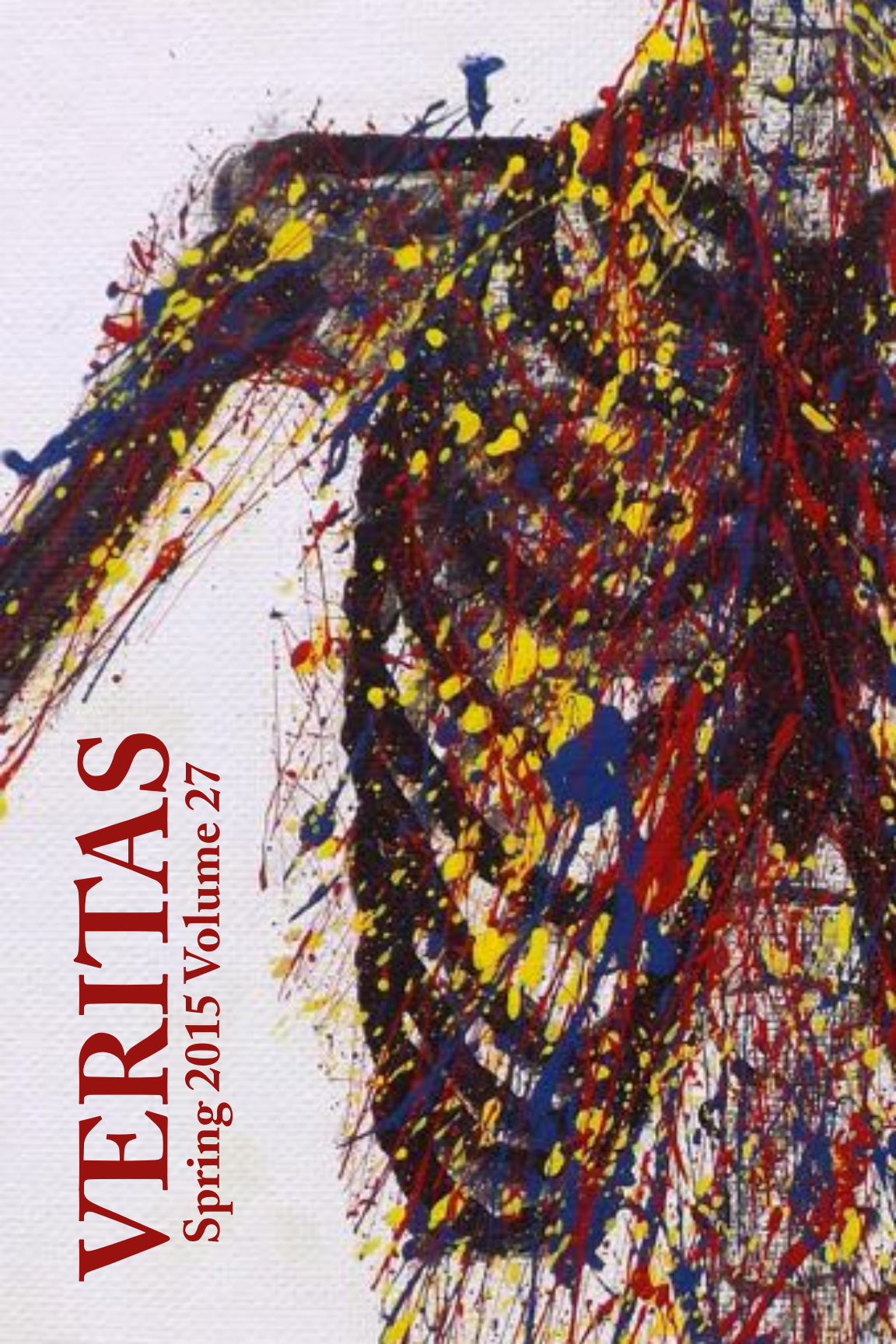


VERITAS

Spring 2015 Volume 27



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cover painting "Beneath the Surface" by Jessica Feliz

page 2-3 photo "Star Trails Over Stuart, VA" by James Merchun

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Hesitation - Jacqueline E. Fabricius

The horizon burns a slow burn
As Helios pulls his chariot to light up the sky
And the last stars die
Live in the moment, they scream, but
I am caught at the top of this inspiration
And breathing out, while the only next
Has terrified me into cyanotic procrastination
The impending inhale inevitably composed
Of a million new bits
(And I can't take that kind of commitment)
So I linger just a second longer
In between

Veritas is the UVA School of Medicine's arts publication featuring art from UVA medical students. Veritas has been student edited since 2000 and published annually since 1994. We received financial support through the UVA Student Council, the Medical Alumni Association, and the Mulholland Society.

Marooned Man - Rodolfo Villarreal-Calderon

Because some nights and days
This bed is a piece of driftwood
Upon which I lie,
And it is not until I share it with you
That I feel myself grounded.

An island of companionship
Unable to drift away
Except into shared slumber.

Soft whispers lap at its shores,
The rustling of warm feet pursuing
The delight of the settled cool air.

The only temblors to occur
Are the shivers that chase my vertebrae
When your nails trace my spine.

And the only new mountain ranges to arise
From this landscape
Are the dozens of goosebumps that erupt
When your hair brushes my ear
And upon it fall the revelations
Of those who share this island.
We are ultimately all
Marooned men.
As mankind on this blue marble
As nations within our designated margins
As families within our fights
As men inside our minds.

But for now all is forgotten.
We lie
And without lying,
Let us whisper now
And allow this soft exchange
To be interrupted only by
Heavy sleep or light sun.

The underside of the pillow
Is still cool and smooth and inviting
If we so wish to reveal it
And refresh our conversation.

Let us decide to remain marooned together
Until obligations find us
And our isle.
They will rescue us from closeness
For which we will be grateful,
Knowing the rescue is not a reprieve
But rather a continuation
As we must have time
To miss each other.
To drift apart.
And stand in wait
Of being marooned together again.

Solstice - Felix Lipke

Sitting on the back porch,
 You've a coffee—me, iced tea.
 The big June sun peers above,
 Weaving through the trees,
 But we're cool beneath the canopy
 That grants our grief a needed brief reprieve.

You escape in a paperback,
 And I've unstrapped my watch.
 But my minute soon swaps for your sweep of its leaves,
 My second switched with your eyes' pendular flicks
 To the start of a new line,
 And up to meet mine.

The sunshine crawls along our laps,
 Plays in the patterns of your skirt,
 Melts these moments away, and the ice in my tea.
 This diagnosis is our solstice.
 And how I'll miss these summer rays
 As our endless days begin to dwindle.

I'll try to savor all these sips,
 This last chapter with you,
 Since we can't stay forever in this while.
 But every one's a bit less sweet,
 And as the sun recedes,
 So will my smile.



Dee Das

A New Light on Gene Therapy - Elizabeth Homan

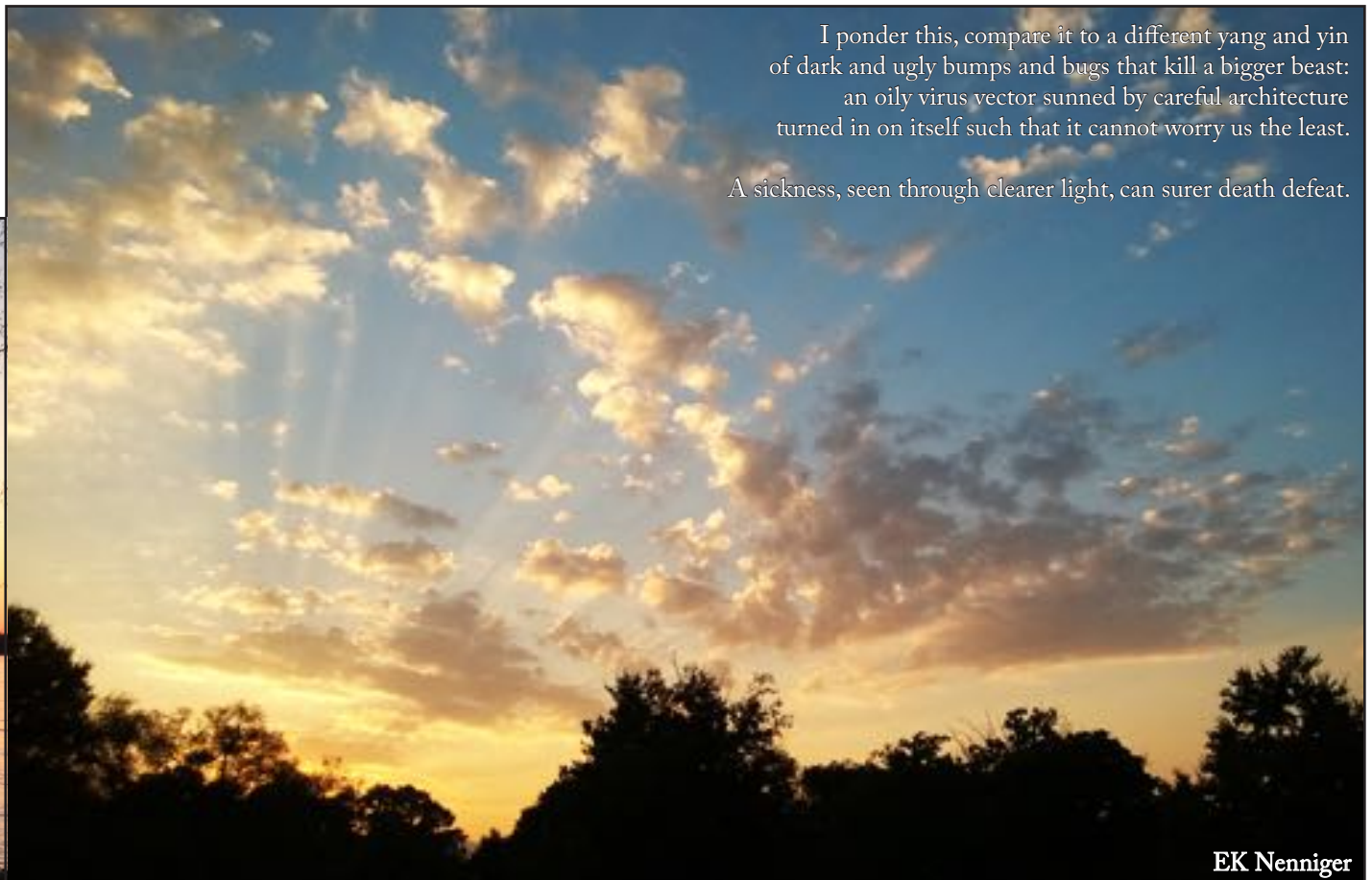
I walked through a car lot one morning when the sun
 became so weary that he sat upon the trees to rest.
 He shone somewhat lazily where cars were lined in rows,
 and played with the shadows that made their little nests
 in crannies of forgotten sleep where worms escaped the heat.

What caught the eyes of passersby were shining metal frames,
 but what caught mine was on the ground in colored streaks and gold;
 the sun had met the oil spills that stunk of spoiled arsenic,
 and in this friend had placed the gift of gorgeousness to mold
 into a rainbow pool that was the tarmac's beauteous sheet.

What was before just waste had soon become a priceless gem
 that only shone as setting sun sat still upon the line
 of canopy so green and full, while taking a hiatus
 from the torments of monotony, and showing every sign
 of giving up before the blushing muse would cast a sunset on the street.

I ponder this, compare it to a different yang and yin
 of dark and ugly bumps and bugs that kill a bigger beast:
 an oily virus vector sunned by careful architecture
 turned in on itself such that it cannot worry us the least.

A sickness, seen through clearer light, can surer death defeat.



EK Nenniger

Thin Places - Lee Eschrenroeder

When at first we met,
I bathed you from head to toe,
Shaved the little hair you still had,
And noted your imperfections.

I did not struggle to identify you
As "you" or simply
What was left of "you."
It was easier not to ask.

And so a sharp blade – in green hands –
Exposed that which had been protected
For a lifetime.
And I acted as though I'd been there before.

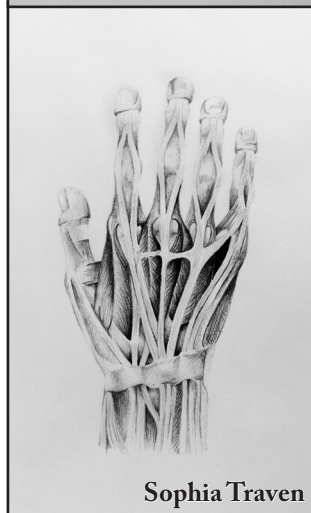
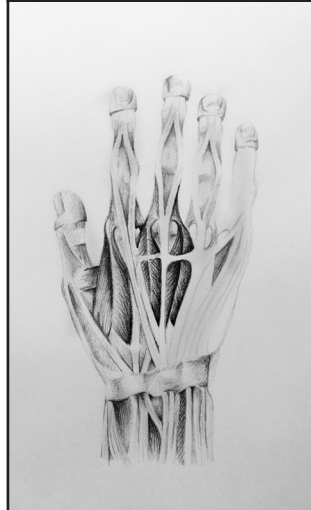
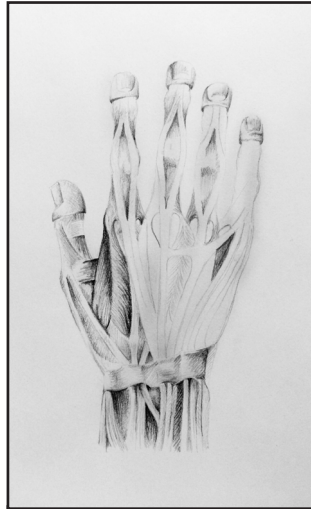
Each day, the distance I had created
Within my mind, to protect me
From the challenge of defining you,
Grew smaller, until it was none at all.

Your hand,
Lying with fingers extended
As though waiting to receive my own,
Beckoned my conscience to it.

The sheet began to weigh down,
Revealing the contours of your face,
Until you appeared as a tired traveler
Laying a steamed towel over your eyes.

I dissected your skin, your muscle,
Your liver, your intestines, your spleen,
Your heart, your lungs, your brain –
And, yet, where were you? What were you?

I had left no room for mystery,
And I was no closer to finding you
Or even seeing the gossamer barrier
That lay between us.



Sophia Traven

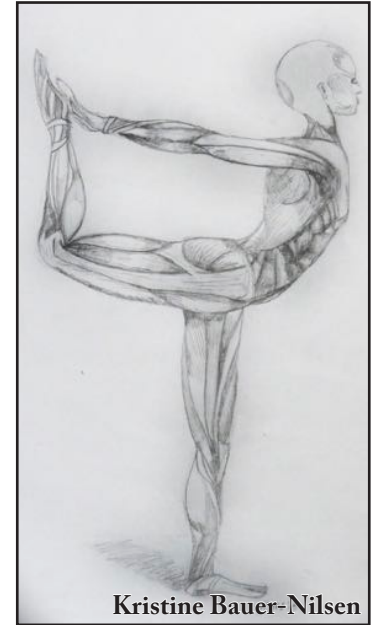
The Celtic tradition speaks of "thin places,"
Where the eternal shimmers into sight.
The light of an unseen sun, reflected by drops of rain,
Affording us a glimpse of that which is transcendent.

And with thin gloves, thin sheets, and a thin blade,
We dissected into that space together.
Searching for answers hidden away
In the house of our being.

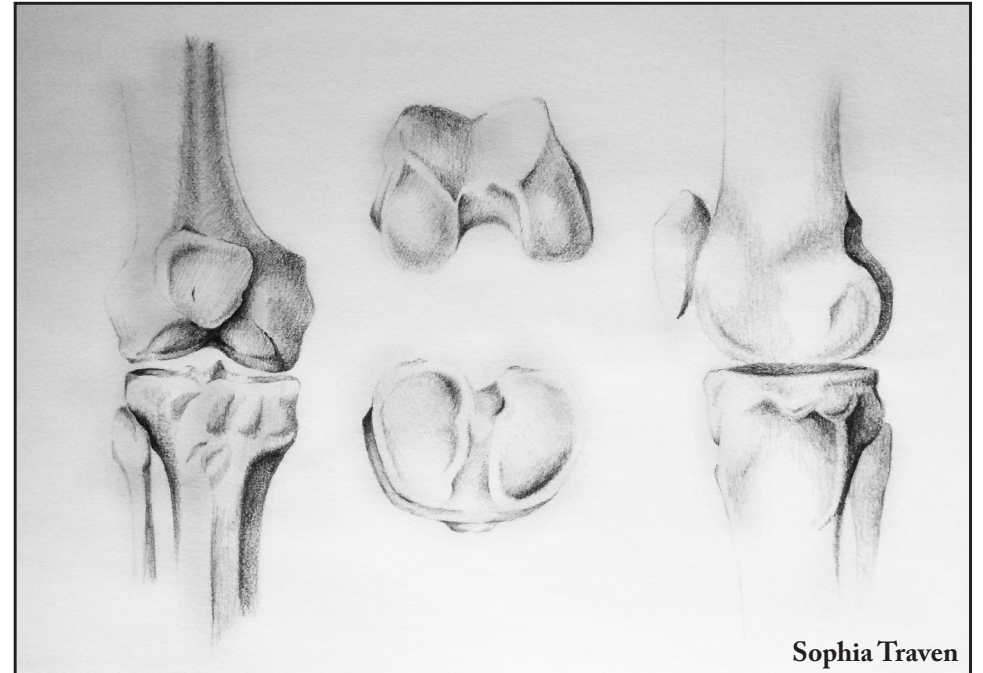
I now know that you were there.
Perhaps I did lay my hands upon you each day,
Or perhaps you watched me, patiently,
Through the veil that separated us.

You have taught me to seek the thin places
And to respect them,
For their beauty, their mystery,
And for the wisdom they deliver.

May I not forget your lesson,
And may I walk ever next to that curtain,
Trailing my fingers softly over its folds,
Waiting for the moments when they may slip through.



Kristine Bauer-Nilsen



Sophia Traven

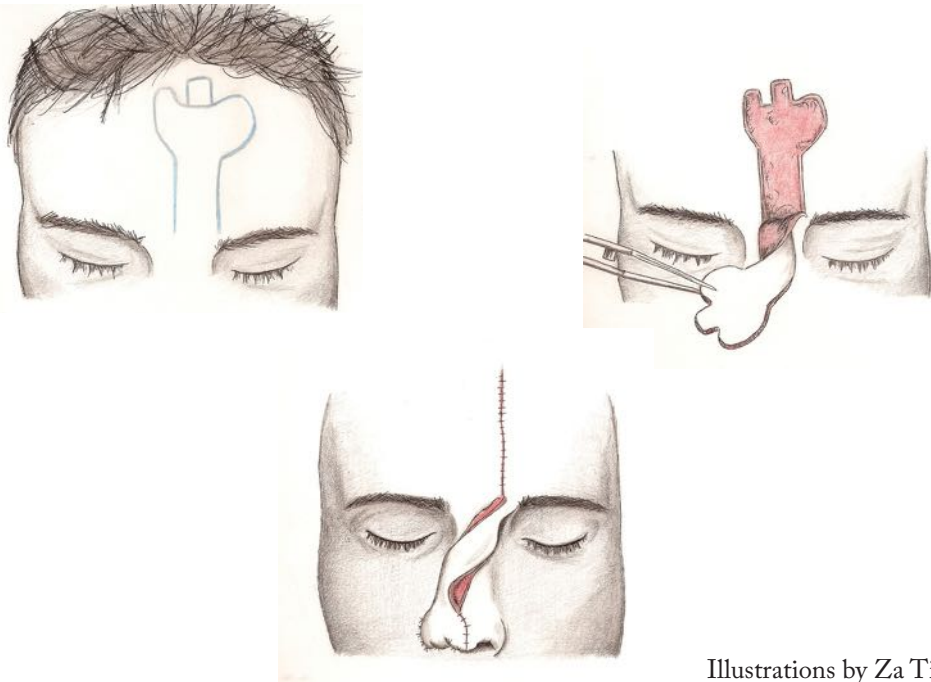
Who am I to judge your imperfections and flaws,
Your wrinkled skin, pigmented moles and misshaped face.
Who I am to believe that perfection is ideal,
And that my atlas should be a guide to your body.

Who am I to say what is right and what is wrong with your brachial plexus.
The nerves descending from your arm like a cascading waterfall,
Reaching out to bring their electric current into your hands below.
A simple path on the surface, but the intricacies beyond imagination.

As a team we search in vain to find the source of your eternal fire.
Inside of the house that is your flesh, there lived a spiritual being,
Whose consciousness arose out of that organ they call the brain.
But who am I to say what thoughts arose in that splendid tissue.

We all wish to see what it is that makes the human form unique,
What it is that brings about our actions from day to day.
Some say it's a combination of the mind moving the muscle,
But I believe there is something more to this universal truth.

But who am I to pronounce that my ideas are more profound than science,
For anything constructed from reason must seemingly be founded in fact.
So while I may never find an answer to these questions of consciousness
I can live in this indefinite universe, knowing that every human life is sacred.



Illustrations by Za Tilt

Tick...Tick...Tick

The harried medical student glanced at the watch on her wrist as she balanced a coffee mug and textbook in her other arm. "Nine o'clock," she read aloud and then, to herself, mused, "If I finish up in lab quickly, I can still make it to the gym and finish my flashcards before midnight." The idea of a good night's sleep propelled her to change into her scrubs and gown in record time.

Tick..Tick..Tick

She rapidly unzipped the body bag and allowed herself to pause briefly, wrinkling her nose at the chemical-laden odor wafting up to meet her. The moment of hesitation passed as quickly as it came and she set to work. Her mind raced and her eyes darted back and forth between the motionless body on her right and the colorful atlas on her left.

"From anterior to posterior: tibialis posterior, flexor digitorum longus, posterior tibial artery, posterior tibial vein, tibial nerve, flexor hallucis longus." She muttered the phrase over and over until she was confident she had committed it to memory. Around her, other students were wandering from table to table, their faces set in concentration. Aside from returning the occasional smile or light remark, she did not let herself stray from the task at hand.

Lower extremity anatomy. Gym. Flashcards. Sleep.

Tick.Tick.Tick

As she moved to the upper leg, she sighed. In front of her she saw a jumble of fat, fascia, muscle, and vessels. She thought back to the difficult dissection a few days prior, her group growing more and more frustrated as other students cheerily passed them, headed to freedom.

"Why did we end up with such a difficult cadaver," she brooded, cursing her luck.

TickTickTick

As she moved away a flap of skin, she suddenly paused. A large hand, previously hidden under cloth, had slipped off the edge of the table. Rather than immediately putting it back in its place, she found herself studying it. Despite time and chemical processing, scars and callouses were still etched into it. It was a strong, sturdy hand. A hand that had held, waved, and touched. And, it dawned on her, it was a hand connected to a man who had struggled, loved, and lived.

She felt a sense of both shame and clarity as she glanced at the bodies surrounding her. Freshly painted nails, a surgical scar, two tiny holes where earrings once hung. The room suddenly felt more alive than it ever had before. The distracted, complaining voice in her head was immediately silenced by a new, more powerful voice.

The harried medical student closed her eyes and bowed her head in reverence. For the first time all night, the hands on her wristwatch seemed to move just a little bit slower.

Tick.....Tick.....Tick

My first run - Woobie (Meagan McGinley)

Seriously, Mom, f*#\$ this.

Usually, you say *letsgoforawalk*, but today you said, *letsgoforarun*. Daddy said *dontrunalone*, then *Woobiecountsasapartner*.

I didn't understand him, but I'm glad you're here to protect me in this peoplepark.

So this is *run*?

I think you've missed the point.

Run is what you do at *dogpark* with new friends

or when someone growls because you are *intact*, whatever that means.

Run is what you do when *ball* bounces or *squirrel* shimmies up a tree or *leaf* rolls and flies away or oh boy *stick* is found! Sometimes it's ok if you really really have to *doyourbusiness* and you're in peoplepark and then I *run* because I'm so excited that I can poop right here right now because I'm oh joy *Outside*.

Then I poop and it's awesome.



Meagan McGinley

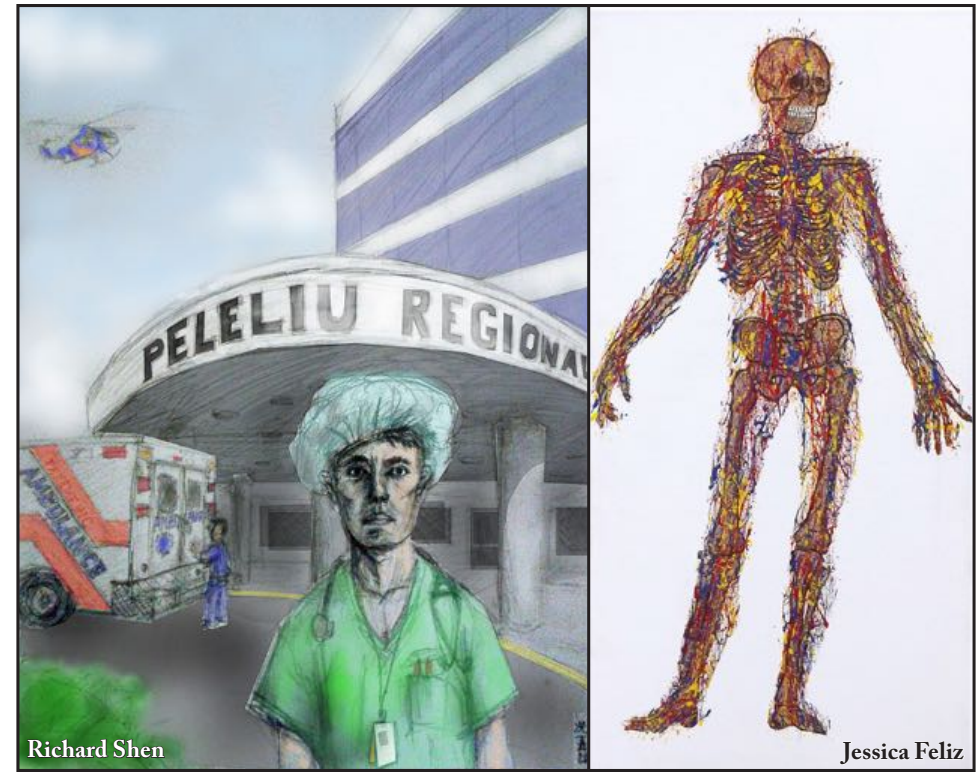
I trust you, Mom, so I believe there must be something really special that we are chasing because why else would you *run* without stopping to leap-lunge that squirrel or splish-crash through water-waves? Did you see how many *stick* were in the waves? IT WAS AMAZING! And we *run* right by! Did you know that we just *run* past geese and goslings in the bush? And you just rolled through raccoon piss? There is a man who smells like poop and forest floor a stick throw to our left. Did you notice the scary bird in the tree? (Thank goodness you are here to protect me!)

I think you would notice these things if we did not *run*. Let's just *letsgoforawalk* from now on.

Wheresdaddy? You ask as we approach home. Well, I don't know, but he sure wasn't *run*.

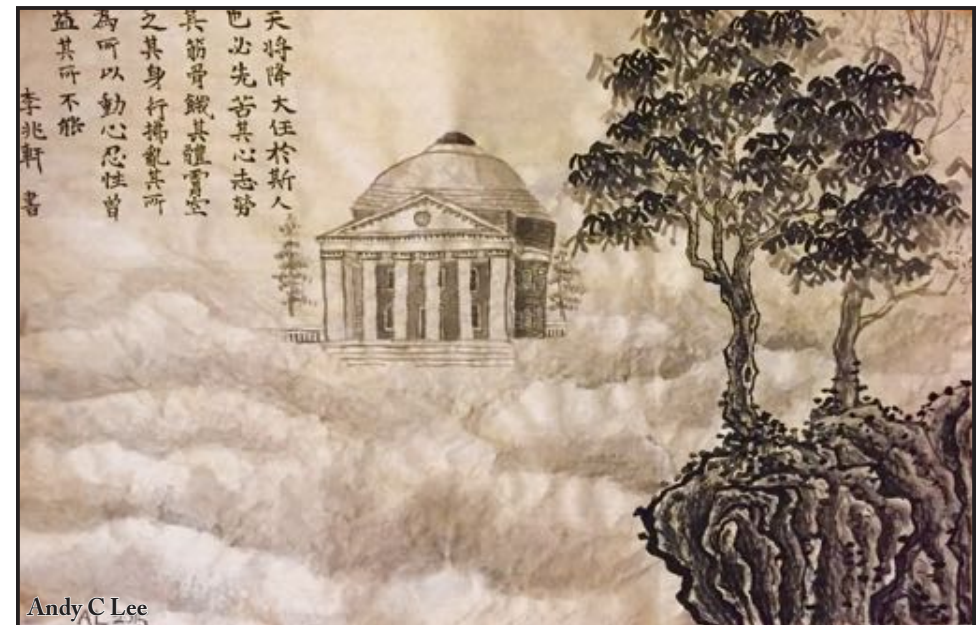


Michelle Lynch



Richard Shen

Jessica Feliz



Andy C Lee



Valentina Grajales



Raj Clark



Patrick Marvil



Valentina Grajales



EK Nenninger



Raj Clark



Walker Redd



Michelle Lynch



Valentina Grajales

Reflection - Thomas Ball

My mother was three years old when she first met Mrs. Kagawa. Twenty years would pass before she met her again. My father was with her then. Mrs. Kagawa played this instrument, the Shamisen, and sang them a song. When she finished, my father asked her, "Mrs. Kagawa... That song you played... what do the words mean?" She told them:

Time flies like an arrow young people, so be careful what you do with your time.

Six decades have passed since my mother first met this sage Lady, but her wisdom has remained with my parents and with me. I reflected on her words one fall morning with my mother and father just before returning to medical school after a short break. I was filled with gratitude for the generosity my dad showed in waking to see me off. We hugged goodbye, I remember, and he *slowly* walked back to his room to rest.

Mrs. Kagawa's words returned to me a few weeks later as I shared the following dedication during the annual ceremony to honor our anatomical donors at the UVA School of Medicine:

Standing here, together, on this hallowed ground, we honor the good women and men who gave their physical bodies for our education. They gave this gift, their final gift to us and our future patients, people they never met.

In this cynical time in which we live, it is essential to pause, to find silence to reflect on this generosity. If some say true altruism does not exist, we must ask, does their gift not prove that it does?

The donors we honor taught us anatomy, they remind us of our own vulnerability and mortality, they show us what selflessness is.

With a flicker we come into this world, for a time we are strong, and then we grow old and we pass just as quickly and mysteriously as our arrival.

As we reflect on what these great women and men gave during their lives and offered us with their last gift—we must ask, what will we do with our lives, what will we give to society. How will we pay forward what we have been given? As Mrs. Kagawa told my mother when she was most strong and able, "Time flies like an arrow young people, so be careful what you do with your time."

This reflection honors David George Ball, who died six months after the morning described, at the start of the spring, 2014.



Thomas Ball

When I Look Into My Hands - Thomas Ball

When I look into my hands, I can see you.

You taught me to be kind, you taught me to be true,

You showed me what it means to work, an immigrant in Yale blue,

You taught me stillness, watching the river, appreciating each ever-changing hue,

You embodied gratitude, what a blessing, Auntie Gracie lived in you,

Thank you for my life dad, I will always be thankful,

You live in the bright stars of the night, you are the morning dew,

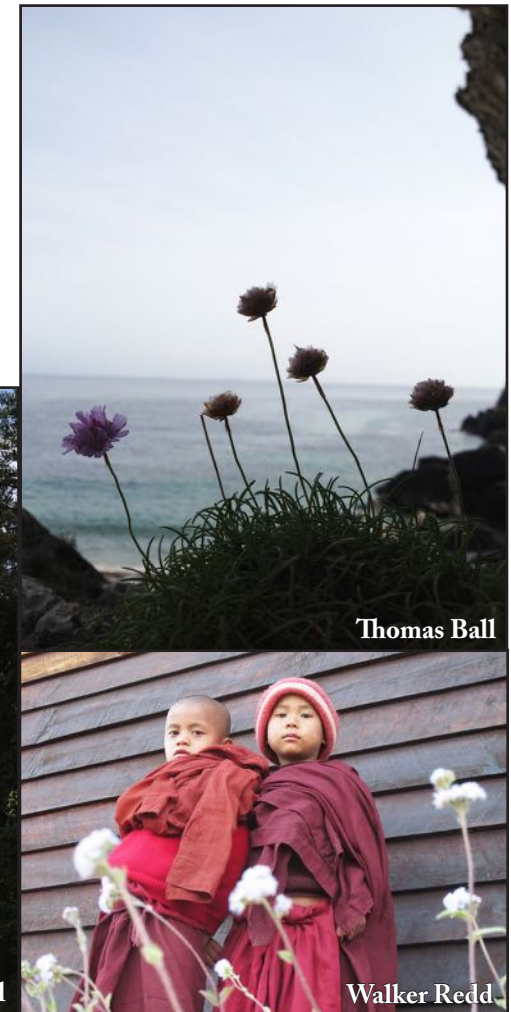
When I look into my hands, I can see you.

Written at kitchen counter next to mom as she ate breakfast, Nov 16, 2014.

Dad's first birthday with the ancestors



Thomas Ball



Thomas Ball

Walker Redd

Inelastic - Anisha Hegde

Doctors are jugglers, and this is not a metaphor.
Fumbling with cuff, stethoscope
and locating radial pulses, I am still a long shot
from the circus.

Doctors are journalists, the kind that ask
personal, uncomfortable questions.
Mental health, sex, bodily motions—valuing scraps
discarded from the dinner table.

Dropping the ball, writing a story without skills
to craft an ending or recognize the holes,
I knocked on your door, and you answered,
on the cancer floor, during quiet hours,
to a nervous girl with a too-crisp, too-white coat
to share the next hour with a first year medical student.

Running the marathon of maintenance chemo,
you spoke of a lack of sleep and a tired frame,
though, even before the words came, your eyes
betrayed the same

Yet you painstakingly rolled up your sleeve,
to assist me in taking your blood pressure,
and answered my inquiries of your current condition,
Then I asked about your family,
and you pulled out photo albums.

Your large family, my empathy for your daughters in college,
who love you dearly but find it difficult
to drive home on weekends, too caught up
with growing up

Your prolific career, your hobbies,
your laughs increasingly originating from
a hearth of mirth rather than sheer kindness,
and your rebellious body that
will always lose the fight with your soul—

Patients are teachers, you taught me.
You were sick, but you reached over to
facilitate physical touch, and to remind me
that sick is not even an ounce of your identity.

I am a nuisance, I so often feel.
New to the science, new to the doctor-patient dance,
in everyone's way, but the doctor and nurse and PA,
they have bottomless to-do lists. In this season, I have time
to marvel at your family portraits,
to ignore the clock and purely listen.

And I am not a physicist, tenth grade taught me.
Newton's laws, atomic equations, viscosity,
and me settling in for a
second-period nap.

This bleary past spoke of ideal gases:
particles that meet with elasticity and leave with
kinetic energy unaffected—arriving at cursory
intersections and departing not a joule disarmed,
challenged or gained; how simple it seemed.

But we are inelastic, I now so clearly see,
we do not, should not, leave unchanged.
You lifted my gaze from pre-drafted interview outlines,
from pursuit of my mentor's praise to your eyes piercingly green
against bare hospital walls, to your story intrinsically
worth hearing and telling and carrying with me.

I am changed. Made whole—conservation of energy,
conservation of momentum—but wholly messy, difficult, un-ideal,
human; my stubbornness, selfishness compelled to transform
by our inelastic collision.



Raj Clark

Sketches - Justin Kim

(Names and details have been changed)

Jeanette

Habit being so strong, all that seemed to remain was *Fine, how are you? Sweetheart... Excuse me. Oh goodness! So nice of you to come by. Thank you.*

(How silly of me to try to decipher.) There were occasional surprises

of course, like a sparker with no gas: *Don't you shove that in my face!*

Don't you be kicking that! What's this wowowowowowow?

Me! My husband! Look at that! Beautiful!

Where are you going? You'll be right back?

I want to get out of here.

I like you. Hah spice...

Wide-eyed, tongue clicking, smiling, laughing,
winking, whistling, blowing kisses,
there had been no question who wore the pants.

But now

Mom

had been dying for years.

Your mother is seventy-five;

What do you want?

How could we not?

Her grip, once strong,

seemed looser,

while losing

everything else.

Smelling a flower,

she nodded,

That will teach them.

Sandy

Asleep in that La-Z-Boy, magnifying glass in hand, large print book open,
I knock; he can't hear. Hearing aid in, bad ear toward me, we talk (he talks).

About Trish, her dimple, her paintings, her cooking, Alzheimer's, Reagan;

Princeton, Yale, Arizona; Johnny and friendly fire; Brian, Beth, and Sidney;

Kenneth, women, and motorcycles; Fyr Fyter, Between-the-Acts, and Thirst Day;

even Professor Einstein, Governor Roosevelt, Boss Daley, and Houdini.

Strong grip, no fishy handshakes. Plowing forward, losing no momentum.

No fall, cancer, or diverticulosis faze this force of a gentleman,

whose September 9th birthday apparently gave him nine lives.

George

"I don't need help."

Status post stroke of some sort,

and most physical therapy declined,

there he sat in his red electronic wheelchair,

plus or minus oxygen, arms drawn over his huge gut,

digits overlapping, pants uncomfortably twisted about him,

facing a TV playing soaps or History Channel.

Absolutely nothing was ever new around here,

except for that toy train moving across the toy tracks.

"I wish I had something more interesting to say." (Do you really?)

Nothing interested him as a young boy in Milwaukee, except for painting;

he put on his own art show a few weeks ago.

"Well, is there a chair for you to pull up or something?"

Food was "pretty grim." Here's a Baptist choir "to sing a requiem or something."

On his eightieth birthday, balloon tied to his chair, I asked him how old he was.

"Oh, seventy-four, seventy-five, seventy-six, something like that."

Whittled down by coughing, wheezing, UTI, virus,

a full blown hemorrhagic stroke ultimately did him in.

I offer him water during a bad coughing fit.

"No, I'll choke on that too."

"Is there anything else

I can do for you?"

"Not a thing.

Except perhaps

to teach me

how to walk across the room again."



Elizabeth Homan

The bugs huddled together within a narrowed, epithelial crevice. They all looked at each other, sodden, depleted, wanting. The leader was the expected one, the required one, the one who above all *led*, but he was sick. His cheeks were hollowed. His voice was gaunt as if catching in the wind all too soon before being heard by his comrades. He hated being like this but him and his brethren, well, had no choice. They all gazed at one another and wondered. How many would be around next time? Would they even be able to form a circle, a huddle?

The previous onslaught had been unexpected to say the least. The leader had comfortably told the troops, "Not today. Rest yourselves. Maybe see your families. Maybe do a little conjugation. Relax." They all had retreated to their small abodes, small dimples within the dermal framework of their all too humanizing town of Sebaceousville. Some engaged in that good old conjugation and even replicated themselves a few hundred times before it began. At first they thought they were all dreaming as a gentle fog descended over the pinkish expanse of town, shading their dimpled peep-holes to the outside world. The fog failed to lift and soon was superseded by dense foam, the kind all too horribly familiar to the residents and troops of Sebaceousville, that pungent, airy but suffocating foam, which carried with it a feeling of want. As if, it wanted to be invited every time but failed to receive an invite. As if it just decided to go ahead and invite itself and bring with it a gross, *no-one-wants-it* potato salad. But instead of curdled carbohydrate, it brought pungent alcoholism, an odor of death.

The residents had to decide in that moment of horrid realization that this moment was not a dream but was that uninvited, unexpected *invite*, whether to try to engage in fight, try to "figure this foam out," or just supplicate, just die quickly. Most decided to die quickly. It was the easiest choice. Most just submitted to the awful, uninvited guest and joined existence with a nature unexplored and suddenly enforced upon their once delightful world. But some, in that split, heavy moment, decided against this and put all their power, their will, their energies into figuring out just what this foam was and how it had the inexplicable power to kill their species. Some decided to quickly strengthen their little membranes that housed their vital organs. Some decided to bolster their replicative system and quickly replicate any and all DNA they had. Some decided, quite brilliantly, to modify their proteins, making everything internal somewhat stronger. Most, though however valiant and noble a cause, still died. Most, but not all.

The leader looked around at the all that were left and asked them, "How did you survive this time?" One replied, "I survived by strengthening my membranes with a fatty acid combination I had never tried before." Another said, "I quickly replicated all the DNA I had as fast as I could and a winning combination happened. I mutated to the form you see now." And finally, the third said, "I made my proteins better, smarter, by making them help, well *chaperone*, each other. They supported each other through the onslaught." They all stared at one another, silent, contemplating. Then one had a sudden realization and asked the leader, "Sir, how do you survive every time?" The leader looked down at his seemingly bleb-like form, bit out of shape, and replied stodgily, "Well soldiers, I survive every time because I take the wisdom of all my previous soldiers before me and use it for my own gain. Someone has to survive every time. Someone has to carry on our species, the legacy of our little Sebaceousville. And I've decided that someone is me. I actually decided that many eons ago, even before the start of our own Sebaceousville, when life was fairly simpler, and I was just living under a rock somewhere. I decided that I needed to start fortifying my defenses because I looked up one day and saw a new life-form, ever complex but ever

fallible, and I realized as long as I learned with every replication of my self, I'd forever be super." His comrades exchanged confused glances. One spoke, "You mean superior?" The leader grunted and almost coughed out, "No. I mean SUPER, bug." Then he extended his multi-pronged pilli to all his comrades and simultaneously killed and fused themselves to himself, fleshing out his hollowed face and making once sodden, pink again.

OSCE feedback: *Ashley did a wonderful job interviewing the standardized patient. She asked all the appropriate open-ended questions, allowing enough time for an adequate patient response before diving into more detailed follow-up that excellently cornered her differential diagnoses. She was cordial to the patient and displayed a moderate degree of empathy, as measured by our empathometer (patent pending). Her physical exam was focused but generalized enough to cover her differential. She listened to the patient's heart for an adequate enough time to determine the murmur. I could tell by her reaction upon listening that she must have heard the fake aortic stenosis. Her carotid radiation catch as well, well, was just brilliant. She most excellently interacted with the all-too standardized and scripted scenario with just the right amount of realness to make us think she will be an adequate enough doctor out there in that real world. However, she fails and has to redo this OSCE as she forgot the most important step for any patient interaction, whether real or not, and that is to GEL IN and GEL OUT.*



Comic by anonymous

Ayiti - Austin Sim

Embarrassed shoots poke through the chunks of concrete, attempting to discern the most efficient way to stretch. Their eagerness and greed is apparent. After the recent disturbances, they were happy to return to some semblance of normal life; ignorant of the world outside of the immediate vicinity. A momentary shadow passes over, followed by the foot. 8 1/2, worn treads (more like ridges, really). Those unlucky enough to be caught in the swath of destruction try to pick themselves up, disoriented and nonplussed. A puff of dust, the smell of baked earth. And they thought themselves lucky when the concrete barely missed them last month. Well, you can't win them all.

Continued on page 24

Lazy coils of barbed wire slink in the corner, next to the patchwork stone wall that is shored up by a hodgepodge of 2x4's. Creepers weave themselves through the barbs, intertwined rust and chlorophyll. Red and green: complementary colors on opposite sides, a chromatic duet of point and counterpoint flowing into the bittersweet harmony of the inanimate and life, metallic and vegetal. The wire represented a boundary sometime in the past, but now, that boundary is being dissolved as the wire becomes reclaimed by the green tendrils. Entropy takes its course, laughing in the face of the futility of structure. Despite the sharpness of the wire, the vines are inexorably set on their course and conquer. Slowly.

* * *

The mud is hungry. It slurps at our shoes and the legs of the cots, gladly accommodating intrusions into its private space. Squelch, squelch. Reluctant to relinquish anything from its greedy grasp, the mud is also lonely with nothing to reach out to, except for the sky. It sends out ambassadors stuck to shoes to find out more about life beyond. However, time passes and the mud loses interest as it ages and loses moisture, drifting off into an organic slumber only to be reawakened by the next rainstorm – a gift from the sky, its only real friend. Waiting.

* * *

The gnarled limbs that are poor cousins of the plywood are driven into the ground, a pathetic caricature of their original rooted life. Wized and desiccated, they gladly provide a service they were unable to while alive. Long since stripped of their youth and leaves, these branches came back from retirement, never really having let go. Oh, but how the world has changed! The harshness of wires, the alien crackle of the plastic, the cloud-like fabric. After having spent its entire life supporting its leaves, functioning as a support in this different sense is not much of a stretch. They are confused because they are covered up. Isn't the point to capture sunlight? Instead, they are half shrouded in darkness as people huddle within. Dark.

* * *

The hedge gazes up at the collapsed dome, mildly horrified. The stately columns that were quite polite neighbors lie broken, their spirits crushed. Fragments of balustrades, their little cousins, litter the courtyard around the hedge, snapped like twigs. It could not believe the demise of such an illustrious family, so easily toppled despite solid foundations. Mortar and debris flowed out the front door, choking the hedge with fine white powder. It is apprehensive. The fissures spider webbing throughout the entire building indicated an imminent collapse, delicately balanced just so, until the next breath of the wind. A white monolithic titan, bent over after a low blow, on the verge of losing consciousness: broken, but not beaten. Maybe.

* * *

The clouds hang low, defeated but still brooding. They huddle together with arms crossed, refusing the sun entry. And yet, they remain indecisive. Will they pour out their sorrows onto a land that has already experience more than its fair share of sorrows? Or will they sympathize and stay their hands? The swaths of greenery still seem sated from the previous rain, thrusting plump leaves every which way, jockeying for the best placement. However, the clouds now puff out their chests, regaining their sense of pompousness. They stand aloof, only associating with themselves and look down on the world. By the look of their sullen gazes, it seems that they have resigned themselves to hold off. For now.

* * *

The river bed rests uncomfortably, wanting desperately to cleanse itself. Bits of debris and refuse cling to it. It wants to reach out its watery arms and brush it all away like crumbs from a lap. Despite the recent rains, those arms were reduced to little more than feeble rivulets, unable to move anything really. In its prime, I'm sure its powerful currents once washed everything downstream effortlessly, but now its atrophied limbs flail fruitlessly. A rainbow of bright plastic is strewn among jagged rocks and silt, resolutely standing ground in the face of the opposition. The only change is through the hogs that walk through, picking out the choicest morsels, immune to the bed's faintly sweet and sour funk. Rummaging snouts and squat legs. As squat as the foreign storm drain. Sharp angles entrenched in a haphazard series of curves and bends. Ordered holes of the grids versus the jumble of irregularly shaped rocks and other debris. The river yearns for the glory days. It works toward regaining lost strength one day. Hopefully.

* * *

A shrine. An offering to the gods. A rocking chair in the corner, saints on the walls, sacks of food, bloodstains on the ground, chicken bones. The lock, hacked off by a machete, creaks discontentedly. Once these shrines are locked up, they cannot be opened again without dire consequences. They say that Papa Doc lost power when his wife hacked open a locked shrine, much in the same way we did. It really is hard to see how this motley assortment of trinkets constitutes voodoo. We must purify this house. The prayer circle struck me as slightly absurd, the collective exorcism even more so. Calling on God to purify the house and return it to its natural state struck me as ironic; the same was done in that room under a different system of beliefs, calling out to another deity. Creole, Korean English, all raised up to request the same thing. Repetition.

* * *

A field turned into an immaculate parade ground. It was confused by the sudden appearance of a neat network of tents and drainage ditches. Gone are the patches of grass that lovingly clothed the field. Gone are the small animals scurrying across, replaced by stone-faced soldiers running laps. LEFT right LEFT right. Countless boots pound and pound, a masseuse with a thousand dexterous fingers, kneading away into oblivion. Tent stakes prick the field, a grid of needles. The sun is setting, dinner. The field neither needs nor wants sustenance as the soldiers open boxes and pull tabs. Barbeque chicken and fried rice waft through the open spaces between tents. The field is not impressed. Emotionless, it keeps the guards company: a silent companion to absorb all of one's worries, all of one's fears, all of one's tears. Now the ground gratefully slurps up those tears that manage to fall. Gluttony.

* * *

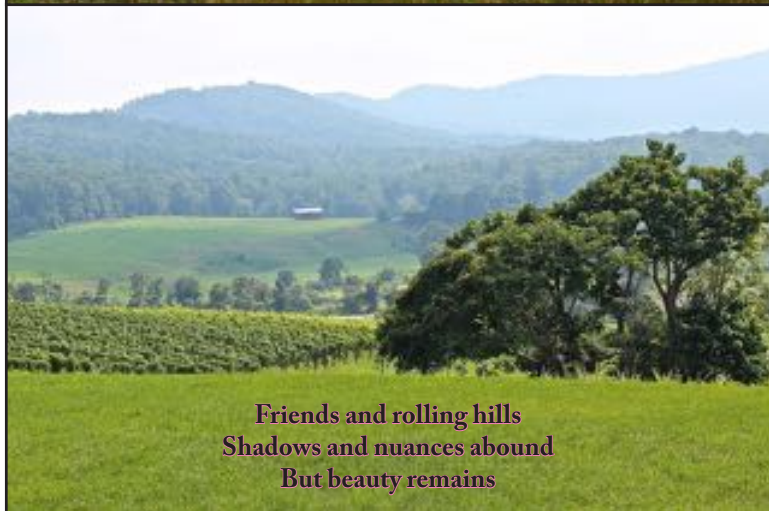
Heat. Vision that refuses to stay focused. Mild delirium keeping rhythm with the pounding. Time stands still. Everything dilates, the smell of sweat crawls by like an instant replay. The Caribbean sun is judging me, staring down its nose intently. Is what you're doing here really worth it? Do you have what it takes? I arch my eyebrow. Is this what heat stroke feels like? The bottled water fills my mouth. I think it would be perfect for making a cup of instant coffee. I shrug and shake my head. I refuse to cower under the baleful eye of the sun, reach out to grab the prescription out of the hands of the next patient, and lumber over to gather the requisite medications. I see the shoots under my foot, crushed. I kick aside the barbed wire next to our makeshift tables while mud clings to my other foot. The crackle of US AID tarps lashed to knobby branches is the percussion line punctuating the symphony of voices that made the clouds retreat. The sun reigns supreme yet again and life goes on. And on.



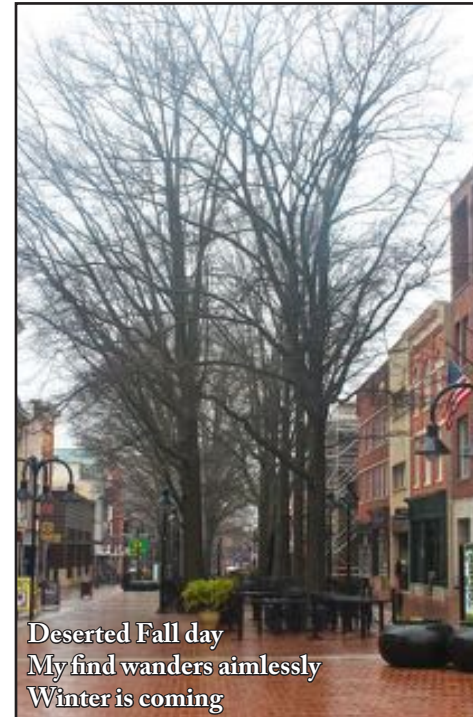
Winter snow parfait
Entreats the emerging babes
Mother Earth offers life



Home memories fade
Rolling mountains dance with fog
My heart still beats on



Friends and rolling hills
Shadows and nuances abound
But beauty remains



Deserted Fall day
My find wanders aimlessly
Winter is coming



Graffiti confronts
It boldly appears one day
Like a hare in March

Page 26-27 photography and poems by Krista Larson

Winter gives a break
Early springtime blossoms hope
Time will foster change



