

Westwind



*Westwind Journal
of the Arts*

Winter 2022

Please be advised that this issue includes sensitive content, including discussion of death, disordered eating, mental illness, and sexual assault.

A Letter From The Editors

Westwind Journal of the Arts is an undergraduate-run journal housed in the UCLA English department. For over fifty years we have printed poetry, prose, art, and everything in between. We aim to enrich the literary community in the present and future, providing a space for young writers, editors, and artists to develop their voices and connect with one another. It is our hope that, in pursuing this mission, we may champion the unique and vital voices coursing through UCLA, Los Angeles, and the world at large.

This quarter, we are proud to publish so many writers from within our own community. The pieces in this journal speak to life as a young person in Los Angeles—they capture this tumultuous moment in time, and are also a projection of our hope for the future. Each page contains something that we and our staff sincerely think enriches the literary arts world; we hope you agree.

The utmost gratitude must be extended to our contributors, who have so generously given a piece of themselves to this journal. We are ever-grateful for the devotion of the *Westwind* staff and the guidance of Reed Wilson. Enjoy this selection of poetry, prose, and art from Winter 2022!

All best,

Jade Lacy and Katherine King
Managing Editors 2021-22

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Poetry

A Letter From The Editors

Even with filled lecture halls and maskless interactions, we still live in a state of perpetual displacement, estranged from how life could have been without a pandemic. Looking towards the future has become an act of mourning, but the poems in this issue embrace grief with tenderness and tenacity, finding a quiet strength in hope. In Anne Sexton's words, each of our contributors are poets "who gave birth, who encouraged things to grow and to flower" in their own nurturing ways. From the gentle solitude of worship to the communal plenitude of nature, the pieces here trace a way through the tumult of a world in crisis—connecting to the people, cultures, and gods that define us to find a sense of imagination.

None of these poems would be brought to life without the work of our contributors, who were gracious in trusting us with their work, and our staff, who remained lively and sensitive to the power of language throughout a trying quarter. There will never be enough words of appreciation for Professor Reed Wilson, for giving us the space to create community, and to you, Reader, for joining us on the page with its pixelated possibilities.

For all the words that are to come,

Jade Lacy

Austin Nguyen

Executive Poetry Editors 2021-22

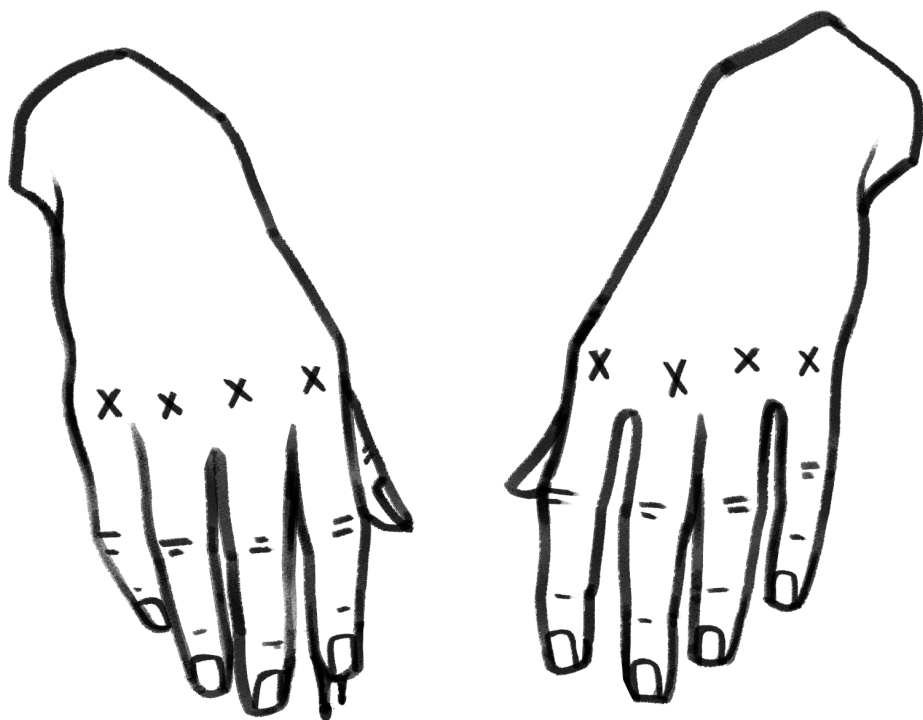


Illustration by: Teal Hall

The Sadness House

Ashley Kim

For E & H

Inside the sadness house
 there is a fog a dog rug stains
a still sunbathed stomach citrus floor cleaner the pet emergency hotline

my apartmentmate's mahogany coffee grinder
(that looks like the Overpriced Urn the Vet Sells
Minutes Before Death by Needle)

The grinder urn goes *err err ERR*
but Death is a silent neck snap
a chest jolt

When I explain the sadness house to my friend
(who majors in math and economics)
he says, *you mean you feel trapped?*

The sadness house is locked from the inside.
It follows me to the supermarket.

There I buy tangerines-
 unripe and round, like the mourning
The previous night I louduglycried
 for one-and-a-half hours (oops!)
Half the time I longed to eat a tangerine
 of waxy sticky juice crisp smell poppy flesh

My dog is- is? was scared of tangerines.
He barked at my pulp-stained hands.

recitation

Mishal Imaan Syed

She takes me into her, voice and song, this temple
We built—subsumed, the plume of her hair, the nexus

Of us. She breaks slowly, the dawn disrobing the threads
Of a dream, a velvet janamaz. We wait, between the rain-gutter

Drizzle and the twining letters. The space between
The safe and the sacred—the plush geometry

Of recitation, the way her voice wavers and weaves itself
Into time and syntax and interlude.

Pashmina-soft, she comes unraveled and the words
Beget themselves, wreathed in blue, a quickening.



Illustration by: Taylor A. Rossi



Illustration by: Ayumi Bergan

Steadfast Is He

Firyal Bawab

A now dead man danced around the olive tree.

Steadfast is he.

He dips his bread in olive oil. He prays five times a day on
the dirt roots have boiled.

The mud and the rocks of Jenin let out a sigh. He holds it in his lungs.

Then he is here again. He holds his hands behind his back.

He dances, kicking out his feet. Wooden crutch swinging back.

He dances, even when caught in the fishing net.

He dances, even when he pees the bed.

He dances for his dignity.

Steadfast is he—

Farraj, Dawoud, Al Nabi

Harb, Barham, Al Jolani.

Minari

Ashley Kim

Before the sun had yet to appear
the sky, a garden adorned with the colors of April
my mother woke me to go to the spring.

Mist fogged up the air;
stardew, my younger sister called it
waterdust, said the older.

We knelt on solid soil, wrist-deep in
earth that gloved every crevice it could find.
Fingers dug in, harvesting every little green sprig
a testament to the earth's generosity,
a covenant to our family.

Her every move was steady,
assured as the river flows along its deep carved path.
My dull fingers fumbled with delicate stems
and jagged tears decorated half-ripped roots.

I remember asking my mother what would happen if I ate the minari,
if my insides would stain a bright spring
or if the plant would find root in my young heart
clinging to me, blood-soil and flesh-river.

If I opened up my mouth to the sun,
would the light find its way in?
Could what is green inside me bloom?

Look to the sky, she said instead.
Look to the earth
and look to that vast sea.





Illustration by: Sabrina Ellis

what shall be called Woman

Eleni Eftychiou

girl nailed up all meat
crucified / worshipped all the same
bloodied palms embellish curves:
neck to shoulder waist to hip
to thigh to foot pounding
in pursuit of loss.

girl done up all meat
the mirror, naked squint & scrutinize
God's creation- half His half her own
and which dress looks best over
shredded skin and bones scraped clean
black or blue? which drink
burns least going down? which meal
burns least coming up? which fingers slip
softest down the throat?

girl pent up all meat
hollowness distended
casts her line down to gut
on her knees and prays: this altar--
porcelain might lend
a sweeter hell.

girl beat down all meat
thrown up and through & back again
purge the acid pitted teeth and muscles tight
slackened / cramped stick it in
hook the jaw bite the bullet crush & spit
the sacred gunpowder of belly.

girl nailed up all meat
and ink and grin and figment
severed from herself--the rib
of Adam blooming into meat:
all body all ache all woman
damned to worship.



Fiction

A Letter From The Editors

During this journal's review period, we whittled down a mass of submissions into a tight five, to swipe the stand-up term. And though our journals are never themed, we'd be remiss to not note how each of these stories manage to involve or induce a complicated sort of smile—from semisweet, to snide, to supernatural. Parsing out whether these are expressions of genuine pleasure or cynicism is up to you, but, regardless, we hope you enjoy them.

Thank you to our fantastic fiction committee for all of their hard work this quarter (enjoy the fruits of your labor!) and to Reed Wilson for making *Westwind* possible.

We're beyond excited to share these pieces with you!

Best,

Katherine King and Garrett Ewald
Executive Fiction Editors 2021-22

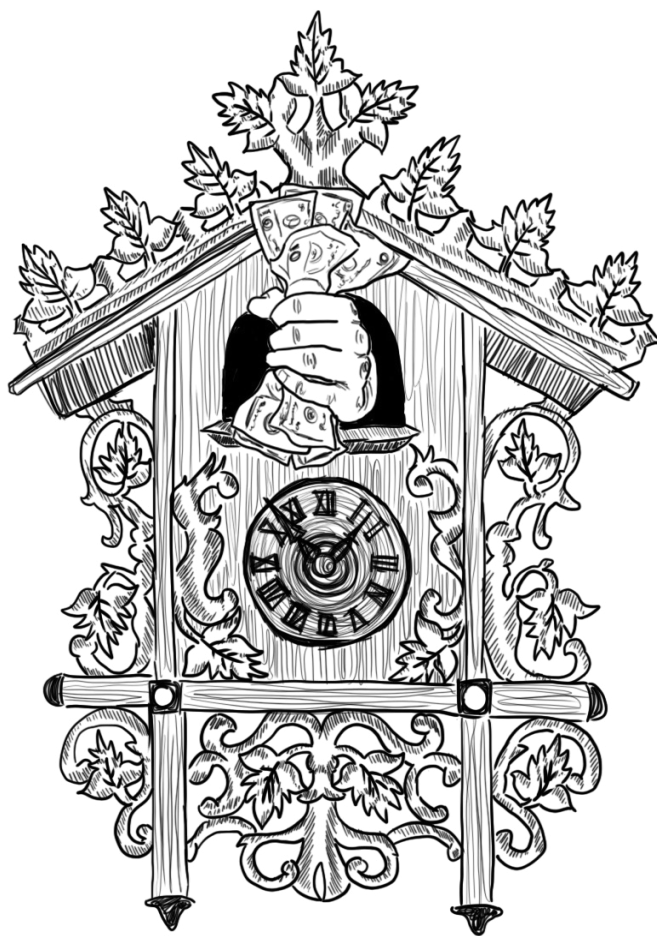


Illustration by: Kendall Moore

Cash Only

Austin Treat

Chet Johnson's sleepless eyes, still blurry from an evening of adultery, read the eviction letter taped to his \$2,800-a-month apartment door on a sunny Sunday morning in Los Angeles. He stared out the living room window, pretending to smile at his side piece waving from her Toyota Prius, but moved from the window before she noticed the \$70 parking ticket tucked under her dusty windshield wiper like the perfect middle finger. He pictured his wife, Linda, doing the same thing with her "Number 2" in Boston, except they'd be playing chess or talking about Adam Smith and John Rawls while smoking Master's Degrees and surfing new real estate listings. He pondered over ways to tell Linda about the eviction letter when she got home. "Ultimately," Chet thought, "She'll find out on her own." He set the California court order down on the dining room table. His favorite Cuckoo Clock, a Black Forest Hillside Chalet (retail: \$249.00), stirred its chains for a 10 a.m. call, pulling the Cuckoo Bird from its linden wood hermitage to serenade the occasion.

"*KooKoo! KooKoo! KooKoo!*" it called.

Across the street, a neighbor opened his garage. Chet watched him carry a long folding table to the tree belt and unfold its legs. This maneuver of spreading stirred Chet in lecherous ways and he left to watch *Sex/Life* on Netflix. When he came back to the window, the neighbor had a whole operation going: an honest-to-God, real life garage sale.

"Lo and behold," Chet smiled. "Perfect."

The eviction letter had induced a surprising level of stress, and the image of Linda and her "Number 2" playing Queen's Gambit naked spun through his mind like a rock stuck in a tire tread. The fastest way to feel better, he thought, was to spend money. Going to his bedroom, past the sex swing, he rummaged through last night's pants to find his wallet, which despite its thickness, contained only plastic. Chet almost had a breakdown, right then and there, when he remembered that Linda kept some rainy day cash in her jewelry box. Praise Be! The only thing better than spending money was spending someone else's money. Chet found fifty bucks next to Linda's wedding ring. He put the cash in one pocket and his wallet in the other.

....

Terrance lived across the street from Chet and had too much stuff. He didn't know what it was worth, but it was worth something to somebody, and that somebody wasn't him. Not ten minutes after he organized his table and put up a sign that read, "Garage Sale. Cash Only," did his neighbor come across the street with a cooler and a lawn chair. The neighbor said, "Hey, Terrance," and sat down. Terrance said, "What's happening, man," because he wanted to be friendly, but also because he couldn't remember the guy's name.

"All these years we've been neighbors, and we haven't had a beer together," said Chet, shaking his head. "LA, am I right?"

"*Man*, you're telling me," said Terrance, cycling through names — Mike, John, Cooper — and pairing them with his neighbor's face. After a minute, he gave up.

His neighbor got two Miller Lites from the cooler he parked next to his chair and urged Terrance to take one. Terrance didn't want a beer at 11:30 a.m., but he felt like he owed the guy after forgetting his name.

"Thanks," said Terrance. His neighbor watched him open the sweating can and take a sip before drinking his own. Sense memory flooded through Terrance. An image of him, his brother, and uncle on a dock at Big Bear Lake, sharing stories about fraternity days. What did his uncle say? Something about forgetting a girl's name and playing it off cool. Terrance took another sip and remembered.

"This damn pandemic, *man*," he said. "Makes me so forgetful. Remind me, what's your name again?"

"It's Chet."

Terrance gave his best charming man-laugh just like his uncle had done in college, bumping his neighbor's shoulder. "Nah, man!" Terrance said. "Your last name! Of course I know you're Chet! What's your last name?"

"Oh!" Chet smiled, relieved. "Johnson. My last name is Johnson."

"That's what I thought," said Terrance as everything went quiet at the street corner. The only thing they could hear was a helicopter buzzing over Melrose, a mile or two away, and Chet drinking beer. He must've polished off three cans in thirty minutes, and was eyeing a fifth before he finished his fourth, when the push and clatter of empty cans in a shopping cart tumbled down the road. Chet fingered the cash in his pocket, ignoring the sound.

"What do you have over here anyway?" Chet asked, rising from his lawn chair and nodding to the collection of tchotchkes spread across Terrance's folding table.

"Oh, just this and that," Terrance said, checking his phone. His girlfriend texted him: "*Will that stuff be off the sidewalk by 5pm because u know i've got friends coming over.*"

"*Ya*", Terrance typed, thinking it was nice that she said "stuff" instead of junk. "Stuff had value. Junk did not."

“Wow,” Chet said, dropping his empty can in a disorderly pile on the grass and picking up a weathered 1990 VHS tape with *Star Wars* written in bold yellow font on the front. “That’s cool,” he said, then put it down.

“Five bucks if you want it,” said Terrance, his eyes drifting past Chet fondling his forgotten timeline of trinkets and settling on the unhoused man standing two feet from the table, leaning over his shopping cart, studying all the knick-knacks flaunting their treasures on display. Chet saw the man too but did a better job ignoring him. His overzealous callousness betrayed a deeper sense of fear in the presence of the concrete camper, a tremor of insecurity that rippled through the energy surrounding the three men beneath the American Sycamore tree.

....

Chet focused on the items in front of him. He saw graphic tees from *Batman* movies hanging from chairs, tarnished silverware sets, cutting boards, and ornate belt buckles all living in their own space on a clean, white bed sheet draped over the table. He got so distracted evaluating each item with his best educated guesses that the unhoused man hovering by the tree all but disappeared from his reality. Chet relished in respite. Then the unhoused fellow coughed up a well enunciated inquiry, alarming Chet, and shattering his brief moment of catharsis.

“How much for the Cuckoo Clock?” he asked, and pointed to an old timepiece Chet hadn’t discovered himself, which really antagonized him, especially because he loved Cuckoo Clocks so much. He was the *Cuckoo Clock Guy*, everyone knew that.

“Good morning, Christopher,” said Terrance, waving to the unhoused like they were meeting for coffee. Chet nearly collapsed into a catatonic state.

“You know him?” Chet asked, rattled.

Terrance nodded, “He collects the cans in our neighborhood every week. I leave mine outside for him.”

Terrance stood from his chair and got a trash bag full of aluminum and plastic redeemables. He crossed the six feet separating him from Christopher, who stood by the Sycamore tree, and handed him the cans. Their shadows touched in a patch of sunlight slipping through the sidewalk arbor. “Might be five bucks in here for you, Christopher,” said Terrance. “Plus there’s some big 24s, worth ten cents a pop. My old lady turned the place into a motel this summer.”

Christopher nodded his thanks before turning back to the Cuckoo Clock. “How much for the Cuckoo Clock?”

At the mention of the Clock, Chet used his last swallow of beer to break his stasis. “I’ll pay twenty-five for it!” he blurted, dropping his fifth can, which bounced off numbers three and four to settle against numbers two and one, crumpled on the dry

bed soil.

All three men went quiet, looking at each other, then the Cuckoo Clock, then back at each other. Christopher remained silent, but stood his ground. Terrance grew excited at the possibility of a bidding war.

“Twenty-five is a fair price,” Terrance said. “But I think it’s worth a quick appraisal on Google.”

“Twenty-five. CASH. Right now,” Chet said.

Christopher broke his silence with footsteps crunching dead leaves. Chet lost his focus staring at the man’s wrinkled garments. His muscles tightened. Christopher took the Clock in his hands with a sense of reverential calm, turning the ornamental timekeeper on its back, then on its side, listening to the dark wood, the solid *thud* it yielded when his knuckles tapped the bottom. After a minute, he put it down again, then turned to Terrance.

“Give me a day,” he croaked. “I’ll pay double what he can.”

Chet scoffed at the street dweller’s gall. “Ridiculous,” he said, but Terrance spoke over him. The only word Terrance heard was double.

“I’ll give you ‘til 4 p.m.” Terrance checked his watch. “That’s in four hours. Deal?”

Christopher nodded. Chet hoped he’d leave, but Christopher stepped closer to Chet and harvested his pile of Miller Lites from the earth.

“I’m done with mine too,” said Terrance, emptying the last half of Chet’s beer on the street, then handed Christopher the five-cent can and winked. Christopher went back to his cart and began pushing it down the road again.

A Black Phoebe landed on the Sycamore tree and went “*Poo-tee-weet?*” Terrance looked at the bird and smiled.

“Damn, birds,” said Chet. “Them and the leaf blowers, always making a racket.”

“How can you hear the birds if the leaf blowers are going?” Terrance asked.

Chet felt attacked. “One replaces the other,” he said, marching to the Cuckoo Clock. “What was that *skeezo* looking at?” Chet muttered under his breath, picking up the Clock and studying it like Christopher did: turning it over, knocking it on the bottom. But despite his best efforts, he discovered little more than a serial number stamped on the back, and several farm yard figurines on the front facade, milling about in a pastoral scene. The actual shape of the Clock, he thought, looked like the one in his living room (retail: \$249.00), so it had to be somewhere close to that in value, unless it was fake or went through heavy refurbishments. Either way, he decided he had to have it, even if the Clock was just some junk POS assembly line creation. If he had it then Christopher didn’t, and that was his bottom line.

“Bidding starts at four o’clock then?” Chet asked, his tone spiteful. He couldn’t

stand—let alone sit and drink beer with—a man who wouldn't accept a clear and present legal tender for an item on sale. It was outrageous, an egregious affront to capitalism, which was what he was fighting for now, he reminded himself. Huffing away from the garage sale, he told Terrance, his no-good-at-beer-drinking-Rawlsian-thinking-neighbor, "I'll be back at four o'clock to buy this clock," before turning on his heel, and almost colliding with the Sycamore tree.

....

With his fifty somnolent smackaroos snuggled deep in his pocket, Chet moseyed to the closest liquor store, with its automated door chime that told every foot "Hello," and stopped dead in his tracks. The movement was so abrupt and spontaneous for Chet it induced a revelation, which was this: he wanted to buy more beer from the packie, but every can or bottle he bought could end up in the hands of Christopher, his competitor, and thus, would bring Christopher closer to his goal of buying the Cuckoo Clock—an embarrassment Chet simply could not suffer no matter the cost. He turned from the packie and headed straight for the All Seasons Brewery on the corner of La Brea and 8th Street.

The bar opened at eleven on Sundays, and since its inception at the end of quarantine, had capitalized on a low supply of public drinking spots and a high demand of public drinkers. Refurbished from a bankrupted Firestone Tires, they kept the original sign on the roof for vintage appeal, which it had plenty of. Now the sign served as a local landmark, indicating an oasis beneath its shaded rafters where Chet sojourned until half-past two, getting swizzled on heavy Baltic Porters and Summer League NBA games. After a while, anxiety crept over his shoulder in such a lively way that Chet actually tried swatting at it. This dumped him on the floor and got him cut off from the bar. The bouncer sent him packing to La Brea with \$25 less in his pocket after Chet chose to pay with cash instead of charging his debit, a decision he'd hoped would appease the bouncer and make everything copacetic, but didn't. His convalescence, he thought, would be a black coffee from across the street. At Met Her At A Bar, he waited in a lethargic line of Millenials and Zoomers ready for Nutella covered waffles and bought a \$4 iced coffee. The heat settled between the apartments and shops, slowly cooking everything in between when Chet emerged, feeling caffeinated. It was 3 p.m., but he wasn't worried. He would tumbleweed over to Bank of America's ATM and withdraw plenty of money to outbid anybody whose primary source of income was recycling cans.

The dregs of his coffee sat in an inch of melted ice by the time he reached the ATM. He noticed the traffic lights by the trash can were out. Passing cars were doing a messy version of a four-way stop. An Always-Busy Man swiped his debit card to get

into the ATM area, but nothing happened.

“Damn, what’s going on?” he said, looking at Chet, who just shook his head.

“I don’t know.”

Then Chet saw Christopher pushing his cart across the street.

It was full of cans.

“Let me try,” said Chet, almost knocking the man over, sliding his card through the plastic slot only to suffer the same discouraging outcome. The whole city block was out of power. The bank doors wouldn’t open any time soon, and even if they did, the ATM machines would remain down until an operator comes to reset them manually. Chet cursed under his breath, panic rising. Twenty-one dollars.

“How do I get more?” he thought. “Come on, Chet, think!”

Bingo.

Cash back.

He raced to Walgreens where the lights were on and made it through the doors in record time. He spun around the store looking for something to buy and decided on an Almond Joy at the front counter. The clerk said, “That’s a dollar, twenty-five.” Chet thought she sounded incredulous, like he didn’t have the money, and to prove her wrong, teetering in place, he reached into his pocket and slammed his entire plastic-gorged wallet on the counter-top. “Cash back,” he panted.

The clerk scanned the candy bar. Chet drummed his fingers, waiting to swipe. He did. Then he saw the worst three words imaginable: *Cash Back Unavailable*.

“No cash back?” Chet said, horrified.

The clerk shook her head. “We have a shortage of cash on hand, sir. I’m sorry.”

“What time is it?” asked Chet.

“3:45,” she said. “Do you still want the Almond Joy?”

Chet grabbed his debit card and ran out the door.

He’d never run so fast in his life. The city blurred. Chet thought he saw a shadow of Christopher and his cart, heading in the same direction, but couldn’t muster the courage to check. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he knew they’d arrive at the same time. His gait slowed to catch his breath. The city landscape turned from corporate gray to residential green, whispering reluctant homecomings. Chet wiped the sweat from his forehead with a dirty hand, replacing perspiration with an amalgamation of dirt and sticky beer sap. He managed to muster an authoritative mantra on his way back to Terrance’s garage sale.

“I’m rich. He’s not. I’ve got twenty-one dollars. He doesn’t. He needs 500 cans to beat me.”

Preoccupied with his words of affirmation, Chet ignored Christopher’s sudden appearance coming up 8th street, until the two men were side-by-side shuffling towards Terrance’s Cuckoo Clock.

....

A bite of turkey sandwich fell from Terrance's mouth when his jaw dropped open, gawking at two unhoused men racing each other down the street, stride for stride. He could tell one was Christopher by the man's rickety shopping cart and broncobuster shoulders, but the other guy, his featherweight contender, was a mystery. Dirt smudged his face like bad camouflage. His clothes were ripped in unmanufactured ways and stained. He limped and stumbled over the uneven sidewalk, 100% shitcocked. The realization that the second man was his neighbor, Chet, only dawned on Terrance after the haggard man slapped into his table like crossing a finish line, beating Christopher by a few strides, and said, "HERE."

Christopher came to a controlled stop beside him, not saying a word.

"Hey, Chet..." said Terrance, putting his lunch away, slow and calm, in case Chet made a grab at it. "Long day?"

"Where's the Clock?" Chet demanded.

Terrance pointed to the Cuckoo Clock at the end of the display table. "Still here," he said.

"I'm ready to buy," said Chet.

"OK," said Terrance.

Chet planted his feet firmly on the ground. "Twenty-one dollars, CASH." He held his wad of crumpled bills high in the air.

"Four hours ago it was twenty-five," said Terrance, baffled at Chet's low-ball.

"That was four hours ago. The offer has changed." Chet permitted himself a jaded smile, stimulated by his flash of brilliant bargaining. "Twenty-one dollars or no sale," he said.

Terrance burned beneath a stoic complexion. His jaw clenched. He hated being played. With hidden desperation he turned to Christopher, whose weathered eyes regarded the Clock with calculated poise.

"It's four o'clock," Terrance said to Christopher. "Can you beat twenty-one dollars?"

Christopher nodded. Chet sneered. Christopher said, "Double." Chet turned chartreuse. Christopher counted \$42. Chet threw up. Terrance smiled. Christopher gave his money to Terrance. Terrance gave his Cuckoo Clock to Christopher.

"Give me 'til tomorrow. I'll give you a thousand bucks!" Chet pleaded. He could get a loan when the banks opened.

"No," said Terrance, packing up his leftover items. His girlfriend's pals would be here soon and he wanted to get to the movies. "That wouldn't be fair." Christopher walked away with his Cuckoo Clock, which was an authentic August Schwer made of

aged linden wood from Germany's Black Forest (retail: \$4,469.00).

Chet passed out against the Sycamore tree.

Above him, the Black Phoebe went "*Poo-tee-weet?*"

Lilies, Smoke, and Something Else

Gia Provenzano

Before you died, you made us promise not to let the Stargazing bots clean up the house once you were gone. Letting them deal with everything would have been simple. The bots would have swept through the house, tagged everything that seemed important, and uploaded it all to a database for us to browse. They could have taken care of delivery and disposal of the items for us too, if we wanted. The whole point of having bots was to make things easier.

But you wanted us to go through your things the old-fashioned way, piece by piece and room by room, a task that fell to me. *You cared the most about Nana's stuff*, the rest of the family said. And yeah, I did, but that was because I cared about what it meant to you. The photos from places that were underwater now, the crates of paperbacks you'd let me dig through, your half-finished sketches—they all had stories and you loved telling them. Stories about the trips you took with your sisters when you were young, stories about all the books you'd saved between multiple moves once the water got too high, stories about learning how to draw and how to garden. I didn't know all your stories, and now, I never would. Digging through your things without you there to explain what they meant, what stories they held, was the last thing I wanted to do. But it was me or the bots.

Two weeks after the funeral, I showed up on your front step with several cardboard boxes knocked flat under my arm. I had a plan: go through the house one room at a time, start with the kitchen and make my way to your bedroom. Maybe doing things efficiently would make it hurt less. I could be like the grieverers and detach completely from the process.

The door creaked when I opened it, and the living room stretched out in front of me. Soft sunlight covered the room, and I could hear my footsteps echoing in the corners. You'd lived in the house alone for as long as I could remember, but it had never felt empty before.

There had almost always been people visiting, some staying for days on end while others just stopped by to drop things off. The older ones always said that the house looked just like their childhood, flat screens instead of holo projectors, physical photos on the walls, and actual cleaning tools that you adamantly refused to replace with nanobots. You'd been fifty-something when the bots had started to make their way into our homes but didn't want anything to do with them.

Now, I wished that you hadn't been so opposed to the nanobots. Having bots in the house would have meant something was here. Even the cat was gone. Luna had been a fixture of your house for as long as I could remember, ever since you found her as a skittish kitten. She bloomed once you took her in though, becoming sweet and more than a little spoiled. I'd taken Luna to my apartment a couple weeks before you died because she irritated the nurses. You had egged her on, giving her treats every

time she snagged someone's stockings and laughing when she made them swear. But after she got in the way too many times, she'd been banished. For the first week, she would sit at my window, looking out and waiting. She missed you, too.

I brushed my fingers over the pencil marks on the kitchen doorway as I walked through it. At the start of every school year, my brother and all my cousins and I would line up so you could measure our heights. A few of my friends even made it onto the doorway, but Cora was the one who stuck around the longest, gathering more than anyone else. Ever since we became friends in the third grade, Cora spent her afternoons with me at your kitchen table. She was skittish when I brought her to your house, just like Luna, but she grew confident with you as a guide. The first time you measured her on the doorway, she tried to shrink herself down, but you pushed her to stand tall when she slouched, to take up space. The only height marks taller than hers were the oldest boy cousins. The marks stopped a few years ago, when Ellie finished high school. You got to see her graduate high school, but you won't get to see her graduate from college.

For the first time I could remember, the kitchen was completely clean. No dishes out, no baked goods on the counter, no fancy implements from my parents that you would discreetly get rid of later. The cabinets were still full though, so I set down the boxes and got to work.

It took me three weekends to get through it because I spent half the time crying and the other half waiting for you to come in and start to cook something. Going through all the food and checking expiration dates was like rewatching the timeline of you getting sick. Some things were just old because they'd been pushed to the back of the cabinet and forgotten, but others expired a few years ago, around the time you got a diagnosis. You'd been sick long before that, but you only went to the doctor after you were forced into going. You said you didn't want anything to change, but things already had. You had stopped baking, and soon after your diagnosis, you stopped painting. Instead, your time was filled with appointment after appointment, shuffling from one doctor to the next.

Cleaning out the pantry was hard, but packing the dishes, on the other hand, was soothing. I could turn my brain completely off. Grab, wrap, repeat, grab, wrap, repeat. I only cried twice.

The living room and the dining room were simple. The nurses had set you up in there once things got bad, so most things had already been moved out a while ago. There wasn't much in there beyond furniture and some of your paintings. Ezra and a few of my cousins came to help me move the heavier things. My brother left quickly, saying he felt like you were still there, watching him. The cousins stuck around and helped me move some of the boxes to Aunt Mara's because she had the most space. I set aside the painting you marked for Cora, the one of sea turtles you both loved. The

rest of your paintings went to my apartment, but I still haven't hung them up yet. I'm not ready to look at them somewhere besides your home.

I saved your bedroom for last.

The door creaked when I opened it. I checked the wall behind the door, and the hole Cora, Ezra, and I had made when we were ten was still there. It happened during a game of tag, when we ran through the house slamming doors so hard that the knob finally broke through the plaster. Ezra tried to cover it up, but you caught us anyway. I cried, and Cora tried to take the blame for everything. You knew exactly what happened, though, and we all had to work in the garden as a punishment. It happened over fifteen years ago, but the hole was still there like we'd made it yesterday. If I unfocused my eyes just a little, I could pretend that there were still shards of plaster on the carpet.

Your room was the one place in the house where your tech ban relaxed. Holophotos of me and Ezra and my cousins were scattered throughout the room: on the walls, on your nightstand and your dresser. I guess we were worth bending your rules for. I swiped over the holos a few times so they'd play and let the echoes of long ago laughter bounce off the walls.

The closet was first on my list. I dropped the already made box on the floor and slid the doors aside. Bright blue and green and pink billowy shirts hung neatly alongside paint stained work clothes, waiting for you to come back and wear them. I stepped up to them and breathed in deep. There was the smell of lilies, smoke, and something else that I had never been able to put my finger on, something to do with your paints. I couldn't ask you now.

I sunk down to the closet floor and cried the big heaving sobs I hadn't cried since the fifteen minutes before your funeral. The last time I cried like that, Cora was there to cry with me while the rest of my family attempted to remain stoic with varying degrees of success. We held each other then, but I was alone now.

Everything was still in its place. Your perfume was on the dresser, your clothes were perfectly hung up, the picture frames were straight, your paint brushes were still sitting on the bathroom counter. But you weren't there, so everything was absolutely wrong. Any second, I swore you would walk through the doorway, pull me up off the

yours anymore because it would be everything you hated. It would just take one call, and I could finally leave. But you had asked me to take care of your things.

I made a call anyway, and I headed to the front porch to watch the sunset and wait. It didn't take long, the sun burned bright orange on the horizon, sinking down past the cityscape. Fifteen minutes after, when the porch lights had clicked on and I started shivering, Cora pulled up on her hover bike. The bike was shiny blue, with touch displays and a million and one sensors. It was a perfect example of everything you absolutely hated. You loved Cora, but you'd made comments about her bike until you got too sick to remember who she was. Even then, she still loved you, too.

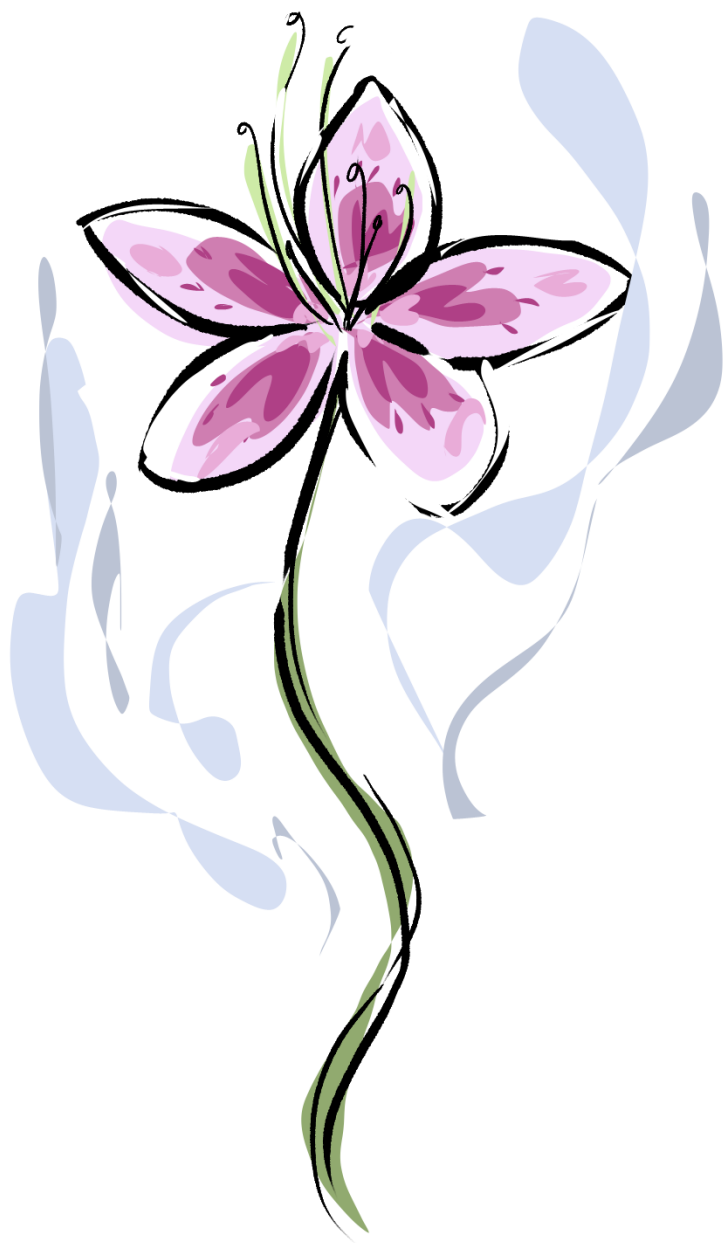
Cora turned off the bike, walked up to the porch, and opened her arms. I launched myself at her and let myself cry again. When I pulled away, Cora was crying too.

"I can't do this by myself," I said. "I don't want to be responsible for remembering her alone."

"What do you need?" Cora asked.

"Tell me a story about her, one I don't know."

So Cora did, and I felt a little less alone.



Phantom Hold

Teal Hall

I only notice that something bad has happened to my body when somebody else points it out.

“What are these?” the boy asks, drawing me out of the trance I fall into when touching him. His name is Charlie. We met in lecture, the same old, *oh do you have a pen I forgot mine I’ll give it back after class I swear thanks*, and weeks later, I’ve finally brought him home. He peers at the soft skin of my thighs and repeats, “Did you fall?”

I attempt to shimmy out of his grasp. I laugh, “What?” and duck down to kiss him.

He dodges me. “You’ve got bruises here. Like, big ones.”

I want to remind him that we were in the middle of something, but I look down and see them too. The bruises are violent colors: sharp purple and sickly, sallow yellow. I desperately want to laugh it off somehow, to tell him that the bruises weren’t on me when I took a shower this morning, but then I see his eyes shift. Instead of concern, a certain thrill runs across his face. He smiles up at me and asks, “Does it feel good?” as he presses down on one. I let out a strangled noise, but before I can correct him, he surges up and kisses me so hard I can’t catch my breath.

Discarded blue jeans and a tie dye t-shirt from a national park gift shop, a stupid California kid. He went on and on about missing the warm weather when I first brought him home but I didn’t listen, too busy figuring out a way to get my hands on him. I look away from the flat plane of his torso as he dresses, and I pretend I can’t feel the throbbing pain from each new bruise that he gave me. I pretend that I like them, that I asked for them, that they make me feel good. He tells me that I tensed all the way through sex. “But it was kind of hot,” are his parting words, and they sink into my skin until they drown in the pit of my stomach.

I go to sleep without looking at the bruises again, pushing the dull ache out of my head like it’s my duty. That’s the start of it.

That week, I get a nosebleed in the middle of a coffee shop after a woman I don’t know brushes by and touches my hip. The cashier has to press a napkin against my face to make me realize I’m bleeding at all. A kid I tutor offers me chapstick at the sight of my lip, and it’s only then I notice it’s split down the middle and throbbing to the touch. My professor pulls me aside before class to ask me if I’m okay; I have to excuse myself to the bathroom to find that my left eye is blackened and bruised like a soft piece of fruit. I bleed and break open in a number of ridiculous, disconcerting ways.

Mom calls me on the phone and I tell her about it through a series of quick

easily, cutting my train of panic right in half, “That happens to every girl sometimes.”

“Maybe,” I say, but my head’s spinning. There’s blood pooling in my sock from a gash I woke up with. It’s the first wound I’ve noticed by myself; the *squelch* of my step was hard to miss. “Does it?”

“Sure.” I can hear her doing the dishes over the phone, the soft clank of the ceramic hitting against itself. “Girls hold our pain differently. We hold onto it forever.” She says this as though it is a simple fact, as if there was a girlhood pamphlet that was passed around and nobody ever thought to show it to me.

My cotton sock is stained dark red. I move it around a little just to watch a spurt of blood gush out and feel the wound’s raw sting. “Have you ever... had something like this happen?”

Mom’s laugh is so calm it unnerves me. “When I was a girl, sometimes I would wake up with blood crusted under my fingernails.” She laughs again, easy. “Sometimes I still do.” I look down at my own hands. Yesterday, someone pointed out a thin slice in the skin of my palm. It hadn’t bled, but there was a glowing maroon color to it, like something was slithering around inside of me.

“Anyway,” Mom says with a sigh, putting down one last dish with a soft clank, “Don’t worry too much about it. It’ll go away eventually.”

She rambles about a new topic after that, but the word *eventually* rots in the back of my mouth for the rest of the call, unsure and slimy, full of phlegm.

Against my better judgment, I invite Charlie over again. He wears a tacky Hawaiian shirt and we don’t waste much time; he asks me one thing about a class assignment and I pretend I know the answer before he quickly moves to kiss me, his hands automatically going to my hips.

He hurts me less this time but still enthusiastically enjoys peppering bruises around my throat in a way that makes me feel a little lifeless. There are other things he tries to do, like his hand wrapping cleanly around my neck until I have to pry it off. A burn had shown up on me that day and added to my list of never ending injuries. It had spread across my stomach as a splash of pink and puckered skin; I watch him notice it halfway through. He glides his fingertips over it as I shiver, swallowing down the instinct to hiss through my teeth.

“You’re like a ghost when I touch you, and you don’t speak much.” he says, his eyes only focused on my mouth, “But I like it that way.”

The taste of bile surges up my throat, threatening to spill into the back of my mouth. I think of a million things to say – *don’t talk to me like that, get away from me, why do you enjoy hurting the girls you sleep with* – but I feel paralyzed the way I often

do, like I have no choice but to move through it and get to the other side without opening my mouth.

His fingers graze along my burn, but there is a terrible stinging sensation in the wake of them, like my skin is ripping apart as he touches it. By the time I finally can manage out a— “*Stop*,” there are tears bubbling up in my eyes. He continues, seeming to not have heard me. Once more I go, “*Stop*,” but it comes out as a whisper, weak and muted.

I screw my eyes closed, hoping that it will make things go faster, but it just helps the tears slip down my face. The stinging on my stomach transfers to the rest of my body, pain radiating from every crook and crevice of my skin, until I hear Charlie shout, “What the fuck?”

I snap open my eyes to the image of him over me, exactly how I left him, but there’s a faint feeling of something dripping onto me. It takes me a moment to understand what I’m seeing: Charlie shaking above me as he stares down at his hand with small chunks of flesh ripped out of it, blood steadily streaming from each divet in his skin. He repeats hysterically, *What the fuck*, until it turns into, “What the fuck is wrong with your *body*?”

I blink, feeling so far removed from myself that, for a moment, I don’t understand he’s talking to me. I start, “I—” but Charlie cuts me off with another shriek of, *What the fuck*, as he scrambles off of me and cries out in pain, clutching his arm in an effort to stop the blood loss. “I...” I look down at my body covered in a shower of red and buzzing with that terrible stinging sensation on my stomach. When I wipe some of the blood away, something sharp pricks my finger.

In the place where the burn had been, there are teeth instead, rows of them, and a tongue that swipes out from inside of me to lick up the blood. It fits into my body perfectly, like a fissure opened up in my skin to let the mouth break through. The thing is large and terrifying, covering almost the entire expanse of my stomach from side-to-side. I can’t help but look at it and laugh; my body, engulfed in blood, my stomach, open and horrible, and my face, wet from crying. I’m a mess, a ghastly, broken thing, but I’m so thankful for it, so thankful it made him stop touching me.

Charlie leaves, I think. He must. He yells at me more, I know, but his voice feels like a distant worry in the wake of my body. There’s a trail of red around the room when I stumble away from the couch, my mind feverish and my body throbbing with pain. I distantly notice the way my feet swipes through his blood as I walk the length to my bedroom, but I think mostly about the sharp sting teeth jutting through my skin. *Is this what it feels like to be stabbed?*, I think. When I breathe in, air rushes through my belly, touching the cold lining of my stomach. I want to look down, but I don’t. In the tangle of my bed, I leave little red footprints on my duvet. The mouth bleeds easily from its gums; I feel something dripping out of it, blood or saliva, maybe a mixture of

both. Before I fall asleep feverishly, like something otherworldly wants to take me away and I can't disagree with it, I think of my mom as a teenager with a gash in her stomach. *That happens to every girl sometimes.*

The blood has dried dusty and brown in the morning, all over my skin and my bed. But there's no sharp, throbbing pain anymore, only the dull ache of my body and a line of tenderness blooming right above my abdomen. When I drag myself out of the mess of my covers, the mirror reflects back to me a clean image of my body, nothing ruined except for my matted bedhead and the clear exhaustion on my face.

I lift my shirt up delicately, bracing myself, but the tenderness is nothing more than a thick line scarred across my skin. I blink at it. Like a band around my torso, it blends into me with puckered edges. More than anything, it gives me a palpable relief. It's nice to wake up without a wound and instead to something healed. But then I think: it's *too* healed, almost like it's been stitched, loved, and cared for.

I run my finger along the scarred surface; numb to the touch, just barely pink, dodging my belly button. The line of it juts down in the middle of my stomach and then back up again on either side. *Like a smile*, I think.

Little Flame

Julianne Estur

I never thought I'd be the type of girl who'd have it in her to steal. But as the satin slip—in a shade of pink too innocent for a guilty party—settles against my skin, I know what I've done.

The nightgown has lace just shy of opaque running up the sides until it meets the lace on the chest. The dress should have fit like a welcoming hug; a confirmation that I was permitted to take up space in it.

Instead, I'm reminded that it doesn't belong to me.

And yet I can't deny that as I stand in front of the full-length mirror, the obnoxiously teal bedroom walls seeming to dim behind me, it's like seeing myself for the first time. I turn, just a little. The fabric flutters against the top of my thigh, and my breath hitches like I'm being touched by a living, breathing person. The nightgown smells like vanilla. I shiver from the thrill of the scent not being mine. The dress really does look like it was made for a woman who wears vanilla perfume. That is to say that the designer probably doesn't know who Anna is, but Anna is the exact person they must've been imagining, the type of girl that people adore and envy and steal from too.

Even if she's a friend.

Even if she had peered starkly into my face last night while we were sitting on her bed close enough to touch and said, "You're actually pretty cute, you know." She said it with a sureness that only Anna could have, and maybe that was why.

I twirl, then I run my hands through my hair, acting like it's fuller than it actually is. I giggle like the girls in the locker room during freshman year P.E. class. I changed in the bathroom stall, always the one at the very end. I had found it hard to look anywhere in there. All my life I'd worn jeans and hoodies, even in sticky summer weather, when my mother would shake her head at other girls clad in tank tops and tiny denim shorts, acting as if it were a cardinal sin to stay cool in the heat. And in there, it was like summer year-round, all stripes and polka dots and lace and all of it on bare limbs. And it was also Anna doing a little hair flip before she pulled her hair into a ponytail. A lot of girls did this; when she did it, it felt more like a movie girl thing, not a normal girl thing.

One of the straps falls off my shoulder. It's a gentle nudge, a go on, sweetheart, take it off all the way. And I know I could've done it because I feel pretty in the way you only can when someone else finds you beautiful, in the way that makes you think you could do the most shameless thing in the world and not care. Instead, all I could do was stand there, simultaneously compelled and terrified by the image of me, a little fire in a gown-shaped furnace, a flame in need of a stoking.





Illustration by: Kendall Moore

The Nineties

Zoie Burt

“You’ve been listening to a lot of nineties albums lately,” my dad says. I’m initially confused as to how he knows about this new development in my music taste, but then I realize:

Of course—The Apple Music family plan. You can see everything I download. I have absolutely zero privacy. This family is starting to operate like an authoritarian police state.”

My dad laughs. “Oh, you really are taking me back to the nineties,” he says. “I’m sure I’ve said that once or twice to my own parents. But the difference is, I actually meant it.”

“Well, so do I.”

“Really? Because when I was your age, everything I did was to the utter chagrin of my parents. Hair dye, piercings, clothing, music... That was the nineties for me: Being told no, then doing all those things anyways. The spirit of rebellion came from a genuine sense of being stifled. And sweetheart, I don’t think your mother and I have stifled you.”

I grumble something inaudible, then continue huffing and puffing my way up the canyon trail. At this point, I am fourteen; new ideologies are brewing in my head like nebulas waiting to hatch stars. For the first time in my existence, I’m beginning to feel like my own person.

In many ways, my life had just begun.

Midway through high school, I became enamored with the idea of cutting all my hair off. This act seemed to perfectly embody the values that my sixteen-year-old self held near and dear to her heart: going against the grain, eschewing societally-imposed notions of femininity, etc. etc. Very cool, very different, very on brand for me (or at least I wanted it to be). What was my existence for if not to continue the legacy of my nineties cropped-hair icons? Dolores O’Riordan on the cover of *To the Faithful Departed*; Sinéad O’Connor and her iconic shaved head; Björk’s pixie cut while screaming into the mic for her witchy anarcho-feminist punk band.

So yes, it all made perfect sense. In the year of our Moon Goddess two thousand and eighteen, I was going to get a buzzcut. I tell my mom this as soon as she gets home from work.

“Okay,” she says.

““Okay”? That’s it?”

“When I was in college, I shaved my hair too.”

“*What?*”

“It wasn’t a full buzzcut, more of a really short pixie. I was a lifeguard at the time, so having long hair was too much of a hassle.”

My dad walks into the living room. “I met your mom when she had short hair,” he says. Then, to my mom: “It suited you, honey. You looked very cool.”

My mom bats her eyelashes. “Thank you,” she says, and I put my face in my hands.

“Oh my god, please, stop,” I say. “This is maddening. I can’t even get a *buzzcut* without having your full support.”

My parents look at each other, bemused.

“All I want,” I lament, “is to be able to listen to Sleater-Kinney and Slowdive and understand this teenage experience they’re singing about that’s so deliciously angry and angsty. But both of you won’t *let* me because you’re too *accepting*, and this causes me great despair.”

“What a life you’re living!” my dad says. “I’m very envious. You know, when I was fifteen or sixteen, I had this altercation with my father. I came home with a new piercing in my left earlobe, and he was not pleased. The conversation got heated and he ended up grabbing that earring and ripping it out of my ear. My memory might have dramatized that moment, but I remember there being so much blood. I still have a scar from that.”

He rubs at a phantom pain in his left ear; my mom lifts her hand and places it on his shoulder, smoothing a crease on his shirt.

“Rebelling, in the abstract, might seem appealing to you,” she says. “But take it from a parent who grew up with a Tiger Mom and another who spent two decades fighting for some freedom of self-expression. It’s really lovely to be able to just exist in the world without having to fight for it. You have it so good, Anouk. Don’t let it go to waste.”

“Fine,” I say. “I didn’t actually want the buzzcut. I just wanted to be told no and then do it anyways.”

My parents both screech with laughter as I head back into my room to mope.

A few things happened after I turned eighteen: I cast my vote for the presidential election, my hair turned neon pink, and California stilled as shelter-in-place orders were issued.

I’m lying on the couch and staring at the ceiling as my dad comes back home from work at the hospital. He drops his backpack next to the door and holds out his phone.

“Hey, look what I was listening to in the car,” he says. I recognize the playlist

title—riot grrrl—and it’s paused on Sleater-Kinney’s “Get Up.”

I sit up on the couch. I didn’t realize he could see the playlists I made too. In an earlier location in the timeline of my life, maybe I would have complained about the violation of privacy that this shared Apple account created for my curation of music, but, for whatever reason, that feels too juvenile to do now.

My dad flips the phone back towards him and presses play. Carrie Brownstein’s younger, angstier self sings:

*Goodbye small hands, goodbye small heart
Goodbye small head
My soul is climbing tree trunks
And swinging from every branch*

Her enunciation and her lyrics feel both aggressive but cozy; the guitar riff sends memories shuffling through my mind, taking me back to earlier days of teenagehood, listening to this track on the bus ride to school; to when this song was first made in the nineties, and the witchy music video that was filmed for it outside of Olympia; to when my parents first moved to San Francisco in their twenties, encountering this grungy city that was fresh, riveting and freeing. I think of the way these aesthetics from the nineties stick with people, revived by each new generation who discovers some remnant of it at a vinyl store, in a compilation playlist, or some recommended video on YouTube. The legacy continues, one way or another.

I curl a strand of pink hair around my finger. “This song makes me feel so alive,” I say. My dad nods, earnest and understanding.

“Stick with that feeling,” he says. “It’s good for the soul, especially as you get older.”

I roll my eyes. “Don’t worry,” I say, lying back down on the couch. “Far be it from me to disobey the grunge feminists of the nineties.”

Creative Non-Fiction



A Letter From The Editor

The Godfather of creative nonfiction, Lee Gutkind, defines creative nonfiction as “true stories well told.” Creative nonfiction allows one to share their stories, their triumphs, and their hardships in a beautiful, unique way, and that is what the authors of the pieces below have done.

Dungeons & Dragons, a burning flame, a departed loved one, familial tension, unrequited young love, the American Dream, death, cancer, betrayal, burnout, poverty, and misery. The five creative nonfiction pieces featured in this journal exemplify the collateral beauty that comes from writing about life’s downs. Four brilliant individuals have shared their stories with us, and as you read them, I ask you to place yourself in their shoes and appreciate the courage and skill it takes to write from your heart about difficult topics.

I hope you enjoy reading these stories as much as I enjoyed working with the authors and the *Westwind* staff to present them to you. Being executive editor of creative nonfiction has been one of my most treasured experiences at UCLA. If there is one thing I will take away from it, it is the importance of telling your story, and I hope that we can inspire you to write yours.

Yusra Akhundzadah
Creative Nonfiction Editor 2021-22



Illustration by: Taylor A. Rossi

Orange Wine

Delaney Fravel

The First Glance

Age 14

*One of your eyes is always half-shut
Something happened when you were a kid
I didn't know you then and I'll never understand
Why it feels like I did¹*

The corner of my eye met yours
until we were both face to face,
a soft smile met by a cheshire grin.
For one time and one time only,
the only witness was a neon glow.

I hated the color pink until I saw it on you.

Our eyes spoke the words we didn't.
Painful introductions were replaced by tender gazes,
gazes that would haunt me to this day.

Right from the beginning I knew,
I knew that you were going to cause me heartache and suffering, but more importantly
I knew that I was going to sit there
and love every minute of it.

I knew your gaze would be one I would never truly be set free from a self-induced
eternal prison of distress,
One that I would be happy to be in and hate myself for.

Do you still think about our first glance?
Our first dance?
Do you remember that I was wearing my new shoes?
The shoes you would spill beige paint on,
The shoes you would jokingly put on your own feet,
The shoes you would comment on how beat up they looked 4 years later.
Do you remember how long my hair was?

1 Bridgers, "Smoke Signals."

I've cut it since.

Do you think about that night as much as I do?
I know you don't,
but I hope you do.
My black and white became technicolor.

The Hiding

Age 15

Chase two girls lose the one²

I understood why you liked them.
I understood why it came down to a coin toss.
Of course I understood.
I was the only one who could.
Who would?
Who else but me?

I hated them.
That's a lie,
I didn't hate them.
They were my friends.
I hated that they were my friends.

You chose her over her.
I would have picked her too if those were my only options.

You tell me it's easy to imagine a life with someone when you're
in love.

I tell you that it's bullshit.
We're so young.

It's ironic that you're talking to me about love.
What love stories have you ever read?

2 Swift, "Cardigan."

Deeper into the Forest

Age 16

He kissed my lips, I taste your mouth (I taste your mouth), oh He pulled me in, I was disgusted with myself³

Even when it was him, or him, or even him,
it was always you,
always and forever peacefully resting in the back of my mind.
God how I wished you knew,
I wished I had the courage to have told you.
I think I'll live with that forever.
Tell me I'm being dramatic like you always did.
Look into my eyes and tell me I'm a hopeless romantic, then look away.

Hide and Seek

Age 17

*And so it goes
You two are dancing in a snow globe, 'round and 'round
And he keeps the picture of you in his office downtown
And you understand now why they lost their minds and fought the wars
And why I've spent my whole life trying to put it into words⁴*

There's something so romantic about Halloween, don't you think? Your touch is the scariest thing.
God that's cliché and cheap,
but it's true.
What if they see?
Oh wait, they did.
They get so angry, don't they?
Do you ever notice how they look at us when we speak to one another? I hope you do.
I think you choose to ignore it.

I think about the way you held me that night,

3 Winter, "Thinking of You."

4 Swift, "You are in Love."

Like I was a teenage runaway threatening to do so.
Why did you hold me so tightly?
Why did you hold me in front of them?

Did you want them to know that it was me,
that I was the only one you wanted?

Your eyes told mine a secret,
A secret forbidden to ever leave your lips.
The lips I wanted to tell me that it was me
me
me
me

Halloween passed and my birthday came,
Season of the pisces I declared.
You hated when I brought astrology into things.
You're an aquarius rising so what could I expect?

You looked into my eyes and told me you loved me.
She was gone,
No one truly in the way of us.
"You're one of my best friends."
Your eyes left mine and my breath returned.

The Bottom of The Barrel

Age 18

*When you've outgrown a lover
The whole world knows but you
It's time to let go of this endless summer afternoon⁵*

I can't do this anymore,
I can't sit here with my heart on fire.
Jesus Christ you only call me when you're high,
I only call you when I'm drunk.

5 Yelich O'Connor, "Hard Feelings/Loveless."

Why do you have this much power over me?
That's something I'll never understand.

For my own sanity, I'll borrow Cupid's wings and pluck the feathers off myself.⁶
Or at least tell me that I'm not the one

I'm not the one you want

I'm not the one you need

Just do it

please

Plato said "Love is simply the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole"⁷ That's
what this is,

A pursuit.

A pursuit of requited love.

I know you want to,

I know that you do.

If not,

then I am as dramatic and crazy as you say I am.

But you say it with a tenderness and that fucking look in your eye that you love me
despite that,

That you love me because of it,

That you want every part of me as much as I want every part of you.

I'll cry into your arms the same way you've cried into mine.

I will give you my heart, mind, body and soul.

I have given you my heart, mind, body and soul.

I can't keep doing this.

Weeping

Age 19 (almost 20)

You never read anything I ever gave to you.

6 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (1888).

7 Abrahamic Study Hall, "Waiting for the Redirection."

That always hurt me.

Not because you didn't read the *pretentious* books I thought you would like, but because you would never understand that *if I loved you any less I might be able to talk about it more.*⁸

8 Austen, *Emma*.

Nailing the American Dream

Linh Vo

Born to first-generation immigrants who labored day in and day out to keep our family afloat from federal poverty lines, I quickly fell into my designated place as the perfect, unproblematic daughter. And to be unproblematic, I often lied. Lying is a tricky thing; the principles of what constitutes truths and lies were always so blurry. And it is within these blurred spaces that I hid.

Although I never intended it, lying grew to be very easy for me. See, the easiest lies come when you believe that such lies are for the best, that you are merely protecting the other person.

Or that is what I had learned second-handedly from having my mother lie to me for the first time. That day, years ago, when I opened the restroom door to wash up for supper, I saw my mother hunched over the sink. I was surprised as I had expected the room to be empty since the lights were off. Even in the dark, I could tell that she had been crying. Her grown-up makeup that I always loved was ruined: her mascara running, the blush from her cheeks fading, and her lipstick smearing from the tissue held against her lips to smother the sobs.

When I had asked her what happened, she merely shook her head, smiled innocently, and said that she just had something in her eye. However, a slight crinkle in her forehead gave her away immediately. She only did that facial expression when she was faking insincerity at large family gatherings or bargaining with merchants at flea markets. My mother has always been so honest and genuine with me. Now seeing her in this strikingly counterfeit light, all I could do was stare at her dumbstruck and nod slowly before exiting the restroom door.

I wanted to ask her again about it later that night, but something in my heart told me that she wouldn't be truthful the second time either. As a curious and inquisitive child, I pleaded with my sister to tell me, and after much hesitancy, she did. My mother cried due to an unpleasant exchange between her and my father's relatives to ask for two hundred dollars to enroll in a local beauty school. In retrospect, two hundred dollars seemed relatively meager of an amount to request for. However, in the eyes of two immigrant parents who had already spent the majority of their savings to build a new life here, that amount was worth pleading for.

With distorted, disapproving looks on their smug little faces and criticism oozing from their voices, they told my mother that they couldn't—no, wouldn't supply her with that money. Apparently, they were too worried that our family wouldn't have the ability to pay them back despite the meagerness of the amount. When I heard the recount of that situation, I was immediately filled with humiliation and rage, my face distorting more than theirs ever could.

My sister didn't quite understand why I was so insulted by this news, but she didn't have enough English at the time to know what people on the streets and behind

closed doors say about us. As young as I was, I was not immune to the hushed voices as we walked into DMV field offices and Social Services public departments. As if it wasn't enough that the rest of society thought our family didn't belong here, even relatives sharing our same ancestry and culture looked down upon us and secretly entertained the possibility of our failure.

Thankfully for us, my mother was never one to give up. She and my father scraped together what they could to pay for her beauty school tuition, and she started that December, two enrollment periods later than she had originally planned.

I reckon that is the reason why I didn't get the 2006 Holiday limited-edition Barbie doll that I wanted for my birthday that November. I had casually slipped it into conversations every time we were strolling our shopping cart nearby the local Walmart's toy section in hopes that she would pick up on the clue. She did, but not in the way that I had intended. Instead of the limited edition, I received a cheap knock-off from the Dollar Tree three blocks down from our 1B/1B apartment. While the replacement doll was a sore sight indeed, my mother's tired, worn-out eyes from the long hours of training thought it was a look-alike. I, however, could tell the stark differences with my sharp judgmental eyes.

I did wish I had the same lens she did when I unwrapped the shiny, aluminum foil and giant bow from my birthday present (courtesy of Dollar Tree free wrapping service). Only then could I take back the look of disappointment I gave her and the look of disappointment she returned when she realized I didn't love it. But I loved her. Oh how much I loved her. I loved her so dearly and whole-heartedly that I faked my best authentic smile, just like she had done prior, and told her that *I wanted this doll just as much as the new 2006 Holiday Barbie edition.*

This is the first lie I ever told her. Although it would not be the last, it was the hardest to tell. I almost choked from the sheer pressure and guilt afterward; it felt like I had betrayed her in some obscure way. However, her sigh of relief and faint smile afterward made me swallow whatever daunting emotions that arose. That night, I stayed up wondering if I should have told her the truth, that she had indeed gotten the wrong doll after all. Before I could decide, I fell asleep and had forgotten all about it the next morning as I prepared for school.

That following year, after hundreds of accumulated hours, my mother finally finished her training and gravitated towards niches for Vietnamese laborers. At that time, the nail technician industry was booming, with estimates being around 360,000 nail technicians in the United States with 80% of them being Vietnamese. Without a strong support network or relatives to rely upon, she sought refuge in the workplace with people who looked like her and spoke her mother tongue. A natural inclination, I must say.

During this time, I worked extremely hard at school and strived to learn the

American way. Our two roles never collided, so I had never really given my mother's occupation much thought. That was until we had Career Day at school. We had received a slip weeks prior asking whether our parents would be interested in presenting. I had neatly slipped it into the back cover of my Science notebook. Too neatly perhaps, for I had forgotten about it the next day. When it was time to collect the slips, I marked that none of my parents were interested in presenting.

Career Day quickly rolled around after that. The presenting parents were physicians, lawyers, researchers, psychologists, administrators, professors... the list of white-collar jobs went on and on. When the presentations finally ended, we all thought that Career Day had come to a close—unfortunately not. To kick off the discussion activity, the teacher said she wanted to expose us to blue-collar jobs that were not as well-paying or highly regarded in society. However, to which she promptly rushed to correct, these workers are still important and should be acknowledged as people too. The kids with parents who did not present were asked to share stories about their parents' occupations for "job diversity and appreciation." On the other hand, the kids with presenting parents were asked whether they would like to pursue similar white-collar careers. None of the kids with blue-collar jobs were asked to entertain that same question. What sort of affirmational bullshit is that?

The kids of the presenters spoke with so much pride and passion, claiming that they wanted to be "just like their parents when they grow up". When the speaking ball was passed to me, I hesitated. I did not want to be just like my mother when I grew up. I murmured quietly, *my mom is a nail technician*. Complete silence—my mother just wasn't as impressive as the other parents. A kind classmate named Susan tried to rescue me from the shame: "That's cool. My mom has a nail lady too. She takes me sometimes and the lady does my toenails. Her name is Molly!" While I internally commended her for a noble attempt, this comment just further angered me more. At the time, I wasn't even particularly sure why.

In retrospect, now having that emotional maturity, I wish I could tell her that it's not "cool." It is difficult and challenging work that causes my mother and other aunties to develop back problems, respiratory illnesses, and be astronomically more prone to cancers. And your white-collar mother doesn't *have* a nail lady because your mother doesn't have the authority to own people. But at that moment, all I could say was "That's cool," before my teacher moved on.

As my sister walked me home from school that day, the only thing I could do was look down at my feet. I was disgusted by the crude reminder that my mother held feet for a living. I had somehow overlooked the fact that nails existed on feet too. I had never felt embarrassed of my mother's occupation up until this point, but I recognized the emotion as the same humiliation I felt when I heard my sister narrate how our relatives denied our loan request.

That night when tucking me into bed, my mother asked me how Career Day went. Panicked, I hurriedly told her that *it was fine and that I learned a lot of important things from that day*. She thought nothing more of it and kissed me goodnight. My second lie, more elaborative and deceptive than the first one. The words slipped out of me before I could comprehensively string together the sentence. I even expected to feel guilty afterward, but unlike after the first lie, the emotion that greeted me was surprisingly pleasant. Even in such emotional turmoil, I could hide my raw feelings so easily and flawlessly. Somehow, despite being small, I had managed to deceive a grown-up. That in itself was enough to make a child boastful.

After Career Day, I soon forgot about my mother's occupation, an easy task to do because she often left her work at the door. That was until my sister joined the after-school program of Boys and Girls Club. Since she could no longer take care of me, a new arrangement was set up: my mother would pick me up from school, drop me off at the nail salon, and we'd go home together when she was finished with her customers.

The customers were rarely sympathetic to this though. Sometimes I would overhear them complaining to one another that they were worried that the nail salon ladies would be talking gossip about them. I wanted to tell them that *khách hàng này có móng tay rất dầy* is not your nails are smelly and that *cô gái này có một làn da đẹp* is not your daughter is ugly. *Hãy yên lặng*, my mother would say. I still remember all of her favorite phrases like yesterday. *The customer is always right. If you correct them, they won't reward me with any tips. If I have no tips, we can't get McDonald's or Lee's Sandwiches' boba for you afterward. Just smile and nod. We rely on their generosity to also make the rent. An chia split profits here is not enough for us to get by. Con, you know the owner takes 60% of what I make.* In order to remain the embodiment of a perfect daughter, I obediently complied with her request.

Years passed in that small busy nail salon, and with it, I grew older too. The shelves no longer looked so tall, the smell no longer so repulsive, and the workers no longer strangers. I came to the realization that Susan's salon lady's name was never Molly. That was a repackaged English name to help customers feel less threatened by the foreignness of her Vietnamese name. After all, customers come to nail salons to buy convenience, comfort, and elegance. And there was nothing convenient, comforting, or elegant about Vietnamese names that don't quite roll off English tongues. So, *Ngoc* became Ashley, *Dan Thy* became Holly, and *Phuong* became Lisa.

The years blended and blurred, but I do remember one undeniable thing: the Vietnamese are storytellers, and they sure had many stories to tell. The fields they used to labor on, their journey and assimilation into the United States, and their favorite ethnic foods. Sometimes, they would even bring in their own home-cooked dishes or small snacks to share. But nothing compared to how they spoke about their children. Oh, how they loved to talk about their children, the source of their pride. They would

Oh, how they loved to talk about their children, the source of their pride. They would tell me about their children studying to be physicians, lawyers, researchers, psychologists, administrators, and professors... the same respected occupations from Career Day. They'd say, *we weren't fortunate enough to have dreams, but our children now can, in the land of opportunity. Here in Great America, they can achieve anything they want. Nothing can stop them here with hard work and determination.*

Their hearts were so pure and prideful that I didn't have the courage to tell them otherwise. They slave away all day, doing work that others in society had deemed too shameful, for this dream, *the American Dream*. How could I take that away from them?

So even when I became of age and maturity, I never told them about the realities in which their sons and daughters were facing or the racism that plagues American society. That the safe haven at school isn't as safe as they imagined—racism still runs rampant behind the walls of the classroom. That a future recruiter would discriminate against their children because of their last names of *Huynh, Nguyen, and Tran*. That education doesn't protect you from discrimination—that an engineering degree didn't stop Vincent Chin from bleeding out on the streets of Detroit that day. That one day, some White man claiming to have a bad day would enter into the workplace of their Asian colleagues and unmercifully shoot them.

That's why I lied to my mother that Sunday when she asked how my first week at the new middle school was. I couldn't tell her that the kids at the affluent and predominantly White school that she labored to scrape together tuition for, were awful and mean. I wanted to tell her: *They called me a chink, mom. They told me that the lunchbox you made me was smelly. They asked me if I ate dogs. They exiled me from their table and the lunchroom.* But looking at her worn-out eyes from work, the same gentle ones that swayed me on my birthday, I didn't have the heart to. So I lied to her again saying that *the new school was so beautiful and all the smart kids were really nice to me*, this time even more flawlessly than the second. My third lie. I desperately hoped that it was the last, but it never was.

Sometimes, I justify them by claiming that I did it to protect her and the *American Dream* that our family crossed oceans and burned bridges for. That justification makes the act of lying more melancholy and sacrificially redeeming, almost poetic. I avoid admitting it to myself, but I think I lied to protect myself more than to protect her. I grew up shouldering the struggles and battles she had fought for me. Each one heavier than the last. The opportunities that I had were available because of her. Seeing her sad, disappointed, or angry was more than I could ever take. I wanted to offer her a reality that was beautiful and perfect because that is what she deserved. She deserved a world that was worthy of her sacrifices, not the ugly one we live in.

understand. It's not much different from how she cuts fruit for me in little heart shapes while she secretly eats the leftover cutout pieces. But for now, I'd like to think that what I told her were not lies because I never meant to deceive her. They were just shiny top coatings to protect underneath, much like the ones she put on her customers' nails. Sparkly and beautiful remnants shaped from ugly truths and heartbreaking realities here in the land of *the American Dream*.



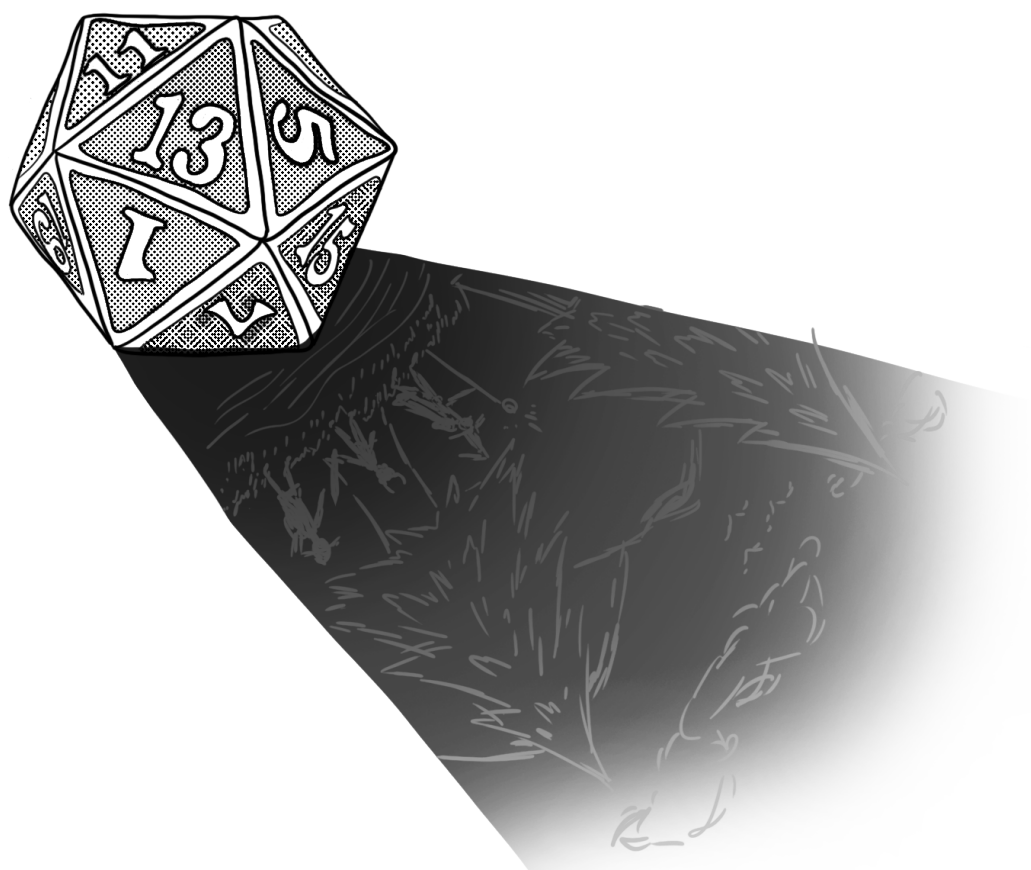


Illustration by: Kendall Moore

Lauveron

Hunter Garza

It was in 2016 when I first began to run Dungeons and Dragons, D&D for short. A wild experience with an explosive amount of creativity, improvisation, and laughing with friends. It was also the same year that my dad was diagnosed with cancer for the first time. A realization with an explosive amount of grief, fear, and numbering days.

For five years, these two things have run concurrently in my life. My dad had “cured” his cancer in 2017, then “cured” it again in late 2018, and when it appeared the third time, there was no more “curing” left. During this time, I ran a bi-weekly-but-not-really-able-to-schedule-it-consistently D&D campaign. I, as the Dungeon Master (DM), have an immense amount of freedom to craft this fictional space for my friends and me. After a while, I decided that this fictional setting I created required a name. I dubbed it “Laurevon,” after my father’s legal name Lauren (Most call him Casey). I didn’t do this with any intent for emotional gravity or as a coping mechanism; I did it because of the great respect I have for my father and his aid in fostering my creativity for many years. The cancer was just a push for me to give it that name.

My father is the greatest father I have ever known. I mean that as objectively as I can be. His humor could light a room up with laughter. His dedication to work in order to support our family was resolute. And he had a brilliant mind that let him run wild while creating fantastical ideas for his scripts. He was always supportive of my personality and passions, even when he did not understand them. He and my mom together showed me healthy love, positive masculinity, and how to respect others. As a fellow creative mind, he and I were often bouncing ideas off of each other. And as I grew up, our relationship got closer to us being life-long (for me) best friends. My family and I took care of and supported each other. Maybe I was able to receive this level of attention because I was an only child, but the amount of care that my dad reserves for those he loves is legion.

I remember when I first learned of his diagnosis. He sat my mom and me down in the living room, all of us arranged in our usual spots; she was on the left side of the long sofa, I was on the right, and my dad was upright in his big sofa chair worn down to the bones where he began to slowly but surely explain his condition:

“Stage 3... colo-rectal...tumor locations...options for moving forward...” His words were fading in my mind, and I went back a month to when he kept complaining that something just didn’t feel right. Oh, how his primary care doctor told him he had nothing to worry about, that he was “perfectly healthy,” and that screening for cancer would be a “waste of time and money.” My mind returned to the conversation, and I asked my dad what we could do next. My parents’ best answer: “rely on the doctors”... the same doctors who would go on to fail us invariably. My mom proved to be a better

doctor and nurse for him time and time again; her compassion gave dad what those doctorate-degreed professionals could not. We all felt a pang each time we heard that there was a new problem. We all felt frustrated whenever a new doctor needed to have dad's condition, medications, and everything else explained, making my mom reiterate it all over again. It felt like a never ending tale of emotional horrors.

My main coping mechanism is, has always been, and will likely always be escapism. There is nothing better for an overthinker to do than to think about something entirely separate from the problem for a while. In this sense, D&D was both my crutch and my cast. I leaned on it to get through these difficult years of supporting my dad's fight while attending community college and working at the same time.

The roster of my group now is almost entirely different from what it once was. What began as a group of old friends playing has now brought new faces that are being made into new friends. And the beauty of this collaborative storytelling is that each person adds something to the mix. My friend Daniel, the player I've had the longest, has a keen mind for the rules and mechanics of the games, helping everyone sort things out when they feel overwhelmed. Daria has a love for roleplaying and exploring these fantasy worlds, poking at the various details that are within to learn more. Riley always knows how to bring a laugh out of the table and think of clever ways around a problem. Aidan's readiness for any combat that the party must engage in protects everyone from danger. And from what my dad had told me, he couldn't be happier to see how much joy it brought me. He recognized just how much I valued this world and those weekly game sessions. And that was the bittersweet beauty of it all. I was making time to enjoy myself while letting a bit of me withdraw from my dad every year, in fear of facing what felt like an inevitable loss.

I found that leaning on D&D shielded me from my own negativity and provided a healing space. Another surgery? Well I guess this time I will challenge my players with their most powerful foes yet, which of course meant I had to spend a lot of time creating those foes. Whittling away at their unformed stat blocks and their complex abilities provided a degree of separation from the ever growing health issues my father faced. And yet it was always there in front of me and my mind. Laurevon. Each thought of that world makes me think of him.

The name took on a life of its own after a while. It became something precious to me, that name which was so arbitrarily made (though, what name is not arbitrary?). As my father struggled more and more, the name took on deeper meaning. My fantasy world took on a deeper meaning. Slowly but surely, it became the fortress in which my mind resided, protected from the harm that I saw coming. Lauren was not getting better, but Laurevon was becoming richer with each day. Every pang of pain or new issue that arose was at the same time a new deep-dive into the culture of another nation or the history of its people.

He had to go to chemo again.

Saikart is a place of powerful mages that use blood magic.

An ostomy bag was installed on him.

The Legendary Artifacts of the Lost are in the Inferno Cove, the Hall of Titans, and Mount Grimstone.

The doctors found another tumor.

One of the artifacts corrupts the user to serve an Archdevil.

It was at the height of Covid, when I had neither D&D (virtual sessions were clunky) nor comfort in another remission period, when I found myself longing for Laurevon. My father wasn't getting better. We all knew it. Rather than talk about the corruption inside him, my dad and I discussed the corruption inside my world. We loved to debate about many historical or alternative histories. They were fun thought experiments for us to escape to and that extended to the fantasy realm of Laurevon. But my father never played. There was never a "good time" to immerse him in the world that was named after him. But I accept that as something that can now never be. Let him instead be the world. All-encompassing, beautiful, and full of history.

I remember the last D&D game I ran before he died. Only a few scant months ago, the 5 year campaign came to an end just as the 5 year battle with cancer did, in defeat of what I hoped would be the outcome. Both were due to scheduling. My friends were unable to make it consistently. My dad's surgery was delayed because of the pandemic. That summer day, it was a bittersweet game of D&D, saying goodbye to fictional characters I have known for years as my dad rested three rooms away—the goodbyes pressing upon all our lips as his cancer spread.

Goodbyes are never easy. I guess that's why I can't say goodbye to Laurevon. The mountains of those lands are like the bones under his skin, the rivers his veins. His eyes gleamed like the sun and moon and his hair like the forests stretching across the land. I am hopeful, at least, that the cancers within that world will be stopped. Fantasies are always better than reality.

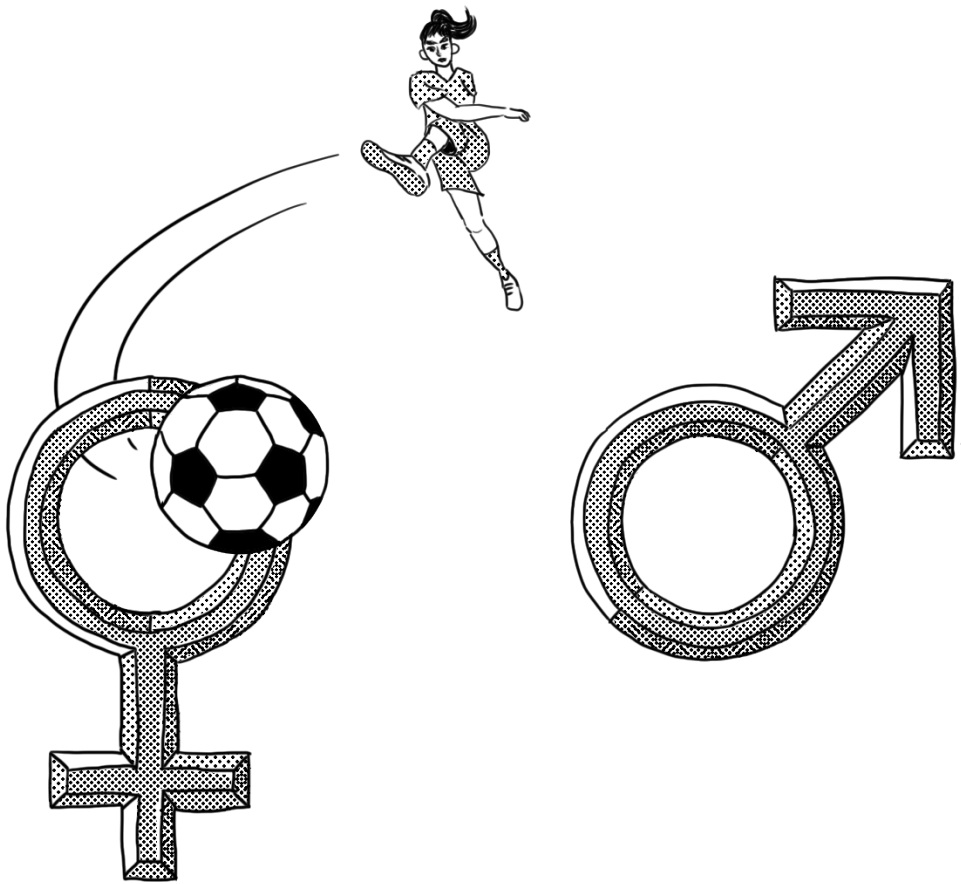


Illustration by: Kendall Moore

Daughter Surrendered

Delaney Fravel

The bedside clock reads 9:13. The glow from the lamp sitting on the left bedside table covers the room in an orange hue. The walls are no longer a bright shade of baby blue, but now a shade of white you could find on the walls of a doctor's office. She's crying softly, a deep pain stabbing her chest, digging into her soul. Their relationship was broken from the start. Whatever hope she had left of salvaging it is gone. It has been for a long time. She sits on her bed, head down, knees tucked against her weeping chest, the unfamiliar texture of the new comforter scratches her legs.

"How am I here?" she whispers to her thighs. "Why can't we be different?"

He knocks on the door.

She cries out "Leave me the fuck alone," the exhaustion clearly layered into every syllable.

There's no lock on the door. Pain seizes through her tired body from the sound of the turning handle. He never knew when to stop. Every conflict was a war, where calling a truce would never be an option. Total destruction and a winning opinion was his way of "peace." A slain army of a single soldier that was always left behind. The soldier was shattered— "Get the fuck out, get the fuck out" she screams, "Leave me the fuck alone." Swearing was her defense mechanism.

The first time she ever swore at him was nine years ago. She had learned that when she was young. He hated hearing words like "fuck you" and "piss off," but he especially hated when they came from her lips. The first time she ever swore at him was nine years ago. She could still remember the way "dammit" rolled off his tongue followed by her name. "Dammit dad" rolled off of hers seconds after.

He's still in his work clothes, a white button shirt and beige khaki pants, tie nowhere to be seen, as always. The orange glow now paints his body against the darkness of the hallway. "First of all, don't speak to me like that, I'm your father." His knuckles turn white as he clutches the door knob.

She places her head into her hands, gasping a broken sigh. She has no energy left. There's no point in arguing. There's no point in trying to explain her feelings. Giving up is the only option.

She had put up a good fight. Never complaining when she had been taken out of art classes and put into sports. Even when she could somewhat make her own choices, she had continued to force herself into things he would like, pretending that she wasn't his daughter and that instead she was the son he always wanted. She hated soccer, but the only compliment she had ever received from him was that she was an "amazing goalie." She had played soccer for six years and hated every second of it, but that glimmer of hope had kept her on the field. According to him, quitting was the greatest mistake she ever made. He talked about it at dinner to this day.

"You could have gotten a scholarship if you had kept it up."

“You were such a good goalie, why did you quit?”

“Why did you stop playing sports?”

All she heard was “Why did you stop being the son I wanted?” The fight to be his daughter had come to a close.

Tensions are running high, but only on his end. Her body lays limp on the bed. How it’s still in an upright position, she doesn’t know.

“Second of all, I’m here whenever you want to talk.”

Talk. He was never good at talking. Every conversation led to either tears or frustration. But listening was where he truly struggled. She could never be heard. Her ideas, opinions and voice were always swept under the rug, to never even be considered. It drained her. A headache and heartache always followed after hearing him speak. Tenderness had never been a part of his vernacular.

He doesn’t look at her. He can’t look at her. His eyes meet the floor. The burden of knowing he was the cause of her pain was one he would refuse to carry.

She continues to scream profanities, a fire lit beneath her.

He looks like a raging bull. Nostrils flared, eyes red. The door slams shut as he retreats. Loud silence fills the room. The battle is over. Despite him following her commands to leave her presence, she feels no peace. Her head rests on her pillow, her body is tired; her throat hurts and her eyes sting from the running makeup. Emptiness is all that’s left where her heart should be. The persistence and determination to one day have what other people have is gone. Every battle along the way had been lost and felt like a cannonball to the chest. She knows that forcing herself to continue fighting would only cause more pain.

“Father’s Day is going to hurt,” were the last words that rolled off her tongue before her eyes shut.

BURNOUT

Ashi Gottumukkula

It all begins with the flicker of a flame. The flame is a pretty yellow gold color against the soft brown wax of a new candle. There's an aroma of persimmon and brown sugar that reminds you of a country that you've never been to but have heard at least a thousand and one tales about. You inhale the sweet smoke and you feel as though you can never get enough. It's a little heady and a little dizzying. A unique scent quite unlike anything else in this world. But it's the flame that captivates you. It licks the top of the candle until there's a shallow pool of wax that reflects the light and glints almost as bright. The soft glow from the flame disperses the shadows in your room just enough for you to do a worksheet full of arithmetic problems. The candle drips indiscriminately on your short story about an alien invasion and on your essay about the search for an identity. It burns steady while you read *All The Places You'll Go*, *The Outsiders*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Persimmon and brown sugar become familiar, like the soft yellow glow of the candle. You're no longer fascinated by the pool of melted wax or the shape of the shadow it makes against your wall. The flame isn't a lightbulb. It's not fireworks over the Sydney Opera House or a thousand paper lanterns on Chinese New Year or a smattering of stars in the shape of a bear. It doesn't take your breath away like the Aurora Borealis or a supernova. You no longer notice how bright the flame burns or the familiar scent of persimmon and brown sugar — or maybe you do and maybe you're a little sick of it. The candle still burns, imperceptibly smaller and imperceptibly duller. The scent of persimmon and brown sugar is not as sweet and not as strong. The wax is nothing but a shallow puddle at the bottom of the glass container that used to hold the candle. It seems sudden when the light winks out of existence, but it has been dying for years. For a second, the darkness grips at you. The absence of the steady, warm glow is a little unnerving. But a second later, the slightly unnatural glow of an incandescent light bulb brightens your room. Besides, there are hundreds of nearly identical persimmon and brown sugar candles that you can buy almost anywhere for only ten dollars and fifty cents.



Illustration by: Kendall Moore

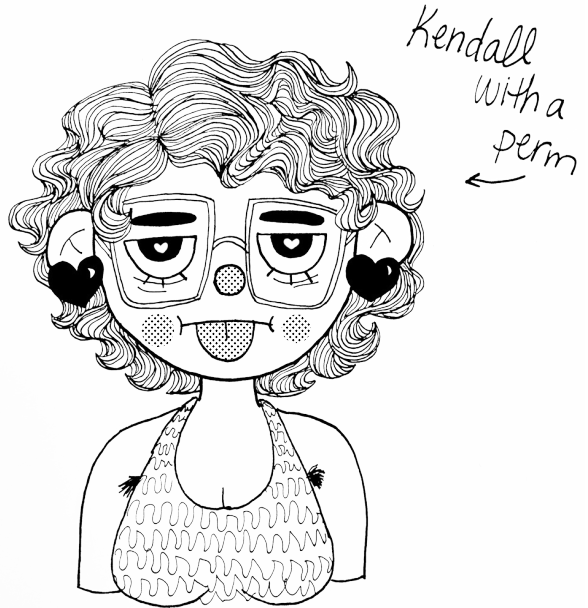
Art



A Letter From The Editor

Working on this issue of *Westwind* has been such a pleasure. It warms my heart to see our journal as a space where the UCLA community of past and present students can share their creativity. Our collection of artworks this quarter covers various mediums and techniques to transport viewers from the sun-kissed shores of Portugal to the moonlit forests of cyberspace, from the inner workings of self identity to the outer embrace of a loved one. I would like to thank all the contributors of this edition for their beautiful compositions, as well as my committee members for helping cultivate the wonderful arts section before you.

Kendall Moore
Arts Editor 2021-22



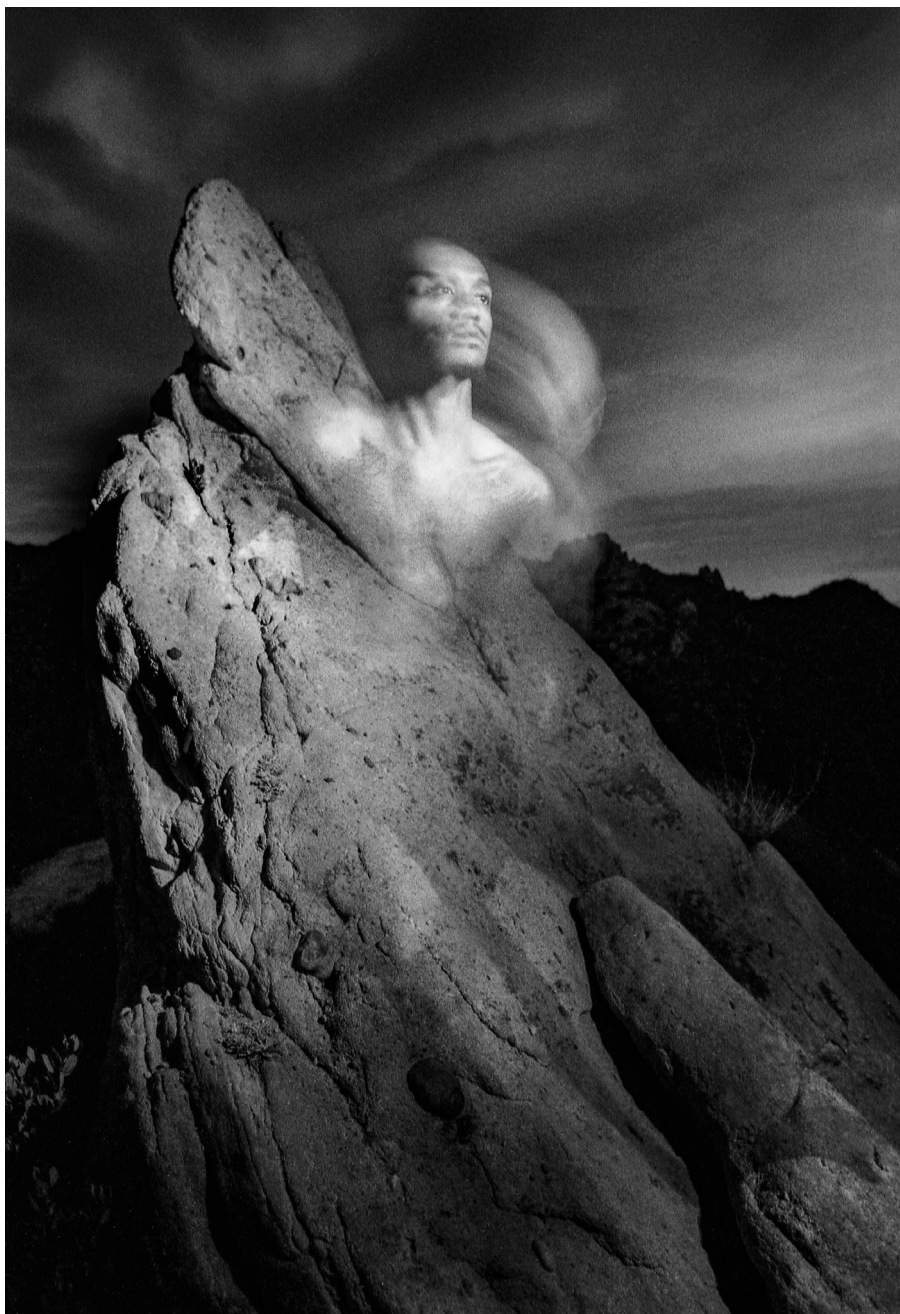
“Phantom Pains”

Jeff Mark Leavitt

35 mm film photographs











“The Girl Who Loved”

James Reeder

The girl who loved kittens
And books by the fireside
She loved to laugh, long and loud
Sometimes too tough to cry

Well time she moves onward
She seen ninety trips around the sun (around the sky)
The girl who loved kittens
Dreams of years gone by (to come)

Her dad and her momma
Her man tall and handsome
They made quite a pair
In his dress whites on their wedding day

Plenty of grandkids
All who adore her
Pictures of all their girls and boys
Rest by the counterpane

Still quick with a wicked joke
But names might escape her
A beautiful smile for all the world
And hands that can fail her

The girl who loved kittens
Had many she loved across the years
Each little face she remembers
And softly she sheds a tear

She gave of a lifetime
A love that was boundless
Never scared to speak the truth
To all who might listen

The girl who loved kittens
Raised one rowdy, crazy young man



Who caused a few heartaches
But here today he stands

Giving thanks for the heaven sent gift from above
Full of love and tradition
The girl who loves kittens
The girl who loves kittens

@2019 James C Reeder ASCAP

“As Eagles Fly”

James Reeder

Lookin up there, a hawk flyin’ solo
Watchin me cross a muddy patch
Circlin my old Ford in the evenin’
Ain’t no lady hawk. Ain’ t no match.

But he ain’t me babe, I got your number
Got my shined up Ariats on.
Pickin you up, looking like a fantasy
That little black dress & the night is young

Circle round like golden eagles
Flyin through the midnight sky
Got you close, your hands on my body
Ridin winds as eagles fly

Rings & things, our harmony sings
Diamonds & backroads & radio spins
Chasin’ the dream wherever it might go
You & me just livin’ free
As eagles fly

Drinkin and flyin, dancin & cryin
Girl after girl, they just ain’t you
Shot after shot, it gets me through
At the end of the day it’s all I can do

That’s all done, times a changin’
This is what I’m waitin for
You’re the one to ride the winds with
Dreamin bout you more and more

Circle round like golden eagles
Flyin through the midnight sky
Got you close, your hands on my body
Ridin winds as eagles fly

Rings & things, our harmony sings



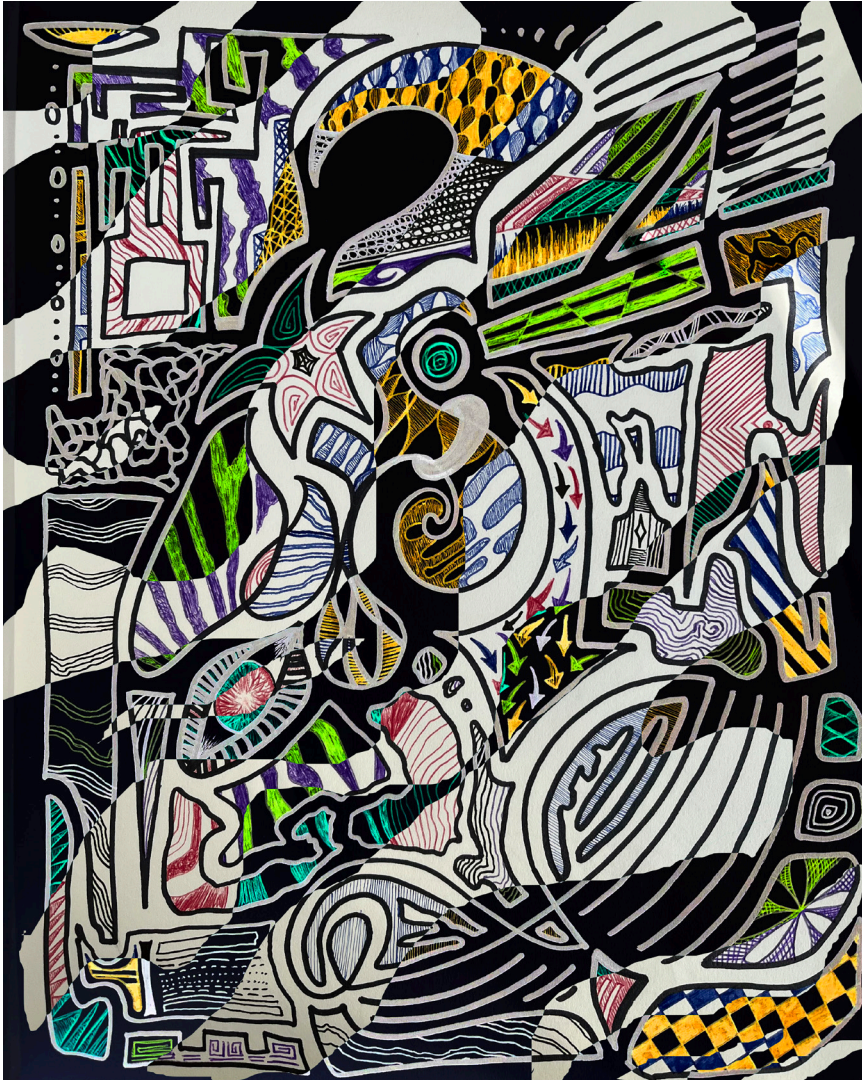
Diamonds & backroads & radio spins
Chasin' the dream wherever it might go
You & me just livin' free
As eagles fly

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“Transposition”

Ethan Lam



“Transposition” is a digitally altered photograph of a drawing. The original drawing is an exploration on the artistic principles of line that uses different patterns and colors to reimagine the way we think about lines and curves. The goal of “Transposition” was to further separate the viewer from the drawing’s linearity.

“The Heart of Santa Monica”

Ethan Lam



“The Heart of Santa Monica” is a digitally altered photograph that features a bright orange flower radiantly glowing on Santa Monica Beach. “The Heart of Santa Monica” aims to highlight Santa Monica’s culture of art and vitality along with its iconic beach. Grains of sand can be seen flying on gentle wisps of air around the flower.

“Breakwater”

Ethan Lam



“Breakwater” is an abstractified backdrop of jaw-dropping waves against the copper-dusted cliffs of Nazare, Portugal. My goal was to visualize Nazare’s position as a world-renowned surfing destination with ultramarine blues to contrast the vivid primary colors in the background. This piece was made using acrylic paint on paper.

“Out of Touch”

Demi Saleeb



I am entirely out of touch with reality.

Of the million faces I carved, not a single one was mine. Here I remained, roaming blindly and aimlessly through the dreamscape. *A walking carcass.* I realized not a single person knew my name. Not a person could read or unfold the chapters of tainted history that was written. Not even I could make sense of it. For whatever remained of my severed spirit had been locked away long ago, deep inside where not a single hand could ever reach out and condemn it again.

“Ms. Handled”

Demi Saleeb



“BLM”

Demi Saleeb



“Fallen Angel”

Demi Saleeb



“Fallen Angel” (Cont.)

Demi Saleeb

Freedom: what a fickle, deceitful thing...Nothing more than another thinning fabric, threaded by a deceitful tongue; the spinning web of a lying construct. Do you believe you are predestined by a set of circumstances? Despite the factors determined, and the unrelenting havoc of existence, you are capable of change. And what more to freedom is it than to lessen these chains?

I hear their thoughts, incandescent and unrelenting; scrutinizing portraits and words unforgiving. They project what they themselves already believe; they all are generic and the same. The silence screams their conceit; they believe me to be privileged in ignorance.

A connection in the disarray of feeling, in the vast fields of emotions and realities. There has never been a greater sense of apathy; is there even a single living being? This feeling...It hangs like a despairing, scornful longing.

“Snowy Night”

Anbu Vajuravel



“Silhouette”

Anbu Vajuravel





End

Contributors

Poetry

“The Sadness House”

Author: Ashley Kim

Editors: Firyal Bawab, Cory Chen

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 a staff member 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!

“recitation”

Author: Mishal Imaan Syed

Editor: Nicole Felici

Mishal Imaan Syed is a second year student at UCLA studying English literature, creative writing, and education policy. Her work has appeared in Open Ceilings, Underwood Press, and *Westwind*. In her free time, she plays classical piano, fluffs her hair, and practices being a fairy.

“Minari”

Author: Ashley Kim

Editors: Thomas Sargis, Corinne Chapkis

Ashley Kim is a third-year English student at UCLA. She enjoys poetry, screenwriting, music, and medicine and hopes to combine all her interests in her future practice. She is currently trying to make sense of her life through words.

“what shall be called Woman”

Author: Eleni Eftychiou

Editor: Nur Hussein

Eleni is a third year psychology major at UCLA. She is co-editor and lead designer of 562 Medium, a Long Beach based art and literary mag. Her work has been featured in the Berkeley Review of Education and a few yet-to-be-published chapbooks languishing on her computer.

“Steadfast Is He”

Author: Fiyral Bawab

Editor: Jinha Song

Fiyral is a graduating International Development Studies major at UCLA. She came to the U.S. from Jordan for her studies. In her free time she draws cartoons.

Fiction

“Cash Only”

Author: Austin Treat

Editor: Rania Soetirto

Austin Treat has recently appeared in Storm Cellar Magazine, The Periodical Forlorn, and Everyday Fiction. He graduated from UMass Amherst in 2017 with a degree in Political Science. “Cash Only” was inspired by his Detroit Street residence in Miracle Mile, Los Angeles, and by Erin Rowbotham. Follow him on Instagram @a.u.treat and Twitter @Treatum. He’s from Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

“Lilies, Smoke, and Something Else”

Author: Gia Provenzano

Editors: Mikaella Butalid, Haniyeh Hashemi-Nejad

Gia Provenzano is a 4th year English major with Film and Professional Writing minors. When not writing, her interests include watching Guillermo del Toro movies, embroidering, and reading sci-fi.

“Phantom Hold”

Author: Teal Hall

Editors: Jordan Medina, Edward O’Keefe

Teal Hall is a senior English major at UCLA. She enjoys the simple things in life, like a good breakfast sandwich. She also enjoys writing.

“Little Flame”

Author: Julianne Estur

Editors: Skylir Ford, Taylor Silveira

Julianne (she/her) is a sophomore English major at UCLA who loves horror and romantic yearning equally, and she thinks those two are the most superior genre combination. She’s also an avid enthusiast of DS-era Pokemon, halter tops, enemies to lovers, and Tony Award-winning musical Hadestown.

“The Nineties”

Author: Zoie Burt

Editors: Jennifer Lopez, Ruby Yassen

Zoie Burt is a sophomore at UCLA studying English, Chinese & Creative Writing. She is from the San Francisco Bay Area and can't wait to see where else words whisk her away to next.

Creative Non-Fiction

“Orange Wine”

Author: Delaney Fravel

Editor: Yusra Akhundzadah

Delaney Fravel is a student at UCLA and an aspiring author with a passion for healing through writing. It is here that Delaney has found a cathartic process for herself and encourages others to try and do the same.

“Nailing the American Dream”

Author: Linh Vo

Editor: Michelle Peralejo

Linh Vo is a scholar and inquisitive writer who enjoys exploring the intersectionalities of love, identity, and upbringing. Through her work, she hopes to spark conversations pertaining to these themes as well as understand more about the world around her through writing.

“Lauveron”

Author: Hunter Garza

Editor: Yusra Akhundzadah

Hunter is a senior undergraduate at UCLA who enjoys writing as a hobby.

“Daughter Surrendered”

Author: Delaney Fravel

Editor: Sabrina Ellis

“BURNOUT”

Author: Ashi Gottumukkula

Editor: Yusra Akhundzadah

Ashi Gottumukkula is a second-year Global Studies and Pre-Political Science major at UCLA who enjoys drinking matcha, critiquing peoples’ outfits, and writing.

Art

“Phantom Pains” (1-5)

Artist: Jeff Market Leavitt

Jeff Mark Leavitt is a native Angeleno, UCLA alum, artist, and educator. His latest work, Phantom Pain, is an exploration of the past’s elusive, and sometimes avoided, truths—pain never processed, losses never reconciled. This project is dedicated to the commonalities and truths we all share—our bodies and how we mitigate the emotional distance placed between ourselves, and our natural environments and how we exist within them. He wishes to enable confrontation with our truths as the images yield representations of one’s own experiences, or uncover intangible feelings previously lingering on the periphery. He uses moonlight to manifest our ghosts and memories, and to meld his subjects with shadow and Earth, texture and feeling.

Medium: 35 mm film photographs

“The Girl Who Loved”

Artist: James Reeder

Jim worked as an actor for many years and then moved on to songwriting for television. He has a BA and MFA in Theater from UCLA.

“As Eagles Fly”

Artist: James Reeder

“Transposition”

Artist: Ethan Lam

Ethan is a senior biology major at UCLA. When not studying or in the lab, he enjoys going to the beach and exploring Southern California. He is currently on the hunt for the best matcha soft serve ice cream in Los Angeles.

Medium: Acrylic on paper

“The Heart of Santa Monica”

Artist: Ethan Lam

Medium: Digitally edited photograph

“Transposition”

Artist: Ethan Lam

Medium: Digitally edited ink on paper

“Out Of Touch”

Artist: Demi Saleeb

Demi Saleeb is a traditional/digital artist as well as a Design Media Arts Student at UCLA. They enjoy drawing characters, designing graphics, painting, and writing stories. They value utilizing their platform as a creator to advocate for social causes (LGBTQ+, BLM, etc.), touching others in a meaningful way, and expressing their ideas through their art.

Medium: Acrylic, markers on paper

“Ms. Handled”

Artist: Demi Saleeb

Medium: Digital media

“BLM”

Artist: Demi Saleeb

Medium: Digital media

“Fallen Angel”

Artist: Demi Saleeb

Medium: Digital media

“Snowy Night”

Artist: Anbu Vajuravel

Anbu is a student at UCLA majoring in Physics. He also loves video-games, movies and thinking about how big space is.

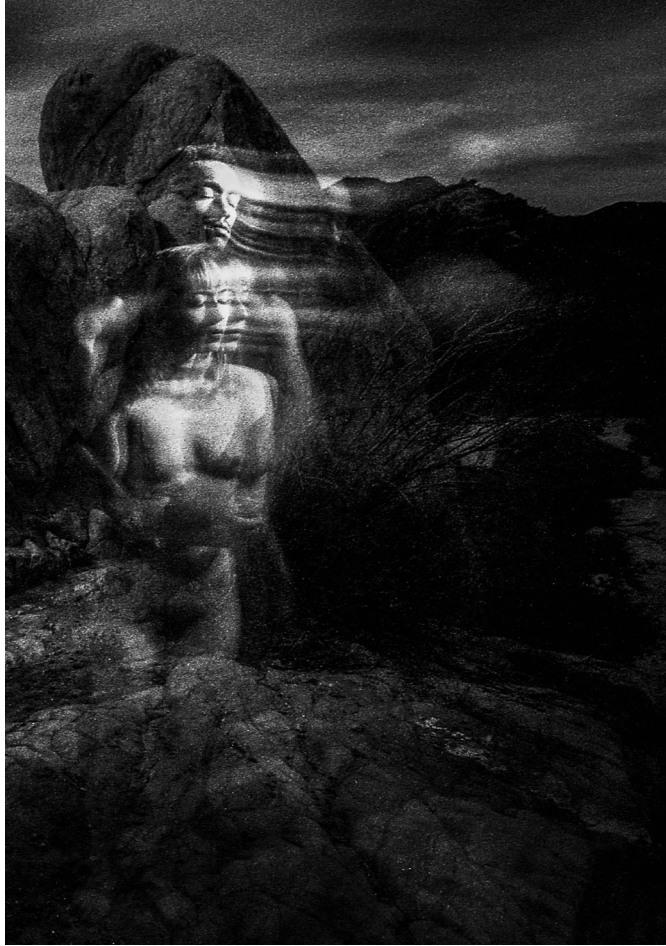
Medium: 3D modeled in Blender

“Silhouette”

Artist: Anbu Vajuravel

Medium: 3D modeled in Blender

Cover Art



Cover Artist: Jeff Market Leavitt

Taken from his photo series, "Phantom Pains"

Illustrators

Ayumi Bergan

Ayumi Bergan is a first year Design Media Arts student at UCLA who has been doing illustrations for as long as she can remember. From oblong beach balls done with crayons to full fledged digital pieces that are featured in zines, publications, and the walls of her clients! You can find her @moyu.doyu on Instagram and @moyu_doyu on Twitter!

Sabrina Ellis

Sabrina is a first-year English major here at UCLA. They really love drawing but hate having to come up with something creative for their artist bio. They can be found listening to an audiobook at 3x speed while indulging in their Candy Crush addiction.

Teal Hall

Teal Hall is an English major at UCLA who has been drawing since she was a wee lad. She enjoys writing, reading, and drawing funny little faces.

Kendall Moore

Kendall Moore 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 pretends she's a character in an 80s movie.

Taylor A. Rossi

Taylor A. Rossi is an author and artist studying English. Her writing focuses on themes of commonplace affection and past daydreams. Her drawings specifically explore disassociation, commonplace affection, and loss.



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