

VOLUME XXIV, UCSD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

THE HUMAN CONDITION

AN EXPLORATION OF ART & LITERATURE

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We live in an age of technology—an age in which technological developments have incredible potential to save and improve the lives of countless patients. While these advancements have greatly improved the quality of healthcare delivery, they fail to address how patients are treated individually and humanistically. Healthcare costs continue to rise, while administrative and technical tasks threaten to protocolize the practice of medicine. These changes threaten the existential heart of medicine: the patient-provider relationship.

In the November 2018 issue of the *New Yorker*, Atul Gawande tells the story of a patient with findings suggestive of multiple endocrine neoplasia. He spends much of his visit sifting through electronic health records rather than counseling the patient in front of him, and his patient leaves dissatisfied and wanting more. Regretfully, Dr. Gawande reflects: “I thought about how unsatisfactory my response was. I’d wanted to put my computer away—to sort out what he’d understood and what he hadn’t, to learn a bit about who he really was, to make a connection. But I had that note to type, and the next patient stewing across the hall.”

While reviewing the outstanding submissions to this year’s issue, we were filled with hope that the next generation of providers is poised to face and meet these challenges. There is a spark of humanism within each of the submissions we received, and they shine brightly in the issue you see here. When reading this issue, we hope you are reminded that humans are infinitely creative, capable of meaningful change, and able to find humanity, compassion and connection in any situation.

Our cover photo this year, taken by Tonya Lee, embodies this theme. Titled “I found happiness at Otagi Nenbutsu-ji,” it depicts an 8th century Buddhist temple in Kyoto, Japan that features over a thousand Rakan statues meant to represent Buddha’s disciples. These statues feature a variety of facial expressions and poses. Many have their faces turned downward in studious contemplation or prayer, but in the midst of these more solemn disciples lies one Rakan whose face is upturned and exalted in a bolt of sudden joy. Like the Rakan captured by Tonya’s lens, this issue is a tribute to the unexpected moments of gratitude and grace found in the sincere and compassionate service of patients and their families.

Sincerely,



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DAYDREAM

MITCHELL FOSTER

On the other side there is a home,
With green grass, red rosebushes, and a pool where sharks
swim in the deep end.
A dog daydreaming delicious dog-dreams,
While a mother in a vintage chair rubs his belly with her
slipper.
Linked Legos litter the carpet to form castles and craters.
There are tiny tantrums and loud loves,
And even bigger promises.
And the ghosts come out at night,
But they can never find a way in
As the flashlight burns beneath the blanket tent.

Here is an apartment,
With an empty dog-bed behind an empty vintage chair.
And a dried-up bath with distant clatter of shark fins circling
down the drain.
The hardwood floor linked like Legos,
polished clean of spilt mistakes.
All the while, the ghosts walk without fear of light.
But they used to though,

They used to though.

On the other side there is a television,
Flashing Rocket Power, Super Mario, and sad movies for
solemn Sunday mornings.
Laughter sings through the homemade forts
and blanket soaked couch where brothers swim.
And a piece of popcorn burrows between corduroy couch
cushions.

Here is a flat screen,
Blank.
Except for the reflection of an empty couch.
Where silence sinks into the folds of leather,
And a little brother stops waiting after school.
But he used to though,
He used to though.

On the other side there is a dinner table,
A dad, silently sipping soba soup and tofu;
A son with a ketchup coated plate under a pile of vegetables



ALMOST HOME | TONYA LEE

awaiting a hungry garbage bin;
A brother leaving behind mouthfuls after a day of taking in
earfuls.

While a mother is just trying to hold her nest together
between oven-mitt wings.

Here is a table,
Where a man finishes vegetables as the garbage bin
starves.
The empty chair across the table looks back at him for
conversation,
But the echo of earphones engulfs him.
And the birds outside the window feed with haste,
To survive instead of nurture their nest.
But they used to though,
They used to though.

On the other side there is a twin bed,
With small sheets and big dreams.
Pokémon run across the blankets,
And a luminous nightlight locks the monsters in the closet,
While Coldplay sings lullabies goodnight.
Under the pillow is a single quarter earned from a tooth
lost in a bounce house.

Here is a king bed,
With small sleep and big empty sheets.
Vodka kisses to sleep,
And skeletons of monsters fill the closet.
Under the pillow is a single earring lost from a woman met
in a house party.
And as it tries alone,
the bed can never really be made.
But it used to though,
It used to though.

On the other side there is a neighborhood,
Where neighbors play in imaginary worlds drawn on the
asphalt;
With a basketball hoop for little big men to dunk on;
A summer for super soakers and slip-n-slides.
And a stranger beware sign on every corner.

Here is a street,
Where Ubers wait on real lines drawn on asphalt.
With empty cellphone screens for the big men to live on.
And strangers sliding shoulders on every corner,
Without ever looking up to find a star speckled sky of
shining eyes.
But they used to though,
They used to though.

On the other side there was a heartbeat home complete
with,
A dinner table,
A television,
A twin bed,
A neighborhood,
And a family.
I still have all the memories I cannot live anymore.
But I used to though,
I used to though.

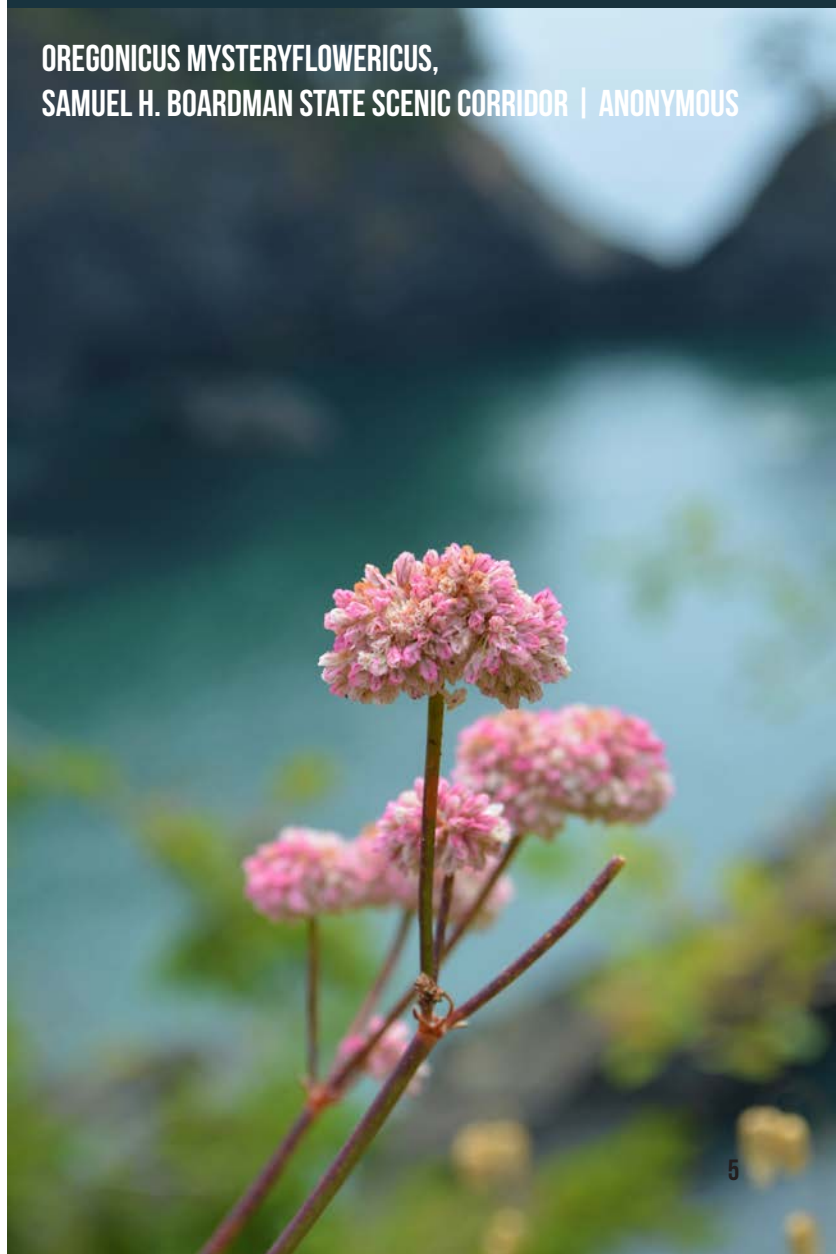
OPHELIA

GAURI SHASTRI

Exchange your pain for flowers, meander up a cliff
Jump or fall, leap or slip, it
matters not if you just tripped.

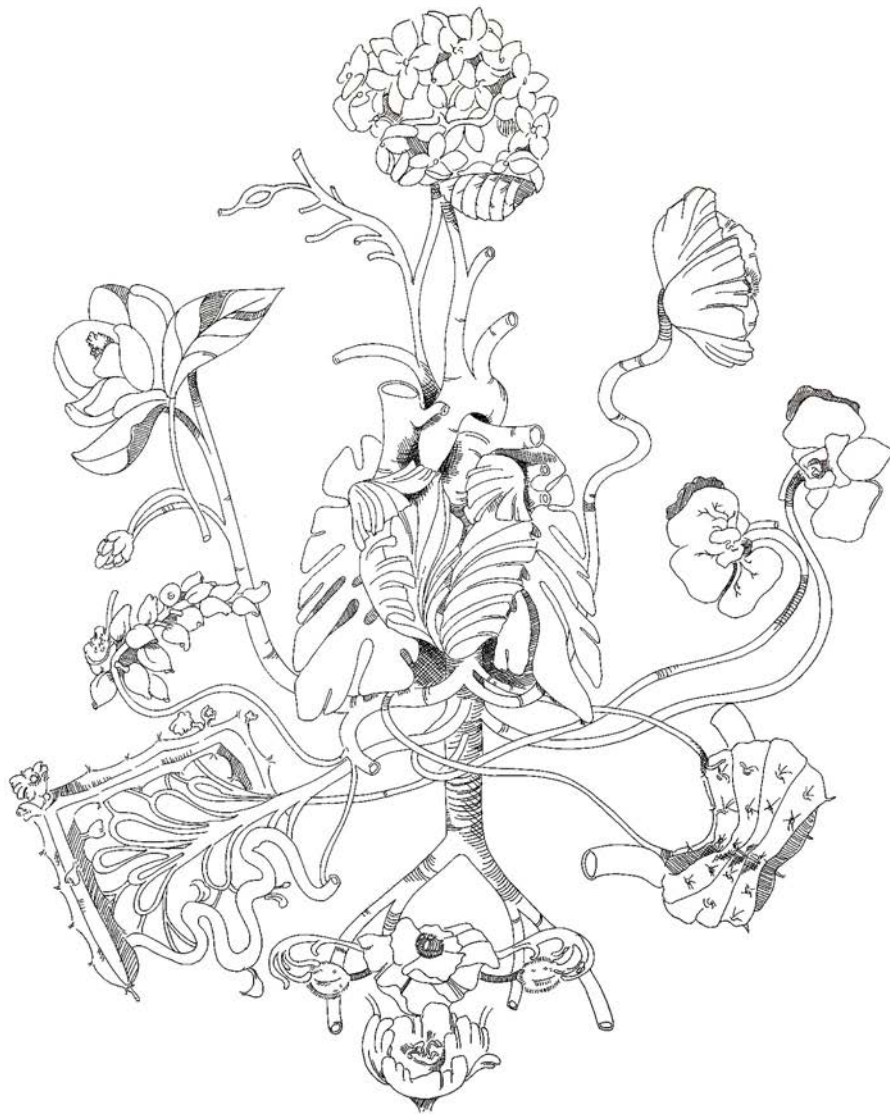
They'll find you in the early hours, floating
down the river with trailing flowers
A simple plot device, nothing more than to
stir Him further, portending gore
Bringing to close this sordid tale of
just another woman Society failed.

OREGONICUS MYSTERYFLOWERICUS,
SAMUEL H. BOARDMAN STATE SCENIC CORRIDOR | ANONYMOUS





LISTEN | PAIGE MYCHAEL RUIZ



CIRCLE OF LIFE | ALICIA ASTURIAS

FACE

GAURI SHASTRI

It has always felt a bit too large,
(Regal, my mother said
Banana, my sister said)
unapologetically protruding from my face.
If I had to start somewhere, that first I'd erase

Next the new eruptions marring my skin,
(Use turmeric paste, my cousin said
No fatty foods, my uncle said)
layering over older scars artfully covered by hair.
With puberty long gone, it feels nothing but unfair

The wild tangles, dry and wiry form
(Coconut brush, my aunt said
Childish, my father said)
a halo of curls, unpredictable at best.
YOU said they were beautiful, so these alone I'll let rest.

NIGHTFALL

HARPREET GILL

I wait for nightfall

for the stars to twinkle
winking their sympathy
for my mother to rise
shining a soft light
an understanding glow
visible
now that her sister
has settled, so slow
as she does
during these summer nights.

I have been patient all day
pacifying my heart
promising I will empty her
soon, soon, soon

I know now
why wolves howl at the moon.





BY THE SEA | TONYA LEE

LOSER

ANDREW J PARK

You lose
Your pen with
the red and blue and black ink
when the attending asks to borrow it
with an impatient hand
on inpatient rounds

You lose
Your voice
when they stand around
waiting
and the monitor hoots
the family stares
and the fellow says
speak up

You lose
Your list
somewhere on the walk
between Bed 21 and Bed 42
and you swore you had it
but now it's gone

But
You never lose
Your empathy
folded
tucked away
in your breast pocket
scribbled with reasons *why*



MENTALHEALTHDAY | PAIGE MYCHAEL RUIZ

DOING THE RIGHT THING

GAURI SHASTRI

Rita caught her reflection in the glass panels of the school office and sighed. Hannah, her foster sister, had insisted they go clothes shopping before the start of the school year as a “girls day out.” As the self-proclaimed authority on all things high school fashion, she quickly proceeded to select a handful of outfits, which Rita politely “oohed” and “aahed” at as appropriate. Today’s tight jeans and gauzy top were stiff and still retained the vague smell of chemicals and department store, like the rest of her new-and-improved wardrobe. It made her feel like an imposter. At least Rita could take comfort in her shoes, the worn trainers she’d had for at least a couple years before she moved in with the Richardsons a few months ago. The way the soles retained the impression of her feet was nothing but comforting.

Finally stepping into the office, she timidly approached the secretary.

“Um, I’m Rita? My...mom...dropped off my lunch?”

The secretary lifted her eyes briefly from the screen of her computer before gesturing to the end of the table where a lunch bag was sitting. Grabbing her lunch, Rita mumbled a quick thank you before shuffling out. She headed past the cafeteria towards a small nook behind the locker bay, where a familiar brunette was furiously scribbling in a notebook with one hand while simultaneously shoveling a spoonful of rice into her mouth with the other hand.

“Hi, Jane.”

Jane looked up to make a quick nod of acknowledgement before diving back into whatever she was working on. A rather imposing looking textbook titled *Molecular Chemistry* sat off to her side. All in all, Jane looked slightly more harried than normal, with her thick straight hair sticking up in odd directions from her messy ponytail. Rita quietly settled next to her on the floor and only had to wait a few moments before Jane started speaking again.

“I’ve got an AP Chem exam tomorrow, and I’ve got to do better than Louis this time. You won’t believe how smug the pompous asshole was when I only got a 96% on the last test!” Jane paused mid-tirade to make a face at Rita’s lunch container.

“Looks like the Richardsons have outdone themselves this time. Is that the latest special from the vegan-organic-free-range aisle of Whole Foods?”

Rita looked down at her elaborate looking salad and shrugged. Mrs. Richardson did in fact shop at Whole Foods, but she figured it would not serve to mention that. Also, could something be vegan and free-range? Jane had already returned to scrawling in her notebook, muttering what sounded like chemical formulas under her breath. Their friendship was an odd one, born more from a mutual appreciation of silence than anything else. In fact, Rita suspected Jane was a bit of a misanthrope and idly wondered whether she aimed to be a doctor someday. Soon the warning bell rang and the two of them parted ways to head to their afternoon classes.

After school, Mrs. Richardson made Hannah and Rita a snack before it was “homework time” at the dining table. Rita figured that Mrs. Richardson had some sort of manual (perhaps “Foster Children 101?”) that told her that troubled youth benefit from schedules and routine and had taken the advice to heart. Rita didn’t mind the scheduled homework time much, though Hannah had grumbled for the first couple weeks about being treated like a child.

Rita found it difficult to dislike Mrs. Richardson in general, who took her role as concerned stay-at-home mother

very seriously. Really, the Richardsons were the quintessential American family—they lived in a small suburban town in the Midwest and their quaint, Cape Cod-style house even featured its own white picket fence. Their oldest son was currently in college studying engineering, and their daughter Hannah was a sophomore in high school just like Rita. Mr. Richardson worked long hours as a manager of an automotive company and so Rita generally did not interact with him much, though he would often arrive home in time for dinner. All in all, they treated Rita well.

At night, in the comfort of her bed, Rita liked to daydream (nightdream?) about an alternate universe where she was some sort of female warrior, braving the woods on her own—kind of like that girl in that new *Star Wars* movie. Maybe she’d have a superpower, like super healing, and a vast knowledge of wild plants. The guidance counselor had asked her last week what her aspirations were, the same question Ms. Nancy the social worker had asked before she moved in with the Richardsons. Rita had always drawn blank; she could hardly respond “woodland warrior woman in another dimension,” but that was always what came to mind—she loved the simplicity of it, but also the fierceness, invincibility—dependent on no one, no one could hurt her.

Some nights the daydreams took a different turn; a mother and father, or an older sister, and maybe a younger brother, creating a family of eclectic nomads. After all, who was a warrior without someone to protect? However, the other family members’ faces would remain frustratingly vague and eventually Rita would fall asleep, exasperated and exhausted.

“Ugh none of this makes sense! It’s giving me a headache.”

Today, Hannah’s friend Katy joined them at the dining table and the two of them were attempting to do their geometry homework. At one point, Katy got up to use the restroom, declaring she needed a “thinking break.”

“Drugs are in the medicine cabinet,” Hannah called out casually—before freezing and staring at Rita. Rita looked around in confusion. Did she have something on her face? Instead, she noticed Mrs. Richardson giving Hannah a stern look.

Hannah nervously amended, “Medicine! Pharmaceuticals! I mean, like, Tylenol and stuff!”

Ah. Rita barely held back an eye roll, and politely answered Mrs. Richardson questions when she started vigorously asking her about

her vegetable preferences to put in pasta.

Rita supposed this was better than the time Hannah had tried to explain to her who Harry Potter was.

That night, after tossing and turning for an hour, Rita decided to venture to the kitchen for a snack. Mrs. Richardson had told her she could always help herself to anything in the cupboards and fridge, but she had never quite felt brave enough before. She pulled out a couple slices of bread and a jar of peanut butter before turning to the drawer cluttered with all of the utensils. Just as she lifted one of the kitchen knives to access the bread knives below it, she heard a sudden intake of breath.

“Rita, dear, please put the knife down.”

A pajama-clad Mr. and Mrs. Richardson were standing in the kitchen doorway, and Mr. Richardson had one arm placed protectively in front of his wife. Rita’s heart stopped for a moment and a chill rushed through her body before she slowly replaced the knife in the drawer and raised her arms in front of her. That was how you showed people you were not dangerous, right? She hoped so. Should she explain that she had only wanted to make a sandwich? Would they believe her? Did it matter?

Rita silently returned to bed after Mrs. Richardson spoke to her softly about safety and “you know you can trust us” and “please tell us if anything is wrong.”

Sleep did not come easily to her after that, and Rita gradually felt more and more uneasy as the days wore on. The Richardsons oozed goodwill and were the sort of people who had a plot

of land waiting for them in Heaven, if such a place existed. However, Rita could not shake the feeling of wrongness she felt—perhaps it had to do with their trepidation around her? As if they were waiting for her to mess up and become the troubled, violent foster child they had anticipated? Their actions seemed too kind, too thoughtful, too polite, too... artificial? As a result, instead of making Rita feel welcome, she only felt more distanced. Did that make her ungrateful? Was she really that untrustworthy?

It was a Wednesday morning, and that in itself suggested to Rita that it was not going to be a good day.

She had woken up to fragments of a dream of swirling darkness and running (lots of running) that left her feeling frantic and unmoored. Then, in her intro to chemistry lab, she had accidentally spilled a drop of sulfuric acid on her shoes. As Mr. Willebrand yelled in the background (“You were supposed to use the diluted solution, not the stock! Acids are dangerous, Rita, and we expect all of our students to take lab seriously!”), Rita’s gaze remained fixed on the hole that was slowly forming on the left side of her beloved trainer, the ones that were hers and that she was supposed to have forever...

“It’s just a pair of shoes, Rita. They usually don’t last more than a few years anyways,” Jane had stated plainly over lunch later that day as Rita continued to stare forlornly at the new pair of shoes Mrs. Richardson had dropped off for her. It turns out Jane had in fact beaten Louis on that AP chemistry exam last week (“101% with extra credit! You should have seen his face.”) and was celebrating by getting ahead on her calculus homework. Rita poked at her noodles, her knee jiggling up and down restlessly.

Rita didn’t think she was a terrible person. She smiled at old ladies on the street and always separated the recycling from her trash. Why then did she feel like nothing was ever enough? Well, she could fix that. Her agitation rose. She decided she could be exactly what the Richardsons, and Mr. Willebrand, and everyone else expected her to be.

During her study hall, Rita diligently researched safe camping fire practices, and then at the end of the school day, she stopped by the art room and pilfered a couple of spray paint cans she’d noticed earlier. She then walked home to an empty house, since Hannah had volleyball practice after school and Mrs. Richardson way at her weekly yoga class. Contemplating her fairly limited color palette (she had felt bad about taking anything other than the almost empty green and white paint cans), Rita proceeded to recreate a rather poor impression of the “Dark Mark” from Harry Potter on the back paneling of the house. Oh well. She figured it wasn’t cheating if she used a Sharpie to try to make the eyes a little more menacing.

Rita then ran inside to take a handful of new clothing items from her closet, stopping by the kitchen on her way out the backdoor to grab a box of matches. Digging a pit in the backyard (about a foot deep, according to Smokey Bear’s recommendations) took longer than she expected with Mrs. Richardson’s gardening tools, but soon she had a regulation fire pit ready, lined with a ring of rocks from the landscaping in the front yard. The clothes were quickly set ablaze, and after a moment of hesitation, Rita toed off her new shoes and added them to the pile.

Stealing, graffiti, and arsonism—that’s what the “bad” kids did, right? At least according to the movies. A neighbor suddenly shrieked in the background. They must have noticed the fire.

As Rita waited for the wail of incoming sirens, she wondered whether Jane would manage to crack a smile if she ever told her about her little act. If Jane would tell her it didn’t make any sense because she wasn’t the type of person to do things like that. At least Jane was always honest.



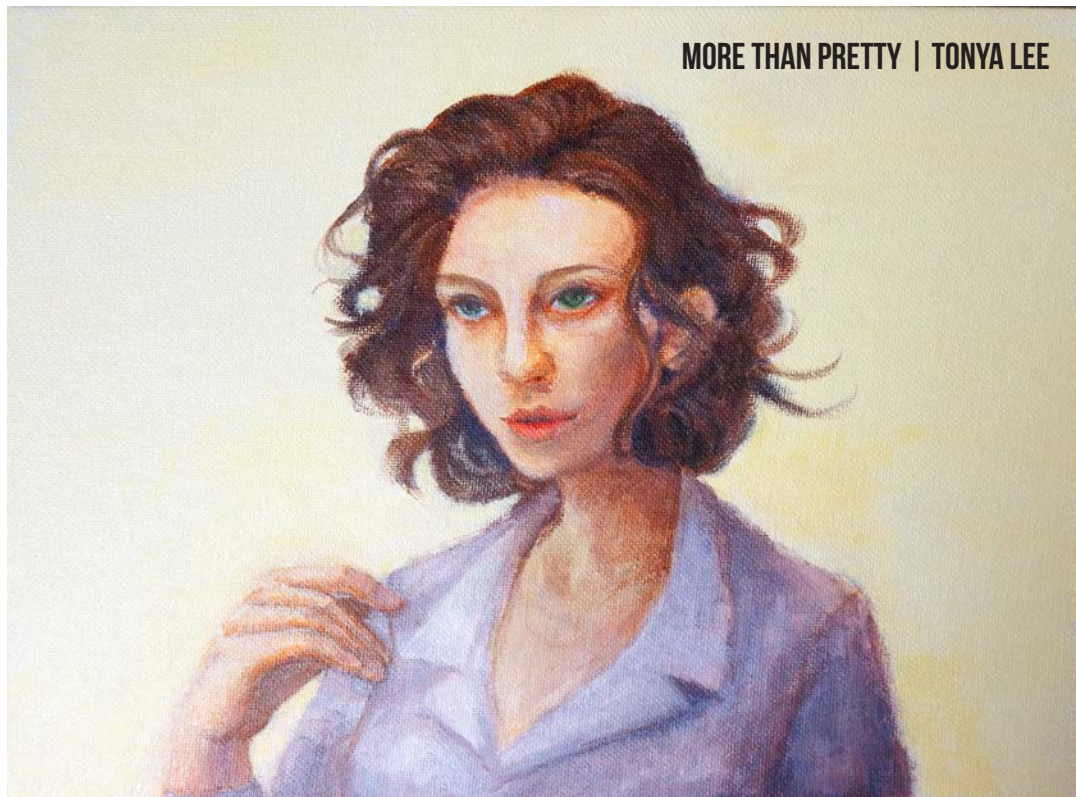
TOY STORY

MITCHELL FOSTER

The streets of the toy store are lined with more plastic than a Beverly Hills surgeon.
I walk down these colorful seams while stuffed animals and stuffed people stare at me.
Lego skyscrapers cast shadows on the hot wheels Mercedes,
And confetti canyons fire off from toy soldiers in the distance.
There are electric model planes soaring overhead,
And a park where play-dough flowers and silly putty trees bloom.

I can't help but find myself standing before a giant shelf of barbies,
Wondering why they are all smiling like that,
Like her lips are afraid of themselves.
In big factories they are shaped the same.
With a brand on her heart that reads "Made in America".
She is told you have to be pretty to sell,
You have to be thin to fit in,
You have to find your Ken to survive,
You have to be a doll, Barbie.
And if you need, there is always more plastic.
But if you want to be a GI Jane, or a Mrs. Potato Head, or a Buzz Lightyear, or filled with cotton,
Well I'm sorry but you've already been boxed and branded.

I worry that maybe it's guys like me that create the market for toys instead of real people.
That maybe your heels are to avoid my eyes,
The hoops on your ears are to block my words,
And the plastic in front of your chest is to keep me out.
Because sure, I could charm your reflection into a smile,
But I wouldn't let you see me vulnerable if it was written on the mirror.
So Barbie know this,
These days I want to drive a Tonka Truck right through those shelves,
Tear open these boxes to show her that she is different, she is not made the same,
That I notice the beauty of her being before the branding on her box,
That if anyone ever treats you like you're smaller than them, like you are just a toy,
Then we should treat them like they are just children.





UNTITLED | BRITT DEVORE



UNTITLED | NEDA DASTGHEYB



GODZILLITO, POTEM FALLS | GAUTAM RAMESH

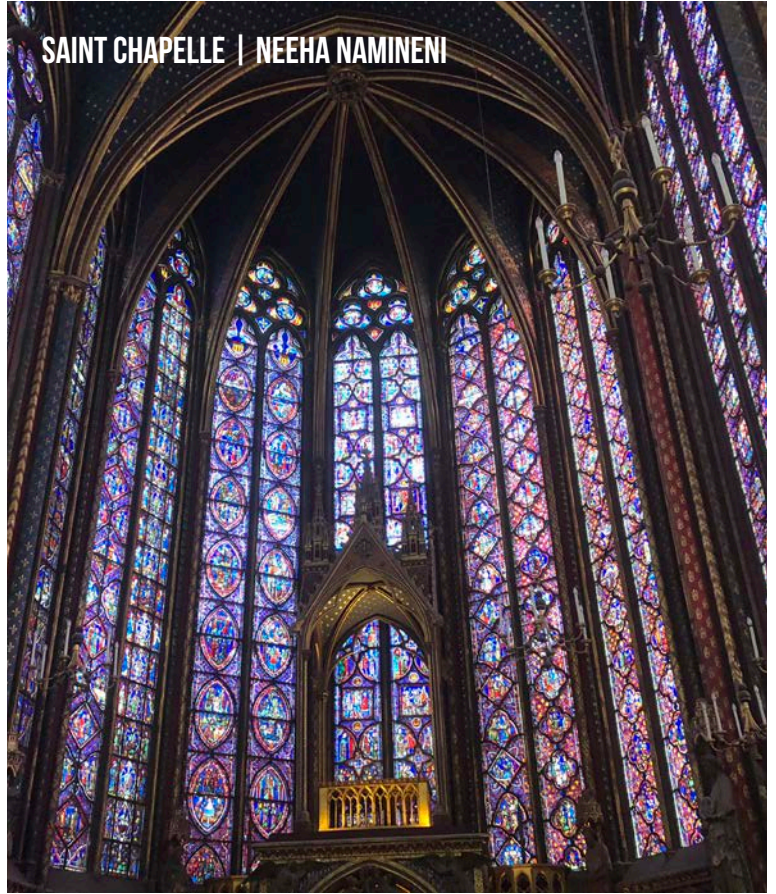


AMIGOS | SOHINI KHAN

OF KINGS AND QUEENS | TONYA LEE



SAINT CHAPELLE | NEEHA NAMINENI



TO SEE THE UNIVERSE | TONYA LEE



AN ARMY UNNOTICED

HARPREET GILL

she rose
to conquer the night
as she had every night
since our galaxy settled
and she whispered to me
that she was lonely

most of the world sleeps
when she reigns
and it pains her

she wished she might have a friend
to make that daily trek
around the earth
together
someone who might understand how exhausting it is
to do the same thing
day in
day out
with no rest
and very little appreciation

I was quiet for a moment
before I told her to lift her gaze from the earth
and look around
across the night sky
where hundreds of thousands of stars
twinkled their love
shining, steadfast
as they had
since the beginning of time.



MONKEY SEE | LUCIA LIN

ON YOUR SHOULDERS

MEERA REGHUNATHAN

To all those upon who have supported me and allowed me to reach for the stars, especially my mom and dad:

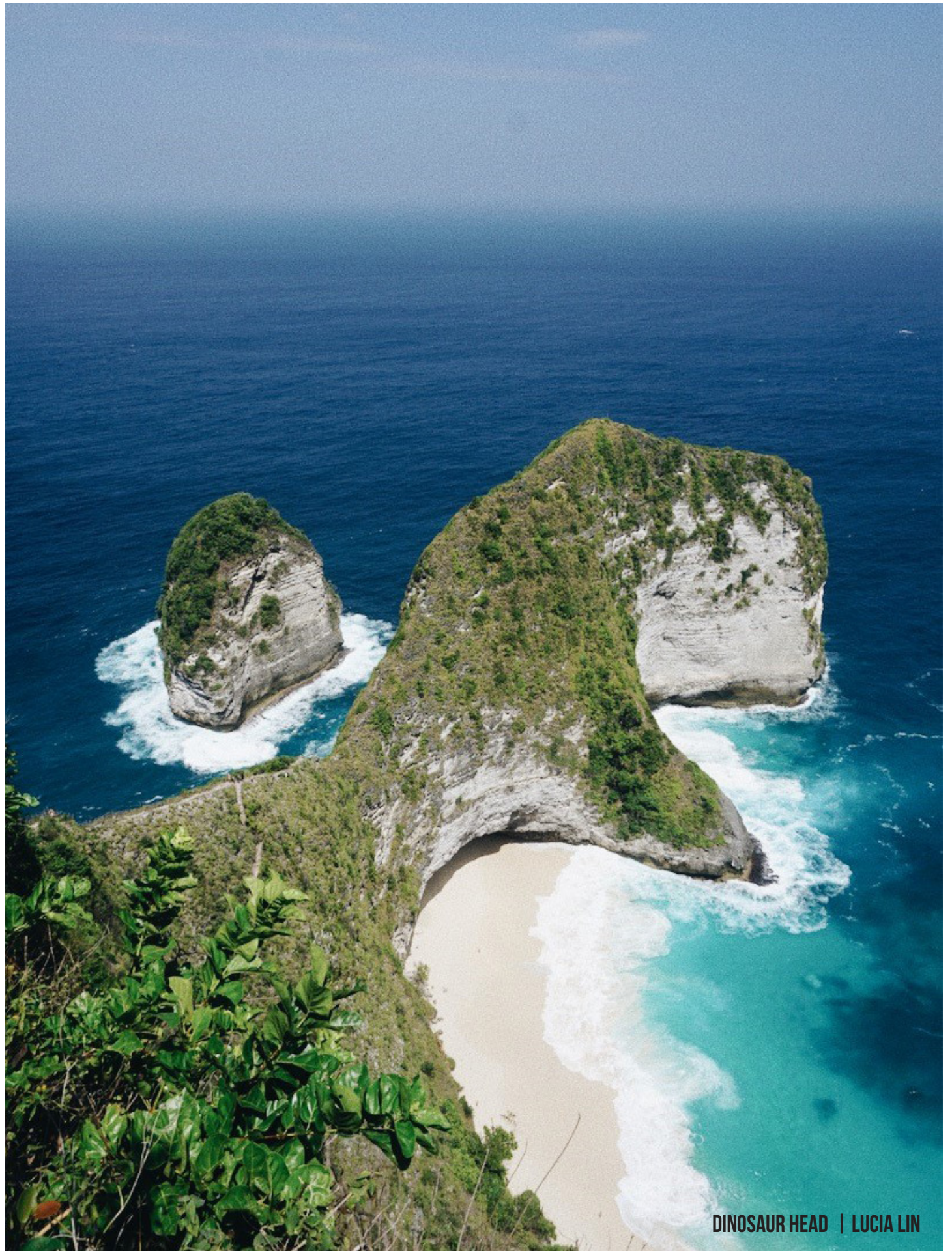
I can see so far,
From way up here,
On your shoulders I stand,
The galaxies are so near.

I can see my dreams close,
And my fears are so far,
As I shut my eyes,
I feel the warmth of a falling star.

I reach up so high,
Because your feet lay on the ground,
I float amongst the stars,
While you remain earthbound.

As I get weary of standing,
And the stars start to fade,
Your shoulders give me strength,
Even as your hairs have greyed.

On your head I lay,
As I take some rest,
Of anything I've ever stood on,
Your shoulders are the best.



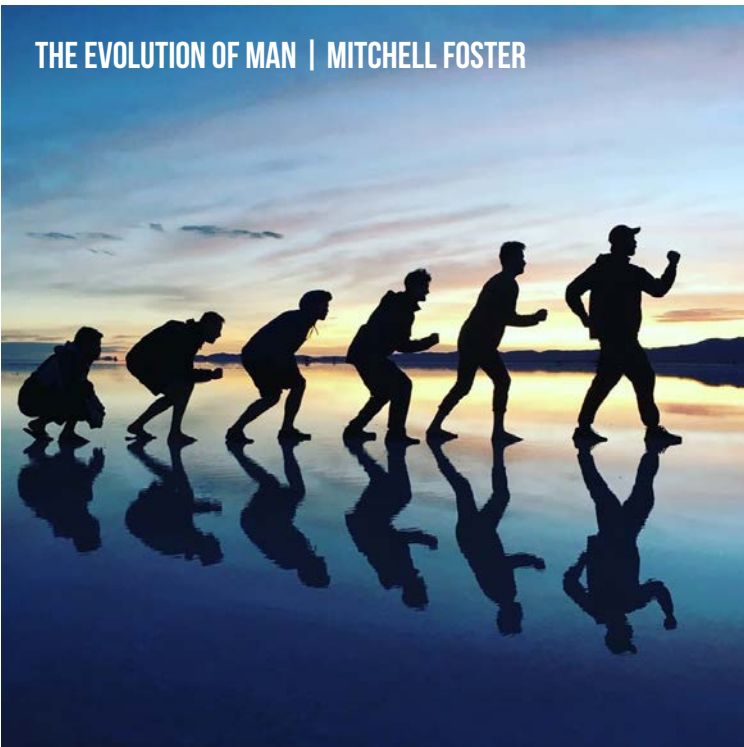
DINOSAUR HEAD | LUCIA LIN

RUIN

MARIA KLINGLER



THE EVOLUTION OF MAN | MITCHELL FOSTER



PARTINGTON POINT, BIG SUR | GAUTAM RAMESH





SALKANTAY | MARIA KLINGLER



STRENGTH

YASMIN AGHAJAN

I shut the door for a silent space.
I am 25.
He is 85.
I tell him he has lung cancer.
He knows.
He will not be cured.
We both appear calm.
I am forced to remain still,
To maintain my professionalism,
Show compassion but not emotion,
To be his physician-
I should not reveal
That this is my first time
Telling a man four generations above me
That he is dying.
I try to subdue my humanity
My heart squeezes
If I express my weakness
How can I confer any strength?
Little do I know
He confers his strength to me
85 sage years.
I am relieved
When he opens his arms
And embraces me.



QUECHUAN FLUTE PLAYER | BOYA ABUDU

STAND IF

JUNMI SAIKIA

Five years ago, during our medical school orientation week, there was this little “ice breaker” game our entire cohort played. “Stand if.” The basic premise is to stand if some comment applies to you. Here, let’s give it a shot:

Stand if you are from California.

I remain seated.

Stand if your family owns a dog.

I remain seated.

Stand if you have a family of your own.

I remain seated.

Stand if you were raised in a single parent household.

I remain seated.

Stand if you took the MCAT.

I stand. But then again, more or less everyone stands, grimly.

There are a handful of students who remain seated. The Med Scholars. They just got outed as the nerds that got accepted into medical school straight out of high school. But after five years, I no longer remember which of my classmates were Med Scholars. Simply put, it doesn’t matter. It never did.

And then there’s my favorite question:

Stand if you hate exercise.

I have never moved faster in my life.

I always hated running. It was the absolute worst thing ever. In middle school, I remember thinking to myself: What would ever motivate someone to move consistently at an above normal rate only to end your movement at the exact same place from where you started?

But, once upon a time, I had a reason to run. And while I hated it, I ran for the sake of someone else. I wanted him to notice me. He was the fastest runner in our year, and my eighth-grade self wanted him to notice me.

So, within the course of the academic year, I picked up my pace, from a lousy lack-luster 12-minute mile time to 8.5-minute mile time at my peak (I know, this is not a particularly good mile time, but I was freaking over the moon about it). Did he ever notice me? I have no idea. I moved away to Florida later that year. We lost contact, until I graduated from high school and made a Facebook account. I added him not long after, mostly out of curiosity regarding where he was headed for college (yes, I had a secret hope we would end up at the same university; yes, I am a hopeless romantic; no, we never did see each other again).

He is engaged to be married, now. And my mile time dropped to about 11 minutes.

What can I say? I really hate running.

At the urging of my post-doc, I joined a 5K team during the spring of my first year in grad school. To say that I was excited would be a lie; little had changed since my orientation week in medical school. I had not been to a gym since I had arrived in San Diego, and the most exercise I participated in was a running late to POM with a bag of professional clothes on my back (extra weight = resistance training, right?).

But the idea of training for a 5K with someone else made the entire concept seem less awful. My previous 5K experience informed me that I could probably finish a 5K under 40 minutes without any preemptive training. But what was the point of paying money for a 5K if I was not going to gain anything from it?

Honestly, what's the point of any of these races? You pay money to suffer. I don't get it.

Anyway.

My post doc and I made this stupid little pact about trying to finish the 5K in under 30 minutes. I'll take a moment now to reiterate that I really hate running. At this point in my life, I had been sedentary for over a year, and my mile time was very nearly 12 minutes again. I had two months to change that.

So, my post-doc and I started training together. Monday, Wednesday, Friday. Plus/Minus weekends. We started gently,

just aiming to finish a mile and a half without stopping. Then we played with running faster. We followed up with running longer.

I watched with amazement as my mile time slowly approached 10 minutes, and even 9 minutes when I was sprinting a shorter run. Maybe running was not as terrible as I thought.

Some of my old medical school classmates caught me running on the weekends, interrupting my workout just long enough to take a jab at my sudden inspiration to exercise. You could say that my outburst during the orientation week game had made quite an impression; I now laugh thinking at how memorable my outburst must have been for people to tease me about it 3 years later. But it didn't matter, I was on track to my goal.

Come, race day.

At this point I was a consistent 9.5-minute per mile runner. I could run 3 miles without stopping. Thus, I foresaw me hitting my goal for a sub-30 5K. My post-doc ended up being a no-show (she was sick), but the rest of the lab that she had managed to rope into joining the team was there. The race began, and with the hype of the crowd, I took off. Later, I would learn from my Runkeeper app that I started my run at the rate of 8-minute per mile. Which would explain the energy crash I experienced about two thirds of the way in. I slowed considerably, and one of the grad students in my lab caught up to me.

He used to run cross country back in high school, and now, two thirds of the way through, he still had the energy to keep on running without stopping. "The key is pacing," he said as he bounced on forward. I tried damn hard to maintain his pace, but in the last half mile, I stopped. I couldn't run anymore. I needed water, I needed rest. I needed this stupid race to end. The distance between the two of us grew.

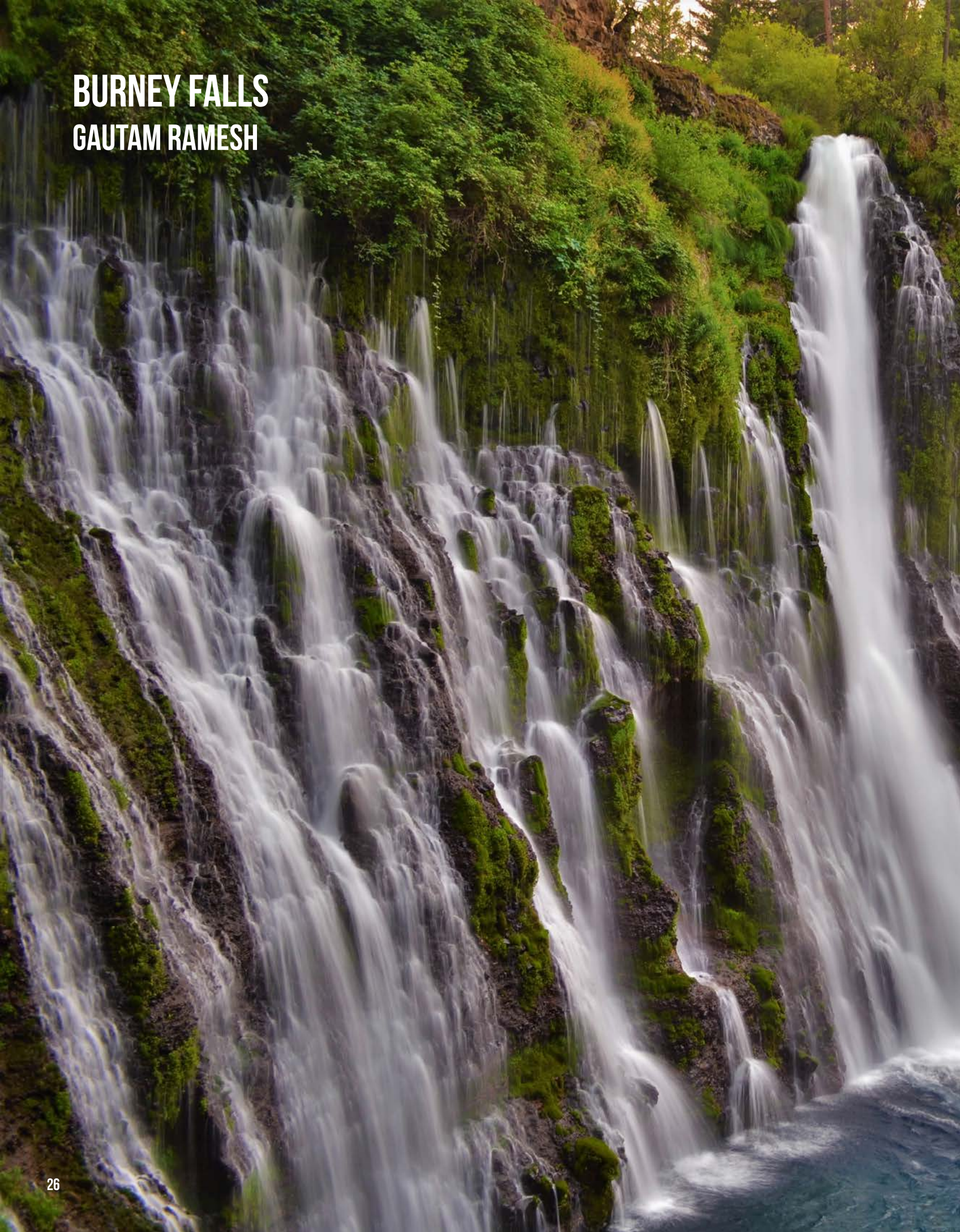
Eventually I did make it across the finish line. 29:58, according to the race tracker online. I got my sub-30 5K. Between pants and ravenous water consumption, it wasn't the joyous victory I envisioned, but rather a desperate crawl to the finish line.

"The key is pacing." That kind of advice pretty much applies to anything. Grad school? Going hard and fast will ultimately lead to burn out, which is honestly one of the biggest obstacles I have faced since starting my PhD. Medical school? The best way to learn a ton of information is to pace your learning, to pick up pieces at a time, and to repeat that learning over months and years. Cramming a few days prior to an exam, while somewhat inevitable, is significantly less efficient, and ultimately the information gained during this kind of studying is fleeting at best. The recall for this kind of learned information months later is dismal. The key is pacing.

But the real takeaway from all of this?

I still really hate running.

BURNEY FALLS
GAUTAM RAMESH





A SERIES OF

GRAYSCALE

PORTRAITS

ASHLEY OTT





HOZU RIVER

BOYA ABUDU







ADVENTEROUS LOVE | PAIGE MYCHAEL RUIZ

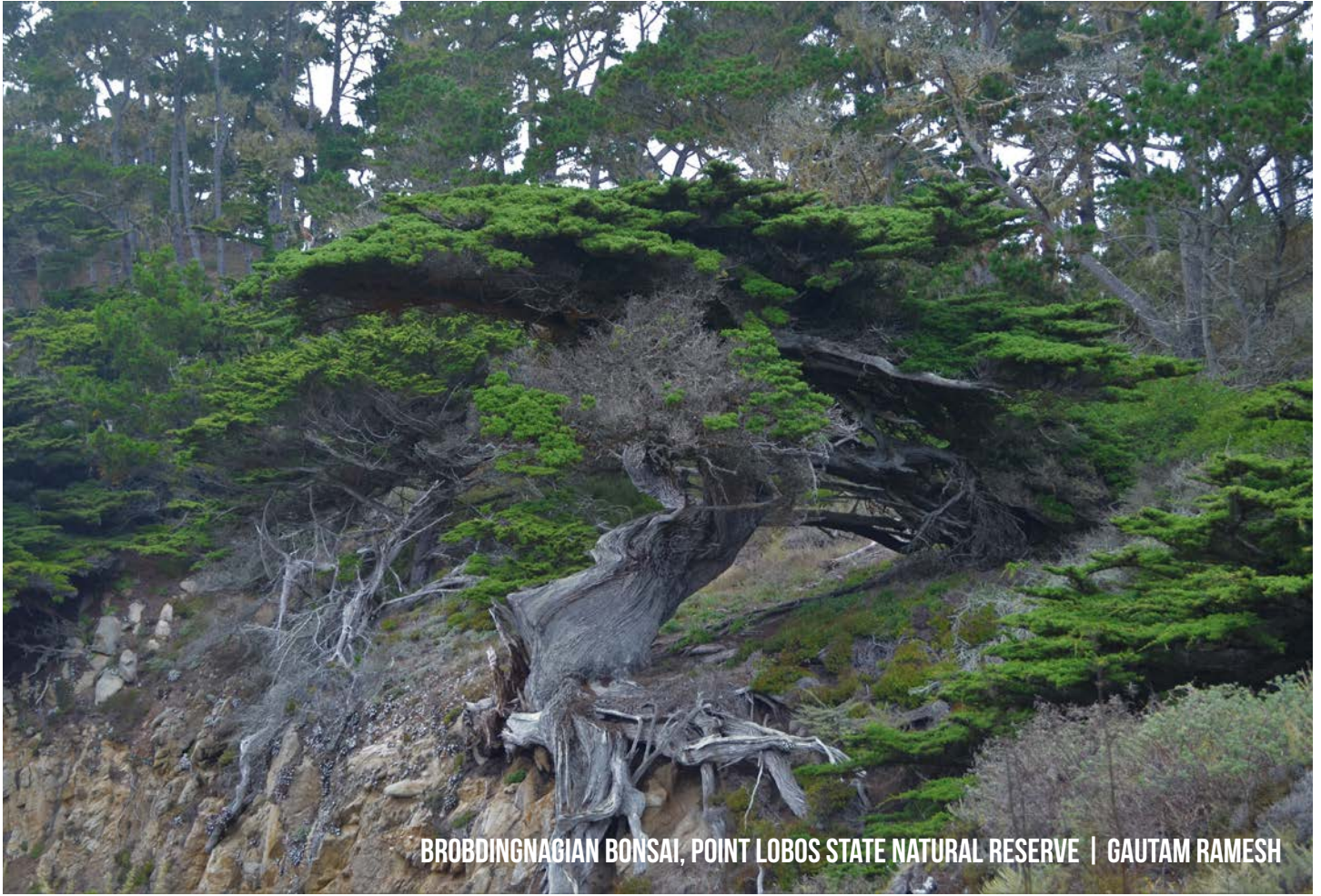
TO THE GIRL WITH THE GOLDEN HEART EARRINGS

MITCHELL FOSTER

There lives a city,
Only with pairs permitting.
Two lungs move together with love in the air.
She takes his breath away when they're a pair.
The kidneys try to filter out the troubles of today,
But were too busy getting stoned and pissing the day away.
Always running together were the nostrils.
Surely, he knows she is picked to be his world.
Two eyes only care about looks and seem vain;
Yet only the two see the world exactly the same.
In time they will stop seeing each other as well,
However, they will stay in contact, forever in parallel.
The legs with brawn shared the weight of all the city's love,
Even with their walls shaking from the neighbors above,
Where ferocious love making rattled the neighbors to go mad.
Here lived passionately, the honeymooning gonads.
The hands preferred to hold in embrace.
While the brain understands its other half no matter the case.

In the middle of it all— the heart was alone.
He sensed how well the others worked within their home.
He felt the harmony that they all shared,
and wondered if one day he would ever be paired.
Because, he had a scar down his chest from when a girl broke him.
He still had hope even though love seemed so grim

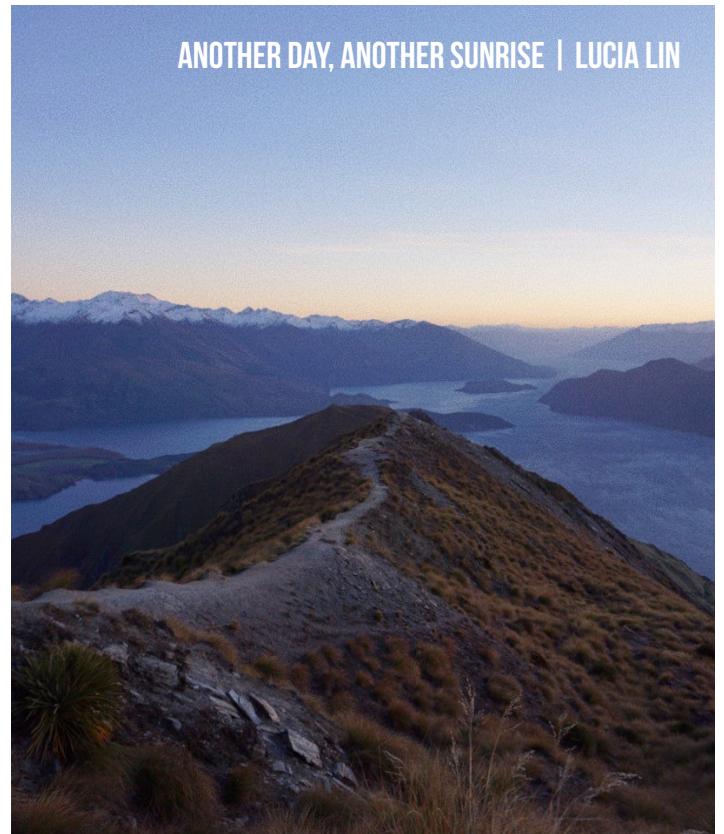
He was just scared about being broken or burned again.
So, he decided to work until romance surfaced from this
bottomless sea.
Alone, he slaved away monotonously.
Day in, day out.
Day in, day out.
Day in, day out.
Day in, day-um.
He skipped a beat.
An angelic silhouette in a city down the street.
Immediately his past was something that was minimized,
because with her in view he was instead filled with butterflies.
He wondered why he never introduced himself before.
After he knocked on the door,
She introduced his jaw to the floor.
When she opened, like him, in her chambers she had four,
And like him she enjoyed music that moved her core,
And like him when she had feelings her insides would roar,
And like him she did her job and a little bit more.
Because she was like him, and he liked her.
She was not the smartest, nor sexiest, nor strongest.
But she thought like him, moved like him, and did everything
this heart did.
With every little rhythmic touch,
It sent fibrillations down his crust.



BROBDIGNAGIAN BONSAI, POINT LOBOS STATE NATURAL RESERVE | GAUTAM RAMESH

It was different this time, for with her he found bliss.
It was perfect chemistry and she was worth the risk.

So he built up the courage to ask for a date.
And from that point on endless chatter began to circulate.
She loved talking to someone just as quirky,
And thought that maybe this one was worthy,
With emotions mounting at a rapid rate,
She delightedly agreed to make it a date.
During the date she asked if he had ever been broken.
She saw that he was uncomfortable when those words were
spoken.
He said well you see I have this scar on my chest...
She said, look I have the same one above my breast.
Well this heart was clever see,
Never one for jealousy,
She began to tell him she
Thought heartbreak was the best thing to happen because it
led to us.
With this one-of-a-kind girl in his life, he began to blush;
It was like she was that last particle of oxygen so that he was
not blue.
She was the one that he wanted to give himself to.
Now with two hearts paired, the city seemed better.
So much happier, stronger, and braver than before he met her.
Because although every city is built with one at its debut,
There is something that this heart assuredly knew,
Something that he realized as soon as he met you,
That life doesn't become whole, until the heart becomes two.



ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER SUNRISE | LUCIA LIN

SAN DIEGO ON A SUNDAY
ASHLEY OTT







UNTITLED A | PAIGE MYCHAEL RUIZ



UNTITLED B | PAIGE MYCHAEL RUIZ

CAROL
INNA BLYAKHMAN

Carol, who waited
At the altar three times,
Told me life spirals,
It grabs and it binds.

She stands in the doorway
Scanning for home
Resting her shoulders
Sinking her bones

She pulls at her socks
and curls into bed
She draws with her finger
a circle overhead
“The reason you spin
Is so you can see
Something has changed
In each of the three”
First brother
Then father and mother.
Third lump removed,
Cold water
Tastes like no other.

Carol is waiting,
Books in her hand.
Watching breath go
Come back
And again.

STEEL RESOLVE | DAVID CARLSON



AN ANATOMY OF LOVE

ALICIA ASTURIAS

Your smile
Wrinkles,
Where my jokes weren't funny

Your voice
Cracks,
When you tell me you love me

Your palms
Sweat,
While you roll the dice

"Maybe orange isn't your color?"
"Well isn't that nice"

Your sides
Ache,
When I look like a fool

My cheeks
Blushing,
"I fell in the pool"

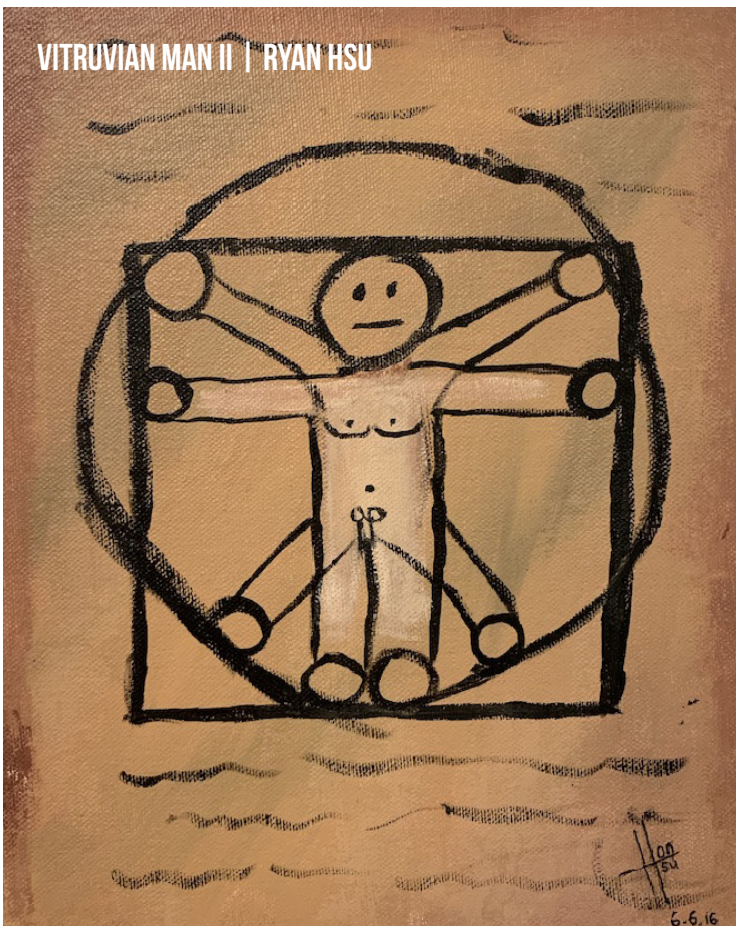
Your temper
Boils,
This is a mistake

My hand
Trembles,
Perhaps this can wait

Breaths settle
Hand in hand
All is still.

I will reach
To you always,
Til nerves betray will.

VITRUVIAN MAN II | RYAN HSU



A TRIAGE OF TATTOOS

JESSICA ERLICH

Headphones in and shoes off, it's nearing 10 PM as I lounge in the back room of the Labor and Delivery nurses' station – the “deck” as it's called. The sun has long set and my mind has already drifted far from the hospital, back to the comfort of my bedroom. In my sleep-deprived daze, I am thrust back to reality by a tap on the shoulder.

“Hey, you're the med student, right?” I look up to meet the gaze of the charge nurse, quickly nodding in affirmation. “Well there's action happening, you'd better go check it out.”

I shut my laptop and ditch my headphones, springing to meet the rumored action that awaits me. I stumble into the triage room to be met by a jarring scene: a flock of nurses, the resident, and my attending crowded around a screaming, writhing patient. She is in what appears to be active labor, her third trimester habitus obvious on first glance. As three nurses hold down the patient's arm to place an IV, my attending talks her down with soothing repetitions of, “You're doing great, my dear.” The patient's cries alternate between curses and pleas, between pain and desperation.

As my eyes scan the scene further, they are caught by the tattoos covering our patient's body: an array of bold, black swastikas adorned with foreign lettering, presumably in German. My heart briefly sinks, my body briefly paralyzes. I stand frozen in the doorway, devoid of reaction. Through the fog, my attending calls to me, “Jessica, would you put some gloves on and lend a hand please?” I snap out of it and do as I am told, as is expected from a good third-year medical student. I reluctantly aid my attending in calming the patient down, mimicking her soothing voice and calming gestures. As

we leave the triage room to discuss the plan, she informs me, “No pre-natal care, 4 prior C-sections, homeless, reports using meth two days ago.”

Normally, I have the capacity to muster some empathy for

these types of patients – the ones that I find the most personally challenging. More often than not, a person's flaws can be traced back to the obstacles and traumas they have faced throughout their lifetime. From personality disorders to substance abuse, so many destructive behaviors are the result of coping mechanisms that, for the most part, are out of a person's control. Or at least, that's what I choose to believe. However, this patient made me momentarily forget that belief. For just a moment, I wanted nothing to do with this swastika-coated woman or her baby. Because let's be honest, if this patient had known that I – a queer woman raised in a Jewish household – had laid hands on her, what kind of confrontation might have



FROM BEATS TO BLOOM | ALICIA ASTURIAS

erupted?

After her triage assessment, we take the patient to the OR for an urgent C-section. She kicks and writhes until the very moment the anesthetic hits her veins. As I'm scrubbing in, I feel resentment. Resentment that time and energy and resources are going into caring for a woman with so little regard for her child and so much hate in her heart – hate specifically for people like me. Nevertheless, I suppress my emotion and join my attending and resident on the surgical field.

The next five minutes pass by in a whirlwind: incision, dissection, retraction, suction, clamping, and at the end of

it all, a brand new baby boy gasping for his first breath of air. I hand the newborn to the neonatology team, wondering if he will be able to survive the many obstacles ahead of him. My resentment for his mother persists.

With the dust of delivery settled, we begin to stitch the patient's abdomen closed. Meticulously threading her suture through the pulsating, traumatized tissue before us, my attending makes a comment that takes me by surprise: "You know, I really feel for this woman." The tone of her voice conveys an unexpected earnestness. She continues, eyes fixated on her instruments, "Who knows what she's gone through? She must be living a tough life." Standing across the surgical table, I am simultaneously flabbergasted and impressed by her take on the situation. How can she be so calm, so composed right now? How can she possibly feel any real sense of empathy for this patient? I make a half-hearted comment in agreement, although internally I still feel a simmering sense of conflict. As we wait in silence for the anesthesia to wear off, I idly run my gloved hand along the swastika that stains the patient's left arm. It's an old tattoo, the colors faded and the lines blurred. She has many like it scattered across her body. After a long few seconds, my gaze slowly drifts towards the patient's face. I'd been avoiding her face the whole night, avoiding the part of her body that perhaps makes her the most human. As I study her features, I begin to wonder about her past. My attending's musings whisper in the back of my mind – what kind of life has she endured? What led to the tattoos, what led to the circumstances she's in now? Does she regret any of it?

And in that moment, I can feel it – that twinge of empathy. Subtly it creeps in, like a dim light in the darkness. For the first time since laying eyes on this patient, I really see her. I feel for her, even though all logic dictates that I shouldn't. Because despite her flaws, despite her evils, at her core, she is only human too.



EVE | ALICIA ASTURIAS

