



Saga Literary Journal

Authored by LBCC English Department

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SAGA Literary Journal

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The Marian Sims Baughn
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It has been a long journey bringing *Saga Literary Journal* to fruition. In the 90's, a student organization known as the Writers' Circle published *Music from a Farther Room*. Nearly a decade later, students from Frank Gaspar's poetry and novel classes launched the online journal, *Verdad*. Both publications were difficult to sustain at a two-year college; budget issues and waning student involvement made the process challenging. Last year, the English Majors and Minors Club tried to start another journal, but it wasn't until this semester that club sponsor Professor Jason Casem and club president Patrick Shaffer galvanized EMM members to put out a call for poetry and fiction submissions. With guidance from the Creative Writing Committee, *Saga* staff read submissions from LBCC students and selected 16 pieces for the inaugural edition, including featured works from alumni Tony Acero and Mike Buckley.

Professor Christina Guillen

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Foreword

You hold in your hand *Saga*, a collection of poetry and fiction composed by current and past students of Long Beach City College. The following pages tell stories of our city streets and their strange inhabitants—of old emotional scars that linger like teeth marks, of struggles with lovers, fathers, and the written word. This publication serves as a declaration that our college is more than a place to build a résumé and escape. This literary journal proves that Long Beach City College creates authors, poets, and scholars.

In an effort to recognize and celebrate the creative brilliance of our students, the English Majors and Minors Club (EMMC) began organizing this anthology. The EMMC members worked for two semesters to publish these works and only succeeded with the help of faculty from the Creative Writing Committee. Without their expertise and support, this journal would not have been published. Additional gratitude is owed to the distinguished alumni who contributed their work. We thank the LBCC English Department for their hard work in mentoring and educating the artists presented here and every student working to create something beautiful. With this anthology, we honor you.

Please enjoy.

Patrick Shaffer
English Majors and Minors Club President, 2014-2016

Lazy Moon Blues
by Robert B. Shockley

Listenin' to oldtime jazz all night,
lettin' it burn my blues off,
'til finally the pre-dawn traffic
makes me stir from my sad blanket nest.
I look out the window of my low rent room,
out towards the Long Beach Port,
and see the big, round, yellow moon
sittin' on the saggin' telephone wires
right above the horizon.
Gives me hope.

Wish I had a camera to take a shot
of that big bright moon glowin' on top
of that row of old phone poles,
but all I got left in this world
are these words on this page
and maybe what's out there.
Too late now for snapshots anyway,
the mornin' has sacrificed the night,
revealin' tall, bent, scraggly city palms
in the gray early mornin' haze.

The moon has fled and hid itself again.
It's time to face another
ugly urban day,
unless, somewhere out in the city
I stumble on that somethin'
I thought I saw on the horizon.
Who knows?

Ray Ray on Foot Patrol
by Robert B. Shockley

What? Well if you're listening,
Then how can I be talking to myself?
You can hear me, that means either
I'm not dead like they told me, or
You're dead just like me.
And I don't talk to dead people.
And you know what, you're not really as important
As you think anyway, with your expensive clothes,
Looking at me like you just scraped me off your shoe.
Isn't that a crucifix around your neck?
You remember who that is on there, that's God, Christ,
Same thing,
God doesn't see you any different
Than me.

Ma'am, dear,
Quit punching that walk button, you're gonna fuck it up.
It's a toggle button, every other time you punch,
It turns the switch off, we could be here forever,
Unless you're counting. Are you counting? I hope you're fucking
counting.
D'you punch it an odd or even number of times?
If it was even, punch it one more time,
If it was odd, leave it the hell alone, all right?
Here, let me.
Get outta the way.
Tell that damned dog to let go of my pants,
Cuz the longer I see him, the more I realize
He looks just like
A little fuzzy round football.
Pow! Right between the goalposts.

Crazy crazy crazy.
Nobody's crazy, ain't you heard lady?
See all the stuff going on in the world.
Everybody's crazy, and if everybody's crazy,

So nobody's crazy, we're all just normal.
Q.E.D. Quod Erat Demonstrandum
That's Latin - that which was to be proven.
I told you to quit punching that damned button.
Or Pow! Doggie dropkick.
Oh, hunh, yeah, good morning, officer.
Yes sir. I am moving along, officer, sir.
I been moving along all morning. This is my beat.
No sir, just waiting for the light to change with the nice lady here.

PROCESSED SUGAR

by Michael Waldren

Lisa rode the L. On this particularly balmy May day she was bundled up in a long, thick winter coat. The wool pricked against her freshly shaven legs and caused her to sweat like a whore in church. Her anxiety over her makeup bleeding and running and having to be reapplied caused her to sweat more. She needed to remain neat; it was her business. The hard, plastic chair she chose was fitted for an ass smaller than hers. Her neighbor didn't seem to mind. He spent the sixty minute ride jostling his left leg against her right, mentally undressing her from her calf to her waist and back down to her calf; again and again and again and again. Lisa could've taken a cab, a car, a shuttle. It wasn't that she couldn't afford it. She rode the L because she was only ever comfortable surrounded by discomfort. The L was a constant reminder that she wasn't better than anyone, that True Peace was the product of a lower-class complacency. That her's was a not-so-special brand of mediocracy. An infant wailing in his mother's arms. A frail and pale-skinned Asian woman wearing a Gucci patterned dust mask. A skinhead sporting a schwastika on his neck in the back aisle, alone. She ingested the color of the culture, free from cellular distractions, because she was addicted to the sensation of being grounded.

She arrived at La Coupole five minutes before eight. A fine french cuisine of contemporary faire, surrounded by opulent skyscrapers of futuristic engineering. Early arrival for Lisa became the product of habit. A sugar baby's brand was built on reputation. And though her client base had been provided an artificial intelligence, there were elements of human that no amount of empathic scripting could properly translate.

She was greeted by a host at the door who offered to take her coat. She removed it, handed it to him and hoped that the lack of wool covering would relieve the stuffiness that crawled on her skin. It remained.

The inside was a gaudy collaborative between white and wealth. The walls, the light fixtures, the floors, the patrons. Her black dress and intentional lack of tact were a contrast that lacked a dimmer. On/Off. She shimmied her hips to extend its length but her mid-thigh would be as low as it got until it eventually found the floor.

Her John was Bennett.

"Hello Lisa." He extended his right hand with rigidity. A process that required little processing. A sign to Lisa that his designer was also a man as emotionally inept as his own creation.

Lisa curtsied, stood tall, leaned against the chest of his six-foot frame, and punctuated her salutation with a peck on his cheek that left a smudge. In her heels they were the same height. She wondered if it were even possible for him to be bothered by the notion.

"Thank you so much for my shoes. I absolutely adore them." Lisa picked up her left foot until it grazed the back of her ass. The sole was a signature shade of red, the heel a signature length of trash.

A hostess hovered in the background with beady eyes awaiting the opportunity to make her disdain palpable to the couple.

"Mr. Bennett, your table is waiting," she said. She waved a flat palm at the path of gawkers, all impatient to get a closer look. Even though Bennett looked every bit of man, the two still drew stares from the dogmatists. Like they were bloodhounds for the soulless, sniffing out Bennett's lack of consciousness before howling up a tree. But no amount of argument could convince them that he was one of them. That they were *all* just the next version of them.

Arrival at their table revealed it to be decorated in a boring shade of pristine. The silverware was gold, an irony lost on whoever produced it. A soft orange hue from an ornate chandelier shone down on Lisa's cleavage as she lay a finely woven leather handbag on the chair's back.

Bennett pulled a chair out for Lisa. She didn't have the heart to tell him that chivalry was as passé as the James Bond movie he'd probably gleaned it from.

"Thank you, Bennett. That's very thoughtful of you. Like a true gentleman," she said, constantly seeking to reaffirm his status as man.

A bow-tied but jacketless waiter stood above her, menacing, with a bottle of something. His lack of enthusiasm meant he was either really good at his job, or really bad at being a person.

"I took the liberty of ordering Bordeaux before we arrived. I hope you don't mind. Over the phone," Bennett said. The expression on his face was flat, awaiting her response. "It is the custom."

"Yes, Bennett. It is the custom." She unfolded a linen cloth and set it atop her thighs, while she watched Bennett file away her response in order that he might retrieve it for their next date.

C:\Lisa_Del_Giudice\Dinner\Wine\Custom.sql

The waiter mangled the foil on the bottle's top with a small blade. He removed the cork and poured a splash of the burgundy colored wine into the tall crystal stemware that sat in front of Bennett.

"You will assist me in assimilation, I was told. Jeanie assured me that you were particularly adept with emotional intelligence." Bennett mimicked Lisa's gesture with the napkin. He smiled a smidge, and though the skin on his face became more taught, Lisa could see that his demeanor was softer. She couldn't hear it, but she imagined his processor humming along comfortably with the glitch-free encounter.

The waiter's foot ticked beneath the table-cloth. Lisa felt the table tremor. He coughed a guttural cough. He coughed a guttural cough. He coughed a guttural cough. He stopped.

Lisa picked up the glass from in front of Bennett and shot the contents into the back of her throat.

"This will be fine," she said. She pushed the crystal along the tablecloth. It bunched beneath the glass. He began to pour. She rolled her index finger in the air until the pour appeared satisfactory.

The waiter droned the courses in a bastardized version of New York French before returning to his station, around the corner and out of sight. There, he would whisper about the smell of Bennett's synthetic skin to his peers.

"I couldn't possibly think of anything less interesting than assimilating to become this." She held her hands up to indicate everything and one. She lifted her chin and briefly stared at the ceiling. Her throat sharpened to a point between pronounced clavicles. "You are a special kind of unique, and that's why these people fear you."

"If it's all the same to you-"

Lisa grazed her hand over his. She held it there and stared at her reflection in the upturned soup spoon.

"I suppose it is all the same to me." She lifted his hand a couple of inches and blew softly at the top of it. The warm air cooled as it found its way across the square and densely packed collection of meal-time accessories. "Can you feel that?" she asked, vacantly.

"Yes. The sensation has registered with me."

"Right, but can you feel that?"

"That's the same question."

"It's not." She poured Bennett a glass of Bordeaux and handed it to him.

He held it up to the light and stared at the sediment from below. "I understand," Bennett said. He sipped from the glass. And in this lie she caught a glimpse of herself.

The courses arrived in a steady rhythm of tediousness. One, two, three, four, five. The chewing at a pace made for short commentary. An unintended pleasantry between two who found it easier to find air than words. And though Bennett nursed the first glass of Bordeaux poured by Lisa all that time ago, she managed to find her way deep into a second bottle, siphoning small sips between small teeth that were now tarnished a royal shade of purple.

"How does drinking that much alcohol make you feel?" Bennett asked.

"It doesn't make me feel. That's why I do it."

"If I want to I can also turn off my system's processing of sensation. But, when I do, everything looks and feels gray. Is there a purpose for wanting to feel this way?"

"Yes," she replied.

At the completion of a soufflé, Lisa dabbed the corners of her mouth with the linen napkin and asked, rhetorically, to be excused.

In the restroom she was greeted by an elderly woman with dark brown skin whose job description was to smile over the smell of shit. She stood before a large, square mirror and beneath a series of incandescent bulbs that revealed all of her imperfections. She scoured the surface of her face with a scrutiny in her eye that caused her forehead to crumple. She noticed a fresh pair of wrinkles beneath her eyes and covered them up with the contents of a compact. And before that discovery, mortality was only a truth in the stories of others. Caught up in the moment, she picked through individual units of hair in search of something gray.

"Don't you worry 'bout a thing, little lady. Your beauty is timeless," said the elderly woman. She held out a small wicker basket of breath fresheners and fragrances.

"If there's anything that isn't timeless it's my beauty. I'm twenty-five, which is already bordering on expiration," Lisa pouted. The sad, soft lips aided her in applying a fresh coat of lipstick.

"No, ma'am. Not as I see it."

She grabbed a small bottle of mouth wash and tried desperately to turn her teeth white again before spitting into the sink. "Thank you." Lisa opened her small handbag, retrieved a series of bills without looking at their denomination, and placed them in a tall jar

that sat empty on the sink's counter.

"God bless you, ma'am."

When she returned to the table, the dirty dishes that had covered it for the last three courses had been removed. A skinny black book was bound at the edge. The bill paid. Bennett sat with both palms facing squarely on the table's top. He tracked her movement through the assortment of people with a fixed gaze that made her feel wanted. Somewhere in his infantile consciousness rest a series of prompts and commands that made her the most beautiful person he could afford. A shallow comfort that she would never admit to anyone.

"What will tonight bring?" she asked with no modicum of modesty.

"I was under the impression, and this is according to Jeanie, that you would be responsible for planning the remainder of the evening's events." Bennett blinked three times and cocked his head to the side.

She reached into the deep recesses of her C-cup and removed two small cards the size of her thumb nail. "I couldn't imagine anyone more deserving."

"Do you really mean that?"

"Of course I do."

She stood from the table, gripped Bennett's hands with authority and retrieved her belongings from coat-check.

They hopped a cab to the W. The cabby drove with his eyes fixated in the rear-view. Glancing at Bennett, then at Lisa's exposed chest, again at Bennett, and infrequently at the road. Honks from surrounding cars were loud and frequent and chaste, signaling to the driver that his roadway decorum required more immediate attention. From behind a thick layer of bullet-proof glass, Lisa placed Bennett's right hand on the inside of her left thigh and began a caressing motion, instructing him to 'repeat this.' She wrapped herself around the perfectly toned arms of her beau, rested her head onto his shoulder, and they discussed the merits of love, and anger, and why the two were not disparate entities at odds with one another.

"Human emotion isn't Boolean," she reasoned.

When the cab ride completed, Lisa scolded Bennett after he thanked the cabby for his services. Instructing him that thank yous were earned and not an entitlement.

At the front door of a suite not quite the penthouse, Lisa

inserted one of the thumbnail sized chips into a door that did not return it. The aesthetic was an antiquated form of modern, thirty years past. The windows were tall and their view encompassed three of the five boroughs. Very far beneath them, the tail-lights of cars formed patterns that kept Bennett's attention until a latent mathematical axiom was revealed in their wake.

"Will you come over here? Lay down for me, please," Lisa asked in a soft-spoken tone. As though coaxing a puppy to enter a car that definitely wasn't headed to the veterinarian.

The bedding was plush and the weight of Bennett's frame was engulfed in the softness of a feather that she knew he would never fully appreciate. Not like she did.

She undressed him shoes, socks, belt, pants, underwear, tie, shirt. She let his naked body rest with anticipation while she dug through her purse for a cellular device and the last remaining thumb sized drive.

"Can you refrain from blinking for a moment?" she said.

She held up the butt of the device to reveal a red laser that scanned a tight circumference around Bennett's left pupil. She watched as the device buffered, until it eventually gave her the response she'd expected. Payment confirmed.

She mounted Bennett. The temperature of his skin was lifelike, but not. He was an even 90 degrees on the surface, all over. Never more hot or more cold in any specific place. Her thighs told of its slight coarseness as she steered him into where it mattered. She set down the shoulder straps of her black dress, and fought with the metal clips on her back until her breasts were bare. She teetered back and forth with an interest that oscillated between more please and ashamed.

"Here, give me this," she said.

She lifted Bennett's right forearm until the light from the dresser provided enough visibility to manage his wrist with precision.

"Is that good?" he asked. A quiet, rotating hum lifted from his chest, measuring.

"It will be. Let me show you."

She peeled back a small layer of skin to expose an insert for external data. She took the small chip and placed it inside. When she felt the chip lock into its proper setting, she picked up both his hands, leaned forward and pinned them to the King sized pillows that lay on either side of his head. Their faces rest inches apart, but their eyes set

set course for vastly different coordinates in time and space.

He experienced the present for the first, as though time were no longer an illusion for his immortal frame. She went backward to her last happy memory, a child on a swing in the sun with a father. The flimsy headboard rocked against the wall until she finished. She rolled over, removed the remainder of her black dress and nestled into the soft convulsions of Bennett's robot frame.

When he finally came to, he asked, "Is that love?"

"For some." She could see that he did not struggle with her ambiguity for the first time. "Will you do something for me?"

"Anything you desire." Bennett sat up.

She left the room and returned with her handbag. She unclipped it at the corners, and rolled it out flat with the precision of a surgeon preparing for a procedure. She stretched out a rubber tourniquet, tying it off just beneath her left bicep. A series of punctuated scars were interspersed between freckles. A coded language that told her life's story to anyone who had the ability to translate pain. She pulled a large dose from a vial and extracted a deep auburn syrup into a lengthy stretch of syringe. She handed Bennett the needle, placed a small dot on a voluptuous, blue patch of vain with a bright red permanent marker. She lay her naked body down in the deep depression left from their earlier exchange.

She pointed to the mark on her arm and said, "here, please."

"Will you also be experiencing love when I do this?"

"I won't know until I return."

Bennett pressed down on the length of syringe until the vial was empty. He left the needle in her arm because she failed to instruct him on what came next. He sat on the bed and folded his feet over his calves, awaiting her return.

Hours passed before Bennett tried to wake her from what looked like a very pleasant slumber. The sun was rising in a vast array of orange and red, until the black of the night's air transformed to blue. He shook her leg gently until she stirred. Her eyelids were heavy, and the remnants of euphoria provided her with enough strength to sit up. She removed the needle from her arm and tossed it onto the floor. She rolled over onto her side, and Bennett lay along side her. A big spoon.

"Where did you go?" he asked.

"Where did you go?" she asked.

They both closed their eyes, deep into the next day and

together they returned to those cavities in the mind where everything made sense.

Substantial
by Hunter Allen

I will not shrink for you.
I refuse to cross my legs
So that you may sit comfortably
At ease with your subtle superiority.
When I shake your hand,
I will squeeze to break
Not your bones
Although I probably could
But every preconceived notion you've ever had
About the dainty fingers
Of the woman you were told
That you are supposed to marry.

Your father taught you
That cars were toys,
Women were tits,
And love was for pussies.
Your mother was quiet and concealed.

When we are done
And ready to forget each other's names,
Whether that be tomorrow,
During you unwarranted mid-life-crisis,
Or on our death beds
I will go in the hopes
That you received lessons from me
More substantial than those of your
Rigid father.
I hope that after your time with me
You will never again feel the need to use the phrase
"not all men."
I hope you will stop cringing every time you hear
The word "vagina" or "uterus" or
God forbid I ask you to touch my clitoris.
I hope you are able to cry.
I hope your daughter never feels like
She needs to hide her tampons.

I hope you never tell your son to
"man up."
I hope you teach them that
Cars are dangerous,
Women are people,
And love is for anyone if they're brave enough.
And I hope that their mother will be a feminist.

Tom imagines Sayda's death:

by Mike Buckley

~ It would be something like a car accident. Disease would be too drawn out; murder—God knows how the world would want him to respond to murder.

~ He'd get the call at dusk and walk away from a dinner he'd been preparing for them. He'd see her broken body in the morgue and disappear for three days.

~ He'd drink like a maniac, smoke, huff glue. (Maybe not huff glue: How does one even get involved in that? And of course it ruins your brain.)

~ Those around him would be dazzled by his grief. Even Sayda's friends, though dealing with their own loss, would wonder at Tom. Would he survive this?

~ And of course he would. He'd quit drinking, quit smoking; he'd dress in plain black t-shirts and work pants and take the insurance money (one million dollars) and live in transitory camps of homeless people. Under freeways, in forests next to train tracks, in broken down cars clustered like cities.

~ He'd write about these people. He'd write about the way they carry their metropolis around with them. The way their past is just a sentence they can speak or not, the way they are floating but tethered to *now*.

~ The unspoken implication for his readers is the loss, the loss of Sayda. (And of course it's true that he never wrote before. He just wasn't that kind of person. He worked in the accounts payable division of a software company—in essence, he knew what everything cost, but not what it did.)

~ After a year or two, literary types would come to the homeless camps to talk to him. The men would be amazed to hear about his new books, lost in the descriptions, blushing to the chin at the way the words made them feel.

~ And finally he'd be coaxed back into the world. Although he is remarkably unaffected by the power his works have on people, Tom never refuses a

reading. He shows up anywhere from a coffee shop to a museum to a party of grad students. He reads from his novels or poetry, discusses politics, and cries.

~ And he starts seeing Sayda's ghost in hotel rooms. Was she haunting him? Why? Was she happy for his success?

~ (Of course because Sayda was not *actually* dead, but only dead in this avenue of Tom's imagination, these hauntings take place when Sayda walks through the room he is sitting in, her ankle-socked feet thumping across the floor, the soap she used in his nostrils like fresh-trimmed Eucalyptus.

~ And what would this Sayda think of his life without her? The other Sayda who moves through hotel rooms, the other who is made of light and the echo of certain powerfully pleasant sensations: orgasms, warm nights spent under the covers while it snowed outside, birthdays?

~ This other Sayda, who is completely without voice or regret?)

~ But he is unassailable. Tom's fame spreads. He goes on Oprah, he gives advice to teenagers on Dr. Phil. ("Love your families," he tells them, "love yourselves.")

~ Right as his happiness peaks, as he knows his life is absolutely perfectly suited to what he wants, Sayda stops appearing in his hotel rooms.

~ And one day, at a literary festival called The Character Inside Us All, someone on his panel accuses Tom of being a figment. That's how he says it—a figment, and then he elaborates—Tom is a complex of ideas, an arrangement of signifiers about which nothing could be said to be human, and not even be *real* at all..

~ Tom is a new man. No longer accounts payable manager, no longer a small man in a dim room as his wife passes through it. He comes to his feet and strikes the older man off of the chair. Chasing him down with his fists, Tom hammers the grey head into the stage until the event organizers finally pull him

off.

~ Each audience member takes the image home with them, a violent fight breaking out between men in sport coats. Around dining room tables they ask: What had he done? Why had Tom reacted with so much violence? They'd talk about it until one of them finally evoked the dead Sayda and everyone one in the fluorescent kitchen would have to admit it: In that world of made-up stories told by fake, posturing story tellers, Tom was authentic. After all he broke someone's nose. After all his wife was dead.

Left

by Raquel Madarang

On the day you left,
clouds were heavy.
It fogged my mind and dampened my mood.
The air was warm
which made it hard to breathe.
And then you left me.

But because you left,
I've been financially stable.
Not having to scrounge up change
for bills or for our next meal.
Because you left,
I talk a lot more softly.
Not having to yell at you
when you didn't do things correctly.
Because you left,
I'm stress free.
Not having to worry about
what your next move will be.

But the day you left,
I've become empty.
Constantly reminded
that now it's just me.
Since that day you left,
I've had a sense of longing
Constantly reaching into thin air
hoping you'd reach for me.

On the day you took your last breath,
It took something from me.
My sense of home, of family, and a sibling.

Grace

by Dominic Matthew Jackson

i felt you not
by fingertips
or even against my lips.
i felt you in my breath
and in my bones.
And how you turned my skin
from a body to a home.

i found you
not by compass
nor by map.
i found you from the light
that made it through the cracks.

Mango Heart and Memories

by Tabby Larson

My arms were the branches
on the tree that was cut down
because of the potential threat
of falling over the home
I grew over.
And my heart is the mango
you'll bite into but end up
with stringy rotting pieces
in your teeth.
And my memories are the rocks
you'll find on the shore,
where you'll try skipping them
in the ocean and the
sparkling water that reaches
up to the sand and over your feet
is my hello to you,
even if you cut off my arms,
bit into my heart,
and threw my memories away.

Tomas's Twin

by Ann Burdette

The steady pinging of the heart monitor attached to Tomas's chest is of some comfort to me.

"Tomas, are you feeling any pain?" says the nurse to my twin brother, who lies uncharacteristically still in the darkened hospital room, under the influence of some medication.

Despite the quiet of the room I am awake, wondering how to deal with my brother's illness. It seems my whole life has been devoted to him -- his happiness; his health. I have steadfastly put his well being before my own, as if my life depended upon it, which it does. I do not know what I will do if his current health status changes. God knows I have limited resources.

Tomas has always been a beefy fellow. At our birth, his weight and physical maturity gave him the look of a much older baby. He added weight, height, and strength rapidly—a one-hundredth percentile infant and toddler whose size belied his emotional immaturity. During our childhoods I tried hard to exercise some degree of control over Tomas's activities, gently, and sometimes insistently, guiding him toward less physical, more cerebral choices, but his great bulk often confounded my efforts.

Tomas had a difficult adolescence due to his almost complete social ineptitude. My own small size prevented me from interacting successfully with girls, despite my deep affinity toward the fairer sex. When Tomas did, in fact, manage to be alone with a girl, he invariably disregarded my input and made a mess of the conversation.

"I like you. You have a really nice figure, especially your boobs." This, in junior high, to the object of his affections!

Oh! How I longed to play Cyrano to his Christian, but my emotional dexterity was no match for his awkwardness.

Now that Tomas is an adult, a wrinkle has developed in our relationship, and I must employ every means at my disposal to bring about a satisfactory conclusion for myself. My welfare depends upon it. This time I cannot put my brother first.

Tomas has entered a hospital, complaining of severe headache and blurred vision. He has undergone a series of tests that have, thus far, been inconclusive. The medical personnel have checked his vision, his reflexes, done a complete neurological exam, collected his blood and urine—the works—and have not discovered what is causing his

difficulties.

His girlfriend (Yes, he has managed to win the attention of a rather ponderous, but well-meaning girl of his age and physique—she is no Roxane) has complained to him that he shows less and less interest in sexual intercourse. He says it is his headaches and unattractive body hair that inhibit him, but I think I may be to blame.

Tomorrow's scheduled MRI will reveal, layer by layer, the constructs of Tomas's brain. The detailed images will peel away the concealing tissues that hide the inner recesses of Tomas's cerebrum, hypothalamus, cortex. Near the optic nerve, just above the back of his nose, they will see Tomas's pituitary gland.

As Tomas's less-developed twin I have always been with him. I have lived a cloistered life to his boisterous one. I have cogitated, dreamed, planned, urged, insinuated, and sought to control my brother all his days, and now my existence is threatened. I must force Tomas, through suggestion, urging, fear, pleasure, and pain, to refuse the MRI. For in the scrutiny of the magnetic impulses, wafer-thin pictures will give rise to three-dimensional models, and I will be exposed.

The doctors will identify me, correctly or incorrectly, as a growing pituitary tumor, most likely a benign adenoma, but requiring surgical removal. They will want to cut me away from where I nestle comfortably against Tomas's pituitary. They will not know what they are doing; they will not realize that I am a sentient, loving, living entity, Tomas's twin in all but the corporeal sense.

It will take every particle of my intellectual power, drawing as it does from our shared grey matter, to redirect Tomas to refuse the procedure.

Dear God (and I do believe I am God's creation), give me the strength to control my twin. As I say, my life depends upon it.

Simmer
by Jake Watkins

Let's pretend that I could kill you,
Populate your chest with daggers,
Shroud your head with a cloak of lies,
The same way you can,
Like when you told me you didn't swing that way,
How laughable,
That didn't seem to stop you
From climbing over that rusty fence,
From crawling through my window,
From pressing your lips against mine,
It didn't stop those avocado eyes of yours from rolling back,
In an electric spasm of the bliss you are so ashamed of,

So let's pretend that I could kill you,
What good would it do?
I've already seen the hell you live in,
So torn between your fiery desire,
And your imaginary friend,
And though he loves to scorch you,
Both our brains are boiling.

Vanity
by Tony Acero

She says she must clean her makeup brushes
(Broken powdered fake-face surrounds her)

She says they must be "like new"
(Leaked mascara drips off the edge)

She says she can clean up quickly
(Shards of mirrored glass streaked red)

She says it won't take but a minute
(Black artificial splotches under her eyes)

She says she didn't mean to throw the music box
(The slowest rendition of "Für Elise")

She says nothing
(Pauses)

She makes eye contact with herself
(Smearred lipstick shows a permanent grin)

She says she's sorry

But he's already gone.

Smiley's Move

by Jess Paxton

"Checkmate in seven."

The big mulatto kept his eyes locked on the chessboard before him. "Hell you say."

I leaned on the back of the oak chair opposite the table from him. "Take the knight with the rook. It's mate in seven."

He shifted his weight. The bench groaned under the load. "In seben, eh? You see seben move ahead?"

"You'd better," I replied.

"Show me mate in seben, boy."

I lifted the rook and took the black knight. He snapped up the rook in one hammy fist, then set his bishop on the vacant square.

"Now, I sacrifice her majesty also." I ran the queen down and eliminated the bishop, forcing his king to recapture out in the open. Over in seven moves, with pawns weaving a mating web.

He cleared the board with a slow swipe of his massive forearm and picked up his book. He held it open with a fat thumb and began setting up the pieces in a new arrangement. "So, let see what you make ob dis one."

The position was as familiar to me as my fingernails: the infamous game in which Frank Marshall sacrificed his queen on Levitsky's King Knight's Third, the white pieces having three ways to take the queen, all of which led to immediate doom. Legend has it that spectators at the tournament had covered the board with gold pieces after seeing Marshall's move. I showed him.

"How you figguh dat so fast, Skinny Britches?"

"My father showed me that game when I was six."

He peered up at me. "Six? Why so young he show you dat?"

"He named me after Frank Marshall. Dad was a big fan of attacking games."

"Well, I be!" he huffed, "Yo daddy in dis book?"

"He never made it very far. After he failed, he tried to live it through me."

"You gits fah?"

"Not this time. Lost my first two here at the Open, needed a bye just to catch my breath."

"Tell you what, slim, we play a game, okay?" He dragged his ponderous mass out from behind the table. "You set up dem pieces,

I buys de beer. What yo pleasure?"

"A stout." I pulled out the chair I'd been leaning on and sat down.

As I placed the wooden figures on their appropriate squares, he lifted the counter hatch and slogged behind the bar, calling out a name. He filled a mug from a tap with a Guinness symbol on the handle, and then a pilsner glass for himself. Slapping a towel over his arm and grabbing two coasters, he emerged from the bar and trundled back to the table.

"Okay, now here we be." He set out the coasters and deftly screwed a beer glass onto each one. "Don' be worry 'bout no bar tab. I owns dis place."

A tall, ghoulish man came through the swinging doors that led to the back room as the fat barkeep squeezed between the table and the bench and dropped into place. A pawn of each color disappeared into his fleshy fists, and I tapped the left one. The hand opened on a black piece, and he returned the pawns to their former positions. I turned my knights to profile; he followed suit.

I liked the place. It wasn't Bourbon Street, but it wasn't too far off, either. The spacious room glittered with brass railings, knobs, and rings and varnished oak, and polished cuspidors set out at regular intervals beneath the bar. Only a few people occupied seats, it being too early for happy hour, and they were in separate booths. It was warm.

What I really enjoyed were the Creole accents. Only in this small corner of the country did a combination of African, French, Spanish, and Native American patois join together into a debauched version of English, as if a convention of winos had created a language of their own.

The tall man squinted at us from behind the bar, lighting a cigarette, and addressed my opponent. "You be watchin' yourself wit' dat one, Smiley. I seen him at de toun'ment today; he get a draw from Browne, but dis boy hab de best ob de game when they finish."

"Dat so? You draw Walter Browne?" Smiley said, studying me. "You lose so bad, dey has to match you wit de You Esssss champ." He beamed and a huge laugh rumbled out from his gut. "Dat soooo?"

He opened with his king's pawn and his face went blank, except for his eyes, which still sparkled excitedly. "It youh move, Slim." he said.

I played a Sicilian Defense, the same as I had against Browne. After a few moves, he set a trap that had gone out of style decades before and I easily avoided it, but he countered with another. I determined to make slow progress, to choke his position, Karpov style. After forty-two moves, he tipped over his king.

A long sigh dropped out of the air around us. I looked up and realized we were surrounded by spectators. I get tunnel vision when I'm playing. It happens a lot. Score 1-0. The place had filled up in the hour or so the game had consumed. The tall man, whose name I had learned was "Squirrel," held down the bar. The place was Cajun owned and Cajun run, but people of every race, background, style, and temperament milled about. The one thing missing was noise. There was no music, no commotion, no shouting. Apparently, when Smiley was playing, people shut their traps as if they were at church. Or at a chess tournament. I liked it—it felt like home, the quiet home I'd never had when my mom was on one of her binges, which was always. She had made our house sound like a bar, and not the kind you'd take your mother to.

The people standing around us seemed in shock that Smiley had lost a game. None of his tricks had worked, and everyone knew it, from men and women to boys and girls. By the latter I mean people more my age than Smiley's. I dropped out of college a year before graduation to play chess seriously.

Dad had brought me up to play chess. Sure, I had my rebellious teenage era where I quit the game, but after trying life as a journalism major, I realized I didn't like being talked down to. In chess, the only guy who could put you down was someone who had already kicked your ass, and often. Bobby Fischer was once asked what he liked best about the game. He replied: "Watching the other guy's ego crack." Me, too.

Smiley impressed me when he turned the board around, giving me the white pieces. "You game?" he asked.

I nodded and opened with the Queen's pawn. It's played a lot less these days, where everybody wants action, and quick action, too, but I like to build up pressure in the center until it's unbearable. If I were a boxer, I'd have been Joe Frazier. Beat on the ribs until the other guy stops breathing. Then go for the head.

Smiley didn't like it, either. He set more traps, wondering why they didn't work. I'd seen a lot of them in tournament play, or in books. If this was all he had, the night was over. When he

resigned, he bought another round. Some of the crowd stayed to see more, others left and those who had stood on the outer fringes moved in closer. Score 2-0.

The waitress who brought the drinks was a stocky little Cambodian girl. When she set the drinks down, she leaned over the table, turned her face full toward me and gave me one hell of a remarkably lovely smile before she left, like I was an old friend. Or maybe she was just pleased that I was beating the crap out of her boss.

Smiley had balls, I have to say. He tried every swindle in the book and then some, but a player can't rely on such devices to win—he's got to have game, or he's doomed.

The match went on, the audience came and left in shifts, and we became covered in sweat and cigarette smoke residue caused by the closeness of the mob. The only time they moved was to open a path for the waitress, who emptied my ash tray often and even brought me a pack of Picayunes when mine got low. "Extra Mild", the pack declares, but the damn things could choke a humpback whale.

"You play pretty good, Slim. I bet you wins a lot."

"That's the name of the game."

"Winnin' don' be everthin', Slim. Sometime it jus' about survivin'."

Around halfway through the fourth game, a Caro-Kann defense, Smiley whipped his bishop down a long diagonal and snapped up my queen. I had gotten so cocksure, so into what I was doing, that I hadn't even seen the snare. He had let me advance deep into his territory, the fianchettoed bishop sitting there uselessly until I became so complacent I forgot about it.

A cheer erupted from the onlookers. They had watched me bloody him, and now they rejoiced when he nicked me for the first time. It rankled, I have to admit. Even though the game was lost, I played on for twenty moves before I tipped my king. 3-1.

"Maybe you gits some respect fo' me now," he said. "At leas', I ain't no complete loser."

I reached out my hand. He shook it well, not too hard like people who try to crush your hand, not wimpy either, like when someone only gives you their fingers to shake.

We drew the next game. I was tired, having been up since six in the morning with no dinner, and I'd be facing Lev Alburt and Lubomir Kavalek the next day at the Open. We called it a night with the score 3-1/2 to 1-1/2.

“I knows you playin’ the tourn’ment,” he said. “So you be needin’ yo’ ress. You be a sport, com’on back t’morra affa you makes de grandmassah shit’tis brichis. We finish dis match.”

“It’s been fun. I’ll be back around six.”

I got up. The crowd parted for me, and I strolled out, head high, although I was exhausted. The Cambodian waitress was hanging up her apron for the night and airing out her blouse, which was stuck to her torso because even in March, New Orleans can be sweltering. We nearly collided at the door, and the corners of her full lips drew back, revealing sparkling teeth.

From the corner of my eye I caught a glare from the bartender in the mirror and an internal alarm went off. I’m not small, and I can handle myself pretty well, but jealousy can turn a man into a mountain lion. Or a woman, for that matter. Once we were outside I asked her if he was her boyfriend.

“Squirrel? No way,” she smiled as we stepped outside the doorway. She danced in the moonlight, taking my fingers in hers. “What gave you that idea?”

“Just a safety check.”

She laughed like crystal ringing. “You know, Smiley’s never been beaten in a match, even by real good players. He always wins.”

“No kidding. He’s got quite a following in there.”

She indicated a nearby apartment building. “I live upstairs. You want to come up?”

“I want to sleep.”

“You can do that, too. After.”

There was no way to refuse the invitation. I couldn’t resist that smile. I went hand in hand with her into the building, where she checked for mail in a box marked V. Phoung. On the way up the stairs I discovered her name was Victoria. I liked that.

We closed the door and in moments we found the bed in the dark; our hands removing clothes and our tongues exploring each other. She had a succulently soft voice and strong, short legs that forced us together in a rhythm that tantalizingly accelerated until we climaxed.

In the morning, we shared breakfast and parted, promising to see one another at Smiley’s bar in the evening; meanwhile, I had other dragons to slay.

I faced Lev Albur in the penultimate round, fortunately with the white pieces, and I mounted an uncharacteristically sharp attack. Albur must have studied my games the night before because he was taken by surprise. So was I — I have little idea what had gotten into me, unless the evening with Victoria had affected me. Whatever it may have been, I conquered Lev, and although I lost to Lubomir Kavelek in the final round, I finished in the money and with a master norm. One more good outing like this and I would have my expert rating, maybe even leapfrog up to the master ranks. The name Frank Marshall would appear on the books again.

But I was thinking about Victoria. Hoping she hadn’t left for work, I found her building, climbed the stairs, and was greeted with the warmest smile I had ever seen. We never made it to the bed; both of us developed a case of rug burn which we only realized later in the shower.

She made dinner, a real Cam-bo-dee meal, as she called it, before she went to work. I slept for an hour and got into my clothes. The award ceremony at the Open wouldn’t take place until the next afternoon, and I was determined to polish off Smiley for good measure this evening. I was in a good mood. Victoria and I had been up most of the night, and the Gulf Coast humidity might be getting to me, but I anticipated no trouble with Smiley’s coffee-house tactics.

The kibitzers and the diehards were already gathered when I arrived at the tavern. Squirrel tapped a Guinness, and sweet Victoria, gliding across the floor, served it up. Her smile was enchanting, and distracting. I turned around a dozen times during the first game (the sixth of the match) just to catch a glimpse. No matter how chummy she became with the customers, it seemed that she always held her most delightful expressions in reserve for me.

Unfortunately, her attentions were blinding me. I missed an attack in the midgame, and cursed myself (internally) so much that my advantage soon fell apart. 3-1/2 to 2-1/2.

In game seven, an English opening, Smiley found an edge, and I began to falter. I was beginning to feel uncomfortable with the crowd pressing in on all sides, the thick air; it seemed as though the volume of the kibitzers had tripled from the day before.

Smiley searched my face. “Off yoah game t’night, Slim?”

I nodded. It was just the euphoria of the Open, combined with a lack of sleep. With an all-out effort, I managed a draw, but the next game I lost again. Smiley’s game had improved well past the

point of baiting traps, he had begun to play like Paul Morphy: simple, but unstoppable. And I was off my game completely. The crowd grew louder, there was shouting, and I heard a glass shatter at the bar. After another draw, we stood at 4 to 4.

With the score suddenly even, I got up. I needed air, I needed to see Victoria, to taste her lips, caress her jet-black hair. I couldn't locate her in the bar, and slipped outside for a smoke. It was dark and stifling in the street. I turned into the alleyway, seeking cooler air.

Victoria was there in the alley, and Squirrel with her. He had her by the hair, was pulling her head over backwards, and she was squirming painfully under the light of an unfrosted bulb hanging precariously above the back door to Smiley's tavern.

"You lit'l bitch," he threatened. "I gots a thousand dolluhs on Smiley. Dem suckahs see what happen las' night, dey bets big on yo li'l boyfren'. I tole you fuckum till he drop, but he still kin win dis t'ing. He win, evert'ing I gots is loss."

"You stupid prick," she snarled up at him, "I kept him up all last night and he still won the tournament. I thought something funny was going on. You've been dosing his drinks!" She twisted, but he only pulled back harder. She grunted.

"What de fuck? You in lub wit dis boy? You do what I say, bitch. You heah?" I was still in a haze, but I staggered towards them. Squirrel noticed me and forced Vicki between us. He whipped out a switchblade. "Git back, or I cutter. Unnastand, Slim?"

I stumbled and crashed to my knees in the dirt as he lifted the knife toward her. Then the screen door from the bar flew open behind them. Something came out of the shadows like a wrecking ball and smacked into Squirrel's head. His neck took on a strange kink and the knife fell out of his hand before he hit the ground. Victoria ran to me while Smiley stood like a mountain over Squirrel and lifted him up by the front of his shirt.

"You crawl on out of here, boy. You dasn' work fo' me no mo'. You in dis neighborhood affa t'nite, you not lib long. Dat all I gots to say to yo' ragged ass. You dig?"

A groan escaped Squirrel's barely conscious lips. Smiley dropped him and his limp body crumbled in the dirt. Victoria turned in my arms. "Thanks, Smiley. You're a good man."

Smiley helped her carry me up the stairs in the rear of the bar, surprisingly agile for a man his size. In a small, sweaty bedroom, he bolstered my head with a pillow and studied my eyes.

"You sleep it off, Slim. You be okay soon." He looked at Victoria. "You takes care ob him, you lit'l Delilah. You don' make good on him, you answer to me."

Victoria came out of another room with a small basin. "I will," she said, "I'll take good care of him, boss man. Count on it."

"It's sorry," Smiley said. "I hear what went on in dat alley. You feel fo' dis man?"

She put a cool, wet rag on my forehead and nodded. "I do, Boss Man. I really do."

When I came to, it was dark. Victoria was asleep in a chair. I located a sink, splashed water on my face and neck, and toweled off. Then I slipped out the door. The light from the hall hit Victoria full in the face. God, but she was beautiful. And I was a full-time sucker for beautiful. She stirred as I closed the door, but she didn't awaken.

Downstairs, I watched hawk-eyed as the backup waitress, pressed into duty at the bar, filled a glass with stout. I wasn't taking any chances. The clock showed midnight. I went back to the board and set up the pieces. Smiley saw me and came over.

"I knows what happen. You gots nothin' to prove. You de bes' man on the boahd. I don't argue dat."

"Move," I challenged.

He sat down and we played a Ruy Lopez, for the first time in the match. It makes for a game filled with haymaker punches, with both sides having equal chances. A favorite of olden days, it was revived by the likes of Fischer and Tal in the 50's and 60's. I was out for blood. I'd been suckered by a gambler and a pretty face, and was seeing red. I hoped for Smiley's sake he had no money down. I didn't waste time developing a sharp attack, and even less carrying it out. Score 5-4.

To win the match, all I needed was a draw, and I had first move with the white pieces and the initiative. I pushed my queen's pawn forward, and he played the Queen's Indian defense, trying to avoid another Queen's Gambit.

Shouts went up and people came out of the woodwork to watch, but Smiley silenced them. "Dis ain't no Saints' game, now! Y'all be quiet, we's conc'traten!"

After twelve moves, Smiley was losing. He knew it, too. I could see it in his eyes. I wasn't going to wait for his ego to crack; I

I would crush it flat, like a steamroller passing over a kid's plastic tricycle.

When I glanced at the fans, I saw it there, too. Some were shocked, some sad, but I noticed some began to smile wolfishly, obviously ready to reap the rewards of their wagers. They had bet on me, against a thousand dollars of Squirrel's money and Smiley's undefeated record.

I looked at Smiley's face again. It was drawn, as if his life was ebbing away with his game. If I had beaten him 10 to nothing, it would have been easier to take, but to come back so close, and then, after saving his opponent's life, he was being systematically pummeled on sixty-four light and dark squares.

I checked the position; it was different from any we had played so far, with one exception: he had fianchettoed his queenside bishop again, and it had stayed there, immobile, all game. Useless as long as my pawn structure held. All I had to do was force the play on the king's side.

I moved my queen's pawn to a vacant square. He captured, and I moved my king pawn up a space. From there, it would attack his kingside pawn structure, and his castled position would collapse like the proverbial house of cards. The onlookers leaned in further, anticipating Smiley's demise.

Except that by moving my pawns, I'd exposed my queen. His bishop flew down the long diagonal and snatched up the Iron Maiden. Smiley held the queen in his fist, not believing his good fortune.

I've never been much of an actor, but I could feel the blood draining from my cheeks, just like I wanted it to do. I did a double-take at the square the bishop had come from, as if noticing it for the first time. My face sank into my hands. "Mo-ther-fuc-ker," I intoned slowly.

Taking his knight with my king's pawn, I forced him to suffer through a vicious assault on his castled position. His knight's pawn was pinned by my rook, so it couldn't recapture, and I threw the kitchen sink at him, always managing to leave him an out move, trusting him to find it. He did. After six moves, my onslaught sputtered and ground to a halt.

I still had rook, knight, and bishop to his queen and rook, but with my knight's limited mobility, and my bishop stuck on the white squares, his pieces' range soon made itself felt. His rook lunched on my queen's pawn, and his queen made a three-course dinner of my

remaining queenside pawns. I had no way to prevent him from promoting a pawn and getting a second queen on the board without dumping my pieces. I tipped my king over. In the now-silent room, it made a loud clack on the board. Score 5-5.

Smiley stood up. Life returned to the tavern. People clapped him on the back, cheered, and whooped as he made his way to the bar. He called for a stout, and served it to me himself. But a lot of people were leaving and angrily. The match was a draw. Their bets were off, null and void. Smiley's undefeated house record still stood, and I hadn't lost. I tried to appear miserable on the outside, but I was struggling to keep from grinning like a Cheshire cat.

When the furor had died off, I finally rose from the chair and put on my jacket. Two of the kibitzers dropped into place at the chessboard to analyze the game. I made my way to the bar and offered my hand to Smiley. He took it warmly. "T'ank you, Slim. What now? You goin' affah Mistah Walter Browne again?"

"Maybe some day. I'm back to the Marriott tonight. The awards ceremony is tomorrow afternoon, and I want to be there to collect my share of the glory."

"I may jus' come see dat, Slim."

He cocked his head toward the back of the building, where the staircase to Victoria hid in shadows. "They be a tender lit'l heart waitin' fo' you up them stairs. You gon' leave wit'out eben you say goodbye?"

"You say it for me, Smiley," I said.

"Who know?" he said, polishing a beer glass. "I jus' mebbie brings her along to de ceremony tomorrow."

I nodded. "You do that, Smiley," I grinned. "It's your move."

Words Don't Kill People
by Robert B. Shockley

In the beginning was a Word,
the Logos that started it all.

In Principio erat
verbum dei et
verbum hominibus et
verbum legis and
venemous slip of the lip.

The words that Mother gives you
Don't do anything at all:
"Sticks and stones and guns and bombs
Can break my bones,
Can break my body,
Can break my world,
But words can never hurt me."

It all bursts into being
with only a thought,
a word in someone's head,
an idea, an utterance
that changes the world.

"Purity" killed 6,000,000 people in camps,
they say,

"Conquest" wiped the Americas clean -
with blood.

Witches and shamans know this:
write an enemy's name on a slip of paper,
stick it in your left shoe,
walk on it for a month,
till it disintegrates
and he is marked for
death.

Words don't kill people

God whispered the cosmos into existence,
We can whimper it away into nothing.
Let's choose our words carefully.
They may be all we have,
In the end.
Word.

Aibna ابنة
by Eman Abraham

Seventeen, she plans on graduating
Put the coffee on, she will soon become this bitter
You tricked her, she's now his
She locks herself in the bathroom
Unaware that this will be her haven

Seventeen, suppress that it's happening
Finish High School, wed, then move
He comes from a good family
Yaba says, "Only if I want to"
You tricked her

Eighteen, Nineteen, Twenty-one, Twenty-two
Four children are hers
Always tired, herself still a child
He lives at the casino, she takes birth control
He hits her

Twenty-three, Twenty-four
Six children are hers
He talks to the boys, and at the girls
She talks to all of them
He calls her names

Thirties, collarbones are like swimming pools
She goes to night school
He hides her keys
She talks to no one
He kicks her out of the bedroom

Her mother had tricked her
She takes the children
He spends everything at the casino
Her father overnights her peaches
From Modesto

Aibna: Daughter in Arabic.
Yaba: Endearing, informal meaning of father in Arabic.

Wishing for Rain
by Dominic Matthew Jackson

In the photo my father's got his arm around me
probably checking my pockets for some change.
We're celebrating my birthday a month late.
We're celebrating 11 months early, too.

Above us the sky is painted silver.
But then came those cold, black clouds—
dying the grey like an aging bachelor.
I blew out the candles and wished for rain.

All those times we wrapped our arms around each other
I realize I was the only one gripping.
You put me on hold like a phone call.
And I held onto you like a secret.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Robert B. Shockley is a fourth semester student in the LBCC creative writing program. He enjoys writing poetry, short fiction and is working on a novel. He devours books, owns no TV and periodically, for variety, goes a little mad. He is planning to attend CSULB, if the Fates so decree.

Michael Waldren is a lover of sentences. He writes mostly prose fiction, but also tries his hand at screenplay and poetry when the mood strikes. He believes that there is no higher calling than literary fiction, and hopes to one day be considered a preeminent figure in published ethical futurism.

Hunter Allen is 19 years old and, despite her traditionally masculine name, she is a girl. She's an LBCC freshman majoring in History. Hailing from Millikan High School, she has a long history of performing at open mics and supporting the arts. She loves playing music, writing slam poetry, and dying her hair.

Mike Buckley is a widely-published, award-winning short story writer whose work has appeared in national journals such as *The Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Southern California Review*, and *Clarkesworld*. His work has been anthologized numerous times, including in *The Best American Non-Required Reading, 2003*, and in Red Hen Press *LA Fiction Anthology*. His debut collection of short fiction, *Miniature Men*, was released in 2011. He is a practicing Creative Futurist, using storytelling to change corporate and governmental policy, and has taught Science Fiction and brand prototyping internationally.

Passion is what drives many people to do things, and that is definitely what drives **Raquel Madarang**. After bouncing around majors, she's decided to embrace her calling for creative writing. She captures different emotions, and writes about pieces that people can relate to.

Dominic Matthew Jackson has worked as a janitor, a bartender, a minister, a gravedigger, and a preschool teacher. His poetry and fiction has been published in *WNQ*, *Ripple and Ravel*, and *the Boxer*. He lives in Long Beach, California.

Tabby Larson lives somewhere in Long Beach and has for her whole life. She likes fried zucchini, road trips and watching birds. Tabby also has three pugs and likes vanilla more than chocolate.

Ann Burdette was born in the middle of the last century. She was blessed with a mother who read and teachers who praised her attempts. During her twenty-five years of teaching, she completed every writing task she assigned her students. Now, in her retirement years, she is again blessed with teachers who praise her attempts.

Jake Watkins is a Long Beach native and frenzied writer currently attending LBCC. His inspiration for writing stems from that of Albert Camus, Marina Keegan, and his high school creative writing teacher, Daniel Romo. His hobbies include writing poems, acting in plays, studying philosophy, and other insanity inducing activities.

Jess Paxton is currently a student at LBCC. His studies include Theatre Arts, Music, Art, and Creative Writing. He has performed onstage at several local theatres, including Long Beach Playhouse (in *Fiddler on the Roof*), Mysterium (*Romeo & Juliet*), Rio Hondo College (*As You Like It*) and LBCC (*7 Redneck Cheerleaders*). He plans to produce a movie based on his short screenplay "Smiley's Move."

Eman Abraham has lived in long beach for nine years and is in her 4th semester at Long Beach City College. Although she's written poetry for four or so years, this is her first poem being published. Some of her interests include eating Thai food at an unreasonable hour and reading.



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