

Westwind Journal of the Arts



Spring 2019
Winter 2020
Spring 2020

Westwind Journal of the Arts

The Lost Journals

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Spring 2019
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A Letter from the Managing Editors

A lot of things have been lost in the shuffle of the past couple of years, including our journals from Spring 2019, Winter 2020, and Spring 2020.

Because *Westwind* is completely operated and produced by undergraduate students, at least half of our executive board graduates each year. This means that, sometimes, as our graduating editors prepare to leave the UCLA bubble and run screaming into adult life, they leave some loose ends for the incoming executive board to tie up. When the tornado of one's final quarter in college is accompanied by a pandemic, there might be a few more loose ends (and understandably so). We hope that's an acceptable excuse for the 2020 journals, but, to be honest, we're not sure what happened in Spring 2019. We were still in high school.

That being said, we extend our sincerest apologies to all the contributors to these journals who have had to wait to see their work featured in *Westwind*. Thank you for allowing us to publish your work, albeit belatedly, and we hope this journal is worth the wait. We would also like to thank the staff and executive boards from 2019-2020 for selecting and editing the pieces included in this special issue, the artists and designers who stepped up to create these pages, and our faculty advisor Reed Wilson for supporting *Westwind* each year.

Strap in for a trip to the past and enjoy these "Lost Journals"!

Best,

Jade Lacy and Katherine King
Managing Editors 2021-22
Westwind Journal of the Arts



Caylin Ellowitz
Collage No. 3 (cover image)
 Magazine collage on poster board

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Poetry

Jim Reeder

Steed of the Gods

The best way to travel
Through the high desert
Is no Silverado or
4x4 pickup
With Warn winch and lift kit

But a big Continental
Pride of the 80's
Sharp edges and leather
Bench seats and sunroof,
Wire wheels and woodgrain.

The Mojave backroads
Follow the landscape
Rising and falling like
Pistons and crankshafts
Driving us forward,
Deep in the soul of
The steed of the gods.

As we break eighty and
Push towards 100,
Cresting a rise (and passing a camper),
The Lincoln breaks free
Of gravitational force and
Slips earthly shackles.
She takes to the air
Like a cold steel Valkyrie
Goddess of Dearborn
Henry's great lady.

Tiny white fences, towering inches
Outline the blacktop
Placed there by volunteers
Eager to safeguard the brown desert tortoise
From the great flying Lincoln.

Off in the distance, the solar reflector
Burns deep in the retina
Causing death by the thousands
Too many eagles, blackened and charred
Rest in the lakebed.

I lightly touch down
And survey my kingdom
Noting crosses and flowers
Placed by the roadside
Honoring gods of the past
Not so lucky in landing.

I pause in my journey
And rest on the mountain.
The Morningstar mine,
Looking down on the heat of the
Ivanpah Valley.

The great Continental
Gleams in the sunlight,
Admired by the cowboys
And slot machine addicts and
Kings of the truck stop,
Keeper of secrets
Savior of creatures
Lavished in chrome
And acres of leather.

She looks to the sky
Searching for sisters
Who soar in the distance.

John Struloeff

The Apartment Where God Died

When God died, the men in our building carried him
From his apartment, careful to cover his face
So we wouldn't cry at the sight of his skin
Or ask with shivering fear, "How could he?"

They buried him in a forest and returned to watch television
Alone in their recliners. After dinner when we children
Curled against their sides and whispered, "What killed him?"
They stood, angry, and ordered everyone to bed.

For hours we lay breathing, listening to the distant rumble of trucks,
Straining to make out voices from the apartment where God had lived.
And then the televisions went dead. Footsteps echoed in the halls.
Without opening the door, sleep came to kiss our cold cheeks.

Quick Draw

the echo of gunshots cracked
from the hill above us

a high school summer, four of us
on ten speeds

we pushed our bikes up the fire road
through a rim of maples

to the old gravel pit, a wall of cascaded
rock towering to the east

a younger friend of ours, thirteen years old, stood
feet spread, right hand ready

sudden movement and boom, a cloud of smoke
drifted away

then the stance, the ready hand –
he fired

boom, but this time smoke plumed
around his leg

we laughed at the comedy
until he crouched in pain

we ran toward him, and he limped toward us,
his step squishing

already the ankle of his jean leg
was black with blood

he held the enormous revolver
limply in his hand

lifted his leg an inch, then

pressed his foot down
bright blood erupted from his shoe
like a spring punctured in a hillside

I missed the bone, he said,
smiling at the luck of it

AJ Urquidi
the wolf in his hurry
had swallowed her alive

i.

somewhere across the hellscape
a president is waking up

here by the launch ramps
hear a man snoring in his duplex

bottlebrush dangles down tangled
rescue ropes no one's eager to grab

things haven't seemed to change
though they have such digital imprints

emblazoned on blockchains the slap
drag of limp banners on rosacea

poles it's that time of the century
when raccoons chase smokers

back into their den when the kingfisher
chokes on a minnow embalmed

all year with microplastics where
does outrage take refuge in storms

of division you cut your losses
shelter in place among whimpering chimes

ii.

you loosen your belt and let
 bad happen a city of insects

 paralyze in defeat under lowering
 shoe though it's taking years to slide

 down you start to cough like old
 uncles who disintegrate

 the aged and infirm grew so
 bold putting off churning out

 wills so new brood would have to
 how brazenly you could sit back

 when sitting back you know means
 saving no one your belt is already

loose your heart policed by the fortunatos
 the wolf and the pummel-loving

 waves have backed off but won't return
 shuckers in the sand with headlamps

 seek a boon anything to ease the diluted
 onslaught the sand drier they stomp

peter and his desperate creatures never
 guessing you'd buried yourself beneath

iii.

 that the warnings were ignored
 was clear once rookies puked

 orbs of clot three bleached
 ribs stab up through asphalt

tax-exempt reminders sudden
 murky caesura patrols the bay

 where the shores rush forth
 to chase long-departed wave

 you must take off your shoes
 before facing the firing squad

it was a day cold enough to icicle
 your blood dribble the wardens

 tossed the national spirit from one
 maw to the next tyrannosaurs

 splitting a white man with hubris
 engine slowly strangles till out wink

lanterns and boots slink sideways
 the mussel puller lights the fuse

 igniting a cigarette gets to squatting
 between torn rocks you close

 a cardboard box around rank
 air of the present moment for later

when we study smothering
 climates of where all went wrong

prince hypothetical

AJ Urquidi

i.

like earth i have come to destroy
my parasites with a blanket
unfurled to the gaping chasm
tongues around the rim
churning klaxons huh

ii.

that's the finale so this overture
the fulcrum there was piss
on my boot from a dog called
yonder for months i could
not gargle more dribbled
quik-dry jelly fire station
macaw kept reminding me how
i fucked up my life

iii.

when i realized the extent to which
mirror tropes angered me
i looked up from the film to see
my tv face reflected in glare

i breach contract like silverless
miner in carson city not
ashamed to expose muscle explore
tuning fork madonna and more

iv.

i can't decide which face i like
best i'll just bend over and wait
for a nuclear option the creek
trickling through the den can't
get my rocks off i'm living
too freely 'neath a bitchy dictator

v.

i chose lewd over terse thus
doomed to be cramped in a pamphlet
i learned to climb apples and pears
in another's glasses before i learned
to be a template in whining eating
girls and sloths lest plague
gouge me and the seas my boat

Jade Love

*We were supposed to
drown here*

in this pool
Time stretches and coils
over blow up alligators
and scalding concrete
that burns backsides

Chlorine clings
to brown, ashy skin,
smells like summer
and burns our eyes

The air simmers
and our skin melts
through the cracks
in the concrete

I plunge into the cool water
The floor leaves my feet
I watch you leave
now I'm just floating
Who will revive me?

Is anyone out there?

The Things We Know

4400 block of Crenshaw in Los Angeles
The border of Hyde Park
1973 white Buick
3 passengers, 1 dead
4 bullets in the chest
trying to catch his breath from
the thick, frozen air
bullets sliced through
minutes after midnight when
blood stained the leather
witnesses can't remember if
his murder was a set up
but we know
his murder was a set up
witnesses can't remember if
blood stained the leather
minutes after midnight when
bullets sliced through
the thick, frozen air
trying to catch his breath from
4 bullets in the chest
3 passengers, 1 dead
1973 white Buick
the border of Hyde Park
4400 block of Crenshaw in Los Angeles

A Ritual

Jade Love

the steam from the comb
burns my ears
and the smell of hot metal and grease
swing into my nostrils
I wince and pull forward
Big Mama presses and greases
and presses and greases
my shoulders shrug
and my neck stiffens in resistance
she clenches my hair and pulls
back on my roots
the teeth of the comb pop
through my kinks
first at the tips,
then back.
my chin rests on my chest
as she pinches the corners of my scalp
while her puckered lips
blow cool air
to protect me from pain

Enrique Martinez

like your narcissus

Once, in a reverie,
I fell into a borehole,
and forged a pact
with the emptiness
of it. And far away
I fell, from the light
of my elation.

Tasha Fierce

there was a time they called us dragons

there was a time they called us dragons, our breath hot and searing against tender flesh, our destructive power rivaled only by their own. in us they planted their worst nightmares: visions of a world engulfed, a Childless future, exploitation ground to a halt by the wrench of us caught in their works. when we were dragons our iridescent scales shimmered like rainbows in the sunlight and we lived together in the skies, without having to search for each other in park restrooms or on abandoned piers, without our ancestors having had to cross borders or die to colonizers or traverse oceans chained in the belly of ships heavy with dark bodies. we were more than the harbingers of their civilization's demise, the mythic embodiment of their anxious death drive. we were families sewn from remnants, brittle but unbroken, scarred and surviving. we were the spark that ignited the flames of renewal, the tolling bell for the tyranny of the true. we were mythical, imaginary. not here, but there. not now, but then.

in this time they call us unfit, unreal, unworthy of life and liberty, unwilling to participate in the pursuit of Happiness. we, who love unabashedly, whose joy is unfettered by propriety, unregulated by chronology. we, who despite the binding of time to our flesh still shimmer with the brilliance of a rainbow, our scales faintly visible underneath the myriad of forms we can take: all human, all magnificent. we are so much more than capitalist-sponsored parades down gentrified roads paved on cis-white supremacy and pocked with ableism. we are the singular potentiality of a future yet unrealized, the roiling plasma current of a universe's impending birth. they call us out of our names because they fear what we once were, what we will be, what we represent. we are the end of Happiness and the beginning of bliss.

in another time they will call us .

this name is not pronounceable by any language spoken today, twisted as these tongues are by the master's tools, the colonizer's sludge coating each molecule of the air we breathe. we are too heavy, now, too weighted by oppression, to visualize exactly what we will become. just know that when it is time, our name will flow from your lips as easy as a lingering kiss on a sun-

soaked beach, as light as a goodbye kiss after a first encounter, as unnoticeable as flyaway hair in your mouth when you're making out under the stars. the we of the future is the We, the spectrum of humanity: black and brown and indigenous and desi and white, queer and straight and cis and trans and men and women and femme and butch and every gender in the rainbow of Us. those of us who are cloaked in Whiteness shed that false skin with its stink of supremacy and become new, in connection with our ancestors, with reparations in hand for those we harmed, ready to be ecstatically merged into We. once we make ourselves whole, the systems that contain us into a form less bombastic, less revolutionary, less fabulous, crumble and fall at our feet. as if by magic, we are safe at last.

and what do we do? we throw a party atop the ruins, a javelin through the affective force field of the present, a slingshot from the past into the future. today, tomorrow, yesterday, we are sweaty under the lights, bodies of all shapes and sizes moving as one, breath heaving with every beat, and can you hear one of our voices shouting from a lifetime ago the revolution is here even though it turned out it wasn't there yet? it's here, now. this is the revolution, a time and place we can't even articulate, can barely imagine, but are grasping for, struggling towards each day together when we dream of a world where liberation is more than a marketing tool, where our lives and loves are exalted, where capitalism and imperialism and cisheteropatriarchy and ableist colonialist white supremacy no longer threaten the survival of not just queers and trans folks but all humanity. this is the revolution, a wish uttered five decades in the past and manifested numberless years in the future.

i can't wait to see you
then.



Zachary Diaz
Empire State Building From Below
Digital Photograph

Fiction

Max Yu

47 Days

It's been 47 days since I last smoked pot and I can't tell if that's worrying or not. Not that it's been almost two months, but the fact that I know it's been 47 days. The casual drug user—meaning the user everyone starts out as—doesn't keep track. The intense drug user is meticulous. Not a fault or trait of personality, but rather having used for so long and so consistently, rituals begin to form, such as forgoing the cognac glass for straight out the bottle, or soaking the bong bowl in 91% isopropyl alcohol every three days otherwise the gunk builds up and we all know that a gunked up bowl does terrible things to your health.

“Really? I think it makes packing bowls a lot easier.” That's Charlie. I stole three grams of medium-grade indica off him while he was sleeping off twelve shots of vodka.

“WHERE THE FUCK IS MY MONEY??” That's Charlie again. That was when I stole eighty dollars from his wallet that he left on the kitchen counter while we were all rolling on molly.

There was no reason why I did that. If you were preparing to sympathize with the narrator, well you should've known from the beginning. Only losers state how long they've been sober. It's a dumb, dumb world. Cruel is never the word to describe it. Whatever's been done to you, it's a case of complex structural stupidity. That's why you need to watch out for people like me.

MDMA is like the greeter at the front of a Walmart who gets paid to smile at you so you won't steal. But even three re-doses of MDMA won't make me an angel. That night Aaron scored several grams of molly crystals—“the purest shit”—but I didn't care. At that time I would've shoved bath salts up my nose. My psychoactive urges weren't well hidden. My druggie group of four already suspected I only hung out with them for drugs. That was a completely false suspicion. Yes, I seemed to never fail in answering my phone if a text had any word with smoke, drink, or snort in it, but I hung out with them for the camaraderie of drugs.

Back then I was still too scared (and looking back, too smart) to buy my own stash. You see, once you buy your own stash, you become master of your domain. That is to say, self-control goes out the window.

So I stuck with the ragtag group of dumb teenagers masquerading as adult drug experts. Aaron convinced us that having sex on MDMA was forbidden.

“If you have sex on molly you’ll cum so hard that sober sex will never feel good again.”

There were four of us. Me, Aaron, Charlie, and Helen. Before we crunched the crystals, no one expected any fucking that night. Aaron just liked to spout off his drug knowledge for the pleasure of having people hear at least 60% of his words. As we later learned, Charlie secretly liked Helen and Helen tolerated Charlie. But of course, molly brings out the best in us. Charlie incessantly professed his love for Helen, Helen accepted all his love, Aaron fucked a rug, and I stole eighty dollars from Charlie’s wallet while he was trying to get his dick hard.

After our second re-dose and Charlie’s fifth monologue on how beautiful Helen was, she went to her room and left the door open. She needed a hair tie. Charlie thought this was an invitation for sex. Helen tied her hair and then saw Charlie fumbling with his belt. She thought he was adjusting his pants. Then Aaron screamed from the living room, “I’m cumming on the rug!” Charlie got hard. I went over to the living room and reminded Aaron of the no-sex-on-molly rule. “Dude it’s a rug. It’s not sex you dumbfuck.” Aaron was right. After all, he was clothed. How could I argue?

That was when I sauntered over to the kitchen counter and found Charlie’s wallet. There is something inconceivably erotic about a lone wallet. What wonders await? All the sexy bits are there: the warm brown leather, its plump veracity. How could I not at least open it? Four 20s and three 5s. Now here’s where I fucked up. I should’ve just taken two of the 20s. Taking all of them just left the three 5s. It was too obvious. Too greedy. A kleptomaniac should have some class, respect. But back then I was nothing but the thrill.

Molly is the love drug. Did I love Charlie? Did I love my friends? No and no, molly doesn’t change that. Molly can only heighten. Charlie finally got his pants off and screamed several unintelligible words. Helen drooled and Aaron stopped rubbing his penis across the rug. He leaped up the stairs. NO SEX ON MOLLY! Aaron barged in to see Helen’s naked lower half and Charlie’s very flaccid penis. Charlie unleashed a dick hardening war cry of “I LOVE YOU HELEN!” as he tried to shove his half-chub into Helen.

Molly is indeed the love drug, but that’s not to be confused with a sex drug. Cocaine and crystal meth are good for rabbit fucking. Molly is only good for fostering love. Aaron threw Charlie and his limp french fry down the stairs to preserve his sexual livelihood. I went into the room and kissed Helen. I despised Helen. She said “Oh”, and I said, “I wanted to say that I love you too, but not as much as Charlie.” “That is true”, said Helen.

That’s when we heard Charlie shriek, “WHERE IS IT?? WHO TOOK MY MONEY! WHERE THE FUCK IS MY MONEY??”

What’s he yelling about? I don’t know. Helen hopped off the bed and we went downstairs to find a pantless Charlie fuming about the living room. He no longer saw love, only fear, something not even Helen could fix.

The wallet was still on the kitchen counter. While Helen tried to calm Charlie down, I slipped the money back into his wallet. Charlie never did have sex with Helen. Aaron might have gotten some semen on the rug, and the next morning Helen pretended to have no memory of the entire night—citing “a hallucinatory daze”.

Those days are long over. Good to get all the antics out of you while you’re underage, although my brain cells didn’t thank me too kindly. Ever since the cops busted me I’ve been sticking to weed. You know what to expect from weed. But that’s also its most addictive factor. You get what you get. Like with alcohol. Easily accessible. And once you make a routine of it, you start to do the same thing. That’s when you fall in line.

I take another swig from the bottle and think: is this what being an alcoholic means? I glance at the clock on the microwave. 9:59am. It wasn’t 10 yet. This is okay. Better than 10pm, then your liver would process all the alcohol in your sleep. I crossed the boundary. I’m the kind of person that once you let yourself drink half an hour within waking up, it’s hunting season for my brain to fuck itself up. Soon I’ll be aiming for another 47 days.

Sometimes I wish for those dumb, dumb days, to be a complete idiot and suffer innumerable consequences. Maybe one of these days I’ll snort a gram of molly and who knows, maybe I’ll cum on a Persian rug.

Edited by Frank Fiore

Jaime Sandoval

Baby Jesus

My abuelita placed a plate in front of me and ran back to the stove. From where I sat at the counter, I saw thin flumes of smoke rising from the edge of the corn tortillas that had caught fire. She grabbed the opposite end of the tortillas with her bare hands, flicked them once to put out the flame, then tossed them into the Styrofoam warmer.

“Oye, they’re not burned. They’re just toasted,” she said, placing the warmer in front of me. Abuelita prided herself in her cooking. She couldn’t have anyone thinking she burned the tortillas. She had cooked my favorite: scrambled eggs with tomato sauce. Of course, no meal could be served without orange rice and refried beans. I picked up my fork and had a small taste of the egg. It was light and slightly tangy.

“Está rico,” I said through a full mouth. Abuelita, who was standing by and waiting for her compliment, nodded. She knew her cooking was good—she just liked to hear it.

“Come con tortilla, Abel,” she said, nudging the warmer closer to me. The thin gold bands skittering down her arms and their familiar rattling reminded me of my childhood. Although she spent most of her day tending to the house, Abuelita always wore a colorful blouse, dress pants, and her gold bracelets. Their soft jingle was a constant when she cooked or washed clothes or simply fiddled with them while watching novelas.

I tore off a small piece of tortilla and used it to scoop egg and beans into my mouth, pleasing Abuelita. I could hardly stand to look at her because she looked so damn happy to see me and I hadn’t visited for two years.

My grandparents thought I would be able to visit Mexicali more often now that I lived a five-hour drive away in LA, but between school, work, and spending time with my boyfriend, it was hard to find the time. After Rob and I got serious, I started spending Christmas with him instead. Abuelita had likely told the family that I couldn’t make it due to work or school. The truth was Rob and I had just moved in together and I couldn’t bear to leave him in an empty apartment for the holidays. When I hinted to her about Rob coming down to Mexicali with me, she said she was getting a call on the other line and would call me back. I knew she wouldn’t return the call. Whenever I spoke to my grandparents about my boyfriend, they immediately changed the subject. They would talk about this aunt or that uncle or who was pregnant or who was ill. Anything to avoid talking about their grandson being gay.

After I finished eating, Abuelita took my plate and set about washing the morning’s dishes. I swiveled around on my barstool and took in the living room as if for the first time. I had arrived late last night and gone straight upstairs to the guest room, failing to notice that all the Christmas decorations were still up. The covers on the sofa and loveseat were green with red embroidered sleighs, and on the glass coffee table, a dancing snowman that my mother gave to me, and I gave to Abuelita. The old, wooden entertainment center by the front door that held a dozen framed pictures of the family had been invaded by porcelain Santas and an Elf on the Shelf that my grandparents probably didn’t know they were meant to hide. From November to early January, my grandparents’ living room was a clusterfuck of 99 Cents Store Christmas decorations, but the enormous tree in the corner was the main attraction. Its branches were robust and teeming with deep green needles. Among the hollow plastic orbs, I spotted the Charlie Brown ornament I had bought from Hallmark and sent to them as an apology for not coming to Christmas two years ago.

The nativity scene under the tree was partially concealed by the couch’s armrest, so I crouched in front of it to get a better look. I instantly recognized it as the gift my grandparents gave my family before we moved away. The white porcelain figurines had delicate golden accents and were huddled around a manger absent of its lipstick-sized baby Jesus. After my mother stopped celebrating Christmas, she returned the nativity set along with a pamphlet titled, “The Truth About Christmas.” Now, the nativity set was more of a reminder of those who were missing.

“What happened to Jesusito?” I asked, searching on my hands and knees under the tree skirt for the missing member of the party. As a kid, it had always been my job to place the Jesus figurine in his manger on Christmas Eve.

“I would like to know! One of your damn primos was probably playing with it and never put it back. It’ll turn up somehow. I’m sure it’s around here. I’ll find it,” she said. I was the oldest of six grandchildren, most of whom were still kids. I had broken my fair share of Abuelita’s porcelain figurines in my childhood. I gave up looking for baby Jesus and sat cross-legged with the tree behind me. Abuelita was next to the counter, drying her hands with a red and green kitchen towel. Her bracelets jangled as she looked down at me, and I felt like I was six again, sitting in front of a pile of porcelain shards, red-handed.

“You might find it shattered when you do,” I said.

“No, it’s your tía Lupe’s kids that break everything they touch, and they didn’t come this year. They spent the holidays with her in-laws in Puebla. They’re still there,” she said, picking at her nail polish with her hip against the counter. She sounded annoyed, but I knew that each absence from Christmas chipped away at her. “Your mother didn’t come either, of course.”

When I was a kid, the whole family came for Christmas, but little by little, people started to drop off. One uncle moved to Riverside, another

to San Diego. Then we moved to Bakersfield and only visited every other Christmas, until my parents decided to become Jehovah's Witnesses and not celebrate holidays anymore.

She had dealt with the empty nest well enough; it was the empty manger she was struggling to cope with. The more the family drifted apart, the harder she tried to bring us back together. I'd seen her guilt-trip every member of our family in this way, but my reason for not coming to Christmas wasn't a matter of circumstance, but one of principle.

"Have you talked to her lately?" I asked. My mother and I only spoke through Abuelita these days. After she completed her conversion, she said she could no longer overlook my "lifestyle" and stopped taking my calls.

"Less and less," she said. She looked at me through her drooping eyelids and, just for a moment, looked sadder than I'd ever seen her. "I hope you can come next Christmas. I'll make those corn tamales you like."

"Well, you know how to get me to come. And it's not tamales," I said, lifting my brow. She looked away and ran her hands through her wavy brown updo. I could see the tug of war going on inside her mind: she wanted to be a mother to me now that my mother had renounced her role, but she was uncomfortable with who I was with—who I was.

I got on my feet. Standing, I was a foot taller than Abuelita. Being the oldest grandson, I had always been her favorite, and like most kids, I preferred her to my mother. In fact, she was probably my favorite person when I was growing up. She'd take me on trips to the store and let me watch novelas with her that my mother wouldn't let me watch at home. It was strange remembering how close we used to be when things were so tense now.

"Are you still hungry? There's more egg left," she said, walking back into the kitchen.

"No. I'm going to lay down," I said and went back upstairs.

I only ever half-enjoyed my visits with Abuelito. He was only interested in hearing positive reports about my life, and I didn't have a whole lot of those. When I struggle with school, he tells me to try harder. When I mention my anxiety disorder, he tells me to relax. When I finally mustered up the courage to tell him I was on medication for depression, he told me to stop being so pessimistic.

That was the last time we spoke before my visit. Now, he sat at the head of the table in the dining room, eating a lightly seasoned chicken breast. When Abuelita walked back to the kitchen to fetch his drink, he grabbed the salt shaker and spread more salt on his food. When she came back, she made him shake off the excess salt. She never missed a thing.

"How's your heart?" I asked. Abuelito's high blood pressure must have gotten worse if Abuelita was policing him like this.

"What do you mean? It's great. Good as always," he said in his gruff, certain voice. Abuelita sat across from me and explained that the doctor had

ordered him to limit his fat, sugar, and sodium intake. He rolled his eyes and popped the last piece of unseasoned chicken into his mouth. As soon as he set his fork down, Abuelita picked up his plate and took it to the kitchen.

"These things happen to everyone eventually," I said, putting my hand on his. I saw his eyes zero in on my chipped red nail polish, and he frowned. He withdrew his hand and used it to reach across the table to grab the deck of cards next to the fruit bowl. He was an inch shy of grabbing it, but his big belly against the edge of the table prevented him from stretching any farther. I nudged the pack in his direction. Without asking, Abuelito shuffled and dealt a third of the deck to each of us.

"You haven't forgotten how to play Verbo, have you?" he said. There was an edge in his voice that made the question a challenge. As little as I wanted to compete in a pissing contest with Abuelito, I couldn't just leave the table—not if I wanted him to respect me as a grown man and not a boy. I hadn't played in years, but I wasn't about to show Abuelito that. I put my cards in order as I tried to recall the rules. In the States, the game was called Bullshit because it involved lying about the cards you were holding and having a good poker face. The player to the left of the dealer plays as many aces as he wants face-down in the discard pile, then the next player plays twos, the next threes, and so on until someone runs out of cards and wins. The caveat is that the player might not always have the card they're assigned to play, which is when you resort to bullshitting. Of course, if someone calls your bluff and they're right, then you have to take the whole draw pile. But if they're wrong, then they take it.

The game wasn't as fun with just three players. When there were several players it was a lot harder to figure out who was lying. I don't think my grandparents viewed this game as a family tradition, but it was. We sat around the table and lied to one another.

"How is school going, hijo?" Abuelito asked. My knee-jerk reaction was to say the truth. It was rough. My GPA was shot because I seldom went to class, choosing to lie in bed and stare at the ceiling instead. I knew that being honest would make me feel better temporarily, but when Abuelito replied with a one-size-fits-all aphorism, I would regret having opened up at all.

"Good. I graduate in June," I said. Abuelito nodded his head, satisfied. I placed a three and a four down. "Two fives."

"Are you going to church?" Abuelito asked. It baffled me how he expected me to return to Christianity when it was the root of my estranged relationship with my parents and grandparents.

"Here and there. Three eights," I say. One of them had to have two eights, and they'd have to call my bluff. I eyed the sizable stack that had formed between us. It was at least a quarter-inch thick and only getting taller every turn.

"You should try to go every Sunday, mijó. Two nines," Abuelita said. She placed her cards, which meant I'd gotten away with the lie. They had to know I was lying. I had made it obvious. They knew I was feeding them bullshit,

but they didn't want to challenge it. I'm normally a talkative person, but when I was around my grandparents, I felt like there was so little I could say. It was a constant state of tongue-biting that I was growing increasingly tired of. The responsibility of lying to keep the peace chafed at me, and I needed to push back in some way.

"Verbo," I said. Before I even turned her cards over, I regretted speaking out of impulse. I flipped over the two cards Abuelita had just played to find that she hadn't lied. They laughed, probably out of relief that it wouldn't be them stuck holding half the deck. I knew they were just having fun, but I felt myself growing anxious. It felt like I was being laughed at, and my cheeks felt warm.

"How is your new apartment?" Abuelito asked.

"Great. It's really nice living with my boyfriend," I said. I heard the galloping of my heart in my ears, but I forced myself to look at them when I said it. They already knew Rob and I had moved in together, but they'd never acknowledged it. They looked down at their cards, pretending to pick a card although it was my turn. I knew they wanted to hear about the furniture I bought from IKEA or how close my new place was to school, but I wasn't going to give them that anymore.

I had previously been too afraid to bring up my sexuality to them so freely, but now that I had done it, I had no idea how to follow through. I wanted to have a heart-to-heart with them that somehow ended in them accepting me for being gay, but I wasn't sure if that was realistic or even how to navigate that conversation. How do you tell someone who thinks they love you that they don't even know you well enough to do that?

The room was so silent that the sound of my heartbeat in my ears felt like it was getting louder by the second. Abuelito and Abuelita didn't attempt to change the subject. They simply had nothing to say.

"I'm sick of this game," I said, tossing my cards onto the table, face-up. My grandparents looked at each other with blank stares as I left the dining room.

When I came downstairs the following morning, the Christmas decorations had all been taken down. There was an empty space in the corner where the tree used to be, and the nativity scene and its box were on the coffee table. Abuelito was sitting on the couch wearing a grey suit and tie. He was reading his big bible—the doorstep-sized one with the gold leaf engravings. Abuelita wore a white pant suit with the sleeves rolled up as she rinsed beans and put them on the stove. They looked like they had just gone to church, but it wasn't Sunday.

When Abuelita noticed me, she grabbed me by the wrist and led me back into the hallway. It was narrow and had no source of light, so I could barely make out her face. She took my hands in hers.

"I can't be upset about yesterday because you're right to be angry. We just don't know how to talk about...When we grew up, these were things you weren't supposed to talk about. But then you come along and talk about them as if they were nothing and it's shocking," she whispered, rubbing my hands. Her bracelets jangled. "We're putting in an effort, but just take it easy on us, mijo."

Her sincerity caught me off guard. I didn't doubt that she wanted us to fix our relationship, but I was going to need a big gesture from them.

"If you really want to show me an effort then you will invite Rob for Christmas next year," I said. She smiled as if she had expected my request.

"Christmas is a very special holiday, Abel. That is for family only," she said. Even in the dim light, I could recognize her resolute expression. She was so full of shit, and stubborn, too.

"If that's how you feel then don't expect me at any future Christmases, then," I said. I raised an eyebrow at her and crossed my arms. It was easy to match her level of stubbornness because she was the one I learned it from.

"Ayayay! Let's not be rash. We'll talk more about this later," she whispered. "Anyway, it's día de los reyes magos! Did you forget?" she added. The cheer in her voice was incongruous to the conversation we were previously having. It was one step forward and two steps back. I didn't know whether to be upset about her abrupt close of the conversation or glad we had it in the first place.

Before I had a chance to decide, she walked back out into the living room. I followed her and noticed there was a pastry on the counter. It looked like a wreath with sliced almonds and green, white, and red fruit jellies on top. I hadn't realized my visit would coincide with the celebration of the three magi. It was a pretty minor religious holiday. You just went to church, took down your Christmas decorations, and ate rosca.

"If you get the Jesus figurine, you have to throw a party on the second of February, día de la candelaria," Abuelita said, cutting a thick slice and placing it on a plate. I had forgotten that inside the rosca was a plastic baby Jesus figurine the size of a bean. I always thought it was just good luck if you got it. I didn't know it required action, and I didn't know what the hell día de candelaria was, but I nodded anyway and took the first slice to Abuelito.

"In any case, there will be a party here on that day. Hopefully you can make it back down to visit us next month, hijo," Abuelito said. His voice was kind and showed no trace of last night's uneasiness. It made me uncomfortable. I wondered if he shared Abuelita's desire to work towards a better relationship or if he was just trying to be civil.

"Maybe," I said. Abuelita served herself a slice of rosca, then took Abuelito's plate out of his hands and gave it to me. She gave him a you-know-better glance.

Abuelita grabbed her slice with her hand and lifted it in my direction. I picked mine up and did the same, then we took a bite. The pastry was soft and buttery, and the jellies were sweet, but the almonds were tougher than I expected. I bit down, but the almond didn't crumble. That was when I

realized what I thought was an almond turned out to be the plastic baby Jesus. I tried to suppress a cough, but the noise drew Abuelita's attention. There was no way I could take the baby Jesus out of my mouth without her seeing it. Without thinking, I swallowed. I thought the figurine would scratch my throat as it went down, but it was so small I hardly noticed. I put the rest of the slice in my mouth and hoped Abuelita wouldn't suggest eating the rest of the rosca today.

"I didn't get it. Did you?" she asked. I shook my head. If the whole family were here, the pastry would be evenly distributed among everyone, and there would have to be a winner. But with only two of us partaking, the celebration reached an impasse. I hoped to be gone by the time they ate the rest of it and came to the realization that their rosca was a dud.

I turned my attention to the nativity set. Half the porcelain figurines were packed inside Styrofoam molds inside a large cardboard box, while the other half were strewn on the table, waiting to be put away. I was surprised to see the porcelain Jesus had been found intact and was inside its mold.

"I told you I'd find it!" she said, picking up the figurine and holding it in front of me.

It was meant to look like the baby Jesus was wrapped snugly in a blanket with only his little head peeking out the top. Abuelita held the newly found figurine like an athlete holding a medal then set it down on the table. It began to roll towards the edge of the table, and I used my free hand to reach out and grab it before it fell, but I only ended up propelling it further. It crashed to the floor a few inches from the table. Abuelita gasped, and I heard her bracelets skitter down her arms as I watched the baby Jesus shatter into tiny pieces.

Edited by Jessica Humphrey

Ainhoa Santos Goicoechea

Candlewax

I used to know a woman made out of candle wax. The candlemaker who'd crafted her shaped her into the perfect woman, ideal beauty. "Some Pygmalion crap," she'd say. Then a scoff. "Fucker."

She never told me what brought her to Los Angeles, but my best guess is that she just ran away on a whim. She had a tendency to brag about her knack for getting around: "With looks like mine back then? Heh, wasn't hard." She had to say 'back then' because she wasn't beautiful anymore.

But why here? Why L.A? Why not Iceland, or Norway, or literally anywhere that doesn't reach 86 degrees on the daily?

She only ever gave me one answer, though, the road stretching out before us.

"Always did like a bit of sun."

She *did* like the sun. And me, for some reason. Maybe because I liked her.

I will never forget the day we met. Her bedroom was nothing special — we disliked opulence at Golden Oaks. Every room in our facilities was bare, white, equipped with precisely what our residents needed. Management called it tasteful. I called it dreary. The lunchroom was a set of white tables lined with white chairs. The common room was white too, with white sofas and coffee tables. And her room? White as well, with a bed, a closet, and a window.

My coworkers had warned me about her appearance, of course. From the moment I arrived they were fluttering around me like gurgling pigeons, commenting on it, on how I just *had* to see it.

I thought I was ready for it.

I was wrong.

A wave of disgust washed over me when I saw her. It's embarrassing to admit, but it's true. The sunlight framed her profile as I walked through the door, her face turned toward the window. Wrinkled. Deformed. Her body sagged unnaturally, folding in on itself. Lumps ran through her skin like veins, prominent like my mother's, but balled up at the tip like teardrops. The top of her head was concave and squashed. In her sunlit halo, she was the hideous parody of an angel.

I blinked thrice, rapidly, and tried to recompose myself before her eyes focused on me. *If I'm lucky*, I thought, *she'll assume that the sun caused the blinking*.

Our first meeting didn't last long. First meetings usually don't. Besides, I was only there to fix up her room and tell her about our services. But as I prattled on and on about Fitness Fridays and Bingo Mondays, as I made sure she had everything she needed (a change of clothes, a portable fan, ice), I noticed her eyes following me, or rather, my forearm.

"It's a swallow," I said, pointing at my tattoo.

She scoffed and looked away. Then, quietly: "I knew that."

"Fan of birds?"

"Nope."

"I am." And then I added, almost automatically: "Birds are always appropriate."

"What?"

"Oh," I stammered. "That there's always a bird that fits the moment: The dove for moments of peace. The owl for moments of wisdom. The—"

"The swallow?"

"For moments of beauty."

"And what's beauty to you?" She grumbled.

"I'm not sure," I said. "I just got it because it was pretty, really."

"Pretty..." She considered my words, savored them. Then she scoffed and grew silent again, disinterested.

Thing is, in the time it took me to finish touching up her room, she never once took her eyes off my forearm. I didn't really understand why. I still don't, not completely at least. But I will always remember how she gazed at my skin. And how it made me smile.

Make no mistake though, she was difficult. She had a tendency to speak her mind, to get in trouble on the daily. She yelled at Louise for an hour because she'd cheated at bridge, broke Wilbur's glasses for speaking over the TV. When Maureen called her a "melter," though, that's when she snapped. I watched in shock as she grabbed Maureen by the collar of her blouse, shook her like a rag doll.

"D'you think I asked to be like this?" she shrieked, spitting on her face. A yellowish glob landed on Maureen's right eye and trickled down to her lips (promptly solidifying because, well, wax).

She kicked and screamed as we dragged her to her room and, when we finally got her in bed, I was the one appointed to stay with her. "Just give her a 'chat'," my coworkers said, but I was too tired to yell at her. So, instead, I listened. She ranted for ages until she finally calmed down, breathing heavily through her misformed nostrils, something inside her still fuming. It was only then I could finally say:

"You do realize your actions will have consequences."

"Like what," she spat.

"Like getting kicked out."

"And who says I want to stay here?"

"Well, don't you?"

"Course not! It's like fuckin' jail."

"A jail you checked into voluntarily," I added.

"And I'm sure you took this job 'voluntarily' too, huh? Do *you* want to stay here forever?"

The question took me by surprise. I had only really considered 'forever' once before, standing in a hospital room seven years ago. But there was a difference between that 'forever' and this.

"God, if you hate it so much, just check yourself out! Move to Alaska or something!"

A heavy silence filled the room, thick like concrete.

"Move to Alaska...hm?" She spoke calmly, yet an edge in her voice made her words sting. "Ya really think that'd solve my problems?"

"Well, you wouldn't melt," I said. "You'd be pretty much immortal. Isn't that what you checked yourself in for?"

"To be *immortal*?" she said, eyes flaring.

"Yes!"

Then, unexpectedly, she grew quiet. The fire in her eyes went dim. She looked down at her hands and stared at them. "That's funny," she murmured, almost to herself. "You don't even know what the problem is."

For the next couple of days, she was quieter. She didn't yell at people, didn't break anything, didn't get into fights. I heard my coworkers gossip about it, about how she was trying to look all good and docile before the board met. During those days, I was probably the only one she spoke to.

"The AC's always on in here," she remarked as she woke up.

"I can't remember my age," she noted later in the dining hall.

"God, I miss the sun," she murmured after lights out.

She's not acting, you idiots, I should have told my coworkers. She's thinking.

The night before the board meeting that would decide her fate, she called me into her room at 5 a.m. Lying in bed and looking out the window, she appeared almost serene. A dormant volcano, the peace unsettling.

"I'm checking myself out of here," she said, "Before sunrise."

"Okay..."

"Was hoping you could give me a ride."

"Um, where to?"

"A little cove not far from here," she said. "Nice place. Not an ounce of shade in the summer."

I felt nauseous. A knot formed in my throat. Cold sweat ran down my back. My eyes locked themselves on the ground, and I was 25 again, standing in a dimly lit hospital room, the sound of raspy breathing emanating from the bed by the window...

"It's gonna be pretty hot out," I told her, forcing myself back to the present. "Don't play dumb kid."

I heard the ruffling of bedsheets, but still didn't look up. "It's just..." I swallowed hard. "Are you sure this is what you want?"

"Look at me," she said. It was soft but it was an order.

She looked old. She looked older than old, she looked impossible. She was a china doll, cracked, plastic barely rescued from a fire. Her corkscrew fingers wrapped around thin blankets like they were twisting around moonbeams, thin and wiry, about to snap like twigs. And her eyes, those drooping eyes, when I finally managed to meet them, had seen more than a lifetime.

Once, in a dimly lit hospital room, I had taken a cold hand in mine and done nothing. I heard her pained, unwanted breathing, and let it continue. But that night, seven years later, I took a different hand and led it to the check out desk.

It was an hour's drive to the cove.

"Used to sunbathe here in the 80s," she told me on the way. "Always did like a bit of sun."

We got there just in time to watch the sunrise, the sky illuminated pink and yellow and orange, the blazing sunlight reflected on the sea, so bright that I had to turn away. I looked at the sand instead, at my hands, my swallow. I thought about how that bird would look when I turned 80, 90 — my skin wrinkled and creased, folded over like a fan, the lines that make up the swallow's wings converging into a black blob. I think she must've noticed me staring at it. She cleared her throat and asked:

"'Birds are always appropriate.' What's that about?"

Her question took me by surprise, as they often did.

"Oh," I said, shifting my eyes back to the sand. "It's...it's the first thing my mom said when I showed her this tattoo. I was 17, and got it without her permission." I chuckled and fidgeted with a seashell. "God, I thought she was gonna be furious! But when I finally showed it to her? She just looked at it and went, 'Well, birds are always appropriate.' And it sounded so ridiculous and formal and just, I don't know, it became a joke. So every time we saw a bird after that, we'd nod approvingly and go, 'Birds are always appropriate, ah yes, birds are always appropriate...' I trailed off, and it was only then I realized I was smiling.

"So it slipped when I asked about the tattoo, huh?"

"Yeah, basically," I said. "Although she did believe it. That birds are always appropriate, that is. All the meanings she saw in them."

"You're speaking in the past tense...she dead?"

I couldn't help but chuckle at her bluntness. "Seven years ago. A melanoma detected too late."

"Sorry to hear." She replied. "Bet she liked the sun too."

"She did," I said. "I think it's what she missed the most in her final days, actually. Nature, the outdoors, the sun. Not being able to do what she wanted, I think that's where her suffering came from, more so than, you know—" I choked up a little. "The actual dying."

We were both silent for a while. Then: "I'd give ya a hug, but my hands are a bit sticky."

It was a slow process. At first it just looked like sweat, like water on skin, and I could bare it. But there came a point when it was all too runny, too fluid and viscous, and I couldn't ignore the facts anymore. Her skin was turning liquid. Beads like small marbles rolled down her neck and arms and legs and to the tips of her fingers and her toes. Hot wax pooled on the sand around her, and I asked her if that wax was still her. She told me to fuck off, that she looked nothing like that.

It became harder and harder for her to talk as the day went on, though. Her whole face drooped, slowly, gradually — her nose merged with her upper lip, her flushed cheeks sagged down to her neck, her chin stretched into a pointy stalagmite. There was the odd question, the quick-witted response, maybe an offhand comment or two. But other than that we mostly just listened: to the waves, to the gulls, to her worn-down voice humming some tune from her youth. We were lost in ourselves, compressed inwards by the sunlight beating our skin. Around mid-afternoon, it forced her eyelids shut.

"Does it hurt?" I asked, breaking the silence.

She didn't answer immediately. She considered the question, savored it.

"Does it hurt to grow up?" she asked back.

I thought about it.

"It's excruciating."

She gave me a half-smile, and said no more.

Soon after, the heat sealed her lips shut.

By the end of the day, she was gone.

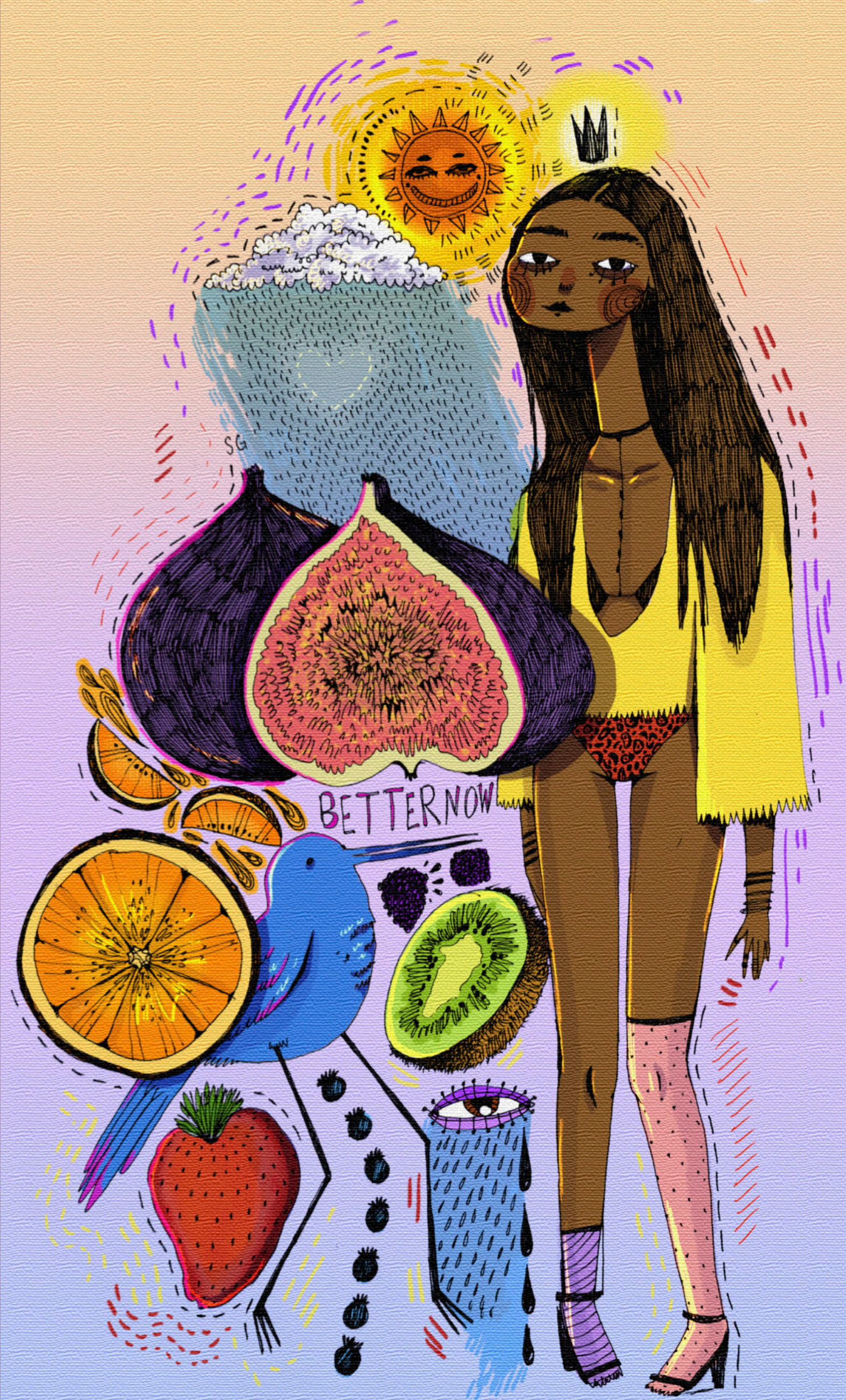
Edited by Kurt Klaus

Sienna Gonzalez

Four illustrations

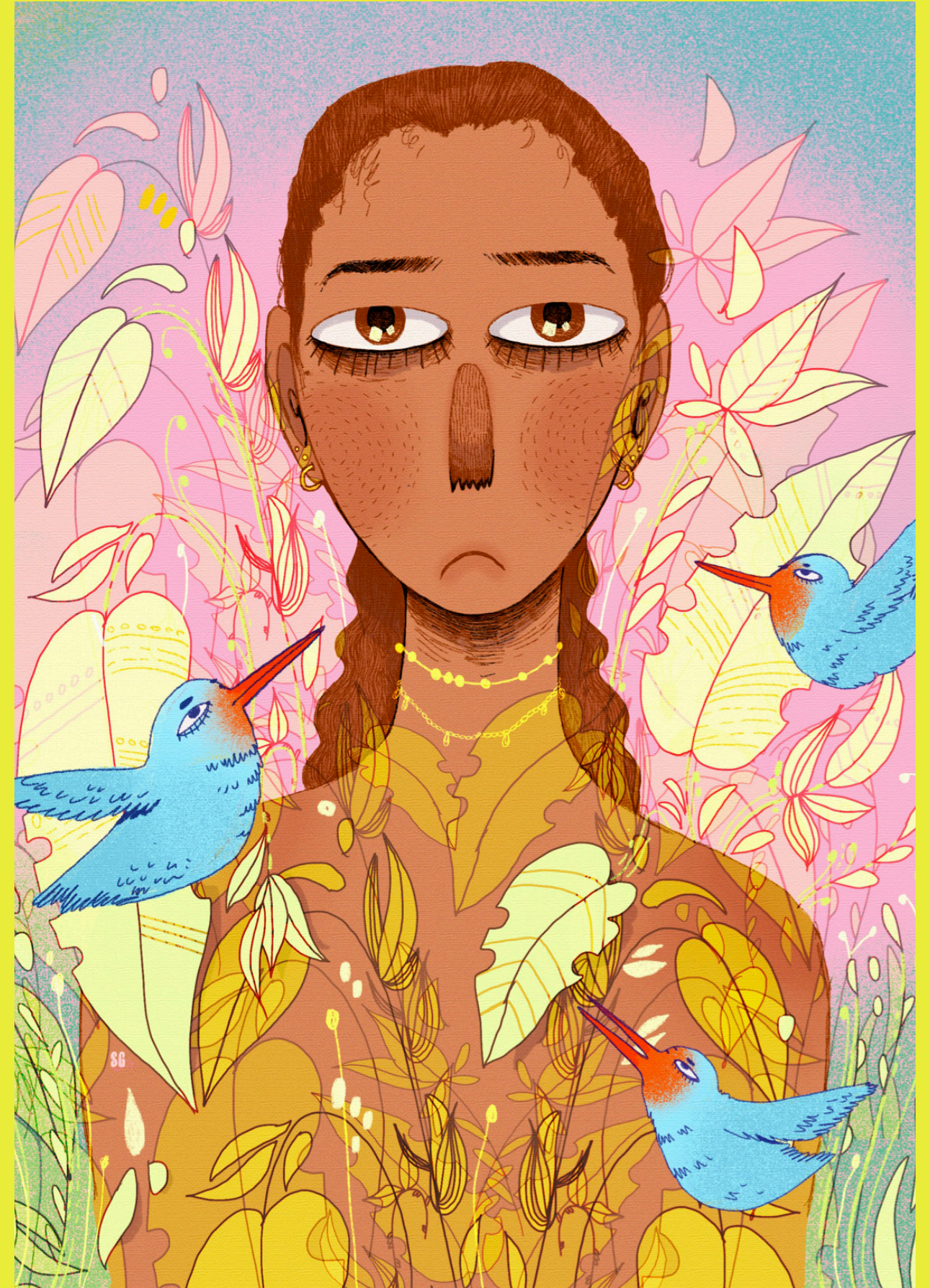


above: *Growth*
facing: *Better Now*





Good Night, My Love



Bittersweet Springtime

Yixuan Jiang

Hunbei

1. The Mother (6 years before the birth of her son)

Shuhui sobbed, lying in the red *hunbei* her mother made, surrounded by a vibrant swirl of phoenixes, dragons, magpies and lotuses.

The ancestors said a good *hunbei* could bring you a son. She had trusted the ancestors.

Yet her mother was the best *hunbei*-maker in town, and she had given birth to another girl.

The midwife stood in front of her, holding the unusually silent infant in her hands like a hot potato, not knowing whether to hand her to the mother. The newborn's huge black eyes peered curiously into the vast world, unaware that she was yet another mistake. She had two tiny moles under her right eye, making it look as if she were shedding black tears.

As the sobbing died down a bit, with some hesitation, the midwife asked the mother, "Do you have a name for her?"

The midwife was clearly just trying to find something to say. Of course the mother didn't. The doctor promised her a boy this time. She had prepared at least ten names for her son, but none for a girl.

After an excruciatingly long silence, Shuhui finally spoke, taking the infant from the midwife, her voice hoarse and faint:

"Laidi," she said, "I'll name her Laidi."

2. The Child (5-years-old)

Lai, come. Di, brother.

It has a good prospect, Laidi's mother had always told her. A name wishing for the forthcoming of another sibling, a male sibling that could *chuanzongjiedai*, pass on the family name.

And that was her name until age 5, when she met the lonely 50 year-old rice farmer who lost his wife and had no children.

She remembered when he first came into the yard, carrying two baskets full of chicken eggs that she later found out was worth a month of his earnings. He had a faded blue cap on, and a large jacket that missed a few buttons, with loose strands on the corners. Before he entered the house, he placed the eggs gingerly on the doorstep and went on to take off his shoes, revealing socks with holes where his toes peeked out.

"Oh you shouldn't have," Laidi's mother went on to greet him, pulling a wider smile than Laidi had seen in years, nudging her daughter forward, "This is Laidi. Come and introduce yourself."

Laidi felt awkward in her tight pigtails and newly-made clothes, like one of those *hunbei* her mother made in her store, neatly folded, carefully packaged, tied in ribbons, and ready for sale.

She stood still in front of the man, her arms positioned stiffly at her sides, fingertips pressed against her new pant legs that hugged her thighs in a way she didn't like. She didn't say anything, keeping her head down and glaring down at the man's stubby toes that stuck out of his sock holes.

"Hello," he said, wiping his hand on his shirt before extending it, "Erm... my name is Li Wang. From today on I'll be taking care of you."

She stared at his hands without moving. They looked coarse, with soil caught under the fingernails, and thick calluses where he probably gripped his farming utensils. Deep creases covered his large knuckles, like cracks on a dry farmland.

"Go ahead," urged her mother, "Shake Mr. Wang's hand."

She felt her fingertips digging into her sleeves as she refused to budge. The man's hands looked steady, firm, and powerful... such that with a small tug, they could easily uproot her from the place she called home.

Sure, no one welcomed her in this house. She knew that from the day she was born.

Her father was a truck driver and was rarely around to see her. Her mother never liked her, and spent the day snipping away at pieces of cloth that predicted every couple's happiness. Her sister Ruonan was also resentful that she had to do more chores around the house now that there was an extra mouth to feed.

But regardless, to a five-year-old, this cold household made up her entire world.

A few seconds passed by. Laidi imagined Mr. Wang becoming upset that she made him lose his face, her mother yelling at her because of the way she treated their special guest, her father returning home with the realization that his daughter had disappointed him yet again...

But Li Wang simply retreated his hand, and with an awkward smile, said, "It's okay. It's my fault I didn't wash them after working in the fields."

Her mother immediately began apologizing to him, and Laidi looked up at the middle-aged man for the first time. His skin was wrinkled and tanned from daily farmwork, shining under the glaring sun. His large, dark eyes met hers, and although he had stains on his shirt, soot on his hands, and sweat on his face, his pupils seemed spotless, without a speck of dust or a trace of filth.

And so she extended her tiny fingers forward, and gently took his hand.

3. The Mother (1 year before the birth of her son)

Her daughter's response took her by surprise.

Shuhui had anticipated reluctance from Laidi —she was, after all, a small child about to leave her family and go off with a stranger she had never met. Shuhui anticipated having to apologize to Li Wang for her daughter's bad behaviors. She anticipated having to sit Laidi down and scold her about how important this was to the family.

But she did not anticipate that her daughter would leave without a word.

She had watched as Laidi packed her clothes and ragdolls, stowing them away in Li's rusty trike cart. As Laidi scurried back and forth between her room and the cart, Shuhui took Li aside and stuffed a red envelope into his hands,

"It's a small gesture," she whispered, "For all the years to come."

Li looked down at the thick envelope and looked back up at her. She knew that he had never held in his hands such a large wad of cash his entire life. She responded with a smile, waiting for him to take in the information and express his gratitude, but instead, he gave the envelope back to her.

"Don't worry," he replied, "I know it seems otherwise, but I promise I'll take good care of your daughter without needing this."

She opened her mouth to object, but was interrupted by Laidi, who tugged at the flaps of Li's shirt.

"I'm done," said Laidi, "Let's go."

Li gave Shuhui an apologetic smile, and gently asked Laidi, "Do you want to say goodbye to your mother?"

Laidi simply shook her head, and repeated, "Let's go."

And with her hand in Li's, Laidi walked out of their yard, her back to the home she lived all her life. Shuhui knew, at that moment, that if she didn't say anything, her tiny daughter would leave forever without a single word of goodbye.

And so she called the tiny girl one last time.

"Laidi."

Her daughter paused for a moment, and finally turned around, looking back at her birth mother. Seeing the two tiny moles under Laidi's eyes, the round nose that reassembled her husband's, and the large eyes that looked just like hers, Shuhui felt tears welling up in her eyes. In a voice so faint she wasn't even sure Laidi heard, Shuhui uttered softly:

"Yilushunfeng."

May the wind carry you on in your voyage.

4. The Child (5-years-old)

They were silent on the way to Li's home.

After pedaling across a bumpy dirt road, they finally arrived in front of a small, battered-down, one-story hut. The wooden door seemed to be barely

hanging onto its hinges, and the ceiling still dripped water from yesterday's rain, but the small hay broom leaning against the doorsteps suggested that someone had cleaned the hut only recently.

As Li helped Laidi off the cart, she spoke to him for the first time since they left.

"Li Wang," she said, "I'd like to change my name."

He started a bit, seeming surprised that she called him by his full name, "Um... sure. What would you like to change it to?"

She was too young to understand how the "planned birth" policy restricted each rural household to only two children, too young to understand why her parents were so glad to hear about the lonely widower in a nearby village looking to adopt a child, too young to understand why a boy could pass on the family name but a girl couldn't.

But she did understand the meaning of her name Laidi. She did understand that her mother wanted a son. She did understand that somehow, after she left with this man, a brother would come and replace her in her original home.

And so, walking into the tiny, old hut, she responded to Li:

"Wudi. I want to change my name to Wudi. *It has a good prospect.*"

And it did.

Wu, no. Di, brother.

5. The Mother (1 year after the birth of her son)

Making *hunbei* was a tricky business.

Hunbei weren't just quilts made for warmth —they were gifts for newly-weds, made to bring couples a good marriage with lots of children. To ensure it completed this daunting task, *hunbei* had to follow a strict set of guidelines. Only a single strand of thread can be used to tie the edges together, symbolizing a whole life together. Eight coins should be sewn on the surface for good fortune, because the number "eight", *ba*, sounds like the word "fortune", *fa*. Four different types of seeds must be placed on the four edges of the quilt — *zao*, *sheng*, *gui* and *zi* — because together, they sound like *zaoshengguizi*, "have a son soon." Golden patterns must be sewn on the surface, with symbols of fortune such as phoenixes, dragons, magpies and lotuses. And most importantly, a healthy, married woman with a son and a daughter should be the maker of the quilt.

Shuhui became that woman.

She became the best quilt-maker in town. They said that she had a pair of "golden scissors." Every couple that slept under the *hunbei* she made had a happy family.

6. The Child (17-years-old)

Wudi wiped the leftover traces of porridge from the corner of Li's mouth with a napkin, pulling out the pillow from behind his neck so he could lie down again.

"You should head back to school," he said, "I'm perfectly fine in the hospital by myself. Lao Liu next door invited me to join him in the lounge this afternoon to check out that new television they got. Oh, and that nice young lady in bed 79 gave me some fruits her boyfriend brought from the city. She said it's called some kind of berry? I've never tried it before. Here, you should take it to school and share it with your classmates."

Wudi looked at the bowl Li handed over, with a dozen of tiny blue pellet-like berries in it. "Blueberries, you mean?"

"You've had them before?"

"I've seen them in textbooks. And no, you should eat them while you're watching television with Mr. Liu," Wudi said, placing the bowl back on the table, "They're probably good for you. And yeah, I'll be heading to school."

Wudi stood up, picking up the porridge bowl and spoon to wash on her way out, throwing her backpack on her shoulders.

"Oh, and Wudi, did the doctor mention when I could leave the hospital?" Li asked from behind Wudi, "I'm already feeling much better, strong as a horse!"

She paused her footsteps, turning to look back at Li, the man she had no blood relation with but called her father, lying in the white hospital bed, with his gray hair, his layered wrinkles, his 30-yuan glasses he bought second-hand from a middle-school kid, his faded blue cap, and the button-up shirt he had worn for at least 10 years.

She and he both knew that he was far from being "as strong as a horse." But with the 100-yuan a day hospital expenses, he couldn't afford to be weak.

"Yeah," she lied, "The doctor says you're doing fine. He also says that the government will announce a new health care policy next month to cover your hospital fees, so don't worry about it."

And with that, she left the hospital, headed towards the opposite direction from her school, towards the largest cotton mill in town.

7. The Mother (11 years after the birth of her son)

Shuhui saw her daughter today. Not her older married daughter — the young one she hadn't seen in more than a decade.

She didn't recognize the girl at first. She was getting fresh supplies from the local cotton mill, walking through the factory, looking at different arrays of cloths that could be used in making *hunbei*, when one of the workers looked up from her loom and they locked eyes.

The girl was wearing an old factory worker's uniform, had a familiar round nose, a loose uncombed ponytail, and two tiny moles under her right eye.

Those two tiny dots made her heart skip two beats.

She couldn't help turning her eyes to the girl's nametag — Wudi Wang. Wudi.

Shuhui remembered when she first heard this name. When a neighbor asked her about it, clearly trying to evoke her response, she pretended to laugh it off, saying that a small child couldn't know any better. The truth was, the terrible name stuck to her heart like a thorn. Clearly the name was the most vicious curse the 5-year-old child could come up with, and she definitely succeeded in her revenge. Shuhui hated the name, hated how it became the neighbors' topic of gossip, and hated how it entailed malign intentions towards her beloved son. She couldn't bring herself to even utter it out loud.

Yet no matter how angry she was at the girl, no matter how others might perceive her choice to give her own daughter away, she wasn't a cold-blooded monster. Sending her daughter away so that she could legally have a son was never an easy decision to make. She played the villain in the story so that her husband, her in-laws, and her ancestors could be happy. She was the one who had to bear this burden on her conscience for twelve entire years.

Seeing her daughter after all this time, Shuhui had a million questions grilling in the back of her mind. Why wasn't she at school? Was Li Wang even able to pay her tuition? Why was she working here? Why did she have bags under her eyes and calluses at her fingertips?

Before Shuhui could ask anything, the girl looked away, returning to her work, silent and expressionless, as if nothing had happened, like a turtle retreating back into its tiny shell. It suddenly reminded her of when the girl was a child, always sitting in the corner of the room by herself, staring at her mother making *hunbei* all day, not willing to play with the other children in the creeks and meadows.

She knew she should ask the girl, her daughter, her blood kin, what she was going through, and if she and Li Wang needed help.

But instead, she picked up the cloth in her hands and walked away.

8. The Child (18-years-old)

Wudi first overheard the news of her brother's death in the cafeteria of her factory. A coworker was telling his friend the news he heard in between mouthfuls of rice.

The son of the famous *hunbei* maker died, he said. Poor kid was attacked by a burglar who broke into the house and stabbed to death by a pair of his mother's own prized scissors. Oh the irony. At least he died in a pile of red *hunbei*, so the scene wasn't as bloody as it could've been.

Wudi chose not to join the conversation.

She never officially attended her brother's funeral, although she promised Li she would go out of courtesy. She watched from a distance, on the hill of gravestones, smelling the smoke puffing out of the town crematorium,

watching the people in white clustered together like a swarm of ghosts from *yincaodifu*, the land of the dead. Her birth mother fainted in the process, sobbing so hard she could barely stand. When they escorted her mother away after the funeral ended, Wudi finally walked down the hill to meet her.

“My condolences,” Wudi said.

The mother looked up at her with bloodshot eyes sunken into her sockets, and uttered the first words she said to her daughter in 13 years:

“Gun.”

Fuck off.

She didn’t blame her mother. Her 5-year-old self really had the foresight.

9. The Mother (1 year after her son’s death)

“Ruonan has what we call *gonghan*, or a ‘cold uterus,’” said the doctor, handing the diagnosis to her, “The likelihood of your daughter having a child is very low. I could prescribe some herbal medicine to help, but it would take a long time for her to get better, and it’s not guaranteed.”

Soft, whimpering sounds came from Ruonan, who was sitting in the chair next to her, trying to muffle her crying in her hands. Shuhui stood up, looking at the diagnosis in her hands in disbelief. “This has never happened in the family! I’ve had three kids. My mother had five. My husband also has two siblings. How could Ruonan...how...”

How could they. How could they do this to her. How could they take away her last hope of passing on the family name.

After everything that she did.

“I’m sorry,” answered the doctor. Then, as if reading her mind, he added, “But you did mention you have three children.”

Shuhui was quiet on the way home. After moments of Ruonan wiping away her tears in silence, she heard Ruonan ask hesitantly, “What will I tell my in-laws?”

She turned to her daughter, her first born, her only hope for the past year.

“Then we have the same problem, Ruonan,” she responded quietly, “What do I tell mine?”

13 years ago, she gave away her own toddler to have a son. A year ago, she gave away half the ownership of her business to persuade her son-in-law’s parents to let their grandchildren adopt both their family names. Now, everything was pointless.

The doctor was right. She had three children. Yet there was only one that could pass on the family name, only one that could pass on the family name, and it was the daughter she thought she would never talk to again.

10. The Child (19-years-old)

The woman had aged.

That was Wudi’s first thought when she saw the familiar figure standing at her doorstep. She studied the features that resembled her own — the same large eyes, the same thin lips, the same narrow shoulders that carried much more weight than they should.

Yet her birth mother also felt different. Different from the person who mercilessly pushed Wudi out of her life 14 years ago. She had new locks of gray in her hair. More wrinkles on the corners of her eyes. Less weight on her body. A new sort of fragility that wasn’t familiar to Wudi.

Hesitantly, the woman asked, “May I come in?”

After moments silence, Wudi finally took a step aside, and for the first time, let her mother in her home.

11. The Mother (1 year after her son’s death)

Shuhui had accomplished many difficult tasks over the years. She inherited her mother’s *hunbei* business at age 18 when her mother died. She made the ultimate decision to let her daughter go. She convinced Ruonan’s uptight in-laws to have their children carry both parents’ family names.

But this was among the most difficult tasks she had ever done.

It was not just the family name at stake. It was her pride.

After taking a deep breath, she looked into her daughter’s eyes and began, “I heard that Li Wang still hasn’t set you up with a matchmaker yet...”

“If you’re just here to introduce me to a man, don’t bother,” Wudi replied.

“But doesn’t Li Wang care that — ”

“He cares,” Wudi interrupted her, “He cares about me.”

Pause.

“Much more than you do.”

Shuhui fell silent. She couldn’t deny the statement. She dropped Wudi’s gaze and looked down.

After a while, Shuhui finally mustered the courage to speak again, “I saw you at the mill. If you agree to do this, you won’t have to work there anymore.”

When she saw that the girl in front of her didn’t respond, Shuhui continued, “Please. For me. For your brother. For the family.”

A few moments of painful silence passed, and Shuhui felt her heart pounding so hard it might burst out of her chest at any second.

Finally, she heard her daughter’s voice.

“I agree to do this,” said the girl, “But not for your family. *For mine.*”

12. The Child (19-years-old)

Never did Wudi imagine that she’d experience this all over again. Meeting with a stranger who would change her entire life.

She looked at her reflection in the eyes of the man in front of her, his wide, hollow, unfocused black pupil draining her image like a void.

The village “idiot” whose parents desperately wanted to find him a wife before he turned 30, and the girl too poor to find herself a husband. Neither of them had a choice. A perfect couple.

As long as you marry him, they’ll pay for Li Wang’s hospital expenses. As long as you marry him, they’ll have your children inherit our family name. As long as you marry him, you and Li Wang will be part of our family again.

As long as you marry him, said her mother.

She extended her hand to the man, the same way Li Wang did years ago: “Hello. My name is Wudi.”

13. The Mother (2 years after her son’s death)

Shuhui flattened the *hunbei* on the table, folded it in thirds, wrapped it up like a bun and tied it with a red ribbon.

It was the best *hunbei* she made in years. She had asked some of her relatives to fetch her the best-quality silk when they were working in the cities. She bought the softest cotton she could find from the mill. She spent five months sewing the patterns into the surface.

She had put her heart and soul into this *hunbei*, the same way her mother did for her on the day she was married. Tomorrow, her daughter and her son-in-law would spend their wedding night sleeping in this *hunbei*, made by the best *hunbei*-maker in town.

Everything had been leading up to this moment.

She was ready for a grandson.

14. The Child (20-years-old)

The day of her wedding, Wudi sneaked into her new bedroom with a pair of her mother’s prized scissors.

Looking at the splendid patterns interwoven on the surface, the phoenix and dragon soaring through the sky, ignited by love, Wudi took her scissors and snipped away. She cut the thread tying the edges together. She yanked off each of the eight coins one by one. She chopped off the seeds from each corner of the *hunbei*, every *zao*, *sheng*, *gui* and *zi*.

After she completed her masterpiece, Wudi smiled, lying in the red *hunbei* her mother made, surrounded by a vibrant swirl of phoenixes, dragons, magpies and lotuses.

The ancestors said a good *hunbei* could bring you a son. She trusted the ancestors.

Edited by Tim Liu

Annika Karody

Venkat

It was a Thursday morning in May when Ram got the call that Venkat was dead. The trill of the landline pierced the 5 a.m. stillness that had settled over his suburban Los Angeles home. An emergency room doctor for thirty-two years, Ram expertly shook his grogginess and went to answer the phone in the study. Married for twenty-six of those years, he knew better than to wake his wife.

Last Ram had heard of Venkat, he was getting divorced. Venkat’s wife, Nancy, discovered that he had lied about his citizenship status and passing the bar exam. He was clerking for a lawyer with no credentials. That was ten years ago; the whole family wrote him off as a fraud.

On the phone was Harry Stevens, one of a handful of Venkat’s neighbors who, along with a hired caregiver, looked after him for the last few years of his life. The funeral was to be held Saturday morning at St. Rita’s Church in Queens.

“Saint Rita’s?” Ram asked.

“Yes,” Harry said. “He converted to Catholicism about five years back: right before he got sick. He made it clear to all of us that he wanted a Catholic burial.” Ram had nothing to say. Harry went on. “We—the neighbors who helped look after him, I mean—think it would be a good idea for you to say a few words. We weren’t able to contact anyone else in the family.”

Ram hesitated to respond. “Was anyone with him?”

“I’m afraid not. His caretaker found the body the next morning.” Ram was silent once more. “I’m glad we were able to talk,” Harry continued. “He always spoke fondly of his ‘cousin in California.’” Harry rattled off his phone number. “Please be in touch.” He hung up.

Ram leaned back in his leather office chair and closed his eyes. The sky was dark in the window behind his cherry wood desk. Abhinaya, his wife, walked into the office door to inquire about the call. Ram told her everything. All she could muster was, “Sorry to hear,” and then, “Catholic, huh? But he kept the name Venkat?”

“I guess so.”

“Lord Krishna’s namesake, saved by Jesus. Guess he never quit pretending to have it all.”

Ram didn’t argue. Abhinaya left to cook up some breakfast and closed the door behind her. Ram looked around the study. Medical textbooks and research publications, some of which he authored, lined the shelves. Molly, the family dog, lay curled up at his feet. His twin children, now fourteen, slept

soundly in their bedrooms down the hall. A bird chirped from a eucalyptus tree overlooking the creek bed that ran through the backyard of the half-acre property he'd bought back in 1988. He leaned forward and turned on his desktop. By 7 a.m., he'd booked a flight to New York.

Ram boarded his flight at noon and immediately began to wrack his brain. He couldn't think of a single thing to say about the man. Every pithy sentence or blanket platitude that he scratched out onto his complementary barf bag unraveled in the face of his own incomprehension.

Ram and Venkat, second cousins on their fathers' sides, hadn't grown up together. In fact, when Ram stepped off his plane from Hyderabad at New York's LaGuardia airport in July 1976, he did not even know that Venkat existed. He stayed at a YMCA for two weeks while looking for jobs at local hospitals. Venkat was the one who reached out to him.

"Ram! It's Venkat: Sridhar's son. No, we've never met. Your father told my father that you're looking for an apartment. I live in Queens. Oak Park: been here for about three years now. You have a pen and paper available? I'll give you my address." Venkat had met him the day after their phone call at the YMCA where Ram was staying, to help with the bags. When Ram thanked him, he simply replied, "we're cousins."

They stopped at a deli for dinner that night. Venkat ordered for them and they sat at the counter, two thick-moustached, thicker-accented Hindu men, eating pastrami on rye. Ram didn't realize he was eating beef until he finished the second bite, at which point he was enjoying his meal too much to stop.

That weekend, Venkat took Ram to his first disco club. He tossed a paisley-printed button-down with bell sleeves at Ram, who was resting on the couch after his first twenty-hour shift at Jamaica Hospital. He had been hired there as a resident the previous Friday.

"Get up, Ramu-boy," he'd said. "It's disco time." When they reached the club and Venkat realized that Ram had buttoned the shirt all the way to the top, he ripped the first three buttons clean off. "This is America, man!" he'd hollered, grabbing Ram around the shoulders. "Land of the Free."

By August of 1977, Ram had made enough money to secure a place of his own and left the lease. Venkat was still toiling for the lawyer who, three years ago, had promised him a Visa in exchange for his work. He never fulfilled that promise, but Venkat never let on. He and Ram caught up from time-to-time, and when they'd go out to eat he insisted on paying, making a big show of pulling out all of his credit cards from his wallet. "Take your pick, sweetheart," he'd tell the waitstaff.

He once went into credit card debt renting a Porsche and having the dealership park it around the block from Ram's building. He then took the subway to Ram's apartment and pretended the car was his.

Years later, Ram and Abhinaya set him up with their friend Nancy. After four years of marriage, while trying to plan a trip to visit Venkat's family in India, she discovered everything: the lapsed Visa, the staggering debt, a

string of failures barely concealed beneath a carefully-constructed façade. She helped him secure citizenship and regular employment before leaving him altogether, but the secret was out; Venkat was a charlatan who sold everyone, including himself, a false image of his place within the American dream. The precarity of Venkat's life was too much for Ram to handle. They never spoke again.

The plane landed at LaGuardia at 9pm and Ram met with Harry the following morning. He lived with his wife Carol in the apartment across the hall from Venkat's place, and was set with the task of cleaning it out. He showed Ram inside the unit. It was squalid and dark. A handful of shirts hung in the closet, oversized and in muted colors. There were no pants, only khaki shorts stacked in a set of plastic drawers. Three years ago, Harry informed Ram, Venkat lost his legs to diabetes.

Harry and Venkat spent a lot of time together after that. Harry was retired; Venkat couldn't work anymore. They both liked cards and used up their days playing poker: hedging bets, taking losses.

"Let me tell you, man, he was terrible!" Harry grinned. "But he knew how to accept defeat. And he was never discouraged from trying again." He turned and looked Ram in the eye. "He was a good man, your cousin, at least the way I knew him. It seems he wasn't a family favorite, but I knew him as a good man."

Harry invited Ram to take what he wanted from Venkat's possessions; he had never made a will. The only thing Ram recognized was a gold necklace with the visage of Krishna stamped into the pendant. He slipped it in his pocket and thanked Harry for his time. Harry handed him Venkat's address book as well. "I have no use for this anymore. I'll see you tomorrow."

Ram left the building and rounded the corner. He found a deli and ordered pastrami on rye to go, pocketing the pen he used to sign his check and grabbing a handful of napkins on his way out of the door. It was a mild, breezy spring day. He walked to Flushing Meadows and sat down by the lake, the breeze whipping his now-thinning, salt-and-pepper hair. He pulled out the address book and paged through it. Hundreds of names, dated from 1973 to the present, 2012, filled the pages. Ram found his own name, circled in blue ink, the words "visit soon" written next to it. He pulled out the stack of napkins and the pen, and began scratching away.

He passed the afternoon in that fashion, pinning the used-up napkins between his knee and the bench, careful not to lose them to the wind. He forgot about his pastrami sandwich until a stray dog wandered up to him and started to sniff around the bag. Ram tossed him one half, then the other, and watched him trot off around the lake. The sun had sunk low in the sky by the time he finished and, satisfied, he took the subway back to his hotel: the midtown Hilton that fit neatly within his budget. He climbed into his freshly-made bed and went to sleep.

The chapel was half-full the next morning with an assemblage of Venkat's friends: a group of stragglers that he played pool with at Lucy's bar, his

neighbors from the apartment building, the corner grocer, his caretaker, Ram, and the priest. They gathered into the pews, heads bowed. The priest performed his last rites and handed the floor over to Ram to speak. Ram stood and passed by Venkat lying in state, legless and swollen, on his way to the pulpit. He pulled a napkin from his pocket and began to read.

“Venkat and I started out the same: two young men, far from home, trying to make good on everything that America promised. I used to think he failed to realize this promise, substituting pretense for practicality, too proud to ever ask for help. I know now that I was off the mark. Venkat was a hopeful man.” He paused to look at the ragtag crowd. “ Moreover,” he continued, “he saw hope where others don’t often bother to look. I want to thank you all for being here today, and for being friends to him. May he rest in peace.”

Ram left the pulpit. He pulled Venkat’s pendant from his pocket and moved to slip it into the casket when he caught a glimpse of a cross necklace laid across his chest. He walked back to his seat and put his hand back into his pocket, the pendant firmly in his grasp.

Edited by Josh Castillo

Jim Reeder

Texarkana



Summertime in Texarkana
Hot as hell (down) near Louisiana
Workin (sweatin') out in (the) oil fields till I drop
Friday nights grab my guitar
Play for tips in a mason jar and sing
What drinkers wanna hear in honky-tonks

She leaned back and she sang along
To a classic Willie Nelson song
And laughed at my fiberglass guitar
I tried to order her a drink, she said
I got more money than you think
I better get you a burger (be)fore you starve.

I don't know what she sees in this rundown man
A pawnshop guitar and a half baked plan
I'm a set in my ways and a one-man band
Too old for the heart ache of one night stands
And I wonder if I got the right
To want something more from my life
In Texarkana

Lost a couple of teeth on this rocky road
Sports and bar fights took their toll
To tell the truth when all is said and done
I wasn't very good at either one
But I could sing and play my guitar
Can't say it's got me too far

I don't know what she sees in this rundown man
A pawnshop guitar and a half baked plan
I'm a set in my ways and a one-man band
Too old for the heart ache of one night stands
And I wonder if I got the right
To want something more from my life
In Texarkana

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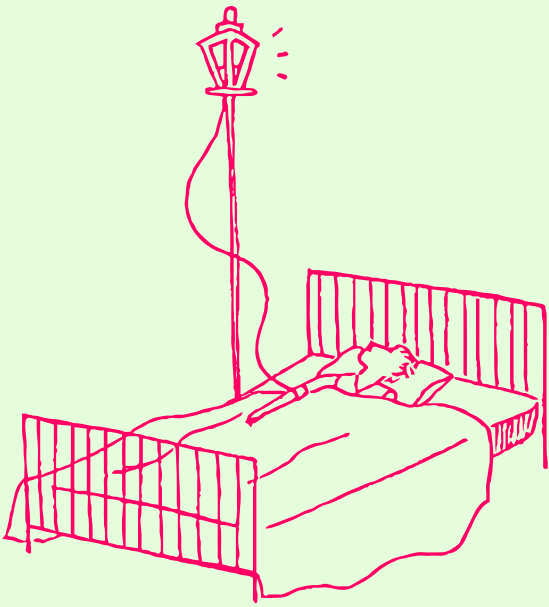
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Poetry

illustration.: Eunice Hong

jimmy vega

collapsed lung

he lay in a hospital bed.
tethered to swelling pain
tangled in blue—
on machines casting sigils
shifting shadows
shattering sleep—
did you dream
melatonin dreams?
did you dream of me?
rhythmically twitching
flutter of iambic
convulsions
irises color
of undertone
half-tucked in bed
morphine kisses
staggered sighs
whimpers like mousetraps
hydrocodone half-smiles
stumbling eyes
sumatriptan somersaults
cold smell, like wet linoleum,
drowsiness like a flickering
streetlamp—monitoring
frayed breaths
pulsing heartbeat
keeping tabs
haphazardly harassed
by wires—

my brother,

he's getting an echo today

your boy's body, lanky,
16 years old, slipping into
crescendo whispers—
dreaming of phosphorescence

i never said that i was brave

jimmy vega

listening to miles davis & not thinking
of you but instead a cold room with
off white walls & machines. your eyes
gossamer & glass like a shadow silent street
but instead of green your iris red

attempting refuge in peripheral tears—

do you remember sitting in traffic & playing
sabbath for her & all you could think of was
lavender & the way it made you explode with love

she never had a name,
but you always called her
my love—

the doctor in starch white tiptoed on tile like glass
searching for a heartbeat

i still search for her heartbeat in gridlock or
3:20 a.m. a *sighing between sighing* brenda hillman
reminds & some nights i am a lamb wrapped in cellophane
going 90 on the 90 still searching for a heartbeat,

highway black velvet scar on your belly—

*do you still restfully dream, restfully
think of me—resting restfully—*

eighty-four days, they said, but we found out in one hundred & five

& the children sleepless with sleep lids hungry in arizona or texas
searching for a mother's heartbeat while ice crams them in cells
with the lights always on & no one listens & i pass the overpass
listening to leonard cohen & not thinking of you, but my love—

my love

*i forget to pray for angels
switching lanes & still searching for
her heartbeat—searching for*

my love—

Omar Zahzah

A Man Made of Almonds

Had no mouth to say “I love you”

& instead gave a hand

to bite

chew

& swallow

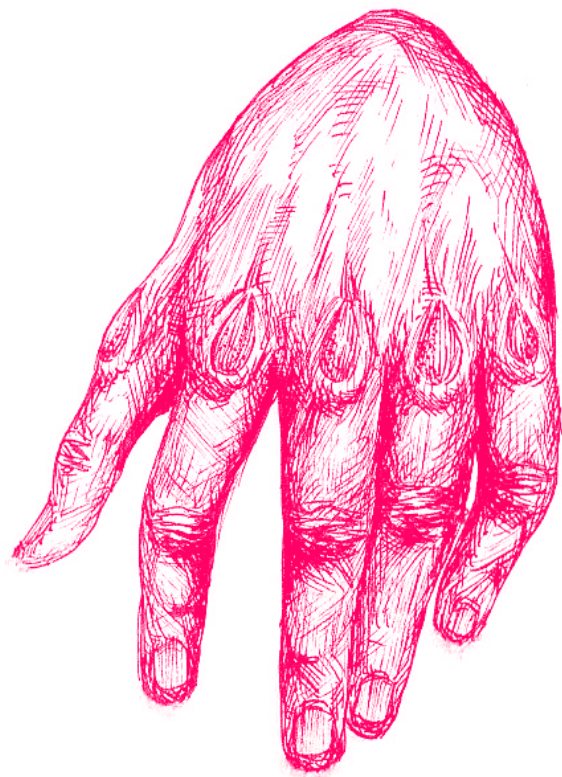


illustration.: Vivien Adamian

hole II

There's a little hole in my heart

Look at it closely: you'll find

A brown eye blinking

It tears up

Now and then.

After all, my heart is not

So versatile: I tied a string around it

Called it a balloon, and tossed it

To a patient audience of clouds

But it fell back towards me with a sad plop.

Another time I jumped

Into the ocean with it, my head abuzz

With all the new climes we could drift to

But my heart only pulled me

Further and further down.

That day, the eye was red and especially runny

I remember.

Bukowski

Omar Zahzah

*"I took a break from writing about the dead
and drinking from writing about the dead."*

-Amber Tamblyn

Did you bray

into the bottle

"Sickness is the only friend

who will dust off your blood

and let you sink

well into your bones,

just the way you like"

while nearby

a familiar mold

watched tender as a burned-out star?

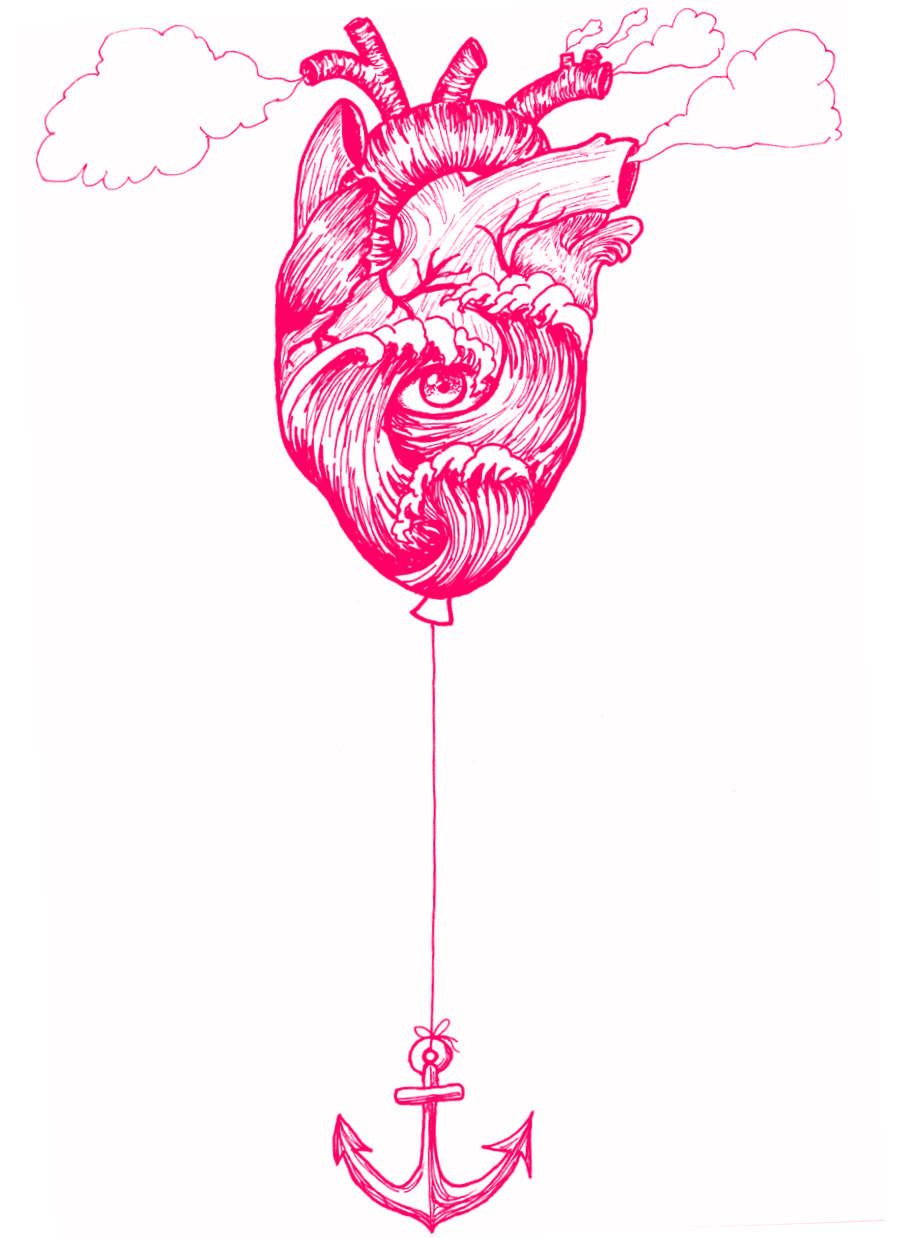


illustration.: Kendall Moore

Arturo Ramirez

Dangerous Game

The atmosphere was vivid,
as
vivid
as what comes to define the word.
The fur was brown with white tips,
a spectacle something like glaciers.
The tongue was a Pepto pink,
it hung too, dangled out
the mouth.
Maybe exhaustion was its last feeling.
The coyote—
Freshly dead.

As dead as you are imagining right now.

You drove past it with speed
no one could match
because you were going to be late to life.
Yet you saw the stillness,
the blood and lining of the guts in great detail
presented in slow motion
as if to make a statement.

You want to stop and do whatever you can
usually not much.
At best a struggle to get it to the side of the road
but you don't because you're in the fast lane and
the truck drivers, limo drivers, motorcyclists
will have you join the ranks of roadkill.
This shouldn't stop you but it always does.

It was beautiful like a painting
but it was real life.
It was beautiful like a painting
only this made you sadder
and kept you sad
because it is real life

and you look back once more,
see it now distanced in the rear view like
a thing of the past
something that stings worse than regret.

I just hope its curiosity was filled
having crossed a busy street in the first
place, because like all animals
us included
we need to fill what we can and want to so badly

or We will die trying.

Anniversary

Arturo Ramirez

It started raining
when we left and got into the car.
We had spent time with our dead relatives,
At the cemetery.
Má Juana died 6 years ago on this day.
Coincidentally it was the national day of
Mourning, popularly known as thanksgiving—
A name that bears more desensitization each year,
because America needs
something to claim as theirs.

We had spent time at the cemetery,
the one that doesn't allow loud music
but you play it anyway.
We talked about genes,
domesticated animals,
and
flowers stolen off graves.

Dirty white clouds blanketed the city.
The mountains outlined grey.
We had instant coffee,
the kind that makes you realize time and again that it is mostly
water. Like us,
like the earth.

The coffee didn't bother me.
Nothing did.
It didn't bother me we were celebrating life
by sitting with the dead.
It didn't bother me the
corrupt,
inhumane
history of the holidays.
The ongoing protest in my head
didn't bother me either.
Neither did the cold.

I sat with my
friends underneath the dirt.

And so my tía said a
prayer. “Descansa
en paz,”
she said.
And it's okay my
friends underneath the
dirt don't listen,

Because they can't.

Sheldon Cole Kozushko

Penguin

LA reminds me of donuts,
The ones I made at a Dodgers game.
Hot on the outside,
Glistening with seductive glaze,

But inside,
Sugar and ice
Make bites so cold that
My lips turn blue.

I am beginning to freeze
With the penguins around me.
Huddling, we crowd together
To stay warm—

Trying to forget
That we live
In a hostile environment.

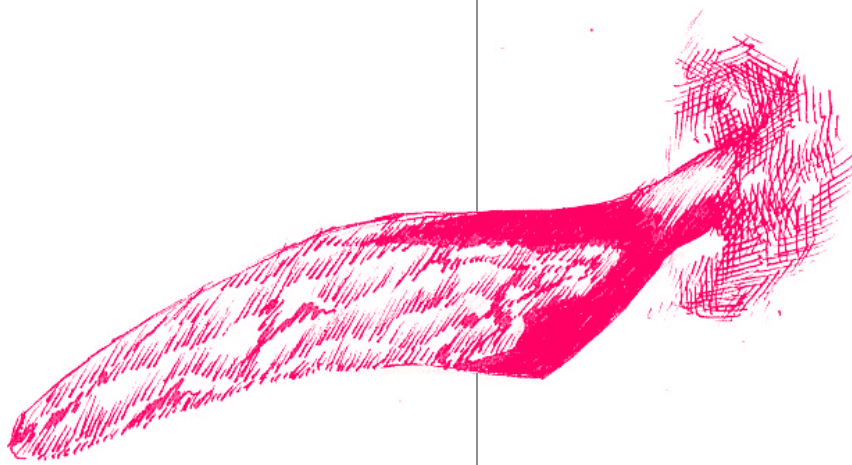
I have pursued a fantasy
Only to find it never endingly unsatisfactory.

Now I am frozen like my peers,
Floating in and out amongst the crowd,
Wishing I could just stay in one
Warm embrace.

I don't think I was meant to be a penguin,
Yet here I am all the same.

And what I was before I do not know.
Maybe a bird that could fly?

But those wings were shorn off
And now
I just slide.



The Perfect Sphere

Maybe if I keep curling, I'll find myself to be a perfect sphere.

My knees to my chin
My feet wrapped backwards
My edges rolled around like a tender ball of clay on a cutting board.

Its warm in here, that's why I stay.
Protected from the knife above
Who wants to make his home nuzzled in the bark on which I lie.

My shell is a mattress beside a small electric heater
My body is a never-born hiding from the world,

My locus has moved to the centre of my atoms
Hidden in the darkness of the spaces between the particles.

A bear's life,
A life too much to take for too long.

Safe and numb—Wrapped,
Wrapped and curled in the perfect sphere.

illustration.: Vivien Adamian

Annabelle Augustine
in the beaverkill

ashes to ashes

I
skeletal flesh
and lifeless eyes
she might as well
be dead already
she looks
older than death
I can't quite look
her in the eyes

II
in the beaverkill
I watch as
mom and grandma
sprinkle
what is left
unceasing wet tears
and salty kisses
the dust of life
mixes carelessly
with the dust of the sea
I feel nothing.

III
I sit in philosophy class
how do we process death
the professor posits blithely
I sit with this empty question
and begin to cry
ceaselessly

dust to dust

—A. V. Augustine

Esther L. Palmer
INSIDE

Outside, Grandmother is fine
like china.
Inside, she feels sick—pain
pinpricking her stomach
for two days.
Outside, children are playing:
there's a gum-blowing competition
happening in the park, right now.
Inside, I want to be outside
playing too;
not here,
where a doctor is asking
me: *where does it hurt?*
Inside, I don't remember
the Korean word for stomach—only
the word for pain;
so Grandmother points to the pain.
Everyone understands pain.



facing illustration.: Eunice Hong

Karo Ska

an unlikely pair

1.
wing-to-wing pigeons, toe-
claws curled, clutching
a phone line, coo-coos cascading
through throats like ice
melting, pinions tucked in, viridian
necks blushing under the strawberry sun.

2.
flying through a star-speckled sky, pigeon
descends on parties alone, settles
into a couch corner, strokes
house cat until she dissolves
into purrs. nobody asks
pigeon to dance. cat nests
in pigeon's plumage, she
meows, rolls over, showing
an unstroked part of her chin.

3.
the moon soars, melding
feather & fur: pigeon brings cat's
hips close, they sway
like they were perched on a pheromone
phone line, pigeon's wings weeping
feathers, their tongues engaging
in non-verbal languaging. at night's end
pigeon glides home, plumes
missing, throat purring.

like glitter

in the arctic, a polar bear collapses
from hunger. no ice, no seals, all sun.
she dived in bitter water, seeking

the scent of seal flesh like a child's eyes
scanning corner store skittles. she
swims like a ballerina, but the dance

isn't enough to stop the shrinking ozone, not
enough to stop the vanishing tundra.
she lays her gentle, giant snout

on her fur-rimmed paws, her eyes
flutter closed and do not open.
scavenger birds circle her, watching

for her last breath. under the hot sun,
her muscles cook like a polar steak.
beaks tear into her, squawks

clanging like warning bells. seasons shift,
winter snows over her heavy boned skeleton,
ice clinging to her ribs like glitter, shining

like the tears of Michael Brown's mother.
her son's flesh lying prone
on the streets in Ferguson,

no ambulance, no paramedics,
all white cops. he died in a bitter river
of his blood. in the arctic, a polar bear
collapses.



Moe Miller
Entering the American Workforce
Paint pen on transparent vinyl

Nida Choudhary

Twenties Blues

The weekdays are planned in my journal to the minute:
working on the thousandth generic application,
scraping through my resume and memories
for a worthy achievement or better yet an
experience. Type and search
No results found
No defining moments to be found

Working long hours
Staring at the brightly lit electric screen
until the late hours when I can hear
the person across the living room puking
out the last few hours into a porcelain abyss

Writing a fabricated tale of struggle and success
of an optimistic, determined human
with a plan, excessive hope, and a false sense of
knowing it all

Fulfilling the immigrant dream(s)
Someone else's dream(s)
Uncertain of an end or acceptance
Working tirelessly anyway because
all the motivation and work ethic I consumed
through my bestselling paperbacks and audible
books,
through the pestering and impatient voices of family and
friends promised a fruitful end to my hard work
and diligent plans

So I wait like an ET
With a likeness for the blues

Catherine Taghizadeh

Delete Me: A Compilation of Sporadic Pieces from Unwanted Poetry

I apologize for my vanity
And for my lack of wit—
I say I cannot wait any longer
Yet here I am,
An eternity later.
My eyes gloom
Across yellow skin,
Carrying smudged tears
On these cold cheeks.
I'm longingly staring at your bright light
From the opaque window.
I'm that swamp monster
Nobody knows exists.
I visit from time to time,
Fearing your memory will whisper
About who I used to be,
Begging your heart to realize
A shell remains.
I'd kill for you,
Don't tell me I'd do it anyway.

I'm in your grasp
Because whatever you held last
Squirmed free of your grip.
I can't keep my eyes open.
But it's with contentment
That I resign myself to the crumbling closet of my mind,
Back to you,
Always running behind the black walls
That shield me like firm arms.
If only I could see
What exactly lurks
In your darkness,
Then maybe
I wouldn't be so terrified
Of what's in the light.



illustration.: Kendall Moore

How Your Feet Ache in Autumn

Catherine Taghizadeh

These fall leaves
Are pieces of my heart.
You step lightly,
But the crunch
Is still too loud.



illustration.: Eunice Hong

Rae Vengo

What It's Worth

Pour me a cup of coffee; half-awake, for the bare minimum
Out the door, I walk the cracked concrete for the bare minimum

Hand one-twenty-five to the bus driver, three stops in
Enters a foul stench, holding my breath for the bare minimum

Clock-in at 7am. Clock-out at 3pm. 2 hours for lunch
One call to mom, one to the kids, and one from my boss; the bare minimum

Clock-in at 5pm. One customer loses their patience,
Another says it's too expensive. Manager yells at me for the bare minimum

Clock out at 12am. Too tired to cook; I stop by the nearest fast-food joint
Bland burger crisp salt on side and liquid sugar—the bare minimum

Rush through the dark streets until sleep meets my sheets
Wake up, pour me a cup of coffee; half-awake; for the bare minimum

Poor. Me. A couple sorry's; "math mistake", \$4 I bear the sum
Life not worth more than working for the bare minimum

Alice Zheng

If the train goes at the speed of light... does everything we carry upon us just fly into space?

Sentiments' expired by the time it arrived
I swallowed them whole with a piece of wheaten bread
and was good to go

Bell tolled for twelve
still vaguely ringing with obsession, delusion
disillusion of promises kept by no one

when we departed
when the sun set to the arc of rising
no shadows left on a collective mind

No history shall burden us.
The conductor asserted as he slowly accelerated the train
it is only safe to buckle up seatbelts and make that notion clear

Hope is a thing we chewed on
and deconstructed for fun for the ride
Lady Lazarus sat next to me in black

Her cat with red hair licked my shin
and waited patiently for me to commit my sin
in our exchanged look a mutual banality

Blank like our heads
Bland like my breasts
Rot and Rank

My dry roses
beheaded in the side pocket of my trench coat
reminded me of my secret plan

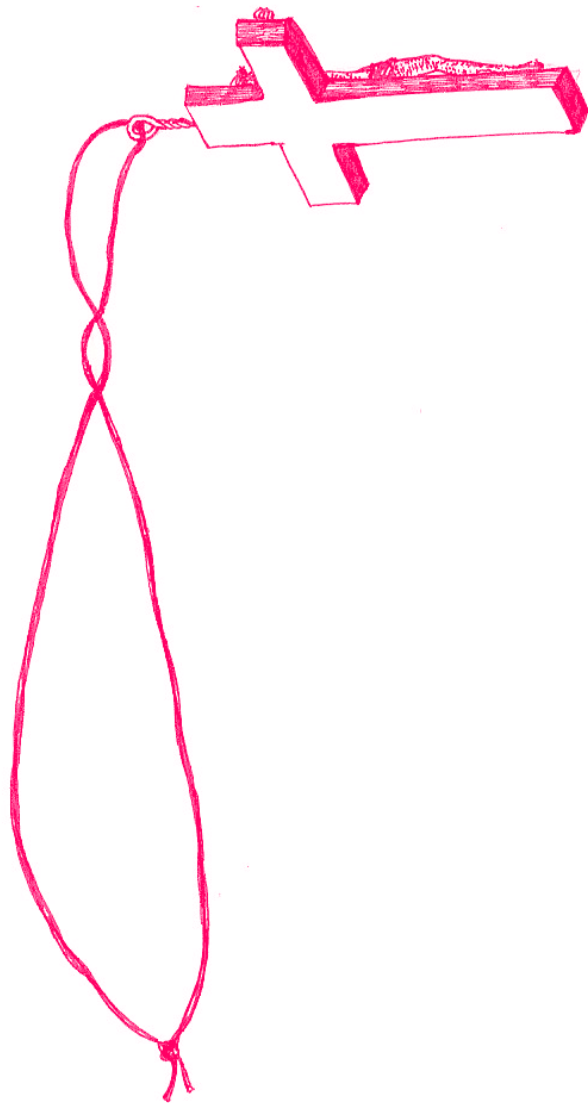
If there is a desert at the end of time
I'd plant those for eternity's sake
a buddhist clock that is praying temporality

with every love we forget
with every light faded on our face
we evaporate to be empty jars

Empty jars that clink and clunk when they are put in one box
Clunk Lady Lazarus flung her body against the wall of the train
Clink Passengers eyed her glorious mess soft like a sigh

I will remember this hour because of how apart we are
Time does not constitute history. Memory does.
I looked at the alien vertebrates in front of me

The wagon radiated into 2000 pieces
supernovae bringing me back
to the year I was born



Jenna Johnson

Forgive Me, Father

Forgive me for forgetting my cross necklace today.
I was in a hurry, you must know.
Forgive me for forgetting to pray.

Almond milk, ice, and coffee as always;
I wish it was pure black coffee I had to show.
Forgive me for forgetting my cross necklace today.

It's storming and I watch the traffic light sway,
like me, resisting the enticement of letting go.
Forgive me for forgetting to pray.

Keeping the windows up, letting the music pulsate,
forgetting you, coffee with milk, things I'll outgrow.
Forgive me for forgetting my cross necklace today.

With the windows up, I can't think of what you'd say.
If these raindrops find me, is it baptism I'll undergo?
Forgive me for forgetting to pray.

With your absence is a different way,
where I drink my tainted coffee slow.
Forgive me for forgetting my cross necklace today.
Forgive me for forgetting to pray.

over morning coffee

Jenna Johnson

You question me,
“How can you let black coffee cross your rosebud lips?”
How can I speak so softly as it lingers in my throat?
I twirl my mug and answer,
“You’re my chaser.”



illustration.: Kendall Moore

Rich Appel

Ode

To my older cousin
who, outside Nick’s Roast Beef at 20th and Jackson,
taught me the word *dickhead*,
and gave me a way of existing in the world of men
when I needed one:
pale and scrawny, naked,
goose-fleshed as a plucked chicken, and stranded
in the savage universe of puberty
where wild jockstraps soared across
the steamy skies of locker rooms,
everybody falling back laughing
at jokes I didn’t understand.
But *dickhead* this and *dickhead* that,
a song that meant the world
was mine enough at least
to bang on like a garbage can,
and knowing it, and having that
beautiful ugliness always
cocked and loaded in my mind,
protected me and calmed me and shaped me
like a psalm.



Fiction

illustration.: Kendall Moore

Lillian Virginia Mottern

Being a Grown-Up Woman Isn't Just Loving Robert Mapplethorpe

Clea was boring in the way that people with loud internal monologues can be boring. Her roommates told her as much every Thursday, when the intention was always to go run around on the Westside and Clea stopped talking completely and stood in corners with wine and people had to insult her if they wanted her to speak to them.

Women like Clea can be justified if they are waifish and malnourished, but Clea was not; she was a big-boned Norwegian with short blond hair and she wore bright eyeshadow and sometimes got very drunk and made sexual jokes about Freud. But usually, her internal monologue was too loud for anything and she could not do much except smile and offer people pieces of pink gum, which she kept in her pockets. This, Clea felt, was a sign that she was an adult woman. The loudness in her head was a sign that she had a mind too wrapped up in itself to stop. So she started smoking in excess and reading Gertrude Stein and Judith Butler and labeling herself as an intellectual to explain herself to everyone else.

Clea's old middle-school friend Zazie lived on the other side of town in Pasadena with a man who was thirty-nine. And, in shocking defiance of the norms of Los Angeles youth, who generally view the area with scorn, Zazie desperately loved Pasadena. This love she attributed to Pasadena's "art culture" which meant that Zazie liked diners and community art shows and middle-aged women in thick, heavy necklaces made of painted wooden beads.

Zazie's man worked at a health food store on the south side of Pasadena and his name was G.

G. was not very attractive, but he spoke Italian because he was from a big Italian family and Zazie was attracted to people with Culture. But G. was from Idaho and he had absolutely no connection to the Italian mob. Because of this, Clea found him magnificently uninteresting. She tried to inform Zazie of this, but because Clea generally could not speak in long sentences

and because Zazie only liked hearing words that matched up with her Mantra of Life, this information was difficult to transmit.

On Sundays, when Clea was not in class and Zazie was not at her coffee shop job, they would meet each other halfway; Clea traveling by train, Zazie by rented car.

They usually ended up just about downtown, right by Pershing Square, which is less a square and more a rubbly concrete patch.

Clea usually wore her tropically-patterned housewife dress. Zazie usually wore her shapeless corduroy pants and her Robert Mapplethorpe t-shirt. Zazie loved the idea of Robert Mapplethorpe.

And Clea and Zazie would go to the big concrete park with the fountain or the Broad if it was Tuesday or the vintage diner on Skid Row owned by the two middle-aged French lesbians who gave them free marshmallow-whip pie as long as they bought themselves the sandwich and soup combo.

And Clea was always depressed. And Zazie always pretended to be depressed. And Zazie talked about G. And Clea talked about how she was in love with her English professor. But Zazie mostly talked. And Clea mostly listened.

It's horrible when you're growing up and you realize your best friends are becoming new people. It's incredibly disturbing. Growing up doesn't happen when you're twelve and start growing hips or when you're thirteen and all the blood begins to drain out of your body. These things aren't radical or important because you go through them with other people; they're a collective sense of discomfort that eventually fades to the dull ache of female anguish that most people agree is universal. Truly growing up is a slower, more dangerous process than simple biology. It means trying things on, things which rarely fit.

So Zazie drank to excess and moved in with G. and Clea studied Chaucer like crazy and pretended she was extremely smart and not even a little sick. Clea and Zazie tried on every fucking thing they could find because they were the kind of women who wanted to grow up in extremes.

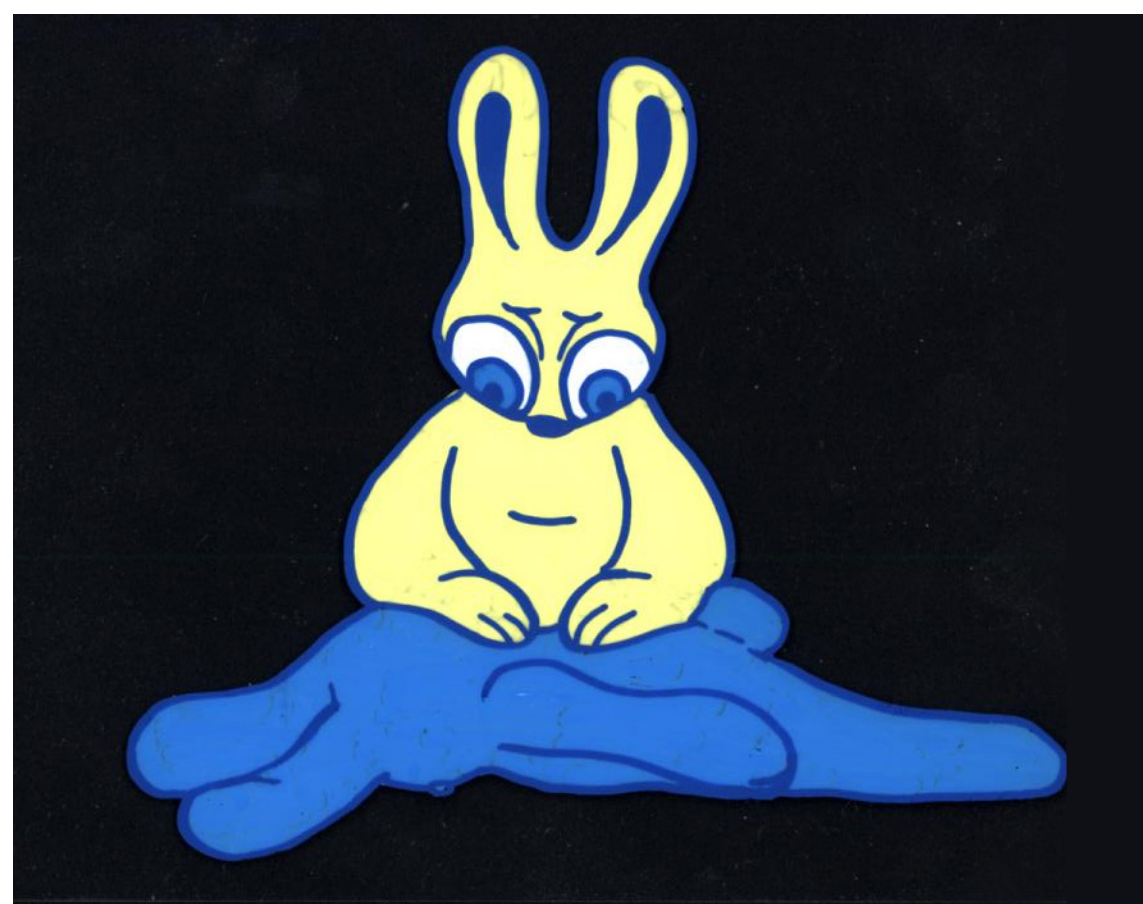
But ultimately, despite attempting grown-up things, they were both only twenty. Something had to break, because the problem with growing up in extremes is that "growing up," as it is portrayed by the people doing it, as it is portrayed by the entire world, does not actually last. Each "grown-up" moment is temporary, and believing that one has completely grown up, believing that everything has been solved by reading philosophy and having a cigarette, when one is still, in all truthfulness, a child, obviously cannot last.

And over time, Clea's inner monologue became too much for her to stand and she stopped going to classes and started sleeping all the time to block it out.

And over time, Zazie stopped being in love with G. and started sleeping with a cashier at the Pasadena Trader Joe's because she seemed to have a penchant for people who worked in grocery stores.

And Zazie came to visit Clea when Clea ended up in the hospital for being too sad. And Zazie held her hand while they pumped liquid into Clea to rehydrate the body that had once been strong and thoughtful. And it never made sense, not for a long time. It never made sense how loving Robert Mapplethorpe and having sex with grocery store clerks and going to college and reading Chaucer and drinking in moderation and "understanding global politics," how it was never enough. Because doing grown-up things doesn't make you a grown-up woman. And being a grown-up woman doesn't actually save you. But it would be so nice if it did.

Edited by Katherine King



Moe Miller
Say Something
Paint pen on transparent vinyl

Kurt Klaus

The Unconventional Methods of Dr. Karzak, Esteemed Surgeon

When asked about his unconventional methods, Dr. Karzak, a man of considerably high respect, told lavish tales of their origins in Copenhagen, Cornish, and the Congo Basin, once even citing Helsinki as a haven of creative and medical genius. The distinguished surgeon performed innumerable operations and casually sported an unparalleled—and quite frankly, unprecedented—success rate of 100 percent, drawing immense envy from physicians around the globe. While the origins of his techniques were more than well-known, the techniques themselves were clouded in mystery.

Operating out of a state of the art shack in Altoona, Kansas, the doctor's speckled Polish face was seldom seen by anyone except Ronaldo, his trustworthy assistant. 400,000 hopefuls applied for the daring and coveted position; rumor has it Ronaldo duly received the job on account of a glorious, hairy mole above his left eye, reminding Karzak all too lovingly of his late alcoholic mother.

For the majority of the doctor's infamous career, the public merely saw his impressive numbers—as opposed to a physical surgery—until the fateful day when Kansas's worst newspaper sent its worst reporter to Karzak's compound. Previously, the esteemed surgeon had rejected over 50 of America's finest journalists the common request of viewing an operation. Now, however, gingerly sipping on a glass of Chopin vodka (he refused to drink any liquid not from his home country, even importing water biweekly from Lake Sniardwy), Karzak promptly agreed to an open-house surgery exactly two weeks from the date. When the shocked journalist returned to his hometown, the mayor immediately gifted him two keys to the city and half a million Kansas dollars.

Fanatics flashing cameras, tourists lacking knowledge of the English language, and aspiring surgeons alike all flocked to the shack to view the operation. Ronaldo stood faithfully at the door, nodding as each sardine packed the can, but never speaking as he believed words were the devil's magic, only used so liars could cover up their deceitful tracks.

Inside Karzak's high-tech compound, black moss caked the ceiling, creating a necessary dark mood for intensive operations; planks of rotting

wood covered a broken window, well-placed cracks letting in the optimal amount of natural sunlight for Dr. Karzak's diligent and trained eye; a tattered mattress in the right corner provided daily rest for the weary surgeon and his assistant, essential when taking on the monumental tasks they so often did; and a thin curtain of top-grade, scientific shrink wrap separated the viewing area from the operating table, marking the open-house surgery as an immensely official occasion.

The esteemed doctor stood calmly by the operating table, silent amongst the chattering crowd. He wore a pristine lab coat and bright green goggles. Once the viewing area filled to the brim, Ronaldo shuffled out the door, locked it, and entered through a back-door to the surgery room, awaiting further instruction from his master. Moments later, he drew a burlap cover off the patient. It writhed in seemingly intense pain—only a doctor as talented as Karzak could cure it now. A hush fell over the crowd as Karzak slipped on a pair of blue latex gloves. The sardines stared in awe, anticipating the surgeon's next move.

In a magnificent flurry, America's finest doctor began the operation. He cut with a scalpel that transformed into a screwdriver; then scissors, hammer, chainsaw, butcher knife. Rapidly, tools exchanged hands between Karzak and his faithful Ronaldo: balloons, hats, dry ice, napkins, whoopie cushions, paper airplanes—each a crucial step in the complex surgery. The pair worked in complete and utter harmony, irrefutably in sync. Viewers clutched hands to hearts as the duos' gears ground, minds whirring, bodies seemingly on the verge of giving out, but somehow pushing through tremendous, apparent distress.

When the surgery was over, Karzak sweat profusely. With a wobbly hand and a dizzy field of vision, he withdrew his goggles and leaned his right arm on the operating table, breathing heavily. After a brief moment of silence, the stunned crowd burst into applause, absolutely astonished by the spectacle they had just witnessed. Whooping and yelling filled the air while violent embraces and thunderous high fives took control of them. Suddenly, however, amidst the cacophonous celebration, Karzak's knees locked, and in a foggy haze, he collapsed to the dirt floor, legs together, arms spread wide from his body.

As for the lifeless, mangled mess of the endangered Altoona bullfrog on the table, it had been expertly cured of its cancer.

That night, Dr. Karzak tragically passed away from the disease of incomparable genius; no physician in Kansas specialized in such a sickness. Ronaldo, on the other hand, now abandoned by his master, received a plethora of job offers due to his impeccable qualifications, ultimately settling on a honey-badger research facility in the booming town of Lanesboro, Minnesota. As for Karzak's patient population—which had coincidentally become endangered two years after the acclaimed specialist arrived in Altoona—it made a rapid comeback, overcoming its fight with cancer and surprising Karzak admirers around the world. He dedicated his life's work to

the frogs, supporters reasoned with teary eyes, and they're living long lives to return the favor.

Edited by Lillian Mottern

Contributors

Vivien Adamian (illustrator) is an artist and writer who likes making zines with her friends and dreams of making queer-horror comics.

Richard Appel was born in Philadelphia in 1951 and currently resides in Media, PA. After a succession of stupid jobs, he earned a BS in Community Development from Penn State, as well as an MA in Folklore and Mythology from UCLA. He has worked as a community organizer/social worker in Philadelphia and as an English teacher both in the public schools and community college. He has participated in three National Endowment Summer Seminars for Teachers, which included an independent study on the importance of stories collected from the WPA during the 1930's (titled *First-Person America*) and how they could be of value in teaching American history within the high school curriculum.

Annabelle Augustine is a recent graduate from UCLA, having received her degree in English, with a minor in Film, Television, and Digital Media in 2021. She currently works as a content creator at TCL Research America, developing and producing animated web series. In her spare time, she enjoys scrolling through streaming plat-

forms (and never finding anything to watch.)

Nida Choudary is a UCLA English alum (class of 2020). While at UCLA Nida completed an honors thesis with the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program titled *Troublesome Minorities: Questioning Assimilation in The Reluctant Fundamentalist and Home Fire*. Part of the thesis has been published by the *Macksey Journal*. She is currently working in a marketing role for a healthtech startup.

Caylin Ellowitz occasionally collages as a way to “concentrate very seriously” on something that’s just for fun. She always looks for opportunities to engage with dimensionality and mood, and likes to imagine that collage is somehow also set design for some liminal and weird unwritten play.

Eunice Hong (illustrator) is a 4th-year English major at UCLA, with a film minor and a professional writing minor. She has been drawing and painting all her life, but began focusing on digital illustration starting freshman year. Since then, she has explored different ways of storytelling like screenwriting, poetry, stop motion animation, and 2d animation. Joining *Westwind Journal* as part of the poetry and art editing team for a few quarters, she found a new avenue to continue drawing by submitting to *Westwind*. Currently, she is an illustration intern at the *Daily Bruin*.

Jenna Johnson is a junior at UNC Wilmington double majoring in English Literature and Creative

Writing. She is the editor-in-chief of *Second Story Journal* and the poetry editor of *Atlantis*. Her poetry has previously appeared in *Atlantis* and UCSB's *Spectrum Magazine*.

Kurt Klaus is a recent UCLA graduate who works for City Year AmeriCorps in South Los Angeles. He provides academic support to a fifth grade classroom, gaining experience he hopes to one day apply in the field of education policy and reform. He loves writing and is currently working on a non-profit, short-story book about the LA public transit system – if you or anyone you know would like to engage in a short, compensated interview regarding experiences taking LA public transit, please contact latransitstories@gmail.com.

Sheldon Kozushko is a poet and singer/songwriter hailing from the Pacific Northwest. He was born in Canada but grew up in a small community south of Portland, Oregon. This duality of origin parallels itself through his writing in themes of life and death, pain and joy. Shortly after graduating from the University of British Columbia, he moved down to Los Angeles, living with his younger brother for a year in their childhood SUV. Sheldon now resides in the historic district of Downtown Los Angeles.

Moe Miller graduated UCLA in the Spring of 2020 with a major in English and minor in Social Thought. These days he lives in Portland, Oregon and mostly spends his free time hanging out with friends, watching animated media, and gazing lovingly into the eyes of his leopard gecko Jesse. *Art-*

ist's statement: “I created these pieces in my triple dorm at UCLA during my first year as a transfer, before the pandemic. Even with the amenities of De Neve housing (wow, air conditioning AND a private bathroom?) I often found myself overwhelmed with schoolwork, a new strange environment, and what’s more: the weight of my own expectations for my future. Needless to say, this dread bled into my work. Despite the pressure I was experiencing I was also stimulated by the excitement of being outside of my element and wanted to experiment with new mediums. So, as a long time fan of traditional animation I took to recreating my own versions of animation celluloids using what I had in the dorms.”

Kendall Moore (illustrator) is a senior English and Spanish double major and film minor. She loves collaging, watching period dramas, and sleeping. When she’s not doing any of the above, she wishes she could be a character in an 80s movie.

Lillian Mottern is an English Major and playwright from the Eastside of LA. Her work has been published in *Waif Magazine* and *The Foundationalist* and she is a co-creator of the zine *Fruit of Our Doom*. She writes about the end of western civilization and trains.

Esther Lim Palmer is the author of the chapbook *Janus* (Finishing Line Press, 2020), and her work has appeared in various journals and anthologies, including *Cali-*

fornia Quarterly, White Wall Review, Poetry in the Time of Coronavirus, Volume 2, The Hungry Chimera, and Oberon's Seventeenth Annual Issue—selected to be archived in the EBS-CO's Humanities' database for universities and cultural entities interested in contemporary literary work. She currently lives and writes in San Francisco.

Arturo Ramirez Jr is a Southern California native who currently lives in Los Angeles. He has a B.A. in Philosophy from the reputable CSUSB. There he tutored classical logic and wrote excerpts for the campus journal. He is a freelance writer and devoted lover of the arts. Currently he is working on a book of poems as well as a screenplay.

Catherine Taghizadeh is a fourth year psychobiology major at UCLA. Other than personal poems, she's currently working on being happy and helpful.

Rae Vengo recently graduated from UCLA with a bachelor's in English. She loves to read just as much as she loves to write and hopes to publish Young-Adult (YA) novels in the future.

jimmy vega is the child of Mexican immigrants, a Chicanx L.A.-based poet, writer, educator, artist, and curator. He holds a B.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from UCLA and is an MFA candidate in the School of Critical Studies, Creative Writing Program at CalArts, where they co-created the MFA in Cre-

ative Writing's HYPERLINK reading series. He is the Assistant Director of Beyond Baroque Literary Arts/Center.

Omar Zahzah is a writer, poet, independent scholar, and organizer of Lebanese-Palestinian descent whose creative, critical, political, academic and journalistic writings have appeared in or are forthcoming from various publications including Narrative Magazine, Mizna, FIYAH, Electronic Intifada, Middle East Eye, Arab Studies Quarterly, Full Stop, and the New York Times. Several of Omar's poems were featured in the anthology, *Beside the City of Angels: An Anthology of Long Beach Poetry*. In 2016, Omar's chapbook *13 Almost Love Poems* was released, and Omar's chapbook, *DEATH*, is forthcoming from swallow::tale press. Omar is the Education and Advocacy Coordinator for Eye-witness Palestine as well as a member of the Palestinian Youth Movement (PYM) and the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (USACBI.) Omar holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from UCLA. Find Omar on Twitter: @dromarzahzah and Instagram: @omarzahzah

Alice Zheng is a bilingual writer based in Los Angeles, originally from Beijing, China. When not reading and writing, she plays and listens to music, watches light-hearted tv shows, and meditates on the ethics of being a romantic.

Editors

Fiction

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Damon J. Dumas
Sophie Ferreira
Samantha Gowin
Eunice Hong
Chandler Kyle
Omeed Partovi
Catherine Taghizadeh
Danyel Taylor
Laura Rodriguez Tenorio

Spring 2020

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Ian Byers-Gamber & A. Jinha Song
Gray, Colorized, 3 April 2020
Digitally colorized large-format positive

Poetry

Roy Graham

The Redeemers

We're in Milwaukee today for Davon
Who opened his golden letter yesterday
Informing him of our imminent arrival
And we are very excited to be here
Just look at us,
Crowded at the porthole,
Trembling and covered in silvery light
Robed before the cameras

I can't wait to meet Davon and elevate him
To polish his teeth and burn his clothes
His family and friends will be
Gently locked into the golden sarcophagus
For interrogation

This is The Builder
He will destroy Davon's bad home and make
him a joyful place, somewhere to be proud of
And this is The Skin
Who will fix Davon's skin
Look how beautiful he is! He cannot be looked at directly!
Meet the Eater!
Folks, he just loves
To eat

Our ship lands on his yard
And he is running, and weeping
But we take him into our gleaming hold
And welcome Davon to his new life as
Redeemed, stamped,
Made into something beautiful at last,
And you're welcome,
And we're crying too,
And we love you,
And we're learning,
And you're better now,
Better than you'll ever be again

jimmy vega

marigold & fugue in d minor

natalie presses keys
as blood stains desert
floors in sonora & sueños
americano are devoured
by vultures or lack of water.
el desierto es muy misterioso
she tells me as white crosses
are tucked inside tierra
in southern arizona, rosary
beads glisten tucked
in dirt or else clenched
like yellowed cavities—natalie
says she misses me
as children are crammed
in cages without their mother's
heartbeat en la frontera, sighing
as they mismatch their socks
or else the sign of the cross
& the women in el camino del diablo
rem sleep of caqui & rain
as they shove their palms
into sky like digging
out clouds—they dream
of stone while they fist
their sleep lids, whispering
to guadalupe—& natalie
is still trying to play bach
as children huddle sleepless
in adelanto or bedford, texas
weep like pregnant saguaros
while bones bleached & abandoned
glitter like snow in desert. natalie
hammers the piano—pounding
percussive instrument while a mother
muffles chamomile prayers in fluorescent

light & ruby saguaro silence
of the jaundiced sonora desert
sleepless—3:29 a.m. & she asks,
do you think dirt disapproves
of anything?



Katelyn Darrow
Views of the Virus
 Digital collage

Ashley Kim

my hometown

melancholy without	my hometown
fat trees	cut down
with deep voices	like the books I used to read
collections of	remembered paths
snails and bugs on leaves	crushed against my will
with a subtle lack of belonging	because we moved on
aromatic bookstores	they forgot
hosting greek myths and imaginary worlds	the feel of paper
that rejoiced and writhed	after screens
twisting park slides	I used to feel free
I pushed my dog down	because I wanted to
I was only ten	yet now the clock ticks
at the local vet office	we got the newsflash my dog was dying
I laughed because	I bawled in vain
we were near the wonder bread	praying to God for sustenance
at the farmer's market	I picked apples and carrots by myself
mom bought kettle corn and	out of a prepackaged bag it did not taste the same
negotiated with the candle maker	oh, to smell authenticity
giant parades	where every exhibition was a row of teslas in traffic
when my feet were off-step	the trees seemed out of place
my clarinet was squeaky and	I couldn't settle with city music

Sophia Bautista

it takes a man and a woman

i try to learn the ways he makes my friend laugh

the sturdiness in the sinew of his bicep when he hugs her
the aloof yawn of summer in his voice
the way he leans in like the earth tipped over
the way he kisses her in the middle of the sidewalk,
creating a landmark out of van ness and weldon avenue,
sunlight dropping like honey on their heads

i am a faithful understudy
because i can do summer, too

i imagine holding her hand
like cupping a firefly, glowing and fragile
i feel an infant hurricane forming in my stomach

i can do summer, too

in my head
i get to kiss her
the sun watches, unforgiving
i feel the warmth in my head and i peel back from her
my brain melting like ice cream on asphalt

this dream isn't an ocean,
but an aquarium with no breeze
i pressed my cheek against the glass
willing myself to believe it wasn't there
that fluorescence was the sun

he takes her to a concert
gives her father a firm handshake
their love is dressed in white

he can do summer

his heart luminous through his chest

i am the root so deeply buried
that can guess what the sun is like
through conjecture alone
the pine shoots and needles press
against the flesh of my back
to remind me i am spring

facing: Samantha Chandra
Dream as Big as the Universe
Watercolor on watercolor paper



Jolin Chan

Jinhai Realizes All Gold Rushes Must Come to an End

Jinhai realizes all gold rushes must come to an end
when all his pan holds are damp stones and beads of dirt,
when this town has lost its glow. This country has promised
gilded wealth and delivered an entire land of brothels,
saloons, and Levi jeans that cannot replace what he has broken.

Jinhai realizes things can be gold-plated. This is not
Gum Saan, the rivers do not flow with aureate metal,
and America is not made out of gold, but of a desolate gray
that covers their eyes with thin hands.

Jinhai realizes silence is gold—that the men wish to rip
out his tongue and examine the characters rolling off this foreign
piece of flesh. That he is not welcome by the look of those blue
eyes. Because blue is not the color of the sky, blonde
is not the color of his hair, and yellow does not pass for gold.

Judy Wu in the American Factory

In the American Factory, adorned with plumes of labor,
robotic hands, and men with blue gloves, they piece together
Judy Wu and her fellow sisters. Each clink and clang
is a body part—hands shove arms into man-made sockets,
foreign fingers pry open brown eyes. A stained thumb investigates
her mouth, metallic molecules sticking to the inside of her cheek.
Is her tongue American enough? Listen closely, are her r's tainted by l's?
If so, you know where she goes. Yes, sir.
And, if one can call it a miracle, Judy Wu passes her inspection,
laying on the conveyor belt exposed to all. When they wrap her up
with her fellow sisters—pulling down the doors of the truck—
she can still smell the plumes of labor, she can still feel
the robotic hands and the touch of men with blue gloves.

Catherine Taghizadeh

Red Spider Lily

Your hair is a flower of the most devious kind;
I pull expecting its petals to stain my hand red.
You insist the touch is sin,
But aren't I going to hell anyway?

I want to explain that
Hell is what you make it,
And if you willed us to be a pair
Won't your footsteps be hot on my trail?

Leave your cream-colored coat behind,
Bring a fan and a shovel,
Continue firing fiendish fantasies in my ear
As we enter the sludge and grudge downwards.

I confess— I've damned myself in a deal with the devil.
Should I be ashamed or laugh at my transgression?
When the infernal payment was demanded,
I let it slip that my soul was already in your possession.

What a glorious day!
When both cherubs and demons
Temporarily excuse the needless notion of good versus evil
To strike a match against our own little Garden of Eden.

The sultry smoke of the flames
Tickles my throat and begs to come in,
But don't I only burn
In this feverish pleasure with you?

My dearest Adam,
Our neighbors are simply jealous
Of the beautifully tantalizing fruits on our tree.
Do we dare offer their forbidden flesh and seeds

To the fiery purists who envy our soot?
You give me a sinful smile and I remember— how could I forget—
We were taught to love our neighbors.

Ziv Haikin

Lenny

Autism is called a hidden disability
as though I weren't six feet tall
rocking in place for stationary pacing
metronomical motion to keep my mind at ease
invisible to the untrained eye

Diagnostic discoveries lead
to doubtful questions from friends
who aren't doctors
I never would have guessed
You act completely normal
Are you sure?

Hidden behind no-contact eyes
lies my windscreech mind
deconstructing words like lincoln logs
reconstructing sentences like legos
Who diagnosed you is an anagram for
You're a liar

An unnamed Pollock is called a mess
avoiding eye contact is considered rude



Jason Chua
Megan
Photograph

Marielena Borrego

How to Cook a Wild Tongue

“Wild tongues can never be tamed, only cut out.”

- Gloria Anzaldua

My father tried to cook my tongue on the stove top,
he had cut it out in my sleep.
I woke up nearly choking on the blood
with the smell of burning meat.

My tongue tried to bound out of the pan
and ricochet back to me.
My father, well versed in all my tongues tricks
clutches the meat tenderizer and strikes down
with every miss he is showered in hot oil,

he does not flinch,
seizes the toothed hammer
and swings down hard,

like a blacksmith forging a sword.
I am bleeding all over my mother's
terracotta kitchen floor.

My tongue writhing in the oil,
twitching, sizzling, broiling,
refusing to let its magic be burned alive.

He had finally done it,
been quick enough
to cut out my tongue.

In the daylight
it mocked him, flicking
like a serpent's, forked tongued
and too fast for him to catch.

I fell asleep with my mouth open
because I talk in my sleep.
Casting spells in the middle of the night,
speaking words of resistance.

A father's bloody love
is a butcher's knife.
I awaken bound to the chair at the kitchen table,
my shirt drenched in blood.

He places la carne de lengua in front of me
and tries to force it back down my throat,
without a tongue I cannot swallow.

I cannot speak with a cooked tongue.
I try and scream yet no one wakes,
No one can smell this violent mistake.

He is basking in the silence
he has finally been able
to create.

My Grandfather Forgets All the Women in My Family are Witches.

Marielena Borrego

I am reminded by a ghost ache
of when I first learned to roller skate,
too scared to use the toe breaks
I slammed face first into the fence.

My grandmother found me on the ground
with a black eye
and began to work her magic.
Insisted that la naranja agria would fix it,
and I screeched as she squeezed
sour orange in my eye.

My grandfather denies the santeria.
Tells the story of my great grandfather
going to medical school in Paris.

He forgets que todos las mujeres
somos brujas.
Las mujeres en mi familia
tenemos remedio mágica para todo.

Coffee for your canas,
honey and lemon for a cough,
concha nácar for sunspots,

aloe vera on burns and
arnica in all the bruises,
vapor rub for everything else

This is our magic,
we can heal you
with something from our kitchen.

The sour orange tree in the backyard
can fix *anything*.
Brew it's juice to cough syrup,
it can bring down swelling on bumps
and even soothe a sore throat.

My grandmother is a healer
fixing scrapes and rashes
She knows exactly when I am sad
And that melón will always fix a broken heart.

The sweet juice like ambrosia,
Or a love potion,
 brujería de amor
 healing me from the inside out.



Samantha Chandra
Rendition of the Wolves Pursuing Sol and Mani
Gouache on watercolor paper

Jason Vuilleumier

The Ox and the Flower

A story? Yes, why not, but you must all promise to be quiet, and listen well. You too, Seji! And heed, for old Esh speaks the truth, and nothing but. All I tell is true, and I had it from Mai-si, who had it from Tesvet, who had it from Calla-tu, and on back to the beginning, to the first Truth-teller there ever was. Heed!

Once, in the innocence of the world, when the sun was still learning to plait her flaming hair, there grew a flower. Some say that it sprouted when a star fell from her perch and was so ashamed that she dared not climb back up, but I have never believed it. There are others who say that it was the first flower, the form from which all others were imperfectly cast, and I give this somewhat more credence. Well, so. Regardless of where it came from, it grew, and it was so great in shape and color and loveliness that the gods saw that men would go blind if they looked upon it. Man was but new upon the earth in those days, and the gods feared that the onset of blindness would stop him trying new things, which could not be; if there is one thing on earth that man is destined to do, it is to attempt everything under the sun, and yes, under the moon as well, if he can possibly manage it.

So the gods ordained that the flower should be destroyed. Though none would admit it outright, none of them had the heart to do it, for it was so splendid and perfect a thing that it seemed a tragedy to crush it out of existence. The Mother told the Father to take care of it, and the Father told the Daughter to take care of it, and the Daughter told the Son to take care of it, and the Son told the Servant to take care of it. With little other choice, the Servant told his cat, which he kept for himself, to take care of it. "Cast it away," he told the Cat. "See that it is lost."

"Ha!" said the Cat to himself after his master left. "He thinks I am a servant like him. Well, more fool him. I do the bidding of none on earth or heaven." And, tail swishing, he stalked off with the flower and cast it at the foot of the Dog, who was both the spoiled pet of all the gods and the main thing keeping the earth in check, for this was when it was young and exuberant and needed keeping in check. "Dog!" said the Cat. "Your master wishes this flower gone. See to it."

"Ha!" said the Dog to herself after the Cat left. "He thinks I will do anything he says, so long as he claims Master said so. Well, I will not be tricked again." The Dog had, in fact, just a few days prior, herded a group of splotchy deer out onto plains where the trees were too high for them to reach and the grass not tasty enough to eat, an order which the Cat had claimed

came from the Father. The deer had become giraffes, and the Dog had had to sleep on the floor a night in punishment for her foolishness. Yes, Pejik, exactly like your fool beast Vishnek—remind your mother that she owes me a new bowl. Now hush.

Well, so. “Hmph!” the Dog grumbled. “Master would never ask me to destroy a flower as fine as this. That Cat is a fool.” But it was her responsibility to keep all the animals of the earth in check, for none had yet learned to do it themselves, and at that moment, she could see that a herd of water buffalo were going dangerously close to the edge of the earth. With no time to lose, she rushed to the Ox, a solid and amiable fellow, if a bit dim, and said, “Ox! This flower must be kept somewhere safe, and I have no time to do it myself. Will you put it somewhere, please?”

“Of course,” the Ox said in his slow, warm voice, chewing his cud. “Where?”

“I don’t know!” the Dog said, already leaping away. She kicked in a wide gesture with her hind legs. “Somewhere!”

The Ox turned his great head in the direction that the Dog had accidentally indicated. “Hm,” he said. “I do not see anywhere very safe that way. But Dog is clever. She knows best, I’m sure.” He picked up the flower and plodded off, because the Dog was his friend, and he didn’t mind helping her with her work, for he had very little to do himself in those days, now that the shape of the land was carved.

Well, so. First he came to a great, rolling grassland, rippling with a cold wind that smelled of snow. He thought it seemed a pleasant enough place for a flower, but then he noticed the tracks—great swaths tramped through the grasses—and saw the great, slow-moving mammoths at the end of them. Yes, they came as far south as the plains in that time, and you may still find a few if you should venture far enough to the north. Well, they were decent creatures, and he bade them good day, but their feet were huge and clumsy, all too likely to crush a flower. So he moved on.

Next he came to a forest, dark and powerful already, as they all are, though the world was young. He considered it, and scouted out several likely places that had plenty of access to fresh water, but eventually he decided that the flower was not likely to be one of those that prefers shade, and carried on with his task.

After the forest, there was a great river with muddy banks, licked with frost, that teemed with flowers. “Ah,” said the Ox. “Now here is a place for a flower.” But even as he watched, there came a great flood, and the river overflowed its banks, washing away many of the flowers. The Ox picked his way through the water with his great cloven hooves. “Perhaps not,” he said, and continued on.

Beyond the river lay many leagues of high desert. The Ox huffed and snorted as he sucked in the thin air, but it was so cold that he bled from his nose. “No matter,” he panted. “I will find a place for the flower. Somewhere safe.”

After a time, he came across a yak. The yak was tied to a stake outside a tent in the hard, dry snow, and it wore great, thick, embroidered blankets over its great, thick fur. “Brother,” it said. “What brings you here with no blanket?”

“I must take this flower somewhere safe,” the Ox said, stopping to rest for a moment. “I have been through grass and trees and water and desert, and I have found nowhere that would be safe for a flower.”

“Well,” the yak said thoughtfully, “you won’t find a place for a flower in the desert. You had better go on. I hear that flowers grow in the mountains, and it will certainly be safe from people and animals there. But you will not be. Beware the mighty Leopard; she roams those heights, and they say you never see her until she is upon you.”

Well, so. The Ox heeded the yak’s advice and bore the flower on through the desert. By this time, he was getting very tired, and hungry and thirsty besides. He would have greatly preferred to be back in his green pasture near the house of the gods, but the thought of returning did not enter his mind. He had told the Dog he would see the flower safe, and so he would. A sense of duty which some of your parents would do well to remember.

When the yak-driver came out of the tent, he saw the great tracks the Ox had left and was puzzled by them. The yak told him that an ox had come bearing a lovely flower to hide in the mountains, and the man wondered at it. The yak was not a clever creature, but nor was it prone to lies. Something had made the tracks; why not an ox? And if an ox, why not an ox with a flower? He told his little daughter about it and laughed. She laughed, too, but she was clever, and her laugh stopped quickly and was followed by great, slow thoughts that moved below the surface like crocodiles, and only rarely came up for air.

The desert came to an end eventually. At its edge grew mountains, sharp and cold and sheer. The Ox could see no flowers, but he climbed regardless. He trusted the word of the yak. Though his hooves chipped and scraped, and his fetlocks grew wet with blood and ice, he trudged on, through stone and snow and frozen gravel and all the other accoutrements of the highest, coldest, steepest mountains.

After a long time, the Ox paused, having heard a sound. He turned his great head back and forth, his bloody nostrils scattering drops across the snow, but he saw nothing.

Then, quite suddenly, the gravelly slope before him moved, and as it moved, it resolved itself into the shape of a great white cat with gray splotches like stone. “What brings you here?” said the Leopard—yes, a cat of ice and snow, not like the golden leopards we have here—who had been sunning herself quite comfortably until the great clomping Ox had come along.

“I am bearing this flower somewhere safe,” the Ox said. “Please, do you know where the flowers grow?”

“Flowers?” the Leopard laughed. The beast had come far too high for the flowers of the mountain-caves. Then she realized what power the Ox’s

ignorance gave her, and she quickly made her laughing cat-grin go still. “The flowers grow just over the ridge, my dear. If you will only follow me, I will take you to them. You cannot climb high enough without me.”

Relieved, the Ox plodded after her, slipping and sliding his way up the mountain, following the steps of the Leopard. After a long climb, he crested the ridge at the top of the mountain, where the snow came to his thick neck, and he stood still, gasping and puffing. When he had caught his breath a little, he looked out into the air, cold and dry and lit up with gold from the sun’s young light, and he said, “I see no flowers.”

“Ah, only look down,” the Leopard said. She padded easily up to the top of a boulder and gestured down the far side of the mountain. “This is where they grow.”

The Ox stepped obediently forward to see, but as he did so, the snow gave way beneath him, and his great bulk tumbled down the mountain. He caught himself before he had gone too far, but he saw at once what the Leopard had been plotting: for him to dash himself upon the rocks. “Ai!” he groaned, and heaved himself to his cracking feet. “Why must you trick me so?”

But the Leopard, seeing that her plan had not worked as well as she had hoped, was already lunging down the mountain, her great jaws parted, black lips glistening, white teeth shining like knives of diamond.

The Ox fled. He barrelled down the mountain, thrusting aside snow and ice with his broad body and carving trenches for himself, while the Leopard bounded atop the snow, wide paws keeping her from sinking, the image of perfect and deadly elegance. The Ox had size, strength, and momentum on his side, but he was also tired, and cold, and hungry, and thirsty. With the snow kicking up around his sides, he could hardly see where he was going.

But the Leopard knew, and she wanted more than anything else to stop him. You see, beyond the desert’s last mountains, over the impassable ridge, lies the far edge of the world. It is not like this one, brimming with lotus and warm waters; no, the farthest edge is frozen. Its falls are made of windblown snow that flows between stone knives, trailing off into nothingness forever, and if the Ox continued on, he would fall with them, and the Leopard would lose her hard-earned supper.

There is one other way in which the farthest edge of the world differs from this one. It has an island, just one island—a great mountain, greater than any you have ever seen, the lord of all mountains, and it is connected to the world only by a thin bridge of ice. By luck or fate, the Ox, bleeding and exhausted, crashed right onto the bridge.

His hooves skidded on the ice, but he did not fall. He only kept running, and it was not until he was already across the bridge that he realized that there was one. He stopped then, in the snow, and looked back.

On the other side of the bridge, the Leopard paced. “Fool!” she spat, her long tail thrashing in agitation. “There are no flowers there! Come back to the world!”

The Ox looked at the bridge, free of snow, all slick, glassy ice, and then beyond it at the twitch-tail Leopard, her fur standing on end, paws bristling with curved claws, and gave a great, heaving sigh. “You will eat me,” he said. His tail, threaded with hoarfrost, hung despondent.

“Of course,” the Leopard said. “But would that not be a kindness? When I think of how cold you must be! Surely you do not wish to cross the mountains again, and go back to wherever it is that you came from? What a journey!”

The Ox slowly shook his head. “I must rest before I cross again,” he said. Then he looked at the bridge again, with all its glimmering satin danger, and sighed again. “I cannot cross it with you there. But I must get this flower somewhere safe.”

The Leopard yowled in impatience. “Flower!” she snarled. “The edge of the world is no place for a flower!”

The Ox looked at the mountain lord, then back to the bridge, and then at the mountain again. “I think it must be,” he said at last, and he turned to the mountain and began to climb.

“No!” called the Leopard. She roared in rage, and roared again, but the Ox never looked back, and there was nothing to show for all her work. She dug her claws hard into the ice of the bridge, but she dared not cross.

The mountain lord was vast, as I have said. But it was not made of the dagger-ridges of the mountains of the farthest edge, but of the stone-dotted slopes and snow-spills of the Mountains of Heaven. Some say that the Mother put it there, so that if she ever had but a moment to herself, she may have somewhere quiet to sit. Not that she ever has. Regardless of its origin, it was not so steep and punishing a climb for the Ox as the edge-mountains had been.

But it was long. A mountain does not get to be called the lord of mountains by being small, and the island-mountain beyond the edge of the world put the rest to shame. Yes, even our Medi Peak—you could stack three Medi Peaks on top of each other and they would not be equal to the mountain lord. The Ox struggled for a day and a night before he reached the peak.

Well, so. Reach the peak he did, and once there, he found a long stone peninsula that jutted out over the clouds at the edge of the world. The dawn was breaking over those clouds, the young sun unplaiting her messy flaming hair to try again, and all was lit up like a great soft sea.

“Ah,” said the Ox. He had not seen a single flower on all his climb, and this troubled him. But all the strength was gone out of his great limbs, and the air dragged painfully through his lungs. “I think you will grow here,” he said to the flower. He looked down at his cracked and bleeding hooves, his trembling legs, and at the blot of red growing where his poor nose dripped, and he said, “I think you must.”

He made to settle down to his knees, but before he could lower himself all the way down, his legs gave out, and he dropped to the snow with a muffled crash. “Ah,” he said again, “ah.” He extended a great foreleg out in front of him, at the edge of the peak of the mountain beyond the edge of the world,

and carved a hole in the snow and the frozen, rocky soil beneath. “Ah.” He patted the flower into the hole, tamping the soil and snow around its roots and leaving great bloody hoofprints.

The flower stretched its leaves and unfurled its blossom, and the Ox sighed with great contentment to see its beauty. “I think I will rest here,” he said. And he laid his great head in the snow, breathing in the scent of that flower, and closed his soft eyes. They did not open again, but the flower bloomed more beautifully than ever, overflowing with the kindness that it had been shown. And so the flower that the gods had ordered destroyed grows there still, beyond the farthest edge of the world, on the gods’ own mountain.

Ah! Now, no questions. I said *no*, Seji. Tomorrow night, after we cross the river, I will tell you of the great Lhai-sey the Blinded, who heard of the ox and his flower from her father the yak-driver, and went on a journey to ask the gods about it. That journey took her to our edge of the world and back to her own and beyond, and if by the end of it you still have questions about the Ox and the Flower, or indeed about Lhai-sey and the Star-staff, they will be my fault, and I will answer accordingly. For now, remember the strength and generosity and kindness of the Ox, and remember that Esh tells truth, as did Mai-si, as did Tesvet, as did Calla-tu, and all the Truth-tellers, back to the beginning.

Edited by Ashley Kim

Creative
Nonfiction

Chandler Kyle

Summer

I used to love summer. I remember soft breezes amidst stagnant, yellow air, the distant sound of a car, and dried pine needles. I remember the creek that ran behind my grandmother's condominium, and her dusty cream couch; the sheer gold curtains that I'd wrap around my body like a gown; the grimy cement pathway that led to her home. I remember the old wooden bridges that crossed over the creek, sitting underneath their railings with my feet hovering a few feet above the water. In the summer, there was always a rubber ducky race. I remember them dropping hundreds of numbered ducks into the creek, with all the residents placing bets on their prized duckies. Why was childhood so ridiculous and fantastic, with such wonderful and confusing things? When I was around 8, or maybe younger, I won the race – taking home the grand prize of a vehicle emergency kit. I didn't want to give it to my parents, because I felt so proud to have won the ducky race. Yet, my father needed jumper cables, and I did not.

I remember the feeling of second hand books, their browning pages and white spines, cover pages half attached and the pen marks of another child's name in perfect cursive. I used to love summer with the library reading program, and the flimsy toys I'd receive for my hard work. I remember loneliness as I watched all the children with their parents in the common reading room, as I sat at a desk in the corner. I remember knowing the librarians, them knowing me. My mother sat with her furrowed brow at the computers, slaving over her resume, and me, asking for a few quarters to spend at the bookstore. I remember when we ran out of quarters.

I remember the time when my father lived in an office room, turning what used to be a patio bench into a bed. I used to love visiting his room because he always had orange creamsicles. He was too embarrassed to let me visit often. I remember my mother yelling when I told a child at the playground where my father lived, only because they asked. I remember my father's old, weary face, illuminated by a blue glow of the television; sound asleep. Ridiculous and fantastic, wonderful and confusing things.

The deep, furrowed brow left lines on her face. His hair greyed faster than age demanded, and once sparkly blue eyes slowly faded. What marks remained on me? I can't see them, but I know they're there. I wish I hadn't asked for quarters. I wish I didn't like orange creamsicles. I wish so many things.

Summer. Stagnant, breathy air; bitter chlorinated pools; second hand swimsuits and green hair. Hot concrete and adults too worried about the

future to watch me swim; to walk over to the reading room and spend a moment with me. A librarian hands me a plastic bookmark with googly eyes for finishing another book. I collect pennies on the street. I watch a turtle bathe in the sun with my bare feet wading in the water, wishing I could see the rubber duckies race again. But there came April showers that never brought May flowers, and I spent summer watching my world shrivel up and die.

My grandmother lost her condominium, and I wasn't there to watch her move out. I never saw the empty living room, it's white couches stripped from the scenery, leaving only bare carpet. I never saw the paintings removed, leaving behind plain white walls. I never saw the kitchen cupboards empty, cleared of her favorite spices and scattered, stashed packets of Splenda. Summer, when she moved into a retirement home and the rooms were smaller and there were no extra beds to sleep on. Summer, when my parents became homeless and now there was no place to go - no condominium with pull out couches or office rooms to sleep in anymore.

I grew older, faster than my hair and eyes and soft little hands. Old enough to be left alone at the library, while my mother and father slaved at jobs that only barely covered a small motel room. There were entire months when I existed at the library, opening books and staring at empty pages with glass eyes. Words drifted off the pages and my thoughts flew to summers past, when my mother and I slept together in my grandmother's living room. The pullout bed of her large white couch, with scratchy blankets pulled from a closet. A soft lamp illuminating the dark, quiet

room, and my mother and I reading together. I thought of the hum of air conditioning and the soft sound of her finger turning a page. Clear in my mind sat a porcelain image of my mother, escaping her sadness in a second hand paperback. Stacks and stacks of second hand books, until there was nothing left to read. I never saw the barren living room, after the bank took the condominium and the economy took my mother. I never touched the sheer gold curtains, just one last time, or held my mother's porcelain face in my hands. I don't remember what her eyes looked like, looking into mine, before they lost their hope and turned to glass. The gold curtains wafted gently with a summer night's breeze, crumbling at the ends into glistening dust. I held that stiff, porcelain memory of my mother in my arms, tightly squeezing it until the porcelain cracked and the image of her was lost entirely.

Summer spent in an air conditioned library, with a furrowed brow at the library computers. Memories like a siren's whisper, luring me into a sea of emptiness, that could only be snapped by a glaring notification: "windows will automatically log off due to inactivity in 10 minutes." A dusty computer screen, and my back hunched over a gummy wooden desk. My eyes glazed over acceptance letters and test scores that weren't enough. There were university emails with congratulations and professional fonts and digital signatures from arbitrary gatekeepers, extending an invitation into a world that could never replace all that I had lost. Alone in a library, I still waited

for my mother to come tell me she had finished her resume so that we could go home and read on my grandmother's pull out couch once more. I accepted the invitation, with the click of a button. In my university's library, I still wait for my father to tell me he is done with work so we can go to the park together. A child's heart that continues to wait, even when it is all gone. My summers of childhood left me behind long ago.

Summer, spent with a bitter sting in my throat, never rising into tears. The last classes of June coming to a close, and sitting alone on the green hills of a college campus. Watching students walk with their families, imagining that they were the very same children from library reading rooms.

A summer sun stings with red hot skin, forgotten sunscreen, and dry eyes. My mother hums into my ear, and my father is smiling. Beautiful, delicate memories. Painful, empty, and heartbreaking memories. Memories splayed out in the sun to fade with each passing summer, beating hot until all the color is lost to the harsh, unrelenting light.

I can't forgive myself for growing up, nor for ever being a child at all. I believed I could save my family from their sadness if only I grew up. I wish I hadn't.

Edited by Spencer Beck

Noemi VanSlyke

Parking

Climbing into the driver's seat, I slam my car door shut. The noise is rather anticlimactic, so I search for another form of release for my pent-up rage. I glance around but my options for catharsis are limited—so I scream. I scream with the reckless abandon of a toddler who has just grasped the concept of the word “no.” It feels good. My vocal cords are wavering, about to surrender to the searing pain in my throat, but I continue to indulge, luxuriating in the sound.

Theatrical? Yes, undoubtedly. But also a warranted response to my third seventy-dollar parking ticket in a matter of months. The City of Angels seems to inexplicably spawn the devil's little white envelopes, which miraculously appear tucked under my car's wiper blades.

I moved to the city last year in late August, starry-eyed and filled with a glittering suburban confidence. By early November I was beat—searching for Cliff bars on sale at the grocery store because the majority of my part-time paycheck was subsidizing the LA City Parking Violations Bureau. My downfall began with an innocent incident: I came home late one night and found that all the parking spaces around my building were taken. I began circling the block like a bird of prey, darting towards any openings between parked cars only to catch a glimpse of a lurking fire hydrant, a red curb—or worse—a “No Parking Anytime” sign.

The thought crossed my mind that I might never find a parking spot: that the universe was conspiring against me and that I may continue circling the block forever until I eventually expired at the wheel. But fortunately, I was spared: a tight parallel job between a seen-better-days Corolla and a soccer mom's Porsche SUV saved me—at least until the next day, when I returned to a white envelope and the sinking realization that street-sweeping occurred on Wednesdays, not Thursdays, on this side of the street.

Street-sweeping! What a concept. Two days of quote-on-quote “sweeping” and the filthy streets are never any cleaner afterwards. Let's not pretend that those elusive, bulky vehicles with the brushes that no one knows the names of are actually doing anything other than swirling the dirt around and putting on a big show. After that first incident I quickly learned that any late night of working or studying would yield a regretful scene the next morning: me, barefoot and pajama-clad, running to my car, bedhead in full effect, the laughingstock of my neighborhood construction workers—scrambling to find a place to move my car before it was too late. And I wasn't the only one.

Now let me be clear: I consider myself a reasonably stable, rational person. I rarely have emotional paroxysms. But one thing that gets under my skin and festers there is the almost-comic cruelty of the parking system in Los Angeles. In theory, parking tickets are necessary evils. I get it. But the limitations of parking, along with the lack of a coherent public transportation network, on top of the obsessive need to penalize violations in this city is unrivaled by any place I've ever lived.

The limited amount of parking is one issue. Having chosen to live off-campus for my third year of college in an attempt to save a few bucks each month (more like \$400 but who's counting?) I was forced to choose between paying \$900 a year to claim a parking space on campus, or \$120 a year for a bus pass. Naturally I chose the latter option, but found myself on an hour-long walk-and-ride combination each morning when the drive would have taken me less than fifteen minutes. I suppose in a capitalistic society, my time is worth less than the trust-fund kid's whose parents have \$900 to spare.

Thinking about the frequency and fanatical gusto with which parking tickets are issued also gets me riled up. I've watched parking enforcement cars stall in the middle of residential streets, emergency lights on, minutes before the scheduled street-sweeping time begins, just waiting to ticket every car still in their way when the fateful hour strikes. I've also seen officers prowling around cars, inspecting them like a butcher does a slab of meat, looking for an outdated registration tag or invalid parking sticker to condemn. I'm glad there are people out there committed to handling what are arguably the most benign law violations you can commit with strict punitive measures. What a constructive use of my tax dollars!

The sheer dollar amount of the parking tickets is another point of contention. If they wanted to metaphorically slap me on the wrist, twenty dollars would be enough. Seventy dollars is five hours of work at my minimum-wage job, it's a quarter of my paycheck, it's two weeks of groceries. *A cruel amount.* And let's not forget who is paying that seventy dollars: not the starlets in their houses in Bel Air with the three car garages and expansive driveways. No, it's the *me's* of the world: the broke college students, the single parents, the small-business owners and the struggling artists. The act of imposing violations on those unfortunate enough not to possess the luxury of wealth is an act of exploitation on socio-economic, as well as racial, lines.

Los Angeles has quite the history of this type of exploitation. In the first half of the 20th century, the city had a booming public transportation system: a network of streetcars, known collectively as the "Red Car," that traversed the area efficiently and effectively. It expanded employment and housing opportunities for the city's working-class residents of all ethnicities. Soon, however, buses and automobiles were replacing the city's trolleys, to the satisfaction of the big-business car, oil, and gas companies who were invested in the previous system's dismantling. This led to increased social divides: the working class and people of color were generally excluded from possessing the means to purchase cars, forcing them to ride buses which were often

far more time consuming and subsequently, location-limiting. Freeways were built to accommodate the increase in cars, and not surprisingly, they were built in a similarly egregious manner: cutting through poorer and more ethnically diverse neighborhoods like Boyle Heights while avoiding traditionally upper-class white neighborhoods like Beverly Hills. So if you've ever wondered why public transportation in L.A. is so incompetent in contrast with other large cities, or why parking is such a nightmare, look no further than the money-grabbing big businesses and the capitalist society which supports them.

I can recognize my own privilege: I own a car in a city that practically requires one. I have a job and an education. But this is a city of dreams and purported opportunities. Everyone here, including myself, is hustling and trying to "make it" under the guise that such a thing is even possible. Yet to live here is to be determined and defeated, day after day, but never leave. I've paid my fair share of tickets, prowled my neighborhood for an elusive spot, and sat in traffic on freeway overpasses for hours on end, which begs the question: how are any of us supposed to "make it" if we literally can't *make it* because we can't find a place to park?

Edited by Emma Dorsey



Jason Chua
Soraya
Photo taken through Skype

Kian Ravaei

Migration Variations

About the piece:

The story of humankind is a story of exploitation, exploration, and relocation. It is our nature to migrate—but there is nothing natural about the violent conditions which uproot many present-day migrants and refugees. Migration Variations takes human migration as its subject, with the final variation depicting butterfly migration in order to remind us that non-human animals also migrate to escape inhospitable conditions.

The theme as it is presented in the beginning is a series of ever-descending intervals, continually plummeting into despair. When the theme is reprised at the end, the intervals are inverted so that they now reach upward, expressing hope. Over the course of five variations, the melody “migrates” from the initial version of the theme to the final version, mirroring the migration of humans from a place of danger and instability to a place of peace.

Piano 1: Veola Sun

Piano 2: Brandon Zhou

Percussion 1: Robby Good

Percussion 2: Cash Langi

Contributors

Sophia Bautista's poetry was featured in *Flies, Cockroaches, and Poets* as the undergraduate winner of Fresno State's Andrés Montoya Poetry Contest. Her work has also been published in UC Davis' *Open Ceilings* Winter 2021 issue, the Sunday Jump's *Hi-fi to Wi-fi* Fall 2020 edition, UCLA's Spring 2021 *LCC re:model* zine, and UCLA's *Pacific Ties* 2019-2020 editions. Her undergraduate research project, *Run Me My Money* - which examines how the COVID-19 pandemic reframed the conversation around unpaid internships - is to be published as a zine in Spring 2022 by saalt press.

Marielena Borrego is a recent graduate of UCLA and completed a double major in Chicanx and Central American Studies and English. She enjoys consuming and creating confessional poetry and these lost journals have reminded her to get back to writing.

Ian Byers-Gamber is a Los Angeles-based artist and art documentarian. In both capacities, his work often involves producing visual archives of and for arts spaces. His photographs propose alternate ways of looking at existing archives while imagining new ones altogether; they have appeared in *carla* and the *Los Angeles Times*, among other publications, as well as in solo

exhibitions at the Chan Gallery at Pomona College and at the University Art Gallery at CSU Dominguez Hills. In 2021, Sming Sming Books published his artist's book, *If They Can Do It, Why Can't We?*

Jolin Chan is a Chinese American writer from Southern California and a student at Harvard College studying History & Literature. She has been awarded the Grand Prize for the International Kusamakura Haiku Competition, a YoungArts Honorable Mention, and a National Silver Medal for the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, among others. Her work can be found in *Frogpond Journal*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *New Zealand Poetry Society*, and more.

Samantha Chandra is UCLA alumni in the class of 2020. At UCLA, she studied Business Economics with a minor in Entrepreneurship and Digital Humanities. While on-campus, she was an active student leader with involvement in the consulting and the entrepreneurial space. Samantha was born and raised on the sunny island of Bali, Indonesia before coming to Los Angeles, and now she lives in Chicago while working at a management consultancy. On top of her full-time job, Samantha is an owner of a small photo journaling business as well as an art content creator on Instagram (@sammys.journal).

Jason Chua is a UCLA alumnus. He currently views art as a means of escapism and free flow without consequences, contrary to his current routine of lifestyle and work. These

two pieces are perfect silhouettes to the lifestyle Jason wishes he had pursued (shown through happiness and movement) versus the lifestyle he has now (shown through stoicism and stillness).

Katelyn Darrow is a multimedia storyteller, researcher, and creator of all sorts based in Los Angeles, CA. She studied Anthropology and Gender Studies at the baccalaureate level with a minor in Film, Television, and Digital Media (UCLA 2020). Through her various creative projects, she hopes to create narratives that are visually and contextually engaging.

Roy Graham is a writer from New York and graduate of the Rutgers-Camden MFA program. His nonfiction has been featured in *Rolling Stone* and *Motherboard*. His fiction has been featured in the anthology *The Night Bazaar: Eleven Haunting Tales of Forbidden Wishes and Dangerous Desires* and its sequel, *The Night Bazaar: Venice*.

Ziv Haikin graduated from UCLA in 2020 with a Bachelor's in American Literature and Culture. They hope you're doing well, all things considered.

Ashley Kim is a Korean-American writer located in California. She is a student at the University of California, Los Angeles, majoring in Cognitive Science and minoring in Asian American Studies. She is one of the managing editors of *Pacific Ties Newsmagazine*. Her poetry and short stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *Spill Stories'* anthology

entitled *Powerful Asian Moms*, *Hyphen Magazine*, *Autofocus*, and *FEED*, among others. Find her on Twitter @ashlogophile. Soli deo gloria!

Chandler Kyle is a UCLA graduate with a degree in Egyptology. They formerly worked on the *Westwind* staff as executive design editor, and continue writing poetry in their free time.

Kian Ravaei composes music that delivers bold melodies, heart-felt directness, and visceral power. He makes his home in Los Angeles, where he serves as a Composer Teaching Artist Fellow for the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and studies music composition with Richard Danielpour — one of his favorite living composers — at the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music.

A. Jinha Song is a poet and graphic designer interested in the revolutionary potential of collaborative practice. Her writing has appeared in *carla* and *Parallax IV*. She studies English at UCLA.

Catherine Taghizadeh is a fourth year psychobiology major at UCLA. Other than personal poems, she's currently working on being happy and helpful.

Noemi VanSlyke is a Hungarian-American writer from Oregon. A 2021 UCLA alumna, her passion for prose led her to major in English. She is now working on finalizing her first fiction novel, which won the Shirley Collier Prize. In her spare time she likes to peruse pic-

tures of dogs on the internet and is perfecting the art of waiting tables.

jimmy vega is the child of Mexican immigrants, a Chicana L.A.-based poet, writer, educator, artist, and curator. He holds a B.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from UCLA and is an MFA candidate in the School of Critical Studies, Creative Writing Program at CalArts, where they co-created the MFA in Creative Writing's HYPERLINK reading series. He is the Assistant Director of Beyond Baroque Literary Arts/Center.

Jason Vuilleumier is a student at Sacramento City College, where he studies game development. His hobbies include writing, drawing, and annoying his cat Napoleon.

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