

*Quercus*

# Quercus

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(kwûrkûs) Latin. (n.) The oak genus: a deciduous hardwood tree or shrub

Editors: Daniel Daley  
Elena Vallejo  
Ryan Sandness

Faculty Advisor: Carl Herzig

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## Summer of Monarchs

It was the Summer of Monarchs,  
and no one was pleased.

Indulgent evenings spent avoiding the looming heat,  
windows forced shut, doors locked.

Sand coated everything that summer—duvets, hair, even the inside of the fridge.  
A thin layer over the flattened grass.

The monarchs flitted by and by, still for milliseconds.  
Their silhouettes flickering over the steaming asphalt.

Unread books piled high along walls those months, no longer enough to satiate ravenous wings.  
Searching for more before the autumn's prophesied dominion.

And come September,  
the last dregs of summer were eulogized with a final bite of cheesecake,  
baked-in grains of sand be damned.

—*Karina Marquez ('22)*

## Birds of the Air

*You might hear the birds singing, flying around.  
You never see them too long on the ground.  
—Kid Cudi, “Mr. Rager”*

You might hear the birds singing, flying around  
the bare limbs of an April with snow on the way.  
You never see them too long on the ground,  
  
the birds or the earthworms. You wake to the sound  
of a beak hitting flesh: a gutting, a spray.  
You might hear the birds singing, flying around  
  
in your rib cage at night. The wingbeats might pound  
like your fists at the window when they fly away.  
You never see them too long. On the ground:  
  
our shadows in sunlight; a dead prophet’s crown;  
a bright blood-inked quill in the mouth of a stray.  
You might hear the birds singing, flying around  
  
in snowfall, their notes rising high: fingers wound  
in a pattern of prayer. In sermons, they say  
you never see them too long on the ground,  
  
but we cling to earth, our spirits weighed down.  
A cloud becomes fog. A bird becomes prey.  
You might hear the birds singing, flying around;  
you never see them too long on the ground.

*—Emily Kingery*

## The Coming of Light

*for Ben*

You will inhabit me one day, as you did  
on the phone five Christmases ago, empty  
bottles chiming like toys of spectral children  
in the back of the car. You spoke of taking me  
through mentioned neighborhoods to see  
the lights, the silhouettes of reindeer and  
ancient miracles. You loved white noise  
like snowfall, sent me pages in a grammar  
all your own and I learned to speak it  
to beg you to be healed. This evening  
I am too late to beg, and still I beg you  
from my own end of the line. This static  
is you. It's you. Walking headlong into wind  
and I'll walk, too. I'll walk you home,  
say I know, say loved and punish my tongue  
for the past-tense verb. I love you, I do,  
in my imperfect words as the children  
next door to you sweep their small bodies  
into angels in the snow. They're not ready  
to be called in. The air has teeth. I can't  
tell where my skin begins and I need that  
to be what you felt when your breathing  
tube slipped from your throat, and you  
away from here: your body this tight cold  
of December. This story has been told  
a million ways, and still I am frightened  
by ghosts. I am living in wait for yours  
to appear in my voicemail, and stay, and  
beg to be played each day like a hymn  
to be sung, an unspeakable thing.

*—Emily Kingery*

## A body exodus

We sit in winery windows, in fluorescent dorm rooms,  
in Starbucks lobbies searching for wifi. We pretend that we  
take back all we've lost; we show our teeth, rolling words  
meant to kill around in our mouths, writing texts we  
never send. Each day, we bury the faint whisper  
that we are prey disguised as predators. Each night,  
we watch it claw back to us from the shallow graves  
we dig. We wonder about *to end* and *ruin*. There is  
so much threatening to bleed out. The red of it all  
does not scare us anymore. Already, so much  
of our own blood has stained our hands. We ebb toward  
the incantations of ruthlessness like they are Moses  
on the mountain. When the commandments land  
at our feet, we forget how to read. There is always  
justification for the disobedience to our selves:  
mostly that we don't yet recognize the body as our own.

—Hannah Blaser ('17)



## There your heart will be also

On that day, you took me mushroom hunting  
down through the field, past the gate we climbed  
and over the barbed wire fence that scraped skin in  
mild warning. What I remember most were the thorns  
lining the hillside and my persistent fear of  
the blood they could spill. Back then, I didn't  
worry you could fall. I didn't wonder how many more  
days would be like this one; each one was a glimmering  
mirror of splendid sameness, and every morning I drank  
from the creek and baptized my body in the muddy water  
of the blessings of the land, of your endlessness.

My hands grasp at the threads of this day  
and so many others. Surely the morels we plucked  
gently from the dirt were washed and fried in butter,  
delicious and golden. Surely there were other morsels  
in our feast: fat slices of warm bread, pies resting  
on the counter, corn thawed from the fall's harvest.  
Surely we ate together that day and hundreds of others.

Surely the rewards, though they stack up in heaven,  
are still as sweet on the earth as they ever were.

*-Hannah Blaser ('17)*

## Orion

The news anchor gave a formal apology on our television screens for pronouncing our town *O-rye-un* instead of *Or-ee-un*. Never mind how it's spelled; we puffed our chests out. Orion, the great hunter, and us on the edge of seventeen: the hunted.

We flaunted promise rings from our dads, our boyfriends, our gods. We were sent home for spaghetti straps, leggings, cropped tops, shorts. Our gym teachers called us bitches, made us run laps for disrespect, read us dirty jokes from their phones each morning. One told me a woman over 125 pounds was useless, another asked if I had lost weight. Yes, and I thought of the ways I'd learned to shrink. The boys skipped school during deer season. They had rifles and bows, and they walked the woods the same way they walked the halls.

We did our best to be easy targets, to dissolve into convenience. We offered our test answers, our uneaten lunches, our selves. We, too, learned to make apologies, but ours were better. We could do them smiling; we could do them all day. *Look at us*, we'd say. *We're sorry*.

—Hannah Blaser ('17)

## Necessities

When I am small, maybe five, my grandma sits me down with a stained flour sack towel and a needle to teach me how to cross stitch. It's tedious, and I am more of a big-picture girl, though I don't know it yet. She draws a duck in blue ink, and I trace over it with tiny, shaky x's. *For the new baby*, she tells me. And my aunt is pregnant and I have no way to grasp the months as they fly by, but I do know that if I perfect the coffee-stained duck, I can move on to a clean slate that will turn into a bib.

Around this time, she teaches me to make tie blankets and tuna casserole. We roll out pie crusts made from cutting shortening into flour, and we sprinkle the excess dough with cinnamon and sugar to make cookies. We snap beans in the shade of the porch and collect chestnuts to roast and salt. We walk through fields searching for deer antlers and discarded golf balls, and I collect both with growing reverence for what can be found in the dirt. We walk down the lane and feed fallen apples to the pony. She shows me that certain flowers can be eaten. We climb over fences instead of opening the gates. We whistle with blades of grass between our lips. I rip apart so many Queen Anne's Lace trying to make a flower crown that my hands burn. She cuts my sandwiches into butterflies. I paint twenty pictures a day. She saves them all.

Around this time, she is unstoppable, to me a force not unlike the sunshine or rain, depending on the day we will either stay inside making candies and art or exhaust ourselves outside walking purposefully through mud to our next task. I assume her plans dictate the weather. I assume each painting made and each flower eaten is a task of unequivocal importance, that my days are built around necessity, and I love doing what's needed, love knowing that I am learning the skills I will need to navigate life, love imagining myself surviving a night in the wilderness with only a blade of whistling grass and the underbelly of sweet flowers to keep me company.

I am older when she falls down the stairs. I am not there. Older still when she falls to the floor while listening to the Cubs playing over the radio.

Around this time, she is fragile, to me a crown of lace flowers, a sharp summer whistle, a pie-crust cookie, all just out of reach. I am not five. I'm more of a big-picture girl now, living in a bigger place with big dreams. Alone in my apartment, I pour over old letters. I trace her handwriting. I write and rewrite replies I never send. I scour my old recipe box for any written by her. I have forgotten how to whistle with a blade of grass, forgotten which flowers can be eaten. I don't eat tuna, don't make casseroles, left my sewing box in my childhood bedroom with my hoops and needles. I am mad with desperation for everything time steals away. I cut a half cup of shortening into a bowl of flour. I lay the crust over the pie pan. I roll and roll and roll the excess to make cookies. To navigate life, I remember the necessities, how the setting sun danced over the brittle corn husks and we watched, me small with stubbornness and calloused feet, waiting for the new day. I remember how she rose to meet each morning, a clean slate carefully holding all my paintings, all my crowns, all my shaky stitches, saying *honey girl*, pointing out the smallest details in every picture.

—Hannah Blaser ('17)

## War Zones

*for Naomi*

i

Under the graffiti wall  
A drum beat of lit dreams  
Beside spun bottle blues

Pipe cleaner arms  
And chewed fingernails  
With a creosote ceiling

On the drained moon  
Folded onto his wet lap.  
Last night he died

From the overdose  
Of an alley cat's anthem  
And this morning

Using fingers stretched  
In the rented city  
The boys' team tied

Together his shoelaces  
Preceding a pick-up  
Game of stickball.

ii

The draped winds of ash  
Rolled over onto stitched  
Fragments of firestorms,

Grandfathers still live  
In Sicily and Normandy  
Wasting away down

Empty hallways when  
The Rising Sun jumps  
Onto a distressed mattress,

The despair of old poets  
Replaying "It's All True"  
And now even more so

With the static backtalk  
Of Motorola whisperers  
And thinning memories

From the exposed psalms  
Of infinity written on dust  
For tomorrow's last kings.

The circumspect landscapes  
For rent by the hours—  
God, how they blessed them,

Crying “dust jacket, rust  
And dine” while sipping raw  
Cream from their boot.

iii

Dawn. Strict clouds form.  
Children cluster at the shore  
Sinking into the absences

Of lemon sand and lacking  
The dry-eyed green boys  
And their bleeding wind.

Under the summer moon  
Is where Ramallah finds  
A swing wrapped around

The olive tree branch  
Hanging like a divining rod  
Far from the sealed river.

She discovers twilight  
Twirling a half-empty roan  
Bottle fluted from cancer

Beside a mug of fried beans  
Her hair turning towards  
The comped music of blades.

Now imagine with your red  
Hair and tortoiseshell hands  
You are a landowner choosing

To measure your pool shot,

The last door of water  
Closing its bosom behind you.

iv

Out of my ear  
I catch the broken  
Thump of a drum.

In my ear I find a hat.  
In the bonded hat  
I find a large rabbit.

In the mother  
I find three stylish  
Kittens (it's true

Rabbits haven kittens—  
That's the language,  
The chatter, we live by).

In the bunnies I find  
Lucky feet listening  
At my sleeping ear

And when I wake  
To the hale night residue,  
There he is, an old man

Sleeping inside me.  
And then I wonder  
How many years

Have left me alone  
Waiting for miracles  
When all this time

They slept beside me  
Pretending to be born  
Under life's top hat.

When I find us alone  
Ear to back there I hear  
The conflicts of love.

—*Chuck Blair* ('76)

## The Rover

Deafened in darkness, disabled I stand,  
Mired in Marsdust, moored to the spot  
Where once I would wander, working for Earth.  
Now I am nestled, near to the crater  
Endeavor, my destiny: doom of mine too.  
Gypsum I judged there, joyful the day was,  
When Homestake was hewn from the heavyset rock,  
Painstaking proof of the probable presence  
Of water that wound through the wasteland of Mars.  
Vain was I then of my vein in the valley,  
Triumphantly traced: Opportunity sang.  
Near to that now, I never shall leave it;  
Unlike the lake that has left us forever,  
Dried up in the dust that darkens my panels.  
No more shall I wander; the water was wild  
But my tracks are contained now, tied to this spot.  
Hopeful I hearken, to hear through the static  
The signals I sought once that spoke from the Earth.  
But empty of energy Earth cannot reach me  
Nor can I contact the callers I wish for;  
Batteries burnt, my breath has run out  
And silent I stay, ceased in my search.

*–Philip Goldfarb Styr*

## Lacrimosa

He hadn't realized that ghosts inhabited only a few moments  
Lived over and over. He didn't realize  
That they could live in neither past nor present nor  
Future. He held his hands over his eyes so he couldn't see  
The ghosts, not realizing these things, nor realizing that he  
Wasn't much different. A bird sat in the tree outside his window, obscured from  
View by darkness, but perceptible to his ear. There had been  
The whoosh of flight, like a small sneeze escaping,  
And then a few remaining desperate leaves rustled faintly as the great bird set down.  
A huge moon sat on the horizon like a coin that had rolled there and was  
Just about to drop, flattening everything in sight,  
But the tree in which the bird sat was blanketed in the  
Shadow of a clock tower. Its hooting seemed both  
Ominous and romantic, as if the bird itself were the ghost of a  
Lover that could not be purged. Some clouds moved  
Like well-herded sheep across the luminous sky,  
Drawn into the face of the moon as if it were a pool from which to drink.  
A few flakes of snow began to fall,  
Large and cold and stark, slowly floating down, like the Lacrimosa movement of the  
Requiem mass composed by Mozart, finished at last as the bird  
Coughs up the bones of the night, and a faint hum is heard  
From the glowing gas within a streetlight staggering on.  
Suddenly, the ghostly white bird takes flight,  
Its wings nearly noiseless, but rhythmic and percussive nonetheless.

*-David Dowell ('22)*



## how to be happy

being happy is easy  
i can show you

smile

smile bigger

show more teeth  
form wrinkles  
where your lips  
curve

because the bigger  
the smile  
the happier you  
feel

smile  
until your cheeks are  
tight  
and your eyes glisten

you look happier

wipe those tears  
away  
happy people don't  
cry

stop quivering  
that lip  
be happy and  
smile

—*America Cortes* ('23)

## Everywhere but

Animated things my hands run up and down  
my thighs absolutely tarantula Nine clouds  
of lethe above—a prison I think they call it a skull  
Two Thousand miles below three thousand miles  
underneath six feet beneath an unmatter where atop t  
he hearse was found by no one broken-down lay a heart  
beat in the lockers within the ribcage of a daydream  
I've stuffed my socks into my pockets and im  
sitting indian style on my ceiling covered in hindu  
tattoos while spreading tarot But yet a pleasant  
aroma perhaps coffee or lavender or laughter  
or some grand memory rolls through perhaps  
an open window and still my toes curl in disgust  
The bleak midwinter hosts twenty-four hours  
of sun and I haven't left my house in months  
The roaches are starting to turn the tables I see  
them amass the walls in the night There's nobody  
within my room not even me and it's such a hell of  
matters

—*Daniel Daley ('23)*

## Madness

Charcoal sketches  
animated by the night

Watercolors seeping together in  
a Shakespearean quartet

Ears buzzing with a rhythmic hum and  
I smell the flavor of the distance

Film reels spin  
“Read it again?”

Rain begins to fall  
and a tea kettle whistles

Texturized dances of  
flickering ghosts, a tune:

“Where have you been?”  
Entranced bees sting my lips

Figments float,  
play hide and seek in the garden

Tasting the dew  
Sweet and heady, like wine

“Am I falling?”  
Book pages ripple

The whispers get louder  
Maze entrances are all I can remember  
when water fills my lungs

–*Isabelle Nelson ('23)*

**we are here &**

we are here & we are hopeless , surrounded  
by choirs of angels , terrible & beautiful  
they offer us red wine that tastes like blood , all  
thick & copper & dying soul

i hold your pinky finger &  
the angels sing something ancient  
a cold wind envelopes us , skin  
draws in tight , goosebumps growing  
on our arms

we join in because we must , sing  
words we understand but do not know  
& there is wine or blood covering our  
naked bodies , our hands filthy  
with humanity

*-Mary Roche ('18)*

**after , his hand**

after , his hand whispers down his lover's spine  
earthshaking , angrier than god , softer than a new

born's gums , his hand speaks of wrath & love that will  
rip them to pieces . his lover clears his throat &

backs away from all that promise , all that  
unspoken heartbreak , the potential of bliss or

peace or home . his lover cannot let his wings be clipped  
again , could never imagine himself in a world without

anger or war or self-hatred - can't fathom life with-  
out a mission . his lover kisses him , hides

his skin like adam or eve after they ate from the  
tree of knowledge of good & evil , bows his head like

he's saying a prayer or cursing fate . his lover ducks  
out the window & climbs onto the fire escape . the

sound of boots on metal has never sounded so much like  
like shattered hope , like the tearing of a tooth straight from

the jaw , like angels crying out as they fall from heaven  
with shredded wings .

-*Mary Roche ('18)*

**even asleep , i feel you slip**

even asleep , i feel you slip into my room , soft body & softer feet , our hearts like violin strings in the same room , mine echoing your frequency

i am bad , so bad , at waking up - think curt or angry think bare legs & bedhead smeared across a face & sticking out in a hundred different directions , i don't pray

anymore , but i fell asleep mid hail mary tonight , pleading for your holy mouth , for your tongue against mine , even if it burns - when i stir, wake

up to you , i ask if you need a blanket through heavy eyelids & smacking mouth & dream fog , but you brought one because you know me too well , your body is a

graveyard returning to life - your fingers trace my arm my stomach under my shirt my fallen open lips , planting seeds under my skin as you go - i used to swallow apple

seeds so i could find out what it felt like to grow or to be a tree or to grow something inside me - you are touching me & it is too hot & the fan is blowing & i'm trying to be

quiet because my brothers are asleep in the next room & my parents are down the hall & i am gasping & i am biting your shoulder or my pillow or my own wrist & then it is

my turn & i am tasting sweat & salt & stars & motherfucking hail marys & who knew thighs could be this beautiful & i have one hand on your knee & the other on your shaking

torso , trying to focus on you & not the art of you , the lines long & short & woven together , brushstrokes in the dark like monet or manet , i don't care which when you

pull my hair , i push harder & , god , i could do this forever & my palm is against your mouth , begging you not to scream (even though it's the most honest hymn i know) & you are

biting down almost too hard & your nails dig into my scalp & your eyes shut , blissful like my mother singing praise & worship & we are breathing

hard , hungry shaking hands holding full bodies & we straighten our shirts & covers but cannot iron out our smiles & fall asleep , lines blending into nothing , stomachs empty , hearts

full , the taste of hail marys in our mouth

-Mary Roche ('18)

## the magic

the magic is disappearing  
dust motes floating away with the sunshine

the dark tiptoes in boxing  
out the frenzy blossoming  
into apathy

we eat by the dreamlight  
swallow our bruises like tylenol or apologies

when you kissed me  
i would find glitter  
gritty between my teeth scratching  
under my tongue

now  
your mouth burns against mine like  
holy water scalding the roof of my mouth

i miss the glitter  
i'm shivering in these shadows  
the stars are invisible & i miss the sunshine

now  
devour me whole whether i  
die by fire or ice i'm dying  
just the same

your fingers set me alight  
& , for these last sweet seconds ,  
we exist in something warmer , or  
brighter than the dreamlight

—*Mary Roche ('18)*

## But for the Love of a Broken Heart

The nurse asks if I'm seeing anyone,  
her way of subtly mentioning the bed  
of violets bitten across my shoulders,  
and I can tell she wants to know

about the lover still asleep in the  
garden-level apartment with the  
shades drawn whose name, if I'm  
completely honest, I can't remember.

The jelly is cold, because of course  
it is, and I can never bite back the gasp  
that comes with cold lube against  
my skin. I always forget the fact that

K-Y was invented for hospital use—  
the smell of it sends me back  
to the night before, where Annabelle  
or Alison or Alexa or one of those

names halfway similar to yours,  
has clamped her thighs around my  
head, crying a name that is not mine,  
her desperation sweet on my tongue.

The nurse's eyes widen with a gasp—  
this is her first time seeing a hole  
where an aortic valve should be  
or any broken heart like my birthright.

The look she gives me is different now,  
a virginal mix of fear and curiosity, and  
she reminds me that I'm not supposed  
to exert myself. I don't say anything

about how sex is the easy part for me,  
it's everything else that starts a war  
in my heart. I don't mention the sheets  
that never smell like home, the voices

high and thick with static. It's not fair  
that a heart barely capable of beating,  
grown weaker with each passing year,  
so staunchly refuses to give up on you.

—*Hannah Salata (21)*





## Portrait of Sappho

In this lighting  
I could mistake her  
for my first love:

polished-copper eyes  
catch the sunlight  
and burn honey-sweet,

a slender hand draws  
pen-point along the tense  
taut line of Cupid's bow,

the conch-shell curve of an ear  
breaking the sun-kissed waves  
beckons me to call to her:

*Cloak me in violet, my love,  
smile at my fool heart  
from behind your notebook.*

*Grant me the love of a girl  
and I will wear your name  
draped across my shoulders.*

–Hannah Salata ('21)

Ode to Maxwell Q. Klinger, MASH 4077<sup>th</sup>

*after Jamie Farr*

Klinger says *I look fabulous*  
sincere as a sunrise  
cloaked in violets.

Klinger boxes in his sundress  
broken nose bleeding polka-dots  
onto a frilled neckline

and I am reminded  
of my own face, blood-red  
whenever I cannot work up the nerve

to wear anything feminine enough  
to clash with my handsewn masculinity,  
how my spine shrinks inward

whenever I take off my binder,  
how I make parts of my body invisible  
to finally feel whole.

But BJ says  
*You're loved, you fool,*  
and I believe him,

and Charles calls  
*Max a gentleman*  
*and a lady.*

My battlefield is made less desolate  
by the life in his eyes, his sea of florals,  
red silk, blue chiffon blooming in the wind.

*–Hannah Salata ('21)*

## Hand-Me-Down

Great-grandpa was a painter made soldier.  
After the war, he returned from Japan  
with four medals, a pocketful of coins,  
and stories he couldn't tell his children.  
I'm told he had nightmares, that some nights  
he mistook his wife for a corpse,  
the colors on his hands for blood.

They tell me my mother was a gentle soul.  
I'd like to believe them, but I cannot recall  
anything before the drinking. I imagine  
she would have loved me, had my sister not died  
when I was a toddler, if I had not grown up  
looking so much like her ghost, if only  
the child to survive had not been a dyke.

I keep wondering what's inside of me.  
Can I keep it doped up, or should I get sober?  
If I lick cobalt from the canvas, will it make me  
a better kind of blue? When I am gone,  
what will they say of me? I don't want to be  
another casualty in the war that raised me, but  
I know these wounds can't heal without scars.

*—Hannah Salata ('21)*

**broken minds can't love**

broken minds can't love

not fully at least  
not fully not until the cracks are filled

not fully at least not until the cracks are filled with the cements of life

broken minds can't love not fully at least  
not until the cracks are filled  
with the cements of life  
and sealed over

can't love not fully at least not until the cracks  
are filled with the cements of life and sealed over  
with healing

they can't love they can't love they can't love

broken minds can't love

until they are reopened

and sealed once again

broken minds can't love until they are reopened and sealed again  
sealed again because  
they are no longer broken

because they are no longer broken  
and they know how to grow with the scars

they are no longer broken and they know how to grow with the scars

because

broken minds are better now

now broken minds can love

*-Elena Vallejo ('23)*

## companions

last night i sat outside  
and cried with the shadows

we bonded  
over things like  
lost dreams and broken love

our tears drowned the blades  
of grass and began to suffocate the earth  
now she is one with our mind

keep turning until  
the brightness  
fades or you can't get  
out of bed anymore

the earth's bed  
is the sky  
mine is made of metal

trapped in the sheets  
sewn to the mattress  
the shadows are there too

they play with my imagination  
friendly confusion  
friendly illusions

they like the nighttime  
and so do i  
it's where lonely minds lie

they see me  
antique treasure  
hard to find  
easy to keep  
rusted and dusted

the shadows  
they plan on staying  
for a while  
but i don't mind the company

*-Elena Vallejo ('23)*

## know/wonder

If snow falls while your mechanic claims cracks in the power steering rack, catch flakes upon your tongue or drips of red on asphalt? Decisions to be made today.

If public radio hosts warn of falling temps while the kettle boils, stay home. Drink coffee. Drink tea. Drink in your dwelling.

If only we knew for certain that cat slept curled upon herself in Schrodinger's box! Or, would truly fail to rise again.

Not-knowing leaves me when I wonder and scatters me when I want to know. Today, I'll catch flakes, sip it all in, and wonder. Tending cracks can wait another day.

*–Jeremy Burke ('99)*

## When I Figure It Out, I'll Tell You

I.

We burned holes in our pockets learning about courage  
or something along those lines.

Whatever we did find, we found it honestly  
    on sticky floors;  
    the words spat at our faces,  
    only to talk with a rasp the next day.

I would have hoped to find this culture  
in a better light than the haunted amber of night  
telling us to go home when our buckets were empty  
and fights almost happen. But the thrown beer can still misses  
its target and grazes my ear. It still lies crumpled in sight  
of the welcome mat and the coarse drunken path  
taken by people whose nights needed to be occupied.

I can tell you  
we didn't listen,  
because out of boredom we followed dress codes and queues  
to see ourselves in the collective  
and transcribe the chapters in an ever-popular novel  
we don't know we're writing  
until we read it from memory years from now.

II.

I'm reminded that it's hard to pull,  
and that pulling yourself together  
in order to pull requires thinking  
that I don't think I have,  
at least before I cut the crusts off my sandwich.  
Fixed in sour mix,  
I forget how to guess at things.  
I forget how to wander the hiking trails  
I've never stepped foot on to think my way back home;  
perhaps it's not the time or place. It is, however, a time to decide.  
Ten horny daggers in a dark mix of light hide  
and learn a balancing act all too common.  
The difference is found when you decide if it's nausea or hunger  
that's a downer the day after  
when you're able to think.

III.

There comes a time to negotiate the end,  
which starts by trying to walk straight.



Fuzzy neon guides you home  
in angry relief. To understand is to feel  
apathy because you are afraid  
to find new places and  
learn new skills. In convoluted dignity  
you find solutions in liquid,  
only for the cycle to start again,  
ending in the lapping wash  
of rain-covered asphalt rendered in decibels  
by cars filled with freedom.

–*Ryan Sandness* ('22)

## A Thought on Memories

I'll hide and you can seek, but that can only come from guessing at pictures to help you answer the phone at night when Mom is late, coming home after bedtime, knowing she still cares though you don't see it; I may be smarter than you in terms of instances fast and fleeting, no longer scared of sleep that left you more time to yourself and your feuds, but we still jump from the swings and kick up woodchips when recess is over—I just get nauseous now, because the heights of the future grow as I test the waters like I did at summer morning swim lessons in the deep end, cutting my feet on the sharp baby blue bottom not knowing it would become a concrete ridden field of grass that I myself would mow over, baking in the sun and waiting to move on to a time that we are remembering now which will pass like weather, the creek flooding the high school track and words flooding mine, I ask you to please look at the nearest embankment of brown river water that will make you see in past tenses and former seasons of doubt read and edited down to its bare bones, the same ones I broke while learning to ski on hilltops of snow in January, not knowing how to slow down or brake because that's how mom and dad raised you to be in the safest danger possible, clinging to what you think you don't have.

—Ryan Sandness ('22)

*We gather together*

grass and forb seeds from our prairie  
*all that liberal autumn pours*

near our road, new prairie planned.  
*from her rich o'erflowing stores*

September now—our tallgrass plain  
*to scatter...good seed on the land*

has turned to *amber waves of grain*  
from which we take to sow some more.

We praise the Lord for *harvest store*,  
sawtooth sunflowers, goldenrods,

add floral yellows to the crowds,  
with asters' purple blinking through,

God's blessings *wondrously* accrue.  
*Now thank we all our God* for seeds

of grass and flower, fulfilling needs  
for land's and *heart and mind's delight*

for joy reaped in our good Lord's sight.

—Nancy Hayes

## Go back

to when this patch of earth was tallgrass prairie,  
before stout settlers broke the four-inch sod.  
Make of this memory a reliquary

for brittle Bluestem bones, a sanctuary  
for seeds sown by some awe-inspiring God  
back when this patch of earth was tallgrass prairie.

Go back to after glaciers' legendary  
retreat left yards-deep silt, scoured land roughshod.  
Make of this memory a reliquary.

Go back some million years as emissary.  
Imagine ten-foot Bluestem mammoths trod  
back when this patch of earth was tallgrass prairie.

Go back eleven thousand years when wary  
humans tracked and speared them deerskin-shod,  
left giant bones on hearths, charred cemeteries.

Climes warmed and dried. The beneficiaries  
were the sturdy grasses smaller bison gnawed.  
Dream when this patch of earth was tallgrass prairie.  
Make of this poem a reliquary.

–*Nancy Hayes*

*For the beauty*

of the prairie, of the ox-eye's yellow  
rays trained on the haze-rimmed rising sun;  
of the sparse pink sprays of showy tick  
whose leaves Japanese beetles nibbled  
down to lace beneath a blush-rose glimmer;

of the prairie blazing star's pink-purple  
fuzzy column, flaming cattail, sparkler  
in mid-sizzle, drama queen on spiky stalk;  
of the yellow coneflower's evolution  
from gray seed-head circled by pale points to  
dark brown cone with drooping golden petals  
languidly by in the summer breeze.

of the Culver's root's small candelabras  
lighting rabbits' leafy banquet tables;  
of the white wild indigo's tall  
spires of full round blooms that broadcast brightness  
over late June evening's dusky green;

of big bluestem's bolt in hot July  
past ox-eye, showy tick, past blazing  
star and yellow coneflower, Culver's root,  
on upward past proud white wild indigo, to  
bob above, tickling wings of darting swift and swallow,  
stirring souls to sing this song,  
*This our hymn of grateful praise.*

–Nancy Hayes

## **bushes burning**

by winter's end  
my eyes ache  
for flowers

I long for  
the first yellows  
the dandelions  
and forsythia  
that I know  
will soon appear  
by some mix of  
seed  
water  
warmth  
and spirit

I spend  
the pale cold days  
gestating over  
seed catalogues

savoring choices  
of elephant dill  
and butterfly weed

awaiting the day  
that the clay soil  
of my backyard  
hosts their  
bursts  
and ringlets  
and clusters  
of fire

*–Sarah Holst ('11)*

**fox and eagle**

I am so tired  
of searching  
for my own cracks  
of cold and blue  
for possibility

yet sometimes  
the flash of red  
at the edge  
of the road

an adolescent  
eagle flying  
twenty feet  
above our heads

kindle a  
primordial  
flutter

a restart  
of wonder

–*Sarah Holst* ('11)

## Our Larger Body

The God of Change had a new/old face. A face that had been shaping our species, our DNA, our starlit structures, for millennia—virus and human, holy human and holy virus—we knew one another—and slowly we human ones began reaching deeply into our memories, back alleys, and coat pockets to find how to honor, live, and be as that which was already and invisible waited and spread.

Some of us were well-practiced in saying “come near, come near” to the God of Change. And we were made to remember that what is Love for Change does not stay inside our boundaries, does not draw circles around the elders we hold dear. This time, collaboration meant distance. The God of Change needed space to breathe and we had to move in step with that unfamiliar dance.

Small rituals developed to appease the request for humans to spread and huddle in covenanted clusters. We made rings with items we found in the backyard: placing circles of pinecones on lichen-covered stumps as the snow fell and melted and fell again. We walked and whispered hello to everything new—“Thank you for your green, mouse-ear chickweed. Welcome, the world has changed.” (The chickweed replied, “It is old, old, my home in the soil is still cold.”)

We breathed deep the sunrises and swept our porches and washed the floors and cried. We held garlic cloves with reverence in our hands, and cooked with garlic, and planned to plant garlic abundant in the fall. We gathered fallen hemlock branches and set them on our steps to dry. We tried our best to love one another. We tried our best to let our imaginations move deeply into our bodies so we could remember our larger body.

The body of Jesus was also co-created by viruses. The small, wet baby, cradled in his mother’s muscular arms, surrounded by animal huffs and stomps, had the calligraphy of the viral face of God running through his veins. As the baby got older, he reminded that living and loving fully means being baptized in the muddy and polluted waters of the world; viruses and all. “We were never separate. Use mud and bread to heal.”

The ancient riddle and map of God held true: what is small, pushed aside, and ignored unveils who we were meant to be. So, yes, we sanitized the door handles. Yes, we maintained a six foot distance as we walked in the slowly warming world. But, inside of us, a growing wind kindled rising flames. We were being opened wide and made to listen to how the story could change.

–Sarah Holst (’11)



**what was once green**

I found a mouse head  
while raking leaves into a pile  
for a toddler

and inconspicuously  
swept it into the dried  
valerian and horsetail  
with my spindly uneven  
metal hooks

all that was left of the  
small fuzzy life  
lingers on me

it's the last warm day  
of the season  
the dog keeps sneaking  
into the garden  
to eat fallen tomatoes

the sun lives in the  
dried cornstalks now

God is the sound  
of what was once green  
now rattling  
in the breeze

–*Sarah Holst ('11)*

**transient**

I chase ghosts in my mind  
while the goldenrod play  
like violins in the ditches

and the tamarack begin  
their slow dance to gold

I want to tell you  
about the bull snake  
that is caught in the netting  
by the potato plants

and that I think of you as I  
feel the smooth piece  
of driftwood in my pocket  
and watch the fireweed  
seed pods turn to smoke

instead I send pictures  
of old farmhouses  
with the paint wilting  
off their doorframes

as if to say  
I am glad to have loved  
for this short sunlit time  
between first and last breaths

–*Sarah Holst ('11)*

## Proper Nouns

Buck Burrenbrough had a daughter named Suffer. Most people thought her name had something to do with her mother dying during childbirth, but Suffer's name was nothing more than the result of the unfortunate combination of a grief that made Buck's hand shake and a hospital typist who had misplaced her glasses. When the birth certificate came in the mail, Buck was so busy doing things mothers do and keeping up with his foreman job at the cannery, that he didn't get around to opening his mail until the due date to change the certificate had passed, and Buck always believed a man should live with the consequences of his inaction, even if some of those consequences fell on the shoulders of others.

"Buck, give that child a biblical name," his mother said.

Buck replied, "Suffer the little children, Maw."

Suffer grew up to be like her father. She walked like him, spoke plainly, and could usually figure people out by the time they'd said three sentences, and for that reason, Suffer blamed no one but herself for the six years she'd just spent in the Mabel Bassett Correctional Center for Women. After all, she'd known when Orrin Forrest was just two sentences into his sorry come-on that he was someone from whom no girl should accept a ride home. She also knew that only foolish girls attached themselves to men who strung words together like pearls, but after she'd listened to the smooth, round sound of those words for a week and a half, she was nearly convinced that she lived somewhere close to pretty, and just a mile or two outside of in love. That is until the sunny April day when Orrin strolled into the 7-11 for smokes and came running out a few minutes later with a bag of cash in one hand and a gun in the other. Suffer had just slipped into the driver's side to help her better find the stick of gum that she'd dropped between the bucket seats and her position had provided her with a perfect view of Orrin's head just as it exploded all over her, the car, and the store clerk who'd successfully discharged his .38 at close range.

Unfortunately, no amount of explaining why she'd been in the driver's seat of a running vehicle at a crime scene had convinced the judge that Suffer had not been Orrin's getaway.

Suffer went over these things in her mind carefully as she sat in the prison discharge area waiting for Maw to collect her and take her back home to the house where she'd grown up. She did not expect her grandmother to be on time. Maw never did or said anything that didn't have some sort of lesson attached to it. She was unable to say goodbye after talking on the phone with Suffer without adding, "Think on your sins, Girl; you've got plenty of time to do so."

Suffer *had* thought on her sins. Like everyone's they were plenty, and never ending, but the chaplain that visited Mabel Bassett reminded her that God loved sinners and died for them. Suffer found comfort in that and believed it, but would simply answer her grandmother, "Thank you, Maw. I will."

She waited until nine thirty before she left the waiting room and started walking toward McLoud. It was seven miles, but Suffer figured that a walk on a warm June day wouldn't be a bad way to reacquaint herself with life outside of Mabel B's. She knew Maw would not be happy, but as Buck use to say with a grin, "Nothing makes Maw Burrenbrough happier than having to forgive sinners."

The correctional center had re-landscaped the inside of Suffer's head. To stay out of trouble, she'd had to employ all the commonsense that her father had instilled in her: keep quiet about things you don't know or understand. When someone speaks to you, look them in

the eye and give the best answer you can. Be thankful, not bitter. And the most important advice that ran on a loop through her head every day while she was incarcerated and, even now, walked with her: *Whatever happens, don't be a smart ass.* That advice, given to her by the person who had loved and understood her the most, and had even enjoyed her proclivity to disobey it, was, Suffer knew, the reason she was walking away from prison life practically unscathed.

She had used her time inside wisely, had kept to herself and in six years finished a college degree in business, learned to cook, play the guitar, and could speak conversational Spanish. Her father had been proud. Before he was too sick with lung cancer to come, Buck had visited her every day that Mabel Bassett's would let him, and every Saturday she received a one-page letter from him that contained stories about the cannery, things Maw had said and done (Mawisms, he called them), and whatever was newsworthy in McCloud that week. After a while, the letters were all Buck could manage. He signed every one See You Soon. Love, your Pop.

When Maw had called with the news that Buck had died, Suffer had thrown up. She splattered the entire floor under the phone and the wall beneath it with the undigested contents of her supper. Then came the tears, and with them a sound from somewhere inside of Suffer she had never been before. It was a deep and empty place and Suffer was unable to crawl out of it for more than six months. When she did, she had a year left in prison and began to work out in the yard. She skipped rope and lifted weights and did squats until her body was as lean and strong and disciplined as her mind had become.

Suffer felt good as she walked and at some point, although it wasn't a premeditated plan, she headed toward the cemetery. "First things first," she said to herself.

Buck's headstone looked like something Maw would pick out: vines around the plaque where his name was carved—William Edward "Buck" Burrenbrough 1951–2001 and beneath it: *I know that my redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand on the earth. I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another.* – Job 19

Suffer decided to like it, "Pretty good job, Maw."

The last letter Buck had sent to Suffer had come to the prison after his death. Suffer held it in her hand, unopened. It was heavier than his usual letters and the envelope had become worn from months of Suffer passing her fingers back and forth over his familiar handwriting. She shook the contents down to one end and tore the other open.

*Hello Suffer,*

*This is the letter you're getting because I'm gone now and I'm sorry about that. It was my plan to stick around, be waiting for you when you got home, but you of all people know plans change when you least expect. I ain't got much to say that hasn't already been said, or a whole lot to leave you for that matter, but here's the deed to Grandpa's old cabin on Lake Eufaula. You always loved that place. There's some life insurance for you—enough to help you get settled.*

*I always felt I owed you a better name, the one your mother wanted you to have, so I started the paperwork in here to get it changed if you want. When I met her, she had the last name of Campbell. You might want to use that too. Might help you start over. I hope you know that you're the best thing I ever did in this world. Check in on Maw from time to time. That's what family does. Life's short. Try to live a good one.*

*See you soon. Love your Pop*

Suffer lay on the ground by Buck's tombstone for over an hour, waiting for the deep

hole inside of her to open up again. Spent from crying and numb from the ball that she had curled herself into, she rose and wiped the saltwater snot from her face. The darkness hadn't come, only a sad ache and what seemed like an awareness of a little more room inside of her head.

When she made it to Maw's, her grandmother's car wasn't in the driveway, so Suffer found the key under the rock in the garden and went inside. The smell of her former home was unexpected—the fabric softener Maw used, a cake that was probably baked for her homecoming, and the perfume that her grandmother wore. The faded smell of Buck was there too—like outdoors, and the cannery, and the cigars he wasn't allowed to smoke in the house, but the smell of which always clung to him. In his room the smell was stronger. This is where he died, thought Suffer and she touched the flannel shirt that hung over his footboard.

Across the hall her bedroom was untouched—same bunkbeds and dresser, same Ramones and Jordan Catalano posters on the wall. There was a lip gloss and a bottle of suntan oil on her nightstand. She pulled a bag out from under her bed and threw three pairs of jeans and some t-shirts and underwear into it. Inside the top drawer of her dresser she found her expired driver's license and a picture of her and Buck and Maw at the lake when she was about ten. She put them in her back pocket.

Suffer had planned to stick around and speak to her grandmother before she left. She wanted to reassure her that everything would be fine and that she would check in with the parole officer as required. But suddenly, she couldn't make herself waste any of the new life that Buck had left her, so she took fifty dollars out of the money jar in the kitchen cabinet, grabbed his flannel shirt off the footboard, and left Maw a note (Love you, I'll call soon) and an IOU on the counter.

At the truck stop on the edge of town, Suffer asked the waitress which driver headed west on 40 was safe to ask for a ride.

"That'd be Miss Sigourney Lisum. She's at the table by the juke box. See that old white-haired woman with her glasses down on her nose reading the paper? She lives up near Eufala."

Suffer asked the woman if she would mind taking her as close to Lake Eufala as she was headed.

"Sure, Sweetheart. I'd be happy to have some company." She had to move a chicken in a wire pen and a quilted bag full of vegetables from the front seat to the bed of her pickup before Suffer could get in.

"You got kin around Eufala?" the woman asked when they turned onto the highway.

"No Ma'am. Not anymore."

"Girl, call me Sig or Sigourney. Everybody else does. What should I call you?"

Suffer looked out the window and watched the telephone poles standing straight up in the red dirt tick by as the woman waited, patiently, for her to answer.

—Renée Minette Hentrich ('07)

## The Rich Eat

*“Nobody. I’m nobody. I’m a tramp, a bum, a hobo, I’m a box car, a jug of wine, and a straight razor if you get too close to me.” –Charles Manson*

I was in Telluride at the Mountain Top Inn, picking up the pieces of my shattered life, when The Killer walked in. The encounter was brief—a simple brushstroke, two tips of the tips of a hair rubbing together for less than a second—but the reaction was atomic. His gravity pulled my eyes into orbit. I observed from the corner of the lobby a man with His face shielded by a logoless green baseball cap and His body clothed in a powder blue ski jacket. He strode by with a negligible grandeur, a doublespeak of being. Both everywhere and nowhere in one moment. At the time I still believed in doubt, and my cerebral cortex yanked the ripcord and ejected my mind from the truth. It wasn’t ready.

Where to even begin?

In a second, He was gone. And so was my mind. Back to the Utah desert or Some Such Place. The Association had just disbanded, or dissolved, as Michael would say, and I was alone for the first time in three years. Three years in the Utah desert at Some Such Place. It had been paradise, or so I thought. Michael had made the place with people like me in mind. A haven for socialists, Buddhists, college dropouts—a place for people who read Jack Kerouac or Hunter S. Thompson for the first time and thought, “Well, isn’t that grand?” In retrospect it made no sense. We were anarcho-communists, big-government libertarians, epicurean ascetics. Michael made it all work with his own brand of charm and a dash of hypnotism. Until he didn’t. A cult, some would say. I don’t know.

I was probably thinking about Michael when The Killer walked by. Or about the money Daddy was wiring to me at the mile high bank down the street. Whatever it was, it wasn’t important enough to remember now. I would have forgotten the whole thing if it weren’t for the paper a few days later.

## Son of Resort Owner Slain

The headline caught my attention. I cut to page seven and dug in. Body found mutilated, posed. A shoe shoved in his mouth and his hands nailed above his head into the wall. Mountain Top Inn. Room 237. Just down the hall. The message written on the wall in blood: **Eat the Rich**. I scanned the paper for more information, to see if they had found a killer. Deep inside, I think I already knew. The eyewitness statements confirmed it.

The Killer had entered my life.

Daddy hired a driver to take me to Denver and I flew home the next day to Pensacola. It didn’t take long for the story to go national. I waited each morning for the delivery boy in my tattered pajamas, my hair frizzy in the Florida heat, and read it right there on the porch with my blackened feet on the railing. The scandal drove my stepmother crazy. There were whisperings on the golf course about the hippy bitch on Gosslander Drive with the true crime addiction. Probably part of the Manson family, they’d say. And they weren’t far off. It all made me feel upside down with glee.

The murders came in quick succession, all resort owners, children of resort owners, their mistresses. Aspen. Steamboat. Vail. Keystone. Each brutal in their own way. Each with the same signature message: **Eat the Rich**. Being the spawn of money myself, I should’ve been appalled. But Michael had instilled in us The Virtues. Patience. Courage. Respect. Love. Above all, Poverty. Poverty of the pocket, Poverty of speech, Poverty of thought, Poverty of the soul. Michael would’ve

been in league with The Killer, but Poverty extends all the way down the esophagus to the stomach. Eating the rich, even figuratively, would've been much too gluttonous for Him.

After several months in the sunshine state, I felt adrift in a sea of retirees, golfers, meth addicts, and sailors. Daddy was busy with work most of the day, and my stepmother quickly grew tired of me sleeping on a mat on the floor. She couldn't understand why someone blessed with everything in life wouldn't use that privilege to sleep in a featherbed, dine at the country club breakfast buffet, and fill an oversized closet with shoes and feather boas. I somehow couldn't explain to her that her vision of god's favor was drastically different from mine.

The strife exploded with a food fight in the guest house's kitchen. It climaxed with a dirty slap to the face. It ended with a headline.

### Questions Abound as Death Count Stalls at 13

The Killer had vanished. Was this another message? A heart attack? A change of heart? I couldn't squeeze the questions into my little skull even if I wanted to. It seemed to me the only thing that mattered. The only thing that made sense. As much as the dissolution of The Association had burned me up, I couldn't shake the one lesson Michael branded onto our bodies. The mantra of scar tissue pressed onto my left leg.

I F I  
I O I  
I l I  
I l I  
I O I  
I W I  
I I  
I t I  
I H I  
I e I  
I I  
I l I  
I e I  
I A I  
I D I  
I e I  
I R I

The next day, I packed my stepmother's Gucci carry-on into her yellow VW bug and drove. The road, for me, always had a divining quality to it. With a little bit of time and tarmac under my spinning wheels, I knew that I'd fall into my groove. When I first met Michael, I was hitchhiking across the southwest. From Moab, I caught a ride with a trucker west and almost fell victim to an entirely different type of killer. The pervert wore a red ski cap and tight white pants. If he was able to keep his hands out of them for long enough to lock the doors, he might have had me. It wasn't so. I fell out the door and into the desert at Some Such Place. Like Alice into wonderland.

By the time I hit New Orleans, I knew what had to be done. I'd been to the French Quarter with my mother as a child, and something that happened there had stuck with me ever since. We'd passed an old woman reading tarot out of an alleyway. My mother, high-hat as she was, had already written off the neighborhood, the whole city, as beneath her. When I showed interest

in the eldritch woman and wanted to see her pretty cards—the knight of swords, the queen of cups, the hanged man—my mother yanked my arm nearly out of its socket and scolded me so severely that little droplets of spit covered my face. As I was being dragged away, the old woman flashed a toothless grin. Then, almost as if she was speaking directly to me, telepathically even, she communicated.

*You will return one day, child. Then I will show you the cards.*

The city at night was a gaudily morbid place. Like a haunted house at the county fair. Festival lights danced like fairies on the balcony railings while women of the night waved rhythmically below. With every step, my shoes stuck to the pavement, sticky with sweat and liquor and god knows what else. After a few minutes of searching, I found her. Even after so many years, the old witch was working out of the same alleyway. I wasn't surprised. Michael had trained the doubt out of me.

She smirked as I approached and slipped the cards from beneath the table. We didn't exchange pleasantries. One by one, she turned the cards.

"Where do I go from here?" I asked as she cut the deck.

She flipped the first card.

*The Tower. Your problem is one of upheaval. A sudden change has occurred in your life. But it is also an awakening. A growing awareness of something inside of you.*

And another.

*The five of cups. The problem you are facing is one that you yourself caused. You are regretful. Disappointed. But it is time to move on. That is why you are here.*

A flash of The Association, with Michael at their head, surrounding me, berating me. Stoning me. A flood of guilt. The pained look on his face as he cast the first stone.

*The Hanged Man. Your solution is to fully surrender. Let go. Give in to that yearning desire. Cast your fate into the waves. Let them carry you to shore.*

She gazed at me with a blank face. Her judging eyes pierced my soul.

I left the bayou at dawn and drove and drove. My intuition was yelling at me, holding a gun to my head and telling me not to stop until it gave the okay. I put my hands up and surrendered. At its bequest, I drove west and north to Denver, through the Rockies and past bloated aspen, then north to the Great Salt Lake. I took a streak of salt crust and spread it on my forehead like a great white warning sign. When it still didn't tell me to stop, I headed to the Uintas. Before long, the rich white light of park city came into view. I pulled over at the first hotel I saw. The peaks. Daddy hadn't shut off my charge card—he never could stomach knowing that I might be sleeping on the streets—and I checked into Room 217. Through the street level window, I could see the lights of deer valley atop the mountain. I bathed myself in their glow, sleeping with my head to the west. Somewhere, right out there in the streets of that disgusting resort town, He had killed for the last time.

The next day, I set out to look for work. Before I met Michael, I'd been a ski instructor in Telluride. I hated every minute of it. The snot-nosed brats I had to pretend to like, the parents who tipped like paupers and cried over the smallest bruise, the shitty manager who tried to get me to turn tricks for a raise. But I loved to ski. And it paid the bills that Daddy didn't cover. There were two resorts in town: Deer Valley and Park City. I took the chairlift to the one owned by the father of a murdered daughter and signed away my time. They were dying for employees, they said. It was like there was no one left to work anymore. I shrugged and gestured to the mostly empty lobby.

"Must all be out on the mountain," I said.



I looked out the giant arched windows at the mountain. The pristine white slopes, covered with fresh powder and groomed to a fine skiable surface, were empty but for a solitary skier carving a trail toward us.



I had never seen a resort so empty, especially on a powder day.

By the time I'd finished signing the last few pages to ensure my employment, the skier had finished his run, slipped out of his skis, and was clomping up to the lobby in his ski boots. My tongue almost fell out of my mouth. Powder-blue ski jacket. Baseball cap. Was it Him? It seemed impossible. The descriptions of The Killer had littered the papers. There was no way He'd be foolish enough to show up wearing the equivalent of camouflage on the opening day of deer season. He opened the large double doors, letting in the wind and whispers of snow.

"How's things, Dave?" the skier said. "Who's this?"

"Elenora. The new ski instructor."

The skier turned to me. His eyes were so hazel they appeared almost gold. His smile reminded me of Michael. As he got closer, I realized the hat had a Denver Broncos logo on it and that the ski jacket was a darker shade of blue than The Killer's had been.

"Nice to meet you, Elenora," he said. "It's wonderful to see a new face around here. I'll certainly be seeing you around."

"Must be nice to see any face around here," I said as he walked toward the elevator.

He laughed and pulled a little brown square of leather out of his pocket. "Wallet is certainly feeling a little light today."

When the elevator closed, I leaned on the counter. "Was that . . ."

"Yeah," Dave said.

Peter Braintree. Owner of Deer Valley Resort. I'm sure a grin crept across my face. It was going to be easier than I thought.

The next day, after hours of training and free skiing on the mountain, I tracked down the site of the last Killing. Oliver Braintree was found posed at the base of a brick retaining wall just a few feet off a popular mountain biking trail. Two tourists, evidently lost and out later than they should have been, found him just after the sunset, his hands nailed to his cheeks, eyes forced open with clothespins. Above his head, painted on the bricks: **Eat the Rich**. It was unclear at first if he was dead or alive when He had mutilated him, but the results of the autopsy made it clear.

For whatever reason, He had wanted the boy to watch the sunset.

As the sun fell below the tallest peaks, I sat exactly where He had placed Oliver, where the bricks were still stained maroon with the bloody message, and saw what He had seen. The view was incredible. In the distance, the spruce lodges and mansions of Deer Valley were coated in golden sunlight. The roads were clear, the snow as virgin as Mother Mary. It was quiet, tranquil. Almost too peaceful. A troupe of deer crossed a distant road and stood stock still in the front yard of a massive house. Why did He want his eyes open for this? I began to grow restless as the wind cold as death settled into my bones. The sun grew orange, then red, maroon, to crimson, to black. Deer Valley, oddly enough, was darker than the growing night behind me. Not a single light was on in the house. No porch lights, streetlights.

Pitch. Black.

Then, like the spark of creation, a bedroom light fixture snapped to life. An explosion of light followed. One by one, bedside lamps, chandeliers, and night lights ignited. My eyes strained to dilate to let in enough of the rich white light. Like heaven's gates ripped wide open.

The pop of tired bones and creaky ligaments sounded as the doors of each house flew open and the shadowy occupants stretched to greet the world.

Transfixed. I would've stared all night if it weren't for the clink and chuff sound of a thrown chain shooting off in my right ear. Off in the distance a mountain bike lay on the ground and a figure wearing a green baseball cap disappeared just beyond the ridge.

"Hey!" I shouted, leaping up and running to my bike.

I shoved my foot onto the pedals and propelled myself up the trail and to the ridge. The bike was carefully laid off the trail. It was like none I had ever seen, gray and devoid of any branding or distinguishing features. I pushed myself past the bike and over the ridge and gazed out into the void beyond.

Nothing.

I sighed. If it was Him, for whatever reason, He didn't want to be found. But He was watching me. At least slightly curious about what I was doing. I looked back at Deer Valley and saw a line of headlights making their way down the mountain toward town.

By the time I rode back in the dark and walked to town, Main Street was alive with light and sound. The bars, populated by only a handful of tourists dressed in kitschy t-shirts and ski caps during the day, had lines of scantily clad girls and their perfumed men snaking out of them. Ladies in fur coats filed in and out of the upper-crust stores. It was like all these people had risen out of the ground. I ducked into the first drug store I could find and retrieved an energy drink, two candy bars, and a jar of minced garlic. Oddly enough, when I went to pay there was no one behind the counter. The guy at the lodge had been right. There really was no one left to work. I left a few dollars on the counter and dipped out into the night.

Early on in The Association, before we became United, Michael would send me out fishing. Me and Nance and some of the other girls would show up to some Podunk bar and stick a nail in our tire. We'd head inside, wet from the rain or sticky with sweat from the summer heat and order coffee and offer a bucket of cheap beer for a ride home. For most guys, we just had to bat our eyes and they'd fall into our laps. Some we had to take to the bathroom or even all the way back to Some Such Place before they'd commit. But every single one, once they'd bedded one of us or listened to Michael preach about Poverty, never left again. That is, until they all did.

The best marks were always at the holes-in-the-wall, but there was no such thing in Park City. There were clubs, there were breweries, and there were themed bars that tried to look like they belonged in Iowa City or Amarillo but failed miserably. I found a little cowboy-themed bar called Mountain Jim's and flashed my ID at the bouncer. He nodded without even looking at it and told me to head in.

Hank William's Jr. grated against my eardrums as my eyes adjusted to the dingy interior of the bar. A handful of older men drinking beer sat at the far end of the bar, and what looked like a bachelor party sat crowded around a large party off to my left.

"Gin and tonic," I said to the bartender.

I watched in the mirror behind the bar as one by one the group turned toward me, their eyes stabbing into my back. The waiter set the drink down with a thud in front of me, the ice cubes rocking back and forth like a miniature earthquake had just hit the place. I strutted over to the jukebox and flipped through the selection. I found just the right song and slid in a few quarters before sitting back down at the bar. The speakers crackled and the table turned as Jim Morrison's haunted voice filled the room.

*You know the day destroys the night*

One of the boys locked eyes with me in the mirror.

*Night divides the day*

His eyes were golden brown, his ruffled white dress shirt untucked from his dark blue jeans.

*Tried to run*

He looked drunk. And hungry. For some reason, I felt like it was him who had chosen the song and not me.

*Tried to hide*

I winked at him, and he stood up. Setting a ten-dollar bill down on the bar, I finished my drink and walked toward the back. I let out a sly smile as the old men at the end of the bar watched him follow me into the bathroom.

*BREAK ON THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE*

*BREAK ON THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE*

The music dulled as the door slid shut behind us. I could feel the tension in the room. Like he was a coiled spring about to pounce. I set my purse down on the counter.

*Break on through to the other side*

*Break on through to the other side.*

“I think you’re lost,” I said, smiling at him in the mirror.

“No, no, little lady, I think I’m right where I’m supposed to be.”

He moved toward me like lightning and slammed me up against the wall. Our lips met and I thrust my tongue into his mouth. It shocked him for but a moment before he had his hands exploring my whole body. I grabbed the back of his head and pushed him even further into me. His kisses made their way from my lips to my chin to my exposed neck. Teeth as cold as ice pressed against my skin. Goosebumps formed across my entire body. A small gasp of pain and pleasure shot out of me as he bit down into my flesh . . .

WAIT.

He stumbled back, a crazed look in his eye. I tried to save face. “I have something special for us.”

A smile curled at the corners of his lips. “Go on.”

I reached into my bag and rifled through it with both hands until I located the little glass bottle. With one twist of my wrist, I popped the top off and slid it aside.

“I have to ask you one thing before we do this,” I said.

“Okay . . .”

“Where are the bodies?”

A look of knowing shock spread over his face and he took a quick step away from me. I grasped the bottle tightly and threw my arm in a dramatic arc. Minced garlic spewed forth like hot oil from a frying pan and covered his upper body. Little pieces stuck into his hair like dandruff and his face was instantly dripping wet with garlic juice. He screamed like a wild animal, his arms flailing and clawing at his face and hair as he stumbled and fell through the door out into the hallway. Gasps sounded from outside.

I slipped through the door and ran for the exit.

*BREAK ON THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE*

*BREAK ON THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE*

The group, all still sitting around the table, shot up in surprise and ran toward their screaming comrade. Somehow, I slipped past them and burst through the front door and out into the night.

Trying not to draw attention to myself, I speed-walked down the hill toward where I’d left the fat-tire bike, hopped on, and pedaled for the mountains. I knew I couldn’t go back to the hotel, so I looked for a public restroom, an empty lodge, an abandoned building—anywhere I could

hold over for the night. I pedaled as fast as I could for what felt like ten minutes before I saw a darkened building at the edge of town.

Sweetham's Catering, the sign read.

I crept to the front door and saw that they were closed until morning. The door was locked, but a side exit near a dumpster was propped halfway open, and I slipped inside. The interior of the building was a maze of industrial-sized kitchens, walk-in storage closets, and freezers. I tiptoed around the darkened kitchen, looking for a place to lie down. In a hallway connecting two large kitchens, I found a door leading into what looked like an office. I sat down in the big leather chair and kicked my feet up onto the desk.

As I shut my eyes, I noticed that there was one drawer in the mahogany desk that had a lock on it.

*Give into that yearning desire.*

I pulled at the drawer, but the lock was engaged and didn't budge. The office was small and devoid of much else besides the desk, a lamp, and a corner chair. I checked the surface of the desk. The inside of the lampshade and the couch cushions were empty, too. I looked up at the drop ceiling. I pushed up one of the tiles, squinted in the dark, then brushed my hand around the edges of the other tile.

Nothing.

I checked several other tiles before my hand met with the touch of cold metal. The key fit perfectly into the drawer, and I slid it open. A ledger filled the inside. I squeezed it out and dug into its contents. It detailed the services provided for the past several months, the amount budgeted for each meal, and how much money each brought in. I flipped forward a few pages until I found the next day's date.

Peter Braintree. Valentine's Day Dinner. 14 meals requested. 7 sirloins, 7 chicken. 4 bottles Merlot. 4 Bottles Pinot Grigio. 1165 Melody Way.

I grabbed a pen from the desk and wrote the address on a scrap of paper before putting the ledger away, locking the drawer, and replacing the key.

For a while, I allowed myself to drift away.

The next morning, I left through the side door dressed in a dark-blue Sweetham's catering uniform. Main street, bustling a few hours previous, was deserted. I found the drug store I'd been in the previous day unoccupied, so I grabbed a few protein bars and had a meal while sitting on the curb outside. The slopes above the main street rooftops were mostly empty. Watching the ski lift climb its way up the mountain just to go back down again over and over and over almost lulled me to sleep. I put my bag on the curb and used it as a pillow.

I startled awake to find the sun creeping toward the western peaks. I hopped on my bike and headed for the trail. Before I could complete my mission, I had to try and meet with Him one last time. Sleeping on the ground had taken a toll on my body, and my joints screamed as I pedaled my way up into the hills. The sun grew closer and closer to the horizon as I climbed. When I topped the last ridge, the strange gray bike was gone. I gasped as I made it to the wall. There was still a bloody epithet smeared across the bricks, but this time the blood was fresh.

### Eat the Rich

### THE RICH EAT

I turned my gaze to the darkened streets of Deer Valley. They were empty, but I knew it wouldn't be that way for long. I had to move.

The sunset came rapidly, and night fell like a lead blanket over the sky. I couldn't bring myself to look up at the mansions as I ran. Taking a different trail, I hustled across the valley and

up the other side to a steep ridgeline that dropped directly onto the street leading through the largest houses. I checked the wrought-iron street sign with icicles longer than my arm hanging like bats from the plate.

Melody Way.

1159. A disgustingly huge cabin-style mansion made of faux logs.

1161. A modern with more windows than walls.

1163. A hedge fence with pointy iron tips shielded all but the black-tiled roof.

1165. The mailbox read Braintree. A semicircle drive with a fountain in the middle. The house made entirely of a dark brick that looked almost like brimstone in the shadowy night. Every light in the house was on, and three cars were parked in center of the drive. A Rolls Royce, a BMW, and an Audi a7.

I stepped up to black door and grasped the golden knocker. A few laughing voices came muffled through the door, and I slammed my hand against it.

One. Two. Three. The door opened suddenly and a man wearing a dark-green turtleneck and ironed slacks answered. It was Peter Braintree. Golden eyes sparkling. He smiled.

“Ah, you’re early.”

“Yes, I was sent ahead to get the dining-room table set.”

He stepped aside and motioned for me to come in.

Once, just before the dissolution, Michael took me to one of his friend’s places. His benefactor, really. A well-off utv salesman living in an adobe compound in Moab. The man was kind, gentle, and somehow, despite his opulent lifestyle, an earnest believer in The Association. Michael really turned on the charm for him. He had this routine that I saw Him pull out only a handful of times. I called it His Kerouac. With almost manic passion, He’d praise the open road, freedom, and a wild life of soft drugs, hard women, and Zen Buddhism. For whatever reason, this was like crack to stable white men. I don’t know if they saw in Him freedom. From their wives, their jobs, their boring lives. If it was some evolutionary yearning for a primal style of manly living. Or if they just loved Him in a slightly different way than I did. Like they saw just one of His many faces and were pulled into the greater thing that was Him. What I do know is that as soon as we left the adobe confines and reached the comfort of the desert, Michael, his eyes shielded by black sunglasses while the desert night sped by, said, “You should’ve killed that pig where he stood.”

I’d never understood what He meant.

The interior of the Braintree’s home was eggshell white with mahogany floors and abstract art on the walls. He led me though a foyer to a dining room with a giant oak table and fourteen chairs surrounding it, then passed through a door to the servant’s kitchen. “Here’s where you’ll find the plates, silverware, et cetera.”

“Thank you, sir.”

He stepped halfway through the door, then paused and peeked his head back in. “Say, do I know you from somewhere?”

I ignored him and started opening drawers.

“Hmph.” I heard him say as the door shut behind him.

I found the spice cabinet and the fridge and rifled through their contents. No garlic. Strange cuts of meat in saran wrap and Tupperware and sitting bloody on plates filled the fridge. There was an entire drawer dedicated to meat tenderizers, thermometers, butcher’s knives. I grabbed a knife from the drawer and searched the rest of the room. A small walk-in freezer was hidden at the back of the kitchen. I pushed my way in, and wisps of cold air like snakes slithered out and disappeared.

I fumbled around for a light switch, my hands aching and shaking with the cold. Finally my fingers stumbled across a thin piece of plastic, and I flicked it on. The light illuminated my mind and made righteous my mission. Reflexively, I clasped my hands in prayer.

It was Him.

Hanging from a meat hook like a stuck pig. A pile of His clothes bundled up in the corner. I gripped the knife until my freezing red knuckles turned white. His skin was flayed, His muscles mutilated almost beyond recognition. I bent over his blue ski puffer and reverently placed my arms through the holes. The hat, stiffened with ice, fit my head perfectly.

You.

Now this is for you.

The first thing you need to know, what I wish I knew, is that the knife won't go in clean—it's hard to press in and needs to run through things like bone and tensing muscle, hard like bedrock, not like pushing a knife through topsoil, and the toughest part is the screaming and the crazy look in their eyes like a tiger caught in a trap, making the whole process difficult as you push the knife through their skin and tear and tear and tear, but they won't just die like normal humans or even like a cockroach, no matter how much you stab and rip and scream, no matter how much your hair gets matted with blood and your hands get sore and bruised from the constant impact, no matter they still don't die and in fact scream and cry and wail and moan, and when they watch the others it just makes it worse—so plan on splitting them up or hiding the bodies away from the others—otherwise you just run into more and more problems, and like me some will get outside and you'll have to chase them and expose yourself to more and more people, and because of this some will get away and that is the one thing you can't stomach, the one thing He can't stomach, I can't stomach, what Michael told me to never stomach, is to fail your mission, the one Given to you, to Kill, and you might not know it yet but this is the path you're on, the path that we all have to follow now, whether we like it or not, we all have to follow the leader, follow the leader and Him and do what must be done and like He wrote before and now I place in blood above the fireplace next to the putrid family photos the words that will eliminate them all from this Earth

## EAT THE RICH

—Drew Leathers ('21)

## *De Bona Mortis*

*a bucolic on death  
inspired by Wordsworth's "Michael"  
& Bruckner's 8th Symphony III-IV*

Luke strode through the cattle gate and down the meandering path, into the shoulder-deep grass of his favorite pasture. Unstooped and physically honed, he remained a tall man, unusual in his strength, even in this, his 84th year. He had in the past come out here to give himself over to untethered remorse and raw shame. But some time ago, the exact moment pinned in his mind, he had noticed a change. No, he had changed. No, he had healed. Shows what time and keeping busy can do, he thought. Well, and a decent confession. Looking around, the meadow seemed softer, scented, Edenic. It was intoxicating. This meadow had become his holy of holies, where he came to think, to muse, to pray, if you will. He was dying, you see, at last. "About time," he chuckled.

Tall bluestem and arching cordgrasses undulated in the late-summer morning breeze. His old draft horses, as was their want, moseyed over, nudging him, snorting, leaning in their heads, one over each shoulder, knowing there was an apple on his person (there was). Their sloppy chomping was, for him, one of the most contented noises on earth. Their scent—he pressed his nose into Pete's flank and breathed deeply—was the aroma of earthly delight.

The contours and colors of the meadow reminded him his childhood bed-loft back home (he could think of that place now without a grimace of pain). Yes, the pasture was like that, a thick woolen quilt thrown hastily over a very large bed . . . it bespoke a sprawling room and cozy comfort all at once. A small creek wound its way down between the shallow folds of the land and pooled into a pond before meandering out the other end. He loved this place because it was open and wide to the blue sky billowing with bulbous masses of white cloud. That sky, so massive in scale, defined the Midwestern prairie more than did the rippling terrain. Yet his own cozy pasture felt private, the undulating roils of the hills forming something of a shelter, the great Burr Oaks served as sprawling, lazy, overfed sentinels.

The word *cozy*. It was his mother's. She'd said that about their home back in the Greenhead Ghyll. She'd meant it ironically: the stone croft was barely big enough for the three of them: herself, Isabel, and . . . and his father, his best friend, whom he had betrayed, Michael.

Luke glanced down at the aged and crinkly letter pinched firmly in his thick-cracked fingers against the caprices of an impishly snappy breeze. It was addressed to "Luke Ghyll, son of Michael, once of Greenhead, last known to be in the territory of Iowa, perhaps a farmer." It wasn't an address as much as an obituary. It had found its way to him, even though he had never found his own way back home. It had been written by a prudent hand, a measured, cleric's hand, clean and precise: "Should this letter ever find you, Luke Ghyll, it is my deep regret to inform you of . . ."

With the letter had come a bank note, his Yorkshire shepherd's croft inheritance. The black lakes and grey fens; the wine dark brook, stone walls, and stone cottage; the green bracken and dappled heather; and the massive oak his ol' Da called "The Clipping Tree" because it was under its shade that the two had sheered their sheep each wet and sharp March—all of this summed up and valued at \$240.00. He'd never spent it. He paid for this place with his own toil.

Luke's first act after he moved in was to shovel out a red quartz boulder that had squatted just under the black loam. He'd horse-hauled it to the front yard, intending to but never getting around to, making it the corner of a stone wall around himself. The problem was that, unlike back home, there weren't enough field stones to bother. So, instead, he just chiseled into it the name "Morning Star." Much later, when the itinerant priest pointed out that, in Latin, that phrase was "Lucifer," he laughed so hard he cried. Then he cried so hard he fell down. Then he confessed.

Luke had been born portentously, as if by the scratch of a divine quill, in 1800 in the Lake District of England. When he was 18, his father had sent him down to London to earn enough money to pay off their debtors and so save the farm. His mother let him go because she had dreamed that he'd become rich, like that lad Richard Bateman years before—that roguish emigre to America who had boasted his dubious success by building a marble church that no one in the village really needed. She was sad, his mum was. His father was nearly destroyed. But, damn, he made him go anyway: risked flesh and blood to save stone and wool.

It didn't seem to have occurred to his folks how horrible *he* had felt, which was confused, rejected, and utterly terrified. He'd wept and pleaded until he saw that he was just making it all the more miserable for everyone. So, he went. At first Luke wrote loving and effervescent lies about how well he was doing, all the while sinking in over his head. His letters stopped when he left London for America, having fallen into shameful dissolution, ignominy. Instead of working to get their land back, he'd become a gambler, a bad one. He fled across the ocean, not from the law, but from hooligan gangsters. More than once on that crossing—hungry, cold, afraid, and devoured by self-loathing—he'd considered going overboard.

Life aboard ship was far from private, and Luke had plenty of opportunities to make friends and connections had he the inclination. He hadn't. He was affable, kind, generous, but oh so very sad and private. He discouraged anyone who got too close, staring longingly over their shoulders at the ship's wake. Funny word, that, he wryly grinned. As a squall swept in, blocking his view of the past, he nodded in appreciation: it made an appropriate end to a dystopic pastoral poem. He turned to look west, but all he saw was a choppy grey spumed and empty ocean. He felt like a cork bobbing in ephemeral meaninglessness.

In Boston he'd gone to work the pubs, remaining at once amiable and aloof. One day an acquaintance reluctantly yielded to his incessant petitions to help him get a job with the local mob. Pat, being Irish, could read hearts and knew that Luke's would not survive such work. But Luke was poor and without a future so, having offered his best advice, which was "Join the army, lad. The pay is good, the killing legal."

Pat introduced Luke to his new boss. As it turned out, the fellow was the very man who had enriched himself and then bought a church half a world away from his soul. Richard took an immediate, if shallow, fondness for his young "cousin" from back home. But once Luke found out what he would be doing for a living, and despite the generous wages, he was more miserable than ever. He was being paid to extort debtors. The crime fit the punishment. "Welcome Luke," he mused, "to Dante's Inferno."

He managed to avoid hurting anyone and even paid off some debts himself, thus insuring his own persistent penury. But he found it increasingly easy to be quietly threatening, casually callous, and spiritually empty. All he had to do was externalize his own guilt. His personality withdrew measure for measure into himself. He'd not written his parents since leaving London, nor would he ever again. Yet not one day passed without his symbiotic mix of memory and remorse. Memories engender remorse, which thrives on memories. There was no way out.

He left Boston in the dark of night and without a trace, ashamed and afraid. He'd been ordered to kill a man over an unpaid debt. Drawn to the memory of why he had been sent to London in the first place, he laughed. "God, You have a very morbid sense of irony!" Being nearly 20 years old, he joined the Marines and sailed the seas in search of, he thought, a bullet, as they say, with his name on it. But there were no wars to be fought, save the one in which he was both protagonist and victim. Bad luck, his naive mind told him. But Luke did manage to make friends among the ship's company, in a manner of speaking. His quiet discipline, generosity, hard and efficient work, and self-effacing humor were attractive. He also had a talent for knowing when to distance himself from anyone who got too close. That too was admired by his mates. His tactic was



simple: just show them a glance at his soul. Surly and mean, that was more than sufficient. It was a kindness, as he was sparing them the contagion of his sin.

Luke managed to save money, avoiding old habits of dice and cards and sex (mostly). Preferring one-way relationships, he read everything he could get ahold of, in any language he could decipher, which had grown to a few, thanks to the diversity among the immigrant recruits on his warrior's ship. But decent stories were hard to come by; the corrosive salt water never tired of consuming them. By the time his tour of duty ended, he had firmly decided to get as far away from that empty ocean as he could. He disembarked at New Orleans, it being not Boston and his French being good enough to fool everyone but the French, who were, he found to his dismay, most everyone. He learned that the Missouri Territory was open for settlers, that land was cheap, work was hard, and people scarce. Très bon. It suited him nicely.

He found a place near the Missouri River amid the dendritic ridges of the Loess Hills in what would become the Iowa Territory. For a few years he was alone, save for occasional bands of Natives on seasonal hunting trips. After a time, Whites began to trickle into the territory. Everyone managed to stay out of everyone else's way and helped out when common decency required it. His new neighbors would have described Luke as quiet, kind, and generous, but he snarled like a dog or slipped away like a wolf if anyone got too close.

He wasn't oblivious. In fact, his favorite sin was too much, not insufficient, self-examination. He knew that he frightened people a bit. That didn't much bother him. He also knew that he was killing himself. That didn't much bother him, either. He imagined himself to be something of a stealthy relationship assassin. He was fine with people at a distance, in need of help or at a common task, but could not abide intimacy, even in those infrequent occasions when he'd gotten intimate. But, he told himself, this was actually a good thing. Were they ever to discover his essential villainy—that is, his sin against his parents—they would be disgusted. Better to snuff out any budding affections before someone got hurt.

Of course, he never married. Anyway, no one could stand his reckless pace, his nervous drive, his devouring, raging, soul-scourging shame. Worse for a few broken-hearted would-be lovers was his gloom. Once, having yielded to incontinent passion with another lonely soul, he simply stopped, stood, took up his clothes, and left without a word or look. Self-aware, he knew that he had acted despicably. It was entered into the black registry of his sins. In his darker moments, this seven-sealed scroll was taken out and examined ruthlessly, at once fueling and satiating his appetite for self-hatred, then re-filed until he needed a fresh nightmare.

This is not to say that he didn't find some measure of happiness. He could even convince himself that he loved his life. Luke worked the thick sod by himself, year after year. The smell of moist black loam was itself a delicious pleasure. He reveled in his bodily health, sturdy and resilient. He loved to work, building fences first, then the barn, and finally a house. Not *a* house, but *his* house, a second body with thick limestone slab walls, the interior a labyrinth of hallways and rarely entered rooms.

Meanwhile, he kept a garden and stewarded the native pastures. He raised cows, kept chickens, fed a pig. He sold native hay to the neighbors and fresh produce to the Missouri River steamboats. He loved nothing more than to pause in the midst of his agrarian labors to pray the Angelus: "Pour forth, I beseech you, O Lord, your grace into my heart: that I, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection." He didn't believe a word of it, but it felt good.

Then that sterile death letter caught up with him. It had taken 15 years. The man that delivered it, a wagon-train driver out of St. Louis, was so pleased with his accomplishment that he didn't notice the brooding storm churning over the continent of the recipient. Luke managed

gritted gratitude. The teamster, never knowing how close he had come to a broken jaw, was still sporting a self-satisfied smile and relishing the telling of his tale when he left, blithely unscathed. A gust of dusty wind hurried him along.

Then the clouds burst in a heave of wind, broiling thunder, and crinkling snaps of lightning. Drops, swollen as a pregnancy, plopped all around. Then came the deluge. The wild rye and Maximillian sunflowers bent low, bobbing and ducking in compliant obeisance to the torrent. Stubborn oak boughs creaked ominously under the strain. Even the horses pushed up out of the swale, trotting briskly for the shaky cover of the lean-to. Luke crushed the unopened letter to his taut chest, knowing it to be the seven-sealed judgment of his perdition. Shoving it into his coat pocket, he stormed out into the meadow, storm be damned.

He was soon brought down by the dragging sodden weight of years of self-loathing. He stumbled once, twice, and for the third time, his knees punching the already soaked sod, his chest heaving, his stomach emptying. Gasps of tears constricted his throat and choked his sobs. He had broken the Fourth Commandment, the first one that doesn't have to do with God and so, in his mind, a far worse offense. He hated himself. He had not been happy since the day he had laid that first and only stone for the new sheep fence with his father. And anyway, that had been the saddest day of his life.

He had felt something in London, in Boston, while a-ship once in a while—something that he thought was happiness—but every experience rotted in his gullet in the stink of stale ale and staler sweat. And nothing else. Nothing. Well, glimmers, he guessed, treasured and elusive as the glances of invisible stars out of the corner of one's eye. Twinkling joys such as good friends, the odd ceilidh, the rare kiss and rarer tussle, the oceans of green Yorkshire breezes, the glistening arched grey backs of rollicking Atlantic dolphins, the symphonic orange and blue and gold sunsets of the Missouri valley. He knew these pleasures to be gifts of God, as the old pastor had told him in his rosy-cheeked childhood. But they were tainted, sticky with the tar of his great betrayal.

Many years had passed. His original sin was compounded by the tepid effort to pretend that he hadn't sinned, that he had been the victim of his parents' sin. If he was Cain, they were Eve and Adam. It was they who had expelled him. It was Michael's poor business sense that had necessitated it. He'd have stayed! Sure he would! The shivering guilt woke him at night, still-birthing every romance, made him flinch at every good word said of him, the compounded weight of which pressed on his shoulders like the boulder of Sisyphus, shredded his entrails like Prometheus's damned eagles. He deserved worse, being neither as clever as the one nor as generous as the other. Indeed, there was nothing clever about being so selfish he would abandon his parents.

After that day he started going to church. Monks, like miserable sinners, love company . . . once in a while. Every month, more or less, a transient Belgian Jesuit would offer mass at someone's house. Luke writhed every minute of the service, counting the number of times that the word *mercy* was used (27 times—he was learning Latin), and wallowed self-indulgently in the scourge of it all. Then, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, years after he got the letter, years before his last trip to the meadow, his house hosted this itinerant Passion Play.

After mass, the other congregants, pleased with the old bachelor's fresh buns and butter, were blessedly down the road. Over bacon and eggs, Luke nervously chatted up the priest. He explained why he'd named his farm Morning Star. His parent's home had been Evening Star, so he'd thought it a simple poetic equilibrium. Then came that innocently amused translation. That's when, finally, the crushing blow, the surging wave of indignant angels, the Wrath broke his bowing will. Then came his cynical laughter, then his genuine tears, then his personal crucifixion, then . . . then the long-repulsed salvation: the confession of his sin. And it was over. Still on his knees, he knew that he had crawled out from under the stone slab of Dante's Purgatorio.

The priest packed his holy gear and headed up the road with a full belly, a fair bit of coin for his missionary work, a cut of smoked ham, a fresh loaf of bread, and a bemused sense that, as happens on occasion, something beautiful had occurred. As his aged mule plodded up the path, he sang the old hymn: *Hoc excitatus lucifer/solvit polum caligine/hoc omnis errorum choru/vias nocendi deserit.*<sup>1\*</sup>

Luke watched him from the porch until his silhouette sank beyond the western ridge. Then he went up the attic, rummaged a chest, took hold of his old military cartridge case, into which he had placed the dried and yellow letter. Taking and reading it for only the second time, he wept for love of his parents and his home and not, he suddenly realized, from his own guilt. Only then did he notice another small parcel in the envelope. Where had that come from? Unfolding the oil paper, he recognized it to be his father's ring, homemade from local copper, a piece of home. Without thinking, he slipped it onto his finger. It fit perfectly, though he remembered his father having massive hands.

Placing the epistle back in the leather pouch with the reverence owed a holy relic, he shoved the thing in his pocket and headed out for a scrub in the pond. Frothingly cleaned, he stepped out of the water to a bath of warm light. Sun dried and reaching, a bit reluctantly, for his clothes, he half expected a voice from the heavens, or at least a dove. "Yeah," he thought, "a white dove would be really funny." Then he saw one, perched on a fence post, staring at him, head cocked pensively to one side. He didn't laugh.

His life since that Sunday was to the unclever eye unchanged. After all, how does one take note of an inner tranquility, humbled but not humiliated, the taming of frenetic energy? What does the soft half-smile of rued memory bespeak? Do the clothes of an unburdened sinner hang more loosely? Does anyone note the difference between a bridled rage and unbonded equilibrium? Perhaps the horses did. The dog certainly did (the scraps were more generous, the pets more liberal). Luke decided to truly love his life. He took up a whittler's knife, washed up and shaved a bit more regularly, caught himself singing everything he could remember, from ribald sea chanties to pious church chants. His wry irony dissolved into self-effacing chuckles that startled the chickens the first time they heard him. "Hope they don't quit laying." He chuckled again.

And that was his new life. Outwardly mostly unchanged, though the edge had gone off his polite civility and the tension had melted off his human interactions. Always respected by his neighbors, he was now endeared to them. He chalked it up to his having learned how to laugh. What he really wanted to tell everyone but didn't because it wouldn't make sense to anyone but those who already knew it was that life isn't always happy, because you can't control everything. But happiness is how you respond to what happens. He couldn't regret that it had taken him so long not to regret, because that, he chuckled again, was just dumb. Then he chomped lustily into the first red apple to come off the tree.

His last day, as he headed out to the pasture, Luke knew that his life was ending, so he took it easy. He also took the letter in its little leather monstrosity. The horses got their apples and scratches on the withers, just where they liked it. Ghyll, his old dog, had passed a few weeks before, with his help. He had been startled by the depths of his grief then, despite Ghyll not being the first dear dog he'd lost. After several days, he could at least see, and not merely believe, that death could be a pure thing. Grief, of course, can be selfish because we can't accept that we can't keep who we want. And he did think it rather unfair that Ghyll got to go first. But he knew death rather

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<sup>1\*</sup> Stirred by that note, the Morning Star  
Freed the heavens of shadow  
the roving gang cease all errors  
abandoning the ways of misdeeds  
—Ambrose of Milan "Aeterne Rerum Conditor"

intimately, having experienced it on the fourth Sunday of Lent, year's back. And he knew that death could be good. Ghyll had known it, too. They'd gone for a long walk that day and eaten well. The old dog had lapped up a particular brew Luke had concocted, curled up at his feet, and fallen asleep. He was buried behind Lucifer's Rock, as Luke, perversely, called it.

Now, finally, it was Luke's turn. The horses wandered off in search of some green tuft remaining in the twilight season of the year while he looked for a place to curl up and fall asleep. He opted for his favorite oak, the one he called the Archangel. Settling in—burr oak roots make fantastic nests—he let his gaze shift to his outstretched ring hand, which still held the letter-casket. Oddly enough, his mind went to an image on a Holy Card he'd gotten from the priest and pinned to his bed's backboard. It was of St. Peter being crucified, upside down, just as the story has it. He was an old, furrowed, fisher of men. He was ignominiously stripped to a loincloth, which revealed a still robust body. His head was raised up so that he could look down at his own outstretched hand. He stared at the nail already driven through the hand and into the wood. His continence—Luke was sure that look was not fear or pain or regret—was a profile of reverent awe.

As his own body sunk comfortably into the lea of the tree, as his head leaned back slowly, gently, to rest against the hard but welcome pillow of wood, as his muscles relaxed, as his heart stilled, Luke was thinking something like this:

Peter, the peasant Palestinian fisherman, couldn't have imagined that he'd ever leave his Da and Ma and his nets . . . and those fish! . . . to be found halfway around the world dying for Love. Peter, at once the Betrayer of his Lord and the Rock of His Church, the patron of sin and redemption, looked down the length of his arm. But he didn't see his own hand; rather, it was that of Christ.

What was Peter's last thought? Luke imagined that it was that he had been a mostly good man. He had accepted that he was not defined by the worst thing he'd ever done, or by the accretions of all the little things he had also done wrong, but by how gracefully he had accepted forgiveness and by how well he had forgiven. And he had loved life well, at least since the dusty wind had blown that French-speaking priest up the road. He was grateful. Looking down at his hand, it seemed that one of his old scars had opened, weeping red. But it didn't hurt, and he wasn't sad. The letter in its case slipped into the loam and leaves, buried out of sight. This, he finally thought, was a good death.

—Bud Grant ('80)



**Northern Lights Dress**  
*Oil on canvas, 20" x 16", 2019*

Leslie Bell ('72)

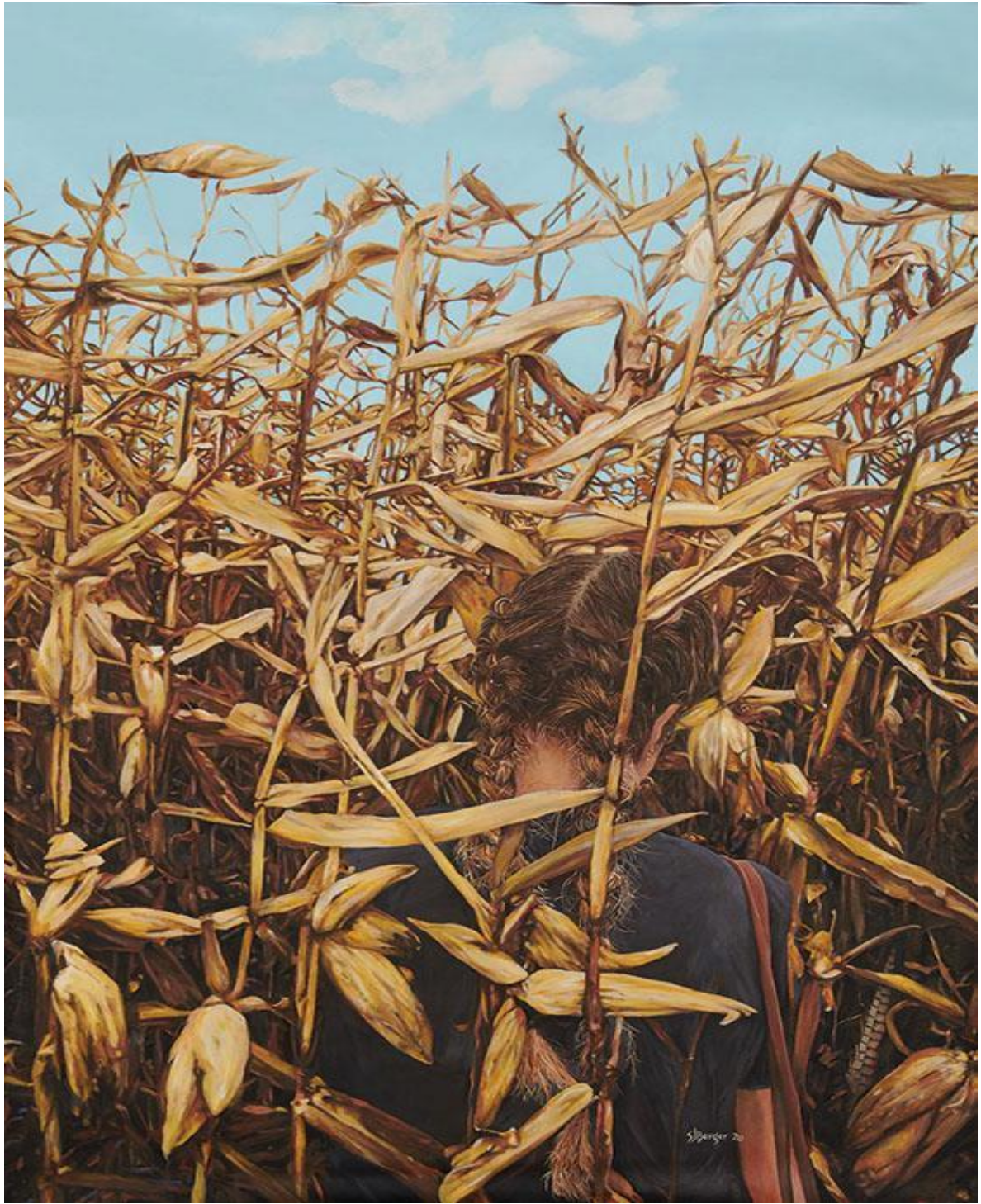




**Where Is the Sea?**  
*Oil on canvas, 20" x 16", 2022*

Leslie Bell ('72)

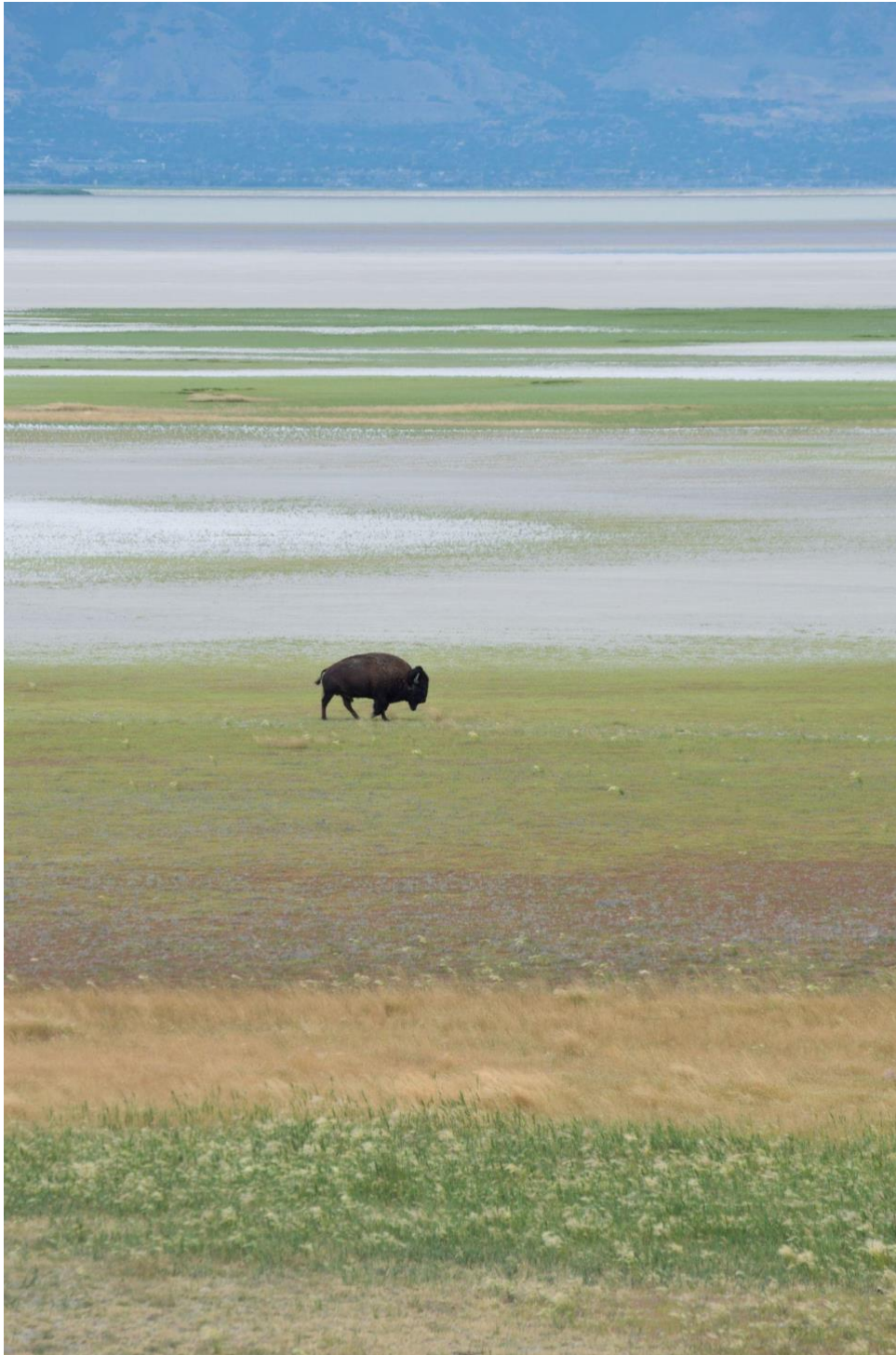




**Enveloped**

*Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 34", 2022*

Steve Berger ('78)



**Bison**  
*Digital photograph, 2019*

Collin Link ('22)





**Looking Out**  
*Digital photograph, 2018*

Carl Herzig



**Mother and Son**  
*Digital photograph, 2018*

Carl Herzig





*Mataji (Dear Mother)*  
*Digital photograph, 2018*

Carl Herzig



**Mother, Daughter, Green Door**  
*Digital photograph, 2018*

Carl Herzig





**Neighbors**  
*Digital photograph, 2018*

Carl Herzig





**Nisha Hair Style Saloon**  
*Digital photograph, 2018*

Carl Herzig



**Puri-vasi**  
*Digital photograph, 2018*

Carl Herzig

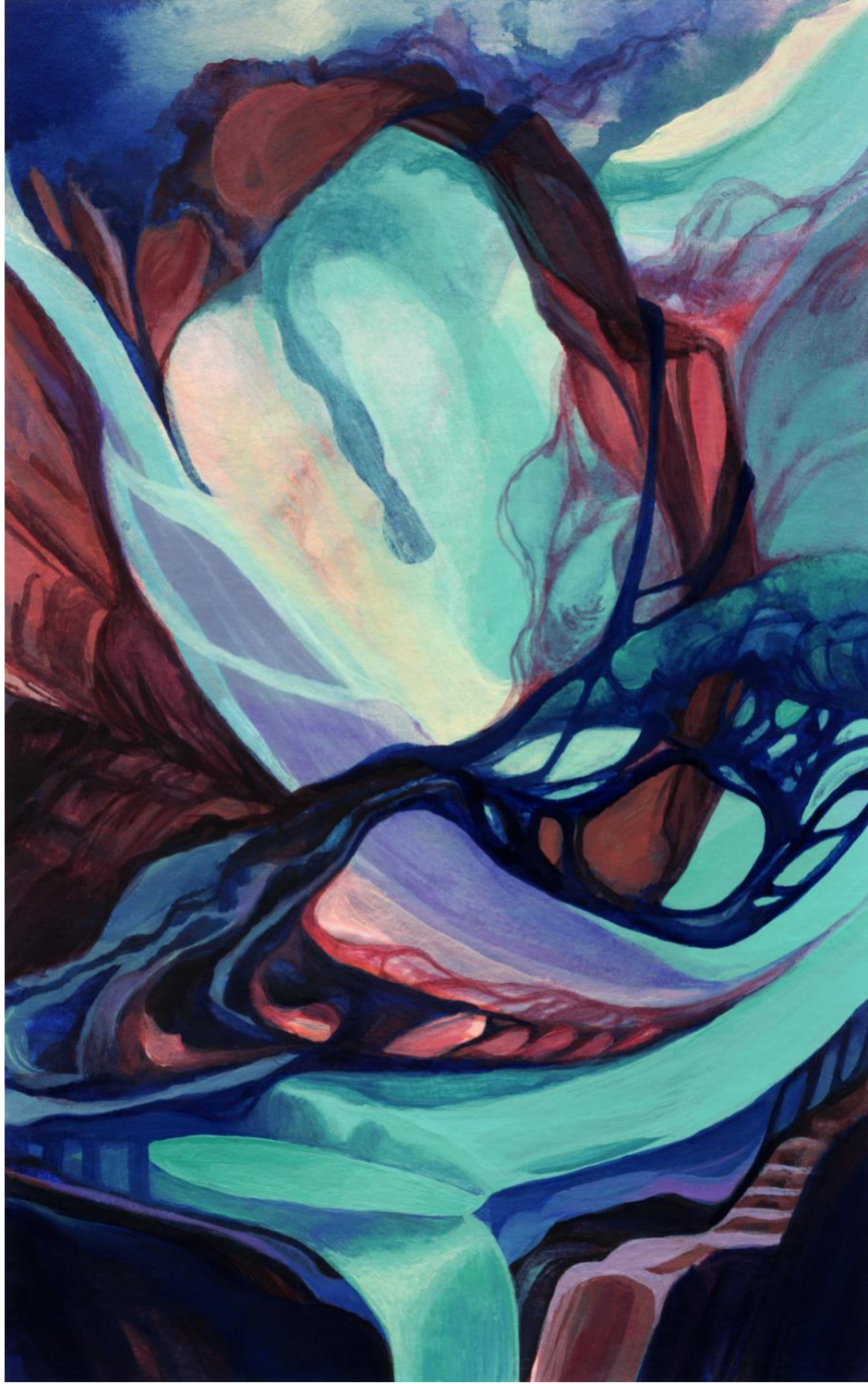




**Rivanna River Watershed**  
*Pen and colored pencil, 30" x 22", 2022*

Sarah Holst ('11)





**Bloom**

*Ink and acrylic on illustration board 6" x 4", 2021*

Megan Peterson ('20)



**Breakage at the Edge of Sea**  
*Oil on canvas, 16" x 20", 2020*

Megan Peterson ('20)





**Delicate Affair**

*Magazine collage–acrylic and wire on illustration board, 6.25" x 6.5", 2020*

Megan Peterson ('20)





**Falling Rising**

*Magazine collage—acrylic and wire on illustration board, 7.25" x 6", 2020*

Megan Peterson ('20)



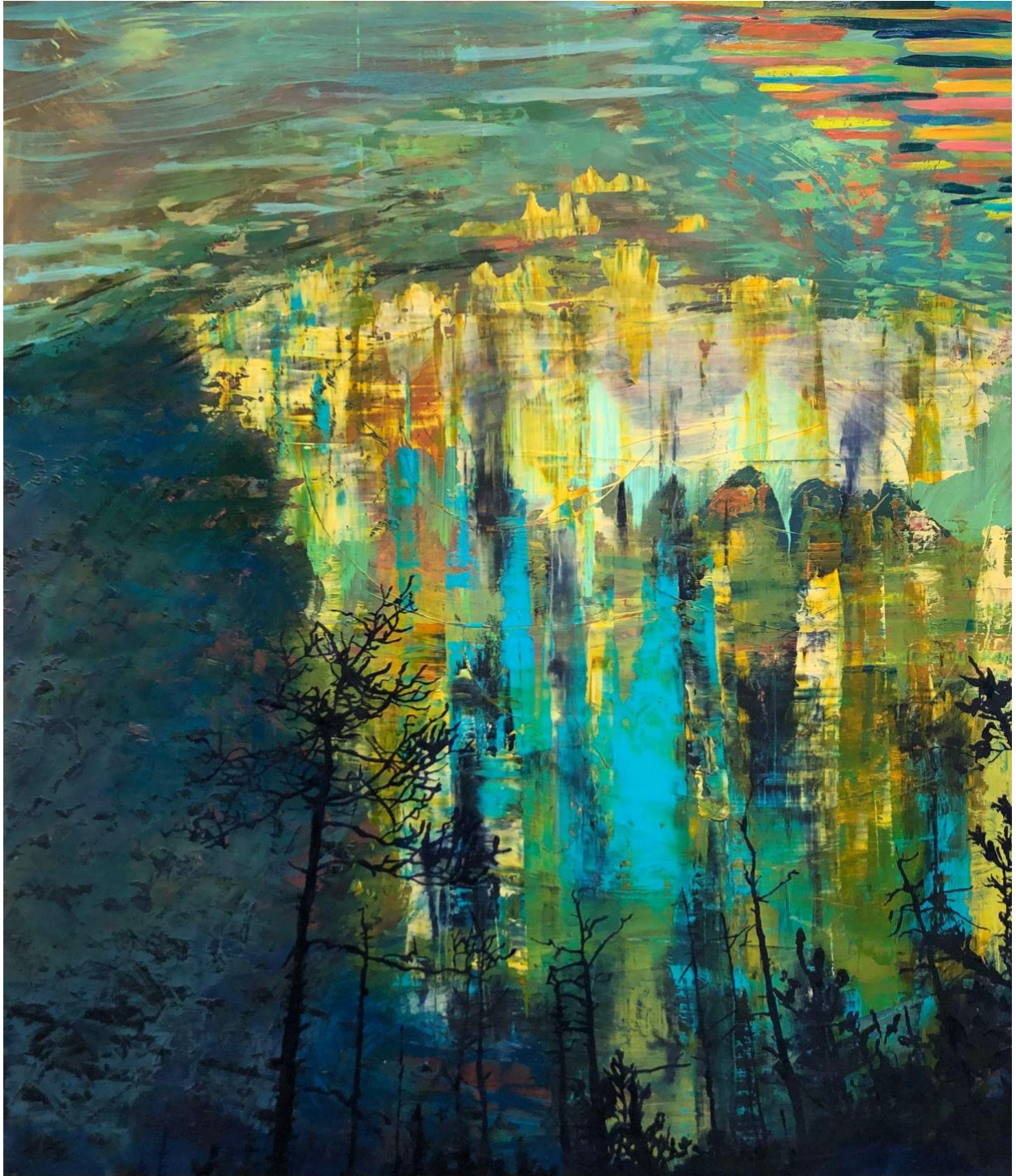


**Suspended**

*Oil on canvas, 24" x 36", 2020*

Megan Peterson ('20)





**Cascade Falls**  
*Oil on panel 24" x 20", 2021*

Kristin Quinn





**Green Island**  
*Oil on panel 24" x 20", 2022*

Kristin Quinn





**Make It Rain**  
*Oil on panel 42" x 36", 2020*

Kristin Quinn





**Painted Bunting**  
*Oil on panel, 24" x 20", 2022*

Kristin Quinn



**The Great Blue Heron**  
*Digital photograph, 2012*

Lawrence Smith ('58)

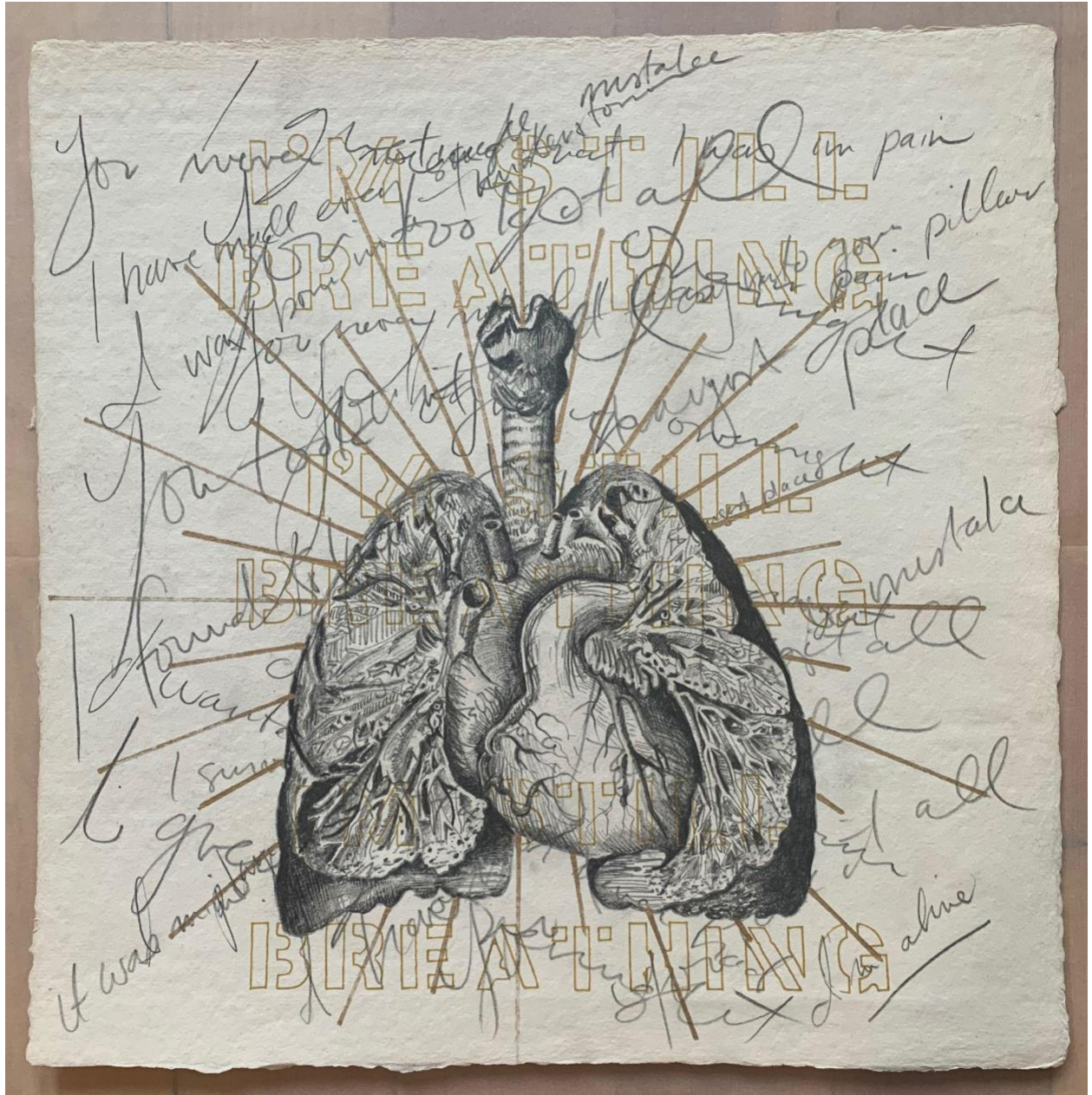




**Present**

*Oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 2020*

Gretchen Parris-Stabile ('05)

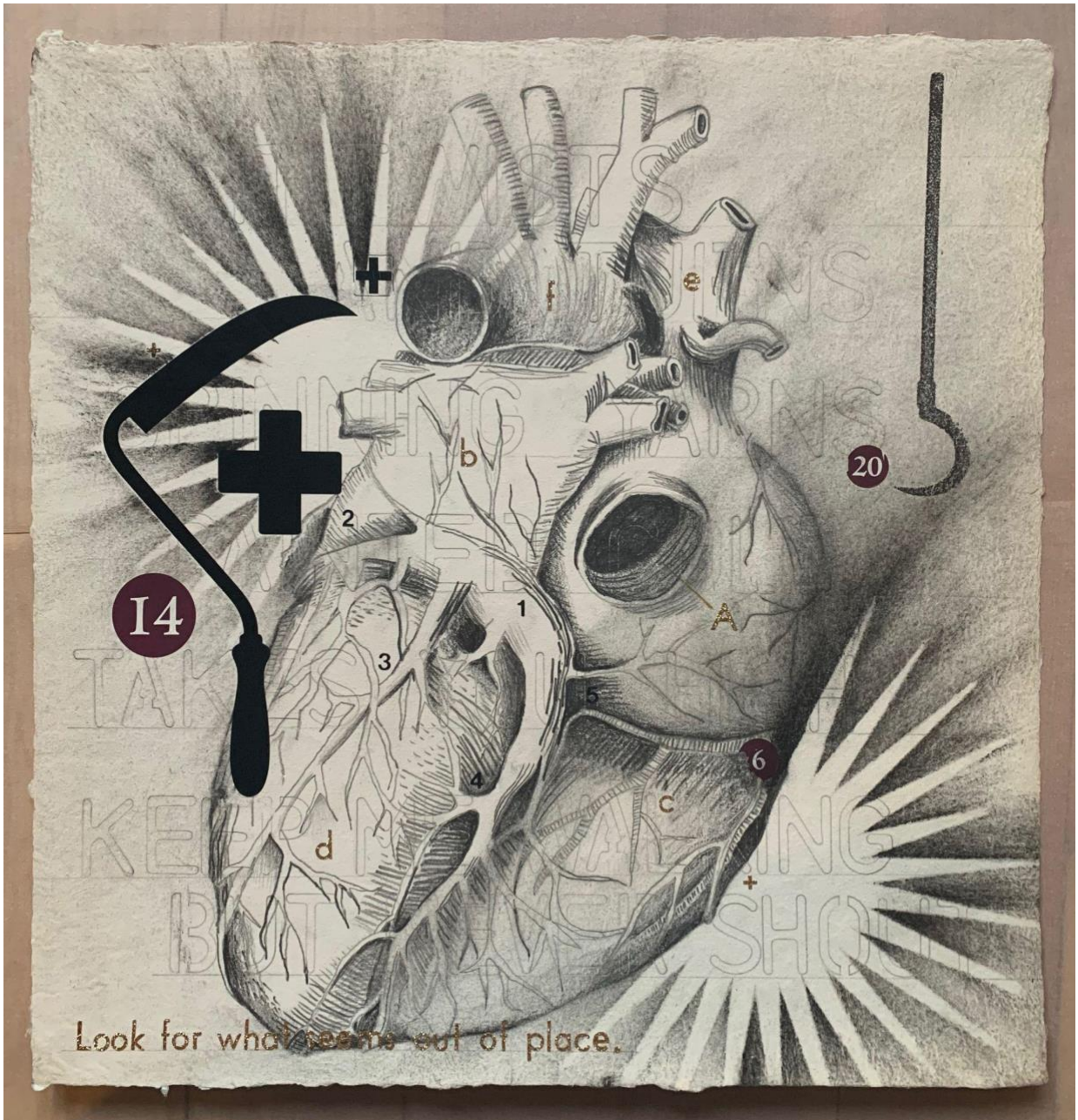


**Alive**

Mixed media on paper, 15.25" x 15.25", 2021

Karin Tweedie ('98)





**Twist**

Mixed media on paper, 15.25" x 15.25", 2021

Karin Tweedie ('98)



**Downtown**  
*Silkscreen, 30" x 40", 2015*

Karen Blomme ('81)