

CURIOS

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Volume 14

CURIOS

"When we learn how to become resilient, we learn how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience." - Jaeda Dewalt

For the past two years, the world has experienced a drastic cultural shift. We've modified the way we work together, talk to each other, and engage in day-to-day activities due, in large part, to the COVID-19 pandemic. We've endured tremendous loss, and we've learned to cope with adverse life experiences. We've learned that developing resilience isn't easy, but it is essential; to be resilient means to adapt to and recover from difficult situations.

The 2022 edition of *Curios* embodies this theme of resilience through expressions of inner strength, perseverance, and recovery. The intent is to connect us through shared human experiences and to demonstrate the power of change and the opportunity it provides to learn and grow.

In the pages that follow, we explore resilience as an indispensable trait. Exemplified in images of white-gypsum sand dunes and geologic formations, we reveal the product and evolution of change—the resiliency of nature. Personal stories and poems contained herein explore loss and unpredicted hardship and unravel the many ways in which humans adapt to change and uncover their strength and endurance for survival.

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The Long View

Sandra Dihlmann





Greased Lightning
Sandra Dihlmann

AN APPALOOSA NAMED SPLASH

Kerry Bennett

Even as the reins escaped my grasp
and worn leather straps
bounced wildly in the air,
I watched it unfold
in slow motion
against the bright
Sonoran morning sky.

Life hung in the balance,
six feet off the ground
when the Appaloosa's white mane
rode rhythm with the wind,
and his thickly-lashed eyes blinked
on and off
as I shot out of the saddle
and hit the ground. Hard.

He knew I'd made contact
with the desert's surface,
rock and sand and wispy grasses;

yet, he took off at a gallop—
gray, speckled hindquarters
cloaked in mesquite and juniper.

The next moment—
that long, long moment—
still rings in my ears.
Gasping for air,
screaming with pain.
The Appaloosa was gone.

Splash.



Sacred Love
R.M. Lunday, Jr.

A LIFE I'VE KNOWN

Bonnie Bowes

After her father has quit the military, after her family has moved for the last time, you will see an eight-year-old start a new school. You will see this scrawny girl, with stringy mid-length brown hair, anxious to meet new friends. Students will laugh as she falls asleep with her cheek flat on the desk and a thumb in her mouth. You will see her cry as her classmates chant, "Boney Bonnie is a baby," until the teacher makes them stop.

The girl will turn twelve. She will enter the fifth grade. You will see her in the girl's locker room getting ready for her next class. She will take off her shirt and expose a series of pimples on her chest from one shoulder to the other.

The girl's best friend will say, "Is your name, Boner?"
The girls will laugh and chant, "Boner, Boner, Boner."
"It's Bonnie, not boner," she'll say, fleeing the locker room.
You will see her cry.

Reflection

Paula Andress





Tree (Still Standing)

Kiril Kirkov

At fourteen, a freshman in high school, the girl will idolize a boy. He won't notice her. She will hide her face. She will stand in front of the class and recite Shakespeare. She will avoid his eye contact by looking up at the ceiling. She will wait for him to ask her to the senior prom, but he will ask a blue-eyed Barbie, instead.

After high school, at eighteen, the girl will marry this boy. Blink once, and you will see them pregnant with their first child. There will be excitement for their unborn son until the change in their relationship takes hold. You will see the hole in the wall after his yelling stops. You will see him push her hard on the bed. "I'm sorry," he will say, over and over. "It won't happen again." She will accept his apology and a ring box from Zales.

"She will not understand what happened or why, and she will yearn to hear his voice one more time. He will appear in her dreams for the next twenty years. She will wonder what she could have done to save him."

After their son is born, they will lose their apartment. You will see them move three thousand miles to live with his father. "If you don't like Ohio," the husband will say. "You can move back to California."

But the girl will discover she is pregnant again. The husband and wife will go to their first ultrasound together. She will wonder why her husband has lost so much weight, why he comes home from work so late. You will see the light leave her eyes when he asks her to abort their child. When she refuses, he does not come home from work. He confesses to an extramarital affair and the consumption of illicit drugs. She will plead for him to get help, but he will refuse. She will cry when he walks out, though she knows it's for the best. You will see her on a plane, seven months

pregnant—with a ten-month-old in her arms and all the material possessions she can carry—heading back to California.

After the move, the girl will offer her brother a place to live. Their relationship will flourish until her brother's relationship with his new girlfriend gets in the way. The girl will plan an intervention. You will see an empty house with windows and doors wide open. The garage door shut. You will see neighbors hurry out of their houses when she screams.

Nighttime. You will see a house full of first responders. You will see streaks of blue and red light through the open windows and doors. You will see an officer sort through her brother's car, holding the note in one hand. You will see the girl fall to her knees and cry. You will see why the brother did what he did.

The girl will remember the good times they had listening and dancing to U2 after school. She will bury her face in her cousin's shoulder as her brother is wheeled out. She will not understand what happened or why, and she will yearn to hear his voice one more time. He will appear in her dreams for the next twenty years. She will wonder what she could have done to save him.

In her new life, she is pregnant for the third time. She will share this news with her boyfriend. You will see the delight in his eyes, his desire to be there during the entire pregnancy. You will see the love they share as a family—the other children happy and secure for the first time. The Hollywood ending every girl hopes will come true emerges: the girl will marry the kind of man she intended to marry for a lifetime.

~



Escalante and Navajo Mountain

Gwendolyn Waring



Aloes in the Moonlight

Gwendolyn Waring

MORNING BIRD

Larry Hendricks

Jarrett wishes he could spit out the taste of the city. Metallic, bitter, cancerous, he wants to be free of it before it kills him.

He pedals his bike harder on the asphalt. Just a couple more miles and at least he'll be away from concrete and steel and into sand, sage and creosote. The daily rides into the desert are his only comfort, his only respite from the darkness of his thoughts. He feels the bike's tires hum on the street, the bumps from the cracks settle in his arms and shoulders. The early morning wind makes a low roar in his ears. A rare fog, before sunrise yet, hovers over a landscape of budding violet and yellow—the spring desert a consolation for his voluntary commitment to a personal hell. Fat, purple clouds drift above the Superstitions, their bellies scraped by the mountaintops.

He'd made it out, once. Faded nightmares of dead-end jobs that could only promise early death by clutching a burning chest and a failing heart or by putting a gun in the mouth were the only scraps of evidence that reminded him of a desperate time. He'd proved he could think himself out of a box and found purchase in a mountain town in Colorado. With scholarships, he went to college there, got a master's degree, became an assistant professor in the fine art of documenting people's stories. He'd found a home, friends, a place to belong, a soft place to fall in a hard world.

But then mother called. She never said it; she was too proud to, but Jarrett could hear it in every word. She needed him to come back to where she was, back to the big desert city that never, ever felt even remotely like a home to him. She was

seventy-five, and her legs and back hurt. Her teacher's pension barely covered the rent and food for herself and Jarrett's forty-seven-year-old brother who was developmentally disabled and needed constant care. Jarrett's father, a man he despised who abandoned his family, has been long dead.



King Kong on Broadway

R.M. Lunday, Jr.

He took a job as a lecturer at Arizona State and moved to be near Mother. He bought his mother and brother a townhome. They are comfortable in the little protective bubble he has made for them. He tries to fit in, to feel at home in this sprawling incongruity of plenty shoehorned into a beautifully desolate landscape. But, he can't. All he feels is hostility, gritted teeth, barely contained rage and uneasy goosebumps of danger to his sanity and health.

He spots something on the road ahead. He slows, and about thirty feet away, he stops. It is a small bird—white crowned, gray chest, brown feathers, with a white mohawk jutting up from its head. The bird sings. Jarrett listens to a long whistle punctuated by a flourish at the end. He hears a sadness, a lament.

The bird rests on the road and sits on a darkened spot. Jarrett sets down his bike. He approaches, hears his footfalls on the street, the bird singing, the crackling of the desert sage and the swaying of Russian thistle carcasses. He



Totem Ghosts
Larry Hendricks

gets within 10 feet. The bird eyes him, but it does not fly off. He steps closer still. Closer. He kneels. The bird remains. It must be hurt. He puts out his hand, palm up. The sun crests the horizon. Saffron light beams through the clouds. He inches his hand closer. Almost touching. The bird cocks its head, blinks. Almost.

The bird flies off to a nearby creosote and sings its song. It is not wounded. Jarrett glances down and he notices the darkened spot is actually remnants of a bird, larger, the same colors as the smaller bird. It has been run over by cars so often that it is nearly unrecognizable. Jarrett presumes the larger bird to be a parent to the smaller bird, probably a mother, because father birds can't usually be bothered with raising the young.

The little bird sings its lament. Jarrett feels tears well in his eyes. Kneeling there, he cries. Soon, it is an uncontrolled, hiccoughing release of wet, lungs heaving. The little bird continues to sing its sad song.

Jarrett stands and wipes his face with his hand. The desert smells of flowers and rain. He sees honey bees floating to work. Soon, cars will be speeding by on the morning commute to dead-end jobs filled with dead-eyed souls. He strolls back to his bike, picks it up and rides past the stain in the road. About 30 feet beyond, he stops and turns back.

The little bird has flown back down to the spot on the street and sings. And sings.

Jarrett pushes off and rides on into the desert.

~



Waterfront Park

R.M. Lunday, Jr.



Dried Roses

R.M. Lunday, Jr.

LA VIE EN COPROPRIÉTÉ

Becky Byrkit

How the two of us lonely park it on the thirdmost step
To survey the cracking concrete perimeter.

How the lot of cars covered dies a slow sundeath anyway
Sheeted in bougainvillea pips, tossed by an irritated God.

How an expensive white trike brings the new neighbor's
Toddler to his dimply pink picked-scab knees, screaming.

How Kamali sits so companionably beside, & sniffs
The halitosis of the asphalt as if it were the world.

How the muumuu ladies amble by, all sunglasses & hats --
Poolbound, quacking, neon noodles: massive, clown-rubber clogs.

How the quail swing by in their singlefile families, expressing
Themselves in grassy yellow banquets of bugs. How

September snickers in her palm & daubs her moonburnt skin.
How the silly, sweet festival of obvious glory, & how everything never ends

Mural at Mercado Zicaleta, Oaxaca
Photo by Jeffrey Staates



I'LL BE YOUR STORY

Alexandra Grant

And so the catfish was loved by the star
and this was such a very sacred thing—
their love between rivers stretching so far,
Their love like the toll of the bells that ring.

The catfish heavy with all he'd seen sank
to the bottom of the river mud. Fell into
he deep murky river green. And so the
banks of the great river flood.

The star so full with the light of his grace
wished so desperately to have feathered wings
so he might fly to the river's embrace
while the hymns of the earth
softly ring.

The star holds the lantern to light the way.





Kaitlin
Rain Varney



Omega Spawn
Aaron Luna

WE DIDN'T USUALLY PARTY ON SUNDAYS

Diane Hair

We didn't usually party on Sundays, but all Boston universities were closed on Patriot's Day. My eight roommates and I got through our usual pre-party routine—bumping our favorite party rap playlist and mixing drinks in red Solo cups that were way too strong—going over what outfits we would wear that night. Once we were dressed and just buzzed enough to still maneuver the subway, we piled onto a red line train and took the twenty-minute ride over to Boston College for a house party. It was a regular night of partying on an irregular night of the week. We danced. We laughed. We drank. We tried to get cute boys' phone numbers, and we eventually poured ourselves back onto the train, back to our dorm, and into our comfy clothes for bed. We'd be able to sleep the whole next morning, if we wanted.

Sooner rather than later, the sun rose and so did the nine of us. It felt like a regular Monday mid-morning. We got breakfast, we sat around in our suite procrastinating the completion of our homework, and we talked about whether or not we wanted to go to the Boston



Phlebiac Brothers

Aaron Luna

Marathon finish line to cheer on the runners. Having partied pretty hard the night before, we were too tired and achy to leave the dorm, so we stayed in, continuing our seemingly normal Monday mid-morning. It wasn't until after two o'clock that we realized something was wrong. Hearing sirens in downtown Boston wasn't abnormal, but something about the multiple sirens we heard that day felt off. Someone said, "Hey, wait. Did you hear a big boom earlier?"

We considered what transpired that morning. We had, in fact, heard something loud and strange not twenty minutes earlier, but we were just too tired to realize it. Something was definitely wrong.

“Every siren I heard made me short of breath, clutch my chest, and fall to my knees in tears. Every police car and ambulance I saw, sirens on or not, sent me right back to that Monday afternoon.”

Around three in the afternoon, I called my mom in a panic. "I don't know exactly what's going on," I told her. "But I'm really scared. I don't know if we'll still be here by the end of the day. I love you, and I'll keep you updated. I love you so much."

We were told, explicitly, that under no circumstances were we to leave the building. Staring out of our tenth-floor window, we saw the National Guard patrolling the Boston Common, which was right across the street from our building and right next to the gilded State House. We were told the bare minimum of the situation going on in the city below us. There had been a terrorist attack at the finish line. We spent what felt like the entire afternoon staring at the State House, fearing that would be the next target, which meant we were potentially a target as well.

When we finally left the windows, we gathered around the tiny television set in the common room and kept the news on a loop. We were desperate for more information, determined to find out how at-risk we were to survive the rest of the day. For four straight days we sat in front of the television, all classes canceled, trapped inside for our own safety. My phone was flooded with texts from people in my life I hadn't heard from in years. A boy from London I had met online in high school called me in a panic, making sure I was still alive. I was certain I was going to die in my room that day.

Months later, the semester ended and I returned to my childhood home in southern Maine. I tried to put what had happened that April behind me. Every siren made me lose my breath, clutch my chest, and fall to my knees in tears. Every police car and ambulance I saw, sirens on or not, sent me right back to that Monday afternoon. For weeks I dreamt of that day and the days which followed, and the constant wondering of how much longer I had to live.

I was finally safe at home, but I still didn't feel safe. Another normal morning came that summer, and I went about my day as usual. I was trying to find a job and trying to avoid my parents, since I was a college student now, and I thought that meant I was an adult. I remember being outside on the beautiful property I grew up on enjoying a lazy summer day when a thundering boom made my heart stop. The house directly across the street from mine fully exploded, shingles and window panes and glass everywhere. I fell to the ground and felt myself sobbing, but I couldn't hear anything. I closed my eyes and I was right back in my dorm room, fearing for my life. The sirens blared as loudly as they did that day in April, and I clutched my chest, air refusing to go in and out of my lungs.

I knew I was home and I was safe, but I couldn't let go of the feeling that I would never be safe again.

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ANGELO'S

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CBS

the LATE SHOW with
stephen colbert

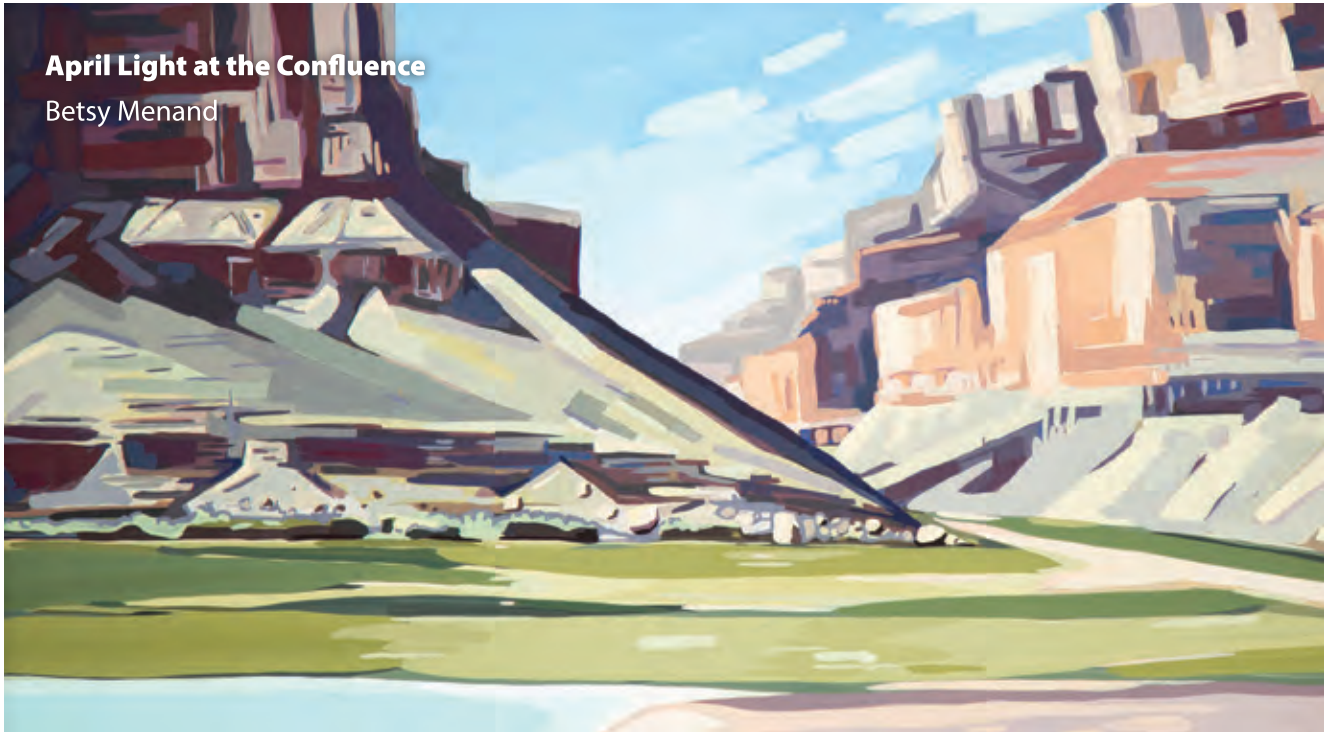
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Late Show
R.M. Lunday, Jr.

Rock and Tree

Kiril Kirkov





April Light at the Confluence

Betsy Menand

TWO WORLDS

David Cassidy

I walk into the yard of a home I've never been to before, yet immediately feel more at home than I would in most places. Sara*, who I haven't worked directly with in two years—other than attending a brief presentation she gave this spring—stands and gives me a hug. We're here to celebrate her birthday. I see John—who I last worked with in 2018 and who I'd worked with on a previous trip only once before—and we start talking about his last trip as if we'd just gotten off the water together the day before. As the time goes by, more and more friends arrive to join the celebration. The conversations revolve around familiar places, relatable experiences, mutual friends, and our unifying passions: river running and Grand Canyon.

I've enjoyed a greater sense of community among the people that I work with in Grand Canyon than any other group that I've been a part of—whether in a workplace, the religion that I was raised in, or even with the family that raised me. These people around me are my friends, my family, and running rivers isn't just our job, it's a significant facet of our life. It has necessarily taken over my life. I've found that I can't spend most of my year, or what will be most of my life if I continue to make a career of it, completely cut off from the world except for a rotating cast of five people, together facing everything imaginable—up to and including death, which has been a tragic reality for three friends of mine already this summer—and not draw incredibly close to them. And while that closeness and that camaraderie and that community is wonderful, I also know that I can't spend most of my year, or, again, if I keep this up, most of my life, cut off from the rest of the world without inevitably withdrawing from everyone and everything else.

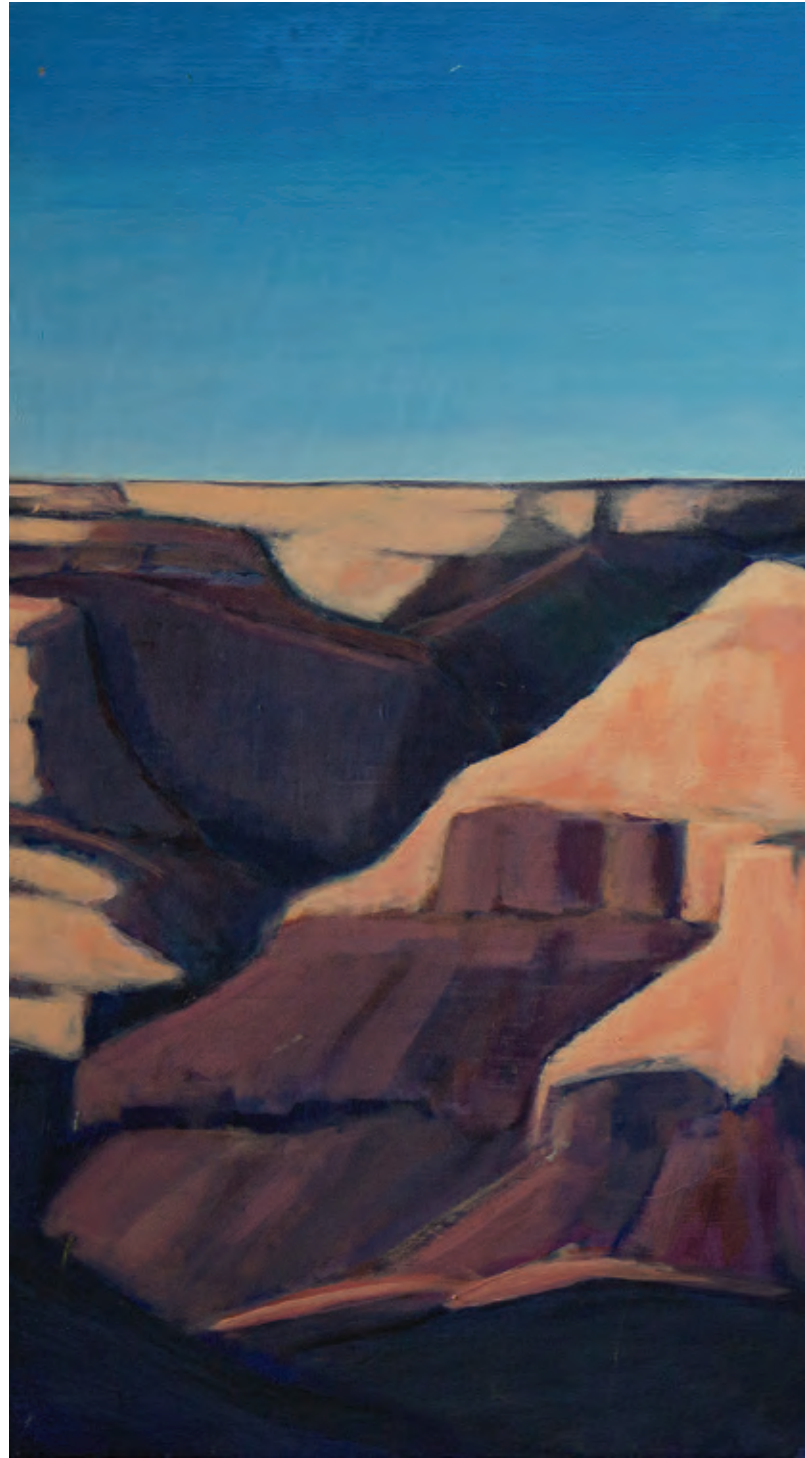
One of my friends who's seen death this year, who was there when a person was buried alive in the same debris flow that crushed a mutual friend and fellow guide, leaving them clinging to life, is here. I talk to them about their plans for the future, and they're not sure

*names have been changed

they'll work on the river again. Their last trip of the season has just ended, and it might simply be their last trip. Ever.

We worked two trips together last year. On the first trip, after dropping off our passengers at River Mile 89, we rowed another 137 miles in three days to the dirt access road at Diamond Creek. A storm hit just before we got there with winds so severe that it flipped one of our 18-foot rafts while we were disassembling it. The guides had to dive out of the way as the 8'x8', 200-pound metal raft frame, borne on the wind like a twirling wood shaving, hurtled toward them. They could have died at that moment. If they hadn't jumped out of the way, it's hard to imagine anything less than a traumatic injury occurring. And what then? Litter-carry the injured ten miles over a jumble of flash flood debris to the nearest usable segment of road? Reassemble a boat and evac a critically injured patient downstream another 54 miles? None of those scenarios were likely to have a positive outcome. We were trapped there for three days. A flash flood of 14,000 cubic feet per second of water had annihilated the nearest ten miles of the 22-mile access road, and medevacs don't fly in storms like that one. That day, I was close to finding myself in the same situation. Was being down there worth seeing someone die again?

They tell me they've made the decision to go back to school. They were looking at graduate programs when we'd last talked this spring, but their experiences this summer solidified their plans. They're moving to Tucson and starting school next spring. There are a few of us here who are transitioning away from the river. Sara got married and has been working for an environmental non-profit. I don't know if she's been on the river at all this year. Anna has shifted to a front country managerial role within the company, though she'll still do a few trips a year. Sierra has moved to Montana for graduate school and is just in town to visit. I haven't done a trip with Sierra in twelve years. We've seen each other a handful of times since then at company trainings, or science lectures, or guide gatherings. But we seamlessly pick up where we left off when we were



on the water last, just as we all do when we see each other, because we understand each other and what goes into living these very similar yet very strange lives. We are a community of people who have chosen to live this way.



Canyon from the South Rim
Gwendolyn Waring

I'm afraid of losing this community. It's comforting, as I spend less time on the river and reduce my contact with that community, to know that others have done the same and have been able to move on. They still have me and everyone else that's here tonight, and all the rest of us scattered around

town, around the country, or down in the canyon right now, caring and understanding. And for this I am grateful.

~



Flipping Saguaro
Randy McNiff

BEAUTY IN BAJA

T. Moens

disembark my flight into the comfortable 80-degree temperatures of southern Baja. It is December 2020, and the tourists are pouring out of the airport in general chaos. I plan my annual trip here during the winter months. Southern Baja is a nice escape from the bitter northern latitudes and the sun invigorates one enough to manage the remaining winter without slamming one's head against something very hard. Ahh, Baja. My father greets me as usual, at the airport with a smile on his face and a beer outstretched in his hand. I ignore the beer and embrace him; it has been a year since I have last seen him. "Hey there, you old bear!" I laugh.

He hands me the beer, all smiles, and I am overcome by a feeling of immense sadness looking at him standing there with a smile on his face. At 79 years old he looks good; there is still tone in his muscles. He has resisted the bending of the years and still manages to stand up straight, mostly. He has a little hobble but moves quite rapidly. I am constantly surprised by his tenacity and ability to maintain pace. The sadness remains as we get into the car, and he tells me of the latest town gossip. The town he lives in is a small fishing village dominated by a gringo population of old fishermen and young water sport enthusiasts. Naturally, this type of demographic diversity makes for an interesting dichotomy in the demographic. Almost as if two opposing forces are vying for cultural control whilst simultaneously commingling. Flavors bursting, like a strongly mixed Rob Roy on a stormy Manhattan night. There are always wild stories to tell and even more manic experiences to have. The busyness subsides as we leave the city, driving past the barrios on the left. I imagine the people there. Living in such squalor, I have lived like that before, but I had an escape, a reality to escape back to. It was a temporary discomfort. For these people, this is their reality. There is



Dancing Cacti

Randy McNiff

no escape for them, the stark image of their lean-to structures all made of rusted corrugated metal and palm bows is haunting as the waning sun casts long shadows down the structures. This place, it is these people's place, and this wasteland is where they make their home, and yet they are some of the happiest people I have ever met, from around the world really. Often those who stand to have the least to lose materially are the happiest. There is something in them that has not ever been sparked. It lies dormant and they are happy. I will visit the barrios before I leave. I always do. There are some in the town in which my father lives who chastise me, saying, "It's far too dangerous to walk alone through there!" or "You're fucking mad, Hudson!" I simply smile at these people and invite them to come along with me sometime. Oh, I know there is danger there. I do not go at night, and I wear tennis shoes as it would be stupid not to. My clothes are older and dirtier when I visit the barrios. My movements are more fluid and slower, and my smiles are quick. As the patchwork

conglomeration of the barrios fades into naked desert, the saguaro cacti stand guard bristling the jagged mountains ahead, beckoning to us, and yet warning us, against entry into this wild land. Into the distant mountains we go, and Baja swallows us up, a small car continuing on a road, the road in itself an end and a beginning, a continuation.

My father has grown silent now. He respects my space and thought; we have this mutual respect. He knows I am a brooding animal, like him in that way, and he respects it and remains quiescent. The sadness remains.

Suddenly, I slam the remainder of my beer, clap him on the back saying, "Let's have some food and drinks."

He startles easily, and I chuckle internally to myself as I see the anger at being startled fade into a slow grin. He reads my mood

and understands my intent. I want to get drunk. My dad, never one to back down from an occasion, careens the vehicle to the side of the road in a small town called Santiago. We spill out of the car and take our seats at the only restaurant in town. One beer goes down before we order, the second once we get our menus. As we order, I request tequila shots. My father declines, but I order two anyway. He acquiesces. (I knew he would.) The shots go down with a lovely burn. He is in the middle of telling me a story about “some a-hole in a rented side-by-side” that he and his crew of old men had gotten into an altercation with. I am hysterical, imagining, hoping that I will be this vigorous when I reach his age. As we crush what must have been our 6th drink, I am still laughing at his exploits. The sadness remains.

“This place, it is these people’s place, and this wasteland is where they make their home, and yet they are some of the happiest people I have ever met, from around the world really. Often those who stand to have the least to lose materially are the happiest.”

As my dad leans back in his chair content and happy with a full belly and a strong drink, I feel his state of being mimicked within myself. A feeling of solidarity, of being in place, of existing as I should and when I do in this world. There is so much pain in our shared experiences, in our individual experiences. Two veterans of different wars, two men who have taken the hard roads in life, two who have always maintained hope through an existential dread, two men who have seen and experienced more than two men ever should, but who find common ground in a familiar place with familiar rhythms. That is how I sit here with my father





Dead Sea
Maya Shimoni



Untitled
Carolyn Bopp

at this moment in Baja, simply another man. He sees it as he looks at me, as I can see it in him. I know that through all his pain he is happy. Despite his mistakes and his faults, I have turned out, not perfectly, but a man nonetheless. These thoughts escape me as he tips back in his chair and spills onto the floor. The laughter erupts again as a stream of curses ensues . . . something about the poor engineering in Mexican furniture. It is time to leave. I pay the bill and we continue on our northern sojourn to the town of Los Barriles.

As we crest the final hills and descend into the coastal town, I see the last few kiteboarders milking the day's subsiding wind for every ounce of power it will provide, letting them cut swiftly across the surface and over the swells. I inhale deeply, the blisteringly dry air expanding my lungs, knowing that I soon will be among their numbers riding the wind. I release my breath. And the sadness remains.

The next morning breakfast is fresh eggs and smoked tuna caught the day prior. I sip my coffee and watch the sun rise, exposing my nerve cells to the early morning photons and initiating a cortisol release that awakens my body, something that no amount of caffeine can do. My father leaves for his morning bicycle ride. I watch the vibrant orange of the Baja sunrise, the salt of the coastal breeze, palatable and fresh, invigorates the senses and the mind. The dry air creates a conglomerate of smells and temperatures that are unique to desert coastal towns. It is no wonder to me that authors such as Steinbeck have written entire novels about this area.

The sadness remains as the days blend and the weeks tick by. Before I am ready, my time to leave has come. Back to work in Northern California I must go. The time spent here has been good. There were days filled with surfing, kiteboarding, and recounting with family, and with myself. Hours after dark swelling with laughter, eating far too much and partaking in drink more than any man should on a consistent basis. We stop for lunch on the way to the airport. My dad is quiet again. I can tell this time it is different. There is something that needs saying, but he's waiting

for the right time to say it. It is always like this when I leave, every time is like the last time. We arrived at the airport after having a late breakfast in San Jose. My dad looks at me, claps me on the back, and says, "This is it, Son. This is life. It's not always easy and it's rarely pretty, but you cling to those moments that are and hold them in your heart. Keep doing what you are doing and never let a moment go unlived. Always keep your brothers close." The tears are a pressure behind my eyes, wanting to well and flow. I do not let them; this is not a moment for crying, and my father would not appreciate it. I grasp his hand firmly, nod my head and turn to go. He calls after me, but, as I turn, he is already walking away. We have never been a family for goodbyes.

"My father has grown silent now. He respects my space and thought; we have this mutual respect. He knows I am a brooding animal, like him in that way, and he respects it and remains quiescent."

There is something special about Baja. It is not simply that my father resides there, and that the place has become a home to me. There is something in the air, in the people, a languidness, a fluid manner in the way they conduct their lives. Moment by moment, experience by experience. Then there is a split difference in this, two forces at times odd to each other, one brought by the foreign influence of the expatriates melding with that of the local Mexicans. It is an environment of wanderers and explorers, of those who might be called lost, but in whose own mind were not lost but always searching. It is a repository of stories and experiences, all lubricated to overflowing with copious amounts of fresh coastal air and liquor. There are many books written about this place. Inspired by the mountains that prickle with saguaro

cacti, and about the people, the natives and the Mexicans, the cartels and the destitute, they all have their place here nestled under the glaring sun. It is beautiful in a way, and sad, and the sadness of it is part of the beauty. It knows all but it tells few, and those who truly get to know a place, this place, understand that the place knows them first, and what it tells them is more about themselves than about any other thing.

The sadness of this Baja is part of its beauty, and the sadness that remains in me is part of the beauty of my experience here. The sadness that began with seeing my dad for the first time in a year. For ten years in a row he has greeted me with a beer, a smile, and a big bear hug at that airport. The perfect way to greet me, and he knows that. I wonder how many times in the future I will visit this airport and disembark from the plane, only to exit the airport and be greeted by nobody. How many times in the years to come will I leave and be greeted at this airport with only the memory of my dad, the beer, and the big bear hug. Dad introduced me to Baja, and Baja taught me that beauty and sadness are not mutually exclusive. They are natural in their oneness.

In this oneness there is no sad, for in nature there is no sad. Sadness is something we impose. In this there is no sadness at all, there just is. Baja is, in a way that many other places are not,



and though despite the years and the pain that will no doubt come with the continuation of my visits here I cannot help but be glad that I am capable of feeling the experience of this place at all, concurrently immersed in the beauty and sadness of it.

~



Peaks from the Little C
Gwendolyn Waring

MARIPOSA

Kerry Bennett

High, high up in the Sierra Madres,
it's cold on the mountain.
The early light
streams wintry white through the pines,
illuminating treasure in the trees.

Tiny hearts and arteries thaw slowly,
imperceptibly,
from February's freeze
as we wait.

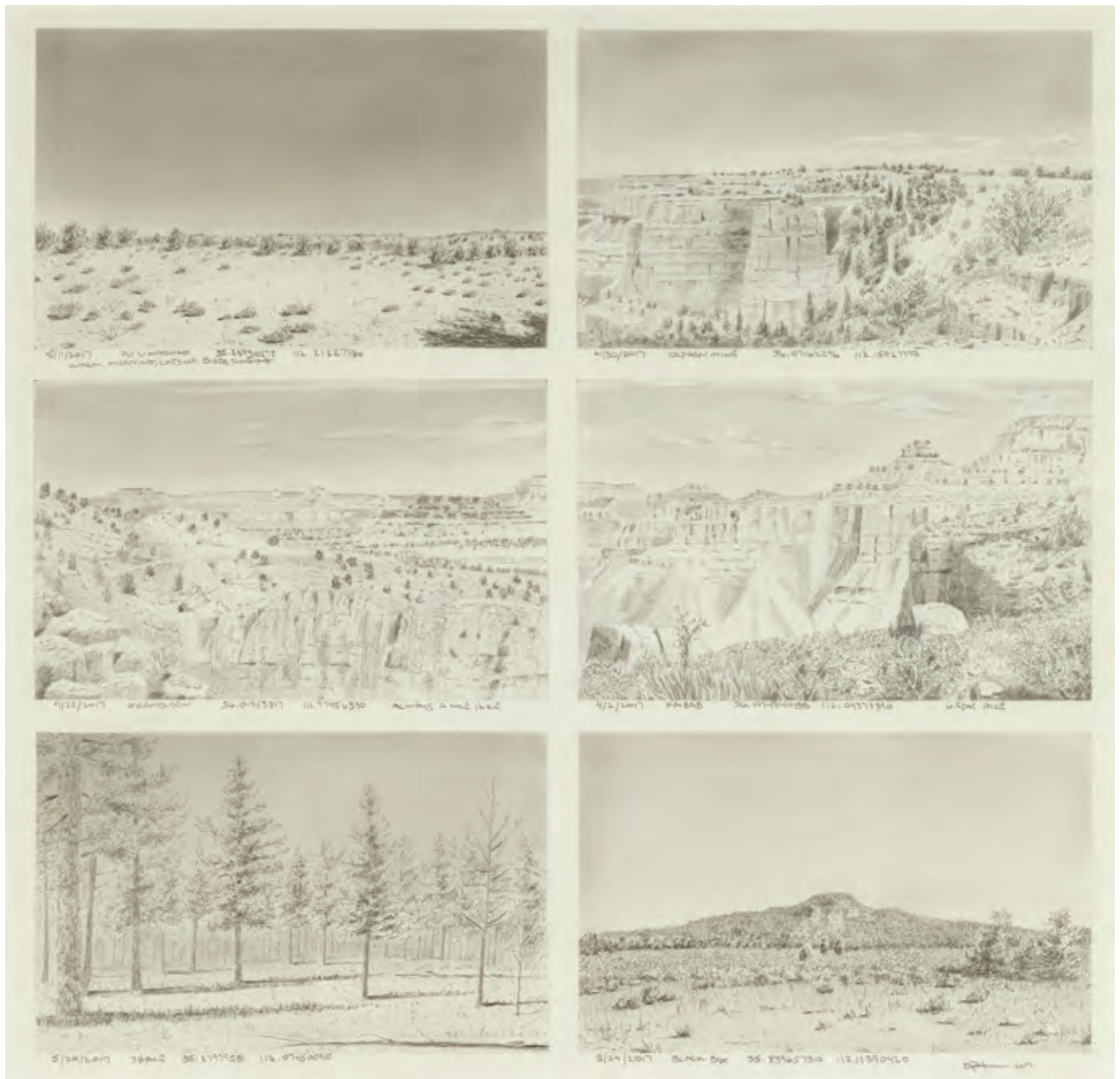
Hours behave like years
as a hundred million monarchs
stir above us,
like golden flecks of glass aglint
in the clear, blue sky.

We listen against the hopeful silence
for the soft flutter of wings
shimmering
in the Mexican morning.

JOURNEYS IN SEARCH OF GRAND CANYON URANIUM

NUANCE AND APOCALYPSE IN THE EARTH'S GREATEST LANDSCAPE

Alan Petersen



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I've been interested in nuclear science and technology since I was eight years old. I can still picture the first book that I read on atomic energy that led me down this path. I've previously addressed the subject by painting nuclear research and production facilities associated with the Manhattan Project of World War Two and the Cold War. In 2015, as I began on a new project that would focus on uranium mines and production facilities here on the Colorado Plateau, my focus shifted when I learned about the breccia pipes of the Grand Canyon region. I became fascinated with these vertical subterranean structures and that are essentially unknown outside of the energy and mining industries and a relatively small number of geologists.



IF MY WORDS WERE STARS

Kerry Bennett

If my words were stars,
I would speak in pure light—
my being lucent, literate—
an aurora of atoms and electrons.

If my words were stars,
my energy would blaze above the desert,
skywriting with a glitter pen
across the clear, black night.

If my words were stars,
my aura would burn
brilliant white, aglow
with existence.

If my words were stars,
I would shimmer like a nebula.
Galaxies of human thought
shining with radiance
and never extinguished.

I would sing
until gravity pulled me back.
Songs of infinite incandescence
from Earth's atmosphere,
where I would break apart
like an asteroid
with the sheer force
of truth.



Gypsum Dunes

Sandra Dihlmann



Interdunal Resilience

Sandra Dihlmann





Dunefield Sprawl

Sandra Dihlmann

MY OWN RESILIENCE

Joshua McCauslin

I try, try again
the same thing, over and over
hoping for a better result.
Achieving failure but never quitting.
Achieving failure but never quitting.
Hoping for a better result.
The same thing, over and over
I try, try again.

UNDYING WILL TO SUCCEED

The tears run down my face;
I keep pressing forward.
Determination on fire
Tasks flood my life
An undying will to succeed simply established
Some look and are astonished,
I should have quit many times by now
But not to me
But not to me
But not to me.

NO STOPPING THE PROGRESSION

I progress, I move forward.
I do not stop or look back.
Persistently achieving the goal—
Intentionally leaping ahead—
Still progressing, I catch a sweat
Brushing it out of my eyes, taking a long stride
No breaks.

I progress, I move forward.
I do not stop or look back.
Persistently achieving the goal
Intentionally leaping ahead
Still progressing, I catch a sweat
Brushing it out of my eyes, taking a long stride
No breaks.

Poems by Joshua McCauslin





Vintage Locomotive

R. M. Lunday, Jr.



Kamali in Hat
Michele Miller

DOUX RÊVE, DOUX CHIEN

Becky Byrkit

My elderly dog is soft & tired, gold & small & white-headed, dark
Thick pads on his paws. His final few puffing pants, I pray

Will not seize. He'll muse friendly on funny little ants, some
Whuffy desert dust, a rare blue spider: a dream or desire.

One huge red cucaracha with horrifying antennae that ventures on
To his body when he's just lying around, assuming the world.

Maybe he'll muse on me. Maybe he'll muse on our Kona-side beach
Flaps, the seahorse lab: his obsession with the rubber hamburger. I

Hope. Is Kamali's death, a moment that has not taken place,
About him? Is his death about this world? Is his death a testament

To stars? Water in a bottomless bowl? A waterless bowl?
Is Kamali's death about the satellite I think we see in the sky

In the one morning hour the two of us wander together, staring at
Grass, musing stupidly like two stalling speedboats, carousing

Like clowns? Or is K's death about plants? Sniffy plants. O black
& ginger plants. Trampled plants, sister plants.

Plants with tendril ornaments, canopied stepped-on cigarettes.
Sure, the world's a tangle, though in death, it's all a comfy

Clump. I hope.

Sound's behind, long behind, a silent solo plane in an awfully
Clear blue sky. One concise desert cloud. You know, I'm sixty, & I

Never knew love really worked like this. I'd always thought:
"Monarchs." Man O man, was I wrong about that. Kamali sprawls,

Many months before dying, on the tile, cool, & I wrap myself, a
Hard puppet on the bed: a firefighter, fighting.



Orchids Color
R.M. Lunday, Jr.



Orchids Monochrome

R.M. Lunday, Jr.

FREE LOVE

T. Moens

I

On January 1, 2020, I was as high on life as one could be without suffering from spontaneous combustion. I was quite literally high in a plane that New Year's Eve, flying back from my most recent and final tour in Afghanistan. The world made sense to me then. After leaving the corporation for whom I had worked this past year, I was finally returning to school. Not that I really thought I needed formal education at this point in my life. I saw school as a paid vacation of learning, funded by the G.I. Bill, an occasion to go on a bout of intellectual tourism, an intellectual trip that I had purchased with six years of service, six years of training, conducting and enduring wartime operations globally. I was ready for a break from the grind of my unique flavor of young professionalism. Laden with high hopes, even dreams, my drive was at an all-time high. I was finally free.

II

Freedom was a new feeling for me. After six years in the Army and then a voluntary tour as a private contractor, my life was rigid and structured. Although self-structured

post military, this still presented at least the illusion of lacking in freedom. The life as a contractor is very similar to the life of deployed soldiers—a life where a robust body and a hardened mind are the key to sanity. The type of mindset that makes one antisocial in traditional society allows survival in the environment of my developmental years. There is a mark placed on those of us who have been to war; it is a mark of courage, of sacrifice, of greater purpose, but also a scar that plagues us that we will never again be quiescent in our lives for the remainder of years. We have been lifted to that plane of metaphysical experience where being no longer becomes a function of our lives but a ratio to be weighed against the pain.

I arrived in Alaska on January 5th, after spending the New Year getting tight with a good friend in Colorado Springs. I spent two short days in the North dropping off my bags. I leapt for the first flight out to Atlanta, where the sprinter van I had just purchased was waiting. I couldn't think of anything more freeing than touring around the country in a van while taking classes online, so that is what I did. My first stop from Atlanta: Starkville, Mississippi. That was where I met her and when "it" all started. She was the most recent love of my life, and "it" was the dreaded viral contagion we all have come to know so intimately.

III

She had curly brown hair, freckles, and the kind of body that stirs the most primal desire for reproduction in a man; she was an excellent representation of feminine beauty. She fucked like a bobcat and fought like one too. I'm not sure whether the emotional scars she left run deeper than the furrows she carved into my back with her manicured claws. We fought, and we fucked; I adapted quickly to this new operating procedure, and it wasn't long before we moved in together. One, two months perhaps, because of the virus. I drove to Mississippi to pick her up; we hoped to make it to the border to spend the COVID-19 lockdowns in Mexico, but we didn't make it. They shut down the border, and I was stuck in Starkville. Screwed. She asked me to stay, and so I did against my better judgment. We unfolded upon each other's lives in the same manner as the virus unfolded upon our lives, as it unfolded upon the world.

Thus, it was around March, and things seemed to go well for a time. We cooked amazing meals, binge-watched TV, and fine-tuned our fitness programs. Oh yeah, and the sex was still amazing. As like-minded as we were with our separatist views on modern politics, this only added to our separation from society at large and in a larger part due to the social separation caused by COVID-19.

Separatist attitudes leaving love in a wake of vicissitudes, unreal exclamation of the soul poured out of dark dimensions that hereunto have been known only by those who hear the soft sigh a woman makes in those first few moments after penetration. She held control over my soul the first time I heard this sigh from her.

She wanted to be a fitness influencer, which I thought was a bit outlandish. We kept our routine of fighting, and, well, you know what else, until around mid-June. I'd had enough. I was going to Alaska. She'd become somewhat financially dependent on me, and, given the other COVID-19 strains erupting in the state, I'd had enough of living in Starkville. I ducked out of the lease and packed my van, determined to weather the remainder of the pandemic in Alaska. There were few shutdown restrictions in Alaska and very few COVID-19 cases. Alaska is a big state with a small population, which is the perfect place to weather a pandemic. She wanted to come. I told her I thought it best if she stayed. Then the crying. I have never fared well against women's tears; she had me dialed in. Fucking master's degree in psychology. We rutted particularly hard that night and left for Alaska the next morning. The wind at our backs, sails set in full, our journey had begun, albeit a beginning to an end.

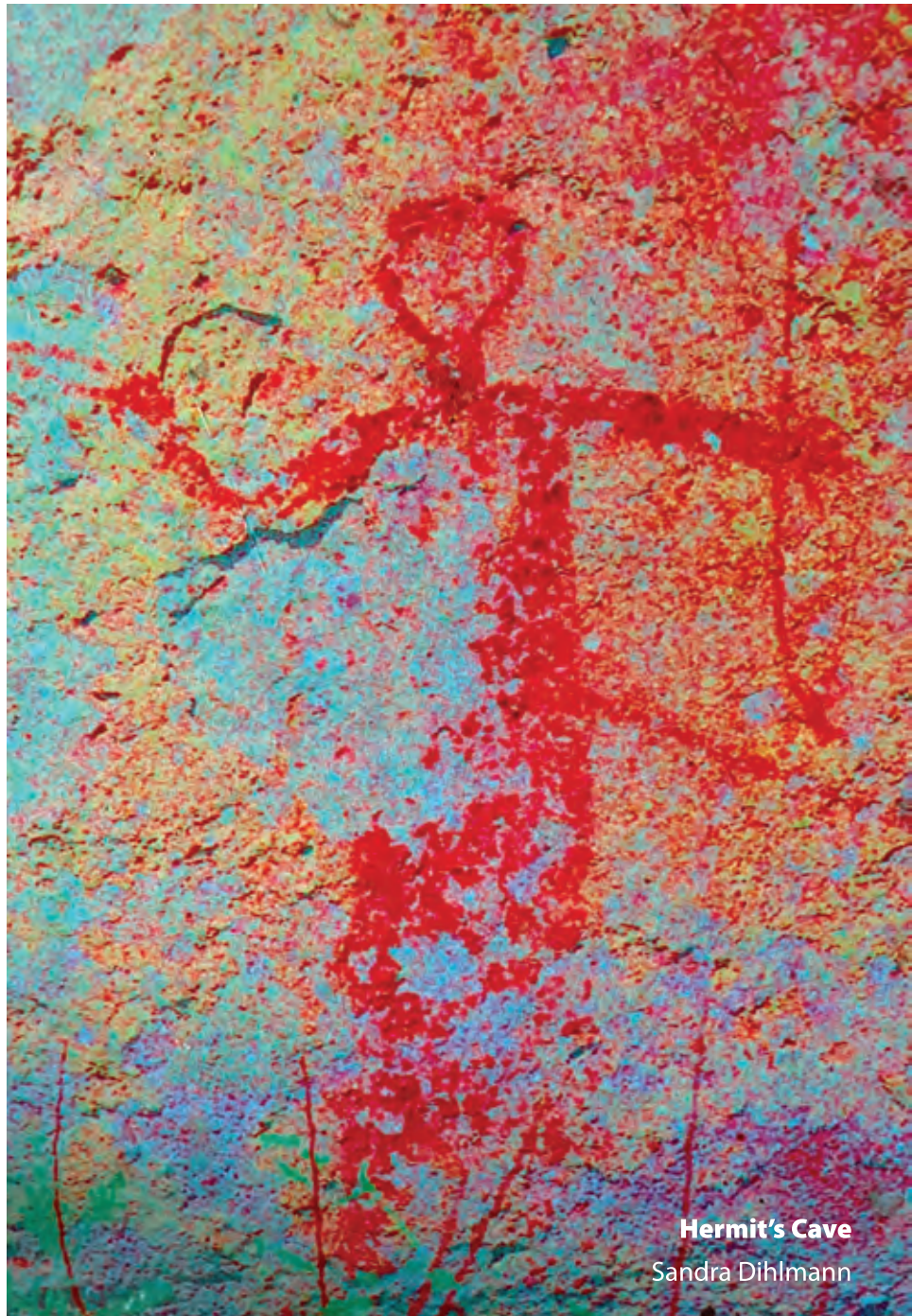
IV

The COVID-19 shutdowns began mid-March, and by June the Pentagon reported the biggest increase in military cases; U.S. cases hovered around 2.5 million by the end of the month. Then, the cases started to double. Despite this we were on our way, driving up through Montana and east toward Washington where we were to cross the border into Canada, making our way up the Alcan Highway to Alaska. Everyone had lost their minds; toilet paper disappeared from shelves and people cast furtive glances

of fear at each other for breaches in physical proximity. The losing of mind included the two of us as well, with our last-minute road trip to Alaska during a pandemic. The world economy had shut down, and with it everyone's hopes and dreams had come to a standstill. The drive up was without incident. There were moments of joy and laughter too. I remember her turning to me after eating a few too many edibles in the Vancouver traffic and saying, "Hudson, I need to pee!" Calming momentarily, she managed a squeaky voice: "They are making me incontinent!" Then she wet herself in the passenger seat; I was hysterical. We had a few moments of fun like that, and we continued our drive in a relative hurry. The way through northern British Columbia and the Yukon was long and arduous. The shutdowns were strictly enforced; we were not allowed to leave our vehicle unless it was an emergency or we needed gas. I was grateful I had built the bed into the back of the van before we left Mississippi. It took four days of driving from Washington to reach my house in Alaska.

V
The shutdowns in Alaska were nonexistent. Masks were minimally used. People went about their business normally. It was a refreshing take when compared to some of the experiences I had on the drive up, particularly with the rigidity of Canada's restrictions. It's remarkable

what happens when people become okay with relinquishing their freedoms. It happens slowly at first; they take away the small ones to get you used to it. Then, as time goes on and the situation worsens, they gradually take more significant freedoms and larger numbers of them. Canada used to be a nice place to live in the same way that the U.S. used to be a nice place to live. Now, we are empires in decline—waning empires whose transformation



Hermit's Cave
Sandra Dihlmann

into something entirely alien has been accelerated by the outset of this virus. When you take a realistic look at societies that rise in the dramatic manner in which the U.S. rose, you will begin to see a general trend. That trend is 250 years, which is roughly the amount of time it takes upstart world powers to rise, peak, wane, and crumble—plus or minus a hundred years or so, but the pattern is there. We are looking at a new society—one where instead of asking, “How do I make my way in this life,” we ask, “Which way do I go in this life?” And, instead of asking ourselves, we ask for directions. The arbitrations we have exercised over our own destiny have no longer become commonplace. I see people confined to the limitations of their own belief that those in power care one lick about them. It’s an amazing case of cognitive dissonance. But this cultural psychological operation (PSYOP) has been going on for generations. The decline of the

west is the decline of the traditional American moralism for the new moral relativism that has replaced it. We are asked to give up what it means to be American in favor of new world order in the wake of the pandemic. I think this is natural in a sense, cultures, like humans, are organic. They are born, they develop through infancy, then they mature, age, and finally perish.

VI

At least she agreed with me in views on the pandemic and American life. Despite this, the relationship deteriorated quickly as soon as we arrived in Alaska, just as American society deteriorated with the crushing tidal blows of the Coronavirus. She hated it in Alaska. She was a city girl who I should have never brought here. With the crushing highs and lows of my relationship, coupled with similar swings in public fear of the pandemic, I was living threadbare, and my mind could barely contain itself. Finally, it



Cliff Dweller

Kiril Kirkov

broke, I broke, and things were starting to straighten themselves out. She and I had made moves together, endured together, and finally the fighting had subsided. We had settled in together. She had regained her financial independence; I had regained some semblance of what I perceived to be myself again; and the sex was still incredible.

Our adventures landed us in Flagstaff. I had a consulting job, and she studied nursing while working part time. We even discussed buying real estate. I had finally made it to normalcy. We were in love. Then it happened again. I always do, happen that is, usually in the worst possible way. I think that's part of what it means to be an American; we happen on things. Things exist in harmony, in natural order in the world, in other countries, and then Americans come along and happen onto them and make them entirely more complex—sometimes worse, but sometimes better, too. I think that's what is great and terrible about America and Americans. I love this about us. Unlike us happening on things, COVID happened onto us, and America is not used to things happening onto it.

Teleological narratives are prevalent in our time. Particularly in the waning west. We tout teleology in the same way we tout our American pride or our gender politics. I challenge you to take the non-teleological road. Take a deontological approach to argument and abate teleology.

It really messed us up. It messed things up in a similar way as the way she messed me up when she happened onto me. Then it happened, and she told me to leave for it. So, I did. My infidelity in thought and speech, though never in action, was enough to break the fragile love we had fostered for each other. I think about it sometimes, about how much stronger our love may have grown with all that we went through together. I think about the sex, her beautiful mind, and the coy smile she flashed so often when we bantered with each other. I still think about these things. For the past year and a half, I have thought of these things as I have continually happened upon myself to no end, with no direction; pure, raw drive has consumed me. Pursuit of money to the damnation of everything, and I have dined well for it; but my mind has happened over and over onto itself for so

long that I began to wonder about my own sanity. It seemed to slip for a while. Congruent with the general public's fear of the pandemic, we were falling into the abyss, together succumbing to our own hubris.

VII

12/05/2021. America seems to have freed itself from the fear and oppression of the virus somewhat, even with the emerging variants. People are ready to move on and are willing to risk infection head on rather than live in fear. I have also moved on with a successful business, sold. I have recalibrated, focusing on my freedom again. Albeit, this time it is not freedom of movement to which my gaze settles, but of thought. Something unrealized that I had all along, and it's the only thing I ever needed. America is becoming freer. With the suppression of freedom, there is a new social movement encouraging freedom of thought and voice. Without COVID this movement may have never gained momentum. If you look closely enough at the mountains of American cultural thought, you can see high watermarks. We have receded since then, but the tide flows again—the tide of voice and of differing opinions. The realization of what it means to be an American is reawakening beneath the waves. The tides of change lap at our feet. It took the suppression of freedom to spawn appreciation of it.

I suppose that I must thank her, too. Whether intentional or not, she enslaved my thoughts and ruled my emotions with an iron control that no woman has ever held over me before. I thank her for this enslavement of my essence, for without it I would have never learned how important freedom of the mind is. To be free of something means to choose the amount of it that you are willing to partake. Under different circumstances, we would have made a fine family together. She gave me something valuable, and I appreciate her for that. In the end, I hope she finds the love she needs just as I hope I find the love that I need and that America and humanity finds the love they need. Through it all, I have learned that there is nothing greater, purer, or more beautiful than genuine love.

~

TOWARD SUNRISE

I held my heart and squeezed it
First it oozed black blood but I didn't accept

So, I squeezed harder, I clenched my teeth
I squeezed my eyes tightly and then opened them

The next color I saw was blue
They say blood is blue before oxygen hits it

I dug a hole and put yellow pine needles on the base

I laid my heart there and covered it with sunflowers

I CAN HEAR THEIR DREAMS

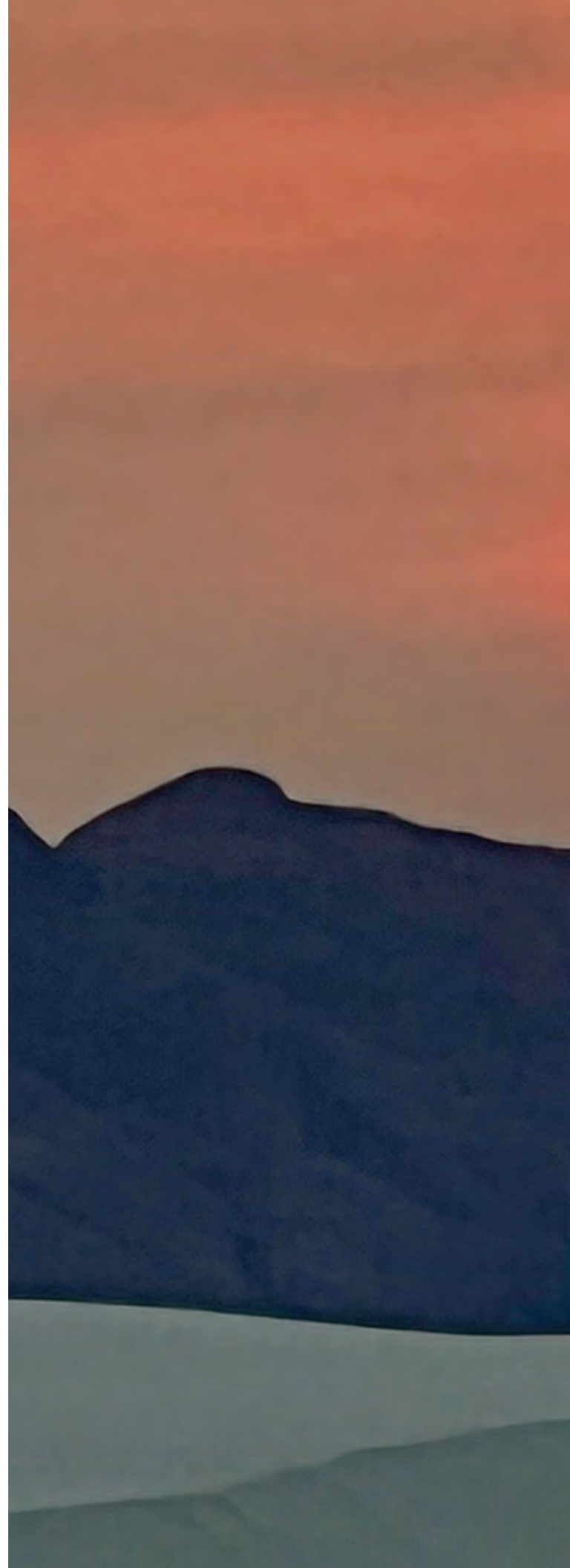
When my eyes dry
I lay in their blankets

I smell them like
How a woman smells
Her man's shirts

I hear them smiling
Ear to ear missing teeth

Their sparkling reflections
All over my walls
Dance with pursed lips

Poems by Thomas Yellowhair





White Sands Sunset Stroll

Jenni Jameson

Annual Reprise

Sandra Dihlmann





ABALONE DZIL

Thomas Yellowhair

Flagstaff is so beautiful
Today, I prepared a roast beef

I am happy my babies are home
They sure did ask what we're having
For supper

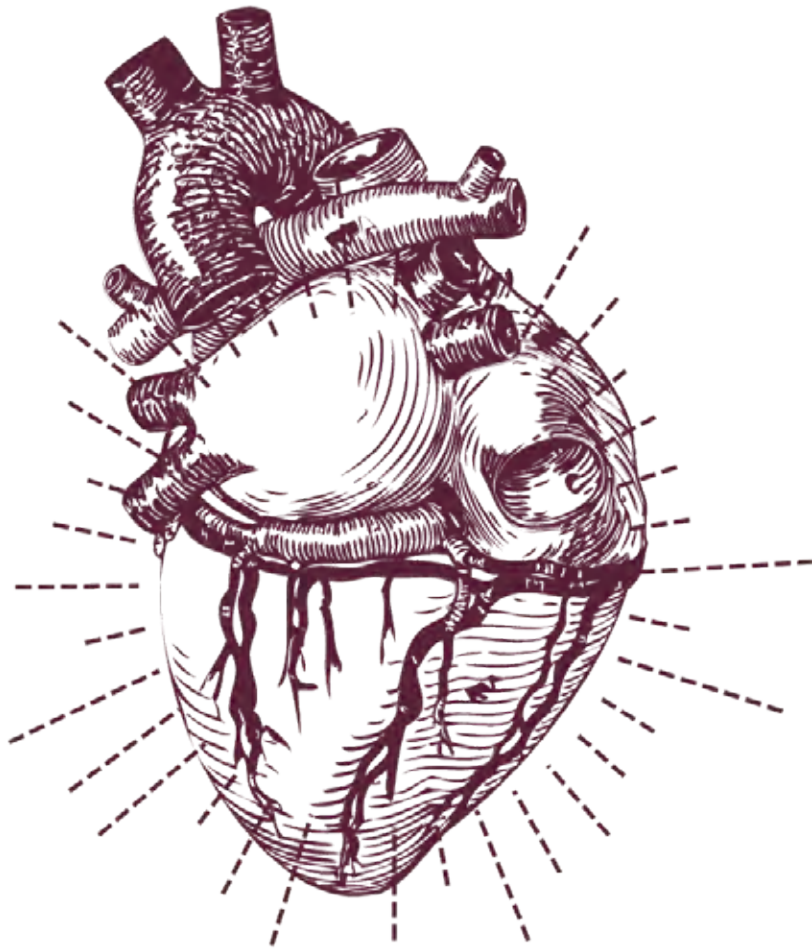
The house is warm and just outside
The snow falls and silences the town

Blues and babies playing with LEGOs
Dad wiping his eyes from cleaning onions

He always cleans onions
When he listens to the blues



The Experience
Sandra Dihlmann



HEART RAFFLE

Thomas Yellowhair

I'm Raffling my Heart
It's costs \$50 a box
There are 100 boxes
There is 1 rule
You can't walk
Away from the prize



Ode to Joy
Sandra Dihlmann

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