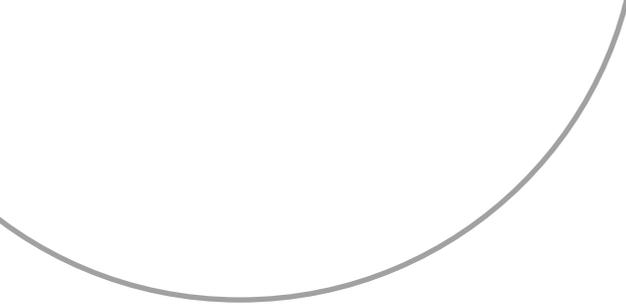


WALL 2020

Literary Journal





WALL

L I T E R A R Y J O U R N A L

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First Edition

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All communication should be directed to the following address:

Liberal Arts Division
Saddleback College
28000 Marguerite Parkway
Mission Viejo, CA 92692
(949) 582-4788

www.saddleback.edu/la
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WALL is a student-produced literary journal of Saddleback College. All entries were submitted by students of Saddleback College. Submissions to WALL are reviewed, selected, and edited by the students on the journal staff.

We accept entries that embrace all viewpoints and walks of life. However, the opinions and ideas contained here in no way represent those of Saddleback College or the South Orange County Community College District Board of Trustees; they are solely those of the authors and creators of these particular works.

The deadline to submit your work for the 2021 edition of WALL is January 25, 2021.
Please see the guidelines for submission at the following link:

www.saddleback.edu/la/wall



WALL

is a community space for creative displays.
It is a fresh canvas,
a blank surface
begging for decoration,
a vast white page
awaiting our words and images.....

MISSION STATEMENT

WALL Literary Journal is dedicated to providing an open space for creative experimentation. We encourage the unfettered expression of ideas, images, and emotions in literary and artistic works that explore and illuminate the human experience. Aimed at a multicultural, cross-generational audience, the works represented in the pages of WALL encompass a diversity of voices and visions. This is art in the raw and in the round. We want our readers to laugh and cry, smile and sigh as they immerse themselves in the pleasures and power of art and literature.

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| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Twenty years ago, a group of students and their faculty advisor set out to create a space at Saddleback College that would feature literature and art from our campus. The result of their collaborative venture: WALL Literary Journal, the publication you now hold in your hands. This edition commemorates a two-decade enterprise that has produced a journal honored with top awards in national competitions among college literary magazines. For WALL, the year 2020 represents not only longevity and continuity; it also marks a turning point, a moment of growth and maturity.

At the same time as the journal celebrates a significant milestone, the works of imagination within its pages and on its cover wrestle with the contradictory tensions and turbulence that distinguish this period in history from any other. As a struggle against a lethal virus coincides with striving for social justice for Black individuals and those affected by racial inequality, the stories, poems, and artwork within WALL call attention to the beauty that exists alongside brutality, the desire for connection and compromise that collides with hatred and divisiveness. The profusion of faces within the artwork and on the cover become a metaphor for facing these truths, and WALL 2020 does so with both boldness and delicacy.

Since the printing of the first edition in 2001, the growth and development of WALL has been made possible by the generous support of faculty, administrators, and staff throughout the district and campus. These benefactors include the South Orange County Community College District Chancellor Kathleen F. Burke, Ed.D., and the district's Board of Trustees: T.J. Prendergast III, Timothy Jemal, James R. Wright, Barbara J. Jay, David B. Lang, Marcia Milchiker, Terri Whitt Rydell, and Ethan Manafi. We also are extremely grateful for the support of Dr. Elliot Stern, President of Saddleback College, and Dr. Kevin O'Connor, Dean of the Liberal Arts Division.

Special thanks goes to professors Suki Fisher, Catherine Hayter, Bill Stevenson, Brett Myhren, Bridget Hoida, Jennifer Hedgecock, Roy Zimmerman, and Shellie Ochi of the English Department; Marina Aminy, Dean of Online Education & Learning Resources; Khaver Akhter and Cindy Luher of the Liberal Arts Division; Professors Karen Taylor, Christopher Clafin, Louis Bispo, and Avery Caldwell of the Graphics Department; Professor Larry Radden of the Speech Department; Professor Ariel Alexander of the Music Department; Barbara Holmes and Matt Brodet of the Division of Fine Arts and Media Technology; Professor Deidre Cavazzi of the Dance Department; Professor Ryan Even of the Photography Department; and Professors Timothy Posada and MaryAnne Shults of the Journalism Department. Other supporters include Kristen Bush and Donna Pribyl of the Graphic Services Department; Deborah Armstrong of the Library Services Department; Ali Dorri, an instructional assistant for the Lariat; Bruce Parker of PJ Printers; and the Science Scholarship Foundation.

As WALL celebrates its 20th year in the midst of such restless times, please join us in marking the moment with a profound appreciation for the resilience of the human spirit as well as the healing power of literature and art.

Gina Victoria Shaffer
Faculty Advisor
WALL 2020

EDITOR'S NOTE

To write and say that the creation and production of WALL 2020 was an exciting undertaking would be an understatement.

Generally speaking, the process of putting together a literary magazine is equal parts thrilling, challenging, exhilarating, and oftentimes overwhelming. It requires unbelievable amounts of commitment from everyone involved in order to accomplish the demanding task of coordinating the various stages of developing a literary magazine. This year, putting together WALL was made even more complex due to the switch from in-person to fully online classes. The international pandemic known as COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, or, most commonly, the coronavirus, completely altered not only our classroom and magazine-making experience but all of our lives as a whole.

Despite the drastic changes with which the WALL 2020 staff was faced, I am proud to say that we successfully put together and designed a beautiful and captivating magazine, one that showcases the wonderfully talented Saddleback students as well as illustrates the current social, political, and individual duality in our world today.

When considering an overall theme for the 2020 edition, the idea of “duality” — light and dark, joy and sorrow, and, overwhelmingly, beautiful delicacy and violent monstrosity — presented itself continuously in the written works and art pieces selected by the WALL staff. Though all unique in their own ways, the large majority of the works for WALL centered on or illustrated a balance (or imbalance) of diametrically opposed ideas, both within each singular work itself as well as when compared with the other works. Despite the variety of contexts in which this duality was showcased, it was undeniably present across the board. The goal for WALL 2020, then, was to place the works within the magazine so that, despite the jarring contrast intrinsic to the concept of duality in and of itself, the magazine remained a fluid and united collection of art, poetry, and prose.

In addition to the works within WALL, the cover for the 2020 edition was chosen specifically for its reflection of the times. The collage-styled images reflect the amalgamation of the coronavirus (and its devastating effects on populations worldwide), the social injustices towards and murder of Black individuals/people of color across the globe, and the ramifications of the duality among Americans in regards to their own personal beliefs, which have impacted a myriad of aspects of individuals' lives (including mask-wearing, social justice response, and self-quarantine, just to name a few).

It is my hope that, in this magazine, a more whole picture of the human experience at large can be understood. The complexity of life as we know it, both before the onset of the coronavirus as well as after, is something to be marveled at and learned from. The talented individuals who created the works within WALL, as well as the magazine itself, are, I believe, the most excellent representation of the beauty and mystery and duality that is now.

Thank you for all of your support.

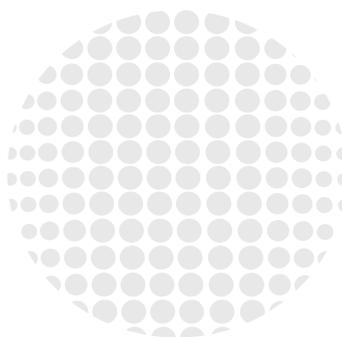
Best regards,

Gabriella H. Palazzo
Editor-in-Chief
WALL 2020

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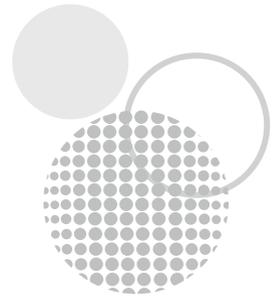
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ON THE COVER :

Design by Matthew Morris using photo by KAL VISUALS on Unsplash (woman at top); publicity photo of Carole Lombard from Paramount Studios (woman's face at bottom); and flowers by ArtsyBee. Back cover photo and design by Matthew Morris.

OH, HOW THE **COOKIE CRUMBLES**

Illustration by Samantha Buck



OH, HOW THE COOKIE CRUMBLES

Tara Nadeau

The sunlight reached Josh's swollen eyes when the sheet he used as a curtain broke free of its thumbtack. Scraping jagged crust away from his eyes, he allowed his left foot to slowly find the floor. The transition of draping one leg over the bed to planting both feet on the floor exhausted him.

Running a hand over his stubble, he began his solo sojourn through the catastrophe that was his bedroom. He plowed his fingers through his waxy brown hair in frustration and knew that he desperately had to pee but figured that changing his conspicuously stained T-shirt first would be a good move. He struggled to remember how the discoloration had occurred and rightfully concluded that someone had spilled on him.

He couldn't remember how much he'd had to drink but had the inclination that he'd imbibed heavily. He also couldn't remember grabbing a hot blonde's ass or the fateful moment she dumped her entire beer on him.

Moving towards his closet, Josh labored to reach his destination before the nausea set in. He smacked his hand to his face and dragged it down slowly—no clean shirts. Turning away from his closet, Josh crushed a carton of open, stolen Thin Mints he'd tossed on the ground the night before. *Fuck it*, he shrugged, and wandered out into the hall, wondering where he could have put the blonde's number. Keith swore that they weren't "banging" and even though she'd shown up with him, Josh recalled that she'd been eyeing him all night.

He poured himself a bowl of cookies and cracked open a beer. As a precautionary measure, Josh had learned to leave himself small bits of kindness for when he simply couldn't function and today this meant a box of Tagalongs he'd snatched from the hands of a Girl Scout the day before.

Josh plodded over to the couch while simultaneously sipping his beer and spilling it down his chin. The overgrown scruff he'd neglected to shave caused the beer to zigzag down his whiskers and onto his shirt, making his already stained tee resemble some sort of earthy tie-dye.

"Gotta hair of the dog it, am I right?" he said to no piece of furniture in particular. Josh was content to spend his afternoon shoving cookies in his face and chugging beers but spewed his mouthful of chocolate peanut butter all over himself when a low flying plane's blast shook the windows of the house. He wasn't entirely used to the new flight pattern of the 287 to El Paso and found himself frequently startled by a plane's engine while at home. Based on the time of day, Josh figured that there wouldn't be another disruption for at least an hour. The startle had left him a sticky mess and he screamed obscenities to any furniture still paying attention.

The sound of Saturday morning cartoons filled the room as Josh sank back into his recliner, but the bellowing of a doorbell cut short his relaxation. Struggling to wipe off the evidence of stolen goods, Josh realized that he was only rubbing the crumbs further into the weaving of his T-shirt. Scraping something sticky off of fabric with one hand can be difficult while holding a beer with the other and, as Josh found out, opening a door at the same time was a near impossible feat. Without looking up from his encrusted hem, he loudly declared, "We don't want it. We don't need it. We have already found Jesus."

The stranger did not respond.

Not expecting silence, Josh dropped his shirt and looked up. Becoming aware of his surroundings in the blinding outside light, Josh rested his red-rimmed eyes on a small pair of tiger print Vans. Both shoes sported perfectly white, perfectly neat double knots and both were pointed at him. Raising his eyes upwards past a pair of knee-high green socks, Josh took in the sight of a young Girl Scout, tawny hair braided down her back, amber eyes locked on him, nostrils flaring.

"Sorry, sweetie, I already got enough of 'em," he said jokingly, gesturing towards his shirt. The irony of pointing out stolen cookies to a Girl Scout was lost on him.

The girl did not respond.

Josh held his smile while he looked at the girl, but her steady gaze made him squirm. "So, uh," he croaked, his smile falling slightly, "aren't you guys supposed to have like... an adult with you or something?"

Glancing over her shoulder, she led Josh's blood-shot gaze to two uniformed Girl Scouts standing at either end of his driveway. Raising his eyebrows high and letting the lower half of his mouth stretch upwards, Josh sucked his bottom lip inward, making a slight pop noise. "Well," he swallowed loudly. "We, uh, don't want any so have um...have a great day."

He grabbed the doorknob, attempting to put a barrier between himself and the girl, but found he was prevented from doing so by the tip of a small tiger print Van. Somewhere in the vestiges of Josh's mind, he recalled Keith telling him that tigers were the most vengeful animal on Earth but couldn't quite put his finger on the relevance of such a thought. Looking up in shock, he quickly shoved the girl's foot out of the doorway with his own and locked the deadbolt. He rushed to the large bay windows lining the front of his house. As he walked the length of the glass, Josh's concern began to grow as he realized that the girl was following him along this path. She was slowly stalking him through the blinds.

She stared at him intently through the glass and Josh was aware that even when there was a break of wall inbetween the panes, even when he lost sight of her, her golden eyes were still locked onto his. Josh peered through the blinds, whispering loudly, "Fuck. The fuck kind of Girl Scouts are these?"

Breaking the lines of the panels with one finger, Josh accidentally splashed some of the beer he still grasped in his hand. Momentarily distracted by placing his can onto a wooden entry table, he looked up only to realize that he'd lost sight of the three girls. He could have sworn that he saw movement...a shadow rushing quickly

to the palm overgrowth—but wasn't certain. Could a grown man even legally defend himself against three children?

He desperately fumbled through the contacts in his phone until he found Keith, who had three younger sisters and would definitely know how to handle three rogue Girl Scouts.

"Hello?"

"Hey buddy, uh, Keith. Hey, what do I do if there's like—"

"Man," Keith sneered into the phone, "you got some nerve if you think that I am going to talk to you after you grabbed my sister's ass. She's a junior, you dick!"

Keith hung up. Josh was stunned into a moment of quiet reflection, interrupted only by the sound of his back door creaking open. The fine hairs on the back of his neck stood up. He'd seen too many horror movies and knew better than to investigate. Turning back towards his foyer, he made a break for it. He sprinted out towards the street and past the rows of pastel houses lining his neighborhood. Throwing his gaze behind him, he saw the three girls advancing in unison. Their movement was fluid, smooth. Josh flailed like a wounded animal. He furiously looked for a place to hide but was having no luck shaking the three hunters on his tail. Ballooning his cheeks out and exhaling in short, sharp intervals, Josh huffed and puffed his way to the local Rite Aid.

*"He'd seen too many horror movies and
knew better than to investigate."*

It had always been one fence hop away from his house and after what seemed to Josh an eternity of running, he saw his salvation. He threw his hands on the cold chain-link and hoisted himself over the top, dragging his stomach across the other side. Josh's feet met the ground with a sharp slap and he scrambled behind the safety of a small blue car.

He had done it.

He had escaped three little girls.

Panting heavily, Josh felt awash with relief and laughed out loud at the absurdity of it all. He lowered himself to all fours to check around the corner of the car's bumper. Looking around and seeing nothing, he began to stand, only to throw himself to the ground when he heard a thump overhead.

Raising his face to meet the threat, Josh locked eyes with those of a Girl Scout crawling towards him. His heart pounding, he took off towards the front of the store, but the thick burning he felt in his thighs turned into a crippling charley horse and he collapsed onto the pavement.

He rolled onto his back as the girls began to circle. Throwing his hands in the air as he scooted away from the approaching pack, he began to scream, locking eyes with the girl in tiger print Vans, "Oh, God! Oh, GOD. Please don't kill me! Jesus, I'm sorry!"

Josh stopped pleading when the girl raised her gaze towards the sky. Making no counter offer, the girl in tiger print Vans lowered her eyes to his once more. Cracking her neck in loud quick snaps, she towered over his exposed belly. Josh's eyes widened, his mouth agape.

The girl in tiger print Vans stretched open her mouth and roared loud enough to shake the buildings around them. It reverberated throughout the sky behind them and echoed away. Josh looked unblinking at the girl, unaware as the other two reached into his pocket to grab his wallet. The girl's presence absorbed his field of view entirely, and Josh failed to see the low-flying plane passing overhead.

After the magnitude of such a noise, the exhausted sounds of Josh's breathing seemed insignificant.

He seemed insignificant.

The girls turned to walk away, leaving Josh on his back, clutching his chest on the blacktop of a Rite Aid parking lot. Red-cheeked, he stared at the clear blue sky above him.

"What a fucking *lower*." The girl in tiger print Vans laughed.



MIND BLOWN

Ceramic Sculpture by Khang Nguyen



CITIES

Nathan Richmond

i was sitting in the park one day
when a strange old man came walking my way
he offered to take me to distant cities
strange places rich with surreal beauties

and i said yes

we traveled to a city that shone with gold
the streets paved with rubies and pearls
the city brought up memories old
and it sat in autumn eternal

and i said what else is there

we walked for many days to a dark cavern
to a city that stank of mildew and mold
built beneath the earth where blind crickets lie
and the people sat in the dark waiting to die

all this i had seen

cities that prospered
cities that suffered
and i asked for something new

and he said sure

we came to a horrible place
where tyrants sat on towers of dead men
and drank from goblets of putrid phlegm
in terror we turned and fled from their disgrace

CITIES

Illustration by Mandana Yaghini



and we ran and ran

we got lost in a city of symbols for things
and lost ourselves in a city of changelings
we walked in confusion through a city of lengths
and struggled our way through a city of strength

and i said that's enough

we came back to that little bench
when the sun had set and the stars came to dance
and so i sat and went to rest
the next time he came, i didn't even glance

TWO PERFECT STRANGERS

Lydie M. Denier

My mother was a beautiful, impractical, and tortured creature. She was a model type with haunting pale blue eyes and long, wavy hair as blonde as hay, who had always dreamt of being part of higher-class society. Before my birth, she worked at a local bar where she met my dad, a local butcher.

Daddy was a strong and emotional man. Though his steely deep green eyes and jet-black hair put a sparkle in every woman's eyes, his own true love was the ocean.

I was their only child for the first five years of their marriage. We lived in the countryside of Brittany, France, in the middle of nowhere. It was so peaceful that the sound of frogs and crickets blended together. During summertime, the delicious breeze gently caressed my face and, in wintertime, the sound of branches scratching against the windows sharpened my senses. With no one to play with, I created an imaginary friend, a big brother.

"Who are you talking to?" my mother demanded one day.

My eyes opened wide. Mommy's harsh voice with its terrifying tone told me I was in trouble again. I could sense something left unsaid when she spoke.

"I'm... I'm talking to my big brother," I hesitated, scared that my usual answer would unleash her volatile nature. I was right.

"You're crazy!" Mommy screamed as she whacked me and locked me inside my bedroom. Her frustration toward me was as palpable as the cold. I shivered, my teeth chattered, and my head pounded. Tears of grief ran down my face. Why she did that would remain a mystery for decades.

However, even at a young age, I knew Mommy was unhappy. She threatened suicide again and again. She was so loaded up on pills that a bedside table drawer was filled up with a forest of prescription bottles from codeine painkillers to valium. I quickly learned how to take care of myself and avoid drawing attention. It was when people forgot I existed that I felt most at peace. Drawing and writing became my refuge each time I came home from school.

At home, Mommy's screams were permanent. With each scream, I stood all alone in my bedroom, in the middle of an explosion, everything flying all around me. And I just stood there. My parents often raged at each other. Sometimes I would dream of another family. *Divorce*, I thought.

On Tuesday morning, November 2, 1976, Mother closed the book on Daddy. She dragged my younger sister, Coco, and me out of bed at 5 a.m. By 6 a.m. Mommy's new man, Jacky, picked up my sister and me. His car smelled of cigarette smoke, which I loathed. Jacky dropped us off at his parents' home in a nearby village—a perfect hideaway where Mommy could move all the furniture out of our home.

As a child, my eyes wandered sadly, wondering where I fit in the world of adults. The worst part wasn't all the changes Mommy brought into our lives, but the silence that came with them. The changes swept over us like waves during a storm, but nobody dared to mention how we had lived before. "Never mention his name again," Mommy said to my sister and me. We had to wipe Daddy from our heads and hearts as if he had never existed.

Night after night, I lay awake with my eyes burning. My last sight of Daddy came sliding fast through my head, a memory of his white Simca vanishing behind a cluster of evergreens. How could I have known I would not see my Daddy again until my eighteenth birthday?

At the first sign of loneliness for him, I started to draw. I lured the memories of Daddy back into my mind, trying so hard not to forget his smile, the green of his eyes, the color of his hair. But after a few years, Daddy had fallen out of my head completely. It was my mother's plan.

When my parents' divorce became final, my mother shipped me off to live with her cousin Josette in Martinique, a French island in the Caribbean Sea. I must have said goodbye to her. We must have wept. But I can't exactly remember hearing her say the words "I'll miss you." Part of me expected her to stop me from leaving. She didn't. I don't have any memories of my mother ever holding me or kissing me tenderly — not even once.

*“But after a few years, Daddy had
fallen out of my head completely.
It was my mother’s plan.”*

While I never received affection from my mother, her own mother—my grandmother, Nana—gave it generously. She nurtured a close relationship with me. In fact, I became her favorite grandchild. Forty years after my mother left me behind, I was at Nana's bedside as she prepared to leave me behind. But, in this case, it was not because of abandonment but due to her terminal illness.

I tenderly held my grandmother's hand as she lay on a hospital bed. "I'm going to go away!" she said.

My grandmother, a tough-minded French woman, was born in the village of Trignac, in south Brittany, in 1916. A survivor of World War II, she became a grandmother at the age of forty-two. She refused to be called "Grandma," "Grandmother," or anything that would make her sound old. And so, until her death, all of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren called her Nana, including me.

Decades had passed, but Nana still retained the same tenderness in her loving heart. Colon cancer had taken a toll on her, but her sparkling baby blue eyes remained.

Nana touched my cheek with her hand for the last time. I wish I could feel her hand again and again forever, but today would be the last. She slowly brought a hand to her mouth in a fist, bumping it against her lips.

"I—" Nana began before she fell silent. She lowered her head to her hands, breaking into tears, a torrent accompanied by the sound of breathless sobbing. I rose and handed her a tissue. "It's okay," I said, gripping her arm. "It's okay."

Confessing one secret didn't lead automatically to confessing them all. The life Nana had put aside more than forty years ago was suddenly intruding into the carefully ordered life I thought I had created. She asked me to sit down next to her. Her mind was racing, her stomach churning with memories of the past.

"Before you were born, your mother gave birth to a boy out of wedlock. They were a rich family, but we were poor and we couldn't keep the boy. We signed a legal document, giving up all rights to him, promising that we would never search for him. For the longest time, I thought about him every day."

A spasm of warmth clutched the pit of my stomach. "Do you remember the family's name?" I was not a crazy child after all, just a child feeling the presence of an older brother. I inhaled deeply and let out a sigh.

Her eyes welled up. "No, I'm sorry. It happened such a long time ago."

"Where is the document, the one you signed?" I asked. The lump in my throat shifted to a flutter in my stomach from the exciting possibility that his name would be on this document.

"In the attic," Nana replied.

"What attic are you talking about?"

"At my old house."

When she was seventeen years old, she had bought the house in the French village where she was born. The white two-story building with light blue shutters, a large garage, a cave, and an attic was a home with so much history. During World War II, it had been requisitioned by the Germans. Nana, the very essence of female power, standing no more than 5 feet 2 inches, negotiated with the German colonel. He could move into the upstairs, but she would live in the downstairs level with her husband and child. End of discussion.

"I forgot to empty the attic!" She closed her eyes. It was obvious she was both alarmed and wary of talking about it. At age seventy, Nana sold the property and moved into a nearby retirement home, located close enough that she could still look at the house she had built with her sweat and determination.

Nana was quiet for a moment, her gaze growing distant and unfocused as she slipped into denial. Her pale blue eyes were filled with tenderness. I got up from my chair, walked to the window, and looked out to a garden decorated with Christmas lights.

A visit from a nurse chased away this gloomy feeling. She nodded hello to me, checked Nana's vitals, wrote on her chart, and quickly left. I sat back down next

to Nana. I held her hand. Her heartbeats were slowing down. I touched her cold lips with my fingertips and caressed the top of her head. I didn't close one eye that night. Each time her breathing slowed down, I squeezed her hand and she opened her eyes. I just couldn't let her go yet, not before she'd given me the name.

Nana passed away at 1:30 p.m. on Christmas Eve of 2008. She was ninety-two years old. Following her death, I dreamed I was moving through a tunnel. I came to a dead end and there was Nana standing against the tunnel wall. She looked beautiful. Her face was young again, her pale blue eyes framed by long, wavy dark hair.

"What's his name?" I asked.

"I will guide you towards him," Nana answered, her eyes wet, filled with the sadness of leaving me behind, alone. And then, she was gone.

A week later, I sat alone on the front row facing Nana's coffin, brushing with my fingers the engagement ring she had given to me decades ago. The rest of the family sat three rows down, away from me and near my mother. The Mass ended. The curtain closed. If the atmosphere had been tense the week before, today it was frazzled. I dabbed under my eyelids with the palms of my hands, but my face kept streaming like a cascade. I am a mixture of resentment and forgiveness, of violence and tenderness. The emotional immaturity of Mommy affected me my whole life. My growing up without a father's love was her doing. I only wanted one thing: to find my big brother.

I drove home in the silence of one who has lost an irreplaceable mother figure. I wished Mommy had burst into tears at the funeral home, saying she was sorry for all the wrongs she had done to me, but nothing. I walked away angrier with every step at being so disregarded. I had been wiped clean from my mother's consciousness. Now we were just two perfect strangers passing by.



UNO

Evangeline Brennan

a WILD CARD, thrown into the mix,
tainting blithe memories of cherished family game nights
with a moment of unadulterated panic.
When her eyes rolled to the ceiling as if in silent prayer.
When her hands clutched her playing cards in a vice-like grip.
When her body shook with convulsions.

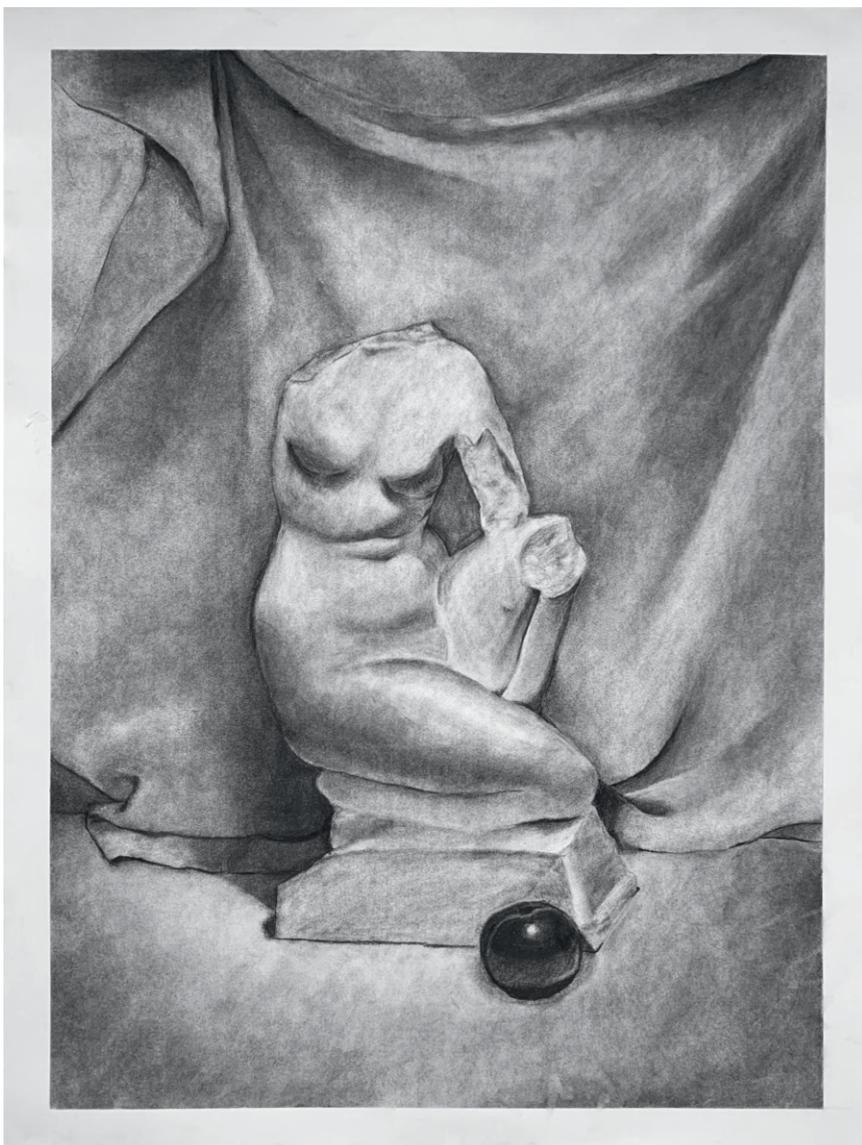
One heart SKIP as another flatlines.
Terror swept through like a storm,
decimating hope with each body-wrenching twitch,
with each sobbed cry from a daughter,
suddenly a child once more. Logic bowed down to panic.
Electricity pulsing through a mechanical heart.

Situations in REVERSE.
Reassuring words whispered from the mother on the brink of death.
Clasped hands and quiet reassurances breathed out
to pacify the frazzled mind of her child,
a girl too scared of what happens next
to know what happens now.

UNO, a game hand that dwindled down to a single card.
Suddenly, I'm a child scared of being left alone.

STILL LIFE

Charcoal Drawing by Huiye



DEAR NICK

Edward J. Hendries

It's been over two years now, and I
still can't shake the last thing I saw.
You, hanging there. Covered in tears
and your long blonde hair. Your parents,
pulling your limp body from the garage
and leaving the hospital without a son.

These memories I have I can't forget.
Like that spider in ink on your finger,
that which can't be erased.
These things I can't and won't
unsee.

DEATH VALLEY **DUNES**

Photograph by Teri Pfeffer Perlstein



MERMAID

Cy Hill

That February of 1977, the hearse took Monty to the cemetery. His wife, his two daughters, and those who came to pay their respects watched as the twenty-seven-year-old electrical construction worker was lowered six feet into the earth after a two-hundred-foot fall onto beach rocks.

Burt had worked on many jobs besides this one with Monty. Although the electrician always had a smile and friendly greeting, he did not know him well. At least it was not raining at the graveside. The little girls stood on either side of their mother, all in black, all holding hands, only the youngest softly sobbing. Burt attended the wake, ate some cake, and said a few forgettable words to the widow who he knew wondered, as they all did, if her husband had taken his own life.

And, if he had, why?

Work on the site was open to those who wanted to work the last half of the day and Burt needed the money. He was a junior at the University of Washington, majoring in business and minoring in art appreciation. His construction work specialty was masonry, and there was a portion of this project he could work on alone and unsupervised. They all parked at the upper end of the project, near the cliff wall that ran parallel to Puget Sound. There were only four other vehicles there when he arrived. Because this site was large, he knew he might not encounter any of those laborers before sunset when they would all knock off. The only one he would definitely see would be the security guard in the shack at the base of the hill on his way out.

After donning work boots, tool belt, and hardhat, he locked his car and walked to the cement parapet, three feet high, that set the project apart from the beach and rocks and surf two hundred feet below. A single hollow steel ring, six inches in diameter, projected up out of the cement wall. There was no reason for it to be there—it just was—and, on the other side of it, all the way down, right there on those rocks, was where Monty's body landed. This preexistent ring coincidentally marked the spot. Burt bent over and looked through the ring's empty aperture, not looking down, but straight ahead, as if it were a periscope placed to view the Sound.

The sky, the sea, the blurred horizon where they intermingled, was an oppressive angry canvas of blues, grays, and olives, all rising up, the black seabirds racing towards him, all escape routes blocked.

Burt pulled back. A gust of wind went through him, chilled him. Monty was still here. There was a part of him that was not in the ground.

There was no reason for him to have been down there, on those rocks. You could not accidentally fall from here unless you slipped, but there was nothing here to slip on and you still had to go over that three-foot-high wall.

He walked down and around the skeletal timbers rising up out of the concrete, the framing for structures that would civilize this space cut out of the wild to expand greater Seattle.

As he worked on the brick enclosure that was his charge, he naturally day-dreamed. Burt was an observant young man, thoughtful and careful in his speech. He was minoring in art appreciation because he enjoyed what was ordered, clean, and sensory. He did not create art yet, but lines and color spoke to him in a shared language. This wall that he built was functional. How he would have liked to turn it into art relief, something like a frieze-projected Babylonian sphinx or a Gorgon at the Temple of Artemis. But this was a blank wall because that was what it had to be, what those who were paying for this project wanted it to be. After a few hours' work, he stepped back and observed its flat emptiness, its barren choice.

The image he had seen at the seawall returned to him, projected upon this brick wall: what he had seen while looking through the hollow ring, out into the sea, that troubled vision of blues, grays, and olives, all rising up, the black seabirds racing towards him, all escape routes blocked.

It was like Van Gogh's *Wheat Fields with Crows*, one of the painter's final paintings before his suicide. The painting and Burt's vision at the sea wall were different, of course, but the feeling was the same.

He would relate this to a woman he knew, one who helped him understand art, the smartest person he had ever met. Kathleen took art appreciation, but she could have taught it. Where might she be today if she had not had a daughter when she was fifteen? How had she managed to raise her daughter, attend the university, and work, all at the same time?

What would Monty's wife do now, with two daughters to raise on her own? Monty was said to be heavily insured, as most electricians were, but if his death was ruled a suicide, his family would not collect. His mind shifted to that image of his wife and daughters, heads bowed, standing by the open grave as the casket was lowered in.

He checked his watch. He had lost track of time. A drop of rain pinged off his hardhat. Hurriedly he covered his work with a tarp and anchored it down.

Strapping on his tool belt, walking back up towards his parked car, Burt saw it was the last one remaining. The others who had chosen to work after the funeral were gone. The sky was roiled clouds, the sea a froth in twilight.

More raindrops fell. All of his thoughts, all of his feelings, everything he had observed on this abysmal day ran counter to his usual cheeriness. He knew it was because he had reached the conclusion that Monty had forsaken his family and life's responsibilities by taking his own life.

A form, wrapped in a long green dress and shawl, sat atop the wall, facing out to sea, approximately where the steel ring was planted. Before taking his own life, so might Monty have sat on this white webwork that gleamed as a spark of sunlight in sunset.

Hoping not to upset or panic the woman, Burt eased to a position at the wall

thirty feet distant from her perch. In her arms she held a bundle against a bared breast. Over the lip of the blanket he saw the back of a baby's head.

The red-headed woman was hollow-cheeked, her face an etching of grief.

"Hello," he said.

Unconscious of wind and rain, she stared out at the sea as if it was where she belonged.

"My name is Burt. What's yours?"

A cool breath of wind ruffled up his work shirt and tickled his bones. Rain began to fall in earnest. Compassion welled up in his chest for this mother and child. He thought of his friend Kathleen and her daughter, of Monty's widow and their daughters.

"What is your baby's name?"

Angry and bitter, she stared at him over her nursing bundle. Her eyes touched his.

"That's not a good place for you to sit," he coaxed. "Why don't you come back on this side?"

"Monty died down there," she said, pointing two hundred feet downward.

"You knew Monty?"

She laughed bitterly. "This is his child."

Within Burt, jumbled thoughts, words, and emotions tumbled like thrown dice.

"Monty's child?" Was this the answer to it all? Monty's death was related to this mother and child?

As she looked down at the glass eyed, plastic thing, pressed to her breast, a store-bought doll, he reached to grab her, as she knew he would. She made as if to lose control of the false thing, the counterfeit of a mother's love. And he grabbed for it, as she knew he would.

He caught the doll, leaning out over the wall, but its head broke off in his hands. Even as he pondered what this was about, she grabbed him by the waist with one arm and slammed him in the back with the other. When she did this to Monty, he leaned over the wall because he not only had a higher center of gravity, but he had already put his heavy tool belt in his car.

As Burt fought to keep his balance, battled to retract his torso back over the wall, she clawed and bit, tugged and pushed, scarlet hair loose and flying, ripping his shirt and skin with nails and teeth. Sinking to his knees on the earth side of the wall, he pushed her away, pushed her off the wall, even as she clung to him. She wedged her knees against the outside of the wall as she continued to fight, trying to pull him down with her. Finally, all that remained of her grip on him was his shredded shirt, and then it gave way, ripped free from his body.

That should have been it.

But she did not fall.

She did not fall.

It took Burt a moment to see that she was tethered to the ring atop the wall by a clamp attached to a short leather belt around her waist. Within that moment a long

knife appeared from the folds of her dress and she struck down at him, her knees still wedged against the outer wall.

His hardhat had landed in the dirt during the struggle, and he swung it upward as a shield, deflecting the blow. It shot up and out of his hands, a launched white bird caught in an updraft from the beach, wind gathered off the sea that climbed, climbed, spun the plastic protective object as a toy, flipped it about, and then dropped it, out beyond the beach, out among the waves.

The deflected blow sent the downward thrust of the woman's knife in an altered arc. It just nicked her leather umbilical cord, but with her added weight, it was enough. It separated. She shrieked all the way down.

From his knees, shaking, peering over the wall, Burt looked to the rocks, clutching the ring with both hands. She lay face up, shattered. Shivering, whimpering, he crabbed backwards on all fours as the heavens cracked and rain fell in a flattened sheet.

Within the shack at the entrance to the worksite, the security guard, enjoying a cup of coffee, was glad to be out of the weather. Rain pelted the roof, the windows, the walls. This was a big storm, even for Seattle. Lighting illuminated the interior of the fragile trailer, and thunder slapped against its fabricated outline like a hand.

Suddenly, the door swung open. He thought it was the wind. Then, a bare-chested young man, soaked and sodden, ripped across his face, arms, and chest, mauled by some wild animal, stumbled in.

The guard dropped his coffee cup. He sat the victim down after closing and locking the door. He set his weapon down on the desk, ready for immediate use if necessary, and asked questions that the young man did not answer, could not process.

Burt murmured noises that were not language but instead bewildered, primal sounds, unable to proceed until he could verbalize and thus understand what had happened. Consciousness of malignancy in the framework of existence is a truth no one seeks. The experience of evil in one of its many facets, from the banal to the brutally violent, forever alters the feel of life. It is more than a loss of innocence.

It was several minutes before he said, "She went after what was best in us. Our compassion. To destroy us."

It was another full minute before he blinked into the guard's eyes and said, "I know what happened to Monty."



I DROPPED MY PHONE IN OATMEAL TODAY

Alyssa Shishkov

I dropped my phone in oatmeal today and it'll never be the same.

That's really all I wanted to say, but since you're here, please stay.

Do you wanna hear more about the oatmeal thing or maybe something else?

It's really not that big of a deal.

It's a story to tell and vanilla as hell.

The case clinging to my committed touch, the camera an eternal dream scene.

It's covered in sugar and lagging too much, guess this is also the end of me.

Whatever I was looking at, I hope it feels special

And comforted as does my mind

To know there's a place where the answers all lie:

It's called block

Delete

Unfollow

Send.

Dearly Beloved

Please leave me alone.

You were there for the grace, we were all logged on.

Also, everyone lied: there's no "better place."

I'm about to die, can you please call my mom?

But what if I miss something someone's not posted?

How will I know who will cry?

It's too late now I'll forever be ghosted.

Pick up the phone.

Go a little bit blind.

HORNS

Illustration by Brianna Fernstrom



HORNS

Alison Gervacio

Ding Dong

The door chimed as I stepped into the room. The woman standing behind the counter, where the cash register stood, looked at me and greeted me, “Afternoon.” Her face scrunched up in soft wrinkles as she smiled at me. She wore a white dress that fell over her knees while her hair was hidden in a wrap that rested behind her. A dark brown wooden cross fell over the middle of her chest. All the nuns at the school wore the same thing except for the older ones. They wore dark blue dresses and my mom called them “Mother Superior.” I never really understood nuns. All I knew was that they weren’t allowed to have boyfriends and they all slept together in the same room. At least that’s what the boys in class tell me.

I gave the nun at the counter the same friendly smile before turning my back on her when I made my way to the shelves. The student store barely had any school supplies — mostly small erasers shaped like animals, such as lions, seals, elephants, whatever might catch a third grader’s eye. The erasers also came in shapes that resembled high heels, lipstick, a mirror — hell, even a toilet. Apparently, this was what companies thought little 8-year-old girls would spend their money on. I didn’t, of course. I wasted my mom’s money on the useless mini zoo animal erasers. Did I even use them as actual erasers? No, because I would’ve ruined them if I did and then how else was I gonna show up Katherine’s mini eraser bathroom set?

Ding Dong

I jumped at the sound of the door slamming shut. I glanced over my shoulder and heard the nun greet another student who walked in. I swallowed hard and looked back on the shelf again. I didn’t come here for mini erasers. I felt my hands go numb. *I came here for something else.* My eyes scanned the shelf as I moved toward the back counter where the nun couldn’t see me. Please be sold out. Please be sold out. My heart dropped. I stood still staring at the box in front of me. I felt as if I’d punched myself in the gut. As my heartbeat pounded in my ears, I slowly reached out and took the box in my grasp, nearly dropping it with my trembling hands.

The box was see-through and displayed a small fake fabric-looking flower. I wasn’t sure what kind of flower it was meant to be, but it was something everyone at school was throwing their money at. My eyes trailed down to the bottom corner of the box where a small bottle was placed. The liquid inside looked like golden nectar; it was meant to be sprinkled over the fake flower to make it smell sweet. I traced the tip of my index finger over the bottle. It wasn’t even sealed inside of the box; it was just placed in a slot. Anyone could’ve just pulled it out if they wanted to.

Ding Dong

The nun's gentle greeting echoed in my ear. It was lunchtime and the entire store was beginning to fill with students cramming together in front of the shelves. They were all clawing at the mini erasers, trying to grab as many as they could. The nun couldn't see me or what I was doing. She was distracted. The other students didn't even notice me, especially since they were all stomping on my feet and shoving me into the back of the store. No one would know.

Ding Dong

"Huh?"

"Someone stole from the student store yesterday."

"Oh. I didn't know that."

The nun frowned at me. I kept my eyes down toward my feet as we walked along the halls of the school. I kept my hands by my side and glanced around the empty school. It was an hour before morning Mass and I was dropped off early so my mom could walk to school before she caught the bus to her nursing class. Today, Mother Superior, the principal of the school, found me playing tag by myself in the middle of the quad and told me to take a walk with her. This was my first time meeting with Mother Superior. I knew my mom had one too many arguments with her about my failing grades at the school. Although my mom disliked Mother Superior, she sounded nice when she spoke to me that day. But I felt her glare pierce through the side of my skull every time she looked at me.

"It's a bit strange that you didn't hear about it. Everyone is talking about it in school. I'm sure students in your class know about it, too. It's caused quite a stir." Mother Superior hummed, folding her hands in front of herself.

Over a tiny bottle of yellow perfume?

"I just don't listen to the gossip in school," I replied in a soft tone, trying not to let my nerves get the better of me. "My mom said gossip is a waste of time."

She frowned and stopped in her tracks. I stopped and looked up at her. There was a long moment of silence. Mother Superior eyed me up and down as if trying to decipher me. Maybe even plotting ways to get me to crack.

"Alison..." Mother Superior's voice was much sterner now. She stepped in front of me and folded her hands behind her when she bent down to look at me in the eyes. "Did you steal from the student store yesterday?" She wasn't even asking anymore. She was demanding me to confess even if I *didn't* do it.

My heart raced and I stood stiffly in front of her. I stared directly into her dark-colored eyes. I could see every crack that carved through her face as she frowned. Her cheap perfume filled my nose so much I was about to gag. I clenched my fists by my sides and released a heavy breath through my nose. "No," I stated flatly, "I *didn't* steal from the student store yesterday."

Mother Superior narrowed her brows at me and scoffed as she stood up straight again. She scowled at me and had such a look of disdain on her face that it made me feel like a cockroach on the ground. "Remember lying is a *sin*, Alison."

"I'm not—"

"Liars go to hell," she snapped in a cold tone. She towered over me and glared,

“Never forget. God is always watching.” Mother Superior shook her head in disappointment before she turned her back on me and walked away.

The sound of Mother Superior’s heels clicking against the concrete echoed through the halls. The sound rang in my eardrums. I gulped down hard against the heavy lump in my throat.

Liars go to hell.

When it was finally lunchtime, I forced myself to forget my interaction with Mother Superior that morning. I laughed and played with my classmates until Katherine called me over to the back of the classroom with the rest of the girls in my class. They all sat at a desk while they made me stand in front of them. Katherine held her nose high as she scanned the area through her curled lashes, making sure no one was watching us. The boys were too busy harassing a grasshopper that managed to find its way into the classroom. Our teacher chatted outside with a teacher from another class. Katherine looked back at me with raised brows and held out her hand.

“Where is it?”

I shoved my hands into the pocket of my dress and pulled out the small bottle of perfume.

The bottle that’s *causing quite a stir*.

Their jaws dropping, Katherine and the rest of the girls let out gasps. They all exchanged looks and giggled while whispering to one another. “You actually did it?!” Katherine laughed, looking down at the bottle.

“Y-yeah,” I spoke up, tilting my head to the side. “Just like you guys, remember? It’s what we all did as an ‘invitation.’”

All the girls paused and gave each other puzzled looks. “Initiation,” Katherine’s voice boomed. Clenching her fist around the bottle, she pulled it underneath the desk and onto her lap. “And yeah, *we all did it*. Right, girls?” The group gave a nod and muttered their agreements, but it wasn’t very convincing. “Okay, you’re part of the group now,” Katherine said. Then, she added, pointing at my head, “But you can’t wear your hair like *that* anymore.”

“But I like my pigtails,” I said, pouting with my bottom lip as I frowned. I defensively grabbed the long strands of hair resting over my shoulders. They always made me feel pretty, especially when my mom had the time to curl them. I loved the way they bounced as I walked. They made me happy.

“Well, if you want to be *our friend*, you can’t wear them,” Katherine retorted. “None of us wears our hair up. You have to match our hair from now on. Here.” She pushed herself up from her seat and grabbed the ties on my head, roughly yanking them out and causing me to fall forward against her desk. She tossed the hair ties into the trash and ruffled my head, letting my black hair fall limp over my shoulders. Since I wore pigtails so often, the top of my hair had indents where the pigtails used to be. “Geez, do you even shower? Hair isn’t supposed to stick up like this.” Katherine scoffed before pulling the cork out of the small bottle and dumping the perfume onto her hand. She rubbed her hands together before pushing them

through my hair. I flinched and shuddered at the sensation of the oily liquid against my scalp. I coughed as the strong alcohol scent of the perfume filled my lungs. I gritted my teeth while she roughly yanked at my hair, trying to flatten the dents. Once Katherine was done, she wiped the rest of the perfume on my shoulders, leaving a faint stain on my school uniform. Katherine and the girls smiled and giggled at me before they all got up and went outside to play with the boys for the rest of lunch. I followed behind them with my eyes toward the ground.

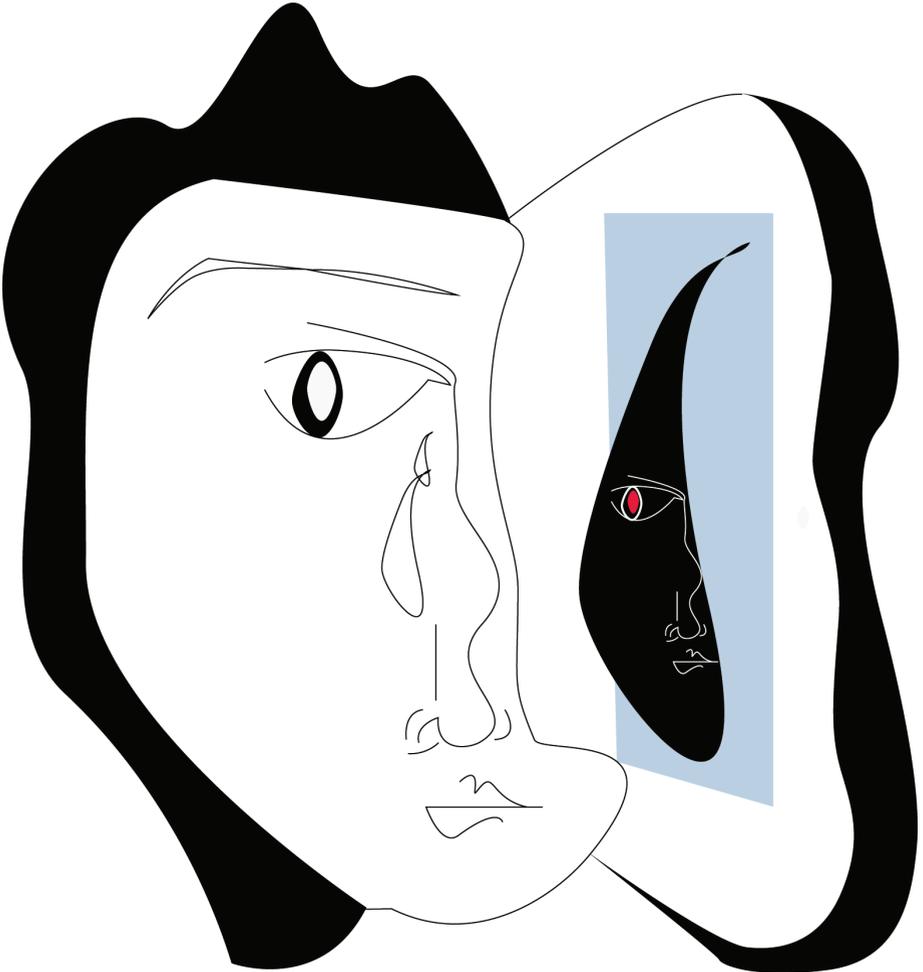
Before I stepped out of the classroom, I noticed my reflection in the window. My eyes were glossed over and my dark hair was soaked in oil. The indents in my hair didn't flatten even with Katherine's attempt to try and smear liquid in it. Instead, they looked more prominent. In fact, the indents made my hair look like a pair of horns on the top of my head. I frowned at the girl who was staring back at me. Having friends was more important than *possibly* going to hell for lying.

Besides, that's something I can worry about after I die, right?



CRYING EVIL

Digital Drawing by Noosha Golab



SHOOT THE SUN DOWN

Blake Montana

I sunk my face inside his white T-shirt to escape the foreboding sun, reeling in the comfort of the sweet smell of sweat that bristled over everything—through his hair, through my hair, through our shirts and our pants, over our faces, over our arms. He fell backwards a bit, barely sitting on his skateboard at my weight, as I pinned him against the green electrical box on the curb.

“Woah,” he said, instinctively looking over me for passing eyes that would expose us. I felt him. I felt this. I didn’t care if they saw us. I’d want them to know, no matter how much it horrified Bret to be seen sprawled on his back by another man. Bret knew it and wrapped his arm around my head as a way to placate me, to keep my mouth from his. He had done it before. If he could hold my head in his chest until the feeling passed, I’d be normal again and we could walk without beams of Bret’s shame cast on us.

“You’re just trying to stop me,” I said.

“Stop you from what?” He looked down on me curiously, still holding me, though with less tension in his arm. He probably realized the filter rate of the empty business parking lot that we were in was around one car per hour, two at most. With cars driven by pasty-faced strangers, there was little chance either of us would know any of them, let alone be recognized by them. Bret seized a place in my dark blonde hair and pushed his hand through, slowly breaking apart iotas of my physical place in this world until I sank into him for good.

I thought about lifting my face from its new place to face his. I thought better of it. Feeling my eyes burn, I didn’t want to push Bret away from me and I didn’t want him to do anything to suggest that this moment would end. The discomfort of public affection was worse for him than it had ever been for me. Bret was shy intimately when I began to know him that way. We didn’t speak of specifics; we just connected and it was me who had been waiting patiently for Bret to emerge from where he kept himself hidden half the time.

I didn’t know how much it really bothered Bret to be seen with me in any way more than platonically. He showed it to me one day when I wrapped myself around him inside the Barnes and Noble at the Town Center, barely able to hold myself back after we had spent most of the afternoon disguised in the presence of his parents. We were both flipping through two editions of *Black Hole*, reading the book together, looking over the artwork, and slipping into our own versions of the characters by reading passages in their voices. He stopped reading and got up, deflecting my blanketing desperation, and walked to the other side of the store. I left our dual copies of *Black Hole* beside the bookcase and found him idling over records,

fingering sealed sleeves of albums he would never buy. He didn't look at me and walked past the sensors out of the music section down an aisle. When a minute had passed, I went into the bathroom to look for him.

"Bret..."

Suddenly my shoulder blades shot with pain, as I was coerced into the green tile wall by violent hands. I looked at Bret in shock, sensing anger in his eyes, while his hands pinned my wrist against their will. I couldn't fight back. Something had convulsed in him, awakening a strength neither of us had known was in him. He kissed me publicly, pushing my head through the wall into a place above the tile, above the crude graffiti, above the carvings, and above the cheap defecations of human output. We weren't in a stall and I saw him in the mirror behind us digging into me, his lips rippling over mine, uttering words meant to be felt, biting my lip, forcing his tongue into my mouth, seething with arousal and the taste of eviscerated tears.

"Bret seized a place in my dark blonde hair and pushed his hand through, slowly breaking apart iotas of my physical place in this world until I sank into him for good."

It should have been him, but it was me who was worried someone might walk in at any moment and see us. In an instant, one of us would turn to stone like a victim of Medusa's glare. I was already a prisoner of his capture, unable to accept or reject, only able to exist between him and the wall, my entire being prematurely aching with carnal currents I had never really experienced until that moment. Not the time I had felt Christina Kathy's mouth on my cock, which had been unbearably hard, not from thinking of her, but of her brother who had walked through her room, coming out from the bathroom in a towel, before she had closed the door. Not the first time or the last time, when it was Bret who returned the favor, surprising me by shifting little by little out of shy territories that left him gazing down. It was a far cry from the outwardly confident, freckled, long-haired tan skater cutout I had imagined him to be, swaying by me on his board the previous summer like an omen of a future I had not yet possessed or suspected to be mine. All the while it was reaching towards me little by little like the sounds surfacing from his headphones when he rode by, nearly cutting me down when we first spoke.

That night, I had left Erin's house late and was walking towards home. I took my time walking through the parts of the neighborhood I only glazed over in the stucco shadow of the condominiums. The buildings looped around a stretch of sidewalk, along grass and brick walls, cutting off the brush on the hill behind all the houses lining the left side of the complex. There was one person walking their dog cautiously on the grass beneath a blinking street lamp, watching me watch them

as I made my way along the sidewalk out of the condos, sweeping a pinecone out of my path, sauntering in the peaceful blur of a high-too high to care about anyone's judgment or distaste. I was smoking a lot that summer, supplementing any shortcoming of feeling for Erin's body by hitting the bong in the corner of her room, wondering if it was the weed that made me hard, my secret deposit box of thoughts, or just good luck. I should be grateful, I told myself on different occasions. I was the one who finally got into her room, the only neighborhood boy of multiple neighborhood boys gnawing on the backs of their hands for her company. That night, we had made it and I told myself it would be the last time. I saw it on her face, a rare aura of disappointment I couldn't displace, a reality of myself I didn't like. Still, I waited till her parents returned, gave them the bullshit smile and the bullshit interest in their bullshit worlds, and assured myself I was still a suspect of interest in Erin's eyes. I hit her vaporizer too—just to make myself feel better.

Bret almost hit me, but I was in no mind to mind. I stole a glance at him and smiled, forcing one out of him when he looked back at my near mutilation with a look that said sorry before he blushed. He stopped, stepping on the tail end of his board and guiding it to his hand, the dirty white wheels still rotating as he walked towards me.

"Hey, sorry back there, I didn't mean—"

"Not a problem at all," I stammered, thrusting my hand out there in desperate hopes of closing the space between us. "I'm Michael."

"Michael, I'm Bret."

His hand was warm. I took it longer than he could manage, his eyes flailing from his skull and splashing the hot ground.

"I've seen you before," I exclaimed matter-of-factly.

"I've seen you, too."

"You should really watch where the fuck you're going though."

"What?"

"I'm kidding." I laughed, suddenly afraid I had lost him in the breadth of a joke and that he would ride away at any moment, leaving me lost and alone in an emanation of the friendly cruelty that only activates when you're no longer strangers with someone. Luckily, he didn't walk away and I had him long enough to arrange the next time I'd see him. He walked me to my house that night and the following nights, claiming it was for my safety. I told him I didn't know about his, though. Then he gave me his number and I made sure he got home safe.

"I'm leaving at the end of summer," he revealed to me one night, while we sat on my porch above the backyard. Both his parents and mine were out of town and he was staying with me. He didn't like being under the gaze of photographs of his father and neither did I. I would not look at him; instead I stared into the glare of the sun falling in the west bursting through the veils of pine needles and branches to our left.

"Are you?" I asked superficially. It hadn't been a good night. I had touched him, but he only responded in tentative moments. He would move back against my par-

ents' comforter, giving in, giving up like the animal the fur blanket at the foot of the bed was made out of.

"This has nothing to do with hiding it. I'm going out of state. We can't delude ourselves after this point."

"I'm not deluded. You are."

Bret stayed silent for a long time. Eventually, the sun was gone. Everything had just begun to revert.

On the sidewalk I felt comfort in his warmth—cherishing his, cherishing mine, my face tucked away like a child finding a hole to escape adulthood. This was how summer was supposed to feel. All my life I had looked for someone to make me feel better about all my faults and the faultlines waiting to widen. And here they were. I looked into Bret's eyes of blue until he moved his head only slightly, the wreath of a smile throbbing to hold place while the sun swallowed him and all of it whole.



BITTER SWEET

Yasmeen Sheik

My mouth is supposed to be sweet
A thick nectar
Ribbons of honey
A smile that captures the soul,
My soul

But it is as bitter as the words you left me with
Numbing my every word
Stifling the song that carried in my smile
Sewing your hatred between my dry lips

I can't speak.

The dull ache in my mouth
travels down my throat,
As I sit here looking at what I wrote

I can still taste you.

I WISH I WAS **CLAY**

Stoneware Sculpture by Nicolette Clark



HER STORY

Brett Cervantes

Blank. That's the only way I could illustrate my emotions today. It wasn't always like this. I believed that nothing could bring me down to such a level of numbness. I was raised to endure pain and never shed a tear. I was raised to believe that I was strong, emotionally and physically, regardless of the fact that I was a girl. Regardless of the fact that I was basically raising myself. It wasn't my parents' fault; they were both hard workers. Hard-working parents wanting the best for their little interracial daughter.

She has light brown skin that turns golden in the sun, big brown eyes that bewilder those who do not know she is half-Asian, and straight dark brown hair as shiny as the ocean water surface on a sunny summer day. She was always smiling, brightening everyone's day with that smile. She had always been an outgoing, athletic, intelligent girl. No fears. No unhappy moments. She was living her best life being a spoiled little girl. She was Daddy's little girl. Spoiled yet humble.

I remember it like it was yesterday. On my way to soccer practice in my dad's Ford Expedition, I told him, "I will never cry over a boy. I will never let anyone hurt me." My father smiled and pinched my cheek like he had always done. Years later, I found myself with a shattered heart, crying as I glanced into the mirror. Holding my hand up to my mouth so that my parents wouldn't hear me crying. And I remember hours before that as the last moment when I stood high and fearless. My endless fake smile became a reminder that I had to remain strong on the outside, while I fell apart inside.

Blank. Blank because I am so tired of being the one everyone steps on. The little happy moments in a life of living hell are not worth the constant betrayal and continuous social distortion that teenagers must conform to. People I let into my life have always found ways to remind me that there is no such thing as happiness in such a shitty life.

After the sexual assault, she was never the same. How could she be? Something like that can't be taken lightly. Especially if that disgusting pig was someone so fuckin' close to her. She stopped trusting, she closed herself off from everyone, and she became the opposite of what she was raised to be. Beating herself up became part of her life as she faced insecurities and trust issues.

I was not okay. But I was raised to be strong and independent. So I balled up my feelings and put them aside. I continued to live my life, trying to hide the emotional distress that I was living. I trusted no one, not even my own father. I stopped being Daddy's little girl. I couldn't trust any male ever again. That is when *he* came into my life. *He* taught me to trust and to let out all the trapped emotions I

was hiding. *He* gained my trust slowly, and I learned to trust *him*. So much that, to this day, *he* is the only person on this planet to know me well enough to recognize a fake smile from a real one. *He* was my first everything, my first love, my first kiss, my first boyfriend, and my first heartbreak. *His* weapon was armed with rounds of betrayals, lies, and vengeful actions.

If you saw her around school, she was always surrounded by guys, not because she was a hoe but because she had always been one of the guys. She was the little sister, the best friend. The way she got along with people and how much she cared about those around her was what made it so easy for people to step on her and emotionally damage her the way they all did. When she met him, they were nothing but summer school partners. Being partners turned into dating, and she was genuinely happy. She had learned to love herself, to appreciate life no matter what it was throwing at her. She had gotten her confidence and strength back. He brought her back.

The feelings I felt for him were so powerful. No one else was as attractive. No other guy was worth it for me to lose what I thought I had, but he cheated, he lied, and he betrayed me. Everything I thought and had built came crashing down. Trust issues, insecurities, and self-hate became the new me. And since him, no one has given me butterflies. No one has gotten close enough to me to realize that my smile is fake, that the way I care about people and the way I try to help those around me is just me hiding what I have balled up. I cry myself to sleep every night, not because I am still upset at what happened, but just because I know it is not the last time my heart is going to be torn into pieces again. It is something that happens constantly until the world decides that you've had enough.

I am so scared of giving someone my all, sharing with someone my deep feelings, letting someone know me enough to know a fake smile from a real one. With that ability, the person would realize it's that way 85% of the time. All I can say is never promise yourself something because you'll end up realizing that you cannot commit to that promise. I promised I would never let anyone give me butterflies again, closed myself off to the thought of falling in love with anyone again. And, for the past couple weeks, it's been a constant war with myself. Who knows what is coming or how many times I will hurt again. But time will tell, and the world will decide when I have had enough, I guess. All I can really do is go with the flow of life and remember that whatever my lowest point in life has been up to this day, I am still here. Life can keep throwing curveballs, but I will still be standing. Blank-minded and blocking my emotions, but standing.



YOU

Kelsey Louis

You're a gateway to broken promises. A dream that is as heavy as a wet blanket. You're insomnia that has insomnia. A parasite that lives inside a morose decaying pile of bones and cartilage, consumed with a dreary disposition similar to a weeping willow. A heartbeat that swoons through your empty carcass. Your heart is mold-ed together with expired mulch, trying to grow relationships but effortlessly they become rotten. Your feet lead a pathway that is made of shattered memories glued together with unforgiving tears.

I follow anyways

Your touch irons and peels off my floral wallpaper like skin. The smell is analogous to a wildfire, burning the hairs on my body and diminishing the decorative roses infused within me. My skin turns to sand paper from the trauma. You like to carry around a giant stamp that reads *Damaged* in a bloody yet dainty font. You stamp your victims leaving me with moist stains of confusion, breaking the fragile glass that makes up the skeleton of me. You don't care that my return date is up, and what becomes broken in translation cannot be returned. You tattoo your brand on my unpretentious body.

I am exactly what you wanted.

You have always gotten what you wanted.

HOLE

Pencil Drawing by Noosha Golab



BRISTLECONE MOON

Photograph by Fern Hesel-Metz



MIDWESTERN **ELEGY**

Beau Hein

Old soul, are you blue?
A palm reader, in Iowa heat,
Spoke of my father.
Muscles in my past life,
my chiseled jaw,
Leather hands.
The women I loved.
Do they miss the man I was?
I do.

A THUMB AT A **FINGER PARTY**

Illustration by Romain Lenormand



A THUMB AT A FINGER PARTY

Callie Riel

We stood in two straight, parallel lines arranged alphabetically by last name and dressed identically – white collared shirts, black suits, black shoes. I heard short, choppy whispers from those around me as people picked lint off each other’s suits and smoothed down errant hair in nervous anticipation. We were in a parking lot in Tustin, facing the front doors of the Orange County Sheriff’s Academy. Some of us were hired by city police departments, some by the Sheriff’s Department, and others were paying their own way, but we all had one thing in common: the goal of surviving six months of grueling training and becoming sworn law enforcement officers. “Don’t make eye contact,” the guy next to me muttered to himself. “Don’t stand out.”

At exactly 1100 hours, the front door of the facility opened. For a moment, all I heard was the eerily cheerful background noise of birds chirping and cars whizzing by. While I waited in suspense, my fingers began typing in the air on an imaginary document, a nervous habit I seemed to have developed on the spot: “Don’t make eye contact. Don’t stand out.” Our peace was shattered with the angry bellows of 15 male law enforcement personnel tasked with turning us into cops. We knew them as TAC (Training, Advising, and Counseling) officers. As we filed through the building for “sign-in day,” the cacophony of noise put me in a dreamlike state. I remember TAC officers mocking my “elf shoes,” a pair of pointy flats I was wearing because I hadn’t realized that the women were supposed to wear men’s dress shoes. “WE DO NOT WELCOME WHORES AT THIS ACADEMY” was directed at someone who had half an inch of skin showing on her neck between the undone top button of her collar. That sentence alerted me to the fact that, though we dressed and acted the same, there was one key difference: some of us were female.

It was January of 2018, and due to recent efforts to diversify law enforcement, local law enforcement agencies hired several women around the same time. Whether out of kindness or as some sort of experiment, they grouped us in the same academy class, Class 231. My class had the largest percentage of female recruits in the history of the academy.

The TAC officers dressed in police uniforms and wore their hair buzzed or shaved. Despite their differences in height, size, and race, they all looked the same to me – terrifying. I assumed they scowled so much growing up that their faces became stuck that way. Commonly heard phrases at the academy were “SIR, YES SIR!” and “SIR, I MADE A MISTAKE, SIR!” Everything was said as a shout. Funny thing about most females: the louder we yell, the higher our voices sound.

“You sound like a mouse, Riel!” TAC Officer Sanchez would say. “Do you think criminals will listen to you if you SOUND LIKE A GIRL?”

One of the hardest parts of the academy was physical training, or PT, which consisted of push-ups, sit-ups, burpees, mountain climbers, and running. TAC officers “punished” recruits with these exercises all day, in addition to a three-hour concentrated PT session in the afternoon. The physical standards are the same for both genders, and with good reason — criminals don’t slow down in a foot pursuit just because a female officer is pursuing them. For the female recruits, the worst part of training was the constant sets of 25 push-ups. One day I kept track of our push-ups and lost track at 600.

On a crisp and wet January morning, TAC officers were giving us set after set of push-ups when the male recruit next to me began falling behind. “Look at Recruit Riel!” an officer yelled at him. “Women are not built with the upper body strength men have, and she is crushing you!” He went on to call the recruit a fat, sloppy pig while I selfishly basked in one of the only compliments I would receive during the six months.

Running also emphasized the differences between men and women. During certain runs, many of the female recruits (including me) would eventually fall to the back of the group. The officers called us the “hen house” and made clucking noises while we ran. Recruits who ran too slowly were put on the “fat squad.” Those on the fat squad marched into the hallway during lunch break every day and presented their food to the officers for inspection and criticism. There were six recruits on the fat squad — all females.

The one relief at PT was our female trainer, “Coach,” whose job was to monitor for injuries. During one PT session, Coach noticed that I was bleeding through my shirt — hundreds of sit-ups in wet sand caused my sports bra to rub against my back, removing a chunk of skin. Coach talked to the TAC officers and we didn’t do another set of sit-ups that day.

During the academy, two female recruits were fired because they didn’t score high enough in the physical fitness tests. One was fired because she wasn’t “tough enough” during the dreaded “Redman” event. During Redman, two officers walked around a wrestling mat with full-body pads while we recruits attempted to hit them with a baton. The fight wasn’t exactly fair because our batons were made of foam and the officers were punching us with boxing gloves. Despite our light head protection and mouth guards, an extra hard shot to my temple managed to knock me out and send me to the ER with a concussion.

For the most part, recruits dressed the same: police uniform with a white cotton undershirt and black combat boots. With regards to hair, women had two options: chop it off or keep it in a tight, perfect bun. The short hairs on our neck and by our ears were shaved weekly. Hairs escaping our updos were called “wispsies” and resulted in physical or written punishment. For gear, women and men both wore about 20 pounds worth of equipment in addition to a 6-pound bulletproof vest. Most of these vests were unisex — the front area, which covers the chest, was completely flat. Also of note, women’s chests aren’t completely flat.

The TAC officers hated anything that made us stand out. But even more so,

they hated anything that made us look feminine. I made the mistake of having about two inches of purple on the sides of my PT shoes. This style choice was quickly (and loudly) pointed out. Apparently, I may as well have had unicorns and rainbows painted all over my shoes. We learned that colors like green and blue are acceptable, while pink and purple are for schoolteachers and certainly not for law enforcement.

My arch-nemesis was TAC Officer Sanchez — a short, bald man with pale skin and enough freckles to play a lifetime of Connect the Dots. When he was mad, his face turned the color of a cherry tomato. All the women in the academy agreed that Officer Sanchez particularly picked on female recruits. In our last week of training, I stopped resenting him when he told us a story of getting into a fight for his life while on the job — a fight that ended with him being stabbed seven times.

“During the incident, when my backup arrived,” Officer Sanchez explained, “it was the last person you want showing up in a knock-out drag-out fight — small, timid, and out of shape. Utterly useless.”

Officer Sanchez used the pronoun “they” to refer to his partner but slipped up halfway through his story and revealed that his backup had been female. “Utterly useless,” my fingers typed on the table.

The TAC officers didn’t give female recruits special treatment. On the contrary, it seemed that we were treated worse than the male recruits. However, once I was patrolling, I began to understand their mindset. On the streets, criminals do not give women special treatment. In fact, females are often in more danger because they seem to be easy targets — women are generally smaller and perceived as being nicer than men.

While I was training in the academy, a TAC officer once told me that I “stuck up like a thumb at a finger party.” I found this to be true not only in the academy, but after I graduated. My failure to fit in eventually caused me to resign after just seven months on the job. I did not have the typical personality of a cop and struggled with aspects of the job that came easily to my co-workers, such as physically controlling criminals and thinking clearly in high-stress situations. During my time as a police officer, I struggled to adapt, but it was apparent that I just did not fit into the “boy’s club.”



PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY

Harry Foster

The day was hot. As all days were in the dry heat of a Middle Eastern summer. I pulled myself from my sleeping bag that morning cursing my situation, while also being glad to still be alive. I sat there in the dusty heat mentally preparing myself like an old Dell computer still using dial-up. After a few moments of quiet contemplation, my body began the routine it had been trained to do.

The wonderful and damnable thing about routine is that my body did things on its own. It's wonderful because, even in my more emotional moments, my body knows not to bother me with pointless things like a morning piss or rolling up my sleeping bag. It simply did so. Yet the routine was damnable in how I was reminded that I wasn't being aware of my surroundings, and I was always reminded at the worst possible time. As I left the semi-safety of my fighting hole, a dirty, calloused hand jarred me into awareness by grabbing the left shoulder strap on my flak. Staff Sergeant leveled me with a glare that instantly shamed me. My cheeks felt hot and I couldn't control the urge to lower my gaze in acknowledgement of my transgression. We both stood there for several seconds. The lesson and reprimand to stay alert was poignant even in the silence. My well-worn, dirtied boots were the only things I was worthy to look at.

"Don't let it happen again." I could hear the implicit order in the gruffness of his voice. Out there, my leadership's word was law and survival.

"Aye, Staff Sergeant," I quickly responded, finally meeting his eyes. He nodded in satisfaction and then his body took him toward his own morning piss. Whether or not his mind went with him is anyone's guess.

Once fully awake, I was once again struck by the beauty of the countryside where we settled. Rolling hills, once rich with the crops of persistent farmers and decorated by the shy innocence of new dewy grass, separated my brothers and me from the enemy. The shining sun and blue sky spotted with cirrus clouds sharply contrasted with the serious mood around the briefing table. The beautiful morning did nothing to alleviate the thick weight of our responsibilities wafting around our heads and in our lungs. We had been asked to defend people we'd never meet. Who would never say thank you. And we were prepared to do it to the death.

My assignment was simple but still vital to the success of our mission. I'd be on the wire again, helping to build up our defenses. Putting up c-wire is an arduous and tedious task. But it's also the task of an artisan. There's a trick to it. A subtle finesse to producing the best result. A rhythm that you can almost hum to. The key is to not lose yourself in that rhythm. Every bounce of c-wire strand, every layer of barbed wire, and every following wire tie are all equally important. Meaning if you're caught in the rhythm, you get sloppy. You lose the kind of perfection that

is born from a desperate concentration. And that can lead to lives lost and hearts broken.

But the morning was bright and so was my team's disposition. A quickly barked order from my squad leader set us to work. My body responded before my conscious mind fully registered the last syllable to leave the sergeant's lips. They call that response training and discipline. I call it voluntary mind control.

We worked quickly because there was always more to do but not so quickly that we did a poor job. The army guys also on the detail told jokes and gave each other a hard time. I was jealous of their easy-going camaraderie. That's not to say that they were unprofessional. It will be a long time before I work with a group of people as dedicated to mission completeness as those army personnel. It just seemed like it was easier for them to laugh. Easier than me anyway.

“We decided to eat our lunch in one of the holes pre-dug to protect us from shrapnel should we get any indirect fire.”

When the time came for a break, my mouth was watering. I had snuck out of my sleeping bag the night before and opened a new box of Meals Ready to Eat or MREs, which was frowned upon because we were supposed to be rationing our food and also because most military guys considered it completely unethical. I know it was childish, but I was tired of everyone getting the spaghetti MRE before me. The spaghetti itself tasted mostly like Italian mud—no clue how I knew that—but it had the best sides. It came with tropical Skittles, a packet of chocolate drink mix, and the ingredients for a decent peanut butter and jelly sandwich with crunchy peanut butter. So today, I was especially excited for lunch because I hadn't had spaghetti for so long that I would swallow every bite of that Italian mud with a smile.

We decided to eat our lunch in one of the holes pre-dug to protect us from shrapnel should we get any indirect fire. You know. Rockets, artillery shells and other such life-ending horror. It also served as good cover in case there was a ground attack. Anyway, the spaghetti lasted about two minutes and I was just about to begin spreading the peanut butter on the bread when the horns started blaring, which meant that we were about to take indirect fire. Everyone around me immediately stopped what they were doing and grabbed their rifles, ready for just about anything. However, I just sat there. Starving. Ignoring every ounce of training that had been beaten into me since I stepped on the yellow footprints. I stared at a blob of chunky peanut butter on a thin slice of bread. It stared back with wry chagrin

as if to say “what can you do?” I waited for five more seconds and then resumed spreading the peanut butter.

One of the army guys looked at me with an incredulous expression. “Yo, what are you doing?”

I cocked an eyebrow. Wasn't it obvious? “Eating,” I grunted. I had gotten strawberry jam instead of the usual grape jelly. It must've been my lucky day.

“Didn't you hear? We're about to take incoming.”

Man, I was so hungry. I had to dig around the bag for a second slice. It always sucked folding it in half when you realize the manufacturers “forgot” to include two slices of bread.

“So? The way I see it,” I began as I finally fished out that second slice. “One of two things is about to happen.” Everyone was listening now, so I spoke a little louder. “Either our lives are about to end, in which case this sandwich doesn't even matter, or the captain will come over here and tell us to get back to work. If we have to go back to work, then I don't want to be hungry. Plus, it's not like we'd even feel it. They'd have to put the rocket in the hole for it to be effective. Anyway, I'm really fucking hungry.”

I took a bite and nearly moaned. It was perfect. Not too much peanut butter and not too much jam. It was the best thing I ever tasted. After a couple of minutes of watching me eat, the guys joined me. For the next thirty minutes, the nine of us guys sat there. Eating in silence. It was probably the best thing they ever tasted, too.



SANDWICH

Tim Tran

Half or full? Cold or toasted?
Choice of rye, white, or wheat.
Toothpick through bread like crucified hands
Securely clasping a slab of meat.
The oven thermometer's mercurial measurement
Proves that it's what's inside that counts.
So count your dressings and weigh your options.
Measure it down to the very last ounce.
Add every ounce to a pound of flesh
Made tender through trauma, sliced razor thin,
So thin you can almost see right through it.
Wounds cured in salt and peppered with sin.
You are the sum of all these layers,
A product vacuum-sealed by fate.
Though the sandwich of you is an acquired taste,
To me it has no expiry date.

WAR CRY

Ink Drawing by Matthew Morris



STEEL

Dylan Robinson

Smelted, layered to smite
Divide between the *is* and the *was*
Steel knows no ally nor foe
Only worthiness;
Determined
Voracious, pining for vitality
A guard separates grip from steel
Struck, the curvature lingers deep
Intimate sights set, the blade yearns
A bolero begins, steps precise...calculated
Opponent: ambiguous
Only the mightier stands tall
As the blood-caked edge is sheathed

BY THE SYCAMORE TREES

Aubrie Fuster

The restaurant is dimly lit by scattered small lamps and large, classy chandeliers giving off a yellow hue. Lettering in different fonts promotes beverages and specialties on mirrors hanging from dark, wooden walls. The quiet chatter of patrons, the clinking of dishes, and jazz vocals playing in the background make the atmosphere calm.

Alistair is sitting on a deep burgundy, cushioned booth complete with a dark, smooth wood table inbetween. He pushes his soft, light brown hair back, ensuring it stays in its place. He adjusts his gray suit coat, picks up a spoon, and looks himself over in its reflection before placing it back in its previous spot. Finishing, he straightens out all the silverware as well as the napkins and menus before directing his attention to the door.

His piercing blue eyes watch the couples entering and leaving the restaurant, all the ladies dressed up in short lace and silk dresses, their hair done up in large curls or pinned back. Their heels clack against the wooden floor and voices join the music to fill the air.

A young woman walks in and she catches his eye. His eyes trace the soft curves of her body concealed in a tight pale blue lace dress. Her face looks soft yet flustered, framed by her short, dark hair curled into large rings. The slight bounce of her curls as she walks makes her seem weightless. She catches the attention of a waiter and they talk for a moment before he points her in Alistair's direction. A grateful smile comes to her cherry lips before she turns and walks toward the table.

"Excuse me, are you Alistair?" she asks, her voice silvery.

"Yes, and you must be Irene?" he responds, standing to offer his hand and guide her to sit in the booth.

"It's very nice to meet you," Irene says, looking over his face for a moment before averting her eyes shyly. "I'm so sorry I was late. My boss held me up at work, so I had to rush to get ready."

"That's okay. It's nice to meet you as well, Irene." He hums with a small smile, watching the chandelier light reflect in her hazel eyes.

Irene crosses her legs at the ankle, placing her hands on the edge of the table, partially folded. "So, why did you choose this restaurant?" she asks curiously.

"Why? Well, because it's the best restaurant in New York!" he exclaims, gesturing around with his hands.

Irene laughs softly. "We'll see about that," she teases lightly, causing a smirk to tug at Alistair's lips. "It is very nice. Do you work for a big business?"

"No, actually I'm an editor for the paper," he replies. "I never cared to be a big

shot. I'd much rather live in a small home where few people know me."

"Oh really? I always thought it would be nice to live near a lake with lots of trees." Her smile widens, though her eyes shift between him and the table.

"Well, that would make you a first," he responded, surprised since all his other dates had focused on fame and fortune. "It's nice to hear someone else prefers a simple life. I would rather not be bothered by anyone."

The waiter comes by and offers them wine, which Irene accepts, but Alistair orders whiskey instead. They continue their conversation as they wait to be served, getting to know each other more.

"Maybe someday you can be a recluse and live in the woods," Irene teases, causing Alistair to genuinely laugh.

"A recluse, huh? I guess that will just have to do. Maybe I'll get a dog." He hums, turning the short crystal glass full of the golden brown liquid in his hand.

Irene's eyes meet Alistair's more frequently as they talk. He watches the confidence building in them as he lowers his eyes to her lips, the light glinting against the gloss. The smooth skin of her arms glows under the yellow hue of the lamps and a shadow traces the underside. Her delicate fingers wrap around the base of the glass like a slow dance before she lifts it to her lips. The deep red liquid slips down her throat and then her lips pull into a soft smile. The food arrives and she lifts a fork, though it seems too heavy an object for her gentle hands. Suddenly, a loud crunch invades his ears as she stabs into her salad, causing a jolt to go through him.

He watches as she lifts the bite to her mouth, making another crunching noise. The sound begins to take over all others in his ears; even the music is dulled to near silence. The smacking of her lips, the lettuce finding its way lodged between the front two teeth, the dressing on the corner of her mouth. It makes him sick watching, but he can't tear his eyes away from the horror across from him. The food moves across her mouth as she chews and mashes it with her teeth. The soggy lettuce and crunched up carrots, the tomato slice being squished and squirting juice across her tongue. The food finally disappears down her throat and she lifts a clean napkin to her mouth to wipe it, her movements delicate once again.

"Alistair, are you okay?" she asks, seeing his expression become hard and sick looking.

"Huh?" He nearly falls forward before leaning back with a jolt when she says his name. A piece of silverware clatters to the floor when he sits up. "Oh, sorry, just got lost in thought," he replies, eye twitching. "You're so interesting." He sits upright again and begins to eat his steak, which cuts like butter, while the continued crunching of her salad with each bite permeates his ears. The previous feeling of ease and the pleasant atmosphere are now gone.

They continue the conversation after they finish eating until Irene checks the time.

"It's getting pretty late, so I should go home," she suggests, moving a napkin from her lap to the table. "I had a really good time with you, Alistair."

"Indeed, it is, I can take you home so you don't have to worry about a cab. Can't let such a pretty thing like you be out with a stranger so late at night." He stands,

offering his hand to help her up.

“Oh, it’s no problem. I appreciate it, but I’ll be okay.” She tries to reassure him as she stands up and pulls the long strap of her small purse over her slender shoulder.

“Please, what kind of gentleman would I be if I left you to take a cab?” he says as they walk out into the cool night air. He shows her to his car, opens the door, and gestures for her to get in. “It’s a free ride.”

After contemplating for a moment, Irene says, “Okay, fine, you can take me home” and gets into the car. After closing her door, Alistair slips into the driver’s seat and snaps on the radio. He drives to the townhouse where she lives but catches sight of a small park partially hidden by the buildings and tall sycamore trees.

“There’s a park just over there.” He turns his attention toward Irene, who fidgets a bit nervously. “Have you ever been to it?” he asks.

“I have, but I rarely see anyone there,” she replies. “I think most people miss it.” Alistair turns and drives to the park instead, deciding to stop there before taking her home. Irene notices the change in direction and a frown forms on her face. “Alistair, I really should get home,” Irene insists, looking out the window at the darkening night sky.

“Don’t worry, darling, I won’t let anything happen to you,” he assures her as he parks and tunes the radio in search of a song. Static crackles for a moment before a song comes through. “Let’s enjoy the fresh air for a little while, then I’ll take you home,” he promises, stepping out of the car and opening her door.

Against her better judgement, Irene steps out of the car and walks down a very short path with Alistair. The park is covered in sycamore trees, the orange-yellow leaves becoming crisp and leaving the branches barren. The branches arch over the pathway on either side as Irene and Alistair encounter a simple, white gazebo with small green vines growing along the beams and over the top. The gazebo overlooks a small lake that reflects the moon and stars. The stars dance in between the empty branches in the moonlit sky. They are still rather close to the car and can hear the music emanating from the radio. The nimble keys of the piano join the soft hum of a trumpet and turn into a dance so fluid that it melts into an orchestra. It all comes together when a smooth male voice comes into the center, creating a warm, graceful flow.

“I’ve heard stories about sycamore trees,” Irene says, looking up to admire the large, twisted branches. “I was told they connect the livin’ with the dead. A lot of people used to be afraid of them. I think they’re strong.”

“Is that so? I always liked them.” Alistair’s hands rest on the edge of the gazebo’s ledge as he looks out onto the lake. “I used to climb them as a child.”

Irene’s gaze shifts to look at Alistair, admiring him for a moment before smiling.

“Did you ever fall out of them?” she asks curiously.

“A few times,” he replies, thinking back for a brief moment. “My mother would always come yelling at me to stay out of them.” He falls quiet and then reaches up to gently run his fingers through Irene’s soft hair before taking her delicate hand and lacing their fingers together. He places the other hand on the small of her back and begins to dance with her, stepping slowly side to side, swaying to the rhythm. The

music moves them across the floor and he holds her close. Alistair spins her away from him and when she spins back into his body, she grips his shoulder tightly, nails digging into his coat.

Her eyes become wide in shock and she parts her lips to speak, but all that comes out is a strangled gasp. Searing pain flows through her core. Alistair watches her rosy cheeks turn pale and blood sputters at the edge of her lips as she tries to breathe. Her chest heaves and falls quickly as he reaches up, gently caressing her cheek. He grazes his thumb across her lower lip, pulling it down so the blood spills down the middle and onto her chin. He leans in closer to her face, whispering in her ear.

“You were almost perfect. I didn’t want it to end this way.” Alistair leans her back against the edge of the gazebo, over the frigid water, watching the shocked expression that paints her face. “You almost changed my mind, too,” he murmurs as he pulls a knife from her body, blood seeping through her blue dress, and lets go, sending her tumbling over the rail. He watches her body splash into the unforgiving depths, her eyes frozen as if she has seen a ghost. He wipes the knife with a pocket square before tucking it back into his coat pocket and pulling out a pack of cigarettes. He lights a cigarette and leans against a beam of the gazebo, taking a long drag before exhaling slowly and running his clean hand through his hair to settle it. Maybe the next one will be better.



KKK: THE FACE OF HATE

Mixed Media Painting by Ellen Rose



THE POLITICS OF EGG TOSS

Ann Hymes

When my children were young, and we had large dogs with eager tongues to help clean the kitchen floor, we often played indoor egg toss. Standing in the semblance of a circle, children both anxious and relaxed carefully lobbed an uncooked egg to one another, in hopes the receiver would make the catch. Visitors of all sizes and temperaments were included. We tried hard to keep the egg in play, laughing with optimism and encouraging success. Until recently, I had never thought of egg toss as political policy.

It's a strategy without "me first." Its success depends on the shared desire of the parties to keep the game going. While our two Labrador retrievers sat patiently just outside the circle, anxious for a missed pass and a chance at the spoils, the rest of us applauded each completion. We took time to be grateful for others' good work. Only the salivating dogs anticipated failure. Our mistake was their gain.

Neighborhood kids couldn't believe we'd throw raw eggs around inside the house, but they quickly got into the spirit of things. The egg jocks had to cooperate with the egg rookies, or my two-egg-crash-to-the-floor limit would be reached before the rhythm of flying eggs got going.

Even when we stepped back and created greater distance between players, greater tension, and greater challenge, a sense of self-worth and accomplishment grew from seeing the success of others. I watched this balance of interests create cooperation and trust. Each of us was anxious to see the harder throws accomplished and to stretch our limits. The children showed composure and self-control. They were part of a team effort, in which success was possible only with the good performance of the weakest link. They resisted the urge to catch anyone off guard.

*“Real success is the ability to
keep the egg in play.”*

My children have become creative, successful adults. They take risks and like winning, but they have learned the importance of a rising tide lifting all boats. Their social conscience resides in a broad tent. Long hours of playing Monopoly taught them lessons in competitive business practice as they bought and sold hotels, speculated, and accumulated wealth, but how does playing to make everyone else lose or go broke possibly contribute to character—or society? Real success is the ability

to keep the egg in play, to acknowledge and celebrate the talents and gifts of others. Tolerance and stability are the outcome, and society is enriched.

When my daughter Hannah was a white-water rafting guide in the Northwest, she knew well the dangers and the surprises of the river. When a group of children were signed up for one trip, and half of them were blind and half deaf, Hannah was the only guide who volunteered to take them down the river. She carefully positioned each child in the raft, alternating those who could see with those who could hear, enabling them to complement and help each other. The churning current challenged them all, without favorites. Their varying physical abilities created an atmosphere of camaraderie and the interdependence necessary to accomplish a successful outcome. The children arrived safely at the end of an exciting adventure, proud of their personal and collective achievement.

Life lessons can have odd beginnings. A game of kitchen egg toss is not enough to direct the course of a child's life, but the uncertainty of eggs in the air instilled the need to work together—even briefly—for a shared goal. My naïve hope would be that as government at all levels faces challenges to peace and individual dignity, perhaps egg toss could be a model for behavior.

There is instant gratification in hurling an egg literally or figuratively at someone with whom we disagree, but the result is shattered avenues of communication. The need is for lessons in patience and listening, in generosity and humility, not ego and bullying. Self-interest is a lonesome pursuit. Real political power is the capacity to keep everyone in the circle, proving that, ultimately, we depend on each other to toss an egg our neighbor can catch.



JOURNEY HOME

Watercolor Painting by Celia Wu



APPARENTLY, I AM NOT MEXICAN

Tania Y. Solano Cervantes

I mistook a scorpion for a spider once. The spine-chilling critter loomed over my head as I sat inside my grandmother's bathroom. I was nine years old then and up against this lobster-like spider that hovered above me from the tiled roof.

So I cried out for backup. "AMMAA! There's a spider in the ceiling! Come and kill it!" The flip and flop of my mother's sandals on the raw, earthen floor came rushing inside.

"¿Dónde? Eso! Ay chingado, that's not a spider! Es un alacran! Salte." My mother scolded me as she barged in and hurried me out of the black shack that was my grandmother's bathroom. I ran out with my pants down around my ankles, bottom unwiped, and away from the venomous menace that I didn't know existed. You see, I had not encountered a scorpion before in the suburbs of Southern California. But just south of the U.S.-Mexico border, where the sun scorched the land with blistering heat, scorpions would seek refuge in people's homes.

This was my first day in Mexico—my first memory of Mexico. Now, this is not to say that I have never been to Mexico; I was actually born in the state of Guerrero. But at two months old (practically a roly-poly infant), I was smuggled across the border and immigrated to the U.S. My recollections of Mexico, thus, rely solely upon the time my family and I tried to emigrate back in August of 2004. My parents figured it was time to "return home" and we left California for Guerrero. Despite not walking the grounds of my native country until this time, I was always keenly aware of where I was from.

The internalization of my nationality materialized at a young age. I was well aware that I was not American. By law, only "native-born citizens" were "truly American." I was, instead, "Mexican," and, for some time, I was ashamed of it. Not necessarily because I faced harsh oppression for being Mexican, but because I had to hide my nationality—hide the origin of my birth—and obscure the fact that I was undocumented.

"If they ask you, say you were born here, in California. Say you are *American*. If not, they *will* call *la migra* on you!" These were the wide-eyed warnings indoctrinating my childhood shame and *la migra*, the border patrol, became my phobia. But no matter how many times I was told to repeat that I was "American," I knew deep down in the depths of my tortilla-loving soul that I was Mexican. No amount of exhortation could obscure my cognition of it.

That is, of course, until I entered a Mexican classroom and realized that I was, apparently, *not Mexican*.

Following the day after my mother's epic battle with the lobster-like spider, I was driven downtown, to my first day of school in rural Mexico. My parents had

spent their morning arranging my enrollment in a third-grade class, resulting in my late arrival. It was lunchtime, and I was given ten pesos for a *torta*. Before stashing the crisp peso down the pocket of my blue plaid uniform skirt, I discerned the man centered on the bill. It was not the face of George Washington.

As I walked towards the school's main courtyard, my mother assured me that one of the girls I had met the night before, a cousin named Alejandra, attended this same school. I was to look for Alejandra and spend my lunchtime with her. I must have looked nervous to my mother because she reached for me, told me to change my facial expression, and reassured me that everything would be all right: "*Quita esa cara, mami. Te va ir bien.*" With two red lipstick-stained kisses stamped on both my cheeks, I was sent off to find Alejandra. It didn't take much to find her. Alejandra spotted me and charged in my direction. A crowd of kids followed her. For fear of looking like a clown, I wiped the lipstick-stained kisses off my cheeks.

Alejandra must have told her friends that I came from the U.S. because they were all curious to hear how their Spanish names were pronounced in English. I had spent the night before telling my cousin that her name in English was pronounced "Alexandra," not "*aa-Ley-HHAANDRab.*" The word got out around campus that Spanish names had an English translation, and so I spent the whole lunchtime pronouncing names in a tongue foreign to the flock of curious boys and girls swarmed around me. *Luis* became *Louís*. *Jose* became *Joe*. *Imelda* became *Amelia*. *Juanita* became *Juliette*. And *Ignacio*, a boy who had pulled my hair in an effort to grasp my attention, became *Idiot*. The bell eventually rang and Alejandra took the role of a Secret Service agent as she escorted me to my class, shoving us through the crowd of kids who were asking me to translate their names. Never had my bilingual skills ever been this appreciated. I felt like such a celebrity. A legendary prophetess, high on her horse.

I eventually made it to my homeroom. The teacher greeted me at the door and instructed me to wait for her in front of the class. To this day, I can't remember her name or truthfully recall what she looked like, but I will never forget my first impression of the stern demeanor this teacher exuded. She carried a ruler in her hand, inspected all the girls' skirts to make sure they did not exceed five inches above the knees, and commanded the boys to fix the collars of their shirts and pull up their pants. This lady was like the lieutenant colonel of the school, one that seemed unimpressed with the new recruit who had just arrived from abroad.

She introduced me to the class: "*Esta es Tania. Viene del El Norte.*" Lively whispers filled the classroom as I was formally presented to the class as this exotic thing that came from "the North."

There were stark differences between this classroom and the ones I was so accustomed to back in Southern California. There was a lack of color in the room. Students' work was not displayed on the walls. Desks were in rows, not clustered into groups of four. And the old brick wall on the back of the classroom resembled a medieval prison cell. The dichotomy of it all made me feel utterly foreign.

I was ordered to sit in the very back row, where one empty spot remained. As I

sat in my assigned seat observing my surroundings, the teacher began lecturing on the metamorphosis of a butterfly. A colossal monarch was illustrated on the green blackboard and, to the side, was a lengthy paragraph. They were notes. Notes in Spanish. I could not understand the words on the board. From the sharp dashes above the vowels to the squiggly line above the letter *n*, I could not read (or write) one word in Spanish. As the students around me attempted to jot down every line in their notebooks, I sat there, motionless, staring at the blank page in front of me. I had never been asked to write anything in Spanish before, let alone ever having been taught to.

The teacher noticed and questioned my failure to follow her lecture. With the spotlight on me, I was forced to explain to her and the whole class that I was illiterate in Spanish. She was upset and ready to grill me.

“¿Cómo que no sabes escribir y leer en español?” the teacher asked, wondering how it was possible for me not to know how to read or write in Spanish.

The only language I had been taught to read and write in was English. Sure, I was fluent in Spanish and that was the dominant tongue in my household, but American elementary schools, or at least the one I attended, solely taught English. No Spanish.

The teacher put into question my nationality: *“¿Qué? ¿No eres Mexicana?”*

I sat at my desk, dumbfounded. I had spent my early years knowing that I was Mexican. But there I was, a child wondering if the teacher had a point: can I truly be Mexican if I can't even read or write in Spanish? And if I wasn't Mexican, then what was I?

A burst of giggles followed the teacher's interrogation. I was no longer the girl of bilingual talents. I was now the girl that was illiterate in her own native tongue. With the legendary prophetess now brought down from her high horse, I remained silent for the remainder of the class. I sat there at my desk wondering if the next lesson would go from butterflies to scorpions. In questioning how two drastically different creatures could exist in one land, I came to a realization:

Apparently, I was not Mexican. I was something more. I am this awkward, delicate fusion of two lands. An imperfect, partial mix. Apparently, I am not Mexican—I am “Mexican-American.”



SOMETIMES, YOU GOTTA **DO IT YOURSELF**

Wooden Sculpture by Savannah Young



SERENITY AT **TEA TIME**

Photograph by Toni Melgar



CHÂTEAU MARGAUX

Trevor Thrasher

Ssssst. The cigarette butt sizzled out and nested itself in the sand in the graveyard of numerous other white and tan colored filters. Guy exhaled slowly and savored the final moments of his break before retying the apron around his waist. As the smoke seeped out of his nostrils, he looked out from the rooftop area where workers cherished their moments of rest, perched on top of the country club. The golf course was a sea of green, stretching far in both directions, contrasted by the pearl-white bunkers scattered throughout. Far off in the distance, little bodies dressed in all white meandered about with their shiny clubs reflecting the overhead sun. The golf course ran through the heart of this valley and money pulsed through its hillside veins.

Returning inside, he looked at himself in the mirror and put on the smile that would create warm welcomes, magic moments, and fond farewells. With his demeanor in check, he proceeded downstairs into the lion's den.

"Guy, have you returned from your break?" the wrinkled and white-haired Sebastian asked with his usual pep. "Please present this bottle of Perignon to the newlyweds out on the patio. The wife is an absolute doll."

He wondered how a man in his late fifties could remain so unquestionably devoted to people whose biggest worries were which colorway their new Mercedes Benz would be or what Ivy League school their child would attend in the fall despite a crippling opioid addiction.

"Certainly, sir," Guy said as he grabbed the gold-stamped glass bottle, worth a third of his rent, and proceeded through the labyrinth of fine dining.

Emerging through the glass double doors, he came out onto the patio and scanned the area for the newlyweds. Sitting at tables covered with white cloths, people engaged in discussion about the recent hot weather. Next to the bouquet of flowers that sat in the middle of these tables were tall bottles with French names Guy tried to pronounce, but he was often corrected by the recipient. The ashlar stonework surrounded them and the golf course stretched out below them. They drank, they laughed, and they ordered food that they rarely touched. How else would one spend a Tuesday afternoon?

Off near the bronze statue of a caddie—a young boy with a bag of clubs slung over his shoulder holding an umbrella—he spotted the couple's table. As he approached their table, he couldn't help but notice the man's attire. He wore tortoiseshell Ray-Ban sunglasses that complemented his perfectly fitted, light brown sports coat. A silk, cream-colored Ferragamo pocket square peeked out from the left of his chest. The gold buckles of his Tom Ford loafers even glistened under his shadow.

"Compliments of the club," Guy greeted cordially as he displayed the champagne, "and congratulations to the two of you. Shall I open the bottle now or would you prefer us to leave it at the front desk to take home once you leave?"

"Dom Perignon?" cackled the young wife as she took a sip of her wine, leaving a red imprint from her lipstick on the glass. "Throw it in the trash where it belongs." For a moment Guy humored himself with the idea of shaking the bottle, popping off the top, and spraying its contents all over the woman like he had just won the Daytona 500 while screaming, "Cheers to a long and prosperous marriage, you pre-tentious cunt!" But he opted not to.

"Now now, dearie, I'm sure we can give it to Mrs. Schepski as a thank you gift for all the dog sitting she has been doing for us lately," the man said, glancing down at his blue-faced Omega Speedmaster timepiece. "Thank you. Please leave it at the front for us. We'll be departing shortly."

"As you wish," Guy replied with a slight bow. He turned around and began making his way to the entrance of the country club to leave the bottle at the front desk when she entered his mind.

It was cyclical. Even when he was bombarded with tasks to complete, he always made time to detour to the guests' observation deck where she sat day after day, just for a momentary glance at her. For hours she would sit alone, overlooking the emerald fairway with a bottle of Château Margaux as her only companion. She sat in the same corner, in the same oak chair, during the same hours of the afternoon every day until she disappeared in the evening, only to return the following day. In all practicality, they should have just had that chair plated with her name on it: Rose Laval.

And so he went, unable to resist the alluring view of the lonely woman. He returned to the glass double doors, walked up the plush embroidered stairway, and banked left towards the open deck with each step covering a little more ground than the previous. He wondered if today would be the day someone or something had finally displaced her from that purgatorial corner.

But there she sat. His eyes softened and the bottle of bubbly almost dropped from his hand as he gazed upon her, sitting in her usual chair. Sometimes she wore a royal purple dress, other times yellow, but today it was an angelic white. So many Cartier bracelets were stacked upon her wrist that it seemed as if she was wearing one solid gold band. In his mind, the "G" on her slippers stood for Guy instead of Gucci, and the hairs on the back of those fur-lined Princeton mules oscillated in the slight breeze. Two diamonds dangled from her ears, almost as large as the sapphire suspended by her silver necklace but shimmering just as bright. Even at that distance, he could almost see himself in the reflection of the wine glass that held her signature intoxicant.

Today will be the day, he thought, tired of his perpetual mental torment. I'll walk right up to her and say, "Hello Miss Rose, my name is Guy and it would be the utmost honor to receive your company this lovely evening." She'll look up at me with approbation and then she'll grab the crook of my arm, following me out to the parking lot where I'll open the door to my Civic for her and then...

The dream disappeared as it had countless times before. Guy looked down at the floor, at his muck-ridden non-slip shoes, and squeezed the foiled neck of the bottle. A woman of such class would never fall for someone like himself, certainly not a waiter of the country club she frequented. He knew it. She knew it. The whole world knew it.

Yet, as the day continued and the evening approached, the rose of the valley planted herself firmly in his mind, her roots seeping deeper than they had ever before. With each greeting he gave to his affluent patrons, he envisioned his approach and how he would address her. He experimented with his posture: standing tall with a dignified authority for some tables and relaxed like he didn't have a care in the world for others. During numerous trips to the bathroom mirror, he examined all 32 of his teeth and made sure that the metal train tracks he had in his mouth for two years did their job. He introduced cold water from the faucet into his cupped hands and acquainted it with his face. Yes, today would be the day, and Guy knew exactly what he was going to do.

"Sebastian, ring me up for a bottle of Château Margaux please," Guy said as he clocked out and untied his apron.

"Ahh, the Laval spéciale. Now, since when have you become a wine connoisseur? Personally, I think the Margaux is a tad too cloying for my palette and I would much much prefer something drier like the Schrader or—"

"Here," Guy interrupted, handing him his card while buttoning up an extra shirt from his locker. He watched as Sebastian swiped away three days of his livelihood in a singular motion.

With the ticket to paradise in his hand, Guy ran his fingers through his hair and exhaled into the palm of his free hand. It smelled a combination of ash and tonsillitis. Better grab one of those complementary peppermints. He attempted to take a step forward but found unbuttoning his top button a much simpler task. Gulp. A golf ball must have wandered off the course and found its way into his throat. The evening lights of the country club clicked on like spotlights exposing Guy's now shiny skin. His legs began making slow progress, focused on following the floral pattern of the embroidered carpet. His body was moving, but his brain was frozen in ice, Walt Disney style.

Upon reaching the plush stairway, he looked up at Jacob's Ladder and questioned how he had so often gone up and down such monumental steps on a daily basis. They seemed to stretch further than Virgil Abloh's runway during the Louis Vuitton Spring/Summer fashion show in Paris. He inched his way up the steps, bottle trembling in one hand, the wooden railing gripped in the other. Slowly but surely, he completed his ascension. Now all that remained was the short walk to his usual vista, where he would eye her as if she were a Ferrari in a display room.

He hoped she hadn't already left for the evening. But there she still sat. Now with the overhead outdoor lights beaming on her, the jewels she wore twinkled like the stars that slowly began to reveal themselves in the evening sky. A true princess awaiting her knight in shining armor.

Guy retreated to collect himself. He wiped his forehead with the end of his frayed sleeve and examined the bottle in his hand. He read the label: PAVILLON ROUGE DU CHÂTEAU MARGAUX. In the middle was a picture of a four-story French colonial house with stairs that led to the front door and pillars, stretching up to the roof above it, eight chimneys and so many windows you'd have to spend an entire afternoon counting them all. He saw himself in the leftmost window on the third story and she was there, too.

Guy grasped the bottle firmly in his hand, letting out a deep breath as he returned to his spot on the opposite side of the window. Then, Guy saw him: the knight in a shining suit. He wore all black and the only color Guy noticed was the red bottoms of his Louboutin dress shoes as he walked. When Rose saw him, she threw her arms into the air, knocking over her glass of wine, and quickly wrapped her arms around his fine suit jacket. He lifted that snow-white dress into the air, causing her fur-lined Princeton slippers to fall to the floor.

When the embrace ended, the two held hands and made their way towards Guy as he stood motionless like a Greek marble statue of Dionysus.

"Oh, did I order another bottle?" Rose said to Guy with a wink as the pair walked by. "Oopsie. Just take it back to the cellar. I'm sure I'll get to it tomorrow."

Guy watched as the two walked out through the front wooden doors and into the darkness of the night. He remained in that spot for a few moments staring blankly at the bottle he held in his fingertips, its crimson glass masking the dark red liquid contained within.

Guy walked slowly out toward his car in the parking lot but first made a point of watering a flower bed of marigolds with a sparse amount of saliva. Waiting for him was his heap of junk on four wheels hiding in the back corner of the parking lot. The faded and oxidized hood stood out like a sore thumb among the gallery of freshly waxed S-Classes and BMWs. When he got to his door, Guy reached into the partially cracked window and pulled the inner handle to unlock it. He wasn't sure why he still locked it there. Probably out of habit. As he sat down on the crumbling foam of what remained of his driver's seat, something poked his bum. Fishing out what impeded his comfort, he produced a wine key corkscrew from his back pocket. He let out a singular snort. Guy placed the bottle in his left hand and the corkscrew in the right, opening the blade and using it to remove the seal. Then he plunged the corkscrew into the cork, twisting until it was secure. With a swift pull, the bottle was open.

"Cheers, Madame Laval," Guy toasted as he took a sip of Château Margaux, enjoying a small taste of the finer things in life.



GLOWING CHARM

Photograph by Miles Brubacher



SIREN SONG

Kayla Bourque

I come from the depths of the deep dark sea
Where the people above are too scared to be
I swim with the sharks and sing in key
To lure a love far away from me
I go to the surface to catch a small glimpse
Of the beautiful lips I long to kiss
The ship comes crashing through the rolling sea
I see my love standing, waiting for me
I wait in silence between the stone
Listening to the echoes and groans
Once my love comes stumbling near
I open my mouth, singing loud and clear
I see their eyes become glazed
They walk aboard in a daze
I sit waiting and singing my song
Hoping this time my love's not wrong
I hear the first crack of the hull below
Creeping toward my love, I stay low
Water seeps into the holes
My love jumps in with no control
I swim to them with hope in my heart
My love is struggling to make waves part
I tell them I'll take them back to my place
I drag them under in a haste
Halfway down I feel a tug on my arm
My love is flailing in alarm
I search their face, frantic and scared
Then hurry to my palace as fast as I dared
While my love follows, floundering behind
I believed they were one of my kind
I feel the grip of my love's will loosen
I scream out in desperate confusion
Not this time, not this one
I hold their face, gentle as sun

SIREN SONG

Illustration by Matthew Morris



With one last kiss, I guide them back
To my palace that shone ivory black
I lay my love upon my bed of shells
Hoping they would wake from their spell
I stay by their side for three days and three nights
Praying my good thoughts will put them right
But on the third day, I lost all hope
My love is gone and I cannot cope
I scream again, my throat seething in pain
I will never see my love again
I lay them on my coral reef
Something beautiful for their eternal sleep
I swim until I can go no more
A mournful song fills my core
My voice floats through the empty space
My love was someone I cannot replace
I sink to the sand below
Lonelier than Calypso

ROGUE'S REBELLION

Photograph by Christine Barker



SEA PLATYPUS

Papier Mâché by Sarah Shimabukuro



FIFTY FEET

Illustration by Alejandro Neira



FIFTY FEET

Gabriella H. Palazzo

The salted winds move violently through the shore pines, numbing Kathy's ears and nose. She stands at the edge of the sheer bluffs, the waters loud and churning below her, her jacket and scarf whipping against her sides, and remembers the birth of her sons.

Her eldest son, her nine-year-old protector, was the quiet and perfect baby everyone had told her didn't exist. Patrick's perfectly-wrinkled baby face filled her heart with roses and sunshine, and the smell of blood and sweat were beautiful miracles with her son in her arms. She held him, held him, and held him. Even later, in her exhausted sleep, she would not let him be taken by the nurses or her husband, Peter, who was then still present and available to her as a friend, lover, and confidant.

As she stands with her toes peeking out and over the bluff's dirt edge, Kathy remembers that Skinner, her seven-year-old, was born on a day much like today—blustery and cold, with the sun shining bright in the sky—but that he was no different. His warm, swaddled, baby body fit just as well in her arms as had Patrick's, though Skinner was a much louder crier than Patrick ever was. Incidentally, Peter was not there at Skinner's birth, much like he wasn't with her today. Some business had called him away then, just as some business called him away now, as it had for the last two years.

She moves away from the edge of the bluff, turning towards the hills behind her. Kathy smells the earth of her childhood, the dry oaks and dewy mustard fields of Northern California, and feels the freezing and wet Pacific Ocean wind hitting her back. Her car, only partially visible from behind a ridge where it sits parked in a dirt lot, is the only evidence of human development in sight. Turning south, she can almost see the land outcropping that is Point Reyes, but it's shrouded in mist, an intangible dream of long-forgotten and carefree summer camp days.

The boys are at riding lessons today. It's a Tuesday and Friday horse-riding "extravaganza," as the Hidden Hills Riding School advertisements had called it. Two years ago, during one of the winter floods, the boys had come home from a grocery store trip with Peter, carrying the school's flyers and begging her to let them go. She remembers how they had opened the door and tumbled in, one after the other, leaving on their raincoats and mud-caked rain boots, and running to plead with her.

"MOMMY, Mommy, please can we go?" Patrick, seven then, put his hands together and jumped around the living room. "I promise I'll be good for the rest of forever." His breaths shortened as he continued to hop and canter through the room. "I want to play with the horsies!"

Skinner quickly copied his older brother, jumping and following at Patrick's

heels. "Me too, Mommy. Go horsies!"

She had laughed, Kathy remembers, watching their antics. As they continued their parade, their shouts increasing in volume with each lap around the room, she looked over at Peter, who had slowly made his way into the kitchen to drop off the grocery bags nestled in each arm.

"What do you think, my love?" she called out.

He looked up, his eyes far away. "What?"

"What do you think about riding lessons for the boys?"

Peter had smiled then, turning his attention to their sons. He looked aware only when with them. "Well, I don't see why not!"

After a round of cheers, which quickly turned into wrestling and squealing, Peter got up, kissed each of the boys on the forehead, and headed towards his office in the back corner of the house.

"Honey, are you going to come out for dinner?" Kathy asked, forcing the smile to stay in her voice.

Peter didn't turn around. "No thanks. I'm going out tonight. Business meeting."

Kathy had said nothing. She instead turned to the boys, bringing them close to her and closing her eyes. "Well, it looks like it's going to be just the three of us tonight."

The boys started their riding lessons in the summer, and, not two weeks after, Peter was gone. He left one early morning for a business trip and never came home.

Kathy used to swim on these days, the Tuesdays and Fridays when the boys had their riding lessons. Especially at first, when Peter's absence was only temporary, to be remedied with time spent apart and maybe even counseling, Kathy would jump into the waters from a lower bluff and swim for miles. The frigid waters filled her wetsuit and quieted her mind. She relished the freedom and wildness of it all, and looked forward to the risk of the fall and thrill of the dive. Standing at the edge of the bluff, her throat tight, Kathy misses the days when she needed the swims, needed them to tire her enough that she stopped thinking, needed them to keep her relaxed and focused on her sons, and not the shadow of her missing husband.

For a while after Peter left, she couldn't sleep, and so she stayed up late into the night painting, reading, cooking, redecorating, and removing any evidence of Peter's presence from the house. Even at the local hotel, where Kathy worked as head concierge, she maintained that same level of energy, with customers complimenting her endless enthusiasm and her employers hinting at a raise. It was the most productive time of her life, and her newfound singleness and increased time with her sons was a gift, a gift after many years of lost love and increasing distance between herself and her husband.

About seven months after Peter left, it was as if a switch was flipped and, overnight, Kathy's energy dwindled to nothing. Her swims became less and less frequent and increasingly difficult. The violent waters no longer danced, welcoming her into their embrace, but jeered and laughed at her, and, like a group of rowdy schoolboys, threw her back and forth amongst themselves, trying to see who could drown her first. The swims stopped steadying her mind around the time Peter's child support

checks stopped coming in the mail, and the fear of her financial situation and the threat of losing the boys began to settle in. She became tired and restless, unable to focus on any one task, and worried constantly. Soon, staying awake was a struggle, and she fought the constant urge to drift into oblivion. All she seemed to be able to do was feed the boys three times a day, take them to school or their lessons, drive to the bluffs, and sleep.

Now, all she does is sleep, which is why, two weeks ago, she lost her job. It was the second time the hotel's general manager had caught her sleeping at the front desk. (She hadn't been fired the first time, only because no customers had seen her or been kept waiting by her slumber.) After they let her go, Kathy went home and fell asleep on the couch, only waking when the boys' school called asking when she would be arriving to pick them up. She had spent the last two weeks sending her resume, pitiful and half-heartedly written, to hiring hospitality-centered locations, all without a response. Each night, as she sat awake and tried to make herself sound more captivating and level-headed, Patrick and Skinner slept in her bed, their slight snores her only comfort.

Pushing their faces, bright and happy and trusting and warm, out of her mind, she goes back closer to the edge. She peers over and looks down, the jagged rocks peeking out from within the purple-blue waters. The smell of seaweed and fish is so strong it stings her nose, making her eyes water. Fifty feet, she had been told her whole life. That was the height of Dilate Drop, over which she now stood. The lower bluffs, Brave Man and Model One, were much lower, easily accessed by hiking trails, and safe to jump off of, as she once had, but this bluff was for the views. When Kathy was a child, tourists used to come here in droves during the summer, taking photos of the coastline and feeling the high winds, and she and her father had set up a stand to sell lemonade. "Fifty cents a glass!" she had called out to lure customers. But the rangers closed the bluff to public use after Joey Shapiro, a local boy only a few years older than Kathy, had fallen over the edge and died while playing tag with some school friends. Now, no one came here except her; the local authorities, as well as the tourists, seemed to have forgotten that the bluffs existed at all. She had meant to bring Patrick and Skinner here for a picnic but never seemed to have the time for it.

Kathy feels old this day, older than her thirty-nine years, but she's not afraid. She only feels tired. She wonders briefly how it would feel to fall over the edge. Would she float down and sink slowly, landing in a white cloud of worriless white? It would look like an accident, and the boys would never know. They would be safe. The nanny, having picked them up from riding lessons, will stay with them, Kathy knows, until nightfall, frantically calling her and then the police, not knowing the reason for the delay. The boys will be turned over to the custody of their grandparents, the ones living a mere fifteen minutes away, whom they have never met. Her boys will be safe, and they will be healthy, and they will be cared for. They will never know she threw herself off. They will never know.

Kathy's mind whirls with the possibilities, the chance to keep them from the hardship that she knows is coming, and the sadness, the thought of never seeing

them again. She shifts forward and looks ahead. Fifty feet. She stands on her tiptoes and stretches her arms out wide, embracing the light of the sun and hearing the whisper of the fields behind her. No tears escape her eyes as she inhales, long and slow. She almost doesn't hear the blood in her ears.

BZZZT. Her phone vibrates in her pants pocket. BZZZT. She sees the home number and answers quickly, her mind frantic.

"Hello?"

"Mommy?" Patrick's slow voice slides through the phone.

"Yes, Muffin, is everything alright?"

"Ms. Jacobs is here."

"Yes, sweetie. I asked her to pick you boys up today so that Mommy can run some errands."

"Okay." He pauses, and Kathy's eyes fill at the thought of his small face frowning with his attempt to understand. "Are you going to come home soon?"

Kathy nods, her hands shaking. "Yes, my love, I am coming home soon."

"You promise?"

The tears come in full force, and Kathy can no longer keep her voice steady. "Yes, I promise, baby."

"Mommy, are you crying?"

"No, sweetie, I just miss you, is all."

"I miss you, too. I love you, Mommy."

"I love you, too, Patrick."

"Mommy?"

Kathy turns away from the edge, making her way back towards her dirt-covered car. "Yes, sweetie?"

"Can you come home soon, before Ms. Jacobs makes dinner? You cook the best."

Kathy laughs, suddenly freed by her son's simple reassurances. "Yes, Mommy is coming home right now. I am coming home to you."



EAST MAUI WATERFALL

Acrylic Painting by Andrew S. Imada



SAGE

Photograph by Jill Reichle



LILAC'S ISOLATION

Harrison Webb

The trouble you see is not what you think

no rotting hours with cold running showers.

I shed to disdain, the guise full of pain

shed not to fear loss or trifling costs

Could it be over, that then it is lost

nor shall I think twice when they ask what is lost

The timing is wrong and nothing feels right,

but hope lingers longer when shedding the nights

An engine that could. Could not often can.

And to slave until hours, before _<3___ing _ the can

A mirror of me, no doubt I can see

the fear's in my head,

take care she says....

LARKADISE

Chandler Franks

I've always thought of someone's experiences, surroundings, or upbringing as analogous to a blueprint. Every place you go, every person you meet, all of the scenery you take in (whether rural or urban) involuntarily characterize your innermost being or—to be more spiritual—your soul. My birth certificate states that I am a Southern California native, but my heart says otherwise. In Colorado's state anthem, "Rocky Mountain High," John Denver sings that he was "born in the summer of his 27th year, coming home to a place he'd never been before." In that case, John, I was born in the winter of my ninth year, coming home to a place I had never been before, either.

Larkspur, Colorado. Population: 203. What a town. The rest of the world likely didn't know who we were, but we loved them anyway. In this town, all four seasons were whimsical clockwork. There wasn't much of a spring out there other than the general store selling baby chicks or sunshine that melted miniature snow showers into the soil. Summers were long, hot and arid due to the altitude of nearly 8,000 feet yet lush from the rain that pelted windowpanes and barn roofs daily. Thunderstorms blew right through faster than a swarm of locusts and graced their farewell with a rainbow. The whistling winds made the green grass and wild daisies sway like a sea of green tidal waves while pine trees sang along simultaneously. The moment you felt the slightest chill in the air, you instantly knew of autumn's arrival. The air was cool and crisp enough to start wearing hoodies at Friday night football games, and your mom made cornbread with chili. Aspen trees turned crimson in color, and a transcending orange hue swept across the surrounding scrub oak. Crunchy leaves fell everywhere, and every child yearned to fall into them. Once they all stripped themselves from the branches of trees and the somber fog drew near, it was time for a winter's solstice. Almost every morning was covered in frost that shined as crystals. Snow caked itself onto wooden dowel fences, roofs, and the backs of cattle like buttercream icing. Horses frolicked around in pastures as frisky as young children, in response to the snippety temperatures. The occasional herd of elk crossed the Frontage Road over near the herd of bison, which is why the speed limit was 20 to 35 miles per hour at the most. And when there's snow and black ice, it's less.

Since Larkspur was much too small to have its own middle or high school, after elementary you had to hitch the bus to a neighboring town. Every morning at 6:05 a.m., you had to be there at the barbed wire fence of Terry's ranch to catch the big yellow tank, or you'd miss it. Essentially, Larkspur kids got to call two places home. About half an hour away, Castle Rock was sweet and charming, mysteriously imperfect. There had been a series of tragic events, which my mom refers to as the moment the "dark cloud" hovered over that sweet place. Dad isn't very spiritual or

religious as it is, but he still blames the devil. Nobody knows how Ann Morrison's brother vanished and left this earth out of nowhere; she won't even confess it to me. Daniel Coletti didn't live to see another year; on New Year's Eve, a drunk driver took his last breath away in a fatal car crash right off of Plum Creek Road.

My own childhood friend, Allie Rae, took her own life in eighth grade when she seemed the most joyful. Last time I recall seeing her sweet, pale face was at a butter braid sale for our choir; little did I know that after the last butter braid sold and we all went home, I'd never see her walking through the halls or singing with us again. The moment I heard that news, regret hit my gut as we had grown further apart at the start of seventh grade. At her funeral, I was in so much shock that I couldn't even cry. My own father wept next to me, and it killed me watching her former boyfriend's reaction to the casket. To seem less inhuman, I attempted shedding tears and still failed. It was a sad day, but there was a beauty in it somehow; not beauty in the fact that death tore the pages of her precious life away, but beauty in the warmth we found in celebrating her together. It was like this sad celebration that pained everyone to attend but brought along an ironic harmony. The togetherness in a small town is all you have and, uniquely, sets it apart from anywhere else in the world.

I'll never forget the day that seemed to hurt me the most of all, though... the day my family told me we'd soon leave. From the moment the words "we have to move" set into my ears, I remained in denial. I couldn't comprehend it. Such basic yet emotionally rattling news. It couldn't be true. It was all just a bad dream. I was just a freshman in high school, and, oddly enough, it felt as if that kind of life was all I'd ever known. And when it started to sink in, it was all a reality I didn't desire to face. No more hearing the distinct sound of snow crunch beneath my feet or the coal train's comforting loud greeting. Farewell to big blue skies, skies that were so clear you could see for an eternity despite the occasional cumulus. Though I didn't care much for cities, I already missed Denver, Mile High Stadium, and a community that swore they bled blue and orange. Goodbye, two lane roads and folks waving as they pass by in pickups. Looking through the ears of a horse atop his noble back and seeing heaven or witnessing the sun's fire slowly transform into the silhouette of the Rockies preceding nightfall. No more cold sunrises, walking through the frigid ice and entering the doors of Castle View High School into the warmth of my best friends.

"Best friends" is an understatement. We were a squad, a "posse," so to speak. Through dumb teenage quarrels and expectable drama, we had each other's back. They were my "sisters from other misters," and, at the time, solely being in their presence brought me more happiness than anything I could probably describe. I'll openly admit we didn't always make the best choices, but, through the giddiness of our rebellion, I momentarily discovered an infinite freedom in the memories we made. To rephrase this, we simply knew how to let our hair down. I don't think I can recall a time that I wasn't cackling until my abdomen went numb or grinning until I couldn't any longer. When my mother reassured me I'd soon "make new friends," it felt unjust; it sounded as though she wanted me to replace a part of my heart, my

family. These gals knew every part of me, and I reciprocally knew them whole.

It was only when I left Colorado that I realized how much the simplicities of living in a rural town affected me. On my fifteenth birthday, we flew out of Denver and into Ontario, California. All I could see were people, cars, and more cars. Gray freeways that overlapped one another, people speeding by that I'd probably never see again. In other states, people often overhype California to be this sunny, booming, and "hip" place, but all I could see was a smoggy rat race within the destruction of nature. It depressed my soul and crushed my spirit; all I yearned for was being within proximity of the Larkspur city limits sign. Though individuals of a booming metropolis like Orange County view small town life as slow, dull, or boring, in reality, it is filled with activities, just different kinds. There is a togetherness, or bond, within a quaint community that a larger population is unable to sustain. At that point, I would've likely done anything just to go home again.

Almost five years later, here I am, a college student, residing in the lovely beach town of San Clemente. Somehow, I went through the motions of it all and proudly blossomed despite my thorns. Though I still have so much to learn about life, the girl I was five years ago is incomparable to the woman I am today. I have had lows, days when I felt sadness; I have had highs, days when I felt unstoppable and strong. Initially, I found it really hard to find any true connections with anybody as quickly or comfortably as I would have in Colorado. I despised the superficiality and materialism that seemed to be the driving force in people's lives down here; names of designer labels rolled off spoiled tongues like a foreign language to me. I had to grow accustomed to a change of pace and culture. Many times, I was mocked and labeled a small town girl. For a hot second, I was an iconic running joke. I had people tell me I talked too slow and frown upon my music taste. Hell, apparently I had an accent. "Hick" or "stoner" were nicknames given to me by some people, based on faulty assumptions, and there were stereotypes that doubted the intelligence of a farm kid. I have had to disprove many assumptions made about me. Fortunately, I am aware of where I stand and am not afraid to challenge the misconceptions of me that come from such close-minded people. Actually, I have learned to be open-minded. Though it took some time, I somehow grasped a love of the tranquility I find swimming in the ocean's salty waves. Despite adjusting to a new lifestyle in Southern California, my love for the mountains, country music, horses, rodeos, and the cowboy way has never vanished. It never will.

Perhaps one day I will return to the wondrous, enamoring state of Colorado to reside. After all, Larkspur was and still is my paradise... "Larkadise," I guess you could call it.



TO AUTUMN'S SPLENDOR

Photograph by Fern Helsel-Metz



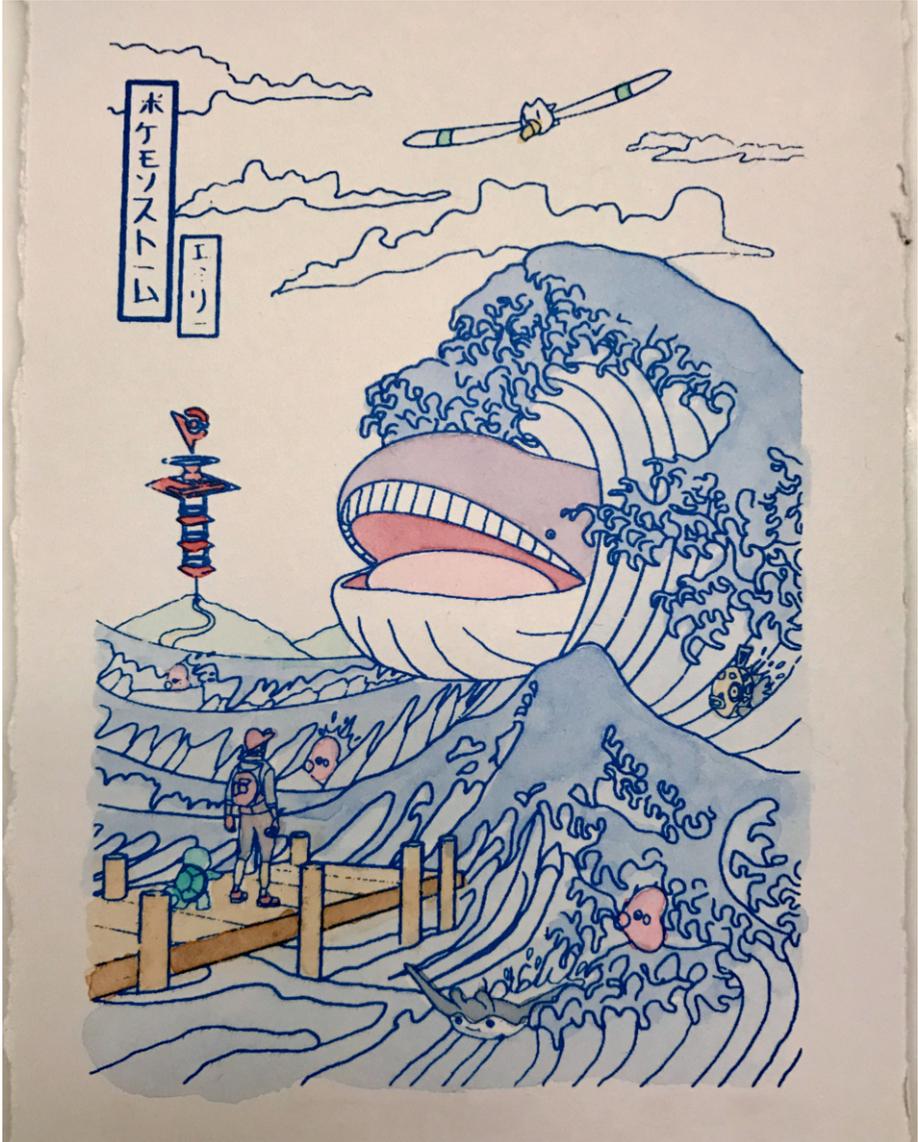
BIRD ON THE WIRE

Digital Drawing by Vishalsinh S. Solanki



POKEMON STORM

Screenprint with Watercolor by Emily Dickinson



STAR-FILLED SCARS

Alexa Ackerman

Gray splattering darkness on the black void
Where different realms exist
Angst or a longing looming voice
Pleading like the rest of our sorrowing kind
Her watery eyes staring up at the moon
I know they'll turn to stone once you look away
To cover up the ache and human wonder
Child, you're better than them
Dancing by the gallows for fun
Living wildly on a foggy night
It's where you can see the black ponies
With sweet nuzzles
They have silky hair and feathery wings
Your wet lashes, purple shadows and crimson lips suit you nicely

BUTTERFLY DAYDREAMS

Gouache Painting by Morgan Wilson (Bobby Sunshine)



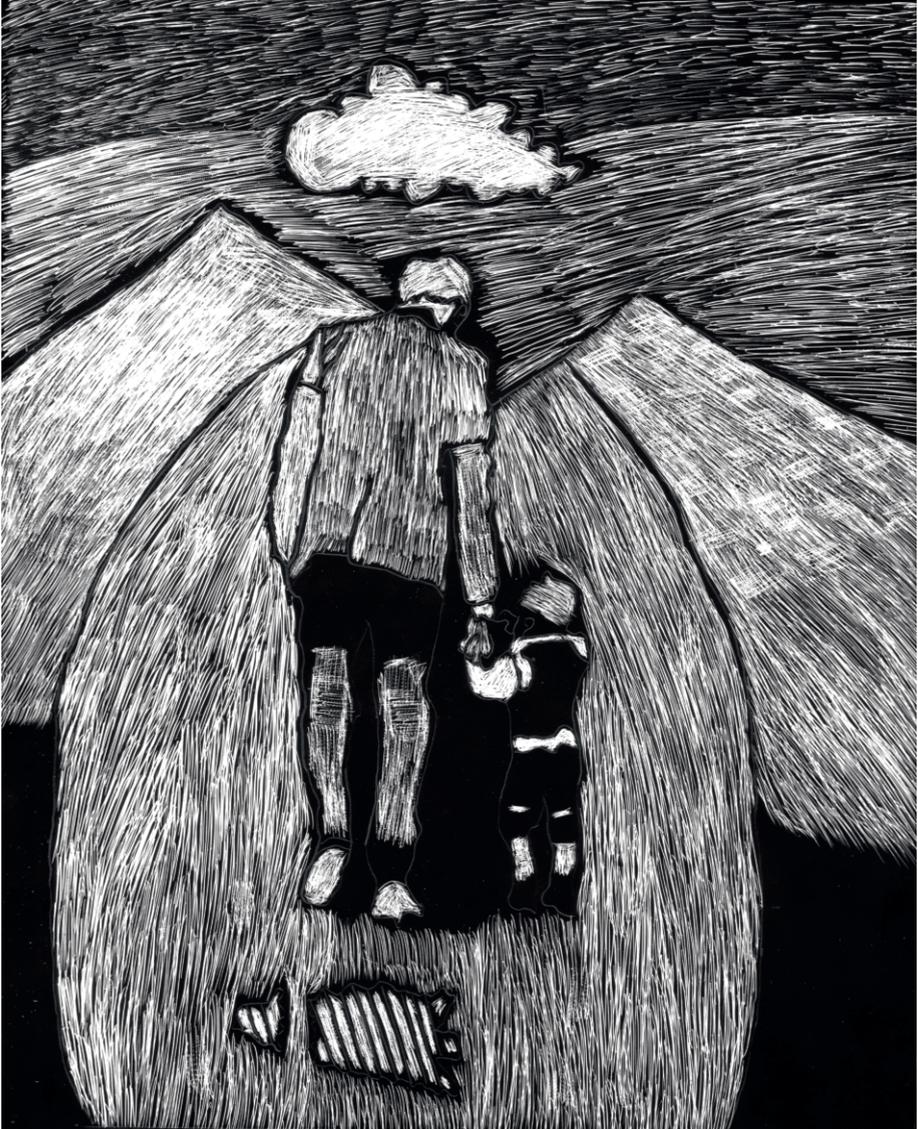
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Photograph by Bryan Mackey



THE ARROWHEAD

Scratchboard Drawing by Vishalsinh S. Solanki



THE MYSTERY OF FATE

Bailey Jia Cooper

The story my mother likes to tell takes place early on a December morning. Two little girls, layered and bundled in quilted jackets, leave in a white van through the unguarded gates of the Huainan Social Welfare Institute and begin a descent down the winding road of the rock quarry. Two tiny bodies sitting next to each other, squished between the driver and the orphanage assistant director, leaving through the gates for the first time since they first entered with a policeman.

The toddlers are not uncomfortable with the proximity of one another. Except for nine months in different wombs and a few days apart, the girls have slept entangled together for warmth and comfort. For 28 months of their lives, their existence has been inseparable. They have been more than identical twins; they have been soul survivors of abandonment.

A mother waits more than an hour beyond the appointed time for her own destiny to change. The “Gotcha Day” moment.

Two men enter, one holding tightly a large clutch wallet, the collector of the red envelope, discreetly concealing a cash exchange of American dollars. The other holding the hand of a bright, red-cheeked, waddling toddler bundled in an orange fleece jacket with a cat face on the side and a bear’s face on the hood framed with the yellow fringe of a lion’s mane. Another discard from one of the hundreds of clothing factories in China. The men greet Aisha, the adoption agency coordinator. There is clear consternation in the dialogue between Aisha and the two men. The scared toddler begins to shake, followed by a wail. The assistant director lifts up the orphan to hand her over to the mother. A photographer readies to capture the change in identity from orphan to daughter.

Through the translation and over the sounds of terrified crying and apologetic explanations, including details of the parting of the cribmates, nicknames for both girls were given: Zhuozhuang and Tiaopi. Aisha laughs and nods approvingly: Healthy and Naughty. The mother asks if she got Healthy or Naughty. She is assured Healthy is the wailer in her arms.

In the middle of the moment, another hand reaches in and attempts to pull her away. It’s a hotel assistant. Aisha screams at her. The hotel worker believes she can comfort the wailing child. It turns out that no one can comfort this toddler. The crying continues.

Fifteen years later, I am still crying. Grieving a loss I still cannot comprehend.

I like to think whoever left me has a good sense of humor. I was a return item to the government’s One-Child Policy, a population control plan designed to limit births in Chinese families. To comply with the plan, some families were forced to give up their children. The Founding Spot, a term popularized in the vernacular of

abandoned children, was in front of a government office building early on Monday morning, September 10, as workers returned from the weekend. I was found, taken to the police station, and then brought to the Social Welfare Center of Huainan, which city locals referred to as the home of the Walking Dead, a government home for orphans, abandoned children, and the elderly. Delivering an abandoned infant was a typical routine for the police. After an examination, the doctor at the orphanage declared my birthday September 8, and so it has been for the last seventeen years. The next day I appeared in the local newspaper as a “Female found yesterday; born on 8 September 2002.” I believe the doctors assigned eight for my birthday because it is considered a lucky number in the Chinese culture. And I have been lucky.

I lived in the Welfare Center for two years and four months. I was given the name Huai Jiarui: Huai for the city, Jia for family, and Rui for intelligent. On December 20, 2004, I was adopted but kept my name and assigned birth date. Eleven days later, on New Year’s Eve, my mother brought me to a small house two blocks from the beach in Santa Barbara, where my life started again. The adoption chapter of my story starts with my mother’s narrative of our first hours and days together coupled with known processes of the orphanages. The start of my life story is not known, a mystery that may never be solved.

If by some astronomically small chance I find my biological parents and have some of life’s early mystery solved, I will still be me. I will still love my adoptive parents and my dog. I will still work hard in school. And I will still be insatiably curious. Being adopted has made me the way I am. If I had not been adopted, I would not be planning a future of college and graduate school. I would forever be living the effects of the One-Child Policy. I was given a second chance that most abandoned during a severe policy never had.

Abandoning me was maybe the greatest sacrifice and act of love my biological parents could ever do. The One-Child Policy was a social experiment that shaped, traumatized, and defined a Chinese generation of parents and children. Chinese culture always had a preference for males, who were the social security for elderly parents. Girls were never valued as much and even less so when a choice for gender was possible. Female infanticide was known before the policy but became more common after it was instituted. The high number of aborted females led the government to revise the ruling to no longer allow abortions after six weeks of pregnancy if the sex was known. Women known to be having a second child could be picked up by local officials and forced to have abortions and sterilizations. A softening of the policy in the countryside started allowing families to have a second child if the first was a girl, in hopes it would be a boy.

The Hague International Adoption statistics recorded over 22,000 children being adopted from China in 2004, the highest year to date for international adoptions from China. Although it provided a sliver of chance and luck for some children compared to the thousands left behind in multiple country and city orphanages in a population of over 1 billion, the rate of international adoptions from China dropped

precipitously after 2004.

Only my biological parents know why abandoning me seemed to be the best option for me to live. It may also be their wound that never heals, a grieving comparable to mine. But I know how lucky I am to have survived. Lucky that my paperwork was sent to the Beijing office of Adoption Affairs in 2004.

When the probability and odds of bad government policies seem unlucky, fate can seem cruel. Ascribing numbers and names for chances of luck may be the only way to try and control the elusiveness of luck. A lot of people tried to ensure I had luck from birth to abandonment to birthdate to my name.

When I was 10, my mother and I returned to China on a Roots Tour. The Chinese government invites any and all adoptees back to China on an “on-the-house” tour. We had 10 days of a Chinese-style Disneyland: the best of culture, countryside, and food. How could one miss the oddity of a government that had imposed a harsh policy attempting to leave a lasting impression and hoping people would wonder why anyone would want to leave the country?

The tour included a meeting in the Beijing Office of Adoption Affairs. The mystery of matching the children to adoptive parents led to rumored speculations within the adoption community that ran from far-fetched face matching to birthdate numerology. No one knew how the process was done. In the office we saw hundreds of files on shelves no more organized than a teenager’s room. The mystery of the matching process looked like it amounted to nothing more than a file on a clerk’s desk and a stamp of approval.

The parents on the tour gathered around the Beijing adoption official, peppering her with questions about the process. I remember her as a tall, beautiful woman in a sophisticated black suit. An interpreter translated the questions and answers back and forth from English and Chinese. While the other children tired of the conversation and went off to play, I stayed with my mother. The question-and-answer period eventually ended. The woman went over to a large window that looked out over the vastness of Beijing. My mother and I also went over to the window for the view. My mother, who had not asked a question of the official, finally said aloud, “Is there really nothing more to the matching than paperwork?” The adoption official calmly answered in perfect English, without taking her eyes away from the Beijing view, “Fate.”



SPRINT

Caméllia Taleghani

I can close my eyes and be there again.
Apple, blueberries, tangerine.
Traffic lights.
Noise pollution.
The car next to us has a puppy.
In the sweetness of the air, I see you.
Me next to you.
Sun can be so bright sometimes.
Music is not loud enough.
I still can hear myself.
Time is fleeting.
I am running.
Trying to catch the fleeting time.
Trying to catch the stolen time.
Just like Dali's *Persistence of Memory*.
Let me depict you a dream
A dream where time has no power and is not invited in my dreams.
The clocks are melting away.
Thus, I still stand here
Embracing the moment
As if tomorrow did not exist.



BIOS

WALL 2020 STAFF BIOS



Gabriella H. Palazzo
Editor-in-Chief

Gabriella is a second-year college student, massage therapist, avid reader, and serious lover of red editing pens. She is currently undecided in terms of long-term educational majors, but loves learning and is greatly enjoying her experience at Saddleback. She is grateful to have been given the opportunity to work on WALL 2020 and is looking forward to the future.



Gina Victoria Shaffer
Faculty Advisor

Gina teaches composition, creative writing, and literature as a professor of English at Saddleback College. She previously served on the faculty of UCLA Writing Programs. Before becoming an educator, she worked as a newspaper reporter, magazine editor, and theater critic. A published playwright whose works have been staged throughout Southern California and in New York, she earned her Ph.D. in English at UC Irvine. She is perpetually inspired by the creativity and innovation of the students who staff WALL and of those who contribute their words and images to it.



Evangeline Brennan
Fiction Editor/ Copy Editor

Evangeline is an English major with plans to work for a publishing company upon her graduation from UCI. In her spare time, she devotes far too little attention to the book that she's been dreaming about writing since she was in the seventh grade. Instead, she hopes to help the writers of the world accomplish the dream that she herself is too afraid to reach for. To contact for proofreading or copy editing, please email evangeline_brennan@yahoo.com



Lydie M. Denier
Fiction Editor

Lydie is an accomplished actress, demonstrating her versatility with appearances in over forty television series and feature films. She is best known as Yasmine Bernoudi on *General Hospital*, Jane on *Tarzan*, the television series, and Nicole on the series *Acapulco Heat*. On stage, she portrayed the title role of the iconic movie star Greta Garbo. Lydie has traveled far from the countryside in France where she grew up watching old American movies on television while dreaming of becoming an actress. Her journeys have taken her to exotic lands and her experiences have been diverse. Now, as she enters this next stage of her life as more of a writer than an actress, she embraces it with all the *joie de vivre* for which the French are famous. Lydie currently lives in beautiful Laguna Beach, California, where, as an excellent chef, she loves to cook when she is not writing or acting.

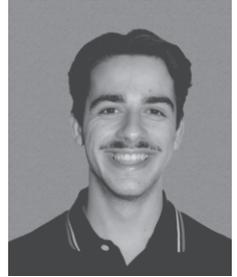
Aubrie Fuster
Fiction Editor

Aubrie is planning to transfer to UC Davis to study veterinary science, loves the arts, and enjoyed the opportunity to work with the WALL 2020 team. She plans to write until there aren't any ideas left to write, and then she'll write garbage.



Dylan Robinson
Personal Narrative Editor/ Copy Editor

Dylan is looking to grit his teeth against the world of journalism, or what remains of it. Editor-in-chief of the Lariat, the Saddleback newspaper, for the 2020 spring semester, studying to become a writer for both news outfits and personal literature. Lover of all things digitized in a computer game or the workings behind a cinema camera. Discussing art is his favorite thing. Right by his side is his girlfriend, Mon, who helps to inspire his work and effort in writing. Dylan hopes to then write to the esteemed caliber of the video essayists he looks up to today. That's it. Only that, not even Aldous Huxley.



Tania Y. Solano Cervantes
Personal Narrative Editor/ Copy Editor

Tania is a proud undocumented DACA student from Southern California. She received her Associate of Arts degrees in Political Science and Liberal Studies at Saddleback College and will be transferring to UCLA in Fall 2020 to study American politics, economics, and literature. Aside from her academics, she jams out to music 24/7, laughs out loud to stand up comedy and satire, enjoys having breakfast food for dinner, and is an expert in daydreaming. She is passionate about social justice and equity and hopes to continue to serve her community in the future.



Beau Hein
Poetry Editor

Beau is currently studying to transfer with an Associate of Arts degree in Political Science and was very happy to be given an opportunity to work as part of the WALL staff for this year. Among many experiences from Saddleback, Beau would recommend engaging in the WALL journal and backstage theatre production for those hoping to try something fun and different. They also would like to thank the WALL team and Professor Shaffer for a wonderful collaboration! Happy reading, folks!





Noosha Golab

Graphic Designer/ Layout Editor

Noosha moved to the United States to get her education as a jewelry designer. However, she developed a passion for the art of graphic design and illustration. As she cultivated skills in these fields, she decided to take some graphics courses at Saddleback College. In her free time, she loves drawing abstract characters and shapes with a lot of influence from famous twentieth century artists such as Picasso.



Matthew Morris

Graphic Designer/ Layout Editor

Matthew is a self-taught fine artist who is working toward an associate's degree in illustration as well as a Certificate in Graphic Design at Saddleback College. He loves all things art and design. Matthew is preparing to transfer to an art program in 2021 to complete his bachelor's degree. While designing for WALL, he discovered a passion for typography and layout.



Vishalsinh S. Solanki

Graphic Designer/ Layout Editor

Vishalsinh is currently finishing a Certificate in Graphic Design & Graphic Communication at Saddleback College. Art has always been his passion. Vishalsinh, who plans to work as a freelance graphic designer, is currently busy creating a beautiful artwork portfolio. His work and portfolio can be viewed at vishalssolanki.wordpress.com



Fern Helsel-Metz

Photography Editor

Fern is passionately pursuing her Associate in Arts degree in Photography at Saddleback College, seeking to explore her artistic side after having previously been a paralegal and demonstrative evidence specialist. She enjoys sharing the behind-the-scenes story of getting "the photo" as much as the patience, planning, and persistence that goes into actually getting the desired photograph. Multiple photographs of hers have been accepted and her work has placed 2nd at the Orange County Fair. Fern was a primary photographic contributor to the 2020 Bloom Exhibition at Saddleback College and her images have received multiple ribbons from the South County Photo Club.

Brett Cervantes

Art Editor

Brett is majoring in finance and accounting as well as business administration. His career goals are to start his own clothing company and other businesses. Although he has never been much of a writer, other than a journal he kept when he was younger, after spending a semester in a creative writing class, Brett has realized that writing is not just about printing words to illustrate a story. Writing is an art that allows one to illustrate not just stories but emotion and character. Instagram: [brett_cervantes7](#)



Harrison Webb

Art Editor

Harrison is currently pursuing his dreams to be a menswear designer and will be attending the Fashion Institute of Technology for the foreseeable future....



Isabella Arnett

Literary Associate

Isabella, who served as a Personal Narrative Editor for the 2019 issue of WALL Literary Journal, is a self-proclaimed coffee and waffle connoisseur who daydreams about a job in editing while studying to be a creative writing professor. Next to teaching, reading, and writing, she is also passionate about all things human: religion, politics, sex, education, and society. Traveling makes her happy, and she can't wait to experience the world through a different cultural lens. She starts classes in English literature at Cal State Long Beach in Fall 2020.



Cy Hill

Literary Associate

Cy, who served as a Fiction Editor for the 2018 issue of WALL Literary Journal, recently changed his major to microbiology but kept his minor in astronomy. He enjoys things small and large.



WALL 2020 Contributor Bios

Alexa Ackerman is a young aspiring writer majoring in child psychology. A member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, she has been writing stories and poems since early childhood. Her passions also include drawing and ballet.

Christine Barker is a student of photography who dreams of one day shooting photo stories for National Geographic. You can find her work at <https://christinebarkerphotography.blog/>

Kayla Bourque, who is majoring in English, hopes to eventually become a successful writer. The poem “Siren Song” was inspired by her love of Greek mythology and the misinterpretation of monsters.

Miles Brubacher is currently working towards completion of his Associate of Science degree in Cinema-Television-Radio at Saddleback College. He holds a job as Animatic Editor for Trilogy Animation Group. In the past year, photography has become a hobby that he hopes to develop into a side profession, with portraits as his focus. Miles likes to bring his camera wherever he goes, capturing the people and things he sees.

Samantha Buck, now in her second year at Saddleback, plans to transfer to a four-year institution to study art and pursue a career in illustration. She has previously shown her art at the OC Fair and is excited to have an illustration published for the first time. You can keep up with her at @samanthachaseart on Instagram.

Nicolette Clark plans on transferring to California State University, Long Beach, to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree with an emphasis in ceramics. Although clay will always be her first love, she is currently exploring 2-D mediums, including oil paint and charcoal.

Bailey Jia Cooper, a junior in high school in the Capistrano District, has been taking writing classes at Saddleback College, including Professor Cooper’s English 1A class and Professor Myhren’s Creative Writing course. She plans to pursue neuroscience and classical studies.

Emily Dickinson will be transferring to Laguna College of Art and Design for Illustration in Fall 2020. She has participated in Saddleback’s “How Very” online art exhibition as well as creating music for poetry for the 2018 edition of WALL. As a fellow Pokémon player, she’s gotta catch ‘em all in addition to creating artwork to inspire others to dream big. Artist Instagram: emilayydraws

Brianna Fernstrom is completing her general education at Saddleback College and plans to obtain a B.A. degree in interior design at the Interior Design Institute. Her illustration for WALL is the first art piece she has ever created. She is working on publishing more of her artwork.

Charles (Harry) Foster After five years in the Marine Corps, Harry left active service to pursue a career as a college professor in composition or literature. He served as editor-in-chief of the 2019 edition of WALL Literary Journal and earned a degree in English at Saddleback College. Harry plans to continue his studies by double-majoring in English and Creative Writing at Columbia University this Fall while also trying to kick his gummy bear addiction.

Chandler Franks, a student-athlete who studies/swims at Saddleback College, plans on attending the nursing program with hopes to ultimately become a nurse practitioner or attend medical school down the line. Aside from her avid interest in health sciences, Chandler has held a passion for writing since a child. She won her elementary school's contest for an essay on "Why Mom Deserves a Diamond" and has written countless stories/poems ever since, with dreams to potentially publish them. Writing has remained a great outlet for her desire to speak to the hearts of others in the most sincere expression of her own.

Alison Gervacio is currently studying in the English Creative Writing program at Sonoma State University. Before this, she was a full-time student at Saddleback, where she obtained an Associate in Arts for Transfer degree in English Literature and a caffeine addiction. She drinks 30 ounces of Strawberry Açai Refreshers once every week (sometimes even twice a week). She had 21 units her last semester at Saddleback. Can you really blame her?

Edward J. Hendries (aka Jake Hendries) is an English major preparing to transfer to one of the UC campuses in Fall 2020. He hopes to pursue more opportunities to share his writing in the future. When he's not writing, he's thinking about writing.

Huiye, who is studying illustration at Saddleback College, hopes to branch out as a comic book designer and plant a sizable handprint on the industry. This is his first publication. Huiye spent much of his time in quarantine exploring the country and meeting people from all walks of life in search of ideas for new characters and locations. IG: artbyhuiye Twitter: AHuiye

Ann Hymes has authored numerous essays that have been published in The Christian Science Monitor Home Forum page. Her novel, *Shadow of Whimsy: A Cape Cod Love Story*, was published recently by Secant Publishing, and the sequel, *Love & Lies: A Secret Memoir*, was released in May 2020. Ann can be reached at whimsytowers@gmail.com

Andrew S. Imada taught and consulted as an organizational psychologist and ergonomist for more than 40 years. Following in the footsteps of his Maui relatives who started painting later in life, Andrew began taking painting lessons four years ago. He is grateful for the teachers and role models who inspired and encouraged him.

Romain Lenormand, who lived in France until 2013, is currently working towards a certificate in graphic design at Saddleback College. As he prepares for a career in graphic design, he enjoys producing digital art and drawing character illustrations.

Kelsey Louis will be graduating from Saddleback College with Associate in Arts for Transfer degrees in English, Liberal Arts Studies, and Communications. She plans to transfer to a UC campus in Spring 2021. The poem “You” in this edition of WALL is her first publication. Kelsey enjoys reading and writing poetry as well as attending different poetry clubs because she loves constant learning and interactions with creative individuals.

Bryan Mackey is a street photographer who has an affinity for the old days of film. Unrelated to his photography, Bryan is an economics major at Cal State Northridge and attended Saddleback for a number of years while working towards his transfer degree. Although he posts his work to his Instagram account @harolds_photography, “Eye of the Beholder,” featured in this edition of WALL, is his first publication.

Toni Melgar completed her study in early childhood education, earning her associate degree in 2019. Being a mom of three, she has plenty of photography practice. Toni sees beauty in all things, especially nature.

Blake Montana is an English major who cannot see a future where he is not writing. He plans to become a published author. <https://www.whatapleasure.org/>

Tara Nadeau took second place in her second grade spelling bee.

Alejandro Neira graduated from Saddleback College in 2020, obtaining his Associate in Science degree in Graphic Design. He previously studied abroad, obtaining a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering in Peru. His main goal is to obtain a master’s degree in industrial design. Moving out of his country and exploring his design abilities over the last few years have given him the opportunity to grow as a designer. His Instagram account is @aleksneira

Khang Nguyen is a multimedia artist who enjoys skateboarding, photography, memes, and going to live shows. Instagram: @olliedamus

Robert Pamer is an English Literature major who will be attending California State University, Dominguez Hills, in Fall 2020. When he isn’t reading twentieth century English or American literature, Robert can be found listening to doo wop groups or old recordings of forgotten bands. No career goals, but he is excited to continue writing while living in Los Angeles.

Teri Pfeffer Perlstein graduated with a B.A. in Studio Art (drawing and painting) from the University of New Mexico and later earned a teaching credential from the same college. She taught for eight years after earning additional credentials in special education and math at California State University, Long Beach. Teri also earned an MBA in Information Systems at Pace University in New York. Retired since January 2019, she is taking classes toward an Associate in Arts degree and potentially an MFA in Photography. Teri's work has been displayed in several exhibitions in such venues as the Triton Museum of Art, The Museum of Los Gatos, the Silvermine Gallery in Norwalk, Connecticut, and the Westport Gallery in Westport, Connecticut. terisgallery.shutterfly.com FB/INST: EnvisagePhotographybyTeri Email: teri@ienvisage.com

Jill Reichle is currently working toward an Associate in Arts degree in Photography in May 2021. Earlier in her life, she worked as an environmental engineer cleaning up soil and groundwater sites. She then embarked on the adventures of parenting. After successfully raising her two boys to adulthood, she decided to do something different and moved over to the creative world.

Nathan Richmond has not declared a major and is a writer by hobby with a strong interest in literature, journalism, environmentalism, and history. Drawing inspiration from a diverse array of sources, he is fascinated with all things surreal, abstract, and fantastical.

Callie Riel After graduating from high school, Callie spent four years in Illinois earning a B.A. in Asian Studies before returning to Southern California to pursue law enforcement. While fulfilling the prerequisites to become a physician's assistant, she works as a doctor's assistant in a local emergency room. In her free time, she enjoys listening to audio books, training for an upcoming Spartan Race, and forcing her dog to cuddle.

Ellen Rose A graduate of UCLA and the Otis Parsons Art Institute in Los Angeles, Ellen describes herself as the oldest student in Saddleback College's Fine Arts program. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions throughout Southern California, including the Riverside College Art Show, Festival of the Arts in Laguna Beach, the Irvine Fine Arts Center, and the Bayside Gallery in Newport Beach. Her painting "Good Habits" received a Second Place Award in the Pacific Western Division of the Community College Humanities Association, a national literary magazine competition. "The Embrace" was featured in the 2015 edition of WALL. "Superwoman," the third of her paintings to be featured in WALL, was awarded Best in Show in the 2017 Saddleback College Student Art Exhibit juried competition. Her work can be viewed at <https://ellenroseart.weebly.com/>

Yasmeen Sheik is attending UCLA this Fall to study English. With a passion for reading and writing, she hopes to become an editor in the future. In her spare time, she likes to play the flute and piccolo... almost as much as she likes writing.

Sarah Shimabukuro is currently studying illustration and animation at Saddleback College with aspirations to transfer to California State University, Long Beach, or Fullerton. She is working towards a Studio Arts transfer degree. Her work has been displayed in the gallery on campus and the 2019 issue of WALL Literary Journal. In her spare time, she loves working with animals and doing graphic illustration for clients as well as for her own enjoyment.

Alyssa Shishkov will be transferring in the Fall to pursue a career in cognitive science researching mental disabilities. Her work was featured in the 2018 edition of WALL Literary Journal. Reading and writing poetry has remained a beloved pastime. She is an avid animal lover and hopes that writing will help her grapple with the fact that cats are not permitted in university dorms.

Caméllia Taleghani who uses the pen name Océanne, grew up in the French Riviera with her Persian family. She considers herself as someone with a hybrid identity and welcomes the best of the three cultures that have shaped her personality. Camellia feels nostalgia when she recalls discovering, at the age of 16, her favorite song, "Hotel California" by the Eagles, playing from a jukebox in Café de Flore in Nice, and instantly falling in love with the idea of journeying across the Pacific Ocean and basking under tall swaying palm trees. She graduated from California State University, Fullerton, with a B.A. in French Literature and is now studying at Saddleback College to pursue a career as a clinical medical assistant. In her free time, she volunteers at the Down Syndrome Foundation, paints conceptual art, writes poems, and sees beauty in the unseen.

Trevor Thrasher is presently an English student studying at California State University, Fullerton. It was at Saddleback College where he took a creative writing course with Professor Suki Fisher, who greatly inspired him to explore and pursue writing. Trevor continues to write and vows to do so until he forgets the English language or the arthritis in his right hand becomes too unbearable.

Tim Tran a copywriter who previously worked in film and television, is back in school pursuing a degree in English Literature. He was born in Westminster, CA and grew up between Santa Ana and Irvine. Tim Tran (714) 928-6092 timothydtran@yahoo.com

Morgan Wilson (aka Bobby Sunshine) is a mixed media artist and the owner/operator of Sad Flower Studios. "I express myself in a way that a lot of people don't like because they are afraid to be labeled. I create art that is flamboyant, which varies from dark subjects to colorful and abstract. My message is to tell people that it's okay to be yourself and express yourself in any way you please. Just be you." Sadflowerstudios.com @Sadflowerstudios @mrbobbysunshine

Celia Wu is a representational artist whose work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Sacred Grounds in San Pedro, at Taiwan Center in San Diego, and in libraries of Mission Viejo and Laguna Niguel. This year, her watercolor paintings were selected for the Annual Member Show of the National Watercolor Society and for publication in Splash 21. Her art has also won Best in Show from the Saddleback Art League's Spring Reflections Juried All Media Art Show and the President's Award from the Saddleback College Annual Student Juried Show in 2019. Celia has a vision to show viewers a different world by allowing them to see through her eyes for a brief moment as her distinctive and particular vantage point reflects her view of the whole. saddlebackartleague.com or at Facebook under Art By Celia Wu.

Mandana Yaghini is currently studying graphic design at Saddleback College. Although she earned a Bachelor of Law degree in Iran, she has always been passionate about art and design. Mandana has won several awards, including second place in the 2020 national T-Shirt competition sponsored by the Print and Graphics Scholarship Foundation. A logo she designed received an honorable mention in a 2020 national student contest sponsored by the Graphic Communications Workforce Coalition. Mandana is happy to follow her dreams.

Savannah Young is currently working towards an associate degree at Saddleback College and hopes to transfer to UCLA to complete a major in art. In recent years, her artwork has been featured in the AIAOC 10th Annual Artwalk where her sculpture “Sometimes, You Gotta Do It Yourself” earned an honor award as well as the Orange County Fair where her painting “Il Mercato” attained a blue ribbon. Today, Savannah enjoys teaching oil painting classes at Von Lortz Sidestreet Gallery in San Clemente and interacting with the people she meets there.

TAKE IT TO THE WALL

Submissions for the 2021 edition of WALL Literary Journal are being accepted through January 25, 2021. Each work must be an original, unpublished piece submitted by a Saddleback College student enrolled Spring 2020, Summer 2020, Fall 2020, or Spring 2021. For a submission form and guidelines, please go to the WALL Literary Journal website at www.wallliteraryjournal.org

Students who submit their work will receive a confirmation via email. Members of the WALL staff read and review each work based on criteria devised for each genre (fiction, poetry, personal narrative, and art). Selections are typically completed by mid-April. Students will be notified by the staff on whether their work has been chosen to be featured in the 2021 edition.

In October, contributing writers and artists share their work with the campus community through a public reading at Saddleback College. Writers read either their entire work or excerpts from it. Artists discuss the creative process behind their work. Some of the pieces are presented in an oral interpretation by students in the Speech Department.

WALL Literary Journal has been honored with First Place awards in nationwide literary magazine competitions since 2012. Recognition for the publication includes Most Outstanding Community College Literary-Art Magazine for the 2017 and 2018 issues from the American Scholastic Press Association. The Community College Humanities Association honored the 2017 edition of WALL with a 1st Place Award in the Pacific Western Division.

JOIN US ON OUR JOURNEY

If you are interested in being involved hands on in producing WALL, enroll in ENGLISH 160: Literary Magazine, a 3-unit class that focuses on creating our award-winning literary journal. Staff members are responsible for reviewing and selecting student submissions; layout and design; copy editing and proofing; and publicity. Students on staff have the opportunity to have one of their own pieces published in the magazine. We seek students in English, Creative Writing, Journalism, Art, Photography, and Graphic Design, but the class is open to all students and no experience is necessary. For further details about the class, which is held every Spring, please contact Professor Gina Shaffer by phone at (949) 582-4544 or via email at gshaffer@saddleback.edu. You may also check for information on the WALL websites at

www.saddleback.edu/la/Wall and www.wallliteraryjournal.org

Photo and Design by Leanne Black

