



THE WESTERN BLOT

An arts & humanities publication of
Case Western Reserve University
School of Medicine

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THE WESTERN BLOT

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Dear readers,

It is our great pleasure to introduce you to the third edition of The Case Western Blot, filled with the visual and written works of medical students, residents, physicians, professors, and lab managers of Case Western Reserve University's medical community. We hope that as you look through the magazine, you will be reminded of your peers' complex inner lives. While they strive for clinical and scientific excellence in the service of others, they also remain curious and seek to more fully understand their patients, themselves, and the world that surrounds.

You may find yourself in a hospital room, on the streets of Peru, in a primordial dream, or in your own childhood memories as you read. And perhaps the impulse that follows as it followed for us--to create--will take you where you most need to be. After all, the compassion for others and for oneself (even more difficult at times) is a practice best expressed through the work of creating itself.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude for the support of Pamela B. Davis, MD. PhD., Dean of the School of Medicine, and the generous contributions from the Caughy Endowment; without them, the production of The Case Western Blot would not have been possible.

Warmly,
The Blot Editorial Staff

Cover: **Untitled**
SAMANTHA COLBY | Sharpie, Ballpoint Pen, Whiteout

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Untitled (Flowers #2)
SARAH KANG | Watercolor

Contributors

Awais Aftab, MD

Awais is a fourth year psychiatry trainee and chief resident for education & research at University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center.

Samantha Colby

Samantha is a 3rd year medical student at CWRU.

Joseph K. Daprano, MD

Joseph is an Assistant Professor of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics at CWRU School of Medicine and is a staff physician at MetroHealth Medical Center. He is the medical director of MetroHealth at J. Glen Smith where he has been in practice for 20 years. He is the codirector of Quality Improvement for the MetroHealth Adult Wellness Service Line. He works overseas on a periodic basis and this poem was written while he was serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Papua New Guinea.

Saarang Deshpande

Saarang is a first year medical student at CWRU.

Aaron Foutz

Aaron is a laboratory manager at the National Prion Center. He oversees safety and compliance of the labs. He enjoys photography in his spare time and is a returning contributor to the Western Blot!

Wesley Alan Friedrichs Lindberg

Wesley is a second year medical student at CWRU.

Sophia Golec

Sophia is a second year medical student at CWRU who enjoys studying foreign languages and traveling. She attended Columbia University where she studied biology and anthropology. Her dual interests in science and the arts have led her to join the Humanities Pathway at CWRU. Her favorite animal is the blue whale.

Ritika Gupta

Ritika is a second year medical student at CWRU. After dabbling in pottery in high school, she rediscovered a love for clay after moving to Cleveland. She finds ceramics to be an excellent way to escape from the everyday stresses of life and enjoys creating pieces that are both beautiful and functional

Siraj Haq

Siraj is a third year medical student at CWRU School of Medicine. He attended the University of Washington for his undergraduate studies and counts writing, craft, photography, and cake decoration among his passions. Outside his studies Siraj has been active with both the Vision Clinic of the Student-Run Free Clinic and Anatomy Camp for local high school students. Siraj believes that art and science play complementary roles in the practice of medicine and hopes to continue his creative endeavors throughout his career.

Andrea Huynh

Andrea is a second year medical student a CWRU. She enjoys traveling, dancing, singing, playing piano and guitar, and dabbling in the art of photography. One saying she lives by is "Create art (even if it's bad art)."

Maria Alejandra Ibanez

Maria is a second year medical student at CWRU. She was born in Barranquilla, Colombia. She received her BS in Microbiology/Immunology at the University of Miami. She is currently involved in SNMA/LMSA and Wellness Pathway at Case.

Ana Istrate

Ana is a second year medical student. She believes in excavation of the self.

Sarah Kang

Sarah is currently a third year medical student and part of the Humanities Pathway at Case Western. She received her B.S. in Microbiology and History of Art from the University of Michigan. Her interests include contemporary art, watercolor painting, and neurology.

Madison Keenan

Maddy is a second year medical student at CWRU SOM. Her love of wood burning is rooted in an appreciation for the unpredictable nature of the reaction of the wooden canvas to the pen. To her, there is beauty in fine tuning her techniques to work with each unique piece of wood and the creativity needed to incorporate inevitable mistakes into the final creation.

Alina Khil

Alina is a second year medical student at CWRU SOM.

Kelly Lew

Kelly is a first year medical student at CWRU. She has recently branched out to landscape photography for its technical complexity and enjoys the process of hiking to these beautiful vantage points.

William Merrick, MD

William has been a Professor of Biochemistry at CWRU for almost 40 years. The generation of poems for children reflects that fact that he has five of these and trying to keep them entertained was a challenge. The photographs reflect getting older and being able to afford a camera that he is still trying to understand. While sunsets always generate color (except during Cleveland winters), it has been great fun to try and capture some additional features as well.

Bethel Mieso

Bethel is a second year medical student at CWRU SOM and is part of the Urban Health Pathway. Her pursuit of medicine and passion for public health has grown out of a deep desire to help make health care more accessible in both disenfranchised communities in the U.S. and developing countries such as Ethiopia, where she was born. In addition to her interest in global health, she is interested in community interventions that address social determinants of health, in particular exploring the ways in which public art spaces can transform urban neighborhoods and communities.

Alberto J. Montero, MD, MBA, CPHQ

Alberto is a Staff Physician in the Department of Solid Tumor Oncology at the Taussig Cancer Institute, Cleveland Clinic.

Vivian Qin

Vivian is a third year medical student at CWRU.

Tegan Schmidt

Tegan is a second year medical student at CWRU SOM and is part of the Masters in Bioethics program. While painting she has the sense that everything, including time, ceases to matter. As someone who studied philosophy in undergrad, she believes that the arts and humanities offer a unique perspective that can only make for better humans.

Helen Shi

Helen is a 4th year medical student at CWRU. This poem was inspired by the surgery clerkship experience during the 3rd year.

Susan Stagno, MD

Susan Stagno is a wife, mother, soon-to-be grandmother, medical educator, psychiatrist and lover of the health humanities (among other things!). She is the faculty lead for the Humanities Pathway at CWRU School of Medicine, and Director of Education in the Department of Psychiatry at University Hospitals. She is a "writer wanna be" and hopes to do more creative writing in her next life.

Pierre Tamer

Pierre is a third year medical student at CWRU. He is curious about how we can better understand the role of the humanities in improving medical practice and our understanding of patients, particularly in surgery.

Punit Vaidya, MD

Punit is an assistant professor of Psychiatry for The Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and works as a staff psychiatrist at the Cleveland VA Medical Center. He works in the Mental Health Ambulatory Care Clinic and directs the electroconvulsive therapy and transcranial magnetic stimulation services. He enjoys drawing and painting in his free time, though lately it's mostly been in digital form using his smartphone.

Sagar Vallabh

Sagar is a third year medical student at CWRU SOM.

Wenda Ye

Wenda is a third year medical student at CCLCM. He enjoys photography, camping and finding new hobbies.

Valeda Yong

Valeda is a CWRU SOM third year medical student who enjoys creating everyday objects out of unusual materials, such as chess sets out of nuts and bolts, coffee tables out of milk crates, or lamps out of clothespins. She enjoys working with her hands and loves going to Home Depot and Michaels to brainstorm ideas. One day, she will probably make every piece of furniture in her home. Her motto is: If you can make it, why buy it?

Rachel Zhuang

Rachel is a second year medical student at CWRU School of Medicine. She completed a drawing minor as an undergraduate at University of Southern California and enjoys mixed media figure-drawing and printmaking.

Q&A

ANA ISTRATE | Poem

did Neanderthals fall in love
and amicably part with sorrow—
ocher on their skin—and hiding
from each other take instruction
from detachment, the obliquity
of gut instinct, and the sun's course?

I barricade myself in the living room,
long sun rays my companions,
and swallow momentum whole,
bitter tasting, inevitable as medicine,
palming the ancient plea,
saying words with my mouth.



Darwin's Decision
AARON FOUTZ | Photograph



Vuelo - Islas Bastillas, Peru *(above)*

ANDREA HUYNH | Photographs

Sinking Sand - Huacachina, Peru *(below)*



V, H and L

VIVIAN QIN | Prose

Vanessa is here to discuss the results of her genetic testing, to find out if it is her fault that her son is missing that crucial chunk of DNA, a lost puzzle piece that is causing him to grow tumors the way other teenagers grow pimples. And we confirm for her that her DNA is incomplete in the exact same way; we describe autosomal dominance without ever saying ‘autosomal dominant’. “But if I have it too,” Vanessa’s eyebrows draw tightly together, “then why am I okay?” Words like ‘phenotype’ and ‘penetrance’ alight on the tip of my tongue, but I know that the Genetics 101 explanation is not what she is searching for. She is searching for something more fundamental, an explanation for why the universe has spared the mother and struck the son. “Why him? Why not me?” This I cannot answer.

The first thing I notice about Heather is her son, a rambunctious toddler who plays peek-a-boo with me from behind his stroller. The second thing I notice about Heather is her face, all misshapen doughy features (Cushingoid, my brain whispers, recognizable even though I have only seen this in textbooks). She was on steroids, she says, because her brain wouldn’t stop swelling, because there was a tumor, no, tumors, plural. She recounts her story and talks about her future with a wary skittishness; from now on, she will live from imaging scan to imaging scan, each negative result only a temporary reprieve from the disease that lurks in her DNA. Her son clambers into her lap and she slowly strokes his blond hair. “Luke needs to get the genetic test. I don’t want him to have to go through” Her eyes well, and she absentmindedly pats his cheek. “We were thinking about having another baby, but now...” I can calculate her Punnett square of probabilities, but I do not know what to say.



The Tide

SIRAJ HAQ | Poem

Blank, a slate in the indigo moonlight
throwing his sins
into bas-relief.

Mute, a cracked relic
luring kindred spirits
to their hurt.

Split, a pensive eye in the black
soul stretching
from pole to pole.

Fired, a pawn in the struggle
braving crosswinds
on the buoyant breeze.

Strong, an august sage unwinding the knot
holding in the tide
at last, at peace.



Colorblind Chaos

MARIA IBANEZ | Acrylic, pouring medium, and
ceramic medium on canvas





Reflections *(above)*
ALINA KHIL | Photographs
Warsaw, Poland *(below)*



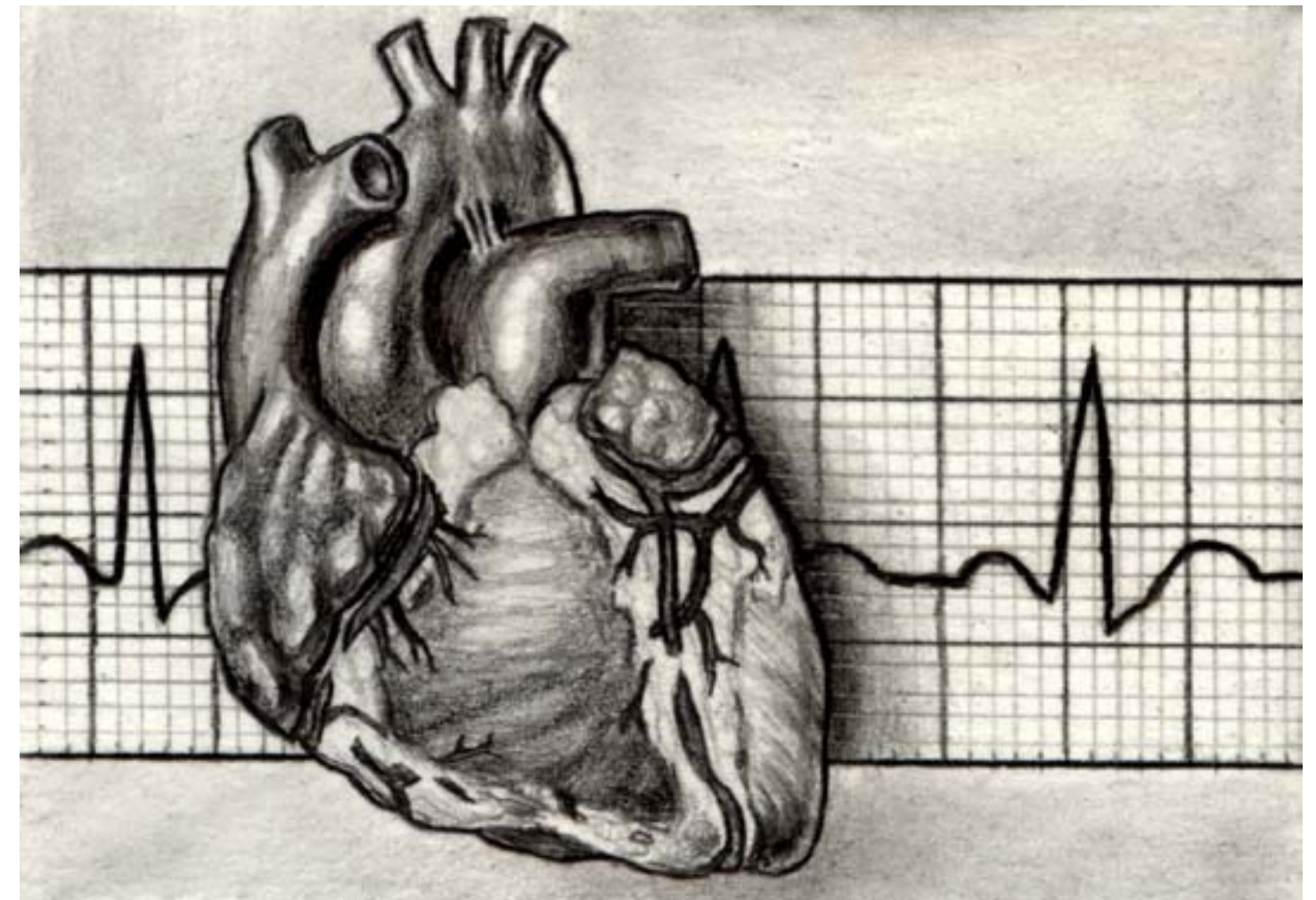
The Fundamental Song

PIERRE TAMER | Poem

flesh bestowing flesh, emerging before my eyes, Mother father and child, in rhythm with their cries. unspoken love bathes the room, tears of disbelief, is there anything more sacred, new life within reach?

new hands and new feet, pure warmth with each beat, calm words and calm tones, pure gratitude beneath. who am I to witness, to share and to behold?
who am I to assist Her, to bring forth the untold?

I am only life, yet I am depth,
I am the clearest air, yet I am breath,
I am from the womb, to Her, I shall return, I am flesh bestowing flesh



Heart and EKG strip

PUNIT VAIDYA, MD | Pencil on paper

A Love Like No Other

SUSAN STAGNO, MD | Prose

He loved her so dearly, and constantly tried to demonstrate his affection in both small and large ways. There was the time he so meticulously removed the cellophane from her favorite exotic tea, opened up the box and inserted a note – written in beautiful calligraphic lettering on fragile, golden-colored parchment paper. You are my perfect cup of tea. All my love, Always, it said. He closed the box, and ever so carefully inched it back into the cellophane so she would be surprised by how the note got there and thrilled with how clever he was. There was the time he brought home the gorgeous emerald and diamond necklace she had seen in the window at Tiffany's. A piece more expensive than he could afford but she seemed so enamored by it. It matched her eyes. He simply had to give it to her.

He'd asked her to marry him of course. And it wasn't exactly that she turned him down but she said she just wasn't ready. She didn't want him to go away. And so he stayed, always trying to convince her of how much he cared. If only, he thought, he could come up with just

the right thing to persuade her that he was the one, that he loved her more than anyone ever could.

She was, for reasons he couldn't quite understand or explain, completely taken with elephants. She collected them – small soapstone fetishes, a wooden puzzle shaped like an elephant, ceramic elephants painted in bright and joyful colors, jewelry with elephants – they were everywhere in her apartment. He asked her what it was about them that she liked so much. She said she didn't really know, but she thought they were very special. She had read things about how social and caring elephants are, how a wise older female elephant becomes the matriarch of the family, which really is just "the girls" – males in elephant societies go off on their own. And how they grieve when they lose a member of their family, like people do. That is when it came to him. A visit from an elephant – a real one, he thought. Did she like African or Indian elephants, he wanted to know. No matter, she said, I love them all.

And so he began planning. He'd heard a story somewhere – or perhaps he read

it in a magazine – about a man who arranged a visit with an elephant for his wife in a hotel in St. Moritz. If they could bring an elephant to a hotel in Switzerland, by God, they could certainly find someone in India to make similar arrangements. He called the Taj Rambagh Palace in Jaipur. He spoke with the concierge. Why not take her out into the grasslands to see an elephant instead, the concierge wanted to know. Bringing an elephant into a hotel was, how can I say, highly irregular. He explained it had to be unbelievable for his girlfriend and she would want to touch it, stroke it, commune with it. She loves them, you see. Highly, highly irregular, sir, the concierge said, but I will talk to my manager. Call again in a week.

And call he did. They said that an animal that large could not be brought into the hotel itself – the doors were not large enough, and then there was the potential damage that could be done, even if they could get one through the door – but there was a beautiful courtyard where the elephant could be brought. Close enough, he decided. The cost for all of this, of course, was astronomical. The airfare, the hotel stay at

one of the most luxurious places in all of India, the arrangements for the elephant to be brought to the hotel, and of course the rather large surcharge the hotel was expecting in order to make this all happen. So he borrowed some money from a friend, and he saved for months, convinced that this would be just the thing that would turn

until tomorrow, he said. What we have done today will pale in comparison.

The next day they awoke late. A refreshing breeze was blowing the gossamer curtains into the room, and they made love – slow, sweet, longing love. No one, he said, will ever love you the way that I do.

*It will be a surprise, he cajoled.
One you will never forget!*

the tide, make her believe. At last the day came. She didn't even know where they were going. It will be a surprise, he cajoled. One you will never forget! So she agreed to take a week away from work, and off they went. When the plane landed in Jaipur, she was enthralled. She had always wanted to visit India, she told him, and couldn't believe he had arranged such an amazing trip. The first day, they toured all the most beautiful sites of the city – the Hawa Mahal – Palace of Wind – built in pink and red sandstone and looking like a huge beehive; The Moti Dungri Ganusha Temple, in which the Elephant God can be found! How perfect! They spent a fabulous and delightful day eating, walking, seeing the breathtaking sites. She said she was thrilled, amazed, enchanted. Ah, but wait

A knock on the door heralded the arrival of lunch – tea, a mildly spicy and ever so tasty vegetable curry, and sweet coconut cakes for dessert. It could not have been more perfect. Ah, but wait, he said. Today is your big surprise. They dressed and he escorted her in grand style to the courtyard of the palatial hotel. Wait here, my sweet. He disappeared into the lobby. Within a few moments he reappeared, glowing, looking so excited, so proud, so in love.

And then it emerged from around the stone wall – massive, lumbering, gray and tuskless. Elephas Maximus Indicus. It trumpeted a loud greeting to her, raising its gigantic trunk and throwing back its colossal head. Oh my God, she cried. He couldn't tell, really, if she was happy or afraid. She seemed

frozen. Don't you want to touch it, he queried. She stammered and stayed in her seat. The man guiding the elephant brought the animal closer. She reached out. It brought its trunk down, gently, and allowed her to touch it. Could she feed it, she wanted to know. But of course. The man who brought the elephant produced some vegetables and nuts and she began to offer them to the elephant which the animal took from her hand. This went on for some time and both woman and animal seemed to grow calmer, happier. And then it happened. A large brown rat appeared, seemingly out of nowhere. They didn't see it at first, but the elephant did. The gigantic animal raised up, made an ungodly and frightening sound, lurched forward and its huge front leg came down on her lap. Oh my God, he cried – No! I love you so! If she had the time, he was sure, she would say I love you, too.



On the layout of a NICU

SARAANG DESHPANDE | Poem

A window.

Parents lain, *rest*, as far from the operatic stage as they feel from a lost home, deferring a chorus, *rest*, nursing amorphous vocal cords, swallowing all of wakefulness. *Rest*.

An attending seizes the first-row chair, a throne at which a resident steers her aria, *staccato*, unsteadily aware that the next measure soars beyond her range like lab values that evoke this coda. *ppp*. A hushed a cappella brushes by his budding ears. The assessment of the presentation draws the baby out of slumber, blinding medical students with distended cries. *Fortissimo!* The resident clenches her lower lip and garrisons her solo, but her subject's cloistered stage deafens her notes.

At 30 weeks, his wails lavished a tachycardic melody. *Crescendo*. *Allegro*. He crowns to hear his opus scorned for its monotony. The incubator hums on in betrayal.

A door.



Untitled

ALBERTO MONTERO, MD | Photographs



Untitled

SAMANTHA COLBY | Charcoal & Graphite



Father/Son

VIVIAN QIN | Prose

“Sorry...sorry...” The son fumbles in his pocket for his ringing cell phone, and I expect him to turn it off, to silence it, at least. He draws his phone out and glances at the screen – “I’m so sorry, it’s work, I’ll be right back –” and he steps out of the exam room into the hallway, closing the door and leaving his father alone with me, the student, and Dr. X, the neurologist.

We sit in silence for a while, the three of us. Dr. X starts to tap his fingers – his clinic has been running late all day, and he stares at the door as if trying to telepathically compel the son to step back into the room. The father gazes blankly at us.

“Where’s my son?”

I try to smile soothingly, “Your son’s right outside, he’s just on a phone call, he’ll be right back.”

This information seems to relieve him, at least temporarily. A few moments later, more agitatedly, “Where’s my son??”

As if on cue, the door opens, and the son returns to the seat beside his father. “Sorry about that,” he says, slipping the phone back into his pocket, “where were we?”

Dr. X rattles off a recap of the father’s symptoms, and the son nods along, agreeing with the assessment of re-

cent falls and difficulty caring for himself. “So this is what I think would be best for you moving forward –” Dr. X’s instruction is interrupted by a familiar ringing.

The son’s hand darts to his pocket and again pulls out his phone. Surely, this time, he will silence it. But I am mistaken again. “Sorry – work –” He is already halfway out the door.

The father looks lost. “Where’s my son?”

I try to soothe him, “He’s right outside on the phone, don’t worry, he’ll be right back.”

The father nods. “Yes. I want him back now.”

I force a smile. “He’s so busy with these phone calls, he must be a very important person!” Even to my own ears, my voice sounds so saccharine as to be sarcastic.

The father frowns and his voice turns plaintive. “Can you bring him back now?” Dr. X nods. “Yes, he really should be here for this discussion...”

I poke my head out into the hallway, prepared to apologize for interrupting what I presume to be a serious work emergency. Instead, I am met with a loud guffaw. The son is beaming into his phone, “...yes, great, FCF6FC is the perfect shade of white...” I stare at him, at this man who is currently deciding on a color palette instead of helping his father through his diagnosis. He turns towards me and

his smile disappears. I try to keep my feelings from coloring my voice. “Your father is asking for you.” He holds up a finger, indicating he needs a bit longer. I can only slip back into the room, to an expectant father, without his son.

The son finally returns and Dr. X finally moves to conclude the appointment. “Any other questions?”

The son leans forward in his chair, elbows on his knees, hands clasped in front of him. His tense energy suggests that his next words are ones that he has been steeling himself to say.

“So...how much longer does he have?”

I have heard this question before, have seen it sometimes accompanied by anguish and sometimes by resignation, but never by the expression I see now in the son.

There is a hint in the exaggerated curve of his back, in the brightness of his wide eyes, a slight sheepishness, something that reminds me of a poker game I once watched, in which a player looked ready to throw his cards down, eager for the game to just be over already. Eager for the end, and wondering exactly how much longer he has to put up with the burden that has been dealt to him.

Later that day, I call my parents.



Woman with Long Hair

PUNIT VAIDYA, MD | Digital drawing on Samsung Galaxy Note



California

MADISON KEENAN | Wood Burning

Better in Person

VIVIAN QIN | Poem

Darkness seeps across the screen,
a plume of ink in water.
No respect for boundaries,
nor vessel territories,
a stormcloud looming over
sulci and rolling gyri.
Neurons engulfed and turned to black,
last sparks of light extinguished.

The CT is worth a thousand words,
but our patient is worth much more.

We run him through the battery
of usual choreographed tests,
of thinking and sensing and moving and talking,
he passes every one.
Well, you look much better than your brain!
Relief spreads throughout the room,
a drop of ink in water.

7/7/17

ANA ISTRATE | Poem

I went out on the balcony alone, thank god, the air too cold for summer, but summer it was. Still at twenty-five wondering when the adventure would begin: to taste the hard potion of the corrupt city. Old friends fresh on my mind like clean sheets. Meanwhile the tasks went on: education had to happen one way or another, and life back home poured like water through a sieve, catching nothing.



Spring *(above)* & **Serenity** *(left)*
WENDA YE | Photographs

sensation & sensibility

SAARANG DESHPANDE | Poem

I.

Recall
that the first use
of our tenuous legs
occurs at a time
we won't
recall.

III.

Contorted metal gulps down its operator
with no remorse for its obesity.

The other car sped off
with her legs' sensation.
Having opened her once,
he had no need for her again.

IV.

A broken body,
segmented.

Brushstrokes of cold fingers
cross the canvas of the hip
and
dread that no touch will ever crawl
up beyond her heart.

"Can you feel this?"
The skin whispers
before the mouth knows.
Her nod,
defeated by a neck brace.

VI.

Perhaps her story is one of revenge,
Earth's musk too near
Or Heaven's lights lost from gaze
while ensnared by a wheelchair.

Metal contorts back,
she recalls.
Now
it tangoes with her stumps,
its prosthetic socket begging to taste her
once more.

VIII.

Recall
that the first use
of her tenuous legs
occurs at a time
she won't
forget.



Skin of any color

RACHEL ZHUANG | Conte Crayon



Fire in the Bush

JOSEPH DAPRANO, MD | Poem

The smoke slumbers in the evening as a blanket of ease.
For fire flies from the sun
And the crack of fire in the bush
Is stifled by the cool of the night.
Morning shall reveal the burned wounds.
Black ground with stilted, stubbled, stringent grass
Which has been singed by
Fire in the bush.

Green gives way to the popping yellow which
Dances from sight into the sound of a single
Brush stroke of yellow turning green black by
Fire in the bush.

Genesis – a child - a man – a woman - a nation.
Burned waste – a nation – a woman – a man- a child.

Life: wo/man is the grass of the field
Cut, bundled and burned like
Bush in the fire.

Giraffes as the Sun Goes Down *(above)*

Skimmers at Sunset *(right)*

WILLIAM MERRICK, MD | Photographs



No labor of love

SAARANG DESHPANDE | Poem

The ghost of a seed
absconds, as raw air finds rest
in pits sucked breathless.

Slice a blood orange
from the wrist that picked the fruit,
praying it will rot

and tuck in the Earth
its promise of evergreen
as topsoil winters.



Lilies of the Field

SARAH KANG | Watercolor



Sandhill Crane Number Three

WESLEY ALAN FRIEDRICHS LINDBERG | Photograph



Milk crate coffee table *(above)*

Milk crates, wood stain, wood varnish

Clothespins lamp *(right)*

Clothespins, hot glue

Mechanics of the Mind *(below)*

Nuts, bolts, acrylic paint

VALEDA YONG | Functional Sculpture



En Ayunas

ALBERTO MONTERO, MD | Poem

in a ketone haze
feels like days
since I've eaten
but been only
about eight hours
to get my mind off the hunger,
I think of a
little boy
in east Cleveland
(Aleppo or San Salvador)
with face
bloodied,
pockets
emptied,
stomach
raging,
austere,
churning
my "ordeal" is
self-induced,
voluntary
eyes closed,
my mind
wonders off again

Twitter Microfiction

AWAIS AFTAB, MD | Microfiction

Prompts: the apocalypse, an odd couple, a tea towel

At the World's end, God and Devil sit for a cup of chai and the tea towel is lifted in the celebration of a game well played.

Prompts: dear, deer, derrière

"Ahū chashm" He eulogized. She giggled. "Say something nice in Urdu about my ass now." He wondered if the seduction may yet be salvaged.

Prompts: ghazal, rocket science, hangover

Haunted by her ghazal-eyes, he submitted his astrophysics paper in a hangover; she was a sadist in bed but gentle with his grading: A+

Prompts: Guns & Roses, brigadier, happy endings

She whispered as he caressed, "You soldier on in love, but you cannot reign. It's hard to hold a candle, in the cold November rain."

Prompts: an infection, an interminable conflict, a flash.

Ironically, it was the driest of their make-up kisses that gave her Mono; their damper osculations, rife with conflict, had been safe.

Prompts: a storm, a jazz band, fake hair.

She was a wig-fetishist caught in a storm; he was the bald one with a car. Call it kismet, call it love, call it all that jazz.

Prompts: a palimpsest, witch-hunt, hysteria.

Witchhunters found her skin tattooed with layers of hysterically overwritten verses; she was deemed not a witch, but was burned for heresy.

Prompts: manga, footsteps, Scheherazade

After 1001 nights, he broke up with her "I have my own stories to tell now". He stepped back & slammed the door on her surprised manga eyes.

Prompts: a roadtrip, a meddlesome spinster, an article of men's haberdashery

She survived spinsterhood spinning yarns to strangers of her licentious road-trips, and of buttons she'd torn off men's shirts in haste.

Prompts: crush, wine, blasphemy

Dressed up as Jesus on Halloween he finally hit on her 'Can I get you a drink?' 'Only if you are better in bed than you are at blaspheming'.

Prompts: Keyser Söze, kite-flying, eloquence

"I suspect God is the Keyser Söze of religion." His kite drifted away, cut-loose, prompting an eloquent confession of his loss of faith.

Prompts: eye, love, ewe

He made sheep's eyes at her throughout the party, only to be pepper-sprayed when he asked her out. 'Psychopath,' she declared.

Twitter Stories #TS was a Twitter microfiction communal challenge, conceived in 2011 by the novelist Musharraf Ali Farooqi (@microMAF), along with the artist Daisy Rockwell (@shreedaisy). The Twitter-based exercise challenged its participants each morning with three prompts. A tweeter would post the prompts, and tag another tweeter to post prompts for the next day, and then the twitterati would write stories inspired by the prompts which would fit within 140 characters. The following twitter stories represent a selection from my responses.



Brandywine Falls

KELLY LEW | Photograph



Healing Hands

MADISON KEENAN | Wood Burning

We Still Matter

BETHEL MIESO | Photograph





Morning
KELLY LEW | Photograph

The Red Apartment

Sophia Golec | Fiction

The day that Helena moved out for good, her parents made her pancakes. After all, she had hardly been in the house since before she had gone to college, and now here she was, about to move into her first apartment after graduation. The pancakes tasted dull and sweet and soft. As she filled the kitchen with the sound of knife against plate, her small family sat in amicable silence, the only other sounds the whisper of wind and the occasional whoosh of a single passing car.

Breakfast completed, Helena hauled her suitcases and boxes into her father's tan hatchback. She then hugged her mother in front of their little white house and clung a little bit to her tiny frame. Driving away, she saw her parents standing in front of their home, still as statues. Helena fought against what felt like a disproportionately deep sense of loss. She wiped away her tears and focused on the road with a steely sense of duty.

The apartment building was red. It wasn't just a little bit red; it was entirely and completely red. The only exception to this red madness was the dark green outline of the windows. It was a short build

ing, just four floors high, and narrow, with a few stairs leading up to the front door. During the thirty seconds that Helena spent standing and looking at her new building, she was passed by three women wearing green fur coats, a small boy on a bicycle with a preposterously large stereo strapped to one side, and several dogs. There was also, of course, a steady stream of cars, bikes, garbage trucks, fire trucks, and tour buses that blocked her view.

"Hey hey! What do you think? Isn't it amazing?!" A small redhead materialized in front of her out of the streaming crowd. She was wearing yellow athletic shorts with printed bananas and a tank top emblazoned with a winking emoji.

"Um, hey Amanda. It's very... red," Helena responded.

"Yea, exactly! Bring some

Helena couldn't help noticing the bright red stairs, the red door to the apartment, and the red couches...

color into your life, hey? Plus, red is supposed to be lucky." Amanda said, hopping up and down with energy. Amanda

led her up two flights of stairs into the apartment. Helena couldn't help noticing the bright red stairs, the red door to the apartment, and the red couches that Amanda's parents had let them take from their basement. "It's lucky, I guess," she murmured to herself solemnly.

After helping Helena with her bags, Amanda went out to buy some dumplings from the store around the corner. They crackled and popped with flavor, dripping in grease and heavily seasoned. Helena ate delicately and then settled into her new, bare room with a sigh. Amanda peeked her head in through the open door.

"Still upset about finishing college, huh? Don't worry about it - it'll be a great year. I have a good feeling about this apartment. I think it likes us."

Helena woke up early the next morning to prepare for her first day on the job as a paralegal. She wore her best

business casual outfit: a well-fitted black dress with a respectable hem length and covered shoulders. She threw on the tiniest percent of mascara and headed to the door. Still in her purple bathrobe, Amanda yelled after her, "You look like a hot nun! Go kill that paralegal job!"

Nine hours later, Helena was lying face down on the couch next to Amanda, who was putting on pink eye shadow while eating fistfuls of Flaming Hot Cheetos.

"It's just like everything fun has ended, you know? I have to be this serious person now, I'm a real adult, and it's awful. Everyone there is awful. They all smell like cheese," Helena ranted into the couch pillow. "How is it possible for literally every single person in a firm to smell like cheese? That's an achievement. I like cheese." Amanda responded, patting Helena on the back of the head with her Cheetos-dusted fingers.

"My entire future is just laid out in front of me like this boring path leading to middle-aged resentment and a beer belly. Do you know any fun fifty-year-old lawyers? I don't."

"Listen Helena, it's all about your attitude. Just because we aren't college students anymore doesn't mean our lives are over. Life's an adventure! Plus, you haven't even applied to law school yet. You could always change your mind."

"Yeah right, my parents would

Everything Is Gonna TURN Out Swell

kill me. I'm going to have a miserable and uneventful life and there's nothing you can do about it," Helena muttered sullenly. Amanda laughed and experimentally put some Cheetos dust on her eyelid with the pink shadow, then screamed and leapt to the bathroom to wash out her eyeball. Helena remained on the couch, as Amanda squirted her eye from a large bottle of contact solution.

Resolved to her fate, Helena began the long and arduous process of living the rest of her dull life. She fell into a cycle of dressing in modest and dark business clothes, pretending to enjoy the company of her fellow paralegals, and then complaining to Amanda. Amanda kept up her litany of enthusiasm and praise to no avail. But soon enough,

forces emerged that refused to let Helena slip into her self-induced monotony.

It began innocently enough. Helena was lying face down on the couch after work as usual (high-collared white blouse, knee-length black pencil skirt, grey kitten heels) and listening to Amanda bake

brownies while trying to sing Radiohead. Suddenly, a tinny melody began to play at her ear. Helena continued to lie prone for a few more seconds, then reached up her arm and grabbed a card that was lodged deep between the couch cushions. The front had a toothy cartoon drawing of a smiling truck with the caption "Just Keep Trucking Along!" Inside, the card came with the greeting: "Everything Is Gonna TURN Out Swell" Someone had scrawled: "To my darling, best of luck!" underneath. The melody was unidentifiable but upbeat.

"Hey, Amanda, whose card is this?" Helena yelled over to Amanda.

"No idea. Must have been one of my parents' friends from when we still used the

couches. God, this card is awful. It's not even a pun!" Amanda said after coming over from the kitchen to inspect the discovery. "Want me to chuck it?"

"Nah, it's okay. I'll hold onto it. It's kinda cute."

Two weeks later, a pigeon set up its twiggy little nest in the corner above Helena's bedroom window. The streaky poops miraculously failed to land, even once, on her window. Every morning, she

pulled the curtains back to find two men suspended in the air outside her window. They were on a crane mounted on a truck, being raised so that they could repaint the building an even more brilliant shade of red. She smiled and waved even though she was in her pajamas and hadn't put her contacts in yet.

The greatest moment came when the whole city was closing down in anticipation of The Big One. Even subways were barely running. Helena

but all four friends continued to stare in awe. The woman turned the street corner and skipped away, swallowed into the snowy night. "Wait until I tell the guys at the office about this," Helena said.

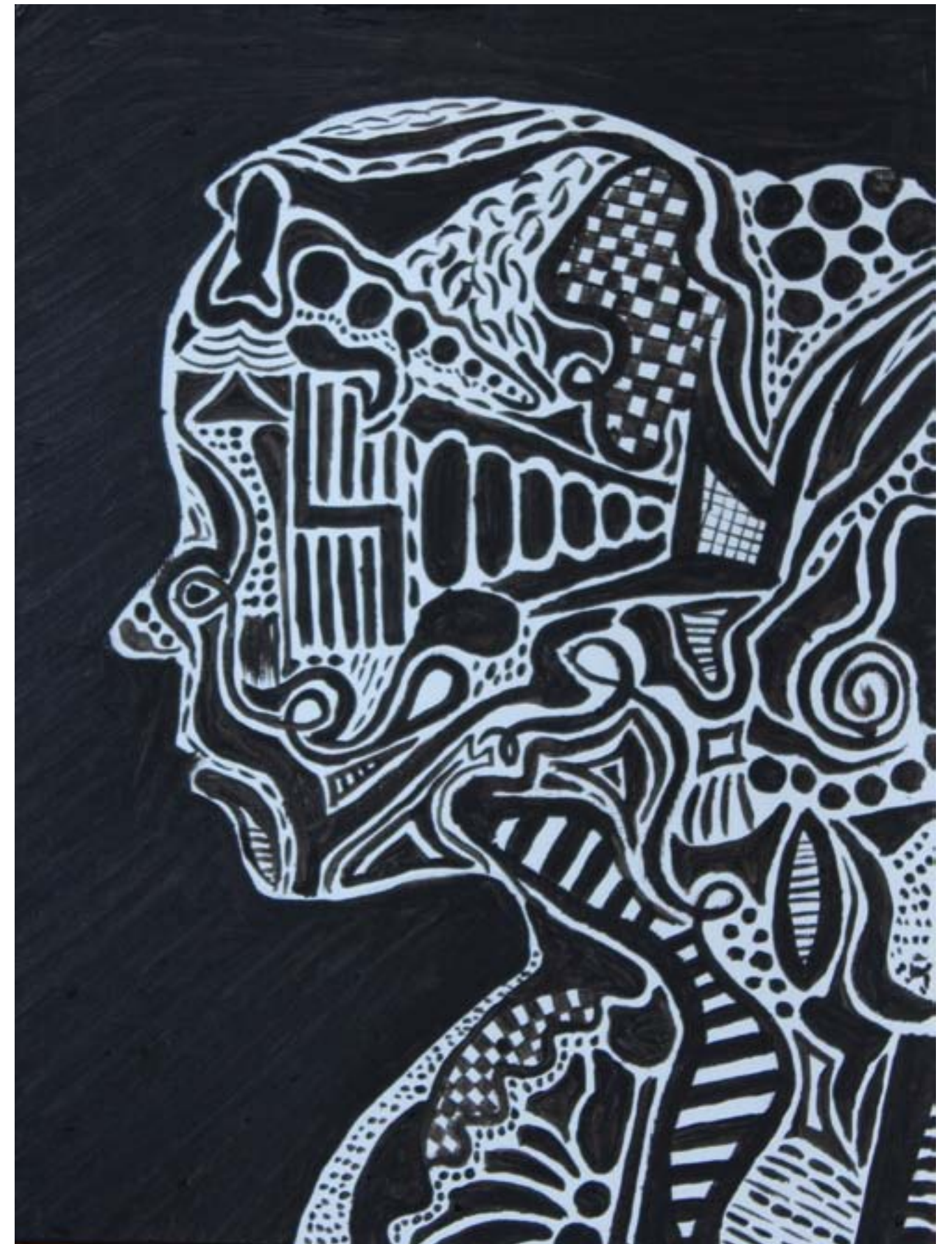
"Don't bother. Come on, I have these new pastries I want you to try," Amanda responded, leading their group back into the red apartment.

These tiny wonders accumulated over the weeks and months.

checked up on the young parents after pulling apart her curtains. The day Helena finally saw the baby bird calling for food through the nest's opening, she didn't lie on the couch for hours after work, but helped Amanda make kale and peanut butter cookies instead. Amanda congratulated her for her slightly decreased apathy by doodling a picture of Helena making out with Taylor Lautner.

These tiny wonders accumulated over the weeks and months. There was the morning (long after the baby bird had flown away, its maiden voyage lovingly overseen by a doting Helena) that she

had been out getting dinner with Amanda and two other friends from college. The snow had just begun to fall, and was a few inches deep. Walking back to the apartment, they came upon a woman skipping in the snow in the middle of the street, face upturned to the falling snow. All she was wearing was a bra and underwear in a violent shade of pink. She didn't even have shoes on. Helena, Amanda, and their two friends, bundled in coats, sweaters, scarves, and mittens, stood in shocked silence. They soon noticed the cameras lining the streets, documenting what was surely a painful modeling shoot,



Exquisite
TEGAN SCHMIDT | Oil on Canvas



Cathedral Cove *(above)*
Stairway to Heaven *(left)*
SAGAR VALLABH | Photographs

An Ode to Retracting

HELEN SHI | Poem

Don't move.
Don't move,
I tell myself,
but my fingertips,
they tingle.
My muscle fibers,
they twitch.
Don't betray me,
I pray.

"Move up!"
commands the attending.
I obey.
"More tension!"
he urges.
I retract harder.
"Lift higher!"
he directs.
I follow.

Tick tock.
I hold still.
Tick tock.
No new directives.
Tick tock.
So it starts.
First, an itch.
Then, a twinge.
Now, muscles screaming.

Don't move,
don't move,
I tell myself.
But my deltoids,
they burn.
My flexor digitorums,
they ache.
Don't fail me,
I plead.

My mind capitulates.
The tug-of-war ends.
My muscles win.
My grip shifts.
3 cm down,
my hand moves.
"Maintain tension!"
"Maintain position!"
commands my brain.

Don't move,
don't move,
I tell myself.
But the attending,
he leaves.
And the resident,
he closes.
Don't tell me
it's over.

My arms relax.
My hand releases,
the retractor relinquished.
My brain rejoices.
The battle: won.
Mind over muscle.
But the day,
it has only begun.



Perspective
TEGAN SCHMIDT |
Oil on Canvas



Two-tone bowl *(above)*

Royal blue mug *(right)*

Half and half bowl *(below)*

RITIKA GUPTA | Wheel Thrown Pottery





The things I used to care about
RACHEL ZHUANG | Collage

A Child's Dream

WILLIAM MERRICK, MD | Poem

This story should begin
As do all those fabled tales
With "Once upon a time"
And then continue without fail

To tell about those animals
Both with and without tails
Of marvelous adventures
At sea on boats that sail.

Well, this story will be different
For it begins not so long ago.
It's about a boy and girl
Who were always on the go.

As children they were small
With quite a need to grow
But when it came to mischief
For that they were not slow.

One day this young pair
Decided on their own
That to the park they'd go
And run away from home.

They left so very quietly
While Mom was on the phone
And walked away so quickly
That they were soon alone.

The park was such a nice place
To play and see their friends.
They had played there often
And hoped play would never end.

They slid upon the slide,
Tried the basketball to send
Through the metal basket
At the playground's southern end.

They gaily teeter-tottered
And swung upon the swings.
They played upon the jungle gym
And upon the monkey rings.

And when they finished playing
And looked around for other things
They found a shiny object
A magic silver ring.

The little boy was first
To make his silly wish.
He wanted to see the ocean
And so became a fish.

He swam around the beach
And made his tail go swish.
If a fisherman had caught him
He would have ended on a dish.

The little girl was next
And wished to be a cat.
Then she could climb the trees
And chase the lowly rat.

A swift and unfriendly dog
Came along and that was that.
The cat was up the tree to stay
And guess who laughed (the rat).

Now there was only one wish left
For the two of them to share.
And they wondered what they wanted
This small uncertain pair.

They decided happiness and joy
And a life without despair
Was what they wanted most
And so the spoke their prayer.

A funny thing then happened;
Do you know where next they went?
Did the unicorn and chipmunks play
In the land where they were sent?

Or did they find some strange place
On the grass or on cement
Where their happiness would ever be
A grand and glorious event?

Where this boy and girl next landed
Was no surprise at all.
For where else would two children go
Who were so very small.

They arrived in their own back yard
Amidst their toys and balls
And found what they were looking for
Wasn't really lost at all.

