

THE BEAT

VOLUME XXVI



EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to present the 26th edition of The BEAT, the David Geffen School of Medicine's journal of art and literature. As we reflect on a tumultuous year around the world, we also recognize the timeless impact of artistic expression. The BEAT continues to embrace human connectivity as a fundamental part of its mission.

This year's pieces, all created by members of the UCLA Health community, are testaments to how our voices hold the power to shape our narratives. We are grateful to all those who submitted their work, and we look forward to seeing how their journeys continue forth. We hope that you experience the rich palette of emotion and insight brought to life on these pages.

Harika Kottakota, Tira Oskoui, Grace Yi
Editors-in-Chief of The BEAT (2023-2024)

And The BEAT goes on...

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VITAL SIGNS AWARDS

ART

IN MAMA'S FOOTSTEPS
by Katherine Ničev Holland

HOUSING CRISIS
by Emma Ruskin

LITERATURE

THE MANDARIN TREE
by Kate Coursey

SILENCE
by Daem Roxane Celestin

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literature // art

COVER ART: **Connection** by Stephanie Punt

Artist's description: « Connection » symbolizes the linkages we share with our past, present, and future. Nature connects us. This work explores the connections we forge with the world and ourselves. It explores the balancing act between pursuing a known path or embarking on the uncharted journey toward our dreams and aspirations.

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We welcome submissions from all faculty, staff, and students at the UCLA Health Sciences community at <https://medschool.ucla.edu/education/md-education/student-life-and-events/ucla-beat>

A STAR

by Daem Roxane Celestin

When a star is born it causes chaos
An explosion of matter no one saw coming
It produces a force that continues to add to
the universe
A star in and of itself is infinite
Infinitely destructive, selfish.
Beautiful.
It makes room for itself
unapologetically
Breaks bones if it has to
Tears skin
Unapologetically.
When a star is born
It takes its time
In no rush but waits for none
Kicking to the sound of its own drum
Making melodies foreign to the world beyond
Music only a few witness
And even fewer recognize.
It is selfish.
With no contributions other than cries of life
Chants of "I am here"
Demanding to be heard, seen, cared for
Demanding to be valued
It is selfish.
Causes destruction purely for its own
existence.
It's selfish.
Beautiful.
The atmosphere bends
Molds itself to carry it, to hold on to it
The world now made new
Twisting, working, trying to understand this
new infinity,
this new constellation.
When a star is born
We look to the heavens in admiration
In adoration

We thank the God of the stars for the new
galaxy gifted
We thank the God of the stars for this pain,
this fire,
this force, this masterpiece.
We thank the God of the stars for the good
and bad
The good overshadows all
We thank the God of the stars for creating
a soul so beautiful
it's blinding
We thank the God of the stars for this rock
Shining
For a glimmer of hope
A twinkle above the world
Oh we wonder what you'll be
The songs you'll sing
The paths you'll tread
The stars you'll follow
All unknown, all a mystery, all infinite
All destined for greatness.
When a star is born
We celebrate
We celebrate less darkness
We celebrate the new beauty, the new light
even if only a few are blessed to see
Even if there are years where the light dims
Even if the star itself doesn't recognize its
own wonder
Even if it shines for one, or two or three
Even if years have passed
We celebrate
We are joyous
For a new thing under the sun

So we celebrate
When a star is born

Galaxy
by Leticia White

Alterity

by Peter Han

while the dust motes rose and fled
in the dim bed he sat and laid
a stranger of both speech and thread
his hands callused, his brow crocheted

the door swung and the light swept in
white coats and ties and instruments
assembled old to young therein
to oak eyes keen for some guidance

and in that space the man did stare
as object of alterity
with naught he came and back threadbare
often alone in humanity

we spoke and shared and laughed aloud
words bespoke but of man further
my pocketed list and his hardships enshroud
unburdened by stranger turned brother



Breaking Waves

by Neil Parker

SUNRISES

by Kalei R.J. Hosaka

I see you gaze out of your fifth-floor room—
Spotting seagulls gliding over the crest of well-formed barreling waves
Their wings glimmering with the ocean breeze.

I hear you say—
You had learned what it is like
To accept the uncertainty of how much time you have left.

Dependent on parenteral nutrition
You think about your children
Who hope this is another challenge that you will soar through.

I watch you gaze out over the horizon
Hoping for another day
Of sunrises—
Breathing in the ocean mist

HOLLYWOOD

HOLLYWOOD SUNSET

by Walter Jong



Lake Agnes

by Jeffrey Xia

A PERFECT STORM

by Kalei R.J. Hosaka

A perfect storm, they say
The stars aligned
A block of “Swiss cheese”

I feel compelled to foreground my telling of
this event with “context”
I was fatigued—covering a holiday shift
A brief patient handoff
“Skeleton” staff in the hospital

I take a deep breath
“I apologize for my role in your child
getting the wrong dose of methadone”
I pause
“You see, I ordered it in milligrams per
kilogram when it was supposed to be
ordered in milligrams”
I listen—remorsefully making eye contact
with the disapproving parent in front of me
“Our pharmacist says it should not have
any impact on his health.
The error passed through several layers of
checks and balances,
But I was the one who ordered it.”

We exchanged pleasantries and mixed
feelings of disappointment and gratitude
The parent responded:
“Well, I know we’re all human and we ‘f---
up’
“But how does our system let errors
happen to vulnerable children? I want
to trust the system. How do we prevent
something like this from happening
again?”

A perfect storm, they say
A block of “swiss cheese”

Two weeks later, I am feeling insecure
We filed a report on ourselves to the

hospital administration
Medical errors happen frequently, I’m told
But I wonder: Will I be the reason this
family experiences a lifetime of distrust of
the healthcare system?
Would I be punished?

I cannot help but think to myself: “would I
feel differently if I were White?”
Because maybe they’d give me the benefit
of the doubt
Because I fear being another person of
color—adored when things go right,
written off when things don’t

I made a mistake.
Am I a mistake?
Lord—how could I make a mistake like
this?

A perfect storm, they say
A block of “swiss cheese”

Medicine is beautiful and imperfect
We are stewards of an imprecise art
Tinkering with death
Teetering on the edge of mortality
Making decisions in a world of floods and
perfect storms

I promise to give you my best each day.
And we will do better.
I am afraid errors are inevitable.

I am not a mistake.
I am here with purpose.
I am human. And I want to make a
difference in this world.

A perfect storm
A block of “swiss cheese”



Cherry Blossoms at Chidorigafuchi on 35 mm film

by Clare Moffatt

CPR

by Nicholas Hamilton

Sounds in the ED are like birds chirping. They're annoying, and you learn to tune them out. In the symphony of patients, beeps are recognized only when you're in the room.

Crowds are for traumas and codes. I look in at the room 10 feet from my desk and see 5 people looking in. I peer in and see chest compressions. I see a nurse usher her mother away. I see crash carts and monitors and people flood the room. Room full of bodies around this one. I hear beeping beckoning people near.

The attending says she needs compressors. A word I understood without ever hearing it before. A nurse asks if I'm BLS certified. Another asks my glove size. I am now one foot on the stool, being switched with the doctor as I start my first chest compressions on a patient.

Before I start, I see her eyes. Shining, like a crystal ball, marbles, snow globes, or any beautiful thing that doesn't breathe. I hear beeping like a beacon beckoning more people.

They teach that you need to go 1/3 of the way down. If you hear the xiphoid process or rib cartilage crack, you're doing a good job. You're supposed to do 100 beats per minute. They teach you to hum "staying alive" in your head. After complaints of people who haven't done CPR, the American Heart Association now has a list of songs that are 100bpm.

They don't often teach you this, but to do CPR is to beat someone else's heart for them. To take a 5% survival to a 25% survival. To press against odds no gambler would ever take. To do CPR is to tell someone to hang up when God calls.

Nothing prepares you for doing it on a young woman. The feeling of cartilage cracking feels like a reward no one deserves. 100bpm is to the tune of death clapping in the corner. It was my first day in the ED when I realized why “staying alive” is always the song, because it was the only thing you are thinking in that moment. I was thinking it so loudly I was begging aloud, pushing 1/3 of the way into her chest begging her to stay alive.

When someone is coding, the beeping is constant. You can only silence the monitor for one minute before it continues.

She was on massive transfusion protocol. That means no one else in the hospital receives blood until this person is ok. The entire hospital is focused on this person.

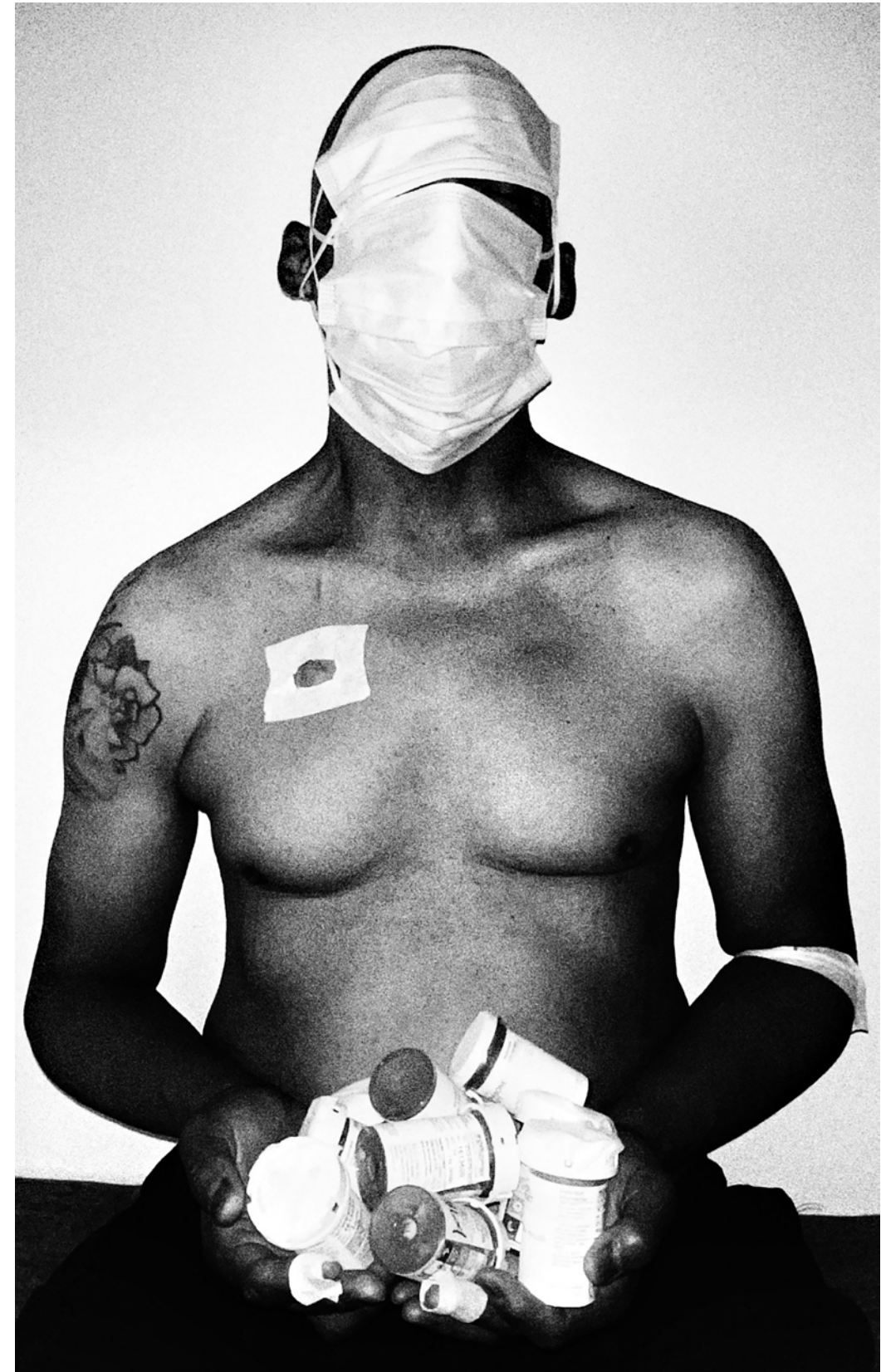
She is spitting out blood as fast as we are giving it. Imagine how much water you feel compared to how much is in the water gun. Imagine it. Think of that when I tell you a liter of blood feels like a lot more when sprayed. Every compression is an ejection. I am switched out, and it’s my job to stop the beeping every minute.

After an hour and a half, I’m there when they call it. Almost two hours, countless empty bags, and syringes, and one life later, 5:52 is the time of

death. I turned off the monitor for a moment of silence. It was then when I realized absence of beeps only happens when death is near, and I will never complain about the beeping in the ED.

Her eyes looked like when someone dies in a movie. The room with 20 people in a small space, looked all parts poetic, and no parts cinematic. Everyone shows when the person flatlines, but no one shows the hour of hoping. No one shows the doctors crying. No one shows residents asking nurses if you’re ok, and you’ve never understood “the blind leading the blind so clearly,” everyone asking are you ok, knowing they aren’t ok and having nothing to say. No one knows what to say to a person who failed saving a life. The death may not be on them, but the blood is, and it seeps through scrubs and stains your dreams, waking up to beeps and compressions, her eyes, like crystal balls and marbles and snow globes and all things not living.

The next patient comes in after another drug intoxication. When putting in his IV, he is complaining to a nurse about a sandwich. What a beautiful thing to wish for. I go back to prepare the body for her mother. To clean off the blood and act like her ribs aren’t cracked. I get the patient a sandwich and walk through the hospital to my car. And I’m happy, to hear birds chirping again.



C IS FOR SURVIVOR

by Consuela Nance

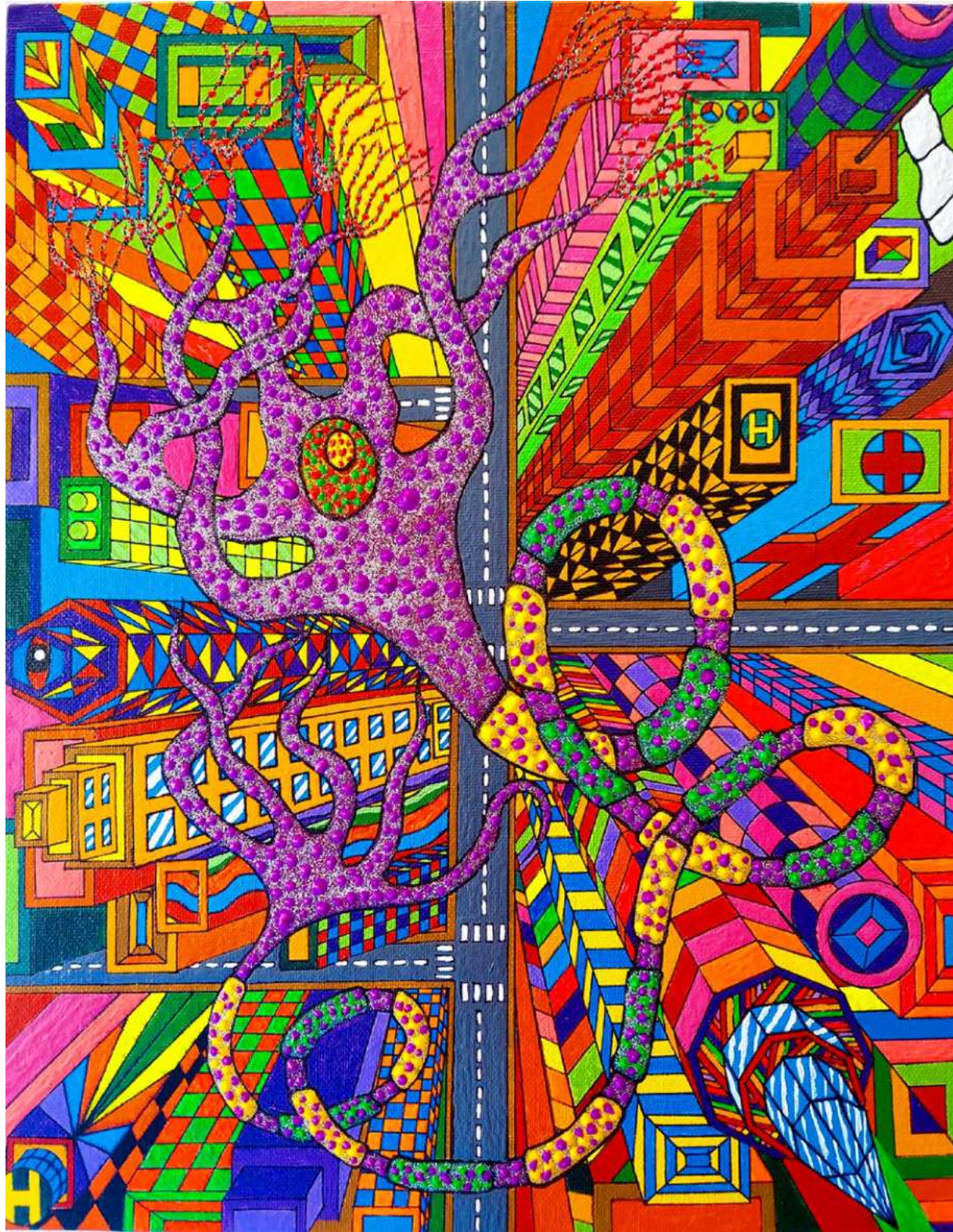
Dos Naciones

by Alberto G. Juarez

Soy de dos naciones
Una vestida de azul, blanco, y rojo
La otra vestida de verde, blanco y rojo
En una nací
y en la otra crecí
Veo una línea pintada en el cemento
Y una cerca de alambres con púas que resiento
El rostro de un migra pendejo
Diciéndome que no me parezco
A la identificación que presento
Todos los días es lo mismo
Comprobar que soy el mismo
Pero aunque alegue con su racismo
Me identificaran
Me colocaran
Y me colgaran
Como un Mexicano
Sin papeles y sin su americanismo

WAVE

by Nima Golzy



FALLING

by Baruc Campos

DRIVING ON THE FREEWAY

by Qiang Zhang

Early morning and the world is silent,
For sometime. The sky a pale reminder of night,
Car rumbles, purrs in the frigid warmth,
Your breath fogging up the air,
Driving to the hospital.

How does it feel when the sky cracks open?
Searing pink and yellow hues in the distance,
On the freeway,
A moment to carry fully,
Through the sudden consults and,
Codes, and
Family members crying and,
The ever-growing kaleidoscope of patients,
You'll see that day;
Patients dying, patients laughing, patients anxious,
And angry, and embarrassed and scared and
In pain, and the simultaneous cruelty,
And beauty of life in each story,
In the hospital.

Carry the freeway drive,
The sublime beauty of nature sharing her light,
Let the vibrant colors of sunrise,
Stay with you,
As a reminder that,
The world can be beautiful.

July 12th 2012

by Christopher Mason

I remember the details of July 12th 2012,
8 years, 8 months, and 23 days ago
better than I can recall anything that happened this morning.
That hot, humid July afternoon
etched in my mind, as clear as the sky that summer day.
Your body, cool and still,
the remnants of a fight for life surrounded where you lie.
It was not neat or tidy,
not a gentle, peaceful goodbye.
It was ferocious chaos.
It was an epic battle.
The discarded, torn open defibrillator pads,
the squeezed empty gel tubes thrown aside,
the caps from syringes, a last ditch effort to shoot life back into your veins,
the plastic blue tube protruding from your mouth where they had tried to give you your breath
back.
Hours after the paramedics left
the fervor in which they had fought to save your life remained as a clear and violent mess.
I was comforted by the evidence of that colossal struggle,
of how hard they had tried.
Yes, the July air was hot and humid
but you were cool and dry
when I kissed your forehead,
when I fixed your hair,
when I whisper in your ear, one last time:
I love you, mom
I'm with you here
goodbye.



SUBJECTIVE MATH

by Alex Sarkissian



Survival
by Emma Ruskin



*Housing
Crisis*

by Emma Ruskin

The Mandarin Tree

by Kate Coursey

a conversation with Liam (age 4):

Liam: "Mama, if I put a stick in the ground, will it turn into a tree?"

Me: "A stick? No. But a seed will turn into a tree."

Liam: "Then I want a seed. Because then I can have a tree everywhere I go."

Elena had jotted the conversation down on a scrap of paper, tucking it into a folder where she kept various odds and ends: Liam's handprints, smeared in blue ink on cardstock (age 2); drawings of dinosaurs (age 4); notes from Liam's preschool teacher, praising his creativity and kindness (ages 3-4.5).

Elena had had vague intentions of making a scrapbook one day—when Liam went to Kindergarten, maybe, when she was less tautened by the exhaustion of managing a toddler. She'd run through countless crafts in her efforts to keep Liam entertained while she worked from home, and the evidence was still strewn about the house: buckets of Play-Doh, glitter pens, half-congealed bottles of acrylic paint. But someday, Elena had thought, she would pull all these disparate pieces together, arrange them in a tapestry charting the course of her son's early childhood. She imagined she would give him the scrapbook, perhaps on his eighteenth birthday, or when he graduated high school.

Someday.

eucalyptus – genus: Myrtaceae. origins: Australia. Used in making dyes, guitars, and bug repellants. Invasive to California, poses significant fire risk.

It was Daniel's phone that woke them the night of August 27th, alarm blaring shortly after 3:00am. Elena jerked upright, fumbling to switch on the bedside lamp.

"What's happening?" she mumbled.

Daniel was already standing. "It's an evacuation order," he said. "There's a wildfire."

"What?"

"Elena, get up. We have to go."

"But..."

"Quickly." He strode to the window, glanced outside, reached for a pair of jeans. Elena rose unsteadily, struggling through the familiar

mire of brain fog.

"Where's the fire?"

"It's close enough. Grab some clothes, I'm going to turn off the gas."

He vanished. By the time Elena made it downstairs, bag in tow, Daniel had finished pulling curtains off the ground floor windows and shifting furniture away from the walls.

"Car's in the driveway." He tossed her the keys. "Can you grab the emergency kit from the garage as well?"

Daniel's brisk efficiency might've once comforted Elena; he had the ability to steer through tumultuous, uncharted waters without breaking course. But for a moment, standing in the kitchen, gritty tile sucking warmth from her bare feet, Elena wanted to shake the calmness out of her husband. Adrenaline wired electric fear through her body, and she yearned for Daniel to show some sign that he felt it, too.

But Elena did not shake Daniel. Instead she stepped out into the thick night air, inhaling smoke that scalded the back of her throat and caused her to double over, coughing.

When she straightened, she saw it: flames slashed a harsh orange line across the hills behind their home, bleeding down into valleys and parched ravines long devoid of rainwater. The pungent scent of burning eucalyptus washed over Elena. The fire was far away still, but she felt each distant explosion of sparks as if they showered white-hot across her skin.

She drifted down the driveway, dreamlike, and unlocked their beat-up Honda Accord. Nebulous clouds of smoke swirled over the garden, cloaking the mandarin tree that swelled each year with brilliant orange globes of fruit. Elena had barely stowed the emergency kit when Daniel appeared, bundling bags into the trunk. *Food, water, clothing, passports.*

And suddenly, a thought struck Elena with such force she nearly stumbled.

"Dan..."

"The evacuation point isn't too far, if we..."

"Dan!"

"What?"

"Liam's things."

For just a moment, Daniel's expression broke.

Then the planes of his features smoothed over, and Elena was once again staring at a man who was both familiar and entirely unfathomable.

"Elena, we don't have much time..."

"No."

"Elena..."

"I said no!" The flames had crept beneath Elena's skin, thrumming against her sternum, leaping from nerve to frazzled nerve. Sparks found 13 months of simmering resentment and turned it to kindling.

She took a steadying breath. "There's enough time. You can wait or you can help, I don't care."

Before Daniel could respond, Elena turned away and strode back up the driveway.

The house was dark. Liam's things weren't organized in any purposeful way, but over time they had mostly migrated to a table near the dining room window, which caught the sunlight on clear afternoons. The table had become a shrine of sorts, heaped with scattered toys, sympathy cards, and programs left over from the small memorial service by Watershed Creek. It was a space frozen in time: *four years, eight months, seven days*. The length of a life. Those number had become the mantra of Elena's existence, the rhythm to which she counted out prayers, heartbeats, pacing steps on hot pavement.

Elena gathered what she could, heaping ragged stuffed animals and hand-knit baby clothes into her arms. She moved mechanically—sometime later, perhaps, there would be an emotion attached to this moment, but right now she could scarcely think over the hum of her own pulse.

Air, stirring beside her. Daniel was there. Wordlessly, he helped Elena collect their son's belongings and carried them out to the car.

mandarin – genus: *citrus*. Can be given in Christmas stockings, also used in traditional Chinese medicine. Grown in California's orchards.

Elena met Daniel the summer she turned 18, when the very earth seemed to shrivel, the bones of the orchards laid bare by drought. Daniel lived one town away—two years older, soft-spoken, already well-entrenched in his work as a carpenter. He had a quiet intensity, an alert intelligence that Elena noticed even through the pleasant buzz of two IPAs.

They'd met at a mutual friend's party out by the old reservoir. It was a clear night, a

spattering of stars reflected on the still water, and she'd offered him a beer, which he declined.

"Not thirsty?" she'd asked.

"Not so much, no."

"You gonna swim?"

"I wasn't planning to."

"You should." Elena had stood up, kicking off her sandals. "It's the best way to see the stars, floating on the lake."

And she had taken a running leap off the rocks at the edge of the reservoir.

She hadn't been able to convince Daniel to join her swimming—not that night, at least. Later, he told her he'd been drawn to her tactile, frenetic energy, the way she never sat still, a portrait in constant movement. When Elena emerged from the water, he offered her a spot on the rock beside him, and they struck up a conversation.

They had, it turned out, many things in common: a shared love of the comic *Pearls Before Swine*, playing the guitar, horror movies. Daniel's father farmed mandarin oranges, and Elena's mother worked at the local cannery packing those same oranges for shipment. Daniel made listening a verb in a way that thoroughly startled Elena, who was used to the ruckus of six siblings. Daniel was rapt, attentive, engaged. He nodded as she relayed her recent decision to attend massage therapy school, against her family's better judgement.

"My father thinks it's a bad idea," Elena said.

"Why?"

"He wants me to go to a real college. He thinks massage therapy isn't a secure career. But I've been a swimmer all my life, so I know what a big difference massage makes for athletes. Plus, I'm good with my hands."

"I see. Well, you seem like the type of person who'll make massage therapy work, if that's what you want."

That made Elena laugh. "You only just met me an hour ago!"

"True. But you can tell a lot about a person's force of conviction in an hour."

Force of conviction. Coming from someone else it might've sounded corny, but Elena had the sense that Daniel saw something within her that was true and frightening and exhilarating, something she had barely begun to recognize herself.

Their first four years together had been a wealth of discovery. Elena, ever adventurous, pushed Daniel to try backpacking, cave

exploration, even skydiving. He, in turn, stilled some of the anxious energy that burned within her, tethered her to the solidity of the shared life they built in a town not far from their childhood homes.

After Liam was born, Daniel worked diligently to ensure Elena did minimal housework. Each evening he brought home a treat—Asian pears, lemon liqueur from Portugal, a funny button to add to her collection. They sat on the veranda, watching the sun sink behind the orchards, Liam bundled against Daniel's bare, sun-weathered chest.

"I'm going to build him a treehouse," Daniel said one evening.

"He's too young for a treehouse."

"But he won't be forever."

And what a treehouse it was. It took over a year to build, a complex set of platforms and rooms nestled in the natural contours of their mandarin tree's branches. By the time he was three, Liam could scramble up the tree without help, plucking mandarins with eager, sticky hands.

It was how Elena remembered her boy most fiercely: at the top of the treehouse ladder, dark hair wind-tousled and cheeks streaked with dirt, laughing, *laughing*.

lasthenia californica – genus: *lasthenia*. A common wildflower.

They drove in silence, turning onto a state highway that cut through vineyards. The distant fire cast its ghostly red mantle over asphalt. The prospect of losing their home didn't quite feel real to Elena; but then, nothing about the last year had felt particularly real, and this seemed merely an extension of an ongoing nightmare.

Strings of headlights coalesced at the old fair grounds, where evacuation tents had been erected amidst patches of wildflowers. After parking and checking in, Elena and Daniel found their way to a bench near the edge of the grounds, carrying a pair of wrapped sandwiches.

An older woman was there already, her thin frame loaded with an absurd amount of jewelry. Her eyes flicked back and forth between Daniel and Elena as they sat.

"You from Grantsville?" the woman asked.

Elena said, "Just south of the city limit."

"I'm to the west." The woman spoke with forceful intensity. "I heard the fire's close. Near the southern edge of my property, right where

the house is."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"I wish they'd give us news." She took a shaky breath. "It was my father's house. He built it himself. Raised all us kids there, and... I just don't know what I'll do if I lose it."

The woman's eyes were bright with desperation. Somehow, seeing her panic calmed the turmoil within Elena. She knew that feeling, that desire to crawl out of her own skin. Elena hesitated, then moved to sit beside the woman, offering half a sandwich.

"It's unthinkable," Elena said softly.

"I just don't know what I'll do," the woman repeated.

"You'll keep going, even when it feels impossible. That's what we all have to do."

"But what if I can't?"

"You will." Elena spoke firmly. "Trust me. You will."

The woman was shivering, so Elena wrapped a coat around her shoulders. She did not look at Daniel. If she did, she feared the bitterness that had seeded her heart and grown would come spilling out, shaken free by the raw woundedness of the person before her.

Cots had been laid out for the evacuees to get some rest. Elena couldn't remember the last time she'd slept through the night—certainly not since Liam died. While once she had been woken by the quiet patter of bare feet, the whispers of "*Mama, I'm scared*," now it was the weight of stagnant air and the house and formless nightmares that arrested her sleep. She woke gasping and breathless. Each time she was sure she would suffocate, but somehow her heart kept pumping, relentless, pushing blood out and back while she lay consumed in the darkness.

Sometimes she had the sense that her panic woke Daniel as well. But he never said a word. They would lie beside each other, silent, and in that hollow space Elena had never felt more alone.

He was awake now, more than an hour after they'd left the older woman and gone to lie down on the cots. Elena could feel his attention like physical touch, pressed against her skin.

"Elena," Daniel finally whispered.

She rolled to face him. Daniel opened his mouth, closed it, swallowed, opened it again.

Say something, she urged. *Say anything*.

But he couldn't. He shook his head, turning toward the smoke-filled sky, and Elena closed

her eyes against the tears that finally burned their way down her cheeks.

white roses – genus: rosa. Frequently sent to the bereaved after the death of a loved one.

Elena had no words to describe the day it happened. The day the axis of her world shifted so profoundly she knew it would never truly stabilize, a seismic undoing of all she knew about life, God, purpose.

It can take less than a minute to drown, the doctors told her.

Sixty seconds. That was the other rhythm to which Elena's existence was now tied. Liam lived four years, seven months, eight days. He left the world in sixty seconds.

It was the time it took to admire a sunset, to touch a kiss to the top of her son's head as she tucked him in at night.

calochortus nuttallii – genus: calochortus. Also known as sego lilies. Bulbs are edible. Survivors.

"I don't want to talk now."

Elena had heard those words so many times she had stopped counting.

Each day after work, Daniel retreated to the basement, where he spent hours whittling small wooden toys and ornaments. He didn't speak about Liam. Whenever Liam's name was mentioned, the color drained from Daniel's face, and he refused to engage in conversation until the subject changed.

In this way, the architecture of his grief was utterly foreign to Elena, who wanted nothing more than to talk. For 13 months she'd wandered through memories that felt, to her horror, less and less real with each passing season; discolored, as if she viewed them through offset panes of stained glass. She'd anguished knowing that Liam would only slip farther from her. Today was the most she would ever have of him; tomorrow would be a little less, pieces flitting away as easily as husks of dried tumbleweed.

And Daniel was silent.

In her husband's absence, Elena turned to gardening, tending the small patch of earth behind the house as if it were a lifeline. She learned the names of the plants, traced the contours of their leaves and petals until she could recognize them with her eyes closed. She basked in the heady fragrance of wisteria and lavender. She took a particular liking to a patch of sego lilies: their crisp white edges reminded

her of the sailboats she and Liam built together, dipping and swaying on the reservoir.

"The sky is beautiful today," she would tell the sego lilies as she pulled up weeds. "Just perfect. And this morning I saw some baby bunnies. Liam would've loved them."

Liam would've loved them, the sego lilies whispered back.

iliamna rivularis – genus: iliamna. Pale pink and purple, like the edge of dawn. One of the first plants to grow back after a fire.

It took eight days to contain the fire. News of the damage was sparse at best, so when Daniel and Elena finally got permission to return home, they weren't sure what they would find.

A strange sense of calm had settled over Elena. She counted rows of trees flashing past as they drove: *four, eight, seven, sixty.* Liam's numbers. If she didn't look back, she could almost imagine him sitting in his car seat, nose pressed against the window, exclaiming at cows and horses.

The house next door had been partially burned. Daniel let out a breath, whispered a prayer.

They turned the corner.

Their home was standing, at least. Elena fumbled for the door handle almost before the car had come to a halt. She half-tumbled out, righting herself to gaze at the destruction.

Fire had reduced the west wall to a mess of blackened timber, eating around part of the front porch. But most of the main house appeared intact. Elena took a step forward, intending to survey the damage more closely, when she realized Daniel wasn't beside her.

"Dan?"

He was striding around the side of the house, fast, purposeful.

"Dan!"

Elena followed.

The thickets of brush directly behind the house had been scorched to blackened skeletons. But Elena's gaze tracked past the burned ground, past the jagged stalks of grass, settling upon the northwest corner of the garden where Daniel had fallen to his knees.

The mandarin tree.

It stood untouched, just beyond the reach of the fire. Its leaves glowed bright as emeralds against a steel-wool sky, casting mottled shadows over Liam's treehouse, which remained safely cocooned within its branches.

Daniel knelt at the base of the tree, head bowed. Elena approached slowly, and the garden plants caressed her ankles, whispering *here, here, here* in music-soft voices.

She reached Daniel and stopped, swaying. She felt as insubstantial as the lingering haze of smoke, as liable to float away.

"I'm so sorry." Daniel's voice cracked, his shoulders trembling. *"Elena, I'm so so sorry."*

Wordlessly, Elena knelt. She wrapped her husband close and felt the shattering of something within him, felt it reverberate

through his body and into hers as he began to sob. She felt the corresponding swell of her own anguish, the stirring of broken pieces as fragile and tender as new birds—hurt, lost, *alive*.

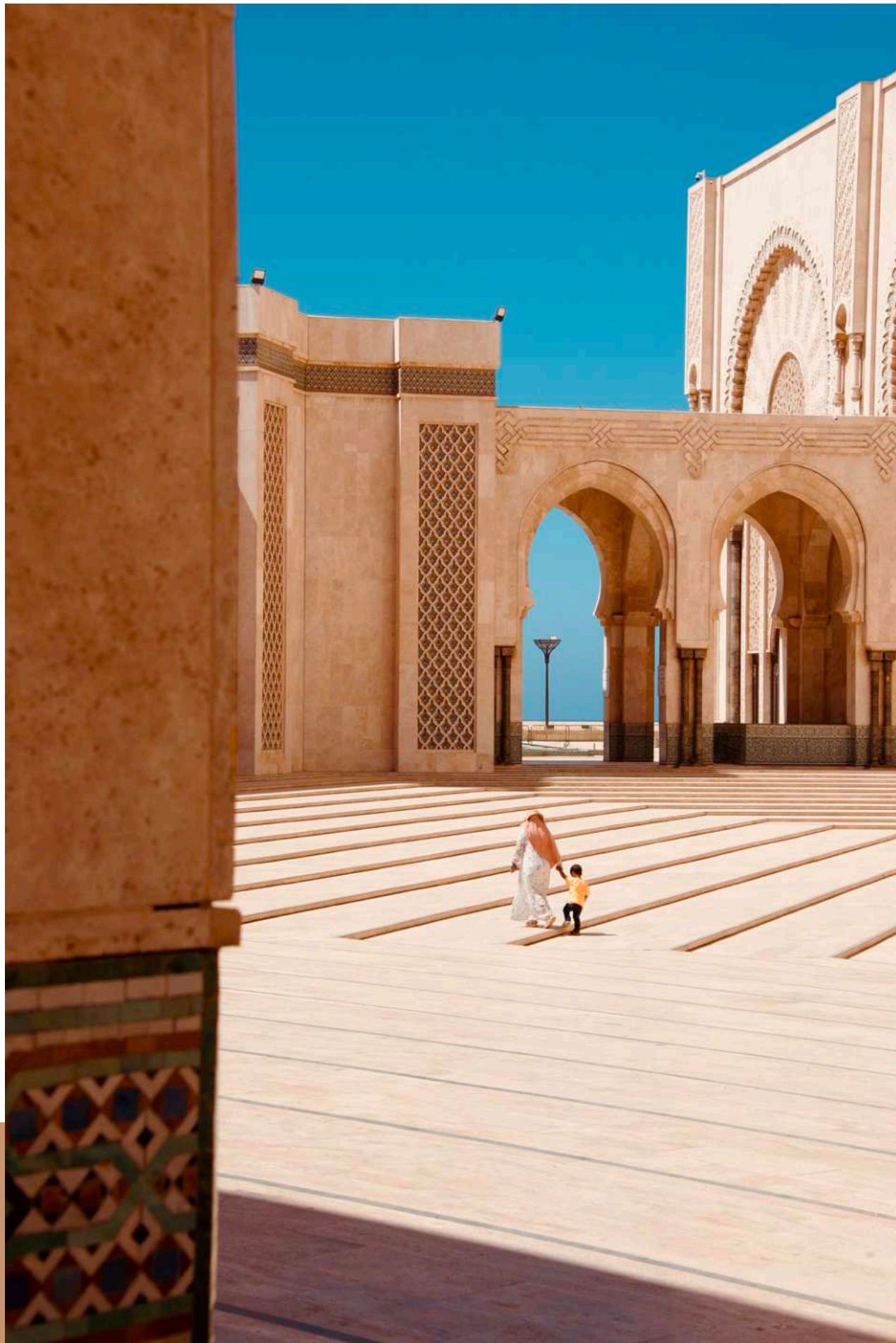
They sat together for so long they might've been a single person. Flakes of ash drifted from the sky, settling like snow over their tangled bare arms, pure white as the sego lilies that now grew thick about the garden.

Here, here, here, the sego lilies whispered, turning moon-bright faces up toward the mandarin tree.



Doorway to Another World

by Shivani Dayal



FORGOTTEN DREAMS

by John Rincon

I've forgotten how to dream.
The whistle tones of every theme.
With every bone, I've given to your dreams.
I've numbed my soul, but swollen yours
And every note that you've composed
Are twilights of my dreams.
In every world, you've planted seeds.
Bringing life, springing trees.
A forest full of steeds
For us to ride, reel in the breeze.
A thousand lives vicariously.
I'm shackled but I'm free.
From shipwreck coves and lost debris
To blooming groves and wild machines.
You are my hopes and dreams.

In Mama's Footsteps

by Katherine Ničev Holland



LEVEL UP

by Daniela Davidoff

Griffith Park on 35 mm film

by Clare Moffatt



in sickness and in health

by Juhee Agrawal

*Who knows what the future holds,
He said with a smile in his voice
As he extended his hand to meet hers.
They looked up at the sea of stars
And saw that limitless possibilities awaited
them, each more delightful than the last
Whatever happened, they would have
each other.*

*Alimony. Bitterness. Custody.
A hope for amicability that
slowly settled into apathy.
Not a word for twenty years.
It's called estranged because you become
strangers.*

*Then who could have predicted that the
future entailed
Showing up and seeing him in a hospital
gown?
Overnight, getting the part she didn't
audition for,
the part of "family," "loved one," even –
"potential caregiver"
Under no legal obligation,
But *in sickness and in health* persists.
He was supposed to live thirty more years
So she resurrects their vow for the next
three months he has left.*

*Who knew that the future would mean
Driving six hours through farmland and
mountains
Alongside his new love
Just to say I'm here, she's here,
We're here.
He can stay with me,
We have family nearby.
He is loved. He is supported.
Don't let that be the reason to reject.
We will help him stay sober.
He can have my liver – it grows back
anyway, right?
I want to donate it. Whatever is needed to –
Her voice breaks.
Is that an option?
*Please.**

*It's what was never predicted,
But what now is.
And your love never disappeared, it just
changed forms
Reappearing in his time of need
If only to say
I'll do anything for you in a heartbeat and
I'm not going anywhere and,
I'll be here when it's time for goodbye.*

I Am Light

by Melissa L. White

A fierce pounding on the door awakens me. I glance at the clock; it's after midnight. I jump up, peek into the hallway. My father answers the front door. Two uniformed ICE Agents thrust a Deportation Order in his face. My mother enters from her bedroom as they handcuff my father.

"He's legal! He's got papers!" Mama screams.

Her cries go unnoticed. They arrest my father and start to take him away. Only after my father pleads with them to let him get dressed do they step inside the entry hall and shut the front door. I hear shouting down the hall, and a baby crying. I know an ICE raid when I see one. They've happened here before.

My little five-year-old brother, Manuel, comes out of his room crying. I run to him, hugging him. "I had a bad dream," he cries. I pick him up and carry him into the kitchen to give him some warm milk. We can hear Mama sobbing in her bedroom. Manuel is frightened.

"What's happening, Fina?"

I take his little hands in mine and try to calm him. "Papa has to go with the officers to answer some questions about his papers."

Manuel frowns. "Is he coming back?"

I smile. "Yes. Do not worry."

He sips his milk.

Mama runs into the kitchen, still sobbing. "Josefina! Bring your brother and come tell your father goodbye!" She runs back into the entry hall. I grab Manuel and carry him in my arms.

My father stands there with his hands cuffed behind his back. He wears jeans, cowboy boots, a red sweater, and his fleece lined jacket. He smiles at us, but I think he looks frightened. I go to him, and he hugs us.

"Be a good boy, Manuel, and take care of Mama and Josefina until I get back."

Manuel nods, solemnly. "When are you coming back, Papa?"

"I'm not sure."

He kisses my mother, and she holds onto him, trembling and sobbing. The ICE Agents grab Papa by the arm and lead him out the door. Shouting echoes down the hallway of our building. I step out and watch as dozens of ICE Agents swarm the corridor, leading away our

friends and neighbors. My mother grabs me and pulls me back inside. She locks the door then runs into the kitchen. She takes out her cell phone and makes a call. She hesitates—fighting tears, then slams the phone down and starts sobbing again.

"Who were you calling?" I pick up her phone.

"The Immigration Alliance Hotline. They don't open till 8:00 am."

"Can they help us?" I whisper, just now realizing the gravity of our situation. Without my father, we won't have money to pay rent or buy groceries. My knees buckle and my heart starts pounding as this very real threat to our family's survival hits me like a slap in my face. Cold. Hard. Unforgiving.

I look out the window and see the Department of Homeland Security van pull out of our parking lot. I feel a knot in my throat as I choke back my tears.

"Go put your brother back to bed, Josefina."

"Yes, Mama." I take Manuel to his room and tuck him in. He reaches out and grabs my hand.

"He's coming back to us, isn't he?"

I smile at him. "Yes. Everything will be fine." I turn out the light and shut his door then hesitate there in the hallway. I've seen on the news how people have been ripped from their homes and deported. Some of these people, like my father, have been here for 20 years or more. My brother and I were born here; we are US Citizens. So is my mother—her citizenship was finalized two years ago. My father's Citizenship hearing is due to be finalized in less than a month. *He was so close. How can this be happening?*

I run back to the kitchen and find my mother on her cellphone, searching for legal aid services for immigrants. I sit down beside her. She glances at me and smiles.

"Don't worry, Fina. The women in our family come from a long line of survivors. Your grandmother and great grandmother supported their families for decades by selling pupusas in the market. We are strong. We will survive."

Another knock at the door panics Mama. "Do you think they've come back for me?" she whispers.



Beach Sunrise by Christine Palodichuk

"I'll go see."

"No! Don't!" Mama's eyes widen with fear.

Ignoring her, I run to the front door and look through the peep hole. It's my cousin, Maria Elena, who lives down the hall. I immediately open the front door.

"Josefina! Mama told me the ICE men came and took Uncle Carlos!" She steps inside our apartment. "I brought you this."

She gives me a large refrigerator magnet with the name and phone number of an immigration attorney here in San Rafael.

"Thanks!" I run into the kitchen and give the magnet to my mother.

Mama looks away. "We don't have money for an attorney!" She starts crying again.

Cousin Maria Elena goes to Mama and hugs her. "You pay what you can. They helped Aunt Silvia. Just call them!"

Mama wipes her eyes. "I'll call them later. Go back to bed. You can't miss school. We'll be okay. We are strong! Somos fuertes!"

I hug Mama then walk Maria Elena to the door.

"I will pray for you," she says.

I nod then lock the door behind her. I go to my room and open my closet. My red satin Quinceañera gown hangs there. The party is next month. I cringe, thinking how much it cost. I clutch the gown, hugging it, breathing in its crisp, clean fragrance.

I hurry into the kitchen and my mother looks up.

I offer her the dress. "We can sell this to hire a lawyer."

Mama smiles, takes my hand. "Bless you, little one!" She hugs me. "I know how much that dress means to you, sweetheart."

I nod, thinking how little it matters when compared to my father's deportation. I kiss my mother's cheek, still damp with her tears, and hurry back to my room. Crawling into bed, I quickly pull the covers over my head, wondering if I will ever see my father again. I close my eyes and whisper a prayer for his safe return. At least I'm not in a cage at the border like so many other children my age or younger.

I do not feel fourteen anymore. I feel ancient,

the weight of centuries of hardship and fear forcing me to my knees. I am a small light in a big dark world, but I refuse to let my flame burn out.

I lay still, listening to my mother crying down the hall, and I wait for dawn's first light to creep in through my curtains, and fill me with the hope of a new day. I whisper softly, "*Soy luz.*" I am Light.

I close my eyes and remember my father telling me when I was six years old that a person's value and essence is known by the way they treat others. "If you want to be respected, treat others with respect. If you want love and compassion, then give other people love and compassion. *Comprendes, Fina?*" I remember this like it was yesterday.

In my mind, I see my father in our garage—loading his tools into his truck—to use in his landscaping business he started with my Uncle Pablo: *Carlos and Pablo's Landscaping Services*. I remember when my father's chainsaw broke, and he did not have the money to repair it or buy a new one, so he borrowed a chainsaw from a friend. Cutting up a fallen tree, he'd stacked cord after cord of firewood, and when he came home that day, I watched him carefully take that chainsaw apart so he could clean it, oil it, and repair some minor damage already present when he borrowed it. "No matter what," said my father, wiping the oily rag over the saw's pieces, "Whenever you borrow something, you must always, *always*, return it in better condition than it was when you borrowed it."

In my mind's eye, I watch him meticulously rebuild that chainsaw—his face solemn—as if performing surgery on a child. He is serious, and he wants me to understand the gravity of the lesson he is trying to teach me.

"Do not forget this, Fina."

I nod, watching in silence as he finishes repairing the chainsaw, then he refills the gas tank even though it was empty when he borrowed it. I have never forgotten this.

After lying in bed for what seems like hours, remembering this moment with my Papa, I suddenly remember my 10th birthday when he gave me a Zebco 88 rod and reel fishing pole. I remember being so excited to finally have my own rod and reel, and no longer forced to use the little cane pole to fish, like a very young child. This rod is shiny and new—and taller than me. I remember fishing on San Francisco Bay on a warm summer day, from the pier at

China Camp State Park. We sit at the far end of the pier, casting our lines. Suddenly, I look up at him, reeling in his line.

"Papa?"

"Yes, Fina?"

"Do you think God will punish us for killing these fish?" Staring at my father, I feel certain our actions will anger God.

He kneels beside me, then looks in my eyes. "Sweetheart. God knows what's in our hearts and minds. He knows we fry these fish and gain nourishment from them. If we say Grace before our meal and ask God to bless the food to the nourishment of our bodies, he will not be angry with us."

I'm still not satisfied. "But we could just as easily eat fruits and vegetables, without taking the life of another creature. I just think it's wrong to kill other animals. It isn't necessary for us to stay alive."

My father puts his hand on my shoulder. "You're a kind-hearted girl. I can see where this may bother you. But I assure you, it is God's will. All throughout the Bible, it talks about sacrificial offerings that people make, doing God's will, and receiving his blessing. I'll show it to you when we get home."

"That's okay, Papa. I believe you." I reel my line in slowly. "I don't feel like fishing anymore."

Papa smiles at me. He too reels in his line then sets his rod down on the pier. "Come sit with me a minute, Josefina."

I put down my fishing pole and go sit on the pier beside my father, dangling my feet over the water below us.

He clears his throat. "Now, I know the Bible has a lot of parables and mysteries in it. And there are many things about our faith that don't make sense to me."

"Like what, Papa?" I study his face as he wipes a red bandana across his forehead.

"Well, like the immaculate conception, for one thing," he says.

"You mean the holy spirit giving Mary a child?"

"Exactly. I know you understand the way babies are made, with a sperm cell and an egg, then the embryo starts to grow inside the mother. But without a sperm from the male body, there is no way a physical baby can grow. I just don't believe a "spirit" could impregnate a woman. It's not physically possible."

I smile. "But that's the whole idea behind our

faith. That God became man. If you don't believe that, how can you believe in Christianity?"

"I'll tell you how," says Papa. "I believe in Jesus' teachings. Love God. Love yourself. And love your neighbor as you love yourself. Those three things are more important in following the Christian faith, than believing a virgin can give birth."

At that precise moment I love my father and his simple beliefs more than I ever imagined it possible to love another human. He doesn't let his doubts interrupt his faith. He is a good man. A simple man. Right then and there, I decide to always strive to be more like my father, and not worry about or question things that don't make sense. Smiling up at him, I sigh. "I guess that's why they call it faith."

"That's right," he says. "I have complete faith in God's plan for us. And that includes fishing."

Lying in bed, remembering that fishing trip on the bay, it occurs to me that it's on this very same fishing trip, during the ride back home in his truck, when my father tells me that the most important thing a parent can give their child is a belief in the afterlife. I remember him sipping his Coke, driving down that winding bay shore road, telling me that we either go to heaven and see our loved ones again, or we reincarnate and find our spiritual family members again and again throughout time.

"If we believe that death is not the end, that our souls continue to live on throughout time, then that is the most important gift any parent can give their child."

I take a sip from my juice box and wonder about heaven. Papa is serious now as he drives. He sets his Coke can in the cup holder and glances over at me. "This helps a child accept death without being depressed about it. It helps them learn that life is transitory, and that giving and receiving love is the most important life experience we can have."

I nod, sipping my juice—my young mind being opened and expanded.

"If you remember nothing else that I've taught you, Josefina, remember this. It is our main responsibility to love as much as possible. Understand?"

Reaching up I touch my father's hand on the steering wheel. He looks at me with tears in his eyes. This moment is seared in my memory. I will never forget it.

Recalling that now helps me have faith that

my father will soon come home to us, and that we will survive until he returns. Closing my eyes, I try to fall asleep. Without fear. Without doubt or worry.

Several days later, when I come home from school, Mama sits in the kitchen talking on the phone to an immigration attorney. Some cash lies on the table, next to a receipt. I grab the receipt, read it, then look up at Mama. She smiles, nods, and keeps talking.

\$175.25 is the price she got for my gown at a local resale shop in town. How much advice will this buy from an attorney? Don't they charge more than that by the hour? I wonder if Papa is tired, hungry, or cold. I wonder if he's now in a cage on the border.

Mama hangs up the phone.

"Fina! This money is going to save us!" She reaches over and hugs me. "The Immigration Alliance will take this as a down payment. Once your Papa is returned to us, we can pay off the balance over time. Thank you, my angel! Your Papa is coming home!"

"Are you sure?" I ask, hearing in my head all the yelling and chaos from that ICE raid. It's only been a week, but it feels like eons since he's been gone.

"Don't you worry," Mama reassures me. "The attorney I met with today has your father's citizenship papers. He guaranteed Papa's safe return."

Mama's joy is infectious. She hugs me, then jumps up to make me some hot tea and sopapillas with honey.

Three weeks later, my father walks in the door and gives both Mama and me a red rose. The color of my gown. The color of love. Overjoyed, I hug my sweet Papa, then sing out, "*Gracias! Dios mío! Soy luz!*"

Standing here, I memorize this moment—so I can tell my own children this story years from now, about how their grandfather miraculously returned to us. When so many others just like him were deported, their families destroyed, their lives shattered. I will tell my children to believe in the light inside them. Because no matter how frightened they are, and no matter how difficult their lives may be, they must never give up. Never give in to darkness, and always let their light shine out unto the world. My father has taught me this. To believe in love—and to believe that we are light.



Evening Stroll

by Walter Jong

five o'clock shadow

by Meg Fender

Leaving work at five o'clock,
weary.

He sees silhouetted
against the clear evening sky,
red leaves on the tree,
clinging.

Trees at dusk in winter
waiting for his attention.

Trees at dusk in winter
take him back
to Midwestern winters,
to being cold and tired and
trudging

home from the playground,
when the streetlights came on.
Summoned for five o'clock dinner,
hungry.

The house, windows lit
with warm yellow light,
curtains not drawn,
allowing strangers
passing to see inside and
imagine it warm, especially
against the dark and outdoor
chill.

Inside, windows wet and steamy
from cooking, the heavy smells
engulf him and make the harvest
gold curtains hang limp,
heavy.

He hides behind the drapery
from the quarreling of siblings
quietly

pressing his forehead
on the cool glass window,
watching winter's first snow fall,
waiting.

Waiting for dinner.
Waiting for mother
to notice his hiding.
Waiting for father
to come home
from his second job.

No one notices.
No one notices
the purple twilight,
nor the snow,
nor the sadness.

His father is gone now,
and one sibling, too soon.
Too soon.

All this happened,
and more!

All this happened
and more.

And in that Midwestern town
long ago, trees performed their
silhouetting spectacle and dropped
leaves and budded and blossomed,

astonishing in the twilight
and the darkness.

ROOM 6

by Melissa Eging

“No matter how you may feel about the kind of work we do sometimes the body will just react, if you feel like you need to step out it’s okay.”

That’s nice. Very thoughtful. But I’ve seen blood before. I’ve seen a crowning head and blood run from the inside of my client’s legs. I sat on my couch at home after birthing my second baby as my midwife pushed down on my uterus and gushes of red spilled out. This was nothing. This was the work I wanted, needed to do.

Room 6.

Room 6 was 5 months along. Just before the cutoff when our clinic and hospital wouldn’t have the tools necessary to terminate the pregnancy. We had already talked to them, made sure they were feeling safe, cared for. A little Ativan for the anxiety and wait. The procedure wouldn’t be today. We would just be preparing her cervix and then Friday, the OR.

She had been crying.

No one wants to be here.

I had watched the resident do the ultrasound on the barely bulging through belly. Screen faced towards us and sound turned all the way down. There was no missing it.

Two giant black holes right where the brain was supposed to be.

There was no life.

Well, maybe there was.

After all, there was a heartbeat. What kind of life could there be? What kind of life for the parents?

Would it be a long life? Or short and filled with pain? Would it be a life of isolation, hospitals, tubes, pricks, pokes, tears?

Were we the one who had to make that call? I didn’t know the baby. I didn’t know the couple. I wouldn’t have to be the one resting my hand on my swollen belly feeling the

reflexive movement of a baby I knew would die. I wouldn’t be the one screaming to the heavens as a child I would never see grow up tore through me. Ripping everything I am and was in half. Would you wish that on someone else?

Would I?

We knocked and entered. The husband had left. She was alone in the dim room, lying back on the table. Her legs spread wide before us. She chuckled a little – something about this position being the one that got her here in the first place.

The doctor took her hand. The resident sat in front of her open legs.

Okay first the speculum. It’s cold and metal. You’ll feel that first. Cranked open. Wrong spot. Closed again, then cranked open wider until we could see inside.

Next the sponge. It’s brown and soapy. Iodine. Original cleanser. Clear the cervix. Numbing comes next. The needle as big as my forearm. Plunge into the soft flesh of the cervix. One shot.

A river of blood. Wipe. Black. Another.

Shot.

Blood.

Much blood.

Sharp. Tenaculum.

Pierce. Tug. Hold.

Blood. Blood. Blood.

Black.

Black.

Black.

I couldn’t.

The light floods my eyes.

I step into the hallway to breathe.

Hands on my knees.

Breathe. In.

Breathe. Out.

I get to leave. I get to step away.

Breathe.



PELVIS

by Sarah Kang

Seeking Purification

by George Heredia



SILENCE

by Daem Roxane Celestin

Silence waits for me
waits for words that know the weight they carry
the burden they bring, the joy they steal
Silence waits at the tip of the tongue
she sits, builds a home,
finds comfort in sweaty palms,
finds peace in the subtle buzz of monitors
she brings back memories
tells stories of dark times strung with dwindling hope
Silence knows this poorly decorated room
knows those eyes, that smile, that breath
She knows

Silence touches every corner
shifts the atmosphere,
she makes her presence known
boisterous. unrelenting. unashamedly.
she commands attention
she pulls, strains

Silence is selfish
she takes hostages
white coats and ill-fitting gowns alike
I watch as she bends time
as she finds joy in making fools of the seasoned
nothing prepares you for her
she sends no warning
she does not declare war
she simply holds power
just for a few anguish-filled seconds
Silence does as Silence pleases

I've seen Silence move
I've seen her break the mightiest of warriors
I've seen her burn plans, defy logic
I've seen her stop mundane in its tracts

most pray to never know her

she waits for me



ANCIENT ECHOES

by George Heredia

I DON'T REMEMBER JULY

by River Sween

There are machines high up in the towers along Westwood Boulevard that let my mind finally breathe. They look like cranes and sit in dim rooms facing mounted televisions that shine a familiar red light across undecorated walls. When they turned on, it felt like a woodpecker was rapidly tapping away in bursts at a spot on the front of my skull slightly to the left. Each tap made my muscles spasm and my teeth clatter. Some days, the woodpecker was more violent with each tap leaving behind a throbbing pain. I never regretted lending my head to that machine though; I soon learned that each tap came with relief. Each fall day, I'd leave the room and feel a bit of joy return. The topography of my emotions rebounded with peaks and valleys. Reds in the brick facades and oranges in the crunchy leaves looked more vibrant every time I stepped out of 760 Westwood Plaza. With each session of TMS, my depression improved.

By July 2022, mental illness was more familiar to me than some relatives. The first time I remember hearing the word depression was when a therapist attached it to me in sixth grade. I had just learned listening to someone's problems could be a career and I had no idea what depression meant, but I knew every day after school all I wanted to do was sleep. Keeping my eyes open felt like a punishment. Five years later, I learned that OCD extended far beyond washing your hands. I walked without rhythm. I used ten words to write a sentence that needed three. "Sorry" was a filler word. Intrusive thoughts paralyzed me and looped in fours like a Pharrell beat. Still, I got better. Medications helped; so did doctors. Friends helped even more until my clouded mind cleared and sunlight flickered behind my eyes. Just a bit of care granted me years of clarity. I learned that a day feeling down never signaled an eternity of doom. The depression would pass as soon as it went

and the intrusive thoughts would circle as they always did. Depression and OCD no longer scared me. They became only brief nuisances.

July erased me.

The depression built up over years, but it felt like I was fine one day in June and gone the next. Over a year has passed and still all I remember about that summer is the comfort I felt in sleep. Most mornings I'd wake up, move to my couch, pull a blanket over me and sleep, repeating that routine until night came and rewarded me with more sleep. When I was awake, I forced myself to eat and let my phone take me away. The dominating feeling that summer was the absence of feeling. I couldn't cry or fume or even force a smile when told.

My partner told me I had a look like nothing existed behind my eyes, that my eyelids laid low and my gaze looked through everything and everyone. We were planning to move in together and had signed a lease mid July; our move-in date was late August. I was also leaving my best friend and roommate since college at the peak of my emptiness. The depression and stress from moving compounded to the point that those brief moments between naps became less frequent. Packing each box felt like peeling pieces of my life away. Minor tasks like doing dishes and cleaning set my brain ablaze. My heart was condensing and hardening each time the pressure dialed up. Most boxes remained empty until the final week.

My birthday was in late August. Most of my memory of that day stems from a picture my partner took of me holding her dog as I exited our new bedroom. She taped a banner above the doorway that read "happy birthday" in her handwriting. Looking back on it, I'm surprised to see a genuine smile. Maybe I was feeling hopeful. That same week, my psychiatrist — after trying what seemed to be every trick in her arsenal — asked me if I knew

what TMS was.

Transcranial magnetic stimulation is a late-line treatment for depression. I learned it was new, approved around the time doctors first told me I had depression. My first time at UCLA's Semel Institute, a kind young doctor sat across from me and asked the usual questions I had come to expect. Halfway through describing my experience to him, tears poured down my face for the first time in months and I couldn't get a word out. He smiled and passed me some tissues. He explained to me his team would position a powerful magnet over a specific part of my brain and send thousands of rapid pulses to stimulate and strengthen neuron pathways in that area. Finally, he informed me of the largest hurdle: I had to attend hour-long sessions every weekday for three months.

Within the first week, I already felt brighter. The coordinator told me I could park at the nearby grocery store and validate with a

purchase to avoid parking fees. Soon, I began associating treatment with candy bars and tortilla chips. I grew more intimate with the store than I ever had as a student, seeing the exact day they switched decorations from summer barbecues to Halloween to Thanksgiving, noticing the first day eggnog hit the shelves. Weeks passed quickly and I began to feel euphoric. I began forming memories again. Hobbies returned to me one by one and new ones tagged along. However, there were consequences. One weekend a few weeks in, I felt a deep depression rivaling the summer's. The next Monday, I described this to one of the doctors and he developed a serious face. He asked me if anyone told me about the Dip.

Early in TMS treatment, the pathways that begin to form are weak. They preview a life after treatment, but they need regular stimulation to maintain. Even two days without treatment, like over the weekend, could break that effect.

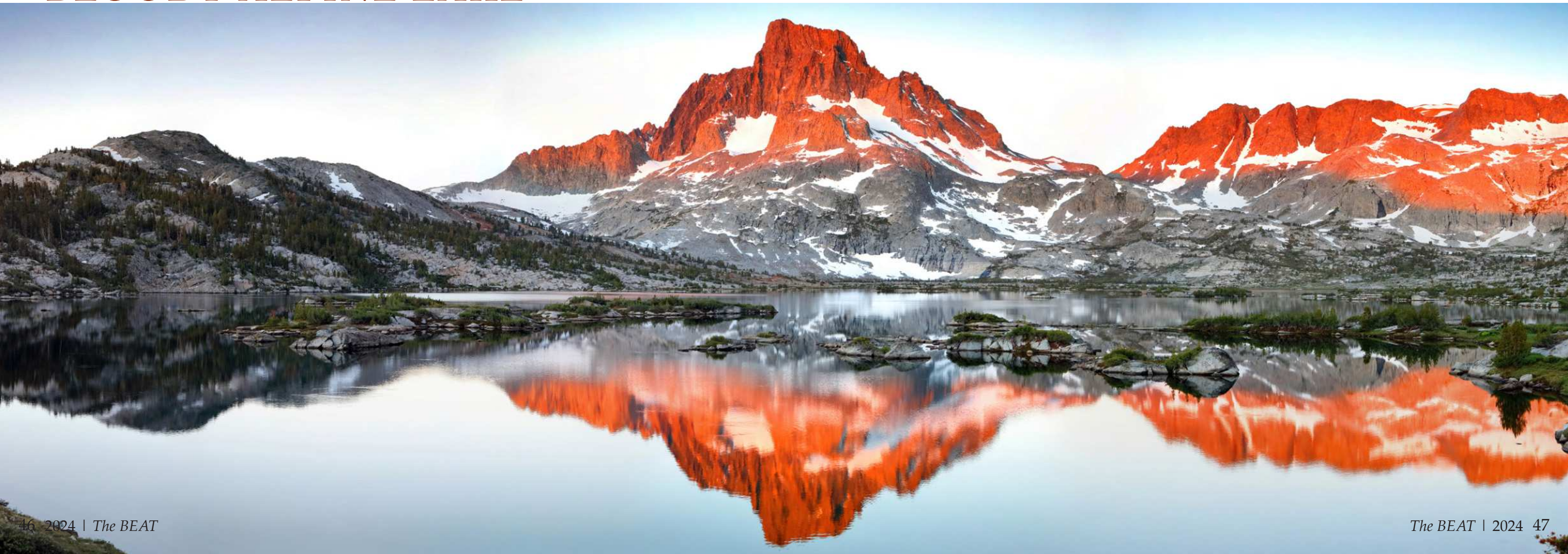
It's a surprise that teases and demoralizes, but the doctor assured me it was a sign that treatment was working. He told me with a smile that this means I had gained something to lose.

My last day of treatment was bittersweet. I had grown to find comfort in the way the pulses made my teeth chatter and the methods I developed to tolerate it. I looked forward to the technician entering my room and watching little bits of the British cooking show with me or how she was trying to convince her boyfriend to watch it with her. The weekly questionnaires offered me tangible evidence that I had improved. Small things like which room I would get that day or which doctor would see me were little mysteries that I anticipated. But the final session wasn't any different from the others. I was there for an hour. The doctor came in to adjust the magnet and give me one last questionnaire while he showed me my

progress. At the end, the technician let me out of the chair and handed me a gold pin shaped like a brain to commemorate my treatment.

That pin sits above my desk at home now. It reminds me of all the pain and robbed emotions, all the days forgotten only marked by naps and empty moving boxes, all the times I cried in my partner's arms as the tears began to flow more easily. Yet it also reminds me of my journey out of those days and how climbing out of that pit took ten times longer than falling in. Healing is a long process, but learning how to live afterward is even longer. Not long after TMS, I began to see the scars left behind after years of dipping in and out of depression. I saw acquaintances where friends once stood. I opened my eyes to life having moved long past me while I was frozen. Enormous glaciers crept across my life and receded leaving deep granite valleys. And those valleys are now teeming with life.

BLOODY ALPINE LAKE by Larry Mao



L SPINE

by Sarah Kang



SONNET FOR FEAR

by Steven C. Cramer

Five years ago this month the battle won,
Remission as the chemo slayed its foe,
With time, defenses lowered one by one,
A rabbit in repose beneath sunglow,

But now confusion, headache—something's wrong,
A large mass on the brain scan, it's come back,
She whimpers, then "I knew it all along,"
The rabbit scurries home under attack,

With searching eyes and tremor in her voice,
She pleads "Why now? My grandson's due next May,"
A pause, she snaps "Start treatment, I've no choice,"
Her plan with roots in terror and dismay,

The red fox gives chase, pounces with its claws,
The rabbit struggles briefly in its jaws.



Pelicans in Flight

by Jeffrey Xia

The right kind of immigrant

by Jessica Menjivar Cruz

As I sweep the hair that had fallen on the salon floor during our client's haircut, I am listening to an evidently affluent white woman speaking with my boss, a short, outspoken Italian man, about the damage that "illegal immigrants" are doing to this country. Fighting to hold my tongue, I'm observant of my boss's response. Like me, he is an immigrant, and has often shared the struggles he faced in his own journey migrating to the U.S. Surely, I think, he will defend us, he will set her straight. Instead, he laughs, nods alongside her, and even agrees with her. Had it been so long since he migrated that he forgot the sweat, tears, and sacrifices that led him to his improved status? What did it take for him to join their side? Was it that he came with a visa to this country and found his way into a green card? Was it his ability to establish his legacy through a successful business? Was it his fancy house in the fancy suburban town filled with affluent members of the community?

I can feel my cheeks reddening and the heat from my boiling blood as I build up the courage to finally speak my mind and stop this ignorance. I want to scream and curse at them, but I remember my mom's words, "el que se enoja pierde" – "he who gets mad, loses." Instead, I turn on my well-developed customer service voice and find the most respectful words to approach the conversation. It doesn't take exceptional intelligence to discern that their views stem from living in a cushioned bubble of privilege maintained by misinformation and a disconnect from real-world experiences. It was exactly what I expected and what my internal monologue had prepared me to address. They listen carefully to everything I say, and I can see their mental wheels turning and forming opinions after some much-needed stimulation. After sharing my own legal status and the immigrant experiences I have lived and witnessed, this lady says something that leaves me even more uneasy and perplexed. She turns to my boss, points her perfectly manicured finger at me and says, "See! She is the right kind of immigrant."

I stood there dumbfounded, questioning

what on earth the "right" kind of immigrant is. Is it based on how we entered the country? Is it what we chose to do when we got here? Is it the amount of taxes we contribute to the country's economy? Or is it the number of children we birth and develop into upstanding U.S. citizens? In the 17 years of life before this woman took it upon herself to label me, 11 of which were spent in this country, I had never once considered the rationale of what made someone "right" in a foreign country and most importantly, who decides what "right" means. Realistically, I understand how she had resolved the cognitive dissonance she was experiencing when determining which category she would place me in. I came at a young age and quickly excelled in school, I began working as soon as I could, I decided to pursue a college career, and had even expressed motivations of becoming a doctor someday. I was an exception to her view of undocumented immigrants because, while I didn't come here the "right" way, I was so young and defenseless that I couldn't be blamed for the crimes of my parents. This ideology pardons me, but in her eyes, my parents' actions are inexcusable. Wanting a better life for themselves and their children was simply not enough.

My father is the hardest working person I know. Coming from absolute poverty and raised by a single mother of 7, he never had the chance to graduate from high school and began working at the same age I did. He didn't really mind dropping out of school since he never loved studying and much preferred the possibility of financially supporting his family and becoming independent. He worked hard; he still does. After losing his first child due to medical negligence, he became committed to providing for his family so that they could be equipped with the tools needed to best advocate for themselves. However, no matter how long or hard he worked, working in one of the poorest countries in Latin America and living next door to gang members hindered his ability to achieve this goal. When my mother was 7 months pregnant with me, my father made the hardest decision of his life of migrating to this

country. He applied for a visa but as is the case for most in our native countries, was denied. He couldn't fail his family, so he embarked on a one-month journey traveling on foot, in stuffy trucks, or in small inflatables across deadly rivers. He left his family, culture, and language for me. He has actively contributed to this country, inspiring his family through his vigorous work ethic, and always grateful for the blessing it is to live in this country.

My mother is the most protective person I know. The youngest daughter in a loving family of 7 inspired by the work ethic and faith her parents instilled in her. Although she loved learning, she was unable to continue past the 6th grade as she began to work on her family's farm like all her older siblings had. When she turned 18, she moved to the capital and worked tirelessly, motivated to cover her youngest brother's school expenses, and contribute to her family so that he could finish school and have a childhood. When my father migrated to this country, she became a single parent to me. She was there for all my firsts; my first steps, my first words, my first asthma attack. Regardless of her limited education and our financial burdens, she relentlessly advocated for me to receive the best medical care and sat by my side in sickness and in health. When my father made the mistake of suggesting she migrate to the U.S. without me with hopes of them earning enough money to bring me at a later time, she nearly bit his head off stating she didn't care how long it took to make enough for us to both come here but that she would never leave me in the care of anyone who wasn't her. A few years later, we embarked on a similar journey as my dad and safely arrived in the U.S.

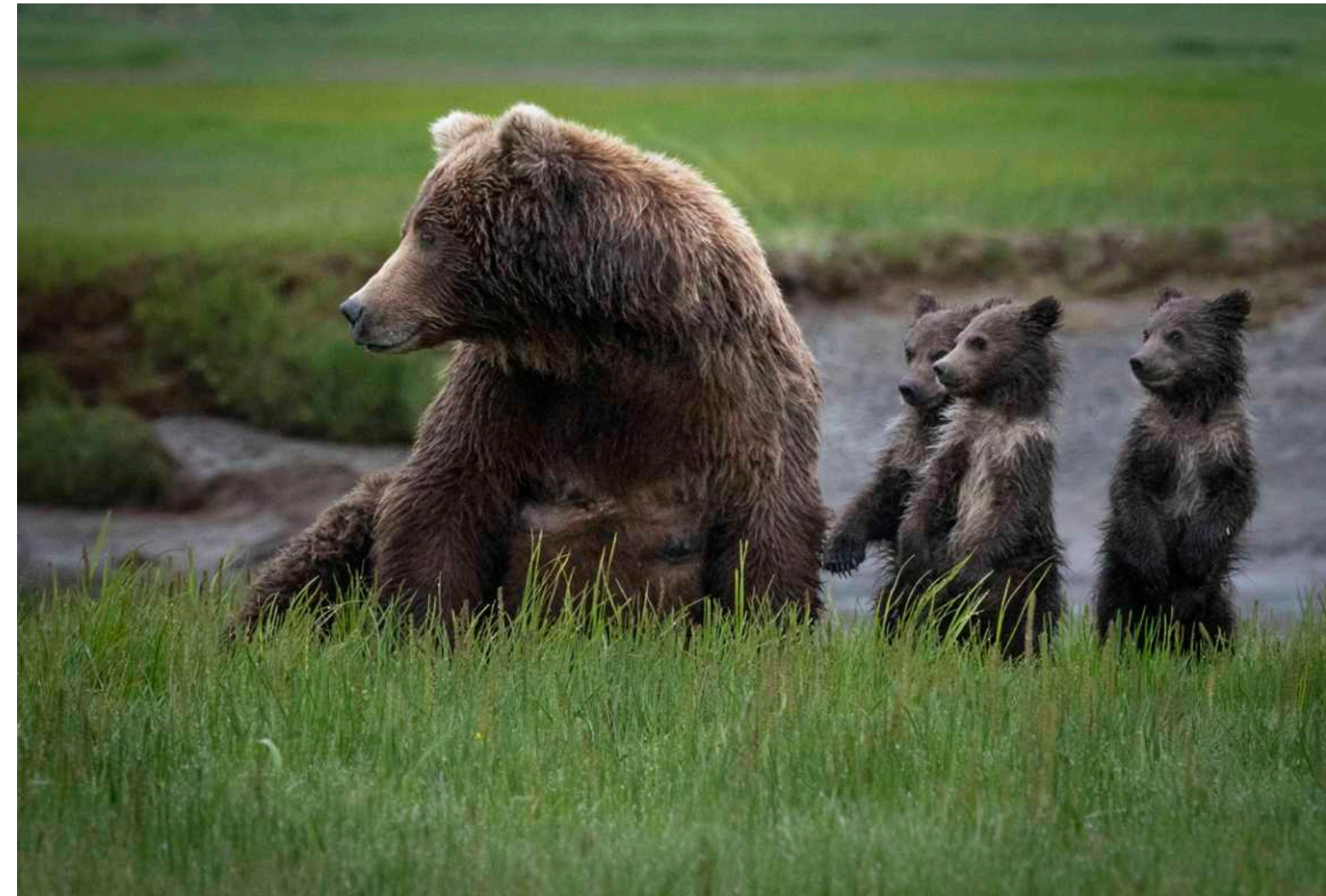
Everything that I am is a result of the perseverance, resilience, and motivation that my parents embody. Their love and dedication to our family led them to make the ultimate sacrifice and pursue a better life for us in a strange land they believed would offer us these opportunities. If there is such a thing as a "right" immigrant doing it the "right" way, I cannot imagine anyone being more representative of that title. But this story isn't unique, it's not specific to me. In fact, it is the most common storyline amongst the millions of immigrants inhabiting this country, undocumented or not. It is the story of the farmers working the fields,

the housemaids and nannies raising strangers' children, the business owners that made their dreams come true, the professionals who took advantage of their parents' sacrifices and seized the opportunities they fought for. Immigrants are the backbone of this country; this has been established. But what truly separates this country's perspective of "right" and "wrong" immigrants can be summed up to the effects of luck, privilege, and bias. The luck of being the one in thousands to be approved for a visa to legally enter this country. The privilege of pursuing a job that pays a livable wage or an education that allows you to climb the socioeconomic ladder. And ultimately, the racial bias that enables white immigrants from European countries to be welcomed into this country while people of color and black immigrants from Asia or Latin America are criminalized upon their arrival.

Sometimes I wish I hadn't grown up so educated, curious, and open-minded. It is much easier and pleasant to be ignorant to the injustices of this country. A country that loves reminding me how fortunate I am to be here, to have a chance to pursue the "American Dream," and to be forgiven for the crime I committed when crossing an imaginary border. Of course, I am grateful, I was raised to be. But I am also angry, I am furious, and I am disappointed. I don't know how to fix the ignorance surrounding undocumented immigration nor do I think people **really** want to be educated. The best strategy I can think of for seeking justice is to use this new position of privilege as a future physician to share these stories fiercely and to glorify the sacrifices of those who helped pave my way. Make it so they must constantly battle the cognitive dissonance between the ignorant and racist attitudes they were raised to believe in and the realities they witness when taking the time to learn about the immigrant experience. I know pursuing a career as a physician will inevitably place me in situations like the one I faced years ago. When those days come, it will again be the wise words of my undocumented immigrant mother ringing in my head – "el que se enoja pierde," that will save them from my fury. But this time I will not remain dumbfounded, quiet, or complicit, I will make sure they know exactly how immigrants get the job done.

The Family

by Neil Parker





Juliet in NY
by Daniela Davidoff

To be a Man in America is

by Nuha Khalfay

to be appropriately medicated for procedures,
and never being told it's pressure not pain
and not having to convince yourself
this is pressure not pain
it's my body
but they're the doctors so they must know better
what this tearing, shattering sensation pulsating through my pelvis is

to not carry so much trauma in your hips,
that you scream when they put the speculum in
professionals coolly calming your hysteria
"you need to relax
keep your knees open and feet in the stirrups
or you
will make the rest of the procedure very difficult"

to never have to choose between
a copper or plastic tesla logo that's shoved through your cervix
or a knock off glowstick bracelet that's stuck in your vagina
or a bendy rod that's shot into your arm
to prevent a pregnancy
that you may not be able to terminate
because someone else felt ownership over your choices, your body, your future

TO BE HUMAN IS TO TRY

by Esther Kim

What kept you from running off the cliff,
The way those pigs did?
What made you wrestle
When you know you would lose?
What made you stand up
After you fell and scraped your knee?
What made you
Wake up in the morning?
You never have all the answers.
You don't always know why.
Sometimes you just feel
The weight of it all.
Giving up is easy;
To keep going is hard.
Giving up is hard;
To keep going is easy.
You never quite know the right words to say.
You never know why you feel this way.
One step, two step
Here we go,
Some days your feet feel heavier than usual.
But the blessing is the struggle,
The victory is in the fight,
Because, in the end,
To be human is to try.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

by Katherine Ničev Holland

BIOGRAPHIES // DESCRIPTIONS

LITERATURE

Alberto G. Juarez: This poignant poem, titled “Dos Naciones,” is a heartfelt exploration of identity and the complex experience of straddling two nations. Alberto G. Juarez skillfully captures the emotional tension of being born in one nation, raised in another, and the constant struggle against societal judgments and prejudices. Through vivid imagery and powerful language, the poet conveys the challenges faced by individuals caught between two cultures and the harsh realities of navigating borders and discrimination.

Christopher Mason: Several years ago, I composed a reflective poem capturing the sudden loss of my mother. The lingering echoes of the battle to preserve her life strangely provide solace. Now, over a decade later, as I delve into the field of medicine, I reflect on my potential role in the profound responsibility of striving to save another person’s life.

Daem Roxane Celestin is a Haiti born and Boston bred 3rd year medical student who fell in love with spoken word poetry at an early age. Her piece “A Star” was written after her OB/GYN rotation and highlights the complexities of bringing life into the world. Her piece “Silence” explores the palpable, undeniable heaviness of the few seconds before delivering bad news. These unspoken moments linger. They haunt us.

Esther Kim: I am currently an RN working at the Marina Del Rey Cancer Center. There are a couple of biblical references in my piece which highlight how, despite the losses and trials we may face in our daily lives, we can keep going each day and be human, for there is a sure victory in the end.

Jessica Menjivar Cruz is a 1st year medical student at DGSOM. She was born in El Salvador and immigrated to the U.S. when she was 6 years old alongside her family. Her primary motivations as a future physician are to provide equitable healthcare and become an advocate for underserved communities, especially immigrant communities.

John Rincon: Motherhood and parenting in general often cause mothers to sacrifice their own dreams, among other things, to be the loving parent that every child deserves. More often than not, a mother’s sacrifices go unnoticed and unspoken. This poem is intended to give voice to that real internal struggle.

Juhee Agrawal: I am a 4th year medical student from Birmingham, Alabama going into internal medicine. I have enjoyed writing poetry since I was a kid and appreciate using it to reflect on clinical experiences, particularly the emotions captured in grave circumstances. I hope you enjoy reading the poem.

Kalei R.J. Hosaka is a resident physician in Internal Medicine-Pediatrics at UCLA. Kalei is from Hawaii; he received his undergraduate degree in Anthropology from Wheaton College, his medical degree from the University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine, and a certificate of professional achievement in Narrative Medicine through Columbia University. Kalei is passionate about writing, music, HIV care, and social sciences and humanities research.

Kate Coursey is a fourth year medical student at UCLA. In her free time, she enjoys writing novels, short stories, and poetry.

Meg Fender: I recently lost my sister to suicide, the fatal outcome of mental illness. This loss has compelled me to write poetry. I believe most people struggle with their mental health or love someone who does. My hope is that by acknowledging this, those in despair will see that they are not alone. I hope those who are suffering will seek help.

Melissa Eging: I am a mother of two. If there’s anything I know it is that the sacredness of reproductive health should be left in the hands of the patient, and we, the doctors, are simply there to serve them.

Melissa L. White is an award-winning screenwriter, novelist, short story writer, and essayist. She works as an Executive Assistant for Dr. Owen Witte, University Professor, and DGSOM cancer research scientist. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and the Best American Essays Award.

Nicholas Hamilton: I am a third-year medical student also getting my MPH here at UCLA. I am originally from Cincinnati Ohio, and hope to both practice as well as create meaningful health policy changes for patients and physicians.

Nuha Khalfay: This piece describes the experience of women seeking gynecologic and reproductive care in the United States. I believe this is a timely submission given recent legal decisions such as Dobbs v. Jackson, and continued underfunding of women’s health across the country. I was born and raised in Denver, CO, as well as in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. I went to the University of California, Berkeley for college where I studied Public Health and French. I am currently a fourth-year medical student at UCLA, and I will be starting my career as an Obstetrician and Gynecologist in the summer of 2024. While I have always been an avid reader of poetry and fiction, this is my first submission of my own original work.

Peter Han: Facial Plastic Surgeon and Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Head and Neck Surgery.

Qiang Zhang is a third-year medical student at UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. In her free time, she enjoys playing music, reading, and recently learning about interior design! She

wrote this poem during a memorable experience she had during her rotations.

River Sween works on lymphoma studies at UCLA’s Heme/Onc research unit. In 2022, he received treatment from UCLA TMS at the Semel Institute. He also writes sometimes.

Steven C. Cramer: I help people with new problems arising from the brain. It can be a terrifying experience. This is one person’s story.

VISUAL ART

Alex Sarkissian is a graphic designer from Los Angeles, currently working in the Health Sciences Development office at UCLA. He started at Pasadena City College and later transferred to the Rhode Island School of Design where he earned a BFA in Graphic Design. His primary medium is posters, where he uses expressive typography, comedic satire, and bright palettes to engage new audiences in high and low stakes issues.

Baruc Campos: Originally from Mexico, currently Baruc Campos is a Postdoctoral Scholar in the department of Neurology from the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

Christine Palodichuk: I have worked for 28 years supporting research at UCLA, and watching the treatment dance of doctors, nurses, technicians, physicists, and support staff inspires me daily. When not at the office, you might find me in the bushes, photographing birds.

Clare Moffatt is a fourth year medical student at UCLA who loves to capture beauty, experience and meaning through her film camera.

Consuela Nance: The chemo and poking and port and masking and medicine can be more fearful than the cancer itself!

Daniela Davidoff: A yearning to digest my identity, my relationships, and my environment are what compel me to create my art. Through my art, I also gain a vehicle to understand my behavioral processes. Through both gestural brushwork and a saturated palette I hope to transmit the intense emotions involved with unpacking internal struggles.

Emma Ruskin (class of 2025) started doing ceramics in high school and now loves making sculptures out of found and recycled materials.

George Heredia: I was raised in Santa Ana, California, proud

son of two loving, hardworking Mexican parents and younger brother to two sisters. In Ancient Echoes, a native of the antique town of Aguas Calientes, Peru sits in contemplation admiring the beauty of the Incan citadel of Machu Picchu nestled high in the Andes Mountains. Pura Tirta Empul (Holy Water Temple) in Bali, Indonesia, is a sacred pool of purification. Attracting worshippers and tourists, the tradition of bathing in the blessed water entails systematic movement through a series of water-spouts, with hopes toward physical and spiritual cleansing.

Jeffrey Xia: I am a nature and bird photographer who is also an internal medicine resident. I have been captured by the photographic arts for all my life and most enjoy working in all kinds of natural settings and the challenge of photographing those little critters with wings that move so dynamically in the air, land, and sea.

Katherine Ničev Holland is a third-year medical student at UCLA. In her free time, she enjoys engaging with the world around her through photography.

Larry Mao: Nature lover, landscape photographer, and dancer.

Leticia White: I am a self-taught artist who grew up and still resides in Highland Park. Painting is my therapy and my passion. I have been drawing and creating since I was a kid.

Neil Parker: Continue to be amazed by the natural beauty all around us. Looking thru the lens allows one not to be distracted by all the noise.

Nima Golzy did his medical school and residency training at UCLA and is currently a Hospitalist and Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Medicine. He is an avid traveler and has visited all 50 US states and nearly every US National Park.

Sarah Kang: In neurology, the process of regrowth and recovery can be slow and painstaking, but also incredibly rewarding. I am continually inspired by the resilience and adaptability I see in my patients. I took up gardening and houseplants as a hobby during the pandemic, and these pieces remind me of the excitement of seeing new growth.

Shivani Dayal is a 3rd year medical student who loves dogs, plants, and all-things-water. She is currently living in Armenia doing public health research and hopes to include poetry and photography in her interdisciplinary physician career!

Stephanie Punt is a post-doctoral neuropsychology fellow, working with the Operation Mend team. She enjoys spending time in nature and creating art.

Walter Jong: A part time wanderer trying to appreciate wherever I am. Using photography to be more present. IG: walt.jong

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