



# Frontage Road

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## Foreword

Dear Reader,

You are reading the inaugural issue of Bishop Seabury's own literary magazine, *Frontage Road*. This project is the culmination of what began as a simple idea back in the fall of 2019. I would have liked to publish this much sooner, but the pandemic was an obvious impediment. In response to this, I've chosen to include work from some now-graduated students, since they did not get the chance to publish any of their material before their senior year came to an unexpected, premature, and Zoom-filled end.

There are many people who have been immensely helpful in the creation of this project. Firstly, I'd like to thank all of the contributors for sharing their talent with us. Next, I'd like to thank my co-editor, Lyle Griggs, and my design consultant, Colin Farha. I'd also like to thank Mr. Pulsinelli for essentially sponsoring this venture, and Mr. Patterson and Mr. Kellogg for their help, too. And finally, I'd like to thank Eric McHenry, my dad, for his frequently welcome suggestions.

Enjoy,

Evan McHenry, Founding Editor

*Cover Art by Sabrina Eicher*

# Biologically

By A.J. Mann

She starts with 'biologically'

But why biologically,  
When psychologically,  
I've got solid logic- please  
Try listening to me

She says not the same page  
But pages change  
As the story unfolds  
But my story's not told  
Maybe you could read along  
If you'd try listening to me

She says 'I'm your mom'  
But that's wrong  
Because that title is long gone, mother,  
Until you start trying to listen to me

Maybe listening is overrated;  
I just hate it  
When what I say  
Is heard the wrong way, mother,  
Maybe you should start trying to *hear me*

I know you feel the same way  
Day after day  
But you can't understand  
'Till I take a stand and  
Say "Mother, you've got to learn to love *me*."

She says never  
But whatever it  
Takes to  
Make or  
Break, just  
Try and fake this  
Love and shake  
This hate, but  
Anyway, just wake me when you  
Learn to love *me*, instead of your daughter.

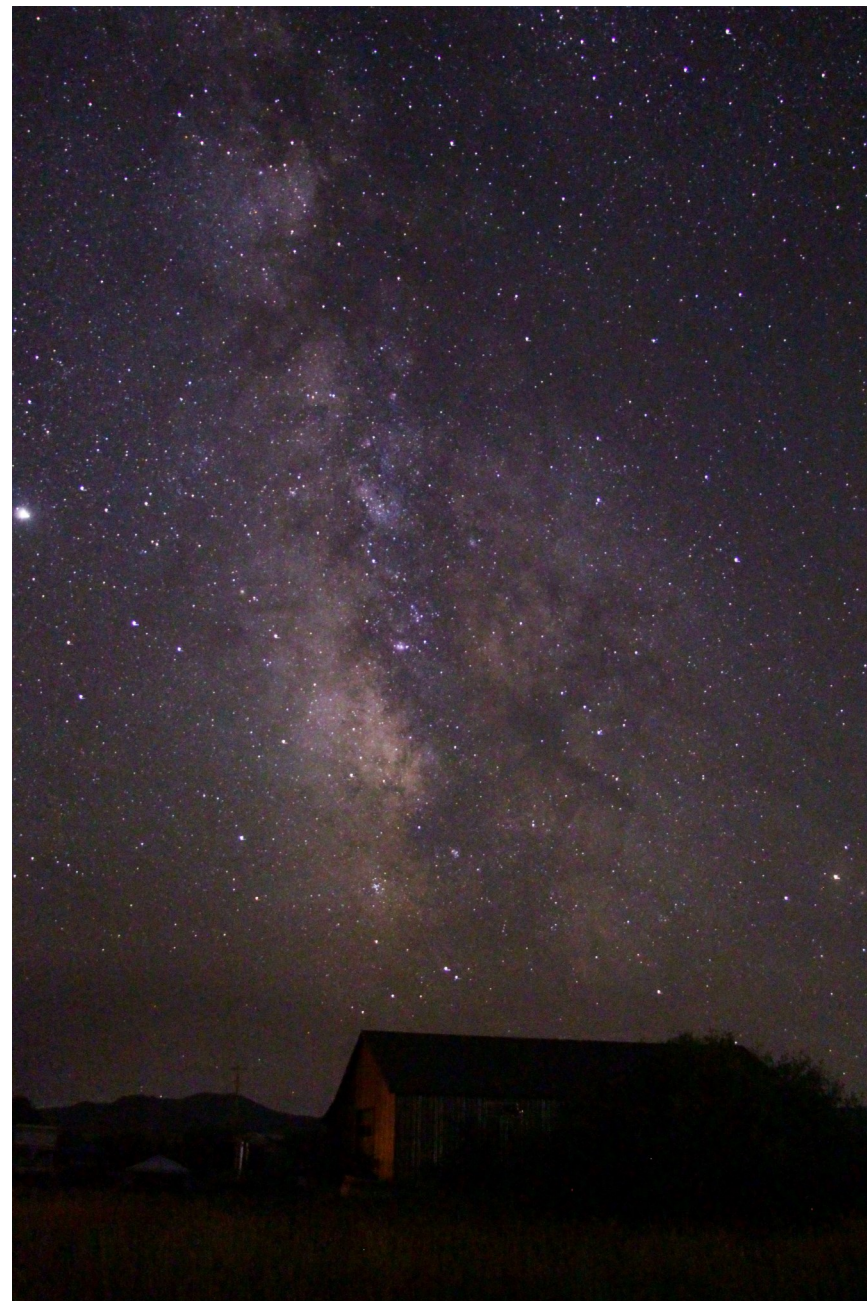


Untitled, by A.J. Mann





*Window, by Sabrina Eicher*



*Steamboat Springs, by Evan McHenry*

# Ariel

By Edie Patterson

1.

They leave for the hour-long drive inland on a foggy Wednesday morning in the beginning of June and, through the silvery haze of the car window as they drive away, she can see the ferris wheel on the Santa Monica Pier, like a ship's wheel, spinning aimlessly, studded with a spiral of bright lights and the black silhouettes of empty seats. The pier is a shell of itself, shadowy against what would be a picturesque sunrise without the mist. She's lived her whole life in downtown Santa Monica, blocks away from the pier and the ocean. She watches the familiar movement of people within the apartments that their car came from, listens to the static roar, muted blue-gray of waves crashing on empty white sand. For a second, everything is silent, seems to hold still.

They'd spent a week packing their bags, went through the motions, stacked full suitcases into the car. The

mover's truck will come later, piling cardboard boxes into its steel skeleton, with her name scrawled in Sharpie across them as if they could fit her entire existence here into brown boxes next to toiletries and wall decor. Nothing fits.

It's okay, though. They've moving to Echo Park, to somewhere pretty, somewhere that's not cramped like this, and it's okay because she didn't really need these walls, these ceilings, the height markings in ballpoint pen in the kitchen doorway; there's nothing really that's here that she won't be able to have somewhere else. Somewhere pretty.

They leave for the hour-long drive inland on this foggy Wednesday morning in the beginning of June and the car starts up, fumes of smoke illuminated by their headlights as it starts to rain a little bit. She watches palm trees and tidy front yards and pastel row-houses and big tall apartment buildings blur together behind

raindrops and car windows and sidewalks with people holding bright-colored umbrellas, bright colors for happiness, to tell her today is a good day and something good is coming. They keep driving. It's quiet until her mom turns on music.

There's more and more traffic as they go and red lights and city streets and she's been here before and it's just downtown Los Angeles but it feels menacing in the rain and colorless gray skies and ominous and everything's okay, though. Everything's okay. It's just a change of scenery. They need more space, anyway.

2.

June in Echo Park is hot, too hot, and during the daytime she walks down cracked asphalt streets through palm trees and blue skies and yucca plants as tall as her. And when evening comes, she sits on the patio in the yard between Saguaro cacti and lush, dark grass, watching the stars and the red dots of airplanes blink in unison, lit-up billboards on stretches of highway. The blur of distant yellow office lights in high-rises five miles away. The one constellation she can name but she's

never sure if she's looking at the right three stars. A little lost, but it's fine, because she's here. It's dark out and she's on the patio of her new house and it's like a little fenced-in paradise in itself and hummingbirds dart from the darkened limbs of locust trees to the feeder by the pathway through the yard.

Nothing ever happens. It's been two weeks here, or a week, or ten days. She's fourteen years old, and turning fifteen in two months and by then the summer heat will be insufferable and she'll be completely out of the thrill of being somewhere new and her life will have returned to the monotony that it was before, just emptier, with a pretty green yard and an hour long drive to the ocean. Her friends live half-way across the city, an hour away in the L.A. traffic, so she FaceTimes them sometimes but she doesn't walk to their apartments like she used to. She's always been quiet and kept to herself, hid away in books and pen scrawl, confiding in a few close friends, the typical cliché. Maybe she'll be different. She's going to a new school in August. But that's two months away. The house is small and dark during the nighttime when



she slips out after midnight when she can't fall asleep and goes to sit in the yard to hear the hummingbirds and the distant city noises and to tell herself this is paradise, because it is, because there's nothing here to indicate it isn't. Her mom has raised her, just her, just the two of them by themselves, since she was born. And now her mom has finally found someone, someone who lived an hour drive away in Echo Park but now they live with him so it's okay. It's okay.

She doesn't really do much. She likes to write poems sometimes. But she wouldn't ever show them to anyone. She likes to draw in a sketchbook. She does these things at nighttime, shrouded in the clear dark fog of a Los Angeles night, alone by herself in the yard when she can't fall asleep at 3 A.M. and it's still nice outside, nicer than in the day, and the skyscrapers and their lights are pretty and the trees and cacti and hummingbirds are pretty and everything is pretty and loud, but quieter than in the day, at least. She draws waves and Ferris wheels and sometimes cacti and hummingbirds and cityscapes to make herself feel better. She likes it here, she says. Yes, it's as good as

she thought it would be, she says. No, she doesn't miss being by the beach. She likes the city. She likes this chaos between the wooden posts of tall fences, an explosion of pretty green things.

One night, it's 3 A.M. again and things aren't really working. She can't write a poem; she can't draw; her pencil doesn't seem to be working the way it's supposed to. She goes outside and walks across the backyard until she hits fenceposts. She roams through the hardwood floors of the dark, empty living room, walking lightly on her tiptoes so she doesn't disturb anyone. She can hear the heavy, relaxed breathing of people who are asleep and dreaming happy dreams. She opens the door again. She has mastered being silent at 3 A.M. She walks outside and keeps walking up through the yard and then opens the gate and then closes it and then keeps walking.

The streets are wide and abandoned, dark asphalt with tar over the cracks, starry black skies, the city in the distance. She keeps walking until she reaches a bus stop and then she sits there, motionless, and waits.

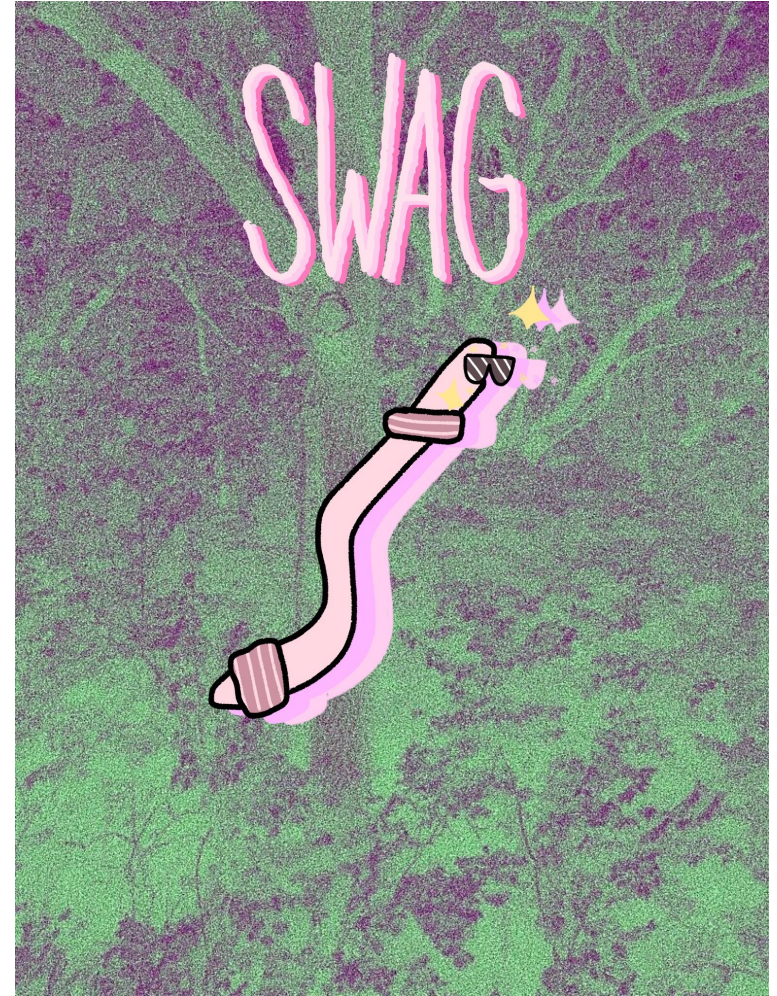
3.

The bus gets to Santa Monica on a clear Wednesday night in the end of June and she can see the ferris wheel on the Santa Monica Pier and she keeps walking along the cement sidewalks she knows better than she had remembered and keeps walking, a few endless blocks, until she gets to the sidewalk by the beach and then she keeps walking because there are no fenceposts; she keeps walking and she sits down on the sand and the ocean is loud, almost too loud, and she just lets herself listen and think again and she doesn't have her notebook but she thinks of the verses of poetry in her head because this dark, angry night is more beautiful than anything she's written about, anything she's read, anything she remembers; she thinks about the sleepy memories of Disney princesses from her childhood who moved inland, away, and wonders how she would change if she were one of them, mermaids turned human and the shift from adolescence to adulthood, mermaid to human, water to land: the waves keep breaking and she gets up and takes off her shoes and walks into the water, freezing and wild and everything,

until it's knee deep and she can maybe make out where the ocean meets the horizon, black against black instead of blue against blue, and, in a kind of homesick daze, she thinks she can hear that animated fortune-telling machine on the pier yelling out its line advertising how it can see the future or something; she tries to think of words to describe what she's feeling or how this happened or why she's standing knee-deep in ice-cold waves at 4 A.M. and looks up at the velvety night sky for inspiration or maybe to recognize that one constellation she knows in a hazy map of faraway suns above her, but there's nothing to say; it's spontaneous, it's loud and quiet at the same time, it's exactly right, it's cold, it's dark, it's beautiful, it's now.



*Periscope, by Sabrina Eicher*



*Earthworm Swag, by Ivan Calderon*

# The Stanford Tuba Experiment

By Evan McHenry

Elliot had seen the campus a thousand times; Stanford threw a long shadow across the town of Palo Alto. Not that it was towering in any physical way--the mountains around it diminished that aspect--but it presided over the town like a monolith. It pervaded the minds of the high school students; it was a parent's dream to see their child in the Cardinal and white. For a long time, Elliot's parents were no different, and despite his incongruous lifestyle, they had carried a tenuous hope for some sort of academic turnaround all the way into his high school career. That hope, over time, had dulled, and now they were preparing themselves to be content when Elliot inevitably settled for a local--and more affordable--community college, if that.

Elliot, now a senior, encountered his plight: he had only a few months until applications were due, and he had

no plan. Every time the conversation arose--"Elliot, have you started writing any essays yet? Elliot, how are those apps coming?"--he'd come up with some quick dodge or excuse to explain his lack of progress. "Oh yeah, just waiting on this one rec letter; yeah, the Common App website is down so I can't work on it right now."

He rolled his phone's charging cable back and forth in his fingertips, scrolling through Stanford's website. He imagined himself there, on the campus, walking between the Spanish Colonial buildings and taking in the greenery. He imagined the prestige of attending, and the looks of disbelief he'd get when he told his peers he'd gotten in; they'd finally forget about that time he misspelled "spelling" in the 5th grade spelling bee, or the time he'd gotten his head stuck in that chair, or the time he'd conglomerated a pack's worth of gum under his desk and then

proceeded to get his pants stuck in it--all of those embarrassing things they'd made fun of him for, all of them would be gone as soon as he announced his acceptance to that legendary institution. He knew he didn't have a choice. He *had* to find a way to get in. He'd show his parents that they'd underestimated him, and that he'd done it all on his own: no fancy tutors like his friends had; no creating nonprofit organizations to pander to college admissions officers; and no meticulous academic work. Surely, not everyone at Stanford was some stellar student. In fact, he remembered his cousin Connor, who had gone to Stanford but was as dumb as a piece of chalk. Granted, Connor's dad did some sort of executive finance for Apple and had gone to Stanford already, but still, Connor was not that smart, so there must be a way.

Elliot's solid 2.7 GPA was also not going to work in his favor. He realized this after googling the stats of admitted students, and panicked briefly, wondering if he could somehow transform his spotty high school transcript. Of course, without some sort of massively illegal scheme, there was nothing

he could do. He didn't immediately rule out infiltrating his school and changing the records, or perhaps bribing the IT guy with the dollars in Elliot's piggy bank, but ultimately he decided such maneuvers were too risky, and they might not even guarantee him admission. He needed something that was sure to work.

So, he turned back to the internet. YouTube was unhelpful; despite the abundance of polo-wearing men in their 20s, Elliot could not find the magic guru he was seeking. He became bored of the same platitudes he found in every video: "make yourself sound unique"; "have a specific interest"; "be at the top of your class." Elliot felt that he was unique, or at least that was what his girlfriend had told him before she broke up with him. He recognized he lacked definite interests, or at least ones that made sense in college (he was a master at the scooter, and could do that thing where he jumped and swung the scooter around, in like, a gnarly 360). And, lastly of course, he knew he was only near the top of his class if you flipped the list upside down. So YouTube was a bust.

He decided to ask his



school's college counselor for help. "Elliot, you're joking, right?" said Mr. Carleton. "Getting into Stanford is hard enough if you're the captain of the crew team and a National Merit Scholar, let alone if you're some random guy with below-average grades who is mostly known for getting his head stuck in a chair." The incident Mr. Carleton was referring to was a total misrepresentation, Elliot felt. He'd calculated the diameter of his head, and then the space in the chair he needed to fit it through--he even had an inch or so of room for error--but somehow he'd gotten it stuck. He postulated that his head's size increased with stress, but was still confused as to how his measurements had failed him. The janitor had been less concerned with this aspect of the story when he arrived to cut Elliot free, despite Elliot's adamant explanation.

Elliot deemed Mr. Carleton just as unhelpful as the preppy YouTubers. His situation, admittedly, was unique, and so it was no wonder that these resources had been of no use. He would need the input of experts, and so he went to Reddit. He found some forum

where people seemed to know a lot about college admissions, and he created a post detailing his dilemma: "Getting into Stanford University with a 2.7 GPA??"

He went to bed, hoping that his inbox would be flooded with answers the following morning. Indeed, there were plenty of replies.

He had earnestly read three responses before he realized they were joking. Several suggested he perform illicit acts on admissions officers, others requested that he be banned from the forum for trolling. For the most part, the forum seemed to be another bust. But one answer caught his eye. Someone called Sunshine\_Bagel said, "Assuming you're somehow not joking, you'd have to be ridiculously good at a sport or have some crazy talent, like being the world's best tuba player or something. Sorry, but you might be better served to look at less selective schools."

If this bagel person was to be believed, Elliot still had a chance, he thought. He considered his athletic achievements, recalling his experience in little league baseball and recreational soccer. Once he had gotten

older and parents ceased to bring snacks to the games, Elliot had quit both sports, and so he figured it was too late for him to turn himself into some student-athlete. He'd dabbled with the harmonica before, but he was fairly certain that Stanford did not have a slot for a harmonica player in their band. This prompted him to return to the Stanford website, and he navigated to the page about the symphony orchestra. Perhaps they needed a certain instrumentalist? His lack of any semblance of musical talent was a problem, but he'd worry about that later. As he scanned the rows of smiling students and read the adjacent descriptions, he noticed something: in the brass section, there was a greyed out box where a student's face should be, and below it, the word "Tubaist." He knew what he had to do.

How hard could it be to learn the tuba? It required blowing air, which was easy, and pressing some little knobs or something. It certainly wouldn't be as hard as something like the violin, which requires a delicate touch and meticulous practice. Once he learned, there would be no way for Stanford to reject him. They

needed a tuba player, and there would certainly be no competition for the spot--who even plays the tuba?

Back on Google, he found a Wikihow article. "How to play the Tuba (with pictures)" read the headline. He skimmed through the article and its oddly specific images, and then remembered he did not own a tuba. He considered buying one, but when he realized the 20 dollars in his bank account would not cover the astronomical price of that enormous brass instrument, he reevaluated his plan. There was no possible way he could convince his parents to purchase one for him, not after the electric scooter tax fraud incident--he'd be lucky if they would even let him use their credit card to buy groceries. People don't just leave tubas sitting out on curbs like they do with couches, and garage sales rarely carry the instruments either. He recalled all of his friends, family, and acquaintances in his mind; certainly one of them must have a tuba, or at least know where he could find one. Then it came to him. He'd been in the band room at his high school only a handful of times, but he had French class in the

adjacent classroom. Judging by the frequent, unpleasant, and window-shaking blarps, they must have a tuba in there.

-

It had been dark for some time now. Elliot sat in his '04 Corolla at a safe distance from the school gym, peering over the unlit dashboard. He turned his gaze down to his phone's lock screen; 22:23 (he used military time because he thought it looked cooler); the janitor should be leaving soon. Elliot stared at the digits overlaid on his "Kid A" wallpaper, letting his eyes unfocus as he imagined what he was about to do.

He heard a car door shut. Glancing up, he saw headlights flicker on across the parking lot, and the lone car parked in front of the gym rolling off. Now it was time. The air was cold, but he'd brought gloves--he didn't want to leave fingerprints--and he slipped them on as he walked across the street. He'd noted the positions of the various security cameras, and had devised a route that would theoretically dodge their gaze. When he reached the wall of

the building, he shuffled through the shadows, ducking into the intermittent crevices between windows when he heard cars passing. When he'd made it to the opposite side of the gym building, he found the door he had rigged. Earlier in the day, he had excused himself from gym class, chewed half a pack of Trident gum, and then jammed the conglomerate into the lock of a side door near the gym. This sticky glob was supposed to prevent the door from fully locking, and provide him a point of entry when he returned later in the night. He pulled on the handle; to his dismay, the door didn't budge. He felt his face grow hot as he questioned how his mechanism had failed to work. The gum must have been more malleable than he expected, and so it was not enough to prevent the lock from closing. He cycled through his remaining options in his head, and determined that it was crucial that he acquire the tuba tonight. He had to find a way. He walked over to the next door, which appeared to be less secure than the first. There was a slab of metal near it, about the size of a ruler--perhaps he could pry this door open? He inserted the

makeshift crowbar into the crack between the door and the wall, but the metal was too flimsy and it began to bend. Then he tried turning the door handle, and to his surprise, it opened. Someone must have forgotten to lock it, he figured, as he slipped into the dark hallway. The smell of floor-cleaner permeated the place, and as his eyes adjusted to the dark, Elliot discerned the shape of the hall from the faint reflection of light on the smooth floor. He wasn't far from the music room, and so all he needed to do was proceed down the hallway, nab the tuba, and make his escape. It felt weird being in the school at night; the place felt haunted and the eerie quiet left a hollow feeling in Elliot's stomach. As he neared the music room, he heard something. The strums of a guitar were emanating from somewhere down the hall. He peered around the corner, and saw light spilling from an open door only 20 feet or so away. Who would be here at this hour? Teachers don't *actually* live in the school, contrary to what Elliot had believed for a length of time he was unwilling to admit. Okay, so maybe some teacher had just left a radio on, or some computer was glitch-

ing out and playing music on its own. But then why was the light on? Surely he was not alone.

Now Elliot had to be careful. He turned back and stepped into the music room, straining awkwardly in order to keep his Adidas joggers from swishing too loudly. He studied the dark shapes surrounding him, which he knew to be the other instruments; the ambient glow of a streetlight outside was reflecting off of the glimmering brass, offering the only indication of the music room's geography. The tuba was not hard to spot. It rested regally on a folding table at the back of the room--Elliot questioned the structural stability of such an arrangement--and its enormous gravity seemed to pull Elliot in like a tractor beam. He approached the beast and ran his hands over the cold, smooth metal. It was larger than he'd imagined, and for a split second he wondered if he could even fit it through the door on the way out. He wedged his hands under its large conical bell and began to lift the thing; it was as heavy as he'd imagined, and he tried to conjure the deadlift form he'd learned in freshman weights class, so as

not to injure his back.

When he got to the door of the music room, he stopped to listen for the guitar music from earlier; it was quiet now, but he couldn't tell if the light was still on in the room the music had been coming from. He deemed checking to be too much of a risk, and so he began his quiet exit. As he was softly ambling back down the hallway, he heard footsteps behind him. The tuba was too close to his head and it prevented him from turning around, but from the sound, he judged the noise to be near where he'd heard the guitar music--just around the corner from the music room. The footsteps were only getting louder, and so he quickened his pace. He imagined some guitar-playing security guard rounding the corner, ready to sound the alarm and expose Elliot's tuba thievery, or perhaps some teacher who already had it in for Elliot (of which there were several) ready to send him to jail for this incident.

He was sure the person was around the corner now, and he heard a man's voice shout, "Hey, what are you doing?!"

He frantically waddled down the dark corridor as the

pointy parts of the tuba dug into his stomach. He cursed this overweight cousin of the trumpet, wishing he could move faster, and tried to discern if his pursuer was catching up to him. He was almost to the exit now, and he could hear the frequency of the footsteps increasing.

He lunged forward and kicked the door handle, and mercifully, the door opened; Elliot burst into the cold night, and quickly realized he was covered in the sinewy strands of the gum from his earlier failed door-rigging attempt. He ran onward with his spearmint belt, knowing he had only a slight head start on whoever was chasing him, and there was no way he could get to his car *and* load up the tuba without being seen. He opted to duck behind a nearby pine tree and hope that he would not be spotted.

There was an audible crunch as Elliot forced the tuba through the twigs and crouched under the branches, finally setting the tuba down next to him; his heart was pounding, and he saw the gym's side door open briefly as a dark figure peered out. After a minute or so of glancing back and forth, the

figure receded into the building, giving Elliot an opportunity to shuffle back to the car with his prize.

He prayed the pursuer had gone back into the building, gone back to playing the guitar or whatever, but he knew they'd probably sounded the alarm, and the authorities would be on their way. He needed to hurry. He slid the tuba into the back seat of his car, fumbled with the buckles before deciding that it was unlikely to slide around on account of its size, and then got in the driver's seat and turned the ignition. A couple blocks away, he realized he hadn't turned on his headlights--an unintentional stealth mechanism, he figured, but he switched them on when he reached an arterial, carefully checking his mirrors for red and blue lights. Every car he saw seemed suspicious. Could they see the tuba in the back? Who drives around with a tuba? What if reports of a man with a tuba in the back seat reach the police? Can they trace his car?

He was still cycling through disaster scenarios when he reached his driveway a few minutes later. He could

see the light on in his parents' room, and so he improvised a disguise for the tuba by covering it in some old gym clothes from the back of the car. Predictably, upon entering, his dad asked him what he was carrying:

"Just some old clothes," Elliot said, hoping his dad would not see the gleam of brass peeking through the hodge-podge of stale athletic shorts and tank-tops.

"Wow, you really gotta clean your car more frequently," his dad replied. "I can smell those things from here, too."

"Yeah I will," said Elliot as he began to lumber up the stairs. When he reached his bedroom, he dropped the metal and fabric mass onto his chair.

Just to be safe, he put the tuba in the closet. He would need to come up with a reason for his sudden brass instrument acquisition, and one that would sufficiently clear him, should reports of a stolen tuba from his school reach his parents. He'd do that tomorrow. He switched off his lamp and went to bed, dreaming of tuba accolades and triumphant admission to Stanford.



The tuba remained in his closet for the next week; luckily, news of the tuba thievery had not spread very far outside of his school. There was an announcement over the intercom, asking if anyone knew anything about the missing tuba, and an email was sent out to students and parents. Elliot had intercepted and deleted the email before his parents could read it, and so they did not suspect anything when Elliot announced that he had bought a tuba on Craigslist at the dinner table.

After a few raised eyebrows, he declared he'd done so because he wanted to learn something new, and he was rekindling a longstanding interest in music (he reminded them of his kindergarten experience with the xylophone). After their initial surprise, his parents were pleased with the idea, and asked how he planned to learn.

"YouTube, mostly," he said with a grin. "You can learn anything on the internet."

The brief interrogation ended at that point, and Elliot retreated to his room and brought the tuba out of the closet, peeling off its dry-fit disguise. The thing sat on his bed like some indecipherable

obelisk retrieved from a foreign land. He knew nothing about its extensive, curling pipes or small knobs; it looked like some module from an oil refinery to him. He saw his distorted reflection in the bell, surrounded by the anachronistic vestiges of his childhood in a room he'd soon move out of--if his plan were to work.

For the next week, Elliot studied the thing; he scoured the internet for tutorials on how to play it, and simultaneously began writing his Stanford application. Unfortunately, Elliot had somehow managed to dent the mouthpiece of the tuba when he was surreptitiously transporting it back from the school. The internet told him that he'd need to buy a brand new one, and so now Elliot was standing in the music store.

Large arrangements of instruments loomed over Elliot as he navigated his way to the counter. An array of guitars hung on the wall, and adjacent to them, a stack of amplifiers sat. When he reached the counter, he told the clerk he needed a tuba mouthpiece. The clerk asked him some questions, speaking in technical tuba jargon, and Elliot nodded his head

and said "yes" as if he'd been playing the tuba his whole life; he had no idea what the clerk was actually talking about, and he racked his brain to recall information from his internet tuba research sessions.

Eventually, the clerk pulled up a picture of a mouthpiece that looked like the one Elliot had broken, and so Elliot told him that was the one he needed.

"You're lucky, this is our last one," said the clerk. "Callum came in here and bought like four just a couple days ago."

"Who's Callum?" asked Elliot, fairly sure no one in his class--or in the school band--was named that.

"Oh, Callum Vaughn III," answered the clerk. "He's a tuba prodigy--probably about your age, too."

Elliot was certain he knew nobody by that name. He thanked the clerk and left with the replacement mouthpiece. On his way home, the extravagant name played through his head over and over again. He had to find out who that guy was.

When he got back home he sprinted up the stairs to his room and immediately

launched his computer. He googled the name, followed by Palo Alto, just to be sure he found the right one. The first thing he could find was a link to the Hewlett-Packard website; he clicked it, and an "Executive Team" page appeared in front of him. He was greeted by the image of a bald, grinning man--the caption underneath read, "Callum Vaughn, Jr, Chief Financial Officer." He read the small biography below that, which had no mention of anything tuba related, and then remembered that the clerk had told him that Callum Vaughn *the third* was the one who'd bought the mouthpiece.

So this mysterious other tuba player was the son of an exec at Hewlett Packard. It figured, Elliot thought. Only chumps play the tuba.

Through some brief Instagram stalking, Elliot found the correct Callum. His bio listed his SAT score--1590--as well as numerous other accolades. He was a senior at a nearby private school and the page was littered with pictures of him; he had blond, longish hair that was parted down the middle, and his wardrobe seemed to consist of only po-

los, khakis, and designer sweaters. There was a picture of him holding a medal with a tuba sitting beside him. And, dreadfully, he was wearing a Stanford shirt in the next photo.

Elliot's heart began to race. He opened the comments section below the post, and read one asking Callum where he planned to apply.

"Stanford is my top choice. Safeties are Berkeley and Pomona," his reply read. The room began to spin around Elliot. His dream of sneaking into Stanford as the lone tuba-playing applicant started to crumble; how had he been so stupid? Of course some snob with good grades and all the money in the world plays the tuba. Elliot cursed his luck, too. He'd gone this far--stolen the tuba--and all for nothing. There was no way he could beat a rich kid who probably had tuba tutors and people to take his SAT for him.

Unless, Elliot thought, something were to prevent Callum from applying. It was the only way. But how? Clearly, this kid was dead-set on applying to Stanford and his dad probably had a private security detail surrounding him at all times. Elliot continued re-

searching, and found Callum's Twitter. It was full of boasts about academic achievements, as well as the occasional Ben Shapiro retweet. Elliot scoured it for any clues as to how he could prevent this preppy tuba prodigy from killing his chances at admission; he had no idea. Then, he saw a tweet with a picture of some sheet music, the caption reading, "Prepping for the big performance — come to the Bing Concert Hall on October 25th if you want to see the best high school tubaist in the country!" The arrogant claim inflamed Elliot; he could hear the nasality of this guy's voice ringing in his ears. He could picture his rival complaining about sub-par *foie gras* or less than optimal golfing conditions. He needed to stop him.

-

The high visibility vest Elliot ordered online arrived. Today was the big day. Elliot readied his materials, and plugged the directions to Bing Concert Hall into his phone. Elliot's plan was to sneak into the concert hall disguised as a worker, and then hit Callum's tuba repeatedly with a baseball

bat. However, his weapon proved too conspicuous upon his arrival, and he was forced to drop the bat into a trash can as he approached the entryway. "Great, now I have to improvise," he muttered to himself.

He kept walking, pretending that he had some sort of agenda, and for the most part, the attendees ignored him. The vest was working like a charm. However, to get to the dressing rooms, he'd need to pass a door that required a keycard. Another challenge. He stepped into the bathroom briefly to gather himself, and noticed a toilet plunger sitting beside the stall. Then he had an idea.

He grabbed the plunger and waited for someone to approach the door to the dressing rooms. When he saw an older gentleman on his way to the door, Elliot ran forward with the plunger in his hand. "Hold the door!" he yelled. The man turned, noticed the frantic and plunger-wielding man dashing toward him, and opened the door for Elliot to run through. Once he was in, Elliot slowed his pace to a brisk walk, and watched as people moved aside, recognizing that Elliot must be on his way to resolve

some wild bathroom mishap. Elliot saw the bald head of Mr. Vaughn moving towards what was probably Callum's dressing room. The tuba must be in there.

Elliot knew that Callum would be out in the audience to watch the opening acts, which would leave Elliot enough time to sneak in and sabotage the tuba in some way. He retreated to a supply room, and began to wait for Callum to leave.

When the time came, Elliot emerged from his temporary hiding spot, leaving the plunger. He tried the door; to his surprise, it was unlocked. He could see the large black case that held Callum's tuba sitting on a table. He then remembered he no longer had the baseball bat he had intended to use to smash the tuba. He didn't know what to do; there were no objects in the room large enough to do any real damage to the tuba, he determined. Perhaps he could fill it with water? No, Callum would notice it spilling out before he even made it to the stage. Elliot sat down, pondering. He'd made it all the way behind enemy lines, and yet he was incapable of dealing the death blow? Then, his gaze turned to

the corner of the room. Under a heat lamp, a terrarium sat. It must have been for the Zoology presentation the previous day, Elliot realized. Inside, he could see a fake rock, some sand, and the terrarium's sole inhabitant: a giant tarantula. Elliot knew what he had to do. He couldn't count on the tarantula for much help, but the sand was promising. He opened the top of the terrarium and placed the tuba beside it. He knew time was of the essence, and so he grabbed fistfuls of sand as fast as he could, depositing them in the bell of Callum's prized tuba. When Elliot deemed the sand sufficient for the sabotage, he placed the lid back on the terrarium and quietly put the tuba back in its case. He noticed that the tarantula was nowhere to be found; not his problem.

He slipped out of the room and took off his yellow vest; it was time to watch the best high school tubaist in the country.

-

Callum smiled at the crowd with his synthetically white teeth, and then the lights dimmed; a lone spotlight beamed down on him as he lift-

ed his prized instrument to his lips. Tuxedoed men grinned, sitting in the crowd--tuba scouts no doubt--all anticipating Callum's legendary performance. Callum inhaled and pressed his lips to the mouthpiece.

He blew into the tuba, expecting the dulcet blarp that would begin his famous opening song, but instead, a plume of sand exploded from the bell; it was as if someone had detonated a bomb in the desert; as if somehow, an entire beach's worth of sand had suddenly rained down on Bing Concert Hall. Bits of sand shrapnel flew through the air, landing in the laps of horrified spectators.

Elliot was standing at the back of the auditorium with a wide grin across his face as chaos unfolded. His plan had worked.

Callum was still on the stage, but now his entourage had surrounded him and a flurry of well-dressed Palo Alto elite were frantically trying to remove sand from their designer suits in the front rows. Elliot briefly caught a glimpse of Callum's face, which had turned Stanford Cardinal. Then, as if the events of the night were not shocking enough, Callum got

up, let out a piercing shriek, and sprinted off of the stage with tears streaming down his face. Just as he reached the exit, however, he was confronted by a huge hairy spider sitting on the door. He let out another panicked scream, which spooked the tarantula, causing it to leap towards Callum. He turned to run, but before he could get even ten feet, he clattered into a grey-haired man with rimless glasses and a red tie. Elliot's heart jumped--that was the conductor of the Stanford Symphony Orchestra, Miguel Pagliotti. Callum shrieked for the third time and pushed the old man over, finally reaching another exit.

This was a good time to make an exit, Elliot thought, and so he departed the imbroglio, pleased with the excellent catastrophe he had engineered.

-

Elliot's dad reclined in the armchair, reading the morning newspaper. The coffee in his mug rippled as the house shook from the reverberations of Elliot's tuba. Normally, Elliot's dad would not tolerate tuba practice so early in the morning, but today was differ-

ent: Elliot had a tuba tryout later.

After he was done with his practice, Elliot paced around his room. "Everything I've worked for comes down to this day," he reminded himself. This did not help his anxiety.

When he arrived at the site of the audition-- Bing Concert Hall--Elliot parked his Corolla and unbuckled his tuba, now in a case he'd found on Craigslist, from the back seat. He didn't need a high-vis vest to get in now; he told a receptionist who he was, and they directed him to a seating area. Around him sat various other angsty-looking teenagers in ill-fitting suits, each with his or her own instrument; Elliot double checked for any tuba rivals, saw none.

When his name was called, Elliot entered the auditorium; the aisle seemed infinitely long, and at the end of it, he could see Miguel Pagliotti himself. When Elliot reached the end of the aisle, an assistant of Pagliotti's extended his hand and introduced himself as the assistant director of the Stanford Philharmonia. Elliot said his perfunctory greetings, hoping his palms weren't too sweaty and that the stains under



his armpits weren't visible, and then set up his Tuba on the stage. He detected the slightest crunch of sand under his feet, a sweet reminder. The thought of Callum's ridiculous expression lightened Elliot's mood, and then he was given the signal to begin his performance.

In Elliot's memory, the next five minutes were a blur. In the auditorium, his tuba sounded even better than he'd thought, and the song flowed from his tuba like splendor from a cornucopia. Afterwards, he noted the wowed looks of the tuba auditors and even Pagliotti himself seemed to be grinning slightly. Elliot could only describe what he felt that day as a religious experience.

This moment formed the basis of a tuba-fervor that was unprecedented for Elliot. He could not stop listening to any music with tubas in it, and he often found himself staying up late into the night watching famous brass bands playing. He would play the tuba whenever he had the chance, challenging himself to master increasingly challenging songs. He became an active contributor to several online tuba forums, and learned the ins and outs of the instrument's maintenance.

He found busking in open malls and shopping areas to be lucrative, and he purchased more tuba supplies with the money he earned. He even joined his school's band, making sure to use the replacement tuba the school had bought.

One day, after class, Elliot was getting up to leave when Mr. Trujillo, the band teacher, pulled him aside. Elliot feared his tuba thievery was about to come back to bite him; he imagined being asked all sorts of questions he couldn't answer, being exposed as a thief, hauled off to jail--Stanford dreams in the garbage.

"Elliot, you've become remarkably good at the tuba," said Mr. Trujillo. "It's really impressive. Anyways, I wanted to tell you that I know a guy in a pretty well-known brass band. I actually used to play in a different band with him back in the day (I know, hard to imagine now that I'm all old)." Elliot didn't find it that hard to imagine since Mr. Trujillo still wore bandanas and bolo ties; Elliot had always thought he was a hippie. "So his band is coming to town soon; they're playing a show. I thought it would be cool if I introduced

you two, since the tuba seems to be such an aptitude of yours."

Elliot told him sure, that would be cool, and agreed to meet him when he came to town next week. As Elliot walked down the hallway, he imagined Mr. Trujillo's friend as a similar-looking old white hippie.

When Elliot got home, he googled "brass band Palo Alto," and clicked on what looked like an upcoming show. Immediately, a concert hall listing popped up: "Broadmoor Band: Authentic New Orleans Brass. Coming to the historic Palo Verde Theatre!" Sure enough, Elliot thought. Mr. Trujillo wasn't kidding.

Over the next several days, Elliot sat through his classes with his earbuds in, listening covertly to the Broadmoor Band's performances. He began to get a feel for their sound, and he tried playing some of their most popular songs at home on his tuba. He'd sit in his bedroom with a video of one of their performances open on his computer, while he tried playing the notes alongside the band with his tuba.

Mr. Trujillo told Elliot

that he planned to attend their upcoming show, and if Elliot came, he was happy to introduce him to his friend.

On the day of the show, Elliot arrived outside of the Palo Verde Theatre. It was a historic building, but the interior was retrofitted; Elliot gazed at the posters lining the facade, advertising other acts to come. When Mr. Trujillo arrived, they walked in and found a place in the dark, crowded room. The place smelled like weed and sweat, but Elliot was happy to finally see (and hopefully meet) this friend of Mr. Trujillo's. Soon, a spotlight illuminated the stage and the band emerged. They were wearing purple shirts and jeans, a contrast to the formal attire Elliot had seen the Stanford Symphony Orchestra wear. But despite their more casual appearance, the Broadmoor Band was immaculate. Their sound swept Elliot up with the same feeling he'd felt back on the stage at Bing Concert Hall in front of Miguel Pagliotti. Elliot felt as though he were floating several feet above everyone, as the deep, transcendent blarps of the tuba reverberated through his very being. The band's performances always looked awe-

some, but this was another level. Elliot coasted on this sense of brass bliss for the remainder of the show, and when it was over, Mr. Trujillo asked, "So how'd you like it?"

"It was amazing," said Elliot, still looking for words to describe how he felt.

"I'm glad you liked it," said Mr. Trujillo. "So do you want to meet Leonard?"

Elliot's heart jumped. In his euphoria, he'd completely forgotten about Mr. Trujillo's original reason for inviting Elliot. Leonard Gilbert was the lead trumpeter in the Broadmoor Band, and Elliot was elated to get the chance to meet him.

Mr. Trujillo led him backstage, showed a bouncer some sheet of paper, and then showed Elliot through a door. Elliot felt like he was in a movie. Behind the door, there were various members of the band, some cleaning their instruments before putting them in large cases, others speaking to attendants or milling about. A tall, skinny man with long dreadlocks approached Elliot and Mr. Trujillo, introducing himself. "Richard!" he said, hugging Mr. Trujillo. Elliot stood next to them somewhat

awkwardly, and then the man turned to Elliot. "Hi there! I'm Leonard Gilbert, as you might already know. You must be Elliot!" Elliot nodded and shook his hand. "I've heard you're quite the tuba star. That's awesome, man. So how'd you like the show?"

Elliot answered him, explaining how profoundly good he thought the performance was and how much of an inspiration Leonard is.

"Thanks so much, man!" said Leonard. "We're gonna be hanging out in town tomorrow if you wanna come chill. I'd love to hear you play."

Elliot felt as if his feet had levitated off of the ground when he heard this. He imagined it: lounging around with some of the best brass players he'd ever seen; talking about tubas and the music scene. He was so caught up in his elation that he almost forgot to say yes.

-

Elliot did not sleep soundly that night; he stared up at his ceiling, imagining playing his tuba--an instrument he was still technically a novice at --in front of some of the na-

tion's best. He tried to fall asleep while listening to some of the Broadmoor Band's songs --perhaps hoping for some sort of hypnopaedia--and eventually did. In his dreams, he was playing on stage with the band; he saw the dark shapes of an audience in front of him, swaying to the deep notes he played. When his alarm finally went off, he knew his parents would be up soon and he could start warming up with his tuba. He needed to impress Leonard. After a sufficient amount of practicing, Elliot felt ready. It was almost 10:30, and he was told the band would be lingering around the Palo Verde while they finished cleaning up. When Elliot arrived, he lugged his tuba in and found Leonard sitting on a stool in the now-empty concert room. Nearby, other band members and managers sat around talking or sipping coffees, while another band was beginning to set up.

"Everyone, this is Elliot," Leonard said, gesturing. "He's a tuba prodigy and a student of a friend of mine, and I thought it'd be fun if we let him come by and maybe play a little. Why don't you all introduce yourselves?"

Elliot's gaze panned across the various members, and they began to say their names.

"Big Louie; Skip; Kenny; Martin J; Reggie; James Kaguro" Elliot, still nervous to be in the presence of such talent, nodded and fiddled with one of the latches on his tuba case.

"You can pull that bad boy out if you want," said Leonard, looking at Elliot's tuba. "How long have you had it?"

"Oh, not that long," Elliot responded, somewhat ambiguously. He was careful not to mention how this was his first-ever tuba, although he half-suspected they'd approve of his having stolen it. Elliot knew this was his chance to impress them. He mustered his courage and then said, "Want to hear a little?"

Leonard nodded, and suddenly the room became quieter. Elliot focused and imagined himself back in Bing Concert Hall, in front of Mr. Pagliotti; he wanted to channel that transcendent tuba talent that he'd conjured weeks prior. He began to play.

Elliot was flying. The sweet sounds of his tuba rumbled the ground and sent reverberations throughout the thea-

tre; people from the atrium wandered in, as if Elliot and his tuba were some beacon of auditory bliss. At a later date, Elliot could not recall who was in the room or what they looked like--only him and his tuba.

The sound of clapping snapped Elliot back to reality. There were more people in the room than there were when he'd begun, all applauding him.

"Wow," said Leonard. "That was incredible. I don't even know what to say." Elliot spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon conversing with the band, and when it was time to go, Leonard asked for his phone number.

"If you ever want to talk about brass, just give me a call," he said. "You've got some real talent, kid."

Elliot was practically glowing when he walked through his front door. He glided up the stairs and sat down on his bed, trying to recall which people had given him what compliments. He looked up at his calendar--it was December, and above the dates was a picture of Stanford's Memorial Court.

Stanford. In his tuba

fervor, he'd forgotten the original reason for all this. He briefly panicked, but then remembered that he'd submitted the whole application ages ago. He wondered where Callum was right now, and whether or not he'd had to write apology letters to Stanford's orchestral scouts.

When Elliot fell asleep that night, he dreamed not of the verdant and flowery lawns of Stanford, but of the rich and raucous streets of New Orleans.

-

Elliot was at school when his phone rang. It was Leonard. When he saw who it was, Elliot excused himself from history class and walked out to the parking lot.

"Hey Elliot. Do you have a minute to talk?" said Leonard.

"Sure," said Elliot, slightly confused.

"Okay great," said Leonard. "What grade are you in?"

"I'm a senior," said Elliot, more confused.

"Okay. So our usual tuba guy, Skip, just told me he'd been offered a place in

this big orchestra. I'm not allowed to say which one yet for legal reasons, but anyways, it's always been his dream to play there. So this, obviously, creates a problem: I need someone to replace Skip."

"Yeah?" said Elliot.

"I think you would be perfect. Your style matches the band's, and I'm willing to offer you a spot without an audition. You made enough of an impression on me back at Palo Verde."

Elliot froze; adrenaline coursed through his veins. He couldn't believe what he'd just heard. A spot. In a professional band. For him.

"Really? Starting when?" asked Elliot.

"We'd need you by early to mid March," said Leonard.

"I can do that. I think I have enough credits to graduate early" said Elliot, gathering himself.

-

The skyline of New Orleans sprawled before Elliot; hazy, pinkish clouds hung over the skyscrapers as the sun began to duck under the horizon. From the roof of the hotel, El-

liot could see the last rays of sunlight reflecting off of high-rises like a spotlight on brass. The lights in the pool adjacent to him had just turned on, and the sky was maturing into a deeper blue. Elliot was reclining on a chaise lounge, imagining his next set with the Broadmoor Band. He'd need to report down to Leonard and the crew in a few minutes for a dinner meeting--they had a show coming up the next day--but for now, he could relax.

Elliot heard his phone buzz. He picked it up; on the home screen, an email notification read: "Stanford University - An update has been posted regarding your application decision." Elliot looked at the notification, then turned his eyes back up to the gradually illuminating skyline in front of him. He deleted the email, set his phone back down, and lay back in his chair. Then he heard Leonard Gilbert call his name.





*An Average Joe In The Abyss, By Ivan Calderon*

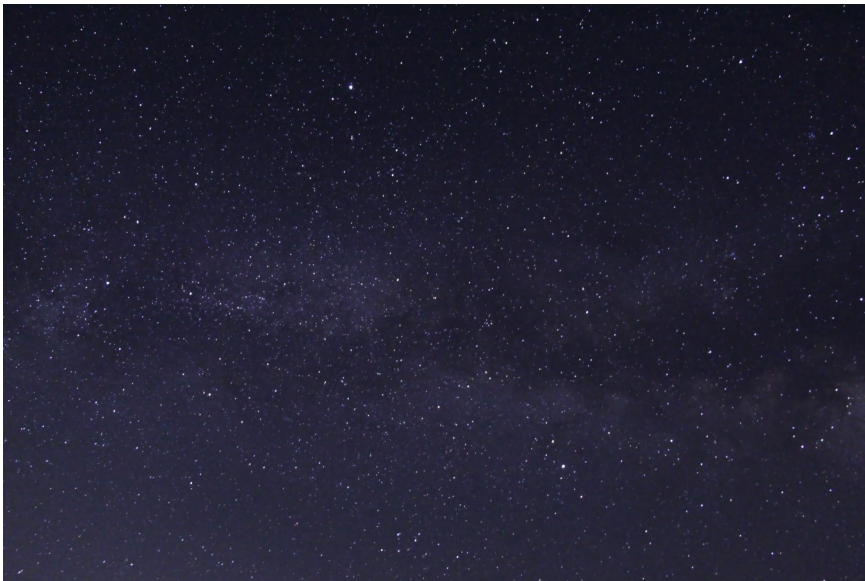
# Puzzle Pieces

*By Elena Weber*

I am not anyone else, yet I am not me  
I am simply a moving living thing with a soul that is lost  
And how I yearn to find me  
How I yearn to not crave completion every second,  
in a film that is far from over, as if I am so displeased  
with the film I want to leave even before the intermission,  
The climax,  
Or the plot is established  
There are simply too many missing pieces in the puzzle  
that I am trying to finish that I think about  
stealing pieces from the boxes around me  
But of course they don't fit and even if they do the picture isn't  
quite right and I get frustrated  
and start over  
But I don't learn my lesson.  
I don't go looking for the rest of my pieces, but I keep praying  
that someone else's will fit.  
There is no reason I should rush finishing, though.  
The puzzle will not be going on the coffee table til much later,  
and of course only if I finish it with the right pieces  
But it is early so I make mistakes

and toss the pieces in frustration.  
I leave the movies early  
I yearn, I want and I need.  
I desperately try to float but I let everything drag me down when  
it sticks  
I see habits but I don't change.  
I don't let myself get up from the fight  
or give myself a fair chance.  
You only give yourself a fair chance  
when you think you deserve it  
and right now I'm not sure if I do  
It's hard to throw what you've done  
for so long out the window, especially if you are already  
missing pieces.  
But right now I am really trying to convince myself that I de-  
serve  
something  
So I sit and watch the movie,  
even though I am not sure about the plot.  
I sit and work on the puzzle even though I have no idea  
what the picture is going to be  
And I will be damn disappointed if it is ugly on that coffee table.





*Top: Pocket Sized Shinrin-Yoku, by Audrey Nguyen-Hoang*

*Bottom: 1million, by Evan McHenry*

*Top: Frost in Bloom, by Audrey Nguyen-Hoang*

*Bottom: Guitar, by Evan McHenry*

# Nothing the Wind Might Sting

By Edie Patterson

1.

The bird flies in through an open window on the first story of the hotel. It flies through a patch of dead zinnia stems in a splintery wooden window box where the cat sits sometimes in the nice weather, his shiny fur full of the dust that is disintegrating flower petals and spider legs and dirt. In the summer, he lies there to watch the glimmering translucence of cicada wings and white moths, his green eyes filled with daylight and flower petals and spider legs.

The hotel is busy on the day the bird flies in. It's early spring, a warm day, and the cat is lying in some pool of sunlight far away; there are guests there and one of them spots the bird and yells something. It's a starling and it flits around in a panic, a whirl of wings and the tame talons that sit on bird feeders in backyards. But still it is wild, angry, shrieking and frenzied and mottled wings and

beady eyes too far away to see.

2.

Fall sinks into winter, flocks of geese into the fanned-out sparrow wings that dart between skeleton branches in the snow, a mess of heartbeats and birdsong. Our days are penciled in planners and guestbooks, colored by memories in organic shapes. We slip in and out of consciousness, dreaming of soft ice cream and chlorine blue beneath our atlas of oak trees.

One day, the heater breaks in the hotel, and everyone sits inside piled in coats and blankets until there is nothing left showing, nothing the wind might sting. Except our eyes, filled with anticipation and glass windows. We are afraid to close them.

Today is winter and cold and the sky is so heavy with gray it's snagged on the naked limbs of elms. Today, we hold our breath, which is a

hazy cloud that drifts upwards to join the sky, an organic shape.

3.

The hotel is full of houseplants, six feet tall from the brims of their ceramic pots, explosions of green on trellises and hooks and nails, and butter-yellow sunlight confined in neat rectangles on the hardwood floor, and people and our backpacks and suitcases and orderliness and instincts. We've shed our puffy winter coats and patterned wool hats and started to open our windows, just a bit. We weigh ourselves down with suitcases and we hold room keys and pamphlets and exhaustion. We ask about the weather and tourist spots and where to eat dinner. We carry our belongings in tidy stacks inside bags, heavy and self-important.

Everyone stops when the bird flies in. It's scared at first, fluttering around with sharp wings full of dust. Then it stops for a moment and sits on a railing of an upstairs hallway that overlooks the lobby. It sits there in the sun so we can see the blue-green iridescence of its feathers and the scared clutch of pink claws on our

polished railings and the point of its beak. We are scared of it and its unpredictability. It is scared of us and ours. So we wait, and in a minute, we watch its wings awaken and some impulse leads it out a different open window where it disappears, unhurt and wild, into an organic shape in a white sky.

4.

In the spring, two barred owls nest in an alley three blocks away from the hotel and stare at us through budding branches and golden hour light and glassy unfazed eyes. We release our breathing and the world instead holds its breath. We think of underground rivers and owl feathers. We float as organic shapes on the steady syllables of our words, held captive by the enigmatic hopefulness between the lines of tree branches that begin to fill in with letters and viridian greens.

The last time we see the owls is in May. One of them is perched on a telephone wire across the street from the hotel. The hotel manager comes inside and we hear the echo of the door slamming from inside the enclosed right angles of white walls of our rooms. Out-



side is the beginning of night and the end of evening and a sliver of yellow moon suspended in an inky dusk.

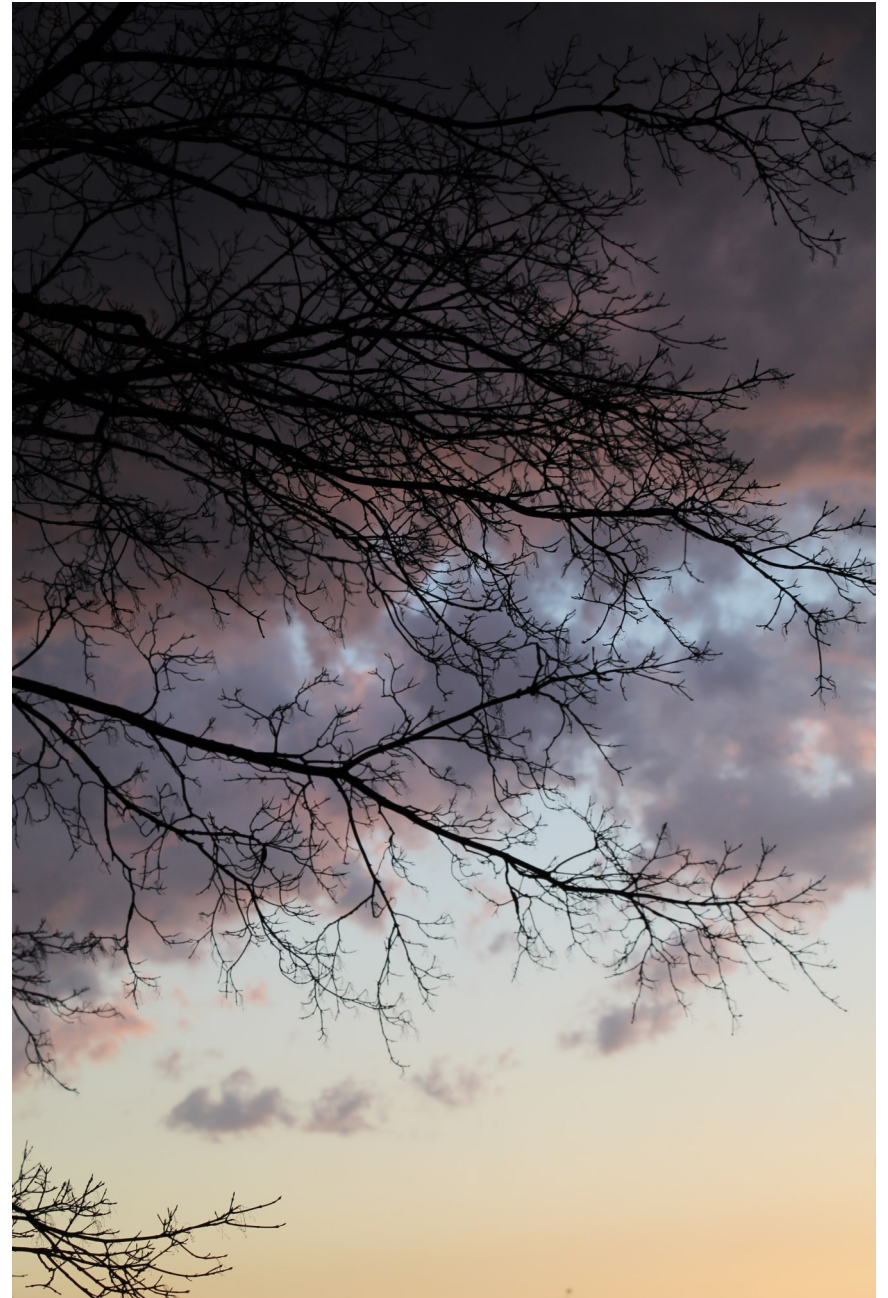
Months shift from breath and memories and leaves. May is a planner page, pencil lines. The breath is still there, exhaling with moon and stars and birdsong.

“There’s an owl outside, a barred owl,” we hear faintly from behind our closed doors.

So we congregate on the lawn, green grass peppered with blooming clovers, a celestial mirror.

We stand in the middle of an asphalt street, barefoot, staring at the sky and the trees, a collective gaze. It feels like watching the world spin, or watching a flower open. There’s tar that fixes cracks in the street and yellow street lamp light. We can barely make out two owl eyes on the telephone wire. There’s a shroud over the owl, a branch of a tree and its tendrils. They stretch out in vibrant shades of green through a heavy darkness. We glance back at the hotel building, its neon sign and stacked bricks and mortar square corners. We feel heavy, placed here on the asphalt be-

neath these trees. We watch the world spin. The owl flies away, hidden by the brown blur of its wings. We watch a flock of birds on the darkening blue horizon. We watch the world spin, barefoot on asphalt. We watch the iridescence of starling wings, too far away to see.



*Something Almost, by Evan McHenry*



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