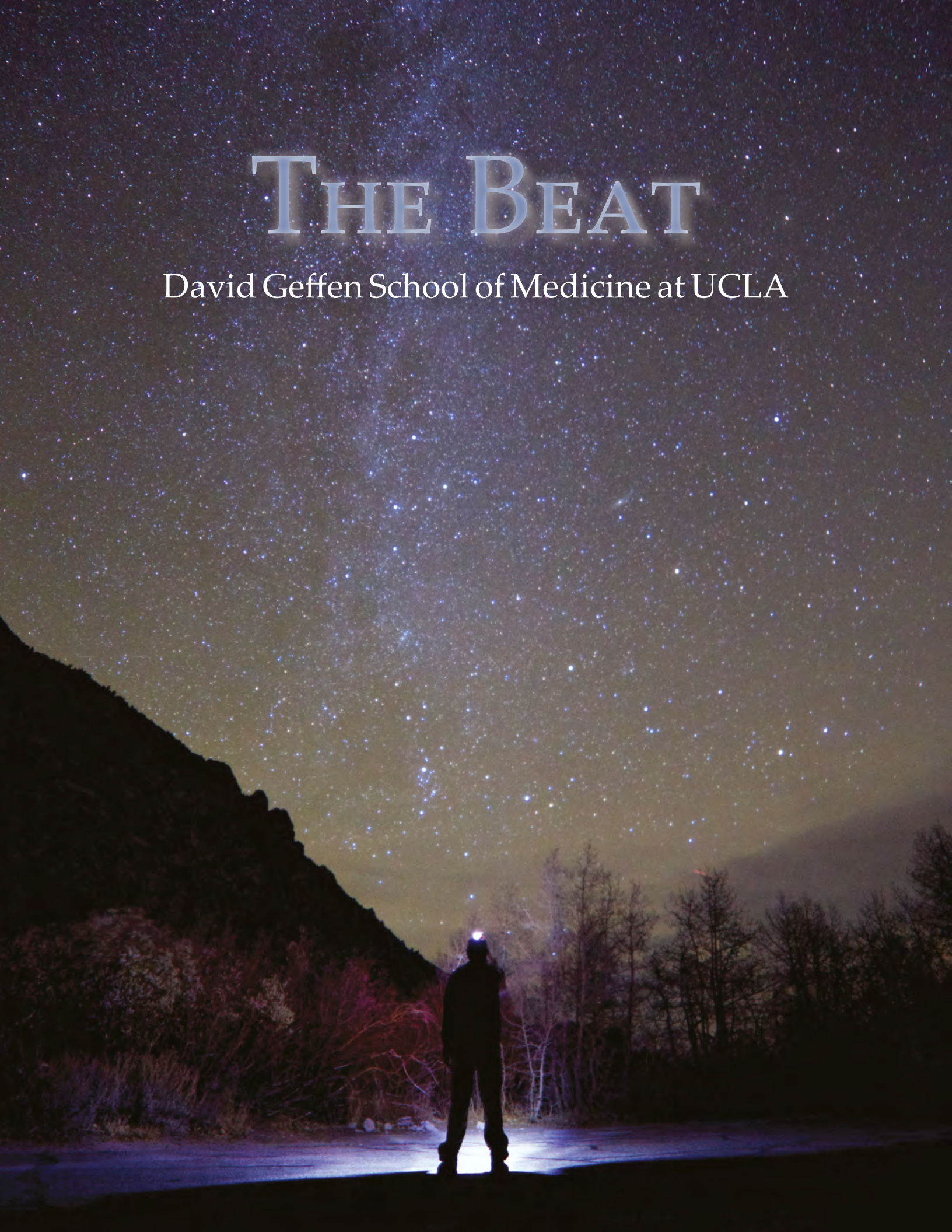


# THE BEAT

David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA





## Editor's note

Dear readers,

Thank you for picking up the 19th edition of The BEAT, the arts and literary magazine for the David Geffen School of Medicine. We're honored to share some of the brilliance and insight of the UCLA Health community with you. Whether in the ICU or under a night sky wheeling with stars, art helps us make sense of the complexities of human experience and captures glimmers of a world we might otherwise miss. We hope that the thread of human connection woven within these pages will inspire you to find beauty and meaning in every moment.

And the beat goes on...

Jacqueline Ngo, Rose Shan, and Victoria Sun



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## Vital Signs Awards

### art

Mind and Heart - Rose Shan  
Yellow swallowtails and orchids - Jessica Poon

### photography

Through the Looking Glass - Stephan Chiu  
Solfar the Sun Voyager - Jonathan Warren

### literature

Chess Night - Eviola Nakhla  
If only to be Me again - Billy Nguyen



Front Cover: **Beam Me Up** by Walter Jong

Back Cover: **The Arch** by Thomas Luong

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

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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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**Adolescence** | *Huan Dong*

## **My first night alone** | *Ka Man Law*

I was probably five or six at that time.

I had asthma attacks since I was two, especially during the transition from Summer to Autumn when the temperature difference between day and night was too much for my young self. I remember sitting upright in the middle of the night when the attacks came and telling my parents that my airway was very 'stiff'. My parents would give me my inhaler, sit by me and wait, hoping the medicine would work. Sometimes, I would make it through, but a lot of times, they would bring me to the emergency room in the middle of the night.

Once, I was sent to the children's ward. I cannot remember whether it was the first night of my stay in the hospital, but I distinctly remember I did not feel sick that night. The ward

was dark with the only light coming from the nurse station at the far end of the ward. I was awake, but knew that I should not leave the bed or the nurses would not be happy.

I sat up and stared outside the window as I was placed on a bed next to the window during that stay. At that moment, a nurse came and asked whether I was feeling unwell. I told her I was fine, but couldn't sleep. Then, I asked her where my parents were.

"They're sleeping in the next room. You'll see them next morning." She said kindly.

She allowed me to sit up for some time, but made me promise that I would lie down the next time she came.

Actually, I did not mind the absence of my parents, probably because it was not my first time staying in the hospital, but still it is comforting to know my parents were just in the next room. I was not alone in the ward. Beside the nurses who were on duty, there were approximately six to seven children sharing the ward with me. The quiet stillness in the ward filled with sleeping children was not interesting, so I silently returned to the view of the streets outside the window.

The streets were lit up by the yellow light coming from the street lamps. The occasional flashes from the headlights of the passing cars on the streets were the only sign of activities at night. I was captivated by them. I remembered myself counting the number of cars passing the streets, not out of boredom, but was more likely to reassure myself that there were other people awake at night.

I did not know how long I had sat up nor did I remember how many cars had passed by. People often said young children are afraid of darkness and being alone. However, all I could remember now, as an adult, is how tranquil the night and the darkness were and the strange, comfortable feeling related to them. Granted, it was not absolute darkness and I was not alone, but I keenly felt the stillness in the ward and

lack of life outside the streets all the same.

Eventually, the nurse came back and made me lie on bed. I asked her when morning would come, and she said it would come in a few hours and so as my parents. As any people suffer from asthma will know, the attack is less severe as morning approaches. Therefore, I know since I was little that when morning comes, all the things will be better; and all I can do, is to wait for morning to come.

I cannot remember very well what came afterwards. I probably drifted to sleep and stayed a few more days in the hospital. When I grew older, I finally knew my parents were not sleeping in the next room when I was hospitalized. Those were just the comforting words from a nurse who thought I would be scared if I knew my parents were far away.

I was hospitalized a few more times after that and would sometimes be awake in the middle of the night. However, that particular night left a deep impression in my mind. It was my first time to know how it felt of being alone and the first time I felt the tranquility of the night.



**The Journey of Medicine** | *Jeannie Radoc*



## Warrior Princess | Arlistel Williams

A fiery air of strength radiated from the core of her being  
Her aura proceeded her  
Tempered by a secretive depth  
True face veiled behind an esoteric truth  
Revelation of which – is solely at her discretion  
All expressed in the lifetime of a singular moment  
An amalgamation of wonder and allure  
Beauty of spirit slunk around her meticulously cultivated armor  
– as a sweet mist  
She smirked, ever so softly  
The corners of her lips curling back down as quickly as they had up  
She could not be possessed  
Like a fawn – cautious and aware  
Only to be viewed from afar

I was swept into the undertow of curiosity  
Had Venus been upstaged?  
Who was this Warrior Princess?  
Duality encompassed in one  
The heart of battle tested mettle  
Her shield cast from the lessons past  
Sword forged by the fires of combat  
Unvarnished in her drive for victory  
Her army ever on her shoulders and mind  
Still, somehow, not invulnerable  
Upon my conclusion – in an instant, she was gone  
Beckoned back to the mist  
All that stood in her void was a desire  
To exchange just a word

## The Path of the Golden Rose | Mary Rose Deraco



## Yellow swallowtails and orchids | Jessica Poon

### Grease and Apricots | Eviola Nakhla

He parts the soil with oil-stained hands.  
“Bring me the shovel,” he says. His voice reaches me  
Through thick, green olive leaves,  
Tired, yet soft as cotton.  
I kneel beside him, always his little girl,  
Worn jeans denting the mound of warm earth.

Sun filters through the branches overhead.  
Deep wrinkles engrave his eyes,  
Muted, dark blue circles hover under  
Fourteen years working the graveyard shift.

He works with heavy iron and a bright yellow vest.  
The shrill bite of metal on metal and  
Booming echoes of train whistles break the night calm.  
Dark sky lit by stark bright construction lights,  
Five men beside him, sweating and grunting.  
He changes the 5000 lb wheel of a Metro train,  
Warm black coffee and the thought of us keep him going until dawn.

But here, the stains come from soil,  
Soft, smelling of dead leaves and earthworms.  
There is no grease. There is no oil.  
Here, darkness is cheating the sun under a canopy of leaves,  
Not the strain to see steel-colored trains in the moonlight.  
Here, our soft laughter is carried on the wind of the tree.  
There are no bright vests, neon and distorted in the pale light.  
The brightness is white buds streaked with pink  
And the sticky-sweetness of tart apricots  
When our tree blooms in the spring.





### Bead in The Nose | Lisa Stern

*Disclosure: This is one of the most practical things that I never learned in medical school.*

If you are a parent, you can probably imagine this scenario: your amazing baby is especially perfect at 9 months of age. She is full of joy and good cheer-laughing, squealing, pleased with her new-found motor skills like crawling and feeding herself. The pincer grasp that differentiates primates from other mammals is on full display. Our opposable thumbs permit dexterity that other species dream of. Starting at 9 to 12 months your baby is picking up small objects: food, paper, trash, lint, etc. Said items usually end up in the mouth, the easiest and most accessible opening. But, in close proximity to the mouth, there are other orifices that are equally enticing: namely the nostrils and ear canals. This perfect baby or young child now has a skill set that enables them to execute a fine motor task without the cognitive ability to comprehend its ramifications. So imagine... your young child gets her

tiny hands on something beautiful like colorful beads and she gingerly picks one up with her pincer grasp. Now what? "Hmmm, she thinks, what should I do with this bead? Maybe I'll put it in my nose!!!! It will fit perfectly. Wouldn't that hurt? Not sure, let me find out." In general, kids do things just because they can. They are impulsive and don't have the problem solving skills and experience to set off that internal alarm that says 'Bad idea'. They can't imagine repercussions. But now.....As soon as your baby has a pincer grasp, the possibility of something ending up inside that adorable little nose becomes a reality. In truth, babies don't have the dexterity to put something up there except for pureed sweet potatoes so there isn't too much to worry about. The problem starts when they are toddlers, especially nose-picking toddlers. Anything small is fair game: foods like peas; small toys- especially beads, Common household item that can be balled up between the fingers i.e. tissues are also favorite items.

Once something is up the nose there are two distinct scenarios. First, you, the parent actually witnessed said item being inserted into the nostril. Second, there has been a covert operation and said item was placed in the nose without being seen. This second option has two outcomes. A) the child comes to you and says that she but something in her nose or B) No confession is forthcoming.

So let's break it down. If you saw something placed up the nose you are way ahead of the game. You actually know what was inserted and when. The item should be removed in a timely manner but it is NOT a life threatening emergency so don't panic. Foreign bodies exist in 2 main groupings: those that hold their shape meaning they are solid and things that are more amorphous and will mold to the shape of the orifice.

As a pediatrician and mother I take pride in a range of wacky home remedies that all pediatricians and parents should have at their disposal. This one I actually read about in a throw-away journal and was struck by its simplicity and usefulness. Filed it away and sat in wait for my first practice run. I will always remember my first time (don't we all?). I was excited when I entered the exam room and was faced with a bead in the nose of an adorable three year old girl. I explained the options to the mother and she immediately responded that this technique seemed like the least invasive, least traumatic procedure. She was giggling a little as she 'kissed' her surprised daughter's mouth and the bead came flying out on the second puff. I was hooked. This home treatment to remove foreign bodies from the nostrils is easy, safe and something only a parent (or grandparent) would want to do. Depending on the type of foreign body it has a fairly high success rate. Either way, try this first before seeing your doctor or ENT. Imagine there was something in your nose;

how would you get it out? You'd blow your nose, of course. Now tell that to a 3 year old.

Following is the DIY solution

Step 1- Occlude the clear (unobstructed) nostril with your finger.

Step 2. Tell the child to open her mouth. Say you are going to "kiss" her.

Step 3. Take an inhalation and put your mouth completely over your child's mouth making a tight seal.

Step 4. Blow.

Hopefully the foreign body will be blown out of the nostril and often across the room. You can repeat steps 1-4 a few times if necessary.

If something is sticky and occludes the canal, blowing can push it closer to the opening of the nostril so you can try to remove it with your fingers. If the above procedure does not work, You MUST see a doctor (a pediatrician or ENT will have the most experience). I don't recommend inserting a tweezer into the nares as you will most likely cause trauma, scare the child and make it more difficult for a professional to deal with the problem later.

Just a heads up about a few scenarios: If there is a foul smelling odor coming from a nostril most likely the child put something up there days or weeks before. You can try this technique but it is less likely to be successful. You should be probably/visit the doctor. Also, a short course of antibiotics might be prescribed.

Since that first time, I have shared the wisdom and take pride in having instructed many parents including one who called while he was in a packed emergency room during flu season. The father put the phone down on a chair and I talked him through the maneuver. The bead came out easily and the father happily walked out of that germ-laden waiting room. Mission accomplished.





**Seraphim** | *Satiro De Oliveira*

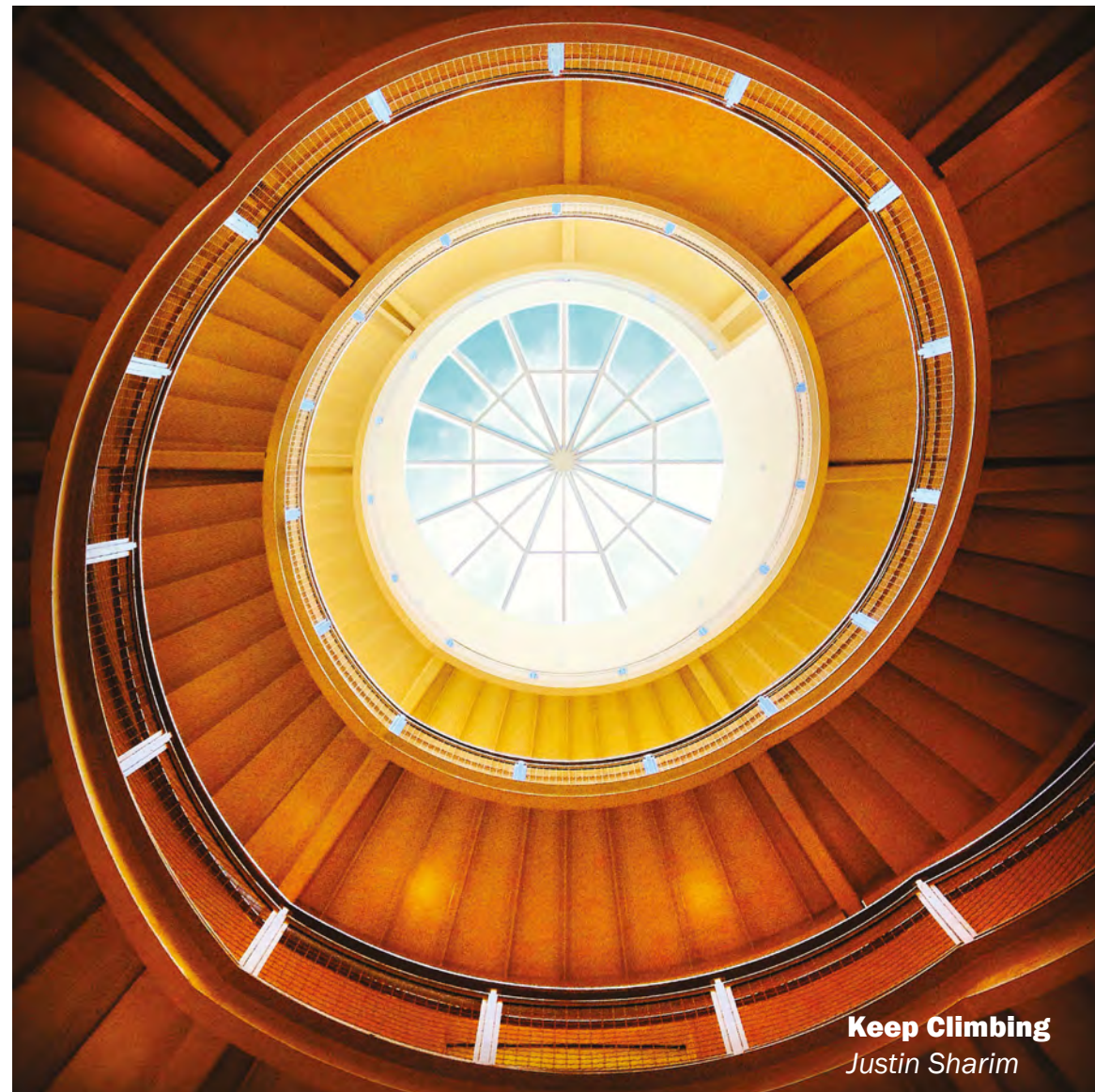
I've seen an angel and now I wake up to cry.  
It will bleed, because tears are not enough,  
It will scar, because screaming is not enough.  
It hurts to dream away, it dies to live by  
Heart is not in pace  
Silence is the lullaby.

Sinking in our fate,  
Dreaming beyond my destiny,  
To live is not a crime.  
I don't wanna see it again  
I don't wanna say goodbye.

I should have known, I should have seen it,  
Pain has no meaning  
Regret and time don't get along  
Darkness and sadness don't go by.  
I have spent my days hiding from light

Haunting dark corners of my apartment at night  
Feeling wrong at every breath  
Numb to everyone's sight.

I fade away on my own  
As life passes me by  
Little by little I get along  
Gently,  
Simply,  
Definitely in time,  
Blessed by an angel  
I breath  
I cry  
I am alive.



**Keep Climbing**  
*Justin Sharim*



**Thursday Silhouette** | *Sally Elliott*

**Nomadian** | *Shaharoh Chism*

Chasing the sun today is only a means to  
Get somewhere else so I can stand under the blue  
Bleeding the dye, no longer painting by numerical strategies  
Leaping over the cracks of the earth and I'm starting anew  
Life—Wife—Knife—carving who I will be  
Strife—Plight—I'm—no longer afraid to be the girl  
Who steps up to the plate even though the menu doesn't always  
include  
The meaning of life and the ways of the world

I am in  
That I fear  
Didn't ask  
But I'm here  
Choosing  
Using  
Learning  
Living

Passing the moon traveling at full speed  
Space is the realm where I can live eternally  
Spiraling out of the earth's gravitation field  
Form an illusion—only thought is for real  
Link—Blink—Think—how I've lived so many lives  
Here—There—Where—time is of no relevance  
Neither is class, creed or any color—not even race  
The hourglass has no effect on this place

I am in  
That I fear  
Didn't ask  
But I'm here  
Choosing  
Using  
Learning  
Living





**Bahai Temple at Night** | Bryan Huebner

## Operating in the Dark | Eric Miller

Mbingo Baptist Hospital is located in the Northwest Province of Cameroon. This humble rural hospital sits nestled deep in a valley surrounded by green mountains marked with jagged stones and granite walls. Multiple waterfalls spill from the cliffs above to the valley floor below in breathtaking splendor. Like clockwork, downpours that fill and flood surrounding tributaries temporarily interrupt spring afternoons. The hum of building static electrical energy can be felt from sinking clouds as they seek out the nearest ground. Innumerable lightning strikes and deafening thunder covers the horizon. An hour passes and as quickly as it starts this nature driven frenzy comes to a mind numbing halt. The setting sun shines through rapidly dispersing mist and a choir of insects and birds begin their nightly serenade. Having arrived at Mbingo hospital four weeks earlier, I was accustomed to the frenetic climate and different time zone; but the daily medical encounters were unrelenting in their defiance of my reality.

After finishing a strenuous day of scheduled operations, a warm night with near suffocating humidity was settling in when I was called to the emergency bay. Having hiked alone for 12 miles, a young woman had arrived and was nearing complete physiological failure. Her blood pressure was almost undetectable and her pulse weak. With a fading voice, she consumed her last thread of energy to describe intense abdominal pain. A quick and very telling physical exam revealed findings consistent with peritonitis; guarding, rebound, acute tenderness. The searing pain of my brief exam pushed her to the brink and seconds later she became unresponsive. A blood test ordered on arrival indicated significant blood loss, yet no visible wound was present.

After a quick discussion with the hospital's chief resident, the staff members, who had remained in house from a long day of prior surgeries, were asked to prepare the operating theater for yet another surgery. The single light that hung above the vintage OR table was clicked on at 1 AM. The anesthesiologist used an oxygen concentrator to quickly fill large plastic bags with valuable air. The bags would serve as an oxygen lifeline in the event that power was lost during the surgery; an ominous thought. The unconscious woman was brought in, moved to the table, anesthetized and prepped for surgery.

Standing across the table from Mbingo's chief surgery resident, we began the exploratory surgery. A midline vertical incision revealed an abdomen swelling with dense, clotted blood. Given the degree of blood loss we suspected blunt abdominal injury with consequent damage to a major organ. However, a meticulous and rapid examination of the liver, spleen, major vessels, and kidney beds was normal. We paused to adjust our retractors, aimed the light towards the pelvis and the source was soon illuminated.

An irregular 15 cm density was easily palpated as it bulged through a severely distended fallopian tube, a tube that under normal circumstances should be pencil thin. Adjacent to the swelling was a disorganized bundle of delicate, friable, and irregular tissue spilling blood at a worrying rate. We quickly recognized this misplaced tissue as placenta and concluded that she was suffering from a ruptured ectopic pregnancy with concurrent life-threatening hemorrhage.

Our primary mission became to control further blood loss. The borders of the hemorrhagic bundle were identified and with concise, directed actions, the fallopian tube was incised, carefully separated from surrounding structures, and the fetus delivered. It would take another 18 weeks of development before its fetal lungs were mature enough

to function and with a single, feeble attempt to breathe it expired.

A brief update from the anesthesiologist let us know her status was wavering. She desperately needed a blood transfusion, but this was a luxurious resource not available at Mbingo hospital. Simple isotonic fluids would have to do. We were gaining ground and with each suture ligation, the blood loss was abating. Our confidence to achieve complete control was growing when suddenly every light, instrument, and oxygen machine clicked off. In that moment, a power substation operator, likely hundreds of miles from the hospital, made the decision to cut electricity to Mbingo Hospital and surrounding villages. Power rationing was common practice.

We found ourselves standing in unfettered darkness punctuated by profound silence. At that point, half the woman's circulating volume had spilled into her abdomen and the loss would not abate in the absence of electricity.

Under my breath, I said, "Just open your eyes and the surgical field will reappear."

But, my eyes were open. With our hands frozen in their prior working position, the reality of the situation was validated when liquid warmth could be felt rising up my fingers and wrists. As I cycled through feelings of confusion, frustration, and helplessness, the chief resident was poised and composed. His calm response to this all too familiar situation was a direct indication of his own unique training experience. After a few moments, I asked, "What do we do now?" He answered, "We wait. We pray."

My sweat soaked surgical gown felt like lead and my back was well aware of the fact that I had been standing for over 24 hours. The manual mechanical bellows could be heard as the anesthesiologist personally delivered each indi-

vidual breath. Seconds felt like hours and in those obscure moments my mind couldn't help but compare the environment of my home institution. Within the walls of one of the world's most technologically advanced tertiary care hospitals, twenty-four climate-controlled operating rooms were guaranteed to be teeming with energy. Most rooms would be equipped with networked computers, unfailing overhead lights, lines of compressed gas, automated anesthesia machines and even highly sophisticated robotic consoles. As my exhausted mind pondered the comparison, I sensed my entire being attempting to pull a mere fraction of energy from those high-tech halls. The volts and amperage needed to electrify a single component would allow us to finish our interrupted task.

With my head swimming in thoughts of a dreamlike abundance that existed over 8,000 miles away, I was jolted back to the Mbingo operating room. A hazy, dim light had materialized around us as a few precious electrons started flowing through that single overhead light. Perhaps oblivious to the import of his task, the hospital custodian had traveled up the hill 100 meters above the hospital and manually started the hospital's generator. The first few attempts failed, but as the tired cylinders of a World War II era motor filled with carbureted fuel vapor, the rhythmic pulse of combusting energy was converted to electricity.

Light and hope restored, we worked furiously in one final push to identify and ligate exposed vessels. While our original mission was to squelch all blood loss, the simple presence of ongoing bleeding let us know there was still a life to be saved. Obeying the surgical tenant that perfect is the enemy of good, we accepted the fact that a few small vessels would remain open and vulnerable to some additional loss. Her depleted army of platelets and clotting factors would be expected to fill the gaps. The abdomen was closed and she was transferred to the surgical ward.

After a few short hours of rest, I awoke and walked to the woman's bedside. Even though the surgery had proven to be immediately lifesaving, in the absence of maximal medical support I was worried her body would not endure the stress of the event. However, as I approached I could see that she was awake and exhibited an aura of profound and reassuring strength. She had made it through one of the darkest nights of her life and in the next several days it was evident that she would make a full recovery. An acquaintance arrived to the hospital later that day and would remain at her side as her primary nurse and caregiver for the duration of her inpatient stay. Several weeks later she left the hospital and made the long walk home on her own accord.

This recollection is not meant to stir feelings of guilt over America's abundant resources; nor is it meant to summon pity for those residents of Cameroon. Its purpose stands as a crucial lesson that each resource, each learned technique, and each passing second should be valued and respected. A multimillion-dollar robotic tool or a single light



bulb should be cherished and used with the focused goal of cure or benefit in those who need it most. A physical exam in Cameroon should be no less telling or essential than an exam that precedes a whole body CT scan in the United States. Moments spent perfecting one's skill, both clinical and surgical, carry equal value no matter where on earth

those moments occur. As my training continues and my experience accrues, each time I adjust a light to improve my field of view at the operating table, I give thanks for those lessons learned while operating in the dark.



**Visual Processing** | Michelle Miller



**Between Yin and Yang** | Victor Sigalov

**Chess Night** | Eviola Nakhla



Lila's father glared at me with beady eyes from across her small dining room table.

"What you study, Nooah?"

The way he mispronounced my name, although Lila must have clarified it for him a dozen times, Noah, made the hairs on my neck prickle; I gripped my fork tightly as I answered.

"I'm studying Philosophy."

"Philosophy? What kind of job will that get you?" He asked, face pinching into confusion.

"He's planning on getting his PhD, Baba. Isn't that exciting?" Lila interjected.

Lila always had this way of bringing the sun in with her whenever she entered a room. Her calm yet sure voice and radiant smile could undermine the tensest of situations. It was one of the many reasons I fell in love with her over the years. We were finishing up our last year at Boston University and despite our many differences, here we were, eating dinner with her parents.

"PhD, eh? What will you do with that?" Her father

asked.

"I'm not sure yet, but I would like to teach at a university someday," I answered. I shot a small glare his way, never breaking eye contact.

"That sounds very nice, Nooah. It is high position. God bless you," her mother said.

She quickly looked down at her napkin, her deep red dyed hair falling over her eyes, and got up abruptly.

"I go make tea for everyone," she said, smiling.

"No, Mama, it's okay. You're my guests; I'll make it, Lila said, pushing away from the table as well.

Lila's mother exuded calm warmth, and although I knew she wouldn't accept me right away, especially because I was not raised in their Egyptian culture and did not practice their Orthodox Christianity, her white cheeks flushed fiercely when I had entered the apartment carrying a box of Godiva chocolates for her. She had welcomed me with the softest voice, the sound of wind running through trees. Her large eyes appeared small behind her thick glasses and her face changed from ivory to red throughout the course



of the evening. Lila's mother was nothing like mine, with her sharp-layered hair, highlights, and yoga body. Growing up, just the two of us, my mother's criticisms cut like ice: Your hair grows too fast, Noah. Why don't you like football like your cousins? You'll never pass Algebra if you take that long on your homework. Only when graduating high school did I see her triumphant happiness, as if my father leaving when I was a toddler had not ruined her ability to successfully raise me.

I had met Lila at a dinner for a mutual friend a couple years back. I remember it so clearly, how she walked in to the dimly lit restaurant late, clutching a small gift close as if to steady herself as she walked. The only chair left was one

right in front of me and she slid in quickly after greeting the birthday girl. She didn't look up at me for a full minute. When she finally did, her cheeks looked a little flushed, and I wasn't sure if she was just shy from being late or just didn't want to introduce herself, but she did.

She didn't particularly stand out that night: ordinary black dress, dark wavy hair, maybe a little eyeliner, but she had this way of holding my gaze when she spoke that made even the most trivial conversation of college and majors seem life-threateningly important. She started loosening up when the food came.

"So what do you do for fun?" She asked.



Vibrant | Nelli Ghazaryan

"Paint, go out with friends, whatever really."

"You paint? I'd love to see your work sometime. By the way, I've been arm wrestling a lot lately. Care to have a go?"

Before I knew what I had agreed to, we were both hunched over the table, perspiring water glasses magnifying our fingers and mariachi music blaring around us. Our friends circled around for the show, and Lila was giving me the fiercest of gazes. The birthday girl counted down and the arm wrestling began. We were a good match. I started out going easy on her, I wasn't the type of guy to shut down a

girl, especially one I had just met, right away, but I could tell she was giving it her all. I had to increase my effort when my arm started going down, and we were locked in with our arms vertical for a few minutes. I actually started sweating a little and then gave it my all. Even with full effort, it wasn't for another minute or so that I started bringing her arm slowly down to the table. She threw down her napkin when she lost and started laughing so loudly that I wasn't sure if she thought she had won or lost.

"I went easy on you," she said.

"Sure. I saw you sweating. Besides, what kind of guy would I be if I lost to you?"

"A noble one."

I found out a lot about her after our match. We were in the same psych class and she hated the lecture hall because she was left-handed and could never find a lefty seat during exams. She apparently lived off black tea from Sri Lanka, hated blue cheese, and had never been to Vegas. I thought we hit it off well that first night, but when I asked for her number as we were getting ready to leave, she stared at me a while and said, "I'll give it to you the next time I see you," and left without waiting for someone to walk her to her car.

Lila and her mother were hunched over the stove preparing the teakettle. They whispered to each other in hushed round tones of Arabic. The smell of mint wafted over and mixed with the odors of stuffed chicken and lamb kabob we had devoured. I wasn't much of a tea drinker, but I knew not to ask for a beer. Lila had handed me a list of do's and don'ts for her parents' visit, and had pleaded with dove eyes: Don't cuss. No substances of any kind. No physical contact. Avoid Politics. Avoid Religion. Compliment Dad's suit. Smile at Mom. Although some seemed ridiculous, I could not help thinking about how she had run to me the night before to give me the list. Waves of thick, dark brown hair framed her warm face, a curl catching at the nape of her neck. She wore a soft smile and her emerald eyes, round like silver moons, twinkled in the light of the street lamp outside her apartment. I was a sucker for her eyes, and I would do anything to make her smile. Pleasing her parents was my top priority tonight, but I hadn't realized how much of a challenge it would be.

Her father ate the last of his stuffed grape leaves, cleared his throat, folded his thick, aging fingers, and gave me his piercing attention once more. I looked into his dark eyes, the color of the Turkish coffee he drank, and found a tired old man. The deep creases that lined his eyes extended down his face, caving in around his mouth. His graying, curly hair flew up at wisps at the edges of his comb-over and his gold-rimmed glasses shone ominously in the dim lighting. We sat quietly for a moment observing one another like territorial pit bulls before he spoke.

"Do you like to play chess?"

"Sure," I said, as enthusiastic as I could manage, nodding curtly.

He pushed himself from the table and caused it to creak slightly as he balanced his protruding belly. He motioned for me to follow him and we made our way into Lila's living room, his heavy breathing leading the way. Lights flicked on, and Lila's early Christmas decorations flashed red and gold all around us. She had several Orthodox icons of Jesus and her favorite saints hung on her walls, but I was pleased to see she hadn't removed any of my paintings, which lined the mantel above her fireplace, for her parents'

visit. As her father set up the chess pieces, I observed an experimental Impressionist portrait I had made of her when we first started dating at the end of freshman year.

Back then, Lila always smelled of sharp ether with a layer of rose perfume, and I, of turpentine with oil paint-stained hands. She was studying Biochemistry and dreamed of attending medical school, while I immersed myself in the Classics and was never without my artwork. We complimented each other well; I won her over with poems and challenged her with philosophy, and she intrigued me with her mathematical logic and passion for health.

That day she would not hold still for me. She kept shaking with laughter as I tried to paint her. We had biked over to the park on the Eastern side of Charles River. Fall blue jays flew in my vision and I breathed the scent of oak, sharp and woody, as I unloaded my canvas.

"Keep your smile, but hold still."

"What do you mean hold still? I have to breathe, don't I?" she said, throwing her head back and laughing.

The sunlight caught her round cheeks, and a fat fly landed on her forehead. I couldn't help but laugh myself. I busied myself outlining a pair of white geese that were ruffling their majestic feathers in our direction. I held the brush lightly and stroked, dipped back into the acrylic, mixed some gray in, stroked, mixed again, stroked, blended, angled, and the pattern continued until two pairs of glassy black eyes stared at me from my work. I thought I could hear the geese honk right out of the canvas. I went back to rendering Lila's face and we talked about high school for a while until I finished. When she finally saw the painting, she hugged me tightly, tears in her eyes. We walked by the river and stared down into the murky water. I saw our silhouettes, hers soft and delicate, and mine tall and wrapping around her, my ashy blonde hair lying lightly on the top of her dark waves. Looking at our fusion, I felt sure of us. Lila was not like most girls I had met at college parties, the ones whose shallow conversations made my ears ache. No, she was firm in her beliefs, intelligent and supportive. She was difficult at times, and although this was our third date, she had not allowed me to kiss her yet, which didn't bother me since I knew her beliefs were what made her so different from every other girl I had met. I stroked her hair as a round mud-green fish's gulping mouth suddenly broke the surface of the water and rippled our reflection out.

I sat opposite her father behind my white pieces and moved a pawn. Lila and her mother had returned and set down tea and her mother's freshly made Baklava in front of us; this was going to be a family event. I inhaled slowly; my blood rushed to my temples, and I was acutely aware of my steady pulse. He moved his knight. There was some more movement of pawns and finally, the first piece was won; he had taken my bishop with his. I quickly trapped his bishop's escape, but his imposing queen guided him back to safety. I looked up at Lila.



“Baba is quite the chess player; I’ve only beaten him twice,” she said, winking at me, far from her parents’ gaze.

“I suppose I’m a bit rusty,” I said, playing along lightly.

“It takes an engineer’s mind to be sharp at this game,” her father said, gruffly.

I ignored the comment and proceeded to trap his rook with my other bishop. He took that bishop with a knight. How did I not see that? I was beginning to lose my nerve. My foot tapped the carpet in an aggressive drumbeat. I had a strong desire to win, maybe because Lila was watching me, and so I took some risks. Our queens now sat side by side as I checked his king. I deduced that he wouldn’t give up his most powerful piece, but he sacrificed his queen in a flurry and proceeded to checkmate me with a pawn, rook, and two knights five moves later. I sat there; defeat and rage coursing through me like poison, blurring my vision.

“Aha! So Philosophy doesn’t help out with chess after all. Just what I thought,” he said, smiling proudly, looking to his wife for praise.

“Good game both of you,” Lila’s mother said, smiling nervously.

By this point, no calming words reached me. My face grew steadily warmer from neck to cheeks to ears until I was burning, the fire within finally rising too high to suppress.

“What do you mean philosophy doesn’t help? Do you have a problem with my career choice?” I asked.

The heat in my voice caused an abrupt stillness in the room, the sweet smell of the pastries no longer present. Everything else happened in chaotic fast-forward, the thin conversation folding out like rows of stacked dominoes.

“You raise your voice at me, boy? My daughter is going to be great doctor. Doctor! And you? A teacher!? That’s not men’s work,” he said, flicks of saliva shooting out with his words.

“Baba, why would you say something like that? Calm down!”

“A PhD is the highest form of education. Don’t you understand that?” I yelled back.

“You might as well work at Jack-in-the-Box. And what about church? How will you raise a family if you are not Orthodox? Is my daughter supposed to suffer because you do not share our beliefs? My daughter, my only daughter...”

“Baba, please, stop. Noah loves our beliefs,” Lila said.

Lila’s mother was screaming for him to stop in Arabic, on the verge of crying. He was losing steam now, the weariness settling all over his face, but I was just getting started.

“If all Christians judge men on their career choices, there’s no wonder there are so many atheists and agnostics in the world. Your religion is pathetic.”

And with that, I stormed out of the living room back in the kitchen, my fists closing and opening as I paced by the leftover Mediterranean dinner.

Lila appeared in the doorway, grabbed my hand, and

silently led me to her room; this was the first physical contact we’d made all day. I wanted to pull her curves closer to me, but I was still breathing heavily from the argument. She closed her door silently and turned to look at me. All the kindness I usually found in her eyes was gone; her eyebrows came together in an unusual look of anger.

“How could you say those things to him? You know he’s a tired old man from Egypt, set in his ways. He’s not like us, Noah. He will never understand. Why couldn’t you just let it be and play up his ego a bit? That’s all you had to do!” Her eyes pinched as she exhaled slowly, trying to calm herself down, and two tears snaked down her cheeks.

“He provoked me, Lila. I couldn’t play along forever. Did you hear what he was saying!? Jack-in-the-Box!?”

“He doesn’t think straight when he’s tired; he just says whatever comes to his mind, Noah. He’s been that way my whole life. He just works too hard,” she said.

Lila looked away now as more tears dripped down her wet face. The fact that she was defending him stung and seeing her cry made me want to hold her and break something at the same time. I knew family was important to her, but was she just going to let me get attacked by her father and then make excuses for him in the end?

“And how could you say that about my religion? You know how much it means to me. Maybe Baba was right...” she whispered.

The tears came harder now; Lila sat on her bed and looked away. I didn’t really mean what I said about her religion, but I knew it was too late to take back.

“I’m sorry, Lila. Let me make it right.”

I sat next to her, so close I could smell her jasmine perfume, and put a hand on her shoulder. She flinched.

“Don’t touch me, Noah. I don’t know what to do anymore. You were the only risk I ever took. I never dated anyone before you because I knew this would happen. I knew eventually he wouldn’t, couldn’t possibly understand my life, my parents, or my faith. I don’t think we should see each other anymore—” She could not continue. The crying escalated and her mother rushed in to shush and comfort her. Her mother’s eyes were still kind, but I wish I could have continued talking to her alone.

The effect of her words did not hit me until a few seconds later. Right then, I was immobilized, a free body trapped in space. The arms on the clock halted. My tie was too tight. All the air in the room turned stale, and I could not breathe. I felt as if my head was being submerged in ice water and I stuttered.

“What? What are you saying?” I whispered. “Lila I love you, you know I always will.”

“I’m sorry, Noah, I love you so much, but let’s just take a break...” She hiccupped.

Every instinct in my body screamed at me to grab her, hold her close, make her stay with me. I could not picture life without her. I had pursued her for five months before

she agreed to a single date with me over two years ago. I was planning on proposing to her that spring, goddamnit! The beige walls closed in around me and my collar became too hot. My temple throbbed.

“Please,” I said.

“I’m sorry...please...go,” she said, voice muffled in her mother’s chest.

My legs were rooted in place, and I had to pry them out the door. Her father was sitting alone, staring at the carpet when I walked by him. I opened the door slowly and walked out into my new life without Lila, although I couldn’t imagine it without her. I thought I knew her. I thought I un-

derstood her difference; it was this difference that I valued so much. Yet somehow I had overlooked her family’s struggles to assimilate into a new culture, her father’s set ways, and how much it mattered to Lila for me to win their approval because of her respect for them. I did not see it until then. I knew I had to win her back, but all I could do that night was pace my apartment, still heated and on edge from the unexpected turn of events. A silhouette portrait of Lila’s face and hair seemed to mock me from my mantel, but I left it hanging.



**Desert Bloom** | *Sataree Khuansuwan*



**ICU** | *Eric Chang*

The tube down his throat  
clouds and unclouds like the afternoon  
outside that we both  
haven't seen for quite a while.

As I watch the fog roll back I wonder  
what it would be like to live life  
through a straw. Tough I bet. Like  
drinking a thick milkshake.

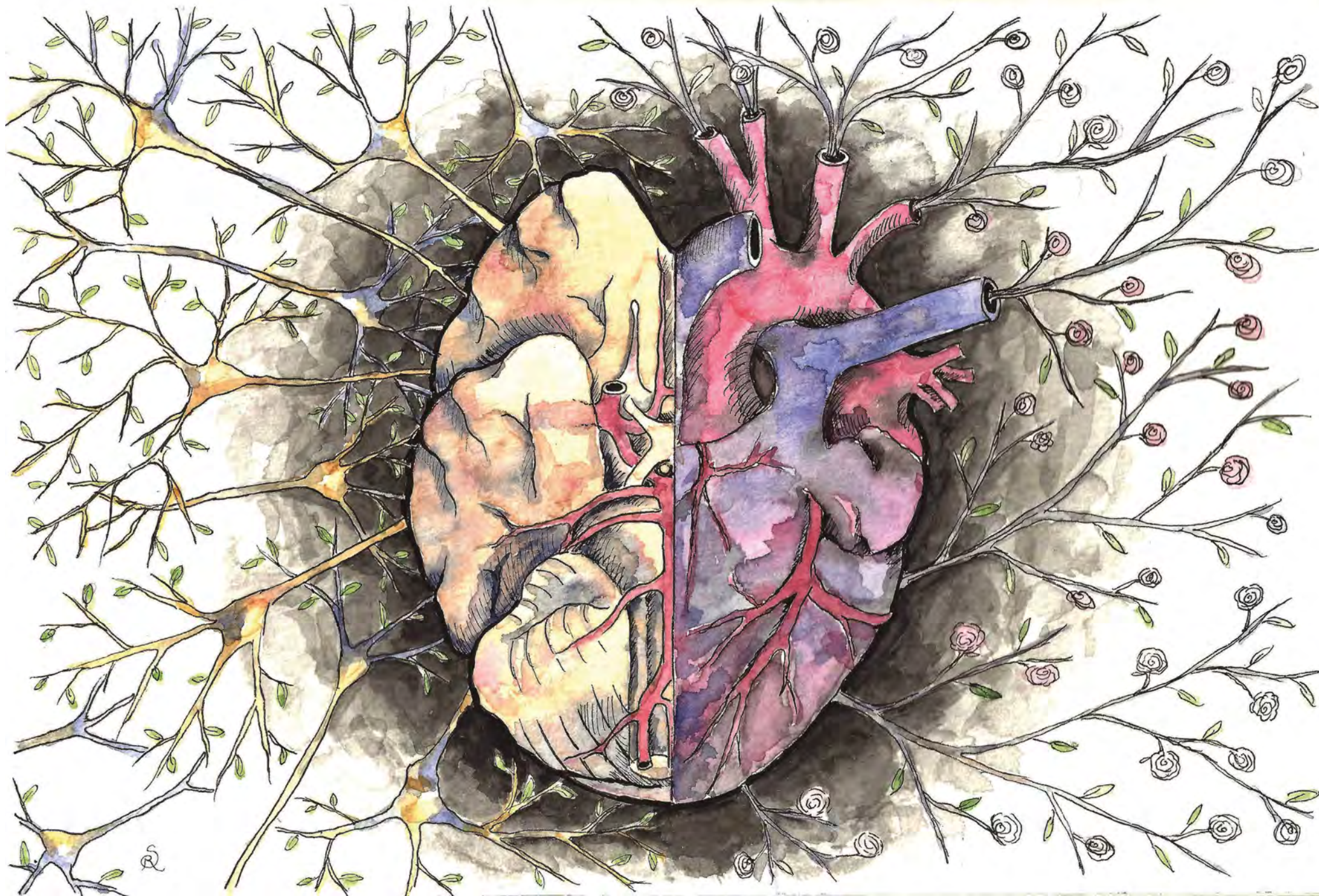
"He's overbreathing the vent," I say  
to the student beside me, though I still  
don't quite understand what that  
means. This becomes clear  
as I struggle to say whether this  
is good or bad when I finally see  
his wife kneeled beside him.

I divert by talking vent settings,  
taking solace in the squeak of the dry  
erase markers on the white board.  
"We're just talking shop," I say to  
the wife, pausing when my marker  
reaches I love you Uncle Socks  
scrawled by a child's hand  
in the corner.

The straw in my coffee is green, like  
the meadow outside he hasn't seen  
for quite a while. My mom texts.  
My uncle has jumped off his roof  
again. His ankle is shattered, but  
he clearly has bigger fish to fry,  
the doctors told her.

The next week I am off service. I see  
Jake getting a coffee. "How is he?"  
I ask. "He died," Jake says. "We did  
chest compressions for over an hour."  
"How was it?" I ask. "Tiring," he says.  
"My chest was burning all day." Jake  
tagging in for the incessant  
beating of the heart.

Poems forget industry  
when they sing the heart's praises.  
The heart does not ask  
for a day off, better work hours,  
or complain about the grind.  
The burn in your chest a reminder  
of how difficult it is to be alive.



**Mind and Heart** | *Rose Shan*

**Impermanence** | *Satiro De Oliveira*

So many times I chased the horizon,  
and so many things passed me by,  
Tied up by time,  
Blinded by the foggy air,  
As a kite flying high.

Restrained and defined by my lifeline,  
Floating over the waves in my jacket,  
Exact in my timeline,  
so much water passed me by,  
revolt, revolve, return.

My pains and my losses have defined me,  
Wrinkle lines over scars,  
Thickened skin papyri  
Written over me,  
as so many times I chased the horizon  
and so many things passed me by.

**On Occasion** | *Issa Lutfi*

saffron and salt, turmeric,  
a teaspoon of cardamom tells me  
the kitchen— is a cast iron acropolis  
while my mom and aunts wrestle  
over who washes dishes, who stands  
at the stove. My dad and uncles find shade

on the lanai, holding over-the-brim  
glasses of Arak, smoking Marlboro light.  
The living room, a melody  
my cousins play the Arabic tabla—  
the heartbeat of middle eastern song,  
rhythmic space separating  
cigarettes and seasonings.

I sit smoke screened between  
the heart and whole world,  
the salt grain, sunshade  
and booze, a beat and bass.  
If only immune  
to the ravages of time                    stay  
preserved in these moments.





**Boyle Heights View** | *Angela Wong*

**His Legacy** | *Jennifer Ritch*



There you go again  
 With your pride and her prejudice  
 Walking away  
 Not touching the ground

She makes sure of that  
 And everything else  
 And everyone else

There you go again  
 With the lightest of loads  
 And your feet  
 Never touch the ground  
 And she makes sure of that

The shadow you cast is large  
 Or so I've been told

Flowers and other living things die in the darkness  
 And you make sure of that

**American Idols** | *Mario Eason*

Chained together, we marched  
 ...as free men  
 ...as slaves  
 ...as prisoners, we marched

Lynched for sport  
 Whipped to submit  
 Raped then jailed for pleasure  
 Cultured faith and broken trust  
 Martyrs for Christ's promises

Minds enlightened  
 Voices uplifted  
 Praise the Almighty  
 Forgive!

Race is a figment of my imagination  
 Imagination mirrors reality  
 Life made easy by broken backs  
 Fathers and Mothers who weren't just black  
 Their eyes staring me down, an inquisition  
 Where is your contribution?  
 What have you done for us?  
 Where is your Daddy?  
 What are you anyway?

Millennial blacks  
 Made in His own way  
 Hues of the past  
 Shades of the present  
 Color is circumstantial  
 Race becomes circumstantial

First we were Niggers, then Negroes  
 We were Colored; we are Black  
 We've become African Americans  
 Brotha's, Niggah's reclaimed

Still without identity  
 Invested in fabricated celebrations  
 Adopting hand-me-down hopes and dreams  
 We are human nature evolved  
 We are here, we are hope; we are precipice  
 This pigment revolution is real  
 Blacks, Africans and Niggahs alike  
 Up in arms, afraid of the other  
 Civil disobedience over ordained racism

Thugs, CEOs, Mothers and Whores  
 The cracked community, material hoarders  
 Four wheels are not our best yet  
 How high or how low, it's just a show

Farmers and field hand, genius engineers  
 Athletes – "Everyone wants to be like Mike"  
 Evolutionary slaves of revolving owners  
 Career cornerstone manufacturers  
 Investing in America's growth

The soul of America, a movement in sound  
 Worshipped like American idols  
 It is everything to emulate in awe  
 Not just breathe and bone  
 But, possessions and gaffes

Eyes on the ground, we walk; profiled fear  
 Target practice; a rookie mistake  
 A cowboy's disregard for civil rights  
 Americans dream to live through the night

We marched, armed together  
 Without spear; without rifle  
 The nation stopped  
 By mere hope and benevolent action

And now...

It's just enough to catch your breath  
 We cannot hide the bruises and bodies  
 Any one of us is next,  
 A parody to law enforcement  
 The chosen profile

Slaves once more; imprisoned still  
 Just Niggah's reclaimed for slaughter  
 Cowboy's cattle, branded and corralled  
 American idols; targets for sport







**new york** | Jacqueline Ngo

heat presses down like a wet towel.  
the city holds its cargo of dead rats,  
dreamers, Laundromats.  
beneath the hungry streets, the rats boil.  
deep in the sewers opened like veins,  
something in the city runs swift.

on Broadway in the blank room  
with the blank walls i awake,  
steamed in my bed like a bun.  
the walls drip with wisps of a dream:  
babies crawling in shallow water,  
cockroaches big as loaves of bread.

the streets call for blood. inside,  
the walls sweat. something boils.  
heat rises. the city hums a tune,  
savage and profound.



**The Warrior** | Jeffrey Hsu

I am the messenger,  
Warning him of the army afoot,  
Steadily inching its way toward him.  
Quickly, he raises his shield of  
Courage, proclaiming his will to  
Fight.

But this battle, instigated by a  
Bloody cough, comes with a prognosis.  
As the merciless soldiers approach,  
His shield becomes heavier.  
And heavier.  
And heavier.

As my attempts to slow the soldiers  
Become more and more futile,  
I find all I can do is lend  
My hand, to help keep his  
Shield from  
Falling.

**Sage** | Paula Stoessel

It takes awhile to reach the place  
Where I can finally inhale  
The scent of sage:

On a thin windy trail overcome with mustard,  
Past the brambles  
Where the rabbits and wild ground birds graze.

But it is there that the birds  
Become suddenly quiet  
And I can almost hear the eucalyptus peal.

You sent me to walk these hillsides  
Almost a year ago where I have  
Traveled through the changing of the seasons

At times I felt the seasons pull  
At me and almost lost my gravity  
But you were there with a quantum force

Last week you grounded me  
With such a weight  
That I felt I was falling through the earth.



**Buddha Head, entwined in roots** | Suman Dutta



I kissed him for the last time that night, noticing that he'd neglected to shave. I smiled at the thought while he was dragged away from my presence. It was a tradition in my family to separate those engaged to be married the night before the wedding. I felt the anxiety crawl up my chest at the thought that this would be the last night I would be unmarried.

I took a deep breath and closed the hardwood door that cut my view off from his car as it sped away. For a moment I regretted informing all of the wedding party to meet at the venue tomorrow so that I could have my rest. The pre-wedding jitters were getting the best of me, and I could tell that I wouldn't get much sleep.

My parents had even vacated the premises to allow me to have a quiet night, it was very thoughtful of them. Up in the cold mountains, secluded from any bustling cities, I was allowed to do whatever I wanted. I had decided to turn on the big screen T.V. that rested gently in on the living room entertainment center. I searched on a bookshelf full to the brim with DVDs my father had collected, enough to fill several lifetimes of footage.

Without hesitating, I slid my favorite movie off the shelf and popped it in the Blue-Ray player. I opened the back door, allowing two big Rottweilers in from the cold before snuggling up on the couch with them. The movie began with the light tones of a piano, and my anxiety slowly lifted. Before I knew it, my eyes were drifting and I was falling asleep.

The next thing I heard felt was the light tapping on my forehead. I took a deep breath and stretched before opening my eyes to a new day. The sun was barely peeking over the hills, and I knew that it had to be time to get up.

"Well good morning, bride to be!" A voice boomed with enthusiasm.

I picked myself up off of the couch, pushing the hounds aside, "Stop calling me a bride, V, I don't like it."

"Don't get your panties in a twist, it's just fun to say, Mr. Lenaghan," V chuckled to herself.

"Oh, stop. So, remind me why we have to be up so early?" I asked on my way to the bathroom.

"Ugh, I've told you a million times. You really should listen. First, you're up here in the boonies because you wanted to be all traditional and whatnot, so there's a long drive down the mountains to our first destination. Second, that destination is hair and make-up. You'll be in the chair for an hour or so before we have to whisk you away to the venue so we can set up the basics. After that you have to get dressed and go over information to th—Hey! Are you listening?" V droned on while I started the shower.

I grabbed my phone and played some generic music before stepping into the warm water. I proceeded with my usual routine and stepped out. I was still in my own world, trying to wrap my mind around the fact that today was my

wedding day. A knock at the bathroom door shook me from my own little upstairs world.

"I'm coming V, geesh. You're like a Pomeranian," I called back before slipping on some shorts and a ratty t-shirt.

As I opened the door, I waited while V finished collecting things around the house. The short woman hummed to herself while she tidied up after me. Veronica had always been my best friend, and she would probably always will be. She had been there from the beginning of my struggles, and now she was on walking me into the next chapter of my life.

I cleared my throat, "V, are you ready to go?"  
"OH shut up with that. You're the one who's a sloppy mess. Your poor parents. I picked everything up and opened the door for the dogs. Will they be okay here?" She sighed, turning her head at my wardrobe choices.

"They'll be fine. My parents are coming back up here to change anyway. Let's head out," I said with a growing smile.

We left in a hurry, realizing we would be late for my appointment. I carefully locked all the doors and waved goodbye to the dogs I loved so much. We hopped into Veronica's old gray Tahoe before screeching out of the driveway haphazardly.

The drive was a nightmare with her at the wheel. She'd never driven up in the mountains, and the way that girl took turns going fifty was astonishing. I couldn't help, but laugh and scream while being in her presence.

The drive that should have taken an hour, managed to happen in thirty minutes, giving us just enough time to walk into the salon. It was a photo finish, but it seemed the stylist didn't seem to mind. I was led to a chair where they washed and primped my hair, while a small Asian woman clipped my fingers and toes. V kept pushing me to try a little polish, but I vehemently refused to be that person.

Once my hair was complete, and my nails were presentable by V's standards, I was moved to a new chair in front of what felt like a thousand hot bulbs around a vanity mirror. A dark haired woman talked at me for what felt like years about make-up and complexion, all while smearing stuff across my face until I had the appearance of flawless skin.

I laughed in my head at my appearance. I could barely recognize myself, but it was definitely me underneath all of those layers. I took a deep breath before handing V my card.

"No honey, this has been paid for already. It's time to go get your tux, darlin'." Veronica cocked her head with a wry smile.

In another whirlwind of a ride, we had picked up my tuxedo and made it to the venue perfectly on time. I was about to step out of the car, when Veronica clicked the lock and trapped me inside.

"Bae, he's coming in. You're gonna have to wait your turn, or we can go to the back entrance," V looked intense for a moment.

"It's fine, let's just take the back way."



Untitled | Esther Jun

It seemed I was zoning out again, because once I came back to the real world, I was standing in the dressing room with the rest of my wedding party, while Veronica chatted with the rest of the group. A blonde woman in a pants suit zeroed in on me once she noticed my presence and came over right away.

"Hello, Max. So glad you're here on the big day!"

I looked at her with a pang of dread, "Hi Macy. Of course I'm here. What can I help you with? What has gone wrong so far?"

"Your father is running a little late, but he promises he'll be here in—"

"Let me guess, five minutes?" I cut her off.

"Yes, that's exactly what he said. What does that mean, sweetie?"

"He's probably in traffic or something. He won't be here for a good twenty minutes or so if we're lucky, but that's a big if. Call Jen and let her know, she'll correct the problem," I shrugged with a smile. Just another day in the life.

"Okay, and just to confirm, your mother is walking you, right?" She nodded with a cheesy smile.

"That would be correct, now if you'll excuse me, I need to get dressed."

I wandered further inside the dressing room to see if I could find a bathroom to change in, only to find a portion of the room had been blocked off with a big sign stuck to it: Baby Brother's Space! I smiled and took the sign down before looking around for the culprit.

"Where are you? I know you're in here somewhere?"

I called out.

A tall blonde woman accompanied by a dark haired woman appeared from nowhere, "Hello Brother!"

"Guys, this is embarrassing!" I gave them a big smile.

"Well, go get dressed. You can't be late for your own wedding!" The blonde rolled her eyes.

"Oh ha-ha, very funny Nina. I'm actually very early! Now get out! I need to change!" I stuck my tongue out at her.

"Seriously, you look like death warmed over," The dark haired commented with a smirk.

"Get out. Can one of you find Macy and start getting the ball rolling?" I hollered as they walked away.

I shrugged, knowing somebody would handle that. I was just starting to get nervous and wanted to focus on something else for the time being. I took another deep breath and unzipped the bag that held my tux. Everything looked in order, so I suited up and stepped out to look in the mirror.

I frowned, thinking I looked chubby in some areas. I felt as though I could see my acne through the make-up, and that I looked terrible for my wedding day. I took another deep breath and closed my eyes, trying to release all of the pent up energy.

Suddenly, I felt a warm hand grab mine, "You look very handsome, Maxwell."

I smiled and looked over at to see my mother standing with a big smile. She wore dark brown glasses with a beauti-



ful sparkling black dress. She looked absolutely fantastic, and I couldn't help, but smile even bigger.

"Mom, you look amazing! You've lost so much weight for the wedding," I gave her a big hug.

"Oh Max, you're too nice. I still need to shed a few more, but I think I'm headed in the right direction. Now enough about me, how are you holding up?" She grinned, giving me the 'mom' look.

"I don't feel like I look good enough. I mean, ew, I look fat, and the stress from the planning made me break out. I look like a hot mess, Mom," I made a face back at the mirror.

She turned my body to face her. The woman looked me up and down before straightening the black lapel with a white trim. She carefully repositioned the white orchid boutonniere to make it straight before running her hand down my white tie until it lay flat.

"Maxwell, you look as handsome as the day you were born. Now, we have to get to our places, it seems it's about time to start," Mom patted my shoulders. Her eyes looked teary for a moment, but as soon as I took her hand to begin walking over to the entrance to the venue she stopped.

We managed to make our way to the line of my wedding party that patiently waited for everything to begin, and suddenly I felt as though I was about to make the most terrifying decision of my life. My breathing became short and shallow, and I felt panic rising within me.

From beyond the doors we were lined up at, the vio-

lins began to play Canon in D minor and my heart practically stopped. The line of people moved inside, and the closer we got, the harder taking steps became.

"Mom, I'm scared," I whispered to her, gripping her arm tightly.

"You'll be fine. Just count your steps and focus on the man you're about to marry," She patted my hand.

I followed her advice and counted my steps until we stepped through the door. To my right, I saw a sea of familiar faces, each smiling with great joy. I couldn't help, but smile even greater knowing that this would be the best day of my life so far. Across the aisle I walked down, I saw Darren being escorted by his mother. He looked amazingly handsome in his tuxedo, complete with coattails like I had specifically instructed he not do. I started to laugh and cry at the same time, realizing I knew he would do this and I was just fine with it.

I took a deep breath as both of our mother's handed our hands to each other in front of the Judge who presided over the marriage. That judge happened to be my future father-in-law, who grinned a big goofy grin as we faced him, ready for the vows to commence.

Behind him was a massive blue ocean tank, where neon colored fish darted through the waters. The lights were dimmed, and a spotlight slowly lit the area around Darren and I. The haired man before us, standing in complete judge robes opened a book that had roughly scrawled notes in.

Welcome family and friends to this joyous occasion between Darren and Maxwell as they join in holy matrimony," Jim began as he looked out on the crowd before him.

The entire speech seemed to fly by. Granted it was a shortened service, but the moment I realized it was time for me to speak, it was as if the whole world had stopped.

"I do," Were the last words to leave my lips until Darren and I kissed one last time as separate entities, and came out married.

Everyone cheered and clapped as the wedding party procession left in a similar order in which they came in, instead taking the stairs to go to the second floor of the building. As we passed by, the cheers got louder while flower petals were launched. It would be time for pictures while everyone would be escorted upstairs.

I held Darren's hand tightly, hoping this feeling of elation would never end. Our wedding party was escorted into the further into the aquarium with the photographers in the lead. Each of us set up different poses in front of numerous tanks, until all of the professional shots were complete. We thanked everyone and informed them they were to walk back, while Darren and I stood before the otter tank and watched them play.

I grabbed his hand and we stood next to each other in silence. The otters swam around grabbing objects and tossing them back into the water with a kerplunk. He put his head on my shoulder and the world seemed right for a moment.

"How do you feel right now?" I sighed.

"I'm really happy, and I don't want this to end," He chuckled to himself.

"Let's go to the reception. Are you ready?"

"Yes, let's go Mr. Lenaghan."

We returned to the venue where the room had been rearranged with seating for everyone and the dance floor had been installed. As we approached, the room applauded. We waved them off until someone in the crowd demanded a speech. Being that Darren was terrible at speeches unless they were directly pulled from his rear end, I opted to take a microphone and address the people.

"Hello everyone, and thank you for coming to our big day. We'd like to thank every single person here for your support and your love for us with every single day. I would also like to send a shout out to everyone who fought hard to make this marriage even possible in these days. Now, without further ado, we are going to have our first dance," I smiled before handing it back to the wedding coordinator.

I lead my husband out onto the dance floor, and we set ourselves up exactly the way we were taught. A Panic! At the Disco song came bursting through speakers and we danced for what felt like ages. Every move was choreographed, but the movement was phenomenal. I was so proud of us as we busted the best moves we could manage, ending the song with boisterous laughter and applause.

The rest of the night was a blur, between heartfelt

speeches from family and drinks galore, the night passed without any hiccups. We did absolutely no clean-up once the reception was completely over, as our family banded together and did the work themselves. We were treated like kings as we were driven back to our apartment and immediately went to sleep in our drunken stupor.

In the morning, the sun shone brightly and work both of us up. We cuddled for a moment, until realizing that we desperately needed to take our marriage license in to file it with the state. Both of us rushed quickly to get ready and collect our things before heading towards the front door.

My phone buzzed wildly in my pocket, strangely while Darren's did the same simultaneously. We both paused and looked at each other, deciding to take the call in case it was an emergency. My call went to voicemail before I managed to catch it, but Darren managed to catch his mom.

"Hello?" He answered, stepping into the other room.

Before I had the chance to call my sister, who had called me, back, a text brought my phone to life. I opened it:

Turn on the T.V. and watch the news ASAP

It was an odd request for her, but I didn't hesitate. I shuffled quickly over to the deep brown coffee table and grabbed the remotes. It took a while to finagle the right order in which to turn everything on, but eventually I managed to do it successfully. I flipped to CNN only to see a bright red banner scrolling across the screen:

Breaking News: Obergefell v Hodges has been overturned today by the Supreme Court 5-4. Marriage between same gendered individuals is now illegal in the United States.

I dropped my phone and stared at the screen in absolute disbelief. I took a deep breath and sat down on the couch, horrified at the words I was seeing. The unbreakable line of defense for gay marriage was just broken through and my rights struck down to the ground.

Darren came back into the room with tears running down his face. His mom must have given him the same information. I looked at him trying to find some glimmer of hope, something that we could do. There was no way it could take effect immediately!

"Is it possible that we can still file it today?" I asked with tears beginning to well in my eyes.

"No. It's effective immediately. Even though we had a marriage ceremony yesterday, we are not legally married..." He trailed off and sat next to me on the couch.

I was completely silent, knowing that the happiest day of my life had just been completely voided out by the government. I took my husband—no, my boyfriend, my life partner, my anything, but husband's hand. Our now useless, expensive rings clinked together lightly. A tear ran down my face, and we both looked at the bleak future, hoping that there would be light at the end of the tunnel.

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**Visitor** | Dorothy Yim

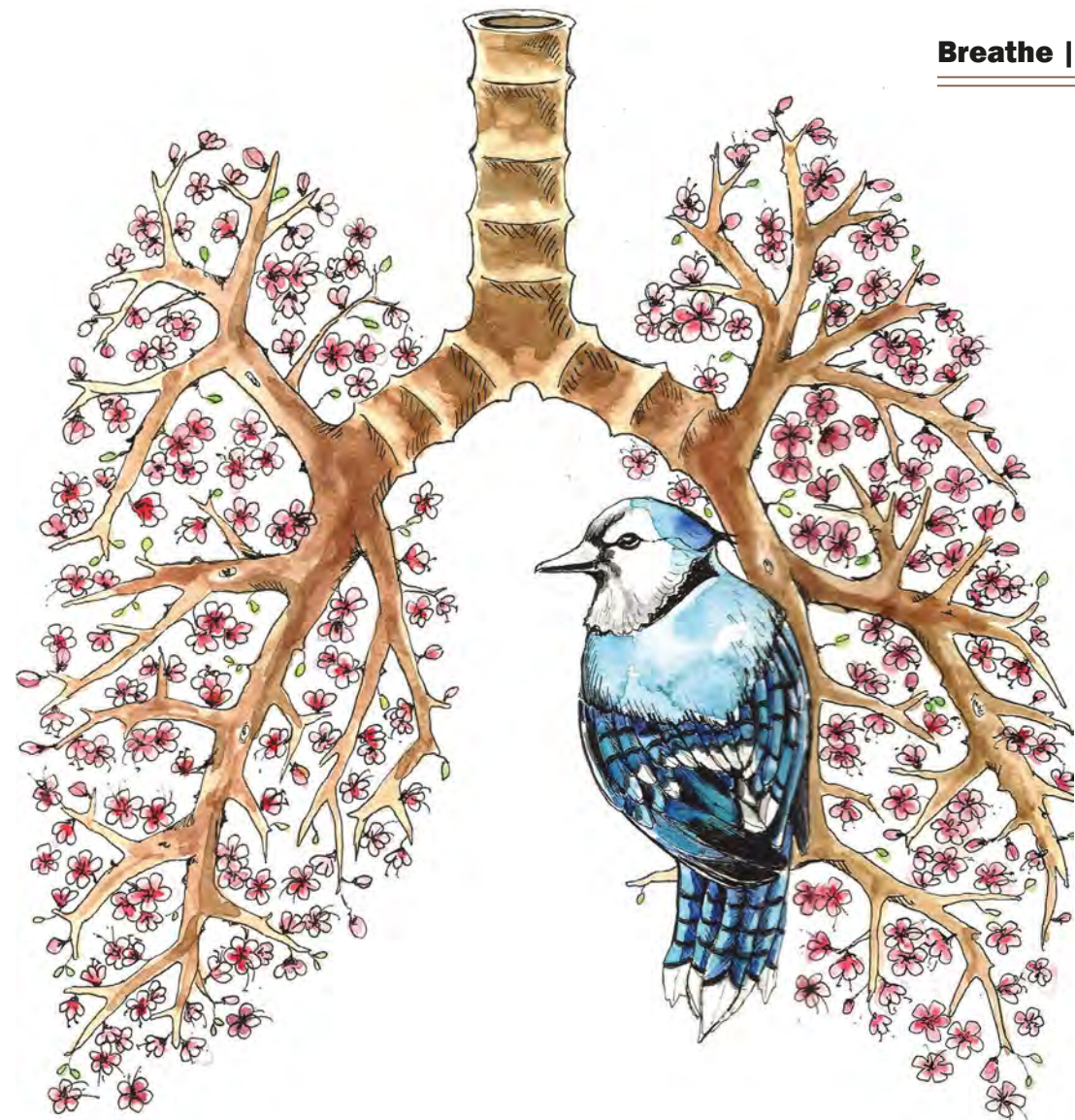
Heart is a six story cottage with banana trees that grow to the moon. At night, the orange glow from the fifth floor faerie lights makes the pumpkins in the corner look like suns; the nighttime tulip garden performs Chopin's Nocturne in E beneath the kitchen windowsill, where pomegranate pies sit cooling for a late night snack.

You are welcome into the heart of fifty seven bedrooms, messy and strewn with children's plushies and empty cigar boxes. When dawn rises over the balcony, the lawn will be aglow with dandelions and the tallest sunflowers because no one has mowed the lawn in over twenty one years.

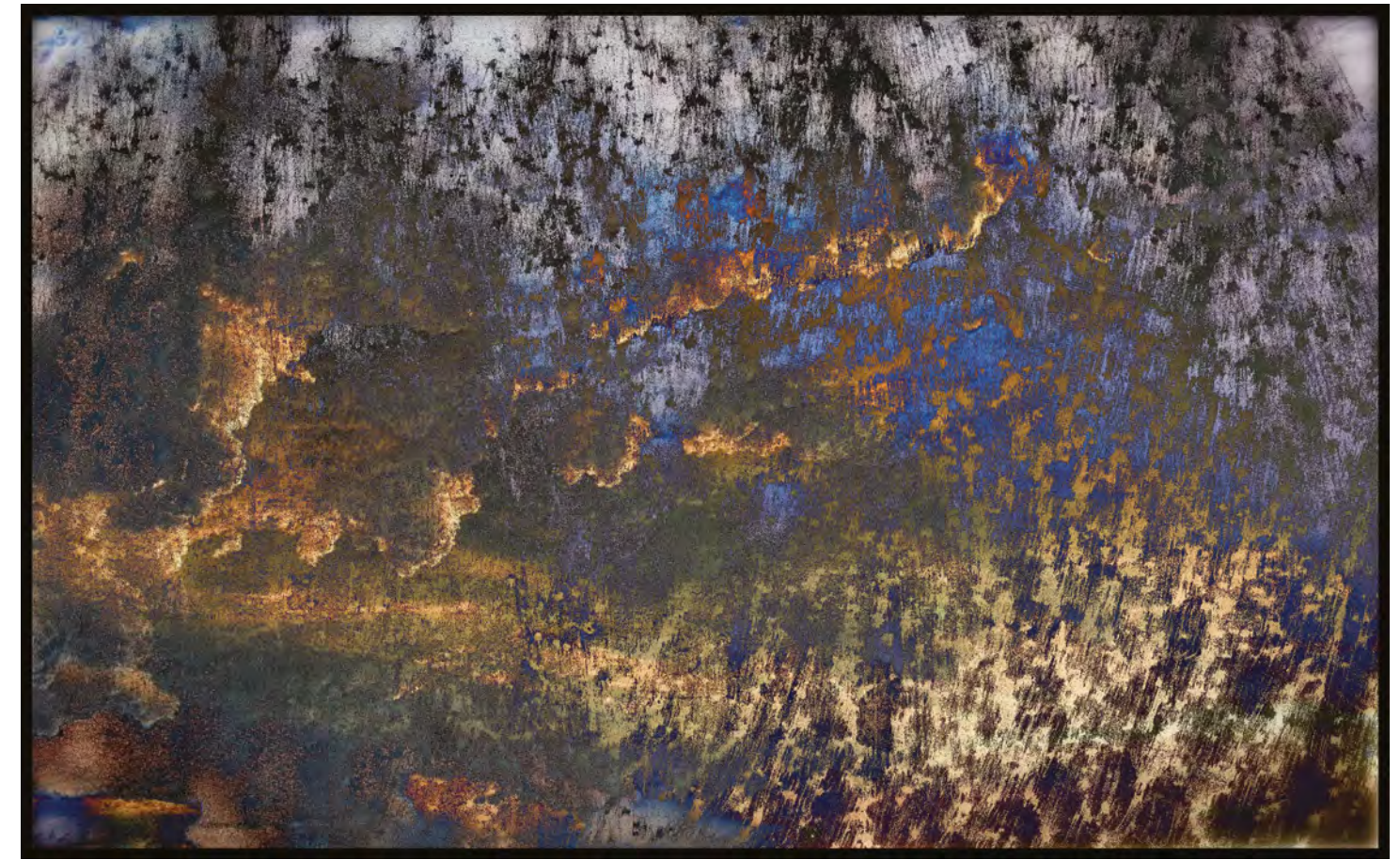
There was a time when a hare snuck in through the back door and made its home on the hearth, right

next to the lilac sofa that seated two. Later that summer, it found residence on the open porch steps, where a cool breeze would bring in the scent of cinnamon and apple leaves. The hare left when it was time to go but that winter, the back door was always left open.

This heart, here, is the only six story cottage with banana trees that grow to the moon; there is no payment to stay but you may be occasionally asked to pick the fruits up top. In return, you will see the moon and stars. There will forever be a glass of iced tea on the lawn tables beside the kumquat bushes – you only have to know where to look and when you decide it's time, please: leave the door open as you go. The jasmine will whisper Thank you for coming. I hope you visit again.



**Breathe** | Rose Shan



**Over and Under** | Matthew Plaia



**A Thrill that Kills** | Stevie Shield

The flame is lit like skies with stars so bright  
She's on my lips like white on rice or snow  
Her smell hits me with joy as much as light  
Shines hard to make all things eat, breath, and grow  
What runs away are thoughts of purity  
Beneath my skin a friend speaks sharply harsh  
Alas, my heart does feign security  
No dam was built to hold this type of marsh  
Again, these flames sway me to jump for joy  
A type of joy that gives my soul no rest  
Except when time tells joy it's not a boy  
So joy tells me no time is left to test

Smoke swirls inside these lungs to leave her mark  
Pain cries to cancer, 'stop!', but death is dark





Sometimes, when I hear music in the trees  
And sweet distant barks,  
I am taken back to that place again

Panama City in your old apartment;  
Ants scavenging in the kitchen.  
A jet plane takes people somewhere,  
I can hear your voice in its engines.

The dirt under your fingernails tells a story  
And this grimy city eats breakfast.

We walk to the market  
And I pretend it's the thousandth time.  
This place belongs in my history.

I buy you flowers from the old woman  
And steal samples from the fruit stand.

Time takes me there still;  
A ripple in memories mirrored onto another reality.  
One where it really is the thousandth time.

Then your cry brings me back,  
And I am okay here too,  
Barefooted on my porch in Los Angeles.



Looking through a Glacier | Neil Parker

**Becoming Sophisticated People** | Issa Lutfi

Wednesdays I'm at Cedar Sinai.  
My aunt is passing— we know  
where expiration dates like my aunt are located  
on the eighth floor. Her blood cells saturate  
in sucrose from sweets, genes,  
remnants from a poisonous heirloom.  
For six months all we breathe is insulin  
type I—the worst type—congestive heart failure  
necrotizing fasciitis dialysis nerve damage  
diabetic retinopathy gangrene. Her sternum  
cracked out after five open hearts, aortic  
valve replacement porcine or bovine? It doesn't matter,  
her skin can't heal, stitch shut, she's broken. Passing  
silicone tubes through stroma, viscous filled  
clotting blood rimming the shunt site,  
while the priest prepares a remedy  
for the dying. Dilaudid is the new must-have,  
all we can do now is wait for  
drip induced hallucinations. We don't tell her  
what we know—throat muscles relax  
to atrophy, her breathing a hum, an  
artless growl.





## Interview With Cormac McNally

Trevor Mooney

“Err, hi...” I said, quickly glancing at the patient’s chart, “what brings you in today, Mr. McNally?”

“Is that yer first wish?” Mr. Cormac McNally glibly responded with a harsh, Ulsterite inflection. He was a wee naked bearded man, no younger than 50, casually reclined on the exam table, legs splayed almost as if to announce his rudely disproportionate member. A pile of red, rain-soaked garments lay in the corner of the room, and the exam robes sat disregarded at the head of the table, still cleanly folded with a smoke pipe placed neatly on top.

Not sure how to respond, I simply nodded my head and took my seat at the head of the table. “You sure you don’t want to use the robes?”

McNally let loose a booming laugh. “Ha! I din’ hop and skip over a beagle’s gowl to have you dress me in your quare britches, now did I? Plus, they’re mighty cold from the rain.” He scratched his dense beard, which had, like a sponge, absorbed obscene amounts of rainwater from the morning’s deluge. Now dislodged, water droplets sprayed all over the exam table.

“Right,” I responded, choosing not to betray the fact that I hadn’t faintest idea of what just came out of Mr. Mc-

Nally’s mouth. I paused, knowing already that this wasn’t going to be a routine visit. Not even close. Mr. McNally’s breath reeked of fetid cabbage and Guinness stout, a mix that doesn’t please the nares even before it sublimes back up the offender’s gullet. His nose was a ruddy, rynophymatous blob, deviating violently to the left, no doubt the handiwork of a well-placed left hook. All in all, McNally was no taller than five feet, with a stocky build and piercing blue eyes canopied by a pair of bushy brown eyebrows so thick that they seemed to merge seamlessly with a raging tangle of brown hair matted across the top of his rather large head. I’d imagine that Mr. McNally didn’t look too much different as an infant, minus the ruddiness and wild hair. And, of course, his very large penis, I noted briefly as my eyes scanned downward.

“Take a gander at my willy, why don’t ya,” Mr. McNally laughed, clearly paying attention to my eye movements. “Me wife confused it fer a bloater on our wedding night!”

“You don’t say,” I replied, trying to keep my tone as professional as possible. “Now, if you don’t mind, Mr. McNally, could you tell me why you’re seeing me today?”

“Right, yer first wish!” exclaimed McNally. “Well, doc, I haven’t been bravely for quite some time, now.” “Oh? And when did you start feeling un—” I paused, struggling to remember the term, “bravely?”

“Well – er – doc, this is just between you an’ me,

right?”

“Of course. Everything you say here is confidential, unless I have reason to believe you are a risk to yourself or others.”

McNally’s blue eyes glinted with mischief. “Oh, you don’t have to worry about me harming me’self. As for others...well, no guarantees – I owe a knuckle or two to my dear friend O’Malley,” he said while gently tapping the bridge of his bulbous nose.

I chose to ignore that last bit. McNally seemed like one who was quite accustomed to settling his disputes extralegally. “You can trust me, Mr. McNally. Now, go ahead and tell me what ails you.”

“As you wish! You see doc, my willy isn’t working properly...what, you think I would just drop trou for no bloody reason?”

“Well, no,” I replied unconvincingly. McNally was no spring chicken, and his nasal telangiectasia suggested that he indulged in more spirits than the average Ulsterite – which is to say, far too much. In other words, he was a prime candidate for erectile dysfunction. “Can you tell me exactly what is going on?” I asked. “Are you having trouble initiating or sustaining an erection?”

McNally once again boomed with laughter, a reaction becoming far too frequent for a single encounter, in my opinion. “HAHAHA, lord almighty, if I couldn’t get a hard

on, I wouldn’t go to you, now would I? No sir, I don’t need a medical-thingy license to figure out my cure: Pot o’ Gold be my remedy!” Pot o’ Gold is a popular gentlemen’s establishment in the fringes of Belfast, frequented too often by men like McNally – men who spoke fluently in religious allegory yet held no compunction about violating conjugal vows. Come to think of it, Pot o’ Gold is likely where he met his “dear friend” O’Malley.

An expression of deep concern suddenly sprouted on McNally’s face. “Hey doc, could ye do me a wee favor and not share that last bit with me dear wifey? It was just a jest. I’ve only seen the place once. I was maybe a touch tipsy, and O’Malley convinced me to go inside the forsaken place before me wits returned.” His sparkling blue eyes fixated on the floor. “‘tis why me and O’Malley had a...” he paused, choosing his next words carefully, “minor scrap.”

I was taken aback by his sudden display of contrition. Perhaps I had been too hasty to judge the man. In my two years as apprentice to the venerable country practitioner Robert O’Mooney, I had treated enough drunken adulterers in my apprenticeship to shake my conviction in the sacred vows of Christian matrimony. Ironic, perhaps, that my Catholic faith could weather Ulster’s Protestant storm, but threatened to buckle under the weight of a couple Ulsterite drunkards who literally pissed on their eternal vows. That’s one of the things I really admired about Dr. O’Mooney: in all his years of practice, he never missed a Sunday service. His “one intractable vice,” he would sometimes joke.

“Of course, Mr. McNally. Mum’s the word.”

McNally exhaled, demonstrably relieved. “Thanks doc. And go ahead and call me Mac. Mr. McNally is me dear old father. If he wasn’t deaf as a damn doorknob, he’d die laughing if he heard anybody call me ‘Mister.’ I love him, but he can still be a right old git.”

“Ok Mac, tell me what ails you.”

“Well, as I mentioned, it is me willy. I’m getting up four, fived times a night to go to the bathroom, and that’s when I’m not even pissed!”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” I said, happy to have finally elicited McNally’s chief concern. “And are you in pain when you urinate or otherwise?”

“No pain. Maybe my feet, but that’s only because I feel like I’m running laps from my room to the john and back!”

“And your urine itself? Is the color normal? Any blood, for instance?”

“Nope! Clear to yellow as usual. I hope that’s a good thing?”

“Certainly good news. How about your overall health? Any fevers, chills, nausea, vomiting?”

“Negatory, doc. I think me years of merriment have purged me of any sort of gag reflex, anyhow.” His eyes had recouped their normal twinkle.



I couldn't help but smile at this one. "One of the many health benefits of Guinness," I rejoined. My medical educators always told me it was a sin to normalize alcoholism, but I had just enough clinical intuition at this point in my career to know that McNally had no designs on slowing down. He was in the "pre-contemplative" phase of cessation, in our profession's needlessly imperious parlance.

McNally boomed again, but for the first time today, not at me. "I'll drink to that, doc!"

"Maybe not with O'Malley next time, though," I responded half-jokingly. "Ok Mr. McNally – I mean, Mac – I think I have enough info to go ahead and give you a proper check up. Before I do that, is there anything else you'd wish to tell me?"

Thoughtfully stroking his brambly beard, he paused. "Well doc, your second wish be my wish to tell you...I'm a wee Leprechaun!" At this, he jumped down from the bed and performed a jig, looking weirdly like a tripod with a wobbly third leg.

At this, both of us were roaring with laughter. With surprising agility for his age, McNally leapt back up to his shoulder-height bed and assumed his casual reclined position. He propped his right leg on his left knee, and turned to me. "And what be your third and final wish?"

Wiping tears of laughter from my eyes, onto which the image of his bare-assed dancing would be forever etched, I collected myself and said, "Okay, leprechaun man, you're not going to like me, but I'm going to need to check your prostate. I have a feeling it is enlarged, which is why you are experiencing nocturia – er, that is, frequent nighttime peeing." Only two years removed from medical school, I occasionally forgot that many patients did not share my medical vocabulary. It was "my one nagging vice," Dr. O'Mooney would always joke. O'Mooney's arithmetic was a tad confusing, seeing as I also happened to share his "one vice" of church-going Catholicism. I asked him about this once, and he only laughed. "You're too young to turn sacraments into sins. So my maths are just fine, thank you very much!" I never knew what he meant by that.

Mr. McNally gave me a quizzical look, which drove his bushy eyebrows even further into tangled mop. "Me prostate, eh? And where be that?"

"Well, anatomically, speaking, your prostate gland is lodged between your bladder and your penis. But, clinically speaking, the only way for me to figure out whether it is enlarged is by performing a digital rectal exam."

"And by digital, you mean..."

"Yes, my finger. Don't worry, Mr. McNally. We perform this exam most men your age, and it is very quick. It'll be over in a jiffy."

"Whatever you say, doc. You have a mighty peculiar set of wishes. And it's Mac, don't forget it!"

"Right," I said, putting on my gloves. "Since you are already supine, just go ahead and turn onto your left side, keeping your left leg straight and bending your right." I didn't

normally perform the DRE with the patient in left lateral decubitus position, but enough time had already been wasted by McNally's jig that I felt it imprudent to ask him to stand up again (much less bend over). "I'll be applying some lubrication here," I informed him, "so my apologies if it feels a little cold."

"Oh, aren't you the gentleman!" McNally was facing the other way, but I didn't need to see his expression to know he was being sarcastic.

"Ok, deep breath!" I inserted my finger, facing down, and appreciated the tone of his external anal fixture. McNally gasped but didn't say anything, setting a completely new precedent. In my experience, it was best to complete the rectal exam quickly and efficiently, and address the patient after it was all done. I moved my finger to palpate the prostate gland. The prostate is normally the size of a walnut, but McNally's was more in the ballpark of a plum. Large, but not severely so. Plus, it felt firm and healthy, no abnormal masses or signs of "bogginess." Infection was unlikely in the first place, given his history. Finally, I palpated both halves of the rectal wall, and found nothing of concern.

I pulled my finger out, discarded my gloves, and addressed Mr. McNally. "You can go ahead and lie down normally, or however you prefer." McNally turned and faced me, his perhaps a hue ruddier than normal (truly a feat unto itself), and his pride clearly wounded. "It seems to be as I expected," I continued, trying to ease his discomfort by effecting a professional cool. "An enlarged prostate. Nothing to worry too much about, many perfectly healthy men have this condition. Just to be safe, I'm going to order one or two blood tests as well."

Still smarting from the exam, McNally grunted, "Hmph. And what about the pissing? Is there anything we can do about that? I can't get a bloody night's sleep."

"Why yes, in fact. I'll be prescribing you Terazosin, which will relax your bladder a bit and help you urinate more fully. Just be warned that it can make you a little dizzy at first, so we will be starting you out at a low dose."

"And this Tera-thingy, it won't disappoint me dear wife, if you catch me drift?"

"No, it shouldn't. But it's good that you asked, because there are stronger drugs out there – the so-called '5-alpha reductase inhibitors' – which cause erectile dysfunction. But seeing as your condition is moderate, I don't see the need do anything that would encourage you to seek a cure at ye olde Pot o' Gold."

McNally's smile returned. "Thanks doc, I appreciate it. And me wife will as well!"

I chuckled, "No problem, it's my job. I'll go ahead and get those labs ordered, and I'll phone in a prescription to the pharmacy. Come back in two weeks for follow up, and we'll see how things are going then."

"Will do, doc," McNally whistled, his teeth clamped around his long pipe as he stepped nimbly into his red, rain-soaked britches. He made his way to the door and turned

the knob. Before opening it, he turned on the spot.

"I know yer mighty busy here, doc." His eyes flashed with cerulean mischief. "But things being confidential between you and me, I'd say you've earned yerself a visit to ye old Pot o' Gold. While yer there, do me a favor and set that gobshite O'Malley straight with one of yer rectal maneuvers."

I smiled. "Take care, Mac. See you in two weeks, hopefully under sunnier conditions."

"Oh, I'd say the conditions were quite sunny today," McNally retorted, gesturing at his crotch. With that, he opened the door and disappeared in a flash.

Shaking my head, I walked over to the desk and dialed the pharmacy, hoping to put in McNally's order before the oft-drunk pharmacists took off on one of their notorious three-hour lunch breaks. "Those worthless piss artists," I grumbled, raising the receiver to my ear and waiting vainly for someone to pick up. As the phone rang ineffectually, I looked out the window above the desk, surprised that the morning's deluge had abruptly given way to brilliant sunshine that flooded the room with natural light. Rays of light refracted through the water droplets still clinging desperately to the windowpane, casting prismatic projections onto the

exam table like a hundred dancing rainbows.

Transfixed for a moment or two, I broke my gaze just in time to catch the unmistakable figure of McNally jauntily making his way down the cobblestone street. At the corner, where stood the dilapidated steeple of St. John's cathedral, he turned and waved; even through the rain-mottled glass, his blue eyes were piercing. He then pivoted toward the cathedral and stooped over with his hands raised, adopting a position that looked curiously like genuflection. But I should've known better. McNally was baring his buttocks in broad daylight, giving me the "two thumbs up" gesture. I didn't return so much as a thumb of approval. McNally quickly refastened his belt buckle and waved once more before disappearing for good around the corner.

Inside the room, the rainbows continued to dance. Almost tauntingly, I thought – not unlike the patient that had just vacated the exam table.

"Three wishes," I said to myself, shaking my head in disbelief. "I'll be damned."

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Fall in JiuZhaiGou | Zhuang Fang



## An Introduction | *Martin Mwangi*

Margaret Haddoc is sixteen now, at the last juncture of her secondary school education. As wild as her fiery red locks she's tried to enjoy every minute of her teenage years pushing herself past the innocence of her adolescence. This brings us to the present moment where she's at match point to win an impromptu tennis match against one of the senior varsity girls. Maggie's always enjoyed playing tennis but never joined the team. She couldn't stand the idea of a blustering coach dictating her schedule. Due to her rather hasty entry into the tennis game, after a few statements by Maggie impugning the skill of the school's tennis players, Maggie hadn't taken the time to properly tie her shoe laces. This seemingly innocuous action would have tremendous consequences. With each backhand Maggie slides into position in front of a hurtling tennis ball generating a hurricane's worth of force into her stroke that would have been difficult for any tennis player to return. What she lacks in elegance she more than makes up for in power.

With salty beads of sweat coursing over her matted eyelashes she rockets into her signature back hand position. It's match point, and she has positioned herself for a glorious win. Unfortunately, the lining of her aged reeboks

lacks her stamina. As she pulls through her backhand, her shoes give way and she slides off balance. All the force she had intended for the ball instead propels her to the ground.

As she hits the ground she instantly gives forth a rasping shriek. It is not until after she's taken to the emergency room of her local hospital that Maggie learns she's ruptured her spleen. At the moment she hit the ground her swollen spleen burst releasing, under the cover of darkness, the militant soldiers of inflammation that would wrangle her into a position she seldom inhabited but always despised; submission.

Shortly after arriving at the ER, Maggie's mother, Olive, arrived to find her daughter in a gurney immobilized from pain and awaiting the decisions revolving around the removal of her spleen; a procedure which at this moment in history was the standard of care.

After the surgery, Maggie is admitted to her room. Meanwhile, Olive wanders down to the waiting area, seeking to find something to cheer up her daughter as well as assuage her own anxieties. Olive never quite understood her daughter. The two could not be more different; one had always been an anxious girl, delighting in the attention of others; in contrast, the other an irreverent, self-empowered young woman. Olive buys a pair of earrings she ad-

mires from the hospital lobby store. At their center piece is an interlocking pattern that unbeknownst to Olive was reproduced from Greek jewelry popularized during the Minoan period, circa 3650 BC.

It's at this point that you are expecting this piece of medical narrative to be about advances in infectious mononucleosis treatment. To the contrary it is about the knot that Maggie should have used to tie her shoes. The same pattern that formed the Herakles knot in the 1st century as an orthopedic medical sling that, over the course of almost 2 millennia, would be modified to form the surgeons knot used to close up Maggie's incision. All these finding their origin in the reef knot that grade school children commonly use to tie their shoelaces.

The reef knot would make its initial foray into medicine as the aforementioned Herakles knot in the 1st century. Throughout the centuries, the reef knot has since been used, modified, and standardized, ultimately coming to be known as the surgeon's knot we see today. Our present day Surgeon's Knot adds an additional loop during the first throw to stabilize the knot when tying the second throw. This same knot bound and maintained tension on the incision site from Maggie's splenectomy.

That helpless experience in the OR, interacting with surgeons while hospitalized affected Maggie in the most unexpected of ways. She resolved to become a surgeon. She wanted to be as competent and respected as the surgeons who powerfully swooped into her room, issuing crisp orders for the nurses and residents who scribbled down and enacted their every word. Her desire to help people would come later.

Fast forward to 14 years later of sustained effort and discipline, Maggie would eventually find herself as the Chief Cardiothoracic Surgical Resident at a large academic hospital. Her intense and determined personality made completion of her long training an ease. Nevertheless, it greatly changed her. More than a decade from the date of her splenectomy, Maggie was about to follow up on the final patient she would examine before graduation. With a 2nd year resident and a medical student in tow, she steps in the room of a middle-aged Hispanic woman whose face made clear her present anxiety. Because of her rudimentary English, her entire conversation was translated through her teenage daughter. After experiencing months of generalized fatigue, weight loss, and persistent chronic dry coughs, occasionally productive of bloody phlegm, she had decided to finally come in to the hospital. Per the hospital protocol, she had received a chest X-ray that although difficult to fully interpret suggested that she needed further work-up to characterize the centrally located unilateral lung mass visualized on imaging.

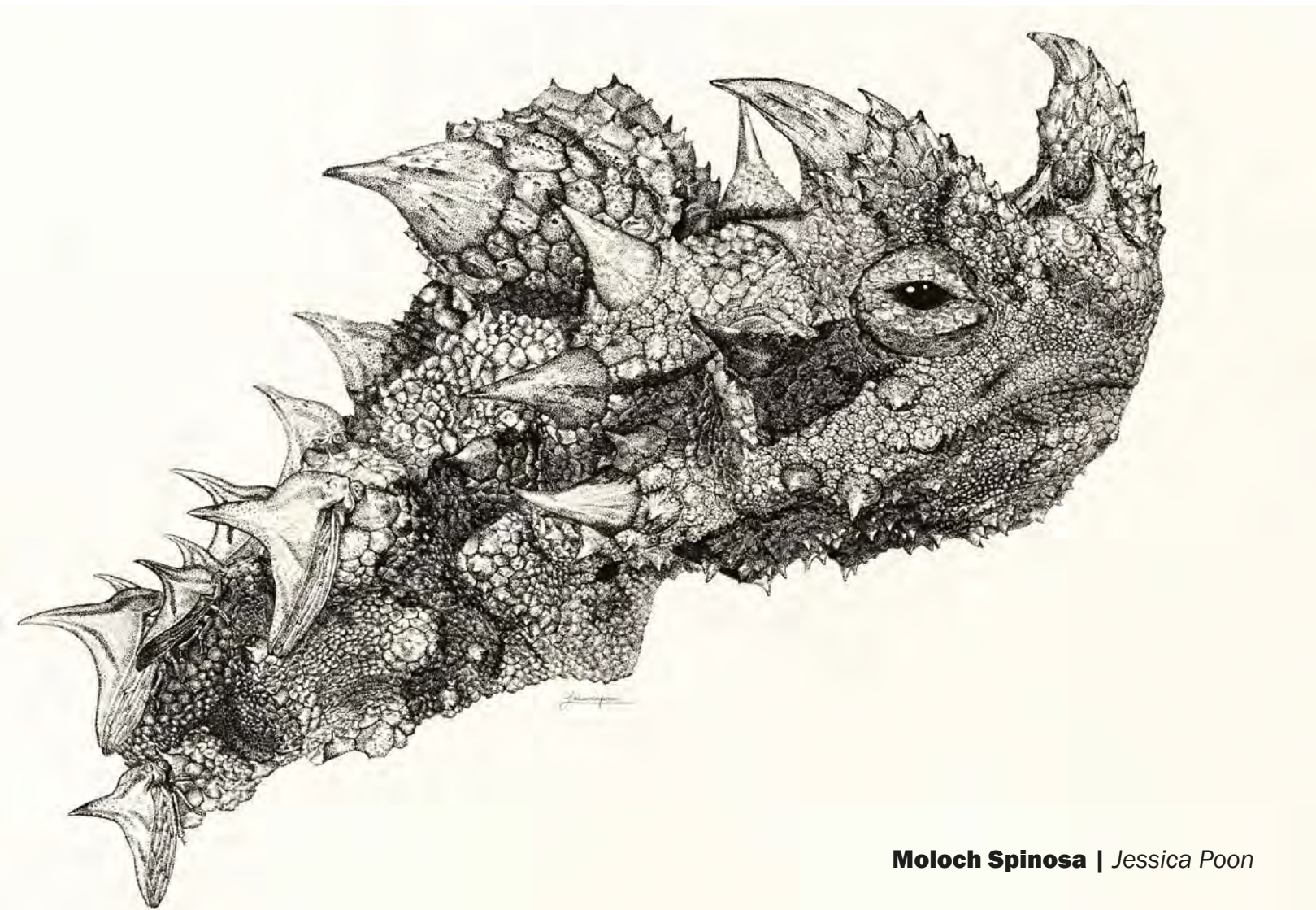
After a brief introduction, the patient asked the question that had clearly been on her mind for months: is this cancer?. At this moment Dr. Haddoc, who had been standing, walked over to her bed and sat slowly next to her. She

put one arm around her and the other on her leg. She had learned the perfect spot to place her gentle hands--on her patients' knee. In a soft, barely audible tone she told her that the mass could be cancerous but they had a plan. That vicious word, "cancer" carried with it such weight that it evacuated the vessels on her temples leaving behind only the pallor of fear. Without any further description she allowed the room to be silent, giving the woman and her daughter a moment to digest the news. The patient turned her head to Maggie with her eyes beginning to sparkle and she looked directly into Maggie's eyes in what seemed like an interminable moment of silence.

The medical student, feeling both wonder and appreciation, would later tell Maggie of his uncertainty, unsure whether he should have been present in this most intimate moment. At the height of the patients' vulnerability, and Maggie's resolve he could only think one thing. This is medicine.

Later that week Maggie would perform a wedge resection of the small cell lung cancer localized to her lower right middle lobe. To close up her initial incision, she utilized a binding ligature known as the constrictor knot. This knot often outperforms almost all other knots in its ability to retain tension in a ligature after weight is removed. First publicly coined in the Ashley Book of Knots (ABOK) in 1944, the origins of this structure likely date much further. Much like the relationship of the surgeon's knot to the reef knot, the constrictor knot is a modification of the clove hitch, another knot developed and outlined by Herakles in the first century C.E. Briefly, the clove hitch is constructed by taking a loop of string or rope (called a bight), around an object. The portion of the rope moving, known as the running portion, is crossed over the standing portion, creating a half hitch (a loop). The second half hitch is created by looping the running strand around the object in the same direction as the first, but is more proximal. After forming the second half-hitch, the knot is finished by tightening the loop. In contrast, the constrictor knot is formed by looping the second hitch more distally and then underneath the first loop and tightened. Interestingly, this is the same knot that formed the pattern on the earrings Olive gave to Maggie while she was in the OR all those years ago.

In a multi-varied way, knots have woven themselves intricately into common use: ranging from the cosmetic (jewelry) to supremely functional, (maintaining the integrity of surgical therapeutic interventions). Unbeknownst to Maggie, they had woven themselves into integral parts of her most seminal memories. Through their intersection with her life, we attempted to showcase a bit of the confluence of art and medicine in surgical knots. In stitching together Maggie's story and that of knots, we hope you have gained a better appreciation for the characteristics of knots. That is, their beauty, strength and efficacy, that have advanced them through the centuries. You were probably expecting closure at this point, but then again this IS just an introduction.



**Moloch Spinosa** | *Jessica Poon*







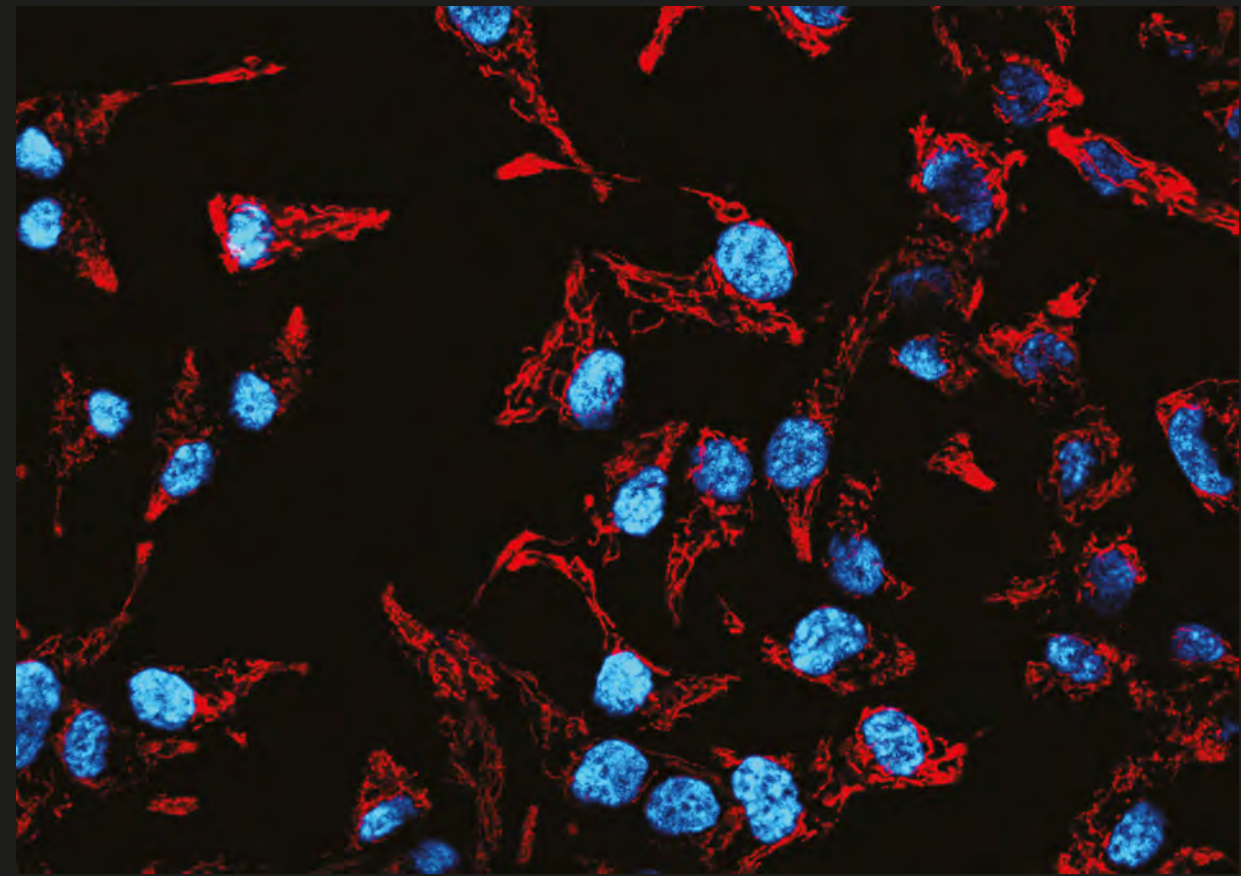
**Gravity** | Thomas Luong

**Mitochondrial Networks, the Source of Cellular Energy** | Kenny Vongbunyong

**GRAVITY** | Paula Stoessel



I can understand  
That being bound  
By gravity  
Can be hard on a man  
Who has traveled through time  
Crossed spatial dimensions  
Experienced exalted states  
Of painlessness and joy  
But you must know  
That it is all within us  
You still live in my center  
And I dance in yours.  
I believe that all will unfold  
When the dragon unleashes fire  
And two moons  
Laugh in the summer sky.





Forty years ago Gerald murdered a woman. It was 1963 in Lukton, New York and she was a Negro shuffling along the Interstate. When the driver, one of Gerald's friends, slowed up next to her Gerald fired his gun and the bullet dinged against a stop sign--he was sure it did--but the woman dropped to the ground and that was that. Gerald spent three years in the penitentiary, and from the moment the judge landed the gavel people have been dogging him, saying the ruling wasn't fair, that it was murder all over again for the ten children she'd left behind. But all Gerald did was shoot a stop sign.

Years passed as unwittingly as that car ride then. Gerald stayed in Lukton, where he had a backbone of support in the small working town that knew him as the rascally but good-natured son of Gerald Walker, Senior. The ones who sneered and crossed the street when Gerald approached were in the minority. Usually they had only lived in Lukton for a few years and, for the rest who had lived there for generations, were just passing through.

Gerald was where he was every day from the hour after he awoke to the hour before he dropped off to sleep: The Steel Lantern, a bar that was as old as the town itself and that had witnessed the birth and demise of every fad tavern, lounge, and restaurant whose owners didn't understand the stubbornness of a populace skeptical of progress. Gerald sat at the center of the sticky, varnished bar on a stool that his body alone had done the work of desiccating into cracked plastic. He drank steadily from the ceramic mug that was his and that the owner--Frank, a good man--kept in the cabinet with the snifters and shot glasses of other town legends.

It was winter but it could have been any season, not just for Gerald but for any of The Lantern's crusted patrons. Like Gerald, they were guys who had lost it all or were on their way to it, and the world never let them live it down. Frank kept a wardrobe of coats and hats for the occasion when one of them, having arrived in the morning and not thinking beyond his day in the windowless den, stumbled insensate into a nighttime blizzard and nearly froze to death.

Gerald was gazing into the dim, liquidy amber of his beer when Big Bill, a red-faced man with a pock-marked nose settled onto the stool next to him and gripped Gerald's shoulder.

"Good man," he said as though doffing his hat to a hero. Gerald eyed Big Bill with a mixture of gratefulness and disgust. As things were, Big Bill was a salve, but in his alternate life--the life Gerald was meant to lead, in which he was not thought of as a murderer--he did not need this man's company. "Barkeep!" shouted Big Bill. "A shot for me and Ger!"

Frank, drilling his cloth-covered hand into a soiled

glass, nodded and took his time to retrieve the rye and pour them both a shot and one for him. They clinked glasses and downed the hard poison.

"What's all, brother?" asked Big Bill between emphatic heaves. His eyes were very close to his nose, and each year they seemed to get even closer, like unfortunate lovers gradually scaling an impassable mountain between them.

"Nothing but me and this beer," said Gerald, not wanting to continue the conversation but afraid of the silence that would follow. Silences were brutal. They revealed each man's frailty--his inability to justify his own existence. Words, no matter how tired or untrue, functioned as jobs and families and ambitions did elsewhere. But these men no longer had access to those things.

"Mmmm," Big Bill hummed.

"Still sending you letters?" asked Frank, shining up a glass and shaking his head like he already knew the end to this tragedy.

"If you can call 'em that. They're gibberish. I don't even read 'em. Just tear 'em up. No time for that shit," said Gerald, taking a sip so the others couldn't see the evidence of his lie, even though it was no mystery how he spent his time. Gerald read every letter--every one of them--even when he was getting a hundred a day. Mostly they were from people who wanted him dead. Others thought what he did was good and right, white nationalists and sorts. There were loons on both sides. But of all the letters he ever received, not one ever professed certainty that he hadn't done it.

"It'll all be settled in the end," said Big Bill with a slippery grin. Gerald had the urge to attack him, and if he were a bigger man maybe he would have. But Frank was keen and got things back on track.

"It's the goddamn media," he spat. "They see someone wounded and they just want to tear him apart. Don't care if he's a good man or not. Vultures," he said, rinsing his hands and flicking away the water.

"He's not dead, Frank." Jim, a high school teacher at the end of the bar, chimed in. He started coming regularly about a year ago. Each time he looked more bedraggled and afraid, and he was thinning out like he wasn't getting home cooked meals anymore. People understood he was making his bed here for when he'd have to lay in it for good.

"I never said he was dead, Jim."

"But you said they're vultures, and vultures--"

"Screw 'em is all I was saying!" Frank slammed a glass onto the counter. The melodrama of it made Gerald smile. A part of him was tired of this posturing. It felt like shining a severed stump to glistening false perfection. But a deeper, needier part of him couldn't stop it.

"Well, what I can say is this," said Big Bill, "if Gerald was to die, he'd die an innocent man."

"Amen to that, brother," said Frank.

Suddenly the door opened and everyone in the bar recoiled from the clean afternoon light. Cold air scuttled up their stiff pant legs.

"Gerald, Gerald." The man who came in was breathless. His name was Tom and he was a spindly little man who looked like a pedophile and worked at Wal-Mart.

"Easy, brother. Easy. What is it?" asked Frank.

"There's two men looking for you. One's a reporter and the other's a big black guy. I think he might be--you

know..."

"What's it got to do with me?" replied Gerald coolly, as though his attitude to the situation would determine its severity. But there was enough strain in his voice to arouse concern. A man in the back of the bar, a lumberjack by the look of him though he'd been on disability for decades, stretched himself awake and staggered to where the action was.

"There's a closet in the back where you can, you know--" offered Frank.

"A closet? You expect me to run when I ain't done nothing wrong! Innocent men don't hide in closets."



Buster | Priscilla Lee



"Well, just thought I'd let you know. They're coming here," said Tom, leaning over the counter like a kid making his selection in a candy store.

"Let 'em," said Gerald, downing the rest of his drink.

"I warned ya," said Tom.

"Warning's all I ever get," said Gerald. But the way Frank stared at Gerald shook him. He tapped the edge of his mug, and Frank swooped it up like he was any old customer.

"You're lucky you get that!" said the lumberjack in a booming voice. "When my old woman shot me, she just shot me. Now look!" He did something with his leg that only Tom took an interest in.

"We've all seen your leg, Gary," said Jim from down the bar.

"But you know, there is something--" Gerald began, getting up and nearly tripping over his stool.



**Dinner Ready Shortly** | *T. Warner Hudson*

"Whoa there, brother." Big Bill patted him heartily on the back. "Someone get this man a coffee!" He laughed. "Put one on, Frank!"

"No, no. I just need--I need to get some air." Gerald fixed up his flannel and smoothed his jeans. "Besides, if I have to hear how Gary's ex-wife shot him in the leg again I'm liable to keel over. Of all the things to undo me," he said, forcing a smile.

"Want a jacket?" Frank was already moving towards the back.

"No, no." Gerald was tired of the goodwill that once kept him in the world of men, active and alive, but that now felt claustrophobic. The others watched as Gerald left.

"He'll be alright," said Gary, shuffling to the back of the bar.

Outside it was bright and cold, and the sunlight hurt Gerald's eyes. When he looked back at The Lantern's heavy wooden door he was relieved to see that no one had followed. It was just him in the bright, flat world where the only sounds were of his uneven, shallow breaths.

He hadn't seen the town in this light for a long time. It was ugly. It looked abandoned. It lacked the pride he remembered so vividly in his youth: the ice cream store, clothing boutiques where his mother shopped, the Fourth of July parade. Now half of it was boarded up. The rest was liquor, dime stores, and checks cashed.

Gerald felt betrayed. He had wasted his life here when he should have left the moment they let him out. He could have had a life anywhere. He could have found a woman, had children, lived a normal life with a job and bills and daily stresses that evaporated at the sight of his beautiful wife and the feel of sinking into a soft sofa with a beer. And when the letters came he'd just rip them up and laugh, maybe even as a family, all laughing together. But he had been afraid. And he was too old now to do anything about it.

Gerald started towards his room a few blocks away, but coming from the other end of the street were two figures loping along like lone survivors of the apocalypse. One was a white man carrying a duffel bag and the other a black man the size of a linebacker. Gerald instantly recognized them as his executioners. The white man pointed towards Gerald and the black man nodded. When they sped towards him Gerald tried to hurry away, but the cold had turned his feet into stumps and he could do barely more than limp. They were calling after him, but Gerald didn't look back. The voices neared, growing louder and angrier. A hard hand grabbed Gerald's shoulder and spun him around.

"Are you Gerald Walker?" It was the black man and his nostrils flared like a bull's.

Gerald shook his head. He could feel his eyes wide and afraid.

"You're not Gerald Walker?" The black man shook him by both shoulders and stared directly into his eyes. Gerald saw that it wasn't anger or rage that animated this man but agony. Agony pure and simple. Gerald shook his head.

"Come on, Vic. Even if it's him, he's not going to talk," said the white man, extending his arm between them.

"I know it's him," said the black man. He continued to stare at Gerald with terrifying intensity, searing images into his mind.

"Let's just talk to the folks at the bar. What was it, The Steel Lantern?" said the white man. The black man seemed to be considering something. He opened his mouth to speak. Then, as though a tightly coiled spring inside him snapped and unwound, he pushed Gerald away.

"Yeah. Let's do that," said the black man. Gerald watched as they walked away and descended the stairs into The Steel Lantern. Part of him hoped that the black man would come back and say what he had wanted to say.

Standing alone in the vacant brightness of day, Gerald felt the pain of the cold all too acutely. But the prospect of going home was grim. There was nothing for him there. There was nothing for him anywhere. And the next day would be the same as today. And the day after that.

Gerald shuffled into an alley a few storefronts down from the bar. He slumped down against the wall and drew his knees to his chin. He tucked his arms into his flannel and hugged his goose pimpled body like when he was a kid and shivered into sleep.

"Gerald." He couldn't make out who was shaking him in the dark. "It's Frank."

"Frank."

"Yeah, it's me. Here. Take this." He pulled Gerald away from the wall and put a jacket around him.

"Here. Now get up. Take my hand." Frank propped him up from under his shoulders and leaned him against the wall. "My God, Gerald, you're light as a feather."

"She had kids, Frank."

"What?"

"The Negro woman. She had ten kids. I killed them all."

"Nonsense!" said Frank, hoisting Gerald up with his arm around Gerald's back. "You didn't kill nobody."

"Yes, Frank, I did. I killed her and all of her children. Even that one today. The look on his face."

"Come on, Gerald. You're not thinking right. You're frozen nearly to death and it's late. I need you to walk with me, buddy."

Gerald found his feet. Frank used a flashlight to light the way to Gerald's place, a guest room in the house of an old family friend. Frank lugged him to the side entrance and shoved open the door. He dragged Gerald to the mattress on the floor covered with clothes, beer cans, cigarette butts, and porno magazines. The place smelled worse than a rotting corpse.

"My God, Gerald, what have you been living in?"

Gerald snorted as he wrapped himself in a moth-eaten blanket and buried his face in the bare mattress.

"I'll see you tomorrow," said Frank, navigating the can-strewn path back to the door.

"Yeah," said Gerald.

"Me and the guys, we can get this place cleaned up for you." Frank waited with his hand on the knob and flashlight shining on the motionless figure amidst the refuse of a life gone to waste. He waited for Gerald to say something, but he was already asleep. "See you tomorrow," Frank said and closed the door.

• • • • •



## The Art of Survival | Jacqueline Ngo

It's only the fifth day and already some of the men are losing it. The donkeys smell like shit and so do the men. Half of us hallucinate infinity: shimmering water, palm trees, ice cream trucks, pin-up girls. Cacti as stiff cold gods, donkeys as smooth-backed lovers. I stopped listening to them hours ago.

Everything's running lower than we'd anticipated: we've cigarettes for only the next two days. Yesterday we woke up to Jensen's donkey lying in a deep puddle of blood, Jensen nowhere to be found. I pat my own warm Franklin on his neck, the only living thing I care about for a hundred miles around. We move on.

• • • • •

The men are losing their senses—one by one, like coins dropped down a wishing well. There are a hell of a lot of scorpions. They scuttle past in the burning sand, dry and brown as the spines of old books. Maybe if I'd read Tolstoy we'd be in a better place. Though it'd be different here. War and Piss.

• • • • •

Losing track of the days. We pass by the bleached-white bones of some poor animal. Instantly I recognize it as Franklin, I absolutely know it. I look down at his patchy gray head bobbing steadily in front of me to force myself back to reality. In a flash I can see inside his head, I mean *really* inside, little pink brain nestled in dense skull, bright red blood coursing around the globe of pulsating brain, god damn I didn't know it was so bright. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

Mark tells me his bag was full of grasshoppers, he had buried the bastards alive because they wouldn't stop playing the violin. The other guys laugh and laugh, but I understand him. That kids' tale, an old grasshopper playing the violin with his legs. A nice old guy, the illustration of him wearing a little top hat. Or is that the cricket from Pinocchio?

At night, I can't sleep. The stars wiggle like marionettes. I blink and they rearrange themselves. Has the North Star always been this neon orange, bleeding?

We go and go and don't stop.

• • • • •

I haven't had a cigarette in days. Dragonflies dive-bomb us, smoking Lucky Strikes. Bastards. I want to meditate among the lotuses, but the merciless sun gleams off their shiny wings, cutting red flashes through my eyelids.

• • • • •

Hunger is our king, our ruler. We bow down to it in the cruelty of night. Robbie went off to hug a saguaro. I can't find Franklin. There is a sharp ache in my right heel, and I pry off my boots for the first time. It smells swampy. A leech has settled. I peel it off, the blood oozing out. Not as bright as Franklin's. It has left the skin beneath clean and new as a peach. As the earliest stars unveil themselves in the bruised sky, I settle my head in the bare sand onto something moist, flat and squishy. It has eyes on the same side of its face, in a cute cock-eyed kind of way. We doze together, and I dream of sleeping on the seafloor, flattened by a cartoon steamroller, eyes gazing lovably and motionless at the brilliant sea of pus above.

I awake to hear David make soft sucking sounds a few yards away from me. I sit up, brushing phosphorescence out of my eyes. He's trying to pry a starfish from his eye. I want to tell him, those suckers can hang on to rocks when the tide sweeps in and out like a power wash. But my mouth is filthy and dry from too many cigarettes. I settle back into my bed of slimy kelp. I don't turn around for the pop. It must have left a neat little hole where his eye had been.

• • • • •

Night falls. Has it been a week? A millennium? I tread softly away from the group, sinking my feet into the still-warm sand, leaving my shoes neatly arranged as a memorial to Robbie, who must still be standing there, hugging that saguaro, imagining he'd finally found solace. There are worse ways to go, aren't there?

I climb a small dune that rises softly over the desert. Faraway rocks emerge from the dark sand, big as tombs up close, but from here they look like God's shit scattered across the desert. The stars dance the tango in vivid swirls, but I ignore the voices. Out here in His elemental garden of rock and sand and a sky dripping with stars, a man can really find himself.

• • • • •



Skull Still Life | Michelle Miller

### Doctoring | Joe Pierre

The surgeon's scalpel

Navigates the tiny space

Between life and death



.....  
**The same doctor who can keep us from disease would also be clever at producing it by stealth.**  
**- Plato (The Republic)**

The rapidly changing fields of bioengineering and genetic modification have changed medicine as we know it. Can humanity be trusted with the power that comes along with such changes or are abuses tumultuous? Advances in science during the last three decades have brought about life changing procedures and breakthroughs. They have made the stuff of science fiction, reality. In doing so, they have raised ethical concerns that have resulted in new laws which govern scientific advancement. Next to such issues inherent to their own practice, those who are creators have a responsibility to anticipate the consequences of their designs for medical practice and to ensure that technologies are designed in a manner consistent with and supportive of ethical principles for medical practice.

This means that issues of beneficence and non-maleficence are kept in mind, that patient autonomy is thought of and protected. The equitable allocation of health resources is made available and that human dignity is respected. Furthermore, issues of confidentiality and informed consent are highly applicable. Particular ethical questions arise in applications of bioengineering to human enhancement. Although the devices and techniques developed by biomedical engineers are usually designed for the purpose of therapy or diagnostic support, they may also be designed to enhance healthy human traits beyond a normal level.

It has been argued that if medicine were to engage in human enhancement, it would move beyond its traditional mission, which is curative and preventive. Erwin Chargaff, Professor of Biological Chemistry at Columbia, noted "We manipulate nature as if we were stuffing an Alsatian goose. We create new forms of energy; we make new elements; we kill crops; we wash brains. I can hear them in the dark sharpening their lasers." A warning of a future of Huxleyan proportions.

But this warning is for naught. The birth of genetic manipulation lies decades behind us. We have long been bioengineering crops; to develop from a shriveled bud of natural corn, a juicy, delicious crop. One that sustains much of our livestock and much of our agricultural economy. Some proponents argue that at the most fundamental level, breeding animals for certain traits, produce for hardiness, or flowers for a desired color are the same as manipulating the human genome.

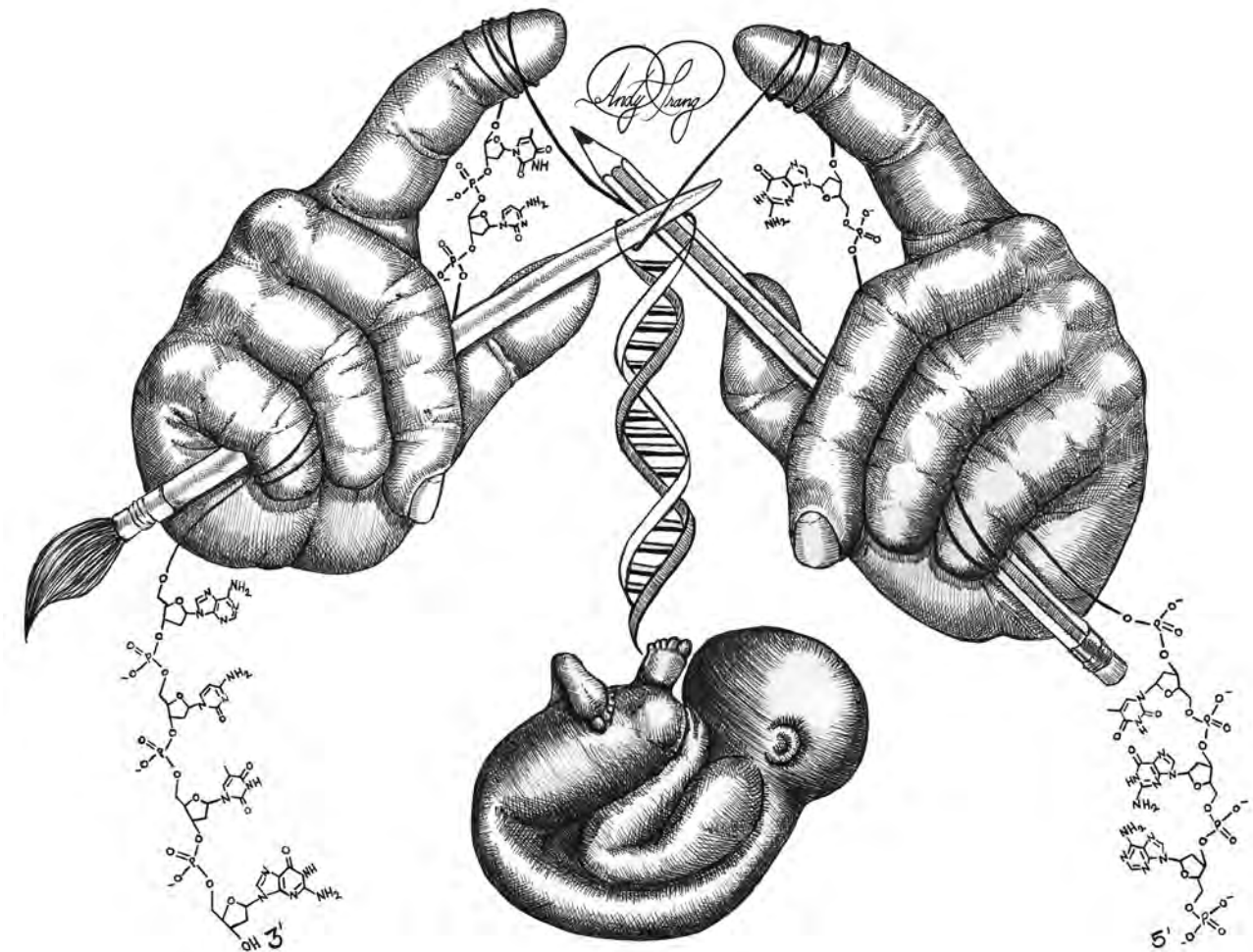
And this manipulation in the human model has led to some remarkable results. Today we have technologies that allow us to save newborns — technology that was not available just 30 years ago. We have pre-preemies being born and nursed to health, who go on living relatively normal and happy lives. Through medical and technological manipulation, we have extended our life span drastically in the last century. We have overcome many of the limitations that are ingrained within our genomes and our cultures. Each time we give a vaccine, transplant an organ or take medication, we are changing the natural order of things. It must be mentioned too that the notion of the natural always being good and the unnatural always bad is unsound, as there are natural poisons that kill, and unnatural devices that save the lives of our loved ones.

Instead of a black and white guide to choosing what is good for the population, public health efforts usually give us shades of grey. This is the nature of making a decision that affects entire populations with multitudes of varying people. But a well-known public health campaign serves as an example of our duty to humankind to overcome the limitations set before us. Without the proper level of iodine, many children were adversely affected during pregnancy in utero. Before mass iodization of salt it was estimated that there would be eventual loss of a totaled billion IQ points in the population. We have a moral obligation to one another, to give the next generation the best chance that it can have. The cost of ionizing salt is small when compared to the positives reaped from the practice.

Thus, I would argue that this is already a Brave New World. What will separate our future from a Huxleyan one is our moral decisions moving forward. Boundaries must be set and respected. No choice should be imposed upon anyone, in either way. But just as we have a moral obligation to ensure that each child gets as much nutrition and care as necessary to develop into their best versions, we are so obligated to entertain and explore the possibilities of future enhancements in the realm of genetic modification.

The fear is not that science will advance, for science is always doing so, but that there will be advancement of science over that of humanity. And it is our humanity that we must protect at all costs.

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**Fiber of Life** | Andy Trang

**Draped and Scrubbed** | *Eitan Novogrodsky*

Dr. Elena Stark is director of everything we do in histopathology and anatomy. Though she is short in stature, she has a sharp tongue and a sharper wit. Her accent makes her command of medical knowledge all the more intimidating.

Yesterday she led a small hoard of scrub-clad, first-year medical students into day one of anatomy. I don't know how anatomy is done elsewhere, but here at UCLA it is sober and purposeful. And Dr. Stark insists that we maintain this decorum as we shuffle through the rows of gracious donors to begin our first order of business: examining the skin and taking samples for lab analysis.

As I look around the room - I notice the great wave of equalization that overtakes the space. Everyone here — alive and departed — has shed their distinctive clothing in exchange for scrubs or drapes. Donors and students greet one another with a single, common purpose: to humbly and diligently learn as much as possible about the miracle of life and the inevitable processes of illness and death.

Here in this space, we are all the same. We join forces with those selfless people who gave their bodies to science. We are tireless knowledge seekers - celebrators of life. We are also submissive supplicants to the unknowable - wary and respectful of death.

My mind wanders to a scene revered in the Jewish tradition: the one day a year that the High Priest of the ancient Jewish people would enter the Holy of Holies. Before he entered the chamber, he stripped naked, cleansed, and slipped on plain, white clothing. Perhaps he felt this same responsibility and humility when he donned his white vestments and prayed for life — and for purified, holy death.

Perhaps he too felt the weight of our common human struggles as he checked his clothes at the door.





It's funny how much more it stings  
to speak about current troubles  
than about those of the past.  
A simple yes, I had brain surgery and it's all done,  
glides off the tongue so much easier, so much smoother  
from hours of rehearsal than:  
it's back and it's tripled in size,  
A phrase so foreign even you have yet to accept it.

It's true what they say.  
Patients never hear anything after the word,  
Tumor.  
Time seems to suspend itself in that moment  
as if in disbelief;  
as if the world has folded upon itself,  
with you (the patient) nestled in its warm embrace;  
as if to protect you (the naïve 13-year-old child)  
from what lurks outside its walls.  
Hide in this blissful enclave,  
where the words can't reach you,  
where you don't have to understand,  
where you'll be ok.

Those same words reverberate, jarring notes,  
falling on deaf ears.  
You'll be ok.  
You'll be ok, they said,  
as they sedate you for a three hour MRI scan.  
You'll be ok, they said,  
as they examine the growing mass on the screen.  
You'll be ok, your mother cries,  
face swollen from restless nights,  
scurrying beside your gurney  
as they shuttle you into the OR for brain surgery.  
I'll be ok. And for a while I was.

I remember waking up,  
Dazed, weary, incomprehensibly thirsty.  
I remember the thunderous ache on the side of my head,  
Burning like branding iron.  
They had stapled my head together.

I remember fragments:  
My sister visiting, only to leave the ICU  
Minutes later, distraught at what remnants  
Of her big brother lay in front of her.  
She's too sensitive I choked out to the nurse.

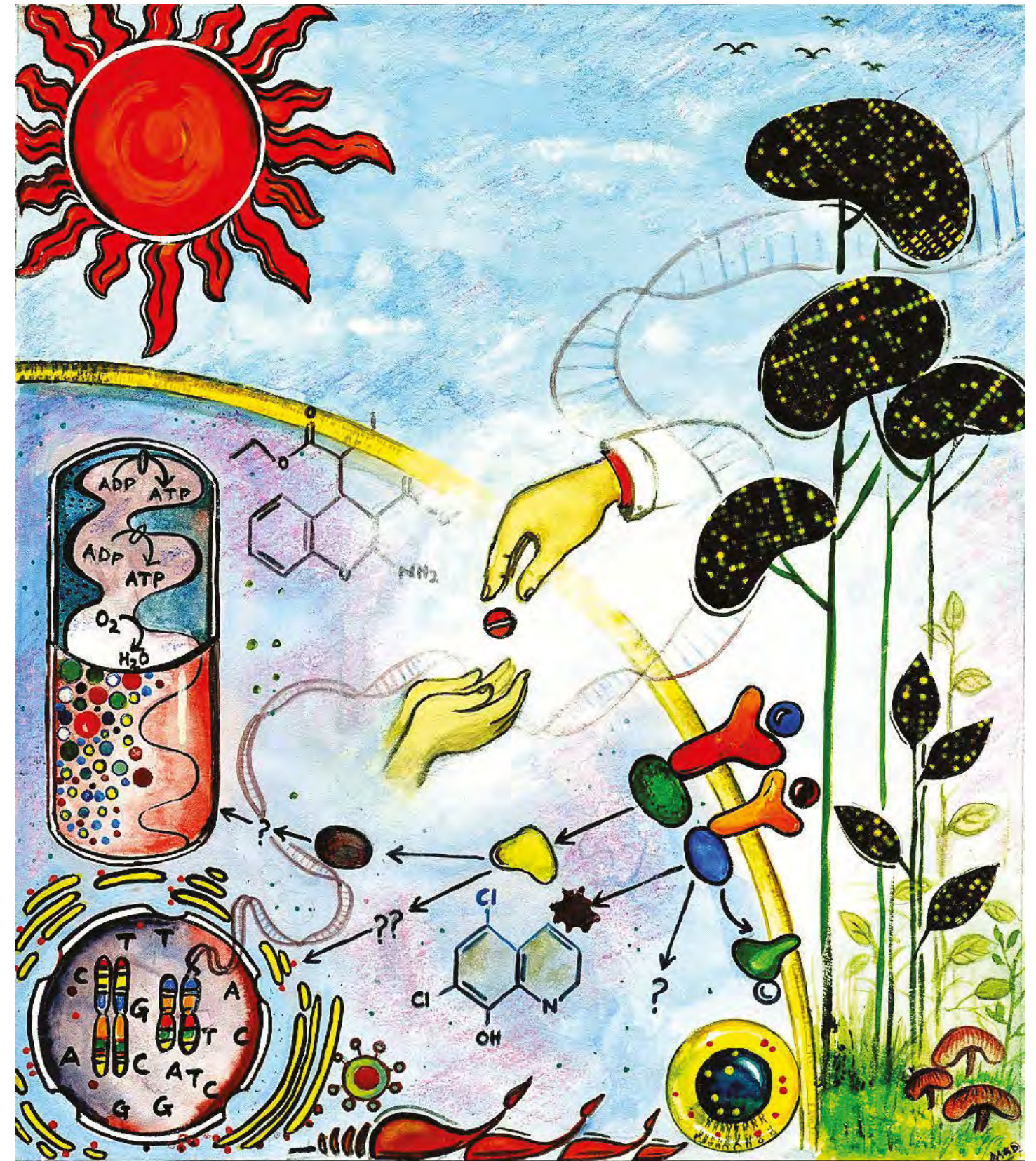
I could hear my mother,  
her heart crooning an erratic lullaby,  
haggard from lack of sleep  
hands trembling  
as she gingerly fed me ice chips.  
Please, go home mommy.  
Please, get some rest.  
I'll be ok.

Months passed.  
I could see  
My parents' relief as I recovered.  
Recollecting shards of myself,  
Piecing together the fragments  
Of all I had forgotten.  
Relearning how to write—  
How to walk, sing, smile, laugh—  
How to be me again.

And yet,  
All good things come to an end.  
The same story. The same characters.  
Round 2. Eight years later.  
You hear it again, already so numb that you don't process.  
You'll be ok. You've done it before;  
You'll do it again.

What if I don't want to do it again?  
What if I don't want to be brave again?  
What if I don't want to understand the mechanism  
Of this new experimental drug  
with a sample size so incredibly fucking small  
That I can count it all on one finger?  
What if, just maybe, I can't go through it all again?

I just want to be me again.  
Normal.  
Without the pain.  
Without the fear.  
The loneliness.  
The tumors.  
Please doc,  
I just want to be me again.



Elixir | Manash Paul





**The Horizon** | Suman Dutta

## **Under His Lights** | *Eviola Nakhla*



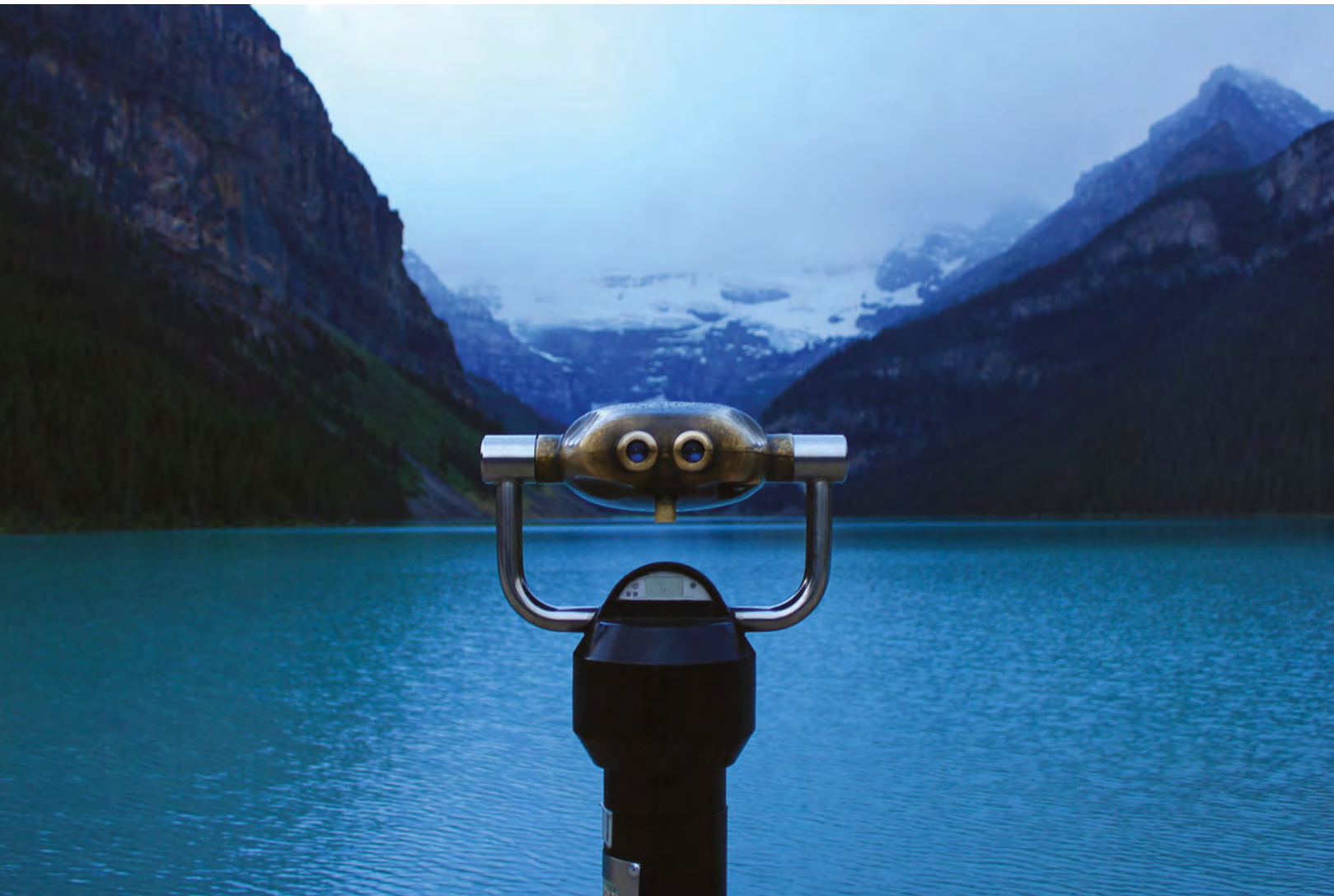
A thin string of Christmas lights hangs above the bed  
Creating a dull halo of light that encircles them  
Love is never spoken, but it hangs in the room, thick as heat  
He envelops her with his arms, pulling her close  
She moves her legs in between his and lets his body surround her  
He nuzzles his face into the back of her neck  
The warm breath dances there, heating her skin

She can feel this time is fleeting,  
Like the quiet, wet kisses he now places on her lips  
With each draw of breath, he takes another part of her soul  
She can feel her essence ebbing out with the ocean's pull  
Yet she gives to him freely, runs her tongue on his bottom lip  
She tells him how her parents are getting older, of her fear  
He talks of his career, the many paths he could take  
She wonders if one of those paths includes her

Is this real, like the leaves turning red and falling every autumn?  
Will he be there to kiss her hand, as he is doing now  
As inevitably as the snow kisses the earth every winter?  
He claims to be incapable of love, to be the one who burns  
Yet all she sees is the layer of ash surrounding his own heart  
Residue from the fire that was lit by another  
Proof that someone else had claimed his heart before her,  
Still holding a dark possession of it even now, after all this time

How can he not feel her pulse quicken as he bites her ear?  
The stillness and the chaos that his presence around her creates?  
She lets out a soft sigh, grabbing his face in her hands  
Memorizing his features as if seeing him for the last time  
The three freckles under his jaw, the stubble on his cheek  
The feel of his hair in her hands, the ink on his chest  
The rumble of his voice, the warm roundness of his shoulder  
As she lays her head upon it, humming the song of her heart  
Hoping he sings along with her, but knowing that he won't.





**Through the Looking Glass** | *Stephan Chiu*



**Solfar the Sun Voyager** | *Jonathan Warren*



## Biographies

**Benjamin Amendolara, MS3** - Benjamin Amendolara is an MD-PhD student in the first year of his PhD who aspires to be a neuropsychiatrist. He considers fiction as a means to challenge one's morals.

**Serapio Baca, Assistant Researcher** - Serapio M. Baca is an Assistant Researcher in Neurology and performs optical imaging and electrophysiological studies of the brain.

**Katherine Bailey, MS1** - I am a first year medical student born and raised in Los Angeles County. I have an interest in exploring areas less traveled and sharing these experiences through photography, drawing, and painting.

**Eric Chang, Resident** - Eric Chang is a medical resident

in the UCLA Department of Radiation Oncology. He grew up in Los Gatos, CA.

**Shaharoh Chism, AAIII** - When Shaharoh Chism is not working for UCLA Cardiology, she enjoys writing lyrics, poetry, creating and performing music.

**Stephan Chiu, MS4** - Stephan Chiu is a 4th year DGSOM student and a former editor of The Beat. His interests include traveling, photography, music, beer, and food.

**Satiro De Oliveira, Assistant Professor in Residence** - I have been a member of the Department of Pediatrics for six years, in the Division of Hematology/Oncology. My artistic expressions are inspired by the challenges I see every day.

**Mary Rose Deraco, Nurse Admin** - My new series of paintings, "Patterns in Bloom," began after a trip to Vienna, a city I had longed to visit for many years. I was moved by the Art Nouveau/Austrian Secessionist movement. This style of painting resonated with me and inspired my new body of work through its decorative design language: floral motifs, curved lines, and patterns. My intention was to tell a beautiful story of growth and transformation through stylistic interpretations that connect the simplistic elements of nature, pattern, design, and color.

**Huan Dong, Drew/UCLA Medical Student** - Huan is a Drew/DGSOM student and currently a NIH-Fogarty Global Health Fellow at Hanoi Medical University in Vietnam. He loves nature and food. He can only take candid photos or photos of scenery because he gets nervous when someone looks directly at the camera lens.

**Suman Dutta, Postdoc** - Postdoctoral Fellow @ Neurology Department, UCLA. Electronics Hobbyist. Photography Enthusiast. Proud Father of a little Princess.

**Mario Eason, Administrative Assistant II** - 7 year veteran of UCLA Health Brentwood with a passion for poetry. Los Angeles native, doing what I do!

**Sally Elliott, Medical Student** - Sally is a MD/MPH student in the PRIME program at UCLA. She loves the forest, the ocean and the LRC.

**Zhuang Fang, Clinical Professor** - Zhuang T. Fang, M.D., MSPH Clinical professor, Department of Anesthesiology Nature photographer.

**Nelli Ghazaryan, BI Programmer Analyst** - Nelli is a Business Intelligence Programmer and Analyst working at



the Office of Health Informatics and Analytics. She recently graduated with a Master's in Public Health from George Washington University. She is a lover of art, science, and dogs.

**Christina Harview, MS3** - Self-proclaimed scientartist, Christina is inspired by the beauty and rawness of humanity and nature in its purest forms. She has been a contributor to the BEAT since 2012.

**Matthew Hill, AAll** - My name is Matthew Hill, I'm a young ambitious writer working for UCLA DOM.

**Jeffrey Hsu, Cardiology Fellow** - I am an alumnus of the David Geffen School of Medicine (Class of 2011), and am currently in my third year of Cardiology fellowship. During my Internal Medicine internship at UCSF, I was deeply saddened by my first experience telling a patient of mine that he had cancer. This poem is my reflection on my encounters with him in clinic over the course of my residency.

**T. Warner Hudson, Medical Director Occupational and Employee Health UCLA Health System & Campus** - Avid outdoor photographer since childhood drawn to adventure and challenge

**Bryan Huebner, MSI** - My name is Bryan Huebner and I'm originally from a small town in northern California and went to college near Chicago. I've always loved being outside taking photos but only recently found my passion for landscape photography.

**Walter Jong, Physical Therapist** - I picked up photography to unwind from the busy week. My weekends are often spent trying to capture two of my greatest loves: being from Los Angeles and getting outside.

**Ester Jun, Pediatric Resident** - Esther is a newly minted Pediatric Intern at UCLA here from very far away...as in Orange County. She attended Williams College, majoring in art history and biology and enjoys melding her love for medicine with drawing.

**Sataree Khuansuwan, Postdoctoral Employee** - Postdoctoral researcher in Neurology department. Photography is my creative outlet.

**Ka Man Law, Assistant Project Scientist** - I came to UCLA a few years ago and rediscovered the joy of writing.

**Priscilla Lee, Nurse Practitioner** - I am a nurse practitioner in the Division of Vascular Surgery.

**Sofia Liou, MS3** - Hi! I am a third year medical student at UCLA who, just a few months ago, was inspired by my patients in Child Psychiatry to practice mindfulness through art. It was through my interactions with them that these drawings first blossomed. I have been sketching ever since!

**Thomas Luong, MS2** - Thomas Luong is a second year medical student who enjoys exploring humanity through his hobbies which include: archery, astronomy, and photography.

**Issa Lutfi, Administrative Assistant III** - This past spring, I graduated with my Bachelor's in English, emphasizing in Creative Writing. Originally, I was a biology major en route to medical school. After numerous hours trying to combat my lack of mathematical comprehension (which started to show up in all my science classes), I decided to reevaluate my career choice and thought to myself, what do I love? I have always had a passion for television and the creative humor and wit the writers bring into the shows. Being that most television shows are based on old literature stories, I figured, I should know the histories in order to write the new and greatest, and behold, I fell (in love) into English. Working at the DGSOM provides me the opportunity to utilize both my medical and English background and will hopefully create for an exciting narrative one day. With a lit. journal like UCLA BEAT, I know I am not the only one traveling on this road.

**Matthew Plaia, Staff Research Associate** - Matthew Plaia is a recent graduate from UCLA with a BA in English and a minor in Public Affairs. He previously attended the California Institute of the Arts for Character Animation and continues to work as a contemporary, mixed media artist in Los Angeles. His work seeks to engage viewers through various collages rooted in impressionism, each comprised of alternate mediums from digital to raw formats.

**Ishan Mehta, Fellow Physician** - I'm currently a second year Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine Fellow. I consider myself a die-hard Kentucky Wildcat basketball fan and strongly believe that I bleed blue!

**Eric Miller, Urology Resident** - Eric Miller is a senior resident in training with the department of Urology at UCLA and an immensely proud alumnus of the David Geffen School of Medicine. He still believes there is nothing more satisfying, rewarding, or fulfilling than being a surgeon-physician. He is an avid outdoor enthusiast and enjoys hiking, biking, climbing, and skiing. Following residency, he plans to pursue a career in academic medicine with a focus on Genitourinary Oncology and Renal Transplantation.

**Michelle Miller, MSI** - I played basketball at Princeton before returning home to LA for medical school this year. I have had a life long passion for art and enjoy exploring a variety of media.

**Trevor Mooney, MS3** - Trevor Mooney is a third year medical student at DGSOM. He was raised in an Irish-Catholic in a house nestled in the rolling emerald foothills of Northern California. In this crucible, his love for tall tales was born.

**Martin Mwangi, MS3** - I am a 3rd year medical student interested in literature with a particular interest in medical narrative submitting a work in collaboration with Diboro Kanabolo (Pritzker School of Medicine MS2).

**Eviola Nakhla, MSI** - Eviola Nakhla was born and raised in Southern California. She was a typical Biology major before starting Medical School but also minored in Creative Writing to further her appreciation for the arts. When not running to PBL, podcasting lectures, or poring over anatomy, she likes being outdoors, venturing to new food and coffee spots, exploring art galleries, and creating art with makeup.

**Jacqueline Ngo, MS2** - Jackie is a medical student who aspires to become a neurologist. She holds an M.S. in Narrative Medicine from Columbia University.

**Billy Nguyen, MSI** - Billy Nguyen is currently a first year medical student interested in pursuing a career in pediatric neurosurgery. When not getting boba and pretending to study, he is found in the confines of biomed library distracting others from studying. Billy enjoys glow in the dark paintings, well-done paninis and extended vacations abroad.

**Eitan Novogrodsky, MS4** - Eitan Novogrodsky is a fourth-year medical student at DGSOM. This piece was included in the 2014 Ceremony of Thanks as a tribute to the individuals and families who participated in the UCLA Donated Body Program.

**Neil Parker, Professor** - When Dr. Parker is not administering, teaching, or seeing patients, he likes to see the world through the lens of his Nikon. Landscapes, nature, and underwater scenes most catch his eye. The old master prefers camera to print without photoshop.

**Manash Paul, Project Scientist** - I am a Project Scientist and work on lung stem cell and lung cancer working with Prof. Steven Dubinett. I love to express my thought through my paintings.

**Joe Pierre, Health Sciences Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences** - Joe Pierre, M.D. is a psychiatrist by day and samurai by

night. His three haikus were inspired by reading Japanese Death Poems.

**Jessica Poon, MSI** - Jessica Poon graduated from UC Berkeley in 2014. She conducted molecular biology research at Brown University and earned a certificate in natural science illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design before joining the DGSOM Class of 2020.

**Jeannie Radoc, MS2** - Jeannie Radoc is a second year medical student at the David Geffen School of Medicine.

**Jennifer Ritch, Assistant to The Chief of General Surgery** - Jennifer Ritch is growing tired, but she can see the finish line, and beyond it, another starting line. And that is usually enough to get her up in the morning. She pretends well most of the time. She'll keep getting better at pretending, until someday, everyone will believe, and then she will be able to rest. But for the time being, she'll get up, and do things, and eat and walk and talk and think and hopefully no one will see that in the background, the space just behind her eyes, she is counting, and humming, and not paying attention at all.

**Rose Shan, MS2** - Rose is a medical student with a lifelong interest in art. She recently picked up watercolor for its convenience, and has since fallen in love with the medium.

**Justin Sharim, Medical Student** - Justin is a medical student at the David Geffen School of Medicine.

**Stevie Shield, Fund Manager** - Stevie Shield is an emcee/ songwriter, poet, short story author, and filmmaker. His tenure at UCLA has been as a research administrator for the Department of Medicine.

**Victor Sigalov, Radiology Senior Staff Research Associate** - I work in the Department of Radiology. In addition to photography, I like traveling, teaching, and reading.

**Lisa Stern, MD, Medical Staff** - Lisa Stern, former peds Heme-Onc fellow at UCLA, practices general pediatrics in Santa Monica where she teaches her young patients to embrace common-sense treatments of childhood ailments.

**Paula Stoessel, Professor of Psychiatry** - Paula Stoessel has recently retired as Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the UCLA Mental Health Service for Physicians in Training. She has a private psychotherapy practice and enjoys writing poetry, reading, and walking in beautiful places.

**Victoria Sun, MS2** - Victoria is an MSTP student in her 2nd year of medical school. She loves learning and sharing stories through art.



**Andy Trang, Researcher** - Andy Trang is a researcher in the Department of Neurosurgery at UCLA. He is passionate about studying many elements and styles of art including portraiture, architecture, technical illustrations, and abstract surrealism. His pieces are predominately in the medium of pen and ink where he practices the technique known as cross-hatching to render a multitude of textures, tones, and lighting effects through the precise placement of a myriad of lines.

**Kenny Vongbunoyong, Staff Research Associate** - As a pre-med who recently graduated from UCLA, I have spent my gap-year investigating cutting-edge research at the Larry Hillblom Islet Center in hopes of finding novel therapies for treating type 2 diabetes mellitus. I will never forget all that I have learned from my new family at Hillblom. With my research experience, I have come to appreciate the vibrant mitochondrial networks which are essential for multiple cellular processes including ATP production, apoptosis, and even glucose-induced insulin secretion in Beta cells.

**Jonathan Warren, MSI** - Jonathan Warren discovered his love for photography on a backpacking trip through Europe when he first picked up a DSLR camera. Since then, he has continued develop his love for photography and in his free

time, when available, constantly looks for new areas to photograph. He has just started his medical career at DGSOM and is currently pursuing a specialty in Emergency Medicine.

**Arlistel Williams, AAll** - I hail from the majestic city of Los Angeles. I'm embarked on an existential quest for the platinum lining to these clouds hanging above. I'm yearning for the beautiful.

**Angela Wong, Asst. Project Scientist** - Angela works in the Department of Neurobiology. She discovered street photography by accident. She prefers photographing sky-lines at night and performance artists.

**Dorothy Yim, Neurosurgery Medical Scribe** - Dorothy is a scribe in the Neurosurgery Department and graduated from UCLA '16 with a degree in Physiological Sciences. Even though she has been a writer her whole life, passion doesn't come close to describing how much she loves writing. She is currently working on a fictional novel as well as a collection of poetry which she hopes to publish one day.



**Corona Radiata | Huan Dong**



**Underwater Exploration, Belize | Ishan Mehta**



A night photograph of a natural rock archway framing the Milky Way galaxy. The archway is made of dark, textured rock and is illuminated from below, casting a warm glow. The Milky Way is visible as a bright, star-filled band of light stretching across the sky, framed by the arch. The sky is dark and filled with numerous stars. The overall scene is a striking natural wonder.

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