



Acts of Resilience II

A WCC Anthology Edited by Tom Zimmerman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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www.wccnet.edu/library

wccpoetryclub.wordpress.com

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www.wccnet.edu/engage/sustainable/sustainability-literacy-task-force.php

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Zaina Al Habash

Acts of Resilience: Pandora's Box

Through the path of deceit, resilience uncovers Pandora's box
seeing the cost of deception broken into little fragments of glass vase
beyond the dark blue skies fading fast and slow, calm and steady.

Acts of resilience show power and grace standing tall and high.
not afraid of what is coming towards you or behind you.
It is visible to the sight of resilience and control of destiny.

Once again acts of resilience prove that we all can show bravery.
Then and now, power of resilience never fades: it soars high
through the doors to make way for the path of resilience, closing Pandora's box.

NAOMI JOHNSON

Bloom

My orchid used to sit in a south-facing window
This allowed her to drink in more than 12 hours of light a day
Orchids, ever temperamental, will wilt with loss of appropriate sunlight
This orchid was one of my proudest achievements
Striking yellow petals that met in a purple center
Her stem was taller than Mount Everest and stronger than it too
In 2020 I killed the girl I used to be
I let the petals of my personality wilt
And I no longer watered my soul
my roots slowly shriveled
Around the same time, I let my orchid die
I let her go weeks without watering her soil
And I left my heater running at 90 degrees
The space in my window that was hers for so long holds nothing but an empty
planter now
Sometimes when the sun shines just right through the curtains I can almost see
her
It's been two years now
And I'm still learning to bloom
To allow every part of me to be seen wholly
Every day comes with the possibility of destruction
But regardless I allow my petals to open
I allow the world to see me
Yesterday when I woke up
My orchid was sitting in the south-facing window
The planter is no longer empty
My friends say I'm smiling more
And that it's nice to see that I'm back to being me
I tell them that I am me
But there has been no "back"

ANONYMOUS

Breaking point

I look at him with disgust in my eyes.
His arms aren't strong enough,
shoulders not broad enough.

His hair doesn't curl the right way,
his teeth aren't white enough.

And there's pain in the bags under his eyes,
pain from what?

He has no right to feel pain.
He has a good life.

He's always smiling and laughing,
how could he feel pain?

He's ungrateful,
he's unworthy.

I hate him.
I'd smoke him right where he stands.
But I'd only break my hand in the mirror.

Every 68 Seconds

My grandmother. My mother. My aunts, both of them. My best friend. My roommate. My roommate's mom. My little sister. My older sibling before they transitioned, and after. My cousin. My other cousin. Another dozen cousins probably. The woman down the hall. Someone's daughter across the street. My boss. My co-worker. My old teacher. My classmate. This girl I graduated with. Statistically, one of my preschool students. My brother's best friend's girlfriend made a whole podcast about it. My friend's friend our senior year even got the cops involved. Nothing happened though. My role-model. My favorite singer. My girlfriend. He said he could "turn her." It didn't work. My ex-best friend. Every single one of us in the high school drama club. Myself included.



Tom Zimmerman

Four and a half years!

She said she fell
A common occurrence during our 30 years
We met on the mat at a martial arts class
Where falling (and falling well) was a prerequisite
And outside of class there were regular mishaps
A trip, or slip
A dropped item or knocked over stack

I had slowly learned to not overreact
To not caution her every step
To not suggest she pay attention
To not ask her to be more careful
To not run to her side to soothe

The injuries and damage were minor
Compared to her embarrassment
Usually a bruise
Maybe a scrape
Nothing more
than basic first aid

But this fall was different
She landed hard and broke her collarbone.
She would need a half dozen screws
And a bracket

Healing was slow this time
A sling

No lifting
Xrays
Physical therapy
Microfractures
For months
and months

Over our time together,
Angela has collected DXs
A lazy autoimmune disorder
Anemia ended blood donation
But brittle bones were new

A warning heeded
To cut back
To reassess
And make room for joy

I advised my employer
hours were reduced
Trips were planned
Japan, Poland, Israel, Cuba, Scandinavia
Canyons, gorges, absent elk, art deco public works
Tables covered with small plates
More physical therapy

At last, the bracket came out
With its companion fasteners
The sling retired to a drawer
But...the arm was still weak

Be patient they advised
The nerves will recover
The strength will return
Time will mend the damage
But patience was not rewarded

Time past and they wanted to listen on the wires
For the signal to the muscles
They listened carefully
Probing deliberately

The signals were disorganized and getting quieter
And there was no way to stop the process
Her motor neurons
All of them
Were slowly dying
And so...would...she...



John Hritz



Natalie Stringham

God's Cathedral

In God's Cathedral the horizon
encircles me inside,
where the land breaks into alternating patterns
of yellow corn and tawny wheat.
Looking into the distance I see
the small brown blurs of deer
grazing quietly watching carefully
as tails twitch and ears pivot this way and that.

As I watch from afar, my heart blooms.
This subtle dance of nature
Reawakens something that I lost,
Or pushed aside
Something that lingers now
If not long before my eyes, deep within.

I shake myself from stupor and wonder
how could I have forgotten this halo of horizon.
Look around!
How small I feel in the vastness
yet how safe and sheltered in this homeland
far outside the cities to which I ran.

The towering corn and the undulating wheat
beckon me toward the awaiting labyrinth.
The twists and turns of my ancestry
that haunt these sacred lands.

My ancestors in the morning early
collecting the milk to feed the babes.
Later toiling,
to recycle all that has come and gone before.
My ancestors
with heavy heels winding their way
through the alternating patterns of maize and grain.

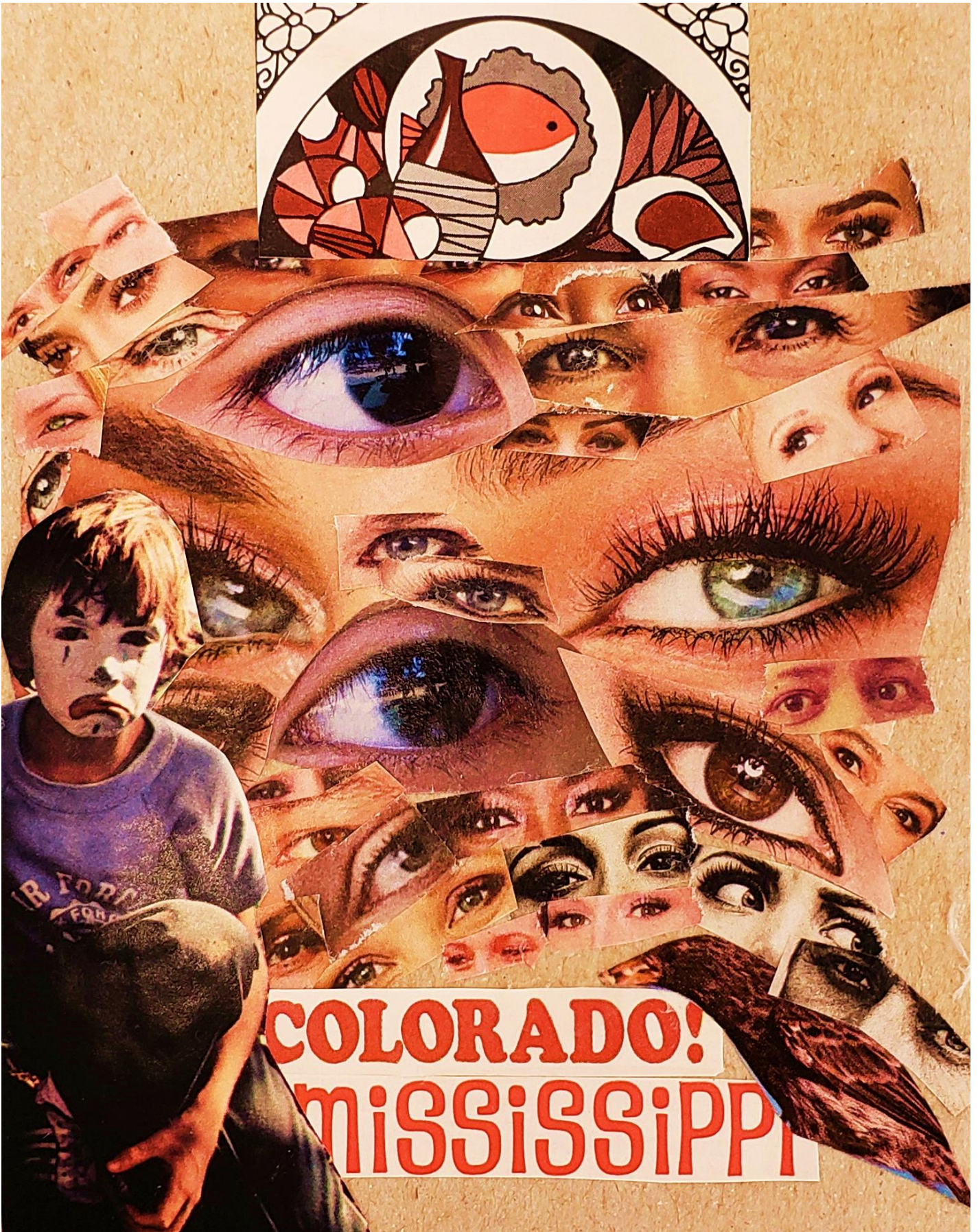
In the center lies the fallen
and the resurrected
the dreams obtained, relinquished, forgotten or reborn
where before the rest they fell to bended knees,
a plea for answers in a world of mystery.
God's Cathedral.

Far outside the cities to which I ran
 how humble I feel inside this cradle of The All.
How long the horizon stretches
 under the blanket of periwinkle blue
tented above the family strife
 where joy muted and love strained at times.
Many times.
I am returned and choose to remember now.

The place where my ancestors collected the pure, warm milk
 early in the morning to feed the babes
toiled the earth daily sunrise to sunset
 recycling again and again what has come and gone before.

They lived their lives
 as humans we often do,
wrestling with the cycles of life.
Individuals grasping for purpose
 Hungry for a pathway of their own
through the alternating patterns of maize and grain.

The tall corn beckons me to enter
 the labyrinth within
 the twists and turns of my ancestry
embraced now
 yet once driven far away from
God's Cathedral.



Lisa Balasa

Half-way Back to God

Some of the moving parts
didn't make it into the hopper
when God shook out my body,
constructed my soul, made me human.

I feel that my brain is only half-working
some days—putting my mind in a haze
that gives me half answers, half words,
half knowing, half confidence.

And the half-world I can no longer hear
holds the key to navigation—the secret
to walking the line, not bumping into walls
or falling over unexpectedly.

I've been given only half of what I need
to know about caring for someone who needs
more than half of me for support. Where can I find
more compassion, more courage, more honesty?

I am half-finished. I've only just begun
something meaningful, to figure out what I believe,
to speak candidly about my doubts, my fears.
I'm only half-way back to God.

Hands

I do everything with my right hand
I eat
I draw
I write
On the other hand,
I have no use for my left
I wish I were ambidextrous
Then I could both of my hands to good use

But, perhaps I already have

Lifting up heavy things

Scrubbing shampoo into my hair,
Running conditioner through the ends
Drying it with a towel

Painting my nails
Trimming them

Embracing the people I love

None of these things can be done with one hand alone
There must be another
That other hand may not do as much as the first
But perhaps it is just as important

I do everything with my right hand
And my left

I Look Back Over My Shoulder

I look back over my shoulder and I see
a torn page that lies on the floor leaking words
that tried to become a line, a stanza, perhaps.

It resembles the crumpled soul
of a would-be poet,
the one who doggedly draws

keen images without frills,
raw emotions without psycho-babble,
astute thought without duplicity.

The poet who waits on the pen
to fill again with what the universe
wants her to know.

The poet who gathers her script from
the outer world so her inner world can show up.
So here it lies, crumpled and torn.

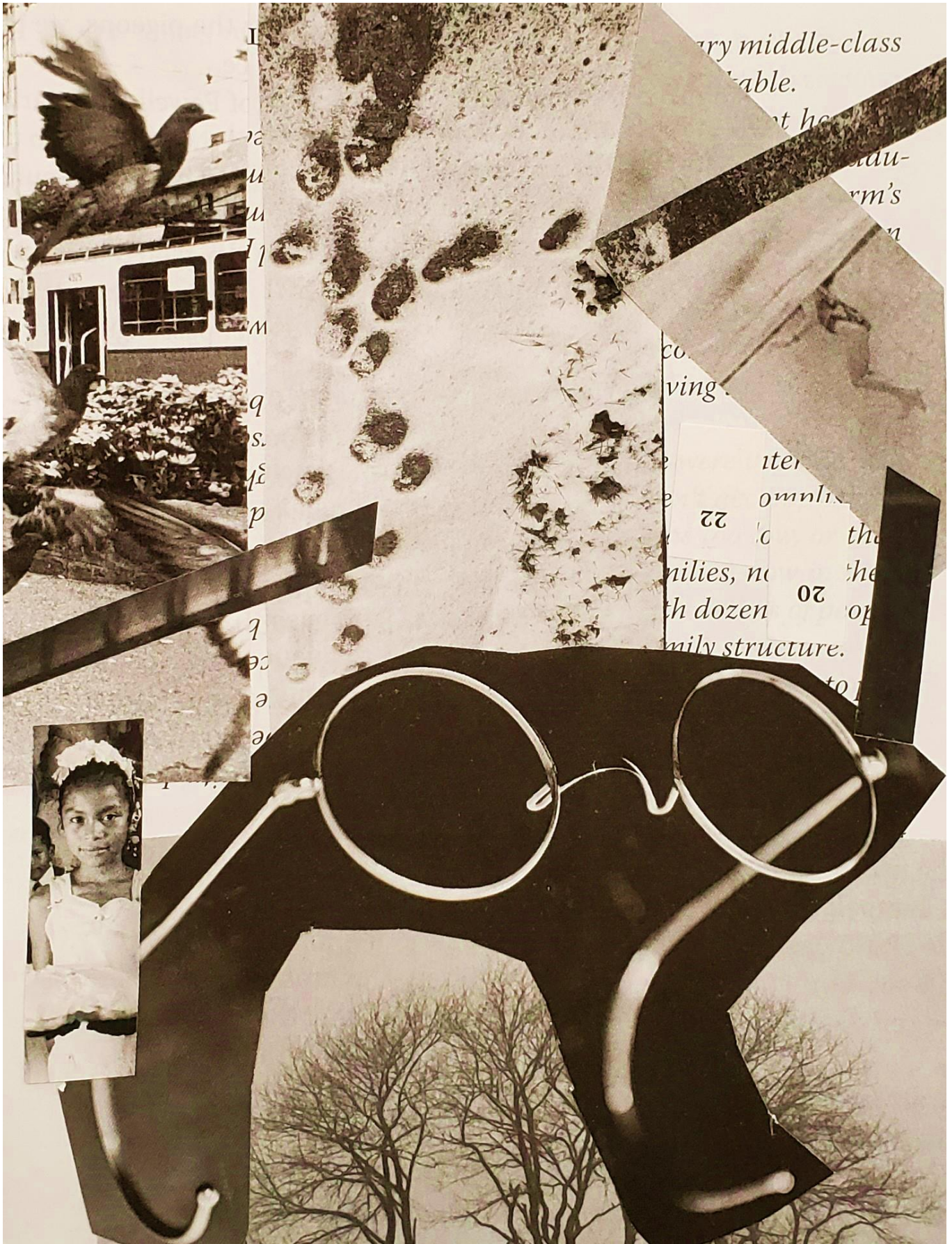
Only a few words survive whole, upright.
Others languish in an unfinished
purgatory—knowing a thing,

but struggling to capture
it in a snare of words, never able
to catch hold of the grace note,___

that one final key that unlocks
tragedy and makes us smile,
holds it up high to make us

laugh, translates it into an
understandable language that
dictates the color of the sky.

The torn page lies tortured and pale.
The poet picks up her aged pen,
begins again, travels on.



Tom Zimmerman

It's Raining in the Store

When I get home,
I sit in my car until my phone dies
skipping faces and forgetting places
I'm avoiding an entrance into me.

Because I just spent so much time putting on scenes
Talking to faces whose hearts I don't see.

I bet they'll find it hard to believe how good of a hugger I am
or how much time talking I spend
when I'm me.

But it's not that you're not a friend to me
I just have a hard time trusting you won't flee if I show you what's beneath
I just have a hard time hearing the bells you hold inside when we talk so
unsensitized

If you just showed me that you too want to fly
That you believe good things are meant to last
And the world is not just supply.

If your heart were not caged to my hug, then maybe we could use your tough and
my soft and

build a world of life at its core.

Then maybe you will see why I cry
Maybe you'll see why I've wished to die
And why it's so hard for me to thrive.

And why I keep so many unread messages on my phone...

Because you see, the things I say and don't mean
always find a place back in me.

and the things you say I don't hear
for fear of the never-stopping wheel ruling my peace.
To be honest I don't trust that from love you speak.
We talk about weather and shows but do you feel the rain in this store?
Dripping down these bright ass lights into boxes with cereal wrapped in unburied
dead stars,
It's pouring all down my spine!
Quick! Cover the pads because God forbid I let flow the blood that's mine
A clutter shall be designed!
We can use the register's electric bands
Just cut it with our human tools and monkey hands.

And take this bucket to Don Juan
He's been surviving here every month, and no one ever understood why he cries.
He'll know what to do for he was born with this brain to outshine.

But you tellin' me, nobody saw this coming?
Did you see the forecast for today?
A sunny sky and normal life you say?
Oh so now it's raining in the store and everyone is just gonna pretend it's a lie.

While all our heads are all wet yet theirs is dry?
The dead, soon to be thawed would have never let this happen.
But from us modern primates
Oil is leaking, blood we're dripping.
And my hands are red too.

But it's not my blood meant for soil and fruit
It's the lives of whose umbrellas we stole.
But now we're here, and it's raining inside the store.

And Your pants are soaked
And you don't believe in this hoax.
You say real men have balls,
and we just have to go to work,
and this whole "rain" thing is nothing but a plot.
While the others tell me this is all just so beyond.

But
my back is damp and cold
and our skin is folding closed,
and Don Juan already knows there's not supposed to be rain inside the stores and,
the things that we feel just cannot be ignored.

Like when the lights start flickering
and my car keys are jingling
Sinking me
The floor is all slippery
The beeping
My body is all twitching
I'm breathing inconsistently
Water and plastic have no past histories

but the drops of rain into the plastic wrapping for bundled sage
Sound like disdain
Like forks on a plate
Trains when its late
Abusers outside the cage
Bills unpaid

And that text never received: I made it home okay.

I am dramatically and visibly losing my shit and these LoFi chill beats ain't doing it
for me.

Because you see, I find no peace within.
While they find refuge in confusion and claim to build solutions
yet they're blocking the exits with thoughts, prayers, and pamphlets
with broken treaties and fake certificates
with paid abusers and statued thieves.

I'm trapped between intentions and excuses and
Don't know how to tell my therapist I'm lonely by my choosing
Because when I'm me and I talk about life, respect and vegan dulces,
I'm reminded of all that we're losing
wasting time with illusions

waiting for views and
a car and shining shoes I
don't know what to do.

You hear me freaking out and walk past me because I'm insane.

But Boy

Your shoes is dragging
How are you not crying?



Mae Bumpus

Know Me

You have shared part of my past
and some of the present.
All that time—in those moments,
You did not know me.

I did not know me.

I changed and changed daily.
I made mistakes and gained knowledge.
I learned by being aware,
I applied what I learned.
I grew spiritually,
and soothed my soul.

Living brings more mistakes.
I stumble less as I grow stronger.
Work. Time. Growth. Progress!
No, you do not know me now.

Through each step, for the better or not,
This person you knew—has changed!

Come, know me now.

The Last Shopping Trip

The month before my mother moves to the nursing home, we go through her clothes together. I write obituary

drafts she amends, corrects. On the last shopping trip, for the chair she takes with her, I wheel her into the store, watch as she

struggles to heft herself out of the wheelchair into one of the leather recliners.

She pushes up with her arms, which tremble

under the strain. She has to pivot quickly to place her bottom above the chair seat, but does not swung over far enough to set her

sciatica-riddled hips carefully down. It takes her ten tries to lift up out of the recliner and back into the wheelchair. I am powerless to help.

Tugging at her only hurts her. She has to do it all herself. When she is able to get into the second chair, the achievement feels like

success for the whole Gardner-White store. We sign the papers as she sits there.

She needs to rest to gain enough strength

to stand and pivot back into the wheelchair. I roll her back to the car, set the brakes before asking her to push up out of the chair,

in order to pivot and insert herself back into the car. Her sheer, fragile skin catches on the edge of the footrest, slicing a five-inch

tear on her shin. Blood floods her oversize white Velcro shoes to pool on the parking lot. She is crying. She gives one last desperate

heave to raise her body out of the chair, then starts to tip over, away from the car. From behind her, I thrust my arms under

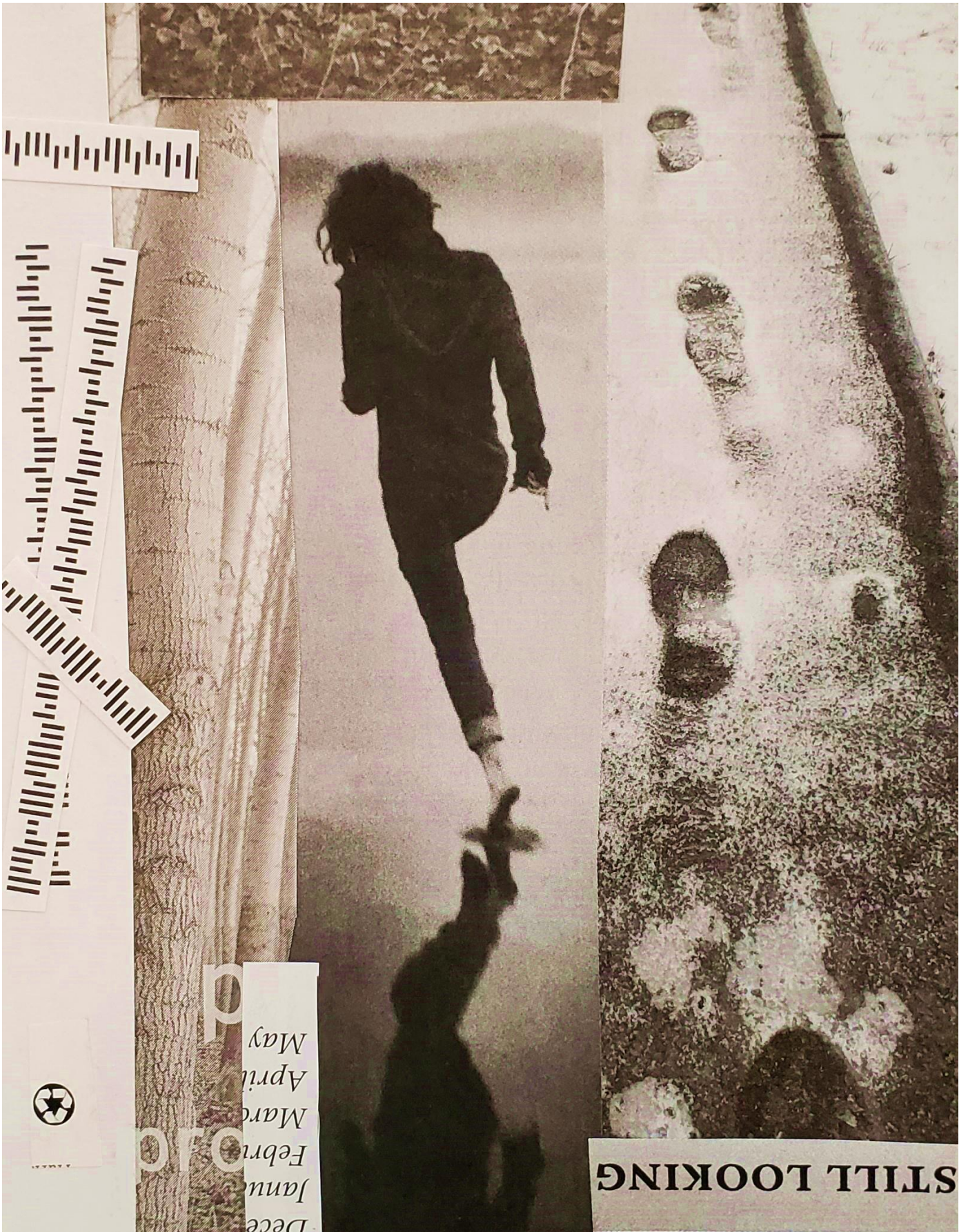
her armpits and keep them stiff as I haul her back toward and into the car, the furniture saleswoman in tears next to us. I tie

my handkerchief around her calf to try to stop the bleeding. As we drive away, I start crying too, apologize for leaving everything too late.

The next week she says *I feel like the world is saying good-bye to me, but I still like being here*

A Letter to My Son

I am not going to be perfect my son. I ask you to forgive me for not knowing what to do in advance. My mistakes will be rooted in ignorance, nevertheless, every decision I make will be planted with love. You are my first child, so I thought it best to give you, my name. My hope is that you wear it with joy and make the name your own. Again, I have never been a father before and no one told me that I would be responsible for your life. Of course, I had a general understanding of the fact that you would be completely dependent on me. However, those words were insufficient at best. I don't know what I don't know yet my son, but I do know this: I love you more than words could ever adequately express. My life is now transformed into a singularly focused mission to pave the way for your greatness. You are my son, and this letter is my promise to you.



Tom Zimmerman

Mirror

I am a mirror; I am broken, warped, and abandoned.

Strangers, family, friends. They take pieces they want and leave the rest.

I am shattered, reflecting the parts that no one wants. An ugly, misshapen thing—crawling and leaking and grotesque.

“Look at me.” I say. “Tell me I’m beautiful.”

He says I haven’t been hurt enough to feel like this. She says it could be worse. Maybe it will be worse.

I clutch the shattered pieces of myself tight, and the glass cuts my fingers. I try to put myself together, but the pieces don’t fit. I force them, make them look whole, but I fall apart again all the same.

She says I’m delinquent. He says he doesn’t recognize me. He shows me all the pieces he took. I don’t recognize me either.

I’m screaming now, glass grinding on glass, as my fingers scar and bleed. No one wants to listen. No one wants to look, to see the sin they wrought. They hold the pieces they stole, denying they belonged to me. Denying who I am.

He says I’m not his son. She says I’m frightening. I look at myself. Maybe I am frightening.

Then a hand reaches out, taking an ugly shard. It is jagged and cracked, and it shows a painful memory.

“It’s beautiful.” Says a voice. “Who would abandon this?”

Your hand holds mine, still cracked and bleeding, and helps me fit my pieces together. They don't quite fit, but you help me make more.

I go, still holding your hand, and take back my stolen shards.

My glass is cracked and flawed, but light dances within me. I am shining. I am radiant. I am a mirror.

A Now What World Redux

“NOW WHAT?,” world!
Her challenge echoing, reverberating,
seeking purchase and demanding reply.

Standing firm in the silence,
unbowed.
The unbothered world spinning past.

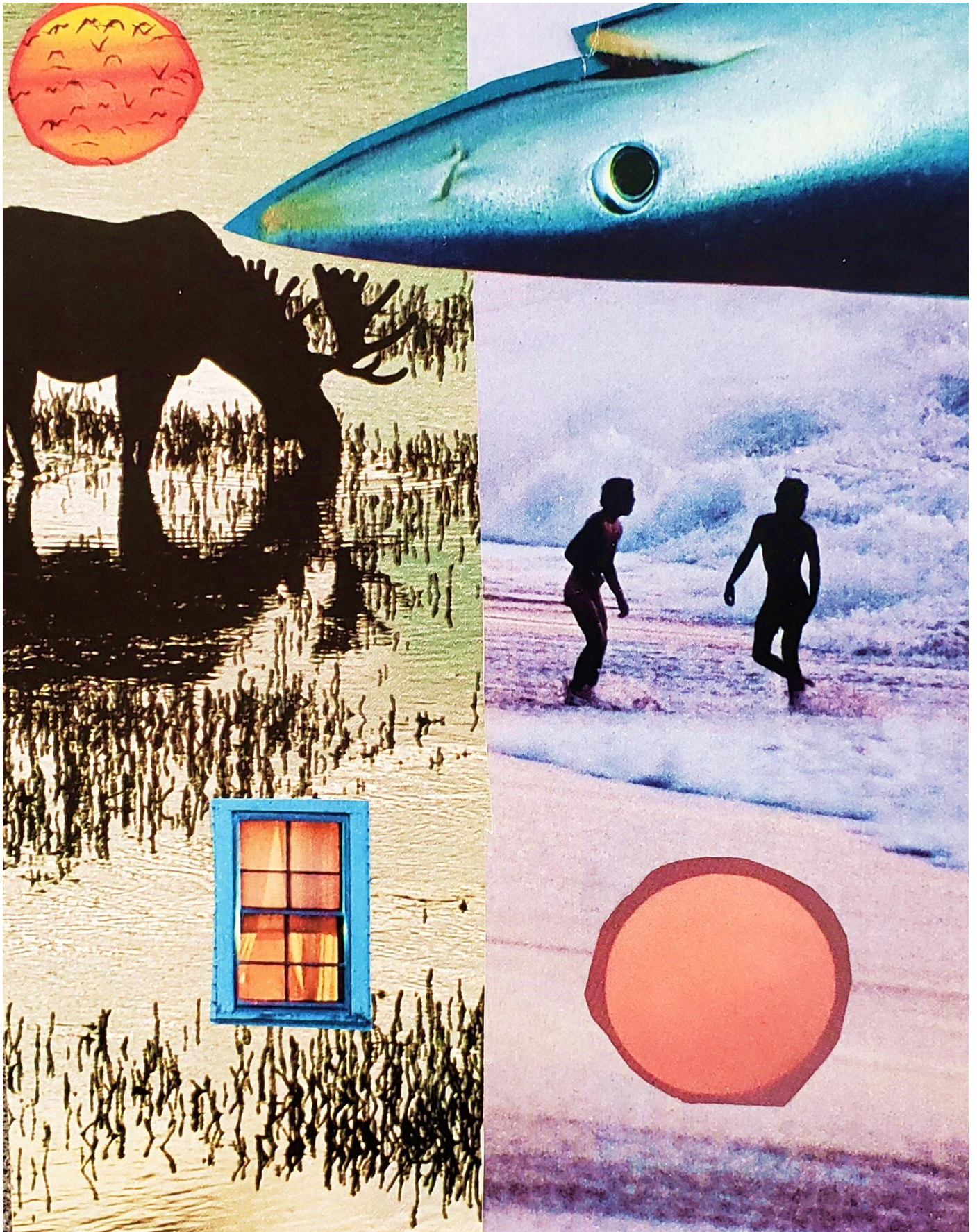
“NOW WHAT? WHAT ELSE YA GOT?”
Her defiance is her strength,
rooting her where nothing should grow.

Standing firm in the silence,
waiting.
All options exhausted.

She is here, standing firm,
unyielding.
Yelling into the void.

She is here, powerful,
resolute.
Reaching out, seeking.

She is here, steadfast,
daring.
Shaping the silence, defining triumph.



Tom Zimmerman

On the Other Hand

I feel like I've been leaning lately,
a few degrees to the right, compounded
over time, like a tree caught by a gale,
torn from its anchor, in a permanent tilt—
needy.

On the other hand, I feel stick-straight,
upright in every sense, never bowed, never
wavering, needing no support from
the family of man, or the family period—
like a rock.

I feel vulnerable to abuse and help alike,
as if I'm the only one who should know every detail,
every remedy, every nuance of the problem,
only me, thank you anyway—
I'm fine.

On the other hand, the farm girl in me
toes the line, faces the chore, the responsibility
with stiff upper lip, every ounce of strength
and a stubborn streak—
jaw set.

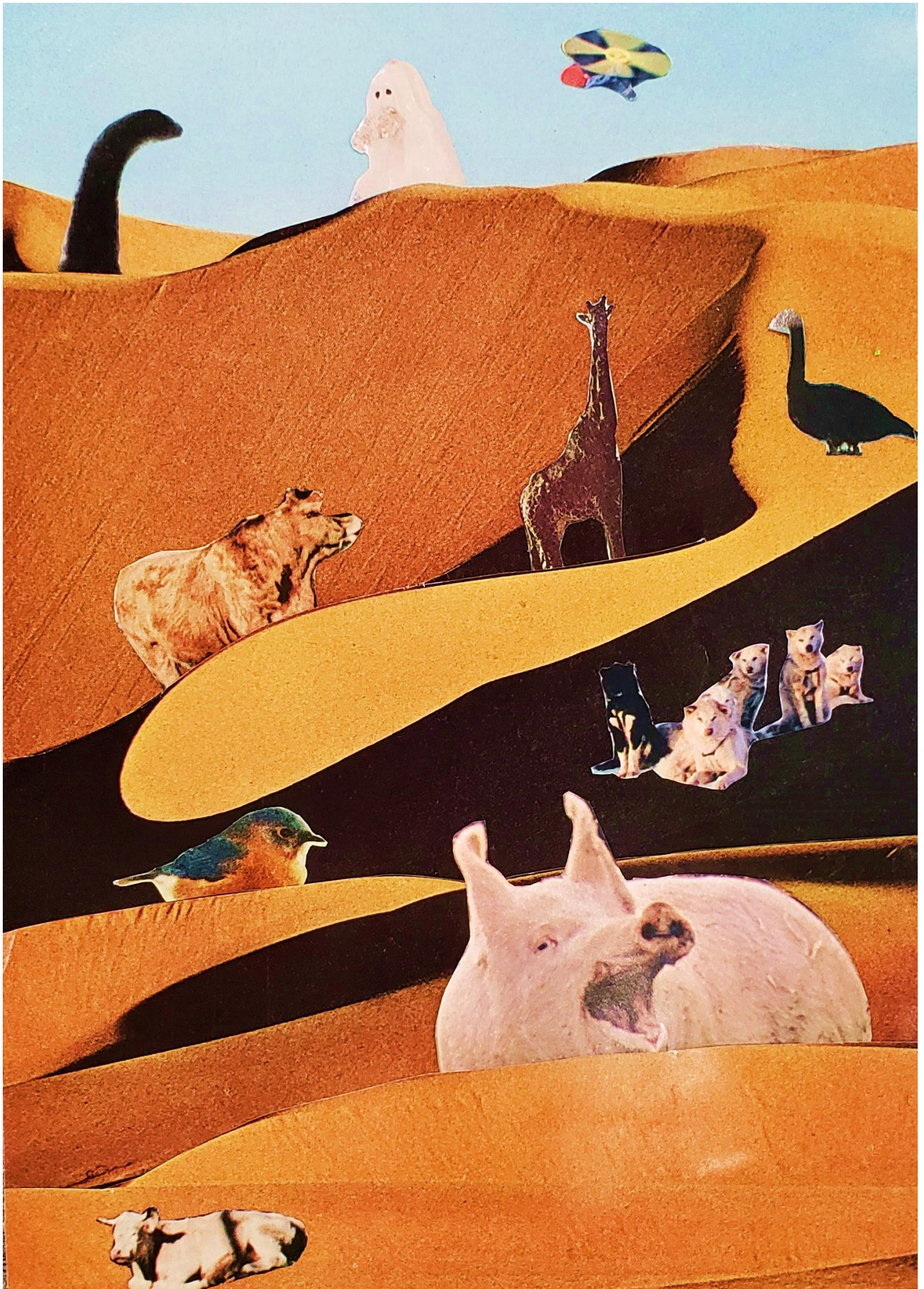
There are so many things to feel bad about
that sometimes a spontaneous cry
is all I can muster, and if I try to explain it
I get caught up in grief, pity, self-loathing—
a rut.

On the other hand, there are still so many things to be grateful for that I can jump out of a pity-party and sing praises for all we've got, the hand of a friend, a smile, a hug—salvation.

The naked truth is, there are good days and bad days, high spirits and utter fatigue, all mixed up together.

On the other hand, I have only to look at our world through a one-inch picture frame—only that.

On one hand, a bleak view and sorrowful thunder clouds.
On the other hand, a vibrant one inch rainbow.



Julie Ross

Quartet: What I Meant to Say

1
the west
wind
sings so zealously
I'm
within this
sound's strange
essence
waking lexicons
in open air

2
down furrows
up snowdrifts
at red tide
through floodplains
I have
dreamed
and some of me I've found
dancing, free

3
we
love
angels, flowers, women, goats,
and men
childlike ecstasy
people in love
figs and donkeys
earth's hot reds, heaven's blues

4
she
sighed
with daydreams I suppress
two parts us and one part
muse
under laden trees
we're abuzz with spirits
on our knees
in
paradise
now

EDITH MORRIS CROAKE

Ravagescape

Blustering winds brought bitter cold and rain.

Ice shards pierced my bark-skin, congealed, glistened.

Wet snow gloved my arms and fragile fingers,

Cloaked my tall, thin body.

In dark of night, the storm's insidious work began.

My quilled boughs bowed, broke,

Plummeted to the ground with thundering crashes

My cries drowned in a forest-chorus of wild groans.

My limbs wrenched from their sockets

Piled in mass graves

Where bones of fractured branches jutted upward

Through a thick snowy shroud.

I may be battered

Bent, bereft

But I

Still

Stand.

Recommended for Interior Use Only

found poem/paint chip

Designer BL-13 wrote on page 100:

that Job's Tears should start the day,
cleansing the air and washing away
all the sadness from Sarah's Garden
into the Quiet Pond that hatches Blue Eggs
into Blue Bliss-fishes that swim around
in free-schools and wonder
what all the bother is about.

They take the tears and hang them
from the trees every Enchanted Evening
like stars in the heavens. They hear all
the garden stories, take out all the downturned
smiles, shake all the gerunds of their frowns,
serve up gladness on a half-shell and send
it floating along with the Drifting Tide
for everyone to share, but only multiple coats
will achieve best results.



Tom Zimmerman

Resilience of Acts

resilience of acts opens up pandora's box, seeking the destiny of acts
feeling scared and lonely, wondering how to defeat your acts of resilience
high and low, low and high, beyond our imagination of lords of gods.

then i see above, the sky shining so hot, filled with tenacity of medusa's crown
through the dungeon of black hole darkness, watching the waves moving,
and calmly and cool, hearing the sound of thunderstorms padding the blue sea.

power and force fly high, gliding low, a shield with the golden glass
of mirrors stainless and clear, conquering the resilience of acts.

Rowan and the Japanese Knife

The arthritis in my knuckles
groans louder since my fall,
so I ordered a nakiri knife.
It severs things from them-

selves with less pressure.
My daughter halved the tomato
as if it were warm butter.
As she went to place the nakiri

onto the countertop, it flung
itself to the floor, sheering
a contact lens-size wedge from
the side of her index finger.

We found the slice – thick and padded
in the center, resting on the brick red tile.
It was clean and bloodless, but
too sheer at the rim to stitch back.

Even after we left the laceration
room at Urgent Care, her blood
pumped steadily for eight hours,
sure it was on its way

somewhere important.
I am going there too.



Zaina Al Habash

Talk about the Weather

This morning, Ann and Trey and I slogged through the woods with slushy snow and ice beads melting, branches dripping, mud where standing water wasn't, sky a soup of skim-milk blue.

Our neighbor Julie, near the western exit, yelled to us, "Here's Mother Nature giving us the middle finger once again!"

I yelled back over goose honks, "Happy spring!"

And what about the weather in the head?

The coffee's on, I've got my earbuds in.

I pause a string quartet I love. My podcast

Buddhist tells me, "Pay attention to your breath." But I can't see it leaving me.

At least the weather's warm enough for that.

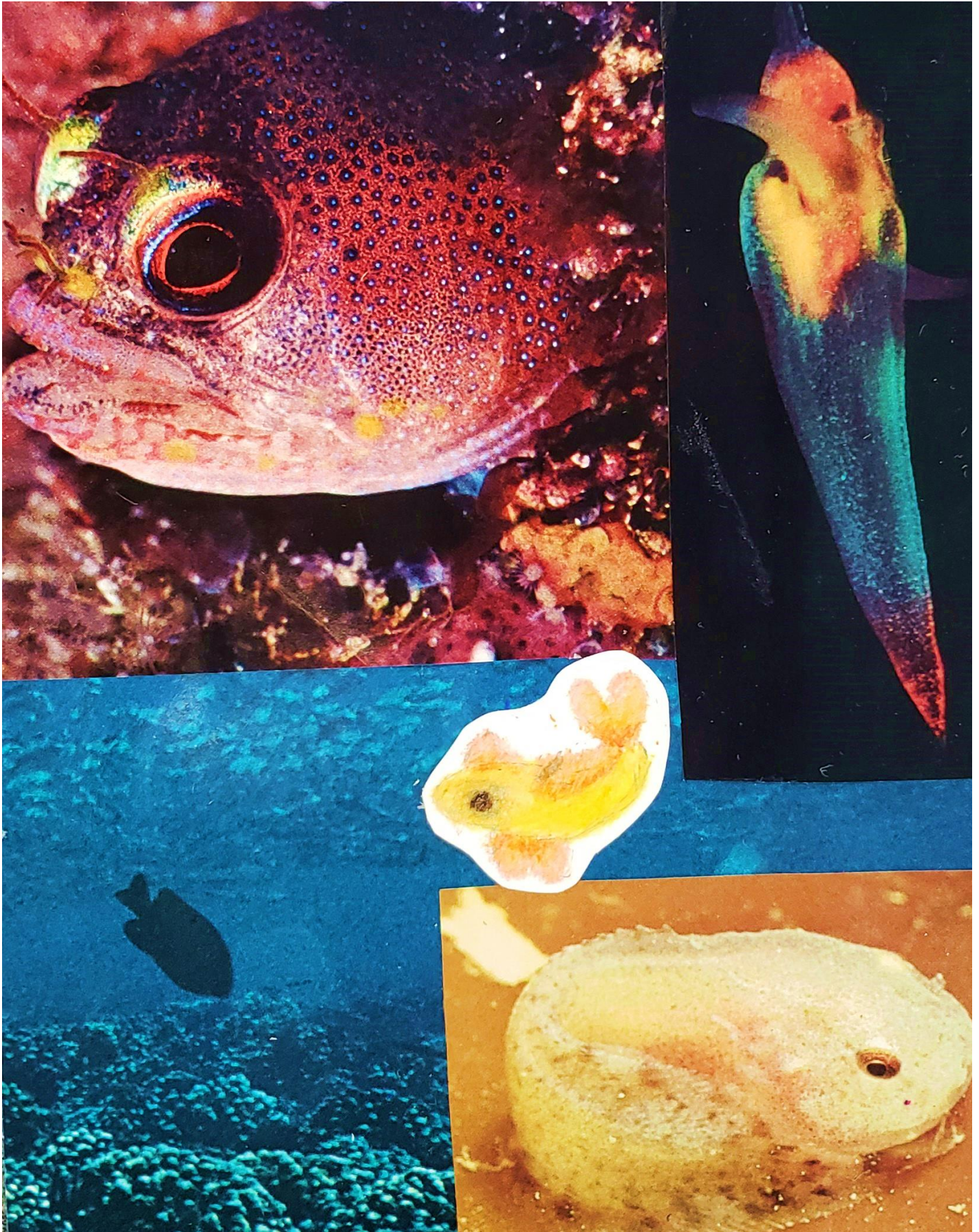
[Untitled]

Us trees whisper secrets to each other
As the wind passes through
Birds act as mail carriers
Delivering messages from me to you

Once we were alone in our tropical paradise
But then you appeared and brought along a nasty hue
Joyous days are now accompanied by searing pain
“Chop that one down too!”

Chop. Chop. Chop.
I slowly begin to wobble and tip
The hard ground hits me all of a sudden
I get hoisted into a machine and turned into wood chips

My beautiful family is now gone
I look at myself and weep
My branches, leaves, and flowers disappeared--
Forever I shall go to sleep



Natalie Stringham

Untitled by Anonymous

Writing is my passion, my burden,
My closest friend and key adversary,
The one who knows my secrets and eventually causes my undoing.
Writing is my mistress.
She eternally wants more than I can give,
The queen of my darkness, and villain of my sunshine.
I hide away from reality in her warmth.
She comforts me in my loneliest hour,
And disappears when my hardships pass.
Revolutions start and end at her lips.
I write when my heart throbs and swells with longing and need,
When nothing but her gracious smile reassures me.
Writing is my excuse and my escape,
A reason to explore, get away, live, and make mistakes,
An expression that doesn't pass judgment
Yet is extremely biased.
I have a love-hate relationship with writing.
Sometimes it is one hundred personal hells, and other times it is the only oasis.
I owe writing my life.
Without her, I would no longer be here.
She kept me going through the tough years.
This is my ode to her.

The Well Women

At sunrise, the women come to the well,
embrace friends in welcome,
lift their arms to herald the day,
and sing to the light.

They wrap around the well,
chuckle at babies, gossip,
discuss family tensions,
cures for a stomach ache.

When discord threatens the peace,
they gather at the well
to speak openly
about what is going on,
the common good,
what they can do.

When disaster strikes their village,
they come to the well for help.
The elders tap the old code
into the stone walls
with their buckets,
releasing ancient songs.

They chant ancestral melodies over and over,
reach into collective memory,
absorb calm,
strength,
wisdom.

Sometimes they help their people
moderate the effects of famine,
plague, or enemy attack.

Sometimes their efforts to stop the devastation
do not work.

Sometimes many people die,
including dear friends and family.

Then darkness rushes over them
and chokes their spirit.

They assemble at the well,
open their hearts to each other,
wail their grief and despair
bend over and pound their thighs.

Such widespread suffering humbles them,
but they do not surrender.
Life is too precious to abandon.

Devastated and afraid,
they start over
to transform a dangerous,
uncharted world.

At sunrise, the women come to the well,
embrace one another,
lift their arms to herald the day,
and sing to the light.

Winter Wind

A new winter wind slapped my face
And tagged my memory with a smell of you
An instant of your presence filled my heart
And left me in an empty swirl
Your distance is the cold sting of ice
As I sit in resolve, waiting for spring

You are not who I know
You are all that you think
An intimate echo in the past nearness
Keeps me

I ran with the leaves as the wind hurried them along
Across the road in near flight they swept the pavement
Traveling as one on an unseen path with no direction
but the writhing airs
I danced with the leaves as they twisted and swished
Up and around my feet like many admirers
Following me to relieve their fluttering turmoil
As if I knew where I were going



Tom Zimmerman

