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PLEXUS
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*Ode to the Peach

You are called by your color
yet by summer
you become sun-tinted
taking on to yourself
the prerogative of the redhead
and on the inside too –
the deeper you go the redder you get
intensifying to the color of blood

My soft, fuzzy love
you fill my hand
with your yielding
rounded density
you invite me with
your voluptuous curves
your feminine little cleft

Your succulent sweetness
evokes in me the desire to
delve into you
to eat you
to eat you until your juice
runs down my chin
I will not want to stop
once I start

Even when I sink my teeth
into your luscious flesh
you make only the sound
of a heart between two beats
tasting nearly like nothing
delicate, fragrant, with a hint of sharpness

In the late summer
You become most indiscreet
your overripenesses
fall to the ground
becoming oozy, squishy masses
like dung –
stinking and attracting flies
then I can’t stand you

Even into the autumn
You are inescapable
your slices unexpectedly
peek at me
from my bowl of milk
you cruelly snuggle
into my ice cream
and usurp every dessert –
shamelessly splayed
atop the tarts, the cobblers
the pies for all to see

Fruit of the Deep South
alone in the dark winter
I break down
tormented by
your one solid defect
that when I had finally
arrived at your core
I found your hard, little brain
where your heart should have been

- Brian McMichael, Class of 2007
Stories to Tell my Daughter

Some people can weave stories out of dry willow branches – creating wicker fiction, thrones with velvet pillows

Some chisel tales from rugged sensualism chipping granite into wine squeezing stories from grapes sucking the marrow out of oak trees

Feathers fall from birds becoming pens taking flight across pages to retell myths about an apprentice who tripped splattering paint across the sky

- Jennifer Frank, Beckman Laser Institute
Past

Fingers outstretched to her face
Suddenly, she
   Like an animal approached too quickly
Pulls away
as though she has been slapped
He, surprised,
Waits for a reason
   In vain. Again.
He tries a line he’s heard before
Everyone believes themselves
To be doing good.
Even the most depraved
Have the best intentions.

A pause

   Thick through a blanket of fog
Not so, says she,
Face turned away now
There will be no reaching her.
Eyes cast down
Staring at her hands
   Remembering how,
Wrought with anger
They had pulled
punched,
twisted and torn.
In these,
she thinks,
   In these very hands
I have found the rebuttal.

- Caren Armstrong, Class of 2009
El Anciano

El hombre sentía
Mirando a las manos
Las lágrimas en los ojos
Los pensamientos oscuros
En el dolor de una vida perdida

Soy cubano él dijo
No puedo ver mi país otra vez
Existe sólo en mi mente
Memorias de mi familia
Memorias de mi vida útil

Ahora soy un hombre anciano
Sufría por mi país, mi familia
Pero soy viejo, nadie me ve
Soy inútil como su mira a mi vida
Pensando del pasado, preguntando ¿porqué?

- Patricia Lenahan, LCSW. LMFT, Family Medicine
Sequential Teds

Sequential teds are not a row of inconsequential little men known to their everlasting humiliation by a trivializing diminutive – No, they are uncomfortable, scratchy calf-length “boots” unstylish white cotton Velcro design But as Nancy Sinatra might say Should she ever need to wear a pair, “These boots are made for walking!” or more accurately put, these boots are made to do the walking for you if you find yourself in the unfortunate position of being a patient in a hospital bed supine, confined, unable to do your own walking

Struggle, oil pastel on canvas
Tracy Slone, Class of 2007

*Dermatographism: condition in which the skin becomes red and raised when the skin is scratched lightly or irritated.

Dermatographism

I never was an artist,
Until just six months ago.
What the inspiration was?
I am not quite sure I know.

Perhaps it was the lobster I saw,
Resting on my plate.
Or the shrimp I savored,
Working magic as I ate.

Whatever the muse,
This much is true.
When the urge commands,
There’s not much else I can do.

But wield my brush
And watch the red streaks grow.
I had to come see you
And my artistry show.

Please take the time
And observe as I begin.
My brushes, my fingers,
My canvas, my skin.

- Grace Sun, Class of 2008
Sequential teds are another great American invention fueled by that other great American discovery (I was about to say ‘invention’ but even we Americans leave a few things to God) electricity.

As my nurse explained (she herself was Filipina)
“When Americans find a problem (she didn’t say death, suffering, anguish, despair, but I know these were included in the list – we Americans have these in our sights as well) they just fix it.”

Once in the grip of the sequential teds – and this grip can convince you that given half a chance at least one of these teds could have been a real man – you walk without walking. It’s the abdominal exerciser. Lose weight while you sleep! Come true at last!

Thanks to good old Yankee ingenuity – I knew we could do it – (death, pain, suffering finally erased) just a matter of time! And those sequential teds in their own inarticulate, heavy-handed way, do yeoman work. Because who wants to go through the indignities not to mention the expert time and precious resources expended! of abdominal surgery for a complex endometrial sarcoma, make it out of the OR, past the morphine induced glow, past the headaches, nausea, clear liquid diet, pain, pain, pain, plastic-tasting food, determined cheerfulness of nurses, awkward conversations with the visiting well, constipation, resigned recognition in the eyes of your fellow travelers, existential despair – to be recovering for God’s sake. Doing your patriotic red white and blue best to get better. Overcome the odds, get back to being a productive member of society – only to be carried off unexpectedly one night by a random blood clot.

How un-American.

And that’s why the teds are there. While you sleep they walk, keeping you safe from yet one more vicious assault from that random, unpredictable universe that must have been invented in Europe (probably France) just one more un-American phenomenon we will surely soon put to rest alongside weapons of mass destruction, suicide bombers, Bin Laden, and lack of appreciation for the freedoms we’ve bestowed on yet another undeserving country. After all, what is cancer really but a mass of unruly, violent, terrorist cells?

Hospitals are full of nifty devices like my good friends the sequential teds. IV lines, monitors, bed rails, open-back hospital gowns. They keep you safe and they keep you tame. And any red-blooded American is grateful for their vigilant presence guarding the destabilized perimeter.

Still, lying in hospital at unguarded moments waiting for the pathology report to give a definitive ruling on the complex mass of unknown origin that will decide my life or death I sometimes dream of rising from my bed, gently extricating from the determined embrace of the teds, leaving gracefully behind the functional and humiliating hospital gown, the tethered cord of the IV drip, the bleep of the monitor to roam the silent corridors of pain and suffering and death naked, unencumbered, free.

- Johanna Shapiro, PhD
Family Medicine
**Untitled**, photo
Daniel Gromis, Class of 2009

**Ollantaytambo**, photo
Shari Atilano, Ophthalmology Research

**Summer**, stained glass
Lucero Zamudio, Medical Education
Youthful Innocence, acrylic on canvas
Sarah Lopez, Class of 2008

Machu Pichu, Peru, photo
Lisa Ehrensberger, Class of 2007
It’s late, on-call-tired
we dash into a third floor room
for a cross-cover page
as always both ceiling-mounted TVs are on
tuned to separate channels

we whisk past a preoccupied mother
the boy standing there with those foreboding
sparse wisps of hair
infused with too many lines
running from as many IV bags
hanging starkly on a wheeled pole

we round a curtain to find
a squad of posed action-figures
resolutely standing guard
strategically placed by their leader
to ward off evil spirits

slumped rag-doll sideways
a pale, pale, thin boy
with dark-crusted, cracked lips
blood slowly seeping from purple little bumps
here and there

The shiner he sports
you wish
was from getting punched
but it’s not, it’s

from the rock-bottom platelet count
from the cancer
from the treatment
from the chromosome
from the mutation
from the virus
that wriggled and jiggled and wiggled inside him

the mom calmly consents to the platelet transfusion
which along with everything else tried through the night
will not save him from bleeding out
even till morning

- Brian McMichael, Class of 2007
Superheroes don’t exist, you declare
Matter of factly
They’re so fake
When they fall, they get up right away
You hate the sound of your body falling
Steel hitting asphalt
You wish for streets and sidewalks of
soft silent carpet
like here, you say.

The only person in the world
That you’ve ever seen
Who looks like you
(other than your cat who died)
Was a man in line at Mc Donald’s

He said
It’s tough to take care of,
Ain’t it
Boy?

- Sarah Mourra, Class of 2008
Awakened by Love
by Daniel Chun, Class of 2007

Head balding, face scruffy with two weeks of growth, the man sits motionless in his wheelchair, looking off into the distance. His arms are crossed on his lap. Head fixed, his eyes sometimes drift, following the occasional passerby. Pale and gaunt, his face emits an unusual grayness, making him stand out amidst the colorful background that lies behind him. Even the flowers appear to gleefully dance around him, mocking his immobility. Everything around him celebrates life as he deteriorates, decays and turns into ashes. The light blue gown brightens his face to a certain degree, but it too, appears to be losing its brilliance.

Suddenly his eyebrows rise. His face brightens and his eyes sparkle as he becomes fixed on something across the courtyard. A woman approaches him. Slowly she bends down and kisses him upon the forehead, gingerly stroking his face with the palm of her hand, cupping his cheek for a moment as he leans into it. She sits next to him and whispers something into his ear. A smile appears and the man is no longer gray but has become colored with emotion.

She strokes his head again, running her fingers through his scant hair.

Slightly lifting his hand, IV line moving with him, he rests it comfortably on her thigh.

Lost in each other’s gaze, there exists an undeniable desire, a desire for each other beyond that of lust or attraction, but simply stemming from pure love. A tear is shed and another. Each reaches over and wipes the other’s tear. Happiness and sadness shared, they enjoy each other’s presence for the time that remains.

She cups his face again. And he kisses her hand. Straining and moving himself into a precarious position, the man leans over, risking stability for the one thing he desires most at the moment... a kiss from his love.

Smiling, with tears in her eyes, she rewards him for his efforts.
Patient History

You come to help from a country so far away
So far away I only see it on TV
You see a quiet boy sitting on an exam table in a free clínica
I see wild eyes and a machete
I see my hand on the pavement
My shoes gone and my 3 pesos for food
Gone
Have you ever picked up
one of your hands with the other?
Trembling
Do my quiet eyes tell the story of my clean, healed stump?
Will I be with you years from now?
Will I be with you in your doctor world so far away?
Will my quiet eyes look at you
Again
from someone else?

- Dan Hoopes, Class of 2008

Untitled, photo
Alissa Detz, Class of 2008
Pine Cove

Ladybug nurseries inside mounds of meadow grass sunbaked and humid spew hundreds of red specks into the thin, crisp, swollen sky.

After capture in popsicle cups baby lizards escape between bars of the homemade cage too wide to contain them.

Water striders skirt atop snow-melt waters of the quiet creek filled with promises of dams to be built and geodes to be found.

Smooth manzanita bark peels into paper-thin spirals hanging, not falling from the tree.

- Sarah Blaschko, Class of 2007
To Carlie, Who Cried

There are so many things I have not understood. She used to cry out, in the middle of the night with real tears, and reach for me when she was only three months old. I was so worried I took her to the doctor but the doctor sent me home. He said not to worry, you are still new at this. All the children cry.

Now, it is the grandmotherly pastor’s wife who tells me To let it all out. It’s okay to cry. Perhaps someday some good will come of all this. like that young man who wrote “Peace Like a River.” After his whole family died in a tragic shipwreck, he sat down with his faith and a pen. His grief comforts so many.

But nineteen years later I am still new at this. My desperation does not come in iambic pentameter. It is not beautiful, it leaks out the corners of my mouth it thickens on the valves of my heart. I cry because I saw her come out of me in my own blood, which I gave her to eat and breathe.

My own blood rots while I stand above her. There are so many things I have not understood.

- Meghann Kaiser, Class of 2006
The End of the Heartbird (A Bit of Nonsense)

Hero waved his wizzletone and pulled back on the trigger stone, and thereby did the wizzle fly and catch the heartbird in the sky.

Astonished town folk ate and sang, and scraps were fed to dogs named Fang. Yet no one seemed to have their fill, and all were anxious for the kill.

Said Hero “sign the bottom line and wizzletones will soon be thine”, and Hero, he grew fat and rich while wizzles flew from every ditch.

And so the heartbird met its end, though wizzlers at their meets pretend they may have caught a sight of one at close of day, at set of sun.

- Stanley Calderwood MD, Pediatrics
Ideations

Some days
I want to lie quiet on the pavement,
crush my head into the concrete with the heel of my hand,
pick the eggshell pieces of skull from my blistered brain,
shudder,
and cease to be.

- Meghann Kaiser, Class of 2006
Run On

Oxygen deprived sinew, 
vies for my attention 
with God’s tree, 
stretching 100 feet 
and 100 years 
to touch untouchable sky 
and leave at heaven’s gate 
gift of precious emerald green.

I want to stop, 
but I touch the tree 
and run on

- Stanley Calderwood, MD 
Pediatrics
Pantoem for Autumn

Autumn is upon us and already the trees are turning
Red and yellow sparks ignite among the green
The badge of another summertime adjourning
a warm ushering toward the dark winter foreseen.

Red and yellow sparks ignite among the green
and the bright summer sun smolders burnished gold
a warm ushering toward the dark winter foreseen
with a frenzied gust of wind we watch the year unfold.

The bright summer sun smolders burnished gold
and windows glow warmly beneath the darkened eaves
with a frenzied gust of wind we watch the year unfold
and flutter away with the last of the fallen leaves.

Windows glow warmly beneath the darkened eaves
As the daylight diminishes the shadows grow long
and flutter by with the last of the fallen leaves
Singing in perfect harmony Autumn's bittersweet song.

The daylight diminishes and the shadows grow long
the badge of another summertime adjourning
We sing in perfect harmony Autumn's bittersweet song
The season is upon us and already the trees are turning.

- Christina Irvin, Obstetrics & Gynecology
Preconceived Anatomy, charcoal & pencil
Pooya Javidan, Class of 2009
Seventy

Though my vision is blurred
I needn’t see to remember you
dark and fresh
like an avocado,
nature’s mayonnaise.

Young with promises of love and
overflowing with desire
I wanted to be with you
a lifetime,
later now,
with sparse grey hair and cane
articulate in spite of trembling lips,
more distinguished perhaps
at last, the older man.

And a kiss on the cheek was just the beginning then.

- Henri Colt, MD, Internal Medicine
Influence Awakening, woodcut print
Lauren Cheung, Class of 2009
Power

I crave the sense.
I dress the part.
I am. I fake.
I lie. I act.

I walk my head
held high my breasts
exposed under a black bra
and white unbuttoned shirt.

You ate it up.
I controlled your lust
And then, in your
dark cold black room

You stripped my clothes
You stripped my power
You ate me up.
My act is flawed.

My heart is racing
As I push my
breasts back into the white
bra which shows

through under the thin
pale blue sweater
I use to hide the marks
you left on me.

- Akiva Kahn, Class of 2009
Your Body

Your body
So small and frail
Effortlessly splits under my pushing hand
As I cut and saw and move
Waiting to find something I will recognize
But you leave me more confused than satisfied
Because everything seems to be missing
Or else, everything has joined into one
One soaked layer of human
Glued together by that noxious substance
And I feel so guilty
Not knowing if I appreciate you.
But I keep trying
And so I cut
And all I find are the chambers of the heart
Because the space inside is made of nothing.
I need to find supportive, understanding eyes
I look around the cold white cell
And for a second
All I can see is how handsome he is in those scrubs
But as I’m walking through the cold bright whiteness to the other side
I notice myself staring at your neighbor
And I smile
Because her body is made of tropical coral
And it’s beautiful.

-Vicky Millay, Class of 2009
Migraine, oil on canvas
C. Gail Ryan, Class of 2006
Learning to Fly

I saw a bird today,
It lay dead
On the pavement.
Poor thing,
Never did learn to fly.

I saw a nest today,
All the babies but one
Had gone.
The mother sat,
Waiting patiently.

I saw her
As she slowly beckoned
Him to the edge,
He was afraid,
And came to peer out
At the world hesitantly.

I saw him begin
To trust and open up,
A little bit.
As she encouraged him,
To step closer without fear,
He looked at her lovingly.

I saw him fall
As she pushed him,
Pushed him over the edge.

He had trusted
And she let him fall
Without a net.

I saw the dazed
Look of confusion
And immense fear
In his eyes
As he closed up.

I saw her sorrow,
For she was only trying
To teach him
How to fly!
She wanted to show him
The world full of life,
She wanted to teach him.

I saw him die
A little bit
As he fell,
Although she dove
To catch her little
Love.
He never trusted again.

I saw him grow up
Full of fear
Of what lay over the edge
Of that nest.
His world was enclosed
In that small bed.

I saw the gardener
Come by with his ax.
He sat down to drink his beer,
Then proceeded to cut the tree down.

I saw him plummet
As his world fell apart.
His mother was now too weak
to catch his fall.
Poor thing,
Never did learn to fly.

I saw him die
As he hit the ground,
Destroyed by his fear,
He lost it all.

I saw her crying,
For her lost little Love,
To whom she’d tried to show
The world, the beauty.

I see you today,
A little bird who is afraid.
I know you,
you who look with distrust at me,
I only wanted to show you
How to fly,
As I once again,
Try to do the same.

- Jaroslava Teet,
Orthopaedic Surgery
Catching Comprehension

I am referring to her in the masculine. Too late to catch myself, I can’t remember the words to apologize, I hope she understands.

Legs slouch spread-eagled, feet propped up. Knees bend awkward at eye level with me with the drape strung out between them fluttering in time with the air conditioner like the makeshift blanket stage of a second grade puppet show. I cower in the corner opposite, beneath a burden of unrelenting English. I know the words for head and back, but Pap Smear? Cómo se dice la cosa de que viene los bebés?

As she cranes her head forward, her face wobbles into view. She is re-enacting her youngest son’s birth. I can’t tell what happened when, or why, but her face squints and pooches with the pains of communication. My interpretation insufficient for medical advice, my hand comes to rest on her right ankle. The sticky residue of fractured phrases And sweat, invests my palm. No sé, Señora. I hope she understands.

- Meghann Kaiser, Class of 2006
Abre los ojos y cierra las piernas
- Abuela’s wisdom

for my grandma libertad, may she rest in peace,
for her good advice, for her contagious laughter,
and for teaching me to count up to ten in spanish

5pm after a 10-hour workday
she lies down
opens her legs
her eyes tightly shut
she prays
santa mar ía, ten piedad de mi…
in broken spanish
he asks her to come closer
no warning
no words of comfort
he penetrates
pain pierces through her spread legs
her eyes tighten further
he pokes, prods
using his hands roughly on her body
then he is done
he walks out of the room
never to be seen again
she lies there still
legs widespread
eyes shut
wondering what happened
wondering if he will return
wondering if he will call

6:20pm after feeding her 80-year old mother
she sits cross-legged on the couch
to watch las noticias en el 34
her eyes widen at the news of car pile-up on the freeway
she utters
que la sombra de san pedro cubra a mis hijos
she calls her daughter immediately to make sure she is ok

mi’ja nomás me dejó con las patas en el aire
she complains
how the doctor was a “chino”
and she couldn’t understand his spanish
her daughter reminds her not all asians are chinese
she bitterly recounts
having been left alone in the room for 15 minutes
with her legs in stirrups
with pain
without explanation

am and pm over a 65-year span
her widespread legs
have born three children
walked across many borders
sold bread on the streets to support a family
danced mambo in támpico
marched in the union parades in méxico
legs with hips that still sway
even though they are many quinceañeras old
her widespread legs
have cradled a dead child at birth
walked out on an abusive husband
stood firmly while he abandoned her pregnant
buried yet another one
her widespread legs
have overcome bone cancer
gracias a santo niño de atocha
stood in front of an assembly line for over 20 years
carried her grandchildren to sleep
her widespread legs
could have crushed a disrespectful doctor’s head
like a boa constrictor
but instead,
she closes her eyes
kneels to pray
for the saints to keep her children safe
keep her job
keep her away from the doctor’s office

- Erica Lubliner, UCI-SOM Staff & Post Baccalaureate Pre-Medical Program
Evening

You and I wandered along pebbled streets in worn out tennis shoes with a guidebook and a Coca Cola with two straws Looking for a garden.

While our drowsy legs traced sinuous paths around the city’s pulse, horizon swallowed sun

We asked for directions, our tongues choking on foreign words under rusting street lamps understanding (at last) the towering walls of the streets held the garden like the sea holds a delicate island forgotten by maps

Through metal bars we watched mist drift over well-behaved rows of roses, hydrangea, and fecund lemon trees

A monk strolled soundlessly on the trimmed wet grass We watched him touch the blossoms with his white palms

You held me with thick brown hands and breathed into my mouth and I breathed into yours until we could not breathe

Anymore.

- Sarah Mourra, Class of 2008
Mulberries

Mitch and I stand on the roof of the old barn, nearly slipping on the loose shingles, and eat mulberries pulled from a branch that dips and waves over us in the breeze.

I know I will go home marked with the juice of sin, but I will also have a little jar filled with all the sunlight wrought into purple darkness of joy that I couldn’t stuff into my mouth this July day.

The mulberry branches gently sweep red gravel from the roof, growing out to touch the back of the barn as its spine slowly sags.

Next to the barn stands the headless windmill, a farmer’s Eiffel Tower, where the wind hisses memories of pumping water and lighting the predawn milking.

This farm is rented out now, the house a perch for migratory students who ruffle their feathers and depart each season.

Away! Away to the horizon march the rows of green, knife-edged corn with smaller rows of pale kernels concealed in raspy sheaths. Small and tart, they yearn for the sweet heaviness of August heat, Little knowing they are pearls to be cast before swine.

Purple-smeared, Mitch and I wade through the rustling green sea that sneaks out of winter’s treacherous muck each spring. The leaves part and we see our apartment buildings marching shoulder to shoulder with the corn.

We hurry back to number 1312 and number 1504, to dream of firm-breasted young women, working life, rock and roll, smooth cars gliding through the night, and war. Restlessly, we await our turn.

- Richard Keslerwest,
  VA Medical Center, Internal Medicine
Incarceration, photo
Ryan Roza, Class of 2008

Flesh & Bones, watercolor & pencil
Daniel Chen, Class of 2009
Collage of a Chinese-American Girl

I am a piece of paper, dipped in simmering cherry blossoms
my Chinese blood oozing up the page, colonizing corners
peering through every word that I inscribe.

And pasted on top, pieces of American independence
snippets of “intellectual exploration and vitality,”
arranged hastily, haphazardly
loose edges flapping, flailing amongst the sighs.

In darkness I lie in bed alone
with my legs strewn, black hair limp, disarrayed.
Dreaming of a comet that will snatch me up
scattering light over a lingering depression in the mattress.

- Sheila Chan, Class of 2008
Science in Life

The eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility
- Albert Einstein 1936

The goal is to see, experience, different forms, colors, shapes understand reflections, intensities, shadows.

Learn, explore, think have the exterior illuminated by knowledge of the interior.

See in the depths of a flower’s red color processes through which pigment is made.

Enhance the brilliance of violet, blue, yellow, and green by concepts of light waves, transmission, refraction.

Magnify the glory of bright twinkling stars each with a different, delicate hue, through discovery of elements, nebulas, quasars, pulsars.

Expand the grandeur of high mountains, deep canyons, winding rivers by knowledge of crust movement, uplift, erosion, eon.

- Moyra Smith, MD, PhD Pediatrics
The concept behind Plexus Audio is to provide a medium for audio artists to showcase their talents. All art is created by affiliates of the UC Irvine School of Medicine and Medical Center. Please enjoy the variety of innovative and interesting audio art we have to offer and stay tuned for future developments from Plexus Audio.

Enjoy,

Joshua Waltzman
Audio Editor

Lauren Cheung
Associate Audio Editor