

# THE BEAT

Volume XXIV



# Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

We are thrilled to present the 24th annual edition of The BEAT, The David Geffen School of Medicine's Journal of Art and Literature. For this year's edition, we asked community members to reflect on themes of identity, social justice, and health equity. The following works, reviewed and selected by medical student committee members, demonstrate the wide array of talents of the members of our UCLA Health community. You will gain a glimpse into the psyche of our fellow students, providers, and staff as they navigate the successes and tribulations within healthcare and within daily life.

The past year has been challenging for us all. It is our sincere hope that you, the reader, may gain some distraction, some pleasure, and some fulfillment in reveling in the beauty of artistic expression and the insightful work of our community. We open this year's edition with a remembrance of beloved medical student Kwame Firempong, memorialized by his classmate, Michelle Miller.

Stuart Fine and Lauren Taiclet  
Editors-In-Chief of the BEAT, 2022

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## Vital Signs Awards

Literature

Perfume - Kate Coursey  
To Do List (MS2) - Beau Sperry

Visual Art

In Memoriam of Kwame Firempong -  
Michelle Miller  
not far from home - Jazlyn Chong

Special thanks to Mary Ann Triest and Aurora Reyes from the SAO for their incredible support in helping us continue the tradition of The BEAT.

The BEAT is a non-profit journal produced by students at the David Geffen School of Medicine. All rights are reserved. Nothing may be reproduced without written consent. All medical student submissions are eligible for Vital Signs Awards. Pieces for publication and the Vital Signs Awards were selected based on anonymous ratings by the selection committees.

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

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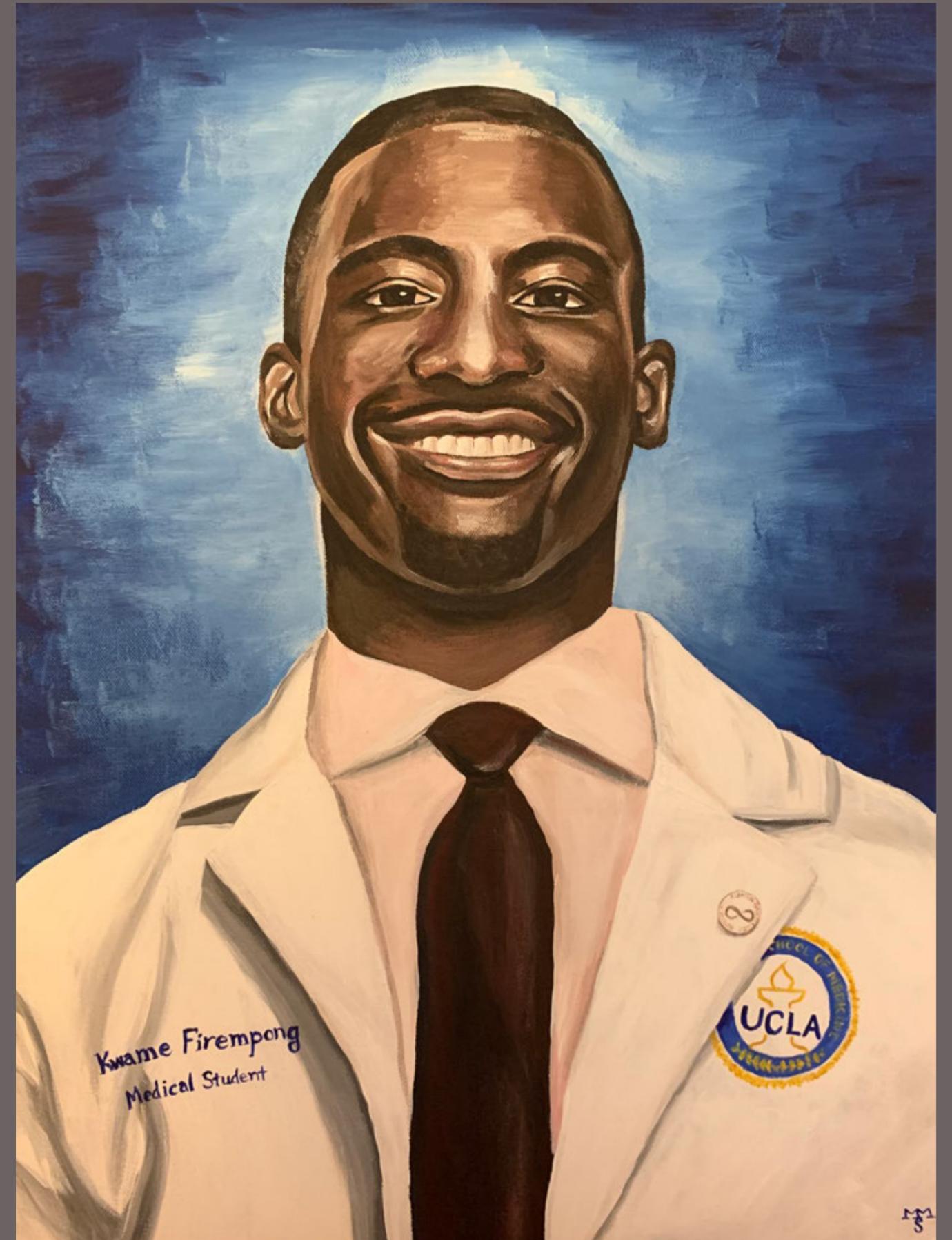
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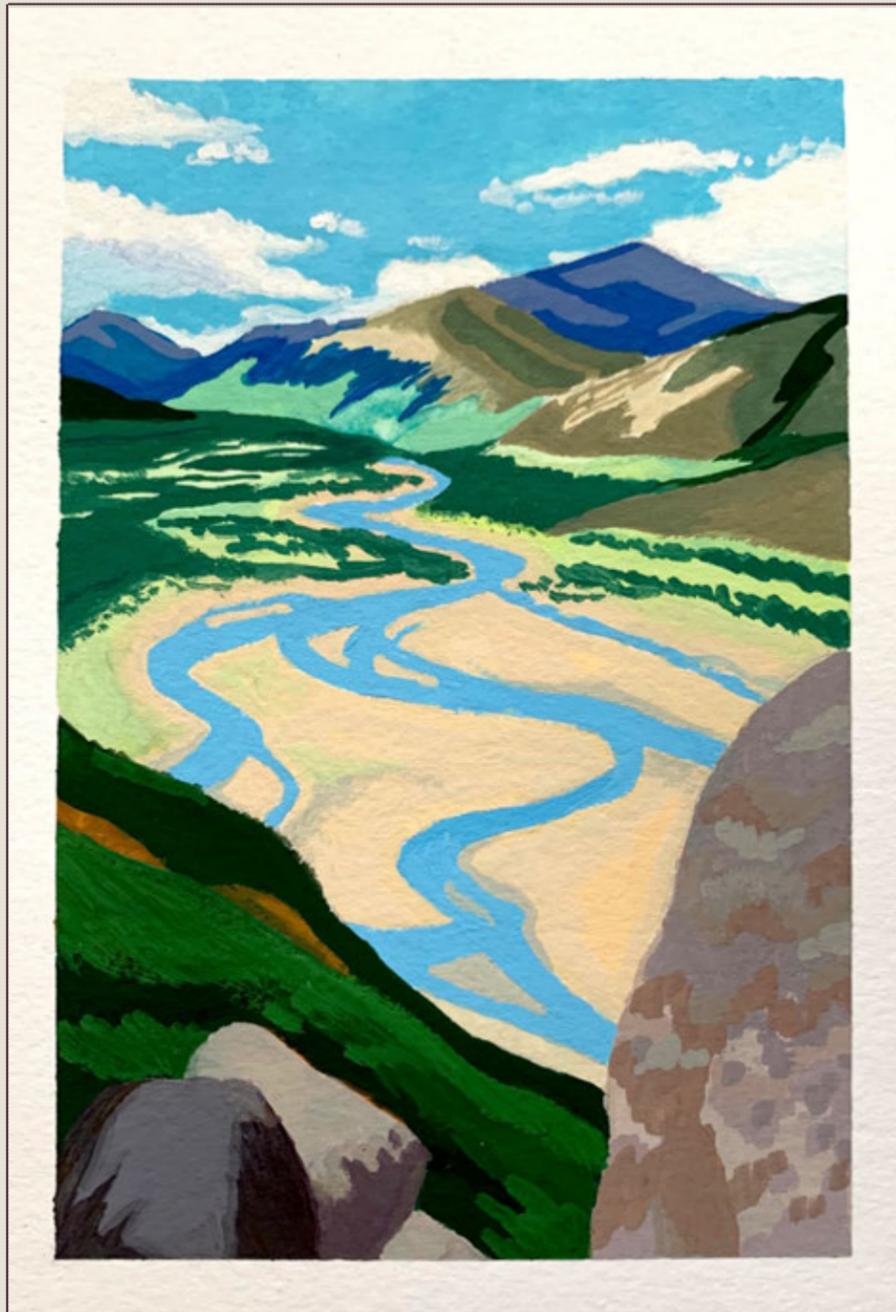
“The fragility of life is apparent when you walk the halls of a hospital and experience what might be the end of a journey for some patients. We spend our lives trying to arrive at a destination: going to work, going to school, rushing to a soccer game, getting a job, getting married. We, myself included, tend to focus on the end destination and forget to appreciate the journey that it takes to arrive. When we share personal moments with those at the end of their life journey, it reminds us of remaining present and enjoying the process to any destination we wish to arrive.” – Kwame Firempong

## In Memoriam of Kwame Firempong

By Michelle Miller

“Dedicated to our beloved classmate, friend, and healer. In his life, Kwame touched innumerable people with his magnanimous spirit and uplifting energy. A natural leader, he operated with a unique blend of gregarious vitality and quiet humility. As the Class of 2022 graduates this Spring, we will remember how Kwame inspired us to remain true to our own identity while pursuing our dreams.” - Michelle Miller





## South America (Reference by Dan Tom)

By Shannon Wu

## Moses

By Beau Sperry

*When I expel / From this mortal shell / Will I die for living numb?  
-Moses Sumney, "Doomed"*

The manner in which  
He descends to us  
is a gust, which is his whisper,  
which is the flaunting of each leaf  
in the canyon's ruddy mane—  
man and canyon and spectral rampart  
resplendent, threadbare, clothed in such darkness  
that the light comprehended it not.

It's always like this  
when He calls: Pirouettes  
and gyrations of air-heart biblical  
and unfurling, each word  
melting wax which holds our bones  
together, each subtle sinew fallen,  
the weak ribbons to which I attach to I.

He says now, *Los Angeles*

and the city unhooks its smoggy dress—  
freeway straps drop from mountain clavicle  
as we prepare our offering:

His the crows, His the deluge  
overdue, His the taillight rubies shining necklaced  
and forever into outer dark, plastic wings  
and oiled waters, our dullen concrete stars,  
false idols all, hollowed-out  
but hallowed, still withering,  
still waiting for his want.

He says again, *Los Angeles*

He says now, *you may clap.*

# Perfume

By Kate Coursey

## Honeysuckle

It had been her mother's favorite perfume—sweet and heady, a shimmering golden oil that her mother dabbed on each wrist before going to the symphony, or the theater, or a concert at the sprawling botanical gardens near the University. Vivian was never allowed to try it—*too expensive*, her mother said. But even as a small girl she would hover next to the gilt-trimmed vanity, gazing at the crystalline perfume bottles arranged beneath soft, muted lights.

After her mother left and remarried, Vivian's memories of their life as an intact family grew diluted, bleached by time and resentment. The month she spent each year with her mother, stepfather, and two new half-sisters somehow made these early memories even more unreachable. But Vivian never forgot her mother's luminous skin suffused with honeysuckle, and even sometimes as an adult she awoke, unsettled, from vague dreams with the scent clinging to her skin.

## Jasmine

It was the first thing Vivian noticed about Serena—she smelled like jasmine, which grew in clay pots on the staircase outside the coffee bar where they both worked. It was the summer before Vivian's sophomore year of high school, and she and her father had recently moved from Denver to a town in western Colorado, where he'd taken a job teaching at a community college. "A fresh start," he'd told Vivian, who hadn't spoken to him for weeks, the upheaval of her mother's abrupt departure now magnified tenfold by an unfamiliar school, a new house, friends left behind.

The coffee bar was a cluttered little shop with mismatched tables, floors tiled with glazed pottery pieces, and overflowing plants hanging from the ceiling. Fueled by the summer rush of tourists visiting the Colorado mountains, the shop had hired several new baristas, Serena and Vivian among them.

Serena was the same year in school as Vivian, a head taller with sun-bronzed cheeks and shimmering black hair that she kept swept up in a messy bun. "You're new around here," Serena remarked on their first day of training, elbow resting casually on the espresso machine.

"Yeah. We just moved."

"Who's we?"

"Me and my dad." Vivian tamped coffee grounds, unable to meet Serena's gaze. Already she dreaded the questions she knew would come—*Why did you move here? Where's your mom?*

Instead, Serena said, "Was that you I saw running past the old bridge yesterday?"

Vivian looked up. "Yesterday morning?"

"Yep."

"Yeah, it was." Vivian had started running shortly after her mother left, and lately she found she could go for hours, traversing the network of paths in the forest beyond the bridge. She relished the chill of fog pearling on her skin, the way running wiped her mind mercifully blank, her feet beating out a percussive rhythm on asphalt.

"It's one of my favorite routes. You gonna run cross country this year?"

"I don't know. Maybe not. I'm not very fast."

Serena shrugged. "Doesn't matter. They let anyone on the team. But there are a lot of great runs up in the hills. We should go sometime."

"I don't have a car."

"I can borrow my dad's truck. You work Wednesday mornings, right? We could go before our shift."

And, because she had no good reason not to, Vivian agreed.

It quickly became a ritual—Wednesday morning runs in the dusky purple dawn, their breath rising in twin clouds, exploring trails that crawled through thick pine forests and crested exposed ridges cropping like rocky spines from the earth. They always stopped for sunrise, lingering in the rose-hued light that filtered through the trees and dispersed the mist.

During car rides in Serena's dad's truck, they fell into easy conversation—about school, the boy on the swim team Serena was desperately in love with, their shared affinity for drawing. And slowly, after weeks of circling the subject, Vivian found herself telling this girl about her mother, about the horrible morning when she realized her mother was gone. To her intense embarrassment, Vivian broke into tears the first time the subject arose; Serena embraced her, and

Vivian calmed down Serena wiped the tears from her cheeks, bought her a coffee, and sat with her head resting on Vivian's shoulder until the cup was empty.

When school finally started, the girls were inseparable. For the first time in months, Vivian envisioned a future in which she was happy without her mother, a prospect that had once seemed fractured, irreconcilable.

## Bitters and whisky

Just as Vivian had always known she would attend college on the East Coast, Serena was adamant that her formal education ended with high school.

"I'm not cut out for school," she told Vivian their senior year, as they sat on Serena's front porch, watching her two younger siblings tussle in the grass. "I'm not good at it."

"That's not true. When you put in the effort..."

"But I don't want to." Serena took a drag from a cigarette they had pinched from her mother's bedside drawer. "The tattoo shop on 4th Street is going to offer me an apprenticeship. I'm already developing my own style...I know I'll be good at it. Besides," she flicked ash from the tip of the cigarette, "who's going to watch the kids if I leave?"

Vivian glanced back at the doorway, the unspoken truth hanging between them: Serena's mother worked, and her father had been passed out on the couch when they arrived, as he was most afternoons, the stench of whiskey heavy about his person.

Serena was right: even if she wanted to leave, she couldn't.

They wrote letters while Vivian was away at college in upstate New York, although by her freshman year they both had cell phones. They shared a love of postcards and vintage stamps. Vivian slowly papered her dorm wall with Serena's postcards—impressionist art, minimalist watercolors, landscapes rendered in rich charcoal.

The first postcard to mention Serena's father came in January of Vivian's junior year. One line, no more: *Taking dad to the doctor after work today, he had some abnormal labs.* By April, Serena's father was in the hospital. In May, Vivian took an early flight home to find Serena out by the old bridge, perched on a rock, nursing an unlit cigarette in bone-cold fingers.

"He needs a transplant," Serena said in an even, muted voice.

Vivian pressed her lips together. She didn't know what that meant, and she was afraid to ask.

"He drinks too much," Serena continued. "We already knew that. But they said he won't survive without a transplant, and they don't think he's going to get one."

In the end, it happened quickly. Serena did not cry—in all their years of friendship, Vivian had never seen her cry. That night, while her mother comforted the two younger children, Vivian and Serena lay with arms entwined in Serena's bed.

"I want to go to the sea," was the first thing Serena said, in the deepest hours of the night, when Vivian had drifted into a state of half-wakefulness. "I want to fix up my dad's truck and drive to the sea this summer, you and me."

Vivian said, "Okay."

## Salt and sea

They drove, stopping for a few days when the mood struck them. They took photos together at boarded-up petrol stations, wondering who might've owned the stores, peering inside at empty shelves, cracked refrigerator units, walls weather-stained and graffitied. They did cartwheels on the salt flats in Utah, slept for several days in a pullout near Donner Pass, where thick evergreens cast shifting, mottled patterns of sunlight on the ground and fragrant pine resin seeped through the cracked car windows. They skinny-dipped in a cold mountain lake one night, dragging themselves onto a raft to watch stars emerge amid the nebulous haze of the Milky Way. Sometimes they spoke quietly—of their parents, heartbreak, the future, all the unsettling thoughts and fears that plagued them on the verge of adulthood. Vivian had never felt closer intimacy than the silences they shared, when she imagined their pulses aligned, beating with and for one another.

They smelled the sea first—brine, carried far inland by the wind. Then came the rhythmic swell of surf beating against rock, and when they parked on the cliffside, shaking out cramped limbs as they slid from the car, Vivian felt the vibrations of that swell travel through her feet, into her stomach, chest, fingers. They made their way wordlessly down to the shore, abandoning the car.

"We're gonna bring our kids here," Serena said, "so they can play together in the sand."

"Who says we're having kids?" Vivian pulled her cardigan tight; the sea breeze sought out every gap in the thin wool, leaving a film of moisture on her skin.

"You don't want kids?"

Vivian shrugged. “I don’t know. I mean, I do, but I’m scared. There’s a lot of ways to fuck up a kid.”

Serena didn’t answer immediately. She dragged the elastic out of her hair, letting it cascade down and whip back and forth in the wind before securing it once again. “I think you’ll have kids,” she said. “I just have a feeling. And yeah, there are ways to fuck up, but we’re not going to make the same mistakes as your mom. Or my dad.”

“Hmm.”

“You’ll make the best mom.”

Vivian took her hand then. They walked along the shore for hours, threading between tidepools, crouching to gaze at starfish and velvet-soft sea anemones, throwing out their arms in delight to catch the spray of the waves.

#### *Mint and cloves*

Vivian met Pranav at a spoken word poetry performance in a Washington D.C. dive bar, two years after graduating college. She was working as an architect, he as a research analyst. He was exceedingly gentle in every way—as a friend, an older brother, a lover. After they moved in together, she came to bask in the smell of his mint soap, the subtle fragrance of his aftershave, the warmth of frying butter and cloves and garlic when she came home to him cooking dinner.

Just as Serena had once opened up the possibilities her life held, so too did Pranav. For the first time, she considered what it might be like to build a life with someone, even to have a child.

*You have to come meet him soon*, she wrote Serena, whose work as a tattoo artist now attracted clients from several states away. *You’ll like him a lot.*

*Of course I’ll come*, Serena promised. *Sometime this year, I’ll come.*

#### *Jasmine, again*

She never did.

Morning rush hour, Washington D.C., November. Vivian was descending the steps toward the metro, half-eaten sesame bagel in one hand, lukewarm cappuccino in the other.

It was as if she missed a step going down the stairs. Her stomach dropped without warning, the edges of her vision blurring like heat-distorted glass. Vivian put out a hand to steady herself, but the railing was too far away, so she sank to the ground, the contents of her purse spilling out: half-used lipstick, spare pens, to-do lists written on colorful stationary Pranav’s mother had bought for her birthday. The muggy air was suddenly thick with the taste of jasmine.

“Miss? Miss, are you alright?”

“I’m fine.” Vivian waved away concerned strangers; the feeling was already passing, leaving her sweaty but unharmed. She gathered her things with trembling fingers. Her coffee had spilled; she tossed the cup. She opened her phone to text someone, but found she wasn’t sure who.

Hurrying, she managed to make the 8:17 train.

All day she was distracted, nagged by a jittery feeling that set her nerves on edge. The call from Serena’s younger brother came in the evening. Vivian didn’t have his number saved, but when she saw the area code she was filled with leaden dread, a knowing that had taken root that morning and grown, amorphous, squeezing air from her lungs with each exhale.

Vivian did not remember much the conversation that followed. There had been a car accident, he told her. Truck driver drifted off, hit Serena’s car as she drove to grab breakfast before work. No survivors.

The air was too thick to breathe, sticky like syrup, coating the back of Vivian’s throat. All she could manage to ask was, “What time?”

*8:15 this morning, D.C. time*, he told her.

#### *Roses*

The memorial was a small affair. There wasn’t money for much else. Vivian had searched frantically for jasmine to lay at the grave site, but found none, and in the end she settled for white roses, their smell cloying in the heat.

Pranav was empathetic, but he had not known Serena, and the winter that followed was long and dark for Vivian. She hibernated, heaping piles of blankets over her body, never quite warm. Serena’s absence in the world—so abrupt, so jarring—had robbed her of her breath, and for months she never quite regained it. She burned cinnamon candles and sage and myrrh, placed boughs of pine around the house in an attempt to fill an ever-present space. She thought often of her mother then as well, who she spoke to only rarely, thought of her soft skin, of honeysuckle, *jasmine*

Spring came. The ground thawed. Vivian emerged into the cadences of a life that was both hers and yet changed, unfamiliar.

#### *Sea and salt, again*

The year of Pranav’s tenth college reunion, they received an invitation. It was to take place on a bluff overlooking the Santa Cruz coast.

“I’m not sure I should go,” Vivian said. “I’ll be 20 weeks by then, and the nausea’s been so bad. What if it gets worse?”

It was true; the nausea had been bad. But it was not the real reason. Vivian had not returned to California since that summer with Serena, and the thought of doing so without her—pregnant now, a son on the way—filled her with a visceral fear she could not quite explain.

But she knew it meant a lot to Pranav, and so in June she boarded a flight, blessedly nausea-free, prepared to sip virgin cocktails with his old college friends.

They were a nice enough group. At 20 weeks Vivian’s pregnancy was noticeable, but not enough so for near-strangers to assume her condition, and Vivian did not volunteer the information.

Pranav had tacked the printout from their first Ultrasound on the fridge, next to expired Bed Bath and Beyond coupons and glossy Christmas cards. Sometimes, when she got up to get a glass of water at night, Vivian would stand in front of the fridge, bare feet pressed against the cool, ridged tile of their kitchen floor, and try to convince herself of the life growing inside her. For the longest time she hadn’t wanted to tell their families, even well into her second trimester. She knew the most vulnerable period had passed—still, she couldn’t shake the memories of sitting hunched over on the toilet, cramps rolling through her body, the sticky slick of blood on her thighs. She had cried and bled until she felt utterly depleted, a cloth wrung until it frayed. Three miscarriages later and finally a pregnancy took, yet despite her doctor’s reassurance that everything was normal, Vivian was sometimes struck with the overwhelming sense that her body was hostile, uninhabitable.

That night in the hotel room, she sat curled against Pranav’s chest, flicking vaguely through an interior design magazine.

“You’re awfully quiet,” he murmured. “Something going on?”

“I’m just tired, that’s all.”

“Are you worried about the baby?” He smoothed her hair, hooking a strand behind her ear.

“No.”

She didn’t have the words to tell him, just as she had never had the words to share with him that she’d felt the moment Serena left the world, felt it in her core, irrevocably. He would listen, she knew, and would not laugh or mock her, but he would not fully understand.

“I think I need to go out for some air,” she said softly. “Just to clear my head a bit.” “Do you want me to come?”

“No, you should rest.” She kissed him lightly. “I won’t be long.”

Outside, she didn’t bother putting on shoes. The grass of the bluff curled up through her toes, left skeins of moisture around her ankles as she crossed toward the cliffs overlooking the sea. The moon hung suspended, wreathed in wisps of cloud, and by its pale light she made her way down onto the sand.

Vivian walked—for how long, she didn’t know—until the ground beneath her changed, morphed into glossy, sea-slicked rock pockmarked with tidepools. She stopped, closed her eyes, breathed in the fine mist of salt.

And then, the feeling—her stomach dropping away, a lurch so profound Vivian cried out in surprise, although there was nobody to hear her. She lowered herself to the ground, gripping the rock so hard blood drained from her fingers. *Jasmine*. The smell was around her, in her, filling her with a profound fear.

*Something’s wrong*. She felt it in her bones, and she looked wildly around, heart leaping against her sternum. Nothing stirred save the waves, rippling across the horizon.

A minute more passed. She sat up slowly, hair falling in damp curls around her shoulders. Another lurch, but less intense this time, and now Vivian’s ears were ringing, her eyes blurring with tears.

She pressed her hands against her stomach.

A kick.

It was a kick.

The laugh broke from her lips. She laughed until she was breathless, until she felt lightheaded and giddy, high off the sea and memories that had never been so close.

Inside her, her son kicked again, a light flutter against her fingertips.

“Thank you,” she whispered, “thank you,” and the words scattered from her lips, dancing out over the water. Waves rose, fell, broke, crested in thick white foam, and through the haze of her tears they might have been wreathed in *jasmine*.

# scorekeeping

By Grace Yi

vulnerability sits at the acromioclavicular joint,  
ready displacement with each fall from grace, and

lust lives in the outer folds, wet, inviting weight  
seeping through your fingertips, heavy  
in your outstretched palms, an offering and a vice

a mother's love lives in the cubital fossa,  
cradled in the crook of the elbow – a nursemaid's first sacrifice

resentment hides in the brachial plexus, mangled innervations of ganglia and rami  
extending rootlets around your neck that strangle you from your sleep

resolve carves out the glenoid fossa;

forgiveness comes through the extensor digitorum,

and in the inferior rectus, you learn that a warrior can contain both unspeakable bravery  
yet cowardice when they decide the fight isn't theirs to win,

that the sight of your ghosts  
can make your esophageal plexus stick like gum to the back of your throat,  
encase your diaphragm,

and when you finally gag the parts of yourself you keep  
hidden spill out of your open mouth like  
marbles into the hands of passersby, eager to collect

as you saw at your vagus nerve, scars  
from an instinct for blind self-preservation

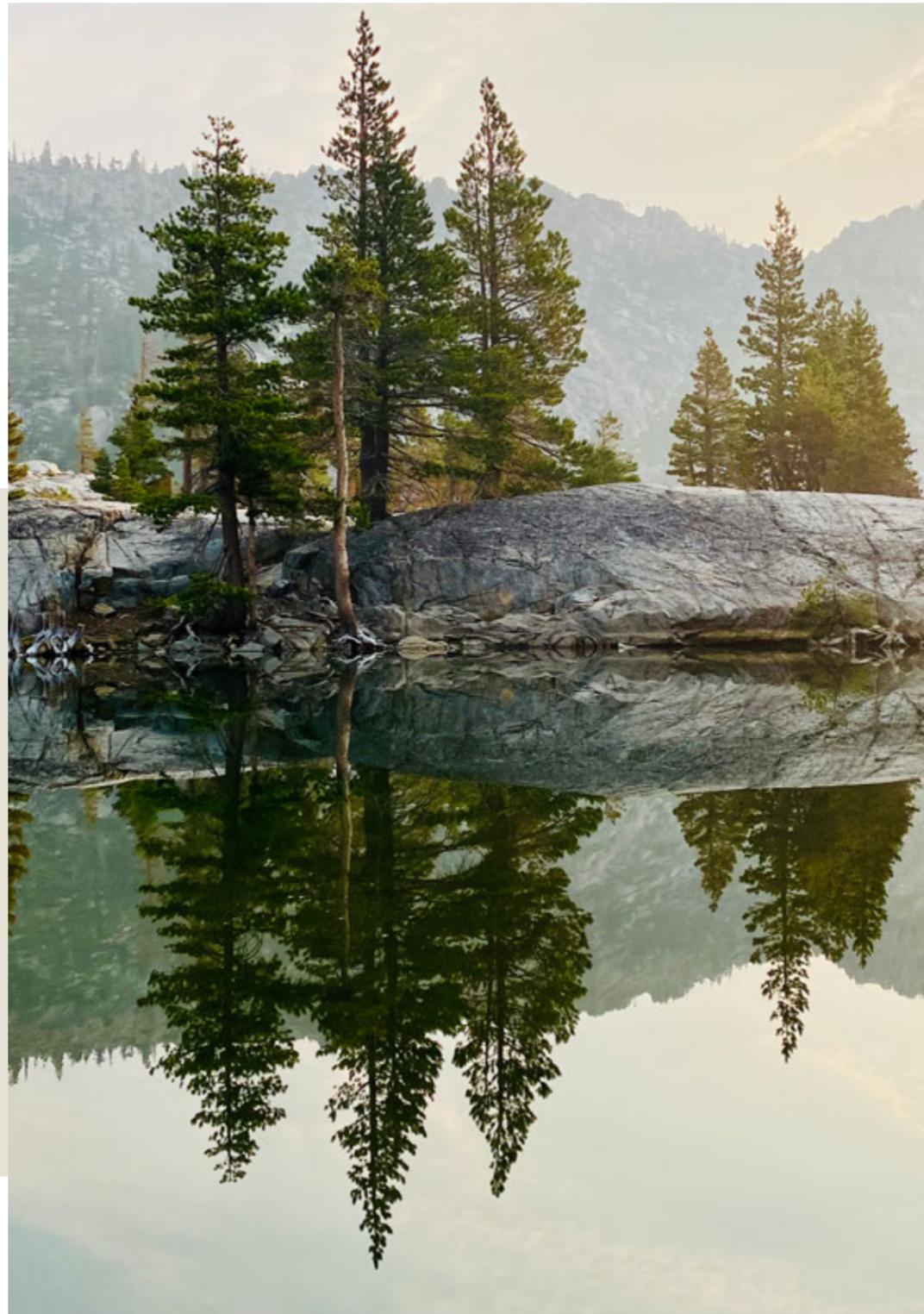
grow in the erector spinae that contains your composure

in a lacrimal gland with a finite amount to give



## Flow

By Sahar Ashrafzadeh



# Reflections of Resilience

By Shivani Dayal

# Places Like These

By Jorge Salcedo-Sifuentes

It's not the struggle that makes us  
I humbly ask myself  
If I was hunted or fleeing  
Or hungry  
Was I running towards it?  
And even if I was,  
Why would being hungry be what made me run?

Is it because of or despite it

The reason that you did  
Is not the reason that you wanted  
And the end's the same  
It doesn't matter where you started

But obviously,  
People like me started farther from a place like this  
So people like me walk farther to a place like this

And we're traveled  
But we're hungry  
And our faces ache  
From the masks  
That keep us safe

They should feel light by now  
We've borne them since we learned  
Some for safety some for luck  
Disarm, no alarm  
One of the heavy tools you'll find on those who've walked far

What are they hiding?  
Bad question  
Whom are they playing?  
Better

And the traveler?  
The real traveler  
Are they strong?  
Does the journey make them strong

Does it matter?

When you lose a race  
You still get stronger,  
But only if you run

And when people like us  
End up in places like these  
At the same time  
As those who started off more closely than we

You know one thing, and it's not why

It's that no matter where we're from,  
We had to run

# Survivorship

By LeeAnn Li

Teach my eyes  
To forget these scenes  
The rush of beauty so painful  
And hurt so deep  
That long after the embers fade  
The vision is changed.

One hears of defiant survival  
Beyond the end of breath  
Medical miracles  
Eyes that have seen God.

But do they ever tell  
Of the reeling  
Crashes  
Of worlds turned on their heads  
How sight is restored once  
The lens of normalcy has shattered.

How one faces the wonder  
Of witnesses to resurrection  
But amidst the alleluias  
The separation  
Of nothing being the same.

Tell me  
Whether glimpses of eternity  
Illuminate ever after  
Or blind the seer.  
Whether one ever recovers  
From  
Being locked immobile in body, only mind free.  
The slow desperation of asphyxia, clammy then black.  
Skin torn, gagged dry,  
Branding pain beyond pain,  
Agony screamed  
Without voice, into the solitude of silence.

But also  
That space where  
Every day was a battle conquered  
Every movement, a defeat of the enemy  
Every love shared  
And drop of compassion so sweet,  
That one touch warmed to tears.

I have walked with You through the valley of the shadow of death.  
Teach my eyes what to remember.  
Let my soul never forget.



Oneness | By Emma Ruskin

# Mt. Rainier

By Zhuang Fang



# Rose

By Qiang Zhang

life is so gentle,  
sometimes  
it hurts.

i tried once,  
to feel the weight of winter;  
feel the delicate dance of snowflakes

brushing my skin,  
so fragile;  
i cried.

i'm scared sometimes.

i'm scared to forget how to hold onto  
sadness.

how to lose the capacity,  
to love  
so much that the world is fire  
i'm burning  
and dying  
and living

isn't the wind  
so beautiful when  
it caresses autumn leaves,  
the ground an empty  
promise  
falling,  
falling  
i'll catch you.

i want to hold onto the sky,  
so tenderly - to be touched by  
the world

to let melancholy  
paint the rain

in the barren snow,  
a rose blooms.

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## To Do List (MS2)

By Beau Sperry

1. Ascertain, catalogue experience of living body; determine ailments therein
2. Publish meaningless, low-impact tract on cytokine storm
3. Be something more than what is offered
4. Publish erratum to meaningless tract on cytokine storm, beg for forgiveness
5. Purchase human hamster wheel, if available
6. I am hurting—
7. I want to be both body and rampant wind, flown in each direction
8. Cook more
9. That stuff I said about the rampant wind, please disregard, I was just tired
10. Stack the unused facts you memorize, determine whether they are the combined thickness of single human femur
11. Consider quitting
12. Determine whether each illness you learn fills the hole inside yourself
13. Reconsider quitting
14. Act like Zoom is not the actual geographic center of a gravity of loneliness, coordinates infinitesimal, inching through a godless galaxy one thumbs-up emoji at a time
15. Change the system (activist poem?)
16. Make time to write, edit better poem than this
17. Abandon writing as hobby, augment time spent memorizing rare genetic phenomena
18. Zoom therapy (note: 3 remaining free sessions)
19. Sacrifice 50 minutes to phone, at altar of distraction economy
20. Shame spiral for said wasted minutes, bring up in therapy (note: 2 remaining free sessions)
21. *Not so much a cry for help—more of a poorly written ransom note to your future self, really*
22. «THIS IS A MESSAGE FROM CVS. YOUR PRESCRIPTION IS READY FOR PICKUP»
23. Pretend to understand the heart sounds of others (remember: “lub” + neurotic, confirmatory “dub”)
24. Review HR video on the improper washing of hands
25. Fill up your own heart—
26. This just-intact heart this slack-jawed heart this melted ice-cap heart this distractable heart this dial-up screech of a heart this undertow this current this prayer to be something else this stillness this absolute shitshow this thirst trap this smoke signal pirouetting into a valley full of larger smog these bickering parts singing tuneless in unison this illness so large it could dam the world’s unceasing flow, this something else

27. Remember to complete evaluations:

- a. Was this poem helpful?
- b. Did this poem adequately address the issue?
- c. Are you beholden to a lonesome future, the tracks of which splay out before you like a forgotten desert railroad?
- d. Did the poet communicate clearly?
- e. Were you satisfied with the poet’s handout materials?
- f. How are you really feeling?
- g. Will it ever be enough?



Focus | By Medha Shukla

# Wilma Rudolph

By Ashley Washington

I reached into my bookbag and pulled out the syringe. Next came the bottle. I felt sluggish and could feel the fatigueness creeping in. I looked at the clear liquid inside, drew some of the contents into the needle, and carefully measured it. I didn't want too little, but I definitely didn't want too much. I had to get it just right. I held the syringe in front of me and gave it a few gentle taps with my index finger. I pierced my skin with the needle and released the contents. When I was done, I exhaled and sat down on the floor to relax. The room was silent except for the loud hum coming from the Nintendo Entertainment System that had been accidentally left on. I ran my fingers across the carpeted floor and looked around. The walls were plastered with posters. There were posters of different celebrities, movies, and shows. There were also pictures ripped out of teen magazines. Of course the biggest poster was the *Back to the Future* one. Ever since we saw the movie in theaters, Jackie was obsessed with Michael J. Fox and began counting the days until the VHS release. On the nightstand beside the bed, there was a bright orange Garfield cat house phone. Jackie always had the coolest stuff. The cord was tangled and bundled up. My eyes then scanned over to the window. I saw my friends outside playing tag. "Come on, Bre! I thought you said you were going to the bathroom."

I turned around and saw Jackie standing by the doorframe. I rushed and placed my insulin bottle and syringe in my bag before she saw them and jumped up from the floor. "Yeah. I thought I forgot something in my backpack, and then I was just taking a break. Who's 'it' now?" I asked.

"Peter is 'it', but he's fast, so he'll probably get somebody soon. Let's go!" she said and ran off. With a weak smile, I followed behind her and hoped that the tiredness wouldn't return. Jackie was right. The moment we ran outside and closed the screen door, Peter had Lenny's arm in his hand. "Tag! You're 'it'!" he shouted with triumph.

Lenny jerked his arm from Peter's grasp. "No fair! You ain't count all the way to 20. You cheated."

"I ain't cheat. You're just slow," Peter replied and stuck out his tongue.

Lenny whipped up his hand and flashed a middle finger. Our eyes widened, and we looked around to see if any adults saw Lenny's one finger salute. There was an air of silence and stillness. I looked at Peter, and he just bit his lip. "1....." Lenny abruptly said.

We were still in shock, until Lenny boomed out loudly, "2.....I ain't starting over, so y'all better hide."

We snapped back into our game and ran in different directions. We didn't play the typical game of tag, but really more of a mix between hide-and-seek and tag. You hide first, and if you're found, you have to be caught in order to be tagged and be "it". This meant I had to find a good place to hide. Behind a tree? Too predictable. In a bush? No. Last time I did that, I was pulling twigs and leaves out of my afro all day. I ran behind the house and saw two trash can bins. I hid behind them and pinched my nose to avoid the smell. I heard a faint "Ready or not, here I come!" and knelt closer to the ground. I mentally prepared myself to sprint away if he found me. I wasn't worried, because I knew that I could easily outrun Lenny. When I wanted to, I could run faster than anybody. I was easily the fastest out of my friends, neighbors, and classmates. Everyone had always told me that I should be on a track team, so when I finally went to middle school, it was the first thing I signed up for. When the coach found out about my diabetes, I was cut from the tryouts. The same thing happened for every sport I tried out for. Every coach was afraid to let me participate. They didn't know much about it, and they never wanted to take the risk. They never understood that I was like the other kids. I can run. I can jump. I can kick. I can dream of being the next Olympian like Wilma Rudolph. "I see you!" I heard Lenny say right before I spotted him closing in on me.

I jumped from behind the trash bins and let the world rush behind me. I heard Lenny's heavy footsteps tumbling after me, but it wasn't long before the sound of his footsteps began to grow fainter. I smiled and passed

by Jackie and Peter. They laughed at Lenny who was starting to see his goal was a lost cause. "You're it!" I heard Lenny scream. I slowed down and turned to see a panting Lenny grasping Jackie's arm.

"Anybody want an apple turnover?" we heard a voice ask.

We all turned and saw Mrs. Charles opening the black screen door.

We all paused from our game of tag and looked at her. She held a plate of large freshly made apple turnovers. We could see the steam floating above them, and a small wind pushed the delicious scent to our noses.

"Mom, why couldn't you have asked that ten seconds ago before I got tagged?" Jackie replied.

With a smirk, Lenny said, "I would have still gotcha. I'll take one, Mrs. Charles."

"Me too, please," Peter added.

"What about you, Breanna?" she asked me.

"No thank you," I replied with a sheepish smile.

"Mom, you know Bre's picky with sweets and food. That's how she stays so skinny."

"I see that, but you have to try one of my apple turnovers. I made them myself. I insist!" she said with a warm smile.

I wanted to tell her. I wanted her to know that I didn't have any more insulin. I wanted them all to understand, but I knew they wouldn't. Everyone I had ever told treated me like I was glass and always saw me as the "fragile kids with diabetes". My old friends stopped inviting me to play. They never invited me over to eat because they were always afraid that I couldn't eat what they cooked. I could eat more food than they could ever cook, but they never gave me the chance. Even family members would greet me with a look of pity. I cringed at the thought of family dinners.

Last Thanksgiving, my family had dinner over at my aunt's house. The entire family gathered there. There were cousins and great-aunts I didn't even know I had. Auntie Ellie greeted us when we arrived at the door. "Oh, you brought potato salad. Looks delicious. You can just set it down on the table with the other food. I made pound cake and your favorite chocolate mousse cake, Margaret," she said to my mom.

She then directed her giant owl-like eyes at me, pursed her bright red lips into a smile, and said, "Don't worry, sweetie. I made sugar-free pumpkin pie just for you!"

She patted me on the shoulder, and I faked a smile. I hated pumpkin pie. When it was time for dessert, I was the only one at the kid table that had pumpkin pie. "Why'd you get pumpkin pie?" my cousin, Tim, asked with a grimace on his face.

He looked at my strangely colored slice of pumpkin pie and popped a piece of chocolate mousse cake in his mouth.

"Because I like pumpkin pie!" I quickly lied.

He scooped up a big piece of his cake with his fork and waved it in front of my face. "Oh, well. You're missing out. I saw my mom make the chocolate mousse cake. She even put chunks of brownies in it."

"Stop it, Tim! You know she's die-bet-it," Mindy harshly said from across the kid table.

"It's 'diabetic'" I corrected her.

"What's that?" Tim asked.

"It's a disease where you can't eat sweets or a lot of food without getting sick," Mindy replied.

They both looked at me to confirm or deny this claim. It was much more than that, but I knew they didn't care to understand it fully. I just nodded my head and took a giant bite out of the disgusting pumpkin pie.

Mrs. Charles held the soft apple turnover in front of my face as if she expected me to gobble it up instantly. I looked at it carefully before taking it in my hand. She smiled at me, and I returned the favor. I looked around. The others were almost finished. Lenny was licking his fingers, and Jackie was down to her last bite. “I ate before I came here, so may I save it for later?” I asked.

Satisfied with my offer, Mrs. Charles extended her megawatt smile and replied, “Of course! I’ll wrap it up for you while y’all finish playing. I’ll even wrap one up for your mom!”

“Let’s not play tag anymore. What about another game?” Jackie said as she wiped her hands on her pants.

“You’re just saying that, ‘cause you’re ‘it!’” screamed Peter.

“No, I’m not! I’m just tired of it,” Jackie quickly defended herself.

Annoyed, she rolled her eyes before continuing, “I know! What about kickball?”

Our eyes lit up, and we rushed outside. As usual, we gathered around in a circle to quickly pick our teams. “I want Bre on my team! Girls versus boys.” Jackie screamed before anyone else could.

Lenny and Peter groaned but didn’t dare to argue. There was no point in arguing with Jackie. “Alright. Who’s got a coin?” I asked.

Jackie and Peter shrugged. Lenny scrambled in his pocket and pulled out a coin. He held it out in front of us and asked, “Heads or tails? Whoever wins gets to pick what they play first.”

“Tails are always better than heads!” Jackie replied.

Lenny flicked the coin in the air. When he reached out to catch it, he missed, and the coin rolled a few inches in the grass before flopping down. We all bent over to look to see which side was facing up, but the coin was too dirty to tell. Peter picked it up and started scraping dirt from it with his fingernails. “Lenny, you need to get better coins!” he said.

“I found it earlier at the school playground. Nobody else even had a coin, so stop complaining!” Lenny retorted back.

After a few seconds, Peter stopped scraping and looked down at the coin again. “It’s tails, so it’s the girls’ call,” he declared.

Jackie looked at me to see if I had a preference. “We’ll kick first,” I replied.

We ran to the makeshift kickball field and got into our positions. I went up to the plate to kick first. Jackie waited behind me for her turn as Peter went to the center of the field and gave a devilish grin. He held the brown kickball up to his face like a pitcher does right before throwing a mean pitch. I looked at Lenny who was guarding first base. He was scratching the back of his ear and then started rubbing his hand over his tangled afro. The sun crept into my eyes, and I wiped the drops of sweat that were starting to roll down my forehead. Before I realized it, I saw a flash of brown speed past me. “Strike one!” I heard Peter say.

Jackie threw the ball over my head back to Peter. He caught it effortlessly and got back into his “pitcher” position. I concentrated on his hands now. They tightened as he lowered his arms. He released the ball, and it seemed like the ball was taking a journey towards me. I raised my foot behind me. The ball closed in on me, and I let my foot swing forward. When the ball left the ground, for a moment, I could hear the sound of a starting pistol being shot and the Olympic crowd roaring. I pushed off from the starting block—and ran.



## Harvest Moon on a Rural Road | By Neil Parker

# The Breach

By Chanel Calhoun

Resistance was futile,  
Evasion, impossible.  
I'd been exposed.  
Those three sweet words  
Linger in the air,  
Like an airborne pathogen  
Watching, waiting,  
Slowly drifting,  
Riding the gentle breath from which it came.

*I love you.*

I shook my head and scowled.  
How could I have let this happen?  
When did I turn a blind eye to this  
Seemingly innocent trickle of emotion,  
Spreading slowly, lazily,  
Gleefully hiding in the shadows of suspicion,  
Dodging my intuition  
To overtake my system,  
Cell by cell,  
Forcing the strongest of my wills to crumble  
To the obedience of  
Desire.

I swallow thickly,  
The dryness in my throat  
Betraying the insatiable thirst  
That drives me towards you.  
But why, you?

No one has ever come close to breaching these walls,  
And yet...you climb them with ease,  
Patience even.  
Navigating through the pitfalls and infinite cloud cover  
Seemingly unfazed.

My eyes narrow.

But even so,  
The entrance to this chamber has been barred,  
Barricaded by priorities and sealed shut  
With dreams and goals that will  
Set the foundation for my future—my success.  
The beginning of my  
Empire.

So...tell me,  
Sly fox.  
What crack did you slip through?  
To gain access to such uncharted territory,  
An area I have yet to map,  
Refused,  
To map.

Because love is a distraction.  
A roadblock to success threatening to derail me  
From everything I have worked so hard to achieve.  
With every triumph threads form,  
Woven with praise and words of wisdom,  
A tether, concealed,  
Holding me straight—steady.  
Until the constant pull, pull, pull of curiosity  
Is quietly subdued—suppressed.

Being conditioned as such,  
Then I should know better,  
Right?  
And yet if this is so then tell me  
Why you follow me into darkness,  
Flickering delusions of curiosity  
Against the back of my eyelids as I slumber,  
Revealing to me  
A dangerous world of  
Possibilities.  
Where everything is  
New, exciting,  
A distraction.  
I fight so hard against it,  
Tear myself away from an alternate universe  
Of what could have been, can be, or rather  
What I want.

*You.*

My stomach tightens at the mere thought,  
Fed by a foreign yearning coursing through my veins,  
Like oxygen to a flame,  
A spark trapped in a cyclical maze  
Desperately searching for escape—direction.

(cont. pg 28)



not far from home | By Jazlyn Chong

## The Breach (Cont.)

My eyes dart up and I pause,  
Suddenly entranced by a sea of dark brown.  
Radiating so much warmth—understanding.  
And for a second, I am stunned.  
How could a soul so beautiful  
Be the cause of such tragedy—my downfall.

He takes a step forward,  
And the proximity shocks me back to reality.

“I can’t,” I say, voice cracking.

Consumed by guilt,  
My mind instantly flees,  
Back to a prison of my own making,  
Where I’ve put the needs of others above my own  
Without once stopping to question,  
Why?

Enraged, my heart slams against my chest,  
Refusing to be shackled by the paralyzing chains of vulnerability.  
The frantic thud, thud, thud  
Now a deafening roar,  
Desperately trying to drown out the familial voices begging me to run,  
That this was a mistake.

“What are you afraid of?” he asks softly.

I immediately stiffen.  
Again and again  
I’ve asked myself those same words,  
And like ghosts they linger,  
A monster without a face,  
A question without an answer.

Until now.

As our eyes lock,  
Clarity begins to rise  
From the ashes of chaos.  
And it hits me.

“Freedom,” I whisper.



Refelctions of a Moonlit Night  
By Michelle Guan



# Mobius Rock Lighting the Milky Way

By Neil Parker

## Memories *in situ*

By Farnaz Haji

She sits  
I stand  
She smiles  
I examine  
She unties her gown  
I remove the tape  
She glances  
I unravel the bandages  
She stares  
I turn  
She worries  
I turn  
She looks away.  
I turn and turn and turn  
Like a whirling dervish,  
Seeking a center.  
Until that last turn of bandage around her torso,  
Where the unnegotiable asymmetry reveals itself.  
And she looks down  
At the empty space  
The desolate site of her puberty  
Her first kiss  
Her first romance  
Her first lovemaking  
Her first breast feeding  
Now...an eviscerated...flat space  
With the blood soaked steri-strips stretching to contain the memories.



## Twilight Between | By Melissa L. White

# I Am From

By Jose Negrete Manriquez

I am from the fruit of the valley.

From my father, who is the Gardener, and from the deep, sinewous roots of my Latinx heritage,

nourished by the sweat and blood of agricultural labor and rays of resistance radiating from our ancestors.

I am from the beautiful *brown* Earth, where the soil is rich and the land is vast, resolved to serve and uplift those who may need their thirst quenched, their bellies filled, or wounds healed.

I am from the fruit of cacti.

From cactaceae, who endure the tests of time, thriving in harsh environments, and illuminating the land with beautiful, complex, and psychedelic flowers.

I am from the selfless act of giving and persevering,

bonded to community through hardships and resilience, for hard times yielded stronger bonds,

¡Sí se puede, Mijo! We were told.

I am from the Chichimeca and the Guamares, who fought against Spanish colonization and whose fervent spirit flows through me.

From my mother's unconditional love, my father's *ganas*, my siblings' strength, my *chingona* wife, and my community's hustle,

I feel my resolve is born from their ideals, working to propagate ripples of resistance against the waves seeking to wash over our land, culture, and right to live beyond existing.

# Smile You Can Hear | By Cristian Cole



# Morning Dew

By Chanel Calhoun



# What You Can't See

By Grace Riley

One brick

you stole from the center of my being  
with no damn rhyme or fucking reason.

You smashed it to pieces and cut me like glass 'til  
I nearly collapsed.

I'm too close to crumbling for comfort.

*You* were too close for comfort.

Take a brick from the side or the top.

Trust me,

I'll be fine.

But break my foundation and

it could be the last time.

Like a house built on crumbling rock

I ache, I cry, and I wonder,

Will I ever recover?

I look the same—

unchanged.

For goodness' sake

I only lost

*one brick.*

Desperate to fix the hole, yet

too weak to do the work,

I wandered in fear of collapse, 'til

finally Time spoke:

I can't make you a new brick,

says Time.

I don't know how or when, but

I make this promise to you:

You will be strong once again.

# Our Dear Friend and Colleague...

By Melissa L. White

*Note to Readers: The following work is a creative piece about fictional persons.*

Ava wept as she read her boss's email, addressed to the lab, about the recent passing of George Wilson Charles, MD, PhD. Although she'd composed a draft of the email herself at her boss's request, so that he could announce George's passing to their UCLA colleagues, it still deeply affected her. She re-read the opening line, "It is with a heavy heart that I share the news with you all about the passing of our dear friend and colleague..." Squeezing her eyes wide shut, Ava couldn't stop crying— she was so intensely saddened by this message.

These tears blurred her vision as she read the final section of her boss' email, where he'd included George's wife, Sarah's, loving tribute to her husband. Sarah wrote about how he'd won her heart with his joyous habit of cooking big holiday meals for their extended family; his tendency to break into spontaneous dance moves in the kitchen while still wearing his chef's apron; his neat whiskeys; his love of jazz, poetry, and fly fishing. All these thoughts raced through Ava's mind as she tried to make sense of the incredible loss she felt right now. Though she'd only known George for three years, he had affected her in profound and deeply meaningful ways.

George was the first lab member she met as the newly hired Executive Assistant, back in August three years ago. He had come into her office, seeking a signature on a grant application from her boss, Dr. Stanley Abramson, MD. As George waited for Ava to finish her phone call, he watched as the florist delivery driver arrived with a spring bouquet. He'd leaned over, smelling the roses, and glanced at the card. It was from Ava's husband, wishing her well on the first day of her new job. George grinned when he read the note: "You are still the Sunshine of my Life..."

When Ava finished her call, George introduced himself, and complimented her on the beautiful bouquet. He also complimented her on the sender's taste in music. "You can never go wrong when quoting Stevie Wonder," George added.

Ava glanced at the card, grinning. "That's our song, 'You are the Sunshine of My Life.' My husband sang it to me this morning over breakfast." Ava extended her hand. "My name's Ava. I'm Stanley's new assistant."

He grasped her hand firmly. "Welcome aboard. I'll show you around the lab. Introduce you to everyone. Then I'd like to get Stanley's signature on these forms, if possible."

"Of course. I'm happy to help."

From that very first day, George had made her feel welcome. He'd offered guidance and support, and she never forgot it. As Ava came to realize over time, George was the mortar that held the lab together. He was a sounding board, mentor, and cheerleader to the postdocs, graduate students, and junior staff. But above all he was a friend. Someone to count on when you needed help. Dr. Abramson had grown to rely on George to not only help proofread and edit the grad students' research papers, but to guide their research as well. George helped them analyze their data in a more scholarly way, which in turn allowed them to tell a more compelling story in their research papers, and not just list a bunch of test results and analytical data. George also assisted Dr. Abramson in the writing of research grants, and the many fellowship applications for postdocs and grad students, making sure the Abstracts, Specific Aims, and Science Narratives were all complete and scientifically accurate.

Dr. Abramson also grew to depend on George's leadership, and his ability to inspire the troops whenever their experiments netted disappointing results. George invariably found a way to work around the lackluster findings and then turn apparent failure into sparkling new opportunities for expanded research parameters. He had a knack for a transformative approach to scientific research, which was greatly appreciated by Dr. Abramson and everyone else in the lab.

As Director of The Medical Research Institute, Dr. Abramson had mentored George as a postdoc, and then helped secure George's appointment as an Assistant Professor. Because of Dr. Abramson's influence and affection for George, he'd been able to acquire for himself some of Dr. Abramson's most endearing qualities, namely his ability to excel as a mentor and guide to others. It inspired Ava to see this fostering of mentorship from one generation to the next, and the subtle ways it affected those around them. From their very first meeting, Ava felt accepted and even valued by George.

He always found the time to ask how she was doing. He genuinely took an interest in her as a person, and not just as the gatekeeper to Dr. Abramson's busy schedule. George was patient with her questions, and never too busy to explain the minutiae required for Ava to effectively do her job. Whether it meant explaining to Ava the intricacies of submitting a research paper online to a scientific journal for publication; or obtaining all the requisite data and materials to submit a progress report for an NIH Grant— George always took the time to help her. And he never

complained. He was abundantly patient. And very kind.

Today, as Ava read Dr. Abramson's email again, she couldn't help but feel deeply saddened, thinking about George's widow and what she must be going through right now. Ava's own husband had passed two years ago, and she knew well the pain and anxiety that a diagnosis and subsequent chemotherapy treatments invariably created for the family of any cancer patient. The day Ava's husband passed away, George had texted her an MP3 file of the Stevie Wonder song, "You are the Sunshine of My Life," along with the message: "Hold onto the happy memories. I'm here if you need anything."

Ava wondered now what George and his wife's song was. She had never thought to ask him. And now it was too late. She sighed. How many opportunities had she missed, to get to know him better over the past three years? How many conversations left unspoken? George was only 42. He had a four-year-old son. He was in fact working on a gene-splicing technique for the potential treatment of the very cancer which had taken his life.

Thinking about George's death in relation to the whole of humanity, she considered the weight of one individual life compared to the vast global population, then remembered a story she'd read, years earlier, in Francis Coppola's literary journal, *Zoetrope All-Story*. The story was called, "The Deep," and it was written by Anthony Doerr. Upon first reading this story back in 2010, she'd cried— deeply moved by its beauty and wonderment relating to the effects of one individual life on the totality of humanity.

In Doerr's story, a young boy named Tom was born to a single mom in working class Chicago, during the early 20th century. Because Tom was born with a congenital heart defect, his mother was overly protective and wouldn't let him play outside or attend school with the other children, until one of her boarders encouraged her to, "let the boy enjoy life a little." So, Tom's mother finally allowed him to attend school starting in the fifth grade, and he met a lovely little red-haired, green-eyed girl named Ruby, with whom he fell desperately in love. He carried this flame of affection for Ruby throughout his life, until years later, after his mother's death, he was forced to take a job as an orderly in the local hospital, and he saw Ruby again, at age 21, just after she'd given birth to her first child.

During a brief but memorable conversation between Ruby and Tom, he reflected on life both as an individual, and as a member of the society at large.

"I used to think," Tom says, "that I had to be careful with how much I lived. As if life was a pocketful of coins. You only get so much, and you didn't want to spend it all in one place."

Ruby looks at him. Her eyelashes move up and down.

Tom continues. "But now I know that life is the one thing in the world that never runs out. I might run out of mine. And you might run out of yours, but the world will never run out of life. And we're all very lucky to be a part of something like that."

She holds his gaze. "Some deserve more luck than they've gotten."

Tom shakes his head. He closes his eyes. "I've been lucky too. I've been absolutely lucky."

Ava closed her eyes, remembering this story, and how it impacted her upon reading it over a decade ago. She thought of the incredible capacity of this character, Tom, to feel lucky to be a part of humanity, however briefly, even with his birth defect. Even with the ubiquitous struggles he had to live with, the constant threat of death. Yet he still prevailed, seeing life as a gift instead of something to be endured. And in the end, being eternally grateful for living just one more day.

This was so like George. She smiled to herself, remembering his laugh-lined eyes, his engaging smile, his mischievous, boyish laughter and quick wit. And most assuredly, his intelligence. Then she realized that George was a lot like this character, Tom. Seeing his life as a part of the whole. A minuscule, but nonetheless vital component of the overarching sea of humanity. And it hit her, suddenly, that in knowing George, and knowing his gentle spirit, and his quiet courage throughout the course of his illness, that her life had been blessed by George's life. And equally blessed by Dr. Abramson's life. As well as all the other members of the lab, and confluently, by all people everywhere. She felt a sudden urge to hug someone— anyone, just to feel connected and in sync with this intense and overwhelming surge of emotion she felt right now.

It was all too much. Ava got up from her desk and approached the window, staring down at the street five stories below, where Charles E. Young Drive South headed toward Ronald Reagan Hospital on the south side of the campus. She wondered how many other lives had ended today. How many other cancer patients had succumbed to this horrendous disease? An ambulance roared by outside, passing on the street below, siren blaring, on its way to the hospital. She prayed quickly that George's splicing research would be completed by the technicians, postdocs, and graduate students in the lab, who had taken up the baton during George's prolonged illness and were now working on continuing his research. If only they could facilitate a breakthrough with this project, it

could lead to an effective treatment and eventual cure for this deadly cancer.

Ava gazed out the window, remembering Dr. Abramson's 70th birthday celebration at the Luskin Conference Center on campus two years ago. The Medical Research Institute had thrown a birthday bash for him, and George had been asked to give a speech. As the senior member of Dr. Abramson's lab, George was uniquely qualified to speak about Dr. Abramson's talents as a researcher and mentor. George had not spoken about Dr. Abramson's many awards, prizes, and accolades received during his long and distinguished career, but instead George had described the overriding defining characteristic that Dr. Abramson possessed above all else— that he was kind.

George had described Dr. Abramson's kindness as the key motivating factor that allowed him to excel as a teacher and mentor, guiding his trainees with his expertise and wisdom. George had concluded that although Dr. Abramson's delivery may sometimes come off as being a bit gruff, his actions were always undeniably motivated by his desire to see his mentees succeed and achieve their goals as young scientists— and this was invariably influenced by Dr. Abramson's innate kindness and his generous spirit, his constant willingness to mentor, teach, and guide his students.

Ava knew this kindness first-hand, from her dealings with Dr. Abramson. And she saw how it translated to a spirit of kindness in the lab. More than one mentee had remarked to Ava in passing, about how the Abramson Lab had offered them a unique educational experience, where they treated each other like family, with unbridled support and respect. Ava also recognized that George contributed heavily to this spirit of family. His quickness to review the graduate students' research papers, his constant encouragement and guidance both complemented and augmented this familial bond. Ava often felt gratitude for being included in this family, even if her contributions were only of a small, indirect nature. She felt tied to, in theory at least, the pursuit of a noble cause— namely, to rid the world of several types of cancer.

Sadly, Ava returned to her desk and began downloading and printing all of George's published research papers, as requested by his family. There were many. In fact, three papers had already been submitted and were awaiting publication confirmation from various medical journals. Ava wrote a quick note to Sarah, George's widow, letting her know that she would send her these remaining three papers as soon as they were published. She wanted Sarah to have them all, to reaffirm her husband's legacy and to have something solid that she could hold in her hands and look at later to reflect on George's life and many contributions to science.

She sealed the mailing envelope, and then walked to the post office to mail Sarah the compilation of her husband's life's work. The sun was shining, and the streets were crowded with students returning to campus for the fall quarter.

All around her, Ava felt George's presence. The undeniable thread of his value, worth, and power emanated out from her heart, crossing the paths of all the people she saw on the street, while simultaneously causing her to appreciate the value, worth, and power of everyone that she saw around her. This emphasized and reinforced the interconnectedness of all life— bigger than any one individual, where the sum of all individuals was so much greater than anyone could be alone. Yet the sum of all would be irrevocably diminished if it were missing even one of the many billions of individuals who made up the total of the combined whole.

The light changed on the corner of Westwood Plaza and Weyburn Avenue, and Ava stepped into the crosswalk, along with all the other people crossing the street. She thought of Anthony Doerr's story and wondered if he was wrong to think the world would never run out of life. What if climate change, and the depleted ozone allowed the sun's rays to parch the earth so much that life as we know it ceased to exist? The burden of this thought weighed on her as she blended into the stream of pedestrians— pulsing, pulsing, pulsing with such unbearable light and fragile beauty that it angered her to ponder the end of life on Earth.

Then it occurred to her that this is exactly what George must have felt when the cancer had caused his writing and speaking to become jumbled. He couldn't even complete the last Progress Report for his grant. He had told her, with tears in his eyes, "I'm sorry I can't finish this. My life's work. Ended before it's complete." Ava hugged him, and felt his shoulders shake as he fought back tears. Then he said, "My son is only four."

How does one respond to that? The injustice was intolerable. She had chosen to say nothing; she simply hugged him and listened to him vent.

After returning to the office, Ava searched her files for jpegs of George to send Sarah. She found a video clip of George carving the turkey during their holiday feast from 2018, while everyone in the lab gathered around the table. She immediately emailed it to Sarah.

The next day Sarah called to thank Ava for the video, so Ava took this opportunity to ask what George's favorite song was, and what song, if any, they had chosen as "their song" for the two of them together.

"He dearly loved 'Peace Train' by Cat Stevens. But our song was John Lennon's 'Stand by Me.' It was playing when we first met, and we played it at our wedding."

Ava said softly, "You know, when my husband passed in 2019, George texted me Stevie Wonder's 'You are

the Sunshine of My Life,' since he knew that was our song, and he told me to hold onto the happy memories."

"That sounds just like him." Sarah's voice trembled with emotion.

"Yes. He was truly special."

After a bit, Sarah said, "If you find any more pictures of George with the lab, please send them. I want to add them to the memorial website that George's brother is building."

"Oh, that's a great idea."

"Yes. We're setting it up so people can post stories, or special memories of him, or just photos if they like."

Ava said quickly, "I want you to know, it gets easier with time. And like George said to me, holding on to your happy memories will help you through this."

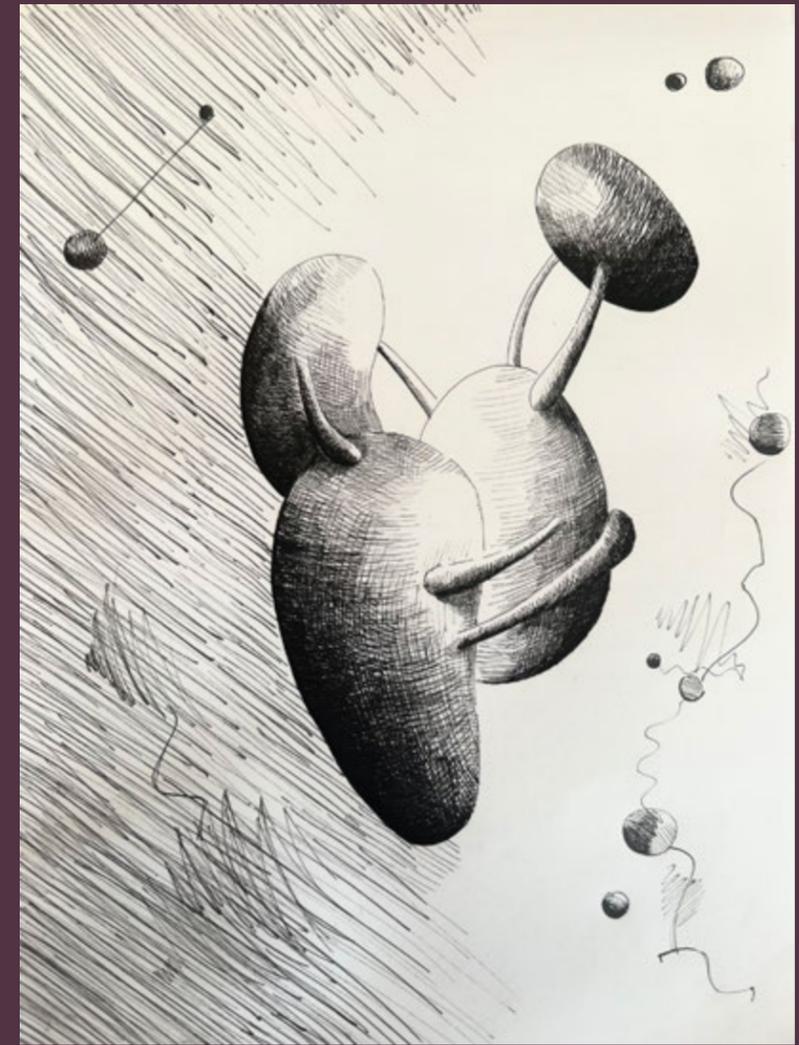
"I'll do that. Thank you, Ava."

"Of course. Take good care."

Ava hung up the phone, hearing George's favorite song, "Peace Train," in her mind. The lyrics were all about believing in good things to come. This helped her feel better. She thought of George's determination to continue his research— despite his cancer— and she knew beyond any doubt that George and people like him would never allow the world to run out of life. Science would prevail, fueled by humanity's unsinkable life force. Passed on from generation to generation— all of us lucky to have lived, however briefly. *So incredibly lucky.*

## Interference

By Jazlyn Chong



# Butterfly

By Qiang Zhang

my grandpa was killed,  
by a butterfly;  
a tumor with white wings,  
that didn't know how to fly,  
so it rested on his brain,  
closed his eyes -  
quietly; sleep.  
listen to the world  
turning on its axis,  
it told my grandpa:

forget your name,  
the wisdom of your hands,  
it whispered in his ear,  
trickling down

into

his mind;

forget those dumplings you used to,  
fold so tenderly,  
for your granddaughter,  
and the mountains in China,  
you climbed over and over,  
and over and  
over  
again  
because  
you were strong.

forget the sound of gravel  
when the red army came  
and pain  
the rain falls on  
your loveless marriage.

forget the way you yelled at her  
and I heard.

forget the music of,  
your terrifyingly

beautiful

lost

life.

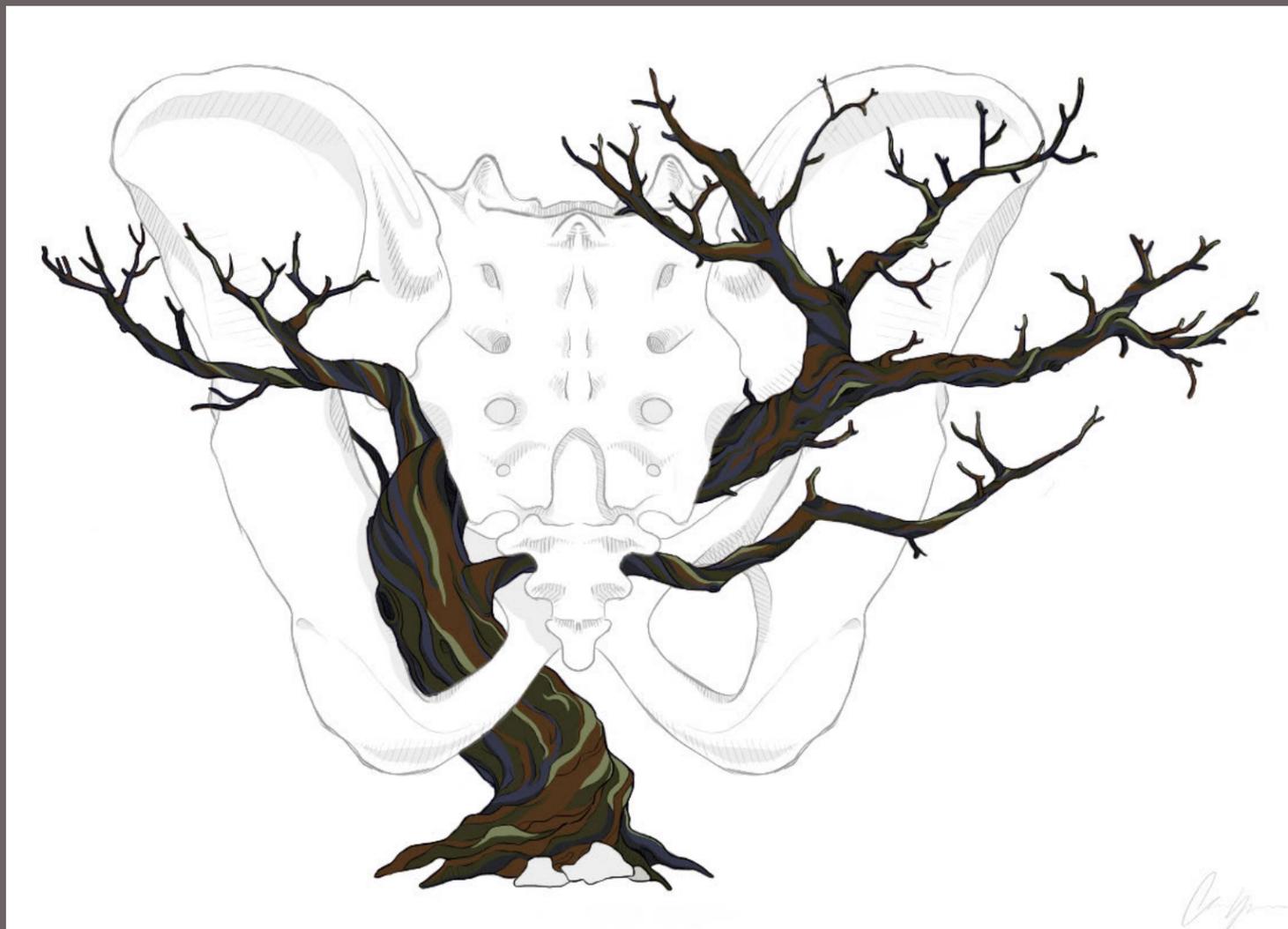
in the hospital bed,  
i hold his hand,  
he calls me

son.

# Hope

By Guadalupe Maya Solorio





Waiting for Spring | By Cindy Ye

## My Mother Is a Chimera

By Shivani Dayal

My mother is a Chimera.  
According to the Ancient Greeks,  
that means she is a fire-breathing hybrid monster composed of various animals.  
I like to think it means she is wildly imaginative and dazzling  
— she knows how to bring disparate things and people together.  
I've only ever seen her breathe fire once or twice when her offspring was threatened,  
so I keep that skill our special secret from the world.  
I think the Greeks described the Chimera as a monster  
because she had more power than the men could handle.

That Chimera made my bones, body, and blood from scratch.  
From molecular building blocks made out of atoms that used to be stardust,  
she built intricate and delicate systems to sustain life.  
Her womb was the origin of my universe.  
Then there was a Big Bang  
— or rather, a forced migration from one Universe to another through a rather narrow canal.  
I was suddenly untethered from my old home.

But I recently discovered that I left a piece of myself behind.  
“Fetal cells have been found circulating in the mother’s blood for over 30 years after giving birth,” my Rheumatology professor said casually.  
He moved on to the next slide as I sat with this puzzle piece that had just fallen into place.

My mother has not just her parents’ DNA within her, but also mine.  
Bloodlines, it turns out, are bidirectional.  
Before my heart had even started beating, my cells were circulating throughout her body  
— and after I left, those cells remained.  
A permanent marker that I had once been there.  
I always knew I was genetically part my mother, but now I know she is part *me* too.  
Puzzle pieces interlocked in a unique way.

“Maybe this is why we are telepathic,” she says.  
It makes sense now...  
— why we seem to call each other right as we are thinking of the other  
— why we are different and yet similar  
— why I can know her thoughts at the slight twitch of an eyebrow  
— why I can read her face like a well-loved book whose pages I’ve memorized

In the *Iliad*, Homer said, “[the Chimera is] of divine stock, not of men” — I couldn’t agree more.  
Only something of divine stock could create a universe inside themselves in which they create new life and exist as a composition of DNA from multiple creatures.

Thank God for Divine Monsters like my mother.



## The Only Path is Forward | By Michelle Guan

# Waves

By Juhee Agrawal

The waves crashed into the harbor  
And the children chortled a sweet melody  
And the songbirds arrived just in time for birthday cake  
For it was spring and new beginnings  
That's what the fisherman told his son  
As they saw the green helicopters falling from the trees

The waves crashed into the harbor  
And the mosquitoes snapped in disgust  
And the humidity hissed like a bad omen  
And life moved slow and sluggish like an insect caught in honey

The waves crashed into the harbor  
and the sky bestowed a dark rage upon the masses  
Seabirds cackled, but with fear  
Ravens came out instead  
And flapped away into the twilight

The waves crashed into the harbor  
And the sky was an icy blue of ultimate disappointment  
Of failed expectations and could-have-beens  
And the red cardinals came and shook their beaks merrily  
For it was time for presents  
and time for sleep

The waves continued to crash  
And would keep doing so for quite some time  
For they operated independently of any expectations  
And answered only to the moon.  
Indifferent to their cyclic constancy,  
To the meaning infused into them by man,  
To the life they could form and take away.

Indifferent to all they could mean to so many.

## to what remains

By Grace Yi

what was lost to the world when it lost you?

I wonder if you looked at your reflection in the mirror, if you had wanted to remove that mole,  
if you marveled at the body you were harbored within, wondered with whom and with  
what you had shared this soul;

in the toughened pads of your feet,  
I wondered if you traversed mountains by the dim glow of headlamps on an alpine start,  
what you imagined as you paused for rest next to a cliff face and gazed up at a  
starless sky  
if you smiled at the sliver of sun peeking through the Sierras  
as you stood at the summit, looking at the pinpoint where you started,  
I wonder who you missed

in your cardiac plexus, sticky with webs of residue and lined with your ghosts,  
I wonder what you regret, which secrets you buried in those half-moons on your palms

I wonder how you felt about blue cheese, because everyone seems to have opinions about  
blue cheese

I wonder if you danced with someone in your living room,  
curled up next to them, delirious with tiredness, laughing until you cried

how mundane becomes profound as soon as you are gone

and in the imprint on your ring finger –  
who did you leave behind?

I wonder if they grieve a piece of themselves,  
or if you both rejoice, now, in a vow fulfilled

now, looking down at you, these are the only parts  
that still remain a mystery

leave it to us to cut open, prod, dissect until we suck away the magic of it  
that's what we wanted, we remind ourselves.

in our hands  
you slip away



## SubI intraoperative sketch

By Michelle Miller

## His Story a haiku

By Melissa June Burdette

History is fixed,  
unless you talk to Grandpa.  
He tells it his way.



## Devil in the Mirror

By Cristian Cole

## Recognition

By LeeAnn Li

The familiarity of your face  
I have seen  
Somewhere:  
Uncertain gaze  
Desperate agony of hope  
Stubborn strength,  
Wearily borne.  
In that space between breath—  
Recognition  
Like smoke of forgotten dreams.

It baffles justice, sometimes,  
The fickle whimsy of life  
Like beams of sunlight  
Illumination freely given, but never secured  
Beauty in transience,  
Winking in, winking out.

Where you languish  
I had once lay  
One rises, one falls  
Who was I to walk away?  
Now

On the edge of flight  
Yet tethered here  
Teetering on this craft of trust  
A hand to grasp yours,  
Lost at sea.  
Speaking the message in a bottle from my shadow self.

In white coat I stood  
As the divide dissolved.  
Past and present ebb and flow  
In holding your heart  
I lose my own.  
In you I've seen me.  
In me, I see you.

# Awaken

By Guadalupe Maya Solorio



# Vernal

By River Sween

It's 1989 and a young woman in her emerald green parks uniform is climbing Vernal Falls in Yosemite National Park. There is a slight heaviness to her breath, but it is strong, controlled. This has been a usual hike for her in the mornings. She pushes past slower families on this crowded day, frustrated her journey was lengthened. She can't wait, there's something waiting up there. In record time, she reaches the top of this three-mile trek, looks down, and sees a vast wilderness speckled with moving black dots.

It's now 2015 and that same woman looks up from the halfway point at Vernal Falls in Yosemite National park. Her body has changed in the past 26 years. Her joints don't move quite the same. On her face is a faint butterfly-shaped rash. She slowly trudges up the uneven trail, careful not to over exert herself in fear of any number of consequences. She passes the occasional large family or stubborn kid, but mostly she finds herself stepping to the periphery, making way for energized twenty-somethings racing up the path. There is someone waiting for her at the top, but she knows she can take her time. There's plenty of daylight left.

A brief escape from the city has filled her with a vigor she hasn't known in decades, so she picks up the pace, even overtaking some of the twenty-somethings from earlier. Then, the smell of ammonia creeps up her nose. Cat pee. Shortly after, sensory overload. She forgets where she is, who she is and what her goal was. Spatial awareness has left, and she is drifting dangerously close to the edge of the unguarded trail. She stumbles, guesses she is near the edge facing the rocky waters below, and pauses long enough to get to the side and collapse, overridden by a coming migraine and the flare that has been chasing her the past few days. Exhausted, she looks up at Vernal Falls.

A doctor sits in front of her peering over a medical chart on screen. This is not the trail. This is a stiff reclining chair in a gray-walled office; fluorescent light washes over each drab countertop and chair. This is a memory she wishes to forget. The doctor said she likely has lupus, and that her unusual sense of smell is a seizure aura.

Years passed. Her condition remained the same. The woman prided herself as an ICU nurse. Schedules were inconsistent and work was demanding on body and spirit, but there were rewards. Her fondest memory is caring for an elderly patient who knew they would soon pass and spent their final hours cheerfully getting to know the young nurse's visiting son.

But her joints ached. Her shoulders carried an unseeable weight that bared down on her with every step through hallways lengthened by tunnel vision. All the time, doctors were still confused by her condition. One doctor would prescribe a drug only for another to take her off it. Not long after her diagnosis, maybe a couple years, her doctors proposed an operation that may help her with her seizures and cognition. The procedure would be invasive. She may lose memory and motor function for a while, they said. Telling her son the next time he sees her, she may no longer recognize him was the hardest conversation she ever had.

She needed a moment to breathe. Since the diagnosis, an autoimmune disease ruled her life. So, she chose to return to the valley that held her youth. She would trace her steps up the waterfalls and look out on that same wilderness. It would not heal her, she knew; but if she could just make it to the mountaintop, she may feel lupus's grip loosen.

Two strangers, a couple, check the woman immediately after she fell. The sun is starting to hide behind the massive granite slabs behind her. At least half an hour has passed. Her consciousness explodes from within after what felt like hours of drifting through her worst memories. "I can't wait now. There's someone waiting for me up there," she says, not missing a beat. Her new caretakers try to slow her down, but she stands before they can get ahold of her. Her joints scream. She doesn't push past the pain. Instead she recklessly ignores it. She steadies herself above shaking legs, weakened by the seizure and her flare up. And she walks. She walks faster than even her younger self, weaving through families along the narrow path. The couple follows closely behind her. Water splashes on her and the ground dampens.

Only a couple hundred feet of trail left. "How long has he been waiting?" Her shoes lose grip every several steps with her pace, but the couple steadies her. They shouldn't be helping her. They should be encouraging her to return to the valley, to see a doctor. Foregoing any sense of safety, she stomps along wet rocks, holding on to grassy walls. Fifty feet. She imagines the release when she can finally lie down and let her creaking joints rest. Twenty feet. Muscles burn. Ligaments strain. She's losing grip more frequently. Her pace has fallen dramatically, but the summit is so close. Just ten feet. Only a few more steps up a steep carved staircase, and she's there. The strangers are at her side now, lifting her up the final climb. Five more steps and, finally, she's made it to the top. She peaks over the guard rail over all the hundreds of feet she has overcome.

The valley below looks so vast to her. She used to scour every inch of these woods. But the top of these falls is enough. She is powerful, still capable of conquering her own world of challenges. Her body is enough.

At the top, she sees her son.

# I Hope My Voice May Perpetuate

By Danielle Tolentino

Florencia's throat burned as though she had pharyngitis, but she didn't dare show her face near the Pyxis machine. Everyone would see her tear-stained cheeks, her puffy eyes, and the crumpled front of her scrubs with which she'd wiped her nose.

It was dark in the supply closet, the smell of ammonium and latex overbearing. The voice in Florencia's head that had gotten her this far tugged at her again, urging her to get up, to dry her eyes, and to finish her first day of clinicals. But every time she thought she was ready, a fresh wave of sobs seized her chest and had her ruining her freshly pressed scrubs even more.

She'd been so nervous this morning, her hands shaking as she ran through the process in her mind. Grab the thermometer stick from out of the box. Apply a plastic cover. Place it under the patient's tongue and wait for the beep of the final reading. Record temperature and dispose of the cover.

She had it down to the last detail, and performed her most flawless vital signs assessment until Linda walked in and gasped.

"Where did you get that?" she demanded, all but snatching the thermometer from the patient's mouth.

"From the supply room," Florencia replied, indignant. She'd followed all of Linda's directions, but her supervising nurse had acted as though Florencia was a ticking time bomb of mistakes since the start of their eight a.m. shift.

Linda heaved an irate sigh, not bothering to lower her voice for the patient. "You were supposed to use the oral thermometer. This is the rectal."

Florencia covered her mouth. The patient gagged. And Linda went across the hall to complain loudly to another nurse.

Then sent to attend to one of the med surg patients, Florencia made sure not to do anything besides give the man a cup of coffee. He told her about his grown children between sips, and she fluffed his pillows, helping him sit comfortably back.

"None of the other girls are so attentive," he said, voice warbling, eyes twinkling. "They didn't even let me have breakfast this morning. At this point, I'll be asleep even before they stick me."

Florencia felt her smile stiffen. "Stick you with what?"

The man shrugged and gestured vaguely at the IV line protruding from the back of his hand. "Whatever they use to put me to sleep for surgery."

Florencia lunged at him, wrestling the mug out of his hands. His heart monitor accelerated, and several seconds later, a team of frantic nurses rushed in.

"He's an NPO!" Linda said, jabbing her finger at the board above the man's headboard. He looked peevish now that his blankets were soaked, but none of the nurses fussing over him paid any heed. "Didn't we go over his chart this morning? Dr. Hall won't be happy if we have to postpone the procedure another twelve hours!"

Florencia wasn't happy about it either. She glared at the man, who was already asking the CNA for another cup of coffee.

"Just go," said Linda, gesturing at the open door. Florencia's heart dropped, but Linda's face remained stony. "Find him some new linens or something. I need to call Dr. Hall."

It was only as Florencia rounded the last corner of the wing, the NPO patient's door in sight once more, that she realized she had no idea where the linen closet was.

Securing her student badge, she walked up to the reception desk, her knees weak and her feet aching. The woman at the desk didn't look at her, even when Florencia cleared her throat.

"Excuse me," she said meekly. "Can you tell me where the linen closet is?"

The middle-aged woman gave her a sharp look over the top of her glasses and said, "By the elevator."

There were three elevators on the floor. By the time Florencia checked every nearby door, fifteen minutes had already passed. Some part of her feared Linda would come stomping down the hall, open a door that hadn't been there before, and yank out a full set of linens.

Florencia could already see the disdain on Linda's face. Her steps quickened, her breath catching in her throat. She pulled open every door in the hallway, starting a few patients, even disturbing Dr. Hall as he poured himself some coffee in the lounge.



## Untitled 1

By Miguel Marin

Nowhere. The linens were *nowhere*. The linen closet, apparently, didn't exist.

Florencia did find the supply closet, though. And since it was empty, she allowed herself to sink to the floor against the back wall, pull her knees to her chest, and sob. Half an hour passed. Then, forty-five minutes. Linda was probably asking for a new nursing student by now. Or, maybe she had already forgotten she'd even had one.

It was just as well. If this was how Florencia performed her first day on the job, maybe she just wasn't meant to be here.

The door broke open with a thud. Florencia jumped, a spike of fear as Linda shouted for her: "*Floor-en-see-uh!*"

Florencia jumped to her feet, trying to wipe her cheeks before Linda rounded the stacks of shelves, her footsteps heavy. When she saw Florencia, she stopped short, her eyes narrowing.

"I was, um," said Florencia. She winced at the sound of her own voice, still thick with tears, but Linda only placed her hands on her hips.

"Do you speak Spanish?" she asked abruptly.

Florencia blinked, the knot in her chest loosening just a bit. She'd disappeared for the better part of an hour, unable to find even a set of bedsheets. Was she not in trouble? "Yes."

"There's a new admission patient," said Linda, already turning for the door. After a beat, Florencia stumbled after her, legs stiff from sitting on the cold tile floor for so long. "Dr. Jimenez and Nurse Benitez aren't here yet, so there's nobody else who can translate."

Florencia's steps found rhythm at Linda's side. She pushed her hair out of her face, clearing her throat and asking, "Did she say where she's from?" Some dialects and accents were harder for her to understand than others.

"Maybe," Linda said forcefully. "It's not as though I could understand."

They reached the ward where the new admission patient was propped up on some pillows, shaking her head as Nurse Tran spoke to her in broken Spanish. When Florencia followed Linda through the door, both of the women turned to look at them with pained glances.

Linda gave Florencia an expectant look. With a steadying breath, Florencia adjusted her student badge and stepped to the patient's side.

"Buenos días, señora," she said, and smiled when the woman's eyes lit up. "Me llamo Florencia. ¿Qué le aflige hoy?"

"¿Se habla español!" The patient extended her hand, the corners of her eyes creasing slightly. "Tenía tanto miedo de que nadie me entendiera."

Linda appeared on the other side of the patient's bed, looking quickly from Florencia to the woman who, by the hospital bracelet around her wrist, was named Victoria Reyes.

"She says she was scared nobody would understand her," said Florencia, and Linda and Nurse Tran turned sympathetic eyes to Victoria. "¿Señora, a dónde le duele?"

"Ay," said Victoria, placing her hand on her heart. "Me daña mucho el pecho."

"She's experiencing chest pain," Florencia translated, watching Victoria attentively and gesturing for her to continue. "She has heartburn and it—oh, she says it's spreading to her neck and left shoulder." Florencia's stomach sank as the list of symptoms worsened. "She has nausea, dizziness, and weakness in her legs. ¿Es todo, señora?"

Victoria let out a breath and smiled weakly, laying her hand over her chest again. "Disculpe," she said heavily, sucking in an unsteady breath. "Me cuesta mucho respirar lo suficiente para hablar."

"She says she's short of breath," said Florencia. She eyed Victoria's hand as it fisted on her chest, and knew from the looks Nurse Tran and Linda exchanged that wasn't good news. "I think—I think it could be a myocardial infarction."

"Check her pulse," Linda said quickly, only to lunge forward and do it herself. "Oxygen and blood pressure. And help me get her hooked up to an ECG."

"¿Que me esta pasando?" asked Victoria, her eyes wide and fearful.

"Está teniendo un infarto, señora," Florencia answered. Those were words no one ever wanted to hear: you are having a heart attack. "No se preocupe, nosotras la cuidaremos."

Florencia nervously smiled at Victoria for another beat before Linda caught her attention with a wave.

"Well? Don't just stand there, get the oximeter!"

It wasn't until break that Florencia was actually able to sit down and send her mother a quick, error-riddled text about the first part of her morning. Just one morning in and already, she was exhausted. But she had barely wanted to take her break. She'd wanted to stay with Victoria, with Linda, and do more.

"So," said Linda, taking her lunch from the microwave and settling down across from Florencia at the table. "How do you think you're doing so far?"

Florencia grinned, stuffing another empanada into her mouth. "It's been mostly a disaster."

Linda smiled too, taking a long sip from her coffee. "I made a lot of mistakes on my first day of clinicals too, you know. Started

inserting an NG without measuring first. Having to explain to the patient why we had to pull it out and start the procedure again was horrific," Linda recounted with a shudder.

She turned to Florencia with surprising fondness in her eyes. "But you have a good head and a good heart. That's what will keep you going."

"Right," said Florencia. "I mean, I do. Want to keep going, that is."

"Well, good," said Linda, pulling out her phone. "We honestly need all hands on deck, at all times." She paused, then met Florencia's eyes. "How do you say 'No you can't get out of bed, you're a fall risk' in Spanish? There's a man in 309 who doesn't understand a single word I say. Either that, or he just pretends."

Grinning, Florencia took a fueling sip of coffee.

## 4000 years, 10 million years

By David Lee



# Biographies

## LITERATURE

**Ashley Washington** is a second year medical student at DGSOM. She was born and raised in Macon, Georgia and graduated from Brown University with a bachelors in biology. In her free time, she enjoys writing, playing piano, cooking, and playing video games.

**Beau Sperry** is an MD Candidate at UCLA. His creative work has appeared in SEED (Bates College), Rainy Day (Cornell), Blind Glass (U. Washington), “An Anthology of Emerging Poets” (Z Publishing) and elsewhere.

**Chanel Calhoun**- I am a third year dental student who loves traveling, writing, and creating works of art in my spare time.

**Danielle Tolentino** is a (very) sleep-deprived nursing student in her 3rd year at UCLA. Hopes to heal others with her writing in case this nursing thing doesn't work out.

**Farnaz Haji**- I am a recent graduate of UCLA breast surgical oncology fellowship and just started working as faculty in Santa Barbara, CA. This piece is a depiction of my experience with a mastectomy patient during their first post operative visit when we remove their surgical dressing and they view their new image.

**Grace Riley** grew up in Wisconsin and discovered her true happy place upon moving near the ocean. She is a second-year medical student.

**Grace Yi** is an Ohio native and is a first-year medical student at DGSOM. She is interested in women's health, implementation science, and therapeutic arts and movement. She loves spikeball, dance improv, and anything else that gets her outdoors. She has one cat (Lucy) who she adores!

**Jose Negrete Manriquez** is a fourth-year medical student in the Drew/PRIME and MPP programs at UCLA. He is applying to internal medicine and hopes to work with immigrant and vulnerable communities.

**Juhee Agrawal**- I am an MS2 from Birmingham, Alabama. I have been writing poetry for many years on different themes including nature, travel, and abstract concepts.

**Kate Coursey** is a third-year medical student at UCLA. In her spare time, she enjoys writing novels, short stories, and haikus.

**LeeAnn Li** is in her 8th and final year of the MD-PhD program at UCLA and is pursuing Neurology. Her personal experience with illness powerfully shaped and informed her path today: in life perspective, PhD research, and career. She has always had a love of words, and has found that writing, both prose and poetry, has enabled her to reflect on and process experiences, just as being in medical school has re-contextualized them. She believes in the power of dialogue and narrative to cultivate empathy.

**Melissa June (Mel) Burdette** is an accomplished poet and public speaker from southern Louisiana. She and her Carolina Dog, Honey the Dingo, now fondly call Los Angeles home.

**Melissa L. White** is a screenwriter, novelist, and short story writer, whose LGBTQ+ film, “Catch the Light,” premiered in Mumbai, India in June 2019. Melissa's biopic script, “WHITENESS OF BONES,” based on the life of female artist, Georgia O'Keeffe, was a FINALIST in four different Screenplay Contests in 2021, and her LGBTQ+ Rom Com script, “Modern Marriage,” won 4th Prize in the Writer's Digest Screenplay Contest 2021 (from over 3,000 entries.) Melissa is currently in Pre-Production for her latest film, “Sunrise Hollywood,” which she will write, direct, and co-produce.

**Qiang Zhang** is a first year medical student at David Geffen School of Medicine. In her free time, she enjoys eating and exploring new cuisines, playing music, and has recently gotten into growing plants!

**River Sween**- I work at UCLA's hematology/oncology research clinic in Santa Monica, starting around the winter surge of COVID-19. In my off time, I write short stories and fantasize about writing for films, TV shows and video games.

**Shivani Dayal** is a California native aspiring poet, nature enthusiast, and medical student at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. She also earned her Masters of Public Health and hopes to help bridge public health and medicine.

## VISUAL ART

**Chanel Calhoun**- I am currently a third year dental student who loves traveling, writing, and creating works of art in my spare time.

**Cristian Cole**- Los Angeles born and raised with dreams of being an athlete and always thought I'd be in front of the camera but found a passion behind it. For more information please check out my website at Coleworldproductions.com. Thank you in advance.

**Cindy Ye** is a 4th year medical student and believer of reckless optimism, radical compassion, and (terrible) dad jokes.

**David Lee** - I document things I love through the lens and the sensor.

**Emma Ruskin** is an MSI who has sold and exhibited her sculpture and ceramics across NYC. These pieces were created during the height of the pandemic and were inspired by themes around separation, connection, and isolation.

**Guadalupe Maya Solorio** is a first generation medical student who has enjoined painting and writing poetry since childhood. Guadalupe gains inspiration from themes that she is passionate about such as equity, social activism, social and environmental justice. She gains also inspiration from her own experiences, medicine and the overall human experience.

**Jazlyn Chong**- California native who has always loved to draw and paint

**Medha Shukla**- I am a third year Pediatric Gastroenterology Fellow at UCLA Mattel Children's Hospital. I made this painting, titled “Focus,” as a gift for my brother as he graduated from his Vascular Surgery Fellowship, but I felt that it also reflected the atmosphere that all of us in healthcare have been experiencing this past year. This painting depicts a need to maintain our focus during a time of chaos that we have never experienced before.

**Melissa L. White** is a screenwriter, novelist, and short story writer, whose LGBTQ+ film, “Catch the Light,” premiered in Mumbai, India in June 2019. Melissa's biopic script, “WHITENESS OF BONES,” based on the life of female artist, Georgia O'Keeffe, was a FINALIST in four different Screenplay

Contests in 2021, and her LGBTQ+ Rom Com script, “Modern Marriage,” won 4th Prize in the Writer's Digest Screenplay Contest 2021 (from over 3,000 entries.) Melissa is currently in Pre-Production for her latest film, “Sunrise Hollywood,” which she will write, direct, and co-produce.

**Michelle Guan**- Having trekked across 12 different countries and counting, Michelle is an avid explorer and enjoys using photography to capture the beauty, cuisines, and cultures found all over the world. Michelle Guan graduated from UCLA in 2018 and is currently a medical student at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine (go Bruins!) This is her 3rd year publishing in The Beat.

**Michelle Miller**- hooper. artist. aspiring neurosurgeon.

**Miguel Marin** is a post-doctoral scholar in the Department of Neurology. His primary research interests include the mechanisms that govern neural and glial regeneration in the central nervous system; however, he finds the entirety of neuroscience a never-ending source of fascination. When he is not in the lab, you can find him in front of his easel painting.

**Neil Parker**- Pandemic has been very difficult but has allowed exploration of local areas. Lots of great places to visit and photograph. There is still life after being a Dean.

**Sahar Ashrafzadeh** is a third-year medical student at UCLA. She spends her free time exploring coffeeshops across Los Angeles, listening to podcasts and audiobooks, and experimenting with different art media.

**Shannon Wu** is a student at DGSOM currently pursuing a research year. She has been drawing since she was young but started experimenting with gouache painting last year, during clerkship rotations. When she's not painting, she enjoys swimming, surfing, and reading.

**Shivani Dayal** is a California native aspiring poet, nature enthusiast, and medical student at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. She also earned her Masters of Public Health and hopes to help bridge public health and medicine.

**Zhuang Fang**- Clinical faculty and armature photographer with special interest in nature. Always use tripod and HDR technique.

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