synchs the wire tight around

the boy's neck and drags him in a cloud of rising dust across the flat and to the edge of the river. Levy, Joseph, GJ, and I all stand back and stand witness. I follow their lead and opt not to intervene lest I be made a target of Jack's rage. The boy chokes and gasps for air. He writhes along the dusty ground and flails like the doe. He tries to grab hold of a root protruding from the ground, but Jack wrenches him free. When the two reach the river's edge, Jack lifts the boy high above his head and throws him in like a sack of potatoes.

"Say hi to the crocs for me, ya fookin' kaffir." Jack fires a few shots into the water around the boy's thrashing limbs. Eventually, the boy rises up and gasps for air. With one hand pulling loose the noose from around his neck, he swims to the far side of the river and drags his dripping body up and on to the river bank. Jack laughs and lets out one more shot before turning back and continuing along the river's edge towards camp.

"Better than jail. Or ten feet under. He must be feelin' nice today," GJ croaks into my ear before taking

me. "You doin' okay?"

"I'm fine," I lie, and take a swig.

"It's okay if you're not. It's sticky stuff."

"I don't get Jack."

"I know. Me neither." He inhales. "Though I wouldn't judge him too harshly. He's a good man. But he's seen some shit." GJ tells me about Jack. He tells me about the time Jack served in the Special Forces during the Rhodesian War. He tells me about the landmines he laid in Mozambique. The same ones that lie silent beneath the dirt to this day. The same ones that blow up unsuspecting children into bits and pieces on their way to school. He tells me about Jack's divorce and about his two daughters who now live in Australia. He tells me about Jack's love of animals. He tells me how much Jack misses his two daughters.

"Has he told you about how he wants blacks sterilized? Has he told you how he thinks the UN should pay white people to have kids?" I ask.

"He's complicated. I don't always agree with him. Or

An ancient species now stands poised on the knife-edge of extinction so that international masculinities might be reinforced.

off. I stand a moment alone along the river's edge and watch the boy shiver pathetically on the other side. After he works the snare from around his neck, we make eye contact. I see a fire burning in the brown of his irises. He glares. And glares. And glares. A minute goes by before I turn and continue down the path towards camp. I don't look back. I can't get my hands to stop shaking.

THAT NIGHT I GRAB A BOTTLE of Old Number Seven from my tent and a pack of cigarettes. I go to the river and watch the moon rise up over a heron standing alone on the water's edge. I take long, quick, desperate drags and drink straight from the bottle. After a few minutes I hear footsteps behind me in the dark.

"Mind if I join?" GJ croaks through the hole in his throat. At age three, GJ, Dutch by heritage but born in Malawi, contracted one of the rarest forms of throat cancer known to modern medicine. His was the third documented case of its kind. This has done little to prevent him from becoming the most talkative, charming, thoughtful, and charismatic person I know. Let alone hamper his romantic successes. He reads my silence as affirmation and sits down on the dirt next to

his actions. But you need to understand how little you understand. You just got here." I shake my head and take another long drag.

"I think he made me give him steroids a few weeks ago."

"Up the ass?"

"Yeah."

"Yeah."

We watch the heron stand in silence beneath the moonshine. The night settles into a quiet stillness. It's soon interrupted by a loud splash. In a flash of moving scales the heron disappears between the jaws of a crocodile, the body of which we barely see before it retreats quick and wraith-like into the water. A few feathers fall slowly to the earth. "Well, I'm gonna hit the sack," GJ croaks. I get up with him and we lay our sleeping pads far from the river's edge.

LATE IN THE NIGHT I wake up with a bladder full of whiskey. I crawl out of my sleeping bag and unzip near a big baobab tree about fifteen yards away. I exhale and relieve myself on the base of the tree's trunk. About mid-stream, I hear a loud rustling emit from out of the

bush across a dried stretch of empty ground. I squint my eyes to make out the bodies moving in the dark. Large silhouettes work their way across the cracked flat land towards my position. One large one, one medium sized one, and two smaller ones. When I realize it's a small family of elephants heading fast to feast upon the tree I'm currently marking I cut myself off mid-stream, zip up, sprint softly back to my bed on the dirt, and slip into my sleeping bag. I spend minutes that seem like hours frozen while the creatures enjoy their dinner of fruits and leaves just fifteen yards away from my bed. I muster up the courage to turn and look. The mother heaves to and fro about her calves. I watch her probe my mark along the tree with her trunk. She starts, grunts, and lifts her trunk high into the air. She catches my scent on it and turns to face me. Elephants have poor vision but a wonderful sense of smell. She leaves her children unattended and ambles towards me. I turn, ever so slowly, to face the other way. I try to play dead but my heart slams loudly against the walls of my chest. The footsteps draw nearer. I feel the ground shake slightly beneath the weight of each of her footsteps. Soon she's right on top of me. I can smell her musk. I hear her long breaths. She sniffs my neck and my head. I feel the whiskers of her trunk brush against the back of my neck and ears. My fingers grip tightly around the small sticks of dynamite in my left pocket. I hold my breath. After a few minutes of inspection, the matriarch lets out a loud trumpeting *brroouuu* from her trunk and trots back to rejoin her children at the base of the tree. I release the air in my lungs and my grip on the dynamite and start to shake.

After a few minutes, I calm down and turn and watch the family eat. The mother eyes me cautiously as I rise out of my sleeping bag and tiptoe to a nearby rock. I wake GJ up, and the two of us sit and smoke and watch the elegant animals eat fruit and branches and rub their tusks against the trees beneath the moonshine by the river.

THE NEXT DAY I tell Jack I'm taking the night off. I go into town and meet Jimmy at a small dance club. We roll a joint in the street outside, find a bench to sit on, smoke, and catch up. A few men sit around a fire nearby and drink. The grapefruit sun sets on the river. I tell Jimmy about life in the bush. He tells me about life selling pet food. We laugh and go inside.

The sounds of Sawa-Sawa blast through the speakers. We meander our way through the sweaty crowd of men and find a seat at the bar. We drink cheap beer. The night drags on and we get progressively more and more hammered. At some point I lose him and

find myself rocking out to Nigerian dance music in some corner alone. I lose myself in the lyrics. *Ashawo, awusha, ashowa, awusha, a bom bom*. See them girls them plenty. I said ah waka waka baby. I said ah wuru wuru baby. Got that alci alco-hol. I said sawa sawa baby. One of the few women in the club approaches and we begin to dance. We dance and dance and drink. Sweat rolls down our bodies. Our hips move close until we're practically conjoined. The promise of more sends drunk tingles into the back of my brain. Eventually we stumble out into the star-filled night and just as I'm about to hail a bike-taxi to carry us away, Jimmy storms out of the club screaming.

"GIB! BWANA GIB! NO!" I turn around, confused. He runs up and pulls me away. He whispers into my ear. "No, Gibson. No. She's no good."

"Why?"

"She's sick."

"Sick?"

"She has AIDS."

A weight sinks into my stomach. I hold my head in my hands. The woman calls out to Jimmy and he goes to negotiate with her. When he returns he holds out his hand.

"She wants money."

"Money?"

"For her time."

"She's a hooker?!"

"What'd you expect, bwana?" I hand him a couple hundred kwacha and vomit into the dirt.

I WAKE UP IN A STRANGE BED in the morning next to Jimmy. I don't remember getting there. Jimmy makes me eggs and gives me a ride back to the park on the back of his bike. Every few minutes I lean over off the side of the rear passenger cushion and yak on the road.

"*Papani nzanga mwanga. Papani.*" He pats me on the back.

"Hakuna fucking matata, Jimmy. Hakuna fucking matata." I go back to work that afternoon.

IT'S BEEN HALF A DECADE since I last heard from Jack and GJ. I often consider returning, but I have no idea what I'd do if I did. The last email I got from GJ said that Jack had moved up to work in South Sudan. When I asked GJ why Jack moved, he told me: Because he can actually shoot poachers up there. Also, he got caught laundering IFAW's money.

I don't regret the four months I worked in Liwonde for IFAW and Jack. I achingly miss the country and its characters, motley and imperfect as they are. I've learned since that this space and these memories are best entered

without judgment or pretense. But I do often question my precarious presence in that complicated country and unpredictable landscape. I often question how it was that I made it out alive. Then I look at the color of my skin and I remember and I thank the people who went out of their way to keep me safe.

I do my best to maintain email communication with Jimmy. He's had a few surgeries and a few bouts of malaria since I last saw him. But he's doing well. Still selling pet food. Still drinking occasionally and getting his heart broken. But he's not "sick" yet, and that's reassuring.

The nights I dream of Africa, I often dream of elephants. I'm standing on the bank of the river, looking into the eye of the matriarch. I feel my body

drown in the well-worn pool of her massive eye. I press my head into her trunk and cry. This feeling wells up from some torn, devastated and unknown place. While saving animals often comes at the expense of human lives in Africa, while sub-Saharan animal conservation has a lot of kinks to be worked out, there is undeniably something worth protecting here. The Alamo of biodiversity demands one last stand, but iron-clad saviors may only bring ruin. I don't have answers. I'm not sure anyone does. So I press my head into her trunk. Crickets chirp. The night is quiet and the birds have returned to their nests. A fourteen-year-old boy shivers on the bank of a river. He returns home to his family without meat. ♪



Heaven in Central Washington | BRENDAN MORRISON

Road Trance

FICTION | KEVIN SCOTT CHESS



Oregon Desert in Winter | DOV WEINMAN

... and the pretty winds blow down.

All was wide open. The throttle, for there was room to ride. The windows, to keep cooler in 110 degree heat. Wind blew in one ear and out the other, then back again. Stereo blasting full volume in order to be heard over all else.

The dust devil in his head danced to the combination of all he knew, as his eyes remained fixed on the stripe of pavement stretching to beyond, flawed by wavy mirages spawned by the heat of the southern Imperial Desert.

Turning his head to stare at the talcum powder consistency of the contoured white sand revealed a vision not matching the cacophony of sounds attacking his ears. Somebody never leaving the highway may not believe that worlds of life exist beyond the limits of their own vision. Life trained him, however, that it was better to keep the desert peripheral and focus instead on the drive, falling into a road trance.

His hands had not changed position on the steering wheel for miles.

The monotony was finally broken. Ahead on the side of the highway: a car. Looked like a long luxury model, the type he and his buddies called a "big boat." He approached, slowed, stopped next to it.

It sat just beyond the shoulder, where the desert resumed. Although the big boat sat still, its rear wheels threw up rooster tails of sand, some of which hung in the air. He sat in his own car on the highway, next to the big boat, as if they both were at a stoplight.

An old married couple sat inside. He turned down the music out of respect, as if he were in a hospital zone. But for the occasional spinning of the big boat's wheels, it was shockingly and suddenly quiet.

The back end of the big boat was mired deep in the powder. The wheels spun and slowed, gradually. Spun and slowed, gradually.

The old couple sat transfixed in the same road trance he'd been in moments earlier. They stared straight ahead, the man's hands clutching the steering wheel at 10:00 and 2:00. It was as if they were driving down the road, but they weren't going anywhere, except for deeper and deeper in the sand.

Still they stared, straight ahead, not talking for miles. ☹

ICE OUT

NOELLE SULLIVAN

Where our streets taper west a frozen ocean grows:
all the town's stripped blankets and godsent insulation
now turned to the roar of machines and public address.
They'll hold races to see who can carve an oval tattoo
deepest into the grain of humanity. What a scar!

Sleds revved by spastic thumbs buzz by.
Beyond, the blue mountains watch like wise elders
waiting for us to get over our youth. A yellow dream
floats above the horizon, hinting at longer life
beyond the lodgepole line.

No entry. Area closed. Take these signs
as false flags and climb the plowmade pile
to find a chunky moraine held by a web of ideas.
Read your future in field bones of snow.

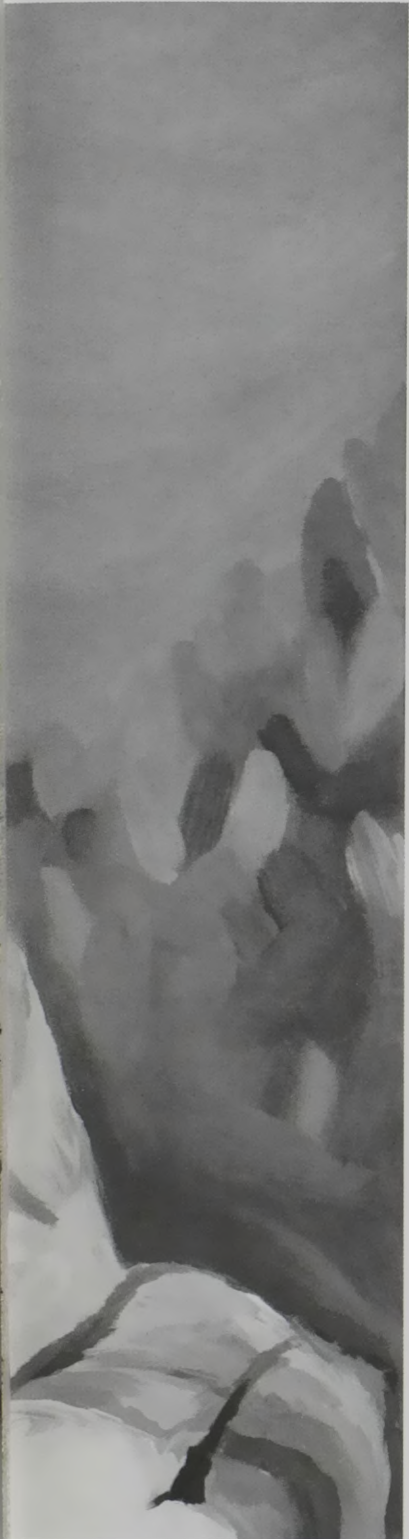
Why all this noise? the elders ask.
You'll find yourself faster in the owl realm,
the murky midday, listening for movement under the snow.
Wait and watch and winter will end, all ice sparkling
in the melt, everything feeding the rush of spring.



The Watcher | KATIE MARTIN

RED WINGS

TOM VERSTEEG



early spring is so
autumnal the same light
washing in low across the same golds
and browns and matted greys the same glow
late in the day haloing
each stalk and flourish that rises
from the common tangle
the same hard slap
in the air that leaves the face
tingling
the same stillness
in possession of the cattails
the reeds the leafless aspen trees
then
one bright shuttle of trills
and a second answering from across the marsh

ICE FROGS

P.V. BECK

Spring broke out one morning and sent a tremor through the marsh
where the frogs were dreaming, cranking their icy bodies slow
ice after ice.

The willows smelled like licorice

and clouds drifted along the foothills like smoke.

Black strings of ravens fly along the mountains over ponds and bogs
where frogs spawn in soft ringed corners of the earth

waiting out life in a gelatinous cloudburst of eggs on windy water.

Fox traipses around the pond sniffing the perfume of popping buds,
the air rhythmic with the sound of peepers.

She listens to their floating chorus and hears the turning, creaking
rounding of the earth.

That ancient tune, the singing ooze of primeval birth.

THE SUMMERIEST CONCERT EVER

CODA | BRIAN DOYLE

THE SUMMERIEST CONCERT I ever attended, or survived, was at a rambling old hotel called the Club Casino, in New Hampshire, so close to the beach that people would run out of the surf and into the huge ballroom when they heard a band open its set with a resounding crash.

The Casino was a rambling old wooden castle built in the nineteenth century and only fitfully renovated since; it has tremendous pharaonic pillars in front and the biggest rickety ballroom I had or have ever seen. The ballroom was crammed with a thousand battered tables with their battered complements of battered chairs, and the tables were so uniformly unstable and teetering that many patrons believed that the management deliberately never repaired the tables for fear of lost beer sales. This may well have been true; the Casino in general was a rough and roughly run place; people could and did slip in through the windows, bribe the ticket-takers, smuggle in seas of whiskey, and brawl unheeded in dark corners; I remember one fistfight in particular between a slight calm Golden Gloves finalist and a furious burly guy in motorcycle gear which drew dozens of patrons interested in how a slight guy who could box could dismantle a guy easily twice his size, which he did. I asked the bartender later what the fight was about and he said a girl, of course, what else?

The band on the night of the summeriest concert ever was Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes, which I still think is the quintessential American bar band, raucous and loud but experienced masters of the pace and rhythm of a show where people are out to have a wild good time dancing and drinking and shouting; a Jukes show was, and probably still is, as far from a polite sit-down-and-peacefully-enjoy-the music event as you can imagine. Even when they played an occasional slow ballad people would be standing and swaying and kissing and guzzling until the band shifted gears and slammed into the next roaring song.

It had been blazing hot that day, and the ballroom was muggy and thick and dense with smoke and heat; muscle cars could be heard rumbling up and down the brief strip along the beach outside; the sharp scent of bad whiskey and the sour friendly scent of sloshed beer filled the room to the brim; people were wearing shorts and flipflops and headbands and tank tops and boots and denim shirts and sunglasses; shirts advertising every college and sports

team imaginable were soaked with sweat and beer; people were cheering and laughing and shouting and singing along at the top of their voices; here and there whole knots of people were hanging onto each other's shoulders as they sang along; Southside Johnny bellowed hoarsely and conducted the drunken chorus with aplomb and skill and what sure seemed like utterly genuine delight; the drummer appeared to hammer louder and louder as the night went on, though I do not know how that could be; the guitars snaked and wailed and preened and wheedled and sneered; and most of all, best of all, the horn section swung and shrieked and rattled the windows with a collective explosive sound like a stupendous brassy fist. I still have never heard a horn section so perfectly synchronized at such a ferocious pitch. I loved the music, marveled at the musicians, relished the wild cacophony of the room and my friends, but it is that astonishing horn section that I remember best. It was utterly wild and wonderfully organized at once; it was both piercing and embracing; it was part of the collective even as it was adamantly itself, brothers in brass; and somehow, even then, even in the hilarious maelstrom of the show in the ballroom on the beach, it seemed particularly and essentially American.

I suppose the show ended finally, after many encores, and I suppose we all filed out and filled the streets and the beach for a while, herded by cops, and I suppose eventually Hampton Beach was quiet, until the first surfcasters appeared again on the beach at dawn. But I don't remember any of that. I only remember the show, the horns, the rough joy, the subtle Americanness of it all. I remember that vividly. I remember how one great thing can hint gently but unmistakably at another deeper great thing. It was only a summer concert, years ago, in a rattling old wooden castle on the beach; but somehow, mysteriously, it was also a wild rough showy loud beery joyous story about something else. Youth, certainly, and summerness, and rock and soul music; but something else that has to do with who we are as a collective, as brassy brothers and sisters, as citizens of a place that still might be unlike any other country that ever was. There is a country beyond this country that we still might get to if we sing together, as loud as we can, swaying and laughing and hanging onto each other's shoulders with heedless glee. ♪



Eagle County Fair & Rodeo | **DALLAS CROW**

JEFFREY ALFIER's latest chapbooks are *Southbound Express to Bay Head* (Grayson Books, 2016) and *The Red Stag at Carrbridge—Scotland Poems* (Aldrich, 2016). Recent credits include *Cold Mountain Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Hotel Amerika*.

P.V. BECK is a poet, musician and artist who has lived most of her life in the mountains of northern New Mexico. She has a Ph.D. focused on the ethnography of fools and ritual masquerades, and has authored works of nonfiction and young-adult fiction. Her most recent poems are from *Fox Went Out*, a collection that evokes a gray fox's life in a habitat under seige.

CARL BOWLBY was born and raised in the Berkshires of Massachusetts and currently resides there. He first attended college in 1990 at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., studying poetry and fiction, and then transferred to New York University where he took up painting in 1992.

KEVIN SCOTT CHES has spent many years as an investigator, regularly dealing with people of varying degrees of sanity, dependency, instability and hidden agenda. He began to write as a systematic refuge (translate: "outlet") in order to alleviate stress and anxieties addressed in his occupation. Kevin's works can be found in *105 Five-Minute Plays for Study and Performance* and (upcoming) *Yellow Chair Review*.

ABBY CHEW earned an M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her first book of poems, *Discontinued Township Roads*, is available from WordTech, Inc. Her poems have appeared in *The Cincinnati Review* and *Heartwood*. She teaches at Crossroads School in Santa Monica, Calif.

MACKENZIE COLE's work has appeared in *Beecher's*, *Big Sky Journal*, 491, and is forthcoming in *Ghost Town* and *Passages North*. He is the founder and janitor of Milltowne Press, and he lives in Missoula, Mont., where he received his M.F.A. from the University of Montana. Keep up with him at deadfallsandsnares.com.

GIBSON COLLINS was born in London, grew up splitting time between Seattle and the Sawtooth Mountains in Idaho, and recently graduated from Whitman College with a major in Environmental Humanities and a minor in Politics. He is grateful to call the American West (its mountains, its deserts, and its coastlines) his home and current romping grounds.

RACHEL CRAMER counts herself lucky to have grown up in the country, a place of rolling ridges and rippling grass in southwest Iowa. The natural world taught her to pause, to observe, and to wonder at the intricate beauty all around her, and these experiences led her to pursue an education based in art and science. Eventually, it brought her to Montana to pursue a master's degree in Environmental Studies.

DALLAS CROW's writing has appeared in *Aethlon: The Journal of Sports Literature*, *English Journal*, *The Flyfish Journal* and *Marathon & Beyond*. His poetry chapbook, *Small, Imperfect Paradise*, was published by Parallel Press in 2013, and his photograph, "Deconstruction," is on the cover of the current issue of *Midwestern Gothic*. He lives in Minnesota where he teaches high school English.

BRIAN DOYLE is the editor of *Portland Magazine* at the University of Portland. He is the author of many books of essays and fiction, among them the Northwest novels *Mink River* and *Martin Marten*.

CHARLES GURCHE has photographed nature and landscape for 28 years. He has received awards from the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History, the Society of Professional Journalists, Nature's Best International Photography Awards and the Washington State Governor's Book Awards. His images have appeared in hundreds of publications including *Audubon*, *National Geographic* and *Smithsonian*.

BRENNAN JOHNSON is a recent graduate from Whitman College in Walla Walla, Wash., where he honed his creativity in the Environmental Humanities and Film and Media Studies departments. A writer, photographer, and avid cook, he recently published a cookbook for his senior thesis titled *Planting Roots*. These days, Brennan can be found baking bread and pastries at the restaurant Rhubarb in Asheville, N.C., as well as writing and exploring the Appalachians in his off-days.

SETH KANTNER is a commercial fisherman, writer and wildlife photographer. He was born and raised in northern Alaska and his art

reflects his love for the land and the animals who live on it. His debut novel, *Ordinary Wolves*, won the Milkweed National Fiction Prize and the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award. He is also the author of *Shopping for Porcupine* and *Swallowed by the Great Land*.

JOHN KIRSCH is an editor in Mexico City. Before moving to Mexico, he was a reporter in Iowa, his native state, and Texas. His photographs have been published in *The Adirondack Review*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Buffalo Almanack*, *The Ofi Press Magazine* and *Midwestern Gothic*.

MARY PAULINE LOWRY's novel *Wildfire* (Skyhorse) was published in 2014. Her narrative nonfiction has appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *Huffington Post*, *xoJane* and other publications. She is currently an M.F.A. student at Boise State University.

KATE LUND completed her M.F.A. at the University of Montana in May 2016 and currently lives in Pinehurst, Idaho, with her husband, Chris, and dog, Smokey. She teaches art at Wallace High School and continues to spend her summers in the woods as a firefighter.

BRANDON MCMAHON is a photographer from the north end of the Bitterroot Valley in Florence, Mont.

BRENDAN MORRISON was born and raised in the rain shadow of the Central Washington Cascades. He enjoys photographing moments of adventure, awe and tranquility as people interact with wild areas. He is a design student at Western Washington University.

LEAH OATES' series *Transitory Space* was shot in Nova Scotia in 2015. Recently, her work has been featured in *Gulf Stream*, *Irreversible*, *Postit 1*, *Artvoices*, *Brooklyn Magazine*, *Vasa*, *Beautiful Decay*, *Eyesin*, *Diffusion* and more. Her works on paper are in many private and public collections.

KATIE MARTIN is a wildlife artist with a love of surfing, hiking, snowboarding, and the outdoors. She received a B.A. in Studio Art from the University of North Carolina Wilmington, where the ocean played an integral role in the inspiration for her artwork. After graduating, Katie moved west to the mountains of Colorado, where she discovered new landscapes and wildlife that are reflected in her more recent work.

TERRI NICHOLS is an Environmental Studies graduate student at the University of Montana. She lived for six years in the Flathead Valley, researching streams and wetlands and writing nonfiction articles for educational websites. Originally from Detroit, she earned her bachelor's in Journalism from Wayne State University. She also served as a Peace Corps agriculture volunteer in a small village in northern Zambia.

SAM OLSON was raised in the rain country of northwest Oregon and northwest Washington. He is a Wilderness and Civilization student at the University of Montana.

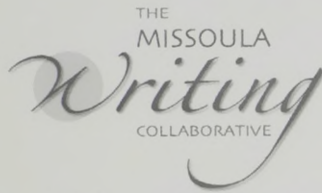
SARAH RAU PETERSON is a Montana native, born in Malta and raised in Butte. She has an English degree from Montana State University-Billings, and now lives with her husband, two children, three dogs, three cats, occasional chickens and a couple hundred cow-calf pairs (and their bulls) in the Pine Hills east of Miles City.

BRENNA RIETMANN is a graduate of the University of Montana. She grew up on a wheat farm in eastern Oregon and works for a local Soil and Water Conservation District.

NOELLE SULLIVAN stumbles along Montana rivers in all seasons. Her poems have appeared in *Crannog*, *Poetry Northwest* and other journals. She lives in West Yellowstone, Mont.

TOM VERSTEEG is a long-time resident of Spokane, Wash., where he teaches English at Spokane Falls Community College. His poems have appeared in *Cimarron Review*, *Mid-American Review* and *Rain City Review*, among others. He is a recipient of the Birmingham Poetry Review's Dean's Award for his poem "Thinking of the Heartland."

DOV WEINMAN is a photographer, mountain-poet, ultrarunner, activist and chicken caretaker, and calls both Oregon and Montana home. He has published poetry in *Whitefish Review*, *Poetica Magazine*, *Portland Review* and others. Dov received a M.S. in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana and is now a coastal resource management Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines.



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