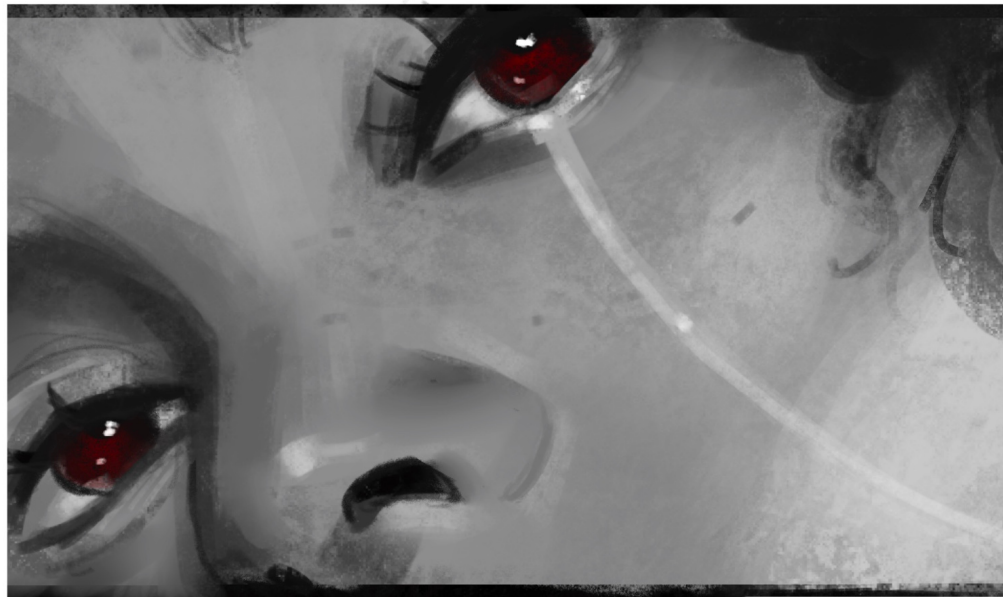
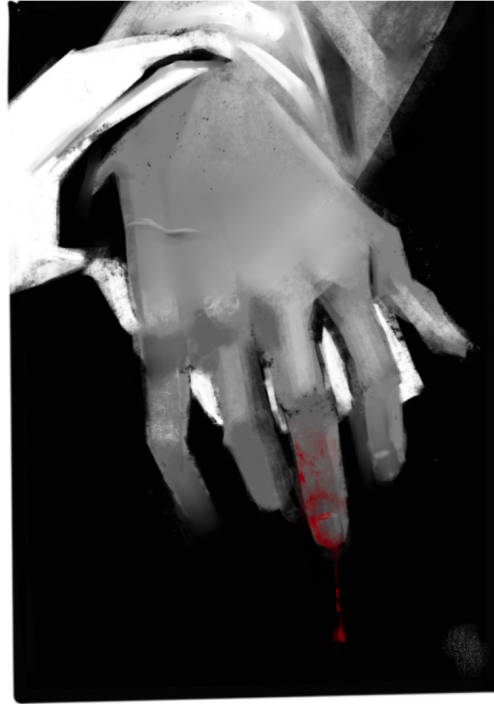


# NEW FORUM

## LITERARY JOURNAL



# WINTER 2022

# NEW FORUM

---

UCI UNDERGRADUATE  
LITERARY JOURNAL  
FALL ISSUE 2021  
[sites.uci.edu/newforum](https://sites.uci.edu/newforum)

## EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

EVANGELINE BRENNAN

KIYANTI SCHLANK

## DESIGN EDITORS

MONIC GONZALES

AMARI HALTON

GRACE TU

---

## EVENTS EDITORS

GINA JOHNSON

CELINA TIQUI

## SOCIAL MEDIA EDITORS

LEXI AMADOR

IRIS KIM

## FINANCIAL EDITOR

MADISON CARTER

## COVER IMAGE

"SEEING RED"

BY SHEREEN WU



ALTERNATIVE  
*media*

This publication does not represent the views and/or opinions of the University of California, Irvine, the University of California, the Regents of University of California, and/or its affiliates.

## DEDICATION

---

Thank you to all the students who submitted their artwork, poetry, and prose you have made this issue happen.

Submitting one's art—and, by extension, self—to the criticism and critiques of others is always difficult but this is especially trying for burgeoning artists and writers; New Forum appreciates the time and effort that you have put into your pieces and is incredibly grateful to have the opportunity to showcase them.

To those who were not published in this issue, we see the incredible potential that your art and writing has, it is the same potential that you hold within yourself and the passion that you have for your craft, please continue creating and submitting.

♥ Evangeline Brennan  
Co-Editor-in-Chief, New Forum

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## POETRY

---

- 1     **HOME IS IN THE CALENDAR**  
Nandini Sharma
- 3     **IDOL OF LIGHT**  
Fiona Farris
- 5     **IN ANOTHER LIFE**  
A.Y.A
- 8     **I AM THE ONE BEFORE "THE ONE"**  
Ashley Abeleda
- 10    **MOVING ON**  
Ariel Yoon Thornton
- 19    **"EMOTIONAL PENDULUM"**  
Ashley Abeleda
- 20    **ON THE HORIZON**  
Nhi Island
- 29    **THE HORIZON**  
Kyle Van Lant
- 31    **REMEMBER MY NAME**  
Sahn Khanpour
- 34    **BEING A VIETNAMESE AMERICAN**  
Nhi Island
- 36    **THE BLOSSOM, THE ORANGE, AND THE TREE**  
Caitlyn Reynolds
- 37    **THE STATE OF HEALING**  
Caitlyn Reynolds
- 39    **JERUSALEM CRICKET**  
Sav Andrea Villescas
- 42    **BERRY PICKING**  
Ash Arumugam
- 52    **RELENTLESS PROGRESS**  
Kyle Van Lant



- 
- 61 **IF I COULD ONLY SWALLOW THE PACIFIC OCEAN**  
Skylar Lee-Stefanov
- 65 **AN ASPIRING SMITH**  
Ben Hamilton
- 75 **VICTORIA**  
Xuan Tran
- 78 **HOT WATER**  
Sav Andrea Villescas
- 82 **NEW YEAR'S EVE**  
Skylar Lee-Stefanov
- 84 **PASHMINA**  
Deepika Rani

## FICTION

---

- 11 **VEGAS**  
Sherissa Go
- 23 **10 MINUTES**  
Savannah Keown
- 43 **DEPENDENCE**  
Olivia Mondragon
- 47 **HOW TO: MOVE ON**  
Heather Oxley
- 54 **AFTER GORDIA**  
Kyle Van Lant
- 66 **SOCK PUPPETS**  
Chris Nagelvoort

## NON-FICTION

---

- 27 **IS IT LOVE?**  
Jodi K. Lacangan
- 49 **AN OPEN AIR NIGHT**  
Nadine Aguirre

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ARTWORK

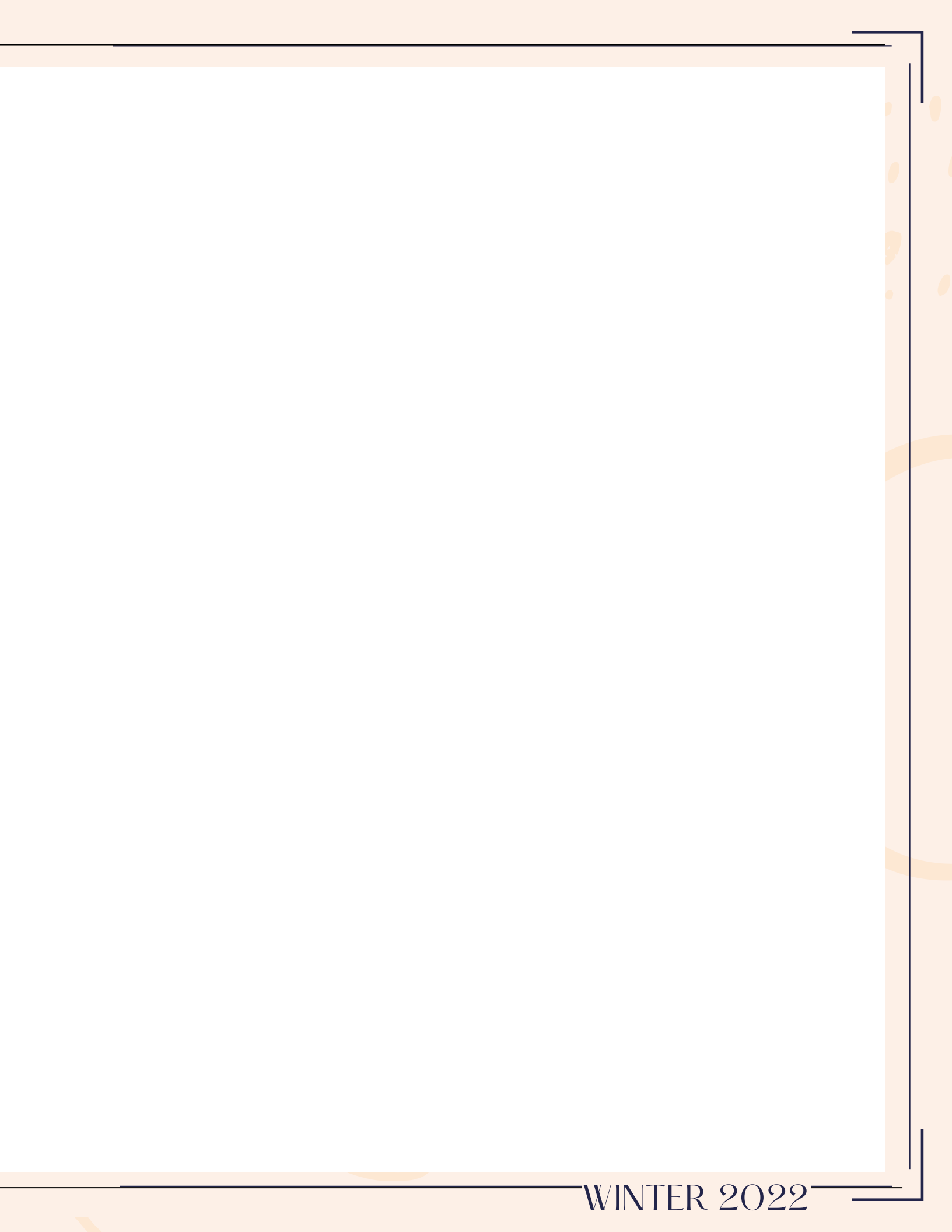
---

- 2     **URSA MAJOR**  
Chloe Wilson
- 4     **LOST SOULS**  
Adison Kailey Brager
- 9     **BEHIND THE SMILES**  
Anna Virovka
- 88    **SEEING RED**  
Shereen Wu

## PHOTOGRAPHY

---

- 18    **ON THE MAT**  
Alyssa Gonzalez
- 22    **SUNSET AT LAGUNA**  
Samantha Haman
- 33    **THE STREET OF PURE EMPTINESS**  
Jazmín Romero
- 38    **SIMPLE LIFE**  
Jose Ramos
- 53    **CRACK IN LIFE, AND SUNSHINE CAN REACH**  
Iris Z.
- 60    **INFLAMED HORIZON**  
Bobby Thornson
- 74    **REFLECTION**  
Mae Elizabeth Vercnocke



WINTER 2022

# HOME IS IN THE CALENDAR

By Nandini Sharma

---

I am told that pain  
is a poet's best friend  
but the moment it comes to me  
my words shy away  
almost as if my efforts are in vain  
my pen's ink comes to an end  
the moment the pain is all I see  
there is nothing left to say  
for in this void of a heart  
there are no gains  
no vowels to spend  
no more joy, an absence of glee,  
I often just waste away the day  
staring at a blank page trying to maintain  
my composure, maybe find another to tend for everytime I look at  
the trees,  
their shadows remind me of May.  
a month long gone, but never forgotten  
for it was a time of peace  
a sense unknown a feeling unfathomable  
I have no memory of what ecstasy felt like  
so I miss the times the horizon didn't approach in when the  
blanket had not a single crease  
when I had all the time in the world to cradle as my mind remained  
painless, childlike.

---

NANDINI SHARMA IS A 1ST YEAR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES MAJOR, AND SHE USES  
POETRY AS A FORM OF STORYTELLING AND JOURNALING. SHE LOVES BEING IN  
NATURE AND READING!

# URSA MAJOR

By Chloe Wilson

---



---

CHLOE WILSON IS AN UNDECLARED FRESHMAN WHO'S JUST EXCITED TO BE ON CAMPUS. SHE HOPES THAT PEOPLE ENJOY SEEING HER WORK IN THIS JOURNAL AS MUCH AS SHE LIKES SEEING OTHER PEOPLE'S WORK HERE :)

ARTWORK | 2

# IDOL OF LIGHT

By Fiona Farris

---

i mirror your image  
the upward curve of your lips  
the crinkle of your eyes  
and my heart is not quite as heavy

you are so vivid and bright  
i can almost touch you  
but the world and seven millimeters  
wash my eyes  
and return me to gray

---

FIONA IS A FIRST YEAR PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR WHO ENJOYS PLAYING WITH DIFFERENT COMBINATIONS OF WORDS. IN HER FREE TIME, SHE WATCHES COPIOUS AMOUNTS OF TELEVISION AND TAKES NAPS. SHE SINCERELY HOPES YOU ENJOYED HER POEM. GO DRINK SOME WATER.

# LOST SOULS

By Adison Kailey Brager

---



---

ADISON KAILEY BRAGER IS A 1ST YEAR PSYCHOLOGY B.S. MAJOR HERE AT UCI. SHE IS A FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT AND IS VERY EXCITED TO BE AT A SCHOOL WHERE SHE CAN DEVELOP HER PASSION OF PSYCHOLOGY, BUT ALSO BE SUPPORTED IN CONTINUING HER LOVE OF CREATING ART. MOST OF HER WORKS ARE DONE IN DETAILED INK AND CAN BE FOUND ON HER ART ACCOUNT @FUTUREGHOSTSTUDIO ON INSTAGRAM. SHE ALSO IS IN THE PROCESS OF STARTING A SMALL BUSINESS TO SELL AND PROMOTE HER ART!

ARTWORK | 4

# IN ANOTHER LIFE

By A.Y.A

---

Maybe we were lovers in a past life, maybe we were nothing or maybe we were destined to meet each other but you felt like home. Someone so familiar, the only one I couldn't lie to, the only one I can open up to, the one that had all my trust.

You became a memory as the years passed by, but always part of me somehow. Every time you came back to me it felt like you never left, every time you disappeared you left a little piece of you in my heart. And as time went by those pieces filled my heart until I realized that you are the one I love.

I wanted to be your light but somehow you ended up being mine. You were my light that set me free, the one that saved me from my own darkness.

You also became my light that filled me with the most excruciating pain that never leaves my heart. A pain that has become so hard to forget, and memories that are filled with tears and when those tears fall down somehow I can feel the pain again and again.

Maybe we were lovers in a past life or just destined to be in each other's life for a mere second of the thousands of seconds that will hopefully have in our lifetime.

You were an illusion of the love that I thought you could give me, you were the possibility of happiness, you were just an illusion.



---

Maybe we were lovers in a past life, maybe we were nothing or maybe we were destined to meet each other but in this life you changed who I was. Part of me died the moment you gave me pain instead of love, fed me lies instead of truth.

You were the light that was just an illusion.

Part of me died the moment you said you will never love me. I am no longer who I was because pieces of me have died and they can't relive because of all those things I can not let go. I will never be the same; not with all those memories.

Maybe we were lovers in a past life, maybe we were nothing or maybe we were destined to meet each other but you felt like home. Someone so familiar, the only one I couldn't lie to, the only one I can open up to, the one that had all my trust.

In this life I hope you will always remember me even if it's for a brief second, when the rain comes down as the one that put all their trust in you. When you look up at the stars you remember me as the one who loved you with all your imperfections. When you see the ocean, you remember how deep my love was for you. And when you hear my name I hope you remember me as the one who tried to understand your past, to understand you and who was always trying to help you. I hope when you hold a book you're reminded of me, who would have started a new life with you wherever you desired.

# IN ANOTHER LIFE

## (cont.)

---

Maybe we were lovers in a past life, maybe we were nothing or maybe we were destined to meet each other but you felt like home.

In this life I love you. In this life I wish you the best. In this life I will love who you helped me become. In this life and in another life I wish you happiness, always. In this life we were together for just a mere second of the thousands of seconds you and I will have in our lifetime. I love you in this life, not always and not in another life. In another life there won't be an us. We were just destined to meet each other in this life.

---

A.Y.A IS 5TH YEAR CRIMINOLOGY, LAW AND SOCIETY MAJOR. LIKES TO WRITE FOR FUN AND FOR HERSELF BUT DECIDED MAYBE IT'S TIME TO SHARE SOMETHING SHE WROTE FOR HERSELF FOR OTHERS TO READ.

# I AM THE ONE BEFORE "THE ONE"

By Ashley Abeleda

---

i can teach you about love

the language is easy

for once you learn how to love

you also learn how to leave

for i am destined to teach

never to receive

- *i am the one before "the one"*



---

ASHLEY ABELEDA IS A 3RD YEAR TRANSFER-STUDENT AT UCI. SHE ENJOYS READING, POETRY, AND MUSIC, AND IS EXCITED TO BE A PART OF A CREATIVE COLLECTIVE!

POETRY | 8

# BEHIND THE SMILES

By Anna Virovka



---

ANNA IS A PASSIONATE SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST FROM UKRAINE. SHE IS CURRENTLY A JUNIOR PURSUING HER BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES DEGREE. SHE WOULD LIKE TO THANK HER ART STUDIO PROFESSORS WHO EXPANDED HER SKILLS THROUGH PAINTING AND OTHER TRADITIONAL ART MEDIUMS!

# MOVING ON

By Ariel Yoon Thornton

---

No one can tell you quite what moving on is like.

You meet people who remind you of people  
And it makes you ache in the worst way,  
Makes you want to jump into their arms and  
Scream in their face and  
Cry at the sight of them and  
Jump to conclusions  
But they aren't them, and  
The ache inside of you is nothing more than a scar,  
Rough around the edges but no longer open and gaping.

Still, you can't help but wince.

---

ARIEL YOON THORNTON IS A 1ST YEAR BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES MAJOR (SUBJECT TO CHANGE) WHO COMES FROM A SMALL MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY IN THE CENTRAL VALLEY. SHE HAS NEVER HAD HER WRITING PUBLISHED BEFORE, SO SHE IS NERVOUS AND EAGER FOR IT TO FINALLY SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY AND BE READ BY THE EYES OF OTHERS. SHE LOVES COFFEE, K-DRAMAS, SPENDING TIME WITH HER FRIENDS, AND MOST OF ALL, HER BLACK CAT, TOOTHLESS.

POETRY | 10

# VEGAS

By Sherissa Go

---

Jessie's father tells her, go, go, find the arcade. He slips a bill, a sorry rumple of a twenty, into the white of her small palm. He tells her again: go to the arcade and spend it, all of it, however you want. He guides her now, hurrying her out of the hotel room. Gracelessly tugging her by her pajama shirtsleeve. Her small, Sketcher-clad feet drag across the stiff, patterned carpet. They drag, hesitantly but not protesting, as he unlatches and opens the heavy door. At last, he lets go of her sleeve, and when he does, she is able to stop and steady herself. Able to turn back around and face him from the other side of the threshold.

He is leaning back just enough to keep the door propped open with his weight. He prods Jessie's left shoulder with an extended hand, so that she might face the direction of the elevators and start towards them. The arcade is down on the fourth floor, Jessie's father thinks, but those shiny, gold elevator buttons should have it spelled out for her.

Jessie stares up at him, perfectly confused. Unsure of what sort of clarification to ask of him. Before she can form some cogent response, before she can think to ask him if he is coming with her, if they are going down to play together like he had promised during the long drive down, he tells her to be back in an hour. Then he slips back into the room, and the heavy door is shut in front of her. Before it can click dutifully into place, it slams with a marked irreverence. The little light on the door handle blinks red once, twice, three times, before emitting a steady, scornful green.

She does not know if her father meant to slam the door like that. She would like to think he didn't; that all the hotel's doors slammed in that same irreverent way. *They do*, she thinks. They

---

must—for security’s sake. In any case, the door has been slammed shut in her face. Shut with all of her belongings inside—the Hello Kitty backpack stuffed with a weekend’s worth of clothes, the baby blue Nintendo DS, an unfilled Mandarin exercise book—and herself, out. Out and alone in the long and lavish hallway.

Flustered and bewildered, Jessie considers her next move. She knows that she is not in possession of a key card—they don’t give key cards to eleven-year-olds in resorts like these. She could bang a small fist on the door and cry out daddy, but she does not wish to draw attention to herself, nor to her father. And anyway, she doesn’t quite feel like going back inside. Jessie knows that whatever private matter her father must deal with in the next hour has nothing to do with her—should have nothing to do with her. And so, while she does not feel like heading to the arcade anymore, she decides that she will. At the very least, she is willing to confine herself to a space where she can be alone in the resort, unchaperoned and unquestioned.

Jessie starts in the direction of the elevators—the central corridor where the floor’s north, south, and east wings meet. She does not bother double-checking the room number etched onto the gold plate above the door. she knows she can trust her remembrance: south wing of the seventeenth floor, she says to herself quietly. Room 17-32.

On her way down the hall, Jessie passes by members of the housekeeping staff. She finds herself skirting the walls to avoid their gaze—she realizes how conspicuous she must look walking by herself. To her relief, however, they pay her no mind. They simply push their bulky supply carts around, unable to notice her. At the

# VEGAS

## (cont.)

---

end of the hall, she sees a housekeeper through the open doors of a large room. Jessie thinks the housekeeper looks out of place amidst those arching bay windows, the leather couches, and the abstract art, though she can't quite think through why. The room must be some lofty suite, she surmises, one much larger and more expensive than that which her father decided to rent.

As she passes by, she catches a better glimpse of the housekeeper, who is vacuuming the floor near the wall-mounted television. Her brown, sunken face is obscured in the evening light, and Jessie can see that her free hand supports her large and bent back. *Don't look at those dirty brown housekeepers*, her father had instructed after they had checked in that afternoon. *And whatever you do, don't let them in my room.*

But Jessie cannot help but idly watch this housekeeper, this large, tired woman, brown and lacking contrast in a pressed burgundy polo. At the moment, Jessie thinks she does so only because she's never been able to before. Doing so feels like some quiet act of defiance. For once, there is something she feels she understands better than her father. It is only when the housekeeper glances up and makes eye contact that Jessie realizes she's been staring, standing awkwardly at the room's entrance. In her embarrassment, she ceases eye contact and again begins to walk hurriedly along.

Soon enough, she reaches the elevator corridor, and with a white, stubby finger, she presses the down arrow button. She knows that these elevators seem to run on their own time, never mind that there are six of them; it had taken her and her father five minutes to catch a ride up after checking in. She is, then, wholly surprised when



---

she almost instantly hears the ding of an approaching elevator. But the arrow light that flashes above it points upwards, and she feels sheepish for expecting anything else.

The elevator's doors slide open, and before they can shut again, a tall, peculiarly dressed woman steps out and into the corridor. For a moment, Jessie is startled. It appears as if the woman is wearing no bottoms. All Jessie can see is that her fishnet stockings rise up, up past her knees and soft mid-thighs until they meet the hem of her short, white overcoat. Down on the woman's feet are sharp, silver stilettos which point—no, squeeze—into convergence at the toes.

To Jessie's silent amusement, a few crumpled squares of toilet paper trail from underneath the woman's right stiletto, stabbed and dragged by the heel. The stiletto's wearer stops not too far from Jessie, then begins to search through one of her coat pockets.

Even in the low, electric chandelier light, Jessie can see that the woman's face is impossibly made up. A deep, purple shadow has been packed all over her eyelids. The shine which coats her rouged lips and cheeks renders her ceramic, uncanny—as if she has been encased in some hardened, paralyzing shell of gloss. If she weren't pretty, Jessie thinks to herself, she just might resemble a clown. But Jessie is instantly captivated by this woman. In fact, Jessie thinks she might be the most beautiful woman she's ever seen.

For a moment, the woman stops fumbling in her pocket and, instead, glances down at Jessie. Her eyes move swiftly to the crumpled twenty in Jessie's hand, then back up at her fretful face.

Jessie thinks she sees the woman's eyes soften (though it is difficult to tell with the painted shadows obscuring her expression).

# VEGAS

(cont.)

---

She startles when the woman addresses her.

"Going down to bet your allowance?" she asks, her focus half-returned to the contents stowed in her coat.

Jessie finds herself furiously shaking her head. "My dad is waiting for me," she replies. "Downstairs at the arcade."

"Well, in any case," the woman says, "I'd put that away if I were you. She finally manages to pull out a pack of cigarettes, a black BIC lighter from her coat pocket. "People here are desperate."

Before Jessie can cooperate, before she can finish shoving the bill into one of her pajama pockets, the woman breaks into a sympathetic smile.

"Oh, come on now," she says, "don't make it so easy." Jessie notes some discernible pity coloring the woman's voice, even with the cigarette now wedged beneath her gapped teeth. "Hide it in your bra," she instructs. "Or whatever you use."

Not wanting this woman to know that she does not yet use a bra, Jessie stretches her shirt's neckline outward and, with her other hand, lets the bill drop down into it. She feels it fall to where her shirt tucks into her pajama bottoms, but even then, she feigns a struggle: the imagined struggle of wedging a bill in between a breast and a bra cup. Jessie's hand remains miming in her shirt when she hears the flick of the woman's lighter. When she finally glances up, she can see that the woman is now crouched to her eye level, squinting with amusement with the cigarette still between her lips. She inhales gracefully, before tucking her lighter away, and takes care to exhale away from Jessie's general direction. I think it's safe, she assures the girl as she stands back up.

The woman then proceeds to ask Jessie if she knows which

---

direction room seventeen-thirty-two is. She's been to the resort many times before, she says, but the layout never fails to confuse her.

"Seventeen-thirty-two?" Jessie repeats.

"Seventeen-thirty-two," the woman confirms.

Now Jessie feels her face warming up. Did the woman just ask her where her father's room was? Yes, she did—Jessie is certain that she has the right number memorized. 17-32. So, who was this woman? Who had Jessie's father managed to contact since they arrived late this afternoon? She certainly was no friend of her father, nor her mother—as far as she knew, they did not have any acquaintances in this state. Certainly not anyone as young and gorgeous as the woman in front of her. She must have come to provide some sort of service.

*That must be it, Jessie thinks. This woman is a prostitute—or a call girl, maybe?* She feels certain that at least one of those two terms is probably accurate.

For a moment, Jessie contemplates pointing the woman in the wrong direction. Not for her mother's sake—no, she won't think about her mother and what might be at stake until a little while later. Rather, she contemplates the possibility out of spite against her father. Her father, who had kicked her out of the hotel room in her pajamas if only to see a call girl. Who took her on that eight-hour drive through the desert instead of taking her to her Saturday Mandarin lesson (she was already failing miserably, and her mother had threatened to take her DS away if she failed the next exam). Who told her not to speak a word of their weekend travels when her mother returns from her conference. He had told her he would

# VEGAS

(cont.)

---

win her a large stuffed puppy and write a note of excuse to Miss Zhao if she complied. Now, however, Jessie wants to take it upon herself to ruin his night, this night that he had dared to pay for, if only because he had broken his promise to her. And, despite being but a speck in the neon desert, she will certainly try.

---

SHERISSA GO IS A 4TH YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR AND CREATIVE WRITING MINOR FROM SAN FRANCISCO. SHE VISITS LAS VEGAS WITH HER FAMILY EACH CHRISTMAS. SHE IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON HER FIRST LITERARY ZINE, FOOLSGOLD, AND TAKES GOOD CARE OF HER CAT AMÉLIE.

# ON THE MAT

By Alyssa Gonzalez



---

ALYSSA GONZALEZ IS A 3RD-YEAR TRANSFER STUDENT AT UCI MAJORING IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES. AS A BLUE BELT IN JIU JITSU HERSELF, SHE WANTED TO CAPTURE THE FEELING OF BEING ON THE MAT. THE PHOTOS INCLUDE HER BROTHER ADAM, WHO IS ALSO A BLUE BELT, AND FOR FATHER ED, WHO IS A BROWN BELT.

PHOTOGRAPHY | 18

# EMOTIONAL PENDULUM

By Ashley Abeleda

---

you will feel more pain  
more disappointment  
more sadness  
than anyone else

but

you will also feel more joy  
more happiness  
more love  
than anyone else

# ON THE HORIZON

By Nhi Island

---

writing a love poem without being in love is like reaching for a  
sunset that's about to rise,  
futile and naïve.

but you see, it is 3 am and I am thinking about my friends having  
the capacity to love someone.

I think about how they are able to feel emotions that I have not  
been able to reach,  
but I so desperately want to reach.

I think about the infatuation I've had with people who have strung  
me along like a puppet,  
but I willingly allow them to do so.

I think about conversations I've had with friends who need to  
constantly remind me that men being nice  
is normal and it doesn't mean they're in love with you because,  
sometimes, I forget.

I forget about the love that friendships bring as I desperately reach  
for emotions I've never felt before.

before, I would write fantastical love stories with adventures that  
went far beyond reality,  
conjuring up a façade of emotions that I am too tired to mimic any  
longer.

# ON THE HORIZON

(cont.)

---

I wanted to experience the feeling of a fantasy, but the horizon I never  
go out to see blurs the line  
between what I should and shouldn't reach, what I can and cannot feel.

I am caught on the horizon, running toward the abyss that can never be  
found.

on the horizon I am comfortable.

on the horizon I am trapped.

on the horizon I am silently suffocating

in this never-ending paralysis.

---

NHI ISLAND IS A FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR WITH A MINOR IN CREATIVE WRITING, ASPIRING TO BE A YOUNG ADULT AUTHOR OR POET IN THE FUTURE. SHE IS A FAN OF COKE AND BUBBLE TEA AS BOTH CAUSE HER TO STAY UP LATE AT NIGHT THINKING ABOUT LIFE. BECAUSE OF THIS, SHE ATTEMPTS TO INTERPRET HER PERCEPTION OF LIVING AS CAFFEINE AND SUGAR ARE RUNNING THROUGH HER VEINS, AIMING FOR PEOPLE TO BE ENTERTAINED AND THINK WITH HER WRITING.



# SUNSET AT LAGUNA

By Samantha Haman

---



---

SAMANTHA HAMAN IS A 5TH YEAR SOCIOLOGY MAJOR WITH PLANS TO GRADUATE SPRING 2022. SHE HAS BEEN INTEREST IN PHOTOGRAPHY FOR A WHILE AND WAS EXCITED TO SPEND THE DAY AT LAGUNA BEACH. SHE HOPES TO CONTINUE HER INTEREST IN PHOTOGRAPHY WHEN SHE MOVES AFTER GRADUATION AND EXPLORE HER NEW HOME BY TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS.

PHOTOGRAPHY | 22

WINTER 2022

# 10 MINUTES

By Savannah Keown

---

10...

He jerks his head towards me, eyes asking a question his mouth can't, because there's too many people around, it's too crowded, we could get caught, and he knows that I can't lose this job. I nod in response, maybe a little too eagerly, but I don't have time to overthink that right now. I shuck off my apron, wipe my hands on my jeans. I see him leave out the back, pockets bulging, eyes catching mine and half a grin on his face as the door shuts behind him.

9...

I wait for a handful of seconds before going to follow, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, but get stopped a yard away from freedom by a guest with a question. The water cups are next to the soda machine, can you please get the hell out of my way? By the time I make it outside I'm irritated, but it melts because he's got a smirk on his face and a lighter in his palm, leaning against the wall 30 feet away.

8...

By the time I make it over, he's halfway through his first cig, because he smokes them like a speed demon. I take my time, soaking it up, letting it burn and fill me in ways other things can't. I like to think maybe he could. He grins, dragon-like, smoke pouring out of his mouth and nostrils as I take the stick he offers out to me. I try to grasp the zippo, but he holds it out of my reach. I frowned around the cigarette, but let him light it anyway.

---

7...

As the spark flits through the night quickly, I inhale deeply, feel his eyes on me like twin weights on my body. Breathe in, breathe out. Again. We make small talk, trying to warm up and cool off at the same time. He inches closer, like the world's slowest magnet. For all his biting harshness and quick remarks, he takes his time with this part. Like a lion playing with his food. I press myself against the wall, and in this small corner of the mall, away from judging eyes and careless whispers, I let myself be cornered by a welcome predator.

6...

He's even closer now, about to start his second cig. It's almost leering, and I think if I was even a pinch more careful, I would've felt alarm bells. No sirens though; only a deep chuckle that tastes like dark chocolate. There's no breeze; the walls close in on us a little bit, and there's no way for the air to move, so all I can see through the cloud of smoke are the twin cherries of the cigs and his eyes, bright and dark and cavernous as he leans ever closer. I see his nose ring glint in the low light of the evening moon.

5...

I let him kiss me, kiss him back too. It's nothing life-changing or earth-shattering, but it's comforting. It's simple, uncomplicated, and just what I need right now. A smoke and a boy made out of trouble to kiss me-- it doesn't take a whole lot. I feel his lanky arms wrap around me, feel the lithe fingers of one of his hands tuck into the back left pocket of my jeans. Our lips are chapped, and our

# 10 MINUTES

(cont.)

---

teeth clack once, but I sigh into it all the same.

4...

We both seem to be over it around the same time, pulling away to pull at our cigarettes again. Mine has burned out because I was too *preoccupied*, so I take a final pull and crush it under the heel of my boot. He stays twined around me, resting his chin on my shoulder and taking a long drag. He smiles at me and leans in close, and I think he's going to kiss me again, but instead he just blows the smoke into my face, my eyes, my mouth, my hair, long and slow. He laughs when I scrunch my nose and squirm in his embrace. He shifts the grip of his arms on my body, making it so that I have a little more room to wiggle in fleeting discomfort. But he keeps his free hand firmly pressed to my lower back, as if I could walk away at any moment.

3...

He leans in again and he does kiss me this time, not as languid or lovely as before. He's harsher this time, tugging at my lip with his teeth like he *wants* me to be marked with it, like he wants whatever we do to last past our precious minutes. Like he *wants* to be more permanent in my life than he *deserves* to be. But it doesn't matter. I let him, I have nothing better to do, and steal the cigarette out of his hand as he distracts himself.

2...

My watch beeps in warning and he leans away this time, and I don't flinch as he curses in frustration. He goes lax against me, and I

---

would think that him brushing my hair out of my eyes was sweet if I couldn't still taste his teeth on my tongue. I push him away, take a drag and put it back in his mouth. He laughs around the filter, and I fish some gum out of my pocket. As we walk back, he stays nearby, hooking his crooked pinky in mine. Not too close, but close enough that I can't ignore him *completely*, even if I wanted to.

1...

I fix myself, one-handed, and figure that these smoky moments of simplicity are better if they don't last. He's not a fixed figure in my life, and it's better if his fingers and cigarettes and lips remain a bad habit that I fill my work breaks with to pass the time. Besides, things can get lost in the haze if I let them get too smoky. I take my place at the counter and smile at the next guest in line, and I can sense him, lurking in my periphery, mischievous as ever. I remind myself that this boy, this bad habit, is something I can quit at any time.

---

SAVANNAH KEOWN IS AN ENGLISH MAJOR, AND IS A TRANSFER STUDENT IN HER FINAL YEAR AT UCI. HER PAST TIMES INCLUDE LISTENING TO TRUE CRIME PODCASTS, COOKING TO AVOID DOING HOMEWORK, AND READING ANYTHING SHE CAN GET HER HANDS ON. SHE IS SO EXCITED TO BE PUBLISHED IN THIS ISSUE OF NEW FORUM AND SHE CAN'T WAIT TO GRADUATE IN THE SPRING!

FICTION | 26

# IS IT LOVE?

By Jodi K. Lacangan

---

This is what I learned about love. It is the mind that is most important?

Can your lover endure the messes your mind creates?

Will they shut down your ideas or help build them?

They don't always have to agree – sometimes being a devil's advocate can help you see the bigger picture, sometimes even make you laugh.

Do they apologize when they know they've hurt you?

Do you hold a grudge or fall back into their arms, knowing that they just want what's best for you?

Do you know how to stop a joke that's gone too far,

Or to just accept you can't change who they are?

Can you keep up with their ideas, their vocabulary?

Can you hold your ground, have something back to say?

And if there's nothing left to say, are you comfortable with the silence of just existing next to each other?

Does this relationship inspire you?

Are you not just happy, but happier than before?

Do they help you reach your life goals, create the legacy you want?

Can they support you when you need it, and let you down, no matter how easy or hard, when you're wrong?

---

And most of all, what is the product of your bodies and cells  
multiplied against each other?

Is it love?

---

JODI K. LACANGAN IS THE CO-EXISTENCE OF BEING A FIRST YEAR BUT A JUNIOR. IT'S A LONG STORY. THEY ARE DESCRIBED TO BE BUBBLY, INTROSPECTIVE, IMAGINATIVE, AND IS A LOVER OF KNOWLEDGE AND HISTORY AND THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE. THEY WORK IN A VARIETY OF MEDIUMS BUT THEIR FOCUS IS ARTS ACTIVISM, AS THEY ARE GENDERFLUID, AFAB (ASSIGNED FEMALE AT BIRTH), BROWN, BIGGER-BODIED, DIAGNOSED SCHIZOPHRENIC, AND QUEER. THEY BELIEVE AN ISSUE TO ONE IS AN ISSUE TO US ALL. THEY STAND AT A GRAND HEIGHT OF 4'8.

NON-FICTION | 28

# THE HORIZON

By Kyle Van Lant

---

I spent an unusually large portion  
    of my childhood  
gambling with God.  
He kept laughing as I kept coming back to the table,  
    kept grinning  
    as I showed him my hand  
    one trembling card at a time.  
First he suggested What Is,  
then How it Works,  
and then Why.

    Why what?  
I played the hand I was dealt  
and won my own eyes to see—  
but at my own expense  
I gazed upon sentinel deeps,  
    insect lifespans  
    frigid smiles  
    viper eyes  
    meaningless deaths  
    shame  
    lies  
    and an ancient sun of immeasurable power.



---

I've clawed madly before  
these lonely days,  
grown into Someone from the weight  
of all that I'd seen.

First he granted me sight.

But now he announces  
that I will be promptly jettisoned  
from my fantasy's invulnerable stone  
into a hurricane  
of love and suffering  
like I'd never imagined possible,  
where everything exists  
and all of it is real  
and nothing will ever be the same again

---

KYLE VAN LANT IS A SILLY LITTLE FOOL.

POETRY | 30

# REMEMBER MY NAME

By Sahn Khanpour

---

Please, remember my name  
You are the most beautiful I have ever seen—  
Both inside and out

I yearn for the days we would laugh together  
The days where we could talk, where we could be  
But the cold, debilitating winds blow  
Blow through our lives and take away these moments we could share

My heart breaks a little more when I see those empty eyes  
Eyes that have seen so much but remember so little  
A tragedy wrought upon the kindest soul  
It makes me wonder if this is what He wanted

Days and nights would pass and only you remained beside me  
An effervescent light that never left my side  
But your fluorescence has now

Dimmed,

Dimmed,

Dimmed.

An arduous task it seems, to live both with and without you  
To see the shell of the person I hold so dear

---

My chest aches, but my love grows  
Which makes it that much harder to breathe

I wish I could share my memories with you, just so you could see them  
too

I wish I could share my mind with you, as if it would change a thing I  
would give anything to speak to you as we spoke before I would give  
anything to have you back

But time is irreversible  
And for that reason I will continue to see you  
To speak  
To live  
To love  
And make the most of what is left

Every ounce of pain is worth seeing a smile on your face  
To see a bit of light in your eyes  
You may not know exactly who I am, but you know our love  
You know us  
So I ask you  
Please, remember my name

---

SAHN IS A 1ST YEAR BIOLOGY MAJOR WHO ENJOYS WRITING POETRY IN HER FREE-  
TIME. WHEN NOT WRITING AND BEING A WOMAN IN STEM, SHE CAN BE FOUND ON  
THE BEACH WITH HER DOG AND A GOOD BOOK, USUALLY ENJOYING THE SUNRISE OR  
SUNSET.

# THE STREET OF PURE EMPTINESS

By Jazmín Romero



JAZMÍN ROMERO IS A FIRST-YEAR EARTH SYSTEM SCIENCE MAJOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE WHO ENJOYS TAKING PHOTOS OF EVERYTHING AND ANYTHING, IN THEIR SPARE TIME, OFTEN LABELED AS THEIR SISTER'S PERSONAL PHOTOGRAPHER. THEY ARE A FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT, BECOMING THE FIRST IN THEIR FAMILY TO PURSUE HIGHER-LEVEL EDUCATION. THEY SEEK TO CONTINUE LEARNING ABOUT THEIR HERITAGE AND CULTURE THROUGH VARIOUS FUTURE TRIPS TO THEIR PARENT'S "HOMELAND".

# BEING A VIETNAMESE AMERICAN

By Nhi Island

---

involves the tug from both sides of the rope,  
making my very existence a game of tug of war.

I am supposed to assimilate and learn the “American Way.”

forget about the blood that got you here

I am supposed to hide my dried pork and rice at the lunch table.

the kids think it’s stinky and weird.

I am supposed to only speak English in this American country.

they don’t understand what you’re saying.

now, I speak broken Vietnamese.

I laugh about it to my friends and call it “Viet-lish”

we all laugh about it together,

knowing that all of us speak the same broken, made-up language

we all know that bits and pieces of our culture  
is being shredded and glued into something broken.

I botch the words to Vietnamese food I love to my grandma  
who tries to understand what I’m saying  
and my confidence  
slowly begins to

# BEING A VIETNAMESE AMERICAN (cont.)

---

crumble.

when I wear those beautiful Vietnamese dresses,  
I feel like a fraud.

friends of my mother look at me and I know what they see.  
they see an American

.  
strangers around me look and see  
an Asian girl, a foreigner.  
my friends and I call each other by our American names,  
but I am becoming deaf to the constant reminder  
that we are never going to be immersed  
in a tradition, a culture  
that is solely ours.

I am scared of others forgetting my Vietnamese name that  
my mother crossed the oceans for.

I am scared of forgetting my own name.

# THE BLOSSOM, THE ORANGE, AND THE TREE

By Caitlyn Reynolds

---

maybe I am one of the blossoms on a tree of oranges  
or maybe I am the orange in a tree surrounded by orange blossoms  
I forget I'm next to the same fruits growing in abundance  
sometimes it feels i am the singular orange on the tree,  
I know it is factually impossible.  
it is impossible for a fruit tree to grow a single orange  
I know it must be untrue, but I can not deny how it feels  
sometimes it feels i am nothing, but the the bud of the blossom  
I have to remind myself the blossoms are the oranges and the  
oranges are blossoms  
they are all one in the same, they grow together on the tree,  
they turn into the same orange  
the orange once was a blossom, even a bud  
the only apparent difference is the rate of growth  
no matter the orange made to be picked first  
it will be enjoyed what it will give: they are fruits  
it uses what it has to serve

---

CAITLYN REYNOLDS IS A FOURTH-YEAR PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCES MAJOR, AND SHE  
IS IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A DOUBLE MAJOR IN LITERARY JOURNALISM. SHE'S  
VEGAN AND HER FAVORITE THING TO EAT ARE FALAFELS!

POETRY | 36

# THE STATE OF HEALING

By Caitlyn Reynolds

---

when I watch the last leaves loosely blow on the tree's body without  
coverage,

and the small groups of marigold leaves

dangle, and droop on the sticks the translucent dewdrops land on

when the sounds are soft streaming along the edges of the sidewalk

on the other side of the curb where small pools are made

when I know it's raining by the drops the sky imprints by it's puddles  
vibration

when I open my window and smell renewal from the reckoning

when it is tainted by the smell of cigarettes

I remember the freshness of it's air fill all the spaces of the lungs

I breathe in this life

I breathe as the newborn gasps the first sips of life,  
with rain

each time the sky turns gray and the clouds water the land

it is the set alarm cueing rinse, to realign away from any dark splashes

the rain is the restoration of brain and body

the reminder to return back



# SIMPLE LIFE

By Jose Ramos



---

JOSE RAMOS IS A 4TH YEAR EDUCATION MAJOR. AFTER AN INVESTMENT IN HIS PHOTOGRAPHY HOBBY DURING HIS UNIVERSITY STUDIES, JOSE FOUND A PASSION IN CAPTURING MEANINGFUL MOMENTS THROUGH HIS CAMERA, WHICH HE FREQUENTLY POSTS ON HIS INSTAGRAM: @QUITOFOTOS. WHETHER IT BE PEOPLE, PLACES, OR ANIMALS, THE SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF EMOTION IS PARAMOUNT IN JOSE'S PHOTOGRAPHY.

PHOTOGRAPHY | 38

# JERUSALEM CRICKET

By Sav Andrea Villescascas

It was the summer of  
child tyrants  
cracking the navy sky with our screams  
—our gurgling  
sputtering laughter—  
it was aloe tongues  
licking  
our rubied skin—  
the saccharine stickiness  
of grandma's backyard pharmacy

scraped knees and  
crooked home-cut bangs  
we built our empire out of  
cherry stained  
popsicle sticks and  
became magnifying glass  
arsonists.

We were dirty then  
blonder then  
blue tongued and pink eyed  
caught constellations on  
our cheeks                      our shoulders  
left our baby teeth  
in a Ziploc bag  
behind us.

---

It was the summer of  
                    carnivores  
            and cannibalisms  
nails chewed down to  
            the rind  
                    blood covenants  
            and band aids

we were untouchable then  
                    guillotines then  
when death was just a word  
            mom kept buried in her pocket  
we caught Jerusalem crickets  
                    under glass—  
            their fat bulb bodies  
clicking  
                    thrashing  
until we took our shoes to them  
and left a pool of butterscotch froth  
            in our wake.

We had no taste for it:  
            the death we doled out  
like dollops of whipped cream—  
            the flowers we yanked  
            out by their necks  
the opossums we sniped  
from the trees  
with our plastic guns.

POETRY | 40

# JERUSALEM CRICKET

(cont.)

---

California wore the sunshine  
like a cruel second skin  
glistening and  
blistering  
in all of her nooks  
and crannies—  
back when our whole world  
sat neatly  
in the muggy crook  
of her elbow  
and we thought *surely*  
that there must be some  
feral animal blood  
burning under our skin  
wrenching our faces to the sky  
to howl so terribly  
at the moon.

---

SAV ANDREA VILLESCHAS IS A 3RD YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR WHO TRANSFERRED FROM GOLDEN WEST COLLEGE IN THE FALL. SHE HAS A CAT, A HUSBAND, AND A CAFFEINE DEPENDENCY. SHE VOWS TO ONE DAY PUBLISH THE BOOK SHE'S BEEN WORKING ON SINCE THE EIGHTH GRADE. IT HAS DRAGONS AND MONSTROUS GIRLS IN IT.

# BERRY PICKING

By Ash Arumugam

---

I go home for the memories to sweeten  
And pinch them off the vine in peak season  
Only for them to shrivel in my fingers –  
To sour when they touch my tongue.  
As I live, they stay safe on the vine.  
But when you come upon that world after me,  
You may find them in my wake.  
You may find one between your teeth.  
And delight in a sweetness I could not.

---

ASH IS A 4TH YEAR PSYCHOLOGY MAJOR. WHEN SHE IS NOT WRITING IN ALDRICH PARK, ASH SPENDS MOST OF HER TIME READING, COOKING, GOING FOR WALKS, AND BINGING CRIME SHOWS.

POETRY | 42

# DEPENDENCE

By Olivia Mondragon

---

Her days always began with screaming.

She would remove the covers and try to ignore the feeling of her cold and sore limbs or the burning of her sleep-deprived eyes. She would navigate towards the crib in the darkness. She had enough guidance when the creature's screams grew louder with every step. Even if the sound was absent, she had grown accustomed to walking the exact same path over and over again.

She tried, once, to explain her struggles.

It happened when their second child was only a few months old, and she was wondering if she had achieved the most hollow version of herself, when her husband had a coworker and his darling wife over for dinner.

The couple brought the unmistakable energy of newlyweds into the home, all smiles and twinkling laughter, loving glances and the eager finishing of each other's stories. The conversations went in every direction, and every pairing of the party had been achieved, except for the pairing of the sexes.

When the blushing wife finally turned to her, eyes sparkling brighter than the light catching in the classic diamond ring, her heart soared. She realized she was finally entering a private conversation with a person who could hear, who could see, who could *understand* the sacrifice.

She tuned out the background conversation of her husband describing all the pictures that hung on their wall, beaming with pride as he named off each of their children, gesturing to the smiling faces and laughing as he recounted their latest mischiefs. She was even able to tune out his signature phrase, the one he

---

repeated to all of the guests whenever the topic of children came up.

“Never a dull moment when you’re a parent, eh?”

She focused all of her attention on the vibrant woman across from her, feeling more awake than she had in months, and recognizing the anticipation bubbling up inside her when the woman began speaking.

“Thank you again for going through all the trouble to make such a wonderful dinner for us. I’m sure extra guests are the last thing you need when you’re already taking on so much as a mom.”

Over a year had passed since that encounter, but the memory still consumed her every waking moment.

She thought of the words as she lifted the screaming infant from the crib and felt his weight settle onto her chest, grateful that the midnight darkness concealed both of their faces.

She thought of the words later in the day when she went to wake her oldest, gathering the energy to get him ready for school, only for her heart to sink when she learned that he had a fever, and that she would be resigned to taking care of him, fated to become the vulnerable recipient of yet another sickness.

She thought of the words as she heard the signature voice box phrases of her daughter’s doll, a toy the daughter was delighted to take care of, giggling as she pressed a plastic bottle to the doll’s lips.

She replayed the conversation over and over again, returning to the same matter she had pondered every day prior.

How could she explain that she had never been a mom?

How could she explain that she *wished* she was a mom, that she had dreamt of a life where she loved her children so much that any amount of pain and suffering would have lessened every time she thought of them?

# DEPENDENCE

(cont.)

---

How could she explain that she was forever resigned to the role of a mother, forced to orchestrate trivial affairs for such needy, petulant creatures, so pathetically and deplorably dependent on her that she couldn't stand it?

How could she explain that she had spent an eternity pondering a single question: If there is no greater pain than losing a child, is there no greater crime than not wanting your own?

Although it would never be enough to comfort her in the slightest, she always ended up with the same afterthought: A life is lost either way.

She remembered the way her heart sank at the woman's comments, despite the fact that she immediately resorted to autopilot to endure the conversation.

She remembered the way the woman complimented her for being able to lose so much weight so soon after having a baby, assuming exercise was responsible for the protrusion of bones, an assumption that was made without the awareness of constantly shedding hair and frequent dizzy spells.

She remembered the way the woman remarked on the beauty of the fresh flowers that were placed on the center of the table. The gesture was so lovely and natural when the woman leaned in to inhale the scent of roses and baby's breath, but not enough to let her feel guilty about letting the vase shatter later that night. After the couple had left and her husband had gone to bed, she had tiptoed out of the bedroom, picked up the vase, and simply dropped it right onto the cold tile, fully aware that she would spend the night cleaning up the shards. There was a strange desperation in the way she stared at the messy pile,



longing for anything to grant her the same salvation and freedom.

Even more framed photos were displayed on the walls now, frozen depictions of seemingly wonderful growth and change, and she felt as if the endless eyes turned her into a constant exhibitionist.

No more flowers adorned the table, maybe because the added color would have been too much for her to handle, but the rowdiness of children was enough of an excuse to satisfy anyone who cared to ask.

The dance continued.

She spent the day taking temperatures, bringing in freshly cooked meals, supplying more blankets, and trying not to grimace every time his tiny fingers brushed against hers. She tuned out the sounds of the doll's enthusiastic voice, the tiny stroller rolling across the floor, and the clinking of plastic shoes being set on the table. She endured the ache of her chest and arms, the constant rocking and hushing, and the repulsive splattering of baby food onto her hands.

She went through all the motions knowing that there was something that hadn't changed since the woman stepped into her home, something that would withstand in the lifetime that awaited, whether the presence of children was physical or not.

Her days would always begin with screaming.

---

**OLIVIA MONDRAGON IS A FIRST YEAR PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE MAJOR WITH A MINOR IN CREATIVE WRITING. SHE LOVES HER LIFESTYLE AT UC IRVINE, AND IS INCREDIBLY EXCITED TO GAIN MORE EXPERIENCE AND FEEDBACK REGARDING HER WRITING.**

FICTION | 46

# HOW TO: MOVE ON

By Heather Oxley

---

You have to keep walking. That's the first and only thing you can do. One foot ahead of the other, keys jangling in your hand while you unlock the door to a room that should be familiar but just feels cold instead. You'll need to hang up your keys on the command strip that's peeling away from the wall. Resist the urge to rip it down.

Keep walking to the kitchen: to the living room, back to the kitchen. Avoid the bedroom for a while. The kitchen feels cold, I know, but you need to eat. One foot ahead of the other: to the fridge with the magnets you can't look at, to the cupboards where you had stashed your favorite snacks. Take one of those down - they're all yours now anyways.

Keep walking. Keep moving. Keep your eyes down. Don't look at the coat still slung over the couch. Don't go to it, and shrug your shoulders into the heavy absence. Don't breathe in the already fading scent. You're going to anyways. At least it'll keep you warm.

Keep going; even though you can't see, and even though your cheeks are burning, even though salt-water slips from your chin. Wipe your face on the shoulder of that leather jacket. You need to go into the bedroom.

It's colder there. Not as lonely. Keep walking, skirting around the bed, until you reach the shared bathroom. You can rest here a moment. Press your forehead against the cool marble countertop. Run the water as hot as you can. You don't feel as lonely in here; the jacket doesn't feel as heavy.

I'd tell you not to look in the mirror, but you'll do it regardless. It's only you in the reflection; the leather bunching awkwardly

---

around your too short arms. Keep going. Don't think about how you didn't feel alone. Don't think about hoping to see someone behind you; waiting like they always are.

You need to keep going.

Staying stagnant means the pain catches up. Take a moment, not a day. Not a week, not a year. You need to move with the grief.

You'll scream instead. The grief will bubble up until you finally stop walking.

You won't listen to me, and it's okay.

---

HEATHER OXLEY IS A THIRD YEAR TRANSFER STUDENT, TACKLING A JAPANESE MAJOR AND CREATIVE WRITING MINOR IN HER TIME HERE. SHE OFTEN WRITES WHEREVER POSSIBLE, BUT WHEN SHE DOES WRITE LONGER PIECES, IT'S USUALLY AT HOME, ACCOMPANIED BY A CUP OF NOW-COLD TEA THAT'S LONG SINCE BEEN FORGOTTEN.

FICTION | 48

# AN OPEN AIR NIGHT

By Nadine Aguirre

---

I was listening to music. I'm always listening to music; whether it be too loud and confined to only my ears or it be just easy enough to breathe in through the open air. I'm always listening to music. It was an open air night and I can't remember what I was doing, maybe I was texting the boy I liked, or reading, or just staring at the wall. A deep double thunk had come from my closet, the sliding doors just barely pried, with your room on the other side. I knew it had to have been your phone falling, or you knocking something by the head of your bed. I hadn't wanted to check, I was lazy and just wanted to do whatever it was I can't remember doing. I still got up to check.

Your light wasn't on, I couldn't see it through the hall. It was still early, your novela still hadn't ended yet. I had pried the door open ever so gently and called out quietly in case you were indeed sleeping early. It's quiet, I didn't know why it was so quiet, you snore so there is no way you could've been completely asleep. I remember I was scared, when I heard the deep groan, it was your groan I was sure but I was so scared because it was dark and it was still early.

I crept in, turning on the light just trying to flood out the fear. You're in the bathroom, it's dark and I want to flood out the fear but when I turn on the light something dies in me. You had slid onto the floor, pant-less, and you looked like you were asleep. But it was groans leaving your mouth not snores. I had grabbed onto your head checking the wall and anything near to see if there had been any blood to smear. I was begging for you to wake up, you thought you were in bed. My hands shook when I helped you up and told you to wipe yourself. I ran downstairs to get water trying to not

---

wake Papí, he had such early mornings those days. My older sister's phone still going to voicemail, trying to get her to answer, cause she'd know what to do. They are blanks now, I just remember the feeling, the heat that had rushed to my face and back while my hands trembled and shook from the cold.

I wanted to call an ambulance but my sister came in time. Papí is trying to get some 7up down your throat, it should've been just low blood pressure the little machine told us so, but you weren't okay. It was so hard to convince you, first to call an ambulance, then finally for you to agree that my sister could drive you. You both went with my sister's boyfriend helping you down the stairs. Papí's pressure went up, he couldn't focus, we stayed together 'til it went down and he told me he'd take me in the morning that there was nothing I could do. I knew he couldn't face it, the fear took him apart, he didn't want to be the one left behind. My sister stopped updating eventually, her phone was dying but my mamá wasn't and that should've been enough. It wasn't.

I called my other sisters to either tell them what had happened or to beg them to tell me it would all be okay. One hadn't answered and the other I can't remember. I didn't sleep all night, I had cleaned the high mirrors in your room, you had told me days ago too and I had been too lazy. I was just staring at your bathroom and I couldn't breathe. I didn't want to breathe. So I called my friend, her voice loosened something from pulling me to earth for even a minute, I'll never forget that.

The boy who I liked, who I will always tie to this night, stayed on the phone with me 'til seven in the morning. He told me to get out of your room, he told me to do anything else. The music was still

# AN OPEN AIR NIGHT

## (cont.)

---

leaking into the open air when I finally left, my tears had run dry by then but made a valiant effort for an encore. I almost hadn't gone to check. I almost hadn't gone to check. I had been listening to open air music but my earphones were on my pillow. You would have stayed on the floor all night. You would have laid in your bathroom all night.

For the rest of the night this is all I can think of, even as this boy (who ended as nothing more than this memory) told me funny stories and kept me talking like I was the one who was probably dying. My mamá, you , had laid on the floor of your bathroom and I heard you fall. It was an open air night and I heard you fall.

---

NADINE AGUIRRE IS A 2ND YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR WITH A SPECIALIZATION IN TEACHING. DESPITE THIS SHE STILL HAS NOT GRASPED THE IDEA OF GRAMMAR AND AT THIS POINT IS TOO AFRAID TO ASK.

# RELENTLESS PROGRESS

By Kyle Van Lant

---

The tides rise.

Man places his calloused hand  
against the spiral of holy power  
that killed old man Apathy  
and the lounging megatheria.

You can hear the sound it makes  
as you walk down empty alleys  
on the coldest morning  
when the Earth grinds and forsakes us  
like rotting in perpetual mundanity

In love's greatest extremes  
we become the world,  
the world our afterthought.

I made reality out of the morning with her  
with our fingers locked,  
with gloves on trash can lids  
storefronts in silver shadow  
the traffic a dim topography  
our footsteps the trampling of history  
while stray cats bounded in the gutter,  
our pasts the stuff of nightmares,  
our future a severance so wise and vindictive  
as to sputter alive with devastating fury

# CRACK IN LIFE, AND SUNSHINE CAN REACH

By Iris Z.



---

IRIS Z. IS A JUNIOR STUDENT WITH ECON MAJOR. LOVES STAYING ALONE AND  
RECORDING THE WORLD BY THE CAMERA AS A SPECTATOR.



# AFTER GORDIA

By Kyle Van Lant

---

I met with George on the road from Atherton, where we'd stashed the original copy of the lease for Gordia below a Romanian pine fence post, now rotted with termites, sun damage, and general chaos that rounded its skeleton smooth. If we were going to meet in Gordia as George required, twenty years after the colony's failure, it'd be better for it to be here rather than in Cloudburst's ruins. I didn't want to see what it'd become, to have it stir up the memories that I'd struggled to keep down for so many years. The trees here had grown taller than they'd been before, crowding the river and clumping in random patches of the valley floor, until the mountains bared their rusted cliff faces. I was standing against the post when he slowed to a stop in a midnight blue sedan, then stepped out slowly, neck stooped but eyes sharp. A bit too sharp. George—as Mido had started going by again after the colony went bust—kept his hair cropped short against his head, same as he ever did, but the trimmed and shaped beard that he'd sported in Gordia had morphed into a black bramble that served more as a shield of ignorance than a mark of wisdom. But then again, who was to know. I probably looked more or less the same as when he'd left me, considering I'd been keeping up with the aging treatments and hadn't changed my wardrobe since the day my elevator car touched Martian soil. Even so, once I saw him I felt off balance for a moment, forgetting who I was now and suddenly becoming that right hand man again. He lumbered over, jeans and a dirty plain white T like he'd started playing an impoverished farmer.

"Just as I remembered you," he smiled, coming to a stop.

"I could say the same."

# AFTER GORDIA

(cont.)

---

“Oh, shut the hell up, I know what I look like,” he barked, and with poorly veiled wist: “It’s not too far from what I am.”

“Why don’t you fill me in?”

“Ever the pretentious jackass. You haven’t changed a bit.”

George analyzed me with meticulous attention to detail. Even with his arthritic back he still loomed over me the same as he always did. His brown eyes were sunken and his features were less sharp, melted with age. “I brought something for us to drink. In case you’re still a sucker for sentiment.”

“I’m not.” I stared, then chuckled. “Actually, I guess I am. If I wasn’t, I wouldn’t be here.”

“I left instructions in my will to get buried here,” George said in an informative tone, as if I’d said nothing at all. The friend was suppressed; here was the businessman. “Not *right* here. No. I’m sentimental but I’m not a fucking idiot. I’m a romantic, and a fool, and a failure, and a choleric bastard, but I’m sure as hell not an idiot. I knew that from the day I was born. Every day just trying to outsmart the world around me so I wouldn’t have to vomit up an empty stomach. Or wouldn’t have to sleep in the gutter. All leading up to this. Yeah, I was smart, to make it all the way here after all this time. Even if I failed.”

“You’re getting buried at Jen’s?”

“Stop trying.” Pushing his buttons was the implication, an old one from our brief meetings in the Cloudburst town hall, a plug wood bungalow which had also served the post office and police station. He hadn’t flinched. He gazed out past the dorsal ridge that rose high above the valley, capped in snow this time of northern

winter. It didn't used to get snowed on until ten years ago, when the atmospheric fillers started to bring enough moisture to snow at this latitude. I didn't look back at it, but I knew. I knew from his eyes. He still looked at things the same way, still had whatever in his eyes made that analytical, silent train of thought that you were never quite privy too. But this time there was something frantic in the gaze. It would be easy to just attribute it to failure. To his break at the end. But I knew that George was layers and layers of Someones, that George or Mido was man after man after man, deep down into his completely unknown soul, the soul that had formed its Russian nesting doll carapace back in the slums of Cairo. To predict him was to fail, but failing to predict him was to fail entirely. Yet this time I was right. "Yeah. Next to her." After a silence: "maybe she'll forgive me."

I blinked. "I'm just gonna say this because it's the truth, George, so don't think I'm getting all sappy on you, alright? I've seen a lot of couples, and I've known a lot of people. I've known Jen. And I know without a shadow of a doubt that you two loved each other more than any two people I've ever met. I'm serious. I don't know who you're seeing now—"

"Nobody."

"Alright. Nobody. But my point is, don't judge yourself for that. Or for anything. She wouldn't have wanted you to do that."

"God, how I hate that shit, Nick," he spat. "Don't you do it to me, too! Every time I see someone from Gordia all they can tell me is how she wouldn't have wanted me to do this, wouldn't have wanted me to do that. Over and fucking over. Like I didn't know her well enough

# AFTER GORDIA

(cont.)

---

to know what she would and wouldn't have liked. At least more than you or any of the other fucks that downed Gordia. Like I don't think about what she would have said every single day when I get cut off in traffic, or when I have to fill out an extra form at the bank to get a lien on the foreclosure, or... or when I see a beach, any beach, and then I have to see her sitting on the blue towel, the one with the swordfishes on it, the only one we ever owned so we always shared it after using the solar shower, and then, then I have to hear what she'd said to me that afternoon as she put on the ring, hearing her over and over, it's like— it's a *curse*, Nick, and you don't understand a thing about it. You and everyone else. You all just pretend to know her. You pretend to know me. It's sickening."

I looked at him. I know what she'd said, Jen with a heart of gold but a brain of a bit less: *My plan worked perfectly*. George looked back before eventually dipping his needle-sharp gaze and scanning the base of the fence post. "I know you didn't mean it. No one ever does. But it drives me fucking insane."

"I can't believe that you blame us."

"You're right. I can't blame you for not understanding." His eyes ticked over to mine.

"Not that. George, you know damn well who downed Gordia."

"Oh-ho. Nick. I *know* you didn't bring me all the way out here to lecture me."

"No, that's not why."

"You're a bad liar. And I know why else. Let's just liquidate it now and call it a day."

"You want to leave already?"

---

"Of course I do! This place is just whispers of you, whispers of her, whispers of everyone who believed in me, everyone that I let down. I'd rather it burn, or just wipe off the face of the map and be just... flatlands and dust. Along with me. Yeah. This is where my dust belongs." He hesitated before saying, "I know that it was me who asked that we meet out here, instead of Blueback. But I couldn't imagine having the last time I see you be in some automated coffee shop in downtown. There's no soul in that city. There's soul here, though. It would kill me to see it again, but I want to be in Cloudburst forever. So I made a compromise."

I said nothing this time. He was right about the dust. Mine belonged here, too. I'd lived more in our two years in Gordia than the rest of my life combined. And he was right about Blueback. There was nothing there for either of us besides a place to live out our days.

George turned around slowly and walked back to his car, popping the trunk. He came back with a bottle of whiskey, and I realized after a moment that it was Winston-Lewis, the same kind we'd drank on that first day in Port Colossus in the dive bar out of town. That's where we'd met. Where he'd convinced me to go on this whole crusade. Where we'd sealed the deal that almost got every person that we'd come to love and care about killed, needlessly killed from behind the kaleidoscope of greed and pride. Where we'd ended up sealing Jen's fate, watching her eyes glaze over as our only doctor, a veterinarian with a fake license, trembled as he tried to sew up the gaping hole in her leg. If only I'd just gone straight to my hotel for the night. But even as I thought it, I didn't want to think about who I'd be if I'd never met George.

He pinched two highballs in his fingers, one of which I took

# AFTER GORDIA

(cont.)

---

reluctantly as he poured in the whiskey. After looking at me for a long moment—at the ridge, at the river, at the road leading to our home—he raised the glass. “To dust,” he uttered.

This time, without hesitation, I echoed back: “to dust.”

# INFLAMED HORIZON

By Bobby Thornson

---



---

BOBBY IS A 4TH YEAR FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES AND SPANISH DOUBLE MAJOR, MINORING IN DIGITAL FILMMAKING. HE ENJOYS MOVIES AND ART MORE THAN ANYTHING BUT IS ALWAYS EXPLORING MORE FORMS OF CREATIVITY. HE WRITES POETRY AS WELL AS TAKES PHOTOGRAPHS IN HIS FREE TIME.

PHOTOGRAPHY | 60

WINTER 2022

# IF I COULD ONLY SWALLOW THE PACIFIC WHOLE

By Skylar Lee-Stefanov

---

by now I've spent most of my time  
on this sullied sailboat, adrift  
atop the Pacific,  
looking  
down  
through a great  
barrier of sky-stained  
glass windows lined with seafoam,  
to witness the world wavering, diluted,  
filtered into patches of teal or dull lapis.  
now and then, I take small sips  
of it. I'll dip my toes in,  
run my hands through  
the waves, let it  
splash just enough  
to taste the salt.  
I'll remember Mariana  
is miles deep below,  
then remember  
I am the son of a socialite—  
a God of the sea—one  
who embraces  
oceans  
like a second  
home, communes into  
coral reefs to greet the salmon and cod,  
conversing in packs along dolphins and



---

socializes with the whales.

I, the unspoken sailor,  
stare back silent at his  
territory in a pale anticipation, hoping  
to one day be whisked  
down a spontaneous  
whirlpool, or maybe  
the megalodon  
reincarnated  
would arrive  
and  
devour me,  
drag me below in a single  
sweep.

it's the thought of speaking  
that is harder to swallow, how it  
engulfs fully like the sea,  
takes hostages,  
an intrusive  
thalassophobia  
and imagining the  
slow sink  
deeper into that  
murky noise.  
Sapphire spilling in  
trickling

# IF I COULD ONLY SWALLOW THE PACIFIC WHOLE (cont.)

down my  
throat,  
occupy  
my lungs,  
then my stomach finally,  
my bones  
and I am frozen  
a mutant of fear—  
my skin turned see-through  
while a crustacean audience  
awaits a now lifeless meal  
to hit  
the seafloor.  
and admittedly, I gnaw this  
wanting—  
nothing more than  
to live  
in the liver of the abyss,  
feel liquid graze my  
limbs  
like silk sheets.  
wanting  
to glide through as though  
I was invincible to the pressure.  
wanting to be  
unwavering,  
undiluted,  
unfiltered.

---

wanting to be whales, fish.  
wanting to be dolphins.  
to gaze into Mariana's  
deathly  
charismatic eyes  
and say  
"I know you".

if I could only swallow the Pacific whole  
then I'd drink,  
and I'd drink,  
and I'd drink  
and it will never be enough.

# AN ASPIRING SMITH

By Ben Hamilton

---

Like the hammer, inspiration strikes me—  
I light the coals, heave the bellows;  
this time will be different, they'll see.

I can see it clearly now, dancing in the fire;  
with a few strikes and a little work,  
I can fulfill this desire.

I can see their faces now, brimming with delight—  
when they see the work I haven't begun,  
they'll say "That boy's done alright!"

The things I'll make, the metal I'll bend!  
And just when I raise the hammer,  
things always seem to

# SOCK PUPPETS

By Chris Nagelvoort

---

After Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen rose to candidacy for the Spanish throne, the potential of a Prussian-Spanish alliance was of major concern. Diplomatic maneuvers of Otto von Bismarck (*origami black hat*) sought to prohibit Prince Leopold's rise onto the world stage (*cardboard tri-fold*). However, the ever-so plotting Bismarck sent the Ems Telegram (*Valentine's day heart-sticker*) to the French government, provoking them to war. Inevitably, German Gen. Helmuth von Moltke (*pipe cleaner mustache*) sided with Prussia. Superior in numbers and organization, the militarily creative general scored successive victories until the end of the war. (*On stage*) One of which was Napoleon III's (*red electric tape sash*) surrender at the Battle of Sedan, where the French resistance formed a new government after the last monarch of France was brutally and cannibalistically devoured by the ferocious Helmuth as he gouged Napoleon's (*googly*) eyes out and pulled the skin off of his finger-like spine with a gaping mouth—

The father chokes on his Americano for a second. *Inaccurate again*, he thinks. The puppeteer unpinches (*de-mouths*) each war figure and drops them into the cemeterial drawer full of every other character.

A census of which would consist most notably of:

- googly eyes
- pipe cleaner or fabric hair
- tears and holes
- white bodies with grey mouths

# SOCK PUPPETS

(cont.)

---

The stage—in lieu of an accurate Arc de Triomphe—is a far too angular tri-fold poster board from Staples®, which the puppeteer's brother used in a science fair project months back, flipped on its side. The father's choice. Old blemishes, where rolled-over electric tape used to be, dot the intrados of the arc. The puppeteer doesn't know what the intrados is. He points and says "roof," and smiles.

The father is often the director of the puppet show.

"Pinch it harder this time, bud." "Helmuth is not the same as Leopold I; we did Belgian Revolution last week." "A paperclip could work as a sword I suppose." "No, those two are enemies—the worst kind of enemies." The puppeteer is scolded for his egregious friendship between Napoleon and Bismarck. He doesn't understand that war is menacing, unforgiving, and fixed. "History is history," the father says. It must be portrayed as so.

The mother designs the costumes for the show.

"Do you think this can be a Romeo?" she says as she pins a bowtie to one of the puppets. "And maybe this one can be Juliet?" She uses a hot glue gun for the hair transplant. The puppeteer twirls the pipe cleaner locks. "Ooh, Juliet *would* look great in braids," says the costume designer. The puppeteer doesn't know what braids are and continues twirling. The costume designer wraps this sock puppet with a zebra scrunchie—a *beautiful dress*. The father thinks otherwise: *the royal gown of Napoleon III's wife, Empress Emilia*.

The next scene of the war is to take place. At the director's orders, the puppeteer makes trenches in the shag carpet (indents), lines them with barricades (Lego 2 x 4's) and makeshift cannons (the older brother's Gundam collection). The cannons, oddly shaped and much

---

larger than the barricades, appear half the height of the Arc de Triomphe.

“They should be the Montague and Capulet buildings, honey”, says the costume designer. “Or better yet, that yellow stocky one could be Juliet’s statue, raised in her tragic honor.”

“No, the cannon must be portrayed,” says the director, having the final word. The costume designer ignores him and stares at the stage. The blemishes turn the Arc de Triomphe to a starry night sky above the magnificent Verona—the multicolored Legos are mini townhouses and the Gundams stand tall as the sculptured peace between the two families.

Tomorrow is the extended family reunion, with a puppet theatre showing! Because it is a special occasion, the director is amassing quite the choreography for him and the puppeteer to rehearse. The practice session takes a toll on the puppeteer. Maybe it’s the difficult UPSTAGE and DOWNSTAGE directions (the little stage space often yields traffic jams between the director’s and the puppeteer’s hands)? Or perhaps the difficulty in the names he pronounces as “helmet,” “ah-toe van,” and “nap-olé”?

Disaster strikes! The costume designer’s “puppy-teer” (the puppeteer’s brother named her Snowball) comes from nowhere onto the stage, flattening the immortal Arc de Triomphe into ash and rubble, creating shooting stars and arrays of cannon parts and building bricks. Unplanned shrapnel strikes the puppeteer in his left eye; the costume designer holds him close to her. The director is in turmoil. Unable to continue with the Franco-Prussian production, the director scrambles for other points in history—the

# SOCK PUPPETS

(cont.)

Crimean War? French Revolution? “No, no, no!” Bearing the weight of unrecapturable time, the director is at mercy to its singular, relentless march. “Time,” he says, “must move forward; as Helmuth commanded his troops with unmistakable tenacity; as I direct this production with unwavering veracity.” He remembers a quote from Helmuth he never knew he knew:

**“If the chain of command is lost,  
it is everyone’s duty to restore it.”**

The director sees the dreaded mutt chewing Empress Emily’s royal gown—it snaps at one end and greys with slobber. The director, manic, decides the last-minute production will be on World War I (the Franco-Sino war is a no-go: the war must have a victor!) with Emily’s torn gown as a makeshift winter coat for either Archduke Franz Ferdinand or French Gen. Marshal Joseph Joffre. The costume designer and the puppeteer scramble to construct the new stage and costumes (Ferdinand and Joffre confusingly both wear white pipe cleaner mustaches).

An ice pack on his left eye, the puppeteer stumbles toward his bedroom. Down the hallway, he walks, passing paintings and portraits of the very people he puppeteers with (or as?). They stare at him. He shrinks under the ice pack. He looks lower. Intermittent shelves of books and photographs line the wall, rearing dust bunnies and sun-washed paper. His vision halved, he sees the right side in its entirety. Unadorned, white walls. The ice pack feels lighter.



Once in his room, the puppeteer plays with the puppets. To be alone with them, without the supervision of the other two stage workers, is the most pleasurable of all. Tidied into his drawer, he always piles them up inside out, leaving the costume as a surprise. Closing his fist, sticking it inside the fabric, and pinching his hands, his limb extends and becomes another's body. The hand becomes the character, and the motions of a few fingers become the story. But what surprises the puppeteer the most is also what is most disconcerting. At the instance of the re-veiling of the puppet, its turning inside out, the hand comes out flush—holding nothing. It is this phenomenon—the sameness between puppet and hand, the puppeteer and his extensions, the clothing and the clothed—that frightens him.

He puts the puppets away, looks around and notices the memorabilia—"Greater Science Fair 1st Place," "Junior Science Olympics Participation Ribbon," plaques, plaques, and more ribbons. Just above the empty top bunk. The documents predate the theatre's inception. They remind the puppeteer of his brother's resignation from the theatre company for something more "...moving." He reads what his brother scribbled on the hardwood floor: *arabesque* and *en l'air*. The (sharpie) lines loop, twist, and twirl—it looks like something. But he can't remember the name for it: ballot or ballet? The puppeteer touches the floor, swearing he could feel indents. Practice is starting again soon. He leaves the ice pack in the room.

It is the day of the extended family extravaganza and the opening night of *World War I: A Puppet Re-enactment of*

# SOCK PUPPETS

(cont.)

*Significant Events.* The puppeteer can't remember the movements correctly. The director (and narrator of the show) is panicking on triple-checking the historical validity of his script. The costume designer has just finished gluing on Winston Churchill's origami bowler hat (she forgoes the toothpick as a cigar in the case of a younger audience).

The audience arrives. Blank faces with lanky bodies. Some young, some old.

A census of which would consist most notably of:

- ages older than the puppeteer
- parkas and anoraks
- blue denim jeans
- hair

The puppeteer can't recognize most of them. They say "Hi \_\_\_\_\_. Oh, how you've grown!" to which the puppeteer nods. They ask why the puppeteer's brother is at college pursuing a different *stage*. The puppeteer shrugs and the situation renews with the next audience member. They line up in front of the handmade stage, towering over it as light from the outside shines through them—black lines and white lines. Encircled by the (for the most part) taller audience members, the puppeteer sees only a flat, half-illuminated canvas. Splotches of light form impressions of depth on this two-dimensional surface. The puppeteer, pinching his sides, can't follow the pattern. They undulate. They twirl. They remind the puppeteer of the light dancing on theatre curtains before the show begins.

---

The show begins.

After an introduction from the narrator (director) of the brewing tensions between the Balkan states and European alliances predating the start of the war, the puppeteer begins his movements. He tries to follow the note of stage directions he taped, hanging onto the back of the poster board (was the Arc de Triomphe; now the outline of Sarajevo's mountainside and later the German countryside). His left eye injured, the puppeteer has difficulty reading the directions. He inaccurately places Ferdinand (*white pipe cleaner mustache*) outside of his 1910 Graf & Stift (*Hot Wheels*) when the Serbian assassin holding the handgun (*Lego stormtrooper blaster*) kills him. The director sighs.

Reading the script as "Capulet" instead of "capitulate," the costume designer hands the puppeteer the wrong puppets, ensuring the show (and history) runs adrift. Without the stilted air of rectitude in his every motion, the one-eyed puppeteer must continue the show somehow. So, he chooses to dance.

*As news of Ferdinand's assassination spreads throughout the western front, Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II (yellow string as his aiguillettes) pledges his support to Austria-Hungary against Russia and Serbia by sending them the carte blanche (Valentine's day heart-sticker).*

The director seethes as the costume designer marches over to the apron pit (carpeted floor) in front of the stage, overtaking him as the new narrator.

*Secretly, however, Juliet (pipe cleaner braids) finds her way into the location of Austria-Hungary's Dual Monarchy, where in an*

# SOCK PUPPETS

(cont.)

---

*emphatic (muted mouth motions) speech she convinces the messenger (unadorned) of the carte blanche to surrender it to her. By way of this incredible act of espionage and bravery, Juliet prevents World War I (paper curtains close).*

Applause breaks out! The puppet show is an absolute hit. The audience members praise the puppeteer, shaking his hand warmly and separately. Bottling her excitement, the costume designer shrugs away all the compliments on her designs. She thumbs Romeo behind her back. The director is in flames. His historical recreation is in shambles once again. Disgruntled, he puts on a pair of socks, laces up tennis shoes, and goes for a run. The puppeteer watches as the director walks out the door—a stray googly eye hugging his left sock.

---

CHRIS NAGELVOORT IS A THIRD-YEAR ENGLISH MAJOR WITH A CREATIVE WRITING MINOR. ENCUMBERED WITH THE UNSHAKABLE WEIGHT OF MAKING A CHOICE, HE IS AFRAID OF MENUS. HE APPRECIATES A NICE, CURATED LIST OF ONE OR TWO LUNCH SPECIALS..

# REFLECTION

By Mae Elizabeth Vercnocke



---

MAE IS A FOURTH-YEAR PUBLIC HEALTH SCIENCES MAJOR. AFTER TRANSFERRING TO UCI IN 2020, SHE IS EXCITED FOR WHAT SHE IS CALLING HER "FIRST AND LAST YEAR OF COLLEGE."

PHOTOGRAPHY | 74

# VICTORIA

By Xuan Tran

---

I

A man and his girlfriend  
are cornered by the pedestal of  
a curvy mannequin without a  
head, nor legs.

Part of her head is covered  
by the plastic curve  
of its b-shaped butt.

On the other side,  
the man is angry,  
face flushed 'n  
red like period stains through creme jeans.

II

Victoria's secret is something  
women know, and girl's don't know.  
Workers'll measure you round your  
teeny chest,  
constrain you with the tape.

Moms decided it's time  
for their pips to wear  
a training bra, because  
their nips are beginning to poke.  
Big boobs make any shirt look good,  
but still, *keep them covered.*

---

She hides her insecurities in  
the beauty of her breasts,  
adorning them in glittery bras  
purple like spilt gasoline  
in the sunlight of the black sea.  
Who's her lover? A man,  
a woman, two women, many men...

III

Sale Sale Sale  
undies in drawers  
undies in baskets  
underneath tables like wringing maggots.

IV

Victoria's Secret was made  
in the eyes of a man. he shaped the store to  
shape his women. he made these women want  
to be *that* woman. Victoria's secret is  
she is for the man, and was never for herself.

V

Sexy sequins,  
slips. Tiny thongs,  
wide hips.

POETRY | 76

# VICTORIA

(cont.)

---

VI

A woman and her boyfriend  
are cornered by the pedestal of  
a curvy mannequin without a  
head, nor legs.

*The fuck,*

She says,

*don't tell me what to do.*

She threw the pink lace  
string on the floor,  
elbowed her way through the  
marbles of women who  
milk through the  
rainbowed fabrics,  
where she left a  
man meaningless and out  
of place.



# HOT WATER

By Sav Andrea Villescas

---

*The water has to be hotter  
than that  
Mother tells me  
steam rolling like hot breath  
up and around my neck.  
She's abandoned her glasses  
fogged and sweating  
on the sill above the sink.  
My hands are pink and  
angry, swollen things  
fat-fingered and shaking.  
She turns the knob slightly  
just enough that I stop  
squirming.  
It's gotta be hot  
or it's not gonna get  
clean.*

I lie in bed crying,  
my thighs and back  
a screaming red  
from trusting the sun too long.  
Mother rubs aloe jelly  
on me as I lie  
naked  
face first on my threadbare sheets.

# HOT WATER

(cont.)

---

The fevered burn breaks  
sometime after midnight  
and I sleep (poorly, but I do).  
I run my baths hot and full  
so that my skin prickles  
as I slither in. The room  
clouds, the mirror weeps.  
It doesn't scare me anymore:  
the blistering heat  
the angry blotching skin  
bright as neon.  
*Why do you like the water  
this hot?* he asks me.  
*How do you stand it?*

*Because I am a woman,* I tell him  
and as soon as I say it  
I know it's true.

I'm a child again,  
fingers pruny, shirt  
splattered in dish water.  
Mother hands me a bowl to dry  
and the glass is so hot  
I nearly drop it.  
*When will I get used to it?* I ask.

My fingers are so soft  
in these days--so uncalloused  
and velvet smooth.  
She smiles a little, a soft one.  
*Soon.*  
*It begins to hurt less,*  
*and we've been doing this*  
*for a long time.*  
I don't think she's talking about the water  
anymore.  
I dream at night  
of Salem  
of fat fingers pointed  
of flames licking my bound hands.  
I dream they call me Joan  
and throw kindling  
at my feet  
hurling words  
    *whore*  
        *witch*  
            *cunt*  
like it were petrol on my flames.  
But I do not burn in this one,  
only watch the hateful faces  
through the warping heat  
and think how strange it is to see sisters on

# HOT WATER

(cont.)

---

the wrong side  
of the fire.

*How do you stand it?* he asks,  
dropping a knife  
into the scalding water.

I tell him: *We've been doing this  
for a long time.*

# NEW YEAR'S EVE

By Skylar Lee-Stefanov

---

Doomsday comes once a year as a reminder  
of the world's inevitable ends.

Back then, in the parking lot of The Orleans casino  
where I awaited my demise, we took  
shelter from a deathly December air, smothered tightly  
inside the jaws of an SUV. The gravity of numbers  
descending, then weighing,  
then restricting. Of cannibal hours eating me internally,  
of my grandfathers gambling money that came  
and went like strangers,  
of the days I recounted from the past,  
or the ones memorable enough to hold at least.  
Here, I'd conduct a timid attempt to preserve them,  
mocking an archeologist studying his own remains,  
and made it tradition to find comfort in remembrance.

The dinosaurs felt it too, I believe,  
through bone-rattling cheers as  
Chicxulub broke the atmosphere.  
That similar affectionate force hugging them  
down like an old family friend.  
They were too kind to let go of course,  
left to the warmth of a mother's nature  
and it was her that brought them there after all.

Now they live on a pendulum

# NEW YEAR'S EVE

(cont.)

---

of time—their anniversary returning again and again.

Now that memory remains fossilized,  
another year sent to extinction.

Now, at the crossroads of a countdown, I'd look  
back at my velociraptor feet as if  
I could make a break for the clouds,  
I'd find my way marathoning to the moon, mars even,  
but the announcement of *ten* hooked me by the ankles  
and *nine* follows so closely  
and they'd become less fatal 'til whispered  
*eight, seven, six,*  
you know the rest

And so sudden comes  
a simmering hope,  
a climatic lightshow,  
a promised pulsing of the neon gunpowder star.  
Our own man-made galaxy for the prehistoric, light-polluted sky.  
They'd hurriedly usher into cascading  
meteor showers.  
Cataclysm's clock reset.  
And us,  
dinosaurs  
in the post-post-apocalypse  
return to Earth, as does everything

# PASHMINA

By Deepika Rani

---

By the banks of the frosty Jhelum(1)  
You stand stone still  
Muffled in a black Pashmina(2) around your nose  
Veiling all but the golden hue of your eyes  
Lined with smoked kohl  
Two piercing needles of obsidian

Silken threads of woven dreams sway back and forth  
Caressing your cheeks like the delicate strokes of a quill  
Writing on you silent tales of a bygone past  
That you take and tuck underneath the dusk of your curls  
Coiling them around your ears like cashmere on a spinning wheel

Living we are  
from two stringy balls of wool  
I've given you the needle  
Weave and unweave me as you will

Who cares if you sow nothing but a colorless phulkari?(3)  
I'll make a buqal(4) out of it  
If the garb tethers, we'll light a Kangri(5)  
To bury under your Pashmina  
Searing embers of sooty air wafting from under your chest

- 
- (1) RIVER IN KASHMIR, DERIVED FROM THE WORDS JAL (WATER) AND HUM (PURE SNOW)  
(2) POPULAR GARMENT WORN IN KASHMIR, A SHAWL SPUN FROM GOAT WOOL  
(3) FLORAL PUNJABI FOLK EMBROIDERY  
(4) PUNJABI WORD FOR WRAPPING CLOTH AROUND YOU  
(5) MINI HEATING DEVICE

# PASHMINA

(cont.)

---

I do not need the borders to tell us where you and I belong  
 The nightingales from our lands tryst under the same moonlight  
 Whistling the melodies of a Bulleh Shah(6) verse  
 In some nameless abode far from this one  
 We toss crumbling cubes of jaggery to ruffian pigeons  
 motored by their feathery wings in a game of chase

Sipping Kahwa(7) from the same tumbler  
 Your Pashmina towering over my head  
 Insulating us from the bitter Kashmiri winters

In the refuge of this lacquered black sky  
 cotton flakes of snow gracefully land onto your Pashmina  
 Dissolve into ringlets of royal sozni(8) embroidery  
 dusty pink paisleys and knots of forgotten prayers  
 They become yet  
 Another chilling mystery that you cloak  
 around your left shoulder in a swivel  
 Frozen in time

I want to tear this Pashmina from you  
 Unravel you  
 Pick you apart  
 Stitch by stitch

---

(6) POPULAR POET FROM PAKISTAN, PUNJAB

(7) TRADITIONAL KASHMIRI TEA

(8) A STYLE OF EMBROIDERY COMMON TO KASHMIR



---

Flecks of velvety sheen floating above us  
Pashm!(9)

From the smokes of a wandering cloud  
You emerge in your bare form  
Sheer and bloodless

Afraid of disturbing the stillness of this picturesque scene  
I clasp the beads of my anklets

For a moon's passing  
The waves of the Jhelum halt  
And I run towards the sight of you  
Darting past the rubbles of shattered buildings  
Ignoring curfews and gunshots  
The snow, a carpeted heaven below my feet  
and scattered pearls over my head

Dark tresses flailing  
Wind billowing through my white kurti(10)  
Whizzing through pristine valleys  
calling your name

Find you, with your back turned to the moon

---

(9) THE FINE WOOLY UNDERHAIR OF GOATS RAISED IN NORTHERN INDIA

(10) A TYPE OF GARMENT: KNEE-LENGTH SHIRT

# PASHMINA

(cont.)

---

Embrace you,  
bury my face in your Pashmina  
encasing you in eternity

And like a forgotten image in a mirror we disappear  
All needles drop in silence  
Just the sound of a Rabab<sup>(11)</sup> playing softly in the distance

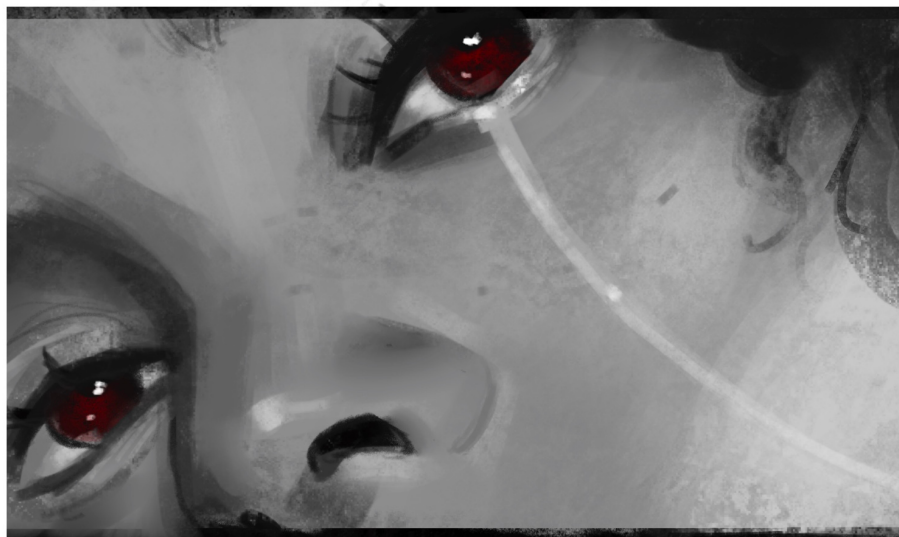
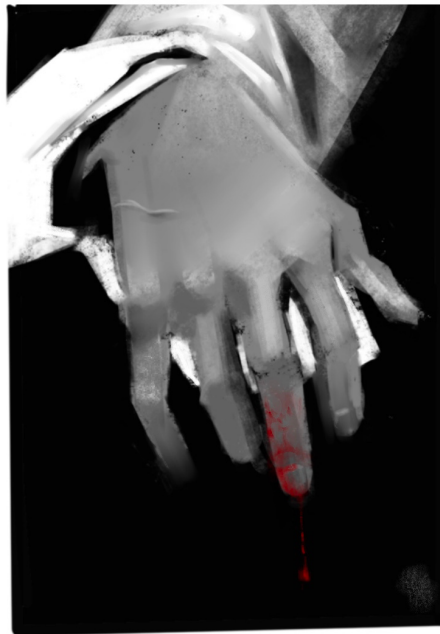
Our story echoes like a ghostly whisper in this lone Kashmiri valley.

---

(11) LUTE-LIKE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

# SEEING RED

By Shereen Wu



---

SHEREEN IS A 3RD YEAR EDUCATION MAJOR. THIS IS HER FIRST COMPLETED ARTWORK IN YEARS, AND IT'S A MIRACLE SHE GOT SOMETHING DONE BEFORE THE DEADLINE.

ARTWORK | 88

# new forum

## meet our **ADVISOR**



Rebecca Schultz is a Lecturer in English at UCI, as well as the Academic Coordinator for Entry-Level Creative Writing Courses (WR 30 and 31) and the Faculty Advisor for New Forum. She has a B.A. from Yale University in English and Art, and an M.F.A. in Fiction from the Programs in Writing at UCI. She is a fiction writer, and also writes book reviews, including for the Los Angeles Review of Books. This year, she's teaching creative writing courses including The Craft of Poetry (English 16, in winter quarter), Intermediate Poetry Writing (Writing 90, also in winter quarter), and Intermediate Fiction Writing (Writing 91, in spring quarter). A Brooklyn native, she lives in Los Angeles in a purple house that used to be a hunting cabin.

**REBECCA**  
**CLAIRE SCHULTZ**

