Camas

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Camas, Winter 2020

THE NATURE OF THE WEST

Camas

WINTER 2020 | *Resilience* | FEATURING LAURA PRITCHETT

THE NATURE OF THE WEST

Camas

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Camas Magazine cultivates a community of writers and artists dedicated to promoting ecological and cultural diversity and resilience in the American West.

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* provides 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, Montana Natural History Center, the University of Montana Environmental Studies Program, and donors.

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Cormorant | NAOMI STOLOW

FROM THE EDITORS

This year has been long.

The beginning of 2020 brought with it a promise of change, of new beginnings, yet things quickly became bleak as the COVID-19 pandemic transformed life for people worldwide. Then, in May, a Minneapolis police officer kneeled on George Floyd's neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, killing him. This injustice made ripples far and wide, and brought forth an international outcry from people imploring our leaders to make a change to the corrupt systems oppression has flourished within for centuries.

Yet, amidst the heartache of this year and every year before it, people have been resilient. They always have.

Ecosystem resilience is defined as the ability of an ecosystem to maintain its core functions after being subjected to damage. Replace "ecosystem" with "human," and the definition works just the same.

The winter 2020 issue of Camas explores all the places in which resilience can be found, from polar bears trying to survive in Hudson Bay in Stephanie Maltarich's "Northern Migration" to Texas Hill Country where families have to pick up the pieces after tragedy strikes in Darby Williams' "Abrasion." Finally, in Laura Pritchett's "Calling Mother Earth on the Crisis Hotline", grief and anxiety and despair are countered with a resilient message from Mother Earth herself: there is still hope.

Winona and I are so delighted to publish such a fantastic selection of art, poetry, and prose that all speak to the resiliency of life on this wonderful planet. Thanks for reading. We hope you enjoy it as much as we have.

Best,

Claire Carlson and Winona Rachel

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dissociation

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think of how it feels
not how it looks.

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is liminal—
the empty airport,
desert campus in April,
gas stations no longer glowing—
finally ripe and lining
up with me
like stacks of dominoes
my body at helm,
a trigger,
threshold
for bursting
context like stars.

Here is how I soothe
myself:
I give reminders.
This muscle
I am tracing
growing lush
in blocks of time.
This ravine
I am crossing
filling with water
warm like that
night wash
of baby's hair.
This word I am tasting
reminding me of
the crow, raven,
corvid,
the white
patches of magpies
telling me
they are in flight.

Liminality | VELIBOR BAĆO

In the Hour Before Dark

FICTION | JAMES BRAUN

In the middle of Bill Chataway's fallow field, a chain-link fence stands no longer than I am tall. When I first saw it I thought there seemed no purpose to it, a fence in the middle of a field meant for farming. But after moving out of town and into the country last year with my father, helping Bill with the barn all summer and chopping wood in the winter for the woodstove, by then I knew, hearing the fence strung between two posts whipping in the wind that ripped through the cedars planted for a windbreak, the first sign of a storm without rain.

Last summer, Bill Chataway left early in late June in his pickup to town, pulling a trailer to load all he would bring home. My and my father's last house had foreclosed the week before, so I was out in our driveway unpacking the U-Haul while my father slept inside the house we were moving into, getting in a daytime nap before his night shift at the oil refinery across the river. I had watched our new neighbor Bill leave that morning, and when he returned, he drove up not his driveway but ours, parking on the dead patch of grass in our yard with sheets of plywood and two-by-fours stacked in the trailer and bed of his pickup. Bill stepped out onto the lawn and stood watching me drag my father's sideboard cabinet into the garage.

Need any help with that? he asked.

That's all right, I said. *I can get it.*

Bill circled around to the other end of the cabinet. *It'd go faster with the two of us.* He lifted and said, *And I'd rather not see you banging the hell out of this cabinet.*

Though there wasn't much left in the U-Haul to unpack by the time Bill came over, he helped me carry in the rest, and once we'd finished I pointed out to his truck and asked him if he might like a hand as well.

Can if you want, Bill said. *But you don't have to.*

I can. Just let me leave my father a note so he doesn't wake up wondering where I went.

I went in through the screen door and wrote where I'd be on a scrap piece of mail, though my father likely wouldn't wake until later. I came out through the front, heading down the concrete porch and over the driveway to Bill's truck, and stepped into the passenger-side seat. We drove up our gravel drive onto the road and turned down his, and it was there in Bill's yard that I got my first taste of wind, holding a plywood board on my head to carry to stack along the side of his house, the wind cutting through the windbreak with ease and blowing my thirteen-year-old hundred-pound self away with the plywood board, flying like a boy with a parachute made of wood across Bill Chataway's yard.

After helping Bill unload all he'd brought home from the hardware store, Bill and I stood on his porch, looking out over his field of corn. You could still see the chain-link fence out there, surrounded by knee-high stalks, and beyond that, the line of cedars.

What do you plan on using all those supplies for? I asked.

Going to build a new barn, he said. *Tore down the old one three weeks ago.*

Must be expensive.

Not at all. You'd be surprised how much people are willing to pay for old barn wood. What I sold in scraps of the last barn covered all of what I paid for in supplies for the new one.

A crow landed on Bill's fence, resting there.

Bill leaned into the porch railing and said, *If you'd like, you're welcome to help. Just keep in mind that I broke even on those supplies, so I can't pay a whole lot.*

I thought of my father then, how he was most nights away at the oil refinery across the river, most days asleep, and me, not having anything else to do or anyone around to do things with.

All right, I said.

The next morning, I woke early and walked the trails that ran through the cedars. I expected to wait there a while by the fencepost for Bill to let me in through the gate, but Bill was already standing there drinking his coffee and waiting for me to come over to his barn.

We walked across the furrows to the worksite, past the chain-link fence in the middle of the field and over to the concrete foundation that had already been filled by men Bill hired out from town. Bill worked the bandsaw while I marked cuts for measurements that Bill called out to me, and while we worked, I found myself looking to where Elena stood watching us from the back window of their house, a house that Bill every day left her alone in. In that face behind the glass you could see all the ways she didn't want Bill to have his barn, that she'd hardly ever see her husband again had he his barn, and though I'd never said so to Bill, I felt sorry for her, because if Bill wasn't working on his barn he was out in his field, Bill sometimes not even working, but just leaning against his chain-link fence and drinking his coffee among his corn.

But there was something the two of them shared in that country blown through with wind. Bill and Elena invited me in for dinner after working all day, and after dinner, the three of us went out on the porch, Bill sitting on the swing in his undershirt, Elena carrying the salt lick she

took from their mudroom closet to hang on the shepherd's hook at the edge of the windbreak. We sat on the porch swing, waiting for I didn't know what, until I saw the first of the whitetails come walking through the cornstalks, coming to take a lick at the salt lick, the three of us watching them together in the hour before dark.

Just as easily, it seemed to me, Bill and Elena could have bought the big fifty-pound block of salt that likely wouldn't roll away in the wind or be stolen by hunters trespassing on their land. But each night after that first night, Elena hung the salt lick, a small four-pound chunk of it with a rope looped through its middle, and each morning she came out and took it back into the house for no other reason than to hang it again in the evening for the whitetails to come.

Later, on a mid-July day, Bill and I were raising the first walls of the barn. I held the frame steady once we had it up, and while holding it for Bill to screw into the foundation, I asked him, *You ever hunt?*

Bill said, *No,* said he only liked to watch the deer through the break in his corn. He said it was how the cornstalks rustled in a way that didn't mean wind, how the whitetails' backs stuck up through the corn until it grew too high to see them and it was time to harvest, and when night came, all you could see of the deer was the white of their tails flicking back and forth in the dark.

By late August we had put in the paddock doors and hammered in metal sheets for siding, and come September, Bill got started on the roof, but stopped when he found morning frost on his corn that would kill it if Bill did not harvest soon. He covered the holes in the roof with a tarp against the winter that came early that year and worked the combine while Elena and I sold the corn at the farmers' market, a tented place on the river where I could look across at the flare stacks of the oil refinery my father worked in. Elena and I sat all day in sweatshirts on barstools, making change for customers, and after the market closed late at night, Elena and I drove back to their house, waking again before dawn to load the corn Bill harvested the day before in wicker baskets, us taking it to town to sell. I'd always wondered why Bill and Elena ever stayed farmers in that land, the wind blowing the seeds around even with the cedars planted to break the wind, a place with hardly any rain and not good for farming, but understood when families from all over came to our tent on the river to buy Bill's corn, the families willing to pay whatever price we had to have a sit-down family dinner with plates before them stacked with corn.

After the harvest, Bill and I had to hold off on the barn for a while, leaving the side shed and roofing and the cupola alone until spring. *It'll be here for us to return to,* he said. In those days when the snow covered Bill's field and the metal of the chain-link fence, I stayed home alone, bored and freezing in a house without heat, still seeing little of my father who took to staying with a girlfriend that lived in an apartment across the river, saving him the back and forth drive across the Blue Water Bridge. I ate frozen granola bars I'd break my teeth on to chew, kept awake at night by the sound of the tarp flapping against the roof and siding of Bill Chataway's barn, that sound carrying all the way over his field and through the cedars to me in bed.

I lived like that for two weeks until I heard snow and gravel under tires out in the driveway, Bill driving down it in his pickup and parking in the place where the dead patch of grass was covered in snow. From the rolled-down window of his truck to me standing on the porch of my and my father's frozen house, he called out, *Any chance you want to come over to help chop wood for the woodstove?*

Wait there a minute while I get my coat! I said, running back into the house.

I thought Elena would like winter since Bill would likely be home more, but I knew different after Bill and I drove out together to the cedars, chopping wood not for an hour or two but rather all day instead. When the cold blew through my coat and numbed my skin, feeling what felt to me like frostbite coming on, I told Bill I was going to head inside for a while to get warm. I left him there and walked across Bill's cleared field, entered their house through the back porch door, the snow behind me blowing into their kitchen to melt on the tile.

Elena stood over the gas stove, boiling water in a pot. *Sit down,* she said, pointing to the kitchen table. *Hot chocolate will be ready soon.*

I sat in the ladder-back chair while Elena poured in the hot-chocolate mix, stirring it with a large metal spoon. She brought over two cups, one for me and one for her, Elena letting her mug cool on the table while I burned my mouth trying to drink mine. We both looked out the back window where Bill was chopping wood and tossing it into the bed of his truck.

Do you ever miss him? I asked.

Of course, she said. *But I understand his desire to be alone.* Elena said before she and Bill were married, he was engaged to her cousin Laurel, whose father owned twenty acres of forest, most of it pine, a property on which rabbits lived and where men across the countryside often trespassed to hunt, Laurel's father not allowing others on the land. She said Laurel's father liked Bill though and let him hunt there when he wanted, and on one of their hunts in November, Bill and Laurel went out to see if they could

bring back any rabbits to stew. The two split off on the trail and wound up getting lost in all her father's acres. Laurel circled back along a deer path and came to where Bill was alone among the pines, and when Bill heard a rustling on the other side, Bill shot through and killed the woman he planned to marry that coming spring.

Bill spent a year in jail for it, Elena said. *But that wasn't the extent of his suffering. Laurel's death has stayed with him to this day.*

Elena and I sat there a while, drinking our hot chocolates. I didn't know what to say, though she seemed glad for the company, happy almost, so I stayed inside until Bill walked in late in the evening with icicles hanging from his beard and snow covering his Carhartt. Elena got up and walked to the mudroom closet, took out the salt lick to string up on the shepherd's hook, the three of us afterwards freezing on the porch waiting for the whitetails to walk across Bill's snow-covered field.

When March arrived, we woke one day to water droplets dripping from the chain-link fence and from the eaves of the Chataways' house. Bill and I went into town to pick up the last of the supplies for the barn, more stacks of metal sheets and boxes of nails, four wood pillars for the side shed. I unloaded with Bill, him then having me hand up supplies to him that he was in need of, me on the ground, Bill on the roof hammering in the sheets above. The windstorms hardly seemed to bother him at all up there, Bill's boots holding well on the footholds of the barn's rafters.

In April, Bill plowed his fields but held off on planting, wanting to finish the barn before doing so. By then Bill and I were down to the last few sheets of roofing and expected to be done before the week was out, though there came a day when it was getting late into the evening and getting dark, Bill not even stopping when Elena walked out to hang the salt lick, not watching the whitetails with her so he could continue working on his barn. I stayed out with him for as long as I could, helping with the handing-up of the last metal sheets, until Bill told me, *You can head on home, son. I'll finish up here and meet you in the morning.*

I looked up to him then, Bill's body an outline against the darkening sky, a toolbelt at his waist and a claw hammer in his hand. I didn't want to leave him there, wanted to ask, *Are you sure?* but also wanted to understand, to know him like Elena came to, as a man that needed time alone to be away from the world that gave him in his heart a hurt without end, even if that time meant a few hours of working by himself long after the hour before dark.

All right, I said, *I'll see you tomorrow, then.* I headed back along Bill's field with the feeling of wind whistling through my coat, hearing the chain-link fence out there begin to rattle. I opened the gate and walked through the trail of cedars, only to return once again to an empty house. I remember dreaming inside of sirens without noise, lights without color.

In the morning I woke early as always, skipped breakfast to see what Elena might have for me to eat, and walked through the trees, waiting at the fencepost for Bill to let me in. I waited there a good two to three hours, wondering where Bill had gone, until I left and walked back up the gravel drive of my and my father's house and onto the road and down the Chataways'. Bill's pickup wasn't in their yard, and when I went around the side of their house, I saw only a single sheet of metal roofing laying on the ground, an empty space in the roof of the barn where a roof was meant to be.

Elena and Bill both were gone for about three weeks, where in the meantime I walked out each morning and waited by the fencepost for Bill, not seeing him but hoping he would come, one day, to let me in. One morning I spotted Elena sitting on their porch swing, looking out across Bill's field. I raised a hand to her, though she likely couldn't see me for her old-age eyes and with the way the wind was coming through.

I walked back up the drive and onto the road and down the Chataways', and went around their house to sit beside Elena on the porch swing. Elena looked three-weeks sleepless when I came to her side, and when she saw me she said she was sorry she didn't come to let me know. She told me the night Bill sent me home he didn't come in at all, but stayed out working to finish the barn, even with the chain-link fence whipping back and forth out there like mad. Elena said she let him be and turned in for bed, but woke in the night when she felt an absence of the body that was most every night beside her. She went out the back door to call for Bill, but received no answer except for the last of a storm that had come without rain blowing at her on the porch.

When she found him, he was laying face up on the ground beside the barn. Elena said he couldn't speak and when he did speak it was not words that came out. She said there was no blood that she could find, but when she looked into Bill's eyes she saw he was not looking with eyes that were his but with eyes that looked drowned. Elena said she called an ambulance and waited there beside him until they arrived, the paramedics loading Bill on a stretcher to take him to the town hospital, where Bill was still at when Elena said what she said to me on the porch, that Bill had landed wrong on his spine and was paralyzed

from the neck down.

The corn went unharvested that year, the fields left to turn fallow the next. There would be no more planting. When Bill came home after another month in the hospital, Elena bided her time taking care of him, wheeling him where he wanted to go, carrying him to bed. I hoped Elena might hire me out to help with Bill, though without their harvest they likely no longer had the money to do so. In the months after, I started coming to them again, not in the mornings to work but in the evenings in the hour before dark, hidden among the cedars to wait for Elena to hang the salt lick for the whitetails, and in that hour, the wind picking up, blowing at Elena and Bill Chataway on the porch with the fence in the middle of Bill's field beginning to rattle.

Tenderness | SARAH PLATENIUS

The Very Hungry Caterpillar

NONFICTION | PAULINA JENNEY

Yesterday, I met my nephew for the first time. He is eight weeks old, 23 inches long, and weighs ten and a half pounds. He has dark blue eyes and dark red hair and a soft, round mouth that sits above a tiny little knuckle of a chin. His eyes focus to meet mine for short bursts of time and he smiles in the moments before drifting off to sleep. Because of the pandemic, he's lived the first two months of his life within the confines of his home. For all William knew until yesterday, the world was a small place with white walls and a fuzzy couch and just two other large humans in it.

Now the nation is reopening, and people are giving up on social distancing, those of us unaffected by the virus are growing more and more confident that we won't or can't be infected by it. Since lockdown began, my brother has undergone a transformation all his own, and none of his family knew anything about it except the tired updates and bath time photos we got though a cell phone screen. So he and his wife chose me, the only party of one who could drive across the state and roll a duffel into the guest bedroom on a moment's notice, to be the first of kin to welcome their child into the world. I did my best to isolate in the week leading up to my visit and drove four hours straight to their house, managing to make it without having to stop for gas. I let myself in the front door. My brother pointed to his baby, sleeping on a mat on the floor, so perfect and untroubled, and I cried.

It is a universal experience, I'm sure, to see that a sibling has evolved into a parent when someone wasn't looking. We went from fighting over the remote, from sharing dad's barbecue, from ignoring each other in the hallways, to being people with wristwatches and haircuts and a living dependent who will one day call us dad and aunt. One day we were children, and then I closed my eyes, moved away, spun around, and came back and now we are something different.

This morning while William slept, I sat on the carpet in the nursery my brother built, looking at the mobile, the rocking chair, the framed pictures of bunny rabbits and hand-lettered quotes. Even though the baby is not yet verbal, he's already amassed a library of classic literature, stacked neatly in a soft rope basket that matches the grey and white gender neutral theme of his nursery. *Mama Do You Love Me?*, *Sam I Am* and, of course, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, with its finger-painted fruits and white, holey pages.

When my brother and I were little, our parents, like so many other Americans, worked full-time jobs, struggling to pay the bills on separate double-wide trailers. Since they couldn't watch us during the day, we went to a baby sitter down the street named Linda. While other nannies might have let us watch shows or color or craft, Linda taught us to read. Over bowls of goldfish we worked on our letters, phonetics, and our vocabulary. In the divorce agreement, my mom retained every possible minute of custody, so my dad, a contractor, would come over to Linda's house on his lunch breaks to play with us. After months of studying, I was eager to impress him, and I read my dad my first book at three years old. Later, when kindergarten started, my teacher occasionally let me lead circle time. I picked my favorite book, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and read it upside down, like a real teacher, so my classmates could see the pictures.

In *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, the main character eats his ways through the days of the week, starting with an apple, then a few plums, a bunch of oranges. He overindulges with cheese and sausage and chocolate cake on Saturday, to the point where he needs to eat a salad and then sleep for two weeks. When he wakes up, he is a butterfly. While the book is supposed to impart several, layered messages to children, including that eating too much cake will give you a tummy ache, its ultimate goal is to make sure kids understand that one day, they'll emerge from a cocoon a beautiful butterfly.

The problem is that real metamorphosis is nothing like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, or at least not always. Although many segmented, land-bound creatures do turn into beautiful butterflies, many more of them turn into moths or fleas. And no one ever talks about what goes on inside that dark swaddle, what parts of our exoskeletons must be discarded, and whether it's supposed to hurt or not, and where the wings come from, if we'll come out with a sting or a propensity for nighttime.

In my favorite cartoon, a sketch by Liana Finck, a poorly drawn caterpillar rages at a beautiful orange and black butterfly, their faces inches apart, her antenna arched in desperation. "Tell me how you did it," the caterpillar

pleads with the butterfly. Of course, she doesn't yet know that the butterfly has done nothing special to become one. On good days, I tell myself that I am the caterpillar and my future self is the butterfly, that being beautiful and aerial is inevitable, and I will have to do nothing but keep munching leaves and sleeping and making myself comfortable to metamorphosize. On bad days, I am the caterpillar, again, and other people are the butterflies, smug in their ability to fly but having done nothing extraordinary to earn it. On very bad days, I remember that the average life span of a butterfly is, on the long end, two weeks, and on the short end, two days, and that even if I somehow do reach some nirvanic state of butterfly-dom, it will be short-lived and ultimately end in death.

This weekend, I held my nephew, and I stared at his tiny little face, and thought about how cocooned we are, not only because there is literally nowhere to go with a baby in a pandemic, especially when it is 106 degrees outside, but because the world outside is too bright and noisy and we are changing. The news keeps saying that after this, things will never be the same, but I worry that they will, and I wonder if it's possible to go into metamorphosis a worm and fail to become anything else. They say that now is a time for change, to shed the old world that plagues us, but I wonder exactly what we are changing into, and whether it will be the kind of world a child can grow up in, floating around with pollinators and flowers, or whether it will be infested with wasps, or moths, or swarms of murderous hornets.

It's hard to make promises you can keep, even to a baby who can't speak. So I open the book, I point at the apples, the plums, the lollipops. "And he built a small house around himself," I say, "And he stayed inside for more than two weeks..."

And instead of turning the page, I look down at the small being in my arms. He looks back at me, waiting, unaware of the way the story always ends. I close the book a page early. In his dark blue, unchanged eyes, I have to see the possibility of a generation already born with wings.

DIYA | ARINZE NDIELI

Approaching Denver

POETRY | JOEY MANCINELLI

As if Damascus, a road plateaus into glass
matches hovering the valley's horizon,
clear as Visine in the eye of god's
phone camera.

Denver is tinder, ready to burn through aspens and faces of men,
how much higher Tenochtitlan, I dream of affairs to lengthen
myself as Optiv Tower, wishing of another's hard-driven
download.

Trimming my legs, Electra, waiting for darkness and thousand
salaries waxing like the moon, I walk toward the top
of the mountain each night, praying East for pixels
jeweled off skyline.

How many elevator rides to be recognized in reflections
of highest lakes and tinted windows, how smooth and razored
as stainless steel I wanted abdomen in modern
curtainless showers.

For bullet holed, Buffalo Bill stacking cartridges into virtual display cases,
rising personas up chairlifts and loading meat into picture frames,
would I send photographs of yearning, scrolls through messages
unfounded. *How big?* I ask of strangers.

Why I hiked upward for images not of sky,
praying backward to laminate walkways peeling
if onlys from my mind.

Sworded, I once urged into rocky temple
ready to cut free from worrying pills on t-shirts
but materialized like dye willing to blend, to bleed.

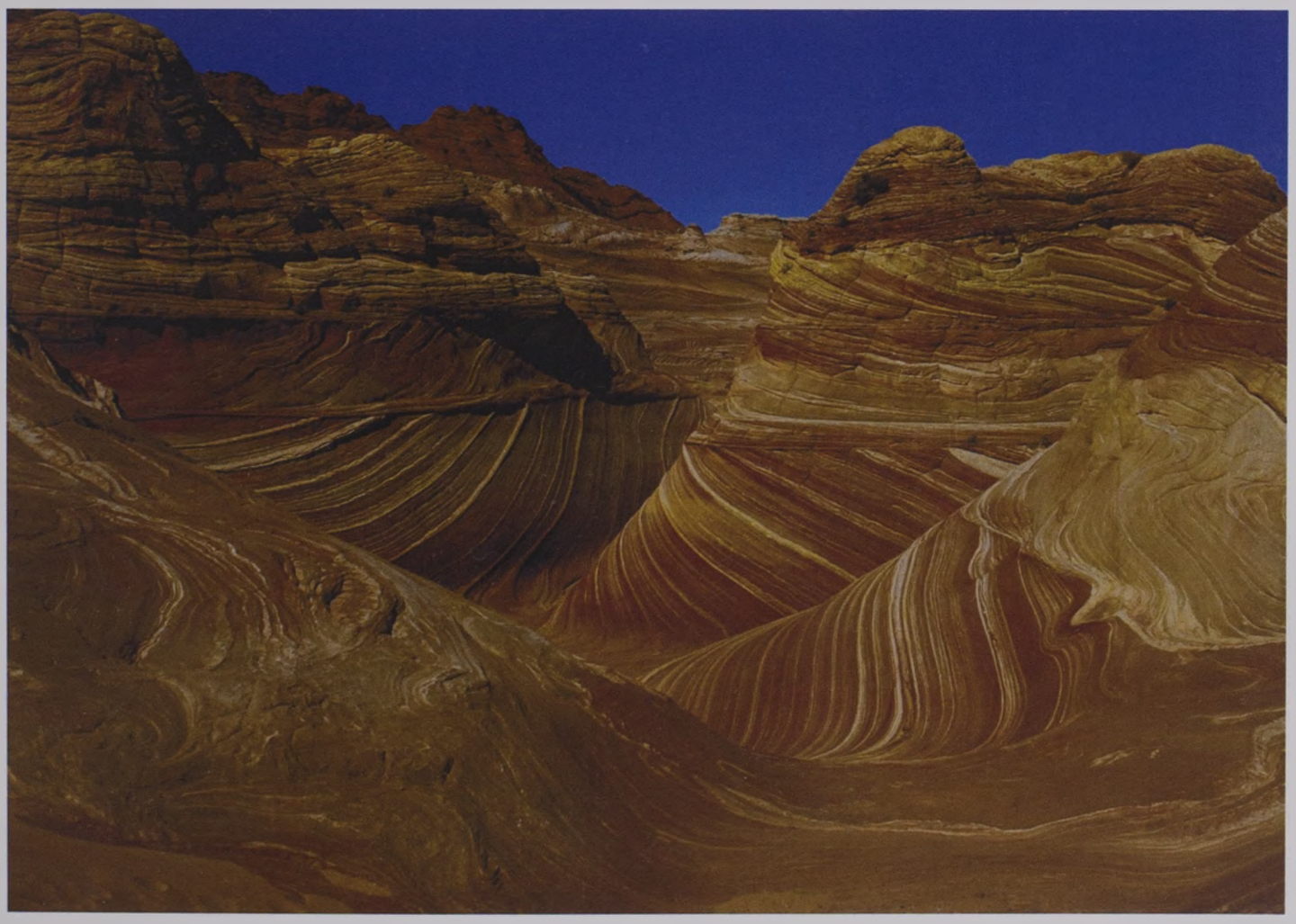
Until on a peak, a hummingbird's vibration
shattered my screen—who are you, Goddess?

Who aligned delicate
beak through our being,

I know, my ear pressed to his turquoise
sternum like the sound of wings,

Brother, how many nights we forgo our meanings
without sight of mirrored trees between us,

turning away
we fluttered into.



The Wave | MARIANNE WERNER

Birthmarks

FICTION | MELISSA MARTINI

Your dad, 100% Italian, born and raised, is asking *you* how to make Spanish rice since, you know, you're Spanish and all. The thing is, you're not Spanish. You're half Puerto Rican and you don't know shit about Puerto Rico, anyway. You've been emphasizing that point for years, but he doesn't seem to remember or care.

"You gotta know, though. The Spanish rice your mother used to make." He gestures towards the big metal pot he dug out of storage and placed on the stove for you. It's old and has black marks burned into the bottom of it. You hope that he has already washed the dust off of it, but rinse it again just to be safe. It belonged to your mother, but you don't remember anything about it or the rice. You barely remember her, if you're going to be completely honest.

When you tried to help her cook as a child, she yelled at you. She didn't want your dirty little kid paws touching any of the food. You watched from afar, sitting at the kitchen table, her hair falling down her shoulders in neat brunette waves. Sometimes on the weekends, the days she spent in the kitchen the most, she didn't blow her hair out and it frizzed into loose curls. On those days, she wore her glasses instead of contacts and didn't put on any makeup. By the end of the day, after a few drinks which hardly impacted her cooking skills, she resorted to confiding in you about how ugly and worthless she felt. You couldn't wrap your head around how she could feel
ugly: you told her she looked beautiful that way—like a real mom. She got offended when you said that. A real mom? What, was she not a real mom all the other days of the week?

Now you're twenty-something and staring into a pot of boiling rice and Dad is asking you if you're sure capers go in there. You pour half the jar into the palm of your hand and pop them into your mouth. "I have no idea. I just really like capers."

Your mother left years ago and teaching you her recipes was the last thing on her mind. All she could think about was getting the fuck away from you and your father and escaping into the arms of her lover, another white guy. She didn't bother to say goodbye to you, she only let you know that you ruined her life via a phone call a week later. The recipe for Spanish rice was not a part of that conversation.

"Well, at least put the sazón and adobo in. I know that much is right. Your mother used to make me go in the Spanish aisle to get that stuff." Dad is hovering over you, watching your every move. His hands are big and thick with rough skin hardened over the years. When he shaved off his mustache for the first time in your life, you told him he looked like Shrek. He thought it was hilarious and decided to never let his mustache grow in again.

"What about the sofrito?" you ask. He shrugs. You frown. He's standing so close to you that he might as well be the one stirring the pot, and yet he refuses to actually do anything. The kitchen is starting to smell pretty damn good, though, so whatever you're doing must be somewhat close to correct.

All the containers he bought say Goya, and you admittedly feel a little uncomfortable using them nowadays. He has them lined up on the kitchen table and it's a guessing game which ingredient to put in next. You have no idea how much of anything to add to the pot. You just know *if it's Goya, it has to be good.*

He's the one who should be doing this. When you were a kid, he was the one who helped your mother make the Spanish rice. She didn't trust you helping, obviously, but he was competent enough to chop vegetables and mix in seasoning. The two of them would spend hours in the kitchen together making Spanish rice and empanadas, all recipes from her family. They laughed together, drank together, and then you all ate together. He definitely remembers more than you do. Why is he pretending he doesn't?

The only reason he is making you do this is because his niece requested your mother's Spanish rice for her baby shower. It was her favorite food as a kid; your mother made it for her all the time. She was a picky eater growing up and hated pasta, which is just about all your dad's Italian family ever made. You, on the other hand, loved pasta. Your mother made sure you knew that's why you were bigger than your cousin.

Years later, you're still bigger than your cousin, even though she's the pregnant one now. Your mother isn't around to let you know this, but luckily she taught you how to compare yourself to other women well enough that you can do it on your own nowadays. She completely forgot to teach you how to make that Spanish rice, though.

You and your cousin were raised like sisters, so the baby will be your nephew. You're going to be his auntie. She's already seven months pregnant and Spanish rice is all she's been craving for weeks, so when she requested you make it for her baby shower, you had no choice but to accept.

There are a million recipes you actually know how to

make: you are quite the baker and would have much preferred to bake a cheesecake or a tray of cookies shaped like diapers.

You even could have decorated the cookies to spell out it's a boy! But no, she is craving the Spanish rice, so that is what you have to make.

This is because your superstitious Italian family believes that when a pregnant woman craves a certain food, she has to have it. If, God forbid, she doesn't have that food, the baby will be born with a birthmark in the shape and color of that food.

If you don't believe it, just look at your great-great-uncle. You know the pink splotch around his eye that always reminded you of Prince Zuko from *Avatar: The Last Airbender*? Contrary to popular belief, that splotch isn't from his mafia days like you always thought. No made man lit his face on fire. Nothing straight out of *Goodfellas* happened. He got that splotch because his mother craved strawberries while he was still in the womb and she never got any. All because that woman never ate strawberries, he was cursed with a big pink birthmark right on his face for everyone to see.

Do you understand what that means for you? If you don't get this Spanish rice perfect, if it doesn't taste just like your mother's, your nephew is going to be born with a big yellow rice-shaped birthmark right smack dab in the middle of his face. Or he'll be covered in a bunch of tiny yellow dots shaped like grains of rice. The kids at school will make fun of him his entire life and it will be all your fault. You don't want that, now do you?

Your entire family is Italian—some people are Italian + Another White Nationality, but it's safe to say you're the only one tainted with brown blood. They pretend you're not tainted by telling you they love your curly hair and saying you're 100% Italian ever since your mother left. But you're not stupid. You hear them deny that their ancestors are from Sicily because it's too close to Africa and call the women on the streets Puerto Rican Whores. You can only imagine what they think of you, what they say about you behind your back.

When your cousin asks you to make the Spanish rice for the baby shower, everyone expects you to not only say yes immediately, but also to know how to make it perfectly, just like your mother. Even your cousin does. This aggravates you.

You love your cousin. You two look alike, sometimes, in the right lighting, except her skin is four shades whiter than yours and her hair is pin-straight, won't even hold a curl with a curling iron and a can of hairspray. Every bit of her body is thinner than you—just enough that she looks ten years younger than you when in fact it's the other way around.

You like the same music and movies and share the same liberal agenda, but when your family makes racist "jokes" at the dinner table, you shift in your seat uncomfortably while she manages to speak up. People listen to her, hear out her opinions. You lay low until the conversation dies down.

Your cousin's baby is going to come out whiter than white, but a couple weeks ago, she hit you with this: "What do they call aunts in Puerto Rico? Titi? He could call you Titi instead of Auntie." Your cousin laughed. How would you know what they call aunts in Puerto Rico?

You didn't know and couldn't bother to care anymore, so you responded, "He can call me whatever he wants to call me." You tried to laugh back, to be polite, but you couldn't.

You focus your attention back on the Spanish rice at hand. You slice red peppers, green peppers, and even a yellow pepper just to get all the colors in there. Next is an onion that makes your dad's eyes tear up even though he's not the one cutting it. He cuts up the pork butt, which he is pretty sure is the right meat to use. You throw in a jar of olives and a can of gondules. Dad helps you mix everything together.

Even though you're pretty sure you did things in the wrong order, everything got cooked at some point and it looks pretty spot on. You still don't know why it's called Spanish rice instead of Puerto Rican rice, but you don't have anyone you can ask.

The backseat of the car is loaded with gifts for your nephew. A big light blue bag has puffs of matching paper sticking out of it – inside are four onesies from Old Navy and a pack of diapers. Next to the bag rests a large box wrapped in Elmo wrapping paper; inside is a dinosaur toy that plays music. You place the final gift next to the bag and box: the tray of rice wrapped neatly with foil ensuring that your nephew will be born with the blessing of no birthmarks.

The drive to the party is long. Your seatbelt feels too tight strapped over your body. You look down at yourself: a purple dress covered in white flowers that goes just to your knees. You straightened your curls so that your hair lay flat on your head, but it's just humid enough to make your head feel heavy and your hair feel like a blow-up mattress that's been freshly inflated. You painted your nails earlier but you've already chipped the nail polish

Dance of Life | KATERYNA BORTSOVA

from anxiously picking throughout the day. You've been pretty good about not picking lately, but something about the occasion has set you off.

The scent of rice fills the car and, in turn, your nostrils. It's going to be the only thing to eat at the party that isn't Italian—various family members made various kinds of pasta, including but not limited to: baked ziti, stuffed shells, manicotti, lasagna, ravioli. *Variety,* your family claims. You always want to say *aren't all pasta dishes basically the same thing?* but you fear the responses you'd get. Besides, you like pasta, so you don't really mind loading up on it.

You finally arrive at the party and Dad parks the car. You're the first ones there besides your cousin's mother, your dad's sister and your aunt. You walk into the house and exchange hugs and kisses, handing your cousin the gifts, but her eyes are locked on the tray of rice. She smirks at you and takes the tray from your hands, carrying it into the kitchen and lifting a corner of the foil. She grabs a fork from a drawer and sneaks a scoopful of rice into her mouth. She offers you a thumbs up and you smile. "Tastes just like your mother's."

"See? Not everything about your mother is bad," your aunt says. "It's good to be like her when it comes to cooking."

You're filled with *I'm nothing like her,* but simultaneously spilling over with *I'm 50% her.*

More and more family members start pouring into the house, handing your cousin gift after gift. You get lost in the sea of humans—somewhere along the lines, you lose your dad, who resorts to drinking beers in the corner. You find a mimosa fountain and camp out there for most of the party, avoiding eye contact and conversation.

At least ten family members walk up to you throughout the party and tell you that the Spanish rice is delicious. You nod and say thank you, but you feel so disconnected from the tray of rice that it barely feels like a compliment.

You hear a distant relative ask his wife to go get him another beer and dish of food. She says no, that she doesn't feel like it. He grows angry, standing up and announcing to everyone around him that he should just go buy himself a new wife, the kind that will do whatever you say. Your family barely responds except for a few chuckles from equally disgusting males in the room, but your stomach twists into knots. You grip your plastic cup so hard that it snaps and orange juice spills all over your hand.

You find yourself walking to the upstairs bathroom even though you don't have to use it. As you're about to lock yourself in there, you notice your cousin is sitting in her bedroom alone,
on the bed, scooping rice into her mouth. Pregnancy has left her with glowing skin and the weight looks good on her. "What are you doing up here alone?"

"I wanted more rice," she says quietly between chews. A stray grain of rice flies from her lips and onto the floor. "I got tired of people telling me I'm eating for two and gaining so much weight, so I decided to hang up here for a little bit."

"You're better off up here. They're being racist and sexist downstairs." You enter her room and sit next to her in bed, wishing you'd brought your own plate of food up with you. You steal an olive off of her plate and pop it into your mouth, realizing you bought the olives with pits in them instead of pitted olives. Annoyed, you pull the pit out of your mouth and look around the room for a garbage can. Your cousin hands you a napkin to wrap it in.

She suddenly pulls her shirt up slightly to reveal her baby bump, grabs your hand, and places it on her stomach. Every time she feels the baby move, she tries to let you feel it, but you always seem to miss it by a second. This time, you feel his foot pressing against your hand and your mouth hangs open in awe.

You look down at her stomach, a slight imprint of his foot showing through her skin where your hand is. Her belly has a few small brown birthmarks here and there, sprinkled about haphazardly. You wonder what would happen if you connected the dots, each and every birthmark on someone's body to the next, what kind of a constellation would live on their skin. She's still holding your hand, her fingers cold against yours.

She smiles at you and you smile back. She thanks you for making the rice, for everything.

"Anytime," you reply. A smirk sneaks onto your face. "I couldn't let my nephew be born with a rice shaped birthmark, now could I?"

Your cousin starts to laugh, knocking her plate of rice over. It spills onto the bed but she doesn't seem to care. "He's shit out of luck. I've been craving sushi for months, but I'm not allowed to have it. Looks like he's gonna have a spicy tuna roll right on his cheek."

You laugh now, leaning your head onto her shoulder. You two sit like that for a while, not talking, just staring at the TV. It's not on, but you imagine what could possibly be on the news right now: another person of color killed by the police, a school shooting, another celebrity coming forward about sexual assault. Instead of getting upset over any of those news stories, you close your eyes and exist in

the silence together.

Eventually, she says you two ought to go back downstairs. It is a party for her baby, after all. You nod and force yourself to get out of her bed before helping her up. You walk downstairs together, entering the room like a just-married couple. Your aunt shouts a "there they are!" and grabs both of you by your arms, dragging you into the living room so your cousin can begin opening gifts. Her husband sits next to her and they go through bag after bag, box after box, tossing wrapping paper around the room and holding up each gift to show the room.

During the drive home, you ask your dad what your mother's baby shower was like. *Did she even have one?*

He laughs. *Of course she had one.*

Who went to it? Did she get good gifts? Was she happy? Was she excited about having a baby?

Yes, yes she was.

"I don't know what happened," he says it quietly.

It's dark out even though it is only the early evening. The only thing lighting up the world around you are streetlights every now and then.

"She did love you, you know. In her own way. Things just...changed." He's been saying that ever since the day she left. You don't know what changed. He doesn't know what changed. You wonder if she knows what it is that changed.

"Did you love her?" You don't know why the questions are coming out of your mouth, but they are, and it's too late now to take them back. He hesitates, but you both know the answer to the question is blatantly and disgustingly obvious. When she left, he nearly drank himself to death. He slows down to stop at a red light.

It is quiet in the car, so quiet that you can hear yourself breathing softly. You hear him sigh. The red light illuminates a gentle smile on his face, the scruff he's been sporting lately doing little to nothing to hide his vulnerability. It's the first time you've really looked at your dad in a while, the red light making his skin look darker than it is.

"Of course I loved her. I think a part of me always will." Another recycled line, but you can tell he is being honest in his answer. He shrugs again, the same shrug from when you were trying to figure out how to make the Spanish rice together. He glances over at you, his eyes thin and somewhere between curious and concerned, before the light turns green and he begins to drive again. "What about you? Do you still love her?"

"I don't know." There's no hesitation with your answer.

You feel guilt for a moment, but it quickly fades away. Childhood flashes through your mind. You search for any memory of her that can convince you that you love her, but all you can remember is being told to sit down and shut up in Spanish—that's the only Spanish she ever taught you: *siéntate* and *cállate*—and her refusing to take you with her on the weekends when she went to the nail salon. She claimed it was pointless because you'd just pick the nail polish off anyway. Of course it was true, you would just pick the nail polish off, but you couldn't exactly help it.

Don't you want to spend some time with your daughter, though? Your dad always questioned her. You still can't seem to paint your nails without picking the polish off, so maybe she was right about you all along. "Am I anything like her?"

"No." He replies quickly. "But you are beautiful like her. I'll say that much."

Beautiful like her. It's supposed to make you feel better. That is Dad's intention. But to be beautiful like her means you are so, so ugly to so many, including her. How many times did she cry to you about how disgusting she was? How many times did she remind you, later on, that you looked so much like her? But, Dad says you are beautiful like her, and you don't know what to make of it, so you shove the sentence out of your head and look out the window at the stars.

The conversation dies a natural and much needed death. You go home, go to sleep, and dream about her. You haven't heard her voice since the phone call years ago, but it rings in your head like it was just yesterday. She's telling you that you ruined her life again and you are crying, sobbing, when suddenly, you tell her that you hate her. That's not how it happened in real life. You wake up, violently sweating, heart pounding like a drum.

Two months later, your nephew is born with a big red birthmark on the back of his head. Maybe it's salmon from sushi, but it's definitely not the Spanish rice, which means you succeeded in cooking it correctly for the baby shower. You hold him constantly and he starts to recognize you after a while, smiling when you pick him up and giggling when you smile back.

You feel something like a love and acceptance you've never thought possible before. He doesn't care about the blood running through your veins and he doesn't care about the dark nest of hair sitting on top of your head. All he cares about is the warmth of your body and the scent of your skin.

He doesn't call you Auntie yet, nor does he call you Titi. He only greets you with soft sighs and those bright blue eyes.

You're holding him and you ask, "Am I doing this right?"

Your aunt nods. "You're a natural."

You look down at your arms, wrapped around the baby's small body. His skin is soft and hairless, but your arms are covered in a light coating of fur you've had your entire life. It's thicker and darker than the peach fuzz on top of the baby's head. He's the first boy to not mind your arm hair, to not make a comment about how you should probably go shave or something.

Sprinkled between your arm-hairs are tiny brown birthmarks. They are ground coffee spilled onto your skin, scattered about without any rhyme or reason. You wonder what your mother craved when she was pregnant, what it was that she never got.

When She Asks How Her Mouth Tastes | DESPY BOUTRIS

Representation in the *Borderlands*

POETRY | DANI PUTNEY

Character selection:
magical slum woman, ex-
assassin à la Irish grandpa,
mech-loving soldier lady,
or robot beastmaster.
The choice is obvious, no
better way to traipse across
moon rocks and galaxy's-edge
conflict zones than as a gentle-
themly AI built to slay. In a universe
where mayhem equals fun,
the he/she of humans
matters as much as good vs. evil.
Too many interstellar bounties
to pick anything besides
self. As a player, my fantasy is

to loot space as a they/them non-
human. What appears as four
options to others is a beacon
telling me *come home.*
Even with video-game classics like
androgynous Link and baby-pink
Kirby, I've never felt as close
to an assemblage of pixels—
rather, I've never known joy
like ignoring a white man
and two sexualized women to select
the me I didn't know existed.
And boy, doesn't it feel right to pistol-
whip alien desperados, my pronouns
on their bleeding tongues,
my metal vibrating with the hunt.

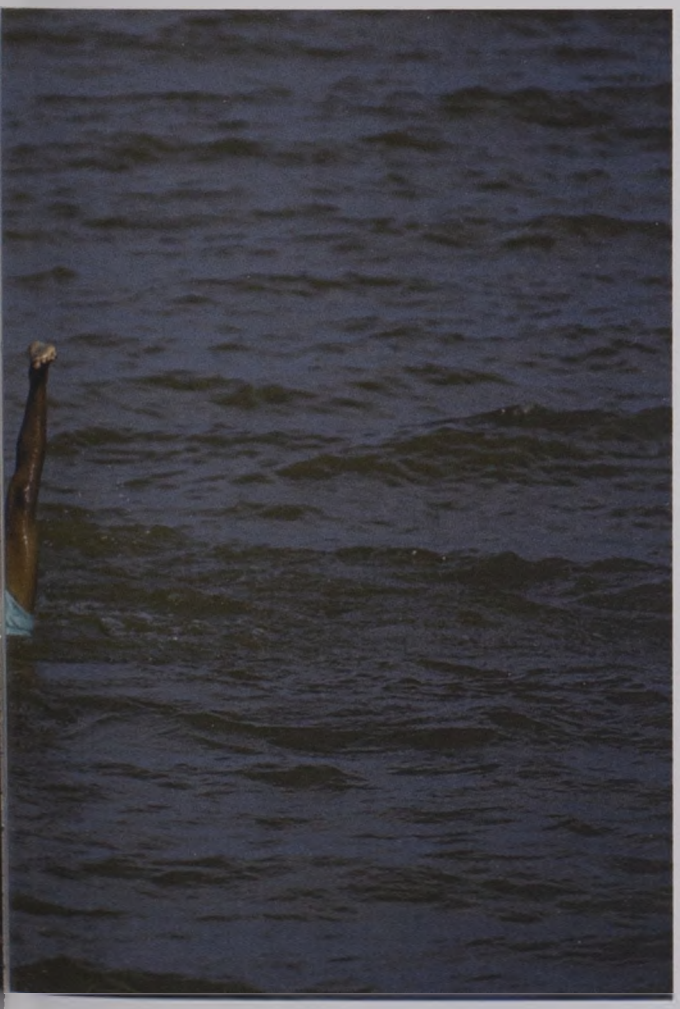
The Death of a Clown

POETRY | AMANDA SORRELL

I'm looking for a better way
to tell you that when it rains
oh it really pours, looking
for a way to tell you I've lost
my mind, when really I haven't,
I think I would like to,
at least stop the constant muttering.

My Aunt Charlotte was a clown,
I'm serious— the red nose
and the funny cone hat—
and when she died
That was all the memories
I had of her so when I got the call
I laughed. I said excuse me,
will they bury her in the red nose?

I guess what I'm saying
is it's easy to laugh at death
when he shows up with a flower
on his lapel that squirts water
and life unloads the hardships
like clowns piling out of a clown-car.
Perhaps the way to stop
the muttering is just to
laugh so loud you can't hear it.



Amazon River | GUILHERME BERGAMINI

To whom it may concern

POETRY | ANGELICA POVERSKY

To whom it may concern

Thank you.

Angelica

(them/ theirs/ they dysphoria my own definitions/ they try to make me a ghost while I am still living/ a ghost while I am in the living room/ turn my orange hunger into flesh fear/ they memorize my pronouns/if they memorize my pronouns/ its not how to pronounce me/ they/ she/they/ he/ they/ call me a /faggot/ before they call me Angelica/ call me a /revolution/ before they call me Angelica/ call me an /activist/ before they call me Angelica/ call me anything but really here/ trans/ in fact/ if you/ read/ what/ I/ said/ they call me them/they/ then spit me out when its convenient/ leave me hung up when they don't care anymore/ she hangs up the phone/ recall how she ignored me until I vanish/ there are more important things right/ her mouth/ an alternative to zoom out/ a preference/ a privilege/ I no don't soothe /them/ out of my skin/ I am and always have been, here/ trans/trans/trans/trans/trans/trans/trans/trans/trans/trans/trans)

PS. Alive alive alive alive alive alive alive alive alive alive alive/ you/ do not make me

Untitled | ANTHONY AFAIRO NZE

Northern Migration: Seeing to Believe

NONFICTION | STEPHANIE MALTARICH

Following a bumpy, snowy road toward the rocky shores of the Hudson Bay, our instructor abruptly pulls over the ancient school bus and kills the engine. Within seconds, the six of us are kneeling on the faux leather seats while pressing our noses up against the opaque windows. We watch as a massive body covered in white fur emerges from the bushes, sauntering around the snow-covered meadow. I raise my binoculars to the foggy window that I've wiped clear for the third time; through my lens, I notice its slender neck reveals that it's a male. We are silent, minus the beeping of cameras.

He walks in circles in the meadow, lifting his nose to smell, then yawns and gently rubs his body on various rocks. Then—without warning—he disappears back into the bushes. We never see him again. I sit back in my seat, reveling in this moment. I don't want to believe this beautiful creature could be so vicious, that he could run 25 miles-per-hour and maul a person, perhaps me, because he doesn't play favorites. On day one of my course focused on polar bears and climate change in the subarctic, we had already received the greatest gift: a polar bear sighting in the wild.

In the days before leaving for Churchill, Manitoba, I traced my flights on a map: Missoula to Minneapolis, Minneapolis to Winnipeg, Winnipeg to Rankin Inlet, Rankin Inlet to Churchill. The town's isolated location, tucked into the Western corner of the Hudson Bay, made it a difficult destination to travel to. It was only accessible by plane or train, and the train tracks had been inoperable for 18-months. When discussing my travels with friends before I left, admitting they would span over 1,600 miles, I'd often sigh and say *I know, it's ridiculous.*

As I did the mental math, I knew flying such a far distance would create a massive carbon footprint. As someone who tries to limit the amount of emissions I put into the atmosphere, I struggled with my decision. Traveling in the time of climate change has become complex. Yet, I still fly. I've often operated under the pretense that in order to care, in order to save something, I have to see it and experience it. If I could see the polar bears, the melting sea ice, their plight and their struggle—I imagined I could convince others it was now or never when it came to acting on the climate crisis.

Churchill is one of those places where the school, swimming pool, town center, movie theater and hospital are all housed in one building near the center of town. Printed flyers pinned to bulletin boards advertise "Tundra Trivia" at the local bar on Saturday nights. Aptly named establishments like the "Tundra Inn" and the "Dancing Bear Restaurant" make up the streets of the quaint town. Tourists and residents are encouraged to adhere to the advice posted on signs on every corner: "Report Bear Sightings: Call 675-BEAR." It is a very inconvenient location for humans: it sits at the heart of a polar bear migration route, and every fall, roughly 900 residents and 900 seasonal polar bears share the town.

Churchill is known as the "Polar Bear Capital of the World." Each year, between 6-10,000 tourists arrive during October and November for a chance to view polar bears as they travel and congregate, waiting for sea ice to form on the Hudson Bay. The number of visitors has increased in recent years, and this is partially attributed to a new trend in "last chance tourism." Tourists visit the region to see the polar bears while they are still there. Much like the disappearing coral reefs in Australia and glaciers in Montana, humans want to see these magnificent things before they are extinct from earth forever.

Our instructor slowed the bus as we approached the parking lot. He inched along creating a large arc to complete an exaggerated U-turn. When the headlights illuminated the side of the building, he paused to explain polar bears had been known to hide out around the corners of our accommodations, surprising students and guests as they disembarked from vehicles. His shotgun would always be on hand, though he admitted he'd never had to use it in 36 years.

A staff member of the Churchill Northern Studies Center greeted me along with the frigid Subarctic air. He handed me a stack of glossy pamphlets and began to rattle off various protocols to stay safe during my visit. One rule included staying inside the building at all times. I wasn't aware that I'd be on lockdown for a week. I thumbed through the colorful trifolds crafted by Churchill's Polar Bear Alert Program. *Do not carry food while walking outside. Stay close to your vehicle. Always keep a safe distance between you and any polar bear. Travel with a group for added safety. Stay alert to the possibility of contact with a polar bear.*

The staff members of the Polar Bear Alert Program, known as conservation officers, were on call 24/7 during October and November to respond to bear emergencies.

The town created the program in 1968 after a teenage boy lost his life during a brief polar bear encounter. As the climate warms, and the Hudson Bay forms sea ice later each year, Churchill will likely see an increase in problems between bears and humans.

For a week, the rhythm of our days was cyclical, much like the seasonal life of a polar bear, much like the arrival and disappearance of sea ice. In the mornings, we'd load up on the bus high on coffee and hot chocolate, and spend the grey days driving around on bumpy side roads, meandering along the shores of the Hudson Bay. Staring out the windows, we'd search for traces of pawprints in the snow or white fur in the dim light. A bear sighting, which we were fortunate to experience on most days, allowed us to slow down, to stop, to sit and observe. Sometimes it felt like hours before we pulled back onto the road, onto the next sighting.

During the evenings we congregated with cups of wine in a classroom where I took diligent notes while our instructor presented lectures on shrinking sea ice in the Arctic and polar bear ecology. I was amazed and relatively envious of their animal instincts. Each year, they repeated the same migration, over hundreds of miles, to the same place, to do the same thing. I wondered, as a human who has trouble staying in one spot for very long, a constant seeker of change—would I find refuge or boredom in a cyclical life that hummed with the change of the seasons, the shrinking and melting of ice? Something in me yearned for a more simple life in harmony with nature.

In our nightly lectures, as I sipped my wine, I learned that sea ice is essential for the survival of polar bears. When sea ice forms on the Hudson Bay, the bears venture 40-miles in search of their staple food: the ringed seal. As the hunt begins, they prey on ringed seals that live beneath the ice. While some hunt, pregnant mothers move into dens to give birth to cubs. In spring, mothers emerge, and "Thanksgiving for bears" begins—they feast, indulging on baby ringed seals, building up two-thirds of their fat storage for the year. Once summer arrives, when the ice melts and breaks up, polar bears return to land—where they eat opportunistically on birds, berries and sometimes whales. They wait and rest in a walking hibernation.

As my instructor clicked through slide after slide on her PowerPoint presentation, I was reminded that sea ice in the Arctic is melting. On the Hudson Bay, it's normal to have three ice-free months a year, but the new normal, in our changing climate, is four ice-free months. On average, polar bears are now left stranded on land for one month longer. Scientists at the National Snow and Ice Data Center document the changes in sea ice as it shrinks and grows throughout the year. Data has confirmed the 12 lowest measurements of sea ice have occurred over the past 12 years; sea ice is declining at a rate of 13 percent. Less ice means less food, and without food, bears won't reproduce. In 2012, researchers predicted female bears in the Hudson Bay region might stop reproducing in 20-30 years. It's possible polar bears could disappear from their southern habitats, like Churchill, by mid-century. Scribbling in my notebook in the cozy lecture hall, I was grateful for shelter, warmth and food. I swallowed hard thinking about my comfort, which came at a cost.

As the polar bears around Churchill sat and waited for the ice to form to begin their winter feast, I sat in the cafeteria each evening and stuffed myself from a seemingly endless supply of food in the buffet line. The cafeteria was always packed with tourists and students from the various groups staying onsite to see the polar bears. I was one of the youngest participants, and most of my dinner conversations were with retirees. Many shared that they'd always wanted to make the trip to Churchill. I found that it was often one of the multiple trips they had planned that year.

Much like our days on the bus, conversations at dinner were predictable. I'd set my tray on the table and pull out my chair. After brief introductions, I'd raise my fork to my mouth. Before my first bite, before I had time to chew and swallow, the man or woman across the table would ask,

"How many bears did you see today?"

I'd count in my head, hmm. Maybe three? Four? He or she might one-up me with six, maybe even seven. Perhaps they took a tundra buggy tour or helicopter ride. I didn't realize it was a competition, but it was clear each table had its own nightly polar bear pissing contest. One evening, a woman sat next to me, moping and frustrated, as she explained how her group had driven around for two days, yet they hadn't seen a single polar bear.

Next to us, a group of young photographers in-training gathered around their cameras to share up-close shots of a sleeping bear. The photos were stunning, and I was envious. In my pictures, the bears were small, barely distinguishable. My instructor spoke disapprovingly in a quiet voice. She explained that getting too close and crowding bears caused stress. It was invasive. That's why our group stayed far away, out of respect. She had witnessed a trend over the past few years: tourists were less satisfied with simply seeing bears at a healthy distance; it was all about getting the shot.

Tourism in Churchill had been on the minds of researchers for over a decade. One evening, a Canadian graduate student approached our table to ask if we would

be willing to participate in her research. Her project was following-up on a previous study from 2010; it focused on polar bear tourism and tourists' perceptions of climate change. When we agreed to participate, she handed us surveys.

I stared at the piece of paper and read the questions under my breath: *How did you get here? Did you offset your flight? Do you believe in climate change? Do you believe climate change is human-caused? Do you believe climate change is threatening polar bears? Did you come to see polar bears because you don't think they will be here in the future?* Putting pen to paper, I answered each question while feeling uneasy. I didn't offset my flight. Yes, I understood that my choice had implications for the polar bears, for our planet. Any justifications I made previously seemed null and void. I felt flight-shamed. Should I give up flying? Could I do that? Would it make a difference? How much can one person do?

After filling out my survey, I asked the graduate student if I could read the previous study from 2010. I wasn't surprised when I learned the researchers of the previous study concluded most tourists understood and believed that climate change threatened polar bears. However, many failed to connect the impacts resulting from their long-distance travel to the reasons why polar bears are at risk. A 2008 report produced by the UN Environmental Program and World Meteorological Organization found the tourism industry alone accounts for 5 percent of carbon dioxide emissions, with the majority of emissions, 75 percent, attributed to air travel.

Polar bear tourism in Churchill grew threefold from 2007 to 2012. Churchill's tourism industry creates a disproportionally larger carbon footprint compared to other tourism operations worldwide. Long-distance air travel and on-land activities such as helicopter tours and tundra buggy rides are extremely energy-intensive. Most tours involve driving around all day for a week, helicopter tours and diesel-powered tundra buggy excursions.

The Arctic is warming at twice the rate of the rest of the world, and in the short term, climate change will have a positive impact on polar bear tourism. As sea ice forms later, it will increase the "waiting period" for polar bears on land—lengthening the viewing season.

Another predictable day on the bus was interrupted as a helicopter buzzed around above. Its echo rumbled across the tundra. We craned our necks, peering out the windows in search of the sound. My eyes finally caught up, and I spotted it hovering above a line of bushes near the road. An empty-net dangled by a cable and bounced along mid-air.

As the helicopter descended closer to the ground, it hovered, dipping its nose and creating waves in the bushes below. A man leaned out of the helicopter with a gun, his outfit resembling a SWAT team uniform. He aimed for something we couldn't see. After holding steady for several minutes, the helicopter landed. With the propellers still spinning, two officers jumped onto the ground and quickly messed with the net. A minute later, they jumped back in, and the helicopter departed. Attached by a swinging cable was an interesting find: a sedated white bear dangled in the net.

A "bear lift," is a technique used to capture troublesome polar bears and haul them to "bear jail." The Polar Bear Holding Facility, or bear jail, is composed of 28 cells. Constructed in 1981, its purpose was to keep bears out of trouble and alive. In the old days, nuisance bears were often shot when they entered town. Since then, over 2,100 bears have sat in the jail cells, without visitation rights or an opportunity for bail. The day we visited, the facility was half-full; 14 bears sat inside awaiting their fateful release.

Their sentence? 30-days. Their crime? Hunger. As we sat and engorged ourselves at the cafeteria each evening, bears roamed the shores, hungry, awaiting the formation of sea ice. When the ice forms late, bears sometimes wander into town hungry. Getting into trouble, they are then sent to jail.

I imagined the bears attempting a revolt or an uprising, protesting humans and their lack of will to change. Do they talk and commiserate in each other's misery? Do they ask why hunger had become a crime? Do they dream of an icy bay and ringed seals for breakfast? Do they know it's not their fault? Humans are empowered to choose who to blame, but rarely, do we point the finger back at ourselves. We rarely acknowledge our role in this crisis.

As the week progressed, chunks of ice floated on the water's surface, eventually forming a solid sheet along the shores, a shelf extending to the horizon. They didn't have to wait any longer. With each day, we saw fewer bears in the wild. My last glimpse of a polar bear was barely distinguishable. Even through my binoculars, they were tiny specks. A mother and her cub moved along slowly where the ice met the sky. She walked on the ice, sniffing, with her cub in tow. The ice formed earlier this year, and I was certain they were thankful.

I knew as I stepped on my plane bound for Churchill that I could care as much about the polar bears without bearing witness to their existence firsthand. It wasn't my goal to see them before they were

gone; I went to see them to remind myself, to remind us, that they are still here. I was drawn to them, their animal instincts, the simplicity of their movement with the seasons and their ability to do it year after year. I wanted some aspect of this in my life. Perhaps my constant migration and transience was partially rooted in my selfish desire to see and experience the world and its creatures. Perhaps it was this simple: I traveled to see the polar bears because it was something I wanted to do.

But at what cost? Through the comfort of my home, the predictability of my next meal: was it my right or my privilege to travel to see polar bears in the wild? To what extent was my northern migration, a part of their demise? Sharing my story wasn't going to save them or our climate or our planet. My single experience, witnessing polar bears in the wild, wasn't going to solve anything. But seeing them, knowing they were still there, gave me hope.

They still mattered. Our planet still matters. We still matter. We are not separate.

Welcome | MATT WITT

Abrasion

NONFICTION | DARBY WILLIAMS

Fingertips and stone. When the two part, each takes a piece of the other with it. In the humid July days of my childhood, we would call our silty, raw, sometimes bloodied hands river fingers. Every summer, my parents dragged my sister and me from northern California to Texas Hill Country to visit extended family, a tradition that my father's family has kept since his parents were young. We children ran feral through the waters, as generations before us had done on the same river. Under partially watchful gazes, my cousins and I would let the river carry our sunburnt bodies over rough limestone, through chutes, over bumps, and into eddies. As we clambered through the silty beige stream, our fingers turned waterlogged and pink, rubbed raw by the rough riverbed. We learned to negotiate its unpredictable current and navigate its twists and turns. It was in the waters and on the craggy limestone banks of the Blanco River that I learned how river, stone, and humans dance in a slow game of abrasion.

Texas is, for the most part, an oppressively flat state, but hill country, as the name would suggest, is distinguishable for its hilly topography—the work of geologic lifting—and for its unusual karst terrain caused by the dissolution of rock by water. Limestone, the main substrate of the area, is water-soluble, so in some places the riverbed collapses and forms caves, sinkholes, or steep canyons where the rock has been slowly worn away and carried downstream. This unpredictable landscape exists where the southeast and southwest meet, and the vegetation mirrors this place between places: yucca and live oak, juniper and cypress, and, thanks to Lady Bird Johnson, a plethora of bluebonnets, paintbrush, buttercup, and evening primrose.

My grandfather grew up in hill country. Raised on a cotton farm during the Great Depression, he excelled in school and eventually made his way to the Naval Academy where he studied to be an engineer. When he was rejected by the Air Force for his unreliable eyesight, he starting working for one of the only other options for young engineers in the service: the Special Weapons Project, the child of the Manhattan Project. After a few years of working in atomic weapons testing, he left the service and began his career in nuclear energy in hopes of using nuclear power for something less destructive. This career led my scientifically minded and driven grandfather far from his rural Texas roots. At the end of his career, he returned to find his footing on a hill overlooking the Blanco River, limestone at his feet.

On May 23rd of 2015, I was a junior in high school, squished between my parents on our couch as the three of us stared, eyes glued to the TV. We watched with our stomachs in our throats, as a 500-year-flood on a small river in central Texas hit national news. The reporter was sopping wet, and he was all but shouting the news as the river behind him roared against the inky, moonless night. He was standing before a bridge we had driven over more times than we could count, and it was completely submerged in the turbid water. Mom and I were still sitting in shock as Dad sprang to action. It was late at night in California, so two hours ahead of us, our Texas loved ones were likely already in bed. Did they know their homes were about to be six feet underwater? After about fifteen minutes of frantically calling various family members, we finally got my grandfather on the phone. His riverside house was far above the floodplain but the floodplain was a joke in a flood that looked like it had been sent by the Old Testament God. When he picked up, we could barely make out the slow, plodding cadence of his words over the whooshing of his windshield wipers battling a deluge of raindrops. He had escaped with little more than his life and was already in his car and heading to higher ground, leaving his home behind in the rising tide. He would spend the night at the home of a family friend who lives farther from the river, and we would wait to see what the water would take away and what it would leave behind.

When we arrived for our annual summer visit a month later, instead of our usual carefree days spent on shady banks, our time was devoted to sorting through wreckage. Friends, family, and community volunteers had already been cleaning for the last month but there was still much more to be done. The work seemed infinite. My family drove slowly along the river toward my grandfather's house, and the water flowed gently next to us, unassuming. It was the wreckage surrounding the water that revealed what had occurred just a few weeks earlier. According to the USGS, the Blanco usually flows at around 93 cubic feet per second, but during the flood, the river reached flows of 175,000. Fifteen inches of rain fell in mere hours on already saturated ground a few towns upstream. This torrent resulted in a wall of water rushing toward my family's little town. Levels rose forty feet above normal before the gauge broke.

Houses that had been permanent in my memory since I was a child stood as skeletons: windows blown out, emptied of their contents, and bright yellow tape and FEMA warning signs on the doors, marking them structurally unsound—condemned. The bases of the old cypress trees that lined the banks barely stood while their branches and most of the trunks had been ripped away; the knees of the roots were still sticking out of the water with trepidation. The ancient trees that had been completely stripped of bark would die in the following months, but if the river left even a small patch of bark behind, the tree had a good shot at survival. We used to swing from those old cypresses into the deeper spots of the river where the water was a rich emerald. But now, no branches or green remained overhead and swimming felt too joyous for the solemn task at hand.

As my parents, my sister and I tried to make sense of the disaster, our conversation slowly crept around the implication that this event was evidence of a violent and rapidly changing climate. It felt the flood had swept what we thought was permanent right out from under us. As we neared my grandpa's house, though, Dad urged us not to bring this up to him. Grandfather had, in the past years, been listening to more and more polarizing media outlets. I felt for him, sitting all alone in the ruins of his home, listening to the talking heads of FOX News telling him to think of his suffering as an act of God. My grandfather is not particularly religious but this was apparently a more favorable narrative. He has lived a fairly low-carbon life, working in alternative—albeit controversial—energy, advocating for composting and wilderness. So where had this firm conviction that there was nothing to be done about the changing world come from? It seemed that he needed something solid to make sense of things, some sort of belief system on which to find sturdy ground. Living in Texas, where oil and gas reigned supreme, certainly reinforced his rationalization. He was once an engineer and a man of science, but this new frame of the world was beyond anything he wanted to understand. Climate change is not an easy thing to come to terms with, even when it comes knocking at your door.

When we finally arrived at my grandfather's home, aunts, uncles, cousins, second cousins, and friends were already at work, roaming around the front yard where an assortment of my grandfather's belongings lay scattered. Salvaging a home after a flood is not glamorous or heroic; it is slow, dull work. Our tasks involved mundane actions like washing dry mud out of dishes, scrubbing down furniture, sorting linens, and determining which of the artifacts of Grandfather's life were beyond repair.

We donned masks and gloves for our work because the thick mud that covered everything was not only composed of river silt and sand, but also sewage, oil, cow manure, and every other bit of refuse the river could pick up and carry downstream. To combat the humid heat, we drank from flimsy plastic water bottles issued by FEMA. The water from my grandfather's well was no longer potable; it too had been contaminated by the flood.

I set to work scrubbing a dresser. I worked at the bloated wood gently to avoid ruining the stain, but the sediment deposits seemed set on staying. The mud was impossible to ever truly remove after the water worked to settle it into every crack and crevice. The dresser was one from my grandmother's collection of antique furniture, and it had already been emptied of the broken dishes and damp, moldy linens. My job was simply to remove the silt. The drawers were hard to pull out because they had expanded when the water swept in, so it took finesse to shimmy them from their niches.

Once I finished wiping down the dresser as best I could, I wandered over to where my aunt and father were cleaning some artwork. One barely salvageable photo was a framed one from my mountaineer uncle's first ascent of Mount Everest. His thick, red down coat was distorted at the bottom where the ink ran with the flood waters, making the scene appear as though my uncle stood waist-deep in a river. Standing proud at the top of the world, the photo shows him forever trapped in the moment of the flood.

In the bustling yet eerily silent front yard, Dad handed me a framed textile, reminding me there was still work to do and we didn't have time to get caught up with one particular object. Trapped beneath the glass was a jumble of bleeding colors, confused fibers, and furry mildew. He instructed me to go to ask my grandfather's permission to dispose of this once cherished item.

Sitting, leaned up against a stone pillar in his driveway, Grandfather was wearing his usual: a faded Wrangler denim shirt, quick-dry shorts, and Chaco sandals with thick wool socks, a strange choice in the 90-degree Texas heat. He looked tired, worn down as though the flood had taken more than just his physical possessions.

"Hey there, darlin'." My grandfather spoke at an excruciatingly slow pace and with a low, Southern drawl.

"Hi Poppy! How're you doin'?"

"Oh, I'll be alright. You got somethin' you want to show me?" He was referring to the frame in my hands. I showed him the decaying art. He gave a hearty chuckle and launched into a story. "Oh, your grandmother and I found that when we were living in Japan..." The story went on for more than five minutes, detailing his half-believable explanation of how that particular item found its way into his home. So much for staying focused.

The house we were cleaning was the one that my grandparents had begun building almost twenty years earlier when he retired from a long career in nuclear energy. His work had taken them from New Mexico, to New Jersey, to California, to Japan, and finally, in their retirement, they had decided to return to their home state. Before they could move in, my grandmother was diagnosed with an aggressive form of brain cancer. She passed away a few months before the house was completed. Within a year, my uncle, my grandfather's middle son, died of esophageal cancer. Dad and his surviving siblings tried to encourage Grandfather to get a dog for companionship in his difficult time, but he refused, reasoning that a dog would only die and leave him devastated again. The house by the river seemed to be all my grandfather had that was secure. Grandmother had been a collector of all things strange and beautiful: antique furniture, mismatched dishes, and unusual art. The house had been a monument to her memory. After the flood, it seemed it was only an empty building.

My grandfather moves like he speaks, each movement stubborn, deliberate, and slow. When the story was over, he lumbered over to one of many trash bins full of debris and pitched the frame without a second glance. I watched his gnarled hands swing at his sides and wondered how the river had worn them. Was he accumulating river sediment or was it more like the bloody abrasion of river fingers?

Only a few months later, a 300-year-flood struck the same river. My grandfather's house was above the water this time, but the wounds of the last flood were still fresh. A 500-year-flood, contrary to what the name suggests, does not mean that the flood will come every 500 years. Rather, it suggests the intensity of a particular flood has only a 1 in 500 chance of occurring every year. A 500-year flood, followed by a 300-year flood a few months later, is not a normal occurrence. The implications of these "once in a generation" floods feels obvious to my liberally minded father and his siblings. It is difficult, though, to broach the subject of climate change in the context of these floods to my obstinate grandfather. What does it matter when one's house is destroyed anyway? Abrasion creates wounds. It scours the riverbed but what does it do to our psyches? The solid ground Grandfather placed himself on seemed less steady than he expected. The changing climate isn't waiting for Grandfather to change his mind, and like the rock beneath him, the belief system he had constructed for himself was not so sturdy when the waters rose. And from what I know of the limestone he lives on, change is the only constant.

Sometimes I think about how, after the flood, there was a dead dog floating in the same spot on the river for weeks, its fur coated in thick mud. Other bodies of flood victims were recovered thirty miles downstream. Some were never found at all. The river is funny this way; it leaves things behind, but more than anything, it wears them away.

I think of my grandfather sitting in his home where the drywall has still not been replaced in many rooms, of the few items he has remaining of my grandmother's collections, of his paradoxical mind, as firm as the rock below him. I think of how the river changed course after the two floods that summer, wearing a new path across the limestone bedrock. What new path did it carve in him?

Are we so different from the rock below us? The river wears away at us slowly. It is our epidermis that comes away first, our fingers bleed where we left behind flesh and collect silt. In a flood, the power of the water changes the place easily, knocking down the cypress trees we thought were permanent fixtures of the landscape, whisking away homes and belongings in its turbid, roiling chaos. It works away at the rock more slowly, taking away bits of silt and dissolving lime just a little at a time. Geologic abrasion is slow and plodding, but I've seen the spots where the rock has given way to the persistence of the water.

Rainfall & Bobbing Poppies

POETRY | ELI COYLE

Camp Fire, Northern California
November 22nd, 2018

Two weeks later it came and buried
in the aftermath everything gone.
Cars buses buildings the same burnt
orange of turmeric, some the same
bleached out bones of coral
collecting as chalk piles. The fine
flour remnants dissolving in rain,
swallowed in soil.
Nothing familiar in the way
things settle and reach
for the winter sun.

A year later I drove
Skyway into Paradise,
the flames now rusted
over. The manzanita bark
plum red. Gray pine and Blue oak
tall in the tanning grass.

Beneath the aftermath
of ash. Each life lost
in transient display.
Each life a wildflower.

A bobbing poppy
in the wind.

Bridging the Years | GREG TURLOCK

Calling Mother Earth on the Crisis Hotline

NONFICTION | LAURA PRITCHETT

Dear Mama Earth,

Check out this postcard from the Rio Grand Gorge Bridge! You may know it as one of America's highest—650-feet drop, hard to imagine, I know, two football fields down!—but unless you've been a little person standing here, you wouldn't know how scary it is. Let me attest. I was standing up there, pre-Great Isolation, and for one thing, that's so far down to the Rio Grande River, and also, each passing car makes the bridge sway, and also, there's the history of suicides and thus the prevalence of telephones with signs CRISIS HOTLINE: THERE IS HOPE, MAKE THE CALL with encouraging stickers and graffiti. So, that's a lot. Plus, of course—you know me!—I was standing there with climate grief and democracy grief and things felt like they were falling apart even then, and there was this moment on the bridge when all I could think was, "This is a disgusting feeling, despite the beauty," and now I realize that self-talk helped prepare me for this current queasy.

Hi Mama Earth,

I am imagining your reply to me, and yes, I did want to pick up that CRISIS HOTLINE phone, not because I was suicidal, but because I was curious. Who was on the other side? But I didn't want to bother her. Now I wish I had—that was my chance. To tell whomever answered about the crazy Taos-blue sky and the clouds and the view, and then to say, "Look, I'll be honest here, I'm actually calling in planetary distress, and I can't kick this queasy feeling on this swaying bridge of life! Do you have anything to say about how to endure?"

Hi Gaia,

I wanted to send another photo of you, to you, this one taken in my backyard in Bellvue, Colorado, with wildfire smoke blooming in the sky. They don't make postcards of these things—wildfire smoke—hence the photo. I wanted to tell you that I had a strange COVID-dream, and in my dream, I picked up the CRISIS HOTLINE phone and you answered. You said right away, "I'm not going to answer with sweet platitudes about how great my sunsets are—although they are pretty great, right?" I agreed they were. Then I asked you for help, because things are pretty nutty around here these days. "I'm going to help by silent example," you said. "I am going to demonstrate how to bear witness, how to be resilient, and not go cra-cra. Things are going to shit. It will be difficult! More swaying is to come! Sure, here's a gorgeous cloud. Mountain mahogany spirals are nice. But also, kid, look what damage can be done and yet some things still recover! Let me show you a list of some handy-dandy tips!" But then you hung up! I can't believe you speak so informally, Mother Nature, and also, your voice sounded raspy, as if you'd been a smoker all your life, but maybe that's the fires?

Dear EarthyMom,

Suddenly I'm getting these mysterious postcards. One has appeared daily in my mailbox, though no regular mail has—weird.

Postcard #1 said this:
PATTERNS. Nature is a balm and a solace—and boy, those are in short supply these days. So start easy with repetitive things you've come to expect: Birds migrating, leaves changing, early snows—I will offer you normalcy via the familiar. I till teach you to witness it, celebrate it, cherish it as never before. Learn where the birds in your backyards nest. Notice

those endlessly-changeable clouds and how they're sweety-lit as ever.

Postcard #2 said:
ATTENTION. Cultivate the right kind of attention, go from the superficial to the substantive. Become better seers. But it's not that easy. Being better seers isn't something that happens with the eyes. You can start there, sure, but it really has more to do with how you organize information in the brain. What is connected to what? As we know, attention is the most basic form of love. Did you know, you can actually learn to love better? Remember this: Hell is suffering from the incapacity to love, as you no doubt read in Brothers Karamazov.

Postcard #3 was sloppily written and it took me a while to decipher:
SALIENCE. You people are on a rickety bridge that's swaying wildly with planetary and cultural and ethical dilemmas, and you know it, and knowing you can't get off the bridge is the tricky part! I know you all want solid footing, though you also know there's none to be had, and you wish you didn't always know it so fully! Process this mortality salience. Do not live in denial of death. Embrace the fact that things end, and you know they end, and that that is existentially hard, but it's also the natural order of things. There is no life without death.

Postcard #4 was clear:
RESILIENCE COMES VIA AMAZEMENT—there are days when you will be amazed by people's generosity and selflessness, by the planet's resilience and beauty, by a gust of laughter or of a brook. Remember that river, so far below you, and be amazed! When the day has been hard, remember that the clouds boiling up over the mountains—they are requesting that you lighten up with them.

Postcard #5 read:
BE IN THIS ALONENESS TOGETHER. Scribble some helpful words in sharpie marker on CRISIS HOTLINE phones for people, family and strangers alike. Metaphorically-speaking, that is.

Dear Mother Earth of the Crisis Hotline,

I got five wonderful postcards from you and I thank you. Here is one last postcard from me, again from the Rio Grande Bridge. I found it when I was cleaning out my house, which is what I do when I get antsy these days. Did I tell you? I was standing on that bridge because I was staying at the Aldo Leopold writing residency right down the road, and thus had at least 1.5 million good-looking acres of trees around me for a month and I was in this America—this America of protected lands and in the home of a man who warned against consumption, reliance, the separation from nature and what it does to the soul. And that's when you started talking to me, I realize!

And did you know? This canyon was not carved by eons of erosion, as is the Grand Canyon—no, it was one big rift. A big tear. If we attributed pain to the planet, we would think that was one mighty painful event, a crisis-like event! Was it difficult?

All I know is this: When the time is right, I'll go back to that bridge and stare down at the huge cavern. I'll pick up the phone. I'll say, "Hello?" and I'll hear your raspy voice saying, "CRISIS HOTLINE, MAMA GAIA SPEAKING," and I'll say, "What's that you said? Endure? And what else?" And you'll say, "If you listen, I have a coupla ideas on wise and humble rebuilding. There is hope."

WINTER 2020 CONTRIBUTORS

VELIBOR BAĆO was born in 1985 in Bosnia and studied law in Salzburg, Austria. He is currently living in Vienna, Austria, and paints abstracts and writes German and English poetry and prose.

GUILHERME BERGAMINI is a Brazilian reporter and photographic/visual arrtist who graduated in Journalism. His works dialogue between memory and social political criticism. He believes in photography as the aesthetic potential and transforming agent of society. Awarded in national and international competitions, Guilherme Bergamini participated in collective exhibitions in 31 countries.

KATERYNA BORTSOVA is a painter – graphic artist with BFA in graphic arts and MFA. Works of Kateryna took part in many international exhibitions (Taiwan, Moscow, Munich, Spain, Macedonia, Budapest etc.). She also won a silver medal in the category "realism" in participation in "Factory of visual art", New York, USA and 2015 Emirates Skywards Art of Travel competition, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Kateryna is always open for commission and you can view her work on Instagram: @katerynabortsova, or on her website: http://bortsova6.wix.com/bortsova.

DESPY BOUTRIS's writing has been published or is forthcoming in *Copper Nickel*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Colorado Review*, *The Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere. Currently, she teaches at the University of Houston and serves as Poetry Editor for Gulf Coast and Editor-in-Chief of *The West Review*.

JAMES BRAUN's work has appeared in the *Minnesota Review*, failbetter, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and elsewhere. His short story "Clay," published in the *Rectangle*, won the 2020 Herbert L. Hughes short story award. James lives in Port Huron, Michigan.

ELI COYLE received his MA in English from California State University, Chico and is currently a MFA student at the University of Nevada, Reno. His poetry has recently been published or is forthcoming in *Tule Review*, *Caustic Frolic*, *Barely South Review*, the *Cosumnes River Journal*, the *Helix Literary Magazine*, and others.

PAULINA JENNEY was born and raised in Flagstaff, Arizona. Prior to joining the Environmental Studies master's program at the University of Montana, she worked as a farmhand, builder, bartender, and caretaker in various countries across the Americas. Her writing has been featured on Terrain.org.

JOEY MANCINELLI was born in Milwaukee, WI in 1996. He studied at UW-Madison. Aria Aber was his poetry instructor for two semesters. He is working on his first book while traveling the South and Southwest. Some of his poems are forthcoming in *Home is Where You Queer Your Heart Anthology*.

MELISSA MARTINI is a short fiction writer whose fiction has appeared in *Zanna Magazine*, *Analogies & Allegories*, *Jalada Africa's Bodies Anthology*, *Pretty Owl Poetry*, and *Dime Show Review*. She received her Master's degree in English with a focus in Creative Writing from Seton Hall University. When she isn't writing, she's reading about astrology or running her dogs' Instagram account.

ARINZE NDIELI is a Nigerian photographer. He is passionate about documenting muffled stories of the African with his visual art. Writing from Kaduna, or whichever place he finds himself, his creative juices tend to paint the spontaneity of his imagination, humanity & justice, truth and emotions in different ways, bringing as much healing to as much wounds crying for balm. His work has been published in ARTmosterrific and Winglessdreamer.

ANTHONY AFAIRO NZE is a graphic artist and illustrator.

SARAH PLATENIUS is a writer and artist whose work draws from the temperate rainforest of the west coast of Vancouver Island, where she lives with her husband, son and daughter. Her visual art has appeared in *Wilderness* and *The Hopper Magazine* and has been exhibited at Experiential Gallery and Pacific Rim Arts.

ANGELICA POVERSKY is a queer non-binary poet who summons ghosts back to life, shatters walls and unearths truths. They have performed and facilitated workshops exploring transness and queerness across North America.

DANI PUTNEY is a queer, non-binary, mixed-race Filipinx poet originally from Sacramento, California. Their poetry appears in *The Matador Review*, *Rappahannock Review*, and *Tule Review*, among other journals. They received their MFA from Mississippi University for Women. While not always (physically) there, they permanently reside in the Nevada desert.

KOLBE RINEY is a queer poet and student based out of Tucson, Arizona. Her work appears in the *West Trestle Review* and *Persona Magazine*, and is forthcoming in *Panoply Magazine* and *To Write Your Name*.

PRESTON ROSE is a nature and water photographer who spends their free time traveling with their fiancé and photographing the world.

AMANDA SORRELL is passionate about poetry and animal welfare. They live in central Ohio with their loving boyfriend and adorable rescue dog. They work as a kennel technician and receptionist at an animal hospital.

NAOMI STOLOW loves wildlife and nature photography, showing how incredible it is. She recently left the London rat race after a long career and is now renovating an old barn near the seaside. This gives her more time to enjoy photography, and although travel is out for now, she is really enjoying photographing local wildlife.

GREG TURLOCK is a published poet, author and photographer. His credits include "Rivers of Life", award-winning poem from the 2019 Alberta Arts Awards, "Hightops in the Snow", his new young-adult novel, *Prairie Survivors* photo essay in *High Shelf Press* and "Beauty from the Underworld" photo in Tiny Seed Journal. www.gregturlockcreative.com

MARIANNE WERNER's passions are travel and nature; she journeys to distant places and often writes about or photographs her adventures. She has published poetry, articles, and photos in varied magazines and newspapers, including *Empirical*, *Watershed*, *San Miguel Literary Sala Solamente*, *Pilgrimage*, *River Poets Journal*, *Flyway*, *Minerva Rising*, and *Written River*.

DARBY WILLIAMS was born and raised in Saratoga, California, on the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. She graduated from Whitman College in the Spring of 2020 with a degree in Environmental Humanities. Her thesis explored gender identity, animality, and creation in the Anthropocene through creative non-fiction and literary analysis. She is currently residing in Seattle, Washington.

MATT WITT is a writer and photographer in Talent, Oregon. His photography and blog may be seen at MattWittPhotography.com.

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