

**WALL**

LITERARY JOURNAL

**2019**



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First Edition

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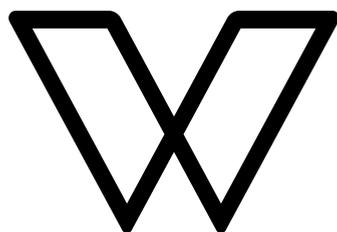
WALL is a student-produced literary journal of Saddleback College. All entries were submitted by students of Saddleback College. Submissions to WALL are reviewed, selected, and edited by the students on the journal staff.

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.

To submit your work for the 2020 edition of WALL,

please see the guidelines for submission at

[www.saddleback.edu/la/wall](http://www.saddleback.edu/la/wall). The deadline is January 25, 2020.



# 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.

## WALL 2019 STAFF

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Four simple letters placed next to each other: L-I-F-E. So simple and yet so complex, embodying all that we experience in the unpredictable span of years from birth to death. On the cover of this year's WALL Literary Journal, Devin Lillemon's inventive and evocative artwork offers a sly commentary on how we view life through a lens: as a series of disconnected moments, as disembodied images unspooling from our cameras and social media filters. While revealing the modern-day compulsion to narrate life as it happens, the cover art also invites readers and viewers to peer through the lens of the writers and artists sharing their distinctive visions in the pages of WALL.

These visions have come to life and light through the dedicated teamwork of WALL's staff, a group of students committed to excellence and inspired by the energetic leadership of their editor-in-chief, Charles H.M. Foster. For the past 19 years, this creative enterprise has been supported by faculty, administrators, and staff throughout the district and campus. The WALL staff and I would like to thank 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, and Martha Uriarte. We also are 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, and Shellie Ochi of the English Department; Marina Aminy, Dean of Online Education & Learning Resources; Khaver Akhter, and Cynthia Luher of the Liberal Arts Division; Professors Karen Taylor, Christopher Clafin, and Louis Bispo of the Graphics Department; Professor Larry Radden of the Speech Department; Professor Ariel Alexander of the Music Department; Barbara Holmes, Jim Langford, Giziel Leftwich, and Matt Brodet of the Division of Fine Arts and Media Technology; 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 unveils its 19th edition, please join us in celebrating the life of the mind and the art of the soul. The works within this issue are provocative and powerful, challenging us to question the nature of life and reality, to unravel the truths and illusions lurking in the shadows.

Gina Victoria Shaffer  
Faculty Advisor  
WALL 2019

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Hyperreality, a term first coined by French sociologist, poet, and philosopher Jean Baudrillard, describes the ambiguous place where reality ends and the imaginary begins. Or, as the rock band Queen put it in their famous song "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?"

Hyperreality as it applies to the written works and visual art in WALL 2019 invites the reader to not only enjoy the submissions on a surface level but to also evaluate and reflect on the meanings of each piece against the backdrop of the reader's own life and experiences. Can the lessons from events of the stories, poems, and visual artwork be applicable in real life? Are the individual codes and rules that we live by a reflection of how reality actually is or how we wish it to be? In an era of fake news and social media, trying to decipher what is real and what isn't real has become increasingly difficult. Sometimes the truth sounds like fiction. Sometimes fiction sounds like the truth. Nevertheless, from the cover to the last poem, the hyperreality in the pages of this year's WALL is joyful to experience.

The process of putting WALL together is simple in explanation, yet was equal parts exciting and frustrating. The excitement is there from the start as a new team is assembled to embark on a thrilling journey. Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise, the fictional commander on Star Trek, was wrong in saying that space is the final frontier. I've come to believe that the human imagination is something that begs to be explored and yet people may never truly grasp its hidden depths. The frustrating part comes from not being able to put all the submissions that we receive into WALL. Some pieces are too long. Some pieces are more easily understood than others. And some simply don't fit in with the theme that emerges from the collection of work selected by the staff. So, we're forced to encourage many talented writers and artists to resubmit next year. The process itself starts with developing criteria and rubrics to evaluate each individual submission. From there, the staff did an excellent job of assessing how well a piece brought out emotion in the reader, the uniqueness in style of the contributor, and whether or not the reader would be able to understand the message of the work.

Here at the end of the journey, the 2019 edition of WALL Literary Journal is a success. It is a success because of all the hard work invested into it by both the editorial staff and the design staff. It is a success because of the evocative, intelligent, and creative work that we've received from contributors. It is a success due to the experience and wisdom of its faculty advisor, Dr. Gina Shaffer, and also because Saddleback College as a whole endorses the journal as a prominent expression of its students' voices. So, from both myself and the 2019 WALL staff, thank you.

Charles H.M. Foster  
Editor-in-Chief  
WALL 2019

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## O N T H E C O V E R

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Design by Marville Uy using **LIFE**, a relief print by Devin Lillemon made by carving into a linoleum plate

# THE ROSE

Shea Nicolai

I was not born  
in paleness or in beauty—  
I was born among thorns  
scaly, severed,  
Knock-kneed and wild-eyed  
folding and curling  
    like a burning piece of newspaper  
And, rising from the ashes,  
    Alive, dead, then alive again  
    with flames as my gown  
    and a wreath of brambles for my crown  
I unfurl,  
in all my unearthly elegance.

# PAPERBARK

Sarah Ellingson



# SOUTH COUNTY DREAMING

Chris Dunshee

It's raining again. The kind of rain that washes the world away. All of my cares and worries running away in rivulets like the raindrops on my window. Running down into an unseen world. Whenever this happens, I cannot help but be transported back in time to a world that I cannot bring myself to forget.

It is another cold night down here. I pull my jacket closer around me as I get out of my car, wind whipping the hood back off my head. With it, the scent of salt carries across the parking lot. No surprise there since I find myself down in Dana Point Harbor. I look up to the sky to see grey clouds rolling in, blocking out the night sky; the forecast was calling for rain. Another gust of wind rolls through, swaying the tree branches above my head and making me wish for a thicker jacket as its chill cuts through.

Shivering, I make my way through the gate, fumbling with the key in my numb hands. It's winter here, so I am always cold. I run down the dock as the first raindrops begin to fall. I'm not that far away and then I'll be able to get inside. Doing my usual counting: one, two, three. The third dock on the right and then down five slips to a white and blue sailboat. It's not much to look at, only about six feet wide and twenty feet long. A narrow and sleek racer, if it worked. But for now, it's home. I climb across the gunwale and drop down inside the cabin, replacing the hard plastic roof cover just in time as the rain really begins to come down. Inside is nothing but darkness, the batteries on the boat having long since run dry. The only source of light is the flashlight on my phone, which I use to make my way over to the bunk that has my sleeping bag and climb inside. It may not be much, but it's better than being outside. Feeling warm once more, I spend my night scrolling through Facebook and listening to the rain fall all around me as the waves rock the boat back and forth. Eventually, I drift off to sleep.

A mist hung in the air the following week. That's what stands out to me on this particular day. We're parked over at the ARCO gas station just off the 5 Freeway in San Clemente panhandling for spare change.

"Hey, sorry to bother you," I say to a stranger. "Do you think you might be able to spare some change to help us get some gas?"

The money isn't just for gas; we would like to get a bite to eat and a few packs of

smokes. People are far more willing to help you if they think it's not something they would consider bad.

This is my life right now though. Every day the same thing. Go to the gas station, panhandle for a bit of cash, hope the cops don't show up, and then drive off somewhere else to do who knows what.

"Sorry, I don't have any change," the stranger says.

"Ok, thanks anyways," I reply. I wander back over to my car where Krash and Shua are hanging out. They are currently splitting a cigarette between them. I grab the pack out of the car and open it up. Only three left for the day. "All right, guys, how much have we gotten so far?"

They both pull out their pockets and pile up the coins and bills on the trunk. It totalled up to just under eight dollars so far.

"Let's take another lap," I say. "If we can get a bit more, we'll be able to hit up McDonald's."

"Sounds good," Krash says. "Let's go."

I head back over to the pumps, where a few new cars have pulled up. The first one I see is a black Mercedes. An older gentleman gets out of the car and looks over as I approach him. "Hey, sorry to bother you, but I was wondering if you might be able to spare a few dollars to help us get some gas."

He looks me over with a look of apprehension and I can't blame him. I don't exactly have a welcoming appearance with my torn jeans and heavy metal band shirt.

"What do you need the gas for?" he asks.

"My friend over there needs to get back to base and we're a bit short on getting there," I say. "We have to go down to Coronado." This was our prearranged lie in case someone asked any extra questions.

He thinks this over for a moment and I prepare myself for the rejection that is sure to come. "Very well," he says. "I can get you some gas. Go pull your car up to the pump behind mine."

"Thank you so much. I'll go get it right now!" I run back over to my car and start it up, driving it around to the pump behind the Mercedes. The man walks over and slides his card through the machine, punching in his pin.

"How much should I put in?" I ask. I'm only expecting a few dollars, maybe five at the most.

"Fill up your tank. We can't have you struggling to get back."

"Thank you again," I say. *Crap, now we have to go somewhere else for change. At least we can get more smokes right now.*

I snap back to reality for a moment as the rain falling increases in intensity. Drumming against the roof of my car and running down the window, blurring the world

outside. Blending the lines between memory and reality until I find myself drifting back once more.

“Hey Dunshee, come pour another drink.”

I look up from the game I’m playing over at Fader’s. We’re all over at his apartment tonight for another house party. It’s what we did last night, and the weekend before and will probably do again the next weekend. This seems to be my everyday life right now: panhandle for change, hang out somewhere, get alcohol and smokes, and forget about my problems for a few hours.

Not tonight, however. Tonight is different. I’m over this life as I drift ever further into darkness. It has taken its toll on my psyche. Day in and day out with no change, no working towards a goal. Just a struggle for survival. It’s a strange feeling going from having a stable home with a family, not a care in the world, to just barely scraping by day by day, not knowing the next time you will be able to eat.

“Nah man, I’m good. You guys enjoy.” I turn back to the game of drunken Mario Kart we’re all playing, dreaming of a better life for myself. When the match ends, I get up and head to the patio for a quick smoke, followed by Krash, Fader, and Panda.

“You up for some beer pong in a bit?”

“Maybe. Hey, we should go to the jacuzzi.”

“That sounds like fun. I’m down to go.”

This banter goes on for several more minutes as I tune them all out. Lost in thought about tomorrow, I take one final drag off my cigarette, flick the butt over the railing, and watch the orange ember arc off into the darkness.

“I’ll catch you all later. I’m gonna take a walk.”

They look up at me, too drunk to notice the dark expression on my face as I head back inside. Heading out the front and down the stairs, I make my way through the complex and down to a nearby park. I had grown up in the area and knew it well. It was bittersweet to relive childhood memories while simultaneously suffering in my situation.

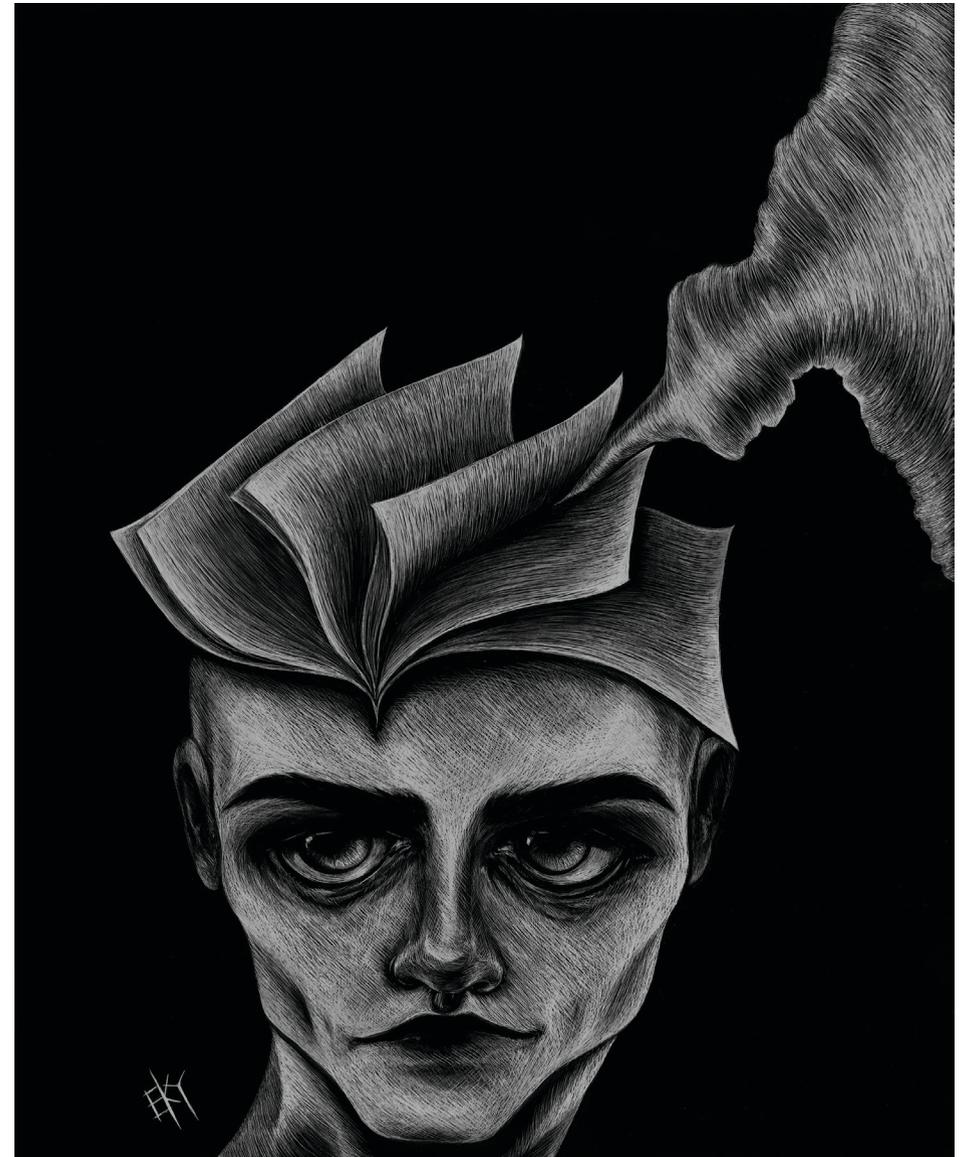
At last, I make my way down the path into an overgrown copse of trees along the creek and pull out my phone. Its blue glow illuminates my tear-stained face as I punch in the numbers. I hesitate, my thumb poised over the call button as anxiety clutches at me. Then, taking a deep breath, I steady myself and hit the button.

The phone rings in my ear once, twice, three times and then a familiar voice picks up. “Hello.”

“Hey, it’s me,” I say as the first raindrops begin to fall. “I think I need to come home.”

# DREAMING WHILE I'M AWAKE

Emily Kristine Yancosky



# DREAMING WHILE I'M AWAKE

Charles H.M. Foster

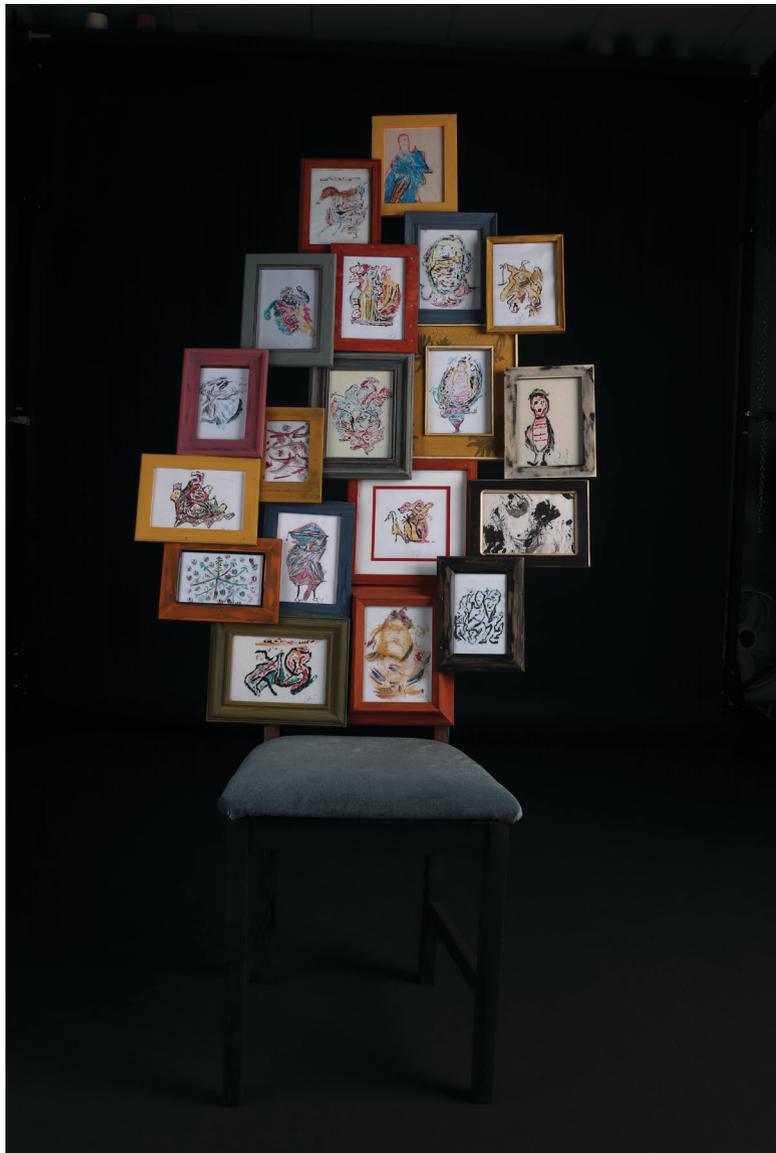
I woke up today, but I didn't stop dreaming  
Yesterday I turned the pages of a Lost World adventure.  
Scaly, cold-blooded creatures  
Born in a prehistoric age flit and screech behind my eyes.  
They trample dense, green forests  
Filled with a myriad of poisonous flowers.  
Smaller weaker creatures feed their ecosystem.  
And as I put on clothes, brush my teeth, wash my face,  
The monsters begin to quiet.

I went to school today, but I didn't stop dreaming  
Yesterday I turned the pages of an exciting spy thriller.  
A tall, handsome man adorned in black military garb  
Quickly ducks into an alleyway.  
He scales a shiny glass corporate building  
One made of solar panels that capture the sun  
And stand as a beacon of all that is prosperous in the world.  
And as I bubble in the final answers of my math test  
The spy, with stolen government secrets,  
Turns into a wraith, letting nothing stop him  
Until he is gliding to a smug victory,  
From the rooftops of lesser beings.

I clocked in at work today, but I didn't stop dreaming.  
Yesterday I turned the pages of an old western tale.  
The hot, acrid air forces the town's new sheriff  
To drink from his very limited water supply.  
The sound of jingling spurs draw him from his heat-induced stupor.  
The worst criminal in the west is here to take the town for himself.  
With narrowed eyes, rotting teeth and fingertips on pistols  
Both men get ready for a dance as old as time.  
And as I scan hot pocket after hot pocket into the register,  
A sharp crack rings out.  
A body drops to the ground and the town is saved.  
  
And when I lay down in my bed to sleep today  
Not a single thought came.  
Not math questions or gas prices; not breakfast foods or unpaid bills.  
To my surprise, I saw that I had become an old man.  
My bed was not my bed. My room was not my room. My hands were not my hands.  
It was hard to breathe. I was alone.  
And when I closed my eyes  
Not a single thought came.

# VISIONS OF A DIPLOMAT

Susan Namazi-Austin



# MEMORY COAT

Sam Warford

After the folds mush my edges rounder  
I have a memory coat to help me remember  
Why I make the steps that I take  
to be  
squished on a subway, cramped sardines  
But there is confidence in the cuffs  
And pride in the collar  
Flared for an adventure of unplanned departure  
Conductor please!  
Prickly grass, dandelions blowing  
An equation in harmony  
though I know  
No algebra.  
I am a worn leather coat  
Of a man who loved and wrote  
Wrote about me and the warmth in my sleeves  
Away again, boots crunching leaves

# WINDOW SHOPPING

Celia Wu



# THE BUBBLE

Isabella Arnett

“Mom, don’t forget the crunchy peanut butter!”

“Mom, can you get me the Mac N Cheese with Spongebob shapes?”

“Mom, don’t forget I don’t like the red apples; I only like the Fiji apples!”

“Honey, could you pick up a frozen pizza while you’re at the store?”

“Don’t forget dog food!!!”

*Crunchy peanut butter? Spongebob mac? Who gives a shit? Where in the mom manual does it say “personal assistant” and “at every beck-and-call”?*

I couldn’t leave the house quickly enough—the requests of my dearly-beloved and over-privileged offspring were starting to feel like I entered the twilight zone of motherhood. *Drama queen.* Just as I think I’m free, my nine-year-old charges to me from the front door:

“Mom! Mom!”

“What is it, Annabelle? I’m about to leave!”

“Mom, just please don’t forget the peanut butter!”

*Good god. Again with the peanut butter.* “I won’t forget it. Go back inside and finish your homework.” I respond after a good eye roll and twenty seconds of consideration to run away. I get in the car and leave before anyone else can stop me.

Getting into the car, I seriously consider having a smoke. I mean, Robert would flip out and plot my murder if I actually lit—much less *smoked*—a cigarette in the Range Rover. But it’s either that or weed—and I don’t have any weed because moms don’t have weed. Moms don’t have fun.

I drive down the street and park the Range Rover out of sight from traffic. I can’t risk any neighbors seeing me commit my housewife crime—and light the long Menthol Marlboro I keep hidden in the inner pocket of my purse. I take a drag. I feel the smoke move down my throat and fill my lungs with the toxic addiction I inherited from my mom at only twelve. I sit in silence and remember picking up the cigarette butts my mom would leave around the trailer—threatening to burn the shithole we lived in while she slept in drunken defeat.

I finish my smoke, spray my perfume everywhere, and get back into the car to embark on my trip to the grocery store.

I arrive at the grocery store and prepare to pull into a golden parking space, practically on the sidewalk, and am reminded of the time Robert scolded me for trying to park his behemoth of a vehicle (worth more than a semester at USC) in a spot so close to other people—and cars.

“Laura, are you going to park here or move the car?”

“Well, no, I was planning on... parking here? It’s right up front.”

“Fuck no! Do you see all of these cars in this part of the lot? It’s bound to get scratched! Do you realize how much this paint job cost?”

With visions of his red cheeks, crinkled forehead, and beady eyes, I park the behemoth into the golden spot.

Then I back out, go around the lot, and park in the back. Away from people and neighboring cars. *Coward, Laura.*

Rolling my eyes and walking the eternity of nine hundred feet to the doors of the grocery store, I pass a woman sitting on the curb with a sign that reads: HOMELESS. MOTHER. ANYTHING HELPS. GOD BLESS.

*Sure you are. Anything for a freebie. Get a job.* I keep walking, avoiding eye contact with her.

I beeline it to the coffee counter and try to ignore the fact that I have already had four cups of coffee and probably shouldn’t have another—especially one of those Frappuccino things that could otherwise be referred to as diabetes in a cup. Off to find the crunchy peanut butter.

With a cart full of groceries, I make my way to the produce section to find my son his special apples. As I’m comparing apples, mindlessly gnawing on my green contribution to global warming, I see a young woman walk in through the doors. My eyes follow her from the entrance of the store to the table of tomatoes not far from me.

Undeniably beautiful—and young, she looked a little suspicious. Not Winona in *The Heathers* suspicious, but more George Clooney in any of the *Oceans* suspicious. She was scoping out the fruits and I took it upon myself to go all Nancy Drew in the produce section and watch her with as much focus as when I’m waiting for my Krispy Kreme to come off the conveyor belt of glaze heaven.

Then I see it.

I see this woman—this *delinquent*—**steal**.

I watch her copiously stuff oranges, apples, tomatoes, fucking lettuce into her ratty dumpster bag. Shameless. *What a thieving little shit.* No money? Get a job! What’s with people and expecting a free fucking ride?

I feel the heat climb up my neck and seep into my face—flushing my cheeks. *Why? What business do you have with what she’s doing?*

I scour my mind for a real reason to be so upset, but I find none. Why do I feel so obligated to hate this thief? I should just get back to the fucking apples. Go back to the apples, Laura. Why make this your problem? *Because you have a bone to pick, Laura, that’s why. What else do you have to do that’s any better?*

*Should I tell management? Or just call the police? Shit! She’s leaving!*

Without even a millisecond of hesitation, I run my Lululemon ass out of the front doors to follow the thief and nab her. I dial 911 on my phone, waiting for my finger to press the call button.

*This isn’t your problem, Laura. Why are you making this your problem? Go back inside.*

My run changes to a stalk around the grocery store and to the back parking lot. *Eeeek. Hide your purse.* I realize that she not only stuffed her rat-bag to the brim but also had the audacity to bring a fucking basket with her—full of more stolen groceries.

I see her heading to a really shitty car. Like super shitty. I can’t even find the make and model shitty. *All right, she’s making a run for it. Press the call button.*

She opens the car door, and I’m about to press the green button on my phone when I watch two children, a boy and a girl—no older than three—tumble out of the shitty car in excitement.

My heart drops. The kids tumble out and jump up to greet the woman I’d been following. They look just like her—beautiful little kids.

I look closer and in the car, I can see pillows and duffle bags stuffed in the backseat. *Are they... living in their car?*

*They live in their car.*

I watch her unload her purse and the basket of groceries, and turn the basket over to create a makeshift table to prepare the food she just stole. She is making sandwiches—deli meat, tomatoes, lettuce and all. *Shit, Laura. Shit, shit, shit.*

I am rooted to the concrete under my feet. I feel the blood drain from my hands and face as my phone slips from my fingers and the young woman and her children look at me. Her face is painted with panic and anxiety, the kids with curiosity and playfulness. All I can do is stare.

We watch each other—each waiting for the other’s next move. I drink in the youth of her, and the fear that swims the surface of her pale skin and bright eyes. I see myself for a brief moment in her expression and feel myself filling with a fog of regret and sympathy.

I feel hot tears well behind my eyes and make their way to my irises, clouding my vision. I blink and feel a hot reminder of motherhood and sacrifice stream down my

# THE OTHER SIDE OF TEXAS

Harley Balling

check. I remember who I was before Robert and the hardships I endured before we could purchase Range Rovers and buy name-brand crunchy peanut butter. I give them a small smile, slightly tilting my head, and turn around. I walk back into the grocery store, find my abandoned cart, and go to pay at the counter. While I wait in line, I see the little stuffed animal keychains displayed by the gum and breath mints that my kids love hanging on their backpacks. I grab two: a seahorse and an alligator.

After my groceries are bagged, I walk out the front doors and around the corner to the back parking lot to give the young woman some money, and the little boy and girl their toys. The car is gone, and so are they.

I didn't know who they were, or why they lived in a car. But I knew that I wanted to help them and the fact that I couldn't made me feel like I hadn't in a long time. I felt helpless.

I make my way back to the behemoth and load the groceries in. As I drive home, I try to conjure up ideas on how I could find them and help them. *Maybe she'll come back to the grocery store? Maybe they park nearby to sleep?* But I know that I can't find them again, and my opportunity to possibly change someone else's life has expired.

I continue thinking about the young woman and her children, my own children, my life, and my happiness—when I realize something.

I forgot the fucking peanut butter.



# HOME

Melanie Nuccio



# VACANCY

Anessa Rodriguez

Breathe in, breathe out,  
feel muscle expand, lungs fluttering like tissue paper  
as oxygen enters the caverns of your chest.  
Sounds and words that aren't yours  
jangle like loose change at the base of  
your throat and you hadn't always been like this,  
hadn't always had to choke down the words and  
grief of others

—*Here*, they had said, *take this*  
dropping pieces of their sorrow  
into your outstretched palms.  
You tremble, feel their grief  
cut into your skin. *Okay*,  
you say, wipe bloody palms  
on the hem of your shirt,  
*Okay—*

The low, heady drone of a dial tone  
crackles beneath your skin,  
curls beneath your tongue and  
buzzes against your teeth,  
paints your mouth the color of negative  
space until each breath  
tastes of desolation.

At dusk you watch dying sunlight  
spill onto your hands and turn them to glass,  
watch red light bleed across your chest,  
cutting through and out as if  
you were never really there  
at all.

Keeley could feel the heat, walking back up Park Street. She smelled the smoke and heard the sirens closing in. A voice inside told her to turn the other way, but instead, she raced down the street in the direction of home. She only slowed when a sizable crowd clustered ahead, forcing her to stop in her tracks.

Smoke poured from the windows. An orange glow lit the insides of the house. Neighbors rushed from their homes and onto the streets to watch the spectacle of flames up close, while others watched safely from their doorsteps. To her horror, there was an ambulance parked up front, with its doors wide open.

Keeley pushed her way to the front of the crowd and caught only a glimpse of a woman as she was loaded into the waiting ambulance, and something in her stomach sank. Red lights flashed and crossed the faces of officers and pedestrians alike. Repetitive sirens wailed as the white-and-red vehicle wheeled down the street. Keeley stared it down until it was long out of sight.

Meanwhile, firefighters worked quickly to contain the fire and keep it from spreading. Keeley glanced to the increasing crowd and was almost astonished to see neighbors, folks she saw on a regular basis, recording the scene with looks of awe and horror. She couldn't comprehend *why*. Why watch? What does showing the world change?

A woman in her mid to late forties, with hands on her hips and lips flat, who faced the flames caught Keeley's eye. Her hair was ash blonde and tightly bound in a bun. She wore clear lenses that reflected the flames. She gestured to a much younger officer with a baby face and blue eyes and barked orders to the rest. Curious, Keeley stepped out of the crowd and came dangerously close to the perimeter the police had set. The ash blonde woman noticed her and strode to where Keeley stubbornly stood in place.

The woman stopped, staring down at the disheveled teenager. "Young lady, you need to stay back," she said sternly. Keeley said nothing and stayed in place, her expression unreadable. "Do you live here?" the woman asked in a somewhat grave yet neutral tone. The steel name tag on her right breast read B. SMITH.

"With my mom," she barely answered. "Is she okay?"

Smith tried to force a smile. "What's your name?"

"Keeley Barnes," Keeley replied, not ignorant to the fact Officer Smith evaded

her question.

"Keeley, you need to come with us," Smith stated and looked over to the young man she gestured to earlier. "Thompson and I will take you to the hospital and we can talk about what happened."

Baby-faced Thompson offered Smith a nervous glance and Keeley a sympathetic, yet tense, smile. "Will I be able to see my mom?"

"That's what we're hoping," Smith replied, ushering Keeley into one of the police cars. At the hospital, doctors and nurses rushed from room to room. No one told her directly, but Keeley assumed Barbara had to be in one of those rooms.

Smith insisted Keeley sit and assured her that a doctor would come shortly. Thompson sat one seat away from her, possibly to give her space. Meanwhile, Smith stood over her. Behind the clear lenses she wore, Keeley saw Smith had piercing, pale blue eyes.

"Are you up for answering our questions, Keeley?"

"What kind of questions?" Keeley asked, meeting Smith's pale eyes.

"Like, where were you when the fire started? Why weren't you home?" Smith questioned her in a tone that failed to come across as friendly.

Keeley tightened her lips briefly. "My mom and I had a fight so I went for a walk. When I came back, the house was ..." Keeley's voice trailed and her eyes slid to the ground. There were tears at the corners of her eyes, cast down to the tiled floor.

Smith sighed and crossed her arms across her chest. "Keeley, I know this is hard, but we want to hear all the facts from you," she said in an attempt to come across as sympathetic. "For starters, do you have any idea what could have started the fire? Or why your mother was still in bed when the officers arrived?"

Keeley's lips quivered. She choked out the words, "She... she smoked a lot and she drank. I should never have left her. If I'd stayed, then maybe..."

Thompson's brow furrowed as Keeley went quiet. Smith gave her a moment, and then continued with her questions. *What was the fight about? Do you and your mother fight often? Why take a walk that late at night instead of staying home? Did your mother always smoke and drink before bed? Was she cautious?*

Questions and answers came one after the other, bringing sudden memories and thoughts to mind. *Like the fact that Barbara Barnes was not Keeley's biological mother.* Unloved and unwanted, Keeley came to live with her at the age of eight, when her real mother died and her father was nowhere to be found. She remembered vividly how when she first arrived at Barbara's home, she was so convinced she was going to be happy again. That with a new home, all her troubles would melt away. How naive she was.

*Her hair was golden yellow and her eyes were a dark ocean blue. She wore embroidered jeans with distinctive orange thread and a floral top. With all the bright colors she wore, Keeley*

couldn't stop herself from staring.

"You must be Keeley. It's so nice to finally meet you," she smiled warmly, bending down to her level. Keeley then caught sight of a gold case peeking from her pocket. "I'm Barbara."

"Hi," Keeley muttered with a grin.

"I'm sure you've had a long trip so let's get you inside and settled." Barbara smiled in return, placing a manicured hand on little Keeley's scrawny shoulder. She rose and opened the door with her free hand and led Keeley inside, her grip tightening. Little Keeley was so happy, she didn't register the pain spreading from her shoulder.

"Officer Smith, can I please have a word with you?" said the approaching doctor.

Smith looked to Thompson and then to Keeley. "I'll be right back."

Smith left and Keeley was alone with Thompson in the lobby. The rookie clearly had no clue what to say and began scanning the room desperately for Smith, who disappeared with the unnamed doctor. Obviously, he'd never been alone with a victim before.

Keeley's stomach growled once and Thompson jumped from his seat. "You're probably hungry. It's been hours. I'll grab you something to eat." He headed in the direction of the nearest machine and paused, turning back to her. "Any requests?"

Keeley shrugged, shoving her hands into the pockets of her ragged jeans. "Anything's fine."

Thompson took a few minutes and came back with a handful of snacks, bottled water, and soda. "Uh, I didn't know what you liked so I ... got a bit of everything. Hope that's all right."

He placed the pile onto the vacant seat between them, offering her bottled water. Keeley took a few grateful gulps and grabbed a bag of M&Ms. She ripped open the packaging and poured a rainbow of colors into her mouth, all without a word. Meanwhile, Thompson popped open his soda and again tried making conversation.

Keeley ignored most of what he said and snagged another handful. This time, it was mostly red chocolate morsels, staining her hands with their bright hue.

Thompson went on. "Got any siblings or other family, Keeley?"

"Besides my mom, you mean?" she presumed, sliding her dark eyes to his. He nearly choked.

"Uh, yeah, besides her..."

Keeley paused. "There's nobody. She's all I have."

Thompson composed himself and set down his soda can. "I'm sorry, Keeley. I didn't mean ..." He sighed and looked at her with guilty eyes. "Keeley, tell me about your mother."

*Flick. A small flame sprang to life.*



Barbara brought a gold painted lighter to her lips, lit yet another cigarette, and exhaled a puff of white smoke. Her lips left red lipsticked stains on each and every cigarette she huffed. "Wipe that damn smile off your face and eat your dinner," Barbara said from the head of the table, far from her charge sitting at the end. "I don't have all day for you to daydream and not eat, so eat already."

Keeley kept her mouth shut.

Barbara glared and tapped a cigarette on the table's surface. "Even if you don't eat, the very least you could do is show some gratitude," she spewed. "After all, I don't have to do anything, but I do. So is it really that hard to show some gratitude for all I do for you?"

Keeley repressed the urge to gag. It was hard to breathe, let alone eat, but she didn't want to appear ungrateful either. She was very grateful, but Barbara did not make it easy. The last time Keeley asked for her new mother to take her habit outside, she wasn't treated so kindly. Keeley stayed in place, with her hands clutching her stomach.

When it was obvious Keeley had no intention of eating or talking back, Barbara snagged her plate from the table and tossed its contents into the trash. Keeley said nothing, clutched her stomach tighter and smiled.

### **Flick.**

"Keeley, get your ass in here. NOW!" she screamed, tossing clothes everywhere. The living room was a disaster, with furniture upturned and scattered. "What did you do with my cigarettes?"

"They aren't good for you," Keeley mumbled, regretting it the instant she said it.

Barbara stopped her assault on the contents of their living room. "What did you just say, you bitch?" She strode towards her and grabbed the front of her charge's shirt. "Wanna say that again?"

"No, but—but I think—"

She was cut off by a hard slap across her face, launching her to the carpeted ground. Keeley raised her hand to soothe her reddening cheek.

Barbara towered over her. "Next time you talk back to me," she hissed as she fetched her prized lighter from her back pocket, "consider the consequences." She flipped the lid and a small but harmful flame came to life.

Keeley was too afraid to move. She knew what was coming. "Please don't," she begged as Barbara closed in. Keeley couldn't bring herself to smile at that point.

Keeley couldn't bring herself to speak at that moment. She had her chance, but Smith had come back with a look on her face that stopped her dead. She rose from her chair and met Smith halfway.

"Where is she?" she urged, desperately.

"Keeley..." Smith began.

"I want to see her," the quivering teen demanded. "Please, I need to know she's—"

Smith took a very deep inhalation, placing a gentle, unpolished hand on the teen's trembling shoulder. "Keeley, I'm sorry to tell you this, but your mother is—" Smith hesitated and Keeley caught her own breath. "The doctors just told me that your mother... didn't make it."

"WHERE IS IT? I know you stole it, so WHERE IS IT?" Barbara spewed as Keeley lay cradled on the floor, shielding her reddened face. Keeley was pinned to the ground by her mother's heel, driving painfully into her side.

"Please, I already told you... I don't know," Keeley pleaded.

"There's no way I lost my lighter so YOU must have taken it! Fuckin' AGAIN!"

"I didn't, I swear." Keeley winced as Barbara's heel dug deeper. It was getting so much harder to breathe.

"If that lighter isn't back in my hands by tomorrow morning, I swear I'll —!"

"Keeley, are you still with us?" Smith asked, sounding genuinely concerned.

Keeley came back to herself. "What?"

Smith removed her hand. "I asked if there is someone we can call for you."

"There's no one," she stated sadly. "What happens to me now?"

"Social Services will have to take over from here, but Thompson and I will keep in touch until they find somewhere for you," Smith relayed, gesturing again to Thompson, who had yet to say anything. He only stared at Keeley, with a look mixed of horror and overriding guilt. "I've already contacted Social Services and they will meet with us here."

Keeley only nodded, taking back her seat. Hours seemed to pass after that. Keeley didn't bother glancing at the clock and instead stared at the tiled floor, hands dug into her pockets. Finally, social workers arrived to take her to who knows where. They smiled apologetically and offered their condolences, promising to find her a place to call home again. They introduced themselves, too, but Keeley didn't bother acknowledging their names and allowed herself to be ushered into the waiting car. She sat in the back seat quietly, and saw Smith and Thompson at the entrance of the hospital.

As the car began to leave the lot, Smith raised her hand and the car came to a slow halt. She walked over to the car back window, while Thompson held back, still with that guilt-ridden expression.

Keeley forced herself to look at Smith, with her ash blonde hair and pale eyes that were all too familiar yet new to her. Smith placed her hand on the top of the car, leaning closer to the obviously distraught teen, while the window was lowered.

"Don't blame yourself, kid," she said with a solemn, soft tone. "There's nothing you could've done. We'll keep in touch. Until then, take care of yourself."

# SHADOW IN MY MIND

Aidan Mitchell

“Thank you, Officer,” Keeley replied.

“Call me Brook,” she said reassuringly, handing her a scrap of paper with seven digits and an area code, “and call me anytime you need help.”

She stepped away from the car, and Keeley turned around in her seat to see Smith raising her hand in farewell as the car resumed its course. Her eyes held a sensitive glint different from the steel glare that drew Keeley to her.

As Smith and Thompson vanished from sight, Keeley took a deep breath in and exhaled, slumping in her cushioned seat. Away from them, she could finally breathe. Further and further from that rank hospital, she could feel her lungs gathering grateful gulps of free air and utter ecstasy.

Any tears she shed in that lobby were long since dry. The driver up front paid her no mind, and a smile crept on her face, her fingers fiddling again with the contents of her right pocket. Carefully and slowly, she revealed a golden case and brought it close to her curved lips.

*Flick.*



Grey-green eyes stare back at her, the mirror reflecting, mocking the girl.

She tries to remember,  
What the shadow used to look like.

Were her rich umber locks mirrored in the darkness's depths?  
Maybe golden curls that haloed a sleeping babe's head?  
Obscured by thick grey fog nothing escaped the chasm.  
She sits at the table, one place always vacant.  
Looking around at those gathered two boys, grandfather, grandmother.

She tries to remember,  
What the shadow used to look like.

Were the cobalt eyes of the young boy hidden in the abyss?  
Perhaps instead the forget-me-nots that bloomed in the infant's oculi,  
Withered and died deep down in that pit.  
A voice rang out, soft and comforting.  
A low gentle tenor responded in kind.

She tries to remember,  
What the shadow used to sound like.

Was it the silvery song of a dove that left its tongue?  
Perchance it was soft, like the patter of rain on glass.  
Not a single sound escapes the deafening silence of the void.

She tries to remember,  
Where her mother has gone.



“The city is completely demolished: cars are on top of houses, bodies are scattered throughout the rubble. Emergency response teams are working to excavate the site, but it may take several weeks.” A reporter stands stiffly onscreen, galoshes smothered in grime and sludge. Her face is stoic, eyes cold as she stares into the camera. I lean forward in my seat, one hand grasping the edge of my computer screen as the woman continues to talk.

“Death” ... “destruction” ... “bodies” are the only words I can make out. I’m too busy staring at the structure in the background of the video. A house-no-more, reduced to a haphazard pile of wood and rubble. I can almost make out the crumpled remains of the green minivan next to what once was the garage.

“Turn that off,” Sasi, my roommate, says. She stands in the doorway of my room, glaring at the YouTube video on my computer screen. “You can’t keep watching this stuff. It’s gonna trigger you again.”

I shut the computer softly, refusing to make eye contact. “Leave me alone,” I say.

Sasi hesitates, as if she wants to say something else, but can’t find the words. Sighing, she turns and walks away. After living with me for seven years, she has observed this cycle many times. Before she first signed the lease with me, I told her I was from Kamaishi, Japan and that I had moved to Northern California in 2011. She put two and two together and never asked why I moved away from home. She never questioned why I had hand sanitizer and not soap in every bathroom, refusing to use the sink. Why bottles of dry shampoo sat in the shower, which hadn’t been used in years. Not once did she question my extensive precautions to avoid the sound of rushing water. She knew the rules. Wash your hands at work. Shower when I’m not home. At all costs, keep water out of sight.

I have tried to get over my fear of water. One time, I walked in the rain to work without collapsing. Another day, I dipped three toes into the community pool. At the hospital, I’m sure they made me shower at some point (albeit with significant resistance). Water gives me a visceral reaction—I can’t stand it. My breathing becomes rapid and strained, the feeling of wet clothes sending me into convulsions. It sends me back *there*, like a PTSD train to hell. My therapist tells me that it’s time to face my fear now that it’s

been nearly eight years since the tsunami. My assignment for today?

Take a bath.

I leave my room and head into the en suite bathroom. There, the tub is gleaming and perfectly white—never used and frequently cleaned. I slowly turn the knob to the left, sending a trickle of water out of the faucet. As I continue to turn it, the din of rushing water fills the air. Steam rises up, billowing like a phantom wave. I resist the urge to cower. Instead, I dip one foot and then the other into the tub.

I sink into the water, feeling the warmth encase my body. I take deep breaths, turning the faucet off. The sloshing against the sides of the tub sends shivers down my spine. I envision our house collapsing as the first wave hit. The crunch of wood against water, the terrifying inky liquid hurtling towards me. As the bathwater grazes my ears, I shout, “Run! Run!”

It’s too much, it’s too much.

I jump out of the tub, wrapping myself in the towel as thoughts flood my mind.

*Where’s mom where’s dad where’s Kiku where’s Akasuki I can’t breathe I’m going to die I can’t breathe.*

*I’m drowning.*

I rush to my bed, flinging my towel aside as I wrap myself in the thick duvet cover. My body quakes as I whisper *It’s okay you’re fine it’s okay you’re fine*. After a few minutes, the repetitive mantra and warmth of the sheets make my eyelids grow heavy, and I fall asleep.

Three days later, I slip a raincoat over my shoulders as I push the door open and step into the street. I have made a lot of progress since my bathing mishap. I even took a *shower* yesterday. I walk for a mile until I find a bench next to a large oak tree. Per my therapist’s instructions, I am sitting in the rain today. Clouds growl overhead as raindrops roll over my wrists, dripping arbitrarily against the pavement.

Now, my assignment is to sit outside whenever it rains. Something about catching the rain in my palms is calming. The repetition of the drops against my hands creates a lulling pattern—controlled and consistent. I can stare into the torrent and the flashbacks seem further away. Across the street, nestled behind rows and rows of downpour I see my sister’s drowned body, floating among the debris. A few yards away is the minivan, crumpled like an aluminum can in cold water. The wail of sirens must be miles away, sounding dull and distant. The PTSD visions are before me but materialize as indistinct phantoms. Now, I know they’re not real.

I stand up and walk towards Lake Tahoe. The shoreline is littered with debris, completely vacant. The sand is damp underfoot as I continue my walk, a moist breeze pulling my sweater taut against my skin. The water is dark and inky, freckled in indentations from raindrops. I stare out at the expanse, listening to the plaintive sounds

of rainfall and wind. Then the words come—unexpected and unrestrained.

“I hate you.” I address the water, standing up straight. “You took everything from me. Akasuki, Kiku, Mom, Dad...I saw them *drown*. And you were so inconsiderate that you sentenced me to a fate worse than drowning: living without them.” A stronger gust of wind slaps a strand of hair across my eyes. I brush it away and continue, my lip trembling. “You didn’t take me with them. You left me to stand in the rubble, all by myself. Covered in bandages with only a passport to my name. I have no one.” A tear drops down my left cheek, intermingling with the mist. “No one. Just the silence and the flashbacks. And the truth is I’m...I’m *afraid* of you.”

I look at the horizon line, a thin laceration between sky and water. Stepping closer to the waterline, I lower my voice to a soft whisper.

“I used to love you, back in Kamaishi. Remember, I swam and surfed and fished? Yeah, I remember that. I wanted to be a mermaid, too, so I would never have to leave you. I loved the water, loved the sea.” I dip the tips of my right toes into the frigid water, tears continuing to roll down my cheeks.

Something from within draws me closer and closer to the water. Soon enough I’m thigh-deep, the freezing water stinging my skin. Breathless, I allow my body to be enveloped by the waters below and the rain above. I float on my back, palms outstretched in surrender. The silence permeates my heart, and a palpable sense of calm overcomes me.

Quiet as ever, I whisper, “But I forgive you.”



# DISORDER OUTWEIGHED

Sofie Levy

Not wanting to eat; eating nothing but sweets.  
Not looking in mirrors; staring in them.  
Not wanting to lie on your side; pinching yourself to show yourself skin.  
Not wanting to wear shorts; hiding.  
Eating in front of people is painful.  
Being proud when you don't make fists and dig your nails into your palms.  
Until someone kisses the marks and tells you that you are perfect.  
Going to therapy because you have one last flame of hope.  
As soon as you feel good about yourself, it fades.  
It's a cycle.  
A bitter, self-loathing and crippling cycle.  
Until you find a love that towers over your self-hate, scaring it so much  
that all it's capable of is hiding deep in your mind,  
in a place not even you know exists.

# THE NOT-SO- NORMAL TEEN

Celia Pedro

I was lying in my bed under a mountain of blankets. The room was silent, but thoughts were booming in my mind as loud and overwhelming as nuclear blasts. My bed was peacefully nestled in the back corner of the room, so I had an open view of every nook and cranny of that bedroom. As I lay there, my tired eyes glanced over the familiar setting of my furniture and belongings. Picture frames containing still images of memories with friends and family hung neatly on the bright blue walls. It was like I was two different people, the person in the picture and the person lying in bed looking at the picture. I admired how healthy and happy I looked and how little I knew of what was to come. Seashells collected with friends on outings to the beach were perfectly placed on my desk as memorabilia of the past. My eyes traveled to each corner of the room, hoping to discover items that would excite my mind and combat my boredom.

After every inch of wall and furniture had been studied, my room returned to its extremely familiar, boring place—the same old place where I stayed in the same old bed for weeks as I battled my illness. My eyes continued searching for places that would evoke happier memories in an attempt to distract myself from the stabbing pain in my body. Suddenly, tears flooded my eyes when I looked down at my bedroom floor and remembered those innocent and enjoyable sleep-overs. My friends and I would choose a place for our sleeping bags, talk about boys we dreamed of marrying, and repeat scary stories we read on the Internet, all while munching on candy and popcorn. These memorable times with friends were now just that, memories. I hung onto these memories, hoping that one day I would be able to relive those joyful times and be free from the pain and sickness that had held me captive in a prison I did not deserve. Waves of pain filled my body, each wave as unpredictable and uncontrollable as the ocean in a raging storm. Those happy memories, once safe on the sandy shores of my mind, were now engulfed by the ocean's power and at the mercy of a fading tide. I could only concentrate on willing the pain to leave my body.

I have experienced many of these similar low points, or “flare-ups,” since being diagnosed with severe ulcerative colitis about four years ago. Recently, my symptoms

dissipated, and my life started returning to normal only to arise with greater vengeance than before, as if competing with previous “flare-ups” to see which wins the contest for strength and duration.

A knock at my door frightened my thoughts away, but the appearance of my mother eradicated all my fears. My mother, Melanie, stands at an average height, but nothing else about her is average. Compassion and selflessness stand on both her shoulders, making themselves apparent to anyone who lays eyes on her. Her soft, brown curly hair is almost always meticulously formed into a crown-shaped bun, which perfectly fits her queen-like grace and desire for immaculate cleanliness and orderliness. However, during my illness, this orderliness was uncharacteristically scattered, and so was she. “How are you, honey?” she kindly inquired as she handed me a steaming, aromatic bowl of homemade soup. Her act of kindness belied the concern she harbored at her core.

“I’m okay,” I responded simply, hiding the pain I felt inside. Despite my vagueness, my mother knew I was not doing well. Her gentle but worried eyes scanned over my emaciated, weak body. Those angelic eyes reassured me that she was “doing good” too, but deep down she feared for my life. I then took a few tentative bites of my soup to show gratitude for the work she put into preparing it, but my body was too sick to eat anything. Each bite was nauseating.

This lackluster way of life continued for weeks, each day getting worse and worse, and I was eating less and less. My body looked like it could not get any thinner, but it did. It was after finally being hospitalized that my health started to improve; however, it took many days of tests, medication, and doctor supervision. Each day in that dreary hospital room started off with blood tests, a visit from the nurse on shift, and mediocre hospital food. The walls in the room were plain white, my hospital robe was plain blue, and the meals were outright flavorless. My phone distracted my mind from the dull atmosphere; mindless flipping through my social media feed was an effective antidote for my pain. As I scrolled through countless photos of former friends and peers that I had not seen since becoming ill, I began to feel exceptionally alone. Group photos from parties, hangouts on the beach, trips to amusement parks and restaurants accentuated my feeling of solitude. Each picture contained many smiling faces and arms embracing as they all posed to save that moment to be remembered forever. I began to pity myself. I wanted to be there, in the middle of all of them, sharing the experience, the smiles, the embrace, and the laughter, but my place in that picture was limited to the reflection of my melancholy face on the phone screen. Again, I felt trapped by pain and sickness, lying there in my hospital robe in the hospital bed, just wishing that I could return to a life full of teenage fun, adventure, and antics. At that moment, I felt like I was the only teenager on Earth who could not sneak out of the house to hang out with friends.

Within a week, my disease began to improve, and I was discharged from the hospital.

Competing feelings of lingering loneliness and elation from leaving the hospital occupied my mind during that brief, exhausting journey home. I was back in my room. The fleeting elation I had been feeling was no match for the power of my loneliness. As soon as I opened my door, I was struck by the prevalent scent of my lavender candle. Before the hospital, I must have become immune to the scent. I trudged back to my familiar bed. It was uncomfortably cold from being empty and unused, but it warmed up quickly from the hotpack I had placed on my abdomen to ease my pain. Most people know their beds to be a place of sleep or relaxation, but my bed had unfortunately become a place where I commonly fought through pain. There I was again, back in this common place where only my brain was active. I could barely remember the times when my body could run as many miles as my mind, the times when I was a healthy teen. As I lay there, in the silence of my room, I could hear the beating of my heart. I wished I was back at school, talking, laughing, and making jokes with friends. Most of all, I wished I was a normal teen.

Many mundane days of recovery went by. My health was greatly improving. The rosy color returned to my cheeks, weight returned to my body, and a smile returned to my face.

One day, I was surprised by an invitation to my friend’s eighteenth birthday party. Jillian has been my friend since elementary school. At our closest, we basically spent every day together. We attended the same school, swam together on the same swim team, and lived in the same neighborhood, but when illness struck and held me captive in my house, we saw each other only sparingly over the next four years. During this time, we talked, but nothing of substance, just a simple “How are you? How’s school, your family, and friends?” The answer was simply “good,” so I was happily surprised that I was invited to Jillian’s party. It had been a while since I was invited to anything, and it had been a while since I was able to accept any invitation.

The day of the party was full of mixed emotions. The prospect of seeing all my old friends for the first time since my illness was making me nervous. Questions bombarded my mind: *what will they think of me; will they be happy to see me; will I be awkward; what do I say to them?* I was able to ignore those “life-changing questions” as I focused on picking an outfit that hid my thinness, styling my hair in a way that hid my hair loss, and applying some makeup to accentuate the part of me that had not changed much, my face. Then, I took a deep breath, smiled, and thought positively about the party.

The drive to the party felt like it took longer than if I had walked. My anticipation increased with every mile I drove, adding more threads to the ever-growing knot of nervousness in the pit of my stomach. When I reached my destination, the San Clemente Pier, the nervousness temporarily subsided as I admired the uniquely colorful sunset that night. Streaks of orange, pink, purple, and turquoise filled the sky like a Jackson Pollock painting. The reflection of the setting sun on the water was blinding, but its beauty was worth staring at. My admiration for the scenery halted as I searched

for the courage to walk down to greet the large group of people who were once my good friends. Nervousness overwhelmed my mind and blocked my senses, stealing from me an appreciation for the calming sound of rumbling waves or the pleasing scent of the salty breeze. I concealed my nervousness with a smile and walked confidently toward the crowd.

At first, I was thrilled to see the familiar faces I once knew, but these positive emotions did not last long. I was greeted with many superficial greetings like “Hi Celia, how are you?” and “Oh my God, I haven’t seen you in forever.” I tried mightily to start conversations and act like the person they remembered me as, but I fell short and they started shifting into groups they fit into most: the swimmer friends, the high school friends, and the “cool” friends. Unfortunately, I could no longer blend into the crowd because I could not find refuge with any of those groups. I walked around, trying to add myself into each group’s conversation, but I soon realized I did not relate to their trivial discussions. The conversation in the “cool girl” group was comprised of statements like, “Oh my God, you guys know Dylan? He’s so hot, I literally can’t take it.” Then another girl would refute, “Are you kidding me, his nose is big enough to have its own address and he wears too much cologne. Sean is way hotter!” After rolling my eyes at their debate about which boy is cuter, I walked over to the group of Jillian’s high-school friends where I found myself in an equally delightful exchange about whose parents have more money to spend on them. “Yeah, my parents got me a brand-new Beamer!”

“Woah, sick,” another chimed in.

Looking for sympathy from his friends, an ungrateful high-school teenager added, “You are so freaking lucky. I only got a hand-me-down from my older brother. It’s so embarrassing to drive a Prius.” After the discussion about their cars died down, another frivolous conversation emerged. “What is your follower-to-following ratio on Instagram?” one person stated to the group as if it were one of the Ten Commandments. “You know you are not cool if you follow more people than are following you.” These unimportant conversations continued and covered topics of new trends, how good they were at hiding drugs from their parents, and the tattoos they planned on getting once they turned eighteen. These topics were the most important and relevant things in the world for them, and they once were for me as well—when I was a normal teen. Since getting sick, these thoughts had vanished from my priorities list, so I sat there uninterested and alone, observing the people around me. *If I had never gotten sick, I undeniably would be standing right there in the middle of the group of “cool” girls being the life of the party, making people laugh, and making people jealous of my very hot boyfriend.* This thought made me laugh out loud because these things were unimportant to me now.

Attending this party made me sad because I could not fit into a group, but it made me realize for the first time how much I preferred being me—a not-so-normal teen. I

have gone through extreme pain and change. I am humbler and more mature because of my sickness. I am not a normal teen, and I do not wish to be. I am grateful that I am now truly me, a not-so-normal teen.



# LOVE FROM A FLOWER

Joanna Tovar

How strange it is  
That love can grow  
From empty thoughts  
That no one knows

He's never noticed  
He's never cared  
A glance, a word  
That's all we've shared

If we are flowers  
Chosen by them or those  
I am a Lily  
He's picked a rose

I've looked, I've longed  
I've loved him lots  
I've plucked my petals  
He's loved me not

It's hard to see him  
With his prose  
The one he loves  
The one he chose

So finally  
With much dismay  
I say goodbye  
I look away

# PETALS

Lauren Rangel

Each morning she wakes—brushing petals off like dust settled on an empty shelf—a slumber too short for the day ahead. She yawns, throwing her clenched fists upwards, and then falls onto her back looking up at the ceiling with vacant, tired eyes. A morning like any other, she thinks. She takes a moment to center herself in this new world. *Today*, she thinks, *today is full of possibility.*

Today she scales mountains of the mind in swift graceful bounds. There are too many to count. At the summit of one, she can see several more...and so on and so forth. She swallows air in a vain attempt to satisfy the hunger that rips at her insides—clawing at her psyche with a thirstful vengeance. It must feed. And so, she pushes onward. For there is nothing sound in tranquility. Nothing comforting in that which is familiar. And nothing worthwhile in plans unhatched.

She thinks back on all of the misnomers that would've been better than that particularly mischievous anomaly. The trajectories that were entirely derailed on its behalf. The number of days spent building fences to keep the mountains at bay. Painting them in brilliant shades—each with their own nomenclature. *You & I. Love You Most. Together Forever. Soulmates.*

She frets through entire days, lost to violent fervor. When sleep comes—as it eventually must—not even the beckoning of twilight could steal these petulant fixations from within her. They are trapped here. Wilting as the flowers release their grip. One by one petals fall like snowflakes in winter. *I need you. I need you not. I need you. I need you not. I need you. I need you not.*

# WHY?

Vera Marmouget



# BONES

Payton Yolanda Risner

I sat there, in the cafeteria, alone. I ate my PB&J slow and steady. I watched my sandwich as a stream of grape jelly leaked onto my paper brown lunch bag with a note from Mom inside of it. She always gave me notes, but I never fucking read them. I'm not an asshole, by any means; I just don't need someone leaning over my shoulder and reading it to the crowd of high schoolers sitting around me in the cafeteria. It wouldn't be the first time someone yanked my mommy's note from my hand to recite it aloud.

"Oh shit, oh shit," I whispered with an entire bite of PB&J dripping from my brown and purple mouth. *Melanie-fucking-Redman*. I wiped my mouth with the back of my bare hand as her flawless stride entered the cafeteria and her curly chestnut hair bounced. Her eyes green as a noble fir tree and her pale legs standing out of her denim short skirt. That was the same skirt she wore when she did her presentation on Virginia Woolf and somehow related her to a burning candle, and it made sense. There was no doubt that she was more intellectual than she portrayed herself. Her clothes always black or gray or a deep navy blue. It was almost like she didn't want anyone to know she was smart.

Once I stood up to try and maybe go over and talk to her, I remembered a skinny, far from "too cool for school" kid like me couldn't possibly land a woman like Melanie Redman. *Stop looking at her, moron. She is going to think you're gawking at her.*

*Oh shit, she's coming over to me. She probably saw you staring. Jesus Christ, mind your own business, Chris.*

"Hi, I'm Melanie." Her smile sprung from cheek to cheek.

"Uh, hey, I'm Chris!" I said too enthusiastically. *Calm down.*

"Haha.. I saw you looking at me. You're in English third period, right?"

"Yeah, I sit behind you." *Why is she still standing there?*

"Mmm, so, I'm having a party tonight at my house and I want as many people there as possible. You got friends, Bones?" I guessed maybe she called me Bones because I'm about as scrawny as a frail piece of hair.

"Yeah, I got friends." I wasn't lying. Johnny was home from school today sick as all hell—throwing up and everything. "I'll let you know. My friend Johnny is sick and I have to write an essay."

"Okay, well maybe I'll see you later! Bye, Bones." She walked away and I looked

down at my miserable sandwich, still shocked that she invited me to her house, her home, her place of sleep and living.

After sixth period chemistry, I went home and called Johnny.

“Christ, she called you *bones*? I told you, you gotta eat a burger or something, man.” He laughed.

“Dude, whatever, *Melanie* invited *me* to her house!” I repeated, still attempting to convince him that she actually invited me to a party.

“Well, are you gonna go?” He paused.

“Of course not. I can’t go alone. Are you insane?”

“Uhh no? I’m going, Chris, chill. I’ll meet you at your house at 8?”

I sat on my blue linen on my twin bed and laid back on my pillow. “Sure.” I hung up the phone and laid there, my eyes fixed on my rotating fan. *I’m going to Melanie-fucking-Redman’s party*. I changed my shirt since it had grape jelly and Jif peanut butter stained on it. I stood in the mirror and a man with chocolate brown hair, skinny as shit, and dull brown eyes stared back at me. Johnny came over and I left the house in silence.

“All right! Let’s get figgity fucked up!” Johnny yelled, starting to chuckle before I told him to shut up. My mom wasn’t supposed to hear me leave. Since we were both lame and didn’t own a goddamn vehicle, we got on our bikes and headed over to 1443 Brookwood Lane.

Johnny and I strolled into the house and tried way too hard to be as nonchalant as possible. We headed straight to the kitchen where the alcohol was heavily supplied.

“Hey! whateerrrr you guy-s-s drinkin’?” Some random girl too drunk to function darted toward us.

“Whatever you’re serving!” Johnny said, visibly eager as he anticipated getting intoxicated.

I couldn’t give a damn about the poisonous liquid that would have made me unable to return home. *Ah, screw it*. “I’ll have a beer, thanks,” I said as she handed Johnny a Solo cup filled with god knows what and tossed me a glorious Coors Light. *Oh, the joy of watered-down beer*. I wondered where *Melanie* could be, and as I turned to face the evocative and overly detailed living room, the radiance of her light skin glowed.

“Hey, Bones! You came! You enjoying yourself?”

I swear her smile would kill me. “I figured my essay could wait until tomorrow.” A weak no-teeth smile emerged on my face. In her presence, I realized I had lost Johnny. “Oh shit, I don’t know where Johnny is. I’ll talk to you later?” I said to her quickly.

“I can help you find him,” she insisted.

*Melanie* and I walked all over the house, but Johnny was nowhere. Then I thought maybe we should check the backyard. We walked out the sliding doors and Johnny was face-down in the bushes with throw-up on his Led Zeppelin T-shirt. He was going to be so pissed in the morning; that was his favorite shirt.

“I think I’m going to take him home,” I told her as I pulled Johnny out of the bushes. “I’ll see you at school.”

“Here, let me give you my phone number.” She picked up a piece of paper from inside the house, wrote her number down, and handed it to me. I left the bikes in her backyard; I knew Johnny was too much under the influence to be able to get on a bike. His arm wrapped around my shoulder, we walked all the way home.

The next day at school, I saw her, but I didn’t say anything. I felt so bad, and I ended up never even calling her. She just gave me this feeling in my gut that made me feel so small. I was so fucking small because I knew I’d never be with her. I’d be an idiot to ever think that was a possibility.

I left school early that day. I ditched fifth and sixth period, so I could maybe get my bike and Johnny’s from *Melanie*’s house. I tried my best to be as stealthy as humanly possible to slip into her backyard without getting noticed. It seemed like no one was home. I opened the back gate and waltzed in. *Damn, I’m sly*. I turned around from closing the gate and she’s just fucking standing there.

“Hey, Bones!” The smile on her face made it seem like she knew I was going to be there.

“Oh, Jesus, hey.” Guilt flushed through my heart, body, and soul.

“You never called me, Chris... Why didn’t you just call me?” She looked at me like I was nuts.

“I know, I’m sorry, I just...” Holy shit. *What the fuck, dude, say something*.

“It’s okay, I understand. Do you not like me? I don’t know, Chris. What did I do? Did I do something?” She stared me down as if she was sad. Or angry.

I walked closer to her, and all I could think to do was to kiss her. And I did. I just kissed her. She stepped away from me and put her thumb to her lower lip, looking down.

“So... do you want me to ride Johnny’s bike to your house with you so you don’t have to walk with two bikes like a total idiot?” She looked back up at me and smiled. I laughed a little and told her I’d love that.

We grabbed the bikes and as we were riding the bikes she turned left. “Um, *Melanie*, my house is the other way,” I said confused.

“I know, Bones. Follow me.”

Oh good Lord, I thought, wondering what she was up to. There stood a white barn on Highway 84 in the middle of tall beige grass. She got off the bike, dropped it, ran to the little white barn, and went inside. I followed. I walked through the doors and she stood there in the center of it all, glistening like the ocean on a calm, no-wind-at-all day. She told me to come closer, so as an instinct I did. She kissed my cheek and whispered something in my ear: “I’m sorry.” To this day I don’t know why she was so sorry. Was I really that lame? Uncertainty. She sat down, and so did I. She leaned on my side and

placed her head on my shoulder. She told me things only she knew about herself, her past. I told her things about myself, my past. I kissed her. She kissed me. We dropped back on the abundant cloud of hay and as she took off her black Pink Floyd shirt, I knew that this moment would never last forever, even though I certainly wished it would. I confronted her and said I had never done this before. She replied, “Obviously, Bones, but neither have I.” I put my lips onto hers once more before the next minute fell into oblivion.

The next morning, we woke up simultaneously and, as I put my shirt back on, she told me something that would stay with me for an eternity.

“I love you, Bones.”

“Melanie, I love you, too.”

We took the bikes back to my house and she told me she’d walk home.

Come third period English, she wasn’t there. *Am I really that bad at sex that she doesn’t want to see me?* I went home and sat on my bed for hours, fixated on my ceiling fan, wondering about all the things I could’ve done wrong, but nothing came to me. I was probably overthinking it and that’s the conclusion I came to that allowed me to fall asleep.

Then two days went by and she wasn’t in third period. *What the fuck.* Until I remembered. The damn barn. *Idiot.*

I pedaled faster than I thought could be possible with my scrawny abilities to that little white barn. I fell off my bike, stood up, and ran inside the barn. There she was lying there on the hay like a luminescent angel. I laid down next to her and wrapped my arms around her. She looked at me with heartbroken eyes, and I reminded her that it was going to be okay. I never knew why she was so devastated and I’ll always regret never asking her. She was so detached from everything, her mom, school, people in general. But she loved *me*. And I’ll never know why.

A salty liquid fell from my eye and I wiped it with the back of my hand. I had known I’d never see her again.

A few years later, I was driving on Highway 84, on my way home from my editing job at the newspaper. I looked to the right of me and there was a little white barn. A figure stood there in front—so ghost-like—waving at me from the distance. *Melanie-fucking-Redman.*



Eternally pure and forever soulful,  
 Such a precious thing about you.  
 Sweetness as you speak so gently to me,  
 Peacefully as damp grass yields to me.  
 Laying here for years or hours,  
 For so long I become the delicate flowers.  
 Something so wholesome, get closer to me,  
 Delicately as we whisper ever so softly.  
 The pleasure is all mine,  
 Attracted towards you I grow more and more.  
 Reminiscing our most beloved moments,  
 The affection grows stronger.  
 Your fingers intertwined between mine,  
 As we lust wistfully.

# MY HAND STILL TREMBLES

Marville Uy



# MY HAND STILL TREMBLES

Connor Stephenson

Love's first spark is something unparalleled. I remember that summer at Idyllwild Arts Academy and the way I felt as our glances first met. There, where pines coat the mountains, idyllic streams meander at their feet, and children sneak out from dormitories before sunrise to catch a glimpse of nature's wondrous display—there I first felt the flutter of insects through my stomach as I leaned in for a kiss. That's one of those things that never really changes: the infatuation and tender nervousness as I guide my lips toward another. I feel like that boy at summer camp all over again; the experience of it takes me right back to that time. I feel like an adult sitting on a playground, or like a man revisiting his favorite childhood vacation spot. It is as if I am observing my former self. My experience with new romance doesn't always connect to the same physical place, but the place created by my emotions always emulates that first experience and transforms me back into an awestruck and scared little boy.

I will always remember where we met. The aroma of hot dirt and sun-toasted pine needles accented by morning dew and crisp mountain air drifted through the grounds at that Idyllwild school. Trails winding through hillsides connected dormitories and classrooms to natural beauty spilling from that forest into our little enclave. And we were there, children, just fifteen years-old—little adults sneaking off to smoke cigarettes in the woods. She was there, too. Her hair was short and naturally blonde but bleached even brighter to a shade reserved for the older debutantes. Her name was Amy and when I said her name I felt like I forgot my own. She studied dance and I studied poetry, so I didn't see her during my classes, but we sat together at mealtime and spent the weekends idle at the grassy amphitheater, cuddled close together, lips inches apart as I stared into her green eyes and hers stared back into mine.

We never kissed in Idyllwild, but at that summer program, we realized that we lived blocks away from each other in Del Mar and later met in a park between our houses in the middle of the night, the autumn fog so thick I couldn't see the other side of the street. It was just me and her, floating in the mist, sitting on wet grass behind a playground overlooking the canyon, disappearing into the haze of the November darkness. I knew we both had feelings for each other. Why else would we be here? Why else would we speak

in those tones reserved for lovers and why else would I feel so taken by her presence? Still, knowing all this, I was slowed by nervousness. I reached my hand forward, my fingers and even my wrist were shaking as I whisked her hair behind her ear and rested my palm just above her neck. I leaned in. It was not the first time I had kissed someone, but I believe it was the first time I felt that anxious feeling only pure infatuation can bring. The relief as my lips met hers was immediate but only partial. My hands were still shaking. I shivered like a child all the walk home.

Ever since that night, the nervous waiting for my parents to fall asleep so I could slide gracefully out the dog-door, the anxious walk to the park filled with all the wonder of what waited for me in the fog, and the jittery and adrenaline-fueled walk home, first kisses make me feel not just like I'm a child again, but like I'm observing my younger self within my older self. It is as if I am seeing a form of myself that I have grown beyond wake up from his dormancy and make his continued presence known again.

I remember being twenty-two years old, seated next to her, Michelle, a different her, on the sidewalk. We were on Viola Drive, a little side street that dead-ends on a cul-de-sac in Westside Costa Mesa just off of 18<sup>th</sup> Street. The smell of equal parts gasoline and hot asphalt with notes of autumn leaves, the swan song of nature's beauty, wilted on the city air. Her eyes were blue with flecks of gold and my eyes gave away my nervousness, I'm sure. I was a man now, but no less a child than I had been before. There I was, love-struck again and moving slowly, waiting for what I thought was the perfect moment to strike.

Suddenly, I thought of Idyllwild and Amy, and I was overtaken by smells of the forest and the feeling of the dew on the grass slowly seeping through my pants and onto my thighs. There wasn't much difference, after all, between that time and this time. I wasn't in summer camp anymore. This wasn't Amy. This time I was in rehab—much like a summer camp for adults who are more childlike than they would care to admit. Never mind the peculiarity of looking for love in rehab or the oddity of a grown man sneaking around against the rules of the facility to spend time with the woman he had met in the smoking section. In that moment I was at camp again, sneaking out with my new friend to watch the sunrise arm in arm.

I knew I should have already kissed her. Not hours ago, but several days ago—there was no denying it. Fear still slowed my movement like that little boy with the quaking hands in the park that November those years ago. The concrete sprouted grass as that mist closed in around us again, and she was there and I was there too. No longer sure which me or which her I was talking about, or what city we were even in, I leaned in to kiss her and we were *there* again, and I was fifteen again. My hand still trembles after each new kiss.

And it was in that moment I was lifted up out of my body and saw myself from just beyond my usual perception. There I saw that boy, hands shaking uncontrollably, and

there I saw that these moments are timeless and will remain that way. Not a day had passed since that night in the park, and I became acutely aware that beneath the façade of manliness and composure, I was still that shivering child finding his way home in the fog.



# CORNERS

Noah East

Buzzing light from the streetlamp,  
intruding blue around us. With  
arms entangled, pupils swelling,  
and head nestled against my chest,  
our bodies are as close as the Earth  
to Atlas' shoulders—but every  
inhalation of saccharine hair returns  
my feet to solid ground. Our embrace  
makes a corner behind the other,  
somewhere to retreat into; still  
wrapped in caressing arms, and hands  
tracing sweet circles around nothing.  
Dream with me, of endless nights,  
budding smiles, and accelerating hearts  
which carry the liquid warmth to our cheeks.  
with eyes closed, we inch forward  
with lips unfurled—only to return  
back to our corners.

# FLIGHT OF THE MECHANICAL HERON

Natalya Shvetsky



# PLAYBOY OF THE MODERN WORLD

Dahlia Colak

Good times don't come from comfort zones—that's what I kept telling myself on my way to the escort's house. I'm not sure if calling her an escort is just, but we met at a karaoke bar and she handed me a business card. Her name and number were written in blue calligraphy. I wasn't going to call her. It's not my style. But a friend told me to man up and get laid. I hate that phrase. Get laid.

Entering her loft was like stepping into an antique store, the kind that organized itself to look like an actual house. She took the two empty wine glasses off the coffee table.

"I'm sorry, this place is a mess," she said. I didn't remember her hair being such a vibrant red. "I just made some tea. You want some?"

"It's okay," I replied. "Your place is really cool."

Her mattress was without a frame on a Persian carpet. Beside her window were two four-foot stacks of books. The coat hanger a Christmas tree, bras and lingerie as ornaments.

"Grat-zie!" she said, "I'm not one to believe in safe spaces, but this is my mecca."

Her smile made sure you thought that was funny. I walked to the kitchen counter and saw a large painting of a woman being eaten out by a squid.

She was trying to tie her hair into a bun when, looking up in a whim, she said, "My dad got me that from Japan. It's by Katsushika Hokusai, painted in like, I don't know, the 18th century or something. It's crazy. They were more in tune with their sexualities then."

"Yeah," I said, not quite sure if I agreed. "Crazy."

She was staring at the painting. With her hair gathered in a haphazard bun, you noticed her face was ruled by sharp angles: her jawline, her Roman nose. The sharpness of her features demanded a respect not often attributed to her kind of beauty.

"Well, I'm going to put on some music and then let's get to it, shall we?"

"Yeah, sounds good." Everything that came out of my mouth made me sound like a prepubescent boy whose sexual escapades were limited to his father's Playboy magazines.

She walked over to a record player and knelt by a wooden box to find a vinyl to play, and I walked to her bookshelf. Alice Walker, Elizabeth Bishop, Anais Nin. Nothing you'd read in public school.

"Wasn't *Tropic of Cancer* the book Jerry Seinfeld forgot to return to the New York

City library?" I was flipping through the book. "He rented it in the 70s, so the fine was..." *She highlights too much.* "...the fine was a lot," I managed.

"It was," she said, her chuckle almost sly.

She walked to the bookshelf and leaned her body on its edge. "I own so many books that I haven't read yet," she said as her eyes grazed the floor. "I thought I'd have more time once I finished college, but every day seems to pass with being occupied with trivial duties..." In a pause, she took a breath and looked out the window. "Maybe I'm making justifications for my lack of willpower to sit down and read all seven hundred pages of *Being and Nothingness*." I turned to put the book back.

She proceeded to sit cross-legged on her velvet couch. There was something light about the way she carried herself, something almost childlike in her confidence. It seemed like she was nervous but was trying carefully to act like she'd been here before.

"Anyways," her smile emphasizing the dimple on her right cheek, "Venmo?"

"Whatever works for you." I liked the idea of sliding an envelope on the nightstand table quietly, walking down to the bar next door, ordering a whiskey, and pretending I was a posh businessman now ready for a meeting. *It's 1950, I'd tell myself. Nice girls don't stay for breakfast. Let's sell some cigarettes.*

"Cool..." She took out her phone and bit her bottom lip. "What's your username?"

"virginiawoolfslover."

"Hah, your ex named Virginia?"

"No, but my ex loved her."

She chuckled. It seemed genuine. I wonder how many orgasms she's faked.

"I sent the request," she said. "Listen, I'm just going to go down the logistical stuff first. You said you were tested? How recently?"

"Last week," I told her.

She blinked in double-time.

"I was—" I cleared my throat. "I've been anticipating this." *I most certainly have not.*

"Oh, is it your first time?" she asked.

"No."

"I meant with a sex worker, Virginia Boy. What are you into? Role play, bondage, domination, any fetishes?"

I wanted to run to the window and scream every bit of my manhood out of my veins until I was empty and clean.

"I'm vanilla—can I use your bathroom?"

"Down the hall to your left, be careful with the cat. I'm going to undress."

"Uh, yeah, cool."

The bathroom smelled of a feminine men's cologne, the marriage of vanilla and musk. My reflection glared at me, disgusted in my inability to not think of my demise.

This artificial pre-performance was suffocating, but I need this. I needed the reassurance that intimacy was possible with someone who doesn't know me at all. The last time I made love was to Bridgette. When we kissed, she didn't move her lips. She stood still with her eyes closed shut as my face parted from hers. The next night, she told me she needed space in order to find herself.

I opened the bathroom window. New York City's sound is convenient when you're trying to drown out your mind. Particularly when it's raining. The window sill was embellished with wax candles, the kind decorated with religious iconography of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Beside the candles lay a tube of lube and a dildo.

I closed my eyes and tried to be present. I'm never present. I paid close attention, listening to the overlay of sounds. Police sirens, children jumping in puddles, two Indian women chattering on the sidewalk, and the tune playing from the other room. It changed from jazz to folk. She doesn't realize Karen Dalton isn't what comes to a man's mind when he's trying to get it up.

I went back to the sink, splashed water on my face, and stared stone-cold at my reflection. My eyes were miserable, begging for mercy.

*You're going to go in there, you're going to pretend she's Joan from Mad Men, and you're going to bang her brains out.*

When I stepped out of the bathroom, she was already naked.

"Come here."

That I did.

The prostitute's kiss sent me back to last Christmas. We'd spent it at Bridgette's family's cabin in Vermont. Our sweet nothings were whispered under blankets by the fireplace as everyone slept. Our bodies were cold; the warmth felt from the contact of our skin emphasized the dimension of touch. I'd never felt closer to her before; I'd never felt more whole before.

This woman, who wasn't Bridgette, was unzipping my pants. I decided to take her arm and kiss her wrist, making my way to her elbow, then her shoulder. Her gaze was vacant.

"You're so romantic," she said. "Even with a stranger."

I picked her up, laid her flat on the bed, and took her hair tie off. *Be present, I told myself. Be here, not in the past, not in memories, be here, you're here now.* Her fingers performed the rehearsed graze on my neck and I kissed her earlobe. I don't know how long that moment lasted. Maybe three minutes, maybe forever. I bit her lip. She smiled.

*Kill me.*

She twirled beneath my body like a butterfly exiting its cocoon, then positioned herself on top. Looking into my eyes, she swept her fingers through my hair and pulled, bringing my face in alignment with hers and her mouth to my ear.

*Kill me.*

"You know she isn't thinking about you right now." Her whisper was sugar simmering in a pan.

She traced her tongue along my neck.

The way Bridgette used to.

*It's dangerous women who are the pros at teasing—whether it's with their carnality or their devotion.*

"Mathew," she said, her grip getting tighter around my throat.

*End it. Kill me.*

The escort and I were as physically close as two people could possibly be, yet in no way could be more disconnected. This realization latched itself onto every memory I have of failed attempts at intimacy and love. If loneliness is living in a house with a lover you think no longer loves you, isolation is sleeping in a bed with someone you know doesn't love you. When we sat alone at dinner, Bridgette never looked up from her plate. Her eyes avoided mine. When our eyes met, hers begged for freedom—to free myself from the responsibility of taking the trouble out of her eyes. To free her eyes from the disappointment of knowing I could never. I knew I wasn't what Bridgette needed, but I let the emotions she elicited cloud my judgement: To love for love's sake.

I didn't realize Joan from *Mad Men* was blowing me until she jerked up. "Wait. Stop," she said. "Why is the street noise so loud?" Her naked body leaped off the bed and put on a blue robe.

"W-what?" I mumbled, putting my boxers back on.

"Oh my god, did you leave the bathroom window open?"

"No," I said, looking for my shirt. "I don't think so, is everything okay?"

She ran to the other room. "Simon? SEE-MON?" she was yelling in a slightly crooked melody as her cry dabbled in desperation.

"Get off your ass and help me find Simon," she yelled, her eyes manic. "He's not HERE."

"I told you to keep the window closed, you fucking idiot!" The tears traced her cheeks as she pushed the sofa aside. "Oh my god, he went out the window."

"Who went out the window?" *Asshole. You know who went out the window.*

"My cat!"

In the background, I caught the record player strumming one of Karen's tunes:

*My man went away*

*I said I'd miss him every night and day*

*And I began to look around*

*Wish I could show you what I found*

*Sweet substitute, sweet substitute*

*He tells me that he's mine, all mine*

# LEFT BRAIN RIGHT BRAIN

Doug Nason

*Ev'ry time I tell him  
You know love is blind  
He's got such lovin' ways  
Got my head in a daze  
My new recruit is mighty sweet and cute  
I'm crazy 'bout my substitute*

As her panic meandered around the house, the silence, the music, and I were surrounded by a discomfort that beckoned something within me when she entered the living room in a hiccup-sob.

"Hey, *hey*... Okay, can you come here?" I asked. My hands took her by the shoulder and then by her chin, gently positioning her face in alignment with mine. "Listen, it's raining. I really don't think he would *want* to go outside."

"He's always trying to get out of here," she said, walking away from my grasp. "Listen pal, I know what this looks like, okay? A prostitute with a codependent relationship with her cat, la-dee-dee la-dee-daa." She suddenly took a Juul out of her blue-robe's pocket and twirled it in her hand. "Don't even *flatter* the thought that *I don't know* how bad this looks." She went to inhale, "But I don't really give a fuck," and exhaled, wiping the smudged mascara with the back of her other hand.

*"Meow."*

And there the gentleman was, making his way to the bookshelf. He massaged his back upon it: hazel-eyed, handsome, and unbothered.

I turned to her and caught her lifting her chin to the ceiling, blowing more smoke, watching her Simon.

"I should..." *Again, the thirteen-year-old-boy.* "I should get going," I said.

She approached me on her toes, elongated herself, kissed me on the nose, and then my lips.

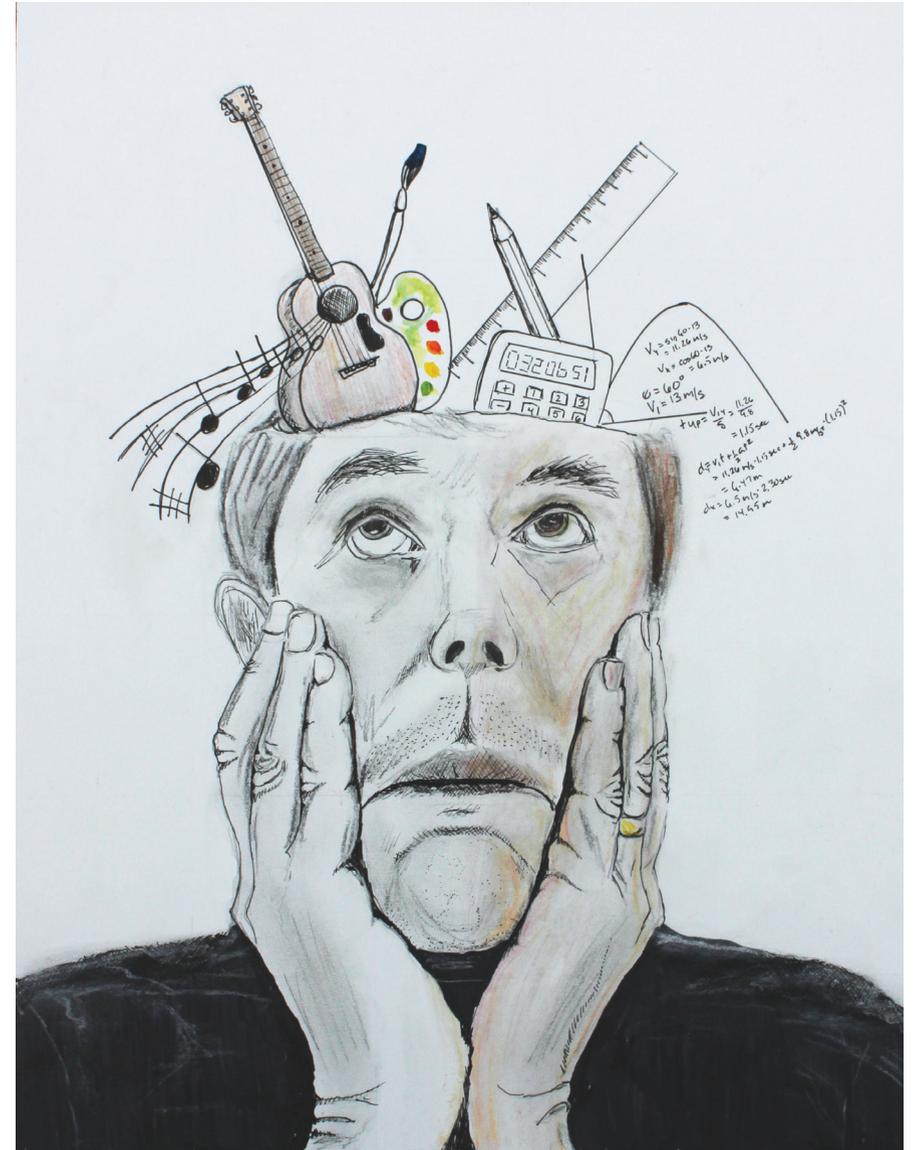
"Mathew," she said, revealing her dimple. "The door is to your left. Please, *please* close it on your way out."

I tipped my imaginary hat.

That I did.

As I shut her door behind me, I wished I had alluded to the possibility of another visit. Not a business meeting, but maybe a cup of coffee. But as I walked away from her loft, I put all thoughts aside and strolled through Manhattan's Mott Street in an elevated state of post-nut clarity, relishing the fact that I—

*Had just gotten my dick sucked.*



# FIRE ALARM

Ye Eun (Miri) Choi

The loud cry of the engine filled the silent car as Haeyeon slammed on the gas. One thing she hated about her Santa Fe was that noise. The car vroomed like an angry teenager at a high school football game—and she was only going at, like, fifty-five miles. In any case, Haeyeon always floored the pedal, ignoring the engine noise; she simply couldn't stand going under the speed limit when she could go much faster.

Haeyeon glanced at the speedometer. The needle was reaching seventy-five. On her usual way home with that crazy rush-hour traffic, she couldn't have imagined that number, but today, she was practically flying on the highway. She was supposed to be starting the second half of her shift by now if Grace hadn't called her.

If she had to choose a single moment from her life that she regretted the most, Haeyeon would, without hesitation, go for the day she gave Grace her mobile number. It was the day her fire alarm went off for no reason while she was out and soaked her furniture. She found Grace, a retired widow in her mid-sixties (she looked younger, though, because she always dyed her hair brown), living in one of the larger two-bedroom apartments next door, and exchanged numbers to make sure that next time there was a false alarm, she knew before the sprinkler went on. And for the next two years, Haeyeon got hundreds of calls from Grace, not a single one about a false alarm. The old woman would go on for hours on such minor things like going a couple inches over the parking line.

But this time, it was about the fire alarm—not that it made the call any less annoying.

“Heeya (she never said *Haeyeon* right), you seemed to be out, so I'm just letting you know, your fire alarm's been going off again. I think it's some sort of error... anyway, it's been almost half an hour now, and Leo seems to be getting really upset...”

Long story short, the old lady called in the maintenance guys. The maintenance guys. Those bastards. Haeyeon could already imagine them breaking into her apartment and stomping all over her just-cleaned carpets with their dirty boots.

“Couldn't you have just—” Haeyeon barely stopped herself from yelling and instead let out a sigh.

“All right, could you tell the office to wait? I'll be there in twenty minutes. And

it's Hay-yawn.”

“But Leo is—”

“Just twenty minutes, okay? Your cat will be fine.”

“Well, then hurry, Heeya, he's so stressed already, poor thing...” Grace mumbled over the phone.

Hence, Haeyeon was speeding home on Tuesday afternoon, leaving her angry boss behind.

As soon as she entered the automated gate to the complex, Haeyeon parked carelessly in front of building C and sprinted toward the stairs. Leaping up, she prayed that the maintenance guys weren't there yet. Her prayer was crushed when she heard a gruff voice calling her as she reached the second floor, panting.

“Oh, Ms. Park?”

One of the maintenance guys—*his name was... Matt? Mike?*—gazed at Haeyeon as if he wasn't expecting to find her. The other guys seemed to have already left, and he was the last one. He was just closing to the door to Haeyeon's apartment, pulling in a notice through the chink, saying he had entered her house according to some kind of bylaw. Beside him was Grace wearing a concerned look on her face, holding Leo in her arms.

“I said I'd be here in twenty minutes.”

“Hen-yun (it was impossible for this lady to pronounce Hay-yawn), you did come! It's fine. They just looked at your alarms and apparently it was just an error. Thank goodness. Leo was getting so upset with the noise. You know cats... they're very sensitive... he almost ran down to the garage to escape...” The woman looked down at Leo, stroking the back of his tiny gray head.

*That old lady must have some sort of grudge against me, Haeyeon thought. Couldn't she wait for just twenty minutes?* She glanced at the cat struggling inside Grace's arms, occasionally hissing.

“You okay now?” Haeyeon said to the cat, raising her eyebrows.

“He's still a bit startled, but he'll calm down.”

*It was meant to be sarcastic, woman,* Haeyeon replied in her head, rolling her eyes.

“Okay, well, thanks,” Haeyeon shooed Matt (or Mike—she didn't really care) and Grace away. Snatching the notice, she slipped into her apartment and slammed the door shut.

Sure enough, dark footprints and dirt were smudged on the living room. Some white dust fell from the ceiling where the fire alarm had been replaced. Haeyeon bit her lips.

“Damn it, I just got them cleaned last weekend, just last week,” she mumbled to herself while scanning the house to check if anything else was out of order. The far left corner beside the couch was empty. Her yoga mat, weights, rubber straps, and running shoes were all thrown under the computer desk by the opposite wall. On the ceiling

above was a brand-new, ugly fire alarm blinking in green. Haeyeon let out a sigh, glaring at the alarm as if it would make it disappear. She then picked up the weights and straps, and tossed them on the desk. Normally, she would have organized them back to their spots right away, but she had to vacuum first.

The sky was dripping with red by the time Haeyeon placed the vacuum back to the charger. *So much for taking the afternoon off*, she thought. It was that moment when her mobile started ringing. It was Grace.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Heywon. I just called since I know you’re home today...” Grace muttered in an anxious voice.

“What?”

“I was wondering if you’ve seen Leo this evening?”

*Oh, wow, seriously?* Haeyeon massaged her forehead between her eyes.

“No. I stayed in my apartment cleaning. What happened?” Haeyeon replied in a sigh, putting an emphasis on “cleaning.” She began chewing on her lips.

“I had my back door open and you know I keep my garage open, too, but I only had the back door open for just a few minutes, and I closed it as soon as I noticed. But now I don’t see Leo. I circled the complex three times, but—”

“Yeah, no, I haven’t seen him. I was inside the whole time.”

Grace was still mumbling to the phone. All of a sudden, she started whimpering.

“It’s probably because of that fire alarm, Heywon. He was so upset the whole afternoon...”

Haeyeon felt her blood boil. Call the office, make her leave work early, let the maintenance guys mess up her place, and *now what?*

“Look, the fire alarm isn’t my fault, okay? I’m sorry your kitty’s so sensitive, but I have nothing to do with it. And I haven’t seen him. Not a sign of him. I’ve been inside my apartment *cleaning* this whole entire afternoon. And it’s *HAY-YAWN*.”

Grace didn’t reply. She probably wasn’t even listening, floundering about to look for her cat; all Haeyeon could hear was her sobbing in the background with an occasional “Le—o—!”

Huffing, Haeyeon hung up and threw her mobile to the couch. She stomped to the computer desk to put the weights back in place. She grabbed two three-pounds in her left hand and an eight-pound in her right, bending over to line them up at the corner. Suddenly, she noticed that the lower window was closed. It was one of those stiff windows that she kept open, but the maintenance guy must have closed it. *Those maintenance guys*, I swear, Haeyeon grumbled. She held the dumbbell with her thumb and reached her right fingers to the bottom of the window to push it open. The window didn’t move an inch. Haeyeon let out a grunt, pushing as hard as she could with her four fingers.

“I hate you,” she muttered, unsure who exactly you was supposed to mean. She hated everything about today. She hated this window. She hated the stupid fire alarm for making her leave work early. She hated her boss, who went off on her for her last-minute absence (*Like does she expect fire alarms to be planned or something?*). She also hated the maintenance guys, as always. And her loud Santa Fe. And Leo. And, not to mention, Grace.

Her fingertips were turning pale as she leaned to the side to push harder. With a sudden *whoosh*, the window swung open. Her right arm unsupported, Haeyeon lost balance.

“Ah!” She gasped as she her grip loosened and the weight left her hand. In a short second, the dumbbell in her right hand was gone. Then she heard a thud... and a high-pitched screech. Haeyeon stuck her head out and peeked down. She couldn’t recognize the faint figure through the darkness and distance, but soon guessed what it was with an ominous gut feeling.

Failing to process the situation, Haeyeon chewed on her lips while giving her best effort to think of what to do. *Is it really it—the cat? Can it be alive? Should I move it away? Hide it? Or just pick up the weight?*

“Leo?” Grace’s hoarse voice came from a distance, along with footsteps in a quickening pace. Startled, Haeyeon stood frozen by the wide-open window with her heart pounding loudly like the engine of her car. *She’ll know, she’ll know it’s me, she’ll think I did it on purpose*, a voice in her head repeated as she peeked out with trembling eyes.

“Leo!” The old woman shrieked in panic, collapsing by the figure. Haeyeon felt as if the world was turning black. *Should’ve left the window closed, should’ve stayed at work, should’ve ignored the call...* So many should-haves occurred to her but gave no direction.

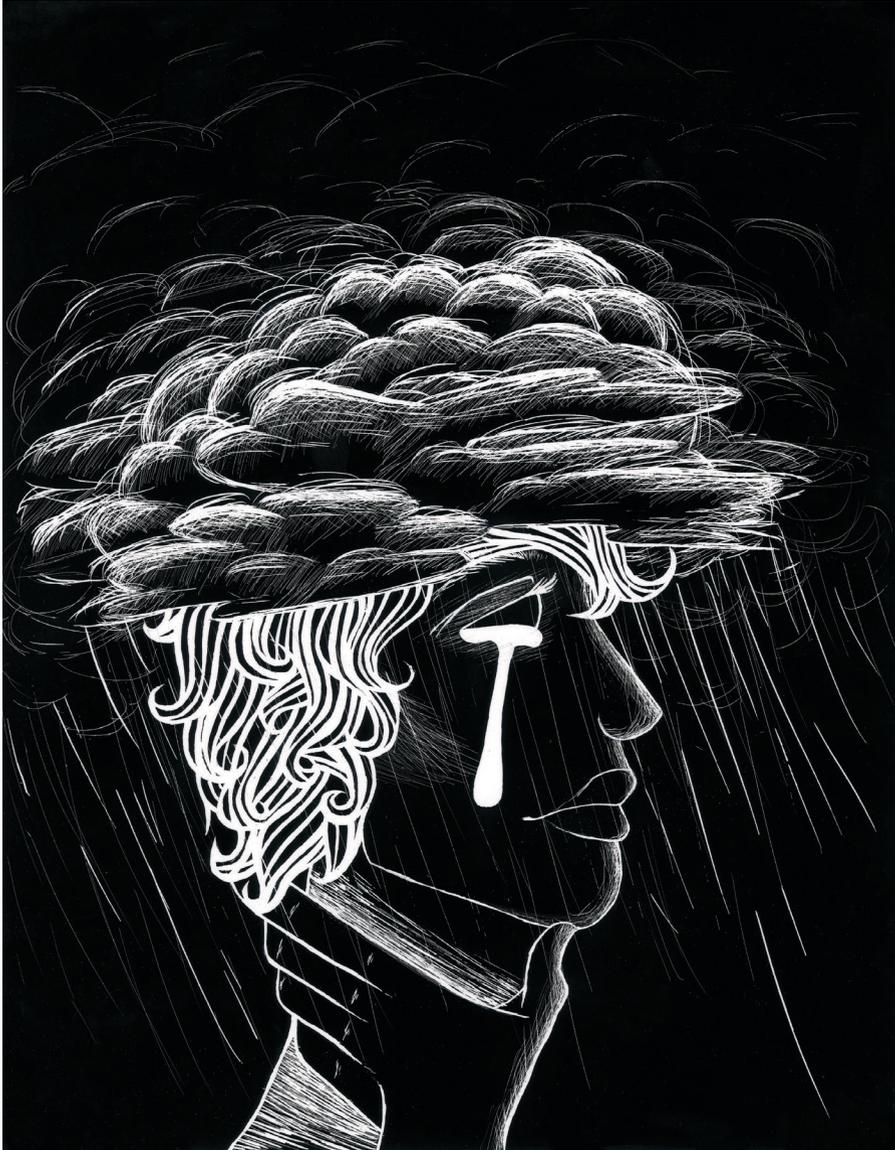
Grace was now sobbing, picking up the dead cat. Then she halted, gasped, and covered her mouth with one hand. She reached for the blood-covered dumbbell lying beside the body with her other hand, shaking. Haeyeon curled her back, aggressively chewing on her lips. Grace tossed her head up, staring straight up to Haeyeon’s window.

At that moment, their eyes met. She felt Grace’s watery eyes piercing straight through hers. Frozen by the window like a corpse, she helplessly watched the woman’s eyes fill up with terror in dreadful confirmation.



# THE DARK SHADOW

Lexy Pound



# THE DARK SHADOW

Hashem Kalthoum

When I was a kid, I went to a school called the Rosary Sisters School in Irbid, Jordan. The reputable school sat on the western side of the city; it had three enormous classical stony buildings, and a church situated on the edge of the street, with four columns holding up the red brick façade and the beautiful stained glass. Students would go there from kindergarten to senior year. The school's education system allowed kids to socialize and build strong relationships with their peers. That being said, I will always cherish the friendships that I built there, especially with my buddy, Sami. He was a flippant, frivolous kid. He was tall and skinny, and his eyes were as black as charcoal. He had thick, curly hair, and his voice was as harsh as the desert. Every time I looked into his eyes, I used to get the feeling that something was troubling him, something that nobody knew. But what did I know? I was just a kid.

During spring break of seventh grade, I went to visit Sami on a beautiful Saturday afternoon. I still think of that visit to this day. The day started normally; we played, studied, and messed around. After a while, we sat down in his bedroom that he shared with three of his brothers; he was staring out the window when he suddenly said, "You know my parents are not actually my parents." He turned his face ever so slowly in my direction while staring at nothing. I stopped what I was doing and looked at him, startled.

"What the hell do you mean?" I asked, with a puzzled look on my face.

"My real parents left me when I was a kid. Apparently, I was a mistake, and they didn't want anything to do with me. And here I am living with fake parents, fake brothers, and fake life." A tear was trickling down his face.

I was speechless; I didn't know what to say. I remember I couldn't sleep that night — the thought of having no parents kept attacking my brain. I asked myself what would I do if I found out that my family was made up. My brain couldn't wrap around the dreadful thoughts of waking up with no parents.

Sami's past was like a dark shadow that grew by the day. His life, school, and friends were all daily reminders that he was different, that he was an outcast in his own family, and that he did not belong, and never would. He never enjoyed what others took for granted, such as parents who would ask him how his day was, parents who would help

him with his homework, parents who would cuddle him to sleep, or parents who would buy him toys so he could have something to brag about in front of his friends. He had nothing but his fake family and the dark shadow following him. He grew up in an institution called the SOS children's villages, a place where kids with no parents could grow up in a safe environment. It is funded by the government or private donors. The SOS mission was to develop children's personalities and protect their rights. However, society never gave the SOS kids a chance to do so. They were looked down upon by their peers, and the consequences of such treatment made an impact on the future of innocent kids. The SOS educated the kids by sending them to local schools. Sami was one of the lucky ones to attend the prestigious Rosary Sisters School where I met him.

During the spring semester of my freshman year, I remember waking up to the thunder roaring outside my window. I looked out and saw that the fluffy white clouds had turned into a furious army of dark grey storm clouds. I never liked rainy days as a kid; they gave me the impression that the day was hiding behind a grey curtain of uncertainty. As we were driving to school, rain was battering down the roofs and storming down the buildings. Rocks and pebbles were racing the cars down the street. People were running, trying to take cover from the vicious rain. As we approached the school, it looked even more intimidating; the stone buildings were dark and wet. It looked like a European castle from the Dark Ages.

Nonetheless, I hurried inside in the hope of finding some warmth. Lamps in the yard were barely lighting the school and were swinging sideways with the howling wind. When I walked into the classroom, my classmates were huddled by the window around the heat source of the room: a single iron radiator that would get turned off before the room was warm. The air was heavy and the smell of fuel burning up in the radiator filled the room; with no windows open, the room felt like a cold cage closing in on us. I joined the crowd, shivering. Everyone had layers and layers of clothes. Kids were talking about random stuff; one kid was bragging about his new Nintendo console, while another was showing off his skills with bouncy balls. Girls were talking in an enclosed circle so no one could overhear their conversations. A couple of kids were peeking their heads out the door, acting as spies who would notify us whenever a teacher was approaching. "Everyone, big boss is on her way," the spies yelled. Everyone rushed to their assigned seat. The teacher, Ruba, stormed through the door, marched her way into the class, slammed her books down on the table, and stared down at us.

"Stand up," Miss Ruba demanded with a straight face.

All the students stood up from their seats as if they were about to salute an army general. She walked down the aisles, looking at each one of us. It was intimidating. It was her way of establishing dominance over her students. "Hmmm.. All right, sit down." Miss Ruba was our social studies teacher, the most dreaded teacher in the Rosary School. She

was known for her commanding personality and edgy comments towards her students. She was a middle-aged lady, with a hunched back and crooked round glasses that sat on the edge of her nose, giving the impression of carelessness and power at the same time. She had thin, unkempt hair with a loosely fitted hair tie.

Nobody liked Miss Ruba, especially Sami; she made him feel small on many occasions. During class, Sami started throwing paper balls around the class while the teacher was rambling about the different social institutions of the society. Somehow, she caught sight of a paper ball and spun around. "What was that?" she yelled, with her eyes bulging out of their sockets. Everyone froze, not knowing what she was referring to except Sami and me. "Someone better say something or the whole class will pay for it."

Sami reluctantly stood up. "I'm sorry, Miss Ruba. I wanted to throw the paper into the trash. I fell the other day, and my leg is hurting me." He lied, trying to reason with the beast inside Miss Ruba.

"Of course it's you, Mr. Sami," she said with a menacing look and a smirk shadowing her face. "Maybe your parents should have taken care of your leg. Or wait, I mean your fake parents should have taken care of you."

Sami looked around, trying to confirm that he had heard the teacher correctly. He saw his classmates looking at him, shocked. Then it dawned on him; his brain was already in a different place while his body froze as if a magical spell had been cast on him. The room had turned black in his eyes; the dark shadow had gotten out of his head and grown to the size of the room. The blackness had blinded him and shut off his brain; tears started to run down his cheeks. He ran out of the class, not knowing where to go. I ran after him, against Miss Ruba's best efforts to stop me. I went down the stairs and found him curled up around the corner, sobbing. I approached him awkwardly, not knowing what I should say, but I instantly went and hugged him. It was one of the most unfeigned moments I have ever had with my best friend.

"Why my parents did this to me? What did I do to deserve this? I can't do this anymore, Hashem. I can't fight it anymore. My past is choking me up. Everything in front of me is turning black, and I can't do anything about it. I'm tired. I tried to ignore it, I tried to forget it, but how could I forget it when everything around me reminds me of it? This school, these people, this uniform is not for me; I don't belong here."

"What are you talking about, man?" I told him, trying to ease his pain. "Don't be like this. You know how Miss Ruba is. Don't worry about her. Everything will be fine." However, my empty words slipped past his ears with no signs of any effect. He did not say a single word after that.

Nothing turned out to be fine. That was the last time I saw or talked to Sami. He never showed up to class anymore, he left his home, and no one has heard from him ever since.

I still think of him to this day. Sami's troubles were not unheard of; it was a social dilemma. Many kids who grow up in the SOS villages have a similar story. Even though kids were being raised in a controlled environment, they were never ready for the real world. They were mentally weak and insecure. They were labeled by society as bad kids. The kids with no parents, the kids with no support, the fake kids.



# HAVE YOU BEEN WHERE I'VE BEEN?

Anisa Panahi

Have you been where I've been?  
It's cold there, and dark  
The air is thick and heavy  
And it weighs upon your heart.

Have you been where I've been?  
Music plays from somewhere,  
But the sound is much too faint.  
And when you strain to hear it,  
You'll find it's gone away.

Have you been where I've been?  
There's talking and there's laughter,  
And people all around  
But when you try and speak, you'll find  
You cannot make a sound.

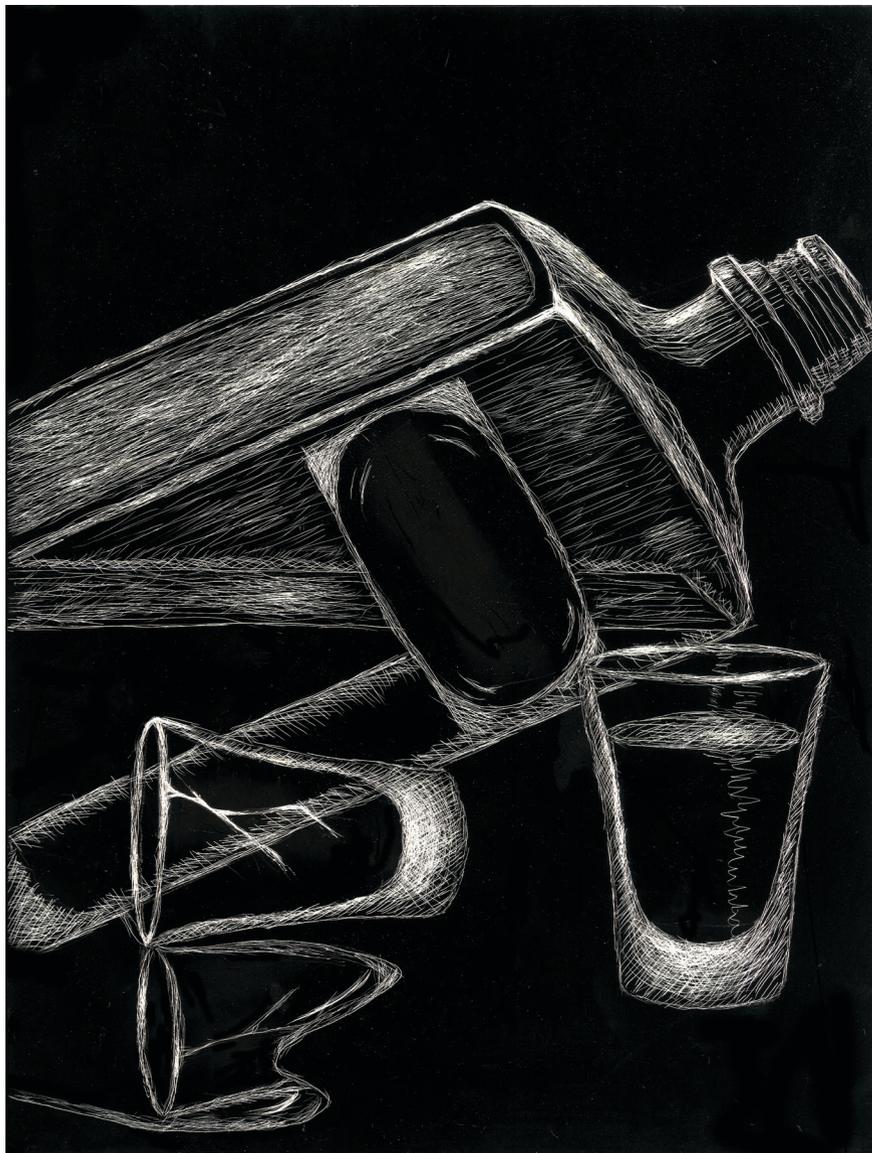
Have you been where I've been?  
You scream and cry and shout  
And pound your fists upon the wall  
And realize though you're not alone,  
There's no one there at all.

It's always and forever,  
This place you might have been.  
When you're there it eats at you,  
Outside and from within

At first, you think it's nothing.  
Then you realize something's wrong.  
But when you decide to run,  
It always comes along.

# WHISKEY DANCE

Olga Vlasova



# WHISKEY DANCE

Jane Hardie

We both drank.  
He didn't need a reason to,  
but me, I drank away the pain.  
All his lies, his cheating.  
The broken dreams,  
and lastly his beating.  
After every fight,  
a little more whiskey  
could ease the pain.  
And then he'd beg me,  
promising things wouldn't  
be the same.  
And with one shot,  
there'd be one more chance  
and we'd continue our  
Whiskey Dance.

The first few days would be perfect  
and hot with passion.  
But then he'd fall into his  
usual actions.  
Lying, cheating-  
tension would build,  
words got heated.  
Shooting back shots as if  
they were needed.  
Thinking maybe they would  
numb emotions,  
instead only causing his  
enraged explosion.  
That one day he let the  
whiskey take over.  
I felt myself flying  
and slam into a wall,  
eventually, the couch is where  
I took my fall.  
His hands tight around my neck.  
I didn't stand a chance.  
He chose to finally end  
Our Whiskey Dance.

# DIRTY PAWS

Sarah Shimabukuro



# IT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

Michael Presley

A being contained in a bottle; A life ended by the bottle  
Tears streaming  
Awkward family presence  
Forced conversation  
“You have to carry on”  
Buried feelings  
He seems just fine  
Doesn’t know how to say  
Scared that he is going to hurt  
Bad thoughts fester  
Anger bubbling over the top  
He starts to feel an empty void  
Hopefully things won’t go the same  
Machines beeping  
Family can’t be present  
No conversation  
“Can he carry on?”  
Hushed meetings  
He had seemed just fine!  
Feels that he shouldn’t say  
Scared his family will be hurt  
Bad thoughts enter  
Worry building under the surface  
He drank to fill his hidden void  
Things will never be the same  
*I pray that they will be okay.*

# ADDICTION AND DEPRESSION

Anastasia Augustson



# BLINDNESS

Cheree Vega

Dear Alcohol, I was visiting a restaurant one day many years ago and while sitting alone at a table I observed two men casually sitting and talking. As they chatted, I watched them dip their cigars into shot glasses filled with you. I had never witnessed that happen before and became very curious. I noticed many flattering things about their appearance as I sat and watched them repeatedly dip once or twice, and then order fresh shots to continue to dip their cigars. Since I was not aware of this dipping thing, I quietly asked the bartender why and what they were dipping their cigars into. He explained to me that in that situation your name was King Henry IV, the finest of the cognac genre. There you cost a robust \$50 a shot and equally expensive cigars were intensified in flavor by your presence. At that moment, I knew I wanted to explore your boundaries.

I was once employed in an environment where you are permanently housed. In this house, a total of three trusted employees, with a well-earned reputation, were the only ones endorsed to access your private entry. This was because of the tightness of your ownership at that time. The members of this environment tend to prize your status as an indication of their stature. It is of general opinion that people assign you prominence by pairing you with lifestyle, intellect, culture, race, food, palate, cornucopia, and Earth's soil and climate. They believe it makes good conversation to discuss your reign. It expresses a refined and sophisticated demeanor. You sit on shelves everywhere. There's talk about your pH balance and how to entertain with you in hand.

In my lack of control, I chose to ignore my highest values over you. This is clear to me as Proverbs 23:29-35 explains, "Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things." Then Peter 5:8 tells us, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a lion, seeking someone to devour." My guilt was evident; my lures hung low, then you ruled over me.

Dear Alcohol, in lack of all that I had loved, I accepted you in my life. But, true to your nature, you set my whole life in flames because of my love for you. As a professional I procured high-level employment at one of the most prestigious firms in this country, having access to abundance. But with you, all I am is a drunkard. Desiring the feeling you

gave me, I enjoyed the drink, but your spirit is denatured, and the results are demeaning and traumatizing, which led me to a lonely bottom. The worst thing that can happen indeed happened. I experienced the separation of my spiritual presence. I was left alone.

Before then, I thought naturally that I had arrived and was living a glamorous life, having full access to a seemingly endless supply of your spirits. My family teased me, saying, "The bar never closes at your house." I thought the nights I shared with close friends and families weren't complete without a strong presence of your spirits. We would all arrive at a particular destination with bottles of you in hand. All eyes gleaming at the exterior labels: Hennessy, Grey Goose, Dom Perignon, and many others considered to be expensive top-shelf variety, with some brought from underground sources.

I've seen documentaries on your chemical makeup and how advanced and mysterious you are. You own a special fury and once in the grips of your abode, the results turn devastating. Your nature is in such abundance that you appear in places I'd never dreamt of. I read that NASA found proof that the Comet Lovejoy releases large amounts of your being into the atmosphere, equivalent to around 500 good bottles of spirits per minute. Researchers confirmed that ethyl alcohol, the substance I drank and just one of the many names you go by, is the same substance released by the comet. Imagine that.

I am aware of another phenomenon in the universe. A woman whose contribution to science is most abundant. Just like you, her presence can be found in the most unsuspecting of places. She, too, can be traced to space. NASA shipped her cells into orbit. They are the cancer cells belonging to Henrietta Lacks. Like your amazing particles, she, too, is without boundaries.

Alcohol, just like Lacks's cells, you can be found in surgical environments where you do important work to save lives. You help to heal and make people healthy again, just like the cells of Henrietta. But, Alcohol, you have a dark side. As many lives as you save, you destroy. Books have been written about you. Books like *Alcoholics Anonymous*. You see the irony. Interesting, isn't it? I've read some of the books written about the dark places you will take people like me that once adored you. You see, I was consumed by you in my younger years and, without any misgivings, I developed an allergy over time. I did not think nor did I understand anything about the allergy I developed against you. I knew for a long time something was wrong with me when I thought I had enjoyed you. What I understand today is that your nature and my nature do not mix well together. The book I mentioned states that people who suffer this allergy usually do not mix well with life when you're involved. I've been restored from a seemingly hopeless state with regard to having you in my life.

However, between then and now, a great deal has occurred. I found myself in a strange place I thought I'd never go. Much like my shock of discovering you in the comet, I was shocked when I found myself there. Dark things happened, yet I have trouble

distinguishing the reality. I stood handcuffed, feeling isolated, abandoned, baffled, and weak, defending and protesting the demoralization I bear witness to due to my consenting involvement with you. Never again, I told myself. Your seeds don't always produce luscious fruit; the harvest of your season didn't blossom with gaiety. It's true, Alcohol, I had been forewarned to beware of your soft whisper and not to answer your wooing. But in your nature, you certainly had me. You obliged me soulfully with your charm. You had the audacity to demand my attention, and I surrendered. In my weakness, I gave in to your cunning ways, only to awaken to the raft of your loud and scolding temperament.

Although I understood the seriousness of the situation, I knew my worst day wasn't the day I earned my first, second or even third driving under the influence (DUI) offense. It wasn't the day I begged the court to release me from custody and was promptly denied. It wasn't the day I mourned over being severely dehydrated and begged for fresh water, and was denied. It wasn't even the day I looked into a hazy mirror and the reflection revealed a slow demise. It was a different day, unlike any other day I had had in my life up until that point. I had lived a privileged life, but one day things changed.

When the judge said to me "go get better," I screeched in my inherited agony. They wrote about my attachment to you, claiming that I had become a full-blown menace, no longer to be trusted in my own wit. My worst day was born from this ruling. The ruling was a collaborative effort. As your charm over me wears away, I sat in a dungeon of silence for forty days appealing to my Creator to give me a new name. I am and still can be a daughter, a wife, a mother, a friend, a good neighbor.

My mother came there to console me. Her eyes cried out in misery to see me held in abrupt captivity. I stood locked away through a shield, bearing witness to her powerlessness. I can testify today no jail could manufacture the pain radiating from within me from the look in those eyes. My poor heart howled in melancholy. Death would serve me better than to take my refuge from the fear in those eyes. I knew her deepest prayer was not to come there on that day, to that place, to claim me. Seeing the pain in her eyes made this day the worst day of my life. Something in me had to die, root and all, for me to live again.

It only takes a flicker of light to break the darkness of a cave. Alcohol, I will keep my promise to listen and be patient with myself. I promised myself to be careful with my feelings, my hopes, and my dreams. I will support my desires and love myself to the utmost. I no longer need you. I had a rebirth with The Great Power that I called upon to save me, the Great I AM. It heard my cries and my prayers in the darkness, and mercifully answered my call. You know it to be true. My voice today is well-reserved and without remorse. I commend you to a final farewell.

# RAYS OF LIGHT

Ryotaro Obana



# THE LIGHT COMES AROUND

Brittney Raymundo

Oftentimes when I take this road, I am reminded of the distant world I once knew. The only world I knew back then. I remember the long commutes she would drag me by my heels to, the childlike car games she would force me to play to stay entertained, even the kind way she would laugh when I ultimately came out victorious. In the midst of this seemingly infinite desert road, I can begin to hear the struggling sounds of a poor static radio as it tries to find its way to at least one viable station, followed by the harsh slam of her hand and a groan of muffled frustration.

As I continue to drive, I can smell the familiar scent of roadside dust as it is swept up into the air to dance in the cheap flurries I once marveled at from the backseat. I can even begin to taste the horrid, stale pink bubblegum she would offer me to prevent motion sickness. I tell myself now that I should've told her I hated the flavor almost as much as I hated the car games and her preference for the oldies radio stations. In the middle of this desert, I am reminded of her, how much I once hated her—how much I didn't understand her. When I drive through this desert, I am reminded of my mother.

The sun begins to set and I watch as the colors decide amongst themselves which one will be the day's lucky winner. Purple puts up a pretty good fight and triumphs over Pink. Their finale is both volatile and wonderful. I get around to thinking that despite all of the things we could—and did—disagree on, I've always stood by my mother's opinion that nowhere else on this planet will ever have a sunset quite as breathtaking as the one you find on this highway.

"Watch the last moments of the light's show while you can, Cupcake," she would warn me. "That light won't come around for another how many hours and once he does, he won't ever be the same."

I hated the nickname Cupcake.

The imperfections of the road bump me back into reality. She was always a bit off, and here I was imagining colors wrestling in the sky just as she would. I shake my head and drive on.

It was always expected of her to go off on tangents like this. But not me, at least not before. I was a stubborn child with little to say and she was a young dreamer with

an eye for finding the most impossible outcomes in the most common situations. They would be just as spectacular as they were horrifying. Thinking about it now, I suppose that maybe she created those narratives to understand her own life. How life never quite went the way she expected it to. She may have even told these stories to just simply get me to speak to her.

Probably both, but then again you never know with her.

I remember the time she told me to watch for meteors because they were the shooting stars of giants.

“And because of this,” I could almost hear the inflections in her raspy voice, “I’m never gonna waste my time on those shooting stars they all speak of ever again. Big dreams call for big risks, Cupcake, and chasing dreams is already harder than it seems.”

I remember how her face went dark after that piece of advice. Her expression always did seem to change when she talked about dreams, ambitions, or anything else of the sort; I never really understood why until I reached the age she was at the time: twenty-three.

I begin to look at the hands fixated on my steering wheel, the reflection on my ring finger, and can’t help but feel guilty for what I had done to her. She was just a child, I often think to myself. She was a child forced to take care of another on her own. Forced to miss prom because of my delivery day, forced to miss graduation because I had gotten sick...

I snap myself out of my melancholy and hear her voice over the roar of my engine.

“You were never a mistake, Cupcake, just an unexpected gift delivered promptly.”

My eyes begin to sting and I laugh. Crazy, crazy woman.

And that was all she was to many of the people we knew. She didn’t think I noticed the way people discreetly tried to sneak glances at us in grocery stores or the way the other mothers of the PTA would whisper when she walked away. But I did. I noticed all of it and, for a moment, even I started to believe she was the character they had created of her. A disgrace who was unfit for the responsibilities that she had brought upon herself.

From such a young age I had begun to despise almost everything about her—from the way she would pick me up from school late with greasy hands and food stains splattered on her uniform, to the way her car brakes screeched because she never got around to scraping up the cash to fix them. I even began to boil when the frozen mac and cheese dinners were overcooked, and I hated the lame “camping trips” she constructed out of bedsheets in our room. I hated her for the fact that I never met him, and I hated her even more for the way she would leave me those nights...

The air grows cold and I scramble to roll up the windows. That’s another part of the desert people solemnly talk about—the biting cold you can feel once the sun retires. It’s the kind of cold no one ever dares set foot in, the kind that chills you to the bone and

makes you feel alone, unsafe. My mother must have known its effects all too well those nights. I continue to think of her to rid myself of such feelings.

I remember the way she looked those nights: the mismatch of neon colors and loud, obnoxious prints hidden behind a thick wool jacket. I remember her face looking different than her own and the trails of tacky glitter she would leave around the bathroom sink. The smell of a cheap cotton candy-scented perfume that would cloud the room until I couldn’t breathe, and the unsettling look of unnatural hair that she wore down past her waist.

She hated wearing her hair down, and she hated cotton candy.

We had a routine those nights and I had grown accustomed to them. She would drop me off at her friend Mimi’s house by 9 p.m. and leave me there until the early morning when we could reunite again. She didn’t think I noticed, but I studied her closely each time she picked me up. The way she looked increasingly surprised when she was able to hug me again, her puffy eyes and how they softened each time she would lay eyes on me. Even the way she would anxiously avoid Mimi’s conversations when they said goodbye. I guessed they weren’t friends after all.

Those nights ended with the one night I’ll never forget.

I begin to increase the pressure on the pedal to pick up my own pace as if I am trying to run away from it once again.

I remember waking up in the dark to her desperate face and her urgent whispers as she tried to help me get up. The loud curses Mimi drunkenly threw our way as my mother scrambled for my wrist and dashed for the door. I remember the unforgiving cold that night. The echoing sound of her heels clicking against the pavement. Her breaths fluctuating rapidly. Her warm sweaty palm gripping feverishly around my wrist.

Click. Click. Click. Breath. Click. Click. Breath. Breath.

“Eileen!”

I heard his slurred shout and a few other words I couldn’t make out as she threw me into the backseat. I remember the sounds of struggles and vicious yelling as I tried to watch the event from a foggy window. The quick glimpse of a man I managed to steal. A man I would never view again. His face remains an image engraved in my mind. A distorted figure who has lingered on in the depths of my curiosity. His wild expression, paired with a set of familiar eyes I had once seen before.

Just as I reached to wipe the blur away, I heard fireworks unlike I had ever heard before. I stopped in my tracks.

To this day I thank every star, every meteor, for the sound that followed.

Click. Click. Click. Breath. Click. Click. Breath. Breath.

The engine started faster than it ever had before and the brakes didn’t make a sound.

# LINES OF LIGHT

Tiffany McGowan

We drove on that night on this very road, on a night like this. I remember the stillness that hung around us like a blanket. The way she nervously gripped the steering wheel until her knuckles went as pale as her face. I remember when she had to pull over on this desert road to cry. Not just for the night's events but for everything, for every big dream she never took a risk on.

We must've stayed parked on this road for hours, neither of us turning to sleep.

I remember the sky beginning to wake up. The cool air becoming less unforgiving, and the rays of sunlight filling us with another chance of life, of hope. The heavy mist was starting to dissolve around us as it was also fading from my mother's eyes. She watched me through the rearview mirror and said nothing.

"I see the light come around," I muttered in a coarse whisper.

I'll never forget how she looked back at me, the tears in her eyes. Her expression had changed drastically and so had she that night. She started the car again and continued on this very road. We did not speak any more words that ride home, but the unspoken truth that our lives had just changed forever hung in the air. From that moment on, we never had another night like that again. And I never thought of my mother the same way ever again.

As I continue on the road and begin to pass street lights that didn't used to be there, I feel a smile grow infectiously on my face. I continue to remember her. That crazy woman, so full of hope, and unimaginable dreams that you would think she would burst at the seams. She was a beautiful woman—a perfect, dysfunctional, wrestling sunset that adopted every color in her at once.

My thoughts are interrupted by the sounds of sweet mumbling in the back seat. *I hope she's dreaming*, I think to myself. I look in my own rearview mirror and watch my own daughter sleeping in innocence

"I see the light come around," I say softly under my breath as I continue to drive on.

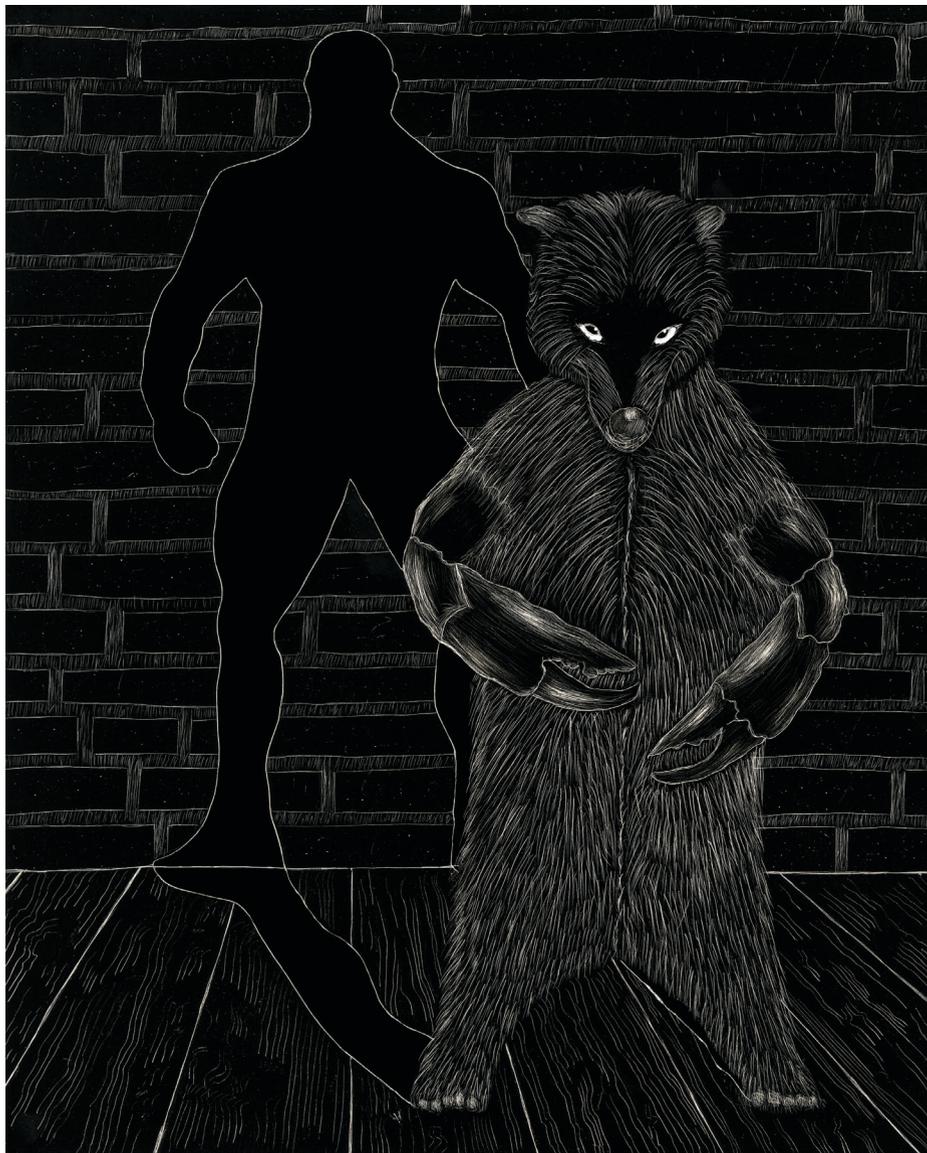


# BOOM BOOM'S BAR

Alicia Long

# BOOM BOOM'S BAR

Cy Hill



As a tavern, *The Lone Wolf* was not much beyond cement floors that were easy to wash and heavy wooden fixtures difficult to break. The fare was tap beer and generic wine. It was the legendary history of the place, intertwined with his own youth, that made it special for Bob “Boom Boom” Norris. Forty-two years of age, he put up all he had to buy it and still required two silent financial partners, nostalgic like him to not lose what had been. The lower bidders intended to tear the place down. Located in Seattle’s University district, the land was prime.

Boom Boom kept bar every night and cleaned the place himself to trim costs. Fifteen minutes prior to closing on this particular weeknight, he sat exhausted on a stool behind the long bar, wondering how many of the half dozen remaining patrons he would have to peel off booths and dump out onto the sidewalk. That was when three men walked in with pantyhose over their heads. The small one pointed a .38 at him. The medium sized one unveiled a sawed-off shotgun from beneath his jacket. The big one, the one bigger than Boom Boom, was armed with only his laugh.

“What can I do for you?” Boom Boom asked.

“What can he do for us?” the big one hooted. His short snappy movements were loose but extreme. He was on a laundry list of drugs. He thrust his meshed face to within an inch of the barkeep’s.

“Put your hands on the bar where we can see them,” his partner with the shotgun directed, “and slide down here.”

“Are you robbing *The Lone Wolf*?” Gloria, a sometimes substitute teacher, called from the nearest booth. “Bad karma, man.”

“Are we getting robbed?” Shakey John, just off duty from driving his cab, called from a deeper booth.

With a lascivious, creased smile on his face visible through the pantyhose, the big one matched Boom Boom’s progress all the way down to the wooden hinged opening in the bar. He slammed it up and grabbed Boom Boom by the arm to jerk him forward. Boom Boom did not move. He was a cross between a bear with his bulk and a crab with his broad pincer shoulders and arms. Pulling him did not work, so the big one tried

pushing him. Boom Boom did not move. What was wrong? He did not understand. Confused, he turned to his brother with the shotgun.

“Out here,” the shotgun gestured. “The keys.”

“I’ll give you what’s in the till,” Boom Boom offered while the smallest robber locked the front door. “That’s back over there,” he said, gesturing with his head.

“We’re talking. You’re moving. In the back. Now.”

“Yeah, we’re talking,” the big one snickered, “and now you’re moving.”

Boom Boom did not recognize either of the two voices on the other side of the pantyhose, but he suspected the third robber, the small one with the .38 who had not spoken, was *Lone Wolf* patron Pete Busher. He had not been around for a while. Pete loitered in the tavern’s deeper shadows, stuck his glass out when someone generously poured from a group pitcher of beer, and was accused by other patrons of stealing the change off their tables. He told incredible lies that he may or may not have believed himself.

“You don’t know the history of this place,” Gloria said as she rose from her booth with Sad Jack. “Biker Gangs met here in peace. You don’t rob *The Wolf*. It’s been tried. Twice.” The big one kicked Sad Jack in the back, sending him sprawling across a table bolted to the floor. “Jack Kerouac worked on his *Mexico City Blues* poems on that table.” She carried her beer glass and Sad Jack’s towards the booths lined against the back wall.

Shakey John was already up and moving out of his booth, but the big one rushed ahead and flung him towards the back. Snores issued from a booth. Its occupant continued to snore, even as he skipped and rolled across the cement.

“Why are you hurting these people?” Boom Boom asked the big one.

“What happened in that booth?” the one with the shotgun sarcastically asked.

Gloria replied, “Jimi Hendrix,” happy to continue with the tour. “Two hours he played there.”

For Boom Boom that particular booth recalled learning French shanties from the crew of Jacques Cousteau’s ship. What a party that was, with every nubile actress from the University of Washington Drama Department singing along.

“From Jimi Hendrix to a snoring drunk,” the leader sighed, shaking his shotgun as if it were his head. “What a dump.” With fresh calm eyes, he peered through his pantyhose and had terrible misgivings. This dive had fifty thousand dollars in an upstairs safe?

“The times come and go,” Boom Boom said, defending his bar. “This place will be great again.” Interesting people were beginning to come back. One of his silent partners was trying to get poetry readings going and a license for open-mike comedy nights. The artistic director of the *Contemporary Art Theatre* was a patron.

Boom Boom defended *The Lone Wolf* because if he did not, no one would. The Beat Generation was gone. No one was a hippie anymore. While many agreed with him as to the bar’s cultural significance and mystique, most had given up on trying to save it. The

location fronting 45th Street was valuable real estate. City Hall laughed at him when he petitioned to have it declared a historical monument. Every City of Seattle service, from the Police Department to the Health Department, hated *The Lone Wolf*. The irony was that Boom Boom could not get through any of the famous authors’ novels who made the bar famous. Poetry confused him.

Not much had gone right in Boom Boom’s life, from the failing of the small bakery business he inherited to his failed marriage. He was not much of anything and he knew that. But there had always been *The Lone Wolf*. Something interesting, something magical always happened at *The Wolf*, and even if he did not understand it, he had to keep it alive.

“This place gives me the creeps,” the leader said. “You can have it. Time to open—”

“Why,” the big thug tapped Boom Boom’s forehead with his index finger, “do they call you Boom Boom?”

An hour later, when she was giving her story to a reporter, *Lone Wolf* patron Gloria explained the nickname. “He does this thing where he hits his chest with both hands and he does not even know he does it. You’d think he was Tarzan.”

The leader wished he had not brought his brother along. He was too high. “Enough,” he said to him, but his brother continued to leer, an inch from Boom Boom’s face. “Move over.” He had to grab his arm to pull him back a step. “You and I,” he explained to Boom Boom, leveling the shotgun’s barrel at his chest, “are going to go upstairs now and open that safe. And there had better be fifty thousand dollars in there.”

The barkeep shook his head. “What?” Yes, there was an upstairs safe, but there were only a few hundred dollars in it that he had to have to keep the bar open.

“Now!”

“Pete Busher,” Boom Boom addressed the short silent robber with the .38, “what have you been telling these two?”

The leader knew then that they were in trouble. With Pete Busher recognized and named, it would be a short trip from arresting him to them.

“I’m not Pete,” he answered, trying to disguise his voice.

“I want the money!” the large brother cried. “Money!”

The leader agreed. Whatever money there was, they had to have it now to get out of town. But Boom Boom could not give them that money. If he did, it meant *The Wolf’s* death. He was broke, and after this, his partners would not risk any more of their cash. The bar would be torn down, the land sold. He abjectly glanced about him, lost in time, the crisis of his life, who he was, at the end of it all. For what reason did he live? For what reason had he ever been? This place would die ...

He did not question if others saw it: the mist rising from the cracked floor. Spirits of time past accompanied by music twisted and spun in desperation, hope, anger, wanting to survive and finding in Boom Boom their vessel –

# THE SPANIARD

Rebecca Thacker

With both hands, he struck his chest twice and cried out. He grabbed the big one and threw him at the one with the shotgun. The weapon went off. Half of the big man's head hit the ceiling. Boom Boom grabbed the other one and hurtled him like a javelin, head first into the wall.

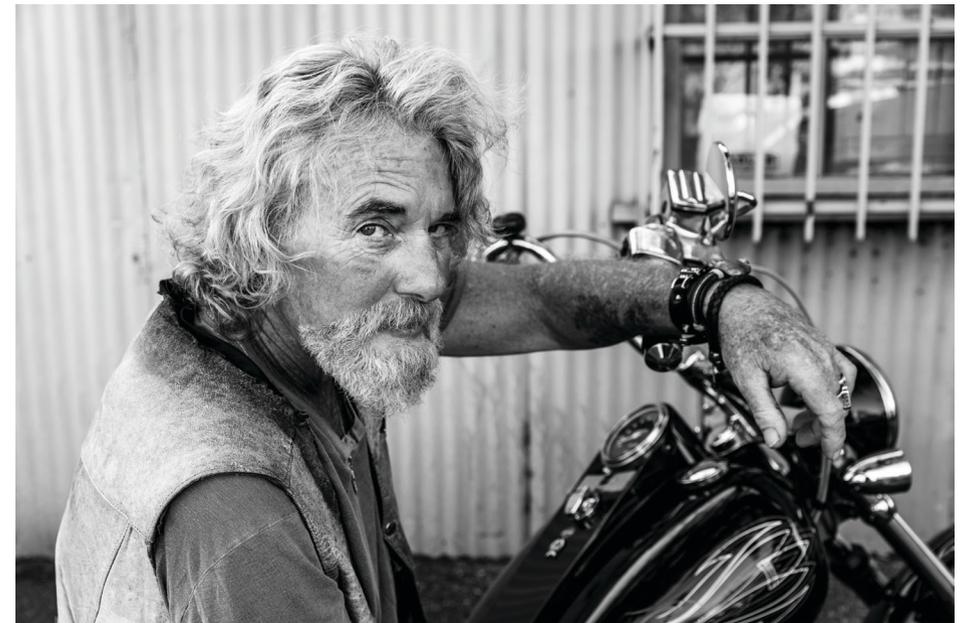
"Pete Busher," his voice was deep and echoed as if from the bottom of a well, "Pete Busher. I'm coming for you."

The little man with the pantyhose over his head turned and ran, firing a round over his shoulder. It missed. He sprayed another wild round, dashing to the front, hoping to escape out that door, forgetting until he pushed upon it that he had locked it himself. He threw another shot over his shoulder. After nicking Boom Boom's shirt, it lodged in a wooden stanchion. The pursuit rerouted to the back of the bar, and then in a grand circle around the circumference of the bar several times with Pete running and shooting and Boom Boom undeterred in dogged pursuit. The last round fired penetrated the large front plate glass window that looked out on 45th Street. It was a clean hole that quickly spiderwebbed. Pete stopped running and fired the empty clicking gun until Boom Boom picked him up and threw him at the vortex in the ruined window. Glass crashed about Pete as he hit the sidewalk.

"And don't come back!" Boom Boom shouted.

The next day a part-time bartender had to be hired to cover the immediate increase in business.

The embedded bullets fired at the barkeep and brain-splattered ceiling were never repaired or painted over. They were simply another chapter in the history, the mystique, of *The Lone Wolf Tavern*.



# THE NECKLACE

Isabella Sola

Is value measured by price or the meaning behind it? A bright, sparkly necklace that glistened in the sun wrapped around her medium brown, wrinkly neck right below her grayish white hair. Hung perfectly low and perfectly not too high above her chest. It hung there every day for as long as I could possibly remember. I cannot recall a time she was not wearing it. Who knew something so simple and delicate could carry so much meaning behind it?

MaryLou Rodriguez was born in 1953 in a small town in Guatemala. With curly brown hair and dark brown eyes, she stood no more than 5 feet 5 inches. She was my grandma from my mom's side and the only grandmother I knew because I did not know my dad's side of my family. So she was my only grandmother and was the best I could have asked for. Her parents did not come from much as they were humble workers in the tailoring business. Generation after generation, parents taught their children the trade of tailoring. MaryLou has always been fascinated by the art and noticed the gentleness with which her parents used the delicate fabric, always cautious not to tear or rip the clothing. Growing up, she continued her parents' legacy by working no less than 50 hours a week and taking pride in every order that came through.

During a blistering summer day, a young gentleman came in to escape the heat. He was more than 6 feet tall and lean with broad shoulders, wearing a clean crisp dark blue suit. She looked closely at his hands and saw no calluses, revealing that he had clearly never worked a day in his life. As he looked around, their eyes met. It was the beginning of a beautiful love story.

His name was Joseph Vasquez. He had the darkest brown hair, always perfectly slicked back, and the bluest of eyes like the ocean. He came from a long line of business investors (hence the nice suit). Every day Joe would tell MaryLou stories of all the places he had been while she worked, mesmerized as he spoke. She was 23 years old and had never left the city, so she felt like she got to experience the world when he told his stories.

As the years went by, they fell in love and Joseph promised her that he would take her away and start a life in America. And on Christmas night, 1979, he presented a small box wrapped in a soft white cloth with a thin red ribbon that contained the biggest promise he would ever make. A promise to love her forever and always, and the news that

he had gotten them transportation to the United States.

Joseph put months into picking out the right ring for MaryLou. He went to jeweler after jeweler, browsing in store after store, in search of the perfect ring. He did not want it to be too big to get in the way of her work or too small so that it might get lost in the fabric. He was in a store 20 miles away from their town when he saw it, a simple stone set with multiple little stones around it on a thin silver chain. No, it was not a ring, but it was the perfect ring in a sense. It was a beautiful jewel and it would not get in the way when she worked, and it was enough to show how much he wanted to promise her a life of their own.

In 1980, Joseph died in a car accident, and shortly after their daughter was born, in Southern California, where they had settled down. Their daughter is my mother. After that MaryLou faced many hardships raising their kids alone, working hard day and night as a tailor in her own tailor shop. Joseph had left money for her in his will. And every day rain or shine, she worked and worked to put food on the table for her daughter and to help provide a life for her.

Years went by and my mother grew up, eventually raising two children of her own, my brother and me. We would spend all our spare time as a family together telling stories, cooking, and playing games. As time passed we could tell something was wrong with my grandma; she was weaker and had to rest more than usual. Cooking together was not an option anymore as MaryLou could not stand for long periods of time anymore, so we would mostly order take-out. Rather than listening to her stories, I started telling her mine, about my experiences growing up, with school and work and figuring out life. She may not have had as much lively energy anymore, but she was still my full-of-life grandma, whom I would not trade anything for. I knew she still loved talking to me and loved watching how I have grown into the person I am today.

One gray and cloudy fall day, something was off. We went to go visit her and she did not answer the door. My mom got the spare key from the planter where it was hidden and unlocked the door. As we entered the room, my mom called for her, "Mama?" There was no answer. My mom frantically searched the house for her and found my grandma lying on the floor unresponsive. My brother and I sat quietly in the next room unsure what to say, as my mom dialed 911.

At the hospital later that afternoon, the doctor approached us in the waiting room. "She is stable now," he said. "You can go see her. However I must advise you, I am not sure how much time you have left. So I would cherish this moment as much as possible and say everything you can now before it is too late."

Walking down the hall my stomach felt empty, my hands numb. When I entered the doorway and saw her, she smiled back at me. Looking at her in the hospital bed made her seem so small. Had she always been that small? She beckoned me to sit next to her.

“Come here, *Preciosa* [Spanish for “my precious one”]. Let me see your face.”

“How are you feeling?” I asked, unsure of how to approach this conversation.

“Oh, I’ve heard what the doctors say, but I’m fine, really. Listen, I want to give you something.”

She unhooked the necklace from her neck and placed it in the palm of my hand.

“I want you to have this. It is a promise. A promise that I will always be here for you day and night, through thick and thin. You are my granddaughter and I love you very much. I want you to always be reminded that no matter the hardships, blessings are given to you by the people you love most. Don’t forget it.”

I sobbed into her hospital gown as I wrapped my arms around her. We stayed like that for hours, until visiting hours were over and my mother took my brother and me home. Later that night we got a phone call that she had passed that very evening.

Since that night I haven’t taken that necklace off. My grandmother is a part of everything I do and she will not be forgotten. I carry with me the same strength she did to work hard and live each day to the fullest. I strive to be as strong and independent as she was, to always make the right choices like she did. And to always have the same kind, caring, big loving heart she did. I won’t ever take off the necklace because it reminds me to be like her, the perfect woman. MaryLou Rodriguez was my grandmother and I am proud to be her granddaughter.



# GATEWAY TO THE GREAT BEYOND

Ency Shirazi



# A MOMENT OF FAITH

Annie Ison

I believe the true challenge for religious people is being able to uphold a strong faith in God or a higher power that he or she worships when everything in his or her life is falling apart. It's easy to blame others for one's mistakes or terrible events that come along, and it's even easier to point that finger towards God. It's at times like these when one should build a stronger relationship with God, instead of becoming angry with Him. When I heard that my grandfather, on my mother's side, was diagnosed with lung cancer, I was devastated. My grandfather was the most kind-hearted man I had ever met, and he devoted his life to God. So that made me wonder why God would punish a good man like him. The more I thought about it, the angrier I became towards God, and I blamed Him for the pain and suffering my grandfather endured. When he grew sicker, he was confined to a hospital bed, so my family and I traveled to the Philippines to visit him. It was our last chance to say goodbye. The day I saw my grandfather in that hospital bed was the day I stopped being angry at God and my relationship with Him become stronger than ever.

Growing up in a Catholic household, my parents made sure my sisters and I would say our prayers every morning, before every meal, and every night. And, of course, it'd be a sin to miss Mass on Sundays. Sometimes during the week, we'd attend Mass two or three more times on the weekdays just because we had the time for it. One would think I'd have a close relationship with God, seeing as how much my family and I immersed ourselves in prayer and worship for Him; but it wasn't that easy. It was one thing to repeat the same prayers routinely, but it meant much more if I had passion in my words, if I actually listened to what the prayers meant and knew why they were important. For so long, I never bothered to pay attention to them. I never experienced any revelations that would make me understand God's love in the way that other Catholics preached about. Prayers felt like a pointless, one-sided conversation. And so over the years, my relationship with God began to fade. When I heard about my grandfather's illness, my relationship with God only got worse. Not only was I losing my faith, but I was beyond angry at God.

During the eighteen-hour flight from LAX to the Philippines, my mother told us to pray with her and offer these prayers for my grandfather in hopes of his healing, but

how could I pray to God when He was the one to blame for his suffering? Despite my frustration at God, I listened to my mother and prayed with her because I knew it would give her comfort. I could only imagine the heartache and grief she was feeling for her father. When I walked into my grandfather's hospital room, I winced at the sight of him. There were numerous monitors and wires attached to his body that were helping him breathe to keep him comfortable and alive. From the doorway, I could hear his labored breathing, slow and heavy. His chest wheezed as it moved up and down. As I continued to look at him, I noticed he was holding a notepad and a pencil. I remembered on the flight my mother had mentioned the cancer had affected his laryngeal nerve, which caused his voice to become very hoarse and weak. Seeing his fragile body lying there, I felt fear overpowering my frustration. I could see how the cancer had drained him physically. But as soon as he saw me at the door, a huge smile grew on his face. My grandfather had made an effort to hide the pain he was in because he embraced the love of his family that stood by him as he fought for his life.

Although he was very ill, his eyes were filled with so much life and happiness. He quickly set down the pencil and notepad and gestured for me to come to him. When I was at his side, he pulled me down. My arms wrapped around his feeble body as I hugged him so tightly. I didn't want to lose him. My jaw tensed as I felt my hot tears soak up his shirt. A flash of anger burned throughout my body and I whispered to him that it just wasn't fair. After I said this, he pushed me up so he could look at me. Then he leaned his head upwards, kissed my cheek, grabbed the cross that hung from his necklace, and pressed it against my heart. He was telling me to not be upset anymore because this was God's plan for him. That small gesture brought me back to God. A simple moment of faith was all I needed. My grandfather reminded me God should always have a place in my heart and I should trust in Him. He knew heaven was calling him home. When I realized it, too, I let go of all my frustrations and felt God's loving embrace. My grandfather was ready to die, and I was prepared to let him go.

My whole life, I've been taught about the word of God and all the teachings and miracles of Jesus. But it was that day when I understood my grandfather wasn't afraid of death because he kept God and his family in his heart. This gaining of faith impacted how I saw the world because it showed me that His love gives me the courage and hope to get me through rough times in my life. Knowing that He is always with me in my heart, it gives me confidence in even the smallest of tasks, such as doing a presentation for a class or offering help to a stranger. When the cancer was too much for my grandfather's body, I accepted that it was his time. I felt peace within me because he was now in a better place where he was no longer suffering and I knew that one day I would see him again. This moment with my grandfather is one I'll never forget because it is a reminder of how precious life is and how fleeting it can become.

# SLAVE TO PERFECTION

Christopher Perricone



# HIDDEN LAKE

Jolene Paige



# TWO SISTERS

Lauren K. White

Heart beats through her chest  
Knees quiver, hands shake.  
Blood rushes through her veins.

Voices boom, temptations in range.  
Anger, fear, anxiety, take over.  
Back to square one. I stand here.  
I watch her shatter. It is all my fault  
Aware but I neglect, neglect her pain.

We are Sisters.

She is broken, but a masterpiece.  
Creative, intelligent yet manipulation was  
Mistaken for love. Toxic to her soul, vicious and alone.  
She lies, ashamed for what is known.

I shut down. I cannot feel.  
My heart hardens, building walls of steel.  
Forbidden entry, to those who dare to  
come near.

We fight, we cry

As time diminishes,  
thoughts continue to control her mind  
Going insane, she begins to cry,  
Crying but the pain will not subside.

We break

I disarm the chamber. I allow access  
to my soul. Blind to what will unfold.  
I put trust into people that have me  
Sold.

We rebuild

Doubt, fear, eyes overflow with tears  
She hides behind her smile and laughter  
Sculpted like tile, but she is easily cracked.  
Cracks that emit light. Light truly within.

Fake it till I make it.  
Hold back my tears, take a deep breath.  
Exhale my fears, I remind her  
Life will get better over the years.

# BEAUTY BEFORE THE STORM

Lauren Chang



# CYCLES 2

Hector E. Montalvo

My brother's world was profane.  
The muffled sound of a closed fist  
As it bangs against flesh  
Echoing in his ear,  
He sits alone  
Adjacent to his hopes and dreams  
Trying to chase the darkness from the corners  
And soak them in the sunlight.  
But he can't.  
So, the tears begin to boil in his eyes  
For all the times he couldn't protect Mommy's neck  
Or stand in front of his father's fists.  
His innocence squandered  
As thoughts wander into another realm  
Where he wasn't left searching for a father.  
His search took him deep below the mud.  
Deep below any type of love.  
Deep below the person he once was.  
He traveled deeper.  
To a place where the lost can't be found.

# WALL 2019 STAFF BIOS

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**CHARLES (HARRY) FOSTER**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Harry is a Marine veteran and English major at Saddleback College. He enjoys writing multiple genres of fiction as well as reading. His plan is to continue his education all the way to Ph.D. and teach college English courses. He also hopes to kick his gummy bear addiction but isn't optimistic about his chances.



**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.



**LAUREN K. WHITE**  
ART EDITOR

Fashion, food, fitness, fun, and faith are major areas of focus for Lauren, who writes about these subjects in her blog. She is currently attending FIDM (the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising) in Los Angeles. Building on her experience as a Social Media Manager for Rancho Capistrano Winery as well as her skills in photography and design/layout, she plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in social media.

**SAM WARFORD**  
FICTION EDITOR

Sam grew up in Los Angeles, has lived in Colorado, and has traveled the United States to race road bikes. Nowadays he is looking forward to attending UC Irvine, where he will study English and creative writing. He likes to read and write about imaginary things for books and games. WALL is the first publication Sam has been involved in and thinks that it has been a wonderful way to collaborate with like-minded people.



**PAYTON YOLANDA RISNER**  
FICTION EDITOR

Payton is moving to Santa Cruz in the Fall to pursue her dream of becoming an editor and later a professor of literature. She is the typical endorser of coffee shops and reading books that may be slightly out of her league. Her habits include writing stories and never getting around to finishing them. She looks forward to being published for the first time and encourages anyone with a creative mind to look into their own opportunity of being published for WALL 2020.



**ALYSSA SIEGEL**  
POETRY EDITOR

Alyssa is a senior in high school with a passion for writing. Ever since the moment she could hold a pencil, she has crafted poems and creative pieces, some of which were published. She is enthusiastic about her academics and enjoys her dual enrollment at Saddleback College, which has provided an additional outlet for her artistic development.



**CHRIS DUNSHEE**  
POETRY EDITOR

Chris is exploring the world of creative writing. He now considers himself to be a longtime reader and a first-time writer here at Saddleback College. He is looking forward to further exploring this field and what possibilities may come his way.





**ISABELLA ARNETT**

PERSONAL NARRATIVE EDITOR

Isabella 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. If you see her around campus, please say hello.



**SOFIE LEVY**

PERSONAL NARRATIVE EDITOR

Sofie, who happened to be homeschooled for all four years of high school, is currently majoring in journalism. She acquired the skills to become fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). Sofie has also created a small collection of poems that she has written that she hopes will one day be published. She has also become an advocate for those with epilepsy as she had suffered from it herself when she was younger. She has now created a club on campus which provides support to those suffering from epilepsy and education to those who are in search of learning more about the illness. Sofie currently runs an epilepsy positivity based Instagram account which has reached over 400 people worldwide called seizurefree4ever.



**DAHLIA COLAK**

LITERARY ASSOCIATE

Dahlia is a lover of Victorian literature and dried apricots. When she isn't whispering sweet nothings to her indoor plants, she writes in an attempt to grapple with the complexities and messiness of being human. This coming Fall you can find her sitting in the meadows of UCI studying English and drama, dreaming of being a professor of literature and running her own theater company.



**CY HILL**

LITERARY ASSOCIATE

Cy is a retiree who played center field for Seattle's legendary Blue Moon tavern. He recently passed Chem 1A.



**HARLEY BALLING**

PHOTOGRAPHY EDITOR

Harley studied photography and journalism at Saddleback College. Portrait shots and landscapes are favorite targets for her lens. A contributor to the Orange Appeal, the campus magazine, she received an Associate Degree in Marketing from Saddleback and plans to major in marketing at Cal State Fullerton



**CANDACE MERIDITH**

GRAPHIC DESIGNER/LAYOUT EDITOR

Candace is a cold brew and Takis addict with a BA in Psychology from the University of California, Santa Barbara as well as an AA in Psychology and AS in Graphic Design from Saddleback College. She is one day hoping to obtain a career in advertising to further her skills and passion for graphic design.



**DOUG NASON**

GRAPHIC DESIGNER/LAYOUT EDITOR

Doug, a part-time science teacher, is completing coursework toward a Certificate in Graphic Design at Saddleback College. He is married with two children, both in college. Doug works for two local churches, doing design work and art installations



**MARVILLE UY**

GRAPHIC DESIGNER/LAYOUT EDITOR

Marville is currently finishing an AS and Certificate in Graphic Design. He enjoys playing video games and basketball in his free time. One might consider him a certified "Sneaker-head" with his big collection of sneakers. He is hoping to one day work for Santa Monica Studio (creator of God of War) as a graphic designer.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**ANASTASIA AUGUSTSON** is currently studying photo communications and photography at Saddleback College and is transferring to Cal State Fullerton in the Fall to continue her education. She has earned two associate degrees in Art History and History. Her work explores the weird and macabre. When she's not shooting, you can mostly find her reading or playing Dungeons and Dragons with her friends and her cat Willow Nobbs.

**LAUREN CHANG**, a first-year college honors student, enjoys photography and artwork, especially beauty in natural environments. Most of her favorite pictures were taken in the many places she has traveled, including more than 12 countries and 43 US states.

**YE EUN (MIRI) CHOI** is giving her first try at creative writing in English in her second year at Saddleback College, although her passion for writing began long before. She has never been so glad for trying.

**NOAH EAST** is currently studying English Composition at California State University, Fullerton. While serving as editor-in-chief for WALL's 2018 edition, he completed his studies at Saddleback College—earning Associate Degrees in Fine Arts/Humanities, English, and Liberal Arts. After working as a content writer in multiple local tech startups, Noah was hired as a tutor at Saddleback's Learning Resource Center. For inquiries, please email: nrleat@gmail.com

**SARAH ELLINGSON**, on a seminal third-grade field trip to the Art Institute of Chicago, experienced an epiphany—it was going to be art or nothing. Years later, a Fine Arts B.A. in hand, she found the transition from studio to the real world a little challenging, necessitating a new set of skills for the commercial side of art, namely corporate marketing and cartographic design. Now, leaving both career and obligatory computer mouse behind, she is gratefully realizing the original dream and has returned to the studio, challenged and inspired by the masterly art faculty at Saddleback College.

**LIZETTE GARCIA** is currently studying English Literature at Saddleback College. After attaining her Associate Degree in English and Liberal Arts this year, she plans to transfer to San Francisco State University to complete her bachelor's degree. Today, Lizette enjoys spending her free time with her dog at the beach.

**JANE HARDIE** is studying Early Childhood Development at Saddleback and will transfer in the Fall to Cal State Fullerton, where she will begin working toward her degree in Theatre Education. She previously studied at Northern Virginia Community College, where she earned an Applied Associate in Arts degree for vocal music and piano. She is currently writing a book that involves women and their #metoo stories. You can learn more by visiting her on Instagram or Facebook at notmychoice.myfirsttime

**ANNIE ISON** is currently studying Psychology at Saddleback College. Her interest in psychology was inspired through her parent's work at a facility for intellectually and developmentally disabled individuals, and she hopes one day to continue her parent's work and help the less fortunate. During Fall 2018, she was encouraged by her English professor to submit work to WALL and is happy to have been selected.

**HASHEM KALTHOUM** is currently studying Biological Sciences at Saddleback College. Hashem is on the pre-medical track, hoping to become a trauma surgeon. A member of the Honors Program at Saddleback College, he is a full-time EMT working with an ambulance company serving the beautiful city of Laguna Beach.

**DEVIN LILLEMOM** recently transferred to CSU Fullerton for Fall 2019 to study Animation. While she attended Saddleback College, she attained an Associate in Arts Degree for Transfer in Studio Arts, and had her prints, such as "Life," displayed in the 2019 Student Art Exhibit. She enjoys drawing and diving into different mediums of visual art that convey her thoughts.

**ALICIA LONG** recently graduated from Saddleback College, earning her Certificate in Graphic Design. Previously, she obtained a degree in English Literature from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her achievements at Saddleback include the 2018-2019 Student Handbook cover design, First Prize in the 2018 GAERF national print competition, and her first illustration publication credit in 2019 WALL for "Boom Boom's Bar." Currently, Alicia is a freelance graphic designer dabbling in 3D printing, digital illustration, and artisan cookie design. She spends her free time with her husband, three kids, and her velcro-dog Scout. Her work can be found at alicialongdesign.com and on Instagram @alicialong\_

**VERA MARMOUGET** is a well-traveled student who has been painting for as long as she can remember. Born in Brazil and raised in New York, she has dabbled in many different forms of art, including sand, pencils, pastels, and oils. While she took a hiatus from art to spend time with an array of architectural adventures, Vera has returned to taking classes in art. She is again deep into forms and light, feelings and space. One of her core beliefs is that living is eternal learning.

**TIFFANY MCGOWAN** is a photographer from Mission Viejo who specializes in macro and portraiture photography. Currently pursuing an Associate Degree in Photography from Saddleback College, she has had photographs accepted in the OC Fair that highlight her ability to bring still life photos to life utilizing her photography editing experience as well as graphic design. Her photos have also received recognition at the South County Photo Club. With a degree in Psychology from CSU Long Beach, Tiffany spends her free time with her family, managing a home-based business, traveling with her photography friends, and seeing the world through her camera lens. Website: [tiffanymcgowan.smugmug.com](http://tiffanymcgowan.smugmug.com)

**AIDAN MITCHELL**, an English/Creative Writing major at Saddleback College, has been writing since 2015 but has never been formally published before. The first thing she did after finding out she was going to be published was to celebrate with ice cream and anime.

**HECTOR E. MONTALVO**, who was honorably discharged from the United States Army in 2014, received his Associate Degree in English Literature and is now working towards a bachelor's degree at Cal State Long Beach. Instagram: @edskizm

**SUSAN NAMAZI-AUSTIN** teaches ceramics at a studio in San Clemente while studying Fine Arts at Saddleback College, where she received the Nik Beatty Memorial Award in Fine Arts. Formerly a student at Foothill College, where she specialized in art history/anthropology/archeology, she was a recipient of the Robert Fairall Memorial Award in Fine Arts. She has exhibited and received several awards, including an Honor Award in Sculpture at AIA Orange County Art Walk at OCMA; Honorable Mention in Ceramics at Saddleback College and the OC Fair; and Second Place in Photography at OC Fair. You can see some of her work at <http://www.artapod.com> and on her Instagram: sun7500yr She can be reached at [sunurise@gmail.com](mailto:sunurise@gmail.com).

**SHEA NICOLAI** plans to major in Creative Writing at Seattle Pacific University, where she will continue to pursue her passions in music composition and literature. "The Rose" is her first official publication, and she is absolutely thrilled to have been chosen to be featured in this year's WALL Literary Journal. For business inquiries, you can contact Shea at [sheanicolai@gmail.com](mailto:sheanicolai@gmail.com), and for more poetry, short stories, photography and music, visit [sheanicolai.com](http://sheanicolai.com).

**MELANIE NUCCIO** is currently studying drawing and painting at California State University, Long Beach. Over the past many years, she has enjoyed taking classes at Saddleback College for personal development as well as to fulfill degree requirements. Her work has been shown at the Max L. Gatov Gallery West in Long Beach, and her drawing "Home" will be featured in Manifest Gallery's 14th International Drawing Annual publication (INDA 14) due to be released in 2020.

**RYOTARO OBANA** is currently enrolled in the certificate program of Entrepreneurship/ Fine Arts, Ceramics, at Saddleback College. Ryotaro received his BA in Fine Arts/ Sculpture from Kyushu Sangyo University, Japan, where he focused on modern abstract stone work. His original stone sculpture "Joy in both life and death" was commissioned by the university.

**BRANDI MICHELE ORTIZ** graduated from Saddleback College with an Associate in Arts for Transfer Degree in Anthropology and plans to attend the four-year university of her choice in the Fall. Since freshman year, she has been an admirer of the WALL, and for many years, she has pursued her passions of reading and writing works that transcend reality. Brandi still dreams of becoming an author, documenting life's many mysteries and distinguishing fact from fantasy through her works.

**JOLENE PAIGE** retired from a high-stress career in air traffic control and is currently pursuing her desire to be an artist. Returning to Saddleback after forty years, she discovered the Emeritus classes, which provide the art education she desired. Currently, Jolene travels often, finding inspiration for her artistic expression.

**ANISA PANAHI** is currently a student at the University of Michigan, where she studies English Literature with a concentration in Creative Writing. Prior to this, she attended Saddleback College, where she received her Associate of Arts for Transfer Degree in English. Anisa intends to pursue a career as a novelist and spends her free time reading, traveling, and being with her family.

**CELIA PEDRO** graduated from high school a semester early, so Spring 2019 was her first semester of college at Saddleback. As a teenager with a chronic illness, Celia is inspired and passionate about creatively sharing her story.

**CHRISTOPHER PERRICONE** is currently studying Photography at Saddleback College while working as a lifeguard and photographer in Laguna Beach. He spends most of his free time either in the ocean or petting dogs. Follow @misterchristophersworld on his journey to live his dream of traveling the world sharing his experiences through photos and videos, and always remembering to take time to pet some dogs.

**LAURA PETERSEN** is currently studying Child Development at Saddleback College. Laura enjoys travel and photography. Her photo “Glass” was taken while she was visiting Greece.

**LEXY POUND** is a high school student who is also attending Saddleback College for her Associate Degree in Science, majoring in Graphic Design. After creating an illustration for the personal narrative “The Dark Shadow” in this year’s WALL, she plans to continue exploring art forms. [lbpalette@gmail.com](mailto:lbpalette@gmail.com)

**MICHAEL PRESLEY** is a recent Saddleback graduate who obtained his Associate Degree for Transfer in English and will be furthering his education in pursuit of a bachelor’s degree at CSULB in Fall 2019. This is his first ever submitted work of poetry and one of the first times he has ventured into writing it, as opposed to writing short stories or other works. Submitting this work to WALL for a creative writing class was his first experience with trying to publish something and has since spurred his desire to craft more poetry and stories to share.

**LAUREN RANGEL** is a non-binary poet and fiction writer raised in Laguna Niguel. She studied at Temple University, where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in environmental studies. She first began writing in high school, where she discovered a deep passion for poetic language and prose.

**BRITNEY RAYMUNDO** is a self-proclaimed “English major for life” with a passion for reading and writing. She has fallen in love with all forms of literature, ranging from poems to plays, and dreams of pursuing a career as a writer herself some day. “The Light Comes Around” will always hold a special place in Raymundo’s heart, not only as her first publication, but also as her first ever short story. [Brittkray1999@gmail.com](mailto:Brittkray1999@gmail.com)

**ANESSA RODRIGUEZ** is an English major at Saddleback College and has been a writer her entire life. When asked whether she likes reading, she is most likely to respond that “one does not love breathing,” as English majors are pretentious like that. If you so wish, you can read more of her work on her Instagram @luminarytales

**SARAH SHIMABUKURO** is currently studying Illustration and Animation at Saddleback College with aspirations to transfer to California State University, Long Beach. She is working towards a Studio Arts transfer degree and has had her work displayed in the gallery on campus. In her spare time, she loves working with animals and will even feed the wildlife that lives in her yard.

**ENCY SHIRAZI** is a writer and translator of six books on personal development from English to Farsi. With a B.S. in Behavioral Science and M.S. in International Economics, both from Cal Poly, Pomona, she worked in a corporate job for over 26 years before leaving to pursue her lifelong passion of studying mysticism and Jungian psychology. As a spiritual life coach, Ency practices healing through a deeper connection with the divine and loves helping others to understand and appreciate Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic. In addition to taking art classes at Saddleback, she enjoys photography and writing poetry, which she shares on her Instagram page @encyshirazi

**NATALYA SHVETSKY** is currently taking painting classes in the Emeritus Institute at Saddleback College. Before this, she was a student at Irvine Valley College /Saddleback College, where she attained certificates in Graphic Design, Desktop Publishing, and Computer Information Science. Her early watercolors were exhibited at Jackson Mississippi Art Gallery in 1991. Her later watercolor works earned formal recognition and an award in the Irvine Valley College 2nd Annual Juried Student Art Exhibition. Her current acrylic paintings can be seen at Fine Art America.com at <https://natalya-shvetsky.pixels.com/> and at her personal website <http://natalyasdesign.com/>

**ISABELLA SOLA** is currently taking general education courses at Saddleback College to obtain an Associate Degree. “The Necklace” is her first work to ever be noticed and published. She is very excited and may lean towards pursuing a major in English.

**CONNOR STEPHENSON**, an essayist, poet, and occasional musician, has written love poems to more people than have read them. He is also a continuation school graduate, 26-year-old community college student, and data guru for a local non-profit.

**REBECCA THACKER** is currently pursuing her passion for photography as a student at Saddleback and apprenticing for a professional photographer. She is aspiring to find her niche and artistry through a camera lens. One of the things she most enjoys about photography is the connection with new people.

**JOANNA TOVAR**, an 18-year-old college freshman at Saddleback, has written multiple poems for her own personal use. However, this time she has decided to share one publicly. Her Instagram is @joannatovar

**CHEREE VEGA** is a full-time student pursuing an education in nutrition, food science, and botany. She plans to become the owner-operator of a unique food learning lab providing food education to desert communities. Coming from a conservative corporate background practicing human resources for most of her work life, this brave girl said her prayers, clicked her heels, and followed her passions as a committed foodie.

**OLGA VLASOVA** is currently completing a Certificate in Graphic Design at Saddleback College. Before this, she was a student at California State University, Fullerton, where she attained an MBA with a concentration in Accounting. She wants to explore different career paths and find her true passion in life. Contact info: [olgavlasova@hotmail.com](mailto:olgavlasova@hotmail.com) or [www.7olgavlasova7.wordpress.com](http://www.7olgavlasova7.wordpress.com)

**EMILY KRISTINE YANCOSKY** is finishing up her Associate Degrees in both Graphic Design and Illustration/Animation. She has been drawing since she was able to hold a pencil. While she strives to have her art noticed on its own, her love for animation has been an outlet for combining her artistic skill with a potential career. Email: [emilyyancosky@yahoo.com](mailto:emilyyancosky@yahoo.com) Instagram: [emilykristineyancosky](https://www.instagram.com/emilykristineyancosky)

**CELIA WU** has focused on basic principles of representational art in oil and watercolor since 2003 at Saddleback College. Her work has been in solo exhibitions at Sacred Grounds in San Pedro, at Taiwan Center in San Diego, and at libraries of Mission Viejo and Laguna Niguel. With her artwork, Celia allows viewers to see through her eyes for a brief moment as her distinctive vantage point reflects her view of the whole. In 2019 she won Best of Show of Saddleback Art League, Spring Reflections Juried All Media Art Show. Celia also won the President Award from Saddleback College Annual Student Juried Show. She is a Master Member of the Saddleback Art League and an Artist Member of the National Watercolor Society. Her artwork can be viewed at [saddlebackartleague.com](http://saddlebackartleague.com) or at Facebook under Celia Wu.





Designed by Leanne Black

## TAKE IT TO THE WALL

Submissions for the 2020 edition of WALL Literary Journal are being accepted through January 25, 2020. Each work must be an original, unpublished piece submitted by a Saddleback College student enrolled Spring 2018, Summer 2018, Fall 2018, or Spring 2019. For a submission form and guidelines, please go to the WALL Literary Journal website at [www.wallliteraryjournal.org](http://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 2020 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](mailto:gshaffer@saddleback.edu). You may also check for information on the WALL websites at

[www.saddleback.edu/la/Wall](http://www.saddleback.edu/la/Wall) and [www.wallliteraryjournal.org](http://www.wallliteraryjournal.org)

