

Foreword

“WHAT TO MAKE of a diminished thing?” Robert Frost’s oven bird famously asks.

The young authors in this volume pose variations on this essential question.

How to survive in a changing climate?

How to find beauty in a degraded world?

How to value a nature that is slipping away?

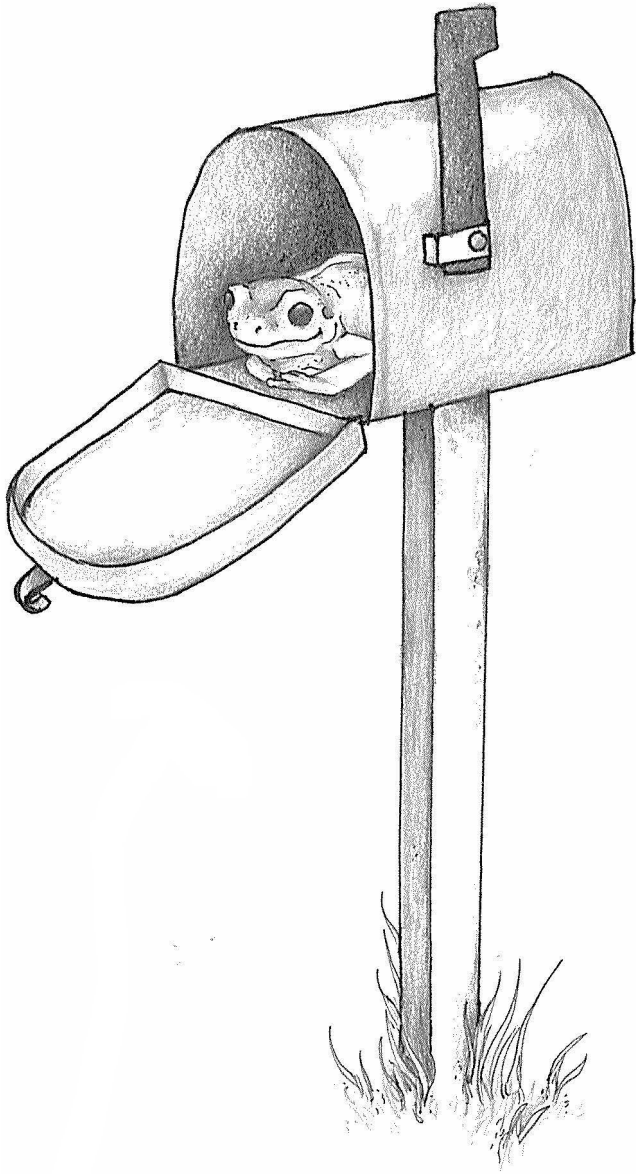
“The earth was made to hold life—to nurture it and cherish it . . . we are bringing about change so quickly that earth can no longer cope with it,” observes Jyotsna from India.

“Earth is resilient, humans are too, but not as,” Grace from the US writes.

“I’m going to try and love all the pieces that never should have come together, mostly because I have no other choice,” Shanti from New Zealand says.

I found their poems and essays to be haunting—wise and honest and true. I think you will, too. Even in the face of environmental destruction, these young writers manage to find inspiration in a “diminished thing.” This collection balances their sense of fear with their sense of wonder.

—Elizabeth Kolbert



EMMA BARRY

Peepers

Emily Rice, 16

UNITED STATES

MY DAD CALLS late Sunday night and tells us to come and hear the frogs, so my brother and I hop in the car and drive to his warehouse in industrial West Eugene. My dad joins us and we make our way down the street toward the rusty yellow gate that leads into the wetlands. We pass by a row of mailboxes—when we were little, my brother and I used to run up and down this street checking every mailbox for tree frogs. They like to make homes there, and it was like Christmas finding a frog in the mailbox. We would scoop them up and cup them in our hands and examine the stripes on their backs with wonder, then set them free and watch them hop away through the tall, muddy grass.

Back then, the wetlands across from my dad's shop were lined with native willow, alder, birch, and towering cottonwood, and the graffiti-covered wooden lookout on the edge of the marsh used to sit tucked in a dense grove of trees. Tonight the three of us stand in the lookout that now stands alone, a stark silhouette against the endless marsh grass, and the soda cans at our feet reflect a rainbow of city lights.

On a normal night, traffic and industrial clamor drown out the night music of crickets and honking Canada geese. But tonight, a full moon in March, a chorus of croaking drowns out the industrial

din, and the geese and crickets and everything, even my own voice. The three of us peer from behind the wooden, graffiti-covered wall, looking out over the pond where a flock of Canada geese sleep, nestled beside the reflection of the full moon, and my dad raises his voice above the croaking to tell my brother and me about the spring peepers that used to sing their way through the silent night when he was a boy.

In My City

Vani Dadoo, 16

INDIA

In my city
If you lie on the roof
of a sixty-something skyscraper to stargaze
you'd have the proof
from the stars, stray and ablaze
that you are still as insignificant.

In my city
If you drive on the bridge over the sea
that separates cities and mountains
you'd see
and wonder at the waves, whelming and wanton,
and not at the beams that hold up the bridge.

In my city
If you walk along and look at the coast
from your house of wood and metal and brick
you'd want to boast
that the water tries to worship and lick
your feet and your hands and your soul.

In my city
If you notice the electric tower rising in the skies
across the highway, the lonely street

you'd recognize
an emerald creeper climbing, not discreet,
unaware of electricity, but thriving on it.

In my city
If you stand on the beach and see the sun drowning in the sea
and behind you there is a row of commercial buildings
you'd agree
that the dying, red sunlight seems to be gilding
the glass windows and the metal girders.

Chiloé

Elisa Troncoso-Cabello, 13

UNITED STATES

i watch the horses

and they're staying where the grass grows higher
and the weeds reach up to their flanks
but we can get close enough to reach out
and touch one, where the hair bristles on the edge of its spine

the ground is patchy and dark
but who
could look at the ground
when all you can see are the dark ocean waves
and all you can hear
are the seals crying from the rocky islands

i can smell the salt and the earth
and the wind would blow me away
if i were not so grounded
grounded in this moment

but when i climb el muelle de las almas
and i scream out for the ferryman
to carry me into the sky
i can only hear the wind answering back
and horses run

We Ran as if to Meet the Moon*

Nida Mir, 15

PAKISTAN

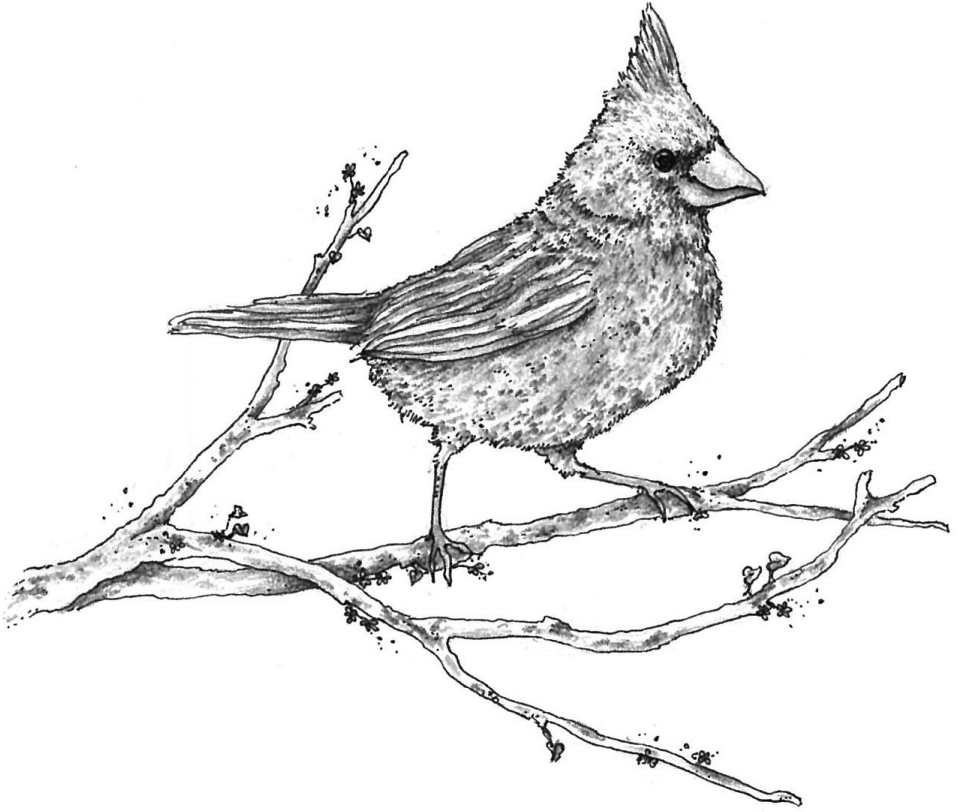
A gilded sceptre for the King of the sky
An ornament for a starry shawl
A starry shawl for the women in nature
And a portal from heaven to earth
An enlarged star just for you
A porous orb made just out of Noor

A stringed pearl in an angel's wing
A wolf's howl
And a wanderer's lamp
A white spot on an inked page
A calm sight after a stormy rage

A marbled gem on a veiled face
A poet's pride and a writer's gaze
Periwinkle petals in a frosted globe
A luna's crown
Zeus' bolt

A lavender-soaked cotton knot
Of a celestial variety
A lonely thought, a lost memory
A curer of anxiety

*THE TITLE OF THIS POEM IS BORROWED FROM ROBERT FROST.



EMMA BARRY

The Cardinal

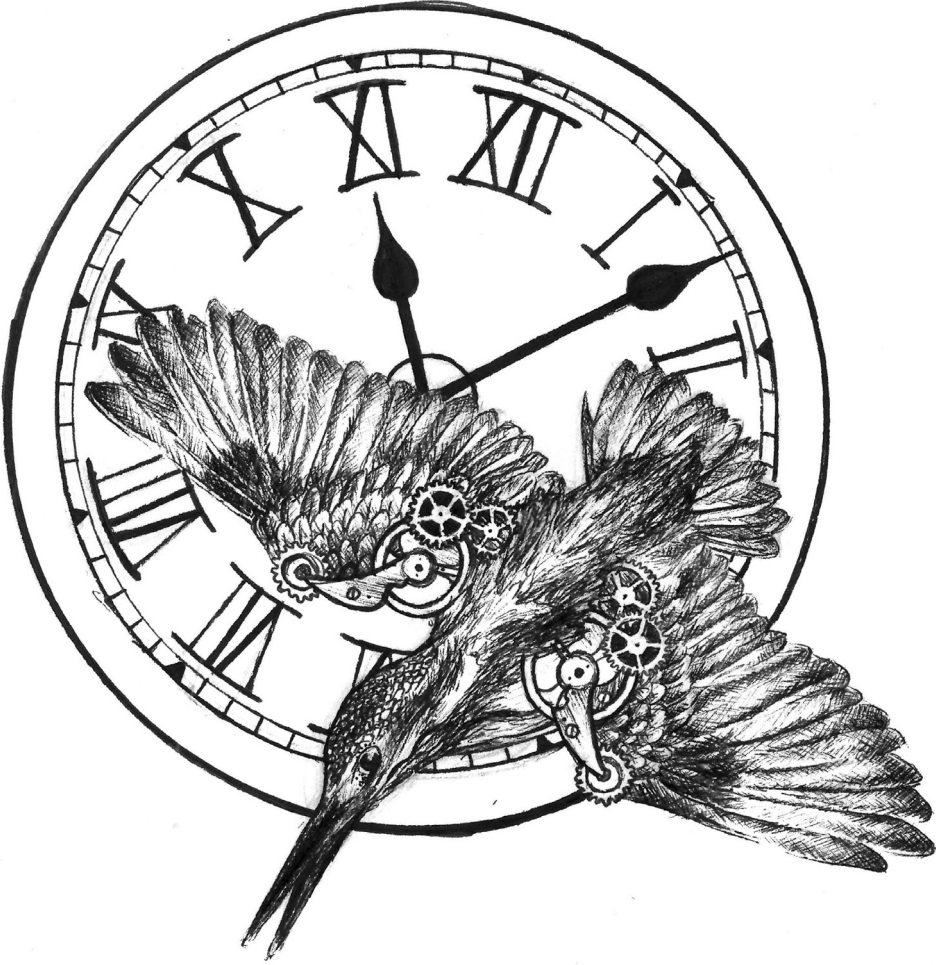
Lindsey Maurer, 13

UNITED STATES

Every morning my friend visits me,
A small bird, perched upon a blossoming branch,
Not scared, but casually watching.

She sits on her branch and stares at me,
Brown, unassuming feathers lending themselves
To the small crest atop her head.

Then, like clockwork, she flutters away,
Wings whirling in a peaceful flight, heading home,
Leaving me with just my coffee.



LIBERTY MOUNTAIN

Kingfisher

Pramit Das, 14

INDIA

With his body of ocean scales and throat of burning fire
Listening to the creaking of crickets
In his forest hearth

Kingfisher
His head moves fast
Like a ticking clock
Looking into white-water streams

Whoosh!

He alights his branch
The leaves now rustling
Wings now whirring
Heading towards water with sharpened sight and sharper beak

Splash!

The kingfisher has his meal

Sound the Silent Alarm

Sirin Jitklongsub, 17

THAILAND

I WAS NINE when my parents moved all our belongings to the second floor of our house, stocked our bathrooms with black basins of clean water, and filled our bedrooms with instant noodles. It was 2011, and I barely knew how Facebook worked, so I merely watched as my parents scrolled through pictures of people perched on their roofs as torrents of tea-colored water rushed past beneath their feet. I turned on the television and saw boats where there shouldn't be boats, on streets and in buildings and in rice fields . . . or, what used to be rice fields. I thought it was funny at the time, and secretly hoped the floods would reach my area as well, so I wouldn't have to go to school. Living in Bangkok, removed from the struggles of people living in less developed, more affected parts of Thailand, I didn't feel that the floods were anything more than a surprising break from my routine. I didn't know that beneath the boats were bodies, and not just bodies but lost lives, lost dreams, lost futures. I didn't know that the floods were a message from our planet.

Like I said, I was nine.

I was thirteen when the black basins made a comeback in our bathrooms and we started a collection of bottled water. My sister and I weren't allowed to shower for longer than seven minutes