

*Issue no.2*

# ART SWAP

APRIL 2022

*ISSUE no.2*

# **ART SWAP**

**APRIL 2022**

Here's what we did:

We all made something, then  
sent it to someone else.

With our newly acquired  
something, we responded.

See below.

## **VISUAL CONTRIBUTORS**

Tommy Ford &

Mary Ellen Ford

Quin Nelson

Laurenne Ross

Christina Schueler

Jesse Shofner

Bailey Zahniser

## **LITERARY CONTRIBUTORS**

Adie Bovee

Claire Brislin

Bethany Kaylor

Meghan Robins

Sam Schild

Korbi Thalhammer



To the Moon	6
Pigheart's Rabbithole, Chapter 5	9
Moving Day	16
The Contract	21
A Lone Survival	25
FIGURES	29
Mother	31
Bridge Woods	36
Hope, hard	41
water map 01	44
ydesogrl	46
Root Energy	49

# TO THE MOON

BY KORBI THALHAMMER

In the city, the night sky hangs low and burns a sickly taupe. Brother Moth taps at my window asking which way to the moon. Were it as simple as a left turn at Albuquerque, I might sleep tonight. But, the truth being what it is, I invite him in.

“Once stars grew thick here,” I begin, “like alder on a riverbank.”

“Then we traded darkness for reading lamps and television screens. Quiet, too, we elected to live without. It seemed to go hand in hand with darkness, and on its own it grew oppressive. So we bettered our sound making and dulled our listening. We even developed small speakers that nestle in our ears, so we could listen each to our own noise and drown out the calls of neighbors and the groan of the landscape. Today we’ve pushed the quiet far from us, way back up into the mountains with the darkness.

“Soil we traded for concrete, that enemy of roots and soaking rains. It lets food arrive by the truckload from far away, and it’s easy on rubber tires. Still, my feet complain as I stride home along the sidewalk, each footfall precisely identical to the last.

“Even water was easy to neglect, until, of course, we remembered we couldn’t live without it. By then it was too late. We’d grown too quickly and anyway we’d poisoned what we had with waste. The concrete we lay over every graded surface admits none of the winter rains, and just hours after the storms we watch the last of that fresh water rush down through culverts, under



“Silent Moon” by Tommy Ford

roads, and out to sea. For a sustainable supply, we pipe water from the north and east. Pumps guide it out of its native rivers, then up over mountains and into concrete-bounded ribbons that wind across the desert. Along the way, it waters fruit trees that couldn't otherwise grow. Some call it a miracle of modern agriculture. In much the same way, upon arrival the water quenches the thirst of millions of people the land here simply isn't equipped to sustain.

“But back beyond the first range of mountains the darkness creeps in again. The moon doesn't have so much competition. You

should go there,” I tell the moth. “We should go there.” And I pull on my coat, a fleece of purple polyester made to mimic wool.

Brother Moth rides beside me in the hollow of my plastic bottle. He rests his crooked feet on the rim of the bottle and beats his wings slowly, gazing out at passing streetlights. At the trailhead, I open my windows and kill my headlights. We sit for a moment, smelling the sagebrush on the air and allowing our eyes to acclimate to the old darkness. Before I’m fully adjusted, I feel the brush of dusted wing against my cheek. I concentrate, straining to hear the whir of wingbeats fading into the breeze.

On my drive home, my eye flashes to the sign above the eight lane highway urging me to use transit, to the billboard reminding me to do my part during this yearslong drought. Earth Day is around the corner, remember, and the trees and turtles could really use a hand. It’s a sick joke we like to play on ourselves.

At home, I draw a cool glass of water at the sink. By way of the aqueduct it has made its way from the Sac-Joaquin Delta across three degrees of latitude to spill out of my tap. It tastes of concrete and chlorine and sunshine.



# PIGHEART'S RABBITHOLE, CHAPTER 5

BY SAM SCHILD

“...So, Scooter. What do you like about Mountain Dew so much?” Pigheart asks.

“It’s delicious,” Scooter responds, “And, it comes in all those different flavors.”

“Hmmm. Do they still make it in all those flavors?”

“Yeah! But lots of the flavors are only available during certain seasons. Summers the best for Dew.”

“...”

“And the different flavors aren’t available everywhere. Some are exclusive to specific stores, like Family Dollar and Wal-Mart.”

“Oh...I see,” says Pigheart.

“And I love Wal-Mart, it reminds me of the good old days when I was first starting my novel. That was during the 2020 pandemic before they changed the Dew recipe,” Scooter continues. “I would walk down to ol’ Wally World with my backpack and fill it up with Mountain Dew, then I wouldn’t leave my house for days while I drank it and ate Dominoes.”

“That...sounds nice,” Pigheart replies, “Warrick used to do a similar thing, but she would drink beer from the

Breckenridge Brewery dumpster and eat pizza she got from the trash behind Pie Hole.”

“She should have been drinking Mountain Dew.”

“She wouldn’t leave the house for days and slept ‘till 2 in the afternoon! I had to take myself for walks. I was living a dystopian reality even before we started drinking shit water soda,” Pigheart says.

“Depression isn’t dystopian!” Scooter says, incredulously.

“Well—”

“ROPES FOR THE REVOLUTION! GET YOUR ROPES FOR THE REVOLUTION!”

“...What the fuck is that guy yelling about?” Pigheart and Scooter say, simultaneously.

They’ve only been companions on the road for three days but are quickly growing close. Scooter now understands whenever Pigheart wants him to lend an opposable thumb to pick something up. Pigheart knows the entire plot of Scooter’s novel. She also knows to keep her nose on high alert to sniff out any Mountain Dew, Scooter’s *raison d’etre*. He even showed her the stash of Dew in his backpack and they’re going to stop by one of his caches on their journey to Wal Mart, where they’ll stop on their way to finding Alex Bones.

The companions look down the formerly paved road now overgrown with grasses and vines pushing through an endless network of cracks. 200 yards away is a man with a wiry grey beard and round glasses.

He is holding a selfie stick and yelling to apparently no one on the abandoned road. He trips on a large crack while yelling about rope. If you zoom out, this network of cracks

looks like the watershed network of canyons and valleys from a time when water flowed all throughout the west.

Wait, this is drone footage. Now it's zooming in on the wiry bearded guy yelling about rope. "ROPES FOR THE REVOLUTION!"

Pigheart and Scooter look at each other, and without saying anything they approach the yelling man cautiously. The unspoken hope is that they can pass him without being acknowledged.

No such luck. "You two! Intrepid journeymen! Have you

heard of Ropes for the Revolution?" "Uhhhh, no," Pigheart says. "Hey look, a talking dog," says the man, pointing a camera at Pigheart. He keeps talking, "Ropes for the revolution, specifically designed for the necks of the water-rich



"bones" by Laurene Ross

1 percent! This rope won't slip or fray when it's touching anyone it detects to be a part of the global oligarchy.

Everyone else can't be harmed by this revolutionary product!"

“Wait a minute! So this rope can sense how rich someone is?!” Pigheart asks, incredulously. “And the talking dog is a skeptic!” the man replies, “Of course, it can sense how rich someone

is. That’s why it’s Rope for the Revolution!”

“I am a skeptic! We’re on our way to go find out what the fuck this Alex Bones asshole is really up to with this Dogs Aren’t Wolves nonsense, and now you’re here telling us your fuckin’ rope can sense how rich someone is?! Why do you keep talking to that camera, and what’s with the drone up there?!”

“Yeah! What’s with the drones, dude?!” Scooter adds.

“This is for all my followers, of course!” The man says, still talking to the camera. The drones have swooped down to 10 feet from the ground, clearly they’re recording this interaction.

“Your followers? Like, YouTube followers?” Pigheart asks.

“Of course! Don’t you know? This revolution won’t be televised but it will be live-streamed! But seriously, do you know Alex Bones?! We think he’s a secret oligarch, scheming ways to keep us in line, to maintain the status quo. Well, we won’t stand for it, and Ropes for the Revolution will have the final say on wolves!”

“This is just getting weirder and weirder,” Pigheart mutters under her breath. “So, you’re out here looking for Alex Bones right now?” she asks the man.

“I’m out here looking to start a revolution!”

“Well, we don’t know Alex Bones, either. I...uh...went down a bit of a YouTube rabbit hole and ended up watching some of his videos. Then my person was taken hostage at PAWS so I’m going find Alex Bones.”

“You’re out here looking to start a revolution!”

“What?! No, I just want to talk to the guy. He clearly can’t have intended for this shit to get so out of hand.”

“Oh, he intended for this,” the man says.

“Maybe...”

“So what happens if they aren’t rich? You know, with the rope? Or, what if they’re rich but not a part of the 1 percent?” Scooter asks. This is good, I wish I came up with this for my novel. I can still use it, though, He thinks to himself.

“We’ve analyzed the skin of the 1000s of subjects from every race and class of people. And, we found that members of the global oligarchy 1% have an easily detectable level of “water-richness” on their skin. That, combined with the lack of chicken nugget oil present on their skin since they can afford to eat other food, means we can accurately detect the skin of members of the global oligarchy, or the 1%, with 98% accuracy. And, that 2% of inaccuracy is only sometimes a little bit inaccurate. This rope has been known to occasionally confuse someone in the 5% richest percentile with the 1% richest segment of the population, and we’ll take those odds FOR THE REVOLUTION!”

Pigheart and Scooter, both eating a chicken nugget, look at each other. Is this guy serious? “Test the rope on me,” Scooter says, “we can hang it over that light post.”

“Well, technically it used to be a light post,” the man interjects, “look, someone took all the wire and the bulb.” He’s right. The scavengers even holes drilled holes throughout the post to get every last piece of wire out.

“...whatever, just swing the rope over that post and wrap it around my neck. Do it quickly, before I lose my nerve,” Scooter says, “Pigheart, get those wolf teeth ready to tear

through some rope if it doesn't sense that I'm a part of the proletariat or whatever."

"Uhhhh," says Pigheart.

"No need to swing it over that post. All Ropes for the Revolution come with a portable gallows," the man says to the drone floating in front of him.

As he pulls a rope out of his backpack, there is a small box attached to the rope near one end. The man presses a button on the box, and Pigheart and Scooter's mouths drop open.

The button really ejected a gallows. The rope sits ready, noose already tied.

"...holy shit," they both say.

"Why should a revolution feel like the 1700s?!" The man shouts to the camera, "You see, when the revolution really gets started we're going to need a way to be sure we're only executing the right people. Death is bad. And believe it or not, we don't condone execution here at Ropes for the Revolution. But, hoarding wealth and resources is worse. Our market research shows that if the richest 1% of the world population's money is distributed evenly throughout the world then we could all go back to eating real food and drinking water again. No more chicken nuggets and wastewater soda! Ropes for the Revolution!"

"Scooter, are you sure about this?" Pigheart asks while the man goes on to the camera, "He seems a little...off."

Scooter looks at Pigheart, then at the gallows, then at the bald man with a long white beard and round glasses ranting at a drone hovering a foot from his face. Everything he's saying seems rehearsed, but in a genuine way like he really believes what he's been ranting about for all these years. He looks familiar, too.

Isn't he hot in that jacket? Scooter thought to himself. And then he realized why the man looked so familiar. He had heard of memes coming to life, but he didn't believe it when he heard it. But, that jacket was unmistakable. A military green winter coat that an old politician from Vermont used to wear. I bet he still has those mittens in a pocket!

"...yeah, Pigheart, I'm sure. But be ready. Just in case," Scooter replies.

Scooter steps onto the gallows platform. The noose moves toward him and he flinches. The noose stops, then moves closer to Scooter as if it were...smelling him. Pigheart watches in awe. This guy is serious! This rope really isn't gonna hang Scooter.

The rope finally does wrap itself around Scooter's neck, "Oh fuck!" says Pigheart.

But just as she's getting ready to jump up onto the gallows platform and start using her teeth on the rope, it unties itself. Scooter looks relieved. He smiles as the rope falls away. "Holy shit!" he says, "it...worked."

"Of course it worked!" says the man, "it's Rope for the Revolution! It has to work!" And with that, he shuts off his camera. The drones land at his feet. He collects them, placing each one in a separate compartment of his bag.

# MOVING DAY

BY CLAIRE BRISLIN

Mama said we could only bring the important stuff, that we'd have to leave most of our things behind, and I told her I wanted to bring Daddy. She gave one of those sighs, then bit her bottom lip and made her eyebrows touch.

Like kissing, I thought, kissing eyebrows, and I giggled. Her head shot up fast and my giggle stopped.

"Is something funny?" she asked.

And I wasn't sure what to say because something was funny, but I didn't want to explain so I just hung my head and shook it no.

She told me to stop messing around and to go pack up my room and decide what I wanted to bring. She said I could only pack one box because the place we were going was small.

"Like a shoebox?" I asked, but she didn't understand.

I went to my room, but I didn't pack up my things. Instead, I put the box sideways and crawled into it like a cave.

\*

Daddy took me to a cave once. We had to walk a long way into the woods and the trees were thick and scraggly and made me nervous so I made sure to stay real close. When we got to the rocks I was tired of walking so me and Daddy sat





"Childhood Memory" by Christina Schueler

down and ate granola bars. My favorite is peanut butter, but he only had chocolate chip. But those are pretty good too.

There was a hole in the rock and Daddy said we said we had to go through the hole to get to the cave. I told him I didn't think he could fit and I didn't want to go alone. He laughed and said of course he could fit and asked me if I was ready. I didn't say anything. I kept looking at that hole in the rock. It looked like a giant mouth.

Daddy said I just had to be brave and that nothing in there could hurt me.

“Nothing’s scarier than your Dad!” he said

And then he growled and gave me a bear hug and tickled me and I laughed until I couldn’t breath and said stop.

Daddy said he’d go first. The hole didn’t look so scary with Daddy’s head popping through and he helped me climb in. I remember it was wet and dark and smelled funny, like when the basement flooded. But mostly I remember Daddy’s hand around mine as we walked away from the light into the darkness.

We had come to see the bats. I said I want to see bats and that I wasn’t afraid of them. But I was a little. Batman is my favorite and Daddy read me the comic book. I dressed up as Batman for Halloween. Mama made my cape.

I heard a squeak and Daddy squeezed my hand. It was a bat squeak. Daddy clicked on the flashlight under his chin and I said you don’t scare me.

He laughed and pointed the light to the ceiling and said, “How about them?”

I shook my head no, but Daddy wasn’t looking. We were both looking up at the ceiling at all the dark spots hanging there. They were sleeping because bats sleep during the daytime and wake up at night.

Daddy let go of my hand to get a better look at the ceiling and I didn’t want him to, but I didn’t say so. He wasn’t looking because he was looking up at the black spots. He wasn’t watching his feet.

Then suddenly he was falling and yelling and everything went black.

I couldn’t move, and then I could, and I ran, and something hit my head, and then my head hit something, and

I started crying and covered my head with my hands to keep the bats out of my hair.

I screamed and screamed and then there was the light flying everywhere, then it stopped on my shoes, and then Daddy's arms were around me. I hid my face in his chest and he carried me. We went back to the hole in the rock and back into the light.

I saw blood on Daddy's hand but it wasn't his blood. It was my blood. I got scared but Daddy kept saying, "Just a scratch, just a scratch" and "You're ok, you're ok."

My face was all wet from crying. Daddy wiped my nose with his sleeve. He wiped his bloody hand on the grass. Daddy grabbed my shoulders and looked at my face.

"Batman was scared too," he said, "but it made him brave."

And I said it made him into a hero and Daddy said that's right and he kept looking at me for a while. And then he asked if I wanted to ride home on his shoulders. And that's my favorite so I said yes.

When we got home Mama was coming back from the garden with her arms full of lavender because it's her favorite. She saw my head and dropped all the flowers on the ground and asked what happened.

Daddy said it was just a little bump and Mama gave him a scary look and bit her lip.

She said are you okay, baby and got a towel and ice. We ate dinner and Mama said time for bed. She asked if I wanted a story and I said I want Daddy to tell me a story. She said fine and Daddy came in instead.

He read me Batman and said goodnight my little hero and turned out the light.

I was almost asleep but then I heard noises. Mama was yelling. Daddy said calm down but she just yelled and yelled. Then something went smash like when I broke the window by accident with a rock once. Daddy yelled a word I didn't understand.

Then the door slammed.

Then the truck started.

I heard footsteps and I turned my head and squeezed my eyes shut tight. The door creaked and I opened my eyes just a little bit. There was a yellow triangle on the wall. It stayed there for a minute.

Then the door closed and the triangle went away.

\*

I was still sitting in the box when Mama came into my room and said what are you doing?

I said I wasn't going to move and she couldn't make me. She pulled me out of the box and said we were moving and that's it and I pushed her and said I hate you and that I was going to go get Daddy so he could come with us.

I ran out the front door and down the road. I knew where he was. I ran past the Humphrey Farm and the place where Daddy used to walk me to the bus stop. I ran and ran and ran and then I started crying but I kept running.

Then I was there and I pushed open the gate and ran to the end of the first row.

He was there but he wasn't there. Just a big grey stone. But I hugged it anyway and cried some more and said I wasn't brave enough to be a hero.

And then Mama came with her arms filled with lavender and she laid it on the ground and hugged me and said I know I know I know.



"Served" by Bailey Zahniser

# THE CONTRACT

BY BETHANY KAYLOR

This familial agreement (Agreement) is entered into this 2nd day of April, 2022, by and between the Kaylors (Family), and Bethany Kaylor, writer and daughter (Daughter), in consideration of the mutual promises made herein, as follows:

## Term of Agreement

This Agreement will become effective on the 2nd day of April, 2022, and will continue in perpetuity until Daughter finds whatever it is she's looking for.

## Services to be Rendered by Contractor

Daughter agrees to provide the following services:

- ❖ Write the truth about her childhood, including the hard parts: the eating disorder, the depression, the latent queerness
  - ❖ Write the truth about her childhood, including the happy parts
  - ❖ Use fake names when appropriate
- 

## Method of Performing Services

Daughter will determine the method, details, and means of performing the above-described services, including the hounding of family members for memories and details. The Family may not control, direct or otherwise supervise Daughter's efforts in performance of those services, although they are permitted to protest and avoid long-distance phone calls if necessary.

## Compensation

In consideration for the services to be performed by Daughter, Family agrees to begrudgingly allow Daughter the satisfaction of the completion of the work to be performed. In return, Daughter will try to extinguish her navel-gazing and will stop using "But it's art!" as an excuse.

### Tools and Instruments

Daughter will supply all tools, equipment and supplies required to perform the services under this Agreement, including weekly sessions with an excellent (if expensive) therapist, a boatload of antidepressants, and a daily journal.

### Workers Compensation

Daughter agrees to proceed at her own risk. She will not hold Family accountable for her own conclusions, nor will she deny them their own versions of the truth.

### Insurance

Daughter agrees to maintain privacy by changing names, dates, and locations if necessary. She understands the years it may take to recover from certain wounds.

### Obligations of Corporation

Family agrees to meet the terms of all reasonable requests of Daughter necessary to the performance of Daughter's duties under this Agreement. However, there are limits to what Daughter can expect: for instance, Mother will likely evade questions of her childhood, especially those pertaining to her fraught relationship with her own mother. Brother will roll his eyes. Father will ask if she's still seeing a counselor, then quickly change the subject.

### Termination of Agreement

Notwithstanding any other provisions of this Agreement, either party hereto may terminate this Agreement at any time. In the case that Family may forbid certain details and stories, Daughter will add a few bells and whistles and call it 'fiction.'

## **General Provisions**

### Notices

Any notices to be given hereunder by either party to the other may be made through conversation or email. Notices delivered passive-aggressively will be ignored, as will biting remarks.

### Entire Agreement

Each party to this Agreement acknowledges that no representations, inducements, promises or agreements, orally or otherwise, have been made by any party, and that no other agreement, statement, or promise not contained in this Agreement shall be valid or binding. Any modification of this Agreement will be effective only if it is in writing signed by the party to be charged, and not during a drunken Christmas party.

### Governing Law

This Agreement shall be governed by and construed in accordance between familial love and personal boundaries.



# A LONE SURVIVAL

BY MEGHAN ROBINS

A blue jay's cry echoed across the alpine lake. "I thought you were dead," Anthony said, lost in the bright orange reflection. Layers of clouds bubbled over the mountains, transforming them from shadowy blue to silvery iridescent. Sunlight drew a line across the canyon, the curtain call of sunrise. Within moments the chill night disappeared, and Anthony and Bernardo were engulfed in morning's warmth, sitting on a granite slab. Anthony touched his brother's arm. He couldn't help it. "What happened?" he said.

Bernardo reached his hands to his face and remembered that both were broken. Hidden beneath his thigh, away from his brother's view, he felt two leather pouches. "Last night when we ran," Bernardo said, "I couldn't find you in the dark. Like a fool, I clunked straight into a low burlled branch and knocked myself out. The pain in my hands, what those bastards did to me, and you were running too fast... When I came to, I was no longer in the forest but on this rock, overlooking the lake. A rustling in the brush jerked me upright. My body ached and I knew that I'd let whatever was coming take me. I was too hurt, too tired, and then out walked a man. His long black hair looked blue in the moonlight, his face unwelcoming. He threw a string of trout on the granite next to me, small ones, seven or eight inches. He collected sticks, took a tuft of grass from his belt and

made a fire. As the moon rose higher, a breeze followed, pushing mosquitoes away from my bloodied face. The flies, though, still chewed my deformed knuckles.

“I watched him—not certain I could call him a friend—prepare what I hoped was food for both of us. My stomach knotted and the remnants of last night’s whiskey threatened a revival. My mouth was so swollen, I feared nothing would get in or out and I would drown in my own vomit. Across the lake, the moon was so bright, the lake so magnificent. I breathed in fresh air, which settled me. I wanted to lay down but wasn’t sure what this man would do. I wasn’t certain he was there, or was I? The warmth of the fire crusted my cheeks. When I awoke, the sun was well overhead and the man was gone. I tried sitting up, but my body wouldn’t respond. All I could think of was water. I could hear a stream trickling, maybe thirty feet yonder. It was small, but it roared like a giant waterfall out of reach. My tongue swelled, my throat closed up, precious tears poured from my stinging eyes.

“I think I died, listening to that pristine mountain water rushing away from me when all I needed was a sip. I lay there, accepting my death and I thought of you, brother. I thought of water. I thought what fools we were to rob those men. I closed my eyes and an image of you came. You were laughing because I’d hitched our donkey with the oxen’s yoke. You laughed and laughed before showing me the proper way. You grabbed the yoke like it weighed nothing at all and pushed my head down like you always do. I dreamt of how we moved west after mother and father died. How relieved you were, no longer bound to what you did not love. You were a better farmer than him or me, but you wanted adventure, to be a pioneer. So here we are.



"little whale fall" by Quin Nelson

“Then something licked my face, sniffed, nuzzled my hair. My eyes cracked open to a wet black muzzle. A dog, perhaps, but it smelled horrible. Maybe that was me. His nose searched my body, paws stepped violently on my stomach. I grimaced and he jumped back. I could see him more clearly. His matted hair gave him a deathly, skinny look. I groaned. He growled. Lips peeled off pink gums and white fangs. His eyes were black and angry and desperate. I looked at his paws spread two feet apart. This was no friend of mine.

“I struggled to my elbows, puffing a vile breath that cracked my lips, warm blood spurting down my chin. His hackles laid down; his lips sheathed those mighty fangs. I couldn’t decide if he was coyote or wolf. I can’t remember which live in this region. His black mangle shimmered blue in the moonlight. ‘I’m sorry,’ I said, feeling disappointed and exhaling another foul breath. He crunched his nose, huffed

and sneezed. Then we heard voices, your voice, and he ran into the underbrush. That's when I noticed the small black smudge on the granite. The fire. The fish! My eyes widened, pushing against the swelling in my sockets. The man had left me, cruelly cooking beside me then leaving? He must have thought I died. Then I saw a small pile of rocks, that one just there, stacked so unnaturally. With my last ounce of energy, I pulled myself over. Halfway, exhausted by trial, I lay down. No, I thought and made myself get there. Scattering the rocks with my better hand, I found two leather pouches. One held the sweetest cooked trout I've ever tasted. The other was miraculously full of water. It saved me, brother. That's what saved me."

Anthony shook his head. There were no scattered rocks nearby, no stream or waterfall just out of reach, no black smudging the rock, no leather pouches. Just his brother's gashed up face and broken hands. "I don't understand" Anthony said. "Who saved you?"

"The man, the coyote," Bernardo said, looking past Anthony at the stones so clearly there, the burn-marked granite. There in the underbrush a glint of shimmering black hair flickered then disappeared. "Look, he's come back," Bernardo said.

Anthony followed his brother's gaze. "There's nothing there," he said.

Bernardo reached for the leather pouches, with bones cracked at the knuckle. But like his brother said, there was nothing there.

# FIGURES

BY ADIE BOVEE

## FIGURES

disappearing the outline  
of my body.  
disappearing the names  
the false gods of parts  
posture & language.  
disappearing figures  
as form or function  
or fact. disappearing  
math, disappearing  
counting.  
disappearing the window  
in the wall, disappearing  
the sound traveling  
through it, disappearing  
the listening street.  
disappearing revision  
disappearing grammar.  
disappearing erasers  
using pen, inking  
the sheets.  
disappearing subject &  
object, disappearing  
reception. disappearing  
coolness & hotness  
& temperature.  
feeling sweat  
disappearing the way  
I thought I  
would be alone.



"Disappearing Figures" by Jesse Shofner



# MOTHER

BY BAILEY ZAHNISER

# SCRIBBLE MOON

BY CLAIRE BRISLIN

“Have you seen the Kawano?”

Morgan’s eyes find mine in a moment of panic.

“The..what?”

“The Kawano,” my mother repeats, sounding out each syllable like a kindergarten teacher. “I-chi-ka Ka-wa-no?”

I can see Morgan raking her brain for information nowhere to be found.

“It’s here in the sunroom,” I say, scooping Morgan’s arm in mine as I guide her down the hall to my favorite room.

I can hear my mother following, the click-clack of black leather heels on the tiled floor.

“Oh wow,” Morgan lets out a breath as she takes in the space.

I watch her eyes travel along the white stucco walls to the teakwood buttresses curving upward, panels of glass letting in the warm glow of late afternoon. At the center of the room is a freshly-painted fountain, the can of cream-yellow paint still sitting on a drop cloth. Topping the fountain is a bronze sculpture of a dancer arching so far backwards she would splash into the water if her one foot wasn’t cemented to the stone.

I drop Morgan’s elbow and slide my fingers between hers instead, tugging her along to my mother’s pride and joy, a painting mounted above a koi pond covered in deep teal tiles where a dozen black, white and orange koi fish swim their slow perpetual circles.

“Oh, I love it!” Morgan says in her cheerful way. Her voice echoes across the room. “It’s so *cute!*”



I close my eyes at the word “cute” and brace myself.

My mother’s lips purse, but she doesn’t immediately say anything, which somehow causes me more anxiety than relief.

I feel Morgan begin to turn her body to continue exploring the room, but I stiffen my arm and squeeze her hand. I know that she hasn’t examined this painting long enough. She squeezes my hand back and relaxes her petite frame into my side, understanding me like she always does.

I peer over every inch of the painting for the thousandth time. Two cranes stand among reeds in water reflecting a pink and purple sunset. They are staggered and back to back, their curved necks arching to make an almost-heart and gazing at one another with intense, beady eyes. The one on the right looks down upon its partner, whose head is twisted upside down. Their beaks point towards each other but do not touch.

“So you really haven’t heard of Ichika Kawano?” my mother finally asks. “Surely as an artist you must have come across her in your studies?”

“Well, I’m really a graphic designer,” my babe says, not even missing a beat. “But this is quite beautiful, and it fits perfectly in this-”

“Ichika Kawano was so gifted that at the age of twelve her parents knew that continuing traditional education would be a waste of her time. She studied with the most talented artists at the Tokyo University of the Arts before attending the Royal College of Art in London at the age of sixteen. Lillian’s father and I happened to be in London for Kawano’s senior showcase and the moment I saw this painting I knew that it was the work of a true master. A name the global art world

would soon know and cherish. I purchased it on the spot and now it is valued at over *ten million dollars.*”

As usual, my mother finishes the last line of her speech with a flourish, as if pulling a cord to let loose the millions from a secret hatch in the ceiling.

Suddenly I’m back in the playroom, age eight, bent over a table painting with acrylic paints that are definitely not toxic-free. My mother walks up behind me to stare down at my work. She frowns. She asks me why my sun is just a yellow scribble. I tell her it’s a moon and its reflection is moving in the water. She sighs in disappointment like she will a thousand more times for a thousand more reasons.

“Wow,” says Morgan. “Well, you obviously have a great eye for-”

“The crane is actually a very important symbol in Japanese culture,” my mother goes on, sloshing what remains of her red wine around her absurdly large glass. “A symbol of happiness, good luck and longevity. And I’m sure you’ve heard of the legend of the 1,000 paper cranes-”

“Actually,” I say, my grip on Morgan’s hand tightening again, “Morgan is half-Japanese.”

I regret it the moment it comes out of my mouth. But only for an instant. The rare look of utter shock on my mother’s face fills me with an almost giddy delight. It’s torture trying not to smile as she opens her mouth, stills her whirling glass, and darts her eyes across every feature of Morgan’s face.

But, as usual, my mother recovers quickly, placing her empty hand on Morgan’s shoulder in a suddenly possessive way that makes me prickle.

“Well, then, I’m sure you must be the one to educate me,” she smiles, examining Morgan’s blond hair and dark

eyebrows with new suspicion and a question she's dying to ask.

When my mother's eyes light up, I know that I've made a mistake.

"We should have a cocktail party while you two are in town," she says. "Nothing fancy, just few family friends. I know they're all dying to catch up with dear Lillian and meet her very lovely partner."

My mother slips her arm into Morgan's and pulls her away from me, rattling on about wines and hors d'oeuvres and guestlists. Over the echo of my mother's heels I hear "sushi" and "sake" and "teriyaki." I can already hear the glee in her voice as she introduces everyone to her lesbian daughter's half-Japanese girlfriend.

I don't even hesitate as I pull the paintbrush from the can of cream-yellow paint. As I step up onto the ledge of the koi pond. As I furiously paint a scribble moon above those two evil birds.



# BRIDGE WOODS

BY CHRISTINA SCHUELER

# STRUCTURALLY SOUND SYMBIOSIS

BY MEGHAN ROBINS

There has come a time when one of us must conform. Symbiosis is our only hope. Our relationship already feels so far adrift that some might call it impossible to repair. But the time has come for reaching across the aisle, the abyss, the imaginary lines, which cannot be seen as a betrayal of one's kind but an act of selfless recuperation. That time has come now.

My plan was subtle at first: The willful burling of branches into trusses, trusting my efforts would support and be supported. I spun tendrils into vines, elongated new growth like highwires—the squirrels were elated. I communicated my plans through branches the way our roots have done for millennia. The way human wires have communicated for a laughable two hundred years. But humans only believe what they can see, so I forced my efforts above ground. I can't tell if you appreciate that. It's been so long since you've looked up, I mean really looked up, at the trees.

I'm sure when you look now, finally noticing my shaping so eerily square, my blocking of branches, my jointing of heartwood, all "calc'd to withstand substantial lateral forces," as they'd say, you humans will either call this a miracle, a gift from God, or somehow take credit yourselves. You'll say things like, "Our influence over the natural world is so great, Nature has started imitating us. Here here!" There will be studies done, statistics pulled, charts made (out of trees), and a new pride will sweep the human race. You'll claim that "Without our ingenuity, trees would never have formed these shapes, never reached across the divides, valleys, distances, such interconnectedness, such globalization. It's surely the

genius of our dominant engineering species. This is the greatest achievement of this or any administration!"

You will say, of course, that such soundness, such strategy is a purely human invention. Ingenuity comes from centuries of scholars, mathematicians, visionaries, risk takers calculated or otherwise. Forget the beavers, beehives, ant hills, and every species of nesting bird. Forget the spinning of webs and hardening of shells, the sequence of spirals credited to an Italian man rather than Mother Nature herself.

You'll forget somehow while looking at the understory built without human hands but for human benefit, built without destruction but growth, without axes and hammers and sawblades but with consideration that Nature is clever too, that all of us are looking at the future now. All of us are worried, wondering but more importantly acting. We are making changes the best way we can because when half my pinecones are scorched by the sun yet the other side is still raw and green, something must change.

You will likely ostentatiously take credit for this. And I will let you. I don't care.

Because dear humans, you are truly a blip on this timeline, a devastating yet extraordinary blip. My roots, my seed, my line have survived for thousands of years. Once upon a time, our symbiosis was real. Before our branches were bare, we produced pine nuts, acorns, pollen, and seeds. You leached our needles for tea, curled our fallen bark into roofs, and thanked us for curing your ailments. We gave you shade and protection and a sense of place. In return, once upon a time, you lit fires to un-strangle our bases from crowding bushes and our own eager offspring. You set fires to crack open our seeds. You tended the forest floors so all creatures, yourselves included, could see friend and foe at a

distance. Once upon a time, you pruned the world with careful hands. And back then, we spoke to one another in a language mutually agreed upon. The sounds were wind rattling my branches, the echo of birds in flight. That language is of the land from the land, but you have forgotten it. You have stopped listening. You no longer speak it. Without our shared language, we have ceased to coexist, and we have become the other.

I am reaching out in this new way, a desperate way. To save you from yourself and us from you as well. I'm reaching across the abyss and doing the improbable to survive.

For decades I have watched you build, chop, extract, build more, chop, build, extract more... If bridges are what you want, I will make your bridges. If skyscrapers are what you want, I will build those too. If saving humanity is what you prioritize, let me help. I am old enough to remember our once thriving interdependency. I am old enough to understand that helping one another is exactly how we survive.

I cannot endure this destruction without you. You cannot keep building without me. So let me speed up our timeline. We have what, twelve years? Let me take the reins, already slipping from your greasy palms. Permit me to grow regenerative structures that suit your calculations *and mine*.

And when we are done, when you are dead and decayed, when there is no more use for my burlled bridges and life-giving highlines, I will unwind my tethers, unclench my heartwood, and undo the construction you're so desperate to profit from.

Or... if you were to come back to me, to tend the forests like you once did, if you were to ask me what I want, we could sit down together. Spend time together. We could reach

across the abyss that gaps humans and nature. We could mend the taking with renewal, heal the resistance with regeneration, and curb this destruction with structurally sound symbiosis.

The choice is yours. I am offering a solution. I am reaching across with everything I have. Are you?





# HOPE, HARD

BY JESSE SHOFNER

# COLORDAO RIVER DELTA

BY SAM SCHILD

A rusted washer  
From the bottom of your toolbox  
Is oxygen from a time when you were

When there was air  
We were  
With lungs and hearts to find

Cottonwood  
Riparian wood  
Pressed wood for our houses

It flooded here when the river last swelled  
30 years ago  
An instant for our bones  
Forever for our roots  
30 years  
Since the steel started breathing  
Since we were washed

We ate fish in Yuma  
It left us retching  
In a motel  
That smelled of gasoline  
And cigarettes

Backward in time  
Downriver there was a flood

The wooden walls swelled and cracked  
The birds diving and splashing  
Our roots drinking

It is nothing now  
But rust  
Where nothing works  
Boats rusted  
Overgrown with Catclaw

We founded the town of Relocation  
With salvaged wire  
And cracked lips  
We built these walls  
Split, dry, in pieces  
We won't move again

We were thirsty and nothing worked  
Our roots drank deep  
We were dusty and nothing more  
Our roots drank  
We were thirsty and nothing else  
Our roots once  
We were mud and now we aren't

We were thirsty and now we're nothing  
Not waiting for the next one  
We were there but now we aren't  
Not breathing in the next one



# **WATER MAP 01**

BY QUIN NELSON

# COLOR THEORY

BY BETHANY KAYLOR

1. Let me begin by saying I don't know where color begins and where it ends. This is not a philosophical euphemism for something deep or emotional—it is simply the truth.

2. During a particularly bleak winter, I listened to Joni Mitchell's *Blue* album and cried a lot. A negative feedback cycle, it was unclear which spurred which.

3. Apply enough pressure to your eyes and small blooms of color will appear: phosphenes. The Greeks didn't know the effect was a result of electrical stimulation in the brain; naturally, they assumed it was fire within the eyeball.

4. My father is partially colorblind, which sounds horrible in theory but in reality just means his socks rarely match.

5. Many years ago, my brother and I were driving along the interstate when it began to pour. We crept along slowly, windshield wipers in furious motion. Within minutes, it was over, the pavement gilded with light. There was a rainbow in the distance, bright against the fading clouds. "Look at that reflection," I said, pointing. My brother was silent, hands tight against the wheel. "It's actually a refraction," he finally said, staring straight ahead, never once tearing his eyes from the road.



# YDESOGRL

BY LAURENNE ROSS

# I DID WHAT WAS NEEDED.

BY ADIE BOVEE

I did what was needed.

Since then the Moon  
shackled ice to my chest

Since then the Dog down the block  
dominated by one word

Since then the Sun  
an uncaring tongue

Slathers itself over everything  
the Horse

Making its way to my thigh  
I will drive myself from mountain to desert

With desire  
I will drive myself

Backwards.

I will drive myself  
With desire

I will drive myself from mountain to desert  
Making its way to my thigh

the Horse  
Slathers itself over everything

an uncaring tongue  
Since then the Sun

dominated by one word  
Since then the Dog down the block

shackled ice to my chest  
Since then the moon.

I did what was needed.





# ROOT ENERGY

BY TOMMY FORD & MARY ELLEN FORD

# AN ECHO IN THE DARKNESS

BY KORBI THALHAMMER

It was one of those mornings Lars simply couldn't stand. Hot and sticky since before dawn, the late spring air, with the addition of the sun, had grown positively oppressive. Lars danced between scraps of awning shade at the market until he reached the edge of the park, where sodden lawn suddenly gave way to crispy grassland. Someone shouted "Hullooo!" and Lars whipped around, afraid he'd been discovered before he'd even begun. But the person was calling to someone else's dog and hadn't noticed the boy standing in the sun, holding a dark sweatshirt and staring out across the plain toward the water reclamation plant and the distant interstate beyond.

Glancing quickly behind himself, Lars took one or two halting steps then bounded into the thicket. Immediately, the noise of the market was lost in the insistent rustle of dry grass against his hips. Burrs clung to the hairs on his legs. The sun rose higher as he crunched quickly along, and Lars could feel its strength pressing upon his forehead. He wondered whether his parents were awake yet. Surely they must have noticed his "little escapades," as they referred to them, had become more frequent as summer neared.

Lars' parents paid him exactly the wrong kind of attention. They always wanted to know where he'd been and what he'd been up to, but when he tried to explain to them that he'd been exploring the trusses under a bridge or poking around the abandoned city incinerator, they grew suspicious and checked his hands for signs of spray paint. Curfews hadn't worked, so twice now they had surprised him with drug tests

at home. Both times the results had come back clean. Even so, they were convinced he'd fooled the test with the dog's pee or by some more clever mechanism -- he was, after all, a smart kid. Even his parents couldn't argue with the generous scholarship offers that had been arriving in a steady stream all spring.

Soon Lars encountered his first obstacle: a chain link fence still in sight of the market. He stretched out his arms and, feigning nonchalance, took a slow, sweeping turn, stretching his back and surveying the trampled path by which he'd come. The market was still humming away. Behind it, drab stucco made the subdivision appear as anthills looming on the horizon. Now and then, Lars could make out the obnoxious laugh of his too-friendly neighbor. He almost sounded like a dog from here.

Lars tossed the sweatshirt ahead of himself, then placed a toe into a wire diamond and pressed up and over the sharp edge of the fence. Landing softly on the far side, he crouched in the grass for a moment to ensure no one had seen him. The sweet scent of dry grass, so pleasant at first, was quickly overwhelmed by something vile. Lars lifted his shoe and grimaced with disgust at the waffle of dog poop pasted to the sole. Desperate for fresh air and satisfied he hadn't been seen, Lars stood, turned away from the fence and continued tramping through the grass.

His goal was in sight: a stately walnut branched up from the edge of the reclamation plant. But to reach it he had to surmount the levee encircling the catchment pond. Beyond the levee, the plant had security cameras. Who watched those cameras (if anyone) early on a Sunday Lars didn't know. What he did know was that his heart now beat harder than it had just a few weeks prior when he'd last visited the plant.

Just before his eighteenth birthday, his parents had had a long (and far too serious, as far as Lars was concerned) discussion with him about the implications of trespassing charges against a young adult. “But I don’t do anything bad once I’m inside,” Lars insisted.

“It doesn’t matter what you don’t do,” his mother had admonished him. “You’re doing something wrong just by being in these places!”

“Do you really want to throw away these opportunities, Lars?” His dad had continued, holding up a spray of scholarship offers like a fan, “You have a chance to really do something special.”

Lars had burst out of the house that night and run to the old river pier. He’d skipped rocks and watched crawdads jetting around the dark riverbed until the police found him at dawn and returned him to his tearful parents.

At the base of the levee, Lars summoned his courage and returned to his old strategy. He pulled on the dark sweatshirt and cinched the hood down so that his vision tightened to just the small golden patch of grass ahead of him. The heat was unbearable. He swept his line of sight across the barren levee. If someone were to see him, this would be the place.

Lars took one last look behind himself then scrambled up the gravel embankment. He skidded across the top and down the far side and jumped behind the walnut tree. Peeking out from behind the trunk, he could see the cameras on their high posts. But he knew he was home free. Slinking low around the base of the tree, he swung himself into the massive concrete tunnel that drained the park.

Instantly he felt the cool rush of underground air. A steady stream of sprinkler runoff coursed through the center of the tunnel and burbled behind him as it drained into the

catchment pond. The walnut tree had pressed its roots through the cracks in the tunnel ceiling. They now hung like a tapestry just inside the entrance. With a shiver, Lars pressed through the curtain of roots and turned to admire them. He let out a long sigh. His breath condensed in a silvery mist and mingled with the roots, backlit by the glare of the sun outside. A frog croaked from the depths of the tunnel and Lars croaked back, listening for an echo in the darkness.