

FALL QUARTER

2019

ucla's literary arts publication

Westwind



Journal of the Arts

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Journal of the Arts

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR -

Westwind only really has one goal: to support UCLA's literary and visual arts community. As executive staff, we are afforded this opportunity every day when a student submits the first poem they've ever written, when a new staff member takes on their first editing assignment, or when a never-before-published contributor sees their work bound in print for the first time; every rejection as much as every acceptance, every potluck as much as every board meeting.

The cop out answer is that every moment is a moment that supports our literary future; each moment an opportunity for inspiration, for education, and for the sweet, phonic joy of alliteration. The contributors bound in this journal are those who have seized on these opportunities and produced something worth sharing with the world. The real story of the world can never be complete until every story within it has been shared. In these pages, we invite you to check out the view from our little corner.

Chelsea Olsen
Managing Editor, 2019-2020

FALL 2019

Westwind

UCLA'S JOURNAL OF THE ARTS

For over fifty years, *Westwind* has been printing poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, art, music, and other media created by writers and artists from UCLA and beyond, curated by a dedicated team of undergraduate students.

Westwind welcomes submissions from new and experienced writers and artists. We seek to cultivate and sustain networks between artists, writers, poets, and readers surpassing the bounds of the campus on which we were founded.

Reflective of our inclusion of a variety of different art forms, *Westwind* encourages work to abandon formulaic and traditional demands and expectations. While we accept every medium, we remain appreciative of other kinds of work which furnish conventional forms of writing with contemporary values and concerns that resonate with our readers.



UCLA Department of English
149 Kaplan Hall
Box 951530
Los Angeles, California 90095

westwinducla@gmail.com

Meetings held every Tuesday at 6PM in Rolfe 3126. All UCLA students are welcome.

We publish our print issue quarterly and accept submissions on a rolling basis. We also publish seasonal zines. For more information find us on:

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Danyel Taylor

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Mary Tran

Table of Contents

POETRY

Nikolai Garcia Hollie Cook	14	41	Catherine Taghizadeh Dandelion
Sterling Davis Coyote Sighting	23	42	Eric Fram Old A.K. A Deluge, and an Abandoned House The Map Grows Smaller Until It's a Point "You could have turned back!"
Moe Miller Blue Balls	24	46	Ernesto Martinez L.A. at 4:05 A.M.
Douglas Barricklow Yesterday the Wind	25	48	Deon Robinson We wanted something tragic that feels accidental Men make noise not prayer
Natasha Joyce Coroico Mt. Ida	33	57	Damian Wang You look most beautiful during your last night on earth Ones and zeroes, ergo this cacophany
Quincy R. Lehr APPLEBEE'S RAT ORGY	35	70	Elias Fulmer a muzzle (radio edit) Hypochondriac Stigmata
Chandler Kyle What is lost, and is stolen Waking up on the 405	38		
Camille Boudreau To Spit or To Swallow	40		

FICTION

Annika Karody Exit Wounds	10	61	Susan Monaghan I Have a Good Dream Facilitated By An Angel
Citlali Salazar Prodigal Nothing	16	74	Rebekah Brandes THE UPGRADE
Jamie Holcomb Variations on the Theme of Loneliness	26		

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Brandon Christopher Distractions are Best Served at Room Temperature	7	65	Melissa Lewis-Ackerman Where Have all the Jews Gone?
Anna Ter-Yegishyan Hallways	50	68	Ernesto Martinez A Pendulum in the Pit
Colin Newton Looking for Mr. Goodcar	53	72	Anthony Karambelas The Lemming and the Ape
		75	Jennifer Wong bReAKInG the Cycle

ART

Vivien Adamian Game Night Untitled #1 Untitled #2	15 56 60	63	Kendall Moore Glitter Vision Citrus Friend
Emily Glennon Sea Ranch	32		Accompanying Illustrations by Vivien Adamian (33, 37, 43, 45, 48, 59, 70) and Moe Miller (24, 41, 44, 57, 71, 79, 81, 83)

HORROR

poetry and fiction originally published in our Fall 2019 Flash Horror Zine

Sebastian Peraic Changeling	80	82	Sarah Dean It's in the Room With You
Jon-Marc Yaden Voice on the Wind	81	83	Gianna Provenzano Crawling

Accompanying Illustrations
by Moe Miller

*DISRACTIONS ARE BEST SERVED AT ROOM
TEMPERATURE*
By Brandon Christopher

A rich and hearty day starts with the proper breakfast. I recommend two waffles, a couple of eggs, some good French Roast and maybe a banana. A solid distraction like preparing a robust breakfast helps quiet the awareness of there being nearly 100 operational nuclear reactors across the United States. Lucky for us, all those nuclear reactors have backup generators just in case the power goes out. But unlucky for us, those backup generators can only keep the reactors cool enough for a limited amount of time—roughly, 29 days. On day 30, there would be 100 nuclear meltdowns across the country. One hundred Chernobyl-scale catastrophes, from the East Coast all the way to the West Coast, after just one month without power. You may survive the cataclysmic earthquake or solar flare that knocks out the national energy grid, but you'll only have one month to live out all your post-apocalyptic Eden fantasies before you blister up and dissolve.

At about 12:45 in the afternoon, I'll start preparing lunch. A salami and Swiss sandwich with a polite spinach salad and perhaps a small bowl of soup; something light like tomato bisque. A multi-tiered feat of cookery like this will keep a soul satisfied throughout the whole afternoon.

Al Qaeda was big on culinary ingredients, too. When members emailed secret messages to one another, they used food references as code words. The phrase, "I need the recipe, flour and oil," was the actual cryptogram they used when asking for instructions on how to build a bomb. The name they used for the actual bomb, for some reason, was "the marriage." You'd think they'd have gone with "the cake" or "the falafel" or some other food-related object as a code word for the bomb—to stay on the culinary theme. But they did not. Perhaps that's one of the reasons the FBI were able to crack their super-secret flour-and-oil-and-marriage cipher within a year. On a side note, McDonald's restaurants in Egypt offer falafels on their menu. And yes, I know what you're thinking. And yes, you are very correct: they are called McFalafels.

A little later into the afternoon, it'll be dinnertime. Dinner is where I really shine. Tonight's spread includes a zesty three-cheese quesadilla, some black beans dusted with Feta, another small spinach salad (also with some Feta), and the remainder of the canned tomato bisque from earlier.

But dinner isn't truly finished simply by preparing the meal. You must be aware that dinner is the Cadillac of home-cooked meals. A meal of that caliber involves finding the proper streaming movie to pair with it. The movie must be synced up to start exactly with the completion of the last dinner component, as well as carefully curated

to harmonize with the meal's ethnicity and cultural origin. My zesty quesadilla almost demands that I watch *Sicario*.

A solitary, uneventful day requires all sorts of distractions to come out of it unscathed. Distractions are the key to living a rich and hearty life.

Every year, more than 600,000 people go missing in the United States. About 90% of those people are eventually found—whether it's runaways coming home, ransoms being paid, spouses returning to their partners, or corpses being located. But that still leaves nearly 10% of those missing people unaccounted for, never to be seen or heard from again. That's around 60,000 people that vanish every single year. No traces, no leads, no bodies, no explanations. Sixty thousand U.S. residents simply disappear, each and every year.

I think about what happens to those missing people as I deliberate dessert. Let's go with a half-bag of semi-sweet chocolate chips chased with a pint of whole milk. I enjoy this while watching *Antiques Roadshow*. My favorite Monday night distraction.

Antiques Roadshow lasts one beautiful hour. Tonight's two takeaways: 1) A chatelaine is a decorative chain used for pocket watches and reading glasses, popular in the mid-19 century. Auction estimate: about \$400 to \$600; 2) Tucson, Arizona, is a shitty city for quality antiques.

It's now 9:00 p.m., still six hours shy of my insomniac bedtime. I'll need more distractions because these unforgettably odd facts and unsettling bits of knowledge multiply like rabbits.

Roughly 17,000 murders happen each year in this country. Only about 8% of those 17,000 murders are caused by women. But of all the 17,000 murders per year, about 150 are as a result of serial killers. Those same FBI statistics also estimate that there are between 25 and 50 active serial killers operating in the United States at any given moment. They just haven't been caught yet. This fact could also lend itself to the 60,000 Americans that vanish without a trace each year—probably some real *Dexter* types who know how to cross all their T's and dot all their I's when killing. Additionally, of those 25 to 50 active serial killers, 17% are most likely women.

I'd like to learn how to make stained glass. A timeless trade. A stained-glass wall sconce from the Victorian era could fetch as much as \$600 at the right auction. You just have to know where your buyers are, and they are not anywhere near Tucson.

The world's population has almost quadrupled in the last 93 years. Stew on that for a second. In 1927, the world's population was just shy of two billion people. It had

taken humankind about 300,000 years to reach that two-billion-person milestone (even after the losses of World War I). Then, in the measly 93 years since that census, we added nearly six billion more people to the planet. Talk about multiplying like rabbits.

In a textbook case of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, we have to genetically tamper with most of our foods now just to keep up with society's eating demands. And the foods we can't improve upon with altered DNA are the same foods that are smothering this planet like Hollandaise over ham. Not to point fingers here, but we all know it's those god-damned cows and their delicious meat. There's over a billion bovines across the globe, and all they do is burp and fart methane gas. Those fat, cavalier beasts are responsible for over half the world's greenhouse gas emissions—more than cars, coal and humans combined.

I'm thinking about making some eggrolls for Midnight Dinner. Eighteen minutes at 350 degrees; don't forget to room-temp that packet of General Tso's sauce. I think there's at least a glass of wine left in the box, too.

There is an allowable amount of insects and insect parts in all processed foods. The FDA realizes that you can't not have insects in most store-bought foods, so they created rules as to how many insect parts there could be. Peanut butter is allowed 30 insect parts per every 100 grams (about the size of a big sandwich). Fruit juice is allowed five fruit fly eggs and up to two larvae in one 8-ounce glass. Chocolate has up to 60 insect components per every 100 grams (about one heaping handful of chocolate chips—in spite of this knowledge, I have already consumed six heaping handfuls of chocolate chips tonight, bringing my current insect component intake to 360 by way of dessert alone). But noodles are the worst. Most noodles have an allowable amount of 225 insect parts per 225 grams. That's 225 pieces of insects in one family-size dinner. Let's not even touch on marinara sauce right now.

There are probably a lot of fly legs and mosquito wings in my eggrolls and wine. I don't have any statistics to back that statement up, but I'm one of the best assumers in the game. Did you know it would take 1.2 million mosquito bites to drain your entire body of all its blood? A coroner would call that exsanguination.

Eggrolls and wine and *Jaws 2* should take me all the way to bedtime. Then it'll be Tuesday. I'll probably start with soft-boiled eggs and toast.

* * *

* EXIT WOUNDS *

By Annika Karody

April 3, 2003, I was deployed to Baghdad with Private Jennings in what was dubbed a "surgical strike." By June, Bremer had disbanded the Iraqi army and most of the government, and everyone in my company was asked to stay 'til things settled down. We were assigned to basic stuff: ground missions, sweeps, surveillance. The resistance was stronger than anyone had expected, least of all us, but in a group of mostly nineteen to twenty-five-year-olds, admitting so was not an option. By then I knew better than to break from the pack.

You learn to ignore the breaches in your psyche. That's how they get you. It starts on the first day of basic training, the drill sergeant screaming in your face.

"Pick up the pace, Private! You run like that in Baghdad, you're dead meat soon as your boots hit the ground."

You vomit up your breakfast after spending all morning sprinting through mud, and wipe the post-retch tears on your perfectly-starved sleeve.

"Your mother let you cry that way? I'll send you packing with an official note that she raised a little bitch."

It happens at eighteen: a vicious age, when the others know how to pick out the weaklings and the sergeants let them do it. For the sake of survival, you learn how to deal.

In between missions it wasn't so bad. The older privates would give us cigs and booze, shoot pool, and go on sodden tirades about what it was to be courageous, to be American, to be a man. None of them were more than five or six years older than me, but I was eager to be inducted into what I thought they knew, and what I thought I didn't. I lapped up their piss-drunk words.

I did my duties and kept my head down, and Sergeant Bennett took notice. In early November, he told me about an assignment: a prison just west of Baghdad where the U.S. Army detained "insurgents", "terrorists", "America-haters". I was doing well on my missions and so was Private Jennings, and they were proud of us boys. They thought we'd be useful there.

The benefits were many. We wouldn't be out in the hot desert sun all day; we wouldn't be exposed to the danger of roadside IEDs, nor would we be called at whim to go stanch the flow of blood in the streets. Jennings and I agreed, packed our bags, and didn't look back.

The compound was dismal: dingy and isolated. It smelled of mildew and old water; it was dark inside except for the hallways lit by fluorescent lights: the kind that make a person feel slightly to the left of sanity. I was assigned to Specialist Dickson: a short man with a bright red face and a temper that snapped like a pre-set vermin trap. He ran the night shift.

Jennings and I were assigned to the same shift, and Dickson took us through our training. We were to keep watch in the east wing of the prison, where they kept “particularly dangerous personnel.” They’d brought us on because they needed all the other military police officers for regularly-scheduled interrogations. We were just there to keep watch.

After a couple hours of orientation, Dickson left Jennings and me alone in the east wing of the prison. Without Dickson’s voice booming through the halls, the wing was silent. Then a sound.

“You hear that, Jennings?” I asked. He nodded. It was a groan: agonized, faltering. It came again from down the block. Jennings and I walked towards it.

Down the hall, about twenty meters or so, sat a man in a cell, handcuffed to one of the bars, wrist raw from yanking his arm in protest. He was blindfolded, and there was a sickeningly bright fluorescent floodlight shining down on him. He let out another weak, guttural sound.

Then a few mutters in Arabic: something under his breath. I hadn’t trained long enough to understand him at the speed he was talking. The higher-ups didn’t care much for understanding, anyway; they just wanted our boots on the ground. He seemed to be repeating the same words over and over, like a prayer.

Jennings and I moved closer to him. Our shadows eclipsed the floodlight, and he started. Cowering in the cell, he begged for mercy and as we stood there, the sound of three pairs of boots marched up behind us. Two opened the man’s cell, uncuffed his hands, and dragged him by the elbows, screaming, down the hall. Behind them was Specialist Dickson, who caught sight of both me and Jennings.

“What’re you two doing here?” he barked. The two of us fumbled for an answer as he stared us down. His eyes flickered, and he pointed in my direction. “Crawford, come with me.”

He led me to a small room down the hall. Inside, the two men held the prisoner by his limbs, pinning him down to a metal table. There was a burlap sack over his head and a bucket of water in the corner. His screams were muffled through a gag.

“Hold his head down, Crawford,” Dickson told me. I hesitated. “Hold it down!” I pulled the man’s face down, and Dickson stopped me just as the prisoner’s face dipped below chest-level. He poured a bucket of water over it, and its contents pooled in the burlap sack over the prisoner’s face. He gurgled, gasping for air.

“Tell us what you know about the October 27th bombings!” Dickson screamed. More gurgling. They ripped the burlap sack off his face and the gag out of his mouth

and held him upright to keep him from dry-drowning.

“I don’t know!” The man choked, “I don’t know.” They pushed him up against a wall, his eyes still covered with a blindfold, now soaking wet.

“I told you,” he said, “I was employed in the military until your country disbanded it. I picked up those in my taxi because I needed money.” A slap across his face, administered by Dickson. “I needed something to survive; I drove them from Sheikh Omar to Tunis; they stole the car; that is all I know; I told you that is all I know.”

They pulled him back down to the table and gagged him, throwing the burlap sack over his head again. Specialist Dickson motioned to me. I hesitated again. I was just there to keep watch.

“Son.” It was a command, not a term of endearment. I held the man’s head down, and they poured the water. When I told Jennings at the end of our shift he went wide-eyed. We were on a smoke break just outside the compound. “Holy shit are you kidding?” he asked. I shook my head. “No way that’s legal,” he said. I was silent. “Fuck, man. Do you believe him? The prisoner, I mean.” I knew what I saw on the streets of Baghdad before we were transferred to the prison. People were scared. And our sergeants gave us pep-talks about morale this, greater good that, but out in the streets, when we were tasked with roaming around in full combat gear and AKs to keep the peace, I saw people desperate, displaced, out of work. It gnawed at me. One time I brought it up to Jennings, but he shook it off. Maybe he saw it too but just couldn’t bear to look. Ever since I got there I’d been conflicted: more so than I’d ever been in my twenty years, eighteen of them spent in a small Iowa town that I despised, but at least understood.

Was the man innocent? My gut told me yes. Did I understand his fury and desperation, even if he wasn’t? I did. After a twelve-hour night shift, I didn’t want to explain. I gave Jennings a shrug and went back to my cigarette.

The other privates participated willingly: never spoke about the interrogations with apprehension or concern, and I figured that this many people wouldn’t co-sign something that was actually wrong. Maybe, I thought, I was just too sensitive.

Weeks continued that way. I would keep watch, as instructed, and sometime around 2 or 3 am, I would hear Dickson and his cronies trudge down the stairs. Screams, more screams, and then silence. If he caught me lingering in the hallway, he’d instruct me to take part. I would finish my shift, justify my actions somehow, or else get overwhelmed, get drunk, and pass out in bed.

One time I drafted a letter to my mother. It began as a hum-drum “miss you, love you,” and ended up a list of all the things that I had done, or simply let slide. I had to stop when I ran out of room on the front of the page; it was far too much. I sparked my lighter and burned the whole thing.

Jennings abandoned his post. Dickson made him torture someone, too: threatened him with physical punishment when he refused. The night before he left, we spoke over a cigarette, his eyes glass in the flicker of my lighter. “Dickson made me do it today, dude. I should’ve asked to transfer out that first night. You should’ve, too.” The next day, the kid was gone.

Eventually, we got caught. A private transferred from Fallujah, and within a week, he blew the whistle. I wonder if Dickson made him participate. Was he just upright enough to take the fall? I don’t know where he got the wherewithal and resolve to file the complaint, but god damn, do I admire it.

Last year, at my trial, they showed me a photo of Specialist Dickson crouching over a shirtless dead body, his thumb up, a huge grin plastered on his face. The face of the deceased was blurred but I recognized a mole on his left arm: the taxi driver. Back in my cell, I cursed myself and wept. I knew I was wrong, and I did nothing. You learn to ignore the breaches in your psyche. That’s how they get you.

* * *

HOLLIE COOK
By Nikolai Garcia

I want to marry her
intertwine our ancestries
make darkness shrink
carry her voice inside me

Lay her on a bed of marigolds
sun vibrating on her skin
heat exploding from within
her bones and my bones

I want her skeleton
share that fire that she carries
listen to her purr as I lick
the smog off her earlobes

I want to wake up
feel a breeze next to me
that alerts me she has left
for boulevards on the moon

GAME NIGHT
Vivien Adamian
Pencil



* **PRODIGAL NOTHING** *
By Citlali Salazar

Itzal let out a strained, “Oh no,” after she pulled up her jeans and felt the ends brush the top of her ankles. Her thoughts ran quick—socks. She could find some in her and Valeria’s dresser. Itzal picked the longest ones she and her sister owned and pulled them up to cover the skin her jeans no longer could.

Pa and Amá had been arguing again last night, in the kitchen-and-dining-and-living room, their voices garbled like the marbles Itzal and Valeria sometimes rolled over their plasticky wood floor. Itzal had eavesdropped like she did every other Sunday night, only hearing but still knowing of all the bills and the statements and the crumpled notebook papers her parents waded through. Sometimes, nothing much happened in these meetings, and Itzal’s parents ended them with optimism expected to last two weeks. But most Sunday nights, like yesterday’s, Pa and Amá’s voices grew more and more agitated, more and more likely to turn on each other than those papers strewn around. Itzal picked up words and phrases like “bancarrotá” and “demasiados gastos,” especially threatening because Itzal did not fully understand the situation—Itzal only knew for certain that these words made her parents speak with an unfathomable bitterness.

Itzal hated feeling that way, helpless and uncertain. She was almost ten and knew she had to grow up and be more responsible so, as she tied her shoelaces, Itzal decided to sort her desires into “need” and “don’t need.”

Amá had almost finished her coffee when Itzal slinked into the main room. She shook her head and said, in Spanish, to go change.

“They’re my longest ones.”

Amá spoke as if last night’s desperation had been but a bad dream. “We’ll buy you a new pair, then.”

“But I don’t need any. Honest.”

Amá’s coffee must have been particularly hot today, must have scalded her tongue and angered her, Itzal thought, because she snapped, “Your father and I work so we can buy you and Valeria these things. Don’t be ridiculous.” But then, noticing Itzal’s dropped gaze, Amá added, “Do me the favor of telling Vale to wake up again, yeah? One more warning and she won’t get paid.” After every day of cleaning, if Itzal and Valeria had behaved to Amá’s satisfaction, Amá would give them a single dollar bill. Valeria would spend her buck at the grocery store for a Pelón Pelo Rico or Hershey’s bar, while Itzal had developed the habit of squirreling away her earnings in a small Ziploc bag, still slightly dusty from the Cheerios it had once contained, and hiding it underneath her thin pillow. She would feel this bundle under her neck every night before she drifted

off to sleep, dreaming of the lump becoming more and more uncomfortable until it was large enough to present to her parents and make them smile.

When the three were ready, Amá drove them to work in her white minivan which shook if it went over 60, her hands clutching the steering wheel as she willed her daughters to stop arguing and yelling and however else distracting her.

Marjorie, Amá's jefa, lived in a sensible, quiet, and ultimately boring neighborhood. In her 80s and with health failing, Marjorie could not do much for herself, so Amá cleaned Marjorie's house daily. During the summer, Itzal and Valeria, too young to stay home alone, accompanied Amá and were thus burdened with the crushing responsibility of keeping themselves not just entertained, but quietly so, while Amá scrubbed and polished and swept and vacuumed and wiped and washed. She had cooked, too, wonderfully aromatic concoctions, but Marjorie had stopped taking solid foods in the last few weeks. Marjorie would, however, sit at her wicker chair and regale Amá with stories of living through the Great Depression, from making quilts from worn-out clothing to using limes to stiffen and gleam up her hair. Itzal had once noticed Amá taking limes to the bathroom, even though Amá's hair was too thick for a noticeable difference.

Amá parked the car and instructed Valeria to knock on Marjorie's door. "You stay," she told Itzal, watching her through the rearview mirror. Itzal hitched up her socks. "I don't want you hiding what you need from me or Papá. Understand? If you need anything you come to us right away."

Itzal thought better of telling Amá that jeans were on her "don't need" list and nodded.

"So we'll leave work a little early today, go shopping, and you can show off your new jeans to Papá."

"What if we're not allowed to leave early?"

"Of course we'll be allowed. Vámonos!" Amá unbuckled herself and opened the car door cautiously so it wouldn't screech.

"Amá, I want to help clean too."

Amá's face hardened as it had that morning, but she kept her voice level. "Go greet Marjorie—look her in the eye and keep your voice strong, you hear me? You're not a mouse—and then go play outside." Her tone left room for nothing but obedience, and Itzal retreated to Marjorie's backyard after letting the woman greet her with a pinching of the cheeks.

The day was long right from the beginning. Itzal used to hunt beautiful, fun-

ny-looking rocks from Marjorie's garden and tried selling them outside her apartment complex, but no one ever saw in the rocks what Itzal did. Even Carmen from upstairs, the only tenant who ever greeted the family, declined to buy one, and so Itzal gave up on that business venture.

Another expired form of entertainment had been the inside of Marjorie's house; when still unfamiliar with it, Itzal and Valeria had been in awe of the dwarfing hallways, the refrigerator that expelled water when they pressed a cup to it, the room solely for a washer and dryer, and the large TV no one had to bang on or fiddle with bunny wires to pick up a signal. But now these novelties were worn out, and the children now had to create new distractions.

Itzal and Valeria tried racing snails, after Amá forbade them from salting any, and put up the strawberry hard candy Marjorie had given them as the spoils. But the snails wouldn't move in the same direction, so Itzal proposed they measure and compare the snails' mucus trails after a period of time. Naturally, the girls soon grew tired of watching the competitors inch along and so looked for four-leaf clovers. By the time they remembered the race again, the snails had disappeared from the patio concrete and into the grass, trails dry. Itzal called it a tie and proclaimed that, in such a result, the older person was the winner. Valeria challenged this statement by slapping Itzal, who shoved Valeria who started to wail who had to be pacified with both strawberry hard candies so Amá wouldn't hear and start scolding them both. Now upset, the sisters sulked and ignored each other while pretending they weren't trying to get the other's attention with such silence. That lasted a while.

Near the end of the workday, Amá approached Itzal just as she had thrown the fern fronds she had collected up into the air. Itzal had been pretending they whirled around her, as if alive, rather than dangling in the air for a second—with no Mississippi—and landing onto her head in clumps.

Amá ruffled Itzal's hair and crouched down by her level. "Do you still want to help me?"

Itzal nodded.

"You can stop picking fights with your sister, you can remember to clean up your messes, you can keep focusing hard in school—and you can stop worrying. That's how you'll help me most." Amá was smiling, but Itzal found herself nodding as furiously as possible to truly make Amá happy.

After work, and after the usual hassle of finding a pair of cheap, comfortable, and durable jeans that Itzal approved of, the trio lined up to pay.

“Amá, can I invite my friend to our house?” Valeria asked as they waited their turn.

Itzal elbowed her, embarrassed. “It’s an apartment, not a house, stupid. Why would anyone even come?” Itzal did not expect Amá to scold her like she did as soon as Itzal’s elbow bounced off Valeria’s shoulder—Itzal was just trying to educate Valeria, not pick a fight.

While Amá finished chastising Itzal, Itzal noticed the woman first; standing right ahead of them in line, she was observing the family with wrinkly pursed lips and a raised eyebrow. Itzal stuttered, looked up at Amá, and then back to the woman. Her sharp gaze deflated Itzal, and she dropped her head, focusing on her shoes. She wriggled her toes as Amá turned around to see what had made Itzal so nervous. The woman snapped her head forward.

“Itzal?” Amá said. Itzal only shook her head. *Later*, she tried to express. *Please*.

Amá once again crouched to her daughter’s height and gently lifted her chin. Her palm was rough, but cool. “Mija, don’t ever be ashamed for being able to speak two languages. What can anyone assume about us, about you, from our conversations? Be proud of your knowledge.” Amá, standing up again, muttered something Itzal suspected she should not have heard, but knew she would not forget in the coming weeks, in that same hiss Itzal would sometimes hear through the walls: “Pinche gringa.”

Summer swept past the family, and near the beginning of fall came the end of Marjorie, as well as Amá’s time cleaning her home. Fortunately, one of Marjorie’s children was quick to snatch Amá for himself—this time at a mansion. Pa joked that Amá had done Marjorie in for a promotion. Amá didn’t much like that joke, Itzal could tell, as she would glare at Pa and gesture at their daughters. But Itzal didn’t mind; she had known Marjorie’s house better than Marjorie. Valeria was also too preoccupied with bragging about Amá’s new mansion to her friends than to mourn. Valeria’s friends teased her for such enthusiasm, but Itzal understood—both had turned near-wild with jealousy when exploring the new house, discovering not just one staircase but two (two!) of them.

The mansion also had a chute Amá could dump in dirty laundry to avoid walking downstairs with a heavy basket, a pool outside with a heated jacuzzi, and poised statues with blank eyes and curious crotches, which Amá explained to be art, in the bathrooms. Sometimes Itzal would focus on the many pictures hanging from the walls or placed perfectly on the many end tables and dressing tables and coffee tables and on bathroom cabinets and in curio cabinets and on kitchen cabinets and even in one liquor

cabinet. Who were these people who lived in such a home? The father, the wife, and the son, prim and dressy in those photos, eyes glazed slightly and smiles a bit too tight—as if posing for a clothing commercial. Did they mind that Itzal and Valeria and Amá were there while they were away for work or school? Did breathing in this mansion feel strange to them, as it did to Itzal, knowing that invisible people breathed the same air? Could the owners feel their presence in the undone beds Amá patted back to perfection, the dishes Amá stacked to their former cleanliness, or in the floors which shone by the time the owners returned?

“Where’s the boy?” Itzal had asked Amá the first time she saw these pictures.

Amá did not look up from the clothes she was folding. “Summer camp.” She shrugged. “Some people don’t know how to entertain their children without money.”

“Can I go to summer camp?”

Amá laughed, but then hugged Itzal upon noticing that her daughter had not appreciated that answer. “I love you too much to send you away. We can have fun here.”

The week before school began, Marjorie’s children invited Amá to the wake and Amá brought the children along so they could give the house one last farewell. While Amá stood with the caterers, gossiping in Spanish like old *compas* despite meeting just that morning, Valeria clung to Amá’s leg and Itzal tried to heed Amá’s instructions to stay close to her—until she grew bored.

Near the back sliding door, from which hung black curtains blocking Itzal’s view of the garden, a young boy stepped in front of her. He was not much older than Itzal. She scanned his hair and his eyes and his pretty upturned nose, fascinated with it all, and nodded with satisfaction at having finally met the boy in the pictures she had puzzled over for so long.

He said hello and looked her up and down. “Your mom’s that one, isn’t she?” He pointed. “She served me my food. It was good.” It was strange to Itzal, hearing his voice.

Amá must have noticed Itzal missing because Itzal heard her name being called.

“She has a funny way of talking, huh? Do you talk like that too?” Itzal blinked. “Hello?”

Itzal did not know if he meant to hurt her feelings, but she did not like that easy way in which he asked that question, nor the manner in which he held out his plate as if expecting Itzal to take it from him. There was an unfamiliar sense of shame in Itzal now, not shame towards herself but towards her mother, caused by the realization of Amá’s accent which Itzal had never fully registered until now. How could Itzal have known that this was something else, another mark of their differences from this boy and his

family, that she had to worry about?

Itzal took a step back, ignoring the boy's outstretched hand. "No hablo Inglés," she said. "Stupid gringo."

His mouth formed a perfect O and Itzal decided to avoid any consequences by squeezing through the crowd of legs until finding her mother's skirt which she was so proud of—the one Amá had made from fabric found at the swap meet for a dollar per yard.

Nevertheless, the consequences found Itzal in the solid form of the old man of the mansion's pictures, dragging along the boy as he approached Amá. His wife followed closely.

The man pointed at Itzal, and then Amá. "Is this your daughter?"

"Yes." Or, Jes, Itzal heard for the first time.

"Is this your way of thanking us? By having your child insult my son at my own mother's wake?"

Amá, smile fading, looked down at Itzal, whose heart was skipping beats on its way up to her throat. "Do you want to talk privately?" she asked the man in that accent so far removed from the typical California lilt, so different from the Orange County polish her own daughters were beginning to inflect—which her eldest now so desperately wished she could impart onto her mother.

"So you can hide your actions from the public?" Heads turned towards the man's booming voice. His eyes were blue like his son's, but duller, a fog cast over them. "We give you job after job after job, we let you bring your children as if we're a daycare, we are sympathetic to your situation and you insult us by letting your daughter call my son a *gringo*?" He whispered the word. "How does she even know such a term? I don't have my child shouting these ugly words, or demeaning others for their curiosity, do I?"

"But it is not the same—"

"I am still speaking. I have always been willing to ignore people's differences and accept them for who they are, so long as they work hard and prove their worth to me. Do you think it acceptable to make a joke of the people you depend on? I am an accommodating man but even I have my limits. I would like for you to leave. In fact, because your daughter was so helpful—" he pulled his wallet out of his pocket, fished out a 20-dollar bill, then cast the money towards Itzal "—she can take it."

Itzal studied the twos and zeros so much more impressive than her own ones in that Ziploc bag, the distant look of the old man, and finally the hand that held it all. She looked at Amá, who only watched, and then at the man and his narrow eyes. He wasn't

looking at Itzal but at Amá—that look in his eye, what was that?

Itzal shuddered and grabbed Amá's hand. Amá squeezed Itzal tight, her other hand clutching a trembling Valeria, and raised her chin towards the man. "Do you accept us, or our work?" she asked. Her voice shook but the venom did not waver. "When we laugh and joke, is it harder to keep believing that you are better?"

No reply. The wife fidgeted. Heads listened in aggrieved silence. And Amá swept her children past them all and into the minivan.

That night, Itzal explained herself as best she could to Amá, and Amá assured Itzal that she was not in trouble. They would speak more about it the next day, after Amá and Pa discussed the matter, Amá told Itzal, and Amá tucked Itzal into bed as if she were Valeria's age again.

But, as soon as Amá closed the door, Itzal freed herself from those near-mortally wrapped blankets, clambering down the ladder of the bunk bed with her Ziploc bag. There were only ones in it, like always, but Itzal figured that one twenty dollar bill wouldn't have made the bag much thicker anyway. And so, after patting the money down underneath her underwear, Itzal returned to her bed. She didn't need anything poking her neck all night long.

* * *

* COYOTE SIGHTING *
By Sterling Nathaniel Davis

Everyone was afraid of Vergil's intense gaze
The Soul is a Cataract – one force

While this cold night air is slicing through my fur like a
scalpel

The rills cannot hear the cries of Pallas Athene.
I want my fangs to be sharp instantly.

If you must know I am here on dangerous business.
I want my quarry bagged and my paws safely

Six fields away, in mountain light—
The faintest eye could miss it.

* BLUE BALLS *
By Moe Miller

A spoilt dog scrimps for scraps at the table
Any unwitting morsel his rightful property.
Now look into me with those wanting eyes. Whimper:
“Give me some, give me some. I’m hungry.”

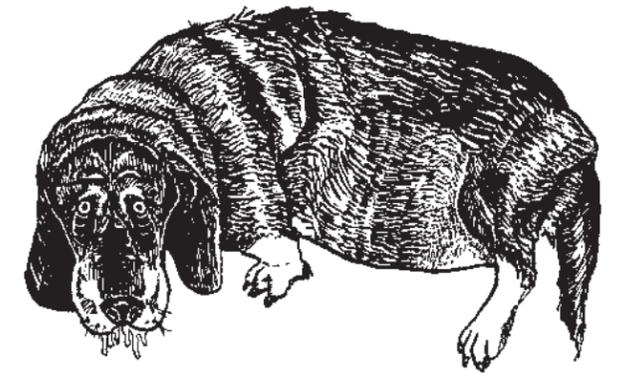
I know the doggy game,
Tear ducts moisten, nostrils flare:
Pitying eyes are synonymous with food.
A fresh sacrifice to be turned over.

The stink of sympathy drives them all.
You attract one you attract the pack,
They're all sniffing, scrimping for scraps.
I want to keep my head above the table,
Away from the doggy dregs
But pleas penetrate barriers.

A sea of cold-nosed sniffles.
“Give us some, give us some. We're hungry.”
Their engorged bellies drag behind them,
One wayward glance and the chorus resounds:
“We're hungry, we're starving, we're in pain!”
I don't have foo—
“We're hungry, we're starving, we're in pain!”

OK.

Spoilt dogs all scrimp for scraps at the table.
Found their meal in the end,
A hollowed vessel conditioned to satiate
And appease salacious howls.



* YESTERDAY THE WIND *
By Douglas Barricklow

Yesterday the wind stripped dandruff leaves
from maple trees, and their liquid amber cousin.

Leaves lay with stems in the air, slender hands
pointed at naked branches shivering in the sun
peering between finger clouds at dry corpses
blown against the fence.

There is enough leaf potpourri to spice the evening,
as bats fly the dark air, zigzag after bugs rising
from leafy rubble around tree trunk's ankles
buried in dry regret from farewell sun.

* VARIATIONS ON THE THEME
OF LONELINESS *
By Jamie Holcomb

1: The Black Cat

When the cat sneezed, everyone reacted. An old man said, "Bless you." Her mother and father cooed. The collection of visitors sitting around the edges of the room laughed. And the cat thought, "How did I do that?"

She sat at the old man's feet and mewed. He made some banter back to her. When she mewed again, he was distracted talking to her father, so she leaned against the old man's leg. He reached out a hand, and she rubbed her cheek on his fingers until she remembered. Somehow she had gotten them all to react at once. Her mew could get anyone's attention, she knew. "But," she thought, "how did I do that?"

Without warning, she felt her mother's hands around her belly. Before she could pull away, she was floating across the living room and through the door, into the room where the family slept. Her mother cooed and closed the door. The cat sat, ears pricked, waiting for the next trick. When nothing happened, she mewed. But there was too much noise in the other room. No one heard her, and nothing happened.

It was when she turned towards the bed that they all laughed. She stopped and listened. They were only talking. Just as she started towards the bed, again, the room of people exploded with noise.

"So that's how," thought the cat.

But no matter how many times she crossed the bedroom threshold, the magic human harmony wouldn't come. The cat thought, "How did I do it? How did I get them all together? How did I make them all pay attention to me?"

"I've been working for so many years—though a cat's life is short, so I guess it can't be so many—but still I can't make them fall in line. It's almost as if everything does what it wants. Almost like that, though as I know, I am the center of the universe, and none of this can happen without me."

She sighed and shrugged and for the moment decided to quit tonight's experiments. She crossed into the bedroom, and no one laughed. She jumped on the bed and listened: nothing. When she crawled under the blind to perch on the windowsill, there was a lot of shouting and arguing in the room of humans, and for whatever reason, she felt like it was her fault.

The sky that night was full of stars, which the cat thought were fireflies. After she curled up and closed her eyes, she dreamed about how the stars must taste. And especially in her dreams, she could control nothing.

2: The Ice

One long winter night, a family of polar bears, a mother and her twin cubs, sat in a snowbank watching the northern lights.

“Tell us a story, Mama,” said one of the cubs.

“Again?” she said, smiling.

The cubs nodded and wiggled closer to her. The sky above them shimmered green, pink, purple and red. Of course, the polar bears saw something very different.

“A long time ago,” the mother said, “There was no such thing as us. No such thing as you, little Hugo, or you, Bellara. No such thing as me or your papa, or even our mothers and fathers, or their mothers and fathers. The only thing was the ice. And it was very lonely.”

She dug a dark claw into the frozen ground and scooped up a pawful of hard snow. She held the ball out in front of her. The twins leaned in close and stared into it.

Their mother said, “When the ice looked up, above it there was only a frozen sky, and it wished to know...” She paused and lifted the snowball over her head, so that it too glistened green and purple, red, orange and pink.

The cubs nudged each other, giggling, and then in unison they said, “It wished to know of what, Mama?”

“Yes,” she said, “It knew of only itself. It wondered what else could be. The ice, for the first time, felt longing. And in the fire of that feeling, it grew a heart, and the heart began to melt the ice.”

The snowball dripped through her fingers, and the children wrestled to catch the droplets on their tongues.

Their mother said, “You want to hear the rest?”

Together the twins shouted, “First there was a storm!”

“And so there was,” said Mother Polar Bear.

The sky crackled and exploded. They saw animated marble. All around the bears, the solid sky flowed.

“Then?” Bellara said, while Hugo drank the drops falling from the snowball. He smacked his lips and said, “The blood of the universe poured out.”

“The clean blood,” Bellara corrected him.

“The clear blood,” their mother said, “poured throughout the body of ice, and everywhere flowers bloomed. Great fire flowers the size of the sky. And from their roots came the tenders of the earth, who grew into many strange and wonderful forms.”

Hugo nodded sagely. “Including us.”

“Well, there’s quite a lot in the middle,” said Mama Polar Bear, “but yes. The tenders of the earth grew into many strange and wonderful forms, including—”

A sound like a thunderclap burst out of the dark. The cubs looked to the sky first, scanning for the source. Then they each felt the warmth and wetness beneath them. Mother Polar Bear lay down. A dark river poured over the ice.

And the cubs were not alone.

3: The Old Man

When I lived in New York City, I thought that I hated the crowds. Everywhere, to do anything, you’ve got to claw your way through a wall of backs and shoulders bearing heads that sneer and roll their eyes and say things to you like, “this fuckin’ guy!” Now I live in the woods, and I miss everyone.

Don’t misunderstand me: it’s beautiful out here. I know all the birds by their songs. I smell pine needles and moist earth. My wife and I live in a quaint cabin. I chop wood and build fires. I’ve learned to hunt. There’s a town just down the mountain where I can get my weekly dose of humanity. I’m not complaining. But now the little things—young campers snickering at me, awkward conversations with the store clerk, my occasional humiliating displays of public anger—feel like knives through my heart. I’m beginning to understand why.

I’ve been remembering an experience I had probably thirty years ago. I’d been working as a messenger, and on this day, I’d had to run from Union Square up through Herald Square to drop off a package. It was summer, and, my god, everyone stood in my way. They all needed to take photos, or stop and check their maps, or scream at their screaming brats. I could have found some other way to go, but, for whatever personal reason, I just had to give up. Maybe I stopped because I saw the empty bench. It appeared out of the crowd, a deserted green metal seat standing alone in the middle of 34th street. I couldn’t fight any more.

Defeated, I fell onto the bench. I just stared at it, them, this mass of people. They were all fighting to get through each other. They were all headed the same direction. They all had the same furrowed brows and gaping mouths. They were all exactly the same. And they felt just like me.

Now the birds feel like me, and the trees and strange bugs and spiders; the whole forest is alive. But nothing understands. I am alone. When you have a crowd to fight against, you get to say, “this fuckin’ guy,” and you get to feel like if only it weren’t for these people, I’d get to do exactly what I want, how I want, when I want.

But—I'll say it this way. This is what you want. I promise. Because I've also walked down Broadway at four o'clock in the morning, when the tourists are all tucked into their hotel beds, and the homeless men and women are wrapped in their quilts, lying in doorways like dead bodies. There aren't even pigeons in your way. And there's no peace in the quiet. Nothing understands how you feel. There's not even anyone to blame for it.

4: Ghosts

The whole town agreed: the house was haunted. Everyone who'd seen something had seen something different. But in ten years, nobody who'd bought the place had stayed for more than a week.

"And this is a buyer's market," said my uncle. He lived on the opposite side of Elm Street, directly facing the house. Like a lot of men in the Northeast, Uncle Cotter spent his afternoons sitting on his porch. But he smoked a pipe, and everyone always made a show about it.

"I'd like to try that some time," I said. We'd been sitting on the porch for an hour at least, watching the sky turn pink. I'd been riding my wooden rocking chair like it would get me closer to the night. I wanted to see a ghost. So far, we'd gotten nothing but black windows.

Cotter blew a long plume and handed the little brown pipe to me. I took it and puffed.

"Don't inhale," he said.

The smoke tasted nicely like apples. Uncle Cotter watched me, grinning, until I exhaled fine. Then, sounding disappointed, he said, "Well. Don't make a habit of it."

He took the pipe back and banged the ashes out into the glass ashtray on the banister. He plucked tobacco from a pouch in his shirt breast pocket, and he said nothing to me for a long while. Finally, I asked him to tell me what he'd seen.

He took his time digging a match out of his jeans. "Well," he said. He struck a match on his boot and put the flame to his pipe. He puffed.

"I've seen.... In my time now, and there's been plenty of it. Thirty years I've been in this house, but I remember walking along here when I was a boy. I saw them building that place, you know. I've seen everything."

He took a long drag on the pipe. I wanted to know about ghosts.

"I've seen... five times, five different families tear ass out those big fancy doors. First ones I heard their car screech out in the middle of the night. 'Nother ran out at

six in the morning, all three, mom, dad and kid, ran screaming down the street in their pajamas."

I said, "But you've seen something yourself, right?"

"I told you," he said. He took a lot of short puffs on his pipe. "I seen what I saw."

"Well, maybe tonight," I said, turning my eyes back to the house.

It was not really fancy, but it had two stories, which meant it was the tallest house on the block. It was made of slatted wood, recently repainted bright blue. The roof was made of many little peaks, and it was shingled in copper that time had rendered green, like a shipwreck. A muddy red and white for sale sign clattered against the great double doors.

"It's gonna storm," said my uncle.

He banged his pipe on the ashtray, and he went inside. The sky was dark. I watched the house for a few more minutes. Then I followed him.

That night at dinner, my uncle said to my aunt, "How long before she picks him up?"

I stared into my stew and pretended to struggle with a potato. I wanted to tell him my side of the story. I'd been stuck here for over a week, and I had no idea when my mother would be returning.

But my aunt said, "Don't worry," and then to me, "It's no trouble."

Later in bed, I thought about what I wished I'd said to the old man. My window faced the alley, and while I wanted to go out to the front room and watch the haunted house, I could hear my aunt and uncle squabbling. I wondered what it was that had soured his mood. Maybe it had nothing to do with me.

That night I dreamed I was surrounded by enormous dominoes. I was trying to count the starry dots on their faces, but they kept falling into each other. I woke up screaming, "It's not my fault!"

No one heard me. My aunt and uncle had already left for work. The sun was up, and I had the house to myself. I stayed wrapped in my quilts, thinking over my nightmare, until I was ready to face the cold.

My aunt usually kept the kitchen tidy, but she'd left last night's dishes in the sink, and on the counter was a half-eaten plate of eggs. I found a clean bowl, and I dug around in the cabinet, looking for a good cereal. On the bottom shelf sat the pipe.

Normally Cotter kept the thing in a leather case attached to his belt. Maybe this was a spare? It smelled like burnt apples, and it was resting on a big box of campfire matches.

I swallowed a handful of cereal. Then I finished the eggs.

There was no tobacco pouch in the kitchen or living room, and for some reason, the main bedroom door was locked. The dregs in the bowl were only a little blackened, so I used a match stick to turn the brown parts up to face me, as I had seen my uncle turn them many times. Once I settled into my rocking chair, I tried to light a match on my boot.

The street was empty, as far as I could see. Still, when I gave up on the boot trick and struck the match on the box, I bent down to hide the flame.

I burst out coughing. The smoke tasted like ash. I gasped and let go of the pipe. It clattered on the porch planks. A sinister line of smoke curled up my leg.

I was afraid to look down. So I looked up. Across the street stood an old woman. I hadn't heard any footsteps. She was standing in front of the house, and the double doors stuck out from her shoulders like bat wings. She grinned at me and waved a red-stained hand.

I didn't look back. It wasn't until I was inside, with my back against the locked door, that I remembered about the pipe. I kneeled on the couch and peeked through the window blinds. She was still standing there. Only now she had her face in her hands, and even though I couldn't hear her, I thought she was crying. I couldn't go back out there.

My uncle came home early in the afternoon. I'd spent the day tidying up the place, and I'd cleaned the plates in the sink. He didn't notice. In fact, Cotter completely ignored me. He stomped around the house muttering to himself. I sat in the living room waiting. Finally he came into the room, and after he turned over the couch cushions, he asked me if I'd seen his pipe.

I lied. He didn't even raise an eyebrow. He just sighed and said, "Course not."

The he headed out to the porch. I held my breath. It wasn't long before I heard him say, "Oh no. No."

A minute later he returned with the pipe. He was cupping it with both hands, and I could see. The bowl was cracked. I could hear my own pulse.

But Uncle Cotter didn't look at me. He walked straight back to his bedroom and shut the door. Even though his voice was muffled, I could hear him say, "I'm such a miserable..."

For whatever reason, he was crying too.



COROICO
By Natasha Joyce

The little square window
like a postage stamp I'd stick
if I had anything to say
they'd understand.

Pop of green so deep
I can hear it move
with padded feet and feelers.
Lives like ours nestled under trees

Do you ever get tired of the view?
At the stove, you pause.
Then the rain starts
as it always does this time of day

We squeeze our heads
through the open window and
the leaves grow heavy again.

You turn back to the stove.
I leave the window open.



MT. IDA
By Natasha Joyce

Brushing teeth at the
base because there was no
time before dawn
getting close and the ticking
clock of noon at our heels.

Climbing.
Soft give of pine needles and earth.
Branches brush by like fingers.
The car still a glint of metal
below where our maps and chargers,
tube of toothpaste left behind.

Then the thinning of trees—
just like they said.
Tundra. A name harsh
even on the tongue.

No hiding place for wind,
our lungs search for oxygen
and then forget to—
Is it possible to smell sky?

The way down will be difficult.
Our muscles' complaints out our
mouths, an irritation misdirected.
Coming down from a high
we should know by now.

There are roads. And maps and trails.
We've divided peaks,
scooped them out like ice cream.
Named them Patterson. Julian. Ida.
But up here it's all vastness.

* APPLEBEE'S RAT ORGY *

By Quincy R. Lehr

We get drunk at Applebee's
 and argue over plates of fries
 about the best analogies
 for all this food and all this size—
 the burger bulging on the plate
 inexorable as climate change,
 ectoplasmic cheese—our date
 spent wondering if our meals taste strange.
 In the back, behind the fridge,
 one hears the faintest pit-a-pats.
 Out of sight, but just a smidge,
 there's a gathering of rats—
 lounging, licking, lurid rats,
 sixty-nining sexed-up rats,
 polyamorous, pumping rats!
 Fucking orgy! Fucking rats!

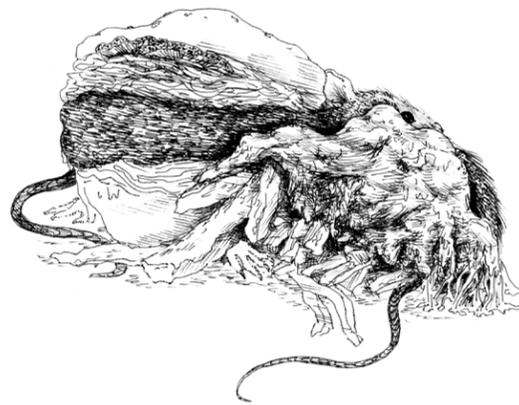
The bumpers in the parking lot
 are full of slogans set to names—
 this one's a shoo-in, that one's not.
 This one's racist; that one blames
 the rich, the poor, the immigrants,
 the kids who live too far from home,
 the forests with too many plants,
 veganism, styrofoam.
 Put it on the media.
 Chalk it up to bureaucrats.

Edit Wikipedia.

It won't bother all these rats—
 lounging, licking, lurid rats,
 sixty-nining sexed-up rats,
 cunnilingual cumming rats,
 furtively fellating rats,
 polyamorous, pumping rats!
 Fucking orgy! Fucking rats!

The menu has another page
 we hadn't noticed with dessert.
 The sundae threatens to upstage
 the chocolate cake. It all could hurt
 to eat—the whipped cream suffocates
 beneath the glue of caramel,
 calories as dark as fate,
 carbs congealed to viscous gel.
 We could try to exercise,
 our Fitbits rattling off their stats
 to burn it off, metabolize.
 We'll munch away like horny rats—
 lounging, licking, lurid rats,
 sixty-nining sexed-up rats,
 cunnilingual cumming rats,
 furtively fellating rats,
 sliming, slurping, shtupping rats,
 shagging, shrieking hordes of rats,
 polyamorous, pumping rats!
 Fucking orgy! Fucking rats!

Did we eat all we could get?
 How much to tip? Which credit card?
 Should my dinner make me sweat?
 How will my gut take all that lard?
 Was it back-and-to-the-left?
 Was it "I am not a crook"?
 Which was the lie that proved so deft?
 Who are we leaving off the hook?
 And that's the end of happy hour
 and all those carbs and all those fats.
 Lights out on declining power.
 We'll have to leave it to the rats—
 lounging, licking, lurid rats,
 sixty-nining sexed-up rats,
 cunnilingual cumming rats,
 furtively fellating rats,
 sliming, slurping, shtupping rats,
 shagging, shrieking hordes of rats,
 pissing, puking, poking rats,
 rolling, reeking, rutting rats,
 polyamorous, pumping rats!
 Fucking orgy! Fucking rats!



* WAKING UP ON THE 405 *
 By Chandler Kyle

Morning answers to the face of God
 delicate gold
 rose blush
 powdered on the cheeks of clouds,
 with squinted eyes,
 barely able to see enough

Fire glowing on a mirrored city line
 amber hearth, cool as dawn
 hearts thawing
 like blue foggy windows
 as the car warms up
 a deep breath, a heavy sigh
 the engine hums softly

Prayers and dreams
 and the cusp of heaven
 resting on our shoulders
 and in our eyes
 mirrored like the glass of skyscrapers,
 Apollo listens closely
 to the choir of a city
 and carries its deepest sorrows and joys
 To the ears of God himself.

* WHAT IS LOST, WHAT IS STOLEN *

By Chandler Kyle

In the soft hours,
the charcoal night, not of obsidian
But a blue haze
peace and silence and emptiness
that crept gently down to me
from the ocean
from Her heart

Where is She, here?
I look around and search desperately
all in vain
the sidewalk is black with soot and dust
the Concrete that piles up
layers upon layers of it
Concrete that seals the dead
Concrete that hides the horror
Concrete that poured over a land
of love and life and beauty

Of what is now lost,
scattered to the wind
or forced to hide in shadows
where you can just barely see
faded footprints of the Tongva
buried beneath crumpled lottery tickets
and stolen dreams

Where is She?
In the soft hours
maybe just a whisper, wafting in from the ocean
just the mist of Her soul

* TO SPIT OR TO SWALLOW *

By Camille Boudreau

Oil slick, tar-in-the-mouth and stuck
to the bottom of heels that slide
in the mud which climbs the hemline
and rises like bile bitten back between lips

Wither white birch, with your paper skin!
Surrender, tear off sheets and
cut out familiar human shapes in
chains of the same fingerprint pressed
against the pressure point on the side of the skull

Ward off the headache.

There's always a headache.

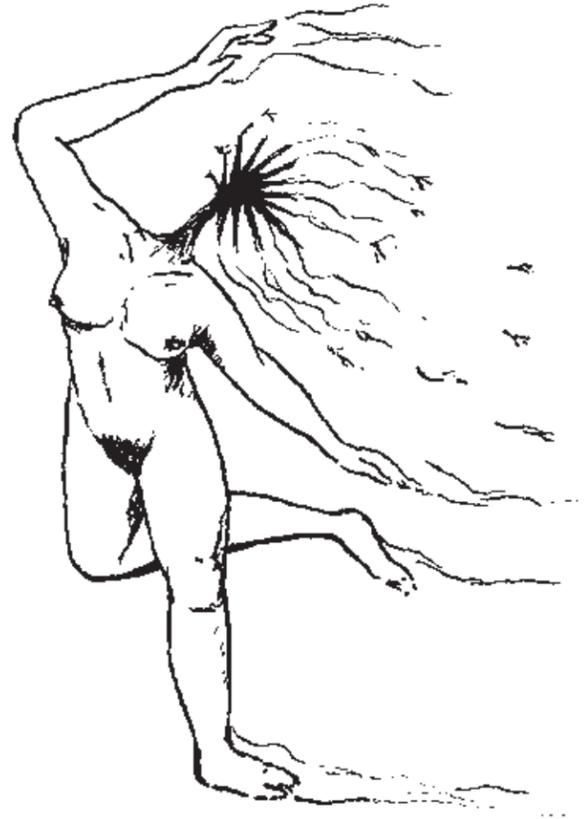
Concrete is no match for roots
breathe, rupture, blink
eye of another annual ring
But after a while, just tear out the tree!
Beauty is purposeless.
Studies show most prefer spent cigarette butts,
and self flagellation.

Gentleness is antiquated
mysticism long since lost to rot
And anyone who grasps after those spider threads?
O Goddess! better off dead.

Bury me on Keats' breast.

* DANDELION *
By Catherine Taghizadeh

With no audience but the wind.
He caresses her billowing locks
And bends her shapely body.
“Join me” she cries,
And a shakedown ensues.
Her seeds are dispersed
And he blows harder.
She’s left naked when it’s done,
And when she tries to leave
She finds she has no florets left
And her feet are rooted in the ground.
When his force breezes by once more,
She’s shaken and shudders.
He twists her body,
Tells her they’re only dancing,
But she finds herself barren of joy.
She wants to say “Nopleasego”
But she’s speechless,
Smothered by his enveloping, all-swaying body.
So when his breeze finally stops blowing,
She decides to simply wither away.
Because what’s the point of dancing in life
When nothing but a stem remains?



* OLD A.K. *
By Eric Fram

It’s funny until it’s you,
age,

until the file cabinet is always spilling,
and you’ve watched the overflow rise to the ceiling
only for a new stack to sprout every time.

You won’t face the door.
It’s not there for you.

It’s not the old friend at dinner,
the empty chair cavorts over
its grandchildren.

It kvells** and keels over
onto the chair next to it,
and so on until you’re holding them all
with one arm,

and suddenly you’re aware of the ravines on the back of your hand.
You don’t know them

like the sunlight that strains
itself every morning
through a colander of grass—
overgrown stalks and weeds hushing the light
up to your window—
so it’s softer, gentler,
quieter. What’s outside the window casts itself on your curtains
as a mirage. You can make it out in phases:
soil to sprout, seed to sky,
every morning.

Later it’s quiet on both sides of the door.
You can hear it from here.

It’ll continue being quiet tonight.

*Yiddish, “Alte Kaker” – roughly “old fart,”
sometimes used in English redundantly as “Old A.K.”
**Yiddish, expresses pride and happiness

* A DELUGE, AND AN ABANDONED HOUSE *
By Eric Fram

Here the sky's darkest clouds roll uphill.
In this valley the rain looms.

When the heavy velvet of night dresses this house,
windows shuttered, mirrors draped, roofline flat like a mouth,

bastioned for a flood,
still unready for the wave that sweeps the house vacant—

inside, barren islands, shallow water:

one picture frame, silhouetted,
wood mountainous and pinched,
seaweed occupying furrows in the glass,

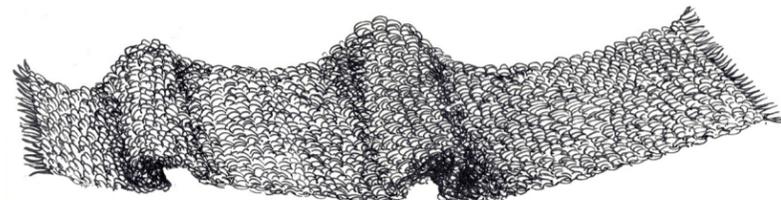
a rug rolled and wringed of dust from socks and dogs,

dining room table supine with legs up and broken—

memory is subaqueous, and the fishing line is short by inches.
The hook returns drowned stuff and things bent at alien angles.

The stuff is bleeding;
the things absorb the blood.

The new owners will just fail to clean the house
of its unlivability, as will the next.



westwind

* THE MAP GROWS SMALLER UNTIL
IT'S A POINT *
By Eric Fram

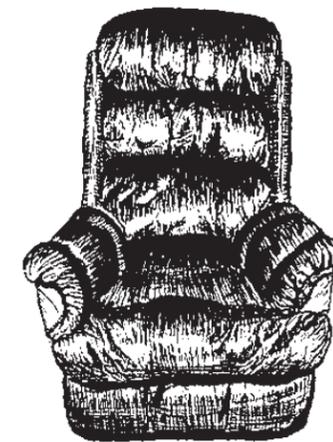
All is in steady arrangement
where habit bore ruts in the carpet
angled toward the bed which faces the TV—

where you called out that you knew
called for your grandson for your daughter for your mother—

moving in pairs of feet or wheels
always in parallel
inevitably converging in a straight line to the window—

and on the other side
a foreign bedroom
like a hotel room but beige
or a hospital room but furnished

and pressing your hand to the glass
you summon a nurse
who explains that the doorframe is too small to accommodate your
recliner
but you'll be comfortable There, so rest.



westwind

"YOU COULD HAVE TURNED BACK!"
By Eric Fram

That was the moon's admonition to me
the night I dove over the banister
and toward the ocean. It was right there,

the foam-drowned shore drooping
under a white slip, each wave conspiring
to tempt the line of the beach out farther

from me. For the rules of this taunt,
look to Moses: the Sea split around him
as a matter of reverence. Whole shoals tucked

their necks and crept back, so you'd
be forgiven to watch the spray dissolve
around my feet and believe the vanishing

to be shy deference. But hold the lip
of a wave closer and you'll see
it sour to a snarl, the water's body

contorting to turn away. When the ocean
leaves, it exposes crags occupied by echo
only, and some still-twitching fish. When

it returns, it allows time for half a gasp
before emptying the coast of our litter
and your immutable emotions. The excess

emerges as sludge and slop, and deep inside
is something I can't dig out. I'll promise to
remember it by feeling, but not by name.



L.A. AT 4:05 A.M.
By Ernesto Martinez

I cannot see
through this thick fog.

A night haze
Grey as hope
Dull as broken dreams

There is no traffic
on these once busy roads
as the happy drivers
sleep for tomorrow

And I drive a tired journey home
alone

There are dim stars
that scatter and illuminate
this dull nebula that encompass me

Angels sleep within a gloomy heaven
lost behind me as I drive
through the fog and
toward the blackened sea
of night

And I hear the soft booms and loud snaps
underneath my car as it glides
through the cracked asphalt

Is it chaos that lulls to me?

Do I dare to look below my wheels
to see relict tentacles of the cemented
chasm grab for me?
Do I sleep here?

As I head home, the fog is all around me
Their lights drift around me
and I drive to find my own home,
I leave them to their sleep
dreaming toward the twilights
that wish for a dawn
of new beginnings

And in my languid stupor,
I hope there is one for me soon

* * *

* MEN MAKE NOISE NOT PRAYER. *

By Deon Robinson

It took weeks for my brother to train
his arm to become a theoretical scythe, tease the strings
of his violin like younger siblings. I trembled,
seasick ears abandoned in the broth
of newborn notes.

July had no business
being that hot, that clumsy. The notes melted
mid-air, a sound that singed the wind.



Epilogue:

A season is—for me, when everyone turns into an instrument.
Before my father was my father, he was my brother's father,
the family drummer. Volatile handyman—the chemistry
between lighting and thunder dug itself in the creases
of his knuckles. The worst part is, you cannot hold it
against your father for not knowing how to hold a conversation.
For knowing how to hack with a machete slick of quicksilver
fury, but not how to attend a funeral. For calling two days late
for a birthday. Children are just chores. The sound of a half-assed
lawnmower yawning over blades of grass. Sometimes, they mimic the curve
of wilting magnolias under the distress of the sun. Maybe melting,
but maybe not.

* WE WANTED SOMETHING TRAGIC THAT
FEELS ACCIDENTAL*

By Deon Robinson

When I first gave my mother morphine, I wanted to taste it so bad. She said it was addictive, and I thought that was a flavor. In the end, she told me to hide it around the house. It looked like if you wrung the night sky from a hand towel, if sapphire melted on the tongue. I can't say curiosity killed the cat but I can say it didn't kill me. The oxy, the cigarettes, the booze, the bruises. I've found them all in different places of the house and wanted them all. What can I say? Family is sometimes the hand that feeds you poison. When my brother found the pills and took them to school, it was not about the pills per se but the inheritance. We wanted something tragic that feels accidental. Like swimming in a pool that drowns the lizards in my father's backyard. We wanted what the kids were whispering about in class. We wanted to see what the horizon had in store, test the rumor that our mouths were gods. Sometimes you do bite off more than you can chew, like when the octopus my mother tried to swallow turned into a fist halfway down her throat. Exploration demands casualty. What happens after the door opens is as much a beginning as an end.

* HALLWAYS.*
By Anna Ter-Yegishyan

There is a short hallway I walk down to get to our bedroom. There are no other bedrooms but this one. The hallway has brown carpet like the second apartment I lived in, the one with a communal yard where I would dig up worms from, occasionally drop along the way, and later not be able to find again despite my desperate attempts. Perhaps that's when I first learned about grief. It entered my six-year-old bones with ease.

Sometimes in the summer I go outside and play with the ladybugs or just watch them huddle by a bush. I find that it's much harder to gain their trust than before. They shy away, spreading their wings at the slightest touch.

The third floor balcony of my second apartment building resembled the gateway to a new world, what felt like an archeologist's dreamland. Going up those stairs was like ascending into a fourth dimension, characterized by a stony cragginess that felt foreign to my four-foot body. My feet only knew flat surfaces.

One day I made the decision to go up them and explore—to feel the surface of the railing, to study the height of the ground from where I stood. Heights didn't scare me back then. I wore a light green dress, the color of baby grass, and started my way up the pebbly steps. Strangely enough I felt nervous, too conscious of the likelihood of my not belonging somewhere.

When I made it up there, the row of apartment doors stretched like a long hallway. It resembled the second floor balcony, only longer, and I ached to walk across it to see how it would feel, or rather, what I would find. One of the third-floor neighbors had a son who was also outside. He was a kid my age, give or take a couple of years, but in this particular context he was everything I feared. He noticed me and abruptly asked, with as much authority as a child can muster, what I was doing there. In that instant I felt that this very private moment between me and the territory in front of me had been shattered. I quickly turned, descended the stairs, and hurried back inside our apartment.

Sometimes I find that I am crossing hallways I don't want to cross, or hallways I know I shouldn't cross, but cross anyway, just for the sheer joy of experiencing that moment, whatever that experience might entail. These hallways typically never look like the one in my childhood apartment, and are even farther from looking like the third floor balcony where I believed anything good was possible.

There were the water games that happened every year in July called Vartavar, an Armenian cultural festival that's sole purpose is to drench people in water using cups, pitchers, buckets—you name it. Most of the tenants in our apartment were Armenian so we eagerly participated in this game. We filled white buckets up with water, ran outside to the second floor railing, and waited for our targets before releasing, laughing and screaming with glee when our aim was dead-on. Some of the boys, though, carried water guns. My sister got into a silly confrontation with one of them, and I still remember my surprise when she stuck her middle finger up in defiance, her back facing me, her short ponytail swinging. So many times I rejoiced in following my sister down a hallway just to see where it would take me. In her shadow, I was protected by love.

With drenched clothes we would head home. Grief had a similar appearance—a sudden and slow permeating flow.

There was a large window in our living room, before the hallway, that overlooked the apartment building next to ours. On days when my sister wasn't home, I played alone—sometimes bouncing a ball against the wall or dancing—and imagined the face of my first grade crush in that window reflection, peering at me just behind the swaying blinds.

One of the places the hallway led us was my parent's bedroom. There they took turns swinging me and my sister by our hands and feet, back and forth, before tossing us on the bed where we landed with a gentle thud, filled with excitement that was less than gentle. Their bed was the same place I would listen to Toni Braxton's song "Un-Break My Heart," tears in my eyes.

Sometimes you're walking down a hallway and open the door to a room you had no intention of entering, and even though your first instinct is to shut it close, you relish quietly in the unknown.

Once a scorpion had its claws pointed at me in the center of a hallway.

I didn't kiss anybody until I was eighteen but I always hoped for it, or rather the new hallways that emerged with it, much sooner. The summer before tenth grade I declared, pensively, "This year is going to be filled with romance," and my mom, one of my main and most attentive listeners at the time, laughed a breathy laugh.

I've willingly walked down hallways, aware that joy wasn't a part of the outcome. These are the moments I ponder about most, but can't seem to fully come to terms with no matter which angle I turn them. Perhaps change of feeling, or change of any spectrum, seemed like a good enough reason.

Other times the walk allowed me to avoid the loss.

Our neighbor would tell us to lie straight down on a big blanket and roll us up until we had morphed into a blanket-person with just our heads exposed. Then she would take the edge of the blanket and pull it out from under us where our bodies rolled uncontrollably, and for what always felt like a longer time than it actually was. We could never tire of this hallway or its repetitive nature. We happily squealed like we were experiencing it for the first time all over again.

Love led me down hallways that were often unfamiliar to me, and yet it was this pearly newness that drew me to it. I saw love as this thing I wanted to peel back and look at, the new layer opening to me like a flower midway through its bloom. Sometimes I felt the guilt of disrupting a natural process by being too eager for it, and other times I couldn't get myself to care. I would sink into it like the walls of love were my nest and could do me no harm. Of course, I came to learn that this certainly wasn't true. Love, when given the power—or love when done taking it from you—could cause the most harm.

There was the bright orange coffee table in the living area, plenty of feet away from the hallway—shielded. We went under this table for the sole purpose of drawing on it, the belly side of furniture, a side no one could see. By the time we moved out, every inch of the bottom side of our table was covered in doodles, including many versions of Tweety Bird, her head frequently too big for her body.

But what about walking barefoot on the hallway, with nothing to separate your skin and the soft carpet—?

Finally, you're at the end of the hall just past the open door, reading at your compartmental desk, the corner lamp the only source of light in the room. I've just come back from the rooftop. I smell books and a blown-out candle flame. You look up from your place, the words erased by my shadow's sheen. Then our bodies touch and the door shuts, removing all view of the hallway.

* * *

✱LOOKING FOR MR. GOODCAR✱

By Colin Newton

The first thing you learn about car owners when you're shopping for cars is that almost all of them love their own.

It's not that my old hatchback had given me much trouble. It's that it had given me enough trouble, trouble with its transmission. While I have been licensed by the state of California to operate a motor vehicle, I know as much about cars as I do about brain surgery. But even I know that a transmission is kind of important. That knowledge, coupled with a freshly expired extended warranty, and I found myself in the market for a car.

My mother—who is more interested in cars than I am, and possibly more than anyone in my immediate family—volunteered to help me look. I obliged. She tackled the role seriously, buying car consumer magazines and poring over pages online that compared electrical systems, miles per gallon efficiency and resale value, as well as phoning dealerships and comparing prices.

For my own part, my effort at automotive investigation largely consisted of asking people I met how they liked their cars. Double points if it was a car I was actually considering buying. In my informal survey, I interviewed people from all races, religions, ages and tax brackets, as well as the most important distinction of all, automobile ownership. It didn't matter if people had luxury SUVs or used compacts. They all loved the cars they'd bought.

Before a business meeting, I spent five minutes talking to a man about his Japanese luxury hybrid, then turned around and spent ten minutes talking to a different man about his racy German hatchback. Unsurprisingly, they both loved their cars. I saw a woman with an Italian subcompact in the parking lot of a laundromat. I'd never seen her before, and I haven't seen her since, but I asked her how she liked her car. "I love it," was her response. "It's so much fun to drive." It had better be. If statistics I hadn't even heard of a month ago were trustworthy, it had a terrible reliability score.

It's not like I wasn't making progress. I had a list of prospective purchases. But, like the fun yet unreliable subcompact, they all had at least one thing wrong with them. Once, I gave my list to a friend and asked her opinion. "They all look horrible," she informed me plainly, then explained to me why I should test drive the car she drove. I asked a woman in a supermarket how she liked her British-born compact, an early contender for my new automobile. She loved it more than her daughters loved their gas guzzling German luxury cars, she reported. I, in turn, reported this to my mother. "Are you still thinking about that car?" she asked. "Not really," I replied. "I'm just in the habit of asking now."

Ever the philosopher, I spent the energy that should have gone into making a decision about what vehicle I should buy on pondering why it was that so many people loved their cars. Like all good philosophers, I couldn't come up with a straight answer, but I found one that was at least psychically satisfying.

In 2019, the number of homes in the United States free and clear of mortgages has increased, although it's still hovering around forty percent. That number shrinks to thirty percent when you look at California. Across the country, renting has been on the rise, and in some southern California cities more than half the population rents.

On the other hand, most people still own their cars. In 2017, under half of American car owners owed payments, and under a third of drivers leased. The data shows that Americans are more likely to own their cars than their homes, so a car can be a big investment, economically and psychologically.

Maybe everyone really does find the right car for themselves. However, given the sheer number of options there are, it seems likely to me that when car buyers finally purchase a vehicle, they spend much of their time as car drivers trying to convince themselves they're driving the right one.

Of course, I might be wrong. It might be something much simpler than that.

After another morning spent car shopping, my mother got tired of power window shopping around Santa Monica and trying to get me to choose a vehicle based on clean car faxes and 360-degree pictures online. I suggested lunch.

It was Sunday, my family's holiday, a day we celebrate by eating. Our disparate parts try to fit together at different restaurants, with varying degrees of success. This time, we gathered at a familiar deli on Wilshire Boulevard. Broad, cracked leather booths from the '70s were illuminated by glamorously garish chandeliers from the '80s, all stacked on top of the dully intricate pattern of a '90s carpet. Every decade of the recent past, except the one we're in, had gathered in this spot to serve up black-and-white cookies and slick pickles with every meal.

This was one of those delis with a spacious menu of early bird dinner specials, where, for a couple of extra bucks, you could have soup, coffee and dessert with your entree. It was an opportunity you're almost obligated not to miss. While the rest of my family settled on their perennial favorites, I spent an undignified amount of time failing to decide between the same two or three dinner specials.

I finally decided on the chicken parmesan. Even then I probably couldn't tell you why. It's not my favorite meal. It wasn't particularly cheap or impressively extrava-

Newton

gant. It was just something to say I picked, and I had to pick something eventually.

When the meal arrived, I found a roughly breaded breast cradled on a bed of sparse, chunky red sauce and frost-breath-thin noodles. I considered my plate, trying to convince myself I had made the right choice before I even bothered to taste it.

* * *



UNTITLED #2
Vivien Adamian
Colored Pencil

ONES AND ZEROES, ERGO THIS CACOPHONY.

By Damian Wang

When I was 13 and you put
 a bandaid on my knee
 I thought you hell
 Helicopter mom, tiger mom, mom
 you're annoying mom stop babying
 me mom I'm tough didn't you see me beat
 three guys bigger than me?

I thought you too much, stickingtome like
 cornstarch slurry and pride
 myself on being my father's son
 because Absence Doesn't Yell
 and Silence Won't Hurt if
 I play

the piano loud enough,
 the white keys slippery and getting wetter
 with each press.

Salt and tang I smell hardness on your tongue
 When you say I fight too much
 like those other boys don't be those tether
 ball boys be a good girl and I yell back

Fuck

That, I'll be boy all I want and drink Boy Juice and eat
 Boy Atoms and fight with Boy Hands
 and be Boy™ like you never wanted
 and you cut

shame across my cheeks like too ripe
 scallions sprinkled over hot ramen,
 while I pump Yakult into my
 veins as though probiotic dairy is sufficient defiance.

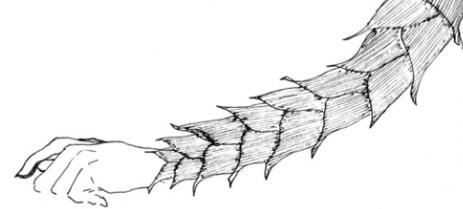


When you force me to apologize to Stupid Cis Boy and his mom
 Your palm flattened head bowed fingernails digging into my skin
 that very boy already tenderized purple
 last night at the skatepark,
 crescent marks cutting across my deltoids I think

you dog, you bitch, no
 amount of bandaids can fix this.

When I
 poke
 at loose elbow skin and refuse
 your plasters tongue in my cheek
 the curvature that cuts
 corners call that a true incision

I think, if I can't
 be your trademarked government-approved birthright
 Boy
 then I'll be packaged molecules and stolen cartilage.



* YOU LOOK MOST BEAUTIFUL DURING YOUR
LAST NIGHT ON EARTH *
By Damian Wang

Your mother's hand on the back of my head, I step into the moon's craters.
Your father nowhere to be seen, your eyes dry for some time now
My fingers shapeshifting against yours.
You see, black birds only sing when there's something to mourn.
I see, how Europa's oceans settle on your skin like a moth drawn
to your plexiglass heart.
You, heady and headful against
me, headless and heedless now.

When my father calls I answer, because skin unbroken still holds the promise of breaking.
Alpha Centauri calls to me all the same, untroubled in its offerings
and I am greedy like a parched, dying man, cupping the last drop of water in the universe.
Homebound to Vega because home found in yours.
How precious the promises of an alien civilization are to me, how
precious you lie
against the black hole of my mind.
When I consume I do not take, I grieve:
Let go of humanity.

The bamboo shoots of my mother's arms bend but do not break.
Yet it is the sprouts on my head that pause, whisper, fracture
I feel it as deeply as glass
splinters under my feet when I'm made to walk across your spine.
You hunch, hover, howl,
I fall with you.

I wonder if you are as feral as they say
Yet your mother holds me when you are away
on this moon, upon this planet, beside the sun
I cannot see and I am her son, now.
Like I ever was when I tumbled through the arms of your yawning youth
Yearning for me
Yield, you say, now.
I do.
You were the stop sign -
I burst through the windshield at astronomical speed into
You.



UNTITLED #1
Vivien Adamian
Colored Pencil

*I HAVE A GOOD DREAM FACILITATED
 BY AN ANGEL*
 By Susan Monaghan

I saw myself on the front line. I saw myself being a hero—a young man's hero, only because I wouldn't be a generous afterthought, a name invoked tangentially a long time afterwards. I saw myself, my distinctly feminine name, getting a reverb of pure jealous awe in the head of a virile twenty-something boy. The angel above me agreed.

"I'm choking," I said to them. I knew it was in my head, but it hurt.

I saw myself flat on my stomach in hot silky mud; I was dragging myself through the floor of a jungle. I felt grit and roots slide against my straining fingers, under my torso, around my neck, and I was laughing. The mud was in my mouth and getting caught in my throat. There was a thrumming sound, the pound of two hundred feet running away, and it was okay that only I knew they were safe, because of what I'd done. I pulled myself under the curling leaves of a fern in the dark, having been a hero.

The angel let me see my hands—they were in nylon cuffs, pulling their tethers to the bed's steel sides. They felt temporary and a little damp, much less gauche than the heavily padded up-the-arm business. The woman in the next bed drew long breathes in her sleep, looking respectful of my situation, closing her eyes to the fluttery play of the angel's glow on her face.

"You want to see these people, when they know how brave you've been. What could you see that'd make you content, what do you want from them? What would make you ready for judgement?"

Their voice lit up my temporal lobe like light focused through a magnifying glass. The light had slick edges, and I could see it ripping into me. Their real question was: Do I let you see my face? Two of their six wings were folded over their head, and I was afraid they meant there was no use in it. I felt like a farm animal, stupid and dirty with sweat, and this, for the minute, felt good.

I saw myself standing on a dirt road at night. To the right, black hills spotted with creosote rolled higher and higher until they became mountains, their peaks unidentifiable in the sky. She was there in front of me in the dark, running away all the time.

"Come on," she whispered to me without stopping. I ran after her, watching her form become less and less distinct as she charged into the hills. When I was a few feet behind her, chasing her between sloping rock, I caught someone else running alongside me. The ground underneath us dropped off; we were looking down at a single fluorescent beam of light, cast by a streetlamp at the bottom of a valley. The three of us weaved down the slope, skidding in zig-zags, and in the outer periphery of the light I saw them

more clearly. I knew them—I loved them.

"Give me your arm," the first girl said, sliding into me, and she grabbed my wrist. When we reached the bottom, she snapped herself away and sprinted toward the white light. The second girl silently followed her, my friends could be so uncompromising, so determined not to look at me, not before I'd earned it, it broke my heart. The first girl knelt in the light with her face cowed. Inlaid in the gravel, a cement disk the diameter of a stool bared the phrase DON'T FUCKING TOUCH.

At the sight of it I remembered what I was doing there, and my chest heaved.

"How do we lift it?" I asked her. The second girl kneeled across from the first.

"With our hands," she said, gently, like I was her daughter. They smiled broadly at me. I almost laughed, I was so happy, so flooded with the thrill of earning my reward. I kneeled beside them and, all at once, we edged the thick tablet out of its metal slot and threw it to the side. The iron-rimmed hole remaining sat passive and awful: it was a dead and empty eye, there was nothing there, but it accused me. The first girl reached her hands inside, and when she drew them back, they were holding a grown woman's, gripping and dirty. She came out on her knees, the second girl helping to lift her by the hips. The woman's arms and legs crumbled; she laid flat on her back, her face turned away from the light. I watched my friend return to the hole, this time drawing out a man's hands, and he, like the woman, crawled weakly onto the dust.

The woman coughed and touched my ankle. I crouched beside her.

"Oh, thank you," she said, her eyes filmy and adoring. Again and again, the two of them went back to the hole, pulling out men and women and children like water from a well. I sat and watched the endless procession with warm blood pulsing to my hands and feet and face.

"Is it as satisfying as it could be, if they have to be so passive?" said the angel.

I agreed, but I was watching too hungrily.

* * *



Citrus Friend
Kendall Moore
Pencil & Collage



Glitter
Kendall Moore
Pencil & Collage

* WHERE HAVE ALL THE JEWS GONE? *

By Melissa Lewis-Ackerman

Walking past Pan Pacific Park in West Hollywood with Rob in tow, I'm stifled by my own loneliness. It's an aching kind of loneliness I don't fight under a sky so clear blue it's almost white.

Pan Pacific smells like dry earth, barbecue grilling, and a homeless man stretched out on a bench with a bottle of Beam. WeHo's invested in a new soccer field. Constructions pervading, but not totally discouraging the usual hordes of health conscious people walking the valley of the park, pushing kids on swings and congregating around picnic tables.

Third street's alive with all-ages of youth, and possibility. Folks in cars never honk at tribes of handsome and pretty walkers headed to the Grove, the CVS, and random cafes for fear of upsetting the California vibe that we're all spiritually interconnected. We're a collective who understands what it means to run so hard and fast away from other worlds we've known into the freedom of illusion. An illusion that will only be broken by mirrors years too late, reminding us that our escapes from ourselves were only temporary.

In West Hollywood we're Peter-Pans looking for a pick-up game of anything. We're beauty queens let down by a season that renders us pointless. We're characters watching tourists line up everywhere to see things we never came here for. We're writers huddled in corners, lamenting the impossible letting go of things. We're people who've decided not to take life too seriously, but in the end learn it doesn't matter how you choose to spend your life, it's still the same psychically tumultuous trip through fear of our own mortality everyone else has.

Pulling Rob's elbow we walk together along the short, cement border of Pan Pacific. He doesn't want to look too hard at the new soccer field. We lived just a few blocks away for years before becoming New York snow birds. Rob mutters something about lost baseball diamonds, about how soccer's taken over the world. He used to circle the perimeter of Park ten times with crazy, red walking sticks before his morning coffee. Impervious to the ridiculous sight of himself in mid-calf, little boy socks, in the end fighting small children for his turn on the exercise equipment.

Rob's already seen Fiddler's Café is closed. That his Kosher fish market has paper over its windows. That our donut shop's down for renovations. That his lemonade stand at the Farmers Market has closed after forty years. And our favorite Chinese place, the Shanghai Grill on Wilshire announced mid-meal last night that the building would be bulldozed to make way for a subway station.

Some days we travel down Fairfax in Rob's black Mini Cooper with Rob lamenting over and over again, "Where have all the Jews gone?"

I finally say, "All the Jews haven't gone. See, Canters is still there." And even as I say this I'm already dreading the possibility of Canters ever closing, because I won't have the right kind of glue to hold Rob together.

Rob touches my shoulder under the sway of treetops when in earlier years he wasn't a candidate for being that intimate a guy. He was a flash of a hug with a million dollar smile who didn't trust anyone could love him. I was a hostile, verbally beat-up head of state, though I don't know what state that was.

Rob's dapper friend, Phil, rode in the back seat of the Mini to be our witness when we were married at the Beverly Hills Court House. I rolled down all the windows, cranking up the volume on, "I Love the Nightlife," by Alisha Bridges. Rob challenged the security guards at the court house to guess who was getting married as we three arrived arm-in-arm with Rob in the middle. One guard searched my blushing, baby face in wonder, probably realizing my love for Rob could never touch the fifty year intimacy he shared with Phil.

Now the poignancy of who Rob and I are together looking out over Pan Pacific is the energetic weight of planets colliding. We're two abandoned kids who wouldn't be tricked by God or pretense, falling head long into the years where there can only be a reluctant intimacy between us sometimes. In the beginning of our acquaintance I don't know that we even liked each that much. Our wars left bodies buried under ash with cold little fingers thrusting upward from beneath it.

"I don't see the exercise equipment. The chin up bars?" I question.

"Just there. Behind those trees," Rob cranes his neck, pointing in the general vicinity, now with entirely too much focus. When he does this his vulnerability gnaws at the pit of my stomach. I'm terrified of the way I'm starting to view him like he's one of my adult children. Overprotective of his heart and mind. I'm discovering this is what life does to people. You get intertwined even if you thought you picked a place where you might always be safe inside your own introspection.

I slip my arm around Rob's waist as we turn toward the Grove. He begins to bitch about the condominiums across the street. He says they're eyesores, but I know he's really just riling himself up so he won't think about anything that might add to his melancholia.

I don't show my concern when he suggest Antonio's for dinner. I hadn't seen

Antonio, the elderly owner of our favorite Mexican joint on Melrose, lately. When Rob and I come in from New York we look for Antonio where we left him last, standing in the doorway of his festive, colorful establishment waiting to greet each guest or random passer-by.

We'd sit at the bar with hundreds of eyes bearing down on us from photographs of young Antonio posing with movie stars from several eras. We'd people-watch from Antonio's front window, drinking margaritas. In a metaphorical suitcase I keep the image of the tiny, absurd, super model marching by in four inch heels, dragging a gray dog that seemed as large as a horse behind her. I keep the image of movie equipment and enormous trucks and trailers taking up much of the street while films were being shot. I keep the image of Goth kids piled in booths, because Antonio's a part of Hollywood's history they just had to see for themselves. But mostly I keep the image of the way Antonio checked on us at the bar, the way his expensive suits looked too big for his thinning body, more and more each year.

I can't make out the absolute origins of my stifling loneliness from walking past Pan Pacific, until I do. The pictures fuzzy, but it's coming to completion. The soccer field's laden with construction barriers and banners revealing what's to come, when once that space of land in the park was a simple patch of green. And it's terrific. But it stings.

"Are you glad we'll be getting back to New York next week?" Rob asks, hopeful, after forcing his will to have us move back to his Brooklyn birthplace after his retirement from academia.

I say that I am glad to be getting back to New York, knowing Rob needs the balance in our amniotic fluid. But in my heart I'll miss the pink/purple of the jacaranda trees, Urth Caffé at midnight, and the heart of my perceived youth. Not to mention life in the fast lane with a funny old guy who took me to Santa Anita, teaching me to bet on Sundays.

I hadn't been ready to stop running, but I give Rob a squeeze. Taking-in one last picture of his wonder over where all the Jews have gone. The Jews don't live in WeHo anymore, because nobody lives in WeHo anymore. West Hollywood's under construction.

* * *

* A PENDULUM IN THE PIT *

By Ernesto Martinez

A single punk among many punks. Swinging their arms and kicking their feet. Keeping the other moshers at bay. Running in a circle. Bumping against the people on the sidelines. Splashing beer in people's faces. Jumping onto the people in the front and surfing to the front stage then jumping back into the crowd. Fighting with other patrons of the pit. Fighting with security sometimes. Kicking people when they're down. An orgy of violence or some metaphysical shit like that. The pit gets crazy like that sometimes, and I was just one of many in the pit some hot summer night back then.

The band playing: Discharge. The unsanctioned godfather of the heavy metal scene, and the go-to band for some good crust punk and political angst. They played the hits: "Hear Nothing, See Nothing, Say Nothing", "Protest to Survive", "Fight Back" and the like. Their latest album "The End" was also a banger. Loved that shit. They did not lose that bassy touch in their guitars; the sounds of a stalled washing machine, with more distorted white noise sound playing at 176 BPM. No useless solos, no musical elegance, no songs lasting more than 2 minutes, and no virtuosity. Just fast raw sounds of protest impacting eardrums like punches to the face. Sounds ripe for a mass release of anger and disdain for whatever pisses them off; whether it be the anger of an untrustworthy government, anger towards an unjust society, or anger towards your neighbor whose dog shat on your lawn (or boots). Either case, the release of anger is always exhilarating.

Ironically, there is a system within the chaos; a structure. There is an understanding in forming a mosh pit: a random dude may collaborate with another patron and push around playfully, another bystander partakes in the action, then more join in. Once this gaggleguck becomes more established, the other non-active participants acknowledge this and disperse to create a ring around such. The direction of the pit (usually clockwise starting at centerstage) is established, and the pit is formed. By all means, skank your way around. Swing your arms and kick your feet as if you're swimming through the muck. Push and shove. You're throwing out that pent up anger. You're fighting for your life. Just don't fight someone else in the process, or trouble will ensure.

It happened to me that night. Some guy decided to play unfair and drag on my shoulders; not as a gesture for me to help him out, just a way to drag me down. Of course, I did not approve. In a fit of rage, I pushed through the gentler gents in the pit to find this perpetrator. I found him, and I shoved him with all my strength. He went down. In his own rage, he got back up and tried to tackle me. I put him in a headlock and swung him back down. As he went down, I kicked him toe-first with the steel-toed

portion of my Doc Martens, pounding his face at full velocity. I don't think I've ever seen a blood flow gush out of a nose so fast.

The crowd reacted and tried to stop, or possibly mitigate, the potential fight. He fought his way toward me, and I the same with the other boot ready to be covered in his blood. I put him in another headlock, and he bit my hand ferociously. Damn, that hurt! I said fuck that shit, and I kned his stomach. As he slumped forward in my chokehold, gasping for breath, I flung him to a group of people and prepped my fists to do a running punch. I thought this fight was gonna go on for another two minutes. Instead, they pushed the other guy into the pit with everyone else and did their best to console me: to calm me down from potentially kicking someone else in the face. They saw what happened and took my side . . . at least I'd like to think that was what happened.

Who cares, really? I was half-exhausted coming down from that high of getting into a fight. I got back in the pit eventually, and this dude and I may have swung elbows at one another occasionally afterward with no hard feelings. Maybe he was drunk enough to forget. Maybe I was.

The gig went for another 15 minutes. Discharge shouted their "Fuck You, Trump!" slogan. The lights went out. The show was over.

* HYPOCHONDRIAC STIGMATA *

By Elias Fulmer

I'd like to pick the brains of the pyramids for awhile,
about their composure with time, a certain grace that
comes with age,

as tonight again a duvet's ruins embalms my calves,
and they are all thrashed and broken.

I reach through my dreams, light as eggshells,
for my phone and it's 4:41am.

I crouch up, my knees both
snap and crack under yoga stress.
"4:41am!" they scream.
Can't I just get some sleep, please?
Eventually, my eyes close with heart buzzing.

Back under the spell of R.E.M.,
I walk past a dead rat and wince,
I find myself in a confession booth,
stained auburn and unnerving, cathartic
in its prowess,

An infernal clicking from the back has me
doubting mercy, so I repent with joint pain
and nausea. Bloody Mary
Bloody Mary
Bloody Mary

is in the mirror here
and I, trilling like a lunatic, gnash in benign terrors,
and survive only to complain.

My toes blistered with shame, the back of my fingers
shrieking as they dig shallow graves, for a state
of mind that hosts anything but resting



* A MUZZLE (RADIO EDIT) *

By Elias Fulmer

underneath the clamors of circuit boards

I am born under a poplar tree
with a Beanie Baby under my arm

I was born in the year of eBay,
a sign in the digital zodiac.

My astrological chart bundled with intimacy, sold alongside
the treasure, garbage and more and more Beanie Babies
an umbilical cord rests at a garage sale table, sans a home.

I hide in a nest of beanie babies

MADE IN CHINA

export, good ol' Deng Xiaoping paved the way for
the 90's kidz and all their forgotten toys. He towed
my party line, funism-loveism-cuddleism, Deng and I
built a praxis of childhood. For a time, a utopia of sugar
reigned over me



"Wannabe" was number one (#1) around the world,
ringing out from the bells of Notre Dame. But I wouldn't know
because Christian rock makes for
white noise of the devil's music.

The Lord delivered us from pop music.

Only 90's kids remember the 90's and for that,

I don't think I'm one of them.

dolly the sheep! she was cloned but, now she is dead.
my mom would feed me lamb as a baby but never told
me what it was... sweet sheep. I had always wanted to pet dolly,
tuck 'er underneath my arm. like another beanie baby (another clone),
one more beanie baby

* THE LEMMING AND THE APE *

By Anthony Karambelas

I haven't studied herd mentality as a discipline, but I know this well. That when a man is caught at an arm's width from his brother, the last thing he will do is say something. He will loop his arm covertly through the crook of his neighbor's and hear words until they are just sounds and his cheeks burn. He will sit and count the contradictions until he runs out of digits. He will even laugh and smile and wag his tail when prompted. But he will never, ever say something.

I wish I could bring back the days when it was all just about fellowship, and men and women, and hollow-throated Hallelujahs. When the pastor's words meant nothing and the Bible was just a book and the only thing I knew was that Jesus loved me. When parents told us to be kind to one another before they drew boxes in the air and specified the people who didn't deserve our love. When things were simpler and ignorance was bliss, and before I stumbled into knowing.

In the summers now, I will feel the heat scorch my back as I watch the Delta lap gently at the rail of the houseboat. I will listen as the boys around me snigger and I will pretend that they are just joking like boys do. I will hear a blue-eyed, self-professed 'lady's man,' who we will call Sam, spit into the salty air as he hisses about Patty. He will recline on a meaty elbow and call her a 'bitch' and the crowd will roar with guttural shocks. It will remind me of a troop of silverbacks hammering their chests and stomping their feet, of a jungle rat quaking beneath a palm frond. I will remember Patty and her water bottle and the rainbow heart stuck to it. How I thought she was brave or foolish or both. Then, Sam will call her 'faggot-lover' when 'bitch' is not enough and it will make me wonder whether God is listening, and if He is, whether he frowns when He looks at Sam.

I will sit solemnly as they swim through every epithet, clouding the air with the vile refuse of human inhumanity and I will wonder why my mother decided this was a good idea. If it was because the slogan for youth ministry read "Love God, Love Others." Did the anaphora tickle? In my head, I will draft an angry text message to her and she will later tell me to email the youth ministry team. At a flashback party a few weeks later, the head pastor will censure the crowd. The boys will look gaunt and their knees will wobble as they wait for their names to be blared through the megaphone. But that will never happen and when Sam realizes this, he will not chalk it up to a lesson learned, but will call for us to find the snitch. They will never suspect me and I will wonder whether this is because I am a sycophant or whether I just act like one. In the meantime, the boys' words will continue to rend my heart in two, flaky ash paper bits that I will let sink to the Delta floor because at least I am not the target of their vitriol

* THE UPGRADE *
By Rebekah Brandes

and at least I know better than they do. The least I can do, I tell myself as light sprays of river water moisten my back, is to pretend to fall asleep when they summon me to their troglodytic huddle.

I once told a teacher of mine that I was an Evangelist. His eyes narrowed into slits and his mouth drew into a line. ‘Oh, you’re one of them,’ he said, jocular and proud. I couldn’t tell how to take this, but I knew what he meant. He meant people like Sam, who worked the crowd—or maybe just followed it—and tossed ‘others’ around like playthings. In that moment, I realized that the small embers cooking my cheeks were a sign of shame. I laughed. Not because by this point, I had decided to take my teacher’s snip for playful banter, but because I was suddenly aware that I had stumbled into a life where my shame was as inescapable as my reticence.

* * *

The first time, I didn’t feel much of a change. That was to be expected. The second time, you would have thought a thousand volts had been run through my skull, the difference it made. But it was only a touch, only a little pulse of electricity, a spark on the surface of my brain, a burst of pink light on my grey matter. I woke up in the clinic and the first thought that sprang into my mind was, “I’m facing East.” So I knew it had worked.

It had been difficult deciding which upgrade to select. I’d divested myself of my savings, money previously destined to become an anniversary getaway with Andrew, and I finally had enough for one. Not one of the fancy ones, but a fourth-tier semi-permanent upgrade. Believe me, there were more tempting choices than Internal Compass Recalibration. There were quite a few in my price bracket that swayed me: the self-esteem upgrade, the math upgrade, one for hand-eye coordination, one for changing the odor of tuna fish to bubble gum (or another similarly priced scent of your choosing). But I thought of all the times Andrew had rolled his eyes when I didn’t know which way to turn.

“Why can’t you just say left or right?” I’d ask when I called him, driving around lost in my twenties, before GPS. “Because I don’t know which direction you’re facing!” he’d yell into the phone. Duh. I didn’t know which direction I was facing either. Then there was the time he told me to meet him at the beach. I thought I’d be clever and casually inquire which direction to drive, figuring I’d look it up turn-by-turn later. But it wasn’t clever. “West!” he snapped, “Toward the beach! Where do you think the beach is? Do you even know where we live?” Oh. West. West Coast. Of course. I still needed to look up the turn-by-turn.

I wish I could have looked up the turn-by-turn for our marriage. It felt like it should have been instinct, how to navigate my own happiness, yet every choice I made seemed to lead me to a dead end. A cold shoulder. A turned head. A happy marriage isn’t easy, I told myself for so long, you have to work at it. When he told me he wanted a divorce I could hardly hear him, the miles between us had grown so much that the sound of each other’s voices was swallowed up by the empty air.

After he left, and the last twenty years of my life evaporated behind me, my friend suggested an upgrade. “For you,” she said, “living well is the best revenge.” So I found myself holding a brochure one morning in Dr. Milton’s flashy office in an old strip mall. “I’ll take this one,” I said, pointing, “and doctor? Will I be able to drive myself home?”

* * *

bReAkInG THE CYCLE

By Jennifer Wong

If you're a first generation college student, then you've probably already given this some thought: the cycle. Cycle—it's such a simple word, but it encompasses so much meaning. It's the idea of being stuck in the same situation your predecessors were, of wanting to do better but not being sure of how.

It's the idea of repeating and perpetuating history, trauma, and poverty.

Break the cycle.

Pursue something beyond what your loved ones weren't able to achieve. Reach for something that you can't even imagine because it's so unfamiliar. Change for your loved ones. Change the course for yourself, your loved ones, and your descendants.

Now, what does that mean?

The cycle starts with my father when he was a child in Cambodia. As a child, his mother required him to feed their hogs after he came home from school. A bright, twelve-year-old boy, he excelled in school, which was the only reason why he was still allowed to attend. He was the second oldest son out of four boys. His older brother stopped going to school two years prior when he turned ten. His younger brother stopped going to school just that year at age ten, and his youngest brother was too young to go to school.

One day, when he came home, the neighborhood kids hollered for him to catch beetles with them. He quickly rummaged through a pile of debris for a tin can with a lid still slightly attached, and when he found one, he ran to catch up to his friends. They were going to put the beetles in the cans and shake them to make buzzing music with pits and pats.

It was dark when he came home. He shook his tin can, smiling at the sounds of his beetle music, but he paused when the sounds of hogs whining overshadowed his music. He had forgotten to feed the hogs. He walked cautiously up the rickety wooden stairs to his front door and peered inside the house.

Silence.

A candle flickering on a table

He sighed in relief. Everyone must be asleep, he thought. He quietly crept to the back room, but before he could reach the door, he was knocked down by a hard object that struck the back of his head. He looked up to see his mother standing above him, her hard face glaring, her mouth spitting words, but all he heard was a constant ring before he closed his eyes.

My father claims he never recovered from that blow. He has different variations of the story. Sometimes, it's the blunt side of a cleaver. Then, it's the shovel his older brother used to shovel dirt, and then, it's a large rock. At times, it's the rusted hammer that his grandfather uses to fix their rickety stairs. Other times, it's the pestle that his grandmother uses to grind fish and lemongrass.

Whatever the object was, it took away a part of him. My father struggled to remember and recall information afterwards. Climbing the stairs caused his head to hurt, and playing with the other kids caused episodes of ringing and blurry vision. He dropped out of school when he couldn't cope; his mother would tell him that he was worthless, lazy, and dumb and that money was wasted to send him to school. Other beatings did not compare to that night.

When he was a teenager, the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia, and he fled to Vietnam. He lived there for a couple years, learning the language although it took him twice as long to learn it compared to his brothers, who weren't supposed to be as bright as him. When the Vietnamese pushed the Khmer Rouge out of Cambodia, he returned to his home country and fished along the Mekong River, starting a fish preserving business. When word got out that there was a possibility of immigrating to a Western country if you were in a refugee camp, he took his youngest brother and trekked to Thailand, where they would stay until they both received sponsors from the U.S.

The story doesn't end here, but the cycle of poverty and abuse does.

He eventually met my mother, had three children, and spent most of his adult life working night shifts as a baker in a donut shop. He burned his hands, told his children that they were like that for them, and hoped that at least one of them would graduate from college.

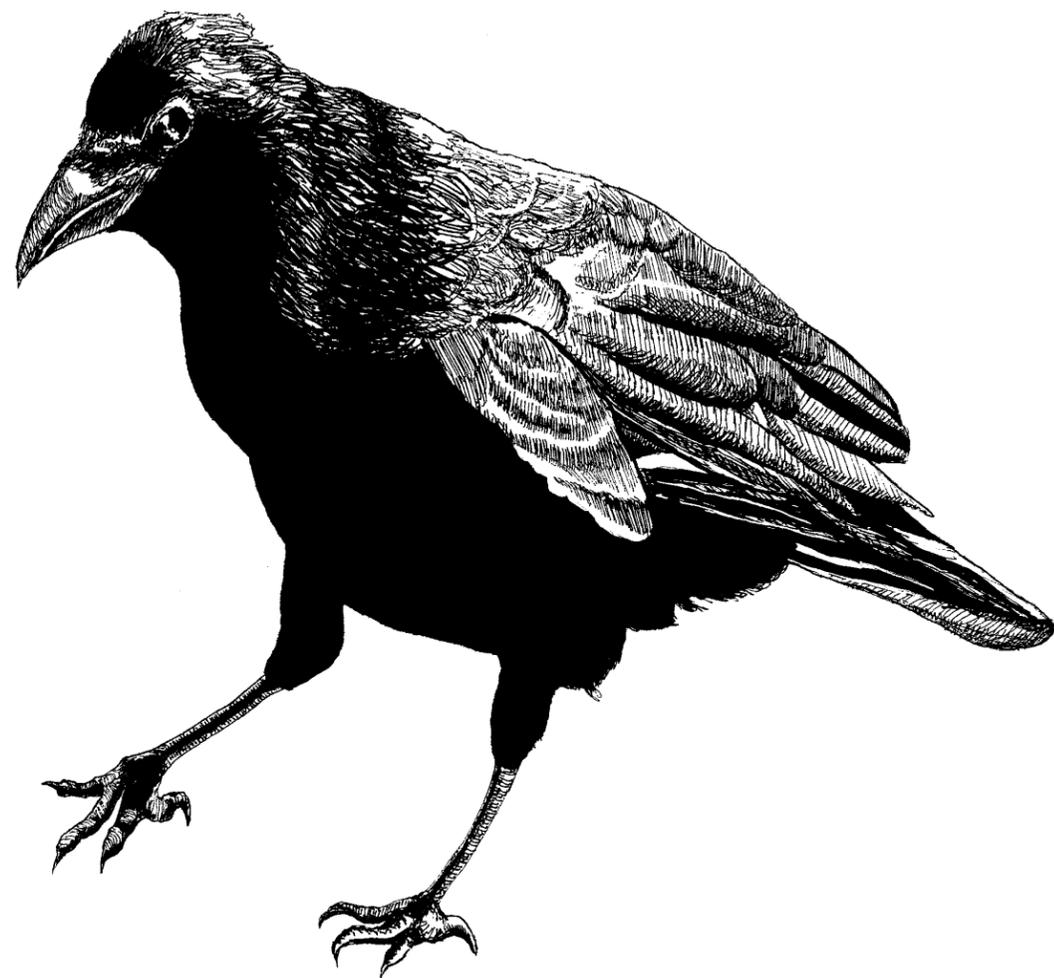
Two out of three. That's better than none.

Wong

I once asked my father while swinging in a hammock with him, “Aren’t you lucky that you didn’t end up being educated and smart? The Khmer Rouge killed the educated people. Maybe, they would have killed you.”

He shook his head and pointed at mine. In Khmer, he said, “They might’ve, but there’s a reason why they killed them. Knowledge. Your mind is power.”

* * *



Horror Collection

Fiction and poetry originally published in our Fall 2019 horror zine.

CHANGELING

By Sebastian Peraic

What city folk don't realize is that we always hear strange noises in the woods at night. The chittering, the distant wailing, the sounds of women weeping—you learn young that they don't hurt you if you leave them be. I had a cousin visit out here once, and this seemed to scare him—not that we hear them, but that it doesn't bother us. But why would it? It's like those whispers you hear in the corn in the midwest, or those lights you see over the desert. It's not like we don't know they're dangerous; we just don't bother them cause we're not idiots. I've never been scared of them, but when he heard the low, guttural growling we hear on Tuesdays, he wanted to check it out. I had to stop him, of course. Like I said, none of us are that stupid.

I'm definitely not stupid either, but I did get curious once. I stopped being curious at maybe 14. You're young, stupid, rebellious at that age. It wasn't enough to hear them—I had to see one to know they're real. But I'm not stupid—if they really were out there, they could also maybe kill me. I was gonna be careful if I wanted to find them. I bought a cheap flashlight: one that could light up the trees some, and that I wouldn't mind losing.

Every two or three nights we heard humming. We've written down the tune so the kids can learn it, like I once done. We're supposed to take it to heart, so we can all recognize it as one of them. I wanted to see what made the humming. Something about a monster that sings fascinated me, and it sounded the least like a monster.

I went to the edge of town at dark, and waited for the humming to start. I felt real good about my plan—even put a good distance between me and the treeline so I wouldn't get grabbed. I'm not stupid. That's why I wasn't even gonna go in the forest.

Then the humming started. I shined my light. I looked for it. I didn't see it. I tossed my light out. It landed a good way out I thought, and I thought I was lucky that the light landed facing out. I got impatient, cause the hum sounded even louder now. Still didn't see nothing.

Until I saw the light burn out.

Then I saw nothing.

But I'm not stupid. None of us are. That's why I'm still here. Never did find it that night, and I didn't look since. Everyone looks at me different now. I bet they think I'm gonna check again, cause my parents are still, to this day, real worried when I go out at night. It's like they think I'm different. I don't know why.

Well, I think that tune stuck with me ever since. I hum it every night I can. We don't hear it from the trees anymore, though.

* VOICE ON THE WIND *
By J.M. Yaden

Wilt thou not come out on the moor, my child?
Wishest thou not to find thy parents there?
Thy brave father and dearest mother mild
Looked long for thee by lantern's lambent glare—
Desperate to find thee they found my lair
Now their voices roam the whispering halls
Of dreaming death, where hateful light ne'er galls
The glorious shadow of Erebus—
List, child, hearest thou not the plaintive calls
Rising o'er the sobbing slough: "Come to us!"



* IT'S IN THE ROOM WITH YOU *
By Sarah Dean

It's in the room with you and you can't turn away because the harder you try the more panicked you become and needles of fear jut from the arteries of your heart and trickle down your legs so you shut your eyes and squinch them up real tight and dig your nails into your palms to make sure you're awake but when you open your eyes it's still there and the sight of it forces more needles out of your heart this time into your arms which burst into goosebumps and the little hairs stand on end while your clenched fists become hot and sweat seeps through the cracks of your fingers then the hairs on your neck prickle as if being blown on and you want to turn around to see if something is behind you breathing on you but you can't because if you take your eyes off of it it'll get you and there's a thudding at the back of your skull thump thump thump and you've never fainted before yet somehow you feel like you're about to while dark patches infect your vision and your head feels weighted and you try to hold your breath so it won't come closer but you can't and you breathe very very very quickly and your breath only becomes louder and louder and louder and you piss yourself because that is all you can do when your body is frozen so your mind attempts to escape from your body but it fails and you're trapped you can't escape and it's closing in and you're in shock in fact you're absolutely terrified but don't worry you won't always feel this way because after all

you

don't

have

much

longer.

* CRAWLING *
By Gianna Provenzano

She could feel the mark his eyes were making between her shoulder blades. It didn't take much to make her feel like she was fourteen again and hiding in a bathroom was her only way to escape. Some days a look was enough. (Or, rather, it was too much.)

She could feel her skin crawling and the urge to shake off that man's glance like a dog shaking off mud was overwhelming. But instead she pulled her bag closer as if it was a shield and quickened her pace. It wasn't like she could give him the what-for. From experience, she knew, it would only make things worse. She'd had enough of the 'God, what a crazy bitch' kind of looks that confronting him would bring. Some nights she could control the urge to crawl out of her skin, but not tonight.

"Hey lady, I'm talking to you," the man calls, obnoxiously satisfied with himself.

Her hair stands on end and she knows it's too late. She drops her bag.

"Glad you decided to listen." She can hear his footsteps coming closer.

He grabs her shoulder. She turns around. He screams.

She's only seen how she looks when she's like this once, but she can remember it as clearly as she remembers feeling helpless at fourteen. Spikes, scales, and a sharp toothed smile, the result of begging someone, anyone, to give her a way out. And she got it and more.

He screams and then he stops abruptly, cut off at the peak. It used to bother her, this part, but it's happened so many times that at this point all she feels is hollow. She leaves him slumped on the sidewalk, breathing shallowly. Frightened, but not dead.

She takes a breath, feels the slow slide of scales, spikes, and sharp teeth returning under the skin. Delicately, she picks up her bag and walks away.



Editors 2019 - 2020

FICTION

This was not only my first quarter as one of the Senior Fiction Editors of *Westwind*; it was also the first official quarter of my creative writing thesis. Coincidentally, meetings with my thesis advisor fell just a few hours before *Westwind* meetings. I would start at one meeting, where my thesis advisor disassembled and analyzed every aspect of my stories, and then end attempting to do the same thing to the *Westwind* submissions. It was an incredibly humbling experience as a writer and Senior Editor. I had to be both student and teacher, a listener and an advisor. In turn, the fiction staff did the same: they learned from the stories and also had to act as editors to them. All of this shows one of many truths about writing: as we write, as we read, as we edit, as we discuss and debate, as we teach, as we listen, we are also learning. We do all at once.

We hope you enjoy the pieces in the fall journal—the fiction staff put all their passion into these pieces. We hope the stories inspire the same passion in you as it did in us, and that you feel you've learned something from reading.

Peyton Austin
Senior Fiction Editor

I stand here before you, on this piece of paper, intrigued and slightly confused. The fiction in this edition of *Westwind* largely focused on what went unsaid. We were presented questions with no easy answers, where more the point of the question was the implications of it being asked rather than a demand to try and conjure some answers. Some stories are based very much in this reality, while others are more askew, just a half-beat off into someplace a little stranger by the way it's still so familiar. In these worlds were, quite simply, decisions to be made. For characters, it was not all life and death, but also how they chose to live their lives, what actions they were brought to and how do they reconcile the consequences of them. For the words creating these worlds, decisions were made by these writers in how to present these lives. Would they be somber, surreal, terrifying, funny, would they forgo or embrace a comma that makes a run-on, but adds something else. There was attention to craft and an attempt to play and experiment with it. These stories selected in this edition of *Westwind* were filled with interesting and revealing decisions.

Thank you to the senior editors—especially Peyton Austin, as my partner in fiction—the editors, and the contributors for their passion and care. I'd also like to thank Reed Wilson, our faculty advisor, for helping create a space for creativity.

Hope there's no problem in enjoying this issue.

Cole Sabala
Senior Fiction Editor

POETRY

If you don't try, then you can't have poetry. Poetry is a product of relentless effort, even in those bursts of accidental brilliance, it forms in the poet before being ushered onto the page. In the simple process of viewing the world, poets are able to distill the bore of traffic into ruminations into the human heart. The veins of the overpass become intertwined within the poet. And as the blur of road bleeds into their mind, the poet translates it for us to read. The poets collected here illustrate that effort and I am more than happy to proudly present it.

This is my first time as Senior Poetry Editor, and besides the thrill of reading and experiencing poetry, I had the joy of working with my amazing staff of undergraduate editors. Without them, I would have quit and sailed off to an island with all the poetry to myself. Jokes aside, without their effort, *Westwind* Poetry wouldn't exist.

So, please enjoy the work we collected for the Fall 2019 Journal, the poems here are a collection of kaleidoscopic indulgences of introspection, landscapes, relationships, and L.A. traffic. All of it beautiful and brilliant.

Lastly, thank you to my fellow editors and especially thank you to Professor Reed Wilson, without you, we would just be a collection of kids with nowhere to go.

Tim Calla
Senior Poetry Editor

ARTS

As someone that has been a lifelong artist and only recently an English Major, a particular question has perplexed me for a few years: "What place does art have in a literature centered space?" But this question only reveals a fallacy that separates creative writing and visual art. I'm firmly of the belief that the only things separating these artistic practices are language (visual vs spoken) and social norms that benefit from a narrative of hierarchy. However once we choose to shed our social distinctions, we learn quickly that the barrier of language can easily be broken by practice and dedication.

All of the art published in this journal is made by undergraduate English majors. People existing in a literature centered space, making the decision to break from the material that is handed to them. I am proud of all of the submissions we are publishing, including the poetry illustrations I have done with Vivien Adamian. I only hope that more people will feel encouraged to submit and join our staff in the coming quarter.

Moe Miller
Senior Arts Editor

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

While I should probably feign confidence to foster credence in this great organization, I will instead start with an embarrassing admittance: When I first took over as Senior Creative Non-Fiction editor, I hardly knew what the medium was. There, I said it, and you might be wondering the same thing. Is it simply memoirs? Essays? Historical accounts? What classifies? I honestly wasn't sure, but luckily there's a thing called on the job experience. Throughout the quarter, my committee accepted creative non-fiction pieces ranging from an essay about finding the perfect car to an account of moshing at a punk concert; from surveying a changing community to growing up in an Evangelical one. These pieces, and the authors who carefully crafted them, allowed me to discover the key to creative non-fiction's classification: it just is. Creative non-fiction is what happened to you at that punk concert or in that Evangelist community. It is what you think about finding the perfect car, or about your changing community, or about anything that piques your interest. Creative non-fiction just is—it is life, thoughts, stories, hope. It is so deeply human and so deeply personal, that in merely one quarter I couldn't help but fall in love. I love these stories, I love this medium, and I hope that you, reader, feel the same. Oh, and one last thing I fortunately learned this quarter: no admittance is too embarrassing for creative non-fiction. Phew.

Kurt Klaus
Creative Non-Fiction Editor

DESIGN

It has been a great opportunity getting to know the talented writers, artists and just generally kind people on the executive board and staff for *Westwind*. I hope you enjoy reading the work in this issue as much as I've enjoyed assembling the packaging.

Emily Glennon
Design Editor

Contributors 2019 - 2020

Douglas Barricklow graduated from UCLA in 1961 with a B.A. in Elementary Education. He is a retired educator/counselor. He lives in Salem, Oregon. His poems have been published in numerous journals, most recently in *The Charles Carter Poetry Anthology* of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and *Calliope*, the special interest writing group journal of Mensa. His chapbook, "Life Imitates French Poetry," may be found at Reader's Guide in Salem, Oregon.

Camille Boudreau sprung forth from an enormous clam shell approximately 21 years ago. She's still trying to find her way back. She is a defender of the beautiful, the antiquated, the moth eaten, and the impractical.

Rebekah Brandes leads with her imagination; she finds joy in storytelling, performance, and flights of fancy. A member of the Screen Actors Guild, Rebekah has acted in film and television for over a decade. She is ecstatic to study at UCLA.

Brandon Christopher is the author of the memoirs *The Middle Kid* and *The Job Pirate*, and the short story collection *Catawampus*. Born and raised in Los Angeles, Christopher now resides somewhere along the West Coast. He is also a red wine connoisseur, unlicensed private investigator, advertising copywriter and Antiques Roadshow's #1 fan. He can be reached at BDCwords@Gmail.com.

Sterling Nathaniel Davis, a poet and philosopher, was born November 26, 1988 in Springfield Illinois. Davis lives in Los Angeles.

Sarah Dean is a senior UCLA English major with a creative writing concentration in fiction. In 2017, prior to transferring to UCLA, *Westwind* published her short story about a troubled teen-aged mother titled "Child of Mine." She is one of three winners of the 2019 *Westwind* flash horror contest. Her recent projects include cross-genre writing and non-linear narratives that often incorporate music and social media. A passionate reader, hiker, reptile enthusiast, and volunteer youth mentor, Dean aspires to attend an M.F.A. and pursue her dream as a professional author.

Eric Fram is a Brojan who studied English at UCLA and participated in the Honors Program for creative writing, and now attends USC Gould School of Law. He was formerly the Senior Poetry and Arts Editor for *Westwind*.

Elias Fulmer is a Swedish-American transfer student from Santa Ana College, studying English here at UCLA. He was raised in southern California and has been published in *Red Fez*, *Gods & Radicals*, and *Sprinkle: An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies*. His inspirations include Allen Ginsberg, Prince, and A.A. Milne.

Nikolai Garcia is a member of the Coleman Collective and Assistant Editor for *Dryland*, a literary journal born in South Central Los Angeles. His first chapbook, *Nuclear Shadows of Palm Trees*, was published by DSTL Arts. His next chapbook, *All the Sad Music*, is forthcoming through Ponte Las Pilas Press.

Contributors

Jamie Holcomb has worked as a music teacher, jingle writer, saxophone player, dog walker, script reader, research assistant, and sound recordist in New York, Dallas, and currently Los Angeles. For five years he hosted the Ordinary Phreeeks Storytelling Show, first in NYC, then in LA, and he married his co-host, Jackie Cuccaro. Studying music has been an important part of his development as a writer.

Natasha Joyce is a second-year MFA Screenwriting student at UCLA. She tends to write sad stories about home, travel and history, but is now experimenting with comedy. When she's not writing, she enjoys exploring the hiking trails of Southern California and listening to podcasts while crawling along the 405.

Anthony Karambelas is a recent graduate of Cal State LA, where he obtained a B.A. in English (summa cum laude). He is an emerging writer, currently working on a memoir charting his path to college at fourteen, the motivations behind that decision, and the subsequent challenges he faced.

Annika Karody is an undergraduate Human Biology and Society student at UCLA, with hopes of making it in the literary world. In her spare time she plays guitar and writes about the environment.

Chandler Kyle is a third year undergraduate student at UCLA, studying English and Egyptology. Much of her poetry contains very "Angeleno" influences and themes, as she loves exploring the city and its people. When she isn't writing or studying, she can be found making mediocre latte art as a part-time barista or napping in campus gardens.

Quincy R. Lehr's most recent book is *The Dark Lord of the Tiki Bar* (Measure Press, 2015). He lives in Los Angeles, where he teaches history.

Melissa Lewis-Ackerman is a bi-coastal English Professor, dividing time between LA and New York. She holds an MFA in Fiction from Queens University of Charlotte.

Ernesto Martinez is an English major at UCLA. He is a Veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He writes stuff recreationally (occasionally) or when he needs to for his classes.

Moe Miller is a fourth-year transfer student at UCLA. They are an English major and Social Thought minor, which is another way of saying that they enjoy spending a lot of time staring at books. Moe also enjoys drawing, sculpting, and spending time with their doughy leopard gecko Jesse.

Susan Monaghan is earning her bachelor's in English. Her short story "Tars (the rat)" was published in Bowdoin's *The Foundationalist* this summer.

Colin Newton is a Los Angeles based writer whose work has appeared in *The Ignatian Literary Magazine* and *ArchDaily*, as well as local magazines and blogs. Last year, he was an artist-in-residence at Oregon State University's Shotpouch Cabin. He writes about media, monsters and metaphysics at IdolsAndRealities.wordpress.com.

Contributors

Sebastian Peraic is a second-year English major completing his honors thesis on Milton's *Paradise Lost* and early English colonialism. He has been writing as a hobby for several years now, and has recently taken an interest in the horror genre. He is very pleased and excited to share his work.

Gianna Provenzano is a second year English major and Professional Writing minor. She is also a member of the of the Westwind fiction editing team. When she has free time, you can find her watching movies with her friends. She would like to thank Ms. Ogle for encouraging her to write.

Deon Robinson is an Afro-Latino poet born and raised in Bronx, New York. He is an undergraduate at Susquehanna University, where he is the two-time recipient of the Janet C. Weis Prize for Literary Excellence. His work has appeared in *Glass Poets Resist Series*, *Homology Lit*, *Honey and Lime Lit*, *Kissing Dynamite Poetry*, *Occulum Journal*, *Okay Donkey*, *the Shade Journal*, *Vagabond City Lit* and *Westwind*, among others. He was also nominated for Best of the Net in 2019. He is pursuing a BA from Susquehanna University, where he hopes to be able to get into an MFA or land himself into a fellowship. Follow his misadventures and let him know what your favorite poems are on Twitter @djrthepoet.

Citlali Salazar is a recent UCLA grad and likes to write with one hand, both if she's feeling adventurous.

Catherine Taghizadeh is a second year Psychobiology major who writes poetry privately in her spare time. She is an aspiring doctor and with an obvious love of science, but can't stop herself from following her enthusiasm for creative writing. She is incredibly grateful for the balance she has maintained between STEM and the humanities, and looks forward to expanding her educational perspective by digging deeper and deeper into the literary world.

Anna Ter-Yegishyan received her BA in English from UCLA in 2017. Her poetry and short pieces have previously been published in *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*, UCLA's *Westwind*, and *FORTH Magazine*, where she worked as an editorial assistant for two years.

Damian Wang is a city boy who wears his heart on his sleeve, enjoys rainy days, hunting for fresh boba, eating ramen, reading comics, doing JoJo poses, and inhaling the dusty aroma of old books. He has an 8-year old cat named Miu Miu, who likes to play feline editor by bodily key-smashing incoherent lines into his works.

A Los Angeles native, Jennifer Wong graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a minor in Education Studies. She plans to earn a Master of Education (M.Ed.) and become an elementary school teacher.

J.M. (Jon-Marc) Yaden is a third-year English major at UCLA, with a special passion for epic poetry and science fiction. His interests include civil rights, environmentalism, and slavery in the modern age. He is currently writing a series of science fiction novels entitled *Trine*. After graduation he intends to pursue a Master's degree in English Literature, and continue to build a career as a writer and educator.

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