



THE BEAT

David Geffen School of Medicine
at UCLA

Jessicapoon

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

We are excited to share with you the 21st annual edition of The BEAT, the arts and literary magazine of the David Geffen School of Medicine. This collection of work highlights the immense creative talent of a diverse group of artists and writers. Each piece of art and literature reflects a unique facet of our vibrant community and all together truly represent the pulse of UCLA Health. It was a pleasure to create this edition of The BEAT; we hope you enjoy it!

And The BEAT goes on...

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ONCE UPON A SUPER BLUE BLOOD
MOON - Jonathan Warren
SHARED HEARTS - Ryan Alano

LITERATURE

RETRACTING - Benjamin Amendolara
TRAUMA, EPSILON & MEMORIAM -
Emmanuel Aguilar-Posada

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We welcome submissions from all faculty, staff, and students at the UCLA Health Sciences community at medschool.ucla.edu/current-the-ucla-beat.

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BETWEEN NIGHT AND DAY

By Thomas Luong

CLINIC RUSH

By Jenna Paul-Schultz

There's a rush. A slam. An influx of humans into the limited space. A need for attention. A reluctance to wait.

The clinic is full today, which clinic is full, I don't know, but the day I am thinking of is fully packed, a mass of bodies pressing in. The dusty red leaves pull into focus the rural clinic, tight black faces staring up at me, multicolored cloths covering all I can see. It is the chips of bright yellow and green paint, the clucks of chickens and the bleats of goats. It is the sun beating down, warming my arms as they rest on the concrete wall: it is dry season. I can see it now: the dryness of the air, in the gathering of people under bits of shade as they wait. There is no rush, the rain is months away.

But then it switches. And in my mind I see that little front room where they file in after socks have been given out. Where they write their names down on the list if they want to see the doctor. Or the nurse or the PA, or maybe just one of us to take their blood pressure and give them vitamins. The air is wet, as it usually is in Philadelphia. No, the sky is black, and the wetness is impending rain. The drudge of the winter taking a toll on people who spend most of it outside. There is noise. There is chatter. There is pushing towards the line for the showers, there are requests to be seen.

Back into the dust and the heat, and a child is being pushed into my arms as his mother sorts through her purse to pull out thick pink and blue pieces of paper that are his and his siblings growth charts. And an old exercise book that has replaced one that got lost. Dirt smears the edges, and I squint to read the handwriting

on the top of the list. "Dana?" I call. "Danny? Dina?" before someone answers. It's Dana, but spelled in an odd way. She apologizes for her handwriting while I write down the correct spelling before going into the cabinet to find her file. We find a seat in the middle of the tight room. I try to speak privately, but we all know that is nearly impossible. We're settling in so she can explain to me what she needs when

I am trying to calm the child down while I attempt to find a moment of stillness to read the number on the hanging scale. "Hembelenu, hembelenu. Nikumanisha swayi swayi," I implore to the woman asking me about her chart, please just a moment, I will finish here fast. "Shakamenu hohu. Chidi hohu!" I say to the child, so he will stay still as I mentally average the most accurate weights from the scale before lifting him off of and returning him to his mother. I record the numbers before turning to the woman who is asking for my attention because

"I just need vitamins," says the voice from behind me. I turn around, "Is your name on the list?" "It is but I just need vitamins she insists,"

"Well just wait your turn and I'll be with you." "We'll be with you just as soon as we get to your chart," we remind them as new mothers come, and try to sneak their charts to the top of the pile. They smile, mischievously, knowing that they'd be called out by everyone there if they really managed to skip the line. "Ilonga twatela kuya ku nasi tachi," the mother implores me. I refer her inside to see the nurse before getting her child weighed. Even on under-five weighing days there is still sickness to be taken care of. I turn back to the woman I am counseling in the corner. What did she eat for dinner last night? What did she feed her child?, I start with. The goal being to discern what the main sources of nutrition are for the child before assuming why he is still so underweight. What are you in for today? I ask, scanning the previous entries. "Well, I'm just here for Tylenol," she explains to me. I prod further and she is explaining to me her cold symptoms as I prepare a thermometer with a cover to check for a fever.

But in that dusty clinic we used that same thermometer, just in the armpit because we didn't have covers to put on. And the images are moving out again, the dust mixing with the rainy evening as the concrete and wooden floors become the same. And the one I'm talking to, what language is this we're speaking? And the press of bodies here has no wall or room to restrict them in to one spot but will keep coming and going as needed.

And the same face asks for some medicine for herself, or for her brother suffering at home. And the greetings are the same, the anonymous goodbyes, the idle pressing of small talk, the strained imploring for help.

And the images regress until that bright blue sky and the dark one filling with rain become the same swirls in my mind. And I don't know what day it is I am thinking of or even where or if it is just a dream, but the dream came from somewhere, or some places even if I can only keep them straight and in line and whole.

7:20PM

Latino male of unknown age, name, PMH. No ID in pockets, only 260 in 20s, breakfast receipts, pocket knife, wooden rosary, faded denims and rugged boots, blue-checked long-sleeves, and a hot day's work etched into the wrinkles of his brown face bronzed browner by summer sun, black hair bathed in blood presents with head injury, GCS 5 status post vertical fall.

The story goes:
Young wealthy couple loses cat in tall tree;
Fifty-ish old man walking down street — neighbor's gardener, they think. Can't speak English, motion their hands with hard-earned money in exchange for cat-retrieving labor.

Man climbs and falls on head — honey, don't panic, call 911:
Here is the story that you want
We do not know his name
Or where he is from
Maybe he was drinking before
I do not know
Please, thank you, good night —

They did not know his name because they did not ask.

TRAUMA, EPSILON & MEMORIAM

By Emmanuel Aguilar-Posada

EMS rolled to nearest hospital with most expensive care in neighborhood where Lamborghini-lined streets glisten under store brand fawning; where buses carry workforce in flocks from the east and south every morning and return exodus required every evening, low wage for high turnover, no vacancy. But he is

here —
hurry
hold
pressure
blankets
shear
clothes
pulse
ox
cuff
arm
inspect
turn
place
IVs
hurry
chin
tilt
mouth
open
intubate
raise
head
infuse
monitor
roll

No; rush, please, *rush*

To CT —
slow burn through
slow machine —
Please read:
midline herniation
needs to go to OR
for craniotomy
or is he—?

Brain dead, 8:55PM.

Social work finds
contact for sister, next of
kin, through fellow landscaper —
Lives in Guanajuato,
need translator,
please, need to ask
if her brother's organs
can be harvested for
transplantation,
for the doctor says
he is ripe.

In an ICU bed,
in a hospital
— in a neighborhood,
a city, a country—
that does not serve the likes of him,
his cells are being kept alive.

Ay, hermano —
primo, padre, hijo, tío,
abuelo, compadre
— la vida te la viviste toda
sea como sea que
la hayas vivido.

Lo que has desangrado
en suelos malagradecidos
nos vacía el corazón
Y en su lugar se forma
una bola de rabia
que sin sangre palpita.

Sólo le pedimos a Dios
Que la muerte no nos sea indiferente;
Que de esta rabia palpitante
fluya sangre nueva
de un amor por vida nuestra,
Que nos mantenga
la mente aguda
y la panza hambrienta
para comernos el monstruo
que nos pisa el pueblo
por encima.

Sólo le pedimos a Dios
Que de esta novena de angustia
nos florezca una fuerza
para mantener la lucha —
Y que en esta misma lucha
siga ardiendo el fuego
de tu memoria.



SHARED HEARTS

By Ryan Alano



UNTITLED

Oil on canvas

By Nicole Lee

NO POET, NO POEM

By Matthew Fournier

I am in despair
In front of paper and a pen
Oh, where have they been
I wonder?
I'm torn tonight
Between ink and paper sheets
How can they ever meet
In darkness?
My mind has grown cold
My words are ever fleeting
My heart knows no beating
In present.
Words no longer friends
They will not lend me their power
I need them in this hour
Of feeling.
I am in defeat
I crack and I crumble
I falter and I stumble
Without them.
It's frustrating me
To express without expression
This mental suppression
Inside me.
I feel so empty
Like a chest without treasure
A ruler without measure
The discord.
Excuse me everybody
But I must lay down this pen
I burn the papers again
They're useless

MY FATHER'S CAR

By Katrina DeBonis

I drove my father's car into the doctor's parking lot, and with brakes screeching and axles clanging, I maneuvered it into the row of luxury sedans. It cost more to ship from New York than what the parts were worth. The check engine light was permanently lit, the air conditioning had quit years before, and the bumper was held in place with thick layers of duct tape. But I needed a car and it worked. I welcomed the surprised, somewhat worried, looks of my colleagues and supervisors. "It's my father's car," I would say and with that I felt that the rest of it was understood - that my father wasn't a doctor and so when I needed a car, he shipped his piece of shit car across the country so that I could have one.

My father first brought home this car when I was in high school. It was big and new, and didn't have the scattered tools, bolts and wire end caps that covered the floor of the old one. I was proud of the new car and it was often filled with my friends. When I fell asleep on the subway coming home from school and wound up at the last stop with my huge backpack and no other fourteen-year-old girls around, I would find a payphone and anxiously wait to see the familiar headlights of my father's car coming down the street, slowing down to let me in and take me home.

My father's car took me, along with my cheap bedspread and mini fridge, four hours north for college and left me there to figure out who I wanted to become. It picked me up from the airport after a last-minute flight home to confront my brother with his stealing and drug use. When he crawled through a window and we couldn't find him for days, we sat in the car, driving slowly past his friends' houses, silent, until we finally saw him. Then he lay across the back seat on the way to the emergency room, when we didn't know where else to go.

For a while there was no car, after my father was arrested for driving drunk, the car taken by the police until he completed his course, paid his fine, and got his license back.

But there it was again, stopped by a fire hydrant, my father reading the newspaper at the wheel while I was across the street interviewing for medical school. After I was finished, I ran across First Avenue, tapped on the window for him to let me in, and said, "This is where I want to go."

After that first night in the hospital, humbled and wired with exhaustion, I found my father's car in the spot I pulled into 36 hours earlier. I called him, my heart weighed down with all the sickness and sadness that lives in the hospital, and I drove to my new home in a new city.

Someone paid a couple of hundred dollars for the pieces of my father's car after it finally stopped working. We had saved some money by then and were able to buy a nice, reliable used car, safe enough to install an infant car seat in the back. Three days after our new car took us home with the baby my father couldn't wait to meet, he passed away in his sleep.

Now, I have so many things. I have these letters after my name, and a nice car without any duct tape that drives my two girls to the beach on the weekends. And although they got me here, to this place where I'm starting to feel I belong, I don't have my father anymore and I miss driving his car.



RESILIENT RED

By Dieter Enzmann



COURAGE

By Michelle Miller

SHATTERED LOOKING GLASS

By Eviola Nakhla

She is the girl in the tight, sequined dress
With hazy, unfocused eyes; parted, glossy lips
Swaying apart from the crowd
Clutching her side as the heavy bass
Reverberates through her skin, down to her bones
The hair at her nape clings moist to her skin
She stares at the throng, distant, yet growing closer

She pants breathlessly on the empty track
Pushing burning legs to go one more mile
Sweat beads on her upper lip, the sting of salt on her tongue
Knuckles whiten as she pulls down the rusting metal bar
Thighs tighten as she bears down her weight
She pumps until her heart pounds, rushing in her ear
To feel the fragility of her being while fighting to overcome it

She clutches a satchel and hums under her breath
With disheveled hair, she pauses in the grass
To listen to a mockingbird chirp above
Catching the scent of honeysuckle in the breeze
Tucks her dress and curls a leg under her book
She stops, eyes closed, throwing her head up to the sun
Warmth upon skin, head buzzing like the buzzing of bees

She pools cool water into her cupped hands
Catching her rippling reflection before splashing
The droplets glisten, multifaceted in the sunlight
Before dancing back down and catching in cascading hair
She kicks and strokes, pushing herself across the water
Allowing it to enter every crevice, to muffle the sound of dry land
She matches her thoughts to the sloshing around her

She catches his eyes from above the steam of her coffee
Holds his gaze then drops to the swirls of foam before her
Pulls at her sleeve and tucks soft locks behind an ear
She shifts so her knees are pointing in his direction
Talks brightly, laughs into her fingers
Her eyes crinkle as a playful smile reaches them
Charm meant for her alone; she holds her own enchantment

Her hair smells of incense from the morning service
A euphony of slow hymns still ring in her ears
The younger girls, bright-eyed, gather at her side
To hear her speak with boldness and zeal
Together they open the gold-spun pages, crinkling the thin paper
They cross themselves as she does and bow their heads in prayer
In one breath, mumble reverence, thanksgiving, hope, amen

She is a shattered looking glass, with edges jagged, edges sharp
Reflecting virtual images
Of lives she cannot truly harp
Yet in each image, she finds a piece of herself that she holds close
Hoping they teach her the intricacies of her heart
To know that these fragments make up a whole,
A whole that it is enough, that she is enough



FLOATING CABINS OF KHAO SOK

By Nolan Ung

THE SIREN'S SONG

By Sarah Luery

She sings
They thrash
Into the rocks at the base of her feet
She sings because she can't cry
Crying only brings them faster
And in greater numbers
They come needle and thread in hand
Ready to mend
To make her whole again
They never see the rocks
And so she sings
She sings to let them know she's fine
But she's not fine
For the singing draws them too
They come in lesser numbers
But they come with hearts like open jars
Lids unscrewed
Ready to be filled
They want to be a part of something beautiful
And so they thrash
Starry-eyed they thrash
against the rocks at her feet
And she can't cry
And so she sings

RETRACTING

By Benjamin Amendolara

I do this strange thing with my neck. It started two weeks into my surgery rotation. It's kind of like a tic. I arch my neck forward and tense it like a lizard flicking out its tongue. I think people are starting to notice. The intern is sitting next to me in the rounding room, frantically scrolling through a list of fifteen patients. I watch what he is doing with his neck. I marvel at the sustained control, the surety with which he drops his head to look at a printout and then back in a flash at the screen. This is what people do with their necks. I'll do that, I think.

"What are you doing?" he says, not looking away from the computer.

"What?"

"Nevermind. Stay here."

I nod. This is my default response when I don't want to risk anything.

"Wait."

Panic bowels leap into my chest. It's called a diaphragmatic hernia.

"Practice retracting while I'm gone."

He gestures to a contraption on the wall, a rubber band looped through a hook on one end and around a pencil on the other. He places a metal pellet on the table in front of me. Balance that on that until I come back. I practice in front of him, give him a face to show the appropriate expected difficulty, and the moment he is out the door I drop it, lean back in my chair. I have also developed a tic with my back. I arch and bend it sideways like an old man hobbling on a cane.

There are two urology residents a few computers over. I watch how they sit. It seems so easy, so natural, as though humans were made to succeed at such athletic feats! I try to sit like they do. It's painful. I ration my movements so as not to appear strange.

I listen in on their conversation.

"You know what I hate?" says one.

"What?"

"Consults. From the ER at 2 am and it's something like this 26 year old woman is pissing blood, and I get down there and she's on her fucking period! Her period!"

"Oh yeah. That's the worst. It's like, get a fucking medical degree and don't call me until you know what a fucking period is."

The first one laughs. I smile, try to make eye contact, then look at the wall as though something interesting has caught my eye. A poster with a nurse smiling about sepsis. I nod at her like she is conveying some archaic wisdom.

They continue.

"But last night was brutal. Actually, it was fucking crazy." He sits up in his chair and looks around, like someone might be listening in. His voice gets low. I strain to hear.

"What?" says the other.

"Some guy goes into a psychotic fit and stabs his sister. She calls the cops. Cops come and shoot the brother like thirty-five times, handcuff him, and bring him to the hospital. They bring the sister too because, well, she was stabbed. She gets bandaged up and the first thing she says is, 'How's my brother doing?' Well, the brother was DOA. No one wanted to tell her, so they brought one of the therapy dogs in. It was a special case so they had the dog balance a box of chocolates on his snout. She didn't take one, and the dog nipped at her or something. Then that was a whole fiasco. But in the end I think it really helped."

"Was he black?"

"Who?"

"The guy who was shot."

He nods solemnly.

"What about the cop?"

"Hispanic, I think?"

"Systemic racism. You don't have to be white to be racist. It's everywhere."

The intern is back. I notice he has coffee stains all over his white coat. It gives me a warm feeling. I am not alone. Seven other people stream in after him. Senior resident, other interns, several sub-interns, white teeth shining through a mask of fatigue. Their eyes are dead and they think no one notices.

Residents start shoving things into my white coat pockets. First gauze and Keflex and 18-gauge needles, and then sandwiches, drinks, cell phones, chapstick.

"You're our walking closet," says the chief.

We round. We barge into people's rooms at the paralytic hour of 5:30, and all I can think of as they lay there with split necks and blood clotted bandages is how I would trade places in a second just to be in their beds. When the chief resident moves towards the patient's neck, four sub-interns descend on him with penlights, gloves, and gauze like ducks to a man tossing bread crumbs.

I hang back. They need all the help they can get. The worse I look, the better they look. Yesterday morning when the chief asked me for a doppler I handed him a syringe. It was painful, but I had to do it. "The doppler! We do this every damn day!" I turned helplessly to one of the sub-interns. I wink. She nods. The machine has already materialized in her hand. She hands it to me, and I make a big show of receiving it and nodding with great rectitude and grace and then pass it off to the chief. On the way out, I tell another one of the sub-interns that I'd get him the next day. One by one, we all stick our hands under the automatic dispenser that whirrs and dribbles a little mouthful of sanitized jizz into our palms. We rub with gusto.

"Closet!" shouts the chief. I scurry over. "Gauze!"

continued on page 18



REBORN FROM SMOKE **feat. SKELETON OF COLOR**

By Ryan Alano

I reach blindly into my pocket and a packet of gauze slides across the floor. He bends over.

"This isn't gauze. Christ, gauze! It's just gauze!"

He reaches into my pocket and pulls out gauze.

Before we finish rounding the intern pulls me aside.

"Do you want to go into surgery?"

I hesitate.

"You can be honest." I know I can't, but something makes me, some feeling of rebellion.

"No."

"I could tell." He looks towards my waist, where my hands are folded neatly in preparation for the OR. He is disgusted. "The devil made those hands."

"Thank you," I say.

"Follow me," he says.

We walk the same speed but somehow he is two steps ahead.

"You know what the secret to surgery is?" he says. I rack my brain for the solution.

"Focus?" I guess.

"No. Kegels. I can do a thousand. In a row." He looks at me with the wide eyes of a cult member. He comes in real close. He's more excited than I have ever seen him.

"I time them to the heart monitor. Beep. Kegel. Beep. Kegel." He smashes the elevator button six times. "My cock is as strong as a bull's." The elevator doors open on a child hooked up to IV and respirator is slumped in a wheelchair. He has all the enthusiasm of a downed Koala. His droopy eye twitches. A gob of saliva drops down to his Mickey Mouse bib. I think that's a smile. I smile back.

"Sad," says the intern when we exit at the OR floor.

"Yeah," I say.

"Kids like that--"

"Yeah."

"Should be put out of their misery."

"The cost," I say meditatively.

The intern pushes his way through traps of nurses and residents. He is on some type of mission, and I dread that he will have me take some part in it. He cuts sharply from the hallway through a door but stops before it swings closed.

"What are you doing?" he says.

"Going to the OR?" I guess.

"This is the bathroom."

"Oh." And so it is, as the androgynous icon indicates.

"Do you have to go to the bathroom?"

"No?" I say.

"Wait in the hallway." He disappears.

But I do have to go the bathroom. I've missed my chance. If there's one thing surgeons don't like, it's waffling. "No one likes a waffler," one attending said to me. "If you're going to be wrong, my god go out in a hail of bullets." This maxim felt poetic. It touched me to my core. I began to take real pride in being wrong. "What's that artery?" someone would say in the OR, pointing at some throbbing cord. "The innominate!" I would exclaim. No matter what the artery was, it was always the innominate. I was never wrong.

A few minutes later the intern storms over to me from the opposite end of the hall in a great sweat.

"Where'd you go?" he says.

I had been standing next to the bathroom door the entire time, enduring looks of pity from passing residents because they sensed the mess I was in.

"I was waiting--"

"Nevermind. Just come with me. You need to help prep the room."

"Okay."

We hurry to the OR, slap masks on our faces and booties on our shoes. The room is a flurry when we enter. The patient is already strapped in.

"You see this?" It takes me a second to realize the nurse is talking to me. "You see this?"

"Yes?"

"You do this. You get here early, and you do this."

"Okay," I say.

"Now excuse me while I queue up Schindler's List." She waddles over to the computer in the corner.

"Great soundtrack," I say.

"Not the soundtrack," says the intern. "The whole movie. Like the dialogue and everything. His favorite part is when Ralph Fiennes snipes Jews from the balcony. Then he really kicks things up a notch, just starts pulling and hacking away at everything in sight. Once caught my hand. But I couldn't move it. The exposure was too important."

"We all need something," I say, not knowing what I needed, what soundtrack I'd play.

"Right," he says, grabbing a pair of Loops from the counter.

The attending, a tall, balding man with bushels for eyebrows, Master of the Universe, king of all dominions, herder of all sheep, storms in. The room goes silent. I have the nagging sense that I recognize him. Then it comes to me. He's dating one of my classmates. I had seen him at a house party, and he was standing in the corner looking old. I hold this image up like a screen print over the world.

"Scrub!" he barks.

"Me?"

"Yes! Can you believe this guy?" he says to the intern.

The intern shakes his head. "No, I can't."

I scrub in. I accidentally touch the outside of the glove.

"Another pair of seven-and-a-halves," says the scrub nurse to the rotator. She drops them onto the sterile field with sincere disappointment. I manage to put them on correctly this time. Then I stand there, my gown flagged open like a man who's just shit himself. I am at a loss.

"Dance with me," says the scrub nurse. I am confused. "Dance with me!" He shakes his right hand at me. I extend the paper holder to him. It rips off and the tie falls to the floor. He sighs. Things like this make people quit their jobs.

"Get over here!" shouts the attending.

I get over there, press myself between the intern and the sterile field. His gown at his waist pulses against mine. Kegels, I remember, and get started.

The patient's neck is slashed open, making a ghoulish smile.

The attending's hands move in a frenzy like he is chopping vegetables for a cooking contest. Blood splatters

continued on page 21

BLOOM

Steel rods & watercolor on paper

By Nicole Lee



RULES OF CONSTRUCTION

By Safiya Lahlaf

My father's mother tongue
Weighs down my own,
An out-of-practice acrobat,
Two left feet disconjugate,
Muscle memory long forgotten—
Lost in the process of generation.
I speak through mouthfuls of marbles
And am reminded, mind and mouth,
Ever foreign to the language
That lends itself to poetry.

Why do I limit myself to the concrete?
The finest marble lies just underfoot.



SELF PORTRAIT

By Michelle Miller

my cheek. Everyone else is wearing face shields.

People wail in German over the speakers as machine guns pop off in horrifying succession. It is strangely soothing, knowing that there are people worse off than me.

“Army-navy!” shouts the attending. The rotating nurse slaps a big metal thing the size and shape of half a pelican beak into his hand. The attending slaps it into mine. “Army-navy!” Slap. “Senn!” I am holding three things now, and I don’t have enough fingers. They slide along each other like kitchen knives.

“In here!”

“What?”

He jerks my hand towards him, forces the instruments into the bloody pit just so.

“Stay.”

Unfortunately, I had been standing on one leg, scratching my calf with my foot. Also unfortunately, I had been in the middle of rotating my back and was angled like a bent street sign. I felt like a peacock about to be eaten by a lion.

My hands are completely still. He jerks my hand in and up in the manner of prying away a two-by-four with a crowbar. I hold the instruments completely still. He jerks my hand again, this time giving my fingers an extra squeeze, a type of warning like the mob gives when they leave a dead bird on your porch.

“Where did you get this guy? Is there another rotator?”

“Break,” said the scrub nurse.

“Break? Break? I don’t get a break! Goddam unions!”

He punctuates his anger with taking a big bite out of the patient’s sternocleidomastoid muscle. The scrub nurse sparks it with a white pen and the bleeding stops.

My intern is disappointed in me.

Ten minutes pass, and they are the longest ten minutes of my life. My thumb is cramped and my fingers are numb. I tense and release my muscles. Every movement is painful, but the pain is different, so it masquerades as relief. I start bargaining. I’ll take any exam, run any number of miles, endure any amount of sleeplessness, just to make it stop.

Finally, like a guard giving his prisoner of war a taste of water, Dr. Skinray pulls away the instruments. My hands tingle with a cool, refreshing burn.

Now the scrub nurse is poking me with a sharp object. It is a pair of scissors. I slide my ring finger into the hole, like a surgeon, and wait for someone to compliment me on my superior technique. No one does.

“Five millimeters,” snaps the attending.

“What?”

“Five millimeters!” I notice the taut suture straining towards the ceiling. I fumble around with the scissors and snip.

“Goddamnit, my first-grader could do a better job than that!”

“He has more practice,” I say under my breath.

The room goes silent. Hands stop working. Eyes look up. I feel daggers in my back. The intern drops his head to make clear he is not the one to blame.

The attending drops his instruments.

“What did you just say?”

“Nothing.”

“No. Tell me.”

“I said, ‘he has more practice.’”

“My son,” he says, “is quadriplegic.”

Machine guns rattle overhead.

“Get. Out. Of. My. OR.”

I stand there, dumbfounded, waiting for the room to break out in miraculous laughter and reveal that this is all a hazing ritual.

“Get out!”

I scrub out and retreat to the rounding room. Two of the sub-interns drop their heads to their computers when I walk in. Word has already spread. I gather my things and head home.

Hours later, I see that I have missed a call from an unknown number. I check my email. There are fifteen new ones from deans, mental health staff, and the AMA requesting their membership back.

“Please come to my office. We’re rooting for you.” The email reads to me in the dean’s soothing voice, but there is something ominous about that second part. On the way to his office I become dizzy and pray that I will pass out on the street and get out of all of this.

I knock on his door. He opens it as cheerfully as though the purpose of the meeting is to discuss scholarships.

I sit down and gaze over the 65 golden apples on his shelf.

“Ben,” he says, his voice a rare elixir. “Tell me what’s going on.”

I nearly cry into his arms.

“I don’t know,” I say. “Apparently his son is quadriplegic.”

“You couldn’t have known that.”

“Yes,” I see, grasping at this glimmer of hope.

“But...” he says. “My hands are tied here. Dr. Skinray wants you to get four physicianships, one for each paralyzed limb.”

“They sound like a good thing.”

“They’re not. They...go into your residency application.”

“Oh.”

“I’ll try to bundle them into three. Apparently his right hand--thankfully the one he would use to cut things--is regaining some function.” He sighs, places a calming hand on my knee. “I can’t know what this feels like. But I can empathize with your situation. Ben, I want you to know you can still be a doctor. Probably not a surgeon or emergency physician, and likely not in California, but there are still options. Have you ever considered family medicine? Maybe in Kansas. There’s a doctor shortage there now. Plus the opioid crisis.”

“I read that.”

His hand on my shoulder is guiding me out of his office.

“Think about it, okay?”

“I will.”

On the way out the secretary is on a phone call and staring directly into a corner. I am sure there is no one on the other end.

At home I sit on my bed for quite some time until fatigue overtakes me.

“Fuck it,” I say, and take a good, long nap.

ONLY FEET HAVE VOICES HERE

By Melissa Burdette

The Right Foot & Left Foot dance foolishly around:
Madly stepping on each other's toes,
Like reckless children competing for attention, each one throwing temper-tantrums,
Solely because they wore different shoes & took different boats
To the same stomping grounds.

REDIRECTION

By Melissa Burdette

A sailor stuck in irons
Will be grateful for the change in wind,
But not as grateful as
a city built downhill from the dump..



LAND HO!

By Andrew Thorne



EMPTY

By Rose Shan



EVERY TIME

By Kristen Schoenhard

For 11 minutes,
I provide CPR
To a dying infant
...

Every time
I look down
At these hands,
I am reminded
Of the child
I could not save
...

Every time
I sit down
For hours on end,
Pouring over textbooks,
I am reminded
Of the future child
I could save



REFLECTIONS OF LAKE HAYES

By Jonathan Warren

DAYDREAMING

By Jenna Paul-Schultz



I daydream. The thoughts in my head becoming larger and more opaque the longer I sit, the thoughts churning until I forget what I imagined and what is real, the sparkles overwhelming the norm. I used to let this get carried away, imagining stories and scaring myself out of sleep. Conjuring up monsters to hide in my closet, and reasons to be scared of the dust underneath my bed. When you're a child they call this an overactive imagination, when you're an adult they don't know what to say.

I had a few monsters that lived in my closet, all of whom took different forms and had names. They weren't necessarily scary—none of my monsters ever are—they were friendly monsters, who wouldn't hurt a fly. The first was Dina, the dinosaur. She had a long neck and longer legs. She was tall, yet fit inside my normal sized closet, that as a kid seemed so vastly large. It was the perfect size for her. She curled up at night, sleeping with her friend, Shelly. Shelly was a skeleton. Shelly was shy, didn't talk much (though Dina didn't, either).

The colors I remember are browns and green. Green for the color of my walls, a deep turquoise green that I painted over a yellow that I must have insisted on when I was a kid but hated so much just a few years later. And browns and whites. The ethereal inside of my closet that seemed to go on and on until there was a chance that I would fall into a Narnia-like world of my own design, trees pulling at my hair and acorns nestling the ground beneath my feet. I must have tried to find Narnia in every closet in my house at one point or another, sinking down to the corners of the floor, digging behind the coats and wrapping myself in them until it seemed that no one would ever be able to find me again. I always made it out, though.

But sometimes I would wake up, realize that I was in my bed and the Narnia that I had made it to was just a dream again. I lie there with my eyes closed, wishing and willing myself back into my dream state for just a moment longer, relishing the sweet freedom it is to be whisked along through a world of my brains own making, wandering from moment to moment in a make your own adventure of my own design.

I became a writer because it was an outlet for the stories. I turned towards being a doctor because it allowed me to anchor those stories in reality, to find a way to harness my brain and squish it into line, poking and prodding it until it sat still long enough to study the reality of the world, to shame it into submission to be useful to something other than itself. Writing strokes the ego, learning medicine squashes it. Studying textbooks and knowing that you will never know everything, that you can only admit to knowing nothing and taking a vow to learn as much as you can. Waking up from a dream every morning and instructing your brain to behave just for a few hours, just exercise and eat its vegetables and sit still for the day as we roam from class to meeting to the library, to take in knowledge and deign to do something with it, and as a reward in the evening we can start dreaming once again.

And that evening as I lie down, and the chemicals in my body prepare to make stories once again, I think about the things that I did during the day and let myself toss and turn into sleep filled with colors and magic once more. A new world swarming around me, enveloping me into the magic that I crave, the implausibility that I know can be real. My brain relaxes, it is let off the leash. The day of strictness is done, and it is time to roam and feel and probe through the infinite possibilities and colors lights sounds that make up a dream like world.

So, no, I haven't stopped daydreaming, and I don't think I ever will. I will never fully extricate from myself the bits that imagine a monster rustling in the closet when something falls against a door, the bits that imagine that there are little beings in the cells of my body making energy and sending channels in and out of the membranes, and telling hormones to go or stop. The daydreams are there, they are just informed by this magical world of science that I feel myself pulled into with a deep black hole like force. They are there on the sidelines, cheering my brain on as it pulls itself together long enough to focus on the subjects at hand, and at night they get to re-claim their domain and put on plays and movies for me to fall into and frolic and explore the endless possibilities that are my dreams.

TOMORROW

By Rujuta Nandgaonkar

Last year, I wanted to be an artist.
I watched and sketched and drew
Until my palms ran with charcoal
And I felt the power of life's imitation
Sizzle in my fingers.

The fourth red bench
On the second longest path
Through Middletree Park
Awoke to my scratchings
Each Sunday morning,
Its "In Memoriam of Jed Atwater"
Peeking somberly around my woolen back
Out into the pink air.

The early-morning joggers I drew,
And the dog-walkers, too.
The lines of the bicycle cartwheeled across the page
Long after it had sped by.

Week after week I persisted.
My grand flourishes splayed across the floor,
My bed, the countertops, and dresser drawers,
Once they had conquered each whitewashed wall.
I tiptoed so as not to disturb their slumber
But every night they demanded another bedfellow.
I slept on the couch.

We became inseparable companions,
The fourth red bench and I.
Every morning I sat with him,
Charcoal stabbing paper
Until even my nails were worn down
And streaks of scarlet pink
Suffused my canvas.

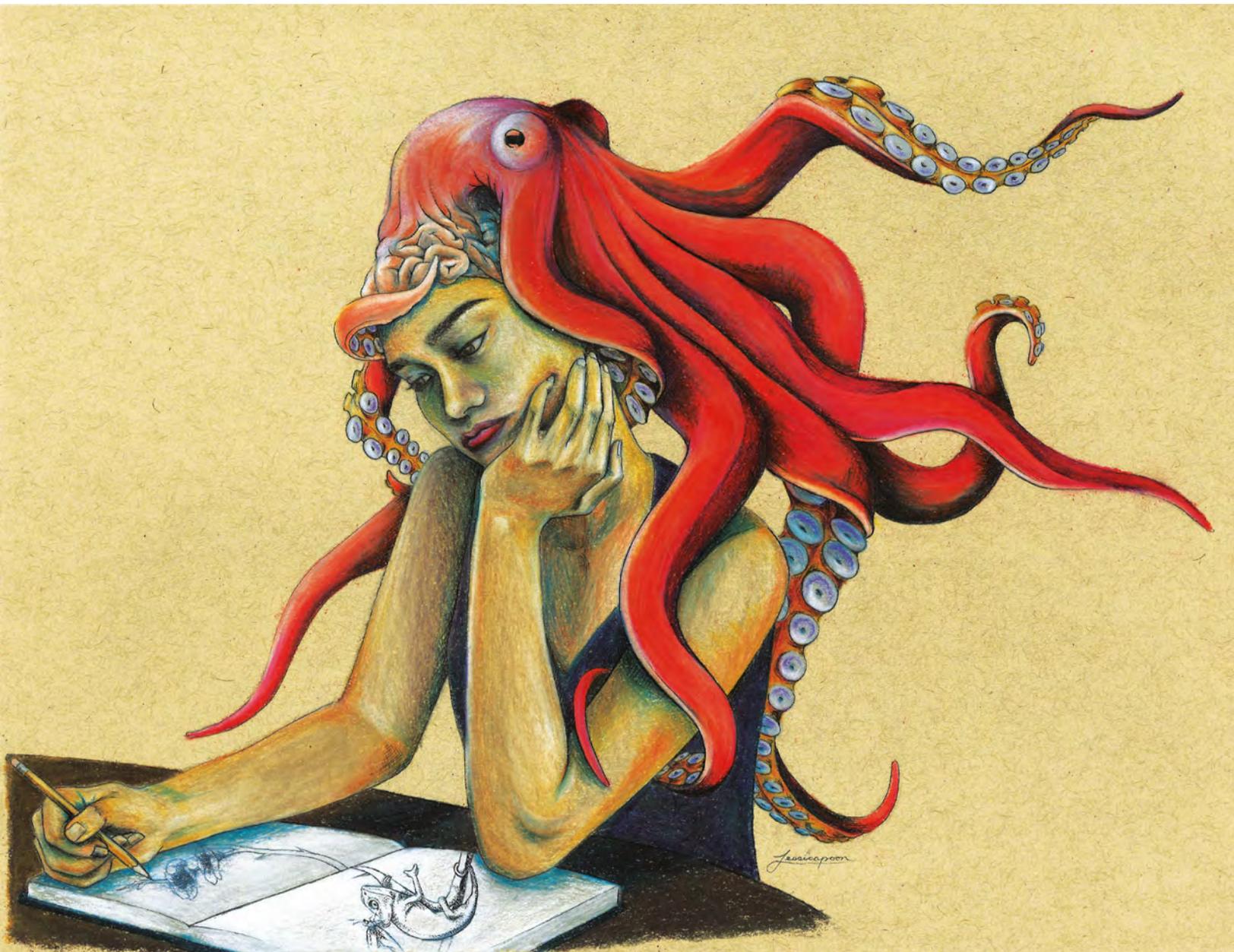
The stones of the path I drew,
And cigarette butts, too.
The bodies of fallen leaves were interred in my pages
Because the people stopped coming by.

Days became weeks
As my creations swallowed
Every available breath of space.
No gaps, no overlaps.
Only one path remained
From my front door.
It led to a chair.

Last week, I awoke to enveloping warmth
And a shadow at the door frame.
Before a charred blackness smothered me,
I felt myself dragged into air tinged a different pink.

They told me my apartment had burned.
Everything was gone.
Something about "went up like a Roman candle."

Tomorrow, I think,
I want to be a poet.



CONCENTRATION

By Jessica Poon



CHRYSAORA

By Andrew Ro

DRUGS

By Benjamin Amendolara

They were on drugs and happy. They clung to each other. With their fingers they touched places on their bodies that could not be said to properly exist. Their mouths were sticky and gaping, breathing for wetness. Their eyes were huge and believing. They pulled the threads of the other's being.

These were days of fortune and longing.

Maxine abandoned herself on the bare mattress, stained with sweat and reeking of love odors. Bastion was in the bathroom, picking at scabs in the mirror. Maxine's legs tingled sweetly. She closed her eyes and imagined her blood moving through her, coming out of her. In her mind, it sparkled. It overflowed the mattress onto the floor, forming a warm, wet embrace. But the beauty turned swiftly, unexpectedly into anxiety. Bastion had been gone for a while. It seemed like hours. Probably minutes. It was too long. Her hands groped along the mattress, searching for nothing. Basti, she moaned. Then he was there, his great warm hulk covering her and his tongue on her neck. Basti, she whispered. Basti, Basti. She wanted to say it for the rest of her life. He didn't say her name, just moved along her, scaling up and down like a monkey searching for food.

Let's get up, she moaned. She didn't want to get up. It was the last thing she wanted to do. But she was feeling hot. Too hot, and saying something like that would make her feel colder, allow her body to establish some type of equilibrium. Bastion groaned. More, he said. Now all she could feel was his giant clammy body covering her, stopping her from moving, stopping her from breathing. Get up, get up, she said, shoving him aside. She spread her body out to get some air. I need to get up, she said. Bastion buried his face in the pillow that had dried hard with the sweat of flailing bodies. She stood in the center of the apartment. Her whole body was concentrated into the soles of her feet. She could number every splinter of wood beneath her. The sensation was too real. She shifted her weight. What is this place, she asked herself.

She saw, as though for the first time, objects, objects she couldn't name, cluttered on the floor, everywhere that didn't make sense, she didn't even remember them falling. How could she not remember them falling? They must

have made a huge clattering sound. She saw islands of congealed neon substances, spilled sodas and generic gelatinous concoctions. There were clothes strewn all over the place, a nonsensical trail leading from the door to the bed to the door to the bathroom to the kitchen. Clothes everywhere like the shells of insects. Her eyes drifted back to the door, and she felt something like horror. The door was open just slightly. She rushed over and slammed it shut. Bastion jerked awake, a trail of spit dangling from his lip to the pillow.

The door was open! she shouted. What if someone came in here? What if someone was watching us? Basti, what if someone was here? She was crying and hugging herself, rubbing her hands up and down her arms.

Huh? he said. No one's here. Come back to bed. Let's do more.

We don't have anymore, Bastion!

Don't call me that, he said. You said you wouldn't call me that.

She knelt next to him on the mattress. Her scent came up at her like a blast of low tide. We have to go, Bastion, we have to go, she said.

Don't call me that, he mumbled and dropped into sleep.

She put on clothes, anything she could find. Jeans she didn't know if they were hers or Bastion's, a sweater, shoes. She scuffled around in the shoes looking for something else, she didn't know what. Keys? She didn't need keys. She didn't have keys. A bag? What was a bag, anyway? She rummaged in one of the drawers and shoved a few crinkled bills in her pocket and left.

It was bright out but it was cold. It was very cold. She rubbed her arms as she stumbled down the street, bumping into people. People cursing her off. She didn't look at them. The air was so clear and bright it hurt. She wanted to be back with Bastion, doing more. Dissolving into their warmth. Things were so solid around her. Cars moved with such intensity. And the sounds, so loud. Everything crinkled and buzzed. She didn't know where she was going. She passed a bar and when she kept walking past she felt hollow and lonely. She walked back to the bar and went inside.

I need a drink, she said, falling over the barstool.

continued on page 32

I'd say, said the bartender. He was a worn man with a big white beard and reading glasses. A veteran of the place. We don't give freebies here, he said. It didn't shake her up. It grounded her, a reminder like that, that parts of society still had rules to live by.

Bourbon and coke, she said. No ice.

While he was fixing her drink, two guys walked in. Jeans and boots and leather jackets and big, crinkly heads. They were the most comforting sight in the world. She spun towards them, her thighs dangling apart.

They sat at the bar. The bartender brought them drinks.

Hey, she shouted at them. One of them looked at the other and then at her. Hey, he said. Little early, don't you think?

Early for me is early for you, she said.

We just got off work.

Well I did too. I just got off work.

Lady, I don't mean to pry, but are you doing all right?

The world suddenly snapped itself shut. She had to get out of there. She threw back her drink and stumbled towards the door. A big hand closed around her upper arm.

Hey, wait there, I don't think you should—

Should what? Who the hell are you? Who the hell are you!

She ripped her arm away, but he was too strong. Then she was crying, letting go of everything right into the shoulder of his jacket. Between heaves the smell of cracked leather and cigarettes invaded her nostrils. It calmed her.

Hey, sit down. Just sit down. We'll talk about it. Mike, another one for the lady here.

In a second there was sweet, cold liquid at her lips and down her throat. The other man moved to another stool and the man whose shoulder she had cried on lifted her onto the stool. And there was the bartender leaning against the back wall cleaning glasses, looking at her with the patience of the universe in his eyes. She was so happy she wanted to die.

Tell me your story, he said. She looked at him and could tell he wanted to know.

Okay, she said. I don't like it here.

That was all she could think to say. She was about to speak again, but every sentence that might come out would just be a less accurate version of what she'd already said. But he knew. The man on the stool with his dirt-creased construction worker's hand on her shoulder knew. He didn't ask her where she wanted to be because he didn't want to make her lie.

She sat with her head down to her neck, drooping on the stool. A flat, cigarette-yellowed fingernail rose up to her eyes and pushed aside a few strands of hair. His fingers were the size and shape of rulers.

It'll be okay, he said. Won't it, Mike? You see? Mike's okay. Aren't you Mike?

The bartender nodded patiently, digging his towed hand into and out of a glass that was already clean.

You see? And Mike's seen everything. I mean, everything.

She gave a little smile.

The man's friend had already left. She hadn't noticed. Now the man got up, placed some bills on the counter, and adjusted his jacket. He winked at her and then was out the door. He took all the heat with him.

There's extra money here, said the bartender, if you want another.

She ran out the door after the man. But the street was so crowded with people. She spun around, searching, not knowing which way to go. She chose a way and ran.

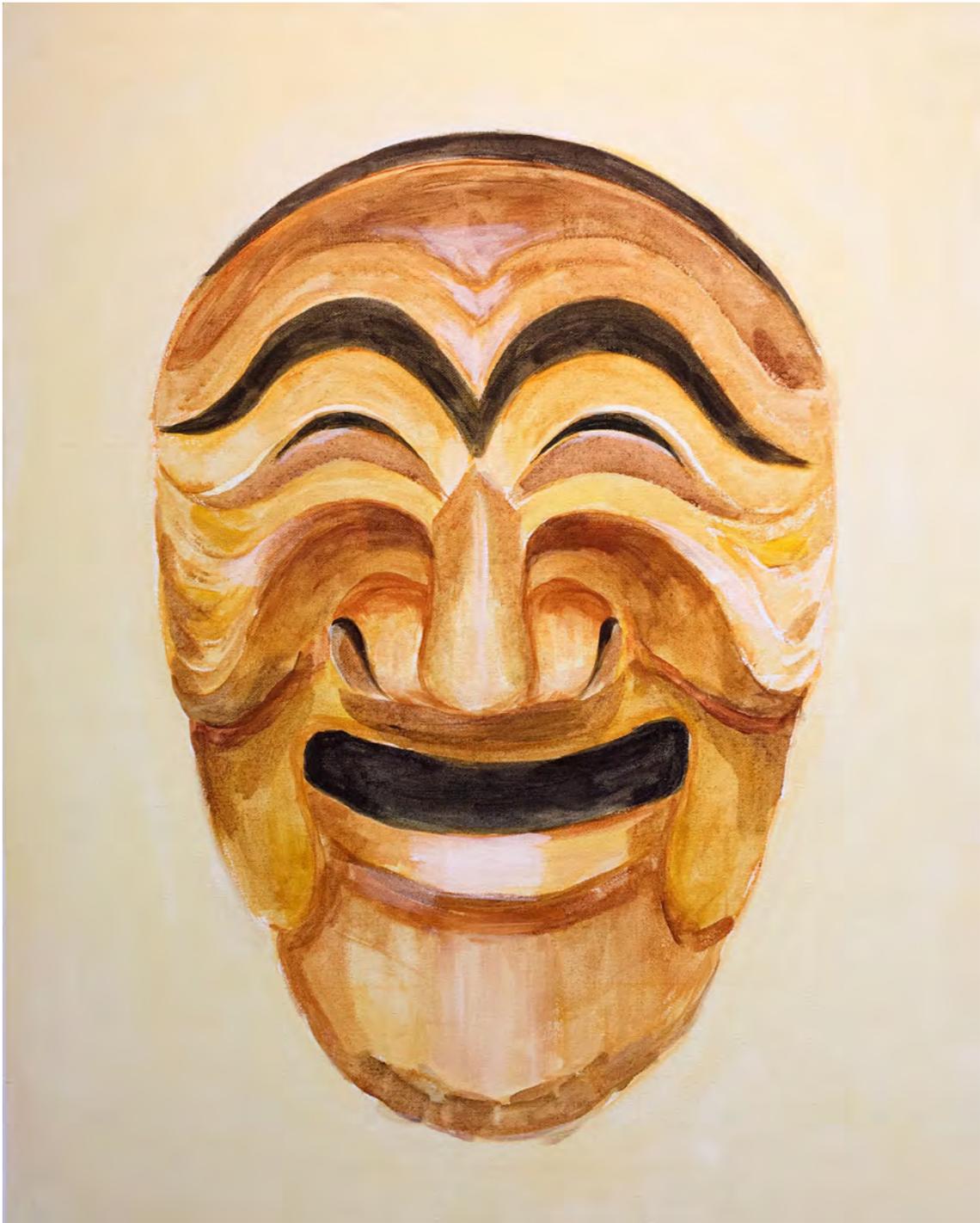
She came up on a man, tall and broad-shouldered with his hands in his jacket pockets. She grabbed him by the shoulder and spun him around. The man looked at her confused, ready to shout at her. Then his face softened. He looked her up and down.

Hello, he said. His face was fresh and unlined, like someone she had never met.

Take me, she pleaded. Take me. Take me to a cabin in the desert.

Okay, he said.

He put his arms around her and they stumbled together to the subway station.



THE HAHOE MASK

By Jamie Sung



INCOMING STORM

By Walter Jong

TIME

By Scott Sherman

Three AM and some minutes awoken,
Equations of time, sleep, alarms.
A quick calculus of the day ahead,
Unrelenting.
Dreary drizzling dawn greets
Again.
Tomorrow is today,
Yesterday now proven,
Not long enough.
I mark another day,
The hours, still never enough.
I mark the hours,
Knowing this day will never be enough.



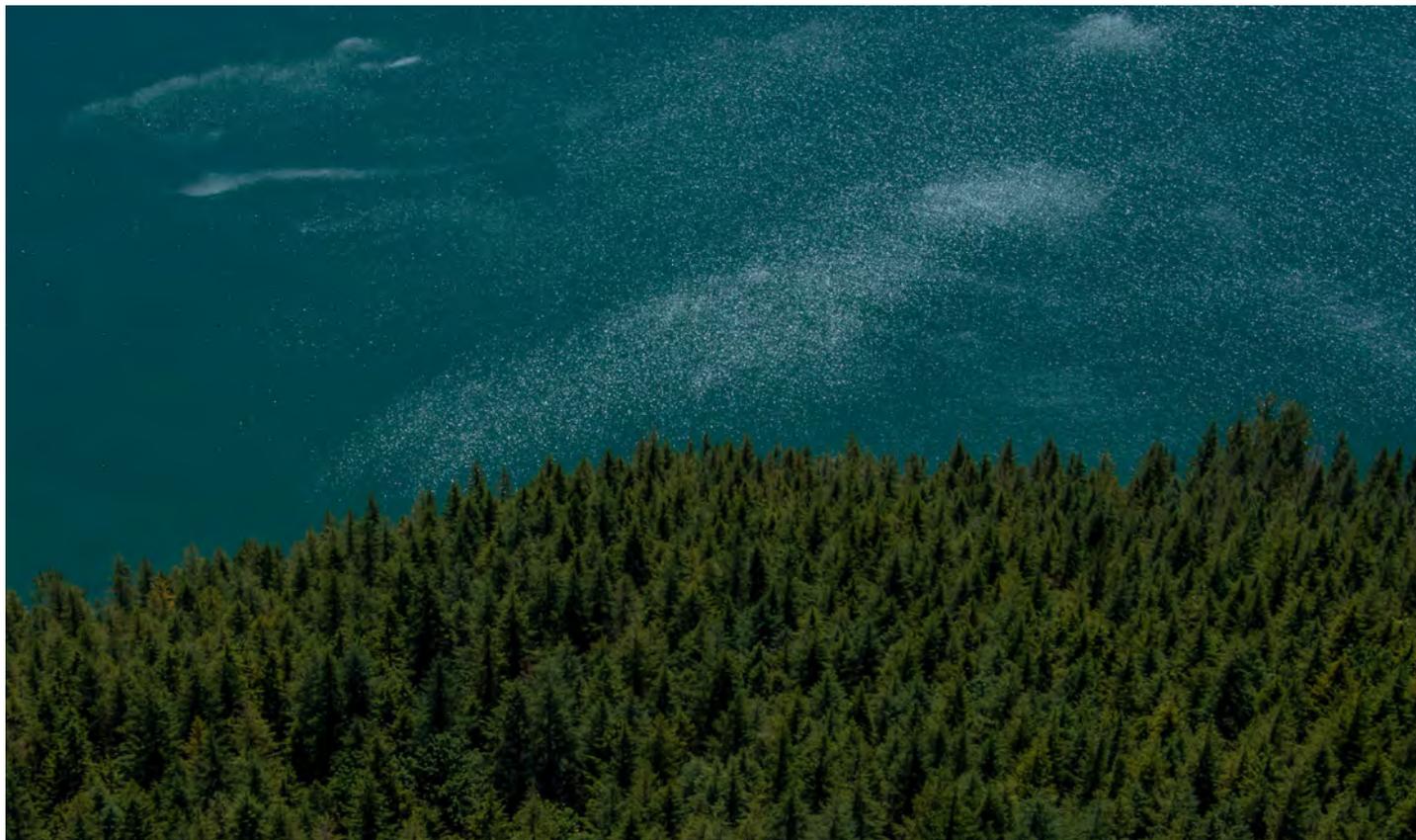


ONCE UPON A SUPER BLUE BLOOD MOON

By Jonathan Warren

STARFIELD

By Andrew Ro



OWLMU

By Nadia Shamout

The universe asked me to be patient
I ignored the advice
Grabbed ahold of all my hands could carry
Every color in every hue
Till my arms could bear no more weight
It told me this would take time, but I would not listen.
I held on and searched for more, inventing ways to lift it all, forgetting the weight of my own body.

When the winds picked up, and time passed through me like age on leather
What I held had sifted through my fingers
Colorful sands, vibrant pieces of once beautiful art, dull edges of the brilliant armor I had gathered
My body was weak, my strength exhausted, my mind sunken in,
Till all that was left was dust in shades of grey and black

I asked the universe to give me another chance
It responded softly, in a comforting tenor, no,
You, give me one.

TITLI

By Gayatri Nair

Am I a dream? ...
I wonder at times;
Walking through my life,
When I see her sometimes.

On a crisp winter morning;
In the warm sunny breeze,
She captures my attention,
In the brief moments we meet.

Fluttering conspicuously;
Over the stream,
I see her world,
as Ours could be.

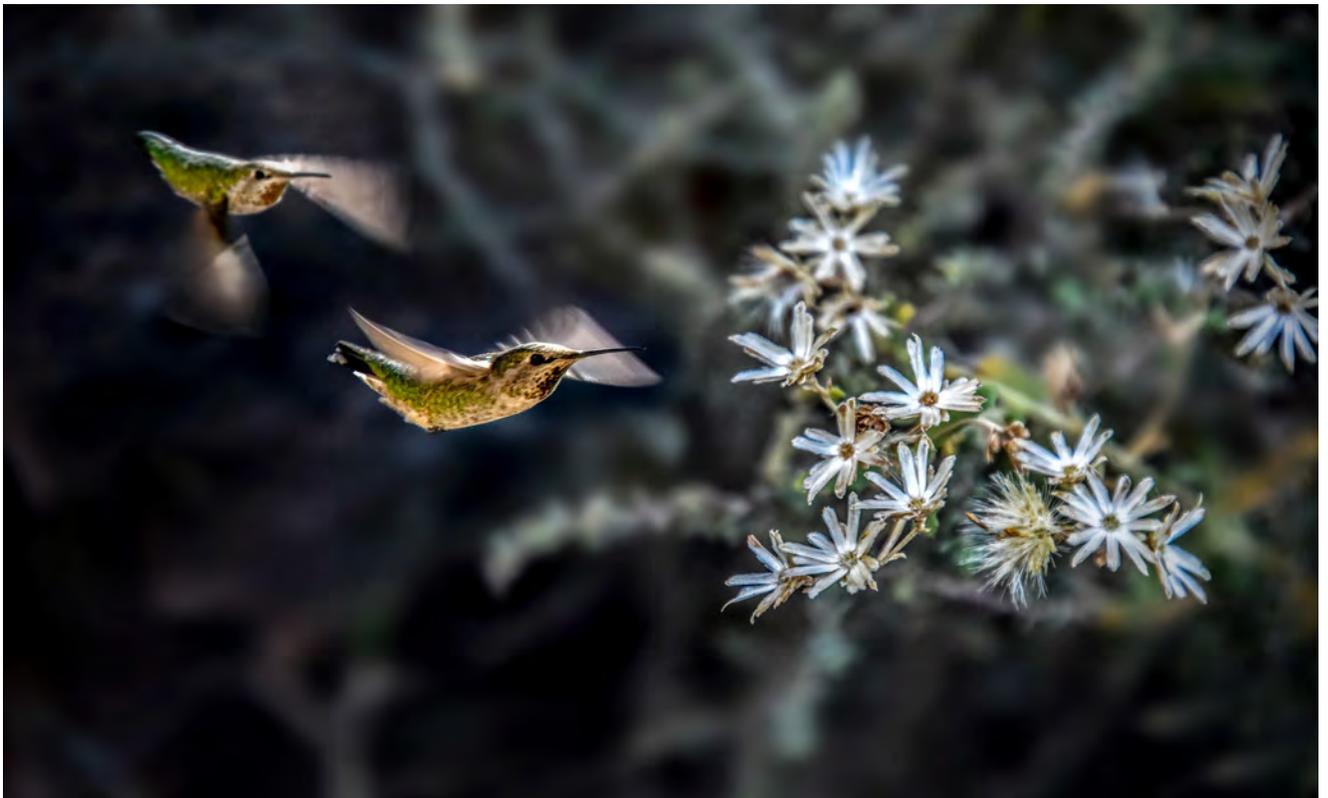
Without the guilt of the past,
Or shadows from the future;
Without the stigma of the color;
Nor restricted by the border.

Unscathed by one's creed;
& safe from other's greed
She drifts across my path; a titli!
...& I wonder, am I a dream?

*'Titli' is a butterfly in Hindi (one of
the official languages in India).*

ACTIVELY SEEKING FOR THE SWEETEST NECTAR

By Suman Dutta



THE BREVITY OF BIRTHDAYS

By Eviola Nakhla

I took out the carrot cake today.
It's been in the fridge since Sunday,
Untouched, still in one piece.
Two raised carrots frame the words
Happy Birthday
And my cursive, iced name.
The cake has started to stale around the edges,
The cream cheese icing hardening.
Pieces of frosting have begun to flake off,
The way dry, chapped skin does.

I was supposed to breathe in its sweetness
when I blew out my twenty-one candles yesterday.
I was supposed to wish for a healthy heart, a long life.
But I wasn't home.
I didn't taste any cake that day.

There was no birthday song.
Instead, In a quiet whisper,
an insulin drip sang for me in the ICU.
Its song persistent and slow,
Like the drip of a leaky faucet.

There were no candles.
Potassium burned a trail through my veins,
Hot, like wax melting on skin.
My parents gathered silently
Around my bare hospital bed.
Wishing to hold my hands but blocked
By multiple leads weaving into and out of me.

There was no birthday wish to make.
The doctors made my wish for me.
"Blood sugar under 120," they said.
It was 520 when I came in.

My gift was a new name.
Diabetic.

What does it mean to blow out candles?
Should such temporary flames represent our years?

I decided to leave the cake out,
So I could watch it rot.





DAY OF DEAD AT MUSEUM

By Neil Parker



LITTLE BIRD, BIG APPEAL

By Suman Dutta

HYPOCHONDRIAC'S LAMENT

By Paula Stoessel

I had a pain in my chestal area
And knew I needed an ologist
So I consulted a cardiologist
Who referred me to a psychologist
Who said it was probably heartbreak
But referred me to a psychiatrist anyway
Who looked at me sadly
And said I needed my head examined
He referred me for neuropsychological testing
Long-term psychoanalytic treatment
And prescribed an enormous cocktail of medications
But what does he know?
He's not even an ologist
So I consulted the following the following ologists:

Anesthesiologist
Endocrinologist
Gastroenterologist
Gynecologist
Hematologist
Immunologist
Nephrologist
Ophthalmologist
Otorhinolaryngologist
Pathologist
Proctologist
Pulmonologist
Radiologist
Rheumatologist
Urologist

One can never be too thorough
But no ologist had an answer
Finally in desperation
I went to ornithologist
He flapped his wings and said
"You are turning into
A Robin Redbreast"
Finally, an ologist
Who knew the answer

STREETS OF GOLD IN THE CITY OF ANGELS

By Melissa White

It's fall in New York. The muggy heat of summer is gone and now the air is crisp and cool. The leaves are turning. There's a spring in my step as I hurry down West 86 Street toward Central Park for my morning run. As I enter the park and approach the jogging trail, I see a homeless man asleep on a park bench. His clothes are filthy and tattered. I'm close enough to smell his stench. His arm drops down off the bench and dangles toward the ground. He clutches something in his fist and as his hand opens, the object falls to the pavement below. I move closer and pick it up. It's a "BLACK LIVES MATTER" button with a black fist raised in protest. I hesitate and think back in my mind to the first time I felt the weight of Black Power. Back 25 years ago to the Rodney King Riots in LA in the spring of 1992. I close my eyes and remember the video that started it all. The video that rocked the nation.

~ ~ ~

In the darkness, you couldn't see the uniforms or the badges. The only thing you could see was the beating; the repeated, savage blows to the face and head of a solitary large man, surrounded by a gang of thugs. The big man staggered and fell to his knees slammed by Billy clubs that cracked his skull, split his lips, and ripped his earlobe apart. He tried to shield his face with his hands but it was useless. They converged all at once; too many of them to count, attacking him relentlessly. When the beating finally stopped, the big man groveled in the dirt, backlit by glaring headlights through a cloud of dust, until two more men appeared, kicking him while the others held him

down.

And what was different about this random act of violence, separating it from so many other beatings just like it?

It was recorded.

For weeks, images from that grainy black and white video inundated the news and made headlines in every major newspaper, not to mention the covers of Time and Newsweek. Back in the days before Twitter or Facebook or Instagram, there were no ranting Tweets in all CAPS taking sides or pointing fingers. But that didn't stop the video from going viral. National TV and radio talk shows fed the media frenzy until they literally slit the wrists of this city, with wounds so deep its scars may never heal.

And the subsequent police brutality trial?

That was the final breaking point.

Within hours of the "not guilty" verdict, violence flared at the corner of Florence and Normandy, spreading faster than a wildfire in Malibu Canyon until thick smoke engulfed the entire horizon. Los Angeles was now a war zone. Up close and personal. In your face with its bigotry and black power, and its low-lying clouds of suspension of disbelief. If you were in L.A. during the Rodney King riots, it's something you will never forget. Looking back now with the hindsight of Ferguson, Baltimore, Chicago, and so many other cities where senseless acts of police violence have ignited fevered protests, this is what I remember...

~ ~ ~

This morning it's raining ash.

From the balcony of my apartment, I stare out across my South Central neighborhood until I notice a fine layer of gray powder blanketing my guardrail. Normally my neighbor's potted palms and patio furniture bask in the sunshine on her balcony, but today they are blackened with soot. I hear gunshots, a distant siren, and a baby crying downstairs. "Mayhem" doesn't even come close to describing the past days' events. It reminds me of watching the Persian Gulf War unfold on CNN just a few months earlier, with live footage of neon green tracers raining over Baghdad. Except this time the war zone isn't halfway around the world.

An explosion echoes down my street and fire engines periodically scream by my house outside. Yet I lay on my couch watching continuous "live riot coverage" with surprising detachment. It's difficult to connect the images on TV with my own neighborhood. Even when I recognize the burning buildings it seems more like war-torn Bosnia than my home. When I first moved here from Mississippi, Los Angeles seemed like another planet. But it grows on you, little by little. Especially with the love I found with my teammates through my basketball scholarship at USC. But even now, after living in South Central L.A. for six years, I still find this hard to believe.

Thousands of people are arrested each hour. The police resort to using duct tape since they've run out of handcuffs. It doesn't seem possible, such blatant anarchy and rampant looting, most of it committed by ordinary people.

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SEA OF TRANQUILITY

By Brandon Villanueva

people. On every network, Eyewitness News teams race to get there first, broadcasting arson, robbery, random shootings, and even two women fist fighting in the street over some dresses they've just stolen from the Sears store in Hollywood.

The mayor imposes mandatory curfews and martial law. The governor mobilizes the National Guard and asks Congress to declare the City of Angels a disaster area. All the while, just like a carnival barker at a media freak show, Police Chief Gates stages sidewalk press conferences outside the Hill Street station, begging people to stay at home. Lying on my couch, I feel like a Palestinian refugee under house-arrest on the Gaza strip. I can't sleep at night with all the endless gunfire, police helicopters, and sirens.

The language school where I teach has been closed for two days. Payday was the day before yesterday and I still haven't gotten my paycheck. I have four dollars and sixty-two cents in my purse and my bank account is overdrawn. There's no food in the house, but I'm afraid to go out. Damn. I should've bought groceries last week, instead of getting that weave. At least my hair looks great. Besides, it's not the first time I've skipped a meal for great looking hair. I look in the bathroom mirror and lightly run my fingers over my plats as my empty stomach growls. How was I to know that this could happen? That normalcy could so completely evaporate.

On the second day of rioting, I'm so hungry I can't see straight. To hell with the mayor's "stay home" mandate. I grab my money and head to the corner grocery store. When I step outside I'm awe struck. This is utterly shocking. It's much worse than I'd imagined. Gutted, burned out buildings smolder all along the street where I live. The air stinks like a trash incinerator, making my eyes water. The stench of burning rubber is so thick I can taste it.

Standing on the corner, rubbing my eyes, I notice people streaming in and out of Circuit City Appliance Store, pilfering TVs, microwaves, and DVD players. Anything they want, they walk in and take. A tattered old man stumbles through the intersection, pushing a large entertainment center on wheels. It's loaded with stereo components, eight surround sound speakers, and a 42-inch TV. He struggles to push it up the concrete embankment underneath a billboard. It starts to roll back on him so I run to help. My six foot one inch frame towers above him. When we reach level ground at the top, he grins.

"Thanks," he says, eyeing me up and down. "Damn. You play ball?"

"Used to."

"For real?" He shoves his grimy

hands in his pockets. "Where?"

"S.C."

"Lady Trojans?"

"You got it." Not anxious to tell him my life story, I glance around at his "home" beneath the billboard. "So how you gonna use this stuff without any wall outlets?"

Chuckling, he spits through the gap in his teeth. "Lemme axe you this, you think I care about wall outlets? I ain't even got any walls."

He laughs, loud and harsh, and then starts to cough. I hurry back down the embankment to the street below and can still hear his hacking cough behind me.

Approaching the corner, I see two Cadillacs and a BMW screech into the Sac-n-Save parking lot. Immediately the car doors fly open and several people jump out and run inside. I notice that all along the storefront busted out windows gape open like a mouthful of cavities. Shattered glass litters the sidewalk. It crunches underfoot as people come running out of the store with cases of beer, toilet paper, diapers, dog food. Anything they would normally buy, they're stealing. Why? Because they saw other folks getting away with it on TV, and there's no one around to stop them.

I jog further down Pico Boulevard toward Korea town. Oddly enough, the grocery store at Pico and Vermont hasn't been burned or looted. As I near the store entrance, a deafening blast rips across the sky above me. I dive for cover between two black jeeps, the only vehicles in the parking lot. When the shooting stops, I spot three Asian men on the roof of the store with automatic assault rifles.

Growing up in the Deep South, I've seen plenty of racial violence, but never like this. And I've taught enough ESL classes to know that Asian people are frequently intimidated by my size and my black skin. But right now, I'm so far beyond hungry I don't care about that crap; all I want is a damn can of soup and some orange juice. I wave my four dollars over my head and crawl toward the entrance.

Hearing no more shots, I gather myself off the pavement, my hands still raised. Something moves behind me. I turn to find an old woman squatting by the pay phones, urinating on the sidewalk. It's so pathetic. She stares at me then smiles, exposing her bare gums. When she finishes, she steps across her golden pond of piss; coming so close I can smell cheap wine, urine, and excrement. She reaches out to me and without hesitation I give her my last four dollars. She takes it, laughing, and grabs my hand. Her skin feels like sandpaper.

"Blessed be those who by their kindness entertain angels unaware," she says, stuffing my money in her shirt. She pulls a 40

oz. Budweiser from her pants and offers it to me. I feel nauseous.

Shaking my head, I whisper a meek, "No thanks," and finally manage to pull my hand away from hers. Another round of gunfire explodes overhead.

I hit the pavement face down and cover my head as the sound of shattering glass surrounds me. Dozens more rounds are fired, then nothing. After an extended silence, a siren wails in the distance, and only now do I realize that I'm crying. Tears soak my face, hands, and the concrete beneath me.

Wiping my eyes, I notice the smooth amber-gold puddle of beer spreading slowly across the pavement towards me. I lift my head and see the old woman lying two feet away in a contorted, crumpled heap of rags. I can't believe this is actually happening. The police finally arrive, sirens blaring, lights flashing. Several more shots are fired then everything's still and quiet again.

Hardly encouraged by the presence of these squad cars, I crawl up beside the woman and realize she's dead. My money dangles from the neckline of her shirt with blood spattered on it. I watch the police chase down several gang kids, none of them look a day over thirteen. I grab my money from this corpse then, overwhelmed, I sink to the ground on my hands and knees beside her, unable to hold back the tears. The concrete beneath us shimmers a liquid gold and reeks of warm beer.

I'm sobbing now, crouched like a whipped dog. An eerie silence descends on the parking lot, slow as buzzards circling overhead. Waves of fear, anger, and hatred hang in the air like vultures, homing in on us carrion below, waiting to devour what's left of this city's sanity and pick its bones clean. I close my eyes, trying to make it all go away; but the street is still here beneath me, glistening with liquid gold, deep in the burned and broken heart of the City of Angels.

Two days later I join dozens of volunteers at the corner of Florence and Normandy. Off-duty police officers lead our group as we canvas the neighborhood, shoveling debris and painting over gang graffiti. Three elderly men salute us as we pass them on the street.

A woman steps out of a diner with "BLACK OWNED BUSINESS" spray-painted in big red letters across its boarded-up windows. She offers us barbeque and lemonade and calls us "God's army of angels."

She laughs as she fills my cup, a big gold tooth parting her full ruby lips. Returning her smile, I think to myself: Maybe she's right. Trying to imagine halos above our backwards baseball caps, I glance at

this paint splattered group around me. I see possibilities sprinkled everywhere, peppered and seasoned with our various skin colors. That nagging ball of fear I felt earlier this morning in the back of my throat vanishes now like a perfect fade-away jumper. One quick swoosh and it's gone.

Enjoying our barbeque, we sit on empty crates in the shade of the diner's sooty awning. The owner moves easily between us, refilling our lemonade cups and handing out little angel stickers. She peels off one for each of us and sticks them to our shirts.

These little cherubs amuse us but the bottom line here is easy to see: this woman is not a rarity. Even with all the recent violence there remains a core of true goodness in most folks here.

I lift my shades off my eyes and watch her, a true angel, spreading her wings and reminding us how to fly. She stands there,

sweat glistening on her brow as she serves those who have come to clear away the debris of hatred, anger, and fear, and she replaces it with love and compassion. I feel a pang in my heart for her so intense and yet so tender all at once, that I feel like I can fly too. My heart goes out to her and I whisper across the heat and dust, "Thank you."

Thank you for lifting us up with your simple acts of kindness.

This is how we overcome the aftermath of violence. This is how we refuse to live in a world of rampant racism. This is how we carry ourselves 25, 50 or 100 years into the future, to that golden world where people of color are no longer terrorized by unconstitutional travel bans, hate crimes, threats of mass deportation or idiotic chants of "Build that wall!"

~ ~ ~

I smile to myself, remembering that smoldering L.A. street-- and I summon the strength to continue to fight for that bright future I dreamed of so long ago, one exhausting day at a time. I look down at the "BLACK LIVES MATTER" button in my hand, and I approach the man sleeping on the bench who just dropped the button on the ground.

I lean down and pin the button to the man's frayed lapel. He stirs in his sleep and opens one eye.

I smile at him and whisper, "Peace, my brother."

He smiles at me then yawns, rolls over, and goes back to sleep on his park bench. A cool wind stirs the trees overhead, as red and orange leaves drop to the ground all around us. I love the feeling of fall in New York, and I cherish the feeling that change is coming. Yes, change is definitely coming.



URBAN LIGHTS

By Ryan Alano

I SAW GOD AT THE MANICURIST

By Paula Stoessel

I saw god
at the manicurist
Beneath the water
Clear and cold
He appeared
As a burst
Of fire and energy
With a kind face
And soothing smile
I tried to see Moses
At the hairdresser
But he kept
Muttering about
Locusts and blood
The red sea
And some heavy
Tablets he had
To carry
So I thought
He had enough
To bear
I sought out Jesus
At the threading
studio
But he was so worried
About his followers
In America
That I thought
I'd wait
It takes
The holiest
Of the holy
To help me
Tolerate
American
news



SELF CARE

By Rose Shan

MIJA

By Mario Curtis Eason

Reason and intellect confound the facts
Stealing hearts and hope in the dead of night
Scattering unanswered questions and prayers
Piled high like autumn leaves

We shared a song, a rhythm of our own
Now, I barely hum - No tune found in here
A gravesite with no marker
Resting place of my broken heart

Awkward place between here and there
Tight and conflicting, I am pulled and pressed
Burdened by blank stares of confused hope
Stressed by the predicament of my shredded mind

Divination is shadowed by demons circling above
Attacking our light and silencing our song
Dreams layer truth on top of fear and doubts
I just want to sing with you again



DAY OF DEAD COWBOY

By Neil Parker



FIRST LIGHT IN DEATH VALLEY

By Zhuang Fang

THE MISAPPROPRIATION OF THE MODEL MINORITY

By Nivedita Keshav

Throughout my childhood, there were few things more stable than the stoicism of my immigrant Indian father. Yet the day we got our Green Cards, I saw him cry. Within a year of arriving in the country, the dot-com boom that brought my family here had swallowed his job along with the majority of internet companies in implosion. He spent the next few years punctuating periods of unemployment with unstable stints at various start-up companies, leaving him to start the process for permanent residency anew each time he was laid off. Over seven years passed before my family received permanent residency. A photo series once documented how tears of various emotions can look vastly different from each other under a microscope. I imagine that if I looked at his from that day, each tear would tell a different story: anguishing under the weight of many insecure years, grasping to make sense of this esoteric process, bursting in the ecstasy of finally belonging.

The pathway to permanent residency that we followed though established was long, challenging, and overwhelmingly uncertain. But that journey was chosen and that choice is a luxury. To flee from one's home in fear of danger is not a choice, it is a need driven by desperation.

Desperation has bound together a caravan of more than 5,000 people, sustained them as they traversed nearly 3000 miles by foot from Central America to the United States-Mexico border. This past year we have watched as the leaders of our nation of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants denied rights to these immigrants. Having left a war ravaged country to which they cannot return, and barred from applying for asylum in this one, thousands of men, women, and children are trapped just across the border in Tijuana—a town that is struggling to accommodate them in crowded temporary shelters with limited access to food and medical care.

Those who oppose the caravan ask why they cannot immigrate “the right way”, as so many others have before. In this way, Asian American Model Minorities—like my own family—are coveted as America's sweethearts, having carved an esteemed place for ourselves in this country by amassing wealth and success and avoiding negative attention. But accepting and upholding this label can be hurtful as it overlooks differences in privilege that translate into differences in socioeconomic status between groups

within the Asian American community itself. Beyond our own community, misappropriation of our narratives allows us to be pitted against other brown and black bodies whose rights are being denied.

To allow this is to be complicit as political pawns in a system of oppression. We must recognize and affirm that not all people who wish to immigrate here are afforded the same opportunities to become educated and skilled as certain groups were in their home countries before arriving. And that this country's laws have excluded entire groups of people from living here. It is our moral imperative to deny that our lives are worth more than theirs because of where and to whom we were born—accidents of random chance and geography.

Our voices are a valuable part of this conversation and we should use them to ask that we are not wedged against other groups trying to come here. In breaking our silence and asserting that there is no single “right way” to immigrate, we unite with a larger movement that has been continuously advocating for the vulnerable. We should join them in questioning why these people are fleeing, what role our adopted country has played in destabilizing their homes so severely that they have chosen to risk their lives, an act only justifiable if death would be a reprieve. Then ask why the administration claims they don't have the capacity to take these people in, yet is willing to pay exorbitant amounts of money to hold them forcibly and indefinitely in detention facilities and tent cities that exist in the underbelly of our familiar spaces, the newest iteration of the prison-industrial complex.

This country was created by pulling threads from around the world and weaving them together. Our shared fabric is held up by a frame made of opportunity, economic prosperity, liberty for the tired, the poor, the huddled masses. If we choose to only opt into the values which serve us and discard the others, the entire structure comes apart. Instead we must help uplift a collective immigrant voice, one of different languages but communicating the same message: asserting that we all have a place in this country, highlighting each contribution we make that enriches it culturally and economically, and declaring we didn't come through the door only to close it to those behind us.

ON BEING MY FATHER'S DOCTOR

By Joshua Khalili

"I am giving your father a kidney." I was nine years old when my mother explained that she would be the kidney donor for my father's transplant. He was suffering from end-stage renal disease secondary to years of uncontrolled diabetes and hypertension. His illness affected my family as we were all introduced to the harsh realities of devastating chronic disease. Joining my father at his medical appointments, I noticed the close bond he particularly had with his primary care provider. Whether I knew it or not, that was the point that I started my path into medicine and primary care.

Flash forward twenty years later- I'm an internal medicine-primary care resident at UCLA and I hear a murmur upon listening to my father's heart. It was severe aortic stenosis and the valve needed to be replaced. He had lost touch with his primary care provider and was now navigating a system of fragmented, specialty care. I then became an important component of my father's health care. While I understood it was not ideal, I believed it was my responsibility to be his doctor. After all, I am an internist, trained in transplant medicine; he trusts me, and I know the details of his medical history. Soon after his decision to pursue valve replacement he faced a series of medical complications including uncontrolled hypertension, shingles and severe hyperkalemia requiring hospital admission. While not always physically present, I was there for it all- from multiple phone calls with my father and his specialists to calling in medications and performing physical exams. I was finally able to demonstrate to my father, and my family, that I wasn't just a child anymore, but I was a doctor and I could handle managing complex disease.

The excitement I had developed quickly transformed into fear when I told him that he needed to go to the emergency room for persistent dizziness in the setting of a recent complicated heart catheterization. I was terrified. And, in that moment, I was not my father's doctor, I was his son. While no longer a child, I was his child, fearing the worst. Could I be both at the same time?

The simple answer was no. Medical literature since the 1800s has described the necessity for separation of personal and professional identities in the care of family members.¹ According to the AMA Code of Medical Ethics' Opinion of Treating Family Members, "Professional physician's personal feelings may unduly influence his or her professional

medical judgment, thereby interfering with the care being delivered."²

My personal feelings towards my father did affect me; I was scared. I was not thinking in the systematic and algorithmic way that I've been trained as an objective internist. However, this conflicted with one of my core principles as a primary care provider- empathy, and the value of building emotionally-enriched relationships with my patients. Throughout residency I have been able to form meaningful bonds with my patients, enhancing their trust in me and making my work enjoyable.

The answer to my question was not so clear. A small study of senior family physicians aimed to identify the internal conflicts experienced by physicians when faced with ill family members. While the physicians interviewed intended to adhere to the ethical principle of separating their roles as family member and physician, when faced with "real-life" situations of family members with serious illness, they always became involved. One physician noted, "I really tried to walk that line of being just a concerned family member, but when things are so blatantly obvious, there is a point when I finally couldn't stay in the bushes anymore. I had to come out.... what good is all that training if you can't help your own family?"³

My identities as physician and son have been intertwined since I learned about my father's transplant twenty years ago. They are components of who I am that can't be so easily separated. At times I may need to be more involved in my father's care and call in a prescription, and other times I'll need to take a step back and ask him to speak with his physician. It's a balance that requires communication and setting expectations while also being supportive and flexible. The answer may not always be certain, but I will always be my father's advocate, both as a doctor and as his son.

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MURCHISON FALLS, UGANDA

By Nikhil Bellamkonda

**YOU CAN TAKE THE MONKEY
OUT OF THE JUNGLE,**



**BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE THE
JUNGLE OUT OF THE MONKEY**

By Andrew Thorne

BIOGRAPHIES

LITERATURE

Emmanuel Aguilar-Posada

Been trying to be goth punk since the 7th grade, but I'm not very good at it. Aside from the namesake of my poem, I dedicate this writing to the creative homies at home whose inspiration and encouragement have kept me writing despite the resistance posed by my dull, stubborn anxiety during 3rd year. I also dedicate it to the forever friends I've made in medical school that keep my head afloat as I learn to swim - y'all are the realest, indeed.

Benjamin Amendolara

Benjamin is a third-year medical student going into Emergency Medicine. His favorite books are Heart of Darkness and White Noise.

Arash Amighi

25 year old male born and raised in Los Angeles current medical student at UCLA. Interested in poetry interpretation since high school and 5 years ceramics experience. Looking for artistic outlets during my training.

Melissa Burdette

Melissa June Burdette is an accomplished poet and speaker, and she currently holds the chair for Vice President of Public Relations for the True Blue Toastmasters' Club at UCLA.

Katrina DeBonis

Originally from New York City, Katrina DeBonis came to UCLA for psychiatry residency training, after which she joined the faculty. She enjoys her involvement in medical and resident education and is currently the program director for the psychiatry residency program at UCLA/Semel Institute.

Mario Curtis Eason

I am a Los Angeles native who lives a quiet life with his partner. Poetry is a passion that keeps me sane in these uncertain times. I have been with UCLA for ten years.

Matthew Fournier

I am currently a CLS intern at UCLA Health through a partnership with CSU Dominguez Hills. I was born in Busan, South Korea and was raised in Philadelphia for 2 years, and 22 years in San Diego. I am fluent in Italian, courtesy of my Sicilian mother.

Nivedita Keshav

Nivedita is a second year medical student at DGSOM in the PRIME program. She is interested in the use of creative mediums to illustrate the immigrant experience and advocate for social justice. She is deeply grateful to Olivia Wu for her insight, feedback, and fiercely compassionate spirit.

Joshua Khalili

Josh Khalili is a Bruin through and through having completed his undergraduate and medical training at UCLA. He is currently the UCLA Internal Medicine- Primary Care chief resident, interested in LGBT and HIV primary care.

ART

Ryan Alano

Ryan is a UCLA MS4 who enjoys photography and visual arts. He is constantly looking to find unique perspectives.

Nikhil Bellamkonda

Nikhil grew up in the Bay Area, and went to UC Davis. He is currently a second year medical student at UCLA.

Suman Dutta

Photographic Enthusiast II Electronics Hobbyist II Proud Father of a Little Princess

Dieter Enzmann

Amateur photographer for 60 yrs. Started with a Brownie and now with Nikon and iPhone. My photos are eclectic.

Zhuang Fang

Clinical professor in anesthesiology and amateur photographer. In the last 10 years, had several solo and group shows in the great Los Angeles area.

Walter Jong

When I'm not on CareConnect, I'm learning and practicing photography any chance I get. IG: walt.jong

Nicole Lee

Nicole Lee is a fourth year dental student at the UCLA School of Dentistry and is currently applying to residency programs in Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery. She graduated from Pomona College, where she majored in Art with an emphasis in sculpture. Her abstract sculptures and paintings are stylistically influenced by the art nouveau movement with references to the biological world—envisioning the natural forms into an altered harmonious rhythm. Nicole's favorite medium to work with is steel by welding, although she enjoys drawing, painting, and digital design as well.



VENEZIA

By Michelle Miller

BEFORE SUNSET



AFTER SUNSET

By Angel Wu

LITERATURE

Safiya Lahlaf

Safiya grew up in Massachusetts, where she attended Northeastern University. She is currently a second-year medical student at DGSOM.

Sarah Luery

Sarah Luery loves her work analyzing data and developing projects in the Department of Radiology. In the evenings, she can be found writing. She just completed the book and lyrics for an original new musical called "Monotony."

Gayatri Nair

Gayatri Nair is a Staff Research Associate in the Department of Neurology/Psychiatry. Being an introvert, she enjoys observing people, playing with pets, reading and in her free time, she likes to volunteer. She dreams of becoming a Registered Nurse at UCLA NICU.

Eviola Nakhla

Eviola is a second year medical student at DGSOM with a passion for fiction and poetry. She was born and raised in Southern California in an Egyptian household and enjoys weaving Middle Eastern themes into her writing. When not podcasting lectures or studying, she likes being outdoors, venturing to new food and coffee spots, exploring modern art galleries, updating her Instagram account, and creating art with makeup.

Rujuta Nandgaonkar

A UCLA graduate, Rujuta is currently a regulatory specialist for the Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center who enjoys exploring her creative side through writing, paper quilling, and photography. A recent trip to her family's homeland inspired a renewed focus on the meaning of family, purpose, and gratitude that has informed her work.

Jenna Paul-Schultz

I graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 2013 with a degree in Creative Writing. After graduating I worked abroad and served in the Peace Corps before doing a Post-Bacc to finish my pre-med requirements and applying to Med School.

Kristen Schoenhard

Kristen Schoenhard, a second year medical student, is an avid anthropological explorer who enjoys taking spontaneous trips around the world, flinging herself off high structures while attached to a bungee cord, meditating for hours in nature, and drinking iced coffee with a double shot of knowledge.

Nadia Shamout

Nadia Shamout is a UCLA graduate with a bachelor's in Anthropology. She currently works in the department of Hematology and Oncology at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine.

Scott Sherman

California native who wished words were enough to get by. Settled on a degree and a career that helped pay the bills so as to get by.

Paula Stoessel

I am a semi-retired psychologist who had the privilege of directing the medical student and resident mental health program for 30 years. I also continue to direct the Psychiatry Interpersonal Psychotherapy Clinic. I enjoy my membership in the PLATO Society, poetry and swimming. But my greatest joy is my two children, niece and nephew.

Melissa White

Melissa L. White is a short story writer, screenwriter, and novelist. She currently works for the Eli and Edythe Broad Center of Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at UCLA.

ART

Thomas Luong

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Thomas believes in exploring the truth of the human condition through his hobbies: medicine, photography, music, hiking, tennis, archery, and astronomy.

Michelle Miller

Michelle is a medical student and visual artist who aims to someday incorporate the skills and values taught through art into her medical practice.

Neil Parker

Since semi retirement Dr Parker has increased his treks photographing the people and culture. Most current series is from the Day of the Dead in Mexico.

Jessica Poon

Jessica graduated from UC Berkeley in 2014 after majoring in Molecular and Cell Biology. She spent two gap years on the East coast conducting basic science research and taking Natural Science Illustration courses at the Rhode Island School of Design before joining the class of 2020 at DGSOM.

Andrew Ro

Exuberance and zest - qualities that Andrew values above all others. Andrew enjoys skipping along the beach (walking is overrated!), collecting antique bottle caps, and being absolutely silly with his loved ones. He also loves documenting his adventures via photography!

Rose Shan

Rose is a UCLA medical student who is currently in Baltimore, pursuing research in cardiology, digital health, and the patient experience. Art is exploration and reflection.

Jamie Sung

Hello, my name is Jamie Sung, and I am a first year dental student at UCLA. I studied Biology at NYU, and during that time I took up painting as a hobby. My paintings are usually portraits of my family, friends, ordinary people and personification of culture.

Andrew Thorne

Andy is an emergency medicine resident. He loves spending time outdoors and taking pictures of monkeys.

Nolan Ung

Nolan graduated the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA in 2018 and is currently doing his residency at the UCLA John Wooden Center, specializing in basketball.

Brandon Villanueva

My name is Brandon Villanueva. I am born and raised in Los Angeles, California, and photography is my passion. I love travel photography, landscapes, and cityscapes. I hope that you see my vision and feel the emotion I felt when you look at my photos.

Jonathan Warren

Jonathan Warren is a third year medical student hoping to specialize in Emergency Medicine. He loves hiking and exploring to find the perfect angle for a photograph and can commonly be found on a local trail if he's not in the hospital. Though third year rotations have taken much of his time, he has enjoyed what few chances he has gotten to get out and share photos with the Beat and his peers.

Angel Wu

I'm currently a fourth year student at the UCLA school of dentistry. I love to draw and paint in my free time and that hobby is a huge part of why I decided to go into dentistry.



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Jessica Poon