

TEMPERED STEEL

Volume 30,
2020

The Colorado Fuel and Iron Co.
MAP OF
WALSLEN MINE
T.28S.R.66 W.
HUERFANO CO.
Scale 1"=200'
Chief Engineers Office, Denver, Colo.

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2019-20

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EDITORS' NOTE

We truly appreciate all of the authors for sending our staff a piece of literary work. *Tempered Steel* leads the way in diversity and we encourage all writers to express themselves in their truest form. Our team sought out writing that exceeded our expectations and more. Each piece showed an enormous amount of character and depth that left a passionate mark on all of us.

The 30th edition of *Tempered Steel* was produced during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Having made some drastic changes to our production methods, the staff of *Tempered Steel* worked extremely hard to get this literary magazine out to the public. We want to graciously thank all of our contributors that made this issue come to life. The talented students at Colorado State University-Pueblo inspired us to overcome many challenging obstacles this semester.

Alongside our staff, this historical edition of *Tempered Steel* would not have been possible without our Faculty Sponsor, Professor Juan J. Morales. His knowledge and dedication to the world of literature inspired us to persevere and celebrate this very special edition.

We hope all of our readers enjoy this volume.

Now Is the Time to Create

While we sit someplace where the starting line
is just as invisible as the finish
Resting beneath a long apathetic shadow
lies our anvil
Waiting to assist in forging new creations

~Aubrey Scott

Austin Belore

Watchmen

The streets are filled with blood and the bodies of us
Who is watching them if no one is watching us?
Where can we find our god?
Is he still with us or is he too far gone?
What're we to do when the Watchmen never come through?
Are we left to wait?
What're we to say when our heroes can't be saved?
Are the Watchmen ever going to save?
Borders designed to separate life, from Mexico to Berlin
Justice sits in a dust bin with a rotten apple core
Nuclear halos hang inside the mind
Radioactive snow falls on Christmas morning cries
Politicians hiding their eyes hoping we won't find the sour
cigarettes
Black coffee conversations over dry crusted bloody cuts
Whisky burning bourbon breathe while cigars flutter in a dish
Who is watching them if no one is watching us?
Who will drain the streets of the blood?
The drains are scabbing up, clogged by the bodies of us
Politicians produce annihilating war pigs
Politicians pretending to be heroes
Politicians, wannabe Watchmen living a faded dreamland

Sandy Brack

Winter Wind

Jack stood near the bus bench, hands deep in the pockets of her mother's fake fur, face buried in her mother's belly. The wind was harsh this winter in the city, and Jack outgrew her own coat last year. Her mother promised her a new one all the time. First, it was Frank. He did something with cars, but Jack couldn't remember what. He made enough to buy Jack a coat, but he stopped coming around a long time ago. Then Charlie—he sold refrigerators and washing machines and didn't care that Jack didn't have a coat. He split her mother's lip once. Bill the banker came around after that. He was tall with kind eyes and promised to take Jack to Nielson's before it got cold to pick out a new coat. Something happened with the banks after that, and she heard her mother telling her Aunt Ruth over the phone that Bill had jumped out of his office window.

Something like that happened to Jack's dad, too, but she couldn't remember—she was much littler then. Back then, in the apartment with the windows that looked out over the world, out over the black snakes that slithered around all the buildings, that crawled with cars and hissed exhaust and car horns, Jack would get in trouble for playing in her father's wooden crates. The crates, only ever one at a time, were filled with green and brown glass bottles, and they clinked together like windchimes. Jack's father spanked her more than once for pulling the bottles out and stacking them on the windowsill; she loved the

way the sun changed color through them. These were not things for kids to play with, her father yelled at her. Jack accidentally knocked one off the windowsill once and it broke, green glass shards exploding like bullets and the worst smelling liquid Jack had ever smelled spilling over the floor. Jack cried as her father mopped up the mess, screaming at her from the knees of his new black suit. She never knew before then, and never understood why, how she could get her father in a lot of trouble for playing with those bottles.

He bought her mother that fur coat from Nielson's for Christmas a long time ago, before the broken bottle. Jack remembered how her mother shrieked and pressed that coat to her face and told her father how much she loved it. Her father said something about how business was good and that she'd be getting a lot more gifts like that real soon. She put it on over her nightclothes and didn't take it off all day. He gave Jack a doll with a yellow dress and a black hat and curly blonde hair who closed her eyes on her own when she was put on her back.

Jack never got anything else from her father after that, and her mother started complaining to her Aunt Ruth over the phone about his drinking. Jack didn't know why drinking was so bad; she drank, and her mother drank. But her father drank out of those glass bottles that Jack was not allowed to touch, so he must have been drinking something bad. Jack remembered what spilled out of that broken bottle—how it smelled—and she didn't understand why her father would want to drink something that smelled so foul. Her mother hated that he did.

Her father split her mother's lip once, too, just like Charlie the appliance man had. There were a lot of empty green and brown bottles in the crate that day. They had been shouting at each other, her mother and father. Jack covered her ears in her bedroom, but their muffled

voices were just as piercing and Jack cried. Her mother didn't want to stay in the city anymore. It was dangerous for some reason. She was scared that something would happen to her father, or to her and Jack. Her father yelled and said she was selfish for wanting to leave. His job was everything, didn't she understand that? Where were they supposed to go? He was for damn sure not going to turn into some farmer in the country, in the middle of nowhere. Her mother said, well maybe she'd take Jack and they'd leave on their own. Jack heard a loud smack and a thud on the floor, the door slam behind her father, and her mother's sobs seeped into Jack's muffled ears.

Her father stopped coming home some time after that. Her mother never said what happened, only that her father had gone away and he wasn't coming back. Jack heard her mother crying to her Aunt Ruth often, saying that she knew that son-of-a-bitchin' Jonesy was the one that done him in, but what was she supposed to do about it? What was she supposed to do now?

Her mother left the apartment often after that, and she wore that fur coat no matter if it was summer or winter. Jack loved the way she looked in it; so beautiful, so regal, like a queen. In the quiet emptiness of the apartment, Jack would look out of the window that looked over the world and imagine where her mother was in that fur coat—perhaps walking along the back of one of those black snakes, arm in arm with some man she hoped would stick around, perhaps in one of the cars that hissed exhaust and screeched defensive horns.

After Bill the banker, her mother stopped bringing men home. She asked Aunt Ruth how she was supposed to find work when no place was hiring men, let alone women, and lots of places were firing them?

Jack stood near the bus bench outside of the station, shivering against the cold wind, pressed against her moth-

er and wrapped in her fur coat. Her mother peeled her away, pressed a small piece of paper in her palm, and gripper her shoulders. "Listen to me, Jacqueline Marie. Your Aunt Ruth and Uncle Edward have a nice place up-state. You be sure to mind what they tell you, and help out around the house, you hear me? They will pick you up at the station. You have a cousin William there 'bout your age. Ruthy says he's kind of small for his age, so you be sure to be nice to him. Let him win sometimes when you're playing. You hear me, Jack?"

"Yes, I hear you Mama," Jack said, and watched a tear trace down her mother's cheek. "Aren't you coming, too, Mama?"

"Yes, baby, but not today. I'll take another bus just as soon as I can. In the mean time you mind your manners and don't play with stuff that's not yours."


"I won't know any body at Aunt Ruth's," Jack said, her own tear icing its way toward her chin.

"I know baby, but you will. Your Aunty Ruth loves you."

"But she doesn't know me." The bus, giant and green, painted with 3101 underneath its great glass forehead, crested the hill behind Jack, hissed its exhaust and lumbered to a stop.

"Listen, Jackie, it's time to go. Give that paper to the man driving, you hear me? You behave for your aunt and I'll be there right after you. I'll come right after you." Jack's mother slid the fur coat off her shoulders and threw it around Jack. "It's even colder up there than it is here, you better stay wrapped up in this." Jack disappeared in the fur coat that her mother wore around the house over her nightclothes one Christmas morning. "At least you won't outgrow this one anytime soon. Now go on, the bus is going to leave soon."

Jack stepped onto the bus, half of the coat dragging behind her small legs. She passed the paper to the man

in the driver's seat, and he motioned for her to take a seat. From an empty seat near back of the bus Jack looked for her mother through the window, but she was already turned away, shivering against the harsh winter wind, and Jack buried her hands in the pockets of her mother's fur. 

Justin Brown

Self-Actualization

Smoke curls from his nostrils like a morning glory crawling up a chain-link fence. It seems invasive, twisting around his long face, making it appear out of focus—like he has a second, breathing, moving skin that can be seen but not actually looked at. He never flinches, never coughs or squints, never seems to notice it at all. In between breaths of smoke, he sips his coffee slowly. Everything he does swells with subdued vitality.

I've been staring for too long. Getting careless.

Need to clear my mind. Don't want to attract attention.

Second refill. House coffee. No cream. No sugar.

He'll be leaving soon. I'm going to follow him today.

It was his hands that I first noticed; He never seemed to be aware of them. Most people standing in line fidget. They play with their phone, grab a menu from the counter, put their hands in their pockets, take them out again, hold them behind their backs, but not him. It was if he had no hands at all, or as if they were hidden by the same veil of curling, living smoke that sometimes clouds his face.

He wears clothes that wouldn't be out of place anywhere: dark jeans and black chucks. The kind of old t-shirt that has been washed so many times that it

is almost transparent.

I've been watching him for two weeks.

I'm definitely going to follow him today.

When alone, people tend to be more guarded, but him... he didn't seem to register that there was anyone else present. He spends his time at the cafe as if he were the only one here and seems completely at ease, more comfortable in public than I can be at home, alone, with the curtains drawn, soaking in a perfectly hot bath, while Dean Martin serenades me from the record player in my bedroom.

He's leaving.

Should I do it? Now that the time has come, I'm feeling butterflies. After a moment's hesitation, I follow him.

As he steps outside of the coffee shop and lights up another cigarette, I realize that I've never seen him in the sunshine before. His skin is like an anti-shadow—transparent, like his shirt, the sun seems to pass through. I'm getting nervous. I've never taken watching this far before, never actually followed someone. This is going beyond curiosity and bordering on stalking. I should go home, but I stand for a moment, watching him, then continue on about a half a block behind. He walks like he does everything else. It seems impossible that anyone can be so comfortable with his body that he does not even appear to notice using it. Watching him walk is like watching frost glittering as it slowly falls through the morning rays of sunlight, effortlessly following a predestined path. He turns down another street, disappearing behind the edge of a large brick building which sits on the corner. When I reach the end of the block, I slowly look around the building's edge, like a child wary of some unknown danger.

I don't see him anywhere.

He must have gone inside one of the shops lining the street.

Feeling a little awkward, I put my hands in my pockets, turn around, and head home.

On the way to my apartment, I attempt to mimic his nonchalance. I allow my shoulders to sag, and I stare off into space. My feet roll softly from heel to toe, my legs slowly rocking back and forth over them.

Stepping out into a street, trying to not notice my hands, I only noticed the bus a moment before impact, and in a flash, I see him, smoking, watching me as I fly like a ball ripping through the air off the end of a club.

He watches as my broken body grinds to a halt on the asphalt.

He watches as my spirit slips out of its cracked shell.

He sees me naked to the burning lines of the universe

my being devoid of perspective

perceiving only him, shining

like a sun in an endless void.

I feel him draw me in and embrace my
discarnate spirit.

...


As I am assimilated, I begin to see again, through
his eyes.

There are multitudes in here.

We look out onto kaleidoscopic gradations
—layer upon layer of simultaneous perspectives
overlapping and folding upon themselves.

There is no center.

We gaze across the street at a middle-aged man in a black, pin striped suit, carrying a thin brief case. He has paused briefly to look at the scene of

shouting people around the mangled body on the ground. He shakes his head, and turns away, walking to his destination. His shoes scuff over the ground, as if the incredible weight of a life that was chosen for him is pushing him into the sidewalk, but the rest of his body, poised, upright, and lithe, shows it not. With every step his briefcase bumps into his right leg, creating a counter rhythm to the cadence of his feet, clicking and scraping the concrete. We shift into a fatherly form and fall into step with him. A feeling of levity and absolute purpose comes over us, our heels tapping out drum lines of the universe's machinations in perfect harmonic simplicity. Like a chorus of a thousand angels, the multitudes within us cry out in ecstasy at perceiving our next affiliate. Sensing something, he turns his head to look at us. We keep walking, knowing that we'll see him again soon. We smile at some boys who rush by to see the accident, but they don't see us. Children rarely do. 

Dante Buck

To Sling an Arrow

All the days of summer seem to mesh together. Every day I wake up, get dressed, string my bow and fire arrows at a foam target for most of the day. I used to like guns or more so the idea of them. Point and shoot, it's as simple as that. But learning to shoot a bow is more involved. First, I had to learn the mechanics of it all, how to hold it and how to correctly launch the arrow straight. Then I built my muscles to shoot consistently, every day for hours I stand here, slinging the arrows. Having only a few arrows I have to walk back and forth after they have all been shot.

Back and forth like the saw I used in high school to cut my boards for the clock I was making. Mr. Smith always commented on how well I formed the wood in such elegant ways. With all the grandfather clocks, birdhouses, and shoe racks I've made, I must have done something right. The sawdust would make me cough but I loved the smell of pine and oak. Sanding the surfaces with the hand sander would make my hands tingle from the shaking. I always thought it was as easy as using the tools how they were supposed to be used. He would say that I could pursue a career in this if I wanted to and I did. But things rarely work out as you want them to.

I thought using a bow would be like using any other tool, but there is more to it than just pulling the string.

I figured it should be as easy as pulling the string and letting go but after a few videos I learned that when aiming you're not supposed to use the arrow to aim, you use your eyes and your arms will follow. However, this is not as easy as it sounds and there's nothing more infuriating than missing the target and losing arrows. It's a good way to rest your arms and back, but not very good for keeping a low blood pressure. Every branch and vine looks like an arrow and you have to mind the burning nettle and poison ivy. Countless times I have walked through those woods and felt the burning of those damn plants. But choices are made here, either wait till winter and find them when all the plants die or keep searching.

I, however, don't like to wait, so I learned to not miss. The more I shot the better I got at it. Practice makes perfect. Something every father says to their children, every coach to their players, and every mentor to their apprentice. I spent so many hours of my life shooting basketballs into the baskets, practicing the movements and adjusting my form, dribbling two balls at once, practicing my spin move. I also spent many hours watching better players while I sat on the sideline. Always chasing and trying to work harder than they did. But my dad always told me that stupid line. Practice makes perfect. I suppose he was right, but when does natural skill make hard work obsolete?


One minute the sun was out and about, shining its golden and warming rays down onto the back of my neck, the next minute my neck felt a coolness as I noticed the sky darkening. Then the thunder booming in the distance, like the sound of the drums at Pow Wow. The summers main event for my family, a congregation of our community to celebrate life and its beauties. Every year I sat under the great big oak tree and enjoyed

the shade and the smell of frybread and funnel cakes as well my cousin's dancing. I used to dance, I wasn't very good, but I did it. I don't really think about why I quit, I just know I danced one summer and stopped the next, in fact all of my siblings did. For a long time, I thought we wouldn't have any more dancers, but my sisters had dresses made for them and started dancing again. I felt pride watching them hop around in their colorful dresses. You could never imagine all of the reds, yellows, and blues that danced like the prairie grass in the wind. They were out of practice, but I was proud that they did it. Perhaps it's just a small thing to dance but I felt that it was more than simply preforming an old task. My grandmother always seemed to be annoyed of my sister's childish outbursts, but they always found a way to make her smile and laugh. That will probably be the last Pow Wow that my grandmother will be able to celebrate. Cancer is a cruel thing; it not only sucks the life out of the afflicted, but it hurts the people around as well.

Reaching back for an arrow then notching it on the string below the brass bead I snapped on to keep the arrow in place as I shot, and let it go. A sharp pain shot through my back and the arrow flew wide left and into the brush. I bit my tongue trying to keep myself from using every curse word I knew. The clouds began to weep as I stood there staring into the woods. I could hear a stir to left, behind the burn pile from the spring storms, as a rabbit hopped into the clearing and stopped. The thought of shooting it arose from the back of my mind as well as an old lesson I learned from my mother.

When the dogs would bring baby rabbits into the house still clawing for life. My siblings and I would cut the top of a shoe box off and fill it with towels. We kept the little thing in there hoping it would live, how na-

ive we were. As I got older, I learned that as soon as they were separated from their mother, they had little chance of making it. So, I would bring the little things outside to the woods and leave them there.

That rabbit could be the mother of a few little things and I would be the one who killed her for no reason. In my contemplation the rabbit had already hopped away. I turned my attention to the target soaking up the rain. I drew the last arrow, lined my arm and fired. Bullseye. Maybe I was born to pull a string and watch pointy sticks pierce the yellow rings downrange. 

Miranda Caro

The Performance

Lucia sat on the orange plastic chair, her violin bow in her right hand. She laid her glossy violin in the crook of her neck and held the neck of the instrument delicately in her left hand as if afraid of suffocating it if she held too tightly. She brought the bow down onto the bridge of her instrument and began to play a slow melody. She pressed down on the strings with her fingers hard enough to leave marks on her already calloused hands. As she played each note, she wished that she could press hard enough to break the skin and draw blood so that she'd have an excuse to stop playing, but the callous underneath was simply too strong to make that dream possible. She played forcefully trying to inflict injury with every note change. She knew that the violin's strings wouldn't break, their strings stronger than her will to play. She pressed the strings powerfully, yet gracefully, not wanting to hurt the violin, but wanting to hurt herself.

For forty minutes, Lucia practiced her sheet music for the next school performance. When she noted the time on the clock as being just under an hour, she hurriedly put the instrument back into its red velvet lined case. She zipped up the case and shoved it in the closet not wanting to even have the violin in sight. She hated the violin and hated the time that it cost her. Every day she went to orchestra class for an hour, then for

two hours at violin practice after school which she took at the old music shop a six-minute-drive away, and then for an additional hour alone in her room after she had finished her homework. She hated that this instrument had taken over seemingly her entire life at age thirteen. She hated how it made her feel even though she could never hate the instrument itself.

She didn't use to hate it. At one point she even loved the violin. When she had first received the gift from her grandpa, a violin player himself, who had sculpted and sanded down every inch of its body from hand, she thought it was beautiful and magical. She had smiled so much from happiness that her face muscles were sore and a few tears had even trickled out of the corner of her eyes. Her grandfather had carved "To my little sweetheart" on the side of its body so that no one could ever mistake it for another. She practiced her violin playing whenever she had time, during lunch recess, before going to school, in between bites during dinner, and late at night when everyone else in the house was trying to sleep. She had dreamed of playing the beautiful melodies her grandfather seemed to seamlessly play at every family reunion and birthday. But having spent so much time playing the instrument and still being scolded by her teacher and her tutor for not being good enough, for not being able to reach some notes fast enough during particularly quick sections, and for dropping and breaking the resin she used to lubricate her bow, she had relinquished all hope of becoming a great player like him one day.

Lucia sprinted down the stairs and to the kitchen where her mother and grandfather were sitting at the old light wooden table with the strawberry printed tablecloth drinking coffee and talking as beans hummed in a pressure cooker upon the stove. "Mama, I'm done

practicing!" she exclaimed as she plopped down on the chair. Her mother looked at her and raised her eyebrows with doubt. Even though she seemed reluctant, she finally replied with "Okay," and Lucia grinned, her gappy toothed smile emerging from her glossy lips. Lucia made a motion to get up from the table, but her grandfather held her arm with his hand and motioned with his other for her to sit down.

"I still haven't heard you play your violin," her grandpa said his accent thick and a bit hard to understand. "Why don't you play me something?" Her grandpa lived in a small house in the run-down portion of the city, but rarely came over because Lucia's family was always too busy during the week. It was true that he hadn't heard Lucia play yet, but Lucia had purposefully avoided playing in front of him. When she went over to his house, she left the violin at home. When he came to her house, she usually made an excuse about having too much homework. Lucia glanced down at the floor and tried to study her shoes. She didn't want to explain how she had refrained from playing for him because she knew he would be disappointed.

"I guess I just never got around to it," she managed to reply. She glanced up for only a moment and caught her grandpa's soft smile.

"Why don't you come to her performance next week?" suggested her mother. Lucia wanted to object, but before she could do anything, her grandfather had nodded and replied in the affirmative.

"Of course! I've been meaning to ask if she had a concert anyway."

Over the next few days Lucia practiced more than she ever thought she could. She wasn't excited to play, on the contrary, she was frightened of seeming like a failure to her grandfather. In her eyes, the instrument

was so beautiful, that she felt she was unworthy of it. It's beautiful lacquered surface shone with beauty, the strings taut as if holding its breath in excitement. Lucia imagined that when she played, instead of the violin singing out in joy, it wailed in sadness from disappointment. She practiced even though she hated the instrument and its superiority over her. She practiced even though her fingers couldn't catch all of the notes perfectly and didn't satisfy her teachers as they remarked, "You missed it again!" She practiced even though she hated the dusty, dingy off-white painted walls of the basement of the music shop and she hated her tutor who was perpetually red in the face. She practiced even though all she wanted to do was sit on the couch and watch T.V. and movies before bedtime.

On the day of the performance, Lucia reluctantly and slowly dressed herself in her concert attire, a stuffy white button up shirt, a silky black skirt that fell all the way to the floor, and ugly black formal shoes. She then put her hair up in a bun, and secured it with pins. Wisps of hair fell from her temples, but she felt too lazy to try and slick back her wavy hair anymore than the imperfection she had achieved. As she looked at herself in the mirror she felt even more horrible about herself. Her forehead beaded with sweat and she tried to wipe it away, but with the sweat gone, a bright sheen of oil shone from her forehead and irritated her more.

"You can do it. Maybe, just try," she tried to reassure herself unconvincingly, her fingernails digging into her palms. She turned away from the mirror, not wanting to watch herself tear up as any courage she had mustered fled from her body. She felt like telling her mother that she was sick and that she couldn't perform, but knowing that she could never get away with that plan, she picked up her violin case and raced downstairs

where her family stood waiting for her. Her grandpa stood at the door, his camera slung over his shoulder, which he undoubtedly would use to snap photos throughout her performance, and Lucia felt her stomach lurch. Not wanting to worry her family, she forced a tight smile, stepped outside, and lead her grandpa to the car. They all packed into her dad's vehicle and drove to the performance.

Her parents and grandpa made their way into the auditorium of the school, while Lucia parted with them to meet her class backstage. While everyone rushed around fixing their attire and practicing for the last time, Lucia took a quick peek through the curtains to look at the stage where she would be performing in only a matter of minutes and her stomach churned in anxiousness. The stage was brightly lit with lights, her chair off to the right side. She could hear the rustling and chatter of the audience and from the sound, she could tell that there was at least a hundred people already seated. She took deep breaths of air, in and out, to calm herself when she heard the call to come onstage. Lucia took one last breath of air and tried to lock away her fear in her throat. She unzipped her violin case, but in seeing the contents, or the lack thereof, she started to sob and fell to her knees. The spot where the violin should have been was empty and the bow lay in the case by itself. It suddenly dawned on her that the violin was still sitting on the chair where she had placed it earlier as she dressed for the performance. She wept on the un-swept ground of the backstage feeling like her life was over. Her teacher, Mr. Smith tried asking what was wrong, but she could only get out through stutters, "It's gone."

Mr. Smith sent out a student to find Lucia's family in the crowd and escort them backstage. Her family

rushed through the doors and at seeing Lucia crying on the floor, were so shocked that they stood around her with wide eyes. Mr. Smith explained the situation: there were no extra instruments and the performance could be postponed no longer. After a brief exchange of words between himself and Lucia's mother, Mr. Smith ushered the remaining students onstage without a single glance at Lucia and welcomed the audience to the performance. A minute later, the sound of strings filled the air. Lucia's sobs had quieted and now tears streamed down her face silently as she held onto her mother's side. Her mother embraced Lucia and stroked her head.

"It's okay baby. Shh shh, it's okay. Just an accident is all," her mother coaxed.

Lucia could see just over her mother's shoulder that her grandpa was standing there, the unused camera still in its case, his hands hidden in his pockets, and a worried expression dominating his features. Her father whispered something to her mother as she and Lucia hugged, and left to pull the car around to pick them up from the back exit.

They piled into the car as they had earlier and pulled out of the parking lot of the school. It was dead silent for a few moments, and the silence made Lucia even more regretful. She felt a new wave of tears start to spill as she looked out the window and focused on a star very far away. Her grandpa broke the silence first.

"Well that's too bad," grandpa sighed. "I was really looking forward to hearing you play. But there's always next time." He held her hand and squeezed it tightly.

"I'm not even good at it," she sniffled, not even able to turn around and look him in the face. "I suck."


"No you don't," her mother chimed in from the front seat. "Your music is beautiful. I've heard you practice

in your room. I wish I could play the violin." Her mother turned around as best she could from her seat, "You know I could never play any instrument, no matter how hard I tried."

Her dad replied in his deep voice, "Your practice is really paying off you know. You're able to play a lot better than when you first started." For some reason this little jab didn't hurt, and Lucia giggled and wiped away a tear.

"Yeah, I was really bad then," she laughed.

When they got home, Lucia rushed to her room, and sure enough the violin lay on the chair, perfectly unaware that its disappearance had caused such grief for her. Lucia picked up the instrument and ran down the stairs to the living room. Her little family sat on the couch as if they had been waiting for her.

"May I play for you?" Lucia asked. She was nervous and her heartbeat pumped hard and fast in her chest. Her grandpa gave her two thumbs up and she couldn't keep from smiling. She brought the instrument to her neck, carefully placed her fingers on the first notes, and brought her bow to the strings. She played and though she knew her teachers would have scolded her for missing notes here and there, choppy notes that cut off spontaneously, she knew that she was playing to the best of her ability. She played, her eyes closed, as she totally immersed herself into the loud wailing squeals of her music, and her violin became an extension of herself. And for the first time in a long time, she enjoyed herself, and couldn't help but smile widely with pride as her family listened to the product of her hard work, missed notes and all. 

Devin Flores

Bees, Wasps, and All Living Things

My grandmother's living room was a shrine to nature.

She liked to decorate with pinecones and autumn leaves and paintings of forests, because those were things you did not see often in the desert where my family lived. In her yard she had windmills and weathervanes shaped like butterflies. On her shelves, she had little statues of animals, and papier-mâché birds of all species with thin wire feet and wings made from real feathers, and jars filled with beans or pressed leaves or the remains of an abandoned nest.

She filled her life with little pieces of nature and built an oasis for herself. And each little trinket had a story, a memory of a beautiful summer day.

* * *

I have never been stung by a bee, but I was always afraid of them. As a little child, I would tense up even if there was a bee in the area. My heart would start to race, my breathing would become shallow, and I would feel that panic start to set in, that fight-or-flight response demanding I do something. But I would force myself to keep walking at a steady pace, no matter how much I wanted to scream and sprint away.

My grandmother had once told me, "Bees can

smell when you're afraid. And they know that when people are afraid, they do stupid things like squash a bug or attack a hive. So when you get afraid of bees, they get afraid too, and that's why they sting you."

Her advice was to stay calm, and not be afraid of bees. It's difficult to force yourself not be afraid of something, but I tried really hard because I did not want to be stung. So every time I walked through her back garden, down the red brick pathway between the wild thistles where the bees lived and the low, chain-link fence that protected the flower patch, I would hold my breath and stare really hard straight ahead and force myself to not be afraid. I still do, when I hear the buzzing of a bee.

* * *

My grandmother's house was not particularly big, but it sat in the middle of a large plot of land which felt like the whole world when I was young. It stretched from the road all the way to the muddy creek, and was mostly brambles and bristles. Her property was a two-acre patch of wild desert surrounded on all sides by green lawns and adobe walls.

There were two buildings, the house and the garage, and a little patch of green in between them—her garden, surrounded by a low chain-link fence and ringed by a stepstone walkway. Everything else, on all sides, was loose dirt or untamed thistle, growing tangled in the shade of the towering eucalyptus trees. Those trees stood like sentinels in a huge ring around the property, twice as tall as the two-story house if not more, and they were never still. The slightest breeze made them sway and whisper to one another like conspirators. Sometimes, when it was very windy, I would get afraid that branches would fall off and land

on the house, or on the car, or on us while we were walking through the garden.

One time I told my grandmother this and she looked at me like I was stupid. "The trees bend so they don't break," she told me, and we went back to planting flowers.

* * *

My grandmother never believed in killing bugs. If someone stepped on a bug in her garden, even a fire ant that had just bit them, she would stand up and wring her hands and her face would twist in a bitter little frown.

"You shouldn't kill bugs outside," she'd say, all the time, because the fire ants were everywhere. "All living things just want to be left alone. And this is their home. They don't come into our homes and step on us."

Except sometimes they did get into her house, and she didn't believe in killing them then, either. She'd insist on picking them up with cups and a piece of cardstock paper, and she'd take them out into her flower patch and chuck them over the fence.

"They don't know it's our house," she told me on one such occasion. "They don't know any better, so it's not fair to squish them for it."

I guess since we're humans, we know better.

I still squish bugs that get into my house, but sometimes I think about my grandmother when I do and I feel bad about it.

* * *

If you've never seen a tarantula-hawk wasp, they look like space aliens. They're huge, as long as your hand is wide, and they have sleek black bodies that shimmer blue in the sunlight. They don't flit or hum like

lesser insects. They buzz through the air like tiny ballistic missiles or miniature attack helicopters, and they have huge pincers and stingers like sewing needles. They scared me even more than the bees did, and they loved my grandmother's back garden. In the height of summer, you could always find one or two there buzzing around, hunting for a spider to lay its eggs in.

My grandmother liked to sit really still at her little wrought-iron table and watch them flit by. "They're prettier than dragonflies," she told me once.

Even knowing what I do now, I'm not sure if I believe her. There had been a lot of dragonflies where she grew up, but there are none in the desert. So maybe she was just pretending they were dragonflies, that their black stealth-bomber bodies were green-and-gold instead. But either way she could watch them for hours and never get bored.

Sometimes I would sit and watch with her, and hold my breath when they came near, until one day I saw the sleek, deadly beauty she had seen from the beginning.

* * *

One time, my grandmother took me out to the side of her house. We stood next to the huge external air conditioning unit, which hummed and clicked constantly as it fought its futile war against the Nevada summer. We stood next to it in the sweltering heat, and she pointed up at the eaves of her house. There was a little wooden box there, painted the same color as the wall, with a little sloped roof. I thought it was a bird house, and maybe it was supposed to be. Instead it was a hornet nest.


My grandmother got out a ladder and climbed up to take the little box off its hook. The yellowjackets buzzed angrily like tiny fighter jets, but they never landed on

her and never stung her. They circled around her head in a halo, but they kept their distance as she carefully climbed back down with the box held in one hand.

She put the box down on the air conditioner, and told me to come take a look. I approached, my heart hammering as I entered the thin cloud of wasps all around her. The box was clearly handmade, and I knew instantly she had made it herself. I never asked why, and she never told me.

She showed me that the sloped roof was hinged, and could be lifted up. She opened the box and showed me the nest inside, with paper hexagons filling the whole of it. She showed me that some of the wasps were still inside, their black and yellow bodies shockingly bright against the pale brown of the nest itself. I remembering being so afraid that they would leap out to defend their home and sting both of us to death.

"I don't want to bother them too long," she told me. "They want to be left alone. But I thought that'd be interesting for you." Then she closed the lid, climbed back up the ladder, and hung the box on the hook again.

That little nest box hung from her eaves for the rest of that year, but when winter came the buzzing stopped. All the wasps either died or left for a new home. So she took the box down for good, and carefully took it apart. The wood she threw away, because it was rotting from being outside without varnish or paint, but she kept the nest. She lifted it carefully off the wood, snipping away at the connecting points with her kitchen shears, and then she put it in a glass jar and sealed it up. As far as I know she still has it, a little piece of nature's wonder sitting on a shelf somewhere with all her other little memories. 

Gillian Hawken

Here

The constant blackness looks blue
as the moon shines against the sky.
The full moon lights the night
bright and unexplainable and so high.

The drive home is always pitch black,
refreshing with houses hidden in the hills,
houses I pass every night unknowingly.
Skipping and dancing in between piles of dirt
as my car winds through those barren roads.
My gullible, childlike eyes
taking in what I thought I once knew.

Abstract shadows dance on the seats of my car.
Light reflects onto the worn out, stained chair.
It reveals to me the years of spilled coffee
and piles of past owners' memories.
Pieces of art that never seem to stop changing.

A constant state of motion.
Pieces impossible to recreate.
Vivid, unforgettable.
The mountains are a silhouette against the sky.
Dim lights from the homes outlining this small town.

We are but a miniscule speck in time,
lucky enough to live
here.

Mikayla Hoffman

Help

Two malnourished boys gaze on, hungry.
Reach out their arms to beg for food.
Their eyes speak for them saying
Please help me. I am starving.

Two young boys covered in filth
Surrounded by others just as famished, just as dirty.
Forget the bath, all they want is
A chance to eat
And fill their bloating stomachs.

Each one hoping for a feast.
Each one asking a question.
Will you help me?
Will this ever end?

Rashon Johnson
Long Thoughts

They told me that inside this room
Was the safest place to be
The walls, this cord, and this mask
Helping me to breathe
They told me that I wasn't ready
For the universe out there
They told me that this fear I have
Is something they all share
I think they were confused
When they described me as being scared
I'm not afraid of what's out there
I'm afraid of what's in here
These tile floors and metal walls
Mock me as I float
The circular window in the corner
Holds the promise of freedom; of hope.
I've never felt so alone
Surrounded by all the stars
I think they made some sort of mistake
Believing this simulation was better than the real thing
They've lost their hope, their wonder
Their curiosity
The fear of what lies between us and home
Is what keeps them that way, I think
But the only way to know what's there
Is to let us go; to be free.

It's some kind of corporate antic
I guess I understand
But to not know
To not care
That's not how I want to live
The darkness suffocates me
As I float here once more
When I was there
I wanted to be here
And now I can't remember why
The blue, the white, the green;
The promise of home, of life
Miles and miles away
I'll never forgive them;
Forgive myself
For leaving; for wanting to get away.

Max Mendieta

The Slow Waltz of Death

We were wild,
Her and I.
Two out of control souls
Dancing upon the world's stage
For no one but ourselves.
With her eyes locked on mine
And mine on hers,
We twirled and spiraled
In and out of each other's embrace
With reckless abandon,
Never holding on too tightly,
But never letting go.

Sierra Pérez

¿Quién te crees que eres?

A collection of sounds, somehow all wrong

Damned if i do, damned if i don't

¿Quién te crees que eres?

A reflection of my being,

too white to be brown, too brown to be white

¿Quién te crees que eres?

I carry the weight of my ancestors, both painful and
loving

I represent what once was, and what will be

¿Quién te crees que eres?

My tears are la sangre de los muertos

Mi sangre is the aftermath of a battle siempre perdido.

¿Quién te crees que eres?

Always wrong, la gringa que ama a las latinas

Never right, la latina amada por las gringas

¿Quién te crees que eres?

la agringada.

or the outlier.

¿Quién te crees que eres?

I hear the differences my name carries in the mouths
of strangers,

one like a passive breeze tickling the trees

¿Quién te crees que eres?

whispering *enough*!

one like the rattling of an angry snake

¿Quién te crees que eres?

whispering *basta*!

Sierra Pérez
Unnamed

Anger is not the epitome of human emotion.
Nor is happiness, or sadness, or fear.
Nay, the true demon that stalks the night and kills the
 mind
Is loneliness.
It is the inky tendrils that murder the damned,
the sticky sweet smiles that suffocate the angels.
It is the ever hunting beast that grins in dark corners,
and prowls crowded rooms.
I find myself aching.
The waning hours of the night bring about the most
 severe yearning.
Like the dusk craves the touch of dawn,
I crave the touch of warmth.
But daybreak is the destroyer of the night,
each passing second further dissolves the fog.
And you were the destroyer of me.
In the end we all go dark,
but my descent has been catalyzed by solitude.

Megan Price

Bandidos Stole Her: Violence Against Indigenous Women

“**A**ll they found was her coin.” My grandmother says matter of factly.

Perhaps at one point she said the sentence with fear or sympathy, maybe a little bit of sadness but now that it's been told over and over to all of her children and grandchildren, the reality of the story doesn't really phase her anymore. My grandmother was never as hard or as firm as when she spoke of family matters. She was quiet most of the time, adhering to the machismo that plagued her life with my grandfather around. She had a mischievous quietness about her though. When she wanted to speak chismes¹ she would get this look on her face of a child who stole from the candy store, she would look like she was ready to burst. I suppose that is how I could have seen her if I had been alive at the beginning of this long journey in finally understanding our family history.

My great Great Grandmother Lujan, who we often referred to as 'Abuelita' was kidnapped from the Ute reservation near the border of Texas. My grandmother spoke often of this story when we were children, substituting stories about her own youth for ones about her grandmother's.

As children, my cousins and I used to play “Abuelita

1 Chismes: Spanish word for gossip

y los Bandidos²" our own version of "Cops and Robbers," running around chasing each other and dragging one another across the dying grass outside my grandparents' yard; my cousins dragging me as I purposefully threw a jar lid (our version of abuelita's heritage coin³) into the ditch that sat on the side of my grandparents house.

Years later after this trivial game ended and we had a million other things in life to worry about, the truth of what really happened to Abuelita was revealed.

"She was sold to a wealthy Spanish family."

"That must have been a good thing for her then? Abuelita must have been treated well by those Spaniards?" I asked after we had been scolded again for playing games that involved our dead ancestors.

"Your bisabuela used to tell me horror stories about her time with those Spaniards. They were not nice to her." Grandmother would say. "They treated her like a servant, como un paleta⁴."

"I thought they were bandidos Abuela. I thought they were very bad people."

"They were still bad mija but they weren't robbers. Maybe to us, but not to outsiders."

Indigenous women, especially those in and around the reservations continue to seek refuge from systematic violence that has plagued their society for generations. Women of indigenous birth are more likely to see violence in their life than the average white woman. They are more likely to face police brutality, corruption of power and abandonment than the

2 Bandidos: Spanish word for robbers

3 Specific tribes held deep connections to these coins, citizenship to tribes was often proved by these silver 3 coins.

4 "Como un paleta": like a peasant.

average white woman. They have more to lose in life, more to fear. I never understood the severity of these stories until I grew up and saw violence against other indigenous women much like her.

There are more than 500 women today that have been classified missing or murdered and of that 500, almost 200 of them are Indigenous. They are helpless to the violence they see as the society around them does nothing to hinder these heinous acts. Women, much like Abuelita, were forced from their lives into roles they were strangers too. Not all of them had the privilege of living through these kidnappings, not all of them were lucky enough to survive.

I can't imagine grandmother Lujan's fear, plaguing her being, as she was taken away from everything she knew.

Afterwards, our game of Abuelita y los Bandidos became a thing of the past. Each of us at a young age being turned off by the romanticized version of the story we no longer wished to be a part of. It seemed easy to distance ourselves from our lineage then, when we cared more about having fun than the severity of our actions, but looking back I suppose the game probably wasn't in good taste. My hands gripped the jar lid tighter each day after, a constant reminder of Abuelita Lujan of the life she had lost, of the family she left behind when she was taken.

It's a constant reminder to us what we lost as a family, our ties with the reservation and our Native American relatives. It's a reminder of what women in Native cultures continue to lose daily. Their agency ripped from their hands much like Abuelita's was is only part of the agony of these kidnappings. They lose their sense of identity as they are thrust into violent worlds they do not wish to be a part of. They lose their family

in the process, being taken far away from everything they know and trust.

My grandmother isn't the first to be taken and she won't be the last. Our childhood was shaped by this event in more ways than me and my similarly young cousins would know. We knew nothing of our Native American bloodline, only knowing, that because Abuelita was forced to marry into that Spanish family, that a part of us was a part of that violent bloodline. Though my own grandmother came from the Spanish ancestors of the owners of my great great grandmother, she despises them for the hurt they caused. She is angry at the reservation for letting Abuelita get taken⁵.

My grandma has since forgotten a lot of the anger she once had. She can hold grudges and she did so for a large part of her life. Now she has other people to look out for and care about. Abuelita Lujan will always be at the forefront of her mind, her memory serving as the drive for every woman in my family to not lose their voice.

I never thought of my life being so intertwined with those of the unheard. I cared that these occurrences and this violence was happening and that it was happening to women but I never really understood the personal and guttural anger and loss that the family members of these missing and murdered women feel. I had grown up understanding that my great, great, great grandmother was stolen in the middle of the night by robbers, people who had no reason to care about others. I had grown up thinking that that was how it was, women were kidnapped by savages. I didn't expect for the kidnapping of Abuelita to feel so


5 Indigenous men are to blame as well, as they act as agents for kidnappings when they do nothing but stand back and watch their women be taken.

much like an exchange of goods. I didn't expect to feel so angered by finding out that she even lived after she was kidnapped and that I, though distant, am a product of that kidnapping. I didn't realize that I could be so personally offended and angered by my own heritage, something that I was told to be proud of.

Women throughout history have been taken and murdered and abandoned because of their gender and race. They are examples of the power that men hold over ethnic women. It began long before colonization and continued long afterwards and women like Abuelita are the end result of this.

Though Abuelita was one of the lucky ones, lucky in the sense that she did not die at the hands of these violent individuals, there are many that do not meet the same fate. Abuelita got to live a long and prosperous life though I'm not quite sure how she felt about it all. My grandmother doesn't speak about her often anymore. As a kid I didn't think it important to ask questions and now when I have them, my grandmother cannot remember all too well what occurred. I do know that Abuelita is strong, though her voice was not heard, her opinions never taken into consideration, she survived. She may not be around to speak out against this violence but in a sense she doesn't have to. The women in my family will. We are not the only ones that see the trend between indigenous women and violence, we are not the only ones paying attention to missing and murdered women⁶, and we certainly won't be the last.

6 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women is a subsection of the Coalition to End Violence Against Native Women, an organization that seeks to call out and cease all and any violence to Native and Indigenous women.

“Abuelita was stolen by Bandidos hija, pero she was taken by the kind that don't look like Bandidos at all.” 

Megan Price

Fuerza

My mom carries
the weight of every mistake I've made,
late night my sisters had
and every fight my brother has put up against her.

She carries this weight in her arms
strong as they wrap around us
to comfort after a bad breakup
to stroke our hair passing strength
from her palms to the roots of our scalp.

It's in her knees
bending to reach towards her grandchildren
picking up the pieces of a broken body
sweeping our persons together again.

In her feet as they march onward
running to us in times of hurt
stopping short in times when
life needed to hit us a little harder
so we could understand just how tired we could be,
how worn down our feet could look.

She carries this in her eyes
brown valleys of love
melting beneath our keen grins
alert and ready to go to war
for four young adults
trying to take on the world.

She carries it in her words
mija todo estará bien
soft affirmations coming from lips
that have kissed away the dark
breathed life into dry bones
and spoken power into our lungs.

Lysandra Rios Quintana

28

I anxiously follow my older sister down the halls,
Everything seems so sterile and lifeless,
The walls are painted a ghostly white,
Void of all happiness and joy.
Rooms begin to appear,
To the right,
The left.

I don't want to be here,
To be seen.
I don't want this to be true.
It's not real!!

Familiar faces begin to pass by.
People I haven't seen in years,
People I don't want to see,
When I see them,
I see fake smiles.
It's blinding!

I haven't made it to my destination,
But fear overcomes me.
They are staring,
Staring because I look just like her.

As we draw closer a path begins to clear.
Those faces start to leave.
We arrive at our destination.

I see her,
My oldest sister,
My mentor.
Beautiful as ever,
But something is missing.
I think for a moment,
Oh! Her glasses.
She's sleeping,
She doesn't need them.

But wait, that's not it!
Something else is missing.

My thoughts are interrupted.
An old man stands at the door.
I realize there are many people now.
Noise that was never there dissipates.
All eyes are on this one man.
He is wearing a white lab coat.
Glasses on the tip of his nose.
Grey hairs,
Man, he's old!

He begins to tell us it's almost time.
The forbidden number has been reached.
There is no going back.
They have done all they can.
It's time to say goodbye.

The world seems hazy again.
Seconds become hours,
Hours become days.

It's not time!
I hear a whisper in my ear,
"Say something"
She's just sleeping,
Where did her glasses go?

"SAY something"
She's sleeping!
"SAY SOMETHING!"

It's too late.
Time's run out.

Alexa Rodriguez
All That's Left

On my dresser, wedged between two large bottles of Victoria's Secret perfume and an unused candle that smells vaguely like salted caramel popcorn, there is a thick stack of polaroid photographs—there must be at least a dozen of them there—each taken only weeks apart, over the course of one long, hot summer. There are a few shots of a wide open beach, with neon towels littering the golden sand. Others are failed attempts at candid, taken in coffee shops whose names I don't remember, with the subjects looking directly at me, or looking more like flesh-colored blurs than people.

After those, there are a few of me, terribly-taken in front of full-length mirrors inside the surf shops that line Mission Bay, or making goofy faces with my group of friends. We look freakishly young, and most of the pictures aren't even centered, but I keep them anyway, because they remind me of fourteen, and skinny jeans and at-home hair-dye jobs and oversized Led Zeppelin tees and screaming my head off at concerts I had no business attending.

Then, at the very bottom of the pile, there's a picture of the girl who passed away a year after the photograph was taken. It's hidden beneath the rest, because simply looking at it can reduce me to a puddle of tears and mascara in seconds, but the thought of getting rid of it can do the exact same.

I haven't looked at it in years, but I remember that she's laughing in it – she was always laughing.

Her head is thrown back like the joke was too much for her to take, though I know it was probably something completely ridiculous, like a poorly-thought-out pun, or maybe it's just the pose she immediately jumped into when she saw the camera lens pointed at her.

Still in the beginning phase of my photography obsession, I was snapping pictures of anything that looked even remotely photogenic—from the bright green bowl of chips that sat on the end of my chair, to the pair of yellow aviators perched on someone's head.


The weather was warm that day, and there were at least six or seven of us lounging around in her driveway in plastic lawn chairs. Across the street, a neighbor was blasting classic rock, and next door, the grumpy old man shouted at us to keep the noise to a minimum.

It smelled like sunblock and tanning lotion, and I can still hear the sound of someone complaining about the lack of color on their pale arms, and at the time I was irritated because all I wanted to do was take pictures in peace without the high pitched complaints of “ew stop it, I wasn't even looking” or “no no, retake that one right now, my hair's a mess.”

Knowing what I know now, and knowing that almost an entire year later, everything would be different and fourteen would have come and gone in the blink of an eye, that some of those friends wouldn't even be friends anymore, that the girl with the fiery orange hair wouldn't even be around to see it, I'd go back in a heartbeat. Knowing that poorly-taken polaroids and half-empty bottles of Banana Boat suntan lotion that haven't been used since that day are the only reminders I have of a summer that came and went

too quickly, I'd grumble a little less and laugh a little more; I'd take twice as many photographs of actual people than I did of random objects, I'd stop and listen to the classic rock and the shouting old man, and I'd appreciate the moment a lot more while it's happening.

Sifting through the pictures now, I can't help but feel I wasted precious time and yes, I lost a friend who was far too young, and yes, that group of kids disbanded not too soon after, and now that nostalgia has reared her ugly head, I'm thinking of everything I should have done differently.

But the sad truth is, sometimes you never know the significance of a moment until it's over and done with and all you have left is a blurry photograph of a girl who's voice is starting to fade from your memory—and sometimes you have to accept that. 

Samantha Romo

The Shadow Man

Characters:

Kari: twenty-three

The Shadow Man: Kari's shadow

Doctor: Kari's physician for 10 years

Setting:

A room in High Tower Asylum. The white walls are illuminated with pale light.

Time:

Friday, October 13

Note: The Shadow Man will be on and off stage. A light will be needed to create the effect that he is Kari's shadow.

As the curtain draws, we see Kari in a far corner rocking in the fetal position. The lights flicker right as it turned midnight casting her shadow on the wall.

SHADOW: Kari...Kari...Kari. Kari we need to leave. We need to leave today.

Kari doesn't respond. She keeps rocking in the corner.

SHADOW: *(appears on stage in dark clothing.*

The shadow on the wall is no longer there. He approaches her) Come on, we don't have time for this, Kari. The Doctor will be here soon.

Silence.

SHADOW: *(kneels in front of her)* Listen to me. This is the only day that this can happen. This is the only day the Doctor comes without a nurse. We have to escape today or else it is another month of constant injections and painful therapies. You want to leave this place don't you?

KARI: Y-Yes, but-

SHADOW: But what?

KARI: *(whispers while rocking)* You're just in my m-mind.

SHADOW: Am I Kari? Am I really just in your mind?

KARI: Y-Yes. *(starts scratching her arms)* Just in my mind. You're not real.

SHADOW: HA! How foolish. *(He puts both hands on her shoulders and whispers in her ear)* Don't tell me you actually believe that. I know that you can feel me. Feel my hands on your shoulders. My breath in your ear. Don't deny it; my presence is making you shiver.

Kari shakes him off and crawls quickly to the other side of the room. He hides on stage.

KARI: *(starts rocking in the fetal position again)* NO! NO! I don't FEEL you! I don't SHIVER! YOU ARE IN MY HEAD! YOU ARE IN MY HEAD! YOU ARE IN MY HEAD!

The sound of footsteps echoes on the other side of the door as Kari continued to scream.

KARI: NOT REAL! NOT REAL! YOU ARE NOT REAL! *(she scratches her arms harder)*

The door burst open. A Doctor rushes in.

DOCTOR: Kari, calm down. Calm down, Kari.

Remember what we said? The voices are only in your head? They can't hurt you.

SHADOW: (*reappears and mimics*) They can't hurt you Kari. (*hides off stage. Kari's shadow reappears on the wall*)

KARI: NO! NO!

DOCTOR: Kari. Kari listen to me. You can do this.

Come on, say it with me. It's all in my head.

DOC & KARI: It's all in my head.

SHADOW: (*reappears onstage*) HA! It's all in your head? IT'S ALL IN YOUR HEAD?! (*kneels down next to Kari*) Do you really believe him? Do you really believe those words that are coming out of his mouth? What is he to say that I don't exist? Who is HE to say that I am only in your mind? What DOES HE know about us? Come on Kari. You know that in your heart that I am real. (*He takes her hand and places it on his heart*) Tell me that you don't feel that. My heart beat. It follows the rhythm of yours.

DOCTOR: Kari? (*He watches her hand suspended in the air*) Kari? Can you hear me?

SHADOW: Kari? Do you hear that? That's the sound of your heart beating. Its beating faster because you know I'm real. Your heart beats in response to mine.

Kari starts to shake.

DOCTOR: Kari? (*helps her put her arm down and the Shadow Man hides off stage*) Listen to me. Whatever the voice inside your head is saying to you, it isn't real. It is the result of your Schizophrenia. That voice you hear is only your consciousness attempting to protect you from your fears. You're scared that the world you created isn't real. You can resist it. I know you can.

KARI: *(looks at the Doctor)* In my head?

DOCTOR: Yes, Kari it's all in your head. *(holds her hands)* Come on. I need you to say it. Say "It's all in my head"

KARI: I-It's all in my head.

SHADOW: *(reappears behind the Doctor)* NO! Kari don't listen to him!

DOCTOR: Very good. Say it again.

KARI: It's a-all in my head.

SHADOW: *(clutches his chest)* STOP IT! Kari stop saying that! *(shouts at the Doctor)* STOP TELLING HER LIES! WHY CAN'T YOU JUST LEAVE US ALONE?!

KARI: STOP IT! *(yanks out of the Doctor's grasp and crawls to her original spot in the room. Clutching her head while rocking)* STOP IT! STOP IT! STOP IT! SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!

DOCTOR: Kari calm down.

The Shadow Man hides. The Doctor reaches out to her. Kari starts kicking and swinging her arms.

KARI: DON'T TOUCH ME! DON'T TOUCH ME! DON'T TOUCH ME!

The Doctor reaches out again. Kari becomes more violent.

KARI: DON'T...TOUCH...ME! *(lets out a shilling scream then starts to cry)*

SHADOW: *(reappears and kneels down next to Kari)* Shh...It's okay Kari. Don't listen to him. All he does is upset you with his words. Do you remember? The day when we first met?

Kari silently nods to herself. The Doctor watches warily.

DOCTOR: Kari?

SHADOW: You were six and when I first saw you. You were being picked on by that Jamie Lewis. He was

pulling on your pigtails and throwing mud on your blue dress. As a result, I punched him, and broke his nose. Ever since then, I knew that we would be together forever. Do you remember what I said to you then?

Kari nods again.

DOCTOR: Kari, do you hear me? (pulls out a pocket light and tries to shine it in Kari's eyes)

Kari shies away.

SHADOW: I told you that I would never leave you. I'll never leave you. Not like everyone else in your life. I told you that I would always protect you. No matter the light or darkness in your life, I would always be by your side. For I am your Shadow. Your other self. The shadow of the life that you wish to have. Even if you try to get rid of me, I will appear. Kari, I will always appear. I will appear with the slightest flicker of a candle. I will appear with the last light of day. I will appear with the darkness in your heart. I will appear with the final spark of a fire. No matter how hard you try, you can never completely be rid of me. I am you. I am you, Kari.

KARI: (looks the Shadow Man in the eyes) I see it. I see it now.

The Shadow Man grins.

DOCTOR: (looks at Kari's shadow) What? What do you see?

KARI: (looks at the Doctor) I see...me. Me and him.

DOCTOR: Him?

KARI: Yes. The Shadow Man.

DOCTOR: (sighs) Kari, the Shadow Man isn't real.

KARI: Your wrong. He's right there. (points to her

shadow)

The Shadow Man smiles again. He stands up and puts a hand on her head.

DOCTOR: That's your own shadow, Kari.

KARI: No. You're wrong.

DOCTOR: (*reaches out to her and grabs her shoulders*) Kari, listen to me. This is just a delusion. A delusion and only a delusion.

KARI: You're wrong.

SHADOW: (*pats Kari's head*) Yes Kari. Don't listen to him. Only listen to me.

KARI: (*puts her hand on her head*) He's real. Why can't you see him? He's right here.

SHADOW: (*kneels next to Kari and whispers in her ear*) Yes Kari, tell him. Drown out his lies. We only need each other and no one else. You only need me. Come on, how about we end this? How about we end all of the treatments? All of his psychological torture? How about we end all of his lies by proving them? Prove to him that I. AM. REAL.

KARI: (*looks in the direction of her shadow*) How?

DOCTOR: (*quietly reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a syringe. Watches Kari cautiously*)

SHADOW: (*whispers*) Don't look, but I think that the Doctor pulled out a sedative.

KARI: (*whispers*) What do I do?

SHADOW: (*whispers*) Don't let him stick you. Take it from him. Show him what it feels like to be poked and prodded.

Shadow hides off stage. Kari turns her attention back to the Doctor.

KARI: He's gone. You scared him away.

DOCTOR: That's my job, Kari. All I want is what's best

for you. That voice in your head doesn't want you to get better. I do. Do you want to get better?

KARI: I-I don't know. I'm sick? Am I sick? *(laughs briefly)* I don't feel sick. I feel...like me. I am me. He is me. Not you. You're not me. You're the voice that is in my head. You're the one that's not real. The Shadow Man is the one that is trying to help me. Not you. He has always protected me.

SHADOW: *(voice coming from off stage)* That's it Kari. He's the figment of your imagination. He's the delusion. He's the one that is making you sick. He puts poison in your veins. The "therapies" that he makes you sit through hurt your mind and make you believe things that aren't true. This "Doctor" is trying to get rid of me Kari. He knows that I am trying to protect you. We have always just needed each other. Don't let him change us just to satisfy his own agenda. We need to go RIGHT NOW.

KARI: *(she looks at her shadow on the wall)* I understand. *(looks at the Doctor and stands up)* I'm ready to go now. Thank you for everything Doctor.

Alarm bells go off in the Doctor's head. He tries to inject Kari with the sedative, but she forces his arm down at the last second. Injecting the sedative into his thigh. She makes for the door and runs out. The Shadow Man comes back on stage and stands over the Doctor. He laughs as the curtain closes. X

Victoria Ruiz

We Will Heal Together

I give my Mexican, my indigenous ancestors
permission
to heal what was once gouged
out of me. To regenerate
the crumbs of broken histories.
I will not just evoke
them, I will embrace
them. Their chants and cheers
will commence me in celebration,
in replenishment. Where I will
witness cempasuchil awakenings.
Where I will get to know
my roots from their seeds.
That will be my life,
my long awaited reconnection.
Our identity will be our home,
rooted in love. Our culture
the oxygen to our growth,
and the light that will nourish
our bones. Let us explore

the trodden terrain together. Soak
up the minerals of the earth,
let them run through our bloodstream
imprinting our past onto our cells.
Every bruise,
broken bone,
unraveling promise
we will heal them together.

Mariah Tipton

Coffee Cup

Her short brown hair lied flat on her back as her hickory colored eyes were plastered to the little scenery our apartment porch gave us; a McDonalds that was always busy with customers zooming in and out, a hotel that was fixed right in front of the Rocky Mountains, and the parking lot that lied underneath us. She wore a light pink tank top, a blue sweat shirt that was zipped halfway, her light blue sweat pants that were too long for her short legs and were constantly being dragged on the floor, and a pair of dark blue slippers. Close to her lips were lines dented in her skin revealing that she laughed and smiled more often than the average person. Her forehead revealed even more lines; probably from the stress of work...of from her own three kids. Her glasses fit perfectly on her face even though they were probably a few years old. The cigarette that was in her right hand lied perfectly in between her pointer and middle finger; watching as she brought it up to her light pink lips, breathed in the toxins that I've told her were probably killing her slowly, and released this light colored cloud that would follow where the wind took them.

"I'm tired of struggling financially. I'm tired of not having anyone to help me and I'm so fucking tired of dealing with things on my own. I'm just tired."

"Why don't you ask someone for help, mama? Like

your sister or your boyfriend?"

"Because they won't help me. They only care about what they can get out of me."

"Why?"

"Because that's just people honey. That's the way the world works...I don't want you to have the life that I had. I want you to not have to worry about if you're going to be able to pay your bills on time, or if you have enough money to get something that you need. I don't want you to have to depend on any man. Got it?"

"Yes ma'am."

My mom was not like any of the moms I have seen. She didn't stay at home to clean the kitchen counter tops, she didn't nose her way in my bedroom to do a thorough search just to make sure that I wasn't smoking cocaine behind her back (but, she knew that I would never do anything like that since I pledged to be drug free in the fourth grade), and she definitely wasn't like any of my friends' moms—wanting to go on shopping sprees whenever she had extra cash, passing down a generations worth of recipes, or even going on family vacations every summer because we just didn't have the money to do expensive yet extravagant trips. Instead, every morning she would make herself a warm cup of freshly brewed coffee, grab a warm blanket, her cell phone, a cigarette and would sit outside on the porch until either her cigarette was done or her cup empty. I was never too fond of her smoking habit—the smell was disgusting as it touched my nostrils and the way it gripped on your clothes just made the idea even more revolting—but, on some weekends when she didn't wake up after ten in the morning, I would join her with my own blanket draped around my shoulders and a bowl of Cinnamon Toast Crunch occupying my

hands. Mostly she would just talk and I would just sit there and listen even when trucks would pass by the apartment complex and made it difficult to hear.

"I hope to get enough back on this tax return. I want to take you and your sisters to Disney World for spring break. What do you think about that?" She would ask with a smile carving her face.

"That sounds like fun!"

"Maybe we could even take a road trip! We could stop in Arkansas, say hi to your grandpa and nana, then maybe make our way to Michigan where I can take you guys to Mackinac Island to try their fudge. Maybe we can even go to New York, I know you've always wanted to go there."

I can't tell you how many times she would say she would take us to the wonderful world of Disney, but once spring break came around, we were trapped in the same four white walls of our apartment with a swimming pool downstairs, not enough gas to really go anywhere besides the park down the street, and no money to go get a tall vanilla ice cream cone at BJ Velvet Freeze. Those broken promises itched my skin, but I shook it off as many times as I could until I just couldn't anymore.

There were moments when her coffee cup would be empty. But, instead of going inside to make another cup, she would instead light another cigarette if the one she was smoking with her coffee was done. Her coffee was always the same; it would first start off black, but with enough Coffee Mate French Vanilla coffee creamer and sugar, the dark color that once filled her cup had suddenly matched its color—light brown. I never heard the end of her constant jokes about being the same color as her coffee or even about how big my breasts were until I was fifteen, but I

didn't mind because I was always able to bring up her height. She always claimed to be five foot eight until I turned ten and that number slowly started shrinking. She could have at least been five foot two by the time I was thirteen; towering over her already small frame, placing my elbow on her head and leaning against her like I was the Tower of Pisa. I would always get smacked right in the chest with laughter escaping from my lungs. "Shut the hell up! You may be taller than me, but I can still whoop your ass!"

The first of the month, my sisters and I always knew that it was time to go grocery shopping (especially my sister, Aaliyah, because she would always ask to get a bag of Takis to take to school with her the next day) as the four of us squeezed into a tiny, two door Mazda that my mother would later call "Little Shit", we would spend ten to fifteen minutes of our lives driving to the nearest Walmart. One by one we would escape from the tiny monster that was our family vehicle and follow her like we were ducks in a row. The moment we entered into the store, it felt as if everyone's eyes were on us; a short white woman was being closely followed by three black girls. I think everyone was afraid that we would try to jump our own mother for the forty-five cents and the EBT card that was in her purse. But, I don't think she ever realized that some eyes were still wondering her way because it never stopped her from turning around to smack either of us in the mouth when we were playing "only step on the black tiles" when we weren't supposed to or for her to threaten to take us to the bathroom for us to get a butt whoopin'.

The first thing my mom would get was her coffee creamer—there were no exceptions to this—because she would always tell us that "this is my breakfast in the morning." It wouldn't matter if the coffee creamer

was stored in the very back of the grocery store or if it would be located in the toy aisle, she would always get the creamer first and then continue with the rest of the shopping; sending me and Aaliyah on our own special mission to fetch the honey ham lunch meat or the two gallons of whole milk. There were times where I would beg her to buy my favorite kind of cereal—Reese's Puff Cereal—and those were the times she would give in and let me grab just one box. Sometimes, I was lucky enough to convince her to let me grab a package of gum because chewing on my nails had become a horrid habit.

In the summer months, instead of reaching for a warm fuzzy blanket, she would reach for a sweater or would just go in her pink tank top and blue sweat pants; admiring the warmth that the winter months had kept from her for far too long.

"Summer is my favorite season...except when it wants to be hot as hell and there's no air conditioning on or a pool to cool you down. Shit, if I could, I would probably go skinny dipping if it was that hot."

"T.M.I. mama. T.M.I."

In the fall months, she would reach for a random sweat shirt—any one that was close enough to the sliding door—and admired the cool breeze that would trickle through the yellow and red leaves. Months before my seventeenth birthday, she found my thick brown book that was given to me as a present for my sixteenth birthday from a mentor who had helped me and another classmate complete our project about racism. I had forgotten all about the book, but when she returned it to me, most of the pages I couldn't recognize. Some were familiar when I flipped through the pages as I was able to recognize the half cursive, half print handwriting that was mine, but as I continued

going through the book, most of the pages were filled with colorful drawings of the Madhatter, Twilight, skits of me running for class president, and bits and pieces of her writing to me. One of those pages, my mom described to me how the weather was changing from summer to fall. "Not too hot, not too cold. Just perfect, like you."

Searching the many faces in my high school auditorium in search for my mother was heart wrenching; no matter how hard I looked, I couldn't seem to find her...I never could find her. Even during a softball game as I was standing in the batter's box, I never could find my mother's face. As I spent the fifteen minutes to walk home after school, I knew what waited for me at home; my little sister, Nalani, who wanted everything that popped up on the television screen, and Aaliyah who believed that she didn't have to listen to me because it was me. More than half the time, my mother had left a list of chores for us to do, and by us I mean me. Nalani's father believed that she was too young to do anything around the house (even though when I was nine, I started washing dishes), and Aaliyah who considered herself to be better than me to even touch the dishes. My mom worked...a lot. Half the time she wouldn't even be home until almost midnight and by then, I would already be asleep. Weekends weren't mine either. Sadly, most of the time, I was expected to spend my Saturdays babysitting...without getting paid. Nalani's own father didn't want to spend his Saturdays watching his own daughter let alone pay me because I was her sister. I remember begging, pleading, even bargaining with my mom and him to at least have half of my Saturdays to myself. It wasn't until I was sixteen that I decided to leave my mother's home and enter into my dad's.

"You moved out and didn't tell me?"

"I thought it would be best for you not to know...I'm sorry."

"Why? Were you afraid that I was going to get angry? That I was going to be disappointed?"

"No, I was afraid that you were going to try and convince me to stay...even though I didn't want to."

Moving in with my dad was probably one of the many great decisions I had made. But, he wasn't like my mom. He, too, lived in an apartment with a swimming pool haunting us downstairs and neighbors that you never really knew, but occasionally would say "hi" to whenever you walked passed their doors. Yet, once you entered inside his apartment door, you could immediately tell the difference. On all four apartment walls that formed the living room were pictures of me as a child until the present; pictures of me when I was one years old wearing a tiny sweater that was covered with cute little dogs to my freshmen year photo where I decided to wear a nice pink top that revealed my collar bone, my hair up in the usual pony tail and a smile that anyone could tell that I was excited about being in high school (it was used as my freshmen year picture that was would be published in the yearly yearbook that he would later give me the money to buy). His apartment wasn't as clean to where someone would question if anyone lived there, but it wasn't a complete wreck that made people worry if he was a hoarder; it was a nice in-between where shoes would be standing at attention by the door and bowling balls would be lined up on the floor (all twenty of them). Compared to my mother's, I had my own room that I didn't have to share with any of my siblings (Aaliyah found it unnecessary to move in let alone come and visit) so, I was able to watch

whatever T.V. show I pleased without having to worry about someone changing the channel whenever I went to the bathroom, and have all of my softball and basketball equipment lie on the floor without giving a damn that someone would tell me to move it out of the way (it could be scattered all over the floor and no one could tell me that it was in their way).

My father believed in the idea that while I was still a kid, I should be able to do anything a kid wanted to do (which included attending every homecoming, prom, playing basketball and softball, bowl, join as many honors societies as I wanted, become a member of the high school marching band, go to Elitch Gardens all four years of high school, and spending Friday nights at the homecoming bonfire). I wasn't stuck having to spend my Saturdays babysitting someone else's kid, and I didn't have to worry about making sure chores got done. I was able to experience a sense of freedom that I have been wanting...that I desperately needed. I didn't have to worry about anyone, but myself and I needed that.

But, as weeks turned into months, the relationship between my mother and I was strained. I never understood how the decision to focus on myself would be seen as a selfish act, but to her, that's what it was. I was guilt tripped to believe that the decision I had made was wrong, that I apparently didn't love her as much as I did my dad, and that I had caused more issues at her place after I left compared to when I was there. My heart ached; it probably even shattered a little as her words were suddenly engraved into my head and were placed on repeat. I didn't want her to feel like I had abandoned her and I didn't want her to feel like she was unloved, but I wanted her to desperately understand that I was tired of being

placed in the grown-up spectrum because neither her or Nalani's father could get their acts together...sadly, neither of us could understand where we each were coming from. It felt like a cup of coffee wasn't going to restore the relationship we had formed through those long months of sitting out on the porch with her coffee.

Although I had the opportunity to experience the childhood that was kidnapped from me, I would randomly miss the loving chaos and shenanigans that happened on a daily basis. I could no longer record the singing competition between the two best contenders (which were often Nalani and my mother) as they used hair brushes and wooden spoons as their microphones while my mother booty-bumped Nalani out of her shot every time. I could no longer take pictures of Aaliyah and Nalani trying on our mother's light blue pajama pants, but because they were too big for either of them, they had to pull them up to their chests, tied them on tight, and having to make little finger guns inside her pants. I could no longer do the Sunday morning dog pile that consisted all three of her children just hop on top of our mother while she was still sleeping just to wake her up.

My parents were complete opposites and I wondered how in the world they managed to stay together for as long as they did. My father never smoked a cigarette a day in his life, he never drank a sip of coffee or alcohol, and he never sat out on his balcony while expressing his personal problems or his financial struggle to his daughter. Unlike my mom, my dad was always at home—which never really bugged me—but, there were those days where he wouldn't want to do anything else besides sit down and watch ESPN for hours. No silly shenanigans were recorded because it was just the two of us instead of four. And

he really wasn't a cook either. Instead of pulling out ingredients from the cupboards and the fridge to make a homecooked meal for two, he would much prefer ordering a pizza or making something simple; like meatloaf or, my childhood favorite, Bar-B-Que spaghetti (which, I know it sounds disgusting, but it's actually pretty good if you have a very open pallet). My mom, on the other hand, could make anything depending on what she had in her kitchen—or even if she had something very little—she could still make a delicious meal. My favorite meal that she would make was when she bought ribs just to make Bar-B-Que ribs right in her very own kitchen. It would make my mouth water as I anticipated for the moment that she would call out that dinner was ready.

I couldn't help but stare helplessly at my mother as she was lying down in a hospital bed. The room she was in was shared with two other people and were separated by curtains. The good thing was that she was the one by the window, the bad thing was that she would have to be really careful to walk to the bathroom because her roommates could care less if she slipped or not. Nalani was too busy sitting in the only chair available on her side of the room, playing on her cell phone. My mother's luscious hair was gone; there was nothing there, but I was pretty sure that if you buffed up her head, you could use it as a mirror. Her glasses were sliding down her face as she slipped in and out of consciousness. How could a person that was once so full of life be slipping into a life of complete dullness? I checked the time, knowing that I needed to be leaving here soon to get ready for class the next morning, but I felt the sudden urge to stay. I couldn't leave her. As I hugged her tightly, I could feel her body shake and tears falling down my cheeks.

"I'm not done fighting. Mariah, I don't want to go. I don't want to die."

"You're not going to die. Please, just keep fighting. We need you here."

"I'm so sorry for everything I've put you through."

"Don't worry about it mama...Just keep fighting. Fight for me, please?"

It's been almost two years since she died. I still miss her laughter, her smile, her scent of whatever perfume she was wearing and cigarettes (Camel's were her favorite), and I miss her presence. At sixteen, I didn't realize how much I would miss her meaningless banters about how fucking freezing it was outside, how every morning she would put me in charge of warming up the stick shift used car (one morning I accidentally removed the clutch too soon, had the car go over the sidewalk and I couldn't back it up to save my life), or how much I would miss her silly singing, dancing, and random text messages.

"My asshole is stinging right now!"

"Why?"


"Because I'm in the middle of taking a massive shit at work XD"

"Oh God mama! Why are you telling me this?????"

"I thought you should know :)"

"But I didn't want to know."

"Well, now you do. Have a great day honey! XOXO"

July of 2009 was my last cup of coffee and December of 2016 was hers as she made her last pot in her tiny Mr. Coffee, but never had the chance to pour it in her little tan coffee cup. 

Danielle Todisco

Alive

I feel buried alive,
captured, suffocated.
Living in a pink trailer house
scuffed, rusted, and sunken in weeds.
With walls made of 99 cent vinyls,
like I'm in the middle of an MTV music video.
I can feel the music completely pour over me.
My skin is boiling from the sounds.
I love it.

Christina Vigil

How To Breathe

A nuchal cord cuts the flow,
She cannot breathe.

Labored and tired, a mother
waits helplessly watching the infant,
entangled in her noose.

She is unraveled and cleaned,
crowned a hood of oxygen.

Her first breath is drawn by
artificial air supplied by machine,
reminding her to breathe.

Now at the cusp of 30, hesitant
and uncertain, her chest restricts;
thoughts trapped in a perpetual
tug of war.

Sudden gasps break the silence.
The brain clamors for air,
momentarily, muscles forget
how to breathe.

Christina Vigil

Razor Fast

My chariot was an L of silver,
trimmed with ruby red handles and wheels.
Powered by my right leg, because
switching to the left was suicide.
A perfect union of rubber and pavement,
I glided down east 5th,
the wind in my hair.
Meticulously balanced,
I channeled my inner Yamaguchi,
landing air jumps and adding flare with an out-
stretched leg.
Erasing the world, I became the air
free to come and go as fast,
or as slow as I wanted.
As the sky dusked,
the dinner call echoed down the block,
time to come home.
Now as I drive a blue Honda, the
a/c is my wind.
I pass by neglected homes,
now filled with unfamiliar faces.
I can see her glide beside me,
curls tangled in the breeze, eyes
alive with adventure;
swiping away summer days.

Danielle Vincent
Smothering Silence

Seth stood in front of the full-length mirror staring at his tired unshaven face. Something about his outfit was off, although he couldn't tell what it was. Sara would know. He rips the third striped tie he's tried on this morning off of his neck and slumps down on the bed running his rough hand across the embroidered flowers. He looks down the hallway willing her to come around the corner and breeze into the room, give him that smirk and silently throw another shirt at him. She was always taking care of him, in all sorts of ways that he never had to think about. In the morning his wallet and keys would be lined up on the kitchen counter ready to go, or his shorts would magically appear on the bathroom counter for him to put on when he got out of the shower after work, or the game would be all set to record before he even mentioned wanting to watch it. In reality though it was his job to take care of her and keep her safe. Like the time she got a flat on the interstate or when he would come home from work and she would be sitting in the closet sobbing. He would sit down next to her, pull her petite frame onto his lap and hold her until the sobs turned into long slow breaths.

As he sits there, the realization hits him. He takes off his too-tight dress shoes and chucks them down the dark hallway where he had been letting his hope float,

hitting a picture on the wall, sending shattered glass all across the hardwood. "I can't do this," he whispers to himself. Hearing the front door creak open, his breath catches in his throat, then...

"Seth? You up there?"

"Fuck" he says to himself, he forgot Lilli and Brady were coming here first. "Yup, be right down." He takes one last look in the mirror and makes up his mind.

Making his way downstairs he curses himself as he carefully maneuvers the shards of glass in his dress socks. This can't be my life, he thinks to himself as he steps off the last stair and into the dim foyer where his best friend and his wife's sister are waiting. Lilli looks immaculate in her calf length black dress, although Seth doesn't have the stomach to look at her face. Brady gives him the bro hug but hangs on just a little longer than usual. Lilli squeezes his hand while taking in Seth's appearance and quickly asks, "Can I run upstairs with you and help with your tie, we really should be going soon honey." Her voice is clear and strong, but Seth knows her enough to understand just how numb and devastated she is. Lilli and Sara were closer than any siblings he'd ever known. They had to rely on each other to endure their childhood. Lilli was always very protective over Sara; she had gotten the worst of it when they were kids.

"Uh, no that's ok. There's uh, some broken glass at the top. Also, I decided I'm not going. She would understand. You know she hated things like this as well as I do. It's fucked up that your Mom even planned this." He said all of this while his eyes bounced around from the floor to the dying plant next to the door to Brady's sympathetic eyes.

"I know, I know. We contemplated not going too. We aren't going for Mom or the drama she'll bring. I just

need to say goodbye to my little sister." Lilli grabbed Seth and hugged him as hard as he's ever been hugged. He could feel the love and acceptance she was offering. She is the strongest woman Seth has ever met. When they parted, he still couldn't look at her face. It was their eyes. They both had the biggest most beautiful light brown eyes he'd ever seen. Only Sara's always had a hint of sadness in them, which to him made them even more beautiful.

"I'm here, man, for anything you need." Brady said on their way out the door. They had stayed with him for the first few days after. Seth and Lilli were in pieces, so it was Brady who made the calls, cleaned up the dishes and found extra room in the fridge for the casseroles the neighbors and a Sara's co-workers had brought over.

After sweeping the glass into the dust pan and leaving it sit in the hall he made his way back into their bedroom. He quickly took off his dress clothes—having never felt comfortable in rigid formal attire—he was glad to be putting on his favorite gray lounge pants and an old t-shirt of his that Sara loved to sleep in. He laid down on her side of the bed—pressing his face into her pillow as he'd done every day for the previous six—inhaling the last faint scents of her vanilla shampoo. As he laid there he realized the gray sky had finally opened up and he couldn't help but smile a bit while he listened to the rain hit the window. It was Sara's favorite kind of fall day.

His smile faded as the memory flooded his mind. No matter how hard Seth willed it away the images of that night persisted.

"I'm trying to protect you, damn it." He roared as he slammed his fists on the counter.

"No, you're telling me that I'm stupid and wrong. She's my mom. She reached out to me. If I want to go see her, I will. I'm sick of you always thinking you know what's best for me. I'm an adult for Christ's sake. I don't need a dad. I never have, and I never will. Besides you don't see Brady telling Lil she can't go see Mom."

"You ARE wrong Sara. She's going to take advantage of you. Like she always has. Lilli wouldn't go see your Mom if she was offering a million dollars. Brady doesn't need to worry about it. You're the only one who's still letting Camille manipulate her. I'm so sick of fighting over her every time she rolls back into town. How many times are you going to let her do this to you? When she breaks your heart AGAIN, I'm going to have to pick up the pieces, AGAIN. I can't keep doing this. You've been so much better lately. Don't throw away all the progress you've made, honey please." Seth pleaded with frustration.

"I'm not some charity case. I'm sick of you making me feel that way. I'm fine and I can take care of myself. I'm not going to let her hurt me. I can't stand it when you tell me what to do like I'm a child."

"Wow! I make you feel like a charity case, huh? Fucking awesome, Sara. This is what you turn into every time she shows up. Are you really going to choose her over us? You are a spoiled little girl." He said the last sentence with a cold hardness in his voice that he knew would hurt her.

"Fuck you, Seth. Fuck you!" He could see the tears start to stream down her cheeks.

"Fine. Go. Run to your mommy. Never mind everything I've done for you, selfish bitch. I'm sick of picking up the pieces of your life. You Are Just Like Her." He said slowly emphasizing every word, knowing this would hurt her the most, but in hopes that she'd

think about how cruel her mom was and change her mind. Instead, she back away slowly with silent tears gushing. She grabbed her keys and slammed the door on her way out.

Within the next hour, he had called her phone eight times and left her three voicemails apologizing emphatically for the things he'd said. He hadn't meant any of it. He loved his wife more than he could have ever imagined loving another person. She was his whole world and he never minded taking care of her or picking up the broken pieces of her life. She had a rough childhood to say the least and it made him proud to be the safe steady place of love she never had before. He wasn't even mad at her really. It was Camille he wanted to throttle. She wrecked Sara every chance she got and the thought of it happening to her again made him so fucking angry. He went outside to sit on the porch, get some air and try to call her again when he saw headlights coming down the road. The relief he felt quickly turned to dread when he realized it was a police car turning into their driveway.

Seth shook his head and got up off the bed. He stared out the window at the wet leaves stuck to the sidewalk and frowned at the little girl who jumped in the puddle near their driveway. Even at 28 Sara still jumped in every puddle she came across and laughed so hard when she managed to soak his pants too. As he turned to walk out of the room he slammed his fist into the wall. Just another of many holes he's made in the sheet rock over the last week. Making his way through their home he could hear the silence and feel the stillness of Sara's absence; it was all encompassing and suffocating. If he hadn't been so cruel. If he hadn't yelled. If he hadn't said the one thing he knew would

cut her to the quick, her worst fear, “you’re just like her”; she wouldn’t have been so upset, she wouldn’t have left, she wouldn’t have driven her car into a concrete wall.

Seth poured himself another drink, Jack and Coke, their shared favorite and sat back into the grey-brown leather couch. It was his third and he had every intention of finishing the bottle. He couldn’t take his eyes off of their wedding photo that sat front and center on top of Sara’s over-full bookcase. It’s a beautiful picture; it hides the reality of that day well. Camille had nearly ruined it with her selfish way of making everything about her then throwing a fit when everyone else didn’t follow suite. Seth ended up throwing her out and she didn’t speak to Sara for a year; it was a good year.

Seth was deep in that memory, his anger and the booze when the door-bell rang. He managed to haul himself up on the second try spilling his drink as it found its own way back to the coffee table. Stumbling forward he tried to catch himself on the plant stand next to the door before grabbing the handle and righting himself for the moment. Surprise and inebriation were all over his face when he saw the deputy from the other night standing on his porch.

“Mr. Tylor, I hope I’m not interrupting. Do you have a minute?”

“Of course, come in.”

“I wanted to update you on our investigation. Sara didn’t hit that wall for no reason, there—”

“I know, she hit that wall because of me. We had a fight and she was upset.” He choked out as if those words had been stuck in his throat since that night. “It’s my fault. I killed her, I killed my wife.” He howled. Big heaving sobs were wracking his body. The officer half

guided half shoved Seth onto the couch sitting down next to him.

"No, Mr. Taylor. That's what I wanted to tell you. There was another car. It veered off into Sara's lane right in front of her. She swerved to miss it and hit the wall." Seth's face went white, then red. The tears just kept coming. He was overwhelmed with emotions that were fighting for control.


"It was a nineteen-year-old girl who turned around to look at her little sister in the back seat. I know this is painful, and I'm so sorry for your loss, but by doing what she did your wife likely saved the lives of two young girls."

"Oh God."

"I also wanted to inform you that there will be charges filed. When I have more information, I'll let you know. Can I call someone for you?" Seth shook his head fiercely. There was no one to call.

"Are you going to be alright?" A slow nod yes was all Seth could manage.

"Ok. Well, thank you for your time, Mr. Taylor. I'll show myself out."

Seth put his hands in his face and continued to cry after he heard the heavy door latch, letting a tiny bit of the guilt and anger purge from his heart. He hadn't killed her, but the love of his life was still gone. He had no idea what the rest of his life would hold. He just knew it would always feel empty. 

Garret Wagers

The Path

The trees litter the soil
They stand tall, watching over their domain
The sweet smell of flowers
guiding the way
The smaller creatures scatter
I am a stranger here
But I feel like I belong.

The trees reject what is not theirs
The flowers are not alone
Foreign invaders all around
I must take what does not belong
It is not theirs, but it is not mine.

Shiny leaves are scattered everywhere
They blow like sails in the wind
I tread carefully,
leaving only memories
Grass flows with the wind
Grounding the dust

My feet sink deep
This is not my home
Mine is made of stone
I do not want to leave

I must take what does not belong
It is not theirs, but it is not mine.

Kenneth Walter

Cowlick Conundrum

Every day, I wake to fifteen alarms in a row, five minutes apart, all of which can only be silenced by answering math questions. If I attempt to refuse, there is no turning off the phone, and there is no snooze, only the blaring of Smash Mouth's Walking on the Sun, (I don't wake up in the morning for my sake, I wake up for the sake of my family). When I do finally arise, I morph from a blanketed cocoon into a standing, gravelly voiced mess, reminiscent of the Crypt Keeper. I shuffle blindly through the dark of my family's house, often times committing hit and runs by stubbing my big toe into the trim of the walls, damn them to hell¹. But once I eventually enter into the steamy paradise of the shower, allowing it to embrace me with the love of a thousand corgi's watching their owner come home, I find myself face to face with, well, myself. Myself, and a wild mess of jungle that comprises of valleys, peaks, and most frightening of all, cowlicks². (It's disconcerting to think that cows can so easily sneak into our houses, even our rooms, completely undetected, and then simply proceed to lick our heads).

Yes, me, my hair, and a black comb, all in that clas-

1 The trim, not my precious toes.

2 For those unaware of the phenomena of the cowlick, imagine Clark Kent's hair swoop on his forehead, although instead of lying flat, debonairly, the bangs shoot straight up, attempting to tickle the sky.

sic morning standoff, looking very closely to that scene from the *Dollar's Trilogy* where Clint Eastwood stares down with the two bandits in the middle of the desert. Except for me, the stakes are much higher, considering the fact that the outcome of the battle might take place in the next few moments decides how I will look to friends and strangers alike for the day. Now most days it is pretty black and white, do I want to leave the house looking like my hair was combed by the gentle Hawaiian waves of Honolulu, flowing over my scalp like a cascading waterfall of Great Clip genius, or will I leave looking like Ace Ventura when he gets two arrows to the knees. Decisions decisions...

Really it all “combs” down to the comb, the weapon of choice for barbers and pun-enthusiasts alike. Now the comb itself has had its roots traced back to ancient times, Persia, China and the like. These were primitive models themselves, simple wood sticks with many thin sprouts sticking out enough to bring some order to the scalp. Ancient Egyptians hailed to have carved some of the first combs themselves, but they also worshipped Ra, a bird-man who they thought carried around the sun, so it's anyone's game at this point. As years passed, the comb, like us, evolved into an instrument of luxury, unlike us, sometimes being carved out of ivory and embedded with rubies and opal for French and English nobles³, like a royal crown for lice. Religion contains several tales considering hair, like the Bible story of Samson and Delilah and how hair played a significant role in his downfall. Rather than tell you the whole thing, I'll just put the lyrics to Harry Belafonte's Man Smart (Woman Smarter) below, you'll get a

3 Have you seen photos of Marie Antoinette? She looks like she dipped her head in a cotton candy machine before she went out for the day.

good idea of the story.

Samson was the strongest man long ago

No one could a beat him, as we all know

Until he clash with Delilah on top of the bed

She told them all the strength was in the hair of his head.


See what I mean? Hell, probably even more popular than that is the Fairytales and Mythology surrounding hair, like the Greek tale of Medusa, a creature that took the form of a serpent woman with a stare that could turn men into solid stone, and a head full of live snakes rather than hair⁴. Then of course there's Sif, the Scandinavian legend of the Goddess with Golden Locks. She supposedly had the most beautiful hair in the Norse world, until one day Loki, the Trickster God⁵, cut almost all of it from her head in her sleep. Rapunzel, a European tale in origin from the Brothers Grimm, was the story of a young maiden trapped in a tower for many years until she realized she could use her hair as rope to escape her imprisonment⁶. (What's the point of proceeding to go on the lamb with that much hair? I imagine the guards wouldn't have a hard time catching her. Even if she's forty feet in front you could just grab her hair and boom, back to the tower.) In more recent history, Navajo Indians believed that their hair contained thoughts, and as such has remained an important aspect of their culture to this day. Similarly, Greasers tended to their hair remained important stories and cultural ideas passed on because of

4 Talk about split ends, am I right ladies?

5 Really Vikings? You had a god dedicated to tricks? I don't know, you just don't seem that fun to me, personally. But having a god dedicated to the whoopy cushion is cool, I guess.

6 Disney has a great documentary on this whole ordeal called *Tangled*, check it out.

what people thought about their hair. And from there, hair really grew on us, with all sorts of styles flourishing, like Bee Hives of the fifties, the Beatles and their bowl-ish cuts of the sixties, afros in the seventies, the entire music genre of "hair bands" in the eighties, and, dare I say, frosted tips, *shudders*, of the nineties. Now it doesn't take a Danny Zuko or a Guy Fieri to realize just from history alone how important the role of hair and combs has played in all our lives from generation to generation. That, and how oddly cool it still is to have a switchblade comb.

But think about it, cosmically. The very nature of the universe is to eliminate the idea of uniformity, everything created uniquely separate from each other and in their own way. But what is this?! The comb defies the very bedrock of this universally accepted idea. It straightens out some of the thinnest material on Earth, aside from my patience, hair, and turns it into a uniform pattern. It levels the playing field of Italian models and my Quasimodo-esque brother alike without remorse, all the while flying its middle finger flag to the skies like, "Hey you Universe, I make stuff equal and shit." It's a beautiful sight is what it is, powerful. Kind of makes me wish I could comb out my own life, straighten it out, see down its path, see all the answers I struggle with day to day. But I guess that's why life is life, and hair is hair⁷. But Universe, would it really kill ya to not send so many damn cowlicks my way? 

⁷ Please note the usage of hair here is in reference to the biological strands sprouting from our noggins, and is in no way in reference to the hit 1969 musical *Hair* of the same name.

Victoria Weisz
I Missed It!

I missed it!
All I could think of was how long this would take
All I could see was the uphill path
that was in front of me
All I could hear was my pounding heart
and my feet screaming "let's get this over with"
All I could smell was the sweat on my brow
I missed it! But now...

I think in peace
My mind at ease
taking in the sights, the sounds, the smells

I see the trees
dancing, spinning, swaying in the breeze
And I see the vibrant colors of the flowers
as they lean towards the sun
And the impressions from travelers that came before
each one with a story

I hear the birds
carrying their tune from tree top to tree top

And I hear the bees humming as they work
And the woodland creatures all doing what they do
what they were created to do

I smell the flowers
each with a more beautiful aroma than any
in a store bought bouquet
And I smell the rain which made the river overflow
And the sweet smell of pine from the trees
fills the air

I missed it!
All because I was too focused
I missed it!
But now it's clear as day.

Ashley Causus

Hunger

I think I've always been hungry. Or perhaps I've never been full. I've never had some deep seeded desire to watch my life unfold like the road atlas shoved in the glovebox. I just want to live. My hunger stems from a longing to have stability. To know I will be going to bed in the same place I woke up the morning prior. My hunger stems in knowing that I don't have to remember which food pantries are open on which days. Because despite what I think, I'm not an adult and shouldn't be allowed to make adult decisions.

Stability is something I've always hungered for. My head is fucked up. My bipolar brain dances along the edge of what is really happening, and what I perceive to be happening. The dragon that I used to chase, was amazing self-medication. The one I chase now is keeping my brain on a moderately normal train of thought. Normalcy and stability are the only thing that keeps me from jumping. Off a bridge. In front of a car. Over the edge.

"Good morning!"

What the fuck do they mean good morning?!
What are they thinking? I'm pretty sure they hate me.
It just means good morning.

I've never hungered for companionship, but I hate the idea of being alone. Make friends with other

people suffering with your condition. That's what my shrink says. I don't view it as a condition. More like a death sentence. But misery loves company. They don't see it the way I do. As a silent battle I win every day because I make the conscious choice to keep breathing. In. Out. They are all just standing in line for disability. I'm not disabled. Fucked up. Not disabled.

"It would be helpful if you joined a support group. Meet other people and see how they are living with this disorder."

I'm sad enough on my own, I don't need twenty-five other sad people, making it worse.

I hunger for normalcy. To know that I can get up, take my kids to school, and maybe clean my house. Half the time just the idea of crawling out of bed is too much. Other days the idea of crawling into bed is too much. Fighting to find the balance is too much work, I want to find that balance in the middle, but most days my life consists of two questions.

Do I need to go to school today? How much PTO do I still have at work?

I hunger to run out of emotions. I know it's not a tangible, quantitive thing that you can legitimately run out of. But the idea of being a robot sounds nice. Cold. Mechanical. A Vulcan, having zero empathy and only focusing on what's logical.

I hunger to feel like a normal person. To not feel the need to cry over my life, and others. To not feel so excited for other people. I throw so much of myself into how other people feel. I hunger to feel selfish. To care more about how I am feeling, as opposed to how everyone else is feeling. I want to own those feelings.

"Why are you crying?"

Because even though everything is stable, it is just

a matter of time before it falls apart and I am tired. I am physically and emotionally tired because I can't stop making up imaginary scenarios in my head.

"I'm sorry. I'm just tired."

I want to not feel exhausted, and I hunger for sleep. When I'm high, I don't sleep. When I'm low, there is no crawling out of bed. Nothing is worth it. When sleep starts to evade me, I grow hungrier. I can watch my children, my husband, sleep. They always look so peaceful. And I look like the crackhead in the house around the corner. Every noise is someone trying to break into the house and kill me. It's constantly looking out the window, because when the house is quiet, and my head is loud, I hear everything. Every car, every cat, every neighbor. Real or imaginary.

"When is the last time you slept?"

Three days ago, but look I'm fine. I even did my face today.

I hunger to not see the monsters. My shrink says that it is called psychosis. Auditory, tactile, and visual hallucinations. I call them meth monsters. Mostly because when they started hanging around, I was drug screened at least four times. What I was describing to the doctor, is what a meth head describes to people after being on a week-long binder.

The monsters aren't really monsters. Just shadow figures. Someone I know. People I don't. They hold the basic shape of a person. The feeling you get when you catch a glimpse out of the corner of your eye, and what was there, isn't. I think that happens to most people, especially when they are tired. Mine isn't out of the corner of my eye. They are walking around as plain as day. Just like you and me. I used to think they

were ghosts. Shadow phantoms living their lives, as if they were never gone. I know better now. It's just my tired brain creating people that were never there.

Or maybe they are ghosts.

"Maybe you should try closing your eyes. Count to ten."

It sounds good in theory. But I don't understand why everyone's solution to a problem is counting. I hate math.

The sounds remind me of white noise. Most of the time. Whispers that only I can hear. Eaves dropping on a conversation I was never meant to take part in. I hunger for the silence. Grounding yourself is the best medicine. Something tangible, that you can physically hold on to, that you know is real, and isn't going away. Or validation.

"Hey, did you hear that?"

"No. You are hearing things again. It's okay."

Everyone has had the crawly bug feeling. Where you can feel tiny little legs dancing across your skin, but nothing is ever there. It happens from time to time. Phantom spiders marching on parade. You know something is on you, and you need to take a shower as soon as possible to wash the feeling away. I feel them constantly. Typically, when I am stressed out the feelings get worse. Tiny legs moving across my spine. Scurrying up my arm. Burrowing into my scalp. An unsettling feeling that medication, or showers, can't shake away.

"Quit hitting yourself."

Easy for you to say. You aren't infested with imaginary spiders.

I hate when people say that the weather is bipolar. Mostly it's in jest. I can take a joke. But when you spent half of your life, in a psych ward, in and out

of therapy, taking medication covered in self-inflicted scars, the joke becomes less funny. This has been my life for the last twelve years. Hungering for a sense of security that most people take for granted.

It's hard to understand a condition that you can't see. But people every day are doing it. Hungry. Walking around with imaginary demons digging their filthy little claws into their brains. So, I will continue to grapple with myself. If getting out of bed in the morning is the only thing I can accomplish that day. It makes me a little less hungry.

"I'm proud of you. You are making great strides. You are fighting the fight and that's all that anyone can ask of you. Managing will get easier, and your coping skills have started to improve. Don't skip your medication, and you will be just fine."

Thank you for your kind words, but I'm not fighting a fight. I'm just hungry. 

CONTRIBUTORS

Austin Belore is a Double Major in English with an emphasis on Creative Writing and Mass Communications. Austin is currently a Junior at CSUP. He specializes in Prose-Fiction, Non-Fiction, and Poetry. His poem, "Watchmen," was inspired by the comic of the same name.

Sandy Brack is a graduate in English at CSU-Pueblo. The inspiration for "Winter Wind" came from her perpetual interest in the rise and fall of the Roaring Twenties into the Great Depression.

Justin Brown is a graduate student at Colorado State University-Pueblo, currently finishing up his thesis work. He teaches English at Pueblo Community College, and due to the Covid-19 lockdown, spends most of his time at home with his partner and their four dogs and two cats. Justin primarily writes creative non-fiction; however, sometimes he will use magical realism to explore complex themes, which is the case with "Self-Actualization." After finishing and defending his thesis, Justin intends to continue teaching and working on his manuscript.

Dante Buck is a student at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

Miranda Caro is a 2019 English and Communication and Rhetoric graduate from CSU-Pueblo. She is a person who enjoys writing creatively and envisions herself spreading that love to others in the future. Most of her inspiration is derived from everyday life—especially the seemingly small but beautiful

moments that make life so wonderful.

Ashley Causus is currently a junior, majoring in English with a secondary certification. She specializes in non-fiction. "Hunger" is an autobiographical piece about her Bipolar disorder.

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Gillian Hawken is a sophomore at Colorado State University-Pueblo. She is double majoring in English and Mass Communications. She hopes to one day use her degrees to become a successful screenwriter. Her poem, "Here" is about the beauty in simple moments.

Mikayla Hoffman is a Psychology/Pre-Physician's Assistant major and member of Psi Chi at CSU-Pueblo. Her piece "Help" was inspired by a black and white photograph of two impoverished boys, and was written to bring awareness to the seriousness of world hunger.

Rashon Johnson is a student at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

Max Mendieta recently received his Bachelor's degree in English with a Minor in Political Science from Colorado State University-Pueblo in December 2017. He is now pursuing his Master's Degree in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing at the same institution. His goal is to continue his education by pursuing his Doctoral degree in Creative Writing with the intent to teach and contin-

ue writing poetry. "Slow Waltz of Death" is a prose poem which touches on the intensity and insanity of co-dependent relationships.

Megan Price is a senior at Colorado State University-Pueblo. She is an English major with an emphasis in Creative Writing. She hopes to use this degree to become an editor. Her poem "Fuerza" and her nonfiction story "Bandidos Stole Her" are inspired by the strong women in her life that have shaped her into the person she is today and hopes to continue to be.

Sierra Pérez is a rising Senior. She plays soccer for the women's team on campus and she is majoring in English and Spanish. Her poem "¿Quién te crees que eres?" is based on her Chicana background, on living between two cultures. "Unnamed" is a collection of passing thoughts and emotions.

Lysandra Rios Quintana is a Social Work major at Colorado State University-Pueblo. Her poem '28' is dedicated to her sister Anastasia 'Stacy' Lauren Garcia.

Alexa Rodriquez is a twenty-year-old Mass Communications major and a second-year student at CSU-Pueblo. She specializes in fiction writing. Her piece, "All That's Left," began as an assignment in her creative writing course, and it is inspired by a personal experience she holds close to her heart.

Samantha Romo graduated in May 2019 with a Bachelor's in English-Creative Writing, and minors in Spanish and anthropology. Her work, "The Shad-

ow Man," was her final work she submitted to Tempered Steel before she graduated. It was inspired by her fascination with the story of Peter Pan and his shadow. She is continuing to write while working on base at Fort Carson and hopes to have more successes for her works in the future.

Victoria Ruiz graduated from the Mass Communications department in 2019 with minors in Chicano studies and creative writing. She specializes in creative non-fiction and poetry. Her poem, "We Will Heal Together," was inspired by the Chicana/o and Mexican American identity.

Mariah Tipton's piece, "Coffee Cup" was inspired by the moments gathered with her late mother. She is a former student at CSU-Pueblo and has her Bachelor's degree in Psychology with a minor in Creative Writing. She is currently getting her Master's in Clinical Mental Health, but continues writing.

Danielle Todisco is a Mass Communications major with an emphasis in Electronic Media. She is a Junior at Colorado State University Pueblo who has always had a strong passion for writing. This is her second time being published in Tempered Steel. Her poem "Alive" is inspired by her love for art, music, and pop culture.

Christina Vigil is an English graduate student at CSU-Pueblo, currently working on her Master's thesis. Her pieces were inspired by a range of experiences from youth to adulthood.

Danielle Vincent is a Colorado native living in Pueb-

lo West. She has two intelligent, beautiful teenagers. She graduated "Summa Cum Laude" from CSU-Pueblo in 2019 with a BA in English and a Creative Writing minor. She's currently a part time graphic designer who is trying to keep her sanity during the Covid-19 Pandemic. She loves reading and is currently working her way through the Game of Thrones series.

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Victoria Weisz is an early college student. She intends to major in communications. "I Missed It!" was inspired by all the little things we miss in life because we get too focused on the future.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Tempered Steel is Colorado State University-Pueblo's annually published literary magazine. The magazine accepts student submissions of poetry, drama, fiction, and creative non-fiction.

Students interested in submitting their creative works for consideration can do so through <https://temperedsteel.submittable.com/submit>. The submission process will ask students to include a cover letter about their submitted work. They will also be asked to remove any author identification and replace it with their PID number.

Tempered Steel accepts multiple submissions from students. By submitting to *Tempered Steel*, students agree that the work is original, has not been published elsewhere, and grants the magazine the right to publish it both in print and on their website. Students retain all copyrights to their submissions and will be allowed to assign any subsequent publishing rights as seen fit.

For more information about *Tempered Steel* or the submission process, please email our professor, Juan J. Morales, at juan.morales@csupueblo.edu.



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