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president's message
Congratulations to the Cosumnes River Journal on another exemplary edition that showcases the work of our students.

This twelfth edition of the Journal was a labor of love for the faculty and students who devoted their time to its creation. The Journal is one of many examples of the creative opportunities we provide our students at CRC to engage in the arts.

The theme this year for the mini-essays is “Separation.” You will read poems and essays about love lost and how one feels when a loved one dies. You’ll also see examples of photography in this edition based on the theme.

The Journal now has a greater presence on the web. You can find it at cosumnesriverjournal.org.

I encourage you to take some time and read the great work of our students. They have poured their hearts and creative energies into this literary publication. Their skills, talents, and learning are manifested here, so please take a moment to find a place to relax and read the work of our students.

Edward Bush
President

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Courtney Lozano » Full of Emotions
Rows of cars line the uneven dirt lot while RVs settle in a separate space, perfect for the families soon to be flooding in from some urban jungle. Weathered oak trees surround the spot and a lake a short walk from the parking area. Most of these folks gather to heat marshmallows and chocolate over their crackling fires, watching the sun kiss the lake's water in a glittery display of wavering sheen.

Some of the other arrivals are still unpacking their cars with anything from a tent and some sleeping bags to portable kitchen tables and feather pillows. I guess they must be getting a head start on summer vacation.

Alvie is barking in the passenger seat as if the other vacationers can hear his aged yelps for attention. Luckily, a family has just pulled out of a space, allowing me to take it before anyone else has the chance. I step out and open the door for my companion, who starts to follow suit behind me as we make our way down to the more secluded areas of the park.

The air picks up in a tangent and seeps through my skin as we walk down a winding trail away from the more touristy sites, Alvie's golden fur becoming a little more browned from the loose dirt. The stream that we always came to play around is still here, calm and gleaming from the speckles of sunlight peeking through the overhanging tree branches. The water was always shallow enough to be safe for a small child but deep enough to entertain a young adult.

Rocks lie scattered along and beneath the stream, so I begin in search of the perfect stone for skipping. Just as I find a match, Alvie is letting loose a series of deep barks directed towards a kid farther down the stream, his soft blue eyes widening at the noise.

"Don't worry! He's a good dog," I yell over at the boy.

He half smiles but goes back to picking up one of the rocks. I watch as he pulls back and throws it towards the water, where it is immediately swallowed up. The boy grimaces and storms back and forth, almost falling over on the bed of rocks under his feet.

"Not easy, is it?" I call out.

"Is what?"

"Skipping rocks. I noticed your unsuccessful attempt just now. Didn't your dad ever teach you how to do it?"

The boy looks at me empty-eyed, the same look I must have given when loss was my only gift at his age. His blond hair and blue eyes glow similar to my almond-hued head and brown ones. The reason for coming here are memories, rolled flannel sleeves and heavy, back-patting hands, pushing their way to the forefront of my mind. The boy is walking away now with sunken shoulders weighing down his small frame.

"Wait!" I stand up, with a desperation that shocked myself. "I'm sorry. I know a sort of technique to it. Can I show you?"

He pauses and for a moment I catch a glint in his eye. "Sure," he replies shyly.

"Don't worry; it's pretty simple." Rolling up my sleeves, I pick up a rock and show him. Alvie perks his ears up, tuning into the conversation.

"Not easy, is it? I call out. "Is what?"

"Skipping rocks.... didn't your Dad ever teach you how to do it?"

"You want it to be a decent size, flat too. Then, think of throwing it like a Frisbee, except backwards." I position myself to the side and lower my right arm.

"Once in position, just release," I say while flicking the rock at my usual speed. It skips across the stream three times. His eyebrows lift, and he immediately starts looking for a similar rock. Once he finds one, he does as I instructed, but the rock only skids slightly before sinking again.

"I can't do it. I wasn't taught like you." I laugh. "You're right, I was taught when I was your age. But hey, there's something else in this trick that I didn't tell you."

He stares at me blankly, waiting for me to answer.

"First, you have to take off your shoes and socks," I instruct. He hurriedly throws them off his feet.

"Now, dip your toes in the stream."

"No way! It's still too cold for that," the boy gripes.

"Well... I guess you'll never skip rocks. What a shame."

I begin putting my shoes on before he reluctantly gives in.

"All right, fine... but just a quick second!" He walks towards the water, and his toes make contact with it in a freezing embrace. He steps back towards me, wiggling his toes back and forth to remember they're still attached to him.

"Ugh. Are you sure it helps?"

"Of course! Now, do everything I told you earlier. We'll do it together." Turning to the side, lowering our good throwing hand, and pulling our wrist back, we release the stones towards the water. His skips twice and mine only once this time.

"It worked!" he shouts.

I lower my eyes to him, pressing my hand on his back. "I had a good teacher. I guess that means now you've had a good teacher." He smiles wide.

"Barn! We're packing up! Where are you?" a voice calls out from the trees. We both look and I notice the sky has already collected a scene of mixed oranges and yellows.
“Sorry, Grandma! I’ll be right there!” Barn replies.
I watch as he puts his shoes back on and rushes up towards the trail.
I put my legs ankle-deep in the stream and bring water up to splash my face.

“Thank you, mister!” I hear him call out from a distance. His golden hair illuminates to shades of brown under the sunlight again.

I wave back, and Alvie is now in the stream with me, his wet nose brushing under one of my palms. My eyesight becomes blurry and something warm trickles down my face though I am not sure why. Maybe it is just the chill of the water.
The alarm clock beeped as he rubbed his eyes open. With a heavy sigh, he slung his legs over the side, got out of bed, and turned it off. He didn’t know why he’d set it since he hadn’t been able to sleep since the funeral. His son slept through it. He could barely make out the small silhouette as his eyes struggled to focus in the dark of early morning. He reached down to touch his face…

_**Let him sleep,** he thought to himself._

Like him, the dog had been up for hours. He could hear the clicking of his nails on the hardwood floor throughout the night. He used to go downstairs to let him out, but since the funeral, he hadn’t felt like leaving the warmth of the bed. He’d often felt a soft squish under his slippers as he stepped into the dining room. He felt bad for neglecting the dog.

He flicked on the light switch, momentarily blinding himself. He closed his eyes as he stood in the doorway, counting to fifteen before slowly opening them again. The dog panted as he put on his flannel jacket against the brisk cold. It still smelled of orange blossom and vanilla. It annoyed him whenever she wore his shirts and jackets. She thought it was silly that he got bent out of shape for something so trivial. He said that it was a matter of respect, of personal boundaries. In retrospect, it didn’t mean a thing, of course. Or rather, it meant everything. Though he couldn’t touch her, he could still smell her. He held the collar to his nose and brushed his open lips on the fabric. He was gripped by sudden dismay when he realized that he’d eventually have to wash the jacket.

*I’ll buy a new one._

After he carried the dog down the porch steps and led him out into the backyard, he filled the kettle with milk and placed it on the stove. He held the refrigerator door open. Empty, save for the half eaten platter of ham from the wake and the tray of eggs she bought at the Farmer’s Market last month.

“See? Nothing in there but that,” he said to the empty kitchen.

“I’ll do some shopping tonight,” he promised. He cracked a few eggs into a skillet and added some slices of ham from the platter. He heard her ts’king as the eggs sizzled and the ham popped.

The dog let out a short, sharp bark to signal that he wanted to come back inside. Normally, he’d coax him back up the steps, but it was too damned cold to stand out there cheering him on. The kettle whistled as he lifted him up to the landing, his back cracking as he straightened up.

The shrill whistle of the kettle must have awakened his son. He heard the floor creak above his head as his son got out of bed.

“Chocolate or strawberry?” he called up.

His son didn’t answer. He poured the steaming milk into a mug and stirred chocolate mix into it. The water ran upstairs as he plated their breakfast and set the table. His son trudged downstairs, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

“Put on a jacket, Son. It’s cold.”

His son ignored him as he pulled his chair up to the table. He sat with his elbows propped on the table, with his chin in his hands, staring down at the plate in front of him.

“I’ll get some food tonight. We won’t have to eat this again after this morning.”

His son sat silent, still staring down at his plate.

“Eat, kid. I don’t want you fainting at school.”

His son didn’t answer and didn’t look up.

“Eat.”

His son stabbed at the eggs and raised half a forkful to his mouth. He chewed once and spat them out.

“They go bad?”

He chewed a forkful himself and spat them out, too.

“Just eat the ham.”

His son tore off a piece of ham with his hands and took a small bite. He gave the rest to the dog, who’d laid his grey muzzle on the table. The dog took it gently, then swallowed it whole.

“You gonna be ok?”

His son didn’t answer. He’d folded his arms on the table in front of him and rested his head on them, face down.

“If you need more time, let me know, Son… ”

He called his son’s teacher, the night before. She promised to call him if there were any problems, stammering her condolences. He hated having to ease others’ discomfort. He thought it ridiculous and unfair that he moderate the anxieties of those on the periphery.

He studied his son, who hadn’t looked him in the eye or spoken to him since he’d told him that Mama was gone, that she wasn’t ever coming back. In retrospect, it was a dreadful choice of words, but he’d been in a miasmic haze when he delivered them. He realized the effect by degrees and tried to mitigate it by telling his son how much his mother loved him and that she would never have chosen to leave him, but it was too late. He disliked feeling guilty, resented the distance at which he was held. He ached to be swallowed by his son’s anguish rather than feel alone in his own.

_**HE KNEW THAT IT WOULD BE A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE DOG, TOO, WOULD NOT BE THERE. HE HOPED THAT THERE WOULD BE AMPLE TIME BETWEEN DEVASTATIONS.**_
He stood up and cleared the plates off the table. The dog followed him into the kitchen where he scraped the eggs into the sink. He popped the tops off two green plastic bottles and fished out a tablet from each. He broke a Rimadyl in two and gave a half to the dog, who gingerly accepted it. He then pried his maw open with his fingers and shoved the phenobarbital into the back of his throat because he’d spit that out if given the chance. He then picked the slices of ham off the plates and threw them at the dog, who devoured them by throwing his large head back with each bite. Four bites. He knew that he’d find half-digested ham on the floor when they’d return in the evening, but he didn’t care. The meds will have already dissolved and entered his bloodstream by then.

He loved the dog. The dog predated both his son and his wife. He’d been his confederate, accompanying him to and through every milestone, both good and bad, for nearly a third of his life. He knew that it would be a matter of time before the dog, too, would not be there. He hoped that there would be ample time between devastations.

The dog followed him back into the dining room and stood next to him when he sat back down, laying his grey muzzle back on the table and resting a paw on top of his slipper. He looked at his son whose head was still on his folded arms.

“Son.”
“Son…”
He was filled with great sadness and greater impotence.
“I’m sorry, kid…”
His son raised his head and regarded him, devoid of expression.
“… that… Mama’s…”
His son directed his gaze at the dog. He held out his palm and the dog walked over, sniffing his hand noisily to see if it held anything for him. Finding it empty, he nuzzled it. The boy scratched him behind the ear.
“I’d give any…”
He didn’t finish the thought. His son looked down at his hands. He picked at the dead skin on the edges of a burst pink blister.
“Finish your milk, Son, then go get ready for school.”

His son grasped the mug of hot chocolate milk with both hands, raised it to his lips, and took a deep draught. His eyes opened wide and he spat the hot milk all over the table, the dog, and his father’s face. He goggled at his father with chocolate milk running down his chin onto his pajamas. His father laughed… hard… then harder… even harder still… So hard that he struggled to draw a breath between each guffaw. The veins in his temples strained to bursting. His head felt like it was going to explode. He gasped in a jerky staccato rhythm, surprised to find himself sobbing.
To the Biracial Black Girls:

You’re still black.

It’s easy to forget when you and your non-black parent walk around. You hold your head high, thinking to yourself: Yes, we are related. I’m not just black. I’m more than that.

I get it. I do.

It validates you because you have your thick, kinky hair, and your melanin rich skin, and your wide nose, and your full lips, and your blackness is the most obvious thing about you. Hardly anybody questions it.

But when somebody asks the golden question: “What are you mixed with?”

Your face lights up like a Christmas tree, your heart races, and you look at yourself with a sense of accomplishment, as if looking “less black” is an accomplishment.

When you talk about your race, you proudly declare that you’re “[insert non-black race here]!” You don’t tell them that you’re black because you have your thick, kinky hair, and your melanin rich skin, and your wide nose, and your full lips, and your blackness is implied. They don’t need to hear you say it. And you don’t want to say it.

But that doesn’t matter.

You’re still black.

It’s in your blood, it’s in your hair, it’s in your skin, it’s in your soul.

Maybe you should stop loving only the parts of you that aren’t “black,” and start loving yourself.

Maybe you should start loving the parts of you that are black because when you don’t, you disrespect not only yourself, but your black sisters and brothers who don’t have another race to hide behind.

And I know that the pride you take in not being “100% black” comes in part from the shame you feel in being black. You look at our bloody history, the names little white boys called us, laughing at us, mocking us.

You look at your thick, kinky hair, and your melanin rich skin, and your wide nose, and your full lips, and your blackness overwhelms you. You hate what you see. You revel in the fact that you aren’t the darkest shade of black there is, and in the process, you damage yourself. You perpetuate the self-hatred that is already so rampant within our community.

To the biracial black girls:

You are allowed to love the parts of you that aren’t black; in fact, you should love the parts of you that aren’t black. But in doing so, you shouldn’t hate the parts of you that are.

YOU’RE STILL BLACK.

IT’S IN YOUR BLOOD, IT’S IN YOUR HAIR, IT’S IN YOUR SKIN, IT’S IN YOUR SOUL.

Your blackness is not ugly; it is not a burden that you have to carry.

Your non-blackness is not a mask for you to wear because you don’t want to be seen as “just black.”

Love yourself. Love your black brothers. Love your black sisters. They are beautiful just like you. They don’t need to be mixed with something else to be beautiful.

When you talk about your race, proudly declare that you’re “[insert non-black race here] and black!” Tell people not because they can’t see it, but because you have your thick, kinky hair, and your melanin rich skin, and your wide nose, and your full lips, and you are so beautiful and proud of who you are.

To the biracial black girls:

You’re still black.

Embrace it.
JOSHUA JOYCE

Island Birds

I can still see it
Her icy blue sundress,
Late nights and early mornings
With her,
Iced coffee in her car,
The interior lighting shimmering
Across her face,
Hours spent parked on Ira Circle,
Kisses and conversations,
Like our lips
We talked of traveling everywhere
We would talk of escape
Pretending to live
Far away from here.

I should’ve gone with her.
Island birds and ivory white sand have taken my place now.

BRIEL BROWN

Eve

envy was red.
it comes in green now,
but it started as a fierce, bright red
that dripped and bled on to everything
and gave life meaning.
endless travels ’round the sun will make man grow dizzy,
yet we oft scorn our blessing.
the sweetest of ripe fruits cannot help but rot
and betray any pleasure they once offered.
they’ve left seeds in their wake, though,
even the sweetest of tastes.
I shuffled the cards seven times. The psychic began to speak:

I.
Your stomach hurts every December. You drink too much coffee.
You pierced your nose and wanted to be a med student, but that’s all behind you now.

II.
You are a poet, born silent. You write about autumn and the tangerine-colored loves that
found fruition at the intersection of summer and snowfall. You sleep with demons.

III.
That is to say you are a philosopher’s child.
Your father waves when he drives past.
Your hand means thank you. His hand means please visit soon.

IV.
You will marry a logician who resembles your father.
A lover on the cusp of Pisces.
He will come to you in a year, in a crowded place. He will bury your young-minded clichés.
The apartment you share will house shelves of books.

V.
Which is to say that soulmates exist.
He will be your copy editor
for the rest of this life
and beyond.
Get Back First

The night was warm, almost hot. Crickets, bugs, and other critters chirped, squawked, and generally made a ruckus, destroying the night’s perfect silence. Nestled in the sticky hot evening, the two figures reclined side by side on the hood of an old weather-beaten car.

“How long are you gonna be gone?” she asked around an unlit cigarette.

“Not sure yet,” he shrugged beside her. “Kind of depends on what I find when I get there.”

“Is it gonna be dangerous?” she asked, trying to sound unconcerned.

“Well it ain’t gonna be safe.” He laughed, but she could hear the strain behind it. It was too sharp, too forced. She hated that false sound.

She shifted, folding her hands behind her head as a makeshift pillow, continuing to watch the stars spattered over the warm sky. They watched her back, winking occasionally. She barely saw them. Her mind was too busy discovering dark places.

“Well, get back in one piece, all right?”

He said nothing. She glanced over but only made out the vague image of his face. Despite her efforts, a pocket of worry began to fill her chest.

“You’re planning on coming back, aren’t you?” she asked.

He turned to look at her, his gray eyes almost black in the lack of light. He reached over, plucked the cigarette from between her lips and threw it into the dark.

“Hey!” she snarled.

“Stop doing that,” he said, leaning back against the car. “You look ridiculous.”

“It’s comforting.” She shot back.

“Ya, cuz you’ve ever needed comforting.” She didn’t see it, but she knew he was rolling his eyes. After thirteen years of friendship, you just know.

“Hey, jackass, this isn’t exactly my favorite night ever,” she said. They lay side by side in as much silence as the critters and bugs would allow.

“I’m in love with you, ya know.” He said after a few minutes.

“Yep,” she answered without hesitation.

“Yep?” He asked, dumbfounded. “Thirteen years we’ve known each other, and all I get is ‘Yep.’”

“What else?” she asked.

“Well… how about you?”

“Ya, no, not gonna answer that.” She shook her head in the dark. “And why the hell not?”

“Cuz you gotta get back first,” she said, focusing on a particularly bright star. This time, she noticed it winking down at her. She couldn’t help but smile. “You get back, and then I’ll tell you. Sound fair?”

There was a short pause.

“Yep.”

Then he truly laughed.
Summers with Michael

We’re falling asleep in the church pews
voices singing, swaying hands

Pulling weeds from sidewalk cracks,
Look at this one! Look at that…

We’re never going to sleep!
Let’s watch TV from our bedroom doorway

Ladybug races and sprinkler showers
muddy feet and a berry juice pouch

Tomorrow and the next day and the next day
Until we grew up and moved away.
PAMANDA TUMMINARO

Sleeping on the Couch

Ed was a ball of flirtations with the waitress that night, and his wife banished him from their bed as if a murder had uncurled.

Downstairs, the glare of the TV danced upon his sleeping face, twelve little ballerinas all vying to hijack his REM pattern.

His wife, Valerie, was snug in silk, with bubble dreams so continuous. No one but the cat could enter, or authentic murder would take place.
LYDIA OUTLAND

All My Faults

I
Forgive me for my faults
I know not what I do.
I never meant to be this weak
Or make a fool of you.

II
Forgive me all my many quirks.
I know I have a few—
Like having an opinion
Completely different from you.

III
I'm so sorry that a stranger
A complete stranger
Cornered me on a train,
Made me feel afraid.
I'm sorry I did that
To myself
And for the fuss I made.

IV
I'm sorry for my feelings,
Emotions running crazy.
As you've said, I'm unreasonable,
Delicate
And lazy.

V
Forgive me all my faults.
You know I have a reserve.
I'm so sorry I'm not what you respect
And not the son you deserve.

VI
Forgive that I was born a girl.
Forgive my fickle heart
That shrivels
And hides within my chest
As I slowly fall apart.

VII
But forgive me most for what comes next.
Forgive me when I stand.
Glue my parts back together
And continue on in any hand.

VIII
Forgive me when I say you're wrong.
Forgive me when I'm done
Because soon
So soon
I'll see myself
And who I've now become.

IX
I'm sorry, but she is not weak,
Not delicate,
Nor crazy.
She is exactly what you made me,
Not unreasonable,
Not lazy.

X
Forgive me for who I am
Because it is not the person you see.
I'm truly sorry I'm such a girl.
But that fault doesn't lie with me.
The Art of the Shakespearean Sonnet: How to Get Away with Insulting Your Mistress

A classic Renaissance writer, intending to express profound desire for a woman, would often compare her beauty to nature by penning a sonnet. Such a poet would construct a litany of parallels between her anatomical features and the most exquisite elements of nature, proclaiming that her smooth white neck matched, or, perhaps, even surpassed, the allure of a lily. In his “Sonnet #130,” William Shakespeare, too, conjures these ideals of beauty, but with every invoked cliché, his mistress deviates further from stereotype. Mercilessly identifying her every imperfection, the Bard still proves that his love for his mistress is more authentic. By masterfully blending sound and imagery, he satirizes the form of the Renaissance sonneteer.

Shakespeare manipulates rhyme and consonance to enhance and impart humor to his criticism of the traditional comparison of feminine beauty to nature. He deceptively begins, “My mistress’s eyes are nothing like the sun.” The sibilance reminds the reader of typical sensual-sounding verse, but the seductive effect is destroyed by the subsequent unmelodious, blunt diction. The following line “Coral is far more red than her lips’ red” contains cacophony to emphasize how comically lackluster—much like his word choice—her lips are. He writes, “If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun,” disrupting the harmonious beginning with a humorous remark that ends on an unpleasant-sounding word. The completion of the rhyme scheme, auditorily fulfilling for the reader, adds to the poem’s established humor.

Continuing to weld sound and imagery, Shakespeare introduces comparisons to man-made objects in the fourth line of his sonnet. Further mocking Renaissance stereotypes, he indicates that his mistress’s beauty fails to rival even that of the mundane world. Having missed an opportunity to make a comparison to the sprouting of plants, Shakespeare writes “black wires grow on her head” at the end of the first quatrain. His mechanical diction and cacophonous selection of consonants and vowels are satirical in their amusing defiance of the Renaissance sonnet. Furthermore, the aroma of his mistress competes not with a garden, but with artificial perfumes, and yet, “in some perfumes is there more delight / Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.” The concluding consonant, in contrast with the softer sounds of the rest of the line, is unexpected, but the comical bluntness is further augmented by the fact that the reader simultaneously expects this word, as it rhymes with “cheeks.”

This effect is repeated in the tenth through twelfth lines, in which Shakespeare explicitly states his love for his mistress, clarifying that his barter is intended not to disparage, but to, instead, exalt. Shakespeare writes, “I love to hear her speak, yet well I know / That music hath a far more pleasing sound.” The second half of the line’s softer consonants are juxtaposed with the roughness of the word used to describe the mistress’s action; the sound of music (with its vowel sounds) is emphatically much sweeter. The harmony of the next line, “I grant I never saw a goddess go,” is amusingly deflated with similarly harsh consonants in the second half of “My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.”

In the concluding heroic couplet of his sonnet, Shakespeare continues to utilize consonants and rhyme to highlight that, despite his condemnation of the Renaissance sonnet and her delineated inadequacies, his mistress is still the object of his affection. He writes, “And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare / As any she belied with false compare.” The couplet’s melody of soft, open sounds serves as a relief from the auditory discord that dominated much of the rest of the poem. Besides the invoked stereotypes, this line sounds most like it could belong to a Renaissance sonnet. Almost contradictorily, Shakespeare reveals that like his cliché—using predecessors, he, too, falls victim to believing that his love is special; however, his sonnet is not based on an inaccurate, hackneyed list analogizing superficial beauty to nature and is, instead, founded on the central strategy of employing sound to deflate such banality. Mocking less apt sonneteers, Shakespeare demonstrates that, even by practically assailing a woman’s countenance, he can better profess his love.
Juan G.

For a year he cut the lawn, and I never knew his last name. I had to ask

the neighbor in the yellow house after he vanished, her roses
dormant witnesses in the dark. When I’d tried
in terrible Spanish to explain where to plant the lavender,
my macete stumbled out machete
and he’d laughed behind black cheap glasses, said, Police, bad,
they don’t like it. Words fall out clumsy, twisted, and his surname—
we only cared when he’d gone. Then,

it was knocks on doors, furtive asks in the night. For a week I watched the online detainee locator site,
made calls that never came back.
The neighbor patrolled his church, carried back stories of an avocado orchard outside Tancítaro, unravelling acres of drug cartels with fuerte-slick lips where his father-in-law was murdered last month. We don’t know to hope

that ICE ripened him out or if he turned scared and went south. Children hunkered the cab with grass clippings, his wife watching the exit signs fall to one. Who knows? the neighbor said, her white teeth shining. Maybe one day he’ll show up with a truck of avocados

and his cataracts scraped clean.

Saving Things

Blood, so little of it—a thud against our sunflower yellow shutters.
My Uncle and I craned necks
to the gravelly weeds, outskirts of our driveway, where a winged thing twitched among the Bunsen flames of thistle bulbs: Bird, no—bat, the tip of his right wing bent backward, cobwebbing threads of bone.

Kneeling, I ripped a stalk of grass, and feathered it over the good wing. It straightened then shut like an accordion.
I dreamed of sneaking sticky fruit to our root cellar, tweezing dead moths by their wings to keep him alive.
I still remember this feeling breaking open like the bat under my Uncle’s heel.
Labor Day

George Perreault

dry white stalks
bend stiffly into
the dregs of summer
as muted birds,
finches mostly—

some sparrows—
side-step toward
seed heads, reaping
the cone flowers, shasta
daisies, black-eyed

susans, rummaging
inside a lavender
till the whole bush
shakes its come-on
far and wide, and if

you’d sit with me a
few, the breeze
freshening now as
it slips down the
foothills—just a while—

we’re given this day
and maybe the next,
hollow-boned birds
working the harvest—
come, catch your breath

Mumma’s Arm

Shreya Pabbaraju

The caress of Mumma’s arm
Velveteen plush
Shamed security blankets
Her brown hands
The stain of dirt
And rugged terrain
Riddled with blisters
A collared pain
Three-job tango
The immigrant story
Her palm teems
With bluffs and buttes
The monsoon rain
Dehradun blooms
The musk rose
Breadstuff tasted sweeter
From mother’s fingers
The knuckles that laced
And clenched in prayer
When we feared living
In our own skin
The wrist on my temple
When the monsoon water
Rolled down my cheeks
Because a girl said our gods
Were not real gods
Devoted to the gentle sway
I slumped into slumber
Analyzing her hands
Her Indian hands
eggs, toast
lifts upward
into my apartment
the house is still
old onion and garlic permeates as
faucet leans perpetually to one side
splashes the sink
with my stale coffee
made of dusty grounds
collected from the left side of the bed
that is tucked tightly
while the right
has blankets peeling
like the crust of eyes
that never slept
because our house is too quiet without you
It’s All Just Water Under the Bridge

She’d reminded her brother at least two dozen times during the drive not to go over the bridge when they reached it, that he needed to stop and pull over to the side of the road when they got close enough. The socket where her eye should have been began to tingle and burn, the way war vets describe the feeling of phantom limbs even years after they’ve lost them. She scratched at the itch behind the healed skin, but it did nothing to relieve the annoyance. The only possibility for relief, in her mind, was to see it destroyed; an eye for an eye, she thought to herself and smiled her uneven smile.

Her brother had been roped into the trip out of guilt. Even though no one had ever directly blamed him for the accident, he was driving when it happened. He couldn’t ignore the look of blame and guilt in the one eye she had left when she’d asked him to take her back to their childhood home. Even though no one blamed him for it, he still owed it to her, and he knew it.

It was a bridge, an inanimate object, concrete and rebar; it didn’t have an agenda or feelings. It hadn’t plotted and schemed after his sister. It was inconsequential in his eyes, but that might have only been the case because he’d managed to keep both of his. Maybe if he’d lost one like she had, he’d understand that it wasn’t just a bridge anymore.

They sat quietly next to each other as the small country town sped by their windows. The branches of the trees on either side of the road had grown together, but only after years of pining, branches like arms outstretched for their long-lost lovers. The red and yellow leaves now canopied the road that divided them, their colors dancing with the afternoon sun. She closed her eye to the rapid rhythmic fluctuation of the light that snuck between the trees. Not wanting to prompt a migraine, she’d lied to him. But really, she couldn’t handle the beauty of the place she’d hated for half her life. There was no beauty in the hate.

He could hear her sucking in large gulps of air in an attempt to calm herself, but it wasn’t doing much good. Her legs jumped up and down while she sat in the passenger seat as if they were running a marathon. Her right hand fidgeted with the window lock while the left tapped incessantly on the gray plastic of the center console. He’d asked if she wanted to stop for lunch or at least a coffee, maybe a break to take a piss and stretch their legs. The few mumbled words that left her lips were incoherent and made no sense, except to him. No, we don’t stop until we get there, she had meant to say with her stammering. Out of guilt, he resigned himself to the fact that he’d make it another hour without perishing. He was less sure that his sister would.

The road became windy, making it hard to see more than twenty feet in front of them. The vehicle slowed as they both crept closer to the edge of their seats. The rhythm of the familiar road exposed the secret just ahead of them, and both their bodies knew that they were close.

Over one more blind hill and the bridge spilled out below them; smiling, taunting them as her brother desperately slammed his foot through the brake pedal, eerily reminiscent of the last time the two of them had been there. The similarity did not go unnoticed by either occupant as they came to a stop: skidding on the loose dirt on the side of the road, this time, instead of stopping short to avoid a piece of junk shaken loose from the truck in front of them, almost going over the side of the bridge in the process and someone losing an eye.

She was disoriented for a moment but was no longer afraid. She found herself in the living memory of her past, in the remembrance of the moment that had defined her life since…. She wanted desperately to tell her younger self to not let this moment spoil her life, to look for the light in the darkness...

She knew they’d made it just in time as she exited her brother’s car and walked slowly toward the bridge, hesitant, like it might come to life and snatch her off her feet before creeping back into the depths of the river that flowed below, desperate to claim all of her this time. She could hear her brother behind her talking to the confused crew members now huddled around him. She could hear bits and pieces of his explanation, his description of how she’d lost her eye. She could hear them, but they were in a different world. In her world, it was her alone, facing the bridge that she’d wished had taken her life instead of just her eye.
After a few moments, a man approached her but did not speak. He knew there were no words he could use that would comfort her. He held out the tiny black box with a red button in the middle of it, but to her, it was a key shaped like freedom. She held the key in her hand and stared at the bridge in front of her, smiling the uneven smile it’d given her.

The rumble of the ground shook her to her knees, and the socket of her missing eye began to burn again as the pieces of her bridge fell into the water below. She was disoriented for a moment but was no longer afraid. She found herself in the living memory of her past, in the remembrance of the moment that had defined her life since. She could see a younger version of herself laying mangled in the road and the front of her brother’s truck as it hung over the lip of bridge, dangling like bait threaded on a sharp hook. She wanted desperately to tell her younger self to not let this moment spoil her life, to look for the light in the darkness even if it meant looking with only one eye. Half the light was better than all the darkness, but she didn’t know how to let the darkness go.

Her brother helped her to her feet in time for her to watch pieces of the bridge splash into the cold water that had made its presence necessary, disrupting the river’s flow as they did. Patches of muddied water bloomed in the places the rocks had fallen, hanging lifeless for a moment before the current carried them away like bad dreams, dissipating after a few moments in the flow. Before she could completely understand the truth of what it meant, the bridge that had taken her eye was gone, reduced to nothing more than rubble lining the river bed below.

She thought maybe her missing eye had imprinted its last vision before it went blind on her brain, only allowing her to see the bridge instead of the water that ran below it. It was just a bridge after all. The river had been there long before the bridge and would be there still, now that it was gone. She’d worn its burden for as long as she could. She could see the world with both eyes now, even if one was still missing.
A sharp-dressed young woman recently charged me while I was strolling along at our local mall. She was holding some sort of pointed item in her hand. I had no idea what was about to happen, but I was concerned for the safety of my fourteen-year-old granddaughter who was walking beside me.

The woman raised her arm and mumbled something about an eyebrow—and before I knew it, she was penciling in an eyebrow over my right eye. There was a template of some sort involved. Okay, I am fifty-seven years old and have never used nor realized other people use “templates” to create fake eyebrows. Do I even need them? I have been perfectly happy since the 70s with my once very chic, perfectly tweezed, perfectly neat pair of eyebrows. It took many years of weekly painful tweezing to get this look.

Indeed my eyebrows have thinned over the years—and might have even become a bit gray or maybe even white. But, do they really matter in the universe? Apparently so, because this girl convinced me to sit at her make-up kiosk so she could pencil in the other much-needed brow and show me the glorious results. I was starting to think she was saving my life or something!

So, there I was in the middle of the mall, in a stranger’s make-up chair, with my granddaughter happily looking on. The salesgirl quickly offered a mini-makeover, and within minutes she was sponging concealer and foundation on my round, wrinkled face. Then came the rose colored blush—WOW, I must really look bad today, I mused to myself, falling for this great makeover that I surmised I must have needed all along. “Whew, thank goodness someone is finally helping me,” I mused to myself.

“Oh, you look so beautiful!” she exclaimed, this make-up expert who was reacting to my new face. I think she must have impressed herself! She handed me a mirror so I could admire and behold the new princess in front of me. Amazing, I thought to myself! I DO look like a million bucks! My granddaughter agreed with us. It was a slam dunk. I was a true beauty queen now with my new look and pink-red-peach shiny lips. I was a movie star in the making. I was basically a semi-retired grandmother with a beautiful round face and two new, perfectly matching auburn eyebrows!

Hmm! Next thing you know, this sales guru was urging me to purchase this new miraculous eyebrow pencil, template, and other assorted fancy make-up which I must have needed all these years. I thought to myself, sure, why not? Then came the reality. “How much do these cost?” I asked this magician of sorts. Let’s just say it was forty bucks for the brow pencil—oh, and she would give me a free eyebrow template, my lucky day! I quickly re-considered and thought, do I really need all this stuff? All I was doing today was taking the granddaughter to buy a little something for herself at the mall. We were going to have lunch together, an easy Saturday at the local mall. BEFORE someone told me about my brow condition. BEFORE I became a celebrity with new, very modern eyebrows—and a professional makeover.

What to do? What to do? I had a feeling that if I came home from the mall with a bag of hundreds of dollars’ worth of make-up, the husband would ask, “What is all this for? We are moving to the country! You look fine the way you are. I love people with grandma eyebrows.” He is such a wonderful man. To think we have been married over twenty years and he never once asked me, “Can you do something about your eyebrows?”

Well, there were other flawed-brow people walking by—people with nice hairstyles and probably a darn good reason and plenty of money to buy new make-up today. Me? I had to whisper to the salesgirl, “I’ll just take the brow pencil please,” as she began returning the concealer, foundation, lip liner, lipstick, and other items to their drawers. I could see her already sneaking peeks for her next target walking by. She could hardly wait to toss my low-budget purchase into a bag and whisk me away.

As of today, I have used the forty dollar eyebrow pencil and template just twice. No one even noticed. I could have used a marker or crayon for far less money. I could have just shaved them completely. I don’t think anyone would have noticed either way.

As mentioned, I have a round face. I am a grandmother, semi-retired. I don’t think eyebrows are going to change my life, but for one day, albeit a very brief moment, I did think they could. So, to the salesgirl at the mall, thank you for your effort, but I don’t need your eyebrows.
Lake Murray

In memory of Christian Pier Ayala
(1996-2015)
July 18, 2015

We vacation at the Boardwalk.
Eating a torta, I gaze at the waves
crashing against the sand,
erasing unknown footprints,
in honor of my innocent primo.

Three months prior,
he trapped himself at a nearby shore.
We say he scribbled
his last memory on a crumpled note,
begging to return the lake a kiss,
since he desired to become one
with her vast body.
He then stripped to his last layer,
as he chugged down
his last vodka bottle, drowning
his swimming instinct.
The red wind swayed
across his brow,
as he bathed his feet in the shore.
The sky—ablaze with fatigue—
witnessed his surrender
to the water.

Descending,
Descending,
Descending,

Bliss.

As I sit here for our reunion,
I still struggle to comprehend
your untimely ways:
What imago drove you
to commit such painful acts?
What forced your love for liquor
over us?
What drove your passion for shrooms
over us?
Your wooden pipe
was my last memory,
the same pipe you savored
with your friends.
“Stop! Don’t get that close!” Michael shouts as he leans over to inspect what’s left of the bridge.

John nods at him from the other side of the stone path that once connected them together, then walks back and forth on his toes and clutches his hands into fists.

“I-I think w-we should-d try t-the river-r,” John says. Michael rolls his eyes at his twin; the river is too freezing this time of year. The banks are deeper now due to the flood that swept through their town, destroying anything built by human hands. Nature is always resilient, Michael ponders, and even now the grass and trees are shining with vibrancy from its sprinkled dew. The sky is still shrouded with a hazy grey, so the morning air is damp and sticky from it. It clings to Michael’s jacket and jeans, much like his twin brother.

John inches closer to the river’s edge, its sheen not giving away the depth of the water. “What did I say, John! First the bridge, now the river!” exclaims Michael. “God, why can’t you think like normal for once!”

“S-sorry, M-Mike. I d-don’t think the-e water-r’s that-t deep,” nods John.

“No, I’m sorry, Johnny. Just… PLEASE, stay where you’re at. I’ll find a way to get to you.”

Michael walks farther down the riverbank while John sets his backpack down to rummage through its contents. John lifts out a long, thick rope and begins tying it to a tree. As Michael is walking back, John is already knee-deep in the river with rope around his ribcage, trying to return to his twin.

“JOHN, STOP!”

“I-I can-n do it-t, M-Mike. T-trust me-e.”

Michael runs down the small incline and straight into the river’s icy hands. They meet in the middle. The water only reaches to their waists.

“I-I told-d you t-the water-r’s not t-that deep.”

Michael stares down at the clouded, wavy liquid surrounding them, his hands clenching his neck and face burning chill pepper red. He wraps his arms around his twin with swollen, murky eyes.

“M-mom says-s that I-I think special-l. Do-o you, M-Mike?”

Clutching tighter, Michael only nods into the crevice of John’s hooded jacket. The river had kept them together, Michael thought. But they’ve never been farther apart.
I remember seeing him that clear and humid morning, when the sun’s rays weren’t fully scorching the earth but slowly warming the air above it, steaming skin and clothes. He stood there, looking at me, curiosity lined horizontally across his forehead, like he was trying to decipher my thoughts. Hair matted against his scalp and he tugged his shirt as he was prone to do, stretching it out. A pair of denim shorts hugged his pencil-thin legs. Bare toes wiggled in dew-pooled grass.

Around him, almost encircling him, piles of debris lay scattered. Rusted appliances, sunning themselves in a vain attempt to return to life. Here a beaten black refrigerator, there a discarded stove. Shredded and drenched clothes. Saturated sheet rock. Wood veneer cabinet doors. A broken dresser with two legs missing, tilted to the side and fighting gravity. A purple couch, still soggy with the vanished weight of nature. A pile of books, wrinkled before their time, like the skin of an old man. A warped photograph fluttering in the dense breeze. Dying embers of memory.

I see him smiling there, breaking free from his curiosity. Immediately, I am reminded of so much. So many complex memories of my son. Our son.

I remember him trying to throw a football one cool autumn evening, the air crisp and inviting and immortal. That day was spent teaching him to throw. As the sun crept below the horizon, his arm still spasmed in awkward movement, struggling to master the fluidity necessary to throw the ball thirty feet. We practiced for hours, but the teasing at school that year persisted, for my son was not an athlete.

I remember the first time he lied to us. I feel the shame of my failure. I recall the scolding at first, hoping to block a potential wave that I knew grew inside of him, like it does all boys his age. Yelling came with the next lie, still hoping to prevent bad behavior and poor choices, secretly terrified that this action, my action, and not his own, would trigger a life-long descent into anger, resentment, and then indifference.

Memories are vivid as he waves to me from amid the pile of debris. I remember his mother, my beloved and the center of my existence, speaking softly to him when he came home from a school day filled with teasing and ridicule. She sat by him at the kitchen table, telling him that things would get better when he grew up. But that did not bring his young heart peace with threats that were real and not existential. Yet these trials of childhood were his to fight and survive. He found relief on the safe and secluded grass of a backyard, but it was now filled with the remains of a past life.

My son could no longer find comfort there.

Perhaps what I remember most, standing there returning his gaze, was his heart and generosity. No matter what youth-induced emotional tortures he endured during the school day, he never reciprocated in kind. At times I longed for him to punch one bully square in the nose, if for no other reason than to stand up for himself before the pummeling began or a teacher intervened and then summoned his mother and me to school for a conference.

No, he would not reciprocate. He treated the girls in his class respectfully and honored his teachers. Doors were opened and smiles offered, like a Christmas morning package demanding to be unwrapped. And like any present, there was so much more underneath the wrapping. Lunch food was assuredly yet quietly shared with those whose bellies groaned empty. Despite his young age, my son understood their private embarrassment and struggles.

He was gentlest toward animals, especially cats. Every stray became a new and loyal friend. The few that stayed around the house grew to become full-fledged members of our family. Eventually three became inside cats with outside privileges. His mother preferred it the other way around, but like our son, her heart was too big as well. She could not resist his pleas to bring them inside during a brash and aggressive thunderstorm all those years ago. At first they hid under his bed, eyes wide like saucers as their reality shook, until he coaxed them out. Fear turned into trust turned into sleep, three tiny balls of fur protected within outstretched legs. All three are now buried in the backyard—what is left of the backyard.

I see him clearly now, standing so close to me. The love for those around him shining brightly like a distant yet powerful star. I don’t know why I see him there in the backyard. I doubt my eyes because my son is dead.

He drowned a week ago during the torrential rain that swelled the nearby river over its banks and tore his body away from us. Neither wishes nor prayers were granted or heard. He ran outside when we weren’t watching, only catching his movement through a window as he rushed to save an abandoned and terrified cat from the rising waters.
My wife screamed his name. I sprinted out the door, too late, as he disappeared under muddy water mixed with wreckage from a trailer home ripped from its concrete moorings.

A vise clamped around my chest and I struggled to breathe. Short, raspy intakes were all I could manage as I sank to my knees as the sheriff approached, his solemn eyes directed down to the damp dirt, hat in hand. A high-pitched whistle rang inside my mind. My vision telescoped at the ground in front of me, only inches now from my folded body. A faint rustling and then the shuffling of boots drew closer, the ringing now a distant echo. The sheriff told me the news.

Yet I see him still standing in front of me, smiling. I dare not tell my wife.

As a young boy, not much older than my son, my father told me of the Voyager 1 space probe, launched thirteen years earlier. He said an important scientist requested that the probe's camera take a picture of the Earth, almost four million miles away. The picture he showed me from a book in his library was of our planet, a distant point of light. I was terrified and mesmerized by the possibilities the picture held. The farther away the probe traveled from its home, the dimmer the light became. I couldn't help but wonder what would happen once that distant point of light faded to extinction in the vacuum of space. How long would it take for the light to blow out like a candle? What would happen to the memories of those who lived and died? Where would those cherished memories go?

This once forgotten memory resurfaced for air as I smiled back at my son. Like Voyager 1 speeding farther away from our planet, the image of what I saw in front of me slowly began to dim into a distant point of light. I don't know if I was moving away or him.

In time, the memory of his face and the joys and struggles we shared will fade. One day my wife and I will die, and so will the complete memory of our son. And when that distant point of light orbiting a star in one of the hundreds of billions of galaxies dies, clearing all traces of humanity, what will become of the memory of our entire species? Who will stand in testament of us before an indifferent void?

If children are testaments of their parents, then when my son's light finally goes out, so will the memory of me.
Nothing about April in Rochester whispers, Death.
Tulips and hyacinths peek
above ground at the first blush of warmth, bits
of soil part, crying, Hope! Alive!
And they’re not wrong.

So, she started on the phone.
*I told the doctor: I don’t want to know
how much time I have, or not.*
She imagined waking in the night counting:
Forty-four days left. Forty-three after tomorrow.

I schooled myself that summer
studying medical words, journal abstracts
online, multiple windows open cross-referencing
variables, genetic markers, treatment plans
until the words in my mind blended together,
fluttering curtains of understanding, all asking:
What’s next? How long? I want to know.

The summer heat lingered in early September,
baked bricks radiating warmth in the dark.
*Not yet,* we guessed. But we didn’t know.
It was cold the day we buried her, mid-month,
long-ago planted trees our windbreak on the plain.
DUANE L. HERRMANN

Finale

For the first time ever, in my more than six decades, I saw my mother truly powerless over me. Powerless to move to yell, or scream, or hit me. Powerless to speak, it was now my turn and I did. ‘I love you, Mom, I always have, but it was so hard when you pushed away.’

She could not speak nor open eyes, but she could hold my hand, new for me, and I knew she heard. I cried.

I cried. She did not deserve the life she found, the trauma that warped her world, imprisoned her and the rest of us born into her pain. I cried for her and us, said I understood, said goodbye.

DERRICK C. BROWN

Evening of Tel Aviv Dancers

The dancers are at rest on stage, rolling around like toddler slobs, like they’ve all just been broken up with in sweatpants and dirty socks, burying the beautiful body under layers.

The music lifts and there they go, resistance and slinking grace slowing, shedding until warm, revealing miracles and pleas within the body, unashamed and wowing the air.

The choreographer pushing them: I need your arm to bend more like a swan’s neck. I need your leg to curl tighter, more nautilus. I want your teeth to clench when you lift her… and no one asks why. They just do, soldiers of young trust.

Can you watch three dancers without imagining it is the story of an affair? Two dancers tumble around on each other like rolling pins as the third steamrolls offstage. Looks like they worked it out.

Israeli dancing women with jet black brows, crows exhaling over a soft Negev, ponytails like vines whipping in a jungle storm, arms sleek as bike frames, cement humor, psych synth accent, and uneasy about the world.

My ticket was in the back of the theater. “So you can keep an eye on the audience and the show. Your enemies are all around you.”
Saxophone

A sleek black shape, irregular in of itself
Bound across by thin metal, inlaid with four locks
Each lock clicks to remove the eggshell and expose the white
An inch thin layer of fabric made to perfectly encase an object
And suffocate it in its embrace
And encased within the white
Lives the yolk
A slick, dark gold, beautifully made yolk
Its keys inlaid with mother of pearl
It looks as if the design was carved by the waves, strong and pure
As I blow through this magnificent work of art
It seems as if a storm whirled through a conch shell
Concentrated power
Feeling life and death dancing in a ballet of balance
And peace
Protected by one inch of cloth
An eggshell
And four locks
Hidden from moon’s glow by a tapestry of thick trees
the dotted lines should be a vibrant spring marigold.
But they are faded—so faded they make you wonder.
Perhaps the roads are mere illusions and the year,
instead of 2018, is 1892.

Through the trees a tiny rectangle
of light, a window appears.
There is warmth inside!
I imagine an open hearth made of stone.
Soup bubbling away in a large cast-iron pot.

Lifeless chicken head fresh with blood
severed just now behind the house
for a simple supper of soup with bread and butter.
Candlestick dripping wax on a worn wooden table,
the cascading ripple of a frozen waterfall.

Do they cry as they kill their chickens?
Is death as lasting, as final?
Alit by flame, do their wrinkles show contentment?
Or do they only feel the propulsion to continue,
that to ponder is meaningless.

Within the layers of nostalgia and intrigue
sadness and hardship too are there.
It couldn’t have been easy, though one
didn’t know otherwise and still doesn’t.
They are, we are, only in the present.

The air is thick with wood smoke.
Each passing tavern is glowing with neon lights
I see no people but I know they are there,
can almost hear the din of low voices
the clinking beer steins.

And I carry on,
stars bright above,
towards my love
who is cooking whitefish
in anticipation of my arrival.
JAKE HUNTER

Milleniahhalalalala

When I stare at the sun,
I always keep one eye closed,
so if I go blind, the other
eye still shines. One dead,
like a grey moon, one alive.

In the morning, I boil some water
and toss in a slice of lemon.

I wish I owned a guitar—I would play
the rising and falling, the true tune,
the sleeping truth waking up now,
here now in this room.

I would strum my guitar, freewheelin’
down through the new age. I’d whisper
a tune so sweet everyone would sing.

SERGIO A. ORTIZ

Muted Things

When I was of age,
older than letting go
of the drool and shake
of my little arms,
my father said,

there's nothing for lunch. (I am poor)

I felt myself blush upon discovering
the throbbing, huge sex of one of my uncles
under his pajamas. (I am homosexual)

I saw a very fat cousin
convulsively clutching a glass,
singing the toast from “Traviata.” (and I love Art)

These three dirty things
were already inside me.
Ever has it been that love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation.

Khalil Gibran

There's a name for separation
There's a name for first and last
When it's all for us or nothing
For me the name is past

John Denver "The Peace Poem"

Ocean separates lands, not souls.

Munia Khan

We love because we can lose. If there was no threat of separation, no death to shake us to our core, we probably wouldn't love much at all.

Donna Lynn Hope

In a separation it is the one who is not really in love who says the more tender things.

Marcel Proust

Separation penetrates the disappearing person like a pigment and steeps him in gentle radiance.

Boy George

Absence is to love what wind is to fire; it extinguishes the small, it inflames the great.

Roger de Rabutin de Bussy

The day he moved out was terrible—
That evening she went through hell.
His absence wasn’t a problem
But the corkscrew had gone as well.

Wendy Cope, Serious Concerns
ALAIN ROBINSON

Separation

I was twenty-two when I moved to my own place, and I did so all alone. No roommates or boyfriends, just a less-mature-than-I-thought version of me. It lasted nine exciting months. I filled that six-hundred-square-foot apartment with candles, flowers, old furniture, and cheap art. I cooked for myself almost every night and bought too many groceries, never knowing how long food would keep.

Before having my own place, I’d always dreamed of the parties I’d have, the people I would invite over. Yet none of those things would transpire as I’d hope. Sure, I invited a few people over infrequently, but the sounds of my neighbors’ crying baby every day and night made me feel too guilty to cause an extra ruckus.

But living alone became daunting after some time. It wasn’t as scary as I had pictured, in many ways. There were no fears of my safe-neighborhood-apartment being broken into, I never felt any disdain for my neighbors, and I had no trouble paying my rent on time. Everything looked great on paper. But coming home to an empty apartment was a feeling I had never anticipated. No sounds of people talking, no smells from family cooking, no person to hug when I’d had a hard day. It filled me with anxiety.

These are things nobody warns you about when living alone.

MARK MCCLOUGHAN

A Given

There was no place anymore for the pink
so it absented itself from the bud
and burst forth. There I go
again, writing about nature as if
it means something to me.
I guess I do it when I need
reassurance that I am tethered
to what’s other, what continues.
I write about the cherry trees
because they ask me to, of course
they do, but also to shield
and stoke the small, lazing hope
of grace fluttering down into me, making me
able to bloom wildly,
one, and live content.

ROBERTO DELGADO

The Boy with the Hoodie

Can you guess who this person is? Nobody can really understand why he doesn’t say much, why he’s always alone, in his black hoodie, writing things down in his notebook. The most he ever says is “hi” and “bye.” He is someone of little words; he doesn’t like to talk much, doesn’t like to be surrounded by a big crowd. Some may wonder what’s going through his head; the only ones that have actually had real merry-go-round conversations with him are his four friends. One of the four is his best friend and his mother; that’s the only person he’s actually had real conversations with.

Now you may think this boy with the hoodie may be strange and/or weird; to others, he seems to be a simple, quiet, shy guy that just comes to school and goes back home to do his schoolwork. I mean, I wouldn’t blame him; he prefers to be alone because he’s been alone most of his life. It’s nothing new. Just a guy that doesn’t want to be the center of attention, the loud mouth; in other words, he keeps himself flying low. Now some may say it’s bad to always stay on the low, but he loves to stay there because he tried to be the center of attention once, and everyone turned on him. Now, if he had trust and actually believed in someone that wouldn’t do him wrong or betray him—maybe he wouldn’t have that hoodie on all the time.

Now can you figure out who this boy is?
Trapped Behind a Black Wall: Reflections by Lee Teter

As my rough hand collides with the sleek black wall, the names of my brothers are holes in the perfect stone under my fingers. They are not the only holes I feel today—there are holes everywhere.

I know I am on this side of the wall—the side with the brightly colored flowers and the men and women in suits and dresses. Everything on this side is groomed. The clothes are freshly pressed and white, the cars are polished and clean, the sky is an unfair shade of cerulean, the ground is paved, and the air is clear and quiet.

On the other side of the wall, the clothes are dingy green, and as the dust rises from their bulky boots to their weary eyes, the ground and the sky can scarcely be told apart. There are no lustrous automobiles, but tanks which yield death to my brothers and to their enemy. And on the days they can see clearly, the sky glows with fire, and the ground is crimson with blood.

With my arm reaching out to feel the glassy ebony rock, I feel the stares of every stranger as they watch the burning tears slice through my cheeks and hear the soft, painful wails which intrude upon their sedated air. They pretend they are not staring, but I can feel the glimpse they steal as they pass me by.

After two hours in the recovery room, I was so happy to see my mom. She held my hands tightly as tears rolled down her cheeks. Her rough hands patted my hair lightly: “Don’t worry; Mom is right here.”

My mom told me to follow all traditional Vietnamese postpartum care to ensure that I would have good health in the future. She put a thick beanie on my head, cotton balls into my ears, and a pair of winter socks on my feet even though it was 100 degrees outside. She said, “Keep your body warm to avoid joint pain, headache, and tinnitus.” Next, she prevented me from using water for bathing to avoid getting a cold. I would be cleaned every day with a ginger-turmeric-alcohol mix that helped my body warm. My mom secretly brought in hot charcoal in an earthen furnace, which she put under a bench in my room. She asked me to lie facedown on the bench and place the furnace right below my tummy to help my uterus shrink.

All my mother’s traditions were a surprise to my nurse. At first, she stood there frozen; then, her eyes opened wide when she spotted me lying on my stomach on the bench with hot charcoal under it. She turned to the sound “coccoc...coccoc...” of my husband grinding ginger and turmeric in a mortar. The smell of alcohol and charcoal permeated the air. After some explanation, the nurse allowed us to keep everything except the charcoal in the room.

Vietnamese postpartum care is a sacred tradition in motherhood. In different cultures, it may be seen as ridiculous, but in my culture, it expresses a mother’s love for her daughter.
I watched Daddy get on the white bus. Mama said he’ll be back soon.

He had metal bracelets on his wrists and a chain around his ankles.

Mama said the big building is called court and the man in a robe will decide when Daddy can come home.

For months Mama wrote letters and sent pictures of me to the man in a robe, asking him to let Daddy come home. She called different people almost every day. Sometimes, she cried when she talked to them. She told them she needs their help getting Daddy out.

One day, I sat on Mama’s lap and I asked her why those men took Daddy away from us. She told me it’s their job to find people who don’t have papers. I jumped off her lap and hurried to my room. I ran back to Mama and gave her all my drawings and my coloring books. I asked Mama if that was enough paper to get Daddy out.

A lot of time passed, and I almost never asked about Daddy.

Today, when I was in class, Mama ran into my classroom and, without stopping, yelled in teacher Heather’s direction that we had a family emergency.

As soon as we ran out of the classroom I asked Mama what happened. She said I must see for myself.

We drive for a few minutes, Mama stops the car, takes off her seatbelt, and, as she gets out of the car, she points straight ahead.

I follow her finger with my eyes.

“DADDY!”
Artist Bios

Faizan Adil completed his BA (Hons) in Mass Communication from Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, in 2015. His undergraduate degree thesis was “The role of photography and photojournalism in Pakistan.” He has been working as a freelance photographer since 2013. His photographs are a self-expression he uses to stabilize his inner self. He is interested in documentary and conceptual photography.

Jacob Ayala is currently Professor Cherelle Holden’s Instructional Assistant. He has worked at CRC for seven months, where he has discovered his passion to teach. With his passion, Jacob intends to become an ESL instructor so he can provide immigrants with the ability to contribute greatly to this country.

Through his art, Guilherme Bergamini intends to express his experiences, worldview, and anxieties. Passionate about photography since childhood, Guilherme is an enthusiast and is curious about competitions and festivals. He has taken part in group and solo exhibitions in Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Greece, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Lithuania, Turkey, Venezuela, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia, Uruguay, India and the US. He has had his work published in several Brazilian and foreign press venues. He publishes part of his photographic journey at www.guilhermebergamini.com.

Raffi Boyadjian was born in Frankfurt, Germany, and lives in Los Angeles. He’s a graphic designer by trade and a short story writer and musician at heart.

Briel Brown is a student and musician from Sacramento, California. She plans to pursue a career in teaching while continuing to write whenever possible.

Derrick C. Brown is a novelist, comedian, poet, and storyteller. He is the owner of Write Bloody Publishing and the author of seven books of poetry and three children’s books. The New York Times calls his work “a rekindling of faith in the weird, hilarious, shocking, beautiful power of words.”

Gabrielle Caggiano is an English and classics major at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She received gold key awards for poetry and painting in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and the Jack W. Bonner IV Award from The Asheville School for her scholastic papers on Sylvia Plath. Her poetry has appeared in The Rising Phoenix Review, The Wilderness House Literary Review, The Mangrove Journal, and The Northern Virginia Review.

Anastasia Clark is a poet and freelance writer. She is the author of several poetry books, including a chapbook, Confetti Stamped (Finishing Line Press, 2013). Her work has appeared in Ascent Aspirations, FLARE: The Flagler Review, Red River Review, and Subtletea, among others. She served as Broward County, Florida Poet-in-Residence for six years. She leads workshops, serves as a judge for poetry contests, and writes freelance articles.

Tamara Coleman is an undergraduate creative writing and Middle Eastern studies student at the University of Houston. She writes Middle Eastern historical fiction to raise awareness of her overlooked culture. She is an amateur photographer and likes to play with color and editing. She is currently head editor of Shards, GM’s online magazine.

Brian Cravens teaches federal and state government courses for Blinn College, a community college located in Texas. “A Distant Point of Light” was written after Hurricane Harvey impacted the Gulf Coast in 2017.

J.E. Crum is a contemporary fantasy artist who creates art focusing on the exploratory qualities of the media of watercolor, acrylic, and pastel to create abstractions of the human form, mostly of the face and hands, developing playful juxtapositions of colors and shapes within the artwork using the method of automatism. Crum tends to draw inspiration from mythologies in the narratives that evolve from her experimentations while creating self-portraiture abstractions.

Roberto Delgado is not much of a talker; he does most of his talking in his writing. He doesn’t like to be called a rapper or a poet writer; he prefers to be considered a storyteller. He tells the stories of the difficulties he faced in his younger years; though he is not much of a talker, he loves to express his emotions through writing. His dream one day is to change the world with his music. The boy with few spoken words has lyrics that one day will be known.

Serena Delgado is currently a student at CRC majoring in English and planning to transfer to CSU Sacramento. Working as an after-school daycare aid during most of the week, Serena enjoys in her off time the simple pleasures of reading horror literature, writing about the human condition, playing with her three birds, and drinking green or white teas. Her daily need for creative thinking flourishes when she is in her rocking chair, crafting stories in the small rooms of her mind. She hopes to tune her gifts and pursue a career as an editor.

Fred Deneke has been a CRC Biology Professor since 2005. In his spare time, he enjoys reading an array of subjects, strives to have garden play (contrasted with yard work), enjoys local live theatre, attempts to hone culinary skills with a plant-focused diet, and explores natural wonders of the world.
**Elisabeth Fondell** is a writer and potter living in rural southwestern Minnesota. She was recently awarded a SMAC grant to develop a body of work showcasing food and the human experience. Her work is published or forthcoming in *The Book Ends Review*, *COV Magazine*, *Real Small Towns Magazine*, and more.

**Allen Forrest** is a writer and graphic artist for covers and illustrations in literary publications and books, the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University’s *Reed Magazine* for 2015, and whose Bel Red landscape paintings are part of the Bellevue College Foundation’s permanent art collection in Bellevue, WA. He lives in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

**Hannah Jones** is a Sacramento native. She is a first-year student at CRC, pursuing a degree in communications. Hannah is diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, a rare connective tissue disorder. She enjoys reading and listening to podcasts.

**Michele Harris** was awarded the David A. Kennedy prize in the field of poetry. Her work has appeared in *Anderbo*, *The Prose-Poem Project*, *Dirtflask*, *Cicada*, *Eclectica*, *Escarp*, *Stirring*, and elsewhere. Her first book, *Blackdamp*, is forthcoming from David Robert Books in May 2019. Currently, she works at MIT and holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Massachusetts Boston, where she teaches literature courses for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.

**Duane L. Herrmann** is a survivor who lived to tell and loves the pure light of the moon and trees. He creates from his knowledge and experience. His full-length collections of poetry are *Ichnographical:173, Prairies of Possibilities*, and *Praise the King of Glory*. Individual work is published in *Midwest Quarterly*, *Little Balkans Review*, *Flint Hills Quarterly*, *Orison, Inscape*, and others in print and online in the US and elsewhere, in English and other languages. He received the Robert Hayden Poetry Fellowship, the Ferguson Kansas History Book Award and was nominated to be Poet Laureate of Kansas.

**Jake Hunter** is a poet from St. Louis, Missouri. He has two black cats, Seahorse and Coal.

**Joshua Joyce** is a fresh author attending Cosumnes River College. He began writing songs and transitioned to poetry. Most recently, he has begun writing flash fiction and short stories in his free time.

**Verneda Lights** is a visual artist/photographer from South Carolina’s Low Country. She is known for her many Afro-surreal and Afro-futuristic works. A Renaissance woman, Verneda is a historian, physcian, and published poet. Works from her “Gullah Me” collection were in Occupy Museums’ exhibit at the Whitney Biennial.

**Tom Darin Liskey** spent nearly a decade working as a journalist in Venezuela, Argentina, and Brazil. He is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi. His writing has appeared in the *Crime Factory*, *HeartWood Literary Magazine*, *Live Nude Poems, Driftwood Press*, and *Biostories*, among others. His photographs have been published in *Museum of Americana, Hobo Camp Review, Blue Hour Magazine, Synesthesia Literary Journal*, and *Midwestern Gothic*. He uses images and words for a monthly narrative photography column at *Change Seven*.

**Courtney Lozano** is a student athlete at Cosumnes River College. She is a freshman and attended Cosumnes Oaks High School. Courtney enjoys art because it is a way for her to express every emotion she goes through.

**Rudy Malcom** is a gay freshman from Long Island, New York, studying the Writing Seminars and psychology at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Rudy is interested in employing an interdisciplinary approach in his writing to understand, explore, and depict his own and others’ realities and perceptions.

**Mark Mcclooughan** is a writer and artist in New York City. He is the author of the chapbook, *No Harbor* (2014, L + S Press), and his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Juked, Lines + Stars*, and *decomp*, among others.

**Jessica (Tyner) Mehta** is a Cherokee poet and novelist. She’s the author of six collections of poetry, including the forthcoming *Savagery*, the forthcoming *Constellations of My Body, Secret-Telling Bones*, as well as *Orygun, What Makes an Always*, and *The Last Exotic Petting Zoo* as well as the novel *The Wrong Kind of Indian*. She’s been awarded numerous poet-in-residencies posts. Jessica is the recipient of a Barbara Deming Memorial Fund in Poetry. Visit Jessica’s author site at jessicamehta.com.

**Jenn Moland** edits books for friends and reads poetry, sighing and gasping upon encountering a delicious phrase; she also writes curriculum and a lot of sermons. She received a BA in English from Minnesota State University, Moorhead and a Master of Divinity from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. She lives in Chicagoland with her family.

**Jackson Moser** is an artist who lives in the oldest city in the US, St. Augustine, Florida. He works to balance his duties of being an actor, a member of a local band, and a poet. “Saxophone” is the first work of his to be seen by the public’s eyes.
Michelle Nguyen is a color pencil artist who specializes in portraits of human beings. She creates works that display emotions in each of her subjects. She believes that art is a universal language. Forty hours or more are poured into each piece of work. She hopes one day she will be able to change the world with one art piece at a time.

Nga Nguyen was born and raised in Vietnam, but now California is her second hometown. Because of the daily reading to her kids, Nga has fallen in love with books. She wishes she could write her childhood book, and it will be a fantastic gift for her kids when they grow up.

Lillian Nickel is a second-year English major at Cosumnes River College. She was inspired to submit to the Cosumnes River Journal by her Poetry Writing Workshop professor. She writes in her free time, and she thoroughly enjoys it.


Lydia Outland is a twenty-two-year-old philosophy major and an aspiring writer. She has been scratching story plots onto the back of paper plates and scraps of paper since she learned how to hold a pencil. Although dyslexia can sometimes dot her paragraphs with unique spellings, it hasn’t swayed her from the enjoyment of writing.

George Perreault has served as a visiting writer in New Mexico, Montana, and Utah, and his work has been nominated both for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Recent work appears in The American Journal of Poetry, Timberline Review, High Desert Journal, and Weber–The Contemporary West.

A first-year student at Emory College of Arts and Sciences, Shreya Pabbaraju enjoys drinking tea, stargazing, and photography in her spare time. Growing up in the wooded suburbs of Duluth, Shreya receives a major inspiration for her poetry from scenes in nature.

Kristina V. Ramos is a student from Sacramento, CA, who believes it’s important to talk about controversial issues like imprisonment and immigration. She also believes we can change the world one story at a time. Kristina’s stories have been published in two anthologies so far, and she hopes to finish her first novel by 2019.

Haley Rapoza was born and raised in California. She loves to be outdoors, bicycling, running, or lying in her hammock. Haley loves the sunshine and hopes to move to Southern California when she transfers from Los Rios, where she will major in liberal arts and obtain an elementary school teaching credential.

Alain Robinson is a creative individual, chasing after different pursuits ranging from writing, photography, pressed flower art, and soon-to-be jewelry making. She’s also a big fan of yoga and could talk anybody’s ear off (successfully convincing them) about the benefits of the practice.

Diana Simon is a mother, psychologist, and artist living in southern California. She attained degrees in psychology and educational psychology, and she practiced as a school psychologist from 2009 to 2016. She transitioned to a career in art at that time, and, since 2017, her artwork has been published in seven journals, displayed in five public art exhibitions, and has attained grand prize winner, or first place winner, in four art contests.

Jessica Simpkiss lives and works in Virginia Beach, Virginia, with her husband and daughter. She studied art history at George Mason University. She is currently an associate editor with the literary magazine 1932 Quarterly. Her work has most recently been published or is forthcoming in the Hartskill Review, Zimbell House Publishing Anthologies, The West Trade Review, and the Virginia Literary Journal, among others.

Chelsea Stone is a third-year law student and a striving poet. She has done most of her laughing and crying in Southern California. She writes mostly of her anxieties, loves, life experiences, and (when the mood strikes) nature. She is trying to live and write in the gray area between logic and creativity.

Emma Sywyj has been an artist for fourteen years. Five of those years she was based in London whilst studying photography at the Camberwell College of Arts at the UAL. From there, she received a BA Honors in photography and a Foundation Diploma in Art & Design. She has exhibited her artwork in the US, in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Athens in Greece and Budapest in Hungary. She has also exhibited in the UK and London several times, where she currently lives and works. She has also been published in several independent art magazines in the UK and exhibited her video artwork in film festivals around the globe.

Kelilah Thomas is a first-year college student from Sacramento. She is an English major with an interest in journalism and political science. Writing is her passion because it allows her to share her experiences in a beautiful way.

Amanda Tumminaro lives in the US. She is a poet and short story writer, and her work has been featured in The Write Launch, The Radvocate, and Cottonwood, among others. Her first poetry chapbook, The Flying Onion, will be released through The Paragon Journal in April of 2018.

Nina Wilson is a recent graduate of Coe College in Iowa. She has been published in numerous literary magazines such as Adelaide Magazine, Fishfood Magazine, Deluge Literary, The Dark River Review, Literary Juice, Rascal, and the Sea Letter for poetry, photography, and fiction. She is also the author of a novel, Surrender Language, published through Adelaide Books.

Vanessa Withun is a contemporary representational artist living in Savannah, Georgia. She holds a degree in environmental science and enjoys combining her knowledge of science with art. Although most of her work is composed of landscapes, she enjoys painting still-life and portraits as well.